



CHINA'S XINJIANG PROBLEM– THE EVOLUTION OF COUNTER INSURGENCY STRATEGY

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Abstract

This paper case studies the Chinese counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in Xinjiang and the dynamics behind the Uighur protests in an effort to evaluate the future path of the region and determine the fundamental principles of the Chinese COIN strategy. In Xinjiang, the situation has been somewhat in the shadow of the world, both because of the global emphasis on the situation in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Afghanistan, South Asia, and the Far East, and partly due to the lack of official information and the inability of the Chinese military and government to publicly actively frame the issue. It is against this background that the study will attempt to answer some of the main questions: how the Xinjiang conflict actually came into being; the initiatives that were taken by the Chinese government to deal with the instability; whether a clear and distinct Chinese COIN doctrine exists; and what the underlying principles of its application.

Keywords: China, Xinjiang, Uighur, Insurgency, COIND Doctrine.

Introduction

Xinjiang (Sinkiang) was made part of China in 1884. Ever since then, the history is testament of the fact that all Chinese Governments, whether Nationalists or Communists, employed all available elements of national power (EoNP) to effectively control the Uighur insurgency or separatist demands. (Shichor, 2004). Though, Uighurs did manage to declare Xinjiang as an independent state in 1933 and then 1944, but for a very short duration time. Post 9/11, with the initiation of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) by the United States (US) and subsequent capture of the Uighurs insurgents fighting in Al-Qaeda (AQ) cadres, the insurgency movement got attributed to global terrorism. Many of the Uighur fighters remained in the AQ hierarchy, while few were captured in Afghanistan. Historically, the Chinese governments has always remained sensitive to the separatist, terrorist and extremist tendencies. Thus, the conjunction between AQ and Uighur insurgents brought a change in the Chinese COIN approach in Xinjiang. (Potter, 2019)

Traditionally characterized by ethnic diversity, tactical geography, and warring identity and



sovereignty narratives, the region has experienced recurrent instabilities as a result of separatist, political, and socio-economic forces. Nevertheless, the Xinjiang issue has been under-investigated in the world because of a lack of transparency and other interests in global security. In this context, the reaction of China, which was marked by a thorough use of political authority, economic campaigns, activities based on intelligence, and the rigid social control, provides a distinct example of counterinsurgency. The analysis of the development of Uighur unrest and readjustive COIN style of China is valuable to understand the character of contemporary internal conflicts, the role of state power, and the future of stabilization of Xinjiang.

This research aims to examine Chinese COIN Strategy and Uighur Insurgency in Xinjiang with a view to predict future of Xinjiang and tenets of Chinese COIN. The Uighur insurgency and Chinese Counter Insurgency (COIN) in Xinjiang has generally remained a mythos to outside world. The unrest in Eastern Europe, Middle East, Afghanistan, South Asia and Far East have kept the Xinjiang issue out of World's focus. Xinjiang, also remained out of world's focus due to non-availability of any official details by Chinese Government or any military related policy paper elucidating the issue. Thus, the issue leads to raising few questions; what is the genesis of the Xinjiang issue? How has the Chinese Government tackled the issue? Does China have any official COIN strategy? If yes, then what are the cardinals of the COIN strategy? what is the reality behind Uighur insurgency? Does it qualify to be an Insurgency? Does the Uighur insurgency have success potentials?

Historical Perspective

Pre-PRC (Till 1949)

Xinjiang, as per available records, never existed as an independent country and, was mostly governed by outsiders. In 1884, the region became part of Chinese Qing Dynasty. (Milward, 2007) The available records assert that the Uighurs have lived in the region as old as sixth / seventh century and have maintained a distinct cultural identity from Han Chinese. On contrast, the Chinese claims over Xinjiang date back to 60BC. In early 1900s, the region remained a contesting ground between the Soviet Union, Britishers and Japan to exert their influence. These global powers supported various uprising during different era leading to creation of East Turkestan Republic (ETR) in 1933 and then in 1944. Despite overt and covert support of global powers, at both occasions, the newly established state of ETR collapsed due to internal turmoil, lack of harmony and cohesion amongst Uighurs.

