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Doctoral Programme in International Studies

**“ROOTING OUT RESISTANCE IN UYGHUR SOCIETY”:  
THE MAKING OF CHINA’S COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY  
IN XINJIANG (1996-2017)**

PhD Candidate: Giulia Sciorati

Supervisor: Prof Paolo Rosa

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## ABSTRACT

The diffusion of episodes of terrorism and political violence around the world has heightened the need for states to design effective counterterrorist measures. Orthodox studies on terrorism hold that the frequency and intensity of terrorist attacks determine the levels of assertiveness maintained by counterterrorist measures. This research builds on this assumption by developing the link between terrorism and counterterrorism policy through two unit-level variables. Besides the frequency and intensity of terrorist attacks, this study examines the political orientation of states' elites, and states' integration in multilateral security frameworks. The research tests for these factors by studying counterterrorist authoritarian regimes, and questions the notion that their political orientation makes state terrorism a measure of choice.

In empirical terms, this study investigates the making of China's counterterrorism policy in Xinjiang from 1996 to 2017. The period is analysed by comparing three within-cases, bookended by pre-identified critical junctures. China's counterterrorist measures in Xinjiang have experienced a revival since President Xi came into power in 2013, and the country has been quick to adopt a counterterrorism policy that has come to resemble state terrorism. Yet, no substantial variation in the opposition to the country's elite nor exceptionally violent terrorist attacks have been recorded in the region.

This study relies upon qualitative data, such as political discourse and documents, news media and scholarly writings, and aggregated data is examined to complement the qualitative sources. Methodologically, this thesis supplements process tracing with qualitative content analysis.

The evidence provides support for a theory of 'multi-causal counterterrorism', according to which counterterrorism policy depends on the combination of systemic and domestic factors. Other than the incidence of terrorist attacks, states choose their counterterrorism policy in the context of ever-changing power relationships at the international and domestic levels. It is concluded that these power relationships impose constraints on states' decision-making abilities.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asia Development Bank
AEI	American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research
AFP	Agence France Presse
ANU	Australian National University
ARRI	Anti-Regime Rebellion Index
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
AU	African Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
BTI	Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
CCDI	Central Commission for Discipline Inspection
CIDCM	Center for International Development and Conflict Management
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
CICIR	China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CIT	China Global Investment Tracker
CMC	Central Military Commission
CNKI	China National Knowledge Infrastructure
CNP	Comprehensive National Power
CNSC	Central National Security Commission
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
CT	Counterterrorism
CTC	United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee
CTED	Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate
CTS	Critical Terrorism Studies
CYL	Communist Youth League
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
EDI	Electoral Democracy Index
ELIAS	European Institute for Asian Studies
EP	European Parliament
EPRS	European Parliament Research Service
ETIM	East Turkestan Islamic Movement
ETIP	Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFS	Global Freedom Score
GTD	Global Terrorism Database
GWOT	Global War on Terror
IAC	Islamic Association of China
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
IJG	Islamic Jihadist Group

IMU	Independent Movement of Uzbekistan
Interpol	International Criminal Police Organization
IPT	Islamic Party of Turkistan
IR	International Relations
IS	Islamic State
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LAS	League of Arab States
LSG	Leading Small Groups
MAR	Minority at Risk Database
MIT	Massachusetts's Institute of Technology
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North-Atlantic Treaty Alliance
NPC	National People's Congress
NSS	National Security Strategy
OEC	Observatory of Economic Complexity
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PAP	People's Armed Police
PBCPSU	Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
PBSC	Politburo Standing Committee
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PPD	Political Prisoners Database
PRC	People's Republic of China
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SCMP	South China Morning Post
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SREB	Silk Road Economic Belt
START	National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism
TASS	Russian Information Agency
TIP	Turkistan Islamic Party
UAE	United Arab Emirates
ULO	Uyghur Liberation Organization
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPP	Uyghurstan People's Party
URFET	United Revolutionary Front of East Turkestan
US	United States
US CECC	The Congressional-Executive Commission on China of the United States
USSR	Union of Socialist Soviet Republics
V-DEM	Varieties of Democracy
VICS	Verbs In Context System
XPCC	Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps
XUAR	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
WUYC	World Uyghur Congress

WTO World Trade Organization

## INTRODUCTION

The deepening importance of terrorism and counterterrorism (CT) studies in the agenda of International Relations became apparent after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York. The issues, which had previously been predominantly addressed as cause-effect phenomena, started to be integrated into the research programs of security studies, peace studies and international studies as part of separate research enquiries.

To large extent, this fact derives from the transformation of terrorism into a highly politicized aspect of international politics. The launch of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) by the United States (US) coordinated global responses to terrorism with CT policies directed at Islamist fundamentalist armed groups primarily located in the Muslim world. The need to determine the implications of the internationalization of CT for international politics has thus become a crucial issue, which in turn facilitated its incorporation into the IR research agenda.

As a number of structural changes are currently embracing CT policy towards its further internationalization, scholars' interest in the topic is bound to increase. Indeed, these changes require the internal and external dimensions of CT policy to be interpreted, so as to “unpack the complexity of transnational security issues” (M. Clarke 2018b, 18). In the case of China, this path has been chosen, for example, by Joanne Smith Finley (2019a) in the special issue of the *Central Asian Survey* (Zenz 2019; Rodríguez-Merino 2019; Hasmath 2019; Smith Finley 2019b; Anand 2019) and by Michael Clarke (2018b) in a recently published edited volume.

Although there is a pronounced need to address changes in CT policymaking, there has been little convergence about how the internal and external dimensions of CT policy should be formulated. The case of China's CT policy in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is a revealing case, as it involves phenomena of transnational terrorism that disrupt the state's reliance on national sovereignty in the security domain and instances of international cooperation between non-democratic countries. This case displays a divergence between levels of terrorist threats and type of

CT policy, an authoritarian leadership and patterns of cooperation between non-democratic states that have a tendency to maintain autonomous approaches towards national security.

## **CHINA'S CT POLICY IN XINJIANG: SETTING THE SCENE**

Growing *malaise* in China's north-western Xinjiang attracted international attention on issues of political contestation and state responses in China. Since early 2017, in particular, the crisis in Xinjiang has witnessed the emergence of massive "re-education campaigns" inspired by the country's past encounters with political opposition. These campaigns have taken the form of a "large-scale extra-judicial detention system" (Zenz 2019, 2) that targets Xinjiang's residents of Muslim faith and Uyghur, Kazakh and Kyrgyz origins. Some scholars trace these campaigns back to 2013 (Zenz 2019), but it is only in 2018 that hard evidence was presented to the world, thus corroborating the rumours on the existence of these detention facilities (Pannier 2018; Sudworth 2018).<sup>1</sup>

These "camps" (Buckley 2018; Byler 2019; Sudworth 2018) are a reminder of the "re-education through labour" system, a form of administrative punishment imposed by the police on counter-revolutionaries in the mid-1950s.<sup>2</sup> Thirty years later, "re-education through labour" was again applied in China's 1983 national anti-crime strategy, which expanded the functions of this punishment to political and crime control, drug rehabilitation and investigative detention (Fu 2005). The mechanics of "re-education through labour" are detrimental to Chinese society (Yu 2010), as they add a layer of complexity to crimes traditionally punished through strong-arm police operations, such as "strike hard campaigns."<sup>3</sup> It was president Jiang Zemin who had re-instated these campaigns (which had been common in Maoist times) in 1996 with the aim of stabilizing Xinjiang (Castets 2003). By the end of 2018, it would not be an exaggeration to argue that the measures adopted by the

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<sup>1</sup> Although a limited number of Western scholars has been able to conduct fieldwork in Xinjiang, detailed accounts on "re-education camps" were given by Kazakh nationals in the region after the government of Kazakhstan negotiated their return in their home country (Pannier 2018). Moreover, John Sudworth's investigation (2018) relied on satellite images of the region between 2015 and 2018, thus making a case for the construction of security compounds in the XUAR.

<sup>2</sup> In Chinese, 劳动教养 (Láodòng jiàoyǎng).

<sup>3</sup> In Chinese, 严打 (Yándǎ).

Communist Party of China (CPC) to counter violent oppositions in Xinjiang had reached a level that combined the hard power of the “strike hard campaigns” to an incursion in personal life that characterized the “re-education through labour” campaigns. Curfews, police patrols, checkpoints, internment camps, hi-tech surveillance and restrictions on freedom of religion are some of the counterterrorist measures that have carried state responses in Xinjiang to the extreme. These were adopted as part of China’s CT policy, whose assertiveness hit a peak with the camps after over two decades of tightened controls. The general aim of CT policy was to maintain political stability in the region. In this work, political stability equates to the absence of anti-state opposition – that is, low levels of political violence and social, ethnic and religious tensions, as well as high level of legitimacy of government authorities among the population (Rice and Patrick 2008; Zheng 2012).

International observers have now identified Xinjiang as a “police state” inside China (‘China Has Turned Xinjiang into a Police State’ 2018; Rife 2018). In addition, the international community has raised concerns over events unfolding in Xinjiang after it was confronted with the reality of extra-judicial internment camps. In September 2018, the High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, tackled the issue of China’s human rights violations in Xinjiang in front of the European Parliament (EP) (Mogherini 2018). Almost a year later, in June 2019, it was the US that threatened China with sanctions if the system of internment camps would not have been curtailed (Wong 2018). A month later, 22 countries, mostly Western democracies, sent a joint letter to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), urging the closure of internment camps in Xinjiang (Cumming-Bruce 2019). Shortly afterwards, however, 50 countries, mostly China’s partners from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, signed a joint letter to the UNHRC where they praised China’s efforts to develop Xinjiang (Xie and Bai 2019). None of the signatories had a particular national interest in Xinjiang. The growing clamour for China’s campaigns in Xinjiang has *de facto* divided the international community into two camps: one that opposes China’s vision for the region and another that supports its efforts to achieve it.

However, China's CT policy in Xinjiang has not been influenced by the reactions of members of the international community; it continues to be largely based on a logic of responses to political violence and episodes of terrorism. After the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests (one of the most threatening moments for China's Communist leadership in modern times), political contestation in the country has remained low with sporadic episodes of anti-state opposition mostly emerging from the country's periphery.<sup>4</sup>

In China, the concept of terrorism is a macro-term that comprises the separatism and the religious extremism that characterize the anti-state groups connected to Uyghur secessionist claims (M. Clarke 2018a). In fact, episodes of terrorism and political violence in Xinjiang are linked to a struggle that aims to establish the autonomous state of East Turkestan (Bovingdon 2004), drawing from the examples of the First Republic of East Turkestan (1933-1934) and the Second Republic of East Turkestan (1944-19946) (Klimeš 2015; D. D. Wang 1996).

Anti-state groups connected to Uyghur secessionism in fact also employed violent tactics of political contestation, including riots and attacks on civilians and public figures or members of the military (START 2019). Policymakers and activists questioned whether the number and scale of these strategies were a sufficient justification for the application of measures that targeted the social and personal freedoms of Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang.<sup>5</sup>

Most traditional studies contend that the baseline proposition of CT is that CT policy becomes increasingly more assertive when threats intensify (Fearon and Wendt 2002; Bueno De Mesquita 2003). However, the scattered anti-state groups in Xinjiang, badly equipped and poorly trained, did not convincingly represent a threat so severe as to require China to resort to the levels of repression

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the violent episodes of political contestation and terrorism in China after 1989, see START. 2019. 'Global Terrorism Database'. University of Maryland: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

<sup>5</sup> Ana Bracic and Amanda Murdie (2019) raised the issue of whether the term counterterrorism offers a justification to states' human rights abuses, thus discussing the ethical problems that surround CT studies. As discussed by Sheena Chestnut Greitens, Myunghee Lee and Emir Yazici (2020), in the case of China, the concept of terrorism remains central in the rhetoric of the country's governmental authorities. Therefore, examining China's policy in Xinjiang under the lenses of counterterrorism is crucial better to understand the policy choices of the authorities, thus offering policymakers and human rights defenders strong empirical studies to rely on.



of a police state. Especially in a country like China, where the total expenditure for public security passed from 780 billion yuan in 2013 to 1.2 trillion yuan in 2017, accounting for roughly 6 percent of China's total budget for public expenditure (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2014-2018). This is even more striking for Xinjiang, as it was local governments that received the majority of the public security budget, estimated to be about 88 percent of the total in 2017 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2014-2018). Moreover, the Xinjiang Military District was placed under the direct control of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)<sup>6</sup> (McCauley 2017) in an effort to incorporate CT into the army agenda (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2019).

These observations raise a crucial question: *why has the country's political leadership adopted increasingly more assertive measures of CT since the mid-nineties?*

The explanation of China's growing assertiveness towards Xinjiang is the principal aim of this study. In theoretical terms, the study addresses the question of which factors affect policymaking in the realm of CT, devoting particular attention to the specificities of authoritarian countries.

## **EXPLANATIONS FOR CT POLICY AND CHINA'S POLICY IN XINJIANG**

This study argues for a multi-causal theoretical framework for explaining states' responses to episodes of terrorism and political violence. Relying on IR literature, the thesis claims that internal and external dimensions of CT have the potential to affect states' policymaking efforts. Based on a review of the existing literature, one of the weaknesses highlighted is the way states choose counterterrorist measures. A debate that would be improved by examining the cumulative impact of domestic processes and the larger international setting on CT policy choices.

The study derives from empirical observations on China's CT policy in Xinjiang, the levels of assertiveness of which have increased since the mid-nineties. Consequently, the thesis looks at this case as a reflection of broader questions about the country's failure to engage its periphery (Koch

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<sup>6</sup> Most provincial-level military districts are under the supervision of the Central Military Commission (CMC).

2006) and the factors that contribute to the development of one type of CT policy over another. Due to the high level of confidentiality of the topic, this work relies on publicly available primary and secondary sources. Among the primary sources examined, there are policy and legal documents, government memos, statements, speeches, press releases, articles and reported interviews from Chinese government representatives. Secondary sources comprise academic publications, reports, working papers and policy briefs from research centres and think tanks, presentations and lectures, seminars and conferences, which were primarily used to gather information that could not be collected in open access.

State responses to terrorism and episodes of political violence have been traditionally ascribed to the magnitude of terrorist violence and the national capabilities of states. From the viewpoint of rationalist theory, states' policies have been explained in connection to "expected utility." In brief, the key contention of this approach is that states act only if the benefits of performing the action exceed its costs (Fearon and Wendt 2002). Rationalism thus explains states' policies in functional terms, interpreting states' behaviours in relation to their attempts to fulfil goals (Bueno De Mesquita 2003). Yet, leaders also follow decision rules, when making decisions. The lexicographic decision rule, in particular, argues for policymakers to select among policy alternatives in accordance with the criterion they value the most (Payne, Bettman and Johnson 1988). As a consequence, policymakers disqualify the alternatives that obtain low scores in the main criterion, while low scores in other criteria do not affect the decision-making process (Mintz and DeRouen 2010).

A variation of the rationalist explanation is realism, which interprets CT policy in pursuance of a security self-interest that is exogenously built as a response to an anarchical international system. In this view, states act in pursuit of their best possible interest, which is signalled by the resources and information states can access. As terrorism creates public setbacks for a government incapable of protecting its people, terrorist attacks and episodes of political violence do challenge government authority. States' responses to terrorism, though, are limited by their availability of security forces, finances and infrastructures (Kenneth N. Waltz 2008).

Another strand of the literature, constructivism, examines the social construction of politics. Constructivism sees states as social actors, the interests and identities of which are determined by shared ideas and norms (Adler 2002). In contrast with rationalist theory, interests are not determined by states as agents that operate autonomously, but they are shaped by commonly held ideas (Checkel 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink 2001). Scholars have advanced a wide set of explanations to clarify why states abide to norms (e.g., Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Wagner, Boekle, and Rittberger 2001; Checkel 1998). On the one hand, international norms offer decision-makers simple rules to follow, generally serving as shortcuts to inform decisions about states' conduct (Shannon 2000). On the other hand, compliance with international norms has the potential to provide legitimacy and positive social reinforcements to states that aspire to enhance their reputation with the international community or seek international legitimization (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Wagner, Boekle, and Rittberger 2001). In addition, states may have instrumental reasons to follow international norms, such as sanctions or foreign aid requirements (Omelicheva 2009b).

A third strand of literature presents perception-based explanations, which look at CT policy in relation to the way governments perceive terrorist threats. Indeed, if states perceive terrorist attacks and episodes of political violence as acts of war, states will rely on the rules, strategies, tactics and institutions traditionally employed at wartime (Crelinsten 1989b; Oliverio 1998). In contrast, if states perceive episodes of terrorism and political violence as criminal offenses, states will respond within the boundaries of the rule of law (Crelinsten 1989b).

A recent specialization in the literature investigates CT policy in reference to regime type. Overall, these studies seek to find an answer to whether democracies are better counterterrorists than authoritarian states (Crotty 2005a; Abrahms 2007; 2008; Crenshaw 1981; Schmid 1992). However, the relationship between regime type and terrorism has an additional layer of complexity. Indeed, as not all democracies are alike, neither are authoritarian regimes. From this consideration, this study proposes to address the issue of CT and regime type by presenting a link between states' CT policy choices and the form of authoritarianism adopted by states' political elites. Case studies on the

responses of authoritarian states to terrorism have been isolated, as recent scholarship has prioritized quantitative analyses. Still, authoritarian states have had the tendency not to report terrorist attacks (Drakos and Gofas 2007). China is a case in point as institutional documents have been known to misreport data on terrorist attacks (e.g., State Council Information Office 2002), thus making quantitative analyses problematic (Pokalova 2013).

The multi-causal theoretical framework for authoritarian states' responses to episodes of terrorism and political violence presented by this study aims to incorporate external dimensions of CT policymaking (interest-based and norm-based) with the domestic dimension of CT that takes into consideration the political orientation of the elite towards the levels of authoritarianism employed to govern a country. This further specification takes into consideration the strand of literature that links CT policy to regime type, but expands its extent beyond questions about the levels of success of democratic and authoritarian approaches. In fact, it considers regime as a condition that affects CT policymaking in authoritarian countries, as the form of authoritarianism towards which political elites are oriented has the potential to promote forms of illiberal practices that have a different intensity.

This study is thus an attempt to contribute to the current debates by presenting a case study of China. Grounding the line of reasoning into empirical observations and research on CT policy choices in authoritarian (Omelicheva 2010; Pokalova 2013; Byman 2016) and democratic states (Chalk 1995; Abrahms 2007; S.-W. Choi 2010), the thesis argues that threat-capability arguments and norm-compliance calculations better explain CT policy choices in authoritarian states when integrated with assessments on the political orientation of states' elites towards different forms of authoritarianism. Consequently, CT policy is not exclusively linked to the levels of terrorist threats. The study positions itself in the research thread that integrates internal and external determinants of counterterrorism policy endorsed by Clarke (2018b), Eriksson and Rhinard (2009) and Omelicheva (2007a; 2009a; 2009b; 2010a). By looking at internal determinants of CT policy, this study contends that states' counterterrorist measures are influenced by cooperative/conflictual intra-elite relations, as they determine the extent to which the country relies on illiberal practices.

In empirical terms, this thesis argues that changes in China's CT policy in Xinjiang have been triggered by the joint action of the pressure to act exerted on China's by the security environment, the orientation of the political elite in terms of the form of authoritarianism and the norms that were conducted by China's reference groups at the regional level – i.e., the Shanghai Five and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). For instance, while Jiang Zemin, President of the People's Republic of China (PRC) between 1989 and 2001, relied on campaigns led by the armed forces as the counterterrorist measures for the country, Xi Jinping, his second successor in charge since late 2012, complemented Jiang's campaigns with the establishment of the “re-education through labour” campaigns, thus further limiting personal and social freedoms.

Counterterrorist measures based on an approach that engages society—e.g., developmental policies—challenge the argument that hard power is the *a priori* choice for states' facing terrorist threats. Hu Jintao, President of the PRC between 2001 and 2012, for instance, attempted a partial bottom-up approach to CT by adopting developmental policies (i.e., internal migration and financial aid) in addition to military power.

Although Xi's massive infrastructural project, the well-known Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), could be considered the natural outlet for the regional development policies adopted by Hu (Clarke 2016), the practice of these two approaches show substantial difference as one's objectives could no longer be associated with the other, especially with reference to their internal dimension. In fact, if Hu's Great Western Development Strategy aimed to adopt development and industrialization policies to integrate territories such as Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Yunnan, which were populated by ethnic groups that central authorities had failed to control since 1949, the focus of Xi's project remained to develop infrastructures and accelerate the economic integration of countries along the old Silk Road (Gan and Mao 2016). Although the BRI maintained an internal dimension similar to Hu's strategy, it was largely overridden by the outward-looking aims of the project. Certainly, Xinjiang continued to play a crucial role in the development of the BRI, as the region is traversed by three out of five corridors that make up the Initiative's landroute. Yet, the projects carried out under

the BRI framework no longer aim to stem insecurities through integration, but consider regional stabilization as a *starting point* of an ever-growing development of the project as a whole and not as an *arrival point*. Indeed, as development projects under Hu aimed to act as “mergers” between eastern and western China, targeting instabilities emerging from ethnic and religious differences thus producing evidence of the implementation of a bottom-up approach to stabilize the region, the BRI abandoned this tendency in favour of top-down measures following a “stabilizing” function. This tendency is empirically reinforced by the BRI traditional model, which transfers human capital and resources from China to its partner countries (Johnston 2019). A similar approach can in fact be recognized in Xinjiang’s development projects, as central authorities encouraged the internal migration to the region from different parts of China, primarily aimed to increase regional business capacity and industrialization. As a consequence, BRI development projects in Xinjiang differ both in aim and implementation with the measures implemented by Hu and cannot be considered as an instance of a bottom-up approach towards countering instabilities in Xinjiang.

In brief, it is thus argued that by studying both domestic processes and larger institutional settings, variations in the levels of assertiveness of China’s CT policy would be better explained.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

This study is organized in six chapters. Chapter 1 reviews existing literatures that have addressed CT policy choices. The discussion stems from the early debates about the role that high levels of terrorist threats play in encouraging harsher responses. I argue that the rationalist approach, which makes CT policy structurally inherited from the levels of terrorist threats, needs to be integrated with other factors as it views the perception of terrorist threats and states’ counterterrorist measures as static. The constructivist approach explains CT policy and a lack of correlation between the levels of threat and the intensity of states’ counterterrorist measures through the acquisition of externally-driven norms. I argue that these norms often fail to answer the question: why was one reference group chosen over another? The perception-based approach promotes a conceptualization of states’ perceptions that

does not vary over time and fails to consider the micro-processes that affect the manner in which terrorism is perceived. Relying extensively on IR research and Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) literature, the study provides the framework for analysing the impact of the internal and individual dimensions of CT policy.

Chapter 2 bridges analytical and empirical parts of the thesis and outlines the research design. It presents the conceptual framework of this study, which makes reference to Neoclassical Realism. The chapter also explains the methodological choices of concentrating on three periods of China's CT policy for Xinjiang. It also conceptualizes CT as a single framework, although it seeks to counter phenomena of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism. The chapter also operationalizes the variables and offers a set of indicators that allow for tracing the impact of internal and external dimensions on China's CT policy choices. It concludes with data collection issues.

Chapter 3 frames China's CT policy by empirically explaining the philosophical precepts of the country's Communist doctrine. This chapter seeks to find common ground between the concepts of terrorism and counterterrorism as presented by CTS and the connotation assigned to them by China's Communist leaders. This chapter also analyses the transformations in the conceptualization of terrorism since 1996. It discusses how changes—i.e., the internationalization of terrorist threats and the establishment of regional frameworks of cooperation—have affected the meaning attributed to terrorism by the country. It shows that these changes facilitated the adoption of a definition of terrorism that was offered by regional actors. In a sense, the chapter re-interprets the modern history of terrorism and CT in China, thus contributing to the literature on policy changes in authoritarian countries. It also discusses how the political orientation of the elite affects policymaking and identifies contentious issues in separatism and religious extremism.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 proceed with the main argument that the action of both internal and external dimensions influences CT policy. These chapters present three case studies, designed to answer the thesis' research question: under which conditions does CT policy result in soft or hard measures? The three case studies analyse three periods of counterterrorism policy in China, tracing

differences in the variables that are considered determinant for the outcome: the pressure to act exerted by the security environment, the political orientation of the elite towards hard/soft authoritarianism and the type of norms presented by states' reference groups. The first case—that of Jiang Zemin (1996-2001)—shows a coordination between the political orientation of the leaders and the type of norms promoted by regional security actors. The second case—that of Hu Jintao (2001-2012)—demonstrates that China did exacerbate the CT policy adopted by political leaders in light of China's strive to consolidate its legitimacy amongst regional powers that pushed the country to internalize the norms presented by regional security organizations. The third case—that of Xi Jinping (2012-2017)—reveal a convergence between internal and external conditions that marked new levels of assertiveness for China's CT policy and the adoption of norms that invade physical integrity rights.

Conclusions synthesize and summarize the main findings and discuss their contribution to theoretical debates and their policy implications. It also outlines potential paths for future research. Among others, the thesis makes a step forward in analysing CT policy choices in authoritarian states.



# **CHAPTER 1. IR APPROACHES TO COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY**

The ultimate goal of IR theory is to explain state behaviour (Hollis and Smith 1991). Among the different approaches to the discipline, rationalism and constructivism have traditionally led scholarly debates (Fearon and Wendt 2002; Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1999). These two approaches inspired several sub-schools, each of which provided a unique perspective to explain why states set certain goals instead of others, and in which way they choose the means to achieve these goals. By devising theory-driven frameworks of state behaviour, IR scholars aim to sharpen their sense of reality. Insights drawn from the theoretical framework of each sub-school used to be the private domain of the members of that particular sub-school. However, interferences between sub-schools are now encouraged, as they develop deeper understandings of the crucial questions characterizing the approaches adopted by each sub-school (Person 2017).

IR has been considered unsuitable to treat the emergence of threats by non-state actors because of its incapacity to adapt rapidly to changing phenomena (Williams 1998). For this reason, CT has been traditionally treated through the lenses of security studies, geopolitics or analyses that focus on “the other end of the bargain,” thus addressing terrorism, insurgency and political contestation. However, given the central focus of the discipline on state behaviour, insights from IR theory have a chance to better explain why states choose to adopt different responses to terrorism (Omelicheva 2007b). Moreover, as IR theory places the state at the centre of analyses, it is better suited to account for the state as the agent that can also choose to adopt terrorism as a policy of securitization.

## **1.1 CT POLICY: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND FUTURE CHALLENGES**

Despite the pre-eminence regained by the topic of terrorism after 9/11, conceptual work on the term CT has remained scarce. A simple JSTOR search practically exemplifies this trend with the term “terrorism” returning 163,351 and “counterterrorism” only listing 68,732 items (“JSTOR Search

Results” 2020). As Olivier Lewis argued (2017), this scarcity can be related to the fact that CT has remained a less contested and “self-evident” term in the literature than terrorism. Yet, understanding and countering terrorism are two mutually constitutive issues: indeed, how terrorism is conceptualized informs how counterterrorism is developed and applied (Coaffee 2006; Goldsmith 2008). As Ronald Crelinsten contended (2009), “how people talk about problems, frame them, and conceptualise them often determines what they do about them ... restricting their imagination and narrowing their options” (7-9).

Nonetheless, a number of scholars has started to work on defining and re-defining CT – among others, Pedahzur and Ranstorp 2001; Posner 2001; Chalk et al. 2004; Wyn Rees 2006; Forest 2007; Foley 2013 and Dahl 2014. Still, most conceptualizations have been more “applied” than “theoretical” (Ganor 2005; Crelinsten 2013), and CT has been commonly defined inductively, grounded in a case-by-case discrimination. For instance, Ami Pedahzur and Magnus Ranstorp framed CT as a struggle between Israel’s democratic and authoritarian policy preferences, while Wyn Reese made a case for CT as being integrated in a deep-seated security regime between Europe and the US.

Despite their contribution in deepening our understanding of the term CT, none of these conceptualizations codified into formal definitions. Indeed, as they were articulated inductively through case studies, these definitions seldom compared between CT and the countering of other forms of political violence. Moreover, they assigned exclusive agency to the state and did not account for the countering of state terrorism.

Although Crelinsten suggested (2009) that CT now operates in the supranational, regional, national and subnational level, the practice of studies on CT has remained anchored to responses to terrorism and political violence that are the ultimate decision of the state. Yet, the literature does seem to agree that CT requires the integration of domestic and international responses and that “the traditional separation between domestic and foreign policy can no longer be strictly maintained” (Crelinsten 2007, 212). Indeed, much of CT writing is that the what is needed is a multifaceted approach is needed (Atran 2004; Crelinsten 2009; Mroz 2009). Ranstorp (2006), in particular, adds

that the development of intern-governmental partnerships in countering terrorism has become crucial given the transnational dimension of the phenomenon. As Crelinsten observes (2007), these partnerships need to be supported by a “framework of international and regional cooperation and global governance” (213). In this manner, the “root causes” of terrorism can be effectively addressed, also in consideration of the applicability and transferability of strategies across states and the social, economic, political and historical contexts in which violence arises (Guiora 2009; Richmond 2003). Lastly, conceptual work on CT agrees to define it as an “oppositional purposive action” to terrorism (Schmid and Jongman 1998, 43). Simply put, without the intention to oppose terrorism, there is no CT.

By putting together the key points of the conceptualization of CT, it transpires that CT can be roughly defined as the combination of public and foreign policies that aim to ensure the protection of the public by introducing restrictions to the actions of violent groups and individuals. Overall, CT is investigated in relation to terrorism, as the increases in the number of episodes of political violence and terrorism have stressed the need for counterterrorist measures to be inserted in states’ national security strategies (NSS). As a policy, CT comprises several endeavours. It ranges from state actions to state decisions, the application of general guidelines, the observable behavioural choices of states and official statements from policymakers (Omelicheva 2010b). Due to its wide application, CT covers a variety of policy arenas and invests several state agencies, disregarding their core mandates. CT can thus be treated as a multilevel governing tool, the application of which is not limited to the governmental organizations that are authorized to play defensive, policing or intelligence roles. This “comprehensive” approach has now become a reference point in CT practice, although this has *de facto* increased the levels of complexity of CT as a discipline (Crelinsten 2009). In fact, neither terrorism nor CT are impeded by national frontiers. Therefore, terrorism exhibits traits that are typical of both internal and international security issues. At the same time, CT assumes some characteristics that are commonly associated with both foreign and domestic policies (Omelicheva 2010b).

As it is included within states' NSSs, CT is assumed to be linked to the principle of state sovereignty (Thomson 1995). Yet, as states' security challenges are globalizing, it would be ambiguous to claim that states remain autonomous decision-makers in enacting processes of securitization. Especially, as the main determinant of CT—i.e., terrorism—is systemic in nature. From this perspective, Alastair I. Johnston (2007) makes a case for normative convergence within international security institutions that operate at regional and global levels. Despite Johnston expanding his argument beyond CT, his study on norms diffusion in regional security organizations supports the notion that CT is a policy that is designed by multilateral frameworks of cooperation and then internalized by those states that do not play the role of decision-makers within these frameworks. An argument that was further specialized by scholars looking at patterns of convergence in states' responses to terrorism in democratic and authoritarian countries (Rees and Aldrich 2005; Omelicheva 2007a; 2009b; e.g., Nohrstedt and Hansén 2010).

As there is no general consensus on its definition, CT is associated with offensive, proactive and aggressive measures. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), indeed, presents a working definition that expands the scope of CT, as it places under its umbrella “all preventive, defensive and offensive measures taken to reduce the vulnerability of forces, individuals and property against terrorist threats and/or acts, and to respond to terrorist acts” (NATO Standardization Office 2017, 31). Among the messages conveyed by the NATO definition is the absence of any discrimination between CT and anti-terrorism. In fact, while CT traditionally entails offensive responses to episodes of terrorism and political violence, anti-terrorism denotes a more defensive character in the policies adopted by states. Indeed, CT and anti-terrorism present different evaluations of terrorism. CT is enacted as a response to terrorism, whereas anti-terrorism is rooted in the notion that states are hyper-vigilant – that is, they remain in a constant state of alert that is not only contingent with the externalization of terrorist violence (Grice 2015). As a consequence, anti-terrorism aims to gather information on terrorist threats as well as reduce the vulnerability of people, properties, security and military forces to terrorist violence (Celmer 1987).

The NATO definition thus envisions CT as a multilevel policy, which has the tools to prevent and respond to terrorist violence. In a sense, anti-terrorism is contained in CT. This is even more prominent as anti-terrorism and CT are not easily discerned, especially since CT generally combines offensive and defensive measures to contrast and prevent terrorist violence. This study does not differentiate between CT and anti-terrorism but inserts both offensive and defensive measures under the banner of CT.

The “logic of response” presented by the NATO definition is consistent with the interest-based explanations of IR theory that identify states as “utility maximisers,” acting in functional terms (Bueno De Mesquita 1988).<sup>7</sup> Counterterrorist measures are in fact framed as policies that seek to “respond to terrorist acts” (NATO Standardization Office 2017, 31), thus entailing that states respond to terrorism in accordance with cost-benefit calculations, which take into consideration states’ material capabilities (Kenneth N. Waltz 2008). Therefore, CT is particularly intrusive, as it operates in several policy areas and according to numerous dimensions. Although states implement CT as a response to terrorist attacks, it is policymakers that detect, perceive and present terrorism to the public (Schmid 2004). Therefore, it is policymakers that provide idiosyncratic definitions of terrorism.<sup>8</sup> These, in turn, set a double standard, as policymakers, acting on behalf of the state, have the tendency to detach CT from state terrorism (Smith Finley 2019a).

Considering terrorism more in terms of “actions” than “actors” well serves the current research agenda of Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS).<sup>9</sup> In this manner, the scope of terrorism is in fact

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<sup>7</sup> The interest-based explanations for CT policy derived from IR theory are presented in section 1.2.

<sup>8</sup> Even in academic circles, conceptualizing terrorism has proven to be a challenge for scholars, especially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks when studies on terrorism expanded dramatically. Yet, one of the main critiques to analyses on terrorism sets the lack of a recognized definition of the phenomenon at the core, arguing that “a lack of definition is perceived widely as one of the factors likely to encourage future terrorism” (Schmid 2004, 378). Indeed, the field has mainly addressed empirical cases, offering few insights on the theory at work behind terrorism (Silke 2003; Schuurman 2019). Building on Igor Primoratz (2004), Anthony Richards (2014) attempted to fill this void by proposing a definition of terrorism that places fear and coercion at the core. He indeed contends that “terrorism is the use of violence or the threat of violence with the primary purpose of generating a psychological impact beyond the immediate victims or object of attack for a political motive” (230). By this, ideology and agency lose the primary role they had previously retained and terrorism assumes a wider application that is not limited to non-state groups. To expand on the definitional aspects of terrorism, see Crenshaw 1991; Hoffman 2002; Ganor 2002; Silke 2003; Primoratz 2004; A. Schmid 2004; Richards 2014.

<sup>9</sup> CTS was formally established in 2007, reflecting the need to fix some of the issues that emerged from orthodox research on terrorism. One of the main objectives set for CTS was to detach terrorism from the underlying link to non-

widened, so as that it makes it possible to assign agency to the state (M. Clarke 2018a). According to Igor Primoratz (2004), in fact, state terrorism comprises campaigns of terrorism that are launched by the state to maintain its power and legitimacy to rule. No clear boundaries have been set between the operationalization of state terrorism and CT, as the latter adopts tactics that are commonly associated with the former. Moreover, state terrorism relies on measures that are operationally similar to those employed by terrorists (Primoratz 2004), thus increasing its complexity. Indeed, as Richard Jackson contends (2008), states have started to use violence as a practice of intimidation earlier than non-state groups. The assumption that terrorism is confined to non-state groups mainly derives from states' legitimacy to use force and the unclear boundaries between the type of violence that is authorized by law and the type that is not (Blakeley 2012; Finn 1988).

Although state terrorism remains one of the most overlooked areas of study in the fields of terrorism and CT (Schuurman 2019), a variety of dimensions were identified as its markers. When state terrorism occurs, violence is employed without a clear cause or justification, and does not discriminate between targets, thus being directed at all levels of society (Primoratz 2004). Ruth Blakeley (2012) further specified on these dimensions of state terrorism by contending that state violence is employed or threatened against civilians by state actors, which aim to induce fear in their targets in an effort to force changes in their behaviour.<sup>10</sup> In a sense, what discriminates between state terrorism and CT are the limits within which states are entitled to wield violence: simply put, once states cross the boundaries set by the rule of law and adopt illiberal practices, CT then enters in the

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state groups forged in the post 9/11 renaissance of terrorism studies (Gunning 2007). In particular, the role of the state as a perpetrator of terrorism remains among the research agenda for CTS. This particular sub-field have now expanded to mainstream studies on terrorism and counterterrorism (Schuurman 2019). A comprehensive overview of CTS has been presented by Marie Breen Smyth, Jeroen Gunning, Richard Jackson, George Kassimeris and Piers Robinson in the introduction to the first volume of "Critical Studies on Terrorism," the flagship journal of the field, in 2008. See Smyth, Marie Breen, Jeroen Gunning, Richard Jackson, George Kassimeris, and Piers Robinson. 2008. 'Critical Terrorism Studies—an Introduction'. *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1 (1): 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539150701868538>.

<sup>10</sup> Blakeley (2007) sets another important standard for orthodox studies on terrorism and counterterrorism. Indeed, she underlines that the phenomenon has been misinterpreted due to the assumption—mainly drawn from IR theory—that the state is a benign actor. State terrorism has resulted in associations with "rogue states". The same misconception has led scholars of constructivism to consider the internalization of normative behavior only in terms of "good norms," where the term "good" underscored norms that entail a step towards democratization (Heller and Kahl 2013).

realm of state terrorism. Yet, the far-reaching impact of CT in today's world narrowed the gap between CT and state terrorism. Indeed,

the wide range of issues where threats to democratic freedoms and values have arisen, such as torture and extraordinary rendition ... surveillance and the right to privacy ... data mining; limits on freedom of expression and assembly; restriction of religious symbols; regulation of charitable organizations and giving; and border, visa, immigration, and refugee controls; starkly demonstrates the pervasive impact of this global counter-terrorism ... effort (Crelinsten and Crelinsten 2018, 363).

The literature on CT has also presented a number of categories that make an effort to discern between states' responses to terrorism. Overall, states were traditionally classified as "soft" or "hard" counterterrorists. While the first category has been characterized by the use of diplomatic measures such as negotiation, intelligence and social reforms in the application of CT, the latter came to be identified in relation with the deployment of military forces, legal-repressive measures and economic sanctions (e.g., Miyaoka 1998; Wilkinson 2006; Omelicheva 2009a; Gunaratna 2017). The multilevel application of CT, in fact, makes it possible to distinguish between soft or hard counterterrorist states and, as a consequence, to understand the direction of states' NSSs (Grice 2015).

The distinction between soft or hard counterterrorist measures takes different forms in the literature in accordance with the agenda that is assigned to states. For instance, Crelinsten (1989a) opposes the "criminal justice" model to the "war" model. In Crelinsten's theorization, the former adopts tactics that rest within the boundaries of rule of law, while the latter employs all possible measures to counter terrorism. These two models also present different agents, as the criminal justice/soft model opposes the war/hard one in the sense that these models respectively rely on the action of the police and civil society or the policy and the military. Among others, the models presented by Peter Chalk (1994) and Ami Pedahzur and Magnus Ranstorp (2001) present these same characteristics under different labels.<sup>11</sup> These dichotomizations, despite offering a useful benchmark

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<sup>11</sup> The dichotomization of CT policy into "soft" and "hard" approaches is a long-standing theme in CT studies. Among the several models designed to explain states' counterterrorist measures, Chalk (1994) and Pedahzur and Ranstorp's (2001) are prime examples. These models, despite standing on different assumptions and being moved by different research aims, come to similar dichotomizations of CT policy that are consistent with Crelinsten's

for distinguishing between states according to their counterterrorist measures, have no means to account for any variation across time and space that CT might experience. In fact, as they stand, CT models difficultly integrate between the internal and external dimensions of state responses to terrorism, thus finding a hard time to standardise counterterrorist measures. Lastly, empirical applications of these models have predominantly been conducted on Western democracies, the commitment to human rights of which is naturally embedded in CT (Wilkinson 2006). To an extent, these cases have proven difficult to analyse by means of this dichotomy as democracies rarely adopt measures that violate human rights and move outside the boundaries of the rule of law. Therefore, studies on democracies cannot account for the full extent of the “hard” form of CT as much as cross-sectional or comparative analyses on democracies and authoritarian regimes could.

Current literature on CT presents general explanations on states’ responses to terrorism. To be sure, interest in the topic have re-kindled only after terrorism had reached the core of the West with terrorist attacks striking New York, London, Madrid and Paris (Crelinsten and Crelinsten 2018). However, there have been few attempts to conduct systematic studies on the convergence/divergence of CT policy among states (e.g., Omelicheva 2009b; Lehrke and Schomaker 2014; Boer and Wiegand 2015) or across time (e.g., Argomaniz and Vidal-Diez 2015; Argomaniz, Bures, and Kaunert 2015; Omelicheva 2017). These tendencies have contributed to counter what Marc Sageman (2014) defined as a phase of “stagnation in terrorism research” (565). Indeed, to grasp in full the factors that regulate state behaviour, the policies adopted by states need to be compared across time and space (Kaarbo 2003). The majority of studies on states’ or international organizations’ responses to terrorism have

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perception-based models (1989). In fact, Chalk conducted a study on the anti-terrorist agenda of the EU as set by the third pillar of the Maastricht Treaty. His investigation concluded that the EU’s CT policy was designed in an effort to protect the precepts of liberal democracies. The EU model was thus rooted in the assumption that democratic legitimacy needs to be maintained at all costs, upholding, in turn, an approach that displays many of the characteristics of the “soft” CT approach, which sits comfortably within the boundaries of the rule of law (Crelinsten 1989). Such an approach opposes a CT policy that does not assign the same importance to democratic values. Conversely, Pedahzur and Ranstorp (2001) build on Crelinsten’s CT approaches—which are operationalized by working on the case of Israel—by adding a third CT model that lies in-between Crelinsten’s “criminal justice” and “war” models. The “expanded criminal justice” model was devised in an effort to better define the relation between CT and democracy. However, this model, despite accounting for the progressive erosion of democratic values in states’ securitization efforts, does not identify an entirely new approach to CT, but should be considered more as a specialization of the “soft” approach.



mostly remained exploratory (e.g., Crelinsten and Schmid 1992; Freeman 2003; Van Leeuwen 2003; Boulden and Weiss 2004; Sidel 2004; Von Hippel 2005; Aznar 2006) and mainly focused on non-state groups as the sole promoters of CT. In this manner, states/terrorists have *de facto* remained invisible (Crelinsten and Crelinsten 2018).

Despite widening knowledge on different cases of CT, scholars made limited attempts to assess how one category of CT policy is adopted instead of another. This tendency is eradicated in the state of CT as an independent field from security studies, foreign policy and IR theory. The “independence” of CT as a field of study is a disadvantage, as it does not allow for interferences from analyses conducted in adjacent fields (Omelicheva 2007a). For instance, the magnitude of episodes of political violence and terrorism has been presented as the core element that affects the type of counterterrorist measures adopted by states. Nonetheless, the extent of the impact of terrorist violence or the variations in CT policy choices that it triggers have been seldom tested in the literature (Sidel 2004; Omelicheva 2007b; 2007a; 2009b; 2010a; Van Dongen 2010; Pokalova 2015b; Reeves 2016). The main field of research for CT has indeed focused on determining the historical, institutional and cultural contexts that lie behind policy choices as well as states’ identities as the main drivers to NSSs (Katzenstein 1996; Miyaoka 1998; Rees and Aldrich 2005; Johnston 2007; Aris 2011).

## **1.2 INTEREST-BASED EXPLANATIONS FOR CT POLICY**

Interest-based explanations for CT policy choices are rooted in the notion that states act in functional terms, thus following a logic of utility maximization. This implies that states act only if the costs associated with performing an action are inferior to the benefits. Interest-based explanations to CT thus place goals at the core of state behaviours. Rationalists and realists interpret states as behaving autonomously in pursue of their self-interests. From this notion, the magnitude of episodes of terrorism and political violence as well as national capabilities are considered as the main determinants of states’ responses to terrorism.

### 1.2.1 THE RATIONALIST EXPLANATION

As a theoretical approach, rationalism explains policy choices in relation to states' goals (Fearon and Wendt 2002, 54). In general, it is rooted in the notion that laws govern nature and that these laws, in turn, are explained by the causal mechanisms that regulate social phenomena. The rationalist school of IR theory is eradicated in the "positivist" approach to the social world, which accounts for a systematic posture in the study of the social sciences. Rationalism investigates states' actions as the product of a reasoning of "utility maximization" (Bueno De Mesquita 1988). This implies that states act in accordance with strategic calculations about the costs and benefits of their actions (Bueno De Mesquita 1988; Fearon and Wendt 2002). This "logic of response" implies that states act in accordance with calculations about their best possible course of action, mainly determined by material rewards.

In this sense, CT is determined by the magnitude of terrorist violence and the national capabilities of states (Omelicheva 2010a). This approach was at the base of the underlying assumptions characterizing the "neo" traditions of the IR schools of realism and liberalism, which, in accordance with a "substantive knowledge of international politics" (Snidal 2002, 88), expanded their theoretical reach by determining that states are the chief decision-makers in the international system. As rationalist theory offers a theoretical framework that systematizes analyses on how states make one decision instead of another, it allows for better predictions on states' prospective behaviours.

Although there exist several approaches to rationalism, this school of thought finds an application among IR scholars mainly as the theory of *rational choice*. In brief, rational choice understands states as autonomous decision-makers that make choices according to preferences and constraints (Snidal 2002). Indeed, as Nicholson states (1996), rationality is exercised in "the efficient pursuit of consistent goals" (157), and it is from this perspective that rational choice established its methodological supremacy over IR theory (Snidal 2002). In fact, the attention rational choice pays to goal-seeking behaviour gives priority to actors, and their ability and their constraints to achieve goals. Although states' goals might include normative or ideational products, the rationalist approach

remains linked primarily to interests. Nevertheless, as rationalism also considers constraints – interpreted as connected either to technological or institutional issues or to questions related to goal interdependency – the rationalist approach is well suited to include the limits states experience in decision-making. Such an approach is thus relevant in studies on CT as it places interests under the spotlight. Yet, interests are not considered only in terms of the nature of goals, but also in terms of the extent to which states are capable of achieving them. The inclusion of CT among states’ central interests is ensured by the nature of terrorism, which jeopardizes the legitimacy to govern of political elites. Subsequently, rationalism is not only a theoretical approach, but also a “theoretical methodology,” which has the potential to explain how decisions are taken in strategic contexts. Yet, the rationalist approach is limited in explaining state behaviour, especially in terms of states’ changing policy choices. Indeed, the “logic of response” proved inefficient to explain state behaviour, as states do not merely undertake actions based on rational calculations but they also consider other factors, *inter alia* states’ material capabilities (Enders and Su 2007; Sandler, Tschirhart, and Cauley 1983).

When making decisions, states also follow decision rules. As Alex Mintz and Nehemia Geva argue (1997), by relying on decision rules, decision-makers can select among the alternatives of a subset. Scholars still debate on why a decision rule is adopted instead of another, although its requirement has been established (Dacey and Carlson 2004). According to John W. Payne, James R. Bettman and Eric J. Johnson (1988), the lexicographic decision rule implies that each acceptable political alternative is represented as a vector of values, one for each attribute, which are ordered according to the relative importance attached to attributes by decision-makers. They will then select an alternative according to the attribute they value the most. In doing so, decision-makers discard those alternatives that obtain low scores in their preferred attribute. Low scores in other attributes do not affect the decision-making process (Mintz and DeRouen 2010). In case of ties between alternatives when examined according to the preferred attribute, decision-makers will turn to the second most important attribute, and so on, until the tie is broken (Dacey and Carlos 2004).

### 1.2.2 THE REALIST EXPLANATION

Connected to the rationalist framework is realism, which interprets CT as the externalization of states' security self-interests emerging out of the stimulation of the international system's anarchic nature. Simply put, "realism explains states' CT responses in utilitarian terms" (Omelicheva 2010a, 7). In fact, states act in pursuance of their own interests, which are defined by the resources that are available and accessible to them, as well as by the information states can gather on the status of the security environment. Countering terrorism remains in the interest of states' security, as it is terrorism that seeks to challenge the authority of political elites. In fact, terrorists challenge the elites' legitimacy to govern and their ability to be the sole actors legitimized to use force. On account of this, elites are perceived by the population as failing in their responsibility to protect them from the violence that is generated by terrorism (Chalk 1994; 1998; Crelinsten 1989a). The primary goal of CT should then be to protect the population and limit the destructive power of terrorist organizations. However, states have a limited number of policies that they can use to achieve this goal, which are mainly characterized by their material capabilities in the military, financial and infrastructure sectors. Consequently, the realist framework adds a level of complexity to rationalist theory, complementing the rationalist tenet that CT is determined by the magnitude of terrorist threats with the notion that it is the material capabilities of states that also play a part in establishing the type of CT employed by states.

A realist approach to CT studies emerged in the wake of national security research, which matched the core principles of realist theory with states' policy choices in the security domain (e.g., Brenner 2006; Posen 2001; Walt 2001). The realist approach to national security is rooted in the traditional realist tenet that the human traits that permeate society are expressed by states' behaviours at the international level. Indeed, realists conceptualized the standards aimed at administering society as emerging from one of the most human of traits – i.e., power (Person 2017).

Some studies on China's CT followed this approach, downscaling insights from IR theory to a human dimension and choosing a research framework traditionally aimed to explore states'

behaviours in the international system (e.g., Clarke 2013; Grice 2015; Liff and Erickson 2013; McDermott 2005). The realist viewpoint thus interprets China's CT as a response to terrorist threats in Xinjiang. In fact, according to the realist framework, power concentrations and threats inspire states to adopt internal and external balancing behaviours that have the ultimate goal to ensure states' security (Walt 1985).

Realists also assume that this power competition takes place in an international system that has an anarchic nature (Kenneth N. Waltz 1979). This anarchy is considered responsible for most states' insecurities. Indeed, as no supreme authority exists that can guarantee their interests, states are automatically driven to use force, thus aggravating "the structural potential of anarchy" (Wohlforth 2008, 139). Consequently, when states respond to power concentrations by means of internal balancing, they strengthen their economic and military capabilities (Voskressenski 2003), while when they balance externally, states form or strengthen alliances and/or weaken those of their adversaries (Buzan and Wæver 2013). Balancing behaviours consolidate the outlook of a state, which means that it is through balancing that states solve the issues that make them weak in comparison with other systemic actors. However, balancing relies extensively on the military. Therefore, balancing behaviours and defence advancements can be confused with one another. Still, realists identify the concomitant growth of the economic and political capabilities of states the element that typify balancing behaviours, as states can then invest economic revenues into military capabilities (Person 2017).

In relation to states' balancing behaviours, Stephen Walt (1985) famously stated that

although power is an important factor in [states'] calculations, it is not the only one. Rather than allying in response to power alone, it is more accurate to say that states will ally with or against the most threatening power (8–9).

Balance of threat theory well espouses discussions on states' responses to terrorism, as it postulates that states balance not only by force of power but also by force of threat. Threats are conceptualized by Walt as a mixture of aggregate power, proximity, offensive capabilities and

offensive intentions (Walt 1985). Yet, balancing inspires states' behaviours that encompass a wide range of policies. Internal balancing, for instance, might include the deployment of military forces, regional economic investments and political reforms (Powell 1994). External balancing, in contrast, might consist of the forging of alliances with the other foreign powers that are presented with the same threat (Wohlforth 2008).

Overall, the realist theoretical framework identifies power concentrations and balancing behaviours as the determinants of CT policy choices. As it looks at interests, this approach is well suited to account for the “physical dimension” of threats in terms of their limits to states' ability of containment. Moreover, as realists also take into consideration power concentrations, their approach can potentially account for the multidimensional nature of modern terrorist threats.<sup>12</sup> From this perspective, China's participation to multilateral frameworks of security cooperation at the regional level, for instance, has been interpreted in the literature in terms of China's external balancing behaviours (Evron 2007; Fravel 2008; Swanström 2015).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the realist understanding of state interests set for a prioritization of CT over other issues. Indeed, terrorism has the most potential to jeopardize the power to govern of states' political elites. This issue that is particularly relevant in the case of China, where terrorism is deeply entrenched with secessionism in Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia.

Interest-based explanations, despite potentially offering a comprehensive picture of how states respond to objective levels of terrorist violence, is limited in its idea that states respond to threats by employing the most cost-effective means, as it does not explain why threat assessments vary over

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<sup>12</sup> The linkage between secessionist and nationalist movements and CT has been established by the difficulty in forming a strategy that would account for the political grievances of these particular groups. As Daniel Byman contends (1998), a successful CT strategy in this domain has proven to be one that prioritizes community empowerment, self-policing and political participation, and that also refutes violence. In general terms, Byman's proposal is for a bottom-up, soft approach to CT policy. However, the power concentrations that make up secessionist and nationalist movements—which assign the legitimacy to wield power outside states' governing elites—from the realist viewpoint entails that political elites will be naturally drawn to balance against these power concentrations by means of measures that directly correlate with the power capabilities and perceived values of the terrorist threat (Walt 1985).

<sup>13</sup> In particular, bilateral agreements on border demarcation with Russia in 1998, Kazakhstan in 2002, Kyrgyzstan in 1996, Tajikistan in 2011, as well as the establishment of the Shanghai Five in 1996 and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001 are interpreted as an effort from the part of China to balance against Uyghur secessionism (Aris 2011; De Haas 2017).

time or across nations. Moreover, it is unable to offer explanations on how governments understand the different counterterrorist measures they can employ. Lastly, these approaches exclude any connection between CT policy choices and states' regime types or the changing social context in which states are embedded, reducing the latter to a consequence of internally driven balancing behaviours.

### **1.3 THE NORMS-BASED APPROACH: THE CONSTRUCTIVIST EXPLANATION**

The norms-based approach to CT is rooted in the social-constructivist interpretation of world politics (Adler 2002). Constructivist theory emerged at the end of the 1980s in an effort to explain states' understanding and construction of reality (Reus-Smit 2001; Linklater et al. 2005). Constructivism is thus based on the premise that state behaviour is influenced by its impact on reality and by the way in which reality, in turn, affects it. These mechanisms arise from "normative and ideational structures" – that is, a collective system of shared norms, values and beliefs, which identifies states as social actors embedded in social environments that do not act in the exclusive pursuit of rational objectives (Checkel 1998; Risse 2002). In other words, constructivism contends that states operate in social environments, which are responsible for states' behavioural choices. As a result, constructivist theory refuses the utilitarian logic of rationalism and realism and argues that security issues (like terrorism and CT) are internalized when successfully formulated in political discourse (Hansen 2006).

While the rationalist and realist explanations present states as autonomous agents acting in pursue of their self-interests, constructivists depict states as social agents acting in pursue of interests that are shaped by their intersubjective ideas (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001). Simply put, the constructivist approach maintains that states' interests are stimulated by ideas that emerge from their interaction with other systemic actors (Checkel 1998), and that these ideas comprise shared norms, knowledge and a common culture (Omelycheva 2010a). In this sense, the social environments that carry ideas and the choices and practices extended within them question the claim that states act in pursue of static interests, which is one of the determinants of interest-based approaches (Reus-Smit

2001). Moreover, these social environments differ in accordance with the norms they convey, thereby offering different historical, cultural and social contexts to states. Interactions with different social environments thus present states with different messages, which may even conflict. The interactions that states observe within social environments shape their interests, as they transfer the norms states acquire from social environments into internal decision-making processes (R. H. Jackson and Sørensen 2007). In a sense, social structures are considered as “constitutive realms,” since it is these continuous interactions between states and social structures to influence and be influenced by state behaviour (Romaniuk and Grice 2018). To an extent, this conceptualization of states and social structures is an attempt to harmonize the constructivist and rationalist approaches “with the former explicating the identities and interests of actors, the latter explaining the strategic pursuits of such interests” (Price and Reus-Smit 1998, 278). Constructivism thus has the potential to explain why states behave against their interests or in ways that can be generally considered as deviant from utilitarian logic. Indeed, it is the intervention of ideas and the ideational dimension that can explain utilitarian behaviours. Yet, Martha Finnemore (1996; 2003), among others, contends that realism cannot account for changing norms that have the potential to shape state interests. In fact, states’ behavioural choices when no material benefits exist can be explained fully only in relation to normative intervention. Thus, the impact of regulative and constitutive norms is key to understand how externally driven ideas influence states’ decision-making processes when utilitarian logic does not apply (Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996; Raymond 1997; Checkel 1997; Onuf 1998; Crawford 2002).

In sum, the manner in which constructivism conceptualizes norms assumes that the international system has the power to shape states’ identity, and that states can be understood by framing their interests. It is in this sense that constructivist theory has the ability to account for the emergence of norms. In addition, constructivists focus on explaining the influence exerted by norms on state behaviour, the way in which they impact states’ decision-making processes and the way norms work in shaping world politics (Price 1997).



Norms are generally defined as the appropriate behaviour that states adopt when carrying a particular identity (M. N. Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 251). Since norms shape state behaviour, they are responsible for the way states are perceived in the international system. Thus, Gregory A. Raymond (1997) argues that international norms are the “generalized standards of conduct that delineate the scope of a state’s entitlements, the extent of its obligations, and the range of its jurisdiction” (128). From this perspective, norms become a counterpart of state identity and a tool that better explains state behaviour (Wendt 1992; 1999; Lapid 1995). Indeed, as state identity sets states the objective of understanding how they see themselves when facing different cultures and societies, thus an outcome-oriented logic does not explain in full how states make certain policy choices.

During interactions, states compete to impose their identity and their norms to state behaviour (Wiener 2007), thus placing negotiation and contestation at the core of the social-constructivist approach (McDonald 2008). The interactions experienced in the international system thus have the potential to inspire normative change (e.g., Kratochwil 1989; Katzenstein 1996; Ruggie 1998). In fact, according to social-constructivists, it is states that introduce insecurities to world politics on the basis of conflicting identities (Hopf 1998) and diverging norms (Finnemore 1996). Moreover, states might follow strategic or instrumental reasons to adopt norms: for instance, norm-compliance might be a requirement to receive foreign aid or have economic sanctions lifted (Omelicheva 2009a).

Due to the dogmatic nature of norms, state behaviour is guided by the norms that are considered appropriate by the social environments that embed states. Norms are thus constitutive elements that guide states to adopt behaviours that are consistent with the expectations of social environments. Still, states display the ability to exert pressure on the social environments that embed them to the point that states can influence and revise the social structure. These interactions can originate new norms or offer re-interpretations of existing norms (Wendt 1992; Checkel 1998). Since the adoption of appropriate behaviours is costly, the motivation of “norm entrepreneurs” (Sunstein 1996) to change social norms depends on the types of actors and norms and is framed by an

“ideational commitment” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 898). Indeed, as Ted Hopf (2002) maintains, each actor carries a different identity that is conveyed through discourse. To understand political choices and changes, constructivists argue that identity and interests should then be examined as much as norms (Wendt 1992; 1999; Finnemore 1996; Price and Reus-Smit 1998; Reus-Smit 2001). Different identities and discursive practices, though, determine norms competition in social environments (Hopf 2002). Security is what states believe it to be and it is this particular belief that distinguishes a security community and creates its values and norms (McDonald 2008). States’ perceptions of security challenges are thus crucial to understand state responses to insecurities as “an actor behaviour is only explainable within the specific context” (Aris 2011, 11).

Social-constructivism upholds that security is a social construct that is developed by actors through interactions (Wendt 1999). The identity of a state and its standards of conduct are transferred to other states through the interactions stimulated at the international level. As international institutions represent the framework that extends state interactions, they act as the main providers of a shared vision on security. It is within institutions that states construct a collective identity, which promotes conceptualizations of security and “strict, observed norms” (Acharya 2001, 21) common to all members. This system forges a connection between the notion of identity construction and security (Hansen 2006), and contends that “an individual’s identities contribute to the creation and recreation of discourse and social cognitive structure ... those identities are constrained, shaped, and empowered” by their social creations (Hopf 2002, 1).

Most research on the regional dynamics of security was conducted on Europe and the US (e.g., Buzan and Wæver 2003; Börzel and Risse 2009) and focused on two main elements. First, the impact of international organizations both on the security policies adopted by member states and the mechanics of norms diffusion, which were taken into consideration in terms of causality (Risse-Kappen, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999). Second, member states were distinguished between the actors that propose new security conceptualizations within institutional frameworks and those that adopt these

conceptualizations, as well as the methods that actors employ to transmit these conceptualizations in an effort to investigate structure (Acharya 2011).

Regional security institutions were amply addressed in the literature, but these analyses are limiting, as they mainly are Western-oriented and polarized to a regime (i.e., democracy). Exceptions are investigations on the Association of East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which mainly targeted the internalization of norms related to economic cooperation instead of security (Acharya 2001). Few cases have examined regional security institutions comprising non-democracies localised in non-Western countries, but these have mainly focused on the patterns of cooperation between Russia and the post-Soviet Republics (Feshbach 1987).

Social norms thus explain states' actions. Yet, it is the combination of the effects of norms and the rationalist self-interests of states that actually paint the most accurate picture of states' actions. Policy choices are indeed better explained as the result of the impact of both factors. Indeed, states' rational preference would be to defeat terrorism: still, states do so by pursuing policies, which are focused towards the outcome and regulated by norms-based constraints on the use of force (Romaniuk and Grice 2018).

#### **1.4 THE POLITICAL REGIME-BASED EXPLANATION**

Scholars looking to explain counterterrorist measures have addressed the connection between terrorism and regime type (Schmid 1992; Ross 1993; Eubank and Weinberg 1994; Eyerman 1998). After the September 11 terrorist attacks, CT became an independent issue of NSS. Since democracies were considered more successful counterterrorists, states' agenda on CT for this period mainly comprised principles of democratization. A case in point for this tendency is, for instance, the US 2002 National Security Strategy (Wheeler 2003). After the launch of the GWOT, moreover, the notion of democratization extended to US partners and continued to be prioritized even after the failures of the US military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. These disastrous campaigns present, in practical terms, how complex the relation between democracy and CT is, leading scholars to

question the assumption that democracies are better counterterrorists. About the GWOT, the principles of democratization embedded in the CT policies of adherent states were indeed proven to stem mainly from the discursive landscape surrounding terrorism, as 9/11 was framed as an opposition of freedom and fear (Boyle 2011). At the same time, few statistical evidence supported the notion that the combination of democratic principles and liberal economic markets indeed introduced preventive measures against terrorism (Piazza 2009). It is Gause (2005), though, the first to sever the link between democracy and terrorist threats. In fact, he made a case against the democratic messages embedded in CT policy, as they were eradicated in the assumption that terrorists and potential terrorists would not resort to violence if they “participate openly in competitive politics and have their voices heard in the public square.” However, Gause argued that since terrorists and potential terrorists lacked the ability to mobilize majorities, even if integrated in the democratic process, they would attack democratic principles, as they were unlikely to achieve the outcome they desired. An example of this tendency is the consequences of the 2005 Iraqi elections, which, despite having fully complied with democratic standards, did not put an end to terrorism in the country (Gause 2005)

Joe Eyerman (1998) identified several structural factors that heightened the risk for democracies to fall prey to terrorism. To an extent, democracies in fact gave terrorists an advantage because they placed lower costs on violence, which, when compared to authoritarian states, simplified the mobilization of terrorists, thus increasing the number of attacks (Eubank and Weinberg 1994; 1998; 2001; Chenoweth 2006; Piazza 2007; Enders and Sandler 2011). Moreover, together with the higher levels of tolerance towards dissenting views on democracies, the restrictive standards in the use of force and repressive measures were identified as additional sources of motivation for terrorists to operate on the territories of democratic countries (Schmid 1992). Lastly, while democratic participation to political life could potentially reduce terrorism, the institutional constraints on the decision-making power of governments could *de facto* lead to the opposite outcome (Q. Li 2005), thus increasing the number of terrorist attacks. These contradictions were some of the democratic

structural factors that exemplified the levels of complexity surrounding the relation between regimes and terrorism. Nonetheless, it is democracies to be considered less prone to terrorism (Lutz and Lutz 2010) than authoritarian regimes (Abrahms 2008).

