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Genocide and Uyghur Resilience: Uniqueness, Current Struggles, and Future Ahead



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Summary of Key Developments

- Since the invasion by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Beijing has systematically intensified total control of East Turkistan by utilizing settler colonialism.
- The intensification of oppression, most notably the genocide and crimes against humanity perpetrated in East Turkistan since 2017, has strengthened demands for freedom and independence within the Uyghur diaspora. In contrast, groups that abandoned aspirations for independence and restricted their efforts to a human-rights framework have gradually experienced a decline in credibility among diaspora communities.
- International attention towards China's genocide and crimes against humanity greatly diminished after the October 7th Hamas attack in Israel and Israel's subsequent genocide in Gaza, as well as during the war between Russia and Ukraine.
- China's genocide and crimes against humanity have continued, now supplemented by a softer strategy that permits a limited number of Uyghurs living abroad to visit relatives in East Turkistan, under strict state surveillance. This tactic is intended to create the illusion for the international community that there is no ongoing genocide, or that China has relaxed its policies.
- The struggle of the Uyghur diaspora to secure freedom for the people in East Turkistan has neither diminished nor ceased. On the contrary, genocidal repression has intensified Uyghur opposition to Chinese colonial control, fostering a resilient anti-colonial consciousness grounded in shared trauma and dispossession. This movement possesses unique characteristics, and faces significant challenges and institutional weaknesses, yet demonstrates a strong sense of national aspiration.

Introduction

Since China's invasion of East Turkistan in 1949, the Chinese state has labeled Uyghur aspirations for self-determination as "separatism." Following the "war on terror" after 2001, the Islamic identity of the East Turkistanians became an additional pretext for intensified repression. Beijing increasingly characterized Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims as "religious extremists" or "terrorists" to justify mass detention, torture, and executions. This initiative culminated in the mass detention of "re-education camps" in 2014, intensifying in 2017, with the intention of eradicating the Uyghur population.¹ China's repressive measures included mass sterilization of Uyghur women, the migration of large numbers of Han Chinese settlers into East Turkistan, and assimilationist policies, all predating 2014.² In the following two phases of the Uyghur struggle under China's continuing genocide, concentrating on the post-2017 surge, are discussed.

¹ The University of British Columbia, School of Public Policy and Global Affairs Asian Research Institute, *Xinjiang Documentation Project: Major Events Preceding the Construction of Re-education Camps* (<https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca/timelines/reeducation-camps/>)

² Rukiye Turdush, *East Turkistan's Right to Sovereignty: Decolonization and Beyond*, (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2023), 47-51.

First Phase: Genocidal Repression, Resilience, and Symbolic Victory

Drive Behind the Genocidal Iron Fist

A central question is why the Chinese leadership chose the 2014–2017 period as the decisive moment to scale up mass detention and other iron-fisted measures against the Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples, despite the absence of any large-scale insurgency movements comparable to those in Algeria, or by the Mau Mau in Kenya, or indeed to any other insurgency movement against colonialism globally. The answer appears closely tied to Xi Jinping’s rise to power, Chinese colonialism, the state’s new technological capacities for repression, and China’s increasing global stature.

Mass, large-scale repression was formalized as CCP policy shortly after Xi assumed leadership in 2012. His harsh and denigrating language of a “people’s war on terror” and of showing “no mercy” became the guiding principle for officials implementing mass detention and “re-education” in the region.³ After Chen Quanguo was appointed Party Secretary of Xinjiang in August 2016, he ordered officials to “round up all who should be rounded up,” leading to the detention of vast numbers of Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples.⁴ Some researchers, national legislative bodies in several countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, declared that China was indeed committing both crimes against humanity and genocide.⁵ Many leading analysts focused on brutal policy of the Xi era.⁶

³ Human Rights Watch, *Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2021) <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/19/break-their-lineage-break-their-roots/chinas-crimes-against-humanity-targeting>

⁴ Patrick Wintour, “Leaked Papers Link Xinjiang Crackdown with China Leadership,” *The Guardian*, November 29, 2021, accessed October 25, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/29/leaked-papers-link-xinjiang-crackdown-with-china-leadership>

⁵ Lindsay Maizland, “China’s Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, Last updated October 3, 2025, accessed October 25, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/background/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights/>

Even though this campaign was initiated and implemented under Xi and came to effect in the Xi era, it cannot be attributed solely to his personal initiative. Indeed, the policy was driven top down from Beijing, as genocidal intent is rooted in China's colonialism. The CCP's insecurity regarding its Belt and Road Initiative passes through the colonized region of East Turkistan, and the Chinese state's technological capacity for mass surveillance and repression together created the conditions for large-scale abuses in the Xi era. In this sense, the timing and intent reflect structural factors shaping the leadership's appetite for eliminating perceived threats in its colony, rather than the decisions of any single individual. Any other CCP leader, including Xi Jinping in this context, might have pursued similar policies in East Turkistan as China's end goal is to eradicate the real owners of the region.

This colonial campaign also reflects a deeper state legacy rooted in the ancient Chinese doctrine of legalism that punishing innocents to prevent potential crimes which contrasts sharply with the Western legal principle of "innocent until proven guilty." As a result, the Chinese state detained almost the entire population of Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples, including vast numbers of women and children. This was done in spite of the fact that violent incidents involving Uyghurs were sporadic and small-scale, with no separatist insurgency able to directly attack Chinese forces in a manner comparable to Algeria, Kenya's Mau Mau, or Palestine's Hamas. Despite this, the CCP expanded mass detention by building a dense grid of checkpoints, cameras, and big-data policing systems.⁷ These technological capacities generated enormous lists of individuals flagged for mass detention. As a consequence, entire swathes of innocent civilians,

⁶ Jude Blanchette, "Xi Jinping's Vision for Xinjiang," *Center for Strategic & International Study*, September 30, 2020, accessed October 25, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/xi-jinpings-vision-xinjiang>;

David Tobin, "How Xi Jinping Commands Policy in People's Republic of China," *University of Sheffield: School of Languages of Arts and Society*, April 1, 2022, accessed October 23, 2025, <https://sheffield.ac.uk/las/research/east-asia/xinjiang-papers-how-xi-jinping-commands-policy-peoples-republic-china>;

Adrian Zenz, "Public Security Minister's Speech Describes Xi Jinping's Direction of Mass Detentions in Xinjiang," *China File*, May 24, 2022, accessed October 23, 2025, <https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/features/public-security-ministers-speech-describes-xi-jinpings-direction-of-mass>

⁷ Human Rights Watch, *China's Algorithms Repression*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2019), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/01/chinas-algorithms-repression/reverse-engineering-xinjiang-police-mass>

not just potential violent actors were captured in a collective punishment system. This indiscriminate dragnet resulted in East Turkistan becoming one of the most tightly controlled police-state regions in the world by the mid-2010s.⁸

China's growing economic and military power intensified nationalist confidence among state leaders and the public, reinforcing ambitions to replace U.S. global leadership. This confidence fueled the drive to use "iron fist" measures and total control over East Turkistan, a key gateway for expansion into Central Asia, Europe, and Africa. This gateway is further linked to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, particularly since three of the six main Belt and Road corridors pass through the region.

While its genocidal attempts to eradicate Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims intensified, in 2017 Beijing provided Han settlers large-scale land grabs and economic benefits from Uyghur forced labor. This injustice and domination profoundly impacted Uyghur political thinking, resulting in the conclusion that survival under Chinese rule is impossible, and independence is the only viable solution.

Resilience and Symbolic Victory

Chinese colonialism totally controlled Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in East Turkistan, detained close to two million people since China's genocidal mass arrest campaign started in 2017.⁹ However, it did not gain total victory since it has reshaped the political dynamics of the Uyghur diaspora. National aspirations for regaining an independent homeland among Uyghurs in diaspora have become more widespread and vocal than ever, while support for Uyghurs who cooperate with the Chinese state and renounce independence in exchange for basic human rights has sharply declined. Genocidal policies in East Turkistan changed some Uyghurs' view as to

⁸ Adrian Zenz and James Leibold, "Xinjiang's Rapidly Evolving Security State," *China Brief* 17, no. 4 (2017), <https://jamestown.org/program/xinjiangs-rapidly-evolving-security-state/>

⁹ Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, James Leibold and Daria Impiombato, *The Architecture of Repression: Unpacking Xinjiang's Governance*, (Barton, Australia: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2021), accessed November 22, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/architecture-repression>

who is loyal to China and consider themselves part of China's nation. Many Uyghurs who had previously given up on independence, believing China was too powerful to resist, have begun to reassess their position. At the same time, clear division emerged between following Uyghurs in diaspora: those who would take a softer approach and asking only for basic human rights, those calling for independence through external self-determination, those who prefer at least genuine autonomy, and those choosing to ignore the genocide entirely, seeking new lives elsewhere in the world. Increasingly, however, a shared conviction is taking shape that only full independence can ensure the preservation of their culture and, ultimately, their survival.