Mao Zedong Era (1949-76)

China, came under rule of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1949. It was the era of Cold War with Soviet Union and USA contesting to gain hegemony across globe, post-World War-II. The USSR, though with rough patch of relations with China, initially aligned itself with PRC to primarily make an ally against the USA. As part of these efforts, USSR accepted Xinjiang as an integral part of China in 1950 during Mao's visit. (Benson, 1990) Though Xinjiang came under Chinese control, yet to stabilize the situation, Mao wrote to Muslim Uighur Leadership and assured of self-determination. The CCP, in order to gain time, adopted a well-thought-out strategy to



stabilize Xinjiang including; assuring the Uighurs of greater autonomy, promises of disproportionate allocation of development funds, planned for speedy Han Chinese migration to alter demography, gradual control over religion and culture and forceful suppression of uprising. The CCP, in-house interlinked the sovereignty of PRC with Xinjiang as it may lead to separatist tendencies in Taiwan, Tibet, and parts of Chinese Mongolia. By 1960s, the Chinese Government (CCP) was able to control the insurgent elements in Xinjiang and placed pro-government Uighurs and Hans in important organizations. (McMillen, 1979) Moreover, the CCP was also able to isolate the insurgents from other population through strict check and control mechanism.

By the mid-1970s, the CCP in pursuance of Greater Western Development Plan (GWD) migrated the Han Chinese to Xinjiang. Though, it initiated the development of the region, but it altered the demography in favour of Han Chinese, which became 35% of Xinjiang population. It was in Mao's era that CCP had firm grip over Xinjiang. Apart from controlling religion, language and culture, the Chinese version of history was made mandatory in curriculum. The CCP policies in Xinjiang met complete success in keeping the Uighur Insurgents suppressed, however, the separatist tendencies still existed in Xinjiang with its sanctuaries abroad. The important aspect to be noted is the difference between a common Uighur and Uighur insurgents. The later formed a minimal part of the entire Uyghur population residing in Xinjiang.

Deng Xiaoping Era (1978-97)

With the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, China remained in state of turmoil till rise of Deng Xiaoping as leader of CCP in 1978. Deng opted for eased policies in Xinjiang primarily focusing on economy, social life, cultural integration and freedom of religious practices. The insurgent Uighurs were at position of relative disadvantage due to increasing development in region, minimal separatist tendencies amongst common Uighurs and negligible international support and recognition. (Tyler, 2003) In 1979, the USSR invaded Afghanistan, thus increasing CCP sensitivities in Xinjiang owing to dubious Soviet past. This brought both China and USA closer against Soviets. The period also witnessed China supporting Afghans to avoid annexation or independence of Xinjiang by Soviets. This period also witnessed the Uighur insurgents or separatists alongside Afghan Mujahidin, thus finding a new source of motivation and nationalism. However, the Uighurs as whole, didn't had consensus and unity of effort. A very limited portion fought for separatism while majority preferred autonomy or integration. Deng Xiaoping had vision of making China an economic power through China's Western borders. (Meisner, 1996)

This period saw an immense increase in trade between Xinjiang and CARs increasing by fifteen times to \$460 million in 1991. (Weimer, 2004) The CCP under Deng also eased the religious sanctions and permitted Uighurs the construction of religious places. The Uighurs Muslims performed Hajj (pilgrimage), thus the region was relatively peaceful and stable. The collapse of Soviet Union post Afghan War and subsequent independence of CARs coupled with return of Uighur Insurgents from Afghanistan increased the CCP sensitivities of similar situation in Xinjiang. Though, fall of USSR had eliminated the element of support for the Uighur insurgents, yet CCP



feared CARs type disintegration in Xinjiang too. The Uighur insurgent elements settled in CARs did make efforts to seek support from newly established states, yet the fragile state of these countries didn't bring any results.

