

“traditional Islam” and “new Islam,” as well as “traditional clergy.” The Islamic policy of Russia has no approach to the “new Muslims and methods of their integration in political and social life, as well as the use of them as a resource of social stabilization. Actions in Daghestan, Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria, and the Volga Area in the form of closing mosques, apprehension of Muslims with great beards or purdah, bans on some Muslim books, tend to make the “new Muslims” emigrate from Russia to Turkey. In connection with the economic crisis and the deterioration of the standard of living in the Muslim republics of the North Caucasus the migration of Muslims to Turkey from this region will grow, Neflyasheva concludes.

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OLGA BIBIKOVA. UYGHUR JIHAD IN CHINA AND SYRIA // *The article was written for the bulletin “Russia and the Moslem World.”*

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Abstract: Muslim Uyghurs live in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China. In this area separatist sentiments are strong. In recent years Uyghur radicals will often organize acts of terrorism. Several thousands of Uyghurs are involved in military operations in Syria on the side of opposition. They consider their participation as a training for struggle for independence.

Sunni Islam in China is professed by more than 20 million people. A half of them are the Uyghurs living mainly in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). There is a significant amount of Uyghurs also outside the People's Republic of China. Except Uyghurs Islam in China is professed by Kazakhs living here, Dungans, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tatars, etc.

XUAR occupies the sixth part of the territory of China (1.66 million sq.km). It is the biggest territory administration unit of the People's Republic of China. Among predecessors of Uyghurs there are representatives of disappeared Turkic and Mongolian nomads. XUAR borders on Kazakhstan (1718 km), Mongolia (1400 km), Kyrgyzstan (1000 km), Tajikistan (450 km), Russia (55 km) and also on Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. The neighbourhood with such number of countries predetermined presence of representatives of 47 nationalities living in XUAR, but Uyghurs – indigenous population of the region. Total length of the frontier of XUAR is over 5600 kilometers. Every third frontier guard of China serves exactly here.

The modern ethnonym Uyghurs was assigned to settled Turkic-speaking people on the assembly taking place in Tashkent in 1921. Uyghurs speak language of Turkic group that brings them together with people of Central Asia and also Turkey.

XUAR is included in the Economic Belt of the Silk Way (EBSW) program that gives once depressive area the roadmap of infrastructure and economy in general. This region is rich in minerals (40% of reserves of coal, 1/3 oils of the People's Republic of China). Through the territory of XUAR to Central China it is being constructed a pipeline from Turkmenistan and a petrol one from Kazakhstan. Besides, it is planned a construction of the gas pipeline from Altai Krai of Russia. Thus, power supply of economy of the People's Republic of China to a great extent depends on a stable situation in XUAR.

The problem of Uyghurs in China is connected with the fact that in ancient time these people lived in an independent state. Two thousand years ago, during an era of the Chinese Han

dynasty, China occupied the territory of this state. In the 8th century Uyghurs were a part of the Turkic khaganate. Process of ethnic consolidation of Uyghurs culminated after disintegration of the Turkic khaganate and formation of the Uigur early feudal state (The Uighur khaganate) on the Orkhon River. In the middle of the 9th century the Uighur state dissolved. A part of Uyghurs moved to Central Asia. In the 17-18 centuries in East Turkestan there was a state of Uyghurs which in 1760 came under power of Manchurian governors of China. Being under the power of foreign governors, Uyghurs revolted at times. Six large revolts in Xinjiang took place in the 19th century. In the 20th century two attempts of creation of an independent states of Uyghurs – the Islamic republic of East Turkestan (1933–1934) and the Revolutionary republic of East Turkestan (1944–1949) took place. In 1949 after integration of the Uighur territories in the People's Republic of China Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region was created.

Considering separatist sentiments of Uyghurs, China, since 1950th, implemented measures to reduce domination of the Uighur population in XUAR. For that end Han – representatives of the title nation began to move here. At Mao Zedong Uyghurs, due to high birth rate, still were in the majority of the population of XUAR. However over the last 50 years as a result the government encouraged moving of Han to XUAR, Uyghurs became minority on their homeland. It is natural that Uyghurs, aborigines of the region, perceive all attempts to dilute the population of XUAR with Han negatively. Historical memory of the population keeps recollections of the independent national state.

