

# **The USSR and the Establishment of the Eastern Turkestan Republic in Xinjiang**

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## **摘 要**

在一九三十年代初期開始的盛世才——蘇聯友好合作期間，蘇聯勢力控制了新疆。1942年盛世才反蘇後，蘇聯被迫從新疆退出。四十年代中期的國際形勢和新疆民族矛盾的激化給蘇聯再次介入新疆事務提供了良好機會。1944年新疆伊犁穆斯林民族在蘇聯幫助下發動了反漢暴動。為準備暴動，激烈反漢的回族人士在阿拉木圖成立突厥民族解放委員會，全力對新疆進行泛突厥主義和泛伊斯蘭主義宣傳，並同時在蘇聯境內從事軍事人員訓練。不久之後，他們在蘇聯的策動下，又在新疆成立了所謂「解放」組織，利用宗教展開反漢宣傳，並通過親蘇穆斯林控制了阿勒泰地區的反盛世才哈薩克武裝。1944年11月，在盛世才去職離新，國民政府勢力剛剛進入新疆的時候，伊寧事件爆發，東土耳其斯坦共和國成立。1945年1月，雅爾達會議前夕，暴動者在蘇聯軍事人員的幫助下，攻取了國民黨駐軍在伊寧的最後據點。隨後，蘇聯人員領導的伊犁民族軍成立。中蘇友好條約談判前夕，民族軍在蘇聯軍事人員的直接參與和指揮下，向國民黨新疆駐軍全線出擊，並於全面占領伊犁、塔城、阿勒泰三區之後，也就是國民政府和蘇聯簽訂中蘇友好條約後不久，在迪化附近的瑪納斯河畔停火並與國民政府展開談判。隨後三區與國民黨方面建立了新疆省聯合政府。蘇聯利用新疆問題迫使中國政府接受雅爾達協定，進而簽署中蘇友好條約，把三區，連同外蒙和東北一起，納入蘇聯的勢力範圍。

# **The USSR and the Establishment of the Eastern Turkestan Republic in Xinjiang**

**David D. Wang**

## **Summary**

Soviet influence dominated events in Xinjiang from 1934 to 1942, when Sheng Shicai shifted his allegiance from the Soviet Union to the Guomindang (GMD). During the period of 1944-1945, however, the international situation and the tense ethnic relations in Xinjiang provided the Soviet Union with a good opportunity to re-enter Xinjiang.

In 1944 the Moslems in Yili rose in rebellion, which the Soviets encouraged and supported. In order to prepare for the rebellion, the Turkish People's Liberation Committee was established in Alma-Ata. Anti-Han propaganda and military training for people from Xinjiang were carried out on Soviet soil. Within Xinjiang, the Soviets helped the Moslems to establish underground organisations and to smuggle weapons from the Soviet Union. Through the pro-Russian Moslems, the Soviets successfully brought the anti-Sheng Kazak forces in Ashan under their control. In November 1944, when Sheng Shicai was transferred to Chongqing and the new Xinjiang government had not yet established itself, the Yili Rebellion erupted, followed by the inauguration of the Eastern Turkestan Republic. On the eve of the Yalta conference, the rebels, with the assistance of the Soviet Union, cleared the Yili Districts of the GMD troops. Soon after, the Soviet-oriented Yili National Army (YNA) was established. On the eve of negotiating the Sino-Soviet (Chongqing-Moscow) Treaty of 1945, the YNA, with the participation of the Soviet personnel, launched attacks on the Tacheng and Ashan Districts. Shortly after the

signing of the Treaty, the YNA occupied Yili, Tacheng and Ashan, and started negotiating with the GMD authorities. As a result, a Xinjiang Coalition Government was established. The Three Districts, however, did not give up their *de facto* independence until 1949.

The Yili Rebellion represented the peak of Soviet involvement in Xinjiang affairs. The Rebellion and the events following it were closely associated with the Soviet Union's Far Eastern policy. Unlike the period of the Sheng-Soviet cooperation of 1934-1942, during which Soviet involvement was vivid and obvious, Moscow's interference in Xinjiang's affairs during the 1940s was masked. Between the Teheran Conference of 1943 and the Yalta Agreement of 1945, the Soviet Union adjusted its East Asia policy and successfully re-established itself in the region. During this period, Stalin used Xinjiang as a bargaining chip in realising his goals of re-gaining all Tsarist-Soviet interests and privileges in East Asia.

## The USSR and the Establishment of the Eastern Turkestan Republic in Xinjiang

David D. Wang\*\*

From 1911 to 1944 Xinjiang was ruled under the administrations of Yang Zengxin, Jin Shuren and Sheng Shicai successively. Under the Sheng Shicai regime (1933-1944), Soviet influence dominated Xinjiang for eight years until 1943, when Sheng Shicai shifted his allegiance from the Soviet Union to the Nationalist Central Government. In November 1944, shortly after the dismissal of Sheng Shicai by Chiang Kai-shek, Moslems rose in rebellion in Yining<sup>1</sup>, the administrative centre of the Yili District in Xinjiang. The establishment of the East Turkestan Republic (ETR) and of the Yili National Army (YNA) followed. In early 1945, the YNA took over in succession the three districts of Yili, Tacheng and Ashan [Altay]. In September the YNA halted at the Manas River, near Dihua [Urumqi], the capital of the province, to start negotiations with the Chinese government. Chiang Kai-shek sent Gen. Zhang Zhizhong to Xinjiang to negotiate with the Yili rebels. In July 1946 a Peace Agreement was reached and the Xinjiang Provincial Coalition Government

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<sup>1</sup> The Pinyin system is used in this article with an exception of Chiang Kai-shek. The geographic names are presented as they appear on *the Map of the People's Republic of China* (compiled and published by the Cartographic Publishing House, Beijing, 1981) or in Yu Weicheng, *Xinjiang jianzhi yange yu diming yanjiu* (Studies on the administrative changes and geographical names in Xinjiang) (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1986). Those not found in *the Map* and the book are provided by Professor Ji Dachun and his colleagues in Urumqi.

was formed, but the political power struggle went on. In September 1949, the Xinjiang authorities surrendered to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and with it the Three Districts passed under the administration of the CCP authorities.

The Yili Rebellion, rather than being a domestic event, was closely linked with the international situation at the time. The Soviet Union played a vital role by encouraging it as part of their East Asian policy during the post-war years. In publications in China and in the former Soviet Union, this event is viewed as a part of the Chinese revolution under the leadership of the CCP, whilst the Yili Rebellion is presented as a Moslem challenge to the Guomindang (GMD or KMT) authorities in the English literature. This study will shed some light on the Soviet role in the incident.

## **The Misrule of the Han Chinese**

When evaluating the causes of the Yili Rebellion, it can be argued that the misrule of the Chinese authorities was the internal cause, which provided the basic background for the Rebellion. The external cause was the involvement of the Soviet Union, which played the principal role.

Widespread discontent among the peoples of Xinjiang occurred during the 1930s under Sheng Shicai's regime. Known for his overly suspicious nature, Sheng Shicai had tried to maintain his dictatorship by conducting continuous "conspiracy trials" and massive purges. In 1937 Sheng Shicai, on the occasion of Stalin's Great Purge in the Soviet Union, manufactured an "international conspiracy plot" involving many people of the upper circle. From then on, a great number of people, ethnic as well as Han, including landlords, feudal princes, religious figures and military and civil officials of the government, were either executed or thrown into prison. In Dihua alone, six prisons were filled with about 120,000 political prisoners, 80,000 of whom died violently between 1934 and 1944.<sup>2</sup> After his shift to

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<sup>2</sup> An Ning, *Xinjiang neimu* (An inside story of Xinjiang) (Singapore: Chuangken, 1952), p.129. A.

the GMD's side, Sheng Shicai not only purged bloodily the members of the CCP in his government but also intensified his suppression of the Moslem and non-Moslem nationalists; for his political needs he would accuse whomever he wanted and for whatever reason he wished. He even sent the relatives and families of the imprisoned to remote areas at Tacheng and put them under close surveillance. The whole Xinjiang became a big jail filled with fear and anger.<sup>3</sup>

Sheng Shicai kept an ever watchful eye on insurgency. As early as in 1939 he forced the peoples in Ashan to hand to the authorities their rifles and sabres, which were essential for herdsmen and therefore put them in a perilous situation. In Ashan the situation had become so tense that from 1940 on turmoil occurred continuously. In 1943, in order to enlarge his military forces, Sheng Shicai initiated a compulsory "horse donation movement." The people were forced to "donate" 10,000 horses to the government, one from each family, without any form of compensation. Those who had no horse to donate had to pay an amount fifty percent more than the market value of a horse.<sup>4</sup> In addition, there was an outbreak of pestilence in some areas in Yili, which caused more hardship for herdsmen. Natural disaster and man-made catastrophe engendered widespread discontent among the people. If the great purges had affected both the Moslem and non-Moslem, the Moslems were the main victims of the movement of "handing over rifles" and "the horse donation movement", especially those Moslems at Yili, Ashan and Tacheng.

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D. Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang, 1911-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) pp.150-151, 154.

<sup>3</sup> Zhang Dajun, *Xinjiang fengbao qishi nian* (Seventy years' storm in Xinjiang), 12 vols., (Taipei: Lanxi chubanshe, 1980), 12:6251-6252. Zhou Dongjiao, 'Sheng Shicai zai Xinjiang de tewu tongzhi' (Sheng Shicai's secret police in Xinjiang), *Wenshi ziliao* (A selection of historical and literary materials), vol.46, pp.233-273.

<sup>4</sup> Haji Nabi Waliyov, 'Xiri Altay de fengyun' (Cloud over Altay), *Xinjiang wenshi ziliao* (A selection of Xinjiang historical and literary materials), vol.13, pp.26-27. Xinjiang shehui kexueyuan, Lishi yanjiusuo (History Institute of the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences), *Xinjiang jianshi* (A concise history of Xinjiang), vol.3 (hereafter cited as XSL, *Xinjiang jianshi*) (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1987), pp.342, 351.