The Deng Administration opted to control the Islam in Xinjiang. Though, the prime targets were the insurgent, yet the common Uighurs had to face the repercussions, thus an element of animosity, anxiety and rage against the CCP started germinating in common Uighurs. On the other end, the Uighur insurgents, having an experience of Afghanistan, were able to create a rebellion in Kashgar in 1990. The uprising led to clashes between armed insurgents and Chinese security forces in Kashgar leading to death of over 2500 Uighurs. Though, the official sources quoted only twenty-two killings, yet unconfirmed sources cited more. During subsequent search operations by Chinese Forces, numerous caches of weapons and explosives were also discovered from Kashgar. The clash opened a new chapter in Xinjiang history with rising trends of militancy. Alongside, the government in efforts to integrate and assimilate the common Uighurs made the Mandarin language compulsory for seeking higher education in Xinjiang.

At start of 1992, the Deng Administration, in attempt to further isolate the militant and separatist tendencies, initiated diplomatic engagements with the newly established CARs. Chinese Government after recognition of the newly established states, coined the idea of Shanghai Five. Later, with increased diplomatic engagements, the organization was renamed as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The diplomatic engagements by Chinese government followed enhanced cooperation in economic and military domains as well, thus curtailing the space for insurgent Uighurs.

In 1996, the situation in Afghanistan became volatile and Taliban emerged as victors. Though, the rise of Taliban did attract back the insurgent Uighurs, yet it didn't improve situation in Xinjiang. The Chinese Government, sensing the old lineage between Taliban and Uighur insurgent in Soviet War, opted for 'Strike Hard Campaign' across Xinjiang. (Gladney, 2004) In 1997, the Uighur insurgents started bombing the populace and the first incident occurred on 25 February 1997 killing nine people. (U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2009, pp. 1–30) Since 1997, the details of the Uighur insurgent actions across mainland China and Xinjiang resulted in over 1500 deaths and injured. To stabilize Xinjiang, the CCP adopted a two-prong strategy of 'Strike Hard' and 'GWD' with an end state of eliminating the separatist tendencies as well as improve the economic situation.

Geography of Xinjiang

Xinjiang is located in western part of mainland China and borders Russia and Mongolia in north, Central Asian Republics (CARs) in west and Pakistan in south. It covers an approximate area of 16,00,000.00 square kilometers and is the largest political entity in China. The landmass of Xinjiang is sub-divided in three distinct basins i.e. Tarim Basin (in south), Turpan Basin (in center) and Dzungaria Basin (in north). Similarly, the distinct mountain ranges separating Xinjiang from



neighbouring regions include; Altay (in north from Russia, Mongolia), Tianshan (in west from the CARs), Kunlun (in east / southeast from China) and Karakoram (in south from Pakistan).

Demographics

Most of the Xinjiang population resides in river basins by virtue of irrigable areas and water resources. The total population of Xinjiang stands approximately at 24.467 million inhabitants with an average population density of 14.9 per square kilometer. (City Population, 2019) The Uighurs (45%) and the Hans (41%) forms the majority of the population, while other ethnicities including Kaziks (6 %), Hui Chinese (4 %), Kyrgyz (1.5 %) and others (3.5 %) form minor portion. The major population centers in Xinjiang include Kashgar (4.65 Million), Urumchi as Capital (3.5 Million), Ili / Gulja (2.9 Million), Hotan (2.5 Million) and Aksu (2.5 Million) (also Urumqi) is the political capital since Xinjiang became a Chinese province in 1884 and has population of 2.9 Million. (City Population, 2019)

Mineral and Natural Resources

Xinjiang is one the mineral and natural resource rich region. The region has large deposits of oil, gas, coal and minerals. Xinjiang is also amongst the largest oil producer to meet the Chinese demands. As per Chinese estimates, Xinjiang Region has untapped oil reserves of over 21 billion tons, natural gas reserves of over 11 trillion cubic meters and coal reserves of 2.3 trillion tons. At present, the region contributes approximately 600 million tons coal, 45 billion cubic meters natural gas and over 30 million tons of oil to China on annual basis. (Edwards, 2014) Other than natural resources, the region has tremendous agriculture base with sugar and cotton as major crops.

