

## 14

OKA Natsuko

### *Transnationalism As a Threat to State Security? Case Studies on Uighurs and Uzbeks in Kazakhstan*

Transborder ethnic groups are often considered to be a threat to the security of states in which they reside. In particular, if an ethnic minority in a “host state” calls for help from a state in which their co-ethnics dominate (a “kin state”), this, it has been argued, might lead to conflict between the host state and the kin state, as the latter tries to meddle in the internal affairs of the host state to protect its ethnic kin, or even claim sovereignty over their settlements.

Post-Soviet Kazakhstan provides a variety of examples for the study of interrelationship between host state, minority, and ethnic homeland.<sup>1</sup> Among ethnic communities straddling Kazakhstan’s borderlands, the extant studies have focused almost exclusively on the Russians, the largest non-titular nationality in the republic. In the years following the end of the Soviet order, their potential call for unification with the Russian Federation was seen as the greatest danger to Kazakhstan’s integrity. The Russians, however, did not take to the streets with separatist demands. The passive attitude by the Russian population has been explained by several

1 For definition of ethnic homeland and kin state, see Charles King, “Introduction: Nationalism, Transnationalism, and Postcommunism,” in Charles King and Neil J. Melvin, eds., *Nations Abroad: Diaspora Politics and International Relations in the Former Soviet Union* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), p. 12.

factors, among others, large out-migration to Russia, weak and diffused ethnic identity that made mobilization difficult, and Russia's vocal but not necessarily substantial policy toward its compatriots abroad.<sup>2</sup>

While considerable attention has been paid to the Russians, there remain only a limited scholarly account on Kazakhstan's other transborder nationalities. This paper focuses on the Uzbeks and the Uighurs, Turkic Muslim communities who have historically grown a strong attachment to their settlements within Kazakhstan, and examines why, despite predictions by some observers, these ethnic communities have not become a threat to the host state. As discussed below, the two groups' relationships with homelands have developed quite differently under the Soviet rule and since Kazakhstan's independence. By comparing them, the paper also highlights the varied nature of the relationship between Kazakhstan, its minority, and their ethnic homeland.

## Minority-Homeland Relationship

One of the most important characteristics of the Soviet state structure was its multilayered federalism based on ethnicity. In the USSR, ethnicity was territorially institutionalized; each republic was perceived as a homeland for a particular nationality, in which its language and culture were promoted and ethnic cadres and intelligentsias were cultivated.<sup>3</sup> Needless to say, however, not all Soviet nationalities were fortunate to have their own national republic, and even if they did, not all of their members resided in it.

2 Neil Melvin, *Russians Beyond Russia: The Politics of National Identity* (London: Pinter, 1995); Neil J. Melvin, "The Russians: Diaspora and the End of Empire," in King and Melvin, *Nations Abroad*, pp. 27-57.

3 For detailed accounts of institutionalization of ethnicity under the Soviet rule, see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). On Soviet institutional legacy for ethnic mobilization during perestroika and nation building in newly independent states, see, for example, Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Dmitry P. Gorenburg, *Minority Ethnic Mobilization in the Russian Federation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

## *Transnationalism As a Threat to State Security?*

How did the Soviet breakup affect lives of non-titular minorities who found themselves on the “wrong” side of the border or did not have “their own” republic from the beginning? Focusing on the cases of the Uzbeks and the Uighurs in Kazakhstan, I analyze how their relationships with ethnic homelands have changed before and after the end of the Soviet order.

### ***Uzbeks***

The number of the Uzbeks in Kazakhstan is 370,000, or 2.5 percent of the country’s whole population (based on the 1999 population census). 89.6 percent of them reside in the South Kazakhstan *oblast*, in which the Uzbeks amount to 16.8 percent of the oblast’s population. Among its lower administrative units, areas in which Uzbeks are most concentrated are the city of Turkestan (42.7 percent), the Sairam *raion* (61.3 percent), and the oblast’s capital Shymkent (15.0 percent). From Shymkent to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, it is less than a two hour drive (120 kilometers), while it is a one hour and forty minute flight to Almaty, a former capital and the biggest city of Kazakhstan.

The Uzbeks located in the south have developed a strong sense of rootedness to their settlements and consider themselves indigenous to the region. Interestingly, this claim seems to be accepted by the authorities of Kazakhstan,<sup>4</sup> who have been asserting since independence that the current borders of the republic “correspond completely to the historically formed area of habitation of the Kazakh people.”<sup>5</sup> And yet, the Uzbeks have never demanded that their settlements be incorporated into Uzbekistan’s territory or a territorial autonomy be established within Kazakhstan.