Other than structural factors, state responses to terrorism remained among the chief determinants of the relation between regimes and terrorism. Debates on this issue focused on the levels of effectiveness of democratic *vis-à-vis* authoritarian counterterrorist measures. Empirical studies were contradictory as some scholars identified democracies as the promoters of the most effective counterterrorist measures (Crotty 2005b; Abrahms 2007; 2008), while others found authoritarian regimes as superior counterterrorists (Crenshaw 1981; Schmid 1992). Martha Crenshaw (1981), in particular, argued that the inability to participate to political life and the limitations set to protest activities were the factors that most incited terrorist activities. As democracies re-directed contentious groups to peaceful advocacy, they diminished the allure of violence and terrorism. In fact, potential terrorists would be naturally drawn to adopt cost-effective democratic means to increase their profits (Eyerman 1998). Hence, the several arenas for political expression guaranteed by democracies would diminish the attractiveness of terrorism (Ross 1993; Abrahms 2008). Moreover, as Seung-Whan Choi (2010) contended, the system of rule of law implemented by democratic regimes potentially solved protests by removing the negative emotions that encouraged terrorism. This system of rule of law, when complemented by functioning democratic infrastructures, conveyed grievances to democratic political participation, thus avoiding any escalation towards terrorism (Crotty 2005b). In authoritarian regimes, in contrast, violent groups were more likely to turn to terrorism, since political representation was precluded by states' reliance to using force. Authoritarian states were then believed to be less successful counterterrorists, especially in light of the connection between terrorism and physical integrity (Walsh and Piazza 2020). This logic entailed that, since authoritarian states are more inclined to violate the physical integrity rights of their citizens than democracies, it was more likely that they would be subjected to terrorist attacks. In turn, these attacks would make more probable that states would change their policy responses to terrorism, as

authoritarian states were more likely to surrender to terrorism than democratic regimes (Abrahms 2008).

While the respect of civil and political rights conferred by democracies has the potential to leave a greater margin of action to terrorist planning of attacks (Schmid 1992), authoritarian states make it more difficult for violent groups to coordinate. From this perspective is thus noted that authoritarian regimes are seldom affected by terrorism. Indeed, the hold authoritarian regimes maintain on civil liberties does not allow for political mobilization (Laqueur 2000). Furthermore, authoritarian states are not limited in their counterterrorist measures by the legal and institutional frameworks that make democracies accountable to their voters (Crenshaw 1981; Eubank and Weinberg 1994). Democratic regimes, in fact, have more limited options to CT, as they must respect democratic constraints and values (Schmid 1992; Chalk 1995) as well as accept restrictions in activities of law enforcement, such as surveillance, investigations and detentions. These factors thus slow down the CT process. As Crenshaw contends (1991), the counterterrorist measures adopted in democratic regimes are not always applicable to authoritarian states and *vice-versa*. For example, China has often relied on censorship at the cyber-level as a measure to curb dissent, using terrorism as an excuse to sustain a meticulous monitoring of Internet content (Warf 2011).

Democratic limitations to CT do not only affect the pre-emptive policy arena, but also punishments. Indeed, democracies find it harder than authoritarian regimes to use force against terrorists, as they maintain low levels of tolerance towards civilian costs. In contrast, authoritarian states are more prone to use violence against their own citizens with the aim to curb terrorism. Prime examples are the regimes in Algeria, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay that have been successful in restraining terrorism (Crenshaw 1981; Martinez 2008). However, questions remain open on the reporting of terrorist attacks in authoritarian regimes, especially as recent studies on state responses to terrorism were conducted by means of quantitative methodologies (e.g., Chalk 1995; Parker 2007; Martinez 2008). Yet, as Todd Sandler (1995) contends, authoritarian states have a tendency to convey falsified information about the state of terrorism on their territories. Consider, for example, a

document on the attacks that had been perpetrated by terrorist forces in the country released in 2002 by the State Council – i.e., the main administrative authority in China (State Council 2002). The document ascribes no less than two-hundred attacks to terrorist forces connected to the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM).<sup>14</sup> However, according to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), China experienced one hundred and sixty-five episodes of terrorism in the same period, only four of which were attributed to East Turkestan terrorist forces. China makes a valid empirical example of a common tendency among authoritarian states, which distorts comparisons between the state responses to terrorism of democratic and authoritarian regimes, as reports are often falsified.

## **1.5 THE PERCEPTION-BASED EXPLANATION**

In addition to the interest, norms and regime-based explanations, CT studies have also taken into consideration an approach that places states' perceptions of terrorism under the spotlight. Counterterrorist measures are thus conceived as being in a “symbiotic relationship with terrorism” (Oliverio and Lauderdale 2005, 154), consistently with the way episodes of terrorism are perceived (Crelinsten 1989a; Oliverio 1998). Hence, the nature of terrorist threats is no longer at the centre of the analysis, but it is states' perceptions that come into focus.

In his seminal work, Ronald Crelinsten (1989a) developed a matrix that accounted for variations in the forms that political violence and state responses can assume. Concerning political violence and terrorism, the matrix spans from individual acts of violence to collective mobilization. States' responses, in contrast, are categorized in terms of how states perceive terrorist threats and which actors are dominant in devising and operationalizing CT. Crelinsten and Alex Schmid (1992) further specialized this matrix by defining categories that include several dimensions of CT – i.e.,

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<sup>14</sup> The East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is one of the terrorist groups that were most active in supporting Uyghur secessionism. Although the role the group played in framing CT policy in China will be discussed in the empirical part of the thesis, it is worth noticing here that the ETIM and its successor—the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP)—have played the role of a “trojan horse” (Mumford 2018, 19) for China's draconian counterterrorist measures, as they fed into elite's narrative against Islamist extremism (Tschantret 2018).

long term *vis-à-vis* short term, coercive *vis-à-vis* accommodating, and domestic *vis-à-vis* international (Crelinsten and Schmid 1992, 310–12).

The matrix thus presents two competing approaches to states' responses to terrorism. On the one hand, the *military* approach perceives terrorism as an "act of war." States' interventions are conducted through the mediation of the army, and terrorism is considered an alternative to armed conflict, thus requiring the development and operationalization of strategic thinking (Crelinsten 1989a). However, when terrorism is treated as a war, it is militarized, thus eroding civil liberties and heightening the risk to precipitate episodes of terrorism (Lutz and Lutz 2013). In fact, the militarization of terrorism relies on paramilitary forces and extrajudicial measures, such as assassinations and detentions.

On the other hand, the *criminal justice* approach comprises policies in which law enforcement agencies are the dominant actors. Under these conditions, civil rights are respected and states' responses remain within the boundaries of the rule of law (Crelinsten 2002). In a sense, when states treat terrorism as a crime, policies are designed to limit the frequency and destructiveness of terrorist attacks.

Perception-based approaches to CT treat the phenomenon comprehensively, thus including measures that target the population and aim to re-legitimize the affected government. Therefore, military forces are seen as facilitating factors for non-military policies to be adopted. Empirical studies on CT, in fact, have made a case for policies that comprise both the military and criminal justice approaches. For instance, Ami Pedahzur and Magnus Ranstorp (2001) observe that Israeli counterterrorist measures of the late forties do not fit in any of Crelinsten's approaches, thus identifying a gap that entailed the work of a third variable. In this direction indeed goes, among others, Arunabha Bhoumik (2004), who examined the increased presence of intelligence services as counterterrorists as the missing link that explains states' counterterrorist measures. However, perception-based explanations do not account for the conditions that distinguish between states'



different perceptions of terrorism, thus making it difficult for variations in the counterterrorist measures adopted by states to be understood in full.

## **1.6 A NEOCLASSICAL REALIST EXPLANATION FOR CT POLICY IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES**

Traditional studies on terrorism and CT do not place the state at the centre of the analysis. As a consequence, IR theory is well suited to counter this tendency, since the discipline devotes particular attention to the state and its behavioural choices (Hollis and Smith 1991). Terrorism and CT studies have proven persistent in their determination to grow as autonomous fields of study, refusing insights from adjacent fields. Moreover, CT studies have been particularly subjected to the powerful influence of policy-driven research, which prioritized investigations on the effectiveness of CT policy rather than the understanding of the factors that drive one policy choice instead of another. In light of this tendency, democracies resulted as the most examined regimes, so that their unique characteristics have limited our comprehension of the full extent of counterterrorist measures.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, studies on terrorism and CT drawing from IR theory have mainly looked at systemic variables as the determinants of CT policy choices, consistently with the tenet that sees IR traditionally devoted to analyse the behaviour of states in the international system. The majority of these studies continued to work towards the goal of better preventing terrorism, thus investigating ways to make CT more effective, *de facto* disregarding Alex Schmid and Albert Jongman's recommendation (1988) for scholars to act as "students of combustion" rather than "firefighters" when working on terrorism and CT policy. One of the most widely recognized limits of traditional terrorism and CT studies is that they struggle to account for the transnational nature of their objects of research. Therefore, the approaches proposed by these studies rarely integrate between internal and external stressors of terrorism and CT. A study rooted in the IR approach of neoclassical realism is thus proposed to

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<sup>15</sup> The approaches of democracies to CT policy is in fact biased towards democratic values that do not account for the full extent of the use of force. In particular, see Nils S. Satana and Tijen Demirel-Pegg (2018) for an account of the relation between military counterterrorism and democracy.

counter the structural limitations of traditional CT studies. In fact, neoclassical realism, as a sub-school of the realist school of IR theory, does not only place the state at the centre of analyses, but also accounts for systemic and unit-level factors to explain state behavioural choices.

Simply put, neoclassical realism aims to explain what states do and why (Rosa 2018). As it explores the behavioural choices of a single state and fails to address interactions between states, it is considered a theory of foreign policy and not one of international politics (Rose 1998). Neorealists root investigations in the assumptions that states are the main agents in policymaking and that their behaviours are influenced by changes in the balance of power (Kenneth N. Waltz 1979). Neoclassical realism adds several specifications to these two assumptions. Above all, it emphasizes the impact of unit-level variables in mediating between systemic stimuli and states' policy choices (Schweller 1994; 1998). With the introduction of unit-level variables, the neorealist notion that systemic pressures were the sole factors that entailed state behaviours was complemented by Randall Schweller's argument (1998) that ideological factors were also in need to be considered in an effort to explain states' behaviour. The neoclassical realist approach in fact incorporates internal and external variables to explanations of states' behavioural choices. At the same time, it maintains that states' policy is driven primarily by systemic variables and by states' relative material capabilities (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016). In contrast with classical and neo-realists, neoclassical realists argue that states' relative power capabilities affect states' behavioural choices in "indirect and complex" ways (Rosa 2018, 38), as systemic pressures are mediated by intervening variables. In particular, since it is political leaders and elites that take decisions, in addition to the relative quantity of physical resources, their perceptions of relative power need also to be taken into consideration. Furthermore, policymakers are not free to use resources as they see fit. The structure of states' political elites therefore needs to be considered as it determines how resources are distributed. Finally, although the neoclassical realist approach identifies systemic pressures as the factors that indicate the direction in which states' behaviour moves, neoclassical realists also contend that systemic pressures are insufficient to explain the full extent of states' behaviours. In fact, in order to understand states'

behavioural choices, neoclassical realists point to the necessity to look at the context in which they are formulated (Rose 1998). Overall, neoclassical realists analyse states' policy choices by looking at how they are constrained by unit-level intervening variables as well as the historical contexts that embed states. In this regard, neoclassical realism shares great similarities with comparative historical institutionalism, as both approaches place at the core intermediate-level institutions.

The intervening variables that scholars need to account under a neoclassical realist framework are explained in full in the school's "manifesto" by Steven Lobell, Norrin Ripsman and Jeffrey Taliaferro (2009). Three are in fact the variables that have to be considered when attempting to explain states' behavioural choices. First, systemic factors, especially the balance of power. Second, domestic factors, such as elite cohesion/fragmentation. Third, individual factors like policymakers' perceptions and misperceptions, which can be biased by several elements (Rosa 2018). The domestic and individual variables thus operate as "transmission belts" that mediate between policy choices and changes in the balance of power. To an extent, more than a theoretical framework, neoclassical realism also is a methodology, as it sets precise variables for analyses. Moreover, due to its focus on intervening causal processes, this approach has proven particularly apt to treat given historical outcomes (Kitchen 2010).

Neoclassical realism offers a promising ground for analyses on CT policy choices. In fact, this framework can potentially offer more comprehensive explanations to CT policy, thus clarifying some of the issues left unaddressed by traditional approaches to CT. Interest-based explanations, in fact, cannot fully account for spatial or temporal variations in the way threats are assessed. In addition, they do not explain in full why states choose one measure instead of another to respond to terrorism. In contrast, norms-based explanations are unclear about the reason why states lean towards particular norms, especially in a domain like that of security that has traditionally relied on state sovereignty but that is increasingly becoming an issue for international politics. Regime-based explanations mainly presented good accounts of democracies that should not be generalized as they are biased

towards the democratic principle of human rights protection, thus failing to take into consideration the full-array of counterterrorist measures available to states.

Finally, perception-based explanations cannot distinguish between the conditions that stimulate states' different perceptions of terrorism. If combined, states' interests and perceptions can potentially account for the systemic variable identified by neoclassical realists. In fact, these two variables, taken together, paint a comprehensive picture of the pressure applied on the state by the international system in terms of stimulating a response to systemic pressures.

Given its proposed integration of systemic and intervening variables, therefore, the neoclassical realist approach combines external and internal factors, while, as it is also an approach that is rooted in IR theory, emphasizes the role played by the state in CT. By presenting such integrative model, the neoclassical realist approach comprises the variables identified by traditional studies on CT, while also better accounting for the transnational nature of terrorism. In fact, the increased globalization of terrorism has led to the establishment of frameworks of cooperation among states at regional and global levels. The establishment of security communities offers a cooperative framework for CT, which has an effect on states' policy choices (Adler and Greve 2009). Although states remain the ultimate decision-makers in CT policy choices, the internationalization of CT has triggered mechanisms of policy convergence between states. The internalization of externally driven ideational material in the domain of CT, as in Mariya Omelicheva's notion of "reference groups" (2007a), is envisioned by the neoclassical realist framework to the extent that it contributes to the individual level intervening variable. Moreover, terrorism is quickly moving from an exclusively physical dimension towards a more volatile one (i.e., cyberspace) and, as a consequence, CT moves in the same direction. Thus, the internal and external dimensions of CT policy should be investigated by using an approach, like the neoclassical realist framework, that can account for the several levels of complexity that surrounds CT (table 1). Moreover, when applied to the policy choices of authoritarian states, the full extent of CT policy can be treated in detail—especially in terms of the

use of violence—thus working in the direction highlighted in recent reviews of the CT literature (Schuurman 2019).

Table 1 A Neoclassical Realist Model for Counterterrorism Policy in Non-Democratic Regimes

<i>Systemic variable</i>	<i>Domestic variable</i>	<i>Individual variable</i>	<i>Policy outcome</i>
Pressure from the Security Environment	Political Orientation of the Elite towards Authoritarianism	Role in Reference Groups ( <i>socialization process</i> )	Counterterrorism Policy

## CONCLUSIONS

The research puzzle invokes a question of which factors are responsible for states’ CT policy choices. This chapter had looked into how different IR approaches have addressed the issue so far. It has pointed out that the interest-based, norms-based and perception-based explanations provide parsimonious accounts and overlook certain important aspects of CT. Regime-based explanations, in contrast, have offered valuable insights on democracies, but have not accounted for the wide array of counterterrorist measures available to states due to the democratic values that are embedded into their explanations.

In order to provide a more comprehensive picture, this study argues that CT policy choices should be analysed from the positions of neoclassical realism, as it maintains that the state remains the prime agent of policymaking but it also severs the link between changes in the balance of power and states’ policy choices by integrating unit-level variables. In this manner, differences between CT policy choices that respond to the same threat are mediated by the action of internal and external factors. Severing the link between systemic stimuli and policy, the study reinforces research inquiries in CT beyond arguments of “logic of response” and “logic of appropriateness,” while, at the same time, maintaining the focus on the state.

## CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter presents the research design that links the empirical goals of the research to the analytical framework that was elaborated in the previous chapter. In addition, it introduces the methods adopted to conduct the research. The chapter is articulated as follows: first, it specifies on the research question, elaborates on the research propositions and presents and operationalizes the variables. Second, it examines case selection and periodization and concludes with issues of data collection.

### 2.1 RESEARCH PUZZLE

This study investigates variations in China's policymaking efforts in the realm of CT to test for the impact of intervening unit-level variables. Drawing from neoclassical realism, the thesis examines domestic and individual variables acting as *mediators* between systemic pressures and policy outcomes. In doing so, this study seeks to contribute to the theoretical debates on the role of the state as a counterterrorist, moving beyond traditional approaches, which struggle to account for state terrorism.

This thesis also severs the connection between CT policy choices and the magnitude of episodes of terrorism and political violence, which is typically established to explain the causal relation between CT policy and terrorism. The rationale of traditional approaches is that CT policy employs military forces or legal-repressive measures (i.e., a hard CT policy), when the pressure exerted by the security environment is high. Conversely, CT policy employs negotiation or social reforms (i.e., a soft CT policy), when the pressure exerted by the security environment is low (e.g., Miyaoka 1998; Wilkinson 2006; Omelicheva 2009b). By severing this connection, this study widens the scope of traditional approaches to CT policy. In this manner, divergences in the counterterrorist measures adopted by different states against the same threat or by the same state over time are better accounted. Lastly, this study looks at the impact of regional securitization processes over states' CT policy choices in light of the rising importance acquired by regions in IR theory and security studies.

In empirical terms, this thesis is inspired by the observation of China's responses to episodes of terrorism and political violence occurring in Xinjiang from the mid-1990s onwards. It was indeed noted that the "logic of response" and the "logic of appropriateness" could not fully explain China's preferred counterterrorist measures in Xinjiang. In particular, China's hard CT policy in Xinjiang could not be ascribed only to the pressure exerted on the state by episodes of terrorism and political violence related to the Uyghur separatist claim, given their relative sporadicity. Still, China's responses to Uyghur separatism need to be treated as an expression of the country's CT policy, partly due to China's multi-dimensional definition of terrorism and partly to the framing of Uyghur separatism after the launch of the GWOT in 2001.<sup>16</sup>

The non-linear patterns presented by empirical observations show an arbitrary relation between the increasing/decreasing number of terrorist attacks and the variant of CT policy adopted by state authorities. High/medium/low pressures from the country's security environment in fact enacted the same type of responses – one that opted for hard power and repression. Thus, the idea that intervening variables might have been operating between systemic pressures and policy outcomes, as suggested by neoclassical realism, was considered. The non-linearity of the relation became even more striking in the last few years, when China's responses came as far as to change into counterterrorist measures that at least one proponent empirically traced to state terrorism.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, traditional approaches to CT policy suggest that a lower pressure from the security environment is conducive of a soft CT policy, characterized by a relaxation of hard power measures and an increased engagement of society in counterterrorist activities. Yet, empirically unanticipated hard counterterrorist measures continued to be preferred by China's leaders: a tendency that *de facto* challenges theoretical tenets placing the pressures exerted by the security environment at the core of CT policy choices.

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<sup>16</sup> China's definitions of terrorism and CT are analyzed in Chapter 3.

<sup>17</sup> The system of internment camps that has recently come to the attention of the international community is characterized by a leniency towards an indiscriminate use of violence and an extrajudicial limitation of social and personal freedoms. As Joanne Smith Finley's empirical analysis shows (2019a), these measures are consistent with the characteristics identified by Ruth Blakeley (2012) as externalizations of state terrorism.

This thesis' research question addresses the divergence between China's CT policy and the pressure exerted by the security environment:

*why has China's political leadership chosen hard counterterrorist measures for Xinjiang since the mid-1990s?*

This study analytically addresses the research question by looking at the factors that can potentially determine a hard or a soft CT policy. In an effort to integrate between systemic and intervening variables, a neoclassical realist theoretical framework is employed.

## **2.2 RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS**

As illustrated in the previous chapter, traditional approaches to CT policy present some criticalities when applied to the Chinese case. These explanations interpret CT policy in relation to interests, norms, regime types or perceptions. Conversely, this study assumes that a multi-causal model can account for the effect of several variables, thus solving some of the inconsistencies that emerge between theoretical approaches and empirical observations.<sup>18</sup> In fact, China is not the sole empirical case to be problematic for traditional approaches to investigate successfully. Among others, another example is the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that—despite never having experienced terrorist attacks—still developed a repressive CT policy (Henne 2014).

The thesis thus argues for a multi-causal theoretical framework based on the insights of neoclassical realism to examine the causal relation between CT policy choices and the pressure

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<sup>18</sup> Yong-Soon Eun (2012) proposes a compelling argument for using multi-causal frameworks to study policymaking. Indeed, he contends that “in the social world both agents and structures are necessary for any act to be possible, since they are ontologically real objects (causes for actions) and interrelated, but not reducible to each other. Implications ... for international relations are, then, rather straightforward: causes of the state's behaviour in world politics can be both structural and agential; the causation in world politics appears far beyond one-dimensional or unidirectional features ... This means that a variety of structural and agential (material and ideational) things or conditions can (and should) be recognized as causes of, or at least as possessing causal capacities in relation to, the state's foreign policy outcomes (772).



exerted by the security environment on the state. Consistently with neoclassical realist theory, systemic pressures are maintained at the core of the analysis, while the effects of domestic and individual factors are considered as mediating the impact of systemic variables over policy outcomes. As a consequence, this study challenges the assumption—prevalent in the explanations of the empirical case—that China’s hard CT policy for Xinjiang should to be ascribed to increasing levels of threat from the region or the country’s non-democratic regime. While the former makes reference to the “logic of response,” the latter interprets China’s authoritarian regime (more prone to use violence to ensure public security and political legitimacy) as the main factor responsible for the country’s adoption of a hard power policy in the region. In contrast, despite this study maintains the focus on the impact of the systemic variable over policy outcomes, the role of intervening variables is analogously important. In particular, intervening variables are examined in an effort to account for the mediation of domestic and individual factors on CT policy choices.

Reaching an agreement on the factors that require investigation in order to examine states’ CT policies is made even more difficult by a *divergence* between democracies and authoritarian regimes in tolerating the use of force and a *convergence* between different states’ CT policy choices.

In China, this argument is supported by observations on the country’s CT policy, which has become increasingly reliant on hard power since the mid-nineties. This period was characterized both by a dramatic wave of militarization in Xinjiang, and by patterns of institutionalization of CT policy at the regional level. To an extent, the 1996 Strike Hard campaign enacted by President Jiang Zemin emerged from a combined effect between the protests that had been shaking Xinjiang in 1996, the political orientation towards repression and control from the elite and a first attempt to establish a regional framework of security devoted to the stabilization of the region’s power imbalances that was eradicated in its newly found geopolitical architecture.

By arguing that multi-causal frameworks better explain China’s CT policy choices, this study identifies causality mechanisms acting between the pressure exerted by the security environment on the state, the political orientation of the elite towards different variants of authoritarian power and the

impact of international security organizations, which operate as reference groups for the CT policy choices of the state. In operational terms, this study maintains that the pressure exerted by the security environment presumes a combined effect in *objective* and *perceived* variations at the systemic level to influence CT policy outcomes. At the same time, the political elite can either lean towards *hard* or *soft* variants of authoritarianism, while the country can operate either as a *mentor power* within its reference groups—thus imprinting the collective framework with the principles of its domestic approach—or as a *novice power* that acquires the domestic approach of the mentor power—thus transferring the collective framework into the principles of its domestic approach.<sup>19</sup> Based on these considerations, this study is rooted in a set of working propositions.

The baseline proposition drawing from traditional studies on terrorism and CT highlights that:

- *Proposition 1.* The magnitude of episodes of political violence and terrorism drives a state to design a CT policy that matches the levels of pressure exerted on the state by the international system.

The propositions drawn from the application of neoclassical realism to CT policy assume that:

- *Proposition 2.* The impact of episodes of political violence and terrorism on a state's CT policy is mediated by the authoritarian preferences of states' political elites.
  - *Proposition 2.1.* When the political orientation of elites leans towards hard authoritarianism, the most likely result will be the design of a hard CT policy, the level of external pressure notwithstanding.

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<sup>19</sup> Novice and mentor relations are examined in detail in section 2.3.2.2.

- *Proposition 2.2.* When the political orientation of elites leans towards soft authoritarianism, the most likely result will be the design of a soft CT policy, the level of external pressure notwithstanding.
- *Proposition 3.* The impact of episodes of political violence and terrorism on a state's CT policy is mediated by the role played by states in reference groups (i.e., socialization process).
  - *Proposition 3.1.* When the role played by states in reference groups is that of mentor powers, the most likely result will be the design of a CT policy that is consistent with the one indicated by the original preferences of the political elite.
  - *Proposition 3.2.* When the role played by states in reference groups is that of novice powers, the most likely result will be the design of a CT policy that is consistent with the one indicated by the preferences of the state that plays the role of mentor in the reference group.

The empirical objectives of this thesis thus aim to identify the extent to which these variables influence China's CT policy choices in Xinjiang from the mid-nineties onwards. The thesis also seeks better to account for the choices of authoritarian regimes in adopting policies to counter episodes of terrorism and political violence.

## **2.3 RESEARCH VARIABLES**

In a research inquiry, the first stage of analysis is the operationalization of the variables taken into consideration to explain an outcome. In this thesis, the independent variable is the pressure exerted by the security environment on states, while the CT policy that states adopt is the dependent variable. In accordance with the theoretical insights proposed by neoclassical realism, the domestic variable is

the orientation of political elites towards hard or soft authoritarianism, while the individual variable is the impact of states' reference groups on policy formation.

### 2.3.1 INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

The independent variable is defined in terms of the pressure exerted by the security environment on the state. In operational terms, this is characterized by the magnitude of episodes of terrorism and political violence experienced by states. The systemic variable remains at the centre of the analysis, although its effects on policy outcomes are mediated by intervening variables. Consistently with neoclassical realism, structural factors continue to be the elements that are mostly considered as responsible for states' policy choices. The effects of the systemic variable then are identified as determinant factors, while intervening variables are recognised as acting as contributing factors, which translate systemic stimuli into policies.

The independent variable is defined by two indicators, which denote the pressure exerted by the security environment on the state. The first indicator are the *objective* threats faced by the state, which are measured in terms of an *increase* or a *decrease* in the number and level of destructiveness of episodes of terrorism and political violence. The second indicator is characterized by the *perception* of threats from the state that interprets the security environment either as *cooperative* or *conflictual*. The combined effect of these two indicators on the independent variable is visually exemplified in table 2. The outcome of their interaction sets systemic pressures on a three-level scale, which measures pressures as high, medium or low.

Table 2 Operationalization of the Indicators for the Pressure of the Security Environment

Pressure of the Security Environment		
State Perception	<i>Cooperative</i>	<i>Conflictual</i>
Objective threat		
<i>Increase</i>	Medium	High
<i>Decrease</i>	Low	Medium

The first indicator measures the increase or decrease of the objective threat faced by China.

Specifically, it examines the number of episodes of terrorism or political violence (e.g., bombings, killings, riots, violent protests or rallies) and their level of destructiveness, which is in turn determined by the number of fatalities, wounded and infrastructural damages. Data are compared longitudinally, and with the security environment of China's regional partners, which are challenged by the same threats.

The second indicator measures China's perception of the security environment by adapting the theoretical framework of the *operational code* to CT policy choices. Traditionally, the operational code investigates "a political leader's beliefs about the nature of politics and political conflict, his views regarding the extent to which historical developments can be shaped, and his notions of correct strategies and tactics" (George 1969, 197). Operational code theory is applied to the speeches, the press statements and the documents presented by the agents that are in charge of security. In practical terms, the Verbs in Context System (VICS) was employed, the results of which were considered only in terms of the first philosophical belief (P-1) and the second instrumental belief (I-2).<sup>20</sup> Within the framework of the operational code, in fact, these are the beliefs that can potentially account for how terrorism is perceived and addressed, as they paint an analytical picture of terrorism taking the narrative presented by the state as the starting point.

P-1 examines the nature of the political universe, as the agents in charge of security in China perceive it. It is considered cooperative or conflictual in accordance with Stephen B. Dyson and Matthew J. Parent's conceptualization of the operational code (2018), thus assuming that the values returned by the VICS indicate a cooperative political universe when scoring from 0 to +1 and a conflictual one when scoring from 0 to -1. In contrast, I-2 investigates the pursuit of goals, which, given the content of the texts examined, pertain to the realm of CT. It is distinguished by operational

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<sup>20</sup> Since the late 1970s, scholars perfected the Verbs in Context System (VICS) and increasingly relied on Profiler Plus—i.e., a computer-based content analysis software programmed to conduct a VICS analysis in order to determine quantitatively the operational code of political leaders. At base, the VICS is a content analysis, which focuses on the type of verbs used in speeches, press statements, interviews and written documents that are compiled by political leaders. Verbs are coded through a dictionary, so as to construct indices that reflect the propositions on philosophical and instrumental beliefs set by George's operational code theory (1969) (Levine and Young 2014).

code theory in highly conflictual and highly cooperative frameworks, according to the same rationale of positive/negative scores applied to P-1. The mean score between the two values returns a positive or negative value that represent either a cooperative or a conflictual perception of the security environment.<sup>21</sup>

As previously indicated, the interactions between the two indicators return three outcomes, which estimate for the level of systemic pressures. The first outcome identifies a high level of systemic pressures. It emerges from an increase in the number of episodes of terrorism and political violence and their level of destructiveness and a conflictual perception of the security environment as returned by operational code theory. The second outcome identifies a low level of systemic pressures. It emerges from a decrease in the number of episodes of terrorism and political violence and their level of destructiveness and a cooperative perception of the security environment. The third outcome identifies a medium level of systemic pressures. This is entailed by two patterns of interactions. On the one hand, an increase in the number of episodes of terrorism and political violence and their level of destructiveness and a cooperative perception of the security environment. On the other, a decrease in the number of episodes of terrorism and political violence and their level of destructiveness and a conflictual perception of the security environment. The first and second outcomes expect the dependent variable to return respectively a hard and a soft CT policy. Conversely, the third outcome—notwithstanding the pattern of interaction that returns it—does not expect any changes in states’ responses to terrorism.

By conceptualizing the systemic variable in this manner, the tenet of neoclassical realism that places systemic pressures at the centre is acknowledged, while, at the same time, the understandings of rationalist and perception-based approaches to CT policy are incorporated in the framework of the variable. Indeed, the rationalist “logic of response” and states’ perceptions/misperceptions of the

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<sup>21</sup> The mean score of the values of the P-1 and I-2 beliefs returned by the Profiler-Plus-managed VICS analysis was calculated in an effort to determine whether beliefs overall tended towards positive/cooperative or negative/conflictual outcomes. The formula employed to calculate the mean score is  $\mu \sum (P-1; I-2)$ .

security environment are both taken into account, while measuring systemic pressures.

### **2.3.2 INTERVENING VARIABLES**

Neoclassical realism contends that intervening variables include domestic and individual unit-level variables. In terms of the domestic variable, this study considers the political orientation of the elite towards hard or soft authoritarianism. In terms of the individual variable, this study considers the impact of reference groups on states' CT policy.

#### **2.3.2.1 THE POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF THE ELITE**

With the variable “political orientation of the elite,” this study refers to China’s position in the authoritarian regime spectrum, whether it is closer to totalitarianism or democracy. As noted by Juan J. Linz (2000), in fact, authoritarian regimes, like democracies, do not come in a single variant.

This study discriminates between hard/tightening and soft/relaxing variants of authoritarianism in China (Baum 1996; He 1997; Yuen 2015; Guo 2000; Perlmutter 1981; Shambaugh 2016). Hard authoritarianism entails high levels of repression and the complete control of the state on most aspects of civil and political life. A variant of authoritarianism that thus leans towards totalitarianism. In contrast, soft authoritarianism entails high levels of liberalization of “a variety of aspects of civic life and the political system” (Shambaugh 2016). A variant of authoritarianism that leans towards democracy.

By assessing the political orientation of authoritarian elites towards either hard or soft authoritarianism, this study accounts for the differences between authoritarian regimes and democracies in countering terrorism. Moreover, failing to consider authoritarian regimes as a single unit, this thesis details on the effects that hard and soft authoritarian regimes exercise on CT policy choices. Since they have a practical application on civil and political life, “stricter” and “looser” variants of authoritarianism are expected to stimulate hard and soft policy responses to episodes of

terrorism and political violence. Therefore, the variant of authoritarianism experienced by the state impacts the extent to which systemic pressures are assimilated in states' CT policy, consistently with the neoclassical realist notion that interprets the domestic variable acting as a buffer between systemic pressures and policy outcomes.

This variable is operationalized in terms of the soft and hard variants of authoritarianism experienced by China. This variable examines several indicators. These include the extent of the political leadership's reform stride, the levels of civil and political liberties, and the individual dominance of the General Secretary over the Politburo (PB). In particular, this last indicator aims to identify whether the PB is supportive or conflicting with the General Secretary. A conflicting PB indeed determines a reliance from the part of the political leader to repressive policies to ensure his legitimacy to rule. Table 3 presents in detail how indicators are expected to unfold in either a hard or soft authoritarian regime.

Table 3 Operationalization of the Indicators for China's Soft vis-à-vis Hard Authoritarian Regime

<b>Political Orientation of the Elite Towards Authoritarianism</b>	
<i>Soft authoritarianism</i>	<i>Hard authoritarianism</i>
Strategy towards reform comprising the economic and political dimensions; less restrictive frameworks for the exercise of civil and political liberties; supportive PB at times of political transitions	Strategy towards reform limited to the economic dimension; more restrictive frameworks for the exercise of civil and political liberties; contrasting PB at times of political transitions

### **2.3.2.2 THE IMPACT OF REFERENCE GROUPS (SOCIALIZATION PROCESS)**

As contended by Mariya Omelicheva (2010a) “reference groups are states or groups of states whose perspectives policy-makers use for interpreting and responding to various situations encountered in the realms of domestic and international politics” (10). States are presented with a multitude of states or groups of states that have the potential to act as reference groups. Yet, this study argues that states are more prone to adopt the perspectives of the groups in which they are embedded, since these groups act as social environments, thus simplifying the internalization from the part of the state of the norms of conduct presented by the groups.

According to Alastair I. Johnston (2007), when states enter international institutions, they take



up the role of *novice* states – i.e., “a *tabula rasa* state that ... becomes rapidly involved in international institutional life” (2007, emphasis added). Novice states oppose *mentor* states, which impress institutions of their norms of conduct. Novice states are then prone to experience socialization processes, as they are unfamiliar with the rules that govern the institution and aim to gain full membership. Johnston makes a case for China entering international security institutions in the nineties as a novice state: a characteristic that ensured the success of processes of socialization on the country. It was in fact through socialization that China chose policies that drew from the perspective impressed by the states that acted as *mentor* states. This variable thus contends that reference groups impact CT policy choices because they have the potential to elicit normative change (Kratochwil 1989; Ruggie 1998).

The idea that interstate interactions shape state behaviour is drawn from social-constructivism, which maintains that states construct their policies in accordance with the interactions they experience at the international level (Wendt 1999). Since norms set the limits of state actions, they are responsible for the way actors are perceived in the international system. Gregory A. Raymond (1997) argues that international norms are the “generalized standards of conduct that delineate the scope of a state’s entitlements, the extent of its obligations, and the range of its jurisdiction” (128).

This variable is operationalized in terms of the role taken up by China in its reference groups for CT policy – that is, the mentor or the novice state. Expectations are for the normative products of China’s reference groups to be imprinted with the preferences of the actor that plays the role of mentor state. In operational terms, China is considered a mentor state when the majority of the themes identified in institutional documents are conducive of China’s objectives. Conversely, China is considered a novice state when the majority of the themes identified in institutional documents are conducive of objectives that are different from China’s. The country’s reference groups for CT policy are identified in this thesis as the Shanghai Five and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). As these organizations operate at the regional level, investigations on their impact on CT policy can potentially account for the influence of regional securitization processes.

### 2.3.3 DEPENDENT VARIABLE

CT policy aims to ensure the protection of the public by introducing restrictions to the actions of violent groups and individuals that belong to terrorist organizations. In this thesis, CT policy includes all the preventive, defensive and offensive measures employed by states to reduce the vulnerability of security and military forces, civilians and properties against episodes of terrorism and political violence, as well as to respond to violent terrorist attacks. On the one hand, this connotation places under a single banner anti-terrorism and counterterrorism; on the other, it stresses the notion that states' responses are caused by actions and not by actors. Counterterrorist measures, though, are not rigid, but change over time. Moreover, a certain degree of divergence exists between the responses of states that are subjected to the same terrorist threat.

After reviewing the literature on CT policy, this study has adopted the re-grouping of the several counterterrorist measures accessible to states in two main categories: *soft* and *hard* approaches to CT policy. In general, the soft approach to CT policy focuses on the root causes of terrorism, whilst the hard approach prioritizes retaliation against episodes of terrorism and political violence (Crelinsten and Schmid 1992; Lesser et al. 1999; Frey 2018). Soft approaches are used in an effort to win the hearts and minds of those groups of society that are more at risk of radicalization. In operational terms, what discriminates between soft and hard approaches to CT policy are the levels of coercion and repression externalized by states' counterterrorist measures.

Table 4 summarizes the characteristics of the soft and hard approaches to CT policy.

- The *soft* approach is characterized by a reliance on the joint action of civil society and the police as agents of CT policy; a legal framework that favours administrative law and practices; and a punishing system that is rooted in strict liability regulations.

The *hard* approach identifies military, paramilitary and police forces as the agents of CT policy; recognizes criminal law as the only possible legal framework to employ in terrorist-

related cases; and considers extra-judicial activities as a viable option for punishing terrorists.

Table 4 Characteristics of the Soft vis-à-vis Hard Approach to Counterterrorism Policy

<i>Counterterrorism Policy</i>		
	<i>Soft approach</i>	<i>Hard approach</i>
<i>Agency</i>	Civil society and police forces	Military, paramilitary and police forces
<i>Law</i>	Administrative law and practices	Criminal justice
<i>Punishment</i>	Strict liability regulations	Extra-judicial activities (torture, rendition, execution, deprivations of liberty)

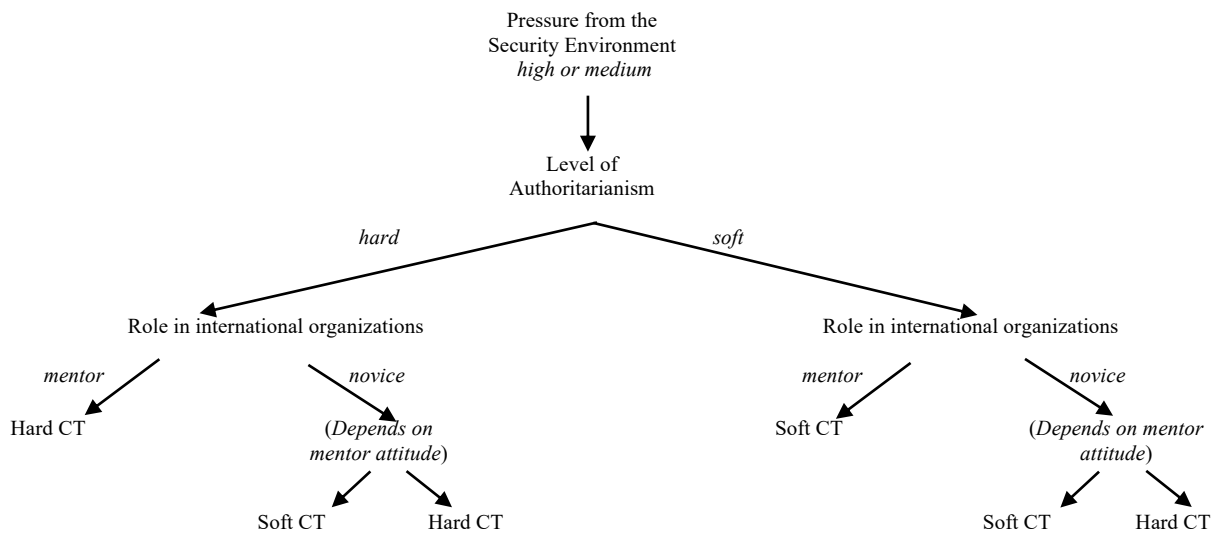
This study analyses China’s CT policy choices as an historical case study in an effort to clarify the causal mechanisms that are in place between the independent and the dependent variable. The outcome of the dependent variable is thus set by history. In empirical terms, China’s CT policy adopted a hard approach from the mid-nineties onwards. Table 5 better details the theoretical model that was presented in section 1.6.

Table 5 A Neoclassical Realist Model for China’s Counterterrorism Policy

<i>Systemic variable</i>	<i>Domestic variable</i>	<i>Individual variable</i>	<i>Policy outcome</i>
Pressure from the Security Environment	Political Orientation of the Elite	Role in Reference Groups (socialization process)	Counterterrorism Policy
Low/Medium/High	Soft/Hard Authoritarianism	Novice/Mentor	Soft/Hard

As shown in figure 1, the model identifies three scenarios that contemplate for a hard CT policy to be chosen under a level of pressure from the security environment that is medium or high. In the first scenario, the political orientation of the elite leans towards hard authoritarianism and the state plays the role of the mentor state in its reference groups for CT policy (*Proposition 2.1*). In the second scenario, the political orientation of the elite leans towards hard authoritarianism and the state plays the role of the novice state in a reference group for CT policy that is imprinted by the norms of a mentor state that leans towards hard power (*Proposition 3.1*). In the third scenario, the political orientation of the elite leans towards soft authoritarianism and the state plays the role of the novice state in its reference groups for CT policy that is imprinted by the norms of a mentor state that lean towards hard power (*Proposition 3.2*).

Figure 1 Conditions for Hard CT Policy



The model applies to authoritarian regimes that are challenged by episodes of terrorism and political violence and that are inserted in reference groups for CT policy. These factors thus embody the *scope conditions* of this theoretical model.

## 2.4 CASE STUDY AND PERIODIZATION

A qualitative research design with case studies was chosen to achieve the research objectives, which seek to determine the relation between the pressure exerted by the security environment on China’s CT policy choices by considering the effect of two intervening variables drawn from neoclassical realist theory—that is, the political orientation of the elite in terms of authoritarianism and the role played by the country in its reference groups for CT.

Robert K. Yin (2017) defines the case study method as “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (14). This method though is subjected to considerable variations, as much as it employs “both within-case analysis of single cases and comparisons among a small number of cases, as most case studies involve both kinds of analysis due to the limits of either methods used alone” (Gillham 2000, 21). This thesis opts for the single case study approach which, as noted by Robert Stake (2008), “is defined by interest in an individual case,

not by the methods of inquiry used” (443) and that its “object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system” (445). These considerations highlight issues of ontology, epistemology, and methodology for the single case study method.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of ontology, the single case study method is “an intensive study of a single unit ... a spatially bounded phenomenon ... observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time” (Gerring 2004, 342). Thus, it needs to focus on a well-defined unit of analysis and precisely account for its spatial and temporal dimensions. In this thesis, the unit of analysis is China’s CT policy choices, which are examined in its application in the country’s northwestern region of Xinjiang in the period that goes from 1996 to 2017. In terms of epistemology, as this study is concerned with a single case and its particularization, it is mainly idiographic, thus following an interpretivist approach (Gerring 2006). Lastly, in terms of methodology, this research follows a qualitative design, which is consistent with its interpretivist approach (Bryman 2016).

Single case studies face criticism about methodological rigor, reliability, replicability and generalizability.<sup>23</sup> Yet, Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett (2005) argue that single case studies can develop sophisticated understandings when they are applied on a crucial case. Crucial case studies are one of Harry Eckstein’s case categories (1975), which retain a specific application to theory-testing. In brief, crucial case studies are selected as they perfectly fit into the scope conditions of the theoretical framework: they are eradicated in the notion that there are cases that a theory must explain. The facts of crucial cases are thus central for confirming or disconfirming a theory. This

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<sup>22</sup> This argument is elaborated on the basis of insights drawn by Willis, Ben. 2014. ‘The Advantages and Limitations of Single Case Study Analysis’. *E-International Relations* (blog). 5 July 2014. <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/07/05/the-advantages-and-limitations-of-single-case-study-analysis/>

<sup>23</sup> The first criticism raised towards the case study framework is that of *methodological rigor*, as case studies were often associated to “free form research”. Yet, proponents of case studies have made an effort in better presenting clarifications of the methods they employ and their epistemological grounding. The second criticism makes reference to the issues of the *reliability and replicability* of the single case study method. In truth, this criticism is common to all qualitative studies. Still, Bruce L. Berg’s argument (2001) is worth restating, as he noticed that the main goal of this type of research is to measure intangibles. Thus, these are concepts that are developed through different interpretations of the same phenomenon. The third criticism refers to the *generalizability* of single case studies. However, as Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennet contend (2005), generalizability can (and should) be increased by carefully selecting between cases.

thesis takes China's CT policy as a crucial case study for the theoretical framework as it is representative of the scope conditions of the research.<sup>24</sup>

Case studies are selected to ensure consistency between theoretical propositions and empirical data, and to reveal the different causal mechanisms that lead to one outcome or another. In order to illustrate causal arguments about how initial conditions combined with the pressure exerted by the security environment, the political orientation of the elite towards authoritarianism and the perspectives of China's reference groups led to the adoption of a hard CT policy, the single case study was divided into temporal segments or "case periods." The distinction was made by means of periodization – i.e., setting the beginning and ending of the "temporal context within which [the] causal process plays out" (Falleti and Lynch 2009, 11). Case periods were bookended by critical junctures. As defined in Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Keleman's pivotal work (2007), a critical juncture is

a situation in which the structural (that is, economic, cultural, ideological, organizational) influences on political action are significantly relaxed for a relatively short period with two main consequences: the range of plausible choices open to powerful political actors expands substantially and the consequences of their decisions for the outcome of interest are potentially much more momentous. Contingency, in other words, becomes paramount (343).

In simpler terms, critical junctures are "characterized by the selection of a particular option ... from among two or more alternatives" (Mahoney 2001, 6). Periodization by means of critical junctures broke the single case into "periods," thus multiplying the observations that are used to test for the propositions. In this thesis, three empirical "within cases" help validating the propositions, illustrating the different impacts of the independent variable on China's CT policy choices and the extent of the mediation on the intervening variables (George and Bennett 2005).

This study is periodized as follows:

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<sup>24</sup> The scope conditions of this thesis are illustrated in section 2.3.

- *The Shanghai Five.* The first period goes from April 1996 to June 2001. In April 1996, a first attempt to establish a framework of security cooperation at the regional level was made between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The “Shanghai Five” needs to be considered as a “loose” institutional framework, the main task of which is to solve issues of border demarcation. The three former Soviet Republics had in fact become independent after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, thus re-opening debates regarding the borders that had previously been set between China and the Soviet Union.

The Shanghai Five had a twofold agenda: on the one hand, it sought to prevent border disputes that could have emerged from the “re-shuffled” geopolitical architecture of Central Asia. On the other, it aimed to prevent the illegal transit of militants and the illicit trafficking of weapons and funds across state borders. In this manner, the members of the Shanghai Five attempted to impede coordination between the transnational terrorist groups that were active in the region.

China’s participation to an international framework of security cooperation like the Shanghai Five represents a first experience for the country, which until then had maintained all issues of security strongly linked to the sole domain of state sovereignty, especially as the policy choices of the CPC with regards to public security had been internationally debated on occasion of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.

- *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization.* The second period goes from July 2001 to October 2012. As the Shanghai Five institutionalized in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a mature institutional framework of security cooperation focusing on opposing phenomena of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism. The SCO counted among its members all the states that took part to the Shanghai Five as well as Uzbekistan, which had not been a member to the Shanghai Five. As issues of border demarcation had been solved, the SCO targeted transnational terrorist groups by institutionalizing security cooperation in two directions. On

the one hand, joint military drills against terrorism and insurgency were hosted every two years on the territory of one of the member states. On the other, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) was launched in 2003. The RATS still is the sole permanent agency of the SCO framework, apart for the Secretariat that was established in 2005. The mandate of the RATS focuses on intelligence sharing between SCO member states on the terrorist groups and the militants active in the region. The RATS is also in charge of monitoring illegal trafficking of funds, drugs and arms. In addition to the joint military exercises and the RATS, SCO member states also adopted several documents on terrorism that span from defining the phenomenon to drafting regulations for its countering. In particular, the 2001 “Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism” presents a definition of terrorism that is also applied by the “Third Amendment” of China’s Criminal Law that was adopted merely six months later.

- *People’s War with “Contemporary” Characteristics.* The third period goes from November 2012 to June 2017. As Chen Quanguo, Communist Party Secretary of Tibet, enters the Politburo after his CT approach in Tibet was recognized as a successful stabiliser for the region. The same approach would be adopted in Xinjiang shortly afterwards, and Chen would assume the role of Communist Party Secretary of Xinjiang in 2016. Chen made himself known in Beijing thanks to the “militarized grid system,” an innovation policy for securitization in ethnic minority areas that consist of police stations and checkpoints localized every 300-500 meters; a neighbourhood grid system that organizes neighbourhoods into small units composed of a neighbourhood committee, and a high-tech face-recognition surveillance system, local informants and party cadres stationed in places of worship. A similar system would be applied in Xinjiang from 2012 onwards when insecurities assumed a more striking ethnic-oriented nature and CT policy, despite maintaining the military dimension at the centre, also relied on high-tech surveillance.



Conversely, June 2017 marks the acceptance of India and Pakistan into the SCO. Not only do the membership of these two powers modify power relations within the Organization, but India, as a democracy that is biased towards the democratic notion of use of force, can potentially affect the norms on CT adopted by the Organization.

## 2.5 RESEARCH METHODS

This thesis adopts an historical case study design that is conducted by means of a qualitative methodology. This study thus employs process tracing as the research method of choice, which is complemented by qualitative content analysis.

Process tracing is a set of procedures for tracing causal mechanisms that is commonly applied to within-case empirical analyses. As a method, process tracing usually answers the question, “what X caused Y in case Z?” (Mahoney 2015). Such a question exemplifies the tasks of process tracing – that is, theory construction and theory testing.<sup>25</sup> In this study, theory was constructed deductively based from insights on the literature of CT policy.<sup>26</sup> Process tracing is particularly apt to investigate the causal dynamics of historical outcomes, as inferences on the operation of mechanisms drawn from process tracing analyses are only applicable to the case under investigation. Historical explanations traditionally examine an outcome by considering sequences of linked causal factors. As Clayton Roberts contends (1996), historical explanations investigate outcomes “by tracing the sequence of events that brought them about” (16). Process tracing well-espouses the neoclassical realist theoretical framework, as the latter looks at the *intervening mechanisms* that influence the relation between causes and outcomes, thus consistently conceptualizing policy outcomes because of systemic stimuli that are mediated by unit-level variables. Indeed, process tracing suggests that if cause X is a necessary condition for the outcome Y to occur, then, intervening mechanisms Ms are

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<sup>25</sup> Simply put, *theory construction* entails the identification of all the possible factors that might produce an outcome in a specific case. In contrast, *theory testing* entails the investigation of whether a particular factor causes an outcome in a specific case (Mahoney 2015).

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 1, especially in section 1.5.

expected to enable the effects of X on Y (Mahoney 2001). In the methodological framework of process tracing, moreover, the impact of variables on outcomes is differentiated in necessary conditions, contributing conditions and INUS conditions.<sup>27</sup> By treating the systemic variable as a *necessary condition* for an outcome to be produced, thus, the importance assigned to systemic stimuli by neoclassical realists is accounted for.

To generalize beyond the case under investigation, combining process tracing with comparative case study methods can potentially enable for a generalization of the causal processes: in fact, the underlying rationale is that cases that are causally similar to the one under investigation are expected to show similar operational mechanisms.

Qualitative content analysis was applied to test for the impact of reference groups on China's CT policy. The aim was to assess the role that China played (either mentor or novice) in the Shanghai Five and the SCO – that is, the institutional frameworks that were identified as China's reference groups for CT policy.

The documents selected for the analysis had to ensure that all the member states had been involved in their drafting as well as a certain degree of temporal continuity, as this study articulates in an historical analysis. The main themes contained in the documents were thus compared with China's objectives for the institutional frameworks to determine whether the country was the power that mainly imprinted the documents with its objectives. In other words, it was assessed whether China played the role of mentor state within institutional frameworks. The entire universe of the declarations released after annual Heads of State Councils was selected for analysis.

A coding scheme was built deductively on the basis of pre-defined categories to ensure consistency. Opposite categories were constructed to determine the amount of content consistent with China's objectives. These categories were built in accordance with a review of the literature on the country's approaches to these institutions. Due to the conciseness of the documents, the units of

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<sup>27</sup> While necessary conditions are factors that, when taken away, yield a different outcome, contribution conditions are factors that increase the probability that a specific outcome emerges. Lastly, an INUS condition does not have an impact on the outcome. INUS conditions are only present when an outcome is over determined (Mahoney 2001).

analysis chosen were quasi-sentences, as they enabled coders to better grasp for the content of the documents. The coding scheme detailed on when to code the different categories, as they could appear in various combinations in a single piece of text.

To ensure the reliability of the coding scheme, a pilot test was conducted on ten percent of the documents (i.e., three) between two independent coders. One document per period was selected.<sup>28</sup> Upon the results of the coding, the Krippendorff's alpha reliability estimate was calculated by means of the R statistical software. To facilitate the analysis, Excel was used to present the units of analysis. From the Krippendorff's alpha reliability test, coders scored  $\alpha \geq .928$ .<sup>29</sup> This value thus sets the coding guide within the values necessary to ensure its reliability (Gemenis 2019).

The categories that compose the coding scheme are as follows:

#### Category 1. Cooperation with other regional agents

*Quasi-sentences refer to forms of cooperation between actors, agencies, organizations and international fora that are active at the regional level.*

1.1 Cooperation with other regional agents is positively valued and encouraged.

1.2 Cooperation with other regional agents is negatively valued and discouraged.

#### Category 2. Relations between institutional members

*Quasi-sentences refer to relations between the member states of the institutions.*

2.1 The member states are envisioned as a unitary block.

2.2 The member states are encouraged to coordinate with other international agents.

#### Category 3. Economic cooperation

*Quasi-sentences refer to the economic, development and financial sector.*

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<sup>28</sup> The documents used were the 2000 Dunshabe Declaration of the Shanghai Five, the 2006 Shanghai and the 2012 Beijing Declarations of the SCO.

<sup>29</sup> Full test materials are available upon request.

3.1 Economic cooperation is positively valued and encouraged.

3.2 Economic cooperation is positively valued but it is not encouraged or no evaluative language is used to define it.

#### Category 4. Energy cooperation

*Quasi-sentences refer to the energy sector.*

4.1 Energy cooperation is positively valued and encouraged.

4.2 Energy cooperation is positively valued but it is not encouraged or no evaluative language is used to define it.

#### Category 5. Other sectors of institutional cooperation

*Quasi-sentences refer to forms of cooperation within the institutional framework that are not connected to the economic and energy sectors.*

5.1 Cooperation in the security and military sector is positively valued and encouraged.

5.2 Cooperation in the cultural, education, sport and tourism sectors is positively valued and encouraged.

#### Category 6. Other<sup>30</sup>

*Quasi-sentences refer to topics that were not covered in any of the previous categories.*

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<sup>30</sup> Category six was included in the coding scheme in light of the “exhaustive” requirement identified by Margrit Schreier (2012) in her instructions on how to design a viable coding scheme. Indeed, the categories of a coding scheme should be *mutually-exclusive* (i.e., quasi-sentences belong only to one category), *exhaustive* (i.e., all quasi-sentences must be included to at least one category) and *saturated* (i.e., all categories must be filled with at least one quasi-sentence).

## 2.6 DATA COLLECTION

This study was primarily based on desk research of publicly available primary and secondary sources. Among the primary sources examined, there were policy and legal documents, government memos, statements, speeches, press releases, articles and reported interviews.

### 2.6.1 DOCUMENTS

When designing the research, the high levels of confidentiality of CT policy and China's policymaking were taken into full consideration. As a consequence, this study relies on publicly available documents such as government official statements, policy papers, speeches and reported interviews, which were used in open access.

Documents on China and Xinjiang were collected from multiple sources. Articles published by the Xinhua General News Service were gathered by the Lexis Nexis database. Access was provided by the University of Nottingham during a visiting period on campus from February to May 2018. Articles were filtered by keyword search, according with the following rationale: the articles that presented at least one term between "terrorism/terrorist," "counterterrorism/counterterrorist," "anti-terrorism/anti-terrorist," "religious extremism/religious extremist," "separatism/separatist," "secessionism/secessionist" or "three evils" in association with at least one term between "Xinjiang," "XUAR" or "Uyghur/Uyghurs"<sup>31</sup> were included within the corpus of data for analysis.<sup>32</sup> Document selection shows the major limitation of this study, which mainly relies on English-language Chinese sources due to the limited proficiency of the author to work only Chinese-language documents and articles.

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<sup>31</sup> The term was searched in all its possible variants: Uyгур/Uygurs, Uyghur/Uyghurs, Uighur/Uighurs or Uigur/Uigurs.

<sup>32</sup> Keyword were chosen after a review of the literature on terrorism and counterterrorism in China, and after several discussions with Guo Yongliang, PhD a visiting researcher at the University of Nottingham from the Taihe Institute in Beijing for the 2017-2018 academic year, the expertise of whom in the field of China's CT policy is recognised by academic publications and extensive fieldwork in Xinjiang.

From the articles collected, the official statements of China's agents of security were extrapolated and registered on an Excel file to make up for part of the corpus of data used for the VICS analysis of the operational code.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the speeches of the three presidents in charge during the period under analysis – Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping – were collected from the edited volumes published by Beijing Foreign Languages Press. Speeches were only taken into consideration when they made reference to terrorism, religious extremism or separatism or to the insecurities that emerged from Xinjiang and the Uyghur minority. The same rationale used to select the articles of Xinhua was employed to select the speeches.

The historical archives of the “South China Morning Post” (SCMP) – a Hong-Kong based publication known to international scholars for maintaining striking levels of impartiality – were accessed by paid-daily subscription. Access was acquired for about a week. Articles from the SCMP were browsed to cross-reference the statistical data acquired by the GTD of the University of Maryland on the number and level of destructiveness of the terrorist attacks experienced by China in the period under analysis.

Policy documents on public security in Xinjiang were also collected. In particular, the government's White Papers and the Minutes published after the First and Second Xinjiang Forums were taken into consideration. Lastly, legal documents – *inter alia*, China's Constitution, the CPC Constitution and the Criminal Code and all their amendments – were also examined.

Documents on the Shanghai Five and the SCO were mainly collected from the “Legislation database of the CIS countries” – i.e., an online archive that stores the most important legislative documents of CIS members states – and the official website of the SCO. Data comprised the Declarations released after annual Heads of State Councils. The opening statements of China and Russia's Presidents at the annual Heads of State Councils were also examined as reference texts to complement the review of the literature on China and Russia's goals for the institutional frameworks.

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<sup>33</sup> China's government agents in charge of security were identified by a review of secondary literature and by examining the “China Vitae” database of the “Carnegie Endowment for International Peace” that is publicly available at <http://www.chinavitae.com/>

In addition to the SCO official website, data were gathered from the official website of the Kremlin, Xinhua General News Service and TASS. The contents of media outlets were accessed through the Lexis Nexis database.

### 2.6.2 AGGREGATED DATA

Aggregated data were collected with two main aims. On the one hand, they were used to acquire empirical data on the terrorist attacks experienced by China.<sup>34</sup> On the other, statistical reports were used to investigate the type of reform strive that was promoted by the country throughout the periods under analysis.

In terms of terrorist attacks, the GTD of the “National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism” (START) of the University of Maryland was employed in open access to gather data on the terrorist attacks that occurred in China. These data were cross-referenced by examining the digital archives of the SCMP to ensure consistency between the data on terrorist attacks.

Data from the Minority at Risk dataset (MAR) were collected for the first period. This dataset, compiled by the “Center for International Development and Conflict Management” (CIDCM) of the University of Maryland, tracked 284 politically active ethno-political groups around the world, including the Uyghurs.<sup>35</sup> In particular, the MAR “Anti-Regime Rebellion Index” was examined in comparison with Tibetans, another politically active communal group in China. As MAR data were only available for the 1996-2001 period, the index was only employed to cross-reference the data presented by the GTD.

Data from other databases and statistical reports were collected to acquire information on China’s pattern of reform. These are *The Political Prisoner database* of the “US Congressional Executive Commission on China” (US CECC), the *Military Expenditure Database* of the “Stockholm International Research Peace Institute” (SIPRI), *Bertelsmann Transformation Index* (BTI) of

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<sup>34</sup> External statistics were preferred to national statistics to avoid issues of reportage inconsistencies on the data released by authoritarian regimes.

<sup>35</sup> The Uyghur minority is referred as “Turkmens” in the MAR dataset.

“Bertelsmann Stiftung”, the *Polity 5* of the “Center for Systemic Peace and Societal-System Research,” the *Global Freedom Score* (GFS) by Freedom House, the *Electoral Democratic Index* (EDI) of the “Varieties of Democracy Project” (V-DEM), and the *China Global Investment Tracker* (CIT) of the “American Enterprise Institute” (AEI). Lastly, more general statistics were accessed via UN Data and the *National Bureau of Statistics* of the PRC.

### **2.6.3 SECONDARY SOURCES**

Secondary sources constitute a significant share of the empirical research. Indeed, information that was not in open access or that the author could not acquire in any other manner due to the high level of confidentiality of the topic were gathered from secondary literature. These sources include academic publications, reports, working papers and policy briefs from research centres and think tanks, presentations and lectures, seminars and conferences. In particular, publications from research centres were also consulted – *inter alia*, the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), the Hoover Institution, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the Jamestown Foundation, the Institute of Law of the Academic Division of Social, Political and Legal Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the Center for Counter-terrorism Studies of the China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) and the Centre for Security Studies of ETH Zürich. Academic and policy publications from Chinese universities, research centres and think tanks were collected from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) platform. Online magazines – such as China File, Bitter Winter and Radio Free Asia – were also taken into consideration.



