

American Foreign Policy Council

CHINA

QUICK FACTS

Population: 1,349,585,838

Area: 9,596,961 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Han Chinese 91.5%, Zhuang, Manchu, Hui, Miao, Uyghur, Tujia, Yi, Mongol, Tibetan, Buyi, Dong, Yao, Korean, and other nationalities 8.5%

Religions: Daoist (Taoist), Buddhist, Christian 3-4%, Muslim 1-2%; officially atheist

Government Type: Communist State

GDP (official exchange rate): \$8.227 trillion

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last Updated August 2013)



Prior to 1949, China's Nationalist government recognized Muslims as one of the "five peoples" constituting the Chinese nation—along with Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans and Han. The Communist Party of China (CPC) has maintained this recognition and continued to push Muslims toward integration. China, in the words of one official, "allows the practice of religion, but not at the expense of the state."¹ In all, Beijing recognizes ten separate Muslim nationalities, the largest being Uighurs, Hui and Kazakhs.

China has a total of 21,667,000 Muslims, representing 1.6 percent of the Chinese population and 1.4 percent of the world's Muslims.² The spread of Islam in China, particularly in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang)—a sprawling Western region of inhospitable deserts and mountains—has long been a

source of official concern, resulting in numerous laws restricting religious practices and teaching. Put succinctly, “to be a practicing Muslim in Xinjiang is to live under an intricate series of laws and regulations intended to control the spread and practice of Islam.”³ Nevertheless, signs suggest that Islam’s popularity continues to grow, along with Muslim dissatisfaction with official policies, particularly in the region of Xinjiang.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Chinese authorities divide their struggle against the “three evil forces” of separatism, extremism and terrorism into five phases between 1990 and 2007.⁴ During this period, religious radicalism within China underwent a significant metamorphosis:

- 1990-1995: Low-grade violence and civil disobedience increased as four terrorist organizations emerged: the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) [also known as the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), or *al-Hizb al-Islami al-Turkistani*] the East Turkestan Islamic Reform Party, the East Turkestan Democratic Reform Party, and the East Turkestan Justice Party. Of these groups, only ETIM/TIP remains active today.
- 1996-1997: The emerging Islamist movements pushed for the politicization of religion to boost recruitment.
- 1997-1999: Islamists expanded their extremist activities and links to foreign actors and began attacks beyond Xinjiang.
- 2000-2002: Terrorist activities were rolled back as regional law enforcement officials cracked down on Islamists.
- 2003-2007: Islamist radicals became more involved in criminal conduct such as the smuggling of weapons and drugs.

To date, the Xinjiang Autonomous Region has remained the epicenter of these concerns and the focal point of China’s long-running anti-terror campaign. This campaign itself is particularly complex, since radical Islamism and Uighur separatism are inextricably linked in the minds of many Chinese officials and citizens. Han Chinese—even those with progressive tendencies toward constitutional democracy—often cannot see the difference between a politically active Uighur and a separatist.⁵

Since Uighurs have been effectively shut out of official politics for over five decades, “a very small minority within the [Uighur] minority”⁶ has become politically active through illegal groups – often with a militant Islamist agenda – established to promote Uighur rights and separatism in Xinjiang. ETIM/TIP is generally perceived as the most active of these organizations, yet substantial disagreement remains regarding the extent and sources of its

foreign funding, as well as its size, location, and ideological influences.

The militant Uighur separatist movement and its Islamist component first appeared in the 1940s in the form of *Hizbul Islam Li-Turkistan*. After numerous failed uprisings against local warlords and the CPC, the movement faded from view for over two decades, but it reemerged during the relative freedom of the 1980s. In this period, Hasan Mahsum (who would go on to found ETIM a decade later) studied in one of the many underground religious schools organized by original members of *Hizbul Islam Li-Turkistan* to expand the reach of Islam and Uighur nationalist ideologies.⁷

In April 1990, after the discovery of a Uighur Islamist uprising plot in Xinjiang, Beijing launched a series of what it called “strike hard” campaigns to suppress the nascent Islamist rebellion. The clampdown, however, did not have its intended effect; while in prison, the Uighur separatists arrested in these crackdowns honed and spread their Islamist-separatist ideologies. The result was the development and dissemination of increasingly extreme Islamist ideologies and the expansion of interpersonal networks among Uighur radicals. However, ETIM’s efforts in the 1990s to gain support from the moderate Uighur Diaspora in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey were unsuccessful, which forced the group to turn instead to more radical elements in the Taliban, al-Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).⁸ Global intelligence firm Stratfor reports that, between 1998 and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, ETIM was based in Kabul, “recruiting and training Uighur militants while expanding ties with the emerging jihadist movement in the region.”⁹ In a 2009 interview, ETIM’s former leader,¹⁰ Amir Abdul Haq, confirmed that he attended training camps in Afghanistan with his ETIM colleagues during this time.¹¹

