

Central Asia

The New Geopolitics

Graham E. Fuller

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PREFACE

This report is part of a larger RAND study on the "Breakup of the Soviet Union: Implications for U.S. Security Interests" sponsored by the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. That project seeks to examine alternative futures for the constituent parts of the former USSR and the foreign policy implications those futures will have for the USSR and the United States. This report specifically addresses the newly emerging Central Asian states.

This research is being conducted in the International Security and Defense Strategy Program within RAND's National Defense Research Institute (NDRI), a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff.

A trip report written in July 1991 presented findings based on the author's trip to Central Asia for three weeks in June and July 1991. The author visited specialists on Central Asia in Moscow for one week and then spent an additional two weeks in Central Asia, visiting Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. During the visit the author was afforded personal interviews with the president and vice president of Uzbekistan, the president of Kazakhstan, a senior adviser to the president of Kazakhstan, numerous opposition groups and figures, Russians working in Central Asia, intellectuals, journalists, and an Islamic religious figure. The author undertook a second trip to the area in May 1992.

Between the author's visit in July 1991 and the completion of more detailed analysis (as of June 1992), immense changes have taken place in Central Asia, reflecting the extraordinary course of events in Moscow and all over the territory of the former USSR in that same period. The most critical event, of course, was the failed coup by hard-liners against President Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991, the collapse of which spelled immediate end for the power of the Communist Party and the central mechanisms that had so long dominated the Soviet state. Within a few weeks, any new federal arrangements among the remnants of the old Union were clearly impossible, opening the way for the gradual declaration of complete independence of all the republics in the former Union. Boris Yeltsin's declaration of a new Commonwealth of Independent States in December 1991 simply formalized the interment of the old Union. Huge questions about the

future nature of relations among the old republics have yet to be worked out—a process that will probably take years.

In the meantime, the Central Asian republics remain in a period of rapid transition. This study attempts to outline what the character of their future options may be. The report does not profess to be a comprehensive overview of all aspects of contemporary Central Asia, but it does seek to treat most of the major issues that currently affect the region's development, including the character of its leadership, the character of its relationship with Moscow, its major internal ethnic problems, the character of relations between the Russians and the native peoples of Central Asia, problems of privatization, democracy, the establishment of political parties, and the likely long-range trends of the region. The author has conducted considerable research on the problems of Central Asia over the past several years and reads both Russian and Uzbek, so this report reflects much of that background as well. The study should help give policymakers a feel for the contemporary state of development of the Central Asian republics and their future ties with Russia and the commonwealth, as well as with the outside world.

One word about terminology is required. In Russian the term "Central Asia" (*Srednyaya Aziya*) refers only to the four republics of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, quite explicitly excluding the huge northern republic of Kazakhstan. Russians speak of "Central Asia and Kazakhstan" when speaking of the totality of this large Muslim region. In the Turkic languages, however, "Central Asia" (*Orta Asya*) generally implies all Muslim states of the area, even though the Russian terminology has gradually had some influence in the region. In common parlance in English, "Central Asia" generally includes Kazakhstan; in this study, Kazakhstan is included when speaking of Central Asia. While there is much that is distinct about Kazakhstan, it shares so many of the characteristics and general problems of the other Central Asian republics that it would be artificial and unhelpful to separate it out.

SUMMARY

The Muslim republics of Central Asia have just recently emerged onto the world scene as independent nations, at once changing the geopolitics of the surrounding regions and perhaps changing the balance of forces within the Muslim world as a whole with their overwhelmingly Turkic orientation.

Extreme political fluidity will mark the politics of Central Asia, given the evolving efforts by these republics to determine their own cultural identities, form new patterns of alliances and associations, identify new friends and rivals, and find their place in a radically changed economic environment. Major questions remain about their future character—probably more than in almost any other area of the former USSR. The following issues will be of greatest concern to U.S. interests:

- The United States will have limited clout in affecting the future relations of the republics among themselves or with Russia. While a federation or confederation of the Central Asian states is desirable from the viewpoint of stability, the choice is up to the players themselves. Neither Russia nor Washington can prevent the assertion of nationalistic urges—however divisive—so long suppressed under communism.
- Regardless of the kind of arrangement that emerges among the former republics of the USSR, each of the republics, especially in Central Asia, will undergo a long period of shakedown in which it establishes national identity, interests, allies and enemies, and goals. The transition from totalitarian Communist Party rule to multiparty states and a more democratic order will not come without a struggle. This whole period will be very rocky under almost any circumstances.
- The source of greatest volatility in the Central Asian republics will be the presence of their huge Russian minorities. Kazakhstan is by far the most sensitive of these republics, and there the possibility of future ethnic conflict is at its highest.
- The interests of other states in the region and around the periphery will have equally significant impact on the development of the Central Asian republics, affecting in turn U.S. policy interests. Central Asia's relations with Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and China will be at the forefront of the new relationships.

- Turkey is in a position to play the most constructive role in the region. It is the ideal model, a state that is similarly Turkic in culture, oriented toward the West, democratic, secular, stable (except for the worrisome Kurdish problem), moderate, and successful in its application of the free-market model.
- Despite Washington's preference to keep Iranian influence in Central Asia to an absolute minimum, realistically it will not happen. Geopolitically, Iran is the single most important country to Central Asia after Russia, since it represents the primary overland link to the Persian Gulf, Turkey, and the West. Its industrial experience and skills will be of value to Central Asia. Yet Iran will also certainly emphasize its credo of political Islam and will attempt to redirect the Central Asian republics away from a Western orientation. It will not likely be able to export its brand of theocratic government to its northern neighbors.
- Some elements within the Arab world are also interested in enlisting the republics on the side of the Muslim world against the West on numerous issues. Nationalist elements in the republics have already expressed vocal hostility, on the basis of shared Muslim culture, against the U.S.-led attack on Iraq during Operation Desert Storm. Russia's own policies toward Central Asia may go a long way to determining the nature of their attitudes toward the West in general.

Concrete American interests in Central Asia are quite limited. The area's economic character, while not unimportant, has little attraction for the United States other than perhaps its energy resources. American interests are thus more negative in character. It is primarily Central Asia's strategic geopolitical location—truly at the continent's center—and the broadly undesirable course of events that could emerge if the region were to drift toward instability, that constitute the primary American interest. Those negative developments could include the following:

- Military conflict between Russia and Central Asia over ethnic, territorial, and resource questions, particularly in Kazakhstan.
- Military conflict among the republics themselves.
- An extension of the process of ethnic breakup, already sparked by the formation of new republics in Central Asia, that could indirectly lead to such developments as the breakaway of ethnically related northern Afghanistan to join Central Asian neighbors. The

breakup of Afghanistan would then provoke ethnic struggles in Pakistan, Iran, and the western border areas of China.

- The Central Asian republics represent a new and uncertain element in Russian-Chinese relations, which are fraught with quarrels in centuries past over these same regions and ethnic groups. The role of the Central Asian republics in the context of Sino-Russian rivalry is unclear; they could back one versus the other or split in their support.
- If events go badly, Islamic fundamentalism could emerge strongly in the region, with negative impacts on Russia, China, India, and the political dynamics of the rest of the Islamic world. It could also spark increased Russian chauvinism in response.
- Nuclear proliferation remains a distinct possibility, given the skills that have likely been imparted to a number of Central Asian technicians.

Thus, given the potential for untoward developments in the region for Western interests, modest hands-on American influence in the region is desirable. Most of these states will probably fall short of American political criteria for good relations, but so do many other states with whom the United States has regular diplomatic relations. Now is the time, while events and developments in the region are so fluid, for maximum American clout to be applied to help shape their future visions, attitudes, and policies. Five years from now, many policy lines will have hardened in new directions and will be more difficult to influence.

The Central Asian republics, long viewed as the greatest bastion of communist conservatism within the old Soviet Empire, suddenly found themselves face to face with the cold realities of independence with the collapse in late 1991 of communist central authority and the unwillingness of most republics to cede newly won sovereignty to any successor centralized federal state. The communist leaderships of the Central Asian republics would probably have preferred to delay the final breakup of the empire, if only to gain breathing space and opportunities to work out new economic relationships. In the event, no breathing space was given, and the republics now face, virtually on their own, a host of severe and pressing problems made all the more urgent by the collapse of all the traditional political and economic mechanisms within the old Union.

The republics of Central Asia are all distinct, at different stages of political and economic development and possessing different leadership styles. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are the least democratic

republics in the region at the moment, while remote Kyrgyzstan is astonishingly the most open and democratic of all, due to the unique characteristics of its president, Askar Akaev.

All the current leaders of the Central Asian republics came out of the Communist Party and remain members of it today (except Kyrgyzstan's Akaev). Nonetheless, the Communist Party in every republic has also changed its name to reflect the new realities and has moved in more nationalistic directions, abandoning entirely the old Marxist-Leninist rhetoric and ideology. But whatever its name and ideology, the party is still firmly in power in all the republics except Kyrgyzstan. The old ideology has given way to a moderate, pragmatic, businesslike nationalism dedicated to the interests of each republic. At the same time, the Party structure maintains considerable importance, for it is still the instrument and structure of power that the current leadership uses to rule in each republic.

As is the case elsewhere in the old Soviet Union, ethnic tensions are growing in Central Asia. These tensions are present between republics, but they are even sharper between the resident Russians and the native (titular) nationality of each republic. In almost every case, the republic's titular nationality is arrayed against *all* the other national groups in seeking to run the republic on a nationalist basis and primarily in the interests of the natives.

Despite differences among the various republics, all share a basically common culture and history (either nomadic or urban) that in principle unites them. All are Turkic (except for the Persian-speaking Tajiks). The term "Turkestan" was used to describe the entire region during the last century, and it could once again come to describe a united confederal or federal region. But at the present time, differences and suspicions among the republics, and the weight of seventy years of divided existence, complicate the prospect of regional unification. Economic necessity may soon spur the hasty emergence of some kind of regional organization, but no such regional federation or confederation will be able to resolve internal conflicts and differences for a long time to come.

Internal political problems are at least as serious as interrepublican problems. The leadership in each of the republics faces opposition from informal nationalist groups or parties that generally believe the president does not pursue a sufficiently nationalist policy, especially vis-à-vis Russians in the republics. With such forces likely to gain strength over time, each president will increasingly need to defend his nationalist credentials and will probably be pushed into adopting more sharply nationalist policies.

realities are deeply upsetting to many Kazakhs, who see themselves as uniquely threatened; they are determined to do something about it.

Many of the Kazakh nationalists are themselves heavily russified, which typically increases the urgency of their commitment to the nationalist cause. Kazakhs reportedly make up over 50 percent of the parliament, in excess of their actual share of the republic's population—a fact that is increasingly disturbing to the local Russians. Whereas for nearly seven decades the ethnic makeup of the purely rubber-stamp Kazakh parliament was absolutely meaningless, today that parliament is now invested with power of legislation that will have major effects on the fate of the Kazakhs—as well as all other nationalities—in the republic.

The importance of Kazakhstan to the economy of the former Soviet Union and to Russia today, given its major mineral and petroleum resources and industry, guarantees that ultimate control of the resources of the republic will be a highly contentious struggle. Kazakh nationalism will grow and confront the Slavic population; the disposition of the large oil reserves, which the Kazakhs will surely wish to use exclusively for the benefit of their own population, will heighten tensions. Outspoken Kazakh nationalism is only beginning to develop itself and to seek articulation; it will not be turned aside from its national goals by arguments of “internationalism” that so long served to suppress nationalism in the USSR in the past.

Among the most potent symbols of nationalism is the struggle for control of nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan. While technically the weapons were all supposed to be under “Soviet” control—and later under Commonwealth Armed Forces control—in fact this is perceived by nearly all in the Commonwealth as meaning basically Russian control. The Kazakh government has been highly ambiguous in its statements about nuclear weapons on Kazakh soil. Kazakh President Nazarbaev clearly recognizes that a Kazakh voice over the disposition of these weapons greatly increases his clout at home, in Moscow, and internationally, and he will seek to maintain it.

Indeed, the prospect of a nuclear Kazakhstan has caught the attention of the whole Muslim world, as a powerful symbol of the strength that the West seems determined to deny them. The Kazakhs are determined to maintain some voice in the disposition of strategic nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan for as long as possible, and even today suggest that although they favor the general abolition of nuclear weapons, they would like to see their neighbors—such as Russia, Ukraine, India, Pakistan, and China—take some steps with them in this direction. Already the nuclear issue has given Kazakhstan a

Relations with Russia will lie at the heart of Central Asian politics for decades to come, and a critical component of those relations is the status of Russians who currently live in the republics. Some 25 million Russians live outside the Russian republic; some 75 million people altogether live outside the borders of their own national republics, potentially involving massive exchanges of population down the road. At the heart of the nationalist struggle are such issues as the language laws that proclaim the native language of each republic to be the state language, replacing the once untouchable position of Russian. The Russian language has now largely vanished in the parliaments of each republic (except Kazakhstan), and campaigns are under way to broaden the use of the native language—much to the discomfort of all of the nonnative population.

Land law is another major issue of contention. Such laws declare the land and its natural resources to be the property of the Uzbek people, or the Kirgiz people, whereas the nonnatives seek a formulation that will make the land the property of “all the inhabitants of Uzbekistan,” Kyrgyzstan, etc. This issue has yet to be permanently resolved and will likely remain a key feature of nationalist politics in future years. Yet another major issue of contention lies in the struggle of the titular nationalities to gain dominant voice and privilege in their own republics—primarily at the expense of the Slavs. Clashes with the Slavs for power within the republics is certain to increase—and the Slavs will lose out in the end.

Of all the ethnic confrontations in Central Asia, the one involving the Kazakhs is potentially the most volatile. They are the one nationality that is a minority within its own republic (40 percent). The Kazakh language has been inhibited in its development, and is less widely used within its own republic and among its own natives than any other native language of the region. And the Kazakhs are the most sensitive to their predicament of nearly any nationality in the region. The Kazakh nationalists are strident and passionate, pouring out the grievances from their past, including their conviction that a third of their people died during collectivization, and that the instruments of economic power in Kazakhstan reside almost exclusively in the hands of the Russians. It is precisely for all these reasons of wounded nationalism that Kazakhstan will likely face the most virulent ethnic tensions and conflicts in the future.

Because the population of northern Kazakhstan is almost purely Slavic, the separation of northern Kazakhstan from the rest of the republic is a distinct possibility—strengthened by Solzhenitsyn's vision of a future Russia that includes northern Kazakhstan. These

unique entrée into the international scene. The nuclear issue in Kazakhstan only heightens the general volatility of the Kazakh internal situation.

The Russians of Central Asia confront serious problems in determining their future. Many have lived most of their lives in the region—some even for a generation or more—and feel themselves natives of the region. They consider themselves hard-working, and as a group they generally occupy significant positions of responsibility in society. Even with rising ethnic tensions in the region, they feel unprepared to leave Central Asia for Russia. Those who have gone back have suffered severe “culture shock”; they openly state that they are “different” from the Russians who live in Russia, who are heavy drinkers, lack a work ethic, and whose way of life is frankly seen as dissolute. Central Asian Russians who have gone back have suffered severe resentment from the local Russians, who accuse them of “abandoning the empire” and, worse, seeking to create an unwelcome new work ethic back home. The resettlement of millions of Central Asian Russians back in Russia—requiring housing, jobs, and food—will be one of the major challenges for the government of the Russian republic.

Boris Yeltsin is widely disliked by nearly all elements in Central Asia, native and Russian. Russians dislike him because he weakened and eventually destroyed the Union by pulling Russia out of it, and because he does not have sufficient understanding or sympathy for the plight of all Russians who live outside the Russian republic. The natives are worried by his Russia-first policies and his unwillingness to expend Russian treasure to assist the Central Asian republics. They also believe that Yeltsin is stirring up new feelings of Russian nationalism and potential chauvinism that will not help ethnic relations in the republics. But they recognize that he is the man to deal with as they move to establish bilateral relations with Russia.

Islam sometimes seems to figure differently in the minds of differing groups in the former USSR. In Moscow there is a general concern, almost an atavistic fear, of the potential negative power of Islam to the south. Almost all Muslims in Central Asia welcome the new freedom of worship that has emerged in the postcommunist era. Among many Central Asian parties and opposition groups, Islam is not a major issue. Perhaps it is the current leadership in Central Asia that is most concerned about the potential political power of Islam, and is determined to try to sideline it.

In fact, the era of perestroika, as it was for everything else, was clearly a turning point for Islam in Central Asia. For decades an

unofficial or “parallel” Islam existed underground alongside official state-sponsored Islam. With the new freedom of religion in the Soviet Union, there will likely be a major scramble between official and unofficial Islam for power and income. “Establishment Islam” may be sufficiently compromised by its past coexistence with state power to place it at a disadvantage against the “cleaner” unofficial Islam. Unofficial Islam will likely be more nationalist in character and less willing to cooperate with the state, thereby increasing the cooperation between state and official Islam against it.

Yet opposition parties, even nationalists, may be tempted to turn to Islam as an auxiliary weapon in their struggle to gain power—especially against former communists. Revealingly, Kazakh nationalists seem committed to the idea that Islam must be encouraged in the republic as part of Kazakh culture. Islam has historically been extremely weak among the traditionally nomadic Kazakhs; yet the nationalists clearly see it as a critical ingredient in the process of strengthening Kazakh self-identity—in distinction to the Russians.

Under any circumstances, Islam will grow in influence in Central Asia; it has long been unnaturally suppressed and must find its own natural level in the newly emerging political cultures. Islamic fundamentalism, however, is not likely to be a major force in domestic or foreign policies of most Central Asian states *provided that* the region is able to develop in relative tranquillity. Radical Islam will surely emerge under one of two circumstances:

- If relations between the native population and Russia (including local Russians) should move toward sharp confrontation, creating a “Christian versus Muslim” context; or if Central Asia should tend to be relegated by Russia and the West into the category of the Islamic world—a political status it has not been used to over the past three quarters of a century.
- If domestic opposition movements should develop in protest against disastrous economic conditions or harsh authoritarian local regimes that can then be accused of “lacking Islamic legitimacy.”

Otherwise, the conservative and sober Turkic and Sunni character of Central Asian Islam should be less inclined toward extreme religious expression than its counterparts in Iran or even the Arab world.

The official Islamic establishment has so far aligned itself with local state power. That is its greatest weakness. Unofficial, or radical Islam, however, emphasizes Islam as a political instrument and works independently of state power. That is its greatest strength. It

will probably enjoy greater official ties with Islamic movements abroad. All the Central Asian states will to some extent wish to emphasize their Muslim character in order to facilitate assistance from the oil-rich states of the Muslim world.

The process of privatization poses major problems of destabilization throughout the former Soviet Union, but in Central Asia it creates special problems: Which nationalities will be the winners and which the losers in the privatization process? The Kirgiz and Kazakhs both mention that they are "not mercantile people" and hence fear domination in the marketplace and the free economy by the other nationalities in their republics—many of whom are Muslims themselves who already have a monopoly on the private economy: Azeris, Kurds, Chechen, Ingush, Dungans, Uighurs, and others. In Kazakhstan, the Russians stand to "inherit" the industrial complexes as well as the agricultural land, since the Kazakhs likewise have a limited tradition of settled agriculture. The ethnic conflicts inherent in privatization are overwhelming and, in the minds of the current Central Asian leadership, are perhaps best left to the future. Yet reform elsewhere in the old Union may force some of these changes upon the Central Asians. Ironically, Moscow has generally been more tolerant of a more developed private economy in Central Asia than in any other part of the empire, but that private sector has been limited almost exclusively to non-Russians.

The Central Asians are now in the process of working out new relationships among themselves and with outside states, especially with neighboring Turkey and Iran. The present leadership of the republics is committed to a pragmatic approach to foreign relations, based on establishing economic cooperation and development assistance wherever possible. Major assistance from abroad may not be sufficiently forthcoming from the West or from East Asia, pushing the republics to enter into the politics of the Muslim world more closely for aid on a religious or ideological basis. At present, rivalry has sprung up at least among Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia for influence in Central Asia. Pakistan and the Arab world are slowly beginning to look for influence there as well, and hope to attract Central Asia into support for more traditionally Muslim politics and policies.

China is another important border state for Central Asia. The Central Asian republics are interested in economic relations with China, and are completing rail access from Beijing to Turkey. But China is itself vulnerable to ethnic separatism, with its large ethnic Turkic population over the border in Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang province). Rising Turkic nationalism and the threat of separatism will consider-

ably complicate relations between the Central Asian republics and China, and some degree of adversarial relationships may emerge. Central Asia may find itself in the middle of any geopolitical rivalry between Russia and China—as in the past.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	iii
SUMMARY	v
Section	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Entrapped in the Colonial Syndrome	1
The Central Asian Republics	3
The Crisis of Identity	3
Divisive Factors	6
The Case for Unity	7
The Impact of the Commonwealth	9
The Character of Domestic Leadership	10
2. UZBEKISTAN	13
President Islam Abdulganievich Karimov	13
The Uzbek Opposition	15
Ethnic Relations	18
The Tajik Minority	23
Islam	24
Outlook	25
3. KYRGYZSTAN	27
President Askar Akaev	27
Islam	31
Kirgiz Informal Organizations and Parties	35
4. KAZAKHSTAN: THE ENDANGERED NATIONAL ENTITY	41
The Political Views of Edinstvo	42
President Nazarbaev	46
The Kazakh Nationalists	47
The National Museum of the Kazakh People	53
Problems of Kazakh Culture	55
Kazakh Foreign Policy	56
China	59
Mongolia	60
Turkey	61
Rivalry with Uzbekistan	61
5. TAJIKISTAN	63

6.	TURKMENISTAN	67
7.	ECONOMIC ISSUES	70
	Trade Issues	70
	Future Economic Integration	72
	Water Resources	73
	Relationship Within the Commonwealth	73
	External Assistance	74
	Conclusion	76
8.	IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY	77
	The Character of American Interests	77
	The Role of American Influence	78
	The Struggle for the Muslim Soul of Central Asia	81

1. INTRODUCTION

ENTRAPPED IN THE COLONIAL SYNDROME

Capital cities often tend to be out of touch with the realities of the rest of the country. Moscow has hardly been any exception. The range of views on Central Asia that has pervaded Muscovite political circles seemed often to miss the dynamic of what was actually happening in the Central Asian republics. Lulled by the political conservatism of those republics, Moscow as late as the summer of 1991 tended to ignore the fact that they were proceeding to establish their individual identities and separate from the former Union in a resurgence of ethnicity and nationalism. Although the failed August 1991 coup spelled the end of the Union, the Central Asian republics had already set a course toward independence as inexorable as that of the Baltic states, just a much slower one. Independence had perhaps been a long-range goal of a small handful of nationalists, but no one could have foreseen that the fulfillment of those desires would come so fast and so unplanned.

The ultimate irony, of course, was that the USSR, the very center of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist propaganda worldwide, was blind to the colonial character of its own empire. It was as if Marxism-Leninism had somehow spared the USSR any susceptibility to the syndromes of colonialism that had affected the earlier colonial empires of the West European states.

