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6

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- 1 Contradictions in Soviet Socialism  
by Ernst Kux
- 28 Mullahs, Mujahidin, and Soviet Muslims  
by Alexandre Bennigsen
- BOOKS
- 45 Hellenic Time of Troubles  
by R. V. Burks
- 59 Whatever Happened to Eurocommunism?  
by Michael J. Sodaro
- 66 Soviet "Active Measures"  
by John J. Dziak
- 70 Exploring Afrocommunism  
by Michael Clough
- 75 Urban Policy in China  
by William T. Rowe
- 81 Beijing and the Superpowers  
by Steven I. Levine
- 87 CORRESPONDENCE
- 89 Index to Volume XXXIII

Cover: Pëtr Fedoseyev, Vice President of the USSR Academy of Sciences, awarded the Karl Marx Gold Medal in April 1983 for his writings on historical materialism and scientific communism. Photo by TASS from Sovfoto.

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# Mullahs, Mujahidin and Soviet Muslims

Alexandre Bennigsen

**T**he impact on Soviet Muslims of the war in Afghanistan and the Islamic Revolution in Iran has been the subject of considerable debate over the last few years. Soviet sources, as usual, provide only incomplete information. Some Western observers have taken the position that a destabilized Muslim world on the immediate borders of the USSR has had virtually no impact on Soviet Muslims, such is the advanced state of Soviet Central Asia's "modernization," secularization, and "social mobilization." By this reckoning, Soviet efforts to purge the Muslim Central Asian population of its Islamic consciousness have been broadly successful, and consequently Islam is no longer important in the makeup of the identity of Soviet Muslim elites (although it has greater influence among the more conservative masses).<sup>1</sup> Other observers insist that Islam remains a common denominator among the Turco-Iranian peoples of Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus.<sup>2</sup> This being the case, it is inconceivable that Soviet Muslims can remain unaffected by the turmoil just across their borders, and it is probable that information and ideas, particularly fundamentalist ones from Iran and Afghanistan, will continue to penetrate the borders of the USSR.

The debate often centers on the idea of "spillover." This idea illuminates less than it obscures for two reasons. First, it is not necessary for ideas to "spill" from Iran and Afghanistan into the USSR to have an effect; given the closed nature of Soviet society the merest drop can have an impact well in excess of its volume. Second, "spillover" implies that Soviet Central Asia is

somehow an empty vessel; in fact, Soviet Muslim territories—with their long Islamic tradition—are similar to the other parts of the Muslim world where a new upsurge of Islamic awareness is evident. This awareness among Soviet Muslims did not begin with the events in Iran but was in fact visible considerably earlier, being the result of local factors in Turkestan and the Caucasus. An Islamic religious revival (particularly noticeable in the activities of underground, or "parallel," Islamic organizations), a new pride in past glories, cautious manifestations of cultural nationalism, and a growing xenophobia all began to surface after Stalin's death. It would be a mistake to believe that events in Afghanistan and Iran are contributing to the closed society of Soviet Central Asia something that was not already there in substance. Their importance is that they have imparted additional energy and self-awareness to an Islamic milieu already characterized by considerable political dynamism and religious activity.

There can be little doubt that Soviet authorities are worried about the "Islamic problem." They understand that Islam is becoming more difficult to control in Central Asia and the Caucasus, that events in Afghanistan and Iran have made this situation worse, and that the worsening situation could be exploited by foreign powers. In a recent article about Soviet reactions to events in Iran during 1981, Yaacov Ro'i summarizes this concern:

*The fact that the republican party press has spelt out its anxieties so plainly clearly demonstrates a serious problem. That the central, all-Soviet media have not*

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<sup>1</sup>See, e.g., Martha Brill Olcott, "Soviet Islam and World Revolution," *World Politics* (Princeton, NJ), July 1982, pp. 487-505.

<sup>2</sup>This opinion, which happens to be that of the present author, is shared with other scholars, e.g., Michael Rywkin, *Moscow's Muslim Challenge*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, 1982.

yet addressed themselves directly to this question, and even deny the existence of any Muslim problem in the USSR, can hardly convince the analyst either of its non-existence or of official Soviet indifference to it.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, since 1981 the volume of material in the Soviet Central Asian news media that has been devoted to the "Islamic problem" has grown enormously, strongly suggesting a stimulus provided by occurrences in Afghanistan and Iran. This literature not only confirms the problem's existence, but also describes some of its aspects in detail. The analysis that follows is based primarily on such Soviet sources, mainly Caucasian and Central Asian periodicals.<sup>4</sup> It also draws on personal contacts with Soviet Muslims abroad; on the testimony of numerous foreign visitors to Central Asia in the period from 1982 to the present (these include Europeans, Americans, Muslims from different countries, and even a number of Afghans who have recently been in the USSR and have since

<sup>3</sup>Yaacov Ro'i, "The Impact of the Islamic Fundamentalist Revival of the Late 1970s on the Soviet View of Islam," in Yaacov Ro'i, Ed., *The USSR and the Muslim World*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1984, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup>There are now a number of good sources of translations of the Central Asian press. For this study, in addition to my own reading of the primary sources, I have used three in particular: Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *USSR Report, Political and Sociological Affairs, Central Asian Press Survey* (Washington, DC—hereafter *FBIS*); *The Central Asian Newsletter* of the Society for Central Asian Studies, Oxford; and Radio Liberty, *Digest of the Native Language Press in the USSR: Caucasian, Central Asian and Turkic* (Munich). The *FBIS* reports unfortunately do not give transliterations of the original titles of articles, which makes it somewhat more difficult to use for those who read the languages of Central Asia and wish to examine the original material.

defected); and on increasing evidence in Central Asian and Caucasian samizdat.

## New "Enemies"

Until 1980, Soviet authorities for the most part publicly dismissed the possibility of Central Asia's becoming contaminated from abroad. Moreover, when the Soviet media occasionally did allude to an external threat, the anti-Soviet influences were always identified as "Western imperialism" or "Zionism." Beginning in about 1982, however, the tendency to see only the West as the perpetrator and beneficiary of destabilization in Soviet Muslim territories changed significantly. Today Soviet observers frequently cite Middle Eastern influences as the most dangerous.

This new emphasis on the Middle East as a source of subversive ideas is exemplified in the works of Professor A. Doyev, holder of the chair of Scientific Atheism at Frunze University in Kirghizia. Doyev singles out such Islamic organizations as the Afghani Hezb-i Islami and Jamiat-i Islami, the Rabitat ul-Alam al-Islami of Mecca (which he denounces as a "terrorist organization"), the Syrian and Egyptian Ikhwan al-Muslimin ("Muslim Brothers"), and several Turkestani and Caucasian émigré groups in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Indonesia, the United States, and West Germany as ones seeking to spread their influence in Soviet Central Asia. He also points an accusing finger at radio broadcasts to Central Asia from Iran (Radio



Afghan freedom fighters of the Jamiat Islami group exult over capture of in the Kunar-Nuristan area near the Pakistani border; at right, Afghani Hekmatyar of the Hezbi-i Islami Party speaks at a Peshawar rally on April 1983.

Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences, Dec. 19, 1982. "Editorial in Kommunist," April 15, 1983, in *FBIS*, No. 4, 1983; and the article by Hekmatyar in the "Common Eastern Literature." During Stalin's time, any word was considered a dangerous heresy.

## Mullahs, Mujahidin, and Soviet Muslims

Gorgan) and Urumqi in the People's Republic of China.<sup>6</sup>

Soviet sources have focused on three main themes in discussing the Islamic threat. First, they argue, Islam is being used as an offensive instrument by foreign powers to incite Soviet Muslims against the Soviet system and against their Russian "elder brothers." For example, we read:

*Foreign circles preach pan-Islamic ideas and ideological subversion disguised as dogma; they interfere in the life of our society and spread hostility among Soviet nations.<sup>6</sup>*

Also:

*The number of foreign radio stations broadcasting religious lectures in the different languages of the Soviet nations has significantly increased during the last years. Imperialist forces exploiting events in Poland, in Afghanistan, and in Iran are working hard to reinforce religious propaganda.<sup>7</sup>*

Second, Soviet sources accuse foreign propaganda organs of attempting to show—implicitly in the case of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeyni's destruction of the Iranian communist left and explicitly in the case of Soviet attempts to eliminate Islamic resistance forces in Afghanistan—that Islam and Marxism are inherently incompatible. This is not a message the Soviet authorities want their Muslim population to accept, and consequently they have spent a good deal of time and effort to refute it. A recent statement by a Professor A. Ortiqov of Tashkent University is typical:

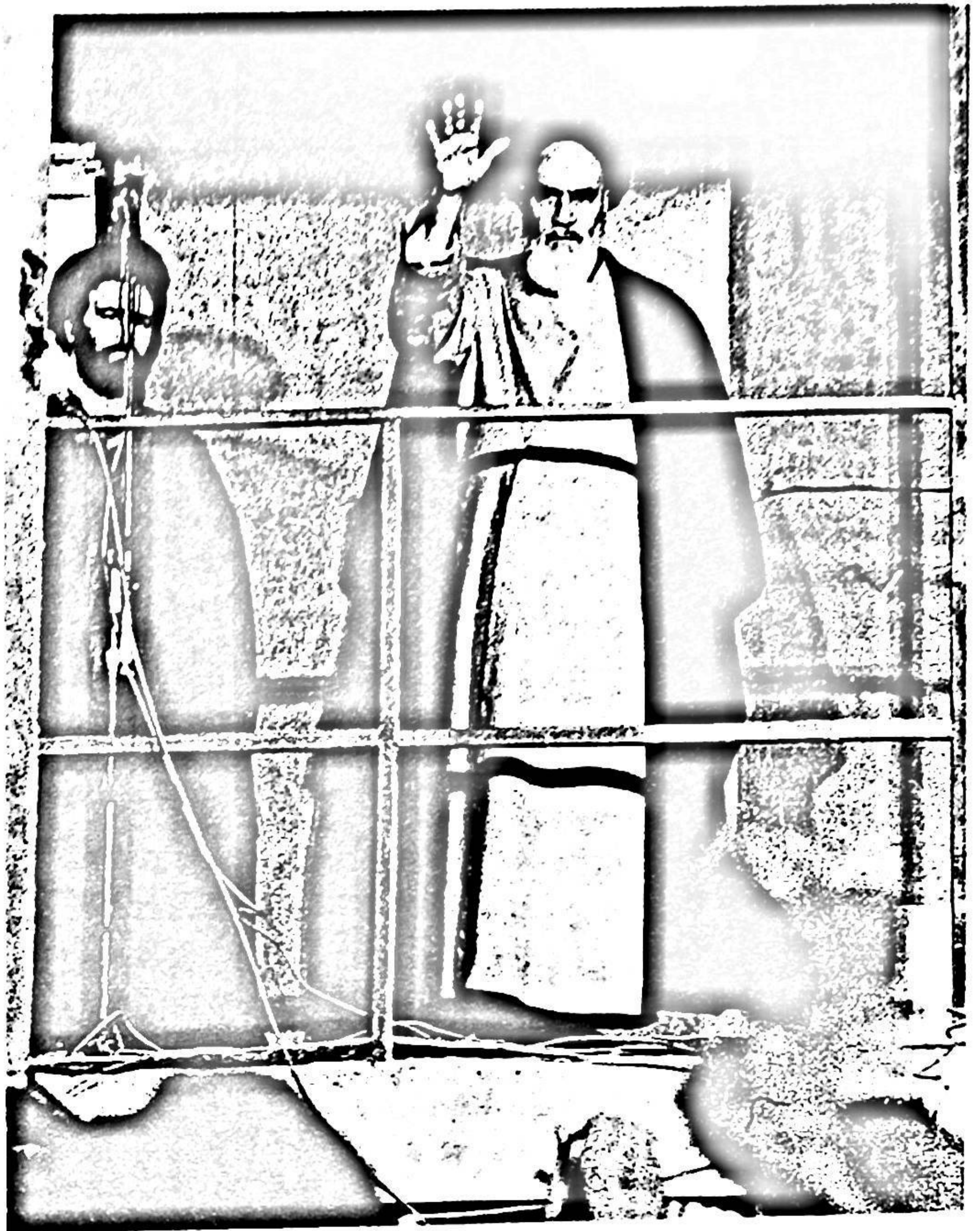
*[Our] enemies and adversaries in the Near and Middle East distort the facts in order to negate Uzbekistan's achievements. They spread the lie that Leninism is unacceptable to Muslims and is incompatible with Islam. They attempt to arouse religious sensibilities and to imbue them with anti-Soviet feelings.... They are unscrupulously falsifying the present situation of Islam in the USSR.<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>6</sup>A. Doyev, "Islam and Atheistic Work," *Kommunist* (Frunze), No. 2, 1984, pp. 68-74.

<sup>7</sup>Major General N. Ovezov, deputy chairman of the KGB of the Turkmen SSR on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the CHEKA, *Sovet Türkmenistany* (Ashkhabad), Dec. 19, 1982.

<sup>8</sup>Editorial in *Kommunist* (Baku), Jan. 28, 1983.

<sup>9</sup>A. Ortiqov, "The Leninist Friendship of Peoples," *Sovet Özbekistoni* (Tashkent), Feb. 15, 1983, in *FBIS*, July 20, 1983, p. 37. This item was a report at a conference held in Tashkent on Feb. 16-17, 1983, on the theme of "Brotherhood and Cooperation Between Soviet Peoples." Both the Ortiqov article and that of Doyev (in 5 above) were cited in an excellent analysis, "Soviets Step Up the Propaganda War," *Arabia* (London), No. 36, July 1984, p. 37.



*Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeyni and his Islamic Revolution have suppressed Iran's communist movement and also pose a threat of revolutionary contagion to Moscow's Muslim subjects in Central Asia.*

—Ledru/SYGMA.

Third, with respect to current events in Iran and Afghanistan, Soviet sources insist that Islam there is primarily the refuge of "fanatics" and other anti-Soviet elements, and that these extremists are encouraged by foreign agents. Explicit in this line of argument is the fear that the Afghan example might inspire similar "fanatics" within the USSR. Professor Anvar Qasimov of Tashkent University spoke to this danger:

*... the Afghan counterrevolutionaries' goal is the overthrow of the [Afghan] government and the establishment of either a monarchy or a conservative Islamic republic. [Afghan] clerics ... back the counterrevolutionaries and attempt to promote a "holy war" under the green banner of Islam.... Counterrevolutionary ideologists accuse the Afghanistan People's Democratic Party of planning to eradicate Islam, of burning mosques and holy books, of banning religious rites, and of teaching atheism in the schools.... Enemy propaganda claims the USSR invaded Afghanistan in order to establish its own institutions in that country. These lies have an effect on backward and*

politically unenlightened segments of the [Soviet] population.... Bourgeois propaganda maligns Soviet policy towards the nationalities in Central Asia. It claims that religious rites are being banned ... and talks about the russification of Muslim peoples.... Although all Soviet nationalities ... are united in a single family, it must never be forgotten that anticommunism, operating in the shadow of reactionary forces and conspiring with the vilest traitors of various religious organizations, will never surrender voluntarily.<sup>9</sup>

## Adverse Domestic Trends

These themes, emphasizing that the USSR's "Muslim problem" is being exacerbated by outside forces, are supplemented by an abundant literature, mostly from the last three or four years, that locates the causes of the problem mainly at home. Three phenomena, all predating the recent events in Afghanistan and Iran, have drawn special attention: the conjunction of Islamic beliefs and practices, on the one hand, and heightened nationalism, on the other; the related activity of underground ("parallel") Islamic organizations in the USSR; and the growing interest in Islam and the Muslim world abroad on the part of Soviet Muslim intellectuals.

"It is well known," wrote a Daghestani anti-religious specialist in 1983, "that religious survivals are tightly tied to nationalistic trends. The nationalistic survivals often take on a religious appearance (*obolochiki*), while religious survivals are propagandized under the flag of the defense of national traditions."<sup>10</sup> Thus, it is acknowledged, it is not easy to combat Islam without offending the national traditions of Soviet Muslims.<sup>11</sup> In a recent article, O. Redzhepova, senior scientific colleague of the Department of Philosophy and Law of the Turkmen Academy of Sciences and a frequent commentator on nationality and religious affairs in her republic, explicitly acknowledged that the overlapping of religious and nationalist trends has its domestic sources:

*We believe that nationalistic propaganda of imperialism helps to sustain and to stimulate the negative*

<sup>9</sup>Anvar Qasimov, "Crocodile Tears," *Sovet Özbekistoni*, Feb. 22, 1983, in *FBIS*, July 20, 1983, p. 42.

<sup>10</sup>S. Muslimov, "In Search of Persuasiveness—Some Pressing Problems of Atheistic Propaganda," *Sovetskiy Dagestan* (Makhach-Qala), No. 6, 1983, pp. 38-39. See also A. Aliyev, "Traditions, Society, the Times," *ibid.*, No. 4, 1982.

<sup>11</sup>Allaberdi Khayyidov and Amannazar Ashyrov, "The Writer, Islam, and Atheism," *Adabiyat va Sünghat* (Ashkhabad), Apr. 22, 1983, in *FBIS*, Aug. 23, 1983, p. 33.

*phenomena in the national relationships in the USSR. But we do not consider it the only reason.... Besides this external factor, there are also domestic contradictions and miscalculations (proshchety) that result in deviations (otstupleniya) from internationalism—which is the norm of the socialist way of life.<sup>12</sup>*

The confusion between the national and the religious is, of course, not a new problem in Islam, but the intensely national/religious experience of both the Iranians and the Afghanis has forced Soviet authorities to see that Islam and nationality are often inextricably tied. At the same time, Iranian and Afghan nationalism—as well as the "domestic contradictions" noted by Redzhepova—have prompted Central Asian and Caucasian Muslims to realize that religion and nationality need not be separated.

Indeed, the tendency of Soviet Central Asian and Caucasian literary figures to use themes that are implicitly, and on occasion openly, Islamic or nationalistic in flavor has accelerated since the beginning of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the war in Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup> Also more evident is a move to purge foreign—especially Russian—words from native vocabularies.<sup>14</sup> These and other indications of a reexamination of their roots (*mirasism*) were discernible among Central Asia's Muslims long before either Iran or Afghanistan erupted, but events in those two countries have certainly further stimulated such a reexamination.

Similarly, if we are to judge by the increase in Soviet denunciations over the last three years, the activities of "parallel" Islamic organizations in the USSR have increased remarkably, an expansion that may well be related to events in Iran and Afghanistan. Singled out for attacks are the activities of "self-appointed" (or

<sup>12</sup>See O. Redzhepova, "When the Arguments Are Missing," *Turkmenskaya Iskra* (Ashkhabad), June 30, 1984. Redzhepova's article sought to refute the argument in my article, "Soviet Islam since the Invasion of Afghanistan," *Central Asian Survey* (London), July 1982, pp. 65-78, which had suggested a connection between the Iranian and Afghan events and the increased Islamic activity in the USSR.

<sup>13</sup>For discussion of this trend, see Daniel C. Matuszewski, "The Turkic Past and the Soviet Future," *Problems of Communism* (Washington, DC), July-August 1982; William Fierman, "Two Young Uzbek Writers' Perspectives on Assimilation," *Central Asian Survey*, November 1983, pp. 63-78; and Tölegen Toqbergenov's review of Absattar Derbisaliev's book, *Shyngyrau Bulaqtar* (Deeply-rooted Sources) in *Qazaq Adabiyaty* (Alma-Ata), Nov. 26, 1982.

