The Changing Security Dimension of China's Relations with Xinjiang

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CLAUDIA ZANARDI, MAR 31 2019

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With 22 million residents in 2010, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is China's largest and westernmost region rich in natural resources such as oil, gas and uranium. It is also a connectivity hub across Eurasia, and crucial to the renewal of the ancient Silk Road. The region encourages the development of China's new Silk Road Economic Belt, which is part of the Belt and Road Initiative put forward by President Xi Jinping. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Beijing has attempted to incorporate Xinjiang into the Chinese state through land reform and the building of infrastructure. The overarching argument of this article is that Xinjiang's security increasingly shifted from a domestic to a regional issue that required securitising trade with the Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). The Chinese focus on economic development and repressive policies towards Turkic-speaking Muslims in Xinjiang became a radicalising factor causing the Uyghur's growing embeddedness in international terrorist networks.

The concept of security that China applies to Xinjiang mirrors a realist definition of national security as the preservation of China's national territory and institutions. The region constitutes a security concern for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) because its independence would likely trigger the independence of other regions, such as Tibet. Hence, ethnic and religious dimensions become subordinate to national unity. The use of violence is required to repress any opposition to a unified China based on Han nationalism, and the economic dimension has become a major tool in the repressive measures.

The Communist Making of Xinjiang as a Chinese Territory

Although other Muslim minorities live in Xinjiang, the Uygur issue dominates regional security concerns because Uyghurs are the largest minority. Despite being Muslim, Turkic-speaking people in Xinjiang have fragmented 'oasis identities' (Rudelson 1997): for instance, Uyghur and Hui have conflictual relations. More sinicised and better integrated, the Hui enjoy greater freedom. Since it is not possible in this short chapter to consider the differences among these minorities, the focus will be on the Uyghur who represent Xinjiang's main Muslim community.

The Communists' 'peaceful liberation' (heping jiefang) of Xinjiang prompted thousands of Uyghur to flee China. The PRC approved a plan for transferring Han from coastal regions to Xinjiang (Joniak-Lüthi 2013) and encouraged migration as a 'patriotic duty' (Dillon 2004, 25). The national land reform had an anti- Pan-Islam/Turkish connotation in Xinjiang since it redistributed the land owned by mosques and religious organisations 'to break down the traditional social structure and religious authority' (Dillon 2004, 35).

China also set up the Xinjiang Production Construction Company (XPCC), a civilian-military organisation, to reclaim land through agriculture and construction, which included demobilised Communists, former KMT soldiers and Han settlers and became a part of 'a four-in-one system of joint-defence linking the PLA, the Armed Police, the XPCC and ordinary people, playing an irreplaceable special role' (Xinhua 2003). In the aftermath of the Sino-Soviet split (1960)

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it also served to counter the Soviet influence.

In 1954, a pan-Turkic revolt supported by exiled Uyghurs in Turkey tried to establish a Muslim state in Xinjiang. Its failure pushed other Uyghurs to flee China. One year later, and according to Mao Zedong's desire to show how minorities lived peacefully together within the PRC, Xinjiang became an autonomous region, XUAR. However, it remained tightly controlled by military commander of Xinjiang General Wang Zhen and the Party Chief in Xinjiang Lieutenant General Wang Enmao, both Han. During the Great Leap Forward (1958–62), which was paralleled by the Sino-Soviet Split, China's repression of Soviet sympathisers in Xinjiang brought the closure of Islamic organisations and caused the migration of further waves of Turkic-speaking Muslims to the USSR, especially in 1962. The Uyghuristan People's Party, which sought independence from the PRC and became the East Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party (ETPRP) open to all Turkic-speaking Muslims in Xinjiang, asked for military and political help to organise a revolt against Beijing, but its plot was discovered in 1969.