Close to one hundred years of oppression forced people to flee from East Turkistan to various countries around the world. Some of them escaped through South Asia and Türkiye to Syria. China's genocidal policies reinforced these Uyghurs ideological movement further as they viewed participation in the Syrian conflict as a means to counter China in the long-term, gaining experience and organizational skills. In Syrian war zones, Uyghur armed forces emerged as an important part of the struggle for independence against Chinese colonial rule in their homeland.¹⁰

The Chinese government also acts aggressively to diminish Uyghur voices in diaspora. Almost every Uyghur's family has relatives who have been detained in reeducation camps or killed, tortured, house arrest, and subsequently used as leverage against Uyghurs in diaspora.¹¹ China's tactics have backfired, as Beijing's denial of genocide and overwhelming resources devoted to suppressing Uyghurs has given the diaspora no other choice than to respond politically, and with great fortitude. The number of Uyghur advocacy and research organizations in diaspora has also increased rapidly since 2017, including *Campaign for Uyghurs*, the *Centre for East Turkistan National Interest (CETNI)*, the *International Union of East Turkistan Organizations (MAARIP)*, the *European Uyghur Institute*, *East Turkistan Policy Institute*, and many other small organizations.

Despite the ongoing genocide and the rapidly expanding hegemonic influence of China on the international stage, Uyghurs' peaceful resistance has persisted, and they have gradually

¹⁰ "Uyghur Fighters Who Fought Massively in Syria Announce a New Battle: 'We Will Expel the Chinese Infidels.'" *Sarajevo Times*, 15 Dec. 2024, accessed oct 28, 2025, www.sarajevotimes.com

¹¹ Amnesty International, *The Nightmare of Uyghur Families Separated by Repression*, (London: Amnesty International, 2021), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/3798/2021/en/>

developed an armed wing active in Syria, with the goal of being prepared for future conflict with Chinese colonizers. This sustained defiance reflects a remarkable degree of resilience, a determined struggle for cultural and physical survival, and the emergence of an ideological framework that challenges the structures of repression.

International pressure on China has increased, and advocacy for Uyghurs organized in other countries has gained support from mainly western countries. Twenty-two UN Member States co-signed a letter to the President of the UNHRC and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on July 8, 2019, calling on China to end “large-scale arbitrary detention” of Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples.¹² The Canadian Parliament’s Sub-Committee on International Human Rights issued a report stating that the actions of the Chinese Communist Party constitute genocide.¹³ On January 19, 2021, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued a statement stating, “I have determined that the People’s Republic of China is committing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang, China, targeting Uyghur Muslims and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups.”¹⁴ From February to June, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Belgium, the UK, and the Netherlands all passed motions declared that China was committing genocide against the Uyghurs.¹⁵ whereas the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has indicated that such violations may constitute crimes against humanity.¹⁶ Fifty-one countries signed a joint statement led by Canada in October 2022, clearly condemning China over atrocities by its regime against the Uyghur population,

¹² “UN: Unprecedented Joint Call for China to End Xinjiang Abuses,” *Human Rights Watch*, July 10, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/10/un-unprecedented-joint-call-china-end-xinjiang-abuses>

¹³ Joshua Lipes, “Canada’s Parliament Labels China’s Abuses in Xinjiang ‘Genocide,’ Urges Government Action,” *Radio Free Asia*, Oct 21, 2020, accessed October 24, 2025, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/genocide-10212020165207.html>

¹⁴ *Euro News*, “US declares China is ‘committing genocide’ against Uighur minority,” January 20, 2021, <https://www.euronews.com/2021/01/20/us-declares-china-is-committing-genocide-against-uighur-minority> ;

¹⁵ Lorraine Boissoneault, “Is China Committing Genocide Against The Uyghurs?” *Smithsonian Magazine*, February 2, 2022, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/is-china-committing-genocide-against-the-uyghurs-180979490/?> ,

¹⁶ United Nations, “UN Human Rights Office Issues Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in Xinjiang, China” Press release, August 31, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/08/un-human-rights-office-issues-assessment-human-rights-concerns-xinjiang>

after China was elected to the U.N. Human Rights Council for the 2024-2026 term.¹⁷ It urged China to respond to a report issued by the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which concluded that China's mass detentions of Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities "may constitute crimes against humanity." The number of countries criticizing China's genocidal policies against Uyghurs and other Muslim population in East Turkistan have not gradually or dramatically increased, however a core group of countries including Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States, have responded to China's crimes against humanity in East Turkistan, and delivered a joint statement at the "Second Anniversary of the OHCHR Assessment" on September 24, 2025, and criticized China's denial of its crimes.¹⁸

The international community's increasing recognition of China's behavior against the Uyghurs as genocide, and as crimes against humanity, along with growing diplomatic support for Uyghurs, has constituted at least a symbolic victory for the Uyghur people. However, it has not yet reached the stage that could achieve diplomatic and political victory. The struggle is also far from an armed conflict and subsequent military victory. Despite facing immense challenges in confronting both the genocide itself and widespread denial of it, the Uyghurs' hope for the future survival is undiminished. The power of China and its genocidal intent and action have not totally deterred their faith, at least in the Uyghur diaspora.

Second Phase: The Stalled Cause

¹⁷ *Joint Statement on Behalf of 50 Countries in the UN General Assembly Third Committee on the Human Rights Situation in Xinjiang, China* (delivered by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations, 31 Oct 2022), Government of Canada, [online] <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2022/10/joint-statement-on-behalf-of-50-countries-in-the-un-general-assembly-third-committee-on-the-human-rights-situation-in-xinjiang-china.html> (accessed 23 Oct 2025).

¹⁸ Item 4 General Debate, 57th Session of the Human Rights Council, "Joint Statement on Xinjiang on the Second Anniversary of the OHCHR's Assessment" Sept 24, 2025. https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fhrcmeetings.ohchr.org%2FHRCSessions%2FHRCDocuments%2F81%2FOTH%2F81_18842118_91113a57-a20f-4489-b8ca-3a6b24678465.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK

Even though Uyghurs have gained some symbolic wins, it is far from diplomatic, political, or military victory, as there are many obstacles created by China's power, changes in the international geopolitical landscape, and Uyghurs' own institutional, organizational, and financial weakness. Key factors as follow:

Genocide Denial and Economic Dependency

China has continuously hidden and denied its genocide since 2019 by declaring that reeducation camps were closed and detainees had been released. This was despite the fact that the following year, researchers from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) used satellite imagery to identify over 380 suspected detention facilities.¹⁹ To hide its genocide, the Chinese government has used euphemistic language for their genocidal policies, such as “population control,” which is in fact the sterilization of Uyghur women, and detaining them for having so-called “illegal children.”²⁰ “Vocational education and training centers,” or mass detention centers, where approximately 1.8 million Uyghurs (Based on the estimations of US government officials and international human rights research organizations) are subject to execution, forced disappearance, torture, and rape.²¹ “Orphanage camps,” are in fact prison-style camps where

¹⁹ *Exploring Xinjiang's Detention Facilities* (Barton, ACT: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2020), <https://xjdp.aspi.org.au/explainers/exploring-xinjiangs-detention-facilities/>

²⁰ Steven Mosher, “China Claims Brutal Crackdown on Uyghur Birth Rate Has ‘Emancipated’ Women,” *Population Research Institute*, January 2021, <https://www.pop.org/china-claims-brutal-crackdown-on-uyghur-birth-rate-has-emancipated-women/>

²¹ Scott Busby, *Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary Scott Busby before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy*, December 4, 2018, https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/120418_Busby_Testimony.pdf;

