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From Ethnicity to Realpolitik
The Changing Turkish-Chinese Relations

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Abstract

By the mid-1990s, Turkey, sharing the common ethnic and cultural affinity with Uyghur, serves as a base for Uyghur refugees, offering rhetoric and material support for Uyghur Diasporas in Turkey. Turkish officials made commitment to the Eastern Turkestan cause and show respect to Uyghur's struggle for independence. Since the late-1990s, Turkish policy toward Uyghur has changed from ethnicity to realpolitik. Turkey began to restrict Uyghur anti-China activities in Turkey. In Turkish political narratives, Uyghur has become a "bridge" between China and Turkey, and no longer the "fighter of independence and justice".

Turkey has changed its policy toward Uyghur to realpolitik. Cooperation on economy and national security benefit both sides since Turkey is a "corridor" for China to European countries, Islamic countries and NATO. Turkish foreign policy has east-drifted in the post-Cold War era, and the new ruling party strengthens it. Cooperation with China opens the possibility for Turkey to accomplish its ambition in Asia in accordance with its foreign policy goals.

Uyghur, as a "bridge" of China and Turkey, according to Turkish political narrative, has been used as a tool for Turkey to trade with China and compensate its trade deficit negative to Turkey due to the common ethnic and cultural ties.

Key Words: China, Turkey, Uyghur, Ethnicity, Xinjiang, Economy, National Security

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