TITLE: CENTRAL ASIA and KAZAKHSTAN TODAY: PROBLEMS and PERSPECTIVES

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In the few years of the post-Soviet period, Central Asia and Kazakhstan became what they actually had been during the whole Soviet period: another Third World region with unsolved structural problems and minimal potential for rapid economic and social development. The future does not look particularly bright for the region. Disorder, and even violent riots in spontaneous and sometimes very unpleasant forms, may soon be a social reality.

Many observers foresee only two possible developments there: a dictatorship by former Communist leaders, or a dictatorship by Muslim fundamentalists. The first development has already taken place in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tadjikistan. The second prognostic development seems at present less plausible. One should also not completely rule out the third and, apparently, the most desirable development that is feasible in at least some Central Asian countries: an autocratic or semi-autocratic regime of moderate reformists. Actually, they already exist and are represented by Nazarbaev in Kazakhstan and Akaev in Kyrgyzstan. In the current situation, they are certainly the lesser evil.

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1For Tables and Figures see pages 59 ff.
At present, Central Asia and Kazakhstan are overburdened by their past. The region's pasts are still alive and often complementing one another: the pre-colonial past represented by what is sometimes called "survivals" of the traditional, or pre-industrial society, the past of the pre-revolutionary colonial period, and, last but not least, the recent past of Soviet imperialism.

Of all the numerous problems that Central Asia and Kazakhstan are facing now, the most important one remains their underdevelopment.\(^1\) Modernization was pursued in this region with a minimal participation by the native population, and none of its processes: industrialization, urbanization, the demographic revolution, the revolution in education, and occupational mobility were fully implemented there. The so-called "inter-regional division of labor" policy carried out by the Moscow center clearly contradicted the interests of Central Asia and Kazakhstan because it condemned the region to the role of a supplier of raw materials which left the region for other parts of the country mainly in unprocessed form. The subsidies that the center paid Central Asian republics were only partial compensation for the profits made from unequivalent exchange with them.

Thus, less than 10 percent of the produced cotton remained in Central Asian republics.\(^2\) The local population still have to buy textiles made from their cotton, but produced in European parts of the former USSR. Nevertheless, in the period between 1970 and 1991 the center reduced its capital investments in Central Asian industry by more than one third, although Central Asia's output per capita comprised only about 50 percent of the country's overall average and was continuing to drop.\(^3\) While per capita capital state investments in the Russian Federation were 119.5 percent of the all-Union average for the years 1981-85, and 123.1 percent for the years 1986-88, in Uzbekistan they were correspondingly 63.9 and 48.2 percent, in Kirgizia 48.2 and 44.8 percent, and in Tadjikistan 43.3 and 42.7 percent.\(^4\)
Underdevelopment in Central Asia

The limited industrialization of the area has been accompanied not so much by the creation of an indigenous working class, as by attracting a work force from the European parts of the USSR. During the construction of industrial complexes neither local needs nor local traditions were taken into account. As a result, the area contains large heavy industry enterprises, entire industrial branches, even entire cities with the indigenous population comprising the minority and, until recently, industrial revenues never reached the local budget. People of European origin are still the main backbone of the skilled work force and scientific-technical personnel. All of the large enterprises, electric stations, oil wells, mines, railroads, aviation, and means of mass communication that were created during the Soviet period are still served by engineers, technicians, and skilled workers from industrial centers of Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia, attracted to Central Asia by higher wages, the possibility of receiving an apartment, and good promotion possibilities.

Ninety-three percent of Kazakhstan’s industry was directly subordinate to the all-Union ministries in Moscow. The republic’s tax revenues from these enterprises constituted only 0.03 percent of its budget. Their employees were not Kazakhstan’s workers but rather Union workers. They virtually embodied the Union center, its defense and heavy industries, and its space research and military power. They were far from integrated into the local society, and often considered themselves more as representative of the center vis-à-vis Kazakhs.

It is true that industrial labor is not prestigious in the eyes of the indigenous population who prefer to be involved in the services. However, even those who wished to take blue collar jobs were never given a fair chance. They were not considered as qualified enough, but at the same time they had limited opportunities to learn a trade. Until recently, in the cities of Fergana oblast’ it was even forbidden to employ rural people.

Sixty to sixty-five percent of the indigenous population in Central Asia is still employed in agriculture, and complaints have often been heard that the movement of the rural population to the cities is made more difficult due to the number of Russians and other people of European origin who have settled there. In Kyrgyzstan the Kyrgyz make up only
20 percent of the industrial workers and much less in management and engineering. In Kazakhstan's industrial sector Kazakhs comprise only 18 percent.

The 71 districts (raions) of Kazakhstan with a predominantly Kazakh population are economically the most backward and have the highest percentage of unemployed. What this situation is leading to is demonstrated by the violent disturbances and inter-ethnic conflict in Novyi Uzen', Munaishi, Dzetybai, and other centers of the oil industry in the Mangyshlak peninsula in Western Kazakhstan, in the summer of 1989. The central organizations had pumped oil there for decades, and in order not to build schools, hospitals, and day care centers have preferred to bring in temporary workers from the North Caucasus. Every quarter planes were bringing over a new shift of 12 thousand people. These shifts included not only skilled workers, but also secretaries, cooks, and even office-cleaners. In addition, migrants from the Caucasus managed to seize many lucrative positions in trade and service. The local Kazakh population was viewed as a burden. Eighteen thousand Kazakh youth remained unemployed with nowhere to go. As a result of this situation, the latter began to demand the expulsion of all the settlers and workers from the Caucasus and the provision of jobs for unemployed Kazakhs. Mobs went on a rampage which lasted for several days and resulted in several deaths, numerous injuries, and great damage to various consumer enterprises and services.

Moreover, since a good command of Russian remained a necessary requirement for social advancement and career promotion in almost all spheres of professional activity, particularly in the cities, it placed members of Central Asian ethnic groups in an even more unequal position in comparison with Russians, and in this way only intensified ethnic competition. In 1988, in the capital of Kyrgyzstan Frunze (now Bishkek) there was only one Kyrgyz-language school. (By 1990 there were three.) In the capital of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, it was impossible even to send a telegram, or call an ambulance in the Uzbek language. Even employment applications had to be written only in Russian.

In agriculture everything was subject to the imposed cotton monospecialization with the most disastrous repercussions on the economy, living conditions, and environment of Central Asia. In the main oases the share of irrigated land sown with cotton was approximately 70 percent, and under direct orders from Moscow this continued to expand
until recently. This was at the expense of grain, cultivation, fruit and vegetables, and the production of meat and milk for local consumption, and has even limited the size of family plots from which kolkhozniks got a lion’s share of their food and income. Even the allotment of land for the construction of new housing in the rural regions became a serious problem.17

In Central Asia a kind of ethnic division of labor exists also in agriculture. While the native population in large part supplies the unskilled labor in cotton cultivation and for pastoral production, ethnic minorities like Russians, Ukrainians, Koreans, Tatars, and others, prefer to be occupied in other, more mechanized branches of agriculture demanding more skilled labor.18 This situation also has a long history. Thus, the virgin land campaign in Kazakhstan was not only conducted at the Kazakhs’ expense: they were practically prevented from becoming involved in grain production.

A shortage of land and water in addition to ethnic competition for a limited number of jobs resulted in growing tension in the regions with a mixed population, not only between the indigenous population and settlers and migrants of European origin, but also between the former and some Muslim ethnic minorities, like Crimean Tatars, Meskhetian Turks, and Chechen,19 as well as between different native ethnic groups. In this regard, one can refer to the violent conflict over land and water rights between Tadjiks and Kyrgyz on the border between the two republics in summer 1989 into which thousands of people became involved,20 or to the brutal and bloody fighting between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the Osh oblast’ of Kyrgyzstan in summer 1990 which took at least several hundred lives.21

The system of education in Central Asia is also inferior to that in other parts of the former Soviet Union. One of the reasons why mechanization of cotton production remains low is the regime’s ability to mobilize the almost unpaid labor of school children and students. For many years during my fieldwork in different parts of Central Asia, I met them as they were forced to bend their backs in the field at the time when their counterparts in other areas of the Soviet Union enjoyed their vacations or attended classes. As a result of this practice and of the neglected school system, the quality of secondary education in the rural areas is very low.22

The situation is further aggravated by the region’s population explosion. The birthrates of most Central Asian ethnic groups still remain very high and correspond not to the
Western model but to that of Third World countries. There are many reasons for this situation, including low urbanization, early marriages, a tradition in which younger members of the family support the elders, the influence of Islam, and, last but not least, pressure from tradition-oriented public opinion. From my fieldwork in different parts of Central Asia I know that some women and men there, particularly from the urban middle strata, would like to use contraceptives and limit their number of children, but they are afraid to do it because this would expose them to condemnation by their relatives and neighbors.

Taking all of these factors into account, it should not be surprising that the area is affected by another social scourge of Third World countries – growing underemployment and unemployment. Although Soviet statistics are not particularly precise, they reveal that in the late 1980s Central Asia and Kazakhstan had several million unemployed persons. In Fergana oblast’ alone one out of five youngsters entering the job market could not find employment. In 1990, in Turkmenia unemployment was 18.8 percent, in Tadjikistan even higher. Nevertheless, the Soviet leadership acknowledged that it could not (or would not) create jobs fast enough to keep pace with the population growth. Already in the 1970s the work force in Uzbekistan grew by 250,000 persons a year, while the number of jobs outside the agricultural sector increased by only 100,000 a year.

The rural population of Central Asia and Kazakhstan is usually characterized by low mobility even within their own republics. Thus, in Uzbekistan, in 1989 only 9 out of each 1,000 people moved from rural areas to cities, while in the Soviet Union in general this figure amounted to 33. It is not only an adherence to a traditional way of life and occupations which hinders migration from villages to cities. It is easier to support big families in the village because there an individual can rely on the support of ones’ relatives and neighbors (communal reciprocal ties still play a very important role in Central Asia), and on the allocation of the family plot. These plots, although very small in 1987 and 1988, provided the Uzbek peasants with more than 22 percent of their income – and this according to official and therefore understated statistics.

However, sometimes figures are deceptive. It is true, that in the 1980s and 90s the ratio between the rural and urban population remained almost the same. But given the particularly high birth-rates in the rural regions, in practice that means that hundreds of
thousands of people migrated to the cities. In professional, educational, and linguistic respects new migrants to Central Asian cities are at a disadvantage and meet strong competition from other ethnic groups. However, if they fail in the cities, they usually can not return back to their villages and small towns, because their jobs, if they had any, are already taken by other people.

