
STRUGGLES AND DILEMMAS OF UYGHUR IMMIGRANTS IN TURKEY

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Introduction

The Ottoman Empire had a tradition of accepting refugees from various parts of the world. Asylum was given primarily to Muslims, but Jews and Christians were also welcome. This tradition continued into the Turkish Republican period, although considerations of ethnicity and language were substituted for religion. Over the last nine decades, Turkey has given refuge mostly to Turkic-speaking Muslims (with the exception of Syrian refugees, Bosnian and Albanian refugees from the Balkans), especially those facing persecution in their homelands. Large numbers of refugees from such disparate regions as the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Soviet Union Central Asian Republics, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China (East Turkistan), and Afghanistan have settled in Turkey. A smaller number have been accommodated from other regions as well. Aside from this tradition, concern for what Turks call “Outside Turks” (*Dış Türkler*) has long been an important feature of right-wing nationalist rhetoric. It can be argued that in the very formulation of “Outside Turks,” which began to be popularized in the 1950s, Turkey can be seen as the natural protector of the “Outside Turks” interests. Both the tradition of accepting Turkic refugees and the big brotherly interest in the welfare of “Outside Turks,” sometimes also termed “Captive Turks,” have been prominent in conservative circles.

Already in the late 19th century, Turkey served as a model for East Turkistan nationalism. Uyghurs have long regarded Turkey as a model and a source of moral support and ideological inspiration. Turkey, a supporter of Uyghur aspirations in Xinjiang (East Turkistan), has also historically been a major destination for Uyghurs fleeing Chinese rule. During the great Turkic-Muslim rebellion (1864–1876) in Xinjiang against the Manchu-Qing Occupation, led by the Koqandi adventurer and opportunist Yaqub Beg, the Ottoman Sultan in Istanbul not only provided Beg's prospective state in Kashgar with weapons and military advisers, but also granted him the title of emir.¹ In the 20th century, Turkey became a haven for Uyghur nationalists fleeing Xinjiang after it had been taken over by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1949. Turkey was the most influential locus in the Uyghur diaspora in the twentieth century. Since the 1950s, Turkey has provided Uyghur activists a primary haven to help shape an East Turkistan independence movement.² The second largest presence in the diaspora resides in Turkey (about one million Uyghurs live mostly in Turkic republics in Central Asia), where Uyghurs claim ancestral links to the Turks. Moreover, Turkey's ancestral, historic, linguistic, and cultural ties made it the most attractive destination for Uyghurs looking to escape Chinese repression.

Viewing Uyghur immigrants as “Outside Turks” (*Dış Türkler*) has been an exceedingly volatile topic. At the core of the controversy is a concern with Turkish national identity and how to deal with all foreigners, not just Uyghur immigrants. A number of policy strategies have been attempted, including integrating the Uyghur population into mainstream Turkish society, and restricted citizenship and legal resident status. There are significant bureaucratic rules and unwritten regulations as well as vague and floating policies that individuals must navigate

¹ Mettursun Beydulla, “Sources and Perspectives on Late Nineteenth Century Uyghur History,” in *Conference Proceedings of the XVI Turkish Congress of History, September 22–25, 2010. History of Central Asia and Caucasus 2* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu [Turkish Historical Society], 2015), 206.

² Yizhak Shichor, “Limping on Two Legs: Uyghur Diaspora Organizations and the Prospects for Eastern Turkestan Independence,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 6, 48 (2007): 121, <https://ca-c.org/article/4216>.

in order to become citizens and legal residents of Turkey. Integration itself is an elusive, though contradictory, concept. For most Turks, integration has meant acculturating Uyghurs into Turkish society without any attention paid to pluralism or multiculturalism. The purpose of this essay is to raise and discuss several important issues that will contextualize the current Turkish view of integrating the Uyghur community as well as the Uyghur struggles and dilemmas. I will also describe and discuss pro-Uyghur and anti-Chinese mobilization in Turkey and the Chinese reaction and the attention they pay to this issue. This attention has affected Uyghurs in Turkey and the relationship between Turkey and China. Finally, I will discuss the new world order: Turkey's relations with China and its reflection on the Uyghurs and the Uyghur cause at home and in the diaspora.

I carried out a research project from 2013 to 2016, involving interviews with 200 Uyghur immigrants (including refugees), asking about identity, struggles and dilemmas and those interviews are the basis for this paper. The objective of this article is to illuminate the historic and ethnographic context of the exodus of Uyghurs from China to Turkey from the 1950s to the present, as well as their subsequent immigration to Europe and the United States. I intend to do this primarily by reporting the content of interviews with participants and eyewitnesses to those events who are currently living in Turkey. I also include updated information about Uyghur refugees and immigrants from around the world. Qualitative analysis reveals the differing historical and contemporary pathways of Uyghur migration to Turkey. This analytical perspective shows the nature of Uyghur migration to Turkey as it interfaces with the Turkish national project and how these perspectives have been shaped by recent periods of neoliberalism, authoritarianism and globalization.

Uyghur migration to Turkey and the struggle to survive

The Chinese Army entered Xinjiang in September 1949 after the victory of the Communist Party in the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949). Uyghur and other Turkic people's quest for independence was suppressed inside China; it was revived abroad after a number of Uyghur lea-

ders including Isa Yusup Alptekin and Mehmet Emint Bugra managed to escape, finally settling in Turkey. Uyghur migration has generally been in phases. In the first, Uyghurs fled China to neighboring countries, mainly to India (Kashmir), Pakistan, and Afghanistan, but also to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. In March 1952, Turkey, supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), offered sanctuary to 2000 Eastern Turkistan refugees who had fled to India and Pakistan following the communist occupation. In 1953 Turkey accepted an additional 900 refugees. But in the 1950s Uyghurs were only offered a substitute, either temporary or permanent, for their occupied homeland. This Turkish policy persists to this very day. In 1965, Turkey accepted 235 immigrants from Yarkand, one third of a group of Uyghur refugees who had fled to Afghanistan in 1961. Their absorption had been made possible by a special program financed by UNHCR, at the request of the Turkish government. Like their predecessors, they were given citizenship and provided with housing. Uyghurs have continued to arrive in Turkey since the late 1960s, mostly on an individual basis.

In Xinjiang under Deng Xiaoping, the Uyghurs benefitted from a certain liberalization on the cultural and economic levels, with the reopening of mosques and Uyghur-speaking schools.³ After the 1980s, many Uyghur left China to study abroad or to go on pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca, never to return. In August 1982, Turkey accepted another group of several thousand refugees from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Many of them had escaped by crossing the border, now more open and less guarded. Then, with the fall of the Soviet Union, and bolstered by the independence of the neighboring Central Asian states, the dream of an independent Uyghur state came to life. However, this led to new political tensions. These tensions intensified in the 2000s in the international context of the “war on terror,” which allowed Beijing to play on the so-called threat of Islamist Uyghur terrorism.⁴

Meanwhile, in Turkey, Isa Yusuf Alptekin, leader of the Uyghur diaspora throughout the Cold War, focused on a two-track approach to

³ Collin Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities and Globalization* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 126.

