

TIP IN THEIR OWN WORDS – AN INTERVIEW WITH ABDUSALAM AT-TURKISTANI, DEPUTY LEADER OF TURKISTAN ISLAMIC PARTY

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INTRODUCTION

In the last quarter of 2022, Abdusalam at-Turkistani, the deputy emir of the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) disseminated a document titled “We are not from China, our homeland is East Turkistan” via a Telegram channel that went by his name. Apart from English, this document has also been published in Uyghur, Arabic, Pashto, Persian and Urdu. The document is an appeal by the deputy commander of the group to the “Islamic community, to the people of the world and especially to the Central Asian Muslims” and it begins by emphasizing Uyghur national and religious identity, while also mentioning that “East Turkistan (Xinjiang) is the fortress of Central Asia” and this “fortress must be protected”.

The senior TIP official also often referred to as “Sheikh” by the members of the group, states, “We are not from China. We are your Muslim brothers and sisters in East Turkistan.” He then laments that “the name of East Turkistan finds no mention on the world map and people of the world, including Muslims, are unaware of East Turkistan and the people of East Turkistan are considered Chinese.”

Abdusalam at-Turkistani further talks about how China “invaded” East Turkistan in 1949 and unleashed its “tyranny” (while also claiming that he is a witness to the “oppression”) and how strategically important East Turkistan (Xinjiang) is for China. He makes it clear that the people of East Turkistan follow the Hanafi methodology in Jurisprudence and that the TIP “is not a threat to any country, organization, or nation”, while also affirming that their “enemy is the Chinese.

government and its policies” and the group is also “ready to cooperate with any country and individual that opposes China in accordance with the Islamic law.”

It is essential to explore the political and geographic context in which TIP was founded if one is to comprehend its ideology.

The Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) is a separatist-militant organization that aims to liberate the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of China. The group has claimed responsibility for/ has been blamed for orchestrating attacks which date back to 1989. A vast majority of such attacks have occurred inside China, with a few others in Central Asian countries.

The group is known to have links with the



ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION



Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda (denied by the leadership of TIP). Some of its members have also been detained at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base. It has previously issued threats to attack the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Its current size and capabilities are largely unknown, but, according to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)’s July 2020 [report](#), at least 500 fighters under the TIP’s Afghan branch were active in Badakhshan, Kunduz and Takhar provinces in Afghanistan. Subsequently, the UNSC’s February 2022 [report](#) estimated that the TIP now comprises between 200 and 700 fighters and “remains active in military training and in planning terrorist attacks against Chinese interests.” (The authors reached out to a member of the TIP for an estimated number of fighters, but he declined to comment).

The report further says that the leadership of the TIP is active in Baghlan province and has re-established its main base there. In March 2022, it made changes to its leadership structure. Abdul Haq remained the group's chief, while Abdusalam was appointed deputy chief. Haji Furkan is the general military commander and two new members Zayiti and Ibini Muhaimaide were added to its supreme Shura council. The media channel of the TIP is called "Islam Awazi" (Voice of Islam) and it publishes statements, images and videos in Uyghur and Arabic languages.

The Turkistan Islamic Party has also been known as "East Turkistan Islamic Movement" (ETIM), "Islamic Movement of East Turkistan" (IMET), East Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIP), Islamic Party of East Turkistan (IPET) and "Islamic Party of Turkistan" (IPT). All of these names refer to the same group that was once led by Hassan Mahsoom.

The group dropped the word "east" from its name in the year 2000 to include all Turkic people and not just the Uyghur population. Some scholars maintain that it was done after the group in 1999 agreed to coordinate its activities with al-Qaeda, Taliban and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

"Islamic Party of Turkistan" is merely an alternative spelling of the group's current name in English "Turkistan Islamic Party." Only in 2008, after the group published a series of videos threatening the Beijing Olympics and identifying itself as the "Turkistan Islamic Party," did analysts make the connection between the ETIM and the TIP/IPT. Western media outlets had been referring to the group as ETIM all along. (NOTE: There are numerous ways to translate and transliterate the names ETIM, ETIP, IPT, and TIP between different languages. Versions of the ETIM /ETIP's name include Hizb-ul-Islami Li-Turkistan Ash-Sharqiyah in Arabic and Dogu Turkistan Islam Hareketi in Turkish).

The TIP considers itself the descendant of a militant group founded in 1940, but the group

has changed its ideology and tactics over some time. The lineage goes back to an organization called the Islamic Party of Turkistan or Turkistan Islamic Movement (IPT or TIM) formed in 1940 by Abdul Azeez Makhdoom (also transliterated as Mahsoom), Abdul Hakeem, Abdul Hameed and other scholars. (NOTE: A spokesperson of the U.S. State Department in 2021 told Newsweek that ETIM and TIP are two separate organizations but both have nearly identical goals.)

The group then got engaged in skirmishes with Chinese government forces in the 1940s and 1950s and around 1956, it changed its name to the "East Turkistan Islamic Movement" (ETIM). The group was led by Mullah Baqee and Mullah Muhammad but the Chinese government forces were able to crush the resistance and the group remained dormant until the 1980s.

