COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

China: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

In July 2014, ISIS declared that the Muslim Uighurs of the western province of Xinjiang needed to be liberated from China's atheist regime. The region is home to about eight million Turkic-speaking Muslim Uighurs who regularly face discrimination and marginalization at the hands of the local and national forces. A Chinese citizen was executed by ISIS in November 2015, and ISIS looked to ramp up recruitment in China with the release of a Mandarin-language *nasheed* (Islamic chant) the following month. (Sources: Jamestown Foundation [1], *Security Studies Quarterly* [2], *New York Times* [3], Deutsche Welle [4])

Beginning in early 2017, China implemented broad campaigns in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) under the guise of countering extremism. In April of 2017, the XUAR government mandated "re-education" programs for members of ethnic minority communities and students who study overseas in an effort to better "assimilate" back into Chinese society. Citing terrorism concerns, authorities in the XUAR required all residents to install a surveillance application on smart phones that automatically detects "terrorist and illegal" religious videos, images, e-books, and electronic documents. However, the government's broad definitions of "terrorism" and "extremism" and its unclear definition of "fake terrorism information" continued to raise human rights concerns as over one million people were arbitrarily detained in internment camps throughout the region. (Source: U.S. Department of State [5])

Following international condemnation of the XUAR internment camps, on July 30, 2019, Chinese officials claimed that they released the majority of the detainees. Despite this assertion, the United States, experts on China, and ethnic Uighur Muslims contested the claim. The Chinese government has not offered convincing evidence of mass releases, and it is reported that people who had been freed effectively remained in captivity as many were forced into labor programs instead. (Source: *New York Times* [6])

Overview

Transnational extremist groups like al-Qaeda did not target China, nor did they develop strong links with domestic Chinese Muslim terrorist organizations in its western regions. However, extremists' disregard of China is receding as China emerges from relative isolationism to global engagement, projecting presence and power in historically off-limits regions like the Middle East and North Africa. Islamic extremist groups see China's burgeoning presence in Arab regions as a particularly serious offense and some have labeled China as the new "head of the snake." ISIS, for instance, has cited China as a legitimate target of attack, although China has declined to join the U.S.-led coalition against the terror group. (Sources: *Security Studies Quarterly* [2], CNN [7])

Internally, China's northwest province of Xinjiang is home to 10 million Muslim Uighurs, an ethnically non-Han Turkic people. According to China expert Philip Potter, the Chinese authorities' "ongoing security crackdown in Xinjiang has forced the most militant Uighur separatists into volatile neighboring countries, such as Pakistan, where they are forging strategic alliances with, and even leading, jihadist factions affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Taliban." The resulting "cross-fertilization" is likely to "substantially increase the sophistication and lethality of terrorism in China." As of December 2014, around 300 Chinese nationals have joined ISIS, according to China's state-run newspaper *Global Times.* In May 2017, the Syrian ambassador to China claimed that approximately 5,000 Uighurs from Xinjiang were fighting in Syria, with some fighting for ISIS while the majority fought under "their own banner." (Sources: Asia Times [8], Security Studies Quarterly [2], Reuters [9], Reuters [10])

In 2014, China saw an increase in terrorist activity. Attacks were no longer limited to China's western region which resulted in heightened counterterrorism measures throughout the rest of the country. One attack outside of the western region occurred on March 1, 2014, when ten men armed with knives stormed the railway station in the southern city of Kunming. At least 31 people were killed and over 141 people were injured. A separatist group from Xinjiang claimed responsibility for the attack. As a result, China tightened its security in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) to prevent additional domestic acts of terrorism. In particular, greater government control was exercised over religious expression and practice. (Sources: CNN [11], BBC News [12], U.S. Department of State [13])

The main target of China's counterterrorism efforts is the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), a terrorist organization that Beijing alleges maintains influence in Xinjiang. Since Xinjiang is home to over 11 million Uighurs, the Uighur community has come under great scrutiny. Although members of the Uighur community did travel to Syria to join

the insurgency against Assad, many under the banner of an organization called the Turkestan Islamic Party, which is generally regarded as an offshoot of the ETIM. (Source: Huffington Post [14])

