

Analyzing Past Genocides to Determine Effectiveness of International Intervention in the Uyghur Genocide

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ABSTRACT

Located in northwestern China, The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is Chinese territory populated predominantly of Sufi Muslim, Turkic-speaking ethnic groups. The largest ethnic group, amounting to approximately 12 million inhabitants, is the Uyghurs. Inhabited mainly by Uyghurs, Xinjiang is also inhabited by ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks. Nonetheless, Uyghurs only make up 0.12% of the entire Chinese population. The high concentration of ethnic populations in Xinjiang has been a concern for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) which is largely monocultural to the mainly Han Chinese and Mandarin-speaking demographic. The CCP launched its “Strike Hard Against Violent Terrorism Campaign” in order to combat the growing issues of separatism and terrorism which has yielded the detainment of nearly 1.8 million ethnic inhabitants of Xinjiang. This paper will compare the Uyghur Genocide to 4 of the past notable genocides in the 20th Century and determine what level of international involvement would be most effective. This paper asserts that the Armenian Genocide displays the best guide in terms of international involvement, but highlights the circumstantial nature of addressing genocide, in that, due to the large scope of genocide not all genocide can be addressed the same exact way.

Introduction to the Uyghur Genocide

Located in northwestern China, The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is Chinese territory populated predominantly of Sufi Muslim, Turkic-speaking ethnic groups. The largest ethnic group, amounting to approximately 12 million inhabitants, is the Uyghurs. Inhabited mainly by Uyghurs, Xinjiang also is inhabited by ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks. Nonetheless, Uyghurs only make up 0.12% of the entire Chinese population. The large concentration of ethnic populations in Xinjiang has been a concern for the People’s Republic of China (PRC) which is largely monocultural to the Han Chinese and Mandarin-speaking demographic. As Islamic militant groups launch attacks worldwide the Islamic and Turkic backgrounds that define this region and its inhabitants have been targeted by the Chinese government in aims of combatting the so-called “Three Evils: Terrorism, Separatism, and Religious Extremism.”

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in the United States, the international world launched a plethora of campaigns with the the purpose to deter the rise and spread of terrorism. It was at this point when China, under the leadership of Hu Jintao, launched its initial “Strike Hard” campaigns. These campaigns were designed and implemented to eliminate any to all prospects of terrorism and separatism. Since then, these campaigns have largely focused on Xinjiang for its Islamic culture; Uyghurs, being the most prolific population in this region, have been the primary victims of the government's attempts at “deradicalization.”

In May 2014, the Chinese Communist Party launched its “Strike Hard Against Violent Terrorism Campaign” designed to combat Islamic-backed terrorism; since its inception, the Chinese government has systematically persecuted the Uyghur population in China and committed mass atrocities under the Convention on the Prevention and

Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Nearly 1.8 million ethnic minorities in Xinjiang have been detained in concentration camps and subject to torture, forced sterilizations, abortions, and indoctrination. The Chinese government has denoted these establishments as “vocational centers” to explicitly combat the threat of terrorism in suspected individuals and has declared claims of human rights abuses as false. Intelligence gathered by the international world paired with firsthand accounts of former detainees paint a much different story.

Survivor Testimony

The Chinese government has refuted all claims of human rights abuses or genocide in Xinjiang despite the presence of extensive evidence. One such example is the harrowing testimony of Tursunay Ziyawudun before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China on March 1, 2022.

Ziyawudun is a native of Kunes County, East Turkestan and was subjected to life in these camps twice; the second of which, in March 2018, lasted nearly a year. She describes her life in the camps that became characterized by fear, indoctrination of communist loyalty, and torture. Ziyawudun recalls “In the camp, we always lived in fear...we heard screaming and crying voices from other cells, wondering whether what was happening to others would happen to us, too.” The oppressive nature of the camps was present in victims even before any physical abuse began.

Ziyawudun, like millions of other victims, faced not only the mental and emotional hardship of the camps, but experienced the horrific nature of them. She recounts how “Several times, the guards took me out of the cell and into an interrogation room, and they beat me.” A particularly horrific occurrence is also illuminated through her testimony in which she reveals “Once, they took me out in the middle of the night, along with a young woman in her 20s. Next to the camp police officers wearing uniforms, there was a man in a suit, wearing a mask over his mouth. I don’t know where he came from. These men raped the young woman. Three police officers raped me as well.”

