Dragan Trailović[*]

Institute for Political Studies, Belgrade

ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM AS INTERNAL CHALLENGES TO CHINA'S NATIONAL SECURITY: A CASE STUDY OF XINJIANG[**]

Resume

The national security of the People's Republic of China is susceptible to an array of intricate internal challenges, risks and threats. This includes challenges that may be of a political nature, risks caused by economic and social differences, threats caused by tensions in ethnic relations, as well as many others. This paper seeks to concentrate on ethnic tensions, namely ethnic violence and terrorism, as the most substantial factors that pose a significant threat to the country's stability and security.

The paper delves into the development of ethnic tensions and conflicts resulting from the interaction between Chinese authorities and factions within the Uyghur movement for national self-determination. It emphasizes the extremist current within the broader Uyghur ethnonational movement that utilizes violence and acts of terrorism in political activism.

This paper aims to follow the evolution and changes of strategies and tactics employed by Uyghur nationalists in Xinjiang over time and present the most characteristic violent and terrorist incidents that occurred in Xinjiang to exemplify these alterations. These changes are reflected in increased violence, a shift in targets from primarily security forces

---

to civilians, including violent clashes between Uyghur and Han citizens and an expansion in the geographic reach of attacks.

Keywords: national security, People's Republic of China, Xinjiang (XUAR), East Turkistan, Uyghur issue, ethnic violence, terrorism

INTRODUCTION

The increased presence and visibility of China on the global stage, coupled with its growing role in economic, political, cultural and security spheres, which have exposed the nation to a large number of new external challenges, risks and threats to its national security. As China seeks to secure energy, raw materials and new markets for its economic and social progress, it encounters competing interests from both state and non-state actors within the international arena, resulting in additional security risks and geopolitical tensions (Stefanović-Stambuk and Popović, 2022). However, China's national security has long been subject to a range of complex internal risks and threats, such as political issues, economic inequality and ethnic tensions, which continue to undermine stability and security. Of particular concern is the issue of ethnic tensions, which include ethnic violence and terrorism, representing one of the most pressing internal challenges to national security and a source of possible social unrest and political instability within the country.

China is home to numerous ethnic groups and national minorities, with a total of fifty-six officially recognized. Despite the Chinese government's assertion that these groups, along with the majority Han population, constitute a unified Chinese nation, the complex nature of ethnic relations presents a significant threat to national unity and overall national security. Throughout its history, China has faced a multitude of challenges related to ethnic relations, often resulting in violent ethnic riots with tragic consequences for human lives. Despite these challenges, the Chinese state continues propagating the narrative that all ethnic groups within China coexist harmoniously with the Han majority (Tobin 2020a, 166-191).

Until now, the most significant instances of ethnic tension, discontent, violence and conflict in China have been observed in three regions among three ethnic groups: Tibetans in Tibet, Mongols in Inner Mongolia and Uyghurs in Xinjiang. In this paper, the focus of analysis of

internal challenges, risks and threats to China's national security will be on Uyghur nationalism, particularly its manifestations through separatism, religious extremism and terrorism, which will serve as a case study.

Xinjiang, a region in the northwest of the People's Republic of China, is home to a predominantly Muslim minority Turkic-speaking Uyghur population. Uyghur organisations, groups and individuals argue that discrimination and unequal treatment towards Uyghurs stem from their ethnic characteristics, language, religion and culture (World Uyghur Congress 2021). They assert the Chinese government systematically suppresses the most crucial aspects of their ethnic identity, violating their rights as a minority group. Consequently, Uyghur nationalists have demanded greater political, economic and cultural self-governance within the ethnic autonomous region of Xinjiang and some have even called for its secession and independence from China. In contrast, the Chinese government maintains the regional ethnic autonomy status exists to protect the linguistic, religious, cultural and other rights of ethnic minorities, as guaranteed by the Chinese constitution.

The different views and activities of the central Chinese authorities, who implement policies aimed at building a unified Chinese nation (nation-building process) on one hand and individuals, groups and movements among the Uyghurs, who see these processes as assimilation and acculturation with the Han ethnic and cultural pattern on the other hand, have led to increased ethnic tensions, conflicts and the use of violence in relations between the state and Uyghur ethno-nationalists, as well as between Uyghurs and Han Chinese themselves (Trailović 2014). Explanations of the nature of this conflict, which significantly threatens the national security of the People's Republic of China, range from those who point out that it is ethnic separatism based on the Uyghurs' sense of their ethnic and cultural uniqueness in relation to the Chinese, to the notion that the basis of Uyghur dissatisfaction lies in religious reasons, such as the control and restriction of religious activities by the Chinese state and to the argument that modernization and economic development have affected the conflict by producing significant disparities in the distribution of economic wealth between Han Chinese and Uyghurs in favour of the Han (Millward 2021; Zhang and McGhee 2014; Hasmath 2018; Bovingdon 2011; Millward 2004, Starr 2004; Dillon 2004;).

The Chinese authorities, however, view the Uyghur movement for self-determination, which has its various forms, from those that are within the framework of peaceful conflict resolution to those that use violence

and terrorist acts, as a threat to national security, territorial integrity and stability, placing it in the discursive framework of terrorism, separatism and extremism. Making it a national security issue that threatens the territorial integrity and stability of the state as vital national interests, China justifies the numerous security activities and measures it implements in Xinjiang (Kam and Clarke 2021; Zenz and Leibold, 2019; The State Council Information Office 2019a, Smith Finley 2019; Zenz 2018).

The Uyghur movement for national self-determination and independence has evolved over time, with some factions becoming more militant and using terrorist methods. These groups have formed various organizations and have even made connections with other extremist and terrorist organizations in the wider region – Central Asia and the Middle East (Potter 2013). As Clarke (2018) commented, the evolution of the Uyghur separatist movement suggests it has taken on a transnational dimension (19-28). Since 2002, Chinese authorities have accused Uyghur terrorist organizations of being responsible for ethnic riots and terrorist acts in Xinjiang and allege they have received support from other terrorist organizations in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria (Duchâtel 2016, 2-5) . The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) have been identified as the main culprits of numerous terrorist acts, with the goal of establishing an independent Islamic state in Xinjiang (Potter 2013, 73).

