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**The Communist Youth League Announces Plans to Send a
New Generation “Down to the Countryside”**

By John Dotson

Introduction

In late March, the China Communist Youth League (*Gongchan Zhuyi Qingnian Tuan*, 共产主义青年团), or CCYL, released an official document that detailed plans to recruit large numbers of young people for work programs in rural areas of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The document, titled “Opinions Regarding Deepening the Development of the Countryside and Promoting Great Endeavors by Youth,” laid out ambitious plans to recruit one million college-level youths by the year 2022. Participants will be sent for terms of service in rural districts, “especially [historical] revolutionary zones, impoverished areas, and ethnic

minority regions [in order to] develop social practical experience activities, [and to] increase skills in spreading culture, spreading technology, and establishing new [social] trends." [1]



Image: In a photo from the official newspaper of the China Communist Youth League, a graduate student from China Agricultural University examines a crop of tomatoes during a work assignment in the town of Wuwei (武威), Gansu Province (Source: [China Youth Daily](#), June 11, 2018).

The phenomenon of sending “educated youth” (*zhiqing*, 知青) to “ascend the mountains and go down to the countryside” (*shangshan xiexiang*, 上山下乡) for work in rural communities has a long history in Communist China, dating back to the 1950s. However, the practice has been particularly associated with the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when millions of high school students and other young people from China’s towns and cities were sent for years on end to experience arduous physical labor and communal existence in rural villages—and in theory, to learn socialist values from the superior wisdom of poor peasant communities. [2] Large-scale use of this involuntary practice faded in the wake of the Cultural Revolution—and was dramatically reversed beginning in the 1980s, when expanding economic reforms brought a massive migration of rural dwellers to the PRC’s growing cities in pursuit of work.

However, on its surface the March announcement by the CCYL appears to indicate a startling return to a practice that many would have written off as an anachronism from the PRC’s Mao-era past. What has brought about this revived effort to send young urbanites to labor in the countryside?

Wherefore the Renewed Push to “Go Down to the Countryside”?

The March announcement by the CCYL did not emerge from a vacuum, and throughout 2018 there were hints in PRC state media of a potential revival of the “descending to the countryside” movement. Early 2018 saw a flurry of material in the Chinese press intended to invoke nostalgia for the practice on its 50th

anniversary: articles presented profiles of people assigned to rural villages and work projects from the 1950s through the 1970s, along with recollections of the positive memories and lasting friendships formed by these “sent-down” youth. [3] In summer 2018, the official website of the CCYL published an article profiling young PhDs and PhD candidates in a range of fields who were conducting “countryside practical research” (*xiangcun shijian diaoyan*, 乡村实践调研) for periods of up to a year in rural areas. Per the CCYL account, these were revelatory growth experiences for the participants: one graduate student was described as “gradually realizing that the knowledge he had studied was from Western experience, and not from his own country's practical experience” ([CCYL Online](#), June 11 2018).

As a branch of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the CCYL has played a major role in organizing youth activities and propaganda, and has long served as a gateway for young people to enter into full Party membership as adults. However, the CCYL was also a key component of the bureaucratic power base of former CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao—and has accordingly fared poorly under current CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping in terms of resources and influence ([China Brief](#), May 11, 2016; [China Brief](#), April 9). Despite this, Xi's own history as an “educated youth sent to the countryside” is an essential element of his own political narrative—and it is therefore possible that the March 2019 announcement by the CCYL represents, at least in part, an effort to maneuver back into Xi's good graces.



Image: This photo, from a People's Daily article titled “President Xi Warms Hearts by Showing His Care for the People,” depicts a scene in 1989 when Xi, “as the then Party head in Ningde, southeastern China's Fujian Province, joined a voluntary labor activity with local cadres” ([People's Daily Online](#), April 12, 2019).

Following the purge of his father Xi Zhongxun, in 1969 Xi Jinping was sent to Liangjiahe—an impoverished village in Shaanxi Province close to Yanan, the home base for the Chinese Communist movement throughout World War II and the early years of the Chinese Civil War. Xi remained in the village for seven years, and the humble dwelling where he and other *zhiqing* lived has been converted into a tourist attraction ([SCMP](#),

February 13, 2015). PRC state propaganda depicts this period as a formative one for Xi's values, and as proof of his leadership skills and concern for the common people: "[Xi] became one with the villagers. They worked and ate together. He went from being a teenager with no knowledge of rural life to the village's Party secretary, leading villagers in accomplishing practical and pioneering works [such as] erecting a dam and liberating the workforce" ([Global Times](#), January 2, 2017).

Xi's early career as a Party official in Fujian is also presented in similar terms of paternalistic leadership by example, with Xi depicted as an enthusiastic participant in manual labor alongside peasant farmers (*see accompanying photo*). The new program announced by the CCYL therefore accords with key elements of the official themes surrounding Xi Jinping, and further bolsters efforts by the current CCP leadership to foster a Neo-Maoist ideological revival ([Journal of Democracy](#), July 2016; [China Brief](#), March 5, 2018).

"Spreading Scientific Concepts and Publicizing the Party's Policies" in Rural Areas

Historical iterations of "ascending the mountains and going down to the countryside" were imbued with the message that urban youth would benefit from their experiences on farming communes and other work projects, and that they would learn from the supposedly more pure socialist values of rural communities. The March CCYL document follows this ideological tradition in part, stating that participating students will "both conduct research and build up the countryside" (*yibian diaoyan yibian xiang jian*, 一边调研, 一边乡建) in the course of their rural work assignments.^[4] Other recent CCYL materials assert that rural work experiences will help urban youth to better appreciate the country's development needs, and to "understand the true native soil of China" ([CCYL Online](#), June 11 2018).

However, the CCYL's new template is for a program that is more regulated and orderly than the chaotic and disruptive practices of the Cultural Revolution, when vast numbers of youth were dumped into rural communities with minimal planning. The CCYL's guidelines indicate that recruitments for this latest rural work program are to be voluntary; inducements for joining are not wholly clear, but would presumably offer ambitious young people a leg up for future Party membership, with all the benefits conferred by that status. (The precise mechanisms by which recruitment for the program and geographic assignments are to be managed has been left vague, but these matters are to be handled by CCYL organs at the county level and above.) Additionally, terms of service in the countryside will not be open-ended as in past years, but will be more limited—with many of the periods scheduled for summer school holidays. ^[5] All of this represents a far more ordered and professionalized version of Maoism than that seen in the 1960s.