In November 2015, ISIS published images of executed Chinese hostage Fan Jinghui, under the title "The Fate of the Two Prisoners" in their magazine, *Dabiq*. This represented the first known instance in which a Chinese citizen was killed by ISIS. President Xi Jinping claimed [15] China would "certainly bring the criminals to justice." However, in the wake of Fan Jinghui's execution, NPR described China's overall response as "muted [16]," and China remains outside "anti-ISIS operations in the Middle East." (Sources: Clarion Project [17], International Business Times [15], National Public Radio [16])

In December 2015, the ISIS foreign-language media arm Al Hayat published a Mandarin-language nasheed exhorting Muslims in China to "wake up" and "take up weapons." The step appears to represent an effort to step up recruitment among Chinese Islamists, and "could be aimed at placing China in the cross hairs," according to a report in the *New York Times* [3]. (Source: *New York Times* [3], CNBC [18])

On December 28, 2016, after a year of relative calm in China, four men drove a vehicle into the premises of a government building in Karakax county, Xinjiang. The attackers, described as Islamist militants by Chinese state media, detonated an explosive and killed one person, before being shot and killed by police. Weeks before the attack, China's head of religious affairs warned that extremist thought was now penetrating central China, in "inland provincial areas" beyond Xinjiang and the western region. (Sources: Reuters [19], *Independent* [20], Reuters [21])

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Homegrown Radicalization

Since the late 1980s, China's northwest Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) has been plagued by violence stemming from separatist movements and religious fundamentalism. Xinjiang is home to a plurality of ethnically Turkic Muslim Uighurs who follow a moderate version of Sunni Islam. Many Uighurs reject the name and idea of Xinjiang, and some seek to create an independent "East Turkestan" to replace the present-day Xinjiang. Chinese authorities claim that extremist religious ideology, often promulgated over the Internet, has corrupted the Uighurs in Xinjiang, prompting many to pursue separatism through terrorist means. Extremist secessionist and religious groups in Xinjiang have been described as splintering, merging, and collapsing. (Source: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies [22])

The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is China's most prominent extremist group. Formed in the 1990s, ETIM is widely regarded as the most active and well-organized terrorist organization operating in Xinjiang. It seeks to create an independent Islamist state covering parts of China and Central Asia. While ETIM has claimed responsibility for a handful of attacks within China, it is best known for its anti-Chinese and anti-American online propaganda. In the past few years, ETIM has begun referring to itself as the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIP). (Sources: Council on Foreign Relations [23], BBC News [24], Reuters [25], BBC News [26], *Washington Post* [27], Associated Press [28], *Security Studies Quarterly* [2], APCSS [29], Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst [30])

Throughout the 1990s, the Chinese government attempted to publicly link ETIM to al-Qaeda, citing funding and training links. In December 2003, China designated ETIM as a terrorist group. Although the U.S. Department of State designated ETIM a terrorist organization in September 2002, they "quietly removed it amid doubts that it existed in any organized manner." The group has also been subject to designations by the U.S. Treasury Department. (Sources: *Security Studies Quarterly* [2], BBC News [26], U.S. Department of State [31], U.S. Department of the Treasury [32], U.S. Department of the Treasury [33], Associated Press [28],)

According to China specialist Philip Potter, collaboration between ETIM and high-profile jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Taliban is likely to deepen, moving the lesser-known Uighur separatist movement "[closer] to the center of a dense web of international terrorist relationships that have the potential to increase the capability [of ETIM]." These increased capabilities might include the procurement of technologically advanced weaponry, leading to an increase in the lethality of future ETIM attacks. Furthermore, Chinese Uighurs active in the Afghanistan war may return to Xinjiang, spreading radicalized ideology within China's borders. (Source: *Security Studies Quarterly* [2])

