

SEPARATISM AND THE WAR ON TERROR IN CHINA'S XINJIANG UIGHUR AUTONOMOUS REGION



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**“Separatism And The War On Terror
In China’s Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region”**

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United Nations Peace Support Operations

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Introduction

The Chinese central government authority has in recent years been under increasing challenge from Muslim separatists in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of the People's Republic of China, a vast, landlocked expanse of deserts, mountains and valleys bordering Central Asia.

The ongoing situation in Xinjiang has been receiving increasing attention since China, after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on American soil, has raised the public profile of its campaign against local Uighur separatism, in the attempt to attract international support and understanding.

Terrorism has emerged as a major security threat for China and a national defense priority for the People's Republic of China as indicated in its Defense White Papers. China's Defense 2000 White Paper had made only sparse and general references to terrorism. The document "China's National Defense in 2002", instead devoted an entire section to the terror threat. The report identified terrorism as a top ranking security issue, specifically pointing to the restive Western Xinjiang region, where separatists want to create an independent "East Turkistan". In portraying China too, as a victim of terrorism, the White Paper said that "The 'East Turkistan' terrorist forces are a serious threat to the security of the lives and property of the people of all China's ethnic groups."

Riding the momentum of the US-led global war on terror, China has actively sought to project its own action vis-à-vis Muslim separatists as part of the worldwide effort. Terrorist characterization of the Uighurs pro-independence activities has been criticized in Xinjiang and by human and civil rights groups worldwide. In both cases it has been alleged that Beijing is using anti-terrorism as an excuse to stifle dissent in its western-most region. Taking the Uighurs' cause to heart, human rights activists also charge that the Chinese government's use of the term "separatism" refers to a broad range of activities including the exercise of the rights of expression and religion and the native population's desire for cultural, linguistic and religious autonomy.

On the contrary, if one is to adopt the Chinese central government perspective, the PRC policy in the region is instead a legitimate response to a genuine threat to the stability of a territory deemed to be of vital national significance both in its strategic location and in its resource potential. This threat would be carried out by obscurantist and violent forces, part of an international terrorist movement aiming at destabilizing Central Asia.

The People's Republic of China is remarkably engaged in a titanic effort to drag the region out of the shoals of underdevelopment into which for centuries remoteness, backwardness and geo-political interests have run Central Asia aground. Xinjiang, with its mineral wealth and its strategic geographic position should be - of all of Central Asia - uniquely equipped to take full advantage of the current dizzying pace of economic development promoted by the Chinese authorities.

In this paper I will argue that Beijing's safest bet in ensuring that the region remains free of fanatic Islamist violence is to make sure that economic improvements and opportunities are more evenly distributed. It befalls on the Uighurs as well as to the Chinese to make the best out of the ongoing development of Xinjiang.

I will further argue that despite the resurgence in recent years of Muslim identity throughout Central Asia the radical Islamic dimension of Uighur activism in Xinjiang – which has certainly been on the rise for some time – should not be over-emphasized. Unrest in Xinjiang has been until now motivated less by Islamic fundamentalism than secular demands. Religion is rather the natural vehicle of expressing the Uighurs' growing socio-economic grievances. Beijing has so far been successful in tackling the interaction of Uighur groups and outside Islamic radicals. There are, however, growing concerns that the conflict could become more violent as Uighurs combining with external militant Islamist influences could radicalize their activities in Xinjiang.

The challenge for Beijing is to find a way to contain the influence of the separatist movement through measures designed to provide genuine autonomy for the Muslims of Xinjiang within the

Chinese constitutional framework. The latest indications however, are that in the near future, the Chinese government will maintain keep its course with its policy aimed at preserving law and order in the region .

However framed and viewed, the ultimate outcome of the ongoing struggle in Xinjiang is uncertain and will much depend on China's unpredictable political and economic evolution. For the time being tensions in Xinjiang remain low-level. As the nexus between China, the Greater Middle East, Central and South Asia and Russia Xinjiang lies at the cultural crossroads between the Islamic world and the Han Chinese heartland. These factors combine to make the outcome of the separatist struggle in Xinjiang of growing international strategic importance.

1. China and Terrorism

A paper on the "East Turkistan" terrorist forces issued in January 2002 by the Chinese State Council Information Office, disclosed that various terrorist activities have been underway in Xinjiang since the 1950s.†The Chinese government stated that, particularly from 1990 to 2001, the "East Turkistan" terrorist forces inside and outside Chinese territory were responsible for over 200 terrorist incidents in Xinjiang, resulting in the deaths of 162 people of all ethnic groups, including grass-roots officials and religious personnel with injuries to more than 440 people.

Pressure on suspected government opponents intensified in the XUAR soon after 11 September 2001. Official sources made clear that the "struggle against separatism" was wide-ranging. Beijing has valid reasons to express its condemnation of terrorism. China's international status has been relentlessly growing in hand with its extraordinary economic development. The selection of Beijing as the site for the 2008 Olympic Games reflected the international community's confidence in China's continuing reform and stability. China's admission to the World Trade Organization demonstrated the Chinese commitment to embracing and upholding the rules of international trade and investment. It has been noted that a strong and forceful stand on international terrorism will put China in good stead in the community of nations. These efforts also help refute accusations, still making the rounds in some U.S. conservative circles, that China has had "one foot in the terrorists' camp" due to arms' transfers to states that harbor or sponsor terrorist groups and organizations .

The Western region of Xinjiang appears to be the main concern and the focus of China's current domestic anti-terrorism drive. Since Oct. 2001, Chinese authorities have disclosed an increasing amount of information about "terrorist" activities in Xinjiang. China has also charged that Xinjiang's separatists have colluded with al Qa'ida members who allegedly may be seeking refuge in remote Xinjiang. Indeed, at least twelve Uighurs are known to be among the six hundred suspected al Qa'ida and Taliban prisoners being held by U.S. forces in the Cuban naval base of Guantanamo.

China alleges that the Uighur separatist movement has been extensively financed by Osama bin Laden and has direct connections to the al Qa'ida network. In a report released in January 2002, titled "East Turkistan Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity" , the Chinese government stated "Bin Laden has schemed with the heads of the Central and West Asian terrorist organizations many times to help the 'East Turkistan' terrorist forces in Xinjiang launch a 'holy war' ". According to the report, bin Laden met with the leader of the dangerous separatist organization, the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in early 1999, and asked him to coordinate with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Taliban while promising financial aid . In February 2001, the report continued, bin Laden and the Taliban "decided to allocate a fabulous sum of money for training the 'East Turkistan' terrorists," promised to bear the costs of their operations in 2001, and along with the Taliban and IMU, "offered them a great deal of arms and ammunition, means of transportation and telecommunications equipment."

In analyzing the Chinese stance, it has been said that in the US - led war on terror, China has

seized the opportunity to justify its repression of pro-independence activities in Xinjiang by framing the conflict in that region as just one more front of the global war on terror.

To address the challenge posed by separatism in Xinjiang, China has taken action both at home and on the international front. Domestically, Chinese authorities have undertaken a number of measures to improve China's counter-terrorism posture and national security. These have included increased vigilance in Xinjiang and higher readiness levels of military and police units in the region. Action has also been taken to update and give more teeth to anti-terrorism legislation. At the end of December 2001, China amended the provisions of its Criminal Law with the stated purpose of making more explicit the measures it already contained to punish "terrorist' crimes".

On the diplomatic front, the PRC has been active not only in multilateral fora dealing with terrorism but also within regional security organizations. At this level, the PRC has worked to establish and develop the security and anti-terrorism components of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) a loose alliance comprising China, Russia and four other Central Asian States . Born in 1996 as the 'Shanghai Group', a body to stabilize and demilitarize shared borders, the SCO, as the organization has called itself since 2001, has progressively been tasked with a larger agenda starting with the promotion of regional trade. China has exercised leadership in developing the body's contents and structure. While this has been done to make the Group more active in standing against 'terrorism, separatism and extremism', it has been argued that a possible rationale of SCO's empowerment on China's part could also be the reduction of the American increased influence in neighboring Central Asia.

Beijing had banked on the international community understanding and acceptance of its policy in Xinjiang in the light of the widely shared anti-terrorism concern post-9/11. Instead, the PRC has been criticised for band-wagoning in the war on terrorism. Western human rights groups have expressed increasing concern that the Chinese policy is spreading a wide net criminalizing innocent Uighurs in addition to the genuine separatist activists.

Despite such criticism, China's efforts have been to an extent successful as, for instance, in the case of East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which was declared a terrorist organization by the U.S. Department of State in August 2002. This is important as until then, the United States had repeatedly rebuked China for human rights violations in Xinjiang and resisted linking the post-September 11 2001 war on terrorism with Chinese attempts to quash Uighur separatism.