In her testimony, Ziyawudun called for the continuance and increase and coverage of the atrocities occurring in Xinjiang from organizations such as Uyghur Human Rights Project and Radio Free Asia. While the topic is being addressed to an extent, the awareness of the events taking place in Xinjiang need more recognition to bring about change. In leaving the camps after enduring these violent conditions the prevalence of emotional trauma is brought about in her testimony. This request stands as a testament to the power and effectiveness of knowledge and understanding of a situation. “I am still not free of my nightmares, the mental anguish of my experience, and my mind is constantly imagining the suffering of so many others who are still experiencing the same fate.... I hope the Congress will do more to help genocide victims, especially women, to get professional support to recover our health, and survive our past and present trauma.” Not only can resources and action be taken to address the atrocities being committed, but resources and actions can be utilized to assist those in the aftermath of such a harsh occurrence.

Clash Between Sovereignty and Human Rights

Any proposed plan of action involving taking action against another country lends itself to being strongly at odds with international law provisions and principles. Many to all claims of human rights abuses and violations of human rights law have been countered with claims of sovereignty. The Chinese government has consistently claimed, amid backlash from the international community, their actions in Xinjiang fall entirely within their jurisdictional and sovereign rights. These claims must be respected, as another entity cannot infringe on another country solely under the suspicion of wrongdoing. The Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang stands as an example when international law and human rights law display their inherent conflict with another.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust and establishment of the United Nations, statutes were enacted by the UN to identify and establish criteria for combatting genocide. On December 9, 1948, the UN enacted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Article II of this Convention laid forth the criteria of actions that qualify as genocide “...with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group

as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.” In combining the criteria set forth by the United Nations with intelligence and first-hand accounts from survivors, the international world is able to designate China’s actions in Xinjiang as genocide.

The Chinese government has targeted a group of people with a specific religious and cultural background and committed atrocities against them on the basis of these attributes. In this paper, I will compare this particular instance of genocide to the most notable examples of genocides in the 20th Century, with varying levels of intervention and in different time frames to determine the effectiveness and potential for any intervention specifically, United Nations intervention. I will analyze and compare the following: Armenian Genocide (1915-23); Holocaust (1939-45); Rwandan Genocide (1994); Bosnian Genocide (1995-99). Each of the examples previously mentioned are both examples of genocide and ethnic cleansing as all violence was specifically targeted to a specific group of people that follow a specific religion and cultural background.

Past Genocides

In determining a plan of action for the present issue at hand as well as other mass atrocities, it is valuable to look at past examples of the same type of occurrence. As I previously stated, the actions of the CCP in Xinjiang against the ethnic groups in Xinjiang can be denoted as genocide and ethnic cleansing. I derive these claims [genocide - as ethnic cleansing is not a term utilized by the United Nations] from the definition set forth by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide which lays the groundwork and criteria for such actions. All of them, China has met. Survivors of the said “vocational camps” have stood as a testament to these workings and intelligence gathered by the United States Congress.

I will set forth the general premise of 4 past genocides, their level of international intervention, and the effectiveness of each. The 4 genocides laid out in this paper were chosen on the basis of time period, varying levels of intervention, and different geographical locations. The Armenian Genocide and Holocaust precede the establishment of the United Nations and its subsequent provisions regarding genocide and human rights violations. The usage of the different time periods allows for the analysis of an atrocity with substantially different international entities and foundations in international law. The varying levels of international intervention (such as Rwanda: low; Holocaust: high) provides for the understanding of different levels of considered success, as well to determine if international intervention would be favorable or not in the Uyghur Genocide. Lastly, the consideration of different locations is very important. It is inherent that the origin of the genocide will influence attitudes and dispositions regarding whether or not to intervene. Using similarities and context-specific conditions, I will assert what level of international intervention would be most effective in the Uyghur Genocide.

Armenian Genocide: 1915-23

Approximately 2 million Armenians lived in the Ottoman Empire in 1915; by 1923, the formerly small, but stable, Armenian population had been reduced by nearly 1.5 million and wholly decentralized under Turkish rule.

Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were predominantly Christian, standing at odds with their Turkish counterparts that were Muslim and made up the majority of the Ottoman population. As both an ethnic and religious minority, Armenians were subjected to fierce discrimination and considered an inferior race. Claims of discrimination and suggestions of administrative change to combat these problems, were met with nothing more than massacres so as to silence Armenian grievances.

The roots of the Armenian Genocide can be traced back to the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Committee of Union of Progress (CUP), an ultranationalist Turkish party founded by the Young

Turks. With the desire of a monocultural state, the decimation of the Armenian population was initiated. Armenian existence soon became characterized by mass executions and deportations.