## CHAPTER 3. CHINA'S COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY: FROM CONTRADICTIONS TO THE "THREE EVIL FORCES"

This chapter illustrates the theoretical principles behind the concepts of terrorism and counterterrorism in Communist China. Its aim is to offer an explanation about the pattern of implementation of the country's CT policy. First, it examines the conceptual framework for terrorism and counterterrorism, investigating how the political elite identifies episodes of political violence and terrorism. Second, it discusses the impact of Maoism over modern CT policy choices, offering examples of modern counterterrorist measures that maintain a strong connection to Maoist principles. Third, it presents the conceptual framework of the organizations that act as counterterrorists at the regional level, arguing for an overlapping with China's definition of terrorism at the domestic level.

### 3.1 PRINCIPLES OF TERRORISM AND COUNTERTERRORISM IN COMMUNIST CHINA

The "Counterterrorism Law of the People's Republic of China" presents the country's working definition of terrorism.<sup>36</sup> Article 3, in fact, reads that

the term terrorism refers to advocacies and actions that generate social panic, endanger public security, violate human property, or coerce state organs and international organizations through violence, sabotage or threat in order to achieve a different political agenda and ideology ... terrorist incidents refer to terrorist activities, either in progress or occurred, that cause or may cause major social harm (2015, article 3).

This definition encompasses several behaviours and attitudes—such as violence, sabotage or threat—that are adopted to achieve political or ideological objectives and that target society as a whole. From this definition, terrorism is an *action-based* phenomenon, as it does not refer to actors but to "advocacies and actions" (National People's Congress 2015). In brief, China's definition of terrorism identifies three elements as determinants of terrorism: use of violence, political motivation

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<sup>36</sup> In Chinese, 中华人民共和国反恐怖主义法 (Zhōnghuá rénmín gònghéguó fǎn kǒngbù zhǔyì fǎ).

and civilian targeting. The same categories were underlined in the literature by Boaz Ganor (2002) as the elements that distinguish terrorism from other forms of non-traditional security.

In China, the term terrorism only emerges in official documents after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, although the PRC had also been hit by terrorist attacks in the past (Shichor 2018).<sup>37</sup> The country's leadership did in fact combine instances of terrorist violence with other forms of political contestation in accordance with the precepts of Maoism (Dallin and Breslauer 1970).

Throughout China's generations of Communist leadership, terrorism was defined according to macro-categories. Their commonalities are expressed in article 3 of the 2015 Counterterrorism Law, thus envisioning terrorism as an opposition to the country's political leadership enacted by means of violent attacks against the civilian population (National People's Congress 2015). After the establishment of the PRC, China in fact suffered from cycles of political violence and terrorism that peaked at different times and intensities (Philip B. K. Potter and Wang 2018). The CPC legitimacy to lead the country thus entered into the official narrative of CT, so as that CT policy was utterly determined by the notion of "stability" (K. Kan 2013).<sup>38</sup> Since China is a one-party system, the state and the CPC are connected, strikingly more than in the case of multiparty political systems. As a consequence, securitization is a domain that equals the stability of the state to that of the political regime and policy choices are made with this particular objective in mind. "Stability/wending" thus is multi-faceted and comprises the challenges to state-party legitimacy, the institutional bodies in charge of countering these challenges and the measures adopted by these institutional bodies to counter these challenges (Benney 2016). Under the leaderships of Mao, Hua Guofeng/Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin (1949-2001), stability/wending remained the prime concept to identify violent political oppositions to the CPC, thus references in official documents were frequent (W. Yuen 2014).<sup>39</sup> The sole exception are the mentions to "revolutionaries," which invoke the conceptualization

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<sup>37</sup> In Chinese, the term terrorism is translated as 恐怖主义 (Kǒngbù zhǔyì).

<sup>38</sup> In Chinese, the term stability is translated as 稳定 (Wěndìng).

<sup>39</sup> See for instance 'Summary of Minutes'. 2010. 'Summary of Minutes of the Meeting on Safeguarding Stability in Xinjiang (Excerpts) (March 19, 1996)'. *Chinese Law & Government* 43 (1): 9–17. <https://doi.org/10.2753/CLG0009-4609430101>.

presented by Mencius of “revolutionary/geming” as a revocation of the “ming” – that is, the mandate to rule (Jianhua 2011).<sup>40</sup> Despite its frequent revisions, China’s rule of law standards remained eradicated in stability/wending.

The connection between “stability of the state” and “stability of the party” is present in China’s 1949 Constitution and its subsequent revisions. In particular, the “disruption of the socialist system” is posed as the foremost threat to the survival of the state (National People’s Congress 1949).<sup>41</sup> Stability/wending is thus a concept that is discursively flexible, since it incorporates several types of stability. As Jonathan Benney contends (2016), the CPC adopts a narrative on stability/wending that

implies that “national stability” (the political stability of the central party-state), economic stability, social stability and psychological stability are essentially fungible, and ... increases or decreases in one form of stability will lead to parallel changes in the other forms (2).

In his argumentation, Benney severs the link between political stability, economic growth and political contestation. Indeed, he claims that the CPC adopts a multi-level application of stability/wending in an effort to counter domestic opposition more comprehensively. By doing so, the concept thus becomes a *system* of stability maintenance.<sup>42</sup> Three historical cases exemplify the role of stability/weiwen as a system. First, responses to the terrorist attacks of the Guomindang in the 1930s. Second, the final stage of the Cultural Revolution (1956-1966). Third, the 1989 June Fourth incident in Tiananmen Square. It derives that since stability/weiwen enacts responses to violent oppositions to the Party/state, it is a precursor of “counterterrorism.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> In Chinese, the term 革命 (Gémìng) literally translates as “the revocation of the Ming”. In turn, the 命 (Mìng) is the “Mandate of Heaven.” This concept draws from Mencius’ social hierarchy, which placed the “people” and the “state” at highest level. From Mencius’ viewpoint, the revolution opposes a leadership that does not act as guarantor of the people’s will. Mencius conceptualization of Gémìng contrasts with the principles of Communism, as it pushes for the de-legitimization of political leaders and their right to rule (Van Norden 2017).

<sup>41</sup> In Chinese, 破坏社会主义 (Pòhuài shèhuì zhǔyì).

<sup>42</sup> In Chinese, 维稳 (Wéiwěn).

<sup>43</sup> In Chinese, 反恐怖主义 (Fǎn kǒngbù zhǔyì).

“National security” is a term that serves a purpose that is similar to stability/weiwen.<sup>44</sup> While the latter is a more theoretical concept that is not affected by changes in China’s political leadership, “national security/guojia anquan” is shaped by the domestic and international climate (Thornton 2018). Under President Xi, China revised the “National Security Law of the People’s Republic of China,” and re-defined the concept.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, article 1 states that

national security refers to the relative absence of international or domestic threats to the state’s power to govern, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, the welfare of the people, sustainable economic and social development, and other major national interests, and the ability to ensure a continued state of security (1993, article 1).

In contrast with Western tradition, China’s conceptualization of national security/guojia anquan places the CPC legitimacy to rule at the core, while the goal of social security remains a less pressing priority. Indeed, under Mao’s leadership, national security/guojia anquan was tied to the Marxist notion of “contradictions.”<sup>46</sup> Mao argued that the struggle among social classes was the main challenge to China’s security (Mao 1957). Mao’s reasoning was rooted in the observation that China’s Civil War had just ended and that “contradictions” mainly occurred at the international level, where the global conflict between bourgeois and socialist nations was harshening (Marmor 1976). In a sense, the concept of national security/guojia anquan was constructed by juxtaposing domestic and international security challenges (Thornton 2018). Under Deng’s ruling, national security/guojia anquan shifted focus, as China’s opening to the West ran the risk to incur into precepts that could hinder Marxism-Leninism. Indeed, Western political ideas – such as capitalism or democracy – were entering China along the routes of international trade (Garver 2016). Therefore, the concept continued to be oriented towards a more international domain, as a “bourgeois liberalization” was bringing the bourgeois/socialist conflict deep into China (Pye 1993).

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<sup>44</sup> In Chinese, 国家安全 (Guójiā ānquán).

<sup>45</sup> In Chinese, 中华人民共和国国家安全法 (Zhōnghuá rénmín gònghéguó guójiā ānquán fǎ).

<sup>46</sup> In Chinese, 矛盾 (Máodùn).

After the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, domestic security objectives became more pressing (Tachen Cheng 2006). The system of stability maintenance/weiwen was integrated into the concept of national security/guojia anquan and the international domain ceased to be considered as the prime source of instability. After two world wars, China in fact believed that security challenges were unlikely to unfold in the short term from the international system (Tien and Zhu 2000). Conversely, instability was caused at the domestic level, coming to the point of threatening the Party's legitimacy to rule. Jiang Zemin's national security/guojia anquan thus stood on three pillars: stability/wending, Comprehensive National Power (CNP) and "mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation" (Y. Wang and Tang 2016, 82). National security/guojia anquan embodied an inward-looking strategy that set the ground for an institutional framework of cooperation, which eventually found an application in the Shanghai Five and the SCO (Y. Wang and Tang 2016). Yet, under the leadership of Hu Jintao, national security/guojia anquan expanded in the international domain, as China re-discovered traditional forms of insecurity, such as sea and land disputes (Lam 2016). For instance, in this period, China was asked to confront long-standing territorial disputes with its neighbours: among others, the India-China border and the Malacca Strait (Tun-jen Cheng, Delisle, and Brown 2006). At the same time, separatism hit China on several fronts, especially in regions that hosted a high density of ethnic minority populations such as Tibet and Xinjiang. However, the country had limited experience in responding to these challenges (Zanardi 2019).

It was on this form of domestic insecurity that Xi Jinping re-conceptualized national security/guojia anquan. Indeed, Xi standardized the concept by coordinating political and bureaucratic agencies, military and paramilitary armed forces with China's laws and regulations (Cheung 2016). At base, this coordination aims to preserve the legitimacy to rule of the CPC.

After the 2015 revision of the National Security Law, CT became a hyponym for national security/guojia anquan. Still, national security/guojia anquan is a broad concept that encompasses different challenges: responses under this banner thus require a case-by-case evaluation before being treated as instances of CT policy.

Other than counterterrorism/fan kongbuzhuyi, stability and stability maintenance/wending and weiwen and national security/guojia anquan, China's political leaders also adopted the term "counterinsurgency" (COIN), which is drawn directly from Mao.<sup>47</sup> Counterinsurgency/fan baodong is linked to the notion of "contradictions" – that is, tensions between classes peaking at different levels. Mao had expanded on contradictions/maodun in the infamous 1957 speech that eventually led to the enactment of the "anti-rightist campaign" (1957-1959) (Samarani 2019). After two decades of Communist ruling over China, Mao anticipated that the political leadership was in need to receive some feedback from the population on the quality of its governance. Since China is a one-party system, information cannot in fact be gathered from ballots, as in the case of multi-party political systems (Schubert 2003). Thus, Mao incited the country's intelligentsia to offer some comments to the government through the press (Mao 1986). Criticism was so fierce that Mao's speech was published in revised form on the People's Daily shortly afterwards. The article version substituted the immunity clause that had been adopted to stimulate responses with a set of six criteria the goal of which was to discern between "flagrant flowers" and "poisonous weed" (Mao 1986).<sup>48</sup> In other words, they aimed to identify the intellectuals that favoured capitalism over collectivization (Schubert 2003).

Among Mao's conceptualizations of contradictions/maodun are the "contradictions that split the people," which maintain a strong connection to insurgency. These contradictions are in fact characterized by a power struggle between groups in society that seek to assume political control over the country by mobilizing the population (Mao 1957). Mao's definition bear some similarities with the conceptualization of "insurgency" from the West, as presented by NATO.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, insurgency includes the

actions of an organized, often ideologically motivated, group or movement that seeks to effect or prevent political change or to overthrow a governing authority within a

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<sup>47</sup> In Chinese, 反暴动 (Fǎn bàodòng).

<sup>48</sup> Mao's full speech is entitled "A Hundred Flowers Bloom, a Hundred Schools of Thought are in Contention". In Chinese, 百花齐放,百家争鸣 (Bǎihuāqífàng, bǎijiāzhēngmíng). See Mao, Zedong. 1986. *The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976: January 1956-December 1957*. Edited by John K. Leung and Michael Y. M. Kau. Armonk and London: M.E. Sharpe.

<sup>49</sup> In Chinese, the term insurgency is translated as 暴动 (Bàodòng).

country or a region, focused on persuading or coercing the population through the use of violence and subversion (NATO Standardization Office 2011, 3–1).

In brief, there is no clear distinction between counterinsurgency/fan baodong and counterterrorism/fan kongbuzhuyi, as the concepts maintain a similar conceptual basis. As a result, in China, no differentiation is made between CT and COIN policies.

Despite the variation in the terms used to refer to terrorism, the use of violence, political motivation and civilian targeting remained at the core of China’s definition of CT policy. Indeed, other than counterterrorism/fan kongbuzhuyi, the most common term used by China’s leaders was that of stability or stability maintenance/wending or weiwen. Yet, a hyperon for counterterrorism/fan kongbuzhuyi was also employed (national security/guojia anquan). Lastly, counterinsurgency/fan baodong was commonly used as a synonym for counterterrorism/fan kongbuzhuyi.

Diachronic variations in the terms “terrorism” and “counterterrorism” offer insights on the theoretical basis of China’s CT policy. Indeed, they offer a more comprehensive perspective on the country’s rationale for policy making in this realm, thus showing that the country maintained a baseline for CT policy well before the GWOT was launched.

### **3.2 A MAOIST CT POLICY**

China’s CT policy is rooted in ideology. Policymakers indeed rely on the work of previous thinkers—such as Confucius, Sun Zi, Lenin and Mao—to justify their policy choices and maintain their legitimacy to rule. The practical guidelines laid down by past thinkers cannot be applied to modern societies, although their theoretical insights still impact policymaking (Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1990). For instance, China’s national security strategy adhered to Maoism throughout the waves of tactical and technological modernization of the country’s military (Su 2013). After the Maoist period, Su Yu—one of China’s most prominent military strategists—published an op-ed on the modernization of the country’s armed forces that maintained Mao’s principle of the “People’s War”

at the core.<sup>50</sup> In particular, Su made an argument for China's armed forces to pursue technological and tactical advancements to keep pace with the armies of the country's opponents. He dubbed this strategy "People's War under Modern Conditions" in an effort to ensure its legitimacy (Joffe 1987).<sup>51</sup>

Under Mao, China maintained a double standard for separatism and national self-determination. Indeed, the country supported several liberation movements in the developing world—such as the "Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine" (PFLP) and the "Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine" (DFLP)—despite them being considered terrorist organizations (L. C. Harris 1977).<sup>52</sup> In addition, due to the Sino-Soviet split, China had to re-discuss trade relations with the other states in its inner periphery—such as Iran, Syria and Libya, which sponsored terrorism (Phillip B. K. Potter 2013a). Yet, at the domestic level, Mao refused any separatist claim coming from the country's ethnic minority groups, even though these originated from the objectives of self-determination.

These insecurities were in fact tackled within the framework of the People's War. Mao's conceptualization of this concept was perfected by Mao in various speeches, reports and lectures throughout his political life.<sup>53</sup> When examined longitudinally, these documents set a pattern for how the concept was designed.

The element that characterizes the People's War is the "people" – i.e., the masses asking for social change (Mao 1934). Although this concept draws from Marxism, Mao identifies agrarian masses as the only rising force to introduce social change instead of Marx's industrial workers. While chairing the "Second National Congress of Representatives of Workers and Peasants" in Ruijin, a

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<sup>50</sup> In Chinese, 人民战争 (Rénmín zhànzhēng).

<sup>51</sup> In Chinese, 现代条件下的人民战争 (Xiàndài tiáojiàn xià de rénmin zhànzhēng).

<sup>52</sup> To expand on these particular movements, see Council on Foreign Relations. 2005. 'PFLP, DFLP, PFLP-GC, Palestinian Leftists'. 31 October 2005. [www.cfr.org/background/pflp-dflp-pflp-gc-palestinian-leftists](http://www.cfr.org/background/pflp-dflp-pflp-gc-palestinian-leftists).

<sup>53</sup> The documents that are considered as conducive of Mao's conceptualization of People's War refer to the 1934-1947 timeframe. This is a moment of change for the country, as it is ravaged by the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the Chinese Civil War (1947-1949). During this period, the country is governed by the Guomindang (Samarani 2010). The documents taken into consideration for the development of People's War are: "Be Concerned with the Well-Being of the Masses, Pay Attention to the Methods of War" (1934), "Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War" (1936), "On Protracted War" (1938), "Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War against Japan" (1938) and "The Present Situation and Our Tasks" (1947). All documents were examined in Chinese.



city in the Jiangxi Province, Mao promoted the idea that “the revolutionary war is a war on the masses; it can be waged only by mobilizing the masses and relying on them” (Mao 1934). This short excerpt reflects the dual character of Mao’s conceptualization of the People’s War. On the one hand, the People are victims of the war. On the other, the People are the force that has the potential to perpetrate war. The connecting link between the People and social change is mobilization. Yet, unless the People is organized by a leader towards a cause, social change cannot occur. Indeed, Mao contended that

the richest source of power to wage war lies in the masses of the people. It is mainly because of the unorganized state of the Chinese masses that Japan dares to bully us. When this defect is remedied, then the Japanese aggressor, like a mad bull crashing into a ring of flames, will be surrounded by hundreds of millions of our people standing upright, the mere sound of their voices will strike terror into him, and he will be buried to death (Mao 1938).

This particular attention to mobilization has been maintained over time, as exemplified by the conceptualization of terrorism presented in the 2015 Counterterrorism Law that identifies the phenomenon as action-based.<sup>54</sup>

After China’s Civil War, forms of political opposition rooted in the mobilization of agrarian or industrial segments of society were typified as “Maoist guerrilla war,” thus becoming a model of insurgency adopted around the world (Wallensteen and Sollenberg 1995). In fact, instances of Maoist guerrilla war were detected in South-East Asia, the Middle East and South America (Girling 2015).<sup>55</sup> Maoism is so eradicated in the approaches of the CPC that policies are legitimized by making reference to Maoist principles.

Despite media coverage suggesting otherwise, terrorism in China is not a recent phenomenon, but pre-dates the establishment of the CPC as the leading force in the country (M. Clarke and Smith 2016). CT policy is traced back to the “Sino-barbarian dichotomy” – i.e., a juxtaposition between

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<sup>54</sup> See section 3.1.

<sup>55</sup> Maoist People’s War mainly spread in other parts of Asia, although certain conflicts in the Middle East and South America have also been traced back to Maoist principles. For instance, consider the cases of Vietnam (1955-1975), Laos (1959-1975), Cambodia (1968-1975), India (1967), Philippines (1969), Nepal (1996-2006), Thailand (1965-1983), Myanmar (1948-1988), Malaysia (1962-1990) and Bangladesh (1971) in terms of South East Asia, or conflicts in Turkey (1972) and in Peru (1980) with regards to the Middle East and South America respectively.

China's major ethnicity (Han) and other minority groups (R. Harris, Smith Finley, and Thum 2018).<sup>56</sup> The Sino-barbarian dichotomy escalated in the eighteenth century, when the Qing dynasty embarked in a campaign of territorial expansion in the West and conflicted with indigenous populations (M. Clarke 2018b). Afterwards, the Qings were called upon to counter forms of violent political opposition that were linked to separatism (Dillon 2018).

In the republican period, China's West was under the control of the warlords. Nationalist sentiment challenged the authority of the Guomindang and led to the establishment of two shortly lived independent states in Xinjiang in 1933 and 1934 respectively (D. D. Wang 1995; Klimeš 2015). During the Civil War, a third independent republic was established in Xinjiang from 1944 to 1949 (Dillon 2018). Opposition to China's leadership did not weaken after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, as governing authorities continued to face forms of opposition that peaked in the eighties and the mid-nineties (M. Clarke 2018b).

In imperial times, the Qing dynasty had adopted different measures to counter episodes of terrorism and political unrest that had spanned from assimilation to conflict (Dillon 2003). After the Civil War, Communist leaders did not have the necessary expertise to design an effective strategy to confront political unrest. In fact, the CPC had come to power by means of a "People's War" that, at base, was a measure of political opposition to the ruling elite (Samarani 2008). Still, Communist leaders had little experience in addressing forms of political unrest that were opposing their leadership, such as separatist movements in Xinjiang and Tibet or what the CPC identified as "religious extremism" from Falun Gong (Dillon 2018).<sup>57</sup> Therefore, CT policy leant on the concept of People's War and its reliance on the "people" is still present in the counterterrorist measures that had been adopted in China. Consider, for instance, one of the latest policies devised by the CPC to counter

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<sup>56</sup> The Sino-barbarian dichotomy is also referred to as the *hua-yi* distinction (An 2019).

<sup>57</sup> Falun Gong (in Chinese, 法轮功 Fǎlúngōng) is a spiritual practice that combines meditation and *qigong* exercises with a moral philosophy centred on the tenets of truthfulness, compassion and tolerance – i.e., 真 (Zhēn), 善 (Shàn) and 忍 (Rěn). In 1999, the CPC outlawed Falun Gong, sentencing its adherents to "re-education through labour" (In Chinese, 劳教 Láojiào in the short form). See Dillon, Michael. 2001. *Religious Minorities and China*. London: Minority Rights Group International.

terrorism in Xinjiang. Started in 2016, the policy adopts the slogan “United as One Family” – a reminder of the Confucian notion of “harmonious society.”<sup>58</sup> This campaign advances a policy that had been introduced in Xinjiang in 2014 under the slogan “Visit the People, Benefit the People, and Get Together the Hearts of the People” (Byler 2018a).<sup>59</sup> The two policies had a similar agenda, but reached different extents. Simply put, the policies aimed to have members from the Han ethnic group enter the homes of Uyghur families in Xinjiang for a limited period of time to assist supervising authorities in detecting separatism, terrorism and religious extremism (Byler 2018a). While Hans are trained in detecting any sign of opposition to the CPC, Uyghurs are expected to undertake activities that are representative of Han’s traditional culture, such as celebrating Han festivals or cook Han traditional recipes (Byler 2018b). The goal of these policies is not only for the Hans to report on any behaviour that they believe to be suspicious, but also to forge cultural allegiances between the Uyghurs and Han traditional culture, thus severing the bond between Uyghurs and Islamic traditional culture.<sup>60</sup> While the 2014 trial policy only involved members of the Han ethnic majority that were affiliated to the CPC—as government officials or their relations—the 2016 policy involved other Han families that were considered reliable by the CPC (Byler 2018a; 2018b).

To an extent, these two policies relied on the core element that determines Mao’s People’s War to ensure the stability of Xinjiang. In a sense, the CPC adopted counterterrorist measures that enacted a People’s War against separatism, terrorism and religious extremism. Then, the “people” in Mao’s conceptualization become the members of the Han community, who are mobilized by the CPC to transfer the allegiance of the Uyghur’s minority in terms of re-prioritizing their commitment to Xinjiang and Islam. Despite its roughness, this correlation exemplifies the connection between Maoism and policy choices under modern Communist leaderships.

The People’s War is not the sole element of Maoist political thought to address violent political unrest. While the People’s War welcomes opposition, the concept of contradictions resists

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<sup>58</sup> In Chinese, 和谐社会 (Héxié shèhuì).

<sup>59</sup> In Chinese, 访民情、惠民生、聚民心 (Fǎng mínqíng, huì mín shēng, jù mínxīn).

<sup>60</sup> This is made clear, for example, by an utter disregard for Muslim dietary preferences (Smith Finley 2019a).

it. In 1957, Mao delivered a speech entitled “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People,”<sup>61</sup> during which he contended that “we [the CPC] are confronted by two types of social contradictions – those between ourselves and the enemy and those among the people themselves. The two are totally different in nature” (Mao 1957). From the late 1930s to the 1950s, Mao detailed on the conceptualization of contradictions and determined that, among the contradictions among the people, there were contradiction between the people and the government. Indeed, Mao stated that

our People’s Government is one that genuinely represents the people’s interests, it is a government that serves the people. Nevertheless, there are still certain contradictions between the government and the people. These include contradictions among the interests of the state, the interest of the collective and the interests of the individual; between democracy and centralism; between the leadership and the led; and the contradiction arising from the bureaucratic style of work of certain government workers and their relations with the masses. All these are also contradictions among the people (Mao 1957).

As the extract shows, certain elements determine the contradictions among the people. Indeed, contradictions are not only an opposition between those who lead and those who are led, but they also are a divergence of the interests of the parties involved in the Lockean contract – that is, individuals, rules and society.

Mao placed particular emphasis on the role played by “right and wrong” in determining contradictions. In fact, Mao delineated six guidelines to discern between right-and-wrong discourse and behaviour. First, to be considered as positive, words and actions need to connect China’s ethnic groups. Second, they need to accelerate socialist transformation and construction. Third, they need to consolidate the people’s democratic dictatorship. Fourth, they need to support democratic centralism. Fifth, they need to strengthen the leadership of the CPC. Sixth, they need to promote international socialist unity and the unity of the global population (Mao 1957). Among these, Mao indicated the second and fifth as relevant for opposing the “contradictions among the people,” thus drawing a parallel between stability and the consolidation of Party leadership.

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<sup>61</sup> In Chinese, 关于正确处理人民内部矛盾的问题 (Guānyú zhèngquè chǔlǐ rénmin nèibù máodùn de wèntí).

When counterterrorist measures change, so do the preferences of the CPC. Nonetheless, preferences remain linked to Maoism, the insights of which require adaptation to contemporary challenges. Nowadays, Maoism does not dictate the rules of policy making in China, but works as a system of legitimization that ensures that policy is consistent with the Party's philosophical core.

### **3.3 TERRORISM AND COUNTERTERRORISM AS THE “THREE EVIL FORCES”**

Despite serving as a reference to policy making, Maoism does not propose counterterrorist measures capable of countering current insecurities. From a Maoist perspective, insecurities mostly are a matter of domestic politics. Conversely, China's CT policy includes an international dimension that contemplates the joint action of several actors as necessary to counter the phenomena that the CPC identifies as terrorism. In the past twenty years, China's political elite distinguished between three challenges to the country's stability – that is, separatism, terrorism and religious extremism (Aris 2009a; 2011; M. Clarke 2018b; Zanardi 2019). These challenges serve as the object of China's CT policy.

Forms of international security cooperation in these three domains date back to processes of distension enacted by China and its neighbouring countries in the mid-eighties (Zhang 2016). For instance, the “Initiative of Vladivostok,” promoted by Mikhail Gorbachev after the 1969 Sino-Soviet border conflict, was not only an attempt to normalize relations between China and the Soviet Union, but it was also a way to establish forms of cooperation to counter security challenges that were spreading in the region and were operating transnationally (Philip B. K. Potter 2013).<sup>62</sup>

After the Soviet Union fell, the republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan opened a dialogue on border demarcation with China and Russia. In 1996, the distension process launched by

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<sup>62</sup> The “Initiative of Vladivostok” was a strategy advanced by Mikhail Gorbachev during the Vladivostok speech of 28 July 1986. It is considered a turning-point in Soviet relations with Asia, as it was “instrumental in repackaging Gorbachev for a more attractive worldwide and regional marketing of the long-pursued Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence” (Samoteikin 2019). To expand on the “Initiative of Vladivostok,” see Samoteikin, Evgeni. 2019. ‘The Goals of Vladivostok’. In *The Soviet Union As An Asian-Pacific Power: Implications Of Gorbachev's 1986 Vladivostok Initiative*, edited by Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer, n.a. Abingdon: Routledge.

the Initiative of Vladivostok transformed into an informal forum for the development of a multilateral dialogue on security between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Garver 2016). The 1996 Shanghai Agreement, which officially started the forum, stressed the importance of building mutual trust in border areas, and placed this principle at the backbone of every activity of the Shanghai Five forum (Aris 2011).<sup>63</sup> It is worth noting that the Shanghai Five forum never served as a fully functioning institution but maintained loose membership requirements and extremely wide-reaching goals (Maduz 2018). Yet, the issue of offering a common response to regional security challenges was raised during the third summit of the Shanghai Five, which was held in Almaty in 1998. Indeed, regional security challenges invested several areas of insecurity: from the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to drug trafficking, illegal immigration, religious extremism and transnational terrorism (Aris 2009b).

Three years before the US called for a global war on terror, the Shanghai Five issued an official document that acknowledged the rise of regional terrorism rooted in religious extremism and separatism (Shichor 2005). Indeed, in the 1998 Almaty Joint Statement, the Shanghai Five presented a shared conceptualization of terrorism. The fifth section of the Statement indeed reads that

all parties agree that any form of national separatism, ethnic exclusion and religious extremism are unacceptable. The parties will take measures to combat international terrorism, organized crime, smuggling of arms, drug trafficking and narcotics and other transnational criminal activities, and not allow the use of their territory to harm the sovereignty, security and society of any of the Five countries (Shanghai Five 1998).

This extract is conducive of the disaggregation of regional security challenges into three main spheres of action, while also stressing the dual commitment of the Shanghai Five in combating terrorism and protecting the national sovereignty of its member states in designing and applying counterterrorist measures (Aris 2009b). It was only during the fourth summit of the Shanghai Five, held in Bishkek in 1999, that security cooperation in the realm of CT operationalized. Indeed, the

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<sup>63</sup> In Chinese, 五国 (Wǔ guó).

Heads of State of the Shanghai Five affirmed their willingness to “take measures to carry out practical collaboration, including holding consultations and formulating joint action plans between 1999 and 2000” (Shanghai Five 1998).

Other than considering the international dimension of counterterrorism, the Almaty Joint Statement and the Bishkek Declaration also are also increasingly concerned with transnational terrorist activities (Shichor 2004). This particular concern led to the institutionalization of the Shanghai Five into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) at the sixth summit of the Shanghai Five, held in Shanghai in 2001. Nowadays, the SCO is still *en route* towards the full institutionalization, but is already presenting high levels of sophistication in several domains (table 6).

Table 6 Structure of the SCO

<b>Permanent bodies</b>	<b>Convening bodies</b>	<b>Non-charter based permanent bodies <i>non-governmental members</i></b>
The Regional Anti-terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent	The Council of Heads of State – CHS	SCO Interbank Consortium <i>regional financial institutions</i>
The Secretariat in Beijing	The Council of Heads of Government – CHG (Prime Ministers)	SCO Business Council <i>business and financial institutions</i>
	The Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs – CMFA	SCO Forum and Discussion Club <i>researchers/academics</i>
	Meetings of Heads of Ministries and/or Agencies – CMFA	SCO Youth Council <i>youth organizations</i>
	The Council of National Coordinators (responsible for directing the organization’s day-to-day activities and preparing meetings of the CHS, CHG and CMFA)	SCO Energy Club <i>energy suppliers and consumers</i> (MoU in 2013)

Source: Linda Maduz (2018)

The willingness to transform the Shanghai Five forum into an institution had been first expressed in Dushanbe during the fifth summit of the Shanghai Five in 2000 (Shanghai Five 2000). Nonetheless, it was only when Uzbekistan joined the framework as an observer member in 2001 that the formal institutionalization of the Shanghai Five accelerated (Aris 2009b). It is interesting to notice that no commitment nor mention to democratic values exists in any of the founding documents of the SCO. This is a distinctive feature, as the charters of other regional organizations such as the EU or the African Union (AU) place democracy at their core (Aris 2011). In its place, the principles of

sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of member states become a recurring theme, which means that affecting the policy choices of other member states is in violation of the principles of the institution (Aris 2009b).

As the Shanghai Five institutionalized into the SCO, the international dimension of CT policy re-structured into “The Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism” (hereinafter, the Shanghai Convention).<sup>64</sup> The document stresses the intention of creating a joint platform for CT and expresses a general commitment to the principles sustained by the Almaty Joint Statement and the Bishkek Declaration. In addition, after the Shanghai Convention was adopted, SCO members joined the US-led NATO counterterrorist operation “Enduring Freedom” (OEF) in Afghanistan (Aris 2011).<sup>65</sup>

The Shanghai Convention conceptualizes terrorism as a threefold concept. Despite having been disaggregated into three separate entities, separatism, terrorism and religious extremism are also addressed as a single insecurity. In this context, “terrorism” thus is a *macro-term* grouping together these three sub-categories. At the same time, “terrorism” also is a *micro-term* identifying one of these sub-categories (Sciorati 2019b). It is these three sub-categories that represents major regional security challenges. Yet, the SCO established both a framework for security and economic cooperation in accordance with the notion that it is economic development that ensures security (Peyrouse 2007). Take China’s coastal development as an example. As domestic instabilities mounted against the CPC, both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao focused on encouraging the country’s economic development (Tien and Zhu 2000; Tun-jen Cheng, Delisle, and Brown 2006).<sup>66</sup> In fact, the underlying idea was that the

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<sup>64</sup> In Chinese, 打击恐怖主义、分裂主义和极端主义上海公约 (Dǎjī kǒngbù zhǔyì, fēnlìè zhǔyì hé jíduān zhǔyì Shànghǎi gōngyuē).

<sup>65</sup> Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) was the official name used by the US government for the GWOT. On 7 October 2001, as a response to the 9/11 attacks in New York, President George W. Bush announced that airstrikes targeting Al Qaeda and the Taliban had begun in Afghanistan. OEF primarily refers to the War in Afghanistan, but it is also used to refer to other counterterrorist operations, such as the OEF-Philippines and the OEF-Trans Sahara. After 13 years, on 28 December 2014, President Barack Obama terminated OEF in Afghanistan. Operations in Afghanistan by the US now are affiliated to “Operation Freedom’s Sentinel” (S. A. Kan 2010).

<sup>66</sup> Under Mao’s leadership, episodes of opposition to the CPC occurred. Among others, the “Hundred Flowers Campaign,” the “Cultural Revolution” and the Tibet and Xinjiang secessionist movements. See Schram, Stuart R. 1994. ‘Mao Zedong a Hundred Years On: The Legacy of a Ruler’. The China Quarterly, no. 137: 125–43.



China's internal stability would have been guaranteed by raising living conditions throughout the country (Joffe 1998).

Among the latest applications of the security-development nexus in China are the development measures enacted in Xinjiang. Going under the names "China Western Development," "Great Western Development Strategy" or "Open Up the West Program," these measures had a dual aim.<sup>67</sup> On the one hand, they strived to help Western China reach the same levels of development as coastal China. On the other, they leant on the constant flow of state investments and Han citizens to increase the stability of the region. The general aim was to empower the Uyghur minority group in terms of welfare and purchasing power, as well as overthrow the population ratio of the region (Joffe 1998). Although Tibet was often identified as China's priority, the CPC identified Xinjiang as the country's main insecurity hotbed (Tanner and Bellacqua 2016).

Not only was the nexus between security and development stressed at the domestic level in China, but it also found an application in the domain of regional cooperation. In fact, China was not the sole SCO member to pick up on this principle and insert it among its counterterrorist objectives. Consider, for instance, Kazakhstan, the modernization of which has led Nur-Sultan to focus on regional development issues through the establishment of a developmental agency, KAZaid, working almost exclusively in Afghanistan, as the state is a breeding ground for insecurities along Kazakhstan's southern border (Sciorati 2018).

Other than conceptualizing terrorism, the Shanghai Convention also describes the areas of cooperation for SCO member states in the CT domain. First, economic cooperation at the regional level ensures stability. Indeed, since most Central Asian states are landlocked, regional connectivity is key to boost trade (figure 2).<sup>68</sup> Second, SCO member states support the CT policy choices of the

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<sup>67</sup> In Chinese, 西部大开发 (Xībù dà kāifā).

<sup>68</sup> Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are all landlocked countries. The Caspian Sea, in fact, does not provide access to the world ocean. Since they are landlocked, these countries face higher trade costs, which are partially diminished by functioning infrastructure system. This is why it should not surprise the enormous success that China's Belt and Road Initiative had in Central Asia. To expand on the economic disadvantages of landlockedness, see Paudel, Ramesh C. 2014. 'Economic Growth in Developing Countries: Is Landlockedness Destiny?' 2014/01. Working Papers in Trade and Development. Sydney: Australian National University. <http://unohrlls.org/custom-content/uploads/2013/09/Economic-Growth-in-Developing-Countries-Is-Landlockedness-Destiny.pdf>.

other members. Indeed, respect of national sovereignty is a principle that has been reiterated in other policy documents or statements at the regional and international levels (Aris 2009b). For example, during a public meeting at the European Institute for Asian Studies (EIAS) in Brussels in December 2018, Yerzhan Ashikbayev, then Deputy Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan, made reference to the principle of national sovereignty in CT policy when answering a question on China's internment camps in Xinjiang (Sciorati 2018). Indeed, Ashikbayev stressed that the issue of internment camps had been addressed in compliance with national sovereignty. Kazakh nationals residing in Xinjiang had been treated under Kazakh law, while Chinese nationals of Kazakh origins had been treated under Chinese law (Sciorati 2018). As discussed in the introduction, internment camps are one of the most recent applications of counterterrorism efforts in Xinjiang and a reminder of the Cultural Revolution (Byler 2018a). These camps target Muslim minorities living in Xinjiang, including the Kazakh and Kyrgyz ethnic groups that reside in the region (Pannier 2018).

In contrast with the camps—the existence of which has remained a secret until protests from Kazakhstan's civil society forced the country to open a diplomatic dialogue with China that eventually led to the release of Kazakh nationals from the camps (Sciorati 2019a)—direct mentions to the People's War were more common in Xinjiang. For instance, in February 2017, during a parade of anti-terrorist paramilitary troops in Ürumqi, Chen Quanguo, former governor of Tibet and current governor of Xinjiang, declared that CT policy aimed to “bury the terrorists' bodies in the vast sea of the people's war” (Chen Quanguo as mentioned in Phillips 2017).

Figure 2 Map of Central Asia



Source: *Department of Field Support, Cartographic Section, United Nations (UN)*

As discussed in the previous sections, China envisions security as going hand-in-hand with economic growth and national sovereignty. Yet, as international cooperation in CT policy deepened, the risk to erode the primacy of the nation-state heightened. At the same time, China also risked falling short of its famous “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence,” which had been established in an effort to counter the narrative of China as a colonial power that was looking towards Central and South-East Asia or the Horn of Africa (Wen 2004).<sup>69</sup> Indeed, among these are the principles of “mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity” and the principles of “non-interference in internal affairs.” As they are at the core of the SCO Charter (Shanghai Five 2001), these principles imply that support will be provided to SCO member states in the policy preferences that respect these principles, and vice versa. It is interesting to notice that these principles are an unyielding compass and are applied even outside the region. For instance, endorsements to China’s CT policy in Xinjiang, Russia’s CT policy in Chechnya and counterterrorist operations in Afghanistan are present in institutional documents. At the same time, Russia’s attempt to sever Crimea from Ukraine did not

<sup>69</sup> In Chinese, 和平共处五项原则 (Héping gòngchǔ wǔ xiàng yuánzé). To expand on the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence,” see Zhang, Shu Guang. 2007. ‘Constructing “Peaceful Coexistence”: China’s Diplomacy toward the Geneva and Bandung Conferences, 1954–55’. *Cold War History* 7 (4): 509–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740701621846>.

enjoy the support of other SCO members (Kaczmarek 2015). In particular, China abstained within the UN Security Council on the issue, as the country risked to heighten the numerous separatist claims that were emerging from its territory and impeach its own sovereignty in case the country would have worked against the principle of “territorial integrity” (Chan 2015; Ikenberry, Feng, and Jisi 2015).

The Shanghai Convention also identifies in SCO member states the guarantors of regional stability. This mandate thus implies that the survival of these political regimes is paramount to maintain stability in the region. As a consequence, the SCO supports policies and actions that aim to preserve the integrity of these regimes (Aris 2011). Therefore, regime security and the fight against the “three evil forces” of terrorism, extremism and separatism are at the centre of the SCO mandate. By recognizing a threefold security threat, SCO leaders can act pre-emptively to nullify every episode of dissent that can potentially challenge regime integrity. Scholars pointed out that the Shanghai Convention offers a justification to SCO member states to repress (Aris 2011). Among others, Benjamin Goldsmith (2005) stated that “under this Convention, terrorism, extremism, and separatism are given broad definitions, providing its signatories with wide latitude to repress dissidents and insurgents alike.”

On this note, it is interesting to consider the Andijan case in Uzbekistan. In 2005, the Uzbek government sedated an uprising in the region of Andijan, located at the border with Kyrgyzstan. The international community criticized Tashkent for the violence used to regain the control of the region (Yuan 2010). Nonetheless, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan sided with Uzbekistan in refusing international investigators to enter the country as they assumed that the issue was a matter of internal affairs for Uzbekistan (Marat 2009). Indeed, the SCO stressed the relevance assumed by the issue. First, the 2005 annual summit was held in Kazakhstan a month after the repression of Andijan. At a diplomatic level, Russia and China supported Uzbekistan. On the one hand, Russia linked Andijan terrorists to the Chechens. On the other, China offered solidarity to Uzbekistan (Aris 2009b).

As regime security is at the core of the SCO framework, any violation to state sovereignty has to be opposed. Indeed, the SCO has the aim to support members in preserving the regimes and, as a consequence, the narrative on terrorism is connected to regime security.

Although the Shanghai Convention is the first document to offer a definition of the three evil forces, this term was later adopted by the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). The RATS is the agency that is in charge of fulfilling the terrorist agenda of the SCO: established in Tashkent in 2003, it aimed to coordinate joint operations against of terrorism, separatism and extremism (Chung 2006). As stated by Vyacheslav Kasymov Temirovich, former Director of the RATS Executive Committee, RATS was established to design a “single approach for SCO states in the fight against terrorism and other problems of modern society” (Temirovich as cited in Aris 2011, 124). Indeed, the RATS is in charge of the insecurities that are specific to a SCO member state, an area crossing the territory of several SCO member states or the entire region. The agency acts as a hub for sharing information and intelligence on regionally active terrorist groups (Aris 2009b). Yet, the RATS does not have the ability to enforce CT policy but depends on the willingness of SCO leaders to adopt its policy recommendations (Aris 2011). It is worth noting that the RATS includes analysts and scholars and does not count many military or paramilitary forces among its members (X. Zhao 2012).

As terrorism, separatism and religious extremism are treated as a single insecurity, their conceptualization helps understanding how CT policy evolves among SCO member states. For instance, after the Shanghai Convention was signed, it became more and more common for Chinese policymakers to use the terms “three evil forces” or “three evils” to refer to terrorism (Guang 2005). Thus, the definitions presented by the Counterterrorism Law of the People’s Republic of China, which were discussed in section 3.1, share some features with the ones offered by the Shanghai Convention. Indeed, terrorism is

any other act intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to a civilian, or any other person not taking an active part in the hostilities in a situation of armed conflict or to cause major damage to any material facility, as well as to organize, plan, aid and abet such act, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate

population, violate public security or compel public authorities or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, and prosecuted in accordance with the national laws of the Parties (SCO 2001, article 1).

Whilst the same Convention defines separatism as

any act intended to violate territorial integrity of a State including by annexation of any part of its territory or disintegrate a State in a violent manner, as well as planning and preparing, aiding and abetting such act, and subject to criminal prosecuting in accordance with the national laws of the Parties (SCO 2001, article 1).

Finally, religious extremism is described as

an act aimed at violent seizing or keeping power, and violently changing the constitutional system a State, as well as a violent encroachment upon public security, including organization, for the above purposes, of illegal armed formations and participation in them, criminally prosecuted in conformity with the national laws of the Parties (SCO 2001, article 1).

Moreover, the decision-making power remains with SCO member states, which can adopt the definition of terrorism presented by the Shanghai Convention at the best of their abilities (SCO 2001, article 1). Although the adoption of this definition is not compulsory for SCO member states, its operationalization is particularly interesting. Indeed, one of the first applications of the term are the speeches and communiqués about military operations from China's leaders (De Haas 2008). It should be noted that the notion of "three evil forces" or "three evils" has a strong connotation to China's traditional culture, as there is a large number of legends that include the "three evils" as a character that tempts men and destabilizes society (Ambrosio 2008).

Although the SCO supports the US-led GWOT, it adopts a different approach at the regional level. In fact, forms of regional cooperation in CT policy have the aim to preserve the political regimes of SCO member states (Goldsmith 2005; Aris 2011). The threefold conceptualization of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism is thus crucial for the SCO, as it grants member states more room for regional coordination.

## CHAPTER 4. DOMESTIC POLITICS IN COMMAND. CHINA, THE SHANGHAI FIVE AND CT POLICY (1996-2001)

This chapter analyses China's CT policy in the period between April 1996 and June 2001. In April 1996, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan established the Shanghai Five mechanism, the objective of which was to ensure regional security by countering the diffusion of terrorism. After the fall of the Soviet Union, in fact, the illegal smuggling of people and goods was facilitated by the porosity of the common borders.<sup>70</sup>

1996 and 1997 were among the most threatening years for China in terms of terrorism. In 1996, China was hit by 51 explosions (START 2019), while, in 1997, three bombs went off in Ürumqi, as the memorial service of Deng Xiaoping was being televised by international media ('China Rocked by Series of Bombs' 1997). No terrorist group was formally identified by the CPC as responsible for the attacks. Although the country's leadership monitored the political contestation that had emerged in the country, the overall aim was to maintain a "united front," so as not to incur in the same risks that the CPC had faced in 1989 after the army had intervened against protesters in Tiananmen Square (Stavis 1990).

Though there were no substantial changes in China's leadership in this period, Jiang's grasp over the PB was challenged by Hu Jintao, who promoted ideas that were not shared by Jiang (Dittmer 2003).<sup>71</sup> Jiang also struggled to be accepted as General Secretary of the Party and President of the PRC by the members of the Politburo and only the aura projected by Deng Xiaoping ensured the consolidation of the power transition to Jiang (Lam 1999). This period thus was characterized by Jiang's strive to reach a consensus among Party members.

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<sup>70</sup> The 1996 summit amongst these countries did not formally establish an international organization. The Shanghai Five remains an informal term used to refer to the annual meetings of these states. Indeed, the term started to be systematically employed after the Shanghai Five institutionalized into the SCO in 2001.

<sup>71</sup> While Jiang Zemin was a key member of the Shanghai faction (given his former role of CPC Secretary of Shanghai), Hu Jintao could potentially enter the Qinghua faction, as he had graduated in engineering from Qinghua University. Yet, Hu also had a connection to the CYL. Both the Qinghua and the CYL factions were in opposition to Jiang, thus aggravating the animosity between him and Hu (Pye 2001).

The chapter monitors the three factors of the theoretical framework presented in section 2.3 at the time of the Shanghai Five – one of the first cases of regional cooperation in the domain of CT experienced by China. In accordance with neoclassical realism, the first section investigates the pressure exerted by the security environment on China’s CT policy by examining the empirical data on the terrorist attacks that occurred in Xinjiang and comparing them with the perception of terrorism of the agents that were in charge of public security. The second section examines the political orientation of the ruling elite towards authoritarianism. Particular emphasis is placed on the level of support enjoyed by the Secretary General in the Politburo at times of leadership transitions. The third section considers the principles of CT policy promoted by the Shanghai Five. In particular, the section presents the competing interests of China and Russia in an effort to identify the normative power of the cooperative framework.

The chapter concludes with some considerations on the impact of these three factors on the making of China’s CT policy in Xinjiang between 1996 and 2001 and discusses the propositions presented in section 2.2.

#### **4.1 ASSESSING THE TERRORIST THREAT IN XINJIANG**

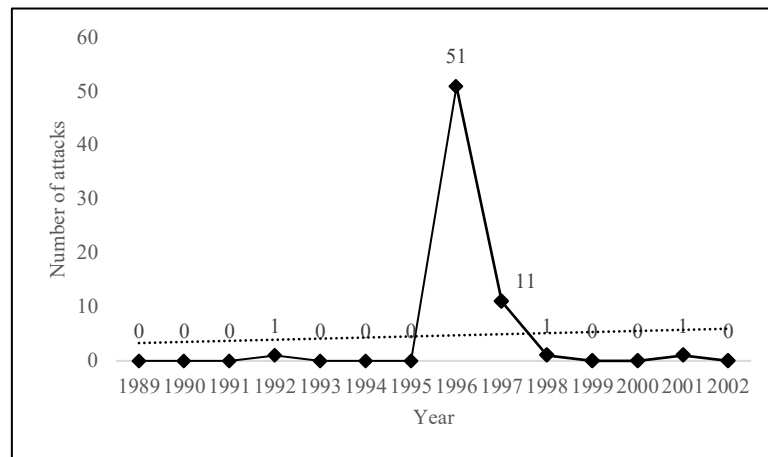
The following sections examine the pressure exerted by the security environment on China’s CT policy choices. The baseline proposition of CT studies, in fact, assumes that the type of CT policy adopted by states—i.e., either a soft or a hard CT policy—is selected in accordance with the levels of threat faced by states (Buono De Mesquita 1988; Fearon and Wendt 2002). As a consequence, empirical data on the number and intensity of the terrorist attacks that occurred in Xinjiang in this period are examined in an effort to understand the systemic variable of this study. In addition, the landscape of China’s terrorist attacks in Xinjiang is compared with the other members of the Shanghai Five – namely Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Other than the empirical data, the perception of China’s domestic security agents is also investigated, so as to paint a comprehensive picture of the country’s security environment.



#### 4.1.1 THE TERRORIST THREAT AS PRESENTED BY THE EMPIRICAL DATA

Between April 1996 and June 2001, 64 terrorist attacks connected to secessionist claims took place in Xinjiang. The majority of the attacks occurred between 1996 and 1997 (figure 3): indeed, in 1996 Xinjiang experienced a total of 51 attacks, while in 1997 the region only suffered 11.

Figure 3 Number of Terrorist Attacks in China (1989-2002)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from the Global Terrorism Database and the digital archives of the SCMP

The number of attacks that took place in 1996 make up for 79.6 percent of the total number of attacks that occurred in Xinjiang in the entire period. In contrast with other periods, terrorism connected to Uyghur secessionist claims occurred only within the borders of Xinjiang (START 2019).<sup>72</sup> The ARRI of the MAR database indeed identifies Uyghur militancy in Xinjiang as the sole case of *campaigns of terrorism* in China for the entire period,<sup>73</sup> while other forms of political contestation, such as Tibet's, are identified as *political banditry or sporadic terrorism* (table 7).<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Between 2001 and 2017, terrorist attacks connected to Uyghur secessionist claims took place throughout China. In particular, Beijing, Kunming and Guangzhou were stricken by violent attacks in 2013, 2014 and 2015 respectively. The Kunming and Guangzhou attacks were among the most gruesome experienced in the country (Blanchard 2014; 'Knife Attack Wounds Nine' 2015).

<sup>73</sup> The MAR employs the term "Turkmens" to refer to the Uyghur minority group (Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) 2018). For the rationale behind the selection of the groups that were included in MAR, see the full guide that is available at <http://www.mar.umd.edu/definition.asp> (last accessed 3 December 2019).

<sup>74</sup> The ARRI was extrapolated from the MAR, a dataset that aims to examine the persecution and mobilization of ethnic groups worldwide. The project focuses on 275 groups from 1945 to 2006. The ARRI works through a scale that goes from 0 (none reported) to 7 (civil war) to operationalize levels of rebellion. The codebook for MAR is available at [http://www.mar.umd.edu/data/mar\\_codebook\\_Feb09.pdf](http://www.mar.umd.edu/data/mar_codebook_Feb09.pdf) (last accessed 3 December 2019).

Table 7 Comparison of the Anti-Regime Rebellion Index for Turkmens and Tibetans (1991-2001)

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Turkmens	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0
Tibetans	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0

0 None reported; 1 Political banditry, sporadic terrorism; 2 Campaigns of terrorism ... -99 No basis for judgement

Source: Author's elaboration of data from MAR

Despite the lower number of attacks, the 1997 Ürumqi bombings had a considerable following on international media ('China Rocked by Series of Bombs' 1997; BBC 1997; Tyler 1997). They in fact occurred at a time of exposure for China, as the three bombs went off during Deng Xiaoping's memorial service, which was being televised all over the world for the first time in the history of the CPC (Tyler 1997). As China was coming to terms with the negative effects of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre on its international image, the attacks worsened its position. Moreover, no regional terrorist organization claimed responsibility for the bombings, thus preventing China from deflecting international attention.<sup>75</sup>

While the Ürumqi bombings negatively raised the country's visibility at the international level, the terrorist attack to the city of Kuytun in the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture claimed the most victims, registering 22 fatalities (START 2019).<sup>76</sup> The incident occurred on 1 October 1997—the same day of the 48th anniversary of the establishment of the PRC—counting among the victims 9 government officials ('Separatists Kill at Least 22' 1997). After the incident, a spokesman from the URFET allegedly stated that "we [the URFET] want to ... show the Chinese do not control our

<sup>75</sup> Reliable information on the terrorist organizations connected to the Uyghur secessionist claims are difficult to obtain. Yet, scholars and policy analysts identify the ETIM as the terrorist group active in this period in the region. The ETIM is a Muslim separatist group, established by Uyghur militants. The first mention of the group in official documents from international organizations dates back to 2000: allegedly, the ETIM and the IMU were among the terrorist groups to which Osama Bin-Laden had asked funds in 1999. The extent of the action of the ETIM before the group was formally included in the list of terrorist organizations compiled by the US Department of State is still discussed, although a comprehensive background on the group's history was presented by J. Todd Reede and Diana Raschke in 2010. See Reed, J. Todd, and Diana Raschke. 2010. *The ETIM: China's Islamic Militants and the Global Terrorist Threat*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

<sup>76</sup> The Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture is located in northern Xinjiang. The area is an autonomous administrative division at the prefectural level, as it hosts China's Kazakh minority group. Its capital city is Yining (in Uyghur language, Ghulja). For an overview of Xinjiang's administrative division, see Guo, Rongxing. 2015. 'Spatial Efficiency and Xinjiang: Policy Options'. In *China's Spatial (Dis)Integration: Political Economy of the Interethnic Unrest in Xinjiang*, 143–56. Waltham, MA: Chandos Publishing.

country” (‘Separatists Kill at Least 22’ 1997). This statement thus entailed that the timing of the attacks was intentional.<sup>77</sup>

While the total number of fatalities for the entire period was 36, the number of injured was 225. Conversely, the total number of damaged infrastructures was 49. In 1998, an attack to Yining, capital city of the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, counted the largest number of injured, as an unidentified chemical agent wounded 150 (START 2019).

In this period, the perpetrators of the attacks were designated with general terms – such as *Uyghur separatists*, *unknown separatists* or *Muslims* – as neither China’s government officials identified the architects of the terrorist attacks nor the leaders of secessionist groups claimed responsibility.<sup>78</sup>

The moment that registered the highest frequency of episodes of terrorism and political violence was July 1996. At the time, 47 explosions were recorded in different areas of Xinjiang and the URFET was blamed for the attacks by government officials (BBC 1996). These accusations emerged only in the press and were not reiterated in official documents or memos. Two spikes were also registered in 1997, as four attacks occurred in March and two in October. In March 1997, a bomb targeted a government building in Ürumqi, during a meeting between security officials. Shortly afterwards, a bus exploded in Yining. In October, two explosions damaged government buildings in Kuytun (START 2019).

It is interesting to notice that terrorist attacks operated as a proxy to oppose China’s leadership in the region. Indeed, the main targets were government buildings, military convoys, members of the police or the armed forces and government officials, and the preferred weapons were bombs. This tendency identifies a general aim to protect, as much as possible, Xinjiang’s population from harm, and thus connects the attacks to Uyghur society.

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<sup>77</sup> The URFET was a Uyghur nationalist group led by Yusupbek Mukhlisi. Since the 1960s, Mukhlisi coordinated the group’s activities from Kazakhstan in self-imposed exile. In 2001, the group merged with the ULO, thus becoming the Uyghurstan People’s Party (UPP) (Reed and Raschke 2010a).

<sup>78</sup> These terms are those employed by the GTD.

Conversely, the Yining incident (better known as “Ghulja massacre” from the Uyghur name of the city) exemplifies another form of attacks. The Yining incident occurred in February 1997 and consisted of mass contestations after the execution of 30 Uyghur activists and the imposition of a ban on *meshreps* – that is, traditional gatherings and a stronghold of Uyghur culture (Amnesty International 1999).<sup>79</sup> In addition to the government’s public security forces, the Yining incident affected the city’s entire population.

Despite aiming to oppose China’s government, the attacks remained localized within Xinjiang’s borders (START 2019).<sup>80</sup> Yet, all these attacks (and the 1996 bombings in particular) strongly affected the CPC. Indeed, President Jiang Zemin commented that

we [the CPC] must realistically carry out in practice all measures for replenishing and strengthening the township armed forces departments and militia, do a good job of organizing militia and public security joint defence forces, form mass defence and control social law-and-order watchdog systems, and consolidate the results of the special controls (‘Summary of Minutes’ 2010).

In this period, troops from the PLA and the PAP were moved to the Lanzhou military region in an effort to support the XPCC (‘Summary of Minutes’ 2010).<sup>81</sup> The working agenda of the latter establishes that the corps needed “accelerating the economic development of Xinjiang, promoting unity among ethnic groups, maintaining social stability, consolidating border defence, and shoring up the unification of the motherland” (State Council 2003).<sup>82</sup>

The attacks that hit Xinjiang between 1996 and 2001 only represented a small percentage of the episodes of terrorism that occurred at the regional level. For instance, the terrorist attacks that

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<sup>79</sup> For a thorough definition of *meshrep* and their role in Uyghur society see Anderson, Elise. 2012. ‘The Construction of Āmānnisā Khan as a Uyghur Musical Culture Hero’. *Asian Music* 43 (1): 64–90.

<sup>80</sup> Xinjiang shares a border with eight foreign countries – i.e., Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. See the Asia Pacific map collection of the College of Asia and the Pacific of the Australia National University (ANU), available at [asiapacific.anu.edu.au/mapsonline/](http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/mapsonline/) (last accessed 3 December 2019).

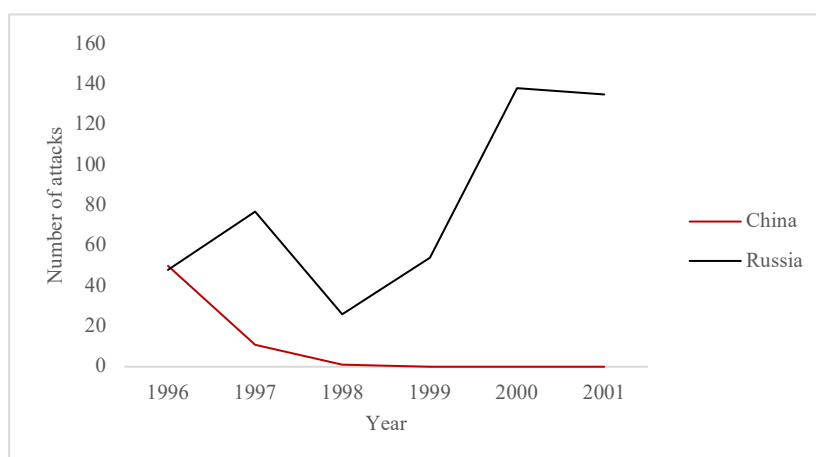
<sup>81</sup> The Lanzhou military region is the region that re-directs troops to Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia and Shaanxi (International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) 2019).

<sup>82</sup> The XPCC is based on the Tuntian system (屯田 *Túntián*), a traditional agro-military tactic that entailed the setting of military units in frontier areas so that these could become self-sufficient. Similar policies were adopted under the Tang and Qing dynasties (R. Guo 2015).

took place in China represented only 13.3 percent of the total attacks experienced by Russia, which amounted at 478 (figure 4). In 1996, China faced 79.6 percent of the total number of attacks that occurred in Xinjiang in the whole period, thus making 1996 the most dangerous year for China. Conversely, Russia experienced spikes in the annual number of terrorist attacks between 2000 and 2001, with the country facing 135 attacks in 2000 and 138 in 2001. The sum of the attacks in these two years equals 57.1 percent of the total number of attacks registered in the whole period in Russia. Between 1996 and 2001, the median value of annual attacks in Russia was 79.6. Yet, the 2000-2001 increase was particularly prominent for the country, as the annual attacks passed from 54 in 1999 to at least 135 per year in 2000 and 2001 (START 2019).

As shown in figure 4, China and Russia reversed their tendencies in 1996. While China's annual number of attacks peaked in 1996, Russia's started to increase in 1998, peaking in 2000. 1996 also was the sole year to register a higher number of attacks in China rather than Russia and the year that registers less variation between China and Russia's annual attacks, as the two countries were hit by 51 and 48 attacks respectively. After 1996, China's annual number of attacks was so low that it did not even match Russia's minimum value.

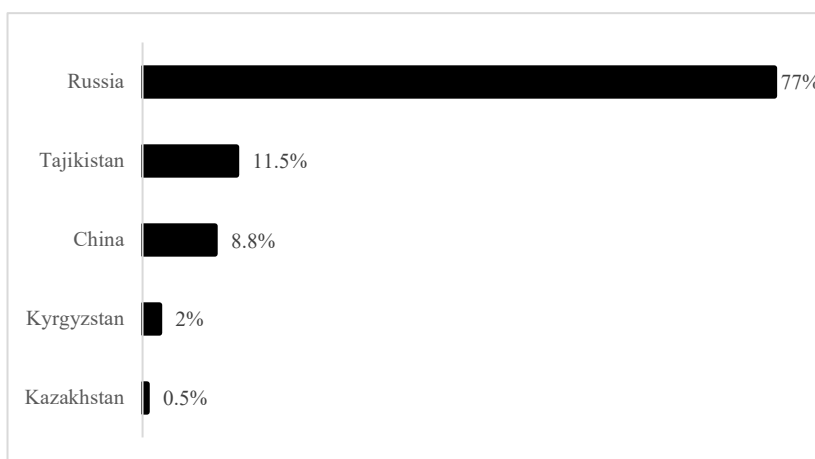
Figure 4 Number of Terrorist Attacks in China and Russia (1996-2001)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from the Global Terrorism Database and the digital archives of the SCMP

When compared with Central Asian states, Russia remains the country that was hit the most by terrorism. Russia's total number of attacks, in fact, is representative of 74.6 percent of the total number of attacks that occurred in the region. Tajikistan and China, in particular, are the countries that experienced the most attacks after Russia (figure 5), with Tajikistan that at the time was still adjusting to the dismantling of the Soviet Union (Nourzhanov and Bleuer 2013).<sup>83</sup>

Figure 5 Percentage of Attacks per Country on the Total Number of Attacks in the Region (1996-2001)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from the Global Terrorism Database

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were less hit by attacks, and Kazakhstan only made up for 0.5 percent of attacks in the region. Indeed, Kazakhstan suffered less the political transition, as President Nursultan Nazarbayev maintained his leadership even after the Soviet Union fell (Aitken 2010).<sup>84</sup>

Between 1996 and 2001, terrorism in China was more prominent, increasing the number of attacks from 1 between 1989 and 1995 to 64 between 1996 and 2001. Even though 1996 was to be excluded from the count, a significant increase in the number, frequency and intensity of the attacks would still be detected.

