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# Ethno-Diplomacy: The Uyghur Hitch in Sino-Turkish Relations

*Yitzhak Shichor*



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**Dedicated to Professor Jacob M. Landau**

Scholar, gentleman, and a long-standing source of inspiration

# Contents

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<b>List of Acronyms</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Sino-Turkish Relations: The Legacy</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Pre-Republic China</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Republican China</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The People's Republic of China</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Uyghur Nationalism in Turkey</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Uyghur Presence in Turkey</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Uyghur Activism in Turkey</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Uyghurs in Sino-Turkish Relations</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>China's Displeasure, Turkey's Defiance</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>China's Pressure, Turkey's Compliance</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Bait in Beijing's Trap</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Conclusion: The Limits of China's Ethno-Diplomacy</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>67</b>

# List of Acronyms

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AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
ETF	Eastern Turkestan Foundation
<i>ETIB</i>	Eastern Turkestan Information Bulletin
ETNC	Eastern Turkestan National Center [Congress]
ETIR	Eastern Turkestan Islamic Republic
EU	European Union
FBIS	Foreign Broadcast Information Service
FNSS	FMC [BAE]-Nurol Defense Systems Inc.
GMD	Guomindang
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party)
MLRS	Multiple Launch Rocket System
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	nongovernmental organization



<b>NPC</b>	National People's Congress
<b>PLA</b>	People's Liberation Army
<b>PRC</b>	People's Republic of China
<b>SCO</b>	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
<b>TKP(ML)</b>	Communist Party of Turkey (Marxist-Leninist)
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>U.S.</b>	United States

# Executive Summary

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Beginning in 1949, China considered, and dealt with, so-called Uyghur separatism and the quest for Eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang) independence as a domestic problem. Since the early 1990s, however, Beijing has begun to recognize the international aspects of this problem and to deal with its external manifestations. This new policy has affected China's relations with Turkey, which has ideologically inspired Uyghur nationalism, offered sanctuary to Uyghur refugees, and provided moral and material support to Eastern Turkestan movements, organizations, and activities.

The origins of this support go back to the late nineteenth century, when the Chinese and the Ottoman empires—previously isolated—briefly competed (in a virtual rather than a real way) for sovereignty and control over southwestern Xinjiang. By that time both empires had already declined, and their final collapse in 1911 and 1922 further reduced the potential for friction. Although Turkey demonstrated sympathy and encouragement from afar when Uyghur nationalism began to emerge in the 1930s, Istanbul remained a bystander and could not, and would not, provide any real support. By the late 1940s Beijing and Ankara had grown further apart, with China becoming part of the Soviet bloc while Turkey joined the Western alliance. Shortly afterward the two clashed in the Korean War, which would damage their relationship for many years, and perhaps to this day.

Even before, and especially since, the early 1950s, Turkey has hosted Uyghur leaders and refugees from the People's Republic of China, who have set up associations and organizations aimed at the preserva-

tion of their culture while at the same time never losing sight of their goal of Eastern Turkestan independence. By using Turkey, which favored these activities, as their headquarters, Uyghur leaders sought to promote the Eastern Turkestan cause, yet they have had little success. The absence of Sino-Turkish diplomatic relations, China's international isolation, the Western disregard of human rights, and the technological limits of the media have all thwarted these efforts. This situation might have changed in 1971, when Sino-Turkish diplomatic relations were at long last established, but it did not. For about twenty years, until the early to mid-1990s, these relations remained marginal for both. China still considered its Uyghur problem a domestic affair, and Eastern Turkestan activities in Turkey continued. Both of these situations, however, were about to change.

The change was initially motivated by the launch of post-Mao reforms after the early 1980s, which opened the door for the greater integration of China in the world. This was followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which facilitated the free movement of Uyghurs between Xinjiang and the now independent Central Asian republics and highlighted the cause of Eastern Turkestan. In addition, Western countries, nongovernmental organizations, and the public have become more concerned about the abuse of human rights and the denial of self-determination. Finally, the media has been revolutionized through the use of new technologies, primarily the Internet.

Consequently, since the early 1990s, East Turkestani organizations and leaders have become more active outside China, primarily in Turkey. At the same time, Beijing has become aware of the international aspects and impact of the Eastern Turkestan problem and realized that it can no longer be regarded as simply a domestic affair. Legal and illegal migration from Xinjiang has created a vibrant Uyghur diaspora community that has attracted widespread attention through demonstrations, publications, interviews, meetings, briefings, and conferences. Beijing has had to react and begin to apply pressure on Turkey to curb Uyghur anti-Chinese activities that Ankara earlier disregarded, tolerated, approved, or even supported, if not explicitly, then at least implicitly.

Until the mid-1990s Turkey managed to defy the pressure that China applied. One reason for this was that a number of Turkish leaders and politicians still felt intimately attached to the Uyghurs, whom they considered the forefathers of primordial Turkism. Another was

that the Soviet collapse created new opportunities for Turkey to revive its influence in Central Asia, based on cultural, linguistic, historical, and ethnic likenesses and continuities. Ankara, which in the past had sympathized with the Uyghurs but was indifferent to their fate and political vision, could no longer remain neutral. Finally, Turkish leaders—legislators as well as opposition party chiefs—were personally committed to İsa Yusuf Alptekin, the nonelected leader of the Eastern Turkestan national and independence movement since the 1940s, especially after the death of his colleague Mehmet Emin Buğra in 1965. As long as Alptekin—highly respected, articulate, and admired—lived, Beijing would fail, and perhaps hardly try, to manipulate Ankara against the Uyghurs.

But in 1995 Alptekin died, at the age of nearly 95. By that time China was already experiencing phenomenal economic growth and had gathered unprecedented political and military power that Ankara could no longer ignore. Also, since that time Ankara's grand designs for Central Asia have backfired, requiring reconciliation with Beijing. Now feeling much more self-confident, both at home and abroad, Beijing has begun to apply pressure on Ankara. Although previously the Turkish government managed to defy China's pressure, now it seems to have no choice but to comply, not only because of the obvious benefits of relations with China, but also because of its veiled threats. Since the mid-1990s China has dramatically expanded its economic relations with Turkey, leading to a Turkish trade deficit of more than U.S.\$14 billion in 2008. In recent years China and Turkey have also launched a noteworthy military collaboration program, primarily in the field of missiles, air-defense systems, and armored vehicles.

Consequently, Eastern Turkestan activities in Turkey have been curtailed, and Uyghurs no longer enjoy the benefits offered in the past by the authorities, such as financial support, housing, and citizenship. A number of Eastern Turkestan organizations have had to relocate to other countries outside Beijing's reach, primarily Germany. Ankara's policy reflects not only Chinese pressure but also its own Kurdish challenge; the Turks cannot support Uyghur separatism while denying the Kurds their right to self-determination. Beijing is fully aware of Ankara's Kurdish predicament—and also its Cyprus problem—and has occasionally exploited it. Nonetheless, China's ethno-diplomacy toward Turkey has not been entirely successful. Despite pressure and intimidat-

tion, anti-Chinese Uyghur demonstrations continue, Eastern Turkestan books and journals are still being published, and the fundamental Turkish commitment to the preservation of Uyghur cultural identity remains unaffected. Without intending to do so, the Chinese have helped to expand Uyghur nationalism to an international level by forcing Eastern Turkestan groups to settle in countries that are not only relatively immune to China's pressure, but also much more influential in world affairs. It is quite possible that Beijing is in fact less worried about the Uyghur "threat" to China than the impression it creates, but that it uses this appearance of a threat to intimidate and manipulate other governments, primarily those in Central Asia and Turkey.

# Ethno-Diplomacy: The Uyghur Hitch in Sino-Turkish Relations

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On January 14, 2003, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the leader of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or AKP), landed in China for an official visit, hastily organized before he officially became prime minister. Heading a sizable delegation of more than one hundred officials and businessmen, Erdoğan aimed at improving the political climate between the two countries, which had been cool for some time, in order to boost economic relations. He reiterated that Ankara upholds the One-China principle, respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and opposes terrorism and separatism. Long concerned about Turkey's sympathy toward and support of Eastern Turkestan and Uyghur "separatist" organizations and activities, Beijing was quick to applaud Erdoğan's "recognition" of Xinjiang as an inseparable part of China and his "commitment" not to allow anyone in Turkey to engage in separatist activities against the PRC. To deliver this message, which reflects a change in the rules of the game, a conference entitled "The Past and Present State of the Uyghur Turks," which was scheduled to take place in Ankara on January 16–17, 2003 (and to which I was invited), was cancelled at the last minute, as soon as Erdoğan set foot in China.<sup>1</sup>

On July 28, 1995, Erdoğan, then mayor of Istanbul, had named a section of the Sultan Ahmet (Blue Mosque) Park, in the heart of his

city, after İsa Yusuf Alptekin, the leader of the Eastern Turkestan independence movement and Beijing's arch Uyghur enemy since the late 1940s. To add insult to injury, after Alptekin's death a memorial had been erected in the park to commemorate the Eastern Turkestani *şehitlerin* (*shahids*, or martyrs) who had lost their lives in the "struggle for independence." Those mentioned on the memorial included Şehit Osman Batur (who had been executed in China in 1951) and Mehmet Emin Buğra, leader of the Eastern Turkestan movement until his death in 1965. On a wall near the memorial were the words "Pray for Muslim Citizens of East Turkestan that have been oppressed and assimilated by Communist Chinese Regime!" along with a quote by İsa Yusuf Alptekin: "Now it's time for liberation of east Turkestan!" Inaugurating the park in 1995, Erdoğan said:

In order to express our deep gratitude to the great leader of Eastern Turkestan we have decided to name this park after İsa Yusuf Alptekin. Now almost 95 years old, İsa Yusuf Alptekin has spent his life working for the cause not only of Eastern Turkestan, but of the entire Turkic world. With his tireless struggle İsa Yusuf Alptekin not only inspired us, at the same time he became a symbol of independence, justice and peace in the Turkic world. ... Eastern Turkestan is not only the home of the Turkic peoples, but it is also the cradle of Turkic history, civilization and culture. To forget that would lead to the ignorance of our own history, civilization and culture. ... The martyrs of Eastern Turkestan are our own martyrs. In order to perpetuate their memory and merry their souls [*sic*] we have set up this memorial to the Martyrs of Eastern Turkestan. May their struggle always be remembered. Today the culture of the people of Eastern Turkestan is being systematically sinocized [*sic*].<sup>2</sup>

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***[Erdoğan's] recent  
association with China  
has come at a cost***

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Eight years later, Erdoğan may have wished that he had never delivered that speech and authorized the memorial. His change of heart undoubtedly reflects his interest in benefiting from China's emergence as a global economic powerhouse since the mid-1990s. Yet his recent association with China has come at a cost. Under pressure from Beijing, Ankara had chosen to kowtow to

China and reduce its identification with and support of Uyghur nationalism. The Uyghurs, a Turkic nationality that claims independence from the PRC, where it has been systematically oppressed, abused, and discriminated against, had regarded Turkey not only as a source of nationalist inspiration but also as a protected base of operation. For more than a century Turkey has provided a model for Uyghur nationalism as well as served as a shelter for Uyghur migrant and exiled communities and a headquarters for Uyghur refugee organizations. Turkey's patronage of the Uyghurs began in the late nineteenth century, long before the establishment of the PRC. This association, and Turkey's perceived role in Central Asia in general, have affected Sino-Turkish relations ever since. Mutual suspicions, if not outright hostility, have also been fed by Turkey's participation in the Korean War and integration into the U.S.-led Western defense alliances, primarily the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Baghdad Pact, and later the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). Yet, while Cold War terminology has become irrelevant, and while China and Turkey maintain friendly relations, the Uyghur predicament is still alive. According to an article in the *Turkish Daily News*, "The plight of the Uyghurs living in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of western China...and Beijing's increased sensitivity over the strong interest in the region...remains an issue of tension between the two countries."<sup>3</sup> This view is shared by other observers, who claim that "the obvious obstacle to the...geopolitical opportunity in Sino-Turkish relations is the Xinjiang terrorist issue" (Dellios and Yilmaz 2008: 29).

The question is whether Uyghurs are a real problem in China's foreign policy in general, and in the case of Turkey and Central Asia in particular, or are they just a means for Beijing to intimidate and coerce other governments?

This monograph explores a relatively neglected field of study related to the role of ethnic communities and issues in international relations, in this study called "ethno-diplomacy." Although numerous studies discuss ethnic issues in a domestic and political context (for example, "ethno-nationalism"), relatively few explore the ethnic dimensions of international politics. History pro-

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international politics*

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vides numerous examples of ethnic issues that have complicated bilateral (or multilateral) relations and have occasionally led to violent confrontations, primarily reflecting territorial claims. Pertinent examples include the annexation of Austria by the Germans on the eve of World War II and the excuse of the Germans in the Sudetenland that led to the occupation of Czechoslovakia. Also, PRC policy toward Indonesia was governed for many years (primarily in the 1960s) by its “concern” for the local Chinese minorities, the same “concern” that led to a Sino-Vietnamese war in the late 1970s.<sup>4</sup> Another example is the Soviet use of Uyghurs in Central Asia to undermine Chinese rule in Xinjiang in the 1960s and 1970s. The most recent example is the Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008. Another case that deserves scholarly attention is the existence of an ethnic group that is split among two countries and is seeking independence from one of them, often—but not always—their original homeland. This is particularly critical in a country that hosts a sizable ethnic minority that is equal or even larger in number than that group in an adjacent country where they are the predominant ethnicity. For example, the number of Azeri people in Iran is more than twice their number in Azerbaijan, and the number of Mongols in China is more than twice their number in Mongolia.<sup>5</sup> Finally, governments—especially the Chinese—often use their ethnic kin in other countries to promote political, economic, and even military interests abroad. This has been done either directly, using regular diplomatic channels such as official visits and meetings, speeches, and letters, or indirectly, using different types of leverage and veiled threats. All of these fall within the framework of ethno-diplomacy.

A very different situation from the one described above is that of the Uyghur nationalist (or, in Beijing’s perspective, separatist or splittist) aspirations in Xinjiang (called by some Turks and all Uyghurs Eastern Turkestan), which are at the root of the most serious predicament in Sino-Turkish relations. Given the small numbers of Uyghurs involved and China’s omnipotence in Xinjiang, the Uyghur impact on the relations between Beijing and Ankara is surprisingly large. This study attempts to offer some lessons about the methods China employs to achieve its foreign policy and domestic goals, and the limits of those methods. Under pressure from China Turkey has had to modify its official and even its unofficial attitudes toward Uyghur nationalism, though by no means has it changed its stance entirely. Many Turks still identify

with Uyghur national aspirations on both the political and the personal level, the result of long-standing historical, cultural, and political roots that reflect collective memories and identities that can by no means be forgotten and discarded overnight. This is something that Beijing has failed to appreciate.

### **Sino-Turkish Relations: The Legacy**

Although post-Mao China has managed to sidestep many of the obstacles that affected its foreign relations (or lack thereof) in Mao's time, its contemporary relations with Turkey are still determined by past events, some of them taking place well before 1949.

#### **Pre-Republic China**

Chinese historical records, especially those of the Ming dynasty, occasionally mention "relations" with or "embassies" from Lumi (namely Rum or Rumeli), a term that indicates the Eastern or Byzantine Empire, and more specifically Asia Minor or Anatolia, which had been governed since the end of the thirteenth century by the Ottoman Empire. It is uncertain that these missions really represented the Ottoman sultans or had been sent by them: "The 'tributary envoys' who came to China from the defunct Kingdom of Rum in 1618 may have been great liars."<sup>6</sup> According to Emil Bretschneider, Chinese historical sources do not mention embassies from Rum that had been dispatched by the rulers of this country. He claims, "I have not been able either to find in the history of the Ottoman empire any allusion to a diplomatic intercourse with China" (Bretschneider 1967: 306–08).

It was only in the late nineteenth century that Turkey began to play a role, if only a very modest one, in northwest China. An official envoy of Khoqand, Seyyid Yaqub Khan Töre, arrived in Istanbul for the first time in early 1865, while Yaqub Beg was consolidating his

rule over Kashgar. Soliciting the Ottoman Empire's support, Töre returned to Istanbul in 1869, and then urged Yaqub Beg to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Ottoman sultan. A realist, Yaqub Beg did not

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*Many Turks still identify with Uyghur national aspirations*

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*It was only in the late nineteenth century that Turkey began to play a role...in northwest China*

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pin much hope on the Ottomans, who were too far away and too weak to offer assistance. Yet Yaqub Beg needed not only weapons, but also recognition and legitimization, primarily to consolidate his position against China. Reports about Yaqub Beg and the Muslim uprising were circulating in Istanbul,<sup>7</sup> where in May 1873 Töre had an audience with Sultan Abdülaziz. The sultan offered to cover Töre's travel expenses and to provide him with weapons (including six cannons and hundreds of rifles) and military instructors. In April 1875 Töre was again in Istanbul on behalf of Yaqub Beg, this time asking for help against the Chinese. In August 1875 the sultan issued a *firman* (decree) in appreciation of Yaqub Beg's services, conferring on him the title of emir (or chief) as well as giving him the *Sancağ-i Şerif* (the holy flag of the sultan). Complying with his request, the sultan sent three Turkish army officers (infantry, artillery, and cavalry) to train Yaqub Beg's troops, three thousand rifles, and thirty guns. Although they had originally planned to stay for two years, the Turkish officers extended their stay after the sultan refused to send replacements.<sup>8</sup> In 1876, following the death of Sultan Abdülaziz, Yaqub Beg congratulated Sultan Abdülhamit on his accession to the throne and "succession to the Caliphate."<sup>9</sup>

In a December 24, 1879, report sent to the sultan by Yaqub Khan Töre, the late Yaqub Beg's "ambassador" to Istanbul, he said that Kashgaria had raised the Ottoman flag, accepted the sultan's authority as its sovereign, mentioned him in the *khutba* (sermon), and minted coins bearing his name—acts that suggested the public acceptance of his suzerainty. He then urged the sultan to persuade the Chinese emperor to withdraw from Kashgaria, which, he said, had "previously been part of the Ottoman Empire. . . . While the Ottoman Empire has got a sovereign right over Kashgaria, it would be a shame to let the Chinese take this rich country without opposition, especially when the Ottoman Empire is in need of financial resources as it is at present."<sup>10</sup> Evidently, his advice was not heeded (nor was the artillery sent by the sultan actually usable, because it was too old) (Yuan Tsing 1961: 159). This "alliance" was of more symbolic than practical value. Moreover, it was directed less against China than Russia; Yaqub Beg knew that Turkey could not offer protection and was actually more interested in enlisting the protection of Britain, at that time Turkey's ally (Liang Junyan 2004: 33–38; Kiernan 1955: 327). Still, this is the closest that the Chinese and the Ottoman empires have ever come to a confronta-

tion. Although the hypothetical Ottoman attempt to subvert Chinese rule in Xinjiang was aborted, Beijing would never forget it. Indeed, the Turks have never disappeared from Xinjiang. Experiments in Ottoman Turkey to modernize Islamic education by including non-Islamic subjects penetrated Xinjiang starting in the 1880s, either directly or indirectly, through Uyghur merchants (Millward 2007: 148, 171).<sup>11</sup> At the same time a number of Ottoman missions were sent to China. In 1908 the last of these presented the Chinese emperor with Sultan Abdülhamit's request to appoint Muslim consuls in China who would take care of China's Muslims (Broomhall 1987: 33). His request was rejected, signaling the end of relations between the two empires.

