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Kyrghyzstan. Three major political groups dominate in Kyrghyzstan, and they correspond to clan-based geographic divisions, each of which is held together by a complex network of clan ties and shared territorial interests: those from Naryn (including long-time party boss Turdakun Usubaliev, president Askar Akaev and his supporters), those from Talas (deposed communist party leader Absamat Masaliev), and the Kirghiz from Osh (tied to the Fergana Valley Uzbek party organization).

The "democratic revolution" of autumn 1990 is a model for the types of struggles that are developing elsewhere in the region. The Osh riots in June-July 1990 gave Masaliev’s political opposition a theme around which to unify. Masaliev, who was born in Osh and spent his career in Talas, had displaced the Naryn-anchored political organization of Turdakun Usubaliev, when the latter was removed from office in 1985.

The Naryn group constituted themselves as a "Democratic Bloc" within the legislature. They further demonstrated their credentials as democrats by championing the political rights of the non-communist "Democratic Movement for Kirghizia," a loose collection of disaffected intellectuals and Muslim moderates whose goal was to break the CPSU’s monopoly on power. Working in concert they pushed Masaliev out; the Supreme Soviet of the republic electing academician Askar Akaev as president of the republic instead. Though Akaev allowed the Democratic Movement to play a limited role in Kyrgyzstan’s public life, he dismissed their calls for new parliamentary elections and ran unopposed in the popular elections for president.
Tajikistan. There are two major groupings in Tajikistan, the Leninabad (now renamed Khojent) group and the less powerful Kuliab faction. The Leninabad group suffered a serious defeat 1985, when Rakhmat Nabiev was deposed as Communist party first secretary and replaced by Khakar Makhamov. After Nabiev unsuccessfully ran against Makhamov (when the latter was elected President of the republic by Tajikistan’s Supreme Soviet), he began to court the political opposition of the republic. Three major non-party opposition groups existed, a secular "Democratic Movement", the Rastokhez (Muslim moderate) and Islamic Renaissance (Muslim fundamentalist) movements. The latter two groups were not legally sanctioned until October 1991, and both, originally rural based, draw much of their intellectual and financial support from Afghanistan.

Nabiev hoped to use support from these groups to defeat Makhkamov in popular balloting for the republic presidency, but the August coup made Nabiev seem superfluous to the non-party reformers. Taking to the streets they succeeded in overthrowing Makhkamov, only to have Nabiev lead a palace coup against the interim president after he demanded the nationalization of communist party property. Tajik demonstrators, led by fasting kazis (Muslim judges), temporarily got Nabiev to step down, pending the outcome of a November 24, 1991 presidential election in which ten candidates competed.

Nabiev won a first ballot victory, with over fifty-seven percent of the vote. Though vote fraud was charged (but not proven), as heir to the Brezhnev-era communist party, Nabiev’s ties reach into every community in better than half the republic. Nabiev’s election was a defeat for Tajikistan’s political moderates. But not for Tajikistan’s Islamic establishment and opposition, who choose to oppose Nabiev only indirectly. The Islamic
establishment has achieved important concessions from Nabiev, giving them a wide measure of control over Tajikistan’s social life. Moreover the role of Islam is sure to grow as "freelance" clerics have convincingly demonstrated their ability to mobilize the population, especially youth (and young people, nearly half of whom are unemployed, make up more than half the republic’s population).

Uzbekistan. The situation in Uzbekistan is like Tajikistan, but even more complicated. Separate coalitions of groups represent the Fergana Valley, Bukhara-Samarkand and Dzizak-Tashkent oblast. While the Communist Party was the only legal political organization it served as the mechanism in which intra-group conflict was regulated. Now that its control has been broken or severely threatened, these intra-elite struggles have been sharply stimulated and in the process new groups have been able to assert their right to participate in the political process.