<sup>14</sup>On this subject, see Marie Broxup, "The Soviets in Afghanistan: The Anatomy of a Takeover," *Central Asian Survey*, April 1983, p. 84. Baku periodicals, especially the literary paper in Azeri, *Adabiyat va Injäsänät*, regularly publish information on the cultural life of Iranian Azerbaijan, works of southern Azerbaijani writers, and also poems by Soviet Azerbaijanis proclaiming their faith in the future unification of the two Azerbaijanis. See, for example, the article by Azeroglu in *Adabiyat va Injäsänät*, Dec. 3, 1982; the poem by Esmira Mirzaeva, *ibid.*, Mar. 4, 1983; and the article by Yashar Garaiev, *ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1983, in which he exalts the "common Eastern heritage" of northern and southern Azerbaijani literature. During Stalin's time, any mention of a "common heritage" in this regard was considered a dangerous heresy.



The tomb—near Bukhara—of Bahautdin Naqshband, founder of the Naqshbandi Sufi brotherhood, is one of the most revered “holy places” of Soviet Central Asia.

—Courtesy of the author.

“nonregistered”) mullahs,<sup>15</sup> clandestine religious schools and illegal mosques run by adepts of the Sufi orders,<sup>16</sup> and the activity surrounding “holy places.” The “holy places,” usually associated with the memory of a Sufi saint, are centers of pilgrimages for thousands of Soviet Muslims.

“The danger of ideological subversion,” writes an Uzbek agitprop expert in a discussion of the activities of unofficial Muslim clerics, “must not be underestimated.”<sup>17</sup> Writing in 1983, a Kazakh anti-religious expert notes that unsanctioned Muslim religious organizations are “much more sophisticated than before. This is due to the fact that among believers today we find not only culturally backward people but also people with secondary and even higher education.”<sup>18</sup> Regarding “holy places,” there has been a veritable flood of critical articles in the Soviet press over the last three years.<sup>19</sup> This is particularly true in Turkmenistan, which shares common borders with Afghanistan and Iran.<sup>20</sup>

The third trend emerging in the post-1980 period is an increased interest among educated Soviet Muslims (especially the younger generation) regarding Islam and the Muslim world abroad. Particularly worrisome to the authorities must be the increase in the number of youths and intellectuals showing political interest in the various revolutionary “neo-Islamic” movements of Iran, Algeria, and Libya. Although the last two movements are frequent recipients of Soviet largesse, So-

viet Muslim readers are warned that the ideology of these movements is reactionary and opposed to the ideas of scientific socialism, in spite of their “temporary anti-imperialistic character.”<sup>21</sup> The connection between Iran and Afghanistan and this new interest in Islam abroad was made explicit as early as 1980 by the head of the Azerbaijan KGB, Major-General Zia Yusif Zade, who denounced the “harmful influence of *imperialist propaganda*, of the ‘sectarian underground’” (a synonym for the Sufi brotherhoods), and of the “reactionary Muslim clergy” (another synonym for the Sufi adepts) on “certain representatives of our intelligentsia and young people.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Bess Brown, “The Phenomenon of Self-Appointed Mullahs,” *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* (Munich), RL 220/81, May 29, 1981. See also Muslimov, loc. cit., p. 37.

<sup>16</sup>See, e.g., *Sovet Özbekistoni*, Sept. 26, 1982; and B. Yalqabov and Yu. Yulin, “Charlatans,” *Turkenskaya Iskra*, Apr. 3, 1982.

<sup>17</sup>M. A. Usmanov, “Greater Effectiveness for Atheistic Education,” *Pravda Vostoka* (Tashkent), June 12, 1984.

<sup>18</sup>*Komsomol'skaya Pravda* (Moscow), June 11, 1983.

<sup>19</sup>See, e.g., V. A. Kuroyevod, *Religiya i tserkov' v Sovetskom gosudarstve* (Religion and Church in the Soviet State), Moscow, Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoy Literatury, 1981, pp. 199–200; *Muslims of the Soviet East* (Tashkent), No. 2, 1981, and No. 1, 1983.

<sup>20</sup>In particular, see M. G. Gapurov, first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan, “Forever in One Family,” *Turkenskaya Iskra*, Jan. 25, 1983; and S. Saparov, “The Real Face of the Ishan—the Truth about the Holy Places,” *ibid.*, Jan. 9, 1982.

<sup>21</sup>See T. Khydyrov and K. Bagdasarov, “Islam in the Plans of Anticommunism,” *ibid.*, Sept. 11, 1982.

<sup>22</sup>Major General Zia Yusif Zade, “Protecting the Country and the People,” *Bakinskiy Rabochiy* (Baku), Dec. 19, 1980, emphasis added.

## Channels of Information

Soviet sources identify a variety of channels, old and new, through which ideas and information about events in Iran and Afghanistan are transmitted to Soviet Muslims. In the case of Iran, the most important conduit, judging from the amount of attention Soviet sources pay to attacking it, is foreign radio broadcasts, especially those from Iran itself. Most often mentioned are Radio Gorgan and Radio Tabriz. The former, located in Gorgan, an Iranian city near the Soviet Turkmen border, broadcasts in Persian and Turkmen; the latter broadcasts in Persian and Azeri. Also cited are broadcasts from the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia, which Soviet agitprop specialists link to the "pan-Islamic propaganda of the imperialists." The foreign broadcasts are condemned mainly for their religious rather than for their political content, although Soviet commentators are quick to point out that it is impossible to distinguish the purely spiritual from the political and that "there is a general unity between imperialism and clericalism."<sup>23</sup>

In addition to purely religious broadcasts, Iranian radio stations have taken a consistently anticommunist line since the downfall of the Shah. The liquidation of the Iranian Tudeh (communist) Party is described in Iranian broadcasts as a victory of Islam over Marxism. Moreover, Iranian leaders have condemned Soviet policies toward Islam in the Caucasus and Central Asia and proclaimed that Soviet verbal support for Muslims abroad is pure hypocrisy. They have professed considerable sympathy for the mujahidin freedom fighters in Afghanistan and have condemned the Soviet invasion of that country as an act of "imperialist aggression."<sup>24</sup>

It is, of course, difficult to assess how Soviet Muslims react to these Iranian broadcasts. At the very least, broadcasts by Iran and by stations in the Middle East and Western Europe must have conveyed some sense of the enormous dynamism and excitement of the Iranian revolution, whatever its direction—in sharp contrast to a more static Soviet society. It is highly likely that many Soviet Muslims interpret the Iranian events, among other things, as an increase of local authority against outside influences—and it is not much of a leap to transfer the lesson to the context of the multinational empire that is the Soviet

Union. Some Soviet Muslims, in fact, saw the repression of the Tudeh Party, one of the oldest communist parties in the Muslim world, as evidence that communism could be defeated by militant Islam.<sup>25</sup> Several foreign Muslim travelers to Azerbaijan and Central Asia told me that the Iranian revolution's populist dimension had particular appeal to the younger intellectual Muslims of the USSR, who are tired of the corruption and oppressive bureaucracy of the Russian-dominated Communist Party.

Foreign broadcasts are also blamed for advertising to Central Asians the Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Only one station, Radio Free Afghanistan, actually broadcasts from Afghanistan proper,<sup>26</sup> but the information is relayed by a multitude of Western stations: Radio Liberty in all Turkic languages of the USSR and in Tajik; BBC and the Voice of America (in Russian, Uzbek, and Azeri); Deutsche Welle; Radio Urumqi; Radios Gorgan and Tabriz; and Saudi Arabian Radio.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the most significant of these is Radio Urumqi, whose expanded broadcasting to Soviet Central Asia was noted by some Western observers as early as 1980.<sup>28</sup>

There can be little question that these broadcasts are listened to with considerable interest. In August 1983, a Western visitor to Samarkand conversant in Uzbek and Tajik inquired of her hosts what they knew of the war in Afghanistan. She was taken by them to a local teahouse and invited to listen to a regular broadcast of Radio Liberty in Uzbek, which gave extensive coverage of the Afghanistan situation.<sup>29</sup>

The responses of Soviet Muslims interviewed about their knowledge of events in Iran and Afghanistan strengthen the case for the radios' impact. One Turkmen listener to Radio Liberty (RL) said:

*I am convinced of the truth of RL's broadcasts because they bear out what people are saying among themselves. For example, as regards the war in Af-*

<sup>23</sup>An Azeri blue-collar worker from Baku who was interviewed in summer 1983 declared: "People in Baku are very sympathetic to events in Iran. I heard that their private feeling is: 'We should deal with (our) Communists like the Iranians did with theirs....'" See RFE-RL, Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research, *Soviet Background Notes* (Paris), SBN 6-83, August 1983.

<sup>24</sup>The transmitter was established with the help of French technicians and could be heard in some parts of Soviet Central Asia. It broadcast in Pashto and Dari and had a weekly 15-minute Uzbek-language program that treated, among other things, the history of Central Asia, including events like the Basmachi uprising. It is not clear if this transmitter is still operating.

<sup>25</sup>RFE-RL, Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research, "Listening to Foreign Radio Among Soviet Nationality Groups," *Research Memorandum* (Paris), RM 6-84, May 1984.

<sup>26</sup>S. Enders Wimbush, *Nationality Research in the People's Republic of China: A Trip Report*, Santa Monica, CA, The Rand Corporation, N-1713-NA, August 1981.

<sup>27</sup>Personal communication to the author.

<sup>23</sup>Isa Dzhabbarov (Jabbarov), "The Life of Slander Is Short," *Özbekiston Adabiyati va San'ali* (Tashkent), Jan. 27, 1984, in *FBIS*, May 25, 1984, pp. 76-77.

<sup>24</sup>E.B., Tehran Radio, Dec. 26, 1982, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: South Asia* (Washington, DC), Dec. 27, 1982, p. 11.



Soviet soldiers photographed in Kabul, Afghanistan, in early 1984.

—Andre Spolvin/EPD Bild via Gamma-Liaison.

ghanistan, RL reports the same things people hear from soldiers and the wounded who have returned to the USSR. This differs, of course, from official propaganda, and everyone can see the flimsiness of the Soviet reports. Far more people listen to RL now than was the case a few years ago. This is partly due to the war in Afghanistan and events in Iran, and partly to the fact that other Western stations are jammed.<sup>30</sup>

Others complain that even with the radio broadcasts, more information is wanted. "Our own media talk only of 'Afghan rebels,' but we have relatives there and they are certainly not rebels," notes one Uzbek, who listens to Radio Liberty and Radio Iran to follow events in Afghanistan and Iran.<sup>31</sup> "But I don't understand," complains a Soviet Tajik by way of underlining the radios' importance, "why RL's information on Afghanistan has become briefer and less frequent. It's very important for us to know exactly what is going on

there."<sup>32</sup> Some Soviet Muslims who are not reached by foreign broadcasts have taken advantage of another electronic development, the cassette tape recorder, to pass broadcast information from place to place.<sup>33</sup>

Direct contact between Soviet Central Asians and Afghans has also contributed to the transfer of information and ideas into the USSR. These contacts were established long before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan when the first Soviet-Afghan cooperative projects began in the early 1960's. Soviet advisers and technicians arriving in Afghanistan at that time made extensive use of Soviet Tajiks as interpreters and liaison personnel. Another fairly large group of Central Asians, again mainly Tajiks, arrived in the 1970's, especially after Nur Mohammad Taraki's ascent to power in Kabul in 1978.<sup>34</sup> More significant, Soviet Central Asians constituted a relatively important percentage of the Soviet force that invaded and occupied Afghanistan in 1979, although most of them were withdrawn in early 1980.<sup>35</sup> An important, perhaps the most important, consideration in this withdrawal of Soviet Central Asians was the all too brotherly spirit in which Soviet Muslims met their Afghan "enemies." An Afghani defector described the following scene to the author:

*I was waiting in front of the Pul-i Charkhi prison in early 1980 for information about several family members who were being held by the revolutionary government. Along came six Soviet armored personnel carriers full of Soviet Tajiks and Uzbeks. When the APC's stopped in front of the prison, these Soviet Muslims swarmed out and began buying Korans, swapping weapons, and generally fraternizing with the local Afghans. This was soon stopped by the Russian officers, who forced the Soviet Muslim soldiers back into the APC's at gunpoint and then shut and locked the lids.*

There is now a substantial literature attesting to this kind of behavior by Soviet Muslim soldiers.

Soviet attempts to limit contacts between Afghans and Soviet Muslims have been only partially successful. Afghan resistance fighters claim to have been

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>31</sup>N. Bayramsakhatov, *Novyi byt i religiya* (New Customs and Religion), Moscow, Zananiye, 1979, p. 38, cited in Allen Hetmanek, "Spillover Effects of Religious Broadcasts in Iran on Soviet Muslims," *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin*, RL 142/80, Apr. 14, 1980.

<sup>32</sup>For an excellent analysis of the Soviet use of Central Asian cadres in Afghanistan before the invasion, see Eden Naby, "The Ethnic Factor in Soviet-Afghan Relations," *Asian Survey* (Berkeley, CA), March 1980.

<sup>33</sup>S. Enders Wimbush and Alex Alexiev, *Soviet Central Asian Soldiers in Afghanistan*, Santa Monica, CA, The Rand Corporation, N-1634/1, January 1981.

<sup>34</sup>RFE-RL, Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research, "Turkic Language and Tajik Services (1983 Data)," *Nationality Listener Report* (Paris), NLR 4-84, July 1984, p. 19

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 23, 24.



helped on a number of occasions by Soviet Muslims who warned them of forthcoming attacks and who smuggled them arms and ammunition.<sup>36</sup> Many Afghan defectors and several foreign visitors to Kabul have observed Soviet Muslims in the bazaars exhorting Afghans to continue fighting the Soviet invaders, otherwise "your fate will be the same as ours."<sup>37</sup>

Contacts also take place between Afghans and Soviet Muslims in the USSR itself. Afghan students, young officers, technicians, and engineers have been coming to train in Soviet Central Asia since the late 1950's. In 1980 in Tashkent alone there were approximately 600 Afghan students—admittedly mostly members of the communist Afghan People's Democratic Party or recruits of the Afghan security agency KHAD; since then the number of students in Tashkent has risen to about 5,000, and the number in Dushanbe, to several hundred. By the end of 1982, there were approximately 25,000 Afghan students throughout the Soviet Union.<sup>38</sup> Persistent but unverifiable secondhand reports and several verified firsthand reports about the intense nationalism and anti-Sovietism of these Afghan students have reached me. From these

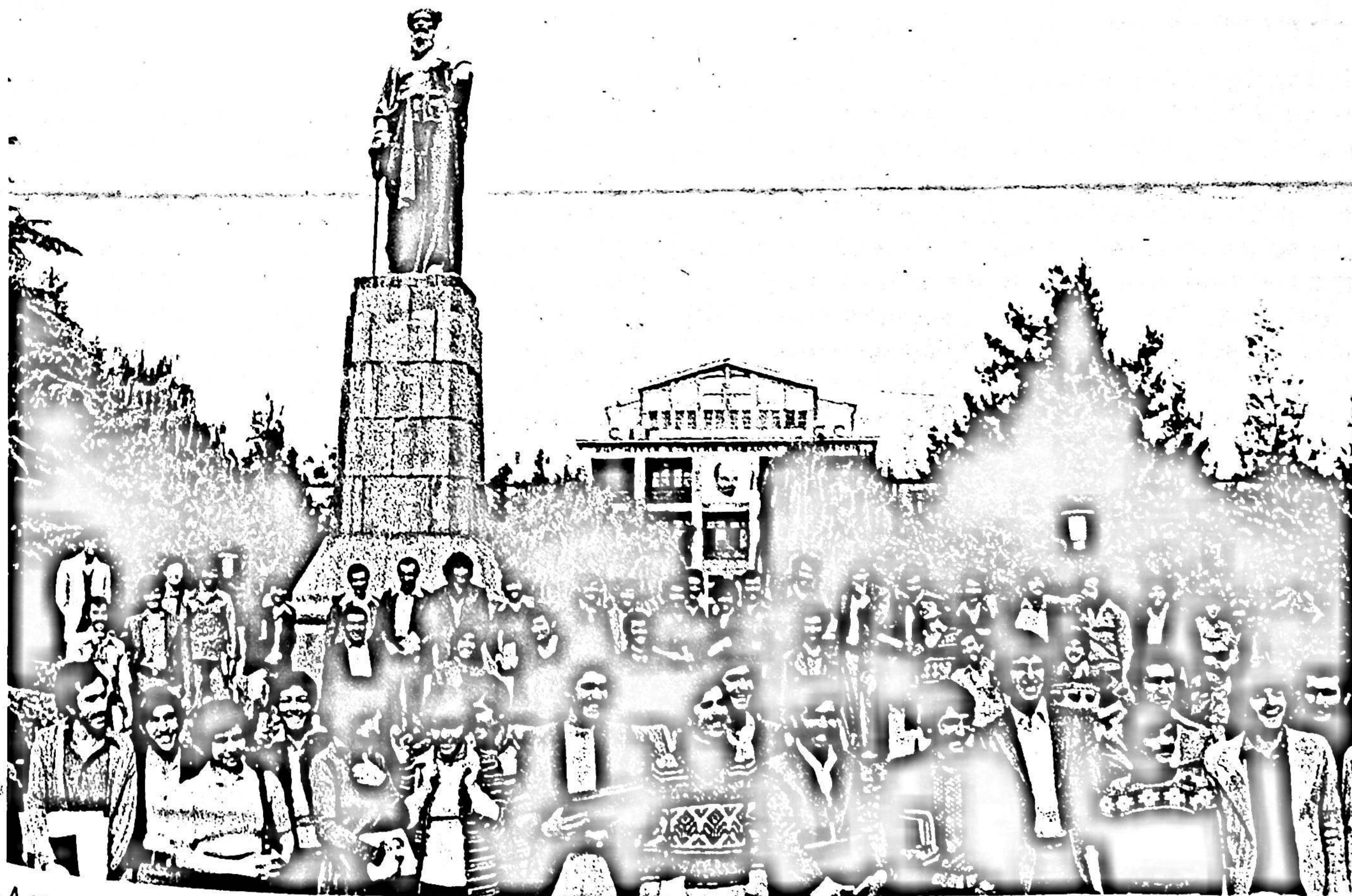
students, as well as from numerous other foreign Muslim students from Algeria, Syria, Iraq, South Yemen, India, Jordan, and elsewhere (not all of them admirers of the Soviet regime), Soviet Muslims can and are learning a great deal about the real situation in both Iran and Afghanistan.

Another channel of information may be via persons directly infiltrating the USSR from Afghanistan and Iran. The Central Asian and Caucasian press alludes to crossings into the USSR by "spies," "saboteurs," and "agitators." Although the specific points of entry are never mentioned, the fact that such articles usually appear in the Turkmen and Tajik press strongly suggests that the foreign interlopers are coming from Afghanistan or Iran. A simultaneous campaign in all Soviet media glorifying the role of the KGB Border Guards, particularly in Central Asia, lends credence to

<sup>36</sup>On this subject, see Marie Broxup, "The Soviets in Afghanistan..." pp. 83-109; see also "Panjshir—The Seventh Offensive," *Central Asian Survey Incidental Series* (Oxford), No. 1, August 1984.