Foreign Fighters

In December 2014, the Chinese state-run newspaper *Global Times* wrote that "around 300 Chinese extremists are fighting with ISIS in Iraq and Syria," and alleged that most of the foreign fighters are affiliated with the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), also known as the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP). According to a Voice of America report, the TIP has been one of the major extremist groups operating in Syria since the start of the country's civil war and is primarily made up of Uighur Muslims from the restive Xinjiang province of China. Many of those who have fled Xinjiang, have reportedly traveled to Turkey, a country with which the Turkic-speaking Uighurs share cultural and religious ties. For some, Turkey has served as a transit route to eventually join with Islamist militant groups in Syria and Iraq. This has led to calls from Beijing for enhanced cooperation between China and Turkey. (Sources: [Al Arabiya](#) [34], [Reuters](#) [25], [Reuters](#) [35], [Voice of America](#) [36])

In May 2017, Syria's ambassador to China, Imad Moustapha, reported that up to 5,000 Uighurs from the northwest region of Xinjiang were fighting in Syria. Moustapha told Reuters that some of the Uighur fighters were ISIS members, but most were fighting in the country to promote a separatist cause "under their own banner." Accordingly, Uighurs affiliated with al-Qaeda's network are said to be in the thousands, including their wives and children. An independent media resource, The Levant, estimates 2,000 to 2,500 Uyghurs fighting under the Nusra Front. The number of "trained jihadist fighters" intercepted trying to re-enter China rose dramatically in 2018, posing a growing challenge for the country, according to Chinese government security and diplomatic advisers. The sources did not specify total numbers but said the increase reflected a higher threat, particularly to China's western region of Xinjiang. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [10], [War on the Rocks](#) [37], [South China Morning Post](#) [38])

In December 2016, as part of new statewide counterterrorism measures, Xinjiang's People's Congress strengthened rules on border crossings into adjacent countries. The Xinjiang region shares borders with the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and the Pakistani-administered section of Kashmir and Jammu. (Source: [U.S. State Department](#) [39])

In January 2015, Chinese authorities arrested 10 Turkish nationals in Shanghai for allegedly helping ethnic Uighurs leave China to fight alongside Islamist militants in Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The police also arrested nine Uighurs from Xinjiang and two Chinese citizens who were helping with the illegal immigration scheme. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [40], [The Diplomat](#) [41])

In December 2014, ISIS militants beheaded two Chinese members after charging them with treason and accusing them of attempted escape. In September 2014, a Chinese citizen fighting with ISIS in Syria was "arrested, tried and shot dead" by ISIS militants after he became disillusioned with the group and attempted to flee to Turkey. In November 2014, nine Xinjiang terror suspects were detained for attempting to leave China after paying up to 60,000 Yuan ($9,700) for altered Turkish passports. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [9], [Reuters](#) [40], [The Diplomat](#) [41])

Soon after the September 11, 2001, attacks against the United States, Chinese authorities reported that over one thousand Xinjiang separatists traveled to terrorist training camps in Afghanistan. In 2002, the Chinese government claimed to have arrested 100 foreign-trained fighters that had returned to Xinjiang. (Source: [Council on Foreign Relations](#) [42])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

China has suffered an increasing number of violent extremist incidents since the 1980s, most of which have been reportedly carried out by ethnic Uighurs within the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. (Source: *[Security Studies Quarterly](#) [2]*)

The state-led Chinese media accuse ETIM/TIP or associated jihadists of carrying out violence, although independent verification of these claims is not available. According to the [U.S. Department of State](#) [43], China has "restricted the ability of journalists and international observers to independently verify official media accounts." Human rights organizations maintain that China uses counterterrorism as a pretext to suppress Uighurs. (Sources: [Human Rights Watch](#) [44], [U.S. Department of State](#) [45], [U.S. Department of State](#) [43], *[Security Studies Quarterly](#) [2]*)

- **June 9, 2017:** ISIS's Amaq News Agency claims its militants in the Balochistan province of Pakistan killed two Chinese

teachers.
The Chinese nationals, a man and a woman, ran a Chinese language center and were kidnapped two weeks prior from the provincial capital, Quetta. Sources: *Financial Times* [46], Agence Frence Presse [47]

- **December 28, 2016:** Four assailants—described by Chinese state media as Islamist militants—drive a vehicle into the yard of a government office building and set off an explosive device in Karakax county, Xinjiang, killing one person. All four are shot and killed by police. Sources: Reuters [19], *Independent* [20]