⁴ Dru Gladney, *Dislocating China: Reflections on Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 365.

raise the profile of the Uyghur cause. First, he actively sought to cultivate relationships with Turkish political and military leaders with pan-Turkist leanings, most notably Suleyman Demirel and Turgut Ozal. Internationally, Alptekin attempted to enlist support for Uyghur nationalist claims through a broad appeal to anti-communist sentiments in the Muslim world, the non-aligned developing world, and Taiwan. In raising awareness for the Uyghur cause, he paid visits to many organizations such as the Muslim World League and the Arab League, as well as attending the Bandung Conference in 1955, the Afro-Asian Conference in 1965 and the World Congress of Islam in 1964.⁵ One of the first Uyghur organizations in Turkey was the East Turkistan Refugee Committee (Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Derneği Yayını), whose journal was launched in the early 1950s. Later, the National Center for the Liberation of East Turkistan was set up to promote culture and participate in various political demonstrations, and to distribute nationalist propaganda. In 1976, the Eastern Turkistan Foundation (Doğu Türkistan Vakfı) was formed, officially committed to the preservation of Uyghur cultural and social identity in China (and elsewhere), rather than to the promotion of political independence.

The ideological divisions dominating Turkish political life throughout the 1970s also affected these associations, which became “politicized” due to internal factions. Following the 1980 military coup in Turkey, all associations, except for those in Uyghur, were closed. This continued until the mid-1980s and was followed by a more politically active period in political terms, when Uyghur immigrants gradually became the Uyghur diaspora. *Doğu Türkistan’ın Sesi* (Voice of East Turkistan), Alptekin established a quarterly journal of cultural studies in 1984 in Turkish, English, and Uyghur. In 1992, the Eastern Turkistan World National Congress was established in Istanbul, the first transnational umbrella organization representing Uyghurs.

⁵ Jacob Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 118, 150; Yizhak Shichor, “Virtual Transnationalism: Uyghur Communities in Europe and the Quest for Eastern Turkestan Independence,” In *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe*, ed. Stefano Allievi and Jørgen S. Nielsen (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 290.

Since 2010, Uyghurs have established many community organizations to facilitate their adaptation to life in Turkey, geared towards solving social and economic problems, easing the difficulties of transition and also aiming to alleviate the feeling of longing for their place of origin by providing a social and cultural life and network. Today, the Uyghurs have a large number of associations and foundations ranging from small solidarity associations concentrated in the big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Kayseri, to more advanced organizations that can be called unions or coalitions. Based on unofficial information, Turkey now has about 180 Uyghur associations and organizations. Some work closely together; most work independently. Their purposes are eclectic and often with the sole idea of sustaining themselves, ensuring solidarity within their own immigrant groups, and preserving their identities through cultural activities. Some organizations such as the East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association (Doğu Türkistan Maarif ve Dayanışma Derneği) are officially committed to the preservation of Uyghur culture and social identity, both in China and the diaspora, and openly promote political independence from China. Leaders are active in raising awareness for the Uyghur cause and have paid visits to many organizations both in Turkey and abroad. They have also visited high ranking Turkish officials including president Recep Tayip Erdogan and presidents of other political parties in Turkey. Doerschler⁶ contends that immigrants motivated principally by economic concerns are likely to be “largely focused on material and status gains in the host country, leaving many quite detached from and disinterested in politics.” By contrast, groups that were expelled or otherwise left reluctantly may pine for the day when they can end their “exile” by returning home. With stronger ties to their society of origin, they might well see themselves as duty bound to advance the interests of their homeland in a more political way in their temporary abode. They are attentive to events in their place of origin that “continue to have a bearing on the lives of friends, family, and other related minority or citizen groups”.⁷

⁶ Peter Doerschler, “Push-Pull Factors and Immigrant Political Integration in Germany,” *Social Science Quarterly* 87, no. 5 (December 2006): 1101, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42956597>.

⁷ Doerschler, “Push-Pull Factors,” 1102.

Starting in the 1980s, and especially since 2009, there has been a new wave of immigrants who came to visit relatives, engage in trade, and study, many of them fleeing from Chinese persecution. The Uyghur ethnic networks in Turkey plays a significant role. They are characterized by a well-functioning extended family, an ethnic neighborhood, community-based groups, and self-help organizations. Initially, most Uyghur migrants who had arrived collectively tended to settle together, creating special quarters, Zeytinburnu, Sefaköy, Aksaray, Selim Paşa in Istanbul or Yasevi in Kayseri. The number of fundamentalists completely rejecting integration into Turkish society is very low. Most Uyghurs want economic integration and access to employment, health care, schooling and other social services; however, the desire for cultural and social integration is the least of their concerns. Hundreds of Uyghurs who seek asylum temporarily are settled across Turkey by the UNHCR. In addition to these, thousands of Uyghur refugees and immigrants are living in limbo in precarious situations.⁸ Of the total population of Uyghurs living in Turkey, estimated at 50,000, at least 10,000 are refugees, plus 10,000 Kazakhs and Kyrgyz immigrants from Xinjiang living in Turkey. A number of Turkish politicians along with Turkish and Uygur scholars have speculated that the Uyghur population living in Turkey is about 320,000.⁹ However, it should be remembered that although not numerically strong, in terms of political leverage for Turkey, “the Uyghurs of China” can be used as a bargaining chip between Turkey and China.

In the last couple of years, about 10,000 Uyghurs have applied for Turkish citizenship, but most of their applications have not been processed. Just before every election and when Uyghur activists visit them, high-ranking politicians make promises to solve issues of residency and citizenship, but invariably they do not keep their promises. Occasi-

⁸ Mettursun Beydulla, “Experiences of Uyghur Migration to Turkey and the United States: Issues of Religion, Law, Society, Residence, and Citizenship,” in *Migration and Islamic Ethics: Issues of Residence, Naturalization and Citizenship*, ed. Ray Jureidini and Said Fares Hassan (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 184, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004417342_011.

⁹ Areeb Ullah, “Turkey to Block Anti-China Media to Dismay of Uighur Activists,” *Middle East Eye (MEE)*, August 4, 2017, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-block-anti-china-media-dismay-uighur-activists>.

onally, the Turkish government has organized a big feast and invited thousands of Uyghurs and high-ranking Turkish politicians to address Uyghur and Xinjiang problems including human rights violations. All of these events are delivered live to the Turkish people and the world. Some Uyghurs believe these kinds of events help the Uyghur cause, but a number of activists and intellectuals have stressed that this type of event plays to targeted audiences. They are used to gain support from the nationalist and religious forces in Turkey, toying with the Uyghur.

Currently, many Uyghurs do not have resident permits or even valid passports. Many Uyghurs live in Turkey “illegally” and their situation is uncertain and precarious. Hundreds of Uyghurs are living in detention houses or deportation centers (*Geri Gönderme Merkezi*) under the guise of being terrorist suspects. Uyghurs in Turkey believe they are innocent. A prominent Uyghur activist and community leader stressed it this way:

I don't understand this and I have a hard time explaining this to my fellow Uyghur brothers. First, I visited Abdulkadir Yapchan/Yapçan in the deportation center and he is a well-respected religious scholar, activist and community leader. (He has been in the deportation center since 2016).¹⁰ Then I visited Amine Vahit in the deportation center in Selim Pasha Istanbul. I talked to her lawyer Mr. Zeynep and he told me that Amine is clean and innocent. Someone called the police and complained about her. So, she was arrested and put

