

“Politics and the Problem of Defining Terrorism  
in the People’s Republic of China”

A paper prepared for:

American Association of Chinese Studies Conference  
Oct. 11, 2014, Washington, D.C.

Panel 1B: “Social and Political Issues through the Lens of  
Literature, Marriage and Political Language.

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## Introduction

Newspaper readers were all too frequently reminded during 2014 of ongoing violence in China, often but not exclusively relating to Xinjiang, perhaps most dramatically the news of March 1, 2014 and the horrific blade murders at the train station at Kunming in Yunnan Province. Six attackers, clad in black and armed with knives, had rapidly slashed and stabbed over 100 victims, 33 fatally.<sup>1</sup>

The train station murders were followed in May by reports of an attack on an open-air market in Urumqi that killed 31 and injured 90.<sup>2</sup> The grim news continued in Xinjiang province, with news filtering out about increased levels of violence during summer months, including a July 10 incident that led to arrests and a massive incident in southern Xinjiang on July 28. About the incident Xinhua reported that it resulted in the deaths of 37 civilians and injury of 13 more, and was led by “a gang armed with knives and axes”, attacking a police station and government offices, and “attacking civilians and smashing vehicles as they passed.”<sup>3</sup> Police shot dead 59 of the attackers and arrested 215 others, confiscating banners proclaiming ‘holy war.’<sup>4</sup> The attacks, wrote Philip Potter in the May 6, 2014 edition of *The Guardian*, “appear to be getting more sophisticated, with links to Afghanistan and Pakistan”, and “with militants apparently able to strike when and where they want.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Teddy Ng, “One Female Suspect in Custody after 33 are killed in Kunming Station Massacre” South China Morning Post, March 2, 2014, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1438306/34-dead-130-injured-knife-attack-kunming-railway-station> [Accessed Sept. 2, 2014].

<sup>2</sup> “Attack at Market Kills Dozens in China’s Xinjiang,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 2014, [http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303749904579576791226602678?mod=WSJ\\_hp\\_LEFTToPStories&mg=reno64-wsj](http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303749904579576791226602678?mod=WSJ_hp_LEFTToPStories&mg=reno64-wsj) [Accessed Sept. 2, 2014].

<sup>3</sup> “China Focus: 18 Xinjiang Terrorist Rioting Suspects Surrender” English.news.cn, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-08/10/c\\_133546149.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-08/10/c_133546149.htm) [Accessed Sept. 2, 2014].

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Potter, “Terrorism in China: the global dimension,” *The Guardian*, 6 May 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/06/terrorism-china-ughur-militants-afghanistan-pakistan> [Accessed Aug. 15, 2014].

Alongside the incidents themselves, the extent and manner of news within China and without became an issue. The *South China Morning Post* reported that coverage of the Yunnan train station murders in major mainland newspapers was surprisingly light.<sup>6</sup> Even the *Los Angeles Times* included an item on the slight regard given the incident in China with the headline, “China silent on deadly knife attack in Kunming railway station”.<sup>7</sup> It was, however, much discussed via web and social media, with some foreign media describing the attack as violence rather than terrorism, or surrounding the word terrorism with quotation marks, and this becoming something of a story in itself. For example, the March 3, 2014 edition of *Time* reported that,

Online posters contrasted these decisions with a statement from the members of the United Nations Security Council that “condemned in the strongest terms the terrorist attack.” In a commentary, Xinhua called the American Embassy in Beijing to task for its own statement on the Kunming mass murder. “The U.S. Embassy in China has downplayed the severity of the bloody carnage in southwestern Kunming City, calling it on its official Weibo account a ‘horrible and totally meaningless act of violence,’ short of calling the murderers ‘terrorists.’” The op-ed continued: “How the U.S. government and some media described the terrorist attacks in China has revealed their persistent double standard in the global fight against terrorism. Their leniency for the terrorists is sending signals of encouragement to potential attackers.”<sup>8</sup>

These complaints are reminiscent of one not much earlier, reactions to the October 28, 2013 vehicle attack in Tienanmen Square in which two tourists and the three attackers died, also widely described by foreign media as an act of violence perpetrated by an ethnic minority within China:

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<sup>6</sup> Andrea Chen, “While world reels in shock at Kunming attack, news is notably absent from China’s front pages” *South China Morning Post*, March 2, 2014, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1438711/while-world-reels-shock-kunming-attack-news-notably-absent-chinas-front> [Accessed Aug. 1, 2014].