Most striking of all, the March CCYL document carries a consistent theme that young people from the towns are now to be placed in the role of instructors—not only in terms of bringing the benefits of their education and knowledge of technology to the less developed countryside, but also in terms of spreading proper political values as defined by the CCP. Students participating in the program will be expected to serve the Party by performing "rural youth thought and political work" (*nongcun qingnian sixiang zhengzhi gongzuo*, 农

村青年思想政治工作), and by "spreading scientific concepts [and] publicizing the party's policies" (*chuanbo kexue lilun, xuanjiang dang de zhengce* / 传播科学理论、宣讲党的政策) to rural dwellers. [6]

Conclusions

The new program announced by the CCYL to send youth "down to the countryside" is not a retreat of China's tragic Cultural Revolution history. Instead, the March 2019 CCYL announcement indicates a program very different in its intent from those of the past, and one that seeks to better organize—and arguably, professionalize—aspects of legacy Communist ideology. If the CCYL document is any indication, the CCP now regards China's urbanized, educated, and plugged-in youth as not only more technically proficient, but also as more politically reliable than young people from less-developed rural areas. It appears that the CCYL is looking to the former group of young people, rather than the latter, to form its vanguard for the PRC's latest incarnation of Maoist ideology.

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Notes

[1] "Central Communist Youth League Notification: 'Opinions Regarding Deepening the Development of the Countryside and Promoting Great Endeavors for Youth'" [*Gongqingtuan Zhongyang Guanyu Shenru Kaizhan Xiangcun Zhenxing Qingchun Jiangong Xingdong de Yijian*, 共青团中央《关于深入开展乡村振兴青春建功行动的意见》的通知], Chinese Communist Youth League Central Committee, Document #5 (2019). <http://youth.cqu.edu.cn/info/1010/10817.htm>.

[2] Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 251-252; and Magnus Fikesjo, "Bury Me with My Comrades: Memorializing Mao's Sent-Down Youth," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 16 | Issue 14 | Number 4 (July 2018).

[3] For two such examples, see: "Educated Youth Ascending the Mountains and Going Down to the Countryside—Recollections of Fifty Years" [*Zhiqing Shangshan Xiexiang Wushi Nian Huaigan*, 知青上山下乡五十年怀感] *Sohu.com*, Jan. 23, 2018, https://www.sohu.com/a/218340850_162611; and "Memories of an Epoch: The 50th Anniversary of Educated Youth Ascending the Mountains and Going Down to the Countryside" [*Shidai Jiyi—Zhiqing Shangshan Xiexiang 50 Zhounian Jinian*, 时代记忆--知青上山下乡50周年纪念], Beijing CCP Committee Dept. of Retired Cadres, April 8, 2018, http://www.bjlgbj.gov.cn/lgbfc/wshg/wshghdq/201804/t20180408_33236.html.

[4] CCYL, "Opinions Regarding Deepening the Development of the Countryside and Promoting Great Endeavors for Youth" (see endnote #1, above).

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*

Italy Joins the Belt and Road Initiative: Context, Interests, and Drivers

By Dario Cristiani

Introduction

In March 2019, Italy and the People's Republic of China (PRC) signed a broad and comprehensive, albeit not legally binding, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Italy to join the Chinese-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This has triggered a significant debate—in Brussels as well as in Washington—about whether this decision signalled an Italian shift away from its historical pro-European and pro-Atlantic position, to a more nuanced position open to deepening strategic ties with China. The MoU is not definite proof of such a shift, and the Italian government has denied any strategic change. However, Rome is the first major European country, and the first Group of Seven (G7) member, to formalize its participation with the BRI project. As such, this development is particularly remarkable.

The motivations explaining the Italian approach are economic and geopolitical; they are also linked to the specific ideological preferences of some of the current members of the government. However, this decision also came about at a time in which the European Union (EU) started shifting its rhetoric on China: the EU now describes the PRC not only as an economic partner, but also increasingly as a strategic competitor. As such, the Italian approach on China will represent a critical strategic trend to observe in the coming months, as many believe that this economic cooperation will inevitably turn into a greater geopolitical understanding between the two countries—thus reinforcing Beijing's influence in Europe and the Mediterranean region.

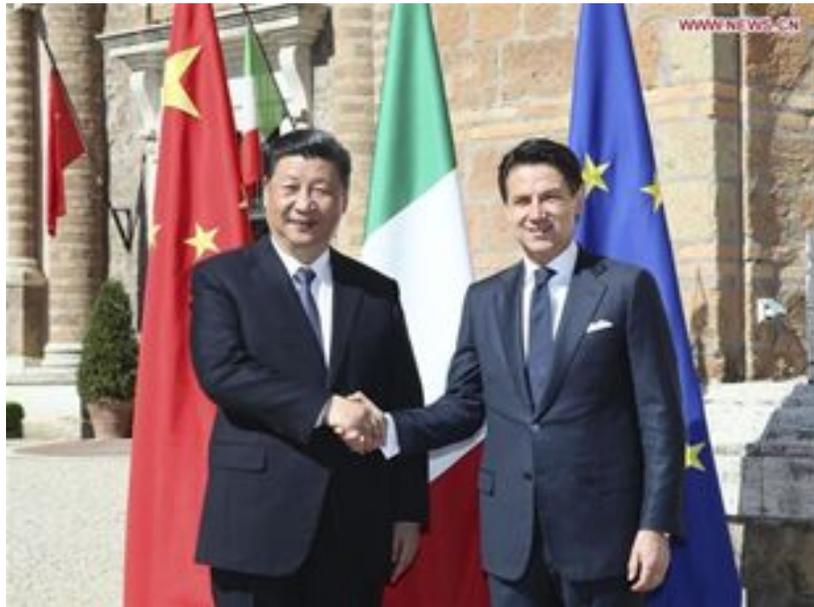


Image: PRC President Xi Jinping (left) and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte (right) shake hands during Xi's official visit to Italy in March 2019. (Source: Xinhua)

The MoU: Contents and Significance

The MoU was officially signed on March 23, 2019, during an official visit by PRC President Xi Jinping. Noting that Italian-Chinese relations are excellent, Xi said that “prospects for cooperation between Italy and China have a brilliant future” due to the fact that Italy was eager to deepen these relations further ([ADNkronos](#), March 22, 2019). Italians have focused mostly on the economic impact of such agreements: for Rome, the ten trade agreements on the table are worth about \$22.45 billion, and they are expected to provide a significant stimulus to the Italian economy as a whole ([Sole 24 Ore](#), March 23). Under the previous center-left government headed by Paolo Gentiloni of the Democratic Party, Italy had already started a process of considering engagement with the BRI; Gentiloni himself attended the BRI Forum in 2017. However, recent months have seen an acceleration of diplomatic movements following the visit of PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Italy in January 2019 ([Il Foglio](#), January 26).

