



**GLOBAL  
RISK  
INTEL**

Risk Report

# **TURKIC TRANSNATIONALISM: EXAMINING THE UYGHURS OF XINJIANG**

[www.globalriskintel.com](http://www.globalriskintel.com)

# TURKIC TRANSNATIONALISM

## EXAMINING THE UYGHURS OF XINJIANG

**Dr. Nadir Gohari**

**RISK REPORT**

**Global Risk Intelligence**

**SEPTEMBER 17, 2018**

**Washington, D.C. · London · Singapore**

**[www.globalriskintel.com](http://www.globalriskintel.com)**

**DISCLAIMER:**

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS DOCUMENT ARE THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE AUTHOR(S) AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE VIEW OF GLOBAL RISK INTELLIGENCE. THIS DOCUMENT IS ISSUED WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT IF ANY EXTRACT IS USED, THE AUTHOR(S) AND GLOBAL RISK INTELLIGENCE SHALL BE CREDITED, PREFERABLY WITH THE DATE OF THE PUBLICATION.

**COPYRIGHT © GLOBAL RISK INTELLIGENCE. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.**

**Dr. Nadir Gohari** is the President & CEO of Global Risk Intelligence. He earned his doctorate in Government and International Affairs from the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University in the United Kingdom. Previously, he earned his Master of Arts degree in International Affairs with a focus on the Middle East from the same institution.

## Summary

This Risk Report briefly examines transnational aspects of the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, China. As a Turkic group, Uyghurs have an ethnic association with other groups that are inclusive of Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Turks. However, there are key differences between the groups that enable the creation of distinct identities. Such distinctions can be made to an extent that interethnic empathy is virtually nonexistent. A review of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is covered, followed by an account of the tensions between the Uyghurs and the People's Republic China, which is then followed by the strategic geographic positioning of Xinjiang in a global context. A case study of the Uyghur diaspora in Turkey is subsequently presented coupled with concluding thoughts.

**TAGS: CHINA, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, TAJIKISTAN, TURKEY, UZBEKISTAN, ASIA, RISK, CHINESE, TURKIC, UYGHUR, CENTRAL ASIA, CENTRAL ASIAN, EAST ASIA, EAST ASIAN, AUTONOMOUS REGION, ETHNIC, ETHNICITY, GOVERNMENT, INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, NATION, NATIONS, STATE, TRANSNATIONALISM, XINJIANG.**

## Xinjiang: Between Autonomy and Province

The People's Republic of China is the most populous country in the world and birthplace to one of the oldest civilizations in the world. The country maintains 22 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 directly-controlled municipalities, and 2 special administrative regions. The abundance of administrative divisions is also representative of not only geographic variance, but ethnic



diversity within the country as well. The westward frontier of China possesses two large and significant autonomous regions, with the Xinjiang Autonomous Uyghur Region being the largest administrative division of the country. The region is host to a number of ethnic groups, which are inclusive of Hui, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Tajiks. The largest of these groups would be the Uyghurs, which are an East Turkic group and speak the Uyghur language<sup>1</sup>, which is broadly written in the Arabic script, but does have transcription in Cyrillic, Latin, and Chinese.

The Xinjiang Autonomous Uyghur Region as administered by the Chinese government designates the area with a degree of federalism that does not necessarily constitute the area as provincial but in turn is also not an autonomous entity separate from the state. This administrative division thereby provides maneuverability for the Chinese government to conduct affairs in a slightly different manner given that there is, at least theoretically, a different sort of interaction between Xinjiang than say for example, Hunan province. It should be noted at this point that while the area has been categorized as an autonomous region by the current People's Republic of China, the previous Republic of China (1912 – 1949) and preceding Qing Dynasty (1636 – 1912) both possessed Xinjiang as a province within their boundaries.

---

<sup>1</sup> Uyghur: ئۇيغۇر.

## Tensions with China

Despite the multiethnic composition in Xinjiang, harmonious coexistence within China has not always been a seamless state of affairs; in part, of course, due to its extensive history. In this respect, temporal context, historical continuity, and sustaining of tensions are all also factors that contribute to the understanding of coexistence and cohesion. For example, while there may have been tensions in Xinjiang that existed between the province and ruling government during the reign of the Republic of China or preceding Qing Dynasty, the continuity and sustaining of tensions were not absolutely consistent. Meaning, that while there may have been periods in time in which there were peaks of tension, there were also corresponding regressions and consequential withdrawals of tension altogether. This is an important feature to note, which will be reviewed in greater detail later on in this report.

## Notions of Religion and Ethnicity

Centripetal areas of anxiety that have been present in Xinjiang are inclusive of religion and ethnicity. The dominant religion in the autonomous region is Islam, whereas the rest of the country is by and large irreligious, in consistency with the irreligiosity that was promoted by the current state government. Islam is not a new feature in China, as the religion interacted with the population of the country for over a millennium, nor is it the only area in the country where Islam is practiced or present with the population. However, Xinjiang is particularly significant in its religious composition and geography in that it shares a close relationship with the Muslim World existing in Central and South Asia. Such a relationship has increasingly alarmed China in that there is a great fear of international terrorist groups penetrating the country via Xinjiang using religion as an ideological tool to destabilize governmental authority.

The dominant ethnic group of Xinjiang are the Uyghurs, which are clearly distinct from the mainstream Han. However, the Uyghurs are only regionally dominant in Xinjiang and do not maintain significant presence elsewhere in China whereas the Han are a dominant group across the entire country. Uyghur separatist groups and previously violent demonstrations against the Chinese government have involved ethnicity as a key factor justifying separation.



## Notion of Identity

Paired to the aforementioned areas of existing tensions with the Chinese government would also be the notion of identity. Essentially, this would be understood in the context of Xinjiang as whether Uyghurs identify as being Chinese or not, and/or to what degree. Elements contributing to the sentiment of disengagement certainly can be found along religious and ethnic lines, however, the extent is far beyond simply two constituents.

## Notion of Chinese Turkestan

Historically, the term “Chinese Turkestan” referred to the Tarim Basin in the province of

– Complimentary View End –

**To purchase the rest of this Risk Report, contact**  
**[americas@globalriskintel.com](mailto:americas@globalriskintel.com) or visit [www.globalriskintel.com](http://www.globalriskintel.com).**



[www.globalriskintel.com](http://www.globalriskintel.com)