<sup>7</sup> Julie Makinen “China silent on deadly knife attack in Kunming railway station”, *LA Times*, April 19, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-china-stabbing-silence-20140419,0,1269379.story#ixzz2zL48wML6> [Accessed Sept. 15, 2014].

<sup>8</sup> “China Reacts to Terrorism ‘Double-Standard’ After Kunming Mass Murder” *Time*, March 3, 2014, <http://time.com/11432/china-kunming-terror-attack-ughurs/> [Accessed July 20, 2014].

Li Wei, one of China's top experts and government advisers on terrorism, said Friday that he stood by a previous statement that the Taiyuan bombing had characteristics of a terrorist attack. "I don't agree with connecting this kind of activity with ethnicity. It doesn't really matter if they are Uighur or Han or whatever ethnicity," he said, adding that social-media users might have been angrier at the Tiananmen attack because it happened in the center of Beijing and led to more deaths.

Mr. Li also argued the debate was complicated by language, saying that the word for terrorism in Chinese strongly implies ideological motivations, while in English, the term is defined primarily in terms of actions, such as violence against civilians to intimidate a government or a population. For that reason, China's central government maintains an official definition for terrorist activities but not terrorism in general, he said.<sup>9</sup>

The disagreement about appropriate nomenclature was and is not limited to journalists and students of Chinese linguistics. The U.S. Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Country Reports for 2013 describes the issue this way:

China has criticized the U.S. response to acts China characterizes as terrorism, alleging that U.S. expressions of concern over the treatment of China's ethnic minorities and deficiencies in rule of law represent a "double standard" on terrorism. China frequently refers to Uighur activists abroad – including those in the United States – as complicit in supporting "terrorist" activity, but it has not provided credible evidence to support those claims.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, something is afoot on this issue, even if the particulars are unclear. The controversy over the vocabulary of violence in China associated with Uyghur populations and Xinjiang province points to a larger and ultimately more significant issue, namely, the political challenges that the vocabulary, legal definitions, and discussions respecting terrorism pose within the People's Republic itself.

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<sup>9</sup> Josh Chin, "Chinese Attacks Ignite Terrorism Debate" *The Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 8, 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304448204579185662229308396> [Accessed Aug. 2, 2014]

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism Country Reports for 2013 <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/224821.htm> [Accessed Aug. 2, 2014]. See also, Michael Martina, "After bombing in west, China angered by U.S. criticism in terror report," Reuters, Fri, May 2 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/02/us-china-xinjiang-idUSBREA4102L20140502> [Accessed July 20, 2014].

With this paper we begin a consideration about several intriguing questions relating to public discourse about terrorism in China. The subject has received some attention by Sinologists and students of terrorism during the decade that followed 9/11, and somewhat less since 2010.<sup>11</sup> But with regular reports during 2013 and 2014 emerging from China about acts of violence that appear to be politically motivated, it is a good moment to renew our attention to these, ultimately political, questions. Specifically, to what extent, if any, has the definition of terrorism, with the associated vocabulary, presented a political challenge to the regime? Is change at all in the offing for a Chinese definition of not simply acts of terrorism, but terrorism itself? What similarities and differences are to be found between public discourse about terrorism in China and those of other nations? To what degree, if any, does discourse about terrorism in China stand over the long term to influence the Chinese understanding of the role and sphere of government?

### Background

A few short weeks after 9/11/01, the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN submitted a document to the General Assembly. Entitled "Terrorist Activities Perpetrated by 'Eastern Turkestan' Organizations and Their Links with Osama bin Laden".<sup>12</sup> That document asserted the existence of over 40 "Eastern Turkestan" organizations, charging

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<sup>11</sup> Writing in 2006, Chien-peng Chung noted the relative quiet in the region, and asked, "as of the proverbial dog that did not bark, what happened to China's supposed vulnerability to, and war on, terrorism?" See Chien-peng Chung, "Confronting Terrorism and Other Evils in China: All Quiet on the Western Front?" *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, May 2006, [http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Quarterly/May\\_2006/Chung.pdf](http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Quarterly/May_2006/Chung.pdf) [Accessed Aug. 2, 2014]. A most useful recent report is Nicholas Dynon, "The Language of Terrorism in China: Balancing Foreign and Domestic Policy Imperatives", in *China Brief: A Journal of Analysis and Information*, XIV: 1, Jan. 10, 2014, 8-12. [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=41799&no\\_cache=1#.VCjW1th0yM8](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41799&no_cache=1#.VCjW1th0yM8).