Adrian Zenz, *The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s Policies in Xinjiang: Overall Strategy, Central Government Involvement, and Evidence for a Systematic Attack on a Civilian Population as well as Genocide*, written testimony before the Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, March 22, 2023, <https://selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/adrian-zenz-testimony.pdf>;

“‘Like We Were Enemies in a War’ China’s Mass Internment, Torture and Persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang” *Amnesty International*, 2021, <https://xinjiang.amnesty.org/>

close to one million Uyghur children reside, removed from their homes.²² “Poverty alleviation” should be better described as forced labor.²³ The Chinese government has strictly denied the existence of reeducation camps, and China’s Foreign Affairs ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian answered AFP’s question at regular press conference in September 2020, stating, “There has never been such a thing as a “reeducation camp” in Xinjiang,”²⁴ and that reeducation camps were closed. However, people were either transferred to forced labor camp or prisons for long-term imprisonment.²⁵

It is important to note here that China was well prepared and fully confident, unconcerned about international pressure over its genocidal actions as the PRC has, in effect, bought The Global South, concentrating on many Muslim-majority countries, with their attached economic incentives. These Muslim-majority countries, including central Asian Turkic states whose heavy dependence on China’s cheap goods, infrastructure investment and fear of Chinese military power, created a great opportunity for China to successfully weaken the international community’s pressure. These countries were not only silenced but also supported China’s genocidal behavior. For instance, Egypt detained and handed over dozens of Uyghur students to China in 2017, right after signing a billion-dollar economic deal.²⁶ Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, during his visit to China in February 2019, supported China’s genocidal policies in East Turkistan by saying, “China has the right to take anti-terrorism and de-extremism

²² Rukiye Turdush and Magnus Fiskesjö, *Mass Detention and Forced Assimilation of Uyghur Children in China* (Toronto: Centre for East Turkistan National Interest, 2024), <https://cetni.org/mass-detention-and-forced-assimilation-of-uyghur-children-in-china/>

²³ Amy Hawkins, “What Do We Know About Forced Labor in Xinjiang” *The Guardian*, November 13, 2023, accessed November 13, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/13/what-do-we-know-about-forced-labour-in-xinjiang>

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs People’s Republic of China, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian’s Regular Press Conference on September 8, 2020,” Updated September 8, accessed November 1, 2025, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202405/t20240530_11346877.html?](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202405/t20240530_11346877.html?_https://perma.cc/NE9P-CAPL), <https://perma.cc/NE9P-CAPL>.

²⁵ “‘Like We Were Enemies in a War’ China’s Mass Internment, Torture and Persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang” *Amnesty International*, 2021, <https://xinjiang.amnesty.org/>

Shohret Hoshur, “Xinjiang County Sends Uyghur Camp Detainees to Prison, Interior of China,” *Radio Free Asia*, March 19, 2020, accessed Nov 21, 2025, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/transfers-03192020163257.html>

²⁶ Nour Youssef, “Egyptian Police Detain Uighurs and Deport Them to China,” *The New York Times*, July 6, 2017, accessed October 27, 2025, https://www.lifeissues.net/writers/mos/mos_476chinabrutalcrackdown.html

“Egypt focuses on China for banking expansion in light of Belt and Road Initiative,” *Xinhua*, updated May 12, 2017, accessed November 9, 2025, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2017-05/12/content_29319758.htm.

measures to safeguard national security.”²⁷ The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and many of its member states publicly supported or praised China’s policy in East Turkistan.²⁸ For example, at the June 2025 meeting of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, China stated, “Representatives of the OIC and its member states visited China many times, including trips to Xinjiang, they have gained a better understanding and spoken positively of China’s ethnic and religious policies, and the developments in Xinjiang.”²⁹ On July 12, 2019, 37 countries sent a joint letter to the UN supporting China’s genocidal policies in East Turkistan, and praised its “remarkable achievements”³⁰ That number grew to 50 countries by July 27, 2019, for the supporting letter.³¹ On March 12, Cuba delivered a joint statement signed by 64 countries in support of China’s human rights position at the 46th UNHRC session in 2021.³² Cuba delivered another joint statement in the 57th UNHCR session on behalf of approximately eighty countries in September 2024, emphasizing that “Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Tibet-related issues are China’s internal affairs,” and opposing the criticism of China’s human rights abuses.³³ A month later,

²⁷ *Aljazeera*, “Saudi Crown Prince Defends China’s Right to Fight ‘Terrorism’” 23 Feb 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/2/23/saudi-crown-prince-defends-chinas-right-to-fight-terrorism>

²⁸ Aaron Rhodes and Marco Respinti, “Betrayal of China’s Muslims Undermines the Organization of Islamic Cooperation’s Credibility,” *The Diplomat*, September 7, 2023, accessed October 27, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/09/betrayal-of-chinas-muslims-undermines-the-organization-of-islamic-cooperations-credibility/>

²⁹ *People’s Daily Online*, “China to Work with Islamic Countries, OIC for Stronger Ties: Spokesperson,” June 25, 2025, accessed October 28, 2025, <https://perma.cc/5M89-XXEV>

³⁰ “Ambassadors from 37 countries issue joint letter to support China on its human rights achievements,” *Global Times*, July 13, 2019, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201907/1157716.shtml>

³¹ Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and Other International Organizations in Switzerland, “50 Countries Co-signed Letter to President of UN Human Rights Council and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Support of China’s Position on Xinjiang-related Issues,” July 26, 2019, https://geneva.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/dbdt/201907/t20190727_8192445.htm

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs People’s Republic of China, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson’s Remarks on the Xinjiang-related Joint Statement by Cuba on Behalf of 64 Countries to Support China at the UN Human Rights Council,” March 12, 2021, accessed October 24, 2025, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/fyrbt/fyrbt/202405/t20240530_11349688.html

³³ Permanent Mission of The People’s Republic of China to The United Nations Office at Geneva and Other International Organizations in Switzerland, “Joint Statement delivered by Cuba on behalf of around 80 countries at the 57th Session of the Human Rights Council” Sept 25, 2024, https://geneva.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/dbdt/202412/t20241219_11504485.htm

Pakistan delivered a joint statement on behalf of 80 countries at the 79th UNGA Third Committee in October 2024. This statement supported China's human rights abuses in East Turkistan, Hong Kong, and Tibet.³⁴ Evidently, the number of countries who depend on China because of geopolitical and economic reason, blindly supporting China's genocidal policies, increased from 37 to 80 from 2019 to 2024. Even though the number of those countries criticizing China's human rights position has also increased since 2019 at the United Nations, there has been no gradual, dramatic increase, and the number of such supporters continues to fluctuate. The number of countries, as of 2024, who have signed joint statements demanding China release Uyghur and Tibetan prisoners has been far less than the number of countries who signed the joint statement in 2023. Only 15 countries signed the statement, despite the strong united advocacy of Uyghur and Tibetan organizations.³⁵ Over 25 European countries signed a joint statement at the 60th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2025, criticizing China's human rights violation in East Turkistan, Tibet, and Hong Kong.³⁶ Overall, the number of countries who signed resolutions criticizing China's behavior in East Turkistan is less than the number of countries who signed joint statements in support of China. Not only has support from international governments decreased since 2023, China's ongoing genocide and related crimes receive only minimal coverage in international media, typically limited to reports from a few organizations investigating forced labor.

