IS CHINA PREPARED FOR GLOBAL TERRORISM?
XINJIANG AND BEYOND

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

China has long faced low-level violence from the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which seeks an independent Xinjiang. To counter the ETIM and other separatist Uighurs, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has passed laws regulating, and in some cases restricting, expressions of Islamic and Turkic identity. Such levels of control have been used elsewhere in China where the CCP has felt threatened by separatist movements. Since the 2014 "Strike Hard" campaign, China's crackdown in Xinjiang has escalated to include internment camps, forced labor, and daily indoctrination programs. The CCP has also made great use of technological advancements to surveil Xinjiang residents. Besides surveillance cameras equipped with facial recognition, the government also collects information such as biometric data, data usage, and location. This sweeping approach is used to combat what China considers to be a serious terrorism threat.

As China continues to develop the ways in which it counters terrorism at home, it has also begun to export its version of counterterrorism methods abroad. In addition to selling surveillance technology to foreign governments, China has also become a more active player in the international counterterrorism space. It has increased its involvement with bilateral and multilateral counterterrorism institutions and has used its soft power to suppress criticism of its tactics. This heightened involvement in counterterrorism activity abroad combined with China's increasing economic influence, resulting from the Belt and Road Initiative, have made Chinese nationals and projects larger targets of terrorism abroad.

While China has never been a particularly strong counterterrorism partner for the United States, recent tensions in trade and rhetoric make cooperation especially unlikely in the near to medium term. Differences in approaches to technology usage and oversight and criticisms of China's human rights violations have added to the tension. Though, superficially, the United States and other liberal democracies are still setting the global counterterrorism agenda, China has found opportunity to independently strengthen ties with states facing terrorism threats. If China moves towards taking a leadership role in countering terrorism and its policies become the future standard, counterterrorism could become an additional area of contention between Beijing and Washington.

INTRODUCTION

China currently faces a limited terrorism threat, but this danger could increase as China's global presence expands. Beijing is concerned about the domestic threat posed by the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and the Turkestan Islamic Party, and as China has become an international economic and political actor, its nationals and facilities overseas have become targets of a range of terrorist groups. Some of those targeting China have international links, but the most common dangers are from disgruntled members of Muslim minorities in China that have only loose ties to established terrorist organizations like the Islamic State and from radicalized individuals returning from Afghanistan/Pakistan and Syria to Xinjiang.

Beijing considers terrorism a threat to the integrity and legitimacy of the Chinese state, not just a limited danger to individual citizens. The result has been a series of massive crackdowns, with China now becoming the world's largest jailor of Muslims, particularly those of the Turkic ethnic minority. In addition, Beijing has implemented a comprehensive surveillance system, enabling it to track its citizens to stop both crime and any political violence before it spreads. A longer-term approach — and one that provokes considerable resentment — is the use of policies designed to encourage cultural assimilation and internal migration to areas where Turkic minorities predominate. Over time, Chinese leaders hope, Muslim cultures will simply be swallowed up and dissipate.

Counterterrorism, for now, has a limited impact on China's foreign policy. Beijing has shown a willingness to work with an array of countries, such as Saudi Arabia, whose policies foster the spread of Salafi ideas that China opposes at home, as well as other countries like Iran which the United States considers a sponsor of terrorism. For now, neither the United States nor other countries have shown more than token concern for China's mass incarceration and surveillance programs. Indeed, China is even selling its surveillance methods to other countries. China, however, is actively involved in Pakistan, Nigeria, and other countries with a significant terrorism problem, and thus its nationals and business projects are increasingly at risk.

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> ### For now, China-U.S. counterterrorism cooperation seems highly unlikely.