In June 1991, the author gave a seminar on Islam at the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Academy of Sciences in Moscow. Most of the attendees were specialists on various areas of the Middle East. Interestingly, they said that many of them had been asked in the last year to turn their expertise to Moscow's own Muslim republics. Most admitted that they had no knowledge of the local languages; they recognized that to turn to a study of their own country presented the difficult challenge of developing an objectivity that had never before been exercised on internal affairs. Many of these researchers found it difficult, too, to think of "their own Muslims" in the same categories as the foreign Muslim countries they were familiar with. The legacy of both ideological and imperial thinking dies hard. Although the empire is dead, and the Union is not to be re-created for a very long time if ever, Russia still needs to maintain some detailed understanding of the politics and sociology of the Muslim republics. Not the least

reason for this is the presence of many millions of Russians there, people whose fate will be closely linked to the policies of the new republics. These new countries are now among the top priorities of the new foreign policy of Russia.

Most Soviet journalistic coverage and casual analysis had tended to see the Central Asian republics as deeply conservative in character, unlikely to go the route of independence; as states where the party was still firmly in control and where traditional—even feudal—mechanisms of power were still in place; and as states that depended on Moscow economically, had a firm stake in the Union, needed the Union for the survival of the political elite, and supported the most conservative forces in Moscow. Although portions of this portrait were quite accurate, overall it ignored the longer-term dynamic trends that were already rapidly changing the face of these republics even in the late days of the Union. It also ignored the general course of nationalist movements and developments all over the Third World, especially after the post-World War II decolonization experience. The way the Russians themselves perceive Central Asia reflects much of the classic colonial syndrome that colored the thinking of the French in Algeria and the British in India, among others. A reorientation, a new objectivity, in Russian thinking will be required before Moscow will be able to come to terms with the present course of events. The Algerian model offers much by way of understanding, except that the Soviet empire was able to come apart without the terrible bloodshed that Algeria inflicted on itself and the French *métropole*. And, as in Algeria and India, there is a whole cadre of Russian-trained native intelligentsia that may quickly become obsolete as new nationalist trends and leaders emerge in the republics less sympathetic to Russian culture.

The most difficult transition of all will be for those Russians (or Slavs in general) who live in the Central Asian republics, usually under privileged circumstances and enjoying a degree of influence and power that can no longer be justified under the new conditions of independence. Undoubtedly the greater part of them will now seek to leave, since there no longer exists any central power or union structure to order life in the republics or to protect their special status as *colons*, technical specialists, or administrators of empire. Those who tarry in relinquishing housing, jobs, and privileged administrative positions will probably be encouraged by nationalist elements to step up their departure schedule; they can be encouraged to leave through psychological intimidation, but some degree of violence cannot be excluded—a time-honored and effective means of bringing about movements of populations. A little terrorism goes a long way.

It will be up to Russia to decide just how involved it will become in the fate and welfare of Russians who opt to stay in the Central Asian republics. Clearly Moscow cannot countenance bloodshed or deliberate killing of Russians there, but what can it do to prevent it? It can send in troops to temporarily keep order or to assist in a peaceful evacuation, but it cannot restore Russians to lost positions or occupy the republics indefinitely. Moscow will be hard put to object to new policies implemented by independent and sovereign governments designed to favor the native populations. Nor, on purely practical grounds, can Moscow or Kiev welcome the return of millions of Russians and Ukrainians to home republics that lack the necessary housing, jobs, and other critical amenities.

THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

The Central Asian republics are currently undergoing a period of extraordinary, rapid, and profound change. Revolutionary change has, of course, seized the entire former Soviet Union, bringing independence and an end to communist ideology, Communist Party rule, and control from Moscow. In many republics there is a more open press. Several political parties have formed, all embarked on a gradual transition from a command-administrative economy to a free market. But the Central Asian republics, while experiencing all of these changes, are also undergoing a special identity crisis of their own. These republics are therefore likely to experience even more profound change and dislocation than most other regions of the old Soviet Union. Indeed, independence came entirely unexpectedly for these republics, leaving them unprepared to cope with the new problems created by independence and the need for new policies in nearly every area of life.

The key questions that face the Central Asian republics touch upon issues of identity, domestic leadership, democracy, ties with other Muslim republics, interrelationships with all the other republics of the former USSR, the outlook for their economies, the nature of Islam in politics, and the character of their future foreign policies.

THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY

Until the Soviet period, Central Asia had never possessed "nations" in the Western sense of the term. Before conquest by Czarist Russia, the various states and entities of the region had long consisted of loose and shifting alliances of tribal groupings under the control of one or another powerful khan or ruler—often nomadic in character in

some regions, based in key urban centers in others. Boundaries were not clearly fixed, and the precise ethnicity of the khans' subjects was often irrelevant to the composition and boundaries of their transient states. All of Central Asia was divisible into two primary culture types: a nomadic culture, particularly the Turkmen, Kazakhs, and Kirgiz; and an urban culture, based on the twin pillars of Turkic governmental, administrative, and military institutions and Persian literary and artistic culture. The whole region was informally known as "Turkestan" to both the region's inhabitants and to Russians. The overall culture was first and foremost Islamic in character, sharing—and contributing richly to—much of the Islamic culture of the rest of the Muslim world, especially Iran. (The strongly nomadic regions were far less exposed to Islam however, and traditional nomadic culture dominated under a light Islamic patina.)

Several important khanates existed in Central Asia during the period of Russian conquest in the eighteenth century—most notably in Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand—although Russia did not in fact formally take over these urban administrative centers as much as it conquered much of the territory around them and established new Russian-oriented cities such as Tashkent.

Under Soviet rule, five republics were eventually created on the soil of Central Asia. The names attached to them did not represent "nations" but rather were drawn from several key tribal designations: Uzbek, Kirgiz, etc. Only a rough effort was made to include major parts of each tribal grouping within the boundaries of each new republic. They were never intended to be truly ethnic states, but rather nominal republics of political convenience. They were created primarily as a mechanism of divide and rule; Moscow paid lip service to their "national" identities but in fact used the five republics as "substitute nationalisms" to destroy any idea of a united "Turkestan" which, with its combined power, could have threatened Moscow's hold over the region.

As artificial as the new republics were at their birth, after nearly three quarters of a century they have inevitably come to take on certain separate and distinct characteristics, reinforced by separate territories, ruling parties, and administrative structures. The establishment in each republic of separate "literary languages" that emphasized differences rather than unity of language helped to further divide the region's peoples. (Only the Tajiks spoke a language, closely related to Persian, that belonged to a language family entirely separate from the dominant Turkic languages of the region.) These republics furthermore dealt directly with Moscow and had very few

bilateral or multilateral ties among themselves. Any efforts at regional cooperation would have been seen by Moscow as smacking of the heresy of Pan-Turkism and dealt with harshly.

Today, with the collapse of the empire, the question of identity ranks high on the list of critical questions the Central Asian states must face. Just who are these native inhabitants of Central Asia? The vast majority are, of course, Muslim, and the Muslim identity has been paramount for well over a millennium. Ethnically they are Turks, members of a broader ethnic group that stretches from Yugoslavia to Mongolia, dominated today by the dynamic state of Turkey. Yet they are also "Turkestanis" in that they have participated in this major cultural continuum of the region with its unique Turko-Persian character for at least a thousand years (despite the movement of various Turkic tribes in and out of the region). They were also part of a Russian empire, later succeeded by the Soviet empire, with at least the elite having close ties with Russian culture, historically their only window to the West. And they have been joint members of the Soviet experiment for seven decades; does this leave them with any special ties to the other republics? Today they also bear the name of Uzbeks or Turkmen, providing yet another possible locus of loyalty.

Thus most Central Asians have reason to be confused about identity. They recognize the many and overlapping aspects that one's identity may take, many of which have become politically permissible only in the past few years. Throughout the Soviet period, to identify oneself as a Muslim or a Turk or even a Turkestani was politically dangerous, risking charges from Moscow of "Pan-Turkism," which was tantamount to treason. Identity questions, furthermore, cannot be answered overnight, for the region is currently undergoing a new era of political evolution nearly impossible for the past seventy years of communist rule. The peoples of Central Asia will probably take decades before deciding just what their essential identity is and how it will influence their policies with other states in the region.

The identity issue, however important, also cannot be "solved" by mere decision: it must await the evolution of internal politics and the feelings of citizens that cannot be hastened. Although resolution of identity affects all the citizens of every Central Asian republic, it cannot be the first order of business. Indeed, many of the "grand questions"—identity, the possible creation of a future Turkestan federation, the adoption of a common alphabet, language unification, cultural ties with Turkey and Iran—seem to be issues on hold for the moment. Few leaders or intellectuals in the area want to address

these complex questions in the face of the more pressing issues of the moment: domestic leadership, dealings with Russia, how to keep shaky economies afloat, how to establish new national forms of government, how to deal with domestic opposition groups, how to stop domestic interethnic bloodshed, and even more basic issues like food, jobs, and economic anarchy. These problems do not leave leaders much time to think about the longer-range course of Central Asian development. The process will develop organically rather than by any blueprint drawn up at leisure by visionary statesmen and thinkers. Events too, will shape these questions; there is nothing like conflict to spur the creation of national passions, loyalties, and allegiances.

As fast as change came in the Gorbachev era, most of the Central Asian republics felt they had some time to address most of these issues. But the abortive coup against Gorbachev in August 1991 changed all that. Suddenly the Communist Party was dead and real independence lay before each republic, whether it wanted it that soon or not. Today, the uncertainties and perils of the independence so quickly thrust upon the republics are forcing a more rapid examination of all the tough issues. There are not often times in history when independence comes faster than its recipients either want or expect it. The Central Asian states, deprived even of the opportunity to develop their national identities independently and in relative freedom over the past century, have been retarded in the political sense of their national development, despite their centuries-old Islamic culture and the genuine educational and technical accomplishments of the Soviet period.

What are the factors today that serve to divide the republics, maintaining them as separate state identities, and what factors work for unity among them?

DIVISIVE FACTORS

The creation of distinct national republics—whatever its historical logic—is now a *fait accompli* that cannot be easily undone. Their independent existence as separate republics over many long decades, the artificially created separate literary languages, individual state and party structures, individual channels for self-advancement, and independent, direct dealings with Moscow have all served to legitimize the separate modern republics. Today the power elites of these republics have much to lose from any willing cession of national sovereignty to other republics. Over time, furthermore, grievances—economic, but especially ethnic—have developed among them, stemming in part from the arbitrary borders that split single ethnic groups

among different republics. Minority-majority friction within any single republic further contribute to tensions. Considering that they have had almost no opportunity to truly explore their own ethnic independence, many of these republics are loath to subordinate yet again those opportunities to some larger group.

Rivalry also exists for leadership among the republics, particularly between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. And the smaller republics fear the influence of the ethnically and culturally powerful Uzbeks as well as the economic power of the Kazakhs. Nor are the republics complementary in economic terms; indeed, it is only the distinct economic character of Kazakhstan that in any way plays a complementary role to the other four republics. And if common Turkic ethnicity is to be the "nationalist" basis for future unity, then Persian-speaking Tajikistan is technically excluded.

The sheer weight of the status quo, then, tends to perpetuate the separate and independent existence of these republics, especially in view of the more pressing daily problems that crowd all agendas, personal and national. Special determination will be required to overcome the separatism of the Soviet period. Other pressures over time, however, might work to overcome this separatist legacy.

THE CASE FOR UNITY

Independence offers new opportunities to explore a long-suppressed past of a common culture and history; awareness of this past should help draw the Central Asian republics closer together over time. The more their identity is truly explored, the more it will point to a common heritage—especially vis-à-vis Russia. This cultural heritage cannot be narrowly based on any one republic; it will be strong only when it is based upon close relationships among all the Central Asian republics.

The economic pressures of independence will force the present Central Asian republics to seek common economic policies as well. The economies of nearly all the republics—except perhaps Kazakhstan—are critically dependent upon external trade, even for food and basic consumer goods. In a region where Russia is clearly the economic powerhouse, some kind of common Central Asian economic unity will strengthen their bargaining position with Russia.

As the Soviet Union broke up, old groupings reemerged based on earlier ethnic and cultural ties: a Slavic grouping, a likely Caucasian grouping, a Baltic grouping; the idea of a Central Asian grouping thus makes considerable sense. In much broader cultural-political terms,

Muslim states tend to express impulses toward unification, toward an ideal but elusive Muslim political unity based on a common faith in Islam; they tend not to approve narrow, divisive nationalism among Muslims, since such a goal is alien to Islam. To the extent that Islamic impulses come to the fore in Central Asia, they will strengthen any drive for political unity.

One of the most pressing problems for Central Asia is the presence in each republic of large pockets of ethnic minorities. In the 1989 census, for example, 2.1 percent of all Uzbeks live in Kazakhstan; 3.4 percent of all Uzbeks live in Kyrgyzstan; 7.5 percent of the Kirgiz population live in Uzbekistan. Just over 20 percent of Tajiks live in Uzbekistan, while 7 percent of Uzbeks live in Tajikistan.¹ (The problems of ethnic minorities within the republics are discussed in greater detail below.) A confederation or even federation might be better able to cope with these potentially volatile ethnic mixtures than the present independent republics, which at the moment have no ready mechanisms for adjudicating complex ethnic issues. Indeed, "normal" ethnic tensions that might have gradually worked themselves out under a freer political system were totally suppressed under communism, rendering them all the more lethal in the new atmosphere of political independence.

Closer relationships among the Central Asian republics may also be encouraged by Turkey. While Ankara for the foreseeable future is not likely to adopt strongly nationalist, chauvinist, or "Pan-Turkist" policies, it will most likely be in Turkey's interest to see some kind of unity emerge among those republics, strengthening the gravity of the Turkish states in the broader international context. Unity of the Central Asian republics would also serve to increase overall stability in the region.²

This same rationale extends to a discussion of Russia's attitude toward a unified Central Asia. Here it can be far more plausibly argued that Russia does not want a strong unified Muslim state to its south; Russia's overall bargaining position politically and economically is enhanced by dealing with all of the republics separately. Above all, Russia wants to avoid any strengthening of nationalism or sense of common Turkishness among the Kazakhs; such a trend

¹*Natsional'nyi Sostav Naseleniya*, Moscow, Informatsionno-izdatel'ski Tsentr, 1989.

²Some in Turkey argue to the contrary, that Turkey may prefer to have the Central Asian republics remain separate; they would thus be less able to exert collective weight against Turkey or create a rival center of Turkic leadership. This *realpolitik* interpretation is interesting, but offers little supportive evidence to date.

would only complicate the position of Kazakhstan's Russian nationals and weaken its present orientation toward the economy of Russia.

In sum, it appears most likely that the Central Asian republics will move towards some greater unity, at least a confederation, in the decade ahead. Russia's own policies will have important impact on this evolution. If the Central Asian republics feel a threat from the north in either political, economic, or demographic terms, the forces for unity and nationalism will grow. While the smaller republics fear "Uzbek chauvinism," the region's recent history has not involved genuine oppression from any source except Moscow. But if relations with Russia remain cordial, there will be less impetus toward creating a common front, and the republics may feel comfortable in their independent and separate status for some time.

THE IMPACT OF THE COMMONWEALTH

The legacy of both the Russian and the Soviet empires predisposes the people of the region to think in terms of unified government, however loosely interpreted that may be. The new Commonwealth of Independent States is voluntary in character and hardly deprives the new states of much of their newly won sovereignty. The Commonwealth is in no way a throwback to the old Union, in any case. However hateful the Union was to republican leadership, its existence spared those leaders from having to cope with the hard realities of republican survival and interrepublican relationships; all of this was almost exclusively stipulated by Moscow. The very looseness of the new Commonwealth can no longer insulate the Central Asian states from facing the complex problem of establishing multilateral relationships among themselves—a problem largely unexamined until very recently. Indeed, until the de facto collapse of the Soviet Union with the abortive coup of August 1991, the Central Asian states had seemingly not even wanted to deal with the hard questions of independence and multilateral relationships; communist leaderships had long viewed their basic fates as attached to Moscow, and had hoped that perhaps some form of the old Union might be perpetuated so as to delay the day when new political dynamics would threaten their position.

The issues the new Commonwealth must resolve are complex and deeply divisive. Indeed, the republics all rushed into it with very little consideration for its future character and no common understanding of its basic principles other than voluntary membership and the full independence of each member. No republic wished to remain outside the Commonwealth at the start, lest it be deprived of any

potential benefits, especially economic, that might emerge from it. But its future, or indeed its efficacy, is far from assured and will require years of exhaustive and tense negotiations if it is ever to assume the character of, for example, the European Community.

Thus, for the states of Central Asia the moment of truth has arrived. Questions of multilateral relationships can no longer be postponed; some form of regional grouping is probably the only way to help insulate these states from the even harsher realities of going it alone or give them greater clout in negotiations with other Commonwealth members. Future arrangements within the Commonwealth and among the Central Asian states will remain highly fluid and uncertain for a long time; its most basic issues have not yet been joined. If it will take the new Commonwealth of Independent States many years to work out a stable *modus vivendi*, so too any loose Central Asian confederation that might be established will take decades to shake down into smoother operating shape as national interests evolve.

THE CHARACTER OF DOMESTIC LEADERSHIP

Even before the collapse of the USSR in late 1991, the new leaders who had come to power in Central Asia in the late Gorbachev era were increasingly strong, nationalist, and independent-minded but committed to preservation of the Union. While their style and policies differ, often markedly, from republic to republic—as do their objective circumstances—this new generation of leadership was no longer beholden to Moscow. None of them minced any words about the colonial and oppressive nature of their past relationships with Moscow, both under the tsars and especially under communism: the republics had been sources of raw materials for the *métropole* and had been exploited in this relationship which distorted and damaged their economies and the political and social development of their peoples. The borders between the republics had been drawn arbitrarily to facilitate a policy of divide and rule. The new leaderships of the Central Asian republics were nonetheless out of the old Communist Party structure (with the exception of Askar Akaev in Kyrgyzstan). While Gorbachev had sought more flexible, capable, less ideological leadership in all the republics in order to bring about perestroika, he had certainly not intended initially that this leadership would come from anywhere but the Communist Party. Indeed, there was no real alternative source of leadership in any case, given the party's total control over the republics for so long. Even the new nationalist elements in the republics readily recognized that the communists monopolized for

the foreseeable future most of the skills needed to dominate the political scene, even in the freer political atmosphere. Nearly all the elite of society were members of the party, since it had been the sole vehicle for advancement in almost any field. The party was familiar with administration, with policymaking, indeed with the exercise of power in general. It also owned all the instruments of state power and physically possessed the logistical infrastructure—budgets, buildings, networks, personnel, vehicles, etc.—necessary to run government. It would thus take some time for alternative sources of political power to emerge.

New sources of political power did not, of course, have to be created out of nothing. As in Russia, large numbers of the potential new leadership emerged from within the party itself, members disillusioned with communist rule who were only too happy to strike out in new directions once the new political atmosphere permitted it. Unofficial opposition groups (“informals”) or popular fronts began to emerge in the republics in 1987, clearly lacking any political power except the potential of attracting public support for their positions. In nearly every case these fronts were nationalist in character, seeking greater independence from Moscow, more attention to the ecological needs of the republic, or greater democracy within the republic. The original party leadership nonetheless maintained its hands on the instruments of control and simply tolerated—to a greater or lesser extent—the activities of the “informals.”

Political struggle in the Central Asian republics will revolve around several key issues. First will be the struggle for greater democratization. With the exception of Kyrgyzstan, all of the republics are basically authoritarian in character, although no longer totalitarian as before. Even though their leaderships have emerged from the Communist Party structure, communism as an ideology, even as a way of thought, is dead. The press enjoys some degree of glasnost compared to the pre-Gorbachev days, even if most of it cannot be described as truly “free.” Informal political organizations—nascent political parties—are engaged in a struggle to create legally recognized political parties and then to oppose the current rulers in free parliamentary and presidential elections for power. The process is well under way only in Kyrgyzstan, although all the republics now have at least officially recognized informal organizations, and many of them have succeeded in registering as parties. Free elections are often still far off in most republics.

But politics in Central Asia is not exclusively about ideas and differing policies. Regional factionalism, tribalism, and clan politics

have always been essential components of the politics of the region, even under communism. Political observers have noted the astonishing degree to which clan politics were long able to bend the communist system to its own ends, allying clan and party structures so tightly that Moscow was never able to pry them apart. Even during periods of purge, few clan members were willing to turn against other clan members, thereby protecting both clan and party from outside assault.³ Clan politics will continue to figure heavily in all the Central Asian republics. In many republics this will be augmented by ethnic politics, reflecting the different ethnic makeups of the population. At the most fundamental level is a struggle between Russians and the titular nationality of each republic. Politics is likely to get much rougher as various elements of the population—minorities, regional groupings, class groupings such as farmers and workers, emerging business elements, Islamic groupings, nationalists of various stripes, the old party elites—all seek to contest the present power structure for the first time in three quarters of a century, if ever.

Despite many common features shared by all the Central Asian republics, this study will now examine the particular republics individually—a process that also helps to an understanding of the region as a whole.

³See Donald S. Carlisle, "Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks," in *Problems of Communism*, September–October 1991, pp. 27, 31.

2. UZBEKISTAN

PRESIDENT ISLAM ABDULGANIEVICH KARIMOV

Even before the abortive August 1991 coup in Moscow, President Islam Abdulganievich Karimov of Uzbekistan, hand-picked by Gorbachev to lead the Uzbek republic in the new era of perestroika, had recognized that his ability to maintain Communist Party power at home depended upon his adoption of a new nationalist line. He openly declared¹ that Uzbeks had been "held in slavery" for a long period of time; they had long and faithfully fulfilled their obligations to Moscow in the production of cotton, but those days "were over." Uzbekistan no longer had any tolerance for serving simply as a source of raw materials to Russia. The borders of the Uzbek state were furthermore "imperialist" in origin, but could not now be rectified without unacceptable turmoil in the region. There is much anger among Uzbeks from the legacy of the past.

In Karimov's view, there is a critical need to change the thinking of all the people in the region to accommodate the new realities. Past uncritical acceptance of Moscow's policies had caused the Uzbeks to "deceive themselves," damaging their own self-image; improvement can come only through the emergence of a "new self-respect" among the people. It was popular to describe Uzbekistan as a "young nation," Karimov said, but this was not true. The Uzbeks had an old and highly developed culture and history that was now continuing in new garb. Uzbeks must now emerge from their spiritual crisis, come to know their own authentic and long-repressed history, and realize that they are the equals of all others in the old USSR.

Karimov sees no going back to an old unitarian concept of Central Asia such as "Turan" or Turkestan. In his view, independent nationalities and nations have now emerged that are the realities of the future. He does foresee a need for some kind of coordinating mechanism for the region's affairs, however. (It is not surprising that Karimov and other former Communist Party leaders should at this point be reluctant to yield much sovereignty or personal power to new institutions, either in the Commonwealth or in Central Asia. The collapse of the Union structure and the more urgent need for the

¹In an interview with the author in July 1991.

Central Asian republics now to cope as independent states may increase their willingness to accept new organizational forms, albeit with reluctance. A new, alternative, noncommunist nationalist leadership might also be more open to ideas of regional federation or confederation.)

Karimov was greatly concerned about the many and volatile ethnic problems that beset Uzbekistan and the region. Uzbekistan was involved in at least two of the ugliest: the killing of thousands of Meskhetian Turks in the Fergana valley in June 1989, and the bloody Kirgiz-Uzbek clashes the following year in Osh just over the Uzbek border in Kyrgyzstan. By the accounts of others, Karimov had demonstrated extraordinary leadership and personal bravery in entering unarmed into the center of the violence to order people to stop fighting. He stated his determination to act resolutely to prevent further such incidents from breaking out. The main source of these problems, Karimov feels, lies in the sharp economic inequities among the peoples of the region. Yet these issues can be solved only by evolution, certainly not by the failed models of revolution.