In broad terms, the central Chinese government has so far responded to the challenge posed by ethnic unrest in Xinjiang with a two-dimensional approach. On one hand, the PRC hopes that Uighur resistance to Chinese assimilation will be eventually be mollified by the fallout of improved economic conditions in the region and overwhelmed by Xinjiang's 'Sinification'. The central government has therefore given high momentum to the economic development of Xinjiang as part of the general 'Go West' policy. While the overall results are indeed stunning, intra - regional economic development has been uneven.

On the other hand, the Chinese government has been showing unrelenting resolve in tackling separatism. Security tactics and uneven economic development risk therefore to aggravate relations between Xinjiang's seven million Han, the dominant Chinese ethnic group, and its indigenous eight million Uighurs. There are also indications of a growing radicalization of Central Asia posing the credible risk of the contagious spread to Xinjiang of violent Islamic extremism. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence of several Muslim Soviet republics bordering Xinjiang, as well as the rise of Muslim fundamentalism in the Greater Middle East, have also contributed to a rise in terrorist activity in the region. Islamic fundamentalist elements in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and the Middle East have reportedly trained some of the individuals responsible for these attacks.

2. Why Xinjiang Matters

Uighur dissatisfaction over Chinese rule has been a constant thorn in China's side over the past several decades. China's current policy, however, suggests a deeper concern for the potential impact that the Islamic resurgence in the region might have for the country's long-term stability.

The conflict in the province is further complicated by a fluid international context. After decades of oblivion, Sept. 11 2001 has catapulted Central Asia back to the fore of international attention. The regional chessboard where Kipling's nineteenth century 'Great Game' was played, is again the theatre of a renewed power struggle among traditional and new players. The new power entry is America which, as a result of its 2001 military campaign in Afghanistan, has solidly entrenched itself in the region.

Central Asia has been extraordinarily agitated since 9/11. This agitation has been spilling over into Xinjiang with potentially unpredictable consequences for the PRC. The stakes are potentially high as Beijing is concerned that separatist activities in the country's largest and westernmost province region, home to some of China's key military posts and rich national resource deposits of oil, minerals and natural gas, hold the prospect of becoming a significant threat to China's long-term political stability.

It has been noted that the Uighur Turkic Muslims obviously represent only a fraction of China's overall population of more than one billion, but given their concentration in a remote border area of vital strategic concern, their power to threaten Beijing's interests is disproportionate to their numbers. The importance of the region to Beijing in terms of its economic and strategic potential, helps explain the central government's response to any unrest in Xinjiang. The priority attached by the Chinese authorities to their policies in Xinjiang are therefore testament to the relevance of the region to economic development and overall stability of the country. However, the scale and intensity of Chinese response risks triggering further anti-regime unrest, heightening the prospect that the Xinjiang crisis will spiral out of control, destabilizing China.

3. Background

3.1 Geography

Vast but thinly populated, Xinjiang (the name meaning "New Territory") is China's largest region. Situated in the North-West of the country, with an area of 1.6 million sq km, the landlocked region makes up one-sixteenth of China's territory and borders Russia, four former Soviet Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan), plus Mongolia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

The geographical feature of Xinjiang is commonly referred to as 'three mountains with two basins in between'. In the North lies the stretching Altay mountain range and in the south are the grand Kunlun mountains and the Altun mountains, serving acting as natural barriers. The Tianshan mountains stand in the middle and divide Xinjiang into northern and southern parts, forming the Junggar basin in the north and the Tarim basin in the South. The Gurbantunggut desert in the Junggar basin is the second largest desert in China. It lies next to Taklimakan desert in the Tarim Basin which is the world's second largest mobile desert. The climate is typically dry-continental with abundant sunlight, little precipitation, a sharp contrast between day and night temperatures, and a bitter coldness. In spite of the presence of such large deserts, Xinjiang does have large rivers, such as the Tarim, the Ili, the Ertix and the Manas which irrigate the desert oases.

The vast barren expanses of the province have historically provided China with "strategic depth" from military threats coming from the West. The region's remoteness made it also a logical choice as

China's nuclear weapons testing site. At site Lop Nor in the north – west part of the Tarim basin at least forty five nuclear tests are reckoned to have been conducted since 1964 .

3.2 People

The latest Chinese census of 1999 estimated Xinjiang's population in circa 17.5 million people. Forty-seven ethnic groups are counted although only thirteen are officially recognized nationalities of Xinjiang . Besides the Uighurs and the Han, other significant ethnic groups inhabiting the region include also Kazaks (numbering about one million), Mongolian (around 159.000) Kyrgyz (about 150.000), and Huis, that is the Muslim Chinese Han (700.000). Small communities of Tajiks and Uzbeks are also counted.

The Kazaks, nomadic pastoralists, arrived in Xinjiang in the mid-1800s when they were pushed eastward by the expanding Tsarist empire and they particularly inhabit the Ili Prefecture in the North-West. However, the Uighurs are the single most populous ethnic group, numbering slightly over eight million. A considerable Uighur *diaspora* has left Xinjiang over the past decades. There are also some 500,000 Uighurs scattered in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. Approximately the same number are known to have settled in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Western Europe and the United States. Uighur communities are also settled in other parts of China as far as Beijing and Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. The activities of the Uighur *diaspora* are closely monitored and appear to be of major concern to the Chinese Authorities who fear that separatists in Xinjiang receive indispensable logistical support from abroad, particularly through the CARs.

The development, from the 1950s, of mineral resources and the opening up of the region for cotton production, brought an influx of ethnic Chinese which dramatically altered the province's ethnic balance. In 1949, Xinjiang had 3.2 millions Uighurs and only 140,000 Chinese. Now, of the total population, 40 percent are Han, and only 47 percent are Uighur. Given current migration patterns, Uighurs fear they might soon be significantly outnumbered. The growth of the Han Chinese population of Xinjiang has been achieved by flooding the region with massive numbers of Chinese immigrants. Initially Han Chinese migration to Xinjiang was officially encouraged to support agricultural development and to promote security with respect to a possible Soviet threat to the lightly populated territory. Since the 1980s, official support for compulsory migration has been toned down, possibly in response to increasing tensions with the local populace, but voluntary immigration to Xinjiang has proceeded apace. In part, this reflects the same kinds of pressures being experienced elsewhere in China as millions of people flood out of the rural areas to seek work in the growing manufacturing economy.

This trend is mirrored in the case of the flow of Chinese to Xinjiang by the demand for skilled workers to fill positions in resource-based extractive industries to supply the raw materials to support China's booming economic expansion. In what is perceived as a further attempt at ethnic dilution by national osmosis, China's strict one-child policy has been waived for Han Chinese willing to move to Xinjiang; they are therefore allowed to have two children, a fringe benefit which encourages further immigration.

The Han are heavily concentrated in the northern part of Xinjiang, in and around the capital Urumqi. The southern, less habitable, part of Xinjiang remains dominated by native groups with the Uighurs being the most important of these. The majority of Uighurs still live in rural areas or the poorest areas of towns and cities. Many Chinese immigrants have moved into newly constructed apartments and have taken most of the jobs in new factories and firms.

3.3 Economy and resources

The region is believed to hold some of China's largest deposits of oil, gas and uranium which,

once all proven and tapped, will be of enormous benefit to the country's economic development prospects. It has been estimated that China will need to import 21 million tons of oil by 2010 if it is to maintain its present economic growth rate, and energy security is a major consideration in Beijing's policy towards the region.

Besides its indigenous mineral resources, the region is central to China's plans for major pipelines linking oil and gas fields in the Central Asian republics to the industrial areas and the coastal cities of China in the east (a gas pipeline joining Xinjiang to Shanghai is in the making). More importantly, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the vast energy supplies of the former Soviet Central Asian republics are becoming a focus of geopolitical attention as regional and extra-regional states seek to secure access to new sources of oil.

Typically, Han Chinese control the major industries in Xinjiang, and its economic production is expressly geared to the requirements of the centre. The Muslims largely remain in traditional agricultural and livestock occupations with comparatively less opportunities for advancement in other sectors. Most of the region's resources are exported unprocessed to China proper, and are re-imported as manufactured goods at higher prices.

In an attempt to close the gap in income and wealth terms between the rapidly growing eastern coastal provinces and the western China 1999 Chinese President Jiang Zemin launched the Western Development campaign, popularly known as "Go West!". Tracking it back to Deng Xiao Ping economic strategy, Jiang's plan focused on massive infrastructure investment in Xinjiang, Tibet, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Regions, Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, Yunnan, Shaanxi, Guizhou provinces and Chongqing municipality – totaling 56% of China's land area and 23% of the population. The results in Xinjiang of the campaign show an impressive record of achievement on the part of the Chinese Authorities. The development of modern infrastructure (highway, railways, telecommunications, etc.) thanks to sustained investment – both domestic and international - is undeniable.

