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Growing Turkish influence in Central Asian countries in the post-Cold War era: tentative implications for China

Aram Karamyan

As the founder of the modern Turkish state Mustafa Kemal Atatürk said in 1933:

Today, the Soviet Union is our friend, neighbor and ally. We need this friendship. But no one can know what may happen tomorrow. Just like the Ottoman, and the Austro-Hungarian empires, they may also be disintegrated, split. The nations they are holding with an iron grip today, may slip away. The world may attain a new balance. Then, Turkey must know what to do. We have brothers under the rule of this friend, with whom we share the same language, faith, and origin. We must be prepared to embrace them. How does a nation prepare such an endeavor? By maintaining strong spiritual bridges. Language is a bridge. Faith is a bridge. History is a bridge. We need to go back to our roots, and reconstruct what history has divided. We cannot wait for them to approach us. We must reach out to them.¹

Currently, Turkey is stressing cultural, origin, ethnic and linguistic affinities among “Turkic”² peoples. As Central Asia has an important strategic role for China’s political stability, this ‘pan-Turkism’ has the potential to undermine China’s comprehensive security, a part of which is peaceful development.

This article examines this Turkish influence projection towards Central Asia and Caucasus regions after the shaking geopolitical change of the Soviet Union’s collapse. It will focus on the influence not only by the Turkish state, but also by businesses, social movements and networks. The aspects of non-governmental movements (especially Fetullah Gülen’s movement) and the role of organizations in Turkish influence projection are shown: their grassroots work, and the potential of spreading ideology among peoples, educating the elitist youth. How can this influence the

¹ A.M. Koknar, ‘Turkey’s Security Relations in Central Asia’ in: A. Cohen ed., *Eurasia in Balance: the US and the Regional Power Shift* (Burlington 2005) 101-126: 122.

² Denoting a large group of closely related Altaic languages and people of Western and Central Asia, including Turkish, Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uighur, Uzbek, and Tatar.

political environment in Central Asia already in the next generation? The implications thereof for China are discussed towards the end of this article.

The role of the state

Turkey has been cited as an important actor because of its strong historical, cultural, ethnic and linguistic ties with the newly independent states of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. Thus, the positive role Turkey might play in this region has been extensively discussed, not only within Turkey but also in the West, where people fear that radical Islam might fill the power vacuum that occurred in the region with the demise of the Soviet Union led to strong encouragement to these newly independent states to adopt a 'Turkish model' of secular democracy with a liberal economy.³

The new Turkic cooperation was supposed to bring about further Turkish growth and development, to enhance its regional influence, and to increase Turkey's international standing in the eyes of its Western allies. At the first Turkic summit in Ankara (30-31 October 1992), Turgut Ozal⁴ captured the spirit of the moment well. In his inaugural speech, he announced that 'if we can exploit this historic opportunity in the best possible way, if we do not make any mistake, the twenty-first century will be the century of the Turks.'⁵

However, Turkey has been confronted by serious obstacles in extending its sphere of influence. It is cut off from the new Turkish world, except for a few miles of common border – a bridge, in fact – with Nakhichevan, an Azeri enclave in Armenia. Between Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan lies Zangezur, which borders with Iran and separates Turkey from other Turkic countries. By the 'Agreement Respecting the Fixation of the Frontier between Persia and Turkey with Exchange of Notes', signed at

³ M. Aydin, 'Between Euphoria and Realpolitik: Turkish Policy toward Central Asia and Caucasus' in: T.Y. Ismael and M. Aydin, *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the Twenty-first Century: A Changing Role in World Politics* (London 2003) 139-160: 139.

⁴ Prime minister from 1983 to 1989 and president from 1989 to 1993.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/437131/Turgut-Ozal>, accessed 9 May 2012.

⁵ D. Jung and W. Pocoli, *Turkey at the Crossroads: Ottoman Legacies and a Greater Middle East* (London 2001) 180.

