

Promoting Terror by the Turkish State: The Case of the Turkistan Islamic Party

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Executive summary

When it comes to the issue of terror and terrorism, the Turkish State very comfortably labels whoever is not in line with Turkey's interest and strategy. Moreover, almost all Western states are outspokenly suggesting that they do understand Turkish concern about its national security and its struggle for counter terrorism actions. However, the other side of the coin is very rarely looked at. This article argues that the Turkish State is promoting terror through supporting the Islamist fundamentalist organisations inside and outside Turkey. The aid and support of the Turkistan Islamic Party- Xinjiang, is one of the cases that Turkey has its hand in it.

Introduction

Turkey plays a crucial role in contemporary geopolitical events.

As an actor between west and east in the world, it has an important geostrategic condition in the regional events in different places such as Ukraine, Syria, Libya, Azerbaijan and Iraq. The legacy of state and

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acting as a multi facet entity could be noticed in both Iranian and Turkish states for a long time in the region. Therefore, both Iran and Turkey in the region have been in a long term, complicated and multi-dimensional competition across the centuries. While they are using similar methods and strategic plans for achieving their goals and dreams, often they are going through several complexities in terms of collaborations and confrontations. Moreover, while Iran and Turkey competing against each other and going through making several allies in the region and internationally, they on the other hand have similar friends and foes. Russia and China are considered as friends of Iran. The majority of the Western countries (NATO Members) and often both Russia and China alongside several smaller countries in the region such as Qatar, Pakistan and Malaysia could be (on and off) considered as Turkish state friends. However, none of the mentioned countries above could be full friends or foes to each or any of the two main regional powers that we are mentioning now.

Turkey, in particular, has a long-term experience in terms of managing state actions. It is characterised by strategically planning for achieving the goals and bringing the dreams of the nation into reality. It has dreams to regain the glory of the past. It has plans for expansion and conquering more territories and imposing its hegemony in the region. AKP's 'Crazy Plan' is aiming at achieving several goals by 2023, the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Modern Turkish Republic.² In this article, I try to show some of the related plans of the Turkish state in terms of using and exploiting terrorism and the trick of convection and supporting Islamist Jihadist Extremism to support its goals and aims. Particularly, I would like to focus on the relations between the Turkish state and Turkic armed groups and individuals, and their families that are currently present in Turkey and used as part of the Turkish strategy in the current crises in Syria, Libya and Nagorno Karabakh.

²James Helicke, *Outdoing Panama: Turkish 'Crazy' Plan to Build an Istanbul Canal*. Online: *Origin; Current Events in Historical perspective*. Accessed on 15-08/2022. https://origins.osu.edu/article/outdoing-panama-turkey-s-crazy-plan-build-istanbul-canal?language_content_entity=en.



It is interesting that the Turkish notion of terror is used for different purposes. On the one hand, Turkish state institutions have adopted a very broad definition of terrorism that increasingly covers peaceful acts of dissidence and further limits political freedoms.³ On the other hand, when it comes to supporting its proxy groups, the meaning of terror could be changed dramatically. This report argues and tries to examine the relations specifically between Turkish State and extremist groups including Turkistan Islamic Party (formerly named East Turkistan Islamic Movement or ETIM) that have recently been developed not only on the scale of using them in Nagorno Karabakh, Syria and Libya, but to recruit them and feed them for the next phase of the chaos in case of using them against China as a factor of economic or diplomatic deals with China.

The dream of Turkey

The Turkish State still lives in a sort of illusion of the glory of the past that can be manifested through the concept of Neo Ottomanism. The dream of the Turkish state is to bring back and rearrange the state based on the pillars of Turkishness and the glory and superiority of the Turks and Turkic world again (Pan-Turanism)⁴. For that, the Turkish state would take every opportunity to get closer to that dream. Turkey could be considered as a medium power that has a long legacy of the Ottoman Empire in ruling the wide areas and managing a multi-faceted array of conflicts and interests. I would precisely refer to three dates that are crucial for the Turkish state as the main discourse of the mission and plan for the future of the Turkish and Turkic nations.

First of all, the year 2023 will be the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923. Secondly, the year

³ Nazil Ozekici and Hasret Dikici Bilgin (2022) Turkey's broad definition of terrorism does nothing to halt radicalisation. Online: Open democracy; Accessed on 16/08/2022. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/turkeys-broad-definition-of-terrorism-does-nothing-to-halt-radicalisation/>

⁴ Pan- Turanism, also known as pan-Turanianism, or simply Turan, is a nationalist cultural and political movement proclaiming the need for close cooperation or political unification between (culturally, linguistically or ethnically related) peoples who are belong to Turkic ethnic groups and nations.