The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) brought havoc in the XUAR. For instance, the powerful Party Chief Wang Enmao resigned, and the PLA had to intervene in 1971 to restore order. The Cultural Revolution also saw the resettlement of thousands of Han from coastal provinces, particularly from Shanghai, to Xinjiang to work at the XPCC. After the break with Moscow, the US became a secondary threat as the USSR's proximity to China made it Beijing's major threat (Nathan 2012, 89). This is corroborated by the expansion of the Lanzhou military region, which in 1985 incorporated the Urumqi's military command to counter the Soviet threat (Shichor 2004, 130). Since during the Cultural Revolution many clerics were killed or fled Xinjiang, when Deng Xiaoping's reforms revived the Islamic culture and religion in the 1980s there were no longer Imams to teach Islam in Xinjiang. Subsequently, authorized and underground Koranic schools (madrassas) flourished with connections to Salafists (Castest 2017).

The 1980s tolerance towards Muslim culture and religion within China aimed at gaining the favour of Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia and, thus, increase bilateral economic ties. The Secretary General of China's Communist Party (CCP) Hu Yaobang proposed more autonomy and reforms for Xinjiang because at that time Muslims were perceived as less dangerous than Tibetans: they lacked both a unified leader and international support (Dillon, 2004, 37). The backside of this favourable policy toward Islamic culture and traditions was an increasing influence of Saudi Salafism among Muslim Chinese, who traditionally followed another tradition of Islam: Sufism (Dillon 2004, 15). Madrassas often had connections with the Salafists (Castest 2017) and taught fundamentalist Islam to Uyghur such as Hasan Mahsum (Acharya Arabinda 2010, 54).

The revival of Islam and Uyghur's culture also triggered anti-Chinese sentiments. In 1981, the Eastern Turkistan Prairie Fire Party was promptly repressed for preaching the use of force to create a Turkistan Islamic Republic in Xinjiang. From 1985 to Tiananmen (1989), Uyghur students in Xinjiang demonstrated and Uyghur's discontent re-emerged as more nationalistic. When the Party's conservative faction side-lined Hu, protests were repressed, several madrassas closed and Pan-Turkish authors and religious leaders who hold divergent views from official historiography were censored or imprisoned. As a result, enhanced censorship, policing, and political and religious control sparked rebellions; Hasan Mahsum established the East Turkish Islamic Party (ETIP/ETIM) inspired by two short-lived historical precedents: the 1st Turkic-Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan (TIRET), from 1933 to 1934, and the 2nd East Turkistan Republic (ETR), from 1944 to 1949 (Forbes 1986, 169). The ETIP's goal was to establish an Islamic Republic under the sharia law, but Mahsum's planned insurrection was discovered (1990). Consequently, the central government's approach to the Uyghur issue changed radically in the 1990s: religious leaders had to be appointed by the government and respect the Party's line, official institutions were created to teach the authorised version of Islam, and the entire society was put under tight surveillance.

Securitising Trade with New Central Asian (CA) Republics

In the 1980s, China's western regions, and thus Xinjiang, started looking for trading opportunities with the Middle East. Delegations of Islamic and Middle Eastern organisations went to northwest China (Yu 1989) to discuss trade, investment and labour opportunities in the Middle East, and Turkey and Saudi Arabia financed religious projects (Dillon 2004, 44). In 1985, Xinjiang sent delegations to Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The outcome was their funding of religious and cultural programmes: for instance, the Islamic Development Bank founded projects for $4,060,000 in

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China's western regions, such as at the Ningxia Academy, the Ningxi a Tongxin Arabic Language School, and the Xinjiang and Beijing Islamic Academies (Dillon 2004, 44).

In 1992, Central Document N.4 instructed opening the northwest to trade with CA through Turkic-speaking communities. New infrastructure and telecommunications facilitated its integration with CA and the rest of China and the exploitation of Xinjiang's natural resources, particularly oil. Although Beijing initially relied on the Uyghur diaspora, by the mid-1990s ties between Xinjiang's Uyghur and the diaspora were restricted as potentially dangerous: opportunities for small traders, mainly Uyghur shrunk since they no longer could find Han or CA partners (Laruelle 2012, 118,120). Consequently, cross-border trade became increasingly monopolised by State Owned Enterprises (SOEs).