The problem of Uighur separatism is directly connected with demographic problems of China which extremely disturb Beijing. In 1953 the first nation-wide population census was held, which results showed that with population – 581.390 million people the state cannot provide the population with food. However till 1956 the government did not attach great importance to demographic factor. Moreover, continuous growth of population was considered as a source of well-being of the country. The population ratio (more than

20% of the population of the globe) and available arable lands of China (about 7% of world arable lands) forced the power to take severe measures for reduction of birth rate in the state. Besides for various reasons the tilled areas are annually reduced almost by 300–400 thousand hectares.

In the 1960s there was an understanding of harmfulness of lack of fertility control policy the Chinese leaders were forced to assume stringent measures against violators of the One Family – One Child program. The system of punishments, penalties, deductions from salary was developed. The second or third child was not taken in kindergarten, it was limited training of such children in universities, the students getting married were expelled from institutes. “Surplus” of children was considered even while pension accounting. In December, 1973 at the all-China reporting meeting on fertility control it was proclaimed the course “later, rarer, less” that assumed late marriages and 4–5 year intervals between of children’s births, availability of contraceptives.

During “Cultural revolution” (1966–1976) multi-child Muslim Uyghurs faced reprisals. For Muslim Uyghur forced refusal to have children was insult of their religious feelings because Islam considers each newborn child as a “barakah” (grace) from Allah. Besides, for the Uyghurs, living in villages, children were always domestic helpers. Having ignored religious feelings of people, the authorities resorted to violent sterilization of many Uighur women and men.

Sinologists consider that during this period the Chinese authorities made mistakes in national policy, also there were infringed so long strengthening relations of friendship and respect between Han and representatives of ethnic minorities.

It only makes sense that mistakes in national policy, measures of forced reduction of presence of indigenous population in XUAR (nowadays the number of Han in XUAR increased up to 40%) due to forced relocation of the Uyghurs far inland gashes consciousness of people.

In the 1980s in XUAR there were more than 20 thousand mosques. In 1987 the authorities organized in Urumqi, the capital of XUAR, an Islamic academy for training of imams. Besides, there were courses on studying of the Koran and Arabic. Communications of Muslims of China with their coreligionists in other countries extended. Uyghurs went on a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia.

Nevertheless, in 1990 in the city of Bazhen there was a revolt under the religious slogans. Beijing had to use regular army for its suppression. Then there were disorders among Taliban students in madrassa of Yarkand city and explosion in the cinema of Kucha city (1991).

As the Turkish newspaper "Vatan" noted: "assimilation process really deepens the problem. Such tendency suppresses language and cultural bases, and fight of people interested in preventing it, is beyond legitimacy."

After the Central Asian republics of the former USSR gained independence as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were organizations in XUAR which set out to win independence of East Turkestan. Among them there was formed in 1992 the World Uighur Congress led by Rabiye Qadir preferring peaceful means, and the Turkestan Islamic Movement (TIM). The last one soon contacted with foreign radical Muslim groups.

Contacts with foreign groups of Islamic doctrine allowed TIM to organize training camps in the territory of the neighboring Pakistan (the region of Waziristan). There were effected contacts with ISIS. Besides that, since 2009 interethnic conflicts constantly took place in the country.

With the course of time Uyghurs acquired the methods of terrorist fight taking place in other countries. Members of TIM became the initiator of terrorist attacks.

Members of this organization made propaganda among believers in mosques of XUAR. In 1992 terrorist campaign began: explosions in hotels, shopping centers, in public transport, in cultural centers, in hospitals, in prison (!), on markets and bus stops. Five years later mass riots and murders of officials began.

One explosion occurred in the bus passing the center of Beijing near Tiananmen Square. In 2015 fighters blew up several houses. It became obvious that Uyghur fighters receive explosives and weapon from abroad. At the same time many of them used cold weapon. Particularly, in August 2014 people armed with knives wearing black masks attacked police station. A little earlier (in March 2014) a group of men with knives 60–70 cm long attacked passengers at the station Kunming, (the province of Yunnan in the South-West of China). As a result of the attack about 30 people died, 143 were wounded.

TIM headquarters of which is located abroad officially assumed responsibility for more than 200 terrorist attacks, carried out on the territory of the People's Republic of China. Islamic priests also caught, they were killed by radicals, accusing them of “complicity with the authorities.”