Abdul Hakeem, one of the group's founders, was released from prison in 1979. He went on to establish several Islamic schools in Karghalik. These schools were used as a medium to spread ETIM's beliefs. Hassan Mahsoom, who later went on to revive the group in 1997, was a student at one of these schools from the years 1984 to 1989.



Former leader of the ETIM/TIP - Hassan Mahsum. He revived ETIM/TIP in 1997 & was killed in a joint U.S.-Pakistani raid on an al-Qaeda hideout in South Waziristan district, Pakistan in 2003.

In 1989, Zeydin Yusup (or Ziauddin Yusuf) restarted the activities of the group. On April 5-

6, 1990, the ETIM led a protest, under the leadership of Zeydin Yusup, which later took the form of violent clashes with Chinese government forces. Zeydin Yusup was killed on 6 April 1990. Hassan Mahsoom also participated in this rebellion and was put behind the bars.

(NOTE: Adel Noori, one of the Uyghurs detained at GTMO, also mentioned that one of his friends, Abdul Hameed, was killed in the Baren Township conflict.)

This rebellion led the PRC to launch an aggressive crackdown on the Uyghurs. The prisons of Xinjiang became a fertile ground for spreading ETIM's ideas and recruiting students, criminals and other civilians into the ranks of militancy. ETIM's support base in Xinjiang got a boost.

Abdul Hakeem, one of the prominent scholars who founded the ETIM in 1940, died in 1993. Following his death, the group was led by Abdur Rehmen and Muhammad Tauhit, but it collapsed later that year.

Hassan Mahsoom remained in prison from May 1990 to November 1991 and again from 1993 to early 1996 (for the latter phase, he was sentenced to three years of labour "re-education" on terrorism charges). He was again detained in August 1996 by the Chinese forces under the "Strike Hard" campaign. After his release from detention, he left Urumqi in January 1997. Mahsoom became more aggressive and militant after the Baren conflict that pitted ethnic Uyghur militants against Chinese government forces in April 1990. He travelled to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye to seek support from the Uyghur diaspora, but all his efforts were to no avail.

An undismayed Mahsoom, along with Abdukadir Yapuquan, revived the ETIM in and around September 1997 and turned to al-Qaeda for financial help. Mahsoom reportedly met several times with Osama bin Laden, the then leader of al-Qaeda, and the latter provided him with financial assistance and training (denied by the leadership of the TIP).

Accordingly, Mahsoom shifted the headquarters of the ETIM to Taliban-controlled Kabul, Afghanistan in September 1998. From 1999 to 2003, ETIM fighters got training in camps set up at undisclosed locations in the Afghanistan-Pakistan-Central Asian region.

In an interview published in ETIM's magazine "Turkistan al-Islamiyah," Abdul Haq said ETIM members attended training camps in Khost, Bagram, Kabul and Herat provinces in Afghanistan, in the late 1990s.



STATUS AFTER 9/11



After the 9/11 attacks, the Chinese government widely publicized the ETIM as a group with ties to al-Qaeda. The Chinese government utilized this information to push against the TIP in the western capitals, adopt laws that discriminate against those who support human rights, and step up its crackdown on dissidents.

Chinese officials sometimes discuss Falun Gong and pro-democracy activists in the same sentence as Uyghurs and connect East Turkistani separatism to Tibetan and Taiwanese separatism, implying that these disparate problems pose a combined threat to China's security and territorial integrity.

The ETIM has been listed on two terrorism blacklists by the US government since 2002, although it has not been added to the State Department's list of "Foreign Terrorist Organizations." The U.S. government has also lobbied to include the group in the UN blacklist. However, in November 2020, the U.S. State Department (under the presidency of Donald Trump) revoked the designation of/ de-blacklisted the ETIM from its "Terrorist

Exclusion List” by the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

Abdul Haq at-Turkistani took over the group’s leadership after Hassan Mahsoom was killed in a joint U.S-Pakistani military raid on a suspected al-Qaeda hideout in Angoor Adda, South Waziristan district in Pakistan in 2003.



Abdul Haq at-Turkistani -- the current leader of the ETIM/TIP

Abdul Haq, according to the U.S. Treasury Department, was appointed to the Shura council of al-Qaeda in 2005 (denied by the leadership of the TIP) and has been designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist in April 2009. The Treasury Department said Abdul Haq has sent operatives abroad to raise funds for attacks against Chinese interests both at home and abroad. He also was involved with recruiting, propaganda efforts, and the planning and execution of terror attacks. In early 2008, Haq openly threatened to conduct attacks at the Olympic Games in Beijing.

Abdul Haq was considered influential enough in al-Qaeda’s leadership circles that he was dispatched to mediate between rival Taliban groups as well as to represent the Shura Majlis in important military matters. In June 2009, he was spotted in Pakistan’s tribal areas attending an important meeting with Baitullah Mehsud, then commander of the TTP. Among those in attendance were Sirajuddin Haqqani, the

operational commander of the Haqqani Network; and Abu Yahya al-Libi, who at the time was a senior al-Qaeda ideologue and propagandist and later became al-Qaeda’s general manager. In August 2009, he threatened to attack Chinese embassies worldwide as well as targets within the country.