Most probably, during the Soviet period, the Kazakhstan’s Uzbek community did not feel that they lived outside of their homeland; they

4 On the official website of the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan [<http://www.assembly.kz/> (accessed June 23, 2005)], the Republican Association of Social Unions of the Uzbeks *Do’sstlik* declares that the Uzbeks are an indigenous population (*ko-rennoe naselenie*) to the South Kazakhstan oblast. In my conversation with officials from the oblast administration, they also supported this point of view.

5 *Natsional’nyi sovet po gosudarstvennoi politike pri Prezidente Respubliki Kazakhstan, Kontseptsia formirovaniia gosudarstvennoi identichnosti Respubliki Kazakhstan* (Almaty, 1996), pp. 25–26.

belonged de facto to Uzbekistan's cultural, social, and economic space. In 1936, an oblast Uzbek newspaper printed in Shymkent in the 1920s was abolished.<sup>6</sup> An Uzbek theater in Kazakhstan—another important component of the Soviet nationalities policy—was also closed in 1941.<sup>7</sup> This lack of cultural institutions, however, did not cause serious inconvenience to the Kazakhstani Uzbeks. They subscribed to newspapers from Uzbekistan, enjoyed Uzbek TV and radio programs broadcast from there. Upon graduation of an Uzbek school in Kazakhstan, those who wished to receive higher education in their native language went to Tashkent or other cities within the neighboring republic. Many students remained there and joined the ranks of Uzbekistan's party apparatus. Thus, if Uzbeks wanted to enjoy privileges as members of the titular ethnicity, they could move relatively easily to neighboring Uzbekistan, without cutting themselves off from their hometown.

The collapse of the Soviet Union gradually but completely changed this situation. Although visa-exempt agreements are still in force between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, presenting an international passport is not enough to cross the border. According to the residents in the borderland area, it is necessary to certify a reason for visiting Uzbekistan; such regulations, they complain, have been intensified since the late 1990s.<sup>8</sup>

The growing distance between the Uzbek communities in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is symbolized by the reopening of an official Uzbek newspaper, theater, and the establishment of a new university for Uzbek students within Kazakhstan. A state-owned oblast newspaper *Janubiy Qozog'iston* was launched in April 1991, shortly before the Soviet breakup.<sup>9</sup> In March 2003, the Oblast Uzbek Drama Theater was opened

6 Author's interview at the editorial board of the newspaper *Janubiy Qozog'iston*, March 9, 2005. Throughout the Soviet period, however, there were two Uzbek local newspapers printed in Turkestan and the Sairam raion.

7 The theater had been established in 1934. Author's interview with Z. Mominjanov, Director of the Uzbek Drama Theater, March 16, 2005. *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, December 23, 2003. Here and below, non-Russian names are Latinized from Cyrillic script using the Russian spelling.

8 It is not unusual for people to cross the border at locations other than a checkpoint. Il-legal border crossing "business" is also rampant.

9 The newspaper holds this name since 1998. In addition to official ones, several independent Uzbek newspapers have been issued since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

## *Transnationalism As a Threat to State Security?*

in the Sairam raion.<sup>10</sup> Although not state-sponsored, the Uzbek-Kazakh Engineering-Humanities University was established in the South Kazakhstan oblast in 1999.<sup>11</sup>

According to an Uzbek school principal in the Sairam village, in recent years almost all of the pupils go on to university in Kazakhstan.<sup>12</sup> One of the key issues here is the alphabet for the Uzbek language; in Uzbekistan, the Latin alphabet was introduced in 1993. Although the Cyrillic is still widely used, school education has completely shifted to the Latin script. Meanwhile, in Kazakhstan, all newspapers, school textbooks, and other publications in Uzbek are printed in the Soviet-made Cyrillic script.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Kazakhstan's Uzbek community has been gradually distanced from Uzbekistan not only by an international border but also by different sources of information and even different alphabets used in school. The newly established Uzbek newspaper, theater and university in the South Kazakhstan oblast demonstrate the institutionalization of their minority status within Kazakhstan. Despite many newly created obstacles, however, contacts with homeland have not ceased to exist. For instance, personal ties between the Uzbeks on both sides are still very strong, as almost every Uzbek in the south of Kazakhstan has relatives in Uzbekistan.

### ***Uighurs***

The Uighur population in Kazakhstan amounts to 210,000, or 1.4 percent of the republic's total population (based on the 1999 population census). 95.6 percent of them reside in Almaty and the Almaty oblast, located in the southeastern part of the republic. The Uighurs account for 3.0 per-

10 *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, December 23, 2003.

