

The Chinese government has its admirers for being able to temper diplomatic difficulties by spreading money through the region and integrating its economic structure with the US and other major economies.

But when it comes to managing regions dominated — now or in the past — in population terms by non-Han peoples, China remains in a political Stone Age in which brutality, torture, terror, unchallenged propaganda, racism, colonialism and media blackouts are essential tools of governance.

China's "peaceful rise" slogan is usually taken to refer to Beijing's relations with the Asian region and the rest of the world. The term has had little currency when it comes to domestic developments and conflicts.

However, following similar tensions and violence in Tibet, China's western-most territory of Xinjiang is now suffering pronounced unrest and ethnic conflict between not only the authorities and the Uighur people but also between Uighurs and Han immigrants.

The term "peaceful rise" can only have ironic value: China's relations with the outside world can never be normalized as long as it systematically mistreats its own people — especially its minorities.

Beijing's decades-long exploitation of Xinjiang's people and their natural resources cannot continue indefinitely without escalating conflict. Yet the problem has been worsened — not only by irresponsible levels of Han immigration but also Beijing's inability to allow democratic reforms that would empower and legitimize the role of Uighurs outside the party-state nexus.

The consequence of this is a problem that has plagued Muslim societies the world over: When autocrats lock up and smear moderate opponents with terms like "splittists" and "terrorists," the only space left is for radicals and genuine terrorists.

In this way, Beijing helps to bestow upon its citizenry a self-fulfilling prophecy of a militant insurgency nightmare and possible future links with Islamic terrorists to the west.

It is a diabolically stupid situation, and almost all of it is Beijing's making.

The response of President Ma Ying-jeou's administration to developments in Xinjiang has been immensely disappointing. Ma's Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) continues to state that Xinjiang is Chinese territory, but this does not demand that the party or the government hide in the wings as the Chinese Communist Party runs roughshod over the Uighurs.

It would be wrong to infer from their silence that Taiwan's government and the KMT are complicit in the violence in Xinjiang. But by saying nothing as atrocities accelerate, both are

## Xinjiang and Taiwan's silence

Written by Taipei Times

Wednesday, 08 July 2009 08:45

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suggesting that the fate of the Uighurs — whom they profess to be compatriots — is of no consequence, and certainly not worth damaging the progress of an economic accord with Beijing.

The question follows: Where will the Ma government draw the line as far as Chinese rights violations are concerned? And does the Ma government have any agenda whatsoever for the ordinary Chinese national, Han or otherwise, for whom it would one day purport to speak? The answers to these questions, even now, are a complete mystery — but chilling to contemplate.

Despicable acts are made more unbearable by the silence of those who seek benefits from oppressors. From now on, the Taiwanese government's response will have to be strong and clear if it is to make up for its extraordinary cynicism and its denial of the human rights and dignity of China's Uighur minority.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2009/07/08](#)