

Michael Clarke (ed.). *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in China: Domestic and Foreign Policy Dimensions*. London: Hurst & Company, 2018. ISBN: 978-18-49-04877-4. 279pp. Hardback, £35,00.

As a jeep ploughed through Tiananmen Square in October 2013 and burned out against one of the stone bridges just outside the Gate of Heavenly Peace, the unrest of Xinjiang was brought home to the Chinese leadership's doorstep. The assailants, a family of Uyghur origins, died in the car crash while two bystanders also suffered fatal injuries.¹ The attacks were attributed to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and were later praised by the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), its successor. The following year, the Chinese Ministry of Public Security announced its campaign to 'strike hard against violent terrorism',² which was followed in 2016 by the appointment of Chen Quanquo, formerly party strongman in Tibet, to oversee the CCP's activities in Xinjiang.³ Efforts to deradicalise (去极端化) culminated in a policy of 'concentrated re-education' (集中教育转化),

¹ It would be the first and certainly the most symbolic attack of that year, which would see a deadly stabbing spree in a Kunming train station and car bombs set off in the streets of Urumqi. T. Phillips, 'China Sentences Three to Death for Tiananmen Square Attack', in *The Telegraph* (16 June 2014), online at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10902074/China-sentences-three-to-death-for-Tiananmen-Square-attack.html> (Here and below, web resources last accessed on 10 January 2020); J. Kaiman, & T. Branigan, 'Kunming Knife Attack: Xinjiang Separatists Blamed for 'Chinese 9/11'', in *The Guardian* (2 March 2014), online at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/02/kunming-knife-attack-muslim-separatists-xinjiang-china>; and Associated Press, 'Urumqi Car and Bomb Attack Kills Dozens', in *The Guardian* (22 May 2014), online at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/22/china-urumqi-car-bomb-attack-xinjiang>.

² J. Doyon, 'Understanding China's Community-Focused Counter-Terrorism Tactics,' in *War on the Rocks* (14 January 2019), online at <https://warontherocks.com/2019/01/counter-extremism-in-xinjiang-understanding-chinas-community-focused-counter-terrorism-tactics/>.

³ A. Zenz, & J. Leibold, 'Chen Quanquo: The Strongman Behind Beijing's Securitization Strategy in Tibet and Xinjiang', in *China Brief* (21 September 2017), online at <https://jamestown.org/program/chen-quanquo-the-strongman-behind-beijings-securitization-strategy-in-tibet-and-xinjiang/>.

which would see many of the Uyghur people interned in centres across the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.⁴

This edited volume is an excellent contribution to understanding the primary causes and effect of the ongoing unrests in Xinjiang and the security policies adopted by the Chinese state to what it views as a gathering of the 'three evils' (三股势力) towards its rule--terrorism, separatism, and extremism--which are largely isolated to this region (p. 2). The ethno-religious dividing lines visible herein make for a highly contentious topic,⁵ leading to blind spots in our understanding of Xinjiang and the plight of its people, the Muslim Uyghur population. Located in the middle of East, South and Central Asia and inhabited by Turkic and Mongol peoples, this region has throughout its history been marked by intermittent control by the Chinese state and, since the creation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, by policies of Han settlement and the extension of the state's control apparatus (pp. 22; 29). With an abundance of natural resources across approximately 1/6 of the PRC's territory (pp. 40; 44), it is but little surprise that this important frontier region finds itself literally on the fringes of the harmonious society as envisioned by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).⁶

This book features eight contributors whom readers will recognise for their work on a diversity of related areas. Broadly speaking, there are three main themes that connect these pieces: (1) the evolution of Chinese counter-terrorism policies; (2) the impact of transnational linkages on the changing character of the Uyghur revolt; and (3) the consequences for China's trade and investment interests abroad, most especially in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The book's first chapter, written by the editor Michael Clarke, zooms in on how, since 2001, the global war on terror has played an important role in how the Chinese state defines the challenges posed by Uyghur revolts (pp. 17-38). Whereas in the 1990s, separatism (which would essentially split the PRC's territorial unity) was the

⁴ A. Zenz, 'Thoroughly Reforming Them towards a Healthy Heart Attitude: China's Political Re-education Campaign in Xinjiang', in *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2019).

⁵ T. Grose, 'How an Academic Journal Censored My Review on Xinjiang', in *Los Angeles Review of Books China Channel* (13 May 2019), online at <https://chinachannel.org/2019/05/13/oil-water>.

