

# Australian politicians back ‘East Turkistan’ terrorism apologists

By Melissa Harrison and Robert Barwick

Some Australian politicians, including a Minister in the Morrison government, are actively promoting an anti-China separatist organisation with links to Islamist extremists, and associates who call for violent jihadists fighting alongside al-Qaeda and ISIS in Syria to direct their campaign against the Chinese people. Assistant Defence Minister Andrew Hastie, South Australian Independent Senator Rex Patrick, and other politicians, are championing the East Turkistan Australian Association (ETAA), a group that purports to represent Uyghur Muslims from China’s Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, which the pro-separatist ETAA calls East Turkistan (also spelled “Turkestan”). ABC reported on 15 April that a leaked Chinese police terrorist blacklist names some Australian Uyghur leaders as “suspected terrorists”, but reporter Sean Rubinsztein-Dunlop gave full credence to the denials of the Uyghurs named in the list, implying their listing was baseless and a Chinese tactic to discredit them. Whatever the case of those particular individuals, however, it is undeniable that the ETAA is associated with, and promotes, known extremists, including people who effectively endorse violent jihad but call for the thousands of Uyghur Muslims fighting in Syria alongside al-Qaeda and ISIS to wage their jihad against the “real enemy”, China.

Understanding the ETAA is very important, as it is loudly backing the current campaign for Australia to fall in behind its Five Eyes partners the USA and Canada and label China’s treatment of its Uyghur minority as “genocide”. This campaign has serious implications for Australia’s relationship with China, its largest trading partner. Most of the politicians who have taken up the ETAA’s cause are known anti-China “hawks” who are heavily involved in Anglo-American neoconservative networks that are aggressively pushing confrontation with, and economic decoupling from, China; their support for the ETAA points to the strategic ulterior motive behind the “genocide” campaign. And the ETAA has its own ulterior motive, as its name attests. A fictional country, “East Turkistan” is not formally recognised by any government, but is a focal point of decades-long agitating of its Uyghur population by foreign-backed separatists, who claim Xinjiang is illegally occupied by the Chinese government. East Turkistan separatists enjoy an increasingly high-profile presence in Australian and international media and politics. By definition, they are self-declared enemies of China; combined with extremist links that any country would see as a security threat, and a disturbing history of racially-charged hostility towards Chinese people, this should motivate authorities not to take their claims of genocide and persecution at face value, but at least demand real proof.

The ETAA, typical of East Turkistan separatists, claims the Chinese government “illegally invaded” and “unlawfully colonised” the supposedly independent republic of East Turkistan (Xinjiang) in 1949. This claim is based on two short-lived, self-proclaimed “East Turkistan Republics”: the first, founded in 1933 and lasting several months, was suspected to be backed by British interests as a separatist project against China; the second, also short-lived East Turkistan Republic, from 1944 to 1949, enjoyed Soviet support.<sup>1</sup>

In October 2020 ETAA supporters protested outside the

1. “Xinjiang: China’s western frontier in the heart of Eurasia, Part 4. Pan-Turkism”, AAS, 20 Jan. 2021.



Liberal Minister Andrew Hastie holding hands with Nurmuhammad Majid, President of the East Turkistan Australian Association. Does the Australian government endorse separatists who excuse violence against Australia’s biggest trading partner? Photo: Screenshot

South Australian Parliament, militantly declaring “men and women who can inherit East Turkistan’s will for independence do not stop fighting Chinese oppressors until the last person and last breath”. The ETAA claimed “71 years of captivity and occupation ... the Chinese oppressive regime, *the bloodthirsty and insatiable people of China*, and the shameful partners of the Chinese state have committed crimes against humanity in East Turkistan, [and have been] looting this fertile and prosperous land and squandering our resources.”<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis added.) Note the ETAA attacks the Chinese people in racially-charged terms and doesn’t bother with the pretence of their political benefactors, who like to say they are against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and not the Chinese people.

Contrary to ETAA’s claims they are the “legitimate heirs of East Turkistan in exile”, Xinjiang has been populated, and controlled by, various ethnicities and powers over the last thousand years.<sup>3</sup> (Except for the two brief East Turkistan republics, Xinjiang has been part of China since the 1750s—decades before the British laid claim to Australia).