<sup>12</sup> Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN, "Terrorist Activities Perpetrated by 'Eastern Turkestan' Organizations and Their Links with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban," 29 November 2001, <http://www.china-un.org/eng/zt/fk/t28937.htm> [Accessed Aug. 15, 2014].

them with acts of violence beginning in 1990, and including murder both within China and at its embassies throughout the previous decade. Members of the East Turkestan Islamist Movement (ETIM) were accused of having met and received money and other support from Osama bin Laden. Further,

The “Uygur National Army” received battle training in July and August 1999 in the Taliban bases in Afghanistan. They practiced conventional weapons with live ammunition and learned the Taliban guerilla warfare tactics and terrorist skills such as assassination, explosion and poison-doping. After their training, the “Eastern Turkestan” elements have fought in combats in Afghanistan, Chechnya and Uzbekistan, or returned to Xinjiang for terrorist and violent activities.<sup>13</sup>

At China’s request, on Sept. 11, 2002, the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement was listed by the United Nations as an organization “as being associated with Al-Qaida, Usama bin Laden or the Taliban for ‘participating in the financing, planning, facilitating, preparing or perpetrating of acts or activities by, in conjunction with, under the name of, on behalf or in support of’ or ‘otherwise supporting acts or activities of’ Al-Qaida.”<sup>14</sup>

While explicit Chinese government statements and legislation concerning terrorism are relatively recent, the concept, from the Qing Dynasty, through the Republic and Warlord periods, and into the establishment of the People’s Republic, has long existed in one form or another. Specific terminology, however, is certainly a recent addition. China’s 1998 White Paper on National Defense included no mention of terrorism in English translation, but this changes with the 2000 edition and forward to the present. In the 2000 document’s English translation, “terror” or “terrorism” appears four times, once as a generic world problem, once as a matter of concern respecting small arms trafficking, and twice in a paragraph referencing the nation’s four partners (Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) in the “Shanghai Five”

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> “QE.E.88.02. EASTERN TURKESTAN ISLAMIC MOVEMENT” Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities, 7 April 2011, <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE08802E.shtml> [Accessed Sept. 2, 2014].

agreement of 1996, and setting forth the formulation of terrorism alongside two other political problems, “national separatism” and “religious extremism.”<sup>15</sup> (Together the trio are to this day popularly referenced as the “three evils”.) The same document of two years later, written in the wake of 9/11, gives substantially greater attention to the subject, with 48 uses of “terror” or “terrorism”, including a section devoted to “Anti-terrorism cooperation”, excerpted below.<sup>16</sup>

. . . The Chinese government has always resolutely opposed and condemned all forms of terrorism, and has actively adopted effective measures to fight against terrorist activities.

The Chinese government is of the view that the international community should strengthen dialogue and consultation and develop cooperation, join hands in preventing and fighting against international terrorist activities, and make efforts to eradicate the root cause of terrorism. The fight against terrorism requires conclusive evidence, clear targets and conformity with the purpose and principles of the UN Charter, and the universally acknowledged norms of international laws. In this regard, the leading role of the UN and its Security Council should be brought into full play, and all actions taken should be conducive to the long-term interest of preserving regional and world peace. Terrorism should not be confused with a specific nation or religion, neither should dual standards be adopted in the fight against terrorism. The international community should make common efforts to resolutely condemn and attack terrorism whenever and wherever it occurs, whoever it is directed against and in whatever form it appears. In fighting terrorism, it is necessary to address both its symptoms and root cause, and adopt comprehensive measures, especially in solving the question of development, narrowing the North-South gap, and ending regional conflicts.<sup>17</sup>

Noteworthy in this passage is the appeal for international cooperation, international law, the international community, and the insistence on universal condemnation of terrorist attacks in all forms. Complicating this package, of course, are political differences among regimes, and differences in philosophy of government, sovereignty, and individual citizen.