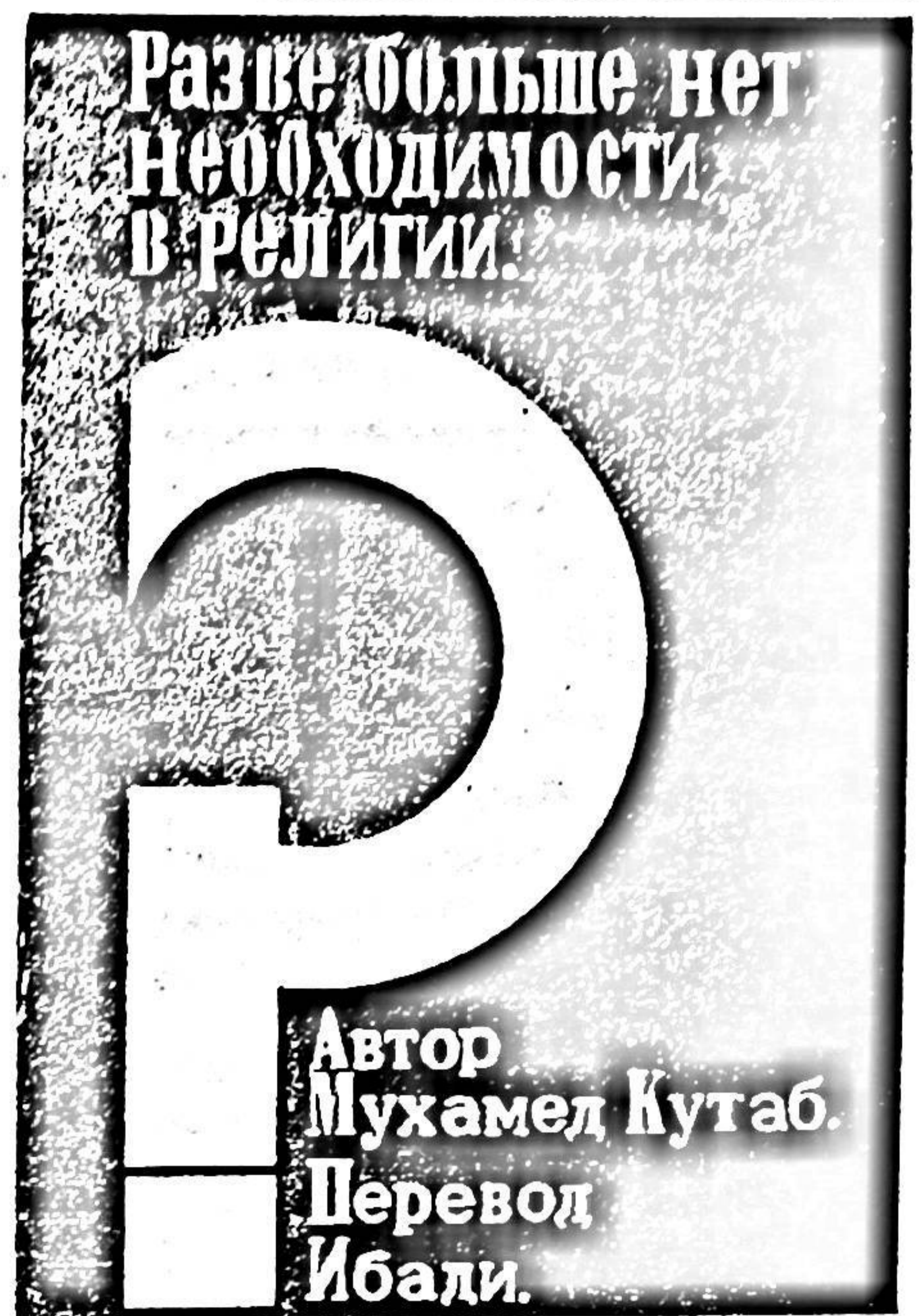
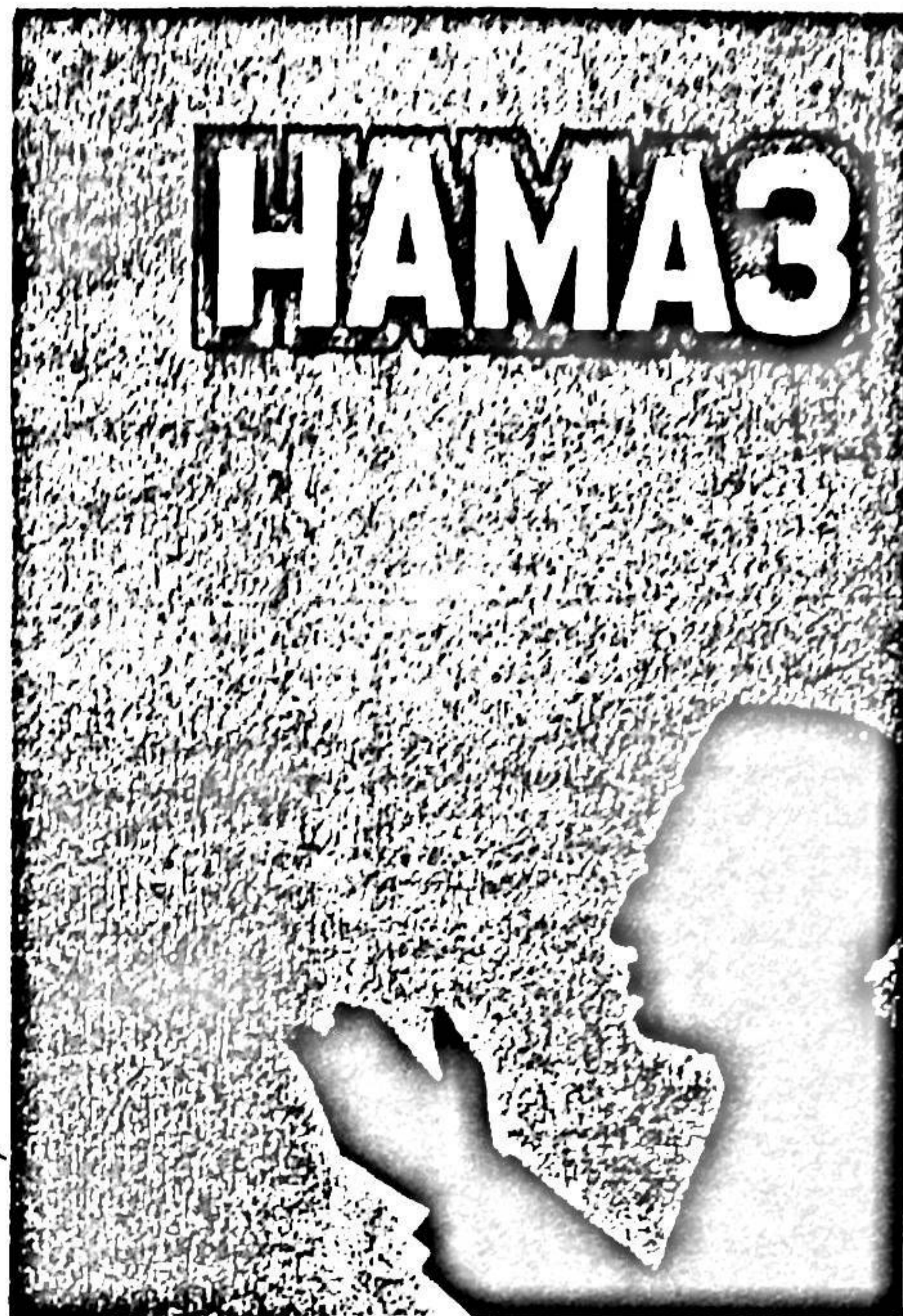
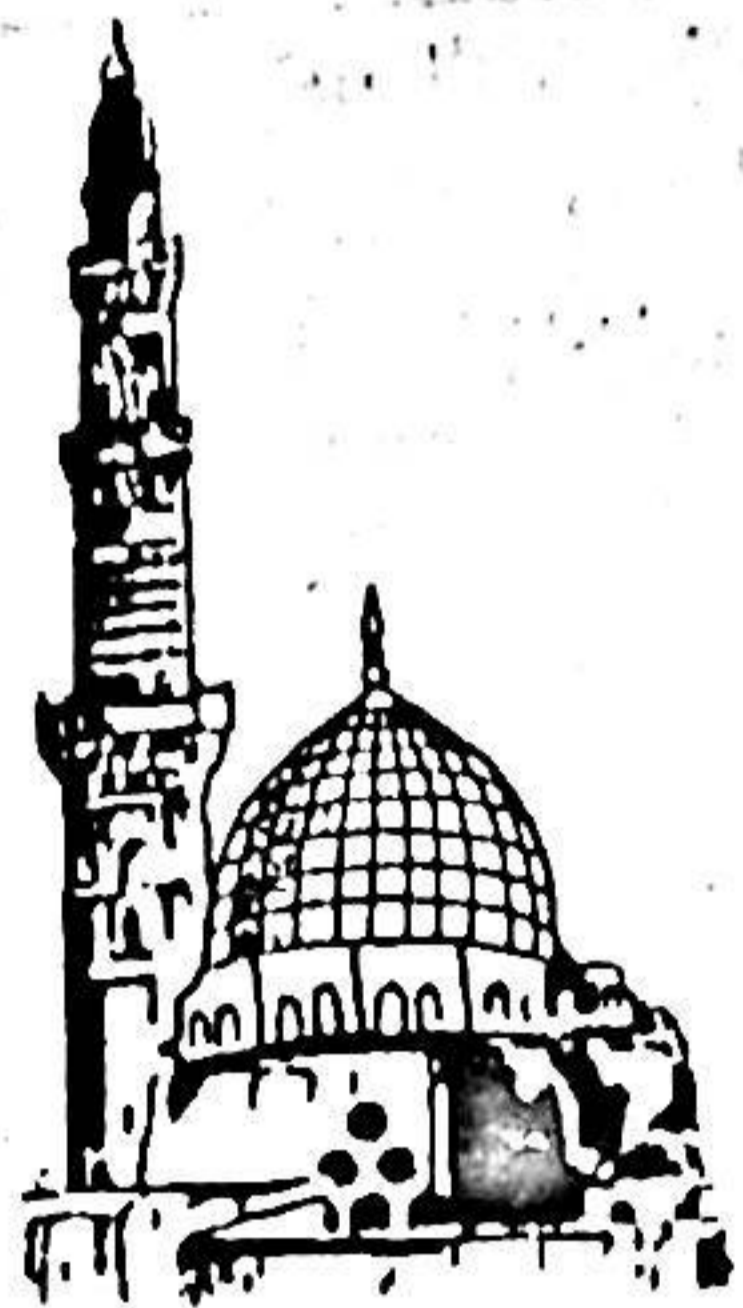
<sup>37</sup>Marie Broxup, "Afghanistan Update," *Central Asian Survey*, September 1983, p. 141.

<sup>38</sup>Marie Broxup, "The Soviets in Afghanistan..." pp. 99-100.



A group of Afghan youths studying at the Tajik Agricultural Institute in November 1980.

—TASS from SOVFOTO.



Covers of materials on Islamic themes produced in Russian-language translation by Afghani groups, from left to right: The Life of the Great Muhammad; Prayer; and Is There Really No More Need for Religion? (Mukhamed Kutab, author and Ibad, translator).

—Photoreproductions by the author.

the claim by Afghan resistance groups to having extended their activities to Soviet territories themselves. Major General V. F. Zaporozhenko, chief of the Political Department of the Central Asian Border Region, even admitted: "Our troops protecting the southern borders are facing extreme difficulties in carrying out their duty."<sup>39</sup> Articles describing fighting by KGB units along the borders are becoming commonplace in the Turkmen press.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Edward Girardet has reported that Afghan Jamiat-i Islami groups have distributed membership cards to Soviet Muslims on Soviet territory.<sup>41</sup> Other mujahidin groups, particularly Hezb-i Islami, are said to have developed similar networks inside Central Asia.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to making direct contact with Soviet Muslims, Afghan resistance groups, especially Hezb-i Islami, are becoming increasingly successful in smuggling written and other materials into Soviet Central Asia. These include so-called night posters (*shab nameh*), leaflets, political and religious tracts, and

cassette tapes. These activities are confirmed by both Soviet and Western sources. For example M. Abdyl daev, director of the Institute of Philosophy and Law of the Academy of Sciences of the Kirghiz SSR, recently attacked the activities of the Institute of Regional Studies in Peshawar, Pakistan, whose job, he alleged, was "to prepare and publish in Russian translation anti-Soviet falsifications (*falshivki*)."<sup>43</sup> Abdyl daev mentioned several such publications to be found in Peshawar, which seem to have been smuggled to points as distant as Kirghizia. They include "The Life of the Great Mohammad" (*Zhizneopisaniye Velikogo Muhammada*), 1982; "Prayer" (*Namaz*), an illustrated guide on how to conduct Islamic prayer, complete with photographs and printed with Russian transliteration and translation, 1983; two works by Arab fundamentalist theologian Muhammad Kutab translated in 1983 from Arabic into Russian—"Is Religion Really No Longer Necessary?" (*Razve bol'she net neobkhodimosti v religii?*) and "Is Islam Really an Opium of the People?" (*Razve Islam yavlyayetsya opiumom naroda?*); and one work by Pakistani theologian Sayed Abdul Ala al-Mawdudi, "Islam and Social Justice" (*Islam i obshchestvennaya spravedlivost'*). The last is a hand-written manuscript; the others are typeset.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Sovet Turkmenistany, Dec. 5, 1982; see also Major General G. Zgerski, chief of the KGB Border Military Units of the Turkestan Military District, "Guarding the Southern Borders," *Turkmenskaya Iskra*, Dec. 7, 1982.

<sup>40</sup>See, e.g., Major Yu. Zhukov, "Gallantry," *Turkmenskaya Iskra*, Dec. 5, 1983.

<sup>41</sup>The Christian Science Monitor (Boston, MA), July 26, 1982. This activity was confirmed by several recent Western visitors to Pakistan and to mujahidin-controlled areas in Afghanistan.

<sup>42</sup>USSR News Brief (Munich), No. 10, 1984, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup>M. Abdyl daev, "Behind the Screen of Islam," *Sovetskaya Kirgiziya* (Frunze), June 30, 1984.

Abdyldaev indicates that he has examined "*Is Islam Really an Opium of the People?*" and the translation of Mawdudi, which he says may "give a favorable impression." But this is "only at first glance," he says, "because the position of the Communists, of the Communist Party of the USSR, regarding Islam and the international brotherly assistance of the Soviet People to Afghanistan is grossly falsified."<sup>44</sup> Soviet dissidents also confirm the smuggling of Afghan mujahidin literature into Soviet Central Asia. For example, they report the arrest in Dushanbe in the second half of 1982 of a group of Tajik nationalists accused of circulating leaflets (smuggled in or produced locally?) against the war in Afghanistan.<sup>45</sup>

Two things are significant about the literature smuggled into Central Asia. First, it invariably focuses primarily on Islam rather than on current political issues, nationality problems, or "Soviet colonialism." Second, it is, to our knowledge, all in Russian. As one Middle East commentator put it, "in an ironic twist of fate, Soviet power has provided Central Asian Muslims with a

common language to read these uncommon publications."<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that Islamic samizdat publications are also being produced locally in Central Asia (in local languages and in Russian). These have received extensive coverage recently in the Soviet press.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, the Afghan mujahidin have made a concerted effort to reawaken awareness of the historical ties and a sense of common purpose among the Tajiks and Uzbeks in northern Afghanistan and their brethren directly across the border on the Soviet side. In 1983, for example, the Islamic Union of the Prov-

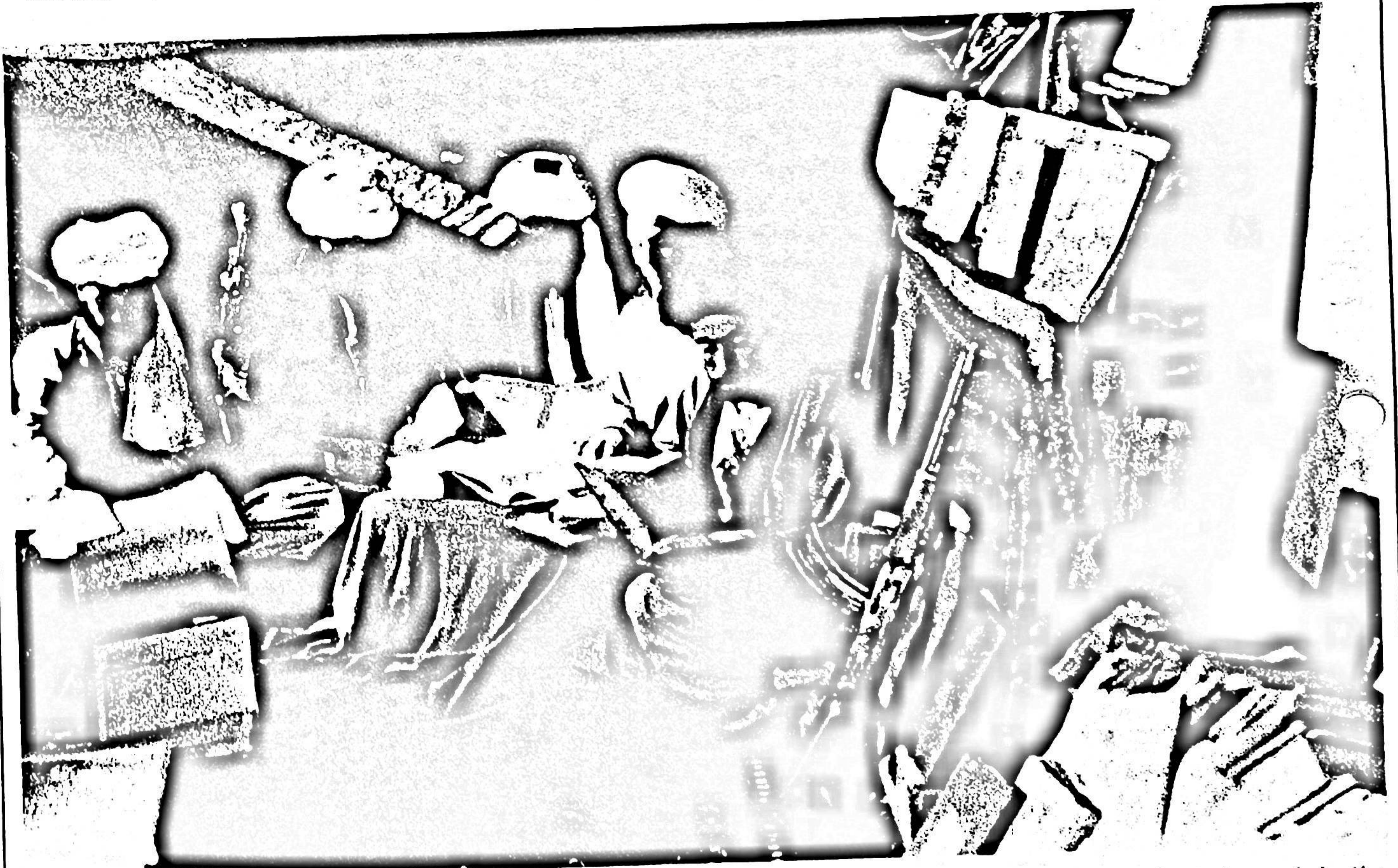
<sup>44</sup>"Soviets Step Up the Propaganda War," loc. cit., p. 37.

