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XINJIANG ISSUE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

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ADVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. DR. ÇAĞDAŞ ÜNGÖR SUNAR

İstanbul, 2019

T.C.
MARMARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ

TEZ ONAY BELGESİ

SİYASET BİLİMİ VE ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER Anabilim Dalı ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER (İNGİLİZCE) Bilim Dalı TEZLİ YÜKSEK LİSANS öğrencisi NAGIMA SHUKURBEKOVA'nın XINJIANG ISSUE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES adlı tez çalışması, Enstitümüz Yönetim Kurulunun 3.10.2019 tarih ve 2019-36/2 sayılı kararıyla oluşturulan jüri tarafından oy birliği ~~/ oy çokluğu~~ ile Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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ABSTRACT

XINJIANG ISSUE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

This research paper examines the positions of Russia and Central Asian countries on the Chinese policy regarding ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and analyzes the manifestation of the Xinjiang issue in the domestic politics of these countries. In contrast to the Western countries that consider the Xinjiang issue as a failure of Chinese national policy and condemn it for the violations of human rights, the governments of Russia and Central Asian countries are emphasizing the achievements of the Chinese government in stabilizing the region and in fighting three evils of separatism, extremism and terrorism. Russia is decidedly supporting Chinese policy towards national minorities criticizing the West for the politization of the Xinjiang issue and for using it as a political instrument against China. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where unlike in other neighbors in Central Asia a large number of Uyghurs live, are trying to maneuver between China and Uyghur diasporas. Furthermore, the publics of these two countries are concerned about the situation of ethnic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in Xinjiang and appealed to the governments to take measures. The study was conducted based on the resources in Russian and English languages.

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ÖZET

RUSYA VE ORTA ASYA ÜLKELERİ AÇISINDAN SİNCAN SORUNU

Bu araştırma, Rusya ve Orta Asya ülkelerinin Sincan Uygur Özerk Bölgesi'nde etnik azınlıklara yönelik Çin politikasına karşı konumlarını incelemekte ve Sincan sorununun bu ülkelerin iç siyasetindeki tezahürlerini analiz etmektedir. Sincan sorununu Çin ulusal politikasının bir başarısızlığı olarak gören ve bunu insan haklarının ihlali olarak kınayan Batı ülkelerinin aksine Rusya ve Orta Asya ülkelerinin hükümetleri, Çin hükümetinin bölgeyi istikrara kavuşturma ve üç kötülük olarak adlandırdıkları ayrılıkçılık, aşırılıkçılık ve terörizm ile mücadelesindeki başarılarını vurgulamaktadırlar. Rusya, Batı'yı Sincan meselesini siyasallaştırması ve Çin'e karşı siyasi bir araç olarak kullanmasını eleştirerek Çin'in ulusal azınlıklara yönelik politikasını desteklemektedir. Orta Asya'daki diğer komşularının aksine çok sayıda Uygurların yaşadığı Kazakistan ve Kırgızistan, Çin ile Uygur diasporası arasında manevra yapmaya çalışmaktadır. Ayrıca, bu iki ülkenin halkları, Sincan'daki etnik Kazakların ve Kırgızların durumuyla ilgilenmekte ve hükümetlerden önlem almalarını istemektedirler. Çalışma, Rusça ve İngilizce kaynaklara dayalı olarak yapılmıştır.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IRAU	Inter-Republican Association of Uyghurs
IUHRDF	International Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation
JPS	Joint Political Council
OBOR	One Belt, One Road
PRC	People's Republic of China
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure
RF	Russian Federation
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
UAA	Uyghur American Association
UN	United Nations
UNRFT	United National Revolutionary Front of Eastern Turkestan
UOF	Uyghurstan Organization for Freedom
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WUC	World Uyghur Congress
XUAR	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The geopolitical changes in Central Asia caused by the collapse of the USSR and the formation of sovereign states of Turkic and other Muslim peoples are one of the incentives for the revival of the independence movements by the Uyghur leading minority groups living in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in PRC. In addition, they were encouraged by the example of the long-standing struggle of Chechnya in the North Caucasus with Russia. The difficult history of the relationship between Muslim Uyghurs and Han Chinese, the influence of cultural and mostly religious difference and support from abroad, including from the forces of international terrorism, led to a significant intensification of Uyghur separatism in the 1990s. Nationalist elements, using violent methods to create an independent state of East Turkestan on the territory of the XUAR, began to pose a serious threat to socio-political stability in the north-west of the country and even China's territorial integrity as a whole. By tough measures suppressing the main wave of separatist protests in Xinjiang by the end of the 1990s, the Chinese leadership began to look for ways to stabilize the situation in the region for a long time.

In the struggle against the forces of "three evils" (international terrorism, national separatism and religious extremism) in the areas where Chinese national minorities live, particularly in the XUAR, the multifacated cooperation of the PRC with neighboring states is called upon to play a leading role, including within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) established in 2001.[1]

1.1. SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Today, the problem of the Uyghur self-determination movement and its suppression by the Chinese government with harsh measures has become a very relevant

[1] Anna Bondarenko, "Problemy i Perspektivy Razvitia Sintzian-Uyghurskogo Avtonomnogo Raiona KNR v Nachale XXI Veka (Problems and Development Prospects of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of PRC at the Beginning of the XXI Century)" (**PhD Thesis**, Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of the Far East, 2007).

topic in the international arena. Despite the fact that the fight against Uyghur separatism in the XUAR of China has been going on for a long time, the crackdown by the ruling party of China since 2017 have shocked the world with its unexpectedness and cruelty. World society drew attention to the situation of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang after, since 2018, information was circulated in the international media about the mass detentions of Muslim minorities, mostly ethnic Uyghurs, in re-education camps without any trial. Several human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International, and the United Nations (UN) committees such as the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination have called for sanctions against China for human rights violations.[2]

Through the efforts of the World Uyghur Congress, which is based in Munich, these events have received significant international response abroad. Protests of the Uyghur diaspora took place in front of the Chinese embassies in different countries such as the Netherlands, Norway, Turkey etc. In mid-July 2019, representatives of 22 countries appealed to the UN Human Rights Committee condemning the policy pursued by the People's Republic of China (PRC) towards ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and a few days later, representatives of 37 countries signed a letter in support of China's policy in Xinjiang. In subsequent days, the number of supporters increased to 50 states.[3] Russia and some Central Asian countries, namely Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, took place on the list of signatories of a letter in support of China.

The relevance of the research topic is determined by a noticeable increase in the role and place of the XUAR in the Chinese domestic and foreign policy. The strategic importance of Xinjiang for China, as well as for Central Asia and Russia, is enormous. Xinjiang became a transit corridor between China, Central Asia, Russia and further Europe, thus creating the thread of a "continental bridge" connecting China and Europe by land. At the same time, the area serves as a security buffer for the internal provinces of China, as it borders with unstable states such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan.

[2] Nikita Batalov, "HRW Trebuet Nakazat Kitai Sanktsiami Za Obrashenie s Uyghurami (HRW Demands to Punish China with Sanctions for the Treatment of Uyghurs)," *Deutsche Welle*, 2018, https://www.dw.com/ru/hrw-a-45431589, (07 September 2019).
[3] "Uzhe 50 Stran Podderjali Pekin Po Sintzianu (Already 50 Countries Supported Beijing on Xinjiang)," *Regnum*, 2019, https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2674557.html, (08 August 2019).

Here is the only nuclear test site of China and most of its nuclear forces. Furthermore, the XUAR is rich in minerals, including hydrocarbon raw materials and minerals, and their development may reduce dependence on hydrocarbon imports from the Middle East, and the common border with hydrocarbon-rich Central Asian countries and Russia has already made Xinjiang a transfer corridor for raw materials.[4]

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

China has become a locomotive for the economic development of Central Asian countries. Since the XUAR became a significant gateway in the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) Initiative of China, the destabilization of the region not only threatens the security of Central Asia, but also strikes the economic interests of the countries of the region and Russia.

After stabilization and strengthening of relations of the Central Asian states with China since 1990s, as well as the beginning of the formation of a common security system within the framework of the SCO, the governments of the Central Asian republics pursue a policy regarding the Uyghurs based on the principles of non-intervention and respect for sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of other states. However, Uyghur communities and local Uyghur organizations in Central Asian countries, particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, are criticizing their own governments for using the Xinjiang issue as a political tool in relations with China. Moreover, the situation is complicated by the fact that other ethnic minorities such as Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Turkmens and Uzbeks fell under the tough policies of Beijing along with ethnic Uyghurs. This has intensified criticism of activists and human rights organizations within Central Asian countries and abroad.

[4] Ekaterina Afanasyeva, "Sintszian-Uyghurskii Avtonomnyi Raion vo Vnutrennei Politike Kitaia 1991-2006 (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China's Domestic Policy 1991-2006)," (**PhD Thesis**, Tomsk State University, 2007), http://cheloveknauka.com/sintszyan-uygurskiy-avtonomnyy-rayon-vo-vnutrenney-politike-kitaya-1991-2006-gg, (07 September 2019).

1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY AND THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of the study is to analyze the attitude of Russian and Central Asian governments towards the Xinjiang issue within the context of their bilateral relations with PRC. The study explicates the influence of the Uyghur diasporas in Central Asia as well as the Turkic minorities in Xinjiang on the Kazakh and Kyrgyz governments' attitude in the Xinjiang issue.

The main question of the study is to identify the reasons for the support of Chinese policy regarding national minorities in Xinjiang by Russia and Central Asian countries. Based on the stated goal, it formulates the following questions:

- What national interests impel the Russian government to support Chinese policy over Xinjiang?
- How does the Xinjiang issue manifest itself in Central Asian states?
- What is the attitude of Central Asian authorities to the Xinjiang problem and why?
- How are Central Asian authorities reacting to China's suppression of ethnic groups sharing commonalities with groups in Central Asia?
- What is the attitude of the societies of Central Asia to the situation in the XUAR?

1.4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The complex nature of the research topic required the study of the works written by both Western and Russian authors on a wide range of topics related to the XUAR**.** The position of the Russian and Central Asian governments on what is happening in Xinjiang and on Chinese policy is a relatively neglected topic, which has not received a holistic consideration by Russian-speaking and English-speaking researchers.

It is worth noting that the majority of Russian scholars consider the Uyghur issue in connection with China's policy in Central Asia, aimed at solving the problem of "three evils" jointly with the Central Asian republics. Also, for Russian researchers, the problems of the independence movement in Xinjiang are associated with the situation in the North Caucasus, particularly in Chechnya. Russian language literature on Xinjiang is

mostly dealing with the problems of Central Asia, which analyze Russia's participation in the SCO and the policies of various powers in the region.

Western scholars view the situation in Xinjiang exclusively from a human rights perspective. Most of the academic publications deal with the oppression of Uyghurs and other national minorities, the policy of assimilation of ethnic minorities and the "Sinicization" of vast North-Western region in China.[5]

A book "Inside Xinjiang. Space, Place and Power in China's Muslim Far Northwest" edited by Anne Hayes and Michael Clarke in 2016 made a profound contribution to the literature on the situation in Xinjiang. The anthology analyzed the amplification of inter-ethnic incidents in Xinjiang with a distinctive focus on political, economic and social interactions between Turkic Muslims and Han peoples.[6]

One of the few studies conducted by Western researchers that occupy a wide range of aspects of China's presence in Central Asia is the book written in 2012 "The Chinese Question in Central Asia: Domestic Order, Social Changes and the Chinese Factor" by Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse in which the analysis of the situation is based on the field research of the authors. One of the main statements of authors is that that China's interest in Central Asian republics foremost is prompted by the necessity of regulating Xinjiang's stability and preventing the growing support of Uyghur diasporas and organizations across the border for the rights of Uyghurs and liberation of Xinjiang. Further, according to the authors, Central Asia is important again in terms of Xinjiang's transformation into an area of transit trade for reaching new markets, after that energy resources of Central Asia and multilateral relations within the framework of the SCO are matters of importance in Chinese foreign policy strategies. As the interests of Central Asian states in relations with China were stated in the book as "to avoid being trapped in competition for influence between Moscow and Washington" and to take advantage of

[5] Ibid.
[6] Anne Hayes and Michael Clarke, **Inside Xinjiang. Space, Place and Power in China's Muslim Far Northwest**, Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.

development aid provided by the Chinese government.[7] However, authors did not delve into details about Central Asian positions in Xinjiang issue.

Another book "China, Xinjiang and Central Asia: History, Transition and Crossborder Interaction into the 21st century" edited by Colin Mackerras and Michael Clarke in 2011 made an important contribution to the study of the situation in Xinjiang in the context of Central Asian transformation in the last three decades. Especially, Kazakh scholar and Uyghur studies specialist Ablet Kamalov's work in this book: "Uyghurs in Central Asian Republics: Past and Present" addressed the interaction between Uyghur diasporas and the governments of Central Asian states.

From Russian language sources, "Myths and Reality of Ethnic Separatism in China and Security of Central Asia" by Konstantin Syroezhkin take a prominent place in the literature of Central Asia, Xinjiang and China. In his work Syroezhkin addressed the national policy of China on the XUAR and activities of Uyghur organizations in the territories of Central Asia and their impact on Uyghur separatism in Xinjiang.

Along with abovementioned works, academic articles written by Western, Russian and Central Asian researchers made a huge contribution in conducting this study.[8] In addition, materials from various news agencies, regulatory acts of various government bodies of China, Russia and Central Asian countries, materials of periodicals were used throughout the study.

1.5. FRAMEWORK AND ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

[7] Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, **The Chinese Question in Central Asia: Domestic Order, Social Change and the Chinese Factor**, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004.

[8] Berikbol Dukuyev, "Kazakhstan: How Astana Should Respond to Oppression of Ethnic Kazakhs in China," *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, 2018; Dosmir Uzbekov and Zaynidin Kurmanov, "Uyghury Kak Aktor Politicheskogo Protsessa v Kyrgyzskoi Respublike (Uyghurs as an Actor of the Political Process in the Kyrgyz Republic)," **Central Asia and Caucasus,** Vol. 17, No. 2 (2014); Erica Marat, "Uyghur Diaspora Faces Government Pressure in Kyrgyzstan," **Eurasia Daily Monitor**, Vol. 6, No. 156 (2009); Igor Grebenshchikov, "Kyrgyzy Ekspluatiruiut Uyghurskoe Menshinstvo (Kyrgyzstan Exploit the Uyghur Minority)," *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, 2005; Rustam Mukhamedov, "Uyghurs in Kyrgyzstan under Careful Government Supervision," *CACI Analyst*, 2004; Sarah Cornelison, "Conditions and Mechanisms for Terrorist Mobilization: Applying the Chechen Case to the Uighur Question," *Institute for Global Engagement*, 2015; Sultan Jumagulov, "Kyrgyzstan's Worried Uighurs," *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, 2005.

The study covers the time scope between the 1990 and 2019. The time limit is mainly due to the intensification of Uyghur separatism in Xinjiang after the collapse of the USSR and the establishment of newly independent states in Central Asia. From Central Asian countries, the study mainly focuses on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan since these two countries accommodate large Uyghur diasporas and several Uyghur organizations.

The study consists of five chapters. The introductory first chapter explicates the scientific relevance, statement of problem, research questions, objectives and framework of the study. The literature review analyzes the main works that have been done on the subject until now and the sources used in conducting this study.

Chapter Two analyzes the origins of the Xinjiang issue and a brief historical background of the national policy of China since its establishment in 1949 and implementation of these policies in the North-Western part of the PRC. This chapter also examines the development of disturbance in Xinjiang after the emergence of Central Asian republics across its territory after the 1990s. This is followed by the study of the development of Chinese harsh policies in Xinjiang.

Chapter Three analyzes the place of the Xinjiang issue in Chinese and Russian bilateral relations. The joint activities of China and Russia on the basis of bilateral relations and as well as multilateral relations within the framework of the SCO as an effort for counter-terrorism, extremism and separatism were considered under this chapter.

Chapter Four elucidates the position taken by Central Asian authorities on the Xinjiang issue. The chapter starts with an analysis of the first manifestation of the Uyghur issue in the agenda of the Central Asian governments after their proclamation of independence in 1991. The development of Uyghur organizations in the region and their interaction with the governments are examined under this part of the study. The chapter analyzes the main reasons behind the attitude of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan towards Xinjiang issue and the response of these two governments to the detention of many Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in Xinjiang since 2018 under the “Strike hard” policy of China.

The last Chapter of the study is Conclusion part. This part sets forth main findings of the study and the answers to the research questions.

CHAPTER TWO
ROOTS OF THE XINJIANG ISSUE

The discontent of Uyghurs within the People's Republic of China and ferocious suppression against this ethnos and other Turkic Muslim minorities by the ruling party has become a highly debated issue in the international arena. Chinese officials constantly assert the validity of its actions putting forward government's responsibility and superior authority to maintain territorial integrity and unity within the country. Moreover, China rejects the accusation of violence against Turkic Muslims, it says it is fighting against "three evils" penetrating the region and the country in general. On the other hand, Uyghurs have complained about state violence, suppression and indoctrination, that is, brainwashing, especially by sending millions of innocent people to the so-called re-education camps and the government's intention to seize the territory and to erase the Uyghur identity. Uyghurs claim that the fundamental rights of Uyghur nation continue to be highly violated and that they have become strangers in their own land.

Even though the instability in Xinjiang and the number of riots in the region have intensified since the collapse of the Soviet Union and with the emergence of newly independent Central Asian countries, the origin of the problem is rooted in the distant past. As for the dissolution of the USSR, so the chaotic environment of aftermath of its disintegration, especially the wave of ethnic conflicts and nationalist movements, was an amplifier of existing dispute between Uyghurs in Xinjiang and Chinese government and this period brought the conflict to another more intense stage.

Speaking about the problem in the Xinjiang region, representatives of the Uyghur society, both in Xinjiang and beyond, refer to the fact that they are the owners of these lands justifying the need for the struggle of the Uyghur people for national liberation. Uyghurs claim that they are autochthonous, i.e. indigenous inhabitants of modern Xinjiang.[9] Different scholars and organizations present different data to prove abovementioned claim. For instance, the World Uyghur Congress affirmed that Uyghurs are the original inhabitants of modern Xinjiang and it has a 4000-year history in East

[9] Konstantin Syroezhkin, **Myths and Reality of Ethnic Separatism in China and Security of Central Asia,** Almaty: Daik-Press, 2003, p. 36.

Turkestan.[10] However, Chinese officials claim the opposite indicating that nowadays Uyghurs are not the descendants of the Uyghur Kingdom of VII - VIII century, but rather newcomers from Mongolia who seek to revive that ancient realm as a modern Uyghuristan.[11] Some well-known Western resources endorse the second version based on overwhelming historical and archeological evidence that proves the difference and not direct reliance of two Uyghur nations.[12] David Brophy in his book "Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier" states that the term "Uyghur" did not refer to an ancient ethnonym, but referred to the civilized part of community in Turkestan, which embraced present Central Asia and Xinjiang, and later it was adopted by major Turkic Muslims living in Xinjiang.[13] J. Todd Reed and Diana Raschke implicitly claim in their work, Uyghurs are not directly descended from Uyghurs of antiquity.[14] But despite the claim on Xinjiang's inseparability from China's integral territory and authority, the region often remained beyond the Chinese dominion in the past. However, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) pursued the historical and nationalist perception of not only that Xinjiang was "Chinese", but that it should be always.

Xinjiang was an inseparable part of Turkestan known as the region inhabited by Turkic nations in the territory between Russia in the north, Central Asia in the west, Afghanistan in the southwest, Pakistan, India and Tibet in the south, Mongolia in the northeast and China in the east. From the 16th century with the advent of firearms, the dominance of nomads in this region ended and Turkestan gradually weakened. Turkestan was divided by other external powers, particularly by Russian and Qing Empires, into East Turkestan and West Turkestan. West Turkestan, present-day Central Asia, was easily taken under the control of Russians in the late 19th century and later divided as Autonomous Republics under the Soviet Union. The situation in East Turkestan inhabited

[10] World Uyghur Congress, Brief History of East Turkestan, https://web.archive.org/web/20160306105709/http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?cat=132 (03 January 2019).
[11] "Xinjiang's Ancient Conflict: China's False History - Ucanews.Com," *UCA News*, 2019, https://www.ucanews.com/news/xinjiangs-ancient-conflict-chinas-false-history/84632, (05 March 2019).
[12] Dru C. Gladney, "Ethnic Identity in China: The Rising Politics of Cultural Difference", **Democratization and Identity: Regimes and Ethnicity in East and Southeast Asia**, Susan J. Hender (ed.), Lanham, Md. : Lexington Books, 2004, p. 135.
[13] David Brophy, **Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier**, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016, p. 261.
[14] J. Todd. Reed and Diana Raschke, **The ETIM : China's Islamic Militants and the Global Terrorist Threat,** Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2010, p. 7.

mostly by Uyghur nation developed quite differently. Several rebellions and independence movements had been carried out by Turkic Muslim people residing in East Turkestan from 19th until the middle of 20th century.

Twice, in 1933 and in 1944, Turkic people of modern Xinjiang declared independent Republic of East Turkestan, however, both attempts were short-lived. In 1933, the East Turkestan Republic was destroyed by the Red Army, thus the Russians precluded possible uprisings for independence in the West Turkestan. In 1944, East Turkestan's second attempt at building an independent state was supported by the Soviets against China. By 1949, Chinese and Soviet governments came to an agreement, according to which Soviet government would not prevent China from conquering East Turkestan and China in turn would not interfere in the affairs of the Soviet Union in Mongolia. When Communists won the civil war in China, the Soviet support of "East Turkestan" entirely ceased. In 1948, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), established under the leadership of Mao Zedong, sent its troops to "East Turkestan" and soon captured the territory completely. In 1949, new established People's Republic of China (PRC) reannexed East Turkestan with 1.6 million km^2 territory.[15]

If in the 1930s the right to national self-determination was documented in the Resolutions adopted by the 1st (1931) and 2nd (1934) All-China Congresses of Soviets[16], so since 1949 the CCP abandoned the widely understood idea of national self-determination, specifying that national minorities have only the right to create their own national-territorial autonomies.[17] After the formation of the PRC to ensure the unity and stability of the country, the Party decided not to borrow the federal structure of Chinese Soviet Republic and not to consolidate the legal right of nations to self-determination. Thus, the old East Turkestan had no right for self-determination. It was emphasized that

[15] Abdulahad Abdurrahman, "Doğu Türkistan Ikinci Endülüs Olma Yolunda! (East Turkestan Becoming a Second Andalusia!)," *İlmi ve Kültürel Araştırmalar Vakfı*, 2018, https://www.ilkav.org/haber-1266-abdulahad-abdurrahman--dogu-turkistan-ikinci-endulus-olma-yolunda!.html, (04 January 2019).

[16] Aleksei Moskalev, **Teoreticheskaia Baza Natsionalnoi Politiki KNR (1949-1999)** (The Theoretical Basis of the National Policy of the PRC: (1949-1999)), Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2001, p. 15.

[17] In 1934, Mao Zedong recognized that the Council's policy on national minorities intended only to obtain the support of national minorities around the Chinese Soviet Republic in the struggle against imperialism and the Kuomintang. – Jang Hsieh, "Chinese Nationalities Policy: It's Development and Problems," **Anthropos** Vol. 81, No. 1 (1986).

Xinjiang, like other national regions of the country, is an inseparable part of the PRC. China intended to integrate Xinjiang with the mainland not only by putting the territory under control, but also by absorbing it politically, economically and culturally.

The defensive security outlook pursued by the newly established PRC in its policy set an overarching goal to achieve a solid consolidation of all regions and minorities within the country. The significant emphasis given to the amelioration of the Chinese ethnic minority policies since the establishment of the PRC proves it well. Even if the reality is different, it is still important to consider how national minorities policy has evolved over the course of half a century to better understand the reasons for increased alienation and oppression of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang.