China also feared the negative impact of the Chechnyan wars of 1994–5 and 1999–2009 (Oresman 2003). In 1995, a demonstration by 50,000 claiming the incorporation of Ghulja (Yining in Chinese) to Kazakhstan was neutralised by the PAP and the PLA (Dillon 2004, 69). Since China forecasted massive social and ethnic unrest in Xinjiang, in 1996 the Standing Committee of the Politburo issued Central Document N.7 (caccfreedomsherald.org s.d.), restricting religious activities, and strengthening military and security readiness.

At the same time, China's counter-insurgency relied less upon the PLA and increasingly on paramilitary forces, the local police, and the militia. Although surveillance shifted to society and the PLA increasingly operated in support of the PAP, demonstrations continued. The killings of local party members, bureaucrats and official imams, and the sabotage of communications infrastructure culminated in the Ghulja uprising (1997) known as 'beating, smashing and looting' (Xu 1999). Xinjiang's government created 'special guard units from the [XPCC]' to control infrastructures. Bomb attacks in Xinjiang and Beijing were traced back to Turkey and Chinese authorities spoke about building a 'steel wall' to securitise Xinjiang (Shichor 2004).

Importing Security Challenge from Central Asia

The Soviet collapse saw the establishment of independent republics through coloured revolutions that China feared as a potential source of instability. The CA republics resumed their relations with China and its Uyghur population. When CA Uyghur lost Soviet support, many Uyghur migrated to Europe and North America (Kamalov 2009, 130) where they established the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) in 2004. Current president Rebiya Kadeer is a former Uyghur businesswoman who traded with CA (Kazakhstan) and was a symbol of China's successful minority policy. A member of the National Committee of the People's Political Consultative Committee, she lost her seat when she refused to denounce her husband for plotting against China (Kadeer 2009). Imprisoned for 'passing on classified information to foreigners' (Dillon 2004, 82), her sentence brought for the first time worldwide attention to the Uyghur issue, whilst China wanted to prevent any internationalisation of its domestic problem (Clarke 2010).

Under Soviet rule, Moscow often mobilised its Uyghur communities against China. For instance, it allowed the publication of the anti-Chinese 'Voice of East Turkestan' calling for the UN to address the Uyghur's issue (Kamalov 2009, 125). In the 1990s, renewed ties between CA Uyghur and their Chinese cousins strengthened the support to Xinjiang's Uyghur. For instance, a CIS-International Uyghur Union was set up in 1992 in Kazakhstan to support Uyghur' self-determination and Human Rights in Xinjiang.

China considers pan-Islamist and pan-Turkic movements as destabilising forces and wants to avoid a sanctuary for independentist Uyghur in CA. Despite this, CA governments do not support Xinjiang's independence – their condescending policy towards their Uyghur communities worried Beijing. A 1999 census put the number of Uyghur in Kazakhstan at 210,300, the largest diaspora in CA (Kamalov 2009, 121), which has an estimated 300,000 Uyghur (Laruelle 2012, 20-21). At the beginning of the 1990s, Kazakhstan saw a mushrooming of Uyghur pro-independence organisations such as the United Revolutionary Front of East Turkistan (URFET), the Uyghur Liberation Organisation (ULO), the International Uyghur Union (IUU) promoting democracy, Human Rights, and self-determination for Uyghur in Xinjiang (Smith 1996, 20). Consequently, the Friendship Declaration between Kazakhstan and China (1995) included the common goal of fighting separatism.

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China's trade policy towards the new CA republics required first the settlement of the borders. Beijing's self-restraint in negotiating a bilateral settlement and long-term economic prospects gave it more leverage over CA governments. China also boosted its stance against the 'three evils' (separatism, extremism, and fundamentalism) by initiating the Group of Five (1996), later institutionalised in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO, 2001), which includes a Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS, 2004) (Debata 2007, 206-7). Beijing cultivates bilateral relations with Muslim countries to obtain their public support for its policy in Xinjiang and to deter them from supporting the Uyghur's cause (Brynjar 2013, 247) (Kondapalli 2010, 245-6). It also combined political pressure on CA countries to dissolve anti-Chinese groups with indirect practices to buy political elites. Since Xinjiang's stability is crucial to CA governments, due to proximity reasons and their Uyghur communities, they continuously balance complacency towards Beijing with the need to prevent discontent among their majoritarian Muslim populations.

