

A bombing in China's Xinjiang province

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6 May 2014

A bombing in the western Chinese province of Xinjiang last week left three people dead—including two alleged perpetrators—and 79 more injured. The government blamed ethnic Uighur separatists and offered a reward of 100,000 yuan (\$US16,000) for information about the activities of the two suspects.

The attack took place at the crowded railway station in the provincial capital, Urumqi, on the evening of April 30, just before the country's May Day holiday weekend. According to the state-run Xinhua news agency, the two men attacked travellers with knives before setting off an explosive device. One of the assailants was named as Sedirdin Sawut from Aksu prefecture in southern Xinjiang.

The blast created chaos. Emergency services and armed police arrived shortly after the explosion and evacuated people from the square in front of the station. The area was cordoned off for several hours, before the station was re-opened under heavy police guard.

The bombing took place as Chinese President Xi Jinping made his first tour of Xinjiang. He had visited a mosque in Urumqi just hours earlier. Xi denounced the attack, declaring that he would “resolutely suppress the terrorists' rampant momentum.”

Xi made similar remarks to a study session of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo in Beijing on April 26. He warned that the “country is facing increasing threats and challenges to our national security and increasing threats to our social stability.”

While not specifically referring to Uighurs or Tibetans, Xi called on officials to “properly resolve disputes affecting national unity and resolutely curb and combat hostile forces from outside and inside the country from using the ethnic issue to engage in separatist, infiltration and sabotage activities.”

Xi's comments followed a knife attack in March at Kunming railway station in southwestern China, in which 29 travellers and employees were killed and

more than 130 injured. Chinese authorities blamed Uighur separatists associated with the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Last October, a car containing three Uighurs exploded near Beijing's Tiananmen Square, killing the occupants and two pedestrians. No organisation claimed responsibility for either incident, or for last week's attack in Urumqi.

Xi's reference to hostile forces “outside” China reflects growing fears in the CCP regime that the US will exploit separatist movements among China's ethnic minorities to destabilise and divide the country. US agencies, including the CIA, have longstanding links to various Uighur exile organisations, such as the Uighur American Association and the World Uighur Congress, which is based in Germany. Both organisations disclaim any connection to the ETIM.

Beijing's fears have only been heightened by the US-led intervention in Ukraine that engineered the ousting of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich by extreme Ukrainian nationalist and fascist organisations. While declaring itself neutral in Washington's confrontation with Moscow, Beijing is clearly concerned at the potential for the US to manipulate ethnic divisions inside China.

The Chinese foreign ministry reacted angrily to a US State Department annual report on terrorism, released last Thursday, which criticised the lack of cooperation and information from Beijing and questioned China's claims of Uighur terrorism. “Chinese authorities labeled several incidents of violence involving members of the Uighur minority as acts of terrorism. In general, Chinese authorities did not provide detailed evidence of terrorist involvement,” the report stated.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang pointed to the hypocrisy of the United States, which routinely brands incidents and organisations as “terrorist” to suit Washington's policy requirements. “On the question of anti-terrorism, making

irresponsible remarks towards other countries and holding ‘double standards’ will not help international cooperation,” Qin declared.

However, the CCP’s discriminatory treatment of ethnic minorities and the use of police-state methods to suppress discontent play directly into Washington’s hands. Ethnic Uighurs, who are Turkic and mainly Muslim, have been marginalised economically as the government has sought to open up Xinjiang and exploit its energy and mineral resources. Beijing’s promotion of Han Chinese nationalism has only further alienated Uighur, Tibetan and other ethnic minorities.

Australian academic Jim Leibold, who is currently based in Beijing, told the *Sydney Morning Herald* that the Chinese leadership has “clearly been doubling down on Xinjiang,” as evidenced by a quadrupling of the Xinjiang security budget since 2009, intensifying bilingual education and the dispatch of 200,000 CCP cadres to the province.

In his comments to the Politburo study session, President Xi declared that a public climate had to be created to “make terrorists become like rats scurrying across a street, with everybody shouting ‘beat them’.” Such remarks will only encourage suspicion, prejudice and hostility toward Uighurs. In July 2009, the deaths of two Uighur workers in a brawl inside a factory in the eastern province of Guangdong provoked violent protests in Urumqi.

The US continues to exploit these ethnic tensions by posturing as an opponent of Beijing’s cultural oppression of minorities and providing financial assistance to organisations such as the World Uighur Congress. A comment in yesterday’s *Wall Street Journal*, entitled “China’s Terrorism Problem,” hinted at Washington’s underlying motive when it referred to last week’s bombing as “the latest evidence that China is neither as stable or harmonious as Beijing would have you believe.”



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