



## CHINA'S INTERNAL POLICY: IRON FIST IN A VELVET GLOVE

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Having recalibrated China's foreign policy, to reflect Beijing's perception of its enhanced international standing, by ushering in a muscular approach, Chinese President Hu Jintao has now turned his attention to domestic issues. The focus is on the two restive, sensitive border provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang. Strong suspicion has occasionally been officially voiced that the US and US Congress-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED) have been supporting Tibetan and Uyghur separatist groups in both Autonomous Regions. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership, which earlier this year finalized its policy for Tibetans and the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), is now hammering out a long term policy for the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). This will be promulgated by mid-2010. Tibetan 'separatism' and Uyghur 'terrorism', both listed as China's highest priority internal security issues, are now at centre stage. The violent disturbances, which erupted across Tibet and Tibetan dominated areas in March 2008 and the fresh outbreak of violence in the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region last September, were the catalysts. Both caught the authorities unawares. The policy is being formulated at the highest levels of the Party under the personal direction of China's President Hu Jintao and the nine-member CCP Central Committee (CC) Politburo Standing Committee. 'Nei jun, wei sung', or as the Chinese translate it: 'Iron fist in a velvet glove', aptly describes these policies which combine development and suppression. There is now, however, going to be more iron in these fists.

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After the March 2008 riots the Chinese authorities intensified armed patrolling in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan majority areas and redoubled domestic propaganda efforts. Re-education was stepped up and stiff punishments were meted out to those found guilty of abetting or participating in violence. Units of the People's Armed Police (PAP) and PLA were deployed in areas considered sensitive throughout TAR. Negotiations with the Dalai Lama's envoys, intended mainly to assuage international concern about human rights and contain restiveness among Tibetans inside China, continued however and the invitation extended for the next round of talks in early 2010, set the time table for finalization of policies relating to Tibet.

Policies have now been put on a long term basis and an enlarged meeting of the CCP CC Politburo, the first such held in nine years, was convened in Beijing on January 8, 2010 under the chairmanship of Hu Jintao to discuss Tibet. This was the first meeting of the Politburo since the riots in Tibet in March 2008. The presence throughout the meeting of Hu Jintao, who combines the posts of CCP CC General Secretary, Chairman of the Central Military Commission and China's President, Premier Wen Jiabao, Vice President Xi Jinping, widely tipped to be Hu Jintao's successor, and Li Keqiang, tipped to take over as the next Premier, underscored its importance. The policies and decisions regarding personnel appointments adopted at this meeting, therefore, have

the endorsement of the successor leadership.

The tone for this high-level meeting was set by Hu Jintao, who launched a rare personal attack on the 74-year old Dalai Lama. He accused the exiled Tibetan leader of engaging in 'Tibetan independence' activities and 'sabotaging' social stability in the Tibetan region. He warned that his government would take 'substantial measures' to ensure 'normal order' of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet. Hu Jintao, unusually candidly, admitted the existence of discontent in Tibet and influence exerted by the Dalai Lama by stating that Tibet faced 'special contradictions between people of all ethnic groups and separatist forces led by the Dalai clique'. Hinting at future policies, he exhorted the TAR Government to prevent and strike at 'penetration and sabotage' by 'Tibetan independence' separatists to 'safeguard social stability, the socialist legal system, national unity and ethnic solidarity'.

This Politburo meeting was followed by the TAR People's Congress from January 10-15, 2010, which unveiled tougher policies and more stringent controls over Tibet and Tibetans. Most obvious was the appointment of Padma Choling as Governor of TAR. 58-year old Padma Choling, who served seventeen years in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) from 1969-86 in the Tibet and Qinghai provinces and was TAR Deputy Governor since 2003, is reputed to be a tough enforcer of Beijing's uncompromising policy against the 'three evil forces', namely separatism, terrorism and religious extremism. He served as Secretary of the Party cell in the important TAR Party General Office when Hu Jintao was TAR Party Secretary from 1988-92 and has easy access to the Chinese President. Padma Choling's appointment will reinforce the policies being pursued by Zhang Qingli, the powerful TAR Party Secretary. Zhang Qingli, who also has a PLA background and is a hardliner, had described the Dalai Lama as 'a wolf in monk's clothes' and 'a devil with a human face, but the heart of a beast' after the March 2008 riots.

The immediate riposte from TAR authorities to the Dalai Lama's 10<sup>th</sup> March 2010 statement confirm that a tough policy for dealing with the Dalai Lama is in place. Padma Choling described it as 'divisive' and asked him to stop 'splittist' activities, while Lhasa Vice Mayor Jigme Namgyal described the Dalai Lama as 'a separatist who uses religion

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as a cloak'. He dismissed the Dalai Lama's claim of 'annihilation of Buddhism' as an 'audacious lie'. All official Chinese reactions noted the Dalai Lama's use of the term 'East Turkestan' to refer to Xinjiang as evidence of his explicit support to Uyghur separatists and China's official media reacted sharply. Days

earlier the Chinese-selected Panchen Lama had, for the first time, been elevated to an official position and appointed Vice President of the Chinese Buddhist Association.