A January 2021 Facebook post by ETAA’s current President, Nurmuhammad Majid, promoted a revisionist history, claiming “the indigenous people of East Turkistan have called East Turkistan their home for over 10 thousand years [before] Evil China even existed”;<sup>4</sup> however, historically there was not a strong tradition of nationhood in Xinjiang, which was primarily dominated by fragmented and localised “oasis identities”.<sup>5</sup>

Majid wrote: “[W]e did not want to be assimilated into men-eating Chinese culture”, claiming a fantastical version of history before the “Chinese invaders” came, when supposedly East Turkistan “had no jails, no hospitals as we had no criminals and we had no sick people ... there was no police force as we never needed them as people used to live with trust and care”. Majid claimed Uyghurs reaped bountiful harvests of over 2,500 different types of fruit and vegetables, most of which no longer existed after the “Chinese invaders ... came with sole intention to steal our soil and wealth”.

2. “Public rally to condemn China’s 71 years of occupation in East Turkistan”, (etaa.org.au).

3. “Xinjiang: China’s western frontier in the heart of Eurasia, Part 1. Xinjiang: East-West gateway on the Silk Road”, AAS, 18 Nov. 2020.

4. Nurmuhammad Majid, Facebook, 3 January 2021.

5. “Xinjiang: China’s western frontier in the heart of Eurasia, Part 8. The ‘East Turkistan’ narrative (conclusion)”, AAS, 24 March 2021.

## ETAA's troubling roots<sup>6</sup>

The Adelaide-based ETAA was founded by Ahmet Igamberdi, a Uyghur separatist who spent many years imprisoned for his political activities during the height of Maoist repressions in China. In 1985, Igamberdi emigrated to Australia, founding the ETAA in 1992; he serves as its ongoing Honorary Chairman.

While it would be natural to sympathise with Igamberdi's ordeals in China, his ongoing separatist activism has included close association with individuals and groups that very few countries would tolerate. In 1992 Igamberdi joined a large cohort of Uyghur diaspora at the "East Turkistan World National Congress" in Istanbul, Turkey, chaired by Uyghur separatist leader Isa Yusuf Alptekin, who declared that the recent dissolution of the Soviet Union indicated "the time for collapse and dissolution has arrived for the Chinese empire". Alptekin's longtime associate Alparslan Turkes attended, telling the audience, "Chinese imperialism's repression of East Turkistan must not be tolerated." Turkes was actually a Nazi sympathiser, who founded the Turkish "Nationalist Movement (or 'Action') Party" in 1969, which was described by the *New York Times* in 1981 as a "xenophobic, fanatical nationalist, neofascist network steeped in violence". The Grey Wolves, the paramilitary arm of Turkes's political party, were responsible for widespread terrorism in Turkey during the 1970s.

Conference participants elected Ahmet Igamberdi as Chair of the newly formed East Turkistan World National Congress. Mehmet Emin Hazret, who was elected Chairman of the Executive Board, would later found the East Turkistan Liberation Organisation, which was designated a terrorist organisation by the governments of China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Igamberdi's Congress was a predecessor to the prominent World Uyghur Congress (WUC), which formed in 2004. Shortly thereafter, a faction of hard-line secessionist Uyghur diaspora split from the WUC, forming the East Turkistan Government-In-Exile (ETGE) in Washington DC, with Igamberdi serving as inaugural "President" and "Commander-In-Chief of the [East Turkistan] armed forces". The ETGE's Constitution claimed their exiled "government" was authorised to wage war, train and support armed forces, and prepare defence against "probable" attacks upon, or invasion of, East Turkistan—that is, Xinjiang, which the ETGE claimed was illegally occupied by Chinese "invaders".<sup>7</sup>

Igamberdi's ETGE co-founder, "Prime Minister" Anwar Yusuf Turani, was "impeached" in 2006 and subsequently created his own rival Government-In-Exile. One of Turani's websites displays East Turkistan separatist pamphlets from the 1940s, which declare the Chinese are "filthy and barbarous", and that "[o]nly when the throats of Chinese fascist oppressors have been cut and they have bled to death will we come again in to the life of light".<sup>8</sup> Another website links to jihadist propaganda from Uyghur terrorist group the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), which is aligned with al-Qaeda. In a speech posted to YouTube in 2019, Turani claimed Uyghur jihadists in Idlib, Syria were "my East Turkistani brothers ... my soldiers". The East Turkistan Australian Association hosts video content by Turani and members of Turani's family and "government" on their website.

