

China

Introduction

This page provides a country-specific quantitative overview of the foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) phenomenon. This includes, where available, a breakdown of how many individuals departed from or have returned to the country as well as certain demographics within those groups. The data is laid out below in infographics, you can hover over a data point to see its exact figures. Where not enough data is available the table is grayed out. If you can assist in completing this data, please click fill out the questionnaire on our [contact page](#).

Below this information, the page also sets out in detail a qualitative review of the policy measures utilized by or available to the country in response to the FTF phenomenon and provides a list of additional reading material relevant to the FTF situation in the country.

Last updated: 1 December 2025.

China		
Totals	Total (Departed)	100-300 ¹
	Total (Non-Returned)	-
	Total (Returned)	- ²

¹ Reuters Staff, 'About 300 Chinese said fighting alongside Islamic State in Middle East', Reuters, 15 December 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-china/about-300-chinese-said-fighting-alongside-islamic-state-in-middle-east-idUSKBN0JT0UX20141215?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews>. See also Mroue, B. and Shih, G., 'Chinese jihadis' rise in Syria raises concerns at home', AP News, 22 April 2017, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/896765.shtml>; <https://apnews.com/article/syria-ap-top-news-al-qaida-international-news-islam-591f9b238c84477b87cfac68bfe169fc>; Duchâtel, M., 'Terror Overseas: Understanding China's Evolving Counter-Terror Strategy', Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, October 2016, p. 4, https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/ECFR_193_-_TERROR_OVERSEAS_UNDERSTANDING_CHINAS_EVOLVING_COUNTER_TERROR_STRATEGY.pdf; Approximately 3,500 foreign fighters who are primarily Uyghurs from China and Central Asia remain in Syria and have been incorporated into the Syrian military, according to [Middle East Forum, 'Integrating Foreign Jihadists into Syrian Military is Dangerous', 11 June 2025, https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/integrating-foreign-jihadists-into-syrian-military-is-dangerous](https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/integrating-foreign-jihadists-into-syrian-military-is-dangerous).

² China has never released information regarding the return of ISIS-trained fighters to its territory. See Duchâtel, M., 'Terror Overseas: Understanding China's Evolving Counter-Terror Strategy', Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, October 2016, p. 5, https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/ECFR_193_-_TERROR_OVERSEAS_UNDERSTANDING_CHINAS_EVOLVING_COUNTER_TERROR_STRATEGY.pdf.

Nationality (At Departure)	Chinese National	200 ³
	Dual Citizen	-
	Resident	-
Gender	Males (Departed)	-
	Females (Departed)	-
	Males (Returned)	-
	Females (Returned)	-
Parent Status	Female Parent (Non-Returned)	-
	Female Non-Parent (Non-Returned)	-
	Female Parent (Returned)	-
	Female Non-Parent (Returned)	-
Current Location (Non-Returned)	Died	-
	In Camps	-
	In Prison	2 ⁴
	Operational (In region)	30 ⁵
	Operational (In other regions)	-
	Prosecuted (Awaiting trial or convicted and in prison)	-
	Other (Unknown location)	-
Current Legal Status (Non-Returned)	Prosecuted	12 ⁶
	Held Without Charges	-
	Citizenship Revoked	-
	Trials in Absentia	7 ⁷
Current Status (Returned)	Citizenship Revoked	-
	Extradited to Third Country	-
	Prosecuted	-

³ The leaked internal list of IS fighters features around 200 Uyghur fighters. Ibid., p. 4.

⁴ Qui, Y., Yu, W., '土耳其抓捕IS中国籍嫌犯 对“东突”分子基本不处罚', Global Times, 13 April 2015, <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJJVgA>.

⁵ Soliev, N., 'How Serious Is the Islamic State Threat to China', The Diplomat, 14 March 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/03/how-serious-is-the-islamic-state-threat-to-china/>; Syria appoints some foreign Islamist fighters to its military, sources say', Reuters, 31 December 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/syria-appoints-some-foreign-islamist-fighters-its-military-sources-say-2024-12-30/>.