- **December 2015:** ISIS posts a new nasheed (chant) in Mandarin Chinese calling on Muslims in China to "wake up" and "take up weapons," in a signal that ISIS is targeting China for recruitment efforts.
Sources: *New York Times* [3], CNBC [18]

- **November 2015:** ISIS publishes images of Chinese citizen Fan Jinghui, showing his bloodied corpse after they execute him in ISIS-held territory.
President Xi Jinping claims China will "certainly bring the criminals to justice." Sources: Clarion Project [48], National Public Radio [16]

- **September 18, 2015:** Chinese media reports that Xinjina separatists have attacked a coal mine in Aksu, killing 16 people and injuring 18 more.
Two months later, security forces kill 28 "terrorists" believed to be responsible for the attack, reportedly under the direction of "foreign elements." Source: Reuters [49]

- **March 1, 2014:** A group of nine men and women go on a stabbing rampage at a train station in Kunming in southwest China, killing 29 civilians and injuring over 130.
Chinese authorities said the attack was "carried out by Xinjiang separatist forces." Sources: BBC News [50], *Guardian* [51]

- **October 28, 2013:** Islamist extremists pough an SUV into a group of pedestrians in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, killing five and injuring dozens.
The Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) took responsibility for the attack. Source: Associated Press [52]

- **June 26, 2013:** A gang with knives attack government buildings in Lukqun, Xinjiang province, killing 35.
According to Xinjiang's provincial government, a 17-person Uighur-led "terrorist cell" carried out the attack, targeting police members. The Chinese government called the incident a terrorist attack, citing it as the deadliest in four years.
Sources: Reuters [53], *Atlantic* [54]

- **April 24, 2013:** Deadly ethnic clashes in Xinjiang leave 21 people dead, including 15 police officers.
The Chinese foreign ministry claimed that a "violent terrorist group" organized the clashes. A spokeswoman for the Uighur World Congress, an umbrella organization of Uighur groups, said that the clashes were caused by the killing of a Uighur youth by armed Chinese authorities. Source: BBC News [55]

- **June 29, 2012:** Six Uighurs attempt to violently hijack an airplane headed from Hotan to Urumqi within Xinjiang, according to Chinese state media.
Source: *Telegraph* [56]

- **July 30, 2011 - July 31, 2011:** Two Uighurs stab a truck driver to death, steal the truck and run it through a group of pedestrians, attacking them with knives, killing six.
The next day, an explosion kills three people, and police shoot dead four suspects. The police blamed the explosion on Uighur "terrorists." The weekend attacks leave more than 30 people dead. In September 2011, the TIP records and disseminates a video claiming responsibility for the July attacks. Sources: BBC News [57], BBC News [58], *New York Times* [59]

- **July 18, 2011:** Uighur "terrorists" use homemade weapons to attack a police station in Xinjiang, leaving 14 of the 18 attackers dead.
Weapons included cleavers, axes, switchblades, Molotov cocktails, and homemade bombs. A regional government spokeswoman told the Associated Press that the attackers replaced the Chinese flag at the police station with a black flag emblazoned with Arabic writing. The men were reportedly shouting "sacred war" and "Allah." Source: Associated Press [60]

- **August 19, 2010:** Six Uighur men drive an explosive-laden vehicle into a group of Chinese military police near an intersection in Aksu, Xinjiang.
Six people died and 15 were injured. Sources: *New York Times* [61], Reuters [62]

- **August 10, 2008:** Five Uighur Muslim attackers drive explosive-laden taxis into a government building in Kuqa, Xinjiang.
The attack injures two police officers and one security guard. Source: *Telegraph* [63]

- **August 8, 2008:** ETIM releases another video threatening the upcoming Olympic games in Beijing.
In the video, a man—identifying himself as Abdullah Mansour—holds up an assault rifle and says in the Uighur language, "We, members of the Turkestan Islamic Party, have declared war against China. We oppose China's occupation of our homeland of East Turkestan, which is a part of the Islamic world." He warned Muslims to stay at home, stating that EMIT did not want Muslims to "get hurt by our fire targeted at China." Source: *New York Times* [64]