Teheran (23 January 1932), Turkey exchanged some territory in the Bajirke and Qotur areas and gained a boundary with Nakhijevan.⁶ It was to solve border differences, but it was also one more step towards establishing ground connections with Turkic countries. Problems arose, while they were thinking about this southern part of Armenia to have ground connections with Azerbaijan, Karabakh (Arcakh).⁷

Although initially cultural, linguistic and religious affinities were the stimulating factors for forging closer ties, Ankara's new attitude towards Central Asia and the Caucasus has been based more on pragmatic economic and foreign policy considerations than on simple nationalist rhetoric or sentimental concerns. Turkey's responsibilities, as understood by the then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, meant that Turkey could, and indeed should, play a dynamic role in connecting the newly independent Central Asian and Caucasian states to the rest of the world, and help them in their quest for an identity. This role also included efforts towards regional cooperation through such organizations as BSEC⁸ and ECO.⁹

At another level, Turkey also expected to gain major economic benefits from the development of closer ties with the new Central Asian republics, which were seen as promising by a growing Turkish industry. In fact, the Turkish private sector, with heavy backing from the government, had moved extensively to exploit the region's economic potential. At the same time, there was also the expectation that Turkey would become politically more important in regional and global politics because of its cultural and ethnic links with the region's large Turkic populations, which were undergoing profound political changes.¹⁰

⁶ L.M. Alexander, 'Iran – Turkey Boundary, International Boundary Study', *The Geographer Office of the Geographer Bureau of Intelligence and Research* 28 (1964) 1-9.

⁷ Y. Djerejian, *Pan-Turkism* (Beirut 1998) 71.

⁸ The BSEC (Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization) was founded on June 25, 1992, and is comprised of Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Georgia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Greece. <http://www.photius.com/bsec/bsec.html#ABOUT>, accessed 3 April 2012.

⁹ The ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization) is an intergovernmental regional organization established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey for the purpose of promoting economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the Member States. In 1992, the Organization was expanded to include seven new members: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan.

¹⁰ Aydin, 'Between Euphoria and Realpolitik', 141.

After recognizing the newly independent Turkic republics, Ankara started to establish institutions to develop relations with those republics and encouraged businessmen, universities, and artists to do so too. Direct air connections and satellite broadcast links have been established. To facilitate these activities and to coordinate the flow of assistance to these areas, the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TIKA) was established in Ankara in January 1992. TIKA was an agency within the Foreign Ministry with its own budget and staff, created in order to provide technical and cultural support to the newly independent Turkic republics. As TIKA President Hakan Fidan acknowledges, Turkey 'took advantage of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Republic of Yugoslavia to initiate projects that reach out to the countries Turkey could not communicate with during the Cold War.'¹¹ In May 1999, TIKA was moved to the prime minister's office and restructured. The agency now works not only towards the Turkic republics, but is also involved in 37 other countries. During the period 2005-2009, around seven billion USD of resources were channeled to TIKA through public and private sources.¹² Turkey also had direct involvement abroad, establishing and financing two universities in Turkic republics, one in Kazakhstan, and one in Kyrgyzstan. The Akhmet Yasawi Turkish-Kazak University was founded in 1994 in Turkestan in southern Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University opened in 1996 in Bishkek. Both universities are financed by Turkey.¹³

A greater Turkish role in the region was favored by the West as a counter-weight against the ambitions of Iran to influence the region. The fear that the vacuum left by the collapse of Soviet Communism could lead to Islamic fundamentalism becoming the politically dominant force among the Muslims of Central Asia led to the West's promotion of Turkey as a Muslim, yet secular and democratic model for development. As a result of growing self confidence about its potential and political support in the West, Turkey felt ready to take advantage of the new economic and political

¹¹ http://publicdiplomacy.wikia.com/wiki/Turkish_International_Cooperation_and_Development_Agency_, accessed 17 April 2012.

¹² However, it is likely that the amounts directed to the new Turkic republics were not that large, since the agency has been more involved in the Balkans, Middle East and Africa from 2002 onwards. See: N. Devlet, 'Taking Stock: Turkey and the Turkic World 20 Years Later', *The German Marshall Fund of the United States* (November 10, 2011) 1-4: 2.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 3.

opportunities when the new states emerged from the former Soviet Union. Cultural and economic protocols were exchanged, and in a direct and unprecedented challenge to Russian interests in the region, the then Turkish prime minister Demirel spoke of the possibility of establishing a 'Union of Turkic States', and suggested that Central Asia might be better off away from the Ruble Zone.¹⁴