Before the US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, Abul Haq, along with Hassan Mahsoom, ran training camps for ETIP/ETIM recruits at al-Qaeda’s camp in Tora Bora in Afghanistan. Abdul Haq was reported to have been killed by a US drone aircraft in the North Waziristan region in Pakistan, near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border on Feb. 15, 2010. The Turkistan Islamic Party never released an official “martyrdom” statement for Abdul Haq. However, in 2010, the group named Abdu Shakoor at-Turkistani as Abdul Haq’s replacement.

Abdu Shakoor was also given the command of al-Qaeda’s forces in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) after Saif al-Adel left the region, according to Karachi Islam.



Former leader of the TIP -- Abdu Shakoor at-Turkistani. He assumed the leadership of the group in 2010 after Abdul Haq at-Turkistani was seriously injured in a U.S. drone strike. Abdu Shakoor was killed in a U.S. drone strike in the Shawal Valley, Pakistan on August 24, 2012.

This rapid ascendancy of Abdu Shakoor was attributed to his close ties with the late Tahir Yuldashev of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), who was on the Shura Majlis with Abdul Haq, as well as his familiarity with various factions of the Taliban.

Abdu Shakoor reportedly appeared in a video with his face obscured taking responsibility for the 2011 Kashgar and Hotan attacks. Abdul

Shakoor was killed in a U.S. drone strike on his training camp in the Shawal Valley of Pakistan on August 24, 2012.

After Abdu Shakoor, Abdullah Mansour took the reins of the group and under his leadership TIP's media released regular videos praising attacks against the Chinese in Xinjiang. In 2013, Mansour claimed responsibility for the 2013 Tiananmen Square attack that killed 5 and injured 38 people on 28 October, 2013. Later, in 2014 in a new video, he expressed support for the deadly mass knife attack at the Kunming rail station that left 35 dead (including 4 perpetrators) and 141 injured.

Following the attacks, in a rare interview with Reuters, from his secret hideout in North Waziristan, he reiterated that it was a holy duty to fight against China and threatened of more attacks in China. Before assuming the leadership of TIP, he served as the editor of TIP's Arabic language magazine "Islamic Turkistan."

Later, in June 2015, Abdul Haq re-appeared in a video released by the official media handle of the group to lead the group, after recovering from his injuries.

More recently, last year in May 2022, Abdul Haq at-Turkistani, along with Abdusalam at-Turkistani, appeared in a video released by the group's media channel where they could be seen celebrating Eid with fellow members in Afghanistan. Their presence in Afghanistan sharply contradicted Afghan Taliban's claims that no foreign fighters were present on its soil.



Abdusalam at-Turkistani (in centre) & Abdul Haq at-Turkistani (to the left of Abdusalam) appeared in a 15-minute-long video released by the group's media outlet in May, 2022.

Recent media propaganda of TIP suggests that they have forgone the hard-line anti-West rhetoric they adhered to previously and instead focuses on propagating bellicose anti-China rhetoric underlining "the CCP's repression of Uyghurs" in Xinjiang. Thus, it is noteworthy that the TIP doctrine has undergone some obvious adjustments that attempt to gradually turn the movement away from global jihadism towards the national liberation movement of East Turkistan.

TIP's toning down of hostile anti-West propaganda yielded significant strategic gain with the U.S. decision to delist ETIM as a terror outfit.

After getting its designation revoked by the U.S. government from the "Terrorist Exclusion List," the group released two statements: one from its central office and another one from its Syrian branch. The statements expressed pleasure at the decision taken by the U.S. government, stated that armed resistance against the Chinese government is justified and hoped that other countries around the world will take a "wise decision" like the American government.

In an interview with Newsweek, a spokesperson of the political office of the TIP said that the group's activities are limited only to Xinjiang region and "they do not have a problem with any person or country other than the unjust Chinese government."

Abu Omar at-Turkistani, a leader of the group in Idlib, Syria, told Al-Monitor that they "are not hostile to the U.S. or the West." He further said that their hostility is only towards China and they were in Syria only to support Syrian people who were displaced and killed by the Assad regime..." and that they would leave, "if the Syrians ask us to leave."

The TIP has distanced itself from al-Qaeda, although it still maintains ties with the Taliban in Afghanistan and Hayat Tahrir ash-Sham in Syria (Afghan Taliban and HTS had links with al-Qaeda at least publicly).



TIP IN SYRIA



Today, the Syrian branch of TIP operates as Katibat at-Turkistan in the HTS-held north-western province of Idlib and the neighbouring provinces of Latakia and Hama and is closely allied with its battlefield partner, Hayat Tahrir ash-Sham, al-Qaeda's ex-affiliate in Syria. TIP's media for all these years has released videos from Syria that regularly featured their men fighting against the Russian-backed Assad regime forces on the front lines, apart from showing the significant weapons arsenal they possess.

TIP is one of the largest foreign jihadi outfits operating in the north-western part of Syria boasting, according to the UNSC report published in 2022, around 1000-2000 fighters, mainly operating in Idlib, under the command of Kaiwusair. The Syrian civil war served as a major catalyst for the many ethnic Uyghurs to escape the CCP's persecution with many of them flocking to Syria illicitly through Türkiye at the end of 2012 to fight under the banner of TIP and ISIS and other jihadists or rebel groups to overthrow the Assad regime.

The TIP has co-operated with HTS and many other non-jihadist groups and fought in battles in Hasakah, Idlib, Aleppo, Latakia, and Hama provinces with being heavily integrated on the battlefield and even conducting suicide bombings.

