TITLE: Tadjikistan: Nationalism, Religion, and Political Change

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Tajikistan, a Central Asian republic with a population of about 5.2 million, experienced an upsurge of opposition politics as the Soviet Union underwent reform and then collapse in the past few years. Nationalism, religion, and democratization were important components of the political agendas of the opposition groups, although in varying ways depending on the individual group. The first two issues were even adopted to a degree by the republic's Communist Party. Broad-based politics not controlled by the Communist Party has been evolving in Tajikistan, especially since 1989. Recent events have disproved the old assumption that the masses, especially those in the villages (who comprise the vast majority of the republic's population) were either politically inert or thought only in terms of narrow, local issues. There is now growing support for a non-Communist, democratic form of government in Tajikistan even though, for the time being, the Communist old guard clings to power.

Although national and religious features gave the opposition a specific, local coloration, the movement was inextricably linked to processes at work in the Soviet Union as a whole. The drive for political democratization by reformers in central government politics affected the terms in which Tajikistani reformers couched their objectives. Reformers in the central government as well as Moscow's and St. Peterburg's city governments supported the Tajik-
Nationalist opposition to the Communist establishment. Nationalist movements elsewhere in the Soviet Union provided examples of what nationalists could do and gave direct aid to members of the Tajik opposition. Inter-republican contacts have continued now that Tajikistan is a separate state.

The Tajiks are the former Soviet Union's largest Iranian nationality and speak an eastern dialect of Persian. There are more than 4.2 million of them in the former Soviet Union. The vast majority of them live in Tajikistan, where they comprise roughly 60% of the population. Most of the rest live in Uzbekistan.

Educated, urban Tajiks, and more ordinary Tajiks than we used to assume, by now have developed a strong sense of national identity. This was brewing for several decades before the Soviet collapse but had the chance to come emphatically to the fore as the old constraints weakened during the Gorbachev-era reforms. Tajik nationalism focuses on several different kinds of issues. On a basic level, it asserts that Tajiks, as heirs to 2,500 years of both Persian and eastern Iranian civilization, are not inferior and do not owe deference to anyone, be it the Soviet regime and the Russians, Central Asia's Turkic majority, or the Persian-speakers of Iran. This attitude affects current politics in several different ways. For example, Tajikistan has made Tajik the state language and has tried to downplay the use of Russian. The cultural and intellectual achievements of the medieval Persian-speaking world receive broad attention, in place of the Soviet emphasis on the Russian heritage and Western civilization.

Tajik nationalism also affects the discussion of economic and
ecological problems. Communists and non-Communists alike blame the policies of the central government for Tajikistan's economic and environmental problems. Similarly, the interplay between nationalism and economic and environmental woes causes Tajikistan to see neighboring Central Asian states as competitors for scarce resources and goods. In practice, such an attitude, not only in Tajikistan but also in its neighbors, has undercut much of the official rhetoric of the past two years about cooperation among the Central Asian republics.

Not surprisingly in the context of rising nationalism, the status of minority nationalities has become a more important issue. Two prime examples of this are the controversies over Tajiks in Uzbekistan and Russians in Tajikistan. Here, too, the Communist leadership has put subjects of public concern to its own use. Communists and non-Communists alike have used as a rallying cry the alleged mistreatment of the substantial Tajik minority by Uzbekistan's Turkic elite. (Their exact number is the subject of heated dispute.) As for the Russian minority in Tajikistan, there are probably about half a million of them. The rise of Tajik nationalism and the scarcity of consumer goods has frightened many of them. Some have reacted by leaving the republic (the exact numbers are disputed, probably several thousand.) The Communist Party has played successfully on the fears of those who remain by portraying itself as the only alternative to rule by Muslim extremists.

Nationalism even affects religious activism, despite the principle that the Islamic community ought to be supranational.
In fact, many Tajiks do consider Islam an important part of their world but link it to their *national* identity. This linkage strengthens the significance of nationalism for the Tajiks rather than contradicting it. Even Islamic religious figures and officials of the Islamic Rebirth Party do not advocate the creation of a supranational Islamic state. To them the significance of national differences makes such an objective undesirable. Besides, Tajiks know that a supranational Islamic state would be one in which they would be an ethnic minority. They do not want to trade domination by Soviets/Russians for domination by anyone else.

The importance of Islam to a large proportion of Tajikistan's indigenous population does not mean that "Islamic fundamentalism" is a significant force there. The term itself is misleading. Most Tajikistani Muslims want a society in which they can practice their religion freely, without the constraints so long imposed by the Soviet system. However, they do not want Islamic hard-liners criticizing their traditional approach to religious observance or imposing rigid codes upon them. Even Islamic political activists, including from the Islamic Rebirth Party, admit that the creation of an Islamic state (which could mean various things in practice) must wait for some time in the vague future. Iran's Islamic republic is not an appealing model for most Tajikistani Muslims because they are Sunni, not Shi'i like the regime in Iran. That difference covers many things, including concepts of the religious and political authority of the mullahs and the perception that the Iranian regime is authoritarian and backward-looking.

The fact that there are millions more Persian-speakers outside the former Soviet Union, primarily in Iran and Afghanistan,
could not fail to influence Tajikistan's contemporary politics. However, this kinship does not guarantee that the Tajiks will fall into the orbit of Persian-speakers beyond their borders. Tajiks are particularly interested in using Iran, Afghanistan, and to a degree even Pakistan to help them recapture the Persian cultural heritage which Soviet rule diminished. However, they are determined not to be subordinated to any of those countries in the process. They also want outside help in salvaging their economy. Therefore, they hope to use the cultural ties to southern neighbors to facilitate trade and production ventures. At the same time, they are eager to develop economic ties to many other countries further afield. Iran and some Afghanistani groups have tried to extend their ideological influence in Tajikistan but thus far have had only a limited impact.

For now, the mainstream of the Tajik nationalist movement is more interested in finding solutions to Tajikistan's massive problems than in fostering conflict on ethnic or religious grounds. They look for help from the West, the "Pacific rim," and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, as well as from their southern neighbors. Tajikistan's future orientation will be affected substantially by how much help it receives from these varied sources.
Tajikistan

by Muriel Atkin

As the Soviet regime underwent reform and then collapse in the Gorbachev era, the inhabitants of Tajikistan grappled with their particular version of the problems of nationality politics that affected the Soviet Union as a whole. After decades during which the Soviet regime defined and regulated national identity in ways which were often restrictive and sometimes demeaning, Tajiks, like members of other nationalities, sought to take control of the interpretation of their own nationhood. This affected not only the Tajiks' ethnic awareness but also relations between Tajikistan and neighboring republics, the Soviet central powers, and foreign countries. At the same time, many of the issues that concerned the Tajiks, including the low standard of living and exasperation with Communist hard-liners, were not unique to any nationality but reflected problems that were perceived widely in the Soviet Union, although some were given a national coloration in their Tajik context. In addition, Tajiks living in Tajikistan have shown an interest in those developments in other Soviet republics which they see as pertinent to their own concerns. Thus, political change in contemporary Tajikistan is not solely about nationalism, although national assertiveness is an important component of the political processes which have been at work there.