The paper will examine the development of ethnic tensions and violence in the relationship between the Chinese authorities and certain factions of the Uyghur movement for national self-determination that have resorted to violent and terrorist tactics. It aims to illustrate how the strategies and tactics of Uyghur nationalists in Xinjiang have evolved over time and the resulting consequences. Additionally, it will offer an overview of the internal challenges and security threats in Xinjiang, with a focus on significant violent incidents that have taken place in the region.

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the main challenges to the national security of the People's Republic of China, specifically on ethnic tensions. The second part deals with the Uyghur movement for national self-determination, analysing its most important militant organizations and the significant violent and terrorist incidents that have occurred over time. This analysis allows for an identification of changes in the movement's evolution.

THE STRUCTURE OF MAIN INTERNAL CHALLENGES TO CHINA'S NATIONAL SECURITY

As with other countries, the People's Republic of China faces numerous challenges to its national security, both of internal and external nature (On external challenges see Pejić 2022; Tanasković 2019). When we talk about internal challenges to China's national security, we can speak of challenges, risks and threats common to most countries in the world, but we can also detect those that are specific to China and related to its local political, economic, security and other social characteristics.

The People's Republic of China faces various internal challenges to its national security, which can be broadly categorized into the following groups. The political challenges include issues related to political stability, legitimacy of the Communist Party of China, corruption and factionalism within the Party (Shukla 2021), as well as many others that are related to the political issues. The second group of challenges would refer to economic aspects, that is, the overall stability of the country, reflected in the possible creation of greater social inequalities and the potential threat of broader social cohesion. The emergence of social tensions and sporadic protests in China is attributed to the growing economic disparities in Chinese society (Chan 2010, 821-825). In addition to these challenges, ethnic unrest, separatism and terrorism pose significant threats to China's national security with the potential to severely impact the political and social stability in certain regions like Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia. This is particularly relevant in light of China's status as a multi-ethnic country, with fifty-six officially recognized ethnic groups residing in over half of its territory (Anand 2019, 131). Hence, the concept of "territorial security" assumes an important role in ensuring the overall national security of the state (Drinhausen and Legarda 2022, 6). Moreover, the issue of Taiwan further complicates the security landscape and poses additional challenges to the People's Republic of China. While the Chinese authorities have emphasized China's political stability, ethnic unity and social stability, as well as China's growing resilience to risks, a national security document released in 2019 recognizes that the country faces a range of diverse and complex security threats and challenges. Notably, separatist groups advocating for the independence of Taiwan, Tibet and East Turkestan (Xinjiang) are identified as the most immediate and serious threat to China's national security and social stability (The State Council Information Office 2019b).

Important challenges to the national security of the People's Republic of China are also those related to its energy security, health security (Covid-19 pandemic), cyber security, as well as threats to the environment and climate change (Drinhausen and Legarda 2022; Grünberg and Wessling, 2021).

To address the numerous challenges facing Chinese society and the state, particularly those related to the unity and prosperity of the Chinese nation, President Xi Jinping is promoting the slogan of "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." As a result, a new concept of national security in China — "comprehensive national security" — is emerging and developing. This concept expands upon the traditional understanding of national security, encompassing sixteen aspects or types of security to facilitate the further development of Chinese society (Grünberg and Wessling, 2021). It implies the need for a centralized national security system to provide a unified response to internal and external challenges. To this end, the Central Commission for National Security was formed in 2014 (Julienne 2021). Further, in 2015 the country's first counter-terrorism legislation was passed (Clarke 2018, 36).

Since the introduction of the aforementioned security concept in 2014, national security has become an absolute priority for the Chinese state and the Communist Party and is directly related to the country's development goals. In this sense, even after assuming the third mandate in 2023, Xi Jinping points out that "security is the basis of development, while stability is a prerequisite for prosperity" (China Daily, 2023).

THE UYGHUR MOVEMENT FOR NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION AS A FACTOR OF INSTABILITY IN XINJIANG

Since its establishment in 1949, the People's Republic of China has been confronted with the demands of particular Uyghur organized groups and individuals for greater autonomy, as well as aspirations for the establishment of an independent Uyghur state. Over the years, various activists, movements and organizations advocating for Uyghur national self-determination have opposed the central Chinese authorities through organized and spontaneous protests of varying forms, ranging from nonviolent demonstrations and civil disobedience to rebellions and uprisings that have involved direct physical violence, sabotage, assassination and other acts of terrorism. Since the founding of the People's

Republic of China, there have been several waves of peaceful protests, but also violent uprisings by individual members of the Uyghur people. These events were in many cases prompted by significant internal and external (international) structural changes and circumstances (Trailović 2012, Trailović 2011). Several such periods are significant: the founding of the People's Republic of China; the beginning of the "reform and opening policy"; the period from the 1990s onwards when there were changes in the international environment due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and ethnic conflicts in neighbouring Central Asia (Millward 2021, 279-404); and new changes in international circumstances arising after September 11, 2001, when the US launched a global war on terrorism and China joined it by designating various Uyghur organizations in and outside Xinjiang as terrorist and linked to global terrorism (Evron 2007).

The Uyghur movement for national self-determination is not monolith and unified and, depending on numerous internal and external factors, it has different specific expressions. Different Uyghur groups and organizations have differently formulated political goals, different recommendations for a possible resolution of the conflict with the Chinese authorities, as well as different methods and mean to achieve the proclaimed goals, which in some cases also involve the use of force. The approaches of the Uyghur ethnic minority can be grouped into three categories: one that sees the solution of the Uyghur issue in integration with the Han cultural and civilizational pattern through the acceptance of the state policy of co-optation; the second advocates the achievement of essential political, economic and cultural autonomy within the Chinese state as a way of preserving the uniqueness of the Uyghur ethnic identity, language and culture, which is significantly different from the majority Han; and the third, which starts from the assumption that the Uyghur ethnic identity, language, culture and religion and their uniqueness can only be preserved within the framework of an independent national state, that is, by secession from the People's Republic of China (Tanner and Bellacqua 2016, 13; Fuller and Starr 2003, 22-26).

