



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Alignment of Xinjiang, Tibet security forces underline China's lockdown policies for Tibetans and Uyghurs

http://www.savetibet.org/lockdown_policies_for_tibetans_and_uyghurs

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Inside Tibet report

- There is growing evidence that military and security officials in Xinjiang (known to Uyghurs as East Turkestan) are collaborating more closely with their counterparts in the border areas of Tibet and elsewhere, reflecting the Chinese leadership's alignment of Tibet and Xinjiang and the importance of both regions to the Chinese government in fulfilling its strategic and economic objectives. This cooperation in the imposition of hyper-securitization and militarization is consistent with a harsher, more coercive policy approach toward "ethnic minorities," which has been particularly evident in Xinjiang with the imprisonment of around a million Uyghurs in internment camps.
- A joint operation by public security forces from Xinjiang working with counterparts from Qinghai Province and the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) to block access to a vast national park area was reported recently in the Chinese state media, while a further article reported that troops from Xinjiang and the TAR even work out together in gyms equipped by interactive game machines in the border areas. Joint drills are held by Xinjiang and Tibetan public security forces, and "long-endurance" drones were recently tested over Mount Everest (Chinese: Zhumulangma) in Tibet with the aim of bolstering security in both regions.

The current Chinese Communist Party secretary of Xinjiang, Chen Quanguo, who served in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) from 2011 to 2016, developed a system firstly in Tibet and now in Xinjiang that combines coercive securitization and militarization with efforts to accelerate political and cultural transformation. It has the stated official aim of: "breaking lineage, breaking roots, breaking connections, and breaking origins" of Uyghurs and Tibetans.¹ This reflects the ideologically driven preoccupation in Beijing—bearing little or no relation to the real situation on the ground—that the two major "ethnic minority" regions of the People's Republic of China (PRC) present a "grave and present danger" to China's overall security.

The emphasis on the strengthened connections between military and security officials in Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, and Xinjiang is linked to Chen's tenure and is in the context of an

¹ This quote from an official government document was cited by Agence France-Presse, which reviewed more than 1,500 publicly available government documents also describing disturbing purchases made by government agencies that oversee the so-called education centers: 2,768 police batons, 550 electric cattle prods, 1,367 pairs of handcuffs, and 2,792 cans of pepper spray. In one of the government documents, officials argued that to build new, better Chinese citizens, the reeducation centers must first "break their lineage, break their roots, break their connections, and break their origins." Ben Dooley for AFP, October 24, 2018, <https://news.abc-cbn.com/overseas/10/24/18/inside-chinas-internment-camps-tear-gas-tasers-and-textbooks>

aggressive ‘counter-terrorism’ drive in both areas with a strongly political dimension, integral to the new policy direction from Beijing that is being imposed on the Tibetan and Uyghur people.²

Most recently, the Chinese state media reported a joint operation by Xinjiang, Qinghai and TAR public security personnel in countering what was described as unauthorized intrusions into three bordering national park areas, the Chang Tang (Chinese: Qiangtang) Nature Reserve, the Altun Shan Nature Reserve in Xinjiang to the north-east and the bordering Hoh Xil (Tibetan: Achen Gangyap) in Qinghai, the latter of which is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage protected area.³ While the joint operation refers to the importance of protecting the wildlife habitat, the announcement in the state media of this action, published on Dec. 24, 2018,⁴ is a clear warning that the authorities will coordinate actions to restrict movement and prevent people travelling freely in these vast areas of Xinjiang and Tibet—including attempts to leave the PRC.

The emphasis on maintaining border security and restricting access in border areas underlines a strengthened, hard-line approach to “locking in” Tibetans and Uyghurs to the PRC. This is combined with more systematic efforts to silence Tibetans and Uyghurs, particularly when they encounter outside visitors, and prevent them from travelling on religious pilgrimages even inside the PRC, or from leaving the PRC.⁵

Referring to the apprehension by security police of a group of five people who appeared to have been organizing a paid group trip across the three major protected areas,⁶ the article stated: “Recently, some people took the lead in organizing personnel to illegally cross the reserve, but they were eventually intercepted by Xinjiang, Qinghai and Tibet police.”