There is a tendency in some quarters to treat the Asian republics of what was the Soviet Union as so exotic as to be incomparable to the rest of the country. Therefore, before taking a closer look at nationalism in Tajikistan, it is worth noting that Tajiks who address nationality
issues are attentive to developments in other republics and at the center. The first Congress of People's Deputies demonstrated to such Tajiks how effective representatives from the Baltic and Caucasian republics as well as Moscow and Leningrad were as advocates of their own national or regional interests and how Tajikistan's representatives suffered by comparison. The efforts of nationalists in other republics, including Russia, Armenia, and Lithuania, to enhance the position of their respective national cultures as the reform era provided new opportunities for doing so also served as an example to Tajiks. A prominent component of discussions of Tajikistan's economic problems includes comparisons with other Soviet republics (see below.)

Reform-minded political groups in Tajikistan, which all advocate Tajik national interests in some form, have cooperated with and been helped by reformers of other nationalities in other republics. The most obvious example of this is the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT) which, according to its leader, Shodmon Yusufov, derived its platform from those of the Democratic Party of Russia and the Social Democratic Association. When Tajikistan's regime refused to allow the DPT to publish the first issue of its newspaper in the republic, the DPT arranged to

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have it published in Lithuania with the help of Sajudis.

Similarly, a Tajik cultural organization, Mehr, that faced harassment from the Tajikistani regime was allowed to organize and publish a newspaper by Moscow’s reformist city government. In May 1991, the DPT played host to a meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan’s capital, of reform-minded groups from Russia, Belorussia, and other Central Asian republics. During Tajikistan’s presidential election campaign in the fall of 1991, Davlat Khudonazarov was the joint candidate of the DPT and the two other main non-Communist groups, Rastokhez and the Islamic Movement. He had been one of Andrei Sakharov’s supporters in the Congress of People’s Deputies and won public support for his candidacy from Boris El’tsin. The rally which these same groups organized in downtown Dushanbe on August 24, 1991 in reaction to the attempted coup by Communist hard-liners included not only the voicing of Tajik interests but also praise for both El’tsin and Gorbachev. The demonstrators also held a minute of silence for the “national heroes” in Moscow who died opposing the coup.

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None of this means that people engaged in Tajik-oriented politics are incapable of formulating objectives or identifying grievances without outside guidance. It does mean that such political leaders, while emphasizing the particular, are well aware of the broader context in which they operate.

The long-standing Soviet condemnation of national feeling, except in the pallid form dictated by the regime itself, continued into the Gorbachev era. The Gorbachev regime continued the practice of its predecessors in presenting "internationalism," which really meant an emphasis on the interests of the center of power, as occupying a lofty moral plane. In contrast, the regime treated nationalism as linked to, and no better than "chauvinism." In practice, the epithets "nationalism" (or "national narrowness") and "chauvinism" were readily applied to any display of interest in one's national heritage or current concerns that fell outside the narrow confines of the officially authorized version. (Given the strongly negative connotations of "nationalist" in Soviet rhetoric, it should be noted that the term will be used in this essay simply to describe people who see themselves as advocates of the interests of the Tajiks as a people and of the worth of their heritage and is not intended to imply that such individuals are necessarily radicals, subversives, or chauvinists.)

Symbolic of this continued Soviet antipathy toward national feeling is the 1986 attack by Tajikistan's leadership, reflecting the attitudes of the center, on Tajik writers for paying too much attention to their own people and republic and not enough to other peoples and internationalism. That same year, the republic's Communist Party First Secretary, Qahhor Mah-
amov, one of the Gorbachev-era replacements for the old-guard leadership in Central Asia,\(^{10}\) told the party to do more to promote internationalism and portrayed nationalism as something pernicious which foreign propaganda encouraged.\(^{11}\) This approach lasted as late as 1989, by which time nationalist movements were gaining an increased following in various Soviet republics. Reflections of this persistence include Mahkamov's 1989 complaint that Tajiks were too interested in national matters and insufficiently interested in internationalism and the declaration by the plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan that it would fight "nationalism and chauvinism."\(^{12}\)

Yet this hard line proved unsustainable. In a climate of waning repression and growing nationalism in a number of republics, Tajiks reacted against the long-standing Soviet practice of manipulative nationality politics as well as Moscow's centralizing and Russianizing practices, to press their national interests with increasing vigor. Even Tajikistan's Communist leadership found it politically useful to espouse Tajik national interests, as changes in the Soviet political system away from the extreme emphasis on command from the center made it desirable for republic-level officials to seek the support of republic-level constituencies.

\(^{10}\) He fell from his offices as party leader and republican president in September 1991, in the backlash against the attempted coup of August 19-21, 1991.

\(^{11}\) Tadzhik TA, "Vospityvat' ubezhdennykh bortsov za delo partii," Kommunist Tadzhikistana, September 3, 1986, p. 2.

There is some irony in this in the sense that the contemporary republic of Tajikistan and the emphasis on a Tajik political-national identity are creations of the Soviet era. Yet these have taken on meaning in their own right during the course of this century. The boundaries of the Tajikistan republic reflect neither a traditional Tajik polity nor the distribution of the Tajik population within Soviet Central Asia (or beyond.) The territory which now comprises Tajikistan was often part of larger states or divided among a number or regional or supra-regional powers. Even the Samanid kingdom (875-999), which, according to Soviet Tajik historiography, was a Tajik state and presided over the emergence of the Tajiks as a distinct, consolidated people with a flourishing culture,¹³ ruled very little of what is now the Tajikistan republic directly. Although part of what is now northwestern Tajikistan (the Panjaket area) was ruled from the Samanid capital in Bukhara, most of the rest of the modern republic’s territory was ruled through local vassals; the mountainous southeast (now called Gorno-Badakhshan) was outside the Samanid realm entirely.

During the 1920s, the Soviet regime subdivided its Central Asian holdings into nationally-defined republics. As part of that process, Moscow’s fiat established Tajikistan as an autonomous republic within the new Uzbekistan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924. The core of this Tajikistan ASSR was formed from the eastern provinces of the old amirate of Bukhara (comprising much of what is now central and southern Tajikistan) and, further north (the Panjaket area), a small part of the old governor-generalship (and, briefly, the autonomous republic) of Turkestan. The following year, the remote Pamir Mountain region, along the border with

¹³From the perspective of Persian-speaking Iranians, the Samanids presided over the revival of Persian culture after the Arab conquest.
Afghanistan and China, was reassigned from the Turkestan republic to Tajikistan under the name Gorno- (Mountainous) Badakhshan.\textsuperscript{14} In 1929, Moscow separated Tajikistan from Uzbekistan and made it a Union Republic in its own right. At that time part of the populous, economically important Farghana Valley (the Leninobod area) was transferred from Uzbekistan to become the northern-most part of Tajikistan.