China's Strategic Interests

The Chinese government terms the insurgent Uighurs as terrorists, thus defining a clear political objective. The CCP links Xinjiang region with the integrity and sovereignty of Chinese state as its independence may set a precedence for Taiwan, Chinese Mongolia and Tibet. Thus, it is easier to conclude that as part of COIN strategy, the Chinese government not only pursues to curb such separatist tendencies inland, but also abroad. The CCP utilizes the diplomatic and economic channels in pursuance of its objectives specific to the subject. Recognition of CARs, establishment of SCO, economic investments and military exchange are the examples of Chinese pursuance of political objectives. China, while exercising its economic and diplomatic leverages over neighbouring / regional countries, introduced a clause in SCO charter, which mandated all to, *“jointly counteract terrorism, separatism and extremism in all their manifestations”*. (Shanghai Cooperation Organization, n.d.) Besides CARs, China maintains healthy economic, diplomatic and military relations with Middle Eastern countries especially Saudi Arabia (KSA). The economic and military interdependence was enhanced in pursuance of political objectives, which enabled China in becoming the largest arms supplier to Middle East and on other end becoming one of the largest oil buyers. These initiatives have enabled China in stabilizing Xinjiang and averting 1979 like situation.

The government's legitimacy entails broader popular acceptance by its citizens and affords it the



right to govern its frontiers. The success against insurgent tendencies is directly linked with the legitimacy exercised. The skillful employment of all EoNP have enabled the Chinese government is establishing its legitimacy across Xinjiang. Unlike other counter insurgencies across the world entailing excessive military use, the Chinese COIN strategy was a classical mix of 'stick and carrot'. (Mansoor & Ulrich, 2007)

The CCP, though incentivized the Uighurs in all domains, yet it attached certain caveats. To avail the preferential policies, a Uighur was required to be proficient in Mandarin language. However, this policy may be attributed as tool with CCP to establish its legitimacy across Xinjiang. Furthermore, Chinese government primarily used the iron hand to establish its legitimacy. It would not inappropriate to term Xinjiang as a 'Police State', primarily due to extensive recruitment of Uighur informers, unannounced cordon and search operations, quick disposal of suspected insurgents, extended powers with police, regular checkpoints and identity parades in remote areas and use of security systems in community places and cities. Owing to the attached sensitivities towards terrorism, the government has kept the police budget at par with the armed forces budget. (Michael, 2014) Another major factor in establishing Chinese legitimacy in Xinjiang lies in strict media control. The government has the capability to enforce media blackout in entire Xinjiang.

China's Counter Insurgency Strategy Post 9/11

With the dawn of 20th century, the Chinese government had a definite edge over the Uighur insurgents and the militancy had been considerably marginalized. The correct application of all EoNP across Xinjiang especially in economic, social and religious domains enabled the CCP in controlling situation. With onset of Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), the Chinese Government supported the US stance. Before 9/11, the Uighurs were referred as separatist or insurgents, however, the GWOT changed their status as terrorists. Thus, it is convenient to say that China capitalize on the strategic opportunity and linked Uighurs to global terrorism. Post US led GWOT, Chinese government intensified its efforts across Xinjiang to further liquidate the Uighur insurgents. The 'Strike Hard Campaign (SHC)' linked all separatist, terrorist and extremist tendencies as one.