<sup>83</sup> After the independence, Tajikistan fell into a civil war, the factions of which were distinguished by clan loyalties. Emomali Rahmon came to power in 1994, and continues to rule over Tajikistan to this day. A ceasefire was only reached in 1999 (Nourzhanov and Bleuer 2013)

<sup>84</sup> Nursultan Nazarbayev was the first President of Kazakhstan after the country's independence. He ruled over the country for almost three decades, ceding the position only in 2019. During the first years of his Presidency, Nazarbayev worked to converting Kazakhstan to the market economy. The country nowadays is the richest among Central Asian states, and its revenues mainly come from oil exports. In its modern history, Kazakhstan had experienced little political reforms, with Nazarbayev maintaining the control of the country through its party the Nur Otan that is heading the country to this day (Aitken 2010).

#### 4.1.2 THE TERRORIST THREAT AS PERCEIVED BY THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The previous section has examined the magnitude of terrorism in Xinjiang. Terrorist attacks spiked in 1996 (START 2019), and China launched its first “Strike Hard campaign” in 1997 (Chaudhuri 2017). In terms of fatalities, it was 2000 to be the most challenging year for China, as the city of Kuytun was hit by a series of explosion that counted 22 victims (START 2019). Moreover, Deng Xiaoping’s death and the 1997 bombings exposed two frailties of the Party. On the one hand, the loss of a leader as charismatic as Deng revealed the inner instabilities of the CPC (Joffe 1998); on the other, as explosions in Ürumqi had occurred during Deng’s televised memorial service, the country’s leadership had been substantially weakened. Indeed, these bombings hit China at a time when terrorist attacks could inflict the maximum possible damage to Beijing, the country’s political centre.

As they aimed to assess how policymakers perceived terrorism in Xinjiang, the type and frequency of mentions of the region in combination with one of the three connotations<sup>85</sup> adopted by China’s leaders to refer to terrorism were mapped in the articles published by the Xinhua General News Service (hereinafter, Xinhua), collected from the Lexis Nexis database.<sup>86</sup> Xinhua maintains the status of ministry-level agency, which de facto acts as a media outlet for the CPC. As a result, it is a useful source to collect information on how an issue is perceived by leaders.

Between 1996 and 2001, Xinhua released 67 articles that made reference to Xinjiang and terrorism. In 1996, 7 articles were released, while in 2001 the total was 2. The majority of the articles was published in 1999 and totalled to 19. The timing for publication is consistent with the streak of bombings that occurred in Xinjiang in 1996 (51), which resulted in four official visits from prominent officials that were all covered by Xinhua. The first to visit was Wu Bangguo, Vice-Premier of the PRC, who conducted a week-long inspection tour in September 1996. Shortly afterwards, Premier Li Peng also visited Xinjiang in a tour that also included the neighbouring provinces of Ningxia and Qinghai. These tours had been conducted to assess the potential of Xinjiang’s development, and stress

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<sup>85</sup> See section 2.3.

<sup>86</sup> The complete list is available in the Appendix.

that China's leaders were aiming to assist the West in achieving the same levels of welfare enjoyed by the coastal area.

In April 1997, Qiao Shi, the Head of China's People's Congress, also toured Xinjiang. His visit was followed by that of Chi Haotian, Vice-Chairman of the CMC, in June 1997. Though no references were made to the 1996 Ürumqi bombings or the 1997 Yining incident, the execution of 8 militants due to their participation to terrorist attacks in Xinjiang in late 1996 and early 1997 was treated in detail by Xinhua (Xinhua 1997c).

Most articles stress the efforts made by China's political leaders to engage ethnic minorities. The narrative presented by the articles is articulated in themes, among which is the relation between China's armed forces and the population in Xinjiang. On the one hand, the deployment of PLA and PAP troops in Xinjiang is associated with the region's stabilization. On the other, the XPCC and its collaboration with other military and paramilitary forces is praised, especially due to the dual focus on economic development and military security. For instance, an article released in February 1997 states that

the PLA forces in Xinjiang have always regarded ethnic solidarity as a key issue in promoting social stability and development and maintaining unity ... the troops have assisted local economic development with a lot of manpower and machinery, and helped complete 27 major local construction projects (Xinhua 1997a).

This statement does not only present the armed forces as providers of security, but also stresses their role in ensuring ethnic unity. In this conceptualization, ethnic unity is fostered by economic development. This connection was also reiterated by President Jiang Zemin, who affirmed that "keeping social and political stability in this region [Xinjiang] has a bearing on the overall situation" and that "the Party Central Committee has attached great importance to Xinjiang's stability and development and has repeatedly discussed about relevant work in Xinjiang" (Xinhua 1998a).

The narrative on development and regional stability was not only promoted at the national level, but it was also regional leaders that conducted the message. For instance, Ablait Abdurixit, an



Uyghur and Chairman of the Autonomous Region People's Government, for instance, argued that "Xinjiang witnesses a stable situation, rapid economic growth and marked improvement in the local people's standards ... People of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang will lead a fairly comfortable life at the end of the century, and this year will be crucial for Xinjiang's development" (Xinhua 1998b). Indeed, this vote of confidence from Abdurixit in early 1998 contributed to paving the way for the 1999 "China's Western Development" strategy.

Other than Deng Xiaoping's death, 1997 was a turning-point moment for Jiang Zemin as Hong Kong returned under the domain of the CPC. The same happened in 1999 with Macau. Between 1997 and 1999, China made real progress in achieving national unity—a goal that the country set to achieve by the 2049 centenary and one of the strongholds of President Xi Jinping. Yet, the CPC still had to ensure the support of Xinjiang and Tibet. Thus, China's Western peripheries had to be included in Deng's notion of economic development and modernization, as leaders leaned on the notion that welfare ensured stability.

Another theme presented by the articles is "national sovereignty." It is interesting to notice that this theme is developed in reference to China's foreign partners. Despite terrorist attacks not being treated in detail, mentions to Turkey's support to the Chinese government make up for a considerable part of the narrative on Xinjiang. For instance, in 1997, Onur Oymen, Turkey's Foreign Ministry Undersecretary, was reported to state that "we [Turkey] will not favor any organization or any people to use violence for whatever purpose and no matter in China or in Turkey, in the Middle East or in Europe as no political result can be achieved by resorting to violence" (Xinhua 1997b). The article also reports Oymen saying that "any people cannot change the border of a country through violence" (Xinhua 1997b). The article is dated May 1997—a time when Xinjiang experienced no less than 10 terrorist attacks in three months, spanning from February to April. Turkey's criticism makes reference to Uyghur Pan-Turkic sentiment that was often advocated. Moreover, after the launch of the GWOT in 2001, Turkey formally committed to China's CT policy by joining Beijing in fighting

the ETIM. In addition to Turkey, Russia and Central Asian states are also made reference to opposing secessionism or cooperating with China to ensure border control.

In this period, terrorism in Xinjiang was presented by Xinhua as a consequence of social inequality, underdevelopment and secessionist sentiments incited by transnational terrorist groups.

After the 1999 “China’s Western Development” strategy was implemented, the articles started to emphasize the fight against illegal smuggling and transnational drug trafficking. In particular, Tajikistan is singled out between China’s partners—a reminder of Tajikistan being among the Central Asian states that was most hit by terrorism.

The relation between terrorism and Islam is presented by reporting the opinions of CPC members at the national and regional levels, as well as international authorities and religious figures. For instance, Sadik Karag, Vice-Chairman of the Islamic Association of China (IAC), stated that

at present, a small number of people have gone mad and are making a great noise for splitting activities under the excuse of religion to undermine socialist stability, but the masses of religious believers will never allow them to succeed. And the vast majority of them are in firm opposition to their perverse acts (Xinhua 2000).

In brief, Xinhua’s articles present terrorism in a twofold manner. On the one hand, terrorism is a consequence of Xinjiang’s low standards of living and underdevelopment. On the other, ethnic and religious dimensions are presented as supporting terrorism. CT policy thus maintains a security and an economic focus, which remained at the basis of the XPCC coordination with the PLA and the PAP.

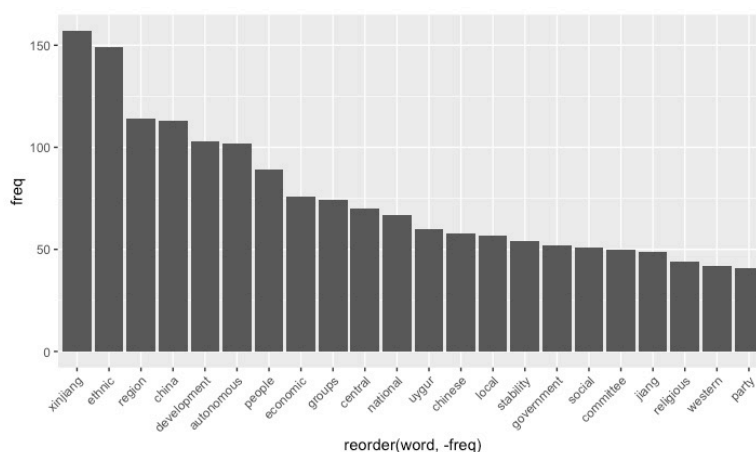
The corpus of articles does not identify a precise terrorist group as responsible for the attacks. Moreover, other than China’s bilateral relations, the articles do not make any reference to forms of international cooperation, such as the Shanghai Five, as the majority of reports indicates a commitment to countering trans-boundary crimes rather than terrorism.

Yet, the discursive landscape of the articles on terrorism in Xinjiang presents a comprehensive picture of the leadership’s perception of the phenomenon. A frequency analysis of the terms most

employed by Xinhua points to a strong domestic dimension, as the majority of the terms makes reference to the national or the regional level (figure 6). This frequency also indicates that terrorism is considered as an internal issue, thus drawing from internal forces. Amongst the most-frequent words, in fact, 12 make reference to China’s domestic realm (i.e., *Xinjiang, region, China, central, national, Uyghur, Chinese, local, government, Committee, Jiang, party*) and account for 54 percent of most-frequent words.

The term *development* is among the five most-frequent words with over 100 repetitions. The term *economic* presents 75 instances in the articles. At the same time, references to *security* are absent from the articles, although the terms *stability* and *religious* are present with over 45 repetitions. Word frequencies conceptualize CT as a strategy that prioritizes the economic and development domains, while maintaining a focus on religion. Still, lacking to mention hard security, military forces and terrorist attacks shows a willingness from the leadership not to present Xinjiang as a “security state.” In brief, Xinhua portrays a CT policy that requires the intervention of hybrid forces legitimated to use force, as well as a development-oriented approach in order to maintain security.

Figure 6 Most-Frequent Words Used by Xinhua in the Articles on Terrorism in Xinjiang (1996-2001)



Source: Author’s elaboration of data from Xinhua General News Service

In addition to Xinhua, the documents, statements and speeches of China’s leadership have the potential to detail on the perception of the country’s government towards terrorism and its subsequent

policy choices. Under Jiang, decision-making in the security domain remained linked to the PBSC and the collection of lower level officials in charge of implementing decisions.

In an effort to understand these actors’ general perception of terrorism, the collection of speeches of President Jiang Zemin<sup>87</sup> was examined in the sections that refer to terrorism, separatism, extremism and stability. In addition, the press statements of the officials in charge of CT policy in Xinjiang were also taken into consideration along with excerpts of the “Summary of Minutes of the Meeting on Safeguarding Stability in Xinjiang” (also known as Document 7) published in March 1996 (‘Summary of Minutes’ 2010).<sup>88</sup>

The corpus of data was investigated by means of the operational code (Leites 1951; George 1969; He and Feng 2015). The first philosophical belief and the second instrumental belief are relevant to this study as they measure the nature of the political universe and the cooperative/conflictual approach towards pursuing goals. In the realm of CT policy, these beliefs detect how terrorism is perceived and how it is countered (Dyson and Parent 2018). The value of the first belief (P-1, +0.5) suggests that terrorism is not perceived as a threat that is impossible to counter. Indeed, the value of the second belief (I-2, +0.2) suggests that the measures to be employed to counter terrorism should be less conflictual (table 8).

Table 8 The Operational Code of the Party Officials Involved in Security and CT Policy (1996-2001)

		Belief values
<b>Philosophical Beliefs</b>		
P-1	Nature of the Political Universe From +1.0 (friendly) to -1.0 (hostile)	+0,5
<b>Instrumental Beliefs</b>		
I-2	Pursuit of Goals From +1.0 (high cooperation) to -1.0 (high conflict)	+0,2
		$\mu(P-1;I-2) +0,3$ ( <i>Cooperative</i> )

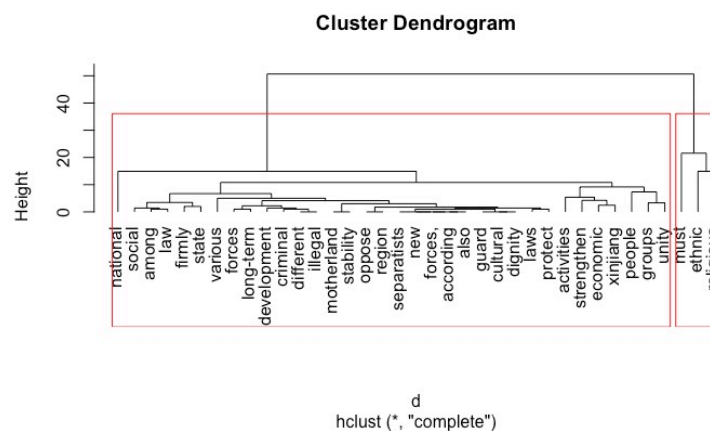
Source: Author’s elaboration of data from Jiang Zemin’s speeches, Xinhua General News Service and Document no. 7

<sup>87</sup> The collection of speeches of President Jiang Zemin was published in 2006 by the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing.

<sup>88</sup> Document 7 results from a meeting held on 19 March 1996 about the stability of Xinjiang. It is one of the first documented reports of this type.

These results are consistent with those returned by the qualitative analysis on the articles released by Xinhua. While empirical data depicted a growing terrorist threat, the articles from Xinhua placed more emphasis on counterterrorist measures that rely on economic development. Indeed, a cluster dendrogram was built on the corpus of documents analysed by the operational code (figure 7). The narrative on terrorism and Xinjiang is traced to two clusters: one that concerns separatism and the other that presents forms of terrorism fostered by religious extremism and ethnic grievances.

Figure 7 Visual Representation of the Two Main Discursive Clusters in the Corpus of Data (1996-2001)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from Jiang Zemin's speeches, Xinhua General News Service and Document no. 7

The leniency towards the first cluster is consistent with President Jiang Zemin's conceptualization that perceives terrorism as linked to economic inequalities rather than ethnic or religious grievances. For instance, while attending a panel discussion on Xinjiang during the first session of the NPC in March 1998, Jiang said that

it is important to resolutely maintaining stability in Xinjiang, a region with great strategic significance in northwest China and also with a concentration of multiple ethnic groups. Keeping social and political stability in this region has a bearing on the overall situation. The Party Central Committee has attached great importance to Xinjiang's stability and development and has repeatedly discussed about relevant work in Xinjiang ... However, there remains a lot of hard work to do in maintaining stability in Xinjiang, and that it's still an arduous task to oppose ethnic separation, maintain ethnic unity and safeguard national unity. *The tree may prefer calm, but the wind will not subside.* It will be a long-term task to fight splittism ... leading officials across Xinjiang should uphold the Party's ethnic and religious policies and implement the essence of the Central government regarding the autonomous region's work down to

the grassroots levels ... Xinjiang can catch up with other provinces and autonomous regions in economic growth, and overtake them and charge itself to the forefront in China's modernization drive. The Central government will as always give a powerful backing to the region's work. The cadres and masses of multi-ethnic people can work to maintain unity and conduct in depth-reform so as to affect a rise in Xinjiang's economic development and social progress ('China-Jiang Zemin-Tibet-Xinjiang' 1998, emphasis added).

Although empirical data identify a rising number of attacks and higher levels of terrorist threat, the perception of the elite was that terrorism remained at levels that could be countered by means of a mixture of military and economic measures. As a consequence, the pressure to act exerted by the security environment is considered as "medium" for this period.

#### **4.2 CHINA'S AUTHORITARIAN PREFERENCES**

The following sections examine the political orientation of the elite towards authoritarianism. Whether authoritarian regimes move toward democracy or totalitarianism, they assume "soft" or "hard" variants, which entail less or more stringent approaches to episodes of terrorism and political violence. In this work, these forms of authoritarianism correspond to the elements that characterize the "relaxation" and "tightening" phases of the fang/shou theorization (Baum 1996), although the limits to the cycle's explanatory capacity are taken into consideration. The focus indeed remains on the elements that characterize the two phases. Soft authoritarianism is characterized by reforms (political and economic), higher levels of civil liberties and political rights and political opposition is contained by more liberal measures. Conversely, hard authoritarianism limits political and economic reform, while favouring repressive measures against contestation and limiting civil liberties and political rights. As a consequence, a soft authoritarian leadership will lean towards more liberal counterterrorist measures, while a CT policy devised under a hard authoritarian regime will be strikingly more coercive.

#### 4.2.1 WHAT AUTHORITARIANISM? CIVIL LIBERTIES AND REFORM UNDER JIANG

After Mao's totalitarian leadership<sup>89</sup>, the CPC turned towards authoritarianism (Nathan 2003; Shambaugh 2016; Shue and Thornton 2017; Brown 2019; Fewsmith and Nathan 2019). Yet, as no two democracies are alike nor are two authoritarian regimes (Linz 2000). In the case of China, the leaderships that governed the country after Mao have been unique, according to leaders' personalities and the type of modernization promoted. Many authors argued for the political orientation of China's elite to be traced to the fang-shou theorization (Baum 1996; He 1997; Yuen 2015; Guo 2000; Shambaugh 2016), which Samson Yuen (2015), in particular, defines as an "alternating pattern of relaxation and control that unleashed China's reform and opening up" (51) and that comprises two phases. First, the fang or "relaxation" phase that encompasses the opening of the country's economic and political systems. Second, the shou phase or "tightening" that is characterized by the closure of China's market and the centralization of power (Baum 1996). Although the concept has been contested in recent years because of the intrinsic rigidity of the two phases that has, above all, troubles accounting for Xi Jinping's prolonged power centralization (Minzner 2018), the notions of "relaxation" and "tightening" offer a case-specific theorization for how to discern between "soft" and "hard" authoritarianism. Nonetheless, in light of growing criticism about the validity of the fang/shou theorization as a cycle marked by temporally rigid phases, "relaxation" and "tightening" are not employed here to identify the beginning/end of a cycle but to discriminate between China's soft/hard authoritarian leaderships by means of a dual characterization that, on the one hand, is consistent with the elements that characterize a soft/hard authoritarian political systems presented in section 2.3.2.1 and, on the other, well-accounts for the specificities of the Chinese case.

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<sup>89</sup> For a full discussion on Mao's regime as a form of totalitarianism, see Tsou, Tang. 1986. *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms: A Historical Perspective*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press and Guo, Sujian. 2000. *Post-Mao China: From Totalitarianism to Authoritarianism?* Westport: Praeger Pub Text. To contextualize Mao's totalitarianism with respect to other totalitarian regimes, see Rosa, Paolo. 2018. *Neoclassical Realism and the Underdevelopment of China's Nuclear Doctrine*. London: Palgrave Pivot and Schwartz, Benjamin. 1963. 'Sino-Soviet Relations-The Question of Authority'. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 349: 38-48.

As the Polity 5 score<sup>90</sup> by the Center for Systemic Peace shows, China has been included within autocracies with a -7 score since 1976. Conversely, throughout the Mao era, the country had maintained a worse -8 score. The Polity 5 score thus establishes that China has not undergone dramatic regime changes, but continued to score as an autocracy throughout the period under analysis. However, what Polity 5 struggles to account are variations within autocracies. Polity 5, in fact, is particularly useful in detecting changes over time or measuring global regime trends. Other widely recognized indexes such as the GFS by Freedom House have the same issue. The GFS, in fact, establishes that China remained between the fifteenth “least-free” countries in the world throughout the period, scoring very low in terms of political rights (7) and civil liberties (6-7). Little variation within single cases is detected until 2002 when Freedom House starts recording aggregate categories and subcategories scores, which offer more nuanced year-per-year data capable to discern between minor annual variations. Nonetheless, both these indexes, include China within autocracies.

Yet, data on political prisoners gathered by the US CECC are a useful starting-point to detail on China’s political regime and investigate its levels of relaxation/tightening. As the database presents a comprehensive list of arrests linked to political crimes from 1989 onwards, it allows to estimate the leadership’s attitude towards political and civil liberties over time.<sup>91</sup>

Between 1996 and 2001, the number of arrests linked to political crimes averaged at 186 arrests per year (US CECC 2019). Particular spikes were registered for 1996, 1999 and 2001, the values of which remain above the tendency line for the entire period under analysis (Figure 8).

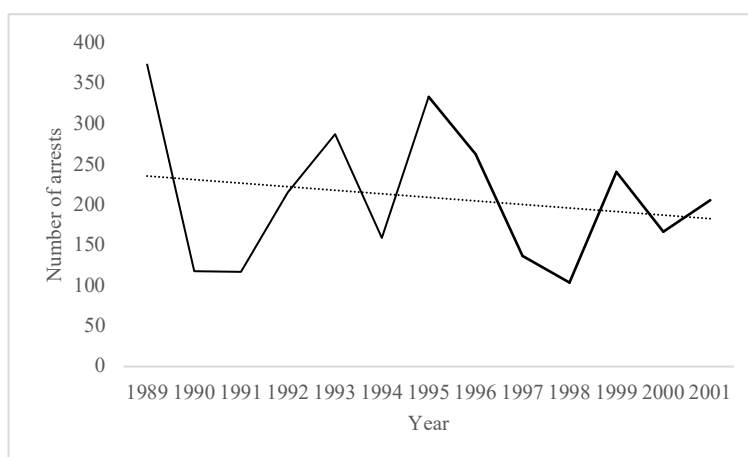
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<sup>90</sup> For a discussion on Polity 5, see Marshall, Monty G., and Ted R. Gurr. 2020. ‘Polity 5: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2018’. Vienna: Center for Systemic Peace. <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/p5manualv2018.pdf>.

<sup>91</sup> The crimes considered in the analysis relate to freedom of association, democracy, ethnic issues, Falun Gong, labor rights, religious freedom and freedom of speech.



Figure 8 Number of Arrests Related to Political Rights and Civil Liberties per Year (1989-2001)



Source: Author’s elaboration of data from the database on political prisoners of the US CECC

In 1996, the number of politically motivated arrests totalled to 263 – the highest number in the whole period. This number also is consistent with the numerous bombings in Ürumqi and the re-education campaigns that were launched in Tibet starting from 1996. Indeed, among the total number of arrests registered by the PPD are 231 Tibetans, 17 Uyghurs, 2 Hans and 13 other prisoners, the ethnicity of whom is unclassified (US CECC 2019). It is interesting to notice that in this period politically motivated arrests remained unrelated to political violence or terrorism. Consider, for instance, that in 1997 the GTD reports 11 terrorist attacks in Xinjiang. Yet, the PPD registers the second lowest number of arrests for the entire period, among which are only 7 Uyghurs.<sup>92</sup> Thus, data for 1997 shows little correlation between terrorist attacks and politically motivated arrests. At base, this entails that under Jiang the levels of control of political and civil liberties remained high, notwithstanding particularly violent events. This data also corroborates the results of the operational code on the speeches, statements and documents released on the Uyghur terrorist threat that identify the nature of the political universe as “cooperative” (see section 4.1.2).

This lack of correlation is also indicated by the tendency line of the mean scores of the annual number of arrests over the total number of arrests that were made per period.<sup>93</sup> The line that is

<sup>92</sup>Although other Uyghurs might be present in the uncategorized section.

<sup>93</sup> In mathematical terms,  $\Sigma$  of arrests per year /  $\mu$   $\Sigma$  of arrests per period.

generated is almost flat, thus neither indicating increases nor decreases in the leniency of the authorities to rely on politically motivated arrests to maintain stability in the country (Figure 9). Indeed, the number of arrests in this period remains at high levels with the annual number of arrests scoring at over 100. These results also support the claim that, under Jiang’s leadership, the CPC did not hesitate to repress (Pye 2001). Yet, they also detail that it was no particular stressor that determined increases or decreases in the total number of arrests.

Figure 9 Tendency Line of the Means Scores of the Number of Arrests under Jiang Zemin



Source: Author’s elaboration of data from the database on political prisoners of the US CECC

In his analysis on the political orientation of China’s elite, Shambaugh (2016) indicates 1998 as a turning-point year for China’s tightening to end, after nine years of growing power centralizations after the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. However, this explanation does not take into full consideration disparities between the country’s economic and political domains. Despite the 1998 economic reforms, in fact, China’s relaxation was not equally pursued in politics, especially as the overall objective of the elite was to preserve political stability and transform governance into the “practice of management” (Pye 2001, 45). This goal well-espoused the aims of China’s elite, who still exhibited discomfort with the notion of disorder and whose priority was to achieve higher levels of economic growth at the national level (Pye 2001).

From an economic perspective, China was in fact attempting to fine-tune its market economy to comply with the standards of global markets – a goal that had been sanctioned by China’s 2001 admission into the WTO (Kirby 2001). This achievement, though, was not exclusively inspired by the country’s strive towards economic reforms, but also China’s aim to acquire a less marginal position in the international system (Lardy 2001).

As Lucian Pye argues (2001), China’s political orientation under Jiang is best defined as “fragmented” (47). On the one hand, policy implementation was hindered by a lack of coordination between the centre and the periphery. On the other, there was a divergence in the objectives set between the economic and political domain (Pye 2001).

Although the elite was particularly eager to reform the country’s economic system (intensifying the pace at which the planned economic system was substituted by a market economy), political reforms were still discouraged after 1989 Tiananmen (Tien and Zhu 2000). In addition, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the failure of the policies enacted by Slobodan Milosevic in Yugoslavia and, above all, NATO’s bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 rooted political stability at the core of China’s political goals (Pye 2001). In this period, China’s leadership authorities also were extremely preoccupied by the dismantling of the Soviet Union as much that several working groups were established to investigate its fall.

Jiang’s political leadership is best identified with a general prioritization of political stability over reform and the maintenance of the Party’s dominance over policymaking. Governance in fact became an issue of management rather than politics, and the leadership was characterized by high levels of technocracy (Lam 1999). This tendency was also influenced by the unsuccessful attempts to promote reform made by the leadership before 1989. Under Jiang, it was the elite that set the standards of the “collective good,” which was then accepted by the rest of society. China’s civil society was indeed asked to set aside individual interests and accept that elite decisions were the best option for the whole country (Lam 1999). Despite economic reforms, therefore, levels of power concentration remained high, thus worsening the relation between policy making and policy

implementation, as no room for negotiation was left. In brief, data for this period indicate political power concentrations and reliance on law enforcement agencies as a way to counter contestation.

Lastly, according to Anna Lührmann and Staffan Lindberg (2019), data from V-DEM's Electoral Democratic Index (EDI) is also a viable tool to discern varieties of autocracy in the authoritarian regime spectrum. The range of the EDI goes from 0 to 1, and values comprised between 0.0 up to 0.25 are all indicative of closed autocracies (V-DEM 2020). Throughout the period under analysis, China scores within this group. Annual variations in EDI scores thus give us an idea of the form of authoritarianism in the country: increasing/decreasing tendencies, in fact, point to relaxations/tightenings in the political system.

As they root their analysis at a global scale, Lührmann and Lindberg (2019) set strict standards on how to look at variations that cannot be applied in the limited longitudinal analysis for a single case. In their approach, 0.1 is the minimum value to take into consideration for variations and four consecutive years the minimum period to consider for increasing/decreasing trends. However, the range of values that characterizes China's regime and the limited period under analysis make Lührmann and Lindberg's standards unfeasible to follow to identify variations in China's autocracy. Therefore, all trend variations were considered. Some observations can be made on EDI values under Jiang. First, the index follows a general decreasing trend. Second, it shows only one major variation between 1999 and 2000, when it decreases from 0.109 (the highest level the EDI assumes in the period under analysis in this work) to 0.096, showing a variation of -0.013. Although a year later the index recovers 0.002 points, the 1999-2000 change is particularly significant as it ends a streak of high values. Variations in EDI values corroborate previous observations: indeed, not only does the EDI, the GFS and US CECC data indicate 1999 as a turning-point year for the worsening of authoritarian values in China and the diminishing of the level of political rights and civil liberties in the country, but they also indicate a general tightening in the approach of the leadership towards control. Such elements identify a political elite that favours a hard form of authoritarianism. Yet, China's political system remains deeply affected by the composition of its decision making

institutions (Rosa 2014): something that is particularly true at times of political transitions, especially when they occur outside normative traditions (Nathan 2003).

#### **4.2.2 INDIVIDUAL DOMINANCE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY OVER THE 14TH AND 15TH PBS**

The period between 1996 and 2001 was among the most dramatic for the country's unity, as China's leaders experienced a number of challenges to their legitimacy to rule. These challenges reduced the levels of concern towards China's relations with foreign partners, but started to consider internal and external events as potential drivers of political opposition and threats to the Communist leadership (Pye 2001). The growing number of terrorist attacks alarmed Jiang, who was convinced that, after Tiananmen, China's political system had regained stability. For instance, after China's PLA forces intervened in Tiananmen, Jiang commented that

the counterrevolutionary revolt had deep roots. The revolt itself, however, brought the result that many people in China are today more clearheaded than before. The revolt has demonstrated that the capitalist world, and especially the United States, wants to destroy socialism ... The slogans by the students demonstrated large confusion about questions of democracy and freedom (Schabowski and Jiang 1989).<sup>94</sup>

During a meeting with Günter Schabowski, a member of SED, Jiang stressed that unrest in Tiananmen could have been predicted, and that accountability resided with Zhao, who had publicly supported the protests (Schabowski and Jiang 1989). In May 1990, in a speech at the ADB, Zhao had stated that the demonstrations had not been a symptom of political instability, thus opposing the editorial he had published in April 1989, in which he had accused students of stirring political turmoil (Stavis 1990). Jiang identified Zhao's actions as "splittist activity" (Schabowski and Jiang 1989) and the cause of his removal from the Party.

Jiang also believed that the message conveyed by protesters had travelled so vastly around China due to a lack of "socialist and patriotic education" (Schabowski and Jiang 1989). In Jiang's

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<sup>94</sup> At the time, Jiang was not yet the President of the PRC but had replaced Zhao Ziyang as General Secretary of the Central Committee. Indeed, Jiang became President only in 1993 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2019b).

opinion, unrest would be resolved by clarifying China's political standpoint to the new generation of intellectuals: a system that had proven successful in the past, when it had increased the awareness of Jiang's generation towards Marxism (Ji 2001). Indeed, the *leitmotif* of the education policy that was drafted in China in 1993 considered education as a prime political objective (Tsang 2000). As an educational reform was being implemented, Jiang least expected unrest to rise against the CPC so early after Tiananmen.

Another element that was troubling Jiang was the dismantling of the Soviet Union, as he realized that the fall of the Soviet Union had left China with an ideological conundrum (Agence France Press 1996). At the core of the Sino-Soviet split had in fact resided the idea that the Soviet Union had abandoned the true principles of Marxism-Leninism and its role as a guide for the Communist world. Relations between China and the Soviet Union had been especially tangled throughout the history of the PRC. Mao was constantly looking at the examples presented by Soviet leaders on how to develop China as a fully-fledged Communist state (Garver 2016b). While Western scholars were looking at the systemic causes of the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Dunlop 2003; Knight 2003; Kramer 2003; Taylor 2003; Zlotnik 2003), China was investigating the event from an internal viewpoint. In other words, Chinese scholars were looking at the collapse of the Soviet Union at the micro-level. Once again, accountability was given to the condition of the CPSU and its inability to maintain a firm grasp over the country (Waldron 2009). While in Western literature the two phases of the collapse of the Soviet Union are treated *en ensemble*, Chinese scholars agree on treating these events as linked but distinct. For instance, the issue was indeed investigated by two research groups at CASS. Their work maintained the maximum importance under Jiang, as it offered the theoretical bases for China to avoid the same mistakes. While one group was investigating the strength and decline of the Soviet Union, the other examined the elements that caused the collapse (Waldron 2009). Indeed, Jiang did not overlook the fact that China's political system was based on the same principles of the Soviet Union, which included six features, such as a common ideology, a single mass party, a paramount leader, a system of terror, a monopoly over the media and the means of violence and a

centrally planned economy (Rosa 2018). The main difference between China and the Soviet Union's totalitarian systems was the systematic employment of violence to quell political opposition. Yet, up until Jiang, China had not exhibited the same levels of repression that characterized Stalin's purges, not even at the time of the Cultural Revolution nor the Strike Hard campaigns under Mao (Schwartz 1963).

Policymaking in China is rooted in the country's PB. In fact, policies implemented without reaching a consensus indicate a power competition that may have the ability to damage the Party's cohesiveness. For instance, the decision to employ PLA forces to quell unrest in Tiananmen split the PB, eventually leading to Zhao's purge (L. Cheng and White 1998). A conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Rajiv Gandhi assigns responsibility to Zhao, with Gorbachev stating that Zhao

addressed the student masses but he was no longer heeded. Probably, there were such deep processes, which had as their result strong tremors within the society, and, as a result, difficult events began to unfold, a split in the leadership with all the attendant consequences ... I am confident that now the Chinese leaders have extinguished just the external manifestations of conflict but the conflict itself is not over, it is not finished. And one will need measures of anything but military character to settle it (Gorbachev and Gandhi 1989).

It should be noticed that China's PB is different from other Communist countries: its twenty-five members, in fact, do not share the same amount of power, but the members of the PBSC rise above all others (A. D. Barnett 1967). The 14th PB operated between October 1992 and September 1997, while the 15th PB was active between September 1997 and October 2002 (Table 9 and 10) (L. Cheng and White 1998).

The 15th PB was the first technocratic institution in the country's history, and was led by one of the first technocrats ever to enter the Party. Indeed, Jiang had entered the Party on the occasion of the twelfth Party Congress in 1982, thanks to Deng's pioneering ideas on the technocratic nature of the country's elite (Saich 1992). However, this also meant that Jiang did not enjoy the same "personal prestige and broad patronage networks of Mao and Deng, and hence had weaker positions within the Party elite" (Horowitz and Yu 2015, 459).

Table 9 Members of the 14th Politburo

<b>14th Politburo</b>					
<i>Institution</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Education (University level)</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>Relation with Jiang</i>	<i>Additional info</i>
Politburo Standing Committee	Jiang Zemin	Jiaotong University	Shanghai	Himself	-
	Li Peng	Moscow Institute for Power Science	Princelings	Supportive	Zhou Enlai's adoptive son
	Qiao Shi	East China Associated University	-	Supportive	-
	Li Ruihuan	Beijing Architect Institution	-	Supportive	-
	Zhu Rongji	Qinghua University	-	Conflicting	-
	Liu Huaqing	-	-	-	Military
	Hu Jintao	Qinghua University	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Opposite faction
Politburo	Ding Guangen	Jiaotong University	Shanghai	Supportive	Same faction
	Tian Jiyan	-	-	Conflicting	-
	Li Lanqing	Fudan University	Shanghai	Supportive	Same faction
	Li Tieying	Charles University	-	Supportive	Conservative approach
	Yang Baibing	-	Military	Conflicting	-
	Wu Bangguo	Qinghua University	Shanghai	Supportive	Same faction
	Zou Jiahua	Harbin Institute of Technology Bauman Moscow State Technical University	-	Supportive	Conservative approach
	Jiang Chunyun	-	-	Supportive	Jiang's patronage
	Qian Qichen	Central School of Communist Youth	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Opposite faction
	Wei Jianxing	Dalian Engineering Institute	-	Conflicting	Qiao Shi's patronage
	Xie Fei	-	-	-	-
	Huang Ju	Qinghua University	Shanghai	Supportive	Jiang's patronage
	Alternates	Wen Jiabao	China University of Geosciences	Tuanpai	Conflicting
Wang Hanbin		Southwest Union University	-	-	-

Sources: Author's elaboration of data from *China Vitae*; Mackerras, Mc Millen, Watson (1998); Leung (2002); Sullivan (2016)



Table 10 Members of the 15th Politburo

15th Politburo					
<i>Institution</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Education (University level)</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>Relation with Jiang</i>	<i>Additional info</i>
Politburo Standing Committee	Jiang Zemin	Jiaotong University	Shanghai	Himself	-
	Li Peng	Moscow Institute for Power Science	Princelings	Supportive	Zhou Enlai's adoptive son
	Zhu Rongji	Qinghua University	-	Conflicting	-
	Li Ruihuan	Beijing Architect Institution	-	Supportive	-
	Hu Jintao	Qinghua University	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Opposite faction
	Wei Jianxing	Dalian Engineering Institute	-	Conflicting	Qiao Shi's patronage
	Li Lanqing	Fudan University	Shanghai	Supportive	Same faction
Politburo	Ding Guangen	Jiaotong University	Shanghai	Supportive	Same faction
	Tian Jiyun	-	-	Conflicting	-
	Li Changchun	Harbin Institute of Technology	Shanghai	Supportive	Same faction
	Li Tieying	Charles University	-	Supportive	Conservative approach
	Wu Bangguo	Qinghua University	Shanghai	Supportive	Same faction
	Wu Guanzheng	Qinghua University	Shanghai	Supportive	Jiang's patronage
	Chi Haotian	-	Military	Conflicting	-
	Zhang Wannian	-	Military	Conflicting	-
	Luo Gan	Karl Marx University Technische Universität Bergakademie Freiberg	-	Supportive	Li Peng's patronage
	Jiang Chunyun	-	-	Supportive	Jiang's patronage
	Jia Qinglin	Hebei University of Technology	-	Supportive	Jiang's patronage
	Qian Qichen	Central School of Communist Youth	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Opposite faction
	Huang Ju	Qinghua University	Shanghai	Supportive	Jiang's patronage
	Wen Jiabao	China University of Geosciences	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Zhu Rongji's patronage
	Alternates	Zeng Qinghong	Beijing Institute of Technology	Princelings	Supportive
Wu Yi		China University of Petroleum	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Zhu Rongji's patronage

Sources: Author's elaboration of data from *China Vitae*; Mackerras, Mc Millen, Watson (1998); Leung (2002); Sullivan (2016)

Cohesion among the members of China's PBs was historically assured by a common identity (A. D. Barnett 1967). Yet, in the case of Jiang's PBs, cohesion was ensured by the members' technical background (L. Cheng and White 1998). For instance, prominent members like Jiang Zemin, Li Peng and Zhu Rongji had obtained degrees in engineering. The new PBs were partly detached from the system of political patrons, and the new generation of Communist princelings was hierarchically

surpassed by other members.<sup>95</sup> The foremost example is the case of Deng Pufang, the son of Deng Xiaoping, who never succeeded in following into the footsteps of his father (Dittmer 1990a). A biographical and factional analysis of the members of the 14th and 15th PBs shows that Jiang maintained moderate support among other members, counting five members in the Shanghai faction and two supporters from his patronage in the 14th PB, and seven members from the Shanghai faction and four from his patronage in the 15th PB (Table 9 and 10). These numbers give Jiang a slight edge in the PB as a whole. The 15th PBSC sees an evermore shift with the ratio turning towards a three to three ratio, although the Shanghai faction is the one that is best represented (two members out of seven), and the PB remains supportive towards Jiang.

However, Jiang's control over the PBs was dually challenged. First, Wei Jianxing remained an ally to Qiao Shi, whom Jiang had forced out of the Party (L. Cheng and White 1998).<sup>96</sup> Second, Hu Jintao was Jiang's main rival, as he acted as a stronghold for "reformists."<sup>97</sup> Wei and Hu thus represent two potential elements of friction with Jiang that limit his control on the PB (Dittmer 2003). Indeed, among the seven members of the PB who conflicted with Jiang in the 14th PB, three belonged to the *tuanpai* faction, a number that increased to four in the 15th PB. As Jiang was vividly conscious of the repercussions of a split would have over the country's stability, he was extremely careful not to create a schism that might have led to a consistent loss of power for the CPC as a whole.

Although the system of princelings had been substituted by a more technical approach, ancestry still had a certain influence over accession to government positions. For instance, if the members of the 14th and 15th PBs are compared, it transpires that Jiang could not compete with the relations of some of his colleagues, especially in terms of his second in command, Li Peng. Moreover,

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<sup>95</sup> Communist princelings are the children of veteran communists who held high-ranking offices in China before 1966, the first year of the Cultural Revolution. For a further discussion on the impact of Communist princelings on China's ruling elite, see Bo (2015).

<sup>96</sup> Qiao Shi had been a political opponent to Jiang Zemin at the time of Deng's retirement. He was briefly considered as a preferable successor to Deng in light of Jiang's highly conservative allegiances. However, Qiao lacked the support of the majority of the party, thus failing to prevail over Jiang (Baum 1998).

<sup>97</sup> The Politburo of the PRC does not operate as a united front, but comprises of factions. Under Jiang, the two opposing factions were the Qinghua faction that was led by Zhu Rongji and the Shanghai faction that was led by Jiang himself. Over time, the Qinghua faction overrode the Shanghai faction, and Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping managed to take the lead on the country's political leadership. To further explore factional policies within the Politburo, see Dittmer (2003).

Jiang was a very different leader than the ones Communist China had had in the past. Most leaders (and Mao *in primis*) could rely on a strong charisma to guide them. This tendency has been highlighted in the number of speeches and writings that these leaders had left behind as well as by the epithets that their colleagues chose for them. While Mao left hundreds of essays and speech transcripts and gained the nickname of the “Great Helmsman,” Jiang was one of the less prolific Chinese leaders in terms of writing. Moreover, he was known among his colleagues as the “Flower Pot” – i.e., “decorative but ineffectual” (Joffe 1998, 190). Comparing Mao and Jiang’s characters raises some questions of appropriateness. As Mao was the founder of the PRC, a war hero and a poet, rumours of his charismatic personality travelled the world. In contrast, Jiang was merely a technician. However, a comparison between Mao and Jiang is justified by the status enjoyed by their theories in China, as both are included in the Party Constitution, although at very different levels.<sup>98</sup>

When Jiang became General Secretary his ability to control the PLA was also questioned, as he had little prior experience on how to deal with the military. Against all odds, Jiang succeeded in creating an enduring relation with China’s military by exploiting four factors. First, civil-military relations were developed according to Deng’s vision. Second, the Constitutional weight of his position was exploited. Third, personal relations with high ranks officials were developed. Fourth, a sense of commitment to the military from the part of the General Secretary was created (Ji 2001).

Leadership transition under Jiang was coming to terms with the Tiananmen Square protests and Zhao Ziyang’s exclusion from the Party. Moreover, Jiang had little dominance over the 14th PB, mainly due to the general belief that he was incapable of taking over the position successfully. As efforts were made to ensure the legitimacy to rule of the CPC and the political stability of the country, little room for manoeuvre was left for the implementation of political reforms.

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<sup>98</sup> The Three Represents is a guiding socio-political theory credited to Jiang, which was ratified by the CPC at the 16th Party Congress in 2002. Jiang first introduced his theory on 25 February 2000, while on an inspection tour in the Guangdong province. The official interpretation of the principle stipulates that the CPC should be representative to advanced social productive forces, advanced culture and the interests of the overwhelming majority (Fewsmith 2003).

In this scenario, political reform was unfeasible and economic reform, despite being a key objective in the leadership's agenda, was tied to a more pressing willingness to become a global actor in the international system rather than a desire to modernize the country's system of governance. These elements thus indicate that the political orientation of the elite was leaning towards a hard form of authoritarianism.

### **4.3 CHINA'S REGIONAL COOPERATION IN CT**

The following sections investigate the form of regional cooperation experienced by China in the Shanghai Five. As this forum was fostered by the joint efforts of China and Russia, its agenda is highly representative of the normative role played by the two states.

As the forum deals with issues that require states to relax their claims to state sovereignty, the Shanghai Five is a viable indicator of the imprint that externally driven norms left on China's principles of internal security. In accordance with Alastair I. Johnston's conceptualization (2007), it is here argued that China's policy choices either shaped or were shaped by the norms conveyed by its interactions in the Shanghai Five. In the first case, China was a novice state in the forum, thus acquiring the norms of the Shanghai Five's mentor state. In the second case, China was a mentor state, thus imprinting the Shanghai Five of its internally adopted behavioural norms.

#### **4.3.1 THE AGENDA OF THE SHANGHAI FIVE**

The Shanghai Five was a multilateral forum of cooperation established on 26 April 1996 between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This framework emerged from talks on border demarcation and demilitarization between China, Russia and the three Central Asian states (B. Wang and Liu 2016). The overall goal was to enhance security and confidence-building measures along the 7000-kilometres border China shares with these four countries (Gill 2001). The 1996 Shanghai summit marked the first of a series of annual meetings that the Shanghai Five continued to host in the territory of its member states (Table 11).

Table 11 Annual Meetings of the Shanghai Five (1996-2001)

Date	Location	Representatives	
		China	Russia
26 April 1996	Shanghai, China	Jiang Zemin, Chairman	Boris Yeltsin, President
24 April 1997	Moscow, Russia	Jiang Zemin, Chairman	Boris Yeltsin, President
03 June 1998	Almaty, Kazakhstan	Tang Jiaxuan, Foreign Minister	Yevgeny Primakov, Prime Minister
24 August 1999	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	Jiang Zemin, Chairman	Boris Yeltsin, President
05 July 2000	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Jiang Zemin, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President
15 July 2001	Shanghai, China	Jiang Zemin, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President

Source: Author's elaboration of data from CIS Legislation

Joint Statements and Declarations were released after the 1998 Almaty summit, as the areas of cooperation between member states expanded. In 1996 and 1997, the Shanghai Five focused on fostering confidence-building measures and achieving border demilitarization, while the 2000 declaration covered additional issues, also related to economic and trade relations.<sup>99</sup> As Jia Qinggong contends (2001), the success of the Shanghai Five is ascribed to the gradual deepening of the areas of cooperation, the promotion of mutual interests and norms based on values shared among member states.

The agenda of the Shanghai Five focuses primarily on three issue-areas. The first reflects the growing insecurities that characterize border areas. After the first meeting of the Shanghai Five, in fact, member states set practical guidelines on how to conduct military operations in the border areas. In particular, from the 1996 Joint Statement, becomes evident that member states aim to avoid conflicts resulting from partial information (Shanghai Five 1996). In 1997, another agreement between the member states focused on border militarization, thus placing defensive deployment and disarmament at the core (Shanghai Five 1997).<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> The mentioned agreements are: Shanghai Five. 1996. 'The Agreement between the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan and People's Republic of China on Enforcement of Trust in Military Area around Border'. Shanghai Five. CIS Legislation; Shanghai Five. 1997. 'The Agreement between the Russian Federation, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan and People's Republic of China on Mutual Reducing Armed Forces around Border'. Shanghai Five. CIS Legislation; and Shanghai Five. 2000. 'Dushanbe Declaration of Heads of States of the Republic of Kazakhstan, People's Republic of China, Kyrgyz Republic, Russian Federation and Republic of Tajikistan'. Shanghai Five. CIS Legislation.

<sup>100</sup> See Shanghai Five. 1997. 'The Agreement between the Russian Federation, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan and People's Republic of China on Mutual Reducing Armed Forces around Border'. Shanghai Five. CIS Legislation.

China and Russia were the member states most interested in border demilitarization, as their political elites were still conscious of the 1969 Sino-Soviet border dispute (Garver 2016). The border talks initiated by Jiang and Yeltsin, in fact, aimed to the permanent settling of shared borders.<sup>101</sup> In 1997, China and Russia demarcated their 4300-kilometres-long Eastern border, which had remained contested throughout history, by implementing an agreement that was in 1991 and ratified in 1992. The sole segment to remain disputed was located along the 55-kilometres-long Western border between China and Russia, which was finally settled in 1998, three years into the Shanghai Five (Q. Zhao 2016).<sup>102</sup>

The second issue addressed by the forum was the economic development of the region. This particular objective entered into the forum's agenda at the 1998 Almaty summit.<sup>103</sup> This meeting was a turning-point moment for the Shanghai Five. On the one hand, it was on this occasion that the forum became multilateral. In fact, the 1996 and 1997 meetings had unfolded following a "Soviet" imprint: China had been a dialogue partner to Russia that had acted as the spokesperson of the three other countries. On the other, the Shanghai Five expanded discussions to issues beyond traditional security. Other than non-traditional security and denuclearization, the member states also considered economic cooperation. Yet, economic cooperation was discussed in broad terms, losing the pragmatism that had characterized border talks. In particular, economic cooperation aimed to harmonise the national and regional objectives of political stability and economic growth of the Shanghai Five. Yet, no operational guidelines were presented (Shanghai Five 1998).

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<sup>101</sup> Within the framework of the Sino-Soviet split (1960-1984), the 1969 Sino-Soviet border conflict occurred in relation to a territorial dispute over the island of Zhenbao (in Chinese, 珍宝岛 Zhēnbǎo dǎo) located along the Eastern border between China and Russia. The digital archives of the Wilson Centre include a vast collection of documents on the conflict that are available at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/192/sino-soviet-border-conflict-1969> (last accessed 15/10/2019).

<sup>102</sup> The Western border between China and Russia is located in northern Xinjiang. An agreement on its settlement was reached in 1994 and implemented in 1998 (Q. Zhao 2016).

<sup>103</sup> Former capital of Kazakhstan, Almaty is a major city in south-east Kazakhstan. The joint statement that was signed after the meeting is sometimes known as the Alma-Ata Joint Statement from the Russian name of the city. See Shanghai Five. 1998. 'The Joint Statement of Participants of the Almaty Meeting - the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan'. Shanghai Five. CIS Legislation.

The third issue area covered by the Shanghai Five dealt with non-traditional security. As the 1998 Joint Statement and the 1999, 2000 and 2001 Declarations report, the issue of terrorism predated the 2001 GWOT in the Shanghai Five framework.<sup>104</sup> Despite eventually acquiring a unique conceptualization, the issues of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism were assumed to be contingent to the porosity of regional borders that enabled the illegal movement of militants and the trafficking of weapons, money and drugs around the region.<sup>105</sup> These phenomena re-direct the attention to the issue of borders. Indeed, “looser” borders supported the ethnic composition of the region, which did not conform to the borders set by states. Uyghurs, above all, are located in China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia and Uzbekistan, and small groups settled in Pakistan (Mukherjee 2010). Over time, as the 1998 Joint Statement and the 1999, 2000 and 2001 Declarations illustrate, the Shanghai Five embraced common goals in the military, economic and non-traditional security domains.

As the main promoters of the Shanghai Five, China and Russia acted along different lines. Russia’s approach was rooted in Yevgeny Primakov’s plans for Russia’s self-determination. After the 1993 parliamentary elections, Russia indeed recognized the need to separate its identity from the West (Tsygankov 2006). The elections had been won by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and the radical-nationalist party, and the country had thus taken a more nationalist path (Moser 1995). After Primakov was nominated Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1996, this notion became more prominent, and found a practical application in the “Primakov’s doctrine,” which envisioned Russia, China and India as an axis to counterbalance the US-led international order (Cohen 1997). Primakov regarded

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<sup>104</sup> The 2001 declaration is included in the documents as it was released in June 2001, roughly three months before the 9/11 terrorist attack fueled the GWOT. See Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). 2001. ‘Declaration on the Creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’. Shanghai Cooperation Organization. CIS Legislation; Shanghai Five. 1998. ‘The Joint Statement of Participants of the Almaty Meeting - the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People’s Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan’. Shanghai Five. CIS Legislation; Shanghai Five. 1999. ‘Bishkek Declaration of Heads of States of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People’s Republic of China, Kyrgyz Republic, Russian Federation and Republic of Tajikistan’. Shanghai Five. CIS Legislation; Shanghai Five. 2000. ‘Dushanbe Declaration of the Heads of State of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People’s Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan’. Shanghai Five. CIS Legislation.

<sup>105</sup> The conceptualization of terrorism under the framework of the Shanghai Five and the SCO is presented in section 3.3.

multipolarity as the tool that regulates the international system (Surovell 2005), and the Shanghai Five fell into this characterization. Primakov's approach thus characterized Russia's vision of the Shanghai Five, especially after he was elected Prime Minister in 1998.<sup>106</sup> For instance, Sergey Lavrov, the current Minister of Foreign Affairs, during an interview in October 2019, commented Primakov's legacy by stating that

we have been often accused recently of turning away from the West and towards the East. Yevgeny Primakov was appointed Foreign Minister after we had turned away from everyone excluding the West in the first half of the 1990s. Moreover, we looked upon the West as petitioners asking it to give us a place in the world that was presented as the triumph of liberal democracy and the end of history ... the foreign policy principles he formulated alongside the concept of multipolarity have since then constituted the basis of Russia's foreign policy concept ... these principles imply, first of all, the defence of national interests without resorting to confrontation; pragmatism; and a multi-directional policy, which suggests readiness to cooperate with any country around the world if there is reciprocal willingness based on mutual respect, equality and a balance of interests (Russian Foreign Ministry 2019).

Lavrov's endorsement of Primakov's doctrine points to a continuity to Russia's current foreign policy. Although Primakov was discharged by Yeltsin in 1999 due to the poor performance of Russia's economy (Dash 1999), after becoming President, Vladimir Putin accelerated the adoption of the Primakov's doctrine (Tsygankov 2005). In particular, the 2000 Shanghai Five summit in Dushanbe made Russia's intention to expand its influence worldwide even clearer. The country's vision for the Shanghai Five, in fact, revolved around the establishment of a cooperative framework among non-Western countries. Indeed, Moscow aimed to expand the Shanghai Five membership to other Asian countries, especially India. This objective was eventually fulfilled in 2017, when India and Pakistan both joined the SCO (Babones 2017). In addition, the Shanghai Five served to counter non-traditional security threats, which, according to Russia, relied on a religious component and the insurgencies in Chechnya and the northern Caucasus (Omelicheva 2009a). Cooperation in the

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<sup>106</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the "anti-West" policy of Russia under Yevgeny Primakov, see Surovell, Jeffrey. 2005. 'Yevgenii Primakov: "Hard-Liner" or Casualty of the Conventional Wisdom?' *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21 (2): 223–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523270500108741>.



Shanghai Five still maintained the general aim to establish an alternative pole for non-Western countries—a goal that also facilitated the launch of the BRICS (Salzman 2019).

China was one of the promoters of the Shanghai Five, together with Russia. Indeed, the city of Shanghai hosted the first summit of the forum. Though Russia mediated the 1996 and 1997 summits, China still managed to foster relations with Central Asian states. In fact, after the establishment of the Shanghai Five, China held bilateral talks with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. For instance, as early as July 1996, China and Kyrgyzstan signed a bilateral agreement on borders issues (B. Wang and Liu 2016).

Indeed, China was concerned with its West border. The risk was that Central Asian states would feed into the self-determination agenda of China's ethnic minorities. As Wang Lequan stated, “following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Xinjiang ... had been targeted as a key area to promote separatism and Westernization” (Wang Lequan as cited in Agence France Press 1996, 10). After opening a dialogue through the Shanghai Five, China negotiated several agreements with Central Asian states. For instance, in this period, China signed 37 and 33 agreements with Russia and Kazakhstan, which pertained to the domains of border settlement, military cooperation, containment of transnational threats and territorial integrity (B. Wang and Liu 2016).

These agreements were inspired by China's experience with Xinjiang's role in the foreign policy agenda of the Soviet Union. During the Sino-Soviet split, for example, Xinjiang became breeding ground for conflict with Soviet and Chinese troops engaging in border skirmishes. As tensions increased, a round of border talks was hosted in the autonomous region. Afterwards, the Soviet Union focused on China's Eastern border and deployed some troops along the Ussuri River (Becquelin 2000).

This conflict with the Soviet Union is particularly significant, as it was the first ever to be experienced by China after the Civil War. Moreover, since the ethnic composition of Xinjiang is similar to that of Central Asian states, claims of self-determination emerged from Xinjiang's ethnic

minorities.<sup>107</sup> Xinjiang's strategic value for the Soviet Union influenced China's strategy for the region. In particular, Jiang feared that Central Asian states would stir dormant claims of the Uyghur minority group. Therefore, Jiang nominated Wang Lequan as Party Secretary of Xinjiang (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2019a), and launched a Strike Hard campaign that limited the religious life of the Uyghurs (Amnesty International 1999). Indeed, China's Western regions were characterized by underdevelopment, poverty and instability. Not only was this area geographically distant from Beijing, but also comprised a vast territory – almost as vast as India – which suffered from extensive ethnic fragmentation (Lai 2002). Furthermore, these ethnicities maintained a connection to religion that the CPC did not have the means to grasp, but to which had devoted a specialized office (Lam 2015). Yet, China's plans for the Shanghai Five were not limited to the military domain, but also included economic and energy goals. Central Asian states, in fact, other than being potential allies, were potential markets that fit well into Jiang's approach to China's economy (Pannier 2016). As a consequence, China welcomed the Shanghai Five as it gave the country the opportunity to engage Central Asia under the guidance of Russia, which was the sole power to understand in-full the region's geopolitical landscape. In this manner, Jiang also avoided being perceived as a threat by Russia.

In brief, despite an increased cooperation in the late 1990s, Russia and China maintained very distinctive interests for the Shanghai Five. In fact, while China had the most to gain from economic cooperation, Russia was more concerned with establishing an “anti-West” framework.

#### **4.3.2 WHO MAKES THE RULES?**

Although China and Russia had different long-term objectives for the Shanghai Five, in this period, the two countries managed to balance their goals. In 1996 and 1997, in fact, China and Russia combined their efforts to settle borders. Russia's foreign policy had already started to move away

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<sup>107</sup> Other than the Uyghurs, the Kazakh minority in Xinjiang also demanded for the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture to be under the government of Kazakhstan (Becquelin 2000).

from the West in an effort to find a new identity, which was more concerned with other non-Western realities (Cohen 1997). At the same time, China needed to maintain a cooperative relation with Russia, as Beijing was starting to take into consideration its Western regions and periphery (Pannier 2016).

In this period, China and Russia were highly engaged in transforming the Shanghai Five into an international organization. Although the Shanghai Five regularly held annual summits, the forum only institutionalized in 2001 (Shanghai Five 2001). Maintaining this status certainly was less politically costly, but limited the international recognition of the Shanghai Five. Moreover, in this manner, China and Russia's objectives could be achieved with difficulty. China and Russia could foster cooperation in security and economic domains, but they could only do so outside the forum, thus using the Shanghai Five as a proxy mechanism to foster dialogue. Indeed, China did not have enough room of manoeuvre to propose common economic reforms like the creation of an economic partnership agreement with Central Asia. At the same time, Russia could not get the "alternative to the West" organization that it aimed to lead. The Shanghai Five thus represents a first instance of the "Shanghai Spirit" – i.e., the sentiment marked by mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for diverse civilizations and shared development that would later characterize the SCO (Shanghai Five 2001).

From the viewpoint of military cooperation, the Shanghai Five developed on two agreements that maintained the military and security domains at the core. On the one hand, the "Agreement on Confidence-Building in the Military Field in Border Areas" signed in Shanghai on 26 April 1996, between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan stipulated that the militaries of the five countries should restrain from attacking each other, conducting exercises that are aimed at one another and inform the other partners of their exercises' scope (Shanghai Five 1996). On the other, the "Agreement on Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in Border Areas" between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which was signed in Moscow on 24 April 1997, continued the work started by the 1996 agreement on settling the 7,000 kilometres-long border that divides China from the other members of the Shanghai Five (Shanghai Five 1997). Despite these agreements,

China and Russia remained active in the military domain. Russia, in particular, devoted a significant part of its GDP to military expenditure, which, in this period, was about 3.4 percent of the country's total GDP. China, in contrast, devoted a smaller part of its GDP to the military, which amounted at 1.8 percent of the country's total GDP (SIPRI 2019). A turning-point moment was the 1998 Russia's financial crisis, as the country's annual military expenditure was surpassed by China of an average US 13 million dollars per year (SIPRI 2019).<sup>108</sup>

The complete agenda of the Shanghai Five is exemplified in the 1998 Joint Statement and the 1999, 2000 and 2001 Declarations, as these documents contain a summary report of the previous work and future strategy of the forum (Shanghai Five 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001). As they present the issues to which the Shanghai Five devoted the most attention, these documents offer some guidelines on the policymaking processes stimulated during the meetings.

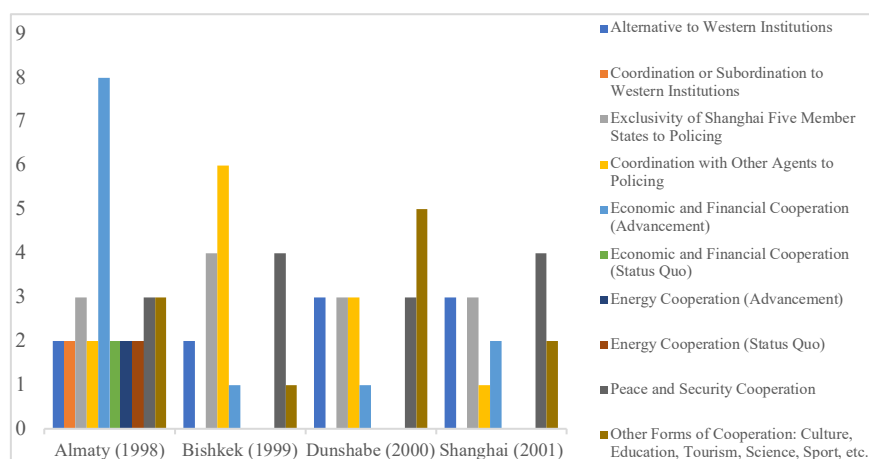
Figure 10 summarises the distribution of the discourse codes from 1998 to 2001. The figure shows that discourse in the Shanghai Five is primarily connected to issues pertaining to the forum's mandate. Indeed, the most-represented discourse codes refer to "coordination with other agents in policing" and "exclusivity of the SCO member states to policing." These discourse codes raise questions on the interaction of the Shanghai Five with other states and/or international organizations.

The discursive landscape is also representative of the discourse codes on "peace and security cooperation" and "other forms of cooperation." These two categories are present in all texts, thus pointing to a Shanghai Five that struggle to set its agenda. Even the 2001 Declaration—the one that institutionalizes the Shanghai Five into the SCO—shows no particular leniency to an issue-area, thus indicating that, even at the time of institutionalization, the Shanghai Five did so following a less politically costly mandate.

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<sup>108</sup> In 1998, Russia's economy was hit by a severe financial crisis. Among others, the main internal cause identified by economists was the size of the debt of Chechnya and the expenses for the reconstruction of its economy. From an external viewpoint, Russia also had to come to terms with the Asian financial crisis that entailed a decline in the demands of crude oil and non-ferrous materials, which represent Russia's main exports. To expand on the crisis, see Akyüz, Yilmaz, and Paul Rayment. 1998. 'The Russian Crisis'. Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). <https://unctad.org/en/Docs/poirrsd002.en.pdf>.