¹⁰ Abdulkadir Yapçan, who has been granted political asylum by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and has been living in Istanbul for 18 years. Yapçan escaped from China in 1998 reportedly the most wanted man in China, was accused of being a senior leader of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Due to the Chinese government's lobbying and pressure, Turkey detained him in 2002 and 2008 but released him (Radio Free Asia, “Exiled Leader Claims China Is behind Turkey's Decision to Detain a Uyghur,” last modified October 10, 2016, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/exiled-leader-claims-china-10102016155133.html>). Turkey's Constitutional Court ruled on May 2, 2019 and ordered him freed from the deportation center. However, the next day the Istanbul Çağlayan 29th High Criminal Court issued a judgment in his renewed extradition case, but he was barred from leaving his neighborhood in the Küçükçekmece district of Istanbul (Abudulla Bozkurt, “Abdulkadir Yapıquan, China's Most Wanted Uighur, Freed in Turkey,” *Nordic Monitor*, May 26, 2019, <https://www.nordicmonitor.com/2019/05/abdulkadir-yapuquan-uighur-man-wanted-in-china-over-terror-charges-freed-in-turkey>). On April 8, 2021, Istanbul Çağlayan Justice Palace dismissed his case, citing a lack of credible evidence (Radio Free Asia, “Turkish Court Rejects China's Request to Extradite Uyghur Religious Teacher,” April 9, 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/turkey-dismiss-04092021192932.html>).

in a deportation center. She has two fatherless children. It is very sad. Do you think Allah can forgive us? We are persecuted and oppressed in China. But similar things are happening here in Turkey. It is because of Turkish bureaucracy and it is the fault of Turkish officials. Turkey is responsible for this in this world and in the next world. We will seek our rights and justice now and in the next world, in the name of Allah.¹¹

The Turkish immigration experience has created two groups of Uyghurs, called *yerlik* (local) or *kona* (old) who were descendants of those migrating at earlier times (in the 1950s), and *yengi kelgenler* (newcomers), those who have immigrated since 1980. At first the cultural differences between these groups were significant. The *yerlik* were more Turkicized, more religious and looked down upon by the newcomers because of their ignorance of religion. The second and third generation, young Uyghurs who were born in Turkey and are better educated than earlier generations, perceive and experience more acutely the discrimination and the status of being outsiders. The second and third generations of Uyghurs in Turkey assimilated so rapidly that in fact, community activists worried about the dangers to Uyghur continuity posed by intermarriages, low levels of connection to the (East Turkistan) homeland, the loss of the Uyghur language, and other indicators of declining distinctiveness. Some communities have been dissolved as the younger generations, some of whom had already been Turkicized and lost their Uyghur cultural and linguistic identity, tend to leave their traditional encapsulated compounds seeking accommodation and employment. Consciousness of Uyghur ethnic identity is typically highest at the time of arrival and erodes over time and across generations. Newly arrived Uyghur are thus more likely to be tied to East Turkistan and, to the extent that they are capable of collective political action in the host society, to act on its behalf in the political realm. Time in Turkish society may also soften the sense of marginal status felt by Uyghur members as a whole. On arrival, a group's folkways, traditions, social practices, cuisine, language, and public behavior may mark them as outsiders.

¹¹ Abdusalam Karataş, "Gündem İçinden: Doğu Türkistan (Agenda: East Turkistan)," *TV5*, July 23, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/100008284862701/videos/2228935120725962/UzpfSTEWMDAwODI4NDg2MjcwMToyMjI4OTcoMDC3Mzg4Nzgz>.

Nonetheless, Alba and Nee¹² have documented the gradual erosion of ethnic consciousness over time in a manner consistent with the formulations of the concept and resistance to nativist elements. Religion, though less-commonly cited as a factor in receptivity, is undoubtedly part of the package.

For similar economic and professional reasons, since the 1960s many of Turkey's Uyghurs began immigrating to third countries such as Canada, Holland, and Scandinavian countries, but primarily to Germany. Paradoxically, it has been more difficult for them to assimilate and easier to maintain their identity in these countries compared to Turkey. Under these circumstances Germany, and later the United States, has become the central outpost and the most important base for promoting the cause of East Turkistan independence and Uyghur nationalism.

The Uyghurs in Turkey consider themselves to be Uyghur Turks, a Muslim part of the Umma, but they still try to retain their Uyghur culture. They generally have positive feelings towards Turkey, even those who have been subjected to unfair treatment, being ignored, ridiculed or treated differently. Most maintain ties with relatives in East Turkistan and even in the absence of such ties, they maintain an interest in Uyghur news, customs and a desire to revisit their homeland. They have formed various cultural and religious associations through which they have contact with other immigrants and refugees from East Turkistan and maintain an identification with the Uyghur community. Unfortunately, most of the Uyghur diaspora in Turkey have not been able to contact their families in East Turkistan since December 2016. E-mail, telephone and internet have been shut down by the authorities. Authorities have severely restricted Uyghurs leaving since the summer of 2017, in what Uyghurs believe is an attempt to keep the lid on stories that might be told about the ongoing repression inside Xinjiang. The Chinese government is conducting a mass, systematic campaign of human rights violations against Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang.¹³ Dr. Abudreşit Celil Karluk

¹² Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹³ HRW, "Eradicating Ideological Viruses China's Campaign of Repression against Xinjiang's Muslims," *Human Rights Watch*, September 2018, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/china0918_web.pdf.

(Professor at Yildirim Beyazit University, Ankara, Turkey) highlighted these issues in a press conference:

China has not only violated human rights in East Turkistan, China has violated human rights every place it can reach. Look at our room now, where are the media? Why is this room not full? These things clearly prove China's human rights violations of people here, in Turkey. China is using its lobby to violate Uyghurs' rights all over the world. East Turkistan has double the honor of Turkey as both Muslim and Turkish. Uyghurs are hopeless and powerless. My fellow Uyghur brothers in East Turkistan said, "Our ancestors fought against the invaders in the Battle of Gallipoli (Çanakkale Savaşı) and they were martyred there. We gave support and help to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. Where is Turkey now? Why is Turkey so silent during our difficult and dark time? Where is the fidelity of the Turkish people?" My fellow Uyghur brothers in Turkey asked me why if, "We have skills and are capable of working, why not give us a work permit? Why doesn't the Turkish government give us the same benefits they gave to Syrian refugees? Why don't they give us the same benefits they gave to Syrian students? Thousands of Uyghur students who came from East Turkistan and fled from Egypt are studying in Turkey now. Most of them don't have a scholarship and most Uyghur students can't communicate with their families, since communication is banned by the Chinese government. They can't receive any financial support from their parents. So, they aren't able to pay 5,000 TL- 30,000 TL tuition. In the end they give up school and a lot of them work for Turkish tourism companies as tour guides and interpreters for Chinese tourists in Turkey. We know thousands of Uyghurs whose residency permits and other problems are not solved in Turkey. When the dead body of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi washed up on the beach in Turkey, the whole world, including Turkey, was shocked and raised their voices. The same things are happening in East Turkistan, but Turkey and the rest of the world are silent. Why? Turkish musicians are performing Uyghur music and songs and making money. Hundreds of Turkish scholars are studying and teaching Uyghur language, literature, culture and history in Turkey. Where are these people? Why didn't these folks give voice to hundreds of Uyghur artists and scholars in jail? All of this makes us think. Obviously, we see the fear of China's huge impact on our Turkish and Muslim brothers and other humanity. I want to say one more thing. It would be very different and we would receive more attention and more support, if we held a conference about animal rights and dogs were killed in the street.¹⁴

¹⁴ Türk Ocakları, "Doğu Türkistan'daki İnsan Hakları İhlalleri Hakkında Basın Açıklaması [Press Conference on Human Rights Violation in East Turkistan]," *Türk Ocakları*, accessed Octo-

