



**End of the Road:
One Belt, One Road and the
Cumulative Economic Marginalization
of the Uyghurs**



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Summary

On August 23, 2016, a press release from the United Nations Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights described the findings of Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights after his visit to China.

China has made huge progress in poverty alleviation, but it also needs to put in place meaningful accountability mechanisms that citizens can use when their rights are violated in the context of development-related activities.¹

In his end-of-mission statement, Alston stated how extreme poverty rates were as high as “10% in Western China, to only 1.8% in Eastern China.” He added: “Certain groups are especially vulnerable, such as ethnic minorities for whom the rate is 12.1%.”²

Despite China’s remarkable economic growth rates since the reform inception period and several economic campaigns targeting minority regions, extreme poverty rates in western China and among Uyghurs, Tibetans, Mongolians and other ethnicities lag far behind those of eastern China, where the majority Han Chinese reside.

In a speech delivered at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan in September 2013, Chinese president Xi Jinping advanced the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB),³ a trade proposal encompassing South Asia, Central Asia, Eurasia, Europe and the Middle East that would augment the role of East Turkestan as China’s primary land gateway to Eurasia.⁴ The SREB aims to integrate these regions through infrastructure and trade with China underwriting the costs of necessary construction.⁵ According to a state policy document, East Turkestan would serve “as a core area on the Silk Road Economic Belt.”⁶

The SREB and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) form an ambitious Chinese goal to place China at the center of trade routes in the eastern hemisphere. Collectively known as One Belt, One Road (OBOR), the initiative projects external influence and upholds the internal economy that according to one observer set out to establish China as a bona fide super power.

The announcement of the SREB is the latest iteration of centrally driven development campaigns in East Turkestan since the fall of the Soviet Union. These initiatives have included Open up the Northwest (1992), Western Development (2000), the Xinjiang Work Forums of 2010 and 2014, the establishment of the Shanghai Five (1996) and later the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (2001). The build up of infrastructure, investment and migration encouraged by these initiatives have done little to significantly alter economic opportunities for Uyghurs, as they remain outside the planning, implementation and monitoring processes while their region undergoes transformation. While China is often quick to claim it successes in raising large numbers of citizens out of poverty, it remains less vocal about how inequitable this change has become.

New economic initiatives in East Turkestan signify familiar exclusions for the Uyghurs. UHRP has previously reported on the effects of economic marginalization among Uyghurs throughout Beijing's interventions in East Turkestan. Compelling evidence on joblessness and lack of opportunity is recapped in this analysis to demonstrate the scant progress economic development campaigns have had on Uyghurs since the fall of the Soviet Union.

In prior research, restated in this work, UHRP has asserted how state led economic development merely represents a form of Uyghur displacement. A form that takes place in situ, rather than a process involving mass removal. In situ displacement has arisen due to the promulgation of economic development campaigns that do not contain any measures for control by the titular population of the autonomous region. Such an exclusionary approach has encouraged migration and greater state intrusions into Uyghur life. UHRP believes OBOR exhibits no change in approach from Beijing to stimulating economic development in East Turkestan. Familiar patterns in which Uyghur rights to participation in the development process remain violations under international standards.

The redevelopment of Uyghur neighborhoods, particularly in Kashgar, under Chinese development campaigns is a physical manifestation of the compression felt in Uyghur society and cultural life. As the physical appearance and demographics of urban East Turkestan becomes less distinguishable from eastern China, Uyghur residents will occupy the same spaces, but without the organic arrangement the redeveloped areas once embodied. In essence, the tangible aspects of Uyghur culture and civilization are under process of destruction under an unquestioned narrative of "development."

However, it is not only Uyghur culture, language, traditions and ethnic identity that is under threat. If OBOR succeeds, there are minorities in neighboring countries, such as the Balochs in Pakistan, who will face similar challenges. Given such outcomes, UHRP concludes development campaigns serve national and party needs to consolidate territorial control of East Turkestan and assimilate Uyghurs into the dominant culture of China while projecting Chinese influence into the Eurasian continent.

UHRP calls on multilateral agencies, such as the United Nations, to recognize in human rights standards the problematic issue of demographic change engineered by state led development campaigns. Governments and private sector entities enticed by the opportunities presented by OBOR, particularly in East Turkestan and other minority regions, should demonstrate their engagement meets international human rights standards and benefits the Uyghur people in the region.

One Belt, One Road and its Antecedents

Center-led Development in East Turkestan 1949-2013

In an October 2012 Global Times article, Wang Jisi, a professor at Beijing University, proposed a strategic shift in China's foreign policy towards Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East.⁷ The 'March West' (西进) would offer China political and economic advantages in these regions as the United States scaled back its presence and embarked on a 'Pivot to Asia' focused on the Asia-Pacific in 2011.⁸

The 'March West' would present not only favorable circumstances for the economic integration of East Turkestan and Central Asia, but also an outlet into Eurasia from potential strategic confinement in East Asia.⁹ Before articulating the concept of the 'March West,' Wang wrote in 2011 of the progressive link between domestic development campaigns in East Turkestan and external trade opportunities in Eurasia:

The central government has been conducting the Grand Western Development Program in many western provinces and regions, notably Tibet and Xinjiang, for more than a decade. It is now more actively initiating and participating in new development projects in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Central Asia, and throughout the Caspian Sea region, all the way to Europe. This new western outlook may reshape China's geostrategic vision as well as the Eurasian landscape.¹⁰

What is notable in Wang's writing is how he invokes development to outline a "new western outlook." As scholar Michael Clarke writes: "In essence, Xinjiang's importance for China-based states throughout history has been of a strategic nature," and the motivation to extend and create alternatives for economic opportunity and growth was a key driver in China's latest shift to its west during the post-Soviet era.

'March West' not only signaled a new policy direction, but also a consolidation of successive domestic development campaigns, external trade agreements and strategic associations that have been in operation since the fall of the Soviet Union to 'open the west' to the Chinese center. To achieve this, the Chinese government conceived the development of East Turkestan as a process to be delivered in incremental phases.¹¹ These initiatives include Open up the Northwest (1992), Western Development (2000), the Xinjiang Work Forums of 2010 and 2014, the establishment of the Shanghai Five (1996) and later the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (2001), as well as the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) (2013).

Despite the territorial integration of East Turkestan into the Chinese state in 1949 and Beijing's heavy subsidization of the regional economy, the state was disinclined to exploit the region's strategic location in relation to the Eurasian landmass.¹² However, the post-Soviet era offered new opportunities for China. Michael Clarke separates China's post-Soviet Central Asia policy into three phases: formulation and gradual consolidation of priorities towards political, economic and strategic interests in response to a new

political order (1991-95); comprehensive articulation of strategic interests coupled with increasing influence in Central Asia (1996-2001). Clarke adds that this phase was also characterized by the realization that China's foreign policy would need to be brought into line with strategies implemented toward East Turkestan. Lastly, the post 9/11 period (2002-2009) led to an "intensification of the major facets of Beijing's integrationist project in Xinjiang – Han in-migration, economic and infrastructure development and rigorous suppression of ethnic minority discontent or opposition." Clarke's timeline explains an ongoing refinement in the center's interests towards the western region and the binding aspects of those interests to migration and increased state intervention in East Turkestan. The following analysis of center-led initiatives in East Turkestan, Central Asia and broader Eurasia demonstrates the progressive regional encroachment of the Chinese state.

The Open Up the Northwest campaign of 1992 was characterized by a twofold approach: the first, a considerable investment in infrastructure that would begin to mainstream the region into the broader Chinese nation. The second was to shore up the regional government budget in the form of state subsidies, which accounted for up to and over 50 percent of regional government revenue.¹³ Open Up the Northwest delivered swift and continual growth in East Turkestan during the 1990s according to official statistics with one scholar reporting an expansion of the economy by over ten percent taken on average over the decade.¹⁴

However, this rapid growth could not correct an inequity in performance across the nation as a whole with China's main centers of growth focused in eastern China. The establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in Shenzhen (1980), Zhuhai (1980) and Shantou (1981) in Guangdong, Xiamen (1980) in Fujian, and the province of Hainan (1988) emphasized prioritization towards coastal regions with easier access to export markets. As eastern China's economy heated, growth in the western regions of the country lagged.¹⁵ By 2004, statistics revealed the scale of the imbalance between east and west. The western region, constituting 71 percent of the country's landmass, and over 28 percent of the total population, accounted for only 17 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP).¹⁶

In addressing this imbalance, the Western Development campaign, adopted as state policy in 2000, undertook an expansion in rhetorical content from the Open Up the Northwest campaign in that its aim was *inter-regional* equity. This signaled a greater commitment towards regional integration with the center placing growth in the west as a goal of national consequence. Given its formulation in Beijing, Western Development priorities were more focused on the large scale and top down, rather than the grassroots and participatory.