China could be an increasingly important counterterrorism partner for the United States given that both countries have a global presence, but such cooperation is not necessarily desirable given how differently the two countries view the threat and appropriate responses. For now, China-U.S. counterterrorism cooperation, be it military, law-enforcement, or intelligence-sharing focused, seems highly unlikely. In addition, China's repressive policies could be a sore point in bilateral relations should there be a U.S. administration that prioritizes human rights and takes more concrete actions beyond the

condemnations by State Department officials being offered today. Finally, the policies of U.S. internet companies — whether to heed China's wishes on surveillance and content or push for free speech that may be exploited by communities China accuses of being linked to terrorism — may prove contentious. Notably, while technology companies are debating whether or not to comply with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) policies, a number of U.S. companies are contributing to the development and entrenchment of China's surveillance program.[1]

The remainder of this essay has five parts. It first describes the terrorism threat to China, both at home and abroad. It then looks at how China has responded to this danger. The foreign policy implications are then examined. We then propose several reasons why China might become more involved in global counterterrorism. The paper concludes by assessing the implications for the United States.

1. THE TERRORISM THREAT TO CHINA

China has long faced low-level violence from the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). ETIM, started by Hasan Mahsun, a Uighur Muslim from Kashgar, seeks an independent Xinjiang, which the organization refers to as East Turkestan. Though it began as a separatist movement, ETIM became more radical over time, in part because some of its members mixed with al-Qaida and the Taliban.[2] The U.S. Treasury and State Departments classified ETIM as a terrorist group in 2002 to freeze its assets, but did not officially designate it as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.[3]

ETIM's organization is muddy, but it has a jihadist, action-oriented wing, often referred to as the Turkestan Islamic Movement (TIM), though that name is also often used for the organization as a whole. China claims that the East Turkestan Education and Solidarity Association (ETESA), a Uighur-led organization based in Istanbul, is also linked to ETIM and has played a role in sending Uighurs to fight in Syria.[4] ETESA, however, classifies itself as a purely *dawah*-oriented organization committed to educating Turkic Muslims by "meeting their Islamic, social, cultural, spiritual, and earthly needs."[5] The Turkish government refuses to crack down on the ETESA's activities in Turkey since

Uighurs are a Turkic people and the ETESA endorses the Erdoğan government. Regardless of the ETESA's involvement, Uighurs have used Turkey as an entry point to Syria where they have forged connections with groups like the Islamic State.[6]

Much of what China considers terrorism at home, however, appears to involve individuals or small groups rather than larger organizations. In February 2017, five people died when three Uighurs detonated a bomb outside of a government compound in Xinjiang. In December 2016, another attack on a government building killed one person, and earlier that year a police chief was killed in a bombing.[7] Other notable incidents include the 2009 riots in Urumqi, which began when two Uighurs died during clashes between Uighurs and Han Chinese at a factory in Guangdong. In response, over 1,000 rioted in Urumqi resulting in more than 150 dead and over 1,000 injured. The Chinese government claimed that the World Uyghur Congress, a Uighur advocacy organization based in Germany and classified as a terrorist organization by the CCP, organized the riots.[8] In October 2013, three Uighurs drove into pedestrians in Tiananmen Square. The incident, which was believed to be a suicide attack, resulted in five fatalities, three of which were the car passengers, and nearly 40 injured.[9] In March 2014, eight Uighurs armed with knives killed 29 and injured 140 at the Kunming train station. In May 2014, a suicide bomber killed 39 at a market in Urumqi. That same month, one Uighur also armed with a knife injured six at a train station in Guangzhou.[10]

Chinese citizens outside of the country are also vulnerable, and this risk is increasing as China's global presence grows. In Pakistan, the Islamic State's local "province" kidnapped and executed two Chinese nationals in 2017. In 2016, suicide bombers rammed a car into the gates of the Chinese Embassy in the Kyrgyz Republic, injuring three local staff.[11] In 2019, Baluch separatists attacked a hotel popular with Chinese visitors, citing anger with China's commercial and government-linked construction in the region.[12] Many of the Chinese deaths are "collateral damage" from attacks on hotels or other targets that house Westerners and foreigners in general rather than specific attacks on Chinese nationals.[13]

Establishing ties to extremist groups abroad fundamentally changed groups and radical individuals in China. The first members of the Turkestan Islamic Movement were Uighurs who had fled the crackdown in Xinjiang, finding refuge in Afghanistan and Pakistan where they forged ties to, and absorbed the worldview of, al-Qaida and the Taliban. Although it is difficult to determine an exact figure, a notable number of Uighurs went to fight in Syria, falling under the sway of jihadist groups there.[14] The Islamic State in 2017 pledged to attack China and has otherwise issued occasional propaganda to that end. As transit to Syria became more difficult and the war there less attractive, Indonesia emerged as an alternative theater of jihad.[15]

