



**World Uyghur Congress**

## **Overview of the Maralbeshi Incident on 23 April 2013**

**May 2013**

## Kashgar Incident

The World Uyghur Congress (WUC) is extremely concerned by an incident that happened on 23 April 2013 at approximately noon, in which 21 people were killed and 19 arrested (11 immediately after, with a further 8 six days later) at Serikbuya in Maralbeshi (Bucha) County in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), the People's Republic of China (PRC).

According to information distributed among the PRC's media, picked up from official sources at the XUAR government propaganda office, unspecified 15 "community workers", who were perhaps accompanied by police,<sup>1</sup> were notified of "suspicious" individuals who, as Deputy Public Security Minister Meng Honwei, were found to be constructing home-made explosives, "lethal weapons" and flags promoting East Turkestan (the traditional name of the land in which the Uyghurs reside) independence;<sup>2</sup> other Chinese media reported that there were pro-jihadist slogans on the flags,<sup>3</sup> without specifying what the slogans actually said, as well as materials for making weapons, combat training equipment and illegal religious materials.<sup>4</sup>

The community workers and, perhaps, the police then called for further assistance from the local police department after purportedly finding several individuals watching terrorist videos and a caché of weapons. They tried to contact the police whilst defusing the situation, but were attacked with knives, a common item in a Uyghur household. When the police arrived, they were apparently ambushed, following which the police opened fire. They were then cornered in a room, where they were barricaded in the room, which was set alight killing 15 people. Of the 15 who died in the incident, 10 were of the Uyghur, 3 Han Chinese and 2 Mongolian ethnicities, in addition to the deaths of the 6 Uyghur suspects at the hands of the armed police.

According to the official narrative of events, 8 people were immediately arrested at the scene for their involvement in this supposed terrorist incident, and a further 11 six days later on 29 April 2013. These individuals, including the 6 deceased suspects, were accused of being part of a terrorist organisation, supposedly founded in September 2012 headed by Qasim Muhammad at his house, where they had in March 2013 made and tested explosive devices in addition to receiving training in terrorist activities; earlier accounts, however, from the Chinese media stated that they were undertaking lessons in the reading of the Koran, illustrating a marked change in the narrative.

Subsequently, the regional committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) posthumously commended the 15 deceased as "regional anti-terrorist heroes", honouring them for their "bravery and sacrifice", whilst 7 of them were also awarded the "regional outstanding CPC member" award.

Further developments lead to an increase in security in the region, including the presence of the military in not only XUAR but also Tibet,<sup>5</sup> in what many fear will be a repeat of the two previous "strike hard campaigns" in 1996 and 2009 respectively, a view supported by the official rhetoric. In addition to this, Radio Free Asia reported on 26 April 2013 further clashes in Yengi Awat village

1 The nature of the work of the community workers has not been specified and is characteristically vague. Why they were present at the house has been confusing in the media and official narrative. Some have said that they were accompanied by police, others have said they were on a regular visit to the house without police company.

2 '11 More Terrorist Suspects Captured After Xinjiang Deadly Attack', *Xinhua*, published on 29 April 2013. See here: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/29/c\\_132349574.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/29/c_132349574.htm) [Retrieved 9 May 2013]

3 For information, please see the following:

'China Arrests 19 Over Xinjiang Deadly Attack', *The Guardian*, published on 30 April 2013. See here: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/apr/30/china-arrests-xinjiang-deadly-clashes> [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

'11 More Terrorist Suspects Captured After Xinjiang Deadly Attack', *Xinhua*, published on 29 April 2013. See here: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/29/c\\_132349574.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/29/c_132349574.htm) [Retrieved 9 May 2013]

'Kashgar Unites to Say Farewell', *Chinadailyasia.com*, published on 30 April 2013. See here: [http://www.chinadailyasia.com/news/2013-04/30/content\\_15073520.html](http://www.chinadailyasia.com/news/2013-04/30/content_15073520.html) [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

4 'Kashgar Unites to Say Farewell', *Chinadailyasia.com*, published on 30 April 2013. See here: [http://www.chinadailyasia.com/news/2013-04/30/content\\_15073520.html](http://www.chinadailyasia.com/news/2013-04/30/content_15073520.html) [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

5 'China's Military Gets Greater Role in Tibet, Xinjiang', *The Tibetan Review*, Published on 6 May 2013. See here: <http://www.tibetanreview.net/news.php?id=12146> [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

(Yingawa in Chinese), the Hotan prefecture, in which 2 “community security officers” were killed, without providing further information.<sup>6</sup>

Below is an image of the burnt-down house.