Through a review of Western Development policies, scholar Heike Holbig identified five areas of priority: (1) the quest for equality, (2) foreign investment, (3) infrastructure investment, (4) tackling the nationalities issue, and (5) sustainable development.¹⁷ While adopting a stronger sense of regional integration, Western Development echoed the Open the Northwest campaign in its emphasis on development as a means to promote ethnic

unity. In addition, strengthening infrastructure reinforced the development policies of the 1990s already underway. Whereas the two development campaigns were characterized by transfers of state subsidies to local government budgets, the amount slated for Western Development was significantly larger than the financial capital earmarked for the 1996-2000 five year plan, indicating an acceleration of center interest in the region.¹⁸

Writing in 1993, academic Arthur Barnett forecast the importance Beijing would place on natural resource extraction in East Turkestan for regional and national economic goals.¹⁹ According to data from 2006, East Turkestan contains an estimated 20.9 billion tons of oil and 10.8 trillion cubic meters of natural gas,²⁰ of which the latter accounts for approximately 25 percent of China’s reserves (this was subsequently upped to 40 percent in 2015 when the government reported 14 trillion cubic meters of natural gas remained unexploited).²¹

Energy	Resource reserves	Proportions in China	Rank in China
Coal	2,190 billion t	38.00%	1st
Oil	23.4 billion t	21.50%	1st
Gas	13,000 billion m3	23.30%	1st

Table 1: “Fossil energy resources in Xinjiang. Source: Resources and Economy Atlas of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, 2012, SinoMaps Press.”²²

Scholar Linda Benson explains how state investment in Western Development was “earmarked for major construction projects, including roads and highways, pipelines for oil and natural gas, and other infrastructure needed to exploit Xinjiang’s natural resources.”²³ In 2008, oil production in East Turkestan had grown to 27.4 million tons from 7 million in 1990.²⁴ A report in Xinhua described how natural gas production in 2015 would represent an increase of 30,000 times compared to 1955. According to the same article, output of natural gas from East Turkestan’s three main fields (Tarim, Junggar and Turpan-Hami) rose from 10.6 billion cubic meters in 2005 to 29.6 billion cubic meters in 2014, an amount that accounted for nearly 24 percent of China’s total output. The major factor in the rapid increase was when “a large project started bringing gas from Xinjiang to the booming eastern regions.”²⁵ The buildup of the natural resource industries and the infrastructure required to transport oil and gas to energy hungry markets during Western Development were critical in linking the center to East Turkestan, encouraging migrants from outside the region to seek employment opportunities and putting the Uyghur homeland in a critical role for China’s economic security.²⁶

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Coal (million t)	24.35	30.34	39.87	60.64	76.46	99.27	119.97	136.47	147.11	143.27
Oil (million t)	24.08	24.75	26.04	27.15	25.13	25.58	26.16	26.71	27.12	27.39
Natural gas (billion m3)	10.66	16.42	21.03	23.59	24.54	25.99	23.54	25.32	27.23	29.15

Table 2: “Fossil energy production in Xinjiang. China Statistical Yearbook, 2015, National Bureau of Statistics of China.”²⁷

In a tacit admission of economic inequities between Han and Uyghur stemming from centralized Western Development policies and in the wake of unrest in Urumchi in 2009, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) central leadership convened the First Xinjiang Work Forum in Beijing in May 2010 to assess and amend the center’s economic strategy toward the Uyghur region. The origins of the unrest in Urumchi, while complex, highlighted inter-ethnic disparities in employment and poverty rates with Han predominant in the natural resources extraction industries and more advantageously placed in cultural and social capital to exploit state investment.

While the First Xinjiang Work Forum largely reaffirmed the focus on natural resource industries located in the north of the region, it also included initiatives to spatially disperse state investment toward Uyghur majority areas in the south, such as the establishment of a Special Economic Zone in Kashgar.²⁸ Also agreed upon was a pairing assistance program between 19 eastern provinces with 82 sub-districts of Xinjiang involving transfers of human and financial capital.²⁹ Pairing assistance underlined the how the state continued to equate development with the necessity of external expertise and the low value placed on local capacity.³⁰ Pairing assistance also afforded the state a greater role in the economic life of Uyghur majority areas in the south of East Turkestan. The Second Xinjiang Work Forum (2014) was also convened under a cloud of state violence. If the First Work Forum engineered state inroads into the Uyghur-dominated south, the second bolstered policies of ‘ethnic unity.’ Measurable benchmarks in terms of ethnic minority employment were proposed, but the focus on “ethnic mingling,” offered the state a platform to leverage regional development planning as a means to blur ethnic distinctiveness.³¹

Concurrent with the implementation of development campaigns in East Turkestan, China, Russia and former Soviet states created institutions to facilitate a transition to the post Soviet world. In 1996, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan established the Shanghai Five, which with the inclusion of Uzbekistan grew into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001. The SCO provided a forum for China, Central Asia and Russia to build consensus on a diverse set of internal and regional security issues. From the Chinese perspective, the multi-lateral agency operated to manage Uyghur political advocacy in a region adjacent to East Turkestan.

However, to interpret the SCO as merely a tool to contain Uyghurs in East Turkestan and Central Asia ignores a diverse set of aims set out in the declaration issued at the foundation of the SCO. In addition to commitments towards regional security, the declaration encourages “effective cooperation among the member states in political,

economic and trade, scientific and technological, cultural, educational, energy, communications, environment and other fields.”³² As the table below demonstrates, one of these areas of interest, trade, appreciably swelled, particularly between China and Central Asian nations in the 2001-2005 period.

	2001	2005	Increase
Russia	10,670,550	29,103,140	173%
Kazakhstan	1,288,370	6,810,320	429%
Kyrgyzstan	118,860	972,200	718%
Tajikistan	10,760	157,940	1,368%
Uzbekistan	58,300	680,560	1,067%
Total	12,146,840	37,724,160	311%

*Table 3: Trade between China and Other Members of the SCO 2001-2005 (In US\$1,000)*³³

In 2013, the volume of trade between China and other SCO members had reached \$130 billion dollars.³⁴ By 2014, a number of gas and oil pipelines beginning in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan transited Central Asia to East Turkestan through the partnership of state owned China National Petroleum Corporation with local counterparts. According to a 2015 report, Lines A (2009) and B (2010) of the Central Asia-China gas pipeline provided 28 billion cubic meters of natural gas to China, representing almost one-sixth of Chinese consumption.³⁵ A newly constructed Line C (2014) is expected to deliver 25 billion cubic meters from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and a Line D under construction will export gas from Turkmenistan to China via Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.³⁶ The Kazakhstan–China oil pipeline (2009) reached capacity of 20 million tons per year in 2014.³⁷



As early as 2003, senior Chinese officials were proposing the establishment of a SCO free trade zone.³⁸ While progress has been slow on this objective, in 2011 Vice Minister of Commerce Zhong Shan made a renewed call for the initiative. As such, according to one observer, “Beijing appears to be the only SCO member beating loudly on the economic drum”³⁹ with pledges of preferential loans to SCO members and a commitment toward the formation of a SCO Development Bank.⁴⁰

One Belt, One Road

In a speech delivered at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan in September 2013, Chinese president Xi Jinping advanced the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) initiative,⁴¹ a trade proposal encompassing South Asia, Central Asia, Eurasia, Europe and the Middle East that would augment the role of East Turkestan as China’s primary land gateway to Eurasia.⁴² The SREB aims to integrate these regions through infrastructure and trade with China underwriting the costs of necessary construction.⁴³ As Xi explained in his 2013 speech, the SREB “boasts a 3-billion population and a market that is unparalleled both in scale and potential.”⁴⁴ A state media article published in 2015 linked the SREB and Western Development as complementary initiatives in the development of East Turkestan, particularly in stimulating manufacturing industries closer to new markets.⁴⁵

The SREB and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) form an ambitious Chinese goal to place China at the center of trade routes in the eastern hemisphere. Collectively known as One Belt, One Road (OBOR), the initiative projects external influence and upholds the internal economy that according to one observer is set out to establish China as a bona fide super power.⁴⁶ Xi Jinping has placed great emphasis on the success of OBOR making the initiative his signature contribution to foreign policy during his presidency.