⁶ Bozkurt, A., 'Turkey's top court, staffed with Islamists and nationalists, overturned conviction of Uyghur ISIS militant', Nordic Monitor, 29 April 2020, <https://nordicmonitor.com/2020/04/turkeys-top-court-staffed-with-islamists-and-nationalists-overturned-isis-conviction-of-uyghur-man/>. Charges towards Kulaixi Yimaier were overturned due to inadequate evidence, the rest were either denying or did not show up at the hearing.

⁷ Ibid.

	Post-release	22 ⁸
	In Rehabilitation/Reintegration Program	-
	Not prosecuted	-
Method of Return	Own Initiative	-
	Expelled	-
	Repatriated	-
Returnee Attacks		-

Preventive measures

China does not currently have a publicly available national security strategy, though in 2015 the politburo of the Chinese Communist Party announced that it was adopting a new security strategy and provided an outline. The new strategy did not go into specifics but warned of “unpredictable” and “unprecedented” dangers facing China, both at home and abroad. Threats were listed as a shifting international environment; domestic economic and social changes; proposed reforms entering a critical period; and a wealth of “social contradictions.”

The strategy was intended to be comprehensive and listed 16 different types of security that should be of concern to China: political; territorial; military; economic; cultural; societal; technological; cyber; ecological; recourse; nuclear; biological; space; polar; deep-sea; and security of overseas interests.

Under the [Counterterrorism Law of the People's Republic of China 2015](#), except for pre-approved news media outlets, nobody in China is allowed to report on a terror attack nor the authorities' response, online and offline.

Article 17 of the [Counterterrorism Law of the People's Republic of China 2015](#) also dictates that press, broadcasting, television, culture, religion, Internet and other relevant entities shall conduct pertinent counterterrorism publicity and education in the society.

⁸ Taylor, E. 'The Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) in China, Syria and Beyond', Grey Dynamics, 10 April 2024, <https://greydynamics.com/the-turkistan-islamic-party-tip-in-china-syria-and-beyond/>.

Administrative measures

In China, the [Public Order Management and Punishment Law of the People's Republic of China](#) allows the public security organ of the Chinese government to authorize short-term detention in severe cases involving disruptions of public order, endangerment of public security, infringement of personal rights or property rights, or detriment to social management. Detention is executed by the police force responsible for public security rather than the police force responsible for investigating criminal offences.

This police force must apply to the public security organ of the Chinese government for authorization of detention. The power to detain rests with the head of the public security organ. The public security organ must investigate the facts alleged to amount to a violation of the law, though this violation does not amount to the commission of a criminal offence, then apply to the head for a decision on detention. The maximum period of administrative detention under ordinary circumstances is fifteen days. In cases involving multiple violations of the Public Order Law, detention for each violation is executed concurrently but the maximum period is extended to 20 days.

A detainee has the right to apply for administrative reconsideration of the decision to detain. Such an application for administrative reconsideration does not suspend the period of detention. A detainee also has the right to institute administrative litigation to challenge their detention. This is a judicial process. Any unit, including State organs and organizations, and any individual, has the right to impeach and charge the public security organ or the people's Department of Public Prosecutions and administrative supervisory organs.

Since 2018, [investigations](#) have found evidence of Uyghur Muslim internment in Xinjiang. The Chinese government claims that those detained had voluntarily entered into "vocational schools," so-called re-education programs, which China says are used to counter "terrorism and religious extremism." There is [evidence](#) that over a million Muslims have been interned without due process.

Under Article 21 of the [Counterterrorism Law of the People's Republic of China 2015](#) there exist restrictions on the operation of internet and technology-based companies which obligate an internet operator or provider to verify the identity of each user and refuse to provide services to a user who refuses such verification or fails to provide a clear identity. Any company who fails to meet such obligation may face fines, orders of rectification and its management and executives may face fines and even detentions from 5 to 15 days.