Figure 10 Overview of Total Discourse Counts by Declaration (1998-2001)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from *Legislation of the CIS Countries*

Regional security had been a foremost objective in launching the Shanghai Five, and the 1996 and 1997 agreements had been adopted thanks to the willingness of member states to cooperate (Shanghai Five 1996, 1997). As argued in the previous section, 1998 had been a turning-point moment for the Shanghai Five, as other issue-areas for cooperation had emerged in the 1998 Joint Statement. Still, it is interesting to notice that the 1998 summit was not chaired by Heads of State, but by Prime Ministers with the sole exception of Kazakhstan, which sent its Minister for Foreign Affairs (Shanghai Five 1998). For Russia, in particular, it was Primakov to attend the summit. Yet, the 1998 Joint Statement shows a considerable number of discourse codes about “economic and financial cooperation (advancement),” which make up for 27.5 percent of the total number of meaningful quasi-sentences in the document.<sup>109</sup> This percentage is noteworthy, as this particular objective conveys China’s main objective for the Shanghai Five. Indeed, in the mid-nineties, China was in the process of applying Deng’s economic principle of an export-oriented economy (Samarani 2006). The energy discourse code goes in the same direction, as it is presented as a “standalone” objective only in the 1998 Joint Statements. Afterwards, it is mentioned in connection with other forms of cooperation.

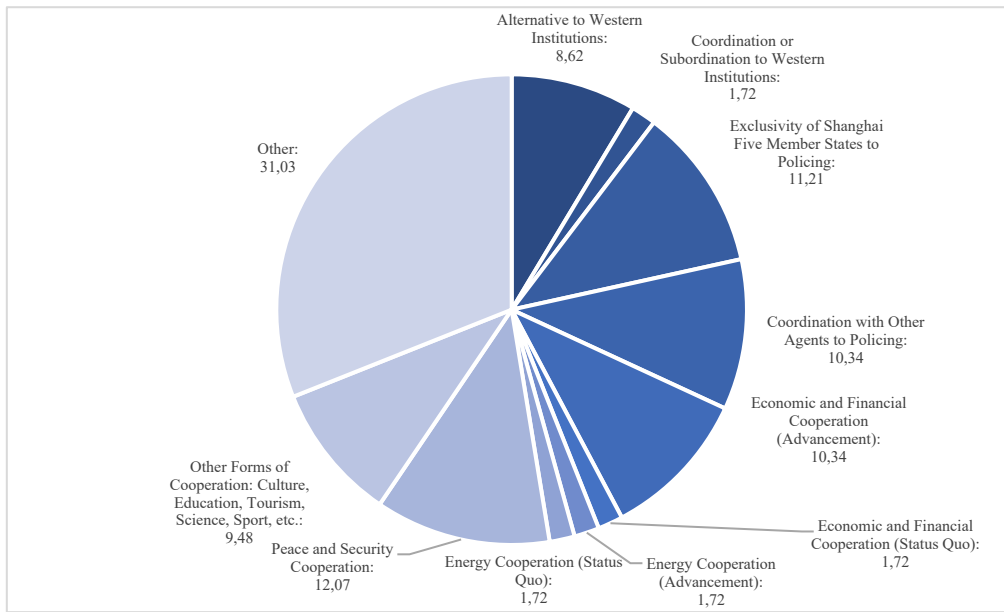
<sup>109</sup> With “meaningful quasi-sentences,” I refer to all the quasi-sentences but those that pertain to the “other” category.

The discourse code for “peace and security” remains the most stable in this period. Although it is more prominent in the 1998 Joint Statement and the 2000 Declaration, it is the 1999 Declaration to refer to China and Russia’s domestic security environment. The Shanghai Five, in fact, makes a commitment to the “one China policy,” as well as opposing secessionism in Chechnya (Shanghai Five 1999). These references occur at particular temporal junctures, as China had just finalized the handovers of Hong Kong from the United Kingdom and Russia had just signed the Moscow Treaty, which ended the first Russia-Chechen war. Still, the 1999 Bishkek Declaration favours the discourse code “other forms of cooperation: culture, education, tourism, science, sport, etc.,” while balancing the ratio of all the other discourse codes but “energy.”

Excluding the 1998 Joint Statement, discourse codes maintain similar frequencies in the documents. The share of each discourse code over the total number of quasi-sentences is visualized by figure 11. The most covered issue-areas in the corpus of data are “peace and security cooperation” and “exclusivity of Shanghai Five member states to policing,” which refer back to the first area of cooperation of the forum – i.e., regional security. Indeed, the discourse code “peace and security cooperation” makes up for 12.07 percent, while the discourse code “exclusivity of Shanghai Five member states to policing” covers 11.21 percent.

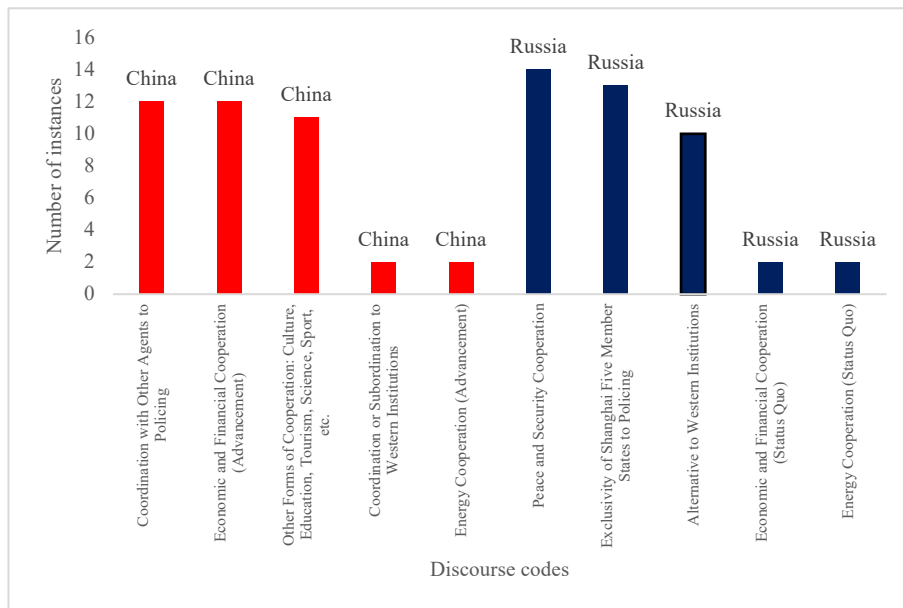
Lastly, figure 12 presents China and Russia’s discourse codes in aggregated form. The agenda of the two powers is represented in the forum’s discursive landscape, and neither China nor Russia’s objectives are over-represented. Thus, the discursive landscape of the 1998 Joint statement and the 1999, 2000 and 2001 Declarations indicates that China and Russia played a co-mentorship role in the forum, and both imprinted the normative framework of the Shanghai Five.

Figure 11 Discourse Code Shares on Total Instances (1998-2001)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from Legislation of the CIS Countries

Figure 12 Comparison of China and Russia's Discourse Counts per Code (1998-2001)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from Legislation of the CIS

## CONCLUSIONS

The chapter analysed the three elements identified in the theoretical framework as the factors that have the potential to affect China's CT policy between April 1996 and June 2001. The aim of the chapter was to examine each factor, so as to determine its impact on China's CT policy.

The first factor investigated the external pressure of the security environment. The analysis first looked at the empirical data on the number and intensity of the terrorist attacks experienced by China in this period. Second, it examined the perceptions of China's domestic security agents. The baseline were rationalist theories on CT policy, which contend that hard/soft CT policy correlate with increasing/decreasing levels of terrorist threats (Bueno De Mesquita 1988; Fearon and Wendt 2002). Empirical data were gathered from the GTD and were cross-referenced with the digital archives of the SCMP, so as to ensure the consistency and exhaustiveness of the data.

Perceptions were investigated by examining the articles released by Xinhua on terrorism in Xinjiang and by assessing selected beliefs of China's security policy-makers through the framework of the operational code (Leites 1951; George 1969; He and Feng 2015; Dyson and Parent 2018). Although the number of terrorist attacks slightly increased in this period, the perception of China's officials in charge of security in Xinjiang did not consider the terrorist threat as overwhelming. This divergence between the empirical data and perceptions points to an external pressure of the security environment that is considered as "medium" in accordance with the theoretical conceptualization presented in section 2.3.1. Indeed, while the number of attacks that occurred in the country in this period increased in comparison to the previous period, the perception of the elite indicated a cooperative attitude towards the threat, as it was considered an instability that the elite could successfully counter.

The second factor looked at the political orientation of the elite towards authoritarianism. It aimed to determine whether Jiang Zemin opted a "hard" or a "soft" form of authoritarianism. The state of political freedoms and civil liberties were measured by means of aggregated data on politically related arrests. These data showed a stable leniency towards countering political instabilities by means of arrests. Moreover, biographical and factional analyses on the members of the PBs indicate low levels of support for Jiang and a scarce ability to implement economic and political reforms in the country. Thus, it was a "tightening" phase that dominated Chinese politics, pointing towards a leniency to hard authoritarianism.



The third factor investigated norm-making reference groups that could potentially affect China’s policy-choices in the domain of CT. The Shanghai Five was the sole framework of cooperation that listed CT activities among its objectives. Between April 1996 and June 2001, the Shanghai Five did not specialize its mandate. In terms of norm-making, China and Russia—the sole members of the Shanghai Five that could act as mentors—maintained different long-term objectives for the forum. The impact of the two countries over the Shanghai Five was investigated in the 1998 Joint Statement and the 1999, 2000 and 2001 Declarations released after the annual summits of the forum. The discursive landscape of these documents showed that China and Russia’s objectives are equally represented. Therefore, a role of co-mentor was assigned to the two powers. This ambiguity in the mandate of the Shanghai Five is consistent with the fact that it remained mostly a cooperative forum that had not yet institutionalized.

These three factors construct a framework for China’s CT policy that is summed up in Table 12. The analyses on these three factors point to a hardening of authoritarian power in the country and a co-mentorship role for China in the Shanghai Five. Thus, the CT policies adopted in Xinjiang in this period depended on the political orientation of the elite that was still afflicted by the events that almost split the Party in 1989. In this period, the domestic dimension of China’s CT policy has the upper hand in explaining the hardening of China’s counterterrorist measures in Xinjiang.

Table 12 The Making of China’s CT Policy (1996-2001)

<i>Systemic variable</i>	<i>Domestic variable</i>	<i>Individual variable</i>	<i>Policy outcome</i>
Pressure from the Security Environment	Political Orientation of the Elite	Role in Reference Groups ( <i>socialization process</i> )	Pressure from the Security Environment
Medium	Hard Authoritarianism	Co-mentor	Hard CT Policy

## CHAPTER 5. IMPORTING “HARD BEHAVIOURS.” CHINA, THE SCO AND CT POLICY IN XINJIANG (2001-2012)

This chapter analyses the drivers of China’s CT policy in the period between July 2001 and November 2012. While July 2001 marks the beginning of the formal institutionalization of the Shanghai Five into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, it is in November 2012 that President Hu Jintao terminates his second mandate as the leader of the People’s Republic of China and that current President Xi Jinping assumes the position. It is also the time when Chen Quanguo becomes a permanent member of the 18th Politburo. After becoming the Secretary of the CPC in Tibet in August 2011, Chen proposed a series of reforms in the way the CPC counters political contestation in the country that ensured high levels of securitization and development to the region.<sup>110</sup>

In this period, China was primarily afflicted by two attacks that made reference to the terrorist forces active in Xinjiang. The first attack took place in 2008 at a time when China was preparing to host the Olympic Games for the first time in the history of the country. It was a particularly significant moment as the Olympic Games endorsed China’s official membership to the group of advanced global nations. The second attack hit Ürumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, in 2009. People took to the streets to protest against the firm hold of the CPC on the autonomous region. The ruling elite responded by deploying military and police forces, so as that manifestations transformed into a riot. According to the coverage of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), at least 156 people died during the attack.<sup>111</sup>

In contrast with the previous period, the CPC identified those responsible for the attacks as the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and the World Uyghur Congress (WUYC). The latter involvement was linked by the authorities to Rebiya Kadeer, a Uyghur businesswoman who had been

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<sup>110</sup> The impact of Chen Quanguo’s strategy of securitization in Tibet on Xinjiang’s CT policy is methodically evaluated by Adrian Zenz and James Leibold (2017), who offer an evidence-based assessment on the perspective of Chen’s strategy on the regions.

<sup>111</sup> A full recap article on the July 2009 Ürumqi riots is available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8135203.stm>

highly praised by the CPC prior to being accused to be involved in the region's secessionist movements. The identification of these perpetrators was reinforced in 2001 at the beginning of the GWOT, when the UN officially added the ETIM to the list of global terrorist organizations.

The connection with the US GWOT was not the sole instance of the internationalization of China's CT policy. It was in 2004 that the SCO strengthened its institutional dimension and established the RATS – that is, a permanent agency that is in charge of sharing intelligence amongst the members of the SCO on known terrorist groups or individuals active in Central Asia. At the same time, its member states adopted three regulations specifically targeting terrorism: the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism (2001), the Agreement on the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (2002) and the Convention against Terrorism (2009).<sup>112</sup> Within the institutional framework of the SCO, the China-Russia bond strengthened with Moscow hosting and leading the annual joint anti-terrorist exercises and providing China's PLA with a reference for its pattern of modernization.

This period is characterized by a change in the country's political leadership that passed from being under the presidency of Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao: a change that bore serious repercussions on the country's policymaking. The imprint of China's political leaders and the PBs on the country was (and still is) deeply linked to their ideological orientation, which is traditionally used as a compass that establishes the direction the country's policies will take under the mandates of its leaders. In contrast with multi-party systems, China's leaders do not have the need to participate in political competitions that have the potential to strip the party of its power to rule. As a consequence, the imprint leaders leave on China's policymaking is more related to the vision that each leader has of China's future and the hold he/she maintains on the PB.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> The full text of these documents is available on the website of the SCO at <http://eng.sectesco.org/documents/> (last accessed 22 May 2019).

<sup>113</sup> China's Politburo is composed of internal factions. According to Zarinsky (1960), these are “any intra-party combination, clique or groupings whose members share a sense of common identity and common purpose and are organized to act collectively – as a distinct bloc within the party – to achieve their goals” (33). Members of the factions cooperate with each other, while competing for power and influence. In a sense, the factional system can be equated to a non-institutionalized party system of liberal democracies. To expand on the extent of the competition among China's factions and the repercussions on the country's political decisions, see Li (2013).

In this period, the country's political elite re-oriented China towards a twofold reform of the PB. In particular, the nine-members composition of the PBSC institutionalized its working agenda, offering higher levels of control from the part of the Secretary General. On the other, each of the nine members of the PBSC assumed the responsibility of at least one operational small group of the country's Central Committee, thus increasing the coordination between the two institutions. In this manner, the work of the PBSC (and subsequently the whole PB) became more engaged with in all the stages of policing from design to implementation. Moreover, it was under Hu that the country started to invest steadily in the propaganda machine and abandoned the system of intra-party purges to maintain control over the members of the Party as it had been under the Cultural Revolution.

This chapter takes into consideration the three variables that compose the theoretical model of this study to determine whether China's CT policy in this period has been influenced by any of the factors identified. In the first section, the terrorist threat that emerges from Xinjiang is assessed by looking at the empirical data on the number and severity of the attacks experienced by China by hand of groups and individuals related to the Xinjiang cause and compare the findings with the perception that the ruling elite has on the threat emerging from Xinjiang.

In the following section, I look at the type of authoritarianism the country experienced under the leadership of Hu Jintao, maintaining a specific focus on the reliance of the PBs towards propaganda as a way to maintain compliance with party preferences and the overall support enjoyed by Hu within the PB.

In the third section, the international dimension of CT is examined by investigating the type of institutionalization experienced by the SCO in the context of the mechanics proposed by the organization in terms of the way terrorism is treated and opposed, and by determining the type of objectives that the SCO embodies either from the perspective of China or Russia.

The question that drives this chapter refers to whether any of these variables can be employed to explain the rationale of China's leaders in choosing to adopt a more assertive strategy for Xinjiang in accordance with the connections exemplified in the section 2.3.3.

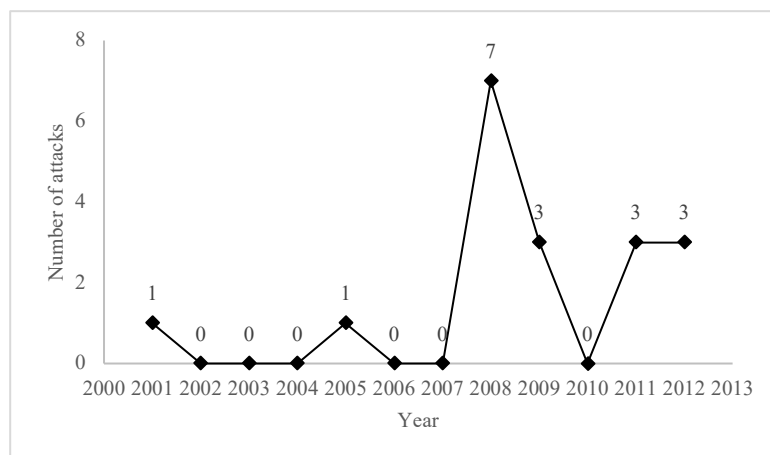
## 5.1 ASSESSING THE TERRORIST THREAT IN XINJIANG

This section examines the pressure to act of the security environment arising from episodes of terrorism and political violence in Xinjiang in the period under analysis. Traditional studies on terrorism contend that CT policies become more assertive when the pressure to act from the security environment heightens. Nonetheless, to detect whether a threat increases or decreases, empirical data on the number and severity of terrorist attacks were complemented by an assessment of the way the agents of policymaking perceive the threatening events occurring in Xinjiang.

### 5.1.1 THE TERRORIST THREAT AS PRESENTED BY THE EMPIRICAL DATA

Between 2001 and 2012, China experienced a total of 18 terrorist events by hand of single terrorists or groups that have a direct connection to the secessionist claims of the Uyghur minority group in Xinjiang. The GTD of the University of Maryland catalogues 6 of these violent events as the product of unknown perpetrators, while the remaining 9 are either allotted to Uyghur separatists or the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP).<sup>114</sup> Events that were not officially claimed by terrorist organizations were included in the study due to their timing and location. Indeed, attacks carried out around the time and place of the claimed terrorist events were considered affiliated to the Turkestani political cause.

Figure 13 Number of Terrorist Attacks in China (2001-2012)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from the GTD and the digital archives of the SCMP

<sup>114</sup> The terrorist groups active in Xinjiang between 2002 and 2012 are treated in detail in the next paragraphs.

The trend of terrorist attacks between 2001 and 2012 is illustrated by Figure 13, which presents data from the GTD database in combination with an archival research of the international edition of the SCMP. As the figure shows, three particular points signal that a larger number of terrorist attacks connected to the Uyghur political cause had been taking place.

The first wave of violence occurred a few weeks prior to China's hosting the 2008 Summer Olympic Games and merely a day after a meeting on CT was held in Beijing between representatives of SCO member states (A. Guo 2008). The meeting aimed to spearhead "a co-ordinated move to counteract the Islamic movement before and during the Games" (Meng Hongwei as cited in Guo 2008).<sup>115</sup> The meeting was a prelude to the signing of the "Agreement on Cooperation in Combating Illicit Trafficking in Arms, Ammunition and Explosives" during the SCO Heads of State meeting that would be held in Dushanbe on 28 August.<sup>116</sup> On 4 August, two Uyghur men drove a truck into a group of policemen in Kashgar and killed 16 people (Van Wie Davis 2008). It is interesting to notice how this attack points to the "self-fulfilling character" of CT (Zulaika 2003), as it unfolds a day before a meeting that was supposed to prevent any terrorist attack during the Olympic Games, thus making fears of other attacks during the event more tangible.<sup>117</sup>

The second wave of violence corresponds to the riots that occurred in Xinjiang on 5 July 2009. According to government data, the riots – which broke out in Ürumqi, a city of about 2.3 million people<sup>118</sup> – killed 197 and injured over 1700 (O'Brien 2015).<sup>119</sup> Most of the casualties were identified

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<sup>115</sup> Meng Hongwei has served as vice-minister of Public Security in China from 2004 to 2018. He resigned *in absentia* via Chinese officials after he was arrested by anti-corruption authorities. Meng had previously occupied the role of Chairman for China at the RATS and Commander-in-chief at two counter-terrorism joint drills in Xinjiang in 2006 and 2011 (Gan 2018).

<sup>116</sup> 上海合作组织成员国政府间合作打击非法贩运武器、弹药和爆炸物品的协定 Shànghǎi hézuò zǔzhī chéngyuán guó zhèngfǔ jiān hézuò dǎjī fēifǎ fànyùn wǔqì, dànào hé bàozhà wùpǐn de xiédìng ("Agreement on Cooperation in Combating Illicit Trafficking in Arms, Ammunition and Explosives between the Governments of the Member States of the SCO"). It was formally adopted during the following Heads of State Meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on 28 August 2008. The full-text is available at <http://eng.sectesco.org/documents/> (in English).

<sup>117</sup> Zulaika contends that terrorism is the product of CT practices and that it partially is the fact that we look for terrorism to inspire the phenomenon to rise. To expand see Zulaika, Joseba. 2003. 'The Self-Fulfilling Prophecies of CT'. *Radical History Review* 85 (1): 191–99.

<sup>118</sup> For data on the demographic composition of Ürumqi, see <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2010/indexeh.htm>

<sup>119</sup> Although O'Brien and Chinese media reports contend that the total number of victims of the Ürumqi riots amounted to 197, there is some inconsistency between reports as the BBC, for instance, states that only 156 were killed during the attacks.

by state authorities as members of the Han ethnic group (Shan and Ping 2014). The events were recorded as some of the worst forms of political contestation in China's modern history after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre (O'Brien 2015). The riots were inspired by the clashes between the Han and Uyghur workers of a toy factory in Guangdong that had occurred on 25 June. Allegedly, some Uyghur men had raped two Han women in the factory. The crime was never confirmed, and a former employee of the factory was arrested shortly after the brawl under the accusation of having spread the rumour as a result of having been laid off (Primiano 2013). Beijing attributes the riots to the joint instigations of East Turkestan forces and the WUYC<sup>120</sup> in the person of its President Rebiya Kadeer (Mu 2009).<sup>121</sup> Unofficially, state authorities implicate Uyghur terrorist units from other regions in Xinjiang, which supposedly infiltrated in Ürumqi before the riots started (Panda 2010).

The third wave of violence swept over a police station in the city of Hotan on 18 July 2011. It took the form of a knife-and-bomb confrontation that claimed the life of two officers and two civilian hostages. The attack was inspired by China's ban on Islamic traditional veils, which had been re-established in the region during the 2009 Ürumqi riots (C. Choi 2011). It is interesting to notice that the ban was introduced in Xinjiang following the example of two international events. First, in October 2010, France had adopted a law against the dissimulation of identity in public places, which prohibited the use of the Islamic veil (Assemblée Nationale and Senate 2010).<sup>122</sup> Second, China had openly supported Russian policies against Chechen extremism and terrorism since Jiang and Yeltsin had met in Moscow in December 1999. After the meeting, the spokesperson from China's Foreign Ministry contented that China "understands and supports the efforts made by Russia in safeguarding

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<sup>120</sup> On the status and working agenda of the WUYC, see <https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?cat=232>

<sup>121</sup> The Chinese government accused Rebiya Kadeer to have leaked information to foreign organizations and sentenced her to prison in 1999. She was released in 2005 and fled to the United States. Before serving prison time, Kadeer was identified by the CPC as a successful example of a modern and developed China in light of her work as a businesswoman. Although Kadeer at first supported the CPC, she soon came to associate the policies in Beijing as a limitation of the Uyghurs' freedoms. According to Primiano (2013), in Chinese media, Kadeer is often mentioned in relation to the three forces of terrorism (i.e., terrorism, separatism and religious extremism).

<sup>122</sup> Loi n. 2010-1192 du 11 octobre 2010 interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l'espace public ("Law n. 2010-1192 of the 11 October 2010 Prohibiting Identity Dissimulation in the Public Space"), last revised on 30 May 2019. The full text (in French) can be browsed at [www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000022911670](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000022911670) (last accessed 12 May 2019).

national unity and territorial integrity” (Laris 1999). In particular, it was during the Moscow theatre hostage crisis of October 2002, that the Russian government, for the first time, encountered the “Black Widows” – that is, Islamist female suicide bombers that embodied violent jihad (Pokalova 2015a).<sup>123</sup> In fact, it was traditional Muslim clothes that enabled them to transport explosives strapped to their chests unnoticed.

The agents of terrorist attacks in Xinjiang are described by the rhetoric of Chinese political institutions as promoting different forms of dissidence and separatism. Most of these groups are unstructured groupings of individuals, the unity of which was artificially constructed by the CPC. For instance, Chinese leaders did connect Falun Gong activists with Uyghurs, or the claims of Tibet and Taiwan with the secessionist claims of East Turkestan (Reed and Raschke 2010b).

The GTD points to the ETIM – i.e., a long-standing active terrorist organization in Xinjiang – as the architect of 6 out of 18 attacks between 2001 and 2012 (START 2019). In recent years, the ETIM have adopted different names, such as TIP, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIP) or the Islamic Party of Turkistan (IPT). The group abandoned the term “east” in 2000 in order to include all Turkic peoples living in Xinjiang and not just the Uyghurs (Reed and Raschke 2010b). For instance, according to China’s 2010 population census, 6.5 percent of the population residing in Xinjiang has Kazakh origins.<sup>124</sup> As the Kazakh and the Uyghur minorities share a similar ethnic origin and culture as well as profess the same branch of Islam, the Kazakhs are a potential recipient of the ETIM claim.

The ETIM has its own media organization called *Islam Awazi*, which is roughly translated as the “Voice of Islam” that releases an online periodical called Islamic Turkistan and administers the

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<sup>123</sup> According to an estimate by Speckhard and Akhmedova (2006), 81 percent of the terrorist attacks in Chechnya between 2001 and 2005 involved female bombers. By using traditional clothes, Black Widows had the advantage to move around with explosives strapped to their chest. The 2002 Moscow Theatre Hostage Crisis is a case in point. For more details on Black Widows, see the commentary of Jeremy Page published by The Times on 7 February 2004, available at <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/spectre-of-the-chechen-black-widows-gjscp5gthjg> (last accessed 12 May 2019).

<sup>124</sup> Data are available at <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/Statisticaldata/CensusData/rkpc2010/indexch.htm> (last accessed 17 May 2019).



social media channels of the organization (Lee 2015). The Arabic writing on the ETIM emblem includes the Muslim profession of faith and two verses from the Quran (Reed and Raschke 2010b).<sup>125</sup>

In September 2002, in compliance with the requests of the delegations of the US, China, Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan, the ETIM was identified as a terrorist organization by UNSC Resolution 1267 (Xu, Fletcher, and Bajoria 2014).<sup>126</sup> In addition, in 2003 the Chinese government released a list of terrorist organizations and their members that included the ETIM (China News 2003). In October 2008, the UN included two additional terms – i.e., “Turkistan Islamic Party” and the “Jamaat Turkestan” – to its blacklist for referring to ETIM.<sup>127</sup> On 20 April 2009, the UN also blacklisted former ETIM leader Abdul Haq (Phillip B. K. Potter 2013b). With the inclusion of the ETIM to the UN blacklist, a connection was established between the ETIM, Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, as the ETIM was added to the blacklist pursuant of paragraph 2 of UN Resolution 1390, which states that “all States shall take the following measures with respect to Usama bin Laden, members of the Al-Qaida organization and the Taliban and other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with them” (UN Resolution 1390 2002, emphasis added).<sup>128</sup>

As the ETIM’s operation centres were transferred to countries like Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the ETIM affiliated with other terrorist organizations that were active in the region, including jihadist groups (Mackerras 2015). The ETIM’s operation centres relocated due to the NATO war in Afghanistan and the Strike Hard campaigns that the CPC had enacted in Xinjiang since 1996 (Reed and Raschke 2010b). The detention of 22 Uyghurs at the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base from 2002 to 2008 further amplified the transnational dimension of the

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<sup>125</sup> The Muslim profession of faith recognizes Allah as the only God and Muhammad as His prophet, while the first verse of the Quran that appears on the emblem of the ETIM recalls the values of faith and obedience to Allah, Muhammad and to those that were granted authority over the people. The second verse calls for a fight for justice and faith in Allah (Reed and Raschke 2010b).

<sup>126</sup> The UN Security Resolution 1267 is available at <https://scsanctions.un.org/fop/fop?xml=htdocs/resources/xml/en/consolidated.xml&xslt=htdocs/resources/xsl/en/consolidated.xsl> (last accessed 17 May 2019).

<sup>127</sup> A compendium of all the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council on terrorist groups or individuals is available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20140705073121/http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1737/index.shtml> (last accessed 17 May 2019).

<sup>128</sup> The UN Security Resolution 1390 is available at [https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1390%20\(2002\)](https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1390%20(2002)) (last accessed 17 May 2019).

ETIM. In fact, the profiles of 21 ETIM members are listed in the “Guantánamo Files” released by WikiLeaks in 2011.<sup>129</sup> These documents stress the connection between the ETIM and the IMU, thus further expanding the extent of the terrorist threat in Xinjiang beyond China’s borders.

Under the presidency of Barack Obama, the Uyghurs were eventually released and welcomed by Slovakia. Their repatriation was not an option, as history of the mistreatment of Uyghurs by hand of the Chinese government was globally known (Savage 2018). In 2006, President Bush had already released 5 Uyghurs from Guantánamo and relocated them in Albania (S. Roberts 2012). Two years later, another 17 Uyghurs were freed and invited to settle in the US. However, a ruling by the Federal Appeal Court upheld that no judicial organ have the power to force the executive to admit a foreigner into the country (Savage 2018). As a consequence, Uyghurs could not remain in the country.

Between 1996 and 2001, the CPC had acknowledged the extension of the terrorist threat in Xinjiang beyond China’s borders. This feature of terrorism was traced back to the open issue of border settlement with the post-Soviet space, the loose status of which had enabled the unregulated flow of peoples and goods within the region. Conversely, between 2001 and 2012, the transnational dimension of terrorism was determined by the connection of the terrorist groups active in Xinjiang with other terrorist organizations operating in the region. Moreover, the spreading of the GWOT and the launch of the US War in Afghanistan further expanded the internationalization of the terrorist threat, moving the claims and operations of the ETIM beyond Xinjiang’s borders.

The magnitude of terrorist threats in China is better examined if compared with its regional partners and especially Russia, which had been the country’s traditional point of reference in terms of policy making during its Communist history (Garver 2016).<sup>130</sup> According to data from the GTD, Russia experienced no less than 181 terrorist attacks, the majority of which were carried out by

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<sup>129</sup> The Guantánamo Files comprise 779 documents on detainees at the US Guantánamo Bay detention camp that were published by WikiLeaks and independent news organizations on 25 April 2011. The documents are marked as “secret” and “NoForn” (i.e., information that must not be shared with foreign countries). They provide assessments, interviews and internal memos on the detainees. Amongst them are information on 21 Uyghurs connected to the ETIM.

<sup>130</sup> For a comprehensive analysis on China-Russia mutual perception, see Garver, John W. 2016. *China’s Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People’s Republic of China*. New York: Oxford University Press.

insurgents between 2001 and 2012. The Second Chechen War had ended in 2002 with the recapture of the city of Grozny by the Russians and the collapse of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (Wilhelmsen 2016). When Chechnya returned under the control of the Russian Federation, insurgency started to shake the region in the form of violent terrorism and extremism (START 2019).<sup>131</sup> In Russia, the first major episode of terrorism after the collapse of the Ichkerian califate was the 2000 Argun Barracks Bombing which killed 50 Russian servicemen and wounded 81. The event was followed by the 2002 Moscow Theatre Attack, the 2004 Beslan School Siege, the 2005 Nalchik Assault, the 2009 Bologoye Train Bombing, the 2010 Moscow Subway Bombings and the 2011 Airport Bombing (Johns 2013). According to Jeffery Bale as cited in Mila Johns (2013), the conflict in Chechnya

was originally an ethno-nationalist and ethno-cultural conflict in which one of the markers of Chechen cultural difference from Russia was the Islamic religion. However, historically, most Chechens have not embraced strict, puritanical, or radical interpretations of Islam. But that began to change in the mid-1990s ... From that point on, the main fighting organizations in the North Caucasus have espoused jihadist Salafism ... echo[ing] the themes and tropes of al-Qa'ida and other global jihadist groups. The conflict has now become primarily a religious conflict (1).<sup>132</sup>

Chechnya and Xinjiang are often compared in the literature (among others, Vergani and Zuev 2015; Li and Niemann 2016; Clarke and Kan 2017; Soloshcheva 2017), as both cases display similarities in terms of the aim of political contestation – i.e., secessionism and violent terrorism, and the form of government of the host state – i.e., authoritarianism. According to data from the GTD, from 2011, threats from Chechnya lost momentum and decreased. As Chechen secessionists represented a violation of national unity and territorial integrity, China was particularly receptive to Russia's struggle in the region. Indeed, this type of threat was posed to the core values that national

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<sup>131</sup> The full report is available at [https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/local\\_attachments/START\\_TheInfluenceofNationalismonRussianSecurityPolicy\\_Oct2015.pdf](https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/local_attachments/START_TheInfluenceofNationalismonRussianSecurityPolicy_Oct2015.pdf) (last accessed 23 May 2019).

<sup>132</sup> The full report is available at [https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/br/STARTBackgroundReport\\_TerrorismAndNorthCaucasus\\_April2013.pdf](https://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/publications/br/STARTBackgroundReport_TerrorismAndNorthCaucasus_April2013.pdf) (last accessed 23 May 2019).

security assumes in the interpretation given to it by the Chinese leadership. In fact, after President Putin's state visit to China between 14 and 16 October 2004, the two countries issued a joint statement that reads that

China supports all Russia's efforts in safeguarding national unity and combating the terrorist and separatist forces in Chechnya ... Both sides reaffirm that as part of international terrorism, the terrorist and separatist forces in Chechnya and the "East Turkistan" should be the targets for the international fight against terrorism. The two sides will take targeted, necessary and pragmatic steps within bilateral and multilateral frameworks. China understands and firmly supports all measures taken by Russia to resume the constitutional order of the Republic of Chechnya and to fight against terrorism. Russia firmly supports all measures taken by China to fight against the terrorist and separatist forces in "East Turkistan" and to eliminate terrorist jeopardy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2004).<sup>133</sup>

Although Russia has served as a reference point for China's policymakers throughout the country's Communist history (Garver 2016), secessionist-driven terrorist threats emerging from Russia were not the sole concern of China's policymakers at the regional level. Between 2002 and 2012, episodes of terrorism and political violence occurred closer to China's borders. Uzbekistan was fighting against the IMU, a militant Islamist group that was established in 1998. The IMU contributed heavily to Uzbekistan's decision to join the SCO (Bakshi 2002). While the group was at first aiming to subvert President Islam Karimov's decision to establish an Islamic state, which was to be ruled under *shari'a* law, the IMU eventually forged an alliance with al-Qaida and the Taliban (Ahrari 2005).<sup>134</sup> In this period, Uzbekistan experienced 9 terrorist attacks by hand of the Islamic Jihad Group (IJG), which, according to the UNSC, was established on the occasion of a detachment from the IMU. The attacks which concentrated in 2004, 2005 and 2009 mainly targeted government officials and police officers, killing 49 in the process (START 2019).

The ETIM shared some characteristics with Chechen rebels and the IJG/IMU, as well as tangible connections. Indeed, foreign fighters from the ETIM were identified both in Chechnya and

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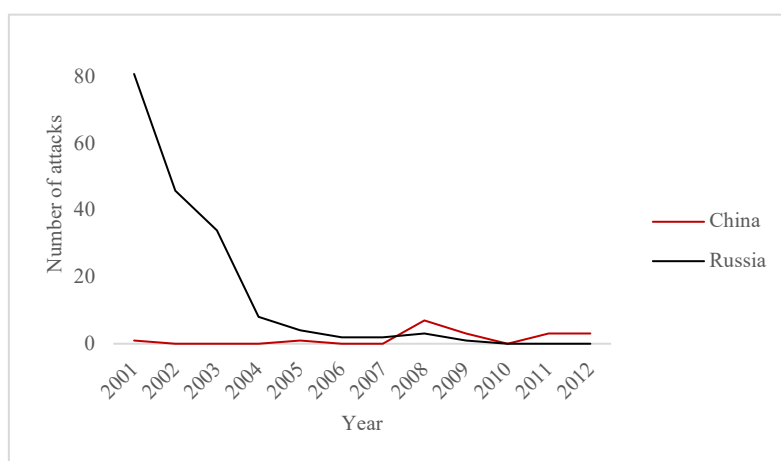
<sup>133</sup> The full text of the joint communiqué (in English) is available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/t165266.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t165266.shtml) (last accessed 17 May 2019).

<sup>134</sup> For a detailed analysis on the development of the IMU's working agenda, see [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/43967/Counter\\_Terr.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/43967/Counter_Terr.pdf) (last accessed 30 April 2019).

Uzbekistan (Clarke 2017). At the same time, the CPC expressed concern over the situation and support to Russia and Uzbekistan on various occasions.<sup>135</sup> Above all, it is interesting to notice an increase in the number of joint exercises in the field of CT within the institutional framework of the SCO that passed from one per year in 2002 to three per year in 2012 (Zhao 2012 and De Haas 2016).

The trend followed by the episodes of political violence and terrorism that were claimed or traced to groups or single attackers that present certain characteristics (that is, secessionist aims, a connection to Islam and a trans-regional character) paint a composite picture of the terrorist threat at the regional level in this period. In particular, the comparison between Russia and China shows particularly interesting data (Figure 14).

Figure 14 Number of Terrorist Attacks in China and Russia (2001-2012)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from the GTD and the digital archives of the SCMP

Between 2001 and 2012, Russia was subject to 181 terrorist attacks. The situation drastically changed in 2004, when the two countries showed a similar evolution until 2010 when the number of terrorist attacks in Russia decreases, while increasing in China. Episodes of political violence and terrorism in Russia unfold following a downward path that presents only one exception: 2008. 2008 is an interesting year for both China and Russia. On the one hand, China in 2008 was preparing a

<sup>135</sup> Among others, see “Medvedev calls on SCO members to strengthen anti-terror cooperation,” Xinhua, 5 December 2012 and “China, Uzbekistan reaffirm further cooperation,” Xinhua General News Service, 13 September 2012.

major international event that had the potential to consecrate the country's admission to the international system – that is, the Summer Olympic Games. At the same time, attacks unfolded in Xinjiang, preparing the ground for what would be later known as the Ürumqi riots of 2009.

On the other hand, Russia in 2008 experienced two potentially disruptive events. First, in March 2008, elections were won by Dmitry Medvedev, who replaced Vladimir Putin as President. Medvedev was a more liberal President than Putin had been (and will later be), whose main aim was to subject the country to a modernization process that implied a substantial law enforcement reform (Kosals 2010).<sup>136</sup> Second, in August, the Russo-Georgian War occurred.<sup>137</sup> The conflict had a strong secessionist basis that ran the risk to destabilize the North Caucasus region, where political contestation against the sovereignty of Russia had been taking place (Cornell 2000).

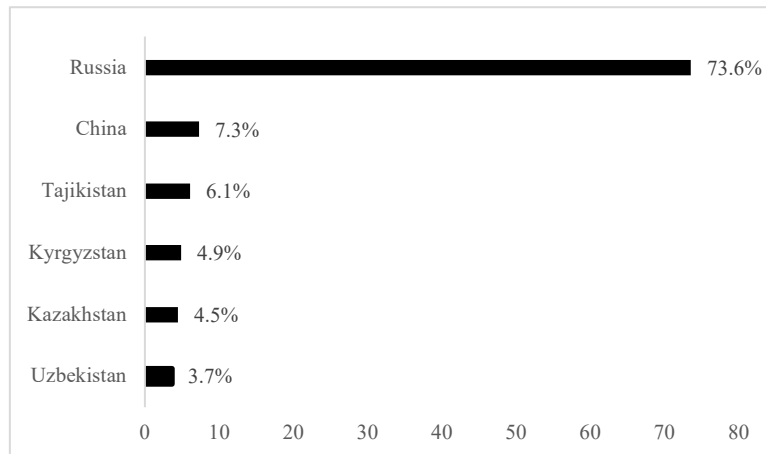
Complicit its territorial extension, Uzbekistan did not experience the same number of terrorist attacks as Russia and China did (figure 15). Nine attacks occurred in Uzbekistan between 2002 and 2012, which concentrated around 2008 and 2009. 2009 marked Uzbekistan's eighteen years of independence from the Soviet Union and President Karimov's speech on the occasion stressed the country's strenuous efforts towards democracy. As Pannier (2010) contends, Karimov's grasp over Uzbekistan was determined by a strong authoritarian ruling. The main form of contestation remains that of Islamic opposition groups, which are the agents that mostly enact violent protests in the country.

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<sup>136</sup> One of the objectives on Medvedev's agenda was a police reform that sought to target the bad reputation police forces had had until then on the Russian population. Until then, Russian police had gone by the Soviet term *militia*: a name that still entailed a connection with the military. The militia had gained a bad reputation due to its reliance on violence. The reform of the police, which until then had played a part in CT, entailed a detachment from the military and a re-distribution of the roles between different law enforcement agencies, thus representing a potential shock for the CT policies in Russia. To expand on the police reform in Russia under Medvedev, see <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/RAD-84.pdf> (last accessed 5 May 2019).

<sup>137</sup> To explore the ethno-political dimension of the Russo-Georgian War, see Cornell, Svante. 2000. *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus*. Richmond: Routledge.

Figure 15 Percentage of Attacks per Country on the Total Number of Attacks in the Region (2001-2012)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from the GTD and the digital archives of the SCMP

The previous section has presented the state of the terrorist threats either emerging from Xinjiang or operating at the regional level but maintaining a significant connection to the Uyghur cause. The picture painted by the longitudinal development of these threats shows decreasing or flat incidences with spikes at particular temporal junctures. For example, China has experienced a slight increase in the number of terrorist attacks in 2008, 2009 and 2011 in conjunction with an international event (i.e., the Olympic Games in Beijing) that had placed China under the spotlight at the international level (figure 13), as it had been in 1997 during Deng Xiaoping's funeral.

### 5.1.2 THE TERRORIST THREAT AS PERCEIVED BY THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

To measure the perception of policymakers with regards to the extent of the terrorist threats in Xinjiang, the number of mentions of terrorism arising from Xinjiang between July 2001 and November 2012 was monitored through the newswires of the Xinhua General News Service. Data were collected from the Lexis Nexis database. The Xinhua News Agency is China's official state-run press agency. It is also a ministry-level institution that is under the management of China's Central government (Shambaugh 2007). The President of Xinhua traditionally is a member of the Central

Committee of the CPC.<sup>138</sup> Given the connection between Xinhua and the Chinese government, Xinhua is a useful platform to detect the perception of China’s policymakers towards a certain issue.

From the collection of articles gathered from the Lexis Nexis database from the source “Xinhua General News Service,”<sup>139</sup> between 2001 and 2012, 253 articles were published on Xinjiang in association with one of the three forms assumed by terrorism according to the CPC (terrorism, separatism, religious extremism).<sup>140</sup> In 2001, a single article covering terrorism in Xinjiang was published, while in 2012, the articles increased to 16. The majority of the articles were published in 2009, when Xinhua released 101 articles. This number is consistent with the coverage of the unfolding of the Ürumqi riots in 2009.

The majority of the articles published on terrorism stresses the opposition between Uyghurs and terrorists by adopting a narrative that targets those characteristics of the Uyghur minority that had been exploited by terrorist groups – i.e., independence and religion. On 21 July 2009, Wu Shimin, head of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission, for instance, explained to Xinhua that

we [the CPC] will continue to meet the reasonable demands of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang and other regions to help them solve problems ... The incident was schemed and fabricated by the “three forces” of extremism, separatism and terrorism both at home and abroad ... None of the clergy in Xinjiang mosques were involved (Wu as reported by Xinhua).<sup>141</sup>

Particular stress is placed by Wu on the type of demands that ethnic minorities present to China’s political leaders, which are identified as “irrational.” Agency is given to the threefold

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<sup>138</sup> The last four Presidents of the Xinhua News Agency also had other positions within the CPC: Guo Chaoren (1996-2000) was a Member of the 15th CPC Central Committee, Tian Congming (2000-2008) was a Member of the 16th CPC Central Committee, Li Conjun (2008-2014) was a Member of the 18th CPC Central Committee and Cai Mingzhao (2014-) is a member of the 19th CPC Central Committee, the Deputy Director of the Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee and the Director of the Central Office for Overseas Publicity and Ideological Work of the Information Office of the State Council. Additional biographical data on the Presidents of Xinhua are available at [http://www.chinavita.com/search/search\\_power.php](http://www.chinavita.com/search/search_power.php) (last accessed 30 May 2019).

<sup>139</sup> Amongst the settings for the search in the Lexis Nexis database, the “high similarity” command was turned on in order to exclude duplicate articles. Subsequently, articles were manually selected to exclude newswires, which would have generated noise to the corpus of documents by providing primers of unrelated articles.

<sup>140</sup> The complete list is available in the Appendix.

<sup>141</sup> To expand on the status and agenda of the National Ethnic Affairs Commission, see <http://www.seac.gov.cn/> (last accessed 31 May 2019).



characterization of terrorism, operating domestically and internationally. It is interesting to notice the classification of religious leaders in Xinjiang as alienated from the violence. Indeed, the theme of religion has still not entered into institutional discourse, while religious leaders have been included into the coverage of the violent events as political figures. On 7 July 2009, Xinhua had already presented the viewpoint of the head of the Islamic Association of China (IAC), Chen Guangyuan, on the 2009 Ürumqi riots.<sup>142</sup> The imam had stated that

from the Islamic point of view, the crimes (of rioters) are very serious and unforgivable ... In a period featuring stability and unification, China is engaged in development and improving the people's livelihood ... It is under these circumstances that these mobs undermined social stability, ethnic unity and the social order (Chen as reported by Qu 2009).

The articles drafted in this period present the image of an open and welcoming CPC that treats terrorists severely but, at the same time, prioritizes the well-being of the Uyghur minority. As it had been after the Conference of Bandung in 1955 where China had taken up the role of champion of third world countries, the CPC proposes itself as the defender of Uyghur interests. References to religion are made only in support of the CPC strive to accommodate the Uyghur community, which is in turn painted as a supporter of the CPC's ruling over the region and a firm enemy of any secessionist claim. Lastly, the PLA and the SCO are presented as providers of security, whose involvement in the region is not only reinforced but also advocated.

In the corpus of articles under analysis, ETIM is the terrorist organization identified as the main responsible for the insecurities emerging from Xinjiang. Three other groups are listed as affiliated to ETIM – that is, the ETLO, the WUYC and the ETIC. Among the articles under analysis, ETIM is mentioned in 29 articles, while ETLO is referred to in 10 articles, the WUYC in 9 and the ETIC in 10. This implies that among the 253 articles under analysis, almost 39 percent points to

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<sup>142</sup> The Islamic Association of China is by self-provided definition a patriotic religious group that connects all Muslim groups in China. Its objective is to “unite and lead Muslims of all nationalities to support the leadership and socialist system of the Communist Party of China, abide by national laws, adhere to the principle of independence and self-management, adhere to the direction of Islam in China, and follow the path of Islam and socialist society” (Official Webpage of the IAC, available at <http://www.chinaislam.net.cn/indexh.html>) (last accessed 31 May 2019).

known perpetrators. 34 articles identify Rebiya Kadeer as the person in charge of the attacks. Terrorism and separatism (also referred to as secessionism by Xinhua) are the two forms of political contestation that are associated with these terrorist groups. The connotation of religious extremism appears only when the whole concept of the “three forces” is explained.

The SCO or forms of bilateral or multilateral cooperation against terrorism are proposed as stabilizing influences in the region, with the Russian operations in Chechnya being cited as a case in point for the reaction of any law-ruled country against violent crimes. On 11 July 2009, Xinhua published a commentary on political violence and the responses of states that present the Russian, Spanish and American responses to political opposition as a justification for China’s reliance on the armed forces in handling the Ürumqi riots. Russia was cited first, and it was stated that “the government struck hard against the Chechen separatists who had been rampant in the 1990s and committed the shocking Beslan school massacre in 2004 that claimed over 300 lives. The Russian government took resolute actions to protect territorial integrity and social order” (Xinhua 2009). Chechnya is nominated throughout the articles either by focusing on Russian CT policy in the region or the connection between the transnational groups of Xinjiang and Chechnya.

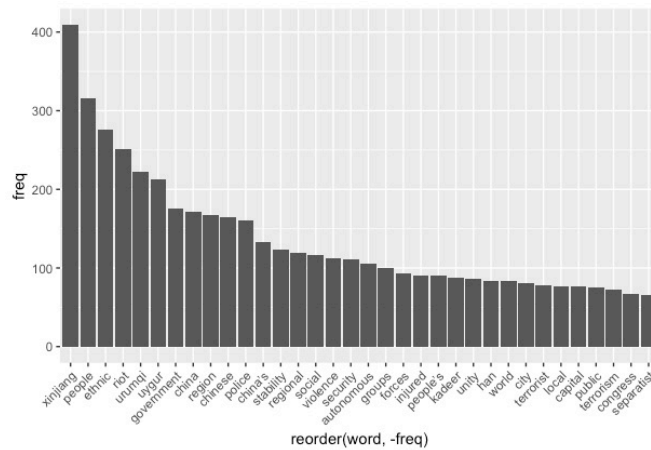
The news coverage of Xinhua offers a basis for the analysis of how the terrorist threat in Xinjiang is perceived throughout this period. A key moment in this sense has proved to be the Ürumqi riots in 2009, as the 101 articles provide a first idea of the type of perception the threat was granted by China’s political leadership. Indeed, 9 of 34 of the most frequently-used words in the articles make reference to one of the two main clusters – that is, the episodes were understood into two clusters, one pointing to an application of Xinjiang as a highly conflictual issue needing to be asserted in terms of hard power (i.e., *government, police, stability, security, unity, han, terrorist, terrorism, separatist*).<sup>143</sup> On the other, 2 out of 34 terms refer to “Rebiya Kadeer” and the “World Uyghur

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<sup>143</sup> With the term “most-frequently used,” I refer to terms that have been employed more than 65 times within the corpus of texts. Frequency was extrapolated by means of the Quantitative Analysis of Textual Data package (quanteda) of the R software. Before calculating frequency, the corpus of texts was mined.

Congress” (i.e., *Kadeer, Congress*), thus once again pointing to external forces as the main responsible for the mobilization against the CPC (figure 16).

Figure 16 Most-Frequent Words Used by Xinhua in the 2009 Articles on Terrorism in Xinjiang



Source: Author's elaboration of data from Xinhua

From the articles from Xinhua emerges the tendency of China's media to report on terrorist attacks in Xinjiang as externally-driven events requiring hard power responses. Another indicator of the perception of the Chinese elite on the terrorist threat in Xinjiang is an adaptation of the operational code of the members of Hu's Standing Committees of the Politburo that are in charge of groups focusing on internal security, ideology and propaganda and legislative affairs. Moreover, Hu, as the President of the country, as well as Wen, with whom Hu retained an extremely closed relation.

As it had been for Jiang, the framework of the operational code was re-adapted as a way to determine whether the attitude towards the threats emerging for Xinjiang retained a conflictual or cooperative imprint, consistently with the re-elaboration of the operational code. The operational code has already been employed in relation to analysis of terrorism policy-choices as contended by Dyson and Parent (2018).

To maintain the focus on the issue of terrorism, I selected three sources extrapolated from the collection of Hu Jintao's speeches published by the Foreign Languages' Press in the sections that specifically treat the Party's stance on terrorism and political instability, the remarks released to the

Party's official press of members of the PBSCs in charge of the above-mentioned leading groups (i.e., Hu, Wen, Wu Bangguo, Li Changchun, Luo Gan and Zhou Yongkang) and the White Papers published by the CPC specifically on Xinjiang, security and terrorism. By adopting the framework of the operational code, a broader evaluation of the perceptions of the PBSCs under Hu over the terrorist threat in Xinjiang is made possible.

Table 13 The Operational Code of the Party Officials Involved in Security and CT Policy (2001-2012)

		Belief values
<b>Philosophical Beliefs</b>		
P-1	Nature of the Political Universe From +1.0 (friendly) to -1.0 (hostile)	-0,0263
<b>Instrumental Beliefs</b>		
I-2	Pursuit of Goals From +1.0 (high cooperation) to -1.0 (high conflict)	-0,0833
		$\mu(P-1;I-2)$ -0,01 (Conflictual)

Source: Author's elaboration of data from Hu Jintao's speeches, Xinhua General News Service and White Papers

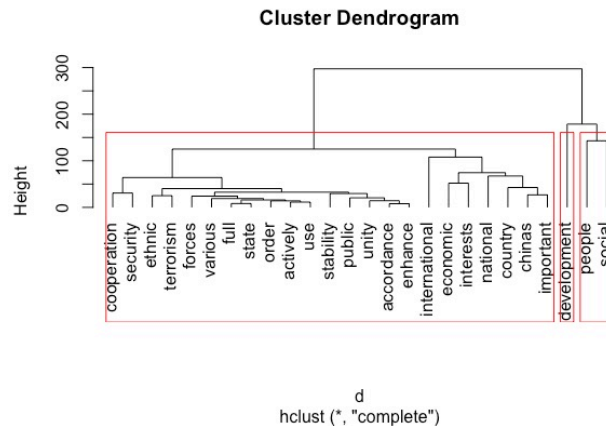
As it was for Jiang Zemin, the first indicator offers us with an idea of the image that the leadership has of the other, in this case the terrorist threat from Xinjiang. In this scenario, we see that the results are fairly low, thus pointing to the perception of a scenario that is rather hostile. The second indicator (I-2) shows that the goals of the PBSCs are pursued by means of tactics that are leaning towards conflict. This result is indeed consistent with the qualitative work on the policies employed by the CPC in this timeframe, as they point to the idea that a crackdown on terrorists should be adopted, while a strategy for the development of the region should also be devised (table 13).

On the same corpus of data, a cluster dendrogram was built in order to illustrate the hierarchical organization of the clusters that compose the PBSCs approach to the terrorist threat in Xinjiang (figure 17).<sup>144</sup> The dendrogram is particularly useful to highlight the two main clusters that determine the discourse of the PBSCs in texts and speeches on Xinjiang and internal stability. As figure 17 shows, the narrative on Xinjiang and terrorism can be traced back to two particular clusters:

<sup>144</sup> The dendrogram was built by means of the *quanteda* package from the R software.

one that is more concerned with security and stability and the other on development. It is once again evidenced the dual approach that Hu proposed for the region.

Figure 17 Visual Representation of the Two Main Discursive Clusters in the Corpus of Data (2009)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from Hu Jintao's speeches, Xinhua General News Service and White Papers

The stress for development indeed is unsurprising given that Hu Jintao's main ideology for China's internal affairs can be summarized in the policy of "Harmonious Society."<sup>145</sup> The concept dates back to Confucianism, thus offering a basis for the legitimacy of Hu's policy. In modern times, it developed into a key feature of President Hu Jintao's signature ideology of the "Scientific Development Concept" developed in the mid-2000s, being re-introduced by the Hu–Wen administration during the 2005 National People's Congress. The philosophy is recognized as a response to the increasing social injustice and inequality emerging in mainland Chinese society as a result of unchecked economic growth, which has led to social conflict. The governing philosophy was therefore shifted around economic growth to overall societal balance and harmony. Along with a moderately prosperous society, it was set to be one of the national goals for the ruling vanguard Communist Party.

In conclusion, the empirical data pointed to a decreasing of the terrorist threat emerging from Xinjiang that, apart from spikes in 2008, 2009 and 2011, corresponding to particular events, did not

<sup>145</sup> In Chinese, 和谐社会 (Héxié shèhuì). For a comprehensive overview of the socio-economic characteristics of the "harmonious society" term, see Zheng and Tok (2007).

originate a steady rise in the threat in Xinjiang. At the same time, the perception of the terrorist threat from the part of the CPC in the bodies of those members of the leadership in charge of specifically related working groups throughout the period showed that the ruling elite in China, despite the exceptionality of the 2008, 2009 and 2011 terrorist events, perceived the threat coming from the region as rather conflictual. In fact, most of the news coverage on Xinjiang makes reference to the 2009 events. Amongst the coverage of those event, the most-frequently used terms either point to the work of the armed forces as providers of security and stability or to the negative identification of external actors as the main responsible for the attacks. Moreover, the operational code on speeches, press statements and texts referring to Hu and members of his PBSCs presenting the work of the three forces in Xinjiang points to an image of the threat as bordering hostility, while the intensity of the tactics to be employed shows a rather conflictual attitude, thus being inconsistent with the result of the empirical data. As the data indeed point to a low level of threat and the perception points to a rather conflictual framework, I consider the levels of terrorist threat from Xinjiang as medium from 2001 to 2012.

## **5.2 CHINA'S AUTHORITARIAN PREFERENCES**

This section investigates the form of authoritarianism adopted by China's political elite in the period under analysis. Studies on authoritarianism distinguish between hard and soft authoritarian regimes in accordance with several factors. In the case of China, three elements are investigated as discriminating the country's form of authoritarianism under Hu Jintao: the level of civil liberties in the country, the strive towards reform and the individual dominance of the General Secretary over the PBs.

### **5.2.1 WHAT AUTHORITARIANISM? CIVIL LIBERTIES AND REFORM UNDER HU**

After Mao, China's political system was labelled as "resilient authoritarianism" (Nathan 2003; Brødsgaard and Zheng 2006). The term makes reference to the ability of the country's single party to

adapt institutions and adjust policies to maintain the power to govern (Li 2012; Nathan 2003; Miller 2008).

Under the leadership of Hu Jintao, authoritarianism in China was exemplified by the policy of the “five nos” presented by Wu Bangguo to the NPC in 2011.<sup>146</sup> This policy stresses the centrality of the CPC as the sole provider of security and development to the country and supported the narrative on China’s incompatibility with other political systems. Since Deng Xiaoping, the country’s governance had been driven by two forces. First, economic reform had replaced Soviet-style development and selected Western market principles had been included in economic policies.<sup>147</sup>

Second, priority had been given to devising an effective strategy to counter political instabilities, as the country was aiming to compete globally as an economic power. To this end, China needed to achieve high levels of political stability, so as to rely on a strong basis to equalize growth levels between its coastal and internal regions. Yet, economic reform and development programmes were not complemented with comprehensive political reforms. After all, despite Hu’s strive underscored the adaptability of the country’s economic institutions, failure to carry out similar reforms in the political realm highlighted the atrophy of China’s political institutions. Indeed, political reformers had been targets of state restriction throughout the country’s modern history: from campaigns against the Falun Gong religious group under Jiang to those against secessionism under Hu. In this period, economic reform was also partly aimed to target political instabilities, as it focused on economic disparities between China’s rich coastal regions and less-developed Western areas. Hu, in fact, believed that these differences, which were caused by a lack of consideration for these regions in past reform waves, were at the core of political instabilities. Economic and political goals are

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<sup>146</sup> The policy of the “five nos” for China was presented by Wu Bangguo at the 11th National People’s Congress in 2011. In brief, it lists the five characteristics that would undermine the soundness of China’s political system: multiple party system, pluralism in ideology, checks and balances in power (or parliamentary bicameralism), federal system and privatization. The full text of the report on the 11th National People’s Congress is available at <https://china.usc.edu/wu-bangguo-2011-report-work-national-people%E2%80%99s-congress-march-10-2011> (last accessed on 17 May 2019).

<sup>147</sup> While Deng contended that the country was in need of a reform rooted in economic privatization, in the theory of the Three Represents, Jiang recruited entrepreneurs and socio-economic actors into the CPC. Hu, in contrast, emphasized the need for the country to solve the economic disparities emerged from previous economic reforms. To expand on the economic reforms in Communist China, see Garnaut, Song and Fang (2018).

therefore usually presented together in Hu's policies. This connection, though, obstructed China's pathway towards a semi-democratic regime, as the country, on the one hand, reformed the economy and opened to global markets but, on the other, did not fully move towards democratic values in the political domain.<sup>148</sup> The Polity 5 by the Center for Systemic Peace, in fact, places China among autocracies throughout Hu's leadership, scoring -7, the same value China had acquired under Jiang.

The dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991 played an important part in helping the CPC maintain political stability. Indeed, because the Party had dedicated several research funds to studying the causes of the Soviet fall, the CPC was able to "reform and rebuild itself institutionally" (2008, 8) by trying out economic reforms at the local level and extending them at the national level only when successful, so as to prevent the same shocks that afflicted the Soviet Union. By examining the Soviet example, China also included the private sector in the five-year-plan system, which had experienced a surge of appreciation under Hu. The Eleventh (2006-2010) and Twelfth Five-Year Plans (2011-2016), in fact, deeply influenced the country's socio-economy. The Eleventh Plan, in particular, comprised a clause specifically referring to the development of ethnic areas, while the Twelfth Plan expanded the agenda to the country's rural and internal regions. In addition, both plans aimed to accelerate Deng's 1978 reform and opening up.

Although a strive towards reform is generally indicative of a "relaxation" phase in authoritarian regimes, one of the main discriminants between "relaxation" and "tightening" remains crackdowns on political opposition. Hard authoritarianism reflects a certain degree of insecurity since "confident regimes do not need to repress, they do not need to crack down" (Shambaugh 2018).<sup>149</sup> Under Hu, this insecurity externalized during the the 2008 Lhasa and 2009 Ürumqi riots, when the number of arrests for crimes related to political and civil liberties spiked (Figure 18). Data from the political prisoners database of the US CECC also indicate that the number of arrests for crimes related

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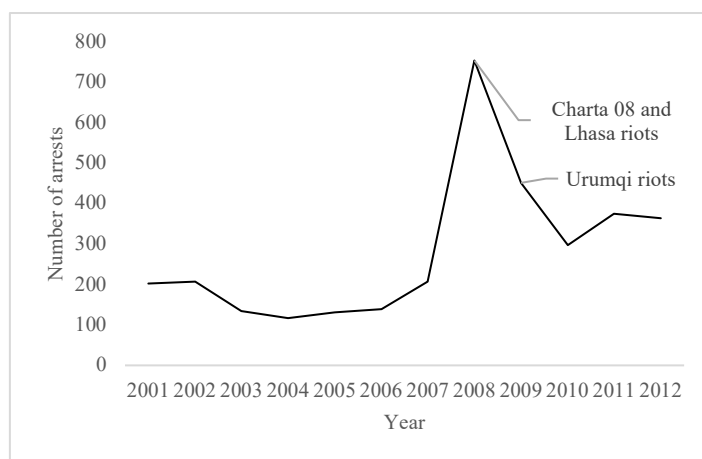
<sup>148</sup> According to Perlmutter (1981), hybrid regimes combine certain characteristics of democracies with those of autocracies. Despite opening towards market reforms, China never fully displayed elements that are distinctively democratic, such as, for instance, presidential elections.

<sup>149</sup> Shambaugh, David. 2018. Need to Know: China's Future with Professor David Shambaugh. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdOjoqd6kNk>.



to political and civil liberties peaked throughout 2008 due to the release of Charta 08 and the Lhasa riots.<sup>150 151</sup> The Charta 08 manifesto alone resulted in the arrest of many of its 303 signatories, including Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo.<sup>152</sup> The number of arrests after 2008 and 2009 gradually lowered. Still, even though the 2008 Lhasa and 2009 Ürumqi riots influenced leadership responses, reform remained crucial under Hu.