### **Republican China**

Attempts by Yang Zengxin, the governor of Xinjiang from 1912 to 1928, to prevent the local non-Chinese population from spreading Turkish intellectual currents failed. In 1913, soon after he had assumed office, a delegation from Kashgar arrived in Istanbul. In response to the delegation's requests, a group of teachers was sent to Xinjiang a year later. It was headed by Ahmed Kemal, who probably had been ordered to promote pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic ideas. The teachers attempted to establish modern schools in Xinjiang and to provide a modern education using textbooks based on Turkish curricula that were printed in Istanbul. The students were told that the Ottoman sultan was their supreme ruler.<sup>12</sup> These are the seeds of Beijing's reservations about Turkey, and the Uyghurs in particular. Superficial as these Turkish attempts to export Islamic reform to Xinjiang were, they upset not only the Chinese authorities—which is understandable—but also Xinjiang's conservative Muslim clergy. These were the first indications of what would become evident many decades later: that Uyghurs and Turks have not always seen eye to eye. Still, the issues under dispute were less religious than national since Turkey's policies—both then and now—are perceived as undermining Uyghur collective identity. The schools were quickly closed and Kemal was arrested. It had taken some efforts, a change in the curricula, and money in order to reopen the schools and arrange for Kemal's release.<sup>13</sup> Turkey has provided a model for Uyghurs and a source of political and nationalist inspiration, though limited actual support.<sup>14</sup>

Turkey's influence in Xinjiang had always been marginal at best and, following its defeat in World War I, that influence almost disap-

peared. Upholding Turkish nationalism, Mustafa Kemal downgraded pan-Turkism. When the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Republic (ETIR) was established in southern Xinjiang in 1933, Turkey was largely absent from the scene, although the ETIR founders had deliberately underlined their affiliation with Turkey. The ETIR flag—a white star and crescent on a blue background—was meant to symbolize the links between the ETIR and Turkey (Nyman 1977: 113). It is still the flag of all Uyghur and East Turkestani nationalist organizations. Two Turkish nationals, one a military officer, advised Khoja Niyaz, ETIR president. Yet, while the Turkish public greeted the new Islamic republic enthusiastically, Ankara's Foreign Ministry was more cautious. Confessing Turkey's "feelings for a people which speaks her language" and underlining the right of every nation to follow the Turkish example of self-emancipation, the foreign minister was quick to deny any collaboration with the ETIR. After an initial outburst of sympathy, Ankara chose to whitewash its association with Central Asia after having been warned by the Russians. As Lars-Erik Nyman puts it, "Soviet diplomatic pressure in Ankara carried greater weight than feelings of kinship" (Ibid: 114). Sometimes history repeats itself. Since the 1990s Chinese diplomatic pressure on Ankara has carried greater weight than feelings of kinship, significantly clipping Uyghur nationalist activism in Turkey. In this sense, Chinese Communism has been a faithful follower of Soviet Communism.

Chinese Communists have never regarded Turkey as playing a prominent regional or global role. In 1919 Mao Zedong, then age twenty-six and still an anarchist, first mentioned Turkey when he welcomed

the split of Turkey, which enabled the Arabs to become semi-independent.<sup>15</sup> Later, in 1926, he planned to write a chapter on Turkish nationalism in a volume on national liberation movements (a chapter that was never written),<sup>16</sup> and in 1936, in an

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***Chinese Communists have never regarded Turkey as playing a prominent regional or global role***

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attempt to mobilize China's ethnic minorities for the upcoming struggle against Japan, he declared, "The glorious national resurgence of the Turkish Muslim people will serve as a compass for all Muslim nationali-

ties and all oppressed peoples. At this crucial moment of life and death, we hope that you will rise up at once!"<sup>17</sup> On July 23 Mao told Edgar Snow that "the Mohamedans and Tibetan peoples...will form autonomous republics attached to the China federation."<sup>18</sup> These promises, however, evaporated as soon as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seized power.

### **The People's Republic of China**

By the early 1950s Turkey had become a base for the Uyghur nationalist leaders who had managed to escape on the eve of the Chinese Communist "peaceful liberation" of Xinjiang. Much worse in Beijing's eyes was Ankara's decision to participate in the Korean War alongside United Nations (UN) and U.S. forces—against the PRC and North Korea—and to join Western defense alliance systems.

This decision was not made under U.S. pressure. As hostilities began, Ankara considered the North Korean invasion of South Korea, presumably authorized by Moscow, as a naked Communist act of aggression that could, and would, affect other countries (Turkey included) and should therefore be stopped. Less advertised, Ankara's main reason for siding with the UN was probably to use its participation in the Korean War as a ticket to join NATO (Brown 2008: 89–108). On July 25, 1950, precisely one month after the invasion, Turkey announced its intention to send 4,500 troops to Korea, long before China's intervention in October of that same year. In the end, 5,090 troops sailed from Turkey to Korea in late September, and by late November they had already engaged in violent clashes with Chinese "volunteer" forces. These clashes resulted in heavy casualties on both sides. In the battle of Kunu Ri, one of the bloodiest of the entire war, Turkish troops bayoneted nine hundred Chinese. These initial clashes were followed by repeated violent confrontations until the July 27, 1953, armistice. Throughout the war Turkish brigades were pulled out, only to be replaced by fresh ones. Altogether, more than twenty-five thousand Turkish soldiers fought alongside UN forces in Korea. They suffered 3,277 casualties: 721 dead, 2,147 wounded, 175 missing, and 234 captured (Türkmen 2002: 161–80).<sup>19</sup> As anticipated, Turkey's participation in the Korean War expedited its integration into the Western security system, and on October 22, 1951, Turkey was admitted into NATO, becoming an official member on February 18, 1952, while the Korean War was still in progress.

Although Ankara's initial decision to join the war had little, if anything, to do with China (and much more to do with the Soviet Union), the war contributed greatly to the shaping and amplifying of Turkish hostility toward Communism in general, and Chinese Communism in particular.<sup>20</sup> In Turkey "Red China" was depicted as an awakening dragon, an evil enemy that had confronted the Turks at least since the third century B.C. Fed almost exclusively by Western sources, the Turkish media underscored the repressive, aggressive, and authoritarian nature of the Chinese Communist regime, depicting it as a minority that ruled masses of ignorant peasants and lacked popular legitimacy. Turkish public opinion considered the Chinese immoral. General Tahsin Yazıcı, commander of the first Turkish brigade sent to the Republic of Korea, referred to the Chinese as "red dwarfs," cruel and barbaric.<sup>21</sup> Although Tibet was mentioned as an object of Chinese aggression, many news articles emphasized the Chinese repression of its Muslim minorities, including in Eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang).<sup>22</sup> Some of these perceptions—which explain Turkey's readiness to welcome Uyghur refugees and leaders and offer them assistance—persist to this very day. In 2006, Çağdaş Üngör wrote, "In contemporary Turkey, China is still portrayed much less favorably than other countries of East Asia. ... The Korean War was critical in shaping the long-term relations of China and Turkey."<sup>23</sup>

The fact that Turkey had participated in the Korean War (in which it directly engaged Chinese soldiers), joined NATO, and provided air bases and other military facilities to the United States against the "Communist bloc" precluded official relations with China for many years. Turkey had also played a leading role in the formation of regional defense systems such as the Baghdad Pact of February 1955 (later renamed CENTO), which Mao regarded as directed also against China (Shichor 1979: 38–39, 86).<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the PRC regarded Turkey as a part of a U.S.-inspired and organized "aggressive bloc" in the Middle East. Unlike other Middle Eastern countries that, in Beijing's view, demonstrated initial signs of "resistance to imperialism," Turkey was categorized early on as hopelessly pro-Western.<sup>25</sup> The Chinese believed—and with good reason—that an American-orchestrated Middle East Islamic pact that included Turkey could have driven Muslims in China to create a fifth column and subvert the state. As Washington's most reliable "aggressive base" in the Middle East, Turkey

was one of the countries that voted to condemn the PRC as an aggressor in Korea at the United Nations General Assembly session on February 1, 1951. In the following years, Ankara consistently supported Washington-sponsored resolutions to postpone discussion of any proposal to unseat Taiwan from the United Nations, and to admit the PRC instead. Turkey's hostile attitude toward Beijing was undoubtedly governed not only by the U.S.-led crusade against Communism, but also by its own sensitivity to the systematic Chinese persecution of Turkic nationalities. It persisted even after the Bandung Conference of 1955, which marked a watershed in China's relations with many third world, Islamic, and especially Middle Eastern, countries.

Throughout these years Beijing repeatedly urged Ankara to adopt a "peaceful and independent policy of neutrality" instead of following the United States, claiming it was the only way to overcome Turkish economic difficulties and political crises. The state-controlled Chinese media argued that Turkey's "acceptance of American 'aid' had resulted in an increase in her foreign trade deficit. ... The flooding of Turkish markets with U.S. goods had been a serious blow to Turkey's weak national industry. Production had dwindled constantly in the textile, leather, tobacco and other industries, and factories had closed down in large numbers. The dumping of U.S. surplus farm produce had forced down Turkey's backward agriculture still further," leading to unemployment and inflation.<sup>26</sup> Ironically, if the PRC is substituted for the United States in the previous quotation, it would reflect almost precisely the impact of post-Mao China on Turkey's economy fifty years later.

In October 1957, following a few months of deteriorating relations between Syria and Turkey, which brought the two countries to the brink of a border war, Beijing stood on Syria's side.<sup>27</sup> On October 17, 1957, Mao sent a telegram to the Syrian president in which he said, "At a time when United States imperialism is goading Turkey to carry out provocations against Syria in a plot to start a war of aggression, I hereby reiterate the firm and just stand of the Chinese government and people resolutely to support the Syrian people in their just struggle to defend their independence and peace."<sup>28</sup> In his speech at the Supreme Soviet in Moscow three weeks later, Mao went on to condemn the "Turkish aggressor."<sup>29</sup> In 1960 Beijing still regarded Ankara's government as oppressive internally and a partner to "U.S. imperialism" externally.<sup>30</sup> Clearly this perception must have been reinforced during the Cultural



Revolution. In fact, it was during the late 1960s that Maoist groups began to emerge in Turkey, groups aimed not only at combatting the government “oppression” but also—or even primarily—at addressing Moscow’s “revisionism.” Representing an ideological “jet lag,” the first Maoist organization in Turkey, the Communist Party of Turkey (Marxist-Leninist), or TKP(ML), was launched in April 1972, after Mao had ordered an end to Red Guard radicalism; to rebuild Party bureaucracy; and to improve relations with Washington.<sup>31</sup> One of the outcomes of Mao’s changing policy was the formation of Sino-Turkish relations.

Sino-Turkish explorations began to pick up in the early 1970s, only after the end of the violent phase of the Cultural Revolution, and following the Sino-U.S. thaw. On August 4, 1971, Turkey finally recognized the PRC, leading to the establishment of full diplomatic relations. In October of that year Ankara supported China’s admission to the UN and its becoming a permanent member of the Security Council. Still, Turkey, located on the margins of the Middle East, Asia, and Europe, failed to attract Chinese attention until the 1980s, and would come to attract more in the 1990s. Following Mao’s death China began to adopt its Open Door Policy, which was based on a drive to modernize and on a desire for greater involvement in the international community. Now paying more attention to Turkey, Beijing has become aware of Ankara’s problematic situation. Since the early 1950s the Eastern Turkestan independence movement, which challenges China’s incorporation of Xinjiang, has been headquartered in Turkey, where it has enjoyed official moral and often material support. Inevitably, then, the Uyghurs, the main ethnic group involved in this movement, have become a problem in Sino-Turkish relations. China’s growing interest in Turkey since the mid-1990s is related indirectly, and often directly, to this problem.

### **Uyghur Nationalism in Turkey**

A Turkic-Muslim nationality of 9.65 million (Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook 2008: 74), Uyghurs are the largest ethnic group in Xinjiang. While they make up nearly half the population in China’s northwestern Autonomous Region, outside China a few hundred thousand live in Uyghur diaspora communities in Central Asia, and they live in much smaller numbers (a few thousand) all around the world, including the Middle East and Turkey. Diaspora Uyghurs *could*, therefore, potential-

ly provide a bridge not only between China and Turkey, but also between China and the Islamic world.<sup>32</sup> Yet rather than representing an asset, Uyghurs have instead become a liability for China's foreign relations. Although in the past the Chinese used their Muslim minorities, primarily the Hui, to promote relations with the Middle East (Shichor 1984: 305–17), a similar use of the Uyghurs has been inconceivable. Unlike the Hui, who, after centuries of assimilation, identify themselves primarily as Chinese, Uyghurs have not been assimilated. Furthermore, they are not only *non-Chinese* in ethnic terms, but are also *anti-Chinese* in political and nationalist terms, as they firmly reject Chinese rule in Xinjiang and demand independence. And for many years Turkey has been not just a country that absorbs Uyghur immigrants, but also the center of Uyghur nationalist activism and the quest for statehood.<sup>33</sup>

### Uyghur Presence in Turkey

As mentioned above, in the late nineteenth century Turkey was already indirectly involved in Xinjiang's education system. A few would-be Uyghur nationalist leaders had studied in Turkey, including Mesut Sabri (Mesut Baykozi Sabrioğlu), who in 1947 became the first native-born governor of Xinjiang. Born in 1887, he was sent in 1904 to a military academy in Turkey, where he stayed for ten years before eventually obtaining a medical degree and returning home in 1915. After the Communist takeover he was arrested and executed in April 1951 (Boorman 1970: 22–24; Benson 1991: 87–113). Some Uyghurs who remained in Turkey, however, have not only survived but have become leaders of the Uyghur nationalist movement abroad.

Mehmet Rıza Bekin is a noteworthy example. A nephew of the prominent Uyghur leader Mehmet Emin Buğra, he was born in Khotan (Hetian) in 1924. As a child he lived in India, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan, and in 1938, at age thirteen, he ended up in Turkey following Kemal Atatürk's invitation to Eastern Turkestan students to come to Turkey to study. Bekin studied in a military academy, served for thirteen months in the Korean War as a captain and a signal officer, and was later promoted to general in the Turkish army. He was also a liaison officer at CENTO headquarters in Pakistan. After his discharge he served the Uyghur cause by heading the Eastern Turkestan Foundation (Doğu Türkistan Vakfı, or ETF), in addition to fulfilling other functions.<sup>34</sup>

Both born in 1901, the prominent leaders Mehmet Emin Buğra and İsa Yusuf Alptekin would work together for the cause of Eastern Turkestan all their lives, first in China and Afghanistan and then in India and Turkey. A native of Khotan (Hetian), Mehmet Emin Buğra became prime minister in 1933, as well as military commander of the short-lived Eastern Turkestan Islamic Republic. In 1939, while still in exile in Afghanistan, he met İsa Yusuf Alptekin, who persuaded the Chinese government to enlist his support in consolidating Guomindang (GMD) rule over Xinjiang. Buğra returned to China in 1943. He was later permitted to leave for Xinjiang, arriving on October 17, 1945, in Urumqi, where he became minister of reconstructions and later vice chairman of the regional government. Mesut Sabri and Alptekin landed in Urumqi aboard the same flight (Benson 1991: 89–91, 108–09).<sup>35</sup>

İsa Yusuf Alptekin was born in the city of Yengisar (Yangi Hissar), a county in Kashgar Prefecture. He studied Turkish in a Chinese school and later worked as a Turkish language teacher. In the early 1930s he became active in GMD circles in Nanjing, promoting the Uyghur cause and seeking full autonomy for Eastern Turkestan. In 1938, while on a visit to Saudi Arabia, he met the Turkish consul in Jeddah and apprised him of the Chinese cruelty toward the Uyghurs in Eastern Turkestan. On May 16, 1939, he came to Ankara to meet the Turkish minister of foreign affairs. Despite the fact that Alptekin came a long way he could not achieve his goals in Ankara.<sup>36</sup> At that time Turkey did not want to, and perhaps was unable to, become involved in the fate of Uyghurs in China. Following his return to China Alptekin focused his efforts on the Chinese parliament, the GMD, and Jiang Kaishek personally, but he had no success.