In the international world, the United States played a substantial role in deterring Turkish harm. Congress led efforts to assist Armenians from the Turkish killings; most notably, passing what was known as the “Near East Relief” spearheaded by Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, Sr. The American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, through community outreach and spreading awareness to the American people, were able to inform the public and lead the drive for collection of funds for Armenia. Through the American embassy in Constantinople, the US was able to put to use the nearly \$117,000,000 raised to assist the war-torn and scattered Armenian population. The Committee, which became the Near East Relief in 1919 after being enacted by Congress, provided immense support to the Armenian population in the course of the next 15 years. The philanthropic nature of international intervention in this genocide was highly meaningful and included programs such as refugee camps, hospitals, and orphanages.

American intervention designed to save and revitalize the Armenian population prevented the decimation of the Armenian population and proved highly successful by implementing programs that were circumstance and context-based to provide the most effective aid. The considerably substantial and sweeping amount of assistance the United States was able to lend in the Armenian Genocide can be attributed to the acknowledgement of the dire need of help contained by the. As many in the US realized, the complete decimation of the Armenians was imminent if humanitarian aid was not offered. Large amounts of money, resources, and the establishment of refugee camps paired with an understanding of the severity of the occurrences made international involvement considerably successful.

Holocaust: 1939-45

Perhaps the most notable example of genocide in modern history, Nazi Germany’s 6 year purge on the Jewish population in much of Eastern Europe, which in the end would claim up to 6 million lives, encompassed a massive amount of international intervention and stands as a core example of genocide. Associating Germany’s humiliating defeat at the end of World War I, Germany, under the rule of the Nazi Party, attempted to systematically wipe out the Jewish population and bring about an exclusively Aryan state. As Germany pushed into other parts of Europe, Jewish people were deported, forced into concentration camps, tortured, executed, and altogether targeted in the majority of Europe. Concentration camps and gas chambers brought millions of lives to an end over the span of these years in alignment with the Nazi Party’s “Final Solution” which would call for the eradication of a Jewish population in Europe.

The Holocaust, being so massive in scale, along with being internationally invasive, lent itself to diverging into a world war. Additionally, the establishment of the Allies and Axis Powers represents part of the international involvement. Nonetheless, the Holocaust stands as an example with an abnormally large scope of intervention and can still be analyzed and considered.

Utilized considerably by some of the Allied Powers, namely Britain, appeasement resulted in not only the delayed resistance to Hitler’s brash desires, but allowed for the expanse of his ambitions to be furthered. As Hitler infringed on the territorial sovereignty of surrounding nations, and openly declared war on the west, the Western World had no choice but to engage in battle to stop him. Additionally, the mass murder of people outside Germany’s border further pushed the Allied Powers to combat him. The conclusion and involvement in this genocide was one that is rare and generally unconventional. Declaration of war is a very serious choice for a nation to make and has grave implications. World War II can be seen as the international involvement in this genocide; battle and pure conflict characterized the scope of the Holocaust provided for war being the only option, and thus stands in its own category of genocide and international intervention.

Rwanda: 1994

Perhaps one of the most notable genocides in the past 50 years, the Rwandan Genocide stands a prime example of ethnic conflict amounting to genocide as well as failed foreign intervention. The massacre of approximately 800,000 individuals was brushed over in the international world, despite ample clues and intelligence.

The Rwandan Genocide can be thought of as occurring in the midst of a civil war. Animosity was spurred with the Hutu-led overthrow of the government and the establishment of Tutsis being inferior citizens. This ousting and discrimination motivated the creation of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) which stood as a Tutsi movement to reestablish themselves in their country, both in a territorial manner and a social manner. In the post-colonial era, the exit of the European powers and their control on the African governments left the continent far and wide in disarray. With the Belgian exit in 1961, Rwanda was left in the hands of two warring ethnic groups vying for power and recognition.

Mass killings of the Tutsi were led by radical Hutu militant groups. Anti-Tutsi sentiment flourished alongside radical Hutu zeal, leading to thousands of Tutsi's, and even moderate Hutu, to be targeted, round-up, and executed by the masses. Over the span of 100 days (April to July) 800,000 to 1,000,000 Tutsi and Hutu were slaughtered.

