

Exile Island

Xinjiang Refugees and the “One China” Policy in Nationalist Taiwan, 1949–1971

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Introduction

Taiwan during the Cold War was a curious place. Living in uncomfortable proximity to one another were wistful ex-warlords who had once held authoritarian sway over Chinese provinces larger than most contemporary European states. Men who in previous decades had regularly plotted assassination attempts against one another now found themselves odd bedfellows in Taipei, equally bereft of their former glory and equally dependent on the charity of the Nationalist government. All told, approximately 1.5 million Chinese mainlanders fled to Taiwan after the Nationalists lost the civil war with the Communists in 1949. Among them were a substantial number of men who Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek preferred not join him on his isle of refuge: thousands of Nationalist Party pensioners in search of a comfortable retirement, but not of political reform. Such undesirables usually belonged to one of two categories: former autonomous warlords whose checkered pasts would not endear them to the Communists, or ambitious Nationalist eminences who had once challenged the Generalissimo himself for control of the party.¹

What these two groups of political exiles had in common was that they had all once contended for political supremacy in or around the Chinese heartland. Moreover, they nearly all identified themselves as belonging to the Han or Sino-Muslim (Hui) ethnic group. In stark contrast to the continued threat posed by such rivals, non-Han refugees hailing from the distant frontier—namely, Tibet and Xinjiang—were viewed in a different light.

1. On the number of mainlanders who relocated to Taiwan after 1949 and Chiang Kai-shek's views toward other Nationalist Party members who accompanied him, see Denny Roy, *Taiwan: A Political History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 76; and Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 428–430.

For the duration of the Republican era (1911–1949), neither the Nationalist government in Nanjing and Chongqing (1927–1949) nor its warlord predecessor regimes in Beijing (1916–1928) had ever exercised effective control over these two borderlands, which today constitute nearly one-third of China’s total sovereign territory. Despite the limited presence of central government authority in Tibet and Xinjiang prior to 1949, however, the Nationalist government took great pains while on the mainland to cultivate non-Han political talent in various organizations under its oversight, most notably within the Committee for Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs (*Meng Zang weiyuanhui*).

Xinjiang, distinguished from Tibet and Mongolia by both its provincial status and its thinly-spread Han administration, was unique among China’s borderlands. From its designation as a province in 1884 until the Communist takeover in 1949, it was the only predominantly non-Han region in which Han officials (and, later, Han warlords) actually exercised what many scholars would today classify as “colonial” rule. Though vastly outnumbered by Uighurs, Kazaks, Kyrgyz, Hui, and Mongols, who together comprised roughly 90 percent of the population, Han rulers in Xinjiang consistently maintained their position atop the ethnopolitical hierarchy, in spite of considerable mayhem wrought by Soviet designs on the province. Still, frequent political intrigues, combined with four dramatic shifts in the orientation of Han rule during the period from 1928 to 1944, produced their fair share of Uighur and Kazak outcasts in search of political refuge. Some fled to the Nationalist embrace in Nanjing, where they pursued a complex mix of ethnopolitical agendas. Among the most prominent of these were Isa Yusuf Alptekin, Mohammad Emin Bugra, and Yolbars Khan, all of whose careers spanned the 1949 divide.

Isa and Emin were Uighur intellectuals who, through Nationalist-funded periodicals in the 1930s and 1940s, advocated Han tolerance for Muslim and Turkic culture, while occasionally pushing the envelope for various forms of political autonomy in Xinjiang. They sat on Nationalist consultative committees, and their views were sometimes solicited on matters pertaining to the Nationalist posture toward various warlord regimes in Xinjiang. Once the Nationalist government obtained a fleeting measure of control in Xinjiang after 1944, both men were appointed to prominent spots in the provincial cabinet, serving as conspicuous emblems of Nationalist tolerance for ethnopolitical agendas different from the party’s own platform.² By contrast, Yolbars

2. Justin Jacobs, “Empire Besieged: The Preservation of Chinese Rule in Xinjiang, 1884–1971,” Ph.D. Diss., University of California, San Diego, 2011, pp. 385–481.

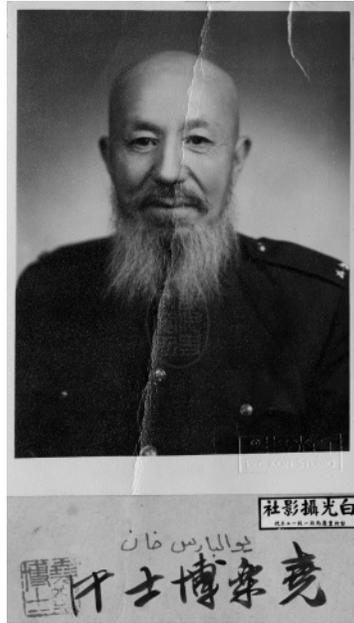


Image 1. Yolbars Khan, Governor of Xinjiang from Nationalist Taiwan, 1951–1971.

Source: Waijiaobu dang'an guan, Zhongyang yanjiuyuan (Taiwan), 119.51/0001, "Xinjiang xianfei qianhou qingxing baogao," p. 21. Reprinted with permission.



Image 2. Isa Yusuf Alptekin, c. 1948.

Source: John Hall Paxton Papers (MS 629), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Khan was a former *ordabegi* (major domo) of the hereditary king of the Hami khanate, a semi-autonomous entity in eastern Xinjiang historically oriented toward the Chinese central government. A veteran participant in more than a decade of high intrigue in Xinjiang, Yolbars was a political survivor whose reputation derived from his performance on the battlefield rather than editorials in the press. In 1937, Han warlord Sheng Shicai forced Yolbars out of Xinjiang, only to see him welcomed in prominent Nationalist offices in Nanjing and Chongqing. Like Isa and Emin, he took advantage of the Nationalist reentry to Xinjiang in 1944, quickly reclaiming his lost position and influence in Hami.

In September 1949, faced with the sudden surrender of Nationalist garrisons in Xinjiang, Isa, Emin, and Yolbars effectively lost their only patron. All three ultimately decided to make the difficult trek over the Himalayas to Kashmir or India. What unfolded next is a fascinating and heretofore unexplored chapter in the history of Cold War ethnopolitics, this time played out among the Xinjiang and Tibetan refugee communities across South Asia and the Middle East. This article discusses how Nationalist overtures to the Xinjiang refugee community after 1949 effectively undermined efforts by prominent Uighur intellectuals in exile to construct an alternative base of political dissent for Xinjiang (or “East Turkestan,” as they called it) modeled on what the Dalai Lama created for the Tibetan exile community in India. Using recently declassified Chinese, British, and U.S. archives, I also explore how Chiang Kai-shek, known for his steadfast advocacy of a “One China” policy that was explicitly designed to keep Taiwan rhetorically fused to the mainland, pursued a similar “One China” policy with respect to the non-Han borderlands of China. In essence, a study of Xinjiang refugee politics during the Cold War demonstrates that the geopolitical goals of both the Nationalist and the Communist Parties evinced a striking convergence, even though their ideological agendas remained fundamentally at odds.

A Cold War Scramble

In August 1947, the Soviet Union abruptly ordered the Chinese consulate in Semipalatinsk to shut its doors and cease operations. The Chinese ambassador in Moscow submitted a cryptic report on the situation. “Though their motives remain a mystery,” he wrote to Nanjing in November, “rumor has it that an earthquake is expected in the Kazak capital [of Almaty] sometime before 1950, and that there may be some relocation efforts. Thus it is possible that sensitive military or chemical installations will be transferred soon, and they do not want

foreigners to spy on them.”³ The ambassador’s reference to an “earthquake” may well have constituted a form of sensitive political doublespeak, particularly in light of what followed. Two years later, on 29 August 1949, the Soviet Union successfully tested its first nuclear bomb just outside the Kazak city of Semipalatinsk. Although Chinese diplomats were no longer stationed nearby to report on the matter, Douglas Mackiernan, a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operative based in neighboring Xinjiang, was able to determine, based on the atmospheric composition of prevailing winds, that a nuclear blast had indeed taken place somewhere north of the Caspian Sea.⁴

Less than a month after the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear bomb, a steady exodus of Nationalist officials and soldiers, along with more than 10,000 nervous Kazak nomads and various other Communist irreconcilables, streamed south toward the Himalayan passes, eager to exit the province before the arrival of the People’s Liberation Army. Those fortunate enough to flee on wheels were sped recklessly through local oases, plowing through donkeys and other livestock, whose intestines came to adorn the vehicles in macabre fashion. As the refugees neared Tibet, they abandoned the motorized transport and either struck out on foot or took mount, scaling snowy slopes in sub-zero temperatures. Pack animals slipped on a daily basis and fell to their demise, their splattered innards and mangled limbs traumatizing those who dared to look down. The elements were just as brutal, with lips and facial extremities peeling beyond all recognition. Numerous children froze to death, debilitating injuries were common, and few escaped chronic sickness. Some two to three months later, however, the survivors found themselves in Gilgit or Kalimpong, from which they proceeded to Srinagar or New Delhi, many panhandling to make ends meet.⁵ By 1952, some 2,300 Kazaks, 1,300 Uighurs, and several hundred Chinese refugees had managed to survive the flight into South Asia from Xinjiang.

As British and U.S. diplomats in New Delhi and Isfahan were soon to learn, many of these refugees carried fond memories of Mackiernan. Long an enigma, Mackiernan is now openly acknowledged as the name behind the first star on the Memorial Wall at Langley, having been shot and dismembered by Tibetan border guards in April 1950. “I knew Mackiernan very well, from the

3. Waijiaobu dang’an guan, Zhongyang yanjiuyuan (Taiwan) [Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Academia Sinica (Taiwan)], *yaxisi* [West Asia Division], file 110.11/0001, “Zhu Xie-mi lingguan chexiao” [Closure of the Semipalatinsk consulate], p. 45.