OBOR matters because it is a challenge to the United States and its traditional way of thinking about world trade. In that view, there are two main trading blocs, the trans-Atlantic one and the trans-Pacific one, with Europe in the first, Asia in the second and America the focal point of each. Two proposed regional trade deals, the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, embody this approach. But OBOR treats Asia and Europe as a single space, and China, not the United States, is its focal point.⁴⁷



Xi Jinping announces the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative in Kazakhstan, 2013 ©Xinhua

The inception of the SREB under the OBOR umbrella marks a new period in Beijing's post-Soviet Central Asia policies to project influence. Domestically, the SREB is characterized by an escalation of the "integrationist project" in the face of mounting Uyghur unrest.⁴⁸ The state's increasing presence was not only an instrument with which to achieve the full assimilation of the Uyghur people into China, but a process that would require Uyghur loyalty to the center-led development project occurring in East Turkestan and across regional borders. To achieve geopolitical dominance through trade in Eurasia, Beijing needs to exercise complete control over the territory of East Turkestan.

China has pledged to support the SREB through financial institutions and committed to several sub-initiatives, such as the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, within the SREB framework. From the perspective of financing, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Silk Road Fund have become key funding agencies of SREB projects. In October 2013, Chinese president Xi Jinping launched the AIIB with the intention "to promote interconnectivity and economic integration."⁴⁹ However, critics view the AIIB as China's push to realign global economic governance in response to the limited powers Beijing exercises over the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and Asian Development Bank.⁵⁰ The AIIB, currently at 57 full members, was established with USD 100 billion of capital to boost infrastructure-led economic development. Although "[t]he bank is not formally part of OBOR...the loans approved at its first general meeting—roads in Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, for example—are all in Silk Road countries."⁵¹ The Silk Road Fund, established in November 2014, is squarely aimed at financing the SREB and is financed by USD 40 billion in Chinese capital.⁵²

The motivations for OBOR appear domestically and internationally driven. In addition to siphoning overcapacity through the development of overseas markets, "China has multiple reasons to push these initiatives in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe: geo-strategy, access to raw materials such as oil, and new markets. It also creates jobs."⁵³ Nevertheless, analysts have expressed how the SREB is characterized by a lack of specific details, particularly on timelines and beneficiary states: "China says it will invest a cumulative \$4 trillion in OBOR countries, though it does not say by when. Its officials tetchily reject comparison with the Marshall Plan which, they say, was a means of rewarding America's friends and excluding its enemies after the second world war. OBOR, they boast, is open to all."⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the Center for International and Strategic Studies reports that OBOR comprises of over 60 "member" states and nearly fifty "related organizations," of which the overwhelming majority are Chinese.⁵⁵

In an interview with the Financial Times, CSIS deputy director Scott Kennedy highlighted the problematic aspects regarding investment commitments to OBOR: "You can hang a lot of policy goals on it, but no one has done a proper economic analysis. The government money they are putting in is not enough; they hope to bring in private capital, but would private capital want to invest? Will it make money?"⁵⁶ According to the same article there is also a question over which states are included in the SREB initiative.⁵⁷ The lack of specific details is summed up in the following passage:

There is also no indication yet of how it will be run — through its own bureaucracy, or as separate departments in different ministries and policy banks. With foreign governments and multinational banks eagerly following the Delphic utterances from Beijing to understand what it means, the vagueness and confusion has not gone unnoticed.⁵⁸

Other concerns regarding OBOR are the security and speed of delivery of goods across continental trade routes, even if Eurasian trade routes mean less reliance on the tense sea lanes of the South China Sea. Moreover, while many governments in states targeted for investment may be enthusiastic, the amenability among the various Eurasian populations is another matter. Nevertheless, as senior officials in the People's Liberation Army indicate, given China's significant investment overseas through the initiative, there may be a future security role for the Chinese military in protecting state investments.⁵⁹

The SREB importance to the Chinese state building project in terms of delivering continued economic growth coupled with Xi Jinping's personal advocacy for OBOR as a central piece of his presidency make these latest iterations of centrally driven development a core national interest. The location of East Turkestan as not only a strategic location for the outward projection of political and economic influence onto the Eurasian continent puts the Uyghur people firmly within Beijing's interest. Control of the land of East Turkestan and the Uyghurs who inhabit the region therefore becomes vital to the success of Xi's personal legacy, as well as China's path to global leadership.

One Belt, One Road in East Turkestan: Chinese State Policy and Objectives

The previous section outlined how the geographic location of East Turkestan places the region as an integral component to the success of the SREB and by extension the OBOR. This section looks at two aspects of state policy and objectives regarding OBOR in East Turkestan. The first is a detailed assessment of the close link between state economic initiatives prior to 2013 and the approach to development in East Turkestan demonstrated by OBOR initiatives. This outline demonstrates how OBOR in the Uyghur homeland merely represents the continuation of state projects rather than a new approach to development. In effect, the Chinese government has not presented any renegotiation of a centrist approach to development in East Turkestan that may benefit the regional population of Uyghurs.

The second aspect analyzed in this section is UHRP's understanding of Chinese government objectives in East Turkestan regarding OBOR. Much in keeping with the extension of on-the-ground infrastructural changes, the Chinese government does not propose any new sense of equitable disbursement of benefits towards Uyghurs stemming from OBOR investment. Indeed, OBOR keeps in place and intensifies a process of Uyghur displacement in order to serve national interests. Assimilative dimensions to government policy in the OBOR period, such as increased migration and curbs placed on cultural identity, are not new to when analyzing prior economic pushes in East Turkestan. From the Uyghur perspective, OBOR is the latest iteration of China's nation-building and territorial consolidation project in the region.

Beijing does not solely rely on economic development in order to achieve assimilative objectives; excessive securitization of East Turkestan and control of information emanating from the region ensure political opposition to economic inequity emanating from the Uyghur community is effectively silenced. While observers may view China's leveraging of existing projects in East Turkestan in order to push OBOR as a prudent fiscal approach, the effects of these augmented investments merely exacerbate existing tensions over marginalization and economic discrimination.

Policy

In a March 2015 document entitled *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road*, China's National Development and Reform Commission, along with other state agencies, outlined a framework for the OBOR initiative. The preface claims the report will "promote the implementation of the Initiative, instill vigor and vitality into the ancient Silk Road, connect Asian, European and African countries more closely and promote mutually beneficial cooperation to a new high and in new forms."⁶⁰ The document attempted to articulate specifics over what exactly OBOR entailed, as Chinese government departments and officials contended to make sense of Xi Jinping's 2013 announcement of the initiative. As one scholar noted: "the form which OBOR has taken bears Xi Jinping's dynamic and top-down policy-

making imprint,”⁶¹ an approach demonstrating the absence of civil society in formulating policy objectives.

In a paragraph referencing East Turkestan, *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road* states:

We should make good use of Xinjiang’s geographic advantages and its role as a window of westward opening up to deepen communication and cooperation with Central, South and West Asian countries, make it a key transportation, trade, logistics, culture, science and education center, and a core area on the Silk Road Economic Belt.⁶²

The above excerpt is illustrative of the state vision for East Turkestan’s role in OBOR; that is, its geography, and not human resources, should be exploited. Far from the policy goal of “instill[ing] vigor and vitality into the ancient Silk Road,” for Uyghurs, this exclusion represented a perpetuation of the status quo.

Given the priorities set out in previous center-led economic development campaigns, the reference of transportation at the head of the list of targeted investments is no surprise. In order to set the stage for a Chinese turn to the Eurasian landmass, East Turkestan’s network of roads and railroads would serve a key role. Chinese scholar Jia Qingguo has outlined how the seeds of Chinese continentalism are evident in the determination to build transportation networks between China and Central Asia.⁶³ To facilitate the transportation infrastructure required in developing external trade to the west, China overhauled rail and road networks in East Turkestan that also connected the region more efficiently to eastern China.