Under Article 12 of the [Counterterrorism Law of the People's Republic of China 2015](#), the Chinese Ministry of Public Security maintains and updates a list of entities considered to be terrorist threats. The list was first issued in 2003 when it contained four terrorist organizations and eleven terrorists that pose a threat to China's security, and announcements have been made as to new entries to the list on an ad hoc basis since. The list contains a profile of each of the terrorists/organizations, along with the terrorist actions they are accused of perpetrating which has informed their designation. The criteria and process for designation is unclear though it is stated in Article 12 of the Counterterrorism Law of the People's Republic of China 2016 that the national counterterrorism leading body shall determine terrorist organizations and individuals. Any organization or individual designated as a terrorist in relation to this list may file an application for review with the working body of the national counterterrorism leading body. The national counterterrorism leading body is required to conduct review in a timely manner, and make a decision to maintain or revoke the determination. Where revocation is the decision, the national counterterrorism leading body is required to make an announcement to that effect. The review decision is final. Courts at or above the intermediate level can also legally determine terrorist organizations and individuals in the course of trying criminal cases. In these cases the national counterterrorism leading body makes an announcement after the judgment comes into force.

Under Article 14 of the [Counterterrorism Law of the People's Republic of China 2015](#), financial institutions and specific non-financial institutions are required to immediately freeze the funds or other assets of terrorist organizations and individuals announced by the working body of the national counterterrorism leading body. Any organization or individual designated as a terrorist in relation to this list may file an application for review with the working body of the national counterterrorism leading body. The national counterterrorism leading body is required to conduct review in a timely manner, and make a decision to maintain or revoke the determination. This review decision is final.

Where revocation is the decision, the national counterterrorism leading body is required to make an announcement to that effect and the funds and assets that have been frozen are required to be unfrozen.

The anti-money laundering department of the State Council also has the authority to investigate any suspected terrorist financing and take temporary freezing measures.

Criminal and surveillance measures

In China, **incitement** to terrorism is addressed under [Article 120C of the Criminal Law](#), which criminalizes the fact of advocating terrorism or extremism, and the fact of preparing or distributing materials advocating terrorism or extremism. In addition, the possession of materials advocating terrorism can constitute a criminal offense 'if the circumstances are serious' ([Article 120F of the Criminal Law](#)). These provisions were inserted in November 2015 (Amendment IX to the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China).

Recruitment is addressed by [Article 120A of the Criminal Law](#), which criminalizes the fact of knowingly recruiting someone for conducting terrorist activities. This provision was inserted in November 2015 (Amendment IX to the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China).

Participation in or leadership of a terrorist organization are criminalized under [Article 120 of the Criminal Law](#).

Travel could be addressed by [Article 120B of the Criminal Law](#), which criminalizes any preparation for conducting terrorist activities, as well as contacting overseas terrorist organizations or persons for this purpose.

[Article 120A of the Criminal Law](#) criminalizes the fact of **providing training** for any terrorist activities, and [Article 120B of the Criminal Law](#) the fact of **organizing such training**. The fact of 'actively **participating in training** on terrorist activities' is also criminalized under [Article 120B of the Criminal Law](#).

Finally, **preparatory terrorist acts** are addressed by [Article 120B of the Criminal Law](#), under which 'making a plan or any other preparation for conducting terrorist activities' constitutes an offense.

Under Article 18 of the [Counterterrorism Law of the People's Republic of China 2015](#), any telecommunication operator or internet provider is required to provide technology access and source code or other de-encryption support and assistance for the purposes of preventing and investigating terrorism by Public Safety Department or National Security Department.

In April of 2017, the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) government mandated "re-education" programs for members of ethnic minority communities and students who study overseas in an effort to better "assimilate" into Chinese society. Citing terrorism concerns, authorities in the XUAR required all residents to install a

surveillance application that automatically detects “terrorist and illegal” religious videos, images, e-books, and electronic documents on smart phones. The app reportedly has the capability to remotely delete this content.

