

Beat: Local

Chinese police launch manhunt after jeep kills 5 at Tiananmen Square

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USPA News - At least five people were killed Monday and nearly 40 others were injured when a jeep plowed into a crowded part of Beijing's Tiananmen Square before bursting into flames, authorities said as they began a manhunt for two people from the restive region of Xinjiang. The incident happened at around 12:05 p.m. local time on Monday when the vehicle 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 just to the left in the background. The violent crash briefly blocked off a busy area in the heart of the Chinese capital as emergency services rushed to the scene, evacuating both casualties and visitors from the iconic square and putting up screens to shield the location. Firefighters quickly put out the vehicle fire, which did not affect any nearby buildings. The Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau confirmed five people were killed, including the driver, two passengers inside the vehicle, a male tourist from south China's Guangdong province, and a female tourist from the Philippines. A total of 38 people were injured, including three tourists from the Philippines, one tourist from Japan, and several police officers. Authorities said they were investigating the incident, but police later issued a notice to hotels in the capital, asking them to be on the look-out for "suspicious guests" and "suspicious vehicles." The notice named two people from Xinjiang as possible suspects in a "major case" that occurred earlier on Monday, but police would not say whether they were referring to the incident at Tiananmen Square. 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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