In August 2018, a United Nations panel reported that China had turned Xinjiang into “a massive internment camp.” United Nations human rights experts expressed alarm over what they said were many credible reports that China had detained a million or more ethnic Uyghurs in the western region of Xinjiang and forced as many as two million to submit to re-education and indoctrination. Gay McDougall, a member of the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination said that “something resembling a massive internment camp, shrouded in secrecy, a sort of no-rights zone,”¹⁵ had been created, and Uyghur human rights organizations reported that three to five million Uyghur, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz (mostly Uyghurs) were locked in the concentration camps. The “People’s War on Terror” is directly linked to president Xi Jinping’s broader moves to establish his personal authority, and to demonstrate absolute control over this key strategic region in order to ensure the success of the flagship BRI, of which Xinjiang is an important part. Current policies seek to quarantine Uyghurs from any foreign contact by targeting individuals who have promoted Uyghur language or culture, as well as people who resist, or are insufficiently enthusiastic about “security” and the “war on terror” campaign.¹⁶ Now the United States, Canada, the Netherlands and UK parliaments and governments recognize that what happened to Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim people in Xinjiang is genocide. More than 50 recognized independent researchers into international law, Chinese ethnic genocide policy and Uyghur studies have conducted research and released their report. This report stated that Chinese authorities’ treatment of Uyghurs meets every criteria of genocide under the United Nations 1948 Genocide Convention. This report concluded that China bears state responsibility for an ongoing genocide against the Uyghurs, in breach of the Genocide Convention. It included mass internment, mass birth-prevention stra-

ber 28, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=turk%20ocaklari%20odogu%20turkistan>.

¹⁵ Nick Cumming-Bruce, “U.N. Panel Confronts China over Reports that It Holds a Million Uighurs in Camps,” *New York Times*, August 10, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/10/world/asia/china-xinjiang-un-uighurs.html>.

¹⁶ Rachel Harris, “Securitization and Mass Detentions in Xinjiang: How Uyghurs Became Quarantined from the Outside World,” *Quartz*, September 5, 2018, <https://qz.com/1377394/securitization-and-mass-detentions-in-xinjiang-how-uyghurs-became-quarantined-from-the-outside-world>.

tegy, forced sterilization, forcible transfer of Uyghur children to state-run facilities, and eradication of Uyghur identity, community, and domestic life, selective targeting of intellectuals and community leaders.¹⁷

The educational dilemma among the Uyghur in Turkey

Compared to Turkish youth, many young Uyghurs in Turkey are more likely to grow up marginalized in an economically deprived environment with restricted educational opportunities. For Uyghurs, including those from families who have been in Turkey for three generations, the most important issue is employment; they have a hard time competing with Turks. Above and beyond the discrimination to which they are subjected there is the accumulation of educational deprivation that begins with linguistic deficiencies. First-generation Uyghurs have a limited command of the Turkish language. These linguistic challenges have been identified as a major factor for the first generations, which is then reinforced by the Turkish school system and regulations that do not adapt to the needs of Uyghur children. Though Uyghurs are the single largest minority group in some counties such as Zeytinburnu and Selim Paşa in Istanbul and constitute the biggest minority of the population in some school districts, there are currently no teachers who can speak the Uyghur language. There are no initiatives to establish a bilingual educational system or language programs for Uyghur students and their parents.

Standard Turkish is not typically spoken in Uyghur communities in Turkey, especially while participating in social and cultural activities and at home. Many Uyghurs who are legal residents in Turkey (even naturalized citizens) will “fetch” a bride from inside their Uyghur community, Central Asia or from East Turkistan. (This was the case until recently; now there is an overseas travel ban from East Turkistan instituted by the Chinese government). These spouses often remain anchored at home for a number of years. This means they

¹⁷ Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, *The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China's Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention, March 2021*, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/Chinas-Breaches-of-the-GC3.pdf>, 3–5.

might spend most of their time at home, watching Uyghur DVDs, reading Uyghur novels and studying the Quran. Except for watching Turkish television programs, they will have virtually no exposure to Turks, Turkish society or their language. Given the recession in Turkey, such a process is likely to continue for a number of years when women have children. The children in turn will spend their formative years consuming Uyghur language and culture. To a large extent it is a vicious cycle.

Lacking economic independence, young Uyghurs are forced into a dependent relationship with their families and the larger Uyghur community that serves as their support system. Based on my study, the family ranked highest in the values held by Uyghurs, followed by the desire for true friendship, and a satisfying occupation. Most Uyghur first-graders do not master standard Turkish because they are raised in settings where mostly Uyghur is spoken. Most parents cannot participate in parent-teacher conferences or school meetings because their command of Turkish is limited. It is rare that such linguistic barriers can be surmounted in schools, and it is therefore a significant factor in the inability of Uyghur students to acquire knowledge in other subjects in school. In an interview, my informant Mr. Karahan touched on this important issue:

In elementary school, in the first and second grades, my daughter and son were not able to acquire knowledge in Turkish and other subjects at school. Their teacher and director of the school asked to meet me to discuss my children's situation. I was not aware of this until I met them. They told me that my children didn't talk and were very silent in the classroom. They got very low scores in all subjects. They thought my children might have mental and psychological problems. They recommended that I see a psychiatrist they knew. My wife and I were very worried. So, I took my children to that psychiatrist and he told us to speak Turkish at home all of the time and take time to help them with their homework at home. I agreed with him and we did what he said. My children are gradually doing better and their scores are improving at school. We did not hear any more complaints from the teacher and the school director. Now we are facing another serious problem: my children do not speak Uyghur at all at home. We speak Uyghur to them, and they reply in Turkish. They are in middle school now and they feel comfortable speaking Turkish and behave more like Turks, not Uyghurs.

I am worried and I feel awkward about this situation. I hope they will go back to being normal one day.

The Turkish educational establishment does not focus on the language problem of the Uyghur community. A number of my informants complained that their Turkish counterparts have more advantages in schooling and in job prospects in Turkey because of their connections (torpil) and untouchable social network, not just because of qualifications. A number of Uyghurs I interviewed complained about the poor quality of education in Turkey, especially the public schools and they said they wished to send their children to Europe or North America, if they would be able.

The social distance between Uyghur immigrants and the Turkish population has become larger, with the exception of the relatively small group of upper-middle class Uyghur immigrants, and a small cadre of technical and cultural intelligentsia, religious scholars and traders, who by virtue of their class position have closer contact with their Turkish counterparts. According to my study, the upscale Uyghur groups feel more at home with their Turkish counterparts than with the poor and marginalized members of the Uyghur community. So, we can see there is an emerging class-based rift within the Uyghur community in Turkey.

Turkish policy toward Uyghurs

The Turkish government has traditionally denied the diverse ethnic character of Turkey's population, which is the popular view of ethnicity in Turkey. People recognize the different heritage of their neighbors, identifying them as Circassians, Tatar, Kurdish or Laz with little tension arising. Uyghurs in Turkey who are the descendants of refugees from Xinjiang in the 1960s, are largely assimilated and consider themselves Turks rather than Uyghur or East Turkistanis. According to some of my informants, Turkish people generally called them "immigrants" (*göçmen*), even "Japanese" (*Japon*) or Chinese (*Çinli*) because of their different facial features, in particular their "almond eyes" (*çekik göz*). Some of my informants stressed that they felt extremely unhappy and even insulted by these descriptions and attitudes. They also mentioned

that the Turkish attitude and behavior have radically changed since the 1990s. These Uyghurs explained this change occurred because of the independence of the Central Asian republics, Turkey's subsequent policy change toward "Outside Turks," and public knowledge and awareness about Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples of Central Asia. For example, media such as TV and newspapers cover more news about "Outside Turks"; history and literature course materials have included more about "Outside Turks." The Turkish government awarded scholarships and encouraged "Outside Turk" students to study in Turkey. Thousands of students have come to Turkey from Central Asian Turkic republics and about one hundred from East Turkistan have come to study in Turkey every year since 1990. This number increased in the last couple of years and now thousands of Uyghur students from Xinjiang are studying in Turkey, although most don't have a government scholarship.

