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Country Report on Terrorism 2019 - Chapter 1 - China (Hong Kong and Macau)

China

Overview: The People's Republic of China (PRC) response to terrorism remained difficult to distinguish from the government's suppression of peaceful activities that authorities deemed separatist or subversive in nature. The PRC government's CT attention remained on ethnic Uyghur so-called “extremists” whom Beijing ascribes to the East Turkistan Islamic Movement, despite a lack of evidence that a group by that name is still active. The PRC government shared international concerns regarding other terrorist groups such as al-Qa’ida and ISIS, among others.

Using counterterrorism as a pretext, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has detained more than one million Uyghurs and members of other Muslim minority groups in internment camps in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region since April 2017. Because of their religion and ethnicity, they reportedly have been subjected to political, linguistic, and cultural indoctrination as well as forced disappearance, torture, physical abuse – including forced sterilization and sexual abuse – and prolonged detention without trial. Chinese authorities also developed new legal guidelines and law enforcement tools to expand their capabilities to carry out this repressive campaign, which included pervasive, arbitrary, high-tech surveillance; the collection of personal data including DNA samples; compulsory stays by PRC government officials in Uyghur homes; and controls on the expression of cultural or religious observations.

2019 Terrorist Incidents: Details about alleged terrorism-related incidents inside China were difficult to verify due to a lack of transparency and information from PRC authorities. PRC government officials provided few responses to requests from U.S. and other international officials for detailed information on alleged terrorist threats. As in 2018, PRC officials continued to claim that no violent terrorist incidents have occurred in the country since 2016, owing to the government's “new counter-extremism policies,” in an attempt to justify Beijing's repressive campaign in Xinjiang.

Chinese citizens abroad were targeted in terrorism-related incidents in 2019. The Baloch Liberation Army continued to link concerns about Chinese activity in the Chinese Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to terrorist attacks in the region and claimed responsibility for an attack on a Chinese-frequented hotel in Gwadar in May. Chinese citizens abroad were also impacted by other terrorist attacks not specifically directed against PRC government policies. For example, two Chinese citizens were injured in a July attack in Somalia claimed by al-Shabaab.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: In March, the State Council Information Office published a white paper: “The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang,” which falsely claimed that the camps were in fact “vocational training and education centers” where detainees learned Mandarin Chinese, national laws, vocational skills, and ideas to counter “extremist” thinking. International media reported on the continued mass transfer of Uyghurs and other Muslims to China's interior due to overcrowding at camps in Xinjiang, on efforts to move some detainees to forced labor facilities, and on draconian detention conditions in the facilities, including torture and deaths. Internal PRC government documents published by international media confirmed the coercive nature and prison-like conditions of the internment camps. In August, Chinese media made public the creation of a CT special operations unit in the People's Armed Police (PAP) operating in Xinjiang. Media reports did not indicate when the unit was initially established, but said the unit had passed an evaluation process and was capable of conducting combat missions.

In September, State Councilor and Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi stressed the importance of intelligence collection and research, calling for strengthened early warning and precise strikes against terrorist activities, and implementation of real-name airline ticket purchases and security checks. The PRC government continued to leverage its domestic technology sector to bolster its surveillance capabilities, including for alleged CT goals. Police deepened use of closed-circuit television camera networks paired with facial recognition, iris scanning, and other technologies to

track, discover, or predict threats to public safety across the country. Although such technology has been used to catch criminal actors, it is also used to monitor and control domestic dissidents and ethnic and religious minorities. The PRC government continued to stress the threat of domestic and international “cyber terrorism,” as a continuing pretext to tighten monitoring and censorship of online speech and mobile communications. Next-generation “anti-terrorism” equipment, including assault vehicles and anti-riot vehicles, was displayed during the PRC 70th anniversary military parade in October.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: China is a member of the FATF, the APG, and the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (EAG). The PRC is also a member of the Defeat ISIS Coalition’s CIFG. There were no significant updates in 2019.

In April 2019, FATF published a Mutual Evaluation Report that reviewed the PRC’s compliance with FATF standards and the effectiveness of PRC’s AML/CFT system. The report demonstrated a strong overall understanding of China’s terrorist financing risks, but noted deficiencies related to the implementation of targeted financial sanctions and understanding of terrorist financing risks among financial and non-financial institutions, businesses, and professions. Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) regularly cooperate on the topic of terrorist financing.

Countering Violent Extremism: The PRC government continued to implement repressive campaigns in Xinjiang under the guise of countering what it called “extremism.” Authorities intensified a campaign of mass “re-education” or “vocational training” of Uyghurs and other Muslims, which began in April 2017 with the purported goal of countering “extremism,” but whose actual goal the United States assesses to be the repression of religious and ethnic minorities. Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other Muslims are reportedly forced to learn Chinese, recite slogans in praise of the CCP, and renounce their culture and religion. At a December 10, 2019, press conference, Shohrat Zakir, chairman of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and CCP deputy chief in Xinjiang, announced that all “training” participants had “graduated” but noted the centers would remain open for local residents to participate in Chinese language, legal, vocational skills, and de-radicalization training. The PRC government’s broad definitions of “terrorism” and “extremism” and its unclear definition of “cyber terrorism” continue to raise serious human rights concerns.