Although Han-Chinese constituted only 5% of Xinjiang's population, the majority of officials were Han-Chinese, and many of them were not even local Han-Chinese.<sup>5</sup> During Sheng Shicai's rule, people in Xinjiang, fearing police terror, placed their hope in the GMD administrations. But the GMD's assertion of its power in Xinjiang was accompanied by administrative incompetence, political corruption, bribery and paternalism. Even Luo Jialun, the GMD High Commissioner of Supervision for Xinjiang, compared the GMD administration unfavorably with the Sheng Shicai's, saying that "Sheng had put considerable pressure on his officials to be clean except a few close relatives and favoured ones."<sup>6</sup> After Sheng Shicai's removal from his post, many local power holders colluded with influential officials. The situation deteriorated to the extent that government appointments could be purchased by auction.<sup>7</sup>

High taxation was another cause of people's grievances. Augus Ward, the American Consul in Dihua observed: "land taxes are often higher than the value of the land and have in some places been collected ninety years in advance. Special assessments, for no clearly stated purpose and covering no specific length of time, also continue to be made at irregular intervals against land and property owners."<sup>8</sup>

Before and during Sheng Shicai's rule, Xinjiang's economy and monetary system were separated from those of China Proper. With the establishment of the GMD administration in Xinjiang, the economic decline and inflation throughout the rest of China greatly affected Xinjiang. According to Owen Lattimore, the price of

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<sup>5</sup> *Dagongbao* (Shanghai), 06/01/1947, quoted in Zhang Dajun, *Xinjiang fengbao qishi nian* 12:7409.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 12:7422.

<sup>7</sup> Yakovlev, A. G., 'K Voprosu o Natsional'no-Osvoboditel'nom Dvizhenii Narodov Sin'tzyana v 1944-1949' (Question on the National Liberation Movement of the peoples in Xinjiang in 1944-1949), *Ucheniye Zapiski Instituta Vostokovedeniya* 7, *Kitaiskiy Sbornik*, vol. xi (1955), p.161.

<sup>8</sup> *Central Files China Internal Affairs* (hereafter cited as CF China IA) 893.00/7-1645, Subject: Sinkiang Revolt: From the Middle of May to the Middle of July; the Character of the Impasse, p.5.

wheat flour, taken in June 1940 as 100, increased to 865 by December 1942. It reached 75,000 in 1945 and an astonishing 517,500 in 1947. By the end of 1944, inflation in Xinjiang was running in excess of 1,200% per annum.<sup>9</sup> According to statistics from Zhang Dajun, a Chinese scholar in Taiwan, from January 1943 to March 1945, the price of coal rose from 3.20 *yuan* per hundred *jin* to 200 *yuan*, wheat flour — from 30 to 4,500 *yuan*. In 1945 an average monthly salary for a petty official was only 200-300 *yuan*.<sup>10</sup>

The termination of Xinjiang-Soviet trade also added hardship to the people. Xinjiang's economy had relied heavily on the export of agricultural and animal husbandry products to the Soviet Union in exchange for industrial materials and manufactured goods. The Xinjiang-Soviet trade had brought many benefits to the herdsmen in Ashan, since their animal husbandry products were sold at good prices.<sup>11</sup> Since Sheng Shicai's shift to the GMD, trade with the Soviet Union had been banned. Due to distance, war and unrest in China Proper, the export-oriented local products found no substitute outlet and therefore went to waste.<sup>12</sup> Yili's economy relied on trading with the Soviet Union more than did any other area in Xinjiang, so people at Yili were more seriously affected by the ban. It led to a great shortage of industrial materials and daily necessities. According to Jack Chen, even iron became a precious metal. One pound of iron could purchase several ten-yard bolts of local woven cloth.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> O. Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia: Sinkiang and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1950), p.179, and Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims*, p.167.

<sup>10</sup> Zhang Dajun, *Xinjiang fengbao qishi nian*, 11:6392-6393; 11:6464.

<sup>11</sup> Haji Nabi Waliyov, 'Xiri Altay de fengyun,' p.24.

<sup>12</sup> S. Burhan, *Xinjiang wushi nian* (Fifty years in Xinjiang) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1984), p.356.

<sup>13</sup> Jack Chen, *Sinkiang Story* (New York: Macmillan, 1977) p.204; CF China IA 893.00/9-2545, enclosure 1, p.6. N. N. Mingulov, 'Natsional'no-Osvoboditel'noye Dvizheniye Narodov Sin'tszyana kak Sostavnaya Chast' Obshchekitaiskoi Revolyutsii (1944-1949 gody)' (The National-Liberation Movement of the peoples in Xinjiang in 1944-1949 as a part of the people's revolution in China), *Trudy Instituta Istorii, Arkheologii i Etnografii, Tom 15* (Alma-Ata, 1962), p.72.



Such political discrimination and economic hardship in Xinjiang had caused discontent among the people already. When an external factor came into play, serious unrest erupted into an uprising. Internal discontent thus created an opportunity for the Soviets to interfere in local affairs.

Further discussion in this article, based on sources in English, Russian, Turkish (the Yili Regime's) as well as in Chinese (the CCP's, the GMD's) will demonstrate that although not the only cause for the rebellion, Soviet involvement did play the fundamental role in the Yili Rebellion.

### **Fermentation of the Yili Rebellion**

Soviet political-ideological influence upon the people of Xinjiang provided a long-term background for the Yili Rebellion. According to A. Khakimbaev, a Soviet scholar, for a long time the Soviet authorities paid much attention to political propaganda among the Xinjiang peoples on both sides of the border. Many Xinjiang people returned from the Soviet Union to Xinjiang with "liberal ideas".<sup>14</sup> Soviet propaganda in the 1920s and the early 1930s influenced the national-liberation movement of the Xinjiang peoples in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>15</sup>

During the Sheng-Soviet alliance of 1934-1942, a number of young people from different nationalities went to Alma-Ata, Tashkent and Moscow to be trained or educated. Sheng also introduced a censorship system to screen publications and mail from China Proper. On the other hand, Sheng allowed well-printed, low-priced Soviet publications and propaganda material in different languages to be widely circulated across Xinjiang without any censorship. Russian became one of the official languages in Xinjiang, although the native speakers of Russian constituted less than 0.5 % of the local population. Many Russian schools were established in

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<sup>14</sup> A. A. Khakimbaev, 'Vliyanie Velikoi Oktyabr'skoi Sotsialistichskoi Revolyutsii na Sin'tszyan (20-e--nachalo 30-kh godov)' [Influence of the great October socialist revolution on Xinjiang (1920s-early 1930s)], *Voprosy Istorii* (Problems of History), no.10 (1982), pp.172-173, 175.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Xinjiang, particularly in Yili, Tacheng and Dihua. As the centres of urban cultural life, the Soviet Consulates in Xinjiang were invariably the largest buildings in towns and the one in Dihua was larger than any of the embassy buildings in Nanjing.

Educated in the Soviet Union or influenced by Marxism-Leninism, the young pro-Soviet Moslems, as typified by Ahmet Jan Kasim, Abdul Kerim Abasoff and Delihan Sukurbayeff, played a decisive role in the Yili Regime to counter the GMD-USA influence and, at the later stage of the Rebellion, the influence of the pan-Turkish nationalists, who looked to Ali Han Ture for leadership.

In 1943 the Soviet Union launched a propaganda campaign in the Soviet Central Asian Republics. In Soviet Central Asia, the Turkish languages had already been converted to the Cyrillic alphabet. In the propaganda aimed at the Moslems in Xinjiang, publications in the Arabic alphabet were specially printed in Soviet Central Asia for circulation in Xinjiang. Periodicals such as *The Oriental Truth* in the Uighur language, *The Kazak People* (or *Kazak Land*) in the Kazak language and many propaganda pamphlets were edited and printed in the Arabic alphabet in Tashkent and Alma-Ata. They promulgated anti-Han sentiment and independence, the establishment of an "Eastern Turkestan government", and self-determination for ethnic peoples in Xinjiang.<sup>16</sup> In the autumn of 1943, the Xinjiang Turkish-Peoples' National Liberation Committee (also called the Oriental Support Committee) was founded in Alma-Ata with some Russian citizens in the leading positions who had worked in Xinjiang for many years.<sup>17</sup>

The Soviet Union also organised people in Yili to cross the border for military training, and sent its own men with arms to Yili to prepare for a Moslem rebellion.

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<sup>16</sup> According to Svanberg, script reform was initiated in 1924 in Soviet Kazakhstan. Benson and Svanberg, ed., *The Kazaks of China: Essays on an Ethnic Minority* (Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1988) p.95.

<sup>17</sup> Ji Dachun, 'Sulian yu Xinjiang sanqu geming' (The Soviet Union and the Three Districts Revolution in Xinjiang) (hereafter cited as 'Sulian yu Xinjiang....'), *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu baogao* (Research reports on Chinese frontier history and geography), no.5 (1990), p.6. Zhang Dajun, *Xinjiang fengbao qishi nian*, 11:6257.

A number of Xinjiang Moslems sought refuge in the Soviet Union from Sheng's persecution. Some of them took part in military training, some sought aid in the supply of weapons and plotted rebellion. Fatih,<sup>18</sup> a Tartar manager of the Local Products Company in Gongha County, was reported "missing", while travelling to the Soviet Union to organise the supply of ammunition. In the Soviet Union, he met Ishag Beg Monhakiev, a Chinese Kirghiz, and discussed plans for an uprising in Gongha. In August 1944, he also met Airbar from Gongha and discussed the possibility of an armed struggle at home, as well as the purchase of weapons in the Soviet Union. Soon after, Fatih returned to organise the Gongha uprising.<sup>19</sup> The above mentioned Ishag Beg went to the Soviet Union in 1942 and soon began to organise the Xinjiang Moslem refugees. With the assistance of the Soviet authorities, he gathered together about two hundred men and organised them into two battalions for political and military training. When the Yili Rebellion began, he became the key military commander of the Yili forces.<sup>20</sup> Abasoff, another major leader of the Yili Rebellion, had crossed over the Soviet border on the eve of the uprising to organise a guerrilla force of more than a hundred rebels. With weapons supplied by the Soviet authorities he returned to the Chinese side in October 1944 in order to participate in the action in time.<sup>21</sup> Delilhan Sukurbayen whom the Soviet Consul in Ashan smuggled across the border in a box in a Soviet geographic expedition team truck after the Chinese Authority had discovered his involvement in anti-Sheng activities in 1942. He participated in military training and learnt revolutionary theory at Alma-Ata. Two years later in autumn 1944, he went back to

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<sup>18</sup> The full names of Fatih and some other Moslems as well as Mongolians in this article are not given in sources available to the author.

<sup>19</sup> Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims*, pp.185-186. Li Shixun, 'Wei zuguo tongyi he minzu jiefang er zhan: Ishag Beg Monhakiev lieshi zhuan' (A biography of Ishag Beg) (hereafter cited as 'Wei zuguo tongyi....'), *Xinjiang lieshi zhuan tongxun* (Newsletter for biographical writings on martyrs in Xinjiang), no.2-3 (1989), p.34.

<sup>20</sup> Li Shixun, 'Wei zuguo tongyi....', pp. 33-34.

<sup>21</sup> Saifudin, *Tianshan xiongying* (A Tianshan eagle) (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1987), p.65.