It is just these people, unemployed and often homeless, who constitute a new and growing underclass in Central Asian cities. Dissatisfied, alienated, angry, and sometimes desperate, they are often particularly hostile towards the Russians and other ethnic minorities and prove to be particularly prone to extremism, violence, and crimes. As a result, a tense situation emerged in which some social differences take on ethnic colors, and social mobility strikes against ethnic boundaries. All this contributed to a general deterioration of inter-ethnic relations in the area.

It is no wonder then, that Central Asia and Kazakhstan belong to the poorest areas of the former Soviet Union, and the standard of living there continues to deteriorate. In 1987 per capita income in Uzbekistan amounted to only 58 percent of the average Soviet income, and to 62 percent, if external revenue is taken into account. In 1988, the average per capita income of more than half of the Uzbeks was below the official Soviet subsistence level estimated at 78 rubles per month. Per capita meat consumption in the rural areas of Uzbekistan was eight kilograms per year, whereas the official Soviet average was 62 kilograms; per capita consumption of milk, fruit, and vegetables was about a half of the Soviet average. In 1990, in Turkmenistan, 40 percent of workers' families and 50 percent of kolkhozniks' families lived below the official poverty line. In Kyrgyzstan, in 1992, the situation was even worse, since 80 percent of the whole population lived below the poverty line.

An inadequate diet, low quality of unpurified drinking water, the lack of proper sewage systems, the excessive use of toxic agricultural chemicals that have contaminated the water, soil, and food, and primitive medical facilities, result in the spread of various diseases and in a drastic increase in still-births, the births of deformed children, and infant mortality. Infant mortality there is so great that in 1990 infants were secretly not registered until they were three months old in order to "correct" the appalling statistics.
In 1989, the infant mortality in Turkmenistan was 54.6 per 1,000 births, twice the USSR average; in Tashauz oblast' the figure was 64 per 1,000.\textsuperscript{40} The situation is worse only in the Philippines, Nigeria, Angola, Chad, and in Karakalpakia, where 92 infants out of every 1,000 born alive die; of every 1000 children there, 83 are born with defects. The average life expectancy in Karakalpak villages is between 38 and 42 years, whereas in the Soviet Union as a whole it was 69.\textsuperscript{41}

As if all of these problems were not enough, Central Asia and Kazakhstan now face an additional one – the area is literally on the brink of ecological catastrophe. Despite all of the lip-service paid to the need to intensify the cotton production, virtually the only way to increase it – besides the corresponding reduction in areas under all other crops, or in pastures and family plots belonging to collective farmers – was to reclaim new lands, which led to the building of more new irrigation systems. From 1965 to 1985, 2.5 million hectares of new lands were cultivated and used mostly for cotton. As a result, cotton production increased to 75 or even 80 percent of total agricultural production, while worldwide, this figure is never higher than 50 percent. However, Central Asia has limited water resources, and cotton production has already consumed outrageous amounts of water. Out of 120-127 cubic kilometers of water which comprise the overall river volume in the area, irrigation in general claims nearly 90 cubic kilometers. Of these 90 cubic kilometers approximately 60-65 are used for cotton.\textsuperscript{42}

Such a system of reclamation inevitably results in the loss of some of the old cultivated lands.\textsuperscript{43} Despite the absurdity of this situation it has its own logic, though it is not based on any sound economic principle. An obsolete irrigation network (some canals, like the Dargom in the Samarkand district, or the Salar in the Tashkent region, have existed for 2,000 years), and exhausted salinized soils on which crops are not rotated, simply can not produce more. Irrigated lands in Central Asia have already lost 40 percent of their productivity. Four hundred and fifteen thousand to 7 million hectares of agricultural lands in Uzbekistan, 416,000 to 1,000,000 hectares in Turkmenia (more than a half of all irrigated land in the republic) and 650,000 hectares in Kazakhstan have salinized.\textsuperscript{44}

Their reclamation demands extensive capital investment and a reduction in the output of cotton, something Moscow was extremely unwilling to undertake and the leaders of
Central Asian republics at present are unable to attempt. For the same reasons the new irrigation systems were built in total disregard of modern water-saving technology, without appropriate drainage systems, cement facing of the canals, distilling stations, and so on. While in Israel the average efficiency of irrigation systems is 0.9, in Uzbekistan it ranges between 0.3 and 0.35. Correspondingly, while in Israel the average amount of water required to produce 1 kilogram of raw cotton is 1.2 - 1.5 cubic meters, in Central Asia the ratio is 10 cubic meters.\textsuperscript{45}

The situation is particularly serious in the western parts of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Cotton has drained the Aral Sea. It is quickly drying up because its two tributaries, the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers are completely diverted to irrigate the cotton fields. In the early 1960s there was more than 1,000 km\textsuperscript{3} of water in the Aral Sea, today hardly more than 400-450 km\textsuperscript{3} remains there. During the last two or three decades its level diminished by 14 meters, and more and more often the Sea is called "Aralkum" (the Aral desert, literally the Aral sand). If urgent measures are not undertaken immediately, by the year 2005 the Aral Sea will cease to exist.\textsuperscript{46} However, the Soviet leadership was reluctant to take such steps because they would decrease the output of cotton. It looks as if the Aral Sea had been quietly written off. Meanwhile, strong winds lift approximately 200,000 tons of sand intermixed with salt from the dry sea bed every day. While heavier particles are deposited on settlements 500 kilometers away from the Aral Sea, lighter particles are carried to much greater distances.\textsuperscript{47}

This is certainly a national tragedy with unpredictable consequences. The Uzbek poet Jamal Kamal bemoans it in the following eloquent verses:

Of a thousand children, a hundred die,
Their mothers' hearts broken,
Clear air, clean water nowhere
in our land;
Our soil poisoned,
Do you care?
Cotton grows where orchards and meadows were,
I tell the truth, I do not lie,
Fruits and meat in our villages nowhere,
Tell me is this fair?
Do you care?48

Salination of the area is accompanied by its desertification. The Kazakh steppes have been suffering from serious erosion ever since Khrushchev's virgin lands campaign. In addition, overgrazing without a seasonal rotation of pastures and a trend from multispecies toward monospecies herd composition have turned vast areas of fertile pastures in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan into sand deserts.49 Desertification in Central Asia and Kazakhstan advances on a scale comparable with those in the Sahara and the Sahel. In the past the Karakum and Kyzyl-Kum deserts occupied less than 24 percent of the total area of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. By now active desertification has claimed an additional 35-40 percent of the area.50

Ethnic Identities and Political Structure

The ethnic and socio-political situation in Central Asia also resembles to a certain extent the situation in many Third World countries, although the idea that Central Asia still lacks clear ethnic divisions, or that these divisions are unimportant, which was argued particularly strongly by the late Professor Bennigsen and his followers,51 seems to me groundless, just like the similar claims that the feeling of Islamic identity was stronger in the Soviet Union than any particular national consideration.52 With due respect to their scholarship and erudition, their insistence on a common Turkestan and/or Muslim identity still prevailing in the area, is nothing but armchair speculation. The recent development in the region speaks for itself. All those who lived in Central Asia, or did their fieldwork there, usually do not have any doubts that Uzbeks and Tadjiks, Kazakhs, and Turkmen, Karakalpaks and Kyrgyz now constitute separate ethnic groups with distinct self-consciousness and self-identification, and in most of the cases with clear ethnic boundaries. The number of inter-ethnic marriages between members of indigenous Muslim groups in Central Asia is very low and is continuing to decline. Thus, those of Tadjik intelligentsia who married Muslim but non-Tadjik women, are strongly pressured by their colleagues and acquaintances who would like them to divorce.53
Mukhammad Salikh, an Uzbek poet and a leader of the "Erk" party, recently characterized the present ethnic situation in Central Asia in these sober words:

A unified Turkestan today is a "political dream." The peoples of Turkestan are already divided into five republics, and in each a national identity has been formed. One can't deny this process that began even during the colonial period some hundred years ago.54

It is true that the Soviets contributed much to the process of ethnic differentiation in Central Asia by its political delineation and its educational, cultural, and social policy, by creating new political and educated elites who do not have a vested interest in a unified Turkestan, but on the contrary, are interested in a separate political existence of their ethnic groups and, correspondingly, in justifying their separateness. However, it would be an exaggeration to call this policy artificial ethnic engineering. The relative ease and success with which it was accomplished indicates that some of the preconditions had already existed before the revolution.

Central Asia was always an ethnically and linguistically diverse region, and even its political unity in the past was achieved only in some relatively short historical periods.55 The circulation of ideas of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism was limited there and they never held sway over the soul and minds of ordinary people. There were over 20 bloody inter-ethnic conflicts in the 19th century Kokand khanate and even more in the Khiva khanate.56

Contrary to the expectations of the Soviet leadership and the incantations of the Soviet scholars, the complicated ethnic composition in Central Asia and Kazakhstan did not evoke "internationalism" and the rapprochement of the Soviet peoples. On the contrary, ethnic tension has increased and social and economic competition between members of different ethnic groups is growing.

Some scholars point out that ethnic specialization may put ethnic groups in the direction of complementary rather than competitive occupations and reduce ethnic tensions. "In ethnic conflicts the ethnic division of labor is more a shield than a sword."57 However, in times of rapid political and social changes accompanied by drastic economic fluctuations, ethnic division of labor only strains inter-ethnic relations, especially if one ethnic groups is identified with an alien outside power base. In such conditions, increased spatial and occupational mobility and competition for scarce resources in ethnically divided societies may
further exacerbate ethnic tensions. In this respect, nationalism in Central Asia and Kazakhstan demonstrates the essential uniformity with nationalism in some other developing countries. When ethnic groups become conscious communities in response to a supranational state and/or competition between ethnic groups, they strive to maintain a separate identity within the larger heterogenous society, or to achieve its ethnic homogeneity as the best guarantee of political and economic advancement. While some Russian (Soviet) scholars still explain nationalism in Central Asia and Kazakhstan by the fact that its society remains to a large extent traditional, in my opinion, the opposite is true. In this region, nationalism is much more connected with still insufficient but ongoing modernization processes and with the emergence of new urban social strata.

However, in spite of the noticeable ethnic diversity of Central Asia, and the important role which it plays in political life, the process of modern nation-building is far from complete. Ethnic consciousness there still has a hierarchical character. An individual considers himself to belong to a given ethnic group vis-à-vis other ones, but in the internal ethnic relations his parochial, regional, and/or kin-based tribal and clanal affiliations still have significant meaning and play an important role in his loyalties. Regional divisions are particularly conspicuous in Tadjikistan and Uzbekistan, while in other Central Asian republics one finds rather pure forms of tribalism.