After gaining control of Idlib province and managing the province through its civilian arm, The Syrian Salvation Government, HTS has reportedly tightened the noose around other rival jihadist groups to maintain its authority and control launching a crackdown from July 2021 on AQ's Syria affiliate Hurras ad-Din and Jund ash-Sham forcing them to dissolve their groups or join HTS. But the liquidation of rival jihadist groups for HTS in all cases has happened not through the use of force but through reconciliation deals brokered by neutral actors in the jihadist landscape in Idlib, mainly through the Turkistan Islamic Party.

The TIP reportedly on many occasions has mediated on behalf of HTS with other rival groups leading to the dismantling of these rival jihadist groups or them being subsumed into HTS ranks. It has refrained from interfering in HTS internal affairs and also maintained working relationships with most of the other jihadist outfits operating there.

This facilitates that HTS always has an upper hand and all the foreign jihadist groups in Idlib operate under its authority and military supervision. While many Uyghur fighters reportedly cut their military/doctrinal teeth fighting against the Assad regime in north-western Syria under TIP with the hope of returning to Xinjiang to pay heed to Abdul Haq at-Turkistani's goal of waging jihad back in China, other TIP members along with their families have travelled to Syria to escape CCP's repression with the long term goal of resettling in Idlib.

Many TIP fighters in Syria have not shied away from showing their faces in the TIP media outputs, divulging their identity details, indicating their disinclination of returning to China for reinvigorating its decade-long anti-CCP insurgency.

Their strategic relationship with HTS and discreet links with al-Qaeda and the changing on-ground realities in the Syrian theatre driven by fluid geopolitical developments will have an impact on TIP's capabilities in the Syrian theatre as from its haven in Syria it continues to organise its external armed resistance against the CCP.

There is little open-source evidence that the group has successfully orchestrated attacks in Xinjiang. But there have been reports that the group was allegedly involved beyond its operational presence in Syria in terror plots such as the 2015 Erawan shrine bombing in Pathum Wan district, Bangkok, Thailand, a suicide attack on the Chinese embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on August 30, 2016, and New Year's Eve Istanbul nightclub attack. Further, the CCP has conflated Uyghur militancy with ETIP and has accused the group of launching deadly attacks that targeted civilians and security officials.

Interview With Deputy Commander of TIP, Abdusalam at-Turkistani

A few days ago, the authors contacted a member of the TIP in Afghanistan via an encrypted messaging application and requested for an interview with their deputy commander Abdusalam at-Turkistani. Our request was granted by the leadership of the TIP and an interview was conducted in Arabic. The views expressed in the publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the authors.

The interview addresses the origin, evolution of the ETIM/TIP, discusses TIP's relationship with other Islamist groups like the Afghan Taliban, al-Qaeda, HTS and its rivalry with the Islamic State's Khorasan branch. It also includes TIP's perspectives on the U.S. government's decision to delist the ETIM as a terrorist organization, CCP's strategy to "assimilate" Uyghurs into majority Han culture, the "counter-extremism" program, "debt-trap" policy of the Communist Party and message to the neighbouring countries.



Q1) Can you tell us something about your organization, ideology and why it transferred from the East Turkistan Islamic Movement to the Islamic Party? According to the U.S. government, ETIM and TIP are two separate organizations. What do you have to say regarding this?



Answer: Our group was established after the struggle of our oppressed people against the unjust policies implemented by the Chinese Communist Party in East Turkistan, and for this reason, we call our group: "The Uyghur People's Movement." In the year 1949, the Chinese government stormed the country of East

Turkistan and killed scholars, intellectuals, and skilled workers/specialists. They usurped our wealth and shut down our religious schools and our media offices. As a result, the capabilities of the people of East Turkistan were severely curtailed and we could not expand our movement in our homeland.

Then again, after forty years in 1989, our people led by Zia-ud-Din Yusuf, rose up against the Chinese occupation. Owing to China's unjust policy, this group could not grow within the homeland. Consequently, our fighters travelled abroad to coordinate the actions of the group, away from the oppression of China with people from all fields rallying around the group, including those living outside Turkistan. Thus, we became an official threat to the Chinese Communist Party.

As for changing the name, we say, we did not identify ourselves as the "Islamic Movement of East Turkistan, rather it was first called the "Islamic Party of East Turkistan/East Turkistan Islamic Party, but the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) labelled our group "Islamic Movement of East Turkistan" to belittle us. However, later, we insisted on naming the group "Turkistan Islamic Party." We made the name inclusive of all the Turks and Uyghur people living in Central Asia. We called it "The Turkistan Islamic Party," by omitting the word "East."

And I affirm here that ours is the first group established to revive the East Turkistan issue with the use of force and weapons. Some countries call our organization the "Islamic Movement of East Turkistan/East Turkistan Islamic Movement," i.e., our group. Please note that we are not discussing two separate groups; rather, these two names are for the same organization.

I do not think that the American government believes that these two names are for two different organizations. They have robust intelligence capabilities and the fact that we are the same organization is well known to them. Everyone is also aware that the American

government delisted our group as a terrorist organization in 2020, and from what I can tell; they have a clear idea of our group's motives and how we function.



