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Readings on Xinjiang

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Earlier this week, the Chinese government announced it had arrested six people allegedly involved in a bomb-making operation in Xinjiang. Tensions in the region continue to run high in the wake of July’s riots and recent arrests of people accused of syringe attacks. China Beat recently ran an interview with a Han Chinese student, Leong, who reflected on the summer’s violence; we also featured this essay by James Millward back in July. Here are five more articles on Xinjiang and the continuing unrest there:

1. Lucy Hornby at Reuters posted a blog entry earlier this month describing the panicked atmosphere in Urumqi, and how the government-instituted controls on information contribute to the city’s unease:

   Urumqi is a city cut off from the outside world. There has been no Internet access for two months. Phone links in or out of the region are sporadic. Text messaging is limited.

   And so people gather in the streets to listen to rumors.

   Walking through the streets of Urumqi these past days, the main sounds I heard were of human voices. The snippets of conversation carried rumors of syringe attacks, and outbreaks of rebellious outrage. The words floated from open shop doors, from knots of people gathered at a bus station, and from people talking on cell phones as they passed me on the sidewalk.

2. Hat tip to Danwei for pointing us to John Kennedy’s article, “Considering Han Chauvinism.” Kennedy’s post was sparked by an essay at Radio Free Asia by Beijing Spring editor Hu Ping (essay in Chinese only) and the comments it generated, both at RFA and UigurBiz, where it was reposted. In turn, Kennedy’s writing on the subject has led to even more discussion of the topic in the comment section below his post.

3. At the Wall Street Journal China blog, Sky Canaves discusses the conditions foreign reporters in Xinjiang encounter as they attempt to report on the situation in the region. Canaves profiles this case of three reporters from Hong Kong:

   Last week, the foreign correspondents clubs in Hong Kong and China separately condemned the treatment of three Hong Kong journalists by paramilitary police in Urumqi. According to the statements . . . on Sept. 4 the journalists were tackled by armed police while running to escape tear gas fired into the crowd, were beaten and held face down on the ground for 15 to 20 minutes. (One of them reportedly had a gun pointed at him at one point.) Afterwards, the reporters were taken to a police station where they were detained for several hours. In the following days, several other Hong Kong reporters were reported to have been detained briefly by police in Urumqi, leading to a protest by about 40 journalists in front of the mainland government’s liaison office in Hong Kong on Monday.

4. More on the story of the Hong Kong journalists can be found at Zona Europa (hat tip to CDT). Cantonese-speakers can watch news clips at the site; below the videos are several articles about the incident and a subsequent press conference held by the Xinjiang Government Information Office:

   “We have press passes. You must not tell lies!” At the press conference, Xinjiang Government Information Office director Hou Hanmin accused the Hong Kong reporters of instigating disturbances and not having press passes. However, she did not produce any evidence. The reporters at the scene got excited and cried aloud, “The government is shameless.” Reporters point out that “instigating disturbances” is a serious charge which requires hard evidence. They were also unhappy that the authorities chose to selectively inform media organizations to attend this press conference. TVB and Now TV whose reporters were involved in the incident last Friday were not notified to attend this press conference. Neither were RTHK and Commercial Radio who reporters were also temporarily detained.

5. “What Should China Do About the Uighurs?” was the question posed at the New York Times “Room for Debate” blog back in July as protests raged in Xinjiang. Four responses, from political scientists
Chien-peng Chung and Yan Sun, anthropologist Stevan Harrell, and terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna, can be read at the NYT page. Here, an excerpt from Chung’s short essay:

. . . other grievances broadly held by Uighurs should be addressed. The perception that economic development in Xinjiang aids Han Chinese at the expense of Uighurs cannot be allowed to continue. The government must look into effectively enforcing existing, and devising more, affirmative action policies to ensure that Uighurs do not feel marginalized. Muslim religious activities in Xinjiang could still be closely monitored for separatist or violent tendencies, but left to operate with minimum overt interference by the authorities.

Communist Party cadres should demonstrate respect for Muslim and other religious customs whenever possible in public. Travel restrictions to overseas destinations for Uighurs should be no different from those for other Chinese nationals.

Tags: Xinjiang