<sup>45</sup>On the new and interesting problem of the Muslim samizdat in Central Asia (mainly religious texts of Sufi character), see Timur Kocaoglu, "Muslim Chain Letters in Central Asia," *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin*, RL 313/83, Aug. 18, 1983, quoting several Kirghiz and Kazakh newspapers; and the important anonymous article "The Deceivers," *Sovet Özbekistoni*, Sept. 26, 1982 (analyzed by H. B. Paksoy, in "The Deceivers," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 113-31).

In the Caucasus, samizdat publications appeared earlier, in the late 1970's. See I. A. Makatov, *Ateisty v nastuplenii* (Atheists on the Offensive), Moscow, Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1978, pp. 116-17; S. Murtazaliev, "Taking into Account Local Conditions," *Sovetskiy Dagestan*, No. 5, 1982, p. 47; and M. A. Abdullaev, *Nekotoryye voprosy teologii Islama* (Some Problems Concerning the Theology of Islam), Makhach-Qala, Dagestanskoye Knizhnoye Izdatel'stvo, 1973, p. 105.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>USSR News Brief, No. 5, 1984, p. 4.



A group of armed Naqshbandi mürids of Tajik and Uzbek background study shari'at law at a madrassah in the Maimana region of northwestern Afghanistan in August 1983.

—Olivier Roy.

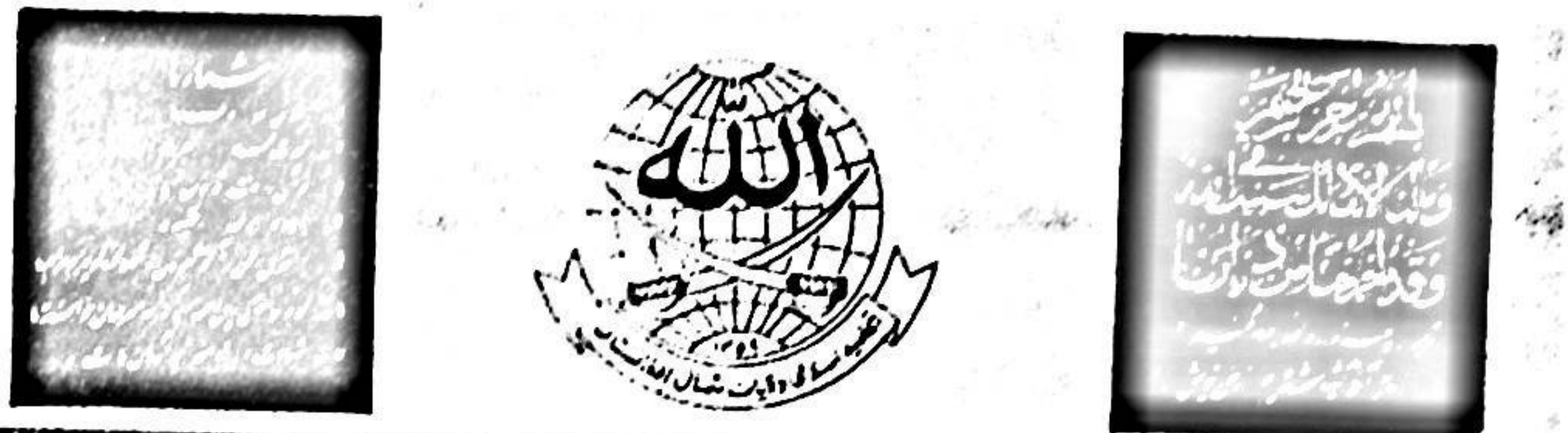
inces of Northern Afghanistan (*Ittihadiy-i Islami Vilayat-i Shimal-i Afghanistan*) began to publish in Peshawar a bilingual (Uzbek and Dari) newspaper *Vatan* (Fatherland), which devotes considerable attention to Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus. The issue of April 4, 1983, is typical: it contains among other things a front-page article on Imam Shamil and his portrait, which is captioned "The First to Lead a Guerrilla Holy War Against the Infidels," and a long article, in Uzbek, entitled "The Tragedy of Great Turkistan," by Musa Türkistani, a historian of Central Asian origin now living in Saudi Arabia. There is no doubt as to the target of publications of this kind—Shamil, for example, is of singular significance only for Soviet Muslims (see below). We should not be surprised if this material eventually turns up in Soviet Central Asia.

Themes of Soviet Historiography

One can trace a variety of Soviet responses to the perceived heightening of Islamic awareness in the Central Asian republics in recent years. Moscow has evidently not seen the problem as sufficiently severe to undertake any drastic institutional or cadre measures. Russians and others of Slavic background continue to retain the same positions of authority in the Central Asian republics that they held before the invasion of Afghanistan or the revolutionary developments in Iran. All second secretaries of republic party central committees in the region and the majority of second secretaries of oblast, district, and city party committees continue to be non-Muslim. Similarly, with few exceptions, the chairmen of republican KGB's, the high command of the Border Guards, and other senior military officers in the region are non-natives.<sup>48</sup>

If there has been no upgrading or tightening of institutional control arrangements, Moscow's increased rewriting of Central Asian history clearly suggests an effort to counter the impact of events in both Iran and Afghanistan. Two examples stand out: (1) revised interpretations of the resistance of the North Caucasian mountaineers (the Mürid movement led by Imam Shamil) to Russian conquest in the 19th century; and

<sup>48</sup>This situation has not changed since the ascent of Chernenko. In January 1984 the Russian second secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan was replaced by another Russian. See *Kommunist Tadzhikistani* (Dushanbe), January 1984. In 1984, four of six chairmen of the KGB in the USSR's Muslim republics were Russian or Ukrainian; two were Muslims—in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. See Timur Kocaoglu, "The Chairmanship of the State Security Committees of the Soviet Muslim Republics," *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin*, RL 34/84, Jan. 19, 1984.



شماره شانزدهم روزنامه وطن، دوشنبه، ۱۳ اسفند ۱۳۶۲ خورشیدی، شماره ۱۱۰۲، ۴ اردیبهشت ۱۳۶۲ میلادی

پاسداران اسلام در ولایت فاریاب، ۴. پرونده میکوچتر روسی را سرنگون و ۱۸۰ نفر بلخاریایی را به قتل رسانیدند



در ولایت قندزیکت پرونده طیاره روسی سرنگون و ۱۵۰ دستگاه تانک دشمن به آتش کشیده شده است.



غازی امام شامیل بزرگوار اولین مجاهدین



غیر از نظام مقدس اسلام هیچ نظامی نمی تواند که سعادت بشریت را تأمین نماید

A copy of the front page of the April 4, 1983, issue of *Vatan*, a newspaper in Uzbek and Dari published by the "Islamic Union of the Northern Province of Afghanistan." This issue features an article on Imam Shamil, a prominent leader of the North Caucasian Mürid guerrillas that resisted Russian domination in the 19th century.

—Photoreproduction by the author.

(2) the reappearance in recent Soviet historical and political writings of references (all critical) to the Basmachi guerrilla war in Central Asia in the 1920's. Both movements bore a striking resemblance to the current war in Afghanistan: like the Afghan resistance, both had an Islamic dimension and a deeply rooted popular character, and in both, as in the Afghan resistance today, the well-organized Sufi brotherhoods played a primary role.<sup>49</sup>

Soviet historiography has shifted widely in its treatment of Shamil and Müridism over the last 60 years.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup>See Oliver Roy, "Sufism and the Afghan Resistance," *Central Asian Survey*, December 1983; and the July 1983 issue of that journal, which is devoted entirely to "The Russian and Soviet Experience with the Muslim Guerrilla Warfare."  
<sup>50</sup>See Ann Sheehy, "Yet Another Rewrite of the History of the Caucasian War?" *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin*, RL 39/84, Jan. 30, 1984.

For the first 25 years of the Soviet regime, it portrayed Shamil's movement as a "positive phenomenon," a genuine national liberation movement.<sup>51</sup> In the early postwar period (still under Stalin), however, the mountaineers' resistance to the armies of Nicholas I was branded as "wholly reactionary." After Stalin's death, concessions were made to the national pride of the Caucasians, and certain historiographical compromises were reached. Müridism was rehabilitated and again proclaimed to have been an expression of the popular liberation struggle, although its essential Islamic Sufi component (its ideology and "its backbone") was condemned as "clerical," "fanatical," and "reactionary."

As the Afghan war dragged on and the Islamic essence of the Afghan resistance to Soviet occupation became widely understood in Soviet Muslim territories, this last—basically positive—historical interpretation of Müridism was officially rejected. After 1980, Müridism and together with it all other movements in the North Caucasus or elsewhere that had resisted Russian armies in the prerevolutionary period were once again roundly condemned. In particular, Marks Maksimovich Bliyev, head of the Department of History of the USSR at the North Ossetian University, argued in an important 1983 article in *Istoriya SSSR* that müridism had been "an aggressive doctrine calling for holy war against the Infidels."<sup>52</sup> According to Bliyev, tsarist Russia had waged a purely defensive war against Shamil. This "Stalinist" thesis corresponds with what Soviet media are currently telling the Soviet public about the Soviet role in the war in Afghanistan. By a cunning feat of historical sleight of hand, the Russian cause in the North Caucasus is deemed to have been just, and the tsarist armies of Nicholas I and Alexander II are proclaimed to have been its proper instruments. By analogy, the Soviet war in Afghanistan and the role of the Soviet army are justified, and the Afghan resistance is condemned.

Regarding the Basmachis, the official approach of Soviet historiography remains basically the same as before 1980. Opposed to both communism and Russian dominance, the Basmachis harassed and delayed the Soviet takeover of Central Asia in the 1920's, and consequently have always been treated as enemies of Soviet power. However, after Stalin's death, the emphasis in historical writing had shifted toward themes of friendship among Soviet nationalities and cooperation of Central Asians with the "elder brother."

<sup>51</sup>Karl Marx himself was a staunch supporter of Shamil and his mürids.

<sup>52</sup>M. Bliyev, "The Caucasian War—Social Sources, Essence," *Istoriya SSSR* (Moscow), No. 2, 1983, pp. 54-75.

References to the Muslim guerrilla rebels, though not officially discouraged, gradually became rarer. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, however, the Basmachi question suddenly reemerged as a burning topic in historical surveys,<sup>53</sup> memoirs and novels,<sup>54</sup> films,<sup>55</sup> and plays.<sup>56</sup>

What is the motivation for this proliferation of material on a subject Soviet authorities generally had preferred to leave buried? Perhaps a decision was taken at the highest level to remind Central Asians that the Basmachi warriors, despite their gallantry and their romantic appeal, had been beaten decisively by the Red Army of Marshal Mikhail Frunze. To those who might be tempted to sympathize with the Afghan mujahidin, the warning is clear: "In the 1920's, when Soviet power was still weak and unstable, we beat your rebellious grandparents. Today, when our power is strong and our army unconquerable we will beat, sooner or later, the Afghan rebels."

Still it is puzzling why the Soviet leadership would raise this controversial issue, for it is sure to stimulate private debate and interest in the subject by Soviet Muslims, who ultimately might be tempted to reject the official version. Most likely, the recent reopening of the book on the Basmachis is a reaction to audible vibrations emanating from Central Asia itself. The Basmachis remain a living legend among Central Asians on both sides of the Soviet border. Audrey C. Shalinsky concludes on the basis of field work in northern Afghanistan:

*In the late 1970's, there were many who remembered life in the Central Asian "homeland." Their experi-*

<sup>53</sup>Among the most important recent historical works is Yu. A. Polyakov and Chugunov, *Bor'ba s Basmachestvom v. Sredne-Aziatskikh Respublikakh SSSR* (The Struggle Against the Basmachis in the Central Asian Republics of the USSR), Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1983.

Recent Soviet sources take considerable liberties with the truth in discussing the ideological struggle against the Basmachi, focusing on the purely military aspect of the war and ignoring its political aspect. In reality in the 1920's, Mikhail Frunze, commander in chief of the Red Army in Turkestan, made important concessions to Islam—such as reopening religious schools and mosques, restoring Shari'at courts, and returning waqf properties—in an attempt to forestall evolution of the revolt into a genuine religious war. Yet, a Professor Inoyatov, writing in *Sovet Özbekistoni* of Dec. 16, 1982, states: "During the early 1920's, Lenin's nationality policy was implemented in Turkestan, and ways were found to overcome religious opposition to the Soviet government" (emphasis added).

<sup>54</sup>From 1984 the following are notable: Ivan Bulanov, *Solntse Revolyutsii* (The Sun of the Revolution), part of a heroic novel yet unpublished, which appeared in *Pravda Vostoka*, May 5, 1984, and Rahim Asenov, *Shadows of the Yellow Dominion*, reviewed in *Sovet Türkmenistany*, Jan. 6, 1984, in *FBIS*, May 25, 1984, p. 54.

<sup>55</sup>For example, the new film on the Tajik republic's Chekists and their heroic deeds against the Basmachis, "Do Not Shoot in the Pass," complete with Russian, Uzbek, and Tajik actors. Reviewed in *Madaniyati Tojikiston* (Dushanbe), Oct. 21, 1983, in *FBIS*, May 25, 1984, p. 48.

<sup>56</sup>For example, "Hero of the Border," about the Basmachi war in Eastern Bukhara, *Kommunist Tadzhikistani*, Feb. 5, 1983.

ences were known to all ethnic groups across northern Afghanistan, and resistance to the Russian presence in Central Asia was widely celebrated in sayings and tales.<sup>57</sup>

It is hard to imagine a Central Asian failing to draw an analogy between the Basmachi resistance to the Russians and that of the Afghan mujahidin, many of whom are in fact the sons and grandsons of the original Basmachis.<sup>58</sup> Where memory of the Basmachi had been fading in Central Asia, contacts with the population of northern Afghanistan (including those between Soviets of Uzbek and Tajik origin and Afghanistan's Uzbeks and Tajiks), together with foreign broadcasts, probably have served to reinforce both an individual and a collective historical consciousness.

We cannot now—and may never—know the precise order of cause and effect, but it is reasonably clear that Soviet authorities are treating the Basmachi issue as something altogether serious and potentially subversive. The current treatment of both the Mürid wars and the Basmachis is strong evidence that Soviet leaders are not yet sufficiently confident that Soviet "social mobilization"—the development of a "new Soviet man" with an "internationalist" mentality—has provided Soviet Muslims with the proper intellectual tools to come up with the "right" interpretation of events in Afghanistan and Iran.

## A New Anti-Islamic Campaign

Beyond this shift in historiography, Soviet authorities have since 1980 adopted severe new measures in all Muslim republics of the USSR aimed at countering what we can only assume on the basis of Soviet reporting to be a rising level of Islamic awareness. There was nothing haphazard or coincidental about the new measures: the new offensive against religious "survivals" is linked by local Soviet authorities to the "spread of ideas of the Islamic Revolution, which creates the basis for a nationalistic and anti-Soviet atmosphere."<sup>59</sup> Soviet criminal legislation has been more frequently employed to attack the existence of underground Islamic schools (on the pretext of enforcing the separation of church and state) and to eliminate "social parasites" and "vagabond clerics." For example, the decree of November 30, 1982, of the Presidium of the Turkmen SSR Supreme Soviet provided for imprison-

ment and corrective labor of up to two years for "social vagabondage,"<sup>60</sup> which, as dozens of articles make clear, amounts to an attack on nonofficial Muslim preaching and teaching.

Another measure of the rising intensity of the anti-Islamic campaign is the upsurge in the number of anti-religious books and pamphlets directed against Islam. In 1980, of 154 anti-religious items published in the USSR, 27 were devoted to Islam; in 1982, 37 of 161 such books and pamphlets were targeted on Islam; and in 1983, 52 of 209 anti-religious books were anti-Islamic.<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, the character of anti-Islamic literature has undergone a noticeable change since 1980. Before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, these publications stressed the antiscientific nature of all religions (including, of course, Islam), the "archaic" nature of Muslim customs, and the contradictions between socialist and religious morals. Today these publications insist on the need to reorganize atheistic propaganda and education of the youth (the majority of anti-Islamic publications are devoted to this particular topic) and on the absolute incompatibility of Islam and Marxism-Leninism.<sup>62</sup> In contrast to the "scientific" discussions of the nature of Islam that characterized most of the anti-Islamic propaganda of Brezhnev's era, today's agitprop resembles that of Stalin's time, with direct attacks on clerics and denunciation of the "class nature" of Islam.<sup>63</sup>

The scope of the anti-Islamic campaign is also revealed by the quite spectacular numbers of atheistic cadres deployed in the Muslim republics. In Azerbaijan (with a total population of approximately 6 million), in 1983 there were 3,761 atheistic "political information groups," 6,911 propaganda collectives, more than 50,000 professional agitator-propagandists, 6,754 "political reporters" (also specializing in anti-religious propaganda), 3,091 lecturers for various party committees (lecturing occasionally on anti-religious themes), 40,000 members of the "Bilik" (Knowledge) Society (the Azeri equivalent of the Russian "Znaniye" Society), and 32,250 instructors spe-

<sup>57</sup>M. Gapurov, "Forever in One Family."

<sup>58</sup>B. Berdiyev, minister of interior of the Turkmen SSR, "Do Not Just Punish," *Turkmenkaya Iskra*, Jan. 20, 1983; also, *Sovet Türkmenistany*, Jan. 7, 1983.

<sup>59</sup>These figures are based on the weekly *Knizhnaya Letopis'* (Moscow). The fact that the percentage of anti-Islamic books dropped in 1983 does not reflect a decline in the volume of anti-Islamic publications; rather there was a huge increase in anti-Catholic books, presumably aimed at Poland and Lithuania.

<sup>60</sup>See among many others, M. A. Usmanov, "Greater Effectiveness for Atheistic Education."

<sup>61</sup>See, e.g., A. Ahmedov, *Sotsial'naya doktrina Islama* (The Social Doctrine of Islam), Moscow, Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoy Literatury, 1982, which had a print run of 100,000 copies.