The situation in Turkmenistan illustrates this point. Before the revolution, the Turkmen consisted of many tribes: the Yomud, Teke, Göklen, Ersari, and others. In the Soviet period, the war on tribalism was repeatedly declared victorious. But tribalism, in fact, continues to play a very important role in Turkmen politics, social consciousness, and everyday life. Tribal affiliation is always taken into account in personal relations, marriage arrangements, career promotion and in-fighting among the ruling elite. In the recent past, it became a common practice for the First Secretary of the Communist party of Turkmenistan to put his tribesmen into prominent and important positions in the government, administration, and even in the scientific and cultural establishment, while regional party organizations sometimes resembled tribal fiefdoms. A Turkmen who settles in the territory of an alien tribe has no prospects for social and economic advancement. In everyday life he feels the scornful attitude of his neighbors. Remarkably enough, president Niiazov claims
that he is an orphan and, therefore, does not have a close affiliation with any particular tribe.\footnote{60}

In Kazakhstan, belonging to a certain "zhuz" (in the past, something similar to a tribal confederation) is still important. There are many members of the Middle (Srednii) zhuz among the Kazakh intelligentsia, and in the 1920-1930s their predominance was even more significant. At the same time, the long-serving First Secretary of the Communist party of Kazakhstan in the Brezhnev period, Kunaev, tried to put his fellow tribesmen from the southern regions of Kazakhstan, i.e., those from the Great (Starshii) zhuz, into positions of power. This practice was officially condemned after Kunaev lost power. His successor, Kolbin, in just the first 18 months tried to eliminate favoritism towards Kazakhs from the Great zhuz and then abandoned this attempt. Some Kazakhs complained to the author that today's leader of Kazakhstan, Nazarbaev, who owes his career to Kunaev, – allegedly his relative – continues the policy of encouraging members of the Great zhuz.\footnote{61}

Clan and tribal membership has retained great importance in Kyrgyzstan as well, although the former First Secretary of the republican Communist party, Usubaliev, insisted that tribalism did not exist in his republic anymore and that appointments on the basis of belonging to certain tribes or clans did not have a place there.\footnote{62} In fact, in the 1930-1950s, the majority of the leading positions had been occupied by the southern Kyrgyz from the Kypchak tribe; then the balance of power began to change in favor of the northern Sary-Bagysh tribe. When Akaev, a moderate reformist, became the President of Kyrgyzstan in October 1990, his election was connected with a struggle not only between reformists and conservatives, but even more so between northern and southern Kyrgyz. This struggle for power was so intense that in the opinion of some Soviet observers it put the republic on the brink of schism or even civil war.\footnote{63} It is remarkable that, despite his negative attitudes towards tribalism, Akaev himself belongs to an old and mighty Sary-Bagysh tribe. Although some Russian newspapers like to stress that he was born into the family of a collective farmer, in Kyrgyzstan everybody knows that he is a descendant of a manap (aristocrat) Shabdan \footnote{64} from the Tynai clan, who in the middle of the 19th century recognized and helped to establish the Russian rule and was rewarded for his service by the Russian government.\footnote{65} Most of the positions in Akaev's entourage are occupied by those from the
northern regions of Chu and Talas, while deputies from the southern regions of the republic still remain the staunchest opponents of the president.66 The Dzhelal-Abad administrative region (oblast’) in the south became an informal center of the opposition to the political dominance of the northerners.67 Akaev’s decision to double the number of administrative regions (and correspondingly the number of lucrative positions in the administration) may be connected with a desire to broaden his regional support base.68

One further example: in the 1991 contest over the presidency in Tadjikistan, a candidate of the democratic and moderate Islamic forces was defeated by a Communist candidate because the latter belonged to the so-called "Khudzhent (former Leninabad) clan" which has remained in power in the republic from the late 1930s. Almost all northern Tadjiks, in spite of their political differences, preferred to support their fellow countryman.69 Actually, the idea of a single Tadjik nation is still in flux. Localized cultural and regional identities are very strong. Divisions between the northern and southern Tadjiks are often stronger than between the Communists and their opposition. Even Muslim activists are sometimes divided along regional lines.70 The ongoing civil war in Tadjikistan, which is often explained in terms of the struggle between Communists and Islamic fundamentalists, may be somewhat conceived as the struggle of regional factions that, for historical and other reasons, have chosen different political orientations and ideological garments. These factions are usually called "clans" which is wrong because they are not based on kinship and descent. In this struggle the Khudzhend faction and its allies from Kuliab and Ghissar confront the Gharm, Pamir, Kurgan-Tiube, and some other factions.71

The Soviet policy regarding Central Asia actually helped the preservation and even the revival of tribalism and regionalism, in spite of its lip-service avowing the need to fight them. During the purges of the 1920s and 1930s, all of the political elites of the indigenous peoples there were physically destroyed; not only the populists and enlighteners of the pre-revolutionary period and the national-Bolsheviks of the revolution and civil war generation, but also those who had been promoted to positions of leadership in the 1920s. The cultural elites were also destroyed. The Soviets created new political elites whose privileged positions in local structures of power were connected not with a promotion of interests in their republics and peoples, but rather with their compliance with Moscow demands and goals.
and with their capabilities to implement policies dictated by the center. The positions of the
top-level regional leaders depended also on their personal reputation in the center and on
their allegiance to the most powerful figures in the Moscow hierarchy. No wonder that, in
1959, the First Secretary of the Communist party of Uzbekistan, Rashidov, in order to please
Khrushchev, suggested to cut the purchase price of raw cotton, and, in 1964, in order to
please Brezhnev, advocated an unlimited introduction of chemicals into cotton-growing,
including poisonous pesticides and defoliants, like butifos. Instead, when the center was
pleased with the performance of the regional leaders, they gave them the right to run internal
affairs in their republics and to distribute preferential treatment and high level jobs, a
percentage of which were reserved for non-Russian elites in Central Asia and Kazakhstan to
secure their support to the Soviet regime.

The undemocratic pyramidal structures of power which had been built with Moscow’s
consent and support, and the complete absence of even rudimentary elements of civil society
in Central Asia inevitably led to a situation in which the actual dispensation of power was
connected to a network of personal trust, patronage, and clientage. One of the important foci
of any individual’s loyalty remains the groupings in which he has grown up and lived. These
are the foundations of trust and thus the channels through which power is meditated and
social advancement can be achieved. In these conditions it is natural that the leadership of
any rank in Central Asia would try to be supported by tribesmen or fellow countrymen.

Under these circumstances the ordinary population, which was denied any partici-
pation in political life and was unprotected in legal and social respects by state-imposed and
state-supported institutions, also tend to rely on traditional ones, like kin-groups and
neighborhoods (makhalla), and their old traditions of mutual aid and reciprocity. These
traditional institutions also help to play down social differences in the interests of local
loyalties which the Soviets failed to destroy. Local particularism which is ruthlessly exploited
by ruling elites, inhibits now the emergence of a liberal and democratic consensus.

So, the Soviets failed to create a homo soveticus from ordinary Central Asians. Not
without reason, the structures that evolved in Central Asia are now sometimes called in the
former Soviet Union "communism in its eastern feudal understanding." With equal
correctness they may be called the Asian mode of production in its eastern communist understanding.

From time to time, passive non-acceptance of the Soviet nationality policy in Central Asia and Kazakhstan provoked anxiety in the Soviet leadership. However, it fought this with measures bordering on sheer idiocy. In Turkmenistan, celebrations of the festival Kurban Bairam were persecuted, traditional funeral rituals were prohibited, and the wearing of the traditional women's dresses that protected them from the harsh rays of the Karakum sun was viewed with disapproval. In Kazakhstan, playing the dombre, the Kazakh national instrument, was condemned as a manifestation of national narrow-mindedness. In Uzbekistan, the wearing of traditional clothes (the men's quilted robes, and the women's dresses decorated in national colors) and celebration of Nauruz, the new year on the lunar calendar, were persecuted.

No wonder that the social structure of the Central Asian ethnic groups in many respects can also be characterized as pre-modern. It consists of an upper class which comes mainly from the former Communist party hierarchy, and people involved in government and administration, and a large lower class, the peasantry. Members of the working class and of the middle class from the indigenous population are small in number; most of the latter are white collar workers or people involved in humanitarian professions. Blue collar workers and a majority of the middle class were recruited from other ethnic groups – the Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Germans, Koreans, and several others.

The Early Impact of Perestroika

At the beginning of perestroika (1986-1987) the new policy of openness and restructuring took on certain anti-Central Asian overtones. The Soviet leadership was clearly disappointed with the situation there and with the regional political elites. First, the Moscow center was concerned because the regional leadership in Central Asia turned out to be incapable, or unwilling, to effectively fight against nationalism. The events in Alma-Ata in December 1986 had significantly large repercussions. They were characterized as nationalistic riots, and the leadership of Kazakhstan was commanded to take immediate measures to combat the Kazakh nationalism. In the following repressions, hundreds of people
were sentenced to prison internment, fined, or fired from work. About 3,000 students were excluded from the universities and other educational institutions.

Meanwhile, growing nationalism in Central Asia and Kazakhstan sometimes became an obstacle even for foreign political goals of the Soviet Union. Thus, the invasion of Afghanistan, unpopular among all Soviet peoples, provoked particular dissatisfaction and protests from the Muslims of Central Asia, which was manifested in a series of anti-war demonstrations and evasion of military service.

Second, the Soviet leadership began to seriously fear the influence of Islam, especially Islamic fundamentalism, on the Muslim peoples of the USSR. In its fight against Islam, it did not consider the specifics of this religion, thus making all measures taken against it ineffective. In particular, it did not take into account the strength of the so-called parallel, or unofficial Islam. While official Muslim spiritual authorities were under complete control of the state and were as servile as their Christian Orthodox colleagues, unregistered clergy also conducted religious rites, such as circumcision, weddings, funerals, as well as organized underground studies and even underground mosques. Although most Muslims of Central Asia could not consistently follow the obligations of Islam and regularly visit a mosque, they continued to consider themselves Muslims. Islam to them involves more than religion. It includes their belonging to a certain civilization, specific cultural and moral values and traditions, a specific lifestyle, etc. In so far as traditional institutions, attitudes and practices in Central Asia have survived, or even revived, as undesirable but inevitable results of the Soviet policy towards the area, the role of popular Islam remains invincible because it is inseparably linked with them.\footnote{75}

The Soviet leadership looked on with alarm as the observation of religious rites in Central Asia did not diminish but continued to grow.\footnote{76} The local leadership demonstrated its inability, and often its lack of desire, to seriously oppose Islam. Many officials, especially from the ranks of the lower leadership, were rather successful in combining an outward devotion to communist dogma with the observation of many Islamic practices in their private lives.\footnote{77} Thus, I have heard many stories from the Communists in Central Asia about how they bypassed the prohibition on circumcising children, the violation of which could have meant their exclusion from the party or being fired from work. Usually, they sent their
children to older relatives, or went away on business trips, and then explained that their irresponsible kinsmen performed this rite without their knowledge and consent. At the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, news circulated that the former First Secretary of the Samarkand regional party organization, Sherkulov, personally participated in building improvements on a mazar – a holy man’s tomb.  