Although there is some controversy concerning the reliability of Chinese statistics, it is hard to confute the perception that, in general, living standard in the province are improving year by year. According to China White Paper on Xinjiang the income of both urban and rural residents is continuously growing . In 2001, the average annual net income per capita in the rural areas of Xinjiang was 1,710.44 Yuan (ca 206 US\$). The average annual salary of an urban employee was 10,278 Yuan (ca 1.243 US\$). Consumptions are growing and the number of durable consumer goods owned by local residents is increasing rapidly. The quality of life of local residents has been noticeably improved. Life expectancy in Xinjiang has been extended to 71.12 years. The demography of Xinjiang shows the features of low rate of birth, low rate of death and low rate of increase.

In 1999, the central government drew up a 10th Five-Year Plan and a development plan for the period up to 2010. According to this plan, by 2005 the GDP of the entire region should reach 210 billion Yuan (calculated on the prices in 2000), with an annual growth rate of 9% and the GDP per capita of over 10,000 Yuan; the investment in fixed assets should reach 420 billion Yuan. It is planned that, by 2010, the autonomous region's GDP should be at least double that of 2000, and the popular standard of living significantly higher .

Beijing holds fast to its policies of economic development and modernization, secularization, and Sinification of its West as the keys to the pacification of the region. However, the prevalent perception among Uighurs is that, in relative terms, the Chinese vision benefits few Uighurs. Southern Xinjiang's economy, where Uighurs are concentrated, appears to be still far from being better integrated with the relatively prosperous Northern Xinjiang economy where Han concentrate in Urumqui.

3.4 Culture and Religion

Remarkable geographical distances are key to understanding the tremendous cultural diversity of Xinjiang existing not only among the various Muslim nationalities but also within the Uighurs as well.

The Uighurs are an ethnically Turkic group of Muslims who probably arrived in Xinjiang as part of the great westward migration of Turkic peoples from what is now Mongolia in the eight and ninth centuries. In addition to their collective identity as Uighurs (the name meaning “Unity”), most tend to identify themselves by the oasis town they originate from such as Kashgar, Yarkand, Karghalik or Turpan. Oases have maintained separate and strong local identities despite their common religion, language and culture.

Uighurs are Sunni Muslims following the Hanafi school law placing themselves in the mainstream tradition of Islam. Historically in Xinjiang, as well as in other parts of Central Asia, Sufism developed although not always harmoniously. Violent raids and warfare by two rival Sufi sects wreaked havoc in Xinjiang from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. In broad terms, Islamic life in the oases of the South of Xinjiang, particularly in Kashgar, appears to be more conservative than in the North.

The practice of Islam, particular in its revived form of recent years, and considering the inseparability of religion from all aspects of Muslim life, including politics and government, has become a symbolic means of confronting the Chinese State. By embracing Islam, Uighurs reject the atheism of the Chinese Communist Party as well as its goals of modernization and social liberation. Such anti-modernist feeling is however far from being universal in the province, as significant segments of the Uighur population are keen to take growing advantage from the remarkable economic development propitiated by the Chinese government development policies in the region.

Early PRC attempts to accommodate cultural differences have in recent years increasingly given way to assimilation policies colliding with Uighur traditional values. Language has also become a symbolic issue. The traditional Arabic (and Koranic) script that had been used in the region for more than a thousand years was banned at the time of the Cultural Revolution when thousands of historical books as well as a number of important mosques went destroyed. Arabic script has been in the past twenty years re-introduced. However, in order to take advantage of any educational and economic opportunities, the native population is obliged to learn Chinese. Meanwhile, few Chinese learn the local languages. The cultural, linguistic and religious distance between the two peoples is not closing and social interaction remains therefore negligible.

3.5 History

Uighur resistance to Han rule has a long history in Xinjiang, portions of which have also been controlled by Arabs, Mongols, Russians, Kazakhs and Tibetans over the centuries. China's Emperors exercised power in the region as early as 200 B.C. under the Han dynasty, but their grip on the territory waxed and waned with the rise and fall of dynasties. The province has been described rather as “an occupied country undergoing its sixth or seventh invasion from China in two millennia”. It has been said that control of Xinjiang from the capital, while historically loose, has also been historically exercised in colonial fashion by whichever faction ruled in Beijing. Uighurs established a kingdom here in the late 8th century and controlled various areas until Genghis Khan's conquest nearly 500 years later.

However, China paints the history of the region as one of substantial continuity and control. The current period of Chinese control dates from the 1870s when Qing dynasty generals suppressed a Muslim rebellion led by adventurer - and British agent - Yaqub Beg. The first systematic wave of Han immigration reports back to that period. The province was incorporated into the Chinese empire in 1884. From 1911 to 1944, the region was dominated by rival warlords or occupied by other forces for much of the first half of the 20th century. The Kuomintang did not establish its control of the region after the 1911 nationalist revolution and the local Turkic elites declared an independent Eastern Turkistan Islamic Republic. This occurred twice during the interwar period, before the Communist revolution, out of the chaos of China's war with Japan, first in 1933 in Kashgar, and then in 1944 in the

Yili Valley with the help of Soviet agents.

As the Soviet Union drew closer to the Chinese Communists in 1948-49, the East Turkistan Republic was dissolved. Following Mao Tse Tung's victory over the Nationalist forces in 1949, Xinjiang was brought back into the Chinese fold through a combination of political astuteness and military force. During the civil war, the position of the Chinese communist party was that ethnic groups in regions such as Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang would be free to choose their own future. However, Mao Tse Tung in 1949 in lieu of self-determination offered autonomous regions, provinces and districts to the various ethnic groups with the promise to find in such context equality with the Chinese majority . The Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) was proclaimed in 1955 but the Communist pledge for autonomy has however only nominally been fulfilled. Ever since 1955 a succession of non-Han leaders have chaired the regional government. In truth, real power has remained with the Han controlled Communist Party and military. Most of the senior administrators, and all of the military commanders in Xinjiang, are Han Chinese appointed by Beijing.

4. Episodes of Terrorism in Xinjiang

Since 2001 Chinese authorities have released reports on various aspects of alleged ongoing terrorist activities in Xinjiang. The Uighur version of facts and episodes reported by the PRC is of course very different. Independent verification of the claims made by either side remains impossible due to the strict information control imposed in the region by official authorities.

A 21 January 2002 government report entitled 'East Turkistan Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away With Impunity', compiling data from 1990 to 2001, made "East Turkistan" terrorist forces inside and outside China responsible for over 200 terrorist incidents in Xinjiang, resulting in the deaths of 162 people of all ethnic groups, including grass-roots officials and religious personnel, and injuries to more than 440 people. This section draws heavily from the above mentioned official document.

The report claimed that arson, explosions, assassinations and kidnappings had continued throughout the 1990s as well as attacks on police stations, military installations and government officials. In the Chinese view such facts are irrefutable proof of the nature of the "East Turkistan" forces as a terrorist organization that "does not flinch from taking violent measures to kill the innocent and harm society so as to achieve the goal of splitting the motherland". The 'East Turkistan Islamic Movement' (ETIM), one of the more extreme groups founded by Uighurs, is often quoted by the Chinese as responsible for the acts described in the report. Out of the terrorist incidents quoted, the following are noteworthy.

4.1 Explosions

Bomb attacks have been among the most common violent crimes in Xinjiang also due to the wide availability of explosives for construction projects. Incidentally, this confirms the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) as the contemporary terrorist's tactic of choice. From Xinjiang there have so far been no reports of suicide bombings, the hallmark of contemporary Islamic radicalism.

- 1 " On February 28, 1991, an explosion engineered by the 'East Turkistan' terrorist organization at a video theater of a bus terminal in Kuqa County, Aksu Prefecture, Xinjiang, caused the death of one person and injuries to 13 others.
- 2 On February 5, 1992, while the Chinese people were celebrating the Chinese New Year, terrorists blew up two buses (Buses No. 52 and No. 30) in Urumqi, the regional capital of Xinjiang, killing three people and injuring 23 others. Two other bombs they planted - one at a

cinema and the other in a residential building - were discovered before they could explode, and defused.