<sup>59</sup>Audrey C. Shalinsky, "Islam and Ethnicity: The Northern Afghanistan Perspective," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 1, No. 2/3, p. 76.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 76-78.

cially trained in anti-religious agitprop.<sup>64</sup> In Kirghizia (total population 3.5 million), in September 1982 there were 27,500 anti-religious propagandists.<sup>65</sup> In Uzbekistan, in the summer of 1983 the number of members of the "Bilim" (Knowledge) Society—all trained in anti-religious propaganda—was 150,000, organized into 7,500 primary organizations.<sup>66</sup> In Chardzhou district of the Turkmen SSR alone, in June 1983 there were "more than 360 atheist lecturers of the 'Bilim' Society."<sup>67</sup> Current figures for the other republics and autonomous regions are not available, but we can assume that similarly massive anti-Islamic efforts are under way there. In addition to these professional propagandists, thousands of part-time specialists are engaged in the same anti-religious work, including all Communist Party and Komsomol members, veteran workers and soldiers, teachers and university professors, village elders, kolkhoz executives, and medical workers.<sup>68</sup>

Since 1980, party and Komsomol central and district committees have held numerous seminars on atheistic propaganda and atheistic education. Examples include the plenum of the Turkmen SSR Komsomol Central Committee (Ashkhabad, 1983);<sup>69</sup> the "zonal seminar" in Andizhan (January 1983) devoted specially to the formation of anti-religious activists in the Ferghana Valley;<sup>70</sup> another "zonal seminar" in the same city (March 1983) for the benefit of anti-religious militants of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan;<sup>71</sup> the conference of the Ashkhabad City Party Committee (September 1982) devoted to improving atheistic propaganda in the Turkmen SSR;<sup>72</sup> and the seminar organized by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (Baku, December 1982) on "How to Improve Atheistic Propaganda and Education."<sup>73</sup>

All educational institutions—from the lowest kindergarten to universities and academies of sciences—are expected to participate actively in the new anti-Islamic campaign.<sup>74</sup> All Soviet higher educational institutions now have a "Department of Scientific Atheism."<sup>75</sup> Recently, special "people's universities" were created in

all Muslim republics, where scientific atheism is one of the main subjects. In the Turkmen SSR alone there are 360 such "universities" with 93,000 students.<sup>76</sup>

Many other institutions are also mobilized for the intensified anti-Islamic work. Various writers' unions have been recently reminded that atheistic themes must be prominent in native-language literature.<sup>77</sup> Then, too, village councils of elders (*aqsqaqs*)—in areas where clan and tribal structures survive (mainly in Turkmenistan, Kirghizia, and the northeastern Caucasus)—are being pushed to participate more actively in the introduction of new secular domestic rites and ceremonies to replace religious ones.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, famous "holy places" are being turned into anti-Islamic museums: examples are the Shah-i Zenda mausoleum and the Khizr mosque, both in Samarkand.<sup>79</sup>

In 1982 a new anti-religious institution was created in Central Asia, a republic "House of Scientific Atheism" in Uzbekistan. Located in Tashkent and having affiliates in every oblast of the republic, this organization has the mission of publishing anti-religious books and other materials, training anti-Islamic experts, and improving the activities of atheistic schools and people's universities.<sup>80</sup> It is probable that similar institutions now exist or are planned for other republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Yet another type of anti-religious institution, an "Ideological Center" (*Ideologicheskii Tsentri*), was founded in 1982 or 1983 in the Azerbaijan SSR. Its purpose is the preparation and inculcation of new "Soviet" traditions and rites to replace existing religious ones.<sup>81</sup>

Despite its vehemence, this new anti-Islamic campaign has a curiously defensive character.<sup>82</sup> All Soviet sources focus on the shortcomings rather than on the successes of the campaign in the Muslim republics.

<sup>64</sup>At the secondary school level, responsibility for anti-religious education is entrusted to history teachers. See, e.g., the article by A. Mamutova, in *Oq Tushchalar Gazetasi*, Sept. 8, 1982, and that by G. Rahmanov in *Mogahymlar Gazeti* (Ashkhabad), May 20, 1983, in *FBIS*, Sept. 9, 1983, p. 24.

<sup>65</sup>S. H. Batirov, "Young People and Atheistic Education," *Yosh Leninchi*, Oct. 14, 1982.

<sup>66</sup>Editorial in *Sovet Turkmenistany*, Nov. 11, 1982.

<sup>67</sup>Report on a meeting of the Secretariat of the Uzbek Writers' Union Board, *Uzbekiston Adabiyoti* (Tashkent), Aug. 9, 1983.

<sup>68</sup>Among the many recent articles, see the one by Mohammed Sovanov and Khodzhageldi Korkhanov in *Adabiyat va San'at*, Aug. 9, 1983.

<sup>69</sup>S. H. Batirov, "Filling Out the Knowledge of Young Atheists," *Oq Tushchalar Gazetasi*, Feb. 26, 1983, in *FBIS*, July 20, 1983, p. 41.

<sup>70</sup>Despite these measures, an individual known to the author who visited Samarkand in the summer of 1983 observed collective prayer being conducted at Shah-i Zenda.

<sup>71</sup>M. Dehlabborova (Jalilborova), "Endlessness of Atheistic Training," *Yosh Leninchi*, Mar. 22, 1983, in *FBIS*, Aug. 16, 1983, p. 38.

<sup>72</sup>*Kommunist* (Baku), June 23, 1983.

<sup>73</sup>Soviet anti-religious propagandists in the Muslim republics frequently use the expression "our counter-propaganda work" (*mya khranitel'skaya rabota*). See, in particular, G. Mamutova, "Greater Effectiveness for Atheistic Education

<sup>64</sup>These figures come from the lead editorial of *Kommunist* (Baku), Feb. 19, 1983.

<sup>65</sup>Perfect Marxist Leninist instruction, *Sovetskaya Azguz*, Sept. 29, 1982.

<sup>66</sup>*Sovet Uzbekistoni*, July 19, 1983.

<sup>67</sup>A. Bedyev in *Sovet Turkmenistany*, June 4, 1983.

<sup>68</sup>From an article by M. Khodzhayev, director of the agitprop department of the Ashkhabad District Party Committee, and G. Mamutov, editor of *Agitprop*, in *Kommunist* (Ashkhabad), October 1983.

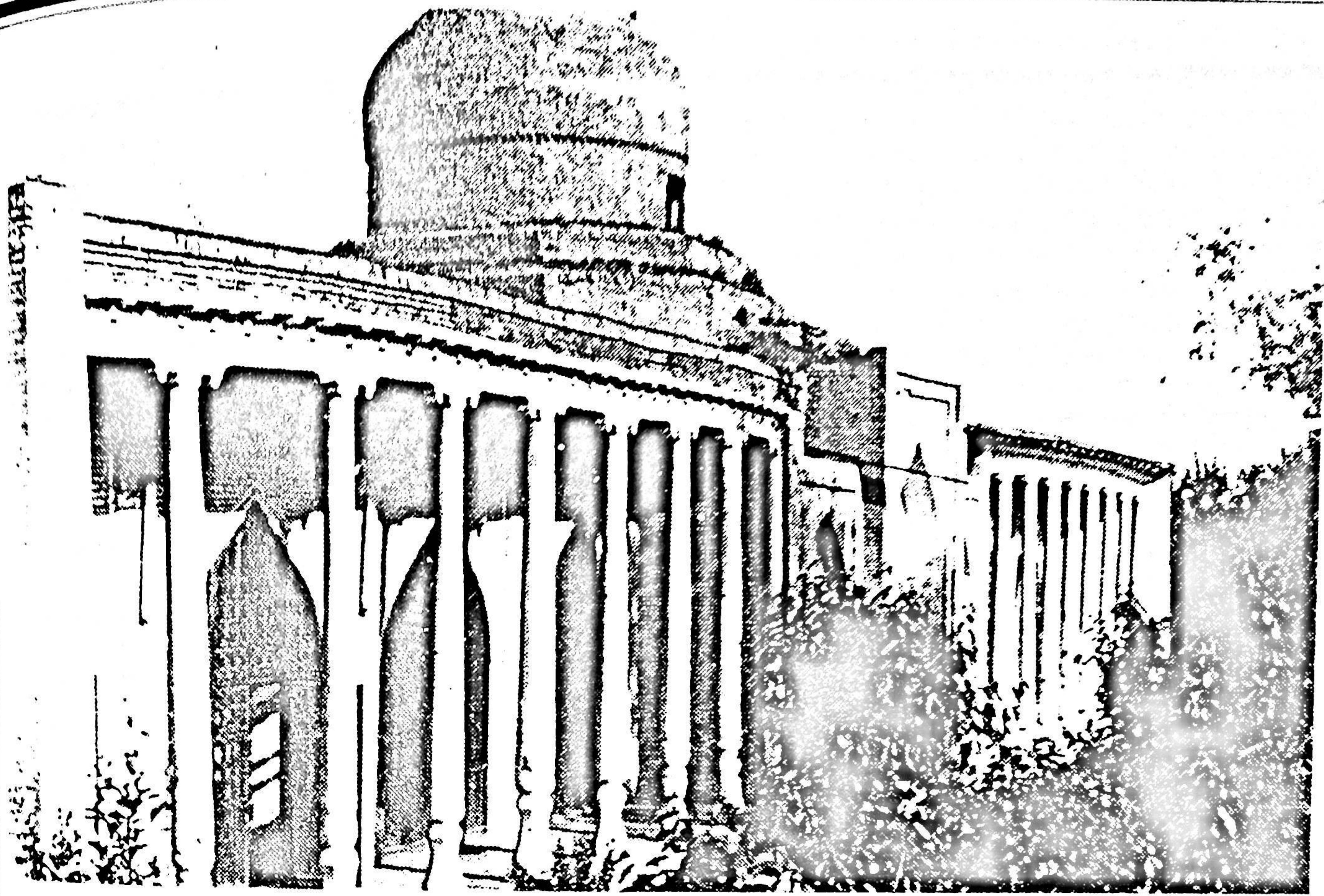
<sup>69</sup>*Sovet Turkmenistany*, July 17, 1983.

<sup>70</sup>*Oq Tushchalar Gazetasi* (Tashkent), Jan. 29, 1983.

<sup>71</sup>*Yosh Leninchi* (Tashkent), Mar. 24, 1983.

<sup>72</sup>M. Oratova in *Sovet Turkmenistany*, Sept. 27, 1982.

<sup>73</sup>*Kommunist* (Baku), Dec. 18, 1982.



The Imam Isma'il al Bukhari madrassah in Tashkent, one of only two legal madrassahs in the USSR.

—Courtesy of the author.

They acknowledge, for example, that some "atheistic educational councils" are dominated by believers, who attempt to "substitute one religious custom for another," and that too many representatives of official Soviet organs, including members of the Communist Party, believe that "religion is so well entrenched that nothing will do any good in any case."<sup>83</sup>

Still, there are some creative, if poorly informed attempts. For instance, G. Aqyniazov, Candidate of Philosophical Sciences at the Turkmen State University, has introduced classical Central Asian literature into the fight against Islam:

*Anti-clerical and atheistic traditions of the past must be used in our educational work, especially Magtymaguly's (Mahtum-Quli) poems—directed against religion, other-worldliness and clerics, as well as his clear advice against falling into the hands of healers, fortune tellers, ishans and mullahs, and the*

*lies and intrigues of (Sufi) sheikhs at the "holy places"—which retain their importance to this day and can be profitably used in atheistic education.<sup>84</sup>*

Does Candidate Aqyniazov really not know, or is he simply pretending not to know, that Mahtum-Quli, the most celebrated Turkmen poet of the 18th century, was an ishan—a sheikh of the Naqshbandi Sufi order—and that all his poems are deeply marked by Sufi mysticism? Such are the dilemmas of anti-Islamic propaganda!

### Role of the Official Muftis

In this climate of strict anti-Islamic vigilance, a temporary change occurred in 1980 in relations between the Soviet regime and the official Muslim hierarchy, which is headed by the Muslim Spiritual Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan in Tashkent. In the Brezhnev period, a mutually fruitful modus vivendi was established between the official Islamic hierarchy and the Soviet government. Anti-Islamic pressure was

<sup>83</sup> See, e.g., Q. Amantayev in *Kazakhstan Kommunist*, (Alma Ata), No. 8, 1982.  
<sup>84</sup> *Pravda*, 1980.  
<sup>85</sup> *Pravda*, Turkmenstany, Mar. 15, 1983.



reduced during this period: after 1968 a few new mosques were opened every year and an institute for advanced Islamic studies—the "Imam Isma'il al-Bukhari" madrassah—was founded in Tashkent in 1971. For their part, official Muslim leaders acted as loyal middlemen between the Communist regime and believers at home (a role similar to that of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy) and as "itinerant ambassadors" to the Muslim world abroad.

Among various manifestations of this seemingly paradoxical cooperation were numerous international Islamic conferences organized by the mufti of Tashkent in different cities of Central Asia, visits of Soviet Muslim religious delegations abroad, and visits of foreign spiritual leaders to Central Asia. All were intended to depict the Soviet regime as the "best friend of Islam" and the USSR as a "great Muslim power."<sup>85</sup>

In the autumn of 1980, this strategy met with a major setback. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a large international Islamic conference planned for Tashkent to mark the 15th century of the Hegira was boycotted by the majority of the important Muslim states, causing it to fail spectacularly. This aspect of the Soviet Islamic strategy was put on ice, with no Islamic conferences being organized in the USSR after that date. Moreover, foreign travel by official Soviet muftis was temporarily reduced to a minimum.

Cooperation between official Islam and the Soviet regime resumed in late 1981, and in the 1982–83 period Soviet Islamic dignitaries visited Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Tunisia, several African Muslim states, the Maghreb, Ethiopia, Finland, Bulgaria, Canada, Kuwait, and Jordan. Lest anyone think that these were merely routine visits, it is revealing to know that Mufti Tajuddin Talgat of Ufa was received in Mecca in 1982 by King Khaled; that Mufti Mahmud Gekkiev of Makhach-Qala (Daghestan) was received in Kuwait (October 1983) by the Crown Prince; and that in August 1983, a delegation led by the Qadi of Tajikistan was greeted in Amman by the Crown Prince and prime minister of Jordan. During this same period, foreign Muslims once again began to visit Soviet Central Asia: these included delegations from Nigeria,

Benin, North Yemen (led by the Supreme Mufti, Ahmad Zabara), Syria (led by the Supreme Mufti, Ahmad Kulfaru), Tunisia (led by the dean of Tunis University and the mayor of Tunis), Jordan (led by the rector of Jordan University), India (led by the director of the Islamic Cultural Center of Hyderabad), Bangladesh (led by the secretary general of Islamic Societies and Organizations), Algeria (a delegation from the Islamic Council), and of course from various communist countries (Bulgaria, South Yemen, and Ethiopia) and Afghanistan. Without doubt, the official Soviet Islamic establishment is once again entrusted with an important high-level diplomatic mission.

Moscow's aim in sponsoring the official Islamic establishment is both transparent and highly successful. In the Muslim world, Soviet Muslim dignitaries are accepted as "We Muslims," even when they serve loyally a godless regime. The message they bring to their co-religionists abroad may not be very different from official Soviet propaganda, it may be rather crude and not very sophisticated, but it is accepted with a certain sympathy because it is presented by authentic Islamic scholars, persons trained in the best Islamic universities of the Muslim world (Al-Azhar in Cairo or



An international Islamic conference opened in Tashkent in September 1980, under the cloud of the ongoing Soviet occupation of Muslim Afghanistan.

—TASS from SOVFOTO.

<sup>85</sup>Since 1970, six major international Islamic conferences have been organized by the mufti of Tashkent: October 1970, in Tashkent ("The Unity and Cooperation of Muslim Peoples Struggling for Peace"); 1973, in Tashkent ("Soviet Muslims Support the Struggle of the Arab Peoples"); August 1974, in Samarkand (on the 1,200th anniversary of the birth of Imam Isma'il al-Bukhari); October 1976, in Tashkent (celebration of the 30th anniversary of the founding of the muftiat of Tashkent); July 1979, in Tashkent (celebration of the 10th anniversary of the founding of the journal *Muslims of the Soviet East*), and September 1979, in Dushanbe ("The Contribution of Soviet Muslims to the Cause of Peace and Social Progress").

## Mullahs, Mujahidin, and Soviet Muslims

Qarawiyn in Fez). Thanks to the activity of these representatives, Moscow managed to neutralize to a certain degree the disastrous propaganda image of the Afghan genocide, as well as foreign Muslims' criticism of Soviet domestic treatment of Islam. It also enables the Soviet regime to retain in the larger Muslim world political options it might otherwise find more problematic. One might well ask how long the Soviets can play the sophisticated but dangerous game of supporting Islam abroad while trying to destroy it at home. Stalin could get away with it after World War II when Central Asia was well shielded by an iron curtain. But is this strategy realistic today?

### Conclusion

We are in no position directly to assess the real impact of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on Soviet Central Asians. Yet we do have the Soviets' own testimony and the limited fieldwork of those who have been fortunate enough to gain recent access to Soviet Muslim regions. From this evidence alone, it is clear that the Soviet authorities believe that events in Iran and Afghanistan are directly or indirectly responsible for the heightened interest in Islam among all social strata of the Soviet Muslim population. Although events in Iran and Afghanistan (or elsewhere in the Muslim world) did not create the Islamic revival, they did impart to it a new, concentrated energy, and are likely to continue to have this reinforcing effect in the foreseeable future. Indeed, the influence may even intensify.

Soviet official sources betray anxiety about a number of social and political problems in the Soviet Muslim territories, but Islam and the problems associated with it are rapidly becoming among those most discussed. There is no doubt that the Soviets recognize the need to counter strongly the renewed interest in religion, religious culture, and religious traditions among the Muslim population of the USSR. Islam is viewed as disruptive to Soviet social engineering at home, and as an opportunity for foreign interference in Soviet affairs. Judging from the vast amount of Soviet media space, educational programs, and man-hours allotted to anti-Islamic activities, the Soviet leadership is taking this matter seriously.

The Afghan war continues, as does Islamic militancy in Iran. It is naive to believe that if, or when, these two situations begin to lose their edge the threat the Soviet authorities perceive in Islam will recede. It



*Ahmad Keftaro, left, Chief Mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic, with Mirzoabdullo Kalonov, center, member of the Ecclesiastical Board of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, and Muslihiddin Mukarramov, Imam Hatib of the Leninabad Mosque, during a 1982 visit to the Soviet Union.*

—TASS from SOVFOTO

would be rash to believe that ideological forces once set in motion can be easily restrained, even in the improbable event of a Soviet military victory in Afghanistan or a collapse of Khomeyni's revolution in Iran. Islam today is a potent ideological and political force. The war in Afghanistan and the revolution in Iran are first of all ideological conflicts, and it is primarily in the realm of ideology that the long-term effects will be felt in Central Asia. Soviet Muslims can no longer be isolated from foreign "contamination," as Soviet sources themselves acknowledge. "There can be no harmless religious beliefs," noted an Uzbek anti-Islamic specialist recently.<sup>14</sup> He was certainly speaking for all of Soviet officialdom, his eyes upon the present but his thoughts upon the future.

<sup>14</sup>E. K. Dzhuravlev, head of the Eastern Department of the Department of International Relations at the Institute of International Law and International Relations of the USSR Academy of Sciences, *Pravda*, Nov. 27, 1984.

# Soviet Muslims and the World of Islam

By Alexandre Bennigsen

The iron curtain drawn by Yosif Stalin around the Muslim territories of the Soviet Union, hermetically sealing Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus off from the Middle East, has gradually parted since 1953 as Stalin's successors have begun cautiously to employ Soviet Islam as a means of addressing the greater Muslim world. These careful and controlled beginnings have accelerated in dramatic and less controlled fashion as a result of the revolution in Iran and then the major increase in Soviet involvement in Afghanistan. Soviet Muslim lands are reestablishing contacts with the Dar ul-Islam, to which they belonged from the earliest centuries of the Hegira and in the history and culture of which they had played a major part. There appears no likelihood that this evolution will be reversed within the reasonably foreseeable future. Thus, it becomes essential to examine its probable consequences—short- and long-term—for both the Soviet Union and the Muslim world.