Thus, for at least a decade, Beijing has stridently asserted that the Taliban and al-Qaeda provided ETIM/TIP with substantial funding as well as weapons, transportation, and safe haven for wanted Uighurs.¹² After September 11, 2001, Beijing pressed Washington to designate the group as a terrorist organization and freeze all of its U.S. assets—something Washington ultimately agreed to do in August 2002. Indeed, both U.S. and Chinese intelligence agencies agree that ETIM/TIP has received training and funding from the al-Qaeda terror network.¹³

But there is disagreement within the U.S. government on this point. On June 20, 2008, for instance, in the case of *Parhat v. Gates*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit rejected the government’s evidence of an al-Qaeda-ETIM link, noting that:

the grounds for the charges that ETIM was ‘associated’ with al Qaida [sic] and the Taliban, and that it is engaged in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners, were statements in classified documents that do not state (or, in most instances, even describe) the sources or rationales for those statements.¹⁴

Similarly, in his June 2008 Congressional testimony, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia Randall G. Schriver explained that “the information provided by the Chinese government about suspected terrorists groups was unreliable, and very likely tied to ulterior political motives.”¹⁵ He said that although U.S. officials agreed with Beijing in the case of ETIM/TIP, they had to resist Chinese pressure to designate other Uighur groups as terrorists.¹⁶

Until quite recently, China did not have a terrorism problem, at least not as commonly understood in the West. Between 2007 and 2009, ETIM/TIP disseminated numerous online videos, narratives, and messages glorifying the Uighur people’s history and calling for continued struggle against China. Although low-grade insurgent activity was undeniable, regional law enforcement agencies appeared to have effectively neutralized Islamist radicals until 2008. But when Uighur resentment and frustration with Chinese rule mounted in 2008-2009, violent Hizb ut-Tahrir splinter groups appear to have exerted greater influence over ETIM/TIP’s ideology and tactics.¹⁷ The IMU, for example, reportedly trained the group’s militants after U.S and Chinese forces forced them from Afghanistan and Xinjiang, respectively.¹⁸ Even Haq himself has acknowledged the existence of an ETIM/TIP-IMU relationship.

ETIM/TIP ideology now seeks to weave the promotion of Uighur political objectives with a campaign against the oppression of Muslims and the suppression of Islam in Xinjiang. For example, one Uighur separatist publication, *Turkistan al-Muslimah* (Muslim Turkistan), regularly links Islam and separatism by claiming that ETIM/TIP is “seeking freedom and independence and to be ruled by God’s *Shari’a*.”¹⁹ Yet the current source of ETIM/TIP’s funding and ideology is unclear. Some analysts claim that recent Uighur publications have employed the kind of rhetoric preferred by al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups – a sign that “either the Turkistan Islamic Party is trying to associate itself with al-Qaeda and allied Salafi-Jihadi groups or al-Qaeda is aiming to attract ‘Turkistanis’ to their global *jihadi* movement.”²⁰ Others, however, suggest that al-Qaeda’s ideology has not had as much influence over the evolution of ETIM/TIP as that of Hizb ut-Tahrir, a nonviolent, pan-Islamic Sunni movement whose objective is the creation of an Islamic society in which all elements of life are governed by *shari’a* law.²¹

Whatever the source of its funding and ideological influence, ETIM/TIP has exhibited a growing radicalism, reflected in both its increasingly Islamist rhetoric and its surge of attacks against Chinese targets in recent years. There is no indication that radicals in Xinjiang enjoy widespread popularity in other parts of China. However, the state's increasingly tight controls on speech, movement, and the practice of Islam have engendered widespread frustration and anger among all Chinese Muslims. A growing resentment of heavy-handed state intervention in religious life—not the insidious intervention of foreign influences, as Beijing claims—has solidified the separatist movement, strengthened its grassroots support, and catalyzed the campaign of Uighur aggression against the state in 2008-2009.