According to the methods for achieving the proclaimed political goals, the Uyghur movement for independence, conditionally speaking, is divided into two larger groups. One group consists of those Uyghur organizations, dominant in the Diaspora, which mainly advocate for non-violent means of achieving essential autonomy or independence (World Uyghur Congress, Uyghur -American Association, East Turkistan Government-in-Exile, East Turkistan National Awakening Movement)

(Trailovic 2019a, 42-44) and the other group consists of various armed, militant and terrorist organisations, often with religious overtones, which operate in China, primarily in the area of Xinjiang and in the surrounding countries (Castets 2003, 11).

The Most Prominent Organizations of Uyghur Extremist Currents

The first such organization after the founding of the People's Republic of China, which was hierarchically structured and well organized with the aim of recruiting and mobilizing members, primarily Uyghurs, was the People's Party of East Turkistan, founded in 1968. The party used guerrilla tactics such as sabotage and clashes with the police and the Chinese military and was involved in several attempts to organize insurgencies during the 1960s and 1970s (Castets 2023, 7-9). The 1960s, 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s were a time of significant ethnic unrest in Xinjiang, largely driven by ethnic tensions. In 1962, tensions boiled over into violence (Mullenbach 2013).

The 1990s saw a significant rise in unrest and separatist sentiment among Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. Several factors contributed to this trend, including economic disparities, cultural and religious differences and perceived discrimination by the Han Chinese majority. Xinjiang saw a surge in Uyghur nationalism and separatism following the independence of Central Asian republics from the Soviet Union. Militant Uyghur groups used porous borders with neighbouring countries to set up training camps and transfer weapons into Chinese territory. Economic reforms and increased communication between Uyghurs and Muslims in Central Asia and the Uyghur diaspora strengthened the Uyghur cause and linked it to the wider Islamic movement in the region. These factors, helped to fuel the rise of Uyghur separatist and terrorist organizations. The emergence of these groups, such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), marked a turning point in the Uyghur struggle for independence and self-determination in Xinjiang (Trailović 2019b, 210-214).

As previously mentioned, during the 1990s, there was a surge in violent and terrorist activities in Xinjiang, leading to the emergence of several militant and terrorist Uyghur groups and organizations. The Chinese government labelled them as separatist, extremist and terrorist and many of these groups were eventually disbanded or eliminated through

Chinese military operations. These organizations, collectively referred to as the "East Turkestan forces" by Chinese authorities, were responsible for numerous rebellions and armed attacks in Xinjiang with the aim of achieving separatist goals like secession of Xinjiang from China and the declaration of independence (The State Council Information Office 2019a). Chinese state authorities have reported that between 1990 and 2008, around 200 violent incidents with fatal consequences occurred in Xinjiang (Evron 2007, 77).

During one of the biggest uprisings in Xinjiang, in the city of Baren in 1990, the pan-Turkic nationalist group, the Islamic Party of East Turkestan, which had emerged in the southern part of Xinjiang in the 1980s, gained attention. Also, one of the most well-known Uyghur organizations was the East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO), which was founded in Istanbul in 1996. China designated this organization as a terrorist group in 2002, holding it responsible for numerous acts of violence in Xinjiang. According to Chinese authorities, the group operated and trained in Chechnya and other locations (Gunaratna, Acharya, & Pengxin, 2010, pp. 79-80).

In 2001, the global community became aware of the Uyghur extremists when US forces engaged in combat with Uyghur fighters who had aligned themselves with the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan in support of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). As a result of this conflict, the US detained twenty-two Uyghurs during a mission in Afghanistan and transferred them to Guantanamo (Rodríguez 2013, 141-142).

The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is a separatist group that aims to establish an independent state for Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The group has been designated as a terrorist organization by several countries, including the United States, China and Russia. In 2020 the US removed it from its terror list stating there's "no credible evidence" that it still exists (Kine 2021).

The history of the ETIM dates back to the 1990s when Uyghur separatist groups in Xinjiang began to coalesce under the banner of Islam. The group was founded by Hasan Mahsum, a Uyghur who fought in Afghanistan against Soviet forces during the 1980s. Mahsum was killed by Pakistani authorities in 2003, but the group continued to operate under the name ETIM. The ETIM has been involved in a number of violent attacks in Xinjiang and other parts of China, including bombings, assassinations and riots. The group has also been linked to several high-profile terrorist

incidents outside of China (Xu, Fletcher and Bajoria 2014; Rodríguez 2013, 141-142). The ETIM has also been involved in propaganda efforts aimed at promoting its separatist agenda and recruiting new members. The Chinese government has accused the ETIM of being responsible for a number of violent incidents in Xinjiang, China has also claimed the group is linked to Al-Qaeda and other international terrorist organizations (Primiano 2013, 461).

The Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), a Uyghur-led militant group, succeeded the East Turkestan Islamic Movement between 2006 and 2008 (Rodríguez 2013, 143-144). TIP has carried out several attacks in Xinjiang and surrounding areas, including a suicide car bombing in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 2013, mass stabbing attacks at train stations in Kunming and Guangzhou in 2014 and double suicide bombings at a train station in Urumqi in April 2014 (Zenn 2014). The organization has effectively utilized the media and the internet to increase its public visibility, especially by advocating for a holy war against the People's Republic of China. In addition, the group has released propaganda videos showing Uyghurs fighting in Syria and clashing with the Chinese military in Xinjiang (Roberts 2020, 116-127). TIP declared its primary objective in 2016 as establishing an Islamic caliphate. This group has shifted the centre of Uyghur terrorist activities from the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to Syria, having confirmed its involvement in the Syrian conflict in 2012.