Although the idea of a Tajik nation-state is a twentieth-century invention, the ethnic designation "Tajik" has been used for many centuries to refer to Persian-speakers, in contrast to various Turkic peoples, wherever these groups lived in contact with each other. By the twentieth century, the area of its use had contracted to Central Asia, Afghanistan, the eastern-most provinces of Iran, and China's Xinjiang province. According to the 1989 Soviet census there are some 4.6 million Tajiks living within Soviet borders,\textsuperscript{15} approximately 3 million of whom live in Tajikistan; the vast majority of the rest live in Uzbekistan, with small numbers of Tajiks living elsewhere in Central Asia or in other Soviet republics. The exact number of Tajik inhabitants of either Tajikistan or Uzbekistan is subject to question for reasons which have to do with ethnic politics (see below.) There are also more than 3 million Persian-speakers in Afghanistan, a majority of whom are called "Tajiks." A small number of Tajiks live in the oases of Xinjiang (perhaps a few tens of thousands.)

The designation of Tajiks or other Central Asian peoples by ethno-linguistic names does not mean that a majority of them perceived such categories as the proper basis for defining states

\textsuperscript{14} The historic name "Badakhshan" is also used now for a province in northeastern Afghanistan.

when the Soviets first reshaped the region into nationally-defined republics. However, decades of Soviet rule in Tajikistan, entailing formal, institutional recognition of national identity and transgressions against national feeling, have made nationality politics extremely important there. Contemporary Tajik nationalists see their people not as the "formerly backward people" they were called for decades in Soviet rhetoric but as heirs to a synthesis of the western and eastern forms of Iranian civilization (representing the Iranian plateau and Central Asia) that has its roots in antiquity. At the same time, many of these nationalists, especially those belonging to the cultural intelligentsia, decry what they perceive as the low level of knowledge about this rich heritage and even of "correct" Tajik among most of their people. They blame Soviet policies for depriving them of their birthright and want to use the power of the state to remedy the situation.16

That Tajikistan's Communist leadership perceived such sentiments to have a widespread following in the republic is reflected by its shift in 1989 to policies which addressed nationalist grievances. This has taken various forms, including the appearance of increasingly explicit articles in the official press reflecting nationalist concerns, the establishment of a Tajikistan cultural foundation to preserve the Tajik heritage, the identification of political figures by nationality in the press, and the restoration of the historic name, Khujand, of Tajikistan's second largest city, Leninobod.

The republican regime's most important concession to nationalist feeling was the enactment of the language law of 1989, which, among other things, gave Tajik primacy over

Russian as the state language, although it did not eliminate the use of Russian. The law also advocated a return to the Arabic alphabet and called for the use of Tajik, not Russianized or Russian personal and place names.17

The Communists did not have a monopoly on expressions of Tajik nationalism. For example there was a ground swell of public support among Tajiks, especially in Dushanbe, for improving the status of the Tajik language months before the legislature passed the language law. Tajik public organizations separate from the Communist Party (called "informals" in Soviet parlance) articulate nationalist concerns. Among the common themes are calls for sovereignty, in an economic as well as a political sense, and full, unhindered cultural development of the Tajiks. Such views can be found among the two main secular "informal" organizations in Tajikistan, the DPT and Rastokhez, as well as the cultural organization Mehr.18 However, neither the Communist (now Socialist) Party of Tajikistan nor the "informals" extend the concepts of national sovereignty or even independence as far as a complete separation from a reconstituted version of what had been the Soviet Union, provided that the new version ensures autonomy for and equality among the republics. The terms in which sovereignty and independence are often discussed give the impression that they are seen in no small part as ways of improving the republic's bargaining position as relations among the constituents of what had

17 "Qonuni zaboni Respublikai Sovetii Sotsialistii Tojikiston," Tojikistoni soveti, July 30, 1989, p. 1

been the Soviet Union are renegotiated. There are surely a number of reasons for this stance, among them the daunting prospect that complete independence poses a small republic with neighbors it does not necessarily trust, an economy that is not self-sufficient, and major economic, environmental, and social problems.

The strength of nationalism among ordinary Tajiks, especially the rural majority, is harder to gauge because of the dearth of reliable information. Communist Party officials and non-Tajiks living in Dushanbe tend to portray rural Tajiks as a primitive, anarchic menace lacking a full-fledged ideology but capable of xenophobia and Islamic fanaticism. Representative of this are the rumors which circulated in Dushanbe in connection with the February 1990 riots and the anti-Communist demonstrations of August to October 1991 that rural Tajiks had come or were coming to Dushanbe to commit mayhem. Even many educated, urban Tajik nationalists view ordinary Tajiks, especially those in the countryside, as ignorant of their national heritage and given to a local rather than a national form of identity.

However there are examples of behavior by ordinary Tajiks that suggest that by now their political awareness in general and their sense of national identity may be stronger than they have been given credit for. Mass anti-government demonstrations in Dushanbe following the collapse of the attempted coup of August 1991, in which rural as well as urban Tajiks (and others) rallied in the heart of the city, were motivated primarily by the kind of opposition to the Communist

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elite that was widespread in the Soviet Union but also invoked nationalism. The demonstrators who called for the resignation of Party leader and President Qahhor Mahkamov because of his perceived support for the coup carried signs saying "Resign," but at least one sign quoted from the Shah-nameh, the Persian national epic set in pre-Islamic times. The point of the sign was the righteousness of the oppressed in overthrowing their oppressor, a point made by referring to two of the most famous characters in the epic, Zahhak, the monstrously cruel tyrant, and Kaveh, the Persian blacksmith whose own sons had been killed by Zahhak and who rallied support for the uprising against him.\(^{21}\) Much of what was said at the demonstration on September 9, 1991, as Tajikistan’s legislature moved to declare the republic’s independence, had to do with the concept of national reawakening. One symbol of this was the call for renaming one of Dushanbe’s main streets, Putovskii Street, (named for the Polishborn Cheka officer, Ch.A. Putovskii, who played an active role in the Communist victory in what became Tajikistan) after the greatest of the Samanid rulers, Isma’īl.\(^{22}\) The strength of national grievances at the grass-roots levels has also shown itself in another way, in the unfortunate form of antagonism and violence towards members of other nationalities (see below.)

Tajik nationalism also affects the discussion of other issues of which it is not the primary component, most notably economic and environmental concerns. The terms in which Tajikistan’s standard of living are discussed frequently note that the republic lags far behind other parts of the Soviet Union, especially Russia and the Baltic states, on various points of

\(^{21}\) Photograph of the demonstrators, Tojikistoni shuravi, August 30, 1991, p. 2.

comparison, including the availability of basic consumer necessities, infant mortality, and the
inhabitants' level of education. Both the Tajikistani regime and the opposition blame much
of the republic's economic woes on Moscow's policies, which they depict as essentially colonial,
although they rarely use that word. According to this argument, Moscow exploits Tajikistan as
a producer of raw materials, especially, but not exclusively, cotton, as well as hydroelectric
power, and weights the system so that other republics derive most of the benefit from what
Tajikistan produces. The solution, according to those inside and outside the Tajikistani
regime is that the republic must have full control over setting economic policy within its borders.