Ashan and later became the Yili Regime's leader in Ashan.<sup>22</sup>

It is inconceivable that the propaganda, agitation, personnel training, and arms purchased on such a large scale in Soviet territory were performed without the consent and assistance of the Soviet authorities.<sup>23</sup>

*Organizing for the Rebellion:* In the summer of 1942 the Soviet Union started to dispatch underground activists to prepare for certain actions under the leadership of the Soviet Consulate in Yining. Some of the White Russians who had fled to Xinjiang after the Bolshevik Revolution or during the period of the Agriculture Collectivisation also became involved in the movement.<sup>24</sup> Before the Yili Rebellion opposition groups had sprouted among the non-Han people in the province and they had been especially active in Yili, Tacheng and Ashan. It was from their activities that the ETR movement eventually emerged. The Soviets helped the local people organise themselves and form the Liberation Organisation (it was also called the Liberation Society) in April 1944 in Yining. With an Uzbek Imam Ali Han Ture as its head, the Liberation Organisation drew its members from different social circles.<sup>25</sup>

This leading underground organisation in Yili was under the full control of the Soviet Consulate in Yining. The cadre members of this Organisation were Soviet underground activists and local youth. Its main tasks were to (1) speed up mass propaganda; (2) coordinate and arrange activities among the opposition groups inside and outside Yining; (3) procure ammunition for the Rebellion.<sup>26</sup> Besides Yili,

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<sup>22</sup> Du Gencheng, 'Xianshen minzu jiefang yundong de guanghui zhanshi: Delilhan Sukurbayev lieshi zhuan' (A biography of Delilhan Sukurbayev) (hereafter cited as 'Xianshen minzu jiefang....'), *Xinjiang lieshi zhuan tongxun* no.2-3 (1989), p.65.

<sup>23</sup> Li Tiejun, appointed by Chiang Kai-shek as Commander-in-Chief in Xinjiang to put down the Yili Rebellion, stressed in his telegram of 5 February, 1945 from the Yili battlefield to Dihua that: "Alma-Ata [of] the [Soviet] Kazakstan Republic is the center of conspiracy and the Rebellion." Zhang Dajun, *Xinjiang fengbao qishi nian*, 12:6276.

<sup>24</sup> Zhang Dajun, *Xinjiang fengbao qishi nian*, 12:6276.

<sup>25</sup> Ji Dachun, 'Sulian yu Xinjiang....,' p.3.

<sup>26</sup> Wang, 'Under the Soviet Shadow: the Yili Rebellion of 1944-1949 in Xinjiang' (hereafter cited

there were also liberation organisations in Tacheng, Jeminay and Qinghe of Ashan, and in Puli of Kashi, along the Soviet-Xinjiang and Outer Mongolian-Xinjiang borders, as well as in Dihua and Aksu.

*Propaganda and Agitation:* The main contents of the propaganda from the Soviet Union and/or in Xinjiang were Marxism-Leninism, Moslem nationalism and anti-Han cause, and friendship with the Soviet Union. The Soviets' propaganda regarding Marxism-Leninism achieved only limited results. Most Moslems, except some young intellectuals, were not interested in revolutionary theory. The Soviets had to turn to the Islam faith and Moslem nationalism.

The Soviet Consulate in Yining kept in close touch with senior Moslems. The Consul himself paid private visits to them with tea, sugar and silk as gifts at the Festivals of Fast-breaking and Corban. In mosques anti-Han and pan-Islamist propaganda were preached and the Mosque Baitulla was the major center for this religious propaganda in Yining. For the Islam cause, Moslems were encouraged to be heroes in their life-time, and so be honoured after their death. Imams called for prompt action to unite all Moslems to expel the Han-Chinese.<sup>27</sup> The appeal to the Islamic spirit and Moslem nationalism achieved good results among the Moslems. The call for Moslem nationalism and anti-Han cause suited both the Soviet Union and Xinjiang Moslems. For the Moslems in Xinjiang, since the invasion of Yakub Beg in the last century, independence had long been the dream of several influential figures of both religious circles and the upper class, but they had never been powerful enough to achieve this goal on their own, and so had to seek foreign support. In addition, "Great Han chauvinism" and paternalism had already caused discontent among ordinary Moslems; Moslem sentiments had played a considerable part in previous Moslem struggles in Xinjiang. This, of course, helped Soviet agitation. Soviet scholars and the CCP's open publications have, however, never

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as 'The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1949....'), Ph.D. thesis, University of Tasmania, Australia, 1993, p.89.

<sup>27</sup> Ji Dachun, 'Sulian yu Xinjiang....,' p.3.

disclosed the Soviet role in this propaganda. Instead, in both Soviet literature and the CCP's open publications this propaganda was interpreted as the "mistakes at the early stage" of the Yili Rebellion.<sup>28</sup>

*Military Preparation:* From 1942 to 1944 many members of secret organisations and local secret agents for the Soviet Union went to Soviet Central Asia for military training. By the autumn of 1944, these people managed to smuggle large amounts of weapons and ammunition over the border. To facilitate the smuggle, the Soviet even built a highway to Baskunchi, near the border, in September and October.<sup>29</sup>

The Soviet Union successfully brought the Kazak anti-Sheng forces in Ashan under its own control. Early in 1940 Osman Batur led the Ashan Kazaks to start an armed struggle against Sheng's regime and at that time, the Soviets and Outer Mongolians treated the Kazak-rebels as enemies because of Osman's strong anti-Soviet stand.

In 1942, the year Sheng Shicai began his anti-Soviet policy, Osman Batur fled to the Qinghe County, the area bordering Outer Mongolia. At this time, Outer Mongolia began to follow the Soviet line and change its policy toward Xinjiang. It supported the Kazak-rebels with supplies of grain, ammunition and equipment. In September Outer Mongolian officers Diembu, Reli, and Noyer met Osman. Osman agreed that he would no longer oppose the Soviet Union and Outer Mongolia, and in exchange, the Outer Mongolian officer promised to provide weapons and accepted livestock and cash as payment. Outer Mongolian General Majik later also came to Ashan to assist Osman to re-organise his forces. In July 1943, Marshal Choibalsan, the number one leader of Outer Mongolia, met Osman on Outer

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<sup>28</sup> XSL, *Xinjiang jianshi*, p.369. T. R. Rakhimov, 'Rol' Akhmatdzhana Kacymi v Istorii Osvoboditel'nogo Dvizheniya v Sin'tszyane' (The role of Ahmet Jan in history of the movement for freedom in Xinjiang), *Materialy Mezhdunarodnoi Conferentsii po Problemam Istorii Kitaya v Noveishchee Vremya, April' 1977* (Material for the international conference of contemporary Chinese history, April, 1977) (Moscow, 1978), pp.194, 196.

<sup>29</sup> Ji Dachun, 'Sulian yu Xinjiang....', pp.4-5.

Mongolian soil. After this Osman received even larger amounts of weapons from Outer Mongolia, and the Outer Mongolian government sent a mission of advisers to assist Osman.<sup>30</sup> From then on the Kazak-rebels in Ashan turned from being anti-Sheng and anti-Soviet to anti-Sheng and pro-Soviet.

Before Osman's change, the Soviet Union allowed Ishag Beg to return to Puli with a force of armed men in May and June 1943. He established a Liberation Organisation and a guerrilla force at Puli. Some of his men went to the Soviet Union for combat training. By the summer of 1944, the Puli guerrilla force had about 120 people.<sup>31</sup>

By the summer of 1944, with Soviet as well as Outer Mongolian assistance and participation, the Moslems established Liberation Organisations in Ashan, Tacheng, Yili and Puli. Moslem guerrilla forces were actively fighting at Ashan and Puli. Preparations for a large-scale uprising were thus underway.

## **The Yili Uprising and the Birth of the Eastern Turkestan Republic**

### **On the Eve of the Yili Uprising**

While the international situation, particularly the Soviet-US Cold War in East Asia, provided the background for the Yili Rebellion, the situation within Xinjiang provided the Soviet Union with an opportunity to support the Moslems in Yili and to initiate the Yili Uprising in November 1944.

Suffering from Nazi Germany's advance into Soviet territory in the west, the Soviet Union had difficulties in dealing with the Chinese in Xinjiang. Soviet personnel had been cleared from Xinjiang by late 1943. By the summer of 1944,

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<sup>30</sup> XSL, *Xinjiang jianshi*, pp.346-347. Du Gencheng, 'Xianshen minzu jiefang xiangwang guangming weilai: Delilhan Sukurbayev lieshi zhuan' (A biography of Delilhan Sukurbayev), *Xinjiang lie-shi zhuan tong-xun* no. 4 (1987) p.3.

<sup>31</sup> Li Shixun, 'Wei zuguo tongyi....,' p.33.

however, the situation in the west was changing in favour of the Soviets. While War in Europe was about to end with victory over Germany, China underwent much suffering in its Anti-Japanese War. Chiang Kai-shek found it difficult to deal with the deteriorating situation in Xinjiang, and in September 1944 he eventually dismissed the hated Sheng Shicai and appointed Zhu Shaoliang, the Commander of the Eighth War Zone, as acting governor of Xinjiang, pending the arrival of new governor Wu Zhongxin. Shortly after his arrival at Dihua, Wu Zhongxin announced the re-organisation of the Xinjiang Provincial Government. Although Sheng Shicai had transferred the majority of about 34,000 men garrisoned in the southern Xinjiang to Ashan to fight against the Kazak-rebel, the Kazak rebellion in Ashan had continued unabatedly. And the uprising at Gongha and the unrest at Puli all continued too. However, most of the newly arrived Central Government's troops were still stationed in the east of the province.

By autumn 1944 when the Yili Rebellion occurred, the civil and military administrations appointed by the Central Government had arrived at Xinjiang, but had not become well established, the military command system in particular. However, with the assistance of the Soviet Union and Outer Mongolia, the Moslems at Yili, Tacheng and Ashan were prepared for the insurrection.

### **Prelude to the Yili Uprising**

The Yili Uprising began on 7 November 1944 in Yining town, following small scale unrest in Ashan, Puli and Gongha. While the Soviets and Outer Mongolians offered assistance to Osman, hoping the latter would be on their side, the Soviets still did not trust him, thinking of him as a capricious chieftain with personal ambitions. On October 1943 the Soviets sent Delilhan back to Ashan. A group of twelve Soviet advisers with General Popov as the head arrived together.<sup>32</sup> They helped Osman and Delilhan reorganise and strengthen their forces. In October the

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<sup>32</sup> The full names of Popov and some Russians, such as Skaub, Polinov in the following pages are not available in the sources of this study.