Figure 18 Number of Arrests Related to Political Rights and Civil Liberties per Year (2001-2012)



Source: Author’s elaboration of data from the database on political prisoners of the US CECC

On the one hand, these two episodes supported Hu’s argument that the disparity between China’s coastal and internal regions should be addressed in order to avoid instabilities and put forward radical reforms. Data from the World Bank show that in 2008 China’s percentage of urban population over its total amounted at 46.5 percent, while four years later in 2012, it increased to 51.7 percent, thus indicating either urbanization or internal migration. Indeed, China’s floating population increased of 15 million people between 2010 and 2012, according to data from China’s 2017 National Bureau of Statistics.<sup>153</sup> The country’s strive to address inequalities is also shown by China’s GINI

<sup>150</sup> Data from the database are publicly available at <https://www.cecc.gov/resources/political-prisoner-database>

<sup>151</sup> The arrests taken into account in this study were the ones related to freedom of association, democracy, ethnic issues, Falun Gong, labor rights, religious freedom and freedom of speech.

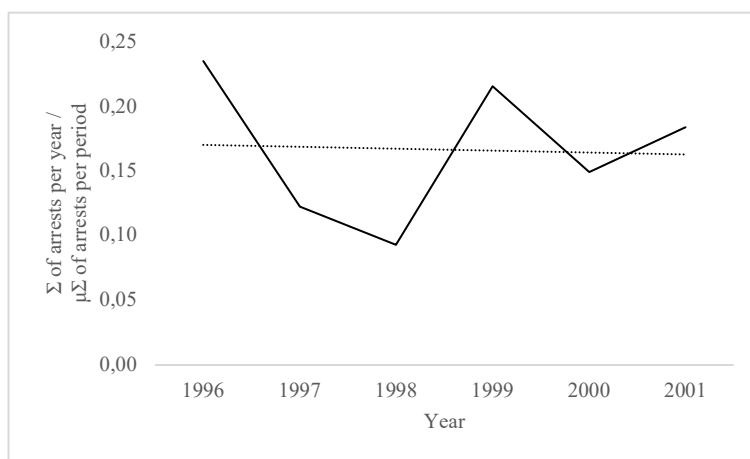
<sup>152</sup> The Charta 08 is a manifesto initially signed by 303 Chinese dissident intellectuals and human rights activists. It was published on 10 December 2008, the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopting name and style from the anti-Soviet Charter 77 issued by dissidents in Czechoslovakia. For the full text, see <https://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/charter-08-chinese-and-english-text>

<sup>153</sup> The term “floating population” indicates people who reside in a given population for a certain amount of time and for various reasons, but are not generally considered part of the official census count. See Liang, Zai, and Zhongdong

index, which in 2008 scored 42.9 and in 2012 lowered to 42.2.<sup>154</sup> Data from the World Bank show that the index started to decline in 2010 and reached the lowest score in 2015.

On the other hand, 2008 marked the beginning of the global financial and economic crisis. At the time, China increased its international status, becoming one of the few economies in the world capable of responding successfully to instabilities. At this juncture, any closure towards economic reforms would prove negative to China's economy. Indeed, Hu employed measures that were considered "mercantilist" by several international partners, such as the devaluation of the national currency and restrictions on exports and access to foreign markets. By doing so, between 2009 and 2012, China's GDP grew annually of about 9.17 percent on average.

Figure 19 Tendency Line of the Means Scores of the Number of Arrests under Jiang Zemin



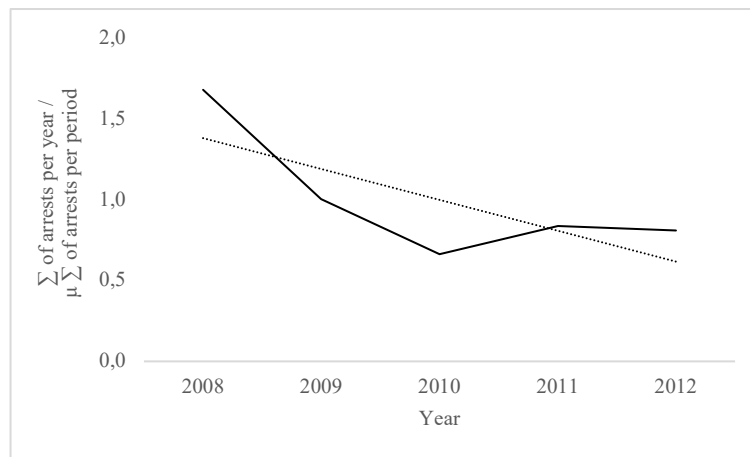
Source: Author's elaboration of data from the database on political prisoners of the US CECC

Despite the 2008 and 2009 flow of arrests, the mean scores for the number of arrests in the whole period (measured by dividing the total number of arrests per year with the mean score of the total number of arrests for all the years under analysis) show that the tendency line for the arrests under Hu decreased (Figure 20), while it had remained stable under Jiang (Figure 19).

Ma. 2004. 'China's Floating Population: New Evidence from the 2000 Census'. *Population and Development Review* 30 (3): 467-88.

<sup>154</sup> The Gini index is a simple measure of the distribution of income across income percentiles in a population. A higher Gini index indicates greater inequality, with high income individuals receiving much larger percentages of the total income of the population. For a working definition, see the one presented by the World Bank, available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/si.pov.gini>

Figure 20 Tendency Line of the Means Scores of the Number of Arrests under Hu Jintao



Source: Author's elaboration of data from the database on political prisoners of the US CECC

As a “relaxation” phase is usually identified by reform and a “tightening” phase by resistance to change and political crackdown, aggregate data offer useful comparisons. For instance, Freedom House’s GFS for China between 2002 and 2012 displays a growing tendency, despite minor oscillations in 2003, 2008 and 2011. A similar trend emerges from civil liberties’ scores, while political rights follow a flat tendency. Data from Freedom House thus indicate a general growing level of freedom in China under Hu, although scores for political rights do not register significant fluctuations. These results are consistent with the country’s strive towards reform, which points to an overall “relaxation” of the country’s governance, while political opposition remained strictly controlled and punished. In addition to aggregate data from Freedom House, the BTI from Bertelsmann Stiftung also gives an idea of the processes of political and economic change<sup>155</sup>. The index indicates that, between 2001 and 2012, China experienced “very limited change,” an assessment that is consistent with data from Polity 5, which also does not indicate any major variation in the country’s political spectrum but maintains a -7 score. Indeed, between 2008 and 2009, a sensitive time for China, due to the Lhasa and Ürumqi riots and Charta 08, China’s BTI scored 4.7 out of 10. Four years later, in 2012, it scored 4.94. In the political domain, China’s BTI showed a

<sup>155</sup> For a discussion on the methodology and validity of the index, see Stiftung, Bertelsmann. 2012. Transformation Index BTI 2012: Political Management in International Comparison. Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung.

0.17 point increase between 2009 and 2012, passing from 3.15 to 3.32. Lastly, data from V-DEM's Electoral Democratic Index (EDI) can be employed to triangulate China's autocracy. Although under Hu, China continued to score as an autocracy, as it had been under Jiang, increasing/decreasing trends in EDI scores point to relaxations/tightenings in the country's political system and can thus specify on China's authoritarian tendency. Under Hu, EDI scores steadily increased between 2003 and 2007 and then again between 2009 and 2010. Indeed, it is in 2007 that the EDI hit the highest score in this period (0.104). Conversely, major decreases are registered in 2008, when the EDI hits the lowest score in the entire period (0.095), and then again in 2011 (0.097). The tendency for EDI scores under Hu remains rather flat, although it is between 2003 and 2007 that scores register the longest and most stable increase in the entire period under analysis (1996-2017).

Variations in EDI scores corroborate previous findings. Indeed, together with aggregate data from the GFS, the BTI and the data on arrests from the US CECC, EDI scores indicate 2008-2009 as an extremely sensitive period for the country's leadership, who strengthened control over political rights and civil liberties. Yet, data also show that this period did not signal a general tightening of the country's authoritarianism, as relaxations were detected before and after 2008-2009 as well as in Hu's strive towards reform. Such characteristics thus distinguish a soft authoritarian leadership. Yet, the country's approach towards governance remains highly sensitive to the composition of its decision making institutions, in particular at times of political transitions that occur outside normative tradition (Nathan 2003).

### **5.2.2 INDIVIDUAL DOMINANCE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY OVER THE 16TH AND 17TH PBS**

As the literature on authoritarianism contends, the most dangerous moments for authoritarian leaders are transitions as it is in those moments that attempted *coups* or violent purges can emerge (Nathan 2003). The stability of political institutions at times of transition has a ripple effect on the form of authoritarianism upheld in the country. Peaceful transitions do not put forward instabilities that require old or new leaders to adopt more stringent forms of authoritarian power either to maintain or

build the legitimacy to rule. Peaceful transitions indeed are guaranteed by a series of factors. Above all is the credibility of the new leader to ensure payoffs to those that support his leadership.

Between July 2001 and November 2012, China was governed by a new generation of Communist leaders, as Jiang Zemin's two mandates expired and the position of General Secretary of the PCC was assumed by Hu Jintao. According to Cheng Li (2013), China's modern PBs are characterized by two main groups, one including elitists such as Jiang Zemin and Xi Jinping and another that supports more populist ideas such as Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. The key difference in the ideologies upheld by these two groups is the conceptualization and extent of economic development: while the former understands economic development as an objective to be achieved as quickly and effectively as possible, the latter understands it in a more comprehensive manner that had to include society as much as possible, solving regional and class imbalances.

Changes in leadership are not limited to the General Secretary, but they extend to the composition of the PB. After every mandate, changes in the composition of the PB (even if the General Secretary remains in charge) can create instabilities and, as a consequence, ensure that a more stringent form of authoritarianism is adopted by the leader and his supporters.

Between 2002 and 2012, China was governed by the 16th and 17th PBs. The first was established in 2002 and concluded work in 2007, while the second terminated the mandate in 2012. Both were led by General Secretary Hu Jintao, who had previously served as Jiang Zemin's number six and successor in the 15th PB (1997-2002). In contrast with Jiang's PBs, the number of seats in the PBSC was increased to nine. The two additional seats were filled by Hua Ju and Jia Qingling, who had been promoted under Jiang because of their personal relations with the General Secretary. The fact that two of Jiang's associates entered the highest ranks of the PB at this time need particular consideration as they might have signalled Jiang's lingering influence over decision making processes and Hu's lack of the full control over the PB. As a consequence, the power transition might not have been completely peaceful as it had been when Jiang came to power as he had come to terms with the lingering presence of Deng in political life. Following the example of his predecessor, Jiang retained

the chairmanship of the CMC for two years after 2002 and his ideological contribution to the CPC, the “Three Represents,” was included in the Constitution of the Communist Party at the same time as Hu’s nomination as China’s General Secretary.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, Hu worked with two PBs that were still very supportive of Jiang. For instance, the 16th PB only counted six supporters to the General Secretary and little increase detected was in the 17th, where Hu could only count on eight supporters (Table 14 and 15).

If compared to others, Hu’s leadership is distinctive because of the connection between Hu and Wen Jiabao. The Hu-Wen relation affected decision making and policy implementation under both Hu-led PBs. In a sense, Wen’s liberal upbringing had the potential to hinder Hu’s grasp over political power. Wen in fact was “open to criticism on issues of governance being raised in China” (Duchâtel and Godement 2009, 5). Given the peculiarities surrounding the figure of Wen, expectations were for Hu to abandon him at the first move in the wrong direction. Yet, the relation endured, as it fostered the division of labour Hu had enacted within the PB as well as the open dialogue between different policy areas Hu sought to achieve. In a sense, thanks to Hu’s reform, policy making became more collegial, although it also “weakened” the position of the General Secretary, who assumed the role more of a coordinator than of *super partes* authority, as it had been under Mao, Deng or Jiang. Nonetheless, by doing so, shortly after coming into power, Hu retained the full control of the PB, something that was eventually signalled by Jiang’s leaving the chairmanship of the CMC in 2004 and Hu’s gaining of his seat.

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<sup>156</sup> For a discussion on the elements that compose the “Three Represents,” see Fewsmith (2003).

Table 14 Members of the 16th Politburo

16th Politburo					
<i>Institution</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Education (University level)</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>Relation with Hu</i>	<i>Additional info</i>
Politburo Standing Committee	Hu Jintao	Qinghua University	Tuanpai	Himself	-
	Wu Bangguo	Qinghua University	Shanghai	Conflicting	Conflicting faction
	Wen Jiabao	China University of Geosciences	Tuanpai	Supportive	Zhu Rongji's patronage
	Jia Qinglin	Hebei University of Technology	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Zeng Qinghong	Beijing Institute of Technology	Princelings	Conflicting	Son of Zeng Shan
	Huang Ju	Qinghua University	Shanghai	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Wu Guanzheng	Qinghua University	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Li Changchun	Harbin Institute of Technology	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Luo Gan	Karl Marx University Technische Universität Bergakademie Freiberg	-	Supportive	Li Peng's patronage
Politburo	Wang Lequan	Central Party School	Tuanpai	Supportive	Hu's patronage
	Wang Zhaoguo	Harbin Institute of Technology	Tuanpai	Supportive	Member of the Communist Youth League
	Hui Liangyu	Jilin Provincial Party School	-	-	-
	Liu Qi	University of Science and Technology	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Liu Yunshan	Jining Teacher's College	-	Supportive	-
	Wu Yi	China University of Petroleum	Tuanpai	Supportive	Zhu Rongji's patronage
	Zhang Lichang	Beijing Economic Correspondence University	-	-	-
	Zhang Dejiang	Kim Il-Sung University, Yanbian University	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Chen Liangyu	Tongji University, PLA Military Service Academy, University of Birmingham	Shanghai	Conflicting	Conflicting faction
	Zhou Yongkang	China University of Petroleum	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	He Guoqiang	Beijing University of Chemical Technology	-	Conflicting	Zeng's patronage
	Guo Boxiong	PLA Military Academy, PLA National Defense University	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Cao Gangchuan	Military Engineering School of the Artillery Corps of the Soviet Union	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Zeng Peiyan	Qinghua University	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Alternate	Wang Gang	Jilin University	-	Conflicting

Sources: Author's elaboration of data from *China Vitae*; Mackerras, Mc Millen, Watson (1998); Leung (2002); Sullivan (2016)

Table 15 Members of the 17th Politburo

<b>17th Politburo</b>					
<i>Institution</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Education (University level)</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>Relation with Hu</i>	<i>Additional info</i>
Politburo Standing Committee	Hu Jintao	Qinghua University	Tuanpai	Himself	-
	Wu Bangguo	Qinghua University	Shanghai	Conflicting	Conflicting faction
	Wen Jiabao	China University of Geosciences	Tuanpai	Supportive	Zhu Rongji's patronage
	Jia Qinglin	Hebei University of Technology	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Xi Jinping	Qinghua University	Princelings	Conflicting	Son of Xi Zhongxun
	Li Keqiang	Peking University	Tuanpai	Supportive	Hu's patronage
	He Guoqiang	Beijing University of Chemical Technology	-	Conflicting	Zeng's patronage
	Li Changchun	Harbin Institute of Technology	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Zhou Yongkang	China University of Petroleum	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
Politburo Alternate	Wang Gang	Jilin University	-	Conflicting	Zeng's patronage
	Wang Lequan	Central Party School	Tuanpai	Supportive	Hu's patronage
	Wang Zhaoguo	Harbin Institute of Technology	Tuanpai	Supportive	Member of the CYL
	Wang Qishan	Northwest University	Princelings	Conflicting	Xi's patronage
	Hui Liangyu	Jilin Provincial Party School	-	-	-
	Liu Qi	University of Science and Technology	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Liu Yunshan	Jining Teacher's College	-	Supportive	-
	Liu Yandong	Qinghua University	Tuanpai	Supportive	Member of the CYL
	Li Yuanchao	East China Normal University Fudan University Peking University Central Party School	Tuanpai	Supportive	Member of the CYL
	Wang Yang	Central Party School University of Science and Technology	Tuanpai	Supportive	Member of the CYL
	Zhang Gaoli	Xiamen University	-	-	Jiang's patronage and Hu's appreciation
	Zhang Dejiang	Kim Il-Sung University Yanbian University	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Yu Zhengsheng	Harbin Military Engineering Institute	Princelings	Conflicting	Son of Huang Jing
	Xu Caihou	Harbin Military Engineering Institute	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Guo Boxiong	PLA National Defense University	-	Conflicting	Jiang's patronage
	Bo Xilai	Peking University	Princelings	Conflicting	Son of Bo Yibo

Sources: Author's elaboration of data from *China Vitae*; Mackerras, Mc Millen, Watson (1998); Leung (2002); Sullivan (2016)



Moreover, after 2004, certain decisions corroborated the idea that Jiang no longer was actively contributing to policymaking. First, Hu changed the core character of Jiang's elitist theory of the "Three Represents" and gradually turned it into a policy that also comprised Hu's populist ideals. In particular, as Hu had a strong connection to the CYL, he gave the agency of the Three Represents to it instead of the CPC. Hu thus managed to charge Jiang's ideology with elements of his own political thought. Second, Hu proposed a series of initiatives that dismantled the idea of "high-speed economic growth" which was one of the strongholds of Jiang's governing style in favour of a regional perspective that proposed a balanced development throughout society. Third, Hu maintained the nine-seats conformation of the PBSC even after Jiang's associates left in 2007. This decision highlights that the enlargement of the members of the PBSCs mainly sought to improve decision-making rather than feeding into factional politics. Indeed, Hu established that each member would be in charge of a specific policy area and preside over the related Leading Small Group (LSG) of the Central Committee. For instance, as Hu was in charge of the policy areas related to foreign relations and military affairs, he presided over the LSGs devoted to "Foreign Affairs" and "Taiwan Affairs." Conversely, Wen Jiabao was in charge of government administration, thus presiding over the LSG on "Finance and Economy." This highly-structured division of labour *de facto* enhanced the country's policymaking, as it resulted in the PB serving as the body responsible for making decisions and supervising and coordinating over the implementation of the same decisions. It was under Hu that the PBSC came to maintain a firm grasp over all policy areas, thus becoming what Sebastian Heillman and Matthias Stepan (2016) would later define as "the party's nerve centre."<sup>157</sup> Still, the increased number of seats in the PBSC and the division of labour enacted by Hu did not only enhance his control over policymaking but also on the PB as a whole as this division of labour enabled Hu to maintain better control on the work of the PB and its members. At the same time, highly structured PBs

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<sup>157</sup> The rationale behind Heillman and Stepan's adoption of this expression is available at [https://www.merics.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/MPOC\\_ChinasCoreExecutive\\_web.pdf](https://www.merics.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/MPOC_ChinasCoreExecutive_web.pdf)

assigned increased responsibilities and status to members, enhancing Hu's credibility to offer payoffs in return for support.

Hu was aware of the fact that Jiang had also struggled to retain the full control of the PB. Eventually, three elements had allowed Jiang to find the legitimacy he needed to rule over the country. First, he had continued Deng's transformation of the princelings system into a more technocratic model overseen by engineers. Under Hu, a wider variety of backgrounds composed PB, thus it was also the technocratic system to be diversified. Consider, for instance, the membership of lawyers, entrepreneurs and returnees from foreign universities.<sup>158</sup> For instance, Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang held a doctoral degree in non-technical subjects – that is, law and economics respectively. Second, Jiang could not count on the same high levels of charisma of his predecessors. Hu, in contrast, was considered a moral heir to Deng, thus benefiting from his experience. Moreover, the connection between Hu and Wen allowed the two leaders to present a tighter front against contrasting members. Third, the link between Hu and the CYL paralleled his levels of support to those enjoyed by the League, which, in this period, had increased in popularity. Lastly, Jiang Zemin had found a strong ally in the military. The link between Jiang and the People's Armed Police is well-known as much as it was long considered Jiang's own paramilitary force. Although it began with difficulty, Jiang's grasp over the armed forces continued after his stepping down from the presidency, given that Jiang retained the chairmanship of the CMC. The connection between the General Secretary and the the army was a destabilizing force for the PB as a whole as it had been so strong under Mao to enable a concentration of power that resembled totalitarianism<sup>159</sup>. Hu therefore maintained a different relation with the military, and the presence of members of the armed forces decreased dramatically from political institutions. While the number of members of the military amounted to two in the PB, there were none in the PBSCs. The diminishing role of the armed forces in the highest ranks of Hu's

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<sup>158</sup> In Chinese, 海归派 (Hǎiguī pài).

<sup>159</sup> See Tsou, Tang. 1986. *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms: A Historical Perspective*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press and Guo, Sujian. 2000. *Post-Mao China: From Totalitarianism to Authoritarianism?* Westport: Praeger Pub Text.

government is not exclusive of the presidency of Hu Jintao, but it is a tendency that has continued from the Deng's era.

It is thanks to the combined effects of these factors that Hu managed to ensure that the leadership transitions within the PBs in 2002 and in 2007 enjoyed high levels of stability as much as no increased levels of assertiveness were required to maintain his grasp over top political institutions. In fact, stability in the most delicate phases of power transition in the PBs, the strive for reform, and levels of civil liberties contributed to building a political elite that followed a more structured and monitored process of policing, thus relying on a form of soft authoritarianism. Even after episodes of political violence repeatedly shook the country, the elite adopted hard power as a response, but did not immediately changed its attitude towards "opening and reform," starting a transition towards a more restrictive form of authoritarianism only after Xi Jinping got a hold of the PB.

### **5.3 CHINA'S REGIONAL COOPERATION IN CT**

This section analyses the levels of international cooperation in the field of CT experienced by China in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The agenda of the SCO in the field of CT is compared against the objectives that China and the other main partner in the institution (Russia) supported in this period for the institutionalization of the SCO. While China envisioned the organization as a bridge to the energy resources of Central Asia and a driver to enhanced economic cooperation, Russia interpreted the SCO as an alternative to Western-led organizations and a means to maintain the high levels of peace and security that the region had been enjoying. These were the country's priority for coming to terms with its post-Soviet status. Despite a decade had already passed, Russia was still adjusting and feared that a lack of support from the post-Soviet Republics of Central Asia that would undermine its status in the entire region. As a consequence, although China was also looking for the maintenance of regional stability through the SCO, the objectives of peace and security were most prominent from Russia's perspective. By establishing the role China played within the SCO in this

period, it is possible to determine which state proposed the norms of the SCO's key domain of policing (CT), and which state internalized and transferred these norms in its domestic policies.

### **5.3.1 THE AGENDA OF THE SCO BETWEEN 2001 AND 2012**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was established in 2001 on the basis of the Shanghai Five. In addition to the member states of the Shanghai Five, the organization included Uzbekistan as a full member. Between 2001 and 2012, the SCO encompassed four observer members (India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan) and dialogue partners (Afghanistan, Belarus, Sri Lanka and Turkey). In 2012, the aggregated GDPs of the SCO members states equalled roughly 14 percent of the world's GDP with China and Russia at the forefront.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, the aggregated military expenditure of SCO member states also equalled 14 percent of the global military expenditure for the same year<sup>161</sup>.

The working agenda of the organization evolved over time, focusing on forms of non-traditional security, such as terrorism, trans-border organized crime, and weapons and drug-trafficking. While the Shanghai Five aimed to settle border disputes and demilitarized border areas, the SCO mainly operated in the realm of CT with one of the latest applications shifting towards cybersecurity.

In this period, the organization adopted three documents on terrorism and CT, which presented the exchange of information between SCO member states as the key aim of regional cooperation in these fields.<sup>162</sup><sup>163</sup> This aim is also the founding principle of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) – that is, one of the two permanent bodies of the SCO established in 2004 and hosted by Uzbekistan in the city of Tashkent.<sup>164</sup> The RATS is also a tell-tale sign of the direction the agenda of the SCO had been taking as the RATS was the first concrete application of the regionalization efforts

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<sup>160</sup> Data from the World Bank. At current prices, million dollars.

<sup>161</sup> Data from SIPRI estimates. At current prices, million dollars. No data available for Uzbekistan.

<sup>162</sup> The documents are the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism (2001), the Agreement on Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure between the Member States of the SCO (2002) and the Convention of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization against Terrorism (2009).

<sup>163</sup> To expand on the definition of terrorism within the SCO, see Chapter 3.

<sup>164</sup> The only other permanent body of the SCO is the Secretariat that was established in 2004 in Beijing. The Secretariat is under the supervision of the Secretary General.

in non-conventional security. As the RATS mainly works through intelligence exchanges between SCO national authorities, it maintains a database of blacklisted organizations and individual terrorists that, according to a report by Gisela Grieger (2015) contains information on about 42 organizations and 1,100 suspects. This database and the SCO 2009 Convention against Terrorism raised concerns from the international community with regards to the protection of human rights. On the one hand, high levels of secrecy surround the contents of this database. On the other, article 23 of the Convention includes an extradition clause between its members. Although the RATS employs a profiling system via lists that is similar to the one adopted by the UN, it is fiercely debated amongst academic scholars and policymakers that the SCO does not uphold the same standards of human rights protection as the UN does.

As an agency, the RATS is tightly structured: it is indeed led by a director that is nominated by the Council of the Heads of State of the SCO. The nomination occurs the year prior the beginning of the director's mandate. From its establishment in 2004 to 2012, the RATS was led by three directors from Central Asian Republics: in chronological order, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.<sup>165</sup> Most RATS directors share similar backgrounds as they are often high-level officials in the armed forces of each state. It is interesting to notice that the only exception is that of Zhang Xinfeng, director of the RATS from China between 2013 and 2015. He indeed had had a career in the People's Police and not in the PLA or the PAP.

Despite most of its agenda focused on the security domain, the SCO is not a military alliance between its members. Indeed, it does not have a mutual assistance clause or a common military force or anti-terrorism unit. Cooperation in hard security is sponsored by the RATS via joint military exercises. The larger of these drills are identified as "Peace Missions" and have been held on a bi-

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<sup>165</sup> The Directors of the SCO/RATS Executive Committee between 2004 and 2012 had been Vuacheslav T. Kasymov (2004-2006) from Uzbekistan, Myrzakyn U. Subanov (2007-2009) from Kyrgyzstan and Djenisbek M. Djumanbekov (2010-2012) from Kazakhstan. It is interesting to notice that the directors all share a background as officials in the armed forces.

annual basis since 2005.<sup>166</sup> Whilst Peace Missions focus on CT, “Counterinsurgency Exercises” have a smaller extent and have the aim to better prepare SCO members to jointly respond to insurgencies. These exercises have proven extremely beneficial for China, whose army has built its capacity through the interactions with Russian armed forces, as the drills included joint training in combat with traditional weapons despite the target of the exercises being non-traditional security.

Table 16 Annual Meetings of the SCO (2002-2012)

Date	Location	Representatives	
		China	Russia
7 June 2002	Saint Petersburg, Russia	Hu Jintao, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President
29 May 2003	Moscow, Russia	Hu Jintao, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President
17 June 2004	Tashkent, Uzbekistan	Hu Jintao, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President
5 July 2005	Nur-Sultan (ex-Astana), Kazakhstan	Hu Jintao, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President
15 June 2006	Shanghai, China	Hu Jintao, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President
16 August 2007	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	Hu Jintao, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President
28 August 2008	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Hu Jintao, Chairman	Dmitry Medvedev, President
15-16 June 2009	Yekaterinburg, Russia	Hu Jintao, Chairman	Dmitry Medvedev, President
10-11 June 2010	Tashkent, Uzbekistan	Hu Jintao, Chairman	Dmitry Medvedev, President
14-15 June 2011	Nur-Sultan (ex-Astana), Kazakhstan	Hu Jintao, Chairman	Dmitry Medvedev, President
6-7 June 2012	Beijing, China	Hu Jintao, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President

Source: Author’s elaboration of data from [eng.sectsc.org](http://eng.sectsc.org)

### 5.3.2 WHAT IS THE SCO FOR CHINA AND RUSSIA?

Between 2001 and 2012, China hosted two summits of the Council of the Heads of State of the SCO and participated to four military exercises (table 16).<sup>167</sup> International observers interpret China’s involvement in the SCO as a way to balance against Russia, although China did not pursue any conflicting behaviour towards the country. The reasons for China’s support of an increasing institutionalization of the SCO are better explained by examining the country’s strive towards stability and energy security rather than from an attempt to balance power at the regional level. The dismantling of the Soviet Union had indeed opened the unknown markets of Central Asia to the world. These markets were of particular interest to China as the country was pursuing a policy of competitive economic development. As China was craving energy resources, Central Asia presented a new

<sup>166</sup> The Peace Missions were conducted in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016 and 2018. The next SCO peace mission is scheduled for September 2019 at Sari-Arka in Kazakhstan. See <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201903/16/WS5c8cbbdea3106c65c34eefa7.html>

<sup>167</sup> One on 15 June 2006 in Shanghai and one on 6-7 June 2012 in Beijing.

opportunity to satisfy the country's energy needs. As Bailes, Dunay, Guang and Troitskiy contend (2007), China entered the SCO in a manner that prevented any competition with Russia, so as the country could devolve of its attention to consolidating its economic presence in the region. In fact, China's narrative on development and regional economic relations inspired the SCO Business Council (2006) and the SCO Interbank Consortium (2005). While the first fosters the dialogue between members of the business communities of the SCO member states with the aim to enhance economic and financial cooperation, the latter funds and provides bank services for investment projects supported by the SCO member states. No security threat had arisen for China with the establishment of the Republics of Central Asia, as the new regional powers had been willing to deepen economic and security relations with the country. Domestic instabilities indeed remained the main challenges to the country's leadership and transnational terrorist groups, like the ETIM, required China to seek the support of other regional partners to design an effective counterterrorist strategy due to the porosity of frontiers and the limited experience of its leadership in this domain. It was indeed within the joint drills of the RATS that China's armed forces received training from their Russian counterparts in various domains of hard security. The ratio of China and Russia soldiers participating to these exercises is indeed distinctively counterbalanced in China's favour. Still, it was Russia that continued to prioritize the military domain with the country maintaining similar shares of government spending throughout the period (table 17). A decrease is registered in 2007 and 2008 at the time of the global economic and financial crisis, when Russia's GDP amounted at US \$1.3 trillion and US \$1.6 trillion<sup>168</sup> respectively. In the same years, China's GDP amounted at US \$3.5 trillion and US \$4.5 trillion<sup>169</sup>, following an increasing trend that had continued until today.

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<sup>168</sup> Data from the World Bank. At current prices, trillion US dollars.

<sup>169</sup> Data from the World Bank. At current prices, trillion US dollars.

Table 17 China and Russia's Military Expenditure as a Share of Government Spending (2001-2012)

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<i>China</i>	11.9	11.8	11.6	11.5	10.9	10.9	10.5	8.3	8	7.6	6.7	6.5
<i>Russia</i>	11.3	11.1	11.3	11.2	11.3	11.2	9.8	9.9	10.2	10.1	10.3	10.8

*Source: Author's elaboration of data from SIPRI military expenditure dataset*

In the same period, Russia hosted three summits of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO and participated to five joint military exercises (table 16). As Russia was well-versed in the geopolitics of Central Asia, it had a strategic advantage in interacting with regional actors. Moreover, the newly-established Republics became a stabilizing force for Russia, after the dismantling of the Soviet Union. No anti-Russian sentiment emerged from Central Asia, allowing Russia to maintain the status quo in the region. As a case in point take, for instance, the continued adoption of Russian as a second language in Central Asia. Even within the SCO, the former Soviet Republics did not maintain conflictual behaviours with Russia. In contrast, they continued to allow Russia to maintain the control of the military facilities the country had built before the fall of the Soviet Union. Kazakhstan, for instance, still leases the Baikonur Cosmodrome to Russia, the first and largest space launch facility in the world.

The SCO, for Russia, was a cooperative framework that complemented and supported the activities of engagement of Central Asian states that the country has been undertaking through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)<sup>170</sup> since 1992. Indeed, Russia's priority was for relations in the region to remain stable and cooperative, as 50 million Russians were still residing in Central Asia.

From an international perspective, Central Asia was one of the last areas in the world that did not experience any infiltration from Western organizations, such as the EU and NATO. China's

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<sup>170</sup> The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is an intergovernmental military alliance that was established in May 1992. In 1992, six post-Soviet states (Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) signed the Collective Security Treaty, while three other post-Soviet states (Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia) signed it the following year with the treaty officially coming into force in 1994. In 1999, six of the nine members (excluding Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan) renewed their participation, and in 2002 the treaty became as a military alliance. Uzbekistan re-joined the CSTO in 2006 but abandoned it permanently after six years.



economic influence was also a potential threat to Russia's presence in Central Asia, thus the SCO also enabled Russia to maintain China's strategy over Central Asia under observation. One of the main applications of the influence of Russia on the SCO is the 2005 Astana Declaration. The document indeed guarantees the withdrawal of foreign troops from the territories of the SCO member states, troops that had been moved there to confront the insecurity arising from Afghanistan. The Astana Declaration (2005) states that

we support the efforts of the international coalition engaged in the antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan and we will continue doing so. Today, we note the positive trend of internal political stabilization in Afghanistan. A number of the SCO member states have provided their ground infrastructure for temporary deployment of military contingents of the coalition participating states, as well as their territory and air space for military transit in the interest of the antiterrorist operation. Given the completion of the active military phase of the antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization deem it necessary for the relevant participating states of the antiterrorist coalition to set a deadline for the temporary use of said infrastructure and presence of their military contingents in the territory of the SCO member states (SCO 2005).

The directive from the SCO's Astana declaration targeted the troops from the US that were still active in Afghanistan. All the SCO member states complied with the precepts of the document by providing the US with a deadline for the withdrawal of troops. In this manner, one of the US main concerns came to life, as the increasing influence of the SCO over Central Asia had the potential to close any passageway for oil and gas that did not involve Russia. In May 2004, Russian deputy foreign minister Vyacheslav Trubnikov had stated that "I don't think we can be happy with the presence of extra-regional powers whether it is the US, China or some other country" (Trubnikov as cited in Menges 2005, 279). Trubnikov's statement summarizes two of the main objectives of Russia's strategy for Central Asia. On the one hand, Russia aimed to prevent that the US-led security organizations expanded to one of the last areas of the world that was still impervious to their influence. On the other, the SCO had the potential to contain China's expansion in the region. This goal was stressed by Russia's proposal to establish a formal partnership between the SCO and the CSTO that was not never approved by the organization.

After the Shanghai Five institutionalized into the SCO, the agenda of the organization widened. At the same time, China and Russia's objectives – which had previously coincided – drastically changed. While China identified the SCO as a framework of cooperation for economic development and CT, Russia considered the organization as way to make a stance against Western security organizations and balance against China's expansion in Central Asia by stressing the focus on security of the SCO.

### **5.3.3 WHO MAKES THE RULES?**

As the previous section exemplified, China and Russia developed competing objectives for the SCO. While Russia stressed the security dimension with the aim of using the organization for creating a framework that would establish an alternative to Western-led security institutions, China aimed to further cooperation in the economic domain so as to assist its internal policies towards industrialization. The imprint of both countries can be found in different aspects of the organization's processes of institutionalization. While in 2005 Russia was successful in ensuring the closing down of the military cooperation between Central Asian Republics and the US army that operated in Afghanistan, in the same year, China spurred the establishment of the SCO Interbank Consortium, which aimed to create higher levels of economic cooperation.

Scholars often assume that the SCO is a Chinese-led project, the equivalent of Russia's Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or its CSTO. Nevertheless, apart from signalling China's drive by providing the names for the SCO and its predecessor, China's leadership position has been questioned by academicians, such as Johnston (2005) and Aris (2008), while policy analysts had assumed that that was the case (e.g., Grieger's extensive publications for European institutions). The Shanghai Five had not been a solid-enough institutional framework for China or Russia to imprint its policy-choices: by presenting a loose institutional framework, lacking any permanent agency and serving more as a forum of dialogue for its members, the Shanghai Five eventually became a proxy for the establishment of the SCO.

When the SCO institutionalized, the diverging objectives of its founders started to emerge. China's opening speeches during the Heads of State Council of the SCO from 2001 to 2012 correlate the SCO with terms that link the agenda of the organization with China's "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" or terms that make reference to economic development. In contrast, Russia's opening speeches in the same frameworks correlate the SCO with other goals. On the one hand, Russia presents the SCO in relation to the threats faced by the region as a whole. On the other, Russia stresses the idea of the SCO as a cohesive group of nations that operates as one to confront systemic challenges and creates advanced cooperative frameworks. In sum, both countries adopt discursive landscape for the organization that emphasizes its goals from their own perspectives.

As Johnston highlights, the mentor states within international organizations provide the theoretical guidelines, support the major projects and determine the direction in which organizations institutionalize. In the case of the SCO, institutionalization passed through the establishment of agencies in charge of fulfilling its strategy. The main application of this institutionalization is the founding of the Secretariat of the SCO, the RATS, the SCO Business Council, the Inter-bank Consortium and the SCO Forum. All these agencies are rooted in three main sectors of application: general administration, security coordination and military affairs, and economic and financial cooperation. These agencies differentiate with one another in a twofold manner: on the one hand, the Secretariat and the RATS are permanent, governmental agencies that had been established to carry out precise functions. They are both administered by directors that are nominated by the Heads of State Council of the SCO and act independently. For instance, RATS autonomously signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2014 with the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) for intelligence sharing on regional terrorist groups. On the other hand, the other three are non-governmental forums of dialogue that do not retain any power of policing nor retain a highly-structured organization. Their administration is a responsibility of the country that maintains the Presidency of the SCO during that year. These structures aim to offer recommendations to the SCO member states on how to improve economic cooperation as well as to assist the business community

to establish ties in Central Asia. These structures, moreover, are based on a system that is not distant from that China has adopted in the last few years with the Balkans and Eastern Europe within the framework of the 17+1.

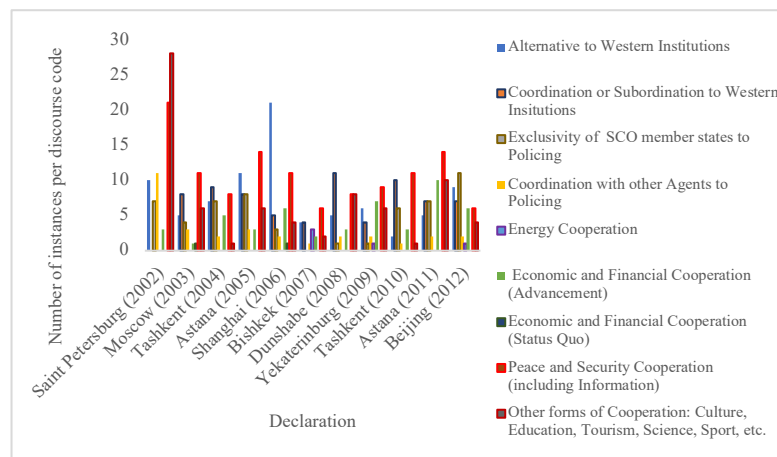
The RATS is the agency that mostly led to the institutionalization of the SCO between 2001 and 2012. It is interesting to notice that the first operational application of the institutionalization of the SCO is an agency that is in charge of CT. Despite China was even keener than Russia to establish some form of regional cooperation in the framework of CT, the country lacked any prior experience in this sense. RATS operations such as “Peace Missions” or “Counterinsurgency Exercises,” for instance, relied on Russian trainers, as, despite the increased amount of government spending for the military (table 17), the PLA and the PAP were undergoing a radical modernization. At the same time, expenditure on public security also steadily increased in China passing from 1987,4 million yuan in 2001 to 7111,6 million yuan in 2012 (National Bureau of Statistics 2017). According to data from the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) of the Massachusetts’s Institute of Technology (MIT), moreover, the arms trade between the two countries had been dominated by Russia’s exports to China, which had started to export bladed weapons to Russia for a total of little over US \$33 thousands earlier than in 2003. In the same year, Russia had exported firearms to China for a total of US \$2,53 million. The major project of the SCO in this period was the cooperation within the framework of the RATS that, despite a number of issues (above all the competition between Central Asian states and the contrasting objectives of China and Russia), managed to become more and more effective, as much as it steadily increased the number of military exercises, passing from 2 per year in 2001 to 5 per year in 2012.

Although the pattern of institutionalization and the support to the main projects mainly came from Russia which was the main provider of baseline policies in the field of CT, it is interesting to look at the objectives that are contained in the Declarations published after each Council of the Heads of State of the SCO. The Declarations contain a summary report of all the evaluations and future scenarios that the Councils discuss during their annual meetings. Ever since India joined the SCO in

2017 alongside Pakistan, the annual Councils have started to be televised by India's media agencies. Before then, the Declarations were one of the few statements presenting the strategy for the SCO that emerged from the Councils' meetings. As they contain the year-per-year strategy of the organization but are not affected by the technicalities of the legal discourse that is present in all the documents of the SCO, they are a useful indicator of the impact of Russia and China's objectives on the institution's operational outlook.

The analysis that follows pays attention to the frequency of discourse codes as a guide to the evolution of discourse within the SCO. Figure 21 summarises the distribution and frequency of each of the discourse codes over time. It shows that discourse in the SCO is most commonly linked to issues related to "peace and security" and to the status of the organization as "an alternative to the Western models of international relations and securitization." The prevalence of this type of discourse is not only consistent with the objectives pursued by Russia within the organization, but also with an increased acknowledgement at the international level of the extent of the instabilities emerging from actors in the region (i.e., Afghanistan and Pakistan) as well as a re-evaluation of the Western model of securitization as a pre-requisite for achieving high levels of security and development. Over time, the code for peace and security has remained at stable levels, excluding 2007 when it touched its lowest point. This is consistent with the outbreaks of the global economic and financial crises that contributed to discourse in the SCO to shift towards codes on the "enhancement of economic and financial cooperation" between its member states: indeed, China was one of the few countries to experience any economic growth even at the worst moments of the crises. This shift was corroborated by the country itself, as increasing levels of economic cooperation were one of China's objectives for the organization. China's export-driven economy, in fact, depended upon foreign markets and Central Asia, given its geographic location, represented an opportunity for China as the region had remained mainly unknown to Western powers.

Figure 21 Overview of Total Discourse Counts by Declaration (2002-2012)

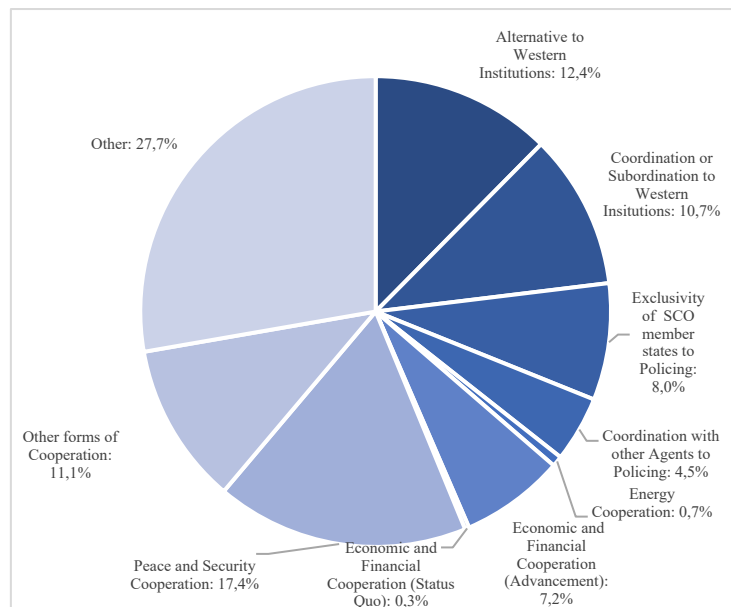


Source: Author's elaboration of data from [eng.sectsc.org](http://eng.sectsc.org)

While statements referring to peace and security display a clear policy agenda, those presenting an alternative model of governance to the West are higher in number and less costly, as they do not put forward real policy commitments but only general principles. Its frequency, though, increases and peaks in 2006 right after the implementation of the principles of the 2005 Astana declaration, when the US-led troops hosted on the territories of the SCO member states were invited to set a deadline for their return to their home countries. The entrenchment of this type of language into SCO official discourse shows a general attitude towards the polarization of the organization's agenda towards peace and security. The stable frequency of its codes throughout the period, indicating that it had become standard and accepted in the framework of the organization. This is particularly interesting as it shows that, despite the SCO's dual agenda (which is present in all the Declarations), it is in the security domain that concrete policy proposals were established. At the same time, codes on "cooperation in the energy domain" are only registered from 2007 but remain at extremely low levels. This provides some support to the idea that energy cooperation is politically more costly to operationalize. "Other forms of cooperation" (such as culture, education, tourism, science and sport) show a high frequency at the time when the organization was first established, although they soon stabilize at lower levels. As it had been for energy cooperation, they were indeed too costly for operationalization, thus only being presented as addenda to the SCO's main agenda.

The share of each codes on the total number of quasi-sentences analysed is exemplified by figure 22. It is interesting to notice that, despite SCO discourse stresses the organization’s status as an alternative framework to the West, it also accounts for a coordination with the other agents active in the region. While in the first Declarations these actors comprise only Western institutions, this tendency changes in later years as a wider extent of organizations are cited as partners to SCO’s activities in the region, including CIS and CSTO. This coordination is often subordinated to the presentation of the SCO as a unitary framework, with the relations between its member states interpreted as a priority and coordination with external agencies as subordinates.

Figure 22 Discourse Code Shares on Total Instances (2002-2012)

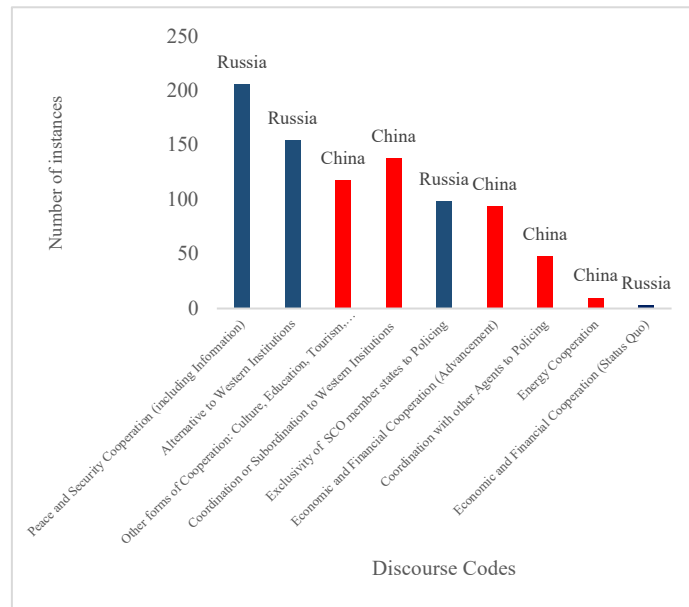


Source: Author’s elaboration of data from [eng.sectscsco.org](http://eng.sectscsco.org)

Figure 23 shows the discourse counts that refer to the objectives of either China or Russia in aggregated form for the SCO Declarations in the period under analysis. Although the objectives of both states are present in the discourse of the SCO, the Russian objectives are emphasized the most. In particular, instances of the enhancement in cooperation for security purposes and the stress for the organization as a provider of norms and models alternative to that of the West are extremely prominent with discourse focusing on the SCO as a provider of economic and energy cooperation

standing out at times when the global architecture for economy and finance had been subject to a re-discussion worldwide.

Figure 23 Comparison of China and Russia’s Discourse Counts per Code (2002-2012)



Source: Author’s elaboration of data from [eng.sectesco.org](http://eng.sectesco.org)

The discursive landscape of the Declarations in the SCO as well as the type of institutionalization and projects that the organization has followed between 2001 and 2012 point to Russia as the member that played the role of mentor state in the organization. Indeed, the permanent agencies established by the SCO referred to a domain that was significant for Russia’s agenda – i.e., the RATS, the counterterrorist branch of the SCO that embodied a security-oriented domain led by the only actor in the organization that had had a consolidated experience in countering episodes of terrorism and political violence that not only extended beyond its territory but that also embedded separatism and religious extremism in its agenda.



## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has analysed the way in which the three variables taken into account in the theoretical framework explain China's policy choices in the realm of CT between July 2001 to November 2012. The aim was to determine whether any of the variables identified had a role in explaining why China's CT policy in this period retained a tendency towards a form of CT that intensely relied on hard power.

The first variable under consideration looks at the levels of terrorist threat in the country. To determine whether the threat was at high, medium or low levels, an analysis has been conducted on the number and levels of destructiveness of the terrorist attacks experienced by China with particular attention devoted to the status of terrorism at the regional level and, in particular, in comparison with Russia and the other members of the SCO. At the same time, the perception of the terrorist threat from the part of China's ruling elite was analysed by means of an examination of press statements extracted by Xinhua, the media service of the CPC, so as to identify in which way the threat was presented to the general public as well as the extent to which it has been mentioned by the authorities. At the same time, media statements, speeches and official policy papers on terrorism and CT were examined, so as to determine whether the elite has been adapting a conflictual or cooperative attitude toward instabilities and whether the tactics employed leaned more towards conflictuality or cooperation. To do so, the operational code approach was adapted to the context of CT. Under Hu, a detachment from the security environment pressure to act experienced by China from Xinjiang and the perception of these threats from the part of the leadership is highlighted by the data. Indeed, while the number, frequency and extent of the terrorist threat in Xinjiang were lower than in other parts of Asia, the CT strategy of the CPC relied on high levels of hard power that included an increased reliance on the armed forces active in Xinjiang and the deployment of troops from the PAP on the region's borders. Episodes of opposition to the Party, moreover, were catalogued as terrorism and inspired responses that almost exclusively involved the military. The campaigns that Hu enacted so as to entail the development of the West, considered, in this period, as one of the main reasons for instabilities to arise, fostered a top-down approach that did not take into consideration the engagement

of civil society, but that comprised the inclusion of incentives for an internal migration towards Xinjiang and of the Han population from other regions in China, and the funding projects led by the paramilitary XPCC. Moreover, the Party perceived the phenomena emerging from the region as threatening with a great number of articles published by Xinhua on the type of threat presented by the episodes of terrorism and political violence in Xinjiang and their relation on the well-being of the country. The operational code on the statements of the providers of security at the highest levels of policymaking within the CPC also point to the threatening nature of the threat, using a language that indicates a conflictual approach. As there is a detachment between the type of threat that is presented by the empirical data and the perception of this threat from the part of the Party, the threat has thus been considered as medium.

The second variable taken into account refers to the levels of authoritarianism present in the country under Hu Jintao. Authoritarianism was assessed in accordance with the literature on the two forms that authoritarianism assumes – that is, hard and soft. Civil liberties were investigated by comparing indexes and databases compiled by well-established international organizations and research centres. In particular, the longitudinal analysis on freedoms and political rights, arrests for violations of communal freedoms, inequalities in wealth distribution and corruption were compared for the period under investigation, so as to determine in which direction the policies adopted by the leadership were going. These indexes paint a picture that indicates levels of authoritarianism which display upward spikes in conjunction with events of political contestation (such as Charta 08 and the Lhasa riots in 2008) but that do not present a distinctive tendency towards a more stringent form of authoritarianism. This tendency is consistent with the analysis on the other two elements taken under consideration. Indeed, a strive towards reform in the economic sphere is present throughout the period, consistently with a “relaxation” in the leadership’s grasp towards the country’s governance. Moreover, as Hu Jintao enjoyed high levels of support within the PBs under his leadership, there was no need for tightening control over China’s elite and civil society to maintain stability.

The third variable takes into consideration the mechanisms of regional cooperation that characterize China's role into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, being the organization the prime provider of cooperation in the field of CT. Between 2001 and 2012, the SCO institutionalized into a comprehensive organization with permanent agencies being established and a precise process of decision-making being set. Through the institutionalization of the SCO, processes of socialization emerged. According to Johnston, the main element that allows socialization to happen is the reiteration of interactions, thus a more stable institutionalization fulfils this aim. Within the SCO, Russia and China were the only countries in the position to act as mentors as the newly-established Central Asia Republics were still undergoing processes of state-building. Russia and China had different interests and a different agenda for the SCO, the objectives of which can be examined to a different extent in the Declarations published by the Council of the Heads of State of the SCO. These Declarations indeed are the sole framework to present the strategy of the SCO and its principles in a concerted and official version. By analysing the discursive landscape of the Declarations, it transpires that Russia's objectives are more frequent and more eradicated into the discourse of the SCO. Moreover, the institutionalization of the organization passed through the areas that were traditionally led by Russia with the only issue-specific permanent agency of the organization focusing on CT. The SCO's main projects, moreover, referred mainly to joint drills on CT and counterinsurgency which in turn relied heavily on Russia's leadership. In light of these results, the mentorship of the SCO in this period has thus been assigned to Russia, although a resurgence of an agenda referring to China's objectives is amplified by external events that entail a re-focus on economic and financial topics at the global level.

The three variables taken into consideration propose a competing framework of the elements that influence China's CT, exemplified in table 18. As the literature on CT states that a country adopts a hard CT strategy to respond to the security environment's high pressure to act, the empirical evidence from China under Hu is not consistent with this standard assumption. The levels of authoritarianism in the country pointed to a form of authoritarian power that was even less stringent

than it had been under Jiang Zemin. Indeed, under Hu Jintao, despite the unfolding of several episodes of opposition to the leadership, a strive towards reform and improved levels of civil liberties and political freedoms was detected. As Hu upheld soft authoritarianism, the heightened levels of reliance on hard power in CT cannot be explained by a general turn of the country towards a generalized reliance on hard authoritarianism.

The third variable indicates that China played a novice role in determining the agenda of the SCO with Russia's objectives and strategies in the lead. As Russia was not only well-versed in CT, but was also reliant on forms of CT heavily linked to hard power, the example provided within the framework of the SCO and the cooperation provided within the permanent agencies and the joint training sessions of the countries' armed forces in the realms of CT and counterinsurgency is determinant for China's adoption of a CT strategy connected to a hard power strategy that overwhelmed the levels of the threat itself and the form of authoritarianism upheld by the political leadership.

Table 18 The Making of China's CT Policy (2001-2012)

<i>Systemic variable</i>	<i>Domestic variable</i>	<i>Individual variable</i>	<i>Policy outcome</i>
Pressure from the Security Environment	Political Orientation of the Elite	Role in Reference Groups <i>(socialization process)</i>	Pressure from the Security Environment
Medium	Soft Authoritarianism	Novice	Hard CT Policy

## **CHAPTER 6. A “HARDENING” OF CHINA’S CT POLICY: CONVERGENCE BETWEEN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES (2012-2017)**

This chapter analyses China’s CT policy in the period between November 2012 and June 2017. In November 2012 Hu Jintao terminates his mandates as General Secretary of the CPC and Chairman of the CMC, and Xi Jinping is nominated General Secretary of the CPC and formally elected to take over the role of President the following March. It is also on this occasion that Chen Quanguo, then Communist Party Secretary of Tibet, enters the eighteenth Politburo after his reforms ensured the stabilization of the autonomous region. June 2017 is instead a pivotal moment for the external dimension of China’s CT policy, as the SCO welcomes India and Pakistan as full member states. Since India is a democracy, it has the potential to influence the norms that determine the SCO’s approaches to CT policy, taking into consideration human and civil rights.

Three are the terrorist attacks that afflicted China in this period. The first event occurred in October 2013 and targeted Beijing. It was extremely significant, as it was the first episode of terrorism to target the country’s capital. The second attack hit a railway station in Kunming in the Yunnan province in 2014. Terrorists attacked civilians with knives, killing nineteen, in one of the worst attacks ever experienced by the country. The third attacks happened in 2015 in Guangzhou in the Guangdong province. It was again launched against civilians at the city’s central railway station, who were attacked with knives. On this occasion, the attack was smaller as it wounded five. These three attacks are signs of a new application for China’s terrorism, which steadily worked beyond Xinjiang’s regional borders.

Contrarily to the previous period, the CPC has not identified any new anti-state group responsible for the attacks. The key promoters of terrorism in the Chinese narrative remained the ETIM, the WUYC and the TIP.

The internationalization of China's terrorism is also indicated by the deepened connections between the groups active in China and international terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS), which became known in this period.<sup>171</sup> Above all, the presence of Uyghur foreign fighters became increasingly more prominent in the Middle East. Moreover, the SCO increased coordination with other regional security organizations – such as, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the CSTO – and specialized the agenda of its permanent agency, the RATS, better to tackle regional insecurities. The RATS in fact had started to focus its activities to combat the trans-regional trafficking of drugs and weapons, since they were identified as the preferred form of financing of transnational terrorist groups. The agency also started to consider a new domain of counterterrorist measures – that is, cybersecurity and digital surveillance. It was in this light that China organized the first joint CT exercise within the RATS framework, which focused entirely on cyber threats.

This period is also characterized by a change in the domestic dimension of CT policy. Indeed, the country's role of political leader passed from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping. After Hu's reform of the PBSC towards higher levels of accountability and institutionalization of the decision-making processes, Xi promoted a wave of centralization in the activities of the PB and the PBSC. Xi's approach to reforms both in the economic and political domains, in fact, was rather limited and maintained a strong association with China's ideology and political traditions.

This chapter analyses the three factors that compose the theoretical framework of the thesis for the 2012-2017 period. The first section analyses the security environment pressure to act by examining empirical data on the terrorist attacks that the country experienced in this period and the narrative on terrorism developed by the domestic agents in charge of public security. This enabled an estimation of the terrorist threats arising from Xinjiang. The second section examines the political orientation of the ruling elite towards the form of authoritarianism employed to govern the country.

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<sup>171</sup> Other than the declarations of the TIP's leaders as to the connection between the terrorist group and al-Qaeda, released documents from WikiLeaks indicate the presence of Uyghur foreign fighter in Syria claiming to be members of the TIP.

Particular emphasis is placed the dominance of the General Secretary over the PB in light of Xi's increased centralization of power, which also included the security domain. The third section looks at the direction taken by the institutionalization of the SCO's framework of CT and makes a comparison with its working agenda. The section discusses China and Russia's competing interests for the SCO in an effort to determine the role that each country plays in shaping the overall objectives of the organization.

The chapter concludes with some considerations on the status of the factors that – according to the theoretical framework – can potentially affect the design of China's CT policy in Xinjiang between 2013 and 2017, by making reference to the propositions presented in section 2.2.

## **6.1 ASSESSING THE TERRORIST THREAT IN XINJIANG**

The following sections analyse the security environment's pressure to act. Since the main tenet of the rationalist approach to CT studies contends that counterterrorist measures follow patterns that are more assertive in case terrorist threats heighten (Bueno De Mesquita 1988; Fearon and Wendt 2002), the situation in Xinjiang is analysed by looking at the empirical data on the number and intensity of terrorist attacks that occurred in this period. China's experience was compared with the internal situation of other SCO member countries. In order to gain a more comprehensive view on the security environment's pressure to act, the perception of the country's security agents was also assessed.

### **6.1.1 THE TERRORIST THREAT AS PRESENTED BY THE EMPIRICAL DATA**

Between November 2012 and June 2017, China experienced 61 episodes of terrorism unevenly distributed over time, and with the majority of the attacks concentrated between 2014 and 2015 (figure 24). In 2014, a total of 31 terrorist attacks occurred, while in 2015 the country only experienced 13 attacks. The attacks in 2014 and 2015 represent 72 percent of the total number of attacks experienced by the country in the entire period. Amongst these attacks, only 6 took place outside Xinjiang with Guangzhou and Xi'an experiencing multiple attacks (START 2019) and

Kunming one of the most gruesome attacks ever to take place in China (Blanchard 2014). Moreover, for the first time in the modern history of the country, a terrorist plot was successfully executed in Beijing, where an SUV crashed at the entrance of the Forbidden City in Tiananmen Square on 28 October 2013 claiming the lives of 5 and injuring 38 (Ng 2013). The attack was claimed by the Xinjiang-based TIP a few days afterwards ('Islamist Group Calls Tiananmen Attack 'Jihadi Operation' 2013). It was 2014, though, to be the deadliest year for China, as the Elixku attacks of 28 July 2014 recorded the highest number of fatalities (78), while the Kunming attacks of 1 March 2014 caused the highest number of injured (143). The total number of victims for terrorism in China in the whole period was 762, while the total number of injured 592 and the infrastructures damaged 158 (START 2019).<sup>172</sup>

The GTD of the University of Maryland (2019) registers few revendications from the groups active in the region. The perpetrators of most attacks, in fact, are identified with the general terms "Uyghur separatists" or "unknown separatists," with only 4 claimed or attributed to the TIP. These are the terrorist attacks in Beijing in 2013 and in Elixku in 2014 as well as the suicide bombing in Ürumqi in 2014 and the Huangdi attack in south-west Xinjiang in the same year. Only a single attack that occurred outside China was claimed by the TIP – that is, the 2016 attack to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kyrgyz Republic in Bishkek, when a suicide car bombing crashed at the embassy's gate (Dzyubenko 2016).

Episodes of terrorism between 2012 and 2017 have been most frequent in May and July 2014, counting 8 and 5 attacks respectively. 2015 registered spikes in March and May when 3 and 4 attacks occurred (START 2019). Most of the May 2014 attacks took place in Xinjiang's Yarkant district<sup>173</sup> and involved a series of bomb attacks in the area of a police station. Only one detonation was successful and the other planted bombs were defused by police forces (Xinhua 2014a). The Yarkant attacks were directed against members of China's local institutions, and used explosions as the

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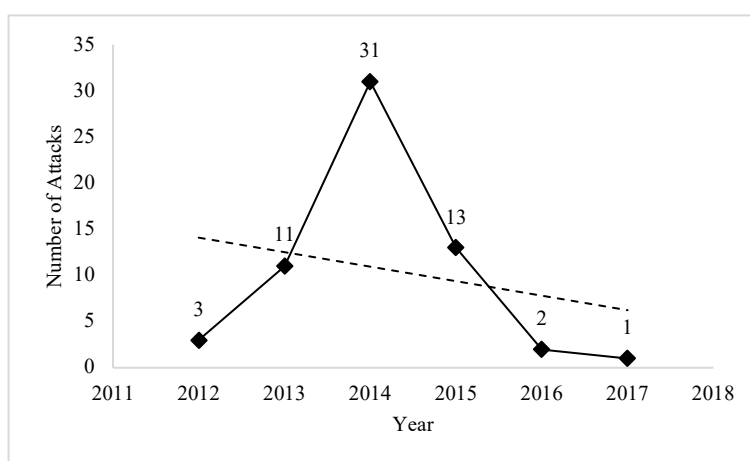
<sup>172</sup> These numbers include terrorists, members of military and police forces as well as civilians (START 2019).

<sup>173</sup> Also referred to as Shache county in national media outlets (in Chinese, 莎车县 Shā chē xiàn).



weapon-of-choice instead of diffused violence against civilians, such as riots, as it was preferred in the previous period. In contrast, the 2015 attacks were not directed against a single target as the Yarkant attacks, but were scattered in several locations and employed different weapons. Among these attacks, two were directed against civilians, one targeting a railway station in Guangzhou (‘Knife Attack Wounds Nine’ 2015) and a casino in Kashgar (START 2019), while two were directed against China’s police forces, including the execution and kidnapping of two Uyghur police commanders (START 2019; Hoshur 2015).