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

China has a total of 21,667,000 Muslims (about 2-3 million less than Saudi Arabia), representing 1.6 percent of the Chinese population and 1.4 percent of the world's Muslims.²² Since 1949, the CPC has expanded its original recognition of Islam to include ten separate Muslim minorities—the largest of which are Uighurs, Hui and Kazakhs—and continues to push Muslims toward integration into secular Chinese society.

The Uighurs

The Uighurs, a Turkic Muslim minority, populate the rugged, oil- and mineral-rich territory of Xinjiang that constitutes one-sixth of the total Chinese land mass. Uighurs are the largest ethnic group in Xinjiang, accounting for 46 percent of the region's total population of roughly 21 million.²³ Uighurs have practiced Sunni Islam since the 10th century, and the faith has experienced a revival among the community now that the government has relaxed its policies regarding religion. Xinjiang alone is home to approximately 24,000 mosques and 29,000 religious leaders.²⁴ The Uighurs have had an historically tense relationship with the Han Chinese majority, and thus many support the idea of independence, or at least greater autonomy, for Xinjiang. In fact, Uighur activists often refer to Xinjiang as East Turkistan, as it was called during its days as a formerly independent republic. "East Turkistan" enjoyed multiple periods of recognition over the last few thousand years, most recently from 1933 to 1934 and again from 1944 to 1949, before Communist troops took control of the country.²⁵

The grievances that the Uighur community maintains against its Chinese counterparts are numerous: government restrictions on Uighur religion, language and culture; official policies that encourage Han emigration to Xinjiang to (allegedly) dilute the strength of the Uighur ethnic identity; and common Han discrimination towards Uighurs. China's authorities reject the

validity of these complaints, saying Uighurs should instead be grateful for Xinjiang's rapid economic development and targeted investment from the government over the last decade. Beginning in 2008, these racial and religious tensions fueled Uighur protests against state restrictions on Islam. A simultaneous series of radical Uighur attacks against the authorities and their Han neighbors only precipitated increasingly restrictive countermeasures. Ultimately, this cycle of escalation culminated in the mob violence of July 2009.

With no real voice in politics at the national level, the political interests of the Uighur community are largely represented by the World Uyghur Congress (WUC). The WUC is the most well-known international Uighur political organization. It is an umbrella group of smaller Uighur nationalist organizations formed after the East Turkestan National Congress and the World Uyghur Youth Congress merged in April 2004.²⁶ Participants elect the WUC leadership and General Assembly to serve three-year terms. The WUC claims to “peacefully promote the human rights, religious freedom, and democracy for the Uyghur people in East Turkistan.”²⁷ Beijing, on the other hand, asserts that the WUC is a front through which Western nations can clandestinely channel funds and weapons into Xinjiang and undermine the integrity of the Chinese state.²⁸

These fears have only been fanned by the WUC's most recent elections. At the organization's third General Assembly in Washington, DC in May 2009, delegates and observers unanimously re-elected Rebiya Kadeer as president.²⁹ Ms. Kadeer is a controversial figure. She originally served as a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in 1992 and a member of China's delegation to the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. But after criticizing China's treatment of Uighurs at the 1997 CPPCC session, she was stripped of her party membership and forbidden to travel abroad. In 1999, while on her way to meet a U.S. Congressional delegation, Ms. Kadeer was arrested and sentenced to eight years in prison for allegedly “stealing state secrets.”³⁰ She spent six years in a Chinese prison before being released to the United States in 2005. Before her arrest, she had been a well-known businesswoman and, at one time, the seventh wealthiest person in China.³¹ China's state-run media has since gone to great lengths to vilify Kadeer,³² while Chinese officials have accused her of “carrying out reactionary propaganda and deceptive agitation” with the help of “the anti-China forces in the West.”³³

The Hui

With a population of 10 million scattered throughout China, the Hui make up about half of the country's Muslims. They are most numerous in the

Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Gansu, Qinghai, Henan, Hebei, Shandong, and Xinjiang. Although anthropologists and historians debate their origin, the Hui people are generally perceived to be a mixed race. Their ancestors include Central Asians, Persians, Han Chinese, and Mongols. During the Tang and Yuan Dynasties, people from Central Asia and Persia migrated to China along the fabled Silk Road. Over centuries, their descendants intermarried with Mongols and Han Chinese, giving rise to the Hui people. Over time, the Hui have lost their proficiency in Arabic and Central Asian languages and adopted Chinese as their native tongue. Today's Hui are best understood as Sinicised Muslims that (unlike other official Muslim groups) look Han and speak Mandarin or other local dialects. Unlike the Uighurs—whose claim to Xinjiang predates that of the Han—the Hui settled in areas already dominated by ethnic Hans.³⁴