In October 1945 Alptekin returned to Xinjiang to assume his membership (without a minister portfolio) in the provincial government, becoming its secretary-general in 1947. He served concurrently as director of Xinjiang's Sanminzhuyi (Sun Yatsen's Three Principles of the People) Youth Corps and as senior editor of the Altai Publishing House. In 1949, due both to political disagreements with Mesut Sabri (Xinjiang's chairman) and the Chinese, and to the approaching Red Army, both Alptekin and Buğra decided to flee the region. On September 20, a month before the Communists invaded Xinjiang, the two leaders left Urumqi traveling south, toward the only part of the border still open to them. A month later, precisely when Urumqi was

being occupied, they began crossing the border to India, accompanied by 852 people, 54 of whom died on the way. India, however, was just a stopover.

Efforts now began to find a permanent shelter for the Uyghur refugees. In late 1949 Turkish members of parliament arrived in India and tried to convince the Uyghurs to come to Turkey, promising employment, money, and housing. Although their Chinese passports were no longer valid (since the fall of the Republic), Uyghurs were given Turkish passports. They arrived in Turkey shortly afterward.<sup>37</sup> The Korean War, however, which involved Turkey in a violent confrontation with China, caused some difficulties. Ankara, which had allowed Mehmet Emin Buğra to settle in Turkey in 1951, now procrastinated on allowing more Uyghurs to come to Turkey. Arriving in Turkey in January 1952, Alptekin, who had good relations with the Turkish press, met with Turkish officials, including Refik Koraltan, head of the Turkish parliament, as well as with Minister of Foreign Affairs Fuat Köprülü. Following their efforts, the Turkish government finally agreed on March 13, 1952, to settle 1,850 East Turkestani refugees in Turkey.

Alptekin himself settled in Turkey in June 1954, and on December 4, 1957, he became a Turkish citizen. This was the first wave of Uyghur migration to Turkey. Since the 1950s Turkey has provided political asylum to thousands of East Turkestani refugees who have fled Xinjiang (Besson 1998: 161–92).<sup>38</sup> Considered a Turkic stateless nation, Uyghurs have been offered an alternative homeland, either temporary or permanent. Some of them have arrived on their own, while others have been supported by the Turkish government or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Svanberg 1989: 591–601),<sup>39</sup> with the encouragement of the United States.

In 1959 Beijing allowed Chinese citizens of other nationalities to leave the country. Some six hundred Uyghurs who claimed to have Afghan citizenship left China overland in 1961, although not all were given Afghan citizenship. They stayed in Afghanistan for five or six

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years as they tried to find a country that would receive them. Lobbying in Ankara, Alptekin persuaded Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel to settle the Uyghur refugees in Turkey. Kaya Toperi, the Turkish consul in Kabul, who was to become a seasoned diplomat and spokesman for President Turgut Özal, played an important role in this decision. In 1966–67, with the assistance of the UNHCR, about 360 Uyghur refugees were flown to Turkey in UN planes. Most of them settled in Kayseri, which has become the predominant Uyghur community in Turkey and also the most nationalistic.<sup>40</sup> This second wave of Uyghur migration from the PRC may have included a small number of refugees who had fled China in 1962 to the Soviet Union (Kazakhstan). For some, Turkey has offered a permanent base, but for others it is only a temporary haven, a stopover on their way to other destinations, whether by choice or not.

The third wave of Uyghur settlement in Turkey began after the launch of post-Mao reforms in the late 1970s. By that time diplomatic relations between Beijing and Ankara had already been established, and Beijing had become much more sensitive to the Uyghur diaspora. Xinjiang's Uyghurs have historically arrived in Turkey, usually indirectly, in one of two ways: either legally (those having a PRC passport that left Xinjiang to study or trade, or on a pilgrimage to Mecca), or illegally (those having forged passports or visas to other destinations, mostly Central Asia, who eventually reached Turkey). In addition, scores of Uyghur refugees reached Turkey from Pakistan and Afghanistan after having illegally crossed the borders, now more open and less guarded than they were in Mao's time.<sup>41</sup> For many of them, arrival in Turkey has been facilitated by the UNHCR, which maintains an office in Ankara. There are conflicting reports about the number of Uyghurs in Turkey, since no official data is publicly available. Some estimate their number at more than fifty thousand, though Turkey has been used as stepping stone for many more on their way to other destinations.<sup>42</sup> This figure seems to be grossly exaggerated. Uyghur interviewees in Turkey tend to agree on a more modest number, of more than five thousand Uyghurs arriving since 1949. Whatever the accurate number, however, the proportion of Uyghurs in the Turkish population is minute, far smaller than the group's influence.

Although from the early 1950s both the Turkish government and public opinion were critical of China, the decision to admit exiled

Uyghurs and refugees was not motivated by political considerations. Instead, it primarily reflected ethnic solidarity and a sense of responsibility on humanitarian grounds—and perhaps also the desire to win Washington’s goodwill. Before the mid-1990s Uyghurs arriving in Turkey had been given housing and citizenship and served in the army (military service is compulsory at the age of twenty-two for all, Uyghurs included). Actually, most Uyghur refugees have maintained an ordinary daily life, attempting to make a living and avoiding involvement in politics, both domestic and international. A few, however, have become politically active, trying to promote the cause of Eastern Turkestan independence.

### **Uyghur Activism in Turkey**

Initially, and following time-honored Ottoman and Turkish noninvolvement traditions, Ankara was reluctant to support Uyghur political and national aspirations, even when Turkey did not yet have diplomatic relations with China. Uyghur leaders did not expect, nor were given, official Turkish assistance, at least not at the beginning. On an unofficial basis, however, Turkey has provided the Uyghurs with freedom of action, offices, and some financial support. Whether willingly or not, Turkey has gradually become the basis of the Uyghur nationalist movement and the headquarters of worldwide associations and organizations. For many years, the movement was led by İsa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Buğra. After Buğra’s death on June 14, 1965, Alptekin remained the uncrowned Uyghur leader until his death thirty years later, in December 1995.

Outside the Uyghur community, the goal of Alptekin and Buğra was to enlist support, win recognition, and promote solidarity for the cause of gaining Eastern Turkestan independence. Inside the Uyghur community, their goal was to preserve Uyghur collective identity, to revive the memory of the two defunct Eastern Turkestan republics, and to promote Uyghur culture and language. To these ends they set up associations, launched publications, organized cultural activities, met with international leaders and organizations, presented appeals and petitions, attend-

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***Alptekin and Buğra  
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nationalist vision***

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ed conferences, delivered speeches, and created networks that would support their nationalist vision.

One of the first organizations established in Turkey was the Eastern Turkestan Refugee Committee (Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Derneği). Its journal, *Doğu Türkistan* (Eastern Turkestan), was launched in the early 1950s. A little later, the National Center for the Liberation of Eastern Turkestan was set up to promote Eastern Turkestan (primarily Uyghur) culture, to participate in various political activities and demonstrations, and to distribute nationalist propaganda. The Eastern Turkestan Foundation (Doğu Türkistan Vakfı, or ETF) was formed in Istanbul in 1976. Officially committed to the preservation of Uyghur cultural and social identity in Xinjiang and elsewhere<sup>43</sup> rather than to the promotion of political independence or irredentism by violent means, the ETF has undoubtedly had a much greater impact. Though careful not to become openly embroiled with Beijing, the ETF is much more than a spiritual source of inspiration for Eastern Turkestan independence. It is also an essential link to friendly governments, first and foremost in Ankara itself, as well as to Uyghur and other Turkic nationality organizations and NGOs concerned with human rights violations, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization). Established and led by Mehmet Rıza Bekin, the ETF publications include *Doğu Türkistan'ın Sesi* (Voice of Eastern Turkestan), a quarterly journal inaugurated in 1984 by İsa Yusuf Alptekin in Turkish, English, and Uyghur. Although it purportedly discusses cultural and historical topics, it inevitably deals with political issues as well and frequently includes condemnations of the PRC. It is still being issued and follows a tradition of publications that began in Eastern Turkestan and Turkey as early as the 1920s and 1930s.

*Yeni Türkistan* (New Turkestan), the first Turkestan émigré journal in Turkey, was issued in Istanbul from 1927 until 1932. Other Turkestan and Uyghur publications in Turkey began to appear only after 1953, following the arrival of the first group of East Turkestan émigrés from China who had become politically active in Turkey. Leading the way, Mehmet Emin Buğra in 1953 became the editor of an Istanbul journal called *Türkistan. İlmî, içtimaî, iktisadî ve kültürel aylık dergidir* (Turkestan: A Scholarly, Social, Economic, and Cultural Monthly), which had a definite political and pan-Turkic character and included attacks on China for its brutal policies in Xinjiang.<sup>44</sup> In 1956–57 in

Ankara he edited another magazine, *Türkistan'ın Sesi. Aylık. İlmî ve kültürel dergi* (Voice of Turkestan Monthly: A Scholarly and Cultural Journal), of which twenty issues were published, including several in English. Articles written by Buğra, Alptekin, and others aimed at enlisting Muslims and other anti-Communist sympathizers, including those in Taiwan, in support of Eastern Turkestan independence. The Eastern Turkestan Refugee Society in Istanbul issued a newsletter called *Doğu Türkistan Haber Bülteni* (Eastern Turkestan News Bulletin) from 1960 to 1966 (Landau 1995: 122; Koçaoğlu 1998).<sup>45</sup> Twelve issues of *Hür Türkistan İçin İstiklâlçi Gazete* (Gazette for the Independence of Free Turkestan) were published in Istanbul from 1975 to 1977. Many of these publications, as well as many books dealing with Eastern Turkestan's history and politics,<sup>46</sup> continued to be published after the establishment of Turkey-PRC diplomatic relations and affirmed the links—both negative and positive—between the two countries.

In fact, the two leaders ran their own independent foreign policy using a variety of diplomatic means, from launching appeals, writing letters to prominent leaders, and holding meetings with NGOs, to attending conferences as official representatives of a nonexistent state called (Eastern) Turkistan<sup>47</sup> while retaining Turkish citizenship. Thus, Alptekin attended the Afro-Asian Conference in New Delhi in 1960 and in Mogadishu in 1965; the Baghdad Conference of the Islamic Countries in 1961; the Islamic Conference in Mecca in 1963; and the World Congress of Islam in Karachi in 1964,<sup>48</sup> to name but a few. In a special memorandum submitted to a number of Islamic meetings in the early 1960s, Alptekin urged Muslim leaders and “peace-loving countries” to implement the resolutions that had already been adopted concerning Turkestan (Landau 1995: 146).

Additional Uyghur organizations in Turkey include the Eastern Turkestan Student Union, the Eastern Turkestan Women's Association, and the Kayseri-based Eastern Turkestan Culture and Solidarity Association (*Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği*), which publishes the bi-monthly *Gök Bayrak* (Heavenly [Blue] Flag).<sup>49</sup> Yet the first step toward forming an international organization was taken when the Eastern Turkestan World National Congress (ETNC, later to be retrospectively called the First National Assembly) convened in Istanbul in December 1992. Representatives of East Turkestan communities throughout the world publicly denounced China's oppressive



policies in Xinjiang, calling for the independence of Eastern Turkestan.<sup>50</sup> The meeting failed, however, to produce an effective organization to coordinate these efforts. Six years later, however, in December 1998, more than forty leaders and some three hundred representatives of Uyghur communities in eighteen countries established in Istanbul the Eastern Turkestan National Center (ETNC) to serve as the international association of Uyghur organizations worldwide and as an embryonic de facto Eastern Turkestan government-in-exile, headed by Mehmet Rıza Bekin. By this time Beijing had begun to lose patience, displaying uneasiness that within three years would develop into a well-orchestrated interna-

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tional anti-Uyghur crusade accompanied by implicit, yet obvious, pressure on Ankara. Consequently, since the late 1990s organized Uyghur activities in Turkey have declined considerably, although they have never disappeared completely, especially in the eyes of the Chinese.

### **Uyghurs in Sino-Turkish Relations**

Beijing has always been aware of the exogenous dimensions of Uyghur “separatism,” yet this problem was once generally considered an internal affair. Indeed, throughout the Maoist era Beijing managed to suppress Uyghur separatism. There was almost no external support for Eastern Turkestan independence, despite the never-ending efforts of Mehmet Emin Buğra and İsa Yusuf Alptekin. Although the Soviet Union offered its help, most Muslim countries, Western governments, and international organizations would not or could not support Uyghur nationalism. Turkey, however, was the exception.

All of this began to change by the late 1970s. Following the expansion of China’s diplomatic relations after Mao’s death, China’s adoption of the Open Door Policy, and its gradual integration into the international system, Beijing has become much more sensitive to the instability caused by Uyghur “separatism” at home and, even more so, to its sources of support and its visibility and negative implications for China abroad. Fuelled by a growing international interest in the state, fate, and vision of Eastern Turkestan, this sensitivity has increased since the collapse of

the Soviet Union; the resumption of China's relations with the newly independent Central Asian republics; and the U.S. offensive in Afghanistan and the recent struggle against terrorism. The growing attention to the Uyghur cause has also derived from new communications technologies that did not exist in Buğra's and even Alptekin's times, primarily the Internet. Turkey has played a pivotal role in this situation.

Before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Beijing had paid little, if any, attention to Turkey as a potential threat. However, the Soviet collapse has propelled Turkey—whose foreign policy had been oscillating since between East (Asia) and West (Europe)—to become more committed to playing a dominant role in Central Asia.<sup>51</sup> In the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, support for Eastern Turkestan and association with the Uyghurs (and the other ethnic groups in Xinjiang) converged with Ankara's foreign policy, which aimed, for a moment, at re-creating a great Turkic-*cum*-Turkish nation. Since the early 1990s, then, Turkey, as one of the competitors for Central Asia, has begun to cause concern in Beijing. Although they have been at a disadvantage in Central Asia in terms of military and economic power as well as political resolve compared to other players such as Russia, Iran, the United States, and China, the Turks offered an overwhelming advantage beyond the others in terms of culture and history. Ankara could, and attempted to, use its cultural, historical, and linguistic characteristics, all common to Central Asia, to raise its profile in this region. Although this policy has by and large failed, Beijing has remained concerned about the possible revival of Pan-Turkist tendencies.

To be sure, "officially, Turkey has eschewed any effort to promote pan-Turkism. However, a number of nongovernmental groups advocate a closer association or cultural union encompassing the Turkic states of Central Asia and the Caucasus" (Larrabee and Lasser 2003: 123–34)<sup>52</sup> Beijing's concern about the reemergence of pan-Turkism, often called "neo pan-Turkism" (*xin fantujuezhuyi*) to distinguish it from "old (or dated) pan-Turkism" (*jiu fantujuezhuyi*) and Turkey's historical and contemporary implication in it, has been evident in numerous publications since the early 1990s.<sup>53</sup> Official PRC policy regards pan-Turkism as not only a reactionary, racist, chauvinist, and bourgeois-nationalist ideology that spread under the auspices and with the collusion of imperialist powers, but also a means to create unrest and sow discord among China's nationalities. Beijing's policy is reflected in

the words of Tömür Dawamät, the Uyghur governor of Xinjiang, who said at a press conference in 1991 that the small number of splitters (a term the Chinese often use to refer to separatists) in Eastern Turkestan would not be able to achieve their goals, despite the support of hostile forces abroad. Answering a journalist's question about whether he was referring to Alptekin (then a resident of Turkey), Dawamät condemned him without, however, mentioning the country he lived in.<sup>54</sup>

Chinese leaders and the government-controlled media have always linked Uyghur “subversive and terrorist activities” in Xinjiang (and elsewhere in China) to the influence of external forces, the infiltration of foreign agents, and the interference of foreign governments and other organizations that Beijing has rarely identified. Accordingly, Beijing was careful not to implicate Turkey by name. Visiting Turkey in the 1980s, delegates from China, and even from Xinjiang, avoided any public mention of Uyghurs, let alone Eastern Turkestan, though undoubtedly they were fully aware of the protection, sympathy, and support provided by Turkey to Uyghur national aspirations and organizations. In September 1986, for example, the Chinese did not respond publicly when the Turkish government granted political asylum to Mohammed Niyazi, a Xinjiang Uyghur who had been the commercial counselor at the PRC embassy in Ankara for two-and-a-half years.<sup>55</sup> In fact, for many years the Chinese have dissociated Turkey from Turkestan and Turkism. The common transliteration of “Turkestan” into Chinese is not *Tuerqisidan*—based on the name of the modern state of Turkey (*Tuerqi*)—but is *Tujuesidan*, based on *Tujue* (or *T'u-chüeh*), the name of the ancient Central Asian tribe (Pelliot 1915: 686–89; Sinor 1990: 285–316; Mori 1981: 47–75). Yet “Eastern Turkestan” is usually shortened to *Dong Tu*, which could refer to either

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***the PRC became much more sensitive to the international dimensions of Uyghur “separatism.”***

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term. Similarly, the term “pan-Turkism” has consistently been transliterated not as *fantuergqizhuyi* but as *fantujuezhuyi*.

As the number of violent incidents in Xinjiang increased by the early 1990s, the PRC became much more sensitive to the international dimensions of Uyghur “separatism.” Obviously, before Sino-Turkish diplomatic relations were estab-

lished in early August 1971, Beijing could in no way have influenced Ankara's Uyghur policy. Even after 1971 it took China nearly twenty-five years to respond to Eastern Turkestan "separatist activism" in Turkey. One reason was that Beijing was not yet confident enough to apply pressure on governments far from its borders. Such a measure could be interpreted as an attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, a policy Beijing firmly rejected. Just as important, though, was that Beijing from the beginning had considered Uyghur unrest in Xinjiang primarily a domestic issue, to be dealt with internally.