The announcement of the security forces’ intervention also indicates the vigorous imposition of a ruling issued in November 2017 prohibiting access to the nature reserves for local people, while security personnel and other authorized officials are allowed entry.⁷ This notice stated that “any unit or individual” would be prohibited from entering three major nature reserves including Hoh Xil (Chinese: Kekexili), an area that is twice the size of Belgium. The reports state that the restrictions also apply to two bordering nature reserves, the vast Chang Tang Nature Reserve, and the Altun Shan Nature Reserve in Xinjiang to the northeast. The notice led to concerns about the exclusion of Tibetan pastoralists who have made skillful use of the remote, wild landscape here and across the plateau for centuries, co-existing with wildlife and protecting the land.”⁸

Under Chinese President Xi Jinping’s reforms to the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), the reconstituted ‘West Zone’ military region merges Lanzhou and Chengdu military regions, representing a strengthened military formation to tackle the Party’s key concerns over ‘stability’ in Tibet and Xinjiang.

² For details of the politicized application of the counter-terror campaign and legislation in Tibet and Xinjiang, see International Campaign for Tibet, ‘Dangers of China’s counter-terrorism law for Tibetans and Uyghurs’, November 15, 2016, <https://www.savetibet.org/dangers-of-chinas-counter-terrorism-law-for-tibetans-and-uyghurs/>

³ International Campaign for Tibet report, Nomads in ‘no man’s land’:

China’s nomination for UNESCO World heritage risks imperilling Tibetans and wildlife’, June 30, 2017, <https://www.savetibet.org/nomads-in-no-mans-land-chinas-nomination-for-unesco-world-heritage-risks-imperilling-tibetans-and-wildlife/>

⁴ Web portal xznqnews.com, December 24, 2018, in Chinese, http://www.xznqnews.com/news/nqyw/201812/t20181224_2483325.html

⁵ International Campaign for Tibet report, ‘Access Denied: China’s Isolation of Tibet and the Case for Reciprocity’, <https://www.savetibet.org/access-denied-chinas-enforced-isolation-of-tibet-and-the-case-for-reciprocity/>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ International Campaign for Tibet report, ‘Ban on access to nature reserves in Tibet raises concern about Tibetan nomads at UNESCO site’, December 11, 2017, <https://www.savetibet.org/ban-on-access-to-nature-reserves-in-tibet-raises-concern-about-tibetan-nomads-at-unesco-site/>

⁸ The ruling also appeared to counter Chinese assurances to UNESCO that they would “fully respect” local herders and “their traditional culture, religious beliefs, and lifestyle. Statement made to UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Krakow, Poland, July, 2017; see International Campaign for Tibet report, ‘UNESCO approves controversial World Heritage Tibet nomination despite concerns’, July 7, 2017, <https://www.savetibet.org/unesco-approves-controversial-world-heritage-tibet-nomination-despite-concerns/>

The Western Theatre Command of the PLA oversees the regions of Xinjiang and Tibet and handles border issues with India.⁹ In 2016 the ranking of the Tibet Military Command was raised a level higher than its counterpart provincial-level military commands when it was put it under the jurisdiction of the PLA.¹⁰

Trial flight of drone to boost border troops capacity

In a further emphasis on border security in Tibet and Xinjiang, the People's Liberation Army announced a trial flight of a new reconnaissance drone near Mount Everest (Tibetan: Chomolungma) in Tibet. The PLA indicated that the new GJ-2 drone could provide backup or even replace troops in the challenging and mountainous terrain of border areas in Tibet and Xinjiang.¹¹

Chinese state media have emphasized the importance of security forces from Xinjiang and TAR coordinating their actions, with joint trainings organized. In one case, a joint training on policing and combat was held for troops from TAR and Xinjiang at the Wuhan City People's Police Training Institute in January 2018. An article in a Chinese academic journal obtained by ICT stated: "With the target of constructing a high quality policing and actual combat instructor corps officer corps, with the focus on training basic theory, basic knowledge, technical and tactical movement and firearms training, and in accordance with the severity of anti-terrorism and violence prevention situation in Xinjiang and Tibet and its work characteristics, a training plan was carefully formulated, there were well-designed training topics, creating an excellent instructor corps, adhering closely to actual combat for carrying out training. By means of such training, the levels of policing and actual combat abilities among the participating instructors significantly increased, laying a robust foundation for promoting policing and actual combat training work in the Xinjiang and Tibet regions."¹²

New gyms for 'interactive' training for Tibet, Xinjiang troops

Special gyms have even been set up in the border area of Ngari (Chinese: Ali) for troops from Xinjiang and the TAR to train in the forbidding high-altitude conditions, which the official press terms a "snow island". The gyms in the border area, which has an average altitude of 4,500 meters, are equipped with the latest equipment including "somatosensory interactive games," aimed at activating the whole body and senses, in order to train major muscle groups. A state media article about the indoor fitness centers in Ngari stated that: "Ali is 'the roof on the roof of the world' and is known as the 'forbidden zone of life.' The Ali Army Division is stationed in the northern Tibet Plateau with an average altitude of 4,500 meters. The borderline is more than 900 kilometers long. Most of the company is located in the snow-capped mountains. The nine-month closure period has made the border defense company