2053 will be the 600th anniversary of the fall of Constantinople (Istanbul) to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. And thirdly, the year 2071 will be the 1,000th anniversary of the 1071 Manzikert (Malazgirt) battle, during which Turkic tribes from Central Asia defeated the Greek Byzantine forces in the Byzantine city of Manzikert. Very briefly we can argue that these three dates and the missions behind these dates could drive the machine of Turkish strategy and goals.

In the first phase, the ideal behind the year 2023, is to turn Turkey into one of the most important actors in the global power balance and a determinant country that works to gain hegemony in the region. Turkey is aiming at gaining the lands of the territories of the “National pact”, “Misaki Milli” which is at least northern Iraq and northern Syria (predominantly Kurdish inhabitants) within its current borders.⁵ Moreover, Turkey wants to impose its hegemony on the lands and governments in the vast geographical regions from Morocco to Afghanistan.

In the second phase of the mission, the year 2053 would be the date that the establishment of the Turkish or Turkic United States (Pan-Turanism) similar to the model of the United States of America and the European Union would be completed.⁶ The majority of the lands of nowadays eastern and central Europe would be part of this forthcoming body. Moreover, the strategic depth and effective role of Turkish foreign policy are not restricted to the Middle East only. According to the plan, the very vast geography from the Balkans to the Caucasus, and from Africa to Central Asia would be parts of the territories of the Turkic United States. In other words, all the countries that have historical and cultural bonds with the glory of the Ottoman empire will be part of that entity. Thus, in 2053, the great

⁵ Uzay Bulut (2019). What does Turkey Hope to Achieve by Its Current Policies in Syria? <https://greekcitytimes.com/2019/10/26/turkey-hope-achieve-current-policies-syria/>

⁶ Uzay Bulut (2019). What Does Turkey Hope to Achieve by Its Current Policies in Syria? <https://greekcitytimes.com/2019/10/26/turkey-hope-achieve-current-policies-syria/>



Turkic United States will have a place in the new world order as the fourth centre of power – alongside China, Russia and the USA.⁷

In the third phase of the mission, the year 2071, would be the date that the Turkic nations would reach the dominating level of the Ottomans and Seljuks. This means that the ambition of 2071 would be the state that has united the Islamic world and that has become number one in the world with its social structure, economy and politics. It should then be the country that rules the world. The dream of the Turkic nations is the year 2071 should be planned as a year in which its world domination and global sovereignty will be established. This is the dream of Turkey. However, the challenges and obstacles in front of that dream are not less than the opportunities to achieving it.⁸

The Challenges of Turkey

Turkey aims at representing the Sunni Muslim communities in the world. As mentioned above, the legacy of the Ottoman Empire made it an illusion for Turkey to regain all the lost territories and rule the world. However, the challenges and obstacles, in reality, are a lot greater than the dream and illusion of Turkey. Internally there are several huge challenges in front of the Turkish state to pursue its ambitious dreams. Fragile economics and polarities of politics in Turkey have always made the plans and decisions not work well. On the other hand, the power of Mafia and drug-dealer bands is hugely embodied within the state organs including the police and intelligence arms.⁹ The terminology of “Deep State” and “Cartel

⁷ Youssra El Badmoussi (2021). Did China Buy Turkey's Silence on the Uyghur Muslims? <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2021/05/341160/did-china-buy-turkeys-silence-on-the-uyghur-muslims>.

⁸ Uzay Bulut (2019). What Does Turkey Hope to Achieve by Its Current policies in Syria? <https://greekcitytimes.com/2019/10/26/turkey-hope-achieve-current-policies-syria/>

⁹ Hot Pursuit (2021) Turkish State-Mafia Allegations Revive Memories of Susurluk Scandal. Online; Ahval Newspaper. Accessed on 16/08/2022. <https://ahvalnews.com/turkish-mafia/turkish-state-mafia-allegations-revive-memories-susurluk-scandal>

State”¹⁰ can serve our argument in this regard. Both formal officials and power stake holders often go through conflict and cooperation in the process of ruling the complexities of politics. Yet, none of them can be the only character to have the final and only decision for any event. Nonetheless, the dream of Turkey is to become a leader of the Islamic world with the Turkic characterisation supremacy under the theory of Turk-Islam Synthesis, “Turk-Islam sentezi,”¹¹ and “Pan-Turanism”.¹²