Popular Support for Uyghur Human Rights Organizations in the Uyghur Diaspora Gradually Decreased

³⁴ China Human Rights, "Nations Voice Support at UN Committee," Oct 25, 2024, <https://en.humanrights.cn/2024/10/25/2e1479a5008d445bb9c0729b91be8dc7.html>

³⁵ Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations, "241022 – UNGA 79 Third Committee: General Discussion on Human Rights: Joint Statement on the Human Rights Situation in Xinjiang and Tibet," October 22 2024, https://unmy.mission.gov.au/unmy/241022_UNGA79_Joint_statement_on_the_human_rights_situation_in_Xinjiang_and_Tibet.html

³⁶ "Nordic Countries Raise Concerns Over Human Rights in China at UNHRC sessions" *ImpACT International*, October 2, 2025, <https://impactpolicies.org/news/607/nordic-countries-raise-concerns-over-human-rights-in-china-at-unhrc-session>

Uyghur human rights organizations, such as the World Uyghur Congress, Campaign for Uyghurs, and the Uyghur Human Rights Project, all funded by the National Endowment for Democracy actively criticize China's human rights abuses. The vast majority of the Uyghur population in diaspora understands that the East Turkistan issue is not solely one of human rights, and is not going to be resolved solely by criticizing China's record on the subject. The diaspora has increasingly recognized that it is futile to expect an autocratic, colonizing power to respond to such criticism. However, at the same time, the community also understands that such criticism has been a necessary component of raising global awareness of the scale of the humanitarian crisis. Despite this evolving perspective, popular support for Uyghur human rights organizations has gradually decreased starting in 2023, and the voices of right-wing groups that demand the full political independence of East Turkistan has increased. More than 60 Uyghur organizations in diaspora sent a joint statement to the U.S. government expressing the global consensus of Uyghurs to gain territorial independence from China.³⁷ The Centre for East Turkistan National Interest (CETNI) also sent a letter to key lawmakers in the United States in July 2024. This effort had also been raised during a meeting CETNI's with conservative party members in Canada April 2023, asking for the recognition of East Turkistan as an occupied nation, as well as East Turkistan's right to sovereignty under international law.

The unpopularity of the leading Uyghur advocacy organization, the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), dramatically increased after the apparent misconduct of key WUC member Dilshat Reshit. This misconduct included credible allegations of Reshit conducting espionage on behalf of China.³⁸ Dilshat was long suspected by many Uyghurs of being a Chinese spy and some activists openly criticized both Reshit and other WUC leaders via social media. However, the WUC ignored these serious allegations until Swedish authorities arrested him. Only after his arrest, WUC published a press release stating that they had decided to remove him from his

³⁷ RTV News, "Over 60 Uyghur Organisations Urge US Congress to Recognise China's East Turkistan As Occupied Country" February 23, 2024, accessed October 29, 2025, <https://rtvonline.com/english/international/13531>

³⁸ Alexandir Martin, "Sweden Arrests Senior Uyghur Representative on Suspicion For China," *The Record*, April 10, 2025, accessed October 30, 2025, <https://therecord.media/sweden-arrest-spying-on-uyghurs-china>

position.³⁹ In addition, another leader of the WUC, considered one of the most influential Uyghur human rights organizations in the West, became involved in an alleged sex scandal that continues to disappoint all Uyghur groups internationally.

An additional reason for the declining reputation of Uyghur human rights organizations is their rigid and ineffective approach regarding activism. Many Uyghurs in the diaspora have become disillusioned with these organizations, as their repeated appeals to the international community's moral responsibility have produced little or no tangible results.

Attention Shifted to Other International Crisis.

After the October 7th Hamas attack in Israel, the Trump administration in the United States provided full support for Israel's bombing of Palestinian civilians in Gaza, despite the international community including many western countries alleging Israeli war crimes and genocide. This trend served to undermine the reputation and credibility of and all human rights voices supported and funded by the U.S. Human-rights organizations and the OHCHR reported that Israel was bombing civilian targets with wide disregard.⁴⁰ According to a UNICEF statement in May 2025, more than 50,000 children have been reportedly killed or injured in the Gaza Strip since October 2023.⁴¹ UN OCHA's regular updates in October 2025 put the total Palestinian fatalities since October 7th, as reported by MoH, at 66,148 fatalities and 168,716 injured.⁴²

³⁹ *World Uyghur Congress*, "WUC Statement on Chinese Espionage Case in Sweden," April 9, 2025, accessed October 30, 2025, https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/statement-uyghur-arrested-over-espionage-charges-in-sweden/?_cf_chl_tk=xiX.yMDQMaYZyDackEKA6a0Nus9rluDKYD_DkNGuaSU-1761801875-1.0.1.1-kzJ7jLfqUTyVvQ4jxVVTYrXYIR1hOtTvNndAGFS1m0

⁴⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Gaza: UN Experts Decry Bombing of Hospitals and Schools as Crimes Against Humanity, Call for Prevention of Genocide," October 19, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/gaza-un-experts-decry-bombing-hospitals-and-schools-crimes-against-humanity>

⁴¹ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "'Unimaginable Horrors': More Than 50,000 Children Reportedly Killed or Injured in the Gaza Strip," May 27, 2025, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unimaginable-horrors-more-50000-children-reportedly-killed-or-injured-gaza-strip>

⁴² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (Occupied Palestinian Territory), *Humanitarian Situation Update #327 | Gaza Strip*, October 2 2025, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-327-gaza-strip>

As a result of the severity and duration of the Gaza violence, human rights organizations, governments, and the international civilian populace have had their attention directed to that conflict, rather than the pre-existing Uyghur genocide. Understandably, and promoted via the use of TikTok videos of injured and killed children in Gaza, the Israeli offensive was more prominent in news cycles. Meanwhile, the Chinese government effectively used this opportunity, forcing Uyghurs to gather and dance in public, posting on social media how Uyghurs were living happy lives, devoid of oppression. Beijing increasingly restricted information about its ongoing genocide, seizing upon the ongoing allegations of Israel engaged in the same activities. The end results of this was a social media campaign contrasting supposedly joyous Uyghurs living in harmony with the real-time bombing videos emerging out of Palestine, all directed to a weary and easily distracted global population. Several Uyghurs who recently escaped from China described the following situation as common:

“In my village, Uyghurs who are not detained have to attend a flag-raising ceremony in the morning and political study sessions in the evening, after working for little or no pay on farmlands that were confiscated from Uyghurs and given to Chinese settlers. Every Saturday, people are forced to gather in the village center to dance, drink, and take videos, all to post on social media.”⁴³

Soft Strategy Game

The Chinese government has employed soft strategy tactics in order to conceal its genocide, allowing selected Uyghurs to visit their relatives in East Turkistan. CETNI conducted phone and in-person interviews with Uyghur individuals in Canada, the United States, and Central Asia, including those who were either declined to apply for Chinese visas or successfully obtained them.⁴⁴ Some interviewees had relatives who were granted short-term permission to travel abroad, while others had visited East Turkistan after securing visas from Chinese consulates, where they were required to sign documents agreeing to specific restrictions.

⁴³ The personal information of those interviewed has been anonymized for their identity protection

⁴⁴ The personal information of those interviewed has been anonymized for their protection, pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the interviewee

Based on the interview, CETNI found that Chinese government's "selected people" consisted of elderly Uyghurs, those loyal to the party, those with a proven and lengthy history of cooperation with Han Chinese, and those Uyghurs with no family members in detention or prison. Chinese authorities also required individuals to provide a "guarantor," who could be a relative or a government official. Those granted permission were obligated to follow strict rules, such as refraining from criticizing the Communist Party, avoiding contact with other Uyghurs excepting close relatives, and returning to China within the designated time period. Any failure to comply with these conditions could result in severe consequences for the guarantor or the individual's family members.⁴⁵

Many Uyghurs refuse to apply for a visa from the Chinese government to visit East Turkistan, believing that it is shameful to seek permission from a colonizer to enter their own homeland. However, some quietly or secretly approach Chinese consulates to obtain visas. Those who do are often viewed by the Chinese government as "cooperative," as they are required to sign documents at the consulate affirming their support for the "One China" policy, strongly opposing the independence of East Turkistan, Taiwan, and Tibet. Further, there is a requirement to never engage in any criticism of the CCP, under any circumstances.⁴⁶ Some Uyghurs who requested political asylum and visited China after gained their citizenship in another country reported what they have go through during their visit as follows:

"I have no idea how they found out that had I requested political asylum, they know, they told me they know that I have requested it. I went through a long interrogation, they asked so many questions about me and each Uyghur that I know and I don't know," said a woman from Canada who recently visited her sister, "I am very scared, I don't want to go again."