By the late 1980s Beijing had begun to realize that its domestic crackdown could not succeed without neutralizing the external sources of Uyghur nationalist activism, and it intensified its efforts by adopting drastic measures to eradicate the movement, not only at home but also abroad. Consequently, since the early 1990s Beijing has begun to apply pressure on those foreign governments that, although not supporting Eastern Turkestan independence directly and officially, still enabled and even encouraged Uyghurs—indirectly and unofficially—to promote their cause.

Not only Beijing's intelligence services but also its Foreign Ministry follows the activities of Uyghurs and others abroad, in much the same way that the Foreign Ministry monitors overseas Falun Gong activities through its 610 Offices, which operate under its General Office. Established on June 10, 1999 (hence its name), 610 Offices are an extralegal police force formed to suppress Falun Gong practitioners both at home and abroad. Reacting to human rights critics, on July 6, 2004, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' 610 Office (an arm of the Ministry of State Security) was renamed the Department of External Security Affairs (Shewai Anquan Shiwu Si, or Guanli Si, literally the Department of Managing Foreign-Related Security). It "aimed at coping with increasing nontraditional security factors" (primarily terrorism) and the safety of Chinese abroad, as well as "dealing with Eastern Turkistan groups."<sup>56</sup>

Most of these efforts are still concentrated on the newly independent Central Asian republics bordering on China, which over the years have provided sanctuary to large Uyghur communities, national organizations, and separatist political activists. These countries, primarily Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan but also Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan, have become more vulnerable to Beijing's intimidation, yet

are beyond the scope of this study. Beijing has also applied pressure, though to a lesser degree, on Middle Eastern governments such as those of Iran and Saudi Arabia, which have always been ready to support China's Muslims on religious grounds but have been reluctant to approve of Eastern Turkestan nationalist irredentism or facilitate Uyghur transnational activism.

The case of Turkey has been more complicated and sensitive due to the country's time-honored commitment to Uyghur nationalism and its

long-term cultural and historical affiliation, ideological inspiration, and material support for the realization of the Eastern Turkestan vision. Until the mid-1990s Ankara tended to ignore Beijing's displeasure about Uyghur nationalist activism in its territory. Initially, Turkey managed to withstand Beijing's pressure and demands with regard to Uyghur presence and nationalist activities, but since the second half of the

1990s Ankara has appeared to submit—though never entirely.

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### China's Displeasure, Turkey's Defiance

At least until the mid-1990s Turkish leaders continued to declare their commitment to Eastern Turkestan, though in cautious terms (Turkish politicians, journalists, and the public at large usually use the term "Eastern Turkestan" rather than the Chinese name "Xinjiang," implicitly identifying with the Uyghur claims). In 1991, following the parliamentary elections in Turkey, Alptekin met with the political leaders, including the newly elected prime minister Süleyman Demirel. Alptekin described the deteriorating situation of Uyghurs in China, primarily in demographic terms, and warned Demirel that "unless Turkey takes immediate protective steps, the Turkic peoples of Eastern Turkestan will disappear from the historical scene in the coming decades." Demirel and the other politicians reportedly pledged that they would "not allow the Chinese to assimilate their ethnic brothers in Eastern Turkestan" and would "take the matter to the UN and other international institutions."<sup>57</sup> However, the Turkish supporters of the Uyghurs could not raise enough votes to put the issue on the UN agenda, and perhaps they did not try hard enough.

Turkish president Turgut Özal was very sympathetic to Uyghurs, to the Uyghur cause, and to Alptekin personally. Meeting with Özal in Istanbul in early 1992, Alptekin gave him an Eastern Turkestan flag, saying, “Now it is your turn to carry this flag in your heart. With this flag I am also entrusting the cause of Eastern Turkestan to you.” He added that Eastern Turkestan is the mother of the whole Turkish world. In return President Özal reportedly said, “I declare that I have taken delivery of the Eastern Turkestani cause. The Turkic republics under former Soviet rule have all declared their independence. Now it is Eastern Turkestan’s turn. It is our desire to see the ancient homeland of the Turkic people a free country.”<sup>58</sup> Their meeting, which was supposed to take only fifteen minutes, lasted for an hour, during which many people waited outside. If Özal really gave this far-reaching statement, it reflected his consistent attitude (yet in words rather than deeds) favorable to the Uyghurs and by implication unfavorable to the Chinese.

Later, on May 29, 1992, East Turkestanis all over the world commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the Yili “massacre.” In May 1962, following the exodus of more than sixty thousand Kazakhs and Uyghurs who fled Xinjiang to the Soviet Union the month before, Uyghurs in Ghulja (Yining) who were left behind began rioting. Chinese troops fired at the crowd, causing an unknown number of casualties. At a press conference held in Istanbul Alptekin publicly accused Deng Xiaoping, general secretary of the CCP at the time, for ordering the shooting. Reportedly, “hundreds of demonstrators who had been refused permission to leave for the Soviet Union were killed, wounded, arrested and imprisoned.”<sup>59</sup> Quoting diplomatic sources, *Yomiuri Shimbun* said that China had become very nervous about growing Uyghur nationalism and that Chinese authorities blamed the Islamic countries—Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey, in particular—for supporting the separatists.<sup>60</sup> To be sure, although Beijing was allowed to open a number of consulates in Turkey, to this day Turkey has never been allowed to open a consulate in Xinjiang, despite (or perhaps because of) its cultural, social, and ethnic affiliation with the region.

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*Turkey has never been  
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consulate in Xinjiang*

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Mehmet Cantürk, who chaired a one-day conference of the East Turkestan Cultural and Relief Committee (held in Kayseri on September 19, 1992), in the conference's opening speech blamed the Chinese for deliberately persecuting the Turkic peoples of Xinjiang through coercive birth control policies aimed at wiping out East Turkestanis.<sup>61</sup> Then, on November 17, 1992, China's official mouthpiece *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily) reportedly criticized Turkey's Turkic policy for the first time. In a long article the paper accused President Turgut Özal and Prime Minister Demirel of incorporating Xinjiang into their vision of the Turkic peoples' homeland, now turned into an official Turkish policy. Moreover, it accused the Turkish government of treating İsa Yusuf Alptekin, regarded by Beijing as the leader of the Eastern Turkestan independence movement, as a president in exile. If Turkey insisted on continuing its policy of sheltering separatists, *Renmin Ribao* warned, China might be forced to take steps to defend itself.<sup>62</sup>

Despite China's threats, the first Eastern Turkestan World National Congress was convened in Istanbul from December 12 to 14, 1992. Delegates from all over the world unanimously decided to strengthen the struggle for the self-determination of the people of Eastern Turkestan and to launch an umbrella organization that would represent the interests of the East Turkestanis living at home (that is, Xinjiang) and abroad. Some days later, on December 22 and 23, Alptekin again met in Ankara with Prime Minister Demirel, the foreign minister, and other leaders, requesting them to bring the plight of the Eastern Turkestanian people to the attention of the United Nations. Based on his appeal, for the first time a resolution was introduced to the Turkish parliament to investigate human rights abuses in Xinjiang. The proposed resolution called upon the Turkish Parliamentary Commission for Human Rights to immediately send a fact-finding mission to Xinjiang to investigate the human rights situation on the spot.<sup>63</sup>

Obviously, such a mission—which the Chinese would never accept anyway—has never been sent. But in early 1993 the new Turkish-language *For the Independence of Eastern Turkestan* began publication in Ankara. The eight-page monthly was intended to enhance the patriotic aspirations of Eastern Turkestanian people living in Turkey. The editor-in-chief, Shekur Turan, a Uyghur and a graduate of Urumqi University, had migrated to Turkey following the occupation of Xinjiang by Chinese Communists in 1949. Another newspaper, *Eastern Turkestan*

*Youth*, appeared in June 1993 in Istanbul. Written in Uyghur, the six-page newspaper was published by and for Uyghur youth that had escaped Xinjiang since the early 1990s.<sup>64</sup> Despite China's misgivings, Turkey's sponsorship of the Eastern Turkestan cause was demonstrated yet again at the World Turkic Conference held in Antalya on March 20–23, 1993. Leading an Eastern Turkestan delegation, Alptekin told the assembly:

Most of the Turkic world is now free. The only Turkic country now under foreign domination is Eastern Turkestan. Eastern Turkestan is an indivisible part of the 150 million population of the Turkic world. The independent Turkic states should now do their utmost to support the Eastern Turkestani peoples' struggle for democracy, human rights and self-determination. Otherwise they will be responsible for the total annihilation of the Turkic peoples of Eastern Turkestan at the hands of the Chinese Communists.<sup>65</sup>

This critical statement did not deter President Özal, Prime Minister Demirel, or Vice Premier Erdal İnönü, patrons of the conference, from welcoming Alptekin. Moreover, in its final report the organizing committee declared:

The Turkic world denounces the Chinese atrocities in Eastern Turkestan. The Turkic world cannot continue to remain silent in the face of a systematic assimilation policy directed against its ethnic brothers in Eastern Turkestan. This policy could lead to serious destabilization in the area, and thus, the Turkic world must immediately start a constructive dialogue with the Chinese government to prevent the total destruction of the Turkic peoples in Eastern Turkestan.<sup>66</sup>

On May 15, 1993, the Eastern Turkestan Refugee Committee organized a Martyrs' Day observation in Istanbul to commemorate the Eastern Turkestanis who had been killed by the Chinese during the struggle for independence of "their motherland." Alptekin, then nearly ninety-three, told the audience of Turkish politicians, scholars, and journalists that a nation that does not remember, respect, and honor its martyrs has no right to independence.<sup>67</sup> The growing interest in Eastern



Turkestan and the continued arrival of refugees have given a boost to Uyghur studies in Turkey. In 1993 Sultan Mahmut Kaşgarlı, a well-known linguist who arrived in Turkey in 1985 to teach Turkic languages at the University of Istanbul, published a volume titled *Modern Uyghur Türkçesi Grameri* (Modern Uyghur Grammar), which has become the principal text for Uyghur studies in Turkey.<sup>68</sup> Students from Xinjiang newly arrived in Turkey have been supported by the ETF, whose aim was to disseminate Eastern Turkestan history and culture. In the summer of 1993 the ETF moved from a small apartment, where they had been located since 1978, to a large thirteen-room office building—which included a dormitory—allegedly offered “on loan” by the Turkish government for Xinjiang’s exiles, but more probably given by the municipality of Istanbul (undoubtedly with Ankara’s approval).<sup>69</sup> Financial support for the ETF, however, more often originates in Saudi Arabia than it does in Turkey.

To be sure, all Uyghur organizations in Turkey have been committed to achieving Eastern Turkestan independence and Uyghur cultural survival by nonviolent means. A number of more radical Eastern Turkestan groups that advocate the use of force and terrorism (primarily in Kazakhstan) have excluded themselves, or have been excluded, from the ETNC to the present. Nevertheless, by the mid-1990s the Chinese had become irritated by the Turkish tolerance, if not their sponsorship, of Uyghur “separatist” policy and hostile attitudes toward China. Ankara could no longer afford to defy Beijing’s displeasure as it had done before. In 1993, shortly after its formation, the Eastern Turkestan National Congress had to be relocated to Germany as China’s pressure on the Turkish government increased. Later, when Erdoğan was in China, he pledged not to allow the ETNC to operate on Turkish soil.<sup>70</sup>

### **China’s Pressure, Turkey’s Compliance**

By the summer of 1994 the Turkish government’s commitment to the Eastern Turkestan cause had largely eroded, primarily, although not exclusively, because of pressure from China. One reason is the immanent tension in Turkey’s identification with either the East (Asia) or the West (Europe). Unable to compete with other players in Central Asia, such as Russia, China, and Iran, nor to fulfill its vision of Great Turkey, Ankara turned yet again to Europe, somewhat losing interest in the Uyghurs. Moreover, there is an inherent friction between Ankara’s pursuit of a universalistic “Turkism” as a melting pot for the diversified

Central Asian nationalities and the Uyghurs' insistence on maintaining their unique cultural and national identity. This friction exists for other ethnicities as well. In the words of Mustafa Aydin, "It became clear that, though they shared a common Turkic origin, the Turkic peoples of Central Asia had a long sense of distinctiveness and preferred to assert their own individual identity rather than be submerged within a broader cultural and political umbrella" (Aydin 2001: 187). Or, as Dru Gladney remarked, "They did not take to Turkish society as quickly as the politicians in Ankara expected" (Gladney 2004: 184). Nonetheless, it seems that, because of their linguistic and cultural similarities, the assimilation of Uyghurs into the Turkish society is much more easily accomplished than their integration into Western Europe, North America, Japan, or Australia. Unlike in the Central Asian republics, in Turkey there are neither Uyghur schools nor Uyghur theaters; Turkish schools do not teach Uyghur history, literature, and language.<sup>71</sup> However, while many Uyghurs in Turkey no longer regard themselves as Uyghur,<sup>72</sup> their leaders certainly do.

In June 1994 Alptekin, disillusioned by the official Turkish attitude, turned to the leaders of Turkey's main opposition parties, including Bülent Eçevit of the Democratic Social Party, Necmettin Erbakan of the Welfare Party, Mesut Yılmaz of the Motherland Party, and other members of parliament. He suggested that Turkey, together with the newly independent Turkic republics, should adopt a common strategy on the question of Eastern Turkestan. Reportedly, these leaders admitted that "several factors" had caused Turkey to neglect its Eastern Turkestan policy, but it was now time to take a fresh look at the problems of Eastern Turkestan's Turkic peoples.<sup>73</sup> This noncommittal response was not what Alptekin had expected. At a press conference he organized in Istanbul on the occasion of the forty-fifth anniversary of the Chinese Communist occupation of Xinjiang (October 13, 1949), he stated:

At present our peoples at home are in a hopeless situation. They feel that the world at large is indifferent to their fate and has forgotten that they, too, are human beings, a part of the world community, and have contributed to the enrichment of world civilization. The concern of the international community for the plight of our people and support for the legitimate rights of the peoples of Eastern Turkestan

would give them renewed hope. It would also remind China that the international community cares about our peoples and will hold China accountable for their suppression.<sup>74</sup>

Sponsored by President Demirel, the Second World Turkic Friendship, Brotherhood and Co-operation Conference was held in Izmir, Turkey, between October 20 and 23, 1994. Though he failed to mention Turkey by name, Alptekin again urged the Turkic states to prevent the disappearance of the peoples of Eastern Turkestan from history and to work out a common strategy to achieve this goal.<sup>75</sup> Two Turkish professors who on December 19, 1994, appeared on a television program on Turkey's relations with the Central Asian Republics and Eastern Turkestan underlined that Eastern Turkestan had been the cradle of Turkic history and culture. In the long run, they added, Turkey could not remain indifferent to what was happening there: the threats to the cultural survival of the peoples of Eastern Turkestan posed by Chinese policies of population transfer, birth control, and sanitization of the Turkic languages must remain a concern to Turkey.<sup>76</sup> Such statements, echoing Alptekin's warnings, however, were about to end.

Known in China as Ai Sha (a Chinese transliteration of İsa), Alptekin was constantly denounced by the PRC leaders. They said that he had "never stopped his Xinjiang independence activities," that he had used any means possible to penetrate Xinjiang, and that he had threatened and opposed Chinese Communism in an effort to overthrow the socialist system. Alptekin became a well-known international figure, including in Xinjiang, largely thanks to China. As in the case of the persecuted writer Turghun Almas, the Chinese denunciations have proven counterproductive; instead of diminishing and degrading their targets they unwittingly glorify them. Still, before the mid-1990s, when Alptekin was alive and China was still confronting Uyghur separatism primarily at home, the Chinese had been reluctant to implicate Turkey. When President Demirel visited the PRC in May 1995, Eastern Turkestan and Alptekin were not mentioned, at least in public. This policy was about to change. Highly articulate, respected, and influencing Turkey's ruling elites, Alptekin had become a nuisance not only for the Chinese government, but also for the Turkish.