Soon after the CCP proclaimed itself as the only legal government of the whole China in 1949, it has legislated the program on the national issue and national policy in the Common Program of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in which officials from all regions and all ethnic groups in China took part. Articles 50 to 53 provided for the equality of all nationalities within the borders of the PRC, prohibiting any actions leading to discrimination and oppression, a split of nationalities. Regional national autonomy was considered as a form of nation-state construction and a means of solving the national questions. Finally, the national minorities were declaratively guaranteed the freedom to develop their own language, to preserve or change traditions, customs and religious beliefs. The government was committed to assisting non-Han people in political, economic and cultural construction.[18] In accordance with the concept of national security and the integration of all border lands and their non-Han population into a single state, Article 9 of the "CPPCC Common Program" proclaimed that "autonomous regions of different nationalities are an integral part of the territory of the PRC".[19] The main goal set by the CCP in the early 1950s in relation to national minorities was to keep them as an integral part of the territory of the PRC and, as far as possible, by peaceful means, carry out primary socio-economic transformations.[20]

[18] Syroezhkin, **Myths and Reality of Ethnic Separatism in China and Security of Central Asia**,p. 175.
[19] Moskalev, **Teoreticheskaiâ`Baza Natsìonal′noĭ Politiki KNR (1949-1999),** p. 44.
[20] Anna Cienciala, "China since 1949. The Mao Years and Post-Mao China," http://acienciala.faculty.ku.edu/communistnationssince1917/ch10.html, (05 January 2019).

In the first half of the 1950s, local people in Xinjiang were taught communism and its advantages; equal rights and prosperous life dreams were promised. But these statements did not soothe Uyghurs for long. The state launched the strategy of encouraging massive Han migration into the region where Uyghurs made up the majority of the population. People condemned the government for the intention from the beginning to change the demographic structure in the region. This assertion was firmed with the state's further encouragement of interethnic marriages.[21]

By October 1955, the territory received new autonomous status and was officially named as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), however the region has never truly experienced the rights and privileges provided by this status such as independent decision-making, control over its affairs and so on. In Xinjiang, autonomy allowed local people to enjoy their culture and language, Autonomy in Xinjiang was no more than just symbolic, it was another way of colonizing the region.[22] This phenomenon exacerbated the sense of frustration among the population of Xinjiang.

And although the 8th Congress of the CCP held in September 1956 as the main focus of the struggle against nationalism considered "opposition to Great-Han chauvinism, while unconditionally eliminating the tendencies towards local nationalism among minority groups" and drew attention to the fact that in carrying out transformations in national areas it is necessary to adhere to "peaceful methods without resorting to violence", strive to "make all kinds of transformations carried out by the masses of these nationalities and their leaders on the basis of leisurely study, through consultation and in accordance with the will of national minorities", the general directions of national policy had already undergone significant changes by this time.[23] Relatively tolerant policy towards national minorities of previous years increasingly turned to the repressive and assimilationist policy.

[21] Preeti Bhattacharji, "Uighurs and China's Xinjiang Region," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2012, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/uighurs-and-chinas-xinjiang-region, (05 January 2019).
[22] Dilbahar Tawakkul, "A Study of Chinese Policy towards National Minorities with Reference to Higher Education: A Case Study of the Central University for Nationalities" (Institute of Education University of London, 1999), https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/14344063.pdf, p.64.
[23] Syroezhkin, p. 177.

Developed by the beginning of 1956, and for the first time promulgated at the congress, the "Common Task of the Party and Peoples of All Nationalities in the field of the National Question" proclaimed:

> To further strengthen the unity of our Motherland and develop brotherhood relations between different nationalities. To further strengthen cohesion within national minorities in the construction of the Motherland and the building of socialism. To transform our Motherland (China) into a great socialist power together, and also, making maximum efforts over a long period of time, to raise all nationalities to an equal position in relation to levels of economic and cultural development.[24]

In other words, on the paper as the primary tasks of national policy, it was set, firstly, the preservation of the territorial unity of China, and secondly, the intensive pull-up of non-Han ethnic groups to the "advanced level of the Han people." The solution of the set tasks assumed, along with transformations in the economic sphere, the adoption of firm measures on the cultural front, the purpose of which would be to change the traditional customs of national minorities and to overcome the traditional ideology in their midst.

Despite the fact that the period of 1949-1956 was generally distinguished by the relatively liberal policy of the CCP in resolving the national issue, while the Chinese press described it as the golden era of the party's national policy, in fact, the first repressions against the non-Hans began at that time. In 1952, a campaign was launched in Xinjiang against counter-revolutionary elements and Pan-Turkists. This campaign turned into a bloody massacre of former active participants in the national liberation movement in Xinjiang from 1944-1949. [25]

In 1957, Mao Zedong proclaimed the policy of "letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend". In China, this was perceived by many as an analogue of a thaw similar in the Soviet Union. In fact, this was one of the tricks of the Chairman of the PRC in order to identify opposition-oriented elements. Among others, representatives of ethnic minorities of China took part in this campaign, being sure that the time had come to criticize and voice their demands. The main requirements of the non-Hans were as follows: First, a part of the population favored the creation of union or autonomous republics within the PRC. Second, the demands were directed against the

[24] Ibid, p. 178.
[25] Tursun Rahimov, **Natsionalism i Shovinism - Osnova Politiki Gruppy Mao Zedonga** (Nationalism and Chauvinism - the Basis of the Policy of the Group of Mao Zedong) Moscow: Mysli, 1968, p. 120.

leadership of the central government. Third, non-Hans were opposed to the arrival of Chinese migrants in the national areas. Fourth, they opposed socialist transformations, especially in the field of agriculture. Fifth, they opposed the CCP, and those who joined the party were called national traitors.[26]

Later, in the course of the beginning of the Great Leap Forward policy, the course was taken to merge nationalities. As some Chinese ideologists noted, since people of different nationalities worked in communes, the relations between them became relations between members of the commune and, therefore, the framework of the national question would gradually narrow down to its complete disappearance. In the face of growing discontent of the non-Hans, another wave of criticism and repression against the national cadre unfolded and the number of Han personnel workers increased in Xinjiang. Establishing the "people's communes" caused a last blow to the national specifics of the minority areas; they have become a truly "integral part" of the Chinese territory.[27]

The "people's commune" disrupted the traditional patrimonial and clan ties among local ethnic minorities, they lost their national and individual identity and turned into a cheap hired labor of the state. Those who refused to cooperate were doomed to starvation, since the communes made it possible for the new government not only to bring the broad masses to the dependence on state, but also to subordinate them even in matters of food.[28]

After the failure of the Great Leap Forward policy in the national CCP course, it would seem that there are some changes. The government is temporarily refusing to set up a merger of nationalities. The settlement period begins in 1961, but all positive developments remain at the level of discussions, since China's political elite did not want to change the direction of national policy at all. A number of facts testify to the difficult situation on the ground. For example, in May-June 1962, more than 67,000 people from Xinjiang fled to the Soviet Union (in particular, to the territory of today's Central Asia),

[26] Donald Hugh McMillen, **Chinese Communist Power and Policy in Xinjiang, 1949-1977**, Boulder, Colo. : Westview Press, 1979, p. 92.
[27] Tursun Rahimov, "Velikohanskii Shovinizm Pekina v Natsionalnem Voprose" (Beijing's Great Han Chauvinism on the National Question), **Problemy Dalnego Vostoka**, No. 2 (1974), p. 90-97.
[28] Maria Goncharevskaya, "Evolyutsia Natsionalnoy Politiki KNR (1949-2015) (The evolution of the National Policy of the PRC (1949-2015))," **PhD Thesis**, South Ural State University, 2017, p.30.

in addition, a large number of people in this region moved to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Zhou Enlai, China's first head of government, called the event a traitorous counter-revolutionary uprising, which nevertheless was "crushed by the people of all fraternal nationalities of Xinjiang."[29] Therefore, it is difficult to say that the period of the first half of the 1960s was a time for correcting the excesses in national minorities policies, as is presented in Chinese historiography.

With the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, destructive tendencies began to appear even stronger. One of the slogans of this time was the elimination of four old ones: old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits. The Cultural Revolution was a disaster for the entire population of China, but the non-Han people suffered from it even to a greater extent. In the case of Xinjiang, almost all historical architectural structures were destroyed, all religious and historical resources were burnt. The religious rituals and teachings were severely restricted. Many imams, religious leaders, were executed or imprisoned. Even the national languages were outlawed.[30]

At this time, the central government again stands for the merger of nationalities. The offensive against regional national autonomy begins. Self-government bodies were replaced by revolutionary committees, in which the Han Chinese predominated, most of them military. One of the outcomes of the Cultural Revolution and the period of destruction was the adoption of the 1975 Chinese Constitution. Many provisions relating to the rights and freedoms of non-Han nationalities were excluded from it, for example, the opportunity to develop their own languages and script, to preserve or reform national customs etc.[31]

In March 1978, the next constitution of PRC was adopted, which excludes the most odious provisions of the previous constitution and returns to a certain extent to the norms set forth in the basic law of 1954. The constitution emphasized the multinational character of China, restored provisions on equality of nations, the right of a nation to

[29] Tursun Rahimov, **Sudby Nehanskih Narodov v KNR** (The Fate of Non-Han Peoples in the PRC) Moscow: Mysli, 1981.
[30] Abdurrahman, "Doğu Türkistan Ikinci Endülüs Olma Yolunda! (East Turkestan Becoming a Second Andalusia!)."
[31] Goncharevskaya, "Evolyutsia Natsionalnoy Politiki KNR (1949-2015) (The evolution of the National Policy of the PRC (1949-2015),", p. 34.

develop its language, freedom to preserve or change morals and customs, freedom of religion and the admissibility of religious organizations'activities within the framework of the law, to develop provisions on autonomy and separate acts.[32] But in reality, the abovementioned points were not fully implemented as in previous cases and there was no specific department responsible for its implementation. The rights of non-Han people continued to be infringed.

After the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China which was held in 1978, almost all the policies of the CCP in the national policy gradually began to be criticized. First of all, the merger of nationalities was rejected. As Chinese scholars note: "Socialist society is not an era of the merging of nationalities or their disappearance; it is an era of common prosperity of nationalities, an era of its common development".[33]

Finally, the principle of equality of nationalities was affirmed in the new Constitution of the PRC of 1982 and the PRC Law on the Regional National Autonomy of 1984. According to Article 4 of the Constitution, "the state ensures the legitimate rights and interests of national minorities, protects and develops the relationship of equality, cohesion and mutual assistance of nationalities".[34] Article 48 of the Law on Autonomy states that the self-government bodies of the regions of national autonomy ensure the implementation of their equal rights to all nationalities of the given region. Declarative statements about equality have not yet meant that they will be implemented in practice, but at least testified to the revision of the installations.

With the beginning of Deng Xiaoping's political reforms in the 1980s, some of the repressive policies against ethnic minorities were loosened. A new policy direction adopted by the Chinese government under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping made it possible for ethnic groups in China to travel abroad, border controls were relaxed,

[32] Syroezhkin, p. 181.
[33] Dmitry Buyarov, "Natsionalnaia Politika Kitaia v Kontse 1950 - Kontse 1970 Godov" (China National Policy in the late 1950's to the late 1970's), **Historical and Social Educational Ideas** Vol.8, No. 1, (2016), p. 41, https://doi.org/10.17748/2075-9908-2016-8-1/1-39-43.
[34] Constitution Of The People's Republic Of China, 1982, https://china.usc.edu/constitution-peoples-republic-china-1982, (05 February 2019).

religious practices were not suppressed severely as used to be. The number of *madrasahs* increased. For many people life seemed normalized.

Though the political controls have never been weakened and the persecution in Xinjiang continued. The government carried out several nuclear tests in the mountains of Xinjiang causing severe environmental damages and jeopardizing lives and health of people of the province. In November 1985, Uyghur students in Beijing staged a rally against the use of Lop Nor region in Xinjiang for nuclear tests.[35]

By the 1990s, the hardening of birth control in line with one-child policy fueled the public indignation in Xinjiang. They were rebellious against the ban, people persisted in having many children "outside of the plan". However, if women could not conceal a pregnancy, they were forced to have an abortion no matter what the period of the pregnancy. And those who gave birth breaking the law encountered cruel penalties which often put women's lives at risk. Many activists in Xinjiang took action against forced abortions and other restrictions. People who organized these movements were educated in madrasahs, thereby the government again started closing down madrasahs destroying existing institutions, strictly banned Koranic teachings, some Mullahs, religious teachers, and sometimes their students as well were detained or sent to "re-education through the labor" camps.[36]

Beijing's persistent strategy of integrating the region, characterized by tight political, social and cultural control, including the domination of the Han ethnic group in the regional government, the regulation of almost all aspects of life, ban on the practice of religious rituals and direct suppression of dissent, provoked violent opposition from the Uyghur population. Arbitrary detainment and torture applied against the thousands of people forced many of them to flee to other countries. Some people fled to the countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan in which the situation was unstable, without having documents they usually joined the militant groups. After receiving military trainings, they

[35] Gardner Bovingdon, **Autonomy in Xinjiang : Han Nationalist Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent**, Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2004, p. 8, http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.624.9996&rep=rep1&type=pdf.
[36] Amnesty International, People's Republic of China: Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, 1999, https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/144000/asa170181999en.pdf, (02 February 2019).

returned to Xinjiang and established liberation and independence organizations. These organizations began to launch organized attacks on Chinese state institutions and in public places.

The situation sharpened with the collapse of the Soviet Union and emergence of the newly independent Central Asian states. The region has entered a period of instability like never before. On the one side, ongoing armed conflicts and international military presence in Afghanistan that began to export its insecurity to other states; on the other side, new unstable Central Asian states with rather weak systems of government. The independence of five Central Asian states; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have a significant influence on the exacerbation of Uyghur separatism. The historical, cultural and religious ties that shared Uyghurs with the people of these states gave hope them for support from neighbors with common borders. The militants began agitating Xinjiang minorities for mass movement. The CCP directed a crackdown in the region. In subsequent years, Chinese repression became stronger than ever. At the same time, resistance of Uyghurs in Xinjiang and their struggle for freedom intensified to a certain extent.

China deployed its Armed Forces and sent in million Chinese settlers to control the province by all means. China could not afford to lose Xinjiang. Keeping hold of Xinjiang is essential for the state. This region is the largest in the country, it holds a strategic position opening the way for Central Asia and Europe but more importantly, its subsoil is overflowing with riches. It is here that the country's largest reserves of oil and gas and coal are to be found. Therefore, even though the Uyghur problem has been haunting the CCP leadership for more than half a century, the government attempts to stifle the rebellion at all costs.

The pursuit for independence or greater political and cultural autonomy are largely derived from resentment over violations of fundamental human rights; restrictions to religious and cultural expression, ethnic conflict with the local Han Chinese population, income inequality, and the assertion that the CCP is misallocating natural resources of Xinjiang. On this ground Uyghur nationalism became sharper, mass demonstrations and consecutive attacks began to take place thick and fast. In April 1990, the Baren protests

began in a mosque against family planning, nuclear testing, and oil exploitation. With the opening fire of PLA soldiers on the protestors, the violent riot broke out with the call for 'jihad' by Uyghur nationalists. On 6 February 1992 four bombs detonated in public buildings and on two public buses in Urumqi resulting in three deaths and 23 injuries. On 17 June of the same year a bomb attack took place in a Kashgar hotel. In the summer and autumn of 1993, several insurrections occurred over the whole province of Xinjiang. Several incidents took place in 1997, starting from the execution of 30 Uyghurs during Ramadan which resulted in culmination of riots in the region.[37]

The deepening Uyghur problem presented a significant obstacle to the implementation of ambitious geopolitical projects of the PRC in the world conjuncture of 1990s. Beijing's government persisted in following heavy-handed responses to Uyghur uprisings. The Permanent Committee of the Politburo of the CCP launched "Strike Hard" campaigns in 1996 targeting separatism and illegal religious activities in Xinjiang. To maintain stability in the region, the government issued the list of strict directives aimed at eradicating mass uprisings and secessionist activities.[38] In consequence of this suppressive campaign, thousands of people were arrested, and as many were executed. As the Amnesty International Report from 1999 shows, the death penalty in the PRC was exclusively used against Uyghurs in Xinjiang during these years. However, this intense campaign of repression failed to stop riots and it resulted in further executions.[39] The restrictions set forth in the "Strike hard" policy gave the impression for the minorities in Xinjiang that the main goal of Chinese government is to eliminate Uyghur identity itself, rather than Uyghur resentment in Xinjiang.

The increase in separatist violence and resentment made the government to issue an economic initiative to eradicate tensions in China's western frontier by developing the provinces. The Great Leap West policy launched in 1999 aimed to better integrate Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Economic situation in the region has improved noticeably and the

[37] Bovingdon, **Autonomy in Xinjiang : Han Nationalist Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent**, p. 8.
[38] Remi Castets, "The Uyghurs in Xinjian - The Malaise Grows." **China Perspectives**. Vol.49, No. 9-10 (2003), p. 2-19. http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/6013, p. 10.
[39] People's Republic of China: Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, 1999, https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/144000/asa170181999en.pdf, (02 February 2019).

infrastructure developed as well. However, the tension between Uyghurs and the government as well as Han Chinese remained unchanged.[40] The Great Leap West initiative could not provide the stability in the region and it may have worsen it. The policy attracted people from other provinces of China and soon the Han migration accelerated into Xinjiang. The wage of minorities increased compared to previous years, but it was Han Chinese population which benefited most from this policy. Furthermore, the minority population met with bureaucratic obstacles in their search for work, mostly they did not meet the requirements of workplaces or simply were discriminated by Han employers ultimately providing cheap labor force. Thus, the inequality expanded to a greater extent which irritated the Uyghur population and spawned new insurgencies.

The attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001 was a turning point for China in dealing with ethnic separatism in Xinjiang. Prior to 9/11 incident, Chinese officials made all efforts to hide the ethnic conflict and its violent applications against rebellions in its western frontier from the international media and community. Yet after the United States' call on the whole world tp join the "war on terror", Chinese regime propagated the Xinjiang unrest blaming pro-independence groups for links with the international terrorist organizations. The American military campaign served for Chinese government to gain international justification and support against Uyghur "terrorism" in Xinjiang. Accordingly, after the 9/11 attacks the Chinese government, under the pretext of "counter-terrorism measures," suppresses any manifestation of political and religious dissent in the region. On this ground, several Uyghur organizations were declared terrorist organizations by the United States and the United Nations. Now Uyghurs lost all hope for a possible international intervention on their behalf. Beijing began tightening its "Strike Hard" campaigns. Even small nationalistic actions were defined as "terrorist" and were subjected to violent measures.

In 2005, China made some changes to its language policy where all citizens of the country have to learn the Chinese language. At first glance, there is nothing wrong with that. Since Chinese is the official language, it is even profitable for all members of small

[40] Amy H. Liu and Kevin Peters, "The Hanification of Xinjiang, China: The Economic Effects of the Great Leap West," **Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism** Vol.17, No. 2, (2017), p. 265-266, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/sena.12233.

nations to know it. However, according to Kaharman Khozhamberdiev, vice-Chairman of the World Uyghur Congress and the leader of the Uyghurs in Kazakhstan, this policy is, in fact, a death sentence for the ethnic Uyghurs of China, and not only for them, for all national minorities in the country. Previously, in all schools of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region - Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and Uyghur - they studied their native language from the first grade. From 5-6 grades they began to learn Chinese, and everyone mastered the official language. There were no problems. But since 2005, everything has changed. A strict law was passed, according to which, in all cities, major population centers, starting from the first class, education should be conducted in Chinese. And they begin to learn Uyghur only from the 6th grade. That is, according to Khozhamberdiev, if the Uyghurs of China today put up with this situation, then after some 30-40 years the Uyghurs will disappear in the form in which they existed for a thousand years, it will be a completely different nation and externally, a person may remain a Uyghur, but his psychology, mentality, culture, language will be different.[41]

In July 2009 Urumqi riots broke out between Uyghur and Han populations in Xinjiang. Starting as protests against unfair treatment of Han population towards minorities, it quickly turned into violent attacks which took away more than 200 lives and injured about 2000 people, many vehicles and buildings were destroyed. The Standing Committee of Politburo was convened immediately after the 5 July riots to take actions in XUAR, the CCP charged the authority in Xinjiang to "isolate and punish the instigators" and to "educate the mass that took part in the riots by provocation of others".[42] According to some accounts, following this meeting thousands of men were detained as 'suspects' of the incident and thousands of men went missing, nobody knew whether they were killed or detained.[43]

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[41] Bolat Ryskozha, "Kaharman Kozhamberdiev: Uyghury Ne Zhelayut Rastvoritsia Sredi Kitaitsev (Kaharman Kozhamberdiev: Uygurs do not want to be assi,ilated with the Chinese.)" *Radio Azattyk*, 2009, https://rus.azattyq.org/a/Kaharman_Kozhamberdiev_uighurs_China/1782943.html, (12 March 2019).

[42] David O'Brien, "Violence And Identity - The ' Self ' And The ' Other ': An Exploration Of Ethnic Relations And Conflict In China ' s Xinjiang Uyghur", Fan Hong and Peter Herrman (Eds.), in **Asian Studies - Within and Without**, Amsterdam: Rozenberg Press, 2013, p.12.

[43] Chisa Fujioka, "Uighur Leader Says 10,000 Went Missing in One Night", *Reuters*, 2009, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-xinjiang/uighur-leader-says-10000-went-missing-in-one-night-idUSTRE56S1O020090729, (02 February 2019).

In 2014, China toughened its "Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism" directed to control Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang. One of the main and ferocious policies the government operated in the line with this campaign is the internment camps or "re-education camps". These camps are run without any legal foundation and are kept from the outside world. Since 2014, over a million Uyghur people were jailed, accused of extremist and separatist crimes, but often they are held without any trials.[44] Families of detainees cannot get information from authorities, they don't know whether their relatives are still alive or not. The daily life of all minorities in Xinjiang is under the constant police control. Since 2016, when the Communist Party Secretary Chen Quanguo who is well-known for his harsh policies in Tibet took charge for the leadership of Xinjiang, the efforts of suppression dramatically intensified. The region became the most heavily policed region not only in China, but in the whole world. The guarded check points were set up nearly in every corner of the region. Vocational centers were doubled, or even tripled in the last few years and accordingly the number of detainees grew heavily. Separate camps started being built for Uyghur children,who will be brought up as Chinese ridding them of their ethnic and religious identity.[45] More than 45 reasons exist to be sent to these internment camps which do not leave any freedom of expression, movement, having property and so on.[46] Lots of Uyghur men and women feared of detainment or executions, began to flee to other countries. Against that, Xinjiang authority declared them as criminals and traitors, took other family members of escaped people away to "hidden camps" and cut off all possible communication accesses in the region with outside. The situation in the region is still strained.

As of 2019, what is happening in the region is defined by many observers as the "cultural genocide". Human rights and other organizations began calling out the world to respond to the torture and political brainwashing in Xinjiang. Organizations like Human

[44] Gerry Shih, "'Permanent Cure': Inside the Re-Education Camps China Is Using to Brainwash Muslims", *Business Insider*, 2018, https://www.businessinsider.com/what-is-life-like-in-xinjiang-reeducation-camps-china-2018-5, (02 February 2019).
[45] Maya Wang, "Eradicating Ideological Viruses: China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims", *Human Rights Watch*, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs#, (07 February 2019).
[46] Tanner Greer, "48 Ways to Get Sent to a Chinese Concentration Camp", *Foreign Policy*, 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/13/48-ways-to-get-sent-to-a-chinese-concentration-camp/, (10 March 2019).

Rights Watch, Amnesty International, World Uyghur Congress appealed to the UN Human Rights Council on 25 February 2019 at its annual session to send an international monitoring mission in Xinjiang.[47] More and more countries began criticizing Chinese crackdown in the region and Muslim groups of several countries also staged demonstrations over the violence against Uyghurs.

[47] Stephanie Nebehay, "Rights Campaigners Seek U.N. Probe on China's Xinjiang Camps", *Reuters*, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-xinjiang-rights/rights-campaigners-seek-un-probe-on-chinas-xinjiang-camps-idUSKCN1PT1DK, (20 February 2019).