The Turkish model of development is the common reference point. Effusive statements have been made about the Turkish role. Its Avrasia TV satellite broadcasts are watched each day by audiences throughout Central Asia and Azerbaijan. The Turkish modified Latin alphabet and technical standards are on offer as the most suitable. In Azerbaijan and elsewhere, Turkey waged – and, in December 1991, won – an alphabet war with Iran and Saudi Arabia to replace the Cyrillic alphabet with the Latin instead of the Arabic one. Extremist circles in Turkey dream not of mere influence, but of a pan-Turkic empire in which Ankara would extend its power over a vast region of Central Asia. This vision, though, has no official backing in Ankara. President Turgut Ozal was quick to repudiate the claim of one of his ministers, Ercument Konukman, in January 1990 that 'several states in the Soviet Union and in China will be under the Turkish flag in the next century'.¹⁵

For obvious geographical reasons, Azerbaijan forms the principal link between Turkey and Central Asia. As soon as Azerbaijan became independent in 1991, the leaders of the republic established close relations with Turkey in order to receive technical and cultural assistance, and to counterbalance the Russian influence. Relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey became even more intense after the 1992 election victory of Abulfaz Elcibey, the Popular Front candidate. Elcibey promised that the country of Atatürk would participate fully in the exploitation of Azerbaijani oil wealth – for which Turkey had already fought during the First World War.

Turkey also discussed the possibility of providing military training to the regional countries, actively advocated building gas and oil pipelines through Turkey to market the Caspian energy resources, and encouraged the adoption of the Turkish – that is Latin – alphabet for all the Turkic states. By mid-1992 Turkey had made a bold bid for leadership and

¹⁴ Aydin, 'Between Euphoria and Realpolitik', 141.

¹⁵ A. Hyman, 'Moving out of Moscow's Orbit: The Outlook for Central Asia', *International Affairs* 69.2 (1993) 288-304: 299.

influence in the region in political, financial, cultural, military, and economic areas. Nevertheless, the region presented important challenges for Turkey.¹⁶

The Fetullah Gülen movement

While discussing the spreading process of Turkish influence, one can't avoid mentioning the role of the Fetullah Gülen movement, although it is not a governmental actor. Regarding the movement's business interests, many commentators suspect strong lines of patronage between the present AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) government and the Gülen movement. It is an Islamic-based movement which has sought to combine a modern interpretation of Islam with Turkish nationalism and statism. Taking its roots from the movement of the prominent Kurdish religious authority Said Nursi (1877-1961), the 'neo-Nurcu' movement of Fethullah Gülen is an important force, with its powerful presence in the media and its network of schools in Turkey, Central Asia and the Balkans.

President Turgut Ozal's economic and political liberalization accelerated the formation and expansion of new alternative social, cultural and economic public spaces.¹⁷ The market economy and the spread of democratization have led to an unprecedented Islamization of the public sphere. Islamic foundations, associations and publishing houses are urging Muslims to become more involved in social and political activities and to control their own lives. The activities of Islamic groups are setting new coordinates in the public sphere. The neo-Nurcus allow more freedom of debate and criticism in their journals, radios, television stations, and newspapers than most other Kemalist and Islamist groups. However, they do this only within the coordinates of the teachings of Anatolian Islam, i.e., Islamo-Turkish nationalism.

New alternative spaces and associations have served to empower Islamic groups in Turkey. Muslim groups have used these alternative spaces to create their own 'parallel society', where they can express their opinion to attract culturally and economically excluded groups. For instance, deregulation of broadcasting has empowered Islamic voices to express themselves on diverse radio stations, television channels, magazines and

¹⁶ Aydın, 'Between Euphoria and Realpolitik', 143.

¹⁷ H. Yavuz, 'Towards an Islamic Liberalism?: The Nurcu Movement and Fetullah Gülen', *Middle East Journal* 53.4 (1999) 584-605: 585.

newspapers. Moreover, a growing Anatolian bourgeoisie, commonly called the 'Anatolian tigers' has formed its own association, Mussiad (*Mustakil Sanayici ve İş Adamları Derneği*; Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association). MUSIAD was formed by those economically excluded from TUSIAD (Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association), a powerful and pro-state business association. Some secular groups claim that the 'M' of MUSIAD stands for Muslim rather than *mustakil* (independent). Indeed, many of the members do not hesitate to present their organization as an association of Muslim businessmen.