Shortly after Demirel's visit, as mentioned above, on July 28, 1995, a new section of Istanbul's Sultan Ahmet Park named after Alptekin was

inaugurated. The area included a memorial to the Eastern Turkestan martyrs who had lost their lives “in the struggle for independence.” Turkey’s president, prime minister, chairman of parliament, and many others participated in the event. Almost immediately the Chinese ambassador accused Turkey of interfering in the PRC’s internal affairs and pressured the Turkish Foreign Ministry to remove the park, the memorial, and the Eastern Turkestan flag; to stop all Eastern Turkestan activities in Turkey; and to deport Uyghurs from Turkey and to refuse them Turkish citizenship. Frightened of the possible consequences, the Turkish Foreign Ministry was allegedly ready to comply. Eventually, however, Turkey rejected China’s demands. “Thankfully at that time, the duty to Eastern Turkestan and its people overrode the crass meddling in Turkish internal affairs by the Chinese ambassador.”<sup>77</sup> Still, the Turkish authorities began to investigate Eastern Turkestan organizations in Istanbul about their anti-Chinese demonstrations, and thirteen Uyghur refugee intellectuals who had sought asylum in Turkey were told to leave the country. It was only under pressure from several political parties that this decision was revoked, although even then the authorities did not extend their residence permits. Almost 150 applications by Uyghurs for Turkish citizenship, submitted three years before, were still suspended.<sup>78</sup>

From September 30 to October 2, 1995, the Third World Turkic Friendship, Brotherhood and Co-operation Conference was held in Izmir, but Alptekin could no longer attend. President Demirel, still the conference’s sponsor, vaguely said that some of the Turkic peoples had now gained independence, some were semi-independent, and some were still living “under foreign domination.” The conference adopted a resolution to seek to improve the political, economic, social, and ecological situation of the peoples of Eastern Turkestan, and also approved a request by the Eastern Turkestan delegation to be officially and regularly represented at the conference.<sup>79</sup> Ten weeks later, on December 17, 1995, Alptekin died. Less known in China, he was highly respected and admired in Turkey, and not just by the Uyghurs. A legend during his own life, he became even more so after his death. In a special gesture of honor, he was buried next to the graves of former Turkish presidents Turgut Özal and Adnan Menderes, at the Topkapı Cemetery. Nevertheless, authorities in Ankara might have experienced a sigh of relief after his death, although it would not last for long. With Alptekin

gone, Beijing, now much more sensitive to Uyghur transnational activism, began to increase pressure on Turkey. Indeed, ten years later, in 2005, when Alptekin's friends wanted to hold a memorial meeting in Ankara, the mayor, bowing to Chinese demands, refused to provide a hall. Although he later apologized, no official memorial event has ever been organized.<sup>80</sup>

Needless to say, all the resolutions, statements, and comments in favor of Uyghurs made before Alptekin's death resulted in no official action. Turkey's reluctance to entirely support Eastern Turkestan independence is not merely the result of benefits conferred by Turkey's economic and military relations with China, benefits that at that time had not amounted to much anyway. In fact, its reluctance may have had little to do with China at all. It may instead have had more to do with the Kurds, another stateless people that, much like the Uyghurs, have been steadfastly seeking independence, yet in this case from Turkey. The equation was simple: Ankara could by no means encourage self-determination, and least of all independence, for Uyghurs while denying it to the Kurds. China was quick to capitalize on Turkey's dilemma (Kuang and Chen 1995: 19–24). Occasionally deploring the “tragedy” of the Kurdish national movement, Chinese studies expressed sympathy toward the Kurds while still defining them as “separatist” (Pan 1999: 89–91).<sup>81</sup> In an attempt to twist

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Ankara's arm, the Chinese used the analogy between Uyghur and Kurdish separatism, implicitly threatening that if Turkey were to continue to support the Uyghurs, then Beijing would support the Kurds. When President Jiang Zemin visited Turkey in April 2000, he alluded to the Kurds, commenting that both countries had to protect national unity and territorial integrity and that both must oppose all kinds of international terrorism, national separatism, and religious extremism.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, China has begun to form relations with the Kurds in northern Iraq, a policy that reflects genuine Chinese economic and strategic (oil) interests in the region but that also sends a warning to Ankara (Shichor 2006: 3–6).

In early November 1996, Qiao Shi, then the chairman of China's National People's Congress (NPC), raised the issue of Eastern Turkestan in his talks with his Turkish counterpart Mustafa Kalemli in Ankara. He reiterated China's "strong opposition" to the attempts by some "national separatists" in "foreign countries" to separate Xinjiang from China and expressed Beijing's gratitude to the Turkish government for pursuing a policy of not interfering in China's internal affairs.<sup>83</sup> However, Turkish citizens visiting China have been put on a watch list. The PRC has also been closely watching the situation in Turkey through the Third Bureau (military attachés) of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) General Staff Second Department (military intelligence). The station in Turkey has been one of the most important, and presumably one of the most active, of all the Third Bureau stations (Eftimiades 1994: 81).<sup>84</sup> China has been engaged not only in collecting political and military intelligence in Turkey, but also in infiltrating Uyghur organizations through moles and sleepers. This is one of the most serious problems Uyghur organizations face (and not just in Turkey): how to expose those collaborating with China. Uncertainty and suspicions about Uyghur activists—some of them high-ranking—often lead Eastern Turkestan organizations to paralysis and passivity, which is exactly what Beijing wants.

Ankara's revised policy on Uyghurs was tested in February 1997, following violent riots in Yining (Ghulja), Xinjiang, riots that reportedly left many dead and wounded.<sup>85</sup> Hundreds of angry Uyghur demonstrators accompanied by Turkish right-wing nationalists gathered in front of the PRC consulate in Istanbul, screaming anti-Chinese slogans, denouncing Beijing's "policy of oppression against Muslims," and burning PRC flags. Three Uyghur-Turkish associations sent a letter to Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan—who three years earlier had indicated unwillingness to do something—urging him to take steps to support their community in Xinjiang. The Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman said that they had been following the situation closely but that "facts must first be understood." Chinese diplomats protested against the demonstrations and called upon the Turkish authorities to take more effective security measures around Chinese facilities in Turkey.<sup>86</sup>

In fact, in all cases the police stopped the (peaceful) demonstrators and forced them to disperse. The Foreign Ministry spokesman apologized to China for the burning of the Chinese flag. He nonetheless

added that Turkey would maintain its “*interest* in the people of the Xinjiang region, given the cultural links between the Turkish people and ethnic Uyghurs,” and that he hoped for a “speedy return of peace and calm to the region” (author’s emphasis). This, however, was not enough to appease the Chinese. The Foreign Ministry also announced that Xinjiang is a part of China, claiming that Turkey attached great importance to China’s territorial integrity and urging “those concerned” to show moderation and common sense to prevent escalation of the incidents.<sup>87</sup>

Turkish defense minister Turhan Tayan also told the parliament, “We have asked the People’s Republic of China to act with prudence” regarding the unrest in Xinjiang, adding, “We have told them that many living there are our relatives and that we will always be interested in those people’s welfare.” He went on, “Our government is, and will continue to be sensitive over the plight of our Turkic and Moslem

brothers throughout the world.”<sup>88</sup> In response, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson warned Turkey to stop interfering: “The affairs of Xinjiang are purely China’s internal affairs. There is no need for others to make any irresponsible remarks about this.”<sup>89</sup> Moreover, Beijing later condemned “East Turkestan terrorists”

not only for burning the PRC’s national flag, but also for “opening fire” on its Ankara embassy in March 1997 and for “attacking” the Chinese consulate general in Istanbul.<sup>90</sup> Still, on December 10, 1997, World Human Rights Day, Uyghurs demonstrated in Istanbul’s Taksim Square, afterward holding a conference exposing human rights violations in Xinjiang.<sup>91</sup>

Concerned about the effects of increased Uyghur activism in their country, as well as the Chinese response, Turkish authorities and police began to intercept, detain, and eventually forbid Uyghur protest demonstrations directed against the PRC diplomatic missions in Turkey. Consequently, Turkish government officials told Uyghur leaders not to hold any demonstration against China in February 1998, on the eve of Foreign Minister İsmail Cem’s visit to the PRC, a year after the Yining incident. Nevertheless, Uyghurs continued to hold demon-

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*a Chinese Foreign Ministry  
spokesperson warned  
Turkey to stop interfering*

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strations in Istanbul.<sup>92</sup> Ordering extensive security measures, the police dispersed the demonstrators without any incident (though Beijing later said that on March 5, 1998, Eastern Turkestan terrorists “launched a bomb attack against the Chinese Consulate-General in Istanbul”).<sup>93</sup> Following his return from an official visit to Beijing a few months later, Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Eçevit said that Jiang Zemin had admitted China’s unease about the demonstrations. By his own account, Eçevit replied to the PRC president that, beyond taking certain measures, Turkey could not prevent such demonstrations and that they should not be exaggerated. He added to his Turkish audience that if certain circles—even if they were marginal groups—were to insist on keeping Eastern Turkestan on the agenda, then the Muslims in Xinjiang could be placed in a difficult situation.<sup>94</sup>

Still, the Turkish government would take further measures to appease the Chinese. A few days later the Turks decided that, based on a bill passed by the Turkish parliament in February 1998, Uyghurs newly arrived from China would be granted permanent residence instead of citizenship, the latter entailing full rights and duties. Uyghurs could legally live and work in Turkey but they could not join the armed forces or government organizations. Applied mainly to about one thousand refugees who had escaped Xinjiang but had not yet been granted citizenship, the new regulation resulted in a considerable deterioration in the Uyghur’s status, as they regarded permanent residence a certificate for “second-class citizens.”<sup>95</sup> Orhan Arslan, deputy leader of the rightist Great Unity Party (BBP), criticized the government for not pursuing a courageous policy aimed at eliminating or reducing the oppression of Uyghur Turks in Xinjiang, or guarding their legal rights.<sup>96</sup> At the conclusion of the Second World Conference of Uyghur Youths (December 16, 1998), some three hundred representatives of Xinjiang dissident groups pledged to do their best to oppose mainland Chinese “imperialist rule” in Xinjiang, as well as to strive for its independence “in a more active way.”<sup>97</sup> This, however, was not what Ankara had in mind.

In fact, Ankara continued to kowtow to Beijing’s pressure. On December 28, 1998, Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz released a secret directive saying that Eastern Turkestan was part of the PRC under the name of Xinjiang and that “it is out of question to open this issue for discussion.” The directive added that the activities of the foundations and the associations established by immigrants from Eastern Turkestan



had made the Chinese government very uneasy. Consequently, ministers and officials were prohibited in the future from participating in Eastern Turkestan meetings, and the hanging of its flags in such meetings was no longer allowed, nor was any act that “would annoy China.”<sup>98</sup> This was probably a response to China’s voting for Greece over the issue of Cyprus in the UN Security Council.<sup>99</sup>

When Li Peng, NPC chairman and former Chinese prime minister, visited Turkey in April 1999, the Xinjiang issue came up in the talks. Turkish president Demirel was quoted as saying that the Turkish government opposed any separatist activities and other terrorist activities targeting China. Saying that Turkey was fully aware that this was a sensitive issue for the Chinese people, he promised to handle it properly. He pointed out that the small number of anti-China separatists had never represented the policies of the Turkish government.<sup>100</sup> Back home, Li Peng was more outspoken. He said that the cause of the so-called “East Turkestan” issue had been the escape of a small number of people from Xinjiang into Turkey “some time ago”; they had formed a small ethnic separatist force there, resorted to violence and terror, and had threatened to establish a country named “Eastern Turkestan.” He concluded that Turkey did not want to see the “Eastern Turkestan” issue become a barrier to the development of friendly Turkish-Chinese relations.<sup>101</sup> A Chinese military attaché in Germany disclosed that Beijing had identified some twenty organizations in Turkey that upheld Eastern Turkestan independence, of which three were “terrorist organizations” engaged in armed struggle in China and in smuggling weapons and military equipment. One of their main functions was to provide shelter to escaping terrorists.<sup>102</sup>

### **Bait in Beijing’s Trap**

#### *Economic Relations*

Indeed, as the twentieth century was drawing to a close, Beijing tried to improve its relations with Turkey not only to promote important bilateral exchanges (mostly economic and military), but also, and perhaps primarily, in order to use those relations as a lever to further proscribe (implicitly, if not explicitly) Uyghur activists in Turkey. A look at the statistics demonstrates China’s formidable economic drive, which has transformed Sino-Turkish trade patterns dramatically since the 1990s. Turkey’s exports to China—valued at around U.S.\$500 million in

1993—declined considerably afterward, reaching as low as U.S.\$37 million in 1999. They began to pick up again, reaching U.S.\$500 million in 2003, and were up to about U.S.\$700 million in 2006, about 40 percent higher than they were in 1993. By 2007 Turkey had increased its exports to China by nearly 50 percent, to more than one billion dollars, and by 2008 they had increased by another 38 percent, to U.S.\$1.437 billion. Yet the Chinese achievements have been considerably more impressive. In 1993 the value of China's exports to Turkey stood at about U.S.\$250 million, half of Turkey's exports to China in that year. Yet in 2006 China's exports to Turkey reached U.S.\$9.657 billion, or nearly U.S.\$9 billion surplus. By 2007 China's exports to Turkey had increased by 37 percent, reaching U.S.\$13.234 billion, and by 2008 they had increased by an additional 18 percent, to U.S.\$15.658 billion, nearly eleven times the Turkish exports to China, leading to a Turkish deficit of more than U.S.\$14.2 billion. In 2000 China ranked twelfth as an exporter to Turkey; since 2006 China has ranked third, following Russia and Germany. Imports from Russia increased by 105 percent from 2000 to 2006; imports from Germany by 350 percent; yet from China by 618 percent. China accounted for 6.9 percent of Turkey's imports in 2006, reaching 7.8 percent in 2008 (see Table 1, which reflects substantial differences between the Chinese and Turkish data).

Not only Ankara but Beijing as well has been consistently aware of, and concerned about, the unbalanced trade turnover, an issue that has come up in almost every meeting. When Vice Premier Zhu Rongji visited Turkey in April 2002, he commented, "China attaches great importance to Turkey's trade deficit with China and is working hard to take measures to increase imports from Turkey."<sup>103</sup> Turkish trade circles explained that while Turkey exports raw materials to China, the Chinese place customs duties on manufactured products from Turkey. "Accordingly," said Kürşad Tüzmen, the Turkish minister responsible for foreign trade, "we cannot sell much to China. We must find ways to sell more to China. At a time when our exports are increasing rapidly,

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***By 2007 China's exports  
to Turkey...[were]  
nearly eleven times the  
Turkish exports to China***

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Year	Exports to China		Imports from China	
	Chinese Data	Turkish Data	Chinese Data	Turkish Data
1993	498	512	166	254
1994	464	355	184	258
1995	144	67	431	539
1996	95	68	408	635
1997	65	44	607	787
1998	43	38	659	846
1999	47	37	636	895
2000	127	96	1,078	1,345
2001	231	199	676	926
2002	289	268	1,089	1,368
2003	533	505	2,065	2,610
2004	591	392	2,822	4,464
2005	633	550	4,252	6,868
2006	765	693	7,307	9,657
2007	1,292	1,039	10,476	13,234
2008		1,437		15,658

Source: International Monetary Fund, *Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook 2000*, pp. 164, 459; 2007, pp. 131, 483; *Turkish Statistical Yearbook 2008*; *China Statistical Yearbook, 2008*.

why can't we sell to China?"<sup>104</sup> All attempts to close this gap, however, have failed. In fact, the gap has now increased.

The outcome for certain sectors of the Turkish economy has been disastrous. Late in 2004 Turkey decided to adopt safeguards and limit the import of forty-two kinds of Chinese textiles, saying they had "disturbed the market." Ankara also began to levy a 50 percent antidumping tax against the import of Chinese-made electronic products such as color televisions and air conditioners. Turkish industrialists and businessmen pointed out, "We face deadly competition from China that has already hit our textile sector."<sup>105</sup> A senior Chinese official expressed "deep concern," adding that China's textile industry is "dissatisfied."<sup>106</sup>

Later, using a tougher tone, Beijing said that Ankara's textile proposal submitted to the WTO, which had abolished textile quotas in January, was one-sided and unacceptable. It was reported that "Turkey was attempting to make China a scapegoat by using dubious figures and hasty generalizations."<sup>107</sup>

Still, in early 2006 *Milli Gazete* published a front-page report headlined "Textile Sector Cries for Help." Deploring that the textile industry, "the flagship of the Turkish economy," was going through a major recession, it blamed, among other problems, the "pressure" caused by Chinese products.<sup>108</sup> A poll reportedly conducted earlier by the Ankara chamber of commerce revealed that twenty-five sectors of the Turkish economy were overflowing with Chinese products; some 80 percent of the ready-made garments and toys industry were dominated by Chinese products, and 100 percent of leather goods manufacturing were under Chinese control.<sup>109</sup> Whereas these sectors had been "conquered" by Chinese products, others had been greatly affected. The poll claimed that in addition to official imports from China there was a huge quantity of *unofficial* imports, which resulted in "unjust competition" in Turkey. According to the report, "It is now possible to import bicycles at a cost of 1.8 dollars a piece from China." China's trade penetration had reached such proportions that "each ship full of Chinese products that docks at the Turkish ports [was] causing the closure of a Turkish factory." Turkey's deficit in its China trade has been reduced in the last couple of years in relative terms, but it has increased quite substantially in absolute terms, as shown in the table above.<sup>110</sup>

Mehmet Ögütçü, a former Turkish diplomat who served in the Turkish embassy in Beijing from 1989 to 1992, and a China watcher,<sup>111</sup> has always emphasized the paramount importance of economic (and political) relations between Turkey and the PRC, adding that Uyghur separatism could undermine these relations:

A constant irritant in bilateral relations between Turkey and China is the separatist activities of the Turkic and Muslim minorities in China's Xinjiang region, known as "Eastern Turkestan." It is important to reinforce the political atmosphere of mutual trust between Turkey and China through constant dialogue in order to avoid any misunderstanding of Turkey's cultural and economic interests in Xinjiang. During his meeting in Beijing last year [May 1998] with

the then Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Eçevit, Chinese President Jiang Zemin, complaining about the activities in Turkey of Uyghur separatists, warned that Beijing may take a stronger stance against Turkey “if the issue continues to be a political problem between Turkey and China.” In fact, better relations between Turkey and China may help improve the presently tense situation and undercut political or logistical support for separatism in Xinjiang.<sup>112</sup>

Still, it is unlikely that China’s economic relations with Turkey have been affected by concern about Uyghurs or separatism, or even by Turkey itself. Beijing considers Turkey less a terminal than a gateway to Europe, the European Union (EU), and the Europe Free Trade Association, which has free trade agreements with Turkey. Beijing believes that since Turkey cannot fulfill its export quotas (because it cannot match its goods and external markets), China could stick local trademarks and labels on Chinese

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***it is unlikely that...  
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goods produced in Turkey and thereby gain access to the European market and avoid the tariffs and quotas applied by the United States and the EU to direct exports from China.<sup>113</sup> In addition, by 2008 Turkey had become China’s third largest overseas project contractor.<sup>114</sup>

#### *Military Relations*

In recent years Sino-Turkish relations have involved security and military cooperation for the first time. Military relations between the two states by no means “remain limited to the realm of military personnel exchanges,” as some assume (Daly 2007). Military explorations began in the first half of the 1990s, after Ankara’s negotiations with Washington for the joint production and technology transfer of the M-270 MLRS (Multiple Launch Rocket System) had failed. Washington criticized Ankara for using U.S.-supplied weapons for

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human rights abuses; restricted arms sales to Turkey; and cut off grants and loans offered earlier to Turkey for arms acquisitions from the United States. As in other cases of arms embargos that have been counterproductive, Ankara had no other option than to develop its military industry independently and to look elsewhere for arms and military technology.