CHAPTER THREE

THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

In the second half of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, the territories of Turkestan, present-day Central Asia and "East Turkestan", acquired strategic importance which led to the imperialist rivalry of the big powers for dominance in the region. After several years of resistance, the West Turkestan fell under the control of Russia. Yet East Turkestan turned out to be the most vulnerable territory. Despite the fact that the region was seized by Chinese troops in 1759 and was named Xinjiang, since then, local residents, mostly Uyghurs, have rebelled more than four hundred times.[48] Sometimes the situation was complicated by the Russian interventions, which had their own interests in the region. In 1871, Russian troops occupied the city of Gulja and the adjacent areas in Xinjiang. The territory was returned to China only ten years later, and together with the Russians Gulja left about 45,000 Uyghurs who settled in the territories of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.[49] Later in 1934, the Soviet Union deployed its army to "East Turkestan" to insure its interests on this territory.[50] And in 1944 when the relations between the Soviet Union and China got worsened, the Soviets supported the independence of the East Turkestan Republic with its capital in the city of Gulja. However, soon after the Communist Party came to power, the Soviet Union recognized the territory of "Eastern Turkestan" as an integral part of China. Russia preferred to smooth relations with its ideological ally and promised to act as a mediator in the reconciliation of two sides. Since then Russians have not shown any encroachment on the territorial integrity of China.

Xinjiang, however, today remains a headache for the Chinese authorities. The strong separatist sentiment of Uyghurs in the region forced Beijing to resort to a fierce

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[48] Mihail Baskhanov, "Politika Anglii i Rossii v Otnoshenii Gosudarstva Yakub-Beka v Vostochnom Turkestane (60-70-e Gg. XIX v.) (The Policy of England and Russia in Relation to the State of Yakub Bek in East Turkestan (60-70s of the XIX Century))" (Academy of Sciences of the USSR - Institute of the Far East, 1991), p.17, http://cheloveknauka.com/v/409820/a?#?page=1.

[49] Igor Rotar, "Zheltaia Chechnya (Yellow Chechnya)," *Lenta.ru*, 2017, https://lenta.ru/articles/2017/11/15/xinjiang/, (01 August 2019).

[50] Ma Te, "The Waning History of Russians in Xinjiang," *Sixth Tone*, 2018, https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1002123/the-waning-history-of-russians-in-xinjiang, (30 July 2019).

crackdown. Since 2017, information has been circulated in the media about violations of the rights of ethnic minorities and the creation of a network of "re-education camps" in Xinjiang that caused outrage in international society. Some governments have called on China to end the mass detention of Muslims in the province. However, there are governments that support and approve counter-separatist measures of the CCP. Russia is at the top of the list endorsing the Chinese policy towards Xinjiang since Xinjiang issue in China is reminiscent of the Chechnya conflict. For Russia a restless Xinjiang also presents a considerable threat to the interests of the country both in China and Central Asia. Moreover, Russia's position on the Xinjiang issue springs from mutual relations developed between the Russian Federation (RF) and the PRC.

Today Russia and China are the largest neighboring powers, they have a common border exceeding 4,000 km, both countries are objectively interested in remaining in a zone of good-neighborliness, friendship and cooperation. In 2019, the RF and the PRC, marked the 70th anniversary of Sino-Russian relations. During these 70 years, the stages of rapprochement between the two countries alternated with the stages of cooling relations. From the moment of the collapse of the USSR and up to the present, there are signs of another rapprochement. Since 1990 the development of relations between the PRC and Russia has gone through three main stages: firstly, during the visit of the President of the RF Boris Yeltsin to China in 1992, two sides signed the Joint Statement on the Basis of Mutual Relations between the PRC and the RF, thus defining each other as friendly states; secondly, in 1994, during the visit of Chinese President Jiang Zemin to Russia two sides signed the Second Sino-Russian Joint Statement which moved friendly relations to the constructive partnership; and thirdly, from 1996, countries established the "partnership of strategic coordination based on equality and benefit and oriented towards the 21st century". Nowadays, the relationship between the two countries are continued on the basis of strategic partnership. [51] Modern Chinese-Russian interests are coordinated in bilateral relations. Both countries have common goals and objectives

[51] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, China and Russia: Partnership of Strategic Coordination, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ziliao_665539/3602_665543/3604_665547/t18028.shtml, (24 August 2019).

such as their emphasis on peacekeeping and the development of cooperation.[52] The proximity and often overlapping of foreign policy interests predetermine close interaction in the international arena.

The steady tendency of rapprochement between the two countries dates back to the post-Soviet period. If in the first half of the 1990s, this tendency was weakly expressed, then since 1996, it has noticeably increased, and after Vladimir Putin came to power in the Russian Federation in 2000, it acquired distinct forms.

In 1996, following the Russian-Chinese summit in Beijing, the leaders of the two countries, Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin, announced a joint statement, which characterized bilateral relations as "strategic partnership." In the same year, the order of regular annual meetings of the heads of government of Russia and China was established, and interaction between the central executive authorities of the two countries was imposed on an ongoing basis.[53] Despite the fact that this statement was more declarative in nature than based on a real state of affairs, nevertheless the official statement on "strategic partnership" did reflect the desire of the two powers to strengthen their foreign policy positions.

Since the second half of the 1990s, the two countries have expanded the scope of Russian-Chinese cooperation and have ceased to be limited only to bilateral ties and entered the interregional level. In addition to cooperation in the fields of economy, trade and politics, the parties agreed on a necessity in security cooperation following the latest events in both of these countries.

The wave of ethnic and nationalist conflicts in the post - Cold War period affected these countries too. Chechen-national liberation movements led to instability in the North Caucasus of Russia and Uyghur separatist sentiment in the Northwestern province of China forced the government of the PRC to take specific actions in eliminating roots of any endeavor of uprisings. Outbreaks of both of these conflicts in the countries were

[52] Vitaly Velmozhin, "Kitaisko - Rossiiskie Otnoshenia: Sovremennoe Sostoianie i Perspektivy (Chinese-Russian Relations : Current State and Prospects)," **Northern (Arctic) Federal University,** Vol. 19, No. 3, 2018, p. 30.
[53] Vladimir Paramonov and Aleksei Strokov, "Otnoshenia Mejdu Rossiey i Kitaem : Istoria, Sovremennost i Budushee (Relations between Russia and China: Past, Present and Future)," **Central Eurasia**. Vol. 46, No. 6 (2006), p.7.

predetermined by the factors such as ethnic and religious diversity and both posed a threat to the territorial integrity of the countries.

A common faith shared by the Chechen and Uyghur fighters for national liberation in their countries rallied them to support each other. According to the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, dozens of mercenaries from the Northwestern China participated in guerrilla operations in the Chechen Republic. In late August of 2000, Russian authorities decided to extradite two Chinese citizens, Uyghurs by nationality, captured earlier during the military operation in Chechnya,[54] relying on the extradition agreement signed by the two countries on June 26, 1995.[55]

Furthermore, Russian experts claimed that Uyghurs, mainly living in Chinese Xinjiang, are increasingly involved in the activities of various radical Islamic groups seeking to destabilize situations in Central Asia and the Muslim regions of Russia. The Central Asian region was of great significance for national security of both Russia and China. The probable export of extremist ideologies and movements from Afghanistan and Pakistan to the weakly controlled Central Asian region and from there to the territories of Russia and China forced two countries to expand collective security measures throughout the region. The initiative to establish a regional institution that would envisage cooperative efforts in economic, trade, military and most importantly in security affairs was very welcomed by the governments of Central Asia.

The Shanghai Five group was founded as a result of the signing in 1996-1997 between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Russia and Tajikistan agreements on strengthening confidence in the military field and on the mutual reduction of armed forces in the border area. Later, on 15 June of 2001 with the joining of Uzbekistan it was transformed into the international Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO has become a regional security organization in which both China and Russia are leading

[54] Aleksandr Sobianin, "'Novaia Granitsa' Dlia Moskvy ('New Frontier' for Moscow)," Expert, 2000, https://expert.ru/expert/2000/31/31ex-china1_22905/, (07 August 2019).
[55] Hu Jianming, "O Zakonodatelstve KNR Otnositelno Ekstraditsii (On the Legislation of the PRC Regarding Extradition)," *People's Daily*, 2011, http://russian.people.com.cn/31521/7573734.html, (02 March 2019).

countries. This Organization has given China and Russia space to develop relations with strategic partners and at the same time ensured safe and stable development in the region.

Actions against terrorism, extremism and separatism, and ensuring security and stabilization at the borders of countries became fundamental to China and Russia, and this was also the common goal of their strategic cooperation. At the initiative of China and Russia, the SCO has become one of the first international organizations that acts against terrorism. The first document of the SCO, three months before 9/11 incident in the United States, was the "Convention on the fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism" which highlighted these three phenomena as serious threats to the territorial integrity and security of the member states, as well as their political, economic and social stability.[56] For China, the signing of the convention was associated with concerns about growing separatist sentiment in the XUAR. For Russia, it was important as the last civil war, fought from 1999 to 2009, in Chechnya turned out to be more brutal than the first which was accompanied by heavy casualties among members of the federal forces, activists of Chechen armed groups and civilians in the republic.

After the 9/11 attacks, to get support and legitimacy from the world community in oppressing separatist movements in Chechnya and Xinjiang, the authorities of Russia and China have made great efforts to present these movements as terrorist acts and consider all participants of the opponent side as the members of international terrorist organizations.[57] Though both the Uyghur and North Caucasian separatists view their struggle not as a national, but as a religious one, as a liberation from the power of the "infidels",[58] ethnic and national aspirations were the main drivers of the struggle for liberation in these regions and the Islam provided the inspiration to struggle. While the Russian and Chinese authorities attempted to justify their harsh suppression measures

[56] "Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism," 2001, http://kremlin.ru/supplement/3405.
[57] Human Rights Watch. Devastating Blows Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang, 2005, https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/china0405/china0405text.pdf, (06 August 2019).
[58] Igor Rotar, "Chechenskii Scenari v Kitae? (Chechen Scenario in China?)," *Voennoe Obozrenie*, 2013, https://topwar.ru/35360-chechenskiy-scenariy-v-kitae.html, (01 August 2019).

against rebellious national minorities labeling them as terrorists, they themselves led to the radicalization of some Uyghur and Chechen civil groups.[59]

Extremist and radical ideas began to penetrate heavily into the territories of Central Asia, the XUAR and the North Caucasus when the US declared the campaign of the global war on terrorism and started the war in Afghanistan. Following this incident, many dissidents of these regions went to fight side by side with terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Taliban etc. After returning to their homeland they posed the threat of spreading extremist views and activities. It forced the governments of Russia, China and Central Asian countries to be on full alert for their security since the territories of these countries turned out to be very vulnerable. Considering this and on the basis of the "Convention on the fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism", the SCO members established the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) in 2002 with the headquarter in Tashkent. The body was tasked with improving interaction in the fight against terrorism, separatism, extremism, illicit drugs and weapons, as well as illegal migration. The functions of the RATS include coordination of law enforcement and special services of the SCO states.[60]

Despite the measures taken against radical and terrorist groups, large-scale terrorist attacks have expanded from North Caucasus to other regions of Russia. According to the official reports, in the period 2000-2005 about twenty acts of terrorism were recorded and the fighters who were involved in all these incidents were from the North Caucasus republics.[61] Beijing was concerned about the militant groups in Xinjiang, the violence happening in the region could expand to other regions of China at any time. Moreover, since the beginning of this century, there has been a significant increase in terrorist threats and attacks throughout the SCO area. Consequently, the SCO member states sought to enlarge the scope of anti-three evils cooperation within the framework of the SCO.

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[59] Matthew Oresman and Daniel Steingart, "Radical Islamization in Xinjiang - Lessons from Chechnya?," *Analytical Articles*, 2003, https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/8256-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2003-7-30-art-8256.html, (07 August 2019).

[60] "The History of the RATS," The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2002, http://ecrats.org/ru/about/history/.

[61] "Samye Krupnye Terakty v Rossii v 2000-2007 Godah (The Largest Terrorist Attacks in Russia in 2000-2007)," *Ria Novosti*, 2008, https://ria.ru/20080804/150102309.html, (07 August 2019).

Later in 2006, at the Shanghai summit, the leaders of the SCO members based on the existing antiterrorist cooperation signed the "Plan of cooperation of the SCO countries in countering terrorism, separatism and extremism for 2007–2009". At the same time, thanks to China and Russia, the SCO has achieved successful results in the proliferation of antiterrorist measures, activities and resources and the development of cooperation to ensure security at the borders of countries. China and Russia, further agreed to strengthen the cooperation between the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), thus expanding the geographical space of terrorist resistance. Thereby, the efforts of China and Russia, the counter-terrorism mechanism of the SCO has moved to a new level, and the organization became an important structure for realizing the interests and benefits of China and Russia.[62]

From 2013, as a result of increasing persecution towards Uyghurs by the PRC the number of riots also increased, and certain radicalized Uyghur groups and individuals linked to external terrorist groups began to carry out terrorist attacks in many other cities outside of Xinjiang. The violence extended beyond the place of origin as happened in the North Caucasus of Russia.[63] The Chinese regime tightened security measures, which were already tough in Xinjiang. And after several suicide bombings were carried out on public places in Xinjiang, Beijing and Shanghai by ethnic Uyghurs, in 2014, the CCP launched a campaign called "People's war on terror" to eradicate extremism.

In contrast to the international society, which has criticized China for human rights violations, Russia has responded positively to Chinese policy regarding the situation in Xinjiang when the CCP launched "Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism" in 2014. This can be understood in the light of Russian war against the opposition in the Syrian conflict and many militants from Xinjiang fought on the side of terrorist groups who fought against the Syrian government. These events, together with the intervention of the Turkestan Islamic Party, which was banned in the Russian Federation and China,

[62] Vitaly Yevtushenko, "Otnoshenia Mejdu Rossiei i Kitaem v Strukture Shanghaiskoi Organizatsii Sotrudnichestva: Strategicheskie Tseli Stran (Relations between Russia and China in the Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: The Strategic Goals of the Countries)," **Molodoi Uchenyi.** Vol. 24, No. 158, 2017, p. 256–59. https://moluch.ru/archive/158/44763/. (26 April 2019).

[63] Sarah Cornelison, "Conditions and Mechanisms for Terrorist Mobilization: Applying the Chechen Case to the Uighur Question," *Institute for Global Engagement*, 2015, https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200500261829, (08 August 2019).

in Syria, prompted Beijing to rethink its approach to the Syrian crisis, which was characterized before by non-intervention. In particular, on August 14, 2016, Rear Admiral of the People's Liberation Army of the PRC Guan Yufei visited Damascus, where he held a number of meetings with the Russian and Syrian military.[64] This visit indicated that Beijing decided to take a step towards supporting official Damascus and Russian military intervention as an option for the fight against the dissidents from Xinjiang who joined terrorist groups and to prevent their return to China.

At the height of the Syrian crisis, the number of Uyghur militants in the ISIS has grown. It is alleged that the leadership of the Islamic Movement of East Turkestan established contacts with ISIS, which predetermined the participation of its militants in the Syrian conflict. In order to recruit Uyghur men to their units, the ISIS Information Center distributed in 2015 through the Internet a hymn urging Muslims in China to join militants in the name of the caliphate. According to some reports, in 2018 about 4-5,000 Uyghur militants fought in Syria. Most of them were concentrated in the province of Idlib, in which Al-Nusra initially taught new arrivals, including children.[65]

The intensification of the terrorist and extremist factors in Xinjiang would weaken China and impede the implementation of economic plans, including the Great Silk Road project, since the southern corridor of this route, passing along the XUAR, will be in danger. In addition, most of the Chinese oil and gas is produced in Xinjiang and fuel from Russia is brought to China through this region, but most importantly, Xinjiang is assigned the role of the central link in the "One Belt and One Road" project, a global Chinese infrastructure initiative that should connect markets of China, the Middle East and Europe. To achieve it China put tremendous funds into development of a backward Xinjiang.[66] Consequently, a destabilization in the region will hit Chinese long-term geopolitical and economic ambitions. Moreover, the detarioration of the situation in this

[64] Maksim Isaev, "Uyghurskii Terrorizm Ugrozhaet 'Shelkovomu Puti' Kitaia (Uyghur Terrorism Threatens China's 'Silk Road')," *Regnum*, 2017, https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2245721.html, (07 August 2019).
[65] Olga Bibikova, "Uyghurskii Djihad v Kitae i Sirii (Uyghur Jihad in China and Syria)," *Rossia i Musulmanskii Mir*, 2018, p. 73, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/uygurskiy-dzhihad-v-kitae-i-sirii, (07 August 2019).
[66] "Kontslager Na 10 Millionov Uyghurov (Concentration Camp for 10 Million Uyghurs)," *Medusa*, 2018, https://meduza.io/feature/2018/09/18/kontslager-na-10-millionov-chelovek, (29 August 2019).

area also threatens to disrupt the Turkmen gas pipeline to China.[67] All these factors slow down the process of unification of Eurasia into a single economic space, which Russia, China and their other allies are striving for. Accordingly, Chinese efforts in stabilizing the situation in Xinjiang are important for Russia not only for ensuring security in the strategically significant Central Asian region, but also in developing its geostrategic interests.

In December 2015, China adopted the first anti-terrorism law, allowing the Chinese army to conduct military operations on the territory of other countries.[68] In 2016, Beijing sent military advisers to Syria to assist the country in preparing the personnel of the Armed Forces. The Chinese military also wanted to "learn methods of warfare - for example, counteracting tunnel bombings, fighting suicide bombed vehicles".[69]

In 2016, the leaders of the China's Special Operations Forces offered to cooperate in the exchange of experiences in countering terrorism. They showed great interest in training their fighter units at the International Training Center for Special Forces near Gudermes in the Chechen Republic, where Chechen instructors will teach the Chinese how to deal with suicide bombers. In July of the same year, a delegation of representatives of the Chinese security services flew to Grozny. The guests were shown video materials about the Chechen experience in countering extremism and terrorism. Later from December 6 to 10, 2016, on the instructions of Ramzan Kadyrov, the Head of the Chechen Republic, a Russian delegation arrived in XUAR. It was headed by the Head of the Special Forces Training Center, Daniil Martynov, and the Head of the Directorate of the Federal Service of Forces of the National Guard of Russia for Chechnya, police colonel Sharip Delimkhanov. The delegation visited one of the largest training centers for the preparation of the "Chinese riot police". The Chinese have held demonstrations in wrestling, climbing and fire training for Chechen specialists. Chechen center instructors showed their fire preparation skills to their colleagues. Joint training is carried out through

[67] Bibikova, p. 74.
[68] Vladislav Gordeev, "Kitai Razreshil Armii Provodit Antiterroristicheskie Operatsii Za Rubezhom (China Allowed the Army to Conduct Anti-Terrorist Operations Abroad)," *RBC*, 2015, https://www.rbc.ru/politics/27/12/2015/567fbed89a79472b029fde51, (08 August 2019).
[69] Aleksandr Rybin, "Kitai Speshit Na Pomosh Asadu (China Hurries to Help Assad)," *Gazeta.ru*, 2016, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2016/08/17_a_10135913.shtml, (08 August 2019).

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the Security Council of Russia and the SCO.[70]

The defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iraq in 2017 caused Beijing fears that radical Islam would infiltrate unstable Xinjiang and from there into the inner regions of China. According to rough estimates of the Syrian ambassador to China, about 5 000 Uyghurs fought in Syria during the peak period of 2014 – 2015. With the end of hostilities in Syria, they began to return to their homeland. In order to prevent any possible extremist actions, in the spring of 2017, the central authorities adopted a law on countering extremism in the XUAR and one of the measures to combat terrorism became centers for "retraining of the local population."[71] Although the Chinese authorities rejected the existence of re-education camps until the end of 2018. Russian government supported all kind of measures taken by Beijing in eliminating the elements of the three evils.

During the official meeting in Moscow the parties agreed to expand cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg Syromolotov and his Chinese counterpart Lee Huailai stated the importance of creating a broad anti-terrorism front in the fight against IS, the Islamic Movement of East Turkestan and other terrorist organizations, and taking comprehensive measures to counter the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters and radicalization of vulnerable segments of the population, in particular in the context of minimizing risks for the Central Asian region.[72]

The representatives of Russian Embassy in China also noted the achievements of Chinese government in stabilizing Xinjiang. On December 28-30, 2018, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China organized a trip to the XUAR for the delegation of foreign diplomats on the regular reports from media about "re-education camps". As the embassy of the Russian Federation in the PRC stated, during their stay in the XUAR, the diplomats

[70] Inna Sidorkova, "Kitaiskii Spetsnaz Hochet Uchitsia v Chechne (Chinese Special Forces Want to Study in Chechnya)," *Gazeta.ru*, 2016, https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2016/12/14/10426007.shtml?updated, (01 August 2019).
[71] Natalia Portiakova and Elnar Bainazarov, "Negativnyi XUAR: Zachem v KNR Stroiat Spetslageria Dlia Natsmenshinstv (Negative Xinjiang, Why in China Are Building Special Camps for Ethnic Minorities)," *Izvestia*, 2018, https://iz.ru/813990/nataliia-portiakova-elnar-bainazarov/negativnyi-suar-zachem-v-knr-stroiat-spetclageria-dlia-natcmenshinstv, (12 June 2019).
[72] "RF i Kitai Dogovorilis Rasshirit Vzaiomodeistvie Po Borbe s Terrorizmom (Russia and China Agreed to Expand Counter-Terrorism Cooperation)," *Ria Novosti*, 2017, https://ria.ru/20170227/1488852584.html?in=t, (08 August 2019).

had the opportunity to get familiarized with the achievements in Xinjiang's socio-economic and cultural development. The delegation of diplomats also visited the vocational education and training centers in Kashi, Hatyen and Moiu counties. The Russian diplomatic mission noted that China is successfully using these centers to prevent and combat threats of the spread of ideas of extremism and terrorism in the region and that there is no humiliation of human rights which is regularly put forward in the Western media. [73]

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, speaking at the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University in Bishkek on February 4, 2019, commented on the "political re-education camps" in the XUAR. According to Lavrov, relations between Russia and China are currently "the best in any historical period," a mutually respectful dialogue exists between the countries. The minister said that Russia does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries adding that the problem of extremism in the region is acute and that there is a need for tough measures. As the Russian Foreign Minister stressed, Moscow is interested in coordinating actions between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China in this area and in coordinating actions not only between Russia and China, but also between the CSTO countries and the SCO to be effective in solving the problem with terrorists who are immigrants from Central Asia, Russia or China.[74]

Moreover, one of the areas of bilateral cooperation between Russia and China is the containing American influence in Central Asia and Eurasia as a whole. Both Russia and China are concerned with the US and its Western allies will use the Xinjiang issue as an opportunity to revive "color revolutions"[75] and thus weaken China as a competitor and prevent the combined efforts of Russia, China and other countries to create a strong Eurasia and confront America's interests in the continent. Consequently, Russia is no less interested in resolving the situation in Xinjiang and in suppressing separatist movements.

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[73] "Lavrov Prokommentiroval Soobshenia o 'Lageriah Perevospitania' v Kitae (Lavrov Commented on the Reports about the 'Re-Education Camps' in China)," *Ria Novosti*, 2019, https://ria.ru/20190204/1550342004.html, (03 August 2019).

[74] "Rossia Otkazalas Osudit Kitai Za Otpravku Musulman v Lageria (Russia Refused to Condemn China for Sending Muslims to Camps)," *Lenta.ru*, 2019, https://lenta.ru/news/2019/02/04/do_whatever_you_want_to/, (03 August 2019).

[75] Sergei Luzianin, "Potentsial 'Treh Zol' (Potential of 'Three Evils')," *Moscow State Institute of International Relations*, 2009, https://mgimo.ru/about/news/experts/120555/, (08 August 2019).

In July of this year, Russia, along with 50 countries, supported Beijing's position on the situation in the XUAR after 22 countries appealed to the UN Human Rights Council to urge China to stop the mass detention of Uyghur Muslims. The appeal was addressed to the President of the UN Human Rights Council and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. It confirmed China's high contribution to normalizing the situation in Xinjiang, the economic and humanitarian development of the region, its infrastructure and the effectiveness of measures to improve the living standards of the population. In addition, the supporting side claims that no terrorist attacks have occurred in the region over the past three years.[76] The Russian officials commenting on this issue stated that the topic of human rights is often heavily politicized, and the signatories of these letters are not really concerned about the real situation with human rights in the XUAR, their task is to weaken China.[77] Russia decided to support China on the basis that Russia itself is often subjected to such attacks by Western states. Again, Russia's support is connected with geostrategic and economic interests and the similar problems of extremism and separatism. Additionally, Russia stands for Chinese policy as a confrontation to the Western interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

[76] "Uzhe 50 Stran Podderjali Pekin Po Sintzianu (Already 50 Countries Supported Beijing on Xinjiang)."
[77] Mikhail Korostikov, "Uyghuram Ne Hvatilo Podpisei (Uyghurs Did Not Have Enough Signatures)," *Kommersant*, 2019, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4031915#id1408741, (08 August 2019).