While a technocrat rather than party apparatchik by background, Karimov is a law-and-order man. Laws exist, and "I will apply them with an iron hand if necessary." Yet nearly all political figures in Uzbekistan (as well as other republics) expressed considerable anxiety about Moscow's intentions toward the republic. Karimov said (before the breakup of the Union) that there were still those in Moscow who are not averse to seeing troubles develop in the newly emerging Central Asian republics as a means of reasserting control over them. On those grounds he believed it was imperative that the new regimes not give Moscow any pretext to try to intervene again. While the breakup of the Union and the formal independence of all the republics considerably changes the equation, the Central Asian population will remain suspicious, if not convinced, that Russia will pursue its old imperialist instincts and seek to manipulate internal politics within the republics for its own interests. This kind of suspicion about the manipulation of "external hands" runs deep in nearly all ex-colonial states.

Karimov has a reputation as the most authoritarian leader in Central Asia today. Glasnost is still weak in Uzbekistan; the liberal Moscow press is only weakly represented in the capital city of Tashkent, and ironically has now come to be viewed with suspicion in most of the re-

publics.² Karimov also revealed his basic political preferences in a September 1991 interview, in which he stated that he favors the "Chinese model" for the modernization of Uzbekistan because he believes the republic is not ready for democracy or a market economy. He apparently quickly reconsidered what the implications of the Chinese model might mean to Western observers, and within a few days said he did not in fact wish to emulate the Chinese model.³

Karimov is a direct, intelligent, self-confident man. He admits he is in a hurry. He sees massive problems lying before the republic, and he wants to make his mark in history as having charted the way toward solutions to some of them. "I have removed the barriers which used to stand in our way." Karimov does not resemble the old, remote type of leader of the past, but is rather populist in nature. There is no cant or ideology to his speech; he has all the earmarks of an effective administrator. Yet his long tenure in charge of state economic planning ill equips him for the task of overseeing the transition to a market economy and privatization; the reform process is bogging down as the tasks grow more complex.

THE UZBEK OPPOSITION

Members of the opposition party Erk (Freedom) and the umbrella opposition movement Birlik (Unity) both complain of the heavy restrictions imposed by Karimov against them.⁴ Still, Erk was registered as an official party by fall 1991; Birlik, however, had not been, and Karimov has stated that it will "never" be eligible for registry. Birlik therefore had to hold one of its major political meetings over the border in Kazakhstan.⁵ Karimov is accused by opposition elements of being a "dictator." But however dictatorial Karimov may be, the situation is hardly reminiscent of the old days in the Soviet Union. Opposition elements have no hesitation whatsoever in meeting with a foreigner in their offices and pouring out their grievances; they do not

²The regime will not open the doors to Moscow muckraking; indeed, in July 1991 a correspondent of the liberal *Komsomolskaya Pravda* reported that he was unceremoniously expelled from Uzbekistan shortly after arrival because he said he had come to talk to opposition groups and examine "the situation" in the republic. Uzbek security authorities informed him that there was no "situation" in Uzbekistan and firmly escorted him to the plane.

³Radio Liberty, 17 and 19 September 1991.

⁴In the spring of 1991, for example, Erk's computers and desktop publishing equipment was seized and held for several months. Until its return it was difficult for Erk to print and distribute the party's bulletins and news to the public.

⁵It is interesting to speculate why President Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan permitted this. See Radio Liberty, 16 and 17 September 1991.

live in fear. At the same time, a true multiparty system is not on the horizon in Uzbekistan, and Karimov is not likely to encourage it. The local press is bland and uncontroversial.

The opposition is primarily "nationalist" in character, with the exception of an Islamic Renaissance Party that has so far been banned in Uzbekistan. (One Uzbek scholar states that fundamentalist forces in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are in contact with the Iranian mullahs, however.)⁶ The opposition readily admits that Karimov is himself a nationalist, but they criticized him, at least before the breakup of the Union, for not going far enough in pursuing Uzbek rights and privileges within the republic and for excessive concern with holding a monopoly of power himself. Erk views itself as more moderate and gradualist than Birlik since its head, Muhammad Salih, is a member of the Uzbek parliament and has therefore not ruled out all cooperation with the government. Salih is a poet, taciturn in style, with deep nationalist convictions and hatred of communism and Russian colonialism but admiration for the riches of Russian culture. Despite this cooperation, another observer described Erk as basically committed to a more thorough nationalist program than Birlik.

The opposition complains that Uzbekistan is the least advanced republic in terms of democracy; the government imposes harsh censorship against anything that is critical of the government. The opposition also ticks off a range of grievances against Moscow and the Russians in Uzbekistan (prior to the breakup of the Union) as they perceive them:

- The Russians had been coming into the republic and "taking all the jobs"; they automatically got housing within three months on a priority basis while housing was otherwise desperately tight for Uzbeks.
- The major aircraft factory in Tashkent is run from Moscow and not from Tashkent; the factory imports its own workers, doesn't pay Uzbekistan for the land it occupies, and "eats our bread." And President Karimov himself "can't enter the factory without an invitation."
- As a result of the influx of Russian workers, the republic's own capital, Tashkent, is only 27 percent Uzbek in population.
- The Russians "refuse" to use Uzbek specialists.

⁶See Peter Ford, "Turkish and Iranian Power Plays in Central Asia Have Moscow on Edge," *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 February 1992.

- In Saudi Arabia there are “twenty generals” in the Saudi military of Uzbek origin (from among the large Uzbek emigre community that has been there over the past 75 years), while there were “no Uzbek generals in the Red Army.”
- Moscow has long feared Uzbek contacts with Turkey.
- The Uzbek parliament is 94.5 percent Communist Party members, and all are appointed.
- “Tell the West not to invest in Uzbekistan as long as Karimov does not introduce democracy.” The Communist Party is “utterly corrupt” and “the biggest thief of all.”

Yet the opposition acknowledges that many positive nationalist steps have been taken in starting to limit the oppressive cotton monoculture that has destroyed the diversity of the economy and produced an ecological disaster. The new law making Uzbek the official state language has greatly stepped up the official use of the language. The business of the parliament had been conducted in Russian for some seventy years; now it is primarily conducted in Uzbek. Political slogans in Tashkent—once mostly in Russian—are now all bilingual; road signs outside the capital are almost exclusively in Uzbek. Of three TV channels, two broadcast in Russian (one is from Moscow, the other is local but is to be abolished) and one broadcasts in Uzbek.

Even government loyalists in the Academy of Sciences state that more should be done to implement the Uzbek language; until very recently, 90 percent of Academy of Sciences publications were in Russian; even theses on Uzbek language and history were defended in Russian. Now that is changing. But even after Uzbekistan declared its sovereignty in 1991, most of the street names in Tashkent bear the names of Russian figures; 2000 kolkhozes in the name of Lenin still exist. Intellectuals have been afraid to wear the traditional Uzbek skullcap, the *tyubetyeika*, for fear of being accused of being nationalist. All this must change if Uzbekistan is to regain its dignity.

The opposition also admits that Karimov will invariably win in free elections in Uzbekistan. He is widely perceived by the masses as having made major efforts to improve the economy and begin the process of distribution of land. And, the opposition states, the masses are inclined to vote for whoever is in power, so deep does the authoritarian tradition run in Soviet Uzbekistan. Furthermore, the opposition points out that only Uzbeks who live in the cities are aware of the discrimination against Uzbeks in their own republic; those in the

countryside scarcely see Russians and are ignorant of conditions in their own capital.

The opposition complains about the Communist Party, but today the party, under new name, is primarily a vehicle, an instrument, a structure for the power of the leadership. The party all over Central Asia has changed its name, but the party, its elite, and much of its power structure remain the same. In Uzbekistan it now goes by the name of the Popular Democratic Party, and its membership is 79 percent Uzbek and only 4.3 percent Russian.⁷ The party is thus no longer an instrument of Russian control. It is still powerful and able to use the coercive abilities of the state to its own advantage, but its program and outlook bear little resemblance to the past as it moves to coopt the nationalist position. The main dilemma for the opposition will be to carve out a distinct set of new issues on which to oppose Karimov and develop the political skills to forward its cause. Now that Uzbekistan has become independent, the opposition can no longer place the demand for complete independence at the top of its agenda. It is increasingly focused on demands for more rapid economic reform and alleviation of pressing economic problems.

The opposition will now surely gravitate toward even more "nationalist" positions on other issues, particularly relating to the relative privileges of Uzbeks and Russians in the republic. The opposition is likely to become more extreme in character as the old party elite moves to coopt nationalist positions that reflect the mood of the population. Ethnic relations are likely to become the major new issue in which the opposition might grow more volatile in espousing extreme nationalist positions, especially toward the Russians and other minorities resident in the republic.

ETHNIC RELATIONS

Russians in Uzbekistan reported that ethnic tensions between Uzbeks and Russians were on the rise even in the six months before the August 1991 coup attempt.⁸ People reported that there was less promenading around the center of the city in the evening; at the workplace people avoided talking about ethnic issues, or tensions lay barely concealed beneath the surface. Russians were concerned about talk of "Uzbekistan for Uzbeks"—an unsurprising slogan in the gen-

⁷Radio Liberty, 24 March 1992.

⁸For example, in a restaurant the author witnessed a group of Uzbek students ragging a Russian waitress in a confrontational manner about why she wouldn't go out with them: "What's the matter, aren't Uzbeks good enough for you? Are we too dark?"

eral context of developing Third World nationalism, but shocking in the traditional Soviet context. In what may be an increasing trend, a "night letter" was distributed in the streets in June 1991 stating that there wasn't enough food, housing, or jobs for Uzbeks and that the Russians would be smart to leave. Russians were in fact leaving (many anecdotes but no figures).⁹ Yet one Russian whose family had lived in Tashkent for several generations told the author that the Russians who were leaving were mainly those who had come after the severe earthquake in 1966 when vast parts of the city were rebuilt with new housing. These Russians were attracted to the warm climate and better availability of food. They had little commitment to or roots in the republic and were starting to leave as the conditions grew less desirable. Other Russians had a greater sense of commitment and wanted to work with the situation. Many of these, however, do not possess special skills (they are drivers, store clerks, etc.), making it hard to argue that the Uzbek economy needs them.

A Russian cultural center had been founded in Tashkent, but as of June 1991 it had not yet been officially registered. A group called "Intersoyuz" is the major Russian-language organization, but it is not a procommunist grouping. Boris Yeltsin refuses to support these Russian-language groups outside of Russia, yet he has spoken out on the need to preserve and protect the rights of all Russians outside the Russian republic. Despite Karimov's determination to protect the position of Russians in Uzbekistan, many Russians there feel that even he is too nationalist in his policies. (These Russians generally displayed a sense of remoteness from and ignorance of the dynamic of nationalism at work in Central Asia.)

Tensions between Uzbeks and Russians found political expression in the most frequent bilingual slogan found around Tashkent: "Druzhba Narodov" (Friendship among the Peoples). While at first glance this seems to be simply a hangover of the old communist internationalist slogan between the peoples of the Soviet Union and the world, in fact it carries a distinctly new meaning: its newfound prominence reflects the Uzbek government's urgent emphasis on preserving relations above all between Uzbeks and Russians. Karimov, politically or economically, could not afford problems with the Russians before independence. After independence, he has license to encourage more "Uzbekization" of the republic, but control of ethnic violence and

⁹A *Moscow News* survey in early 1991 indicated that 80 percent of the Russians in Uzbekistan believed a "massive Russian exodus" from Uzbekistan was "very likely." See Donald S. Carlisle, "Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks," in *Problems of Communism*, September–October 1991.

preservation of the economy (and its Russian specialists) have to remain key features of his ability to retain power—even at home.

Opposition spokesmen claimed they too understood the economic necessity of maintaining the cadre of Russian expertise in Uzbekistan. They also understand the need to live with powerful neighbors (“We can’t afford to frighten Moscow and China”). Yet a young Uzbek driver (who sported a Turkish flag and Koranic inscriptions on his dashboard) told the author that the Russians “had all the good jobs” just because they wouldn’t let Uzbeks have them. He assured me that there were Uzbeks trained and ready to do work at all technical levels if the Russians would just leave. However naive his economics may be, the nationalist message is clear.

With the declaration of independence by all the Central Asian republics, the difficulties of ethnic relations will inevitably grow far more severe. For most Russians, the handwriting should now be on the wall. Their position in Uzbekistan will grow increasingly unpleasant, but they must balance this against the tremendous uncertainties of returning to a Russia in economic turmoil and hardship. When, and under what circumstances, will they decide to go back? How much does the choice rest with them?

In an interview with the author in July 1991, then vice president of Uzbekistan, Shukrullah Mirsaidov (now a minister of state), spoke about the future of the Russian workers. Wouldn’t he really hope to replace Russian technicians over time with Uzbeks? Of course, he answered, any leader of Uzbekistan today will have the goal of training and preparing his people for assuming greater technical skills, responsibility, and power within the republic. The only question was frankly when. Nationalist policies over the longer run would prevail.

But Mirsaidov saw economic independence to be at least as important as political independence. He viewed the Communist Party of Uzbekistan as a totally independent entity; he acknowledged that the Communist Party will have to accept a multiparty system in the future, but first the people “need more political maturity.” He saw the goals of the party today as providing for the welfare of the people, establishing a “decent [*dostoyanaya*] life” for all. In the meantime, Russia must be prepared to deal with Uzbeks on a strict basis of equality; there will be “problems” if Russia cannot face that fact. The presence of needed Russian technicians and specialists is a reality, he said; the Uzbek government is in fact offering them special deals in order to retain their services. Typically, Mirsaidov had little use for Yeltsin and saw him as a potential source of recrudescing Russian chauvinism and dominance.

Loyalist critics of the president stated even before independence that Uzbekistan must devote a great deal more attention to bilateral relations with other republics rather than simply with Russia. Suspicions of Russia still run deep. Many intellectuals commented on the fact that the Moscow press is trying to make the Central Asian republics look bad by criticizing their lack of democracy. Yeltsin is viewed as no friend of Central Asia, given his lack of understanding of the area and his fixation with Russia. Some defended the need to limit glasnost in Uzbekistan, stating that Uzbeks are not like the Balts, among whom "cooler heads prevail" in the exercise of politics. Nor is Uzbekistan ready yet for multiparty politics, in the eyes of some intellectuals; Uzbeks are "too emotional."

Yet these same intellectuals are ardently nationalist in the need to restore the history, culture, and self-respect of the Uzbeks. New textbooks are now being printed that for the first time present the history of Central Asia accurately. These individuals also feel that a Central Asian federation is not on the horizon; emotions among the various peoples still run too high, and federation will not rein in emotions. But despite differences, all Central Asians are prepared to stand against Moscow on issues of common concern.

Now that Uzbekistan has achieved full independence, the position of the Russians in the republic (and indeed, all other republics) is far more tenuous. As long as there was a Union, Uzbeks had to be circumspect in expressing their views about the local Russian population. Relations with Moscow were too sensitive, and they always held the threat that Moscow might intervene to protect not only the lives but the livelihood of Russians in Uzbekistan. Today Russia has far less implicit right to intervene in Uzbek affairs. Any president of Russia will have to show clear concern for the welfare of Russians in the non-Russian republics, but he can no longer insist on preferential treatment for them nor even insist that their services be retained or their permanent residence guaranteed. Moscow can seriously consider military intervention only if it is necessary to rescue Russians from widespread pogroms or general anarchy.

Certainly no ruler of a Central Asian republic can afford for that kind of ethnic explosion to take place, because of its repercussions for overall ethnic relations in the volatile republics. But Moscow's options are highly limited if the republics opt to implement a plan to replace Russians with native specialists. There had been such a process of *korenizatsiya* ("nativization," or affirmative action to replace Slavs with Uzbeks) in modest terms even under Brezhnev in order to keep the locals happy. Today, Moscow no longer has any ability or

authority to oppose or slow that process without causing significant problems. As long as there is no pattern of gross violation of human rights or bloodshed, Russia can only protest or employ economic measures to try to protect the status of Russians outside of Russia. Any attempt at military intervention could be a very bloody affair and lead to an ugly situation. How bad would things have to get before Moscow would take that step? At best, Moscow could send in troops only to preserve order on a temporary basis or to permit an orderly exodus of the Russian population; it could not restore Russians to lost positions or occupy the country indefinitely. Indeed, any support to the external Russians would in the end be self-defeating, as it would send the message that Russian nationals in the republics are Trojan horses posing great risk to republican sovereignty. The republics will be under heavy local pressure to replace Russians with their own citizens. Nationalists in ex-colonies do not usually place economic motives over nationalist ambitions in their postindependence policies.

Under these circumstances, it is hard to rule out the prospect of some limited, random bloodshed. With independence in all the republics, the resident Russians (and other nonnative nationalities as well) must be making the same calculations. Their future is not bright under the best of circumstances, and they realize that Moscow's ability to support them is rapidly disappearing. Local extremists will surely circulate other "night letters" or scrawl slogans in public designed to intimidate and frighten the Russians and force them to choose to leave.

The history of terrorism also suggests that a very few limited, violent attacks can have massive impact on a foreign population and will encourage all but the hardiest and most committed of souls to depart. Local government's formal condemnation of terrorist acts will not render them any less effective as a psychological weapon designed to permanently change the demographics of a once-colonial state. The leadership may indeed publicly deplore such tactics, but in the end it may secretly welcome them if it helps reduce the Russian presence and free up housing, jobs, and available food. The Russian population in Uzbekistan was estimated at 1.7 million in 1989; the departure of that number of people will go some distance toward providing jobs and housing for urban Uzbeks. It is easy to imagine the Uzbek government deciding that it will bear the economic consequences of the Russians' departure. Economic considerations can come later. The leadership may wish to retain a small cadre of Russian specialists with unique skills, but the majority of Russian workers can probably be replaced eventually by Uzbek counterparts without serious economic dislocation. The process is an inevitable one.

THE TAJIK MINORITY

Ethnic tensions involve more than just Russian-Uzbek relations. Uzbekistan faces a serious problem with its large Tajik population—the only major nationality in Central Asia that is Persian-speaking rather than Turkic-speaking. An informal Tajik political organization, in its March 18, 1991, unofficial newsletter *Sogdiana—Ovozi Tajik* (Sogdiana—Voice of the Tajiks), reprinted an open letter backed by 10,000 signatures to President Karimov from the “Social-Cultural Organization” and the “National Cultural Center of the Tajiks and Tajik-speaking Peoples.” The group includes Tajiks, Bokharan Jews, gypsies, and some Iranians and Arabs who live in Uzbekistan. The letter demands the “inalienable sovereign right of all citizens of the republic to determine their own national identity [prinadlezhnost’]” and calls for the need to “renew and strengthen the juridically century-old historic legitimate and mutually enriching Turkic-Uzbek and Parsi-Tajik dual-language character of the region,” thereby giving Tajik equal rights as the state language of Uzbekistan. The movement demands special state support for the cultural protection and development of the Tajik language, culture, historical monuments, access to media, training centers, etc. The demands of the Tajiks in Uzbekistan will continue to pose a problem, a fact recognized by Karimov, who points out that he himself speaks Tajik and has some Tajik blood in his family—unsurprising given his origins in Samarkand, a city that contains a slight Tajik majority. It is unlikely that the state can accede to fully equal rights for the Tajik language on an official level, but clearly many steps could be taken to support Tajik linguistic institutions, which would help mollify the Tajik population.

Samarkand, one of the fabled cities and great cultural centers from the heyday of Central Asian Islamic culture, is still magnificent, with its huge Islamic monuments, mosques, and religious schools. A Russian who knows the city commented that there has been a major effort to emphasize the prominence of the old buildings as jewels of traditional culture: higher entry fees are being charged, more watchmen are on the sites, and more importance has been attached to maintaining these glories of Central Asian civilization. Private enterprise is more advanced in Samarkand than in Tashkent, which is a far more Soviet than Uzbek city. The Samarkand marketplace, entirely dedicated to private enterprise, is thriving, filled with all kinds of produce, meat, vegetables, fruits, and nuts. It is interesting to note that the Tajik signs on many of the monuments are written in the Arabic alphabet (as is Persian) rather than in the usual Cyrillic.

This trend is likely to increase as Tajiks continue to stress their common culture with Iran.

Yet Uzbeks point out that despite linguistic differences, they have more in common culturally with the Tajiks than with any other nationality in Central Asia. The Tajiks and urbanized Uzbeks together once made up the great urban civilization of the area as distinct from the nomadic and steppe traditions of the Kirgiz, Kazakh, and Turkmen. For well over a century the two had been referred to in common as "Sarts" as distinct from the nomadic "Kirgiz." But in the age of modern nationalism, in which ethnicity and language usually take precedence over religion and culture, it is uncertain whether the Tajiks and the Uzbeks will be able to coexist comfortably. The Tajiks, as do other Central Asians, remain fearful of Uzbek power, numbers, and influence in the region. Many Uzbeks speak of an eventual process of "assimilation" of the Tajiks in Uzbekistan—an idea deeply disturbing to the Tajiks and certain to be explosive.

Yet even former Vice President Mirsaidov hints at future reorganizations of the borders in Central Asia. He too speaks of the artificial and colonial character of the republican borders drawn by the Bolsheviks and suggests that they may someday need to be reexamined. But for now, he concedes, the issue is far too emotional and it will do nobody any good to raise it. The permanence of existing borders is carefully written into all bilateral agreements in Central Asia, and there could be no thought of any broader federation until bilateral and interethnic relations improve.

It is significant to note the stress that all republics have placed on the "inviolability of state borders" among the key provisions of the new Commonwealth. These provisions are especially important to republics that fear Russian expansionism, such as Ukraine and Kazakhstan, but they are also meant to protect smaller states from the ambitions of their neighbors. "Uzbek expansionism" is a distinct fear in Central Asia.

ISLAM

The Uzbek government has grown increasingly uneasy about the recrudescence of Islam in Uzbekistan, especially in the densely populated Fergana valley. Young fundamentalists temporarily seized a regional Communist Party headquarters in Namangan in early 1992 and were directly disrespectful and threatening to the president. These same fundamentalists demand that the government adopt the

Islamic law of modesty for the women of Namangan. The government is disturbed at the implications of the rapid growth of new mosques in the republic and other signs of increased Islamic activism. Indeed, Uzbekistan is viewed by the other Central Asian republics as possessing a greater "Islamic flavor" than any other republic—with the exception of Tajikistan.

There is no doubt that Islam has grown in Uzbekistan, which is not surprising given its long repression under communism and the presence of historic centers of Islam in the republic. Yet there is no reason to assume that fundamentalism is about to take over: increased Islamic activism is not synonymous with fundamentalism. Islam could greatly increase its clout in Uzbekistan and elsewhere, however, if economic conditions should sharply deteriorate, if government policies are generally unpopular and repressive, or if there is any ugly confrontation with the Russians. Likewise, if "official Islam" in the republic will not be allowed to enjoy a status somewhat independent of the government and its policies—thus becoming a discredited force—then only "unofficial" or fundamentalist Islam will be the net winner. The government does not necessarily recognize the critical need for a credible and independent official Islam.

