

China's Xinjiang Problem: The 2009 Riots and its Aftermath

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Summary

The 2009 riots occurred because of the deep-rooted ethnic biases prevalent in Chinese society, coupled with the state's hard handed approach and the sense of deprivation among Uighurs. Perceptive to the problem and alert to the situation, the Chinese government has introduced more economic incentives for the local population. However, the deep-rooted causes of the tension remain unresolved and repeated instances of violence only show that some of the policies may be backfiring. In a year in which China will see a political transition, Xinjiang is marked by an uneasy peace. Chinese leaders will be hoping that there is no more trouble at a time when stability remains their paramount objective. All the same, they will leave no stone unturned in their search for what is proving to be an elusive stability in the region.

In the year 2011, the Chinese leadership's focus was upon ensuring domestic stability. Consistent with this, the National People's Congress (NPC) passed a budget for the domestic law and order apparatus (*wei-wen*) which, for the first time, surpassed the budget of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). At 624.4 billion Yuan (US\$ 95 billion), this represented a 13.8 per cent increase over the 2010 budget. In contrast, the military budget stood at 601.1 billion Yuan (\$91.5 billion).¹

While an important impetus for this came from the Jasmine Revolution in the Arab world and the fears about its replication in China, there were also at the same time domestic issues that continued to fuel the leadership's fears of instability. Concerns about domestic stability began with the 2008 riots in Tibet, which was quickly followed by the 2009 Urumqi Riots – the biggest in terms of the number of deaths in a single instance of mass ethnic violence in China. These riots represented the growing cracks in the portrait of domestic harmony that has been the catchphrase of the 4th generation of the Communist Party of China's (CPC) leadership. In addition, mass incidents due to corruption, environment, labour mistreatment and land grab cases increased not only in number but also in terms of their geographic spread within China.

Despite the government's attempts to ensure stability, violence has resurfaced in China's minority regions in the recent past. The recent instances of self immolations in Tibet have grabbed worldwide attention. In Xinjiang, Kashgar in 2011 and Yecheng County in February 2012 saw the recurrence of ethnic violence. The repeated outbreak of violence indicates that there is something wrong at the systemic level as far as China's minority policy is concerned.

In this context, this Issue Brief argues that despite focused efforts undertaken by China in the aftermath of the 2009 riots, it has not been able to and, perhaps may never be able to, answer the structural problems of the Uighur discontent in Xinjiang.

Situating Xinjiang

"China's Wild West is at the confluence of two generational struggles: Orwellian repression, the challenge of the previous generations, has not vanished. And terrorism is my generation's challenge. If we are to defeat terrorism, I argue, we must approach the issue honestly and with open minds."² This explanation aptly summarises the situation in Xinjiang. While Xinjiang continues to face the problem of suppressed identity at the

¹ Willy Lam, 'Beijing's Wei-wen Imperative Steals the Thunder at the NPC', *China Brief*, 11(4), 10 March 2011, available at http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37630&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=517, accessed on 2 February 2012.

² Martin Wayne, *China's War on Terrorism: Counterinsurgency, Politics and Internal Security*, Routledge: London and New York, 2008, pp. 3-4.

hands of a state that previously focused upon assimilation, in the present times the challenge faced by Uighurs also comes from racial stereotypes and economic inequality. In addition, China's participation in the Global war against terrorism is helping in sustaining these stereotypes amongst the Han population.

Xinjiang, one of China's ethnic minority provinces, is home to the Uighur minority; the Uighurs are one of the 55 ethnic minorities recognised by the Chinese state. According to the 2005 sample census, minorities constituted 9.44 per cent of China's total population of 1.3 billion.³ It is also well known that although small in number, China's minorities inhabit vast areas of Chinese territory, mostly in its western border regions. Xinjiang borders eight of China's neighbours in Central Asia and South Asia.