Government policy throughout the life of the Republic has aimed at the homogenization of the population of Anatolia based on Turkish cultural and linguistic norms. For Kemalists, this approach was crucial to the goal of the survival and long-term viability of the nation-state. In order to achieve this goal, Mustafa Kemal and the military/political elite equipped the state with a superior power over the civil society. Serif Mardin¹⁸ put special emphasis on the statist and centralist character of the Republic in its founding years. Ottoman history demonstrated that external power exploited minority and nationality questions to advance Turkey's expansionist foreign policy goals. To avoid this problem, a new identity had to be created and disparate elements made to cohere.

The descendants of Muslim émigrés from East Turkistan were not exempt from legal pressure and propaganda. There was to be no education or publishing in Turkic dialects such as Uyghur. This had been undertaken so rarely as to be inconsequential. To prosper in society, it was important that an obvious non-Turkish identity be suppressed. More significantly, rural to urban migration and the tendency to inter-marry into the Turkish Sunni majority have played a key part in the assimilation

¹⁸ Serif Mardin, "Center and Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics," in *Political Participation in Turkey: Historical Background and Present Problems*, ed. Engin Akarlı and Gabriel Ben-Dor (Istanbul: Bogaziçi University Publications, 1975), 22.

process. Youths, especially those of the second and third generations, have failed to develop their knowledge of the Turkic or Uyghur languages of their forefathers, long gravitating instead to the prestige language of the state, Istanbul Turkish. Even the involvement of Uyghurs in local politics in Turkey can have the purpose of raising awareness of the Uyghur question and identity locally; for instance, advocating the recognition and use of Uyghur ethnicity, and demanding Uyghur language instruction in Turkish schools (thus far not successful). But crucially, it is also aimed at gaining support for the Uyghur struggle in East Turkistan. Having become Turkish citizens and voters, Uyghurs have started to engage in the political lobbying of Turkish political leaders on the issue of Uyghur rights in East Turkistan. Such forms of lobbying and generating support for the Uyghurs, unfortunately, have not put any pressure on China; it is a case of politicians giving lip service.

Chinese repression across borders:
Anti-China mobilization among the Uyghurs in Turkey

Anti-Chinese sentiment among Uyghurs in Turkey has attracted the attention of Chinese authorities for a long time, and this attention has in turn affected and shaped mobilization. Uyghurs in Turkey have worked with “newcomers” or new Uyghurs or Kazaks from Xinjiang to distribute information to the rest of the world about Chinese human rights abuses. During the February 1997 riots in Ghulja, the July 5, 2009 Urumchi riot, and recent implementation of China’s “re-education camps,” for example, Uyghurs in Turkey have gathered eyewitness accounts of events in Ghulja, Urumchi and across Xinjiang from newcomers in Turkey and distributed these accounts to the world press both through news conferences and social media.

Radio Free Asia Uyghur Services has documented that Chinese agents have offered jobs to native Turks to collect information about Uyghurs in Turkey.¹⁹ A number of my informants indicated that Chinese embassy or trade office staff are dedicated solely to mapping dissi-

¹⁹ Radio Free Asia, “Uyhgurlar Hakkide Melumat Toplash Uchun Hitay Bezi Turklerge Ish Teklifi Sunghan [Chinese Offer Jobs to Some Turks to Collect Information about Uyghurs in

dents and other Uyghurs including refugees and their activities in Turkey. Threats, often directed at family members still in Xinjiang, are the most common way the Chinese government has used to silence dissidents in Turkey, and a large number of refugees and immigrants still live in fear of Chinese authorities.²⁰ TRT World has documented that, “The persecuted community who are living in Turkey say Chinese authorities have recruited Uyghurs to watch over whether their behavior is ‘suspicious’ or opposed to the ruling Communist Party”.²¹ Therefore, most of the Uyghurs I interviewed asked me to keep their identities confidential, and a number of Uyghurs, including students, university lecturers, tradesmen, and housewives, refused to agree to an interview out of fear. A couple of them asked me to delete the recording after I finished the interview. Uyghurs live with fear and trauma because their families remain stranded in China’s growing “re-education camps”.²² China is tearing Uyghur families apart.²³ As a consequence, a number of my interviewees would not socialize with other Uyghurs, especially Uyghur organizations and activists. They said that there was no way of knowing whether or not these people were connected to the Chinese Communist regime. A lot of my informants stated that the Chinese government was documenting demonstrations, identifying those involved in these activities, sending out threats and harassing Uyghurs and their family

Turkey],” last modified October 6, 2017, <https://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/xelqara-xewer/xitaydin-turuk-yashlirigha-jasusluq-teklipi-10062017222809.html>.

²⁰ Amnesty International, “Nowhere Feels Safe,” accessed February 26, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2020/02/china-uyghurs-abroad-living-in-fear>.

²¹ TRT World, “Uyghurs in Exile Say China Is Spying on Them Worldwide,” accessed June 14, 2018, <http://www.etaa.org.au/uyghurs-in-exile-say-china-is-spying-on-them-worldwide>.

²² ABC, “Uighurs Live with Fear, Trauma as Families Remain Stranded in China’s Growing ‘re-education Camps’,” ABC’s Asia Pacific Newsroom, October 6, 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-24/uighur-community-in-australia-fear-reports-of-crackdown-in-china/9824554>.

²³ Ivan Watson and Ben Westcott, “Cultural Genocide: How China Is Tearing Uyghur Families Apart in Xinjiang,” *CNN*, November 15, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/14/asia/uyghur-china-xinjiang-interview-intl/index.html>; Fergus Hunter, “Detained and in Danger: The Tortured Australian Families Who Fear for Their Missing Loved Ones,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 17, 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/detained-and-in-danger-the-tortured-australian-families-who-fear-for-their-missing-loved-ones-20181115-p50g5q.html>.

members still in Xinjiang.²⁴ The Chinese government used WhatsApp and WeChat to intimidate and surveil Uyghurs in Turkey.²⁵ These relations then contribute to the widespread feeling among activists and many Uyghurs that Chinese authorities have eyes and ears everywhere. This, in turn, is a powerful obstacle to Uyghur diaspora mobilization in Turkey and the rest of the world. On September 15, 2018, a prominent Uyghur activist, community leader, president of East Turkistan Culture and Solidarity Association (Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği) and former deputy president of the World Uyghur Congress, Sayit Tumturk, said:

Turkey does not allow us to establish a new independent organization for the campaign for East Turkistan independence because of China. But we have permission from the French authorities. So, we will establish our new organization in France between September 28 and October 1, 2019. Turkey's isolation by the international community and economic crisis has pushed Turkey close to China. China's economic, military and technological power and investments in Turkey are increasing its influence in Turkey; Turkey is also silent on human rights abuse in East Turkistan. Turkey is behaving and acting like a political ally of China. This is encouraging China's policy toward East Turkistan. I have been campaigning for human rights and democracy for East Turkistan for the last 30 years, peacefully and legally. Now our activity has been restricted by the Turkish authorities, especially since February 2018. I am very disappointed. I think and I hope this friendship between Turkey and China is temporary and not forever. The government controls the media and is hiding the real situation from the Turkish people. The Turkish people will not remain silent about the terrifying tragedy in East Turkistan. I have been warned by the Turkish authorities. I am afraid for my security and I am afraid of being arrested by the Turkish authorities. I think nobody can stop me. It is my moral and religious obligation. I will continue my liberty, freedom and independence campaign for East Turkistan with my fellow brothers. I am wil-

²⁴ Borzou Daragahi, "We Can Reach You Wherever You Are: Uighurs Abroad Feel China's Reach," *The Independent*, November 12, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/china-uighur-repression-espionage-informants-muslim-terrorism-a8626526.html>.

