

# VIOLENT RESISTANCE IN XINJIANG (CHINA): TRACKING MILITANCY, ETHNIC RIOTS AND ‘KNIFE-WIELDING’ TERRORISTS (1978-2012)

Pablo Adriano Rodríguez<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Warwick (United Kingdom)

E-mail: paolo.adriano@gmail.com

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**Resumen:** Este artículo aborda la evolución de la resistencia violenta al régimen chino en la Región Autónoma Uigur de Xinjiang mediante una revisión y análisis de la naturaleza de los principales episodios violentos, en su mayoría con connotaciones separatistas, que han tenido lugar allí desde el comienzo de la era de reforma y apertura chinas (1978-2012). En este sentido, sostiene que la resistencia violenta, no necesariamente con motivaciones político-separatistas, ha estado presente en Xinjiang en la forma de insurgencia de baja escala, revueltas étnicas y terrorismo, y probablemente continúe en el futuro teniendo en cuenta las fricciones existentes entre la minoría étnica Uigur y las políticas llevadas a cabo por el gobierno chino.

**Palabras clave:** China, Xinjiang, Uyghur, Violencia política, separatismo, terrorismo.

For the first time since the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Beijing allocated in 2012 more spending for national security purposes than for defense. This decision was announced during the last National People’s Congress, held in Beijing only a few weeks after several ethnic Uyghur assailants went on a hacking rampage that left ten Han Chinese people dead in a commercial street of Yecheng (Karghilik), in the Kashgar prefecture of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR)<sup>1</sup>.

The stability of Xinjiang, the northwestern ‘New Frontier’ annexed to China under the Qing dynasty<sup>2</sup> and home of the Uyghur people –who officially account for the 45% of the population in the region- is one of the pivotal targets of this expenditure focused nationwide on social unrest, but specifically aimed at crushing separatism in this Muslim region, considered one of China’s “core interests” by the government<sup>3</sup>.

In Yecheng, attackers were blamed as “terrorists” by Chinese officials and media. ‘Extremism, separatism and terrorism’ –as defined by the rhetoric of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)- were invoked again as ‘evil forces’ present in Xinjiang. Countering the Chinese official account of the events, the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), a Uyghur organization in the diaspora, denied the existence of a gratuitous separatist attack against civilians and talked of a clash between Uyghurs and Chinese military personnel, the first “no longer bearing China’s systematic repression, and using primitive fighting methods to resist”<sup>4</sup>.

Violent episodes in Xinjiang are notable for a lack of verifiable information and accounts often contradictory by non neutral parts. This has been defined by Gardner Bovingdon as “theory of representational politics” in which politics and violence are represented as a major part of the politics itself, where the actors, including Beijing and the Uyghur nationalist camp itself, “consciously represent their own actions and those of their opponents as they pursue their political aims”<sup>5</sup>.

After all, as the famous quote posed, "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter". In the case of Xinjiang, twentieth century China's "terrorists" are portrayed by Uyghur exile groups not as 'freedom fighters', but as down-to-earth people 'forced' to resist repression, with no evident separatist agenda.

All of this makes it complex to produce an assessment of the level of threat to national security posed by violent separatism in Xinjiang. If we are to believe the Chinese government - and its budget- militants in Xinjiang are a threat to "not only China's national security, but also the peace and tranquility of the region and the world"<sup>6</sup>. This is a rather hyperbolic statement, but at the same time violence do exists and have hit Xinjiang many times since the 1980's. There is scope, so, to examine whether some of that violence has been politically motivated by separatism. With this aim, this paper gives an overview of the violent attacks registered in Xinjiang since the 1980s and attempts to put into a contemporary historical perspective the evolution, nature and extent of violent dissent in the region.

A critical analysis of the attacks reported in Xinjiang demands a cautious stand on them since even labeling the whole phenomenon as 'violent separatism' would be mistaken, as many of the events described were probably not motivated by separatism. Same occurs with the widely stale label of 'terrorism', for which I would favor a 'technical' use based on tactics, targets and motivations of the attacks, rather than one which describes certain individuals<sup>7</sup>.

Overall, the majority of the violence episodes refer to ethnic riots prompted by specific grievances; insurgent attacks launched by unconnected groups of militants, targeting security forces and probably trying to spread resistance; and finally terrorist actions which targeted Han Chinese and Uyghur civilians in order to spread fear among both communities on migrating to Xinjiang in the first case and co-opting with the authorities in the second.

### **1. Post-Cultural Revolution (1978-1989): 'If a Uyghur was hit by a car, it would result in a major incident'.**

The start of Deng Xiaoping's reform and openness era brought with itself a slightly more moderate political environment in China which favored an ethnic consciousness and religious

revival in Xinjiang. Upsetting political measures such as family planning and constant Han migration into the region were seen as threatening to their identity by the Uyghur population, concerned for their own ethnic survival. At the same time, religion gained weight after decades of darkness under the Cultural Revolution. Mosques were opened, Islamic seminaries were allowed and copies of the Koran were reprinted. Along with this officially sanctioned religious revitalization, several underground Islamic schools begun to appear in the region. Some of these underground schools were launched by Abdul Hakeem, who had created in the 1940s the Hizbul Li-Turkistan (Islamic Party of Turkestan or Turkistan Islamic Movement). One of his students in Karguulik was Hasan Mahsum, who would found the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in 1997<sup>8</sup>. Despite the 1980's are considered a time of recovery and reconciliation after the excesses of the Red Guards, violent separatist episodes took place, mostly in the form of ethnic riots or with religious grievance as a catalyst<sup>9</sup>.

In the case of ethnic riots, everyday frictions such as a Han Chinese driver accidentally running over a Uyghur child, or a Uyghur shot dead by a Han for a property issue would result into wide-scale violent confrontations with Han Chinese accounting for the majority of the victims and with security forces having to intervene to avoid more serious riots<sup>10</sup>. Those years, "if a Uyghur was hit by a car, it would result in a major incident"<sup>11</sup>.

Religion can be found as the indirect catalyst of violence, with the closing of a mosque by local Chinese officials or the ignorance of Moslem precepts by Chinese policemen when dealing with a dead body deepening local anger in an already violent and rarefied atmosphere. The riots could result in the storming of municipal buildings or even an army base<sup>12</sup>.

The most remarkable challenge out of religious concerns came in 1989 and was described by authorities as an "extremely serious" incident. Hundreds of Uyghurs stormed the Xinjiang's Great Hall of the People in Urumqi in a protest against a controversial book which described Moslem sexual practices<sup>13</sup>. Fair to say, this episode came amidst a national spiral of students' political activism with no separatist aims which finally led to the Tiananmen 'incident' the same year. This movement had a specific religious dimension in Xinjiang,

although the main demands were the end of nuclear tests in the Lop Nor and a greater political freedom. In any case, government officials in Beijing were not comfortable with Wuer Kaixi, leading Chinese dissident and one of the student leaders in Tiananmen, being himself a son of Uyghurs.

Although it is difficult to produce evidence of organized armed uprisings during this period, local officials confirmed in 1988 that earlier in the decade a rebel group led by Kirghiz militants successfully raided a military armory in Payzawat County (Kashgar) and attacked Han Chinese people before being crushed by PLA armed units<sup>14</sup>.