2. THE EVOLVING STATE RESPONSE

Chinese counterterrorism is repressive and otherwise favors an array of security measures with a focus on arrests and surveillance. The government argues that ratcheting up surveillance and counterterrorism programs is done in an effort to counter the "three evil forces": separatism, terrorism, and extremism.[16] The idea of the three evils was conceptualized in the late 1990s and remains the framework used by the CCP for its counterterrorism strategy.[17]

Many of China's counterterrorism measures are simply the result of years of accumulated experience. The 2014 "Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism," the operation behind the current crackdown in Xinjiang, is only the most recent in a series of Strike Hard campaigns beginning in 1983.[18] Strike Hard campaigns began as anti-crime operations to assure the public of the state's ability to provide security. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the ensuing independence of Central Asian states and in the aftermath of 9/11, Strike Hard campaigns saw a shift towards focusing on illegal religious activity and separatist ideas.[19]

Some of what China does in the name of counterterrorism would be done by any country, such as building up its border patrol to detain foreign fighters returning from Syria. Other actions, such as forcing the return of Muslim students studying in the Middle East to then arrest and "re-educate" them, are uniquely Chinese.[20]

The government alleges that since 2014, it has arrested nearly 13,000 terrorists in Xinjiang, broken up over 1,500 violent and terrorist gangs, seized over 2,000 explosive devices, and punished over 30,000 people for illegal religious activity.[21] However, as much of what China considers terrorism would be legitimate religious observance or political action in other countries, numbers for truly violent actors are, in reality, unknown.

China passed its first comprehensive counterterrorism legislation in 2015, showing a growing prioritization of domestic counterterrorism efforts. Previous legal measures against terrorism have been amendments to Chinese criminal codes, passed partly in an effort to comply with U.N. obligations, rather than standalone, comprehensive laws.[22] The 2015 counterterrorism law gives the government broad authorities and vaguely defines terrorism and extremism so as to encompass a broad range of actions that the regime fears would threaten domestic stability.[23] Among other things, China's law requires that technology companies assist with counterterrorism, including with decryption, and limits foreign access to the information and communications technology (ICT) market in China for national security reasons.[24] It also prohibits the media from reporting on counterterrorism without government approval. Many have criticized the approved law for providing room for egregious human rights violations by failing to include judicial oversight, allowing for individuals to be sent to education centers after prison sentences without clarifying the circumstances under which that can occur, and mobilizing members of the public against targeted groups through the creation of villager committees.[25]

In practice, counterterrorism activity in the Xinjiang Province proved particularly aggressive, banning clothes that supposedly advocate extremism and banning "enticing" a minor to participate in religious activities. Individuals could be fined tens of thousands of dollars for spreading news, including on social media, that supposedly harms stability. Publishing, downloading, and sharing "extremist" thoughts are also prohibited.[26] The government has also published a list of actions that imply religious extremism, but the list includes seemingly arbitrary actions such as storing large amounts of food or suddenly quitting drinking and smoking.[27]

To quell dissent, the government has worked since 2014 to build out a police state that essentially monitors residents' every move. Though this system primarily exists in Xinjiang, the government has begun to actively export its surveillance technology to other parts of China.[28] This involves innovative (some would say dystopic) uses of sensors, big data, and other cutting-edge technologies and methods. This surveillance presence is particularly heavy in Muslim-populated areas. To enter markets, buy fuel, or use public transportation, residents submit to facial recognition scans. Residents must download apps for their phones that monitor their messages and data, and some residents have systems in their cars that are tracked by satellites. Authorities also collect biometric data such as DNA, fingerprints, iris scans, and even gait.[29] Knives purchased by Uighurs have the purchasers' identification data etched onto the blades as QR codes. For those under any form of suspicion, facial recognition software alerts authorities when they venture more than 300 meters from their homes, workplaces, or other approved areas.[30] Officials also place QR codes on homes for officers to scan whenever they interrogate the occupants. The level of surveillance that Uighurs are subjected to is informed by their own level of political trustworthiness, along with that of friends and family members. In fact, the detention of one individual in Xinjiang subjects the next three generations in his family to increased surveillance.[31]