The Rwandan Genocide is noted for its lack foreign intervention. While there was an international presence at the time of genocide, tight constraints rendered them useless and subjected designated "peacekeepers" to watching horrors unfold before them. Ample signs and intelligence display the possibility of effective intervention: the UN, labeled the genocide as an "internal conflict" and hesitated significantly on designating the term "genocide" to the conflict in Rwanda. Reports of human rights abuses and plans of attempted eradication of the Tutsi people by the Hutu were widely ignored by the international community. Had these signs being taken into account and action taken at the outbreak, it is widely concurred that the Rwandan Genocide would not have become what we know it as of today. It is the general consensus that the foreign policy and intervention in the Rwandan Genocide was heavily flawed and was not the correct approach because of the chance to stop any occurrences of genocide before it began. The approach taken during the Rwandan Genocide would not be very applicable to the Uyghur Genocide because of the lack of ethnic conflict in Xinjiang as well as the presence of a stable and accepted government in China.

Bosnian Genocide: 1992-95

Alongside the three preceding examples of genocide, the Bosnian Genocide arrived at the decline and collapse of a power. This occurrence is one that differentiates the Uyghur Genocide as there is no dispute for control and/or governmental collapse present.

In the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990's, numerous different states began to declare independence. Slovenia announced its independence, followed by Croatia, and soon after Serbia; however, when Bosnia attempted to declare its independence, it was not formally accepted and Serbia advanced in the name of "saving Serbian Christians" in Bosnia, resulting in the Bosnian Genocide being both religiously and ethnically motivated.

Similarly to the Turkish purge of the Armenians, the Serbians set out to entirely decimate Bosnian Muslims. Utilizing Yugoslavian military equipment, Serbian forces advanced on Sarajevo and began the Bosnian Genocide. Bosnians were forced into concentration camps, raped, tortured, and murdered. The establishment of Muslim enclaves surrounded by UN Peacekeepers were designed to protect the Bosnian targets from the Serbian purge. However, the veracity of the Serbs did not wilt. In Srebrenica, the Serbians assassinated 23,000 people and the safe haven in Srebrenica fell.

NATO began to launch airstrikes on Serbia in 1994. The following year, peace talks began and a ceasefire was called. International tribunals have followed and have convicted more than 160 individuals of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The outright intent to decimate called for the need and presence of international involvement, which to a certain extent NATO was able to accomplish. Most convicted are Serbians, Bosnian-Serbians who led the

campaign to eradicate the presence of Bosnian Muslims. We can look to the imminent decimation of the Armenians and see a pattern with regards to the Bosnian Genocide: the force with which Serbian forces were attacking Bosnians suggested similar intent, resulting in UN intervention. The use of legal action is an interesting use of foreign policy and somewhat specific to the Bosnian Genocide. However, in relation to the Uyghur Genocide, the force taken by the Serbians does not strongly correlate, making any usage of violence improbable.

Conclusion

The 4 previous genocides I have set out stand as examples of mass atrocities in which we are able to analyze the circumstances and various levels of international intervention involved to conclude on a possible remedy from the international world pertaining to the Uyghur Genocide. I first turn to the general premise of the Uyghur Genocide itself, that is, what the actions in Xinjiang are an example of: a targeting of a minority born from ethnonationalism.

In responding to acts of genocide, intervention is highly context-specific. No case of genocide can be responded to the exact same way because of the sweeping nature of genocide as well that required of intervention. The Uyghur Genocide is unique from the cases previously mentioned. A number of factors and aspects of the Uyghur Genocide sets it apart from preceding examples of genocide that must be taken into consideration. First, it is important to understand the actions taken by the CCP are not motivated by the intent to eradicate the Uyghur race in their entirety. In Armenia, there was a concurrence to eliminate the presence of the designated minority. The actions taken by the aggressors along with stated intentions highlight this. Additionally, the concept of the “Final Solution” present in the Holocaust signifies complete decimation of the targeted group. China’s actions in Xinjiang do not align with the intention of these stated goals. Second, China’s stated intentions differ from previous genocides in that China’s goal is not exclusively ethnic or religion based. The Young Turks had the intention of an exclusively Turkish state; the Nazi’s, an exclusively Aryan state; the Rwandans, an exclusively Hutu state; and finally, the Serbians, an exclusively Serbian Christian state. While China has exclusively targeted an ethnic and religious minority, which suggest the actions are motivated on the basis of these factors, the CCP has not designated an exclusively Han Chinese state as its reasoning and motivation behind its role in Xinjiang, making the situation more complicated with regard to international involvement.

Numerous aspects of China’s actions in Xinjiang are done through fear and force and violate multiple provisions of international law. Nonetheless, China’s actions are not broad, violent, or exposed enough to take sweeping action like that done in Bosnia or the Holocaust. As I previously mentioned, China dissents from any accusations of wrongdoing or human rights violations, so strong and forceful action is not realistic or practical. The strength and role of China in the global playing field, both politically and economically also prevent wide-scale action to take place. The increasing power and influence, produced from strong trade initiatives (Belt and Road Initiative) and its mass production of resources make it an immensely difficult entity to combat. I believe that the Armenian Genocide paints the best path in terms of international involvement and may highlight the best example for success.