Ashan Provisional Government was proclaimed in Burqin, in Qinghe County, with Osman as chairman and Delilhan as vice-chairman and Commander-in-Chief of a force of 2,288 men.<sup>33</sup> Real power, however, lay in the hands of Delilhan, backed by the Soviets. The Kazak armed struggle had forced Sheng Shicai to divert most of his troops to Ashan, but by September 1944, the Russian Assistance enabled it to spread further to all of the seven counties in the Ashan District, threatening even Qitai, Fukang, Qiande and Changji, the areas around Dihua, the capital of the province.

In support of the Kazak-rebels at Ashan in the north Xinjiang, Moslems at Puli in south-west Xinjiang rose in rebellion in June 1944. The plan and the preparation for it were mainly the work by Ishag Beg in the Soviet Union. He organised a guerrilla force of 120 Tajiks to attack the local garrison. The authorities rushed to send the troops from Shache to Puli to rescue. The rebels, however, retreated into Soviet territory.<sup>34</sup> The National Army's troops at Kashi were also being tied down by the Tajik rebels.

The Liberation Organisation at Yili, which was under the leadership of the Soviet Consulate, decided to begin the rebellion in Yili. In order to lure the garrison away from Yining, the Organisation had chosen the Gongha County, which was about 100 kilometres east of Yining, for the uprising. On 14 August Fatih and his men crossed the border at the Huocheng County from the Soviet Union. Fatih had direct contact with the Soviet Consulate in Yining. The Soviets provided the rebels at Gongha with arms. On 5 October, the day Wu Zhongxin arrived at Dihua, Fatih's guerilla force joined hands with 1,600 local people at Ulasultai, and launched an attack on Gongha county. A few days later, the county fell.<sup>35</sup> During September and October 1944 disturbances also began in Tacheng.<sup>36</sup>

While uprisings were taking place in various parts of Xinjiang, movements of

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<sup>33</sup> Du Gencheng, 'Xianshen minzu jiefang....,' p.66.

<sup>34</sup> Li Shixun, 'Wei zuguo tongyi....,' p.33.

<sup>35</sup> Wang, 'The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1945....,' pp. 101-102.

<sup>36</sup> Ji Dachun, 'Sulian yu Xinjiang....,' p.4.

the troops from the China Proper to Xinjiang were being impeded intermittently in the Gansu Corridor. A well-equipped Outer Mongolian troop appeared in the Mazunshan area between Xingxingxia and Yumen, killing people and harassing the communications.<sup>37</sup>

By November 1944, small scale uprisings and disturbances had occurred in Qinghe, Fuyun and Jeminay (in Ashan), Tacheng, Gongha (in Yili) and Puli (in Kashi), the areas bordering the Soviet Union and Outer Mongolia, in Xinjiang as well as in the Gansu Corridor, and it appeared that the troublemakers were most likely local Moslems using weapons provided by the Soviet Union. At this stage, it seems that Moscow was waiting for the suitable international and domestic climate to precipitate a large scale rebellion in Xinjiang.

### **The Yili Uprising and the Birth of the ETR**

*The Uprising and Soviet Participation:* In October 1944, Abasoff, one key organiser of the Yili Uprising, returned from the Soviet Union with his Soviet equipped guerrilla force, and made an alliance with Fatih's forces at Gongha. He was accompanied by Peter Alexandalov, a military officer of the Tsarist Army who had fled to Xinjiang after the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequently returned to the Soviet Union. He was the commander of the provisional headquarters for the uprising and after the establishment of the ETR became its Commander-in-Chief.<sup>38</sup>

On 6 November, following the orders of the Liberation Organisation in Yining, the Gongha guerrilla forces of 5,000 men gave up Gongha town and began to move to Yining. The following morning they launched an attack on the city. According to G. R. Turrall, the British Consul in Dihua, the signal for the attack came from the Soviet Consulate, as did the first machine gun fire of the battles, which aimed at the Air Force Headquarters, some sixty meters down the street from the Soviet

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<sup>37</sup> An Ning, *Xinjiang neimu*, p.162. Xingxingxia is a small town at border with Gansu.

<sup>38</sup> Meng Xiandian, 'Zhongguo gongchandang de zhongzheng zuisuizhe: Abdul-Kerim-Abasoff lieshi zhuan' (A biography of Abdul Kerim Abasoff), *Xinjiang lieshi zhuan tongxun* no.2-3 (1989), p.46. Wang, 'The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1945....', p.105.

Consulate.<sup>39</sup> Several hundred Moslems went into the Soviet Consulate to collect their weapons.<sup>40</sup>

On the first day, the battles in Yining were not very decisive. Next morning a dozen coaches of soldiers in Soviet army uniforms and carrying machine guns arrived at Yining via Huocheng. They occupied a bridge at the north of the city in an attempt to stop the reinforcements from Dihua arriving from the north. A Soviet force of 3,000 Kirgizs and Kazaks under the command of the Soviet Kazak General Skaub arrived at Yining to assist local Moslems. This certainly was the beginning of the direct involvement of Soviet military personnel in the Yili Rebellion.<sup>41</sup>

With the assistance of the Soviet Union, Moslem guerrilla forces successfully took over the town of Yining, and cleared the town of its garrison force. By 14 November the garrison force and many local officials withdrew to Guiwangmiao, the Air Force Academy and the Hayranbag airfield in the north-eastern outskirts of Yining. By this time the rebels, with the assistance of the Soviets, had won the first round of the Yili Uprising.

*The Birth of the ETR:* The Soviets seemed to be very confident of a victory over the garrison force in Yili. On 8 November, just one day after the Yili Uprising occurred and the severe fighting was still going on near the Soviet Consulate, the Soviet Consul called Rahimjan, one of the key leaders of the Liberation Organisation, to discuss the establishment of the ETR. After the discussion, Ali Han Ture, a well-known Imam from Soviet Central Asia, was appointed Chairman of the ETR.<sup>42</sup> Four days later, while Yining had yet to be cleared of the Nationalist Army, and rebel-guerilla forces still fighting around Yining, the Eastern Turkestan Republic was proclaimed.

*The Fall of Yining:* The period from mid-November 1944 to January 1945 was

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<sup>39</sup> IORL/P&S/2405, no.12, File 62, Turrall, Urumqi, December 1, 1944, quoted in L. Benson., *The Ili Rebellion* (East Gate, NY: Sharpe, 1990) p.45.

<sup>40</sup> Zhang Dajun, *Xinjiang fengbao qishi nian*, 11:6268.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 11:6269-6270.

<sup>42</sup> Wang, 'The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1949.....,' p.107.

a crucial time for the ETR because the local garrison force had still held the three strongholds of Guiwangmiao, the Air Force Academy and the Hayranbag airfield. The military authorities at Dihua were sending troops to Yining to attack the ETR. In spite of the Soviet assistance, the ETR had great difficulty in holding its own which seriously threatened the ETR's survival. The Soviet Union came to their rescue again.

On 14 November Zhu Shaoliang called an emergency meeting in Dihua, the military authorities decided to send troops to Yining from five directions. Li Yuxiang was appointed Commander of the 7th Reserve Division in charge of the military actions against the rebels, with headquarters at Jinghe County near Yining.<sup>43</sup> On 22 November, Zhu Shaoliang sent deputy-Commander of the 7th Reserve Division Du Defu to Yining to command the troops at Hayranbag. The total number of the personnel and civilians at Hayranbag was about 8,000. Du Defu set up his new headquarters with the help of chief of staff Cao Riling, and two regiment commanders Jiang Xuanyu and Peng Junye. They organised all the people around with determination to defend themselves to the last. Supplies of food became more and more difficult to maintain. In spite of the shortage of food and the freezing weather, the beleaguered soldiers and civilians fought very well and held their positions until reinforcements arrived.<sup>44</sup> Li Yuxiang sent troops by two routes from Jinghe to Yining for a counter-attack. The main force of the 45th Division made up one group. They took the challenge of the cold weather and the blocking actions of the ETR forces and successfully reached the Yili plain, about a dozen kilometres

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<sup>43</sup> XSL, *Xinjiang jianshi*, pp.363-364. For the GMD's military actions against the rebels, also see Guofangbu shizheng bianyiju dang'an (Archives, Historical Compilation and Translation Bureau, Ministry of National Defense) (Taipei) Guojun dang'an (Archives, National Military) 003.8/0292, "Xinjiang jiaofei jilu 1945.5" (Records on the military actions against the rebels in Xinjiang).

<sup>44</sup> Chen Li, *Yining shibian jilue* (A Concise Record of the Yining Incident) (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1977), pp.19-20. Benson, *The Ili Rebellion*, p.47.

from the airfield at Yining on 15 January 1945.<sup>45</sup>

If the reinforcements from Dihua as well as the garrison in Suiding, Huiyuan, and other rear areas of the rebels had joined up with the troops encircled by the rebels in Hayranbag, it probably would have meant the end of the ETR. At this crucial time, many ETR leaders left in a hurry for the Soviet Union with their spoils from the conflict.<sup>46</sup>

During the period from mid-November 1944 to January 1945, the battle over Yining was indecisive. The newly-established ETR regime could have been crushed by the Xinjiang authorities, unless its troops could crush the encircled garrison force at Hayranbag, defeat the reinforcements from Dihua and occupy the whole Yili District. Later this was accomplished, once more with the assistance of Soviet military aid and the participation of Soviet military personnel.

The ETR had few qualified military leaders for its guerilla forces, and the ETR forces did not have any experience in modern warfare. The military victory of the ETR over the Xinjiang authorities firstly depended on the former Russian commanders, who had returned to the Soviet Union after many years' serving in the Xinjiang army and come back now with Soviet instruction. Peter Aleksandarov and Polinov were two such military leaders. The second group of military personnel, on which a successful outcome depended, were the local Moslems in Xinjiang trained in the Soviet Union. The third important group of military leaders were regular Soviet Army officers. These three groups enabled the ETR to consolidate its positions at Yili and to increase its military strength at Tacheng and Ashan.

Ishag Beg, who had been one of the original planners of the Yili Uprising, arrived in Yining from the Soviet Union with a cavalry battalion. He arrived at a time when the reinforcements from Dihua were launching an intensive attack on Yining. Working with a plan of Ishag Beg, the ETR guerrilla forces succeeded in preventing the troops at Hayranbag from breaking through the encirclement and

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<sup>45</sup> Chen Li, *Yining shibian jilue*, p.20.