Preventing large scale social unrest anywhere in China has been one of the important domestic objectives for the Chinese government. This task is trickier in the case of Xinjiang because not only is it plagued by the general set of problems prevalent elsewhere in China like socioeconomic inequality, human rights violations, strict media control, etc., but its geographic location, economic status, the ethnic identity of its people and their aspirations

³ Colin Mackerras, "The Disturbances in the Tibetan Areas and Urumqi 2008-2009: Implications for China's International Relations", in Yufan Hao and Bill K P Chou (eds.) *China's Policies on its Borderlands and the International Implications*, World Scientific Publishing, Singapore, 2011, p. 21.

and linkages with people across the border all add layers of complexity and worry the Chinese leadership about internationalisation of the issue. Stability in the region continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing the Chinese leadership. However, all the measures undertaken so far seem to have yielded little positive results.

State Policy on Xinjiang

In the first three decades after 'liberation', the major focus of the Chinese government's Xinjiang policy was establishing control. One of the prominent methods by which it attempted this was by encouraging Han Chinese migration into Xinjiang. While this was undertaken in the name of development, by bringing in educated and trained workers, it was also a part of the assimilationist prism through which Mao looked at the minority regions. Thus, with development came the Han migrants but over a period of time they have substantially altered the demographic structure of the province and also exacerbated the feeling of deprivation amongst the Uighurs (discussed below). According to Millward and Tursun (2004), the other methods of establishing control included: "...1) political integration by Chinese style administration, 2) Development of party structure that was dominated by the ethnic Han and, 3) Cultural assimilation through Confucian education."⁴ It is reported that during this period, the government also focused upon reducing the influence of Islam in the region.⁵ Other developments that were perceived extremely negatively by the Uighurs and other minorities were the strict enforcement of birth control practices during the first phase of the One Child Policy and the decision to locate the nuclear testing facility at Lop Nor in Xinjiang. In addition, excessive damage was done during the years of Cultural Revolution when, in the name of 'eliminating the old', a lot of the cultural heritage of the minorities was destroyed. Consequently, tensions simmered in Xinjiang throughout the 1970s.

In order to address these tensions, the Chinese government initiated a softer and inclusive approach after 1985 when affirmative action, economic development and recognition of the Uighur's different identity became a part of policy.⁶ This was also consistent with the general reform policies throughout China. While it did help in increasing the economic

⁴ James A. Millward and Nabijan Tursun, "Political History and Strategies of Control, 1884-1978" in S. Frederick Starr (ed.), *Xinjiang, China's Muslim Borderland*, London and New York, M. E. Sharpe, p. 63.

⁵ Anthony Howell, *Population Migration and Labor Market Segmentation: Empirical Evidence from Xinjiang, Northwest China*, Masters Thesis, Michigan State University, p. 31, 2009, available at <http://books.google.co.in/books?id=cSRw2dithoIC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>, accessed on 7 April 2012.

⁶ S. Frederick Starr, "China's Changing Strategic Concerns: The Impact on Human Rights in Xinjiang", Statement before the Congressional Executive Commission on China, 16 November 2005, available at <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/roundtables/111605/Starr.php>, accessed on 22nd March 2012.

activities in the province and the gradual opening of the transborder trade with the newly independent Central Asian states led to the rise of its gross economic numbers, at grass root levels the reality was different. The concomitant withdrawal of state financing from welfare activities led to increases in the cost of living. In addition, increasing demand for energy resources from other parts of China led to increasing extraction of energy resources in Xinjiang, creating a feeling that the state was exploiting the province for the growth elsewhere.

Subsequently, violence raised its head in Xinjiang in the mid- and late-1990s when the separatists were reinvigorated following the creation of Central Asian states based on ethnic identities after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. This in turn led to the renewal of China's hardliner approach aimed at rooting out what was called 'the three evils of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism'. Termed by state agencies as "Strike hard/maximum pressure!", this approach had its roots in Beijing's fears about Uighur separatists trying to emulate the example of the Central Asian states and pushing for liberation. Thus, the hardliner approach was followed alongside the economic development policy, a form of incentive for peace. In general, during the last two decades, China has followed a carrot and sticks approach towards Xinjiang, wherein there has been an extensive and intimidating presence of the security apparatus while at the same time the larger focus has been upon improving the infrastructure, including energy supply and transport and communication, in the region in order to promote economic development.