The MoU does not represent an international agreement, has no binding effect between the parties, and remains mostly generic in its contents and wording ([Italian Government](#), March 2019, [Corriere Della Sera {English Translation}](#), March 12, 2019). The collaboration will focus primarily, but not exclusively, in the sectors of transport, logistics and infrastructure. Infrastructure connectivity has a central role in the MoU, and must be understood within the broader framework of the “Connectivity Platform” between the EU and China, which is intended to facilitate infrastructure and transportation projects ([EU-China Connectivity Platform Short-Term Action Plan](#), July 13, 2018).

The MoU stressed that there would be “open, transparent and non-discriminatory procurement procedures”—historically a significant problem for countries trading with China. Rumours concerning additional MoUs have indicated that Italy’s 5G telecommunications network would be part of the cooperation agreements, but later the Ministry of Economic Development—the institutional actor that more than any other pushed to sign the MoU with China—and President Sergio Mattarella both denied that this would be the case ([Ansa](#), March 13, [MISE](#), March 11).

Italy is not the first European country that China has reached out to under the framework of the BRI. The PRC’s initial focus was primarily on Eastern and Central European countries, and several countries still waiting to become members of the EU. At the end of 2018, China first raised the bar by signing BRI agreements with Greece and Portugal. However, Italy’s entry into this project changed the terms of the debate. Despite all of its problems, Italy remains a European heavyweight: Rome is a founding state of the EU, a member of the G7, a long-standing NATO member, and remains among the top five European countries in terms of economic size, population, and political clout. As such, Italy entering into a BRI agreement, even a non-binding one, has raised concerns among officials in Brussels and Washington ([Politico EU](#), March 13).

Italy as a “Trojan Horse” for Chinese Influence?

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has denied that Italy will become a “Trojan Horse” for the PRC in Europe. He made clear that the MoU is in accordance with EU rules and policies, and in full agreement with the 2030 Agenda, the 2020 EU-China Cooperation Agenda, and the EU Strategy for Eurasian Connectivity ([Corriere Della Sera](#), March 13). The language of the MoU is vague on most matters, and leaves room for interpretation regarding the extent of cooperative projects. In addition, several observers have pointed to the fact that, while deepening economic relations with China is clearly an important goal, this could have been done outside of the BRI framework ([ISPI](#), March 20).

There are a number of further, historical elements of concern that resurface from time to time in Brussels and Washington concerning Italy and its international stance. While Rome has been a firm supporter of the European communitarian project and Transatlantic cooperation, at the same time, for historical, cultural and geopolitical reasons, it has always retained some freedom of action in dealing with strategic competitors or enemies of the EU and NATO. This was the case regarding the Soviet Union, for instance, with Italy being one of the NATO members more active in nurturing relations with Moscow. These concerns still inform the views of many of Italy’s allies, as they are concerned that this inconsistency may resurface again.

The Drivers of the Italian Approach

Economic considerations, geopolitical needs, and specific political conditions were at the core of Italian motivations in signing this MoU. The economic rationale is particularly significant, as Italy considers the BRI a vital opportunity to boost Italian exports to China. Italy has suffered from serious financial problems in recent years, and the recent deterioration of the global economic outlook is set to have an immediate impact on Rome, threatening to trigger a new economic recession ([Sole 24 Ore](#), January 21). As such, Italian policymakers, whatever their political stripe, are always very focused on finding opportunities for Italian companies abroad as long as the Italian domestic market remains stagnant. The Chinese consumer market is perceived as a terrific opportunity, particularly in light of the rising Chinese interest in Italian products.

In addition, Italy is eyeing Chinese investments in the infrastructure sector. The PRC is particularly interested in the port of Genoa—and above all in the port of Trieste, the historical Mediterranean gateway to trade and business with Danubian Europe. In an interview with the Italian daily *La Repubblica*, Wang Huiyao, the founder of the Center for China and Globalization (a Chinese think tank close to the government), said that “the Italian economy is going nowhere and joining the Belt and Road earlier than others is a great opportunity... Italy has many economic problems, Europe is in crisis and the BRI is the only major global investment plan” ([La Repubblica](#), March 22).

Another critical reason motivating the Italian approach is the shifting geopolitical reality of the Mediterranean. The past ten years have shown clearly that the United States, while remaining a significant Mediterranean

player, is less and less interested in this region: the hands-off American approach towards the conflicts in Syria and Libya is an example of this shifting reality. As such, while this dynamic does not imply that Washington is disappearing from the Mediterranean geostrategic equation, a number of external powers are now trying to deepen their presence in this space. China is one of the foremost of these powers, and it is increasingly active in the Maghreb, in the Mashreq (primarily in Egypt), and in a number of European Mediterranean countries (for example, Greece, Serbia, and Croatia) ([Balkan Insights](#), September 28, 2018, [Egypt Today](#), December 28). As such, while Italy joining the BRI does not mean that Rome is ready to abandon its historical pro-Atlantic stance, the fear of American disengagement from the Mediterranean is raising concerns in Rome about future Italian security. Inevitably, this will lead Italy to interact with all those global powers who are becoming more involved in the Mediterranean region.

Lastly, the Italian position towards China has been influenced by the peculiar political and ideological features of the current Italian government. The current governing “yellow-green coalition” is formed by the 5 Stars Movement (5S) and the League (previously the Northern League)—two parties that are both relatively new to power (although the League has shared government responsibilities in earlier cabinets led by Berlusconi). The less clearly defined historical legacies, institutions, and political cultures of these parties have left greater room for specific political personalities to drive the government’s agenda, and shape its stance on global affairs.

In this context, the two deputy prime ministers of Italy—the leader of the League, Matteo Salvini, and the leader of the 5S, Luigi Di Maio—have had a clear and visible influence in shaping the international political agenda of the government. Salvini has prioritized his relations with the so-called “Sovranist” bloc and Russia, and he has expressed several criticisms of ties with the PRC, fearing that Beijing would “colonize” the Italian economic system ([Huffington Post Italy](#), March 11, 2019). However, these concerns did not stop the Italian government from moving ahead with the BRI MoU. The main political supporter of this decision was the other governmental coalition partner, the 5S, some of whose members share vital links with China. The 5S Movement remains a diversified and heterogeneous movement, and the lack of a well-defined political ideology leaves room for various individuals to shape the movement and the government’s priorities on several dossiers.

