

# Xinjiang region and China's policy towards it

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## Manifest Pedagogy

UPSC has earlier concentrated on issues of international importance with strategic consequences to India like the East China Sea issue and the South China Sea. With China's continuing reluctance to designate Masood Azhar as a global terrorist its domestic policies towards minorities and Islamic hardliners have come under the radar.

## In news

Detention of Uighurs in Xinjiang by China

## Placing it in the syllabus

India's Bilateral relations

## Static dimensions

- Xinjiang region.
- History of the region.

## Current dimensions

- The policy of China towards the region and its Implications.
- How can India use Xinjiang card in its diplomacy with China?

## Content

Xinjiang region and its History

- Xinjiang is the largest and most western part of China's administrative regions, which is surrounded by Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. (See map below). The region is inhabited by more than 40 different ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Uighurs and the Han (Chinese). Uighurs who are Muslim(minority), speak a language close to Turkish and are culturally and ethnically closer to Central Asia than the rest of China.
- The Xinjiang region was thinly populated by small – scale kingdoms and tribal alliances of herders and oasis farmers. It was ruled by Han rulers initially and later by Uighurs.
- For centuries, the area became known to the Chinese as Xiyu (“Western Regions”) when it was annexed under the Qing (Manchu) dynasty in the 18th century.
- In the 1940s, it experienced a brief period of independence, but after the Communists took power in 1949, China regained control over it. Its full name is the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.
- For a long time, Xinjiang had a rebellious and autonomous streak, with indigenous ethnic Uighurs challenging the authorities.
- In the early 1990s, as the collapse of the Soviet Union gave birth to new nations, there was a spike in demonstrations and demands for independence, but these were quickly crushed.
- In addition to ethnicity and cultural dissonance, tensions are also seen to be rooted in economic factors – as the development of China has elevated cities such as Kashgar and Urumqi, young, qualified Han Chinese from eastern regions have come to Xinjiang, taking the most lucrative jobs and triggering resentment among indigenous people.
- A significant outbreak of violence took place in July 2009 (mainly in Ürümqi), during which scores of people were killed and hundreds injured.



## The policy of China towards the region and its implications on China

- **Racial discriminations:** The region is inhabited by more than 40 different ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Uyghurs and the Han (Chinese). Factors such as the massive state-sponsored Han Chinese migration from the 1950s to the 1970s, government policies promoting Chinese cultural unity and punishing certain expressions of Uyghur identity, and heavy-handed responses to separatist terrorism contributed to the tension between Uyghurs and the state police and Han Chinese.
- **Economic discrimination:** It is said that the Han Chinese are given the best jobs and that the majority are doing well economically, which has fuelled resentment among Uyghurs.
- **Restriction on religious practice:** There are complaints that Islam is severely restricted, with fewer mosques and strict control over religious schools. In a report published in 2013, Amnesty International said authorities criminalized ' what they labelled ' illegal religious ' and ' separatist ' activities ' and clamped on ' peaceful cultural identity expressions. '

The above-mentioned problems have fueled the disturbance in the region and put China under international pressure to provide individual rights to the people inhabiting Xinjiang region.

### China's policy towards the region

In recent times, China's harsh Xinjiang policy – especially the mass detention of Muslim minorities in so-called “vocational education and training centres “– has given rise to growing outrage from the world community. However, despite the global rebuke, China appears to hold fast to its hard

position.

### **How can India use Xinjiang card in its diplomacy with China?**

- Two actions China took in March reveal its inconsistent policies toward the Muslim world in general, and in particular toward the threat of Islamic extremism. In the first, China admitted once again that it runs “vocational training centres” for Muslims in its Xinjiang region, and that the facilities are designed to counter a threat of Islamic extremism within China.
- But within hours of that statement in Beijing, despite irrefutable evidence of its support for extremist violence, China refused to condemn the founder of an Islamic terrorist group in Pakistan to a blacklist of the United Nations.
- There are two ways that India can use the Xinjiang issue to deal with China:
  1. One is to reveal China’s policy on the Xinjiang Uighurs and take the help of other countries to put pressure on China to Blacklist the JeM terrorist Masood Azhar.
  2. Second is to deal with China Individually.

Like this India can put pressure on China that Terrorism as global a problem and it is necessary for both countries to cooperate in dealing with it.