CHAPTER FOUR

CENTRAL ASIA

An analysis of the problem of ethnic separatism in China will be incomplete without consideration its Central Asian component. Firstly, Central Asia is the region with which the XUAR adjoins not only geographically, but also historically, culturally, ethnically and religiously. Secondly, considering the characteristics of ethnogenesis in Central Asia, the peoples of the region have close, and sometimes by their historical and cultural past family roots. Thirdly, the ethnic diasporas from among the major ethnic groups of the Central Asian states reside both on the territory of the XUAR and the Uyghur, Dungan and Han ethnic diasporas on the territory of the Central Asian states. Fourthly, along with the cultural and religious affinity between the peoples of Xinjiang and Central Asia has always existed close economic ties. Moreover, through Xinjiang and Central Asia took place the famous Silk Road.[78]

Considering abovementioned common elements, it would seem that the states of Central Asia should have come first to help and support Uyghurs in Xinjiang over China's oppression. However, the governments of Central Asian states largely avoid mentioning China's Uyghur crackdown. The main reason is considered to be that the countries fear economic retribution from its powerful neighbor. Yet there can be other factors that prevent these countries to stand up to China.

This chapter mainly addresses the questions of what the attitude of the authorities of the Central Asian states to the Xinjiang problem is, how does the Xinjiang problem manifest itself in the Central Asian states and what is the attitude of other ethnic groups in the region to these events. Moreover, I found it necessary to include in this study the influence of the Uyghur diaspora and Uyghur organizations in the Central Asian region. Addressing the problem of the Uyghur diaspora in the states of Central Asia also allows us to take a closer look at the question of what it is today, how strong separatist sentiments

[78] Robert Guang Tian, "Sintzian-Uyghurskii Avtonomnyi Raion Kitaia i Ego Rol v Sisteme Regionalnogo Ekonomicheskogo Sotrudnichestva Bolshoi Tsentralnoi Azii (Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China and Its Role in the System of Regional Economic Cooperation of Greater Central)," **Central Asia and the Caucasus**, Vol. 61, No. 1 (2009): 12.

are in it, how justified is the "uyghurophobia" that has been observed in most states of the region. Furthermore, in recent years, for the governments of Central Asian states Xinjiang issue also began to represent the problem of their compatriots (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek people) living in Xinjiang.

The answers to these questions are directly related to the relations of the Central Asian states with China and the specific situation that developed in the 1990s. In the early 1990s the relations between China and Central Asian states were relatively poor. In order to resolve territorial issues, China reached border agreements with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan where in some cases of them China obtained 50 percent or less of the argued territory.[79] For Chinese policy in the post-Soviet Central Asia, the preservation of socio-political stability in the region and minimizing the negative impact of the separatist attitude of national minorities on the north-western regions of China were of paramount importance. In these years, it was mainly about limiting the influence of Islamic fundamentalists and pan-Turkists on the Muslim regions of China. Such a statement of the question was determined primarily by the need to maintain stability in predominantly Muslim areas of the PRC, which, in the opinion of both the central and regional leadership, was directly dependent on the situation in the neighboring independent Muslim republics.[80]

In 1992, the first leaders of Central Asian states visited the PRC on official visits, who, on the one hand, signed a number of documents on trade, economic, scientific and technical cooperation, and on the other, assured the Chinese leadership in agreement with the PRC's position on the most sentimental issues for the country. Firstly, that the government's concerns about the "revival of Islamic fundamentalism" in the territory of post-Soviet Central Asia are not well founded. Secondly, that the government of the PRC is recognized as the only legitimate government, and that Taiwan is an integral part of Chinese territory. These same principles are further enshrined in declarations on the basis of friendly relations between the PRC and the states of Central Asia.

[79] Evan S. Medeiros, **China's International Behavior: Activism, Opportunism, and Diversification.** Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2009., p. 134.
[80] Lilian Craig Hurris, "Xinjiang, Central Asia and the Implications for China's Policy in the Islamic World," *The China Quarterly*, No. 133, 1993, p. 125.

The head of the State Council of the PRC, Li Peng, who visited Central Asian states in April 1994, spoke in Tashkent and expressed his vision of the principles of bilateral relations between the PRC and these states. Not removing from the agenda of the above provisions, he emphasized that relations between China and the states of Central Asia should be built on four fundamental principles: 1- adhere unswervingly to good neighborliness and peaceful coexistence; 2- develop mutually beneficial cooperation and promote common prosperity; 3- respect the choice of the people of each country and not interfere in internal affairs; 4- respect sovereignty and promote stability in the region.[81]

In the same year, the worsening domestic political situation in Xinjiang and the intensification of the activities of the Uyghur separatist organizations put another issue on the agenda of China's relations with the Central Asian states - the issue of ethnic separatism. The Chinese side, for whom this problem had already acquired real outlines by the beginning of the 1990s, received assurances from the leaders of the Central Asian states that they are opposed to any kind of national separatism, and will not allow the separatist activities of any organizations and forces on their territories.[82]

The further attitude of the authorities on the activities of the Uyghur organizations on the territories of the Central Asian states was determined precisely by this formula. Although it would be inappropriate to talk about any repression, but the activities of the Uyghur organizations and their leaders have come under the field of vision of the relevant authorities. And there were grounds for that, since the activities of some organizations and the statements of the leaders of these organizations introduced additional complications to the relations with China and thereby caused direct or indirect damage to national security interests of the Central Asian countries.

However, these measures did not lead to the desired result. The consolidation of the Uyghur organizations both within the region and with the organizations of the Uyghur diaspora beyond its borders not only did not stop, but, on the contrary, increased. The

[81] Liang Zhenpeng, "Kitaiskaia Diplomatia v Tsentralnoi Azii v 1990 Gody (Chinese Diplomacy in Central Asia in the 1990s)," (**PhD Thesis**, Far Eastern Federal University, 2017), p. 18.
[82] "Joint Declaration on the Further Development and Deepening of Friendly Relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the People's Republic of China," *Diplomaticheskii Kurier*, No. 1 (1996), p. 69.

reason for this is not relief from the authorities, of which the Chinese press accused the leadership of the Central Asian states, especially Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, but the intensification of repressive measures against extremist groups in China itself.

China sought to take the stability of the region under the control with multilateral institution. China and four other former Soviet states, namely Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, formed a multilateral forum to negotiate existing border and security issues. The main reason for China's desire to get closer to the countries of the region was the instability in its north-west province. The Shanghai Five, predecessor of the SCO, was established in 1996 to deal with the disputed border issues with Central Asian countries and to overcome common security challenges. The first summit was held in April 1996 in Shanghai where five countries negotiated to develop some security confidence building measures. The second summit took place in April 1997 in Moscow in which the Shanghai Five countries signed an agreement on mutual reduction of military forces in the border territories. In the third summit which was held in 1998 in Almaty, the countries expanded the issues of discussion focusing on peace and stability in the region as well as economic cooperation between five countries. The fourth summit took place in Bishkek in August 1999 and the fifth one in Dushanbe in 2000. In these summits, countries agreed on maintaining the peace, stability, friendly neighborhood, development and prosperity in the region. They also affirmed to resist external interventions, conflicts and threats, national separatism and religious extremism.[83] From the founding aims of this cooperation it is explicitly seen that China sought to prevent any support of Central Asian governments for "East Turkestan's" pro-independence actions.

The collapse of the USSR and the emergence within Central Asia of new independent states, whose statehood is as we mentioned before built primarily on an ethnonational basis, indirectly stimulated the intensification of trends in ethnic separatism in China. In the early 1990s, the leaders of local Uyghur communities gained hope for the emergence of more favorable conditions for the only, in their opinion, possible solution to the Uyghur issue - the creation of an independent state in the territory of Xinjiang

[83] Qingguo Jia, "The Success of the Shanghai Five: Interests, Norms and Pragmatism," 2019, http://www.comw.org/cmp/fulltext/0110jia.htm, (02 March 2019).

Uyghur Autonomous Region.[84] But with the collapse of the USSR, China quickly established diplomatic relations with all republics of Central Asia, because the sovereignty of peoples who are ethnically close to Chinese Uyghurs could detonate and cause a new wave of separatism not only in Xinjiang, but also in Inner Mongolia and Tibet. Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, according to the Uyghurs, betrayed the Turkic brotherhood for the sake of their own national interests. And the Uyghur diasporas, mainly in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, have become a convenient foreign policy factor for use by these countries in their relations with China.[85]

Since the early 1990s, under the influence of processes occurring in the world and in the post-Soviet space, as well as China itself, among the Uyghurs of Central Asia (mainly Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan), represented mainly by immigrants from China in the 1960s, there has been an intensification of anti-Chinese activities in support of performances in the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region in order to recreate the independent Uyghur state of East Turkestan. Uyghur organizations began to be established in all Central Asian states where Uyghurs live compactly, but they became most active where the Uyghur diaspora was least subjected to assimilation processes, or where national legislation was more liberal regarding political parties and movements. There were two such states at the time, like today, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic. Although Uyghur organizations existed on the territory of other countries in the region, in these two countries they had more common views and purposes with those in Xinjiang.[86]

This chapter mainly focuses on the standpoints of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan towards the situation in Xinjiang and analyzes their perspectives under the subtopics since the Uyghurs in these countries could preserve their identity and Uyghur diasporas and their organizations are actively involved in attempts to release "the East Turkestan" from China's repressive policies unlike the Uyghurs in neighboring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

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[84] Anna Bondarenko, "Problemy i Perspektivy Razvitia Sintzian-Uyghurskogo Avtonomnogo Raiona KNR v Nachale XXI Veka (Problems and Development Prospects of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of PRC at the Beginning of the XXI Century)," (**PhD Thesis**, Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of the Far East, 2007), p. 3.
[85] Igor Grebenshikov, "Uyghury v Kyrgyzstane (Uyghurs of Kyrgyzstan)," 2001, https://zonakz.net/2001/04/18/уйгуры-в-кыргызстане/, (03 March 2019).
[86] Syroezhkin, p. 196.

Ethnic Uyghurs in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, who immigrated until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, have been assimilated with local nations. Nowadays, Uyghur associations in these countries are predominantly limited with cultural and social activities, they do not represent political views of their compatriots in Xinjiang.

Tajikistan, unlike other Central Asian countries, does not have ethnic affinity with the ethnic minorities of the XUAR. There are currently about 5,000 Uyghurs living in Tajikistan. A large number of Uyghurs arrived in these lands in 1950 – 1960's. The identity documents of these newcomers of Tajik lands in many cases did not indicate their true nationality. They were recorded either as Tajiks or Uzbeks. Interethnic marriages also facilitated the assimilation of Uyghurs with local Tajik people. With the proclamation of the independence of the Republic of Tajikistan, Uyghur diaspora established the Association of Uyghurs in May 1992. Since then, the Association has conducted activities related to the cultural heritage of ethnic Uyghur people.[87] The Tajik government and the Uyghur diaspora in it had not made any statement on the Xinjiang issue until the summer of 2019, when Tajikistan, in the composition of 37 countries, signed a statement supporting China's policies in the XUAR at the close of the 41st session of the UN Human Rights Council.[88] China is a strategic partner of Tajikistan and it is significant for Tajik government to maintain and strengthen bilateral relations with the CCP in economic, political, security, military and military technical spheres. In particular, Beijing plays an important role in ensuring security on Tajik-Afghan border which is very susceptible issue for the security and stability of Tajikistan.[89] This is evidenced by the emergence of a new Chinese border post and the accumulation of military equipment and soldiers of the Chinese army in the Ishkashim district of the

[87] Gulchehra Usmanova, "Liuboi Mujchina v Uyghurskoi Semie - Prekrasnyi Povar (Any Man in a Uyghur Family Is a Great Chef)," *Uyghur Today*, 2016, http://uyghurtoday.com/2016/07/14/lyuboj-muzhchina-v-uygurskoj-seme-prekrasnyj-povar/, (04 September 2019).
[88] "Tajikistan Podderzhal Politiku "Perevospitania" Musulman-Uyghurov v Kitaie (Tajikistan Supports the Policy of "Re-Education" of Muslim Uyghurs in China)," *Sputnik*, 2019, https://tj.sputniknews.ru/world/20190715/1029411661/tadzhikistan-uyghur-musulmane-china.html, (04 September 2019).
[89] Amin Hozhaev, "Tajikistan Rasshiriaet Sotrudnichestvo s Kitaem v Sfere Bezopasnosti (Tajikistan Expands Security Cooperation with China)," *Russkaia Planeta*, 2019, https://rusplt.ru/rubeji/tadzhikistan/tadjikistan-rasshiryaet-sotrudnichestvo-s-kitaem-v-sfere-bezopasnosti-21825.html, (04 September 2019).

Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan bordering Afghanistan.[90] From the first days of the establishment of diplomatic relations, the Republic of Tajikistan and the PRC attached paramount importance to the issues of ensuring regional security, stability and a joint struggle against international terrorism, religious extremism, fundamentalism and separatism, the illegal distribution of narcotic substances and organized crime.[91] Moreover, China is Tajikistan's largest investor. Tajikistan is the first country to sign a Memorandum of Understanding on the joint construction of "One Belt, One Road" with China. With the help of China, infrastructure, energy and communications are developing in Tajikistan, the connection of the northern and southern roads and the unification of electric networks throughout the country have been achieved.[92] Thus, the support for Beijing's policy in the XUAR by Tajikistan as well as other countries in the region can be explained by the increased economic dependence of these countries on China. The share of China in the external debt of Tajikistan, according to the Minister of Finance of Tajikistan, is about 48%.[93] Consequently, China's power began to influence the political decision-making.

There are three Uyghur national cultural centers today in Uzbekistan. The Uyghur Cultural Center of Uzbekistan was established in Tashkent in 1989. Currently, its structure includes Andijan regional and Tashkent city centers.[94] The Centers publish their own Uyghur magazines in Cyrillic. There are also three programs broadcast daily in

[90] "Ekspansia. Kitaisy Berut Pod Kontrol Granitsu Mejdu Tajikistanom i Afghanistanom (Expansion. The Chinese Take Control of the Border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan)," *Kavkaz Center*, 2019, https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2019/08/01/118324/ekspansiya--kitajtsy-berut-pod-kontrol-granitsu-mezhdu-tadzhikistanom-i-afganistanom.shtml, (05 September 2019).
[91] Li Jing, "Sotrudnichestvo Respubliki Tajikistan i Kitaiskoi Narodnoi Respubliki v Ramkah SHOS (1996-2012gg) (Cooperation of the Republic of Tajikistan and the People's Republic of China within the SCO (1996-2012))" (PhD Thesis, Tajik National University, 2013), http://cheloveknauka.com/sotrudnichestvo-respubliki-tadzhikistan-i-kitayskoy-narodnoy-respubliki-v-ramkah-shos.
[92] "Spetsialnyi Reportaj: Poseshenie Si Tsinpinom Stran Tsentralnoi Azii Otkroet Novuiu Stranitsu v Razvitii Otnoshenii s Sopredelnymi Stranami (Special Report: Xi Jinping's Visit to Central Asian Countries Will Open a New Page in the Development of Relations with Neighboring Countries)," *Xinhua News*, 2019, http://russian.news.cn/2019-06/10/c_138131108.htm, (05 September 2019).
[93] Alisher Zarifi, "Glava Minfina RT: Dolia Kitaia vo Vneshnem Dolge Tajikistana Sostovliaet Okolo 48% (Head of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Tajikistan: The Share of China in the External Debt of Tajikistan Is about 48%)," *Radio Ozodi*, 2019, https://rus.ozodi.org/a/30090194.html, (05 September 2019).
[94] The Committee of the Interethnic Relations and friendly Cooperation with Foreign Countries under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, The Uyghur Cultural Center of Uzbekistan, http://interkomitet.uz/o-komitete/nacionalnye-kulturnye-centry/ujgurskij-kulturnyj-centr-uzbekistana/, (05 September 2019).

Uyghur on state radio, and short television shows a couple of times a month. The broadcasts are devoted exclusively to the life and culture of ethnic Uyghurs in Uzbekistan. The current situation with the Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities in China is not covered and in general, the society of Uzbekistan is not very much aware of what is happening in the XUAR. There is no exact data on the number of Uyghurs living in Uzbekistan. Like in Tajikistan, part of the Uyghurs in Uzbekistan registered as Uzbeks and many of them were assimilated. According to the last census conducted in Soviet times, in 1989, almost 36,000 Uyghurs lived in the Uzbek SSR, accounting for 0.2% of the republic's population. Since then, full censuses have not been conducted, but according to official statistics, in 2000 the size of the Uyghur community was approximately 19,500 people, which is significantly less than the previous number.[95]

The situation is aggravated by the fact that the Uzbek government has long been reluctant to even recognize the existence of a Uyghur minority in the country. According to the professor of the National University of Uzbekistan Ablat Khodjaev, an ethnic Uyghur and author of books about this ethnic group, in the mid-1990s, at a meeting of former President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov with then-Prime Minister of China Li Peng, Karimov answering the question about Uyghurs in the country said that there are no Uyghurs in Uzbekistan at all.[96] Today, the government of Uzbekistan adheres to the same position. On the situation taking place in Xinjiang between the Chinese government and Muslim minorities, the Uzbek authorities refers to the principles of peaceful coexistence, which constitute the foundations of relations between the two countries, and this, mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, peaceful coexistence.[97]

[95] "Uighury Uzbekistana (Uyghurs of Uzbekistan)," *Uighur Narod*, http://uighur.narod.ru/uighurum/uighur-uzbekistan.html, (05 September 2019).
[96] "Nevidimye Uyghury Uzbekistana (Invisible Uyghurs of Uzbekistan)," *Eurasianet*, 2019, https://russian.eurasianet.org/невидимые-уйгуры-узбекистана, (05 September 2019).
[97] Otabek Tuliaganov, "Analiz Razvitia Ezbeksko-Kitaiskoi Diplomatii v Ramkah Politiki "Odnogo Poiasa, Odnogo Puti" (Analysis of the Development of Uzbek-Chinese Diplomacy in the Framework of the Policy of "One Belt, One Road")," **Molodoi Uchenyi**, Vol. 143, No. 9, 2017, https://moluch.ru/archive/143/40092/, (06 September 2019).

Nevertheless, Uzbekistan also took place in the list of countries supporting Chinese policy towards Uyghurs in Xinjiang at the UN Human Rights Council in 2019.[98]

The Xinjiang question in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan developed differently. Uyghur national funds and cultural centers in these republics already existed under the Soviet Union. But the main goal of their activities was to promote the development of the Uyghur culture and create conditions for the preservation of the Uyghurs as a distinct ethnic community. All these organizations received official registration with the relevant authorities in Central Asian countries; moreover, their activities were strongly stimulated by the state authorities. The subsequent development of Uyghur public organizations is directly connected, firstly, with the awareness of the active part of the population of the importance of creating public associations; secondly, with the emergence of a legal framework for targeted organizational reform and improvement of Uyghur public organizations.[99] And yet by the mid-1990s, activists from Uyghur diaspores in Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan, began to organize radical organizations for the liberation of "the East Turkestan".

Back in May 1991, among the Uyghurs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan was spread Appeal of the Uyghur Liberation Organization. In particular, it claimed: "Our Motherland today is under the yoke of the Chinese colonialists, experiencing their cruel oppression. Our people face the danger of disappearing as a separate nation. The Uyghur people, wherever they live, are united by one goal - the liberation of Uyghurstan."[100] But as an official organization it will be established one year later in Kazakhstan under the name of Uyghurstan Organization for Freedom (UOF).

On January 26, 1992, the Inter-Republican Association of Uyghurs (IRAU) was formed, which received state registration in Kazakhstan on September 30, 1992. This decision was made by three hundred delegates from five Central Asian states gathered in Almaty. According to some sources, they called on the President and Parliament of

[98] "MID Kitaia: Uzbekistan Toje Podderzhal Politiku Kitaia Po Otnosheniu k Uyghuram (Chinese Foreign Ministry: Uzbekistan Also Supported China's Policy towards the Uyghurs)," *Togri.uz*, 2019, https://www.togri.uz/ru/politika/mid-kitaya-uzbekistan-tozhe-podderzhal-politiku--11142, (06 September 2019).
[99] Kaharman Khozhamberdiev, "Uyghury v Rakurse Istorii," *Vysshaia Shkola Kazakhstana*, 2001, p. 235.
[100] Syroezhkin, p. 495.

Kazakhstan, as well as the governments of the republics of Central Asia, to "help the Uyghurs in their national liberation movement."[101]

The IRAU was an interstate organization, and its associative members consisted of Uyghur culture societies of all Central Asian states. In addition, representatives of Uyghur organizations from Germany, Turkey and the United States took an active part in the work of this organization as honorary guests. In turn, representatives of the IRAU traveled to Turkey, Holland, Germany and the USA to participate in the first World Uyghur Kurultai (Istanbul, December 1992); in the work of the International Organization of Turkic Youth (Munich, November 1994); in an international conference on the protection of human rights in China (New York, October 1994); in the work of the 4th session of the UN General Assembly (Hague, January 1995), the outcome of which was a special resolution on " the East Turkestan".[102]

Later, as the Head of the Uyghur diaspora in Kazakhstan Kaharman Khozhamberdiev noted, a dissent arose in the organization due to the approach to defining the goals and tactics of the organization. If one section of organization's leaders saw them in creating favorable conditions for the development of Uyghur culture and language, solving the socio-economic problems of the Uyghur population of Central Asian states, for the other, political slogans related to the protection of human rights and the creation of an independent Uyghur state began to acquire paramount importance. In the wake of the intensification of ethnic separatism in the world and the activities of so-called extremist groups in China, the second group came forward. In 1995, a separate organization emerged from IRAU - the Society of Uyghur Culture of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the IRAU itself was transformed into the Regional Public Union "Association of Uyghurs." As the main task of the Regional Public Union "Association of Uyghurs" was declared "the struggle for human rights, for the right to self-determination of the Uyghurs in their historic homeland."[103]

[101] Zheng Kun Fu, "Sintzian-Uyghurskii Vopros i Ego Razvitie (Xinjiang Uyghur Issue and its development)," *Tsentr Sravnitelnogo Izuchenia Regionov*, 2001, p. 74.
[102] Khozhamberdiev, "Uyghury v Rakurse Istorii (Uyghurs from the perspective of history.)," p. 239-244.
[103] Ibid, p. 237.

2003 was a significant year for Uyghurs in Central Asia. Mainly because Central Asian governments signed bilateral agreements with China on mutual fight against terrorism and extremism and assured their main partner about the inadmissibility of any activities of "separatist groups" which obviously meant Uyghur associations in the territories of their countries. Apart from this, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the SCO was headquartered on November 2, 2003 in Tashkent. This Center in Chinese policy mainly targeted to fight Uyghur separatism in Xinjiang. However, it was obvious that forthcoming impacts of these initiatives will have an impact on Uyghurs living in the republics of Central Asia. The joint military exercises of the SCO members "Cooperation 2003" that held in both Kazakhstan and in the XUAR in August of this year only confirmed it.[104]

The problem of the Uyghurs living in China, has repeatedly spread to neighboring Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan where societies expressed indignation against Beijing's policies in Xinjiang and demanded that the authorities take a stand in defense of minorities. The dual position, when Western countries consider such fugitives as political dissidents, and neighboring China unconditionally calls them terrorists and separatists, put the authorities of the Central Asian countries, especially Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in a rather difficult situation. The authorities of these countries try to maneuver between both parties, which often fails and leads to criticism from both the PRC and the countries of Western democracy.

The governments of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan use the Uyghur issue as a tool in their negotiations with Beijing. In exchange for preventing them from becoming a source of concern for China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan sought to obtain concessions from Beijing on other controversial issues.