Luigi Di Maio, the Minister for Economic Development and leader of the 5S, was the major institutional actor in crafting this agreement—together with one of his undersecretaries, Michele Geracci, whose role in promoting the deepening of Italo-Chinese relations can be hardly underestimated. Geracci is considered close to the League, a party he joined in 2018 as an “expert in foreign markets,” but he was also very close to Beppe Grillo, the founding father of the 5S movement. Geracci lived for years in China, has an unusually broad network of contacts in the country, and his role in government has been characterized since the very beginning by an intense focus on deepening ties with China ([Il Foglio](#), March 7).

Conclusions

While the BRI MoU that Italy signed with China does not mean that Rome is changing its historical foreign policy approach and its major alliances, it has raised concerns in Brussels and Washington. This was inevitable since Italy was the first European heavyweight that formalized its participation in the BRI project. While the MoU is non-binding and somewhat generic, this latter element might be used in the future to further deepen relations in several strategic sectors. Economic and geopolitical considerations drive Italy's approach to the BRI. However, this evolution was also favoured by the presence of elements in the current government particularly sympathetic with Chinese interests. Although the latter might change in the future if the government changes (or if less pro-China elements within the 5S movement emerge), economic and geopolitical considerations are set to remain significant in the coming years. Given the geopolitical significance of the BRI, the evolution of Italian relations with China will be particularly significant—not only from an economic standpoint, but also for the future of the European and Mediterranean geopolitical equations.

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The Role of State-Owned Infrastructure Companies in the Development of China’s Latin America Policy

By Johan van de Ven

Introduction: “Operation Car Wash” and Infrastructure Projects in Latin America

Brazil’s “Operation Car Wash” bribery probe, which began in 2014, has caused major upheavals in both Latin American politics and the regional infrastructure sector. Operation Car Wash began in March 2014 as an investigation into unusual bank transactions involving Brazil’s state-owned oil company Petrobras, with allegations that construction companies—including the Brazilian construction conglomerate Odebrecht S.A.—had given Petrobras executives bribes in exchange for awarding them contracts at inflated prices. The scandal has implicated three former Brazilian presidents (Dilma Rousseff, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and Michel Temer). The political scandal has also reverberated across the region: Ecuadorean Vice-President Jorge Glas was sentenced to six years in jail in late 2017 for taking bribes from Odebrecht, and all three living former presidents of Peru have been arrested in connection with the scandal. The recent suicide of former

Peruvian president Alan Garcia came as police prepared to arrest him on related charges ([El Universal](#), April 17).

The unfolding scandal has revealed that Odebrecht S.A., the region's biggest infrastructure builder, established its status thanks in part to the extensive use of bribery, totalling close to \$800 million in hand-outs to officials throughout the region. Amid the ongoing fallout of this scandal, two trends have emerged. Firstly, Chinese state-owned engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) contractors have attempted to fill the void, stepping in to secure contracts initially awarded to Odebrecht. The quick reaction of Chinese state-owned EPC contractors to the Odebrecht scandal shows the responsiveness of these companies to market opportunities.

Secondly, steps have been taken by the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to expand and institutionalize the PRC's policies towards Latin America. The coinciding development of China's policy towards Latin America suggests two possibilities: that (a) Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) respond to government policy signals in selecting projects; and (b) that the outgrowth of China's Latin America policy has been shaped in part by the lobbying of state-owned EPC contractors eager to make the most of the opportunities presented by Operation Car Wash and the Odebrecht crisis. The latter idea runs against conventional wisdom, but provides a compelling explanation for observable patterns in PRC policy in Latin America.

Chinese SOEs Take Advantage of Odebrecht's Fall

Across Latin America, there are numerous examples of Chinese state-owned EPC contractors taking over projects originally awarded to Odebrecht (*as detailed below*). The development of this trend results from a realization by these companies that the problems facing Odebrecht as a result of Operation Car Wash, including the payment of at least \$3.5 billion in fines, presented a market opening. Previously, Chinese contractors had bid for infrastructure contracts in Latin America, but often found themselves disadvantaged by Odebrecht's status as the region's premier builder—as well as Odebrecht's widespread practice of bribery, through which it nurtured favorable political relationships. The crisis faced by Odebrecht, as well as its recent reputational toxicity, has opened a vacuum at the top of the infrastructure construction food chain in Latin America. As the examples below show, this opportunity was seized upon by Chinese state-owned EPC contractors—beginning with Sinohydro's move to secure a role in Colombia's Magdalena River dredging project.

Colombia

In 2014, the Navelena consortium formed by Odebrecht and Colombia's Valorcon received a \$916 million contract (as the only bidders) to dredge a 908-kilometer stretch of the Magdalena River between Puerto Salgar-La Dorada and Barranquilla to a depth of 2 meters, allowing non-stop river navigability. Amid the unfolding of Operation Carwash, Navelena was unable to secure financial closure for the project. In March

2017, contracting agency Cormagdalena declared the contract void, with Navalena having failed to make any progress on dredging work. Reports emerged just prior to formal cancellation that Sinohydro—a subsidiary of PowerChina that specializes in the construction of hydropower plants, and an unsuccessful bidder on the original contract— was negotiating with Odebrecht to take over the contract, with the apparent support of Colombia’s National Infrastructure Agency ([Dinero](#), February 10, 2017). However, the reopening of the approval process means that a new contract has yet to be awarded ([BNAmericas](#), April 17, 2018), other than a temporary contract for interim dredging work ([DredgeMag](#), November 5, 2018).



Image: The Chaglla hydroelectric power plant in Peru, which was purchased in 2017 by a consortium led by the Three Gorges Corporation, a Chinese state-owned enterprise. (Source: Odebrecht.com)

Peru

In August 2017, a consortium led by China Three Gorges Corporation secured a tentative agreement with Odebrecht to buy the Chaglla hydroelectric power plant from Odebrecht for \$1.39 billion. This agreement was suspended by an emergency decree in February 2018, which allowed the Peruvian government to complete the drafting of a bill that would require 50% of the sale price to go to the state. Soon after, the project’s financiers—J.P. Morgan and SMBC—sought the repayment of \$320 million in outstanding debt owed by Odebrecht. In November 2018, Peru’s Justice Ministry announced that an agreement had finally been completed, at a reduced price of \$1.2 billion. Justice Minister Vicente Zeballos said Odebrecht would have to turn over half of the sale price to Peruvian authorities as reparations for committing bribery ([Energiminas](#), November 29, 2018).