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<sup>15</sup> “China’s National Defense in 2000,” People’s Republic of China White Paper, Sept. 2000, [http://english.gov.cn/official/2005-07/27/content\\_17524.htm](http://english.gov.cn/official/2005-07/27/content_17524.htm) [Accessed July 20, 2014]. The “Shanghai Five” was launched with the “Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions, signed April 26, 1996, later to become the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001 with the addition of Uzbekistan.

<sup>16</sup> PRC Information Office of State Council, “China’s National Defense in 2002”, Dec. 9, 2002, <http://china.org.cn/e-white/20021209/index.htm> [Accessed Aug. 15, 20014].

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

An essential aspect of this project is a focus on Chinese etymology, aiming to determine the development and use of Chinese vocabulary. “Terrorist” 恐怖分子 [kǒngbù fēnzǐ], literally “terror” + “practitioner”, appears to be a relatively recent addition to the Chinese lexicon, beginning to receive common usage in media and government documents after the al Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. of September 2001.<sup>18</sup> Political revolutionaries in Chinese may be referred to as “revolutionary” 革命 [gè míng], or simply as “bandits” 大寇, [da kǒu]. The latter was used as a popular nickname, as it happens, for Sun Yat-sen and three student compatriots in 1905 plotting the end of the Qing Dynasty, referred to as “the Four Bandits” (四大寇). A question we hope to resolve is whether a distinction is made in traditional Chinese language between acts of violence directed against an individual or against the state, and if so, at what point in Chinese language and discussion that distinction appears.

One well-traveled observer, Professor Yitzhak Shichor, University of Haifa, commenting on Xinjiang violence in 2006 notes that “the Chinese are very vague with regard to this term and adopt wide, flexible and inclusive definitions of ‘terrorism’ not only in the media and in official statements but also in [the] December 2001 criminal code that lists ‘terrorist’ offenses and their corresponding penalties. . . .” and that violent activities in the region were treated as ordinary criminal acts until the 1990s, with the term “terrorism” receiving widespread use only after 9/11.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Dynon, “China’s ‘War on Terror’ in Xinjiang”, *The Diplomat*, July 10, 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/07/chinas-war-on-terror-in-xinjiang/> [accessed Aug. 2, 2014].

<sup>19</sup> Yitzhak Shichor, “Fact and Fiction: A Chinese Documentary on Eastern Turkestan Terrorism”, *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Volume 4, No. 2, May 2006 [http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Quarterly/May\\_2006.pdf](http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Quarterly/May_2006.pdf) [Accessed Aug. 15, 2014]. For an excellent brief account of the region, see James Millward, *Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center, 2004), <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/fileadmin/stored/pdfs/PS006.pdf>. [Accessed Aug. 15, 2014].

## Defining Terrorism

Definitions of terrorism are inherently political, reflecting a philosophic and moral understanding of government's role, and the individual's relationship to it. UN Security Council Resolution 1566, agreed upon in 2004, defines terrorism as "criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act."<sup>20</sup> The U.S. Department of State, citing Title 22 of the U.S. Code, Section 2656f (d) offers this: "Premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience." Israel's Jonathon Institute defines terrorism as "the deliberate and systematic murder, maiming, and menacing of the innocent to inspire fear for political ends."<sup>21</sup>

Lacking national status and conventional military power, terror groups aim to achieve their political objectives through violent action targeting political leadership, security forces, and civilians. Their aim is to accomplish one of two ends: 1) Topple or drive out an existing government—including one in fact or popularly understood as occupation by an external power—in order to establish an independent nation and government, or 2) to succeed in an ideological or religious campaign to replace a particular nation, several nations regionally, or all nations, with some alternative post-nation-state vision (e.g., an Islamic caliphate, world communism, etc.). Of the former, the FLN's efforts against French occupation of Algeria, the

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<sup>20</sup> United Nations Security Council. S/RES/1566, 8 October 2004, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/542/82/PDF/N0454282.pdf?OpenElement> [Accessed Aug. 15, 2014].

<sup>21</sup> As quoted in Christopher Harmon, *A Citizen's Guide to Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3.