In October and November 2004, violent clashes broke out between the Han and the Hui in Nanren, Henan. Fierce fighting between the two communities raged for hours and left more than 100 dead and more than 400 injured.³⁵ Authorities moved quickly to quell the violence, even deploying paramilitary troops. Such episodes of violence are sporadic, since Hui and Han Chinese generally coexist peacefully. The Hui today enjoy far more religious freedom than they did in the first decades of Communist rule, when all religion was repressed. However, greater religious freedom has also increased mosque attendance among Hui—a tendency that many Han interpret as clannish, which may contribute to increased tension between the two groups in the future.³⁶

Kazakh Muslims

Approximately one million Kazakh Muslims reside in the north of Xinjiang, on the border with Kazakhstan. Unlike the Hui, Kazakhs speak their native language and feel a close connection to clans in neighboring Kazakhstan. In Kazakh society, rituals are generally performed in accordance with Islamic tradition, and include prayers, fasting, observance of the *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), and adherence to Islamic burial rites. Similarly, Kazakhs supplement their official legal marriages with traditional ceremonies. Generally speaking, Kazakh Muslims have maintained a better relationship with the Han than have the Uighurs.³⁷

The tight controls on information in China (particularly in Xinjiang), coupled with the severe penalties associated with either financial or rhetorical support for unrecognized Islamic organizations, makes it impossible to determine who donates to Islamist groups and how much. However, it appears that the Uighur community (rather than the Hui or Kazakhs) is the primary domestic constituency and support base for Islamist movements that call for

Xinjiang's independence. *Turkistan al-Muslimah*, for instance, publishes articles on government persecution of Uighurs, but does not mention the plight of Hui or Kazakh Muslims in Xinjiang.³⁸ The magazine publishes only the names of "martyred" Uighurs, and in its first issue, the journal stated its aim as exposing "the real situation of our Muslim nation in East Turkistan, which is living under the occupation of the Communist Chinese."³⁹ Publications of this ilk do not appear to exist within either the Hui or Kazakh communities.

Xinjiang's economic situation has only exacerbated the potential for extremism among its populace. In 2012, the *People's Daily* reported that the poverty rate was 13.8 percent higher in regions populated by ethnic minorities in comparison with the national average.⁴⁰ Nearly 500,000 new people enter the Xinjiang job market each year, yet it provides on average less than 350,000 new positions. In order to improve the job prospects within the underemployed Uighur community, Beijing has begun a program to create 400,000 jobs per year and secure work for 85 percent of college graduates. The government has also already changed the law to make it easier to sue employers for ethnic discrimination.⁴¹ Additionally, Beijing continues its long-standing policy of encouraging Uighur migration from Xinjiang to other parts of China in the hope that better economic opportunities and intermarriage will gradually integrate Muslim Uighurs into secular Chinese society.

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

The Chinese state maintains an intricate system of control over its Muslim minorities. China's Islamic educational institutions, which span grades 1 through 12, are closely monitored by the region's Commission on Religious and Ethnic Affairs (CREA). Its teachers and clergy are thoroughly vetted by the parallel Islamic Association to ensure they do not harbor extremist ideas or tendencies. In practice, this has created a series of state-sponsored and tightly-controlled religious schools for Chinese Muslims.⁴²

Although official policies give Uighurs preferential admission to China's secular universities, China currently possesses no Islamic universities or upper level curricula in Islamic affairs.⁴³ Therefore, those Muslims interested in becoming imams or religious leaders must travel to Islamic universities in the Middle East, such as Egypt's al-Azhar University, to complete their theological instruction. These educational institutions, however, have historically served as breeding grounds for Islamic extremist organizations (al-Azhar was the birthplace of the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 20th century). They may present opportunities for the radicalization of China's Muslims in the last stage of their theological training.⁴⁴

The foreign funds flowing to Islamic schools—historically also environments of radicalization in other parts of the world—are tightly controlled in China. Foreign funds for education in Muslim communities must be channeled through CREA and the official Islamic Association, and the independent construction of mosques and religious schools is strictly prohibited.⁴⁵ At the same time, the CPC supplies students' textbooks, thereby controlling the content of what is taught in Muslim classrooms. Like all students in China, in order to advance, Muslims must reproduce answers that reflect history as described within officially approved texts.