4. Thomas Laird, *Into Tibet: The CIA’s First Atomic Spy and His Secret Expedition to Lhasa* (New York: Grove Press, 2002), pp. 81–90.

5. Zhang Dajun, *Hengdu Kunlun san wan li* [Crossing the Kunlun Mountains at 30,000 *li*] (Xianggang: Yazhou chubanshe, 1954), pp. 44–45, 74–76, 86–87, 124.

time he was in charge of a small detachment of army meteorologists," recalled an assistant to J.C. Hutchison, the British Charge d'Affaires in Beijing, in 1950, "and always wondered why a man with his exceptional qualities stayed on in Urumchi after the end of the war."⁶ We now know why: from 1945 until his death five years later, Mackiernan evidently cultivated extensive ties with potential anti-Communist guerrillas, the most famous of which was Kazak chieftain Osman Batur, executed in 1951. The Chinese Communists were convinced that Mackiernan had spent his time dangling the prospect of significant U.S. aid to disaffected nomads in the event of World War III, and said as much in reams of post-1949 propaganda.⁷

With the benefit of archival hindsight, such charges are beginning to appear less and less outlandish. Upon arriving in Srinagar or New Delhi, prominent Uighur and Kazak refugees invariably asked U.S. and British visitors the same two questions. First, what had happened to their good friend Douglas Mackiernan? Second, when would World War III break out? Soon after Yolbars escaped, he was interviewed at the British embassy in New Delhi and indicated that he "has reconciled himself to awaiting hopeful developments, among which he seems (like so many other refugees) to include the possibility of a Third world war."⁸ Husayin Taiji, the head of some 300 Kazak refugees in Srinagar, revealed extensive prior contact with Mackiernan, as well as considerable apprehension over whether he could still gain leverage from the latter's investment in him. "I am very much eager to hear any news about Mr. Meckarneen who is, however, expected to have been settled down in the free world," he wrote to John Hall Paxton, the former U.S. consul in Urumchi, now posted to Isfahan.

I did my best to welcome and preceed [sic] him at Gas-kul, my dwelling place, where I got the chance to treat and entertain him for five months as my only guest I have ever had. I am still carrying his notes and an introduction as souvenir he had written for me. I would be thankful to you if you be kind enough to get me hear of him as soon as possible.⁹

6. "A Report on Conditions in Sinkiang Prepared by Mr. O. C. Ellis," 15 November 1950, in The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNAUK), Far Eastern Department, FO 171/92207, Enclosure 2, p. 2.

7. Justin Jacobs, "The Many Deaths of a Kazak Unaligned: Osman Batur, Chinese Decolonization, and the Nationalization of a Nomad," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 115, No. 5 (December 2010), pp. 1291–1314.

8. "Record of Interviews with General Yolbas Beg, former Governor of Hami in Sinkiang, at New Delhi," 3 April 1951, in TNAUK, Far Eastern Department, FO 171/92207.

9. "Letter from Husayin Tayji to Mr. J. Hall Paxton," 23 January 1952, in Office of Chinese Affairs, Department of State, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD, Record Group (RG) 59, Office of Chinese Affairs, file 350.4.

Just as the tragic fate of one past suitor came to light, however, another suitor quickly stepped in to fill his shoes. This was the Nationalist government in Taipei, which soon issued numerous invitations for Kazak and Uighur refugee leaders to relocate to Taiwan. Delilhan Haji, the son of the former Xinjiang Minister of Finance Janimhan, a Kazak chieftain executed by the Communists in 1951, relayed his invitation to sympathetic U.S. diplomats. Speaking in “a cultured and well-modulated voice” to those who visited his camp in Srinagar, Delilhan also sought advice from John Hall Paxton in Isfahan. “I received a letter from Formosa in which I have been invited to come to Formosa,” he informed Paxton in fluent English, adding that the Nationalists had already agreed to send him funds and a passport for the journey. “But I am afraid if I will go to Formosa, the Communists may reach there. Therefore I require your consultation whether I will go to Formosa or not.”¹⁰ Delilhan ultimately decided to remain in Srinagar, where he kept an open and sympathetic line of communication with Taipei. For Yolbars, however, who was then 63 years old and thus Delilhan’s senior by some four decades, the prospect of a comfortable sinecure on Taiwan was most appealing. During an interview with British diplomats in New Delhi, Yolbars “stated his intention of going first to Kashmir to see the Sinkiang refugees there and then of continuing to Formosa where he was proposing to tell Chiang-kai-Shek of his mistake in giving arms to the Commander-in-Chief of Singkiang . . . who surrendered to the Communists, when he might have given them to Yolbas who fought the Communists.”¹¹

Also frequent participants in such meetings were Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Mohammed Emin Bugra, both of whom ranked extremely high on the list of Xinjiang personages desired by the Nationalist government in Taiwan. However, neither man expressed any interest in relocating to Taipei and instead apparently spent the majority of time lobbying the Indian and Turkish governments to look after the welfare of the refugees in Kashmir. The most influential factor driving the various postures of Isa, Emin, and Yolbars toward Nationalist Taiwan appears to be found in their assessment of Xinjiang’s geopolitical future. “We understand,” wrote F. E. Cumming-Bruce, a British diplomat in the New Delhi embassy, “that whereas [Isa Yusuf] Aliptakin holds that an independent Turkestan is possible, Yolbas sees that such a state would be unable to withstand Soviet determination and that the only hope for Turkestan is to seek

10. “Notes on the Kazak refugees in Kashmir” and “Letter from General Dalil Khan Haji to J. Hall Paxton, February 2, 1952,” in NARA, RG 59, Office of Chinese Affairs, file 350.4.

11. “Record of Interviews with General Yolbas Beg,” in TNAUK, Far Eastern Department, FO 171/92207.

the protection of China, while endeavouring to secure the maximum degree of autonomy.”¹² As a result, the Nationalists were able to recruit only one of their four coveted personages to Taiwan (though Delilhan, from his base in Srinagar, later proved willing to make official appearances at the occasional political conference in Taipei).

The failure to convince either Isa or Emin to take up residence in Taiwan did not sit well with many of the Nationalist faithful in Taipei, some of whom were not enamored of the increasingly geriatric Yolbars. Isa and Emin were learned, cosmopolitan Uighurs, in the prime of their careers, respected throughout the Muslim world, and thoroughly versed in the power of propaganda. By contrast, Yolbars was a product of the battlefield, and a parochial one at that. He had never before set a single foot outside China. Furthermore, his well-known loyalty to the Nationalist government made his recruitment to Taiwan something less than a public relations coup. Many would figure that of course someone like him would work for the Nationalists. His former employer, the Hami khanate, had always maintained a cozy relationship with the Chinese central government. By contrast, luring to Taiwan either Isa or Emin—men long at odds with Chinese claims on Xinjiang—would have allowed the Nationalists to parlay their recruitment into a substantial amount of political capital among Xinjiang refugees abroad.

The determination of some top Nationalist officials in Taiwan to pursue an alternative to Yolbars persisted well into the 1950s, many years after the one-time *ordabegi* of the Hami khanate first set foot on the island. In November 1953, K. L. Rankin, the U.S. ambassador in Taipei, solicited the views of Foreign Minister George Yeh (Ye Gongchao) regarding future Nationalist policy toward the non-Han borderlands, should the government one day succeed in retaking the mainland. Yeh spoke scornfully about Yolbars, calling him “ridiculous,” “illiterate,” and a “drag on the situation.” Most importantly, Yeh charged,

he is quite unacceptable to Mehmet Emin BUGRA and Isa Yusuf ALPTEKIN, whom Dr. Yeh regards as among the real leaders of the Sinkiang people—despite their unfriendly attitude towards the Chinese Government. Dr. Yeh wished that these two men would come to Taipei but declared that, owing to Yalpus Khan’s being here (and to other reasons), they would not come here.¹³

12. “Record of Interviews with General Yolbas Beg,” in TNAUK, Far Eastern Department, FO 171/92207.

13. K.L. Rankin to Walter P. McConaughy, 5 November 1953, in NARA, RG 59, Office of Chinese Affairs, file 350.4.

Yeh's allegations—several of which were questionable—nonetheless reflected the views of an influential faction within the Nationalist Party. The following year, Chu Chia-hua, the head of the prestigious Academia Sinica, published a series of letters he exchanged with Mohammed Emin Bugra, in which he continued to implore his “misinformed” Uighur friend to take up residence on Taiwan, all the while somehow managing to avoid even a single reference to Yolbars, who by then had already been “governor” for three years.¹⁴

The political battles among Xinjiang exiles were so contentious because so few of them had the political clout and patronage networks necessary to serve as a convincing representative for the province. Of the five former governors of Xinjiang who were still alive in 1950, two (Zhang Zhizhong and Burhan Shahidi) had defected to the Communists, one (Masud Sabri) was waiting to die in a Communist jail, and two (Wu Zhongxin and Sheng Shicai) had fled to Taiwan. Unfortunately for the Nationalists, the two ex-governors who had chosen to seek refuge in Taiwan were both ethnic Han. Quite apart from the obligation, ubiquitous in the age of decolonization, to elevate “indigenous” politicians to positions of conspicuous authority, both Wu and Sheng were effectively barred from participation in Xinjiang refugee politics for reasons entirely unrelated to their ethnicity. Wu Zhongxin, governor for two years dating from late 1944, was an implacable foe of both Isa and Emin, having long viewed them as “ambitious careerists” who had shrewdly played the race card to advance a separatist platform from within the Party.¹⁵ As a result, if the goal was to lure Isa and Emin to Taiwan, Wu would be useless.

