

THE CENTRAL ASIAN MUSLIMS AND THEIR BRETHREN ABROAD --  
Marxist Solidarity or Muslim Brotherhood?

by

Paul B. Henze

Washington, DC

October 1983

A discussion paper prepared for the Conference on National Identity and the Development of Future Studies on Central Asia, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 18-19 November 1983.

NOTE: This paper is a draft subject to revision in light of the discussions during the conference. References are not meant to be comprehensive but suggestive.

THE CENTRAL ASIAN MUSLIMS AND THEIR BRETHREN ABROAD --  
Marxist Solidarity or Muslim Brotherhood?

I

The present relationship of the Muslims of Soviet Central Asia to their religious--and to a great extent ethnic, cultural and linguistic--kindred to the south of the USSR's borders is best evaluated by examining trends. Recent trends must be considered in light of (1) 19th and early 20th century history; (2) developments during the period of the rule of Lenin and Stalin; (3) the evolution of Soviet policy toward the Muslim world from the mid-1950s to the end of the 1970s; and (4) the aftermath and implications of the revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In this brief essay I do not propose to engage in lengthy historical analysis but will merely sum up what seem to me to be the main characteristics of each period. I will also from time to time make reference to developments in the Caucasus and among the Muslim peoples of the Volga-Ural region. These areas have always had--as they still have--important links with Central Asia.

By the time the heart of Central Asia came under Russian imperial rule in the 19th century, the whole region had fallen into a condition of relative stagnation--like much of the Muslim world to the south and west--but it was still very much part of this world, as it had been for more than a thousand years. The native states of Central Asia retained little of the political dynamism that characterized them before the 16th century, but the extent to which they were isolated from the outer world has been exaggerated. Study of Ottoman archives, for example, reveals more contact and a higher degree of mutual awareness on

the part of the major Turkish state and the region where the Turks had their historical roots than many Western students of the region have realized or than Russian historians have generally cared to acknowledge. Awareness of, and contact with, Iran was always substantial. The boundary where the Russian advance into Central Asia halted--mostly out of fear of a clash with the British--has now for more than a hundred years artificially walled off a region which through almost all of its recorded history enjoyed continual intercourse not only with the lands to the south but to the west and east as well.

Have these old links been broken or overshadowed by new ones to the Russian/Slavic world to the north and west? They obviously still exist--but are they becoming less important? Has Marxism replaced Islam as the predominant Central Asian ideology? These are the questions to which this essay will address itself.

## II

The economic orientation of Central Asia shifted decisively after the Russian conquest toward European Russia. Russian influence was felt in many other areas, but the overall situation was classically colonial during the final tsarist period--with one major exception. While interest in cultural renewal and modernization was inspired in areas such as India primarily by intellectual and political contact with the imperial power, it was influences from more advanced fellow Muslims within the Russian Empire that were predominant in the evolution of modernist thinking in Central Asia. The Crimean and Volga Tatars and later the Azeris, both by example and attraction and eventually by direct contact, encouraged the Central Asian jadid movement.

Central Asian concern with political and cultural renewal and economic and social progress fell easily into pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic channels with the Turkic currents gaining strength over the Islamic--in part because the sense of common Islamic identity and the Islamic cultural base remained strong enough to be taken for granted. In the Ottoman Empire itself the initial impetus toward pan-Turkic thinking came largely from the advanced Turkic Muslims of the Russian Empire. \*FN1

A substantial sense of Turkestani nationalism had developed by the time the Tsarist Empire reached its final years. It was encouraged by the imperial pattern of administration. Conditions for evolution of Central Asia into a Turkic-Islamic nation were much more favorable than they were in the Caucasus, with its stronger religious and ethnic distinctions and wider variations in response to Russian imperial domination. The comparison is almost never made, because subsequent developments were so different, but an objective assessment of the factors favoring--or not favoring--evolution into a modern nation-state between Russian Central Asia and British India in 1910 might well have concluded that prospects were better for Turkestan than for India. An awareness of national distinctiveness had almost certainly developed farther in Turkestan than it had in Algeria by the eve of World War I.

Islam and nationalism based on linguistic, cultural, historical--even "racial"--affinity were for the most part not seen as mutually exclusive. This was true among other Russian Muslims and among Ottoman Turks as well. During the hectic decade that began in 1914, the whole Turco-Iranian Islamic world from the Balkans to China was convulsed by

war and resultant political disorder. A clear but very broad and ill-defined sense of Islamic brotherhood survived but nationalism and regionalism were more important than Islam as motive forces. The Ataturkist state in Turkey was only residually Islamic in theory; in practice Islamic loyalties were probably as important as Turkish nationalism in the struggle against Christians such as the Greeks and Armenians. Less well articulated nationalism emerged as the dominant force in the ethnically more complex states, Iran and Afghanistan. If Central Asia had not become a battleground for rival Russian-based political factions, some version of the Pan-Turkism represented by Enver Paşa in extreme form might well have emerged as a political force unifying much of the area into a national state, a Turkestan which would soon have absorbed the native khanates. The triumph of the Bolsheviki and Lenin's determination to preserve the Russian Empire, insofar as possible, intact, doomed Central Asia to continuation of colonial status. Only massive British intervention could have made any difference.

