

CHINA'S RESPONSE TO RISING TERRORISM IN XINJIANG

SHAN Wei & PING Xiaojuan

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Executive Summary

1. China has witnessed a series of violent terrorist attacks involving Xinjiang's Muslim minority, the Uighurs, in Xinjiang and other provinces in recent months. As the attacks have increasingly attempted to maim innocent civilians in large numbers, it has become a major national security issue.
2. Although Beijing has poured hundreds of billions of renminbi into Xinjiang to boost its economic development, the developmental projects fail to narrow the income gaps across ethnicities. The restrictive policy on religion has further radicalised many Muslim Uighurs.
3. The Uighur community has experienced profound social instability due to the rapid modernisation process. Traditional values have been eroded but new ones have yet to be constructed. This paves the way for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and extremism.
4. To tackle the issues, the Xi-Li administration held a high profile Xinjiang Work Conference on 28 May 2014, gathering almost all the top leaders in the party, government and military. The conference made general guidelines and new policy plans in anti-terrorism and in promoting social development in Xinjiang.
5. Beijing's new strategies are two-pronged. One involves heavy-handed tactics and fierce crackdown. A one-year "strike hard" campaign has been launched to crack down "violent terrorist activities" and contain "the spread of religious extremism".
6. The creation of the National Security Committee will centralise efforts in the formulation of strategies to fight terrorist attacks, crisis manage, and coordinate anti-terrorism policies and actions by the party-state or military agencies.
7. The other is the announcement of a new social and economic policy package, including promoting Chinese national "consciousness" among ethnic minorities,

boosting employment with a “one household, one job” policy and promoting bilingualism in Xinjiang’s education policy.

8. These new policies may face challenges in the short and long run. Integrating the Uighur groups into the Chinese nation will be a long and difficult process. The government’s restrictive religion policy may continue to enrage the Uighurs.
9. Externally, the rise of political Islam and the changing political landscape in the Middle East, especially in Syria and Iraq, might have a profound and lasting impact on Xinjiang.