Spot Report
Deadly Attacks in Western China
13 August 2008

On 10 August 2008, the city of Kuqa in China’s northwestern region of Xinjiang was hit by a wave of violence that left eight people dead. Among the eight were seven suspected assailants and a security guard. The violence occurred just two days after the Olympic opening ceremony in Beijing and less than a week after another attack in Xinjiang that left sixteen policemen dead and another sixteen injured.¹ Two days later, on 12 August 2008, three security staff were stabbed to death at a checkpoint near Kashgar, which was where the sixteen policemen were killed.²

China’s official news agency, Xinhua, reported that the attacks on 10 August 2008 began at 2.30am. A vehicle was driven into the yard outside a police station and exploded. A security guard was killed in the first attack and two police officers and two civilians were also wounded. Police officers shot and killed one suspect, injured another and one assailant reportedly committed suicide.³

At 8.20am, police found five bombers hiding under a market counter. The bombers threw homemade explosives at police. Two bombers were shot dead and three others killed themselves.

Hualin Market was among several sites attacked - *Xinhua*

*Xinhua* reported that at least twelve bombings took place that morning. The targets were government and police offices and the devices were made out of bent pipe and gas canisters and tanks.⁴

It has also been reported that two of the attackers involved in the attacks were women. One was killed and the other, a 15-year-old girl, was wounded in the attacks. This has been viewed as an attempt to escape scrutiny from security forces. Officials also said that three bombers were still on the run and the attackers were a mix of local residents and outsiders.⁵

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While no group has claimed responsibility for the attacks, they are believed to be the work of the East Turkestan Independence Movement (ETIM). While it would not be the first time that women were involved in an attack, their involvement is seen as a highly unusual development. The attacks are also viewed as significant as they show that the perpetrators were well-organised. However, there is little to suggest that ETIM is capable of sophisticated attacks on the scale of groups like al-Qaeda.

The stabbings on 12 August have yet to be linked to the killings of sixteen policemen on 4 August 2008. It was the third attack in Xinjiang in eight days. It is not clear how many attackers were involved but Xinhua reported that the attackers jumped out of a passing vehicle and stabbed the security staff to death.6

More importantly, none of the recent attacks in China have been close to Beijing, which is due to intense Chinese security for the Olympic Games.7 Xinjiang is nearly 3,000 km away from Beijing. As such, the attackers may be concentrating their efforts on areas where they can launch attacks simply to embarrass the Chinese government during the Olympics.

7 Ibid