- **August 4, 2008:** Days before the Olympic Games, a truck ploughs through approximately 70 jogging paramilitary officers in Kashgar, Xinjiang province.
The two male perpetrators then exited the truck and attacked the officers with machetes and homemade explosives, killing 16. Chinese state media called the incident a terrorist attack carried out by ethnic Uighurs. However, three

foreign tourists who had witnessed the attack gave a different account, claiming that there were no loud explosions and that the "men wielding the machetes appeared to be paramilitary officers who were attacking other uniformed men." Source: *New York Times* [65]

- **July 23, 2008:** ETIM releases a video threatening the upcoming Olympic Games in Beijing.
  The leader of the group, "Commander Seyfullah," said in the video, "[O]ur aim is to target the most critical points related to the Olympics. We will try to attack Chinese central cities severely using the tactics that have never been employed." Throughout the video, Commander Seyfullah spoke mostly in the Uighur language. Source: *New York Times* [66]
- **January 5, 2007:** Chinese authorities raid a terrorist training camp in Xinjiang, killing 18 terror suspects and capturing 17.
  Authorities also seized explosives. Source: APCSS [29]
- **1990:** According to former Xinjiang governor Abdulahat Abdurixit, Xinjiang experienced "thousands of explosions, assassinations, and other incidents" perpetrated by various separatist and religious groups in the 1990s.
  Source: East West Center [67]

Domestic Counter-Extremism

In October 2014, China's National People's Congress drafted legislation that would establish a national anti-terrorism intelligence system, which would improve intelligence gathering and sharing. The state-controlled Xinhua News Agency said the draft law would increase Internet controls and tighten security measures regarding the transport of dangerous materials and border controls. According to the Xinhua report, anyone found guilty of "promoting terrorism and extremism by producing and distributing related materials, releasing information, instructing in person or through audio, video or information networks" may face more than five years in prison. The law—entitled the "Counter-Terrorism Law"—was passed on July 1, 2015. A top priority of the law is to set up counterterrorism working bodies in the national, provincial, and prefecture-level governments and to emphasize prevention as a counterterrorism strategy. However, a major issue raised by the draft law involved the definition of terrorism which is defined as "any advocacy or activity that, by means of violence, sabotage, or threat, aims to create social panic, undermine public security, or menace a state organ or an international organization." In this case, the vague terminology provides the government the ability to arbitrarily label any dissension as terrorism.(Sources: Reuters [68], Refworld [69])

In December 2015, China passed a new anti-terrorism law that allows the Chinese military to conduct counterterrorism operations in other countries. The law was criticized by western governments and businesses. Notably, then-U.S. President Barack Obama expressed concern that telecom companies would be forced to provide the Chinese government with "back door" access to their products, encryption codes, and sensitive technology. (Source: *Financial Times* [70], Reuters [71])

Human rights advocates expressed skepticism about the draft law, claiming they will "[legitimize] ongoing human rights violations and facilitate future abuses…[in a region with] a history of gross human rights abuses committed in the name of counter terrorism." While acknowledging the Chinese government's duty to prevent "appalling attacks" perpetrated by extremists, Human Rights Watch proposes radical revisions to the new laws to ensure conformity with international law and human rights standards. Human rights activists are also concerned about China's nebulous definition of what constitutes 'terrorism,' which has led to the conviction of over 8,000 Chinese citizens who "may face up to 10 years in prison." (Sources: Reuters [68], Human Rights Watch [72])

Since 1996, the Xinjiang government has launched regular "strike hard" campaigns as an attempt to crack down on violent extremism, separatism, and terrorism. As a result, a heavy police presence is a constant in Xinjiang. According to a 2008 Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies report, Chinese strike hard campaigns "[tamp] down violence in the short run but [fuel] a sense of injustice and mistrust among the [Uighurs] in the long-run." Fresh crackdowns are implemented after outbreaks of violent ethnic tension between Uighurs and Han. For example, in February 2017, Chinese authorities made it compulsory for all vehicles in parts of Xinjiang to be fitted with satellite tracking devices. In the large northwestern autonomous prefecture of Bayingolin, drivers who refuse will not be permitted to purchase gas. (Sources: *Wall Street Journal* [73], *Guardian* [74], APCSS [29], BBC News [75])