By 2006, Sznajer recorded the existence of an 86,000-kilometer road network in East Turkestan that included highways to a number of Central Asian border openings.⁶⁴ According to government sources, the state spent CNY 33 billion (USD 4.1 billion) on highway construction region wide between 2001-2006, over three times the sum invested from 1955-2000.⁶⁵ Jia reported China planned to invest CNY 2.3 billion (USD 294 million) between 2007-2012 to upgrade highways linking border-trading areas in the region.⁶⁶



Image captured from Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Xinjiang Regional Road Improvement Project webpage ©CAREC

An official report from 2006 detailed the state’s plans to boost road infrastructure in rural areas of East Turkestan. From 2006-2010, the government intended to use CNY 10 billion (USD 1.6 billion) for rural road construction. The investment would increase the rural road network by approximately 32,000 kilometers.⁶⁷ In 2012 state media announced a further injection of CNY 3 billion (USD 484 million) of state funds to add more than 5,000 kilometers.⁶⁸ By 2015 the government promised an extra CNY 2.7 billion (USD 440 million) for an additional 4,000 kilometers taking the entire network to over 115,000 kilometers, which would connect 99 percent of towns and 98 percent of villages across the region.⁶⁹ While this overhaul of the rural road network appears to connect regional residents more effectively, internal travel restrictions limited mobility and permitted the further intrusion of the state into village life.⁷⁰ A Xinhua article published on January 18, 2017 remarked how the region would “spend more than 200 billion yuan (29.2 billion U.S. dollars)” in the calendar year on road improvement. Furthermore, the article revealed, “plans to spend 1 trillion yuan in transport infrastructure, including over 470 billion yuan in expressways, from 2016 to 2020.”⁷¹

Throughout the post-Soviet era, China has realized the construction and vocalized the potential of continental railroads west through East Turkestan. In 1990, Chinese officials proposed the New Eurasian Continental Bridge—a railroad intended to link eastern Chinese ports with Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Completion of the initiative hinged on the building of the Northern Xinjiang Railway from Urumchi to the Kazakh border, which was accomplished in 1992. Commenting on the link, a Chinese official said:

“Xinjiang is opening a door to the west.”⁷² During a visit to Kazakhstan in 1994, Premier Li Peng expressed Chinese aspirations toward continental trade routes with a call for a ‘new Silk Road’ joining Central Asia to China.”⁷³

Railroads to Kashgar and Hotan were constructed in 1999 and 2011 respectively. The Lanzhou to Urumchi railroad, completed in 1966, was upgraded in 2014 to operate high-speed trains that would reduce travel time between the two cities from 23 hours to 11. Four new railroads in northern Xinjiang were unveiled in a 2009 announcement, one of which linked Urumchi with Kazakhstan at the border town of Khorgas.⁷⁴ A line connecting Urumchi to the coalfields of Guchung and Jimisar Counties opened in 2009 and a railway from Kumul, completed in 2012, facilitated easier access to the potassium salt mines in Lop Nur.⁷⁵ Construction was arranged for two lines linking East Turkestan to Inner Mongolia and Qinghai. The Inner Mongolia line intends to connect Tianjin with the Kazakh border.⁷⁶ Although still stuck in a proposal stage, China has discussed plans to build a railroad to Uzbekistan via Kyrgyzstan.⁷⁷

According to overseas media reports transportation projects have accelerated since Xi’s announcement of the SREB. Cheng Jianjun, the vice-director of the Chinese administration’s development and reform commission in East Turkestan told reporters: “We last counted a list of 320 infrastructural projects in railway, highway and civil aviation construction, with an investment value of nearly 2 trillion yuan under this [SREB] initiative.” Citing Raffaello Pantucci and Alexandros Petersen, academic Michael Clarke references how “the web of connections that China is forging across the region...is the realization of the ‘New Silk Road’ vision...but with the connections oriented largely toward Xinjiang.”⁷⁸



Lanzhou – Urumchi high speed railway in Kumul, 2014 ©Xinhua

Trade and logistics form the second and third items on the practical objectives list in *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road* policy document quoted above. The main centers for the development of outward trade of Chinese manufactured goods have been Khorgas and Kashgar. Much like the development of an efficient transportation network, the establishment of Khorgas and Kashgar as Special Economic Zones predates OBOR and is a further example of how Chinese officials are able to co-opt and augment existing infrastructure. The establishment of Special Economic Zones in these two locations dates to the First Xinjiang Work Forum of 2010. Beijing hyped the new trading areas not only as new sources of economic growth, but as regional economic hubs that help bring about trade with Central, South and western Asian countries, as well as eastern Europe.⁷⁹

State media reported that Kashgar's new trading area could create as many as 600,000 jobs, more than the population of Kashgar County as recorded in the 2010 census.⁸⁰ The new development zone in Kashgar elicited CNY 10.7 billion (USD 1.6 billion) of investment in 2010, an increase of 52 percent over the previous year, with the majority of funds coming from outside of East Turkestan.⁸¹ Based upon an existing industrial park covering five square kilometers, initial plans called for the zone to be expanded first to 8.5 square kilometers and later to 160 square kilometers.⁸² Observers have cast doubt on the viability of the Kashgar project calling the initiative "a new bottle with old wine."⁸³ Scholar Bill Chou and Xuejie Ding add: "It is skeptical whether the Shenzhen model can be transplanted into Kashgar...The development programmes in the past several decades did not address the roots of ethnic tension, including suppression of cultural autonomy and unequal distribution of the benefits and social costs of economic growth. Besides that, the success of the Shenzhen special economic zone is an exception, not a rule."⁸⁴



China-Kazakhstan border crossing at Khorgas © Jamestown Foundation

The Special Economic Zone in Khorgas, which encompasses 73 square kilometers, received a total of CNY 20.8 billion (USD 3.3 billion) in cash infusions by October 2011 from 12 investment initiatives.⁸⁵ A senior government official told the China Daily in 2011 that a planned rail facility was set to become “the biggest transshipment station in Asia.”⁸⁶ Khorgas presently contains four industrial parks and as one Chinese government official contradictorily noted in 2016 the free trade zone has drawn over CNY 6 billion (USD 971 million) in investments and that the number of visitors to the zone had increased dramatically.⁸⁷ In an August 2016 article, the Straits Times outlined how Khorgas “is expected to be a key overland transport route of the Silk Road initiative.”⁸⁸ As one overseas journalist noted:

This new city on the frontier of Xinjiang has essentially become a back door for China to access the markets on the other side of the Eurasian gap. As manufacturing continues growing in the west of China it now seems redundant to transport products that are manufactured there across the entire country to the ports of the east just to ship them by sea back west again. Yet upwards of 80% of China’s EU trade goes the ocean route, a roundabout journey of 40 to 60 days. Like in the time of the old Silk Road, China needs a western gateway, so Horgos was reborn.⁸⁹

An article published on November 30, 2016 by the Center for International and Strategic Studies detailed how should the overland trade prove successful Khorgas could become the “new Dubai” with trade increasing by a factor of twenty and 50,000 jobs created. However, the article also hints at how current demographics could not support such growth stating “that’s roughly 40 percent of the surrounding district’s current population.”⁹⁰

Parallel to the development of Special Economic Zones in Kashgar and Khorgas, Chinese authorities have undertaken enterprises to promote trade, industry and other fields that stem from the period preceding OBOR.⁹¹ These enterprises have also been used to promote OBOR on the Eurasian landmass with East Turkestan as a strategic area. In 2010, officials announced the Urumchi Foreign Economic Relations and Trade Fair, which began in 1992, would be upgraded and re-launched as the “China-Eurasia Expo,” and that the event would serve as an opportunity to expand trade with Central and South Asia.⁹² At the fifth China-Eurasia Expo held in September 2016, several foreign dignitaries, representatives from international organizations, diplomatic envoys and ministers from overseas states were in attendance indicating the elevation in the Expo’s status.⁹³ According to the Expo’s website, Chinese officials and foreign delegations discussed the development of the SREB, as the 2016 Expo was the first since East Turkestan had been designated a “core” area of the initiative. Even though “[a] series of cooperation agreements were reached with many foreign universities to promote the cooperation between Xinjiang and surrounding countries in science and technology and education,” few specifics on broader policy are available.⁹⁴

The official literature on the 2016 Expo stated how: “During the Sino-Foreign Culture Display Week, a series of Chinese and foreign excellent cultural works were exhibited, including song and dance shows, films and TV programs and cultural relics exhibitions, which further enhance the cultural communication between Xinjiang and surrounding countries.”⁹⁵ Overseas observers have noted how Uyghur participation at the Expo has been largely limited to cultural performances rather than as key interlocutors in the direction of trade and investment between China and Central Asia. Reporting from the 2011 Expo, Al Jazeera documented the exclusion of Uyghurs⁹⁶ and in 2014, a blogger remarked on the few Uyghurs who were in attendance for the 2014 event.⁹⁷



Karamay Forum, 2016 ©China Daily

promote economic and social development.”⁹⁹ The location of the forum is no surprise given Karamay’s importance to the natural resource extraction industry in China and China’s interest in securing natural resources in Central Asia. According to official data released in 2013, Karamay is among the highest performing prefectural level administrative areas regionally in terms of economic measures.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, and exacerbating a sense of Uyghur exclusion, Karamay is largely populated by Han Chinese settlers attracted by work in the natural resource industries. Yet another event, the Kashgar Central & South Asia Commodity Fair, demonstrates the spatial dispersion of attempts to attract investment and the emphasis placed on the success of Special Economic Zones. Much like the China-Eurasia Expo, the Commodity Fair has longevity before OBOR, as it was established in 2004. The twelfth iteration took place in June 2016.¹⁰¹

Objectives

Chinese state policy toward Uyghurs and East Turkestan during the post-Soviet era has been partly shaped by external opportunity, particularly in regard to Eurasia. The curbing of overseas support for Uyghur political aspirations and the expansion of trade with post-Soviet states are two manifestations of how China has exerted influence across borders.