4.1. THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

[104] Rustam Mukhamedov, "Uyghurs in Kyrgyzstan under Careful Government Supervision," CACI Analyst, 2004, https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/8747-field-reports-caci-analyst-2004-1-28-art-8747.html, (01 June 2019).

4.1.1. Uyghur Organizations in the Republic of Kazakhstan

The activities of Uyghur organizations in Central Asia primarily begin in Kazakhstan, and it dates back to the late 1970s. In 1979, a group of seven people of the Uyghur intelligentsia began to publish the newspaper "Voice of Eastern Turkestan" in Kazakhstan. A newspaper published in Almaty in the Uyghur language informs readers about the history and current situation of the Uyghurs' historic homeland, propagates patriotic sentiments. In the early 1980s, Uyghur intellectuals, veterans of the East Turkestan Republic of 1944-1949, prominent representatives of the Uyghurs joined the publishers of the newspaper. United by a common idea of recreating an independent Uyghur state on the territory of the so-called Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region of China and expelling the invaders from their homeland, in 1984 the united patriots established the National Revolutionary Front of Eastern Turkestan (NRFET). The Front begins propaganda activities aimed at awakening the patriotic spirit of the Uyghurs - immigrants in the countries of Central Asia.[105]

According to data provided by Modan Muhlisov, the leader of NRFET, in 1991, a kurultai (congress) of the Uyghurs of Central Asia was held in Almaty. 150 delegates from all regions of residence of the Uyghur diasporas arrived at the kurultai. The outcome of the kurultai was the formation based on the Front of the International Committee "East Turkestan". It consisted of 45 activists of the Uyghur movement. The committee operated in Central Asia, and also established contacts with compatriots living in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Germany and Australia. Contacts were established with the national organizations of Kazakhstan – "Azat", "Attan", "Zheltoksan", which provided all possible assistance to the committee. The committee aimed to reach the international level, to draw attention of the world community to the situation in East Turkestan.[106]

On May 15, 1993, a historic decision was made to continue the struggle for the liberation of the Motherland by armed means. On this day, members of the United National Revolutionary Front of Eastern Turkestan (UNRFET), Uyghur organization

[105] Syroezhkin, p. 490-491.
[106] Modan Muhlisov, "Dvizhenie Za Osvobozhdenie Uyghurstana (Movement for the Emancipation of Uyghurstan)," *Central Asia and the Caucasus,* 1997, https://www.ca-c.org/journal/10-1997/st_13_muhlisov.shtml, (03 March 2019).

formed in Kzakhstan, made a solemn oath. In May 1993, at the congress of Front activists, it was noted that, despite attempts to draw the attention of democratic states and international organizations to the problems of the people of "East Turkestan", the world community does not pay attention to the fierce violations of the rights of the indigenous people of "East Turkestan". Activists claimed that while the Uyghurs living in Central Asia represented by the Committee were fighting China through democratic methods, the Chinese authorities in the XUAR suppress any discontent of the population with the cruelest measures. The authorities of the new independent Turkic states - Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, to whom the Uyghur people had high hopes, are increasingly distancing themselves from the Uyghur liberation movement and are inclined to the need for rapprochement with the Chinese official authorities. Therefore, because of numerous appeals to the Committee from the side of underground associations of "East Turkestan" with a request for help to the unfolding radical movement of the people, the Front started taking radical positions.[107]

The main idea in the Declaration of the UNRF of East Turkestan is as follows, "the UNRF recognizes and supports the armed struggle of the Uyghur people against the Chinese invaders and considers it a method of struggle that can lead to the liberation of the people and the re-establishment of the Uyghur independent state." [108] However, the organization does not reject civilized forms of struggle. Since 1993, the activities of the Front are in line with the proclaimed Declaration. In 1994, during the meeting of the leadership of the Front with the Uyghur diasporas of Almaty, Bishkek, Tashkent, Sary-Agach, Chilik, the new course of the organization was supported by the majority of the participants.[109]

Another Uyghur organization which was one of the largest in Kazakhstan was the Uyghurstan Organization for Freedom (UOF) which was formed on 20 June in 1992 at a meeting convened by an initiative group that did not agree with the decisions of the kurultai of Uyghurs in Central Asia, held on January 26 of in 1992 and decided to create an IRAU. The key discrepancy was that the IRAU, limiting itself exclusively to the

[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.

cultural and educational work among the Uyghurs, did not set a goal in the program documents to recreate the statehood of the Uyghurs. The congress was held openly in the House of Culture in Almaty, and attended not only by guests from Turkey, China and Germany, but also by employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Supreme Court, and the National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan.[110]

In the documents adopted by the congress, it was emphasized that the UOF considers the promotion of the restoration of independence of Uyghurstan as its main goal. In addition, the organization is created to educate the people, especially its younger generation in the spirit of patriotism; the exposure of the colonial policy of the leadership of China, carried out in relation to the Uyghurs and other national minorities living in China. It was specifically emphasized that the organization uses political means of struggle to achieve its goal. As one of the objectives of its activities, the UOF provided for the protection of the legitimate interests of the Uyghurs and other peoples by participating in the formation of state and public bodies of the Republic of Kazakhstan in order to protect themselves from accusations of Uyghur nationalism, its documents stipulated that the organization was not a supporter of the creation of national-Uyghur autonomy in the Republic of Kazakhstan.[111]

Unlike most Uyghur organizations, including the radical ones, UOF, speaking of the future state of the Uyghurs, used only one term - "Uyghurstan". Arguing this position, Ashir Wahidi, the Chairman of the UOF, emphasized:

> Our position on this issue meets objections of opponents who say that since there are other Turkic-speaking people living here apart from the Uyghurs, in order not to offend them, the Homeland should be called Eastern Turkestan and in the struggle for its liberation to rely on them. But we should not forget that, firstly, the definition of "Uyghurstan" does not mean at all that this state is only for the Uyghurs, but only emphasizes that the Uyghurs are the indigenous people of this territory and in this sense is of no small importance for the struggle for self-determination. Secondly, the name "Uyghurstan" does not infringe upon the interests of other peoples, but on the contrary, imposes the responsibility of the guarantor of their interests on the main part of the indigenous people of these places, as for their statehood, these problems are already solved for them: the Kazakhs have Kazakhstan, Uzbeks - Uzbekistan, etc. The Uyghurs living here have made their own contribution to the formation of these states. Now they should assist us in acquiring our statehood. Thirdly, we are obliged to call our Motherland "Uyghurstan" especially now, when

[110] Syroezhkin, p. 496.
[111] "Ustav Uyghurskoi (Uyghurstanskoi) Organizatsii Svobody (Charter of the Uyghur (Uyghurstan) Organization for Freedom)," 1992.

> the Chinese colonialists have the threat of complete assimilation of the Uyghurs. Fourthly, those who believe that the definition of "Uyghurstan" is unknown to the world community should recall that Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and other young states were also completely unknown to the world, and today they are recognized by all. As for the name "Eastern Turkestan", it is not the name of either the state or the people, this is a purely geographical definition and this name does not cover the entire territory of the Uyghurs settlement. Uyghur lands north of Tien Shan will remain outside its borders.[112]

The main difference of this organization from UNRFET until 1997 was in tactics of activity. As emphasized in the documents and in the statements of the leader of the organization, the UOF stands for non-violent forms and methods of struggle. The main focus of their activities they put on, firstly, the exposure of the national, economic, military policy and other acts pursued by the Chinese 'invaders', contrary to generally accepted international norms; secondly, bringing the issue of self-determination of the Motherland to the international arena in order to find the understanding, assistance and support of the international community and eventually restore the statehood of Uyghurstan within its historical boundaries.[113]

In the first half of the 1990s, the intensification of the split in the Uyghur movement in Kazakhstan led to the creation of new organizations. But with the exacerbation of the brutal violence against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang by China, there was a marked increase in the consolidation of the activities of radical organizations and the inclusion in the radicalism of associations in Kazakhstan that did not exist before. This tendency was indicated at the beginning of 1997, when in response to the brutal suppression of the protest on February 5 in Kuldja, the Regional Public Union "Association of Uyghurs" together with the UOF and the UNRFET established a coordinating body - the Joint Political Council (JPC) in Almaty on February 8.[114]

The goal of the JPS was to prevent a split in the Uyghur movement and to develop a single plan of action for all the Uyghur public organizations. The work of the JPS was primarily aimed at attracting the attention of the world community to the Uyghur problem. In the political statement "Unite for the independence of our great motherland Uyghurstan", adopted by the JPS, it was emphasized:

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[112] Ashir Wahidi, "Uyghurstan," *Ittipak-Edinstvo* 12, No. 5 (1995).
[113] Syroezhkin, p. 498.
[114] Khozhamberdiev, p. 246.

> In the current international situation, we consider it necessary to work together to bring the issue of homeland to the international arena, and, taking into account the principles of democracy and human rights, fully support the struggle for the right to self-determination of our compatriots in their historic homeland, and we consider the creation of an independent state to be the only goal of this struggle.[115]

At the same time, members of the JPS, concluding that "the struggle for greater autonomy or the creation of a federation cannot be a strategic goal of our liberation struggle," decided "to support the struggle of our compatriots for independence against China's colonial policy, taking into account the current situation and in the future adhere to this activity." The name of the future state was determined as "Uyghurstan". At the same time, the appeal specifically stressed that "non-compliance with these principles in the process of creating an independent Uyghur state will be viewed as a betrayal." Considering themselves as the main focal point for the activities of all Uyghur organizations, the JPS members specifically stressed: "We consider it inappropriate and equivalent to separatism to create a new political organization in the Central Asian states."[116]

In the matter of consolidating the activities of the emigre Uyghur organizations, the JPS managed to achieve certain results. During the period 1997-1999, several press conferences were organized with the participation of foreign journalists, petitions, letters and appeals were made to the heads of state of the West, Russia and Central Asia, which spoke of violations of human rights and civil liberties of the indigenous people of the XUAR. Members of the JPS repeatedly appealed to the United Nations with a request to assist the national liberation struggle of the indigenous people of the XUAR against the "Chinese invaders."

The outcome of the activities of the JPS was the participation of its members in the development and discussion of documents of the international coordinating center of the Uyghur movement, which in 1998 was the National Center of "East Turkestan" (in

[115] "Unite for the Independence of Our Great Motherland Uyghurstan. Political Appeal of the Regional Public Union 'Association of Uyghurs', the United Revolutionary Front of East Turkestan, the Uyghur Organization of Freedom" (Almaty, 1997).
[116] Ibid.

Turkey), and since 1999 is the East Turkestan/Uyghurstan/National Congress (in Germany).[117]

On May 25, 1998, an expanded conference of the Uyghurs Culture Society of the Republic of Kazakhstan took place in Almaty, attended by about 200 people, mainly representatives from Almaty and Almaty region (Talgar, UygHur, Enbekshi-Kazakh, Zhambyl and Panfilov districts), as well as a delegation from Shymkent. However, later the bureau of this Society turned out to be unworkable, and there was a constant rotation in it. Many of its members came out of the organization, including representatives of the Uyghur intelligentsia and medium-sized businesses. And despite the fact that the goals and objectives of the organization have not changed, in fact its work has come to naught. The organization was no longer supported either by the majority of the Uyghur population of the republic, or by other Uyghur organizations operating in Kazakhstan.[118]

In the wake of the intensification of the activity of the Turkic youth and the emergence in October 1995 in Munich of the social and political organization "World Kurultay of the Uyghur Youth", the youth Uyghur movement became more active in Kazakhstan. On April 25, 1999, the constituent congress of the regional public association "Union of Uyghur Youth of Kazakhstan" was held, which was later registered with the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This association, like all those that have arisen since 1998, does not set any political goals. Its activity, judging by the statutory documents, is limited to the problems of Uyghur youth. Although, taking into account the peculiarities of the mentality of modern youth and the rejuvenation of members of separatist organizations operating in XUAR, it would be inappropriate to exclude the possibility of strengthening radical tendencies among members of this organization.[119]

4.1.2. Xinjiang Issue in the Agenda of the Kazakh Government

[117] Syroezhkin, p. 500-502.
[118] Ibid.
[119] "Charter of the Regional Public Association of the Union of Uyghur Youth of Kazakhstan," 1999.

In October 1995, the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan, following the results of an audit of the activities of the UOF and UNRFET and their press organs, the newspapers "Uyghurstan" and "Voice of East Turkestan", found them inconsistent with the law and ordered to stop their release. Yusupbek Mukhlisi, Chairman of UNRFET, and UOF Chairman, Ashir Wahidi, received an official warning.[120]

In January 1996 in Almaty, unidentified persons attacked the leader of the UOF Ashir Wahidi. The attackers tied him up, severely beat him, with the result that Wahidi spent about two months in the hospital and took away the documentation of his organization stored in his house. At the same time, none of the Kazakhstani newspapers, including even the official Uyghur "Uyghur Avazi", reported this incident. The internal affairs agencies of Almaty tried to close the case as "undisclosed" due to "lack of evidence". In this regard, the Russian political analyst Vitaly Hlyupin believes, it is possible that the Chinese secret services organized an attack on Wahidi, operating, if not in direct contact with the Kazakh special services, then, of course, with their knowledge. But according to one of the former law enforcement officers, employees of the National Security Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan might not have known about the preparation of the attempted assassination of Wahidi. Their only omission in this matter is that with the weak counterintelligence work of the current Kazakhstani national security agencies, representatives of the special services of foreign states often behave as if they are acting in their own state.[121]

In February 1999, three Chinese citizens of Uyghur nationality were deported to China from Kazakhstan, who in August 1998 illegally crossed the Kazakh-Chinese border and asked for political asylum from the authorities of the Republic. The decision to deport was made quietly without the court and public debate, which, according to human rights defenders, is contrary to the norms of the international convention on the status of refugees. The refugees explained their act by the fact that they were subjected to political persecution by the Chinese authorities. All the time while the arrested were in the pre-trial detention center of the National Security Committee, letters were sent to Kazakhstan

[120] Andrei Chebotaraev, "Predstaviteli Uygurskoy Diaspory Kazakhstana (Representatives of the Uyghur Diaspora in Kazakhstan.)," *Neweurasia*, 2001, https://www.neweurasia.info/archive/2001/free/06_19_Uigur.htm, (17 March 2019).
[121] Ibid.

from all over the world asking authority not to extradite them. Human rights institutions referred to international norms, the fundamental principle of which is non-refoulement of refugees to countries with an anti-democratic regime. Whatever the refugees are accused of. Even if it threatens with the complication of diplomatic relations or - even more so - with economic sanctions.[122]

Kazakhstan found itself in a difficult situation. On the one hand, wanting to look democratic and civilized in the eyes of the world, Kazakhstan adopted the Law on the Procedure for Granting Political Asylum, signed the Convention on the Status of Refugees in 1999,[123] but on the other hand was afraid to spoil relations with its powerful neighbor whose human rights abuses are regularly reported by human rights institutions. As a result, the government decided in favor of the latter. The same year, in 1999, China declared the defectors criminals and achieved their extradition from Kazakhstan. According to the testimony of some representatives of the Uyghur diaspora, these people were executed upon returning to the PRC. This event provoked protests and appeals to the authorities of Kazakhstan from the local Uyghur diaspora. They were also supported by human rights organizations in Kazakhstan, considering the fact of the deportation of three refugees from the PRC to a direct violation of human rights and other international norms. The government of Kazakhstan, in turn, justified its action by referring to the fact that Kazakhstan in 1996, together with China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, signed the Shanghai agreement, according to which these CIS states should return the Uyghur refugees inside their borders back to China.

Presenting the submission of the draft law "On Combating Terrorism" in the Senate of Parliament in June 1999, Nurtai Abykayev, then chairman of the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan, noted that in Kazakhstan there was evidence of increased separatist tendencies among the Kurdish and Uyghur diasporas. Thus, the head of the National Security Committee actually acknowledged that representatives of these diasporas are the main targets of application of the adopted anti-terrorism law.

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[122] Gulnara Bazhkenova, "Uyghurskie Bejentsy Deportirovany v Kitai (Uyghur refugees deported to China.)," *Neweurasia*, 1999, https://www.neweurasia.info/archive/99/archives/february/Nazp0189.htm, (17 March 2019) .

[123] The Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan to the United Nations, UNHCR, http://kazakhstanun.com/unhcr/, (07 September 2019).

However, several incidents that occurred in the territory of Kazakhstan with the involvement of extremist Uyghurs from Xinjiang provoked the authorities to treat the activities of entire diaspora as separatist and extremist, from which political refugees and other members of the Uyghur community in Kazakhstan are suffering.

Hemit Memet, Kasim Mapir and Ilyas Zordun - three young Uyghur asylum-seekers who reportedly took part in a demonstration on February 5, 1997 in Gulja, were forcibly returned to China by the Ministry of National Security of Kazakhstan on February 11, 1999. They were arrested while trying to cross borders to Kazakhstan. Later, it was reported that the two brothers, Hemit Memet - Saydakhmet Memet and Zulfikar Memet, were also arrested in the XUAR for "aiding and abetting the terrorists." They were held in the "Yenghi Hayat" prison in the town of Gulja, and Zulfikar Memet was reportedly executed in June 2000. Saydakhmet Memet was sentenced to 6 years in prison.[124]

In Almaty in September 2000, special forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs physically destroyed a group of four people who had offered armed resistance to police officers. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, citing data from the security services of Kyrgyzstan and China, the deceased were members of the UOF, which was, in official statement, called "a terrorist separatist organization". They were accused for a number of crimes in China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan's law enforcement agencies incriminated these people with the murder of two policemen in one of the districts of Almaty. In a long battle with this group, up to five hundred police and military men were involved. All suspects, either accidentally or intentionally, were killed during the shootout. This incident is considered to be the only case involving an armed clash between extremists and law enforcement officers until a surge of extremist activities in 2011-2012.

In 2001, near the US embassy in Almaty there was a robbery of collector car bank of "Turan Alem" - again with gunfire and explosions. One of the participants of the raid was a European by nationality, who converted to Islam. He soon died from wounds

[124] "Kitaiskaia Narodnaia Respublika: Uygury Spasaiutsia Ot Presledovania, v to Vremia Kak Kitai Obiavliaet Voinu Terrorizmu (Uyghurs Flee Persecution While China Declares War on Terrorism)," *International Amnesty*, 2004, https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/92000/asa170212004ru.pdf.

received during an exchange of fire with guards. His two accomplices turned out to be Uyghurs, which gave a new reason for the media to expand the topic of extremism penetrating into Kazakhstan, originating in China.[125]

These and several other events related to the activities of the Chinese Uyghurs in Kazakhstan, eventually caused a tough response. Massive searches were conducted in places of compact residence of the Uyghurs in Almaty, and without the authorization of the prosecutor, which in turn made the Uyghur diaspora complain about racist illegal actions of law enforcement agencies. At the beginning of 2000s, the refugees themselves from the PRC, if they did could not get to the UNHCR office in Almaty in time, they could have been intercepted by police and quietly deported to China. And even obtaining a UN mandate did not guarantee security: several times suspicions arose regarding Kazakh or Chinese intelligence services that could be involved in the disappearance of several fugitives.

According to the director of the Central Asian Political Research Agency, Yerlan Karin, this incident around the "Uyghur question" was a consequence of the fact that, against the background of growing political tensions in Central Asia, the issue of terrorism and extremism became one of the fashionable topics covered by Kazakhstan's mass media. At the same time, experts in this topic, in pursuit of expressing their opinions on it, began to confuse different and sometimes contradictory concepts, as a result of which some facts were fitted to pre-formulated conclusions and, thus, far from objectivity. In addition, Mr. Karin doubts the belonging of the dead militants to the UOF, which, according to him, occupies rather moderate positions in its activities and is far from extremism. Most likely, they belonged to certain criminal groups.[126]

Obviously, the precedents mentioned above, testifying to the somewhat stereotypical attitude of many representatives of state bodies and the media of Kazakhstan towards Uyghurs, were due to the following points.

[125] Rinat Saidullin, "Uyghurskie Organizatsii v Kazakhstane: Nastoiashie Terroristy Ili Razmennaia Moneta Spetsslujb? (Uyghur organizations in Kazakhstan: real terrorists or bargaining chip of special services?)," *Fergananews*, 2006, https://www.fergananews.com/articles/4383, (01 April 2019).
[126] Chebotaraev, "Predstaviteli Uygurskoy Diaspory Kazakhstana."

Firstly, due to geopolitical and economic factors, Kazakhstan is under great political and economic influence from China. Moreover, as a reality has shown, China has quite weighty levers of influence on Kazakhstan and often seeks from it the solution of certain issues in their relations in their favor. A striking example here is the gratuitous transfer of more than 500 sq. km of so-called “disputed territories” by Kazakhstan to China in 1998. Therefore, in certain issues, the Kazakh government almost always makes concessions to its eastern neighbor, not wanting to spoil the existing relationship with it. Because of this, at the request of representatives of the Chinese Embassy in Kazakhstan or on their own initiative, the Kazakh authorities control the activities of the Uygur organizations, especially those that are not registered with the judicial authorities, and try to prevent any anti-Chinese actions from them.

Secondly, Kazakhstan has obligations to China not to support separatism in the XUAR, it was one of the main principles in the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations with the PRC. This is expressed in both bilateral and multilateral agreements, including within the framework of the SCO. According to the documents adopted at the Almaty (1998), Bishkek (1999), Dushanbe (2000) and at subsequent summits of this interstate association, its participants confirmed their mutual rejection of any manifestations of national separatism and intentions regarding the prohibition on their territory of any separatist activities against other five countries. It is also obvious that, in addition to the obligations assumed in relation to China, Kazakhstan, like any other state in the world, is driven by absolute rejection of any manifestations of separatism. It is possible that these states themselves may sooner or later face the problem of internal separatism. In this case, they may have to seek appropriate support from their international partners.

Thirdly, under conditions of activization of radical Islamic organizations and groups within the republic and expectations of a possible invasion of its territory by Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) militants, as well as in the light of the September 2000 events in Almaty, the official bodies of Kazakhstan without any external pressure

are interested in neutralizing any actions of certain organizations, including the Uyghur ones, which they regard as anti-constitutional, radical and extremist.[127]

Kazakhstani government's disregard to the Uyghur problem has caused outrage of the society and the Uyghur diaspora within the country. On this basis, in 2009 the leaders of Uyghur diaspora in Kazakhstan with Kazakh public figures held a round table highlighting that the Kazakh people, whose fate is closely connected with the Uyghurs, cannot be indifferent to this situation. Murat Auezov, Kazakh scientist-Sinologist, believes that Kazakhstan has a special responsibility in this regard and emphasizing the importance of Uyghur people in the Turkic nations' historical and cultural heritage he added that Kazakhstan should condemn the Chinese policy in Xinjiang. The scientist also claimed that Kazakhstan and China are interdependent on each other. China has big interests in Kazakhstan - this is oil, this is gas and the large number of Han Chinese residing in Kazakhstan – so, here the diplomacy can work seriously. Moreover, Auezov considers that these events are pushing to find effective ways to create a consolidation of the peoples of Turkestan. If the region's governments can manage to become a major Central Asian geopolitical player on this world map, they will be reckoned differently and talked differently.[128] Participants of the round table appealed to the Kazakh government to take actions on the situation of Kazakh, Uyghur and other Turkic minorities in Xinjiang.

Since the 2010s, Kazakhstan, like many other countries of the world, has faced an alarming trend of increasing manifestations of religious extremism and terrorism. The peak of this process came in 2011-2012, when 14 extremist attacks and armed clashes with the forces of law and order were committed in various regions of the country. The above-mentioned surge of extremist activity in 2011-2012 caused a rather harsh reaction from the state and its bodies. Thus, in October 2011, the law "On religious activities and religious associations" was adopted, aimed at strengthening state control in the sphere of religion and interfaith relations. On September 24, 2013, the Decree on the State Program on Countering Religious Extremism and Terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan for

[127] Ibid.
[128] "Esli Uyghury Ischeznut s Litsa Zemli, to Eto Budet Ogromnoi Poterei Dlia Mirovoi Kultury (If the Uyghurs disappear from the face of the Earth, then this will be a huge loss for world culture.)," *Radio Azattyk*, 2009, https://rus.azattyq.org/a/uigury_Kazakhstana_/1773454.html, (01 April 2019).