Q2) The former emir of ETIM Hassan Mahsoom was reportedly said to have met and received financial assistance and training from Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan sometimes in 1997-1998. Your current leader Abdul Haq at-Turkistani was appointed to the Shura Majlis of Al-Qaeda in 2005. So, is your organization still affiliated with Al-Qaeda or its leadership? Do you depend on them for your finance, weapons or training?



Answer: This is a very important question. To clarify this issue, I assert: It is untrue that our former emir Hassan Makhdoom (Mahsoom), may God have mercy on him, received funding from and underwent training with al-Qaeda. In an interview with Radio Free Asia, Hassan Makhdoom (Mahsoom) responded with a detailed response in which he categorically denied these rumours. Our group is free and is not affiliated with other groups, but China always seeks to discredit us in order to alienate us. China succeeded in this distortion to some extent. But America's decisive decision in 2020 to remove the name of our group from the list of terrorist organizations also helped other countries to recognize that our group is not a terrorist group, and the truth about these issues will come to light soon.

Some of them believe that America has delisted our group from the list of terrorist organizations owing to its hostility towards China, but we do not second with this opinion. Rather, America's decision on our part is correct. The American government knows the truth about our group and believes in our cause of serving justice to our people. But other countries, either out of fear of infuriating the Chinese government or to

preserve various benefits they get from China, did not take a rational decision of supporting the revolution of our people.

As for the participation of Sheikh Abdul Haq, may God protect him, in the Shura of al-Qaeda, this is a baseless allegation. This narrative is a by-product of China's hostile attempts to blemish the reputation of our organization. As for our relationship with al-Qaeda, I reiterate and emphasize that we have no connection with them. Our group does not need al-Qaeda or other groups for training and other purposes. Our group has members who are specialists in all fields, as they know their goals and they take action accordingly. Our people, in 1933, then in 1944 and before that, established independent states and they know very well how administrations and governments are run.



Q3) The U.S. government dropped the name of ETIM from its list of terrorist organization in 2020, citing the reason that "there was no credible evidence that ETIM continues the exit." However, the U.S. Department of Treasury blacklisted your current leader (Abdul Haq al-Turkistani) in 2009 for "providing financial, technological or material support to terrorists or acts of terrorism." Do you have anything to say about this?



Answer: As I mentioned earlier, some nations refer to our organization as "the East Turkistan Islamic Movement." The US government's removal of our group from its list of terror groups in 2020 was a noteworthy development for both our group and the entire population of East Turkistan.

Our group has never been a terrorist organization, but the US government included us in its list of terrorist organizations as a result of the disinformation spread by the repressive Chinese administration. After the US

government announced that the Turkistan Islamic Party had been taken off the list of terrorist organizations, our group issued a statement congratulating the US government on its decision.

As for your question that in 2009, our current leader Abdul Haq at-Turkistani was blacklisted by the U.S. Treasury for supporting terrorists or terrorist activities financially, technically, or materially, I believe that I answered your question above. The decision of the US government in 2020 has annulled all previous decisions regarding the classification of our group as a terror outfit.



Q4) The Constitution of ETIM The constitution of ETIM explicitly mentioned that the group would cooperate with the “Mujahedeen” from all over the world to establish the fallen Islamic Caliphate. However, a spokesperson for your political office said in 2021 that the TIP does not pose any threat to any person, group, or state other than the Chinese government & your group's activities will only be limited against the Chinese government in Xinjiang /East Turkistan. Shall this be considered as your departure from the previous stance of carrying out “global jihad”?



Answer: We originally focused our activities on the issue of East Turkistan, and until now we are still following this principle. Our enemy is CCP and we continue to fight against the occupying Chinese Communist Party, and our group does not represent a threat or danger to any other country, people, or organization, nor do we want to do so.



Q5) On July 14, 2021, a bus carrying Chinese nationals in the Dasu area of the Upper Kohistan district in Pakistan was struck by a suicide bomber. 9 Chinese engineers & 2 Pakistani paramilitary troops were killed. According to one media report, the ETIM was allegedly responsible for orchestrating the attack & the group also coordinated with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. So, was the TIP involved in it?



Answer: TIP was not involved in this attack. But regardless of who carried out this attack, we have always pleaded with the world to stop the expansionist and aggressive programs of the Chinese Communist Party. From this point of view, perhaps the goal of this process is two points:

First, the Muslims of other countries demand human rights for the Muslims of East Turkistan and second, if the Chinese regime does not stop the oppression and abuse of the Muslims of East Turkistan, then there will be no peace for the Chinese infidels in any country and God knows best.



Q6) In September 2022, a Chinese national was shot dead and 2 others were injured by an assailant in Karachi. The attack was claimed by a new Sindhi nationalist group. However, a channel linked to the deputy emir of the TIP praised the attack & said - "Al-Hamdu lillāhi Rabbil- 'Ālamīn. The days are coming when the hearts of the believers will be healed." Should this be considered a direct threat to Chinese nationals and interests in Pakistan?



Answer: First, I must make it clear to you that we have nothing to do with these attacks, and our group has appealed to the entire world, including neighbouring countries, regarding the oppression of the Chinese regime in East Turkistan.