- 3 From June 17 to September 5, 1993, ten explosions occurred at department stores, markets, hotels and places for cultural activities in the southern part of Xinjiang, causing two deaths and 36 injuries. Among them, the June 17 explosion at the office building of an agricultural machinery company in Kashgar, demolished the building, killed two people and injured seven others. An explosion on August 1 at the video theater of the Foreign Trade Company in Shache County, Kashi Prefecture, injured 15 people; on August 19 an explosion in front of the Cultural Palace in the city of Hotan injured six people.
- 4 On February 25, 1997, directing its terrorist activities to the capital of Xinjiang again, the ETIM blew up three buses (Buses No. 2, No. 10 and No. 44) in Urumqi. Nine people died and 68 others were seriously injured in the incidents, among whom were people of the ethnic Uighur, Hui, Kyrgyz and Han origins.
- 5 Between February 22 and March 30, 1998, ETIM set off a succession of six explosions in Yecheng County, Kashgar Prefecture, injuring three people and causing a natural gas pipeline to explode and start a big fire.
- 6 Early in the morning of April 7, 1998, the same terrorist organization engineered eight explosions one after another at places such as the homes of a director of the Public Security Bureau of Yecheng County, a vice-chairman of the Yecheng County Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and a deputy commissioner of Kashi (Kashgar) Prefecture. The explosions injured eight people ”.

4.2 Assassinations

Chinese authorities claim also that ETIM and other terrorist groups have targeted their attacks at officials, ordinary people and patriotic religious personages of the Uighur ethnic group, as well as the ethnic Han people, killing them as “pagans”.

- 1 “On August 24, 1993, two ‘East Turkistan’ terrorists stabbed and seriously injured Abliz Damolla, the imam of the Great Mosque.
- 2 On March 22, 1996, two armed and masked terrorists broke into the home of Hakimsidiq Haji, vice-chairman of the Islamic Association of Xinhe County, Aksu Prefecture, and assistant imam of a mosque, and shot him dead.
- 3 Early in the morning of April 29, 1996, a dozen ‘armed-to-the-teeth’ terrorists broke into the homes of Qavul Toqa, deputy to the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region People’s Congress at Qunas Village of Alaqagha Township in Kuqa County, and three other local Uighur grassroots officials. Three of Toqa’s family died in the attack.
- 4 The ‘East Turkistan’ terrorist organization plotted the assassination of Arunhan Aji, executive committee member of the Islamic Association of China and chairman of the Kashi Islamic Association, on May 12, 1996.

- 5 Early in the morning of November 6, 1997, a terrorist group headed by Muhammad Tursun, at the order of the 'East Turkistan' organization abroad, shot and killed Yunus Sidiq Damolla, a member of the Islamic Association of China and of the Islamic Association of Xinjiang, chairman of the Islamic Association of Aksu and imam of the Mosque of Baicheng County, while he was on his way to the mosque to worship.
- 6 On June 4, 1997, four terrorists broke into the home of Muhammad Rozi Muhammad, an official of Huangdi Village of Aqik Township in Moyu County, Hotan Prefecture, and killed him with 11 stab wounds.
- 7 On August 23, 1999, a dozen of terrorists led by Yasin Muhammad broke into the home of Hudaberdi Tohti, political instructor of the police station of Bosikem Township in Zepu County, Kashi Prefecture, killing Hudaberdi Tohti with 38 stab wounds and his son with a shot to the head. Then the terrorists set Tohti's home on fire, causing serious burns to his wife.
- 8 On February 3, 2001, a gang of terrorists broke into the home of Muhammadjan Yaqup, an official at the People's Court of Shufu County, Kashi Prefecture, killing him with 38 stab wounds ”.

4.3 Attacks on Police and Government Institutions

According to the said government report, terrorist attacks were conducted against Police targets and Government Institutions.

- 1 “On August 27, 1996, six terrorists dressed in combat fatigues drove to the office building of the Jangilas Township People's Government, Yecheng County, where they cut the telephone lines and killed a deputy head of the township and a policeman on duty. Afterwards, they kidnapped three security men and one waterworks tender in a village of the same township, and later killed them in the desert 10 kilometers away.
- 2 Early in the morning of October 24, 1999, terrorists attacked the police station in Saili Township, Zepu County, with guns, machetes, incendiary bottles and grenades. They shot one member of a local security guard dead and wounded another, wounded a policeman and killed a criminal suspect in custody ”.

4.4 Secret Training and Fundraising

China also claims that in order to train hardcore members and enlarge their organization, the 'East Turkistan' terrorist forces secretly established training bases in Xinjiang, mainly in remote parts of the region.

- 1 “ In 1990, the 'Shock Brigade of the Islamic Reformist Party' has been said to have established a base to train terrorists in the remote Basheriq Township, Yecheng County. Three training classes were run there, with more than 60 terrorists having been trained, mainly in the theory of religious extremism and terrorism, explosion, assassination and other terrorist skills, and physical strength. Most of the trainees later participated in the major terrorist activities, such as explosions, assassinations and robberies, from 1991 to 1993 in various parts of Xinjiang.

- 2 In February 1998, Hasan Mahsum, [the alleged ringleader of the 'East Turkistan Islamic Movement' abroad, and since Dec.14 2003 the number 1 most wanted], sent scores of terrorists into China. They established about a dozen training bases in Xinjiang and inland regions, and trained more than 150 terrorists in 15 training classes. In addition, they set up large numbers of training stations in scattered areas, each of them composed of three to five members, and some of them being also workshops for making weapons, ammunition and explosive devices. The Xinjiang police uncovered many of these underground training stations and workshops, and confiscated large numbers of antitank grenades, hand-grenades, detonators, guns and ammunition.
- 3 On December 30, 1999, the police discovered an underground hideout in Poskam Township, Zepu County. In this hideout, which was 3 meters from the ground and measured 3 meters long, 2 meters wide and 1.7 meters high, they found tools for making explosive devices, such as electric drills and electric welding machines, as well as blueprints and antitank grenades.
- 4 On February 25, 2000, the police arrested seven terrorists in the No. 3 Village, Kachung Township, Shache County, and discovered a tunnel leading to an underground bunker beneath the house of one of them, which was equipped with ventilation devices, water supply and sewage systems. The police seized 38 antitank grenades, 22 electric detonators, 18 explosive devices, 17 kilograms of explosive charges and more than 20 fuses from the bunker.
- 5 In August 2001, police discovered a four-meter-deep tunnel under the house of a terrorist in Seriqsoghet Village, Uzun Township, Kuqa County, and confiscated 61 explosive devices from the tunnel, which also contained various kinds of equipment for making arms and ammunition”.

4.5 Plotting and Organizing Disturbances and Riots

In order to create an atmosphere of tension and fear, and extend its political influence, China claims that the “East Turkistan” terrorist forces plotted and organized riots and disturbances many times, by engaging in terrorist acts of beating, smashing, looting, arson and murder, which seriously endangered social stability, people’s lives and property.

- 1 “ On April 5, 1990, a group of terrorists, aided and abetted by the "East Turkistan Islamic Party," created a grave terrorist incident in Baren Township, Akto County, Xinjiang. They brazenly preached a "holy war," the "elimination of pagans" and the setting up of an "East Turkistan Republic". The terrorists tried to put pressure on the government by taking ten persons hostage, demolished two cars at a traffic junction and killed six policemen. They shot at the besieged government functionaries with submachine guns and pistols, and threw explosives and hand-grenades at them”.
- 2 From February 5 to 8, 1997, the "East Turkistan Islamic Party of Allah" and some other terrorist organizations perpetrated the Yining Incident, a serious riot during which the terrorists shouted slogans calling for the establishment of an "Islamic Kingdom." They attacked innocent people, destroyed stores and burned and otherwise damaged cars and buses. During this incident seven innocent people were killed, more than 200 people were injured, more than 30 vehicles were damaged and two private houses were burned down. The terrorists attacked a young couple on their way home, knifing the wife to death after disfiguring her and severely injuring the husband. A staff member of a township cultural station was stabbed to death and then thrown into a fire “.

- 3 In particular, the Baren uprising in April 1990 initiated the cycle of violence during the 1990s and is considered a watershed episode because of the amount of weapons and explosives, and the foreign money and backers. At Baren, 50 Uighurs and several Chinese police were killed, starting a process of increasing radicalization. Afterwards, 1000 Uighurs were rounded up in Xinjiang by Chinese forces, and imprisoned. Baren became a symbol of the liberation struggle. Bombings began in 1992 in Urumqi, and continued thereafter, reaching Beijing in 1997 when two buses were bombed.
The Beijing bombings are significant in that they marked an expansion of the violent campaign for independence in Xinjiang.

4.6 'East Turkistan' terrorist incidents outside China.