In 1997 Turkey for the first time signed an arms deal with China for the acquisition of twenty-four WS-1 302mm unguided rockets, as well as 144 rockets for assembly in Turkey, to be supplied between 1998 and 2000. Using Chinese technology, Turkey began to produce under license the TR-300 rockets (or T-302, upgraded from the Chinese four-barrel WS-1B MLRS), called in Turkish the *Kasırga* (tornado). It is considered to be more advanced than the Chinese rocket. In late 1998, based on a similar contract signed with China Precision Machinery Import-Export Corporation, the Turkish Army ordered fifteen of China's most advanced short-range surface-to-surface missiles, the B-611, and began to license produce over two hundred missiles for more than U.S.\$300 million. The first missiles were probably deployed as early as 2001, although there are doubts if the Turkish Army acquired any of them. Shrouded in secrecy and disinformation, the project was called J-600T, and the missile, Turkish designation *Yıldırım* (thunderbolt), was reported by Turkey to the *UN Register of Conventional Arms* in March 2007; it was first displayed during a Victory Day parade in Ankara on August 30, 2007. The B-611 had been designed as a replacement of the Chinese DF-11 (M-7 or CSS-7) short-range ballistic missile. Allegedly developed jointly by Turkey's Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey, Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation, and China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation, it is a short-range, ground-based, solid-fuelled ballistic missile system. Its production is undertaken by the Turkish firm Roketsan (Roket Sanayii ve Ticaret, or Missiles [Rockets] Industries and Trade).<sup>115</sup>

Nevertheless, China is a marginal military supplier to Turkey. Excluding the yet unconfirmed U.S.\$300 million deal for the B-611, the value of the PRC arms transfers to Turkey between

1998 and 2007 is estimated at a meager U.S.\$39 million, less than 1 percent of Turkey's total arms acquisitions in that period, or about 7 percent

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***China is a marginal  
military supplier to Turkey***

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*including* the deal.<sup>116</sup> In addition, China's HQ-9 air defense system is among the competitors in the Turkish bid for the supply of advanced surface-to-air missile systems, with potential capabilities against ballistic missiles.<sup>117</sup> It is possible that Roketsan may have received Chinese support also in developing its air-to-surface missile Cirit (pronounced *jereed*, meaning javelin, or spear), which derives from the TY-90 (Tianyan, meaning "heavenly swallow"), made by China's Northern Industries Corporation.<sup>118</sup> Yet Sino-Turkish military cooperation has not been limited to missiles. Another facet of it emerged in 2005 when the two countries reportedly upgraded the FMC [BAE]-Nurol Defense Systems Inc. (FNSS) ACV-SW (Armored Combat Vehicle) chassis by adding a BMP3 turret on it. The Turkish army operates a total of 2,500 upgraded Infantry Fighting Vehicles, which the FNSS intended to export (primarily to the United Arab Emirates).<sup>119</sup>

Most important, or, from a Uyghur perspective, dangerous, has been Sino-Turkish cooperation in the struggle against "terrorism." A first step in this direction was taken when the Turkish army deputy chief of staff signed a Sino-Turkish military training and cooperation protocol on May 28, 1999, during his visit to China.<sup>120</sup> Challenged by occasional Uyghur demonstrations and even acts of violence against Chinese staying in Turkey, in October 1999 the Turkish police arrested ten members of a group called the Eastern Turkestan Liberation Organization following a series of violent attacks on people of Chinese origin in Turkey. According to Chinese sources, it had been formed by Mehmet Emin Hazret, a Uyghur from Khotan Prefecture in Xinjiang, who escaped to Turkey in 1989 and set up the Eastern Turkestan Liberation Organization in 1996.<sup>121</sup> Its attacks had allegedly paved the way for the first Sino-Turkish security cooperation agreement, signed on February 14, 2000. Among other things, it facilitated public security coordination between the two countries and stressed that measures would be taken against separatist activities targeting the territorial integrity of both Turkey and the PRC. Reportedly, the Uyghur issue was evaluated within the scope of the struggle against terrorism. Moreover, the Turkish interior minister (who signed the accord in Beijing) stated that "his country will never tolerate any form of anti-China activities or terrorism in Turkey."<sup>122</sup> Built up patiently over a number of years, Beijing's pressure on Turkey culminated when PRC president Jiang Zemin visited Turkey from April 18 to 21, 2000.

*Political Relations*

In an interview held on the eve of his visit, Jiang Zemin paid tribute to Turkey's role in the world. Alluding to the Shanghai Five, known since 2001 as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, or SCO, he reminded the interviewer that "China and the Central Asian republics have all announced their opposition to all forms of organizations that will harm each other's sovereignty, security, and their societies' ways of life,"<sup>123</sup> hinting that Turkey was expected to do the same with regard to NATO. He implicitly warned Turkish leaders of the dangers of fanning a Uyghur uprising. His forthcoming visit generated a good deal of concern among Turkish officials. They wished to downplay the Eastern Turkestan issue, all the more so since the Chinese Foreign Ministry had indicated that comments about Xinjiang, Uyghurs, separatism, and especially Eastern Turkestan would be regarded as interference in China's internal affairs and would be condemned as such. The Turkish press admitted that "the support given to [separatist] currents by Uyghur nongovernmental organizations in Turkey has occasionally created tension in relations between the two countries."<sup>124</sup> Grudgingly, the media appeared to welcome the forthcoming improvement of relations between China and Turkey:

However, the fact that our kinsmen in East Turkestan are living under the threat of racism creates a sour situation. Ankara has to follow a "fine tuned" policy, one which is neither provocative nor in neglect of the situation our kinsmen are coping with. ... We must remember our kinsmen in Eastern Turkistan.<sup>125</sup>

Many people in Turkey, and especially the coalition rightist Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, or MHP), regard China's occupation of the mostly Turkic-populated Xinjiang as illegal. Until the eve of the visit, MHP ministers had objected to the awarding of a medal to the PRC president (conditioned only by a unanimous vote), underscoring that China was operating a repressive regime in Eastern Turkestan or Uyghuristan. Decorating Jiang Zemin, said the columnist

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and researcher İbrahim Karagül in *Yeni Şafak* (New Dawn) on April 14, 2000, appeared like rewarding the “holocaust” that was taking place in Eastern Turkestan.<sup>126</sup> In an interview on the first day of Jiang Zemin’s visit, an MHP minister provocatively said that “calling this region Xinjiang by the Chinese is just an attempt to falsify historical facts.” The state minister Professor Abdulhaluk Çay, who was in charge of relations with Turkic communities abroad as well as MHP vice president, however, finally had to submit:

We have to pursue realistic policies. If giving the medal to the Chinese president is in the interest of Turkey, then we will accept that. We have accepted it. But that does not mean that we have changed our mind about Eastern Turkestan. We will convey our message in a friendly atmosphere during our bilateral meetings.<sup>127</sup>

Indeed, the MHP decided to withdraw its objection on the condition that this issue would be raised in all discussions with the Chinese, a demand reinforced by Turkish human rights organizations and Uyghur associations. Indirectly, and showing an interest in appeasement, President Demirel raised the issue of the Uyghurs twice. A Turkish diplomat who had taken part in the meetings reiterated Demirel’s message:

We told them [the Uyghurs] that they should be loyal citizens of China and live in peace and harmony. We also expressed our support for the territorial integrity of China and assured them [the Chinese] that we have no intention of interfering in its internal affairs. We have racial, linguistic and religious links with the Uyghurs and want them to provide a bridge of friendship between Turkey and China.<sup>128</sup>

In their joint statement the two presidents declared that their countries would fight against international terrorism, separatism, and ultra-religious fundamentalism—the same terms agreed upon and used by the SCO. For the Chinese this has been a great achievement. Both presidents agreed that curbing separatism and banning activities promoting “Xinjiang independence” were vital for stability in the region. Alluding to the Kurdish issue, President Jiang Zemin stressed that both countries are faced with the task of protecting national unity and territorial

integrity and both oppose all kinds of international terrorism, national separatism, and religious extremism.<sup>129</sup> The visit produced an Economic Cooperation Agreement in the fields of foreign trade, joint investment, transportation, tourism, energy, the defense industry, and security. The Uyghur issue, however, has remain unsettled.

### **Conclusion: The Limits of China's Ethno-Diplomacy**

The increased political, economic, and military relations between the two countries have created important incentives for Ankara to cooperate with Beijing, as well as created leverage that Beijing could use to gain Ankara's compliance.<sup>130</sup> Apparently, Ankara has quietly submitted to Beijing's demands, at the expense of Uyghur nationalism. In early September 2000, Sabahattin Çakmakoglu, Turkish minister of national defense, provided an example of the link between the Uyghur issue and relations with China. Before leaving on an official visit to China he responded to a journalist's comment that a number of Turkish civil servants got involved in "fundamentalist" activities:

We are not able to disclose the figure. However, I can't think it is an important figure. It is possible that there may be those among civil servants who got involved in separatism and fundamentalist activities. When evidences are found, required procedure will be followed.<sup>131</sup>

During his visit, which improved Sino-Turkish military relations, a PLA truck exploded in Urumqi, killing more than sixty people and wounding many more. Officially reported as an accident and not as an Eastern Turkestan terrorist act as some had speculated, China used the occasion to urge Turkey to help fight separatism in Xinjiang.<sup>132</sup> Çakmakoglu had managed to avoid this issue while visiting China, but after his return an article in *Akit* (Contract) on October 12, 2000, harshly condemned "the disgraceful policy" practiced by the world, Washington, and Ankara, all of which were closing their eyes and remaining quiet about the "genocide" carried out by Communist China in Eastern Turkestan. "Cultural Genocide in the Turkish World and Eastern Turkestan" was the title of an academic meeting held at city hall in Zeytinburnu, a typical Uyghur neighborhood in Istanbul on February 24, 2001. Indeed, Turkey's inability or unwillingness to withstand China's pressure is probably one of the main reasons why the

focus of Uyghur international activism and its pursuit of Eastern Turkestan independence have relocated to Western Europe and North America. The Chinese are undoubtedly aware of this change. Referring to the Eastern Turkestan independence forces, Professor Yang Shu of Lanzhou University claimed that “these *terrorists* were concentrated in Central Asia, [and] some others were active in Germany and Italy, whereas we traditionally thought they would choose Turkey to be the place for their activities. Now the concept has *somewhat* changed” (emphases added).<sup>133</sup> This was two months after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Despite Ankara’s compliance with most of China’s demands, Beijing has remained concerned about Eastern Turkestan activism in general and about its Turkish connection in particular, all the more so after September 11, 2001. Eastern Turkestan activism that Beijing had in the past *occasionally* associated with terrorism was now *constantly* identified as such.<sup>134</sup> The American-led antiterrorist crusade has provided Beijing with fresh ammunition and opportunity not only to further suppress Uyghur opponents at home, but also to further intimidate their proponents abroad, particularly in Turkey. Specializing in issues of separatism and divided nations, Zhang Zirong, a lecturer at Beijing University’s Institute of Political Science, said bluntly, “If Afghanistan should not harbor Osama Bin Laden, then Turkey should not harbor anti-China, pan-Turkism organizations that resort to terrorist means to draw public attention.” Du Ren, whose paper “On Pan-Turkism” details the link between Turkey and Xinjiang’s separatism, accused Ankara of exploiting the power vacuum created in Central Asia after the Soviet disintegration to revive its pan-Turkic ambitions.<sup>135</sup>

Though pan-Turkism has not been directly associated with Turkey (and definitely has not been in the Chinese language, as described above), Turkey has been implicated in the movement not only in the English usage but also in Beijing’s mind. Occasionally Beijing has displayed some concern about Turkish statements—made essentially for domestic consumption—insinuating that the disintegration of the Soviet Union provided an opportunity for “the rebirth of the Turkic world from the Adriatic to China.” To be sure, pan-Turkism is primarily associated with small right-wing ultra-nationalist and anti-Communist radical parties that command a fraction of the Turkish electorate. It by no means enjoys widespread public support or official

sanction (Sezer 1996: 87). Nevertheless, to this day Beijing considers Turkey the political and cultural epicenter of pan-Turkism. According to Zhao Linglin, “Turkey then is the main base for modern pan-Islamic and pan-Turkish thinking, and its influence over Central Asia cannot be underestimated. ... The West can find great use for Turkey’s pan-Turkism to jointly expand forces in the Central Asian region.”<sup>136</sup> As mentioned above, numerous articles and books on pan-Turkism have been published in China over the years; without exception, they are all critical of and hostile toward Turkey. Beijing *appears* to be very concerned about pan-Turkism, although it is unlikely that it is actually as concerned as it seems. Similarly, it is unlikely that Beijing is actually concerned about Turkey.

On April 15, 2002, China’s prime minister, Zhu Rongji, accompanied by Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, began an official visit to Turkey. His visit, as well as President Jiang Zemin’s visit precisely two years earlier and many others, reflect the growing Chinese concern about Turkey since the mid-1990s. A few days before his visit the Chinese had indicated that his discussions in Ankara would cover “the fight against separatism and terrorism, including the fight against East Turkestan terrorism.”<sup>137</sup> Now couched in terms of the international fight against terrorism, and in light of the U.S. offensive in Afghanistan, Beijing had upgraded its crusade against the Uyghurs, and its veiled pressure on Turkey. At the start of the visit, Uyghur demonstrators led by Seyit Tümtürk, secretary-general of the Eastern Turkestan Culture and Solidarity Association, convened at Güvenpark, Ankara. They condemned China’s violation of human rights and urged the Turkish government to deal with this issue during Zhu’s visit.

Rejecting these appeals, Turkish prime minister Bülent Eçevit boldly reiterated that his government would step up the restrictions on the activities of “Eastern Turkestan” elements in the country and would not support terrorism. He then underlined Turkey’s commitment to the PRC territorial integrity and added that the “Turkish kinsmen” in Xinjiang constitute a “friendship bridge” between the two countries. Asked whether Uyghur separatists should be placed on international

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***Beijing considers Turkey  
the political and cultural  
epicenter of pan-Turkism***

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terrorist lists, Eçevit refused to be specific. Prime Minister Zhu responded that China appreciated Turkey's attitude on Eastern Turkestan, especially its repeated emphasis that Xinjiang is a part of the PRC, and its concrete measures to restrict the anti-Chinese separatist activities by "Eastern Turkestan" elements in Turkey. He added that East Turkestan elements, some of whom had received military training in Afghanistan and are now sought by the United States and the coalition forces, are still engaged in anti-Chinese separatist activities and are looking for new bases in various countries, including Turkey. He said that the joint fight against "East Turkestan" elements conforms to the two countries' fundamental interests in safeguarding security and stability: "We hope that China and Turkey will cooperate more closely and work together to prevent the 'Eastern Turkestan' terrorists from damaging Sino-Turkish ties." Before leaving he invited Turkish businessmen to visit Xinjiang, surprising his hosts.<sup>138</sup>

On May 26, soon after he returned, Zhu Rongji welcomed his first official Turkish guest. Deputy Prime Minister Devlet Bahçeli was the first high-level Turkish official to visit Xinjiang. Leader of the MHP, he has always stood for the independence of Eastern Turkestan.<sup>139</sup> Now, visiting Urumqi with a different political and geographical perspective, he stated that regional people, particularly the Uyghurs, can play the role of a bridge between China and Turkey: "There is kinship between the ethnic groups in the region and Turkish people. Their language, religion, culture and origins are common." He added that the Turkish people expect Uyghurs to protect their own culture, to live in prosperity, and to play an active role in the bilateral relations. "We wish Turkish businessmen to take part in the project [developing the West] and to have a role in the

development of Xinjiang Autonomous Region. We encourage initiatives to this end. The contacts between the business circles in Turkey and Xinjiang Autonomous Region will strengthen in this way."<sup>140</sup>

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*many Uyghurs in  
Turkey...have business  
relations with China*

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As a matter of fact, many Uyghurs in Turkey, including some involved in Eastern Turkestan nationalism, do have

business relations with China in general, and with Xinjiang in particular. Beijing not only approves of these relations but often encourages

them in order to create rifts in the Uyghur nationalist movement.<sup>141</sup> Still, the outcome of China's policy has been disappointing both politically and economically. In 2006 the share of Turkey's trade turnover with China reached no more than .46 percent of China's total trade turnover (it reached .54 percent in 2007). One would have expected that much of Turkey's China trade would be carried out with Xinjiang, yet Xinjiang's share in Turkey's trade with China is negligible (.06 percent in 2006 and .1 percent in 2007). Turkey's share in Xinjiang's trade turnover is similarly minute: .06 percent in 2006 and .08 percent in 2007. If the Uyghurs are supposed to provide a bridge to China and to Xinjiang, it is very narrow and shaky, if it exists at all.<sup>142</sup>

Since 2008, however, it has become clear that Ankara, although limiting certain aspects of Uyghur activism in Turkey, still allows anti-Chinese demonstrations, publications, and meetings with officials. Although many of these activities are officially forbidden by law, individuals in the Turkish police occasionally, and unofficially, identify with the Uyghur demonstrators, turn a blind eye, and show lenience toward perpetrators. On June 12, 2003, for example, a meeting was held in Ankara to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Uyghurs' arrival in Turkey. Despite earlier Chinese embassy protests, four hundred participants, including some from Central Asia, gathered in a hall, while 1,500 remained outside for lack of space.<sup>143</sup> An interesting example of Turkey's tolerance toward Uyghurs is the Eastern Turkestan government-in-exile, established in Washington, D.C., in mid-September 2004. Elected minister of information and tourism, İsmail Cengiz (chairman of the East Turkestan Solidarity Association in Turkey) contacted the media (including television, radio, and newspapers). The next day the Chinese called the Turkish Foreign Ministry and asked for clarifications. They replied that Turkey had nothing to do with the Eastern Turkestan government-in-exile; although some of its "ministers" were Turkish citizens, their participation in the government was a private matter.<sup>144</sup> Still, when Ahmet Igamberdi, former president of the Australia Turkestan Association and "president" of the government-in-exile, arrived in Turkey, he was not allowed to enter. Otherwise, regular Eastern Turkestan activities in Turkey continue.