⁹ International Campaign for Tibet report, 'Inside Tibet: Major live fire drill testing new tanks in Tibet highlights political imperatives, military capacity on plateau', July 21, 2017, <https://www.savetibet.org/ict-inside-tibet-major-live-fire-drill-testing-new-tanks-in-tibet-highlights-political-imperatives-military-capacity-on-plateau/>

¹⁰ According to the Chinese state-run newspaper the Global Times, May 13, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/982843.shtml>. The newspaper reported: "China continues to strengthen its military presence in the autonomous region and aims to allow the military command to shoulder more combat assignments, analysts said."

¹¹ Asia Times reported on December 5, 2018, that: "The state-owned military-industrial conglomerate Aviation Industry Corporation of China unveiled a new reconnaissance drone series last month at the Zhuhai Airshow. But AVIC gave scant details about the specification and performance of the GJ-2 drones." (<http://www.atimes.com/article/long-endurance-drones-set-to-patrol-borders-in-tibet-xinjiang/>) The Global Times, cited by Asia Times, reported that the GJ-2 can cruise at a top speed of 370km/h while at an altitude of 9,000 meters, and can remain airborne for as long as 20 hours thanks to its long-endurance turboprop engine. Reportedly a GJ-2 prototype flew over the 8,848-meter Mount Everest during one trial flight.

¹² The article, published in 2018 although the exact date is not given, is entitled: 'Xinjiang and Tibet Public Security Agencies Policing and Actual Combat Instructors' Ability Enhancement Training Classes Held at the Wuhan City People's Police Training Institute'. According to a translation from Chinese into English by ICT, the piece states: "In accordance with the Ministry of Public Security's training plan and relevant work deployments under Aid Xinjiang and Aid Tibet, from 29 January to 3 February, Xinjiang and Tibet Public Security Agencies Policing and Actual Combat Instructors' Ability Enhancement Training Classes were held at the Wuhan City People's Police Training Institute (Ministry of Public Security Police Practical Training Base at Wuhan)." This article was obtained from an online database accessible in the PRC and exact details of the publication could not be obtained.

a 'snow island.' The officers and men of the Ali Army Division need to overcome the harmful effects of unfavorable factors such as cold and oxygen deficiency. For this reason, let the officers and men have a good environment, and guarding against a good body has become the common aspiration of the country, enterprises and people of all ethnic groups.”¹³

The presence of Xinjiang troops in the Ngari region of the TAR, bordering India, was reflected in a visit in November 2016 by current TAR Party Secretary Wu Yingjie, who said that the Xinjiang authorities had “actively assisted” “social stability work” in Tibet for a long time, and that now this would be strengthened, with a particular emphasis on “safeguarding border security” and “combating illegal border crossing.” The same official report of the visit stated: “In the Ali Army Division, Wu Yingjie visited the People's Liberation Army commanders, the armed police forces and the officers and men of the public security forces, and expressed sincere gratitude to the Xinjiang Military Region stationed in the Ali Training Force. He pointed out that for a long time, the vast numbers of officers and men have been living in the Ali Plateau for many years, and have made great contributions to the stable development of Ali. Ali is an important border area in our region, and its strategic position is extremely important.”¹⁴

Three days earlier on Oct. 2, 2016, TAR Deputy Party Secretary Deng Xiaogang had met armed police troops and grass roots Party cadres in another sensitive border area, Nyingtri (also known as Kongpo, Chinese: Linzhi), close to Arunachal Pradesh in India, which China claims as part of the PRC. Construction began in December 2014, of a new railway line east from Lhasa to Nyingtri close to India's border. The prefectural capital of Nyingtri, Bayi, is known as a base for the PLA.

¹³ Chinese state media website, 'Advanced fitness equipment went into the Ali Army Division of the People's Liberation Army: helping officers and men to "guard a good body"', June 18, 2015, <http://www.chinanews.com/mil/2015/06-18/7353880.shtml>

¹⁴ Tibet Daily, 'Wu Yingjie: Focus on solidifying the grassroots foundation, do a good job of stable work', October 5, 2016, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2016/1005/c64102-28757100.html>