In the secret CPSU Politburo resolution of 1986, Islam was declared an obstacle to socioeconomic development. The following year, the previously hidden anxieties of the Soviet leadership were made public. Beliaev, a commentator close to the ruling circles, announced that the export of the Islamic revolution was more than propaganda, and that an Islamic infrastructure existed in Central Asia that created a very favorable atmosphere for foreign interference. The appearance of a movement towards pure Islam, especially in Tajikistan from 1977, was also noted. Its adherents borrowed the name "Wahhabites" from the followers of the strict form of Sunni Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia, although they were not directly connected with the latter. They criticized the existing moral order, the official clergy, and the corrupt sociopolitical system in Soviet Central Asia.

In November 1986, Gorbachev, while stopping in Tashkent on his way to India, ordered the local leadership to conduct an "uncompromising fight against religion." After his critical observations, many Communists were excluded from the Party for observing religious rites. In Turkmenistan alone more than two hundred Communists were expelled from the Party for circumcising their children.

The threat of Islamic fundamentalism, potential or real, as it existed in the first half of the 1980s, was overestimated by the Soviet leadership, maybe because, as one Russian scholar noted, nowhere was "Islamophobia more prevalent than in the country’s political leadership." However, the events in Iran and Afghanistan actually influenced the Muslims in Central Asia, in whose minds and hearts Islam became identified with anti-colonial liberation movements. From the end of the 1970s a growing number of people in Central Asia began to listen to broadcasts of the Teheran radio, and audio cassettes of Khomeini's speeches were widely circulated there.

Third, the political elites in Central Asia and Kazakhstan began to be considered by the center as too conservative to put reforms into practice. The anti-corruption campaign and
the so-called "Uzbek affair" which had been secretly initiated during the Andropov reign, was made public under Chernenko, and revived with Gorbachev's coming to power, exposed their complete corruption, incompetence, and ineffectiveness. However, this sad state of affairs to a significant extent was a result of Moscow's own policy towards Central Asia. While corruption there is endemic – the population is used to it and considered it as a normal state of things – the central leadership for a long time closed their eyes to it, particularly because some of its members received their share of bribes.

Cotton production in Uzbekistan has been in decline from the early 1980s (average 4.9 millions tons a year). However, Moscow's demand remained the same: "Cotton at any cost." This resulted in a popular, but bitter, joke in Uzbekistan: "If you don't plant cotton, you will be planted in jail; if you don't bring it in, you will be put out" (in colloquial Russian the verb posadit' means simultaneously "to plant" and "to imprison", while the verb ubrat' means "to harvest" and "to sack"). The local leadership, unable to meet Moscow's constantly increasing demands, resorted to different types of deception, including falsification of cotton production figures, and bribes.

In 1986, the "Uzbek affair" reverberated across the entire Soviet Union. At the 27th Party Congress, Gorbachev and Ligachev chose Uzbekistan as the object of especially harsh criticism. Ligachev proposed shaking up the Uzbek elite. Ninety percent of the personnel of the Central Committee of the Communist party of Uzbekistan was changed. Serious personnel changes were also made in Uzbekistan's Council of Ministers, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, the militia, the regional party apparatus and government, and ministries. A massive wave of arrests and dismissals affected different strata of Uzbek society. Thousands upon thousands of foremen, agronomists, kolkhoz and sovkhov directors, and other lower level specialists and administrators upon whose work the organization of cotton growing depended, were subjected to various punitive measures. To a lesser, but still significant, degree repression was carried out in other Central Asian republics as well.

The decisions made at the January plenum of the Soviet Communist party Central Committee in 1987 and some consequent practical measures definitely put the republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan at a disadvantage. There were told that while the center was short of capital to contribute much to the development of the area, they should give the
center an even larger part of their financial and material resources. "A decisive strike must be made against any attempt to place local interests over all-state interests," stated Pravda. Central Asian republics were even blamed that their population lived too well at the expense of subsidies from the center.

Another demand was to get rid of obstacles to the introduction of Russians into the local elites and the migration of Russians into the area. A growing out-migration of the Slavic population from Central Asia and Kazakhstan sounded an alarm to the Soviet leadership which tried, although without positive results, to change the situation. Pravda was upset that "in several republics, the most prestigious professions were turned into the unique privilege for persons of that or another nationality." The entire campaign involved a number of concrete measures. Thus, hundreds of officials in the Party and administrative apparatus were taken from the center, moved to Uzbekistan and given substantial promotions. There were locally nicknamed the "landing force of the limited contingent" - a clear allusion to the occupation troops in Afghanistan, which the Soviet press always called the "limited contingent". According to Igitaliev, the former chairman of the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan, a "triumvirate" of Russians was sent to Uzbekistan from Moscow to serve as the de facto governors of the republic: Anishchev, the second secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan; Ogarok, the first deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers; and Romanovsky, the deputy chairman of the presidium of the republic's Supreme Soviet. Moscow also expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that in Central Asia the national intelligentsia and student population were becoming too numerous and exceeded the ratios for the native ethnic groups. Some practical measures followed. For example, the number of Kazakh students in higher learning institutions of Kazakhstan was limited.

For a long time a large part of the Central Asian population has had high hopes for improving the situation in agriculture with a plan to divert Siberian rivers to Central Asia, no matter how ludicrous the plan was ecologically and economically. When in 1986, the center, under the influence of the Russian public opinion, finally shelved the plan without any appropriate reconsideration of Central Asian ecological policy, this was perceived there as one more manifestation of a colonial policy that strangled the interests of the periphery for the interests of the Russian center.
It became clear that Gorbachev’s leadership was incapable of helping the Central Asian republics overcome their economic hardships. Instead, it recommended the same solutions to the problem that had been advocated in vain in the Brezhnev period: reducing the birth-rate and transferring a part of the Central Asian population to unpopulated or underpopulated parts of Russia – to the non-black earth zone, the Urals, or even Siberia.

One may suspect that these suggestions had strong political connotations. Due to difference in birth rates and the out-migration of Slavs from Central Asia, the ratio of natives to Russians there was changing to the advantage of the former. Moscow was afraid that this tendency would result in a growth of nationalism. Thus, V. I. Kozlov, a Soviet demographer who is one of the champions of the policy of Russification, admitted quite frankly his alarm concerning the danger presented by the ethnic homogeneity of Central Asian republics (i.e., the growth of the indigenous population there) to the position of Russians in the Soviet Union.101

However, both of the suggestions failed. Ordinary people in Central Asia simply ignored the family planning campaign, whereas many intellectuals there publicly denounced it.102 All attempts to persuade, or to lure the Central Asians to migrate to Russia also failed to make headway.103

The Emergence of National Movements

Public opinion in Central Asia reacted acutely against what it considered as a colonialist policy of the center. Just because vertical social structures with widespread patronage and clientage are still characteristic of Central Asian society, economic and other benefits there are distributed not only in accordance with an individual’s general standing in the society, but also depending on his position in these structures. When a power of patron is diminishing, his clients are at a disadvantage. By 1988, a growing discontent with the existing conditions affected all strata in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. National groups and organizations began to emerge in different republics in which intelligentsia, and educated urban middle strata in general, played the most active and organizing role and tried to articulate consistent programs of political goals and actions.104

Of all these movements, the most numerous was Birlik (the Movement for Preserving the Natural, Material, and Spiritual Wealth) in Uzbekistan formed in November 1988 by 18
intellectuals. Among its original demands were the end of "cultural imperialism" and colonial exploitation of Uzbekistan, democratization of the political life, and finally, sovereignty of the republic. Its popularity quickly grew, and in 1989, despite active opposition of the Uzbek leadership, it was able to organize a series of rallies and demonstrations. Similar, though less successful attempts, have been made in other Central Asian republics.

However, the formation of the national movements in Central Asia and Kazakhstan took place in significantly more difficult conditions than in many other regions of the Soviet Union. National intelligentsia there are a rather new phenomenon. Although they demonstrate now the same "colonial ingratitude" that other colonial powers have faced in the recent past, they are a creation of the Soviet regime. They lack a tradition of democratic political process and do not have a clear vision of the political future for their republics, either in a form of Western-type liberal democracies, or any other system. Instead, they tend to incline towards ethnic nationalism because it means to them the dominance of their own ethnic group in corresponding republics as the best safeguard and as an improvement of their own positions in society. Thus, the rights and identity issues became closely intertwined. A liberal democratic system, based on an individual's merit and competence, guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens regardless of ethnic membership, began to be considered detrimental to the interests of politically strong but economically disadvantaged ethnic groups.

Besides, the national intelligentsia in Central Asia are still not numerous, is often quite corrupt, and are tied to the old political elite and the official power structure more closely than in other parts of the former Soviet Union. Most of them are involved in culture, education, and humanitarian professions which were always under the strictest control of the Communist Party. Until recently, most of them have been obedient servants of the Communist leadership, particularly because a significant part of the system of higher education was turned into a market place where admission to a university and even a university diploma, as well as professional positions, could be acquired for money or through patronage. No wonder, that contrary to the European parts of the USSR, Central Asia in the Brezhnev period lacked a dissident movement. It is notable that during perestroika many leaders of informal national organizations in Central Asian republics preferred to escape anti-communist slogans, were rather moderate in their political demands, and were ready for
collaboration with local political elites. Often their criticism of the latter was leveled more at personalities than at institutions.

No wonder that on January 17, 1992, when Mukhammad Salikh, the leader of the "Erk" party, tried to ease the atmosphere at the university campus in the capital of Uzbekistan Tashkent, after the student demonstration had been dispersed by police the previous day, participants of a protest rally booed him because of his previous moderate stand towards the government. It is also remarkable enough, that even such influential and internationally known figures in the Central Asian cultural elite, as the Kyrgyz writer Chinghiz Aitmatov, or the Kazakh poet Olzhas Suleimenov, never openly sided with the opposition and preferred to maintain good relations with the political elite.

