

Beat: Politics

China arrests 5 over deadly Tiananmen Square attack

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USPA News - Five people have been arrested on suspicion of involvement in this week's suicide car attack on Beijing's Tiananmen Square, killing two people and injuring 40 others, Chinese officials confirmed on Wednesday, describing the incident as a "terrorist attack" for the first time. The attack happened at around 12:05 p.m. local time on Monday when a jeep drove into crowds of tourists and police officers in front of the Tiananmen Rostrum, a structure that stands at the entrance to the Forbidden City and bears a giant portrait of communist revolutionary leader Mao Zedong.

The vehicle, carrying a driver and two passengers, then crashed into a guardrail of the Jinshui Bridge before bursting into flames. Footage from the scene showed the vehicle engulfed in flames with thick black smoke rising from the scene as the giant portrait of Mao was visible in the background. Five people were killed, including those inside the car, while 40 others were injured. "Police have determined the incident of 10/28 was a rigorously planned, organized and premeditated case of a violent terrorist attack," the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau said in a statement on Wednesday. It identified the driver as Usmen Hasan and his passengers as his mother Kuwanhan Reyim and wife Gulkiz Gini. Inside the jeep, which had a license plate from the restive region of Xinjiang, investigators found petrol - which was used to set the vehicle on fire - two machetes, iron bars, religious text, and a religious flag. The five people arrested by police were also found to be in the possession of long knives, a "jihad" flag and other items. The bureau said the suspects - all of whom have names identifying them as members of the Muslim Uighurs ethnic group - had confessed to knowing Usmen Hasan. Other details about the suspects, such as their intentions or when and where they were captured, were not immediately released. Hours after Monday's attack, as authorities remained tight-lipped to discuss the sensitive incident, police had issued a notice to hotels in the capital, asking them to be on the look-out for suspicious guests and vehicles. It urged them to notify law enforcement if they had any information, adding that it was necessary to prevent them from "committing further crimes." An estimated eight million Uighurs are living in the Central Asian region of Xinjiang, which is officially known as China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. A large number of Uighur are reportedly unhappy about the large migrant Han Chinese settlers, accusing them of making their interests less important and generally disregarding their culture. Xinjiang was the scene of violent clashes between Uighur Muslims and Han Chinese in July 2009, leaving 197 people killed and more than 1,700 others injured. The riots were the region's worst ethnic clashes in decades and the violence only stopped when a large number of troops were deployed to the remote western region. Following the riots, China cut all communications from the region to the rest of the world, including international phone calls, text messaging, and the Internet. Thousands of additional security forces have since been deployed and thousands of "riot-proof" closed-circuit television cameras have been set up in public places in an attempt to discourage any violence or unrest. The area where Monday's incident happened is internationally best known for the massive pro-democracy protests that took place in June 1989 at Tiananmen Square. The protests turned deadly on June 4 of that year when troops and tanks cleared the square with live fire, resulting in the deaths of at least 241 people. Other sources have put that figure at close to or more than 1,000.

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