China has also initiated trade events away from the regional capital of Urumchi. The SREB and Karamay Forum held in August 2016, an event also called the “Davos Forum in West China” by China’s state media,⁹⁸ is an example. The event included representatives from China, Iran, Pakistan, and Kazakhstan and official media outlined the objectives as strengthening “cooperation between China and countries along the Belt and Road Initiative region, which will

Furthermore, external opportunities in Eurasia extend beyond the consolidation of territorial sovereignty and new export markets. Access to natural resources, particularly oil and natural gas are a significant factor. In meeting the infrastructural demands of these external opportunities, China has put in place a succession of development campaigns, as described above and in the previous section, to link the center with East Turkestan and Eurasia.

Development initiatives have increased state, and consequently Han migrant, presence among Uyghurs. An economic growth narrative has heavily influenced contemporary policy in East Turkestan with an attendant lack of value and role for Uyghurs in directing the development process and establishing opportunities that align with their collective interests. As a result of this imbalance in power relations, the presence of the economic growth narrative in ethnic minority areas has been called “an instrument to *neutralise* [UHRP italics] ethnic minority dissatisfaction with Chinese rule.”¹⁰² Referencing the Uyghurs, Michael Clarke calls state dominance of the economic development narrative in the region ‘developmentalism,’ which he adds, “has contributed to political, economic and cultural marginalisation of the Uyghur.”¹⁰³ In this approach to development, the Chinese government not only secures East Turkestan for external investment and migration, but also silences any opposition to inequitable policies.

While ‘developmentalism’ describes how the state attempts to achieve the consolidation of ethnic minorities into China through an interventionist approach, it is also fitting in pointing out the necessity of continued delivery on economic opportunity domestically and the notion that border regions are open for development. In essence, development in East Turkestan provides a spatial fix to fears of a stagnating national economy. As a December 9, 2015 article in the Chinese state run *Global Times* claimed OBOR would “bring new opportunities for Xinjiang’s economic development...boost business exchanges between Xinjiang and other areas of the world, and therefore revitalize the economy in the northwest of China.”¹⁰⁴ However, in demonstrating the close relationship between broad geographical development objectives and neutralizing Uyghur political opposition, the article adds: “As Xinjiang’s separatist forces have...overseas connections, more efforts should be made to defend social stability in the province and guard against extremism and terrorism.”¹⁰⁵

Michael Clarke writes in a September 10, 2015 article for *The Diplomat* “the OBOR (and the SREB component especially) is as much about Beijing’s domestic concerns as it is about its grand strategy priorities.”¹⁰⁶ He adds: “the intensification of Uyghur and Tibetan opposition to ongoing Chinese rule since 2008 has underlined for Beijing the need to accelerate the economic development/modernization of these regions as the primary means of achieving their integration into the modern Chinese state...it is thus no coincidence that these regions are specifically envisioned as playing key roles in the OBOR.”¹⁰⁷

While the Chinese Communist Party sought to recognize ethnic differences, “the long term aim was to bring about a slow fusion of the peoples into one people.”¹⁰⁸ On the one hand, ethnic classification separated the peoples of China into individual *minzu*, and on

the other, all *minzu* formed a part of the *Zhonghua minzu*.¹⁰⁹ Given the state's goal of integration, the construction of the ethnic classification system would result in its eventual dismantlement. The organization of groups based on *minzu* would in time not only produce tension between the state and ethnic minorities over the advantages and disadvantages of heterogeneity and homogeneity among China's peoples, but would also create a form of displacement for the more than fifty *shaoshu minzu* (少数民族) during the fusion process.

Indeed, two simultaneous and paradoxical types of displacement can be highlighted in the Chinese context: first, a pragmatic inclusion of the 55 minorities in the Chinese nation, that is, a forced displacement from the margins of the Chinese territory to the core of the nation; and second, an exclusion of these same ethnic minorities through a political and social displacement to the margins of the Chinese body politic and society.¹¹⁰

Economic development has been a primary driver in achieving the goal of ethnic fusion. While a modernization imperative has been at the forefront of domestic policy across China, especially since the late 1970s, some scholars have argued that in ethnic minority regions a civilizing component is attached to development initiatives. According to scholar Stevan Harrell, the Communist approach to modernization is not defined by the conversion of peripheral peoples into those of the center, but rather to raise them to a standard of modernity that is universal. Harrell adds that in China, including the period of CCP government, Han culture is promoted both as a measure of centrality and modernity: "As long as such an innate, almost visceral Han sense of superiority remains, the actual program of the Communist project will be based on the unconscious assumption that Han ways are better, more modern ways. Peripheral peoples who act like Han—who are educated, Hanophone, *cultured*—will be treated equally with their Han compatriots." Harrell's argument underlines how Chinese Communist approaches to achieving material development among ethnic minorities were focused on the displacement of peripheral identities for those of the center—in this case Han culture. As the redefinition of ethnic minority identity is set out in the terms of the 'civilizer,' minorities are only granted voice if they speak in favor of the civilizing project.¹¹¹

The neutralization of opposition to Chinese policies and assimilation of the Uyghurs into China through 'developmentalism' speaks to long-term goals of the CCP. The effective displacement of Uyghurs through economic development, explored in the following section, permits the continuation of this territorial and cultural merging and OBOR is the latest initiative in realizing these aims; however, as previously stated, 'developmentalism' has also opened East Turkestan to excessive securitization in order to consolidate these gains.

While some analysts have seen the development process in East Turkestan in purely economic terms, others have proposed a greater strategic objective within OBOR. According to one academic: "The initiative is a timely reminder that China under the Communist party is building a new empire."¹¹² According to an October 12, 2015 article in the Financial Times: "A push into central Asia will partly fill the vacuum left by the

retreat of Moscow after the cold war, followed by Washington's military pullback from Afghanistan."¹¹³ Michael Clarke calls this strategy China's "Eurasian Pivot" and that it was conceived as a response to the United States' Asia "rebalance." He adds: "From this perspective Central Asia emerges as a strategic safety valve for the expansion of Chinese influence."¹¹⁴

In 2000, at the outset of Western Development, scholar Dru Gladney wrote in a chapter for a volume entitled *Energy and Conflict in Central Asia and the Caucasus* on China's primary interests in Central Asia, which he identified as "energy and ethnic security." In the introduction Gladney states:

China is often portrayed as expanding beyond its borders in search of economic and energy security, with Central Asia considered to be one of its most immediate areas of conquest. Figuring large in these scenarios are China's restive border minorities, particularly the Muslim people known as the Uyghurs, and the role they may play in either obstructing China's expansionism or in derailing China's economic development drive.

As this passage indicates, the presence of the Uyghurs presents a potential impediment to China's post-Soviet ambitions in the Central Asian region. The following section examines in detail the displacement of Uyghurs from East Turkestan as a policy solution to this "obstruction."

Chinese State Economic Development and the Effect on Uyghurs

Displacement

The post-Soviet transformation of East Turkestan under center-led development campaigns has been characterized by state agendas. From the Chinese government's perspective, benefits of state-initiated economic development policy to the citizenry are self-evidential rather than accrued through a negotiated process, as "large-scale, capital-intensive development projects accelerated the pace toward a brighter and better future."¹¹⁵ If displacement of individuals and communities in the pursuit of this greater good should occur, it is a localized by-product of a national project.

However, analysts of development-induced displacement and resettlement (DIDR) consider the development process, and its associated costs, from the local scale upward. Center-led development has overpowering effects on marginalized peoples' ability to control the direction of change in their communities.¹¹⁶ The subsequent analysis examines how the Chinese government's cumulative development initiatives have provoked displacement of Uyghurs within their homeland and how OBOR will only exacerbate this on-going process.