Uyghur's Growing Embedment in International Terrorist Networks

The current insurgency in Xinjiang is linked to the Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation. In the 1980s, anti-Soviet forces in Pakistan already referred to Central Asia and Xinjiang as 'Temporary occupied Muslim Territory' (Scheuer 2002, 21). Some Uyghur were also trained as jihadi soldiers and Moscow's defeat by Islamist guerrilla renewed the Uyghur's hope for independence (Wayne 2008, 23).

When China started restricting Uyghur's cultural freedom and Islamic education, many Uyghur fled to Afghanistan which had no extradition treaty with the PRC. In 2002, China identified 400 Uyghur fighting in Afghanistan (Fuller 2004, 342) and later asserted that 1,000 Uyghur had been trained there and posed a threat to China (Wayne 2008, 10). For instance, the Baren revolt (1990) was organised through a network of mosques, foreign fighters reportedly came from Afghanistan (Wayne 2008, 7), and China traced insurgents' weapons to Mujahidin in Afghanistan. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan Pakistani consulates gave visas for Uyghur to study in fundamentalist madrassas, and some fought in Pakistan's Kashmir (R. Gunaratna 2002, 51). Indian intelligence also reported that Pakistan trained Uyghur, and Pakistani pan-Islamic jihad groups instructed Uyghur in Baluchistan: fundamentalist groups such as Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamaat-e-Tablighi, and Lashkar-e-Toiba helped Uyghur insurgents (R. Gunaratna 2002, 145).

With connections to Bin Laden, Hasan Mahsum established ETIP in 1990 (Schmidt 2013, 269). It became operational in 1997 when he brought its headquarters to the Taliban's stronghold in Afghanistan (R. a. Gunaratna 2015, 244). It trained Uyghur recruited at mosques to launch an unsuccessful jihad to create an East Turkistan Republic in Xinjiang (Dillon 2004, 63). The ISAF's bombing killed Mahsum (2003) and weakened the organisation that moved to Waziristan under Abdul Haq where he strengthened ties with Al Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). However, Uyghur fighters were not numerous (Brynjar 2013, 247) and disagreement between nationalists and conservative Islamists within the ETIP undermined the organisation. Finally, its allegiance to the leader of the Taliban Mullah Omar limited its action: the Taliban courted Beijing to counterbalance the US and forbade the ETIP from targeting China (Brynjar 2013, 248).

During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Beijing cooperated with Washington. It subsidised mules and $200–400 million worth of weapons to the Mujahidin (Crile 2003, 268–9) and the PLA had facilities in Peshawar and near the Pakistani border with Afghanistan where it employed 300 military advisers. In 1985, the PLA opened military camps in Xinjiang to train the Mujahidin with 'Chinese weapons, explosives, combat tactics', etc. (Shichor 2004). Later, China also had diplomatic ties with the Taliban in Afghanistan, where Chinese telecoms built infrastructure in exchange for cooperation on the Uyghur's diaspora. Consequently, the Taliban handed two Uygur fighters to China (Palmer 2004, 4).

In the aftermath of 9/11, Jiang Zemin launched another strike hard campaign (2001–2002) domestically while rushing to declare China's support for the US after Washington initiated the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Jiang Zemin offered to tackle terrorism in Xinjiang. Subsequently, Washington opened an FBI office in Beijing, helped China build signals intelligence (SIGINT) in Xinjiang, and Beijing obtained more room to manoeuvre with covert operations against Uygur militants abroad (Wayne 2008, 87). Since China's priority was to keep Xinjiang a domestic issue, its contribution to GWOT remained limited. Furthermore, Beijing perceived the presence of American military bases in CA in the framework of the GWOT as a destabilising development in its periphery since they provided the

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US with a potential platform for hostile actions against China. In fact, Washington has regularly been accused of implementing direct and indirect actions to undermine the Chinese government through supporting Human Rights and democratic development in Xinjiang, and also Tibet. Beijing believes that the colour revolutions in the former USSR were fomented by the US, and aimed for regime change in China too (Nathan 2012, 92).