Brazil

In September 2017, HNA Airport Holding Group (a subsidiary of the Chinese conglomerate HNA Group) won preliminary approval to purchase Odebrecht’s 60% stake in Rio de Janeiro Aeroportos—which itself holds a

controlling stake in Rio de Janeiro International Airport, Brazil's second-busiest aviation facility ([Globo](#), September 19, 2017). Although HNA is neither state-owned nor an EPC contractor, this case adds to the track record of Chinese companies looking to strike deals on discounted terms, seizing upon opportunities in Latin America presented by the Odebrecht scandal. However, HNA was ultimately not able to complete the deal after it failed to receive necessary Chinese regulatory authorizations within the timeframe set by Brazil's National Civil Aviation Agency ([CADE](#), December 27, 2017).

Dominican Republic

In November 2018, President Danilo Medina of the Dominican Republic said that his government would hold a tender for investors interested in the Punta Catalina coal-fired power plant, awarded to Odebrecht in 2013 in return for as much as \$92 million in bribes ([Diario Libre](#), February 11, 2017). Medina, who was in office at the time of the original award, said "There are people interested in investing in Punta Catalina, but there what you have to do is an international tender, you have to be very transparent, and that's what we're doing." While no further news on the tender has been made public, China Gezhouba Group—which made a bid at half of the cost presented by Odebrecht during the initial tendering process—may submit a proposal again ([Diario Libre](#), February 11, 2017).

Angola

A further example of Chinese companies taking advantage of the Odebrecht crisis may be seen outside of Latin America: in Angola, where China Railway 20 Bureau Group has taken on work that was initially contracted to Odebrecht. In 2017, the government of Angola cancelled a \$142.3 million contract initially awarded to Odebrecht to complete the second phase of a highway intended to connect Prais do Bispo and Corimba (two districts of the Angolan capital of Luanda). The pursuit of former Odebrecht contracts in locales distant from Latin America signifies that Chinese companies seized a *market* opportunity, rather than purely a political one ([Dinheiro Vivo](#), July 19, 2017).

What Explains the PRC's Increased Foreign Policy Focus on Latin America?

Coinciding with these deals and potential deals, China's foreign policy engagement with Latin America has scaled-up dramatically. The first meeting of the Forum on China and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) took place in 2014, where Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged \$250 billion in investment over the next decade ([Xinhua](#), July 7, 2014). In 2016, the State Council released a white paper on Latin America and the Caribbean, identifying energy resource exploration and infrastructure construction as two cooperation priorities—a potential signal as to where state-owned EPC contractors should direct their focus in an effort to develop political capital ([PRC State Council](#), November 24, 2016). In addition, Latin American heads of state such as Argentine President Mauricio Macri and his Chilean counterpart Michelle Bachelet attended the first Belt and Road Forum in May 2017.

There is a clear precedent for the Chinese government viewing SOEs as tools for a policy implementation pyramid—indeed, this is a fundamental assumption of China’s “Going Out” (*zou chuqu*, 走出去) policy. Furthermore, there is an established institutional framework for guiding the work of central government-controlled SOEs, revolving around the State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC). Just as SASAC and other government agencies can act as a channel through which instructions are passed down to SOEs, this same channel can operate in reverse. What remains unclear is whether the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched new initiatives in Latin America following lobbying by state-owned firms eager to tap a new market; or instead, if these same SOEs saw the Odebrecht scandal as an avenue to burnish their political capital by responding to a *de facto* extension of the “going out” policy.

Governments and companies can both identify and exploit opportunities presented by the market. There has clearly been a response on the part of China’s SOEs to the opportunities presented by Odebrecht’s loss of its position atop the totem pole of Latin America infrastructure construction; and taking advantage of this opportunity would seem to benefit both the commercial goals of state-owned EPC contractors and the strategic aims of the Chinese government. In this context, the most likely explanation is that of an enduring truth: that Chinese SOEs (and Chinese companies in general) maintain an ongoing *quid pro quo* with the government, often finding overlap between commercial and political agendas.

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The Stand-Off Over the Myitsone Dam Project in Myanmar: Advantage China

By Sudha Ramachandran

Introduction—China’s Stalled Dam Project in Myanmar

On January 12th, the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in Myanmar issued a statement warning Myanmar that if it failed to resolve the dispute over the stalled Myitsone Hydropower Dam project in Myanmar’s northern state of Kachin, “confidence of Chinese entrepreneurs in investing in Myanmar” would be “seriously hurt” ([Global Times](#), February 21). A fortnight prior to this statement, the PRC Ambassador to Myanmar, Hong Liang, visited the Kachin capital of Myitkyina, where he met local Kachin groups and religious leaders to win their support for revival of the controversial Chinese-backed dam project. Hong reportedly warned them against opposing Chinese projects, including the Myitsone project, in the Kachin state ([The Irrawaddy](#), January 9). PRC officials have reportedly been visiting the homes of Kachin villagers to canvass support for the project ([The Irrawaddy](#), September 13, 2018).

The \$3.6 billion Myitsone dam project is a Sino-Myanmar joint venture: Myanmar's Ministry of Electric Power and a domestic conglomerate, Asia World, as well as the PRC's state-run China Power Investment Corporation, signed a memorandum of understanding in 2006; work on the project began subsequently in December 2009. In September 2011, amid protests over the Myitsone Dam's social and environmental costs, Myanmar's then-President Thein Sein announced the suspension of the project, citing the "will of the people" ([Mizzima](#), September 30, 2011). Since coming to power in January 2016, Myanmar's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) has avoided making a decision on the project's future. But with State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi due to meet Chinese leaders on the sidelines of the upcoming Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, where the Myitsone project is bound to come up for discussion, the NLD government will need to decide the fate of the project before Suu Kyi leaves for Beijing ([The Irrawaddy](#), April 5). This will not be an easy decision, as the government is caught between mounting pressure from the PRC and calls from the people of Myanmar to cancel the project.



Image: A construction site for the Myitsone Dam Project in northern Myanmar, left inactive after the halt of work in 2011 (undated). (Source: Asianews.it)

Concerns and Controversies Surrounding the Myitsone Dam Project

The Myitsone project envisaged construction of a dam around 3.2 kilometers south of the confluence of the Mali Hka and the N'Mai Hka Rivers, where the River Irrawaddy originates. The dam was to have an installed capacity of 6,000 megawatts (MW). [1] Under the initial agreement, 90% of the electricity generated was to be sold to China and the rest would be available for Myanmar's use, free of charge ([Frontier Myanmar](#), November 29, 2018). The deal has been strongly criticized in Myanmar: according to Khin Khin Kyaw Kyee, lead researcher at the Institute for Strategy and Policy–Myanmar, many Myanmar citizens see it as a

“one-sided” deal that is tilted overwhelmingly in China’s favor, with few benefits for Myanmar. Concern also existsthat China will gain control over one of Myanmar’s “main water sources”, which will leave the country “more vulnerable” to Chinese pressure. [2]

Besides, there are concerns over social and environmental costs that the local population has to bear. The mega-dam is expected to flood 766 square kilometers (km) of territory in the Kachin state, and over 15,000 people are likely to be displaced and deprived of their livelihoods. The flooding will destroy the rich biodiversity of the area, as well as disrupting agricultural lands and fisheries in both the immediate area and downstream. Of additional concern, the dam is located in an earthquake-prone area—and damage to the dam in the event of an earthquake could result in flooding of Myitkyina, situated 40 kilometers downstream ([Kachin Development Networking Group](#), September 12, 2016).