But Britain, in spite of its commitment to continued rule of India, was not prepared to commit the resources that would have been required to back a Central Asian independence movement any more than she had been willing to commit herself to supporting Caucasian resistance during the Crimean War, 70 years earlier. \*FN2 British intervention in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which Soviet historians still like to dramatize as a major threat, was amateurish and hesitant. The enthusiasm of the men immediately involved was never matched by a long-term commitment in London, or even in New Delhi. \*FN3 The same was true of the collapsing Ottoman Empire, where the British ended up pursuing extremely limited objectives, such as the detachment of Mosul and Kirkuk from the new Turkey.

No other foreign power had an interest in playing a major role in Central Asia or even in the Caucasus. The United States was not then a factor in this part of the world. A short-lived proposal for an American mandate over the Armenian regions of Eastern Anatolia provoked alarm in the U.S. Congress.

What remained of the Ottoman Empire, its Anatolian core, was too weak to challenge Lenin's reconstituted Russian Empire. If Enver Paşa instead of Mustafa Kemal had led the Turkish independence struggle, Turkey would probably have been plunged into an extended entanglement with Lenin's revived empire. The results would have been even more disastrous than those of most of the Russo-Turkish wars that were fought between the 16th and the early 20th centuries. Atatürk correctly judged the limitations of the new state he built from the ruin in which the final collapse of Ottoman power had left the Anatolian Turks and made peace with the Bolsheviks. The cost for the Islamic peoples of the Russian Empire was high in the short run. But we can see now, as the 20th century nears its end, that the result has been to put the Turks of Anatolia as well as the Turkic peoples of the Soviet Empire in a stronger position to assert themselves against Russian encroachment.

### III

In Central Asia the Bolsheviks showed a healthy respect for the strength of Turkestanian nationalism as well as Pan-Turkism. As soon as their military control over the most vital parts of the region was assured, they gerrymandered it into separate ethno-linguistic entities, forcing each new republic to differentiate itself as much as possible from its neighbors and discouraging contacts with the Turkic/Islamic peoples

of the Caucasus, Urals and Volga. Muslim national communism quickly proved to be a deviation from Bolshevik orthodoxy as intolerable as nationalist deviations in Eastern Europe after World War II, as the experience of Sultangaliev demonstrates. FN4 Its potential for revolutionizing the Muslim East, though theoretically attractive, raised the specter of internal pluralism in the application of communist principles and dilution of Bolshevik control over outlying parts of the empire. It could not be tolerated. So both Islam and most normal manifestations of Pan-Turkic and sub-Turkic nationalism were proscribed.

Economically Central Asian integration into the reconstituted Soviet Russian Empire was accelerated. For all practical purposes the economic isolation of the area from the lands to the south and east was now complete. The purpose of agricultural collectivization and of such infrastructure and industrial development as occurred in the period before World War II was to secure full centralized control over the region's resources and productive capacity and to ensure that this capacity would be maximized to serve all-union purposes. There was a great deal of propaganda, both internally and abroad, about transformation from colonialism into a new form of economic freedom benefitting the local population, but the primary result of pre-World War II economic development was that Central Asia became a prime producer of raw and semi-processed materials (cotton, minerals) that met priorities set by GOSPLAN in Moscow. While the local populations benefitted from some of this economic development, they played no role in the decision-making processes it entailed or in determining the share of benefit they would receive. FN5 All this was called Marxism and "scientific socialism", but it was really nothing more than totalitarian colonialism. Education and elementary public services were expanded and a greater degree of

public order was enforced than Central Asia had ever/before in its history. Health care improved and the population expanded steadily, except for disruptions resulting from collectivization which were severe in the Kazakh steppes. And the Great Purges took a severe toll of the native political elites that had evolved during the 1920s and 1930s. In terms of culture and religion, Soviet Central Asia was almost entirely cut off from the Islamic, Turco-Iranian world to the south, though there were intermittent contacts with Chinese Turkestan and a few links to kindred peoples in the Caucasus and Urals were maintained. On the whole, however, all Turkic/Islamic peoples were kept separate from each other inside the USSR.

A great deal of intellectual effort went into alphabet and language reform and the creation of separate literatures and histories for each individual nationality. The Arabic script was replaced by the Latin alphabet in the late 1920s, but in less than a decade Latin began to be replaced by Cyrillic. The result, in spite of rapid increase of literacy, was to cut the Central Asian peoples off from both the Islamic world of which they had so long formed a part--and also from their own past. \*FN6 Both Marxist solidarity and Muslim brotherhood were suspect and permitted to manifest themselves only within rigidly prescribed limits.