In what follows, we shall first examine the bases for identification between Soviet and non-Soviet Muslims. Then we shall explore the ways in which the post-Stalin leadership, particularly the post-Khrushchev leadership, of the USSR has attempted to exploit Soviet Islamic institutions to further Moscow's ends in the Muslim world. Finally, we shall trace the impact of developments in Iran and Afghanistan and the dilemmas these events pose for the Soviet Union.

A number of factors have served to link the Muslim

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peoples of the Soviet Union with Muslims elsewhere in the world. Among them are religion and ethnolinguistic ties.

## Religious and Ethnic Bonds

*Religious identity.* That Soviet Islam has served as such a link may, at first glance, seem somewhat paradoxical. In the Soviet Union, the religion found itself under the domination of an atheist state, whose avowed aim was—and still is—the thorough and systematic eradication of *all* religious creeds. As a result of half a century of antireligious campaigns, Islam in the USSR lost a portion of its believers. Some became indifferent, while others (more rare) turned into authentic atheists. Islam also lost, more or less completely, its hold on the economic and political life of the believers' community. In many ways, Islam became a "private affair," and its administrative structure was modified to fit in better with the realities of the Soviet system. Islam, in other words, has adjusted to new circumstances with apparent submissiveness. Moreover, its official leaders in the Soviet Union have seemed to be willing to cooperate with the authorities in certain domains, especially—as we shall see below—when the cooperation concerns relations with the Muslim world abroad.<sup>1</sup>

However, though forced to adapt itself to the new

<sup>1</sup> The meekness of Islam, though surprising at first sight, is understandable enough. As far as Soviet Muslims were concerned, there was not much difference between their "infidel" Christian-Russian masters of tsarist days and those same masters turned atheists. If anything, in the latter guise these masters may even have appeared more acceptable, inasmuch as they now declared *all* religious creeds equally obnoxious and endeavored to prove by word and deed the frailty of false beliefs that the former Orthodox government had tried for centuries to force on the Islamic faithful.

order of things, Islam has in no way been contaminated either by Marxism or by secularism. From the standpoint of Islamic law and theology, Islam in the USSR is the same unadulterated, pure religion that it had been before 1917, and its leaders, though formally submissive to the godless Soviet regime, have never been accused by anyone—friends or adversaries—of heresy (*shirk*), infidelity (*kufr*), or even innovation (*bida*). Paradoxically, nowadays, Islam in the Soviet Union appears more conservative, more traditionalist, and less modernist than the creed practiced in many Muslim countries of the Middle East or the very progressive Islam of prerevolutionary Russia. Nevertheless, a Soviet Muslim and a Muslim from abroad feel completely at home with each other in whatever country they meet. Both belong to the same Muslim "millet" (nation), to the same Dar ul-Islam, and share the same spiritual background which rules their everyday life. They observe the same religious rites and social customs. They have the same dietary traditions, wear almost the same clothes, and display the same attitude of deeply rooted mistrust toward the non-Muslim West (represented by Americans and Europeans in the Middle East and by Russians in Central Asia). In short, they are brethren facing together a hostile world.



A Soviet Muslim at prayer in Kazan.

—Jonathan Wright for Gamma/Liaison.

There are three branches of Islam represented today in the USSR, with differing levels of contact with their coreligionists abroad. The first is Sunni Islam, which is the religion of the immense majority of the Turkic, Iranian, and Caucasian Muslims of the USSR. Since World War II, Soviet Sunni Muslims have maintained continuous, though limited, contacts with the religious centers abroad, such as the holy places of Mecca and Medina, and the Islamic universities of al-Azhar and Qarawayin. The "parallel" (unofficial) popular Islam is represented in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Volga region by the great Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqat*), the same that exist throughout the Muslim world—especially the Naqshbandiya and the Qadiriya. These Sufi orders are highly decentralized, but their spiritual doctrine and the mystical rituals and practices of the adepts (*zikr*) are rigidly the same everywhere.

A second branch of Islam in the USSR is Shi'a Islam (the Ithna Ashariya or "Twelvers"). Unlike Sunni Islam, this branch has a centralized hierarchy of clerics within an organization that can be termed a "Church," with spiritual centers in Iraq (An Najaf and Karbala') and Iran (Mashhad and Kom). However, in the Soviet Union, the Shi'a "Church," to which some 3 million Azeris belong, is cut off from these spiritual centers abroad.

Finally, there are the Ismailis of the Nizarite rite (followers of Aga Khan)—consisting of some 60,000 to 100,000 Pamirian peoples in the Autonomous Oblast of Gorno-Badakhshan. It is a highly centralized sect, which until the 1950's seems to have maintained certain illegal contacts with the Ismaili spiritual and political centers in India.

*Ethnic and linguistic kinship.* Soviet Muslims also identify with Muslim brethren abroad through feelings of ethnic kinship. The southern frontiers of the Soviet Union have been traced in a purely artificial way and do not reflect any natural national or geographic divisions. As a result, almost all Soviet Muslim nationalities possess more or less important correspondent "brother" groups abroad.

These national groups may be classified into four categories. The first category comprises large nationalities distributed in practically equal numbers between the USSR and one or several foreign states. These include the Azeris (with 5.5 million in the USSR as of 1979 and over 4 million in Iran); the Turkmen (2 million in the USSR and a total of about 1 million in Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, and Iraq); and the Tajiks (3 million in the USSR, 3 to 4 million in Afghanistan, and small groups in China). With the Turkmen, who con-

## Soviet Muslims and the World of Islam



*Ethnic brethren: at left, a Turkman in northern Iran, and at right, a Soviet Turkman in Ashkhabad, the capital of Soviet Turkmenia.*

—Photos by Bijan Sanjanmad/Pictorial Parade and Keystone.

stitute a tribal federation rather than a modern consolidated nation, the sense of kinship among Soviets, Iranians, and Afghans is reinforced by the fact that often members of the same tribe are separated only by mere political frontiers. Such is the case with respect to the Yomuds, the Göklens, the Emrelis, and the Salys—who live in the USSR and Iran—as well as the Ersaris, the Saryks, and the Ali Elis—who dwell in the USSR, Iran, and Afghanistan.

In the second category are large Muslim nationalities of the USSR with corresponding minorities beyond the Soviet border. These include the Uzbeks (with 12.5 million in the USSR in 1979 and about 1.5 million in Afghanistan); the Kazakhs (6.5 million in the USSR, small groups in Afghanistan, and an important minority—about 400,000—in Xinjiang); the Kirghiz (2 million in the USSR, probably more than 100,000 in China, and a small group of less than 10,000 people—the Wakhan—who once lived in Afghanistan but have now migrated to Pakistan).

The third category consists of the immigrant nationalities in the USSR, with majorities abroad. These include the Uighurs (210,000 in the USSR in 1979 and as many as 7 million plus in China); the Dungans (50,000 in the USSR and 3.5 million in

China); the Baluchis (13,000 in the USSR in 1970 [they were not counted in 1979] and an indeterminate number in Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan); and the Kurds (over 150,000 in the USSR in 1979, 1 million in Iran, 4 to 6 million in Turkey, and 1 million in Iraq).

Finally, there are Soviet Muslim nationalities that have established more or less important colonies abroad. These have not lost their original national identity or their language, and they maintain in some cases official or clandestine contacts with their original homeland and their brethren in the USSR. This is the case of the so-called Circassians (Cherkess) in Turkey, Jordan, Israel, and the United States. The name "Circassian" is a common appellation designating the descendants of various North Caucasians.

The bonds of religion and the ethnic and sometimes tribal kinship between some 43 million Soviet Muslims and the Turco-Iranian world—more than 100 million strong—beyond the Soviet borders have made for a complicated relationship between the Soviet Muslims and the Muslim world abroad. In particular, two important questions arise. First, what and where is the real national center of these populations? Is it in the USSR, where Muslims enjoy a measure of cultural and lin-

linguistic freedom and are formally endowed with "autonomy" and distinct administrative and territorial status, but where de facto they are subjected to religious discrimination (often bordering on persecution) and where their political development is placed under the meticulous control of the "elder brother"? Or is it abroad, where they are granted full religious freedom and where, theoretically at least, they have, as individuals, access to political power, but where their communities have no national existence whatsoever?<sup>2</sup> Second, what is the relationship between Soviet Islam and the Muslim world abroad? What official or underground channels are used for their contacts? What strategic position does Moscow assign to Islam, and what part do Soviet Muslims play in the relations between the USSR and the outside Muslim world?

### Soviet Muslims' Attitudes

Let us look at the traditional attitudes of Soviet Muslims toward Muslims abroad. It should be noted that such attitudes, or at least their expression, have been limited by official policy. Specifically, the Soviet government has never formulated any irredentist claims in connection with Azeris, Turkmen, Uzbeks, or Tajiks living in Iran or Afghanistan. Soviet propaganda ig-

nores them. Their ethnic or religious kinship with elements of the Muslim population in the USSR is never mentioned. According to Moscow's official line, Soviet Muslims express solidarity only with those engaged in a struggle against imperialism, whatever their creed (Muslim or other). For Soviet Muslims their Russian "elder brothers" are supposed to be the "nearest and dearest," well ahead of any "bourgeois" or "feudal" Muslim brethren residing abroad. This official doctrine explains the scarcity of written sources about the relations between Soviet Muslims and the outside Muslim world. Analysis of these relations must therefore be based mainly on information derived from personal contacts.

It can be said that, as a rule, the Central Asian masses are ignorant of the world beyond the Soviet frontiers. Where foreign Islam is concerned, their main feeling is that of a vague religious kinship.<sup>3</sup>

The position of the Muslim elites of Communist upbringing is, on the other hand, complex and ambiguous. In general, Central Asian intellectuals are intensely interested in and hence well acquainted with the political evolution of the Muslim world abroad, while, with few exceptions, the Middle Eastern elites know little of Soviet Islam. The Soviet Muslim elites' attitude toward their foreign brethren is a complex

<sup>2</sup> The Azeri language, for example, has not been officially recognized as a written literary language in Iran, and the same is true for Kurdish in Turkey and Iran and for Uzbek and Turkman in Afghanistan.

<sup>3</sup> This feeling seems, however, to be fairly strong. As a Soviet Muslim soldier (a Turkman) who deserted and joined the Afghan rebels recounts, Russian officers found it necessary to say that in Afghanistan, Soviet units were fighting not Muslims, but some kind of pagans. This was communicated to the author by Afghan émigrés the author interviewed in Paris.



Muslims of the USSR and Afghanistan: at left, customers at a tearoom in Samarkand, in Soviet Uzbekistan; at right, tribesmen living north of the Hindu Kush in Afghanistan.

—Photos by EUPRA and Marc Riboud/Magnum.

blend of interest, disdain, and an ardent desire to help.

Regarding Soviet policy in the Middle East, Soviet Muslim elites have traditionally been more radical and adventurous than the Russian leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In approaching the issue of the Ghilan Republic in 1920 and the questions of Azerbaydzhan and Kurdistan in 1946, for instance, these elites endorsed the most drastic policy, the annexation of the whole of northern Iran. It is likely that the present-day elites favor Soviet annexation of, if not the whole of Afghanistan, then at least Afghan Turkestan north of the Hindu Kush. Such an annexation would considerably strengthen the Soviet Muslims' demographic and political position vis-à-vis the Russians.

Soviet Muslim political elites have also consistently championed a "transfer of revolutionary energies" from Europe to the Muslim world at large. In the 1920's, many Muslims expressed the hope that Soviet Central Asia or the Caucasus would eventually become a "revolutionary springboard" and that the Soviet Muslims—Tatars, Azeris, Turkestanis—would be the "middlemen" between Moscow and Asia, the torchbearers of the "socialist revolution" to the teeming millions of Asians and Africans. Thus, Nariman Narimanov, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaydzhan, wanted that republic to serve as a "duct for [the passage of] Bolshevik-style revolution into all the states and nationalities professing Islam,"<sup>4</sup> and Najmuddin Efendiev (Samurskiy), the Daghestani Communist leader, considered that Daghestan "ought to serve as a bond of union between the USSR and Asia and as a channel of Communist ideas flowing toward the Near East."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Mir Said Sultan Galiev, the Tatar Communist, wrote in 1923: "Tatar workers were the best conductors of revolutionary energy . . . in the entire East."<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere he observed, "If we want to sponsor the revolution in the East, we must create in Soviet Russia a territory close to the Muslim East which could become an experimental laboratory for the building of communism,"<sup>7</sup> and, "Just as Red Turkestan is playing the part of a revolutionary beacon for Chinese Turkestan, Tibet, Afghanistan, India, Bukhara, and Khiva, Soviet Azer-

baydzhan . . . will become a Red beacon for Persia, Arabia and Turkey."<sup>8</sup>

Suspicious of such spontaneity, Stalin banned these views as "bourgeois nationalism" and eventually liquidated Sultan Galiev and Efendiev as traitors (Narimanov died in his bed but was denounced posthumously). Now, after half a century, the position of Moscow remains unchanged: it is the Russian "elder brother" alone who bears the responsibility for carrying out a revolutionary strategy in the Third World. Muslim Communists are no more trusted in such roles today than they were 50 years ago. At best, they tend to be used as technical advisers but not as political cadres.

This low level of involvement or contact probably causes no great discomfort to Soviet Muslims in the case of the Arab countries, in which they have shown little interest.<sup>9</sup> However, they do feel stronger ethnic and religious kinship with Iran and, especially, Turkey. Particularly among Soviet Muslim intellectuals there are still feelings of empathy for fellow Muslims seeking revolutionary change in those countries, and, as we shall see, there is even the belief that these brethren might in some way help Soviet Muslims ease the tight control exercised over them by the Russian "elder brother."

### Islam—a Policy Tool?

It is paradoxical that, despite the CPSU's deep distrust of Muslim cadres as means of promoting Communist revolution abroad, the Muslim religious establishment, represented by the four Muslim Spiritual Boards,<sup>10</sup> appears today to be the most effective "agent" that Moscow has for pursuing its state strategy toward the Muslim world beyond Soviet frontiers. In contrast with the indifferent, ignorant, or disdainful—and therefore largely ineffective—West, the USSR has a cautious, restricted, but systematic

<sup>4</sup> M.S. Sultan Galiev, "Toward Declaration of the Founding of the Azerbaydzhan Soviet Republic," *ibid.*, Apr. 9, 1920.

<sup>5</sup> The "pogroms" in Daghestan in the wake of the "Yom Kippur" war of 1973 were obviously sponsored by the authorities and cannot be considered an expression of real popular antisemitism.

<sup>10</sup> These are located in Tashkent, for Central Asia and Kazakstan (because of its importance, its chairman, Ziauddin Babakhanov, has the title of "Grand Multi"); Ufa, for European Russia and Siberia; Makhachkala, for the Northern Caucasus, including the krais of Krasnodar and Stavropol; and Baku, for the Shia Muslims throughout the USSR and for the Sunnis of Transcaucasia. The first three Boards are Sunni (Hanafi in the case of Tashkent and Baku, and Shafi'i in the case of Makhachkala). In the case of the Baku Board, the chairman is also the Sheikh ul-Islam of Soviet Shiiites, and the vice-chairman is the Sunni multi.

<sup>4</sup> See Narimanov's *Bor'ba za pobedu Sovetskoy vlasti v Azerbaydzhanе 1918-1920* (The Struggle for the Victory of Soviet Power in Azerbaydzhan, 1918-1920). Baku, Azernasher, 1967, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> N. Efendiev (Samurskiy), *Daghestan*, Moscow, 1924, pp. 117-18.

<sup>6</sup> M.S. Sultan Galiev, "The Tatar Autonomous Republic," *Zhizn natsional nostey* (Moscow), No. 1, 1923, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> M.S. Sultan Galiev, "Decree on the Tatar-Bashkir Republic," *ibid.*, No. 4, 1920.

y aimed at using the Islamic religion for  
This strategy, inaugurated after Nikita  
; downfall, seeks to advertise the "free-  
m in the USSR through the testimony of  
ic representatives; to present the Soviet  
s 43 million Muslims as a better partner  
st for the world of Islam; and, finally, to  
ntacts with the conservative pro-Western  
tes, such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan,  
d Egypt.

4, Soviet Muslim territories of Central Asia  
ucasus have opened their frontiers to  
lims, welcoming delegations for "friendly  
or participation in the numerous lavish in-  
conferences organized by the Tashkent  
ard. The pattern of such visits is predicta-  
itation is issued by the Grand Mufti of  
iautdin Babakhanov. The visit begins in  
ith a reception by the officials of the Board  
hough not always, by those of the Uzbeki-  
ment. Then there is a trip to the two Soviet  
adrasahs (universities)—Mir-i Arab in  
nd Imam Ismail al-Bukhari in Tashkent—  
ne of the "working" mosques in Tashkent,  
and Samarkand. After Central Asia, the  
egation is taken to Baku, where the Sheikh  
eets it at the Taze Pir mosque. Finally, the  
goes to Leningrad and Moscow where the  
are received by the local *imam-khatibs*  
eads of mosques). In Moscow, they are also  
n behalf of the Soviet government by Ab-  
ullayev, an Uzbek who is deputy chairman  
ncil for Religious Affairs of the USSR Council of  
Sometimes they also visit Ufa.<sup>11</sup>

urs are intended to produce the general im-  
hat in Sovietland, Islam is free and opulent  
the government treats its Islamic leaders as  
" and not as "tools." Abd al-Bari Isaiev, the  
European Russia (Ufa), put it this way in an  
nguage broadcast on Radio Moscow:

*welcome in our country our brothers in reli-  
the guise [sic] of various delegations. They  
mosques and say prayers with us. They can*

Following are just a sampling of the Muslim delegations that  
the USSR in recent years: in the winter of 1974, Jama at-i  
am of Pakistan, Young Muslim Society of Egypt, and a  
of Muslims from Singapore; in the winter-spring of 1975,  
zak Mohammed, Deputy Prime Minister of Mauritius, and a  
of Somali ulemas; in the spring of 1976, an Afghan ulemas  
headed by Afghanistan's Minister of Religious Affairs; in  
legation of Turkish ulemas, a Pakistan delegation headed by  
ary General of the World Islamic Conference, and a  
delegation.



*Grand Mufti Ziauddin Babakhanov, Chairman of the Muslim Spiritual Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, addresses a world religious conference in Moscow in June 1977 on the theme "For Lasting Peace, Disarmament, and Just Relations Among Nations."*

—TASS from Sovfoto.

*personally verify the truth of what we say concerning  
the freedom of Islam in our country . . . . Our Muslim  
guests publish frequently their impressions in the Is-  
lamic magazine published monthly in our country  
[Muslims of the Soviet East]. They note with complete  
satisfaction that the Soviet Union zealously safeguards  
Islamic monuments . . . and that the Soviet state does  
not interfere with religious affairs . . . .<sup>12</sup>*

Various international congresses organized by the  
Spiritual Board of Tashkent provide even better oppor-  
tunities to demonstrate the "prosperity" of Soviet  
Islam and its unconditional support of Soviet policy. A  
brief sampling follows:<sup>13</sup>

- In 1970, a conference was organized in Tashkent  
on the general theme of "unity and cooperation of  
Muslim peoples in the struggle for peace." It was  
chaired by Ziauddin Babakhanov and attended by a  
hundred Soviet ulemas and by representatives of 24 Mus-  
lim countries. Violent attacks were launched against US,  
Israeli, and South African "imperialism."

<sup>12</sup> Radio Moscow in Arabic to the Arab world, June 25, 1979.