2013-2017 was promulgated. These regulations envisaged to take a tight control over the activities of organizations that could have possible relations with internal or external extremist groups. The Uyghur organizations also began to experience pressure and periodic inspections by law enforcement agencies. Consequently, following years there was a noticeable decrease of activities of the Association of Uyghurs in Kazakhstan.

Since 2017, Kazakhs from China and activists claim the strengthening of the oppression of national minorities in the Xinjiang province of China. However, the activities of the ethnic Uyghurs in Kazakhstan regarding to Xinjiang problem has not been noticed, they are not active in the search for relatives in custody in Xinjiang, they do not make frequent statements. Kaharman Kozhamberdi, the leader of Uyghur Association in Kazakhstan and the Deputy Chairman of the World Uyghur Congress, explained the reason of the indifference of Uyghurs of Kazakhstan with the continuing pressure from the law enforcement structures of Kazakhstan. Personally, he said, he was brought to the administrative court in Almaty three times (for the first time for the creation of the People's Party of Uyghurstan, for the second time for holding an unsanctioned rally). Officials warned him not to raise this question. He claims that the Kazakh government does not express its position, pressure is mainly exerted by the Kazakh authorities. For instance, it became impossible to hold meetings on the problems of ethnic Uyghurs. Over the past ten years, Uyghurs' or other newspapers did not publish a single article of Kaharman Kozhamberdi, he was told that "an order has been received from above not to publish".[129]

The Uyghur diaspora in Kazakhstan claim that they are aware of the close relations between Kazakhstan and China and they do not want to harm the policy of Nur-Sultan[130], however they demand the respect for fundamental human rights, and they propose that the government of Kazakhstan should also have a clear position on human rights issues. At the state level, the Uyghur issue was never discussed. The government

[129] Aian Kalmurat, "Uyghuri Kazakhstana Stali Bezuchastnymi Iz-Za Davlenia (Uyghurs of Kazakhstan became indifferent due to pressure.)," *Azattyk*, 2018, https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-uighurs-xinjiang-china-kaharman-kozhamberdi/29523101.html.

[130] On 23 March 2019, following a unanimous vote in Kazakhstan's parliament, the city was renamed Nur-Sultan from *Astana*, after former Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

of Kazakhstan, as in other Central Asian states, is supporting Beijing's policy in the XUAR.

Meanwhile, Uyghurs residing in the territory of Kazakhstan are complaining that they cannot contact their relatives in Xinjiang since 2018 when the Chinese crackdown in Xinjiang was reinforced. In the last few years, the relatives of Kazakhs lived in Xinjiang also began to appeal to the government with the same question. Most activists claim that not only Uyghurs, but also other Turkic Muslim nations living in Xinjiang have been subjected to violence and detained in re-education camps. Kazakh activists raised the question of their release and demanded the government to take action in this regard, but they have not achieved satisfying results.

Catherine Putz, the author of the article "On Xinjiang, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan Bend to Beijing's Will", published in the international online journal *The Diplomat* in Japan, addresses the topic of "powerlessness" of Nur-Sultan and Bishkek when it comes to protecting Kazakhs and Kyrgyz forcibly placed in "camps of political re-education" in Xinjiang. According to the author, Kazakhstan uses diplomatic channels to free its citizens, and interprets the problems of ethnic Kazakhs in China as the "internal affairs" of a neighboring country.[131]

4.1.3. The Situation of Ethnic Kazakhs in Xinjiang

More than 1,5 million ethnic Kazakhs live in Xinjiang. In consequence of the state program of ethnic repatriation launched in 1991, more than a million ethnic Kazakhs returned to Kazakhstan 14.2% of which returned from China. Kazakhs who have returned home receive "Oralman" status (a literal translation from Kazakh is a returnee) and a year later, according to new amendments to the legislation, can apply for citizenship of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The improvement of the economic situation in Xinjiang had an impact on reducing the number of Kazakhs arriving from China. Moreover, a part of the

[131] Catherine Putz, "On Xinjiang, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan Bend to Beijing's Will," *The Diplomat*, 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/on-xinjiang-kazakhstan-and-kyrgyzstan-bend-to-beijings-will/, (09 May 2019).

Kazakhs has long lived in Xinjiang, and the other part is the second and third generation of immigrants who are completely assimilated into the local community.

In general, the Kazakhs in Xinjiang unlike Uyghurs are loyal to the political order of the PRC, since they lack separatist sentiment compared with the Uyghur population. In bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and China, the Kazakh diaspora in Xinjiang plays the role of a bridge of friendship. Basically, these were the Uyghurs who were subjected to detentions and thorough checks by Chinese governments since early 2017 when the state repression in Xinjiang was exacerbated. Nonetheless, the fight against violent extremism, which strengthened control over the Muslim population, had an impact on the ethnic Kazakhs too. Along with other ethnic minorities of Xinjiang, Kazakhs living in this region were subjected to pressure in the political re-education camps.[132]

The issue of pressure exerted on the Kazakhs of China by the local authorities in East Turkestan was raised at the state level for the first time in June 2017 during a plenary session of the V World Kurultai of Kazakhs that took place in the capital of Kazakhstan with the participation of Nursultan Nazarbayev. Ethnic Kazakh from Germany Omirkhan Altyn from the tribune of the World Kurultai of the Kazakhs raised the issue of discrimination of Kazakhs in China, drawing the attention of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev to the situation. Omirkhan Altyn believes that the Kazakhs in XUAR should enjoy the same civil rights as the Kazakhs in the eastern provinces of China. Moreover, in the interview to *Azattyk* he stated that seeing such pressure in the 21st century is shameful. "Two countries are neighbors, they have recently launched the Silk Road; there are good-neighborly and trade relations between the countries. The Kazakhs there are a kind of bridge between the two countries. What friendship can there be if you rock this bridge? Therefore," he said, "the heads of the two countries can talk on an equal footing and calmly resolve this issue."[133] The head of state at the World Kurultai of the Kazakhs

[132] Berikbol Dukuyev, "Kazakhstan: How Astana Should Respond to Oppression of Ethnic Kazakhs in China," *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, 2018, https://analytics.cabar.asia/en/kazakhstan-how-astana-should-respond-to-oppression-of-ethnic-kazakhs-in-china/, (22 May 2019).
[133] Nurtai Lahanuly, "Eto Byl Moi Dolg – Rasskazat o Polojenii Kzakhov v Kitaie (It was my duty to tell about the situation of Kazakhs in China.)," *Azattyk*, 2017, https://rus.azattyq.org/a/omirkhan-altyn-kazakhi-v-kitae-germanii-kurultai/28595913.html, (18 May 2019).

instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan to focus on the situation of the Kazakhs living in the People's Republic of China. Since that time, rumors about the restriction of legal rights of more than one million Kazakh people have spread widely in the information space and on social networks.[134]

In October 2017, Senator Nurlan Kylyshpaev during the plenary session of the upper house of Parliament appealed to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan Bakytzhan Sagintayev with a deputy request to deal with the rumors about the infringement of the rights of the Kazakh diaspora in China. The deputy also asked the head of the government to report on the measures taken in case of confirmation of this information. "The reason for the deputy request was the issue of violation of the rights of representatives of the Kazakh nation who are citizens of other states. It is known that the Kazakh diaspora in China is the largest. The main locations of them are XUAR, Qinghai Province and Gansu", said the deputy.[135]

Earlier, Kazakhstan's Foreign Affairs Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov reported that any appeal about the infringement of the rights of ethnic Kazakhs in China is necessarily discussed with the Chinese side. He stressed that the interests of the Kazakh diaspora abroad were always in the orbit of the foreign service department. "Following the results of the Kurultai, we found out that the Kazakhs in the PRC, in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, are having difficulty obtaining official documents, getting passports in their hands so that they can cross the border and make a trip. We thoroughly study all these questions, analyze, and also discuss with our Chinese colleagues," said Kairat Abdrakhmanov on the sidelines of a meeting of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, answering questions from reporters.[136]

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[134] Andrey Grishin, "What's behind China's Anti-Kazakh Campaign?," *Open Democracy* , 2018, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/whats-behind-chinas-anti-kazakh-campaign/, (22 May 2019).
[135] Diana Kulmaganbetova, "Zashitit Kazakhskuiu Diasporu v Kitaie Deputat Poprosil Sagintaeva (The deputy asked Sagintayev to protect the Kazakh diaspora in China)," *Informburo.kz*, 2017, https://informburo.kz/novosti/zashchitit-kazahskuyu-diasporu-v-kitae-poprosil-deputat-sagintaeva.html, (20 May 2019).
[136] Zhadra Zhulmuhametova, "Glava MID RK Otvetil Na Vopros o Problemah Etnicheskih Kazakhov, Zhivushih v KNR (The Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan answered the question about the problems of ethnic Kazakhs living in China.)," *Informburo.kz*, 2017, https://informburo.kz/novosti/glava-mid-rk-otvetil-na-vopros-o-trudnostyah-s-kotorymi-stalkivayutsya-kazahi-zhivushchie-v-knr.html, (20 May 2019).

Kazakhstan is one of those countries that encourages Kazakh people from around the world to return to their homeland. The Oralman repatriation program was established by government immediately after independence as a way to preserve national identity and increase internal stability of the country. Since then more than 1 million ethnic Kazakhs immigrated to Kazakhstan in search of a better life.[137] Despite the fact that the largest Kazakh community lives in China, immigrants from China make up only 14.2 percent of the total number of repatriates who returned to Kazakhstan since 1991. Specialist in the field of International Law Esbol Omirzhanov, speaking of the oppression of ethnic Kazakhs in China and small number of Chinese Kazakh migrants mentioned that one of the reasons for that is of a policy of political cleansing among ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. Due to their religious affiliation ethnic Kazakhs fell under the assimilation policy of Beijing along with Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang.[138] There are many cases when some Kazakhs who had already transferred their families, children to Kazakhstan and are themselves citizens of this country were detained in China when they went there to visit their relatives. Documents were taken from some of them and banned from returning to Kazakhstan. Moreover, legal documents of many ethnic Kazakhs which proved their right to enter Kazakhstan as returnee were taken away by Chinese officials. Hundreds of ethnic Kazakhs in Xinjiang or their relatives in Kazakhstan applied to Kazakh authorities to take measures on this issue.

Since 2017, taking advantage of the repatriation program many Kazakhs returned to their homeland in Kazakhstan avoiding persecution by Chinese government and in the hope of better life. However, these people also faced many difficulties. The documents given to Oralmans are valid only for a year, there are cases when the arriving Kazakhs could not obtain citizenship due to long bureaucratic procedures. In order to get citizenship, they have to collect several references including non-criminal history reports which means they should go back to China. They ask the Kazakh authorities to grant

[137] "Adapting to Life in East Kazakhstan," UNDP in Kazakhstan, accessed May 25, 2019, http://www.kz.undp.org/content/kazakhstan/en/home/ourwork/our_stories/adapting-to-life-in-east-kazakhstan.html.

[138] Nurtai Lahanuly, "Pravozashitnik: "Kitai Provodit Politiku Assimiliatsii Menshinstv" (Human rights activist: China pursues minority assimilation policies.)," *Azattyk*, 2018, https://rus.azattyq.org/a/omirzhanov-kitay-kazakhi-interview/29070172.html.

citizenship without having to go back to China and collect references there. They fear that if they return to China, they will not be released back and sent to re-education camps.

The Kazakh authorities are trying to resolve this issue within the framework of existing agreements between the states and through high-level negotiations. Within these pledged frameworks, authorities can only contribute to the solution of the problem by means of diplomacy, that is, allow personal appeals to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, one should not expect a holistic approach condemning the situation in Xinjiang. Such maneuvers will be evaluated as interference in the internal affairs of China. It should be noted that the official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan focuses on resolving issues of ethnic Kazakhs who have citizenship of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Due to the ambiguous reaction of China itself, the official line of Kazakhstan does not use the term "political re-education camps" or "oppression of the Kazakh diaspora" in Xinjiang. On the one hand, Kazakhstan understands the sensitive attitude of the Chinese authorities on the Xinjiang issue. On the other hand, the society in Kazakhstan want the government to protect the Kazakhs abroad and it cannot ignore the situation with Kazakh diaspora in Xinjiang.

According to the latest data at the beginning of 2019, the number of appeals to the Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan in connection with the oppression in Xinjiang was 915, of which 29 were suspected of dual citizenship, among them 15 people were released after the intervention of Kazakhstan diplomats.[139] According to the agreements with the Chinese side, more than 2,000 ethnic Kazakhs received permission to leave Xinjiang, which had not previously been arrested.[140]

In turn, official Beijing understands the importance of bilateral economic relations with Kazakhstan. In this regard, the Chinese authorities are trying to keep the situation under control and are entering into dialogue with the Kazakh side. In 2018, the Chinese

[139] "Sotni Kazakhov Iz Kitaia Obratilis k Kazakhstanu s Problemoi Grajdanstva (Hundreds of Kazakhs from China Addressed Kazakhstan with a Citizenship Problem)," *Sputnik*, 2018, https://ru.sputniknews.kz/society/20181008/7517128/mid-kazahstan-kitaj-grazhdanstvo.html, (23 May 2019).
[140] "China 'to Let Thousands of Ethnic Kazakhs Leave Xinjiang'," *The Guardian*, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/09/china-to-let-thousands-of-ethnic-kazakhs-leave-xinjiang, (23 May 2019).

authorities informed that the reason for the delay of some ethnic Kazakhs is violations of the rules for crossing the state border of the PRC.[141]

In mid-August of 2018, the Foreign Ministry and the Embassy of the PRC organized a trip of Kazakhstani public representatives to China on their own initiative. As part of this trip, community leaders got the opportunity to raise the issue of the situation of ethnic Kazakhs in Xinjiang. The delegation consisted of members of the public, there were no officials in it. Before going to China, they asked the Consulate General of the PRC to organize visits to the so-called educational camps in Xinjiang, but they were denied. Answering the question of journalists, what is the reason for the persecution of ethnic Kazakhs, Omarali Adilbek, chairman of the NGO "Zhebeu", answered: in unjustified measures under the cover of the fight against terrorism. Political analyst Rasul Zhumaly also noted that in Xinjiang there is an obvious abuse, an excess of the measures taken. According to him, in China they understand that all this is reflected in the growth of Sinophobia in Kazakhstan, therefore, the Chinese side is interested in solving the problem. "In Beijing, we met with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the state committee on national affairs. We voiced our concerns, complaints and, of course, suggestions. There were a lot of promises that they would try not to take it to the extreme and resolve the issue," he noted. Rasul Zhumaly believes that it is necessary to build up ties - interdepartmental, interparty. In his opinion, it would be good if other organizations would participate in such events, for example, the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. The delegation proposed to open a "Kazakh house" in Urumqi in Xinjiang - a focal point that would deal with the bureaucratic issues of the Kazakhs there, on the spot. For example, documents to be collected for obtaining citizenship, so that people would acquire citizenship upon arrival in Kazakhstan. But most importantly, the official bodies of Kazakhstan should carefully examine the issue and give an assessment to the situation, said delegates.[142]

[141] Dukuyev, "Kazakhstan: How Astana Should Respond to Oppression of Ethnic Kazakhs in China."
[142] Zhanna Baitelova, "Politolog Posle Vizita v Sintsian: Nervoznaia Obstanovka, Chuvstvuetsia Strah u Naroda (Political scientist after a visit to Xinjiang: Nervous situation, fear is felt among the people.)," *Forbes Kazakhstan*, 2018, https://forbes.kz/process/politolog_posle_vizita_v_sintszyan_nervoznaya_obstanovka_chuvstvuetsya_strah_u_naroda/, (24 May 2019).

Meanwhile, the Kazakh authorities were holding negotiations with Chinese colleagues. On the other hand, they are trying to suppress the activities of certain public institutions that, through their demands and "provocations", can aggravate friendly and mutually beneficial relations between the two countries.

In recent weeks, Kazakhstan has taken active steps to curb propaganda aimed at increasing pressure on China in connection with the problem of ethnic Kazakhs detained in Xinjiang. The arrest of Serikzhan Bilash On March 10 (the leader of the unregistered association "Atazhurt Eriktileri" ("Volunteers of the Fatherland"), raising the problems of the Kazakhs in China), however, showed the limits of Nur-Sultan's tolerance in this matter. Bilash is reportedly accused of inciting ethnic hatred.

Serikzhan Bilash was born in China, moved to Kazakhstan 15 years ago in 2004 and got the citizenship of Kazakhstan. Bilash, known for his work to attract public attention, including at the world level, to the position of ethnic Kazakhs in Xinjiang, was first detained in Almaty, then taken by plane to Nur-Sultan, and then placed by court decision under house arrest. On March 11, the Nur-Sultan Prosecutor's Office stated that the detention of Bilash was connected with suspicions that he had allegedly publicly called for "jihad". The capital prosecutor's office interpreted this word as denoting "war against ethnic Chinese."[143]

The American *Foreign Policy* journal, commenting on the detention of Serikzhan Bilash, quotes the words of a Kazakh lawyer, Ayman Umarova, who will continue to represent the interests of the activist. According to her, house arrest on Bilash imposed along with a number of other restrictions. The lawyer said that her client would be electronically monitored. Over the next two months on the eve of the trial of his case, Bilash is also prohibited from participating in the activities of any organization and giving interviews. According to Umarova, "all this is completely wrong." "Bilash is the leader of the organization, not an extremist. Many people around the world know what is happening with the Kazakhs and other people in Xinjiang, thanks to him, and this made him a target," says the lawyer. Umarova refers to the activities of the unregistered

[143] "Merknushee Okno v Sintsian. Mirovye SMI – Ob Areste Serikzhana Bilasha (Fading window in Xinjiang)," *Azattyk*, 2019, https://rus.azattyq.org/a/media-review-world-media-about-the-detention-of-serikzhan-bilash/29817726.html, (20 April 2019).

association “Atazhurt Ertiktileri”, the actual leader of which is Bilash. It has existed since 2017 and is known for actively raising the issue of persecution and repression that ethnic minorities, including the Kazakh community, have been subjected to in the past few years in Xinjiang.[144]

Foreign Policy calls the “Atazhurt Eriktileri” association “one of the few windows into a sealed region” (Xinjiang in China), where “an extensive network of camps can contain from 800 thousand to two million people”, and the actions of Kazakhstani authorities regarding Bilash considers as an attack on one of the largest primary sources of information about the internment system created by Beijing and an attempt to silence criticism of Chinese policy. The journal separately notes that together with the detention of Bilash on March 10, the police conducted searches in the office of Atazhurt Eriktileri in Almaty and carried away computers, hard drives and cameras. These electronic media, the publication reports with reference to members of the association, contained important information about ethnic Kazakhs contained in camps in Xinjiang.[145]

According to the expert of the Kazakhstan Bureau for Human Rights Andrei Grishin, the accusations against Bilash is a signal to everyone who tries to draw attention to this problem, to the situation of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. “Perhaps it was done under pressure from China or simply as a demonstration of loyalty. But one thing is clear: the decision was made in a hurry,” said Grishin.[146]

A similar opinion in an interview with the British newspaper Telegraph was expressed by the expert of the international organization Amnesty International Patrick Poon, who deals with the problem of “camps” in Xinjiang. He expressed fears that the Kazakh government “is acting to please China.” According to the expert, “Atazhurt Eriktileri was engaged only in what helped other Kazakhs”.[147]

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[144] Reid Standish, “Astana Tries to Silence China Critics,” Foreign Policy, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/11/uighur-china-kazakhstan-astana/.
[145] Standish.
[146] “Merknushee Okno v Sintsian. Mirovye SMI – Ob Areste Serikzhana Bilasha.”
[147] Sophia Yan, “Leading Activist for Persecuted Kazakh Muslims Arrested,” The Telegraph, 2019, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/03/10/leading-activist-persecuted-kazakh-muslims-arrested-china/.

The author's column devoted to the detention of Bilash, published in the American *Washington Post* mentions a video published on March 10. On this video, the activist himself confirmed that he had been detained, and he was threatened with accusations of "inciting hatred". He added that he was not kidnapped "neither by the Chinese, nor by the Chinese spies." *The Washington Post* considers this statement to be "not comforting if you are aware of how long China's hands can be when it comes to punishing its opponents." According to the author, President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan "should not fulfill the requirements of the Chinese secret police, and Bilash should be immediately released. Otherwise, a small but valuable window through which the tragedy of Xinjiang is visible may fade."[148]

Serikzhan Bilash and his organization's activism played an outstandingly important role in terms of the access to data about the situation in Xinjiang. In past years, they could collect numerous testimonies from Kazakhs and Uyghurs about their families who were detained in internment camps, members of the organization helped those people to appeal to international organizations, to the office of the President of Kazakhstan, Kazakh foreign ministry with their complaints to get support. However, Kazakh authorities took no serious actions, on the contrary, the organization members, particularly the leader Serikzhan Bilash received several warnings to stop their activities.[149]

As the author of *The Diplomat* suggests, the reasons for what is happening with Bilash "do not need an explanation": "Nur-Sultan wants him and others like him to keep silence, because they expose the weakness of Kazakhstan's policy." As the newspaper writes, Kazakhstan fears conflicts with China, one of the largest trading partners, and its reserve of patience seems to be severely limited when it comes to the level of passions inside the country regarding the oppression of ethnic Kazakhs in Xinjiang. As *the Diplomat* concludes:

[148] "A Whistleblower on Xinjiang Has Been Detained. Is China behind the Arrest?," The Washington Post, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/a-whistleblower-on-xinjiang-has-been-detained-is-china-behind-the-arrest/2019/03/11/50664752-442b-11e9-90f0-0ccfeec87a61_story.html?utm_term=.7346eba76377.

[149] Rob Schmitz, "Families Of The Disappeared: A Search For Loved Ones Held In China's Xinjiang Region," National Public Radio, 2018, https://www.npr.org/2018/11/12/665597190/families-of-the-disappeared-a-search-for-loved-ones-held-in-chinas-xinjiang-regi.

> The arrest of Bilash demonstrates that Kazakhsat plans to respond to a growing degree of anxiety in its usual manner: intimidation tactics, the purpose of which is to silence "difficult people". Bilash, like many accused of "stirring up hatred" in Kazakhstan, is likely to be accused, convicted and sent to prison. Or, as his wife fears, he will be extradited to China,[150]

The representatives of human rights organizations in Kazakhstan claim that the last years the government is refusing to grant political asylum for those who fled from Xinjiang, regardless they are Uyghurs or Kazakhs. Thus, Nur-Sultan adheres to precisely the policy that will not annoy China. There are many cases when refugees were detained or sent back to China for crossing the border illegally.

It seemed that the government took an open stance on the situation in Xinjiang when the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Beibut Atamkulov speaking in parliament on March 5 refused to use Beijing's terminology, which prefers to use the euphemism "vocational training centers", instead of that he called them "camps". Noting that, "unfortunately, this pressure is directed not only at the Kazakhs," Atamkulov thereby indirectly acknowledged the scale of oppression.[151] However, later on Atamkulov disappointed his fellow citizens after his meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of PRC Wang Yi in Beijing on 28 March. According to the Chinese report on these negotiations, "the Kazakh side understands and supports the measures taken in Xinjiang to fight the "three evil forces" and ensure regional security and stability." It shows that despite the fact that there are obvious human rights violations in China, neighboring Central Asian countries that are deeply dependent on China lack the strength to codemn Beijing.[152]

4.2. THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

4.2.1. Uyghur Organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic

[150] Catherine Putz, "Is This the Closing of the Kazakh Window Into Xinjiang?," The Diplomat, 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/is-this-the-closing-of-the-kazakh-window-into-xinjiang/.
[151] Muhtar Ekei, "'Moshoe Lobbi' Kitaia i 'Bessilie' Nur-Sultana (The "powerful lobby" of China and the "powerlessness" of Nur-Sultan.)," *Azattyk*, 2019, https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-foreign-media-review/29865212.html, (12 May 2019).
[152] Putz, "On Xinjiang, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan Bend to Beijing's Will."