The emphasis on spirituality in Gülen's thinking is partly explained by his attachment to Turkey's 'folk Islam': Sufism. Specifically, Gülen derives inspiration from the writings of Said Nursi, whose Nur movement (active from the 1920s to the 1980s) was similarly distinguished by its advocacy of reason, progress, and tolerance, and its quietism towards direct political involvement.¹⁸

Gülen prefers to draw inspiration from the Ottoman model of state-society relationships. Although the empire's rulers were guided by their faith, the Ottoman system of governance was not theocratic. Public laws were formulated on the basis of the state's needs rather than in accordance with Islamic law (*sharia*).¹⁹ Gülen is first and foremost a Turko-Ottoman nationalist. His nationalism is an inclusive one that is not based on blood or race but rather on shared historical experiences and the agreement to live together within one polity.²⁰ This cultural revival of Islamic circles in Turkey seeks to criticize the present Kemalist project and its future orientation by reconstructing the past of the Turko-Muslim community. By reimagining the cultural content of the Turkish nation, the Islamic groups present the political nation as Muslim, Ottoman and Turkish. The politics of nationalism in Turkey have been gradually embedded in the politics of culture. There is an attempt to 'free' the definition of the nation from the statist elite. One of the major effects of the politics of culture is the reconceptualization of the nation, and its cultural connection with Central Asia and the Balkans. A large segment of the population has celebrated and supported Gülen's conception of national identity as Muslim, Ottoman and Turkish. The politics of nationalism in Turkey have been gradually

¹⁸ B. Park, 'The Fetullah Gulen Movement', *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 12.3 (2008) 1-11: 2.

¹⁹ Ibidem, 2.

²⁰ Yavuz, 'Towards an Islamic Liberalism?', 595.

embedded in the politics of culture. There is an attempt to ‘free’ the definition of the nation from the statist elite. One of the major effects of the politics of culture is the reconceptualization of the nation, and its cultural connection with Central Asia and the Balkans. To feel one’s identity for many Nurus is to feel a religio-historical emotion, without reifying it. Emotional aspects of identity are not fixed into a single concept, as an emotional state remains a fluid process.

Gülen states that there is no necessary contradiction between Islam and modernity. Indeed, according to Gülen, Turkish Islam’s more adaptable and less doctrinal Sufi traditions have enabled Turkey, with its democratization, free market economy, and secular political system, to incorporate aspects of modernity barely found elsewhere in the Muslim world. A key to his thinking is that Islam should positively embrace science, reason, democratization, and tolerance. It should not shield itself from other ideas, or from scientific and technological progress. Gülen believes that the relative economic and moral poverty of so much of the Islamic world is explained by its attachment to misplaced and dogmatic interpretations of Islam, not Islam per se. He argues that Turkey can lead the Islamic world toward this realization, and for all his proclaimed universalism there is also a pronounced ‘Turkishness’ to his thinking. Turkish society is nationalistic, and some of this flavor has been absorbed by Gülen and Fetullahchi.²¹

For Gülen, the key to Islam’s adaptation to the modern world does not lie in direct political activity and organization. Instead, he propagates a kind of ‘educational Islamism’, as opposed to a ‘political Islamism’. New prominent religious and highly educated people, a ‘Golden Generation’, should be cultivated and encouraged to dedicate their lives to the service (*hizmet*) of the people and to inspire them towards the movement’s objectives.²²

Gülen’s community is based on a complex web of business networks and controls a large media empire. Initially benefitting from some protective cover from Prime Minister Turgut Ozal – reckoned to be a sympathizer – the movement has opened around two hundred schools in Turkey since it first was established in 1982. Furthermore, universities such as Fatih in Istanbul, hospitals, charities, a television channel (Samanlı TV) and a radio station (Burç FM) have been established by the movement. It owns

²¹ Park, ‘The Fetullah Gulen Movement’, 2.

²² Ibidem, 2.

Sizinti (a scientific monthly), Ekoloji (an environment-related magazine), Yeni Umit (a theological journal), Aksiyon (a weekly magazine), Zaman (a daily newspaper) and The Fountain (English language religious publication).²³ In 1996 it established a bank, Asya Finans, operating on the basis of Islamic principles such as interest-free banking and initially tasked to raise investment funds for the newly-independent Turkic republics. Its activities are now extensive and global. It is backed by sixteen partners and has over half a billion USD in capital. Moreover, a powerful association of businessmen, ISHAD (*İş Hayati Dayanışma Derneği*, Business Life Solidarity Association), which includes over two thousand businessmen and merchants, supports Gülen's educational activities. This infrastructure also includes universities and colleges, high schools, dormitories, summer camps, and over a hundred foundations. Day-to-day activities are organized by a hierarchical management based on the tenets of trust, obedience and duty to the community.²⁴ The network also spawned a Journalists and Writers Foundation (largely to facilitate dialogue activities), and a Teachers Foundation, each of which publishes journals and organizes symposiums and conferences – frequently abroad – and provides an umbrella for a host of dialogue groups and charitable organizations.²⁵