That left Sheng Shicai. Familiar to historians of the Cold War as a chameleon-like warlord of the 1930s, Sheng's collaborative book with political scientist Allen S. Whiting, *Sinkiang: Pawn or Pivot?* (1958), has long been a staple of the literature on Sino-Soviet relations. The obligations of national determination notwithstanding, there is no reason an “enlightened” Han official could not play some substantive role on behalf of Chinese claims on Xinjiang, as ex-governor Zhang Zhizhong continued to do for the Communists after 1949. Sheng, for his part, had once been considered among the most “enlightened” of any Han official who had ever set foot in Xinjiang, having developed and sponsored numerous institutions of Soviet-style affirmative action during his eleven-year tenure as *duban*. That, of course, was all before 1937, when Sheng began to purge nearly everyone he had briefly enfranchised. Later estimates put the number of executions in Urumchi alone at 14,000, with a total

14. Chu Chia-hua, *Taiwan and Sinkiang (Formosa and Chinese Turkistan)* (Taipei: Chinese Association for the United Nations, 1954).

15. Jacobs, “Empire Besieged,” pp. 385–429.

estimate of nearly 80,000 people imprisoned.¹⁶ Yolbars, in particular, dated his first period of exile from Xinjiang to Sheng’s attempts to kill him in the mid-1930s, and the two men must have taken strict pains to avoid each other at Nationalist Party gatherings in Taipei. Former U.S. consul John Paxton, during a visit to Hami in 1948, noted how Yolbars “continued throughout to extol the Chinese Government of the province since the overthrow of Sheng, for whom, alone of Chinese, Yolbars had no good word.”¹⁷

Even for those more concerned about placating Emin and Isa rather than Yolbars, General Sheng was anathema. In the chaos of 1949, when eleven members of Sheng’s extended family were brutally murdered as part of a revenge plot, Isa made a special trip to Lanzhou to console the perpetrators—recast in his account as “heroes”—and lobbied for clemency in the courts.¹⁸ Throughout his remaining years on the mainland and well into the 1950s on Taiwan, Sheng grew accustomed to calls for justice whenever he attended a party conference. By the late 1950s, the uproar over Sheng’s lack of accountability reached a peak, and some people suggested that he should “commit suicide in order to appease Heaven.”¹⁹ It was only the personal intervention of the Generalissimo himself that insulated Sheng from his detractors. After working with Whiting in 1958, Sheng promptly dropped out of public life, changed his name, and began to carry a revolver everywhere he went, supporting himself on the 50,000 taels of gold he had siphoned off from Xinjiang’s coffers two decades earlier. For such a man, there was no public or private role possible within the Xinjiang exile community, and Sheng appears to have limited himself to occasional consulting work for those in government or the media who wanted to understand the historical context of Soviet designs on Xinjiang.²⁰

All of the above did not constitute an auspicious beginning for the borderland posture of the new regime on Taiwan. The Nationalists ultimately managed to procure only one aging Uighur dignitary, whose degree of literacy was dubious and whose loyalty had never been in question. Optimists within

16. Gansu sheng guji wenxian zhengli bianyi zhongxin, ed., *Zhongguo xibei wenxian congshu, er bian* [Collection of documents relating to northwest China, Series Two], Vol. 11 (Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 2006), p. 508; and Vol. 10, p. 678.

17. “Travels in Southern and Eastern Sinkiang,” 20 September 1948, NARA, RG 59, Office of Chinese Affairs, Sinkiang file 893.00.

18. Ma Zhiyong, “Xinjiang junfa Sheng Shicai yuefu yijia bei sha zhi mi” [The mysterious case of the murder of Xinjiang warlord Sheng Shicai’s father-in-law and his entire family], *Wenshi tiandi*, Vol. 9 (2008), pp. 26–30.

19. Zhang Murong, “Li jiang hou de ‘Xinjiang wang’ Sheng Shicai” [The life of “Xinjiang king” Sheng Shicai after leaving Xinjiang], *Wenshi chungkuo*, Vol. 11 (2003), pp. 47–48.

20. For a complete account of the afterlife of Sheng Shicai, see Jacobs, “Empire Besieged,” pp. 380–384.

the party might also point to the tacit support of a young Kazak general in Srinagar, Delilhan, who looked upon a veteran man-of-arms like Yolbars with reverence. Pessimists, however, could have noted Isa's and Emin's considerable head start in the cultivation of refugee loyalties in Kashmir, as well as their extensive prior contacts throughout the Muslim world. How were Yolbars and Delilhan going to compete against such savvy globetrotters, now free to broadcast their jaundiced views of Chinese rule in Xinjiang to Muslim audiences throughout the world?

Recruiting Kazaks

Once settled in Taiwan, Yolbars received for his daily paperwork a Nationalist government seal demonstrably out of place in tropical Taiwan: Office for the Chairman of the Xinjiang Provincial Government (*Xinjiang sheng zhengfu zhuxi bangongchu*). This was a special office reserved specifically for the chairman (governor) of Xinjiang alone, bereft of any claim to actual territorial administration. Three other provincial administrations operated by the Nationalists after 1949—those of Taiwan, Fujian, and, briefly, Yunnan—all retained a living tax base and tangible clumps of land to look after.²¹ Not so in the case of Xinjiang. The *raison d'être* for this office derived entirely from its symbolic power. By 1951, the dramatic plight of Uighur and Kazak refugees had caught the attention of Western media, culminating first in a lengthy *National Geographic* magazine spread, and later in a highly embellished novelistic treatment, *Kazak Exodus*.²² “The world is looking at developments in Xinjiang very closely,” a planning committee on Taiwan observed. It was Yolbars's job to ensure that whenever the global spotlight was focused on Xinjiang, the Nationalists came out the better for it.

He began by sizing up his competition. The archival record in Taiwan begins in 1952, with letters to and from Isa and Emin, who by this point had left South Asia and relocated to Turkey. The extant missives, written in Uighur and translated into Chinese by Yolbars or his secretary, strain to maintain a façade of civility. “I served in the central government for thirteen years,” Isa wrote to Yolbars in December. “Thinking back on it now, I accomplished

21. In the case of Fujian this meant only a handful of offshore islands, and in the case of Yunnan it was limited to jurisdiction claimed by the defeated Nationalist general Li Mi in Burma.

22. Milton J. Clark, “How the Kazaks Fled to Freedom,” *National Geographic Magazine*, Vol. 106, No. 5 (1954), pp. 621–644; Godfrey Lias, “Kazak Nomads' Struggle against Communists,” *The Times* (London), 17–18 February 1955, p. 7; and Godfrey Lias, *Kazak Exodus* (London: Evans Bros., 1956).

absolutely nothing. It was all a waste of time. In the formulation of policy, the government never once consulted us, and it never adopted a single piece of our advice.” Embittered by the glass ceiling experienced by non-Han figures such as himself within the Nationalist government, Isa used his correspondence with Yolbars as an opportunity to vent his feelings of dissatisfaction at Han rule in Xinjiang: “If I go to Taiwan, won’t it be just like before? It is enough that you are there. Until I finish my work abroad, and until the central government recognizes our achievements, there is nothing for me to do in Taiwan. It is better for me to stay here.”²³

“Here” was Istanbul. As it turned out, in the first few years after 1949, Isa and Emin had been quite the industrious exiles. When they were not shuttling between New Delhi and Kashmir, they were crisscrossing the Middle East on fundraising tours among Xinjiang refugee communities from an earlier era, when Sheng Shicai had taken aim at his province’s Kazaks. One goldmine was Saudi Arabia, where some 8,000 refugees had long since integrated into local society and were eager to donate to Isa’s and Emin’s cause. In 1951 alone, Yolbars learned, Emin had collected \$6,000 in Saudi Arabia and an additional \$2,000 in Egypt, where the local press referred to him as the former “Governor of Turkestan.”²⁴ The funds were intended to help relocate several thousand Kazak refugees in Kashmir to Turkey as well as publish anti-Communist propaganda from their new offices in Istanbul.²⁵ Isa and Emin knew that if they wanted to speak for Xinjiang in the non-Communist world, they needed a Xinjiang constituency that would lend legitimacy to their words. Turkey, as the only Turkic-speaking nation not under Communist rule, fit the bill. Working tirelessly with representatives from multiple governments and charity organizations, Isa and Emin ultimately succeeded in securing asylum in Turkey for 1,734 Kazaks, along with several hundred Uighurs. The former settled in rural Anatolia, the latter in Istanbul.²⁶

By the time Yolbars got his office in Taiwan up and running, Isa’s and Emin’s resettlement plans for Turkey were nearly complete. Nevertheless, Yolbars still sent out feelers to the refugees, ensuring that some funds from the Association for Mainland Refugee Assistance (*zhongguo dalu zaibao jiuji zonghui*) were redirected to Kashmir, and dangling the prospect of resettlement

23. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 109/0005, “Xinjiang nanmin yiju Tu-er-qi” [Xinjiang refugees relocate to Turkey], p. 108.

24. “Governor of Turkestan Has Escaped from Russia and Arrived in Cairo,” 4 November 1953, in TNAUK, Far Eastern Department, FO 371/106523.

25. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 109/0005, pp. 113–118, 239–242.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 227–235.

in Taiwan. Upon learning of the proposal to send Kazak nomads to a tropical island, a British clerk in India recorded a caustic observation: “The idea of sending Kazaks to Formosa seems fantastic.” Nevertheless, Yolbars was determined to make up for lost time, and in three years from 1951 to 1953, he managed to direct US \$16,000 to the refugees in Kashmir.²⁷ Two of them, Kali Beg and Hamza, duly began to parrot the rhetoric of the Nationalist government. Noting that 176 Kazaks and 13 Uighurs had already left for Turkey, Kali Beg announced that the remainder of his band, some 180 Kazaks, “swore an oath to remain behind in Kashmir and await orders to invade Xinjiang and eliminate the Communist bandits. We are loyal to party and state and will follow the blue sky and white sun flag as we march forward.”²⁸ Unbeknownst to Yolbars, however, these two Kazak chieftains had also been in touch with U.S. and British authorities and seemed to be soliciting anyone with deep pockets.²⁹ In early 1952, Paxton, from his office in Isfahan, felt inspired to send a personal check for almost \$300 to the same Kali Beg and Hamza. “We have the pleasure to inform you that this amount was equally distributed by us amongst ourselves,” Kali Beg wrote back in March. “So please accept our heartfelt thanks for this aid especially from the refugees of Kazaks 340 in number.”³⁰

At the same time that Yolbars and Kali Beg were exchanging letters, representatives from the Communist government on the mainland approached a large group of Kazak refugees in Pakistan. After a month of free banquets and regular allowances paid out in Soviet rubles, a deep split emerged. Some of the refugees returned to the mainland by sea, whereas others were persuaded to go back across the Himalayas on their own initiative. Isa, alarmed by the sudden overtures from Beijing and Taipei, attempted to rein in Kali Beg. “The Turkish government has recently sent representatives to agitate among us, and they are inviting us to go to Turkey,” Kali Beg informed Yolbars, referring to Isa’s and Emin’s activities in Istanbul. “But I was resolute and told them that my government is the Nationalist government, and that I will always be a citizen of the Republic of China.” By late 1953, however, the allure of the resettlement deal in Turkey, brokered almost entirely by Isa and Emin, proved

27. “Kazak Refugees,” 12 October 1951, in TNAUK, Far Eastern Department, FO 371/92897; and “Letter from Orville L. Bennett to Dr. George A. Fitch,” 24 March 1955, Office for Refugees, Migration, and Voluntary Assistance, NARA.

28. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 109/0005, pp. 129–130.

29. Godfrey Lias conveyed their overtures to Winston Churchill in *Kazak Exodus*, p. 229.

30. “Letter from Kali Beg and Hamza to J. Hall Paxton,” 13 March 1952, NARA, Records of the Office of Chinese Affairs, #6p Sinkiang. I am indebted to Charles Kraus, whose prior research in these archives first alerted me to the existence of the documents.

too much for the destitute refugees to turn down. Only Kali Beg and a hundred of his followers remained behind, in a final bid for Nationalist largesse. “People from Xinjiang are scattered throughout many Muslim countries now,” Kali Beg wrote. “If the central government ignores us, it will have a negative impact on foreign relations with the Muslim countries of the Middle East, and they will begin to suspect that the government looks down on the weak peoples of the world.”³¹

Yet news of the resettlement of 1,734 refugees to Turkey had severely undermined Kali Beg’s declarations of loyalty to the Nationalist government in Taiwan, which in turn undermined Yolbars’s efforts to lobby on their behalf. “In light of current financial difficulties,” the Executive Yuan in Taiwan announced soon after hearing of the resettlement in Anatolia, “it will no longer be possible to provide relief funds to Xinjiang refugees in India and Pakistan. At this time of hardship, we hope our compatriots will be able to cultivate a spirit of ‘overcoming all hardship’ and look after their own provisions.” Although Yolbars scrambled to come up with a formal blueprint to bring Kali Beg and his followers to Taiwan, the anticipated price tag (\$30,000) for their relocation was seen as too high to justify the benefits that might accrue from such publicity. Instead, the Nationalist government decided—quite optimistically—that it could try to work through Isa and Emin as liaisons and attempt to foster symbolic declarations of loyalty from among the resettled refugees.³² Unwilling to admit that Isa and Emin had “won” the opening round of Xinjiang refugee politics, certain voices within the Nationalist Party, such as Foreign Minister Yeh, instead took to blaming Yolbars for the exodus of nearly 2,000 Kazaks—former citizens of the Republic of China—to Turkey.

The Rift

The idea that the Nationalist government could simply work through Isa and Emin was based on a faulty assumption: namely, that the interest was mutual. Once the refugees were settled in Turkey and the prospect of additional aid from Taiwan diminished, however, serious doubts began to surface. “Of course we are extremely excited about news of an impending counterattack

31. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 109/0005, pp. 110, 171, 175–180.

32. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 152.11/0048, “Xinjiang sheng zhengfu ji Zhongguo huijiao xiehui zhi guomin waijiao huodong” [Foreign relations activities of the Xinjiang Provincial Government and the Chinese Muslim Association], p. 30; and Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 109/0005, pp. 216–219, 229, 246–247, 256.

on the mainland,” Emin wrote to Yolbars in February 1953. “But never once did we receive a clear indication of what the government’s position will be regarding Xinjiang.” To facilitate preparations for the retaking of the mainland, Emin demanded that Taipei issue a clear statement regarding its “attitude” toward Xinjiang. “If the government insists on being as stubborn as before and continues to view Xinjiang as an inseparable province of China,” he added, “then I assure you that the disputes and disagreements will never end.” Yolbars countered with vague assurances. “As far as I know, the government plans to respect the opinions of local figures and implement regional autonomy.” He then cautioned Emin not to let his political ambitions cloud his practical judgment. “You are an old veteran cadre of the party,” he wrote, “and you have served the central government for a long time now. You have studied the dictates of our late Premier [Sun Yat-sen] and know what the fundamental policies of the party are. Surely you do not harbor any misconceptions on that front.” Instead, Yolbars tried to focus all attention on the Communist threat to their homeland. “Mutual suspicions and individual pursuits will serve only to divide our strength.”³³

Nevertheless, the rift was clear, and Yolbars was quick to remind his detractors of Emin’s continued intransigence. Just three months after this exchange, Yolbars submitted a comprehensive plan to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Taipei to raise Taiwan’s profile in the Middle East. He blamed the “conspiracy of Emin” for the fact that “two thousand of our Kazak compatriots were seduced into adopting Turkish citizenship,” and elsewhere he referred to “selfish and scheming individuals like Emin and Isa.” To make matters worse, Beijing had begun to send formal Muslim diplomatic delegations to the Middle East, an initiative that dovetailed with its interest in the refugees still living in Pakistan. In response, Yolbars proposed a detailed list of countermeasures. He suggested bringing some of the refugees from Turkey to study in schools on Taiwan, staffing Nationalist embassies abroad with Muslim personnel, sending an annual delegation to the World Muslim Council, and participating in the *hajj* to Mecca. This last proposal met with enthusiasm, and plans got underway to organize a pilgrimage to Mecca the following year. Yolbars himself would headline the delegation. In the meantime, in January 1954, Emin and his wife paid a visit to the Nationalist embassy in Ankara, not realizing that Yolbars had been forwarding his letters up the Nationalist chain of command. Much to Emin’s surprise, the ambassador lashed out at him for “advocating Xinjiang independence and separation from the Republic of China.” In no

33. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 109/0005, pp. 109, 120–121.

uncertain terms, Emin was told that “the central government will never grant you independence” and that “bad things” would happen to him if he continued “pursuing such proposals abroad.” Although the ambassador still forwarded Emin’s request for \$400 to Taipei, it was now clear that any further largesse would come with tight strings attached.³⁴

On 17 July 1954, with tensions running high, Yolbars, his son, and three other prominent Chinese Muslims boarded a plane for Egypt. Although the Nationalist press touted this *hajj* delegation as an opportunity to win over Middle Eastern leaders, the real goal was to bring Isa and Emin to heel. Chiang Kai-shek approved additional relief funds for distribution among Xinjiang refugees, and Yolbars vowed to convince Isa and Emin to relocate to Taiwan.³⁵ On 26 July, the long-awaited reunion took place in Cairo. Yolbars handed Isa a goodwill gift of \$2,000 and asked him to come to Taiwan. According to Yolbars, Isa countered with a request for another \$10,000 as a Nationalist show of faith in his cause. Yolbars must have demurred and thereby sparked a bitter rift. “The government has never trusted me,” Isa said, “instead giving power to Zhang Zhizhong, Masud, and finally Burhan [i.e., the last three governors of Xinjiang]. Although I once received the post of secretary, even then the government did not trust me.” Five years later, Isa was still smarting from an incident with Nationalist border guards in 1949 who had apparently detained and roughed him up as he tried to flee the province. He now realized that his service for the Nationalists in Xinjiang a decade earlier had all been a charade and that Chiang Kai-shek had simply used him as a rhetorical counterweight to a Soviet puppet government in the northern districts of the province. “The government fanned my hatred for Communism and the Soviet Union but then let Xinjiang fall into their very hands. As a result, untold numbers of anti-Communist youth were slaughtered and thousands of refugees fled abroad. The government cannot shirk responsibility for this tragedy.”³⁶

Yolbars appears to have been taken aback by Isa’s tirade, for his account contains no indication of a rebuttal. Two weeks later, they met again in Mina, a town just outside Mecca. This time Isa showed up with a group of partisan refugees in tow. They immediately put Yolbars on the defensive. “We hear

34. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 152.11/0048, pp. 21–22; Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 109/0005, pp. 226, 239–242; and “Letter from Yolbars Khan to Mr. George Fitch, Far East Director of the Committee to Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals (July 1955),” in NARA, RG 59, Office of Chinese Affairs, #6p Sinkiang.

35. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 105.22/0005, “Juyu feibang chaosheng tuanti qianzheng; zhu Sha dashiguan zhoubao” [Refusal to issue visas for the bandit *hajj* group; weekly reports of our ambassador in Saudi Arabia], pp. 89–90, 95–96, 110, 119.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 157–158.

that you are destitute in Taiwan and have had to borrow money to make ends meet,” Yolbars later recounted them as saying. “If you like, you can remain here with us and we will make sure that all of your living expenses are met. Rest assured that we have the means to take care of you.” In addition, they blamed the loss of Xinjiang on the Nationalist failure to grant high-level autonomy to the province. This time, however, Yolbars evidently came better prepared. “It is inappropriate to raise words of accusation at this time and place,” he countered. “Unless we succeed in our goal of retaking the mainland, all talk of other matters is nothing more than hot air.” If they wanted high-level autonomy in Xinjiang, he said, they would have to earn it by deeds, not words. “I obtained my current titles as Governor and Commander of Xinjiang Pacification neither before the loss of Xinjiang nor after arriving in Taiwan,” he explained. “They were bestowed on me while I was in the mountains waging war on the Communists.” If Isa wanted an official statement on high-level autonomy or independence for Xinjiang, Yolbars suggested, then he and the refugees would first have to unite with the Nationalist government on Taiwan and work together for the liberation of the mainland.³⁷

In the evening Isa returned for a third meeting. Yolbars, fed up with his intransigence, did not even bother to record a detailed set of minutes for the occasion, noting merely that he “again complained about the government’s lack of trust in him and revisited his abuse at the hands of the border patrol officer” in 1949. When Yolbars visited Isa at his lodgings the next day, he found 60 refugees waiting for him. They must have had some choice words for him, for Yolbars immediately launched into a spirited defense of his past. “When Sheng Shicai leaned toward the Soviets and united with the Comintern [Communist International],” Yolbars said, referring to warlord politics of the 1930s,

I fled to the central government and met high-ranking officials on Isa’s introduction. The details of my service in the central government are well known to Isa and he can vouch for me. I have never been bought off by the Han and I am certainly not their running dog. Isa is in attendance here today. Go ahead and ask him whether or not this is true.

One month later, after returning to Taiwan, Yolbars hurried to debrief Chiang Kai-shek. His conclusion was decidedly pessimistic. The goal of “preventing Isa and Emin from being used by others” would prove “very difficult to meet,” he wrote. From four heated meetings in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, two things had become clear. First, Isa’s and Emin’s “true colors” had emerged: they were

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 158–159.

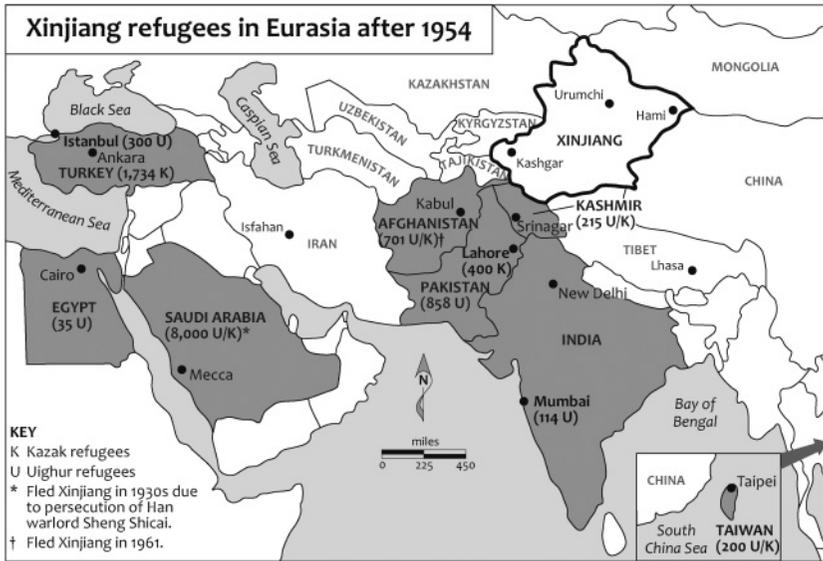
now hostile to Han rule in general, be it in Nationalist or Communist guise. Second, Xinjiang refugees throughout the Middle East were fast falling under their wing, imbibing a narrative of ethnic conflict that obscured the many contributions Isa and Emin had once made to the stabilization of Han rule in Xinjiang.³⁸

Faced with a propaganda war on two fronts, Yolbars got to work. He renewed his correspondence with Kali Beg in Turkey, and through him learned of other former nomads in rural Anatolia who were either unhappy with the life of a farmer, annoyed at Isa and Emin, or both. Working through the Nationalist embassy in Ankara, Yolbars extended an offer of free university education for any disaffected refugees, provided they were willing to study in Taiwan. Among the hundred or so volunteers was Kali Beg's own son. At the same time, Yolbars petitioned George Yeh, the Nationalist minister of foreign affairs, to build a new mosque in Taipei, in hopes of making a positive impression on visiting Muslim dignitaries. The *hajj* trips to Mecca became a near-annual occurrence, although poor health and advanced age precluded Yolbars's inclusion. As for the rift with Isa and Emin, Nationalist authorities simply acted as though nothing was amiss, continuing in the press to claim both men as allies. They combined their public silence on the "East Turkestan" issue with a slew of new propaganda from Yolbars's office, including *Frontier Culture* (*bianjiang wenhua*), a monthly pictorial highlighting Uighur, Kazak, and Mongol loyalty to the Republic of China.³⁹

The publication of *Frontier Culture* in October 1955 coincided with the designation by Beijing of Xinjiang province as a "Uighur Autonomous Region." This move emulated the rhetorical forms of Soviet affirmative action policies while sidestepping the more drastic institutional changes mandated by a federation of theoretically equal republics. It was also an indication that the Chinese Communists now felt secure enough on the borderlands to risk a display of political concessions without fear that they would actually be called on to concede them. If Yolbars understood what the mainlanders were up to, his pronouncements in the press gave no indication of it. He went on public record denouncing the move as a "stepping stone" to formal annexation of Xinjiang by the Soviet Union and claimed that Moscow had succeeded

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 159–160.

39. Waijiaobu dang'an guan (Taiwan), file 109/005, pp. 246–247, 251–253; Waijiaobu dang'an guan (Taiwan), file 112.22/0003, "Tu-er-qi jizhe fang Tai; lü Tu-er-qi huaqiao fang Tai; lü Ba-ji-si-tan huaqiao Sha-bu-lei; Ai-sha zhangzi Mu-la-de fang Hua; Zhong Tu youhao xiehui" [Turkish reporters visit Taiwan; overseas Chinese in Turkey visit Taiwan; Shabula, overseas Chinese in Pakistan; Isa's oldest son Murad visits China; the Sino-Turkish Friendship Association], pp. 28–31; and Waijiaobu dang'an guan (Taiwan), file 152.11/0048, pp. 111–114.



Sources: Letter from Yolbars Khan to Mr. George Fitch, Far East Director of the Committee to Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals, July 1955, in U.S. Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs, Records of the Office of Chinese Affairs, #6p Sinkiang, NARA; and various British and Nationalist Chinese archival documents. Cartography by Debbie Newell.

in “swallowing up” China’s northwestern province. Aware only of Beijing’s rhetoric but lacking eyes on the ground, Yolbars may actually have believed his colleagues’ claims that Beijing “had to satisfy its master in the Kremlin.” The Nationalist Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, was less quick to jump to conclusions. After a thorough examination of an atlas recently published on the mainland, one official observed that “Yining, Tacheng, and Altay [cities in Xinjiang] are all still present on the bandits’ map.” This official, thinking that perhaps Yolbars had based his comments on dubious intelligence gleaned from refugees, concluded that the comments in the press by Yolbars and other Nationalist officials were hyperbolic and that Xinjiang had not been “swallowed up” by Moscow. “Although Soviet ambitions in northern Xinjiang are well known,” he wrote, “even the Communist bandits would not lightly give away a chunk of our national territory.”⁴⁰

40. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 152.11/0048, pp. 186–193; and Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 119.5/0001, p. 228.

This uncompromising aspiration for political and national sovereignty, a goal shared by Chinese Communists and Nationalists alike, is what ultimately determined the fate of Chinese border politics during the Cold War. Neither Chiang Kai-shek nor Mao Zedong would willingly countenance the separatist activities of non-Han actors, be they in Turkey or Tibet. During the 1959 Tibetan uprising against the Communist government, Chiang, while eager to exploit the revolt for his own aims, was unable to bring himself to support the goals of the rebels.⁴¹ To do so would be anathema to the ideal of national unity. The same was true of Xinjiang. In July 1956, after Yolbars issued a comprehensive report on the activities of Isa, Emin, and the Chinese Communists in Middle Eastern countries, he made the following assessment. "Taking advantage of their physical proximity, [Isa and Emin] frequently lure [the refugees] with promises of gain, threatening and cajoling them with considerable skill. From their bases of operation in Istanbul and Cairo, they publish journals and magazines, thereby swaying hearts and minds and influencing international opinion." The implications for Nationalist policies on Xinjiang were clear. "We should worry more about these activities than about those of the Communist bandits."⁴²

Thus, the threat of ethnic separatism was deemed of far greater import than a Communist regime committed to the protection of China's national sovereignty. To be sure, Yolbars kept meticulous tabs on the many cultural and religious delegations sent by the mainland to various Middle Eastern countries, and he often noted the participation of "the traitor Burhan," the Tatar governor of Communist Xinjiang. But these reports quickly became routine and did not raise eyebrows. Far more worrisome were indications that Xinjiang refugees in Turkey were lending a willing ear to the increasingly hostile ethnic rhetoric of Isa and Emin, who now ran the East Turkestan Refugee Association in Istanbul. These shifting dynamics were apparent in a letter sent to Yolbars in 1958 by a Uighur man named Wahad. Once a lieutenant-colonel in the Nationalist army in Xinjiang in the 1940s, Wahad fled in 1949 to Istanbul, where he came in touch with the refugee community led by Isa and Emin. In 1957, he wrote a letter to Chiang Kai-shek requesting a military pension.

41. On pp. 505–506 of *The Generalissimo*, Jay Taylor writes that Chiang "came close to saying he would recognize Tibetan independence, declaring that the Tibetan people should have the right to determine their own future." It is important to note, however, that he did not, in the end, recognize Tibetan independence. This statement is well within the bounds of standard Nationalist rhetoric on the non-Han borderlands in the 1940s, which projected a future democratic administration for all regions and provinces throughout China, in which people would "determine their own future" as a constituent provincial or regional unit of the republic.