Much of the research on DIDR has focused on the physical aspects of displacement, i.e. removal of individuals. A survey of the literature suggests DIDR occurs when development initiatives are focused on: (1) water supply (irrigation, reservoir and dam projects); (2) urbanization and transportation (highways, railroads, building construction); (3) energy (mining, pipelines, natural resource extraction); (4) agriculture and natural resources (monoculture, cultivation enlargement and conservation) and (5) population redistribution schemes.¹¹⁷

Amongst Uyghurs, there are examples where physical displacement has occurred under the aforementioned five conditions. Land and water degradation in the lower Tarim River from extensive agricultural use resulted in an outflow of the population in the area during the 1990s.¹¹⁸ One study on the Tarim River Basin suggests that the movement of peoples further upriver as degradation continues in the lower reaches will eventually result in a drastic shortening of the Tarim and water resources in East Turkestan.¹¹⁹ Water conservation projects have also displaced peoples in the region. The World Bank backed Xinjiang Turfan Water Conservation Project estimated over a hundred displaced individuals in an effort to increase supply to boost local incomes.¹²⁰ The direct effect of energy *projects*, rather than the associated opportunities stemming from natural resource extraction, on displacement among Uyghurs, is far from well documented.¹²¹

While UHRP believes Chinese development campaigns have physically removed Uyghur individuals and families, the predominant characteristic of Uyghur displacement is *in situ* (i.e. Uyghurs have *largely* remained in place) and economic initiatives have created forces of compression as Chinese settlers and the state increase their presence in East Turkestan. Han Chinese migration has not only created compressive forces, but also necessitated further projects to increase water supply and cultivable land in East

Turkestan. Furthermore, according to Radio Free Asia (RFA), migration to the south of the region has led to ethnically charged clashes over state allocation of capital for reclamation work required in these projects.¹²² In a November 3, 2013 article, RFA reported Uyghurs were complaining of exclusion from the subsidies Chinese migrants received to convert unused land for cultivation. The article cites two Uyghur farmers from Aksu Prefecture who describe how the state has disproportionately distributed land and subsidies in favor of Han settlers.¹²³ Further information on land grabs in southern East Turkestan disadvantaging rural Uyghurs is available in UHRP's report *Without land, there is no life: Chinese state suppression of Uyghur environmental activism*.¹²⁴

In a 2004 monograph, demographer Stanley Toops outlined how the perception of frontier regions of China as having available resources and development opportunities had encouraged the movement of people to Xinjiang.¹²⁵ Stanley Toops argues that migration was not unprompted and state "inducements and incentives" featured heavily in promoting East Turkestan, especially during the Western Development campaign.¹²⁶ Michael Clarke writes that the notion of East Turkestan as a province full of "'untapped' resources and abundant land is undermined by the fact that most of the arable land in Xinjiang is already under cultivation and water resources are increasingly scarce, while there has been significant desertification due to urbanisation, extensive irrigation and land reclamation projects spurred by increased Han settlement since 1949."¹²⁷ Scholars Howell and Fan attribute the motivating factors in migration to East Turkestan as linked to reform of the economy, looser restrictions on controls governing migration and development policy, in particular Western Development.¹²⁸

Stanley Toops has also projected that an increase in migration, including the floating population, would lead to a growth in Han Chinese in the region.¹²⁹ Between 1953 and 1990, the Han Chinese population increased from 0.3 to 5.7 million.¹³⁰ From 1990 to the 2000 census, the number of Han Chinese grew to 7.5 million and by the 2010 census the figure had reached 8.8 million.¹³¹ Between 2000 and 2012 another 1.2 million were added to the number of Han Chinese in East Turkestan.¹³² In the post-Soviet era until 2012 (22 years in total), the number Han Chinese increased by 4.3 million, whereas in the 37 years between 1953-90 the rise was of 5.4 million. However, despite such growth, the percentage of Han Chinese in the region between 1990-2010 has been recorded at the 38-40 percent level ostensibly due to a rise in the absolute number of Uyghurs. Nevertheless, during CCP rule, the proportion of Uyghurs in East Turkestan has shrunk from 75 percent to 45 percent.¹³³

Much of the migration to East Turkestan has occurred in the north of the region. In particular, Urumchi, Shihezi and Karamay, of which the latter, as previously mentioned, is a center for the natural resource industries, a sector of the economy dominated by Han Chinese.¹³⁴ In 1949, 75 percent of the population lived in the Uyghur dominated south; however, by 1990, more of East Turkestan's population lived in the north of the region.¹³⁵ Data from the 2000 census shows that Han Chinese constituted over 75 percent of the total population of the regional capital, as opposed to 20 percent in 1949.¹³⁶ As Reza Hasmath has observed in the nineteen years after the Soviet collapse the population of Uyghurs in urban areas dropped significantly except for in Kashgar and Hotan.¹³⁷



Chinese migrant workers picking cotton near Kumul, 2013 ©Xinhua

As a surge in migration under government encouragement resulted in compression of Uyghurs in the north of the region, the Xinjiang Work Forums of 2010 and 2014 stimulated migration to the south, an area predominated by Uyghurs. The establishment of the Kashgar Special Economic Zone during the 2010 Work Forum was promoted as an opportunity to draw outside investment. With financial capital from Guangdong in the amount of CNY 1.4 billion (USD 186 million), ambitious plans to transform Kashgar as a hub for Central Asian trade modeled on Shenzhen were outlined.¹³⁸

According to anecdotal evidence collected by overseas reporters, construction and real estate opportunities were available in Kashgar after the Special Economic Zone designation, especially to Han Chinese with the social and financial capital to take advantage. One Han Chinese property developer told a journalist working for Newsweek: “When I went to Kashgar on May 26 [2010] to try to do a building [sic], all of the desirable properties had already been taken...I talked to some locals in March who said that they couldn’t even sell their apartments, but by May locals and nonlocals, from places like Guangzhou, Shanghai, Jiangxi, were all buying.”¹³⁹ In an interview with a New York Times reporter in 2010, a salesman at a new development in Kashgar said: “We can’t build apartments fast enough for demand...Come back here in five years, and you won’t recognize the place.” The same reporter observed: “With few exceptions, the bricklayers, plumbers and electricians are Han, as are about 90 percent of the buyers.” When questioned “why the promotional materials [for the new developments] did not

include Uighur-language text, the salesman...was frank. ‘What’s the point?...They can’t afford this place.’”¹⁴⁰

The promotion of “ethnic mingling” at the Second Xinjiang Work Forum of 2014 has encouraged local officials to implement measures encouraging Han Chinese migration to the south. Reports of cash rewards for couples entering mixed marriages in Cherchen and the announcement of a new mixed ethnicity settlement near Hotan were illustrative of the approach.¹⁴¹ The relaxing of *hukou* requirements in southern East Turkestan has been another means with which the state has attempted to stimulate migration.¹⁴² The measures compounded exclusion from the fledgling economic and social mainstream in the south among those Uyghurs already there choosing to opt out of “ethnic mingling.” As such initiatives continue, and OBOR continues to emphasize the need to attract external investment, the north-south axis of economic imbalance is in jeopardy of becoming even more localized and ethnically divisive.¹⁴³

However, a narrative stating that waves of Han Chinese migrants are descending upon southern East Turkestan must be tempered by a demographic analysis. For example in Kashgar Prefecture approximately 202,000 Han Chinese resided in the area according to the 1990 census.¹⁴⁴ In 2012, the number of Han Chinese in Kashgar Prefecture stood at nearly 285,000 (approximately one third growth). In 2000, nearly 56,000 Han lived in Hotan Prefecture and by 2012 the figure was roughly 75,000 (approximately one half growth). A comparison of data between the two prefectures from 2011 and 2012 show modest rises in population, especially in contrast to absolute numbers of Uyghurs. However, what the population statistics also illustrate are the increasing populations of both communities and of demographic growth in the south, which had long been resistant to migration. In addition, it appears Uyghurs are not moving from the region in large numbers.¹⁴⁵ The encouragement for increased migration in the south has strong indications of continuing under OBOR given the tendency for migration in Xinjiang to follow boosts in transportation infrastructure.¹⁴⁶

Howell and Fan argue that prior to the 1970s migration to East Turkestan was state managed and that most migration in the reform era has been self-directed. Furthermore, Agnieszka Joniak-Liithi suggests: “Han migrants to Xinjiang should not be understood as a homogeneous category of participants in a singular state project intended to establish state control over the region...[and] migrants follow their own strategies when the situation permits, rather than fulfill the government’s plans.”¹⁴⁷ While this may be the case, the role of the state should not be diminished in orchestrating the demography of the region. Incentives drive the process under center-led development campaigns that promise to deliver on continued economic growth and opportunity.¹⁴⁸ The state has strong motives to provide these opportunities given the need to sustain economic growth across the nation, as well as to incentivize Han presence across East Turkestan as a means to strengthen ties between the region and the center.¹⁴⁹