"Three Chinese civilian police officers received me at the airport. They said they just want to have a friendly talk, and asked so many questions about other Uyghurs that I know." Said Semet,

⁴⁵ This information is consistent with findings published by Human Right Watch, See: *Travel For Uyghurs Heavily Restricted*, (London: Human Rights Watch, Feb3, 2025), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/03/china-travel-uyghurs-heavily-restricted>

⁴⁶ This information was reported to CETNI by several Uyghurs in the diaspora who approached the Chinese consulate but could not obtain a visa because they refused to sign documents related to the "One China" policy. The same information was also collected from two other Uyghurs who recently signed the document and traveled to China. They confirmed that they signed the document solely to obtain a visa and that it does not indicate their support for the policy.

interviewed by CETNI, “They said, you have asked political asylum xxx year, they even know the year that I asked political asylum. I was quiet, then they said, “Do you know that your crime is betraying the Chinese Communist Party?” I was very scared, I thought they will put me in prison. I said “I came here with American passport and visa, you can’t talk to me like this” They laugh sarcastically and said, “Yes we can, but our party is merciful, if we give you a visa and freely came to visit your family, that means the Chinese government is treating you very nicely, you should be honest about how the Chinese government treats Uyghurs fairly, and praise the party. We don’t ask too much, just keep in touch with us when you go back, as long as you are repentant of your wrongdoing and cooperate with us, the party will forgive you.” Again, they said: “You should appreciate the party, your brother just recently graduated vocational training school.” Semet did not provide further information about his response to these Chinese officers.⁴⁷

Although Uyghurs have struggled to sustain broad public support or attract lasting international attention, they have continued to endure. China’s genocide and crimes against humanity in East Turkistan, detaining family members, sending threats, planting spies, and sowing division in the diaspora have not deterred them. Many Uyghurs believe China’s diplomatic success in international world is a temporary one and real political battle between China in terms of justice and independence is far from over. It can be seen from constant activism and social media comments of Uyghurs in diaspora that showing their faith in future change of East Turkistan.

The Uniqueness of the East Turkistan Cause: Similarity and Difference Between East Turkistan and Palestine

Both East Turkistan and Palestine share the similar circumstances of living under colonial occupation and suffering from subsequent settler colonialism. However, China and countries, lead by China’s advocacy for Palestinian statehood within a two-state solution framework, contrast with China’s firm opposition to East Turkistan’s claims to self-determination. Furthermore, their criticism on Israel’s genocidal actions in Palestine demonstrates a significant

⁴⁷ Semet (currently an American citizen); a pseudonym is being used to protect the identity of the interviewee, Phone Interview with author Sept 26, 2025

double standard in the interpretation and application of international law and humanitarian norms. China is clearly destroying millions of Uyghur Muslims with its genocidal policies and systematic repression. Although state interests and geopolitical power dynamics play a significant role in shaping governmental positions on these two cases, a comparative examination of their historical context and legal statuses may assist legal practitioners and advocates of justice to understand the underlying facts of China's actions, rather than accepting propaganda, and to contribute more effectively towards genocide prevention.

Palestine: Historical Fact

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1922, the Council of the League of Nations confirmed the British Mandate for Palestine, a legal commission for the administration of that land.⁴⁸ The British mandate was incorporated into the text of Balfour declaration which is the statement declared by the British government that expressed British support for “*the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people,*” into the Mandate's preamble.⁴⁹ Despite the Arab revolt, British mandate accepted large scale Jewish immigration. Especially during the Jewish genocide number of Jewish population migrated to Palestine dramatically increased.⁵⁰ However, international opinion supported Jewish insurgents in Palestine because of the Holocaust, and Britain was faced with a difficult choice between Arab and Jewish interest in Palestine.⁵¹ Ultimately, the British withdrew, leaving the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine unresolved and Israel declared its Jews state.⁵² The Palestine Liberation

⁴⁸ League of Nations, *The Mandate for Palestine*, Approved by the Council of the League of Nations on July 24, 1922, Entered Into Force on September 29, 1923, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/palmanda.asp

⁴⁹ United Kingdom Foreign Office, *The Balfour Declaration*, Statement by Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Lord Rothschild, November 2, 1917, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/balfour-declaration/>

⁵⁰ United Nations, *The Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem, Part 1: 1917-1947* (New York: United Nations, 1978), <https://www.un.org/unispal/history2/origins-and-evolution-of-the-palestine-problem/>

⁵¹ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII*, Document 768, "Memorandum by the Secretary of State," June 11, 1945, accessed October 31, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d768>

⁵² United Nations, Division for Palestinian Rights, *Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem, Part II (1947-1977)* (New York: United Nations, 1979), accessed October 31, 2025, <https://www.un.org/unispal/history2/origins-and-evolution-of-the-palestine-problem/part-ii-1947-1977/>

Organization was formed in 1964 to centralize the leadership of various Palestinian groups, engaged in guerrilla war against the Israel during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s.⁵³ In December 1987, the Palestinian mass uprising against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem lasted until the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, which intended to establish a framework for both peace and a two- state solution.⁵⁴ During this uprising, the Muslim Brotherhood officially established Hamas in Gaza, the organization combining Islamic ideology with a commitment to armed resistance against Israel.⁵⁵

East Turkistan: Historical Fact

The people of East Turkistan controlled major part of their homeland, and established the Republic of East Turkistan twice, in 1933 and 1944, within the territory of East Turkistan following the collapse of the Manchu Empire. This occurred five years before the establishment of communist China, during which time the Chinese communists had no control over any part of East Turkistan. The UN's failure to recognize the East Turkistan Republic was a major oversight at that time and shortly after establishing China's communist regime in 1949, China, with Stalin's support, invaded East Turkistan. There was no mandate ever given by colonial power of Manchu empire to new communist China to control East Turkistan. Unlike Palestine, The League of Nations Council also did not issue any mandate recognizing the new Chinese communist state as having legal authority over East Turkistan, nor did it approve the annexation of East Turkistan into China. In fact, China also was not recognized by the United Nations. It was not until 1971 that U.S. strategy, influenced by Kissinger, aimed at re-aligning with China and securing the PRC's UN seat.⁵⁶ However, these developments did not affect the occupied

⁵³ "Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last updated October 21, 2025, accessed October 31, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Palestine-Liberation-Organization>

⁵⁴ Roger Heacock, "The First Intifada, 1987-1993," *Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question – PalQuest*, accessed October 31, 2025, <https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/29773/first-intifada-1987-1993>.

⁵⁵ Jim Zanotti, *Hamas: Background, Current Status, and U.S. Policy*, CRS In Focus no. IF12549 (Congressional Research Service, June 14 2024), accessed October 31, 2025, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/IF12549.pdf>

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Warner, "Nixon, Kissinger and the rapprochement with China, 1969–1972," *International Affairs* 83, no. 4 (July 2007): 763–781, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2007.00652.x>

status of East Turkistan, and it came to be officially considered as part of China by the international community.⁵⁷ Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims protested vigorously against China's military invasion, political and economic oppression, and Chinese settler colonialism in a peaceful way, and faced a violent crackdown. The remoteness of East Turkistan's geography also facilitated this violence. Recent examples of violent crackdown include the massacre in Ghulja and the crackdown on July 5th in Urumchi.⁵⁸ Even though Uyghurs had admittedly engaged in several scattered acts of violent resistance in East Turkistan, unlike in Palestine, they possess no armed forces, and no largely representative organizations advocate on their behalf. This dispossession reflects the complete and utter control that China exercises over the remote region of East Turkistan, surpassing even Israel's domination of Palestine.

Since 2017, 1.8 million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims have been detained in reeducation camps.⁵⁹ Dr Adrian Zenz, a researcher at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, wrote in a 2024 report that up to 2.5 million individuals were engaged in coercive labor in East Turkistan. Approximately 900,000 Uyghur children were removed from their families and taken into prison style orphanage camps or boarding schools for Sinicization.⁶⁰ Horrifyingly, the population has dramatically declined overall, driven in large part by the forced surgical sterilization of Uyghur women.

Legal Status of Palestine

⁵⁷ National governments and UN documents referred to "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China". (This makes implicit the referring to East Turkistan as part of China)

⁵⁸ Amnesty International, "*China: Remember the Gulja Massacre Crackdown on Peaceful Protesters*", *Index: ASA 17/002/2007* (London: Amnesty International, 2007), accessed November 1, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/zh-hans/documents/asa17/002/2007/en/> <https://www.amnesty.org/zh-hans/documents/asa17/002/2007/en/>.