Image taken from Chinadailyasia.<sup>7</sup>

### Information from the Ground, Media Barred and BBC Corroboration

We, the WUC,<sup>8</sup> and the Uyghur American Association (UAA),<sup>9</sup> have strong reasons to believe that the official narrative does not reflect the actual turn of events, doubts echoed by the US State Department acting spokesperson Patrick Ventrill in a Briefing on 24 April 2013.<sup>10</sup> These doubts have also been corroborated by a BBC investigation to Serikbuya.<sup>11</sup>

According to reports from the ground, the violent confrontation commenced as Chinese “community workers” and police illegally broke into the house of a Uyghur family, forced the women present to unveil and the men to shave off their beards,<sup>12</sup> subsequently shooting and killing one protesting Uyghur male, which precipitated the violent clash. As the confrontation

6 'Second Clash Reported in Xinjiang', *Radio Free Asia*, published on 26 April 2013. See here: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/violence-04262013165708.html> [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

7 'Kashgar Unites to Say Farewell', *Chinadailyasia.com*, published on 30 April 2013. See here: [http://www.chinadailyasia.com/news/2013-04/30/content\\_15073520.html](http://www.chinadailyasia.com/news/2013-04/30/content_15073520.html) [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

8 'Call Issued for Independent Investigation on Maralbeshi Incident by World Uyghur Congress and International Community Urged to Follow Up on Recent Arrests', *World Uyghur Congress*, published on 1 May 2013. See here: <http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?p=20278> [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

9 'Unlawful House Search and Arbitrary Use of Lethal Force Results in Nearly Two Dozen Deaths in Kashgar', *Uyghur American Association*, published on 24 April 2013. See here: <http://uyghuramerican.org/article/unlawful-house-search-and-arbitrary-use-lethal-force-results-nearly-two-dozen-deaths-kashgar> [Retrieved on 8 May 2013]

10 'State Department Daily Press Briefing', *US State Department*. 24 April 2013. See here: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2013/04/20130424146374.html#axzz2SgtPycW0> [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

11 'Doubts Over China Government Claims on Xinjiang Attack', *BBC*, published 26 April 2013. See here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-22319579> [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

to view an accompanying video report to this article, see here:

'China Violence: Ethnic Tension in Xinjiang Province', *BBC*, published on 29 April 2013: See here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-22319688> [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

12 'China Violence: Ethnic Tension in Xinjiang Province', *BBC*, published on 29 April 2013: See here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-22319688> [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

escalated, the Uyghurs in the house, feeling threatened, defended themselves with knives and axes.<sup>13</sup> Whilst officially the people in the house burned it down, some experts have made claims that the Chinese police may have in fact firebombed the house with all those inside.

This account is broadly corroborated by an undercover investigation by respected journalist, Damian Grammaticas, of the BBC who visited Serikbuya in the immediate aftermath. He reported that many of the locals in this small village were frightened to speak with journalists, some of whom had been warned by officials to not speak with “journalists” and “outsiders”.

His reporting also revealed some graphic and disturbing accounts on how those in the house were killed based on eye-witness testimonies, which do not fit with the official line that the “terrorists were shot.” For example, one eye-witness claimed that an injured man approached the police with a knife, was shot and then subsequently stabbed to death with the police's pickaxes. Three of the man's friends were subsequently shot twice after trying to help.

Damian Grammaticas and his team were subsequently temporarily detained and removed from the area, having been unable to corroborate at all with the government's narrative. The BBC was the only independent media organisation that was able to get a glimpse of the reality on the ground. Indeed, Senior Research at Human Rights Watch (HRW) Nicholas Bequelin highlighted whilst one can go around the media restrictions in the XUAR, one “can't go around that people are terrorized in fear of getting caught.”<sup>14</sup> There have also been reports of accelerated use of arbitrary detention since this incident. Issac Stone Fish also remarked in a Foreign Policy article that, “Many of the Western reporters who wrote about the incident noted the unreliability of the government's version.”<sup>15</sup>

### Points of Concern and Unanswered Questions

There remain many unanswered questions regarding the incident. The narrative which emerged within the Chinese media which was based on official reports is confused and lacking in any substantive information on certain aspects of the incident.

Firstly, several aspects of the incident are particularly concerning. The change in narrative from earlier media accounts that the individuals were undertaking lessons in reading the Koran at the time of the illegal search of the house to one of possessing explosive devices needs closer attention. Uyghurs ability to practise their religion, namely Islam, is well-known to be heavily restricted, with minors not permitted to study at all, and only state Imams and mosques being recognised, whom Uyghurs frequently complain often espouse CCP propaganda and whose teachings bare little resemblance to the one which Uyghurs aspire.<sup>16</sup>