²⁵ John Beck, "How China Spies on Uyghurs in Turkey. WhatsApp and WeChat Are Used to Intimidate and Surveil Uyghurs," *Coda Story*, February 13, 2020, <https://codastory.com/authoritarian-tech/surveillance/uyghurs-turkey-whatsapp-wechat>.

ling to become a refugee in a safe place such as Europe, if it is necessary. I hope for the best, and I am preparing for the worst.²⁶

From September 28 to October 1, 2018, 200 delegates from 15 organizations in 20 countries attended the summit in Paris, France. They established the East Turkistan National Council (Doğu Türkistan Milli Meclisi) and the East Turkistan Independent Organization (Doğu Türkistan Bağımsızlık Teşkilatı) in Paris. Seyit Tumturk was elected as the president of the East Turkistan National Council.²⁷

Turkey's relations with China and its impact on the Uyghurs

We cannot draw a full picture of the current and future situation and status of Uyghurs in Turkey unless we discuss Turkey's economic, military and trade ties with China. Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the People's Republic of China began on August 4, 1971. This change in position was tied to the change in the U.S. position towards China. President Nixon and his leadership's long-running adverse position toward China began to change in the early 1970s, leading many countries, including Turkey, to establish relations. However, little close cooperation occurred between the two countries in the 1970s and 80s. This situation changed after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002. From June 24 to 29, 2009 Turkish President Abdullah Gül became the first Turkish president to visit China in 14 years. He called on Uyghurs to play the role of a "friendship bridge" between Turkey and China. The two sides signed \$1.5 billion worth of trade deals. This was an important visit, but relations were then locked due to strong public reactions in Turkey against the Urumchi riot and massacre on July 5, 2009. (Hundreds of Uyghurs died and thousands were injured and disappeared, according to independent sources. Eyewitnesses set this number much higher). Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

²⁶ Huseyin Tejelli, "Sheriqi Turkistan Musteqqilliq Herkiti [East Turkistan Independent Movement: Talk with Mr. Seyit Tumturk]," *Qerindashliq Situdisi*, accessed September 15, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/search/videos?q=huseyin%20tejelli>.

²⁷ Ömer Aydın, "'Doğu Türkistan Milli Meclisi' Kuruldu," *Memleket*, September 30, 2018, <http://www.memleket.com.tr/dogu-turkistan-milli-meclisi-kuruldu-1512118h.htm>.

denounced what he called “savagery” and called on the Chinese government to “give up efforts to assimilate” Uyghurs. He announced to journalists upon his return to Ankara from the Group of Eight summit in Italy that the July 5 riot and massacre in China was genocide. There was no way to interpret this otherwise.²⁸ He also said in the G8 meeting that Turkey would bring the Uyghur issue to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the UN and AB’s agenda. Just after the Urumchi massacre, Turkey gave citizenship to 3000 Uyghurs. It is an open secret that Erdogan supports a Xinjiang secession to become an independent East Turkestan “under Turkey’s responsibility.” In February 2012, then Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping (the current Chinese president) visited Turkey and reiterated the goal of increasing bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2020.²⁹

In 2010, a “strategic partnership” between Turkey and China was forged. The partnership has rapidly deepened through agreements, such as the one signed in 2015 during the G20 summit in Antalya, which subsequently made Turkey part of China’s BRI.³⁰ Turkey’s currency, the lira, has lost about 40% of its value against the U.S. dollar and the euro since the start of 2018. The drop has been made worse by a row between Turkey and the United States that led to U.S. economic sanctions against Turkey. Turkey’s gross external debt stock stood at \$466.67 billion, more than half of its gross domestic product (GDP), 52.9%, at the end of March 2018, the Treasury announced on June 29.³¹ China could play an important role in helping Turkey overcome this economic crisis. The Industrial and Commercial Bank of China in August 2018 provided a \$3.6 billion loan package to the Turkish energy and

²⁸ CNN, “Turks Criticize Chinese Treatment of Uyghurs,” last modified July 11, 2009, <http://https://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/europe/07/11/turkey.china.uyghurs/>.

²⁹ Today’s Zaman, “Turkey, China Set Eyes on \$100 bln Mutual Trade,” last modified February 22, 2012, <http://www.todayzaman.com/news-272194-turkey-china-set-eyes-on-100-bln-in-mutual-trade.html>.

³⁰ Xinhua, “China’s G20 Presidency Aligns with Turkey’s Priorities,” last modified November 16, 2015, http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2015-11/16/content_37078424.htm.

³¹ Hurriyet Daily News, “Turkey’s External Debt Stock Reaches \$466.7 Billion in First Quarter,” June 29, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetcailynews.com/turkeys-external-debt-stock-reaches-466-7-billion-in-first-quarter-133976>.

transportation sector. One thousand Chinese companies are active in Turkey and Ankara is working to attract more Chinese tourists.³²

Scholars claim that the Turkish support for the Uyghurs will weaken long-term bilateral relations,³³ as well as China's and Turkey's divergent policies regarding regional issues, such as China's handling of religious freedom in the Xinjiang region, and Turkey's attempt at seeking increasing economic relations with Taiwan, may impact the possibilities for potential cooperation between China and Turkey.³⁴ The impact of the Uyghur issue on China-Turkey relations may be large, as China suspects Turkey is harboring Uyghur terrorists and thus this may lead to difficult relations between the two countries.³⁵ Due to the shift in support away from the United States in the post-Cold War era, Turkey needs to diversify its security, military and economic interests through pursuing a "balance" towards China, the newly-emerging power.

At an unofficial level, emotional and hostile attitudes have prevailed. The public mood displayed varying degrees of hostility towards China over their persecution of Uyghurs and human rights abuse in Xinjiang, and politicians and government cannot stand aside. Turkish public opinion is split regarding opportunities with China and China's growing threat to its values and interests.³⁶ Left-leaning groups in Turkey favor China; Turks who are oriented towards Turkic or Muslim identity and values see China very negatively because of the Uyghur issue. The business community in Turkey sees China as the golden goose and they want to take advantage of China's economic growth. The Turkish go-

³² Thomas Seibert, "Anxious Not to Offend China, Turkey Stays Mum on Treatment of Uyghurs," *The Arab Weekly*, September 16, 2018, <https://theArabweekly.com/anxious-not-offend-china-turkey-stays-mum-treatment-uyghurs>.

³³ Erkin Ekrem, "Türk-Çin İlişkilerinde Uyghur Sorunu [Uyghur Issue in the Relationship between Turkey and China]," *World Uyghur Congress*, March 10, 2015, <https://www.uyghur-congress.org/tr/turk-cin-iliskilerinde-uygur-sorunu/>.

³⁴ Selçuk Çolakoğlu, "Turkey-China Relations: Rising Partnership," *Ortadoğu Analiz* 5, no. 52 (2013): 42, https://www.orsam.org.tr/d_hbanaliz/3selcukcolakoglu.pdf.