The following episodes have been quoted:

- 1 “ In March 1997, ‘East Turkistan’ terrorists opened fire at the Chinese embassy in Turkey, and attacked the Chinese consulate-general in Istanbul, burning the Chinese national flag flying there.
- 2 On March 5, 1998, they launched a bomb attack against the Chinese consulate-general in Istanbul.
- 3 In March 2000, Nighmet Bosakof, president of the Kyrgyzstan ‘Uighur Youth Alliance’, was shot dead in Bishkek in front of his house by members of a terrorist organization named the ‘East Turkistan Liberation Organization’ because he had refused to cooperate with them.
- 4 In May 2000, members of the ‘Uighur Liberation Organization’ beyond the boundaries extorted US\$100,000 as ransom after kidnapping a Xinjiang businessman, murdered his nephew, and set the Bishkek Market of Chinese Commodities on fire.
- 5 On May 25, 2000, terrorists attacked the work team of the Xinjiang People’s Government which went to Kyrgyzstan to deal with the above case, causing one death and two injuries. The culprits then fled to Kazakhstan, killing two Kazakhstan policemen who were searching for them in Alma-Ata in September the same year.
- 6 On July 1, 2002, a Chinese diplomat posted in Bishkek and his driver were reportedly assassinated”.†[With reference to this last specific episode, it is not yet clear who was responsible for the assassination. However, two Uighur suspects were detained by the Kyrgyz authorities and handed over to China].

The Chinese report is impressive in its detail. However, it is also impossible to get independent confirmation of the official version of all the facts reported. Most of the incidents occurred several years ago and Beijing has presented limited evidence to support its claim that they were carried out by terrorist cells taking orders from Muslim radicals abroad. Exiled Uighur activists who monitor Xinjiang said many of the attacks that China has blamed on terrorist cells are better described as violent crimes committed by young, frustrated Uighur men.

The Uighur version of events, as told by foreign-based propaganda organizations, is evidently very different, describing for instance, rallies as peaceful demonstrations opposing the Chinese repression of the Uighur identity and religion that turn ugly because of Chinese provocation and use of force.

5. The Separatists: Organizations and Individuals

Uighur separatism represents a galaxy of uneasy scrutiny. There are nearly a hundred organizations popping up from time to time claiming to represent different sections of the Uighurs in Xinjiang as well as outside, and to be fighting on their behalf.† It is difficult to say whether all such organizations exist in reality or whether many of these are merely ‘letterhead’ organizations, which exist only on paper.† Co-ordination among the various ‘East Turkistan’ liberation groups is known to be limited although Chinese Authorities claim there have been signs of recent consolidation.

5.1 Organisations active in Xinjiang

The organizations listed hereunder are known to be active in Xinjiang. Of these only the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party and the Home of East Turkistan Youth seem to be oriented towards religious extremism and pan-Islamism.† The relative support enjoyed by these organizations amongst the local people and their respective roles in acts of violence in Xinjiang are difficult to establish.

Some of these organizations have ideological and possibly even operational link-ups with the† Hizb-e Tehrir (HT) or “Party of Liberation”, which projects itself as† the largest and the most popular Central Asian Islamic movement with followings in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and† which has been fighting to establish an Islamic Caliphate in the historical region once known as Turkistan, encompassing the XUAR and the Central Asian Republics (CARs) .

They are also reported to have links with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan which has re-named itself since June, 2001, as the† Hizb-i-Islami Turkistan, or the Islamic Party of Turkistan, and re-formulated its objective as the creation of† an Islamic republic out of the five Central Asian Republics and the XUAR of China.

Amongst the major terrorist/extremist organisations of Xinjiang identified so far are :

1 The East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM)

Public enemy nr.1 according to China, the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is one of the more extreme Uighur groups. An indication that ETIM is a special concern for Chinese authorities came on 15 Dec.2003 as the PRC Ministry of Public Security issued for the first time a most wanted list of people dubbed Eastern Turkistan terrorist comprising 11 names belonging to four separatist groups all based abroad. ETIM was prominent in the list .

The ministry’s statement said that in past six years ETIM had set up at least 10 terrorists training camps. It alleged that by the end of 1999 it had more than 1000 members and had amassed 5.000 anti-tank grenades. The movement was accused of organizing a series of robberies and murders in Xinjiang in 1999 which left six people dead. The ministry said the organization had received several million US dollars from Osama Bin Laden. It also accused the group of raising money by smuggling drugs and weapons, kidnapping, blackmailing and robbery.

Chinese characterization of ETIM as a terrorist group is however not exclusive. In 2002, the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush froze the group's U.S. assets. On Aug. 26, 2002, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage announced that Washington had placed the East Turkistan Islamic Movement on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations. The group "committed acts of violence against unarmed civilians without any regard for who was hurt," he said. Although ETIM has traditionally focused on Chinese targets, the American administration explained that it may have had plans to also attack American interests. The State Department said movement members attempted to attack the U.S. embassy in Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek, as well as other U.S. interests abroad. In May

2002, two members were deported to China for the plot. The group was not placed on the top priority list of terrorist organizations but rather on the broader list of groups subject to financial sanctions.

State Department officials explained that they took a tougher line because of persuasive new evidence that the ETIM has financial links to al-Qa'ida and has targeted American interests abroad. But to Uighur separatist, who have felt bitterly disappointed by the shift in U.S. policy on Xinjiang, this may have rather appeared as an obvious bid for closer relations with China which came at the time of crucial UN Security Council negotiations over a resolution on Iraq and before Chinese President Jiang Zemin's scheduled October 2002 visit to President Bush's Texas ranch.

Outside Xinjiang, ETIM cells are said to be operating in Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Pakistan. U.S. officials claim that the group has a 'close financial relationship' with al Qa'ida, based on information they received from militants being held at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. ETIM leader Hahsan Mahsum has denied any connections between al Qa'ida and his group.

2 The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party (Sharki Turkistan Islam Partiyesi)

ETIP was founded in the early 1980s with the goal of establishing an independent state of Eastern Turkistan and advocates armed struggle.† Based in the cities of Kashgar and Hoten, is supported mainly by religious fundamentalist elements, conservative forces and some farmers.†

3 The Eastern Turkistan Revolutionary Party (Sharki Turkistan Inkalavi Partiyesi)

Based in Urumchi and Ghulja, it claims the support of† writers, progressive students and other intellectuals.†

4 The Eastern Turkistan Independence Organization (Sharki Turkistan Azatlik Teshkilati)

Centered in Hoten, it claims the support of some young farmers, unemployed Uighurs and young officials.† SHAT's members have reportedly been involved in various bomb plots and shootouts.

5 The Eastern Turkistan Grey Wolf Party (Sharki Turkistan Bozkurt Partiyesi)

It used to have some following in Urumchi, and it is believed in Xinjiang that the Uighurs descended from a wolf - hence its name.† This party, reportedly backed by teachers, students and other intellectuals, is said to be pan- Turkic oriented.†

6 The Eastern Turkistan Liberation Front (Sharki Turkistan Azatlik Fronti)

Reportedly has a presence in the cities of Turfan and Kumul and is supported by unemployed Uighur youth, farmers and intellectuals.†

7 The Home of East Turkistan Youth

Branded as 'Xinjiang's Hamas', it is a radical group committed to achieving the goal of independence through the use of armed force. It has some 2,000 members, some of whom have undergone training in using explosive devices in Afghanistan.

8 The Free Turkistan Movement

Led by Zahideen Yusuf, the Free Turkistan Movement is Islamic fundamentalist. The group has claimed responsibility for organizing the Baren uprising in April 1990.

9 Islamic Holy Warriors

Led by Ujimamadi Abbas, executed in October 2003 in Hotan, it is charged with involvement in the separatist movement since 1995 and suspected of having played a key role in the violent riots of Yining in 1997.

10 **The East Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO)**

ETLO is charged with crimes of arson. The Chinese authorities claim that in 1998, members of the "East Turkistan Liberation Organization" who had infiltrated into Xinjiang after receiving special training abroad, planned arson in some of the busiest areas of Urumqui.

5.2 Uighur organizations active outside Xinjiang

11 **The Committee for Eastern Turkistan,**

Based in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, is probably the most radical national movement in Central Asia. The Committee has recently become more militant and has vowed to intensify its struggle in a bid to free Xinjiang from growing Chinese influence. It was originally formed by Uighur guerrillas who fought against the Chinese in the period of 1944-1949.

12 **The Xinjiang Liberation Organization/Uyghur Liberation Organization (ULO)**

Based in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, dispersed throughout the Uyghur diaspora in Central Asia. The ULO claims responsibility for assassinations of "Uighur collaborators" in China and Central Asia.

13 **United National Revolutionary Front of East Turkistan (UNRF)**

The UNRF stridently opposes Sinification of Xinjiang, and is known to assassinate imams with pro-China views. Based in Kazakhstan and originally moderate, claims it was radicalized in 1997 as a result of the Chinese crackdown called "Operation Strike Hard".

14 **Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)**

Probably the most important Islamic organization for influencing and recruiting Uighurs within the Central Asian Uighur diaspora. IMU's roots go back to 1991 but it was formally founded in 1996 by the Taliban as an armed auxiliary to itself. The IMU obtained financial support and training in al Qa'ida camps, and operated in the Ferghana Valley. Most financing comes from control of heroin and opium trade in Central Asia. The IMU links most directly in Xinjiang with the Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkistan, providing military and financial assistance.

