

**CHINA'S WESTERN DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY IN TIBET
AND XINJIANG**

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Executive Summary

1. China's western development program has significantly boosted the economies of western China. But rapid economic growth has failed to reduce income gaps between local minorities and the Han Chinese. Minorities, mainly Tibetans and Uyghurs, are lagging behind and feel that they are victims of Han exploitation.
2. Shocked by the deadly ethnic conflicts in Tibet in 2008 and in Xinjiang in 2009, Beijing sought to fix problems by enforcing new policy packages in Tibet and Xinjiang and changing the focus of development from infrastructures to improving the livelihood of all ethnic groups.
3. For the first time, the four neighboring provinces with significant Tibetan population, namely, Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan, have been included in the Tibet development plan.
4. Kashgar, a Uyghur-concentrated city, is to be established as a Special Economic Zone and the economic engine for Xinjiang's growth.
5. Maintaining stability remains crucial to the western frontier. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) provides the "forceful guarantee" to consolidating CCP rule and a secure environment for economic development in western China.
6. These new initiatives look promising. Yet in the long run the Chinese leadership may face challenges domestically and internationally. Chinese leaders showed no sign of revising their religion policy, which has radicalized many Tibetans and Muslim Uyghurs. The question of whether economic development can ultimately bring ethnic harmony remains.

7. Internationally, while the Dalai Lama has been promoting a moderate approach, some of the overseas Tibetans, represented by the Tibetan Youth Congress, are increasingly radicalized and prefer a separatist agenda.
8. Tibet remains a contentious issue between New Delhi and Beijing because of its intimate connection with the strategic interests of both parties. However, both countries realize that it is in their interest to get on well with each other. They need to cooperate in a wide range of issues, including trade, the Pakistan issue and the climate change issue.
9. Turks share ethnic and linguistic links with the Uighurs and Turkey has traditionally championed their “cause.” Yet trade ties between China and Turkey have been getting stronger over the past decade. The PLA and Turks conducted joint air exercises and military drills in November 2010, the first time China was engaged in such cooperation with a NATO member.