## **2. The Baren uprising, ‘ghost’ guerrillas and the first terrorist attacks (1990-1995).**

The emergence of the post-Soviet Central Asian states notably changed the landscape in Xinjiang during the 1990’s years of the past century. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the PRC moved on to a strategy aimed at bringing the region closer to the rest of the state<sup>15</sup>. The core lines of this plan were to neutralize the influence of the newly born Central Asian states, the development of infrastructures linking Xinjiang with the rest of China, a reinforcement of military and paramilitary forces, and finally an increasing flow of Han migrants into the region. Still recovering from the Tiananmen aftermath, Beijing was wary of the dangers of separatism in Xinjiang, the dangers of ethnic minorities following suit and demanding their own Persian suffix *-stan* for the land of the Uyghurs.

This tougher approach ended the 1980’s openness and somehow softer relations of Beijing with the unique ethnic, cultural and social conditions of the minorities in Xinjiang. At the same time, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism worldwide and the spread of fundamentalist concepts into Xinjiang at the beginning of the decade are quoted as major reasons<sup>16</sup> behind an uprising in Baren township (Akto County, south of Xinjiang) in 1990, one of the most remarkable violent separatist episodes in Xinjiang up to date.

### **2.1. The Baren uprising: ‘Separatism slipped into copies of the Koran’<sup>17</sup>.**

The characteristics of the Baren uprising point to an organized plot involving weapons smuggled from Afghanistan, where young Uyghurs had

received military and religious training and were eager to bring ‘jihad’ to Xinjiang<sup>18</sup>. The addressees of the weapons, however, were Kirghiz rebels, historically more eager to take up arms than their traditionally less belligerent Uyghur cohabitants. This Afghan connection was a worrisome novelty for Beijing, and despite having been a quite sporadic one –one could say almost inexistent- in terms of operational connectivity with violent episodes in Xinjiang, it has influenced the approach of the PRC to separatism over the years.

The climate prior to the events in Baren was already suffocating enough due to the tougher official stance, with local minorities demonstrating on religious and other grievances, such as nuclear tests conducted in the Lop Nor region or family planning measures, with ethnic survival and freedom of religion in the background. What in the 1980’s would have translated in *just another* ethnic riot gained this time a ‘jihadist’ character. The official account described a rather impromptu uprising, with a crowd of Kirghiz radicals storming a group of local officials and security forces, stealing their weapons, killing six armed officers, and then entrenching themselves before being chased and eliminated by local security forces<sup>19</sup>. However, local reports<sup>20</sup> closely following outlined an ‘Islamist militancy’ dimension of the events. For the first time, an organization was quoted as responsible for the violence –the ‘Islamic Party of East Turkistan’- and its leaders had an explicit Islamist discourse with references to a “sacred war to eliminate the heathens”. Besides, the Afghan connection, with mujahedeen guerrillas supplying the weapons from across the border was supported by local resident accounts and considered feasible by Western diplomats<sup>21</sup>.

The events in Baren, therefore, built on ethnic unrest and usual grievances of the local people, and demonstrations joined momentum with an Islamist militant plot for an armed uprising against Chinese security forces. The plot was uncovered and events precipitated, with violence spreading into Kashgar, Kuqa and Hotan.

### **2.2. ‘Ghost’ guerrilla warfare and ‘terrorist’ tactics.**

The answer of the Chinese government to the Baren incident was a clampdown on illegal religious activities, which were labeled as ‘counterrevolutionary’. The clergy was purged,

Islamic schools were closed, and thousands of people were arrested. In 1992, Amnesty International (AI) denounced the deterioration of human rights in Xinjiang<sup>22</sup>, where political prisoners were held in secret without trial, and the massive arrival of Han Chinese migrants. One of those detainees was Mahsum, who would spend several years in prison before founding the ETIM<sup>23</sup>.

At the same time, Uyghur separatist organizations began to flourish. Some of them, such as the Eastern Turkistan National Salvation Committee or the Eastern Turkistan Popular Liberation Front, were based in Turkey and adopted a non-violent stance, with a rather pan-Turkic secular ‘creed’<sup>24</sup>. Others, based in neighboring Kazakhstan, threatened to launch a cross-border guerrilla campaign and claimed to have several thousand volunteers ready to fight in Xinjiang. This is the case of the Front for the Liberation of Uighuristan or the Committee for Eastern Turkistan.

Reports of ‘militant’ attacks targeting infrastructures, military vehicles and even nuclear areas were publicized by Uyghur exiles, although there is little or none evidence of operational connectivity between these organizations in the exile and reported militant attacks in Chinese territory<sup>25</sup>.

In terms of violent resistance, and leaving aside unconfirmed reports of guerrilla activities, a first wave of terrorist attacks took place in Xinjiang between 1991 and 1993. The most part of the attacks were not openly admitted by the Chinese government until 2002, in the official paper ‘East Turkistan Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity’<sup>26</sup>.

Innocent civilians, both Uyghur and Han Chinese, were killed in explosions at public buses, government buildings, video theatres, etc. Overall, more than 70 people resulted injured and six or seven died, depending on the accounts. Other attacks targeted Uyghur members of the Party or ‘collaborationist’ Muslim imams<sup>27</sup>. Although these actions were mostly staged in the south-west of the region, in the Kashgar prefecture, they reached the bigger city of Urumqi.

The responsibility for these attacks, involving terrorist tactics, remains unclear. The Chinese government account of 2002 blames them on the ‘East Turkistan terrorist forces’, a quite

malleable term, as it does with the majority of other violent episodes in Xinjiang soil. However, some reports pointed to the East Turkistan Democratic Islamic Party or an organization named the Islamic Reformers Party (IRP), probably a precursor of the ETIM<sup>28</sup>.

Along with separatist attacks of different nature, ethnic riots usually leading to attacks on Han people and strong clashes with security forces kept on taking place in Xinjiang. Rarely reported in official media, some of them were admitted by Chinese officials, such as a pro-independence violent demonstration taking in Kashgar described as “the bloodiest unrest in the country” in 1993<sup>29</sup>. The same year, the ETIM is said to have fuelled a large scale violent protest by Hui Muslims in Qinghai province which spread to Xinjiang and whose catalyst was a Taiwanese comic seen as insulting to Islam<sup>30</sup>.

### 3. The Years of Lead (1996-1999).

The second half of the nineties decade saw the most virulent wave of violent separatism in Xinjiang. Several factors contributed to a worsening of the situation.

The changes in Central Asia were crucial. The most strategic blow for separatist groups as well as for the moral of every Uyghur hoping for independence was the gradual rapprochement of the Chinese government to the Central Asian states, which culminated in 1996 with the signing of a treaty on “confidence-building military measures” between Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the embryo of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)<sup>31</sup>. A demilitarized zone was created across the communal borders of these states, thus cutting any foreign influence – whether it was the smuggling of weapons or the transmission of radical religious ideas- to enter Xinjiang. Parallel to the treaty, Beijing launched the first of several ‘Strike-Hard’ campaigns in the region, a crackdown on criminal activity which was aimed at crushing separatists. Repression and desperation resulted in a period of violence which peaked in 1997, with the Ghulja (Yining) riots and its aftermath.

#### 3.1. The ‘Ghulja Incident’: Crackdown meets protests, protests meet repression.

The Chinese official version of the ‘Ghulja Incident’ –also referred as the ‘Ghulja Massacre’ by human rights and Uyghur diaspora

organizations- initially played down the riots as a case of “street violence”<sup>32</sup>. Years later, this violent unrest would be blamed on the ‘East Turkestan Party of Allah’ and categorized as “terrorism” by the PRC in its landmark paper ‘East Turkestan Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away With Impunity’ (2002): just another sample of different depictions of similar events depending on the ‘geopolitical weather’.

As with the majority of the violent episodes taking place in Xinjiang, there are conflicting versions of what happened in Ghulja, but the ‘terrorist’ claim, and even the possibility of an armed uprising Baren-style, are hardly credible, since there is no evidence, for instance, of firearms in the protesters hands, as happened in Baren years earlier.