As a consequence, Xinjiang has seen considerable amounts of investments during the last decade. For example, for the year 2007, China's infrastructure investment in the region was to the tune of 1.3 trillion Yuan; in addition, a grant of 438 billion Yuan was allocated for their continuation and expansion in 2008-09.⁷ This has led to a vast improvement in the region's infrastructure and a substantial enhancement in the region's connectivity with the rest of China. At the same time, sticks have also been used in the form of heavy policing and intelligence activities, harsh treatment meted out to any form of dissidence, selective media control and summary court trials and executions.

At the societal level, the Han-Uighur relations are not peaceful. Because, while the state encourages assimilationist policies, an unintended consequence of the 'Strike hard' policy has been that it has helped sustain prejudices and stereotypes against Uighurs in Chinese society. Thus, by labelling Uighurs as separatists, China seems to have overdone the hard power approach. Though on occasion China realised that the separatist element amongst the Uighurs was small, this did not reflect in state policy towards Xinjiang. Policy actions that led to the rounding up of and relocating Uighurs in Beijing and Shanghai before the

⁷ Michael Clarke, "China, Xinjiang and the Internationalisation of the Uyghur Issue", *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 22(2), 2010, p. 216.

Beijing Olympics and the ban on renting rooms to Uighurs in these cities before and during the Olympics reflect that the stereotypes that were built around ethnic identities are being supported by state policies. Millward notes that "there is a widespread perception that Uighurs are ungrateful, lazy, violent, knife carrying, pocket picking criminals, in addition to being potential terrorists"⁸ and that too among the well educated Han Chinese.

The 2009 Riots

There is a widespread perception that the 2009 riots, the biggest acts of violence in Xinjiang, might have been caused by a combination of economic factors and the prevalent stereotypes that are being sustained by the anti-terrorism campaign. Using China's integration and employment opportunities, by mid 2007, about 900,000 Uighurs had taken up jobs outside Xinjiang.⁹ Most of them are employed in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs. In doing so, they also tend to compete with their Han counterparts who flock to China's industrial boomtowns. Sometimes in the same factories, language, food and habit differences mean that there is hardly any interaction between the Han and Uighur workers. Therefore, co-employment is not a solution to ethnic integration unless concerted efforts aimed at ethnic sensitisation are put in place.

In the case of the Shaoguan factory, there is evidence to show that a retrenched Han employee might have deliberately created an impression that the Uighur workers had raped two Han women.¹⁰ This led to the subsequent bloody clash in the factory as well as inside the dormitories. While the official media reported only two deaths, private accounts estimate the number to be much higher, at least in the double digits.¹¹ After the government repressed the news about the truth about the Shaoguan factory incident, it escalated into a much bigger and bloodier clash in Kashgar on the 5th and 6th of July in which nearly 200 people lost their lives. Again, private estimates put the number of deaths at more than 250.

Therefore, one can see that social inequality coupled with ethnic stereotyping and media control led to the tragedy of June and July 2009. Now, after the outbreak of fresh violence

⁸ James Millward, "Introduction: does the 2009 Urumchi violence mark a turning point?", *Central Asian Survey* 28 (4), December 2009, p. 351.

⁹ Ibid. Out of these, 200,000 is estimated to have migrated to cities like Shaoguan in Guangdong, which is a showcase of Chinese development. For more, see Jonathan Watts, "Old Suspicions magnified mistrust into Ethnic Riots in Urumqi: Job creation and integration went violently wrong in Guangdong", *The Guardian*, 10 July 2009, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jul/10/china-riots-uighurs-han-urumqi>, accessed on 14 March 2012.

¹⁰ "No Rape in the Riot Town", *Radio Free Asia*, 29 June 2009, available at <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/ethnic-clash-06292009102144.html>, accessed on 18 April 2012.

¹¹ Millward, n. 7, p. 351.

in mid-2011 and more recently in the last week of February 2012, the People's Republic finds itself at a crossroads whereby it is unable to manage the situation in the way it would like; stricter control seems to be backfiring politically whereas development is further raising inequality instead of controlling it. While one may not see escalated violence in the future, it can be concluded that the unintended consequences of state policy are leading to a situation whereby the state is not sure as to what it can do in the future.

Scenario since the 2009 Riots

The Chinese government responded to the 2009 riots in two ways: first, at the political level, it fixed accountability for the riots; and, second, at the economic level, it created economic incentives to foster peace.