11 This is a private university and has campuses in Shymkent, Turkestan, and the Sairam raion. According to one of the organizers of the university, as of 2005 the main language of instruction is, contrary to their original idea, Kazakh.

12 Author's interview with Khalmurat Iuldashev, Principal of the Uzbek School No. 19 in the Sairam raion, March 16, 2005.

13 According to Khalmurat Iuldashev, in his school the Latin script was temporarily introduced in the second half of the 1990s, but the Cyrillic has been reintroduced afterwards. Author's interview, March 16, 2005.

cent of the population of Almaty (the city has a republican status and does not belong to the Almaty oblast), and 9.0 percent of the Almaty oblast. Within the oblast, areas with most compact Uighur settlements are the Uighur raion (55.4 percent), the Panfilov raion (29.4 percent), both of which border China, and the Enbekshikazakh raion (22.2 percent). Despite such geographical proximity to their homeland, the Uighurs had been almost completely isolated from co-ethnics in Xinjiang for more than two decades until the last years of the Soviet rule.

During the last two centuries, the Uighurs straddled the border that today separates the Semirech'e area, southeastern part of Kazakhstan, from the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Province of China. In the borderlands, multiple migrations occurred in two directions. In particular, the mass immigration from China to the Soviet Union in the 1950s to 1960s had significant impact on the self-understanding of the Uighurs in Kazakhstan. Using their own designations, Roberts divides the Uighurs into *yerliklär* ("locals"), who are born in Kazakhstan and whose families have lived there since at least 1900, and *kegänlär* ("newcomers"), whose parents or who themselves came to Kazakhstan in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>14</sup> While both of the groups consider Xinjiang to be the home of their ancestors, *yerliklär*, as the name suggests, have developed a strong sense of attachment to Semirech'e and perceive themselves autochthonous to the region.

In 1963, the Sino-Soviet political split resulted in the complete closure of the border between Kazakhstan and China, and exchanges between the Uighurs on opposing sides were cut off. Meanwhile, with an aim to show the superiority of its nationalities policy over the Chinese one, the Soviet government strongly supported Uighur education and culture. The Uighurs were provided with a variety of cultural institutions—schools, mass media, theater, and a department of Uighur Studies at the

14 Other designations for *yerliklär* and *kegänlär* are *sovetiklär* ("Soviets") and *khitailiklär* ("Chinese") respectively. See Sean R. Roberts, "The Uighurs of the Kazakhstan Borderlands: Migration and the Nation," *Nationalities Papers* 26, no. 3 (1998), pp. 511–530. See also Ablet Kamalov, "Uighur Community in 1990s Central Asia: A Decade of Change," in Touraj Atabaki and Sanjyot Mehendale, eds., *Central Asia and the Caucasus: Transnationalism and Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 152. In his article, Roberts divides the Uighurs in Kazakhstan into three groups; *yerliklär*, *kegänlär*, and temporary sojourners (primarily traders) from China.

### *Transnationalism As a Threat to State Security?*

Kazakh Academy of Science, which during the last decade of the USSR transformed into the Institute of Uighur Studies. Those institutions were located primarily in Kazakhstan, a republic with the largest Uighur population.<sup>15</sup> While the Soviet Uighurs used the Cyrillic script for their language, one of the two Uighur newspapers was published in the Arabic alphabet like in Xinjiang.

The reopening of the border between Xinjiang and Kazakhstan began in the late 1980s. The improvement of the Sino-Soviet relationship and then the collapse of the USSR in 1991 have resulted in renewed links between the Uighurs on opposing sides of the border in personal, cultural, economic, and other spheres.<sup>16</sup> Beijing has seen the cross-border exchange of the Uighurs with suspicion in fear that Kazakhstan might become an area of support for the independence movement of Xinjiang. Kamalov attributes the closing of many Uighur cultural institutions, most importantly the Institute of Uighur Studies (transformed into the Center of Uighur Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies), and the Uighur newspaper printed in the Arabic script, to Chinese pressure.<sup>17</sup>

Although there is no movement seeking territorial autonomy for the Uighurs now in Kazakhstan,<sup>18</sup> the issue was discussed among the Uighur intelligentsia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Their primary argument was demography: why do the Uighurs have no ethnic territory, when smaller nationalities are provided with autonomous republics or provinces? At the time of "a parade of sovereignty," the Uighurs also prepared a petition asking for autonomy. This letter, however, was never submitted to the party; the Uighur leadership worried that the already tense interethnic relations would deteriorate and decided not to

15 Kamalov, "Uighur Community," p. 152.

16 Sean R. Roberts, "A 'Land of Borderlands': Implications of Xinjiang's Trans-border Interactions," in S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), pp. 216–237.