Intelligence Based Sting Operations (IBSOs)

Unlike other insurgency riddle regions across the world, Xinjiang didn't witness any major military or police operations. The Chinese armed forces and police, while seeking experience of the regional countries including Pakistan (China's Ministry of National Defense, n.d.), introduced a broad-based spy / informer network in entire Xinjiang. In order to keep the situation stable and calm, the reliance was placed on IBSOs. Irrespective of persuading the common Uighurs for providing information, whether through financial or intimidating techniques, the life of a common Uighur remains calm and peaceful. The IBSOs despite breaking the will of insurgents has also divided the Uighur populace in three sub-groups i.e. desirous for assimilation and integration with mainland China (*the majority and middle class*), desirous for more autonomy (*political elite and well educated*) and hardcore insurgents. (Davis, 2008)



Economic Initiatives and Activities

Deng Administration, commenced GWD not only to enhance the overall economic potentials but also to assimilate the frontiers. Since then, the policies of China have remained constant while focusing on, *“undertaking extensive economic prosperity and development projects to an extent where the autonomy or independence becomes less desired for the Uighur populace”*. The Chinese government in order to keep Xinjiang under control provides approximately ‘60 percent of the capital investment in Xinjiang’ in comparison to approximately 32 percent in other provinces. (Weimer, 2004) These economic initiatives have increased the GDP per capita of Xinjiang by 27 times (‘from \$274 in 2000 to \$7476 in 2018’).

Populace Support

All Counter Insurgency doctrines define ‘people’ as ‘centre of gravity’ and deemed essential for success. Without the support from local population, no insurgency can be defeated or marginalized. However, the Chinese policies in Xinjiang were more so ‘stick and carrot’ oriented. Though, colossal initiatives in educational, economic and development domains were done by CCP, yet intermittent application of SHC or similar actions alienated the Uighurs. Further, the Han migration for GWD made the locals skeptical of the government’s intent. Over a period of time, the better educated Han migrants (*now forming over 40% of Xinjiang population*) dominate the key government positions across Xinjiang. (Becquelin, 2004) To address the issue of disenchantment amongst Uighurs, the Chinese government affords incentives and preferential policies to Uighur populace. For instance, permission of having more children, relaxed criteria for higher education and quota system for jobs are only afforded to Uighurs and not Hans. (Sautman, 1998) These policies are a major source of rise in educated Uighurs desiring integration and changing separatist mindset amongst common Uighurs in Xinjiang.

Isolating the Insurgents

Internationally, China managed to get East Turkestan Independence Movement (ETIM) as terrorist organization after GWOT, thus isolating the insurgent elements globally. At regional level, the SCO platform afforded China with acceptance of its stance on terrorism by member states . At domestic level, the incentivized policies in Xinjiang led to split amongst Uighur populace in three groups, thus curtailing the extent of support for insurgent elements. The Chinese government exercises strict check over religious affairs a matter of state policy primarily to deny the religious platform to insurgents. (Bovingdon, n.d., pp. 137–139) However, it also permits the Muslims and in specific Uighurs to proceed for Hajj. Ever since the relaxations afforded by Deng administration in 1980, the numbers have been on constant rise and in 2019, over 11000 Uighurs performed Hajj. On political front, the CCP affords representation to the Uighurs at provincial level by their inclusion in party. To further segregate and isolate the insurgent elements, the party decision affecting insurgents are announced by Uighur party members.



Control over Insurgent Activities

Post-9/11, the Chinese government following the footprints of the US, linked the Uighurs to culprits of the terrorism across the world (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations, n.d.). The Chinese Government branded the insurgent Uighurs as the “*East Turkestan Terrorist Forces*”, a terrorist organization. For the first time, the Chinese government made public a record of terrorist activities conducted by the insurgents. Xinjiang remained peaceful from 2001-07 with no insurgent or terrorist activities. However, the international researchers and subject matter experts maintain that the PRC didn't intentionally share any such details to show normalcy in the region. However, no authenticated document either negating or supporting the stance is available.