On April 3, 2008, East Turkestani organizations held a demonstration in Istanbul during the Beijing Olympics torch relay ceremony. About

one thousand Uyghur and Turkish people reportedly attended, despite the Turkish police's attempts to block the demonstrators using heavy security measures. Some Uyghur youth were taken away by the police for shouting "Freedom for East Turkistan" and holding "East Turkistan" flags, but they may have been released later. These demonstrations, and the continued existence and activities of a number of East Turkestani organizations,<sup>145</sup> including the World Uyghur Congress and the Eastern Turkestan government-in-exile, indicate that Turkey is still one of the

most important shelters for Eastern Turkestan nationalism. Unlike some Central Asian and even Western European governments, Ankara has never extradited Uyghurs to China, although people holding Turkish passports have been implicated in "anti-Chinese terrorist acts" in Central Asia, and although the Chinese supply Ankara with names of Uyghur activists in Turkey. To be sure, China still sus-

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***China still suspects  
that Turkey may be hiding,  
if not protecting,  
Uyghur "terrorists."***

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pects that Turkey may be hiding, if not protecting, Uyghur "terrorists." On October 20, 2008, China's Ministry of Public Security revealed the names of eight Uyghur Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement militants charged with attempts to sabotage the Olympic Games. The report linked them to "a South Asian country" (presumably Pakistan) and to "a certain Middle East country" (presumably Turkey).<sup>146</sup>

Ostensibly, Beijing's ethno-diplomacy and the pressure applied on Ankara to curb the activities of Eastern Turkestan organizations have proved successful. The freedom of action and the explicit support granted to Uyghur migrants in Turkey have become considerably limited, forcing some of them to "escape" yet again to countries beyond Beijing's reach. However, in practice and in a retrospective view, Beijing's policy has been not only ineffective but also counterproductive. For one thing, China's reaction has contributed to advertising and spotlighting the Eastern Turkestan cause—little known until China began its anti-Uyghur offensive—on a global scale, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. For another, Chinese pressure on Turkey has led to the creation of alternative Uyghur bases in Western Europe and North America, where Beijing's influence is much more limited and where

freedom of action and speech is much more pronounced. Also, the wholesale Chinese attack on Uyghurs, which confuses culture with politics, has tended to consolidate Turkish public opinion and the media in favor of the Uyghurs. Beijing has been insensitive to the fact that Turkey could not but remain committed to the Uyghurs and to Eastern Turkestan nationalism, at least implicitly—not necessarily in terms of separatism and the pursuit of national independence, but more in terms of preserving Uyghur cultural identity. The Chinese have also failed to appreciate the fragility of Turkish politics and the weakness of the system in dealing with Eastern Turkestan. China's mistake—very much in Mao's style—has been to perceive the Eastern Turkestan situation and personalities in dogmatic, monochromatic, and universalistic terms rather than in pragmatic, multicolor, and particularistic terms, without being aware of shades and distinctions. Now, with the increased U.S. presence in Central Asia and the Middle East, Beijing's ethno-diplomacy could become even less effective.

In fact, it is quite likely that Beijing is smart enough to realize that Uyghurs, either inside China or, more likely, outside of it, in no way represent an existential threat, as Chinese propaganda occasionally portrays them. At worst they are nothing more than a marginal nuisance that Beijing could easily manage. Still, the Uyghur issue is high on the Chinese agenda for two primary reasons: first, because they regard Uyghur nationalism as a potential, if not an actual, threat; and second, because they can make good use of this issue to promote their own relations with those countries that provide a shelter for Uyghurs, primarily Turkey and Central Asian countries. In other words, Uyghurs serve as a bargaining chip to intimidate and manipulate, if not to blackmail, these countries. To be fair, however, Ankara itself may have been playing the Uyghur card to extract concessions from China.<sup>147</sup>

Finally, is the PRC a substitute for Turkey's traditional allies, the United States and the European Union? Over the last decade or so Ankara has been reexamining its strategic orientation and global self-identity. Still unacceptable to Europe and critical of the United States, Turkey has begun looking to the East, including China. "Changing axis" was suggested in 2002 by several Turkish generals, a group led by General Tuncer Kılınç, secretary-general of the powerful National Security Organization, who said, "Instead of the United States and the EU, we should establish a bloc with Russia, China, and Iran." Hurşit



Tolon attacked the EU as a new imperial power. They and other generals, such as Ilker Başbuğ and Yasar Büyükanıt, have advocated increased collaboration with the East. Many of these generals, who proclaim ultra-rightist views and once belonged to the so-called “Eurasianist” team in the army, have been forced to retire.<sup>148</sup>

A few politicians apparently hold similar views. For example, Mehmet Dülger, one of Erdoğan’s ruling AKP delegates and the chairman of the Turkish Parliament Foreign Relations Committee, is also a proponent of Turkey’s “Eurasian vector” or the “Eurasian Triangle,” comprising China, India, and Russia.<sup>149</sup> In a discussion held at the Hudson Institute in New York on April 17, 2007, he said, “What are the alternatives [to Turkey’s incorporation into the EU]? ... States like India, China, or Russia are all alternatives.”<sup>150</sup> Yet even he has been critical of China:

The fact that the US press remains insensitive to the flow of Muslim blood but swings into action whenever a Westerner is killed causes resentment. ... There are instances where civil populations, mostly Muslims, have become victims of state terrorism with the excuse that they are causing unrest in ... the Uyghur region of China. ... The international community is silent on issues like these with these people even being the object of political bargaining and compromise.<sup>151</sup>

Other Turkish politicians, such as Duğu [East] Perinçek, leader of the Workers’ Party (İşçi Partisi), are even more critical of Turkey’s Western orientation. A former Maoist, Perinçek is said to have close

relations with pro-Chinese circles in Turkey and even with foreign intelligence services, including the Chinese and the Russian. Although opposed to Turkey’s membership in the EU and even in NATO, Perinçek advocates Turkey’s membership in the SCO and has played a vital role in bringing Turkey closer to China and Russia. On

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***Turkey is still a relatively  
marginal player in  
China’s Middle East policy***

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March 21, 2008, he was detained as part of the ultra-nationalist Ergenekon investigation. According to an article published in the *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, “Despite having only marginal support, he has

become an important figure dominating public debates in recent years” (Uslu 2008: 6–7).<sup>152</sup>

Despite figures like Perinçek, only a small minority—if any—in Turkey truly consider Beijing an ally or a substitute for either the United States or the EU. Likewise, Turkey is still a relatively marginal player in China’s Middle East policy. Driven by its thirst for oil, Beijing’s principal object of interest in the Middle East is much more the Persian Gulf than Turkey.<sup>153</sup>

# Endnotes

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1. Shorter versions of this study were presented at the convention “Nationalism, Identity and Regional Cooperation: Compatibilities and Incompatibilities,” organized by the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN), University of Bologna, Forli, June 4–9, 2002; and at the international conference “China and the Middle East: Central Asian Connections,” at the University of Haifa (Israel), May 16–17, 2006. Research for this monograph and field trips to Turkey were facilitated by a MacArthur Foundation grant, No. 02-76170-000-GSS, on “Uyghur Expatriate Communities: Domestic, Regional and International Challenges,” for which I am grateful. I would also like to acknowledge the initial support for this study by the Hebrew University’s Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, the Research and Development Authority, and the Minerva Center for Human Rights. Special thanks are due to my research assistants over the years: Ofer Ben-Zvi, Itamar Livni, Ran Shauli, Gülhan Güler, Salih Bicakci, Anet Allievi, Zhang Hongbo, Vicky Wu, and particularly Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak, who assisted me in my research in Turkey.
2. *Eastern Turkestan Information Bulletin* (hereafter *ETIB*) 5(4) (August 1995): 3.
3. Lale Sariibrahimoğlu, “Growing Turco-Chinese Relations Face Ups and Downs on the Turkic Uighurs of China,” *Turkish Daily News*, April 18, 2000.
4. See, for example, Susan Grueneberg, “The Status of Ethnic Chinese in Vietnam as a Problem in International Law,” *Journal of Asian Culture* 3 (September 1979): 16–49; Hungdah Chiu, “China’s Legal Position on Protecting Chinese Residents in Vietnam,” *American Journal of International Law* 74(3) (July 1980): 685–89; Pao-min Chang, “The Sino-Vietnamese Dispute over the Ethnic Chinese,” *The China Quarterly* 90 (June 1982): 195–230.
5. Yitzhak Shichor, “Hostage Minority: the Ethnic Dimension in Sino-Mongolian Relations,” unpublished paper.

6. "On the Ch'ing Tributary System," in John K. Fairbank and Ssü-yu Têng, *Ch'ing Administration: Three Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 177.
7. This paragraph is based on Hodong Kim, *Holy War in China: The Muslim Rebellion and State in Chinese Central Asia, 1864–1877* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 146–58.
8. Statement by Muhammed Yusuf Efendi (one of the officers), dated December 19, 1878, reproduced in Mehmet Saray, *Doğu Türkistan Türkleri Tarihi (Başlangıçtan 1878'e Kadar)* [A History of East Turkestan Turks from the Beginning to 1878], vol. 1 (Istanbul: Doğu Türkistan Vakfı, 1998), pp. 292–99. And "Osmanlı Devleti'nin Yakub Han'a Yardımı" [Ottoman Empire's Aid to Yaqub Khan], pp. 165–72, in *ibid.* See also Mehmet Saray, "Turkish Officers Sent to Kashgar in 1874," *Doğu Türkistan'ın Sesi* [Voice of Eastern Turkestan], 2(6) (August 1985): 45–48.
9. Saray, *Doğu Türkistan Türkleri Tarihi*, pp. 353–59.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 316.
11. See also Jiang Mingxin, "Luelun Aosiman diguo de xihua gaige" [A Brief Sketch of the Ottoman Empire's Westernization Reform], *Xiya Feizhou* [West Asia and Africa] 10 (2008): 29–35.
12. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, pp. 172–73. See also Andrew D. W. Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang 1911–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 18; C. P. Skrine and Pamela Nightingale, *Macartney at Kashgar: New Light on British, Chinese, and Russian Activities in Sinkiang, 1890–1918* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 248–49.
13. Skrine and Nightingale, *Macartney at Kashgar*. See also Masami Hamada, "La Transmission du Mouvement Nationaliste au Turkestan Oriental (Xinjiang)," *Central Asia Survey* 9(1) (1990): pp. 29–48; Alimcan İnayet, "Osmanlı ve Cumhuriyet Döneminde Türk-Uygur İlişkileri (1861–1934)" [Turkish-Uyghur Relations in the Ottoman and the Republican Period], [www.turkforum.net/showthread.php?t=498718](http://www.turkforum.net/showthread.php?t=498718). See also Edmund Waite, "The Emergence of Muslim Reformism in Contemporary Xinjiang: Implications for the Uyghurs' Positioning Between a Central Asian and Chinese Context," in Ildikó Bellér-Hann, M. Cristina Cesàro, Rachel Harris, and Joanne Smith Finley, eds., *Situating the Uyghurs Between China and Central Asia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 166–67.
14. See, for example, Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: A Study in Irredentism* (London: C. Hurst, 1981), p. 53.
15. "So Much for National Self-Determination" (July 14, 1919), in Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Mao's Road to Power, Revolutionary Writings 1912–1949*, vol. 1, 1912–920 (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), p. 337.
16. "Report on the Work of the Propaganda Department from February 1 to May 15" (May 19, 1926), in Schram, *Mao's Road to Power*, vol. 2, *December 1920–June 1927* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 381.

17. "Declaration to the People of Muslim Nationalities by the Central Soviet Government" (May 25, 1936), in Schram, *Mao's Road to Power*, vol. 5, *January 1935–July 1937* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), pp. 201–03.
18. Quoted in Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 420.
19. See also John M. Vander Lippe, "Forgotten Brigade of the Forgotten War: Turkey's Participation in the Korean War," *Middle Eastern Studies* 36(1) (January 2000): 92–101.
20. The following paragraph draws on Çağda Üngör, "Perceptions of China in the Turkish Korean War Narratives," *Turkish Studies* 7(5) (September 2006): 405–20.
21. Interview in *Hürriyet*, December 9, 1951.
22. See, for example, "Communists Massacred Eight Million Muslims in China," *Cumhuriyet*, May 12, 1952; "The Murders Committed by the Reds in Chinese Turkestan," *Hürriyet*, November 24, 1951.
23. Üngör, "Perceptions of China," pp. 406, 416. See also Deniz Ülke Arıboğan, *Çin'in Gölgesinde Uzakdoğu Asya* [Far East Asia under China's Shadow] (Istanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2001).
24. For commentaries against the Turkish-Iraqi-U.S. alliance, see *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily], February 24, 1955, and *Guangming Ribao* [Enlightenment Daily], February 27, 1955, and March 19, 1955. See also Yang Dongyan, "Bageda tiaoyue de xingcheng qi dui zhongdong de yingxiang: yingmei zai zhongdong de maodun yu zhengduo" [The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Its Influence on the Middle East: U.S.-British Rivalry in the Middle East], *Nanjing Daxue Xuebao* [Journal of Nanjing University] 2(38) (2001): 60–68.
25. See, for example, Wang Qing, "Meidi nuyi xia de Tuerqi" [Turkey under American Imperialist Enslavement], *Shijie Zhishi* [World Knowledge] 17 (November 3, 1951): 19–20.
26. Comments in *Renmin Ribao*, December 2, 1955.
27. For China's diplomatic involvement in this crisis, see *Renmin Shouce 1958* [People's Handbook], pp. 432–33.
28. *Renmin Ribao*, October 18, 1957, p. 1.
29. *Renmin Ribao*, November 7, 1957, pp. 1–2.
30. *Support the Patriotic and Just Struggle of the Turkish People (A Mass Rally of the Youth and People of All Circles in Peking)* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1960).
31. Led by Ibrahim Kaypakkaya (who was killed a year later, at age twenty-four), the party suffered a number of splits over the years, leading to the foundation of additional organizations. Noteworthy are the Communist Party of Turkey (Marxist-Leninist) (Maoist Party Center), founded in 1987, and the Maoist Communist Party, created in 1994 and that in 2003 claimed to replace the TKP(ML), also changing the name of its Workers and Peasants Liberation Army of Turkey (TIKKO) to the People's Liberation Army (HKO). Clashes between the Turkish authorities and Maoist militants have continued to this day, yet they do not seem to affect Sino-Turkish relations. See Aydın Çubukçu, "Türkiye'de Maoçuluğun Doğuşu Üzerine Bazı Gözlemler" [Observations on Certain Origins of Maoism in

- Turkey], *Praksis* 6 (Spring 2002): 53–62. For some documents, see <http://revcom.us/a/v19/910-19-919/corim.htm>; <http://revcom.us/a/v/24/1181-1190/1187/mkp.htm>. See also “Turkey Detains 23 Maoists Militants, Seizes 250 Kilo of Explosives,” AFP, September 12, 2006.
32. Turkish president Süleyman Demirel told PRC president Jiang Zemin that Turkey considers Uyghur Turks as a friendship bridge between Turkey and China. BBC, April 24, 2000.
  33. Much of the following section is based on Yitzhak Shichor, “Virtual Transnationalism: Uyghur Communities in Europe and the Quest for Eastern Turkestan Independence,” in Jørgen Nielsen and Stefano Allievi, eds., *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 281–311.
  34. Doğu Türkistan Vakfı Başkanı (president of the East Turkestan Endowment), *M. Rıza Bekin’in Anıları* [Reminiscences of M. Rıza Bekin] (Istanbul: Kasta Yayınları, 2005); interview, Istanbul, May 22, 2006. See also a video interview at [www.forcedmigration.org/video/uyghur/media/bekin.htm](http://www.forcedmigration.org/video/uyghur/media/bekin.htm).
  35. For a more detailed biography, see Abdullah Bakır, *Doğu Türkistan Milli İstiklâl Hareketi ve Mehmet Emin Buğra* [East Turkestan National Independence Movement and Mehmet Emin Buğra] (Istanbul: Doğu Türkistan Vakfı Yayınları, 2005), pp. 18–100.
  36. This paragraph and the following are based on *Türklük Mücadelesi: İsa Yusuf* [Turkic Mujahid: İsa Yusuf] (Istanbul: Bayrak, 1991), pp. 35–85.
  37. Interview with Gulamettin Pahta, New York, September 16, 2003. See also a video interview with him at [www.forcedmigration.org/video/uyghur/media/emet.htm](http://www.forcedmigration.org/video/uyghur/media/emet.htm).
  38. Besson’s article is based on Erkin Alptekin, *Doğu Türkistan’dan Hicretimizin 40° yıldönümü* [The 40th Anniversary of Our Exodus from Eastern Turkestan] (Kayseri: Erciyes Degisi, 1992), pp. 17–22. Turkey had probably been “encouraged” by Washington to accept Uyghur refugees.
  39. The UNHCR office in Ankara has handled hundreds of Uyghur refugees, but their files are not accessible.
  40. Interviews with Seyit Tarañçi, May 23, 2006; Seyit Tümtürk, May 24, 2006; Arslan Alptekin (son of İsa Yusuf and brother of Erkin), May 25, 2006, all in Istanbul; Enver Can and Asgar Can, Munich, June 24–25, 2006. See also a video interview with Enver Can at [www.forcedmigration.org/video/uyghur/media/can.htm](http://www.forcedmigration.org/video/uyghur/media/can.htm).
  41. Based on interviews, Istanbul, July 1998.
  42. Central News Agency (Taipei), June 7, 1998, in BBC, *SWB*, FE/3248, G/3 (June 9, 1998), and Yi Ming, “Xinjiangdu yundong de waibu huanjing” (The External Environment of the Xinjiang Independence Movement), at [www.asiademo.org/1999/03/19990303b.htm](http://www.asiademo.org/1999/03/19990303b.htm).
  43. For example, the ETF organized the First International Seminar on Culture and History of Turkestan, held in Istanbul on April 6–8, 1988.