<sup>46</sup> Wang, 'The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1949.....', p.112.

thus inflicted heavy casualties. Thanks to the plan, the victory "had created favourable preconditions for the final seizure of the three enemy strongholds and for the liberation of the whole Yili District."<sup>47</sup>

Probably about the time Ishag Beg arrived at Yining, a mission of Soviet military officers headed by Polinov also arrived at Yining. In January 1945, when the Nationalist Army penetrated into the northern outskirts of Yining. Polinov, formerly a commander of the cavalry company of the Tsarist Russian Consulate in Yining, succeeded Peter Alexandarov as the Commander-in-Chief of the rebellion force. In the 1930s, Polinov served as Sheng Shicai's military adviser with the rank of Major-General. Having lived and worked in Xinjiang for many years, he knew the geography, the people, and the military situation in Xinjiang very well. No doubt his appointment greatly benefited the ETR.<sup>48</sup> Polinov arrived at Yili with a mission of Soviet military officers who were assigned as deputies to the local Moslem military commanders. In reality, they were the chief power-holders.<sup>49</sup>

The Soviet Union also sent troops to Yining to counter-attack the reinforcements from Dihua. A force of about 3,000 Soviet Kirgizs and Kazaks, headed by a General Skaub, a Tashkent Kazak, 57, was holding Denus Pass and Toghraksu Pass [the strategic points leading to Yining]. Kozlov, a Soviet Lieutenant-General, was the advisor of the Yili guerilla forces. He was directing attacks on Huocheng, Suiding and Huiyuan. In early January 1945 Soviet Moslem troops from Soviet Central Asia, made up by Uighurs, Kazaks, Uzbeks and other, arrived in Yining. Some of them were sent to Guozigou to fight against the reinforcements from Dihua and some to attack Hayranbag.<sup>50</sup> By 23 January 1945 the reinforcements, headed by Xie Yifeng, the Commander of the 45th Division, were utterly defeated at Yining and driven back to Jinghe. The troops at Hayranbag, lost

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<sup>47</sup> Li Shixun, 'Wei zuguo tongyi.....,' pp.34-35.

<sup>48</sup> Ji Dachun, 'Sulian yu Xinjiang.....,' p.5.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Wang, 'The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1949.....,' pp.114-115.

all hope. Five days later, Moslem-rebels launched their last attack. By 31 January, all troops had been cleared out of Hayranbag.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, the ETR had won the initial victory in its movement, as Saudanov Zair, one of the leaders of the Yili forces, claimed: "The victory in the battles at Hayranbag decided the future of the Revolution after the Yining [Yili] Uprising."<sup>52</sup> The ETR would not have been able to win this decisive victory over the Xinjiang authorities at Hayranbag, if the Soviets had not come to its assistance.<sup>53</sup>

### **The ETR's Growing Military Power and the Soviet Restraint**

During the period from February 1945, when Stalin and F. D. Roosevelt signed the Yalta Agreement, to September 1945, shortly after the Sino-Soviet Treaty was signed in Moscow, the ETR's military power had grown rapidly with Soviet assistance and had penetrated as far as the Manas River near Dihua.

#### **The Foundation of the Yili National Army**

In order to strengthen and enhance the achievement of the Yili Uprising, the Soviet Union sent a group of about 4 to 5 senior advisers to Yining secretly. The mission perhaps arrived after Polinov's return. Local Moslem personages constituted the Yili government, but the Soviet senior advisers played the decisive role in policy making. Vladimir Ivanovich Kozlov, a Lieutenant-General from the Soviet Kazakhstan Republic, headed this Russian mission, which was code named

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<sup>51</sup> XSL, *Xinjiang jianshi*, pp.367-368. Detailed records on the battles at Yining are available in Hou Sheng, "Lujun zhengbian di sishier shi di liushiwu lu Yining zuozhan benmo jishi" (Records of the military actions of the 65th Brigade, the 42nd Division at Yining), manuscript (Taizhong, Taiwan: Mr. Zhang Dajun's Private Collection).

<sup>52</sup> Wang, 'The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1945....,' p.107.

<sup>53</sup> Deng Liqun, 'Xinjiang heping jiefang qianhou' (Before and after the peaceful liberation of Xinjiang), *Jindaishi yanjiu* (Modern history research) no.5 (1989), p.145.

“No. 2 House”.<sup>54</sup> He conducted its activities in strict secrecy. The Soviet Consulate at Yining also was under his supervision. The mission probably stayed until the summer of 1946, when a peace agreement with the Xinjiang authorities had been signed. When the Yili Regime withdrew its representatives from the Coalition Government in Dihua in 1947, these senior advisors returned to Yining and again left for home when the CCP’s special representative Deng Liqun arrived at Yining from Moscow in August, 1949.<sup>55</sup>

After the arrival of the Soviet secret mission at Yining, the ETR began to build up its military strength. A former senior officer of the Yili regime, Saudanov recalls: “The liberation of the Yili District was just a major victory of the revolution. The new developments in the situation demanded [us] to expand the military struggle to Tacheng, Ashan and even towards Dihua.”<sup>56</sup> The “new developments in the situation” in early 1945 were that, the British-American allied troops had landed at Normandy about six months earlier. Both the British-American forces and the Soviet forces were counter-attacking Nazi Germany in central Europe. Hitler’s defeat was certain, while the Big Three were going to discuss Far Eastern affairs. In February, Stalin and Roosevelt reached the Yalta Agreement concerning China’s sovereignty of Outer Mongolia and Manchuria.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, the ETR’s preparations for the organisation of a regular army were under way at Yining.

On 7 January, an Eastern Turkestan Military Bureau was set up. The

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<sup>54</sup> Wang, ‘The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1949....,’ p.118. Zhang Dajun, *Xinjiang fengbao qishinian*, 12:6897.

<sup>55</sup> Ji Dachun, ‘Sulian yu Xinjiang....,’ p.7. The writer interviewed Ugur, the head of the Department of Propaganda under the Yili Regime, the Chinese Consul in Alma-Ata under the CCP regime. Ugur said: “Members of No.2 Houses belonged to the Ministry of Interior Affairs of the Soviet Union. The ranks of their positions were equivalent to the bureau directors of the Ministry.” Interviewed with Ugur, 27/02/1989, Urumqi.

<sup>56</sup> Z. Saudanov, *Wujun de geming licheng* (The revolutionary course of the Fifth Army) (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1989), p.22.

<sup>57</sup> See D. Wang, ‘The Xinjiang Question of the 1940s — The Story behind the Sino-Soviet Treaty of August 1945,’ forthcoming.



Headquarters of the ETR guerrilla forces was re-organized. Three months later, in April 1945 the ETR formally established an army, the Yili National Army, with Polinov as the Commander-in-Chief, Abasoff as the Head of its Political Department. Soviet military advisers were appointed to the Headquarters and to units above the level of regiment. The YNA officer of company and above company level were under the control of Polinov's mission of Soviet commanders. In the 1980s a former Soviet secret agent in Xinjiang, said: "The organization of the rebels' military forces [the YNA] were based on ethnic composition. The Soviet Union appointed its ethnic military officer to the relevant ethnic military unit [of the rebels].... In the General Headquarters and the front Headquarters, nearly all the staff were Soviet military officers."<sup>58</sup>

The Soviet Army's military manuals, teaching material and pedagogy for military training and regulations were used. The Soviet Union had trained a number of the YNA officers.<sup>59</sup> Russian was one of the official languages of the YNA. *Pravda Vostoka* newspapers were circulated in each of the companies of the YNA.<sup>60</sup> The Tsarist Russian military ranking system was adopted. The Crescent was used on the flag and insignia of the YNA. The motto on the flag was: "Advance the Independence of Eastern Turkistan!" The YNA uniforms and shoulder epaulets were in the Soviet style with the insignia of the ETR in Russian.<sup>61</sup>

The Yili National Army appeared as a regular Moslem army with very strong Islamic faith; to the chief of each unit, an Imam was appointed as a deputy. But it was no less than a force with Soviet commanders, organised according to the Soviet military system, trained by the Soviets, and dressed in Soviet uniforms. It appeared at a time when Chiang Kai-shek had just received the first reports about the Yalta Agreement. When Chiang Kai-shek tried to discover the details in the Agreement

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<sup>58</sup> Wang, 'The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1949....,' pp.120-121.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Z. Saudanov, *Wujun de geming licheng*, pp.92, 112.

<sup>61</sup> Wang, 'The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1949....,' p.122.

and prepared for negotiations with Stalin, the YNA began its military actions in the northwest of Xinjiang. At the negotiation table, the ETR and its army were used by Stalin to put pressure on the Chinese to accept the Yalta Agreement.

### **The Military Advance of the YNA on the Three Fronts**

Following the declaration of the YNA in April 1945, the ETR made a plan to launch military attacks on the north, south and central fronts against the Xinjiang provincial government. On 12 April a Chinese diplomat in the U.S. reported to Chiang Kai-shek about the Yalta deal, and it was not until mid-June the Soviet Union and the United States respectively notified the Chinese government about the secret agreement. In late June, Chiang Kai-shek sent Song Ziwen to Moscow for negotiations with Stalin on the terms of the Yalta Agreement. From early July the YNA advanced on the three fronts and launched a full-scale attack on the Nationalist troops. It can hardly be believed that the timing of the events in northwestern Xinjiang and the exposure of the Yalta Agreement were coincidental and not orchestrated by the Soviets.

Ishag Beg and Polinov were appointed as commanders on the three fronts. At this stage, the weather became warm and the Moslem rebels no longer enjoyed the edge provided by the freezing winter previously. They also had to fight the Nationalist Army's main forces in a huge area along the Xinjiang-Soviet border, from Ashan in the most-northern Xinjiang to Puli in far-western Xinjiang. Under such circumstances, efficient communication, good command, good training and sufficient military supplies were absolutely necessary for the local Moslems to win their victory. But all these were beyond what the local Moslems could muster without the Soviets' assistance.

*On the North Front:* In the middle of July, when the first round of the Sino-Soviet negotiations in Moscow yielded positive results, Song Ziwen went back to China. The YNA began its eastward movements. In mid-July Polinov led a troop to march to Bole and Emin in the Tacheng District. On 5 August, when Stalin and Song

Ziwen renewed their negotiations in Moscow, Tacheng County had already fallen into the ETR hands. In August, the YNA directed its forces to the Ashan District. At this time, most of the Ashan area had already been brought under the control of Osman's guerrilla forces, which were led by Delilhan with the assistance of the Soviet advisory mission.

A Soviet force of more than 1,000 men had entered Xinjiang across the Haba River to reinforce the YNA which was fighting in the battle for Chenghua. Outer Mongolia also provided personnel and weapons. According to the report of Wan Lingyun, the Commander at Ashan, a Soviet-Outer Mongolian force of 400 men arrived at Fuyun and Qinghe. Arms and ammunition were sent around the clock by camels and motor vehicles from Outer Mongolia to Fuyun. With the participation of the Soviet-Outer Mongolian military personnel, Delilhan's men successfully defeated the government's troops stationed in Chenghua. In early September, the ETR's forces took over Chenghua, the center of the Ashan District.<sup>62</sup> By this time with the participation of the Soviet Union and Outer Mongolia and the assistance of Delilhan's and Osman's troops, the YNA successively took over Tacheng and Ashan.