Resistance to the Myitsone project is widespread within Myanmar. A 2017 poll conducted by the Yangon School of Political Science found that 85% of people in Myanmar oppose the building of the dam ([Myanmar Times](#), January 3, 2017). Opposition to the project became a nationwide campaign as early as 2011. [3] Several reasons exist for the dam becoming a nationwide concern. For one, it was Myanmar’s military junta that decided in favor of the project, and details of the deal were never made public. The Myitsone project became an item on the agenda of the pro-democracy movement, and thus garnered support across the country. Additionally, the location of the dam has raised cultural concerns: it is situated close to the origin of the River Irrawaddy, Myanmar’s lifeline and the heart of its culture. The people of Myanmar revere this area as the birthplace of their country and its civilization ([Kachin Development Networking Group](#), September 12, 2016). This cultural connect with the Irrawaddy evokes strong emotions among all of Myanmar’s people, and has evoked resistance from citizens all across Myanmar against the dam project.

Additionally, the PRC’s intimidation of Myanmar on the Myitsone project has not only angered the people of Myanmar; it has also transformed opposition to the project from a movement revolving around environmental and social costs, to one that is concerned about the project’s implications for Myanmar’s sovereignty ([The Irrawaddy](#), April 1). Thus, it is not just the Kachin community that is opposing the Myitsone project. Its opponents include people from “more than one ethnicity or group of people”—people from all walks of life, with diverse ethnicities and from different geographical locations, are resisting the dam project. [4] In recent months, Myanmar’s civil society has been working towards unifying the anti-dam campaign. On April 1st, for instance, civil society activists, writers and environmentalists from across the country converged at Yangon to strategize their opposition to the dam project. They formed a national committee to coordinate the campaign, and have warned the government of nation-wide resistance if it decides to go ahead with the controversial project ([The Irrawaddy](#), April 1).

China's Interests in the Myitsone Dam Project

It was the Myitsone Dam's hydropower capacity and its value to China's Yunnan Province that initially drew the PRC to pursue the project. Electricity generated by the dam was seen to be useful for the industrialization and development of Yunnan. However, in recent years Yunnan has developed a greater electrical production capacity, and is even exporting its surplus. According to Chinese analysts, there is waning interest in the PRC in Myitsone's hydropower—and Beijing has therefore reportedly adopted a “softened position” on the dam project's revival. Apparently, it is keen to pursue Myanmar “for compensation for renegeing on the terms of the contract rather than simply resuming the project” ([IPP Review](#), April 1).

Why has China then stepped up pressure on Myanmar in recent months? According to an Indian businessman in Yangon, the Myitsone project is now useful to China as a “bargaining chip.” By pressuring Myanmar on the Myitsone project it is hoping to “secure concessions on other projects in Myanmar,” including the Kyaukphyu Deep-Sea Port and a number of smaller hydropower projects. [5]

The suspension of the Myitsone project upset the PRC not so much on account of “the loss of access to hydropower as because of the loss of face it suffered.” Beijing has been rankled that Myanmar, despite its “extreme dependence” on China, “dared to snub” its patron by cancelling a Chinese-backed project. The importance of this “loss of face” factor has grown in recent years, especially in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as China does not want “other BRI members to believe that they can suspend or cancel a project without serious consequences.” [6]

The Dilemma Faced by Myanmar's Government

Back in 2010-11, when the Kachin campaign against the dam was gathering momentum, it was not difficult for the NLD to take a position on the controversial Myitsone project: it was then a party struggling against military rule, and it swiftly joined hands with Kachin activists to demand the project's cancellation, targeting the government's unpopular policies and opaque decision-making. However, since the NLD came to power in 2016, it has neither cancelled the project nor clarified its position. Indeed, it has not even made public the findings of a report of a 20-member commission it set up to review the dam project and its implications ([The Irrawaddy](#), March 14).

The NLD government is in a quandary: if it cancels the Myitsone project, it will be liable to pay \$800 million to China, and it would face China's ire. It would also weaken investor confidence in Myanmar, and possibly affect the country's economic revival ([Global Times](#), February 21). Myanmar's dependence on China, which had declined in the wake of its democratization and subsequent improvement of relations with Western countries, has surged over the last couple of years in the context of the Rohingya conflict. Western countries are criticizing the NLD government's handling of the Rohingya conflict, and Myanmar needs China's support

to fend off Western criticism and actions in global forums like the United Nations Security Council. Given this dependence, Myanmar's government cannot afford to anger Beijing by cancelling the Myitsone project.

Green-lighting the revival of the Myitsone project, on the other hand, would make the NLD government unpopular in Myanmar. Going against the will of the people will put the legitimacy of the government at risk, and could affect the NLD's electoral performance in next year's general elections. Protests against the decision can be expected to erupt across the country, impacting Myanmar's stability. Importantly, reviving the project is "very likely" to trigger "another wave of anti-China sentiment" in Myanmar, impacting the future of BRI projects in the country. [7]

China's Calculations

Signs are emerging that the NLD government is considering a change in policy: in late January U Thaung Tun, Myanmar's Minister of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations, said that his government was considering downsizing the dam and relocating it, or offering China an alternative project ([Mizzima](#), January 30). However, he did not clarify the government's preference.

The NLD government appears to be preparing the public for its decision. On March 14, Suu Kyi appealed to the people to be more open-minded, and to view the Myitsone project from a wider-perspective. Speaking to residents of Pyay in the Bago Region, she said that the government would make a final decision on the project after considering political, social, economic and environmental concerns. Looking at it from just one viewpoint would result in a flawed decision, she said. Importantly, Suu Kyi stated that her government would not cancel a project approved by its predecessor simply because that project did not comply with the current administration's policies ([The Irrawaddy](#), March 14).

It is evident that the government is considering reviving the Myitsone project, perhaps with alterations in its size and location to address public apprehensions. While the changes may go some way in assuaging local fears, it is unlikely that this will blunt widespread opposition to the project. Any decision to go ahead with the project will be seen in Myanmar as caving in to Chinese pressure—and hence, undermining Myanmar's sovereignty. Kachin activists have also repeatedly said that they will accept nothing less than a full cancellation of the Myitsone project.