The context unleashing the protests of thousands of Uyghurs in the streets at the beginning of February 1997 can be more easily determined. By the end of 1996, the ‘Strike, Hard’ campaigns had already resulted in 138 separatists executed and 4,800 Uyghur officials and party members dismissed<sup>33</sup>. Some Uyghur diaspora sources point to 57,000 ethnic Uyghurs arrested and over 1,700 executed during the crackdown.

Thus, Xinjiang was a time bomb when the ‘Ghulja’ protests, which later triggered the riots, took place.

Two local residents who escaped to Kazakhstan soon after the riots explained that thousands of Uyghurs had gathered to demand the release of 200 Uyghurs detained two days before<sup>34</sup>. The authorities reacted by beating demonstrators, among them women, detaining more people and thus unleashing violent reactions by the protesters. Tensions scaled and soldiers ended up opening fire. The Uyghur American Association holds that those 200 detainees, prior to the incident, were arrested for taking part in traditional Uyghur gatherings known as ‘meshrep’, considered a breeding ground for separatists by the Chinese authorities<sup>35</sup>. Amnesty International pointed to the storming of a mosque by Chinese police as the trigger of the riots<sup>36</sup>.

As with the account of the events, the recount of victims differs depending on the source. Officially, there were 10 killed and 144 injured, but alternative accounts raise the numbers to a

hundred Uyghur and 25 Han Chinese killed during the riots<sup>37</sup>.

The arresting of a group of women reading prayers, the imprisonment of two Uyghur for drugs trafficking and the arrest of hundreds of young Uyghur demonstrators against the decision of the authorities to appoint the mullahs through administrative channels were also quoted as triggers of the riots. For our scrutiny, therefore, it is worth noting that the repression and tight control of religious traditions within a wider anti-criminal campaign, far from crushing separatist activism, brought real separatist violence to Xinjiang during that year 1997. The Chinese government denounced in 2002 that demonstrators in ‘Ghulja’ called for the establishment of an “Islamic Kingdom” and this is a likely development in the course of the riots although it barely qualifies for describing a rather spontaneous demonstration as a terrorist attack.

The aftermath of the ‘Ghulja Incident’ produced two outcomes: more ‘Strike-Hard’ campaigns by local authorities and the worst year in terms of violence for the region.

### 3.2. The ‘terrorist’ wave.

An account different from that officially released in 2002 by the PRC and based in Chinese and Western media collects 16 terrorist attacks with separatist connotations during 1997 and another 10 in 1998<sup>38</sup>. As scholar Dru C. Gladney puts it, by 1997 many Muslims were “wary” of separatism, but the pre- and post-Ghulja crackdown “alienated many of them”<sup>39</sup>. Therefore, the management of the ‘Ghulja Incident’ was like hitting a beehive.

Many of these terrorist actions, notably three bomb blasts in public buses in Urumqi, with nine killed and 68 injured, and a series of assassinations of Chinese and Uyghur officials and pro-Chinese imams, were admitted by China only in its official account released in 2002. Other attacks, usually reported by Uyghurs in the exile quoting local sources, depict brutal actions such as decapitation of Han Chinese, train derailments, more killings of Uyghur informants and even a halted terrorist plot to attack Hong Kong during the handover of the territory to China by the United Kingdom<sup>40</sup>.

A new batch of separatist groups emerged claiming these and other attacks, such as the

Uighur Liberation Party (ULP), the United National Revolutionary Front (URNF), the Organization for Turkestan Freedom (OTF), the True God Party, or the gang of Tursun Turdi, this last one quoted in the Chinese paper. According to these sources, attacks took place as far as in Beijing or Tianjin. Although, as stated before, a reasonable part of these events might have been produced or exaggerated by a sector of the Uyghur community in the exile for propaganda purposes<sup>41</sup>, or just confused with criminal or random actions, others were admitted at that time by local Chinese officials as attacks carried out by militants.

The worsening of the situation due to the massive crackdown produced an intensification of violent resistance through ‘terrorist’ means aimed not only at eliminating Han Chinese officials or terrorizing the Han Chinese community in Xinjiang, but also to warn fellow Uyghurs of the dangers of collaborating with the authorities over political and religious issues. This terrorist wave had its epicenter in Ghulja. Along with the ‘terrorist’ attacks, militant groups were reported to harm infrastructures, such as mines or gas pipelines, or to attack Chinese troops, military vehicles and stations on hit and run guerrilla style actions. Accounts leaked to Taiwan and Hong Kong media<sup>42</sup> described probably overstated armed attacks against military bases, army ammunition depots, and even a guide-missile base in the Lop Nor nuclear area. More credible are reported fights between militants and security forces derived from police raids on suspected separatists’ locations, similar to more recent violent clashes<sup>43</sup>.

By 1999 violent separatist attacks had declined. Some terrorist attacks –according to the Chinese official account- were reported that year, but these were mostly encounters between police forces and suspected separatists which degenerated in violence or organized militant raids against police stations. Bombings at public places and targeted assassinations were almost absent, and even the militant campaign inflated by biased accounts from the exile.

Summarizing, the ‘Strike Hard’ crackdown campaigns paid off by the end of the twentieth century, at least in terms of containing organized violence on Chinese (Xinjiang) soil. Ethnic riots and the subsequent repression continued, although they would not reach the levels seen at

Ghulja in 1997 until 2009 when riots broke in Urumqi.

#### **4. Decline of violence: Attacks in Central Asia and the Xinjiang issue under the ‘War on Terror’ (2000-2007).**

Besides domestic crackdown, China had based its efforts to deactivate separatism in Xinjiang on economic development and a diplomatic strategy in Central Asia which would culminate in the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001. This collaboration had already resulted in the deportation of prominent Uyghur exiles to China from Kazakhstan and in the detention of Uyghur “terrorists” in Kyrgyzstan. The Chinese increasing economic and military power and its gradual influence in international affairs proved crucial in Uzbekistan, where president Islam Karimov urged the Turkic-speaking states to ignore the Uyghur plight since it could upset relations with China, and in Turkey, where government officials were urged not to take part in the activities of Uyghur organizations there<sup>44</sup>.

In terms of separatist violence, the main developments at the beginning of the century were an alleged militant campaign in Central Asian countries and the controversial integration of the conflict in Xinjiang within the global ‘War on Terror’. The first has been put into question by Uyghur accounts as an orchestrated fallacy, whereas the second would put into focus the Pakistan connection with the issue and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), an obscure mutating group with low if non-existent operational capacities in the region but sanctioned by China and the US as head of a violent separatist movement.

##### **4.1. Separatist violence in Central Asia: Crime or political violence?**

China holds that several ‘terrorist’ actions were carried out by Eastern Turkestan militants in Central Asian countries during the years 2002-2003. According to the official account of the PRC, a leader of the local Uyghur community was killed in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) in March 2003. A multi-national “separatist” group with people from Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Uzbekistan and China and previous experience alongside Chechnya rebels was arrested for the killing<sup>45</sup>. Uyghur exile sources considered the suspects were innocent and described the killing of

Nigmat Bazakov as the work of Chinese agents<sup>46</sup>.

Kyrgyzstan saw other episodes such as the kidnapping of a Uyghur businessman, most probably a crime-related issue; and an armed attack against a Chinese delegation sent to investigate a previous attack in a Chinese market. In 2002, a high-ranked Chinese diplomat and his driver were assassinated in Bishkek. Local police presented the crime as the result of a commercial dispute with no political connotations, but those arrested for it were labeled as Uyghur “separatists” and deported to China and executed in 2004<sup>47</sup>. In 2003, bandits robbed and killed the passengers of a coach with Chinese traders ambushed in Kyrgyzstan, another crime linked with separatism by Chinese authorities<sup>48</sup>, which denounced organizations such as the Uyghur Liberation Organization (ULO) or the East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO) for organizing a separatist armed campaign in Central Asia.