17 Kamalov, "Uighur Community," p. 162.

18 Uighur activists stress that they do not demand territorial autonomy be created within Kazakhstan, or a part of Kazakhstan be attached to an Uighur state upon its foundation. However, some observers in Kazakhstan suspect that Uighurs might make separatist or irredentist demands. See, for example, Konstantin L. Syroezhkin, *Mify i real'nost' etnicheskogo separatizma v Kitae i bezopasnost' Tsentral'noi Azii* (Almaty, 2003), p. 441.

raise this question.<sup>19</sup>

While both of the Uzbeks and Uighurs in Kazakhstan are transborder ethnic communities, since the breakup of the USSR their relationship with respective homeland has changed in quite different directions. Under the Soviet rule, the Uzbeks in the south were practically integrated in Uzbekistan's cultural, social, and economic space, but since Kazakhstan's independence they have been increasingly distanced from the homeland. It was only after the collapse of the Soviet Union that the Uzbeks have become a "stranded" minority in Kazakhstan. In the case of the Uighurs, they were already a "diaspora" in a sense that it had a homeland outside of the Soviet state. The Uighur community had been cut off from homeland during the Sino-Soviet split, and the end of the conflict and then the collapse of the Soviet Union have resulted in an increase in contact with co-ethnics abroad.

## **International Relations around Minority**

The most significant difference between the Uzbeks and Uighurs is whether or not they have a kin state. In this section, focusing on the relationships between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (Uzbeks' kin state) as well as China (the state that rules Uighurs' homeland), it is examined whether and how the issue of minority matters in these relationships.

### ***Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan***

With the demise of the USSR, Kazakhstan had to delimitate borders with neighboring states, all of which, except China, were former Soviet republics. For Kazakhstan, the border with Uzbekistan was the most disputed one. Basically, both sides agreed to accept the previous administrative border as their new state boundary. However, the Soviet border between the two republics was not necessarily clear due to frequent exchange of territories and land leases.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Author's interview with Kommunar Talipov, Director of the Center of Uighur Studies, Institute of Oriental Studies, September 23, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> OKA Natsuko, *Kazafusutan no jinko hendo* [Demographic changes in Kazakhstan] (Tokyo: Institute of Economic Research, Hitotsubashi University, Discussion Paper No. D98-16,



## *Transnationalism As a Threat to State Security?*

What worried and irritated the Kazakhstani side most was perhaps the Uzbekistan's border guards. In early 2000, they were found undertaking unilateral demarcation of the border with Kazakhstan, allegedly deep inside Kazakhstan territory.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the guards did not hesitate to open fire on local residents who, often not knowing where they were exactly located, crossed the border. (Such incident continued even after delimitation was completed.)<sup>22</sup> Naturally, shooting on Kazakhstani citizens by foreign authorities roused public sentiment in Kazakhstan. Antipathy to Uzbekistan and dissatisfaction with its own government were frequently expressed in newspapers and on the Internet. These incidents did affect interethnic relations among people living in the borderland area; an Uzbek resident of a border village admitted that anti-Uzbek slogans, such as "Uzbeks go home," were heard.

Some Kazakh inhabitants of the borderland, increasingly irritated by stalled delimitation talks, resorted to extreme measures. In December 2001, villagers from Baghys and Turkestanets, not knowing in which country they lived, declared the establishment of the "Baghys Kazakh Republic" to attract public attention to their desperate situation. The majority of the residents of Baghys and Turkestanets were ethnic Kazakh, and they wished that their settlements would be included in Kazakhstan's territory. This "independence" movement assumed an ethnic character and was obviously instigated by activists of *Azat*, a Kazakh nationalist organization.<sup>23</sup> Participants' primary concern, however, was their mundane problems rather than high politics.

Meanwhile, the both governments did not raise the issue of kin minority in the negotiation process. While in some cases ethnicity of resi-

---

1999), p. 8.

21 International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Border Disputes and Conflict Potential* (Osh and Brussels, 2002), pp. 7-8.

22 According to the prosecutor's office in Shymkent, four people were shot dead by Uzbekistani border guards from mid-1999 through June 2004. Olga Dosybieva, "Uzbek Border Death," *Reporting Central Asia* (Institute for War & Peace Reporting) 291 (June 8, 2004).