The high level of unemployment in Tajikistan is the target of nationalist criticism on the
grounds that Moscow's policies have not provided training for Tajiks to fill new industrial jobs
but have relied instead on importing workers from other republics. This is intertwined with
Dushanbe's acute housing problem because the imported workers and Russians in general have

23 Representative of the voluminous literature on this subject are: Sh. Sultonov,
"Maromnomai partiya," Tojikistoni soveti, September 5, 1989, p. 2; H. Umarov, "Iqtisodi
tijorati: ovoza, vohima va haqiqat," ibid., June 3, 1990, p. 3; Sh. Shoismatulloev,
"Progress--nemat azim," ibid., March 1, 1990, p. 2; A. Vahhobov, "Khomushi ba ki lozim?";
Berdieva, "Hama rosti juyu mardonagi;" A. Istad, "Iqtisod-- sarchashmai mas"alaho milli,"
Adabiyot va san"at, September 7, 1989, p. 3; R.K. Alimov, Sh. Shoismatulloev, and M.
5 (May), p. 12.

24 A few examples of this oft-repeated argument are: "Durnamoi rushdi mo," Adabiyot va
san"at, July 13, 1989, p. 2; H. Muhammadiev, "Barodari man boshi, barobari man bosh!,
ibid., September 7, 1989, p. 3; N. Yodgori, "Narkhi pakhta va sathi zindagi," Tojikistoni
soveti, January 6, 1990, p. 2; R. Bobojonov, H. Botirov, and M. Mavlaviev, "Mo hama
farzandi yek oilaem!", Tajikistoni soveti, July 30, 1989, p. 3; S. Mirzoev, "Tadzhikistan!
Kakov tvoi zavtrashni den?" Sogdiana, 1990, no. 3 (October), p. 1; "Natsional'nyi vopros",
p. 84.
received priority in housing assignments.\textsuperscript{25}

That is why rumors which falsely alleged that large numbers of Armenians had fled to Tajikistan to escape the violence in Azerbaijan and were being given priority housing assignments in Dushanbe touched off a large demonstration in that city on February 11, 1991.

The demonstrators' underlying grievances were not about the Armenians but about general dissatisfaction with the standard of living and the unresponsive political leadership but those rumors struck a raw nerve. When republica\textsuperscript{n} Ministry of Internal Affairs forces fired on demonstrators who gathered the following day to continue pressing their demands, rioting swept the city.\textsuperscript{26}

Even opposition to the construction (begun in 1976) of what was planned to be Central Asia's largest hydro-electric dam in Tajikistan's Roghun area has been given a nationalist dimension. The opponents' arguments include assertions that the reservoir created by this dam will provide irrigation water for other republics while not only flooding good land Tajikistan itself could have used but also driving Tajiks from their village homes in the lands to be flooded, thus destroying the Tajik cultural traditions that village life had preserved. The analogy between


the dam project and the Chernobyl disaster as examples of the environmental damage resulting from flawed technology is another illustration of the way nationalists perceive their particular concerns with an eye to developments elsewhere in the Soviet Union.27

Tajik national concerns are not tidily defined by the borders of Tajikistan. Millions of Tajiks and other Persian-speakers live outside that republic while roughly forty percent of the people living within its borders are not Tajiks but members of many other nationalities, only a few of which are represented in large numbers.

Even some of the inhabitants who are classified as Tajiks for census purposes in fact belong to other ethnic groups which speak eastern Iranian languages (as opposed to western Iranian Tajik.) These peoples fall into two main groups, the Yaghanbs and the Pamiris. The Yaghnoobs are descended from the Soghdians, who were a powerful, prosperous, highly cultured people of ancient Central Asia. Several of the region's major cities, including Khujand and Panjakent in Tajikistan and Bukhara and Samarkand in Uzbekistan, were originally Soghdian. The modern Yaghanobs are few in number and have suffered considerably from forced relocation from the mountains to the lowlands in the Soviet era. The Pamiris are composed of seven different peoples, all few in number, whose homelands are in the remote Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast'. They have traditionally adhered to the Isma'ili sect of Shi'i Islam, which distinguishes them both from the Sunni majority in Central Asia and the Imami ("Twelver") Shi'i majority in Iran. Although policy towards the Yaghanobs and Pamiris, as determined in Moscow as well as Dushanbe, has been rather assimilationist, with education and publications generally

being available in Tajik or Russian but not the eastern Iranian languages, they have not, as of
this writing, formed movements which compete with Tajik
nationalism. 28

Tajik nationalism has made at least token gestures towards these eastern Iranian peoples.
Nationalist rhetoric points with pride to the role of the ancient eastern Iranians in the making of
the Tajik people. 29 Apart from the matter of historical accuracy, this assertion is significant
because it supports the nationalists’ argument that the Tajiks do not inhabit the periphery of the
Persian world, a long-held view among many Persians in Iran, but the center of a world which
draws both on eastern as well as western Iranian traditions. 30 Since 1989, some publications
in Pamiri languages have been made available and some educational opportunities as well as
radio and television broadcasting in these languages have been promised. 31

Far more significant in terms of sheer numbers is the Uzbek minority. According to the
1979 census, they constituted roughly 23 percent of Tajikistan’s population. 32 Unofficial
estimates in the wake of the 1989 census still put them at between 20 and 25 percent of the

28 L.F. Monogarova, “Evoliutsija natsional’nogo samosoznaniia pripamirskikh narodnostei,”
Etnicheskie protsessy u natsional’nykh grupp Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana (Moscow: Nauka,

29 Representative of this view are: "Tojikon," Entsiklopediyai Sovetii Tozik, vol. 7
(Dushanbe: Sarredaktsiyai ilmii Entsiklopediyai Sovietii Tozik, 1987), pp. 428-29; S. Aini,
"Ma"noi kalimai tojik," Sadoi Sharq, 1986, no. 8, p. 85; B.Gh. Ghafurov, Tojikon (Dushanbe:

30 Atkin, "Tajiks."

31 "Mas”uliyyati buzurg," p. 2.