Mau Mau project to drive Britain from Kenya, or the Irish Republican Army's long-standing effort for Irish independence stand as classic examples. Of the latter, the al Qaeda (and lately, ISIS) effort to end both the presence of foreigners and rule by the House of Saud in the Arabian Peninsula, establishing a caliphate in its place, and Soviet Russian efforts to move humanity toward world communism with the help of insurgencies supported by the "armed force" of the Third Communist International (Comintern).<sup>22</sup>

Central to a terror group's actions is assault not only directed at military targets or government leadership (i.e., assassination), but at civilians. Terrorism is, then, rightly understood as an act of war--not simply random or pathological violence--as it has a political motive.<sup>23</sup> Those utilizing terrorist motives seek to rule, and understand themselves justified in their actions as they lack the tools--their own nation-state and military force--with which to fight against the existing governments they hope to expel or topple bring down.

The bloody actions described in the Chinese press and attributed to regional activists certainly appear to be similar to politically motivated attacks directed at civilians, and hence at least something like what would be described as terrorism. And while those actions have received significant attention in the news, and in longer journal discussions over the past decade, larger questions and problems present themselves. These have largely to do with, and

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<sup>22</sup> On al Qaeda's objectives to remove U.S. personnel from the Arab peninsula, see interviews with Osama bin Laden and his "Letter to the American People" of 24 November 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/24/theobserver>. On the Comintern, see the Communist Third International, noting that its purpose was "to fight, by all available means, including armed force, for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie and for the creation of an international Soviet republic as a transition stage to the complete abolition of the State."

<sup>23</sup> Worth noting here is Mao's famous distinction between wars: "History shows that wars are divided into two kinds, just and unjust. All wars that are progressive are just, and all wars that impede progress are unjust. We Communists oppose all unjust wars that impede progress, but we do not oppose progressive just wars. Not only do we Communists not oppose just wars, we actively participate in them." *Quotations from Chairman Mao* [the Red Book], 59-60.

grow out of, the political nature of terrorism and definitions of terrorism. The oft-repeated slogan “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” demonstrates this nicely: Can China and the other great powers agree on a definition of terrorism, or are all concerned destined to fall back on their own national- and cultural-specific definitions?

Complicating matters for students of the question at hand—the language, vocabulary and public discourse about terrorism in China—is the well-established concept of state terror. Indeed, the concept understood as “terrorism” first emerges with the Revolutionary French regime’s “Reign of Terror”, imposed in 1793 with revolutionary trial and execution by guillotine in Paris alone of over 16,000 aristocrats, royalty, and persons adjudged to be counter-revolutionaries. Similarly, the “Red Terror” in 1918 in the Soviet Union, and the SS in Nazi Germany were the progenitors of terrorism, with the bottom-up terrorism we think of today being primarily a post-Second World War phenomenon. In possession of the tools of large-scale violence against a population, and often with a monopoly on the arms, governments wield tremendous power.

In any discussion about terrorism in China, the problem of state terror is worthy of inclusion, even if briefly, as does Richard McGregor in his 2010 volume, *The Party: The Secret World of China’s Communist Rulers*. McGregor argues that while the Chinese government under Mao’s rule used state terror freely and quite effectively, the regime has reversed course since the beginning of Deng Xiaoping’s “Reform and Opening Up”. “Terror”, he writes, “is just a side effect these days, used sparingly and, in large part, reluctantly”, with the system effectively seducing the individual rather than suppressing him or her, choosing to “co-opt, not coerce, the population.”<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, he goes on to contend that, as of 2010, at any rate,

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<sup>24</sup> Richard McGregor, *The Party: The Secret World of China’s Communist Rulers* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 165.

“terror remains essential to the system’s survival and is deployed without embarrassment when required.”<sup>25</sup> There remains a strong sense, at least among the ruling classes that fear of the government is necessary to instill in the general population to keep the country from falling to pieces. This, McGregor believes, reveals “a regime with a profound appreciation of its limited legitimacy and fragile mandate.”<sup>26</sup>

And so, another question arises: to what extent, if any, does the concept of state terror exist in China as part of the public discourse about terrorism, and if not, under what conditions might it be permitted to be included, or is this too dangerous a step?