Political Reshuffle

Undoubtedly, the 2009 riots were a huge embarrassment for China. Therefore, someone had to be held accountable for the riots. In addition, the people of Xinjiang had to be shown that Beijing was serious about fixing the problems in the province. Changes effected at the political level aimed at changing the popular perception about the Party. Thus, the CPC appointed Zhang Chunxian who has a developmental outlook and is regarded as a soft liner as the Xinjiang Party Secretary, in place of Wang Lequan who had a reputation of being a hardliner and was credited with promoting the stability first policy and enforcing it in a strict manner. His image as a ruthless hardliner had won him the nickname "secretary of stability".¹² On the other hand, Zhang Chunxian has an amiable and responsive image with the people and especially the media. The Hong Kong media is reported to have once voted him the "most open-minded party secretary." Zhang has managed state-owned enterprises and is therefore familiar with the challenges of economic development. Observers have reported that he is beginning to introduce new ideas into Xinjiang and had restarted the internet service that had been shut down during the riots, citing that the internet was important for economic development. However, as the recurrence of violence in 2011 and 2012 shows, the leadership change at the provincial level has done little to restore the faith about the Party-State amongst the minds of the aggrieved Uighur populace. How the reality on ground has been needs a closer look to see what caused the return of violence to this region.

Economic Incentives

The 2010 Xinjiang Work Conference undertook extensive measures aimed at ensuring that the region was developed to such an extent that the overall economic conditions in

¹² Shan Wei and Weng Cuifen, "China's New Policy in Xinjiang and its Challenges", *East Asian Policy*, 2 (3), July/September 2010, p. 61.

terms of income, purchasing power, access to basic services and other kinds of security improve, which, it was hoped, would lead to mitigation in the differences between the Han and Uighurs. The two overarching goals were 'leapfrog development' and 'promote stability'. The major decisions taken at this conference include:¹³

- Government investment has been forecasted to double to almost two trillion Yuan. 31 State-owned enterprises plan to invest 991.6 billion Yuan (\$155 billion) in Xinjiang between 2011 and 2015. This is in addition to the one trillion Yuan already spent between 2006 and 2010.
- Tax reforms comprising an increase in resource tax. This change would see the tax pegged on the prices of oil and gas and not on quantity, as was the case earlier, which prevented the locals from reaping the benefits of increased oil and gas prices around the world. Estimates have it that this reform will result in \$615-\$700 million in profits for the region.
- A system of pairing assistance, where 19 richer provinces and cities will contribute a percentage of their GDP to the pair region and assist in the areas of human resources, technology, financial help and so on. For instance, Shanghai is expected to divert between 0.3 and 0.6 per cent of its GDP to parts of Kashgar prefecture.¹⁴
- Special economic zones will be established around Kashgar and in the border towns of Alataw and Korgas.
- Industry established in the less developed southern regions is set to get tax sops, with companies exempted from paying taxes for the first two years and having to pay only half the standard rates in the next three years.¹⁵

This economic largesse is intended to raise the GDP of the region, which would reflect in the income of the residents, rural as well as urban. It is also hoped that the new initiatives would help in expanding access to public services like education, oil, coal and water in Xinjiang to national levels by 2015. All these are ultimately aimed at eliminating poverty in the region by 2020.

The enhanced economic assistance and inflow of investments from Beijing are already showing some positive results. The regional economy has definitely recorded an upward trajectory. While China's overall gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate was pegged

¹³ "Xinjiang's economy set to be transformed", People's Daily Online (English), September 9, 2010, available at <http://english.people.com.cn/90778/7596422.html>, accessed on 15 April 2012.

¹⁴ Shen and Weng, n. 13, p. 61.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 63.

at 12 per cent in 2011, the GDP growth rate of the province was 2.8 percentage points higher than the national average.¹⁶ According to the Xinjiang Regional Bureau of Statistics, the region's GDP reached 657.45 billion Yuan (\$104.17 billion) in 2011.¹⁷

Unresolved Structural Problems

However, these measures have done little to correct the deeper causes of economic concern and socioeconomic inequality prevalent in Xinjiang. It appears unlikely that the China will be able to solve these problems anytime soon mainly because there is little space for reversing the policies of the last 60 years and the market economy makes it very difficult for the inequalities to be corrected in a short time-frame. Below, four important areas of socio-economic concern are discussed to demonstrate this argument.