Limits on religious activity likewise abound. Until the unrest of 2008-2009 (described below), propaganda and education controls coupled with ample security appeared to have suppressed Islamist activity within China's Muslim communities. After widespread unrest in Xinjiang began, authorities sought to rigidly enforce laws and provisions that severely restrict the practice and teaching of Islam. These regulations, which had been on the books for years, were now publicly posted online and on banners throughout Xinjiang.⁴⁶ Examples of policies that limit Islamic activity include:

- Half-hour limits on sermons
- Prohibitions on prayer in public areas
- Prohibitions on the teaching of the Koran in private
- Restrictions on worship, with Muslims only permitted to attend their hometown mosques
- Restrictions on the studying Arabic to special government schools
- Prohibitions on government workers and CPC members from attending mosque

Two of Islam's five pillars—the sacred fasting month of Ramadan and the *Hajj*—are also restricted. Authorities use propaganda and control of passports to compel Muslims to join government-run *Hajj* tours that deliberately reduce exposure to Islamist teachings.⁴⁷ Policies that compel students and government workers to eat during the holy month of Ramadan have proved to be the most controversial. In 2007, one university in Kashgar forced students to eat during the day by locking its gates and putting glass shards atop the campus walls to prevent them from returning home after dark to break the daily fast.⁴⁸

Although the details remain unclear, these policies of state repression of Islam likely provoked the wave of Uighur unrest and attacks against the Chinese authorities, military, and the Han citizenry that took place in 2008. Between May and August, Uighur separatists reportedly attacked police in Wenzhou using an explosive-laden tractor,⁴⁹ bombed a Guangzhou plastic

factory,⁵⁰ and coordinated a series of deadly bus bombings in Shanghai and Kunming.⁵¹ These attacks culminated with two deadly terrorist attacks in early August 2008—the first involving an assault on police officers in Kashgar,⁵² and the second involving a series of 12 homemade pipe bombs that simultaneously hit a public security station, the industrial and commercial administrative offices, a local department store, a post and telecommunications office and a hotel in the city of Kuqa.⁵³

In response, Chinese authorities launched a series of drastic countermeasures. In August 2008, the government detained hundreds of Uighurs and deployed thousands of paramilitary forces throughout Xinjiang. Police patrolled Kashgar's Uighur neighborhoods, entering houses, hotel rooms, rental apartments, and remote villages, checking occupants' names against a government list in an attempt to expose dissidents in hiding.⁵⁴ By the end of that month, approximately 200,000 police had been mobilized to "check and register" the transient Uighur population. These enhanced security efforts reportedly uncovered 12 cells operating in Kashgar, resulting in 66 arrests; five cells in Urumqi, resulting in 82 arrests; and the destruction of "41 training camps that had been engaged in illegal proselytizing and the training of jihadists."⁵⁵ The crackdown culminated in the reinstatement of the "10-household mutually insured system" in Kashgar and Khotan. Under that policy, if one person is found guilty of anti-state activities, the 10 neighboring families will also be held responsible.⁵⁶

The state's campaign against the "three evil forces" also led to local Xinjiang governments' greater enforcement of regulations restricting Islam.⁵⁷ The strict enforcement of these laws appears to have significantly eroded public support for the state and galvanized public anger and resentment into a force that extremists can manipulate. Thus increased security measures have only served to validate Islamist claims about unjustly targeted state repression. Indeed, almost 1,300 state security-related arrests were carried out in Xinjiang between January-November 2008, and about one-half of all trials in China related to the crime of endangering state security take place in Xinjiang.⁵⁸

However, the cycle continued in 2009. Although the racial incidents that sparked the next wave of large-scale ethnic violence took place thousands of miles away in Guangdong,⁵⁹ the massive scale of the Uighur response in Urumqi (the capital of Xinjiang) reflected widespread public hostility towards the state's tightened restrictions on Islamic activity. Thousands took to the streets to protest the state and ethnic Hans on July 5th in an initially peaceful gathering that quickly turned violent. The Han responded with their own wave of anti-Uighur violence, and when the smoke cleared, nearly