OUTLOOK

Uzbekistan has a strong sense of national identity and the national self-confidence that comes with numbers, size, and historical importance in the region. It possesses most of the great cities of classical Central Asian Islamic civilization. The Uzbek language is by far the best-developed Turkic literary language of the region, based as it is on the older literary Chagatai language. The Uzbeks have their frictions with the local Russians, but realize that over the longer run they are dealing from a position of strength. They possess more trained cadres able to take over from Russian specialists in the republic than does any other republic. Its economy is the second largest in Central Asia, after Kazakhstan's.

Uzbekistan will be more interested in some kind of Central Asian regional grouping, since it does not feel threatened by other republics in the region. With the increasingly looser ties among the republics of the former Soviet Union, Central Asia will need to depend more on its own resources. In fact, by January 1992 Karimov had called for a broader Central Asian Union to overcome economic problems by pooling the rich resources of the region. His distrust of Russia was pal-

pably growing, and there were even reports that Uzbekistan might issue its own currency, the *tanga*.¹⁰ The importance of the continued existence of the CIS to Uzbekistan, then, would seem to be dwindling. Tashkent's own clout would be increased by the extension of its influence beyond its borders in some kind of regional arrangement. Kazakhstan seems to be its only potential rival for leadership, but the smaller Central Asian republics may not want to be led. In the interim, economic and ethnic relations will have to be the central focus as this important republic feels its way toward new national policies in its newly independent status.

Karimov will have to be attentive to opposition forces within his republic, however, since they are better developed and more articulate, sophisticated, and educated than the opposition in other republics in the region. If he aspires to the establishment of good international ties, it will not be in his interests to allow Uzbekistan to be widely perceived as a bastion of authoritarian rule, even though, realistically, most foreign countries in considering their investment strategy will probably value stability over liberalism.

¹⁰Radio Liberty, 22 January 1992.

3. KYRGYZSTAN

PRESIDENT ASKAR AKAEV

In 1991 the capital of Kyrgyzstan, long named after the Bolshevik hero Frunze, changed its name to Bishkek to rid itself of the unfortunate associations with that Russian conqueror. The name of the republic itself was changed only in the last few years from the Russian-language form of "Kirgizia" to the Kirgiz form, "Kyrgyzstan." The name changes appropriately mirror the striking political changes in the republic that came with the advent in late 1990 of Kyrgyzstan's new president, Askar Akaev.

Unlike more urban-oriented Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan has developed out of a nomadic society. Its politics and party had been among the most reactionary in Central Asia. Then in 1990, the heavy bloodshed between Uzbeks and Kirgiz in the Kirgiz border city of Osh severely discredited the former party boss Masaliev and led to political turmoil, the surprising result of which was the selection of Askar Akaev to the position of president. Akaev had been a prominent academic in the Academy of Sciences but a political unknown. He is an intellectual, soft-spoken, gentle, and accommodating in his manner, and with a firm commitment to democracy. He has so far remained faithful to his stated ideals. Kyrgyzstan today is the most liberal regime in all of Central Asia.

During a 90-minute interview with the author in July 1991, Akaev stressed that his major goals in Kyrgyzstan are to strengthen the national accord (*natsional'noe soglasie*) among the various ethnic elements of the population and to ensure the foundations of civil society. In his view, the liberation of the Kirgiz people from totalitarian control has been a major development, but it cannot be allowed to descend into conflict such as took place in Osh. Akaev observed that the peoples of Central Asia have a common culture and heritage, which all the more requires that ethnic relations be established on a healthier basis (*ozdorovlenie mezhnatsional'nykh otnoshenii*) to reflect international norms of conduct. Simultaneously, the process of democratization needs to move ahead toward the firm establishment of a state based on law and the separation of powers. Akaev prides himself on having established the first multiparty democracy in the region. He personally devotes attention to the strengthening of political parties so that they can establish a firm footing and develop a mean-

ingful variety of programs. He believes in the exercise of full freedom to assemble, demonstrate, and publish, as long as the law is observed. (And the Kirgiz press is, in fact, much livelier than the Uzbek.)

On the nationalities level, Akaev points out that Kyrgyzstan has over 20 separate nationalities; each is in the process of establishing its own national center in the capital for the development and strengthening of its culture. A Ukrainian-language school was opened in the fall of 1991, partly commemorating the three waves of Ukrainian immigration to Kyrgyzstan: 130 years ago, then 100 years ago, and then again in 1941. The presence of the Slavic population, says Akaev, has considerably aided in the development of the republic. The wounds of the Osh massacres, too, were somewhat healed by the visit to Bishkek of Uzbek president Karimov and the signing of a new treaty of friendship between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Akaev, noting the different stages of development among the Central Asian peoples, felt that there was no basis at the time for any reversion to a "Turkestan" or a Central Asian federation. (These views were articulated before the final collapse of the Soviet Union; the benefits of regional confederalism may now loom higher in the absence of any other federal or even confederal relationships within the old Union.) Akaev sees clear need, however, for the establishment of an open society and the preservation of national identities and ways of life (*natsional'naya samobytnost'*); these are central to national development. The challenge is to walk the fine line between constructive national development and virulent destructive nationalism.

Akaev said that before the party selected him as president, he served notice to all that he was determined to uphold human rights over national rights in the republic. And while in one sense this formulation is a repetition of the tired old internationalist, antinationalism line of the Soviet Communist Party, it is now being used in an entirely different context. The term "human rights" has taken on a new, revolutionary, Western and democratic sense. At the same time, the pressures upon the president from nationalist and informal groups to pursue precisely those policies that favor national rights have never been stronger. Indeed, in July 1991 a battle was raging in Bishkek in the parliament over the new land law. The parliament had proposed that the land of Kyrgyzstan and its natural resources were to be the property of the Kirgiz people; Akaev had boldly vetoed the bill, asking that it be reformulated to state that the land is the property of the "inhabitants of Kyrgyzstan." Similar debates are taking place throughout most of the former Soviet Union.

Akaev, who was selected with the strong support of informal and anticommunist groups in the republic, wryly noted that the Communist Party had not been at all helpful to him on the land issue; for all the party's talk about internationalism, when it came to the vote it stood solidly and opportunistically on the nationalist side. (Not surprising, given its domination by the Kirgiz.) While Akaev wants to see other parties move into major positions of responsibility, he does not believe reprisals should be conducted against the Communist Party and its members for past actions.

Akaev noted that he is dedicated to creating the necessary preconditions and foundations for the establishment of an open market. Money spent on agriculture, for example, should go directly to farmers and not to kolkhoz. As in other republics, the transfer of land to private ownership presents problems, since the Kirgiz historically have not been farmers or traders. Akaev believes that the land in principle should go to those who work it, yet he acknowledges that in practice this could mean that most of the land will not go to the Kirgiz themselves.

Akaev proudly noted that Kyrgyzstan already has the most liberal investment laws of any republic. Negotiations have been under way with South Korea, Japan, Turkey (for a joint project on fur and leather), Israel (for a project on agricultural technology), and the United Arab Emirates. Akaev was particularly interested in attracting German investment; Kyrgyzstan has traditionally had a large German community, but most of the Germans have been leaving for the new opportunities in unified Germany. Akaev has been in touch with members of the German government, urging them to come and invest in projects that could even be exclusively limited to working with the Kirgiz German community. China is also an extremely important potential trading partner. And in late 1991, Akaev was one of the rare republican leaders to make a trip to the United States to talk about investment opportunities; his liberal political and economic domestic policies have already won him a special place in the hearts of Washington policymakers as a model for future Central Asian development.

Kyrgyzstan also enjoys the benefit of a world-class Kirgiz writer, Chingiz Aitmatov. Aitmatov, whose early short stories were written in Kirgiz, has been writing in Russian for most of his professional life and is one of the top writers in the Soviet Union. His novels have been translated into many languages, including English, and have

received wide attention for their breadth of vision and superb style.¹ His works are of universal interest and character but draw on Central Asian themes for material. He was appointed to Gorbachev's advisory council several years ago and was later appointed Soviet ambassador to Luxembourg. His prestige serves the Kirgiz republic well.

Recognizing his republic's economic vulnerability, Akaev is intent on developing close de facto economic relations with as many of the former republics as possible. He believes there are good and natural historical reasons for close Russian-Kirgiz relations, and he has worked to maintain good ties with Yeltsin. Nonetheless, his country's lack of contiguous borders with Russia tends to isolate Kyrgyzstan and make it extremely dependent on others for transit and trade rights.

Akaev himself is clearly one of a new breed of Central Asian politicians as well. He is well educated, informed, and international and democratic in outlook. He has spent many years of his life in St. Petersburg. To date he enjoys the backing of the new political parties in the republic, and he consults with them regularly. With the dissolution of the Union, Akaev is now under less pressure from those within the republic who sought complete independence. On the other hand, the nationalist agenda will persist, this time focused more on internal politics and the rights of the Kirgiz versus Russians and the other ethnic groups within the republic who contend for the limited national resources. As an independent state, Kyrgyzstan now has greater leeway to support the interests of the Kirgiz over non-Kirgiz. But Akaev must balance Kirgiz interests against the need to maintain the stability required to attract foreign investment and to keep on good terms with Russia and the Russian specialists necessary to his republic's economy. Unlike Uzbekistan, where there is a relatively large native cadre with technical expertise, there are fewer Kirgiz specialists ready to fill in for Slavs.

Akaev will unquestionably remain committed to liberal, internationalist policies. As long as these bear fruit, he should maintain a strong position of leadership. In the event of deteriorating conditions, however, and the exodus of the critically necessary Slavic community (900,000 out of an overall 4.2 million population in 1989) over fears of burgeoning Kirgiz nationalism, more zealous nationalists could easily come to the fore; and they could guarantee the departure of all non-Kirgiz and plunge Kyrgyzstan into deep isolation. The only republic

¹See especially *The Place of the Skull* and *The Day Lasts Longer Than A Hundred Years*.

that can be counted on to assist Kyrgyzstan is Kazakhstan, whose people are ethnically, culturally, and linguistically very much akin to the Kirgiz.

ISLAM

An interview with the deputy Qazi (or religious authority) for Kyrgyzstan afforded an opportunity to talk to “official Islam” within the republic. He was accompanied by a representative of the Ministry of Information who served as “translator.” This procedure recalled the old days, when party watchdogs accompanied all religious figures in meetings with foreigners to ensure that the correct line was transmitted. In this case, too, the “interpreter” did more of the talking than did the Qazi himself, although clearly there was a great deal more glasnost involved than in the past.

It was striking that the Qazi himself spoke only in Kirgiz and seemed to have a limited comprehension of spoken Russian. This fact is astonishing—and perhaps disturbing—in its implications for the future. A limited knowledge of Russian, from the second-highest religious figure in the republic, suggests an extraordinary isolation of the religious establishment from Russian/Soviet culture and society. It implies either that the Islamic establishment is completely isolated from society or, more likely, that Russian simply doesn't matter to it because it wields its power and influence exclusively via the local language. It suggests that massive segments of Kirgiz society are untouched by Russian influence or even the need for Russian. It also suggests a religious establishment with a firm existence outside the control of the main state mechanism—an establishment that, although restricted in decades past by Soviet power, has been scarcely touched in substance.

The Qazi commented that the Russian ending “-ov” or “-ev” that had been added onto Kirgiz family names (and indeed all Turkic names) over the past century was now beginning to drop out of usage, with Russian patronymics (-ovich) being replaced by the Turkic suffix “-oglu” or “-ogly” meaning “son of.” This is but one sign of the renaissance of local culture.

The Qazi commented that the Kirgiz were quick to adapt to changing circumstances on the outside. They feel their main ethnic closeness to be with the Kazakhs, whose language and nomadic background is very similar—indeed, the term “Kirgiz” for nearly a century was used to include both Kazakh and Kirgiz peoples. The Qazi commented that both peoples lack an urban tradition, which creates their present

openness and lack of rigidity regarding the outside (compared, say, to the Uzbeks). The Qazi observed that Tashkent is still really the center of "Turkestan" in religious and cultural terms.²

The Qazi was pleased that the region is returning to its religious roots. He stated that there is now full freedom to open mosques and religious schools (*medreses*). The government does not provide any financial assistance for these projects; all funds must come from "private" sources such as believers, collective farms, and other institutions. (Most of these institutions would appear to be state-run, but they may volunteer funding for religious purposes from their profits even while the state no longer formally allocates money in its budget.) The religious tithe on personal income—the *zakat*, one of the five formal obligations upon every Muslim—once banned, is now legal, and it provides important income for the religious establishment. In the past there was a limit in Kyrgyzstan of 33 mosques, but now there are over 100, and more are being built.

Although the Qazi did not say so, these developments presage serious competition between the current religious establishment and the previously illegal underground or "parallel" religious institutions that had never been under the control of the religious establishment. With the burgeoning of new religious institutions, there will be a scramble for financial resources. The old religious establishment will be at a disadvantage in this struggle, for the average believer may perceive it as a corrupted institution that has sold itself to the state by doing its bidding for so many decades. In just the past three years the Grand Mufti of Central Asia has been changed once and his successor challenged, out of popular recognition that both incumbents were "bad Muslims" and, by implication, servants of the communist state.

The Qazi said that most Islamic training in the earlier period had taken place at home, not in the mosque. Among other things, students had studied Arabic. Believers have had access to a Koran in Kirgiz translated from Russian, but the new Qazi, who has studied in Bokhara (in Uzbekistan) and in Jordan, is translating a new version into Kirgiz directly from the Arabic.

When asked about a Russian-language book in the local bookstore on atheist education, published as late as 1990—long after the emer-

²This is an unusual remark, since Tashkent has never been a traditional center of Central Asian culture but rather an administrative center dominated by Russians. He may have meant that Uzbekistan is really the most advanced urban culture in Central Asia, or that the Mufti of Central Asia resides in the Uzbek capital.

gence of glasnost and freedom of religion—the Qazi replied that it was hard to stop overnight the ideological momentum of the past. He observed, however, that when religious books hit the bookstore they sold out in 24 hours. He commented that he was pleased that Muslims and Christians in Central Asia both agreed on the need to press for religious education. Gorbachev is responsible for all these desirable changes, the Qazi noted, “and we pray for him.”

The Qazi commented that the foundations of Islam in Kyrgyzstan are weak, as they are in Kazakhstan, due to the original tribal—as opposed to urban—nature of those societies. Islam had penetrated tribal societies relatively late compared to the urban civilization of Uzbekistan. Fortunately, however, he said, Central Asia will be the recipient of aid from the external Muslim world. The highest-ranking Saudi religious figure, the Shaykh al-Islam, was planning a visit and might bring financial aid as well as religious literature. King Fahd of Saudi Arabia had already helped pay the expenses of many Hajjis from the northern Caucasus to go on the Hajj to Mecca in 1991. There has been no such financial assistance from Iran, the Qazi said. Over the past several years there have been visiting delegations from the Pakistani party Hizb-e-Islami (the Islamic Party), who come to propagate the faith. (This fact is very interesting, since the Hizb-e-Islami is one of the oldest and most established fundamentalist parties in the Muslim world. Its message would unquestionably stress the role of Islam in *politics*, a view that can hardly be welcomed by the secular government.) Religious authorities have also visited from Singapore.

Kyrgyzstan has recently established its own independent local mufti, no longer subordinate to the Mufti of Central Asia based in Uzbekistan. This act most probably reflects a political desire to avoid any dependence on Uzbekistan.

When asked about the appearance of the new Muslim party in Russia, the Islamic Renaissance Party (banned in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), the Qazi replied that there was “no need” for such parties, that “Islam itself was a party” and needed no rivals. All such religious movements, he noted, such as Wahhabism (Saudi fundamentalist) or other fundamentalists, or the Renaissance Party, or the “Islamic Center,” were all undesirable elements designed to weaken the central establishment of Islam. (Russians pointed out that these movements are paralleled by active Christian movements in Central Asia such as the Baptists and Adventists, whose congregations were developing at a much faster rate than those of the official Orthodox church.)

The Qazi's hostility to unofficial Islam, echoing official views expressed in Uzbekistan, suggests that the religious establishment and the state are still working in tandem to protect each other's interests. Here again, unofficial Islamic movements and organizations may have much advantage over establishment Islam in the future. They will enjoy greater popular respect, will be perceived as still "pure," and will probably do better in attracting private funding. State authorities, however, almost surely will support establishment Islam as more supportive of state interests and the status quo.

Foreign funding to Central Asian Islam could go to both official and unofficial Islam. The Saudi state, for example, is more likely to support official Islam as the more conservative force, but private fundamentalist Wahhabi groups in the Kingdom could well support more radical Islam in Central Asia. If Iran provides any funding, it will most likely go to unofficial Islam as being more revolutionary in character. (There are very few Shi'a in Central Asia.) Other Islamist groups³ in the Muslim world will also support unofficial Islam and push for a bigger role for Islam in the politics of Central Asia.

Unofficial Islam in Central Asia will unquestionably evolve along lines already familiar in much of the rest of the Muslim world. It will be critical of official Islam's cooperation with communism for three quarters of a century; it will seek greater reflection of Islamic values and Islamic law in the jurisprudence of the state, effectively seeking to dismantle parts of the purely secular legal system so long in place in the region. The clash in the legal area need not be absolute—that is, between application of purely Islamic law (the Shari'a) as opposed to purely secular law. There is room for compromise in such areas as family or personal law, where Islamic custom can be partially adopted; this has occurred in other partially secular Muslim states such as Egypt. Extremists will nonetheless push for the establishment of an "Islamic state" based entirely on the Shari'a—an improbable development except perhaps in Tajikistan. Islamists will also push for an anti-Western agenda that is first and foremost anti-Russian but also antagonistic to the United States as the leading "imperialist" force in the world. It would press for foreign policies based on solidarity with Islamic causes around the world.

Unofficial Islam will also be far more "nationalist" in character when it comes to clashes between Muslims and non-Muslims in the region. The large Slavic presence in the Central Asian republics will surely

³The term "Islamist" refers to those who believe in a political role for Islam in society, sometimes (often incorrectly) called "fundamentalists."

be targeted by unofficial Islam as tending to compromise the Islamic character of Central Asian society and complicating the spread of Islamic values in social conduct. It will strongly support the expulsion of all Slavs and non-Muslims from the republics. The greater the tensions between Slavs and Muslims in the republics, the more unofficial Islam will receive popular support, serving as a nationalist vehicle.

Official Islam will find it difficult to move in the same political direction when thus challenged by unofficial Islam. But neither official Islam nor, certainly, unofficial Islam will be likely to support, say, local Kirgiz nationalism against Uzbek or Tajik nationalism; Islam does not believe in encouraging splits among believers or among Muslim political entities. The official Islamic establishment in any given republic will seek to maintain its independent authority within the republic, whereas unofficial Islam knows no borders and can readily link with informal groups in other republics, both inside and outside Central Asia. Unofficial Islam is likely to enjoy broader international Islamic ties than official Islam. Official Islam will thus find itself generally hard pressed to compete with unofficial Islam, which will ideologically outflank it on most issues. Its greatest strength will be its alliance with the state and its formal possession of the structural institutions of state Islam.

KIRGIZ INFORMAL ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTIES

Representatives of the Kirgiz National Front stated that their organization was one of a group of four new political parties that also included Asaba (Flag), Erkin Kyrgyzstan (Free Kyrgyzstan), and a Social-Democratic Party mainly supported by the Slavic population. The National Front quite openly admits it is not yet ready to seek power. It is still in the process of developing cadres with open minds who can learn to think politically—skills that most of the population could never develop during the long decades of communist rule. (This theme was a constant one in Central Asia: the general recognition that the Communist Party in each republic still has the greatest degree of political experience and a strong base of cadres that cannot be matched by the new parties and informal groups. Indeed, until recently the Communist Party was the only vehicle to power for anyone with personal ambitions. With the collapse of communist rule in Moscow itself, however, party members in the other republics will soon begin splitting off from the main party, carrying their political skills and experience—and perhaps even some of physical holdings of

the old party—to build new parties. In short, the old Communist Party will not hold all the political cards indefinitely.)

The Front lays particular emphasis on the need for economic sovereignty, the ability of Kyrgyzstan to produce a lot more of its own goods. The only final manufactured product Kyrgyzstan currently produces is the result of a joint venture with a South Korean company, Gold Star, which coproduces a television set. Kyrgyzstan has also established an all-Union monopoly in the production of animal feed in block form. As noted earlier, Kyrgyzstan also possesses rich potential for hydroelectric power, upon which much of the rest of the region could be dependent. It will require further investment in order to realize all this potential. It also is the second-highest coal producer in Central Asia after Kazakhstan.⁴

The Front seeks a new law on privatization, which it sees as essential to the development of the economy. As the Front describes it, a major new private company has been established which runs a commercial center called *Zher* (The Location). This business center is designed to facilitate meetings with foreign businessmen. Its first goal is to build a children's hospital for the republic as a model of what private enterprise can do in the social arena. There is also urgent need to raise the skill level of workers and the overall use of technology. The Kirgiz people in particular, lacking any mercantile background, need to develop these new business skills. Islam is also useful to the development of the state, both to raise the general moral level of the people and to emphasize the Islamic character of Kyrgyzstan to facilitate contacts with other Muslim countries that might invest. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states have shown interest in the development of Kyrgyzstan and may be important sources of aid.

The German and Russian populations of the republic are also important to the future trade ties of the republic, for they will provide a reassuring image of competence, especially if Germany considers investing there. Here is where an unbridled campaign of "Kyrgyzstan for the Kirgiz" would not serve the economic interests of the state, desperate as it is for foreign ties. One of the Front's main concerns is that the Communist Party itself is getting into trade, where by dint of its longtime power, cadres, and contacts, it enjoys an advantage over other elements in private business.

The National Front was realistic enough before the collapse of the Union to recognize the critical economic importance of the Union to

⁴Boris Rumer, *Soviet Central Asia*, Unwin Hyman, Boston, 1989, p. 46.

Kyrgyzstan's future. It also recognized that if the Union was not to survive, then the Kirgiz would have to consider some special economic "Turkestan Union" or Central Asian common market. A political union did not then seem feasible, however. Under changing circumstances and dwindling options, these political views may change.

But the Kirgiz worry about Uzbekistan, for example, for they perceive an expansionist character in the Uzbeks that they believe came out during the Osh incidents. That spilling of blood has been described as a turning point for the Kirgiz people: the Osh incidents, however great a tragedy, served to bolster the concept of a distinct Kyrgyzstan and the unity of the Kirgiz people that had never existed so clearly before. The Kirgiz held the Uzbeks purely responsible for the incidents, not any distant "hand of Moscow."⁵ The Front expressed little doubt, however, that there are always elements in Moscow that will seek to control and manipulate the Kirgiz; with the collapse of the empire they wonder whether these predispositions have disappeared entirely.

The National Front had already been more "nationalist" than Akaev in its opposition to the idea of Gorbachev's Union Treaty. The Front sought no more than a weak confederation that would deprive the center of any ability to apply force. With the attainment of independence, the National Front will unquestionably move to further secure the rights and benefits of the Kirgiz within the republic. In terms of relations with the Russian population of Kyrgyzstan, the National Front notes that more Russians knew the Kirgiz language in the 1940s than do today. In the 1950s, however, with the influx of more Russians, the use of the Kirgiz language was weakened considerably and its development was slowed. About 80 percent of the parliament is made up of Kirgiz, even though they make up only 52 percent of the population.⁶ Due to the new language law, Kirgiz is now the major language used in parliament, although Russian is permitted. The Front also supports the idea of a single unified alphabet for all the Turkic languages of Central Asia that would be designed to stress points in common among all the languages, rather than the differences that the present Bolshevik-imposed alphabets deliberately stress. Today, too, many Kirgiz children who live in the capital, Bishkek—primarily a Russian city—insist on speaking Russian at home with their parents, a very negative indicator of Russian cultural

⁵The distinguished Kirgiz writer Chingiz Aitmatov himself publicly blamed the Kirgiz leadership for the incidents, however, perhaps one of the factors in the downfall of the old communist guard.