Rehabilitation and reintegration measures

China’s [Counter-Terrorism Law](#), adopted in 2015, outlined counter-terrorism actions that includes efforts to de-radicalize extremists, as well as established a lead governmental organ, the National Counter-Terrorism Agency to carry these out. The law proposes a three-component strategy for de-radicalization, which includes prevention, custodial rehabilitation, and aftercare of radicalized individuals. The strategy targets three main groups of individuals: 1) those who have engaged in terrorism or extremism, but do not qualify for criminal punishment; 2) those who are imprisoned on charges of terrorism or extremism; and 3) those who have been released from prison.

According to the Counter-Terrorism Law, there are some specific provisions that apply to rehabilitation. One of these is community rehabilitation. In the case of those who have been linked to terrorism, but cannot be prosecuted, police authorities are tasked with involving villagers’ or citizens’ committees from the communities to which the individual belongs, the places where they are employed, the schools where they study as well as from their family members and legal guardians ‘to educate and correct them.’ Another is custodial rehabilitation, which sets forth an obligation for prisons, detention centers and community correctional facilities ‘to supervise, educate and correct’ people imprisoned on terrorism related offences. A third is occupational and educational rehabilitation, according to which before being released, inmates are to be assessed for the potential threat they may pose. Grassroots organizations, as well as anyone involved in investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating the case of the inmate in question are asked to participate in this assessment. If the inmate is deemed to be dangerous, he/she is placed in a “placement and education” program, based on the decision of the court. Such programs are administered by the provincial government and implemented by facilities under its jurisdiction. Individuals attending such programs are to be assessed annually by the relevant facility. If they are found to be genuinely repentant and do not pose any threat to society, the facility is obliged to promptly issue a recommendation to the court to relieve them from further attending the program.

In June 2025, [reports](#) emerged that a significant number of Chinese Uyghurs have settled in Idlib, a city in northwestern Syria, with the goal of liberating East Turkestan as soon as possible. Some [reports](#) suggest that there are between 10,000 and 20,000

Uyghurs living in Syria, although the exact number of Chinese Uyghur foreign fighters located in Syria is unknown. According to some reports, there are approximately [3,500 foreign fighters](#), the majority of whom are Muslim Uyghurs from China or other central Asian countries, who have been integrated into the Syrian military. These fighters were previously affiliated with the [Turkistan Islamist Party](#), an Al Qaeda-linked group seeking to establish an Islamic emirate in China's Muslim majority Xinjiang region. This group has now dissolved and former members have now been integrated into the Syrian army, [making up about 30%](#) of the army's personnel. In recognition of their contribution, these fighters have been granted citizenship in Syria due to their role in fighting former president Bashar Al-Assad, and their children will receive [free education](#) from primary school to university. Most recently, the US has [approved](#) the integration of the fighters into the army. Expert Colonel Ahmed Al-Hammadi supports Uyghurs remaining in Syria as he states that Uyghurs are threatened and oppressed in their own country and may be in danger if they return.

[Additional Resources](#)

Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering and Global Center on Cooperative Security, 'Financing and Facilitation of Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Returnees in Southeast Asia', Typology Report, November 2021, https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Typology-Report-on-FTFs-in-SEA_PUBLIC.pdf

Clarke, C.P., et al., 'Uighur Foreign Fighters: An Underexamined Jihadist Challenge', ICCT Policy Brief, 15 November 2017, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/uighur-foreign-fighters-underexamined-jihadist-challenge>

Duchâtel, M., 'Terror Overseas: Understanding China's Evolving Counter-Terror Strategy', Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, October 2016, https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/ECFR_193_-_TERROR_OVERSEAS_UNDERSTANDING_CHINAS_EVOLVING_COUNTER_TERROR_STRATEGY.pdf

Lu, X. (2022). How Jihadists Travel: The Clandestine Migration of Chinese Transnational Fighters to Syria. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 48(6), 654–673. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2022.2130738>

Sprick, D., 'China's Constitution and the People's War on Terror', Verfassungsblog, 9 May 2018, <https://verfassungsblog.de/chinas-constitution-and-the-peoples-war-on-terror/>

Zhou, Z., 'Rehabilitating Terrorists: The Chinese Approach', Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses, 8:4, April 2016, p. 10-15, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26351410>