External Support and International Recognition

The diplomatic and economic clout enjoyed by China both globally and regionally has considerably reduced the element of external support for the insurgent Uighurs. (Potter, 2019) Post 9/11, the linkages of insurgent Uighurs with global terrorism proved to be the last nail in the coffin. The economic interdependence between China and CARS, Middle East and Europe has further emboldened the CCP over its stance. As a mandatory clause of SCO charter, the CARs very frequently arrest and handover insurgent Uighurs to China, however, the fate of these Uighurs is known across Xinjiang. China projects its COIN operations in Xinjiang as ‘flank of the US-led war on terror’. (Shichor, 2004)

Insurgency in Xinjiang - Post 9/11

The dawn of new century saw the Uighur insurgency at its lowest grade. The insurgents were dominated by the Chinese government's policies at international, regional and domestic levels, thus denying the recognition and support. (Shichor, 2004) Further the branding of the insurgency or separatist movement as terrorism considerably reduced the support for the Uighurs. Academically, the insurgents had lost all features of a successful insurgency movement. There was a serious leadership dilemma both for the insurgents as well as the peaceful Uighurs. The nexus with Taliban and AQ gave the insurgent Uighurs added militancy dimension in the cause. However, as Xinjiang had seen a long and protracted Chinese counterinsurgency, the desire for seeking autonomy and liberation in common Uighur had considerably lowered. The majority of the Uighurs started desiring for a better future and assimilation with China.

Leadership Dilemma

For a successful insurgency, the importance of both political and insurgent leadership is an undeniable fact. A successful counter insurgent would always attempt to eliminate the insurgent leadership. Chinese government, analyzing the Mao's principles of Guerilla Warfare, reverse engineered these principles into a successful counter insurgency doctrine and achieved success in Xinjiang. The leadership dilemma amongst insurgent and common Uighurs led to disintegration amongst the community and the majority started preferring assimilation with mainland China. At



the political level, the CCP exercised its strong influence thus denying a chance to any other political party or Uighurs a chance to rise. At global and regional level, the diplomatic and economic engagements have kept the Uighurs migrants apart, thus not able to unite on one agenda.

Cause of Uighur Insurgency in Xinjiang

Mostly, the Uighurs by sectarian division are Sunnis with minor exceptions. A very limited population of people with Central Asian lineage is Shia. Xinjiang is no exception to typical sectarian differences, and this has been a major reason of disharmony amongst the Muslim populace. Though involvement of KSA and Iran in this sectarian discord hasn't been determined, yet this issue has kept both sects at poles from each other. Few researchers attribute the insurgent Uighurs to the religion, while few maintain that the prime reason behind this mindset is prevalent sense of deprivation. (Liu, W. H., & Hao, 2012). Xinjiang: Increasing pain in the heart of China's borderland. As discussed above, the protracted conflict has made the majority of Uighurs desirous of better future and assimilation, thus it is safer to assume that the element of gathering around religion has gradually been minimized. In Xinjiang, a common Uighur has suffered more at the hands of both insurgents and counter insurgents (CCP), thus it is a situation of no love for anyone. The insurgents may have a cause to pursue, but a common Uighur has none.

Political Representation

As mentioned earlier, the decades of protracted conflict left the Uighurs split in three distinct groups; hardcore insurgents (limited percentage of Uighurs), desirous for autonomy (2nd largest in terms of Uighur population) and status-quo seekers aspiring for assimilation / integration with mainland China (the majority). This division fractured the very fiber of a society as no consensus could be developed amongst Uighurs (both inland and abroad). The Uighur did attempt to establish a common global forum to raise voice for Uighurs i.e. World Uighur Council (WUC) in 2004. The organization has set its aims and objective for peaceful settlement of the issue through political means. Moreover, it denounces the insurgent agenda and doesn't own such individuals and organizations. However, the organization doesn't enjoy diplomatic clout globally and is also not accepted by Uighurs in Xinjiang due to political reasons.