The IMU changed its name to the Islamic Party of Turkistan (Hezb-e Islami Turkistan) in June 2001. The original goal of the IMU was to overthrow the Uzbek government and install an Islamic state in Uzbekistan. When the IMU changed its name to the Islamic Party of Turkistan, its goal expanded to creating an Islamic state for all of Central Asia and Xinjiang, which led to increased recruits of Uzbek, Uighur, Chechen, Arab, and Pakistani members. The IMU subsequently broadened its activities beyond Uzbekistan to attacks on surrounding countries. The total size of the IMU is estimated to be about 5,000 serving in the armed wing. The Uighur component is unknown but thought to be small.

5.3. Uighur "cyber - separatism"

Segments of the Uighur diaspora, particularly of the one settled in the Western countries, are engaged in an advocacy action for the Uighurs' separatist cause. Their activities are closely monitored

by China which charges that their promotion of the East Turkistan cause goes well beyond the simple ideological support to trespass into the criminal field of terrorist abetting.

Pan-Turkic East Turkistan groups are based in Turkey, the United States and Germany. They are active in orchestrating Uighur propaganda and – in the light of the restrictions posed by China to field work in Xinjiang - represent a much sought, albeit biased, source of information for human rights groups on what is happening in the province. Their activity appears to be mostly confined to web sites and has therefore been heralded as a vocal but relatively un-effective ‘cyber–separatism’. Such groups include:

1 **The East Turkistan Information Center**

ETIC runs a prominent Germany-based English-language news web site on Uighur affairs. China has accused ETIC of secretly sending information on how to conduct violent terrorist activities back to a network within the Chinese border, and claimed it was using its information role as a facade for these activities.

2 **The World Uighur Youth Congress (WUYC).**

Chaired by Mehmet Toti, the organization comprises young people of Uighur origin from different countries of the world. They are known for having arranged a World Uighur Youth Congress in the Estonian capital of Tallinn in November 2000 as part of the conflict prevention conference organized by the Unrepresented Peoples and Nations Organization (UNPO). They have been vocal in advocating the attention of international organizations, particularly UNESCO, in the prevention of the destruction of Uighur historic sites.

3 **The East Turkistan National Congress**

Presided over by Enver Can, it claims to be the only legitimate umbrella body of the Uighur people abroad and the representative organ of the Uighur people to speak and act on behalf of that people in the free world. It includes 18 organizations legally operating in 13 countries around the world. It claims to abhor violence of terrorism as an instrument of policy and declares its unconditional adherence to the internationally accepted human rights standards as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; adherence to the principles of democratic pluralism and rejection of totalitarianism and any form of religious intolerance.

The first General Assembly, or National Congress, of the ETNC was held in 1992 in Istanbul. At the second General Assembly, held in Munich in 1999, the East Turkistan National Congress was founded as the international democratically elected representative body of the Uighur people.

4 **The Uighur American Association (UAA)**

The Uighur American Association renounces the use of violence to achieve political ends. The UAA claims that Beijing's military approach to terrorism in Xinjiang is state terrorism, and is burying the seeds for future violence among young Uighurs. As a lobbying group in the US, UAA has encouraged the American public and government to think of the Uighurs with the same amount of sympathy they accord Tibetans and others.

5.4 Most Wanted

On 15 Dec.2003 as the PRC Ministry of Public Security issued for the first time a most wanted list of people dubbed ‘Eastern Turkistan terrorists’. The list comprised eleven names belonging to four

separatist groups all based abroad :

Hasan Mahsum,39

Topping the list is the alleged leader of ETIM. According to the profile released by the Chinese authorities, Mahsum was a founder of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement. He was born in 1964 in Xinjiang and was a first time arrested in 1993 for terrorist activities. After serving a three-year labour re-education sentence, he went abroad in 1997 and founded the organisation.

Muhanmetemin Hazret, 53

Thought to be the leader of ETLO. The Group is accused of bombings and killings including the 2002 murder of a Chinese diplomat in Kyrgyzstan.

Dolqun Isa, 36

Thought to be the Deputy ETLO leader. Accused of masterminding explosions in Hotan.

Abudejelili Kalakash, 43

Leader of East Turkistan Information centre (ETIC) and member of the World Uighur Youth Congress. Crimes said to include sending activist information via the Internet on making poisons and explosives.

The following individuals have also been charged with planning of terrorist acts, organizing terrorists training abroad, weapons smuggling arson, killings and making explosives.

- 1 Abudukadir Yapuquan, 45
- 2 Abudumijit Muhammatkelim, 36
- 3 Adudula Kiaji, 34
- 4 Abulimit Turxun, 39
- 5 Hudaberdi Haxerbik, 33
- 6 Yasen Muhammat, 39
- 7 Atahan Abuduhani, 39

It is perhaps useful to include here the names of Uighur individuals apprehended and executed by China. Their deaths at the hand of the Chinese has somewhat elevated them to a state of “martyrs” and their example may therefore be present in the minds of other would be radicals.

Zahideen Yusuf

Leader of the Free Turkistan Movement is deemed to have been the force behind the Baren riots of April 1990. The episode initiated a process of increasing radicalization of Uighurs. Yusuf is thought to have smuggled and stockpiled weapons and to have been spreading the message of jihad beforehand. Zahideen was killed in Baren. However, his memory is still nourished in the popular lore.

Ujimamadi Abbas

Executed in October 2003 in Hotan he was the leader of the militant group ‘Islamic Holy Warriors’. According to Chinese charges, he had been involved in the separatist movement since 1995

and had played a key role in the violent riots of Yining in 1997. Abbas had sought refuge in Nepal in 2000 but was repatriated in 2002, under Chinese pressure, by the Nepalese authorities.

Uighur propaganda portrays Abbas as a peaceful political activist who nonviolently resisted Chinese rule in East Turkistan. Uighurs have blamed the Nepali government for extraditing Abbas to China in violation of the international law principle of *non-refoulement* and disregarding the refugee status that had been granted to him by UNHCR officials in Nepal.

6. China's counter- terrorist strategy: repression and diplomacy

As China perceives rising tide of terrorism and separatist movements within its own borders, the PRC government has adopted a bi- dimensional approach in dealing with the issue . The first dimension deals with prevention. This involves *ad hoc* domestic legislation and sweeping action on terrorist activities by the law enforcement agencies. The second dimension concerns with isolating and demonizing the separatist groups. This is done by a combination of domestic efforts to co-opt “assimilated Uighurs” , and of diplomatic action aiming at isolating separatists by undercutting whatever international support they can muster.

The crack down on Uighur separatism is in Xinjiang known as “Strike Hard! Maximum Pressure!”. Such law-enforcement campaign is part and parcel of a wider national ‘Strike Hard’ high-profile police initiative launched in 1996, as an answer to citizens' legitimate concerns about rising crime. The ‘Strike Hard’ campaign never officially came to an end, though it has faded from the scene in most urban areas. In minority areas, particularly in Xinjiang province, the ‘Strike Hard’ campaign has continued in 2002 and 2003, and includes harsh measures against political activists.

6.1 Domestic measures

In the wake of the Sept.11 attacks, Chinese authorities undertook a number of measures to improve China's counterterrorism posture and domestic security.† These included increasing its vigilance in Xinjiang and increasing the readiness levels of its military and police units in the region.† China also bolstered Chinese regular army units near the borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan to block terrorists fleeing from Afghanistan, while strengthening overall domestic preparedness.† At the request of the United States, China conducted a search within Chinese banks for evidence to attack terrorist financing mechanisms. Despite the current ongoing stabilization of Afghanistan under the government of Hamid Karzai, military vigilance at the eastern tip of the Wakhan corridor, the stretch of mountainous territory that provides Afghanistan with a border with China, remains high.

Chinese Authorities also felt the need to upgrade criminal legislative provisions with the specific aim of targeting terrorism-related crimes. On 29 December 2001, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC - China's legislature) adopted amendments to the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China. The stated purpose of the amendments, which entered into force the same day, was to ‘punish terrorist crimes, ensure national security and the safety of people's lives and property, and uphold social order’.

However, human rights group are concerned that the new provisions enlarge the scope of application of the death penalty in China and may be used to further suppress freedom of expression and association. Human rights activists are concerned that the new provisions introduced on ‘terrorist’ crimes, enlarge the scope of the death penalty, and that both the new and existing provisions on such crimes are vaguely worded and may criminalize peaceful activities and infringe unduly upon rights such as freedom of expression and association.

As far as the responsibilities of the law-enforcement agencies are concerned, China's 2002 White Paper on national defense identified the fight against terrorism as one of the major peacetime

tasks of the paramilitary People's Armed Police (PAP). The Paper stated that specific anti-terror missions of the PAP included “performing anti-attack, anti-hijacking and anti-explosion tasks”. This appears to be an enlargement of the PAP traditional mandate, as the force, established in 1982, has in the past primarily been charged with guard duties and internal security.