⁶ T. Brox, & I. Bellér-Han (Eds.), *On the Fringes of the Harmonious Society: Tibetans and Uyghurs in Socialist China* (NIAS Press, 2014).

primary lens through which the issue was perceived (p. 29), the international campaign against terrorism, as Clarke argues, provided a framework for China not only to 'deploy significant repressive force, in political, legal and police/military terms, to confront the perceived threat to Xinjiang's security posed by Uyghur terrorism, but also to establish the political and legal framework through which to confront any future challenge to state power' (p. 3).⁷ Clarke makes an interesting observation when he notes the fear of the authorities for either a 'resurgence of Turkic nationalism or radical Islam' within the region, respectively influenced by the newly independent states of Central Asian and the rise of mujahideen factions in Afghanistan during the nineties (p. 23).

These are two rather different images of Uyghur opposition to the Chinese party-state, the first referring to the ethnic differences of the population towards the predominantly Han-Chinese state, the second to presumed religious linkages to the global movement of jihad. This distinction is explored more in-depth by Sean Roberts, who argues that Uyghur militancy is a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the terrorist threat and the state-led counter-terrorism campaign predate exclusively terrorist acts committed by Uyghur cells before 2013 (pp. 99-128). As the author observes, 'most of the violent incident could not be conclusively characterized as terrorism.' Roberts also raises doubts about the capability of both ETIM and TIP to carry out attacks 'within China, let alone [...] outside the PRC' (pp. 102-103). Nevertheless, American recognition of ETIM as a terrorist organisation in 2002, an attempt to seek Chinese involvement in the 'war on terror', and China's tacit support for the invasion of Iraq, led to the detainment of twenty-two Uyghurs on the Cuban prison island in Guantánamo Bay.⁸ Roberts interviewed four of the former detainees, now resettled in Albania. These interviews form one of the most interesting elements of this work.

⁷ C. Leung, 'Hong's Kong Anti-Terrorism Task Forces goes to Xinjiang to Study Local Methods, as China Rejects International Calls to Investigate Mass Internment Centres', in *The South China Morning Post* (6 December 2018), online at <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/2176737/hong-kongs-anti-terrorism-task-force-goes-xinjiang>.

⁸ R. Bernstein, 'Washington Has a Uighur Problem, Too', in *The New York Times* (15 July 2009), online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/16/us/16iht-letter.html?mtrref=www.google.com>.

A common thread of the Uyghur drift away from their Xinjiang homes runs through Afghanistan and Iran (pp. 113-114) to Turkey, a country that stands out as 'atypical of China's relations in the broader Middle East, where Muslim majority countries ignore the plight of Uyghurs in favour of a strong relationship with Beijing' (pp. 171). Initial recruitments efforts by ETIM along these channels of migration are described as 'mostly informal, highly disorganized and deprived of both weapons and financial resources.' Furthermore, there initially seems to have been 'little, if any, contact with the Taliban or Al-Qaeda' (pp. 115). Around 2015, however, increased pressure from the Chinese state, looming large towards the East of Xinjiang, would gradually increase the flow of Uyghurs streaming out of the PRC, now mostly through South East Asia, as explored by Stefanie Kam Li Yee (pp. 173-186). Coupled with the lack of any real status in Turkey, and the desire for combat experience to tackle repression at home, the TIP would soon grow in strength, with fighters present in Syria (pp. 118-124). In a sense of dark irony, China's fear for Uyghur terrorism and separatism would eventually drive the TIP into the arms of Al-Qaeda and ISIS (pp. 125-127).

Julia Famularo investigates the ideological framework through which the Chinese states observed this repression (pp. 39-74). Referring to Document 9, a leaked CCP report on the state of the ideological sphere within China, the author notes Chinese representations of the Xinjiang unrests as Western attempts at destabilising the country in works that 'draw a direct link between extremism and Western liberalism' (p. 43). As a result, draconian measures that were put forward under the CCP's secretary general Xi Jinping include regulations on religion and extremism, panoptical surveillance and, as mentioned above, re-education camps (pp. 46-53). To this ideological framework is added Zhou Zunyou's chapter which focuses on how the Chinese criminal justice system deals with terrorist financing, deterring extremism and promoting international counter-terrorism cooperation (pp. 75-98). However, as far-reaching as this domestic security apparatus might be, the increasingly transnational character of TIP is visible after the attacks of 11 September through alliances with the Pakistani Taliban and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, with Uyghurs fighters present in Pakistan's North Waziristan. Here, it is interesting that Andrew Small also traces the evolution from ETIM to TIP as an important factor in the changing character of Uyghur militancy (pp. 129-139). Operation Zarb-e-Azb of the Pakistan Armed Forces essentially

displaced ETIM/TIP out of their main area of Pakistan towards the Middle East (p. 130).