Since then, we have seen various international groups attacking the Chinese for their national interests. We believe that it is a direct result of our speeches and voice of the cries of the Muslims of East Turkistan. At this point, I must also make it clear that we, the people of East Turkistan, have been a bulwark to prevent the Chinese regime from invading Central Asia and even Western countries.

The Chinese chose East Turkistan as their primary target because it provides them with access to Central Asia via an overland route and they were aware that other nations could not be occupied until this impenetrable wall was destroyed. If the Chinese regime does not hold this land under its control, it will not be able to occupy other countries. Also, the people of Turkistan will not allow the Chinese regime to do so.

Due to China's takeover and control of the global economy, its military supremacy and its

competition with its adversaries, America and the West; China has initiated a large project called the "Silk Road," and through this project, the Chinese government has embarked upon the path to occupy Central Asia and even the West. Neighbouring organizations and states that have understood this must act accordingly. If the Chinese regime continues its occupation of East Turkistan, it will gradually expand towards capturing Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and even the West. One does not need to be well-versed in politics to comprehend this reality of CCP.

For this reason, we understand the attacks of the Sindhi and Baloch organizations on the Chinese from two points:

First: They understood the point mentioned above.

Second: They responded to the calls of the Muslims of East Turkistan and God knows best.



Q7) Hassan Mahsoom was killed in a joint operation of Pakistani & U.S. forces on 2 October, 2003 in South Waziristan. Taking into consideration these incidents & the incidents mentioned in the above two questions, do you plan to attack the Pakistani government forces alongside Chinese interests in Pakistan?



Answer: Our group does not want to attack or threaten any country. I would add that if Pakistan and the neighbouring countries refrain from harming us and don't interfere in our affairs then we can and will maintain good neighbourly relations with them.



Q8) The Afghan Taliban has maintained that there are no foreign fighters present in Afghanistan now. However, a video released by your group's media channel which is dated May 2022, showed your leaders (Abdul Haq & Abdusalam) along with other members of TIP celebrating in Afghanistan. How do you explain this?



Answer: We have sites and carry out operations all over the world, but as far as our fighters are concerned, we have decided to place our positions in areas that do not represent any threat to anyone and we do not want to disclose our locations owing to security reasons. However, if a country declares publicly that it is helping and sheltering the people of East Turkistan, then, it may disclose our locations.



Q9) The Chinese have pressured the Afghan Taliban to crack down on Uyghur militants in Afghanistan and as a result, some of the militants reportedly were cleared from an area (bordering China) in Badakhshan province. Have you faced or are you currently facing any problems put forth by the Afghan Taliban?



Answer: I have already answered your question above.



Q10) What do you think about the current Afghan Taliban government? Do you second the decision of their top leadership to ban the education of women? Also, do you have any information on where Ayman Zawahiri is? The U.S. claims to have assassinated him in Kabul in July 2022.



Answer: Afghanistan is a place that has constantly seen persistent conflict and as for the new Afghan Taliban government, I think that the Afghan people have now got a respite from war and are living peacefully after the Afghan Taliban took control. Regarding the decisions taken by the Afghan Taliban leaders, I don't wish to meddle in the internal affairs of other nations and I don't want to pass any judgment on or make any negative remarks about them. Furthermore, we are unaware of Ayman Zawahiri's whereabouts or the circumstances surrounding his killing in Kabul.



Q11) In October 2021, a Uyghur suicide bomber, affiliated with the Islamic State, blew himself up inside a Shia mosque in Kunduz, killing at least 50 people. Last month, the Islamic State claimed that two of its Inghimasiyeen targeted a hotel in Kabul that was housing Chinese & other foreign nationals. Your current leader Abdul Haq at-Turkistani has admonished the Islamic State in the past. What do you think about these events and the group that calls itself "Islamic State"?



Answer: Until now, we do not have conclusive evidence that the bombing in Kunduz was carried out by a Uyghur or Uyghurs affiliated with the Islamic State. However, the Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the same. We believe that this group, called the Islamic State, is an extremist group, and is an organization of “Kharijites,” (seceders or those who exit the community) as defined in Islam. The Emir of our group, Sheikh Abdul Haq, and I are convinced that the so-called Islamic State group is a group of extremists, and we reiterate these criticisms.



Q12) A 2022 U.N. report claimed that at least 50 Uyghur militants from TIP have defected to the Islamic State. Are you worried that the IS can hijack your cause or severely damage your capabilities in any manner?



Answer: There are no defectors from our group to the Islamic State (IS). We are convinced that none of our members will join this extremist organization, God willing. There is no reason to be concerned about our members defecting to the Islamic State. It cannot undermine our organization because we have educated our members on this subject. We continue to take strong measures to prevent the infiltration of extremist views of the so-called Islamic State into our organization.



Q13) The Chinese government has been maintaining close contact with the Afghan Taliban and the lead Chinese envoy in Kabul has held several meetings with the Taliban leadership since the 2021 takeover of Afghanistan. Quite a few Chinese companies have also expressed interest in a variety of projects in Afghanistan. Based on all that, how do you see the Afghan Taliban's collaboration with the Chinese?



Answer: I do not want to talk about why the Afghan Taliban government has maintained ties with China. But I insist and believe that, whether it is the Afghan Taliban or any other country, they should not engage and cooperate closely with the Chinese Communist Party because the Chinese regime is “dishonest, deceitful, and treacherous.” Even the Chinese people are weary of this system.