It is worth recalling the specific anti-terrorist activity carried out in Xinjiang by the pseudo-military Bin Tuan organization, formally known as the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC). The Bin Tuan was formed in the 1950s when Chinese troops were relieved of combat duties and drafted into agricultural development projects. It was disbanded in 1975 but re-established in 1981 and retains a somewhat misleading military designation as the Xth Agricultural Division. The XPCC numbers about 2.28 million people, including about 1 million workers. Despite its alleged non-combat status, the XPCC has served as an effective arm of the PLA in countering unrest in Xinjiang over the years and played a key role in ending the 1990 Baren uprising. Among the overall XPCC responsibilities are management of the Chinese detention camps.

6.2 China's anti-terror diplomacy

It is widely held that Sept.11 marked a watershed in the anti-terrorism postures and policies of states worldwide. China's initial response to the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC was one of deep shock, sincere sympathy, and condolences. Chinese officials strongly condemned the September 11 attacks and announced China would strengthen cooperation with the international community in fighting terrorism on the basis of the UN Charter and international law.† China voted in support of UN Security Council resolutions after the attack.† Its vote for Resolution 1368 on Afghanistan marked the first time it has voted in favor of authorizing the international use of force.†

China and the United States began a counterterrorism dialogue in late-September 2001, which was followed by further discussions during the State Department's Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Ambassador Francis Taylor, trip in December 2001 to Beijing.† The profile of US-Sino anti-terrorism co-operation was raised with the Government of China approving the establishment of an FBI Legal Attaché in Beijing and agreeing to create US-China counterterrorism working groups on financing and law enforcement. Sino-American co-operation was extended and pursued with increasing intensity and manifest satisfaction on the U.S. part.

The PRC has typically sought international cooperation in preventing terrorist organizations in Islamic countries from providing support to separatist groups operating within China. Beijing has reached out to states in the region suspected of providing havens for terrorist organizations. For instance, China maintains a close relationship with Pakistan, a country whose role in the war on terror is sometimes seen as ambivalent.

China has taken a constructive approach to terrorism problems in South and Central Asia, publicly supporting the American-led coalition campaign in Afghanistan and using its influence with Pakistan to urge support for multinational efforts against the Taliban and al Qa'ida.† Similarly, Beijing is believed to have pressured Pakistan to crack down on Muslim groups it suspects of arming fundamentalists in Xinjiang. The PRC special relationship with Pakistan has not refrained the Chinese government from taking action against the possible spread of Islamic fundamentalism at the hands of Pakistanis in Xinjiang. According to journalistic reports in late December 2003, 700 Pakistani traders were expelled from Xinjiang. Beijing has also restricted visas for Pakistanis wanting to travel to Xinjiang along the Karakorum Highway and taken measures to prevent Muslim Uighurs from traveling to Pakistan and Afghanistan to attend Islamic *madrassas* (religious schools).

Moreover, Beijing has been particularly interested in developing ties with the authorities in neighboring states to restrict the operations of Islamic separatist groups who maintain the independence

campaign safe from Chinese intervention.

6.3 Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

China has in particular, sought closer cooperation with the governments of the Central Asian Republics. Anti-terrorism has increasingly become a major focus of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) that includes China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The organization was born in 1996 as the 'Shanghai Group' comprising Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia and China and was formed in part in an effort to overcome lingering suspicions between Beijing and its ex-Soviet neighbors, to create a more stable border area, and promote intra-regional progress through trust and co-operation.

After a five-year embryonic phase, the post 9/11 scenario, substantially revolutionized by American political and military influence in the region, provided the urge for an upgrade of co-operation among the partners of the organization and for the institutionalization of collective mechanisms. A Charter was signed in June 2001 as well as a declaration and an agreement on terrorism, separatism and extremism. The Charter has come into effect in September 2003, following ratification by four countries.

Permanent bodies have been created: a Secretariat was inaugurated in Beijing on January 15 2004 and an anti-terrorist institution in Tashkent is expected to be opened within June 2004 (Uzbekistan joined SCO in 2001). Such body had been originally planned to be hosted by Tajikistan in its capital Bishkek, but Tashkent was eventually chosen to accommodate Uzbekistan's status and for symbolic reasons, as that country feels that it is the primary target of terrorist activities in Central Asia (particularly by the IMU) .

Although the organization aims at developing an equally strong articulate "second track" mainly covering economy and trade, security is bound to be one of the main components of the SCO. Anti-terrorist and military exercises were conducted in the summer of 2003. Named "Cooperation 2003", the anti-terrorist exercise saw more than 1,000 soldiers from Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan launch a mock battle to rescue air passengers held by a gang of international terrorists.

In a second stage of the exercise on August 11-12, Chinese forces in Xinjiang practiced hostage-release techniques and the destruction of a terrorist base. The drills were the first of their kind within the framework of the SCO, and the first time the PLA had taken part in such a large - scale joint anti-terrorism exercise . While the Chinese stress that the SCO is not a military alliance and does not target any third country, the organization is "both responsible and effective in making contributions to the international anti-terrorism campaign", and as such, proved to be a critical part of Chinese efforts to stem and eradicate external links to domestic separatist and terrorist cells.

7. Xinjiang : radical Islam's next tinderbox?

Muslim communities are found in almost every part of China from Guangdong and Fujian where Muslim sailors and merchants first came ashore to the far north-eastern provinces of Liaoning and Heilongjiang. However, the deepest impression left by Islam has been in the remote North-West, along the Silk Road. According to the 1999 census, China has more than 17 million Muslims. The Hui, ethnically and linguistically of Chinese stock, are the largest officially recognised Muslim group at about 8.6 million. Hui minority populations are found throughout China and they do not have a traditional territorial homeland. There are however, significant concentrations of Hui in their own autonomous region, Ningxia, as well as in Gansu and Qinghai provinces, which lie to the east of Xinjiang in central China. Conversely, Turkic Islam in China is however, clearly associated with the

territory of Xinjiang where the native Uighur population practices a moderate form of Sunnism venerated by Sufism.

The challenge to state authority posed by Islam's blurring of the lines between the spiritual and the secular is well known and has determined in China as elsewhere, areas of conflict between the Chinese State and its Muslim citizens. Such conflict is at its most intense when religion is laced with nationalism. This is precisely the combination most feared by the government in Beijing.

To address such challenge the PRC has systematically sought to manage and control religious activities throughout China, ostensibly to safeguard national unity and stability. Religious practice has been put under vigilance in the XUAR, as in other parts of China, since the 1950s. The Cultural Revolution was particularly hard for all religious groups in China, Christians, Buddhists and Muslims. In Xinjiang and throughout China, mosques were destroyed or closed and ancient religious sites desecrated. After Deng Xiao Ping took power, the situation improved rapidly for the Muslims. Mosques were rebuilt or reopened and greater interaction between China's Muslims and the wider Islamic community was permitted.

However, in the late 1980s and the 1990s, in sync with the growing separatism menace, the Chinese government responded by restricting contacts between its Turkic Muslims and visitors from the Middle East. By the early 1990s, mosque construction and renovation was curtailed, public broadcasting of sermons outside mosques was banned, and religious education was proscribed. Only religious material published by the state Religious Affairs Bureau was allowed, religious activists were purged from state positions and Haj pilgrimages were tightly controlled and limited to participants over 50 years of age. Despite such measures, Chinese Muslim participation in the annual Haj pilgrimage to Mecca grew steadily from the mid-1980s, exposing many ordinary people to international Islamic thought and political developments. Similarly, foreign Muslims were allowed to visit Islamic sites in China, creating a greater awareness of the wider Muslim community. Uighur participation in the Islamic vision of a Muslim Central Asia was strengthened when the Karakorum Highway, linking Pakistan to China, was opened in 1986. Since then the route of the Haj - an obligation for devout Muslims - would always include a stop-over in Pakistani religious schools (*deenie madaress* [ar.]) on the way to Saudi Arabia. In this manner, thousands of Uighurs developed connections with Pakistani religious schools and organizations.

The first serious outbreaks of violence directed at the Chinese authorities occurred in the 1990s in response to the imposition of the above described restrictive measures and reflected the local communities' anger and frustration at Beijing's about-turn on greater religious freedom. Chinese control has intensified in the XUAR since October 2001. Today China sees Islam's revival in Xinjiang, part of a wider Islamic revival in Central Asia, as the chief obstacle to Uighur assimilation and to modernization of the region. However, while there is a growing conservatism in the province external observers feel that it is not the Taliban style of Wahabbi Islam that the Chinese government seems to be afraid of. Moreover, the indigenous Sufi tradition appears to be a spiritual obstacle to the spread of unbridled fundamentalism. It has been observed for centuries that Sufism, a form of Islamic mysticism preaching direct communion with God, has been the most tolerant expression of Islam incorporating Buddhist, Shaman and even Christian beliefs .