Beijing used the threat of terrorism to justify repressive policies at home because it considered everybody 'fighting for an independent state in the north-western province of Xinjiang' to be a terrorist (Chung 2002). This is the reason why, although the US included the East Turkestan Islamic Party (ETIP) in the Department of State's Terrorist Exclusion List (State 2004), it refused to include the WUC, the East Turkestan Liberation Organization, and the East Turkestan Information Centre. Actually, Washington supports the WUC through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) funded by the Congress. Traditionally, the NED provides funding to the Uyghur American Association that promotes religious freedom and Human Rights in Xinjiang (Mackerras 2011, 26-7). Despite the Chinese pressure, Washington also refused to repatriate 22 Uyghurs in Guantanamo, two of whom were supposedly members of the ETIP (Jankoviak 2004, 318).

Economic Development and Repressive Policy towards Turkic-Speaking Muslims as Radicalising Factors

Although China's constitution states that ethnic groups are equal, China maintains quite a paternalistic attitude towards its minorities. The Constitution also guarantees their freedom of religion; however, religions must accommodate (Saunders 2017) socialism because Beijing fears their interference and requires religious organisations to register with the Religious Affairs Bureau. Since religion equals ignorance, Uyghur are also considered to be primitive, thieves and increasingly as terrorists (Kantian 2007, 64, 73), while those Uyghur who receive Chinese education are criticised by other Uyghur for sacrificing their culture (Kantian 2007, 17) in exchange for better economic opportunities.

As in Tibet, China's policy towards Xinjiang is increasingly based on both repression and 'forced' economic development. It is not by accident that in 2016 China nominated Chen Quanguo, former governor of Tibet, as the Party Secretary of Xinjiang. Furthermore, that same year the ongoing major military reform reduced the military regions from seven to five theatres (Saunders 2017): the incorporation of the Chengdu and Lanzhou MR in a broader Western Area Command including Tibet and Xinjiang highlights the CPC's increasingly unified vision of security in these two autonomous regions and their connections to neighbouring areas.

Beijing equates prosperity with long-term stability and identifies Chinese nationalism with Han nationalism on which the Chinese dream is based (Meyer 2016). Oasis towns near the southern border of the Taklimakan desert are the bastions of Uyghur culture, as well as China's poorest areas. Although separatist and Islamist movements have been flourishing in those areas (Dillon 2004, 5–6), deprivation is not the only root of terrorism; rich Muslims also embrace terrorism and there is evidence that Hui are slowly radicalising (Acharya Arabinda 2010). Over the last decade, Xinjiang has been developing fast, but such economic development has disproportionally benefited the Han settlers whilst subjecting the Uyghur on their own land (Bovingdon 2010). As a result, Uyghur's socio-economic marginalisation/discrimination undermines societal stability and China's policies towards the Uyghur may facilitate the interpretation of 'Islam as an ideology of national liberation' (Laruelle 2012, 180) and increase inter-ethnic conflict.

In fact, the riots in 2009 were the deadliest ethnic clashes in decades (around 200 casualties) and demonstrated the failure of China's approach to Xinjiang. In 2010, when the first Xinjiang Work Forum was held, Xinjiang's security budget doubled (Cui 2010), and Wang Lequan was replaced by a member of the Politburo, Zhang Chunxian (Simpson 2010), as Xinjiang's Party Secretary. Whilst Muslim countries kept a low profile (Mackerras 2011, 37) terrorist organisations called for reprisal. For instance, Al Qaeda in the Maghreb threatened Chinese expatriates and investment; Al Qaeda's top leader Abu Yahya al-Libi, called for the Uyghur to fight China, and the TIP's leader, Abdul Haq al-Turkistani, incited Muslims to target Chinese interests abroad (Mackerras 2011, 38; Stratfor 2009).