The twelve years 1941-1953--World War II and its aftermath--entailed for Soviet Central Asia an acceleration of all the developments of the immediate pre-war period: intensified economic development, but entirely in the framework of serving common USSR goals; slight easing of political and cultural restrictions during the war years followed by a distinct tightening as soon as the war ended. Central Asia remained disconnected from the rest of the Islamic world. Isolation increased after the end



of the war. Central Asians who had had the opportunity defected to the Germans in sizable numbers. Those who fell back under Soviet control at war's end were severely dealt with. In terms of culture and religion, the final Stalinist years were a period of rigidity and repression--histories and novels were condemned and rewritten; linguistic works the subject of endless controversy. Contacts with Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, let alone with more distant Islamic countries, were severely restricted. This was the period when maximum emphasis was placed on the notion that all peoples of the USSR were destined to merge into a new species of "Soviet man", when languages were to undergo a process of sblizhenie leading eventually to sliyanie. The Great Russian people had emerged from the war officially recognized for what they had always been in fact--the dominant people of the Soviet Russian empire, and Russification was now more openly advocated than at any previous period in Soviet history.

#### IV

The death of Stalin soon brought an easing of tension, a less oppressive atmosphere, but no fundamental changes in the general direction of Central Asian economic development in spite of changes that were supposed to lead to greater regional autonomy. Central Asia became continually more important as the locus of some of the Soviet Union's most sensitive installations for nuclear missile development and space technology. As far as most Central Asians were concerned, however, these installations might just as well have been on the moon. They were, and are, extra-territorial insofar as all Central Asian administrative arrangements are concerned.

Under Khrushchev Soviet foreign policy became more active and, in comparison to the doctrinaire rigidity of the final Stalin years, more imaginative and creative. Khrushchev was an optimist about the Soviet system and believed that Marxism could be dynamic and constructive. But he was also flexible. Power political considerations always dominated when there was a conflict or potential clash between classic Marxist principles and more pragmatic approaches. The Soviet Union, by the end of the 1950s, was deeply involved in the Middle East and Africa. Except in rare instances, Marxism as such did not prove to be a useful vehicle for furthering Soviet influence among Arabs and other Muslims and such communist parties as existed south of the Soviet borders were more often a hindrance and a complication rather than a help. Soviet Muslims found themselves drawn into Soviet operations in the Middle East in many ways--and some clearly welcomed the opportunity to break out of the isolation in which they had lived for more than three decades. Before we consider the implications of Soviet Muslim participation in Soviet foreign policy--and the limitations that also became apparent in the Brezhnev era, let us examine the most fundamental development that became apparent during the 1950s and 1960s--population growth.

The Central Asian population continued to grow during World War II and growth accelerated afterward. There was some influx of non-Muslims during and immediately after the war, but the major addition to the population of the region was one whose significance has only gradually become evident: peoples expelled from the European USSR and the Caucasus for disloyalty during the war. These included almost all Crimean Tatars, a significant proportion of Volga Germans and the entire native popula-

tion of the Chechen, Ingush, Balkar and Karachai autonomous republics or districts--probably between one and 1.2 million individuals, of whom about 3/4 were Muslim. Fewer of these peoples seem to have perished in the course of their relocation than had originally been assumed. All the Muslims seem to have managed at least a modest level of growth even during the first years after their resettlement. During the late 1950s a large proportion of the North Caucasians were permitted to return to their restored territories. These Caucasians brought back with them a broadened awareness of their Muslim co-religionists in Central Asia. They left behind, among the Central Asians among whom they had lived, the same kind of awareness. Gradually evidence has accumulated that the exile of these people to Central Asia reinforced religious belief and created religious links which are increasing in importance today. \*FN7 Most of the Crimean Tatars remained in Central Asia, for they were not permitted to return to their attractive and strategically important territory. Perhaps as many as 400,000 Crimean Tatars now reside in Uzbekistan alone. Among the most culturally advanced and <sup>o</sup>politically articulate of all Soviet Muslims, they contribute to both Turkic and Islamic awareness of the local population. But there is little evidence that Marxism has any significance at all among Crimean Tatars.

Khrushchev's attempt to overcome the USSR's chronic grain deficits led to the program for developing "new lands" in the mid-1950s. The movement of large numbers of Russians and other Slavs into Kazakhstan continued well into the 1960s, with the result that in the 1979 census the Kazakhs and other Muslim nationalities (6.1 million) were still outnumbered by Russians and other Slavs (7.07 million). But Slavic

immigration practically halted during the 1970s and the rate of natural increase of Slavs slowed while the Muslim birthrate remained high. The Turkic population of Kazakhstan is in all likelihood going to overtake the Slavic population by the end of the 1980s.