Another big-actually it could be the biggest- obstacle in front of the Turkish dream is the Kurdish question.¹³ The Kurds in the Middle East have already risen and their social and political rights (perhaps including their own nation-state) are only a matter of time. The Kurds (especially those Kurds who are inspired by Abdullah Ocalan and his Revolutionary Ideology) are the main obstacle in front of the Turkish dream. As mentioned above, the year 2023 is the year that Turkey must control both Northern Iraq and Syria and put it back within its borders. That is why we can see daily atrocities, bombardment and military attacks from Turkey against both Kurdish populated areas in Iraq and Syria. However, the Kurds are strongly and with new techniques working on building their own entities and resisting in front of the Turkish military campaigns. This means that the first phase of the Turkish dream almost failed.¹⁴

Iran is another big obstacle in front of Turkey. Due to the Sunni-Shia long term conflicts, both Iran and Turkey have big trends of power and hegemony in the region. Iran doesn't easily let Turkey be

¹⁰ Benjamin, Lessing *The Logic of Violence in Criminal War: Cartel State Conflict in Mexico, Colombia and Brazil.* University of California, Berkeley ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2012. 3527063. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1082041103/fulltextPDF/FC052B80B2464C46PQ/1?accountid=10792>

¹¹ Akin, A and Karasapan, O. (1988) “The Turkish Islamic Synthesis,.” *Middle East Report* 153 (July/August 1988). Accessed on 30/June/2022. <https://merip.org/1988/07/the-turkish-islamic-synthesis/>

¹² Uzay Bulut (2019). What Does Turkey Hope to Achieve by Its Current Policies in Syria? <https://greekcitytimes.com/2019/10/26/turkey-hope-achieve-current-policies-syria/>

¹³ Henri Berkey and Dienc Kadioglu (2011) *The Turkish Constitution and the Kurdish Question.* Online; Carnegie; Accessed on 15/08/2022 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2011/08/01/turkish-constitution-and-kurdish-question-pub-45218>

¹⁴ Uzay Bulut (2019). What Does Turkey Hope to Achieve by Its Current policies in Syria? <https://greekcitytimes.com/2019/10/26/turkey-hope-achieve-current-policies-syria/>



the first and biggest player in the region. While the majority of territories and political players in both Iraq and Syria are loyal to Iran, Iran started to win the game with most of the Arab states that are not happy with Turkish expansionist dreams. Recently, Saudi Arabia and Iran started negotiating and understanding each other. Egypt and the UAE, as two main players in the Arab world, are both against Turkey and its hegemonic dreams.

More importantly, the newly risen China as a global power doesn't fully trust Turkey to manage the game between Russia and the USA. Therefore, China treats Turkey as a corridor to its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects. However, the misbehaviour of Turkey, especially in relation to the Uyghur Chinese citizens, is making China trust Turkey less.¹⁵ We can talk about this point in the next sections.

Promoting Terror and its Ramifications

While Turkey claims that it is a democratic state and complies with international law and the European Human Rights Criteria, it is in practice doing everything to achieve its expansionist dreams regardless of human rights, while also breaching both European and international law. Obviously, in recent years and especially after the Arab spring in 2011' Turkey has been involved with supporting extremist groups in the region. Indeed, Turkey has become a hub for gathering and serving Islamic terrorist groups across the world.¹⁶ In Turkey nowadays, there are groups from Chechnya-Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and indeed, a Uyghur group that is called the Turkistan Islamic Party.¹⁷ There are hundreds of clear pieces of evidence that Turkey¹⁸ supported ISIS and Al-Qaeda

¹⁵ Michale Daventry (2021) Turkey Could Send its Uyghurs Back to China at Any Moment. <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/turkey-could-send-its-uyghurs-back-to-china-at-any-moment/>

¹⁶ Amberin Zaman (2021) Turkey's scapegoating of McGurk rooted in revisionism. Online Almonitor. Accessed on 15/08/2022. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/01/turkey-biden-nsc-mideast-brett-mcgurk-ankara-ypg-syria-pkk.html>.

¹⁷ Youssra El Badmoussi (2021). Did China Buy Turkey's Silence on the Uyghur Muslims? <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2021/05/341160/did-china-buy-turkeys-silence-on-the-uyghur-muslims>.

¹⁸ The Young TV (2015) Turkish Government Caught Helping ISIS. Youtube. Accessed on 03/09/2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHyKfPEl95w>

organisations. Turkey gave arms to them and treated their injured individuals in the Turkish hospitals across the border from Syria.¹⁹ Moreover, recruiting and transferring mercenaries to Libya and to Azerbaijan is clearly evidenced in the last few years.²⁰ I would argue that the main aim of supporting radical Islamic groups is an expansion of Turkey's hegemony and getting closer to its dream of controlling the vast majority of the region.

