

China as an alternative model?

Written by Sushil Seth
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If China were the world, Xi Jinping (习近平) would be its president. It is a scary thought, but communist China is spreading its tentacles, what with its One Belt, One Road project, turning the South China Sea virtually into its inland waterways and cajoling/threatening regional countries into its hegemony — the word that China used in the past to describe the US.

It claims that it will never be a hegemonic power, because China has always been peaceful. In other words, if it looks like China is expanding, it is all for the good of humanity.

Talking of humanity, one may spare a thought for the Uighurs in China's Xinjiang, as they are being made to suffer in silence. Xinjiang and Tibet are examples of what might be in store for other territories that China claims to be its own.

Hong Kong, of course, is a case in point where its China-sponsored government has been trying to railroad legislation under which criminal suspects from Hong Kong would be extradited to the mainland to face its judicial system.

Under “one country, two systems,” Hong Kong is supposed to maintain its separate governing system for 50 years from 1997, when the British relinquished the colony.

Beijing has been busy chipping away at Hong Kong's autonomy and the proposed extradition legislation will erode it even further. No wonder, the territory's government has faced such protests, with estimates of up to 2 million people participating.

Although the Hong Kong government has suspended the legislation, it will most likely be revived when it gets the necessary signal from Beijing.

At present, Beijing does not seem happy at the “mess” created by the Hong Kong authorities, particularly its chief executive.

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The people protest has a long way to go, and if the fate of the Tiananmen democracy movement is anything to go by, one has to worry about the future.

Here is a lesson for Taiwan. Hong Kong's "one country, two systems" has sometimes been held up as a model for Taiwan, which China regards as a "renegade" province to be united with the motherland by whatever means. Well, it is a sham — if it ever was workable — looking at what is happening in Hong Kong.

Worse still, look at what is happening with the Uighurs in Xinjiang.

According to media reports, Xinjiang's Muslim Uighurs have been put in vast detention centers for "re-education," as they are lacking in the desired/prescribed loyalty to Chinese communist rule.

They are regarded as potential or real terrorists, and it would do them and China good if they start learning from the beginning what it means to be a Chinese under Xi's rule.

There are reportedly 1 million Uighurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang, "happily" learning from their mistakes and wanting to be reformed. And what does that involve, as recounted in a recent article by James Millward in the New York Review of Books?

It requires detainees to sing anthems of the Chinese Communist Party, disavow Islam, criticize themselves and their family's beliefs, watch propaganda films, and study Chinese language and history. And they are told that their culture is backward.

Or to put it in China's sanitized version, as in a Xinhua news agency interview in October last year with Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Chairman Shohrat Zakir, the detainees must learn Chinese language and "gain modern science knowledge and enhance their understanding of Chinese history, culture and national conditions ... learn legal knowledge, including the content of the Constitution, Criminal Law and Xinjiang's Counter-extremism regulations, as well as acquire at least one vocational skill ... to suit local conditions and the job market."

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In other words, they will need to truly forget who they are — and to do all this — to forget who they are — they most likely would spend rest of their lives in these “re-education” camps.

It is also called, in an Orwellian sense, a process of reintegrating into society. It is creepy even as I write this and spare a thought for those million or so Uighurs who have to live this every day.

China is starting to exercise such stifling power in the world that even Muslim countries have not raised their voice against the repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang.

China prides itself on its alternative model of political and economic development. What is happening in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong is not an attractive alternative. Indeed, it is repulsive and scary.

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