Overall, most part of the violent episodes reported those years in Central Asia can qualify as criminal cases which, due to the Chinese pressure on local governments, were linked to separatist forces. In any case, and due to lack of verifiable information, a certain degree of cooperation between extremists from Xinjiang and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) might have taken place<sup>49</sup>.

Meanwhile, violence had notably decrease in Xinjiang soil, with very sporadic episodes such as the spontaneous storming of a government building or the assassination of a Uyghur official.

At that moment, China had already taken a more decisive step: to involve ‘separatist forces’ in Xinjiang within the global jihadist enemy fought by the US in the ‘War on Terror’.

#### **4.2. The paper ‘East Turkestan Forces Cannot Get Away With Impunity’.**

Beijing had looked at the Pakistan-Afghanistan theatre long before the 11-S changed the global conception of terrorism. From 1996, intelligence accounts had suggested the presence of Afghan veterans training scores of Uyghur militants in Xinjiang, some of them former mujahideen in the Afghan war, a point confirmed by Ahmad Shah Masood, leader of the Afghan Northern Alliance<sup>50</sup>. The Chinese government feared

Muslim missionary groups with trade links to China could incite unrest in the region, so it moved closer the Afghan Taliban government. Chinese diplomats reportedly held talks with the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, making Beijing one of the closes countries to an isolated regime which was about to crumble<sup>51</sup>.

The 11-S attack provided China with the opportunity to vindicate its own crackdown on Muslim separatism by exaggerating the threat posed by Uyghur radicals in Afghanistan, of whom there was no evidence of having performed any of the attacks -apart from the smuggling of weapons for the Baren uprising in 1991- on Chinese soil. When the US was about to invade Afghanistan in October 2001, Chinese authorities denied any diplomat contact with Kabul since 1993 and closed the Pakistani border fearing an avalanche of ‘terrorists’<sup>52</sup>.

Beijing called for US support to fight “terrorism and separatism” in Xinjiang, at a moment in which violence was almost absent in the region if compared with the 1996-1999 period. In 2002, China issued the paper ‘East Turkestan Forces Cannot Get Away With Impunity’, which provided the first official account of violence in Xinjiang from 1990 to 2001.

That paper, although valuable given the lack of information on the topic, introduced episodes of violence never reported, but presented important gaps such as lack of coherence on the recount of victims and more notably an ambiguous and not clear attribution of the responsibility of the attacks<sup>53</sup>. Some of the 31 cases presented by the paper were blamed on groups such as the East Turkestan Islamic Party, the East Turkestan Islamic Party of Allah or the East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO); but the majority of them are attributed to the ‘East Turkestan terrorist organization. The inconsistencies and shortcomings of the paper, as well as of a documentary then broadcasted in the Chinese Central Television (CCTV) and entitled ‘On the Spot Report: the Crimes of Eastern Turkestan Terrorist Power’ have been examined in detail<sup>54</sup>.

However, it was the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) which became the *de-facto* visible face of ‘terrorism’ in Xinjiang once the US included it in its own list of terrorist organizations –the UN followed suit- and thus vindicated China’s part in the global ‘War on Terror’<sup>55</sup>.

### 4.3. Shadow of the ETIM.

Although there is agreement on the existence of the now extinct ETIM within the nebula of violent separatists groups in Xinjiang, there are reservations considering its real size and extension, as well as its record of attacks during the 1990's and beyond.

Some scholars have made the ETIM responsible for a fair amount of the illegal activities and attacks blamed on the 'East Turkestan terrorist organization' quoted in Beijing's 2002 paper. If we are to accept this standpoint, the ETIM can be seen as a group which achieved high levels of financing and logistical infrastructures, "closely cemented ties with Al-Qaeda", and became one of the "major beneficiaries of covert funding from the Uyghur diaspora population"<sup>56</sup>.

However, other accounts suggest that the ETIM, founded in 1997 by Hasan Mahsum, never succeeded in gaining support from the Uyghur diaspora in places such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan or Turkey<sup>57</sup>, so Mahsum decided to establish the ETIM headquarters in Taliban-controlled territory in Afghanistan. Former Uyghur inmates in Guantanamo confirmed the existence of Uyghur-led jihadist training camps<sup>58</sup> and even modest links with Al Qaeda or the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Some of the Uyghur militants came from Kashmir, where they had fought after being recruited by Pakistan's Inter Services-Intelligence (ISI) at local Pakistani Islamic schools, while others had a longer record at Afghanistan, where they took part in the Soviet-Afghan war<sup>59</sup>.

Despite being allowed to stay in Taliban-controlled areas, neither the Taliban or al-Qaeda wanted trouble with China and al-Qaeda polices toward ETIM was one of containment: Taliban leaders faced strong pressure from America at the end of the century, so they favored a friendly relation with China which demanded the cease of militant attacks on Chinese soil<sup>60</sup>. This context could explain the Taliban-Chinese contacts and the decrease of violence at the turn of the century.

When the Taliban regime collapsed, the Uyghur militants –between 500 and a thousand- escaped to the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan, where in 2003 Mahsum was shot dead in a US raid in South Waziristan<sup>61</sup>.

### 5. 'Knife-wielding' terrorism, the Urumqi riots and the Turkestan Islamic Party (2008-2012).

Violence in Xinjiang had been almost absent between 2003 and 2007. Only in 2005 two Party officials, one of them an ethnic Uyghur, were reported to be killed in a crackdown on Uyghur activists trying to build an unofficial mosque<sup>62</sup>. However, the countdown to the Olympic Games, to be held in Beijing in the summer of 2008, saw the emergence of a new wave of violence. It was unleashed with a raid on a purported "terrorist" camp in the Pamir Plateau in January 2007. According to the official media depiction of the events, Chinese police forces destroyed the camp killing 18 "terrorists" in the operation<sup>63</sup>. No evidence was produced to support the claim that the ETIM was running the camp or training militants there. As with the majority of the unrest in Xinjiang –in this case that derived from an alleged anti-terrorist operation- there was a different version of what happened in the mountains of the Pamir which points to a brutal crackdown on Uyghurs demonstrating in Kushirap, in Akto county, against the closing of a local mine by Chinese businessmen<sup>64</sup>.

Given the scarcity of reports on violent episodes since 2003, the raid in the Pamir Plateau and how Beijing dealt with it was relevant since it pointed to a revival of violence in the region. This escalation would materialize in 2008 with the beginning of a series of attacks directed at security forces, police stations and in some cases innocent civilians which still recurs nowadays, and in July 2009, with the ethnic riots which left 197 victims in Urumqi, the majority Han Chinese.

#### 5.1. 'Knife-wielding' terrorism in Xinjiang.

The majority of the violent attacks registered in Xinjiang since 2008 present similar characteristics such as the use of cold weapons or improvised explosives and a lack of firearms, munitions or manufactured explosives. This suggest the existence of unconnected highly amateurish cells which act on their own initiative probably fueled by specific local grievances such as economic marginalization, Han immigration or certain measures of religious repression by Xinjiang authorities or the arrest of relatives/friends by Chinese police. These grievances might have surrounded the storming of a police station in Hotan in July

2011, when a group of 14 rioters killed a security guard, an armed police and two civilians, taking hostages and set fire to the building. According to the official account of the incident, “the attack was violent, of a terroristic nature, organized and premeditated”, and included the chanting of religious slogans and the waving of a flag with a separatist message, although no images of it were published<sup>65</sup>.