The ramification of Turkish expansion and its ambitions to control the resources of the region would put Turkey into a crossroad at least in the near future. The rise of China in the region and especially the BRI project would certainly have an impact on Turkey and its geopolitical status in the region. In this regard, Turkey not only has an economic deal with China. It is in fact, the issue of supporting terrorism and especially supporting the Turkistan Islamic Party. This would have a serious ramifications on the future of Turkey-China relations.²¹ Arguably, the Turkish state and almost every single national figures and political leaders and parties in Turkey, (apart from the pro-Kurdish political party HDP) have clearly and proudly shown their full support to their "so-called Uyghur Turkic Brothers".²² This means that the notion of supporting the case of Xinjiang is not only the will of Erdogan or the AKP ruling Party. It is indeed a nationalist and ultra-nationalist notion and policy of the Turkish state and Turkish nationalist movement that is deeply embodied within the mind and feelings of the vast majority of the Turks.²³

The crossroad that Turkey will be on, and the pathway that it will finally achieve, would be the policy that is based on the dream of

¹⁹ Kurdistan Democratic Communities Union (2022) Turkish Neo-Ottoman Expansionism in Iraq: Dangers and Consequences International Community's Stance Can Prevent Destabilisation of the Middle East. Report by the KDCU: June 2022.

²⁰ Bold Medya (2021) Berat Al Bayrak Randevu Vardı. Sedat Peker'in Yeni Açıklama. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxyeNwK9imE>

²¹ Ulusal Kanal (2019) Türkiye Uyghur konusunda Çin'in yanında, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WK1xI1O8XyQ>

²² Yurttas TV (2021) Meral Akşener kürsüde ağladı! "Elinde iman metre ile gezenler bu zulme sessiz kahyor!". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQ65qKbgqr0>.

²³ Yurttas TV (2021) Meral Akşener kürsüde ağladı! "Elinde iman metre ile gezenler bu zulme sessiz kahyor!". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQ65qKbgqr0>.



Turkic expansion to control the world. Therefore, China has no choice but deeply understand that fact and try to limit Turkey within its current range rather than letting it grow bigger and stronger. The policy that the Western countries (EU and the USA) is pursuing towards Turkey is to use Turkey as a member of NATO against Russian hegemony and of course Chinese projects from now on. But they will never let Turkey become a bigger power than what it is now. Thus, China would rethink when it comes to the deal with Turkey. Bringing Turkey out of the range of the Western powers cannot happen that soon unless Turkey will be fully ignored by the Western powers due to their difficulties and failures of their strategies in the region. We can easily see that the USA has failed in Afghanistan and almost all countries that have been occupied by the USA since the start of the War on Terror in 2001. We cannot see even one USA successful story in the region. Thus, whether China likes it or not, it has no choice but to expose its policy and start acting differently in the region.

In this regard, the treatment of Turkey would be different from what the Western powers have done so far. I'm not in the position of suggesting any plan to China at this stage. But I can show the nature of the Turkish ambition and Turkic expansion that directly has an impact on the BRI and its internal case of Xinjiang province.

What Turkey want to do with and against China in this case?

Based on the statements and discourse with Turkish officials, one can conclude that Turkey wants to have sustainable economic relations with China. However, Turkey wants to promote, fund, train and support fundamental groups including Turkistan Islamic Party and use them as mercenaries in Syria and wherever else Turkey needs them.²⁴ Arguably, Turkey wants to grow them up, and prepare them for the next phase of its expansion dream. This is not a claim. It is the aim that has been confirmed by almost all the important figures

²⁴ Bayram Balci (2019) The Uyghur Tragedy: An Embarrassment for Turkey. <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/the-uyghur-tragedy-an-embarrassment-for-turkey,3332>.

within the state and the big figures within the deep state.²⁵ Moreover, in the Turkish National Assembly (TBMM) there was even a push for erecting active legislation to recognise the situation in Xinjiang as genocide. However, due to the lack of zeal and the political tactics of the ruling AKP and Erdogan's new partner, the MHP Party and especially its leader, Devlet Bahçeli, pursuing the legal procedure in the TBMM was postponed.²⁶ That doesn't mean, the case has become less important for Turkish politics and Pan-Turanist agendas. It is only a temporary tactical policy of the AKP and Erdogan due to economic crises and relying on China's projects and economic support to Turkey.