*On the South Front:* Combat on the southern front started in the middle of July. The YNA on the southern front was not as successful as it was on either the northern or the central fronts. According to sources available so far, Soviet troops were not involved in the battles at the Aksu and Yanqi Districts except for the presence of the Soviet commanders at various levels of the YNA. The reasons for the Soviet Union not sending its troops to the southern front were probably: (1) geographical difficulties in crossing the Tianshan Mountains in order to reach Aksu and Yanqi, and the considerable distance between these areas and the border with the Soviet

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<sup>62</sup> Wang, 'The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1949....,' p. 122. For more information about the battles in Ashan, see Waijiaobu Dang'an ziliao chu dang'an (Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) (hereafter cited as WDD) (Taibei) 320/1 "Xinjiang jiaofei mijian" (Secret documents on fighting against the rebels in Xinjiang) I, 1944.3 -- 1945.1: Ashan.

Union meant that any quick withdrawal or other movement of Soviet troops would not have been easy; (2) the southern front was not a major battle front, as the main purpose of the fighting in the south was to prevent the Nationalist forces from reinforcing the central front.

At Puli in the Kashi District, however, which was close to the Sino-Soviet border, Soviet troops in great numbers took part in the battles to help local Moslems fight against the GMD authorities. The leader of rebel forces was Khrum Khan Ture, a Soviet citizen.<sup>63</sup> After the campaigns at Wusu and Jinghe, northern Xinjiang, Ishag Beg went back to Puli via the Soviet Union with his Tajik and Kirghiz guerrillas.<sup>64</sup> Some Soviet troops had already entered Puli before his return. According to a Chinese diplomatic report from India to Chongqing, on 22 August 1945 1,500 Soviet troops launched an attack on the local garrison at Puli.<sup>65</sup>

Military activities in southern Xinjiang served to assume the YNA's victory on the northern and central fronts, the main purpose of which was to reach Dihua, the capital of the province.

*On the Central Front:* The key campaigns were at the central front. The ETR's purpose was to seize Wusu and Jinghe, and then move eastwards to Dihua. Wusu was the hub of communication between Dihua, Yining and Tacheng. Both sides, the ETR and the authorities in Dihua, were preparing for a decisive battle at Wusu and Jinghe. Gen. Xie Yifeng's New 2nd Army placed its headquarters at Wusu. Gen. Guo Qi's 45th Division garrisoned at Jinghe. The Nationalist forces totalled 10,000 men in this front. The ETR dispatched half of its total 30,000 men forces to the central front. In early September the YNA launched a full attack on Jinghe.<sup>66</sup> The YNA used aircraft at the battlefield. The aircraft were either war spoils seized from the Nationalist's Air Force Academy at Yining or Soviet planes provided by the

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<sup>63</sup> Zhang Dajun, *Xinjiang fengbao qishinian*, 12:6520.

<sup>64</sup> Li Shixun, 'Wei zuguo tong-yi....,' p.37.

<sup>65</sup> Zhang Dajun, *Xinjiang fengbao qishinian*, 11:6518-6519. For more information about the battles at Puli, see WDD 320/1 "Xinjiang jiaofei mijian" IV, 1944.9 -- 1945.12: Puli.

<sup>66</sup> Z. Saudanov, *Wujun de geming licheng*, p.35. XSL, *Xinjiang jianshi*, p.399.

Moscow government, or a combination of both. Even if they were war spoils, the ETR had neither pilots nor maintenance staff.<sup>67</sup> Without the presence of the Soviet technicians and pilots, these planes could not have been used in the battles.

Soviet Army personnel were also engaged in the fighting at the central front. A CCP source in Xinjiang has the following to say on this issue: "It was impossible for the YNA to launch a decisive campaign against the Nationalist troops and to break through the Jinghe-Wusu line. The Nationalist troops defended with fortifications and modern arms. At this crucial moment the YNA received full assistance from the Soviet Union. Apart from military supplies....the Soviet Union also sent senior commanders, military advisers and even junior officers to the battles. Many commanding officers, sergeants and technical personnel enrolled themselves in the YNA, actively participating in the fighting. Appointed as the YNA's Commander-in-Chief, the Soviet senior officer, General Polinov, was in full command. Soviet assistance had a decisive role in the victory of the campaigns."<sup>68</sup>

In mid-September 1945, the YNA and the Soviet troops reached the Manas River and confronted the Nationalist troops along the river.

### **Additional Evidence on the Soviet Role in Yili's Military Power**

Soviet involvement may be further substantiated by the material of the Yili Regime, the CCP, the GMD,<sup>69</sup> the Soviet Union as well as American diplomatic papers.

At present, publicly released official publications in mainland China on Soviet

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<sup>67</sup> CF China IA 893.00/10-3145, p.8. Ji Dachun, 'Sulian yu Xinjiang....,' p.5.

<sup>68</sup> Wang, 'The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1949....,' p.129.

<sup>69</sup> For the GMD official material on the Yili Rebellion, see WDD 309/18 Yining shijian (The Yining Incident) I, II, III 1945.9 --10; 1945.10 --1946.8; 1947.10 --1948.5; 309/21 "Yining mijuan" (Secret files on the Yining Incident) 1947.3 -- 1948.1; 317/40 "Zhu Xinjiang tepaiyuan baogao" (Reports from the special representative of the Foreign Affairs in Xinjiang) I 1942.8 -- 1945.1; II 1945.2 --1948.12; 320/1 "Xinjiang jiaofei mijian" (Secret documents on fighting against the rebels in Xinjiang) I Ashan, 1944.3 -- 1945.1; II Yining, 1944.10 --1945.5; III Ashan 1944.3 -- 10; IV Pulli 1944.9 -- 1945.12.

involvement in these events always follow a line established by Deng Liqun, the then CCP special representative to Yili and later a senior cadre specializing in ideological and propagandist work. One sentence can summarize the line: "The Soviet Union had offered full political, military and economic support to the Three Districts Revolution in every respect, moral and practical."<sup>70</sup> But more detailed explanation on the Soviet support of the Yili Rebellion can be found in some restricted materials. These include notes on interviews by official scholars with people directly concerned with the event.

In 1989 Deng Liqun was interviewed by Chinese official scholars engaged in writing the history of the Three Districts Revolution. In one of these interviews Deng Liqun stated:

The Soviet Union had offered full political, military, and economic support [to the Three Districts] in every respect, moral and practical. The destruction of the GMD's main forces at Yili, as a matter of fact, was accomplished with the assistance of the Soviet Union.... If the Soviet Union had not offered any help, the Yining Uprising [Yili Rebellion] would not have been successful. Even if the initial Uprising were successful, it could not have been maintained without the Soviets....<sup>71</sup>

Under the CCP regime the YNA was reorganised as the Fifth Army of the PLA in Xinjiang. The book *Wujun de geming licheng* (The Revolutionary Course of the Fifth Army) by Saudanov, the former Head of the Political Department of the YNA and vice Political-Commissar of the Fifth Army, is an official history of the YNA. It lists casualties of the Yili Regime and the National Army in major battles as follows:

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p.130.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Also see Deng Liqun, 'Xinjiang heping jiefang qianhou,' p.150.

	<i>The GMD</i>	<i>The Yili forces</i>
“The battle for liberation of Yining town”	180 killed	30 casualties
“The battle of annihilation at Hayranbag”	1,500 killed	100 casualties
“Battles at Tacheng, Emin, Tartashi”	two regiments*	40 killed
“The Battle at Hefeng, one of the fiercest battles at the north front”	1,000 killed	140 killed
“Battles at Huocheng, Suiding & Huiyuan”	474 killed	100 casualties <sup>72</sup>

\*there were about 500 men, at least, in a regiment.

The ratios between the two sides are: 6:1; 15:1; 25:1; 25:1.4; 4.7:1. According to Saudanov, the Yili forces deployed respectively 5,000 and 7,000 soldiers at Jinhe and Wusu, facing in each place 4,000 GMD troops. In the battle for Wusu town 900 GMD men were killed and 1,000 captured.<sup>73</sup> During the battles at Wusu and Jinghe, over 2,000 men of the Nationalist Army were killed and 3,800 captured.<sup>74</sup> In the Soviet accounts between 4,000-5,000 men of the 20,000 Nationalist Army were captured in the battles.<sup>75</sup> If these statistics were accurate and if the Moslem-rebels were poorly trained, poorly-equipped, inexperienced with modern war, and with only primitive arms (knives, sticks, pitchforks, hunting rifles and some captured arms, as portrayed by Jack Chen and in some Chinese accounts), how could they

<sup>72</sup> Saudanov, *Wujun de geming licheng*, pp.9, 13, 31-32.

<sup>73</sup> Z. Saudanov, ‘Xinjiang sanqu geming youguan qingkuang de huiyi’ (Memoirs on the Three Districts Revolution in Xinjiang), *Xinjiang wenshi ziliao* vol.16, p.19. Saudanov, *Wujun de geming licheng*., p.37.

<sup>74</sup> Jack Chen, *Sinkiang Story*, p.235.

<sup>75</sup> M. Kutlukov, ‘O Kharaktere i Dvizhushchikh Silakh Natsional’no-Osvoboditel’nogo Dvizheniya Narodov Sin’tszyana v 1944-1949 gg.’ (The character and the driving forces of the National-Liberation Movement of the Xinjiang peoples), *Nauchnye Raboty i Soobshcheniya, Kniga 5* (Research Works and Correspondence, Vol. 5) (Tashkent, 1962) p.261. M. Kutlukov, ‘Natsional’no-Osvoboditel’noye Dvizheniye 1944-1949 gg. v Sin’tszyane kak Sostavnaya Chast’ Kitaiskoi Narodnoi Revolyutsii’ (The National-Liberation Movement of 1944-1949 in Xinjiang as a part of the Chinese People’s Revolution) *Sbornik Rabot Aspirantov, Otdelenie Obshchestvennykh Nauk, AN UzbSSR, Vypusk 2* (A Collection of Dissertations, Department of Social Sciences, Academy of Sciences, UzbSSR, Issue 2) (Tashkent, 1958), p.274.

defeat the GMD's regular army with more advanced American weapons, and cause them heavy casualties at so little cost to their own forces? It seems beyond any possibility that this could have happened.