Moreover, if the Communist Party wants to occupy a country; it will be first in the name of under-signing economic deals that will allow these Chinese companies to enter their target country. As we have seen, the Chinese government will subdue these countries in the name of aid and then gradually start to reveal its ulterior motives. This tragedy has occurred in our homeland East Turkistan and there are also similar instances in Tajikistan. Tajikistan owed a lot of debt to China as well, and after the former failed to repay the debts, parts of its territories were bought by the Chinese regime.

Similarly, through false promises and economic inducements, China is attempting to expand its footprint and occupy Pakistan. I think the development of Gwadar port by the Chinese companies (in Balochistan province) is something that bothers us and other countries.



Q14) Chinese Muslim Han Weiliang, who was once educated in Dar-ul-Uloom Nadwat-ul-Ulema seminary in Lucknow, India, hoped that “the Turkic Muslims could have an Islamic State...extending from the eastern borders of Afghanistan to China”. In 2016, India had to cancel the visa of World Uyghur Congress leader Dolkun Isa who was scheduled to visit Dalai Lama (highest spiritual leader and former head of the country of Tibet) in Dharamshala, India, because of reportedly objections raised by China. The Indian Army and Chinese PLA have clashed at Galwan Valley & most recently in Arunachal Pradesh with both sides sustaining casualties, including fatal ones. Do you have any comment on these events and/or a message to the Indian government as well as the “Tibetan government in Exile?”



Answer: Thanks to Han Weiliang who studied at the Dar-ul-Uloom as it was there where he studied in-depth about the history and discovered the fact that these lands belong to the people of East Turkistan and not to China. Regarding the cancellation of the World Uyghur Congress leader's visa by the Indian government, we urge and request the Indian government to be brave

and refuse to comply with China's unreasonable demands because we are neighbours, share a common history, and want to maintain good relations.

Moreover, the CCP continues to dominate the Galwan Valley and Arunachal Pradesh in India. If the Indian government is not careful, China will have another opportunity to exert its influence on the Indo-China border. It is also possible that China could expand its footprints in these territories and even annex some of the Indian territories.

From this point of view, I think the Indian government may desire a neighbouring nation that will aid it in driving out this intruder and is likewise dedicated to being a good neighbour. And I would like to appeal to the Indian government; just as you have taken care of the Tibetan refugees, may you also consider our neighbourly relations and take care of and help the people of East Turkistan in every way. I also hope that India will provide shelter to the Uyghur people who were forcibly and unjustly driven out of their home.



Q15) What do you think of the HTS & its civilian government (Syrian Salvation Government) in Idlib province? Your group has been accused of having close ties with al-Qaeda, but your organization's Syrian branch has worked alongside HTS in Idlib even after HTS severed its ties with al-Qaeda in 2016-17. How do you define this relationship?



Answer: Regarding Hayat Tahrir ash-Sham or the new Salvation Government in Syria, my answer is as before: I do not want to interfere or comment on the internal affairs of others; but I have already mentioned that our organization has nothing to do with al-Qaeda. Another issue that I would like to highlight is that we need some places to conduct military training and organize our army units for the liberation of East Turkistan.



Q16) Various jihadist commentators and rival factions have in the past accused TIP of siding with HTS during the infighting that broke out between HTS and other rebel groups with accusations that HTS holds sway over TIP's Syrian leadership. How do you respond to these allegations?



Answer: Regarding your question, our group's policy since its inception has been to not to interfere in the internal affairs of others. There is no basis for these allegations.



Q17) How does your current strategic relationship with HTS impact your ties with al-Qaeda? How do you view the strategy of HTS reigning in other rival jihadist groups who challenge their authority as we have seen in the context of HTS launching a crackdown & detaining the leadership of Hurrās ad-Dīn?



Answer: I must first clarify that the separation of Hayat Tahrir ash-Sham from al-Qaeda does not affect our strength. Secondly, I have already answered the last question. Our organization is not bothered and has nothing to do with al-Qaeda.



Q18) There is another group that emerged in late 2017 in north-western Syria known as Katibat al-Ghuraba, or Katibat al-Ghuraba' at-Turkistan (KGT) that claims to comprise ethnic Uyghurs and fighters of Arab descent with its media output predominantly produced in Uyghur language. Do you have any relationship with KGT? Has the TIP in Syria been able to rally other factions of ethnic Uyghur fighters to achieve common objectives?



Answer: The Turkistan Islamic Party can and will unify various Uyghur groups, whether armed or political if they are interested in the cause of East Turkistan, because our group is the first armed force that came into being to solve the East Turkistan crisis. This group was born out of the hearts of the people, and our group is supported by the people of East Turkistan.

We stand with our people, work for their liberation, our religion, land and nation. The common hope and goal of the people of East Turkistan is to get rid of China's occupation. Based on this, I believe that the people of East Turkistan and all organizations want to reach this goal with us shoulder to shoulder. But we need a favourable situation and partners to achieve this objective of liberating East Turkistan.



Q19) *Does the Syrian branch of TIP have some kind of autonomy, especially when it comes to decision-making processes like entering into agreements with other groups? If yes, then to what extent do they enjoy autonomy?*



Answer: As for the Syrian branch, its leadership system is not autonomous and is appointed by the central leadership. The centre is aware of all decisions related to the issue of Turkistan taken back in Syria.