Figure 24 Number of Terrorist Attacks in China (2012-2017)



Source: Author’s elaboration of data from the Global Terrorism Database and the digital archives of the SCMP

It is interesting to notice that the majority of the attacks targeted governmental institutions, especially against the armed forces operating in Xinjiang. Moreover, for the first time, terrorist attacks affected China’s capital reaching, in a sense, the heart of the country’s governing authorities. The attack in Beijing resonated on Chinese media with Guo Jinlong, Beijing’s Communist Party Secretary, stating that police forces needed to “look for vulnerable links” and “learn a lesson” from the Tiananmen terrorist attack (Jiang 2013).<sup>174</sup> Moreover, a week after the attacks, Liu Lei, political Commissar of Xinjiang, replaced General Peng Yong as Commander of the Xinjiang Military District (‘China Xinjiang Military Boss Booted off’ 2013). Peng’s replacement symbolised the high levels of

<sup>174</sup> Guo Jinlong was the mayor for the Beijing municipality between 2008 and 2012 and a member of the 18th Politburo between 2012 and 2017 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2019b).

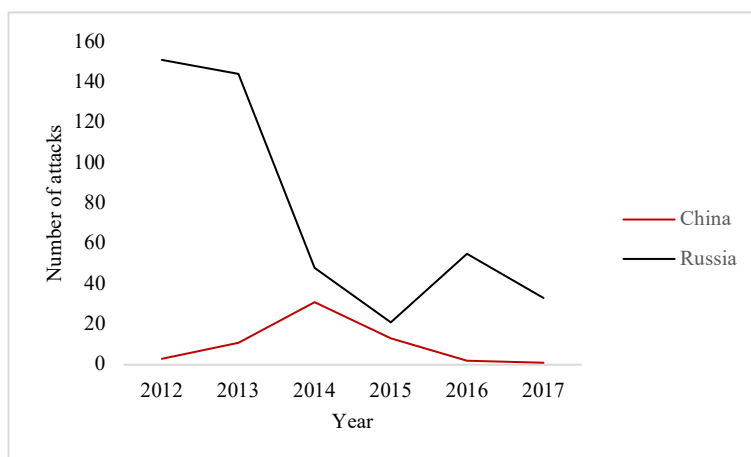
concern displayed by China's political leaders at a time when violent political contestation in Xinjiang had come closer to the country's political leaders.

The TIP is the sole terrorist organization that claimed any involvement in the attacks around the country (START 2019). After the attack in Beijing, for instance, the group released an eight-minute audio clip warning China's political authorities of future attacks in the capital (M. Clarke 2015). The way the TIP took the lead in the region is still debated. Indeed, analysts contend that the TIP either comprised a small group from the ETIM that had detached from the main organization or that the TIP gradually substituted the ETIM after the death of the ETIM's leader, Hasan Mahsum, in 2003 by the hand of Pakistani security forces (Xu, Fletcher, and Bajoria 2014). In the late 2000s, both groups co-existed, but no in-depth information exists on their interaction. Chinese media outlets, for instance, make reference to both organizations with the TIP being mainly identified in connection with the jihadist propaganda materials circulating in Central Asia (Zenn 2014). As the Bishkek attack exemplified (Dzyubenko 2016), the TIP had the resources to operate throughout Central Asia, although it continued to hit targets connected to China's leadership. Still, questions should be raised in relation to the TIP acting as heir to the ETIM, especially in light of its connection to other regional organizations. In fact, former ETIM leader, Hasan Mahsum, had repeatedly denied any connection between his organization and al-Qaeda or other global terrorist organizations, such as the IMU ('Terrorism' 2006). Conversely, links between the TIP and al-Qaeda – above all, the presence of militants from the ranks of the TIP around Syria (Vagneur-Jones 2017) – open to the interpretation of the TIP as a "*faux* group" created at the aim to securing a connection between members of the ETIM and al-Qaeda; a process that started with the death of Mahsum in 2003 but that consolidated ten years later through the Syrian conflict. Moreover, the sphere of action of the TIP in terms of geography strengthens the notion that the group maintains at least a partnership with the IMU. Indeed, by omitting the term "East" from its name, the TIP indeed aimed to evoke a pan-Turkic sentiment. Lastly, in contrast with the ETIM, the TIP relied on the media as a way to promote its agenda and carry out threats. In particular, TIP's media outlets, such as the "Voice of Islam" or the "Islamic

Turkistan,” well-served China’s narrative that presents the TIP as a terrorist organization that the country need not fear, as its repeated threats to conduct biological and chemical attacks against China’s civil population never followed through (ACCORD 2016).

Despite the TIP’s strong presence in the region, the episodes of terrorism experienced by the country represent a small percentage of the attacks that occurred at the regional level. In particular, between 2012 and 2017, attacks in China equalled at about 13.5 percent of the attacks experienced by Russia in the same period, as Russia faced a total of 452 terrorist attacks rooted in secessionist claims (figure 25) (START 2019). While 2014 and 2015 were the most threatening years for China as the country experienced around 70 percent of the total number of attacks for the entire period, Russia’s attacks spiked in 2012 and 2013 as a total of 295 attacks occurred, equalling about 65 percent of the total number of attacks in the whole period. Although the number of terrorist attacks in Russia in this period follows a decreasing tendency (figure 25), the country experienced a spike between 2015 and 2016 when attacks passed from a total of 21 to 55 per year. In particular, in 2016, 73 percent of the total attacks (41 out of 55) maintained a connection with global terrorist organizations, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (START 2019).

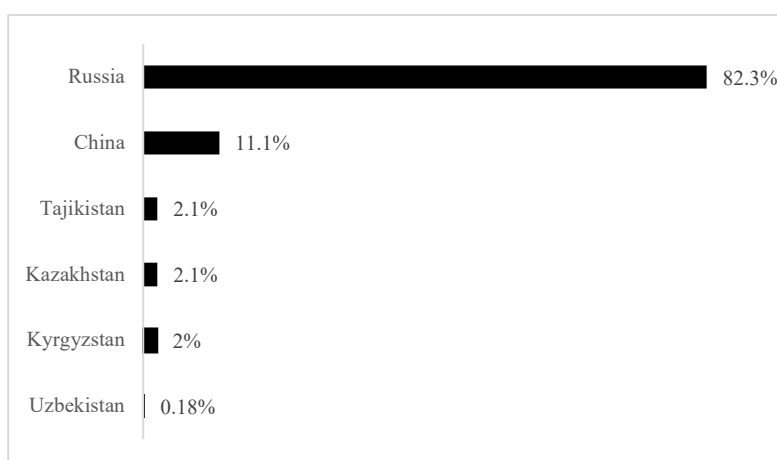
Figure 25 Number of Terrorist Attacks in China and Russia (2012-2017)



Source: Author’s elaboration of data from the Global Terrorism Database

As figure 25 exemplifies, in 2013 and 2015, China and Russia displayed inverted tendencies: while China's number of terrorist attacks per year peaked in 2014, after 2012, Russia followed a decreasing tendency that halted only between 2015 and 2016 when the country passed from 21 to 55 terrorist attacks per year. As the comparison between the two countries shows, for the entire period, China's terrorism remains at a lower scale than Russia's with the number of attacks per year never reaching the minimum number experienced by Moscow. For instance, 2015 is the year that shows less variation between the two countries with China facing 13 attacks and Russia 21. Also, in comparison with other Central Asian states, Russia remains the country that had been most stricken by terrorist attacks. Russia's total number of terrorist attacks in this period, in fact, represents around 82 percent of the total number of attacks in the region, while China's represents about 11 percent, thus granting the country the title of second most-stricken regional power (figure 26) (START 2019).

Figure 26 Percentage of Attacks per Country on the Total Number of Attacks in the Region (2012-2017)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from the Global Terrorism Database

Terrorist attacks in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan decreased from the previous period and Uzbekistan, in particular, accounted for 0.18 percent of the total number of attacks in the region, despite the work of the IMU, which had represented almost 4 percent of regional attacks between 2002 and 2012. While terrorist attacks in Central Asian states decreased their impact on the total number of terrorist attacks in the region, attacks in Russia passed from representing 73

percent of the total number of regional attacks in the previous period to about 82 percent, and in China from 7 percent to 11 percent (START 2019).<sup>175</sup>

China and Russia are the two regional powers that have been most afflicted by terrorist attacks between November 2012 and June 2017. The number of terrorist attacks in China follows a decreasing tendency line (figure 24), despite attacks peaking in 2014 with a total number of 31. In 2016 and 2017, terrorist attacks in the country record the lowest levels with 2 attacks registered in 2016 and only 1 in 2017 (START 2019). In sum, empirical data point to a terrorist threat in China that decreased in this period, but that is also better connected to global terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, the ISIL and the IMU and that mainly targets governmental institutions. Such features thus assign a new mandate to the terrorist group active in the country, and have the potential to entail a heightened perception of the severity of the threat from the part of the actors that are involved in policymaking in China in this period.

### **6.1.2 THE TERRORIST THREAT AS PERCEIVED BY THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP**

In the previous section, the scale of the threat emerging from Xinjiang was analysed. Episodes of terrorism spiked in 2014 (START 2019) with China adopting its first CT Law in 2015 in response (President of the People's Republic of China 2015). Also, 2013 was a challenging year for China's CT efforts, as Beijing was stricken for the first time by an attack that had so far been relegated to the country's remote north-west (Ng 2013). The attack in Beijing in 2013 was a symptom of the new momentum that terrorism in China was experiencing as it started to focus either on political targets or large-scale violence on civilians (Blanchard 2014).<sup>176</sup>

With the aim of determining the perception that Chinese policymakers retain on the threat emerging from Xinjiang, the type and number of mentions of the region in combination with one of the three connotations assumed by terrorism in China's official conceptualization were mapped in the

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<sup>175</sup> For data of terrorist attacks between 2002 and 2012, see section 5.1.

<sup>176</sup> The threefold conceptualization of the macro-term "terrorism" in Chinese institutional narrative as the combination of separatism, religious extremism and terrorism is discussed in-depth in section 3.3.

articles from the newswires of Xinhua General News Service, gathered from the Lexis Nexis database. As Xinhua retains the status of a ministry-level institution and plays the role of press agency to the State and the Party, it is a viable resource to collect information on the conceptualizations presented by China's leadership.

In this period, Xinhua published 265 articles on terrorism in relation to Xinjiang.<sup>177</sup> During the last few months of 2012 and throughout 2013, 49 articles were released, while in 2017 the number of articles reached a total of 2. The majority of the articles were published in 2014 for a total of 171. This tendency is consistent with the number of terrorist attacks that occurred in China in the same year (31), the highest frequency for the entire period.

Most of the articles highlight the success of the Chinese government in curbing the terrorist threats emerging from Xinjiang. The narrative that was adopted presents a series of themes, above all the responses to terrorism enacted by the country's political leadership. On the one hand, emphasis is placed on the captures, arrests and punishments received by those identified as terrorists; on the other, the variety of counterterrorist measures adopted by the Chinese government are presented in detail, and their success, either effective or potential, is stressed.<sup>178</sup> For instance, in October 2015, Yu Zhengsheng, Chairman of the National Committee of the CPPCC, during a rally in Ürumqi for the 60th anniversary of the founding of the XUAR stated that

counterterrorism is the focus of our current work ... The three forces (separatism, terrorism and extremism) are the biggest threats for Xinjiang and the common enemies for people of all ethnic groups ... The success achieved by Xinjiang over the 60 years has proven that only by firmly sticking to the leadership of the CPC, the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the regional autonomy system can we do the region good (Yu as reported in 'China Stresses Stability, Security in Xinjiang' 2015).

Yu's statement continues to consider the "three forces" as the determinants of all insecurities in Xinjiang: a connotation that is consistent with the conceptualization that President Jiang Zemin

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<sup>177</sup> The complete list is available in Appendix.

<sup>178</sup> Counterterrorist measures are mainly presented in terms of economic policies, education activities, legal documents and military deployments in restive regions.

had presented and launched the Shanghai Five mechanism (Aris 2009a). The three forces' conceptualization is also present in China's 2015 CT Law which, according to Liu Yuejin, CT Commissioner of the Ministry of Public Security, was "inspired by a SCO counterterrorism convention, and the UN's Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism" (Xinhua 2015c).

Another theme presented in the articles is that of "ethnic unity," although it is also imbued with a religious character, as it was common to the articles released by Xinhua in the previous period. President Xi Jinping, for instance, defined ethnic unity as "the most difficult issue of the most lasting importance" for Xinjiang (Xi as cited in 'China Needs to Unify against Terrorism' 2014). Ethnic unity was valued highly by Xi, as much that it was a sufficient cause to determine the dismissal of police officers in Xinjiang when their actions were deemed to undermine the principle of "ethnic unity" as the leadership had presented it (ACCORD 2016).

Moreover, statements on "ethnic unity" and "religion" given by Party officials are often legitimized in the articles by correlating them to the comments of other authorities. After the attacks, for instance, Xinhua usually includes the perspective of the foreign partners that can give traction to China's official narrative – these are, Turkey and Saudi Arabia (Xinhua 2013b; 2014g). On the one hand, Turkey is the historical homeland of the Uyghurs, which triggers strong sentiments of belonging from the Pan-Turkic community. On the other, Saudi Arabia remains the key religious authority among Islamic countries (Salamé 1987) and, as a consequence, critical remarks from its part on the inappropriate use of Islam as a justification for an attack has the potential to be more effective than any statement issued by any other Muslim country. Moreover, Xinhua often underlines the viewpoints of China's Muslim partners in South East Asia and the Middle East, so as to present a stronger case and hinder the mandate of terrorist groups in the region. For example, in this period, a series of guidelines on "how to practice Islam" as they were presented in an "international symposium" on Islam jointly organized by China and Central Asian states, was reported in an attempt to oppose the precepts that had been circulated by terrorist groups (Xinhua 2016). By making reference to

international sources, Xinhua points to the increased efforts made by China's political leaders in severing the connection between the Uyghurs and Islam, as it is in this period that the TIP opened a branch in Syria (ACCORD 2016) and that evidence was found of Uyghurs fighting alongside terrorist organizations in the Syrian conflict (Lin 2015; Vagneur-Jones 2017).

Concerning the relation between terrorist attacks and Islam, in addition to opinions from Party officials and international public figures, Xinhua reported the comments of high-level personalities in Xinjiang. For instance, imam Jume Tahir of the Id Kah Mosque, located in Kashgar, in July 2013 stated that "Muslims encourage people to love peace and cherish life ... We should overtly oppose acts intended to split the country and sabotage ethnic unity" (Jume Tahir as cited in Areddy 2014). The following year the imam would be assassinated by three members of an identified group due to his advocacy of moderate Islam, common to the traditional dimension of religion amongst Uyghurs (Soloshcheva 2017), that led to the widespread notion that he was supporting the CPC ('Xinjiangers Condemn Murder of Religious Leader' 2014). Still, imam Tahir's was not the only statement condemning terrorism to come from China's Muslim community, as several members of the IAC released interviews to Xinhua (Xinhua 2014f; 2013a; 2014c; 'Xinjiangers Condemn Murder of Religious Leader' 2014).

The articles published in this period do not only present terrorism as the phenomenon that disrupts the peace and security of civilians around China, but also as the element that hinders any effort devoted by China's leadership to improve the living standards and economic development of Xinjiang. In the articles, terrorist groups are indeed presented under a unique banner as threats to the future development of Xinjiang and the entire region. The actors involved in countering these threats are not therefore limited to military forces such as the PLA and the PAP, but also to the XPCC (e.g., 'The History and Development of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps' 2014; 'XPCC Plays Special Role in Fighting Terrorist Crimes' 2014; 'XPCC Irreplaceable in Maintaining Xinjiang Stability' 2015; 'Senior Chinese official stresses reform' 2017; 'Senior Official Calls for Xinjiang



Stability' 2014; 'Xi's tour delivers new signals on Xinjiang policies' 2014). The XPCC indeed retained the hybrid status of both guarantor of security and promoter of development (Bao 2018).

The corpus of articles indicates the ETIM as the group responsible of the most terrorist attacks in this period. It is mentioned in 15 articles. The WUYC had lost the primacy it had exercised in the previous period, as it is only cited in 3 articles; the same number of articles in which the TIP was mentioned. This implies that only 6.8 percent of the articles connects terrorist attacks to the work of known terrorists, a sharp decrease from the previous period when the articles mentioning known terrorists had accounted for about 39 percent of the total number of the articles published.<sup>179</sup>

Another striking change from the narratives of the two periods involves the case of Ilham Tohti, who replaced Rebiya Kadeer in Xinhua's narrative as the promoter of terrorism. Kadeer, former "daughter of the nation" and incumbent leader of the WUYC, is mentioned in a single article, while, under Hu, she had been identified as the "mastermind" of terrorist attacks in no less than 34 articles. In this period, it was Ilham Tohti, a lecturer in economics currently serving a life-long imprisonment for opening a rather critical blog on the measures adopted by the CPC against the Uyghurs to be identified as a leader amongst terrorists. His job as a teacher, moreover, further aggravated his position, as accusations were made of his exploitation of the position to "corrupt" the young minds of students (Mackerras 2016). Amongst the 6 articles that mention Tohti, 5 go into an in-depth argumentation on his role as terrorist, while 1 dismantles the evocative image that had been painted by Western media of the scholar as a modern-day "anti-colonial hero" at the same level of Nelson Mandela (Xinhua 2014i).

The SCO (and, to a minor extent, other forms of international cooperation) is mentioned extensively in the articles, although the status of the Organization slightly changes from the previous period. Indeed, the SCO – identified as a single body enjoying the same status of China's other foreign partners – is now granted some form of agency and thus the legitimacy to be cited by Xinhua as a

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<sup>179</sup> See section 5.1.2.

voice against terrorist violence in Xinjiang. In particular, it was the RATS of the SCO to issue an official statement condemning terrorist attacks in China on behalf of the Organization (Xinhua 2014e).<sup>180</sup> In contrast with the previous period, the SCO is indeed presented as a partner rather than an example to follow, and cooperation is aimed to be expanded to other areas than security, such as finance and trade. Still, an enhanced cooperation in the framework of the Organization continues to be encouraged by the perspective of security as, from the viewpoint of its members, the SCO has an advantage in fighting against separatism and religious extremism, given its transnational nature (Xinhua 2013c). Lastly, amongst the forms of international cooperation presented in these articles, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is also heavily mentioned. In particular, the role of Xinjiang in the project is identified as crucial (Xinhua 2017b).

The articles published by Xinhua also present a dimension of terrorism that was absent in the previous period – that is, terrorism in cyberspace. Although the theme is present throughout the articles, it acquires primacy from 2016. This tendency is corroborated by the increased number of requests that were submitted to Google by the Chinese government for the removal of web content related to terrorism from its search results. Most requests offer a justification related to “violence” or “national security”. For instance, according to the data of Google’s Transparency Report, in 2014 alone, Google received 14 requests from the Chinese government categorized under either “violence” or “national security,” while in 2017 requests increased up to 318 (‘Google Annual Transparency Report’ 2014-2017).<sup>181</sup>

The media coverage of the terrorist attacks related to the groups active in Xinjiang paints a composite picture of how China’s leaders perceived terrorism in this period. In this sense, 2014 was a turning-point moment. Indeed, 171 articles of the total 265 articles that were published in this period

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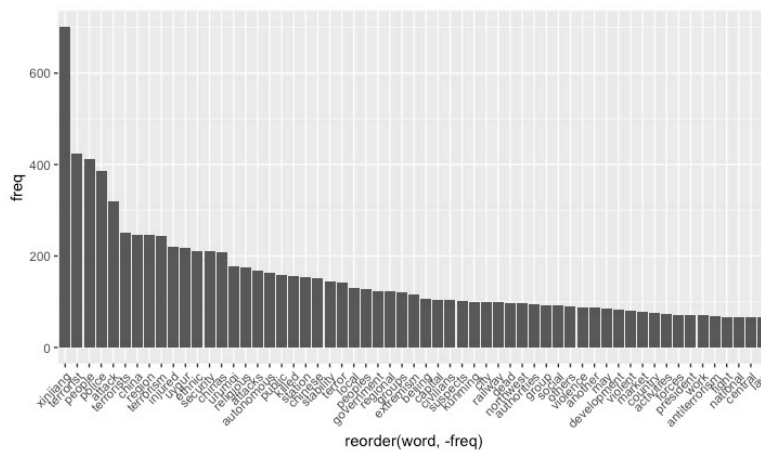
<sup>180</sup> The full text of the document is available in Chinese at this link <http://ecrats.org/cn/news/5923> (last accessed 30 July 2019).

<sup>181</sup> The full dataset for China’s government requests to remove content is available at <https://transparencyreport.google.com/government-removals/overview?hl=en> (last accessed 31 July 2019). Google’s Transparency Report is released biannually.

were released in 2014. 2014 serves the purpose that had been 2009's in the previous period, as it presents terrorism at its peak.

The frequency analysis of the terms most employed by Xinhua in the articles on terrorism published in 2014 indicates a considerable institutional dimension of China's efforts to curb terrorism: indeed, the measures enacted by China's leaders are at the frontline of the narrative presented, while the roles played by external actors, being either terrorists or international and regional organizations, are minimized. Amongst the 50 most-frequent words present in the articles by Xinhua, 13 make reference to China's governmental bodies (i.e., *antiterrorism, authorities, Beijing, capital, central, country, fight, government, law, national, police, president, public*), accounting at about 26 percent of the total number of most-frequent words (figure 27). The term *development*, which had taken up a prime position in the narrative of the previous period, now holds the 46th place among the most-frequent words employed in the articles. At the same time, references to *security* measures (e.g., *forces*) had become more common, thus indicating that the connotation of CT under Xi had changed.

Figure 27 Most-Frequent Words Used by Xinhua in the 2014 Articles on Terrorism in Xinjiang



detected in the official documents, press statements and speeches released by the country's ruling elite.

In contrast with the previous period, President Xi reformed security in a way that does not consider the members of the PBSC as the ultimate providers of a security strategy for the country. His predecessor, Hu Jintao, had institutionalized decision-making processes by assigning the chairmanship to the LSGs of the Central Committee of the CPC to the nine members of its Standing Committees, thus securing that the PBSC would lead in all the dimensions of policymaking.<sup>182</sup> Under Xi, a collective of smaller groups, operating at the national and local levels, were in charge of security in the country. These groups were not side-lined, but actively engaged with the media and the public. Other than these groups, Xi also created new national institutions aimed at making decision-making processes more efficient, above all the Central National Security Commission (CNSC) established in 2013 (Lampton 2015).

The data sources chosen to examine the perception of these actors are the collections of Xi's speeches published by the Beijing-based Foreign Languages Press in 2014 and 2017 in the sections that make reference to terrorism and political instability; the press statements of members of the national and local groups in charge of security, and the White Papers released by the State Council of the PRC in this period that make reference to Xinjiang and terrorism. This collection of data was examined within the framework of the operational code (Dyson and Parent 2018), so as to make a more detailed evaluation of the perceptions of Party officials involved in security and CT.

The value of the first belief (P-1, +0.4) suggests that anti-state groups are not perceived as hostile by the government's security providers in this period. The value of the second belief (I-2, -0.07), in contrast, suggests that the measures to be employed to curb the actions of anti-state groups should lean towards a more hostile approach (table 19). Consistently with Dyson and Parent's insights on President Vladimir Putin's stance to terrorism via the operational code (2018), the more hostile

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<sup>182</sup> For an analysis of the role of the LSGs as advisors to the Politburo and the reforms enacted by President Hu Jintao, see Miller, Alice. 2008. 'The CPC Central Committee's Leading Small Groups'. 26. China Leadership Monitor. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution.

approach is rooted in hard power. These results are consistent with those drawn from the empirical analysis on the number and frequency of terrorist attacks in China in this period, and the more qualitative analysis on the articles released by Xinhua. Indeed, while the empirical data return the image of a threat that moves in a general downward pattern (figure 24), the discursive landscape of Xinhua prioritizes counterterrorist measures that mostly rely on hard power, as CT is presented in relation to the domestic sphere.

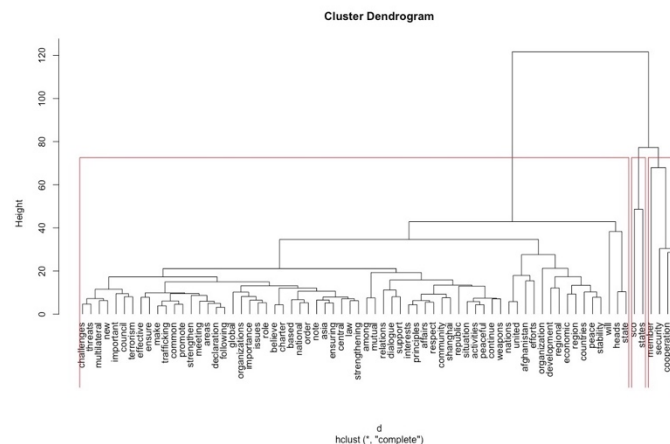
Table 19 The Operational Code of the Party Officials Involved in Security and CT Policy (2012-2017)

		Belief values
<b>Philosophical Beliefs</b>		
P-1	Nature of the Political Universe From +1.0 (friendly) to -1.0 (hostile)	+0,4
<b>Instrumental Beliefs</b>		
I-2	Pursuit of Goals From +1.0 (high cooperation) to -1.0 (high conflict)	-0,07
		$\mu(P-1;I-2) +0,43$ (Cooperative)

Source: Author's elaboration of data from Xi Jinping's speeches, Xinhua General News Service and the White Papers

A cluster dendrogram was built on the corpus of speeches, statements and official documents to illustrate the clusters that compose the discursive landscape of China's security providers (figure 28). The narrative on terrorism and Xinjiang can be traced back to two main clusters: one that is concerned with domestic forms of CT, and one that presents different forms of CT at the international level. Indeed, the total number of references on "domestic forms of CT" represents 91.1 percent of the total number of references on terrorism and Xinjiang. It is interesting to notice that cooperation in the framework of the SCO is separated from other forms of international cooperation in the field (e.g., CICA, ASEAN and the UN).

Figure 28 Visual Representation of the Two Main Discursive Clusters in the Corpus of Data (2014)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from Xi Jinping's speeches, Xinhua General News Service and the White Papers

As the dendrogram shows, the cluster on the “domestic forms of CT” dominates. The leniency towards this particular cluster is consistent with President Xi’s conceptualization of terrorism as linked to a sclerotization of the concept of “ethnic unity.” Indeed, while attending the 14th group study session of the Politburo of the 18th Central Committee, Xi stated that

we [the CPC] should also let patriotic religious personages play a role, enhance positive guidance for religious believers, meet the latter’s normal religious needs, and effectively resist the infiltration of religious extremism ... Terrorists are the common enemy of people of all ethnic groups. We should firmly trust and rely on the officials and the general public of all ethnic groups, and unite with them in safeguarding ethnic unity and social stability. We should increase our efforts to combat separatist activities in the new circumstances, promote ethnic unity, ensure that all ethnic groups work together for common prosperity and development, enhance publicity for and education in ethnic unity, consolidate the theoretical foundation of ethnic unity, and maximize our efforts to unite with the people of all ethnic groups (Xi 2014a).

From Xi’s viewpoint, terrorism was connected to issues like ethnicity and religion, and CT thus mainly required the intervention of the Party. International cooperation was supported as a form of coordination to prevent these issues to gain strength from outside phenomena. Empirical data indicate lower levels of terrorist threat with the number of terrorist attacks following a decreasing tendency. At the same time, the country’s leadership perceived terrorism not as a rising threat, but

one that still required assertive measures to be curbed. As a consequence, the security environment pressure to act is considered medium.

## **6.2 CHINA'S AUTHORITARIAN PREFERENCES**

The following sections investigate the type of authoritarian power wielded by China's political elite under Xi Jinping: either a form of hard authoritarianism characterized by high levels of power centralization, control over civil liberties and political rights and reliance on hard power or a form of soft authoritarianism, which is characterized instances of power diffusion, higher levels of civil liberties and a focus on economy and welfare as key strategies to ensure the country's domestic security and stability. China's strive towards reform, the status of civil liberties and the individual dominance of the General Secretary over the country's PB were analysed to determine the form of authoritarianism in China under Xi.

### **6.2.1 WHICH AUTHORITARIANISM? CIVIL LIBERTIES AND REFORM UNDER XI**

While President Xi Jinping's amendment of the Constitution in 2018 consecrated his position as the first Mao-level leader in China since 1976, this achievement signalled a centralization of power and a future for the country that was moving toward totalitarianism.<sup>183</sup> But Xi's hard authoritarian turn predates the 2018 constitutional amendment, as Xi had acquired the status of China's "core leader".<sup>184</sup> Questions yet remain on when Xi's "tightening" phase had started, given the "relaxation" China had experienced under Hu.

According to data from the database on political prisoners of the US CECC, under Xi, the annual number of arrests for crimes related to civil liberties was on average over 200 arrests (US CECC 2019).<sup>185</sup> Spikes were registered at the very beginning of Xi's leadership due to the Bo Xilai case, as

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<sup>183</sup> The 2018 amendment of the Constitution allowed Xi to eliminate the second mandate limit of the Presidency and to have his philosophical contribution to the Party inserted in the Constitution at the same level of Mao and Deng.

<sup>184</sup> Before Xi, the last "core leader" was Jiang Zemin. Hu Jintao was never addressed with the title.

<sup>185</sup> The arrests taken into account in this study were the ones related to freedom of association, democracy, ethnic issues, Falun Gong, labor rights, religious freedom and freedom of speech.

well as in 2014 after attacks in Xinjiang and in 2017 after the Meng Hongwei case (Figure 29). Under Hu, the number of arrests had spiked in relation to events that disrupted the stability of the country, but they had decreased after these events. For instance, in 2008-2009 in correspondence with the release of Charta 08 and the Lhasa and Ürumqi riots, the number of arrests spiked up to 755, around 1.6 times above the average of the period. From 2010, yet, the number of arrests had returned under average.

Figure 29 Number of Arrests Related to Political Rights and Civil Liberties per Year (2012-2017)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from the database on political prisoners of the US CECC

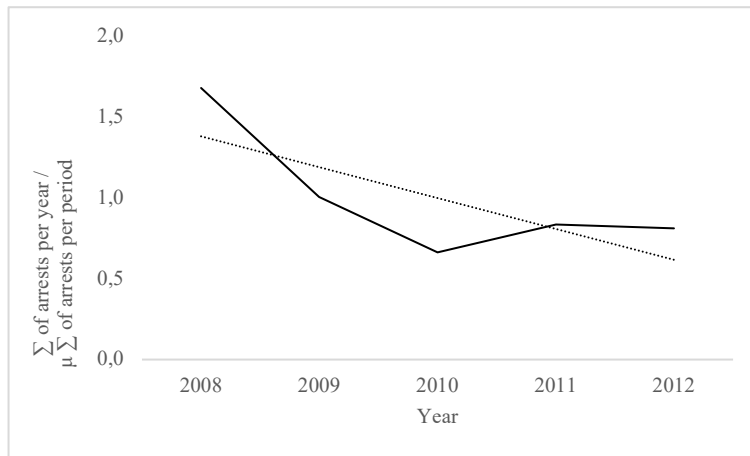
Under Xi, the number of arrests also spiked in correspondence with violent events. Still, the mean scores of the number of arrests show that the tendency line for the arrests under Xi remains stable (Figure 31), while, under Hu, it had started to decrease sensibly after 2008-2009 (Figure 30).<sup>186</sup>

These numbers are particularly interesting, if taken in the context of the reforms concocted in 2012 after the Bo Xilai case. These reforms were presented at the Plenum of the 18th Central Committee in the form of a 60-point text, which outlined about 300 reforms spanning across different policy areas. This document was labelled by Alice Miller (2013b) as the “most comprehensive policy document passed by any Central Committee Plenum since the beginning of the reform era in 1978” (2).

<sup>186</sup> Mean scores were measured by dividing the total number of arrests per year with the mean score of the total number of arrests for all the years under analysis.

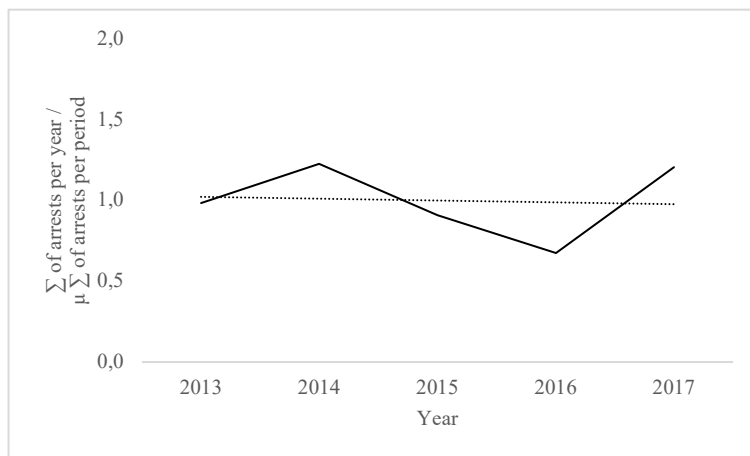


Figure 30 Tendency Line of the Means Scores of the Number of Arrests under Hu Jintao



Source: Author's elaboration of data from the database on political prisoners of the US CECC

Figure 31 Tendency Line of the Means Scores of the Number of Arrests under Xi Jinping



Source: Author's elaboration of data from the database on political prisoners of the US CECC

Although the extent of reform might have suggested that a “relaxation” phase was about to begin, the centralized supervision on the reforms, a core feature of Xi’s approach, goes in another direction. While in Russia attending the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games, Xi gave an interview discussing reforms. He stated that reforms are “10 percent design and 90 percent implementation” (Xi as cited in Lam 2015, 157). As William Lam contends (2015), this statement is indicative of Xi’s vision on reforms, one that maintained the control of the political leadership at the centre of the process. This approach is one of the reasons for Xi and Premier Li Keqiang’s clashes. As Li was Hu’s only supporter to seat in the 18th PBSC, he enjoyed little support from the other six members and had to

accept Xi's approach towards reform.<sup>187</sup> Indeed, Li aimed at reform that would let the market operate, following the same rules of other WTO member states (Miller 2016).<sup>188</sup> In contrast, Xi proposed reforms that were more connected to ideology, a strategy aimed at preventing "subversive mistakes" (Lam 2015, 266). This strategy traces back to the studies that Chinese scholars and analysts had conducted on the USSR, as a detachment from ideology was among the main causes China found to its dismantling (Shambaugh 2016).

As Xi's reform strive was connected to the notion of stability, social governance remained one of its prime application (Miller 2014).<sup>189</sup> Indeed, in the above-mentioned 60-point document, the concept of reforms is linked to the notions of "boosting the leadership of Party committees and pushing forward the guidance of the government" (Lam 2015, 112). During an official visit in Guangdong in this period, for instance, Xi stated that the real question the Party had to answer was not what to reform, but what *not* to reform (Lam 2015). By this, Xi stressed that it was the political leadership that should determine the policy areas in need of being reformed.

This reform centralization is also exemplified by the establishment of the "Leading Small Group for Reform," which fostered reforms only in the economic domain (Miller 2013a). Xi was Chairman of the Leading Small Group and, contrarily to tradition, he also led the "Leading Small Groups of Economy and Finance," which usually are under the supervision of the Premier (Lam 2015). Reform and innovation were thus under Xi's direct supervision, although the Leading Small Group for Reform had three Vice-Chairmen that also were PBSC members: Li Keqiang, Liu Yunshan and Zhang Gaoli (Miller 2013a). The type of reform promoted by the group, though, took several steps back from Deng, China's great reformers, especially at the political level. Deng had in fact established

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<sup>187</sup> Despite a past in the *tuanpai*, Liu Yunshan and Xi maintained a common conservative approach, especially on civil liberties, internet control and free speech (Li 2012).

<sup>188</sup> China had entered the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. To expand on the implications of the country's accession on global markets, see Halverson, Karen. 2004. 'China's WTO Accession: Economic, Legal, and Political Implications'. *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 27: 319.

<sup>189</sup> In Chinese, 社会治理 (Shèhuì zhìlǐ). The concept is thoroughly explained in Yan, Xuexiang, and Hong Zhong. 2014. 'From Social Management to Social Governance 从社会管理走向社会治理 (Cóng shèhuì guǎnlǐ zǒuxiàng shèhuì zhìlǐ)'. *探索 (Tansuo) Exploration*, no. 2: 66–69.

village-level elections since 1979 and envisioned an electoral system for other low-level political positions. Indeed, Deng aimed to reach a higher involvement of the population in the country's political life, in an effort to enact some form of democratic reform (Womack 1982). In contrast, Xi advocated for an electoral reform within the Party and elections among party members were only launched at the city level. These try-out elections, started by Hu during his last Plenum, were quickly abandoned under the pretense of social problems, above all corruption (Lam 2015). Although reform continued to be pursued under Xi, centralization remained a key element that accompanied the process, thus Xi's reform strive was not an instance of "relaxation" but a "tightening" of leadership control in the political domain. Indeed, Polity 5 continues to label China as an autocracy, scoring -7 also under Xi. The EDI by V-DEM offers some additional contextualization on China's autocratic system. Indeed, in this period, the country scores the lowest, when compared with Jiang and Hu. In particular, the country passes from a 0.091 to a 0.084 index in only five years. The decreasing trend is consistent, detecting only a minor increase between 2016 and 2017, when the index registers a 0.001 increase. Under Hu, the EDI had followed an extremely unstable pattern, showing three decreasing moments and two increases. Yet, the scores of the index under Xi point to a steady decrease, indicating worsening autocratic levels. Scores from Freedom House, moreover, also show a steady decrease in GFS values and the country's scores for political rights and civil liberties. In particular, the GFS passed from scoring 17 out of 100 in five years, while civil liberties decreased of one point, passing from scoring 15 in 2015 to 14 out of 60 in 2017. Political rights scored 0 in 2017, the lowest score ever obtained by the country in the whole period under analysis (1996-2017). Freedom House scores thus point to the same "tightening" that was detected in the reform process under Xi.

Similar results are corroborated by the BTI, which paints a composite picture of the scale and extent of the reforms experienced by China in this period. In fact, while in 2012 China's BTI scored 4.9 out of 10, in 2017 the country scored 5, and the country remains in the domain of "very limited" reform (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2012-2018). Moreover, the disaggregated values for China's political

and economic domains show a decrease in the country's levels of democratization that pass from 3.3 out of 5 in 2012 to 3.2 in 2018. Among the five sub-indicators used to compose the index, the value for "stability of democratic institutions" passed from 1 in 2012 to 0.5 in 2018. This decrease underlines the lack of efficiency of Xi's governance due to power concentration (Miller 2014). In contrast, the value for "political and social integration" increased of 0.4 points, passing from 2.3 out of 5 to 2.7. This increase is consistent with the strengthening of intra-party relations under Xi. After the Bo Xilai case in 2012, Hu and Xi both enacted "anti-corruption campaigns," targeting Party members at all levels (Lam 2015). In addition, the joint action of the "anti-corruption" and the "anti-terrorism" guaranteed that Xi would tighten its ranks and paved the road for the 2018 constitutional amendment. In sum, what transpires from the triangulation of these indexes is a general downward tendency for China's autocracy, while reforms, despite remaining sought after, were characterized by power centralization from the part of the General Secretary.

### **6.2.2 INDIVIDUAL DOMINANCE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY OVER THE 18TH AND THE 19TH PBS**

Between 2012 and 2017, China was governed by the 18th and 19th PBs, which Xi led after serving as Hu's number five in the 17th PB (2007-2012).<sup>190</sup> One of Xi's first acts as General Secretary was to change the PBSC conformation back to Jiang's seven-seat composition, abandoning the extension to nine seats promoted by Hu (Miller 2016).

The 18th and 19th PBs comprised Xi's main opponent, Li Keqiang, as Premier of the State Council and sole member of Hu's faction to retain a seat in the 18th PBSC. This ratio was particularly fitting for Xi, who was the promoter of a newly reformed princeling clique. Among the other members of the 18th PBSC, indeed, were Yu Zhengsheng and Wang Qishan, both of whom belonged to the "red aristocracy" like Xi (Miller 2013b). Yu Zhengsheng, in particular, was the son of Yu Qiwei, a revolutionary famous for fomenting protests against the Mukden incident. He was better known under

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<sup>190</sup> See section 5.1.2 for an analysis of Xi Jinping's role in the 17th Politburo.

the pseudonym Hua Jing and in connection to his first wife, Li Yunhue, also known as Madame Mao after she married Mao in 1938 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2001-2019).

Zhang Dejiang, Liu Yunshan and Zhang Gaoli held the remaining seats in the PBSC. They all maintained a strong connection with Jiang and owed their memberships in the PBSC to his mediation (Miller 2013b). In fact, Jiang was still an active member of the CPC, despite having now turned eighty-six. Xi's nomination as General Secretary instead of Li, for instance, is often attributed to Jiang's intervention. Li, in fact, would have made a more natural heir to Hu, as they belonged to the same faction and shared a similar vision for China (Lam 2015). Although both Xi and Li held doctoral degrees, the latter is often considered to be best qualified because of the high quality of his doctoral dissertation (Miller 2013b). Yet, it was Xi to be discovered by Jiang while serving as Party Secretary in Zhejiang, and it was Jiang allegedly to scheme to have Xi enter into Hu's 17th PBSC (Lam 2015). When the 18th PB was revealed in 2012, no observers, neither international nor domestic, could have foreseen Xi's future power grab. Most had considered Xi's nomination as the result of an "alliance" between Jiang and Xi's supporters against Hu and Li.<sup>191</sup> Indeed, Jiang and Xi had an elitist vision of politics that well-served as link for establishing a coalition against the more revisionist ideas promoted by the other camp (Lam 2015). Thanks to this coalition, Xi could count on twelve supporters in the 18th PB that increased to eighteen four years later in the 19th PB. While, in the 18th PBSC, Li was the only member conflicting with Xi, the 19th PBSC also included Wang Yang, who supported Li and Hu's approach. Yet, it should be stressed that Xi remained a reluctant factional politician. The purges endured by his father, Xi Zhongxun, a revolutionary belonging to the first generation of Communist leaders and the first General Secretary of the State Council under Zhou Enlai (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2001-2019), influenced Xi's approach towards factions. Yet, it was not only his father's political life to shape Xi's understanding of politics, but also the case of Bo Xilai, who, as Xi, was a member of the princelings clique (Miller 2013b). Therefore,

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<sup>191</sup> Despite the CPC Constitution states that members of the PBSC are elected, informal polls and consultation are the manner in which nomination actually occur.

it was Xi's personal contacts or Party members with similar backgrounds that he favoured and ensured his dominance over the PB. A biographical analysis of the members of the 19th PB, for instance, shows this tendency. Among Xi's supporters, in fact, eight maintain a personal relation with the General Secretary, while two share a similar background (Table 21).

Table 20 Members of the 18th Politburo

<b>18th Politburo</b>					
<i>Institution</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Education (University level)</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>Relation with Xi</i>	<i>Additional info</i>
Politburo Standing Committee	Xi Jinping	Qinghua University	Princelings	Himself	-
	Li Keqiang	Peking University	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Hu's patronage
	Zhang Dejiang	Kim Il-Sung University Yanbian University	-	Supportive	Jiang's patronage
	Yu Zhengsheng	Harbin Military Engineering Institute	Princelings	Supportive	Son of Huang Jing
	Liu Yunshan	Jining Teacher's College	-	Supportive	Conservative approach
	Wang Qishan	Northwest University	Princelings	Supportive	Xi's patronage
	Zhang Gaoli	Xiamen University	-	-	Jiang's patronage and Hu's appreciation
Politburo	Ma Kai	Renmin University of China	Princelings	Supportive	-
	Wang Huning	Fudan University East China Normal University	Shanghai	Supportive	-
	Liu Yandong	Qinghua University	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Member of the CYL
	Liu Qibao	Anhui National University	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Conflicting faction
	Xu Qiliang	PLA National Defense University	-	Supportive	-
	Sun Chunlan	Anshan Industrial Technology College	-	Conflicting	Hu's camp
	Sun Zhengcai	Qingdao Agricultural University China Agricultural University	-	Supportive	Jia Qingling's patronage
	Li Jianguo	Shandong University	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Li Ruihuan's patronage
	Li Yuanchao	East China Normal University Fudan University Peking University Central Party School	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Member of the CYL
	Wang Yang	Central Party School College of Continuing Education University of Science and Technology of China	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Member of the CYL
	Zhang Chunxian	Yanshan University	-	Supportive	Xi's patronage
	Fan Changlong	People's Liberation Army Xuanhua Artillery Academy People's Liberation Army Military Academy Beijing University of Science and Technology	-	-	-

Meng Jianzhu	Shanghai Mechanical College	-	Supportive	-
Zhao Leji	Peking University	-	Supportive	Xi's patronage
Hu Chunhua	Peking University	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Member of the CYL
Li Zhanshu	Hebei Normal University Harbin Institute of Technology	-	Supportive	Xi's patronage
Guo Jinlong	Nanjing University	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Member of the CYL
Han Zheng	East China Normal University Fudan University	-	-	Member of the CYL

Sources: Author's elaboration of data from *China Vitae*; Mackerras, Mc Millen, Watson (1998); Leung (2002); Sullivan (2016)

Table 21 Members of the 19th Politburo

19th Politburo					
<i>Institution</i>	<i>Member</i>	<i>Education (University level)</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>Relation with Xi</i>	<i>Additional info</i>
Politburo Standing Committee	Xi Jinping	Qinghua University	Princelings	Himself	-
	Li Keqiang	Peking University	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Hu's patronage
	Li Zhanshu	Hebei Normal University, Harbin Institute of Technology	-	Supportive	Xi's personal relation
	Wang Yang	Central Party School, College of Continuing Education University of Science and Technology of China	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Member of the CYL
	Wang Huning	Fudan University, East China Normal University	-	Supportive	-
	Zhao Leji	Peking University	-	Supportive	Xi's patronage
	Han Zheng	East China Normal University, Fudan University	-	-	Member of the CYL
	Politburo	Ding Xuexiang	Fudan University	-	Supportive
Wang Chen		-	-	Supportive	Xi's similar background
Liu He		John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University	-	Supportive	Xi's personal relation
Xu Qiliang		PLA National Defense University	-	Supportive	-
Sun Chunlan		Anshan Industrial Technology College	-	Conflicting	Hu's camp
Li Xi		Northwest normal university	-	Supportive	Xi's similar background
Li Qiang		Zhejiang University	-	Supportive	Xi's personal relation
Hu Chunhua		Peking University	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Member of the CYL
Li Hongzhong		Jilin University	-	Supportive	Jiang and Xi's patronage
Yang Jiechi		University of Bath London School of	-	Supportive	Jiang's patronage

Economics		Nanjing University			
Yang Xiaodu	Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine	-	Supportive	-	
Zhang Youxia	none	-	Supportive	Xi's personal relation	
Chen Xi	Qinghua University	-	Supportive	Xi's personal relation	
Chen Quanguo	Zhengzhou University Wuhan University of Technology	Tuanpai	Conflicting	Li's patronage	
Chen Min'er	Shaoxing University	-	Supportive	Xi's personal relation	
Guo Shengkun	University of Science and Technology Beijing	-	Supportive	Jiang's patronage	
Huang Kunming	Fujian Normal University Qinghua University	-	Supportive	Xi's similar background	
Cai Qi	Fujian Normal University	-	Supportive	Xi's personal relation	

Sources: Author's elaboration of data from *China Vitae*; Mackerras, Mc Millen, Watson (1998); Leung (2002); Sullivan (2016)

During the Hu-Xi transition, the CPC faced bitter criticism about the Bo Xilai case. Bo's status as a member of the "red aristocracy" raised questions over CPC legitimacy, thus jeopardizing political stability. It was from Bo's corruption charges that the privileges enjoyed by the oldest "red families" started to be debated publicly, especially as these privileges violated the principles of Maoism. Moreover, the Bo Xilai case was not the only scandal tied to members of "red aristocracy" to stir public opinion in this period. Ling Gu's car accident, during the last few months of Hu's leadership, for instance, also had the potential to arouse dissent.<sup>192</sup> Two students of Tibetan and Uyghur origin from Beijing's University of Nationalities in fact had also been involved in the crash. Ling's vehicle was a black Ferrari, a symbol of the family's wealth (Ansfield 2012). The accident was not reported on national media, but was discussed on social and international media.

These episodes made the Hu-Xi political transition even more sensitive, as the legitimacy of the CPC was on the line. Xi was not Hu's favourite for the succession, but the sensitivity of the transition spurred the Party to prefer Jiang's conservative approach to Hu's reformism (Lam 2015).

<sup>192</sup> Ling Gu was the son of son Ling Jihua, one of the closest associates of President Hu Jintao (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2019a)



After all, Hu never managed to become “core leader” like Mao, Deng and Jiang (Miller 2016). Moreover, Xi was considered a more moderate politician in comparison to Li, thus making up for the less dangerous option.<sup>193</sup> Indeed, Xi had proven capable to innovate, yet follow Maoist principles (Miller 2014). For instance, extracts from WikiLeaks show that Xi’s work in Shaanxi and Zhejiang had gotten the same assessment (Hall 2012).

While Deng and Jiang, at transitions, maintained the role of Chairmen of the CMC, Xi immediately took over from Hu (Miller 2014). Whether it was because of Xi’s personal experience in the armed forces or the presence of other princelings in the army, it was clear that Xi enjoyed the support of the country’s military. Moreover, Xi prioritized the role of military leaders as policy consultants in contrast with Hu’s state-sponsored think tankers (Miller 2014).

The backgrounds of the members of the 18th and 19th PBs also make a break with the past, as Yu Zhengsheng was the only engineer to make it in the PBSCs. The other members came from a variety of backgrounds, mostly related to the social sciences and humanities. This differentiation is a symptom of a detachment from Deng and Jiang’s technocratic PBs, which had feared that non-technical experts would have charged political decisions with ideology (Lam 2015).

Nonetheless, although when Xi came to power the PB was balanced towards his supporters, the Hu-Xi transition remained very distant from tradition. Yet, in two years, Xi managed to build a widely known personality through the speeches and writings published nationwide. Moreover, thanks to his connection with the military, the legitimacy crisis that the CPC was facing due to the Bo Xilai case and the support of the majority of the PBs, mainly composed of Xi and Jiang’s supporters, the General Secretary managed to pursue a successful power centralization that came as far as stripping Li of some responsibilities that would have traditionally been assigned to the Premier.<sup>194</sup> In addition to rediscussing the core notion of political reform, increasing the number of arrests related to civil liberties and political freedoms, this power grab contribute to building a political system that no

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<sup>193</sup> Xi had been referred to as a Wuweierzhi politician (无为而治, Wúwéi ér zhì), an expression that implied that Xi would have complied with Marxist ideology in style of governance.

<sup>194</sup> See, for instance, the Leading Small Group on Reforms.

longer was rooted in Hu's accountability process. Power transitions in authoritarian countries remain most dangerous when they violate tradition. As new leaders might be asked to subdue opponents or solve instabilities created by non-standard power successions, conflicts between the members of the political elite during these transitions may be responsible for a harshening of the authoritarian power adopted by rulers. As the analysis on the PBs in this period shows, although Xi could count on a wide number of supporters, he was challenged by a deeply unstable political environment, which required the CPC to "tighten" its grasp to maintain stability.

### **6.3 CHINA'S REGIONAL COOPERATION IN CT**

These sections examine the forms of regional cooperation experienced by China within the framework of the SCO. As the SCO presents two main poles, China and Russia, the agenda for the Organization of the two countries is a valid indicator of the role China and Russia played in the SCO. In fact, after 11 years of interactions in the Organization, if China had come to play the role of mentor state, thus managing to insert some of the driving principles behind its objectives for the SCO into the agenda of the Organization, it would entail that the country had internalized the norms of conduct of the SCO and started to "give and not only "take" from the Organization's strategy. In contrast, if China continued to be a novice state in the SCO, thus adopting most of the principles developed into the Organization to devise its own domestic strategies, it would entail that the country's strategies are externally driven from the mentor state of the SCO that could be no other than Russia, especially in the top domain of the Organization: CT policy.

#### **6.3.1 THE AGENDA ON TERRORISM OF THE SCO BETWEEN 2013 AND 2017**

The institutionalization of the SCO culminated in the expansion of its member states in 2017, when India and Pakistan joined as full members (SCO 2017). The process for the inclusion of the two South Asian powers started as early as 2005 when both India and Pakistan were granted the status of observer members to the Organization along with Iran (Sajjanhar 2017). It was only during the 2015

summit of the Heads of State of the SCO in Ufa, Russia that official preparations for the inclusion of the two countries were divulged (Putin 2015). Thanks to the membership of India and Pakistan into the SCO, the aggregated GDPs of SCO member states passed from representing about 16.5 percent of the world's GDP in 2016 to about 20.8 percent in 2017.<sup>195</sup> At the same time, the total military expenditure for SCO member countries passed from representing about 17.6 percent of the world's total military expenditure for 2016 to about 21.9 percent in 2017.<sup>196</sup> It is interesting to notice that China is the SCO member state that invested the most in military power with Russia and India maintaining similar levels of investments between one another (US 66.52 billion dollars and US 64.55 billion dollars in 2017 respectively), but failing to make China's numbers (US 216.3 billion dollars in 2016 and US 227.82 billion dollars in 2017).<sup>197</sup> In 2017 the combined GDPs and military expenditure levels of the SCO member states represented one-fifth of the world's total GDP and military expenditure, but it is China's presence which ultimately determine the result.

In this period, the agenda of CT of the SCO focused on the non-traditional security threats that had started to emerge in official documents in the previous period. In particular, under the banner of the RATS, the SCO expanded its efforts in countering the illegal trafficking of drugs, as a way to limit the funding of terrorist organizations. As Afghanistan is one of the top opioid producers in the world and Central Asia continues to be the main transit region for the opioid trade (UNODC 2019), a concerted effort of regional actors remains one of the few strategies that has the potential to disrupt the connection between drug trafficking and terrorism, since it is due to the unique dynamics of each regional actor that different types of connections between the two phenomena are created (Omelicheva and Markowitz 2018). Since the 2012 SCO summit in Beijing, the commitment of the Organization to countering the illegal trafficking of drugs emerging from Afghanistan has been exemplified in the acceptance of Afghanistan's request to become a SCO observer member (SCO

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<sup>195</sup> Data from the World Bank. GDP in trillion US dollars (at current values, 2019).

<sup>196</sup> Data from the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2019. Values in billion US dollars (at current values). No data available for Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

<sup>197</sup> Data from the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2019. Values in billion US dollars (at current values).

2012). Moreover, at the 2019 summit of the Heads of State of the SCO held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan the Organization put forward the proposal of establishing a permanent agency devoted to countering illegal trafficking in the SCO area, although no operational procedures have yet been set in motion (Perteghella, Sciorati, and Tafuro Ambrosetti 2019).

In addition to countering illegal trafficking, the SCO agenda for CT placed more emphasis on cybercrime. After setting up an expert group in 2013, the Organization conducted its first Internet anti-terrorism exercise in 2015 in Xiamen, a port city located on China's south-east coast (Chen 2015), with the aim of improving the ability of the SCO to detect web content related to the "three forces" and prevent terrorist attacks (Wood 2015). An increase in the levels of international cooperation in the fight against cybercrime is not only part of the SCO agenda for CT in this period, but it is also consistent with China's own 2017 Cybersecurity Law, whose article 7 stresses the importance of "actively carry out international exchange and cooperation in terms of ... crackdown on illegal crimes committed on the network" (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress 2017, article 7).<sup>198</sup>

The last application of the SCO agenda for CT between 2013 and 2017 makes reference to foreign fighters, especially Uyghurs, active in Syria and Iraq. The Counter-Terrorism Committee of the UNSC (CTC), for instance, estimated that, up to 2015, 2500 citizens of SCO member states had travelled to Syria and Iraq to take part to terrorist activities and that some of them had taken their families, including children, with them ('CTED Delegation Meets with the Director' 2015). To tackle the issue, the SCO once again relied on forms of international cooperation. In particular, an operational framework between CTC and RATS was drafted in letter exchanges between 2012 and 2013, a formal application of which, though, did not emerge until March 2019 ('New Framework for Enhanced Cooperation' 2019).

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<sup>198</sup> The full text translated in English of China's Cybersecurity Law is available at <http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?id=22826&lib=law> (last accessed 19 July 2019).

Despite including higher levels of specification, the SCO agenda for CT in this period remained eradicated to the idea the “three evil forces” of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism determine the instabilities that jeopardize the stability of the SCO area. All of the specifications emphasized in the agenda of the Organization (that is, illegal trafficking, cybercrime and foreign fighters) are taken into consideration as collateral challenges to the more pressing threefold conceptualization of terrorism in the region.

### **6.3.2 WHAT IS THE SCO FOR CHINA AND RUSSIA?**

Between 2013 and 2017, China did not host any summit of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO,<sup>199</sup> although the country hosted the 2015 meeting of the Council of Heads of Government in Zhengzhou, capital of China’s north-east province Henan (Table 22) (Medvedev 2015).<sup>200</sup> In this period, China participated to the 2014 and 2016 “Peace Missions” held bi-annually by the organization, acting as host to the 2014 drill at the Zhurihe Training Base located in Inner Mongolia that was held from 24 to 29 August 2014.<sup>201</sup> The Zhurihe drill is considered to be one of the largest anti-terror drills ever conducted within the SCO framework (Wang Ning as cited in ‘SCO exercise Peace Mission’ 2014).<sup>202</sup>

In this period, the SCO served the same function that it had served for China under President Hu Jintao: a proxy organization that aimed to increase China’s presence in Central Asia (International Crisis Group 2013). After 2013, an additional specification was added to China’s SCO function, as Central Asia had become an even-more strategic objective for China. It was in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, that President Xi Jinping on 7 September 2013 delivered the speech that presented

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<sup>199</sup> Between 2013 and 2017, the summits of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO took place in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on 13 September 2013; Dunshabe, Tajikistan on 11-12 September 2014; Ufa, Russia on 9-10 July 2015; Tashkent, Uzbekistan on 23-24 June 2016; and Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan on 8-9 June 2017 (Table 22).

<sup>200</sup> Comprehensive information on the 2015 Council of Heads of Government is available at <http://government.ru/en/news/21054/>

<sup>201</sup> In Chinese, 朱日和训练基地 (Zhū rì hé xùnliàn jīdì).

<sup>202</sup> Wang Ning (王宁 Wáng Níng) currently serves as the Commander of the PAP. In 2014, he acted as Chief Director of the SCO drill in Zhurihe and Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the PLA (Bo 2014).

China's new foreign policy plan, the BRI, whose landroute, the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), planned to connect China to Western European markets by passing through Central Asia (Xi 2018). China's agenda for the SCO is well presented by President Xi's words in Nur-Sultan, as he stressed that China "will deepen trust and cooperation with Central Asian countries ... within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to combat the 'three forces' of terrorism, separatism and extremism as well as drug trafficking and transnational organized crime to create a favourable environment for the economic development and the wellbeing of the people in this region" (Xi 2014a). The fight against terrorism, interpreted in the definition adopted by China's leader, is now directly linked to a general objective of economic and social growth for Central Asia as a region, supposedly determined by increased levels of cooperation with China.

The stated involvement of the SCO in China's BRI plans is particularly sensitive in light of the scale of the whole project which estimates set at up to 8 trillion US dollars (Hillman 2018).<sup>203</sup> The dataset<sup>204</sup> released by the AEI tracking China's investments worldwide reports that the country invested a total of US 39.9 billion dollars between 2013 and 2017 in projects and construction contracts with SCO member countries under the banner of the SREB.<sup>205</sup> The sector in which China invested the most was the energy sector, which comprised 28 projects for a value of US 21.85 billion dollars, most of which were devoted to increasing China-Russia energy cooperation. Russia was the SCO partner that benefited the most of China's investments (60 percent of the total) with Kazakhstan receiving the majority of the remaining funds devoted to SCO countries (45.5 percent). Even excluding Russia, the energy sector remains the recipient of most of China's investments in SCO markets. In fact, 34 percent of China's investments to SCO member countries involve the energy

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<sup>203</sup> No official estimates were released by China's government institutions or state-sponsored research centres so far. An overview of the scale of the BRI and its strategic implications was presented by CSIS in early 2018 and is available at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-big-chinas-belt-and-road>

<sup>204</sup> The dataset is open-access and available online at <http://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/> The July 2019 update was the version of the dataset employed in this study.

<sup>205</sup> Amongst the 39.9 billion US dollars, 14.6 billion were devoted to projects and 25.3 billion to construction contracts. Tajikistan did not receive any investment under the BRI framework in this period (Scissors 2019).

sector, counting a total 12 projects between 2013 and 2017 spanning from the alternative, coal, gas and oil subsectors (Scissors 2019).

The SREB does not only clarify the increased strategic importance of Central Asia for China's grand strategy, but also the sudden lack of commitment to the development of mechanisms of energy cooperation within the SCO framework itself.<sup>206</sup> China continued promoting a wider conceptualization of security in the SCO which was not limited to the military domain, but also included cooperation into other sectors, especially the economy, tourism, education and culture. An increased cooperation in education, for instance, led to the launch of 12 Confucius Institutes in Central Asia, including one in Ashgabat in Turkmenistan.<sup>207</sup> Moreover, international students studying in China through a scholarship scheme discussed under the banner of the SCO were about 20000 in 2013, and most of them came from China's SREB first hub – Kazakhstan. It is interesting to notice that Xinjiang plays a major role in the expansion of China's agenda for the SCO in the field of education, as the region is one of the preferred destinations for Central Asian students moving to China as its culture, religion and language maintain strong similarities to Central Asian states with 80 percent of the total number of international students in Xinjiang coming from Central Asia (A. Li 2018).

Other than a re-focus of China's preferences in the field of cooperation amongst SCO member states, under President Xi China also re-considered the levels of inter-organizational cooperation across Asia. At the 2014 summit of the CICA held in Shanghai on 24 May 2014, President Xi proposed forms of cooperation between CICA and the SCO, the ASEAN, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the League of Arab States (LAS) (Xi 2014a).

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<sup>206</sup> Energy cooperation had been one of the main objectives of China's agenda for the SCO under President Hu Jintao. In contrast to other sectors, such as business, efforts in the energy sector had not led to the establishment of any official or unofficial agency under the banner of the SCO.

<sup>207</sup> This is a particularly significant event as Turkmenistan still is one of the less open countries in the world (Kazantsev 2018). The European Union only managed to find an agreement with Turkmenistan's government to open a permanent delegation in June 2019. For additional information, see [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/turkmenistan/65289/high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-visited-ashgabat-sign-establishment\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/turkmenistan/65289/high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-visited-ashgabat-sign-establishment_en)

Whilst under President Hu China had been extremely cautious in promoting forms of inter-governmental cooperation, President Xi relaxed China's stance, although he also remained adamant in countering any attempt from the part of Russia to transform the SCO into a formal military alliance. Although increasingly more comprehensive SCO joint military drills were drawing the organization into that direction, China prevented the SCO to draft any official agreement in this sense. Russia's reputation at the international level in this period, in fact, was particularly unfavourable for the SCO to change its status.