This structure is composed of businessmen, teachers, journalists, and students. Gülen is well aware of the opportunities available in a free market economy. His philosophy, therefore, is very much in tune with this growing business community. He stresses education and engagement in the market economy. Gülen's activities are aimed at molding a cohesive and disciplined community through education, mass media, and financial networks.²⁶

Although revenues raised by school fees are often used to enable access by less-privileged students, it remains an inescapable fact that the movement's educational model is elitist. In Turkey this is contributing to the creation of a parallel and Gülen-inspired elite. In post-communist Central Asia (the main location of Gülen's overseas educational activities), successful applicants are usually the children of either the wealthy or government officials.

The Gülen movement eludes definition. Deeply Turkish, it is globally engaged. It is apolitical, yet constitutes an existential political threat to

²³ Yavuz, 'Towards an Islamic Liberalism?', 585.

²⁴ Ibidem, 585.

²⁵ Park, 'The Fetullah Gulen Movement', 4.

²⁶ Yavuz, 'Towards an Islamic Liberalism?', 596-597.

Turkey's officially secularist order, not least through its penetration of the state's machinery. It is opposed by a Kemalist state, yet it enhances Turkey's 'soft power': its external trade and its pan-Turkic links. Espousing democracy and openness, it remains secretive and publicity-shy. Spiritually based, it is extremely wealthy. More of a unifying set of values than an organization perhaps, its tentacles expand relentlessly nevertheless.²⁷

Under the current AKP administration, a number of business groups owned by avowed members of the movement has grown rapidly with the help of state contracts and concessions. ISHAD is another key organization for fostering the movement's business ties – particularly in countries other than Turkey. ISHAD members are reputed to provide the main sources of funding for the movement.²⁸

Gülen seeks to prevent 'emotional alienation' among the Turkic-Muslim youth by establishing the missing link between the Turkic-Ottoman communities and God. He stresses the role of natural sciences to prevent the fragmentation and alienation caused by skepticism. Therefore, the neo-Nurcu education system seeks to discover the attributes of nature to consolidate faith in God. According to Gülen, a lack of religious education would create atheism whereas the lack of scientific education would result in fanaticism. Gülen's schools promote patriotism and a common religio-historical consciousness for the Turkic youth. Financial supporters are regularly invited to visit the schools and explore investment opportunities in Central Asia. These conservative businessmen usually prefer to fund schools in Central Asia because of their commitment to Gülen's Turko-Islamic worldview. The teachers of these schools in Central Asia usually come from the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, or from Bogazi University in Istanbul. They believe that they have a mission to fulfill, just like missionaries. However, the Nurcu teachers are not only seeking to deliver God.

These Nurcu education networks are closely connected to conservative business circles. The combination of business interests with Gülen's ideas is powerful both inside and outside Turkey. These networks, despite claims of a central organization and a strict hierarchy, are rather loose networks of like-minded Turks, whose similar ideas are a result of

²⁷ Park, 'The Fetullah Gülen Movement', 11.

²⁸ I.B. Gözaydin, 'The Fethullah Gülen Movement and Politics in Turkey: A Chance for Democratization or a Trojan Horse?', *Democratization* 16.6 (2009) 1214-1236: 1219.

their internalization of the writings of Said Nursi. Students in Gülen's high schools in Turkey consistently achieve superior results on university exams. Although these schools do a much better job than state schools, they still stress memorization and conservative values more than critical thinking. Gülen's educational system does not necessarily promote free will and individualism, but rather promotes a collective consciousness. The schools are less likely to encourage self-reflection and self-realization of individual potentials.²⁹

Gülen's notion of politics can not be considered liberal, since he gives priority to the community and the state over individual rights. Although Gülen makes political and social claims on the basis of religious distinctions, these are not based on mutual respect and responsibility to other political and gender-based communities. Further, he hardly questions the oppressive policies of the Turkish state. It is, therefore, difficult to consider Gülen's project either liberal or democratic. Rather, it is a hybrid communitarian movement rooted in Turko-Islamic tradition. However, in comparison with the elitist and socially exclusive nature of Turkish intellectual life, Gülen, as a religious leader, is fairly tolerant of 'others' and is open to dialogue with all groups in order to promote civility in Turkey. The Nurcu movement of Fethullah Gülen has reconciled itself with democracy and secularism without becoming either democratic or fully secular.³⁰

During a summit in Nakhchevan, Azerbaijan, in 2009, participating leaders decided to create a Council of Cooperation of Turkish Speaking States (CCTS) with its headquarters in Istanbul. In addition to this, TÜRKPA³¹ (Turkish Speaking Countries Parliamentarian Assembly); TÜRKSOY³² (Joint Administration of Turkic Arts and Culture), which has

²⁹ Yavuz, 'Towards an Islamic Liberalism?', 598.