32 Tsentral’noe Statisticheskoe Upravlenie SSSR, Chislennost’ i sostav naseleniia SSSR
(Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1984), pp. 132-33.
inhabitants of the republic.\textsuperscript{33}

Tajikistan's regime asserts that Uzbek inhabitants are well treated in the republic and point to the use there of the Uzbek language to some extent in schools and the mass media. However, there are no token Uzbeks in the republic's highest political offices. The very size of the Uzbek minority, and the fact that they belong to a nationality which numbers some twenty million in Central Asia as a whole, means that it has the potential to pose a serious problem for Tajikistan's rulers if it should ever organize a nationalist opposition. However, that has not yet come to pass, despite the occasional friction between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in recent years, including over the treatment of the Tajik minority in the latter republic. There was a non-violent dispute between Tajiks and Uzbeks on a collective farm (kolkhoz) in southern Tajikistan but it was sparked by a pressing economic problem--how farm land should be allocated--rather than ethnic antagonism for its own sake. This incident did not escalate into a broader conflict between the two nationalities.\textsuperscript{34}

Russians constitute the next most numerous minority in Tajikistan, and in terms of positions of influence occupied by its members, a more powerful one than the Uzbeks. According to the 1979 census, Russians comprised just over 10 percent of Tajikistan's population.\textsuperscript{35} Their relations with the Tajiks have become increasingly uneasy since 1989. Tajiks have been increasingly open about their resentment of Russians over various matters


\textsuperscript{34} TadjzhikTA, "Dar Prezidiumi Sovetii Olii RSS Tojikiston," Tojikistoni soveti, June 23, 1989, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{35} Tsentral'noe Statisticheskoe Upravlenie SSSR, Chislennost', pp. 132-33.
including the preferential treatment in employment and housing mentioned above and the inability of most Russian inhabitants to speak Tajik. Russians' worries increased because of the 1989 law making Tajik the primary state language. This did more than raise the prospect not only of Russians being required to learn a language few had shown any interest in learning. It also raised fears of Russian children being denied a good education in their own language which would stress the Russian cultural heritage and train them well for desirable careers. The Russians' concerns have intensified in the wake of the Dushanbe riots of February 1990. Although it is not certain that Russians were singled out for attack, some certainly were hurt during the riots and have been assaulted or threatened in subsequent individual incidents. Rumors have magnified the dangers still further. As a result, many Russians now perceive themselves at least as living in a hostile environment created by Tajik nationalists and probably at physical risk.

There has been a wave of emigration from Tajikistan since 1989. However, the number, motives, and national identity of the emigrants are subjects of controversy. Accounts which emphasize that large numbers of Russians and members of other non-indigenous nationalities emigrated imply that they were driven out because of abuses inflicted on them by the Tajiks. Some Tajik accounts not only put the total number of emigrants much lower but also cite other motives for emigration, including increased opportunities for Germans and Jews to leave the Soviet Union altogether, and the desire to escape Tajikistan's low standard of living, a concern

36 Muhammadiev, "Barodari man boshi."

which is said to have motivated many Tajiks as well others to leave the republic. Not surprisingly, Armenians, who comprised only a small fraction of the republic’s population, were alarmed by the anti-Armenian sentiments expressed on the eve of the Dushanbe riots of February 1990 and subsequently emigrated from Tajikistan in increased numbers. Even the number of emigrants, in toto or by nationality, is disputed, from several thousand of all nationalities to 100,000 Russian-speakers alone by late 1990, according to the Russian leader of a group which aids emigration from Tajikistan.38

Communist hard-liners in Tajikistan, including ethnic Tajiks, have played on the Russians’ fears to strengthen their own hand in the power struggle with more reform-minded members of their own party as well as non-Communists. Their alarmist message is that they, the hard-liners, are the only people standing in the way of a take over by Islamic extremists.39 This tactic seems to have served the hard-liners well, especially Rahmon Nabiev, the 61-year-old former republic-level party boss (1982-1985), who lost his job in Gorbachev’s purge of Brezhnevite party leaders in Central Asia and had been trying to make a come back. Nabiev got his chance in the fall of 1991, at the head of the hard-liners’ backlash against proponents of change who had briefly prevailed in the aftermath of the August coup attempt. Many Russians in Dushanbe are said to have supported this restoration of the old guard.40


The fact that the Central Asian republics are not ethnically homogeneous is one of several factors which now complicates relations between Tajikistan and its neighbors. The Stalinist approach to inter-republican relations, which survived until the Gorbachev era, was to minimize them and focus all republics' dealings on Moscow. The changing climate of Gorbachev-era politics made possible increased direct contacts and cooperation among republics. However, the weakening of the old controls also allowed more inter-republican antagonism to surface.

In some ways, Central Asians have found advantages to cooperation on governmental and non-governmental levels. Representatives of the Central Asian republics, Tajikistan included, began working on a cooperation agreement in 1989 and signed the final draft in June 1990. The pact addressed primarily economic and environmental issues. These included the high level of unemployment, the way the centrally-planned economy had assigned these republics the role of raw-materials producer, and the environmental disaster in the Aral Sea area. On this last point, the republics vowed to cooperate in seeking help from outside sources, both the Soviet central government and the United Nations, and revived the argument that diverting Siberian rivers southward could solve the problem. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan also concluded a bilateral agreement at the end of 1989 for cooperation between their respective Academies of Sciences. Tajikistan already had such agreements with ten other countries, many with the former Soviet bloc but also with the United States, France, and India. All of these apparently predated the agreement with neighboring Uzbekistan, a small reflection of the extent to which the old,


42 TadzhikTA, "Dar safi pesh," Tojikistoni soveti, December 9, 1989, p. 3.
centralized Soviet system oriented republics toward Moscow and away from each other.

On a less lofty level, the Communist leaders of Tajikistan (Mahkamov) and Uzbekistan (Islam Karimov) neither of whom could be described as democratic reformers, were alleged to be on good terms personally. 43

Cooperation exists at lower levels of power as well. For example, in 1989, a delegation from Turkmenistan, where cotton is a major crop as it is in Tajikistan, visited a large cotton-growing kolkhoz in southern Tajikistan to discuss issues of deep concern in much of Central Asia: water pollution and methods of cotton cultivation. 44 In September 1991, representatives of city and district (raion) governments in northern Tajikistan and neighboring parts of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan concluded a cooperation agreement in the spheres of economics and education. 45

Inter-republican cooperation does not hinge solely on common bonds among Central Asians. As the old Soviet centralized command economy broke down, the Central Asian republics each negotiated agreements with Soviet republics outside the region. In the case of Tajikistan, this included plans for exchanges with Russia, Belorussia, Georgia, and Armenia in economic and cultural spheres. Non-Communist Party groups have also expressed a desire for cooperation across republican borders. The reasons for this are not limited to the varying degrees of cultural kinship among the Central Asian peoples and the economic and environmental


44 "Az rui maslihati dustoni hammusobiqa amal mekunem," Tojikistoni soveti, August 16, 1989, p. 3.

problems that transcend republican borders. Reformist organizations face a common problem in much of Central Asia: hostility towards them by those republican regimes which are controlled by Communists who in some cases want to limit economic reforms and in all cases want to prevent political democratization. A spokesman for the Democratic Party of Tajikistan told representatives of Helsinki Watch in 1990 that a "regional association" of reform-minded parties existed in Central Asia.  