200 were dead and at least 1,680 injured, most of them Han.⁶⁰

The government response to the Urumqi riots was sharp and swift. Authorities in Yining “smashed two violence gangs, and arrested more than 70 suspects,” according to Jiao Baohua, secretary of the Yining city CPC committee.⁶¹ Since then, the Chinese state has implemented a series of new measures designed to prevent further violence. These steps entailed:

- *Increased security*, including the deployment of thousands of armed police, special police, and public security personnel to patrol the Uighur sections of Urumqi and carry out numerous raids;⁶² new city government ordinances calling on all local businesses and residents to register guests with the authorities;⁶³ new traffic restrictions and a city-wide curfew after dark;⁶⁴ harsh sentences for those involved in the riots;⁶⁵ and manhunts for suspected Islamists.⁶⁶
- *Expanded propaganda*, including the initiation of “face-to-face interactions to explain the truth and expose the lies and sinister intentions of the hostile forces both at home and abroad, and preach the importance of nationality solidarity and stability;”⁶⁷ the implementation of a “political education” campaign to promote “new model citizens with a modern attitude;”⁶⁸ the creation of Uighur working groups “to conduct intensive propaganda and educational work and to safeguard social stability;”⁶⁹ and the deployment of some 2,100 more officials and police to communities in Urumqi “to explain government policies and solve disputes.”⁷⁰
- *Improved information and financial controls*, including the suspension of text-messaging and Internet services in Xinjiang between July 2009 and January 2010;⁷¹ and a region-wide effort by law enforcement agencies throughout 2009 to target the finances and properties of extremists and groups agitating for Uighur independence.⁷²
- *Legal controls*, including new restrictions on—and warnings to—lawyers,⁷³ as well as death sentences for some rioters and harsh prison sentences for others.⁷⁴
- *Investment*: The government believes that investment injected from the central government and state-owned enterprises will help Xinjiang “realize fast-paced economic development.” The central government has also designated different areas of Xinjiang as recipients of large amounts of capital, technology and talent from specific Chinese municipalities and provinces. (In this case, the term “talent” may in fact be a euphemism for “Han Chinese labor immigration,” which is a major source of irritation within the Uighur minority.)⁷⁵
- A reshuffling of government personnel, including the ouster of Urumqi’s Communist Party Secretary, Li Zhi, and Xinjiang’s regional police chief. Wang Lequan, the hard-line secretary of the CPC Committee of Xinji-

ang for 15 years and an ally of former President Hu Jintao, faced unprecedented pressure but managed to retain his post.⁷⁶ Wang was finally transferred to Beijing in April 2010 and replaced by Zhang Chunxian, who, as Party chief of Hunan province, had gained an early reputation as a soft-liner. Zhang quickly turned back to state repression, however, and in March 2012, he announced a “resolute crackdown on any terrorist incident as soon as it breaks out.”⁷⁷

Throughout this turbulent time, the Han have blamed the government for not protecting them from Uighur violence. Following a new series of Uighur attacks on Han police and civilians in July and August 2011, hundreds of Han took to the streets in protest.⁷⁸ In response, the Xinjiang government recruited 8,000 new security officers to enforce a program aimed at curbing Islamic extremism.⁷⁹ During the crackdown, large quantities of religious literature and media were confiscated and hundreds (possibly thousands) of Uighurs were detained, “re-educated,” and fined up to \$800 for “violations” of the new program’s regulations.⁸⁰

Thanks to widespread official and military support for continuing the hard-line approach against separatism and Islamism in Xinjiang, expansion of these efforts has continued apace with the increasing severity of separatist attacks. Uighurs cannot compete with police firepower so instead they tend to attack soft targets, including Han civilians and local police officers, with knives or simple explosive devices.⁸¹ In 2012, one group of Uighur separatists even attempted to seize control of a civilian aircraft, but they were overpowered by the crew and passengers and immediately arrested when the plane touched down.⁸²

Local governments in Xinjiang have even expanded their policies to encompass bans against traditional Uighur clothing. In late 2012, Yining announced that it officially discouraged Uighurs wearing traditional Islamic dress or veils or growing beards. Soon after the measure was adopted, a Han man pulled a veil off of a Uighur girl in public, provoking a violent clash between 1,000 angry Uighurs and riot police. In a response that seemed to criticize local authorities’ handling of the case, Beijing announced that, while it encourages more modern ideals to replace the “somehow backward” Uighur culture, they know it will be achieved through guidance rather than force.⁸³