Regional and International Cooperation: The PRC government continued to promote the UN as the primary international forum for counterterrorism, where it actively promotes a repressive approach to counterterrorism. In October, the UN Counterterrorism Executive Directorate conducted its first ever assessment of China’s implementation of international counterterrorism obligations. The PRC engaged in a range of multilateral, regional, and bilateral fora, while seeking to present itself as a global leader on counterterrorism. In March, former Vice Foreign Minister Cheng Guoping was appointed to a newly-created position as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs External Security Commissioner, with a mandate to enhance diplomatic outreach on CT-related topics. In 2019, efforts under these frameworks included a joint border operation, exercises on preventing terrorist use of the internet, and a joint CT drill held in Russia. BRICS meetings, including its fourth Counterterrorism Working Group meeting, reinforced the centrality of CT cooperation. China continued to participate in the Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism for Counter Terrorism, along with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. Representatives from 31 countries sent military and police representatives to attend the PAP’s biennial Great Wall International Forum on Counterterrorism.

Units from the People’s Liberation Army and PAP also held bilateral CT drills with a range of countries including India, Kazakhstan, Russia, Singapore, and Tajikistan, and in July Beijing held high-level talks with Pakistan on how to strengthen CT cooperation to protect CPEC projects. China is a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum, APEC, and the East Asia Summit, and it is also a member of the GCTF. The PRC government hosted 800 officers from ASEAN and dialogue countries for their largest-ever CT exercise in November.

Hong Kong

Overview: Hong Kong continued its security and law enforcement partnership with the United States through the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department’s joint implementation of the Container Security Initiative.

2019 Terrorist Incidents: No terrorist incidents were reported in Hong Kong in 2019.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Counterterrorism remained an operational priority for the Hong Kong Police Force. The Police Counterterrorism Response Unit provides a strong deterrent presence, assisting police districts with CT strategy implementation and complementing the tactical and professional support of existing police specialist units such as the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Bureau, the Special Duties Unit, the Airport Security Unit, and the VIP Protection Unit.

In 2018, the Hong Kong government set up the Inter-Departmental Counterterrorism Unit (IDCU) to strengthen overall CT efforts by monitoring global trends, reviewing, and improving CT strategies in Hong Kong, developing specialized CT training, and optimizing emergency response plans. The IDCU held its first exercise in March.

In 2019, authorities in Hong Kong falsely characterized the acts of pro-democracy and human rights protestors as terrorism. The PRC spokesman in Hong Kong also falsely described the actions of protestors as showing “signs of terrorism.”

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Hong Kong is a member of the FATF and the APG. Hong Kong’s FIU, the Joint Financial Intelligence Unit, is a member of the Egmont Group.

In September, the FATF published a Mutual Evaluation Report of Hong Kong, assessing Hong Kong’s AML/CFT regime to be compliant and effective overall. The report assessed Hong Kong to be at medium-low risk of terrorist financing and assessed that it has implemented sound systems to detect and investigate terrorist financing when it occurs. It further states that authorities demonstrated “a robust use of financial intelligence and the capacity to conduct complex CFT investigations,” although these have not yet exposed proliferation financing cases.

In November 2019, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority hosted Hong Kong’s AML/CFT regulatory technology forum, discussing with participants from banks, financial regulators, and law enforcement agencies the use of innovative technology to enhance the efficiency of its AML/CFT ecosystem.

Countering Violent Extremism: There were no changes to Hong Kong’s CVE programming in 2019.

International and Regional Cooperation: Hong Kong law enforcement officers attended U.S. government-sponsored capacity building training at the International Law Enforcement Academy on personnel and facility security, law enforcement techniques to counter terrorism, and financial investigations. In January 2019, Hong Kong’s representatives joined a tripartite meeting among mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau to foster cooperation on AML/CFT. Hong Kong is also an APEC economy.

Macau

Overview: Macau’s CT cooperation with the United States included information sharing. The Police Intervention Tactical Unit (UTIP), which falls under the Macau Public Security Police Force, is responsible for protecting important installations and dignitaries, and conducting high-risk missions, such as improvised explosive device deactivation. UTIP’s Special Operations Group’s mission is CT operations. Macau cooperated internationally on CT efforts through INTERPOL and other security-focused organizations.

2019 Terrorist Incidents: No terrorist incidents were reported in Macau in 2019.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: As a gambling center, Macau authorities are aware of the risks associated with junket promoters. They have indicated they are working on further steps, including strengthening the regulatory framework for market entry and intensifying AML/CFT oversight.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Macau is a member of APG. Macau’s FIU, the Financial Intelligence Office (FIO), is a member of the Egmont Group. In October, the APG announced that Macau became the first member among the globally evaluated members to demonstrate compliance with all 40 FATF recommendations.

In January and February, supervisory agencies – including the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau, the Finance Services Bureau, the Macau Monetary Authority, and the Housing Bureau – updated their AML/CFT guidelines to reduce the risk of money laundering and financing of terrorism.

Countering Violent Extremism: There were no changes to Macau’s CVE programming in 2019.

International and Regional Cooperation: In 2019, the FIO signed separate memoranda of understanding/cooperation for exchange of AML/CFT intelligence with counterparts in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Federative Republic of Brazil. In January, the FIO hosted a tripartite meeting among mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau to strengthen cooperation on AML/CFT. In September, the FIO visited the AML Bureau of the People’s Bank of China and the China Anti-Money Laundering Monitoring and Analysis Center to further strengthen cooperation and exchange.

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