⁵⁹ Lindsay Maizland, "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang," *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 22, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/background/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights>

⁶⁰ Magnus Fiskesjö and Rukiye Turdush, *Mass Detention and Forced Assimilation of Uyghur Children in China* (report, Centre for East Turkistan National Interest, 19 July 2024), <https://cetni.org/mass-detention-and-forced-assimilation-of-uyghur-children-in-china/>

In 1974, after the Yom Kippur War, The UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 3237, granting the PLO observer status as an “entity” at the UN.⁶¹ Observer status is thus a political designation, conferred by a majority vote in the General Assembly, rather than through a legal treaty or charter provision.⁶² However, this status gave Palestine the right to participate in debates and international conferences under the name “Palestine,” though without voting rights.⁶³

In 2011, Palestine was admitted as a full member of UNESCO.⁶⁴ This membership strengthened the argument that Palestine was already functioning as a state actor within the UN system, laying the groundwork for it to be recognized as an observer state at the General Assembly in 2012, achieved via General Assembly Resolution 67/19.⁶⁵ This resolution implicitly recognized Palestine as a state, elevating its international legal status from a “people represented by the PLO” to a state-level participant. As an observer state, Palestine cannot fully participate in all UN decision-making mechanisms reserved for member states, cannot vote on resolutions in the GA and cannot pass legally binding resolutions. However, Palestine gained the right to sign and accede to multilateral treaties open to other states.⁶⁶ It subsequently joined bodies such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), UNESCO and several human rights treaties, giving it legal tools to pursue claims against Israel and strengthen its international legitimacy.⁶⁷

⁶¹ G.A. Res. 3237 (XXIX), U.N. GAOR, 29th Sess., at 121, U.N. Doc. A/RES/3237 (Nov. 22, 1974), <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-180059/>

⁶² U.N., *Palestine’s Status at the U.N.: Explained*, U.N. ISPAL (Apr. 18, 2024), <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/palestines-status-at-the-un-explained-news-item/>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ U.N., *General Conference admits “Palestine” as UNESCO Member State*, U.N. ISPAL, Oct. 31 2011, Doc. UNESCO_Pal-MemberState, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-202965/>

⁶⁵ G.A. Res. 67/19, *Status of Palestine in the United Nations*, U.N. GAOR, 67th Sess., 44th Plenary Meeting, at para. 2 (Nov. 29, 2012), U.N. Doc. A/RES/67/19, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/739031/files/A_RES_67_19-EN.pdf

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, “The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, Opens a Preliminary Examination of the Situation in Palestine,” International Criminal Court, Jan. 16 2015, ICC-OTP-20150116-PR1083;

Legally Palestine was an observer state in the United Nations. Gaza and the West Bank were administered by the Palestine authority and they have their military wing, Hamas, operating on their soil. Palestine not only gains financial and diplomatic support from most Muslim countries, but also military support from Iran.

Palestine could not gain peace through a two-state solution in the UN Security Council because of U.S. veto power and U.S. support for Israel. Currently, Palestine has lost in battle, the Gaza Strip has been completely destroyed, effectively turned into a graveyard by Israel. At the same time, Palestine have achieved a political victory, widely supported by countries in the UN Assembly, and creating a shift in public opinion towards supporting them. Numerous countries, including Canada and the UK, have since recognized Palestine as an independent state.⁶⁸ On an ongoing basis, global street protests supporting Palestine may be found. European and Muslim leaders, along with representatives from the Trump administration, have gathered to ensure peace in Gaza. Such talks are currently underway, and Palestinians remain hopeful that these negotiations will lead to the establishment of an independent and peaceful Palestine.

Legal Status of East Turkistan

The legal status of East Turkistan has been subject to distortion by China, as well as the international community stemming from China's historical rendition of East Turkistan being part of China itself. East Turkistan was colonized by China and should be recognized by the UN as a separate region within the PRC. The main international failing, to date, has been the refusal to recognize the region as "occupied territory" or the Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples as "people entitled to self-determination," in line with generally accepted principles in international law.

The people of East Turkistan are considered by the UN as ethnically Turkic, religiously Muslim minority within the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of

U.N. Secretary-General, *Non-Member Observer State Status in the United Nations: Note by the Secretary-General*, U.N. Doc. A/67/ 698 /Add. 1 (Jan. 30 2013),

⁶⁸ Prime Minister of Canada, "Statement by the Prime Minister on Canada's Recognition of the State of Palestine," *Prime Minister of Canada* (September 21, 2025), <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2025/09/21/statement-prime-minister-carney-canadas-recognition-state-palestine?> ;

UK Government, "UK Formally Recognises Palestinian State," *GOV.UK* (September 21, 2025), <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-formally-recognises-palestinian-state?>

China (PRC).⁶⁹ Uyghurs and other Turkic people strongly reject China's "One China" policy, and consider East Turkistan as a distinct, separate region. They also reject their being categorized as "indigenous people" in UN documents. The Centre for East Turkistan National Interest has published report in 2023 and clearly and consistently stated that Uyghurs and other Turks in East Turkistan are indigenous to East Turkistan, but not "indigenous peoples" of China, as categorized by the UN.⁷⁰

China designated East Turkistan as the "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region" in 1955, relatively recently, and established distinct autonomous laws throughout the area. However, none of these autonomous laws have ever been implemented, and none of the autonomous region rights were guaranteed.⁷¹ East Turkistan has been directly and violently controlled by Beijing via the employment of heavy military forces, including more than two million Chinese construction corps.⁷²

Current Challenges Confronting Uyghur Resistance in the Diaspora

Challenges in Institutionalizing the Uyghurs in the Diaspora under a Unified Leadership with a Statehood Vision

Even though many of the Uyghur organizations in diaspora continue to struggle for establishing human rights and sovereignty for the people of East Turkistan, there has to date been no single, unified entity established representing national will and legal rights. Power struggles among human rights organizations supporting Uyghurs and all those native to East Turkistan often emerge as arguments over legitimacy. This lack of unity stems from the complete and overwhelming nature of China's brutality, as well as intentional and well-funded sabotage by

⁶⁹ All UN documents including "Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China," the report published by the OHCHR on August 31, 2022, referred to Uyghurs as a minority and used the term 'Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities.'

⁷⁰ Rukiye Turdush, *The Problem of Classifying Uyghurs as "Indigenous Peoples"* (report, Centre for East Turkistan National Interest [CETNI], Nov. 5 2022), <https://www.cetni.org/the-problem-of-classifying-uyghurs-as-indigenous-peoples/>.

⁷¹ Rukiye Turdush, *East Turkistan's Right to Sovereignty: Decolonization and Beyond*, (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2023), 133-139.

⁷² Ibid; p 98.

Beijing of such groups. As multiple Uyghur organizations claim to represent the people of East Turkistan, clarity is urgently needed to define what constitutes legitimate representation, particularly in the international sphere, and how to convince the diaspora population of said legitimacy.

The East Turkistan Islamic Party is an armed force, formed with the intention of gaining legitimacy. To date, the Party has gained recognition from many Uyghurs in diaspora, as they view it heralding future defense force of their homeland. However, this legitimacy may be short-lived, depending on whether the ETIP maintains its goal of establishing sovereignty, and sustains itself as a military force. The primary danger here is that the ETIP could transform into a mercenary proxy of a foreign army, and that such a change could occur via coercion. While the U.S. removed the label of terrorist organization from the ETIP, the group has not been removed from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 1267/1989 sanctions list.⁷³ Without being removed from the UN sanctions list, it is extremely difficult for this group to gain international community's recognition and legitimacy. ETIP may need to take active measures, such as implementing creative changes to its name or other concerns of the international community in order to facilitate the lifting of these sanctions. Their legitimacy also dependent on future geopolitical landscapes across multiple regions, in addition to the group's own power dynamics and ideology-based survival strategy.