42. Waijiaobu dang'an guan (Taiwan), file 152.11/0048, p. 124.

His plea apparently fell on deaf ears, for the following year he wrote a letter to Yolbars that was filled with strident ethnic rhetoric. “It is very difficult to get one’s debts back from the Han,” he wrote. “Unless you slit their throats you can’t get anything.” Referring to the Chinese staff at the Nationalist embassy in Ankara as “authoritarian Han,” he lambasted the “many excuses they have for why they cannot help a Uighur compatriot.” But the Han themselves, he continued, “have tons of money, travel to all the gorgeous places in the world, and live in beautiful Western houses.” Seeing violence as a means to press his claim for a military pension, Wahad stated his intention to murder an embassy employee. “Maybe if I do this, I can knock some sense into the Han.” He signed off with a declaration that “it will be my glory to dispatch of such an enemy.”⁴³

Wahad’s letter obviously did not elicit much sympathy in Taiwan. Yet it must have been unsettling to see a former lieutenant-colonel in the Nationalist army transformed into a hate-spouting proponent of ethnic violence. Wahad, as it later turned out, had not even been conscripted into the military. He had joined voluntarily and then graduated from infantry school. His subsequent rise to a position of leadership indicates a significant degree of ideological indoctrination. This is apparent in the path of his retreat from Xinjiang in 1949. Instead of crossing the Himalayas with Isa, Emin, or even Nationalist armies composed of Han, he retreated first to inner China, eventually exiting through Guangzhou and Hong Kong. This was a loyal Uighur who had repeatedly risked his life for the Nationalist cause. Once he arrived in Istanbul, however, he found a close-knit Uighur community numbering in the hundreds, and it would have been difficult for him to remain aloof from the orbit of Isa and Emin, if only because of the indispensability of their services in navigating the Turkish immigration bureaucracy. The lesson for Yolbars and the Nationalist government on Taiwan was clear: without vigorous countermeasures in relief funds, education, and propaganda, Xinjiang refugees throughout the Middle East would eventually begin to parrot the anti-Chinese rhetoric of Isa and Emin.

Round Two

Despite the insinuations of Isa’s refugees in Mecca, Yolbars appeared to be doing quite well for himself on Taiwan. In 1966, the *Lianhe bao* reported that

43. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 107/0001, “Tu-er-qi renwu zhi; Xinjiang ji Wa-he-de shengqing zhengjian; Xinjiang ji Su-dan shengqing zhengjian; Xinjiang ji Pa-la-ti xueli shengqing zhengjian” [A summary of important Turkish figures; application materials of Xinjiang resident Wahad; application materials of Xinjiang resident Sudan; application materials and academic history of Xinjiang resident Palat], pp. 61, 107–109.

a thief had broken into his home and stolen 200,000 yuan worth of jewelry and other valuables, suggesting a life of considerable wealth and privilege. Most of the stolen baubles belonged to his wife, Liu Shujing, a Han woman from Sichuan 38 years his junior. They had married in 1951 after the death of Yolbars’s previous wife (also a Han woman from Sichuan) during their arduous trek through Tibet.⁴⁴ Yet Yolbars, now entering his seventh decade, began to feel the effects of age, and was often confined to his desk. This, however, did not prevent him from continuing to attend official functions, host the occasional delegation from Muslim countries, and continue to arrange for more exchange students from Turkey. In 1960, one such student, Chengis Yarbāğ, asked for more money to fund his studies. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed Yolbars that expenses for these refugee students were becoming “excessive.” Still, the cost was worth it, according to the ministry: “Because it is our nation’s policy to take care of our border peoples, and seeing as Isa and Emin continue to raise the flag of independence at this time, we too will actively continue to cultivate the loyalty of our expatriate sons overseas for our own ends.”⁴⁵

Things changed again in the mid-1960s, when new developments began to alter the refugee landscape. In 1965, Emin died in Istanbul at age 64. Isa, who lived another three decades, now gained complete control of the exile community in Turkey. He immediately took the East Turkestan movement to a new level. In April 1965 he traveled to Mecca to make a presentation at the eleventh session of the World Muslim Congress (WMC). He asked the delegates assembled there to pass a resolution encouraging the Nationalist government to declare “East Turkestan” independent of China and to abolish the “colonial name” of Xinjiang. In addition, member-states were asked to commit to providing both tangible and moral support for Xinjiang refugees throughout the Middle East. When a representative from Syria seconded the motion, Nationalist spokesman and Sino-Muslim (Hui) representative Sun Shengwu immediately lodged a note of protest, invoking WMC prohibitions

44. “Songbie changmian tai ganren, dashi fufu pin shi lei, jugao linxia qu jingtou, bian shou liwu bian qianming” [Farewell scene emotional, ambassador and his wife repeatedly wipe tears, descend from on high to take in scene, then receive gifts and sign autographs], *Lianhe bao*, 9 March 1962, p. 2; “Yao-le-bo-shi xinwen Xinjiang youji huoyue” [Yolbars glad to hear about vigorous guerrilla war efforts in Xinjiang], *Lianhe bao*, 30 January 1963; and “Yao-le-bo-shi shicai, guanqie shoudao chilai Beishi xingjingdui” [Yolbars a victim of theft, seasoned thief caught by Taipei police], *Lianhe bao*, 27 February 1966. John Hall Paxton met Yolbars’s previous wife in 1948 during a trip to Hami, describing her as “a pouting Chinese girl from Chungking who appeared habitually discontented.” He also described Yolbars as seeming to be “completely dominated by this woman and hurried to comply with every hint of her desires.” See Paxton, “Travels in Southern and Eastern Sinkiang,” Sinkiang file 893.00, pp. 13–14.

45. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 112.22/0003, pp. 34–35.

from involvement in politics. The next day the representative from Saudi Arabia, a staunch ally of the Nationalist government, rallied to Sun's defense, declaring that Muslims everywhere must adapt to the conditions of the country in which they live. In his notes, Sun recorded his satisfaction in seeing Isa pack up his briefcase to leave, only to be dissuaded by the WMC host.⁴⁶

After the initial blindside, Sun regained his composure. Several days later, he issued a rebuttal:

Mr. Isa was appointed by our very own government as secretary of the Xinjiang provincial government. Once the Communist Party began to occupy the mainland and Xinjiang, all the provincial leaders fled abroad. Except for a small number of ambitious careerists like Isa, the majority of them have continued to embrace the legal government of the Republic of China.

It was here that the recruitment of Yolbars and funding for his propaganda paid substantial rhetorical dividends. Sun wrote: "In Taiwan we have set up an Office for the Chairman of the Xinjiang Provincial Government, and it is chaired by Yolbars Khan, a Uighur Muslim. This office provides relief aid and succor for dispersed refugees and draws up plans for the recovery of lost territory." The biggest blow to Isa's platform, however, came when Sun divulged his extensive history of cooperation with the Nationalist government, a rhetorical strategy deployed to great effect in Chu Chia-hua's published letters to Emin in the 1950s. "The political status of China's Muslims is not below that of any other Muslim nation," he concluded. "Indeed, Mr. Isa himself has been nurtured and mentored by our government for more than three decades now." Sun recorded with relish the sight of Isa "folding up his briefcase and preparing to depart." In front of the assembly, however, Sun attempted to retain the moral high ground. He made a grand show of extending an invitation to Isa to come to Taiwan and "participate in the sacred task of resisting Communism and recovering the mainland," and promised to submit his grievances to the Nationalist government for "consideration."⁴⁷

Back in Taiwan, Yolbars was getting help from unexpected quarters. The disastrous famines of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) and persecution campaigns on the mainland had resulted in a renewed crop of 701 refugees from Xinjiang. This time they ended up in Pakistan and Afghanistan, neither of whose governments recognized Taipei. One refugee in particular stood out from the pack, a man by the name of Sabik. In December 1963, two years

46. Waijiaobu dang'an guan (Taiwan), file 152.11/0045, "Huijiao renshi Sun Shengwu yu Xiao Yongtai" [Muslim personages Sun Shengwu and Xiao Yongtai], pp. 40–43, 46–48.

47. Waijiaobu dang'an guan (Taiwan), file 152.11/0045, pp. 61–66.

after his escape from Xinjiang, he wrote a letter to the Nationalist ambassador in Ankara, who duly forwarded it on to Yolbars. Sabik related the following story. A native of Yarkand in southern Xinjiang, he was once a member of several Nationalist Party organizations, including the local branch of the Uighur Association for Ethnocultural Advancement, a vestige of the Sheng era. Formerly a well-to-do man, he described repeated imprisonment after 1949, including the confiscation of \$60,000 in assets. During the famines of the Great Leap Forward, he claimed—implausibly—that starving Han had resorted to eating Uighur babies.⁴⁸ In 1961, following his wife’s supposed remarriage to another man, he contacted relatives in Afghanistan and managed to flee as part of a trade caravan. Once in Kabul, the Afghan government pressured the refugees either to return to Xinjiang or to resettle in another country. After turning to U.S. officials for help, he was encouraged to get in touch with both Isa in Istanbul and the Nationalist embassy in Ankara.⁴⁹

Yolbars sensed a golden opportunity. Sabik’s background was not unlike that of Wahad. Furthermore, because Sabik was from Yarkand, where Isa once maintained an influential base of operations, Yolbars worried that the two men would quickly form a bond. When, for unknown reasons, Isa proved slow to respond, Yolbars sprang into action. “In this hour of need, when life and death hang in the balance,” he wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Isa and Emin have abandoned these refugees. The political significance of a rescue effort undertaken by our government at this time would be considerable.” Though Yolbars wanted to bring them to Taiwan, the Ministry urged them to relocate to Turkey, which was now offering to pay for their relocation expenses. Events soon conspired to undermine this arrangement. First, Isa finally wrote back to Sabik, “scolding me for exchanging letters with Governor Yolbars.” Suddenly aware of the deep schism that ran throughout the Xinjiang

48. Although cannibalism was a common strategy of survival in many regions of China during the Great Leap Forward, there are several reasons why this claim is suspect with regard to Xinjiang. First, Xinjiang suffered perhaps the least of any region in China during the Great Leap Forward and soon became a net exporter of grain to other regions in China. On this point, see Li Danhui, “Dui 1962 nian Xinjiang Yi-Ta shijian qiyin de lishi kaocha: laizi Zhongguo Xinjiang de dang’an cailiao” [A historical inquiry into the causes of the 1962 Yi-Ta incident in Xinjiang: based on archival material from Xinjiang], in Shen Zhihua and Li Danhui, eds., *Zhanhou Zhong Su guanxi ruogan wenti yanjiu: laizi Zhong E shuangfang de dang’an wenxian* [Research on several issues in postwar Sino-Soviet relations: based on archival documents from both China and Russia] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), pp. 486–514. Second, in rural areas in which starvation might otherwise have occurred in Xinjiang, the state maintained a strict policy of segregation between Uighur and Han communities, the latter largely insulated within military colonies. Therefore, even if cannibalism did occur in rural Xinjiang—and there is as yet no evidence that it did—it is most unlikely that starving Han would have had access to Uighur babies, even if they had been so inclined toward such action.

49. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 119.5/0001, and “Zhiliu A-fu-han Xinjiang nanmin” [Xinjiang refugees detained in Afghanistan], pp. 11–12.

refugee community, Sabik informed Yolbars that he “no longer wanted to go to Turkey because it will be hard to get along with my compatriots there if Isa is acting like this.” Instead, Sabik asked Yolbars if he could help them travel to Saudi Arabia, where the Xinjiang exile community was more prosperous. But even that would prove difficult now. Alerted to Turkey’s offer of resettlement, Beijing began to put pressure on Kabul to reverse its stance and let the refugees remain in Afghanistan. At least in this case, it seems, the Communists were more determined than the Nationalists to keep potential recruits out of Isa’s backyard.⁵⁰

For his part, Yolbars, informed that his own government was unwilling to assume the burden of mass resettlement in Taiwan, saw little reason to help them relocate to Saudi Arabia, where the existing refugee community maintained extensive contacts with Isa. In Afghanistan, however, Sabik could continue to work on behalf of the Nationalist government as a covert agent among the steady stream of refugees who continued to flee Xinjiang. With relocation efforts stalled, Kabul fast became the next battleground for Isa and Yolbars. According to Sabik, Isa sent his men to Afghanistan to spread rumors about the negative effects a Nationalist passport would bring to its owner, and further promised to sponsor free annual *hajj* trips to anyone who relocated to Turkey. They apparently also brought letters from refugees in Istanbul attesting to the luxurious life they enjoyed under Isa’s patronage. Yolbars countered by lodging urgent requests with his government for relief funds to be distributed among Sabik’s followers. It is not clear how much, if any, money was actually dispensed, but something in Yolbars’s overtures must have been sufficient to give many of the refugees pause. By 1967, when Isa finally succeeded in gaining United Nations (UN) support for the resettlement of refugees in Turkey, only 235 of Sabik’s 701 followers took the offer. The remainder—how many in each case is not clear—either moved on to the Soviet Union, relocated to Taiwan, or simply remained in Kabul, where Sabik continued to speak in their name in his correspondence with Yolbars. In his own documents, Yolbars began to refer to Sabik as “my secret agent and contact man in Afghanistan.”⁵¹

For the next four years, Sabik was exactly that. The complex wheelings and dealings of the Xinjiang exile community need not detain us here, but suffice it to note that during these years Sabik evidently served as a highly effective

50. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 119.5/0001, and “Zhiliu A-fu-han Xinjiang nanmin,” pp. 14–20, 51–53, 96–100.

51. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 119.5/0001, “Zhiliu A-fu-han Xinjiang nanmin,” pp. 101–107, 150–153, 220, 225, 242–250. See also “Information: Refugees: From East Turkestan,” 17 November 1967 to 17 October 1968, in TNAUK, Far Eastern Department, FO 95/15.

counterweight to Isa among the Middle Eastern exile community. Shuttling back and forth among Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Taiwan, he was entrusted with ever greater sums of money, numbers that peaked in 1969 with the deposit of \$25,000 in an Iranian bank account. Such large sums inevitably left Sabik vulnerable to accusations of graft, and—if the counter-accusations can be trusted—Isa’s men never missed an opportunity to fan the rumor mill in Kabul. An investigation by Yolbars’s son purported to clear Sabik of any wrongdoing and merely stressed the prudence of obtaining a signed receipt whenever money changed hands. In 1969, with the Xinjiang refugee population in Afghanistan having suddenly swelled to 12,000—largely as a result of renewed chaos during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)—Yolbars gave Sabik his biggest task yet, flying him to Taiwan to draw up comprehensive blueprints that would provide this burgeoning exile community with the necessary startup capital to maintain a livelihood in Afghanistan. The archives for this period are filled with requests for relief funds from newly arrived refugees, whose wishes were often granted, with gifts ranging anywhere from \$100 to \$600. With confidence running high, Yolbars, cognizant of his impending mortality, even offered his governorship to Isa, provided he assumed it in Taiwan.⁵²

The momentum continued to shift in Yolbars’s favor. By 1969, the son of former Xinjiang governor Masud Sabri (1947–1948), once a devout fan of Isa, had broken off contact with his former mentor and informed Yolbars that he would like to visit Taiwan. With a fast-growing coterie of covert agents across the Middle East, Yolbars decided that the time was ripe to spur his greatest ally into action. This was General Delilhan Haji, the one-time Kazak guerrilla commander and son of the former Minister of Finance in Xinjiang. Delilhan, who had remained in Srinigar but kept up a vigorous correspondence with Yolbars, declined numerous offers of relocation to either Turkey or Taiwan. He did, however, deign to fly to Taipei on several occasions in the 1950s and 1960s to participate in Nationalist Party congresses as a formal “representative” from Xinjiang. Sporting an Indian passport, Delilhan also made several trips to Afghanistan to confer with Sabik and took over the latter’s responsibilities for a time in 1969 when accusations of graft temporarily sidelined Yolbars’s “secret agent.”⁵³ That same year, however, Delilhan made his biggest move

52. Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 119.5/0001, “Jiuji Xinjiang nanbao” [Relief efforts for Xinjiang refugees], and “Zhiliu A-fu-han Xinjiang nanmin,” pp. 47–48; and Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 119.5/0002, “Jiuji Xinjiang nanbao” [Relief efforts for Xinjiang refugees].

53. On the activities Delilhan carried out on behalf of Yolbars, including correspondence between the two men, see Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 119.5/0002, pp. 13–15, 156–159; file

yet. He and his brother decided to abandon their home of nineteen years in Srinigar and spend their twilight years in Istanbul—Isa’s long-time base of operations.

Neither Delilhan nor his brother, cut from the same ideological cloth as Yolbars, liked what they saw. The second generation of Kazak youth had been almost entirely assimilated into Turkish culture, and Uighur exiles in Istanbul enjoyed far better living standards than did their Kazak counterparts, confined as they were to the Anatolian countryside. Delilhan immediately blamed Isa, whom he accused of siphoning off UN aid money for his personal use, all the while inflating his and Emin’s own role in resisting the Chinese Communists in 1949. Delilhan reminded everyone that Isa and Emin had fled Xinjiang long before the arrival of Communist troops, and how he, his father, Yolbars, and Osman Batur had waged a bloody struggle long after their departure. Fluent in Kazak, Turkish, Chinese, Urdu, and English, Delilhan wasted no time in contacting Turkish authorities and lobbying for better living conditions for the Kazak community.⁵⁴

Delilhan was a cosmopolitan, experienced politician, with an established reputation among Kazak youth. They had grown up hearing tall tales about the brave struggles of men like Delilhan, Osman, and Yolbars Khan. Isa, a complete stranger to the battlefield, had no rhetorical antidote to such men. After Delilhan’s arrival in Istanbul, a new rift emerged within the exile community in Turkey, a rift attributable in no small part to Yolbars’s efforts from Taiwan. Delilhan described Yolbars and the Nationalist government in Taiwan in glowing terms and continued to sponsor student exchanges into the 1980s. When I met Delilhan in Istanbul in 2008, he was 87 years old and basking in the reverent respect of the younger Kazak generations. Their parents had moved from rural Anatolia to urban Istanbul, eventually striking it rich via the manufacture of thermoplastic polymers. Now grossly outnumbering the Uighur expatriate community in Istanbul and infinitely wealthier, these third-generation Kazaks elevated Delilhan and the long-departed Osman Batur into a new pantheon of Xinjiang historical icons, and gutted the East Turkestan Refugee Association of almost any association with its founder, who passed away in 1995. By and large, these Kazak youth did not seem to be aware of the

119.5/0001, “Zhiliu A-fu-han Xinjiang nanmin,” p. 249; file 119.5/0001, “Jiuji Xinjiang nanmin,” pp. 104, 163–165; file 112.22/0003, pp. 40–41, 96–99; file 109/0005, pp. 137–139; and “Da-lie-lihan haiwai guilai cheng Xinjiang feizheng ruhu, yimin jiegan kangbao” [Delilhan returns from overseas, says Xinjiang bandit government like a tiger, rebels taking up arms to resist], *Lianhe bao*, 26 May 1960.