⁶*Natsional'nyi Sostav Naseleniya*, p. 87.

domination that concerns all Kirgiz nationalists (and is a common grievance in Kazakhstan as well).

Although Russians and Jews are leaving Kyrgyzstan, the National Front claimed in July 1991 that new Russians were still arriving. This is less likely to be the case after Kyrgyzstan's declaration of independence, although the Slavic population has some confidence in Akaev, at least for the time being. What makes the subject of non-Kirgiz inhabitants a difficult one is the issue of land. Land in Kyrgyzstan is limited, since 90 percent of the republic is mountainous. The pressure on the land requires a new law governing immigration into the republic, says the Front, and most Central Asian republics are establishing immigration boards and regulations to begin to implement genuine sovereignty within their borders. The land law, as to whether the land and resources of the republic belong to the Kirgiz or to the "inhabitants of Kyrgyzstan," therefore addresses a critical issue. Forty-seven percent of the people of the republic are non-Kirgiz. The Front feels strongly that the blessings of the republic should fundamentally belong to the Kirgiz themselves. They say there is a difference between the homeland of a person and the homeland of a nation. The Kirgiz people have only one homeland, whereas the Russians living in Kyrgyzstan have a Russia to go home to. The land is the unique seat of language and culture. While the Front claims that the land issue is the one major area in which it does not support President Akaev, in fact this issue is deeply pregnant with a whole complex of issues over nationality rights that lie at the core of future nationality frictions in Central Asia.

Thanks to Akaev's policies, says the Front, Kyrgyzstan is now the most politically advanced state in Central Asia. In fact, there is little doubt that it is the most liberal and enlightened. All the informal organizations of Central Asia have been conducting annual meetings, first in Alma Ata and then in Bishkek to discuss common problems and coordination of policies in their efforts to gain acceptance as legitimate political parties in their respective republics. At these meetings the Kirgiz see themselves as a model for the rest of the Central Asian republics. Whereas Akaev is a democrat, Nazarbaev in Kazakhstan is described as much tougher, Karimov in Uzbekistan is a dictator, and Tajikistan is "quietly fascist." If it comes to elections, however, the masses are conditioned to vote for the party in power, say all the informal organizations. Akaev, fortunately, has been selected for a five-year term by the party. The National Front is able to enjoy the fruits of glasnost in freely publishing its own newspaper, expressing its opinions, and even criticizing Akaev by name. The Front is still afraid of the latent power of the Communist Party and

its successors, however, and therefore views it as tactically wiser to support Akaev against the old guard. And where ideology divides the political spectrum, so too do clan loyalties that are never forgotten in the political balance: the Buga clan had dominated the republic's Central Committee for decades.

The Front is highly ambivalent about privatization. First, in the postcommunist ethic of the old Soviet Union, the owner of a private enterprise is automatically expected to assume a special responsibility of stewardship vis-à-vis the public. This represents a responsibility that few Kirgiz are yet used to or ready for, says the Front. Second is the question of which political elements are positioned to benefit most from privatization. The Communist Party, or its successor, is already seeking to exploit privatization to its own ends in order to strengthen the party economically; the party is well positioned to take over state enterprises as they are privatized, and most of the people who possess the administrative skills to run them are party members. Third, and most important, is the question of which nationalities will benefit most from privatization. The Kirgiz are not well represented in industry. The domination of the bazaar by other nationalities—Azeris, Kurds, Chechen, Uzbeks, Dungan, etc.—puts the Kirgiz at a further disadvantage in the future. For the Front, the process of privatization is already moving too fast for the safety, welfare, and best interests of the Kirgiz, who may now find themselves left out after distribution time in Kyrgyzstan. The critical issue is how to protect the Kirgiz people in the transition to capitalism. The Front prefers to delay this whole process. If Akaev is determined to proceed with privatization “race-blind,” he will unquestionably clash with nearly all Kirgiz nationalist elements on the issue.

There is one sector in which privatization will not pose as many economic problems: agriculture. Historically, Central Asia has enjoyed a higher degree of agricultural privatization than any other part of the USSR. In Uzbekistan, for example, private farming in 1982 occupied between 0.6 and 0.7 percent of total cultivated land and yet produced 55 percent of its cattle, 46 percent of its meat, and 40 percent of its vegetables. In Kirgizia, private farming produced 57 percent of the potatoes, 50 percent of the vegetables, 28 percent of the meat, and 42 percent of the eggs.⁷ Despite the relative ease in transition to private agriculture, privatization will still present the same difficulties in ethnic terms. The Kirgiz excel at animal husbandry, but they have limited experience or involvement in other forms of

⁷Rumer, pp. 125–126.

agriculture. Will the Slavs and other non-Kirgiz nationalities give up their land to Kirgiz? Who will have preference in the privatization of the rest of the state farmland?

The privatization issue is thus highly volatile, in both ideological and ethnic terms; its implementation will create distinct winners and losers, dividing mostly along ethnic lines. The Kirgiz will continue to feel fearful that their future lies in the hands of others. Kirgiz power will be increasingly exercised in parliament and in state administration—a major advantage over the long term—but it cannot now resolve the privatization problem as long as large numbers of non-Kirgiz remain in the republic. For this reason, privatization will most likely move only very slowly in most sectors of the Central Asian economy.

4. KAZAKHSTAN: THE ENDANGERED NATIONAL ENTITY

The republic of Kazakhstan poses the greatest extremes of potential confrontation between local nationalists and Russian national interests. The Kazakhs—a minority of just 40 percent¹ in their own republic—feel uniquely embattled and threatened as a culture, a fact that lends an urgency and even shrillness to their national cause, suggesting serious clashes down the road. The national interests of the Russians and the Kazakhs seem more at odds here than anywhere else in Central Asia, precisely because the non-Kazakh population has such power and influence and is reluctant to relinquish it. Similarly, the Kazakhs themselves face significant constraints in imposing their desires for the future on the rest of the population of Kazakhstan, a fact likely only to exacerbate their sense of frustrated nationalism. Kazakhstan is potentially the most explosive republic in Central Asia.

Local Kazakh officials state that of a 17 million overall population in Kazakhstan (1991 figure), less than half—8 million—are Kazakh. The industrial, economic, commercial, and agricultural resources of the republic are mainly in the hands of non-Kazakhs; as a former nomadic people, the Kazakhs—like the Kirgiz—lack an industrial, agricultural, or mercantile tradition. The northern part of the republic, and much of the east, is heavily—sometimes almost exclusively—populated by Slavs, leading the charismatic Russian émigré writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, among others, to suggest that northern Kazakhstan be annexed to Russia, with the rest left to the Kazakhs. The mere suggestion of such a partition is immensely provocative to the Kazakhs. But its likelihood nonetheless increases in the future if Kazakh nationalism grows—as it almost assuredly will. If the Kazakhs have any advantage it lies in the increasing control of the mechanism of government, which can compensate considerably for the de facto power of the non-Kazakhs in other respects.

Alma Ata is not a particularly Kazakh city. Only 22 percent of the population is Kazakh, and on the streets one hears far more Russian than Kazakh. As in all Soviet cities, the housing crunch in Alma Ata

¹According to official Soviet population figures in 1989; see *Natsional'nyi Sostav Naseleniya*, op. cit.

is severe, adding an additional factor of friction to ethnic relationships in the competition for housing. Much of the housing is relatively new and, at least from the exterior, more attractive than what is found in many other Soviet cities. Alma Ata reflects the aspirations of a leading former party first secretary, Kunaev, who was close to Brezhnev and built the city to enhance the prestige of the republic. It has many fine, even grandiose, state buildings that are much more impressive than anything in the other capitals of Central Asia.

Kazakhstan has two main registered nationalist parties: the Edinstvo (Unity) movement among the Slavic population, and Azat (Freedom), a purely Kazakh party that is also an umbrella for many other informal Kazakh movements, many of which are more extreme than Azat. Neither movement has representatives in parliament so far, although that body is reportedly over 50 percent Kazakh in makeup. Edinstvo is still more a movement than a real party. Its importance lies in its role as spearhead of Slavic aspirations in the republic.

THE POLITICAL VIEWS OF EDINSTVO

One of the two coordinators of Edinstvo's ruling council presented the organization's concerns and goals during an interview in July 1991. Edinstvo was founded as a reaction to nationalist organizational moves by the Kazakhs that emerged legally onto the political scene with the new opportunities under glasnost and perestroika. The movement claims that it was particularly alerted to future problems by the early ethnic clashes between the Kazakhs and the Chechen (an exiled Caucasian people who control much of the private retail market). The membership of Edinstvo in fact is not even exclusively Slavic; only 70 percent are, while the rest of the membership is made up of non-Slav, non-Kazakh nationalities who likewise feel threatened by a resurgence of Kazakh nationalism. In principle, Kazakhs are free to join but obviously opt not to, although Edinstvo believes that many Kazakhs are privately disturbed by the nationalist character of the Azat movement. That may be true, but probably only among a small handful of the old communist elite.

Edinstvo was especially disturbed by the rival Kazakh organization Azat's access to the local Russian-language press; Edinstvo wrote to President Nazarbaev to complain and distributed the letter among the Russian population, but it was not able to get the letter printed. Edinstvo thus believes that the Kazakhs are getting special treat-

ment, even in the leading daily *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*.² Whenever Edinstvo tries to publish its views in the press, it is ignored because the authorities see it as advocating “inflammation [*razzhiganie*] of interethnic relations,” even as Edinstvo accuses Azat of doing precisely that.

The officially promulgated aims of Edinstvo are to promote interethnic peace and to fight nationalism—and especially nationalist privilege—for any group. In reality, of course, it holds an unspoken interest in a return to the former status quo, in which Kazakhs had very little influence. The emergence of “nationalism” as a factor can only threaten the Slavic population, although in theory an unleashed Slavic population could make life very difficult for the Kazakhs. The Edinstvo representative (prior to Kazakhstan’s declaration of full independence) referred to the dangers the Kazakhs ran of foolishly “waking a sleeping bear.”

Like the Russian population in other republics, members of Edinstvo are unhappy with the language law in Kazakhstan which declares Kazakh to be the state language. Edinstvo seeks to place the Russian language on the same footing—an aspiration strongly opposed by the Kazakh nationalists. (The Russian language does not need to be “protected,” the Kazakh nationalists say; it is the Kazakh language that is threatened and requires protection.) Edinstvo objects that it is simply pointless and unrealistic for Russians to learn Kazakh when vast numbers of them live and work in a Russian environment. Perhaps, they say, Russians who work in a mainly Kazakh environment could and should learn the language, and can be given special rewards for doing so, but the law should not affect a Slav’s chances for promotion if that person cannot pass Kazakh-language examinations. “It’s too bad that the Kazakh language is weakening, but it’s not our fault and we shouldn’t be asked to pay the price for this fact.” The requirement is to help strengthen the Kazakh language, not weaken the use of Russian. Even the prominent Kirgiz writer Chingiz Aitmatov (who writes in Russian) looks at the language problem this way.

Edinstvo sees other privileges accruing to the Kazakhs, such as their 64 percent representation on the Alma Ata city council when they are only one quarter of the local city population. This gives the Kazakhs

²Yet Kazakh intellectuals claim that this paper represents the point of view of the Russian community; they seek to found a Russian-language paper that will present the Kazakh point of view—especially needed because many Kazakh intellectuals have a poor command of Kazakh.

special influence and power. Although jobs are not officially distributed on an ethnic basis, when openings are advertised they specify applicants "who can speak the Kazakh language and are familiar with Kazakh life." The formal heads of most state organizations are now Kazakh, most of whom are "not competent," in Edinstvo's view. Appointments also reflect the clan structure of the Kazakhs, who are divided into three main tribes or clans. Each Kazakh in a position of power seeks to appoint as many individuals as possible from his own tribe. Edinstvo estimates that 80 percent of the positions in the republic's institutions of higher education are allocated to Kazakhs; the militia too, allegedly is 80 percent manned by Kazakhs. Kazakhs also dominate in the prosecuting organs of the republic. These are distortions of the demographic and power realities of the republic. All of this could lead to potential civil war, in the view of Edinstvo.

Yet Azat continues to press for advantages, Edinstvo asserts. It seeks to control the military, customs offices, immigration into the republic, and security within the republic. This is intolerable for Russians. Azat seeks a "national" (the code word for native) government for the republic, whereas the goal of Edinstvo is "civil" government. Edinstvo actually sees negative influences at work in Kazakhstan from the many American films and TV shows that show blacks in positions of responsibility, which only "gives the Kazakhs ideas about taking over" when they are not ready to do so. At present one of the main problems is that the laws from pre-perestroika days are no longer enforced but new ones have not yet taken their place, giving Kazakh elements great license to misbehave. If the market becomes freer, for example, it will simply be taken over by the Mafia, in the view of Edinstvo.

Edinstvo members were depressed about the future even before the breakup of the Union. They felt they were receiving very little support from other elements of the republican population, or from Russia and the Center in the last months before the breakup of the Union. The Edinstvo leadership claimed it received no financial support from the Center or even from the Communist Party. Only half of Edinstvo's membership is communist. The Communist Party is shying away from supporting it (because most of the local party is Kazakh and gives preference to Kazakhs even while officially spouting an "internationalist line"). Edinstvo funds come from "private" and organizational contributions provided through open voting. It would like to challenge Azat to report on its own sources of financial support.

The Edinstvo spokesman fears that Russians by nature are passive about their fate and will do nothing until it is too late. They will be forced to leave Kazakhstan if a nationalist government comes to power. Yet most of the Russians in Kazakhstan have nowhere to go; they are not welcome back in Russia. Edinstvo is not without important allies, however: both the Army and the Orthodox Church supported it before the end of the Union and have been in close contact. Edinstvo believed the Army could be a powerful weight in times of conflict. That is why "Yeltsin was crazy" when he talked about allowing national armies to be established in the non-Russian republics. Edinstvo is also in informal communication with other Slavic organizations in other republics.

For all the power of the Slavic population in Kazakhstan, Edinstvo's darker vision of its own situation suggests that the Slavs in Kazakhstan are vulnerable over the longer run, especially with the republic's complete declaration of independence at the end of 1991. Moscow now has vastly less clout in the republic's affairs. And there are far fewer constraints now on Kazakh nationalist forces within the republic that would prevent them from pursuing nationalist policies at the expense of the Slavs. The Soviet Army, perhaps an ace in the hole as long as the empire existed, now has no official standing in Kazakhstan. As Kazakhstan's own national military forces are developed, the balance of power will shift more clearly to the Kazakh side. The Orthodox Church, while able to serve as a powerful spokesman for the Slavs, can wield only limited power on their behalf. In short, the Slavs may grow increasingly frustrated in Kazakhstan and will find their power resources diminishing, at least within the Kazakh government. The major issue is whether the Slavs are prepared to use their economic and technical power, or will try to enlist Russia on their side, to shore up their dominance of industry and agriculture or to agitate for the breakaway of the Slavic-dominated north Kazakhstan.

The situation is further exacerbated by the aggressive nationalist intentions of the Russian Cossack movement along the borderlands. The Cossacks had long played a role in the tsarist empire as defenders of the Russian borderlands. At various historical periods they have occupied large portions of northern and western Kazakhstan, and they even had periods of self-government during the period of the Russian civil war. Today they provide a backbone to the Russian settlers of northern Kazakhstan, and have sought to publicly celebrate the 400th anniversary of their existence, something that would no doubt carry overtones of territorial aggressiveness. The Kazakhs see the most direct cultural clash of all between themselves and the Cos-

sacks. The situation could be explosive in the future if the Cossacks come to represent an explicit force that challenges the Kazakh character of northern Kazakhstan.

PRESIDENT NAZARBAEV

The dynamic, charismatic, canny, and effective president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, is widely perceived by both Russians and Kazakhs in the republic to be supportive of Kazakh rights, but neither group views him as a true Kazakh nationalist. Indeed, his overwhelming commitment is to the economic development of the republic and the maintenance of Kazakh-Russian binational power. Russians have had reasonable confidence in him primarily for that reason, and everyone in the republic was pleased that Nazarbaev played such a major role in Union politics as a close supporter of Gorbachev—a clear sign of Kazakhstan's importance in the old Union.

Yet for all Nazarbaev's pragmatism, he is hardly devoid of nationalist emotion when talking of the past experience of Kazakhs in the Union. In a typical (preindependence) interview,³ Nazarbaev commented that historically the Center had conducted colonial policies in Kazakhstan no better than the colonial policies of foreign countries, and had served to "poison" the Kazakh people and their homeland. He points out that 40 percent of the Kazakh people—a massive number—perished in the collectivization campaign in the 1930s and more than half a million fled their own republic. Nazarbaev says that half of the Kazakh people don't even know their own language as a result of Center policies, while 70 percent of the country lives in ghetto conditions produced by the "military-industrial policies" promulgated by Moscow. Kazakh writers have "nobody to write for" in their own language; grandparents cannot even communicate in Kazakh with their grandchildren in the cities.⁴

Nazarbaev blames much of Kazakhstan's woes on the fact that under Stalin it was relegated for many years to the position of "concentration camp" for prisoners, wives of executed traitors, and exiled nationalities. National tensions have thus arisen in this unsettled

³*Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, 2 July 1991.

⁴One woman nationalist interviewee wept as she described how she decided to send her daughter to a Kazakh school in Alma Ata to at least teach her something of the culture she herself had become alienated from; as a result the woman was accused by her Russian colleagues of being a "nationalist." The Kazakh language must thus be preserved and fostered, Azat says, all the while keeping the critically necessary Russian population in Kazakhstan.

and rootless environment where so much of the population has been transient. The presence of so many exiled criminals has served to "corrupt" Kazakh youth; a terrible social legacy was imposed upon Kazakhstan as a result of these massive social upheavals, creating a society today whose foundations are not healthy or normal.

To improve Kazakhstan's position, Nazarbaev talks of the need to profit from foreign expertise. He has imported two American specialists from California, one of whom is a Korean-American, to advise on how to develop the Kazakh economy. Kazakhstan is willing to pay what it takes to get the necessary foreign teachers and specialists, including Russian. (No other republican leadership has yet so openly declared its intent to import foreign expertise to this end.)

Nazarbaev thus walks a thin line between speaking to the grievances of his fellow Kazakhs, the need to maintain the republic's huge Slavic skilled labor force and technicians, and the importance of good relations with Russia.

THE KAZAKH NATIONALISTS

For all Nazarbaev's prominence and prestige, in the eyes of the Kazakh informal organizations he has not done enough on the nationalist front. The Kazakh nationalists cover a considerable spectrum, among which Azat may be one of the most moderate. But in July 1991, months before independence, an Azat spokesman already declared as the minimal goal of all Kazakh nationalists their opposition to any kind of federal Union. Above all, nationalists demand preservation of the territorial unity of Kazakhstan, the inviolability of its borders, and the impermissibility of autonomy for any area within the republic (designed to prevent any Russian separatism or Russian autonomy within the republic). Nationalists also call for the democratization of society and politics and for government to actively assist this process. Any reminder to the nationalists of the complicating factor of their position as a minority within their own republic elicits deep anger and frustration. Such a state of affairs would not exist, they say, were it not for the one-third of the Kazakh population that died during collectivization—a greater sacrifice than any other Soviet people has ever made, including the quarter of the Byelorussian population that died during World War II. The proportion of Kazakhs relative to other nationalities was further lowered with the forced exile into Kazakhstan of refugees and other nationalities and groups under Stalin. Thus the Kazakh population should "actually be considered larger" than its present proportion would indicate. It should be given the honorary status, in effect, of majority population of the

republic, based on the sacrifices of the Kazakh people, rather than on today's cold and brutal statistics.

Azat states that all peoples have a right to live in Kazakhstan, but those who do must respect the laws, the customs, and the language of its Kazakh natives. Yet it sees the Kazakh language dying, not by itself, but as the result of a policy of russification for more than a century. The moderate nationalists of Azat say they know they cannot pursue unrealistic or idealistic nationalistic goals for the Kazakhs in the republic. Yet they want to see tangible signs from the Russian population of respect for the Kazakh language. They do not expect that the launching of spacecraft from Baikonur will be carried out in the Kazakh language, but that Russians who are in regular contact with Kazakhs should start demonstrating some token efforts to use the language as a courtesy and in simple public discourse. After all, "Kazakhstan is our republic"—a stunningly revolutionary concept in the history of Soviet nationality policy.

Yet when the author mentioned these facts to other Russians, they were contemptuous of the idea of using even minimal Kazakh.⁵ Even politically sensitive Russians still have a distinct colonial mindset toward the "natives" of the empire on linguistic policy. If Russians do not seem to be making the initial efforts to accommodate Kazakh sensitivities on the language problem, the official campaign of the republican government to encourage them to study the Kazakh language also did not fare well in the preindependence period of Kazakh "sovereignty." An article in the local Alma Ata press⁶ on the anniversary of the language law presented a mixed picture:

One year after the language law has been adopted in Kazakhstan, teaching is now conducted in 15 native languages. Of 8126 schools of general education, 2768 are conducted in Kazakh. There are also schools where mixed Central Asian languages are used. Literature available in the Kazakh language has increased by five to six times. Efforts are also under way to renew culture in the national language. Works of Kazakh writers are being resuscitated. But the language is not being used in government to the extent it should be [*nyet dolzhnoi*

⁵I queried a politically sophisticated and sensitive Russian, for example, who had grown up in Uzbekistan, about why he did not use the Uzbek language, at least as a courtesy in exchanging initial greetings and pleasantries with Uzbek officials at meetings; he replied that it would be utterly "artificial" to do so, considering that the officials all spoke excellent Russian. When I suggested it might be appreciated as a gesture, he stated that it would be very hard for Russians to do so because it was so "unnatural" and would seem like a "game." A prominent Russian journalist in Kazakhstan stated it was "childish" to talk about using Kazakh.

⁶*Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, 29 June 1991.

vostrebovannosti]. Study circles in the Kazakh language in the collectives are dwindling, the standards of study are low in schools, and there is no clear coordination of effort at the republican or the local level. The government has emphasized the need to guarantee the development not only of Kazakh, but of other languages as well, but in accordance with the law in the name of consolidation of society, friendship, and mutual understanding of all nationalities living on the territory of Kazakhstan.

In Kazakhstan more than anywhere else, the language issue seems to be the premier vehicle of nationalist aspiration, the supreme symbol of nationalism and feelings of oppression at the hands of the Russians. It is invested with intense emotionalism precisely because the language is in a weak state. All nationalists emphasized the extent of the problem in Alma Ata, where their children are a minority in Russian schools (which they attend in order to get the best education and to learn Russian well) and moreover refuse to speak Kazakh at home with their parents, and indeed often cannot communicate with their Kazakh-speaking grandparents in the countryside—a deeply painful phenomenon. Old people or villagers reportedly go to the airport and cannot even seek assistance in their own language from Russian personnel, but are forced to speak a foreign language in their own homeland. Azat stresses that if there is no legal basis for the use of the language it will eventually die, whereas Russian, as a powerful cultural vehicle, needs no protection. And above all, Kazakhstan is the sole Kazakh homeland—there is no other; this is in contrast to the options available to most of the republic's other nationalities, who have their own “home” republics.