Of the four most active groups, the World Uyghur Congress has been the most active, and closely identified with human rights activism in Uyghur diaspora under US-based National Endowment for Democracy funding. The WUC gradually weakened because of internal corruption and Chinese infiltration, via espionage, and subsequently lost its popular support among Uyghurs. The WUC later closely cooperated with a newly emerged organization, the Campaign for Uyghurs, mainly focusing on lobbying activities around the world, to raise awareness of China's genocide and crimes against humanity. This organization is supported by the State Department of the United States, however, their activity is limited to merely raising awareness. The East Turkistan Government in Exile, a right-wing organization, funded by

⁷³ S.C. Res.1390, (Sept 11, 2002).

https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/eastern-turkistan-islamic-movement?

unknown sources, also has maintained a visible presence over the years. However, there were also several other self-proclaimed governments in exile, making it very difficult any such group to identify, legitimize, and organize politically. Nevertheless, small right-wing organizations and their leaders undertook several failed attempts to call for such legitimacy through democratic elections in diaspora, with the aim of dismissing or reducing the various self-claimed exile governments. In April 2024, 20 right-wing political organizations in the Uyghur diaspora united to create a coalition with the East Turkistan Government in Exile to advocate for the sovereignty of East Turkistan and coordinate efforts internationally. Although initially successful, the coalition broke down after the Government in Exile repeatedly violated agreed-upon principles. Thirteen organizations have now withdrawn from the forum, stating that they left because of disputes over democratic legitimacy, equal cooperation, and decision-making processes. They criticized the Government in Exile for rejecting democratic election proposals, trying to impose top-down control, accusing forum members of disloyalty, and mishandling key events. The withdrawing groups emphasize that their departure reflects procedural breaches, not ideological differences, and reaffirm their commitment to the East Turkistanian people's national aspirations.⁷⁴ Leaders of this East Turkistan Government in Exile also largely lost standing even more as they have publicly criticized the most well-known Uyghur group, the ETIP, by assuming that this group was designated by China purposefully to justify Uyghurs as “terrorists.”⁷⁵ The “East Turkistan Islamic Party” was established in Syrian war zones, staffed by Uyghur refugees, with the intention of developing organizational and military skills sufficient to establish sovereignty and self-determination. This group was labeled and designated as terrorist group by

⁷⁴ Centre for East Turkistan National Interest, “Statement on the Withdrawal of 13 East Turkestanian Political Organizations From the Collaborative Forum of the Self-Proclaimed East Turkistan Government in Exile” Facebook story, posted October 11, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=509223735327749&id=100087203817068&mibextid=wwXlfr&rdid=nYmiWMRqj7mELgYW#;

Talk East Turkistan, “Statement on the Withdrawal of 13 East Turkestanian Political Organizations from the Collaborative Forum of the Self-Proclaimed East Turkistan Government in Exile,” Facebook story, posted October 11, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=509223735327749&id=100087203817068&mibextid=wwXlfr&rdid=nYmiWMRqj7mELgYW#.

⁷⁵ India Narrative, “ETGE Alleges Uyghur Militants in Syria Exploited by Chinese Intelligence, Seeks US Support,” *East Turkistan Government in Exile* (June 6, 2025), <https://east-turkistan.net/india-narrative-etge-alleges-uyghur-militants-in-syria-exploited-by-chinese-intelligence-seeks-us-support/>

China, the United States, and the United Nations. However, they were removed from the U.S. terrorist list in 2022.⁷⁶

Right-wing advocacy organizations, such as the East Turkistan Youth Congress, and academic organizations, such as the Center for East Turkistan National Interest, are lacking funding, resources, and professional staff, and are therefore facing extreme challenges. However, these organizations have continued to work hard for movement in the Uyghur diaspora, as well as to establish academic underpinnings for East Turkistanian people's national aspiration in the international community.

There is ideological division and mutual distrust between right-wing independence organizations and left-wing, externally funded groups that focus on human rights. It is extremely difficult for such groups to cooperate, unless in urgent circumstances, such as short-term and hot-button subjects against their common adversary. Because, many externally funded Uyghur organizations in the diaspora focus primarily on their organizational missions and awareness-raising projects, they have not developed a unified vision of statehood, one that could unite diverse groups and perspectives without abandoning the core national aspiration for independence.

The Difficulties of Uyghur Armed Groups in Syria and the Increasing Chinese Pressure on the Syrian Government

Armed Uyghur groups have taken part in the Syrian civil war opposing the Assad government. Throughout the war, China maintained good trade relations with the regime, despite sanctions, and have signed multiple agreements forming a “strategic partnership.”⁷⁷ Even though, China did not openly deployed Chinese army in Syrian territory however, there are reports about China's

⁷⁶ News Agencies, “U.S. Removes Group Condemned by China From ‘Terror’ List,” *Al Jazeera*, November 7, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/7/us-removes-group-condemned-by-china-from-terror-list>

⁷⁷ Jesse Marks, “China Economic Role in Post-Assad Syria Reconstruction,” *China Global South* (May 20 2025), <https://chinaglobalsouth.com/analysis/china-syria-post-assad-economic-ties/?>;

Lara Nelson, “Assad in China: Syria's new economic and diplomatic ally?,” *The New Arab*, September 25, 2023, <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/assad-china-syrias-new-economic-and-diplomatic-ally?> .

arms sales to All Assad regime.⁷⁸ China also deployed the “Night Tigers,” a Special Forces team, in the city of Tartus to fight at least one armed Uyghur group.⁷⁹ Armed Uyghur forces were described as tough and disciplined fighters, directing their efforts against the Assad regime, as well as Chinese and Russian forces. Following the fall of the Assad regime, the newly established Syrian authorities have reportedly incorporated Uyghur forces into the new national military structure. These fighters could be considered for Syrian citizenship, in recognition of their involvement in armed conflict against the regime, and upon demonstration of their loyalty to the new government. The U.S. government also supports this arrangement.⁸⁰

The commander of Uyghur military forces, Abdulaziz Dawood Khudaberdi, was appointed to brigadier general, and Mawlan Tursun Abdussamad and Abdulsalam Yasin Ahmad were both given the rank of colonel.⁸¹ The Syrian government did not recognize the Uyghur military forces as an independent division operating under the East Turkistan flag, nor did it authorize the wearing of East Turkistan uniforms. Instead, Uyghur fighters were permitted to maintain their ethnic identity while remaining subject to Syrian military law, and serving under the Syrian flag.⁸² This ongoing arrangement allows Uyghur units to strengthen their military capabilities and to benefit from resources provided by the Syrian government; however, their operations are confined to serving Syrian national interests rather than those of East Turkistan. In the absence of a formal agreement, it would likely be difficult for these forces to separate from the Syrian national army, even if an opportunity were to arise regarding conflict against China.

In a potential worst-case scenario, Uyghur forces could be disarmed, and their commanders might be secretly deported to China or otherwise eliminated by the Syrian

⁷⁸ David Volodzko, "China's Role in the Syria Crisis Revisited," *The Diplomat*, September 21, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/09/chinas-role-in-the-syria-crisis-revisited/>

⁷⁹ Michael J. Mazarr, "China Increasing Its Military Presence in Syria," *Stimson Center*, June 21, 2018, <https://www.stimson.org/2018/china-increasing-its-military-presence-syria/>

⁸⁰ Shelly Kittleson, "Will Foreign Fighters Test the Stability of Post-Assad Syria?," *The New Arab*, October 29, 2025, <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/will-foreign-fighters-test-stability-post-assad-syria>

⁸¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/syria-appoints-some-foreign-islamist-fighters-its-military-sources-say-2024-12-30/>

⁸² Timour Azhari, Khalil Ashawi and Suleiman Al-Khalidi "Syria Appoints Some Foreign Islamist Fighters to Its Military, Sources Say," Reuters, December 31, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/syria-appoints-some-foreign-islamist-fighters-its-military-sources-say-2024-12-30/>

government, as a result of strong Chinese pressure on Syria to dismantle Uyghur armed groups entirely. However, forcing them out of Syria or dissolving their units would contribute to future instability, and risks turning disillusioned Uyghurs into a future enemy of this or another reconstituted Syrian government. The Syrian government may calculate these risks, and in the meantime consider using Uyghur armed groups as leverage between Syria and China. The uncertain status of Uyghur armed groups in Syria presents significant challenges to their continued survival. Nevertheless, their future will not only depend on the trajectory of Syria's evolving political landscape, but also on the role and status of China and other big powers.