However, force continues to play a major role in China’s anti-terror and anti-separatist strategy. April 2013 witnessed the bloodiest episode of violence in months when 15 community watchman and police clashed with a group of 14 radical Uighurs in a Xinjiang neighborhood home. When three

community watchmen entered the house to investigate a report of suspicious behavior, they found a stash of knives, axes, and homemade bombs. They were able to summon the police before being captured and killed by the radicals inside. The police officers who then reported to the scene were lured into the house, which was subsequently set aflame by the attackers. Six of the so-called “gangsters” were killed and 8 detained.⁸⁴ According to Hou Hanming, executive deputy director of Xinjiang Autonomous Regional Party Committee’s Propaganda Department, the “violent, blood-bonded terrorist group,” was gathering to watch a film promoting *jihad* that had been smuggled into China from abroad.⁸⁵ The incident was dubbed a terrorist attack and Vice Minister of Public Security Meng Hongwei announced that it necessitated an “iron-handed crackdown against terrorism.”⁸⁶

Yet again, however, it appears that these increased state security measures, rather than quelling unrest, merely perpetuated the cycle of violence. In late June 2013, “knife-wielding” mobs in Lukqun, Turpan (southeast of Urumqi) attacked a police station, a local government office and a construction site and set fire to cars. 27 people, including 9 policemen and security guards, died in the resulting violence.⁸⁷ Fan Changlong, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, responded by ordering tightened security measures and intensified patrols during an inspection tour in Xinjiang. He said ethnic unity and social stability in Xinjiang are the armed forces’ responsibility: “We must unswervingly fight against terrorists and the ‘three forces’ of terrorism, extremism and separatism, in order to safeguard ethnic unity.”⁸⁸

Thus today, Xinjiang remains an inhospitable place for Muslims. A vicious cycle of repression and rebellion now exists in which the state’s suppression of Islam broadens the appeal of extremist Islamist ideologies among Uighurs. Furthermore, the implications of radicalization are increasingly international, as the issue affects China’s level of cooperation with its neighbors and South Asian partners. In one instance, China condemned Japan for granting a visa to Uighur leader Rebiya Kadeer to attend the 2013 WUC conference in Tokyo.⁸⁹ In another, Beijing was able to pressure Cambodia into deporting a group of asylum-seeking Uighurs back to China. Within a week of their deportation, China rewarded Cambodia with a package of new bilateral trade deals worth \$850 million. Meanwhile, in January 2012, two of the Uighurs that had been deported were sentenced to life in prison for their roles in the riots in July 2009.

The plight of China’s Muslims has begun attracting attention from Middle Eastern actors, including Bahrain’s Salafist Al-Asalah Islamic bloc, who in July 2013, “expressed deep regret because nobody cries for Muslims in China despite the renewed massacres... the most heinous crimes of genocide and

ethnic cleansing.” In the Bahraini daily *Akbbar Al-Khalij*, the bloc issued a call for Muslim solidarity that also denounced both Beijing’s treatment of its Muslim population and the “disgraceful Arab and international silence” about the situation.⁹⁰ Islamabad, on the other hand, pledged full cooperation with Beijing in countering ETIM after it was confirmed that the Uighurs responsible for the attacks on police and Han civilians in 2011 were trained in Pakistan.⁹¹ More recently, ETIM itself has released videos displaying their training facilities in Northern Waziristan.⁹²

ENDNOTES

- [1] Interviews by American Foreign Policy Council scholars, Xinjiang, China, June 2008.
- [2] “Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Muslim Population,” *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*, October 2009. <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=458>.
- [3] Edward Wong, “Wary Of Islam, China Tightens A Vise Of Rules,” *New York Times*, October 18, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/19/world/asia/19xinjiang.html?_r=3&hp&oref=slogin.
- [4] Interviews by American Foreign Policy Council scholars, Xinjiang, China, June 2008.
- [5] Louisa Greve, Testimony before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, February 13, 2009, http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_house_hearings&docid=f:48222.wais.
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- [7] Rodger Baker, “China and the Enduring Uighurs,” Stratfor *Terrorism Intelligence Report*, August 6, 2008, http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/china_and_enduring_uighurs.
- [8] Ibid.
- [9] Ibidem.
- [10] “Terrorists Arrests Just Tip of the Iceberg,” *Global Times*, June 30, 2010, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/opinion/commentary/2010-06/547217.html>.
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