Representatives of pro-reform groups in the Central Asian republics have met a few times to address issues of mutual concern.  

Some indication of the significance of such contacts, at least for one group of Tajikistani reformers, the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, can be seen by specific actions taken at the May 1991 meeting and immediately afterward. Those attending sent telegrams to the governments of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, urging them to end their repressive measures against non-Communist organizations. At the end of the meeting, members of the DPT and its Kyrgyzstan counterpart went to Isfara, in northern Tajikistan, to discuss a territorial dispute in that area which had been festering for two years between the two republics.  

While such factors appear to be bellwethers of increased cooperation among Central Asians, other considerations reflect the obstacles to regional cohesion. Some of the problems which are widespread in the region, such as the low standard of living, the degraded environment, and the pressure of a rapidly rising population on scarce water, farm land, and

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46 Helsinki Watch, Conflict, p. 58.


housing, pit the republics—and the dominant nationalities within them—against each other. Republican governments have hurt each other’s inhabitants by measures designed to keep goods in high demand within their own borders. Thus, oil-producing Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan halted fuel shipments to Tajikistan at harvest time, with the results that trucks could not bring crops to market. Tajikistan banned the export from the republic of food, certain consumer goods and other high-demand items and tried to enforce that with checkpoints on roads leading to neighboring republics as well as railway stations, post offices, and Dushanbe airport.

Access to water is a particularly contentious issue in this region plagued not only by natural aridity but also by the policies of central economic planners which misused and polluted much of the water that is most readily available. Both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, in the mountains of which many of Central Asia’s rivers originate, mistrust the designs of the down-river republics, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, on their water. A dispute over claims to irrigation water and farm land led to violence between Tajik and Kirghiz villagers on the border between the two republics. According to official Tajik sources, about a thousand people fought over this on June 13 and 14, 1989; one person died and more than a score were wounded. Although the water dispute was eventually resolved, recriminations between the

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leaders of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan over the territorial dispute continued into 1991.53

There is another kind of ethnic dimension to the tensions between Tajikistan and the neighboring republics. Alone among the major indigenous nationalities of Soviet Central Asia, the Tajiks are culturally Iranian rather than Turkic. Even though there is a long tradition of close contact and mutual cultural influences between the Tajiks and the Turkic peoples of the region, especially the Uzbeks, the tensions between them now are significant. Part of the problem is related to the concern that Uzbekistan will use the fact that it is far more populous and powerful than Tajikistan to take advantage of the latter in the kinds of economic disputes already mentioned. However, another important factor in the discord is the Tajik nationalists' belief that Uzbeks have, throughout the Soviet period, denied that the Tajiks are a distinct nationality, characterizing them instead as Uzbeks who have stopped speaking their original tongue. Similarly, Tajiks accuse Uzbeks of either claiming as part of the Uzbek heritage or simply neglecting the achievements of any Iranian peoples who lived at any time in the area which is now Uzbekistan.54

The main expression of this dispute in contemporary terms is over the status of the Tajik inhabitants of Uzbekistan. Tajiks and Uzbeks do not even agree about the number of Tajiks involved. An official Uzbekistani source put the Tajik population of the republic at about


700,000 in 1988, out of a total population of about twenty million. Tajikistani estimates are higher, although they vary among themselves. The largest figure, offered among others by an Uzbekistan-born Tajik ethnographer who has made his career in Tajikistan, is 3 to 3.5 million. The discrepancy in population figures is part of the larger argument made both by Tajik mainstream Communist and reformist sources: that the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand and their environs were inhabited predominantly by Tajiks in the 1920s, when they were made part of the new republic of Uzbekistan, and remain predominantly Tajik today. According to this argument, the Uzbeks have deliberately undercounted Tajiks and have used various methods to assimilate them, from denying them access to sufficient education or publications in Tajik to forcing them to list their nationality as Uzbek.

In the past few years, Uzbekistani officials have tried to conciliate the Tajik minority, particularly by expanding access to education and the mass media in Tajik. They also announced that Tajiks who had been forced to identify themselves as Uzbeks on official documents would be allowed to change formal nationality listing to Tajik.


36 "Natsional’nyi vopros," p. 33; for a similar estimate, see also Muhammadiev, "Barodari man boshi."


official national registration in Soviet documents used to be virtually impossible.

Such moves have not defused tensions. Indicative of the mistrust at work in both directions was the suspicion among educated, urban Uzbeks that a particularly unpopular, hard-line secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, who was finally ousted in 1987, was really a Tajik. Tajik intellectuals took umbrage at particularly extreme statements by a few Uzbeks, who claimed that certain great medieval Persian authors were really Turks or, in one case, who faulted Tamerlane for allowing non-Turkic peoples to survive in Central Asia.

There have allegedly been at least two occasions when Tajiks in Tajikistan called for Bukhara and Samarkand to be transferred to Tajikistan. Given that the Uzbeks outnumber the Tajiks several times over, any attempt to turn this irredentist rhetoric into action would be reckless indeed.

In a region in which Sunni Islam is an important part of the cultural as well as spiritual traditions of the great majority of indigenous inhabitants, one may wonder whether this supra-national common bond can serve as a unifying force despite all the factors which divide them. The answer may be that some Central Asians want this to be so but that many others think differently. Certainly this has not been the case until now. A shared religion did not


60 M. Umarzoda, "Ma"nii 'Tojik'," Tojikiston soveti, September 25, 1988, pp. 3. 4; R. Sobirov, "Na"lgare, ki zargari kunad..." ibid., October 21, 1988, p. 3; S. Halimsho, "Darakhti jovidonkhirad," Adabiyot va san"at, August 24, 1989, p. 5; I am grateful to Professor William Fierman for confirming that such an argument is indeed found in the Uzbek-language original of Ahmadali Mahmudov's novel, Immortal Cliffs.

61 Barki, "Vstrechailas'"; Helsinki Watch, Conflict, p. 12.
prevent conflicts between political, tribal, or other social units in the pre-Soviet era or between those or nationalities under Soviet rule. One reason is that Islam means different things to different Central Asians. For some it is at least as important in a cultural and social sense as in a strictly religious one. For some, Islam means the traditional practices of their particular family, village, or urban quarter and not of people outside those groups. Others seek a break with traditional practice in the pursuit of a more thoroughly Islamic society; however they do not all agree on what that alternative ought to be. Still others have begun to take advantage of the waning of Soviet anti-Islamic policies since 1989 to learn more about the teachings of their faith, a process which began so recently that its outcome cannot yet be predicted.  