<sup>13</sup> The best source on the activity of Soviet Muslim religious leaders  
is the journal *Muslims of the Soviet East*, a monthly published in  
English, French, Arabic, and Uzbek by the Muslim Spiritual Board of  
Central Asia and Kazakhstan, in Tashkent. Specific citations to this  
journal are given for several of the activities listed below in the text



## Soviet Muslims and the World of Islam

• In 1973, the same Board convened another conference in Tashkent, on the theme "Soviet Muslims support the just struggle of the Arab people against Israeli imperialist aggression."

• In August 1974, an important international congress was held in Samarkand to commemorate the 1,200th anniversary of Imam Ismail al-Bukhari. High-ranking representatives from 25 Muslim countries were present (including ones from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, Morocco, and Jordan). On this occasion, the congress, in an unusual departure from the norm; abstained from attacking the US or Israel.

• In October 1976, a congress was convened in Tashkent by Babakhanov, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Central Asian Board. It was attended by distinguished representatives from Syria, North Yemen, Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia, India, and Pakistan.

• On July 3, 1979, an international conference was held in Tashkent to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the journal *Muslims of the Soviet East*. The conference was chaired by Grand Mufti Babakhanov and attended by high-ranking delegates from Jordan, Iraq, India, Turkey, Tunisia, Pakistan, Kuwait, Iran, Lebanon, Japan, Bulgaria, and Ethiopia. Its final declaration—signed by all the delegates, including those from "pro-Western" countries—contained vicious attacks against "Israeli, USA, South African, and Chinese imperialism."<sup>14</sup>

• In September 1979, a symposium was convened by the Central Asian Board at Dushanbe, the capital of Tadzhikistan. Its theme was "the contribution of the Muslims of Central Asia, of the Volga, and of the Caucasus to the development of Islamic thought, to the cause of peace and social progress." Delegates from 30 Muslim nations were present, and Grand Mufti Babakhanov took the opportunity once more to denounce "Israeli and South African imperialism."

• In September 1980, a large international congress is scheduled for Tashkent. It will be devoted to the following subject: "the 15th century of the Hegira must become the century of peace and international friendship." A permanent exposition bearing on "Islam in the USSR" is to be organized, and a book on the life of the Muslims in the Soviet Union is to be published.<sup>15</sup>

All of these visits and conferences in the USSR are carefully staged and controlled so as to strictly limit how much of Soviet Muslim realities the visitors see.

Nevertheless, a fair number of foreign Muslims have seen behind the pious screen erected by the Spiritual Boards to perceive the genuine misery of Islam in the Soviet Union (there are probably less than 200 "working" mosques in all of Soviet Central Asia) and the classic type of colonial relations existing between the ruling Russians and the Muslim natives.<sup>16</sup>

Aside from receiving foreign Muslim delegations in the USSR, Soviet Muslim religious leaders are constantly touring Muslim countries—especially those with conservative and pro-Western governments, such as Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Tunisia. The Soviet delegations are in general headed by Ziauddin Babakhanov or one of his two deputies: vice-muftis Abdulgani Abdullayev and Yusufkhan Shakirov. Members of these delegations speak perfect Arabic and have a thorough knowledge of all aspects of religion. Thus equipped, they are certainly the best possible Soviet itinerant ambassadors to the Muslim world.<sup>17</sup>

The enumeration of services by Muslim spiritual leaders to the Soviet government would be incomplete if we omitted the propaganda broadcasts (such as the one cited above) by Soviet muftis and other represen-

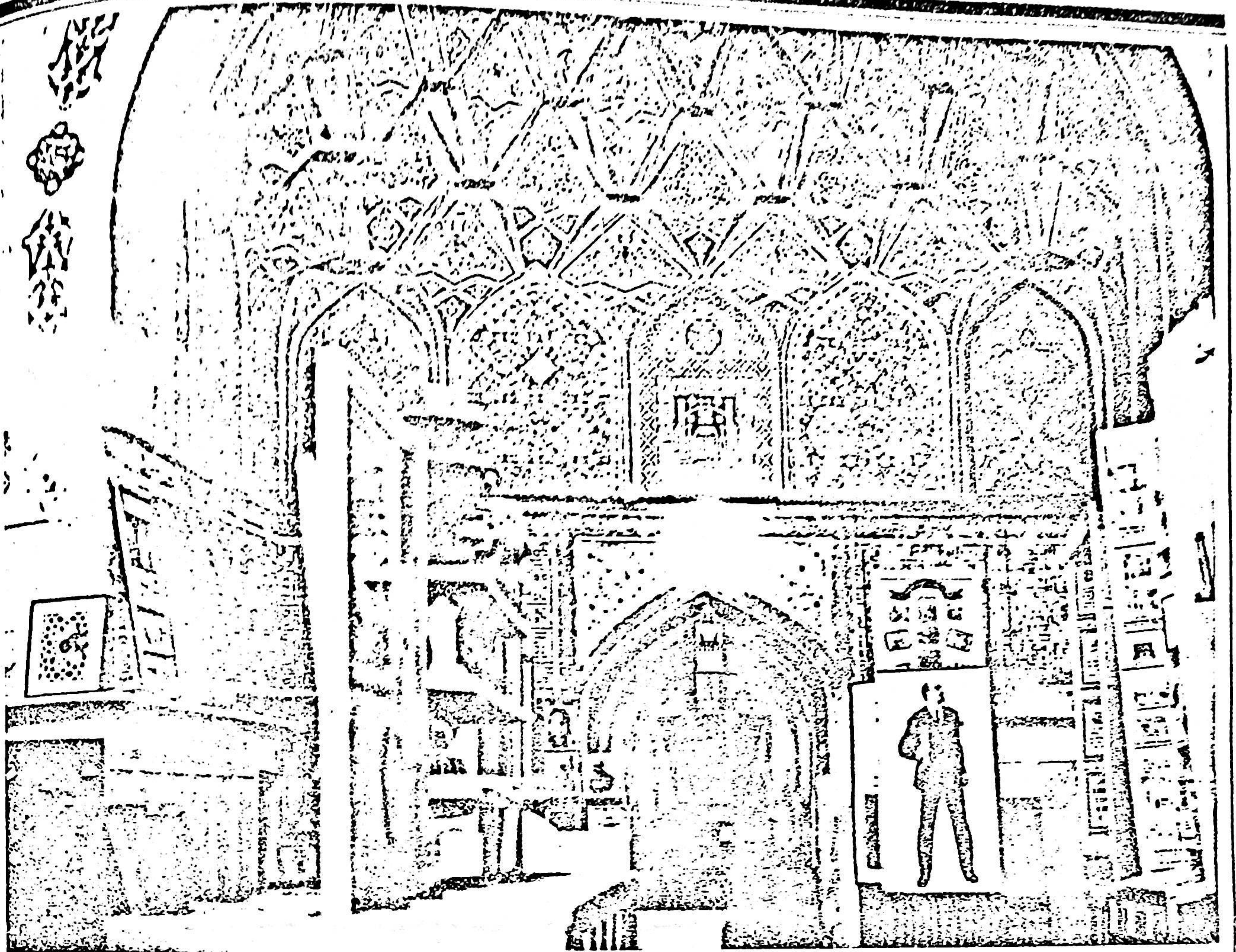
<sup>16</sup> *Muslims of the Soviet East* regularly publishes important articles signed by the Grand Mufti of the Tashkent Spiritual Board or his deputies denouncing foreign Muslims who, after visiting the USSR, have published unpleasant reports. See, for instance, No. 2, 1974, pp. 25-29 (criticizing a Moroccan visitor); No. 1, 1975, pp. 8-13, and No. 3, 1977, pp. 18-20 (attacking Pakistani visitors).

<sup>17</sup> Some of the recent trips abroad by Soviet Muslim delegations include:

- 1972, delegation led by Babakhanov, to Morocco.
- 1974, delegation headed by the same mufti, to North Yemen.
- Summer of 1975, an important delegation with Babakhanov among its members, to Iraq, Jordan (reception by King Hussein), and Egypt (reception at the University of al-Azhar).
- September 1975, Soviet delegation to a conference in Mecca on the "mission of the mosques"—Babakhanov received by King Khalid of Saudi Arabia.
- October 1975, Soviet delegation to the International Symposium on Islamic Education, in Lucknow, India.
- October-November 1975, delegation headed by Yusufkhan Shakirov, to Somalia and Mauritius.
- 1976, delegation led by Abdullayev, to a Muslim-Christian dialogue in Tripoli.
- Winter of 1977, delegation under the direction of Abdullayev, to the International Conference on "Islamic Thought" in Ouargla, Algeria.
- March 1977, Soviet delegation headed by Abu Furab Yunus, imam-khatib of the "Itila Sheikh Mosque of Tashkent, to an international symposium in Bangladesh on the Muslim predication (sermon).
- July 1978, delegation headed by Babakhanov, to an international conference in Karachi on the propagation of Islam.
- Summer of 1978, delegation headed by Abdullayev, to Niger, Mali, and Senegal.
- September 1978, delegation led by Babakhanov, to an international conference in Istanbul on the Hegira calendar.
- Winter of 1978, delegation headed by Abdullayev, to the 12th International Conference on "Islamic Thought" in Batna, Algeria.

<sup>14</sup> For the text of the declaration, see *Muslims of the Soviet East*, No. 3, 1979, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> Radio Moscow in English, May 11, 1979.



The interior of an Islamic madrasah, converted by Soviet officials into a Communist museum in Bukhara, Uzbekistan.

—Hussein Rofe/Keystone.

tatives of the Soviet Islamic hierarchy. These broadcasts in Arabic, Persian, Pashto, Urdu, and Turkish have increased in frequency during the last two years. Their themes do not vary much from standard Soviet emanations, but voiced by the highest religious authorities, they may be assumed to have somewhat greater weight among foreign Muslim audiences. They condemn Israeli, Chinese, American, and South African "imperialism"; call for political harmony between Islam and the Soviet government; trumpet "freedom of religion" in the USSR; denounce numerous "enemies," including Soviet Muslim émigrés (especially those working for Radio Liberty); and (in recent months) exhort the Afghan people to resist "wicked fanatics." The following excerpt from a broadcast by Ziauddin Babakhanov is typical:

The Muslims of Afghanistan for centuries have suffered the oppression of the foul order of feudalism,

and now they have chosen the independent path of growth and progress. All peace-loving forces, first and foremost the friendly people of the Soviet Union support them . . . . But the counterrevolutionary elements in Afghanistan who were deprived of their privileges as a result of the April revolution are trying to restore the regime of injustice condemned by Islam itself. The glorious Koran says: "God orders justice and decency." US imperialism has embarked on activities against Afghanistan and tries to distort the ideas of the revolution and to cast aspersions on friendship and mutual assistance between Afghanistan and the USSR. American imperialism is arming the rebels, interfering in the internal affairs of a sovereign state and causing bloodshed which is condemned by God . . . . We Muslims of the eastern Soviet republics, in accordance with our religious duty and our conscience, cannot remain unconcerned about the events in our neighboring Islamic country; we completely support

## Soviet Muslims and the World of Islam

the people of Afghanistan in its struggle for freedom and against imperialism. We decisively demand that the interference by US imperialism and Chinese militarism in the internal affairs of Afghanistan be stopped. We ask all our coreligionists in the countries neighboring Afghanistan not to believe the lies of the imperialists and to make efforts so that bloodshed should not take place among Muslim peoples.<sup>18</sup>

It is obvious that cooperation between the Soviet government and the USSR's Muslim leaders is fruitful and beneficial for the former. For some years now, respected religious leaders in the USSR have praised the Soviet government at every Islamic conference in every Muslim country—including some held in the holy cities of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, not a word has been said at these conferences in defense of the US or of the West in general.

On the other hand, the Soviet regime must pay in "cash" for any action by the Muslim leaders in its favor—by immediate and important concessions such

as the slowing down of antireligious propaganda, the opening of new mosques, or the publication of religious literature. It is clear that Soviet authorities are not happy to promote the process of religious revival within Muslim territories, a process which, in conjunction with the demographic explosion of the Muslim populations of Central Asia and the Caucasus<sup>19</sup> and the intense activity of the xenophobic fundamentalist Sufi brotherhoods,<sup>20</sup> is bound to become a major threat to the future stability of the Soviet regime.

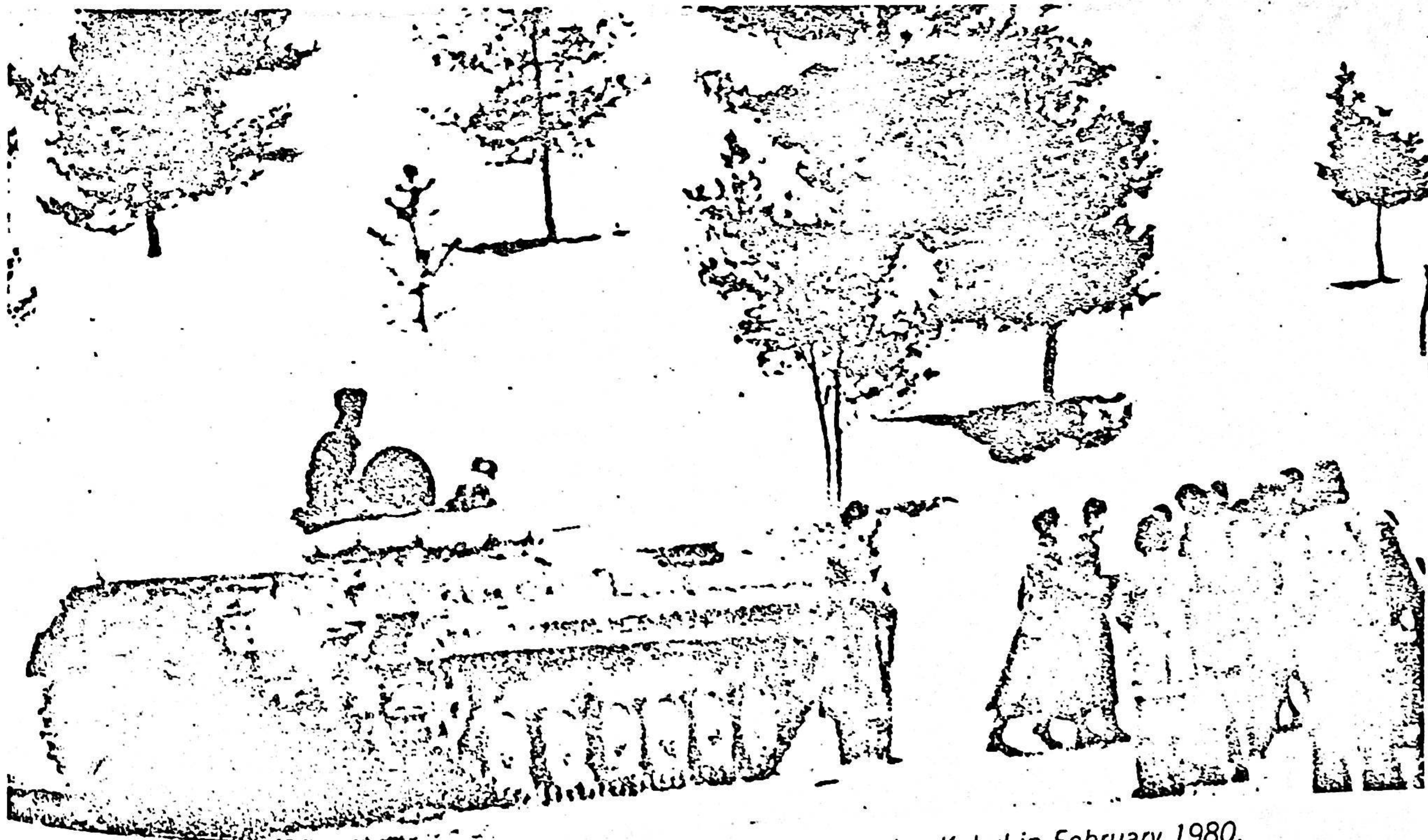
### Soviet Muslims in Afghanistan

Beyond participating in exchanges of Islamic delegations, Soviet Muslims had, until recently, generally not been assigned to diplomatic, economic, technical, or military missions abroad. Only two or three of them

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Michael Rywkin, "Central Asia and Soviet Manpower," *Problems of Communism* (Washington, DC), January-February 1979.

<sup>20</sup> The best sources on this phenomenon, admittedly from Soviet eyes, are two antireligious periodicals: *Vestnik nauchnogo ateizma*, a quarterly, and *Nauka i religiya*, a monthly, both published in Moscow. For fuller detail, see the author's article, "Muslim Religious Conservatism and Dissent in the USSR," *Religion in Communist Lands* (Keston), Autumn 1978.

<sup>18</sup> Radio Moscow in Pashto, Jan. 29, 1980 (Ziauddin Babakhanov's talk at the Tashkent Central Mosque on the occasion of Mawlid—the Prophet's birthday). See also Radio Moscow in Arabic to the Arabic world, Jan. 14, 1980.



An armored personnel carrier and troops of the Soviet force occupying Kabul in February 1980.

—Katherine Young.

had attained ambassadorial rank (N.A. Mukhitdinov, the former First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, was Soviet ambassador in Damascus in the 1950's). In foreign Muslim countries, USSR Muslims were employed in subordinate capacities—as technicians, interpreters, or auxiliary staff (cooks, chauffeurs), and even then only in small numbers.

This pattern has been disrupted by events in Afghanistan, starting with the April 1978 coup against President Mohammad Daoud and continuing through the Soviet invasion of December 1979, which overthrew the regime of Hafizullah Amin. At first intent on helping a friendly Marxist regime, and then moved by the need to prevent a total collapse of state administration in an Afghanistan wracked by successive purges within the ruling *Khalq* (People's) party, the Soviet Union undertook to send in large numbers of administrative and technical cadres. Inasmuch as there existed few Russians with sufficient knowledge of local conditions and languages, Soviet authorities were forced to employ Central Asians (mainly Uzbeks and Tajiks, but also some Turkmen) in these missions. By late 1979, there were several hundreds (perhaps even thousands) of Soviet Muslims in positions at all levels of Afghanistan's administration, from the lowest posts up to deputy minister jobs. The invasion only increased their numbers. Moreover, the rank and file of the invading USSR forces included a fair percentage of Central Asians, even though the officers in command were Slavs.<sup>21</sup>

The Soviet Muslims sent as administrative cadres to Afghanistan after the 1978 coup in Kabul enjoyed direct contact with the native Muslim population under conditions of practically no Russian control—a thoroughly new experience in the history of the Soviet Union. In effect, they found themselves realizing the dream of the Muslim "national Communists" of the 1920's (Sultan Galiev, Turar Ryskulov, Najmuddin Efendiev, etc.), i.e., the building of communism in a neighboring Muslim country, a large part of whose population shares a common ethnic, religious, and linguistic background with the Soviet Muslim advisers.

Before the invasion, certain Western observers had argued that the existence of some 30 million Muslims

in Soviet Central Asia might constitute a deterrent to a Soviet military occupation of Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup> However, far from opposing the occupation of a brother Muslim land, the Central Asian Muslim elites seemed to welcome the adventure.<sup>23</sup> Conceivably, they sincerely believed that they were helping liberate their brothers, Uzbek and Tajik, from the "imperialists" and from "feudal domination." But their involvement in the Afghan operation also has given them a better bargaining position with regard to the Russians and might eventually oblige the latter to pay for the cooperation with important concessions, such as deciding to increase industrial investment in Central Asia rather than attempt to siphon Muslim manpower off to projects in the purely Russian areas of Western Siberia and northern Russia.