Uyghurs often resort to obtaining a basic religious education at unsanctioned locations due to these heavy restrictions. Those who do not follow the official state sanctioned practise of religion are often met with violence and repression as witnessed in this incident. This incident bares much resemblance to a previous one which occurred in May 2012. An eleven year old boy Mirzahid Amanullah died in police custody following a police raid on an unsanctioned school,<sup>17</sup> which was also followed by similar raid in which 12 children were hospitalised.<sup>18</sup>

13 'China's Black Hole', *Foreign Policy*, published on 26 April 2013. See here: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/04/26/china\\_s\\_black\\_hole\\_tibet\\_xinjiang](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/04/26/china_s_black_hole_tibet_xinjiang) [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

14 'China's Black Hole', *Foreign Policy*, published on 26 April 2013. See here: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/04/26/china\\_s\\_black\\_hole\\_tibet\\_xinjiang](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/04/26/china_s_black_hole_tibet_xinjiang) [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

15 'China's Black Hole', *Foreign Policy*, published on 26 April 2013. See here: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/04/26/china\\_s\\_black\\_hole\\_tibet\\_xinjiang](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/04/26/china_s_black_hole_tibet_xinjiang) [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

16 See the World Uyghur Congress' submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for further information on these issues: [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/ngos/WordUyghurCongress\\_ChinaPSWG51.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/ngos/WordUyghurCongress_ChinaPSWG51.pdf)

17 'Death in Detention Draws Denigration', *Radio Free Asia*, published 6 April 2012. See here: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/death-06042012180843.html?searchterm=mirzahid+> [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

18 'Dozen Children Injured in Police Raid', *Radio Free Asia*, published on 6 July 2012. See here: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/raid->

Likewise, being that all the police and and community workers who were initially present were killed following the fire in the house, it is unlikely that the information regarding the details of the purported terrorist material would not have been able to have been recorded. Indeed, to kill 15 people in such a short time with knives and axes is unlikely, and the conflicting accounts that the purported perpetrators were both “gangsters” and “suspected terrorists” is confusing.<sup>19,20</sup>

In the same vein, additional questions remain as to why the authorities had not undertaken measures sooner if, as is inferred from the official narrative, knowledge that weapons were tested in March 2013 was already known. Moreover, the surreptitious chance that “community workers” - whose actual role has not been specified - would subsequently arrive at the location and witness, *inter alia*, the construction of weapons is also far-fetched.

Furthermore, as the village is 'small, one road village', it must be assumed that the eye-witnesses in Damian Grammaticas' report are more equipped to independently report on the events as they transpired. Those eye-witnesses brave enough to speak with Grammaticas have corroborated with reports received by the WUC and UAA from the ground, information which fails to corroborate at all the government's narrative.<sup>21</sup>

In view of the above, it is noteworthy to mention that the PRC has a well-documented track record of conflating peaceful dissent, religious activities and expressions of a Uyghur identity with terrorism and separatism. The reputable Dui Hua Foundation recently found through its research that 50% of all ESS charges are implemented in XUAR, whilst this region accounts for only 2% of the population of the PRC,<sup>22</sup> thus clearly showing a discriminatory implementation of these laws. This represents a growing trend that has increased since the commencement of the global war on terror, further still since the 5 July 2009 ethnic unrest in Urumchi, the aftermath of which bares similarities with the recent incident.

**We therefore urge the international community to make representations via all available diplomatic means for the PRC to undertake a full, comprehensive and independent investigation into this incident. We also recommend that the PRC set up an independent ombudsman to deal with complaints of such issues in the future, and to revise its laws so that its definition of what constitutes terrorism falls into line with internationally, accepted standards.**

#### Additional Sources

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'China Says No Foreign Link Found in Last Week's Xinjiang Violence that Killed 25', *Washington Post*, published on 2 May 2013. See here: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/china-says-no-foreign-link-found-in-last-weeks-xinjiang-violence-that-killed-25/2013/05/01/9798a304-b2d7-11e2-9fb1-62de9581c946\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-says-no-foreign-link-found-in-last-weeks-xinjiang-violence-that-killed-25/2013/05/01/9798a304-b2d7-11e2-9fb1-62de9581c946_story.html)

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19 '21 Dad in Clash with 'Gangsters' in Western China', *The Times*, published on 24 April 2013. See here:

[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/25/world/asia/violence-in-western-china.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/25/world/asia/violence-in-western-china.html?_r=0) [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

20 'China's Black Hole', *Foreign Policy*, published on 26 April 2013. See here:

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21 'Doubts Over China Government Claims on Xinjiang Attack', *BBC*, published 26 April 2013. See here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-22319579> [Retrieved 8 May 2013]

22 'State Security Stats Highlight Ethnic Unrest, Lack of Names', *Dui Hua Foundation*, published on 8 February 2012. See here:

<http://www.duihuajournal.org/2012/02/state-security-stats-highlight-ethnic.html> [Retrieved on 8 May 2013]