- i. **Migration:** Some of China's earlier policies that encouraged Han migration into Xinjiang are certainly at the root of the whole problem in the region. *Table 1* illustrates the massive influx of migrants into the province over the last 50 years. Ideologically, the fears of Soviet threat had encouraged the leadership to populate the region with Han so that the Army could be aided in case of a conflict.¹⁸ Subsequently, the expansion of the infrastructure and transportation linkages has played a role in encouraging Han migration.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Xinjiang in Some Selected Years

| | 1945 | 1982 | 1996 | 2002 | 2006 |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Uighur | 2,988,528 | 5,995,947 | 7,916,013 | 8,692,300 | 9,413,796 |
| Han | 222,401 | 5,283,971 | 6,432,816 | 7,595,700 | 8,121,588 |
| % of Minorities | 93.85 | 59.73 | 61.92 | 60.13 | 57.40 |

Source: Debashish Chauduri, "Minority Economy in Xinjiang", *China Report*, February 2010, Vol. 46, No. 1, p. 14.

According to the latest Chinese census of 2010, the current population of Xinjiang is 21.81 million, including 8.75 million ethnic Han Chinese who have settled in Xinjiang after 1949. The increasing ratio of the Han population has been used by the World Uyghur Congress to argue that "the population shifts more and more in favour of the

¹⁶ "Xinjiang's economy grows 12 pct last year", available at http://english.gov.cn/2012-01/31/content_2055300.htm, accessed March 20, 2012.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Martin Wayne, *China's War on Terrorism: Counter-insurgency, politics and internal security*, 2008, Routledge, New York, p. 80.

Han Chinese and make the Uighurs strangers in their own land.”¹⁹ This is also an unintended consequence of an incomplete form of an integration strategy that is not working in the case of Xinjiang and the state is not in a position to take a different ideological position towards the restive province. The state cannot be seen to be too liberal because, the hardliners within and outside the Party might question its legitimacy to rule if it is seen to be soft on issues of national identity and integrity.

- ii. Intra-regional Inequality:** As Debashish Chauduri points out, the relative semblance of economic prosperity hides a deeper intra-regional disparity, which, he believes, is a major cause of Uighur resentment against Chinese policies.²⁰ In 2009, the average annual income in Southern Xinjiang was only 3,142 Yuan.²¹ The average rural income in greater Xinjiang was more than three times the average in the south (of XAR). It is observed that the southern areas are generally impoverished unlike the developed parts of northern Xinjiang which tend to attract Han settlers and which are managed by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC).²²
- iii. Unemployment:** The XPCC-led development has concentrated in the north where infrastructure is better and where industry is in far greater number; thus, again, increasing the perception that state support is largely usurped by the Han migrants. And this perception is substantiated by the numbers. The Uighurs comprise only between 6.5 to 9 per cent of Xinjiang's total workforce, although the Corps routinely hires more than 700,000 seasonal labourers annually to pick cotton, most of whom are Han or Hui Chinese from outside Xinjiang.²³ It has been argued that the huge cotton based industry provides an opportunity for the expansion of Han migration.²⁴

¹⁹ World Uyghur Congress, “One Year after the Xinjiang Work Conference: Ethnic Division and Inequality Remain Unchanged in East Turkestan”, Press Release of 20 May 2011, available at <http://bit.ly/GPAkuD> (shortened URL), accessed March 18 2012.

²⁰ Debashish Chauduri, “Minority Economy in Xinjiang”, *China Report*, February 2010, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp 9-27.

²¹ *Xinjiang Statistical Almanac 2009*, China statistical publishing, August 2009.

²² The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) is the primary agency that has been entrusted with guarding the frontier as well as ensuring that the frontier lands are being cultivated optimally. As stated in the Chinese White paper on the XPCC, “It is a special social organization, which handles its own administrative and judicial affairs within the reclamation areas under its administration, in accordance with the laws and regulations of the state and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and with economic planning directly supervised by the state. It is subordinated to the dual leadership of the central government and the People's Government of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.” White paper on Xinjiang, *History and Development of Xinjiang*, Chapter IX, “Xinjiang production and construction corps”, 2003, available at <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20030526/9.htm>, accessed February 29 2012.