Igamberdi remained ETGE's President until 2015, and today ETAA retains ties through Adam Turan, formerly ETAA

6. See note 5. The history of various East Turkistan diaspora organisations is covered extensively in Part 8 of AAS's "Xinjiang" series.

7. "The Constitution of Government-In-Exile of East Turkistan Republic", [er.eastturkistan.gov.org](http://er.eastturkistan.gov.org), Archived, 25 Nov. 2004.

8. "Why Are We Fighting?", [eastturkistangovernmentinexile.us](http://eastturkistangovernmentinexile.us), 25 Sept. 1945; "Struggle for the Motherland", 13 Jan. 1947, ([eastturkistangovernmentinexile.us](http://eastturkistangovernmentinexile.us)).



Now-East Turkistan Government-in Exile "Prime Minister" and ETAA associate Salih Hundayar's tweet in 2017 calling for terrorists fighting in Syria alongside al-Qaeda and ISIS to fight the real enemy—China.

Spokesperson and General Secretary, who was appointed the Washington DC-based ETGE's "Ambassador" to Australia in August 2020.

The ETAA also hosts video content from current ETGE "Prime Minister" Salih Hundayar, who has promoted Uyghurs as a potential US military asset within Central Asia and the Asia-Pacific, and has admitted to firsthand contact with Uyghur foreign fighters in Turkey. Hundayar found it "quite sad" that the majority of Uyghur jihadists in Syria fighting alongside al-Qaeda and ISIS "are naïve and think they are fighting in the path of Allah when in reality they are fighting for interests of foreign governments that supply them with the funding and arms, *whereas their real enemy lies in East Turkistan*"<sup>9</sup> (emphasis added)—i.e. in Xinjiang, against the Chinese government. ETGE declared, "our only enemy is the Chinese Occupation Forces (Chinese Government and Security Forces)"; however, ETGE has revealed it considers China's "forces" to include police, government personnel and civil servants.<sup>10</sup>

## East Turkistan terrorism and radical ideology

Troublingly, the ETAA's website hosts video content by Indian Dr Zakir Naik, a radical Islamic teacher whose preaching has been cited by perpetrators of terrorist attacks in India and Sri Lanka as their inspiration, and who is banned from entering the UK and numerous other countries under anti-terrorism or anti-hate laws; and Shady Alsuleiman, a prominent Australian Imam who has earned notoriety for his extremist views that have been called a "Trojan horse" for fanatics.<sup>11</sup>

The ETAA's website reposts a number of articles which downplay the severity, or cast doubt on the existence of, Uyghur terrorist group the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Then-US Secretary of State (and anti-China hawk) Mike Pompeo removed ETIM from the US terrorist list in October 2020, claiming a lack of evidence of its existence—contradicting the British Home Office, which had

9. Salih Hundayar (@SalihHudayar), Twitter, 15 December 2017. This statement is revealing for two reasons: it shows the Washington-based Hundayar is fully aware the jihadists in Syria are supported by external governments, which include the US and UK; and he endorses violent jihad against the Chinese people.

10. "The Six Demands of the East Turkistani People", ([east-turkistan.net](http://east-turkistan.net)).

11. "Al-Qaeda at city mosque", Erik Jensen, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 Apr. 2010; "Seek and you will find Shady", Rick Morton, *The Australian*, 18 June 2016.

acknowledged ETIM as one of the names of the terrorist TIP in 2016. Pompeo's de-designation also contradicted the US Department of Defence's 2019 warning that ETIM was one of three groups presenting the greatest threat to US and allied forces in Afghanistan;<sup>12</sup> however, it was consistent with conspiracy theories promoted by East Turkistan separatists. ETGE's Salih Hundayar bizarrely claims TIP is a "Chinese intelligence front created to mislead Uyghurs and radicalise them in order to justify China's claims that Uyghurs are 'terrorists'".<sup>13</sup>

China suffered a series of terrorist attacks committed by "East Turkistan" groups between 1990 and 2016, which the government reports killed more than one thousand civilians, including Uyghurs. The East Turkistan/Uyghur issue has gained increasing importance among transnational terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, which have: called for a global jihad against Chinese non-believers to avenge alleged deaths among Xinjiang's Uyghurs; extended the boundaries of the would-be Islamic caliphate to include Xinjiang; and supported ETIM/TIP fighters since the late 1990s. Alarmingly, American counter-terrorism researchers have observed that Uyghur jihadist fighters returning from the Syrian war front, who may number as many as 20,000,<sup>14</sup> "could be envisioned as shock troops" in a "simmering insurgency" in Xinjiang: "Beijing could soon find itself in the crosshairs of a religiously motivated, battle-hardened crop of returning foreign terrorist fighters".<sup>15</sup>