The Insurgent Representation

Similar to political representation, the Uighur insurgents are also split in various sub-organization and groups. The agenda of both WUC and Insurgents are different from each, wherein, WUC professes peaceful resolution, while the insurgents opt for armed struggle. The majority of insurgent organizations are not based in Xinjiang, thus have minimal linkage with the population. Owing to stern repercussions, the insurgents have least acceptance amongst common Uighurs and thus have minimal representation. Moreover, the systematic policies by Chinese government aimed at reducing violence have largely affected the representation level for insurgent. Though, the provincial and central Chinese governments still maintain that large insurgents are operating in Xinjiang, however, in reality the insurgent element has been considerably marginalized. (Potter, 2019)



AQ / ISIS and TIP Nexus 2008

With declaration of ETIM as terrorist organization, the Uighur insurgents were able to establish another organization namely Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), in 2008. (Sowell, n.d) The newly established organization had less of political aspiration and more of militant ones. The organization advocated targeting Chinese both inside and outside Xinjiang. The TIP proclaimed itself as a sub-branch of AQ / ISIS in Xinjiang. The TIP used media facilities of AQ for claiming responsibility of various terrorist activities from 2009 onwards. At one occasion, Abu Bakkar Baghdadi also announced his support for insurgency in Xinjiang. In one of his speech, he said, *“Muslim rights are forcibly seized in China, India, Palestine and more than a dozen other countries and regions. Your brothers all over the world are waiting for your rescue, and are anticipating your brigades.* (Olesen, 2014)

External and Domestic Support

Post 1949, Xinjiang remained hub of attention for global powers. As mentioned earlier, British, Soviet and Japanese government had tried to influence the internal dynamics of Xinjiang for vested interests. However, fall of British, disintegration of Soviet Union and establishment of CAR and 9/11 events gradually reduced the global support for the Uighurs . After events in 1990s, the Uighurs had established nexus with Taliban and AQ in Afghanistan. Despite being part of Taliban and fighting alongside against US, the Uighur insurgent still did not enjoy their support for the cause. However, with onset of US led GWOT in Afghanistan and declaration of Uighur insurgents as terrorists, the global support considerably reduced. However, interestingly both Taliban and AQ had soft corner for China. (Fishman, n.d., pp. 48–51)

Political Support from Muslim World

For most part of the history, the Xinjiang issue has remained a myth to outside world and Muslim world is no exception to it. The myth can be attributed as intentional or unintentional for Muslim countries. So far, only Turkey, owing its old historical and cultural lineage, supports the peaceful Uighurs. Post 2009 insurgent actions in Xinjiang and subsequent hike in counter insurgency activities by the PRC, Tayyip Erdogan said, *“no state, no society that attacks the lives and rights of innocent civilians can guarantee its security and prosperity. Whether they are Turkic Uighurs or Chinese, we cannot tolerate such atrocities. The suffering of the Uighurs is ours ”.* (Nojonen & Torbakov, n.d. Turkey officially affords the Uighurs with political asylum and supports their peaceful political movement. However, despite this political support, the Turkish government, at various instances, has announced that no secessionist movement against China will be allowed on its land.

Insurgency Attributes Comparison (1949–2018)

	1949	1978	2001	2018
Ideology / Motivation	Nationalism	Nationalism	Religious / Nationalism	Religious / Nationalism
Cause	Defined	Weakened	Weakened	Strengthening
Internal Support - Moral	Active	Active	Indifferent	Passive / Available but passive
Internal Support - Material	Active	Limited	Very Limited	Limited
External Support - Moral	Yes	Moral	Limited	Relatively Improving
External Support - Political	Yes	Limited	Limited	Relatively Improving
External Support - Logistic	Yes	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Sanctuaries	Yes	Limited	Negligible	Negligible
Objectives	Independence	Autonomy / Independence	Independence	Independence
Leadership - Internal	Organized	Very Limited / Covert	Undeclared	Very Limited
Leadership - External	Yes	Limited	Undeclared	Available at Political & Insurgent Level
Environment - Local	Yes	Independence	Independence	No
Environment - International	Yes	Very Limited	Very Limited	No
Geography	Urban / Rural	Urban	Rural	Rural
Political Leaders	Yes	Very Limited	Limited	Limited
Armed Members	Yes	Limited	High	Limited
Recognition	Yes	Limited	Very Limited	Negligible
National Representation	Yes	Limited	Limited	Fairly Limited