³⁰ Ibidem, 600.

³¹ TÜRKPA was established on 21 November 2008, according to the Agreement signed by the Heads of parliaments of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, and the Republic of Turkey in the 'Dolmabakhche Saray' in Istanbul. <http://www.turk-pa.org/cat.php?cat=2023&lang=en>, accessed 16 May 2012.

³² TÜRKSOY was established in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, on 12 July 1993, by the Ministers of Culture of the newly independent five Turkic republics: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, together with Republic of Turkey. <http://www.turksoy.org.tr/EN/belge/2-27270/about-us.html>, accessed 25 May 2012.

its headquarters in Ankara; and the Turkish Academy with its seat in Astana, Kazakhstan, were all integrated into the Turkish Council. This new organization had its first summit in Almaty on 21 October 2011, and discussed economic cooperation amongst its members.³³

Turkey entered the summit with rather ambitious expectations such as the establishment of a common market, the foundation of a Turkic development and investment bank, and firm pledges from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to build oil and gas pipelines via Turkey. However, the first multilateral meeting of the presidents of the six Turkic republics resulted in a vaguely worded declaration that did not entail any specific commitments but only loose political statements.³⁴

It would not be correct to say that spreading Turkish influence in the region went smooth all the time. For example, during the 1990s, Uzbek President Islam Karimov cracked down on the movement's activities in his country, including a ban on the distribution of *Zaman*. The movement has minimal presence there today.³⁵ In 2005, Turkish teaching staff at the Islamic theology school at a university in Turkmenistan was sacked by the country's autocratic leader President Saparmurat Niazov. It seems that the Turkmen regime was becoming increasingly unhappy about both the pan-Turkic and Islamic ideology of the Gülen network in the country.³⁶ It may be that present leaders don't want any strong influence from any side and are keeping all the options open for cooperation with other countries interested in the region. But the point here is that the elitist youth's education is under Turkish influence. Gülen's schools already represent around ten percent of Central Asia's education systems, and it could be that – in a tacit partnership with the Turkish state – the movement's activities will over the longer term intensify the emotive and material bonds between Turkic peoples – or their elites – and states. The Gülen network's Central Asian elites could in time take on the forms of their Turkish counterparts, thereby encouraging the emergence of a pan-Turkic world linked by overlapping and fused identities. This could in turn ease the development of economic interactions, and even encourage closer state-to-state relationships. Such an evolution would not quite correspond with the kind of 'Turkish model' that Ankara's secularists have sometimes hoped to be

³³ Devlet, 'Taking Stock: Turkey and the Turkic World', 3.

³⁴ Jung and Poccoli, *Turkey at the Crossroads*, 180.

³⁵ Park, 'The Fetullah Gulen Movement', 8.

³⁶ Ibidem, 8.

adopted in Central Asia, but it might dovetail with the pan-Turkic aspirations of nationalist elements in Turkey.³⁷

In order to expand its political, economic and cultural ties with the Turkic republics, Turkey launched a series of initiatives, particularly in promoting a variety of educational and cultural programs in Central Asia and Azerbaijan. Therefore, it is possible to argue, that following the phase of euphoria, Turkey's foreign policy in the region has been characterized by a major emphasis on cultural and economic relations, rather than on political ones. There has been a clear shift in Ankara's policy from the initial multilateral to a more bilateral approach in dealing with the former Soviet republics.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu argued in his book *Strategic Depth* (2000) that Turkey possesses 'strategic depth' due to its history and geographic position and lists Turkey among a small group of countries which he calls 'central powers'. Turkey should not be content with a regional role in the Balkans or the Middle East, because it is not a regional but a central power. Hence, it should aspire to play a leading role in several regions, the Middle East and Central Asia, which could award it global strategic significance.³⁸

Recent tangible activity among Turkish speaking countries

Among the newly independent states of Central Asia, the pan-Turkic sentiment is most pronounced in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's most ardent support of closer Turkic ties is Nizami Jafarov, director of Baku's Ataturk Center, a corresponding member of Azerbaijan's Academy of Science, and head of the Azerbaijani Permanent Parliamentary Commission on the Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan. He noted that the integration process of the Turkic peoples has recently accelerated: 'Closing is easier via culture. This is a sphere where no diplomatic problems may emerge.' A new TV channel will focus on culture and history of the Turkic world, present

³⁷ Park, 'The Fetullah Gulen Movement', 6.