54. Ingvar Svanberg, *Kazak Refugees in Turkey: A Study of Cultural Persistence and Social Change* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1989), pp. 172–174.

considerable diplomatic legwork bequeathed to their new patriarch by Yolbars Khan on his island of exile.⁵⁵

One China, Indivisible

On the morning of 27 July 1971, at Taipei’s Veterans General Hospital, Yolbars Khan died in his sleep at age 83. Chiang Kai-shek wrote an inscription for his tomb, today perched handsomely in the Da’an District of Taipei, lauding his many decades of loyalty and service to the central government. Yet it was his services after the fall of the mainland that were probably of greater import to the Chinese state than anything he did before 1949. By the time of his death, the frustration of Isa’s political ambitions was well advanced, and the East Turkestan Refugee Association could not claim anything close to an ethnopolitical monopoly over Xinjiang expatriate communities outside the Communist bloc. By maintaining a vigorous base of operations in Taiwan, Yolbars emitted a viable gravitational pull for anyone willing to pay lip service to the Nationalist geopolitical platform. Though Isa enjoyed a considerable head start in the cultivation of refugee loyalties and funded his activities with UN money, he proved unable to insulate his constituency from the overtures of an exile government in Taiwan. In the end, Yolbars effectively denied a steady stream of impressionable immigrants to Turkey, retained crucial loyalties in Afghanistan and Kashmir, and, when the time was ripe, even infiltrated Isa’s own backyard via proxy assault. Indeed, just two months before his death, the fruits of Yolbars’s last labors were put on full display in the Nationalist press: Pakistan refugee Seyit Abdulla and his family of eight arrived in Taiwan to take up permanent residence on the island. Their portraits were splashed about the newspapers.⁵⁶

After the death of its chairman, the Office for the Chairman of the Xinjiang Provincial Government quickly withered away. Under Yao Daohong, Yolbars’s eldest son, the office dispatched a letter to U.S. President Jimmy Carter in 1977 urging him not to normalize relations with the mainland government. Other than that, however, the archival record runs dry, and rumor has it that the bulk of files were burned to avoid investigations of financial

55. *Ibid.*; Jacobs, “The Many Deaths of a Kazak Unaligned,” pp. 1304–1312; and Confidential interviews with the author, Istanbul, May and April 2008.

56. “Yao-le-bo-shi bingshi, zongtong tiban wan’e” [Yolbars succumbs to illness, president confers title and writes funeral lament], *Lianhe bao*, 28 July 1971; and Waijiaobu dang’an guan (Taiwan), file 162.5/0001, pp. 154–155.

malfeasance.⁵⁷ Then, in 1988, Yao submitted a routine application for a new government car, as permitted once every ten years. The proposed price tag of 600,000 yuan attracted ministerial attention, and the government decided to shut down the office within a year. By this time the Xinjiang office was little more than a quaint relic of the Cold War, and several articles appeared in the newly democratic press poking fun at its past activities.⁵⁸ But it had been no laughing matter for the Generalissimo. During the 22 years that the Nationalist government on Taiwan held the China seat in the United Nations, its “governor” of Xinjiang played a crucial supporting role in upholding Chiang’s “one China” policy. In the same way that Chiang’s continued survival on Taiwan guaranteed that the island would not fall prey to Washington’s preferred “two Chinas” policy, so too did the Xinjiang government-in-exile help secure Chinese sovereignty—both Nationalist and Communist—over a historically non-Han, weakly integrated region.

How is it possible to say that one small office on a tropical island helped secure Chinese rule over a land several thousand miles away and fifty times its size? To understand this claim, we need only to examine the history of the Tibetan exile community. After the Tibetan uprising against Communist rule in 1959, approximately 80,000 Tibetans fled with the Dalai Lama to India, where they set up a Government of Tibet in Exile. What is less well known is that the Nationalist administration on Taiwan, acting through its Committee for Tibetan and Mongolian Affairs in Taipei, also made overtures and offered assistance to the refugee community in Dharamsala. By and large, their overtures were rebuffed, and not until the late 1960s did any Tibetan politicians or students travel to Taiwan to meet with Nationalist representatives. Offers of financial assistance, the construction of refugee schools in India, and invitations to travel to Taiwan were all declined; the Dalai Lama’s personal fortune, estimated at nearly \$4 million, proved more than enough

57. Nearly all the archival documents consulted for this study were discovered in folders ostensibly about something else, most often matters relating to the Hui (Sino-Muslim) community in Taiwan or political relations with Muslim countries more broadly. Only one folder included the title of Yolbars’s office in its shelf name. Fortunately, documents produced by his office were also included in duplicate form in the files of the Nationalist offices to which his correspondence was addressed.

58. “Xinjiang shengfu banshichu yusuan zao xiuli, liwei fu dan shu, niannei xu caiche” [Budget of the Office for the Xinjiang Provincial Government to be revised, legislators submit proviso to dissolve within the year], *Lianhe bao*, 20 May 1988; “Kongxin sheng zhengfu jiyang zai renjia, Fujian sheng yu Xinjiang sheng zhengfu de cunfei, haiyou zhengyi” [Hollow provincial governments a burden to maintain, debate continues over their abolishment], *Lianhe bao*, 31 May 1991; and “Xinjiang shengfu banshichu mingnian qi zhengshi caiche” [The Office for the Xinjiang Provincial Government will be formally dissolved beginning next year], *Lianhe bao*, 28 December 1991, p. 1.

to sustain the Tibetan exile community on its own.⁵⁹ The Dalai Lama rose to even greater international fame and influence, essentially unchallenged within the Tibetan exile community. The only other person qualified to challenge his claim as spokesman for Tibet—the Panchen Lama—made the fateful decision to remain in China after 1959, where he publicly supported the Communist government. Not only did these actions shatter his credibility outside the Communist bloc, but his subsequent persecution during the Cultural Revolution effectively undermined Mao’s goal of using him as a counterweight to the Dalai Lama.

Isa Yusuf Alptekin was by no means the Dalai Lama, and Yolbars Khan did not carry anything close to the political weight of the Panchen Lama. Even so, the comparisons are illuminating. No other viable candidate was around to play the role assumed by Yolbars in Taiwan, and few other takers for the post. Without him, the Nationalist government never would have been able to create a Xinjiang government-in-exile with the prestige necessary to make headway among the Uighur and Kazak refugee community in South Asia and the Middle East. Even if declarations of loyalty among the refugees were likely motivated more by poverty than ideology, that is beside the point. The end result was that, after an initial “hemorrhage” of 1,734 refugees to Turkey in the early 1950s, Yolbars stepped in and drew clear battle lines across the Middle East. Hence, an increasing number of refugees made the decision to stand—or at least claim to stand—on the Nationalist side of the fold. As word spread that a veteran anti-Communist Uighur warrior had succeeded in convincing the Chinese government-in-exile to dispense substantial funds to destitute refugees, the appeal of Isa’s umbrella in Istanbul gradually diminished. By the late 1960s, Yolbars was bankrolling his own secret agent in Afghanistan, a man who traveled extensively around the Middle East, throwing cash at receptive refugees and telling them to thank the Generalissimo. Having fostered a substantial base of sympathetic refugees over a period of two decades, Yolbars effectively laid the groundwork for the much younger Delilhan Haji to strike a

59. Chen Ming-hsiang, “Zangbao zai Tai shenghuo zhuangkuang diaocha ji fudao cuoshi zhi yanjiu” [Research on the living conditions of Tibetans in Taiwan and suggestions for future measures], Paper Commissioned by the Committee for Tibetan and Mongolian Affairs and Tamkang University, February 2002. Chen bases his conclusions for the failure of Nationalist efforts on Taiwan to make headway among the Tibetan refugee community in the 1960s on three collections of historical documents, including Xu Zhengguang, ed., *Minguo yilai Meng Zang zhongyao zhengce huibian* [An edited collection of important documents pertaining to the Tibetan and Mongolian Affairs Committee since the founding of the Republic] (Taipei: Meng Zang weiyuanhui, 2001); Meng Zang weiyuanhui bianyi shi, *Meng Zang weiyuanhui jianshi* [A short history of the Tibetan and Mongolian Affairs Committee] (Taipei: Meng Zang weiyuanhui, 1971); and Liu Xueyao, *Meng Zang weiyuanhui jianshi xubian: fu liren weiyuanzhang jianli* [Addendum to the short history of the Tibetan and Mongolia Affairs Committee: including a brief history of each committee head] (Taipei: Meng Zang weiyuanhui, 1996).

blow against Isa's stronghold in Turkey in the 1970s. It is not necessary to make the argument that Yolbars managed to score a decisive "victory" against Isa and Emin in Turkey, only that he succeeded in muddying the rhetorical waters of Xinjiang activism just enough to ensure that no unified or unchallenged political platform ever managed to coalesce among those hostile to Chinese claims on the region.

The Office for the Chairman of the Xinjiang Provincial Government is one of those obscure footnotes of history that are all too often overlooked. Yet it played an important role in modern Chinese history. There is a reason why few people other than a handful of Cold War scholars and Inner Asian specialists had ever heard of Xinjiang prior to 11 September 2001, when pan-Islamist terrorist attacks finally drew sustained global attention to China's Uighur population. There is a reason why, in the words of political scientist David Bachman, there exists today "no unified opposition and no widely agreed upon leader who is seen internationally (and even in China) as speaking for Uygurs or Xinjiang in the way that the Dalai Lama speaks for Tibet."⁶⁰ Even as the Dalai Lama was busy consolidating his position within the Tibetan exile community and shrewdly publicizing the plight of "his people" throughout the world, Yolbars Khan was busy obstructing Isa and Emin every time they attempted to speak for "their people" in Turkey. The Nationalists no longer represent China in the United Nations and the Xinjiang government-in-exile is now nothing more than a disparate collection of documents buried in misleading and obscure archival folders. The historical legacy of both entities, however, should not be forgotten. If not for the stubborn political afterlives of Yolbars Khan and Chiang Kai-shek on Taiwan, the world of geopolitics today might include two separate Chinese republics, and the one on the mainland might find itself facing a unified Xinjiang opposition movement in exile second only to that led by the Dalai Lama.

60. David Bachman, "Making Xinjiang Safe for the Han? Contradictions and Ironies of Chinese Governance in China's Northwest," in Morris Rossabi, ed., *Governing China's Multiethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), p. 182.