The question remains as to whether the PRC still wants to go ahead with the Myitsone project. Its need for Myitsone's electricity in Yunnan having fallen, it could reject Myanmar's compromise offer on Myitsone. China may have calculated that while Myitsone could provide it with more electricity, a larger Chinese role at the Kyaukphyu Port would boost its strategic and economic interests—in which case, it can be expected to demand monetary compensation for the stalled dam project, even as it presses for concessions on the Kyaukphyu project. Regardless, it is still "Advantage China" in the Sino-Myanmar standoff over the Myitsone project.

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Notes:

[1] The Myitsone dam is one of seven dams, and the largest planned on the Irrawaddy River and its tributaries. The seven dams will have a total installed generation capacity of 21,600 megawatts.

[2] Author's interview with Khin Khin Kyaw Kyee, lead researcher at the Institute for Strategy and Policy–Myanmar, April 12.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Author's interview with an Indian businessman based in Yangon, April 12.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Khin Khin Kyaw Kyee, n. 2.

Nowhere to Run, Nowhere to Hide: Whither Jihadism in China?

By Jacob Zenn

Introduction—Ethnic Conflict in Xinjiang and the Government's Response

Over the past year, political re-education camps in the western Xinjiang Province of the People's Republic of China (PRC) have attracted much international attention due to allegations that hundreds of thousands of Uighur Muslims are being detained in the camps. This is being done with intent to assimilate the Uighurs into the dominant Han culture and to make them loyalists of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), but is conducted under the guise of additionally providing them with vocational education ([Lowy Institute](#), May 25, 2018; [China Brief](#), May 15, 2018). The Chinese government's defense of the camps is that they serve the interests of "anti-terrorism" (*fankong*, 反恐) and "de-extremification" (*qu jiduanhua*, 去极端化). China also claims that these camps help to defend the Uighur population from the "harms of terrorism" ([People's Daily](#), March 19).

The creation of the Xinjiang camp system began a few years after major clashes took place in June 2009 between Uighurs and Han Chinese in Urumqi, Xinjiang's largest city—an outbreak of violence that led to several hundred deaths ([Renmin Wang](#), March 18). Those clashes were followed by a subsequent campaign of attacks by Uighurs militants on typical terrorist targets (such as train stations and markets) mostly in Xinjiang, but also cities elsewhere in China—including an incident at Tiananmen Square in October 2013 ([Sydney Morning Herald](#), November 26, 2013). PRC authorities put much of Xinjiang under virtual martial law

after June 2009, cutting off the Internet for over a year and establishing ubiquitous police posts throughout Urumqi and other cities. In particular, PRC commentators cite the June 2009 clashes and the 2014 assassination-by-stabbing of Juma Tahir (the head imam of Kashgar's famous Id Kah mosque) as key motivators for the government's "anti-terrorism" and "de-extremification" measures ([Renmin Wang](#), March 18).



Image: Police stop and frisk citizens on an unidentified street in Xinjiang. (Source: BBC)

The tactics of the attackers after June 2009 were generally unsophisticated, to include car rammings, knife-stabbings, and small-scale bombings. This was true even when the death tolls in some attacks ran into the several dozens—such as in a train station knife-stabbing incident in Kunming in March 2014, and a market car-ramming and bombing in Urumqi two months later in May 2014. Though the attacks were not necessarily orchestrated by the main Uighur jihadist group, the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), it was still the TIP that claimed responsibility or otherwise praised them ([China Brief](#), January 25, 2016; [China Brief](#), May 23, 2014; [China Brief](#), March 6 2014).

The Jihadist Movement in Western China from 2009-2014

Until 2013, the TIP's several hundred fighters were nominally active in Afghanistan (or the border region with Pakistan) and formally allied with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. However, the group became best known for serving as the mouthpiece for Uighur jihadism in the PRC through its high-quality videos and publications—a media campaign that began with threats to disrupt the Beijing Olympics in 2008, and grew in the year after the June 2009 clashes ([Terrorism Monitor](#), March 17, 2011). Profiles of Uighurs involved in violent incidents after the June 2009 events in Xinjiang indicated that, in general, they had consumed some Islamist or jihadist literature. However, they were also seeking vengeance for social grievances, such as the inability to build mosques in Xinjiang, or to emigrate from China to other countries such as Turkey ([China Brief](#); September

10, 2014, [Qz.com](#), November 7, 2013). There were also broader structural factors involved, such as grievances over Xinjiang's shift in character from a Uighur-dominant culture to a Han-dominant culture—the result of continued mass migration into Xinjiang by ethnic Hans, and the Communist Party's encouragement of Uighur out-migration from Xinjiang to other parts of China for work.

The Syrian war, which commenced in 2011, may have further exacerbated Uighur militancy: it both attracted Uighurs travelling to Syria to fight, and also coincided with an escalation of attacks in Xinjiang. The TIP, for its part, relocated from Afghanistan to Syria in 2013 ([China Brief](#), October 10, 2014). PRC authorities, in response, began to further monitor Uighurs in China and their travel because of concerns that Uighur “foreign fighters” would return to Xinjiang to launch attacks, or organize attacks in other regions of China—similar to the ways in which some European citizens have engaged in terrorism after returning from Syria to their home countries. Therefore, even though the concept of “re-education through labor” has decades-long roots in the PRC, it was the series of events between 2009 and 2014—the June 2009 clashes, the Syrian war, the sporadic terrorist attacks ranging from Kunming to Beijing, and the assassination of Juma Tahir—that provided the context behind Beijing's ultimate decision around 2014 to set up the vast network of political re-education camps in Xinjiang ([China Brief](#), May 15, 2018).

In the years since 2014, Uighur militancy in China has come to a gradual halt. The last known significant terrorist attack in the PRC occurred in December 2016, when four people in a car detonated explosives at a CCP headquarters building in Xinjiang; the four people in the car were shot dead, and one other person was killed in the explosion ([The Guardian](#), December 29, 2016). From the perspective of the authorities, the political re-education camps, the mass monitoring of Uighurs, and other security measures have therefore been effective. This has made the TIP not only less relevant in its bases far away from China's borders in Syria, but also has left the group literally calling for help from the global jihadist community out of desperation for its circumstances.