³⁸ 'Davutoglu Promoting "Strategic Depth" in Turkish Foreign Policy', [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=34973](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=34973), accessed 2 March 2013.

³⁹ 'New TV channel to open in Azerbaijan', *Day. Az*, 10 February 2008 <http://today.az/news/society/42230.html>, accessed 30 February 2012.

common cultural technologies and propagandize modern culture. Jafarov noted that the channel will broadcast the single Turkic language, close to Turkish. The deputy considers it expedient to dislocate the head office of the TV channel in Istanbul. There is also a plan to open offices in all Turkic countries.³⁹

President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan's President Roza Otunbaeva and Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguli Berdimuhamedov were in attendance at the summit hosted by Turkish President Abdullah Gül. During the summit, the leaders agreed to appoint Turkish diplomat Halil Akinci as the first Secretary-General who would officially assume his responsibilities following the entering into force of the Nakhchivan Agreement.⁴⁰ On 21 October 2011, the Turkic Business Council held a first meeting in Almaty.⁴¹

The leaders also agreed to establish the Turkic Speaking States Business Council in order to foster economic cooperation and decided to explore the possibility of the establishment of the Turkic Speaking States' Development Bank in Istanbul and a joint Insurance Company in order to support development of non-oil sectors and create new opportunities for private sector. The first summit of Turkic Speaking Countries Cooperation Council was held in Kazakhstan in 2011 and Kyrgyzstan hosted the second summit in 2012.

'Turkic countries should create a visa-free travel zone to enhance connections and trade', Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said following the signing of an agreement to lift visa restrictions between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan. 'Turkish citizens will be able to visit Kyrgyzstan with their passports without a need for visas and vice versa. The trucks of our countries will be able to travel [across borders] more easily from now on,' Erdoğan told reporters at a press conference with visiting Kyrgyz Prime Minister Almazbek Atambaev.⁴²

³⁹ 'New TV channel to open in Azerbaijan', *Day. Az*, 10 February 2008 <http://today.az/news/society/42230.html>, accessed 30 February 2012.

⁴⁰ <http://www.eurodialogue.org/Turkic-Summit-In-Turkey-Concludes-With-Declaration>, accessed 2 March 2013.

⁴¹ B. Bekmurzayev, 'Turkic Business Council held first meeting in Almaty', *Kazworld.info*. <http://kazworld.info/?p=17257>, accessed 2 March 2013.

⁴² 'Turkic world should create own Schengen area, Turkish Prime Minister says', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 27 April 2011

Following eighteen years of delay, the summit of Turkic-speaking countries, based on solidarity and cooperation, passed a landmark threshold for institutionalization. The first such summit was held in 1992 at the initiative of then-Turkish President Turgut Özal. Uzbekistan, which has not been represented at the presidential level at any summit since 1998, and was not even represented at a low level during this İstanbul summit.⁴³ The joint statement was signed in the Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Turkish languages.

The summit emphasized that the International Turkic Culture Organization (TÜRKSOY) performs an important task in identification, enrichment, expansion and promotion of the common values and in deepening cultural relation among Turkic speaking states and peoples.⁴⁴

Such contemporary developments of integration processes among Turkic-speaking states as the establishment of TÜRKSOY in June 1993, an intergovernmental organization (CCTS) in October 2009, and TÜRKPA in January 2010, illustrate the fastening of integration processes, which Turkey did not achieve in the early 1990s.

Implications for China

In contemporary international relations China's rapid economic development is a hot topic and is discussed widely in academic circles in the United States, China and elsewhere. Questions arise whether it is going to be peaceful, if it poses a threat for the countries in the region and for the United States. How will the U.S. respond if China surpasses the U.S. economically, and how will that influence China's military intentions? Will China seek to become a new hegemon in the international system, and

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey8217s-premier-voiced-turkish-schengen-2011-04-27>, accessed 17 July 2011.