Complementing the surveillance system is a heavy police and security presence that is unique to Xinjiang and other minority regions like Tibet. Police and paramilitary troops are stationed every few hundred feet, and there is a network of police posts and stations that enable a rapid response — and an intimidating show of force. This grid-like system was first tried and perfected in Tibet by the then-CCP Secretary Chen Quanguo. Chen has been the CCP secretary in Xinjiang since 2016 and is the mastermind behind the region's surveillance and re-education programs.[32] When residents receive calls from overseas or partake in any other activity that authorities might deem suspicious, police go to their homes to question them.[33] To integrate the heavy technological surveillance with the police presence, officials use the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP), a mobile app. The app collects personal information on all Xinjiang residents, not just Turkic Muslims, and links it to the individual's

identification number. It also tracks residents' locations and seemingly innocuous information such as electricity usage. The app amalgamates this information and notifies officials when an individual needs to be investigated. It also provides officials with specific questions to ask during interrogations and requires them to indicate if the person in question falls within a list of types that receive additional attention. Things like traveling to or from Xinjiang or knowing how to weld would put individuals on the IJOP's radar.[34]

Chinese officials acknowledge the presence of a robust Sinicization program in Xinjiang meant to assert government oversight over ethnic and religious affairs.[35] China's Sinicization program extends far beyond confiscating religious material and now includes large-scale political education camps. More than one million Uighurs and other Muslims are currently detained in re-education camps with another two million forced to attend daytime political indoctrination programs.[36] These camps have been compared to concentration and internment camps given their abusive nature. Detainees face harsh interrogation practices, including torture, and rigorous indoctrination programs that have driven some to suicide.[37] The indoctrination curriculum includes reciting Chinese laws and Communist Party policies, learning Mandarin, singing songs about the CCP and Xi Jinping, and renouncing religious beliefs.[38] The CCP refers to these camps as vocational training centers, and evidence shows that some of those interred are being forced to work in on-campus factories for low wages. The government argues that the centers aim to turn the Uighur population into an industrial workforce to help lift them out of poverty.[39] The indoctrination program is not confined to the camps. Uighurs living outside of the camps are also required to attend weekly or daily flag-raising ceremonies, Mandarin classes, and political indoctrination meetings during which they are obligated to praise the CCP and condemn their families. They are also sometimes forced to host government officials for homestays through a program called "Becoming Family" to both further indoctrinate them and to give the government additional oversight.[40]

The CCP has also passed a law to formalize the Sinicization program with a goal of bringing Islam within the confines of traditional Chinese culture. Representatives from eight Islamic organizations met with government officials and agreed on a five-year plan to Sinicize Islam and make it more compatible with socialism.[41] The government has also undertaken efforts in the past few years to eliminate outward symbols of affiliation with Islam. This includes banning the veil, fasting for Ramadan, and certain beards; restricting pilgrimages to Mecca; and even issuing a list of banned names because of their association with Islam.[42] In 2014, Xinjiang passed the Regulations on Religious Affairs which also banned teaching religion in schools, prohibited the use of "halal" as a label for anything other than food, and banned children from participating in religious activity, including at home.[43] The government has also gone to lengths to bulldoze and rebuild the Old Town in Kashgar which is known for its traditional Islamic and Central Asian architecture. One mosque in the Old Town was converted into a hookah lounge while new restaurants in the area are catering to Han Chinese tastes.[44]