There never has been any large-scale migration of Russians into the four southern Central Asian republics while the native populations have continued to exhibit the highest rates of natural increase in the USSR during the 1970s. Statistics are readily available and have been commented upon at length in Western literature.<sup>\*FN8</sup> They demonstrate the extraordinary strength of the Muslim family. Elementary improvements in medical services and conditions of life which have occurred during the Soviet period have helped ensure a higher rate of survival and greater longevity, but these factors have not led to continued population growth among the European population of the USSR. There is very little evidence that Central Asian Muslims share in the recent marked decline in life-span, especially among males, that has afflicted the Slavic population of the USSR. Central Asians pride themselves on their large families and increasing numbers. In this they are similar to their Muslim co-religionists south of the border. The 1979 census provided evidence that a net decline--largely as a result of out-migration--may be setting in among Russians and other European nationalities in the four southern Central Asian republics.

Population increase is both cause and effect of increased assertiveness and confidence among Central Asian Muslims. Some features of this confidence are the consequence of foreign policy initiatives taken by Khrushchev. Active engagement in the Arab World and other countries of the Middle East and Africa--a large proportion of them

Muslim--engaged Soviet Muslims in contacts that are to some degree irreversible--or reversible only at high cost to Soviet foreign policy objectives. Educated Uzbeks, Tadzhiks and others were recruited into the Soviet foreign service and began appearing in Soviet embassies abroad, in military and economic aid missions and even occasionally among KGB teams in the Third World. Programs for training students from the Third World were developed with Tashkent as a major center. Learning Arabic--and other Middle Eastern languages--became permissible--since the knowledge was to serve overall Soviet foreign policy aims. Large numbers of delegations were brought from Muslim countries to visit Central Asia. Central Asian awareness of the Muslim world beyond the Soviet borders has increased steadily during the past thirty years. As Central Asians have increasingly assumed control of their own local government, educational establishments, media and publishing enterprises, this process has become to some degree self-propelled and difficult for Moscow to control, for Soviet Muslims have proved adept at turning many features of what for long were only theoretical "affirmative action" features of the Soviet system to their advantage.

Examination of publications such as encyclopedias issued in native languages in Central Asia during the past two decades reveals a steady increase of cultural and historical material relating to the Islamic past of Central Asia and neighboring Islamic countries. The Cyrillic alphabets in which Central Asians write their languages have not proved to be an obstacle to linguistic assertiveness. In spite of official pressure for introduction of Russian terminology and widespread learning of Russian, the most significant trends have been the renewal of traditional terminology and the broad interest in cultivation of native languages.

Islam has always been a way of life--an interlocking amalgam of cultural habits, rituals of living and attitudes toward family and society--as much as a religion. Even in urban areas, Islamic patterns have survived to a marked extent. In rural Central Asia--where most of the people still live (the rural population of some parts of the region increased more rapidly than the urban in the 1970s), Islamic life has continued to flourish in a manner which has no parallel among rural populations elsewhere in the USSR. Soviet authorities found it in their interest--as a matter of control--to maintain an official Islamic clerical structure which has acquired bureaucratic status and even a degree of independence. \*FN9 Alongside it, with some informal links, unofficial Islam has continued to exist. Islamic cults and brotherhoods have not only proved tenacious, but there is a good body of evidence that their influence and the number of their adherents have been increasing for some time. / While the Kremlin has continued to encourage atheistic propaganda, it has acquired the nature of a bureaucratic ritual, and there is little evidence of its effectiveness even among communists.

The Soviet relationship with China has also worked to the advantage of Central Asians--many of whom have close ties with kindred populations on the Chinese side of the border. At various periods in modern history, there has been refugee movement in both directions, with the result that there are communities of Uigurs/<sup>and</sup> Muslim Chinese--Dungans--in Central Asia and large numbers of Central Asians--especially Kazakhs--whose origins are in the USSR, living in Chinese territory. Competition between Moscow and Peking for Central Asian loyalty has not necessarily benefited either the USSR or China--but it has given Central Asians some

sense of independent status and, as with the relationship to the Muslim world to the south and west, broadened their geopolitical horizons.

Thus requirements of Soviet foreign policy are likely to continue to require continual compromises with the result that Soviet Muslims--on the basis of official information and activities alone--can now secure a great deal of reasonably accurate information about Islam abroad which had long been considered illegitimate for them to have. Marxism, which has weakened in the European USSR and in Eastern Europe as a philosophy capable of serving as a substitute religion--is in an even weaker position among Soviet Muslims. It has very little to do with their relationship to Muslims in China or south of the USSR's borders. Moscow cannot permit independent Marxist development for the same reasons it moved against Sultangaliev in the 1920s--out of fear of inability to control it. Even seemingly enthusiastic communist activists among Soviet Muslims have shown no serious interest in developing creative forms of Marxism that could appeal to Islamic peoples outside the Soviet borders.