Thanks to connections with Al Qaeda, the ETIP reappeared in the mid-2000s as TIP, and currently operates in Syria

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with around 200 fighters, and during the Arab Spring (2010-12) encouraged Uyghur to fight for Sunni Muslims. Turkey facilitated Uyghur's travelling to fight in Syria through an association for cultural education founded in Turkey in 2016. China discovered that people working in the Turkish Embassy in China were illegally distributing passports to Uyghur to help them reach Syria (BBC 2015). In addition to CA, South East Asia (SEA) also became a route for reaching Turkey and Syria: in 2016, Thailand repatriated 109 Uyghur out of 400 who were smuggled into camps. Therefore, there is growing concern about terrorism in SEA (Pantucci 2017). Furthermore, since those Uyghur illegally leaving Xinjiang have to rely on locals for protection, they often become easy targets for criminal groups.

Within the PRC, the car bombing in Tiananmen Square (2013) and the knife attack at Kunming rail station (2014) signalled the dangerous spreading of the Uyghur issue outside Xinjiang. Hence, in 2014 XUAR's security budget doubled again and the second Central Work Forum on Xinjiang recognised that 'Xinjiang's most sustained problem is the problem of ethnic unity' (Leibold 2014, 4). Nevertheless, this indirect admission that economic development is all that is needed is inadequate, and more efforts should focus on reducing ethnic differences through better ethnic integration (e.g. improving labour opportunities, bilingual education, and economic conditions especially in the south) remains a rebranding of hanification.

China's counterterrorist actions remain limited by its view of separatism as criminal activity. This blurs the distinction between criminal and political offences (Dillon 2004, 112) and responds to China's attempt to criminalise terrorism per se, notwithstanding the political motives of the perpetrators (Clarke 2010) For instance, in 2002 for the first time an official document addressed the terrorist threat in Xinjiang claiming that ETIP had a dozen bases in the region (Wayne 2008, 44), and in 2003 a pilot-anti-terror squad was set up in Beijing (Lam 2003) and later replicated it in 36 cities, even if they were anti-riot squads (Wayne 2008, 78). Although China has become more prominent on UN global counter-terrorism, passed its first anti-terror act (2015), and now holds regular counterterrorism exercises, it still lacks counter-terrorism experience and capability. Beijing's increasing disillusion with the SCO in dealing with terrorism, explains the creation of the 'Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism' (RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty 2016) between China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan where China runs military camps to help train Afghan police (Snow 2017). In fact, the deteriorating security situation in neighbouring Afghanistan is a growing source of worry for Beijing. For instance, in 2017 the State Commissioner for counterterrorism and security, Cheng Guoping, questioned whether Afghanistan would become another haven for terrorists (Reuters 2017).

Overall, the Uyghur issue is gaining increased importance within Al Qaeda and domestic and international dimensions are increasingly entangled. For instance, in 2016 Al Qaeda Ayman al-Zawahiri acknowledged Hasan Mahsum as a jihadi leader and praised the jihad against the Han 'atheist colonisers' (Joschelyn 2016). In 2017, a video of Isis showed some Uyghur fighting in Iraq and threatened China to cause 'rivers of blood' (Hincks 2017). This highlights China's increasing need to protect its citizens and economic interests abroad due to the fact that terrorist attacks on Chinese expatriates are increasing. For example, in 2015 a terrorist attack in Mali killed Chinese executives of China Railway Construction Corporation, ISIS executed a Chinese citizen, in 2016 the Chinese embassy in Bishkek was targeted by a Uyghur network operating in CA (Dzyunbenko 2016), and in 2017 ISIS killed two Chinese citizens in Pakistan (Rasmussen 2017). This increase in security threats to Chinese businesses and citizens in CA underlines the security challenge of China's Belt and Road Initiative, which is a pillar of China's economic expansion through internationalisation.

