

Under Chinese pressure, India cancels visa to Uyghur separatist Dolkun Isa

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A diplomatic row between India and China erupted after New Delhi granted a visa to exiled Uyghur leader Dolkun Isa, a separatist from China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

The decision prompted an angry reaction in Beijing. Last Thursday, China's foreign ministry said Isa was "a terrorist on red notice of Interpol and the Chinese police" for his arrest. "Bringing him to justice is a due obligation of relevant countries," it said.

On Monday, under pressure from Beijing, India canceled the visa it had granted to Isa, the executive chairman of the Munich-based World Uyghur Congress (WUC). Isa was to attend an April 30-May 1 conference of Chinese opposition groups in the city of Dharamsala, the seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile and of the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Buddhist leader. Indian officials told the *Hindu*, however, that the visa did not allow Isa to address public gatherings, and could be reissued if Isa applied for the correct category.

New Delhi's decision to back Chinese separatists point to the explosive international tensions emerging amid Washington's "pivot to Asia" designed to isolate and prepare for war against China. The reckless US "pivot" is coming together with other conflicts, such as NATO's proxy war in Syria and the Indo-Pakistani conflict, to fuel bitter international tensions.

After orchestrating wars for regime change by backing Al Qaeda-linked Islamist terrorist forces in Libya and Syria, US imperialism and its allies are considering whether to use similar methods against China, a nuclear-armed power that is the world's second-largest economy. Washington is well aware of explosive ethnic and regional divisions within China, a country with 55 officially recognized ethnic minorities.

Beijing is concerned over large-scale participation of

Uyghur Muslims in NATO-backed Islamist militias fighting to topple Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's regime. On April 25, *Al Jazeera* reported, "In Syria, the Uighurs have formed their own units and also joined up with other Central Asian units composed of Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kyrgyz and others. They mostly fight for the Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra Front."

After the Syrian war ends, these fighters could return to foment wars in their home countries. In September, Christina Lin, a former Pentagon and State Department official, wrote that if Assad fell to the NATO-backed Islamists, "fighters from Russia's Chechnya, China's Xinjiang and India's Kashmir will then turn their eyes toward the home front to continue jihad, supported by a new and well-sourced Syrian operating base in the heart of the Middle East."

This policy is extraordinarily reckless. Beijing has made clear that it would react violently to overt encouragement by the major powers of separatism in China, threatening to use military force. At the 2005 China's National People's Congress (NPC), the regime passed an "anti-secession law" pledging to go to war in response to any declaration of independence by Taiwan, which it fears could be the signal for the broader international promotion of separatist tendencies in China.

India's decision to grant Isa a visa points to the growing alignment of Indian foreign policy on the reactionary intrigues of US imperialism, particularly the Asia "pivot," as it seeks to leverage its relationship with Washington to attain the status of a global power. With New Delhi already considering whether to base US forces aimed at China on its soil, it is now embroiling itself in more intractable ethnic conflicts in the region.

China's northwestern autonomous region of Xinjiang

is home to the predominantly Muslim Uyghur ethnic minority, who speak a Turkic language. Xinjiang has seen significant ethnic unrest that has killed hundreds of people. The Uyghur separatists in the WUC claim that they have faced oppression ever since coming under the Chinese Communist Party's rule after the 1949 revolution.

The Chinese government, which has relied ever more on fomenting Han Chinese nationalism since restoring capitalism in China over the course of the 1980s, accuses the WUC of fomenting unrest and terrorist activity in Xinjiang.

The WUC is a reactionary tool of American and European imperialism. It receives funding directly from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), whose main sponsor is the US government. According to its web site, the NED gave the WUC \$215,000 in 2015 alone for unspecified "human rights research and advocacy projects."

The WUC was formed in 2004 at a meeting in Munich, Germany, comprising various exiled Uyghur groups including the World Uyghur Youth Congress (WUYC) and East Turkestan National Congress (ETNC). Most WUC leaders live abroad, including its president, Rebiya Kadeer, in the United States, Isa in Germany and others in Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Japan, Britain and Sweden.

Kadeer, a businesswoman, became a millionaire in the 1980s through her real estate holdings and ownership stake in a multinational conglomerate. In June 2007, at a conference on democracy and security held in Prague, Kadeer met privately with then-US president George W. Bush, who praised people like her as "far more valuable than the weapons of their army or oil under the ground."

As for Isa, he received an award from the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation in Washington last month.

Washington sees Xinjiang—which is rich in oil, gas and rare-earth metals, and strategically located in the center of Eurasia—as vital to its strategic interests. Xinjiang borders on Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Mongolia and the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The region is an important trade and transportation hub, as Chinese exports cross the territory to reach the Pakistani port of Karachi and then to South Asia. It is a

critically important route for China's ambitious Silk Road infrastructure project to connect East Asia to Europe, from China to the Mediterranean Sea. Some 53 Chinese state-owned enterprises—from energy to construction and tech companies—have invested \$300 billion in 685 projects in Xinjiang.

While US and European imperialism's intervention in the region is utterly reactionary, the response of the Chinese business oligarchy is not in the least progressive, either. Beijing is also promoting nationalism and militarism, while stepping up police repression in Xinjiang and extending political backing to terrorist groups as part of its international diplomatic maneuvers.

According to Indian press reports, New Delhi's decision to grant a visa to Isa was in part a retaliatory move against China's decision to side with Pakistan and help shield the Pakistani militant group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) in Kashmir. This month, India reacted angrily to China's decision to put a hold on New Delhi's request to add JeM leader Masood Azhar to the United Nations' Al Qaeda-Islamic State blacklist.

Welcoming India's decision not to grant a visa to Isa, China recommended that India and Pakistan discuss directly to resolve the differences on placing Azhar on the UN terror list. On Tuesday, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said: "We encourage all parties related to the listing matter of Masood Azhar to have direct communication and work out a solution through serious consultations. China is willing to continue with its communication with all the relevant parties."

Azhar is suspected of carrying out a string of deadly attacks against Indian targets, including the attack on the Indian parliament in December 2001 that brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war.



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