Between March and April 2017, the Chinese government launched a security campaign in the Xinjiang province, ostensibly aimed at addressing "separatist, extremist, and terrorist activity." The campaign targeted thousands of Uighur and other Muslim ethnic groups for detention, as well as increased surveillance and involuntary collection of biometric data. In

March 2017, XUAR lawmakers passed a regional Anti-Religious Extremism Law. The law prohibits the dissemination, downloading, or sharing of "extremist" content. The law also criminalizes religious garments and "abnormal" beards as they are indications of radicalization. In April of that same year, the XUAR government mandated "re-education" programs for members of ethnic minority communities and students who study overseas in an effort to better "assimilate" into Chinese society. Citing terrorism concerns, authorities in the XUAR required all residents to install a surveillance application that automatically detects "terrorist and illegal" religious videos, images, e-books, and electronic documents on smart phones. The app reportedly has the capability to remotely delete this content. In October 2018, a BBC investigation found new evidence of Muslim internment in Xinjiang. The Chinese government had claimed that those detained had voluntarily entered into "vocational schools," so-called re-education programs, which China says is used to counter "terrorism and religious extremism." There is evidence that almost a million Muslims were interned without due process. (Sources: BBC News [76], U.S. Department of State [77])

On March 18, 2019, the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China released a white paper entitled "The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang." Among other details, the report mentioned how Chinese authorities have arrested almost 13,000 "terrorists" in the far western region of Xinjiang since 2014. Since 2014, Xinjiang has "destroyed 1,588 violent and terrorist gangs, arrested 12,995 terrorists, seized 2,052 explosive devices, punished 30,645 people for 4,858 illegal religious activities, and confiscated 345,229 copies of illegal religious materials." Following the publication of the report, critics—particularly, the World Uighur Congress—claim that China's methods of counterterrorism serve as an excuse to suppress the Uighurs as well as further endorse the increasing Sinification of the Chinese public. (Sources: State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China [78], Al Jazeera [79])

On July 10, 2019, more than 22 countries at the United Nations' Human Rights Council called on China to halt its mass detention of Uighurs. However, the ambassadors fell short of a formal statement being read out at the Council or a resolution submitted for a vote due to fears of potential political and economic backlash from China. Despite condemnation for China's actions, 37 other countries expressed support for the repressive policies in XUAR. (Sources: New York Times [80], Associated Press [81], Reuters [82], Xinhua [83])

Outside of XUAR, Chinese authorities have also focused their attention on Hong Kong as it has been embroiled in mass demonstrations over the summer of 2019. Dissension began in February 2019 when the local government introduced a bill in Hong Kong's legislature that would allow people accused of crimes to be sent to countries with which Hong Kong had no extradition treaty. Hong Kong was a British colony until 1997 when it was handed back to China under a policy known as "one country, two systems." The policy made Hong Kong part of China but let it keep many liberties denied to citizens on the mainland, including free speech, unrestricted internet access, and the right to free assembly. China promised that this system would remain in place until at least 2047. However, the introduction of the bill catalyzed the public to demonstrate against the encroaching power of China. Fueled by anger toward the police, as well as the slow erosion of civil liberties, the largely leaderless protests morphed into a broader, more complicated movement about protecting freedoms, democracy, and Hong Kong's autonomy. (Sources: New York Times [84], Washington Post [85])

Public demonstrations began in June and although mostly being peaceful, protests have culminated in violent responses from security forces and have been labeled by Chinese authorities as showing the "first signs of terrorism." The city's largest and most violent protest took place on June 12 when police officers fired tear gas and rubber bullets at demonstrators. On July 1, 2019, hundreds of demonstrators broke into the Legislative Council building, occupying it for hours and vandalizing it. Given the level of violence, on June 15, Hong Kong's Chief Executive, Carrie Lam, claimed she would suspend the extradition bill, calling it "dead." However, she refused to withdraw it entirely until September 4, when she announced she would formally withdraw the bill. It was unclear, however, whether that decision would be enough to quell the protest movement. The list of protesters' demands has grown to include an independent investigation into the police response, amnesty for arrested participants, and direct elections for all lawmakers and the chief executive. (Source: Wall Street Journal [86], New York Times [84], BBC News [87])