The first relocation of the Uyghurs to the territory of present-day Kyrgyzstan falls on approximately the second decade of the 20th century, followed by another wave in 1950s. Then, thousands of Uyghur families migrated from China because of the brutal policy towards Xinjiang. Later, after Kyrgyzstan declared its independence in 1991 under the slogan "Kyrgyzstan – Our Common Home", and the transition of Kyrgyzstan to a market economy, many more representatives of this ethnic group arrived and settled in it.

As in Kazakhstan, representatives of Uyghur intelligentsia began to establish their associations in Kyrgyzstan in early years of its independence. Some of them already existed and mainly focused on Uyghurs who settled down in these territories. On December 17 1989, before the Soviet Union dissolved, the Ittipak (Unity) Uyghur Society was created, its main goal was to solve the socio-economic and cultural problems of the Uyghur diaspora in Kyrgyzstan. The society works closely with government officials, and its leaders are members of the Assembly of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan. As the first chairman of the Council of the Uyghur society "Ittipak" Nurmukhammed Kendzhiev emphasized in his speech on the first Kurultai of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan, "We, national-cultural associations, will greatly benefit society if we stand on the position of support and cooperation with the legitimately elected power of the people." The same position was confirmed on the third Kurultai of the peoples of Kyrgyzstan by Rozmukhamed Abdulbakiyev.[153]

In Kyrgyzstan, the expression of discontent against China by the Uyghurs is limited to the family. In the early 1990s, attempts were made to hold rallies and pickets in front of the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek, but these forms of protest were banned by the Kyrgyz authorities.

Taking advantage of the possibilities of a formal democracy of the new time, the Uyghurs tried to register in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan a party for the liberation of East Turkestan. But the Ministry of Justice of Kyrgyzstan, for example, refused to legalize the organization as "the goal of separating the territories of a neighboring state". The piquancy of the situation, however, is not in the lawful refusals of the official departments, not in the legal inexperience of the Uyghur leaders, but in that the goals of violating the

[153] Syroezhkin, p. 505.

territorial integrity of the neighboring country are pursued by the Uyghurs who are citizens of Kyrgyzstan. The organization managed to establish itself within the framework of the Uyghur educational center, which is part of the Assembly of Peoples of Kyrgyzstan.

After the Kazakh, the most powerful regional organization is in the Kyrgyz Republic, Uyghurs Society of Kyrgyzstan. Close ties have been established with supporters and compatriots in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Germany, the United States, Russia, and other countries.

In addition to the "Ittipak" Society, there are several autonomous and unconnected Uyghur organizations in Kyrgyzstan. The Uyghurs Association of Kyrgyzstan, the Bishkek human rights organization "Democracy" and the Uyghur information center "Erpan" claim the right to represent the interests of the diaspora individually. The reason for the apparent fragmentation of the Uyghur movement lies in the conflict of interests of the Uyghur intelligentsia and Uyghur entrepreneurs. The intelligentsia blames businessmen for "they use the Society only to make money and forget about the main goal of the Uyghur organization - the struggle for the liberation of Uyghurstan". Entrepreneurs do not want to risk their business for the sake of a dangerous and not promising policy.[154]

Constant monitoring by the governmental special services seriously restrains the activity of the Uyghur organizations in Kyrgyzstan. The first pressure from the Kyrgyz authorities was felt by the Uyghurs in the mid-1990s, after being accused of Wahhabism. The fact is that the Uyghurs are much more religious than their Muslim counterparts - Kyrgyz and Kazakhs. Islam for the Uyghurs - is part of the national tradition and the guarantor of ethnic self-preservation. As carriers of pure Islam in the Soviet period, the Uyghurs often were imams in mosques. In Bishkek, the diaspora is still compactly living in the area adjacent to the Central Mosque and is the main consumer of the cult. But adherence to the norms of traditional Islam is interpreted by the Kyrgyz secret services as "religious extremism". Over time, the accusations of Wahhabism were replaced by a search for links between the Uyghurs and the Islamic underground organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, the leaflets of which are found not only in the south of the republic among the

[154] Grebenshikov, "Uyghury v Kyrgyzstane."

Uzbeks, but also in the north - in places of compact residence of the Uyghurs. However, the Uighurs are not judged for traditional Islam, but on charges of terrorism.[155]

4.2.2. The Xinjiang Issue in the Agenda of the Kyrgyz Republic

Kyrgyzstan, like neighboring Kazakhstan, borders on China and has a large Uyghur community, which makes it a natural primary "beacon" for Uyghurs fleeing from the XUAR. However, both countries appear to be the least safe shelter for Uyghurs. Immediately after the independence of these countries, in line with its policy in the XUAR, China did everything possible so that its Central Asian neighbors would cooperate with it in the area of returning the Uyghurs suspected of "separatism, terrorism or religious extremism."

With the beginning of the 21st century, the oppression over Uyghur organizations has only been strengthened under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which unites China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The SCO Secretariat was established in Beijing in January 2004. The official opening of the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure was held in Tashkent in June 2004. Directed mainly by China, the SCO was named by Chinese officials as an "important force" in the fight against "terrorism". Some experts argue that one of its main goals is to suppress the activities of the Uyghur nationalists in both the XUAR and Central Asia.[156] In addition, China has extradition agreements with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.[157] Kyrgyzstan ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in October 1994[158] and it became a member to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in September 1997[159] and the UN Convention on the

[155] Ibid.
[156] Yunna Wang, "Interesy Kitaia v Shanghaiskoi Organizatsii Sotrudnichestva (China's Interests in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization)," **Vestnik KRSU,** Vol. 18, No. 3 (2018), p. 140–44, https://www.krsu.edu.kg/vestnik/2018/v3/a35.pdf.
[157] Hu Qian and Chen Qiang, "China's Extradition Law of 2000," **Chinese Journal of International Law**, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2002), p. 647–54.
[158] United Nations Treaty Collections, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&clang=_en, (01 June 2019).
[159] United Nations Treaty Collections, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 1984,

Status of Refugees in 1996[160]. However, the ratification of abovementioned documents does not assure their fulfillment in all cases, sometimes national interests are more important than human rights of individuals. Uyghur asylum-seekers could theoretically resort to the asylum procedure in Kyrgyzstan, but in practice they do not do this, apparently because they fear that the Kyrgyz authorities will pass on information to the Chinese authorities.

In the Batken events, when armed clashes occurred between militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the armed forces of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999-2000, it turned out that the security services of the countries were rather weak and vulnerable to external attacks. It should be noted that in 1999, China provided Kyrgyzstan with timely support in repelling an attack by international terrorists.[161] Based on the interests of its national security, Kyrgyzstan began developing and deepening mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation with the PRC in the area of law enforcement, border and defense agencies. In addition, the Kyrgyz Republic annually receives from the PRC assistance in training personnel and strengthening the material and technical base of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the same time, the legal basis for cooperation between the two countries in the law enforcement sphere is developing. Along with the treaties on extradition and on rendering legal assistance in civil and criminal cases in 2002, the Kyrgyz Republic and the PRC concluded an agreement on cooperation in the fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism. The parties also signed the Treaty of Good Neighborhood, Friendship and Cooperation in 2002, which is based on the principles of mutual respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each other.[162]

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https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-9&chapter=4&clang=_en. (01 June 2019).

[160] The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the Kyrgyz Republic, The 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, http://kg.one.un.org/content/unct/kyrgyzstan/en/home/we/unhcr.html, (01 June 2019).

[161] Dosmir Uzbekov and Zaynidin Kurmanov, "Uyghury Kak Aktor Politicheskogo Protsessa v Kyrgyzskoi Respublike (Uyghurs as an Actor of the Political Process in the Kyrgyz Republic)," **Central Asia and Caucasus**, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2014), p. 148–57, https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=22604919.

[162] Centralized Legal Information Data Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic, Treaty on Good Neighborhood, Friendship and Cooperation between the Kyrgyz Republic and the People's Republic of China, http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/17226, (02 June 2019).

In May and July 1998, terrorist attacks were committed in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan, which resulted in numerous casualties. On March 12, 2001, the Osh City Court accused Chinese citizens of Uyghur nationality of these incidents. Bahramzhan Alimov and Askar Toti were sentenced to death, but the sentence was not carried out because of the moratorium on the death penalty in Kyrgyzstan.[163] Ali Mansum sentenced to 25 years in prison. Supporters of the convicts claimed that they had nothing to do with these explosions, and that they were "appointed guilty" because of their ethnicity. The investigation insists that the convicts are members of an international terrorist organization operating from Chechnya to Xinjiang. The purpose of the attacks is to provoke Kyrgyz-Uzbek clashes and create instability zones in areas bordering on China. The lawyer of those sentenced Gulnur Dzhanalova believes that "all charges are unproven and based only on assumptions." Counselor of the Chinese Embassy in Kyrgyzstan, Tsinghua Xiao, distanced himself from his fellow Uyghurs, citing the fact that "the Kyrgyz authorities did not inform the embassy about this." However, the Chinese office avoids communication not only with the current, but also with their former citizens. Mr. Xiao confirmed that "there is no relationship between the Chinese embassy and the Uyghur diaspora in Kyrgyzstan".[164]

Local Uyghur activists have expressed concern about press reports, in which the Uyghurs are exposed as "separatists" or "terrorists". Activists claim that such articles appear to be published at the behest of local "pro-Chinese forces" and Chinese intelligence services. Uyghur refugees were at risk of being detained by the police as "illegal migrants", which exposes them to an even greater risk of forcible return to China. According to reports, some NGOs assisting Uyghurs from China were threatened, intimidated and harassed by unknown or unidentified persons who seemed to be trying to prevent them from defending the Uyghurs.

[163] Igor Grebenshchikov, "Kyrgyzy Ekspluatiruiut Uyghurskoe Menshinstvo (Kyrgyzstan Exploit the Uyghur Minority)," *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, 2005, https://iwpr.net/ru/global-voices/kyrgyzy-ekspluatiruyut-uygurskoe-menshinstvo, (02 June 2019).
[164] "Kitaiskaia Narodnaia Respublika: Uygury Spasaiutsia Ot Presledovania, v to Vremia Kak Kitai Obiavliaet Voinu Terrorizmu (People's Republic of China: Uyghurs Flee Persecution While China Declares War on Terrorism)."

On May 23, 2002, two Uyghurs, Memet Sadik and Memet Yasin, were reportedly handed over to China by Kyrgyz authorities on suspicion of involvement in "international Islamic terrorism". According to an employee of the US embassy in Beijing, they were suspected of being members of the organization of the Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkestan, as well as planning "terrorist acts" in Kyrgyzstan, including an attack on the US embassy in Bishkek. Commercial television of Kazakhstan later reported that Sadik and Yassin had been arrested during the "joint operation of the intelligence services of China, the United States and Kyrgyzstan," and that "a detailed map of the area and explosives" had been seized from them. The message ended with the statement that "the fact that both terrorists are ethnic Uyghurs, suggests that they are associated with the organization of the Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkestan".[165]

On the evening of June 29, 2002, two bodies of Chinese citizens were found at the intersection of Panfilov and Gorky streets in Bishkek. As it turned out, this is the First Secretary of the Chinese Embassy, Wang Jiangping, and driver Womaer Nourmaymayti. A week later, Kyrgyz law enforcement authorities detained two men suspected of committing the murder. They were Yakub Erkin and Mustafa Kara. Yakub Erkin, a native of the XUAR, a member of the organization "Liberation of Turkestan", withdrawn from him a passport of a citizen of Kyrgyzstan issued by the Uzgen Department of Internal Affairs in the name of Mamatzakir Kudayarov. Mustafa Kara - a native of the XUAR as well, Uyghur by nationality, had a passport of a citizen of Turkey. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, he is Silay Rahmatulla, he is Emil Abuvali. In 1984, he was convicted of murder in Urumqi and sentenced to 10 years in prison. In Guangzhou in 1989, he was sentenced to capital punishment, but after an appeal, he was sentenced to 18 years in prison. In 1999, for 6 months, he underwent combat training in Chechnya. It is unclear how he got there. He arrived in Bishkek in 2002.[166]

At that time, the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic Bakirdin Subanbekov explained that the First Secretary of the Chinese Embassy was an accidental murder victim, since the goal was a Mercedes driver, Womaer Nourmaymayti. At the

[165] Ibid.
[166] "Samye Rezonansnye Sobytia v Kyrgyzstane, Sviazannye s Grajdanami Kitaia (The Most Resonant Events in Kyrgyzstan Related to Citizens of China)," *Akipress*, 2016, https://kg.akipress.org/news:1326528, (02 June 2019).

same time, the minister excluded political motives for the murder. “These were purely criminal squabbles,” the minister said. Later, the client of the murder was detained - Tursun Khalil, a citizen of the PRC, who had been living in Kyrgyzstan for 3 years and was engaged in private business.[167]

On December 31, 2002, in Bishkek, three Uyghurs — Ablimit, Tokhti Niyaz and Kayser Jalal – were reportedly sentenced to 16, 17 and 25 years in prison, respectively, for creating an “illegal East Turkestan organization” and “illegal possession of weapons. Their lawyers reportedly stated that the sentence was pronounced on the basis of trumped-up evidence.

In the spring of 2003, 19 Chinese citizens were killed in the Naryn Oblast of Kyrgyzstan, traveling by bus from Bishkek to XUAR. The newspaper Vechernii Bishkek, called the incident the handiwork of a certain Uyghur organization.[168]

On March 31, 2004, official Chinese media reported that Rahmutullah Ismail and Arken Yakuf (Uyghurs from the city of Urumqi) were executed after they were handed over to China by Kyrgyz authorities in July 2002. According to available information, they were sentenced to death in January 2004, convicting the murder of a Chinese diplomat and his driver in Bishkek in June 2002. Allegedly, shortly after their arrest in Bishkek, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan stated that there was no political motive for this crime, and that it was rather a random consequence of the power struggle between criminal groups. However, at the time of the transfer of Ismail and Yakuf to China, a statement was made that, according to the Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs, both men were “active members” of the East Turkestan Liberation Organization, a group that China had previously condemned as “terrorist.” Official Chinese sources claim that Ismail and Yakuf were officially arrested on October 31, 2002 in China. On January 12, 2004, the People’s Arbitration Court of Urumqi sentenced them to death.

In 2004, the Bishkek human rights organization “Democracy” appealed to the presidents of the U.S., Russia, Germany, Great Britain, Turkey, Kazakhstan and to the

[167] “Kitaiskii Diplomat Byl Ubit Sluchaino (The Chinese diplomat was killed by accident),” *MSN*, 2002, https://www.msn.kg/ru/news/1014/, (26 May 2019).
[168] Sultan Jumagulov, “Kyrgyzstan’s Worried Uighurs,” Institute for War & Peace Reporting, 2005, https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kyrgyzstans-worried-uighurs.

Secretary General of the United Nations to deal with human rights violations of Uyghurs residing in Xinjiang. Among other demands the appeal called on "to condemn the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan for the illegal deportation of Uyghurs seeking political asylum in these states to China".[169]

Despite the controls over the activities of Uyghur organizations became regular, verifications by law-enforcement agencies has been intensified after the Kurultai of the Uyghur Society in Kyrgyzstan held on 28 July 2003. During this Congress the Chairman of Ittipak was elected. The government officials did not approve it and soon officials from the Ministry of Interior conducted document checks at the office of Ittipak.

The representatives of the Uyghur diaspora complained about labeling Uyghurs as terrorists or extremists on mass media. They also condemned that some government officials presenting unreliable information which in turns exacerbating Uyghurophobia in Kyrgyzstan. For instance, the article was published on the newspaper Vechernii Bishkek included the speech of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Justice Kurmanbek Osmonov which emphasized a specific threat in the region comes from Uyghur separatist organizations.[170]

The leaders of the Uyghur diaspora do not deny that some of the crimes could really have been committed by the Uyghur militants. However, they are particularly concerned that no distinction is made between the few extremists and the majority of the law-abiding Uyghur population of Kyrgyzstan.

Meanwhile, some observers consider that the anti-Uyghur attacks in Kyrgyzstan indicate support by the country's leadership for China's anti-Uyghur policy in favor of its powerful eastern neighbor. According to Tursun Islam, the chairman of the Uyghur human rights organization "Democracy", it seems that some politicians and law enforcement agencies of Kyrgyzstan are fulfilling the will of the Chinese intelligence services, who are advantageous to attribute "terrorism and religious extremism" to the Uyghurs. He stressed that there is no extremist Uyghur organization in Kyrgyzstan.[171]

[169] Mukhamedov, "Uyghurs in Kyrgyzstan under Careful Government Supervision."
[170] Ibid.
[171] Jumagulov, "Kyrgyzstan's Worried Uighurs."

After the Urumqi riots in July 2009, Uyghur community of Kyrgyzstan gathered in the outskirts of Bishkek on August 10 with posters to honor the victims of the clash in Xinjiang and to call for an independent investigation into the riots. They accused China of state terrorism against the Uyghur population. After the protest was over, two Uyghurs – Dilmurat Akbarov, the head of local Uyghur society Ittipak, and his deputy Zhamaldin Nasyrov were detained by police for staging a rally not sanctioned by the government.[172] According to the article published by the Jamestown Foundation, the government avoided making any statement, the reasons of detainment remained unknown.[173] They were released from detention with the intervention of Tursunbek Akun, the Ombudsman of Kyrgyz Republic.[174] The demonstration did not get desired attention from local media. Nevertheless, as many experts in Bishkek claimed, these arrests and discouragement of further anti-China activities showed that the Kyrgyz government holds up Beijing's policy in Xinjiang.

As China has increased its influence on Kyrgyz authorities through bilateral cooperation, financial aids and through the SCO, Bishkek fell under the strong pressure from its larger neighbors. Uyghur diaspora was warned by the Kyrgyz government not to disrupt good relations between Kyrgyzstan and China. As China – Kyrgyzstan relations are getting closer, Ittipak attempts to avoid from being labeled as an extremist organization and continue the missions of the Association.

Nevertheless, Kyrgyz Uyghurs were mainly concerned not with repressions by the authorities, but with problems between local ethnics. During the political turmoil that swept Bishkek in 2010, there were reports of groups attacking ethnic Uyghurs. For example, the American Uyghur Association reported at the time that a Uyghur restaurant had been burned in Bishkek. Radio Liberty reported that in the suburbs of the Kyrgyz capital several Uyghurs were wounded by gunshots. A Uyghur man told EurasiaNet.org

[172] "Kyrgyzstan Uyghur Leaders Detained After Protest," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2009, https://www.rferl.org/a/Kyrgyzstan_Uyghur_Leaders_Detained_After_Protest/1796440.html.
[173] Erica Marat, "Uyghur Diaspora Faces Government Pressure in Kyrgyzstan," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 6, no. 156 (2009), https://jamestown.org/program/uyghur-diaspora-faces-government-pressure-in-kyrgyzstan/.
[174] "Kyrgyzstan's Ombudsman Secures Uyghur Releases," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2009, https://www.rferl.org/a/Kyrgyz_Ombudsman_Presses_For_Uyghur_Releases/1796654.html.

that, as part of the Madina market, where many Uyghurs work, was burned to ashes during several hours during inter-ethnic clashes that year.[175]

Kyrgyzstan received harsh criticism by the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) in May 2011 after the Kyrgyz policemen prevented four Uyghur leaders from traveling to the US for attending the International conference "The Future of the Uyghurs in East Turkestan", held 2 – 8 May 2011, which is co-sponsored by Freedom House, WUC, the Uyghur American Association (UAA) and the International Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation (IUHRDF). Dilmurat Akberov, former president of the Uyghur Society of "Ittipak", who holds a position in a local government, and Ruzi Muhammed Abdulbakiev, a former member of the WUC Steering Committee, were asked by Kyrgyz authorities to refrain from travelling to the U.S., arguing that this trip would "harm Sino-Kyrgyz relations." In addition, Hasyethan Tohtahonova and Elvaskhan Saloi-Akhunov were taken off from the airplane by police.[176] This incident happened one week after the meeting within the framework of the SCO.

Rabia Kadeer, the President of the WUC, expressed her disappointment at the actions of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, which also did not allow the leader of Uyghur diaspora in Kazakhstan to fly to the US for the conference. She stated that the governments of two countries are acting as if they are parts of China. "Instead of supporting and protecting Uyghur brothers and sisters, the Central Asian governments are acting like puppets in the hand of the Chinese government" she added.[177]

The situation was complicated by the incident that occurred on Pikertyk area close to the Kyrgyz – Chinese border in 2014. On 23 January, 11 unknown people penetrated the border in Kyrgyzstan. Alexandr Barykin, a local jaeger, noticing violators, tried to detain the group. He killed two of the violators, but he himself died, according to media reports, he was stabbed to death by the attackers. The rest of the violators seized jaeger's hunting rifle and were able to barricade themselves in one of the premises of the Kyrgyz

[175] Cristina Maza, "Kyrgyzstan's Uighurs Cautious, Still Fear Chinese Influence," Eurasianet, 2014, https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstans-uighurs-cautious-still-fear-chinese-influence.
[176] "World Uyghur Congress Strongly Protests Travel Refusal for Uyghur Exile Leaders from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan," World Uyghur Congress, 2011, https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/world-uyghur-congress-strongly-protests-travel-refusal-for-uyghur-exile-leaders-from-kazakhstan-and-kyrgyzstan/.
[177] Ibid.

border guards, but after a while all of them were eliminated by border guards. The Kyrgyz border guards suggested that the perpetrators could be "Uyghur separatists." It was also alleged that the group had infiltrated Kyrgyzstan with the aim of committing terrorist acts. However, the "terrorists" had no weapons other than a few knives. Later Acting The head of the State Border Service of the Kyrgyz Republic Raimberdi Duishenbiev stated that the identities of all 11 killed were established. "Those killed on the Kyrgyz-Chinese border are similar in appearance to ethnic Uyghurs, and in terms of equipment they look like separatists," he said.[178]

The World Uygur Congress expressed concern over the "killing of 11 young people of Uyghur nationality by border guards of the Turkic Republic." "China has close relations with Kyrgyzstan through the SCO, whose mission is the fight against terrorism and separatism. The Kyrgyz Republic remains an important channel through which Uyghur refugees can escape the repression they are subjected to in East Turkestan," said in the statement. "It is well known that the Chinese authorities export repression abroad to curb Uyghur activity and asylum-seeking Uyghurs," the text says. The Congress considers that "Uyghur patriots fighting in China for their rights and the freedom of their homeland have no reason to commit acts of terrorism in the neighboring Turkic republic, where, apart from the fraternal Kyrgyz people, there is a rather large Uyghur community". Congress calls for "a complete, transparent and independent investigation of the incident." "The most likely is that the Uyghurs crossed the border of Kyrgyzstan, fleeing persecution in China, where the labels of the terrorists were long attached to the Uyghur patriots," said in the statement.[179]

On August 30, 2016, the attacker crashed a car into the gates of the Chinese embassy in Bishkek and detonated an explosive device. As a result, he died, and three employees of the representation were injured. Kyrgyz authorities have established the

[178] Nazgul Begalieva, "Insident Na Granitse Obespokoil Vsemirnyi Uyghurskii Kongress (Border incident worries World Uyghur Congress.)," Vechernii Bishkek, 2014, https://www.vb.kg/doc/259624_incident_na_granice_obespokoil_vsemirnyy_yygyrskiy_kongress.html, (08 June 2019).

[179] Mahinur Niyazova, "Vsemirnyi Uyghurskii Kongress: Ubitye v Kyrgyzstane Narushiteli Granitsy, Vozmojno, Byli Bejentsami, Spasaiushimisia Ot Repressii (World Uyghur Congress: Violators killed in Kyrgyzstan border may have been refugees fleeing repression.)," Information Agency 24.kg, 2014, https://24.kg/archive/ru/community/170478-vsemirnyj-ujgurskij-kongress-ubitye-v-kyrgyzstane.html/, (08 June 2019).

identity of a man who blew himself up. According to the State Committee for National Security of the country, it was the 33-year-old ethnic Uyghur Zoir Khalilov, who had a Tajik passport and was part of the organization of the Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkestan, who committed the attack.