An English writer makes an interesting observation that despite the belief in Soviet complicity in the rebellion, "no official complaint was lodged, then or later, with the Soviets".<sup>76</sup> Available sources suggest that Chinese authorities did not "lodge an official complaint with the Soviets" for the following reasons: (1) The Yili Uprising broke out in the western-most part of Xinjiang at a time when Nationalist China was deeply engaged in its Anti-Japanese War. Large areas of northern China had fallen into Japanese hands. The Chinese Central Government was so preoccupied with fighting against the Japanese that it was unable to direct its attention to Xinjiang affairs. (2) While the European war was turning in favour of the Soviet Union, the Nationalist government was hoping for more Soviet aid to its Anti-Japanese War, especially Soviet participation in the War against Japan. (3) Contrary to past practices when the Soviet Red troops entered Xinjiang under an agreement with Yang Zengxin, the governor of Xinjiang of 1911-1928, and when the Soviet military advisers were attached publicly to Sheng Shicai's regime, the Soviet involvement in the Yili Rebellion were carried out under the cover of the ETR by encouraging local Moslems to rebel, and by secretly supporting them with arms and military personnel. If the Chinese government took it up diplomatically with the Soviets, as Zhang Zhizhong pointed out, the Soviet Union would have denied it out of hand. They could easily deny it in one sentence: "It is a Chinese domestic affair in which we have no interests!"<sup>77</sup> Under such circumstances, it seems understandable the Nationalist authorities had to handle the USSR with great care.

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<sup>76</sup> Benson, *The Ili Rebellion*, p.41.

<sup>77</sup> Mamtimin Yusup, 'Yinggai zunzhong sanqu geming de keguan lishi shiji' (We should respect the facts of the Three Districts Revolution), *Xinjiang shehui kexue yanjiu* (Xinjiang social sciences research) no.19 (1983), p.19.



Some English comments on the Soviet role in the ETR drew heavily from the reports of British and American Consuls in Dihua, especially the ones of British Consul Turrall and American Consul Robert Ward. But the accuracy of these reports should be investigated with care for the following reasons:

(1) The UK and the US established their Consulates at Dihua in 1943. During the previously 9 years of the Sheng-Soviet “honeymoon” with Sheng’s “pro-Soviet and Anti-Imperialism Policy”, “imperialist conspiracy plots” were continuously uncovered, and nearly all of the Western as well as Japanese influences were eliminated from Xinjiang.<sup>78</sup> It was not easy for Westerners to re-build their intelligence network in Xinjiang, especially in Yili, Tacheng and Ashan, which had been looked upon by Russian-Soviet authorities as their traditional sphere of influence for a century. It was difficult for the British and the Americans to extend their information network to the Three Districts where the Soviet Union had its own consulates in each of the Three Districts. Furthermore, some files of diplomatic representatives have limited access by foreigners.<sup>79</sup>

(2) The period 1944-1946 was the peak of Soviet military involvement in the Yili Rebellion. During this time, Turrall and Ward were in their posts in Dihua. A very strong pro-Soviet leaning could be seen in their reports. According to Song Xilian, the then Commander-in-Chief of the garrison in Xinjiang, Ward's dismissal from his office in Xinjiang was related to his pro-Soviet stand.<sup>80</sup> (Turrall died from illness in Dihua. No available source shed light on his attitude to the Soviet Union.)

(3) Commenting on Chinese as well as Turkish sources on Soviet military

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<sup>78</sup> According to Henry Wallace, Horace H. Smith was the only American in Dihua in June 1944, which was two months before the Gongha Uprising. J. M. Blum, *The Price of Vision: The Diary of Henry A. Wallace* (Boston, 1973), pp.347-348.

<sup>79</sup> Allen S. Whiting, ‘Book Review: *Warlords and Muslims: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang, 1911-1949*. By Andrew D. W. Forbes, Cambridge University Press, 1986,’ *The Journal of Asian Studies* vol.47, no.2 (1988), p.345.

<sup>80</sup> Song Xilian, *Yingquan jiangjun Song Xilian zishu* (An autobiography of Song Xilian) (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1986), p.201.

personnel participating in the Yili Rebellion, an English work cites two foreign visitors to reach the following conclusion:

During Graham's visit to Yining in September 1946, he saw no Soviet troops at any time during the course of his motor journey from Urumqi [Dihua] to Yining; nor did he see Soviet troops in Yining.... His reports were corroborated by the independent American traveller and author, Barbara Stephen, who visited Yili in 1947 and reported no active Soviet influence in the ETR.<sup>81</sup>

The times of Walter Graham's and Barbara Stephen's visits to Yili were September 1946 and sometime in 1947, respectively. Several sources of both the former Yili leaders and the CCP indicate that when negotiations between the Yili Regime and the Xinjiang authorities had begun in September 1945, Soviet military personnel (military advisers were excluded) were withdrawn, and Soviet arms were taken back in order to avoid discovery by the GMD.<sup>82</sup> When Graham and Stephen visited Yili in 1946, the Peaceful Agreement had already been reached and a coalition government had been organised in July 1946. Besides, no sources are available to prove that foreign visitors had been allowed to enter Yili before 1946 or to travel freely in the Three Districts even after that time. In April 1947, John H. Paxton, the then American Council in Dihua, paid an unexpected visit to Yili and Tacheng, but he did not have the freedom to travel on his own.<sup>83</sup>

(4) American and British diplomatic files offered many sources which do not support Turrall's and Ward's interpretations of events in Xinjiang. There were four American Consuls in Dihua from spring 1943 to autumn 1949: Clubb, Smith, Ward and Paxton. Clubb finished his term in Dihua in early 1944 (or May 1944) about six months before the Yili Uprising occurred. The views of both Smith and Paxton on

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<sup>81</sup> Benson, *The Ili Rebellion*, p.142.

<sup>82</sup> Wang, 'The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1949....,' p.135.

<sup>83</sup> CF China IA 893.00/11-647, Subject: Visit to Ili and Tacheng Zone, pp.3, 4.

the events differed from that of Ward.<sup>84</sup> While American diplomats were not supporting Ward's view, some British diplomats disagreed with Turrall's as well.<sup>85</sup>

Twenty-three years after the Yili Uprising, even the Soviet authorities admitted their support of the Yili Rebellion. In broadcasts of 14 May 1967 and September 1967 in Uighur for listeners in Xinjiang, the Soviets revealed: "...in 1949 [1944?], the people of East Turkestan broke the chain of tyranny and slavery of the Kuomintang hordes and set up the East Turkestani [sic] Republic.... The aid they received came from the Soviet Union.... The Soviet State.... provided the East Turkestan national army with arms and trained commanding cadres for it."<sup>86</sup> Not without cliché in usage and not without exaggeration in tone, the Russian broadcast basically confirmed the gist of my above argument.

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<sup>84</sup> Ward's and Turrall's views were recorded in CF China IA 893.00/2-2046, subject: Views of the late Geoffrey Turrall, Esquire, on the Sinkiang situation. Smith's full name is not available to the author.

<sup>85</sup> Mr. Etherington-Smith, who succeeded Mr. Gillett as Acting Consul-General of the UK in Kashi, analyzed the Soviet connection with the rebels: "...there seemed little doubt, in the face of the evidence that had come in from independent as well as Chinese sources, that the revolts....were instigated and contrived from Russia.... we have it on reliable evidence that the revolt was started by an incursion from across the border.... One is that the rebels possessed, and were able to use, aeroplanes and field artillery.... And I cannot therefore resist the conclusion that the Russians have assisted them, not only with arms, but with technical men and advisers, who have helped to give the movement.... It is therefore a safe assumption, which events would seem to confirm, that the Soviet had a hand in the direction of this revolt.... " In the same report of the American Embassy in Moscow on 1 August 1946, which was based on the files of the British Embassy at Moscow, it was stated: "British officials in Sinkiang, Nanking and New Dehli are not in complete agreement in their interpretation of recent events in Sinkiang, they all suspect that the USSR played a positive if concealed role in the later stages of the revolt." CF China IA 893.00/8-146, Subject: British Despatches and Memoranda on Sinkiang, Enclosure 1, pp.2-4; p.1.

<sup>86</sup> BBC Summary of World Broadcasts: the USSR No. su 2475 26/5/67 1967 A3/2, and Soviet Broadcasts in Uigur for Sinkiang, 1 July-30 September 1967, *Central Asian Review*, vol.xv, no.4 (1967), p.377.

## Soviet Restraint on the Yili Regime

In mid-September 1945, the YNA halted at the Manas River, and then negotiations between the Yili Regime and the Xinjiang authorities began. Who initiated the negotiations seems unimportant. The key point was that Stalin's aims at Yalta had already been realised with the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance in 1945. Under the Treaty, China recognised the independence of Outer Mongolia and Soviet privileges in Manchuria in exchange for Soviet promises of non-interference in Xinjiang's affairs and of non-support of the CCP. The cease-fire at the Manas River and the following negotiations between the Yili Regime and the Xinjiang authorities were thus an inevitable development of the Sino-Soviet Treaty.

Since November 1944 when the Rebellion erupted in Yining, the GMD authorities in Xinjiang were constantly placed in a passive situation. All they could do was to urge the Central Government to send more reinforcements for a counter-attack on the ETR and to put pressure on the Central Government to find a solution through diplomatic channels, particularly after the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty when fierce battles were still going on at the central front. Chiang Kai-shek on 11 September telegraphed Wang Shijie who was attending the conference of foreign ministers in London, directing him to negotiate with Molotov. Wang asked Molotov to investigate the air attack at Wusu and Jinghe. Molotov replied, "This is a transitional period. It is not necessary to worry about it."<sup>87</sup> To test Soviet sincerity with regard to non-interference in Xinjiang affairs, Chiang Kai-shek sent Zhang Zhizhong to Dihua.

Zhang Zhizhong arrived at Dihua on 13 September. On the following day at noon, he visited F. G. Evseeff, the Soviet Consul in Dihua and raised the issue of Yili

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<sup>87</sup> Qin Xiaoyi, ed., *Zhonghuaminguo zhongyao shiliao chubian* (Important historical materials of the Republic of China), vol.7, part 1 (Taipei: Zhongguo Guomindang dangshi weiyuanhui, 1981) p.764. *Wang Shijie riji* (The Diary of Dr. Wang Shih-chieh) (1933-1979), vol.4 (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1990), p.175, 15/09/1945.