Another reason Islam has not been as powerful a unifying force in practice as it is in theory is that it has become strongly linked to national identity among Central Asians in the past half century. If anything, this linkage strengthens the legitimacy of the comparatively new concept of national identity in this region. One reflection of this national coloration of Islam is that, as the power of the Soviet system eroded, the authority of the Muslim Spiritual Administration of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, a Stalinist creation, weakened considerably while religious figures in individual republics gained in authority. That is certainly the case in Tajikistan, where the chief qadi, Haji Akbar Turajonzoda, is widely respected because of his personal qualities, not because he is part of a bureaucracy which is nominally headed by the Mufti of Tashkent. Although he used his position in Tajikistan's legislature to seek official

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recognition of the role Islam plays in Tajik society (such as recognizing Muslim holidays as legal holidays)\textsuperscript{64} he chose not to run for president in the fall 1991 campaign, despite widespread enthusiasm for his candidacy. He has publicly disavowed the notion of establishing an Islamic republic in Tajikistan.\textsuperscript{65}

Once again, the fact that the Tajiks are an Iranian people worried about domination by the Turkic majority plays a role. A number of Tajik intellectuals have expressed the concern that any supra-national Islamic movement in the Soviet Union would be dominated by the Turkic peoples.\textsuperscript{66} Even one of the founders of the Tajikistan branch of the all-Union Islamic Revival Party (subsequently the Islamic Movement Party of Tajikistan), Davlat Usmonov, voiced no interest in the creation of a supra-national Islamic state. Apart from the fact that he considered such a state impracticable, he also saw it as undesirable. To him, it is significant that Muslims belong to different nationalities; he thinks their national differences matter.\textsuperscript{67}

Culture also links Tajiks to the much larger number of Persian-speakers living outside the former Soviet Union, in Iran and Afghanistan. Soviet policy toward this kinship was oddly ambivalent. On the one hand, the official line designated the Tajiks a distinctive Soviet nationality, separate from peoples living outside the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Moscow's foreign policy found uses from the 1920s to the 1980s for the fact that Tajiks share


\textsuperscript{65} V. Vyzhutovich, "Krasnoe zhaima kommunizma ili zelenoe znamia islama?", Izvestiia, October 5, 1991, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{66} Helsinki Watch, Conflict, p. 13; statements made in this author's presence.

\textsuperscript{67} "Partiia, kotoroi ofitsial'no u nas net," Komsomolets Tadzhikistana, November 21, 1990, p. 2
in the Persian cultural heritage. The Tajiks’ interest in the Persian cultural world ought not be interpreted simply as a desire to emulate Islamic political activists in the Islamic Republic of Iran or among Afghanistan’s mojahidin. This interest predates the emergence of Islamic political activism by decades. In its current manifestation, it entails a variety of particulars, culture and economics being prominent among them, religion far less so.

Since World War Two, Tajik intellectuals found ways, often indirect ones, to evade Moscow’s strictures designed to separate them from Persian history, language, and culture. As glasnost’ and perestroika gained strength in Central Asia since the late 1980s, intellectuals and political figures have become much more open in asserting the links between Tajiks and Persians. For example, Tajikistan’s 1989 language law also equated Tajik and Persian. Tajik “informal” organizations also see the Persian connection as important, especially in a linguistic and cultural sense. Tajiks in Uzbekistan expressed similar sentiments in a 1989 rally in Samarkand. Both the 1989 Tajik language law and the program of the Rastokhez popular front organization advocate a return to the use of the Arabic alphabet, which had been dropped in 1929 as part of Moscow’s attempt to erect barriers between the various Muslim peoples of the Soviet Union and kindred peoples abroad. The justification for the change is that it will allow Tajiks direct access both to works which are part of their heritage and contemporary writing in Persian, since so little of this has been translated into the modified cyrillic alphabet.

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68 Atkin, “Tajiks.”

69 “Qonuni zaboni.”


71 “Na ruinakh ambitsii.”
in which Tajik is written in the Soviet Union. (Knowledge of the Arabic alphabet would not be sufficient to enable a Tajik to read with comprehension the Koran or any other work in the Arabic language since the two languages belong to a separate linguistic families.) The transition has proceeded very slowly thus far, at least in part because of the sheer logistical difficulty involved.\footnote{Atkin, "Tajiks."}

Tajiks' curiosity about Iranians extends beyond those living in Iran or representing the Tehran regime to those living in Western countries, whether as refugees from the Islamic Republic or students.

Much of the Tajiks' attention now directed towards the wider Persian world reflects practical concerns over developing Tajikistan's economy. For example, Tajikistan's regime has announced a conference for Tajiks from around the world to meet in Dushanbe in March 1992. The organizers are especially interested in attracting people who have technical expertise, familiarity with the workings of a market economy, and the prospect of investing in businesses in Tajikistan.\footnote{FBIS, Daily Report, Soviet Union, August 6, 1991, p. 73.} In 1990 and 1991, delegations traveled in both directions between Iran and Tajikistan. Economic relations, such as prospects for joint ventures, trade, and the application of Iranian textile manufacturing technology to Tajikistan-produced cotton, as well as cultural relations, figured prominently in the discussions on those occasions.\footnote{Ibid., April 25, 1991, p. 75; "Bozargononi Iron dar Tojikiston," Tojikistoni shuravi, August 27, 1991, p. 3; Atkin, "Tajiks."} Some Tajik intellectuals are interested in learning from revolutionary Iran for what it can show about how a country can make itself economically self-sufficient after having been, in Iranian revolutionaries' terms,
dependent on foreign powers. That is an issue of immediate practical relevance for Tajiks who want to reform Tajikistan’s economy and end what they see as in essence a colonial relation to the broader Soviet economy.

Interest in things Iranian from the Soviet side of the border is not contingent upon kinship of the Tajiks and Persians. Several predominantly Turkic republics of the former Soviet Union, in addition to Tajikistan, have made No ruz a legal holiday, even though this new year’s day celebrated on the vernal equinox is of pre-Islamic Persian origin. Over the centuries it was incorporated into the customs of various Turkic peoples, who nevertheless retained their distinctive identities. Since the late 1980s, officials on both sides of the Soviet-Iranian border have shown an interest in increased trade, joint ventures, the exploitation of natural resources in northern Iran, the opening of new transportation routes, and, from Iran’s point of view, the pursuit of increased influence in the predominantly Muslim republics of the Soviet Union. All this has led to exchanges of delegations and talks between the Iranian government and both the Soviet central government and individual republics, in addition to Tajikistan. Soviet Tajiks’ attitudes toward Afghanistan are in many ways similar to their attitudes toward Iran but are complicated by the war the Soviet army fought in support of the Communist regime in Kabul.