The high-level Tibet Planning Forum held in Beijing from January 18-20, 2010 which followed these meetings, was the fifth such meeting ever held. In a departure from past practice, delegates from all Tibetan areas in China participated. The Forum, which had development and stability as its themes, approved a massive package for TAR as well as Tibetan areas in the adjoining provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu and Qinghai— the first time that the scope of developmental assistance was expanded to these Tibetan areas outside TAR. The decision confirmed that in addition to developing Tibet and improving the peoples' living standards, enhanced and stringent controls on the populace will be enforced. Hu Jintao described the slogan for the conference as 'Chinese characteristics, Tibetan flavour' (zhongguo tese, xizang tedian). He promised an influx of investment, technology and experts and fixed the target for growth of TAR's GDP at 12 per cent. It is estimated that Tibet's GDP in 2009 would touch US\$ 6.4 billion. Another brief report which has attracted little comment was that PLA personnel would receive a bonus of approximately US\$ 24,000 as incentive for serving in Tibet. The terms governing grant of this bonus are yet unknown, but it could be a precursor to creation of a Corps similar to the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps.

Long term policies are now being formulated for the restive, violence prone Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and likely to be promulgated in the coming months.

These will be discussed and approved at the highest level by the nine-member CCP CC Politburo Standing Committee, also in a 'Forum on Xinjiang'. Security and stability along with development will be the main items on the agenda. After the recurrence of severe rioting in the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) last year, officially labelled as the 'March 14<sup>th</sup>' and July

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5<sup>th</sup> incidents, hard-liner XUAR Party Secretary Wang Lequan declared that it had been a 'profound lesson learned in blood'. He asserted that the authorities would take 'most resolute and strongest measures to deal with the enemies' latest attempt at sabotage'. China promptly launched a 'strike hard' campaign in Xinjiang resulting in the arrests of thousands of individuals, and Uyghurs throughout China were singled out for checks.

Since the beginning of this year a series of measures have been taken to further augment the security infrastructure in XUAR. In addition to intensified re-education and propaganda campaigns, China additionally unleashed a propaganda offensive against the US-based World Uyghur Conference and Uyghur leader Ms Rebiya Kadeer. It was decided that funding for public security would be doubled in 2010. A proposal in the current budget has accordingly been made for RMB 2.89 billion (US\$ 423 million) in contrast to the RMB 1.54 billion allocated in 2009. A new set of 'Regulations on the Comprehensive Management of Social Security in the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region' have been drafted and began to be enforced from February 1, 2010. The Xinjiang People's Armed Police (PAP) Corps set up its brigade-strength Sixth Detachment on February 8, 2010 in Urumqi. The PAP Deputy Chief of Staff Pan Changjie and XUAR Vice Chairman Jappa Abibulla described it as the 'Fist to maintain Stability'. PAP units, totalling 30,000 troops, are already spread across XUAR and deployed in Urumqi, Kashgar, Ili, Hotan and Bayingolin.

Paving the way for the Forum on Xinjiang and on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 'Western Region Development', XUAR Chairman, Nur Bekri recently enumerated the Autonomous Region's achievements over the past decade and indicated the areas of focus for future development. He noted the rapid increase in people's incomes and the accelerated development of transportation infrastructure. He added that XUAR will have 3 more airports by 2010 raising the total to 17. Crude oil output and natural gas production, in which the XUAR is already ranked second and first in the country respectively, is set to rise. The number of state-owned enterprises is expected to increase from the present 89. In conclusion, Nur Bekri asserted that though last year's 'July 5<sup>th</sup> incident' had caused 'huge damage' to the enterprises in XUAR, 'no force can destroy' the unity of the people or alter the development trends.

The emphasis on security is evident in the appointment of

Zhou Yongkang, Politburo Standing Committee member and Head of the CCP CC Central Commission of Political Science and Law— the country's highest body overseeing the security apparatus — as Head of the 'Leading Group for the Preparation for the Central Work Conference on Xinjiang'. In his address to the plenary meeting of the Leading Group, Zhou Yongkang stressed the need to promote ethnic equality and unity. He said that harmony and stability were essential to national unification and security for maintaining lasting stability and peace in Xinjiang. Over a hundred reports have been prepared by the Research Office of the State Nationalities Affairs Commission on 'new problems' in the relationship between ethnic nationalities. Like the Forum on Tibet, this proposed Forum also has 'leapfrogging development' high on the agenda.

Extensive preparatory work has been done for this first ever Forum on Xinjiang. According to reports over 500 cadres from 64 departments travelled to villages and towns in different parts of Xinjiang. Special attention was paid to the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. A number of central departments despatched study groups to examine their respective areas and these included the: CCP CC Organisation Dept; CCP CC Propaganda Dept; CCP CC United Front Work Dept; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Public Security; and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). A number of central enterprises like the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), PRC National

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Energy Administration etc are involved. The Forum will issue documents clarifying regulations for the proper development of Xinjiang's oil, gas and other 'superior resources'. It will try to resolve the uneven development between North and South Xinjiang and issue guidelines for the protection of Xinjiang's ecology and environment. Importantly, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps is to be reorganized and transformed to fight against 'Xinjiang independence' and 'splittist forces'.

So as to ensure proper implementation over the longer term, the Forum on Xinjiang will also decide on large-scale reshuffles of Ministry and Commission-level officials and PLA Generals. A number of new officials will be drafted in.

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another publicly undeclared objective is to neutralize US support to the separatists in Tibet and Xinjiang. A likely side effect of the prospective massive development plans will be to reorient China's economy inwards and boost domestic consumption. The Forums will boost exploitation of the mineral and other natural resources in both provinces,

thus enhancing China's energy security and facilitating its modernization effort. Additionally, the problem of uneven economic growth between coastal and hinterland provinces will be somewhat ameliorated. Finally, after reorienting China's foreign policy, Hu Jintao would have left a lasting imprimatur on the country's domestic policy concerning minorities.



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