⁴³ E. Kart, 'Turkic-speaking Nations Move Closer to International Visibility', *Today's Zaman*, 16 September 2010.

http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action;jsessionid=B29AA22A5942204DB961CEFD480A1515?newsId=221786, accessed 2 March 2013.

⁴⁴ Declaration of 10th Summit of the Heads of the Turkic Speaking States (İstanbul, 16 September 2010), *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Turkey*, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/declaration-of-10th-summit-of-the-heads-of-the-turkic-speaking-states-_istanbul_-16-september-2010_.en.mfa, accessed 1 May 2012.

could this power transition be peaceful? In these entangled developments the key point for China, as an emerging superpower, is economic development. To assure this, internal and border stability is crucial for China.

A strong economic base could enable China to achieve a truly global power status in the twenty-first century, which represents a way to achieve comprehensive security. Given the importance of domestic stability for China's peaceful development, and taking into account that the Xinjiang region's Uyghur population has Turkic origins and shares cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic commonness with the Turks of Turkey and the rest of the Central Asian Turkic populations, what tentative threat does Pan-Turkism represent for China's comprehensive security?

One of the key goals of Chinese foreign policy is to assure stability around its borderline and to convince its neighboring countries and the world that its intentions are peaceful. China's official stated foreign policy doctrine is that of a 'peaceful rise', a concept that has its roots in Deng Xiaoping's 24 Character Strategy in the 1990s: 'observe calmly, secure our position; cope with our affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile, and never claim leadership.' In the early years of the twenty-first century, the term peaceful rise was officially coined by an advisor to President Hu Jintao and summed up by Premier Wen Jiabao in Spring 2004, which was replaced the same year by a 'peaceful development' doctrine. In September 2005, Hu proposed building a 'harmonious world' in his speech given at the summit conference commemorating the 60th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. This all illustrates how essential stability and peace are for China's development.

Pan-Turkism's main ideological bearer and promoter is Turkey, which gained a historical opportunity in this sense after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the road opened to the southern Caucasus and Central Asia. Since Pan-Turkism emphasizes the commonness of origins, language, religion, and culture of all Turkic peoples and aims to unify all those peoples, it could be a tentative latent threat for China's comprehensive security. Extending Pan-Turkism to the Uyghur could stir up extremist, separatist, and terrorist actions in Xinjiang, which has the potential to cause a chain reaction in China and destabilize it from within. In this way, Central Asia is considered China's strategic backyard.

Conclusion

Turkish governmental as well as non-governmental movements and organizations have played a big role on a grassroots level in promoting common Islamic and Turkic-patriotic values in Central Asian countries. One of them, the Fetulah Gülen's movement, promotes patriotism and a common religio-historical consciousness for the Turkic youth. They educate the elitist youth, which is very likely to become the next generation elite in these Central Asian countries. Those elites can play a large role in the pan-Turkic political and economic integration process, which is now taking place.

Although the Gülen schools represent around ten percent of Central Asia's education systems, it could be that – in a tacit partnership with the Turkish state – the movement's activities will over the longer term intensify the emotive and material bonds between Turkic peoples and states. The Gülen network's Central Asian elites could in time take on the forms of their Turkish counterparts, thereby encouraging the emergence of a pan-Turkic world linked by overlapping and fused identities.

Pan-Turkism's important particularity is counting on the great powers' interests in global confrontation, as in world conflicts or systemic weakening of Russia, Iran and China a chance appears to realize Turkey's and Pan-Turkism's aspirations. Turkey's leadership and Pan-Turkists' leaders always make corrections in their activity tactics based on the specifics of international relations' current circumstances and their own experiences.

Separatism, extremism, and terrorism among the ethnic minorities along China's northwestern frontiers pose a tentative threat, and the Chinese see a long term threat to their security interests from Islamic fundamentalism and possibly pan-Turkism. The SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) is considered as a mechanism for combating 'the three evil forces' and promoting economic and security cooperation with Central Asian countries, which gives some leverages for China to prevent any outside help to 'East Turkestan' movement from Central Asia.

The question to what extent Central Asia relates to pan-Turkism is considered in pan-Turkism ideology: shared historical origins, cultural affinities, linguistic similarities and religion. Gradually, step by step, this Turkic unity is being realized by Turkish governmental and non-governmental organizations.