Advances which the Soviet Union was able to make in Islamic countries and among Islamic populations outside its borders during the past 25 years have had very little to do with Marxism. Communist parties, as such, have not only not played a major role in expansion of Soviet influence in Middle Eastern and African countries; they have often proved to be a serious obstacle to Soviet foreign policy goals (as in Sudan). In many countries where the USSR has been able to develop major influence and presence over a period of time, communism, as such, has had to be downplayed and indigenous communist movements severely disadvantaged:

Egypt, Iraq, Syria. It is not surprising that Central Asians, therefore, find communist ideology and communist party links as such of little consequence in relationships with peoples to whom they are linked by ethnic or religious/cultural affinities.

V

Economically the past thirty years have brought both steady and extensive economic development in Soviet Central Asia and increased integration into the USSR economy as a whole. No distinctive Central Asian economic relationships with kindred Islamic countries have developed. Only occasionally, and on a very limited basis, have Central Asians played a special role in Soviet economic aid activity abroad. Within Central Asia, intensified agricultural development--grain in Kazakhstan and cotton in the southern republics--has brought no unique benefits to the local populations. Exploitation of mineral resources (oil, natural gas, uranium, aluminum) has been entirely within the framework of all-union requirements. No large-scale industrial development has taken place to satisfy specific Central Asian needs or exploit unique Central Asian potentials. It became increasingly evident during the 1970s that Central Asia was generating a substantial surplus of manpower at a time when shortages in the older industrial regions of the USSR, as well as in Siberia (where they are chronic), were becoming more serious. No solution for this dilemma has been found. Schemes for diversion of rivers to permit vastly expanded cultivation in Central Asia have made good popular-science reading, both at home and abroad, but no firm commitment to investment of the vast resources necessary to begin to implement such projects has been forthcoming. The issue



appears to be generating some rancor and tension between Central Asians and Moscow. Concepts of Marxist solidarity do not provide an adequate framework for working out a solution.

Awareness of economic developments in other parts of the Islamic world has increased in Central Asia and among Soviet Muslims in general. Some have seen firsthand the vast upsurge in wealth and economic activity that has resulted from inflow of profits from oil into countries immediately south of the border. Such developments bring home to Central Asians the fact that the Soviet economic and political system --which is supposed to bring them so many advantages--makes it quite impossible for any separate region or nationality to benefit in the same way from resources located in its territory.

Compared to conditions that existed before World War II, or even to the situation in the 1950s, Central Asians are now much less isolated from knowledge of the outer world. Their native-language media provide large amounts of information--often carefully selected and distorted, it is true, about developments in the outer world, including conditions in neighboring countries to the south. There is plenty of evidence that Central Asians have developed the same skills as other peoples of the Soviet Union for reading between the lines. They are also able to listen to foreign broadcasts, sometimes in languages other than their own, for knowledge of foreign languages among Central Asian educated elites has increased markedly. Information flows through many other channels. The cassette recorder has penetrated Central Asia too.

Meanwhile interest in "roots", in history, in cultural identity and family background and in regional history--the same phenomenon that

has been observable in both advanced and developing societies in recent decades, has spread among Central Asians. The new generation of native intellectuals, teaching at universities, writing for newspapers and cultural publications, engaged in research into the history of their own region, has become ever more concerned about self-expression and communication with others with similar interests. Endless controversy with political authorities has not prevented recurrent manifestations of local nationalism. Suppressed in one field or among one group, it has constantly welled up among others. Nationalism has infected sports. Self-assertion takes not only the form of interest in native traditions, but also in independent approaches to other cultures. Recent observers report keen interest in Western music among Central Asian youth, wearing of T-shirts with European and American identification and even wearing of U.S. military uniform components with insignia. \*FN11 Some of this is undoubtedly sheer faddism, but it is hardly evidence of Marxist discipline. While literary developments seldom reflect the immediate concerns of the "broad masses", they are frequently highly revealing of the pre-occupations of the opinion-forming elements in any society. Concerns of anthropologists are often in the same category. Study of such materials from Soviet Central Asia provides a great deal of insight into contemporary life--insight which no journalist making a quick tour or even academic exchange students on officially sponsored visits can gain. \*FN12

## VI

If any single country to the south of Soviet borders has attracted the attention of Soviet Muslims continually and in greater depth than any other, it is modern Turkey. There are many reasons. Turkic affinity

is deeply felt. Religious traditions--the role of the Ottoman sultans as caliphs--play a residual role. But it is primarily the experience of Turkey as a modernizing republic that has attracted the curiosity of Central Asian elites. Kremlin rulers have never been confident of Central Asian loyalties, however, to attempt to exploit Central Asian affinity for Turkey by turning it around and trying to influence Turkey itself. The official policy of the Kremlin toward Turkey has generally been one of formal good will with little warmth. Beneath the surface there always <sup>is</sup> a fear of the positive interest Turkey arouses among Soviet Muslims. Internally, in Central Asia and the Caucasus, Soviet leadership has actively discouraged interest in Turkey and denigrated individuals interested in Turkish historical ties as backward and reactionary. In 1945 Stalin tried to intimidate Turkey into accepting semi-satellite status--the pressure backfired and Turkey made a decisive turn toward the west. During the past 20 years, the Kremlin has devoted major resources to encouraging subversion in Turkey. Examination of Soviet relations with Turkey is enlightening, for it demonstrates the essential insecurity of the Kremlin leadership as a constant factor in policy toward this most dynamic modern state in the Islamic world.