Ethnic Violence and Terrorism as Strategies of Uyghur Extremist Currents: The Key Violent and Terrorist Incidents

The Uyghur movement for national self-determination traces its roots back to the early 20th century when Uyghur intellectuals and activists began demanding greater autonomy and self-government (Wang and Fletcher, 2018; Wang 1998, 2). The emergence of modern Uyghur nationalism took place gradually and according to Uyghur nationalists, the beginning of this process dates back even to the middle of the 19th century, when a large number of Muslim uprisings against the Qing dynasty took place in parts of present-day Xinjiang. However, it gained significant momentum after the Bolshevik Revolution, largely due to the influence of the Uyghur population that migrated to Russia or territories under its control as early as the 1880s (Roberts 2020, 29-33).

During the period from 1912 to 1949, the Xinjiang region was controlled by various "warlords", primarily due to political changes in

China, including the fall of the Qing dynasty and the establishment of the Republic. The region suffered political influences from the Soviet Union, while at the same time Uyghur nationalism grew. This resulted in conflicts between the Muslim population, primarily the Uyghurs and the Chinese authorities, which led to the formation of two Uyghur republics of East Turkestan, the first of which lasted from 1933-1934 and another, which lasted from 1944 to 1949 (Millward 2021, 175-230; Tredaniel and Lee 2018, 181; Wang 1998, 2-3;). After that, Xinjiang was placed under the control of the newly formed People's Republic of China and its Communist Party.

In the following decades, particularly from the 1960s onwards, Uyghur nationalism gained new momentum and nationalists organized protests and demonstrations calling for greater rights and autonomy. The first significant incident took place in 1954 in the city of Khotan, when an Uyghur rebellion occurred in response to the Chinese government's policy of restricting and suppressing religious practices in the region. A second incident took place in 1962 with a conflict in Ili that led to the exodus of the Muslim population from Xinjiang to the Soviet Union (Millward 2021, 257-260; Wang 1998, 4-5). The conflict arose when the Soviet Union allowed Muslims from Xinjiang to enter its borders, while the Chinese authorities attempted to obstruct this movement (Roberts 2020, 47). The dispute involving the Soviet Union occurred on the western boundaries of China as well (Mitrović 2010, 80). Another conflict between the central Chinese authorities and Uyghur nationalists occurred in 1969. It was an attempted uprising by members of the East Turkestan People's Revolutionary Party (Mullenbach 2013).

During the 1990s, Uyghur nationalism became more militant in its expression and conflict continued to intensify, with some Uyghur nationalists resorting to terrorist tactics. The first incident that marked the beginning of a period of instability in the Xinjiang region was the uprising in the town of Baren in 1990 (Roberts 2020, 53). Following the conflict in Baren, during which approximately fifty Uyghur people and six policemen were killed, the uprising spread to other cities and led to the deaths of over a hundred people (Mullenbach 2013). This uprising is considered a significant event in the history of ethnic relations and a turning point in the history of ethnic tensions in Xinjiang (Rodríguez-Merino 2019, 32). It was one of the larger uprisings of Uyghur Muslims against the Chinese government's policies in the region and paved the way for later protests and rebellions in these areas. The Baren uprising

suggests a coordinated scheme involving Uyghurs who had received military and religious training in Afghanistan and smuggled weapons across the border (Rodríguez 2013, 137). During 1992 and 1993, there were also bombing attacks in Xinjiang. The Shock Brigade of the Islamic Reformist Party was responsible for a bus attack in Urumqi in February 1992, while the East Turkistan Democratic Islamic Party carried out bomb attacks in southern Xinjiang that killed four people in 1993 (Castets 2003, 11). In 1995, there were major riots in the area of the city of Yining and in the same year riots also broke out in Khotan. There were also new incidents in 1996 in the Aksu area (Wayne 2008, 82).

In the period from 1996 to 1997, there were a large number of incidents with outbreaks of ethnic violence and Uyghur rebellions. One of the largest protests in Xinjiang took place in 1997 in the city of Yining (Ghulja), when a demonstration that began peacefully and then turned into violent riots left several people dead and around two hundred wounded (Mullenbach 2013. The main reasons for the demonstrations were Xinjiang authorities were implementing a rigorous policy of restricting the religious activities of the Muslim population and their traditional religious gatherings (Shamseden 2021). In the same year, three bombs exploded in public transport in Urumqi, which caused deaths and injuries (Roberts 2020, 56; Primiano 2013, 460). Between February and April of 1998, a string of bombings occurred in Kargilik County with the aim of targeting economic entities and public security officials at the local level (Clarke 2018, 24).

There were minor incidents in the next years. But according to Chinese authorities, a new wave of terrorist acts and violence began in 2008. One of the largest incidents in Xinjiang happened in its capital city, Urumqi, in 2009. During this outbreak of ethnic violence, nearly 200 people were killed and almost 2,000 were injured. The tension and unrest initially started after a clash between Uyghur migrant workers and Han Chinese workers at a toy factory in Guangdong province (South China), where two Uyghurs were killed (Tobin 2020b, 305; Zambelis 2010, 16). Uyghurs held peaceful protests in Urumqi in response to this incident. However, the demonstration turned violent, resulting in clashes between Uyghurs and Han Chinese, attacks on Han Chinese civilians and widespread rioting after the police tried to disperse the crowd. The violence quickly escalated, with mobs of Uyghurs attacking Han Chinese people, shops and vehicles. On July 6-7, Han individuals attacked Uyghurs. Armed with various weapons, including spiked clubs,

pipes, machetes and cleavers, these Han individuals roamed the streets and targeted Uyghur neighbourhoods (Millward 2021, 373). The Chinese government respond with force and deployed thousands of troops to the region to quell the unrest. According to some authors, the widespread violence involved ordinary citizens attacking each other, as opposed to previous incidents such as those in Baren and Ghulja during the 1990s when attacks were mainly directed towards police stations and security institutions (Tobin 2020b, 309).