Deduced Cardinals of Chinese COIN Strategy

The Chinese military or government doesn't officially declare the counter insurgency doctrine. However, this doesn't imply that Chinese government is dealing Xinjiang without any strategy. After having deliberated on insurgency and counter insurgency in Xinjiang, following figure out as likely cardinals of the Chinese Counter Insurgency Strategy: -

- a. Unity of Effort and Singleness of conception at higher level.
- b. Clearly defined Aim and Objectives.
- c. Strategic Vision (clearly defined political, military, and economic objectives).
- d. Diplomatic and economic engagements at regional and global level to deny support to insurgents.
- e. Targeting Insurgent's Centre of Gravity (population).
- f. Establish political primacy and legitimacy.
- g. Utilizing all EoNPs available to subdue insurgent elements.
- h. Establish control over the area and inward/outwards movement.
- i. Availability of military, para military and police in troubled areas (for situation



- handling).
- j. Strict control over media to deny space to insurgents.
- k. Systematic segregation of society to deny space to insurgents.
- l. Intelligence 'collaboration and sharing' network (to facilitate quick response through IBSOs).
- m. Initiating economic activities and according preferential policies to commoner (to make the populace a stake holder).
- n. Integration and Assimilation of the Region (deny insurgent with religious, sectarian, cultural, ethnic platforms).
- o. Integrating the status-quo seekers in politics and deny same to insurgents.

Conclusion

The primary of political goals is at the center of the success of China in Xinjiang. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has never compromised its purpose, unlike most counterinsurgency efforts that alternate between military and political priorities, the goal of the Chinese Communist Party was always one: to keep the region secession-free and to make sure that it will never be retracted and integrated into the Chinese state indefinitely. Such clarity has facilitated the harmonization of all aspects of national power diplomatic, informational, military and economic towards the one end state. The connection between the stability of Xinjiang and more complex issues like Tibet, Taiwan, and national sovereignty adds even more weight to the issue by guaranteeing the further political intent and availability of resources in decades.

The effective application of intelligence-led operations and internal security measures is also one of the characteristic features of the Chinese COIN model. Instead of massive kinetic military operations, China has been focusing on surveillance, informer systems and pre-emptive interference of possible threats. The fact that Xinjiang was reorganized intentionally in terms of its demographic and social structure also represents a further indication of how long-term the Chinese COIN policy. Combined violence on enforcing migration policies, culture assimilation and regulation of religious expression have been used to water down the ideological and social underpinnings of insurgency. Although these policies have helped in breaking up the Uighur society, turning it into assimilationists, autonomy seekers and an insurgent minority of marginalized people, they have also destroyed the organic unity behind any unified resistance group. In this regard, China has had a success in acting at the heart of an insurgency the people.

The Uighur movement on the rebel side exhibits much of the inability of ineffective insurgencies. It is afflicted with divided leadership, absence of a common political vision, lack of domestic support and insignificant foreign support. Though connection to transnational jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) has also given the movement a degree of relevance in its operations, it has also made the movement illegitimate on the international front because it has been linked to global terrorism. This post-9/11 context more specifically allowed China to be able to place its own domestic security policies in the context of the larger discourse of counterterrorism,



which allowed it to minimize outside criticism and limit the support systems of Uighur populations. Most importantly, this research show that the Uighur problem, as we know it, is not an entirely satisfactory insurgency according to the classical definition of the concept. Lack of popular support, poor organizational set-ups, inability to operate effectively, and failure to gain recognition internationally are important factors that would lower its chances of success. In its place, a low intensity, fragmented resistance continues to be the order of the day and is dominated by powerful state apparatus that has perfected the art of coercion as well as co-option.

It can be seen that continuity and not transformation is going to shape the future of Xinjiang. Chinese state is bound to continue and even escalate its existing COIN practices especially in the areas of surveillance, economic integration and diplomatic insulation. The monitoring and data analytics can be further improved by technological technologies to make the state more capable of pre-empting dissent. Meanwhile, the expanding economic capabilities of China in the world will keep reducing the possibility of foreign intervention or prolonged international pressure.



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