In Hotan, the existence of explosive devices implies an organized action, not a spontaneous instinctive one. However, it is highly improbable that separatism or terrorism were the final purpose of the assailants, which according to local sources, were enraged because “innocent people”, maybe relatives, had been arrested on a crackdown on religious activities<sup>66</sup>.

The chief at the police station tried to persuade them of setting disputes in a peaceful way, something which reinforces the possibility of a protest before violence spread. It does not seem they were trying to spread terror to change society or to claim the independence of Xinjiang. A similar episode took place in June 2008, when a group of Uyghurs attacked a police station in Sangong with rocks and petrol bombs to protest a pre-Olympic crackdown<sup>67</sup>.

In other cases, premeditation and militancy are more evident. The plot surrounding the Kashgar attack in August 2008 is an example of the new *modus operandi*<sup>68</sup>. Driving a truck into a border patrol police division in the precise moment the soldiers started a jogging exercise, followed by a knife-hacking rampage and the throwing of rudimentary explosives over the injured policemen implies a higher organization level. There is also no previous protest or demonstration which serves as a catalyst of violence. Same applies for the killing of three security officers by knife-wielding attackers in an isolated checkpoint the same month<sup>69</sup> or the attack launched by a man in a tricycle who threw explosives over a group of border patrol officers in Aksu on August 2010<sup>70</sup>.

Apart from the weaponry used, the level of organization or the existence of specific or general motivations, it is worth considering the targets of the attacks registered since 2008. When this last wave of violence begun, a Chinese scholar considered that the new attacks were “no longer targeting civilians by planting bombs on buses as they did in the 1990s but

attacking government, personnel, army and the police”<sup>71</sup>.

Interestingly, for many of the attacks reported, a debate unleashes between the Chinese official media and the Uyghur organizations in the exile on whether Han Chinese civilians were or not targeted in the attacks<sup>72</sup>. This is an important question since from the target we can infer the nature of the attacks, if they are terrorist actions against innocent civilians aimed at spreading fear in the population and ultimately achieve a certain objective such as stopping Han migration to Xinjiang; or attacks directed at Chinese police, military or security forces, which would rather point to a sort of insurgency maybe looking for recognition and support among local Uyghurs. Lack of transparent and verifiable information prevents a straight assertion on the topics, but considering the ethnic riots of 2009 and some testimonies by Uyghur sources<sup>73</sup>, Han civilians have likely been targeted in some of the attacks.

Another issue is the authority of the attacks, and whether there is a militant organization behind them. As outlined before, operational connectivity between organizations or militants outside Xinjiang and the attacks has yet to be probed and only the Baren uprising in 1990 has provided a real picture of direct external influence. However, two developments ask for considering this possibility again: the turning point in the Chinese stance towards Pakistan regarding the existence of Uyghur militants in the tribal areas of this “certain South Asian country”, as Beijing has referred to it; and the existence of “the most concrete evidence ever introduced that links attacks in Xinjiang to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement or militants in Pakistan”<sup>74</sup>.

## **5.2. The Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) and the Pakistan trail.**

Between 2002 and 2007, no actions of the ETIM were reported in the group’s profile at the UN Security Council list of entities associated with Al-Qaeda and the Taliban<sup>75</sup>. This period coincides with the decline of violence described above, although it would be rash to extract any conclusion from it.

The ETIM emerged in 2007 renamed as Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), years after Abdul-Haq al Turkistani (Maimaitiming Maimaiti) allegedly took over the leadership of

the group in 2003, after Mahsum's dead. The vacuum of this long period of inaction has casted doubts on the real origins of the TIP. Analysts have speculated with the possibility of the faction being "a splinter group of the ETIM or even a false-flag operation designed to establish ties between Uyghur separatists and Al-Qaeda"<sup>76</sup>. The TIP has also been reported to be a Uyghur split of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), an Uzbek movement which was renamed Islamic Party of Turkestan (IPT) –different from TIP- in 2001<sup>77</sup>. It is worth noting here that while East Turkestan –as in ETIM- refers to the area of China's Xinjiang, the term Turkestan encompasses a wider area of Central Asia, probably the one targeted by the IMU/IPT for the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate which would cover an entire Turkic wider region including Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Xinjiang<sup>78</sup>. The fact that a video issued in March 2012 by the TIP in the jihadist media outlet Islam Awazi (Voice of Islam) is a message to mujahedeen in the Caucasus translated to Russian language reinforces the possibility of the group not being a Xinjiang-focused direct 'descendant' of the ETIM.

Abdul-Haq, alleged member of the Al-Qaeda Shura Council in 2005<sup>79</sup>, was the face of the new TIP in the countdown to the Beijing Olympic Games when the group revealed itself with a series of videos in which it threatened to launch attacks in Chinese soil during the event. In these videos, the fresh media-savvy faction of Uyghur radical militancy, based in tribal areas of Pakistan, claimed responsibility for two bus bombings in Shanghai and Kunming, an implausible bravado statement which China denied<sup>80</sup>.

In 2009, Abdul-Haq was identified one of the top al Qaeda leaders by the US<sup>81</sup>. That year, soon after the ethnic riots in Urumqi, the group threatened to attack Chinese embassies and other targets worldwide and within China and accused the Chinese of committing "barbaric crimes" against the Muslims in Xinjiang<sup>82</sup>. In January 2010, Abdul Haq was killed in a US missile strike in Pakistan's North Waziristan province<sup>83</sup> and in May 2011, Abdul Shakoor Turkistani (Abdul Shakoor Damla), a militant appointed commander of Al Qaeda in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, was identified as new leader of the TIP<sup>84</sup>.

China had already started to look at Pakistan right after the Hotan attack (July 2011). Scholars quoted by official media pointed at the country as the direct source of violence<sup>85</sup>. Pan Zhiping, director of the Institute of Central Asia at the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences outlined the proximity of Hotan to the border with Pakistan and the affinity in religion and language as being factors of risk for Uyghurs to be influenced by the ETIM. Meanwhile Li Wei, expert at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, analyzed the Hotan attack as one in which great influence by overseas terrorist organizations could be signaled in the rioters, with a "complicated approach to the attack" and the aim of "amplifying fears among the public". After a double attack in Kashgar (August 2011), "a group of religious extremists led by militants trained in overseas terrorist camps", in a clear allusion to Pakistan, were made responsible<sup>86</sup>. In a statement, the local government of Kashgar said that "captured suspects confessed that their leaders had earlier trained in Pakistan and joined the ETIM"<sup>87</sup>. Following on this, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry pledged cooperation with Beijing in fighting the ETIM, somehow validating the Chinese claim<sup>88</sup>.

The greater evidence of the existence of a violent threat, although an overstated one, came in September 2011 with a TIP video which contained footage of Memtieli Tiliwaldi, a Uyghur man shot dead by Chinese police in the aftermath of the Kashgar attacks, thus putting an ETIM/TIP militant in the scene of an attack in Xinjiang soil<sup>89</sup>.

### 5.3. Terrorism overstated and ethnic riots.

The TIP video footage providing evidence of the ability of radicalized Uyghurs in Pakistan to strike in Xinjiang soil was followed in April 2012 when the Ministry of Public Security published a list of six suspects militants of the TIP and accused them of having engaged in terrorists activities in "a certain South Asian country" in a clear reference to Pakistan<sup>90</sup>.

However, despite the confirmed existence of an operative TIP, exaggeration has remained a common practice in the official approach to Uyghur dissent in Xinjiang.