From 2010 to 2016, a series of violent incidents occurred in Xinjiang including the 2010 bombing in Aksu which killed at least seven individuals, the 2011 clashes in Hotan and Kashgar resulting in the deaths of 17 individuals, the Uyghur separatist attack in Kashgar from July 30 to August 1, 2011 resulting in the deaths of 15 individuals, the 2011 clash in Pishan resulting in the deaths of seven Uyghurs and one government policeman and the February 28, 2012 riots in Kashgar which resulted in the deaths of 20 individuals (Mullenbach 2013). The attacks in Kashgar on July 2011, marked a significant shift in the nature of violence in Xinjiang. According to Potter (2013), these complex and coordinated attacks included a car bombing, a truck hijacking and stabbings on the first day, followed by an attack on an area popular with Han Chinese involving multiple explosions, shootings and stabbings the next day. The attackers' degree of operational sophistication suggested cooperation and a video released a month later by TIP showed one of the attackers receiving training in a Pakistani camp (75). The change was predicted in 2008, as evidenced by the Kashgar attack. This attack showcased a new way of operating, involving driving a truck into a border patrol police division during a soldiers' exercise, followed by a knife-hacking rampage and throwing rudimentary explosives. According to Rodríguez (2013), this suggests a higher level of organization (143). As noted by Potter and Wang (2021), there are indications that the Uyghur militants are improving their tactics and becoming more sophisticated over time, especially in terms of adopting coordinated attacks and suicide bombings similar to those used by al-Qaeda (5).

During this period, attacks became more frequent and widespread, with major incidents occurring in Beijing and other eastern cities (Kunming and Guangzhou). Notably, these attacks targeted busy city centres, resulting in increased civilian targeting and the random killing of civilians, which marks a significant departure from previous incidents that were mainly concentrated in Xinjiang and primarily targeted state

institutions and law enforcement agencies (Tanner and Bellacqua 2016, 4; Potter and Wang 2021, 4-5). The transfer of terrorist acts from Xinjiang to other parts of China has been a significant aspect in the evolution of the Uyghur nationalist movement. Starting with the explosion of a bomb in Beijing in 1997, which was claimed by the East Turkistan Freedom Organization (Castets 2003, 11).

In October, 2013 a terrorist attack occurred in Tiananmen Square where a car driven by two Uyghurs intentionally drove into a crowd, resulting in five fatalities and around forty injuries (Radio Free Asia 2013). The same year a violent incident occurred in the town of Lukqun in the north Xinjiang, where a group of Uyghurs attacked a police station, local government buildings and a construction site with machetes. 17 people were reportedly killed by the attackers and all 10 of them were killed by security forces (Roberts 2020, 166). In 2013, a situation similar to that of 2009 occurred, which went against the commonly observed pattern of conflicts in Xinjiang being primarily between Uyghur extremists and security forces. Specifically, there were two incidents in Korla and Karghilik, respectively, where Uyghur and Han citizens reportedly engaged in violent clashes (Roberts 2020, 165). Subsequently, on March 1, 2014, the Kunming (southern province of Yunnan) stabbing incident, took place, in which a group of eight knife-wielding attackers, allegedly belonging to a separatist group from Xinjiang, launched an assault on passengers at the railway station, resulting in 33 deaths and over 140 injuries (Smith Finley 2019, 2). The incident is considered one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in China. According to Roberts (2020), the attack deliberately targeted defenceless civilians and demonstrated signs of preplanning, suggesting political motives. This is supported by the alleged discovery of Eastern Turkistan flags at the site of the incident (170).

On October 12, 2014, a predominantly Han Chinese agricultural trading centre in Maralbexi (Bachu) district in Kashgar Prefecture was attacked by four Uyghur men armed with knives and explosives, resulting in the deaths of 22 people. The attackers targeted Han Chinese stall owners with explosives and stabbed several police officers (Radio Free Asia 2014). A year before that, another incident happened in this same district. According to the Chinese authorities and state media, three Chinese community workers visited an Uyghur house and found individuals watching terrorist videos and possessing knives. The workers reported the situation to the police, but were attacked by individuals in the house. Police officers sent to investigate were ambushed and killed and

the attackers then attempted to assault a local police station (Rodríguez-Merino 2013, 9). In 2014, two major terrorist attacks happened in Urumqi: a suicide bombing in the South railway station, which killed three and a suicide attack at a market, which killed 31 and injured 90 (Smith Finley 2019, 2; Roberts 2020, 166)

As documented by Rodríguez-Merino (2013), there were 28, 34 and 18 reported violent episodes in the region in 2013, 2014 and 2015, respectively (9).

Chart 1. Number of violent and terrorist acts in Xinjiang from 1990-2020
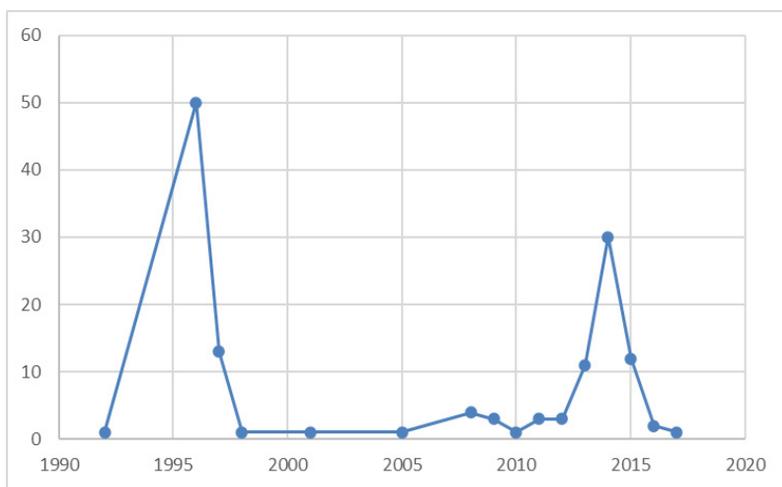
Data source: (START 2022)

On September 18th, 2015, an attack involving knives in Aqsu (XUAR) resulted in the loss of 50 lives and caused injury to an additional 50 individuals (Hasmath 2018, 1). In July 2015, the police in Shenyang, the capital of China's north-eastern province of Liaoning, killed three Uyghur men who were claimed to be members of a terrorist group called "Hijrah Jihad." Later in November 2015, China's state media reported a terrorist attack in a coal mine in Baicheng county, located in the Xinjiang region, which was believed to have resulted in 16 deaths (The State Council Information Office 2019a, Tredaniel and Lee 2018, 177). According to other sources, around 50 people died in this incident (Clarke 2018, 26).