The Struggles of the Turkistan Islamic Party

Since relocating to Syria, the TIP has been allied with al-Qaeda-aligned militants in the northwest of the country. According to the Syrian government, the TIP most recently has been operating near a village called al-Mashri in the eastern Sahl al-Ghab plains of Hama, where it has attacked Syrian Army checkpoints ([Al-Watan](#), April 8). In 2018, the TIP also claimed attacks in al-Mushrafiya in the southern Idlib countryside, indicating that the group's operations extend well beyond Hama. The location of al-Mushrafiya, which straddles the border with Turkey, also suggests that some TIP militants (and their family members) move back-and-forth between Syria and Turkey, and that they may receive some support from Turkish intelligence and security agencies ([Terrorism Monitor](#), September 7, 2018).

Notwithstanding the TIP's role in the fighting in Syria and its probable havens in Turkey, one mission has been consistent for the group since it first arrived in Syria in 2013: promoting the narrative that Uighur

jihadists' support to the Syrians should be reciprocated by other jihadists' support to the TIP's struggle in Xinjiang (which it refers to as "East Turkistan") ([Islamic Turkistan](#), August 17, 2013). This was the main point of TIP members in a January 23, 2019 video of eight of their fighters in Syria, who claimed that:

- "We are preparing at the religious and military levels to come rescue you [the Uighurs of Xinjiang] from this atheist government;"
- It is important to "acquire the agreement and support of the suffering people" in Syria so that "our jihad can continue until we liberate Turkistan, *in sha Allah*, and free our oppressed brothers from China;" and
- "Uighur men in Europe and other countries" should "return to their faith and jihad." [1]

To further convey its support for the largest al-Qaeda-aligned group in Syria, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), on February 5th Abu Umar al-Turkistani, the TIP's "general amir," was one of the signatories of a document declaring "solidarity" with HTS. [2] This further demonstrated the TIP's desire to be seen as standing with al-Qaeda in the hopes that other al-Qaeda supporters would do the same for the TIP. (Other signatories were from Uzbekistan, the Caucasus, Albania, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, the Maldives, and Gaza.) Following this, in March 2019 Abdul Haq al-Turkistani—the overall leader of TIP, and arguably the longest-standing Uighur jihadist, who first fled to Afghanistan around 1997—was featured in another audio statement produced by the TIP's media wing, Islom Awazi. In the audio, al-Turkistani lamented:

- The Islamic world's "suspicious silence towards a population that is being exterminated" [in Xinjiang];
- The "secret jails" for Uighurs in Xinjiang;
- The ignorance of Muslims (including Muslim scholars) regarding the status of Muslims in China, and Muslims' "abandoning us in these trying times;" and
- That Chinese rule in Xinjiang was the same as the Israeli occupation of Palestine. [3]

Clearly, al-Turkistani was also directing his speech to al-Qaeda leaders, since in the online advertisement banner of the speech there were images of various al-Qaeda leaders, including Aymenn al-Zawahiri. The audio prompted a response in March 2019 from one of the leading al-Qaeda clerics in Syria, Abdullah al-Muhyasini, who advocated for a one-week social media campaign called "I Support East Turkistan." In April 2019, the "al-Qaeda General Command" also declared in a statement posted online that it is "obligatory to help our oppressed believers and brothers... in the Turkistan Islamic Party, led by the mujahid Shaykh Abdul Haq al-Turkistani ([alsahabmedia.net](#), April 4)."

However, these statements seemed to mirror the proverbial "hashtag campaigns" encountered in Western social media, wherein activists tweet support for a cause but engage in few practical or long-term steps to actually do anything about the problem. Moreover, Abdul Haq al-Turkistani's audio seemed to emerge as the result of a spate of mostly Western reports condemning Chinese policies in Xinjiang, and not voices from

Muslim countries or even jihadists themselves. Little evidence exists, however, that al-Qaeda is willing or able to orchestrate attacks in China, or to help the TIP to do so; al-Qaeda as an organization has other priorities, and presumably little room to operate in Xinjiang considering the PRC's control and monitoring of borders, social media, and virtually all communications within the region.

Future Prospects for Uighur Militancy

It is not only al-Qaeda, or other actors within the global jihadist movement, whose support to the Uighurs has come across as insufficient (or as merely rhetoric, with no action). This is also true for major geopolitical actors, including Muslim governments: Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, for example, dismissed the political re-education camp issue altogether when he said in a January 2019 interview that he “did not know much” about it ([Tribune \(Pakistan\)](#), January 8, 2019). Another neighbor, Kazakhstan, has accepted some Uighurs in the country as asylum-seekers, but the PRC has publicly acknowledged Kazakhstan's “support” for its policies in Xinjiang ([PRC Foreign Ministry](#), March 28). Even the Taliban, which has historically hosted Uighur jihadists, has failed to support the TIP: the Taliban's relationship with Pakistan, its Islamo-nationalistic ideology, its focus on Afghanistan, and its disinterest in provoking Beijing has meant that it has generally sought to restrain the TIP. Moreover, the TIP is no longer as close to the Taliban as in previous years because of its relocation to Syria. Turkey may now be the most important state actor for the TIP; however, while Turkey facilitates the TIP's fight in Syria and Turkish leaders have occasionally voiced support for the Uighur cause and allowed Uighurs to organize anti-China protests in the country, there is little evidence that Turkey supports militants in Xinjiang or anywhere else within the PRC itself.

Much of the international support for the Uighur cause comes not from Muslim countries who rely on China for economic or diplomatic reasons, but rather from governments and organizations in the West. However, PRC spokespeople and media have been quick to dismiss any criticisms from the West, noting the West's own struggles—and, in many cases, failures—to prevent terrorism. The state-controlled *Global Times*, for example, published an editorial after the March 2019 terrorist attack in New Zealand stating that “migrants, especially Muslims, cannot integrate into Western society... the living standards of Western lower-class white people have declined in recent years... [and] the West currently lacks the conditions to duly reflect” on terrorism or to develop “long-term solutions” ([Global Times](#), March 17). At the same time, the fact that terrorist attacks have decreased, or ceased altogether, in the last few years in China has evidently given the PRC confidence to continue its policies regardless of what Western governments and media might say.

On the one hand, the reduction of terrorist attacks in China could lead one to expect that PRC authorities would scale back the “political re-education” program to avoid international criticism. The terrorism problem it was intended to solve, after all, is perhaps no longer such a big problem. On the other hand, the apparent “success” of the policy may lead Beijing to believe that the policy should not be stopped; but rather, that aspects of it should be expanded to other regions of China that may experience ethnic or other forms of

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unrest. The lack of any indications that the camps are being curtailed in Xinjiang suggests that the latter course is more likely.

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Notes

[1] Video titled "Advice of Fathers," posted on Telegram on January 23, 2019.

[2] Document posted by (@f_13l) on Twitter on February 6, 2019.

[3] Audio released on the Islom Awazi Telegram channel on March 18, 2019.