Samples of this hyperbolic stance are the group of Uyghurs -women and children included<sup>91</sup>- who tried to flee Xinjiang and were accused of

being “violent terrorists” who looked for “terrorist training”<sup>92</sup>; or when the possession of “boxing gloves” was quoted as evidence of a potential terror plot in which four suspected “terrorists” were shot dead in a raid in Korla<sup>93</sup>.

Along with these two cases, the ethnic riots which ravaged Urumqi in July 2009 were blamed on the “three forces” of extremism, separatism and terrorism both at home and abroad<sup>94</sup>. Although the WUC and other Uyghur organizations in the exile might have promoted the peaceful protests which escalated into a tragic pogrom, no evidence have been produced that they included ‘violence’ in their agenda.

Thus, the Urumqi ‘incident’ could be compared with the events unfolded in Ghulja in 1997, although this time the situation turned much more violent for Han Chinese civilians, targeted by mobs enraged at the violent crackdown on a students’ demonstration.

It is relevant pointing that these protests were not fueled by ‘official’ executions, police brutality or crackdown campaigns by authorities –as in Ghulja- but by a previous riot in a factory in Shaoguan (Guangdong province), in which two ethnic Uyghurs were killed by a mob of Han Chinese co-workers<sup>95</sup>. In the Urumqi riots, the “enemy” was not the Chinese state represented in a military border patrol, a family-planning centre or a collaborative Uyghur Imam, but the Han Chinese civilians so far as they were ethnic Han.

### Conclusion.

Violent episodes with politic-separatist connotations have been present in Xinjiang since the declaration of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Although this paper has reviewed its nature and extent since information began to flow from this once remote region in the reform era, historians have revisited other previous waves of violent resistance to Chinese rule. The existence of small armed groups of Kazakhs in the early years of the PRC or two large-scale ethnic riots in the restive city of Ghulja -the first in 1962 in relation to an exodus of Kazakhs to the Soviet Union and the second led by Uyghurs in the middle of the Cultural Revolution - are among the most significant<sup>96</sup>.

As a direct consequence of the tensions inherent to a quasi-colonial environment, where the Uyghur ethnic group –still a majority within Xinjiang- perceives a threat to its identity<sup>97</sup>, the

recurrence of not necessarily “separatist” episodes of violence seems to be an inevitable outcome for the region.

In this sense, some authors have highlighted the ‘Catch-22’ situation that Beijing faces when addressing the grievances of the Uyghur ethnic minority, especially in the realm of Islam, an unalienable feature of Uyghur identity which, when interfered with, has triggered much of the violence in Xinjiang<sup>98</sup>. Therefore, on one hand, greater religious openness such as those seen in the 1980s usually involves greater identity awareness for Uyghur people, which can result in a higher appeal for separatism, since it comes with a realization of the outstanding differences between the ‘local’ Uyghur and the Han ‘settler’. If, on the other hand, the Chinese government chooses, as it has done with the ‘Strike, Hard’ campaigns, a repressive control of religion and other traditional practices intrinsic to the Uyghur identity, violent resistance will be a likely outcome, although hardly to an extent which compromises Beijing’s control over the XUAR.

### Notas:

<sup>1</sup> Chi-yuk, Choi, ‘Ten hacked to death in Kashgar rampage’, in *South China Morning Post*, 29 February 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Dilxat Raxit, spokesman of the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), quoted in ‘Group of axe-wielding men attack market place in Xinjiang’, *The Telegraph*, 29 February 2012.

<sup>3</sup> See D. Swaine, Michael, ‘China’s Assertive Behavior. Part One: On “Core Interests”’, *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 34, Winter 2011. Available in Internet at: <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/67966> [Accessed on 04/05/3012].

<sup>4</sup> Han period is cited as the beginning of Chinese rule in Xinjiang by the official account of the PRC. Since then, it holds, Xinjiang has been an “inseparable part of a unitary multi-ethnic Chinese nation”. However, the general view of Western scholars, among them James A. Millward, states that, besides the Han tug-of-war period and the Tang ‘commercial’ peak, real Chinese-based political control of nowadays XUAR came with the Qing Empire.

<sup>5</sup> Bovingdon, Gardner, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2010, 7-10.

<sup>6</sup> As posed by Hong Lei, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, quoted in ‘China details overseas links for Xinjiang militants’, *Reuters*, 6 April 2012.

<sup>7</sup> A ‘lowest common denominator’ definition of terrorist attack could be that of “an attack against non-combatants designed to influence a target

audience and change its behavior in a way that will serve the interests of the individual/group responsible for the attack". See Rodríguez, P. A. "A Critical Approach to Terrorism in the People's Republic of China: The case of Xinjiang", MA dissertation, *University of Warwick*, 2009, 15.

<sup>8</sup> 'China, The Evolution of ETIM', *Stratfor*, Global Intelligence report, 13 May 2008. Available at: <http://www.stratfor.com/sample/analysis/china-evolution-etim> [Accessed on 23/11/2011].

<sup>9</sup> The period 1980-1989 accounts for a minimal organized armed guerrilla activity and a greater incidence of ethnic riots, whereas no attacks using 'terrorist' tactics were reported. See Rodríguez, P. A. "A Critical Approach to Terrorism", op. cit., 28-30.

<sup>10</sup> Butterfield, F., 'Moslems prospering in rugged Chinese border area', in *The New York Times*, 29 October 1980.

<sup>11</sup> As put by Xia Ri, then deputy director of Xinjiang's economic research center, quoted in Elliot, D., 'The uneasy peace in China's oil province', in *Business Week*, 15 July 1985.

<sup>12</sup> *People's Daily* report of 1984 quoted in Sun, L. H., 'Chinese Turkic Minority in Northwest Live in Uneasy Peace', in *The Washington Post*, 14 January 1985.

<sup>13</sup> Xinhua and Xinjiang Radio reports, quoted in 'Xinjiang "hooligans" storm CCP regional headquarters', in BBC Monitoring Service Asia-Pacific (BBCMSAP), 22 May 1989.

<sup>14</sup> Reuters, 'Top official warns of "conspirators" in Moslem West China', 26 July 1988.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed account of Beijing's strategy towards Xinjiang in the 1990's, see Becquelin, N., 'Xinjiang in the Nineties', *The China Journal*, 44, 65-90.

<sup>16</sup> Rodríguez, P. A. "A Critical Approach to Terrorism", op. cit., 31.

<sup>17</sup> Leaflets with separatist themes had circulated the region slipped into copies of the Koran weeks before the events, according to officials in Urumqi quoted in Schmetzer, U., 'Is Muslim holy war brewing in China?', *The Toronto Star*, 18 April 1990.

<sup>18</sup> Journalist Anthony Davis, who met a group of young Uyghurs in Khost, southeastern Afghanistan, in the first half of that year, explain the influence of the Afghan War in the Baren uprising. Although the weapons used by rebels were channeled by sympathizers with the Afghan resistance, they were probably bought in Pakistan, according to Western diplomat sources. See Davis, A., 'Beijing should have seen the Uighur problem coming', in *Asia Times*, 26 March 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Reuters, 'China says 22 died in armed revolt in far western Xinjiang', 22 April 1990.

<sup>20</sup> See Xinjiang regional television reports, quoted in BBCMSAP, 'Muslim Rebels in Xinjiang proclaimed 'Holy War', says China', 23 April 1990; and Reuters, 'Traveller tells of Mujahideen-backed uprising in China', 9 May 1990.

<sup>21</sup> Reuters, 'Traveler tells of Mujahideen-backed uprising in China', 9 May 1990.