23 By delimitation, Baghys has been incorporated into Kazakhstan. Turkestanets has been passed into Uzbekistan's jurisdiction; most of its residents expressed their desire to move to the Kazakhstani territory. Daur Dosybiev, "Uzbekistan: Ethnic Kazaks Set to Leave," *Reporting Central Asia* 157 (November 1, 2002).

dents in a disputed territory was taken into account, the two states made no claim on each other to territory on the grounds that it is settled by co-ethnics. After multiple and complex negotiations, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan finally signed a border delimitation agreement in September 2002. As of July 2006, demarcation is still in progress.<sup>24</sup>

Neither Uzbekistan nor Kazakhstan dared to interfere in the matter of co-ethnics residing in another country, much less annexation of their settlements. As to the relationship between Tashkent and the Uzbeks abroad, Megoran points out that the Uzbekistan's foreign policy has not been influenced by the presence of the Uzbek minorities abroad. Rather, the Karimov administration has often met its ethnic kin with suspicion and even hostility.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, Kazakhstan has been encouraging ethnic Kazakhs abroad to "return" to their historic homeland.<sup>26</sup> Unlike Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan has suffered from a sharp decrease in its population since independence due to large out-migration and a relatively low birthrate. Moreover, Astana aims to increase the share of titular nationality, which is just over a half of the whole population of the republic.

### *Kazakhstan and China*

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan and China have established close relations in a variety of spheres. Among others, the two states, together with Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan set up the so-called "Shanghai Five," named after the place where its first summit was held in April 1996. The five states signed an agreement on confidence building measures in the borderland area, and subsequently China and the four CIS countries completed delimitation of respective borders. In June 2001, this regional framework accepted Uzbekistan as a new member and renamed itself the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

24 Information provided by Daur Dosybiev, independent journalist in Shymkent, Kazakhstan, July 3, 2006.

25 Nick Megoran, "The Borders of Eternal Friendship? The Politics and Pain of Nationalism and Identity along the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley Boundary, 1999-2000" (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 2002), pp. 109-110.

26 Sally N. Cummings, "The Kazakhs: Demographics, Diasporas, and 'Return'," in King and Melvin, *Nations Abroad*, pp. 133-152; M. Auezov and S. Zhusupov, eds., *Immigratsionnaia politika v Kazakhstane na primere repatriantov iz dal'nego zarubezh'ia* (Almaty, 2000).

*Transnationalism As a Threat to State Security?*

(SCO). A delimitation agreement between Kazakhstan and China was signed in July 1998.<sup>27</sup> In Kazakhstan, despite some criticism against Astana's allegedly too generous concessions to Beijing, this agreement did not trigger popular protest movement like in neighboring Kyrgyzstan.

China keeps its eyes on the Uighur communities abroad, and puts pressures on foreign governments not to allow Uighur activists to engage in anti-Chinese campaigns in their territories. Today, the chief agenda of the SCO has shifted to the fight against "separatism, extremism, and terrorism." Although each member state has different (but allegedly linked) targets such as Chechen insurgents and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, many Uighur leaders believe that the real purpose of the SCO is to suppress international Uighur movements.

Kazakhstan not only closely cooperates with China within the framework of the SCO, but also demonstrates its regard for its great neighbor over the issue of the Uighurs.<sup>28</sup> Astana bans Uighur independent movements within its territory, and categorically denies asylum to Chinese citizens. For example, in February 1999, Kazakhstan deported three Uighurs back to China where they were subsequently executed. This step aroused international criticism.<sup>29</sup> According to local NGO activists, since then no refugees have officially been deported back, but in fact Kazakhstani authorities did arrest some Uighurs and handed them to China.

Thus, despite disputes and conflict over the border delimitation and control, the governments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan did not make an issue of co-ethnics during negotiations. On the contrary, the Uighur question is a matter of great importance in Sino-Kazakhstani relations. The Uighurs are sandwiched between a state hostile to any kind of their ethnic movements and the host state that seeks to keep friendly relations with that state.

27 IWASHITA Akihiro, "Shanghai puresesu no kiseki to tenbo: Soren hokai kara kiko setsuritsu made" [Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Its Formative Years and Prospects], *Roshia kenkyu* 34 (2002), p. 103.

28 Kamalov and Roberts argue that Kazakhstan plays the "Uighur card" to obtain concessions from China, or to gain China's support for its own agenda. See Kamalov, "Uighur Community," p. 162; Roberts, "A 'Land of Borderlands'," p. 233.

29 UNHCR Almaty, Kazakhstan, *Annual Protection Report*, November 1998–December 1999 (Almaty, 2000), p. 6.

## Minorities' Strategy

How are minorities affected by their relationship with homeland as well as the relationship between Kazakhstan and the kin state or the state ruling their homeland? Do the Uzbeks take any action to be united with their co-ethnics? How do the Uighurs seek to cope with problems they face as a stateless nation? Below, I focus on the strategies taken by the Uzbeks and Uighurs since Kazakhstan's independence.