Sherif Rashidov, the Brezhnev-era party boss was from Dzhizak, but his support came from throughout the republic, and after his death (in 1983), those tied to the cotton economy came under attack republic wide. The "cotton-mafia" from the Fergana valley suffered disproportionately, leaving the party organization in the region relatively "headless."

The Fergana Valley (not Tashkent) was always the real spiritual center of Uzbekistan, and the power vacuum there further stimulated the development and politicization of Islamic fundamentalist groups. By 1991 these groups were already having a perceptible influence among young people in Tashkent as well, where non-party political moderates, grouped around the political movement Birlik (unity) was declining in popularity, in large part
because they were illegal and so banned from a public role in political life. The Islamic
groups were not as troubled by their illegal status, because they were able to meet in
mosques during the course of religious services.

The party elite was split even before the August 1991 coup, divided between
supporters of President Islam Karimov, and those supporting former Vice President (and later
State Secretary) Shahrulla Mir-saidov. After the coup, the need to "ban" the communist party
(which in Uzbekistan through October 1991 at least was a largely symbolic action),
heightened the conflict between the two men, both of whom were keeping close watch on
events in Tajikistan.

For now at least Karimov is in firm control. He faced only token opposition in the
December presidential election (from Erk's Muhammad Salikh, a popular poet), and used the
size of this victory to justify a purge of Mirsaidov and some of his group.

However in the long run such actions are likely to prove more destabilizing than
supportive of Karimov's long-term aims. For now the opposition---the democrats of Erk, the
banned Islamic Renaissance Party, and the ousted partocrats---will have little choice but to
take to the streets with their growing frustrations.

Kazakhstan. The situation in Kazakhstan is also extremely complicated, in large part
because of the republic's peculiar demographic situation; it is the only republic in the union
in which the titular nationality is a minority in their republic. Although Kazakhs slightly
outnumber Russians (38 percent to 36 percent) native Russian speakers make up about sixty
percent of the population. The Communist Party of Kazakhstan was multi-national, although
Kazakhs were somewhat over-represented.

Kazakhstan's communist party was always dominated by descendants of the Great Horde, the tribal group that ruled in southern Kazakhstan (the area that was least affected by Russian and then Soviet rule). But there were also party elite groupings corresponding to the Small Horde (western Kazakhstan) and Middle Horde territories. The Turkmen are divided into two tribes, and there have always been two competing groups of party leaders.

Though Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbaev is far and away the most popular political figure in the republic and won a resounding victory when he ran unopposed in the December presidential elections, the successor socialist party which he organized is predominantly Russian. To counter this he helped form a party for the Popular Consolidation of Kazakhstan (headed by prominent poets Olzhas Suleimenov and Mukhtar Shakhanov), which is likely to be overwhelmingly Kazakh in composition (and which will not receive the CPSU-owned property in the republic).

The creation of these two parties seems likely to further exacerbate existing ethnic divisions. What Nazarbaev appears to fear most is that the question of secession of the northern, overwhelmingly Russian oblasts of the republic will be put to a vote in a local referendum.

Nazarbaev appears to be hoping by creating a predominantly Russian socialist party he can create a rift between the Ural Cossack secessionists and the remainder of the Russian speaking population. Similarly, his hope is that a Kazakh national party dominated by establishment nationalists would help defuse the growing appeal of the legally recognized non-communist Azat (freedom) party (which is not well represented in the Supreme Soviet),
and that of the illegal Muslim secessionist group of Alash.

**Turkmenistan.** Sapurmarad Niazov has managed to contain potential political opposition. The opposition group within the party has been out of power so long that they are not nearly as skilled political infighters as Niazov’s coterie. Islam is a powerful force in the countryside, but the clerics do not represent an organized opposition group, and Niazov’s "democratic" opponents have been easy to isolate. Moreover, Niazov is hoping that friendly ties with Iran and foreign development of Turkmenistan’s mineral resources will provide a high enough per capita income to keep everyone happy.