Ataturkist Turkey, even when following a policy of neutrality among the great powers (as it did from the establishment of the Republic almost to the end of World War II), was feared by the Kremlin because of its potential as an example of successful, independent non-communist development. When Turkey turned decisively toward multi-party democracy and launched itself on the road to vigorous economic development in the framework of a non-dogmatic mixed economy, it became a greater danger. All the more so when it joined NATO in 1951. The insignificant Turkish

communist party was never permitted by Moscow to develop ties to Turkic Muslim communists in the USSR. When Marxism emerged into the open in Turkey in the 1960s, Turkish leftists were not encouraged by Moscow to interest themselves in the Turkic peoples of the Soviet Union. When the Turkish Labor Party fell into disarray in the wake of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Moscow, in effect, abandoned it and shifted to a policy of encouraging extremism and anti-Western violence in Turkey--but again without any reference to Soviet Muslims. Turkish leftists were generally not interested in Soviet Muslim Turks. This was natural in view of the fact that from the 1920s onward, disaffected Tatars, Caucasians and Central Asians had taken refuge in Turkey and many rose to positions of prominence. Many of these people had been liberals in the political context of the declining Tsarist Empire--but once settled in Turkey they found themselves denounced as reactionaries and rightists by the Kremlin. They were accused from time to time of subversive activity inside the USSR far beyond any capacity they possessed--or that would have been tolerated by the Turkish Republican government, mindful in the extreme to heed Ataturk's warnings against irredentism.

Nevertheless, under the rampantly free conditions that prevailed in Turkish society after the 1961 constitution was adopted, interest in Dis Türkler became a preoccupation of rightist politicians in Turkey. This suited the Soviet leadership; they liked it that way. The presence of such currents in Turkey gave the Kremlin a convenient excuse to restrict all but carefully controlled formal contacts between Turkey and the Turkic/Muslim peoples of the USSR to the level of folklore and music. Both Turks and Soviet Muslims nevertheless often contrived

~~nevertheless~~ to exploit such contacts to get to know each other better and have meaningful exchanges of opinion.

When the Soviet Union and surrogates such as Bulgaria became involved in massive destabilization efforts in Turkey, including support of terrorism, Soviet Muslims played no role. Turkish Marxists during this period strongly condemned all Turkish politicians who displayed any interest in the Muslims of the USSR. There is not much evidence that Soviet subversive operatives made <sup>great effort</sup> to infiltrate the sizable communities in Turkey who are of first and second generation Soviet (and Chinese) Muslim origin. The same could not be said, however, of the Pan-Turkist National Movement Party of Alparslan Türkeş. The exposure of the plot against the Pope has revealed how extensively this party appears to have been infiltrated and exploited for Soviet subversive purposes.

Far from being able to foster or try to manipulate feelings of Marxist solidarity, the Soviet leadership has displayed little confidence in the actual existence of such feelings among its Muslim/Turkic peoples and great fear that even experimentation with such political currents might provide a camouflage--as far as the Muslim/Turkic peoples themselves are concerned--for capitalizing on feelings of Turkish and Islamic brotherhood that undoubtedly do exist--and which would be intensified by closer and more frequent contact.

Pahlavi Iran did not pose the same problem for the Soviet leadership in coping with its Muslims than Republican Turkey did. The fact that most Anatolians are Sunni, like most Soviet Muslims, while most Iranians are Shia, may have been of minor significance at least, but

probably more important was the fact that Iran did not embark on a policy of uncompromising pro-Western, pro-democratic modernization that could have made it attractive to intellectuals as an alternative to communist-style modernization in the USSR. When, during the 1970s, Iran experienced a burst of economic growth as a result of sudden oil wealth, the Shah's imperial pretensions and the equivocal nature of many Iranian reforms made it questionable as a model that would appeal to Central Asians as anything other than a country that was benefitting directly from its own petroleum wealth. It was only in respect to Azeris (because of both Turkic affinity and religion) and Tadzhiks (because of Iranian heritage) that a degree of mutual interaction comparable to that which has always to some degree existed between Anatolian and "Russian" Turks could come into play. In both instances, some degree of cultural and political influence may have been exercised by the Soviet Muslim peoples on their kindred on the other side of the border. The subject is, however, complex and inadequately studied.