From 2016 until today, almost no new cases of terrorism have been recorded in Xinjiang. According to Chinese officials, Xinjiang

has not experienced a terrorist attack since December 2016. China has implemented measures to prevent terrorist activities in Xinjiang, including increased surveillance and security, establishment of "re-education" camps, suppression of religious and cultural practices and promotion of economic development. The Chinese government claims that its measures have been effective in preventing terrorist attacks and unrest in Xinjiang and reduced violence in the region since the implementation of these measures (Maizland 2022; Mai 2021).

CONCLUSION

Uyghur issue poses a significant challenge to Chinese national security, with complex and multifaceted implications for domestic stability, regional security, ethnic relations and international reputation. The situation has also been complicated by allegations of terrorism and separatism in the region, which the Chinese government has used to justify its crackdown. The issue has attracted international attention and criticism, with many countries and human rights organizations calling for greater transparency and an end to the alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang. On the other hand, Chinese government maintains its actions are necessary to combat extremism and terrorism. (Trailovic 2021).

The Uyghur movement for national self-determination is a diverse and multifaceted group, consisting of different organizations with varying political goals, conflict resolution strategies and methods to achieve their objectives. The movement can be broadly categorized into three approaches, including integration with Han culture, autonomy within China or secession from China for an independent national state. Additionally, the movement can be grouped into two larger categories based on their methods, including non-violent means advocated by diaspora organizations and armed, militant and terrorist organizations primarily operating in Xinjiang and surrounding countries.

The Uyghur separatist and extremist movement have evolved over the years in response to changing political, economic and social conditions in Xinjiang and beyond. Uyghur nationalism gained new momentum from the 1960s onwards. Protests and demonstrations were calling for greater rights, autonomy and independence and conflicts between the Chinese authorities and Uyghur nationalists occurred, such as the 1954 Khotan rebellion and the 1962 Ili conflict. In the 1990s and 2000s, the Uyghur separatist movement became increasingly violent, with a number

of bombings, assassinations and other attacks carried out by Uyghur militants. Some of these attacks targeted Chinese government officials, while others were aimed at Han Chinese civilians. Not only were Han Chinese officials and communities targeted in these attacks, but also Uyghurs who were suspected of collaborating with Chinese authorities. In the 2000s and 2010s, some Uyghur militants began aligning themselves with global jihadist movements, including Al-Qaeda and later the Islamic State. This led to an increase in attacks inspired by these groups, as well as concerns about the potential for Uyghur militants to travel to other parts of the world to carry out attacks.

The Uyghur extremist activity emerged in two major waves: the first occurred after the fall of the USSR, peaking in 1997 with 50 deaths and 98 injuries, while the second began before the 2008 Beijing Olympics and culminated in 2014 with 164 deaths and 426 injuries in 28 incidents (Potter and Wang 2021, 4-5).

As discussed earlier, the Uyghur nationalist movement has evolved over time, with an increase in attacks targeting civilians and a shift towards more coordinated and sophisticated tactics. Changes in the development of the Uyghur movement for national self-determination and its extremist currents implied the diffusion of tactics and capabilities that have the potential to substantially increase the sophistication and lethality of terrorism in China (Potter 2013, 71). The transfer of these attacks from Xinjiang to other parts of China is a significant aspect of this evolution. The involvement of Uyghurs who have received military and religious training abroad suggests a coordinated scheme. There was a significant variance in the pattern of aggression, with attackers demonstrating a higher level of organization.

The conflicts in Xinjiang have also shifted from primarily being between Uyghur extremists and security forces to attacks targeting civilians. A noteworthy aspect of the conflict is that it involved direct violent clashes between Uyghur and Han citizens. As Chinese security officials and experts observed there was a shift in the nature of terrorist attacks in China. They note four trends: expanding geographic reach, maximizing casualties, increasing frequency and increasing sophistication (Tanner and Bellacqua 2016, 32).

REFERENCES

Anand, Dibyesh. 2019. "Colonization with Chinese characteristics: Politics of (in)security in Xinjiang and Tibet." *Central Asian Survey*, 38(1):129-147. doi:10.1080/02634937.2018.1534801.

Bovingdon, Gardner. 2011. *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Castets, Rémi. 2003. "The Uyghurs in Xinjiang – The Malaise Grows." *China Perspectives*, 49:1-22. doi: 10.4000/chinaperspectives.648.

Chan, Kin-Man. 2010. "Harmonious Society." In *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society*. eds. Anheier H.K. and Toepler S. New York: Springer.

China Daily. 2023. "Xi stresses better coordinating development, security, March 13, 2023. https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202303/13/WS640e817da31057c47ebb40ee.html.

Clarke, Michael. 2018. "China's 'War on Terrorism' Confronting the Dilemmas of the 'Internal–External' Security Nexus." In *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in China Domestic and Foreign Policy Dimensions*, ed. Michael Clarke. New York: Oxford University Press.

Dillon, Michael. 2004. *Xinjiang – China`s Muslim far North West*. London: Routledge.

Drinhausen, Katja and Helena Legarda. 2022. Confident Paranoia: Xi's "Comprehensive National Security" Framework Shapes China's Behavior At Home and Abroad, *MERICS China Monitor*. https://www.merics.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/Merics%20China%20Monitor%2075%20National%20Security_final.pdf.

Duchâtel, Mathieu. 2016. "Terror Overseas: Understanding China's Evolving Counter-Terror Strategy". Policy Brief. ECFR/193. https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/ECFR_193_-_TERROR_OVERSEAS_UNDERSTANDING_CHINAS_EVOLVING_COUNTER_TERROR_STRATEGY.pdf.

Evron, Yoram. 2007. "China's Anti-Terrorism Policy." *Strategic Assessment*, 10(3). https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/fe-3900055296.pdf.

Fuller, Graham E. and S Frederick Starr. 2003. *The Xinjiang Problem*. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/30301/01_Xinjiang_Problem.pdf.

