

China's Olympic security measures reveal a regime under siege

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With less than a month before the Olympic Games in Beijing, the Chinese government has implemented extraordinary security measures, including the mobilisation of the military. Amid widespread discontent over inflation, and unrest among the country's national minorities, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is determined that nothing will mar its efforts to showcase China to the world.

Vice Minister of Public Security Yang Huanning justified the measures by declaring that “anti-China forces” were determined to sabotage the Olympics. The ministry's web site commented on July 4: “As the Beijing Olympics draw daily closer, all kinds of anti-China and hostile forces are further intensifying their activities to create disturbances and carry out sabotage by any means.”

Separately, Meng Hongwei, another vice public security minister, identified three main threats: international terrorists, separatist insurgents from the Xinjiang Uighur autonomous region and criminals. Attending a security meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) with officials from Russia and Central Asian republics, Meng pointed to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which has publicly threatened to attack the Olympics. Earlier this year, China claimed to have prevented a terrorist incident involving an Uighur passenger on a domestic flight.

In the name of fighting terrorism, Beijing has intensified its repression in Xinjiang. On July 10, the Chinese authorities claimed to have killed five Uighurs during a police raid at an alleged “holy war” training camp. The next day, 82 people were arrested as terrorist suspects and 485 people as criminals and gangsters during more raids on illegal religious schools or supposed jihad training centres. Chinese authorities have not produced any evidence against the detainees.

Last weekend, three men arrested in an earlier raid in January 2007 were publicly shot before thousands of people in Yengishahar city in Xinjiang in order to intimidate the local population.

In Beijing, security plans are already in full swing. According to the state media, an anti-terror force of 100,000 commandos, paramilitary police and soldiers has been deployed in Beijing and five other cities hosting the Olympic events. Another 100,000 police officers, 200,000 security guards and 600,000

volunteers will patrol the streets during the Olympics. There will also be a substantial Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) presence, including the deployment of fighter jets, helicopters, warships, surface-to-air missiles and bio-warfare units.

Tian Yixiang, head of the military arm of the Olympic security body, told reporters that the military will use whatever means necessary to protect the games, including shooting down aircraft that get too close to the venues. Foreign journalists have reported at least two camouflaged HQ-7 anti-air missile launchers near the main “Bird's Nest” stadium. The navy will step up coastal patrols.

Tian said the PLA will target threats ranging from separatist militants from Xinjiang and Tibet to banned Falun Gong religious practitioners. He has also listed “sabotage by hostile foreign powers” and “unexpected mass events”—that is, mass protests—as threats to the games. “Our military force has already formulated detailed plans” to deal with these risks, he declared. “Our enemies will do whatever they can to sabotage the Beijing Olympics. They will even resort to extreme violence.”

Travel control has been tightened. The Civil Aviation Administration announced on July 7 that passengers will have to pass through “special security checks” at airports in 19 major cities and at all airports in Xinjiang and Tibet. From last week, all motor vehicles entering Beijing have been subject to multiple checks. The police authority warned drivers to bring their ID cards and not to carry knives and explosives, or facing being treated as criminal or even terrorist suspects. At least 39 people have been arrested for carrying knives and banned items since police searches at subway stations began last month.

The *Financial Times* commented that the extensive security measures “could cast a chill over Games events”. “Tougher implementation of visa rules in recent months has already sent the number of tourists arriving in the Chinese capital plummeting.”

The extent of the security dragnet is clear from a central government edict issued in late June, ordering a nationwide crackdown on political dissidents. It called for all levels of government to ensure “zero mass petitions to Beijing, zero petitions to provincial capitals and no mass incidents during Olympic Games period.” The term “mass incidents” refers to

protests and demonstrations, which occur increasingly frequently in China, because of growing social inequality and official corruption.

The *Washington Post* pointed out on July 8 that authorities in Shijiazhuang city near Beijing have issued a “Six Combats” manifesto of police control. It included an “Assault on Petitions”—that is, public protests to the government—as one of the objectives for achieving “sweeping victory on Olympic security work”.

Political dissidents have expressed concern about these roughshod methods. Li Datong, a sacked editor, told the *Post*: “The government only knows this method and they are only good at this method to deal with dissent.” Zhang Zuhua, an advocate of political reform, warned that repression “may control the situation temporarily, but it’s not the way to solve the problem fundamentally”.

In a recent statement, Amnesty International commented: “Much of the current wave of repression is occurring not in spite of the Olympics, but actually because of the Olympics... in an apparent attempt to portray a ‘stable’ or ‘harmonious’ image to the world by August 2008.”

Beijing’s claims to be promoting a “harmonious society” belie the country’s sharpening social tensions that are leading to hundreds of protests. Last month an official cover-up of the death a teenage girl in Wengan, Guizhou province triggered an angry response. Tens of thousands of people stormed the local government buildings. In Shanghai, a man angered over police interrogation concerning a theft, lashed out and killed six police officers. In Hunan province, a man exploded two gas canisters in front of a local government building to protest against the forced demolition of his home.

Even the official *China Daily* sounded a warning in its editorial of July 4: “Why were the people of Wengan so angry as to set fire to government buildings? How could a citizen turn so violent after a single regular police interrogation? Does the removal of an illegal structure have to end up in hatred? ... The three tragic episodes reveal a less-than-harmonious relations between the general public and those who are supposed to be at their service.”

But the protests continue.

* On June 23, 1,000 redundant teachers from dozens of cities and counties in Hunan organised a petition in the provincial capital, Changsha, over the lack of pensions and healthcare.

* On July 8, 1,000 former workers from a bankrupt state-owned refractory materials manufacturer blocked the main transport route of Guiyang city, demanding financial assistance.

* On July 13, hundreds of migrant workers attacked a police station in Yuhuan county in eastern Zhejiang province over the lack of residential rights in urban

areas.

* On July 15, more than 2,000 laid-off workers from 20 factories in Qinzhou city, Guangxi province were joined by hundreds of farmers in demanding the government resolve long-standing grievances. Armed police arrested a dozen people.

* On July 19, more than 500 rubber farmers clashed with police over the low prices offered by local rubber companies in Menliang county of Yunan province. Police shot and killed two protestors.

Beijing gained some kudos from its public displays of concern for the victims of the recent Sichuan earthquake, but that has quickly worn thin as protests and petitions continue by parents who lost their children in flattened schools. The collapse of the shoddy school buildings exposed the corrupt collusion between construction companies and local officials. Riot police squads are now patrolling some temporary housing areas in the quake zone. Last month five activists were detained after attempting to assist parents launch a legal campaign.

The siege mentality of the CCP leadership was evident in the talks earlier this month with the Dalai Lama’s envoy in Beijing over an agreement to end the longstanding dispute over Tibet. Chinese officials reportedly insisted that, for further talks to take place, the Dalai Lama had to use his authority to restrain more radical tendencies such as the Tibetan Youth Congress from disrupting the Olympics. Following protests around the world during the Olympic torch relay, Beijing is clearly worried that the issue of Tibet will flare up again as the games approach.

Beijing has invested an enormous amount of financial and political capital in the Olympics to promote the illusion that it is ushering in a new “shengshi” or golden age of the old Middle Kingdom. However, the huge police-state apparatus that has been mobilised to provide security cannot hide the fact that the rise of Chinese capitalism, based on the super-exploitation of the working class, has led to intense social tensions that sooner or later will blow apart the myth of the “harmonious society”.



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