## VII

We are still too close to the revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan--and these dramatic events are still far from running their course--to give more than speculative answers to most of the questions that arise about cross-border influences. Kremlin leadership seems to have been almost as much surprised by the collapse of the Iranian monarchy as the United States and its European allies were. It is even possible that some Kremlin leaders were as alarmed by some of these developments as the White House was. But it was not their investment nor their policies that were discredited before the world, nor was it the Soviet Embassy that was captured and its occupants made

hostage in November 1979. Iranian revolutionaries did not claim to be Marxists and the Soviet leadership saw no advantage in pretending any of them were. From the early 19th century into modern times, the Russian Empire found Iran a difficult country to deal with. By the time the Iranian revolution occurred, several years of increasingly intense Soviet meddling in Afghanistan had brought no clear-cut advantages to the Kremlin. The Iranian revolution confronted the Russians with new fears about what might happen in Afghanistan--but every move that was made to improve the Russian position there by political and subversive means--as well as through party channels, relying on Marxist appeals--brought new complications. We cannot do more than guess at the complex of considerations that led to the Soviet decision to be prepared to intervene militarily in Afghanistan. The too frequently heard allegation that the move had nothing to do with fear that rising politico-religious disorder and ferment in Iran and Afghanistan might eventually infect the Soviet Muslim population cannot be accepted on the basis of present evidence.

The Afghan invasion was carried out under a somewhat tattered banner of Marxist solidarity--but whatever credibility the notion might have had at the time (little) has long since been dissipated by the fervent resistance the Afghan population has put up against Soviet forces as well as by the fact that Marxist factions in Afghanistan have proved incapable of uniting into any semblance of a government that would be able to maintain itself more than 24 hours if Soviet tanks and bayonets were withdrawn.

We know that there was a high degree of curiosity among the Soviet Central Asian population about events in Iran from mid-1978 onward.

Their information came from both Iranian and foreign broadcasts and then by interpolation of selective Soviet reporting on Iranian events. This interest seems, by and large, to have continued. Whether "interest" can be differentiated into clearly definable attitudes is much less clear. Shias / <sup>are</sup> few in Central Asia. Specific Shi'ite sentiment is hard to verify. A more general interest in the spectacle of an Islamic people taking its destiny into its own hands and accepting a leadership largely because it has no outside, foreign links, is attested to a greater degree. There is little evidence that Central Asians have interpreted Iranian developments in terms of Marxism. The Tudeh Party, e.g., seems to evoke little sympathy. /among groups such as Azeris and Turkmens in Iran, of course, and their struggles against religious authorities in Tehran, may be provoking more concern among their kindred across the border.

Central Asian interest in Afghanistan seems to have been much less intense than in Iran until the invasion occurred. The invasion changed everything. Soviet Central Asians are involved in it still, though early use of Central Asian troops and resultant difficulties, which are reasonably well attested, led to more reliance on Slavs and other Europeans. But Central Asians have been drawn into Soviet political efforts to cultivate related minorities in Afghanistan. The population of northern Afghanistan includes large numbers of Turkmens, Uzbeks and Tadzhiks. Among each of these peoples, but especially among the Uzbeks, many people are direct descendants of parents who fled from the Soviet side of the border during the 1920s, when the Basmachi were being suppressed, or during the commotion that resulted from collectivization and the great purges of the 1930s. Marxism would not have



much appeal to such people, but close ethnic and religious ties would still be real. The influence could go both ways. There is evidence from Afghanistan to support almost any interpretation one might wish to emphasize.

On the larger international plane it is clear that the invasion of Afghanistan is having, and is likely to continue to have, a profound effect on Muslim attitudes toward the Kremlin in the whole region from the Mediterranean to Southeast Asia. At the same time, it has heightened the interest of many of these people in the status of Muslims in the USSR and in their attitudes and orientation toward the Soviet system. Central Asian Muslims serving abroad find themselves in an equivocal position when confronted with this curiosity. If they try to justify the invasion of Afghanistan, they have to do so on grounds of pacification and accelerated modernization--not Marxism as such. A few are known to have expressed the view that the areas of Afghanistan inhabited by the same peoples as live across the Soviet borders should be incorporated with their "home" republics in the USSR. This kind of attitude appears to have very little to do with a desire to expand Kremlin/Marxist influence as such--more with their own Central Asian nationalism.

#### VIII

So we face in the 1980s the fascinating spectacle of a much more confident, self-conscious Central Asian Muslim population confronted with a degree of ferment in the region immediately to their south which has no precedent since the period immediately following World War II. There are also influences from China, where kindred Turkic peoples are adjusting to the pragmatic approach to modernization that the rulers in Peking have adopted, along with a much more positive orientation

to the outer world, / as well as a distinctly negative attitude toward Marxism and Russian nationalism as propagated from the Kremlin.

For the immediate future there is little reason to expect the native population of Central Asia to do much more than capitalize off the opportunities the present situation--and their own position within the Soviet Union--gives them to make further material and psychological gains.

\*FN13 Many questions remain open--not only in respect to foreign orientation but on domestic concerns as well. Have the five republics, for example, gained the loyalty of their "nationalities" to the extent that all prospects for future Turkestani solidarity are dead? Can nationalism operate in Central Asia on two or three different levels? Is there, indeed, a version of the new "Soviet Man" emerging there? What is the role of Islam as a unifying force? Are nationalism and religion differentiated?