International Counter-Extremism

Under former leader Mao Zedong, China was a key patron of terrorist organizations such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, as well as a significant supporter of state sponsors of terrorism like Iran, Syria, and Libya. As China

prioritized economic development over political objectives—seeking acceptance into the established world order—such links were discarded as inconvenient millstones. Today, China has completed its evolution from "open support for terrorist organizations to disengagement… to a position of active opposition." (Source: *Security Studies Quarterly* *[2]*)

China's reversal on transnational counter-extremism is exemplified by the country's leading role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a regional intergovernmental Asian organization formed in 2001. The SCO's geographical focus of operations is Central Asia. It seeks to combat "the three evils of separatism, extremism and terrorism," as China's then-President Hu Jintao proclaimed at a 2004 SCO summit. SCO membership extends to Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, while observer status is afforded to Afghanistan, India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan.In July 2016, China held joint counterterrorism training with its largest SCO partner, Russia, in Moscow. China conducted similar exercises with Tajikistan later that year in October. Within the Central Asia region, China also hosted the opening conference of the newly formed Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism in Counterterrorism, together with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. The Mechanism seeks to improve coordination between the four countries in "intelligence sharing, anti-terrorist capability building, joint anti-terrorist training and personnel training." Furthermore, more than 80 countries sent representatives to attend China's Forum on International Cooperation in Countering the Use of Cyberspace for Criminal and Terrorist Purposes in December 2018. In a bid to deepen regional security cooperation, China and Kyrgyzstan initiated joint counterterrorism exercises in XUAR in August 2019. Over 150 personnel from the Chinese People's Armed Police Force and the National Guard of Kygyzstan engaged in counterterrorism training. (Sources: APCSS [22], Congressional Research Service [88], Shanghai Cooperation Council [89], *Hindustan Times* [90], U.S. Department of State [5], Xinhua [91])

Outside of the SCO, China's willingness to cooperate with major Western nations on counter-extremism and counterterrorism is more muted. Long-standing skepticism about China's human rights record has impeded assistance from the West, while China's propensity for maintaining a low profile on the world stage has prevented its full engagement. Nevertheless, China held bilateral counterterrorism meetings with the United Kingdom and the United States in 2016. In November of the same year, the Chinese Vice-Minister of Security was elected as the president of INTERPOL for a four-year term. (Sources: Congressional Research Service [88], U.S. Department of State [39])

Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States called on China to play a greater role in combating global terrorism. In 2005, former Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick urged China "to become a responsible stakeholder" in the international system. Despite China's voicing of strong support for the United States after 9/11, such calls failed to yield any substantive impact during the 2000s, as China shunned direct involvement in the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom against al-Qaeda. (Sources: U.S. Department of State [92], Congressional Research Service [88])

However, as China tackles what it perceives as a surge in domestic Uighur extremism—especially by adopting Western intelligence techniques relying on "big data" collection—opportunities may emerge for enhanced cooperation between the China and the U.S. in particular. The same law that is set to push through domestic changes in counterterrorism policy, for instance, also seeks to increase international cooperation. Indicative of America's growing willingness to join forces with China was President Obama's January 2015 statement that "There are specific areas where we could work together, for example in stemming the flow of foreign terrorist fighters and cracking down on terrorist funding networks…." In May 2017, Chinese concerns about Xinjiang fighters joining militant groups in Syria and Iraq via Turkey—with which Uighurs share cultural and religious ties—prompted calls for enhanced cooperation between Beijing and Ankara. (Sources: Reuters [68], *Washington Times* [93], Reuters [35])

In late 2017, reports surfaced that the Chinese government was readying two Special Forces units to aid Syrian government troops. However, Chinese officials denied the claims. In August 2018, the Chinese ambassador to Syria said that China was prepared to provide military assistance to the Syrian army fighting terrorists. The Chinese military attaché in Syria also stated that cooperation between the two militaries was ongoing. In September 2018, Xinhua reported that China wanted its counterterrorism forces to play a bigger role overseas, in line with President Xi Jinping's pursuit of a more robust foreign policy and the strategic interests of the state. (Sources: Middle East Monitor [94], Daily Beast [95], *Financial Times* [96], Reuters [71])