Although the CCP presents it as an economic program, the Great Western Development campaign has contributed to changing demographics in Xinjiang. The campaign, initiated in 1999, seeks to bring economic prosperity to minority-majority regions to quell separatist impulses, beginning with Xinjiang. The CCP has explicitly encouraged Han migration to Xinjiang to better integrate the province when separatism was proving to be a larger issue in the 1990s.[45] Because of the increased investment into Xinjiang, Han Chinese migrated to the region, dramatically changing the ethnic makeup of the province and creating tremendous local resentment. Although Han Chinese made up only 7% of Xinjiang's population in 1949, today, they make up at least 40% of the population.[46] To complement Han migration to Xinjiang, the government has also implemented a labor exportation program through which Uighurs are sent to work in other regions in China. This subsequently lowers the number of Uighurs in the region, thereby increasing the ratio of Hans to Uighurs.[47] The government also orchestrates ethnic dilution by encouraging Hans and Kazakh Muslims to intermarry by offering monetary rewards.[48] There is also some evidence of Uighur women being forced to marry Han men in exchange for freeing male relatives held in the internment camps.[49] By intentionally manipulating Xinjiang's demographics and erasing various facets of traditional Uighur and Muslim culture in the region, the CCP is partaking in a form of cultural destruction under the guise of counterterrorism and counterextremism.

3. FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR CHINA

Counterterrorism has not fundamentally altered China's foreign policy — or affected other countries' relations with China. Beijing has worked well with a range of governments, including those that claim to champion the Muslim community, relying on its economic influence as well as arms sales, surveillance assistance, and limited security cooperation to gain their support in general and for terrorism-related issues.

Countries that have expressed human rights concerns about the mass jailing of Muslims and other Chinese abuses that might incite terrorists have done so in a perfunctory way at most. At the international level, multilateral institutions are shying away from condemning Chinese treatment of Uighurs, though individual officials are making efforts to bring more attention to China's actions.[50] Since taking her post as U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet has regularly criticized China's human rights violations and called on the CCP to grant a U.N. fact-finding mission unfettered access to Xinjiang.[51] Such calls have been met by accusations of bias, with the CCP asserting that U.N. officials and member states are "politically driven" and maintain a double standard in how they choose to label terrorist attacks in China versus the Middle East.[52]

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In March 2019, the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, headquartered in Saudi Arabia, went as far as adopting a resolution commending China's efforts to care for Muslims and indicating an interest in future cooperation.[53] The international community's unwillingness and inability to hold China to account is driven by China's growing economic dominance, especially as the Belt and Road

Initiative (BRI) gains momentum, Beijing's willingness to tolerate human rights abuses in other countries, and its moderately successful efforts to modify the international human rights regime to make it more accommodating of China's actions.[54] This dynamic became especially obvious in July 2019 when 22 states, primarily Western, submitted a letter to the U.N. Human Rights Council calling on China to respect human rights.[55] Though the signatories were made public, no state took credit for leading the effort out of fear of targeted economic backlash from China. In response, 37 states, primarily Middle Eastern and African states with poor human rights records, submitted a letter commending China's human rights achievements and the success of its counterterrorism program.[56]

China, for its part, is willing to work with countries at risk from terrorism. Aggressive commercial efforts continue in Pakistan, Kazakhstan, countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and other countries with a terrorism risk, and thousands of Chinese workers reside in these countries. This is despite listing many of these countries as "sensitive" and exposing Uighurs with any ties to this list of 26 sensitive countries to interrogation, detention, or imprisonment.[57] Notably, the countries on the list are all either Muslim-majority or have significant Muslim populations.

China has relied on governments in these areas to fight terrorism themselves rather than becoming directly involved or working with the United States, France, or other external powers against terrorist groups. This is primarily because China has for some time claimed a non-interference position, but also because it was just in 2016 that the Chinese armed forces became authorized to conduct counterterrorism operations abroad,[58] and in general, China's power projection capacity remains weak.

In general, China seeks to present itself as respecting the international counterterrorism framework, even if its actions indicate otherwise. As a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council (UNSC), China has regularly voted in favor of counterterrorism resolutions undergirded by the rule of law and human rights. It has also, in the past, advocated for U.N. members to agree on a definition of terrorism that can serve as the foundation of future counterterrorism work and for U.N. counterterrorism measures to address the

supposed root causes of terrorism such as poverty and the desire for self-determination. It has ratified nearly all U.N. conventions related to counterterrorism and has shown a commitment to updating the UNSC Counterterrorism Committee on actions it has taken to meet U.N. obligations.[59]