As stated in the committee, the attack was initiated by a number of Uyghur terrorist groups fighting together with the Islamists in Syria and affiliated with the terrorist organization "Front al-Nusra", the emissaries of which financed the terrorist action. As the State Committee for National Security of Kyrgyzstan stated, five citizens of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were detained on suspicion of involvement in the preparation of a crime. Another four Kyrgyz citizens are on the international wanted list. In respect of two more citizens of the republic, allegedly located in Turkey, an arrest warrant was issued. According to the intelligence service, one of the wanted natives of Kyrgyzstan coordinated the attack on the Chinese embassy. About the second it is known that he was trained in the explosive business in the territory of Syria and helped to make a bomb.[180]

The Chinese Foreign Ministry demanded that the Kyrgyz Republic ensure the safety of its citizens after the explosion inside the PRC embassy in Bishkek. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunin said that China would cooperate with Kyrgyzstan to punish those responsible for the Bishkek terrorist attack.[181]

Expert Toktogul Kakchekeev believes that the attack was organized by Uyghur separatists and had three goals. The first was revenge for the criminal prosecution and punishment of members of the "Islamic Party of Turkestan", which includes separatists. The second was that, in cooperation with ISIL, terrorists "showed teeth" to the Chinese authorities for sending Chinese troops to Syria. And the third goal of the terrorists was to demonstrate their strength. That is why it was committed on the eve of Independence Day to "hint" to the Kyrgyz authorities about the constant threat from terrorists. "If this was done during the holiday, the consequences would be very deplorable - both for our society

[180] "Kirgizia Obvinila v Napadenii Na Posolstvo KNR Uyghurov (Kyrgyzstan accused Uyghurs of attacking Chinese embassy)," *BBC News*, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-37295936, (12 June 2019).
[181] "Pekin Budet Sotrudnichat s KR, Chtoby Nakazat Vinovnyh v Terakte v Bishkeke (Beijing will cooperate with Kyrgyz Republic to punish those responsible for the terrorist attack in Bishkek.)," *Radio Sputnik*, 2016, https://ru.sputnik.kg/society/20160831/1028895688.html, (12 June 2019).

and for the organizers themselves, because then the toughest sweep in the country would begin. This was done just before the holiday, so that, sitting on the podium during the state parade, statesmen were sitting on pins and needles. Their goal was to terrify the country," the expert claims.[182]

The terrorist attack at the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek could have been committed by Chinese Islamists from the border areas or their agents in the Kyrgyz Republic. This opinion was expressed by Deputy Director of the Institute of CIS Countries Vladimir Zharikhin. The political scientist believes that the purpose of the terrorists was to show that they were not suppressed. "China strictly controls the Islamists. And in Bishkek, apparently, they had the opportunity to prepare for the terrorist attack. The Chinese embassy has suffered, but we must not forget that the US embassy is in close proximity to the Chinese diplomatic mission in Bishkek. By their actions, the terrorists wanted to attract attention and show that they continue to fight" said Zharikhin.[183]

Reportedly, in connection with the attack and the terrorist act against the Embassy of the PRC in Bishkek, the Uyghur Society of the Kyrgyz Republic "Ittipak" held an urgent extraordinary meeting of the Central Council. "The Central Council unanimously and resolutely condemned the attack against the Chinese Embassy in Kyrgyzstan. Chairman Artyk Khadzhiev on behalf of the Central Council of the Uygur Society of the Kyrgyz Republic "Ittipak" stated that the Uyghurs of the Kyrgyz Republic condemn such crimes in any of its manifestations, since terrorism has no national boundaries, is incompatible with universal morality and the canons of traditional Islam" said in the statement of the Uyghur society of the Kyrgyz Republic.[184]

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[182] Aidana Abduvaitova, "Terakt v Posolstve Kitaia: Kto i Zachem Organizoval Vzryv? (The attack at the Chinese Embassy: who and why organized the explosion?)," Vechernii Bishkek, 2016, https://www.vb.kg/doc/346048_terakt_v_posolstve_kitaia:_kto_i_zachem_organizoval_vzryv.html, (12 June 2019).

[183] Alina Kozhekova, "Vladimir Zharikhin: Terakt v Posolstve KNR v Bishkeke Mojet Byt Delom Ruk Islamistov Iz Kitaia (Vladimir Zharikhin: The attack at the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek could be the work of Islamists from China.)," *Information Agency 24.kg*, 2016, https://24.kg/obschestvo/36346_vladimir_jarihin_terakt_v_posolstve_knr_v_bishkeke_mojet_byit_delom_ruk_islamistov_iz_kitaya/, (12 June 2019).

[184] "Obshestvo Uyghurov Kyrgyzstana Reshitelno Osujdaet Napadenie Na Posolstvo Kitaia v Bishkeke(Kyrgyz Uyghur Society strongly condemns attack on Chinese Embassy in Bishkek.)," *Kabar*, 2016, http://www.kabar.kg/society/full/110536, (12 june 2019).

It's obscure that China worries about initiatives of Uyghur communities abroad who struggle for the liberation of East Turkestan threatening China's territorial unity. In order to dissuade Uyghurs from participating in political activities of Uyghur diasporas, China use the family members living in Xinjiang by threatening about their safety. Even there some cases when Chinese intelligence services encourage Uyghurs themselves to report on others to monitor political attitudes of the members of Uyghur communities. Apparently, it did not pass by Kyrgyz Uyghurs.

Despite the fact that Beijing and its representatives in Kyrgyzstan always claim that they have no relationship with Uyghur diaspora and with former citizens who left China, they still monitoring activities of Uyghur diaspora in Kyrgyzstan. Journalists of the Kaktus media portal visited the Madina market in Bishkek, where most of the traders are Uyghurs. Journalists tried to interview, but Uyghurs from China avoided any communication. "They did not even voice the reason for the refusal to comment, quickly leaving and hiding," notes the publication.

Only local traders agreed to answer the questions. According to them, visiting Uyghurs are afraid to talk about what is happening. "All Uyghurs who work in Kyrgyzstan have relatives in China. If they say something here, they will quickly find out about everything there in China, and their relatives can be more harmed. Therefore, they all prefer to remain silent," explained the reason for this behavior one of the merchants. Vendors say that visiting Uighurs are quiet, they are engaged only in trade and try not to catch the eye of law enforcement officers. Journalists of the publication noted that Uyghurs from China are "very much afraid." This was confirmed by the taxi driver, who for a long time carried visitors. "Their helpless position is also used by some law enforcement officers in Bishkek. Previously, many Uyghurs lived in the neighborhood of Vostok-5. Now they all moved to different parts of the city because police searched their houses, endlessly checked their documents. "It's clear why they did it, in order to earn money on them. This is also a certain corruption scheme," the taxi driver said.[185]

[185] "'Ochen Silno Ispugany'. Kak Jivut Priezjie Uyghury v Kyrgyzstane ("Very scared." How do visiting Uyghurs live in Kyrgyzstan?)," *Kaktus.media*, 2019, https://tengrinews.kz/sng/ochen-silno-ispuganyi-jivut-priezjie-uyguryi-kyirgyizstane-362204/, (15 june 2019).

4.2.3 The Situation of Ethnic Kyrgyz People in Xinjiang

Part of the Kyrgyz people found themselves in the Chinese territory as a result of so-called Great Game which developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries between Tsarist Russia, China and Great Britain. Ultimately, the parties agreed that they would divide the disputed lands, and part of the Kyrgyz lands, mostly high mountains, ended up in China. Today, Kyrgyz people in China are one of the 56 officially recognized peoples of China. Their number reaches 200 thousand people. The traditional region of their compact residence is Eastern Turkestan, where Kyrgyz people have their own autonomous territorial unit Kyzylsu-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region which was formed on July 14, 1954. The Kyzylsu-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region is a part of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, bordering the Kyrgyz Republic (Issyk-Kul region, Naryn region, Osh region) and Tajikistan (Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region). For decades, traveling from one side to the other was more or less possible, but in the early 1960s, when Soviet-Chinese relations deteriorated sharply, the border was closed tightly. Only since independence in 1991 Kyrgyzstan became easier to travel, but the border is still strictly guarded from the Chinese side.

After independence, the authorities of Kyrgyzstan seriously thought about the repatriation of ethnic Kyrgyz living in China to the republic, however, due to lack of budget, these plans were not implemented. Some Kyrgyz of China began to move to their historical land by their own means. However, only few of them could obtain citizenship and others had no legal status at all, accordingly, they had difficulties with access to all those needs that are provided for citizens of the country. In October 2006, Feliks Kulov, the Prime Minister of Kyrgyz Republic, signed order setting up a state program to ease the repatriation of ethnic Kyrgyz living abroad. This decree provides repatriates with a temporary legal status that would allow them to work and have access to education and medical care, pending Kyrgyz citizenship.[186]

Kyrgyz in XUAR were able to preserve the traditional way of life and their language. Since 1980, “Kyrgyz Literature of Kyzyl-Suu” and “Kyrgyz Literature of

[186] “Kyrgyz Prime Minister Approves Official Repatriation Program,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2006, https://www.rferl.org/a/1072221.html.

Xinjiang" magazines had been published in Kyzyl-Suu. They also had their own TV channel in Kyrgyz language. Xinjiang TV used to broadcast Kazakh and Kyrgyz channels. Kyrgyz people desired to preserve their ethnic heritage, however they never had a separatist sentiment than the Uyghurs. Even though the autonomous status of the region did not provide any privileges, people did not demand anything more from the government. They never complained of oppression. Nor have they ever been restricted in cultural, educational, or economic development. Kyrgyz freely developed cultural, educational and family relations with their homeland, studied and worked in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz in China always served as a bridge in bilateral relations of China and Kyrgyzstan.

From April 2017, news reports about "political re-education camps" in Xinjiang began to appear in news sites, where persecuted citizens called these camps prisons, and the Chinese authorities called training centers. Since 2018, ethnic Kyrgyz who moved from China and relatives of those who live in China appealed to the President of Kyrgyz Republic Sooronbay Jeenbekov. They ask for help in the release of relatives from the so-called "re-education camps". For the first time, the Parliamentary Committee on International Affairs, Defense and Security discussed behind the scenes information about the mass arrests of ethnic Kyrgyz in the XUAR on November 27, 2018.[187]

Soon *Kairylman*s (returnees) created the Committee to Protect the Kyrgyz People in China. The first meeting was held with the aim of bringing the problems of ethnic Kyrgyz in China to the authorities of Kyrgyzstan and the public. At this event, compatriots who received Kyrgyz citizenship declared that their family members and friends are massively detained in China. They claimed that in the "re-education camps" in XUAR there are about 50 thousand ethnic Kyrgyz. According to the representative of the committee, Almanbet Osmon uulu, about 22 thousand Kyrgyz were sent to the camp only from the Akchi region. In total, 40 thousand Kyrgyz live in Akchi. Almanbet Osmon uulu stated that the detention of the Kyrgyz is in no way connected with their religious views. "Kyrgyz people in China have never been fanatics of Islam. Among the detainees there are persons far from religion. For example, Professor Mambettursun

[187] Zhazgul Masalieva, "Kuda Propadaiut Kyrgyzy v Kitae? Versii Rodstvennikov (Where Do the Kyrgyz People Disappear in China? Relatives Versions)," *24.kg*, 2018, https://24.kg/obschestvo/102826_kuda_propadayut_kyirgyizyi_vkitae_versii_rodstvennikov/, (15 June 2019).

Mambetakunov or the journalist Nurmanbet Osmon. They both were accused of terrorism," he said.[188] A representative of the "Atazhurt Eriktileri" organization in Kazakhstan Serikzhan Bilash, confirming this information, added that editors and journalists of newspapers and magazines, poets, writers and intellectuals in the Kyzyl-Suu Autonomous Region are detained in the camps. China began detaining Kyrgyz intelligentsia, it is certainly nothing more than a cultural genocide.

At the meeting, which was attended by public figures, activists and Kyrgyz repatriates from China, the requirement was voiced that the authorities of the country should pay attention to the situation of compatriots in the PRC. Kyrgyz repatriates claim that they fear to communicate with their families in China, because all detained there are those who have relatives abroad. After the first meeting of the Committee the number of complainants who have lost contact with their relatives in China considerably increased.

Later it became known that among the Kyrgyz, who held in the camps of China, there are those who are listed as students in Kyrgyz universities. As reported in the newly created Committee to support the Kyrgyz in China, 45 students and one teacher who left for the Kyrgyz Republic have not returned from Xinjiang. After the winter holidays in the 2017-2018 academic year at least 20 ethnic Kyrgyz students from China were expelled from the universities. The reasons were shown as failure to meet the requirements of the course of study or to pay the tuition fees. However, they all were not able to return to Kyrgyzstan.[189]

Kairylman, who received the passport of Kyrgyzstan, a student Aaly Suyunaaly uulu, said that they received invitations and threats from Chinese law enforcement agencies. "In 2017, on vacation, individual students were told to return, they were leaving for China, but they did not return. The latter left in January in 2017, they also did not come back to Kyrgyzstan. I also received threats and calls a couple of times" he told in an interview with Azattyk. Aaly came to Kyrgyzstan in 2014 and in 2017 he received citizenship of the Kyrgyz Republic. His father came to Kyrgyzstan twice. Last time came

[188] "Prosba Obratit Vnimanie k Polojeniu Kyrgyzov v Kiate (Request to Pay Attention to the Situation of Kyrgyz in China)," *Radio Azattyk*, 2018, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/ 29629611.html, (15 June 2019).
[189] Gene A. Bunin, "Kyrgyz Students Vanish Into Xinjiang's Maw," Foreign Policy, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/31/963451-kyrgyz-xinjiang-students-camps/.

in 2016 with his grandmother. Six months later, in March 2017, they reported that his father had been taken to the camp. He has not been able to contact his mother for a year.[190]

Relatives of ethnic Kyrgyz feared any publicity about problems in the neighboring country. But the difficult situation of fellow countrymen and the increase in the number of prisoners forced them to speak openly about what is happening. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was limited to the message that it was checking information about the situation of ethnic Kyrgyz in China. Some public figures and human rights activists called on the authorities to pay attention to the Kyrgyz people in Xinjiang and find diplomatic ways for dialogue with Beijing. "Our government should send an official appeal to the Chinese side, based on intergovernmental agreements and stable cooperation, and receive an official response," said former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Askar Beshimov. "European human rights organizations and the entire progressive world openly discuss the existence of "re-education camps" in China. We should also ask the Chinese side to provide information about ethnic Kyrgyz. Four diplomats from Kyrgyzstan work in Urumqi, let them also collect information. This will clarify how the situation is and what the root of the problem is. Based on this, we must take the following steps," claimed Beshimov.

In December 2018, Kyrgyzstanis organized a rally near the UN House in Bishkek to draw attention to the problem of re-education camps in China. More than 20 people gathered at the rally. They wrote an appeal to the UN with a request to create a special commission to investigate what is happening in the PRC. "We demand to set up an ad hoc group of representatives of the UN, which would be sent to China. We must find out what they want from the people, why people need to forget their historical roots. It is necessary to establish a dialogue with the Chinese authorities in order to stop such actions," said Almazbek Zhazibayev, a representative of the public association "Kyrgyz El Zhashtar Council" (Kyrgyzstan Youth Council).[191]

[190] Nurzhan Toktonazarova, "Vse Bolshe Etnicheskih Kyrgyzov Zaiavliaut o Propaje Rodstvennikov v Lageriah Kitaia (More and more ethnic Kyrgyz claim of missing relatives in Chinese camps.)," *Radio Azattyk*, 2018, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_china_rights_prison/29634348.html, (18 June 2019).
[191] Tatiana Kudriatseva, "Kyrgyzstansy Trebuiut Ot OON Obratit Vnimanie Na Lageria Perevospitania v Kitae (Kyrgyz citizens demand UN pay attention to re-education camps in China.)," *Information Agency 24.kg*, 2018,

At the press conference, answering questions about the detention of thousands of ethnic Kyrgyz in China, President of the country Sooronbay Jeenbekov said that Kyrgyzstan cannot interfere in the internal affairs of China. He claimed that Kyrgyzstan will attempt to help its citizens and other compatriots who found themselves in re-education camps in Xinjiang using diplomatic channels. The President asked to be cautious with statements about the re-education camps in China, and also not to disturb the society about the expansion of Chinese citizens.[192]

After the President made a statement, social activists organized a rally near the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek on December 20, 2018. Protesters demanded PRC to stop persecuting ethnic Kyrgyz in China and free them from re-education camps. Also, the protesters demanded to create a commission to verify the legality of the granting of citizenship of the Kyrgyz Republic to Chinese citizens over the past 10 years.

From 28-30 December, at the invitation of the XUAR government, diplomats from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Pakistan and Thailand visited the cities of XUAR Urumqi, Kashgar and Khotan. "The organizers familiarized foreign diplomats with the socio-economic development of the region, and also demonstrated cultural attractions, educational institutions, mosques, markets and other objects. As part of their visits to vocational education and training centers, representatives of embassies conducted joint conversations with students of these," the press service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic reported. The report does not contain information about re-education camps and the situation of ethnic Kyrgyz in the PRC.[193]

On February 22, the head of the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry completed an official visit to XUAR. At the meeting, the head of the XUAR, Shokhrat Zakir assured Minister Chingiz Aydarbekov that there are no Kyrgyz in the Chinese "re-education camps". Referring to the chairman Shohrat Zakir, the Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported

https://24.kg/obschestvo/103147_kyirgyizstantsyi_trebuyut_otoon_obratit_vnimanie_nalagerya_perevospitaniya_vkitae/, (18 June 2019).

[192] "Jeenbekov Dal Raziasnenia Po Informatsii o Zaderjanii Kyrgyzov v Kitae (Jeenbekov gave clarifications on the information about the detention of Kyrgyz in China.)," *Sputnik*, 2018, https://ru.sputnik.kg/society/20181219/1042514103/kyrgyzstan-zhehehnbekov-kitaj-zaderzhaniya.html.

[193] "Diplomaty Kyrgyzstana Siezdili v XUAR," Sputnik, 2019, https://ru.sputnik.kg/society/20190109/1042783001/kyrgyzstan-kitaj-mid-diplomaty.html, (22 June 2019).

that information about ethnic Kyrgyz in China's "re-education camps" was not confirmed.[194] It is clear that the Foreign Ministry is cautious in matters related to China, arguing that the issue of bilateral relations with a neighbor is matter of importance. In this the Ministry is in solidarity with the President of Kyrgyzstan Sooronbay Jeenbekov, who believes that "one should be more careful in talking about China".

On May 21, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi arrived in Kyrgyzstan on an official visit. Before the meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the SCO countries, the Minister of China met with Foreign Minister Chingiz Aydarbekov. Following the meeting, the ministers spoke to reporters. "We highly appreciate the support of the Kyrgyz side for China's foreign and domestic policy. We are talking about adherence to the principle of a single PRC and all the measures we have taken to deradicalize the situation in XUAR," said Wang Yi. He recalled that the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China borders with Kyrgyzstan, so they are bound by common security interests. "In February, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan visited Xinjiang, and then the Kyrgyz side made a statement, fully endorsing China's policy in the XUAR and convincingly refuting unsubstantiated reports. We highly appreciate it," added the Minister.[195] This news disappointed everyone who was still hoping for Bishkek's firmness even with respect to the Kyrgyz people from China as there was no mention of the Uyghurs at the meeting.

China for Kyrgyzstan, of course, is a good partner and sponsor, and many argue that China is a large independent state, with its internal policy and ideology, which means no one has the right to interfere in its affairs. But since this is about human rights and the fate of their compatriots, the Kyrgyz authorities are obliged to come up with proposals and help their people. Otherwise, the government will only confirm its weakness as a sovereign state.

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[194] Aidai Irgebaeva, "MID KR Utverjdet, Cto Kyrgyzov v Kitaiskih Lageriah Net - a Aktivisty Soobshaut o Tysiachah Zaderjannyh (Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry claims that there are no Kyrgyz in Chinese camps - and activists have reported thousands of detainees.)," *Kloop*, 2019, https://kloop.kg/blog/2019/02/23/mid-kr-utverzhdaet-chto-kyrgyzov-v-kitajskih-lageryah-net-a-aktivisty-soobshhayut-o-tysyachah-zaderzhannyh-kyrgyzov/, (23 June 2019).

[195] Yakub Khadzhich, "Kitai Blagodarit Kyrgyzstan Za Podderjku Gonenii Na Musulman v XUAR(China thanks Kyrgyzstan for supporting persecution of Muslims in XUAR.) ," *Golos Islama*, 2019, https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=36511, (23 June 2019).

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region to this day remains the main threat of destabilization for the People's Republic of China. The favorable geopolitical position of the XUAR forces Beijing to keep the region under full control and prevent both external and internal factors influencing the further intensification of the Uyghur separatism in the region. However, the world community criticizes China for taking harsh measures against innocent civilians without distinguishing them from those involved in separatist and extremist acts. China arguing the opposite emphasized that in recent years the region has stabilized to a large extent. Moreover, China seems to have increased its supporters in international arena on its policy in Xinjiang, in July 50 permanent representatives of other countries sent a collective letter addressed to the Chairman of the Human Rights Council and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in which they supported China's policy on the Xinjiang issue, praised China's notable achievements in the field of human rights and in the fight against terrorism.

Nevertheless, the PRC continues to develop cooperation with the SCO member countries and border countries in the fight against international terrorism, national separatism, religious extremism, and pursues a policy of further resolving the Xinjiang issue. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan among five central Asian countries along with Russia openly took their positions on the side of China. Only Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan refrain from open statement on support for China.

Support for China's policies in Xinjiang by Russia and the Central Asian countries, along with other states, has demonstrated that any country in international politics puts in the first place not global, but its national interests.

In foreign policy decision making Russia is always guided by its geopolitical interests. By backing China on Xinjiang issue Russia has very clearly shown that it is geopolitical interests that come first, in which China holds key position. Very often, Russia and China act in the same connection, opposing the United States and other European countries which condemn the policies of Moscow and Beijing. Due to the

sanctions imposed by the West, today Russia is in a state of a “rogue state” and China is the only partner, the largest for it, whom it can rely on from an economic point of view. With such political support for China, Russia confronts Western interference in the internal affairs of other countries and condemns the Western countries for politization of human rights topics.

Furthermore, Russia stands for Chinese policy in Xinjiang since it has similar problems of extremism and separatism. Uyghur separatism in Xinjiang in the eyes of Russia is always associated with the separatism in the North Caucasia, especially in Chechnya. Any foci of religiosity and nationalism in secular China and Russia are being watched with great attention - as the nutritious soil of three evils: separatism, terrorism, and extremism.

For Russia the security of Central Asia is a matter of importance since the region offers economic opportunities for Russia in terms of valuable natural resources, favorable terms of trade and trade routes. The situation in Xinjiang affects the security of the entire Central Asian region. Therefore, the Russian authorities consider the Xinjiang issue as a common problem of China, Russia and Central Asia. Accordingly, Russia is actively involved in the regulation of security issues in Central Asia, particularly within the framework of the SCO.

The congeniality of ethnic Uyghurs in Xinjiang with the peoples of Central Asia did not help them get support from neighboring states. China’s economic power is more likely to influence political decision-making in Central Asian governments. The main factor influencing the support of Chinese policy in Xinjiang by the countries of Central Asia is economic pragmatism. Because China is the main investor in the region. Most of the economic projects in Central Asia are promoted mainly at the expense of China. Secondly, this support can be determined by the ideological closeness of the political regimes of Beijing and Central Asian countries. Particularly, the authorities of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are afraid of political Islam within the country. The population of these countries, of course, condemn the policy of China in Xinjiang, but in these countries, it has no influence on the political decision-making process.

But the situation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on this issue is slightly different. The societies of these countries and Uyghur diasporas call the governments of two countries to condemn Chinese crackdown against national minorities and to defend their compatriots in Xinjiang. The authorities of both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan stated that Xinjiang is an internal affair of China and that they will not interfere in it. Due to pressure from activists and human rights groups, the governments attempt to settle the issue regarding Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in Xinjiang with China by the diplomatic means.

For all Central Asian countries, it is critical to see a stable Xinjiang across their borders under the powerful China rather than to have instable new independent “East Turkestan” or “Uyghurstan” since there is a big dissension among the Uyghur associations and diasporas who strive for the liberation of “East Turkestan” on the future of Xinjiang.

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