³⁵ Yizhak Shichor, *Ethno-Diplomacy: The Uyghur Hitch in Sino-Turkish Relations*, East West Center Policy Studies 53 (Honolulu: East West Center, 2009), <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/ps053.pdf?file=1&type=node&cid=32351>.

³⁶ Selçuk Çolakoğlu, *Turkish Perceptions of China's Rise*, Report No. 39. (Ankara: International Strategic Research Organization, 2014), 9.

vernment evaluates China as the balancing factor in world politics.³⁷ Officially, for example, Turkey has always pledged to help China fight Uyghur separatism and “terrorism.” Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu stated in Beijing: “We take China’s security as our security. We absolutely will not allow in Turkey any activities targeting or opposing China. Additionally, we will take measures to eliminate any media reports targeting China.”³⁸ While on July 8, 2019 a letter signed by 22 countries was sent to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights which voiced concern about the oppression of the Uyghurs, including the use of internment camps, 37 countries defended China over the mass detention of Uyghur Muslims in a letter to the UN on December 6, 2019.³⁹ Turkey did not sign either of the letters. The official opposition in the Turkish parliament (CHP, IYI party and HDP) has twice requested the government condemn human rights violations in Xinjiang and send an independent investigation to the Xinjiang, but both times this was rejected by the Turkish government (AKP and MHP).

Turkey and China have pledged closer cooperation on judicial matters. To help nurture closer relations, eight Turkish prosecutors and judges are learning the Chinese language at the Public Security University in Beijing.⁴⁰ Yücel Oğurlu (law professor and rector of Istanbul Commerce University) touched on many of these factors at the nexus of law, immigration, Turkey’s relationship with China, and Uyghur’s status in Turkey:

Turkey must immediately show concern and put on its agenda the citizenship application of these 5–6 thousand Uyghurs who came to Turkey as students and traders.⁴¹ China is proposing that communications with foreign

³⁷ Çolakoğlu, *Turkish Perceptions of China’s Rise*, 9.

³⁸ Reuters, “Turkey Promises to Eliminate Anti-China Media Reports,” August 3, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-turkey-idUSKBN1AJ1BV>.

³⁹ France 24, “37 countries defend China over Xinjiang in UN letter,” July 12, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190712-37-countries-defend-china-over-xinjiang-un-letter>.

⁴⁰ Anadolu Agency, “Turkey, China Justice Ministers Seek More Cooperation,” November 14, 2018, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkey-china-justice-ministers-seek-more-cooperation/1310926>.

⁴¹ Yücel Oğurlu, “Uygurlar’ın Vatandaşlığında İnsanlık Sınavını Kaybediyoruz... (I) [We Are Failing Our Test on the Uyghurs’ Citizenship],” *Diriliş postası*, November 17, 2018. <https://www.dunyabulteni.net/analiz/uygurlarin-vatandasliginda-insanlik-sinavini-kaybediyoruz-h432888.html>.

countries' ministries, institutions and universities be proof of its legitimacy. Any communication with China from a Turkish ministry or official, using the words they said on purpose or not, and for good intention, discussing China's security, territorial integrity, peace or terrorism, can be used against Uyghurs. As an example, the Turkish Public Administrations or justice departments, jurisdictions and financial authorities have nothing to learn from China, no lessons and no practical experiences. We should be aware that every compromise contributes to Uyghur oppression; we should be conscious of our obligation as humans and as the brotherhood of Muslims and Turks. After I saw the desperate situation, I felt a humanitarian and conscientious obligation to say the following: Uyghurs are human, if humans matter. Uyghurs are Muslim, if Muslims matter. Uyghurs are civilized, if civilization matters. Uyghurs are Turks, if Turks matter. The Chinese embassy and consulates have stopped renewals and extensions of Uyghurs' passports, and have not given passports to the newborn babies of Uyghurs in the last two years. Most Uyghurs' passports in Turkey are about to expire. They will be without any legal papers or identification... and then other serious problems will start, such as residency permits and student affairs processes... As Turkey, we should give these 5000–6000 Uyghurs citizenship or refugee status. They will not be able to go back to East Turkistan. They will be executed or put in jail as political criminals if they return. We should not evaluate their citizenship applications based simply on our foreign policy. We should go beyond this, and should evaluate their applications in light of history, faith, and humanistic values.⁴²

China's strategy in Turkey is positively aimed at gaining political influence, security guarantees, furthering the BRI, an economic presence and access to natural resources. China wants to become one of the main economic powers in Turkey, and has made great strides since 2010. On balance, Turkey has been far more important for China, and predominantly for Xinjiang. Since Communist China took over Xinjiang in 1949, the Chinese government has always been concerned about separatism among Uyghurs. Inevitably, China's strategy and foreign policy in Turkey is determined by tactics and domestic politics, as a means to consolidate its control of Xinjiang and restrain the Uyghur independence movement in Turkey. Right now, China's major foreign

⁴² Yücel Oğurlu, "Uygurlar'ın Vatandaşlığında İnsanlık Sınavını Kaybediyoruz... (I) [We Are Failing Our Test on the Uyghurs' Citizenship]," *Diriliş postası*, November 19, 2018, <https://www.uzerk.org/tr/uygurlarin-vatandasliginda-insanlik-sinavini-kaybediyoruz-i.html>.

policy initiative is the BRI. Xinjiang is right in the middle, the hub of that infrastructure development plan. Therefore, the concern is that if Xinjiang is not stable, it could undermine all foreign policy initiatives.

Beijing expects BRI recipient countries such as Turkey, and particularly Central Asian states, to be loyal to the “One China” policy. This includes refusal to support the Uyghur cause, collaborating in the “hunt for dissidents” within the frame of anti-terrorism, limited relations with Taiwan, silence on the Uyghur and Tibetan issues, and (in some cases) alignment with China at the UN Security Council. Uyghurs have reportedly been arrested and harassed by Turkish authorities.⁴³ Thousands of Uyghurs seeking asylum have been waiting in Turkey for a number of years for resettlement to a third country. Also, hundreds of Uyghurs are living in Turkey without any legal documents. Turkey and China have signed an extradition treaty.⁴⁴ China is now using its growing diplomatic and economic clout to pressure the Turkish governments to deport Uyghurs. Turkey is also helping China repatriate Uyghurs by sending them to third countries from which they can be extradited by Beijing.⁴⁵ Exiled Uyghurs are fearful and do not feel safe in Turkey.⁴⁶

Turkey signed a deal with China in November 2020 to buy 100 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Sinovac Biotech, to be delivered in batches. Based on the agreement, China was meant to deliver 50 million doses of the Sinovac vaccine to Turkey by the end of February, and the rest by the end of April.⁴⁷ However, shipments have

⁴³ Amnesty International, “Nowhere Feels Safe.”

⁴⁴ Turkey - China Extradition Agreement, “Treaty on Extradition between the Republic of Turkey and the People’s Republic of China,” accessed May 13, 2017, <https://www2.tbmm.gov.tr/d27/2/2-1798.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Gareth Browne, “How Turkey Is Sending Muslim Uighurs back to China without Breaking Its Promise,” *The Telegraph*, July 27, 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/26/turkey-sending-muslim-uighurs-back-china-without-breaking-promise>; Kuzzat Altay, “Turkey Is No Longer a Safe Haven for the Uyghurs,” *Foreign Policy*, March 2, 2021, <https://foreign-policy.com/2021/03/02/why-erdogan-has-abandoned-the-uyghurs>; Radio Free Asia, “Uyghur Mother, Daughters Deported to China from Turkey,” last modified August 9, 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/deportation-08092019171834.html>.