The change in China's engagement with domestic and international terrorism can also be seen in its increased involvement with multilateral institutions focused on counterterrorism. China is a founding member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization which was created in 2001 to allow for closer security cooperation between members. The organization has long emphasized combatting terrorism as a priority and employed China's rhetoric regarding the three evil forces.[60] In 2011, China was one of the founding members of the Global Counterterrorism Forum, which supports the implementation of the U.N. Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.[61] The strategy is the first U.N. resolution outlining a comprehensive strategic and operational approach to counterterrorism.[62] In recent years, China increasingly has been taking part in bilateral and multilateral counterterrorism training exercises, having conducted operations with Cambodia, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Russia in 2018. In 2019, China joined Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan to create the Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism, which aims to improve counterterrorism cooperation among the four countries.[63]

The relationship with Pakistan is especially notable because it is the first time that the economic elements of the BRI were linked to increased military cooperation, and such a pattern may be a harbinger. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is China's flagship BRI project but remains under threat by Baloch militant groups. Pakistan recently created a military force solely responsible for protecting CPEC projects and Chinese workers, and China has struck a deal with the Pakistani government to build Chinese fighter jets and other weaponry in Pakistan.[64] In terms of volume, Pakistan is by far China's largest patron having bought 39% of China's arms sales since 2010.[65]

In addition to exporting arms and working with regional states, China is exporting the surveillance state in the name of counterterrorism and is indeed using its exports to strengthen its own surveillance capacity. Chinese firms are working with Ethiopia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Brazil, Venezuela, and other states to help them monitor political opposition and journalists. In Venezuela, ZTE, a Chinese telecommunications company at the forefront of developing technology used for social control, helped the government create a "fatherland card" to store massive amounts of personal data.[66] Such technological capacity can help these governments fight crime, but they also strengthen the state's capacity to target its political opposition. By exporting this technology, the Chinese government and companies gain access to a tremendous amount of data that in turn helps them advance the algorithms behind these various technologies.[67]

4. ISSUES THAT MAY CHANGE CHINA'S RISK LEVEL

Although China's current terrorism risk is low, several factors may change this in future years. This is particularly likely internationally, as China becomes a global power and because China has less ability to repress dissent abroad than it does at home.

The most likely risk is simply to Chinese nationals and commercial interests overseas. Many Chinese commercial initiatives, including many linked to the BRI, are in countries like Nigeria and Pakistan that have a significant jihadist terrorist presence. Al-Qaida, the Islamic State, and like-minded groups have a presence in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, and Africa where China is active and governments are often weak or have limited reach. Chinese nationals may be victims of "collateral damage" from other attacks, targets of kidnapping for ransom, or other risks.

In addition, China's infrastructure building and other efforts often change local dynamics, creating new terrorism risks. Local communities, suddenly tied to the central government and commercial centers through new roads and commercial relationships, may be increasingly resentful of their governments and of the Chinese workers and companies that support them, especially as China-funded projects are less likely to protect human rights when compared to projects funded by the U.S. or EU. They are also less likely to be accommodating of local needs and attitudes and more concerned with the needs of the national government.

This could lead to a new trend whereby Chinese nationals and projects are no longer simply "collateral damage" but are, in fact, targets themselves.

China's gross mistreatment of its own Muslim community could become an issue among the world's Muslims. For now, important states like Saudi Arabia and Egypt have played down any criticism of China, with only the Turkish government raising the issue, albeit inconsistently. China historically has not been an important part of the Islamic world's discourse, but high-profile events there could change this, perhaps quite quickly.

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China's own responses may also make this more likely. A highly visible Chinese counterterrorism operation overseas may catch the attention of jihadist groups, moving China closer to center stage. Regimes may also seek Chinese support to crush dissent and violence at home, making China more of an immediate enemy of jihadist organizations.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Cooperation between China and the United States on counterterrorism is unlikely in the near to medium term, but that is not to say that cooperation is always particularly desirable even if it does produce operational benefits for both countries. Although groups like the Islamic State pose a threat to both states, and dialogues and expert exchanges do occur, the two states have different counterterrorism priorities. In general, China is focused on violence involving Uighurs and others it considers immediate enemies of the Chinese state and has few qualms about relying on harsh and collective forms of punishment in pursuit of counterterrorism. The United States, in turn, sees the Uighurs and other Muslim communities as oppressed when it gives them

any thought at all.[68] It, instead, prioritizes terrorism in the greater Middle East. This difference in interest and focus now also operates against the backdrop of greater tension between the United States and China in trade and in rhetoric from the Trump administration.