No wonder that during the restructuring period the opposition in Central Asia and Kazakhstan turned out to be not influential enough to lead broad and stable national movements with clear social and political goals. From time to time they were temporarily able to inspire an urban underclass and a part of rural population with nationalistic slogans but they often failed to suggest to them an attractive alternative, and to control them. Besides, they began to face competition from groups of Islamic orientation. In the late 1980s, attempts were made to organize various Islamic parties within the borders of separate republics, or even the whole area, although most of these groups had primarily a local following. However, they definitely had an influence on certain strata of Central Asian societies.

An underclass and rural population turned out to be particularly prone to extreme forms of ethnic nationalism and to slogans like "Down with the cotton", "Uzbekistan for Uzbeks", "Russians out of Tadjikistan", or "Priority to the indigenous people in Kazakhstan". They are looking for a scapegoat to avenge all miseries of their life, and they find it, or are encouraged to try to find it in others: infidels, Russians and other people of European origin, neighboring ethnic groups, and particularly ethnic minorities in their midst.

Inter-ethnic relations in Central Asia and Kazakhstan deteriorated during perestroika. After unrest in Ashghabad and Nebit-Dag (May 1 and 9, 1989) followed pogroms of the Meskhetian Turks in the Fergana valley (June, 1989), riots in Novyi Uzen' and Mangyshlak (June, 17-20, 1989), clashes in Buka and Parkend (March, 3, 1989) unrest in Dushanbe
(February, 11-14, 1990), a pogrom in Andizhan (May, 2, 1990), fighting between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the Osh oblast' (Spring-Summer 1990), clashes in Namangan (December, 2, 1990).

For a long time everything was blamed - and still is blamed - on various subversive forces. The Moscow center liked to point to the extremists, Islamic fundamentalists, the "enemies of perestroika," the corrupted faction of local political elites, the mafia, etc.. The regional leadership preferred to blame informal organizations, like Birlik in Uzbekistan, or "Kyrgyzstan" in Kyrgyzstan. The opposition in Central Asia also claimed that the violence was the result of instigation; it just pointed blame in the opposite direction - to local and central authorities and the KGB. Thus, one of Uzbekistan's opposition leaders, Muhammad Salikh, made the following claims about the pogroms in the Fergana valley: "The violence that occurred was instigated. Which organ instigated it - the KGB, the Central Committee [of the Uzbek Communist party], or the [Moscow] center - we cannot say with certainty, but it is very clear that all of the action were planned in advance."108

Be that as it may, the whole matter of ethnic violence never went behind more or less obscure allusions. So far only one thing is clear: there are different forces in Central Asia, which in spite of their contradictory interests are ready to play with the fire of ethnic conflicts, and in an atmosphere of overall crisis they can always find receptive and explosive social environment.

The Last Years of Perestroika

Just because the political culture of the masses in Central Asia and Kazakhstan is very low, conservative political elites retained their power there during the whole restructuring period. While in the Baltics, or Moldova, people who can be called national communists came to power for a time, in Central Asia the leadership was taken by groups that can be characterized as the national nomenklatura. In spite of all their grievances against the center and their desire to strengthen their power at the expense of the latter, beginning from 1988, most of them clearly preferred to side with Moscow against the democratic movement in the Soviet Union in general, and against the opposition movements in their republics. Thus, all of them were for preserving the Soviet Union and for a new Union Treaty. It was not by chance that the Central Asian deputies at the sessions of the USSR Congress of People's
Deputies and Supreme Soviet were the most docile and always vote the way the central leadership wished.

In its turn, beginning from 1988, the Gorbachev's leadership clearly changed its policy and expressed its support to the conservative political elites in Central Asia. It also demonstrated an increasing readiness to close its eyes on their old and new sins, as long as they controlled the situation in their republics and did not insist on a fundamental transformation of the Soviet Union. Already from late 1987 attempts to introduce ethnic Russians into the political elites and administrative apparatus of the Central Asian republics were curtailed and then practically abandoned. Thus, in July 1989, Kolbin, whose name had been indelibly connected with the events in December 1986, was called from Kazakhstan. In 1989, Moscow called out of Central Asia the "landing force", those Russians that it sent into leadership positions there during the anti-corruption campaign. Scathing attacks on the corrupted command-control apparatus in Central Asia turned into a growing reliance on the latter.

It is not surprising then that between 1988-1991, all attempts to organize national movements and parties in Turkmenistan immediately met with opposition from the Turkmen leadership which more than once announced that the creation of unofficial organizations in the republic would be a "blind, absurd mimicry." The leadership's opposition to a People's Front in Turkmenistan was based on the conception that all issues concerning the republic's population could be solved by official political organizations. On January 15, 1990, the Minister of Justice of Turkmenistan proudly announced on Soviet television that there were no unofficial groups in his republic.

In keeping with the spirit of the times, Turkmenistan passed a law on sovereignty on August 22, 1990, but, both before and after this decision, the national opposition continued to be severely suppressed. Niiazov, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan, was elected president in an election in which he had no opponents and received about 99 percent of the votes. This "unanimous support of the people" – the expression used by the servile Turkmen press – even provoked irony from the liberal Moscow press.
In Uzbekistan, in 1989 and 1990, the opposition remained popular among the masses, but the political elite, using all of its organizational capabilities and administrative pressure, like a ban on some opposition activities, ensured its victory in the elections to the republic’s parliament in February and March 1990. Among its 500 members, the opposition held no more than 50-60 seats. Besides, the Uzbek leadership provoked or encouraged a split of Birlik, from which a moderate branch broke away to form the Erk Party ("erk" in Uzbek means freedom). The declaration of sovereignty made on June 20, 1990, remained a symbolic act. The demands of the republic’s leadership to Moscow were moderate, primarily dealing with economic issues.

A similar policy was practiced by the Tadjik and Kyrgyz leaderships. To remain in power, the political elites in these republics did not hesitate to instigate, or to resort to, violence. In 1988, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Tadjikistan, Makhkamov, spoke out against the creation of a People’s Front in his republic. Under pressure from the Tadjik leadership, unofficial organizations, which had begun to appear in late 1988, either fell apart or remained with few participants. Within a year, political life in Tadjikistan was primarily defined by the consequences of the unrest in its capital, Dushanbe on February 11-14, 1990. There is reason to assume that this unrest was provoked by the local elite, who knew that dissatisfaction with them was strong and feared losing power in the upcoming elections to the Supreme Soviet of the republic.

The unrest was of a nationalistic kind and was directed against the European or Europeanized population. However, simultaneously, a demand was put forth for the resignation of the local leadership. The latter promised to do this, but this seemed no more than a tactical maneuver. Control over the situation was restored with the help of the army. An emergency plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Tadjikistan with the participation of representative from Moscow was quickly held, and as could have been expected, the Tadjik leader Makhkamov did not resign. Elections took place during the ensuing state of emergency, and the local elite was victorious. On November 30, Makhkamov, refusing to hold national elections, was elected president of the republic by the Tadjik parliament. The state of emergency in Dushanbe was not lifted until 1991, however the opposition was soon revived in Tadjikistan.
In Kyrgyzstan, the political elite also refused to enter into constructive dialogue with the national opposition, represented by the movement "Kyrgyzstan" that appeared in early 1990. At the same time, the political elite tried to play along with nationalism by placing the ethnic Kyrgyz in a privileged position. The explosive situation that developed in the Osh district (oblast') was not a secret to anyone, but there were no measures taken to alleviate the situation. The congress of the Kyrgyz Communist Party, which took place during the Uzbek-Kyrgyz confrontations and during a state of emergency in the capital of the republic, tried to place the blame for the bloody events in the Osh district on the "Kyrgyzstan" movement and reelected almost all of the old leaders, headed by First Secretary Masaliev. In July 1990, at the time when "Kyrgyzstan" was being persecuted, news began coming from Kyrgyzstan that the ruling powers, including the KGB, were secretly supporting extremist organizations: the Kyrgyz "Osh Aimay" (which is Kyrgyz for "land of Osh" or "People of the Osh Region Movement") and the Uzbek "Adolat" (which is Uzbek for "Justice" or "Justice Movement").

As a result, many representative of the Party apparatus were elected in summer 1990 to the Supreme Soviet of the republic. Nevertheless, the Osh events upset the situation in Kyrgyzstan, and put Masaliev's position in jeopardy. His desire to preserve the compromised leaders and to incite tribal passions turned out to be extreme even for less conservative members of the local elite. Under pressure from the movement "Kyrgyzstan", the candidate from the reformist circles, Akaev, was elected president of the republic on October 27, 1990.

The situation was somewhat different in Kazakhstan where the most acute problem was the power sharing between different ethnic groups. (According to the Soviet census of 1989, of Kazakhstan's 16,746,000 people Kazakhs constituted 39.7 percent while Russians made up 37.8 percent.) In the late 1980s and in the early 1990s, relations between the Kazakhs and the Russians continued to grow tense. All of the political organizations in the republic, except for the Communist Party, had split along ethnic lines. By 1990, several emerging Kazakh parties and movements ("Azat", "Alash", "Zheltoksan") were openly demanding the republic's complete independence and secession from the Soviet Union. Besides, all the Kazakh organizations supported preserving the territorial integrity of the
Solzhenitsyn's published treatise "How We Should Build Russia", with its proposal to annex northern Kazakhstan to Russia, led to the September 21-23, 1990 demonstrations in Alma-Ata, counter demands, and the reminder to the Russians that the Omsk region in the Russian Federation was once Kazakh territory. In October 1990, when the republic's parliament made a declaration of sovereignty, many Kazakhs picketed it, carrying the slogans "Don't sign the Union Treaty". In such conditions, Kazakhstan's president Nazarbaev expressed his readiness to sign the Union Treaty, but at the same time, he tried to introduce some changes in the Treaty and categorically took a stand against changing the borders of the republic.