Q20) *Yurtugh tactical, a private military contractor in Idlib has been reported of having links with TIP. It regularly publishes photos of Uyghur militants taking combat lessons. How is it related to the TIP and what role will such tactical groups play in strengthening the hand of jihadist fighters?*



Answer: It does not matter whether this contractor in Idlib belongs to the Turkistan Islamic Party or not, but let me tell you that we will not let go of the advantage that these military schools have to offer. This and other military schools are essential to our armed struggle and when it comes to such tactical contractors and groups, they are of great importance to us and any fighter who wants to fight. Knowing and learning modern warfare is certainly one of the requirements of jihad.



Q21) *What will happen if the last rebel-held stronghold of Idlib falls to the Assad regime? What will be the repercussions for the future of exiled Uyghur fighters and TIP members in Syria? Will they find their way back to Afghanistan or Turkey?*



Answer: We cannot add anything to this as we are working on developing precautionary measures and plans related to this issue. We do not plan to reveal our strategies.



Q22) *Outside the Central Asian region, a vast number of Uyghur refugees are settled in Türkiye. President Erdogan in 1995 said that “East Turkistan is the cradle of Turkic history, civilization and culture.” Also, the Turkish government has been accused of allegedly providing unhindered safe passage to Uyghur/TIP militants in Syria for fighting against the forces of the Assad regime. So, how do you evaluate Turkey's support for the Uyghur cause?*



Answer: We highly appreciate the Turkish government's support for Uyghur's grievances. Despite strong pressure from China, the Turkish government has boldly pursued ethno-national cooperation with the Uyghurs and provided shelter to the displaced and exiled Uyghurs who have been rendered stateless. We thank the government and people of Türkiye and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and it is certain that the

government and people of Turkey, including Recep Tayyip Erdogan, will receive acclaim for their support of the Uyghurs throughout history.



Q23) What do think about Turkey's ambiguous policy towards the Uyghur cause and the TIP? On one hand, it has designated ETIM as a terrorist organization, while on the other hand, it has been reported that the TIP was formed as an armed organization to replace the ETLO. (East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association or ETESA is considered the Islamist wing of ETIM. One theory is that it was composed of members of the Turkey-based-East Turkistan Liberation Organization ETLO)?



Answer: We cannot overlook how the Turkish government continues to treat the Uyghurs better than other countries. We would like to express our gratitude to the Turkish government and ask for continued care, cooperation and sympathy for the Uyghurs and their homeland.



Q24) How does ETIM/TIP see China's "counter-extremism program" in Xinjiang? Is this government policy leading to more Uyghurs & Chinese Muslims joining ETIM/TIP, or is it scaring them away?



Answer: Before answering the question, I will address an important issue, which is that I hope you call our country East Turkistan instead of "Xinjiang." We are not at all pleased with the moniker that the invaders have given us.

The Chinese claim that they are fighting extremism in East Turkistan; instead, the Chinese Communist Party is plundering our homeland and its resources without any compensation and killing innocent people. They have even killed unborn children, under the pretext of family planning policy, and tortured intellectuals. I wonder how one would not see the Chinese government as an extremist entity when it continues to annex our lands and suppress our members. Of course, no one would hesitate to describe the Chinese Communist Party as an extremist entity in this case.

If this is the case, then China's "counter-extremism program" will be counterproductive and cause great harm to it because the Uyghurs now understand these policies very well. Even some Chinese are also not satisfied with what the CCP has done with the people of East Turkistan and, since then, they have also criticized the unjust policies of the Chinese government towards Uyghurs.

The CCP's treatment of the Uyghurs has drawn criticism from the Taiwanese government as well. In addition, America, along with more than fifty other countries were outraged and held the Chinese government accountable as under the guise of combating extremism, the state of China perpetrated injustice and repressed the people of East Turkistan. All this proves that the so-called policies of cultural assimilation and massacres pursued by China in the name of combating extremism are accelerating the process of its defeat.

ITCT does not necessarily endorse any or all views expressed by the author in the article.

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Note: *Mona Thakkar's associate Vineet also contributed to this report.*

ABOUT ITCT

ITCT is UK based organisation and founded in 2018. It is a non-political and non-profitable organisation and is a unique think tank in itself. There is not a single organisation around that specifically counters the narratives of Islamist terrorism by using the tools of Islamic Theology. ITCT exposes the root causes of Political Islam and works hard to eliminate it through introducing the actual concept of Islamic Theology.

ITCT conducts a comprehensive research to find out the key elements that draw the most vulnerable people of the society into the fire of religious extremism. ITCT works on three main factors in order to educate the Muslim community:

- That Islamist Terrorism is wrongly associated with Islam
- And is committed by misguided Muslims
- By manipulating religious texts to brainwash Muslims

ITCT has three pillars to stand on:

- **MISSION**

Countering Islamist Terrorism

- **VISION**

Educating Muslim Community

- **OBJECTIVE**

Providing the Solution of Islamist Terrorism

ITCT is an independent organisation that generates funds through donations. ITCT warmly welcomes talented writers, researchers and experts and would like to publish their work.