Anticipated Political and Legal Barriers Imposed by China

A maxim that everyone can agree on is that the international geopolitical landscape is changing quickly. The United States and many other governments are playing short-term politics, making it very difficult to predict which choices and opportunities may emerge in the near future for the people of East Turkistan. However, one thing is clear: China is rapidly expanding its military and technology. According to widely cited 2023 report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) titled: "Tracking the Tech Race," China leads the world in 37 out of 44 critical and emerging technologies, including AI, quantum, advanced materials, hypersonics, 5G/6G, robotics, biotechnology, and more.⁸³ The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has strengthened ideological control across the education system, encouraging students to see the West not just as a strategic competitor but as an existential threat to the regime's security and ideology. This narrative reinforced by the CCP's official journal, *Qiushi* (求是).⁸⁴ Furthermore, China's 15th Five-Year economic Plan identifies advanced technology as the main driver of economic growth and emphasizes continuously weaponizing rare earths, batteries, and chipmaking

⁸³ Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), *Critical Technology Tracker*, (Baton, Australia: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2024), <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/critical-technology-tracker/>

⁸⁴ Li ke, "Tui Jing zhun shi jian she ti sheng da xue sheng guo fang su yang," 推进军事课建设 提升大学生国防素养, [Advance Military education to Enhance University Students' National Defense Literacy and Overall Defense Competence.] *QStheory.CN*, September 29, 2025, accessed Nov 1, 2025, <https://www.qstheory.cn/20250928/e9dd4319b87048d292bd48da80247453/c.html>

equipment's as part of its strategic deterrence against United States.⁸⁵ During the 19th Party Congress in 2017, Xi Jinping's speech and Chinese National Defense White Papers was formally outlined "Building a world-class military by the mid-21st century." Based on this goal, China is rapidly expanding its military budget and preparing to surpass US military power in a few years. China is also vowing to set new rules for the world order, aligning itself with Russia, Pakistan, Iran, and India, leading the Global South.⁸⁶

All central Asian countries remain under the heavy influence of China, after Russia attacked Ukraine and withdrew its focus from the region. US-led western countries retain focus on the Middle East because of Israel's settler colonialism, and the war in Gaza. Middle Eastern countries, and now many African nations, also maintain close relationships with China in order to balance their dependency between two superpowers in the middle of ongoing economic, political, and military crises in the Middle East. Approximately 134 of the 193 member states in UN General Assembly are generally referred to as the Global South.⁸⁷ China presented itself as the leader of the Global South through its New Silk Road project, as well as its shared colonial history. China will not only block East Turkistan's legal claims for independence or improved rights at the UN Security Council through its veto power, but also block any resolution regarding the East Turkistan issue at the UN General Assembly, by using its economic incentives, as they have often rallied these countries to support its policies.

⁸⁵ Matthew Johnson, "A Five-Year Plan for Managed Confrontation" *James Town Foundation*, Nov 3, 2025, <https://jamestown.org/program/a-five-year-plan-for-managed-confrontation/>

⁸⁶ Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, *In Tianjin Xi Pitches New 'World Order,' Plays Hosts to Modi, Putin*, (Toronto: Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2025), <https://www.asiapacific.ca/asia-watch/tianjin-xi-pitches-new-world-order-plays-host-modi-putin>.

⁸⁷ "Explainer: What is the Global South and why is everyone talking about it?" *Arabia English*, September 7, 2023, accessed November 1, 2025, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2023/09/07/Explainer-What-is-the-Global-South-and-why-is-everyone-talking-about-it->

Despite formidable obstacles, the people of East Turkistan should use any possible leverage wisely between their allies and enemies. The United States and other western allies may not want China to collapse because of their economic interdependency, however they are cannot permit an autocratic country like China to rule the world. In addition to obstacles on the path of creating a legal base and political support in the international arena, emphasizing the security gap between the West and China may create opportunity for Uyghurs and other peoples to gain at least safety, if not serious allies.

Recommendations

Recommendations to the International Community:

- 1) East Turkistan should be recognized as an occupied nation, and the legitimacy of right to Sovereignty of East Turkistan through self-determination, should be recognized by the international community based on international law.
- 2) The legitimate representative entity of East Turkistan should be invited to participate in UN deliberations on any and all forums involving its sovereignty, human rights, and territory.
- 3) The legitimate entity of East Turkistan should be granted observer status at UN General Assembly based on the international legal norms of right to self-determination. It is understandably difficult for many states to formally endorse a Uyghur political entity in the Observer Status role. However, it will also present political leverage for them to use against the patronage and hegemonic dominance of China.
- 4) China must be held accountable for its genocide in East Turkistan and its so-called “New World Order” strategy must be evaluated based on the genocide and crimes against humanity in East Turkistan.

- 5) Governments around the world should approach, with caution, their relations with China and critically examine the inconsistency between its foreign policy claim of *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and Jointly Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind* in international relations and its repressive policies in East Turkistan.

Recommendations for Uyghur Organizations:

- 1) The only legitimate way forward for the people of East Turkistan is to claim UN observer status, through methodical lobbying, gaining endorsement from other states.
- 2) Legitimacy must be based on the will and national aspirations of the East Turkistanian people, which include the right to external self-determination and sovereignty. Only organizations that clearly and consistently advocate for this vision can be considered legitimate representatives of the broader East Turkistanian nation.
- 3) The Uyghur diaspora constitutes the principal source of legitimacy for political, diplomatic, and military organizations operating in exile. Securing their recognition and support is crucial for such organizations to attain genuine credibility and legitimacy.
- 4) Organizations that focus solely on short-term missions, without a clear vision for statehood, cannot claim to represent East Turkistan as a whole. They merely represent their own organization's agendas. For example, organizations such as the WUC advocate for self-determination without clearly specifying whether it refers to external or internal self-determination, leaving the question of full independence to a future referendum. However, without ideological, legal, political, and military preparation groundwork and diplomacy for statehood from this point forward, it is not possible to achieve independence through peaceful referendum, as Chinese settlers constitute the majority of the population, and claim voting rights.
- 5) There are also some other Uyghur organizations which have slogans about statehood, consider themselves representative for the whole of East Turkistan without having popular recognition or legitimacy provided by the people. They have neither a clear statehood working strategy nor the ability unite or cooperate with other organizations. These organizations should be united with other right-wing organizations which focus on the right to sovereignty of East Turkistan, and emphasize the need for statehood. If they

reject to unite or cooperate because of individual power struggles, and narrowly focus on short-term organizational missions, it will be very difficult for them to establish true political legitimacy.

- 6) Despite the ideological fraction and fight over legitimacy, all of the Uyghur organizations including right-wing, left-wing, and the far-right wing (referring to military groups), should establish cooperation based on careful prioritizing. Cooperation may start with recognizing the validity of each group and their potential usefulness, instead of dismissal
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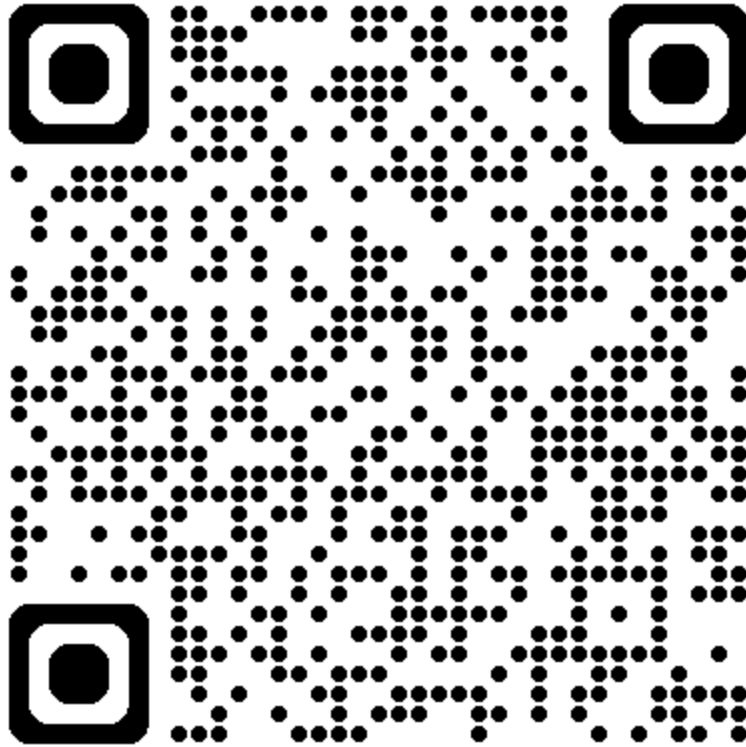
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About Centre for East Turkistan National Interest

The official name of this organization is the Centre for East Turkistan National Interest, and its acronym is CETNI.

CETNI is a non-profit and an independent international research, and a think-tank oriented organization. CETNI was founded by a group of Uyghur academics and experts.

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