Inside XUAR calls for separation from the People's Republic of China sounded more often. Before the Olympic Games in Beijing (2008) there was the whole terrorist campaign, including an attempt of attack with explosives on an air liner. Next year there was a conflict between the Uyghurs and Han living in XUAR as a result of which more than 150 people died, several hundreds were wounded. The government had to send military units and armored elements into the region.

There were adopted laws forbidding students and state officials to visit mosques. Control of children's education in kindergartens was strengthened. In 1997 the campaign against illegal madrasahs was conducted. There were imposed restrictions for visiting of the sacred cities Mecca and Medina in the period of Ramadan by Chinese Muslims. In 2017 in China camps of reeducation appeared where the Uyghurs and other Muslims (Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, etc.) were banished who aroused suspicion by their behavior. Besides, in the list there are bans on solemnization and funeral ceremonies by religious traditions, punishments for parents who do not let their children go to public schools.

At the same time, as noted by observers, “the policy pursued by Beijing in relation to Muslim Uyghurs includes also a number of preferences in comparison with other residents of the country, including on religious ground. For example, restrictions on birth rate which are imposed on Han do not concern them, they can have more than one child in family, there are privileges for college entrance. For the last decade the government of China made great financial injections to the region, having constructed numerous large plants and enterprises.” Nevertheless, along with the ideas of separatism in Xinjiang the Salafi ideology began to extend.

It only makes sense that authorities of the Turkestan Islamic Movement came in contact with ISIS that predetermined participation of its fighters in the Syrian conflict. First there were about 300 people who were involved in the battle which was conducted by the Jabhat al-Nusra organization (nowadays “Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham”) for Aleppo.

Uyghurs come to Syria through Turkey together with their families which representatives Jabhat al-Nusra settle apart in the houses left by Syrians generally in Idlib province seized in 2015. It was the result of the special propaganda campaign appealing the Uyghur families for leaving their homeland and living in the caliphate where the shariah laws prevail. What is more visas to Turkey provided consular agencies of this country in other states, including Afghanistan and neighboring countries of Central Asia. In some cases, Uyghurs obtained Turkish citizenship right away. Certainly, that Beijing voiced protest to actions of Ankara.

The authorities of Thailand paid attention to mass obtaining the Turkish passports by “tourists” from China. In the middle of 2015 Thailand expelled more than 100 Uyghurs to China. Later it has transpired that the authorities of Indonesia locked up several Uyghurs accused of terrorism.

For recruitment of the Uyghur men into their folds, ISIS Information center distributed in 2015 over the Internet the anthem urging Muslims of China to join fighters in the name of the caliphate. Tellingly that Uyghurs, unlike other fighters, in the

territory of Syria do not cover their faces, that demonstrates that they are not going to return home. Moreover, Islamic propaganda is actively carried out also among children. In particular distributing among the Chinese Muslims information on their activity in Syria, jihadists do video with children who say: "Chinese Kafirs! Know that we already are on the land of the caliphate. We will come to you and we will run up our flag in Turkestan."

According to some reports about 4–5 thousand Uyghur fighters were already at war in Syria in 2018. Most of them is concentrated in Idlib province in which Al Nusra initially provided training of newly arrived, including children.

It is no secret that the Turkish intelligence under the instruction of the U.S. recruit the Uyghur together with Turkmens, Kazakhs into the Syrian opposition ranks. Turks have their interest here, hoping to receive thus a part of the territory of Syria where the Uyghur families are already settled. Erdogan patronizes the Turkic people, hoping for their loyalty especially that many Uyghurs understand that they will not be able to return home.

The U.S. has more ambitious aims: due to activization of an Islamic factor, to weaken China, to interfere with implementation of economic plans, including the project the Great Silk Way as the southern corridor of this route passing through XUAR will run into danger. This project assumes to create new infrastructure which will promote trade expansion of China with other countries. Besides, destabilization of the situation in this area threatens to disrupt also construction of the Turkmen gas pipeline to China.