Grünberg, Nis and Claudia Wessling. 2021. "The CCP's Next Century Expanding Economic Control, Digital Governance and National Security". *MERICS Papers China*. No 10.

https://merics.org/en/report/ccps-next-century-expanding-economic-control-digital-governance-and-national-security.

Gunaratna, Rohan, Arabinda Acharya and Wang Pengxin. 2010. *Ethnic Identity and National Conflict in China*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hasmath, Reza. 2018. "What explains the rise of majority–minority tensions and conflict in Xinjiang?" *Central Asian Survey*. doi: 10.1080/02634937.2018.1496067.

Julienne, Marc. 2021. "Xi Jinping's Conquest of China's National Security Apparatus." Italian Institute for International Political Studies. Jun 29, 2021. https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/xi-jinpings-conquest-chinas-national-security-apparatus-31007.

Kam, Stefanie and Michael Clarke. 2021. "Securitization, surveillance and 'de-extremization' in Xinjiang." *International Affairs,* 97(3): 625–642; doi: 10.1093/ia/iiab038.

Kine, Phelim. 2021. "How China hijacked the war on terror." *Politico*. September 9, 2021. https://www.politico.com/news/2021/09/09/china-hijacked-war-on-terror-511032.

Mai, Jun. 2021. "China says tough measures in Xinjiang are to beat terrorism – why isn't the West convinced?." *South China Morning Post*. April 4, 2021.

https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3128277/china-says-tough-measures-xinjiang-are-beat-terrorism-why-isnt.

Maizland, Lindsay. 2022. "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang." *CFR*. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights.

Millward, James. 2004. *Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment*. Washington DC: East-West Center.

Millward. James A. 2021. *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*. 2021. London: Hurst&Co.Ltd.

Mitrović, Dragana. 2010. "PR China's Border Issues within the Framework of Modernization and Opening up." In *Japan and Serbia: Regional Cooperation and Border Issues: A Comparative Analysis*, eds. Duško Dimitrijević and Ivona Lađevac. Belgrade: Institute of International Politics and Economics.

Mullenbach, Mark J. 2013. "Dynamic Analysis of Dispute Management (DADM) Project." Department of Political Science, University of Central Arkansas (Conway, AR). https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/asiapacific-region/chinauighurs-1949-present//.

Pejić, Igor. 2022. "The Development of the Modern Chinese Concept of Conventional Deterrence. *Vojno delo*, 4:II/15-27. doi: 10.5937/vojdelo2203015P

Potter, Philip B. K. and Chen Wang. 2021. "Governmental Responses to Terrorism in Autocracies: Evidence from China." *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(1): 1-23. doi:10.1017/S0007123420000514.

Potter, Phillip B. K. 2013. "Terrorism in China: Growing Threats with Global Implications." *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 7(4): 70-92. doi: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26270778.

Primiano, Christopher. 2013. "China under stress: The Xinjiang question." *International Politics*, 50(3):455–473. https://doi.org/10.1057/ip.2013.7.

Radio Free Asia. 2013. "Beijing Says Deadly Car Crash in Tiananmen Square a Terror Attack." October 30, 2013. https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/explosion-10302013214659.html

Radio Free Asia. 2014. "22 Killed in Farmers' Market Attack in Xinjiang's Kashgar Prefecture." October 18, 2014. https://www.refworld.org/docid/544662fb4.html.

Roberts, Sean R. 2020. *The war on the Uyghurs China's Internal Campaign against a Muslim Minority*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Rodríguez, Pablo Adriano. "Violence resistance in Xinjiang (China): tracking militancy, ethnic riots and "knife-wielding" terrorist (1978-2012)." Historia Actual Online (2013): 135-149.

Rodríguez-Merino, Pablo A. 2019. "Old 'counter-revolution', new 'terrorism': historicizing the framing of violence in Xinjiang by the Chinese state." *Central Asian Survey*. 38 (1): 27-45*, * doi: 10.1080/02634937.2018.1496066.

Shamseden, Zubayra. 2021. "The Ghulja Massacre of 1997 and the Face of Uyghur Genocide Today." *The Diplomat*. February 05, 2021. https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/the-ghulja-massacre-of-1997-and-the-face-of-uyghur-genocide-today/.

Shukla, Srijan. 2021. "The Rise of the Xi Gang: Factional politics in the Chinese Communist Party." Occasional Paper, Issue No. 300. Observer Research Foundation. Last access February 18, 2023.

https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ORF_OccasionalPaper_300_XiGang.pdf.

Smith Finley, Joanne. 2019. "Securitization, insecurity and conflict in contemporary Xinjiang: has PRC counter-terrorism evolved into state terror?" *Central Asian Survey*, 38(1): 1-26. doi: 10.1080/02634937.2019.1586348.

Starr, S. Frederick (ed.) 2004. *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*. New York: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute.

START (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism). 2022. Global Terrorism Database 1970 - 2020. Available at: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd.

Stefanović-Štambuk, Jelica and Slobodan S. Popović. 2022. "A Thousand Miles" and "A Thousand Tasks": China's Diplomatization of Multifaceted Russia-Ukraine Conflict and Global Security." *Politika nacionalne bezbednosti,* 23 (2): 7-31. doi:10.22182/pnb.2322022.

Tanasković, Darko. 2019. "Projekat obnove „Puta svile" kao diplomatski izazov" [The Silk Road Restoration Project as a Diplomatic Challenge]. *Diplomatija i bezbednost*, 2(2):9-19.

The State Council Information Office. 2019a. "The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang". *The State Council Information Office*. Last Accessed March 18, 2023. http://geneva.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/ztjs/aghj12wnew/Whitepaper/202110/t20211014_9587980.htm.

The State Council Information Office. 2019b. "China's National Defense in the New Era." *The State Council Information Office*, Last Access February 23, 2023. https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.

Tobin, David. 2020a. *Securing China's Northwest Frontier Identity and Insecurity in Xinjiang.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tobin, David, 2020b. "A "Struggle of Life or Death": Han and Uyghur Insecurities on China's North-West Frontier." *The China Quarterly*, 242: 301–323, doi:10.1017/S030574101900078X.