### *Exit*

Unlike the Russians, the overwhelming majority of the Uzbeks and Uighurs have not chosen a strategy of exit. One of the factors preventing out-migration can be found in the strong indigenous identity among the Uzbeks in the south and the Uighur "locals." As discussed above, both of them consider themselves native to their settlements, not immigrants.

In the early 1990s, when living conditions were more favorable in Uzbekistan than in the south of Kazakhstan, a certain number of Uzbeks did leave for Uzbekistan. At any rate, however, Kazakhstani Uzbeks have not "returned" to their ethnic kin state on a massive scale like the Russians or Germans. Today, the Kazakhstan's rising economy all the more encourages them to stay; as of 2003, Kazakhstan's GNI per capita was four times larger than that of Uzbekistan. As most Uzbeks have relatives in the neighboring country, they are clearly aware of economic superiority of the state in which they live. On the part of Uzbekistan, it cannot afford to invite co-ethnics abroad; it already suffers from overpopulation and lacks resources for new immigrants. The tightening political control in Uzbekistan also appears to have discouraged the Uzbeks to move to their kin state.

Meanwhile, some analysts argue that Astana is settling ethnic Kazakh immigrants from abroad (*oralmans*) in primarily Uzbek villages to change the nationality composition in favor of the Kazakhs.<sup>30</sup> My respondents in Shymkent and the Sairam raion, however, related the set-

30 Igor Savin, "Upravlenie mestnymi mnogoetnichnymi soobshchestvami v Kazakhstane," in V. Tishkov and E. Fillipova, eds., *Mestnoe upravlenie mnogoetichnymi soobshchestvami v stranakh SNG* (Moscow, 2001), p. 287.

## *Transnationalism As a Threat to State Security?*

tlement of Kazakh “repatriates” in their region not to the intention of the government, but to the desire of *oralmans* themselves to live in a temperate climate.

With no kin state, the Uighurs are not leaving for their homeland under Chinese control.<sup>31</sup> Living in Xinjiang is not an attractive option as the Chinese policy toward the Uighurs is much more severe than that of Kazakhstan. Some Uighurs told me that they would wish to move to Xinjiang if and when an independent Uighur state was established—which is very unlikely in the near future. As is clear from the case of Uzbekistan, kin state does not necessarily welcome its co-ethnics. Stateless Uighurs, however, have high expectations of what “their own” state would have to offer. Meanwhile, a few Uighurs sought political asylum in Europe and North America.

### *Authorized Ethnic Movement*

Today in Kazakhstan, with few exceptions, ethnic organizations are officially registered and act within the framework set by the regime. The area of their activities is mostly depoliticized; the main focus is put on national language (without questioning a status of the state—i.e. Kazakh—language), culture, and tradition.

In Kazakhstan, thirty five nationalities have ethnic organizations, officially registered as social associations (*obshchestvennoe ob"edinenie*). Most of them have their roots in so-called cultural centers that were born in the midst of perestroika. Out of them, thirty one join the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan (APK),<sup>32</sup> a president’s consultative body established in March 1995 to “strengthen public stability and interethnic accord” (it is chaired by the president himself).<sup>33</sup> With an official aim to

31 For example, in 1994, 284 Uighurs immigrated to Kazakhstan (among them 261 from the other CIS countries.) In the same year, 351 migrated from Kazakhstan (307 to the CIS countries.) In 1999, these numbers were 94(91), and 94(75) respectively. See Bakhytzhamal Bekturganova, “Uigurskii ekstremizm” v Tsentral’noi Azii: mif ili real’nost’? (*Sotsiologicheskii analiz problemy*) (Almaty, 2002), p. 82.

32 APK’s website [[http://www.assembly.kz/info-culture\\_unit.shtml](http://www.assembly.kz/info-culture_unit.shtml)] (accessed June 23, 2005)].

33 Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan ot 1 marta 1995 g. ob obrazovanii Assamblei narodov Kazakhstana.

provide support for ethnic organizations, a more important mission of the APK appears to be control and cooption of ethnic groups through its affiliated members. From the point of view of ethnic organizations, APK membership offers certain access to power as well as recognition by the authorities as a representative body of their ethnicity.