Azat insists that only a “national” government will be capable of protecting Kazakh rights. The use of the Kazakh language in parliament must be increased, and the natives of the republic must have priority for reasons of national development. If the Kazakhs did not occupy the majority of seats in parliament already, they would not have been able to pass the law on sovereignty, Azat says. These views suggest that the frustration of Kazakh aspirations will only lead to greater interethnic tensions and conflict.

In this context, the future of democracy in the republic becomes very complex. Although they will not admit it, Kazakh nationalists will have no desire to implement democracy when they cannot even exercise a majority voice in their own republic. Representative government will give unacceptably large voice to Russians and all other non-Kazakhs, who will oppose the Kazakh national agenda. On this basis it is unlikely that Kazakhstan will implement any kind of democratic voting process. Indeed, any victory for democratic forces there will

represent a direct setback to Kazakh national interests. The Kazakhs will above all seek to retain control of the mechanism of government to counterbalance their weakness in all economic and industrial affairs.

An Azat spokesman admitted there was debate among the nationalists about the desirability of the Russian population leaving—even peacefully and gradually—over time. Some see it as a prerequisite to the creation of a truly Kazakh culture and society; others believe that the non-Kazakh population is deeply necessary to the development of the republic and that any departure of Russians cannot be considered for the foreseeable future. But the nationalist process is a dynamic one: what passed for moderate views on the presence of Russians in the republic in mid-1991 reflected the reality at that time of an existing Union, however weak. Today, with full independence, the nationalist agenda has also moved forward and will be far less compromising on the Russian presence than it was before. All nationalists agreed that if life is bad in Kazakhstan, then no one will want to stay: “*Ash adam oroska*”—the hungry man is a troublemaker—as the Kazakh proverb says.

The nationalists give clear expression to their belief that the Kazakh people have suffered uniquely. But Azat notes that they also resemble the Russian people in their long-sufferingness. And both peoples could explode when the breaking point is reached. In the meantime, says Azat, the Russians must realize that if life does not start getting much better for the Kazakhs as well, then trouble lies ahead. Azat has warned Nazarbaev that he is heading for trouble if he attempts to muzzle the Azat movement, which serves as an umbrella for many other nationalist groups besides.

The Azat spokesman said that Azat was not supported by the Kazakh Communist Party, contrary to what the Edinstvo movement claimed. Objective observers agree that Russians have put out a great deal of distorted information about Kazakh nationalist aspirations, but the Kazakhs too are guilty of generating deliberately frightening stories about the intentions of the republic’s Russian population.

Other nationalist informal organizations under the Azat wing include the more radical Zheltoqsan and Alash movements, as well as the Social Democratic Party and the National Front. Positions espoused by various spokesmen for these groups include demands for full Kazakh independence, long before the collapse of the Union made it a realistic goal. Other nationalist goals include demands that

- The damaged “gene pool” of the Kazakh people must be restored; the preservation and perpetuation of Kazakh culture must take top priority; old customs and traditions must be revived.
- Restoration and strengthening of Islam in Kazakhstan is important to the development of Kazakh culture.
- New leaders are required in Kazakhstan to bring about these transformations; the old leaders who grew up in the old system (including Nazarbaev) are not capable of such change; Nazarbaev is not focused specifically on the problems and needs of the Kazakh people, only on the problems of Kazakhstan as an economic region.
- Communists should not be allowed to remain in charge; American specialists and advisers cannot truly help Kazakhstan as long as they are working under the aegis of the party; the United States should give no money to help Kazakhstan’s development as long as the Communist Party is in power.
- The Kazakh people are living under terrible circumstances and conditions in their own republic; they are the slaves of slaves (i.e., of the Russians who also suffer from communism).
- Laws passed by the parliament to benefit the Kazakh people are not being implemented; the language law is not being implemented; the business of the Kazakh parliament is still conducted in Russian, unlike in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.
- Kazakh culture is not even granted basic respect by the non-Kazakh population.
- The colonial mentality in Kazakhstan is worse than in other republics, due to the presence of exiled nationalities, prisoners, and compulsory migration of Russian agricultural workers under Khrushchev’s Virgin Lands program.

The problems of “privatization” in Kazakhstan closely parallel those of the other Central Asian republics: who benefits from the process? The number-two man on the former Central Committee of the Kazakh Communist Party, a Russian, has recently become the head of the largest “private corporation” in Kazakhstan,⁷ clearly designed to perpetuate both the power of the party in new form and the power of the Russians in the republic. It is the perpetuation of precisely this kind of status quo that so angers the nationalists.

⁷RFL daily broadcasts, 15 November 1991.

Some of the nationalists believe that Kazakhstan must join in a Central Asian or Turkestanian union; yet others pointed out that the Center's policies had driven all the Turkic peoples against each other, forgetting their common heritage.

Discussions with Kazakh nationalists are charged with a high level of emotion, much greater than the author sensed in the other republics. Anger seemed to be a dominant feature of their outlook, a deep sense of grievance and resentment over the lack of respect accorded their culture and language by others. Dispassionate discussion was often difficult.

Another Kazakh intellectual expresses deep concern for the problem of widespread alcoholism among the Kazakhs today.⁸ According to his research, the use—and abuse—of alcohol was introduced by the Russians. During the Soviet period, alcoholism has of course become one of the few solaces in the grim life under communism, and it has been especially insidious in Kazakhstan's "abnormal" society with its high proportion of forced exiles, criminals, dislocated populations, etc. Alcoholism is seen as badly damaging the structure of the Kazakh family and even affecting the virility of the Kazakh male, among whom there is now a seriously declining birthrate.

It is striking that the nationalists of Kazakhstan seem more focused on the issue of Islam than do other nationalists in Central Asia. In Uzbekistan, where Islam is probably strongest in Central Asia, the religion seemed simply to be taken for granted and did not figure prominently as an issue for the nationalists. In Kazakhstan, however, where Islam has never been strong, religion may now increasingly be perceived as an important instrument to help establish Kazakh culture and traditions more deeply, as the primary symbol of the difference between Kazakhs and Russians. Islam may therefore be especially encouraged by some nationalists as not a rival but a complement to secular nationalism. There is a distinct problem that religion could become a greater vehicle of rivalry and confrontation as "Slav versus Kazakh" takes on overtones of "Christian versus Muslim." Local politics in Alma Ata now includes a struggle over the restoration of Orthodox churches as opposed to mosques. The religion issue can readily become a symbol of the broader political struggle.

⁸Based on an interview with Samat Utenyazov, Kazakh Academy of Sciences, September 1991.

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE KAZAKH PEOPLE

The National Museum of the Kazakh People in Alma Ata might better be entitled the "Non-Museum of the Kazakh People"; a visit in 1991 revealed yet more aspects of the cultural struggle between communities. Housed in an attractive, modern-style building with vaguely eastern motifs, the museum is divided into several historical periods. The early, pre-Islamic period displays artifacts of steppe peoples who have lived in the region, mostly Sarmatians and other early Iranian/Indo-European nomadic peoples. No Kazakhs or other Turkic peoples are represented there, since they had not yet migrated heavily to the present area of the Central Asian republics.

The Islamic section provides information on Islamic figures who had been living in Kazakhstan in the heyday of medieval Islam, but in fact no actual Kazakhs had been converted to Islam in that period, and Islamic civilization was based primarily in the great Central Asian cities in the territory of today's Uzbekistan. Only a few prominent Muslim figures had lived as far north as what constitutes today's Kazakhstan. Thus Kazakhs are shown by their absence as participating only marginally in that period of culture as well. A more accurate cultural picture would of course have portrayed an indigenous native culture of that period as broadly Turkic, involving the rise and fall of individual tribal powers. The original homeland of the Kazakhs could also have been portrayed even outside the region of today's Kazakhstan, but it is not. Any portrayal of the Kazakhs closely grouped within other Turkic groups would have been viewed as dangerously "Pan-Turkic" in character.

The Soviet period is mainly dedicated to the accomplishments of Russians living in Kazakhstan, with a quote from a famous nineteenth-century Kazakh writer, Abayev (Abai), speaking of the "need to learn from Russia; only Russia can be the source of civilization." The quotation from Abai seems to be taken heavily out of context, since he was known to strongly support the need to develop the Kazakh language as a key feature of Kazakh character and life, particularly in education, regardless of his awareness of the major cultural access that the Russian language provided.⁹ World War II exhibits are also mainly devoted to Russians who have lived in Kazakhstan. Industrial exhibits make no real reference to specific contributions of Kazakhs per se, attributing all progress to the "people of Kazakhstan," which primarily means Russians.

⁹Serge A. Zenkovsky, *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1960, p. 63.

The last and newest section of the museum is an eye-opener. Opened only in the last year, it is dedicated to the struggle against the "military-industrial complex" in Kazakhstan, complete with a map of the republic marked by numerous skull-and-crossbones symbols of nuclear sites, military zones, and war industry. Gruesome pictures show Kazakh children horribly mutated or deformed as a result of nuclear experiments in the region—some of them deliberately using Kazakh villagers in the vicinity as unwitting guinea pigs. Other pictures prominently feature the activities of the organization "Nevada-Semipalatinsk," a joint U.S.-Kazakh anti-nuclear testing organization that was one of the earliest informal political organizations in Kazakhstan after the advent of glasnost. Posters feature fraternal meetings of American and Kazakh members, as well as many American Indians, with whom the Kazakhs seem to have made some association. Other exhibits emphasize the ecological ravages of the Soviet period and the destruction of the Aral Sea. The entire exhibit had an implicitly strong antistate and anti-Russian character. Leading Kazakh nationalists had associated themselves prominently with this antinuclear movement and the need to "stop war."

The museum thus says almost nothing about Kazakh history or origins, nothing about the migration of Turkic peoples to the region or the gradual division of Turkic peoples into different language groups—all apparently out of a continuing fear of inciting Kazakh nationalism or, worse, Pan-Turkism. The entire museum is thus a stunning tribute to the absence of the Kazakh people themselves; it does nothing to establish, record, preserve, or propagate Kazakh culture. No distinction is drawn between the cultures of the Kazakhs (or Turkic peoples) and of the Russians who have colonized the area. As a statement of what "a Kazakh" is, the museum is schizophrenia personified, a summation of the distorted national history of the Kazakhs. Little wonder that the nationalists begin to sound shrill over being deprived of their culture in their own republic.

Indeed, one is struck by the parallels between Native Americans and the Kazakh, something that the Kazakhs themselves sense. Both are threatened cultures, overwhelmed by powerful outsiders who have killed large numbers of their population; much of their land has been taken, parts of their territory have been used for nuclear testing, and social despair has driven large parts of the population to alcoholism. A sad, dark vision of their own future emerges. The logo of the Nevada-Semipalatinsk antinuclear movement shows a bearded and hooded Central Asian shaman sitting in profile in the desert accepting a peacepipe from an American Indian.

An evening television program in Kazakh, however, presents several hours of Kazakh folk music and individual artists, all heavily applauded by a purely Kazakh audience. A local bookstore is divided into two sections—one with books in Russian and a smaller one with books in Kazakh, including what seemed to be a profusion of newly printed novels. A grammar or textbook of the Kazakh language was not available in any language in any bookstore, however, nor was a Kazakh-Russian dictionary; one wonders what materials are used for language classes in the republic. In Bishkek there were no Kirgiz-Russian dictionaries available either. An independent Kazakhstan may now be able to direct more funds to the preservation and encouragement of Kazakh culture with less concern about “equal rights” for Russian culture in the republic.

PROBLEMS OF KAZAKH CULTURE

The very fragility of Kazakh culture and historical identity is likely to pose serious problems for the republic in the future. No nationalism is perhaps more dangerous than the one that feels deeply threatened and insecure. There are, of course, preeminent classic traditions of Central Asian culture, art, and literature, but they have resided almost exclusively in the great classic cities of Central Asia, most of which are located in today’s Uzbekistan: Bokhara, Samarkand, Khiva, etc. Those cities reflected an urban culture that only slightly touched the nomadic way of life of the Kazakh, Kirgiz, and Turkmen on the steppe. The very name “Kazakh” only came into common use among Russians in the twentieth century; the Kazakh and the Kirgiz were both referred to by Russians as “Kirgiz” until the republic of Kazakhstan was formed after the Bolshevik Revolution. The Kazakhs themselves, however, did refer to themselves as Kazakhs and were aware of their own unique cultural traditions, which they saw as “purer” Turkic than the mixed Islamic and Tatar traditions of the cities. While traditions of nomadic culture already existed in music, literature, and oral epics, ironically the Bolsheviks initially helped strengthen Kazakh distinctiveness with the formation of the republic of Kazakhstan after the revolution.

Russia had not always been viewed as a negative force by the Kazakhs in earlier centuries. One of the three hordes of the Kazakhs had actually requested incorporation into the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century, to avoid invasion by the Mongols who had already subjugated the eastern Kazakh hordes. The Kazakhs found themselves between Chinese and Russian power, facing possible encroachment from Uzbeks, Chinese, or Mongols, from whom the

Russians were able to provide protection.¹⁰ The Kazakhs thus felt themselves distinct from the peoples and Islamic culture of southern Central Asia. They also reacted negatively to the Islamic missionary work of the Tatars, who were the key Muslim/Turkic nationalist elements of the tsarist empire. Kazakh intellectuals responded positively to the Russian intellectuals they encountered, which provided a socialist, antireligious character to the thinking of many Kazakh intellectuals. "Kazakhstan became the only Moslem or Turkic region of Russia in which the impact of Islamic culture was drastically overshadowed by Russian."¹¹ If it had not been for the depredations against Kazakh lands in the nineteenth century, and especially the brutal policies of the Bolsheviks, Kazakhstan might have found itself closer to the Russians than to its Turkic neighbors throughout this period. But in view of their tragic losses at Russian hands in the twentieth century, and their spiritual, cultural, and political subjugation under communism, the Kazakhs have now found themselves in a struggle for their very identity and existence.

Under these circumstances, Kazakh culture seems to be undergoing a reevaluation as the republic adjusts to independence and starts to act on the need to protect itself from Russia in the future. The Kazakhs' Turkic and Islamic cultures are now becoming important symbols of their membership in the broader Turkic and Islamic world—which will yield important allies in the Kazakhs' struggle for true independence and security. While Kazakhstan can never separate itself from a fairly intimate relationship with Russia, it is probable that it is in the process of remolding its national cultural profile into one that will emphasize the Turkic and Islamic ties it had once spurned. Kazakh intellectuals, who had found themselves part of a broader Russian/Soviet culture, comfortable in a completely Russian-speaking world, will now be required to come to terms with a much more nationalist kind of culture that is essentially hostile to Russia. Indeed, new social elements, more native in outlook, will move to the fore.

KAZAKH FOREIGN POLICY

Any Kazakh foreign policy must first deal with the reality of Russia as its dominant next-door neighbor. Russia, and perhaps more distantly China, represent the only clear security threats to an independent Kazakhstan. The Russian threat is potentially territorial as

¹⁰See Zenkovsky, pp. 56–57.

¹¹Zenkovsky, p. 64.

well as economic. How can Kazakhs develop a truly national Kazakh culture as long as they remain a minority within their own republic? How can the republic change this demographic balance without pushing out the Slavic population? Russians will likely begin to leave in more significant numbers as more nationalist policies come into play that discriminate in one sense or another against them. If and when conditions in Russia improve, it could become more welcoming to Russians outside that republic. But such a situation does not now seem likely for the foreseeable future, so Russians will not readily depart Kazakhstan, where they are well situated, until a significant threat develops to their lives and livelihood.

If Kazakhstan state policy continues to discriminate more sharply against Slavs in Kazakhstan—as it almost assuredly will—how much might Moscow intervene politically? If extremist nationalist groups seek to “encourage” Slavic departure through bloodshed and terrorism, how will Moscow react, especially if terrorist acts are not condemned by the government in Alma Ata? If discrimination or provocations against Russians increase, how long will it be before the Russian-dominated northern provinces of Kazakhstan break away to join Russia? Would Alma Ata then attempt to use military force to forestall such a move? Or seek to expel the Russians living there?

The immense natural and mineral resources of this enormous republic will not be easily relinquished by the Russians. Of particular concern will be the disposition of the huge Tengiz oil fields in western Kazakhstan. Will this wealth serve Russia—primarily through its control by the Russians in Kazakhstan—or the Kazakhs? Until the Soviet breakup, these resources were clearly viewed by Moscow as part of the resources of the Union. While they now clearly “belong” to Kazakhstan, the question remains, whose Kazakhstan? Potentially, such oil holdings are a powerful instrument in the hands of the Kazakhs to ensure their economic future, much in the way that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have been able to use their oil wealth to benefit primarily their own small native populations, allowing them to import foreign workers and put themselves into the administrative positions of the new state. Do the Kazakhs aspire to Saudi-style control of their own oil resources? Will these resources be put at the disposal of the Kazakh people to perpetuate and strengthen their own local culture, or will the people become mere ethnic and folkloric ornaments in a republic dominated by Russians who require the oil themselves?

The emotions of the Kazakhs on all these issues suggest that the evolution of the national problem in this republic will be more severe

than in the other Central Asian republics where the native language and population has long dominated and where Russians can have no future except as guests and foreign specialists there at the sufferance or request of the native population.

The magnitude of these changes so far seems to be registering only dimly on the Russian psyche. The transition from a truly colonial relationship to one of independent and sovereign nations is just beginning. It is difficult for Russians in particular to grasp this change, precisely because it is taking place "at home" and not in some foreign country. The leaderships in the new republics are quite explicit about their aspirations and intentions, but the Russians seem not to hear. Such insensitivity, if it continues, will only increase the friction. The Russians in Kazakhstan, who once thought they were living in "their own country," are now turning into expatriates living in a foreign land; they will have a difficult time adjusting to the new realities. They are inclined to speak of Kazakh emotionalism, the lack of logic and realism, the excessive sensitivities, and the "artificial character" of the Kazakhs' movements to restore native culture and language. They seem blind to the character of nationalism—which indeed is "illogical" in its manifestations—in which the creation of national myth is more important than "reality" and in which dedication to language, however "inconvenient," is a key vehicle to national self-fulfillment.

Over the longer run, the outlook for Russian-Kazakh relations is not good. Nationalist policies in Alma Ata are destined to increase, perhaps rapidly, hastening the day of confrontation on a whole range of issues, including state language policy, privatization, democracy and the representation of non-Kazakh nationalities, land ownership, control of industry, natural resources, the territorial integrity of northern Kazakhstan, and increasing discrimination against non-Kazakhs. However enlightened the leadership in Alma Ata may be, it will have to contend with rising Kazakh nationalism, and will have to accede to it or ultimately be swept away. Sober economic calculations about the national interest in stability and calm are not likely to prevail over the longer run.

In short, any Kazakh government has to be prepared for the possibility of confrontation with Russia, possibly involving even the use of force. While Kazakhstan can never hope to match Russian military power, it may hope to have sufficient military force to make clear to its Russian population that northern Kazakhstan will not be relinquished without a major struggle, and to give Moscow a sense of Kazakhstan's seriousness of purpose. This question may already be

in the minds of Nazarbaev and others in considering the future of nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan, to be used at least as a powerful bargaining chip with Russia to ensure the inviolability of the northern territories. It is difficult to imagine Kazakhstan making no effort to develop a nuclear weapons capability, given the knowledge of its own technicians working in nuclear weapons plants in the past. It will be very much in Alma Ata's interest to maintain close ties with Russia, but conflict is now built into the future equation.

On balance, it is hard to imagine how this issue of the Russian position in Kazakhstan can be resolved without the ultimate loss of the heavily Russian-populated northern region. Might this factor play a significant role in Kazakhstan's foreign policy toward other nations? Is there any way in which foreign ties could strengthen its hold on northern Kazakhstan? It seems unlikely that even a strong Central Asian federation would have significant impact on Kazakhstan's ability to hold onto a breakaway north.

CHINA

China represents the only other state that, given its size, presents a distinct potential threat to Kazakhstan. It has posed such a threat in the past. Conversely, Kazakhs have taken refuge in China when under hardship from Soviet policies. Approximately 1.5 million Kazakhs currently live over the border in western China.¹² Given the colonialist character of Beijing's policies toward the Turkic population in Xinjiang province, these Kazakhs are disturbed by what they perceive as a Chinese attempt to destroy their culture and absorb them into the vast Han population—the traditional Chinese response to foreign elements. The Kazakhs in China see their own ethnic fate as closely linked to that of the Uighur Turks, who number some 12 million people in Xinjiang and are engaged in a struggle for greater autonomy.

Given the move toward greater nationalism among all the peoples of the former Soviet Union, the same trends are bound to infect China as well, especially those peoples who are divided between the Soviet Union and China. The Chinese authorities are determined to suppress all non-Han nationalist expression in China, especially among Muslims, whom they view as particularly resistant to assimilation. An independent Kazakh government, concerned about the frailty of

¹²See Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1986, p. 36.

the Kazakh culture, cannot ignore the Kazakh population in China. At the least, this population is a sizable reserve of Kazakhs able to help redress the ethnic balance within Kazakhstan. The Kazakh government is attempting to encourage the Kazakhs in China to come back to their homeland as part of a broader strategy to do just this. The Kazakh birthrate is also sharply higher than the Russian in Kazakhstan, working to strengthen the Kazakh demographic position.

The Chinese government would probably be happy to rid its borderlands of non-Han peoples, and may be interested in striking a deal with Alma Ata on terms for repatriation of the Chinese Kazakhs. If not, Alma Ata will have to interest itself in the welfare of the Chinese Kazakhs, at the threat of friction with China. It could easily provide logistical support for armed guerrilla actions by local Kazakhs in Chinese Kazakhstan, and it could do the same for the Uighurs. A major factor in this calculation will be the degree to which Kazakhstan expects to depend economically on China. Trade over the border is already growing, and western China could be an important market as well as a critical rail link to the east. In any case, Alma Ata will have to make relations with China a key element in its future foreign policy, however irrelevant this may have been in the Soviet period.

Kazakhstan will also need to determine the character of its relations as a state caught between China and Russia. If Russia and China turn out to enjoy basically good bilateral relations, then Kazakhstan's ethnic policies will be viewed as an irritant to Russia, which may seek to discourage them. If Sino-Russian relations are bad, however, Russia could conceivably encourage Kazakhstan to play the ethnic game in Xinjiang in order to weaken China. In any case, as separatism among ethnic minorities grows in China, as it inevitably will, what position will Russia take? Very possibly, it might welcome a process of breakaway nationalities, in the hope of weakening China as a rival. In either case, Alma Ata's policies will be greatly influenced by its intermediary role in the region.

MONGOLIA

A significant community of Kazakhs live in Mongolia, most of them in flight from the horrors of collectivization. Conditions there have often been better than in Kazakhstan. Nazarbaev is encouraging them to return too, however; in July 1991, 170 Kazakhs got permission to leave Mongolia for Kazakhstan, a repatriation process strongly sup-

ported by the "Atameken" or "Fatherland" committee of the Kazakh Union of Writers.¹³ Mongolia, too, is happy to have them depart, since they are a potentially inassimilable Muslim religious/cultural intrusion into Buddhist Mongolian society. Apart from religious differences, the chances are good that over the longer run Kazakhstan will find much in common with Mongolia as the two independent states look for allies against the two great powers they are wedged between.