In the aftermath of 9/11, China offered minimal support to the United States in counterterrorism operations in Central Asia, but it exploited the world's mobilization against Islamist jihadism to ratchet up operations in Xinjiang. It also encouraged the United States to designate the East Turkestan Islamic Movement as a terrorist organization, which it did in 2002, though the Department of State remained critical of China's actions towards Uighurs and other Muslim minorities.[69] Besides offering verbal backing, China has done little to support global counterterrorism operations and has in fact frustrated efforts by the U.S. and its partners by not reciprocating in intelligence exchanges about international terrorist threats.[70]

Cooperation today remains limited and the U.S. government continues to be critical of China's human rights record, although economic competition has become more intense than in the past. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo has been the most outspoken member of the Trump administration on China's treatment of the Uighurs, pledging U.S. support to end repression of Islam in China and accusing China of conflating terrorism with religious and political expression.[71] The Department of State had planned to sanction select Chinese individuals and entities with support from the National Security Council under the Global Magnitsky Act, but was blocked from doing so by the Treasury Department to avoid jeopardizing ongoing trade talks with the Chinese government.[72] The issue of human rights abuses in Xinjiang and general opposition to China's current counterterrorism practices have also managed to gain traction and support in Congress, further posing an obstacle to cooperation. Representatives from both parties in both chambers of Congress wrote a letter to senior Trump administration officials urging them to sanction individuals responsible for human rights violations in Xinjiang.[73] Three separate bills have also been introduced to Congress condemning the regime's actions in Xinjiang.[74]

Differences in counterterrorism approaches also extend to the technology industry. Technology clearly plays a central role in Chinese counterterrorism, and control over the industry is integral to the CCP's broad use of technology. This insistence on extreme oversight of the industry is one area of tension with U.S. and European-based internet companies. China is highly interested in increasing cooperation in combating terrorist use of the internet, especially by individuals and entities it finds threatening to the CCP. However, because of vast differences in Chinese and American values as they relate to privacy, different views on political and social activism among Muslims in China, and tensions over dominance in cyberspace, cooperation has been difficult. In addition to wanting the U.S. government and technology companies to moderate content it believes to be dangerous, the CCP also antagonizes American technology companies by requiring them (and other foreign technology companies operating in China) to create China-only versions of their products that ensure compliance with local laws regarding censorship and government accessibility to software and data.[75]

U.S. counterterrorism relations with China are unlikely to improve under a Democratic presidency. Democratic presidential candidates have not spoken much about China, but in the few statements made, they express a desire to continue restricting trade with China to avoid the erosion of America's economic and security advantages. There may, however, be a change in the U.S. government's approach to Chinese human rights violations. Though the current administration does express some criticism of human rights abuses in China, it has been reluctant to take punitive actions. Under a Democratic administration, there stands a greater chance for measures against China that may bring more attention to this issue, such as increasing oversight on tech transfers to China for use in surveillance and other activities that infringe on human rights. Such measures would create additional tension in the bilateral relationship.

6. CONCLUSION

For much of recent history, the United States and other liberal democracies have set the global counterterrorism agenda. China has played an active role in the shaping of the debates and measures that comprise the counterterrorism framework, but the framework still reflects the liberal values held by most P5 members, which China rhetorically supports. Complementing its public commitment to international counterterrorism measures, China has found opportunity to independently strengthen ties with states facing terrorism threats, through economic partnerships and implicit support of their illiberal approaches to counterterrorism, and may move towards taking a leadership role in countering terrorism, especially as it sees economic value in increasing security cooperation. Making China's counterterrorism policies the future standard is not only dangerous because it fails to respect human rights, but also because Beijing and Washington disagree on the nature of the threat, creating the potential for an additional area of contention.

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