Consideration of these questions leads in turn back to the questions with which we began this essay: What is the basis of Central Asian interest in kindred peoples and co-religionists beyond their borders? Some things can be said with relative assurance. Marxism does not offer a basis for constructive relationships. It is not necessarily an obstacle, except in certain instances, such as Afghanistan. For the most part it is irrelevant. Central Asians show no inclination to develop their relationships with kindred peoples in Marxist terms. On the other hand, a trend toward increase interest in Islamic-based relationships is discernible. How it will develop is difficult to predict. Equally strong--perhaps more fundamental--is a sense of common Turkic heritage. It is not clear whether with peoples such as the Tadzhiks, the <sup>sense of</sup> common Iranian heritage is as strong or, if it is, whether it can have the same consequences.

- 1 - See the two initial chapters of Jacob M. Landau, Pan-Turkism in Turkey, Hamden, CT (Archon Books), 1981; S.A. Zenkovsky, Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia, Cambridge, MA (Harvard), 1960.
- 2 - I have discussed this problem in my "Fire and Sword in the Caucasus", Central Asian Survey (Oxford), Vol. 2/1, 1983.
- 3 - Two excellent first-hand accounts are C.H. Ellis, The Transcaspiian Episode, London (Hutchinson), 1963 and F.M. Bailey, Mission to Tashkent, London (Jonathan Cape), 1946.
- 4 - Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union, Chicago (U. of Chicago Press), 1979.
- 5 - see my "Economic Development of Soviet Central Asia to the Eve of World War II - An Examination of Soviet Methods as applied to a Semi-Colonial Area", Part I in Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society (London), July-October 1949, pp. 278-296; Part II in the same journal, January 1950, pp. 28-44.
- 6 - I described and analyzed these developments in "Politics and Alphabets in Inner Asia", in J.A. Fishman (ed.), Advances in the Creation and Revision of Writing Systems, The Hague (Mouton), 1977, pp. 371-420.  
e.g.
- 7 - See/the study by a man who appears to be a Chechen still living in Kazakhstan, A.D. Yandarov, Sufizm i Ideologia Natsional'no-osvoboditel'novo Dvizheniya, Alma-Ata (Izd. "Nauka"), 1975.
- 8 - They are most conveniently available in A. Bennigsen & C. Lemerrier-Quelquejay, Les Musulmans oubliés - L'Islam en Union Sovietique, Paris (Maspero), 1981.
- 9 - A. Bennigsen and M. Broxup, The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State London (Croom Helm), 1983.
- 10 - E.g. S.M. Demidov, Sufizm v Turkmenii, Ashkhabad (Izd. "Ylym"), 1978.
- 11 - This and many other revealing features of current Central Asian life are reported in David C. Montgomery, "Once Again in Tashkent", Asian Affairs (London), June 1983, pp. 132-147.
- 12 - For an interesting review of recent Soviet writing on ethnography and reflections of sociological developments in current literature see Daniel C. Matuszewski, "The Turkic Past in the Soviet Future", Problems of Communism, July-August 1982, pp. 76-82.
- 13 - I have discussed this issue in broader terms--and many other issues as well--in a study entitled "Soviet Nationalities in Strategic Perspective--the Specter and Implications of Internal Nationalist Dis-sent", which will appear shortly in a symposium to be published by Croom Helm, Ltd., London, edited by the Society for Central Asian Studies, Oxford.

# The Central Asian Foundation

24241 Fairway Drive  
Kansasville, Wis. 53139  
Racine (414) 878-2005

The Central Asian Foundation is engaged in furthering public awareness of and scholarly research on this strategically important region of the world. Within the past decade, the importance of Central Asia--which may be defined geographically as the largely Turkic-Muslim regions of the USSR, China, northern Afghanistan, and northern Iran, as well as the ethnically and culturally linked territories of the Caucasus--has become more apparent to Western observers: an importance which recently was accentuated by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Islamic revolution in Iran, and dramatic demographic gains among the Muslim populations of the Soviet state. Currently no other foundations or charitable organizations direct their resources toward furthering our knowledge of Central Asia. The Central Asian Foundation was created to serve this pressing need.

The Foundation has many activities which include sponsoring public seminars and lectures, commissioning special studies on various historical, political, economic, and strategic aspects of the Central Asian region, and publishing the results of its research for the general public and the scholarly community.

The Foundation is registered with the Internal Revenue Service as an operating foundation under section 4942(j) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Accordingly, contributions to the Foundation are deductible for income tax purposes.

For those interested in learning more about the Foundation or contributing to its operation, please contact one of the Trustees.

S. Enders Wimbush  
24241 Fairway Dr.  
Kansasville, Wis. 53139

Paul B. Henze  
6014 Namakagan Rd.  
Washington D.C. 20816

Warren Shear  
Box 14440  
Oklahoma City, OK  
73114