

When speaking about terrorism in East Asia, there are several countries one should look at. The whole area of South Asia is full of terror groups, especially Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. Then, there is the problem of China, a country constantly dealing with pro-independence movements. Although it is difficult to gather reliable information on the security level at the Western border of the People's Republic of China, there are reasons to believe that jihadi militants have become a problem for Beijing as well.

Starting from Pakistan - with the former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif out of the picture since the end of July - the country risks becoming even more instable, hence more dependent on the army. The Supreme Court has removed the Prime Minister grounding its decision on Article 62 of the Constitution. This article allows the Court to remove Parliament members holding a dishonest conduct. Being Sharif involved in a big scandal linked to the famous "Panama Papers", he has then opted for resigning.

Having Sharif – leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (Pml-N) – out of the political scene for the third time represents a significant victory for the army, which is now re-emerging as the sole significant interlocutor for any kind of interaction. Sharif's coalition had already fallen twice in the past: the first time in 1993 and the second time in 1999, always due to the pressures exercised by the army. At the moment, it does not seem to be available in Pakistan a person able to replace Sharif and lead to dialogue and "peaceful" confrontation. Instead, the country seems characterized by a struggle for power among 10 local organizations, about 30 transnational groups and 4 organizations being full-fledged terrorists (Al-Rashid Trust; Al-Akhtar Trust; Rabita Trust; Ummah Tamir-e-Nau).

Tamil Tigers (LTTE) are the most important militant group in Sri Lanka. They want a free and independent state for Tamils and they remain very active today. Very different is the situation in Bangladesh, where 4 terror groups are trying to promote a social model based on Taliban values. These four groups are Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B); Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB); Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Purba Bangla Communist Party (PBCP). Alongside the above-mentioned groups, there is also Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), which is classified as extremist group. This is the student fringe of the movement Jamaat-e-Islami, and is very active in helping youths to accept the superiority of Islamic values and to conform to them.

The case of India is much more complicated. The country is currently suffering for two phenomena: the strengthening of violent pro-independence groups in some regions, and the danger deriving from infiltrations of individuals belonging to Taliban militia or to the Islamic State. Separatist groups with terror tendencies are active in Kashmir (All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC); Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF); Lashkar-e-Jabbar (LeJ); Lashkar-e-Omar (LeO); Mutahida Jihad Council (MJC), also known as United Jihad Council (UJC); Tehrik-ul-Mujahideen (TuM)), Arunachal Pradesh (Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM); Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K)), Assam (Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist); Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM); Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB); Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA)), Manipur (Coordination Committee (CorCom); Manipur Naga Revolutionary Front (MNRF); National Socialist Council of Nagaland -- Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM); Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K); People's United Liberation Front (PULF); Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF)), Meghalaya (Achik National Liberation Army (ANLA); Achik Songa An'pachakgipa Kotok (ASAK); Achik National Liberation Co-operative Army (ANLCA); Achik Tiger Force (ATF); Achik National United Force (ANUF); Hynniewtre National Liberation Council (HNLC); Liberation of Achik Elite Force (LAEF)), e Nagaland (Federal Government of

Nagaland-Non-Accordist (FGN-NA); Federal Government of Nagaland -Accordist (FGN-A); Non-Accordist faction of Naga National Council (NNC-NA); Naga National Council-Accordist (NNC-Accordist)).

In all these areas the connections between the Islamic State and local groups are becoming stronger and stronger, fostering several concerns. The biggest worry for India is that with the help of some of these groups the Eastern regions could finally succeed in separating from India. More and more analysts believe that this ambitious goal can be achieved thanks to the support these groups are receiving from Bangladeshi terrorists.

Terrorism is becoming a problem for China as well. Beijing has started to speak formally about terrorism in 2011, when a new regulation was approved to clarify the meaning of “terrorism” and “terrorist organizations”. According to the Party, “terrorism” – as a big umbrella term - includes all the activities possibly “threatening the society, public security, the State bodies, the international organizations with violent acts, sabotage and intimidations, [...] or incite, support – both financially and non-financially – these kinds of initiatives”. The same regulation has then defined terrorist organizations as “criminal organizations, created to carry out terror attacks”, and terrorists those who belong to such organizations or support them.

The Chinese case is particularly interesting because China has been accused of instrumentally using the concept of terrorism to fight against pro-independence movements in Tibet and Xinjiang. In 2015, Xi Jinping has approved the first anti-terrorism law of the country and the regulation seems to be conceived to attack the activities of the rebels in the regions asking for more independence rather than to face a real terrorist threat. The regulation has also been very much criticized abroad for imposing further limitations on the rights of citizens. In China, it is forbidden to speak about terrorism and anti-terrorism operations on social media and technological companies are obliged to hand the Government the data required to constantly monitor all “dangerous activities” taking place on the internet. Finally, the new regulation has formalized the concept of “war of the people”, that is to say the need to involve civil society in the fight against terrorism to “easily gather the information on the field”.

Why is China doing all this? It has been years that Beijing tries to hold off the pro-independence inputs from Tibet and from Xinjiang and the new regulation has been useful also to assure more freedom of action in the rest of the country. The formalization of the idea of “war of the people” has served to convince the population and to create a united front against a threat depicted as violent and destabilizing. For the case of Xinjiang, the global war on terrorism and the more recent infiltration of men of the Caliphate has strengthened the message of Beijing, giving it more credibility.

As difficult as it is to collect reliable information on what is going on in Xinjiang, there are at least a couple of obscure evolutions that deserve to be mentioned. First and foremost, the remarkable effort made by the Party to monitor everything is taking place within the region. Among the security measures undertaken, the Party is withdrawing passports, forbidding parents to choose Islamic names for their children and impounding – or reclassifying – all sorts of weapons, including kitchen knives. The fact that in Tibet no such measures have been implemented might be a sign of further infiltration of Islamist militia close to ISIS, threatening even more the stability of Xinjiang.

Nevertheless, it seems realistic to hypothesise that Chinese Islamic minority might consider active militancy as an alternative to the submission to the Party, given the constant refusal for more independence from Central government. It is evident that China has enhanced the level of alert, fearing not only Uyghur claims but also the possibility of an infiltration of more structured and dangerous terror groups. The recent Chinese investment –involving more than 60 billion dollars – on a new economic corridor improving the connection with Pakistan (CPEC) is an example of Chinese determination to monitor the Pakistani situation rather than the result of economic calculus.

In fact, this investment will never provide a return able to justify such a remarkable Chinese financial commitment. Although this hypothesis is hard to be verified, given the impossibility of accessing Chinese intelligence sources – it still deserves to be kept into consideration when evaluating Beijing initiative on the Western border.