It is argued that historically, culturally, and linguistically, the Uyghurs share deep linkages with the Turkic ethnic groups in the broader Central and West Asian region. Turkey has long served as a shelter destination for the Uyghur refugees who claim Chinese authorities are targeting them. There is an estimation that the Uyghur diaspora population in Turkey now counts between 50,000 to 60,000 individuals. Moreover, there are about 5,000 well-equipped individuals and their families that have resided inside the Syrian border in the province of Aleppo and in both Idlib and Afrin cities since the Turkish occupation took place in 2016 and 2018.²⁷

More explicitly, in 2015, Reuters published a report on the question of Turkic-Uyghur refugees, noting that Turkish diplomats have even delivered travel papers and Turkish passports to help the Uyghurs escape Chinese territory. China's distrust is directly linked to the question of Turkish passports. In 2015, China accused Turkish diplomats in Shanghai and Kuala Lumpur of issuing passports to Uyghurs, helping them to join the war in Syria.²⁸ This is really crucial if this allegation by Reuters is true and if the Turkish embassy in

²⁵ Bayram Balci (2019) The Uyghur Tragedy: An Embarrassment for Turkey. <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/the-uyghur-tragedy-an-embarrassment-for-turkey,3332>.

²⁶ Bayram Balci (2019) The Uyghur Tragedy: An Embarrassment for Turkey. <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/the-uyghur-tragedy-an-embarrassment-for-turkey,3332>.

²⁷ Michale Duchatel (2019) China's Foreign Fighters Problem. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/01/chinas-foreign-fighters-problem/>

²⁸ Michale Duchatel (2019) China's Foreign Fighters Problem. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/01/chinas-foreign-fighters-problem/>



China has ever been involved in such an issue. Publicly and with the encouragement of the state and nationalist movements, in February 2019, through a stern governmental statement, Turkey criticised Beijing for violating the fundamental human rights of Uyghur Turks and other Muslim communities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. This somehow stimulated public satisfaction as Turkey is one of the few countries in the Islamic world to have publicly condemned China for its actions. Indeed, when Erdogan and other figures of the Turkish state come to China and directly address Chinese officials, they would deny all this. However, one must deeply understand that the notion of Pan-Turanism expansion is directly behind the move of the Turkish state in the case of Uyghurs and against China.

On the other hand, the Turkish state still wants to sustain its relations with China, at least for the time being, and due to the current economic hardship and political difficulties of Turkey with the Western powers. While Turkey at this stage does not promote choosing one side over another, Sino-Turkish ties have steadily grown stronger in recent years. Today, on the great scales of cynicism, Turkish-Uyghur camaraderie is largely outweighed by political, security and economic considerations between Turkey and China.²⁹ Therefore, relations between the two countries have intensified in a variety of domains, primarily economy, transportation, commerce, and tourism, with a trading volume of around \$24 billion in 2020. However, that doesn't mean the Turkish dream is left alone and ignored. China would always think of that as a serious matter.

Conclusion

With regards to Turkish strategy toward the case of Xinjiang, we can briefly suggest that Turkey wants to use this case for three different purposes. Firstly, it is used for its internal political and national purposes. Every single political party uses this case for showing its

²⁹ Bayram Balci (2019) The Uyghur Tragedy: An Embarrassment for Turkey. <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/the-uyghur-tragedy-an-embarrassment-for-turkey,3332>.

strong affiliation to the Turkish and Turkic dreams and expansion strategy. Every state figure and deep state stakeholders including the big mafia are sharing this value that one day their Pan-Turanist dream must come true and all Turkic lands will be free from the enemy. In this regard, China is considered as an enemy.

The second purpose with which Turkey has a big problem is the Kurdish question. Therefore, Turkey often discuss it with every other state to confirm the matter of territorial integrity of the countries. Since the Kurds are almost 25% of Turkey's population or more than 20 million people, (in contrary to the Uyghur people in China who are a very little tiny minority), Turkey is always afraid of the secession of the Kurds to establish their own state in the Middle East. Thus, China can take this weak point of Turkey into consideration when it comes to the deal on the Xinjiang case. That is why the formal Turkish agenda is to promote Turkish-Chinese relations including territorial integrity matters. The third and the most crucial purpose of Turkey is to feed, grow up and recruit those groups that could be used in the next stage in all Turkic lands such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and of course in the Chinese territory of Xinjiang. In fact, the aim of Turkey with regards to the case of Xinjiang is circling around these three purposes. But the Turkish strategic plan is always on the table and considered as the main policy to reach the dreams of 2023, 2053 and finally 2071.