The Current Situation and Its Prospects

Some Western scholars predicted that the Central Asians would be the first to revolt against the Soviet Empire. Actually, the opposite took place. Before the March 17, 1991 referendum on the future of the USSR, all Central Asian leaders stated that their republics were overwhelmingly in favor of the preservation of the Soviet Union. Even president Akaev stressed that Kyrgyzstan had no other realistic choice but to remain part of the USSR. Docile electorates complied with their president's desires. Of those who participated in the referendum preserving the Union, Uzbekistan voted 93.7 percent in its favor, Kazakhstan 94%, Kyrgyzstan 94.5%, Tadjikistan 96%, and only 2% opposed the measure in Turkmenistan. With the exception of president Akaev, who faced an attempted mini-coup in his own republic, all other Central Asian leaders either gave conditional approval to the August 1991 coup in Moscow, or preferred a wait-and-see position.

Because of the economic weakness and political instability of the region, the Central Asian leadership to the very end were the most persistent champions of keeping the Soviet Union intact. Its dissolution has created many new problems for them.

The main problem for the local political elites is how to remain in power in the new conditions of independence. For this they spare no efforts, and it seems that for now they are doing this quite successfully. In Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tadjikistan, and to some extent in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the power is still in the hands of the old nomenklatura and the Communist Party's apparatus existing under different names.
It is obvious that Central Asia is a long way from a liberal, Western-type, democracy, and many political scientists in Russia and in the West foresee only two possible developments there: a dictatorship by former Communist leaders; or a dictatorship by Muslim fundamentalists. The first development has already taken place in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tadjikistan.

Turkmenistan’s president Niiazov expressed his attitude towards democracy in his country by bluntly stating that "formal democracy is a burden for the people," and that "Western-style democracy does not suit us." He frankly claims that "one should be a complete idiot, if he allowed the formation of the opposition only because, in the opinion of some people, this corresponds to the idea of democracy." His own vision of democracy has a very peculiar character. He is promoting a multiparty system on the basis of the former Communist Party only. Veteran Communists are to rally into a new Communist Party, secretaries of rural districts and other Communists formerly responsible for agriculture are to launch the Dekkhan (Peasants’) Party. Other Communists can join the Democratic Party headed by Niiazov.

Khudaiberdy Khalliev, a Turkmen writer, says that "in the degree of openness Russia and Turkmenistan today can be likened to the West and the USSR of yesterday." The opposition "Agzybirlik" organization now has to operate underground, and individual dissidents are severely persecuted. The best known case is the trial of Shiraly Nurmuradov, a poet and playwright, who in his epigrams dared to ridicule the president. He was sentenced to three years in a labor camp on a false accusation of swindling. Shortly before U.S. Secretary of State James Baker visited Turkmenistan in early 1992, police, in the Soviet traditions of the seventies and the early eighties, detained or put under house arrest those whom they called "destructive elements", alias everyone who was publicly critical of the government. The authorities resorted to the same practice on other occasions as well. The Niiazov cult of personality also bears features that are characteristic of the Soviet tradition. For instance, he was the only presidential candidate in the election. Today he is officially called "Turkmenbashi" (the leader of Turkmen people).

Uzbekistan’s president Karimov’s record is no better. His country’s independence allowed him to throw away even those mild restraints that perestroika imposed upon his
actions. The Communist Party was renamed the People's Democratic Party, and the former regional (oblast') Party secretaries became the khakims – the governors of administrative regions. But six months after the August 1991 coup in Moscow, the legal opposition in Uzbekistan was crushed. Karimov even refused to sign those of the CIS agreements that were concerned with the observance of human rights.\textsuperscript{141}

Karimov does not tolerate any criticism or objection to his policies. Vice-President Mirsaidov was removed from his post a month after he was elected in December 1991, as soon as he had shown an inkling of independent thinking.\textsuperscript{142} The students' protests against soaring prices in Tashkent, in January 1992, were suppressed with the utmost of cruelty. At least two students were killed, dozens were wounded and beaten, and thousands were sent away from the Uzbek capital.\textsuperscript{143} Opposition papers were closed, and other papers, including mass media publications, came under strict censorship. Even the dissemination of liberal Russian newspapers was practically banned in Uzbekistan.\textsuperscript{144} Since February 1990, Uzbekistan has had a decree banning open-air rallies and demonstrations.

Opposition parties, even those who, like the Erk Party, wish to play a constructive role in the changing political scene, and who in the recent past were seeking a dialog with the government, are virtually forced to work underground. Their leaders are terrorized, beaten, jailed, or forced into political exile; their activists are fired from their jobs or denied employment by the government. Some of the opposition leaders were even kidnapped by the Uzbek secret police (the National Security Service is the new name for the KGB in Uzbekistan) from the territory of other CIS republics.\textsuperscript{145}

Karimov has a personal reason to maintain good relations with the USA. His daughter is married to a banker from New Jersey, and his son-in-law's brother has been appointed Uzbekistan's representative to the UN.\textsuperscript{146} However, he certainly prefers to sacrifice his international reputation for more power at home.

The Uzbek leadership was clearly scared by the events in Tadjikistan where the former Communists were temporarily ousted from power. They use the fighting in the neighboring republic and the rapid revival of Islam in some regions of Uzbekistan as justification for the crackdown on the opposition. They used to avow that Uzbekistan is not yet ready for democracy and that stability in the country should be maintained at any cost.
Uzbekistan's foreign minister, Abdurazakov explains his government's iron hand policy in the following words: "If you are the head of a family and someone begins to act up, you must assert your authority to keep everyone in line."\textsuperscript{147} In its turn, the opposition claims that it could respond to the suppression with mass disobedience, or armed resistance, but is not doing this because it does not want a civil war, and, instead, prefers peaceful, constitutional methods for the political process.\textsuperscript{148}

In Tadjikistan, the Communists smashed the government of national accord formed after the events of April 1992 and have returned to power in a bloody civil war, in which, according to still very loose estimates, no less than 50,000 people were killed and about 500,000 became refuges.\textsuperscript{149} During this war they had no aversion to using criminals with a number of convictions, like Sangak Safarov, who at the November 25, 1992 session of the Tadjik Supreme Council boasted that "we [i.e., the pro-Communist Popular Front] have broken the back of democracy in Tadjikistan and soon we'll drive this scum to a place whence it will never reappear neither in Central Asia nor in Russia."\textsuperscript{150} The Communists declared Safarov a "people's hero" and a "father of the nation". However, as some observers had predicted,\textsuperscript{151} they got rid of him as soon as "the Moor has done his duty." Safarov and his lieutenant Faizali Saidov were murdered on March 30, 1993 under unclear circumstances.\textsuperscript{152} However, it seems that the "red terror" still remains the main weapon of the Tadjik government in its struggle against the opposition.\textsuperscript{153} Among other measures imposed on all opposition parties and movements, the Tadjik Supreme Council in June 1993 officially banned the Democratic Party, the Islamic Renaissance Party, the "Rastokhez" movement, and the regional movement "Lali Badakhshon".

The second prognostic development in the region, a dictatorship by Muslim fundamentalists – an idea used by many members of the Russian press to scare their readers – seems at present less plausible. It is true that Central Asian society is turning to Islamic values and traditions, though they are conceived quite differently by different groups and strata of the population. The number of mosques, religious enlightenment centers, and religious schools for men and women is growing. In 1989, there were 160 mosques in Central Asia and Kazakhstan; by 1991, their number increased to five thousand.\textsuperscript{154} Such Central Asian leaders as presidents Niiazov and Karimov, who apparently believe neither in
God not the devil, hurried to demonstrate their devotion to Islam and, in 1992, made a hadj to Mecca. (Remarkably, one of Karimov's entourage during this pilgrimage complained: "The greatest difficulty with the visit to Saudi Arabia was abstaining from drinking alcohol and smoking." Karimov also swore his presidential oath in January 1992 on the Koran. Their flirting with the religion in an ideological vacuum is characteristic of all CIS countries, and may be better understood considering Eltsin's frequent attendance at Russian Orthodox churches, or the Georgian leader Shevarnadze's sudden baptism. However, the expanding role of Islam in Central Asian politics is an undeniable fact. The state supported (in the recent past, "the state appointed") "official" clergy still prefer to ally with their government and are against the politicization of the religion. (The only exception was the Tadjik religious leader Kazikolon Khodziakbar Turadzonzoda's unsuccessful involvement with the opposition in the political struggle in his country.) However, they are challenged by more radical clerics from the middle and lower levels who accuse them of conformism and corruption. In nearly all Central Asian countries social protest of the impoverished and pauperizing strata is connected with new developments in the religious life which sometimes takes a fundamentalist turn, including demands to clericalize the social life and even to create an Islamic state.

In some regions, especially in the Fergana valley, alcohol is practically forbidden, and women are forced to cover their faces. Even in Kyrgyzstan, where the observance of Islamic law by the former nomads before the Bolshevik revolution was the weakest in Central Asia, it has been decided to build a mosque in every Kyrgyz settlement. When the Pope's nuncio visited Bishkek in April 1992, a Commission of Volunteer Muslims gathered 150,000 signatures appealing for "a ban on the activity of foreign missionaries on Kyrgyz territory." (To put this request in its proper perspective, I must add that this year the Russian Orthodox Church has approached president Yeltsin and Khazbulatov, the speaker of the Russian parliament, with a similar request.) When the poet Ernis Turchenov published his translation of the Koran into Kyrgyz, young Muslims accused him of corrupting the Holy Writ. Actually, this only demonstrates their ignorance of the basic tenets of Islam, since the Koran was translated from the Russian, and, therefore, Turchenov could not corrupt the original
text. Nevertheless, the zealots held a meeting in the central square of Bishkek demanding "Death to Turchenov!", forcing the poet into hiding.\(^{158}\)

Still, the danger of Islamic fundamentalism should not be overestimated, at any rate in the short run, because it meets with resistance from the ruling political elites, their more liberal-minded opponents, and even officially-sanctioned clergy. All Central Asian leaders insist that their states will remain secular ones. In all of them the activities of Islamic parties are banned. Besides, it seems that at present a majority of Muslims in Central Asia and Kazakhstan do not support the idea of clerical totalitarianism. In part, the movement to disseminate knowledge about Islamic dogmata and normative practice can be seen as an attempt to recreate and re-integrate this religion as a component of national culture and self-awareness. Thus, 65 percent of the Kazakh students consider Islam an integral part of the Kazakh culture.\(^{159}\) A poll conducted in 1991-92, in Uzbekistan, revealed that many town women do not accept a number of Islamic canons and are critical of the basic tenets and commandments of Islam, although they regard them as part of and educated person's cultural heritage. Most girls and young women, in both the town and the countryside, accept the teachings of Islam only theoretically.\(^{160}\) The current upsurge in Islamic activism is to a large extent the search for self-identity and sometimes a desire to return to the idealized and imaginary past as a reaction against modernization in its Soviet-type colonial variety. Even many of those who call themselves fundamentalists, like the members of the Islamic Renaissance Party, claim that they consider the spread of religious education as their main objective and do not support the creation of an Islamic state based on the shariah. Thus, Abdulla Utaev, a leader of the Islamic Renaissance Party in Uzbekistan stated that "Uzbekistan's government should be secular, and all forms of belief or non-belief should be respected; but Islam should occupy a central place in public life."\(^{161}\)

Besides, it is difficult to imagine that fundamentalist Islam will be, in the near future, a threat in Central Asia, given the absence of scripturalist Islamic knowledge for over more than seven decades. Kazikolon Turadjonzoda has described the current situation in these sober words: "What Islamic republic can possibly exist, if a mere three percent of the population can read the namaz the real way?"\(^{162}\)
Nevertheless, the peril remains that the liberal and nationalist opposition, who exploited Islam in the struggle for virtually secular goals, may have the tables turned on them. This could happen considering that those who are concerned with the promotion of their vision of religious values may use politics as the vehicle by which they impose their views upon the majority of the population. Still, at present the main danger lies at the opposite extreme.