In consequence of the increasing decentralization of Soviet power in the Gorbachev era and the concomitant rise in the importance of the republican governments, the Kabul regime opened a

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75 Atkin, “Tajiks.”

consulate in Dushanbe. During the war years, the proximity of and the cultural similarities between Tajikistan and Afghanistan made the former useful to Moscow as it strove to solidify Communist rule in the latter. Moscow used Soviet Tajiks (and other Central Asian peoples) to work in Afghanistan’s government, educational, and scholarly systems. It had publications from Tajikistan sent to Afghanistan. It used Tajikistan as an example to show organized delegations from Afghanistan and as a place to educate young Afghanistanis. Cultural exchanges between these two republics continued throughout the war years. Tajiks from Tajikistan saw tours of duty in the Soviet military in Afghanistan from the invasion in 1979 to the Soviet withdrawal in 1988.77

This last point is an extremely sensitive one for some Soviet Tajiks. In the period following the August 1991 coup attempt, when various people in Tajikistan expressed their opinions more openly in public than before, at Tajik poet and advocate of reform, Bozor Sobir, ignited a controversy by stating in the republican legislature that no Tajik ought to take pride in being named a “Hero of the Soviet Union” for having fought in Afghanistan. Sobir’s objection was that the title came at the price of fighting ones’ brothers. Not surprisingly, there were indignant responses from people who spouted cliches of Soviet “internationalist” rhetoric.78 However, one Tajik who served in the Soviet army in Afghanistan from 1985 to 1987 was able to have published in the official press a letter in which he endorsed Sobir’s view and added that Tajiks who fought in Afghanistan were fighting people of the “same race, same

77 Atkin, “Religious, National, and Other Identities,” p. 58; TadzhikTA, “Dar safi pesh.”

blood, and same language." Political conditions have not yet changed enough in Tajikistan to permit a full and free public discussion of this issue or a reliable sampling of public opinion on the subject.

Tajik nationalists also see Afghanistan as important to them culturally, for much the same reason as they do Iran: as a source of examples of good usage of literary Persian to counterbalance the harmful effects of Soviet language policy and of literature in the Persian language.\(^8\)

Since the Soviet military withdrawal, Tajikistan has had direct and indirect dealings with Afghanistan’s government on cooperation in various spheres. Tajikistani officials have signed economic agreements with representatives of the Kabul regime and a private company acting with that regime’s permission for such things as trade between the two countries, development projects, and joint ventures.\(^9\) There are also plans for exchanges of students and publications and for increased scholarly contacts. Representatives of one of Afghanistan’s northern border provinces offered to allow Tajikistanis to study in madrasahs there.\(^2\) Small numbers of Soviet Muslim religious figures have being going abroad to study, with Moscow’s approval, for years. Opportunities for foreign study are particularly important now because the recent, substantial increase in religious freedom in Central Asia has brought with it an increased demand for

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\(^7\) M. Shukurzoda, "Haqiqat zahr ham boshad, niyushi!", *Tojikistoni shuravi*, September 14, 1991, p. 4.

\(^8\) Atkin, "Tajiks."


Islamic instruction, which cannot be satisfied in full by the madrasahs in the region.

The extent and nature of religious influence which passes from Afghanistan to Tajikistan are controversial subjects and also ones on which there is more propaganda than reliable information. An attempt to resolve the controversy lies beyond the scope of this essay. Various Soviet sources, including V.V. Petkel', head of the KGB in Tajikistan from 1985 until 1991, saw Islam in wholly negative terms and linked it to anti-Soviet subversion from abroad, especially via Afghanistan.83

Such assertions owe so much to the ideological biases and self-interest of those who make them that it is difficult to discern whether there is any basis for them in fact. Claims by some Afghanistani mujahidin to have supporters in Soviet Central Asia cannot be confirmed independently. Although the perseverant battle by Afghanistani mujahidin against the Soviet invaders and the Communist regime in Kabul may well have won admiration from at least some people in Tajikistan or elsewhere in Central Asia, that does not by itself prove that Tajiks feel a particularly loyalty to or draw their ideas from any mujahidin group. The assumption that mujahidin influence plays a crucial role implies that Tajiks are merely passive objects to be manipulated by others.

Furthermore, the mujahidin, while agreeing that Islam is a part of their way of life, disagree among themselves on what kind of Islamic country Afghanistan ought to be. There is a big difference between a state which is Islamic, in the sense that Islam is practiced freely in accordance with local traditions, and an "Islamic state" which seeks a radical transformation of

83 A typical Petkel' tirade is available in translation in FBIS, Daily Report, Soviet Union, April 12, 1991, pp. 74-75; see also Atkin, "Islamic Assertiveness."
society to purge it of the injustices, deviations from proper Islamic practice, and non-Islamic influences (all as defined differently by different groups of radicals.) Afghanistan's mujahidin organizations are divided along these and other lines; several of the organizations are also associated predominantly with a particular ethnic group. Thus, one of the groups that is more radical in its approach to Islam, the Hizb-i Islami, is largely Pashtun and is at odds with the Jami'at-i Islami, which is more moderate on the nature of the role of Islam in Afghanistani society and is predominantly Tajik. Afghanistan's Tajik population lives primarily in the northeast, across the border from Soviet Tajikistan, while the Pushtuns live predominantly in southern and southeastern Afghanistan (and across the border in Pakistan.)

The anti-Communist demonstrations in Tajikistan between late August and early October 1991 may reflect something about the limits there of Islamic radicalism of any type, including as inspired by Afghanistani mujahidin. Former KGB commander Petkel' had alleged that at the time of the February 1990 riots in Dushanbe, Afghanistani mujahidin had marshalled near the border, ready to invade Tajikistan in support of Islamic extremists there. Yet, in the aftermath of the failure of the August 1991 coup, when the Soviet regime was the weakest it had been since the Nazi invasion, there was no uprising by Islamic radicals in Tajikistan and no armed intervention by Afghanistani mujahidin. Although the anti-Communist demonstrations were large, they remained orderly. No one was attacked physically. There was no declaration of an

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Islamic republic and no decision to make a complete break with the Soviet Union.

As important as national consciousness is now to many Soviet Tajiks, they do not look at the rest of the world solely in terms of ethnicity. Tajiks in the republican regime and in opposition to it do not limit their curiosity about foreign lands to those where Persian-speakers are numerous. They also favor developing economic relations with a host of other countries, many of which do not share a Persian cultural link, from Europe and the United States to Turkey and China.85

This reflects two fundamentally important characteristics of nationalism as it now exists among the Tajiks of Tajikistan: it is subject to diverse interpretations and is not necessarily exclusivist. The nationalist camp contains Communists and anti-Communists, the secular and the religious. It is virtually impossible now for anyone to find political support among Tajiks without addressing issues in nationalist terms. The very fact that this is so means that people use nationalist rhetoric for a variety of motives and interpret it in multiple ways. For example, the Communist Party veteran, determined to survive in changing conditions by adapting, the urban intellectual who links pride in his Tajik identity with a desire for political democratization and economic reform, and the unemployed youth who vents his frustration by expressing hostility toward "Europeans" all talk about similar issues but draw sharply different conclusions. For now, the mainstream of the nationalist movement is more interested in working out solutions than in fostering conflict. They look for effective remedies for their problems in the West and

elsewhere in the former Soviet Union as well as in lands to the south inhabited by kindred peoples. Their future orientation will be affected significantly by how helpful a response they receive from these varied sources.