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Defense College

## NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE FOUNDATION

### STRATEGIC TRENDS

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#### CHINA

##### **China forced to take a clear stand against IS**

Also Chinese people working abroad have become a target of the Islamic State and China is now under pressure to review its foreign policy of non-intervention in conflicts far beyond its borders. Last November 20<sup>th</sup>, three Chinese executives were killed when Islamic militants stormed a hotel in Bamako, the capital of Mali. Shortly before, ISIS had announced in one of its online magazines that it had put to death a Chinese citizen after holding him as a prisoner for two months.

Until recently China's problems with Islamic terrorism were limited to attacks in its north-west province of Xinjiang, home of the Muslim Uighur people, which prompted serious efforts from Beijing to help stabilize Afghanistan and prevent it from becoming a safe haven for Uighur militants. As a matter of fact China is one of the leading actors in trying to bring about a political settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Many of its economic initiatives in the region are motivated by security concerns more than commercial interests.

China believes that the conditions in which terrorism has thrived can only be addressed through an improvement of economic conditions in Afghanistan and other Islamic countries. In many of these efforts — particularly the reconciliation push in Afghanistan — Beijing is working already with the United

States as a close partner. Looking more broadly at the whole geo-political stretch running from Xinjiang to the Middle East, China's economic and political role is likely to be a crucial one, and aspects of this and other partnerships already are developing.

In the recent past Chinese President Xi Jinping strongly criticized the double standard over how the West is committed to fight terrorism within its own borders and looks instead with doubt at the attacks in Xinjiang. While the Chinese government has usually followed an insular approach to domestic issues, it has consistently pushed to connect the unrest in Xinjiang with the Western-led war on terror and extremism.

"Terrorism is the common enemy of human beings," Xi said in Manila, Philippines, while attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit, along with other Asian leaders and President Obama. He then added that China "firmly opposes terrorism of all forms" and "will resolutely crack down on any terrorist crime that challenges the bottom line of human civilization." He did not specify how such agenda will be carried out. Military action is not a familiar course for China but after the blow suffered in Mali, it is most unlikely that Beijing will look the other way.