



**Chinese paramilitary police patrol in Urumqi, western Jina's Xinjiang province.** Photograph taken by Eugene Hoshiko / Associated Press

## Mobs roam restless Urumqi

**Mobs wielding makeshift weapons continued to roam the city on Wednesday, despite a massive show of force by Chinese troops.**

*By Robert J. Saiget  
July 8, 2009*

In Urumqi, the capital of the remote northwest Xinjiang region where 197 people died in unrest on Sunday, army helicopters circled overhead as thousands of soldiers and riot police filled the city shouting out "protect the people".

"We support this," said a 45-year-old Han Chinese as he watched the troops roll by in trucks. "But they should have got here sooner. It took them three days to do this. Why so long?"

President Hu Jintao abandoned a G8 (Group of Eight) summit in Italy, in what observers said was an unprecedented move, to tackle one of China's worst spikes in ethnic tensions in decades. After authorities blamed Muslim Uyghurs for Sunday's unrest that also left more than 1,700 people injured, Han Chinese took to the streets with shovels, meat cleavers and other improvised weapons vowing to defend themselves.

After a night-time curfew was declared on Tuesday, Chinese authorities appeared determined to show they were able to maintain order. Thousands of riot police wearing helmets and carrying shields lined up on a main road in Urumqi dividing the city centre from a Uyghur district, with columns of soldiers behind them.

Internet access was revoked in parts of Urumqi after the deadly riots erupted, to stop the flow of information that it saw as a dangerous threat. "We cut the Internet connection in some areas of Urumqi in order to quench the riot quickly and prevent violence from spreading to other places," Li Zhi, a Communist Party official, told a news conference. Further, Li accused exiled Uyghur leader Rebiya Kadeer of orchestrating the violence over the Internet and through telephone calls. She denied the charge. Nur Bekri, governor of the region, further accused protesters of using the internet and text messages to mobilise rioters.

A technical official working for state-owned telecommunications company said shutting down the Internet in Urumqi, or only parts of the city, was easy. "You can do it in one second. There is a big backbone network and all you need to do is to switch off the telecom route," the official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the topic.

Despite Chinese officials' decision to cut off the Internet and mobile phones, pictures, videos and updates from Urumqi poured into websites such as Twitter, YouTube and Flickr. Media watchdog Reporters Without Borders accused authorities of wanting to see Urumqi "cut off from the rest of the world." In an endorsed statement, they asserted that "once again, the Chinese government has chosen to cut communications in order to prevent the free flow of information. We firmly condemn this behaviour."

# China restores limited internet access after Urumqi violence

**Block on calls from China to overseas numbers and on most text messages remains in place.**

*By Tania Branigan  
Beijing, China  
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Normal internet access in China's troubled north-western region of Xinjiang may not be resumed for months, it has emerged, as officials begin to allow users to visit a small number of sites. The internet was blocked across the region three weeks ago after inter-ethnic violence in Urumqi killed at least 197 people. Authorities also shut down text message services.



**Officials have begun to allow users access to a small number of sites.** Photograph remains the property of The Guardian (guardian.co.uk)

Mobile phone users are now receiving texts again – but only in the form of a daily update from the authorities and weather reports. The first, on Sunday, told them the security situation had improved and urged them not to believe rumours.

A block on calls to overseas numbers – from any phone – also remains in place.

Authorities told media groups that there was now access to a small selection of sites including internet banking, the online stock exchange and university enrolment services. A statement from the Telecommunications Administration this weekend said that business and government-related sites would also reopen, although it did not indicate when.

"We have received no instruction on when to fully resume the public internet connection in Xinjiang," said Haimiti Mijiti, vice-president of China Telecom's Xinjiang branch. Some have speculated that normal access would not be restored until after 1 October, the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. When asked to comment on this, Mijiti responded: "There is no set time given yet."

Nur Bekri, the governor of Xinjiang, told reporters recently: "Internet control was necessary ... It became a tool to spread false information." The authorities said yesterday that false rumours were still circulating in the city – such as claims that people had taken hostage pensioners, women and children, demanding the release of suspects detained after the unrest.

"Cutting off the Internet and short messaging service is the action that Chinese government decided to take. Under extreme circumstances, such as after the Urumqi riot, it is understandable," said Nigel Hickson, the acting director of the UK Department for Business Innovation & Skills. "But I don't think it is a long-term solution because the Chinese government cannot block the Internet and short messaging service forever."

Most citizens agree – some more than others. "No Internet, no business for me," said Li Fenfa, an Urumqi resident who runs an online business selling dry fruit and has seen no transactions after the Internet was cut.