In February 2009, Chinese authorities announced the project to demolish five square kilometers of the eight square kilometer old city, which when concluded would affect between 65,000 households, an estimated 220,000 people representing about 42 percent

of Kashgar's total population.¹⁵⁰ By 2011, two-thirds of Kashgar's old city had been demolished.¹⁵¹ In the words of one overseas reporter, as the demolition progresses "[i]n its place will rise a new Old City, a mix of midrise apartments, plazas, alleys widened into avenues."¹⁵² In a 2015 article, with the ethnocentric title of *Across China: Kashgar's Silk Road ambitions -- from backwater to bridgehead*, state media described how Kashgar has become "a city of construction sites."¹⁵³ However, the article neglected to mention how construction in Kashgar during the OBOR era has been enabled by the demolition of the Uyghur old city. A number of Uyghur communities have been targeted for demolition across the region, including Kashgar Prefecture, the Tashbulaq district of Urumchi, Turpan, Hotan, Ghulja, Kumul, Aksu, Korla, and Uyghur neighborhoods in Karamay, and Bortala.¹⁵⁴



New and old collide in Kashgar

The redevelopment of Uyghur neighborhoods is a manifestation of the in situ displacement felt in Uyghur society and cultural life. As the physical appearance of urban East Turkestan becomes less distinguishable from eastern China, Uyghur residents will occupy the same spaces, but without the organic arrangement the redeveloped areas once embodied. Further anecdotal accounts from overseas media, especially from Kashgar Old City residents, relate the reordering of the social fabric towards the impersonal through the loss of institutions such as the *kichik masjid*.¹⁵⁵ Agnieszka Joniak-Liithi has written convincingly about the transformation of East Turkestan into a region that is becoming more familiar and comfortable to Han migrants:

The sheer numbers of incoming Han result in an ever-expanding transfer of Han spaces to Xinjiang. Because the number of temporary, seasonal, and permanently-settled Han in the region is greater than ever before, incoming Han are followed by yet other Han migrants and middlemen who offer their services to make the immigrants feel “at home”...Owing to their increasing numbers, and also to missing mechanisms that might otherwise control this phenomenon, the Han migrants of the past two decades have been able to recreate in Xinjiang their ‘spaces of familiarity’ to an unprecedented extent...That most of the post-1980s migrants have arrived in the ‘gold rush,’ driven by money and opportunity, makes it even more difficult for the Uyghur, and also for local Han and earlier Han immigrants and their descendants, to establish a positive relationship with these newer arrivals.¹⁵⁶

In the context of OBOR, in a report for the Center for Strategic and International Studies entitled *The Emerging Political Economy of OBOR*, Alexander Cooley writes that “[p]art of the problem with Chinese assumptions about the purportedly stabilizing effects of transportation infrastructure is that not all Uighur residents of Xinjiang consider themselves the primary beneficiaries of Beijing’s investments. Large-scale construction projects or state led investment is sometimes criticized for disproportionately benefiting ethnic Han in positions of access or connected state-owned enterprises (SOEs) such as the Xinjiang Construction and Production Corps and encouraging additional Han settlement.”¹⁵⁷ UHRP believes that OBOR represents a further state incursion, under the economic development narrative, into the lives of Uyghur in which will only accentuate displacement in situ through increased migration and urbanization.

Marginalization and Joblessness

In research conducted on DIDR, social scientist Michael Cernea outlined a model that attempted to chart the vulnerabilities faced by displaced peoples, as well as the likelihood of recovery from impoverishment connected to displacement.¹⁵⁸ In his Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) model, Cernea lists the potential risks facing displaced peoples as: landlessness; joblessness; homelessness; marginalization; food insecurity; increased morbidity and mortality; loss of access to common property and services; and social disarticulation. Most striking of the vulnerabilities Cernea outlines if the Uyghur context is considered are marginalization and joblessness.

According to Cernea, one sign of marginalization among displaced peoples is a tendency towards self-deprecation stemming from social stigmatization. While this experience is defined amongst physically displaced individuals and communities, this phenomenon has also been documented with Uyghurs displaced in situ. Smith Finley has recorded the “internalised oppression” of first generation *minkaohan*. One Uyghur interviewed by Smith Finley from this generation “had evidently internalised the negative official portrayal of Uyghurs as ‘backward’ (in relation to the advanced Han), and confided that she had wished she had been born Han.”

Cernea also asserts that marginalization can occur even before displaced peoples are physically removed, as infrastructure and services are downscaled in anticipation of displacement. In East Turkestan, this process may be seen in a different light because the contrary has happened. Infrastructure and services have undergone a remarkable transformation under center-led development campaigns; however, Uyghurs have not been the primary beneficiaries from such improvements. As one scholar has noted: “The economic activities of the Chinese state and its representative in East Turkestan have not been ethnically neutral. Rather, they have overwhelmingly benefited the Han in East Turkestan, and many seem deliberately designed to encourage Han immigration.”¹⁵⁹



Uyghur bus rider in Ghulja ©Gilles Sabrié

In a 2008 paper on the Xinjiang economy, Cao Huhua found a very high correlation between poverty designated counties and counties in which ethnic minorities exceed 90 percent of the total population. Cao added that rural ethnic minority areas in East Turkestan recorded significantly lower income levels when compared to rural communities in non-ethnic minority areas.¹⁶⁰ A *Phoenix Weekly* report showed that the per capita GDP in each of the four southern prefectures (Kashgar, Hotan, Kizilsu and Aksu) in East Turkestan is less than 45 percent of the regional average. In addition, 85 percent of the rural poor and 63 percent of the unemployed were found in these four prefectures.¹⁶¹ According to official data released in 2013, among the highest performing prefectural level administrative areas in terms of economic measures were Karamay, Urumchi and Shihezi. All three locations ranked highly in terms of GDP per capita, average wages and employment. Six of the seven majority populated Han Chinese

prefectures ranked at least in the top third of all prefectures for at least one of those three measures.¹⁶²

Joblessness is a key indicator of the displacement in situ Uyghurs have experienced as East Turkestan transforms under post-Soviet era development. According to one Hong Kong based scholar, discriminatory practices in hiring have aggravated economic disparities between Uyghurs and Han Chinese.¹⁶³ Differences between ethnic groups in the distribution of jobs can also be detected across a number of types of skilled and unskilled employment. Reed and Raschke claim 80 percent of the workers employed in East Turkestan's manufacturing, transport, communications, oil and gas, and science and technology sectors are Han Chinese. Additionally, Han Chinese occupy 90 percent of jobs in the active construction industry.¹⁶⁴ Research conducted by the Congressional–Executive Commission on China spanning six years of Western Development illustrates discrimination against Uyghur candidates for jobs with the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, the civil service, and in the regional education sector.¹⁶⁵ According to Vicziany and Zhang empirical evidence demonstrating a lower chance that Uyghurs will be able to secure jobs has led to perceptions that development in the region is geared toward the Han majority of China.¹⁶⁶ This is a finding supported by Hopper and Webber in 2004 who surveyed Uyghur and Han Chinese attitudes to employment opportunities. Asked whether employment conditions in Xinjiang were better or worse than ten years earlier, 76 percent of Uyghurs stated that the employment situation was worse, while only 49 percent of Han Chinese felt the situation had worsened.¹⁶⁷

Conclusion

China's successive economic development initiatives in East Turkestan and Eurasia have not benefitted the Uyghur people. By design, Beijing has set development priorities within the context of state and party interests, rather than accounted for the concerns of the titular holders of autonomy in East Turkestan. It is therefore problematic to label the center-led campaigns in the region as 'development' given the exclusion facing Uyghurs from setting economic priorities and the inequities in opportunity captured in economic measures. The 'grand strategy' aims of OBOR do not augur well for a more localized development approach from the Chinese state.

Since 1990, center-led development campaigns have contributed to the in situ displacement of Uyghurs driven by the external opportunities presented with the fall of the Soviet Union. While anxieties over Uyghur political activity across the border were key motivating factors, this work argues that the necessity of generating new economic opportunities in China were also critical in the territorial consolidation of East Turkestan by the Chinese state. Displacement of Uyghurs in situ through development in situ was a process of compression instead of physical removal. This is understood as compression in resources, political influence and space as the center presence increased and absolute numbers of Han Chinese increased.

Displacement in East Turkestan was aided by formidable boosts in transport infrastructure and widespread urbanization carried out in the name of development. The buildup of the natural resources extraction industries, also under the auspices of successive development campaigns, became a significant pull factor for migrants from outside of the region. This movement of people has seen an expansion in what have been called "Han spaces," as well as an unprecedented dispersal and prominence placed on Han culture in the Uyghur homeland.

Uyghurs did not possess the requisite cultural and social capital in a development process led by a state from which estrangement was already in place. Development as it is understood in East Turkestan was an instrument with which to assimilate the Uyghurs and to determine loyalty to the center-led vision for the region. The choice facing Uyghurs was one between cooption and displacement. In a decision making process that already excluded Uyghurs from determining development policy, those Uyghurs who chose cooption would have little agency to effect change from within.