Uprising. Evseef told Zhang that it was an internal affair of China; the Soviet Union did not intend to interfere; but in his personal view, it would be better to resolve it peacefully. Zhang asked whether he could offer his good offices. The Consul replied that he was happy to do so as an individual, but he would not be able to do anything until his government instructed him to do so. He also suggested that the Chinese government should bring the matter up with the Soviet Government.<sup>88</sup>

At 7:30 p.m., 15 September, less than 24 hours after Zhang Zhizhong's visit to the Soviet Consul in Dihua, A. A. Petrov, the Soviet Ambassador to Chongqing, presented the following memorandum to the Chinese government:

According to a report of the Soviet Consul in Yining to the Soviet government, several Moslems, as representatives of the rebels in Xinjiang, visited the Consul and suggested the Soviets to be a mediator of the dispute with the Chinese authorities. They also announced that they did not wish to be independent; instead, their aim was to gain autonomy for the Yining, Tacheng, Ashan and Kashi districts where Moslem people were the majority of residents....if the Chinese government agrees, will get the Consul in Yining to offer his good offices to mediate the present dispute in Xinjiang.<sup>89</sup>

The Yili side was surprised by and disappointed with Petrov's statement, as Ward recorded that on October 18, 1945 "Rebel delegates shown copy of Soviet memorandum to Ministry of Foreign Affairs which document Chinese regard as basis for negotiations, and which referred to rebel representatives as representing groups now in insurrection (rather than as envoys of a sovereign state); appear surprised and disappointed, and state that they are without power to negotiate on

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<sup>88</sup> Zhang Zhizhong, *Zhang Zhizhong huiyilu* (Memoirs of Zhang Zhizhong) (Beijing: Wenshi ziliao chubanshe, 1985), pp.418-419.

<sup>89</sup> Qin Xiaoyi, ed., *Zhonghuaminguo zhongyao shiliao chubian*, vol.7, part 1, pp.765-766. Also see Wu Zhongxin Diary, 19/09/1945 (unpublished); and Fawubu Diaochaju dang'an (Archives, Bureau of Investigation, Ministry of Justice) (Taipei), 876. 12102/7100 "Guanyu jie jue Xinjiang jubu shibian wenti jingguo zhi youguan wenjian" (Documents on the Incident in Xinjiang) (undated).

such a basis....”<sup>90</sup>

So far, no material has been unearthed to document the ETR’s request for Soviet mediation or the ETR’s suggestions to the Xinjiang authorities for negotiations. On the contrary, sources in English, Russian and Chinese as well, including testimony of the former Yili leaders, indicate that it was the GMD’s side which asked for negotiations, and the ETR government wanted to continue fighting until the liberation of the whole of Xinjiang. Saifudin Aizizi, the number one leader of the Yili Regime from August 1949, said that the Chairman of the ETR government, Ali Han Ture, “did his utmost to oppose peaceful negotiations.”<sup>91</sup> A CCP source in Xinjiang claimed that: “Within the Three Districts Moslem nationalists and the religious upper circles, headed by Ali Han Ture, tried very hard to go on fighting until the whole of Xinjiang was ‘liberated’, and was independent of China.”<sup>92</sup>

English sources also confirm the ETR’s unwillingness for a cease-fire. Ward reported thus in July 14, 1945: “....the Ining [Yili] leaders are widely whispered among the natives to have declared that their march would bring them to Hsing Hsing Hsia [Xingxingxia].”<sup>93</sup>

However, Ali Han Ture, as the Chairman of the ETR government, and many others from the upper religious circle, had never been the fully-authorized leaders of the government, especially since the summer of 1945, when Ahmet Jan, the said secretary of the No. 2 house in Yining, became a member of both the ETR government and the 5-member high-military committee.<sup>94</sup> Since the cease-fire at Manas River and the beginning of negotiations, Ali Han Ture’s power had fallen into other hands. By mid-September, the plan for fighting on three fronts were

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<sup>90</sup> CF China IA 893.00/10-3145, p.5.

<sup>91</sup> Saifudin, *Tianshan xiongying*, p.114.

<sup>92</sup> Wang, ‘The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1949....,’ p.143.

<sup>93</sup> CF China IA 893.00/7-1645, p.7.

<sup>94</sup> Xie Min, ‘Sanqu geming de zhuoyue lingdaoren, Ahmet Jan Kasim lieshi zhuan’ (A biography of Ahmet Jan Kasim), *Xinjiang lieshi zhuan tongxun* no.2-3 (1989), p.3.

completed. The YNA had already occupied the Three Districts of Yili, Tacheng and Ashan. At about the same time, the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance was signed. Stalin's aims at Yalta had already been achieved. Therefore, it was a good opportunity for the Soviets to move from military operations to political struggle.

In order to keep the fruits of military victory and to start a peaceful political campaign with Soviet participation, the Yili Regime reorganised its government. Ahmet Jan, Abasoff and other pro-Soviet young Moslem intellectuals gathered much more power in their hands at the expense of Moslems from the upper circles. In order to reduce the possibility of the Yili Regime making changes to the cease-fire agreement and as a precaution against the possibility of the Xinjiang authorities uncovering information about Soviet involvement in the Three Districts, the Soviets repossessed Soviet-made weapons.<sup>95</sup> It seems that the "transitional period" mentioned by Molotov in his reply to Wang Shijie at the conference in London had ended.

In short, there were several reasons why the Soviets, who planned the Yining Incident, halted the YNA at the Manas River and persuaded the ETR to accept the Xinjiang authorities' suggestion for negotiations. First, by the middle of September 1945, the aims of the YNA's military operations on the three fronts had already been achieved; therefore, the Soviets was able to bring the Three Districts of Yili, Tacheng, and Ashan, the traditional Soviet-influenced area, under their effective control. The mining concessions, including gold, tungsten and uranium, would be re-gained.<sup>96</sup> Second, the ETR government lacked internal peace and harmony. Disagreements between the anti-Soviet Moslem upper circle and pro-Soviet young Moslems intensified.<sup>97</sup> The further away the YNA moved from Yili, the weaker the

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<sup>95</sup> Ji Dachun, 'Sulian yu Xinjiang....,' p.7.

<sup>96</sup> See Chapter 10 of Wang, 'The Yili Rebellion of 1944-1949....'

<sup>97</sup> For the disputes among the Moslems in Xinjiang, see D.Wang, 'Nationalism or a Power Struggle: Yili Moslems Challenge to the GMD authorities in Xinjiang,' forthcoming.

Soviet control became over the ETR. Third, by this time the Sino-Soviet Treaty had already been signed through which the aims of Stalin's Far East policy had been achieved. If the YNA under Soviet command (it was impossible for the ETR to take over Dihua without Soviet assistance) took over Dihua, where American and British diplomats were, it would have aroused international concern. So, it was the right time (September 1945), and the right place (at the Manas River), for the Soviets to halt the YNA, and to push the Yili Regime to negotiate with the authorities in Xinjiang.

The Yili Rebellion represented the peak of Soviet involvement, although a very concealed one, in Xinjiang's affairs in the twentieth century. The Rebellion and the events following it were closely associated with the Soviet Union's Far Eastern policy. Unlike the time of the Sheng-Soviet cooperation of 1934-1942, during which the Soviet involvement was vivid and obvious, the Soviets' interference in Xinjiang's affairs of the 1940s was masked.

Xinjiang, together with Outer Mongolia and Manchuria, the three major frontier regions of China, had long been a target for control for Tsarist-Soviet Russia and the other major Powers. In the early 1930s with the occupation of Manchuria by Japan, all Soviet privileges in Manchuria were abolished, and Soviet control of Mongolia and Xinjiang was threatened. The Soviet Union, however, successfully turned Xinjiang into its exclusive sphere of influence by taking advantage of Sheng Shicai's situation. As a result of Sheng's ceasing to co-operate with the Soviet Union in 1942, the Soviet Union reluctantly withdrew its personnel from Xinjiang. Stalin, of course, was not happy with this situation, but it was difficult for him to do anything about it at that time.

From the 1943 Teheran Conference to the 1945 Yalta Conference, the Soviet Union adjusted its policy and re-established itself in East Asia successfully. In late 1944 and early 1945, the ETR was set up in Yining, and large quantities of Soviet ammunition and military personnel arrived in Yili to help the Moslem rebels. At Yalta Stalin "brought up the subject of political conditions upon which the Soviet



Union would enter the war against Japan”, which were the main points of the Yalta Agreement.<sup>98</sup> Under the Agreement the independence of Outer Mongolia was to be recognized, and the privileges of the former Tsarist Russia in the Far East which were lost to Japan during the Japanese-Russian war of 1904, were to be regained by the Soviet Union as preconditions for the latter to enter the war against Japan. Since the Yalta Agreement impinged the sovereignty of China, the vital step to realize the Agreement was to obtain acquiescence from the Chinese government. During the first part of 1945, after destroying the Chinese government’s civil and military administrations in the Yili District, the ETR forces marched north to attack Tacheng and Ashan. This marked the high point of the ETR’s military might. Stalin now was able to use the problem of Xinjiang to his advantage in his negotiations with Chiang Kai-shek on the terms of the Yalta Agreement. As a result, the Sino-Soviet Treaty was signed on 14 August 1945.<sup>99</sup> In short, political events in Xinjiang during this period of time followed closely the Soviet Union’s Far Eastern policy. In the late 1940s the Three Districts of Yili, Tacheng and Ashan in Xinjiang, Manchuria and Outer Mongolia became the spheres of influence of the Soviet Union and a part of the Iron Curtain during the early stage of the Cold War in Asia.

The foregoing analysis suggests that no study of Xinjiang during the 1940s can be accomplished adequately without reference to the Soviet Union’s Xinjiang policy. Western scholars have seldom mentioned the role played by the Russian Government in the Yili Rebellion. Publications in Taiwan, on the other hand,

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<sup>98</sup> US Department of State, *United States Relations with China, With Special Reference to the Period 1944-1949* (Washington D.C., 1949), p.115.

<sup>99</sup> For information about negotiations on the treaty, see Guoshiguan (Academia Historica) (Taipei) Xingzhengyuan dang’an (Archives of the Executive Yuan), 062/1289 “Qinding Zhongsu youhao tongmeng tiaoyue an 1945.7.4 --1948.2.13” (Files on the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance Between the Republic of China and the U.S.S.R.. For a detailed story on Xinjiang’s role in the Soviet East Asia policy, see D. Wang, ‘1945 nian de Zhong-Su youhao tiaoyue he Xinjiang wenti’ (Xinjiang Question and the Sino-Soviet Treaty of 1945), *Zhongguo bianzheng* (Journal of Chinese frontiers) vol. 122, pp.76-83; and ‘The Xinjiang Question of the 1940s — The Story behind the Sino-Soviet Treaty of August 1945,’ forthcoming.

over-emphasise the Soviet Union's interests in annexing Xinjiang. Scholars in mainland China are not free to write on this very sensitive subject. As a result, much work has yet to be done before a trustworthy history of Xinjiang in this period can appear before us.