



The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land

Gardner Bovingdon

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For close to half a century, the Uyghur people of Xinjiang, in northwestern China, have struggled to achieve autonomy and independence. As reflected by recent events, however, their efforts have been met mostly with violent resistance, matched by a sophisticated strategy of state-sanctioned propaganda, dissident broadsides, and viral ethnonational rhetoric. Nevertheless, this Muslim minority remains passionate about establishing and expanding its power within government, and China's leaders continue to push back, refusing to concede any physical and political ground.

Beginning with the history of Xinjiang and its unique population of Chinese Muslims, Gardner Bovingdon follows fifty years of Uyghur discontent, particularly the development of individual and collective acts of resistance since 1949, and the role of various transnational organizations in cultivating dissent. Bovingdon's work provides fresh insight into practices of nation-building and nation-challenging, not only in relation to Xinjiang but also in reference to other regions of conflict, highlighting the influence of international institutions on growing regional autonomy. He takes on the function of representation in nationalist politics and the local, regional, and global implications of the "War on Terror" on antistate movements. While both the Chinese state and foreign analysts have portrayed Uyghur activists as Muslim terrorists, situating them within global terrorist networks, Bovingdon argues that these assumptions are weak, drawing a clear line between Islamist ideology and Uyghur nationhood.

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