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Dear Mr. Rogers:

One day last week in Nanking a group of glum-faced correspondents and political observers were discussing the Chinese military situation and speculating grimly about the future. There was a lull in the conversation. One of the group, who knew that I had just returned from two months of travel throughout Northwest China, turned to me and asked, "What the devil is going on in the Northwest?" The question had no particular relation to the general discussion; it was simply based on curiosity. He might just as well have been asking about Pago Pago.

"What the devil is going on in the Northwest?" It is significant that this question was asked in Nanking. It reveals the fact that Northwest China seems almost as remote and unreal from China's capital as it would from New York, Chicago, or San Francisco.

Northwest China, as defined in political terms by the Chinese Central Government, consists of four large provinces - Sinkiang, Kansu, Chinghai, and Ninghsia - which are under the authority of General Chang Chih-chung's Northwest Headquarters in Lanchow (Kansu). Geographically it is a vast borderland which has frontiers touching Tibet, India, Afghanistan, the Soviet Union, and Outer Mongolia. Much of the territory in these four provinces is sparsely populated, and the total population of the region is approximately 13 million, or somewhat less than three percent of the estimated total in all of China. Deserts, mountains, steppes, and plains cover most of the region, while agriculture is confined to a few small areas: the valleys of the Yellow River and its tributaries in Ninghsia, Kansu, and Chinghai, the narrow Kansu corridor stretching westward to Sinkiang, and the scattered oases and river valleys in Sinkiang. The eastern borders of this region are almost a thousand miles west of Nanking and the western borders are over two thousand miles from the capital.

At present the four Northwest provinces are outside the war zones in China and are divorced from the Civil War situation to a large degree. Repercussions from the military struggle in other parts of China are felt in the Northwest but for the most part only indirectly. The Northwest is a distinct region with many unique characteristics differentiating it from the rest of the country. These are some of its salient characteristics:

(1) Remoteness. Throughout the region there is a strong sense of isolation, both geographical and psychological. The Berlin crisis - and even the loss of Tsinan in North China - do not seem ominous to most inhabitants of these provinces because news of world events reaches them only as a faint echo. Some foreign influences are felt, but even the Soviet Union, a close neighbor, appears to be merely a shadowy prime mover hovering in the background of local conflict situations. Life goes its own way in the mountains, oases, and valleys and on the steppes, plains, and deserts.

(2) Primitive Transportation. There is not a single railway line in the four provinces. Airline routes touch three of the four provincial capitals, but in two of these three places the service in infrequent and undependable. The only modern transport developed to a considerable degree is motorized trucking along a few major crushed rock and dirt highways. Even these trucks serve only a small percentage of the population, however, and most travel and trade makes use of camels, horses, carts, mules, and donkeys.

(3) Lack of Modern Development. There is not one really large-scale industrial plant in the whole region. Each provincial capital possesses a few small-scale modern or semi-modern factories, but all of these factories together would barely make up the industrial plant of a small U.S. manufacturing town. With a few exceptions the existing factories are government-owned, and private, capitalistic industrialism is virtually non-existent. Even urbanization on the pre-industrial pattern is limited, and Lanchow (population 204,000) is the only large city in the whole region which has modern urban characteristics. Not a single city in the whole region has running water, plumbing, or a sewage system. The four provincial capitals have dim electric lights, but even in these places life usually procedes on a dawn to sunset schedule. There is only one university in the whole region (in Lanchow), and institutions of health, education, social welfare, and cultural activity of any sort are rare. There is a considerable amount of trade, which follows ancient caravan routes, but only a few modern influences have infiltrated via these routes. In short, the Northwest is a "backward" region, and a place where one still sees pigtails, bound feet, and many other marks of pre-Revolution China.

(4) Ethnic Diversity and a Mixed Economy. The population in the Northwest is a racial and cultural hodge-podge. In Sinkiang alone, for example, the Provincial Government lists 14 "racial" groups. The Chinese (Han) in that province comprise only about five percent of the population, while the majority is made up of Uighurs together with Kazakhs and many smaller groups almost all of whom are Muslims who are non-Chinese in language, race, and culture. Across Ninghsia, Kansu, and Chinghai is a belt of Chinese-speaking Muslims, a distinct group which is only part Chinese in race. The western and southern parts of Chinghai are inhabited almost entirely by Tibetans, while western Ninghsia is the domain of Mongol groups. The Han Chinese are concentrated in limited areas: the Kansu corridor, the eastern river valleys of Ninghsia and Chinghai, and a few oases in Sinkiang. In contrast to most of China, where intensive agriculture prevails, the economy of the Northwest mixes agricultural and pastoral elements, and the economic divisions follow ethnic lines

for the most part. The Han Chinese together with groups such as the Uighurs and Chinese Muslims are usually agricultural. The Mongols, the Kazakhs, most Tibetans, and some other minor groups are pastoral.