Possibly because of Sufism, a major influx of radical Islam has not yet encroached on the mainstream Uighur population. There are therefore few indications that Xinjiang will become a hotbed of Islamic radicalism or even a haven for al Qa'ida. Among the Uighurs, few have any sympathy for the fundamentalist society of a Taliban type. Music and alcohol are not unfamiliar in Uighur areas, and women aren't sequestered (*purdah*) as in many other Muslim societies. Furthermore, independent observers and experts point out that Uighur identification with Islam and their religious practices are based primarily on ethnic identity and cultural heritage, and have little in common with the forms of Islam preached by Wahabbi schools in some countries. Direct contact between Xinjiang and Saudi

Arabia (where 10,000 Uighurs are thought to be living) has been limited. Before Beijing tightened the reins on the area, it has been reckoned that only about 6,000 Uighurs a year ever went on the Hajj pilgrimage - an obligation for devout Muslims - compared to some 30,000 from Malaysia, a Muslim country similar in population size to Xinjiang.

Rather hypothetical is also a possible Uighur-Hui connection as the Hui and the Turkic Muslims have different relationships with the Han Chinese and the two groups are not natural allies. The former are frequently referred to as "Chinese Muslims" and are culturally closer to the mainstream Chinese community. The Hui have no inherent connection with the Turkic-origin Islamic groups but have often served as a bridge between them and Beijing. The Hui lack the sense of group identity that sustains the Uighur separatist movement and have not been implicated in anti-Chinese violence in Xinjiang.

Does the above rule out all possibility of Xinjiang turning into another Ferghana Valley, the Central Asia hotbed of Islamic radicalism? Not entirely. The Chinese authorities have the not so unreasonable concern that due to a presumed – although not entirely proved - connection between veterans of the Afghan war and separatists in Xinjiang, that the independence movement is being armed and influenced by outside powers. The Afghan war should not be underestimated in terms of the impact it has had on disaffected Islamic youth. As an ideological event, the Afghan conflict clearly had a powerful effect on those who now seek to create an Islamic state in East Turkistan. A number of Xinjiang Muslims are known to have trained and fought alongside the Mujahideen in Afghanistan together with other committed revolutionaries from a number of Islamic states.

It is therefore plausible that some of the Xinjiang Muslims who fought in Afghanistan have returned to take up arms against the Chinese. Certainly, radical Islamic international contacts were consolidated in Afghanistan and the end of that conflict has created a pool of well-trained, religiously motivated, fighters and a vast amount of surplus weapons. There is a virtually uncontrollable trade in weapons from Afghanistan to the border regions of Pakistan, Kashmir, Tajikistan and to criminal elements elsewhere in the region. Smuggling of all kinds of contraband is endemic throughout the area and centuries-old tribal connections make it unreasonable to dismiss the influence of “outsiders” in the Xinjiang conflict.

It therefore remains to be proved that the separatist movement in Xinjiang is being managed or manipulated by foreigners. As far as clues of a possible radicalization are concerned, many Uighurs have for instance, little knowledge of what has been the litmus test of Muslim zealotry, the Palestinian issue. Moreover, while in all the statements that have attributed to bin Laden since 9/11 he has repeatedly tried to rally Muslims by mentioning the injustices done to Muslims in places like Palestinian territories, Chechnya and Iraq, he has never mentioned East Turkistan.

In short, whereas there has clearly been a growing awareness of their ethno-religious roots amongst the Muslims of Xinjiang in recent years, it is not apparent that this can be equated with the beginning of an Islamic fundamentalist movement. The increase in Muslim unrest in Xinjiang indicates that the roots of widespread discontent and unrest among Uighurs, appear to lie in current socio-economic inequalities rather than in the influence of foreign Islamist movements .

7.1 Conclusion

Although the word “terrorism” is used frequently and its practice is generally opposed, there is no universally accepted definition in general use or in treaties and laws designed to combat it. States and commentators describe as “terrorist” acts or political motivations that they oppose, while rejecting the use of the term when it relates to activities or causes they support. This is commonly put as “one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter” (Reagan).

In a recent report, the UN Special Rapporteur on terrorism noted that the issue of “terrorism”

has been “approached from such different perspectives and in such different contexts that it has been impossible for the international community to arrive at a generally acceptable definition to this very day”. The Special Rapporteur also pointed out that “the term terrorism is emotive and highly loaded politically. It is habitually accompanied by an implicit negative judgment and is used selectively”. Recent attempts to finalize the UN Convention on ‘terrorism’ have stalled, *inter alia*, owing to disagreements about the definition.

Beijing's framing of Muslim unrest in Xinjiang as “terrorism” appears to be a case in point as radically divergent interpretations of the current Uighur struggle are given by the Chinese government and by the Uighurs themselves.

However framed, I would argue that such unrest has been until now motivated less by Islamic fundamentalism than secular demands. At the same time this could change as -with the exception of the moral support provided by international human rights activists - Islamist groups appear to provide the only allies that the Uighurs can count on. Shunted by their historically traditional patrons (firstly Russia), Uighurs have been keenly disappointed by America eagerness for Chinese support in their anti-terror drive. Moreover, the military action in Iraq by the United States and Britain has spent the little political capital left and enjoyed in Xinjiang by America, as that action has generated fierce hostility. It is no therefore surprise that Uighurs would now look at the Islamic *ummah* as a provider of support, both material and moral, to the separatist quest. This could increase in the future as the Uighurs’ sense of despair becomes more acute.

Until now claims that Xinjiang separatist groups, including the ETIM, significantly threaten Chinese control of the region appear not entirely convincing; such groups are simply too small, scarcely coordinated and dispersed to wage an organized campaign. It has been observed that although there are periodic riots, infrequent bus bombings and frequent fistfights between Uighurs and Hans, resistance against Chinese government control is generally passive.

One important outcome of the ongoing crisis in Xinjiang is China's Muslims growing significance to China's internal and international relations. This is bound to affect Beijing’s relations with key countries in the Middle East. Chinese ties to countries like Iran, Iraq, and Libya have been driven by a host of geo-strategic, energy, commercial, and foreign policy considerations.

Unrest in Xinjiang stems from the concurring effects of cultural/religious policing and demographic alteration. Beijing's attempts to Sinify the region through the strict control of religion, assembly and language, as well as through the encouragement of Han Chinese settlements in the region, have fomented anti-régime sentiment.

The perception that the evident economic development of the region has been unequally benefiting Hans and Uighurs breeds *per se* hostility. Beijing’s challenges in Xinjiang stem from its difficulty – critics say unwillingness - to redress such inequality and to address the basic aspirations of national minorities such as the Uighurs.

At the end of the day the root causes of terrorism in Central Asia - and to large extent also in Xinjiang - are poverty and backwardness. The best long-term policies are therefore poverty reduction strategies. On this account the People’s Republic of China policy of economic development of Xinjiang represents a positive strategic course and an opportunity. In Xinjiang the People’s Republic of China has scored remarkable albeit uneven success in overcoming the region’s economic and cultural backwardness. However, it has so far done that by privileging a top-down approach to the economic development of the region’s resources.

A segment of local population, the so called “assimilated” Uighurs, has been increasingly recognizing the necessity of embracing and adapting to the Han driven socio-economic change. While some Uighurs seek full independence, assimilated Uighurs may simply content themselves with greater autonomy and better protection. However, they risk to remain caught between the local ethnic extremism of the separatist fringes and the Han settlers’ prejudices.

As noted in this paper, Xinjiang has so far been spared the tragic hallmark of terrorism by Islamic fanatics - suicide bombing. However, disruption of the traditional transmission of Uighur culture risks to create a class of young men all too available for mobilization by Islamic fanatics. Among them, the high rate of unemployment and the feeling of extreme alienation - if not outright despair – may make young Uighur men receptive to recruitment by groups of violent Islamic fanatics. Moreover, according to some analysts, the combustible political situation combines today with the circumstance that the region is the second most HIV/AIDS infected in China. As the local healthcare system appears to be failing to adequately care for them – with the Uighurs perceiving as deliberate the central government’s lack of response to AIDS - it has been argued that the situation could soon provide a lethal hotbed for the recruit of suicide bombers . The involvement of female suicide bombers in April 2004 terrorist attacks in Uzbekistan – an absolute first in Central Asia - rings therefore an ominous alarm bell .

With Beijing's management of the situation in Xinjiang having profound ramifications for the domestic, regional and international security, the so called “fourth generation” of the Chinese leadership is called to important decisions in the context of the international war on terror.

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