<sup>22</sup> Amnesty International report, 'Secret Violence: Human Rights Violation in Xinjiang', 13 November 1992. Available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA17/050/1992/en/3752fb46-f939-11dd-92e7-c59f81373cf2/asa170501992en.pdf> [Accessed on 04/10/2011].

<sup>23</sup> Mahsum was detained from May 1990 to November 1991 in the security clampdown following the Baren rebellion. He would be imprisoned later again until 1996.

<sup>24</sup> Isa Alptekin, then head of the Uyghur exile movement, denied having "power, guns or international support" to challenge Beijing rule. Quoted in 'Uyghurs in lonely battle for identity in China', *The Independent*, 21 April 1990.

<sup>25</sup> The most spectacular attack reported involved an organization called The Tigers of Lop Nor, which reportedly managed to blow up two airplanes and a number of tanks inside a nuclear zone. The episode is quoted in AFP, 'The Uighurs-sacrificed on Central Asia's chess board', 25 April 1996.

<sup>26</sup> PRC, The Information Office of China's State Council, 'East Turkestan Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity', Beijing, 21 January 2002.

Available at: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2002/Jan/25582.htm> [Accessed on 06/10/10].

<sup>27</sup> Rodríguez, P. A. "A Critical Approach to Terrorism", op. cit., 35.

<sup>28</sup> AFP, "'Foreign hostile" groups aiding Xinjiang separatists, says Beijing', 3 July 1995.

<sup>29</sup> Hao, Z., 'Complicated ethnic issue in Xinjiang; conflicts happen from time to time in south Xinjiang', *Ming Pao*, 28 September 1993; and AFP, 'Risk of social explosions this year: official report', 23 March 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Wo-lap Lam, W., ' "Sacrilige" stirs Muslim protest', in *South China Morning Post*, 6 December 1993.

<sup>31</sup> AFP, 'The Uighurs-sacrificed on Central Asia's chess board', 25 April 1996.

<sup>32</sup> Officials quoted in 'China plays down Xinjiang riot as case of street violence', *Straits Times*, 12 February 1997.

<sup>33</sup> Official figures quoted in AFP, 'Eight Uyghurs executed in China's Xinjiang region: opposition', 6 December 1996; Estimates from the Uyghur exile quoted in AFP, 'Nearly 5,000 Uighur officials dismissed for separatism in China', 30 September 1996.

<sup>34</sup> Their fairly credible account, which coincides with footage then broadcasted by Channel 4 (See [www.guljavigil.org/information.htm](http://www.guljavigil.org/information.htm)), figures in Forney, M., 'Uighur fire: Suppression in Xinjiang attracts international attention', in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 February 1997.

<sup>35</sup> UHRP, 'Uyghur American Association marks the twelfth anniversary of the Gulja Massacre', 2 May 2009. Available at: <http://uhrp.org/old/articles/1787/1/Uyghur-American->

Association-marks-the-twelfth-anniversary-of-the-Ghulja-Massacre-/index.html [Accessed on 13/11/10]

<sup>36</sup> AFP, 'Amnesty calls for restraint from China over Xinjiang unrest', 22 March 1997.

<sup>37</sup> See Forney, M. 'Uighur fire: Suppression in Xinjiang attracts international attention'.

<sup>38</sup> Rodríguez, P. A. 'A Critical Approach to Terrorism in the People's Republic of China', MA dissertation, *University of Warwick*, 2009, p. 111.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in AFP, '80 die in unrest in northwestern China: exile group', 11 February 1997.

<sup>40</sup> Reuters, 'China says smashes plot to sabotage Moslem region', 28 August 1997.

<sup>41</sup> Some were publicized through pro-independence publications such as *The Voice of East Turkestan*

<sup>42</sup> Examples can be found in BBCMSAP, 'Over 300 dead after rebellions in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, Hong Kong journal says', 27 October 1997; and 'Xinjiang separatist movement continues heating up', *Inside China Mainland*, 1 November 1998.

<sup>43</sup> See, for instance, Radio Free Asia (RFA), 'Uyghurs prepared to fight and die', 11 March 2011

<sup>44</sup> See BBCMS Former USSR, 'Uzbek leader warns helping Uighurs could upset relations with China', 12 June 1998; and BBCMSAP, 'Turkish paper cites secret directive in Xinjiang issue', 10 February 1999.

<sup>45</sup> See BBCM former Soviet Union, 'Kyrgyz minister says arrested Uighur separatist leaders have Chenchen links', 12 July 2000.

<sup>46</sup> See Working, R. 'China's own Muslim nationalists', in *The Moscow Times*, 26 October 2001

<sup>47</sup> Xinhua, 'Murderers of Chinese diplomat executed in Xinjiang', 30 March 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Reuters, 'China links Kyrgyz bus blaze to separatist group', 12 July 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Contacts between IMU and ETIM are reported in 'China, The Evolution of ETIM', and Raman, B. 'The Xinjiang Angle', *Outlook India*, 1 August 2011. However, it remains unclear if this link is behind any of the attacks blamed on Uyghur militants in Central Asia.

<sup>50</sup> Western intelligence reports quoted in Cooley, John K., 'Counterterrorism assignment: Keep track of the 'Afghanis'', *International Herald Tribune*, 30 July 1996; Rashid, A., 'Afghanistan: Taliban Temptation', in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 March 1999.

<sup>51</sup> AFP, 'Chinese diplomats to call on Taliban supreme leader', 12 December 2000.

<sup>52</sup> Reuters, 'China denies reports of links to Taliban', 15 September 2001.

<sup>53</sup> Rodríguez, P. A. "A Critical Approach to Terrorism", op.cit., 16-17.

<sup>54</sup> See Millward, James A., 'Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment', *East-West Center Washington, Policy Studies* 6, 200; and Shichor, Yitzhak, 'Fact and Fiction: A Chinese Documentary on Eastern Turkestan Terrorism', *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4:2, 89-108.

<sup>55</sup> Dillon, M., 'We have terrorists too', *World Today*, 58 (1), 1 January 2002; See also Dolat, E.,

'Washington betrays China's Uighurs', in *Asia Times*, 5 September 2002.

<sup>56</sup> As described in Gunaratna, R., and Pereire, K., in 'An Al-Qaeda Associate Group Operating in China?', *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4:2, 55-61.

<sup>57</sup> 'China, The Evolution of ETIM'.

<sup>58</sup> Testimonies of Kariaji and Abu Bakkar Qassim, as well as of other Uyghur inmates in Guantanamo described a "tiny, primitive, outpost" run by "secretive members of some sort of Uyghur liberation group". Interviews can be found in Cloud, David S., and Johnson, I., 'Uighur Nationalism tests the boundaries of security, tolerance – activists of Muslim Ethnic Minority say they have been harassed by China – Other nations ask 'Who's a threat'', in *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, 3 August 2004; and Golden, T., 'Chinese leave Guantanamo for Albanian limbo', in *The New York Times*, 10 June 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Ahmed Rashid, 'Afghanistan: Heart of Darkness', in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 5 August 1999; Mahendra Ved, 'Pakistan recruits Islamic mercenaries in Central Asia', in *The Times of India*, 20 August 1999.

<sup>60</sup> Mahsum posed this view in an interview with RFA. On these reflection and the evolution of al Qaeda's stand on China, see Fishman, 'Al Qaeda and The Rise of China: Jihadi Geopolitics in a Post-Hegemonic World', *The Washington Quarterly* 34:3, 47-62.

<sup>61</sup> According to Chinese intelligence estimates, a thousand Uyghur militants were present in Afghanistan: 300 were captured by US forces (although only 22 ended up in Guantanamo), 20 were killed and 600 made their way into Pakistan.