Authorized ethnic organizations are ardent supporters of pro-regime forces. Despite their wish to achieve representation in state organs in proportion to their population, ethnic organizations do not back up candidates on grounds of ethnicity. Rather, it appears that these cultural centers, by supporting pro-regime candidates irrespective of ethnic background, seek to lobby their interests through these politicians. For example, in the fall of 2004, during the election campaign for the *Majilis*, or the lower chamber of the national assembly, neither Uzbek nor Uighur organizations supported candidates of their own ethnicity.<sup>34</sup>

The core of the Uzbek movement in Kazakhstan is the Uzbek Cultural Center of the South Kazakhstan oblast, in which the Uzbek population is most concentrated. The Republican Association of Social Unions of the Uzbeks *Do'stlik* officially claims to unite regional cultural centers, but it seems to play a rather symbolic role.<sup>35</sup> Uzbek leaders do their utmost to demonstrate their faithfulness to the regime. In March 2005, for example, at *Qurultoy* (assembly) of the Uzbek Cultural Center of the South Kazakhstan oblast held at the House of Friendship of the Peoples in Shymkent, activists repeatedly expressed their gratitude to the president. Ikram Khashimzhanov, chairman of the oblast Uzbek cultural center is, not surprisingly, a member of *Otan* (Fatherland), the biggest pro-Nazarbaev

34 Two Uzbek candidates stood for the 2004 Majilis elections from Constituency 63, formed primarily from the Sairam raion of the South Kazakhstan oblast. Abdumalik Sarmanov, one of the candidates, was de-registered due to comments he made that allegedly incited ethnic hostility. Commenting on this, the Uzbek respondents that I interviewed told that Sarmanov would not have defeated the successful candidate Satybaldy Ibragimov, an ethnic Kazakh and a "friend of Nazarbaev," even if he were allowed to run. In the same elections, the Republican Cultural Center of Uighurs of Kazakhstan did not support an Uighur candidate who ran from a constituency that included the Uighur raion and the Panfilov raion of the Almaty oblast, the area with a highest percentage of the Uighur population.

35 *Do'stlik* is headed by Rozakul Khalmuradov, chairman of the Disciplinary Council of Akimat of the South Kazakhstan oblast. He was deputy Akim (governor) of the oblast from 1999 until 2002.

party.

On the part of the Uighurs, as an umbrella for Uighur organizations, the Republican Cultural Center of Uighurs of Kazakhstan (RCCUK) was established in September 2003. Although he did not run for the chairmanship of the center, the key figure here was Dilmurat Kuziev, the president of the Republican Uighur Association of Manufacturers, Entrepreneurs, and Agricultural Workers. As a successful entrepreneur, he has been offering financial support for the Uighur community, including the Uighur Theater, schools, mosques, and translation of the Qur'an into the Uighur language.<sup>36</sup> On the political front, he is a devoted supporter of President Nazarbaev. In the 2004 Majilis elections, the RCCUK appealed to the Uighur community to support the *Otan* party.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, there are several organizations that did not join the RCCUK. Reasons for this are the differences in spheres of activities, personal conflict and competition among leaders, as well as the attitude toward Beijing. As Xinjiang independence movement is not allowed in Kazakhstan, organizations acting within the limits of the current regime are primarily focusing on cultural and economic issues of Kazakhstani Uighurs. But some leaders' close relations with the Chinese authorities have provoked distrust and criticism against them. And yet, the community of Uighur activists and intelligentsia is quite small, and personal ties can often be found even among conflicting organizations. As with the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan, the Society of the Culture of Uighurs (SCU), headed by Farkhad Khasanov, is the only organization representing the Uighurs in the Assembly. Currently the RCCUK is seeking its official membership, in an attempt to replace the SCU.

### ***Underground Organizations***

Despite Beijing's apprehension that Kazakhstan might serve as a stronghold for the Xinjiang independence movement, the support provided by the Kazakhstani Uighurs is more moral than practical. Never-

36 Author's interview with the staff of the Republican Uighur Association of Manufacturers, Entrepreneurs, and Agricultural Workers, September 22, 2003.

37 Shardinov, Chairman of the Republican Cultural Center, is a member of the *Otan* party; Kuziev has joined the *Asar* party, headed by Dariga Nazarbaeva, daughter of President Nazarbaev.

theless, there are a few but vocal activists who openly demand Xinjiang's independence. Kakharman Khozamberdi has formed the People's Party of Uighurstan in September 2002; it declares in its platform that the "main purpose of the party is to contribute to the political struggle of our nation for the restoration of the sovereign, civic, and democratic state in its historic homeland (the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Province of the People's Republic of China)." At the same time, it stresses that "in its activities [the party] will use only political methods" and "decisively will condemn and expose all manifestations of terrorism, extremism, and religious fanaticism."<sup>38</sup> Its proclaimed moderateness notwithstanding, the People's Party of Uighurstan has no prospect of being registered under the Law on Political Parties that bans parties along ethnicity.<sup>39</sup>

The United National Revolution Front of Eastern Turkistan, headed by the deceased Iusupbek Mukhlishi<sup>40</sup> was allegedly willing to resort to force for the sake of national independence. With very few followers and limited financial resources, it appears that Mukhlishi did not have a real capability to carry out any armed struggle. However, his sensational statements and aggressive slogans, published in the local press and in his own newspaper *Voice of Eastern Turkistan*, created a negative image about the Uighur community and offer a pretext for the authorities of Kazakhstan, as well as China, to take suppressive measures against them.

