

**CHINA'S FLAWED POLICY IN XINJIANG
AND ITS DILEMMAS**

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Executive Summary

1. On 5 July 2009, the Urumqi riots, the deadliest ethnic violence in decades, revealed deep-rooted ethnic tensions intertwined with religious issues in China and called into question the Party's "ethnic policies" (民族政策).
2. President Hu Jintao had to cut short his Europe tour and return to China for crisis management, implying the seriousness of the event and the incapability of other leaders including Premier Wen Jiabao and heir-apparent Xi Jinping in handling the riots. Hu is the only leader who has the power to mobilize and coordinate civil security and military forces.
3. The western media continued its negative reports of the event in China, yet China bashing is not as vehement as in the reports of the March 2008 Tibet riots.
4. Ethnical minorities in China enjoy preferential policies in education, family planning, judicial treatment, and other areas. But they also face heavy regulations in religious activities.
5. The current tensions between Han Chinese and the Uyghur have resulted from a number of social and political problems in the region. The first is economic inequalities. While the central government has invested heavily in the region to promote the welfare of the people, the income gaps among ethnicities has widened, leading the Uyghur to believe that the Han are the only beneficiaries of economic growth and they the victims of Han exploitation.
6. Beijing's preferential policies in favor of minorities have significantly heightened the ethnic consciousness of both the minorities and the Han, sharpening the ethnic divide. They have also resulted in unintended consequences of "reverse discrimination," causing resentment among the Han. In addition, the government's policy toward religion has manifested grievances within the Muslim Uyghur community.

7. To reduce ethnic tensions and reestablish ethnic harmony in Xinjiang, the Beijing leadership needs to modify its ethnic policies. First of all, there is a need for the Chinese Communist Party to change its anti-religious attitude and be more tolerant of religious practices.
8. Greater efforts are also necessary in reducing the income gaps between Han Chinese and other ethnic groups. In the meantime, the government has to be more accommodative to ethnic minorities, showing respect for their distinctive cultures and ethnic identities.
9. China may want to learn from the Singaporean model of “community bonding.” All members of society, regardless of racial, ethnic or religious backgrounds, should be regarded as equal citizens of the country and should demonstrate mutual respect. Only in this way can ethnic groups live in harmony and peace in the multi-ethnic state of the Chinese nation (中华民族).