⁴⁶ Joanna Kakissis, “‘I Thought It Would Be Safe’: Uighurs in Turkey Now Fear China’s Long Arm,” *NPR*, March 3, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/13/800118582/i-thought-it-would-be-safe-uighurs-in-turkey-now-fear-china-s-long-arm>.

⁴⁷ Sadet Ergin, “Çin’den aşılardan gecikmesinin nedeni Uygur Türkleri meselesi mi? [Are the Uyghur Turks Issue Reason for the Delay in Vaccines from China?],” *Hürriyet*, May 26, 2021,

been beset by delays and China is still 32 million doses short of meeting the February target. These promises never materialized in full or on time as China postponed the delivery of vaccines numerous times.⁴⁸ According to Bridge Beijing, by September 6, 2021, Turkey had received only 31.4 million vaccine doses from China.⁴⁹ Turkey has struggled to get vaccine. By September 15, 2021, there have been 6,737,641 infections and 60,606 coronavirus-related deaths reported in the country since the pandemic began.⁵⁰

The shortages caused a heated debate in Turkish society and raised suspicions that China was delaying vaccine shipments to pressure Ankara to extradite Uyghurs living in Turkey to China, though Turkish and Chinese officials have denied any such pressure. With those deliveries repeatedly delayed, there is growing suspicion Beijing could be using the vaccines as leverage. Uyghur activists and many Uyghurs living in Turkey and around the world believe this is the reason behind the delays. They pointed to a treaty for the extradition of Uyghur Turks signed between Turkey and China in 2017 as a potential reason for the delay.⁵¹ That treaty was ratified by China in December 2020 but has not yet been ratified by the Turkish Parliament.

<https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/cinden-asilarin-gecikmesinin-nedeni-uygur-turkleri-meselesi-mi-41818288>.

⁴⁸ Kareem Fahim and Karen DeYoung, "China Has Made Big Vaccine Promises. When They Come Up Short, Nations Struggle," *The Washington Post*, April 7, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/china-sinovac-turkey-coronavirus-vaccine/2021/04/06/f87bc1bc-93cd-11eb-aadc-af78701a30ca_story.html

⁴⁹ Bridge Beijing, "China COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker," August 12, 2021, <https://bridge-beijing.com/blogposts/china-gives-a-major-boost-to-global-distribution-and-access-to-covid-19-vaccines/>.

⁵⁰ Reuters, "World-Coronavirus-Tracker-and-Maps," last modified September 15, 2021, <https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/turkey/>.

⁵¹ Dake Kang and Suzan Fraser, "Turkey Uighurs Fear Sellout to China in Exchange for Vaccine," *AP News*, February 5, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/turkey-beijing-coronavirus-pandemic-ankara-china-c8b714974552c484c501a5784efc117a>.

Conclusion

In Turkey, the widespread failure to respect cultural differences and thus the right to be different makes the development of successful immigration policies difficult. It is unlikely that affirmative action policies will be developed that would ensure Uyghur immigrants equal access to educational and occupational opportunities. If no action is taken, the socioeconomic disparities between native Turks and the Uyghurs will continue to grow. Turkey, facing a period of economic recession and a lack of resources, is likely to grow more dependent on outside resources and economic and technological support, especially from countries such as China. We can see from the last fifty years of the relationship between Turkey and China, that if Turkey receives more economic and technological support from China, the result will be increased suffering at home and in the diaspora in Turkey. Framing the issues in terms of assimilation and acculturation or exclusion and segregation may be helpful, but ignores the socioeconomic and political contexts. Among these policies are the priorities of “economic development,” “fair distribution of equal opportunities,” “participation in the political process,” “raising the standard of education,” and “engaging in serious dialogue.” The best prescription is effective policies leading to an improvement of the educational and occupational standing of the Uyghur, providing them with a fair and accountable legal process and protection for citizenship, and residence or refugee status, which would go a long way toward their economic, cultural and social integration.

In response to the external forces that provide Uyghur nationalists within Xinjiang with moral and ideological support, the Chinese government has actively sought cooperation with Turkey in preventing citizens from promoting Uyghur nationalism inside Xinjiang and supporting a Uyghur independence movement abroad. The Chinese government has been especially successful in gaining such support through the establishment of strong economic, trading, and military relationships and mutual security guarantees with Turkey.⁵² Turkey’s economy

⁵² In 2015, a Chinese consortium bought 65 percent of Turkey’s third-largest container terminal, Kumport, in Istanbul, acquiring a pivotal position in container transportation. In January

has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, which has devastated its primary economic sector, tourism. As Erdogan tightens his control over the central bank and the courts, foreign reserves are shrinking, the trade deficit is rising, and the Turkish lira is plunging. On the Liberal Democracy Index compiled by the University of Gothenburg's V-Dem Institute, Turkey now ranks in the bottom 20.⁵³ China's economic and technological power and investments in Turkey aren't just increasing its influence; they are making Turkey far more reticent to speak out about Beijing's abuses, systematic oppression and atrocities in Xinjiang. Turkey is thus more vulnerable to Beijing's economic and political pressure and shares its wish to prioritize development over human rights.⁵⁴ China is now a major player on the world stage and because of this Turkey, as well as many other nations and international institutions, are afraid to hurl any criticism.

2020, a Chinese consortium bought 51 percent of the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge connecting Europe and Asia across the Bosphorus. China's Export and Credit Insurance Corp. committed up to \$5 billion for Turkey's Wealth Fund, to be used for BRI projects. China is providing \$1.7 billion to build the Hunutlu coal-fired power plant on the Mediterranean Sea. Turkey's Bora ballistic missile – modeled on the Chinese B-611 missile, introduced in 2017 and deployed in the Turkish military operation against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in May 2019 – is a product of bilateral defense cooperation, as was the participation of Chinese military officers in Turkey's Ephesus military exercise in 2018. Huawei's share in the Turkish market has grown from only 3 percent in 2017 to 30 percent in 2019. Another Chinese technology company, ZTE, took over 48 percent of Netas, Turkey's key telecommunications equipment manufacturer, in 2016. Netas manages pivotal projects including the new Istanbul Airport's telecommunications and the digitalization of national health data (Ayca Alemdaroglu and Teppe Sultan, "Erdogan Is Turning Turkey into a Chinese Client State," *Foreign Policy*, September 9, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/16/erdogan-is-turning-turkey-into-a-chinese-client-state>). Alibaba bought a stake in Turkey's online retailer, Trendyol, in 2018 (Robert Stone, "How Coronavirus Pandemic Could Expand China's Footprint in Turkey," *Middle East Eye*, May 21, 2021, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/how-coronavirus-pandemic-could-expand-chinas-footprint-turkey>). One thousand Chinese companies are currently operating in Turkey. The China ambassador to Ankara, Deng Li, stated that China's investments in Turkey will reach \$6 billion by 2021. Turkey's leading mobile phone operator Turkcell signed a \$590 million long-term loan package with the China Development Bank (CDB) (Tuba Sahin, "Turkcell, China Development Bank Ink \$590M Loan Deal," *Anadolu Agency*, August 10, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/turkcell-china-development-bank-ink-590m-loan-deal/1937231>).

⁵³ V-DEM Institute, "Autocratization Surges—Resistance Grows: Democracy Report 2020," University of Gothenburg, March 2020, https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/de/39/de39af54-0bc5-4421-89ae-fb20d533dba/democracy_report.pdf.

⁵⁴ Alemdaroglu and Teppe, "Erdogan Is Turning Turkey into a Chinese Client State."

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