The Syrian Crisis and the rise of Islamic State consolidated this shift and gave further impetus to the prominence of Xinjiang in Islamist circles. Most important here is the transformation of TIP towards TIPL (Turkestan Islamic Party in the Levant), and the increasingly international character of the fighters that operate under its flag, as Raffaello Pantucci notes in his chapter (pp. 157-172). Important observations include the message visible in TIP/TIPL's multimedia output which showcases the 'outreach that the groups make towards al-Qaeda' and, simultaneously, its 'anger at ISIS' (pp. 168-169). Equally interesting is the seeming disconnect between the Uyghur militants joining the international jihad and the support of this broader movement for the Uyghur cause itself, with 'little evidence of al-Qaeda mobilizing its forces to launch attacks against China' (pp. 162-163). While it is unclear how strong international support would be, there is seemingly a strong intention by the Uyghur militants of preparing for an attack on the Chinese state in the long run, with 'Syria as a context for people to come and train to prepare for the eventual conflict back in China' (p. 169).

Yet, as the authors note, the fight need not directly be brought home. With China's ever-expanding BRI, itself a result of the 'Go West' campaign of the 2000s (pp. 29-30), and most importantly along its way to Europe running through sensitive areas in Central Asia and the Middle East, China's trade and investment interests abroad are easy pickings for terrorist cells. Mordechai Chaziza traces Chinese counterterrorism policy in the Middle East (pp. 141-156). Despite the country's principle of non-interference in matters of other states, and its rejection of any kind of involvement in military operations against al-Qaeda and IS (pp. 142-143), its expanding global footprint makes it increasingly vulnerable to attacks on its foreign investments, on Chinese nationals working in these areas, and on its energy supply network there (pp. 127; 143). While these attacks are not limited to Uyghur terrorism, the connective hub here is, of course, Xinjiang, with roads for example leading from the Chinese city of Kashgar to the port city of Gwadar in Pakistan, along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (pp. 135; 145).⁹

⁹ A. Aamir, 'Pakistan Insurgent Attacks on China Project Seen to Persist', in *Asia Nikkei Review* (13 May 2019), online at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Belt-and-Road/Pakistan-insurgent-attacks-on-China-project-seen-to-persist>.

Most importantly here, the book shows that BRI will increasingly entrap China in security dilemmas where the country traditionally had 'a limited role and a limited capability to influence events' (p. 14). It is but little surprise that in such a security nexus that combines both internal and external threats, the Chinese state has been busy to expand its counter-terrorism capabilities on both a domestic (establishment of the National Security Commission) and international level (through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, p. 5), as is explored in this work. However, in the context of the BRI, the authors of this work are right to point out the 'traditional Chinese response to security issues', a state-led modernisation strategy (p. 30) which next to the practice of security, also features 'heavy investments in local economies', (p. 3)¹⁰ a model which is copied abroad yet might not be a recipe for success.¹¹

This highly readable volume acts as an interesting corrective to the prevalent understanding of Uyghur separatism in relation to the Chinese state through its exploration of the country's counterterrorism policies both at home and abroad, the latter point being identified as a lacuna in the literature (p. 4). The work figures as an excellent introduction to the practice of security within China and, increasingly, along the BRI. One of the most important contributions is the book's understanding of Xinjiang-linked terrorist violence (p. 2) which separates the wider Uyghur population from the more militant elements within that society.

¹⁰ See S. Hameiri, L. Jones, & Zou, Y. 'The Development-Insecurity Nexus in China's Near-Abroad: Rethinking Cross-Border Economic Integration in an Era of State Transformation', in *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (2019); and U. Hoering, *Der Lange Marsch 2.0: China's Neue Seidenstraßen als Entwicklungsmodell (Long March 2.0: China's New Silk Roads as Model of Development)* (VSA Verlag, 2018).

¹¹ A recent example of such a state-led development strategy is Syria, where China recently pledged its assistance with the reconstruction of the country's infrastructure. See Michael Martina, 'China says it will Make Efforts on Syria Reconstruction,' in *Reuters* (24 November 2017), online at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-china/china-says-it-will-make-efforts-on-syria-reconstruction-idUSKBN1DO11S>.

Another is the spotlight that is placed upon the evolution of a terrorist organisation such as ETIM, their linkages to al-Qaeda and IS and its evolution towards TIP and the underdiscussed topic of Uyghur fighters in Syria.

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