TURKEY

Turkey has long been a refuge for Kazakhs fleeing conditions in the Russian/Soviet empire. Perhaps 130,000 Kazakhs currently live in Turkey, but Nazarbaev wishes to encourage them to return home. Kazakhstan seeks close ties with Turkey, however, and has reportedly already sent 320 Kazakh students to Turkey to familiarize themselves with the country and to facilitate future ties with Ankara. Kazakhstan also finds itself courted by rival Muslim states such as Saudi Arabia and Iran; the oil-rich states will be potentially important to its future economic development, so here too, Alma Ata will be interested in keeping its Muslim credentials burnished.

RIVALRY WITH UZBEKISTAN

Within Central Asia, Kazakhstan's largest rival is Uzbekistan. What Uzbekistan lacks in natural resources and size it makes up in part with a larger, better educated, and more experienced native population that has had greater voice over its own development than has Kazakhstan. It also enjoys the weight of history as the center of Central Asian civilization. In the Soviet period, Tashkent, as the preeminent city of Central Asia for so many decades, developed much experience in international relations, especially as a center for Moscow's Third World relations. This rivalry for leadership in Central Asia suggests that Pan-Turkism will inevitably become part of the coinage of that rivalry: which state will operate as "leader" of the Central Asian Turks? Unfortunately for the Uzbeks, they—more than any other nationality in the region—enjoy a reputation as "expansionists" and "chauvinists," which may cause the other republics to lean more toward Kazakhstan as "leader" of the Central Asian region. Nazarbaev has reportedly already moved to establish

¹³See *Radio Liberty Daily Report*, 29 July 1991.

close ties with President Mutalibov of Azerbaijan, perhaps partly as a flanking move around Uzbekistan.

The dynamics of regional politics would suggest that either Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan will try to take on a more radical mantle as defender of Muslim and Turkic rights in the region, using those ideologies to enhance its own influence and power. Since Kazakhstan is more dependent on good relations with Russia than Uzbekistan is, it may be less willing to play the radical. The Kazakhs historically have prided themselves on their distinctive, nomadic-based culture, opposing the Islamic and Pan-Turkic ideologies that dominated much of pre-Bolshevik Central Asian politics—then strongly dominated by the Tatars of the Russian Empire. On the other hand, should Kazakh relations with Russia severely deteriorate in the future, it might spearhead a Central Asian opposition to Russia. This rivalry is only now emerging—and for the first time in history. Its potential direction is still far from clear, and we have little precedent on which to base speculation.

If a greater move toward unity among the Central Asian republics does not take place, it is possible that these states might come to align themselves with different protectors. If Kazakhstan remains close to Russia, for example, might some of the other republics drift more toward Turkey, or even Iran, Pakistan, or China? International politics have not yet made their mark upon Central Asia, although several contenders at least—Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia—are already making bids. More contenders could well emerge. For example, Ukraine cannot be excluded as a potential ally to any Central Asian state that is on poor terms with Russia.

5. TAJIKISTAN

The future of Tajikistan is likely to differ sharply from that of the other Central Asian republics, on ethnic, religious, and geopolitical grounds.

The Tajiks have been an integral part of classic Central Asian culture for the past one thousand years or more. The Persian language (from which Tajik scarcely differs) has been the primary vehicle of that culture, even though the Turkic peoples of the region dominated the governmental, military, and administrative side of the region's various states. The Tajiks and their preeminently urban culture were long grouped by the West with urban Turkic culture under the single name "Sarts," or urban people of Turkistan, in distinction to the nomadic peoples. These urban peoples were usually bilingual, speaking Persian and Turkic, as many are still today, especially in the old cities of Samarkand and Bokhara.

With the emergence of independent republics, however, the Tajiks, like other Central Asian nationalities, have had seventy years of "independent" existence that has tended to firm up an identity that was less distinct in the past. The clear linguistic difference with the surrounding Turkic peoples (whose language is totally unrelated) lends the Tajiks a greater ethnic distinctiveness, one that has grown with time. The Tajiks are also known for their disinclination to migrate at all within the Soviet Union, and they retain a highly compact and distinctive culture. They have been among the most anti-Russian of any Central Asian people, creating an uneasy atmosphere in recent years in the republic that has led to an early exodus of many Russians (figures unavailable).

The Uzbeks constitute the greatest rivals to the Tajiks today. The fact that 20.5 percent of all Tajiks live in Uzbekistan weakens the ethnic clout of the Tajiks in their own republic, where 1989 population figures show a total population of 5 million in the republic, of which 3.1 million were Tajiks, 1.2 million were Uzbeks, and 400,000 were Slavs (the latter figure representing a dramatic drop).¹ This mix serves to create significant ethnic tension. (See discussion of the political activity of the Tajik minority in Uzbekistan in Section 2.). One possibility, of course, would be some kind of population exchange,

¹*Natsional'nyi Sostav Naseleniya*, p. 90.

but such an arrangement would be highly destabilizing. A genuine federation in the region might be a useful vehicle whereby the crazy-quilt patterns of rival ethnicities could be politically resolved. Otherwise, the Tajiks are left surrounded by Turks to the east, west, and north, a difference exacerbated by their own growing attention to their Persian roots. Today, Uzbekistan constitutes the greatest single threat to Tajik culture and independence.

But the southern border of Tajikistan, shared with Afghanistan, presents a very different situation. Northern Afghanistan is primarily peopled by Tajiks and Uzbeks, in distinction to the dominant Pashtuns of Afghanistan who mostly live farther south. The Tajik population of Afghanistan is greater than that of Tajikistan itself. Ironically, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—that sought to preserve communist control of that country—also served to facilitate awareness and contact between the two Tajik populations. Today, with an independent mujahidin government in Kabul, and Tajikistan increasingly able to develop its own independent foreign policy, Tajikistan and Afghanistan will develop much closer relations. Given the overall dissatisfaction of the non-Pashtuns with Pashtun rule in Afghanistan, one cannot rule out the possibility of a breakaway movement in northern Afghanistan that could lead to the unification of the Afghan Tajiks with Tajikistan and the Afghan Uzbeks with Uzbekistan. The Tajiks of Afghanistan are widely scattered throughout that country, but there are major communities in the north.

If resurgent Tajik nationalism may sharply reorient Tajikistan away from the Soviet/Turkic north to the Afghan/Tajik south, the Tajiks are also intensely interested in developing closer relations with Iran as the natural “center” of Persian culture. The Tajiks plan to abandon the Cyrillic alphabet imposed upon them and return to the Arabic alphabet, which is used to write Persian in Iran and Afghanistan. Ties with Iran have grown markedly as Iran has dispatched several trade missions to Dushanbe and has opened an embassy.

Tajikistan is not, of course, contiguous with Iran, thus slightly complicating direct contacts. Nor are the Tajiks Shi'ite in religion, except for a small minority of some 100,000 Isma'ilis (who differ from the Iranian mainstream “Twelver” Shi'a).² The ties of Persian culture are nonetheless growing ever stronger, as the Iranians themselves find new stimulus to nationalism in the “discovery” of Persian brothers inside the old Soviet Union. The interrelationship among the Persians of Iran, the Tajiks of Afghanistan, and the Tajiks of Tajiki-

²Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, p. 13.

stan may develop a complex new triangular character. The two Tajik groups may eventually feel closer to each other than to Iran, and some kind of three-way rivalry could emerge. More likely, however, will be the emergence of some kind of feeling of Persian unity against dominant Turkic and Pashtun neighbors. As elsewhere in Central Asia, a high degree of political and social fluidity now exists, generating new kinds of geopolitical relationships that were not thinkable before.

Despite the Sunni character of the Tajik population, it is nonetheless interesting to note that the first Islamic political party to emerge in Central Asia, the Islamic Renaissance Party, has demonstrated greater strength in Tajikistan than in any other republic. During the mid-1991 uprising against the Communist Party of Tajikistan, and even more during the spring 1992 uprising challenging the old power elite, the Renaissance Party played a highly significant role in the demonstrations against the Communist Party. The Islamic leader of the movement established for the first time in Central Asia clerical prominence in local politics, and he assumed a significant role within the new Tajik government in May 1992.

The reasons for this phenomenon are important to consider as possible indicators of greater Islamic involvement in Central Asian politics in the future. First, despite its non-Shi'a character, Tajikistan may demonstrate a significant susceptibility to the politicization of Islam that so vividly characterizes Iran. The Iranian message, after all, has never been a purely Shi'ite one. The Ayatollah Khomeini consistently claimed that the Iranian revolution possessed a universal character valid for all Muslims: the application of broad Islamic principles to the politics of revolution and reform. It may well be that Tajikistan's strong cultural orientation toward Iran has strengthened its susceptibility to the Iranian political vision—at least in part. If that is the case, then there might be grounds to believe that the Iranian message could find partial resonance over time in other republics of Central Asia as well—even though it is very unlikely to come to power.

The final victory of strong fundamentalist mujahidin groups in Afghanistan during the long struggle against Soviet occupation and the communist regime of Najibullah has also strengthened the Tajiks. The most effective commander among the mujahidin, Ahmed Shah Masud, is a Tajik; he maintained contacts over the border with Tajikistan during the long civil war and is now the chief military power in the new Afghan government. These fundamentalist mujahidin groups have strong interest in the Tajik population in the former Soviet Union, especially now that Soviet Tajikistan has be-

come independent. This strain of Sunni fundamentalist thinking will doubtless have its impact upon the future political life of Tajikistan.

The role of Tajikistan in Central Asian politics will thus be a distinct one. Tajikistan, along with all the other former republics, has joined the Commonwealth of Independent States. As the poorest and most isolated republic of the former USSR, Tajikistan can ill afford to further isolate itself by cutting any economic ties anywhere. It will be heavily dependent on other states for nearly all its agricultural and industrial commodities. It possesses major hydroelectric potential, however, that will be a useful commodity in trade with neighboring republics. If a future Central Asian federation should develop (a "neo-Turkestan"), Tajikistan will almost surely be compelled to join it, despite its ethnic differences with all the other Turkic states of the area. It may be hard for it to gain equal status within that grouping, given its small size and ethnic character. Uzbeks, too, are often dismissive of Tajik concerns for preserving their ethnic distinctiveness, saying that the Tajiks will have "little choice" in the matter in conforming to the policies of the Turkic majority.

For all these reasons, Tajikistan will be especially inclined to seek ties with the rest of the world. It will particularly seek to develop major trade ties south with Afghanistan—if that country can remain stable and peaceful. Afghanistan offers Tajikistan a ready source of agricultural produce and, ultimately, overland access down to the well-developed markets of Kabul and Pakistan and to the Indian Ocean.

Tajikistan's relations with Afghanistan could be highly destabilizing, however. If the future politics of the new mujahidin-led government in Kabul give rise to serious clashes between the "northerners," i.e., the Tajiks and the Uzbeks on the one hand and the long-dominant Pashtuns on the other, resulting in a civil war, the possibility that northern Afghanistan might seek its own independence cannot be excluded. The large Tajik population there will be especially attractive to a Tajikistan that already feels itself isolated in a sea of Turks. A union of these forces would create a solid Persian-speaking belt, from the borders of China across northern Afghanistan and Iran and on to the Gulf, counterpoised against a Turkic belt to the north.³

³The breakup of Afghanistan would also have severe consequences for Pakistan, possibly leading to the breakaway of the Northwest Frontier Province with its Pashtun majority, which would then unite with the rump Pashtun state of Afghanistan. The Baluch of Pakistan would likewise seize the opportunity to unite with their Baluchi brethren in Iran and Afghanistan.

6. TURKMENISTAN

Turkmenistan has been the most quiescent republic in political terms of all the republics of the former Soviet Union. It has enjoyed less glasnost and less perestroika, and its Communist Party has undergone the least evolution of all the Central Asian states. It still maintains a highly conservative social and political structure, and one of the strictest systems of political control in Central Asia.

Turkmenistan's conservatism springs from its highly distinctive character within the Central Asian context. The Turkmen have essentially been rural and nomadic, with a highly tribal structure dominating political and social life. Tribal affiliation and loyalty are more important than any national sense of cohesion. As in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, a distinct tribe—in this case the Tekke—has tended to dominate the political scene, including the Communist Party.

There are no independent political parties in Turkmenistan yet, and only one nationalist informal organization has emerged in any strength, Agzybirlik or "Unanimity." The old Turkmen Communist Party structure is not likely to be displaced as readily in Turkmenistan as it was in the other Central Asian republics.

The Turkmen are also ethnically distinct from the other Central Asian Turks. Linguistically, Turkmen is one of the Oghuz Turkic languages, related more closely to Azerbaijani and the Turkish of Turkey than it is to Uzbek or Kazakh Turkish. Turkmen feel a strong sense of nomadic superiority over other Central Asians and have had relatively little to do with them. They were converted to Islam earlier than other nomadic Central Asian groups (in the twelfth century), primarily through the vehicle of the Sufi movement of mystical brotherhoods—and that movement maintains its strength today. Official Islam has been extremely weak in Turkmenistan and nearly destroyed by communist rule. Unofficial Islam has been strong and growing. Anti-Russian feeling remains a significant part of Turkmen nationalism to this day.¹

This distinctive cultural pattern will have some influence on the relationship of the Turkmen to the rest of the region. First, the Turkmen are less likely to be drawn toward a Turkestani or Central Asian union than the other Central Asian Turks. It is unlikely that

¹Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, pp. 93–106.

they will resist membership if such a creation comes into being, but they will never represent a major political force within the Central Asian grouping.

Second, the Turkmen will pursue closer ties with Azerbaijan and Turkey, due to both ethnic and geographical proximity. Turkmenistan is, of course, divided from Azerbaijan by the Caspian Sea. Trade with Azerbaijan can be only by ship or air. The Turkmen president, Saparmurad Niyazov, paid a state visit to Turkey in December 1991, indicating his interest in close cooperation with Ankara.

Turkmenistan also has a large border with Iran. A significant Turkmen population lives across that border, an estimated 500,000 in 1977 that must be approaching a million today, given the Turkmen's high growth rate.² This population of Turkmen could be a potential breakaway element from Iran if nationalist-separatist feelings should grow among it. Turkmen relations with Iran have never been close, due to the Sunni-Shi'a split between the two peoples. On the other hand, since their revolution the Iranians have actively sought to propagate Islamic politics within Turkmenistan, and this may contribute to a more politically active brand of Islam in the future. Islam remains a strong factor in the Turkmen sense of self-identification, in contrast to the Kazakhs. Tehran has also pursued a policy of cultivating political ties with Turkmenistan since the collapse of the USSR. The Turkmen are likely to remain far closer to Turkey politically than to Iran, but Iran has the advantage of the long contiguous border with Turkmenistan, and the Turkmen would be wise to maintain good ties with any neighbor to help reduce their considerable isolation. Rail ties, furthermore, will soon link Turkmenistan with Iran, giving access to the Persian Gulf, a critical gateway to the outside world.

Turkmenistan also has a sizable border with Afghanistan, but there is no large Turkmen population on the Afghan side. In principle, Turkmenistan could eventually tie in to an Afghan overland connection to Kabul, Pakistan, and the Indian Ocean.

Turkmenistan possesses major gas and oil reserves that from a commercial point of view are located far from the urban centers of Central Asia. These resources will nonetheless be best exploited commercially through pipelines that traverse Russia, rather than Iran, given the likely Western reluctance at this point to invest in projects that would require transit of Iran, which still enjoys an image of political insta-

²Patricia J. Higgins, "Minority-State Relations in Contemporary Iran," in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (eds.), *The State, Religion and Ethnic Politics, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 1986, p. 178.

bility and radicalism. Given the depth of the Caspian Sea, a pipeline across it to Azerbaijan and on to the Black Sea is not commercially feasible. Turkmenistan's gas and oil reserves will also be more attractive to Russia and Ukraine rather than to Iran, which has its own oil and gas. But Turkmenistan's oil and gas wealth, plus its small population, give it the highest per-capita income of any Central Asian state.

7. ECONOMIC ISSUES

TRADE ISSUES

All Central Asian governments are eager to expand their trade options and transport links independent of Russia. High on the list of interests is the completion of rail links from Beijing to Istanbul via Urumchi, Alma Ata, Bishkek, Tashkent, Ashkhabad, Tehran, and Istanbul. This will help overcome the land-locked character of all the Central Asian states and provide access to the Persian Gulf and even the Mediterranean. A pact between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan has already been signed to this end, and others are under way. Another option is road access to the Indian Ocean via Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan, China, and the Chinese-Pakistani Karakorum Pass south through Pakistan. A third road option is via Afghanistan through Kabul to Pakistan and on to the Indian Ocean. The Uighur region of Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang province) is of great interest to Uzbekistan, particularly because of the new oil finds there. The opening of Central Asia to the world now makes possible a restoration of the classical geopolitical concept of Central Asia and its Silk Route—a major East-West highway for centuries in the Middle Ages and before. Turkey and Iran will also benefit from transportation links to the East as far as China and the Indian subcontinent now that the political barriers of over a century have crumbled.

With independence come new demands for greater self-sufficiency. No one expects that the republics can become truly self-sufficient—indeed, it would be foolish to slip back into the old Soviet trap of the quest for autarky. Economic independence means freedom to chart one's own economic relationships in the world as opposed to the rigidities and diktats of a closed Soviet command economy. Under the Soviet system, each republic played a narrow economic role within the entire Soviet economy, and a republic's particular role often served it poorly. In the eyes of Central Asians, the imperial economy was run without regard for the individual good of any given republic except Russia—despite Russian feelings that Russia suffered more than any other republic through its subventions to the others.

Uzbekistan is particularly determined to end its destructive dependence upon the monoculture of cotton production. Cotton has been the focus of the Uzbek economy as far back as tsarist days, and it was greatly stepped up during the Soviet period, at great cost to the over-

all economy as all other forms of agriculture gave way to cotton. Nearly all of the raw cotton was sent out for processing in other republics, requiring the Uzbeks to pay higher prices for finished cotton goods and to lose potential revenue from those goods that could have been processed locally. Almost all other industry in the republic was related to cotton: the manufacture of agricultural equipment and the fertilizer and chemical needs for cotton production.

The disastrous ecological repercussions of cotton monoculture have been well described elsewhere: the massive quantities of excessive fertilizers and pesticides poured upon the land have now poisoned the water tables, ruined much of the land, and are affecting the health of the citizenry; the profligate use of the waters of the Amu and Syr rivers to irrigate cotton lands cut off the water supply to the Aral Sea, which is now terminally drying up, producing thousands of miles of wasteland, blowing land-infesting salts for hundreds of miles, and changing the climate of the whole region. The health of all who live in the region has been severely affected. Child and female labor on the cotton fields has also taken a terrible toll in health and lost education. Most serious of all for the future, the monoculture has meant that Uzbekistan remained totally dependent upon the other republics for most commodities, placing it in a difficult position for future diversification of its economy.

Uzbek economists speak of the necessity of developing native industry to process Uzbek cotton at home. That this cotton is of relatively low quality by world standards—it is grown at a more northern latitude than most cotton produced in the world—will complicate Uzbekistan's export of cotton goods; the Soviet Union, in its mania for economic autarky, had insisted on self-sufficiency in cotton, regardless of its quality. Uzbeks are also becoming increasingly aware of the overall low level of Soviet technology, thereby requiring them to seek technical assistance even from outside the framework of the new Commonwealth. For the time being, however, the economic straits of all the republics may assist the Uzbeks in being able to sell goods that are not competitive on the international market and hence more affordable within the Commonwealth.

Internationally, Uzbek ties are growing. Thirty joint ventures already existed in the republic in mid-1991. Tashkent is also aggressively developing political and economic ties with its immediate neighbors, as well as with several Arab states, Israel, India, the United States, and West European countries. Kazakhstan has also moved rapidly to establish a broad range of international ties. While Central Asia's diplomatic and trade ties are rapidly opening in prin-

principle with a broad range of states, there may not be much substance to those relations for quite some time, while they grope their way through a new world of Western-style economic relations. With extremely limited hard currency, barter may be an essential element of their trade outside the Commonwealth for some time to come.

FUTURE ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Although the political leadership of the Central Asian states may choose to maintain political independence, economic independence clearly is out of the question. In economic terms the four southern republics, excluding Kazakhstan, tend to form a contiguous economic unit with similar characteristics. More importantly, the region is linked by a common water supply system, a common electrical grid, and common use of minerals and pastureland.¹

Central Asia's greatest economic promise, apart from cotton, lies in its immense energy resources: its gas, oil, and hydroelectric power potential—apart from Kazakhstan's own rich oil and coal resources—make it one of the richest regions of the old Soviet Union; its natural gas resources are second only to Siberia. Gas resources, in the past almost exclusively piped to the European USSR, have major potential for a chemical industry in Central Asia. These energy resources, coupled with the large population resources, also make the region suitable for energy- and manpower-intensive industry. Since the European parts of the old USSR consumed 80 percent of the country's energy, the Central Asian republics are well positioned to contribute economically to Russia and especially Ukraine in return for manufactured goods.² Rational management of these shared regional resources will require close coordination among the southern republics.

The very similarity of the economies of the southern four republics, however, means that trade among them lacks complementarity and cannot meet most of their basic needs. The situation changes considerably, however, when Kazakhstan is added to the equation. Kazakhstan as an economy differs considerably from the other four republics; whereas the agriculture of the southern republics focuses on cotton and has a high potential for fruit production, Kazakhstan's agriculture concentrates on animal husbandry and cereal production. Unlike the other republics, Kazakhstan also possesses an important ferrous and nonferrous metal industry. Since the machine-building

¹Rumer, *Soviet Central Asia*, p. 20.

²*Ibid.*, p. 28.

potential of the four southern Central Asian states is highly circumscribed by the absence of steel, trade with Kazakhstan in this area shows much promise.³ North-south trade within Central Asia thus possesses some promise, although none of the republics produces much consumer goods, requiring major trade outside the region.

WATER RESOURCES

Water is one of the most critical elements for the future development of the Central Asian economy, and it is likely to be a source of friction in this immensely arid region. The abuse and waste of precious water resources in the old Soviet Union led to the now irreversible loss of the Aral Sea, with major impact on the ecology of several republics. Water resources are also unequally distributed among the republics, with four-fifths of the water rising in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, states that make up only one quarter of the land area of the four southern republics. There are incompatible patterns of water usage between irrigation and hydroelectric power generation, and this will require adjudication. With burgeoning population and new industrial plans, water will become an increasingly sought-after commodity in the region.⁴ If the republics cannot cooperate or come to be on bad terms with each other, water could well become a weapon in the hands of these two small republics—both of which feel the greatest grievances toward Uzbekistan. Hopefully, the hard facts of interdependence will serve to integrate the economies and establish joint resource planning.

The Central Asian republics have long been interested in a scheme from the nineteenth century that calls for the diversion of Siberian river waters to Central Asia to meet its growing needs. The efficacy and cost of such a project has been debated in the Soviet Union for many decades. Rising nationalist and ecological impulses in Russia have grown increasingly opposed to the idea, however, and today there is no chance that an independent Russia will ever permit diversion of its Siberian rivers—with its uncertain ecological impact—to service distant and independent Muslim states.

RELATIONSHIP WITHIN THE COMMONWEALTH

In view of the poor economies of all the former republics of the USSR and their limited abilities to earn hard currency, trade within the

³Ibid., pp. 20, 49.