Conclusion

China acknowledges separatism as the main threat to Xinjiang's stability and blames hostile foreign forces, mainly the US, for backing Human Rights, minority rights, the spreading of democratic values, and the insurgency in Xinjiang (e.g. through the Uyghur World Congress). However, rioters are traditionally indigenous, though increasingly embedded in global jihad networks. Beijing fears an independent Xinjiang because it would likely threaten the territorial integrity of the PRC by triggering other autonomous regions, such as Tibet, to push for independence. Therefore, China implements a pervasive surveillance system, the increasing militarisation of the region, repressive policies towards Uyghur, and 'forced Hanicisation' (Laruelle 2012, 179) of Xinjiang, which made the ratio of Turkic-speaking Muslims drop from around 90% at the end of the 1940s (Forbes 1986, 6), to roughly half of the population

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in the 2010s (Han and Paik 2017, 39).

China uses a carrot and stick approach including intense security crackdowns and forced economic development. On the one hand, Strike Hard campaigns address political unrest, criminal activities and religious movements under the same banner. In 2017, the provincial government expanded a 2015 regulation forbidding Muslim names as 'overly religious' (Feng 2017). Passports have been seized (Hornby 2016), Muslim dress codes forbidden, and long beards banned (Reuters 2017). In 2017, the Hotan/Hetian prefecture issued a directive outlawing the teaching of Uyghur language at school, including in secondary school (Sulaiman 2017), and the XUAR Working Guidelines on the Accurate Registration and Verification of Population introduced biometric collection scheme for Xinjiang's residents, from 'DNA samples, fingerprints, iris scans and blood types' (Haas 2017).

On the other hand, despite Xinjiang's economy improving, economic opportunities benefit Han residents disproportionally, and favourable policies to attract Han enhance competition for land and water. Xinjiang per capita income remains behind the national average and the growing wealth gap between Han settlers concentrated in towns and Uyghur concentrated in underdeveloped rural areas, exacerbate social tensions. The WUC argues that development policies such as the opening of the Northwest to trade with CA, the development of the Western regions, the adoption of Fora in Xinjiang, and more recently the Belt and Road Initiative all result in the marginalisation of the Uyghurs (WUC 2016, 2).

China's repression of Uyghur culture and religion breeds resentment. The prohibition of formal religious education under the age of 18 and of informal religious education even if given privately by parents (Wayne 2008, 105), did not eradicate fundamentalism. Rather, these measures increased Uyghur's rancour. Cultural and religious constraint triggers violent protests (Purbrick 2017, 241), and Uyghur reach the Middle East or Turkey to study and/or fight for Islam. Though China's strategic partnership with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran does not stop trade with Muslim countries, it does complicate China's relations with these countries. Therefore, by fearing the support of Muslim countries for Uyghur separatists, Beijing plays down 'proliferation concerns and supplies arms and problematic technology to them at generous prices' (Horner 2002, 44).

While China pushes for economic development in Xinjiang, tight media control and cyber-surveillance constrain the region's economic growth: access to the Internet is pervasive and control exceptionally extensive. Although security measures and censorship made it difficult to have reports on Xinjiang unrest, officers admit there are incidents (Pantucci 2017). This explains why Xi Jinping called again for setting up a 'Great Wall of Steel' in Xinjiang (Reuters 2017). The militarisation of Xinjiang is increased by the use of new technology such as the use of drones. In 2013, the regional government ordered China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation drones for targeting terrorists. It requested drone pilots after 100 people were killed in violence that erupted in Xinjiang in 2014 when Muslims reacted against the security measures during the Ramadan (Tatlow 2014).

Uyghur perceive these measures as undermining their identity. Furthermore, counter-terrorist efforts include the use of drones and tracking devices on vehicles based on China's Beidou navigation satellite system (Phillips 2017). Hence, China's security policy towards Xinjiang will push regional development further as well as push further repressive policies, and there is no real alternative for Uyghurs to the dilemma of either resisting or sinicising.

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About the author:

Claudia Zanardi is a PhD candidate in the War Studies Department of King's College, London where she researches French, British and German foreign and security policies towards China and China's military modernisation. Previously, she worked at the European Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and the Assembly of the West European Union (WEU), and she produced research for the OECD-GOV Directorate and the International Secretariat of Amnesty International (Paris Office). She was part of the European China Resource Advise Network (ECRAN), a Taiwan Fellow researcher of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China (ROC) in 2015, and since 2017 a Global Royster Fellow at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.