²³ Liu Yong, “Economic band aid- Beijing's new approach to Xinjiang”, *China Security*, 2010, 6 (2): pp. 13-23.

²⁴ Nicolas Becquelin, “Xinjiang in the Nineties”, *China Journal*, July 2000, No. 44, p. 81.

Other large scale investments also fuel this feeling of neglect. Due to lack of fluency in Mandarin and the lack of technical skills that their compatriots from Eastern and South-eastern China possess, the Uighurs find themselves disadvantaged when it comes to finding jobs in either state or privately owned enterprises. The energy industry, which generated 57 per cent of Xinjiang's GDP in 2008, draws only one per cent of its workforce from the Uighur population.²⁵ A case in point is Xinjiang's Oil Management Bureau which has a staff of 40,000 or so, of which the Uighurs make up less than one percent. As newspaper reports have pointed out, Uighur labourers in other parts of the country complain that they are forced to work in coastal factories like the Shaoguan toy factory because of the difficulty in finding employment back home.²⁶ Thus, local unemployment pushes the people out of their homes to far off areas where they are susceptible to ethnic prejudice. In the new economic structure discussed above, Xinjiang is expected to get an additional share of the revenues generated from energy exploration. This should help in the development of local economies wherever such projects are located.

- iv. **Education:** Economic inequalities are also exacerbated by unequal access to education, which, in turn, perpetuates the linguistic handicap mentioned earlier, and all of which are finally compounded by the general mistrust that exists between the Uighurs and the Hans. Remy Castets has argued that although theoretically the Uighurs are supposed to enjoy quotas and other preferential policies to ensure better education and job opportunities, in practice the partial withdrawal of state financing in these sectors has led to an increase in the cost of education, thereby reducing the number of people who can afford to send their children to school.²⁷ There also remains a higher drop out rate for Uighur children, because of the state's withdrawal from support for education and the inability of the Uighur parents to fund higher education.

Within the educational system, there is an ongoing language conflict between Mandarin and Uighur. Mandarin is widely acknowledged to be the language of the market place and Uighurs have welcomed its teaching side by side with Uyghur. This policy of bilingualism began in 2004 for high school graduates and by 2008 it was introduced for teachers as well as all pre-school children.²⁸ However in practice, bilingualism has

²⁵ Liu Yong, n.24.

²⁶ Willy Lam, "The Xinjiang Crisis: A Test for Beijing's Carrot-and-Stick Strategy", *China Brief*, July 2009, Vol. 9, No. 15, available at http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35307&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=459&no_cache=1, accessed 14 March 2012.

²⁷ Remy Castets, "The Uyghurs in Xinjiang - The Malaise Grows", *China Perspectives*, September-October, 2003, No. 49, available at <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/648>, accessed on 15 March 2012.

²⁸ White Paper on Development and Progress in Xinjiang, *Steady Development of Social Programmes*, 2009, available at http://www.china.org.cn/archive/2009-09/21/content_18566736_4.htm, accessed on March 1, 2012.

gradually given way to only Mandarin.²⁹ One of the conditions to gain entry into university is knowledge of Mandarin. Special scholarships have been reserved for excellence in Mandarin. Thus, the Chinese language policy that was aimed at helping the development of the Uighur population tends to be perceived as an attack on the local culture.

Conclusion

The 2009 riots occurred because of the deep-rooted ethnic biases prevalent in Chinese society, coupled with the state's hard handed approach and the sense of deprivation among Uighurs. Perceptive to the problem and alert to the situation, the Chinese government has introduced more economic incentives for the local population. However, the deep-rooted causes of the tension remain unresolved and repeated instances of violence only show that some of the policies may be backfiring. In an year in which China will see a political transition, Xinjiang is marked by an uneasy peace. Chinese leaders will be hoping that there is no more trouble at a time when stability remains their paramount objective. All the same, they will leave no stone unturned in their search for what is proving to be an elusive stability in the region.

²⁹ Maureen Fan, "An Ancient Culture, Bulldozed Away; China's Attempts to Modernize Ethnic Uighurs' Housing Creates Discord", *Washington Post*, 24 March 2009.