### Australia's anti-China hawks back ETAA

The ETAA enjoys escalating support from several Australian parliamentarians, particularly independent South Australian Senator Rex Patrick, who headlines at ETAA protests and is leading a petition demanding Australia ban imports from Xinjiang. The banner photo of the petition is deeply provocative to Australia's biggest trading partner in a way that Australia would be offended by if Chinese politicians advocated blatant separatism here, picturing Patrick with ETAA demonstrators holding separatist signs reading "It's East Turkistan ... It's not Xinjiang".

In March 2021, Patrick, whose pro-Uyghur activities have been publicised by the terrorism-apologists at ETGE, demanded the Australian government accuse China of genocide in a formal parliamentary motion. In a 4 March 2021 tweet, Patrick asked if the "Wolverines" would "step up"—challenging Parliament's notorious faction of infantile anti-China US-loyalists who call themselves Wolverines after the teenage heroes of the Cold War propaganda film *Red Dawn*, and leave stickers of claw marks around Parliament House, to support the Uyghur genocide designation. Patrick's motion was blocked by the federal government and Labor, who evidently did not believe their own lip service to alleged human rights abuses committed by the Chinese government.

Liberal "Wolverine" MP and Assistant Defence Minister Andrew Hastie also champions the ETAA and its President Nurmuhhammad Majid, who is pictured with Hastie on his official website. On 27 September 2019 ABC reported that a delegation of Uyghurs, led by Majid, met with Hastie to seek assistance in making representations to Immigration Minister David Coleman. Majid, a registered immigration agent and,

12. United States Department of Defence, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 1 Jan. 2019-31 Mar. 2019, (dodig.mil).

13. "The Greatest Victims of Terrorism in the 21st Century Are East Turkistan and Its People", Salih Hundayar, 11 Sept. 2020, (east-turkistan.net).

14. "What Is the Empire's Strategy?", Col. Lawrence Wilkerson's speech at the Ron Paul Institute Media & War Conference, Ron Paul Liberty Report, youtube.com, 23 Aug. 2018.

15. "Xinjiang: China's western frontier in the heart of Eurasia, Part 6. 'Afghan' jihadist terrorism comes to Xinjiang", AAS, 14 Feb. 2021.



Top: Rex Patrick endorsing separatism against China. Above: ETGE "PM" and terrorism apologist (and ETAA associate) Salih Hundayar (left) with Australian activist Drew Pavlou (right) in New York in 2019.

until 2019, a translator at the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, lobbied the federal government to create a special humanitarian visa providing urgent refugee protection for Uyghurs—a campaign assisted by the accusations his organisation makes against China. In a 23 October 2019 parliamentary speech, Hastie promoted the ABC documentary *Tell the World*, which alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang, featuring testimony from ETAA members.

The ETAA is also supported by prominent anti-China activist Drew Pavlou, who regularly attends ETAA protests, is evidently familiar with its leaders and repeats the separatist line—declaring, "East Turkistan is an occupied nation".<sup>16</sup> Pavlou has been interviewed several times by Talk East Turkestan, a YouTube channel which also promotes content from individuals associated with radical jihadist ideology, including banned extremist teacher Dr Zakir Naik.

Ordinarily Australian politicians, especially conservatives like Andrew Hastie, would never promote an organisation with ETAA's extremist links; they, and ETAA, are getting a free pass because the country they are targeting is China. For Australian politicians to accept ETAA's claims of persecution without question, and ignore the context of those claims, which is the security implications of ETAA's links to fellow Uyghur separatists urging the ISIS and al-Qaeda-linked Turkistan Islamic Party to wage their jihad against the Chinese people—which China cannot and will not ignore—is a dangerous precedent, and extreme hypocrisy. How does Australia deal with threats of extremist violence, and how would Australians feel about a country that promoted organisations that excused extremist violence against us?

16. Drew Pavlou (@DrewPavlou), Twitter, 21 Feb. 2021.