This work has focused on the compressive aspects of center-led development interventions in East Turkestan. Aspects of cultural displacement, in particular regarding the condition of the Uyghur language and Islam, are areas in which displacement in situ have had profound effects. Indeed ethnic minority policy theorists such as Ma Rong propose the active disregard of cultural diversity in law and policy, as well as the deterritorialization of ethnic identities. The aim of such an approach, as Bovingdon states: "is to bring about greater uniformity in language, religious practice, dress, fertility."¹⁶⁸

This research has focused on how displacement in situ has been an incremental process among the Uyghurs through center-led development campaigns. However, the Chinese state has also introduced measures to administratively disperse Uyghur. The fragmentation of Uyghur political dominance in East Turkestan into sub-autonomies (prefectures and counties) nominally presided over by other *minzu* is another means the state has exercised displacement in situ. The control of land by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, an entity reporting directly to Beijing, and the creation prefecture-level cities in southern East Turkestan, such as Aral, add to the fragmented picture wherein the Uyghur autonomy is dismantled piecemeal.

International Instruments

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement offer the clearest understanding of international standards on DIDR. However, the Guiding Principles are incomplete regarding protecting populations displaced in situ.¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, a broader understanding of the standards is useful in safeguarding the rights of indigenous populations displaced by government policy and external migration. Principle 6.2 (a) and (c) clarify state responsibility towards creating conditions where forms of displacement do not manifest in profound changes in demographics, particularly in the Chinese case towards the dominant Han population. The article states:

The prohibition of arbitrary displacement includes displacement:

- (a) When it is based on policies of apartheid, “ethnic cleansing” or similar practices *aimed at/or resulting in altering the ethnic, religious or racial composition of the affected population* [UHRP italics];
- (c) In cases of large-scale development projects, which are not justified by compelling and overriding public interests.¹⁷⁰

Principles 7.1 and 7.3 present insights to the Uyghur condition in respect to displacement in situ. Principle 7 outlines state responsibility toward avoidance of displacement, but more pertinently, describes processes of consultation with targeted populations, as well as means of address:

Principle 7.1. Prior to any decision requiring the displacement of persons, the authorities concerned shall ensure that all feasible alternatives are explored in order to avoid displacement altogether. Where no alternatives exist, all measures shall be taken to minimize displacement and its adverse effects.

Principle 7.3. If displacement occurs in situations other than during the emergency stages of armed conflicts and disasters, the following guarantees shall be complied with:

- (b) Adequate measures shall be taken to guarantee to those to be displaced full information on the reasons and procedures for their displacement and, where applicable, on compensation and relocation;
- (c) The free and informed consent of those to be displaced shall be sought;

- (d) The authorities concerned shall endeavour to involve those affected, particularly women, in the planning and management of their relocation;
- (f) The right to an effective remedy, including the review of such decisions by appropriate judicial authorities, shall be respected.¹⁷¹

The third principle relevant to the Uyghur case regards guarantees toward vulnerable populations:

Principle 9. States are under a particular obligation to protect against the displacement of indigenous peoples, minorities, peasants, pastoralists and other groups with a special dependency on and attachment to their lands.

In a review of the Guiding Principles, Forced Migration Review, an initiative of the University of Oxford, described the challenges facing the standards as outlined in the document. The first action item recommended is the need for states to incorporate the Guiding Principles into national legal systems.¹⁷² According to Cernea, “China’s legal architecture for land and resettlement is a *state-centric-strong* model.”¹⁷³ Although Cernea notes that since 1986 China’s record toward offering compensation for loss of land has improved, adequate levels of recompense in East Turkestan is in dispute.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, specific protections for ethnic minorities facing issues of assimilation and displacement in situ from development campaigns are lacking. In the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law under Chapter VI The Responsibilities Of State Organs At Higher Levels, Article 55 merely states:

The state shall develop preferential policies to attract and encourage domestic and international investment in ethnic autonomous areas.

When establishing the plan for national economy and socialist development, state agencies at higher levels should give consideration to the needs and characteristics of the ethnic autonomous areas.¹⁷⁵

UHRP believes issues of displacement in situ resulting from state initiated development campaigns would be ameliorated if the Chinese government met international standards of the right to participation. The Declaration on the Right to Development, which was approved by 146 votes at the United Nations General Assembly in 1986, offers an extensive description of the right to participation. The 10 articles of the declaration read as a call for the guarantee of this right. Articles 1 and 2 describe individual and collective rights to participate in economic, social, cultural and political development. Article 2 adds, that while it is the responsibility of every individual to contribute to development, governments must implement development policy equally across all sections of the population. Expanding on this, Article 3 firmly places the obligation on states to realize this view of the right to development and in a specific provision on participation, Article 8.2 reads: “States should encourage popular participation in all spheres as an important factor in development and in the full realization of all human rights.”¹⁷⁶

Scholar Anne Orford comments the implication of Article 8.2 is that the right to development should be “characterized as a ‘participatory right’...participation as a right means that people should have control over the direction of the development process, rather than simply being consulted about projects or policies that have already been decided upon.”¹⁷⁷

Recommendations

For the Chinese Government

- Implement measures to ensure that new business and development initiatives launched in East Turkestan under the OBOR initiative provide equal opportunity employment and investment opportunities to Uyghurs.
- Authorize Uyghur civil society entities to independently and transparently evaluate the effectiveness of development initiatives carried out under OBOR.
- Meet the human rights standards as outlined in Principle 6 of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement that protect vulnerable populations from demographic manipulation through government policy.
- Recognize Principle 7 of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement that asserts the right of vulnerable populations to consultation and participation in the development process.
- Realize Article 2 of the Declaration on the Right to Development, which establishes “active, free and meaningful participation in development,” and take steps to ensure the meaningful participation of Uyghurs, at all levels, in the determination and evaluation of policies regarding development, investment and employment in East Turkestan under OBOR.
- Take action to broaden the focus of development initiatives beyond the scope of infrastructure and natural resource industries, and expand development initiatives designed to enhance local, grassroots development and smaller-scale industries.
- Ensure the construction of modern transport infrastructure, such as roads and railways, in East Turkestan are matched with guarantees that Uyghurs are granted the right to freedom of movement within the region and over borders.
- Permit genuine participation of Uyghurs in state-initiated trade fairs and allow Uyghur civil society to organize their own events to promote Uyghur-run businesses.
- Scale down securitization of East Turkestan. If the Chinese government is sincere in its assertion that economic development will bring stability to the region, there is less need for excessive numbers of security forces.
- Respect genuine and meaningful autonomy in East Turkestan with popular representatives given the freedom to oppose assimilative policies targeting language, religion, redevelopment of neighborhoods and local scale administration.

For Concerned Governments

- Raise ethical standards of private sector investment in China under OBOR initiatives. Companies investing in East Turkestan should not only meet international human rights standards, but also demonstrate how new enterprises will benefit the Uyghur people in the region.
- Raise concerns at bilateral human rights dialogues with the People’s Republic of China over limitations placed on Uyghurs to genuinely participate in development and to peacefully oppose demographic transformation in East Turkestan.
- Open consulates in the East Turkestan regional capital of Urumchi that will permit a closer observation of equitable development in the region during the era of OBOR.
- Establish a “Special Coordinator for Uyghur Affairs” in national foreign ministries.
- Pass a “Uyghur Policy Act” that incorporates protection of Uyghur rights to development and genuine representation in the development planning process.

For the International Community

- Send observers, particularly the Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Opinion and Expression; Minority Issues; Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Rights, to East Turkestan with unfettered access to Uyghur communities to impartially conduct an assessment of China’s compliance to its international obligations to protect the human rights of the Uyghur people.
- Ensure human rights standards, especially in regard to displacement, and are fully met by the Chinese government before multilateral assistance and projects, through agencies such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, are approved.
- Include provisions in existing human rights standards on displacement that protect vulnerable populations from demographic transformation and assimilation due to development initiatives.

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The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) was founded by the Uyghur American Association (UAA) in 2004 with a supporting grant from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). UHRP's mission is to promote human rights and democracy for the Uyghur people. In 2016, UHRP became an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-exempt organization.

UHRP works to raise the profile of the Uyghur people by:

Researching, writing and publishing commentary and reports in English and Chinese covering a broad range human rights issues involving civil and political rights, through to social cultural and economic rights;
Preparing briefings – either written or in person – for journalists, academics, diplomats and legislators on the human rights situation faced by the Uyghur people.

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