⁴Ibid., pp. 77–79.

framework of the new Commonwealth would seem to be essential for a long period to come. Although no one has openly said so, the Central Asian leadership has surely been appalled at the rapid breakup of the Soviet Union. All the republics had deep grievances with the Center, but at least there were mechanisms, however inequitable, to meet the basic needs of all the republics. Now that the republics are on their own, future sources of goods, services, and economic interchange are much more uncertain.

Under independence, the old trading patterns among the various republics are likely to persist for some time out of force of habit, even as they move toward a more rationalized economic basis that will slowly evolve in new directions, augmented by the growing impact of the international economy. Economic chaos in the Central Asian republics is likely to be particularly intense, given their previous dependence on the Slavic republics for so many of their needs. Today the Slavic republics are likely to hoard their production for their own use or for hoped-for trade with external countries for hard currency. Central Asia thus remains quite isolated and faces serious economic difficulties in the long period of transition to new economic relations.

EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

Sources of capital investment within the region will remain a top priority, particularly as it was relatively discriminated against in terms of capital investment in the Soviet period. But where can capital be found? Surely not from Russia, intent upon its own developmental priorities. Most likely only the energy sector possesses enough drawing power to bring Western capital into a region going through a period of immense uncertainty. Few other resources have sufficient attraction to overcome the other uncertainties. South Korea and Japan might have special interests in getting in on the ground floor of new investment opportunities in the region and going for the long haul. Japan is refraining from major investment in the former Soviet Union until the territorial question of the Kurile Islands is resolved. South Korea has limited capital. West European capital is more likely to go for investment in Eastern Europe, Ukraine, and Russia. Foreign investment on a big scale in Central Asia by the major Western states *on purely economic grounds* would thus not seem promising.

Investment on political grounds, however, changes the equation somewhat. Turkey has political as well as economic reasons for cooperating in the region, but not a lot of capital. Iran also has strong political motives, but limited capital. The Arab states of the Gulf also

have political interest in Central Asia, and they have the capital. Thus there is a good chance that the Gulf Arabs will have special economic and political clout in the region in the future.

Central Asia is likewise interested in seeking assistance from IMF and the World Bank, but the problems of reordering their economies to meet these organizations' criteria are exceptionally difficult.

Central Asia faces virtually all of the economic problems that Russia is encountering, and some more as well. One advantage the region enjoyed in the Soviet period was its distance from Moscow, which permitted it greater economic latitude, retention of segments of its historic market—or bazaar—economy, and its good agricultural climate. These factors in principle can help speed the transition to market capitalism.

On the other hand, privatization presents severe problems since it entails potential ethnic clashes from the outset. Privatization produces winners and losers; historically in Central Asia, the dominant position of Russians and Ukrainians has given them the advantage in using the state mechanism to perpetuate their own strength. Old party hands will be reluctant to privatize in any case, but the interjection of ethnic conflict into the process will deter them even more from moving in this direction. Nearly all natives fear that privatization will work against them, unless they can restructure the process so that it benefits locals only. That too will increase strife with the local Slavic population. Many Uzbek economists further claim that privatization of agriculture—in a region that depends on centralized irrigation and where most peasants lack the equipment to take over private lands—means that this policy will be ineffective in the short term and will ultimately cause the farmland to be concentrated in the hands of a few private landowners similar to Latin America's *latifundias*.

The economic outlook for the short to medium term thus looks quite poor. At the least, the region can feed itself without major problems. But its modest industry depends on the presence of local Slavs, so production is bound to drop, at least initially, when Slavic specialists depart, voluntarily or involuntarily.⁵ The economy of the rest of the Commonwealth, too, is likely to get worse before it gets better in many respects. It does not look like external trade can possibly take up the slack of Central Asia's needs. Foreign aid will thus be very important to the standard of living over the short haul—and severe

⁵Economist Boris Rumer points out that those republics with more developed industry ironically are now less advantaged than those rich in raw materials, since there is a market for the latter but not for poor-quality industrial products.

living conditions can only help spawn extremism, including Islamic fundamentalism.

CONCLUSION

The Bolsheviks launched dozens of new “nations” within the USSR along a course of national development, a course they believed would be limited to purely superficial cultural manifestations in a multinational, internationalist Soviet environment. Whatever the “nations” may not have been at the outset, the logic of these new nations cannot now be denied. “Internationalism” is not an acceptable option for people deprived of the opportunity to experience their own necessary nationalist phase—emphasizing development of local ethnicity and culture—before they move into a more self-confident, self-assured, internationalist stage. And any attempts to impose internationalism, even in a more democratic context, will be viewed by most Central Asians as an attempt to deny them their heritage and to overlook their deep grievances from the past.

Many Russians have been living in the Central Asian republics simply for the sake of a good job. But now the natives are moving to take charge. Even those Russians who are educated and sensitive are still inclined to judge the growing manifestations of local nationalism, and even xenophobia, against some kind of “objective” criterion of logic that suggests such a slide to narrow nationalism is backward, unprogressive, and primitive. Sensitive Russians who value democratic ideals now speak of the need for all the peoples of the former Soviet Union to come to value human rights over national rights. It may make sense for Russians to speak of this higher form of consciousness. But what meaning does it have for the Kirgiz or Kazakhs, who have been systematically deprived of their own nationalism, ethnic self-expression, and self-fulfillment? Tolerance and internationalism will find few takers among those who are now out to build new nations on the basis of ethnic nationalism. There will not be a lot of room for nonnatives in the new calculus.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

THE CHARACTER OF AMERICAN INTERESTS

What is the character of American interests in Central Asia? In specific terms, they are relatively modest. Despite some economic attractions of the region—mostly oil—U.S. interests are primarily “negative” in the sense of seeking to avoid undesirable developments. In other words, if things go well in the region, U.S. interests are quite modest. But if things develop negatively, the damage to U.S. interests in the region could be quite significant.

American interests thus tend to fall into several categories. First is the interrelationship of Central Asia and Russia. As noted below, Russia will always remain the primary “republic” of interest to the United States by virtue of its size, population, economy, natural resources, human resources, military power, and general international influence. Russia is clearly the sole great power of the former Soviet Union. To the extent that the Central Asian republics can influence Russia’s policies, the United States will have an interest in them.

Most important, the republics’ policies can indirectly serve to encourage or moderate any potential Russian tendencies toward authoritarianism or expansionism. If the republics are hostile, chaotic, regionally disruptive, economically discriminatory, harsh in their treatment of local Russians, or threatening to Russia in any other form, the chances grow for aggressive Russian responses. Renewed Russian efforts to re-create the old empire will excite strongly negative world opinion. It will be in the general interests of the world to encourage the evolution of good working relations between the Central Asian republics and Russia—even if the Western and American ability to influence those policies is modest.

Second, the United States has an interest in the ability of the Central Asian republics to affect positively or negatively the external states in the region. The very emergence of Central Asia onto the scene of world politics exerts a strong ripple effect on such states as Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and others, potentially unleashing regional conflict, wars, separatist or irredentist movements, and religious extremism that affect the broader stability and security of the surrounding states. The United States shares an interest with

the rest of the world, and especially the Asian states, in moderating any such negative trends.

Third, but of very high priority, is a general world interest in deterring nuclear proliferation in the Central Asian republics. While non-proliferation is a global issue, it obviously deserves special attention in the republics of the former Soviet Union where nuclear weapons have been deployed at some time and could possibly be acquired by republican governments in one fashion or another. Nor is the certain withdrawal of these weapons to Russia sufficient to ease fears, for expertise in producing nuclear weapons is likely to be widely dispersed throughout much of the technical elite of the former Soviet Union. Citizens of the new republics might be able to turn their expertise to the advantage of their new nations or, worse, make themselves available to other nations in the region. International concerns on this issue will not be readily dispersed.

Fourth, the United States will have a commercial interest in the raw materials of Central Asia. Kazakhstan ranks high in this capacity, especially with its oil reserves, as does Turkmenistan with its gas reserves.

Fifth and last, these states are geopolitically situated in an important region with far-reaching impact on its neighbors (see below). The emergence of stable and moderate governments able to contribute positively to the overall post-Cold War world is in everyone's interests.

THE ROLE OF AMERICAN INFLUENCE

The significance of the Soviet nationality question for U.S. interests and policy has undergone total transformation since the advent of Gorbachev and perestroika. For many decades, the ethnic fissures of the Soviet empire were of fascination to the U.S. policymaker because they were a profound Achilles heel in the body politic of the long-time ideological adversary. Ethnic conflict in the USSR was seen as desirable in Western eyes as a prime means of weakening hostile Soviet power. Foreigners who studied Soviet ethnic problems were perceived by the Soviets as doing so with malign intent.

Today the world is different. With the death of the ideological challenge of communism and with "new thinking" pervading Russian foreign policy, the West has now come to view ethnic conflict in the former USSR in a different light. To be sure, the right of the Baltic republics to independence is a long-standing Western position. But American thinking has been much more cautious when it comes to

the independence of other Soviet republics. As late as August 1991, President Bush personally informed the Ukrainian parliament that its national aspirations could perhaps best be met within the Union. The eruption of ethnic strife between Azerbaijan and Armenia exemplified broader concerns for the generic problems unleashed by nations breaking away toward independence from the old USSR. Washington was even more frankly worried about the potential susceptibility of the Muslim republics to fundamentalism and ethnic extremism.

Whatever the virtues of a reformed, enlightened, and unified Soviet Union might have been, such a thing is not to be. The nations of the world must now deal with the reality of at least fifteen new states emerging from the ruins of the former unitary state. No one knows at present where the ethnic aspirations of most of the peoples of the former Soviet Union will lead. There is a great deal of poison and vitriol in the system—the legacy of seventy years of communism—that will take at least a generation to eliminate from the body politic of each republic. Further outbursts of extremist nationalist expression will continue for a long time to come; conflict, even war, may erupt between some of these republics as new equations of power come into being and are tested. In most cases we are dealing with nations that have never before operated as independent national entities on the international political stage. The chances are that the shakedown process will last decades.

The shakedown process will furthermore not be significantly affected by the presence, or absence, of the new Commonwealth structure. The creation of the Commonwealth is unquestionably desirable; it can facilitate the development of new, more rational relationships among the former republics, and perhaps aid in the adjudication of conflict. But the United States should not hope that the Commonwealth can supplant or prevent the evolution of these complex, messy, evolving new interrelationships. Nor can U.S. relations with the Commonwealth—whatever that body may or may not become—ever be a substitute for direct U.S. bilateral relations with each of the republics if we wish to have influence. In almost no case should the Commonwealth be a vehicle for American policy, except perhaps in seeking the creation of a unified military policy in the republics, and even here direct U.S. influence on each of the republics will be far more meaningful.

In the end, the quest for national identity, the articulation of new national interests, the elaboration of new structures of friendships and alliances, and even the determination of new antagonists in each

republic will all be new and unavoidable. Each of the republics must tread the process in its own way, involving change, cooperation, and conflict in areas not always predictable now. The Commonwealth can never be a substitute for this process of individual national evolution, but it can perhaps assist it.

For the West, the wisest course will be to remain open-minded about these internal developments. Recognition of all the republics has been a wise step. We should have no preconceived notions about who is truly ready for independence or who deserves diplomatic recognition and who does not. The Union is gone, and our policies of recognition of these republics as sovereign states and the establishment of direct diplomatic relations with them will have no negative effect on the viability of the future Commonwealth. American approval and disapproval can be indicated through the course of bilateral relations, rather than through withholding formal recognition.

If internal conflict should grow in the region, the United States can cooperate through diplomatic means with Russia or any of the other republics to try to limit armed conflict. The United States can also turn to members of the international community and the peacekeeping instruments of the UN to help resolve confrontations that are regionally destabilizing.

Whatever the nature of U.S. bilateral ties with any of the Central Asian states or other republics, in the end Russia is still the dominant state and the single most important relationship for the United States; Russia's size, population, capabilities, international influence, and residual armed might and nuclear arsenal could hardly dictate otherwise. Thus more time, money, and energy will be expended in working with Russia than with any other former republic. And our relations with other republics will always include consideration of how they affect our relations with Russia, if at all. The new republics will need to be realistic about that.

The other critical element is speed. There is no substitute for developing a close understanding of the politics of each of the republics—and quickly. We are living through a period in world politics of immense volatility and fluidity, in which relationships that have never existed in history are being gradually forged. If there was ever an important time for constructive U.S. influence in this process, it is now. For one decade from now, many new relationships, attitudes, and even alliances will be more firmly established and harder to affect or turn around. Now is the time for U.S. influence to come to

bear in order to assist in the construction of positive new interrelationships in the region. U.S. influence is of course limited and not likely to be decisive in any instance. But it is more important to act constructively today, while we are "in at the creation," than at some period in the future when the new states have already gone a long way toward determining their course. Such a period of extraordinary geopolitical fluidity comes about only rarely in international relations.

As in its policies toward other countries, the United States will naturally need to express concerns for military policies, human rights, and democratic practices as important criteria for close working relations with these republics. But the United States will also hardly be the only power to influence their political and economic evolution. Even if Washington is unsympathetic to certain policies, other states may well play a role running counter to U.S. policy in Central Asia. Should Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, or other Muslim states seek to establish close working relations with many of the Muslim republics, for example, they too will influence the evolutionary process. So will European, Japanese, or Chinese diplomatic ties with emerging Central Asian states. It will be important from an intelligence and policy point of view for Washington to analyze the possible future patterns of geopolitical relationships in the region that independent Central Asian states will create, for they may be far-reaching and of unpredictable impact. Some of these emerging relationships are already becoming clear, such as with Turkey and Iran.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE MUSLIM SOUL OF CENTRAL ASIA

Just what is the geopolitical significance of the Central Asian republics in territorial terms? The emergence of Central Asia into the arena of world politics has already begun not only to stimulate the ethnic interests of Turkey and the contiguous geopolitical interests of Iran, but to provoke the interest of the Muslim world at large. At a rare juncture in Muslim history, six new Muslim states have in effect just appeared on the world scene in a region that many decades ago played an integral part in the history of Islamic culture. The impact of these states on overall Muslim world politics is not yet clear.

At the outset, however, clearly the Turkic role in international Muslim politics is permanently enhanced. Turkey previously had been the lone ethnic Turkic state in the larger Muslim world; today its impact is increased by the Central Asian republics that grant Turkey

a special place in their international vision.¹ Secondly, with the emergence of the new Turkic states, the net weight of the Arab states in international Muslim politics has also decreased relative to what it once was. The Arab states have slowly begun to recognize this reality. A wholesale reorientation of Muslim politics is under way: for seventy years Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan were at the northern periphery of the Muslim world, but today they are closer to the center of that world.

The Arab world, for its own geopolitical reasons, was in fact slow to recognize the significance of the emergence of Central Asia. Long dependent upon the Soviet Union as a source of weapons, training, diplomatic support, and strategic counterbalance to the United States in the Arab-Israeli confrontation, most of the Arab world initially could see nothing but bad in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Even Arab states well disposed toward the United States were not altogether happy at the prospect of the United States dominating a unipolar world, thereby automatically diminishing the options of all other states. Most Arab states therefore were slow to recognize anything positive in this striking new geopolitical convulsion.

These perceptions have slowly begun to shift, however. In the view of a number of Arab commentators, the United States is rapidly trying to turn the new situation among the states of the old Soviet Union to its own advantage, particularly to deny the Muslim republics military power and especially nuclear weapons. The significance of a Kazakhstan with modern weaponry, including tactical nuclear weapons, is not lost on an Arab world that has so long sought advanced weaponry from the USSR. The Arab states are also concerned about the position of the new states on the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially since several of them have already established some contact with Israel. (The ability of the new states to establish ties with Israel was, of course, an immediate symbol of the radical new foreign policy directions made possible by the break with Moscow's long-term Arabo-centric policies. Indeed, the very act of establishing ties with Israel was symbolic of their new independence.) Arab commentators now point up the importance of establishing close diplomatic ties with the Central Asian states and using Arab economic leverage to influence their foreign policy orientation. In more radical terms, some discussion is also taking place about the need to create a new Muslim bloc

¹See the recent RAND study on the future geopolitical orientation of Turkey: Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey Faces East: New Orientations Towards the Middle East and the Old Soviet Union*, RAND, R-4232-AF/A, forthcoming.

that might be able to resist Western domination of the new international military, political, and economic order.²

The Central Asian states will therefore be buffeted by competing interests trying to draw them into a variety of geopolitical or ideological groupings; these groupings could include the following:

- A Turkic grouping against Iran.
- A Turko-Iranian grouping against the Arab states.
- An "Islamistan" grouping of Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, quite distinct from the Arab world and India.
- A broader Muslim world grouping, including Central Asia, that may or may not be directed against the West or against Israel.

If Central Asia is unable to find, or is effectively denied, significant benefits in the new Commonwealth of Independent States and in its contacts with the West, a reversion to an intensified Muslim identity and political orientation toward the Muslim world could represent an alternative.³ But it would be erroneous to think of the Central Asian states' options as either/or between the Commonwealth and the Muslim world. By any standard, these republics will be vastly enhancing their ties with the Muslim world and increasingly realizing their Muslim character, even while maintaining economic ties with many of the other former republics of the Soviet Union and with the West.

Central Asia's decisions about its political and economic orientations will be powerfully influenced by the policies of Western states toward them. At this point, participation in an anti-Western bloc is an alien concept to them. They have been imprisoned in an anti-Western ideological state for three quarters of a century and have little reason to wish to perpetuate the past. They will be open toward the West unless events force them to change this outlook. At this point they have everything to gain by being as open as possible to the West, and indeed to all comers. But it would be artificial for the West to attempt

²See, for example, Egyptian commentary by *Al-Ahram's* assistant editor Salaheddin Hafez, and Gulf commentary in *Akhbar Al-Khalij*, by Sayyed Zahra, in *Mideast Mirror*, 2 January 1992.

³Some commentators and political groups in the Soviet Muslim republics took exception, for example, to the U.S. attack on Iraq during the Gulf War in early 1991; their sympathies lay with Iraq as a fellow Muslim state. Here too, expression of sympathy for Iraq was also a tactical statement toward Moscow, which had not yet granted true independence to these states. For the internal Soviet politics of the Gulf War, see Graham E. Fuller, "Moscow and the Gulf War," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1991.

to discourage the Central Asian republics from forging ties with the Islamic world they have been barred from for so long. Those ties are part of the Central Asian identity quest. The West needs to be aware of these intellectual and ideological trends in the region and understand that they leave the Central Asian states no longer isolated.

Conflict among the Central Asian states, too, may well bring outside regional intervention. On ethnic grounds Iran will strongly support Tajikistan in any confrontation with other regional states and could come into conflict with Turkey if it were to become a future champion of the Turkic republics against Tajikistan. Afghanistan is another volatile factor, given its high number of Tajiks, who actually outnumber the Tajiks in Tajikistan. Afghanistan also contains 2.5 million Uzbeks, according to Uzbek statistics. If internal Afghan politics lead to continued strife between the long-dominant Pashtuns in the south and the Tajiks and Uzbeks in the north, Afghanistan could conceivably break up, with the northern half seeking to combine with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. A far more powerful Tajikistan would emerge that would be strongly oriented to Iran, located as it is among Turkic states.

Any partition of Afghanistan would have serious consequences for Pakistan: it would probably reignite the longtime Afghan Pashtun quest for unity with the Pakistani Pashtuns, who dominate Pakistan's northwest frontier. The breakup of Pakistan would ensue, with incalculable effects on India. The Baluch people, who are divided—reminiscent of the Kurds—among three states, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran, would also then seek to unite themselves by forming a new state with territory from all three.⁴ Yet other border changes could spontaneously emerge from this kind of wholesale shift of ethnic groupings.

The China-Central Asia-Iran-Turkey railroad line will strongly influence trade patterns, and will link Muslims on the Soviet and Chinese sides of the border. Chinese stability will be directly affected by growing Chinese Muslim interest in greater autonomy, if not independence, from Beijing—which directly encourages the quest for greater autonomy or independence by Tibet and parts of Inner Mongolia. The Central Asian issue is bound to significantly affect Russian-Chinese relations in the decade to come; it may divide them, or it may unite them against a perceived hostile Muslim belt.

⁴See Graham E. Fuller, "Afghanistan's Jagged Mosaic," *The New York Times*, 23 March 1992.

Indian ties with Central Asia are also likely to strengthen, first because India has already had good ties of long standing with the USSR, during which time it maintained contacts—and a consulate—in Central Asia. India will be anxious to protect its interests in Central Asia and to prevent Pakistan from establishing a monopoly over Central Asian relations. India will also seek to weaken the resurgence of any specifically “Islamic power” in Central Asia by making ties with India attractive—a geopolitical interest for India surpassing the economic importance of Central Asia.

While Pakistan has not traditionally had significant ties with the Central Asian republics because of long-time poor Soviet-Pakistani relations and the Afghan war, Pakistan—unlike India—is increasingly interested in strengthening all ties with Muslim states in the region, including Central Asia. Already there are those in Pakistan who speak of a new regional conglomeration of “Islamistan” that would stretch from Pakistan to Central Asia, including Afghanistan and Iran.

Turkey is now beginning to depart from its previous Ataturkist legacy of caution toward the external Turks (“dis Turkler”) to be the first to establish direct relations with all the new republics of the former Soviet Union. From the U.S. point of view, Turkey remains the most logical long-range connection for Central Asia; its moderate, secular, democratic, and free-market policies make it the single most desirable state in the Muslim world to exert influence over Central Asia.

Iran so far has not matched Turkey in influence in Central Asia, although it has moved quickly to establish diplomatic relations with all the new Muslim states and to reach other economic and cultural agreements with them as well. Iran created the Caspian Sea Cooperation Union, which includes Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Iran, and Azerbaijan, is headquartered in Tehran, and significantly omits Turkey by definition. While few Central Asian states are sympathetic to Tehran’s radical policies (except Tajikistan, which is drawn to Iran primarily because of their shared linguistic and cultural heritage and concern over Turkic power), Iran can be useful to them as simply another means of widening their options in their relations with the outside world. While initial American contacts with the Central Asian republics emphasized U.S. concern for the Islamic fundamentalist policies and intentions of Tehran, these warnings will be only partially heeded by the Central Asian governments; they distrust Islamic politics themselves, but they keenly need Iran for access south at a minimum. Iran will play an important role in their future simply by virtue of its physical location and the access it

affords to the Persian Gulf, Turkey, and the Indian Ocean. The long-sought Russian access to a warm-water port may now come only via Central Asia's new access to Iran.

The borders between the Central Asian republics have been fixed under Soviet power for well over half a century. But the liberation of the republics and their new freedom to fulfill nationalist foreign policies make uncertain any guarantee of the future borders of the region. Confederation or federation would be the wisest way to handle complex ethnic problems among the republics, but wisdom may not prevail. If the borders are revised or contested, constant low-key conflict—Balkan style—could come to characterize the region for many years. Such a development would tend to have minor direct impact on American interests, but it would condemn the republics to decades of economic stagnation and ensure the absence of foreign assistance. That is a formula for persistent turmoil, which prepares the ground for radicalism, including Islamic fundamentalism.

In the final analysis, the West's greatest interest is to ensure a smooth, stable, and moderate development of this newly emerging geopolitical region on the world scene. Russia's interests dictate the same. Central Asia is just that: it lies at the heart of the Asian continent. It therefore has the ability to disrupt its neighbors in all directions around Asia if it should turn into a region of chronic turmoil and discontent.

RAND/R-4219-USDP