In recent years, the Uighurs in Kazakhstan (and Central Asia as a whole) have been increasingly labeled as "extremists" or "terrorists," who are plotting armed struggles with an aim to build an Uighur state or an Islamic caliphate. An incident in September 2000 further intensified such prejudice against them. At the center of Almaty, four men (as to the citizenship and ethnicity among them, various sources gave different figures, but at least one of them was a Chinese citizen of Uighur ethnic-

38 "Narodnaia partiia 'Uighurstan': Sbornik dokumentov" (in Uighur and Russian), Almaty, 2003. I owe this document to Khozamberdi.

39 Under the 2002 Law on Political Parties, formation of parties based on "professional, racial, national (*natsional'naia*), ethnic (*etnicheskaia*), and religious affiliation of citizens" (Section 8, Article 5) are prohibited.

40 He died in August 2004.



## *Transnationalism As a Threat to State Security?*

ity), who allegedly had killed two personnel of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kazakhstan, were shot dead by the internal ministry's forces. After this, police searched houses in compact Uighur settlements, and took many Uighurs who had nothing to do with the incident to the police station for questioning. The mass media sensationally reported the incident as "Uighur extremism." My interviewees in Almaty complained that many Uighurs who had worked in the state sector lost their jobs after the incident. Dilbirim Samsakova, head of the *Nazugum* Foundation, who took in two children of a deceased suspect, was found dead in June 2001; the culprit is still at large.

Among the Uzbeks, there is no nationalist organization whose political agenda openly contradicts Kazakhstan's domestic or foreign policy. Meanwhile, Southern Kazakhstan has reportedly seen a rise of activities by banned religious movements such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, a movement seeking to create an Islamic state by political means. Some observers relate this not exclusively but primarily to the ethnic Uzbeks, both locals and those from Uzbekistan.<sup>41</sup> According to my informants, there indeed were relatively more Uzbeks who joined the ranks of Hizb ut-Tahrir, but currently they are not overrepresented.<sup>42</sup>

The two Muslim communities, in particular the Uighurs, are often blamed that they allegedly produce more "terrorists." The issues of Islamic and Uighur movements, however, have been politicized not so much by these communities as by the three states—Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and China—that view those movements as a serious threat to their security and overemphasize such threat.

## **Conclusion**

The cases of the Uzbeks and the Uighurs in Kazakhstan show that their transborder ethnic links with homelands have not challenged the existing border of the host state. The breakup of the Soviet Union made the Uzbeks in Kazakhstan a "real" ethnic minority who live in a host state

41 International Crisis Group, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir* (Osh and Brussels, 2003), p. 18.

42 Authors' interview in Turkestan, March 29, 2005.

and have a distinct kin state. Seemingly, this situation is likely to lead to conflict over territory in which a minority resides. However, the Uzbek community has never asked to revise the border so that their settlements are incorporated into Uzbekistan, nor did Uzbekistan make an irredentist claim. Disagreements over border delimitation and control between the two states notwithstanding, interethnic relations in the south of Kazakhstan generally remained stable. The Uzbeks are aware of more favorable economic and other conditions in the host state as compared to the kin state, and seem to enjoy certain advantage of being “stranded” in Kazakhstan.

By contrast, the Uighurs, after more than two decades of separation from their homeland, have been renewing ties with their ethnic kin since the late 1980s. The opening of the border has enabled exchange with co-ethnics on the other side of the border, which has led to the increase in China’s suspicion about their support for the Xinjiang independence movement. Close relations between the host state and the state ruling their historic homeland obviously have worked to Uighurs’ disadvantage; the two states are in agreement not to allow transnational Uighur ethnic movements to flourish. Although they wish to have their own state, the majority of the Uighurs do not support the idea of an independent Uighurstan for fear that such a demand would invite negative reactions from the host state.

Despite differences in the relationship with their homeland, the strategy taken by the two minorities focused here are quite similar. Their choice of such a strategy has been strongly influenced by Kazakhstan’s policy of control and cooption, which is only partially mentioned in this paper. Such discussions will be developed in a future study.