44. For an example, see M. Ruhi Uyghur, “Doğu Türkistan ve Çin tarihinde bir mühim nokta” [An Important Point on the History of East Turkestan and China], May 21, 1953, pp. 25–27, cited in Landau, *Pan-Turkism*, p. 121, and p. 139, n. 142.
45. Much of the information on Uyghur publications in this monograph draws from Koçaoğlu’s study.
46. For example, Mehmet Emin Buğra, *Doğu Türkistan: Tarihi, Coğrafı ve Şimdiki Durumu* [Eastern Turkestan: History, Geography, and the Present Situation] (Istanbul: Güven Basımevi, 1952); Mehmet Emin Buğra, *Doğu Türkistan’ın Hürriyet Dâvâsı ve Çin Siyaseti* [The Cause of Eastern Turkestan Liberation and China’s Policy] (Istanbul: Asmeanbey Mat., 1954); Hızır Bek Gayretullah, *Osman Batur* (Istanbul: Orna Yayınları, 1965); and İsa Yusuf Alptekin, *Doğu Türkistan Dâvâsı* [The Cause of Eastern Turkestan] (Istanbul: Marifet Yayınları, 1973, 1981).
47. İsa Yusuf Alptekin, *Doğu Türkistan İnsanlıktan Yardım İstiyor* [East Turkestan Expects Help from Humankind] (Istanbul: Ota , 1974), in Landau, *Pan-Turkism*, p. 115.
48. *ETIB* 5(5–6) (October–December 1995): 2.
49. Chaired by Ebubekir Türksoy in Kayseri. They also publish a bi-monthly journal called *Fikir ve Kültür* [Thought and Culture].
50. *ETIB* 2(6) (December 1992): 3–4.
51. See Vojtech Mastny and R. Craig Nation, eds., *Turkey between East and West: New Challenges for a Rising Regional Power* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996). See also Gareth M. Winrow, “Turkey and Former Soviet Central Asia: National and Ethnic Identity,” *Central Asian Survey* 11(3) (1992): 101–11; Sabri Sayari, “Turkey, the Caucasus and Central Asia,” in *The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and Its Borderlands*, ed. Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994), pp. 175–96.
52. See also I. P. Khosla, “Turkey; The Search for a Role,” *Strategic Analysis* (New Delhi) 25(3) (June 2001): 343–69.
53. An Weihua, “Lun Tuerqi tong zhongya xin duli guojia de guanxi yu Tujue yuzu de lianhe” [On the Relations between Turkey and Central Asia’s Newly Independent Republics and the Unity of Turkic Nationalities and Languages], in *Xin xingshi xia de zhongya yanjiu* [Studies on Central Asia’s New Situation], ed. Zhu Bian, An Weihua, and Zhang Zhenguo (Beijing: Beijing daxue yafei yanjiusuo, 1993), p. 89. See also Pan Zhiping, “Lun Tuerqi yu fantujuezhuyi” [On Turkey and Pan-Turkism], *Shixue Jikan* [Collected Papers of History Studies] 4 (October 2004): 60–68; Sami Kohen, “Contacts with Central Asian States: A Foundation for ‘Pan-Turkism,’” *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 11(3) (September 30, 1992); John C. K. Daly, “Pan-Turkism Takes Step Forward in Eurasia,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 5(39) (February 29, 2008); and John C. K. Daly, “The Rebirth of Pan-Turkism?” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 5(5) (January 11, 2008).
54. *ETIB* 1(1) (May 1991): 4.

55. Associated Press (Ankara), September 11, 1986.
56. *Renmin Ribao*, July 6, 2004. See also the testimony of Chen Yonglin, former diplomat in China's consulate in Sydney, in *Falun Gong and China's Continuing War on Human Rights*, Joint Hearing, U.S. Congress, July 21, 2005 (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005), pp. 34–36.
57. *ETIB* 1(4) (November 1991): 1–2.
58. *ETIB* 2(2) (March 1992): 4–5. Of Kurdish origins, Özal was sympathetic toward Uyghurs only in rhetoric rather than in action. See Muhittin Ataman, “Özal Leadership and Restructuring of Turkish Ethnic Policy in the 1980s,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 38(4) (October 2002): 123–42, which does not even mention Uyghurs.
59. *ETIB* 2(3) (June 1992): 6.
60. *Ibid.*, 5.
61. *ETIB* 2(5) (October 1992): 4–5.
62. *ETIB* 2(6) (December 1992): 3.
63. *Ibid.*, 2–4.
64. *ETIB* 3(1) (February 1993): 4; *ETIB* 3(3) (June 1993): 4.
65. *ETIB* 3(2) (April 1993): 2.
66. *ETIB* 3(2) (April 1993): 2.
67. *ETIB* 3(3) (June 1993): 4.
68. *ETIB* 3(2) (April 1993): 3.
69. *ETIB* 3(4) (August 1993): 3; interview with Muhammad Tohti of the Uyghur Canadian Association, Toronto, September 24, 2003.
70. Interview with Anwar Rahman, Morges, Switzerland, June 24, 2003.
71. Interview with Mehmet Rıza Bekin, Istanbul, May 22, 2006.
72. *Ibid.*, pp. 227–28. Most peasants and merchants in Xinjiang do not regard themselves as Turk, but intellectuals identify themselves as Turks first and then Uyghurs. Justin Jon Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China's Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 118–20.
73. *ETIB* 4(3) (August 1994): 3.
74. *ETIB* 4(4) (October 1994): 1–2.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
76. Turkish Radio and Television International Euro-Asia broadcast (TRT-Int Avroasya), in *ETIB* 4(5–6) (December 1994): 5–6.
77. Jack Churchward, “Will Turkey Abandon the ‘Homeland of Turkic People?’” *Turkistan Newsletter* 4(57) (March 1, 2000): 1–4.
78. *ETIB* 6(1–2) (February 1996): 2–3; “Open Letter to the President and Prime Minister of Turkey on Eastern Turkestan,” *Turkistan Newsletter* 4(79) (April 5, 2000): 2.
79. *ETIB* 5(5–6) (October–December 1995): 6–7.



80. Interview with Ömer Kanat, Senior Editor, Radio Free Asia and former secretary to Alptekin, Washington, D.C., October 8, 2006.
81. Earlier, Beijing criticized Turkey for violating Iraq's territorial integrity when its troops had penetrated northern Iraq to eliminate forces of the Kurdish Workers Party. Xinhua (Beijing), May 20, 1997, in BBC, *SWB*, FE/2924, G/3 (May 21, 1997).
82. *Guangzhou Ribao*, April 21, 2000; *Turkish Probe*, April 23, 2000.
83. Xinhua (Ankara), November 7, 1996.
84. See also *Ming Pao* (Hong Kong), October 7, 1998, in *Global Intelligence Update*, October 8, 1998.
85. For more details about this incident, see Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, pp. 331–33.
86. Agence France Press (Ankara and Istanbul), September 11, 16, 1997. See also Metin Dermirsar, “Refugee Group Protests China in Istanbul Meeting,” *Turkish Daily News*, February 18, 1997.
87. BBC, February 19, 1997.
88. Agence France Press (AFP) (Ankara), March 20, 1997.
89. AFP (Beijing), March 21, 1997.
90. Information Office of China's State Council, “‘East Turkestan’ Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity,” Xinhua, January 21, 2002, in *Foreign Broadcasts Information Service—China*, January 22, 2002 (hereafter: *FBIS-CHI*).
91. East Turkistan Information Center, *World Uyghur Network News (WUNN)* 72 (December 28, 1997), p. 3.
92. Taiwan Central News Agency (Ankara), February 9, 1998; Kanal-7 TV (Istanbul), February 8, 1998, both in BBC, *SWB*, FE/3148, G/3 (February 11, 1998).
93. Information Office of China's State Council, “‘East Turkestan’ Terrorist Forces.”
94. BBC, June 2, 1998.
95. Taiwan Central News Agency (Ankara), June 6, 1998, in BBC, *SWB*, FE/3248, G/3 (June 9, 1998).
96. BBC, June 9, 1998.
97. Taiwan Central News Agency (Ankara), December 17, 1998, in BBC, *SWB*, FE/3414, G/10 (December 19, 1998).
98. Mehetan Demir, “Secret Prime Ministry Directive on Eastern Turkestan,” *Hürriyet* (Ankara edition), February 4, 1999, p. 18, in BBC, *SWB*, FE/3455, G/2 (February 10, 1999). The directive was exposed five weeks after it had been issued.
99. See [www.cdn.com.tw/daily/2000/09/.../890919b3.htm](http://www.cdn.com.tw/daily/2000/09/.../890919b3.htm), June 28, 2001. In the past China's votes usually conformed to those of Turkey, with few exceptions. See Samuel S. Kim, *China, the United Nations, and World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 223–24.
100. Xinhua News Agency (Beijing), April 6, 1999, in BBC, *SWB*, FE/3503, G/4 (April 8, 1999).

101. Ibid., April 18, 1999, in BBC, *SWB*, FE/3515, G/2–G/3. See also Si Liang, “China and Turkey Make Joint Efforts to Curb ‘Xinjiang Independence’ Activities,” *Zhongguo Tongxun She* (Hong Kong), April 5, 1999, in BBC, *SWB*, FE/3503 (April 8, 1999).
102. Interview in Berndt Georg Thamm, *Der Dschihad in Asien: Die Islamistische Gefahr in Russland und China* [Jihad in Asia: The Islamic Danger in Russia and China] (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008), p. 213. He blamed the Eastern Turkestan Liberation Organization for attempting to assassinate Li Peng during his visit to Turkey (p. 194).
103. Xinhua, April 16, 2002, in *FBIS-CHI-2002-416*.
104. “Tuzmen: ‘15 Percent of Our Trade Deficit Is Caused by China,’” Anatolia News Agency, December 2, 2005.
105. Meral Tamer, “The Business World Is Waiting for Water for the Pump,” *Milliyet*, July 9, 2005. See also Xinhua, August 5, 2005.
106. Xinhua, February 2, 2005. These comments were made during Turkish foreign minister Abdullah Gül’s visit to China.
107. Xinhua, July 16, 2005.
108. *Milli Gazete*, January 20, 2006.
109. This paragraph is based on Emre Özpeynirci, “25 Turkish Sectors Have Been Conquered by Chinese Products,” *Hürriyet*, September 8, 2003, in *FBIS-CHI-2003-0910*.
110. Calculated from Turkish Statistical Institute, [www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id](http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id).
111. Mehmet Ögütçü, *Yükselen Asya, Çin ve Türkiye* [Rising Asia: China and Turkey] (Ankara: IMGE Publishing House, 1998).
112. Mehmet Ögütçü, “Building a Turkish-Chinese Strategic Partnership in the 21st Century,” *Turkish Daily News*, July 30, 1999. In his other works Ögütçü underscores the economic incentives for Sino-Turkish relations while downplaying the Eastern Turkestan issue. See “Turkey and China,” *Perceptions* 1(3) (September–November 1996): 155–79; “Sino-Turkish Relations: Preparing for the Next Century,” in P. Raman Kumaraswamy, ed., *China and the Middle East: The Quest for Influence* (New Delhi: Sage, 1999), pp. 68–90.
113. Wu Gang, “Tuerqi: Zhongguo shangpin jinru Ouzhou de ‘tiaoban’” [Turkey: Gangway for the Entry of Chinese Commodities to Europe], *World Market* (March 2002): 14; Nadir Kemal Yilmaz, Fang Lee Cooke, and Rosita Dellios, “Turkey’s FDI Policy and Chinese Foreign Direct Investments in Turkey: Some Economic and Management Implications,” *Global Business Review* 9(1) (2008): 40.
114. Xinhua, December 12, 2008.
115. Information collected from several sources. See, for example, *Turkish Armed Forces* (Land Forces Equipment), [www.turkishworld.multiservers.com/equipment.html](http://www.turkishworld.multiservers.com/equipment.html); *Jane’s Strategic Weapons Systems*, [www.janes.com/extracts/extract/jsws/jswsa002.html](http://www.janes.com/extracts/extract/jsws/jswsa002.html). See also Utku Çakırözer, “J Booster for the Army,” *Milliyet* (Istanbul), January 14, 2002, in *FBIS-CHI*,

- March 14, 2002; "Chinese Missiles for Turkey," *Milliyet*, June 2, 2005; "China to Help Turkey Produce Missiles," Central News Agency (Taiwan), December 21, 1996, in BBC, *SWB*, FE/2802, G/1 (December 23, 1996); "Secret Cooperation with China," *Star* (Istanbul), April 6, 2005.
116. Adapted from SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), arms transfer database.
  117. Anatolia News Agency, August 10, 2008; *Turkish Daily News*, April 29, 2008; John C. K. Daly, "Turkey Ponders Russian Missile Offer," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* (The Jamestown Foundation) 5(140) (July 23, 2008); Andrew McGregor, *Arming for Asymmetric Warfare: Turkey's Arms Industry in the 21st Century* (The Jamestown Foundation, June 2008), p. 17.
  118. Prasun K. Sengupta, "Eastern Showcase," *Force* (New Delhi), May 16, 2008; *Today's Zaman*, July 16, 2008.
  119. "A New Birth of Chinese Version BMP3," *Kanwa Defense Review* (Hong Kong), May 12, 2005.
  120. *Jane's Defense Weekly*, June 9, 1999, p. 13.
  121. <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2003-12-15/18471347957s.shtml>.
  122. Anatolia News Agency (Ankara), February 14, 2000, in *Turkistan Newsletter*, February 16, 2000, and "Open Letter to the President and Prime Minister of Turkey on Eastern Turkestan," *Turkistan Newsletter* 4(79) (April 5, 2000): 2.
  123. İter Türkmen, "Turkey Must Play a Bigger Role," *Hürriyet*, April 10, 2000, p. 23, in *FBIS-CHI*, April 14, 2000. Türkmen was a senior diplomat and minister of foreign affairs in the 1980s.
  124. İter Türkmen, "Turkey and China," *Hürriyet* (Ankara), March 21, 2000, in *FBIS-CHI*, March 28, 2000.
  125. Columnist Hadi Uluengin, "Zemin Ankara'da" [Zemin in Ankara], *Hürriyet*, April 20, 2000, at <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=148649>.
  126. *Turkistan News*, April 15, 2000. The same tone was adopted by Ceyda Karan, "Sad History of a Civilisation," *Radikal* (Radical), April 24, 2000.
  127. Stephen Kinzer, "Jiang's Cordial Visit to Turkey Overshadowed by Ethnic Dispute," *New York Times*, April 19, 2000, p. 5; Susanne Güsten, "Jiang Zemin in der Türkei: Die Minderheitenfrage belastet den besuch des chinesischen Präsident" [Jiang Zemin in Turkey: The Minorities Question Clouds the Chinese President's Visit], *Der Tagespiegel*, April 20, 2000.
  128. *Update on the State of Affairs in Turkey*, No. 168, April 28, 2000.
  129. *Turkish Probe*, No. 379 (April 23, 2000), at [www.turkishdailynews.com/FrProbe/latest/foreign.htm](http://www.turkishdailynews.com/FrProbe/latest/foreign.htm); Si Liang, "China and Turkey," n. 118. See also *Der Tagespiegel*, April 20, 2000.
  130. Hülya Güzel, Metehan Demir, and Ugun Ergan, "We Have Become China's 'Favored Nation,'" *Hürriyet*, April 20, 2000, p. 9, in *FBIS-CHI*, April 25, 2000.
  131. Anatolia News Agency (Ankara), September 5, 2000, in *FBIS-CHI*, September 6, 2000.

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## About this Issue

Beginning in 1949, China responded to so-called Uyghur separatism and the quest for Eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang) independence as a domestic problem. Since the mid-1990s, however, when it became aware of the international aspects of this problem, Beijing has begun to pressure Turkey to limit its support for Uyghur activism. Aimed not only at cultural preservation but also at Eastern Turkestan independence, Uyghur activism remained unnoticed until the 1990s, despite the establishment in 1971 of Sino-Turkish diplomatic relations. It has gathered momentum as a result of China's post-Mao opening, the Soviet disintegration, increased Uyghur migration, the growing Western concern for human rights, and the widespread use of the Internet. Until the mid-1990s Turkey's leaders managed to defy Chinese pressure because they sympathized with the Uyghurs, were personally committed to their leader İsa Yusuf Alptekin, and hoped to restore Turkish influence in Central Asia. By late 1995, however, both that hope and Alptekin were dead, and China was becoming an influential, self-confident economic power. At this time Ankara chose to comply with Beijing's demands, which were backed by increased trade, growing military collaboration, and China's veiled threats of support for Kurdish nationalism. Consequently, Turkish Uyghurs suffered a serious blow, and some of their organizations had to relocate abroad, outside Beijing's reach. Nonetheless, Uyghur activism continues in Turkey and has become even more pronounced worldwide. Possibly less concerned about the Uyghur "threat" than it suggests, Beijing may simply be using the Uyghurs to intimidate and manipulate Turkey and other governments, primarily those in Central Asia.

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