Some Central Asian leaders like to present themselves as a bulwark against fundamentalism, thus justifying their dictatorship – an argument that is often tacitly bought in Russia and in the West. Actually, the opposite may become true. When secular opposition is weak and suppressed, disillusioned and dissatisfied ordinary people may turn to fundamentalism as a political force against their oppressive, corrupted, and inefficient rulers. Sociological studies in Andijan and Namangan, in Uzbekistan’s part of the Fergana valley, demonstrate that the majority of those who call themselves fundamentalists there consist of young people who are unfamiliar with Islamic teaching but are certain that it means social justice and moral purity.¹⁶³

I would also not completely rule out the third and, evidently, the most desirable development that is feasible in at least some Central Asian countries: an autocratic or semi-autocratic regime of moderate reformists. Actually, they already exist and are represented by Nazarbaev in Kazakhstan and Akaev in Kyrgyzstan. In the current situation, they are certainly the lesser evil, however one should have no illusion about them. Both of these leaders are often praised by the press and politicians as the champions of democracy in Central Asia, but, in fact, they are quite authoritarian. Nazarbaev’s sympathy towards authoritarian rule, allegedly as a transitional stage from totalitarianism to democracy, is well known; he does not pretend to hide it or his high opinion about the South Korean, or even Chinese models of development.¹⁶⁴ Currently he is trying to impose a moratorium on activities of all political parties and movements, except his own newly created Union of People’s Unity.¹⁶⁵ The independent press and other mass media in Kazakhstan are operating in difficult conditions under constant pressure from the government.¹⁶⁶ In Kyrgyzstan, there are discussions about a “quiet transition to Akaev’s dictatorship,” which is expressed in a popular joke: “Communism has gone – Keminism has come” (Kemin is the birth-place of
Akaev). Even some of those who call themselves democrats accuse Akaev of betraying democratic principles.\textsuperscript{167}

The main problems that these leaders are facing now consists not in their sometimes uneasy relations with democratically oriented organizations, but rather in their connections with the former Communists. They still prefer to rely upon the latter because, among other things, the Communists occupy the dominant positions in the government and administration, and they constitute the most serious political force in parliament. Thus, the Communists are able to sabotage any serious attempts at reform.

Recently, president Nazarbaev complained that the government of Kazakhstan had proved its complete insolvency. He caustically remarked that an anti-crisis program is a manual for Kazakhstan's bureaucrats in the same way that Decameron is a handbook for a bishop.\textsuperscript{168} Even in Kyrgyzstan, the only Central Asian country where the Communist party and state ceased to be one (the Communist Party there was suspended after it had expressed support for the putsch leaders in August 1991 and is functioning now under the name the Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan\textsuperscript{169}), president Akaev is still very susceptible to pressure from the former Party functionaries.\textsuperscript{170} The conflict between the executive and legislative powers, with the majority of the latter made up of members of the former Party nomenklatura, is at its apex in Bishkek as it is in Moscow.

Despite the fact that some observers call nationalism in Central Asia an \textit{a posteriori} phenomenon, since it gained strength only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union,\textsuperscript{171} so far the ideology of ethnic nationalism, of nationalism by blood, has turned out to be the strongest of all competing ideologies in Central Asia. This is the case primarily because ethnic nationalism proved its compatibility both with the mainstream Islamic revival and with national Communism of the post-Soviet period. In Tadjikistan the "democrats" from the Rastokhez movement and the Democratic Party who demanded liberal and market oriented reforms, but at the same time demonstrated strong nationalistic inclinations, forged an alliance with the members of the Islamic Renaissance Party against the Communists. In other Central Asian countries, as in some former Western colonies, nationalism propagated by the ruling and cultural elites is considered instrumental in societal consolidation and independent statehood-building.
It is true that the political leaders of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the most multi-ethnic republics in the region with a very significant Russian population (the Russians constitute about 37 percent of the whole population of Kazakhstan and about 30 percent in Kyrgyzstan), have declared their allegiance to "nationalism by soil" and desire to achieve nation-state consolidation in their republics. However, at present the question of sharing power and the economic benefits of modernization in both of these republics remains unsolved.

In Kazakhstan, all political arguments ultimately boil down to whether the republic should evolve into a Kazakh ethnic state or a multi-ethnic national state. Just like in Assam, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Fiji, and some other countries, many Kazakh political parties and groups (such as Alash, Azat, the Republican Party, and Zheltoksan) use the "indigenous" question (and in addition, the consequences of Russian and Soviet colonialism) as an argument for providing the Kazakhs priority and special political status. In the political arena, Russians are at a disadvantage by being underrepresented in Kazakhstan's parliament. The fight for a wider use of the Kazakh language in education, culture, and administrative practice relates not only to the growth of ethnic consciousness and the desire to prevent acculturation, but also to the mundane motivation to place the Kazakhs in advantageous positions with respect to other ethnic groups.

At the same time, many Kazakhs also worry that radical economic privatization and the transition to a market economy will hurt their ethnic group, which does not have any tradition of commerce and free enterprise and, thus, would inhibit, rather than facilitate, the emergence of a strong Kazakh middle class. Remarkably enough, president Nazarbaev explained his antipathy to outright ownership of land by pointing out that to permit such ownership would be alien to the heritage and mentality of the former nomads.

Inter-ethnic tension and competition in Kazakhstan drove president Nazarbaev to argue for civil accord and inter-ethnic accommodation in the country. He constantly emphasizes that no one ethnic group should have privileges in Kazakhstan. So far Nazarbaev has proven to be a very skillful politician who is capable of keeping inter-ethnic tension under control, albeit he is not able to defuse it. However, one may wonder whether and for how long he will be capable of maneuvering in the future. The Kazakh intelligentsia makes
the appeal that he "help his own people" and reproaches him for "neglecting the interests of
the Kazakh people." On the other hand, the Russian-speaking population reproaches him for
being led by Kazakh nationalists. They claim that although Nazarbaev avoids publicly
favoring Kazakhs, this is just what he is doing in his practical measures.\(^{174}\) The absence of
consociational structures in Kazakhstan makes the development of a political culture based on
bargaining a particularly difficult task. Whether the recently emerged parties that are not
based on an implied ethnic principle – be it the presidential Union of People's Unity or the
centrifugal National Congress of Kazakhstan – are capable of fostering an inter-ethnic
accommodation remains to be seen.

The situation in Kyrgyzstan is similar to that in Kazakhstan and also does not favor
adjusting to an inter-ethnic social environment. The situation is further aggravated by the
competition for scarce land resources. Increasing numbers of Kyrgyz are migrating from the
mountainous regions to the more fertile areas of Kyrgyzstan, but the arable lands there are
already occupied by Russians and some other ethnic minorities. In addition, the growth in
unemployment affects the Kyrgyz more than any other ethnic group in the republic. Just like
in Kazakhstan, most of the non-Communist political organizations in Kyrgyzstan, even those
that declare their allegiance to democratic principles, have split along ethnic lines. While the
Kyrgyz support Asaba (Revival), Erkin Kyrgyzstan (Free Kyrgyzstan), and some other
parties with a certain nationalistic appeal, the Russian population gives their sympathy to the
Slavic Fund.\(^{175}\)

The prevailing conditions in Central Asia and Kazakhstan do not favor the possibility
of a political, or even an economic, unification of the region. Central Asian leaders have met
several times to discuss their countries' economic cooperation, including the establishment of
a common market, a bank for reconstruction and development, custom free borders, and
other measures. However, it seems that they are only paying lip-service to these plans. Some
attempts made in this direction were not particularly successful, and Nazarbaev publicly
called them "unrealistic".\(^{176}\) The Central Asian Regional Union, which was founded on
January 24, 1993 at the Central Asian leaders’ meeting in Tashkent, has so far turned out to
be stillborn.\(^{177}\)
There are several reasons for these failures. The economies of Central Asian countries are to a large extent not complementary, and their leaders profess the principle that rescuing a country that is drowning in its problems is its own business. When, in the beginning of 1992, Turkmenistan increased fifty fold the price of its gas, without any consideration of its neighbors' financial situation, this action put Tadjikistan and Kyrgyzstan on the brink of energy starvation.\textsuperscript{178} The introduction of a national currency in Kyrgyzstan was strongly disfavored in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.\textsuperscript{179} Political competition and discord should also be taken into account.\textsuperscript{180} Ideas of Turkestan unity are still alive, or rather resuscitating, in circles of the Uzbek ruling elite and some Uzbek intelligentsia who hope that, as the most numerous ethnic group, the Uzbeks would dominate in a united Turkestan. A semi-official Uzbek newspaper has the audacious title: "Turkestan". However, sober observers understand that "a single state is utopia in today's conditions."\textsuperscript{181}

Uzbekistan's intervention on the side of the Communists in the civil war in Tadjikistan is a clear indication of its intentions. It practically made Tadjikistan a vassal state of its neighbor. One of the Tadzik leaders, Rakhmonov, flatters president Karimov by calling him the "father of all Tadjiks".\textsuperscript{182} Kyrgyzstan has already indicated its dread towards its stronger neighbor.\textsuperscript{183} Disagreements between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan also became public knowledge.\textsuperscript{184}

In addition, territorial claims and counter-claims between Tadjiks and Uzbeks (on Bukhara, Samarkand, the Zerafshan oasis, parts of the Fergana valley, and some other territories), Uzbeks and Kyrgyz (on the Kyrgyz part of the Fergana valley), Uzbeks and Kazakhs (on some territories along the Syr-Daria and Arys' rivers), Kyrgyz and Tadjiks (on the Northern Pamirs, the alpine pastures in the Alay and Transalay ranges, and some other territories), Turkmen and Kazakhs (on the Mangyshlak peninsula), etc.; water disputes between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan; and other disputes and tensions between different Central Asian ethnic groups do not facilitate their unity.