Between 2013 and 2017, Russia played host to the 2015 summit of the Heads of State of the SCO which took place in Ufa, capital city of the Republic of Bashkortostan located in north-west Russia at the border with Kazakhstan (Table 22). The annual SCO summit for 2015 coincided with the annual summit of the BRICS (Putin 2015). In this period, Russian armed forces participated to the SCO 2014 and 2016 "Peace Missions." The number of troops involved in the missions per country is currently unclear, as the prime sources of information are Russia and China state media agencies, TASS and Xinhua respectively, and they present unmatching estimates ('SCO Exercise Peace Mission' 2014; TASS 2016).

Russia's agenda for the SCO in this period is affected by the country's annexation of the Ukrainian region of Crimea in 2014.<sup>208</sup> The annexation did not find any support from the international community, which imposed Russia three rounds of sanctions in 2014 (Oxenstierna and Olsson 2015). As a consequence, regional cooperation acquired even more importance for Russia with the SCO, in particular, remaining the sole framework of cooperation that moved beyond the post-Soviet space, as it comprised China, another veto power from the UNSC.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> To expand on the international responses to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the subsequent isolation of the country, see Biersack, John, and Shannon O'Lear. 2014. 'The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy'. *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 55 (3): 247–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2014.985241>

<sup>209</sup> Russia currently is a member of several regional organizations, such as the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) since 1992, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) since 1998, the SCO since 2001, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) since 2015. See Tsygankov, Andrei P., ed. 2018. *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*. Abingdon: Routledge.



Due to Russia's position in the international community, it was natural that the country would expand its narrative of the SCO as an alliance between non-Western powers. Such an objective, though, remained hindered by Russia's fellow partner in the SCO, China, in whose foreign policy calculations stable relations with foreign partners were key for its foreign policy plan to be successful. As a consequence, the annexation of Crimea is a turning-point for Sino-Russian relations in the SCO (Lanteigne 2018). After the institutionalization of the organization in the previous period, Russia's CT policy in Chechnya had been central in China's political discourse on Xinjiang, and the definition of terrorism adopted in China's documents on CT had been inspired by the institutional documents of the SCO (Xinhua 2015c).<sup>210</sup> In turn, SCO documents on CT had been drafted on the hard case of Chechnya, as the form of terrorism emerging from the region did not only assume the form of political violence, but also retained a religious motive and secessionist claims, thus embodying the "three evil forces."<sup>211</sup> These characteristics of the threat emerging from Chechnya bore a high similarity with China's Xinjiang and Russia's CT policy in Chechnya had complied with the country's goals for its Western regions. Crimea, on the contrary, set a dangerous example for China's own secessionist regions, as it violated the principles of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of another country and that of territorial integrity. As Gui Congyou, acting director of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's European-Central Asian Affairs department, stated to TASS in late November 2014 while discussing Crimea: "we [the Chinese government] are against any nationality gaining independence through referendums. As far as Crimea is concerned, it has very special features. We know well the history of Crimea's affiliation" (Gui Congyu as cited in 'China against Declaration of Independence at Referendums' 2014). Gui's statement well represents China's approach to the annexation of Crimea to Russia, as it refuses secessionism, while setting Crimea on a different level to any of its own secessionist regions. By doing so, China was attempting to preserve its relations with Russia. Still, the country's stability at the domestic level ought to be preserved, thus foreign ministry spokesperson

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<sup>210</sup> See section 5.3.

<sup>211</sup> To expand on the connection between the conceptualization of terrorism as the combination of the "three evil forces" and the events unfolding in Chechnya, see section 5.1.

Qin Gang right after the annexation stressed China's commitment to the principle of non-interference in international relations (Qin Gang 2014), and the country's support to Ukraine's unity and sovereignty. Moreover, President Xi reiterated the same vision to President of Russia Vladimir Putin in a recorded telephone conversation a couple of days later ('The Situation in Ukraine Is Now Suspended' 2014).

Concerns raised by Chinese government authorities in relation to the Ukraine crisis were mainly driven in an effort to prevent a "domino effect," which a *faux pas* in China's responses to the crisis would provoke, and to ensure that the country's own secessionist regions would not follow Crimea's example. China's attitude towards Russia and the country's agenda for the SCO after the annexation of Crimea shows the extent reached by the country's experience in the realm of CT which was less dependent from the example of other states and had started to rely on its own operational framework. A case in point are the CT campaigns launched in Xinjiang in this period which draw back from the experience of Mao's People's War. Under the banner of these campaigns, CT started not only to rely on mere military power, but also on a full-scale invasion of personal and social life. These campaigns have come to the point of relying to vocational training centres and artificial intelligence surveillance technologies that have the potential to turn China's CT policy into state terrorism (Smith Finley 2019a).

After the annexation of Crimea, it was clear that the agenda of Russia and that of China for the SCO had diverged. As China's BRI project was enabling the country to acquire more strategic importance in Central Asia, Russia's role in the region was being undermined. The full memberships of India and Pakistan into the SCO in 2017 is the tell-tale sign of a divergence of China and Russia's objectives for the organization.<sup>212</sup> The joint acceptance of the two South Asian powers, in fact, jeopardizes the stability that China and Russia have been pursuing in the SCO, as history shows that

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<sup>212</sup> The process had started with the summit of the Heads of State of the SCO in 2015, right after the annexation of Crimea (Putin 2015).

India and Pakistan's conflictual relations peak unexpectedly (Ahmed, Ahmed, and Bhatnagar 2019).<sup>213</sup>

While the acceptance of India's membership was sponsored by Russia, Pakistan's found in China its main supporter (Perteghella, Sciorati, and Tafuro Ambrosetti 2019). Russia was attempting to re-balance China's presence in Central Asia and the SCO by introducing China's main competitor in Asia into the organization (Babones 2017). At the same time, Pakistan, one of China's traditional allies in the region, was hosting one of China's most ambitious BRI projects, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which aimed to establish a direct connection between China's Southern regions and the Arabic Sea (Jacob 2018).<sup>214</sup>

With India entering the SCO, the organization welcomed the first democracy between its members. As a result, the working mechanisms of the organization became more transparent up to the point of televising the 2019 summit of the Heads of State of the SCO.<sup>215</sup> Moreover, India and Pakistan memberships disrupted the mentor/novice relations established between SCO countries. China was in fact no longer relying on 16 years of adjustment to behavioural norms dictated by a cohort of countries that had been part of the same state for centuries, but was forced to work towards a new equilibrium for the organization.

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<sup>213</sup> In late February 2019, India and Pakistan risked an open-conflict after the Indian aviation bombed a terrorist camp located on Pakistan's territory as a form of retaliation for the terrorist attack in Kashmir that had costed the lives of 46 Indian military officers two weeks earlier. As the Indian government accused Pakistan to grant the protection of terrorists, Pakistani forces responded by taking down two Indian jets, capturing and releasing one of the pilots in a few hours. This event is the last occurrence of a vaster animosity that has the potential to disrupt the principle of cooperation within the SCO, creating a break within the organization. For a discussion on India-Pakistan relations, see, among others, Iyer-Mitra, Abhijit. 2019. 'A "Paper Tiger"? What India Wants to Be(Come)'. In *India's Global Challenge. Growth and Leadership in the 21st Century*, edited by Ugo Tramballi and Nicola Missaglia, 111–40. Milan: Ledizioni LediPublishing.

<sup>214</sup> From estimates dating back to 2017, China invested 62 billion US dollars in the CPEC (Siddiqui 2017). Other than being one of China's top BRI projects, it is also the one that was most targeted by terrorism. On 23 November 2018, China suffered its most destructive terrorist attacks on foreign grounds outside of Africa as a bomb was set off in the Chinese Consulate in Karachi. Terrorists were protesting Chinese infrastructural projects in Pakistan (Khan 2018).

<sup>215</sup> A record of the live updates released during the 2019 summit is available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/sco-summit-2019-live-updates-pm-narendra-modi-to-hold-bilateral-meet-with-xi-jinping-putin/liveblog/69765304.cms> (last accessed 18 July 2019).

Table 22 Annual Meetings of the SCO (2013-2017)

Date	Location	Representatives	
		China	Russia
13 September 2013	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	Xi Jinping, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President
11-12 September 2014	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	Xi Jinping, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President
9-10 July 2015	Ufa, Russia	Xi Jinping, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President
23-24 June 2016	Tashkent, Uzbekistan	Xi Jinping, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President
8-9 June 2017	Nur-Sultan (ex-Astana), Kazakhstan	Xi Jinping, Chairman	Vladimir Putin, President

Source: Author's elaboration of data from [eng.sectesco.org](http://eng.sectesco.org)

### 6.3.3 WHO MAKES THE RULES?

In this period, the objectives of China and Russia for the SCO dramatically conflicted. Due to the precarious status of the country among the international community after the annexation of Crimea, Russia relied on its long-standing proposal of turning the SCO into a formal military alliance which would act as an anti-Western pole (Lanteigne 2018). This objective had never been more pressing for Russia, as the Crimean crisis had intensified the traditional “West *vis-à-vis* East” precept of the country’s foreign relations (Neumann 1996).

At the same time, China’s ambitious BRI required relations between the country and its partners to remain friendly; and the transformation of the SCO into an anti-Western pole had the potential to hinder China’s passage through Western countries. In particular, between 2013 and 2017, the scale of the BRI was not only determined by its expanded geographical and geopolitical reach, but it also influenced the power dynamics of the country’s political leadership. The reform of the country’s Constitution in 2018, for instance, was rooted, among others, in the idea that, to be successful, the BRI required higher levels of political stability that the two-mandates limit of the Presidency could not guarantee (Talia 2018). Thus, what was in line were not only the massive amounts of investments made by China into the economies of its foreign partners, but also President Xi’s own legitimacy to govern both from the viewpoint of the CPC and the public.

As in this period both China and Russia were highly projected at the international level, the objectives of both countries for the SCO are reflected in what could be labelled as a “second wave of institutionalization” for the Organization. Indeed, due to the wide agenda of the SCO, even after more

than a decade its institutionalization was not yet completed. The Organization's second wave of institutionalization, in fact, was characterized by the objective of re-shaping the mechanisms surrounding the functioning and the development of the SCO and the mandates of its permanent bodies – i.e., the Secretariat and the RATS. For instance, in 2014, the Organization approved a series of formal guidelines to enable foreign partners to apply for full membership: a process that had previously been extremely unclear (Shanghai Cooperation Organization Division 2019). In this period, no new permanent agency was launched, although increasing efforts were made in countering transborder threats, especially in terms of countering the illegal trafficking of drugs and weapons.

From the viewpoint of military cooperation, China covered some ground in shaping military cooperation among SCO member states, mainly thanks to the country's numerous investments in the military domain at the domestic level, evidenced by a significant increase in the country's public security expenditure (National Bureau of Statistics of China 1997). Expenditure on public security in China increased from the previous period, passing from about US 100 billion dollars in 2012 to US 174 billion dollars in 2017. The majority of the expenditure for public security arose from local governments, which in 2017 spent US 149 billion dollars, while the Central government used only US 25 billion dollars (National Bureau of Statistics of China 1997; 1997). In this period, China did host one of the largest SCO military drills in 2014 ('SCO Exercise Peace Mission' 2014). SCO joint military exercises continued to be organized bi-annually and, in this period, the SCO "Peace Missions" were held in 2014 in the Zhurihe Training Area in Inner Mongolia in China, and in 2016 in the Edelweiss Training Area in Balykchy in Kyrgyzstan (De Haas 2016). According to data from the State Council Information Office of the PRC (2018), up to 2017, the SCO organized 24 joint military drills, 14 of which were hosted by China and 8 by Russia. China's armed forces attended all military drills, whilst Russia's participated to 19.

Despite its leniency towards Russia, the bilateral arms trade between China and Moscow also is a valid indicator of the efforts made by China in modernizing its military. Not only did China's imports from Russia increase, but they also differentiated in terms of the types of weapons acquired.

At the same time, China became a more active exporter of weapons and weapon materials to Russia (Simoes, Landry, and Hidalgo 2019). According to data from the OEC of the MIT (2019), in 2017, Russia exported 6 million US dollars' worth of goods to China, the majority of which were explosive ammunitions.<sup>216</sup> In the same year, Russia imported from China spring, air and gas guns for a total value of about US 1.1 million dollars, representing 71 percent of the total imports of Chinese weapons to Russia (Simoes, Landry, and Hidalgo 2019).<sup>217</sup>

The opening speeches of China and Russia during the SCO Heads of States Councils remain representative of the precepts that moved the agenda for the Organization of both countries. China's narrative, for instance, shifts from a reiteration of the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" to a new security concept for Asia that President Xi had presented in Shanghai in 2014. During the fourth summit of the CICA, President Xi had emphasised the need for Asia to move beyond the conceptualization of security as a "zero-sum game" that had been devised during the Cold War, and "advance the process of common development and regional integration, foster sound interactions and synchronized progress of regional economic cooperation and security cooperation, and promote sustainable security through sustainable development" (Xi 2014b).

By looking at this concept transpires its support of the types of security and cooperation that were required to the BRI to be successful: a wider conceptualization of security that comprises traditional and non-traditional security threats and that places international cooperation at the forefront.

In contrast, Russia's opening speeches to the SCO annual Heads of State summits point to the country's leniency towards a stronger link between the SCO and other forms of regional cooperation, especially the CSTO. Although a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two Organizations was signed in October 2007 to foster a collaboration between the two Secretariats

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<sup>216</sup> In 2017, exports of explosive ammunitions to China were worth about 5.6 million US dollars (Simoes, Landry, and Hidalgo 2019).

<sup>217</sup> Russia's total imports of weapons from China amounted at about 1.6 million US dollars in 2017 (Simoes, Landry, and Hidalgo 2019).

(Collective Security Treaty Organization n.a.), a more profound engagement between the two Organizations would have proven key to ensure Russia's primacy in the region. Maintaining its status as the main partner of Central Asian states had never been more pressing for Russia, as China's BRI had resulted in the increased presence of China in the region, and the Crimean crisis had instilled doubts in Russia's Central Asian partners with regards to the country's intentions. After Crimea in 2014 and Russia's role in the Abkhazia-South Ossetia conflict in 2008, to what extent Russia remained a partner and did not become an aggressor? It is not surprising that Russia's agenda for the SCO aimed to close ranks at the regional level and counterbalance against the West: a conceptualization of regional security that drew from the concepts that President Xi had harshly criticized at the CICA summit in 2014.

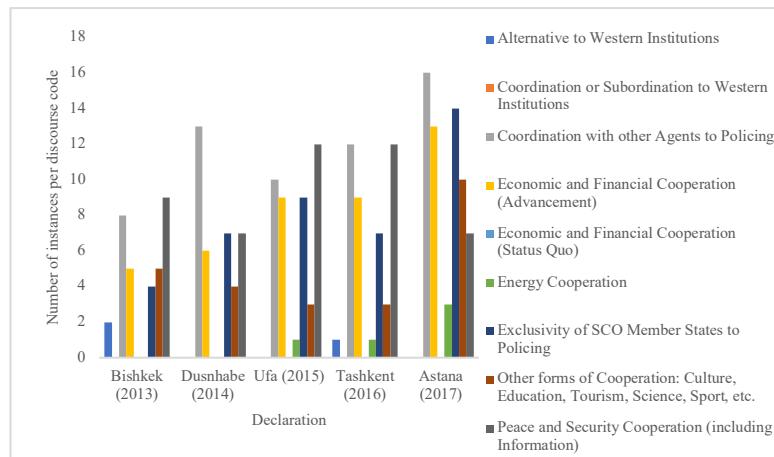
The animosity between China and Russia in the SCO sclerotized in all the phases of the accession processes underwent by India and Pakistan to become full members of the Organization. After receiving a formal application in 2014, the request was accepted during the 2015 Ufa summit in Russia and discussions on the practical aspects of the accession begun (Shanghai Cooperation Organization Division 2019).<sup>218</sup> The accession of the two countries possibly is the most vivid instance of the competition between China and Russia in the SCO at a time when China was proving of having been acquired the status of top member of the Organization, despite its disadvantage in having formed a cooperation network with states that were formerly part of the same political unit (Yuan 2018).

The agenda of the SCO is revealed by the Declarations that are published after each annual Heads of State Council, as these documents contain a summary report of the Organization's previous work and its future strategy. Since they introduce the main concerns of the SCO for the year to come, the Declarations are a useful indicator of the decision-making processes undergoing in the Organization. In fact, it is in the discursive landscape of the SCO that the country's whose goals primarily shape the agenda of the Organization is indicated.

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<sup>218</sup> India and Pakistan became full members of the SCO in 2017 (Babones 2017).

Figure 32 Overview of Total Discourse Counts by Declaration (2013-2017)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from [eng.sectesco.org](http://eng.sectesco.org)

Figure 32 summarises the distribution and frequency of the discourse codes over time. The Figure shows that discourse in the Organization in this period is linked to issues related to the coordination of the SCO with other agents active at the regional and international levels. In fact, it is the opposing discourse codes related to “coordination with other agents in policing” and “exclusivity of the SCO member states to policing” to be amongst the most frequently coded instances in the discursive landscape of the Declarations. In a sense, it is as if the Organization, reached a more advanced point in its institutionalization, was now questioning the stance that it should take in its relations with other actors and agencies, other than that of silent partner as in the framework of the United Nations to which the Organization had been an observer member since 2005.

The prevalence of this type of discourse is also related to the contrast between China and Russia on the nature of the Organization. While China, with its BRI project, was looking to increase cooperation beyond the region, Russia was more concerned with developing stronger ties between SCO member states and open the Organization to coordination only with other agencies and partners from the region. A clash amongst the two powers of the SCO, then, that is centred around the extent of the interactions of the Organization. Indeed, the code for “coordination with other agents in policing” grows extensively in the discursive landscape of the Organization, but for 2015 when the Ufa summit shifts the attention of the SCO back to the security domain in the region. After all, the



2015 Ufa summit was the first occasion for the member states of the Organization to meet after Russia's annexation of Crimea. From the Ufa summit, it is the discourse code for "peace and security" to become more frequent; a trend that is also displayed in the 2016 Bishkek Declaration, but that halts during the 2017 Astana summit. The Astana Declaration shows an increase in the frequency of most discourse codes compared to the previous documents, but for the one concerning "peace and security" and "an alternative to Western institutions" which decrease. These two codes are also representative of Russia's key objectives for the Organization.

This decrease is interesting to look at also in comparison with the previous period, during which they had predominated.<sup>219</sup> The agenda of the SCO had then been polarised around these two objectives, while it is between 2013 and 2017 that the dual mandate of the Organization fully emerges for its documents. The objective of "peace and security" is, in fact, complemented by the goal for the enhancement of economic and financial cooperation that remains at higher levels throughout the Declarations. As the instances for the discourse codes representing "peace and security" and "economic and financial cooperation (advancement)" stabilized at high frequency levels, this entailed that these codes had become accepted standards in the framework of the Organization and that security had been joined by economic cooperation at the operational level, and not only nominally as it had been in the previous period.

Instances related to codes on "energy cooperation" emerge from the Declarations of the Organization from 2015 onwards at low but increasing levels. This tendency indicates that energy cooperation remains more politically costly to operationalize than the other objectives of the Organization, while an attempt to put cooperation in this field into practice is being fomented, also thanks to the energy projects of the BRI amongst SCO member countries. According to data from the Global Investment Tracker (GIT) (2019), in fact, energy projects in SCO states under the banner of the BRI amounted at about US 6 billion dollars divided into 9 projects located mostly in Kazakhstan,

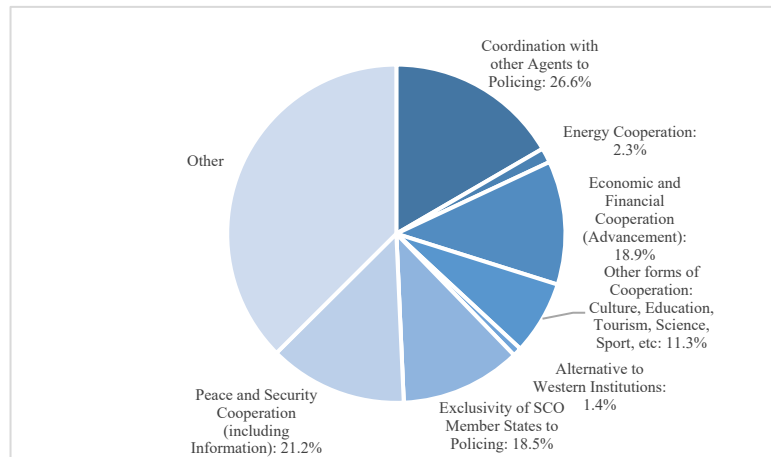
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<sup>219</sup> See section 5.3.3.

Russia and Uzbekistan and the Oil & Gas sector. Moreover, after 2015, the working agenda of the Organization also expanded to other forms of cooperation in a more practical framework, as the stabilization of the increase in the frequency of the discourse code “other forms of cooperation: culture, education, tourism, science, sport, etc” shows.

The share of each discourse code on the total number of instances analysed is visually displayed by figure 33. It is interesting to notice that the areas that were most covered in the entire corpus of Declarations stresses the duality of the Organization’s mandate (security and economic cooperation) and the status of the SCO as either an Organization that maintains an international or a regional network. The most striking variation from the Declarations released in the previous period is that the idea of the Organization as an alternative pole to Western institutions had almost disappeared from official documents. In the previous period, the same code had indeed accounted for 12.4 percent of the discursive landscape, while now it reached less than 1.5 percent. Moreover, two discourse codes that had been relevant in the previous period had vanished completely from the documents – these are, “subordination to Western institutions” and “economic and financial cooperation (status quo).” The first, in particular, is connected to the losing ground of discourse as the SCO as an alternative to Western institutions, as it points to the Organization as moving in the direction of becoming a partner of international organizations and states and not an adversary or a superior. At the same time, it was an enhancement of the framework of international cooperation in the SCO that drove discourse in the Organization.

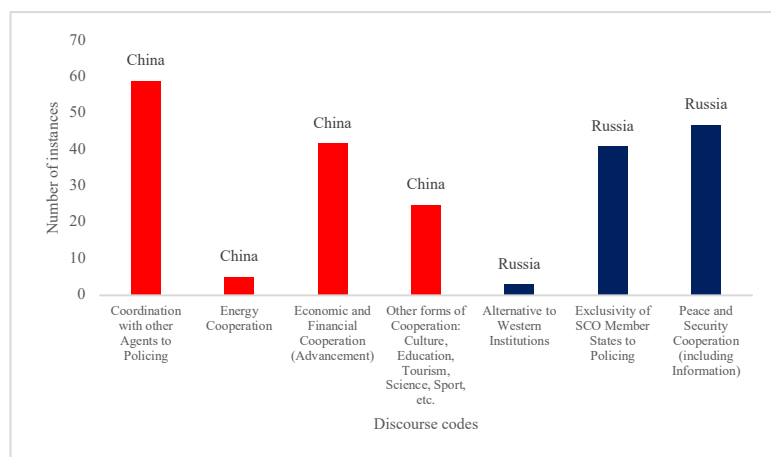
Figure 33 Discourse Code Shares on Total Instances (2013-2017)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from eng.sectsc.org

Figure 34 is representative of the discourse counts referring to the objectives of China and Russia in aggregated form, as present in the SCO Declarations in this period. The agenda of both powers is present in the discursive landscape of the Organization, but the Chinese objectives are emphasized the most. In particular, instances on coordination with other agents of policing and enhancement of economic and financial cooperation are particularly emphasized, as consistent with China's general objectives for the BRI.

Figure 34 Comparison of China and Russia's Discourse Counts per Code (2013-2017)



Source: Author's elaboration of data from eng.sectsc.org

The discursive landscape of the Declarations in the SCO as well as the projects the organization started between 2013 and 2017 indicate that China's role within the SCO was no longer that of a novice state, as it had been in the previous period, but that the country had internalized the norms of the Organization and started to build new rules of its own that moved beyond the exclusive focus on CT that had shaped the SCO in the previous period. More than a decade after having entered into the SCO, China had indeed lost its status as a novice state by internalizing fully the norms of the Organization. A process that would have been impossible for the country during the transition in 2001 when the Shanghai Five had transformed into the SCO, as the Organization had experienced a new institutionalization, which *de facto* expanded the number of its members and established new cooperative interactions.

However, despite having acquired a less subordinate position within the SCO in this period, China remained tied to the norms it had acquired when playing the role of novice state in the Organization in the domains of security and CT. Indeed, CT policy remained within Russia's sphere of influence as it was Moscow to "pull the strings" of policy-making in this domain. In fact, as socialization theory contends, states in social environments internalize the norms promoted by mentors (Johnston 2007). Yet, states can pass from "novices" to participants in international institutional life, when the norms embedded in social environments are fully internalized by novices and states start promoting their own normative behaviour (Johnston 2001). What is interesting to notice in China's membership to the SCO is that, despite the country *de facto* started to make normative contributions to the Organization in this period, it did so in domains that were not connected to security, which remained Russia's policy-choices domain. Therefore, although China participated to the normative processes of the SCO (thus acquiring the status of mentor state), the country's approach towards security and CT remained dependent on the behavioural norms China had acquired in the previous period by Russia that maintained supremacy in the security domain.

## CONCLUSIONS

The chapter analyses the three factors that the theoretical framework identifies as the factors that have the potential to affect China's CT policy between November 2012 and June 2017. The goal is to investigate each factor so as to determine the extent to which it can potentially influence China's CT policy choices.

The first factor examines the external pressure played by security environment by looking at the empirical data on the number and intensity of the terrorist attacks experienced by the country and the perceptions of China's domestic security agents. Rationalist theories on CT policy indeed are grounded in the notion that hard/soft CT policy correlate with increasing/decreasing levels of terrorist threats (Bueno De Mesquita 1988; Fearon and Wendt 2002). Data on the number and intensity of terrorist attacks were collected from the dataset compiled by the Global Terrorism Database of the University of Maryland, which was cross-referenced with the digital archives of the international edition of the SCMP so as to ensure the exhaustiveness of the data. The perceptions of China's security agents were examined by looking at the articles released by Xinhua on terrorism and by assessing the selected beliefs of domestic security agents extrapolated from the framework of the operational code. Findings indicate a detachment between the empirical data on the terrorist attacks experienced by the country and the perceptions of China's security leaders. Despite the number of terrorist attacks is higher than under Hu's presidency, more than fifty percent is clustered around a single year (2014) and the general trend for the terrorist attacks of this period is downward-looking.

At the same time, Xinhua identifies the majority of episodes of political violence experienced by the country as instances of terrorism. The negative influence of terrorism to development is now not only presented in relation to the country's Western regions, but also with regards to China's status at the regional and global levels. In fact, terrorist attacks are often presented in correlation with the role Xinjiang plays in the BRI. Moreover, the framework of the operational code (Dyson and Parent 2018), used to analyse the statements about terrorism made by China's domestic security providers, points to a disjunction between the status of the terrorist threats – that is not considered “conflictual”

– and the counterterrorist measures that lean towards “conflict,” thus denoting high levels of assertiveness. This mismatch between the empirical data and the perceptions of domestic security providers, thus indicates that the external pressure of China’s security environment is “medium” for this period.

The second factor examines the political orientation of the elite in terms of levels of authoritarianism. The rationale is to determine the extent to which Xi adopted a “hard” or a “soft” form of authoritarianism (Shambaugh 2016) to govern the country. The degrees of political freedoms and civil liberties were assessed by means of indexes and data on arrests were extracted from databases compiled by established organizations. These data show a consistency in the form of power adopted by Xi over the country, which leans towards “hard authoritarianism.” This consistency is substantiated by a limited strive towards political reforms. Even at the most critical phase for Xi’s leadership – that of transition from the presidency of Hu – he was capable of maintaining a strong hold over the Politburo and launch “anti-corruption campaigns” which resulted in purges against his political adversaries. Lastly, his leadership style mostly relied on setting limits to the freedom of expression of the population and the members of the CPC rather than on propaganda. As a consequence, Xi’s control over political institutions remained tight throughout the period.

The third factor examines the norm-making reference groups that can potentially influence the country’s policy-choices in the domain of CT. By this, I looked at the mechanics of regional cooperation in the SCO, since the organization comprises states that are involved in joint counterterrorist activities with China. Between November 2012 and June 2017, the SCO specialized the mandates of its agencies and started to expand its coordination with the actors and the organizations that were active at the regional and global levels. In terms of norm-making, China and Russia were still the sole members of the SCO that could potentially act as mentors in the organization since theirs were the sole political and economic systems that were not undergoing processes of state-building. China and Russia had different objectives for the SCO, the impact of which on the organization’s policy-choices was examined in the Declarations released annually by the Council of

the Heads of State of the SCO. The discursive landscape of the Declarations shows that mentions of China's objectives are more frequent and more embedded in the texts. Moreover, in the previous period, the SCO's institutionalization had prioritized the security domain: an issue-area that reflected Russia's objectives for the organization. Conversely, in this period, the SCO's agencies prioritized economic, touristic and education forms of cooperation: issue-areas that are distinctive of China's objectives for the organization. Therefore, in light of its discursive landscape and processes of institutionalization, mentorship is given to China for this period.

These three factors construct a framework for China's CT policy that is visually presented in table 23. Findings on the first factor disprove the rationalist tenet of CT studies, as no sensible increase in the levels of terrorist threats was detected in this period despite a China's counterterrorist measures remained linked to hard power.

At the same time, an assessment of the second factor displays a leniency towards a form of hard authoritarianism under Xi's presidency. In fact, while civil liberties and political freedoms were rather limited around the country, Xi's reforms in the political domain were characterized by higher levels of power centralization. In addition, Xi's transition from Hu's leadership involved intra-party conflicts, characterized by a series of "anti-corruption campaigns" that also involved Xi's own supporters. A hardening of the country's form of authoritarianism can then be detected throughout the period.

The third factor identifies China's mentorship in the only reference group that can potentially influence the country's adoption of externally driven norms in CT policy. In this period, it was China's objectives to provide the direction of the SCO's working agenda as shown by an analysis on the discursive landscape of the organization. Moreover, a coordination between the organization's mandate and the country's own BRI projects deepened the working agenda of the SCO in other issue-areas than security, a Russia-led field of cooperation that had been prioritized in the previous periods.

Analyses on these three factors point to a convergence between the hardening of authoritarian power in the country and China's full internalization of the SCO's norms on CT policy promoted in

the previous period by Russia’s leadership. Indeed, despite China no longer played the role of the novice in the SCO, the normative efforts of the country did not extend to security and CT. Thus, the policies adopted in this period by the Organization in these two domains depended on the norms that had been internalized in the previous period, when it was Russia’s that shaped the policy-choices of the Organization. Nevertheless, the high-level assertiveness that Russia’s conveyed norms on CT proposed in this period was aggravated by the hard-authoritarian orientation of the country’s political elite. Thus, both the internal and external dimensions of China’s CT policy have then the potential to explain a sensible hardening in China’s counterterrorist measures for Xinjiang in this period.

Table 23 The Making of China’s CT Policy (2012-2017)

<i>Systemic variable</i>	<i>Domestic variable</i>	<i>Individual variable</i>	<i>Policy outcome</i>
Pressure from the security environment	Political orientation of the elite towards authoritarianism	Role in reference groups ( <i>socialization process</i> )	Counterterrorism policy
Medium	Hard Authoritarianism	Mentor*	Hard CT Policy



## CONCLUSIONS

At the time of the completion of this thesis (December 2019), international observers are ever more concerned with the state of China's counterterrorism policy in Xinjiang. After eye-witness accounts spread around the world in late 2017 (Sulaiman 2017), news of the establishment of modern-day internment camps in Xinjiang caused alarm among members of civil society and the academic and political communities about the integrity of the Muslim minorities that inhabit the region.<sup>220</sup>

China considers the camps as educational and vocational facilities that fall in the domains of CT policy and de-radicalization. Among others, during a panel of the "2019 Mediterranean Dialogues" held in Rome on 7 December, China's Special Envoy to the EU, Mr Wu Hongbo, stressed that China's measures in Xinjiang comply with UN standards on CT policy (Hamaizia et al. 2019).<sup>221</sup> References to the UN system of CT policy are not a novelty for China, as much as also the joint statements and declarations released by the Shanghai Five and the SCO mention the UN as a normative reference for CT policy (Shanghai Five 1996-2000; SCO 2001b-2017).

The latest application of China's CT policy in Xinjiang has major implications for the country's efforts as a human rights defender at the international level, especially since China has recently been taking up a more active role in UN peacekeeping operations. Since 2013, the country has in fact scaled up from fifteenth to tenth contributor of troops and police forces to the UN (United Nations Peacekeeping 2013). Yet, as the current counterterrorist measures adopted in Xinjiang include indoctrination, international observers have warned of the risk of incurring in a "cultural genocide" (R. Harris 2019; Zand 2019) in case these measures are not discontinued in the short-term.

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<sup>220</sup> On 26 November 2018, a group of 278 academics from 26 countries delivered a statement that called for the release of detainees and an end to China's campaign against Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. See Concerned Scholars. 2018. 'Statement by Concerned Scholars on China's Mass Detention of Turkic Minorities'. Concerned Scholars (blog). 26 November 2018. <https://bit.ly/2SEEm7y>.

<sup>221</sup> A recording of Mr Wu's address is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDYPuR2lQ2g> (last accessed 13 December 2019).

Given China's current grand strategy, CT policy in Xinjiang has the potential to jeopardize the country's international standing. First, the civil and political liberties of Xinjiang's Muslim minorities already presented China with the threat of US sanctions (Wong 2018). Nonetheless, the current framework of US-China trade and technology confrontation aggravates the threat posed by sanctions. Indeed, despite efforts for modernization and innovation, China's economy still lags behind the annual growth rate set by the elite—the so-called “new normal” (China Internet Information Center 2014)—and remains dependent on exports (Bermingham and Wang 2019). In particular, although President Donald Trump argued for the disengagement of the US from the role of global police force (The Straits Times 2018), Washington has been raising its voice against human rights violations in Xinjiang as well as in Hong Kong. For instance, in late November 2019, the US spoke up against the measures adopted by Hong Kong's Legislative Council to contain the protestors that since June 2019 had taken to the streets to protect Hong Kong's special status against Beijing's growing interference (Fulda 2019). In fact, the US adopted two laws aimed to protect Hongkongers. On the one hand, the “Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act” enables the US to sanction Hong Kong officials that violate human rights and political liberties. It also calls the US Congress to revise annually Hong Kong's special economic status (BBC 2019). On the other, the “Protect Hong Kong Act” that prohibits the exports of anti-riot equipment to China and Hong Kong (South China Morning Post 2019).

In the near future, the US approach towards Hong Kong can potentially be extended to Xinjiang, as the political situations in the two areas already inspired a common narrative in the US (Hong Kong Free Press 2019), although they remain rooted in different political claims.

Second, as China's counterterrorist measures in Xinjiang raise the attention of the international community, they jeopardize the country's plans for a re-settlement of the international order—an order no longer based on the principles of the “Pax Americana” but on a new “Pax Sinensis” (Sciorati 2020). Such an international order is in fact envisioned as a “hub-spoke” model of international relations, thus placing China at the centre and its partners as “spokes of a wheel” (Sapio

2019). However, the CT policy implemented in Xinjiang questions the country's ability to uphold the standards that the global central power is asked to maintain. Still, the current situation in Xinjiang has already granted China a display of loyalty from some of its economic partners. In July 2019, two coalitions of states sent letters to the UNHRC either supporting or opposing China's CT policy in the region (Cumming-Bruce 2019). Nevertheless, as doubts continue to be raised over the conditions of the country's Muslim minorities, China risks a halt in the infrastructural projects of its "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). In fact, since Beijing's geo-economic interests are moving to the Gulf and Muslim-majority states, the country's CT policy in Xinjiang risks to hinder the participation of these partners to BRI projects. In this particular juncture, the success of the BRI is ever more important for President Xi, given the slow pace of China's economic growth, the large-scale investments already made to support BRI projects (estimated at 1.2 trillion US dollars by 2027 by Morgan Stanley<sup>222</sup>) and the political legitimacy of President Xi.<sup>223</sup>

Today, China's CT policy in Xinjiang is at the cornerstone of the interests of domestic and international actors. In primis, the release of the "Xinjiang Papers" on the New York Times in early November 2019 indicates that the US perpetuates its commitment to the region (Ramzy and Buckley 2019). At the same time, in case the whistle-blower explanation for the leak of the documents is proven true, the "Xinjiang Papers" would also indicate that the counterterrorist measures in the region have fragmented the CPC. After the Party was almost ruptured in 1989 (Dittmer 1990a), the CPC has remained particularly prone to sedate any form of internal contestation—a sensitiveness that is bound to grow as the Party approaches its centenary anniversary in 2021 (Xinhua 2017c).

As the latest developments in China's CT policy in Xinjiang indicate, decision-making in the domain of CT policy does not only depend on systemic factors—being the increasing or decreasing number of terrorist attacks or states' grand strategies. Indeed, while China's CT policy roots against

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<sup>222</sup> The full study is available at <https://www.morganstanley.com/ideas/china-belt-and-road> (last accessed 15 November 2019).

<sup>223</sup> Among the reasons why the two-mandate limit to the Presidency was abolished in 2018 was the fact that a project like the BRI required leadership continuity.

the country's plans to re-design the international order, the country continues to rely on its counterterrorist measures. Thus, systemic factors are mediated by unit-level variables, so that counterterrorism becomes a "multi-causal" affair.

Moreover, China's status as a global power—the first authoritarian regime to assume the position after the Soviet Union—also entails that its counterterrorist measures have the potential to be adopted by other illiberal countries, even beyond the sphere of action of the SCO, due to the extent of China's BRI partnerships. Nowadays, the BRI has in fact assumed a more striking political and security application after China learned the hard way not to rely on the security of its economic partners (Turcsanyi 2019).

Since the international system faces a resurgence of authoritarianism, examining China's policy making efforts is inevitable for policymakers. In fact, the country carries the principles that can potentially expand around the world. As a result, placing authoritarian regimes under the spotlight has a wider application, as it indicates the direction towards which CT policy is currently moving.

## **THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION**

After 9/11, states expressed an avid interest for terrorism and counterterrorism. As a result, scholars and policy analysts started to focus on addressing the two major issues of the effectiveness of CT policy and deradicalization. On the one hand, scholars have been interested in the factors that explain radicalization and the consistent weakening of the "social contract" between the state and its citizens (Laskar 2013). On the other, they have debated whether the counterterrorist measures states implement are indeed successful and, thus, terrorism can be prevented. Yet, few investigated the divergence in states' responses to terrorism.

Addressing these debates, Chapter 1 outlined the scholarship about the role of states in CT policy and about the wide array of responses states adopt against terrorism and political violence. The first part of the chapter accounted for the IR approaches that prioritize the study of the factors that affect states' policy choices – i.e., the magnitude and perception of terrorist attacks, states' regime

type or the processes of normative socialization between states. Non-complementary positions and a bias towards democratic values, inherited in these approaches, were argued to be insufficient in explaining the divergence in the counterterrorist measures adopted by states over time and space. The last part of the first chapter was devoted to argue for “multi-causal counterterrorism.” It was argued that integrative models—models that comprise both systemic and domestic stressors—better account for all the factors that affect states’ policy considerations about CT. In broader terms, these models offer various combinations on the continuum about how one CT policy is chosen instead of another.

The analytical focus of neoclassical realism, drawn from IR theory, maintains the state at the centre and discerns between systemic and unit-level factors that influence states in opting a certain CT policy. Thanks to the inclusiveness of several factors, neoclassical realism avoids structural oversimplifications that a high magnitude of terrorist threats entails a hard CT policy, and vice-versa. A focus on systemic and unit-level factors—a “multi-causal” theory of CT—has thus offered a more nuanced explanation for states’ CT policy choices. To a certain extent, the magnitude of terrorist threats influences the counterterrorist measures of states, but this relation is not the sole factor that accounts for states’ policy choices. Indeed, empirical cases have proven this relation faulted by registering opposite outcomes to those that were expected by the causal link.

The study also initiated debates about variations in political regimes, bringing new insights to the seminal division between “democratic” and “authoritarian” counterterrorists. This thesis has advocated the argument that the conceptualization of “authoritarian” counterterrorists as a “single block” of states, which rely on repressive and violent means that border state terrorism, is too narrow to dominate the analysis on the relation between regime type and counterterrorism. In response, the study has offered a nuanced characterization of “authoritarian counterterrorists” that allows to account for different ways violence and repression can be expressed by authoritarian states in the domain of CT policy. The most important contribution of this study is an analytical differentiation of “soft/hard authoritarian counterterrorists”: this study has showed that while an authoritarian regime can factor a leniency towards violence and repression (thus, a hard counterterrorism policy) in certain

cases, the strict dichotomy of democratic-authoritarian counterterrorists reflects just one type of authoritarianism, the hard one.

By providing a detailed account of systemic, domestic and individual conditions, the study has sought to show that CT policy choices have several layers of complexity that might not fit into a paradigm of cause-effect evaluation. This argument is very timely for empirical testing, since the “effective” counterterrorism policy continues to be searched worldwide. At the same time, a thorough investigation on variations among authoritarian counterterrorists is needed as discussions on the appropriateness of the counterterrorist measures adopted by authoritarian states is becoming ever more pressing due to the revival of authoritarianism currently witnessed in the international system.

## **EMPIRICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The case of China’s CT policy in Xinjiang presents the extent to which systemic, domestic and individual factors affect states’ counterterrorist measures: reliance on civil society and police forces, administrative law and practices, strict liability regulations—i.e., a soft approach to CT—or military, paramilitary and police forces, criminal justice, extra-judicial activities—i.e., a hard approach to CT—remain ascribed to the pressure exerted by the security environment on states, which is mediated by the political orientation of the elites and the integration of states in international security framework. CT thus becomes a “multi-causal” affair. The analyses on China’s CT policy conducted in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 showed that differences in the form assumed by these factors contribute to shaping the country’s responses to terrorism (Figure 35).

The first case investigated the making of China’s CT policy between April 1996 and June 2001. The analysis returned a medium-level pressure to act exerted by the security environment, a hard authoritarian regime—characterized by a limited strive towards reform and a factional PBSC, as well as the role of co-mentor for China in the Shanghai Five – i.e., the only framework of cooperation in the domain of CT in which the country was involved. According to the theoretical model presented in section 2.3, such a composition of the factors pointed to a hard CT policy that

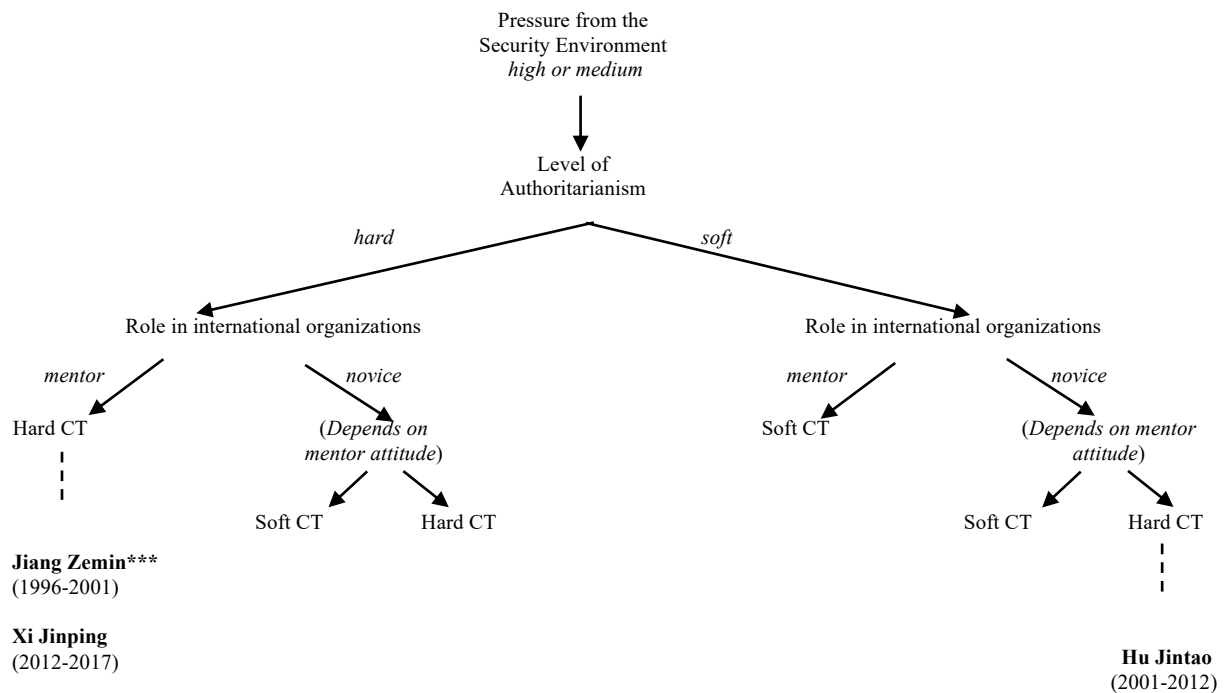
was mainly affected by the domestic variable – that is, the political orientation of the elite towards hard authoritarianism.

The second case studies China's CT policy between July 2001 and October 2012. The analysis returned a medium-level pressure exerted by the security environment, a soft authoritarian regime and the country's role of novice in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) – that is, the institution that substituted the Shanghai Five in 2001. The theoretical model thus pointed to a CT policy that was influenced by the normative preferences of the organization.

The third case examined China's CT policy between November 2012 and June 2017. The analysis returned a combination of the factors presented by the theoretical model that comprised a medium-level pressure exerted by the security environment, a hard authoritarian regime and China's role of mentor in the SCO—even in this period, the SCO remained the only cooperative framework for CT policy for China. As a consequence, a convergence between domestic politics and institutional norms governed China's CT policy. The three cases are visually summarized in figure 35.

As the study presents an historical case with a given outcome, it is interesting to notice that China's hard CT policy is not solely influenced by the pressure exerted by the security environment, which maintains the same levels, but also by the form of authoritarianism and the normative framework presented by regional institutions. The longitudinal development of China's CT policy shows that in the last period (November 2012-June 2017) the country internalized the counterterrorist measures that had constituted the normative framework of the SCO in the previous period (July 2001-October 2012). As the Shanghai Five forum institutionalized into the SCO in June 2001, China had relied on the normative framework set by the mentor state of the organization—i.e., the mentor state of the organization—in an effort to make up for its inexperience as a counterterrorist. Indeed, despite the pressure from the security environment remaining at medium levels and the soft authoritarian regime installed by the political elite, China continued to opt for a hard CT policy. In the last case, however, the convergence between the political orientation of the elite and the norms presented at the regional level identify a rising level of autonomy for China in the domain of CT policy.

Figure 35 The Making of China's CT Policy (1996-2017)



\*\*\* Under Jiang Zemin, the embryonic status of the regional cooperative frameworks for CT policy prevented the imprint of a particular normative system.

The three periods do not show great differences from a systemic point of view. As a consequence, the empirical evidence is inconsistent with proposition 1 – i.e., CT policy matches the levels of pressure exerted on the state by the international system. What changed was the context—internal and external—in which political decisions were taken. While in the first and third periods China's political elite leaned towards hard authoritarianism, in the second period the elite opened to soft authoritarianism. At the same time, the impact of an external normative framework for CT became more prominent in the second period, as processes of formal institutionalization began at the regional level. In the first period, regional cooperation in the domain of CT had in fact remained “lax,” thus preventing norm socialization to take place. As a consequence, for the first period, the empirical evidence is inconsistent with the expected proposition 3.2 – that is, China implemented a hard CT policy under Jiang Zemin due to the internalization of the Shanghai Five's normative framework. Indeed, the empirical evidence for the first case is consistent with proposition 2.1, which interprets China's hard CT policy as a consequence of the hard authoritarian regime adopted by the political



elite. Conversely, the second and third cases are consistent with the neoclassical propositions 3.2 and 3.1, respectively.

A “multi-causal” theory for CT policy in Xinjiang provides a broader perspective to reason on the future of CT in the country. Since empirical evidence identified China’s reliance on the internal and external contexts, it is worth noticing that the “tightening” under Xi is not coming to an end, thus pointing to a hard authoritarian regime for China in the years to come. Consider, for instance, the 2018 Constitutional amendment that abolished the two-mandate limit to the Presidency (thus making it possible for Xi to be re-elected for a third term) as well as the inclusion of Xi Jinping’s thought in the CPC Constitution (Buckley and Bradsher 2018). These events point to a lack of opening from the part of the country’s political regime. Furthermore, as China is no longer a novice state in the SCO, it now imprints the normative framework of the organization with its preferred behavioural norms. This scenario entails that other regional powers might adopt China’s counterterrorist measures. To an extent, CT policy at the regional level has already started to move in this direction. The Xinjiang camps, for instance, also “hosted” Kazakh and Kyrgyz nationals. Yet, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan complied with China’s CT policy, prioritizing the “principle of non-interference” to states’ “responsibility to protect.” These observations set the ground for the application of the theoretical model to other Central Asian states, which seem to rely on China’s CT policy. They also open to questions about the processes of socialization and learning of “bad” behavioural norms among non-democratic countries.

## APPENDIX

Articles released by Xinhua on terrorism and counterterrorism in Xinjiang (1996-2017)

### 1996

- 29/09 Efforts Urged to Maintain Stability in Xinjiang
- 02/09 Wu Bangguo Makes Inspection Tour in Xinjiang
- 07/11 Qiao: Xinjiang Is China's Inseparable Territory
- 02/09 Border Survey between Xinjiang, Tibet Completed
- 11/09 Li Peng Inspects Xinjiang, Qinghai and Ningxia
- 15/09 Chinese Councilor Urges Quicker Reforms for West China
- 27/11 Education of Ethnic Minority Stressed in China

### 1997

- 17/02 Army, Ethnic Groups in Xinjiang "as Close as Family"
- 18/02 FM Spokesman on Criminal Activities in Xinjiang
- 19/02 Kazakh FM Esteems Sino-Kazakh Ties
- 03/03 Xinjiang Enjoys Ethnic Harmony: Official
- 04/03 Economic Growth Tops Priority for Ethnic Regions: CPPCC Members
- 12/03 Regional Autonomy of National Minorities Areas Lauded
- 13/04 Top Legislator Stresses Efforts against Separatism in Xinjiang
- 29/05 Terrorists Executed for Serial Bombings, Killings in Xinjiang
- 24/06 Troops in Xinjiang Asked to Remain on Alert
- 17/09 Tibet, Xinjiang Delegates Give Press Conference
- 08/11 Chinese, Russia Crack down on Boundary Crimes

### 1998

- 01/03 Ethnic Region Linked Closely to Beijing
- 07/03 China-Jiang Zemin-Tibet-Xinjiang  
Jiang Zemin Stresses National Unity
- 08/03 Xinjiang People Aspiring for Stability, Development: Official
- 11/03 Chinese Believers Enjoy Religious Freedom
- 12/03 Stability Returns to Xinjiang after Crackdown on Terrorism
- 07/05 Chinese, Kazakhstan Prime Ministers Hold Talks
- 08/05 Chinese President Meets with Kazakhstan Prime Minister
- 03/07 Jiang Zemin Inspects Xinjiang  
Chinese President Leaves Urumqi to Attend Five-State Meeting
- 04/07 Chinese President Back in China after Working Visit to Kazakhstan
- 10/07 Chinese President Inspects Xinjiang
- 05/10 Chinese, Kazakh Defence Ministers Hold Informal Meeting
- 01/12 Xinjiang Official Warns Investors: Get to Know Xinjiang First
- 23/12 National People's Congress Discusses Wide-Ranging Bill

### 1999

- 06/01 Urumqi Police Crack Major Drug-Trafficking Case Urumqi, January
- 14/01 China Cracks down on Drug Trafficking

18/01 Northwest Xinjiang Cracks down on Smuggling  
 19/01 Xinjiang Muslims Celebrate Fast-Breaking Festival  
 12/02 Xinjiang Maintains Stability  
 08/03 Highlights of Xinhua Reports on NPC Session  
 09/03 “Independence of Tibet”: Outcome of Foreign Aggression  
 27/03 Xinjiang Celebrates Islamic Festival  
 06/04 China, Turkey to Further Develop Bilateral Ties  
 18/04 Xinjiang Pilgrims Return Home  
 26/05 Crack Police Squad to Tackle Smuggling  
 24/06 Death Penalty for Six Drug Traffickers in Urumqi  
 01/09 Hu Jintao Puts Emphasis on “Three Stresses” Education  
 04/09 Ethnic Affairs Minister Meets Egyptian Guests  
 09/09 National Unity Helping Economy in Northwestern Autonomous Region  
 27/09 China Adheres to Ethnic Equality and Unity, Paper  
 Chinese Ethnic Groups Enjoy Equality, Unity and Mutual Assistance, Paper  
 20/10 Chinese Moslems Enjoy Complete Religious Freedom  
 06/12 Li Peng Said Here Today That the Completion of an Important

## **2000**

05/03 China Sets Major Tasks for Development of Western Areas  
 06/03 Ethnic Minority NPC Deputies Stress Social Stability for Reviving Western Region  
 07/03 Religious Freedom Fully Guaranteed: NPC Ethnic Minority Deputies  
 14/03 Legislation Law to Promote Law Making in Ethnic Minority Regions  
 15/03 Chinese Premier on Develop-the-West Strategy  
 23/05 CPPCC Vice-Chairman Stresses Improving Political Consultation  
 03/06 Leaders of Non-Communist Parties Inspect Xinjiang  
 09/06 Russia Taking Part in Development of China’s West  
 28/06 Jiang’s Tajikistan Visit to Boost Bilateral Ties: Diplomat  
 19/07 Official Calls for Social Stability in Xinjiang  
 09/09 URGENT: Explosion Occurs in Suburban Urumqi  
 12/09 Developing the West, A Long-Term Job: Premier  
 13/09 Urumqi Explosion An Accident: Experts

## **2001**

03/03 News From Xinjiang: Stability, Gas Pipeline Launch, Happy Farmers  
 14/03 Ethnic Minority Lawmakers Advocate Development, Stability Policies  
 02/09 Senior Official on Religious Belief

## **2002**

21/01 Full Text of “East Turkistan” Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity  
 True Colors of “East Turkistan” Terrorist Forces Exposed  
 25/01 China’s Islamic Community Condemns “East Turkistan” Terrorist Force  
 07/03 China Intensifies Attack on “East Turkistan” Terrorists  
 11/03 People of Xinjiang Cherish Stability, Oppose Separatism  
 15/08 China Rejects Al-Qaida Contacts Allegation  
 20/08 Senior Party Official on Discipline Inspection  
 12/09 FM Spokesman: ETIM a Wholly Terrorist Organization  
 20/09 Ministry of Public Security Leader on ETIM

## **2003**

- 20/01 Chinese FM Reiterates China's Stand on Counter-Terrorism
- 03/03 High-Tech Beefs up Northwest China Region's Capability to Fight Terrorism, Separatism
- 04/03 Xinjiang Muslim Deputy Performs Religious Services as Usual in Beijing
- 01/09 Xinjiang Becomes China's Link to Central Asia
- 31/08 Xinjiang Continues to Crack down on Terrorism
- 10/09 Senior Chinese Leader on Stability, Religious Freedom in Northwest Region
- 26/11 Tribute Paid to Late Uygur Leader
- 15/12 China Seeks International Support in Counter-Terrorism  
China Sets Forth Criteria for Identifying Terrorists, Terrorist Groups  
China Vows to Defend Uygur Interests in Anti-Terrorism Fight  
First Batch of "Eastern Turkistan" Terrorist Groups, Individuals Identified Terrorists
- 24/12 Death of Wanted Terrorist Confirmed by Chinese FM Spokesman

## **2004**

- 04/02 China Joins Regional Counter-Terrorism Cooperation
- 13/02 China Discloses More Evidence of "Eastern Turkistan" Terrors  
China Vows to Step up International Anti-Terror Cooperation
- 12/04 Official: Xinjiang Enjoying Stability and Development
- 16/04 Backgrounder: Recent Terrorist Activities by "Eastern Turkistan" Groups
- 19/05 Kazakhstan to Promote All-Round Cooperation with Xinjiang
- 20/05 China Conducts Anti-Hijacking Drill
- 16/11 Ambassadors: China Can Make Major Contributions to Peace, Stability, Prosperity of Central Asia

## **2005**

- 08/03 President Hu Calls for Good Implementation of Policies on Ethnic Minorities, Religions
- 30/05 Chinese PLA Proves Worth in Minority Areas
- 16/06 China to Draft Counterterrorism Law
- 25/08 Former Xinjiang Businesswoman Accused of Trying to Smuggle Assets out of China
- 05/09 "East Turkistan," Major Terrorist Threat to China, Official
- 26/09 Chinese Senior Leaders Visit Armies, Herdsmen in Xinjiang  
Luo Gan Conveys Central Government's Regards to People in Xinjiang
- 29/09 Central Government Delegation Confirms Achievements in Northwest China Region
- 30/09 Senior Chinese Leader Put Forward Suggestions on Xinjiang's Development
- 15/12 FM Spokesman: U.S. Should Not Provide platform for Any Separatist Remarks

## **2006**

- 24/01 Chinese President Calls for Enhanced Anti-Terrorism Efforts

## **2007**

- 08/01 China Focus: Chinese Police Destroy Terrorist Camp in NW Region
- 09/01 Thousands Mourn Policeman Who Died in Fight at Terrorist Camp  
China's Police Pledge to Maintain Battle against Terrorist Activities

08/02 Chinese FM Spokesperson on Trial of Terrorist Suspect  
 09/03 Room for Terrorist Activities Shrinking in Xinjiang: Official  
 12/03 Xinjiang Chief Judge Vows High Pressure on Terrorism  
 29/03 China to Monitor Ethnic Relations  
 17/04 China Exclusive: Xinjiang Secessionist Sentenced to Nine Years in Prison  
 19/04 Convicted Xinjiang Terrorist Sentenced to Life in Prison  
 Xinjiang Terrorist Sentenced to Life in Prison  
 10/07 Chinese Court Rejects Appeal of Convicted Xinjiang Terrorist  
 14/07 China's Top Military Officer Stresses Importance of SCO Drill  
 06/08 SCO Joint Drill to Improve Anti-Terror Capability: Experts  
 11/08 SCO Joint Drill to Crack down on "Three Evil Forces": Experts  
 12/08 Military Expert Says Anti-Terrorism Is an Important Mission of Chinese Army  
 14/08 SCO Drill to Improve Joint Anti-Terror Capability, Says Expert  
 12/11 Chinese Court Sentences Six Terrorists to Death, Life Imprisonment  
 21/12 Backgrounder: Major PLA-Related Joint Anti-Terror Military Exercises and Trainings

## 2008

19/02 Chinese Police Kill Two Terrorists, Arrest 15 Others  
 09/03 China Vows to Strike First in Combating Terrorism  
 China Focus: Terrorist Attack Prevented for Olympics: Official  
 Terrorist Attack Prevented for Olympics: Official  
 10/03 Newsmaker: Wang Lequan, Xinjiang Party Chief on Top of Terrorists' Wanted List  
 20/03 China Says Eastern Turkestan behind Airline Incident in Xinjiang  
 10/04 2 Terrorist Groups Nabbed in China's Xinjiang  
 10/07 China Focus: Chinese Police Detain 82 Suspected Terrorists Targeting Olympics in Xinjiang in First Half  
 26/07 China Focus: Chinese Police Deny "Terrorist Attacks" behind Recent Explosions  
 01/08 China's Xinjiang Confident of Olympic Safety: Official  
 04/08 Police Station Raided in West China's Xinjiang, Terrorist Plot Suspected  
 China Exclusive: Terrorist Plot Suspected in Violent Attack on Police in West China's Xinjiang  
 Police Station Raided in West China's Xinjiang, Terrorist Plot Suspected  
 Terrorist Plot Suspected in Violent Attack on Police in West China's Xinjiang  
 05/08 Chinese Police Say 18 Turkistan Terrorist Suspects Arrested This Year  
 China Focus: Xinjiang Official Calls Monday's Raid on Border Police a Terrorist Attack  
 Xinjiang Police Tightens Security Checks after Violent Attack on Border Police  
 Xinjiang Official Calls Monday's Raid on Border Police a Terrorist Attack  
 Weapons in Xinjiang Attack Resembled Those of East Turkistan Terrorists'  
 Xinjiang Official Calls Monday's Raid on Border Police a Terrorist Attack  
 10/08 Serial Explosions Kill Two in China's Remote Xinjiang  
 Several Explosions Rock Kuqa in China's Remote Xinjiang  
 Eight Terrorists Killed, Two Blow Themselves up in Xinjiang  
 Olympics Organizer Slams Secessionist Attacks in Xinjiang, Saying Won't Impact Games  
 11/08 China Exclusive: Bomb-Shocked Xinjiang County Resumes Normal Life  
 Civilian Dies of Injuries from Sunday's Xinjiang Bombing Attack  
 China Exclusive: Bomb-Shocked Xinjiang County Resumes Normal Life  
 12/08 Xinjiang Bombings Dampen Tourism Prospects: Official  
 21/10 China Announces Names of Eight "Eastern Turkistan" Terrorists  
 China Focus: China Identifies Eight Alleged "East Turkistan" Terrorists  
 China Identifies Alleged "Eastern Turkistan" Terrorists

- 28/11 Xinjiang Armed Police Elevated to Greater Role in Fighting Terror
- 17/12 Two Terrorists in Xinjiang Attack on Police Sentenced to Death

**2009**

- 06/03 Chinese Official Warns of “More Severe” Security Situation in Xinjiang
- 09/04 Two Executed for Terrorist Attack on Border Police in China’s Xinjiang
- 06/07 China Focus: Civilians. Armed Police Officer Killed in NW China Violence  
Civilians and Armed Police Officer Killed in Northwest China Unrest  
China Focus: Ravaged by Riot, Xinjiang’s Capital in Horror  
Xinjiang Party Chief Slashes Riot Which Kills 140  
China Focus: Police Have Evidence of World Uyghur Congress Masterminding Xinjiang Riot  
Police Have Evidence of World Uyghur Congress Masterminding Xinjiang Riot  
Commentary: Riot a Catastrophe for Xinjiang  
Backgrounder: Previous Unrests in China’s Xinjiang Region  
Uyghur Victims of South China Toy Factory Brawl Condemn Xinjiang Riot  
Eyewitness Accounts of Xinjiang Riot  
China Focus: Death Toll in Xinjiang Riot Rises to 140  
Backgrounder: Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
- 07/07 Uyghur Victims of South China Toy Factory Brawl Condemn Xinjiang Riot  
Roundup: Overseas Chinese Condemn Violence in Xinjiang  
Internet Cut in Xinjiang to Prevent Riot from Spreading, Official  
Anti-Terror Expert: World Uyghur Congress behind Xinjiang Violence  
Xinjiang Riot “against Islamic Doctrine”: Religious Leader  
Violence in Urumqi Not a Peaceful Protest, FM Spokesman
- 08/07 Chinese President Leaves for Home Ahead of Schedule Due to Situation in Xinjiang  
Commentary: Riot Shall Not Stop Xinjiang’s Developing Steps  
Chinese Police Chief Urges Hardline Crackdown on Thugs in Xinjiang Riot  
Evidence Shows Rebiya Kadeer behind Xinjiang Riot: Chinese Gov’t
- 10/07 China Focus: Xinjiang Muslims Attend Friday Prayer Amid Tight Security  
Xinjiang Muslims Attend Friday Prayer Amid Tight Security  
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