#### The 2011 Reform Legislation

On 26 October, 2011, a major Indian newspaper, *The Hindu*, ran a story on the Chinese Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress drafting of a new law concerning anti-terrorism. Said to have been welcomed by security officials in China, the article noted that it had “also evoked concern among legal experts about civil rights.”<sup>27</sup> The article continued to note that,

The law would address the “lack of clear definitions” under the current criminal law to prosecute terrorism-related cases, which had “direct, adverse effects” on China’s counterterrorism battle, said Yang Huanning, the Vice-Minister of Public Security. ‘China is faced with the real threat of terrorist activities, and the struggle with terrorism is long-term, complicated and acute,’ he told the NPC.<sup>28</sup>

The new legislation, if approved, would follow a decade of Chinese action against terrorism under previous law, which led to the conviction of over 7,000 individuals in China since 2001,

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ananth Krishnan, “Concern as China mulls over anti-terror laws”, *The Hindu*, 26 October 2011, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/article2571362.ece> [Accessed Aug. 1, 2014].

<sup>28</sup> Krishnan.

and as “China intensified its efforts against the ‘three evils’ of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism.”<sup>29</sup>

Xinhua’s summary and assessment of the legislation, passed on Oct. 29, described the legislation as “an anti-terror bill which makes clear definitions of terrorist acts and organizations, paving the way for the country to crack down further on terrorism,” and that it “defines terrorist acts as those which are intended to induce public fear, endanger public security or to coerce state organs or international organizations by means of violence, sabotage, threats or other tactics.” The document went on to define terrorist organizations as “established to conduct terrorist acts, while terrorists are those who organize, plot and conduct terrorist acts as well as those who are members of terrorist groups.”<sup>30</sup> Terrorist acts, the article continued, are those with a specific intent. They “cause, or aim to cause, severe harm to society by creating casualties, bringing about major economic losses, damaging public facilities or disturbing social order”, and include actions aimed at supporting terrorist acts, such as their instigation or financial support.<sup>31</sup> Terrorists and terrorist organizations are those “established to conduct terrorist acts”, and are populated by those aiming to achieve their aims. The penalty for participation in a terrorist organization is three to ten years in jail, and the article continued by referencing an acknowledgment of the Vice Minister of Public Security: “this is the first time that concrete definitions of terrorist acts, terrorist organizations or terrorists have been drafted” with “the lack of clear definitions up to this point has had direct and adverse effects on China’s efforts to fight terrorism domestically and internationally in cooperation with other countries.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Krishnan.

<sup>30</sup> China legally defines terrorist acts, organization GOV.cn, Source: Xinhua, 29 October 2011, [http://english.gov.cn/2011-10/29/content\\_1981475.htm](http://english.gov.cn/2011-10/29/content_1981475.htm) [Accessed Aug. 1, 2014].

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

The new law was not without its critics: the article in *The Hindu* quoted Human Rights Watch (HRW) senior researcher Nicholas Bequelin, who argued that without judicial reform leading to a truly independent judiciary, the legislation's impact would be limited:

“Strengthening law enforcement powers without appropriate judicial checks and balances is dangerous,” he said. A key issue, he added, was “how organizations or individuals are designated as terrorists, by whom and on what basis, and whether such classification would be challengeable”.<sup>33</sup>

### Conclusions

As with much of Chinese government policy, limited transparency allows for only tentative conclusions. However, if the present year marks a trend, it is highly likely that PRC anti-terror law will be utilized intensively, perhaps even receiving further legislative enhancement. Chinese legislation, decisions from the bench, and state media editorials concerning terrorism will be worth continued attention, alongside those relating to the other two evils, separatism (lately the charge against Minzu University Professor Ilham Tohti), and religious extremism.

Assertive, proactive steps against terrorism on the PRC government's part is likely, aiming to press dissent to the surface, making an example of a few to impress the many. Dissent in the far western regions, as well as Hong Kong should the democracy movement there intensify, is likely to be stifled.

Importantly, any Chinese discussion of terrorism will disallow inclusion of the concept of state terror. It is conceivable that internet search and social media references might make reference to the concept to a degree that necessitates an explicit and forceful Party response.

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<sup>33</sup> Krishnan.

However, “Red Terror” (of the mid-1960s) and “oppression” already appear on lists of banned search terms, so effective responses to this potential problem exist right at the outset.

Internationally, disagreement about Chinese vs. foreign definitions of terrorism will continue, with Chinese representatives likely, sooner or later, to press for an international definition that is in harmony with the Chinese understanding. Determined, steady, long-term pressure on international organizations on this issue can be expected. Alternatively, were the effort to remold an international definition of terrorism to go badly, expect to see China advance a definition of terrorism that is said to match the country’s unique culture and history.

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