

The terror group China fears the most

According to the [recent United Nations Security Council](#) report confirmed that ETIM not only exists and operates in Afghanistan but is also pursuing a “transnational agenda.”

According to the report, ETIM is among the “foremost” foreign terror groups operating in Afghanistan. The report says ETIM is situated mainly in Badakhshan, Kunduz and Takhar provinces and that Abdul Haq (Memet Amin Memet) remains the group’s leader. The report goes on to say approximately 500 ETIM fighters operate in the north and northeast of Afghanistan, primarily in Raghistan and Warduj districts, Badakhshan, with financing based in Raghistan. Those northern areas connect with China through the narrow Wakhan Corridor, a potential passageway for Xinjiang-bound militants.

The UN report says ETIM collaborates with Lashkar-e-Islam and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, two banned Pakistani militant groups. It also said ETIM “has a transnational agenda to target Xinjiang, China, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, as well as Chitral, Pakistan, which poses a threat to China, Pakistan and other regional States.”

Beijing has been pursuing a multi-faceted strategy to counter ETIM’s threat.

While it has offered Kabul to train and advise its security forces, with reports in the Chinese media even indicating a possible deployment of Chinese forces in Afghanistan to prevent ETIM fighters from using the Wakhan corridor in Badakhshan province to cross unchecked into Xinjiang, it has also offered Taliban “development” in exchange for peace.

Beijing’s definition of peace, however, does not simply refer to the absence of civil war in Afghanistan. Rather, it also

and mainly stresses the importance of not providing any safe heavens to ETIM fighters. Observers and analysts, however, doubt that the Taliban will force the ETIM out of existence at Beijing's request. On the contrary, the Taliban are going to need as many fighters on its side as possible to win its war for Kabul.

That likely means that the ETIM will not only be one of the chief beneficiaries of the Taliban's war to establish an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan but will also likely be able to carve out the space to continue its pro-Uighur campaign in Xinjiang. Its position will also be strengthened by the presence of other jihadi groups, including al Qaeda and the Islamic State in Afghanistan (IS-K), both of which sympathize with the so-called "Uighur cause."

Growing indications that Turkey – home to a sizable Uighur population including thousands who have fled persecution in Xinjiang – may play a direct military and diplomatic role in Afghanistan after America's withdrawal also raises risks for China.

Turkey's now well-known use of jihadi fighters in Syria for essentially geopolitical objectives will make its future presence in Afghanistan unsettling for Beijing. Turkey, now pursuing pan-Islamist "neo-Ottoman" ambitions, has been championing the Uighurs cause for some time.

China is not only facing a few hundred ETIM fighters in Afghanistan. Rather, it could face a combined force of thousands of jihadis backed by state and non-state actors with direct territorial access to Xinjiang via Afghanistan.

Analysts suggest China's position is also compromised by the lack of any significant on-the-ground human intelligence networks and an ability to intercept or pre-empt anti-China terrorist formations in Afghanistan.