In all likelihood, the Central Asians were very useful in the course of the military operations involved in the invasion. For instance, they probably served as interpreters for the Soviet armed forces. They likewise made it possible for the Afghan administration to function under the occupation. Furthermore, their presence tended to give to the Soviet occupation of the country the character of an intra-Islamic affair. Certainly, this seemed to be the intention of the Soviet leadership in the beginning, when Central Asian Muslims were spectacularly exhibited in Kabul.

But the operation did not prove a success. In February 1980, the USSR began to systematically pull out units with Central Asian soldiers and replace them with purely Slav units. At the same time, the Soviet Muslims manning the Afghan administration began to be superseded by Russians or even by East Germans.

One can discern several possible reasons for this withdrawal of Soviet Muslim cadres. First, there is the violent opposition of the Pushtuns—a self-styled *Herrenvolk* who have traditionally viewed the Uzbeks and other Turks residing north of the Hindu Kush as *Untermenschen*. The Pushtuns would rather be occupied by the Russians than by despised and hated neighbors from Central Asia. As a consequence, Central Asian Muslims were attacked and in some cases killed,<sup>24</sup> and any hope of securing the support of the

<sup>22</sup> For example, Louis Dupree argued: "The Muslim population of the Soviet Central Asian republics themselves might object to being involved in the occupation of a brother Muslim land. See his article, "Afghanistan Under the *Khalq*. *Problems of Communism*, July-August 1979, p. 49.

<sup>23</sup> The author's discussion of the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan is based on personal contacts with Afghan émigrés in Europe and information provided to him by journalists and diplomats in Moscow.

<sup>24</sup> Information circulating in Moscow in March 1980 told of a riot of Kazakhs in Alma Ata over plans to bury in a non-Muslim cemetery Muslim kinsmen returned from Afghanistan in coffins.

<sup>21</sup> The fact that many Central Asian Muslim soldiers were serving in the Soviet units which invaded Afghanistan in December 1979-January 1980 suggests that the Soviets did not expect these units to fight the rebels. It is a rule in the USSR that only purely Slav units should be used in quelling uprisings in Muslim territories. Such was the case in the repression of the May 1979 riots in Dushanbe and disturbances in Tashkent in the 1960s.



Members of the Jamiat Islami Afghan rebel forces opposing the Soviet-sponsored regime in Kabul, photographed in the Nuristan-Kunar area of northeastern Afghanistan in January 1980.

—Alain Dejean/SYGMA.

Pushtuns through them was doomed. This card had to be abandoned.

Second, the *non-Pushtun* population—Tajiks, Turks, and Hazaras—greeted the Soviet Muslims only too well. Friendly contacts were established without the Russians' being able to intervene, and Soviet Muslims were submitted to systematic religious and political "intoxication" by the Afghans. In some places, including Kabul, an active "black market" in Korans was organized. Eventually, in January 1980, some Soviet Muslim soldiers deserted and went over to the rebels, in spite of the extreme difficulties of doing so.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, even those Central Asians willing to assist

their Russian "elder brothers" in the mission of "liberation" cooled off when ideology had to be translated into action, which had a rather gruesome side. "Liberating" Tajik and Uzbek brethren in Afghanistan seemed to entail shooting these same Uzbek and Tajik brethren, or—even worse—helping Russians shoot them. Although the immense majority of Soviet Muslims in Afghanistan remained obedient to Soviet orders, Moscow perhaps came to question the degree of their reliability as the need for military operations grew more pressing.

### Moscow's Options in Afghanistan

These recent actions suggest some awareness on the part of the Soviet leadership of the potentially destabilizing impact of the Afghanistan venture on Soviet Central Asia. One way of assessing this potential is to examine Moscow's options and their possible consequences.

If the Soviets prove unable to crush the rebels' resistance in Afghanistan rapidly and decisively, they will have to face a lengthy guerrilla war. This would be

<sup>25</sup> Soviet Turkmen defectors have reached Pakistan and have been interviewed there.

In addition, a New Delhi dispatch by the Associated Press dated Mar. 27, 1980, quotes "a reliable Western source" to the effect that he met with three Soviet army reservists from Uzbekistan who had deserted to a rebel-controlled area in Afghanistan. A UPI dispatch of the same day reported that one of the three defectors had said that they had been told they would be fighting American, Chinese, and Pakistani enemies of Afghan Muslims. Instead, they found they were "fighting our Muslim brothers. We were lied to."

a grim prospect, for sooner or later such a conflict would be bound to antagonize the Muslim world and could also awaken the never quite forgotten attitudes that motivated the great Basmachi movement in Central Asia.<sup>26</sup>

Were the Soviets to succeed in liquidating or neutralizing the rebellion (which for the time being seems quite unlikely), they would then have the choice of several solutions: (1) They could annex Afghanistan, which would thus become the 16th "Soviet Socialist Republic" of the Union. This outcome would be welcomed by the Soviet Muslim elites, religious and Communist alike, since it would add 15 million deeply religious and nationalist brethren to the existing 43 million Soviet Muslims and thus strengthen their not unreasonable hope of outnumbering the Russians. (2) The Soviets could annex the northern, Turkic part of Afghanistan to the Uzbek and Tadzhik republics of the USSR and permit the country south of the Hindu Kush to become a purely Pushtun state. This solution might be even more favorable in the eyes of Central Asian Muslims. (3) Soviet armed forces might withdraw from Afghanistan in favor of establishment of an "independent" but highly submissive Afghanistan ruled by pro-Soviet but non-Communist leaders receptive to Soviet civilian advisers. Such a modified "finlandization" of that country may already be under consideration by the Soviet authorities.

Further issues arise, however, with regard to the last option. Would Moscow favor a Pushtun-dominated regime, with the Pushtuns won over by a promise of eastward expansion toward the Pathan territory of Pakistan? In such a case, Soviet Central Asians would be excluded from Afghanistan in deference to Pushtun sentiments. Or would the USSR seek a regime dominated by the non-Pushtuns (Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks). Central Asians would then presumably participate in the political and economic life of Afghanistan. This would be a very favorable solution for the Central Asians but one with dangerous, far-ranging implications for the Russians.

Within the framework of most of these possible alternatives, Central Asian Muslims would certainly have much to give the Afghans in the way of technology and practical know-how, but also could receive much in return. As suggested above, the iron curtain between Muslim brethren on opposite sides of the Soviet-Afghan border has already crumbled, with active circulation and uncensored exchange of information and

<sup>26</sup> A guerrilla movement, centered mainly in the Fergana Valley and in southeastern Uzbekistan, which started in 1918 and lasted until 1928 (in some isolated areas until 1936).

ideas now taking place. One of the key sets of ideas which could strike responsive chords in Central Asia is a fundamentalist, conservative religious revivalism, for such a revivalism would fortify already existing currents in the Central Asian republics. For instance, the Sufi brotherhoods hidden away within the Soviet republics would probably welcome even a temporary success of the religion-inspired resistance in Afghanistan, with its strong flavor of Holy War. If armed resistance continues in Afghanistan, it might well become a model of heroism for contemporary Muslim nationalists such as that which Shamil and his Naqshbandi murids provided all the nationalist anti-Russian movements in the tsarist Empire.<sup>27</sup>

The Soviets' room for maneuver in Afghanistan is therefore very narrow. Their victory must be rapid, complete, and spectacular. A failure, or even a doubtful success, might be a dramatic signal to the Central Asian Muslims, not unlike that of the defeat of the tsarist armies in Manchuria in 1905, which spurred the birth of a Muslim national movement.<sup>28</sup>

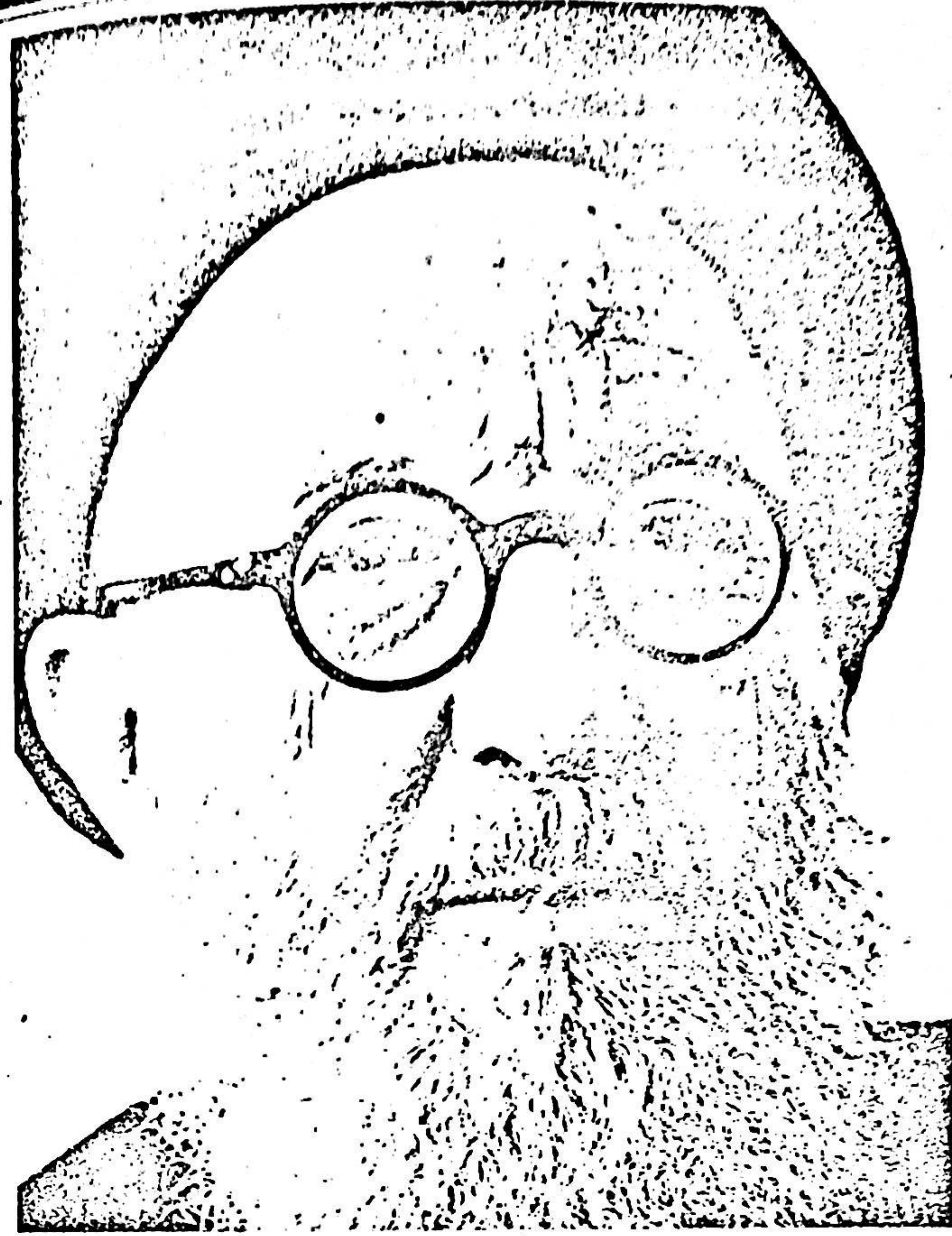
## Iran's Influence

While developments in Afghanistan seem to have the greatest potential for immediate and profound impact on Soviet Muslims, events in Iran may also have a direct, deep, and far-reaching effect. Iran is undergoing an Islamic fundamentalist and anti-imperialist revolution not very different in character from that of the "theocratic state" of Uzun Haji and his followers in 1918-21, which has left long-lasting memories among the Caucasian Muslims.<sup>29</sup> (Curiously, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini even bears a physical resemblance to Uzun Haji.) Since the downfall of the Shah, Caucasian and Central Asian Muslims have displayed a passionate interest in news reaching them from Tehran and Tabriz. Iran has always enjoyed, and still enjoys, an immense prestige in the Turco-Iranian

<sup>27</sup> The impact of the Caucasian wars on the development of the Ukrainian, Polish, and Tartar national movements is well known.

<sup>28</sup> Almost all the Muslim political parties appeared immediately after Russia's defeat in the Japanese war. Among them were Ittifaq al-Muslimin, Tangchylar, and Uraichylar in the Tartar country, and Hummet and Musawat in Transcaucasia.

<sup>29</sup> In 1918-19, Uzun Haji, a Daghestan Sufi Sheikh (Naqshbandi), founded the "Emirate of Daghestan-Chechnya," a theocracy based on the shari'a. Subsequently, even though he was in his 90s, he led the great rebellion of North Caucasian mountaineers against the Soviets. Uzun Haji died in 1921, during the fighting, and his tomb in the village of Vedeno in the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic is one of the most popular "holy places" of pilgrimage in the Caucasus. See V.N. Basilov, *Kult svyatykh v Islame* (The Cult of the Saints in Islam), Moscow, 1970.



*Ayatollah Seyyed Kazem Shari'at-Madari, an Azeri Shi'a Muslim from Iran who has called for greater religious freedom for his brethren in the Soviet Union.*

—Alain Keler/SYGMA.

world, not only because of the country's unique and advanced culture but also because of its long tradition of statemanship. This is especially true among the Caucasian Muslims, for whom Iran remains—in spite of the uncertainty of its present position—an inspiring model.

Several aspects of the Iranian revolution evoke especially resounding echoes in the Caucasus—among the younger generation of Muslim intellectuals and among the quite numerous “religious fanatics” in this region (i.e., members of the Sufi orders). First, there is the “anti-imperialist” aspect of the Iranian revolution. It is easy to draw a parallel between the “foreign imperialism” of the Americans in Iran and the “imperialism” of the Russians in the Caucasus and in Central Asia. As the Iranian Shi'a religious leader Ayatollah Seyyed Kazem Shari'at-Madari (an Azeri Turk from Tabriz) put it:

*The Iranian Muslim people's triumphant struggles constitute a turning point in the history of world struggles, and the best model to follow by the oppressed*

*Muslim peoples, of the world, who are meticulously studying Iran's great Islamic movement. These peoples should be benefiting from the Iranian struggles' special characteristics for the liberation of Muslims from the yoke of satanical powers, blasphemy and impiety. . . .*<sup>30</sup>

Second, there is the “populist” character of “Khomeini-ism,” with its promise to bring to power a new category of younger political leaders of more popular origin. Third, there is the exaltation of the cultural, moral, and political values of Islam. This flatters the innate sense of superiority that the Caucasian Muslims feel with regard to their non-Muslim (Russian or Armenian) neighbors. The fact that “Khomeini-ism” is a Shi'a phenomenon and has “reactivated” Shi'a minorities in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen probably would not be a great obstacle to a religious union of Muslims in the Caucasus, where differences of dogma between the Sunnis and Shi'ites have been weakened during the 60 years of the Soviet regime.

However, religious fundamentalism is not the only ideology which Iran can export to its northern neighbors. Radicalism of various sorts—always spiced with the time-honored religious flavor—is another possible Iranian influence on Soviet Islam. Among its various forms is the wild romantic philosophy of Ali Shariyati, which attempts to reconcile Marxism with Shi'a Islam. Such creeds do not always conform to the laws of logic, but “Islamic Marxism” (or “Marxist Islam”), with its tremendous pathos, its constant references to the glories of the past, and its promise of a happy and mighty future, constitutes a powerful and dynamic revolutionary ideal, more inspiring than the emasculated, bureaucratic Russian model of socialism.

All of these factors help to explain a dramatic reversal in the flow of influence between the Soviet Union and Iran since the fall of the Pahlevi monarchy in January 1979. Where once Iranians listened to propaganda broadcasts from Radio Baku, today it is the Soviet Azeris and Turkmen who follow with interest the broadcasts from Tabriz and Tehran. In June 1979, Allahshukur Pachayev, *akhund* (head) of the Baku Jami mosque and Shi'a deputy chairman of the Muslim Spiritual Board for Transcaucasia, told a group of foreign journalists in Baku that “events in Iran do not

<sup>30</sup> Tehran broadcast in Persian, Feb. 22, 1979. That Shari'at-Madari included Soviet Muslims among those suffering oppression was soon evident. In an Apr. 19, 1979, Tehran broadcast of an interview the Ayatollah had granted to Soviet newsmen, he was quoted as saying: “We expect the USSR to show greater respect for the religion of the 45 million Muslims of that country and allow them greater freedom.”



A meeting of the Muslim Spiritual Board for the Northern Caucasus, presided over by its chairman, the Mufti Hapiz Omarov (center) in Makhachkala, Daghestan, in August 1979.

—TASS From Sovfoto.

mean that Islam will also make new inroads in the Soviet Union,"<sup>31</sup> but one wonders how realistic this official assessment was. Once more, as in 1908, Iran presents the picture of a "revolutionary" country where "something is on the move." Even if the Muslims of the USSR prudently express the view that developments in Iran cannot affect their life and ideology, something of their inner joy still shines through: if their Shi'a brethren in Tehran have succeeded in humiliating what they see as one mighty "imperialism"—the US—then its counterpart, Soviet "imperialism," may too be defeated one day in the Caucasus.

## Prospects

There is thus considerable potential for events in such unlikely places as Afghanistan or Iran to have a profound impact on Soviet domestic politics, although one would be foolhardy to predict its precise nature. Should this actually happen, the situation would contrast sharply with those obtaining at the birth of the Soviet Union and in its Stalinist period. In the 1920's, when Soviet Russia was struggling against countless economic and political difficulties and its Muslim territories were only slowly emerging from the chaos of the Civil War, Soviet Islam was a breeding ground of

revolutionaries and an exporter of ideas. Muslims who had joined the Bolsheviks tried to elaborate theories adapting Marxism to the specific conditions of a Muslim society, and these formulations—for example, Sultan Galiev's "national communism," Turar Ryskulov's "Pan-Turkic Marxism," and Najmuddin Efendiev's "Revolutionary Pan-Islamism"—made their way to the outside Muslim world. Indeed, their enduring echoes may still be heard in the radicalism of Libya's Mu'ammarr Qadhafi and in the programs of Algerian or Syrian socialists. Then, with the advent of Stalinism, this communication of ideas ceased.

In the post-Stalin period, Moscow authorities cautiously opened some communication channels between Soviet and foreign Muslims, apparently on the assumption that the technical and intellectual achievements of Soviet Muslims and the facade of official Soviet Islamic institutions would impress the greater Muslim world. However, after decades of enforced conformity to stale Russian Marxism, Soviet Muslims had nothing to export in the political domain. To the contrary, it is they who are likely to be influenced by ideas, programs, and ideologies—perhaps even by models of political warfare and guerrilla activity—moving northward from a "destabilized" and radicalized Middle East. These ideas—ranging from the most conservative religious fundamentalism to the wildest revolutionary radicalism—share one common characteristic: the potential for destabilizing Soviet Islam, and thereby for undermining the unity of the USSR.

<sup>31</sup> A full text of Pachayev's statement can be found in Steffan Feste, "Soviet Muslims Rejoice Over Iran," *Dagens Nyheter* (Stockholm), June 11, 1979.