The internal situation in Central Asia is also connected with its international standing. Russia still remains the main economic partner for all Central Asian countries, although there are serious difficulties in their relations with Russia. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan would prefer closer cooperation between CIS countries and are clearly disappointed with Russia's
position on the issue. Their numerous attempts to provide the Commonwealth of Independent States with real economic power remain unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{185} Akaev complained that Kyrgyzstan was nearly forced out of the ruble zone.\textsuperscript{186} The position of Uzbekistan is more restrained, while Turkmenistan's participation in the CIS is largely a formal one. Niiazov, Turkmenistan's president, has repeatedly said that the very existence of the CIS is senseless.\textsuperscript{187} In its turn, Russia above all other things prefers stability, apparently, as the best guarantee against the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. For this illusive stability Russia is ready to sacrifice its declared democratic principles. Russian troops helped the Communists in Tadjikistan return to power and are still assisting them in the continuing civil war. The liberal Russian press has already sounded the alarm that this policy is fraught with consequences similar to the invasion of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{188}

Meanwhile, different Muslim countries, such as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, have already begun to compete for influence in the Central Asian region. So far its countries consider Turkey as their most desirable and attractive partner. Central Asian leaders consider Turkey to be, among other things, a liaison to America, and they hope that the United States will back Turkey in its economic assistance to their countries. President Karimov declared Turkey an elder brother of Uzbekistan, just as Russia was called in the country until recent times. President Akaev praised Turkey as "a morning star for the Turkic [-speaking] republics of Central Asia" and claimed that relations with this country would have the most important meaning in Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy. Even Nabiev, the former president of Tadjikistan, the only Iranian-speaking country in Central Asia, which traditionally looks with suspicion on the neighboring Turkic-speaking countries, presented to Mr. Demirel a golden heart symbolizing Central Asia's bond with Turkey.\textsuperscript{189} The cultural and economic presence of Turkey is increasing in Central Asia, but claims that it has an important role to play in stabilizing the Central Asian region,\textsuperscript{190} seem premature to me. Turkey does not possess the capital and know-how so desperately needed for the modernization of this region.

In spite of several attempts to promote Iran's presence in Central Asia, it is still far from being influential. However, it has concluded some important economic deals with Turkmenistan. Among other things, Teheran proposes to build a railway and road from
Ashghabad to Northern Iran with an outlet to the Persian Gulf. Pakistan's presence in the region is even less visible, although Pakistani leaders, since the time of Zia ul-Haq, have been cherishing the dream of creating a "strategic deep front" in view of its confrontation with India. In comparison with Turkey and Iran, Pakistan has relatively weak historical and ethnic ties with Central Asian countries. Even more important is the fact that the economies of the two regions are oriented towards different markets and are likely to compete rather than implement one another in the future. Surprisingly, Arab countries have expressed limited interest in the Central Asian region. Saudi Arabia is concerned mainly with the promotion of Islamic learning; other Arab countries are doing even less. No wonder that, without hesitation, all Central Asian countries, except Turkmenistan, have established diplomatic relations with Israel and are demonstrating their interest in the Israeli expertise in trade, industry, and especially agriculture.

Meanwhile, there is no improvement in the ecological situation and the economy of the region is in a serious crisis. Its industry and agriculture are over-centralized, with obsolete machinery and equipment, poor technologies, low productivity, and an undeveloped infrastructure. The Kyrgyz economy, deprived of reliable raw materials and energy sources and forced to import them, has found itself on the brink of collapse. Russia has cut quotas for supplies of metals by one-third; of oil, by two-thirds. In 1992, total economic production in Kyrgyzstan fell by 27 percent, and it continues to plummet. The living standard, especially of the provincial indigenous population, continues to decrease; in many places people live on home-baked bread and tea. They also face growing unemployment. In Uzbekistan, president Karimov's August 1992 promise of a better live proved to be a big price hike. Prices on food stuffs and manufactured goods are almost as high as in Russia, while wages are much lower. The civil war has brought Tadjikistan to the verge of complete economic disaster; more than 80 percent of its industrial enterprises are destroyed or damaged. Hunger is widespread, particularly in the southern regions of the republic and in the Pamirs.

In addition, Russians who have lost their Big Brother status and turned into an ethnic minority are, along with other non-indigenous people, leaving the region in growing numbers. This is creating a shortage in the professional and skilled labor force. This process
accelerated in the late 1980s. In 1989, 94,000 people left Uzbekistan.¹⁹⁵ In the first half of 1990, 34,000 people left Kirgizia.¹⁹⁶ During the first nine months of 1990, 65,000 people left Tadjikistan.¹⁹⁷ According to one opinion poll, in 1991, at least 130,000 Russians in Uzbekistan, over 50,000 in Tadjikistan, and about 20,000 in Kyrgyzstan were prepared to flee from the area.¹⁹⁸ These prognoses turned out to be correct. As a consequence of the civil war in Tadjikistan, of 588,000 Russians who lived in the republic, 300,000 have already left it. In 1992, about 5 percent of the Russian population of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and about 4 percent of the Russian population of Turkmenistan has left these countries.

According to the rough estimates of the Russian Ministry of the Economy, at least 1.5-1.6 million ethnic Russians will migrate to Russia before the year 2000. However, the figure can be as high as four or five million. In fact, the only factor preventing more people from immediate emigration is the enormous difficulties involved with resettling in Russia.¹⁹⁹

With the possible exception of oil-and-gas-rich Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, the economic crisis in Central Asia will undoubtedly not be overcome in the near future. Serious economic reforms in the Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan have so far not begun. The scale of structural changes is not even worth mentioning. In Kyrgyzstan even the smallest enterprises have not yet been privatized.²⁰⁰ President Karimov likes to talk about the “Turkish model of development” as the best match for Uzbekistan, but, in actuality, he simply strengthens the state monopoly. The presidential office instructs the republic’s ministry for foreign economic relations in matters concerning which foreign firms it may sign agreements with.²⁰¹ Turkmenistan’s government favors a state-regulated economy and the preservation of the collective farm system. State-run enterprises in the country still account for 99 percent of production and severe restrictions are imposed on entrepreneurship.²⁰²

Even the transition to the market economy and the reduction in cotton production and its intensification will hardly bring immediate results and help the region out of poverty. Thus, considering the fact that one-fifth of all labor in cotton production is connected to water, a reduction in water consumption can reduce the labor force by 6 to 12 percent.²⁰³ This and similar developments will inevitably lead to an increase in unemployment and to the further pauperization of that significant part of the population which is fraught with ethnic
and social unrest. When the Uzbek government removed control over prices on January 16, 1992, this action immediately resulted in the student’s spontaneous protest in Tashkent.  

With few exceptions, like Kazakhstan’s billion dollar oil contract with the American corporation, Chevron, attempts to attract foreign capital have not yet been lucrative. Many of them, like Akaev’s dream of turning Kyrgyzstan into an Asian Switzerland, are not based on sound economic estimates. No wonder he strives for Western investments in Kyrgyzstan without great success. One of his aides complains that “We were patted on our back with approval by our American and German friends, but no money was given.”

Given the geographic location of Central Asia, its shortage of infrastructure, material and skilled labor, its political instability and completely corrupted and inefficient administration, the prospect of large-scale foreign investments into the region seem rather dubious.

All in all, in the few years of the post-Soviet period, Central Asia and Kazakhstan became what they actually had been during the whole Soviet period: another Third World region with unsolved structural problems and minimal potential for rapid economic and sociopolitical development. The future does not look particularly bright for the region. Social disorder, and even violent riots in spontaneous and sometimes very unpleasant forms, may soon be a social reality.

For several decades the Soviet Union liked to refer to the Central Asian example as the model for successful development along socialist lines, which the Third World countries were encouraged to emulate. In fact, very little has been achieved after more than seventy years of ruthless Communist rule which cost the peoples of this region millions of lives, but failed to get them out of poverty, or to change drastically the foundation of their traditional organization. Those people in Third World countries, and in the West as well, who, in their
Endnotes

I wish to express my gratitude to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research for supporting my research on the current situation in Central Asia and Kazakhstan.


35. M. Salamatov. Why Infant Mortality is so High in Turkmenia. 

36. N. Davlet-uulu. Independent Kyrgyzstan. Current Political and 

37. Thus, Uzbekistan used 54 kilograms of pesticides per hectare, 
while in the Baltic republics this figure was as low as 0.3 kilograms 

Kommunist, N 15, 1988: 35-36; Ak-Mukhammed Velsanar. Tam, gde ne 

39. I received this information from some members of the Russian 
parliament during my visit to the Soviet Union in summer 1990.


42. Z. Wolfson. Central Asian Environment: A Dead End. Environmental 


44. A. Khodzhamuradov. Uspekhi melioratsii zemel' v Turkmenskoi SSR. 


46. P. Shermukhamedov. Trudno zhit' bez Arala. Zvezda vostoka, N 2, 
Management Crisis in Soviet Central Asia. The Carl Beck Papers in 
Russian and East European Studies, N 905, University of Pittsburgh 
Center for Russian and East European Studies, 1991: 42 ff.


61. On the other hand, some articles in the Soviet press claim that Nazarbaev belongs to the Junior (Mladshii) zhuz and, therefore, could not be regarded favorably by Kunaev. See, for example, Moscow News File, *Moscow News*, N 3, January 19-26, 1992.


125. The Literary Gazette Int., vol. 1, issue 17, N 1, November, 1990: 5.


148. Personal communication with Abdumannob and Abdurahim Pulatov, leaders of the Birlik movement; see also *Moscow News*, N 36, 1992; 5.


159. Personal communication with Dr. Alma Sultangalieva.


196. Izvestiia, September 17, 1990.


Figure 1. Indigenous population of Central Asia and Kazakhstan.

Figure 1 (continued). Percent growth / decline.

Figure 2. The most numerous ethnic groups in the capitals of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (1989).

Figure 2 (continued). Percentage of those ethnic groups in the region's capitals (1989).

Figure 3. Infant mortality in Central Asia and Kazakhstan in 1989.


Figure 4. Ethnic composition of Kazakhstan's population in 1989.

Source: 1989 census.

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<th>Ethnicity</th>
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