I derive this possibility from the Armenian Genocide which featured widely considered successful international intervention. At the outset, however, it is worth mentioning a highly notable aspect: the Armenian Genocide was largely characterized on deportations and the decentralization of a stable Armenian population. The approach taken exactly in this example would not work because of the lack of deportations as well as the heightened security, surveillance, and restrictions in Xinjiang. Nonetheless, in terms of international intervention, the course of action taken in this genocide proved to be highly successful. The largely successful nature of the role of the outside world can be attributed to the solidarity and general understanding of the dire importance at hand. The United States Congress understood that decimation of Armenians was imminent with the lack of help. The eradication of the Uyghur population in China is not at hand currently, but the importance of solidarity and understanding of the issue at hand is illustrated.

The American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief was able to fund and give \$117,000,000 in humanitarian aid. The establishment of a solid understanding of the issue at hand, the keen awareness of the stakes at hand, and the purposeful and dedicated execution of assistance allowed for international intervention to be highly successful. While circumstances and specifics may differ, the premise of involvement stands as a hopeful one in the face of the Uyghur Crisis in Xinjiang. I find the Armenian Genocide to be the best example in terms of present involvement, not due to the explicit action taken, but because it illuminates the impact of deep understanding, solidarity, and unified action: aspects to which I find to be the displayed in the most successful foreign policy.

Taking Action

Global superpowers such as China, which carry an immense amount of geopolitical influence and power, determine considerable amounts foreign policy and relations between countries, which result in not only political reparations, but economic ones, as well. The vast economic power exercised by China and the international world's reliance on Chinese trade and markets cause Chinese relations to be of top importance. The Uyghur Genocide is not limited solely in Northwestern China; in the years since 2014, the Uyghur Genocide has produced a shift in trade relations, specifically that in America. The unethical origin of many resources and goods from Xinjiang has turned a number of American corporations away. This shift in attitudes of large corporations have the potential to greatly influence their consumers. Consumers not only have the opportunity to consider more thoughtfully about where their goods come from, but can be aware of such actions taking place. The spread and increase of knowledge of the Uyghur Genocide can have an impact on individuals through their own decisions (such as consumption of goods) as well as on a greater level (foreign policy of individuals respective countries).

In looking at the 4 of the most notable examples of genocide in the 20th century, analyzing their levels of foreign involvement and comparing it to the Uyghur Crisis, I assert that the Armenian Genocide paints the best picture for future, or potential involvement, in the Uyghur Crisis. Nonetheless, while the general premise can be determined, for anything to change, a level of policy must be implemented. While this is not an exhaustive list, it serves as few possible policy oriented solutions, resembling that of the steps taken in the Armenian Genocide.

First, and most prevalent among responses to human rights violations, sanctions could be imposed. It is here that I believe the Armenian Genocide can shed some insight into successful and preventative involvement. Sanctions, often strong ones, are imposed against countries believed to be taking part in human rights violations. While effective to an extent, sanctions can fall flat in the absence of a strong and unified establishment of sanctions. The establishment and implementation of multiple countries' Sergei Magnitsky Laws, which allow for sanctions to be imposed on corporations and officials that are suspected of contributing to human rights violations. The multilateral efforts would have the potential for being much stronger and effective than independent and individual sanctions.

Next, the establishment of dedicated research programs through the existence of NGOs would contribute to the understanding and knowledge regarding the Uyghur Crisis. The knowledge of a crisis and the spread of awareness can contribute to the strong desire to issue humanitarian aid and policy to assist the victims of this targeting. The Armenian Genocide stands as a key example of the effectiveness of simple understanding of the specific circumstances and implications of the actions of another country.

Lastly, as seen in Armenian Genocide, the creation of refugee centers greatly assisted in the decentralization of the Armenians in the former Ottoman Empire. The United States and other countries could work alongside border countries, particularly Central Asian countries bordering the Xinjiang region, to coordinate the creation of these centers. This step, which carries much potential if executed in a plausible manner, poses some challenges. Central Asian countries, namely Kazakhstan, have been hesitant to blatantly condemn actions taken against a population of some ethnic-Kazakh persons due to the presence and valuable nature of trade and economic ties. The establishment of refugee camps could signal hostility towards the CCP, resulting in Chinese frustration and anger towards these actions.

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