Trailović, Dragan. 2011. "Etnički separatizam u severozapadnoj Kini: izazovi ujgurskog nacionalizma i separatizma Narodnoj Republici." [Ethnic Separatism in Northwest China: Challenges of Uyghur Nationalism and Separatism to People's Republic]. Master Thesis. University of Belgrade: Faculty of Political Sciences.

Trailović, Dragan. 2012. "Socijalni rascepi i zahtevi za secesijom u NR Kini: Slučaj Sinđanga." [Social Cleavages and Demands for Secession in the People's Republic of China - A Case of Xinjiang]. *Politička revija,* 34(4): 267-290. doi: 10.22182/pr.3442012.15

Trailović, Dragan. 2014. "Proces izgradnje nacionalne države u Kini i formiranje ujgurskog nacionalnog identiteta." [The process of nation-state building in China and the formation of Uyghur national identity]. In (Dez)integracija država i identitet: (dez)integracija država i nacionalni identitet na početku 21. veka [(Dis)integration of states and identity: (dis)integration of states and national identity at the beginning of the 21st century], eds. Zoran Milošević and Živojin Đurić. 471-494. Beograd: Institut za političke studije.

Trailović, Dragan. 2019a. "Diaspora Political Mobilization – The Cases of Albanian and Uyghur Diaspora Transnational Activism." *The Review of International Affairs*, LXX (1174): 36–51.

Trailović, Dragan. 2019b. "Uticaji međunarodnih činilaca na etničke sukobe u Narodnoj Republici Kini" [The Influences of International Factors on Ethnic Conflicts in The People's Republic of China]. Phd Diss. University of Belgrade: Faculty of Political Sciences. https://nardus.mpn.gov.rs/handle/123456789/11789

Trailovic, Dragan. 2021. "Politika ljudskih prava Evropske unije i kineski suverenizam: slučaj Sinđanga" [The European Union's Policy on Human Rights and Chinese Sovereignism: The Case of Xinjiang]. *Međunaroni problem,* LXXIII (1): 58-86. doi:10.2298/ MEDJP2101058T

Tredaniel, Marie and Pak, K. Lee. 2018. "Explaining the Chinese framing of the "terrorist" violence in Xinjiang: insights from securitization theory." *Nationalities Papers*, 46(17): 177-195. doi:10.1080/0090 5992.2017.1351427 .

Wang, David. D. 1998. "East Turkestan movement in Xinjing." *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 4(1): 1–18. doi: 10.1007/BF02876846.

Wang, Ke and, Carissa Fletcher. 2018. *The East Turkestan Independence Movement, 1930s to 1940s.* Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press.

Wayne, Martin I., 2008. *China's War on Terrorism Counter-insurgency, politics and internal security.* London, New York: Routledge, London.

World Uyghur Congress [WUC]. 2021. "2020 Human Rights Situation in East Turkestan, Annual Report." *World Uyghur Congress.* Last

Access March 15, 2023. https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Report-DesignWUC-19052021.pdf.

Xu, Beina, Holly Fletcher and Jayshree Bajoria. 2014. "The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM)." *CFR Backgrounder*, September 4, 2014. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/east-turkestan-islamic-movement-etim.

Zambelis, Chris. 2010. "Uighur Dissent and Militancy in China's Xinjiang Province." *CTC Sentinel*, 3(1). https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Pages-from-CTCSentinel-Vol3Iss1-art5.pdf.

Zenn, Jacob. 2014. "An Overview of Chinese Fighters and Anti-Chinese Militant Groups in Syria and Iraq." *China Brief*, 14(19): 7-10 https://jamestown.org/program/an-overview-of-chinese-fighters-and-anti-chinese-militant-groups-in-syria-and-iraq/#.VX3kqEZGR9g.

Zenz, Adrian and James Leibold. 2020. "Securitizing Xinjiang: Police Recruitment, Informal Policing and Ethnic Minority Co-optation." *The China Quarterly*, 242: 324–348, doi:10.1017/S0305741019000778.

Zenz, Adrian. 2018. "'Thoroughly reforming them towards a healthy heart attitude': China's political re-education campaign in Xinjiang", *Central Asian Survey*. doi:10.1080/02634937.2018.1507997.

Zhang, Shaoying, and McGhee Derek. 2014. *Social Policies and Ethnic Conflict in China: Lessons from Xinjiang*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Драган Траиловић

Институт за политичке студије, Београд

ЕТНИЧКО НАСИЉЕ И ТЕРОРИЗАМ КАО УНУТРАШЊИ ИЗАЗОВИ НАЦИОНАЛНОЈ БЕЗБЕДНОСТИ КИНЕ: СТУДИЈА СЛУЧАЈА СИНЂАНГА

Сажетак

Национална безбедност Народне Републике Кине подложна је низу сложених унутрашњих изазова, ризика и претњи. То укључује изазове који могу бити политичке природе, ризике изазване економским и социјалним разликама, претње изазване тензијама у етничким односима, као и многе друге. Овај рад се фокусира на етничке тензије, односно етничко насиље и тероризам, као најбитније чиниоце који представљају значајну претњу стабилности и безбедности земље.

Рад се бави развојем етничких тензија и сукоба који су резултат интеракције између кинеских власти и фракција унутар ујгурског покрета за национално самоопредељење. Наглашавају се активности екстремистичке струје унутар ширег ујгурског етнонационалног покрета, која се користи насиљем и терористичким актима у свом политичком деловању.

Овај рад има за циљ да прати еволуцију и промене стратегија и тактика које су користили ујгурски националисти у Синђангу током времена и представи најкарактеристичније насилне и терористичке инциденте који су се десили у Синђангу као пример ових промена. Ове промене се огледају у повећаном обиму насиља, померању циљева терористичких и насилних аката са првенствено кинеских безбедносних снага на цивиле, укључујући насилне сукобе између грађана Ујгура и Хана, и ширење географског обухвата напада.

Кључне речи: национална безбедност, Народна Република Кина, АО Синђанг, Источни Туркистан, ујгурско питање, етничко насиље, тероризам