It only makes sense that repatriation of the Uyghurs who got fighting experience in Syria is not desirable for Beijing as fighters can really destabilize the situation in China. It is impossible to forget also about the neighboring Afghanistan and Pakistan where the Uyghur separatists gain experience in training camps. All these factors combined slow down the process of integration of Eurasia in a common economic space that quite answers the purpose of the U.S. to weaken China as a competitor and not to allow the united

efforts of Russia, China and other countries to create strong Eurasia and to resist the American capital. China which strengthened its economic positions in the world in collaboration with Russia prevents the U.S. from imposing its will to other states. Through the example of China it becomes obvious that Islamic Jihad is used as a lever of pressure on undesired countries for Washington. Having begun with support of the Afghan mujahedeens, an Islamic appeal, with financial support of the U.S., NATO and Qatar extended first among Albanians – Muslims in Kosovo and Yugoslavia, among the Caucasian separatists in the Russian Federation, promoted radical jihad in Libya, disintegrated Iraq and tried to disintegrate Syria. Now, probably, there is a project to weaken China...

Uyghurs are included into the biggest group of foreigners who are at war together with “Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham” on the territory of Syria. The correspondent of Associated Press agency in a conversation with fighters from China found out that not hatred of Assad's regime was the main cause of their participation in military operations in Syria, but “desire to gain military experience for the subsequent fight against Chinese authorities.”

Realizing it, Beijing thought of the prospects to return Uyghurs home. In December, 2015 China adopted the first Anti-Terrorism Law allowing the Chinese army to conduct warfare on the territory of other countries. There were carried out the first military maneuvers outside China. However, it was not specified in what country. Possibly, in Somalia where in Djibouti where Beijing organized its first military base. In 2016 Beijing sent to Syria military advisers with the purpose to render assistance in training of contingent of armed forces. The Chinese military also wanted “to study methods of conducting combat operations – for example, counteractions to tunnel blowing up (when radicals dig tunnels under positions of government forces and blast them, causing collapses of armed objects exteriorly), fight against the equipment operated by suicide bombers.” Besides, Beijing cooperates with the governments of Kazakhstan and the states of

Central Asia for which the problem of repatriation of compatriots who were at war in the ranks of radical Muslim groups also became extremely relevant.

By the end of the Syrian war (and there is no doubt any more) foreign fighters from China and countries of Central Asia concentrated in Idlib. According to Murat Yetkin, the editor-in-chief of the Turkish newspaper "Hürriyet," "in Idlib province there are 60 thousand jihadi fighters, 15 thousand of them "foreigners": about 600 of the European countries, about 6 thousand from Chechnya and the Russian Caucasus and about 7 thousand from Central Asia, generally from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and also from China." In the summer of 2018 the Uyghur fighters concentrated around the city of Jisr al-Shughur (20 km from the Turkish border) where there is a base of the Uyghur TIM.

In September, 2018 Russia and Turkey signed the memorandum of stabilization of the situation near Idlib. It was also decided to create a zone of de-escalation which will separate the Syrian government forces and dissident armed forces. The refusal of clean-up operation on this territory demonstrates that there is an understanding of presence of a large number of civilian population there – wives and children of fighters and also locals. On September 28, 2018 the Russian minister of foreign affairs S. Lavrov said that heavy armament is being removed from Idlib. At the same time, along a humanitarian corridor Tel Sultan – Abu – al-Duhur, created by the Russian military, the city was abandoned by thousands of civilians. Fighters released only old men, women and children. There are grounds for believing that Turkey is engaged in the fate of the remained fighters and their families.

At the end of September, 2018 the Al Arabiya TV channel, reported that between Russia and Turkey there were serious disagreements concerning withdrawal of fighters. Russia demands to transfer the fighters leaving Idlib to government forces from Syria. In return, Turkey declaring concern of the prospect to receive a new wave of immigrants insists on sending fighters to territories controlled by Kurds. It confirms our thought that

Turkey seeks to strengthen its presence in the east of Syria, including at the expense of ethnically close fighters that is connected, first of all, with the aspiration of Turkey, not to allow creation of the Kurdish autonomy within Syria.

It should be noted that affiliation of the Uyghur jihadists with fighters “Hayat Tahrir al- Sham” (HTSh) can be costly for Uyghurs as this association where together with Jabhat al-Nusra other organizations of fighters joined, gained reputation of the most aggressive part of the armed Syrian opposition. HTSh which in November, 2013 was announced the only legal representative of Al-Qaeda in Syria is accused of numerous war crimes. Therefore wherever it is – in Idlib or in the east of Syria – it will be destroyed.

Nevertheless, the Uigur fighters have no other way out. Those who managed to leave Idlib earlier perhaps already moved to Afghanistan or Pakistan, but Beijing which does not want to return Chinese jihadists home, will try to make maximum effects to solve this problem outside China.

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