The Northwest's border position, its geographical remoteness and isolation, its economic and technological "backwardness", and its ethnic heterogeneity provide the background and framework for the present political situation in the region. The political and the military situation there can only be understood in terms of these facts. The most striking characteristics of the present situation might be summarized as follows:

(1) Political Regionalism. A high degree of localism and autonomy exists throughout many parts of the region. Kansu Province, which is centrally located, has the largest concentration of population (7,250,000), and is strategically important, is firmly under a provincial regime appointed by the Central Government, but the two provinces of Ninghsia and Chinghai adjacent to Kansu are under stern, semi-autonomous, authoritarian governments. These regimes are controlled by Chinese Muslims, who as a group are politically dominant in the belt which they occupy even though numerically they are a minority. General Ma Hung-kui in Ninghsia and General Ma Pu-fang in Chinghai have local control, in both cases inherited from family predecessors, which is close to absolute. Police state methods of control are used in both places. Although the title of Warlord is sometimes applied to these two men, it is not accurate in many respects, for both places which they control are characterized by a degree of efficiency which is not usually associated with warlordism. In both of their provinces, furthermore, reconstruction and development policies are being carried out independently, and in Chinghai particularly they have had considerabl success. The relations between these two local leaders and the Central Government can be described more accurately as political alliance than as complete political integration. This political alliance at present is based upon joint opposition to the Communists and upon the fact that both Chinghai and Ninghsia depend upon the Central Government for military supplies. Other ties, such as loyalty to Generalissimo Chiang and the tradition of Chinese rule, exist also, but alone they might not prevent a political separation under present conditions in China where centrifugal forces of disintegration are strong. In Sinkiang the provincial administration is appointed by and loyal to the Central Government, and the large Chinese garrison force controls most of the province, but strong traditional localism persists at many points throughout the huge territory of the province, growing Uighur nationalism makes the situation unstable and uneasy, and political separatism has resulted in the establishment of a completely autonomous regime in the rich northern and northwestern sections of the province (the Ili Valley and adjacent territory).

(2) Anti-Communist Defense Line. Despite the existence of localism and autonomy in the Northwest, the region is cut off from penetration and infiltration by the Chinese Communists who occupy territory contiguous with the Northwest in southern Suiyuan and Shensi. Geographi-

cal isolation partially explains why this region is on the sidelines in the Civil War, but the natural defense assets have been supplemented by a military defense line along the eastern border of the region from Ninghsia to Chinghai. The religious basis for the anti-Communism of the Muslims along this line seems to be one important reason for its effectiveness. Some Central Government troops are stationed in defense positions in this region, but the main strength is provided by the two Muslim Ma's (whose troops are nominally part of the National Army but actually are local forces with a good deal of autonomy) both of whom are bitterly anti-Communist. The most important military forces are Ma Pu-fang's cavalry which comprise some of the best military units in China and in the last analysis provide the main defense for the whole Northwest.

(3) Ethnic Problems. Perhaps the most basic internal problems in the Northwest involve relations between various ethnic groups. The problems arising from inter-group friction are often economic and political as well as social. Considerable friction between the rulers and the ruled is often involved. The Han Chinese have not been notably successful in ruling minorities, and the Chinese Muslims have not been much better in the regions under their political control. As a result, many ethnic minorities are dissatisfied with their present position. Except in Sinkiang, however, these ethnic problems do not constitute critical political problems at the present time. The Tibetans in Chinghai, for example, are politically inarticulate and are closely controlled by Ma Pu-fang with policies which combine conciliation toward those who are cooperative and repression of those who are unruly. The Mongols in Ninghsia, who are another major group, are much less rebellious than most Mongols in China at present - perhaps because they have been given a fair degree of autonomy. In Sinkiang, however, the ethnic problems are critical. Growing nationalism, particularly among the Uighurs, has created demands for political changes and a greater amount of self-rule. This nationalism, together with moral support and material aid (in amounts which have not yet been accurately determined) from the Soviet Union, were primary factors behind the Ili Revolt in 1944-45 which resulted in the establishment, by the Uighur-led Ili Group, of the Soviet-oriented regime in North Sinkiang which is still entirely cut off from Sinkiang as a whole. The Chinese administration in Sinkiang is attempting to recoup and improve China's position there by instituting reforms and following conciliatory policies toward nationalist groups, but it also feels compelled to maintain a large garrison force in the province to guarantee its control.

(4) International Problems. The boundaries separating Northwest China from its neighbors in many cases are poorly-defined and are subject to conflicting claims. Because of its geographical position, furthermore, much of the region receives influences from across its various borders, particularly the Soviet border, which vitally affect the local situation. This is especially true in Sinkiang. It seems highly probable that nationalism in Sinkiang would not be the serious problem which it now is from the Chinese point of view if the Soviet Union was not a close neighbor. Not only has the nationalist movement received moral support and some material support from the Soviet Union, but the impetus for the growth of the movement from the start was due in part at least to influences emanating from the far side of the Soviet border. The

most serious border dispute in the Northwest is along the border between Sinkiang and the Soviet satellite, Outer Mongolia, in the Peitashan area. For over a year hostile truces have alternated with small-scale warfare between patrols, and this situation continues, although neither side appears to be anxious to press the issue to its logical conclusion or allow it to develop into a major conflict. Locally, however, both the Chinese and the Mongol troops are still anxious to control as much as possible of the Peitashan range, which is probably the most important single area of strategic importanee along the whole Sinkiang-Outer Mongolia border.

The four Northwest China provinces of Sinkiang, Kansu, Chinghai, and Ningbsia are, themfore, a rather unique region with special characteristics. Although connected with the outside world by airlines and by long, tortuous land routes to Tibet and India as well as to the Chinese provinces of Suiyuan, Shensi, and Szechwan, the region is isolated to a large extent and not only goes its own way in many respects but also has its own problems. A military defense line separates it from the Chinese Civil War, and all intercourse with the Soviet Union and Outer Mongolia is cut off by the local counterpart of the so-called Iron Curtain.

In the long run, as local leaders in the region themselves recognize, the political future of these four provinces undoubtedly will be determined by the outcome of the Chinese Civil War and by other national and international developments, but for the time being Northwest China is somewhat of an entity unto itself.

Sincerely yours,

A. Doak Barnett

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