<sup>62</sup> Reuters, 'China glorifies Uighur killed over crackdown', 15 July 2005.

<sup>63</sup> Xinhua, 'China Focus: Chinese police destroy terrorist camp in NW region', 8 January 2007.

<sup>64</sup> This description of the facts by an anonymous source, which is rumored in Kashgar, is quoted in Poch, R., 'Un incidente en el Pamir', *La Vanguardia*, 20 June 2007.

<sup>65</sup> As described by Hou Hanmin, director of the government's news office in the XUAR, in Tze-wei, Ng, 'Finger-pointing over fatal clash', in *South China Morning Post*, 20 July 2011; See also Reuters, 'China blames terrorists for attack in Xinjiang', 19 July 2011.

<sup>66</sup> Dolkun Isa, secretary general of the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), quoted in 'Uighur demonstrators "killed by Chinese police" say activist', *The National*, 20 July 2011.

<sup>67</sup> AFP, 'Uighurs attack west China police station: police', 6 June 2008.

<sup>68</sup> A comprehensive account can be found in Tam, F. and Chi-yukin, C., 'They hacked police with machetes, then they threw grenades', in *South China Morning Post*, 5 August 2008.

<sup>69</sup> See 'Three die in knife attacks', *Financial Times*, 12 August 2008.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Xinjiang akesu lianfang duiyuan xunluo zao baozha zhuangzhi xiji 7 si 14 shang’ (‘Attack with explosive devices on security patrols leaves 7 dead and 14 injured in Aksu, Xinjiang’), Phoenix News (Ifeng.com), 19 August 2010

Available at: [http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/detail\\_2010\\_08/19/1990114\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/detail_2010_08/19/1990114_0.shtml)  
Accessed on: 22/05/12.

<sup>71</sup> Chu Sulong, head of the Institute for International Strategic Studies, quoted in Bezlova, A., ‘China: insurgents from Xinjiang learn new tactics in Pakistan’, in Inter Press Service (IPS), 13 August 2008.

<sup>72</sup> The two positions are quoted in ‘Terrorist attacks hit Kashi’, *Global Times*, 1 August 2012; and AP, ‘12 dead in Xinjiang clash; China says civilians targeted, Uighurs say violence aimed at police’, 28 February 2012.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in RFA, ‘Immigration Tensions Led to Attack’, 29 February 2012.

<sup>74</sup> Zenn, J., ‘Catch-22 of Xinjiang as a gateway’, in *Asia Times*, 22 September 2011.

<sup>75</sup> See entry ‘QE.E.88.02. EASTERN TURKISTAN ISLAMIC MOVEMENT’ at: <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE08802.E.shtml> [Accessed on 28/09/11].

<sup>76</sup> McGregor, A., ‘Will Xinjiang’s Turkistani Islamic Party Survive the Drone Missile Death of its Leader?’ *Terrorism Monitor*, 8:10, The Jamestown Foundation, 11 March 2010.

Available at: [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_tnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=36144](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_tnews%5Btt_news%5D=36144)  
Accessed on: 21/05/2012.

<sup>77</sup> Raman, B., ‘The Xinjiang Angle’, loc. Cit.

<sup>78</sup> Raman, B., ‘The Xinjiang Angle’, loc. Cit.

<sup>79</sup> ‘QE.E.88.02. EASTERN TURKISTAN ISLAMIC MOVEMENT’, loc. cit.

<sup>80</sup> Reuters, ‘China denies group’s claim of role in bombings’, 26 July 2008; AP, ‘Islamic group threatens Olympic transport’, 7 August 2008.

<sup>81</sup> US Department of the Treasury press release, ‘Treasury targets leader of group tied to Al-Qaeda’, Available at: <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg92.aspx> [Accessed on: 21/05/12].

<sup>82</sup> ‘Uighur terrorist leader threatens attacks against Chinese interests across the globe’, *The Long War Journal*, 2 August 2009

Available at: [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/08/uighur\\_terrorist\\_lea.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/08/uighur_terrorist_lea.php)  
[Accessed on 03/04/12].

<sup>83</sup> AP, ‘Militants report 15 dead in missile strike’, 22 January 2010; ‘Al-Jazeera, ‘Xinjiang fighter killed by drone’, 2 March 2010.

Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asiapacific/2010/03/2010328195748457.html>  
[Accessed on 28/03/10].

<sup>84</sup> *Karachi Islam* report, quoted in ‘Al Qaeda appoints new leader of forces in Pakistan’s tribal areas’, *The Long War Journal*, 9 May 2011

Available at: [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/05/al\\_qaeda\\_appoints\\_ne\\_2.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/05/al_qaeda_appoints_ne_2.php)  
[Accessed on: 23/04 2012].

<sup>85</sup> Dasgupta, S., ‘China finally ready to admit Pak’s role in Xinjiang violence’, *The Times of India*, 20 July 2010.

<sup>86</sup> Xinhua, ‘Xinjiang attacks masterminded by overseas-trained terrorists: government’, 1 August 2011.

<sup>87</sup> ‘Attackers trained in foreign camps’, *Global Times*, 2 August 2012.

<sup>88</sup> ‘Pakistan extends full support to China against ETIM,’ Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Release, August 1 2011

Available at: <http://www.mofa.gov.pk/mfa/pages/article.aspx?id=787&type=1>  
[Accessed on: 14 September 2011].

<sup>89</sup> Wines, M., ‘Militant Band claims role in Western China Attacks’, *The New York Times*, 8 September 2011; and Dasgupta, S. ‘Video shows terrorists in China got training in Pak bases’, *The Times of India*, 8 September 2011.

The video can be watched in the web *Jihadology.net* at: <http://jihadology.net/2011/08/25/new-statement-from-the-amir-of-the-turkistan-islamic-party-shaykh-abd-al-shakur-damala-statement-on-the-occasion-of-the-military-operations-in-the-prefecture-of-hutan-and-kashghar-in-east/> [Accessed on 03/07/12].

<sup>90</sup> ‘Authorities name six as terrorists’, *China Daily*, 7 April 2012.

<sup>91</sup> RFA, ‘Women, Children captured in Standoff’, 30 December 2011.

<sup>92</sup> Xinhua, ‘China police killed 7 kidnappers in hostage rescue in China’, 29 December 2011; ‘Police shoot dead 7 terrorists in Xinjiang’, *Global Times*, 30 December 2011.

<sup>93</sup> RFA, ‘Slain Uyghurs not linked to bomb’, 13 March 2012.

<sup>94</sup> Xinhua, ‘Xinjiang to speed up legislation against separatism, regional top lawmaker’, 20 July 1997.

<sup>95</sup> Watts, J., ‘Old suspicions magnified mistrust into ethnic riots in Urumqi’, in *The Guardian*, 10 July 2010.

<sup>96</sup> See Millward, James, A., *Eurasian Crossroads. A History of Xinjiang*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007, 238, 264, 273.

<sup>97</sup> For an explanation -based on Barry Buzan’s concept of societal security- of how the PRC’s approach to Xinjiang clashes with the ethnic minority desire to protect its identity thus producing “legitimate violence” as an outcome, see Acharya, A., “Explaining minority conflict in China: a theoretical perspective”, in Acharya, A., Gunaratna, R., & Pengxin, W., *Ethnic Identity and National Conflict in China*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 13-18.

<sup>98</sup> See Clarke, M. 'China's "War on Terror" in Xinjiang: Human Security and the Causes of Violent Uighur Separatism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20:2, 279–281; and Zenn, J., 'Catch-22 of Xinjiang as a gateway'.