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THE FUTURE OF FUNDAMENTALISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Executive Summary

Economically interwoven with Russia, demographically multi-ethnic in a world moving toward mono-ethnic definitions of statehood, each of the Central Asian states faces long odds against survival as real independent states.

Islam offers these new states a number of important qualities which could help to shorten the odds against their survival, holding the societies together during the impossibly trying periods which lie ahead. Furthermore, since it is unlikely that any of these states will prosper without foreign assistance, and some may not even survive, the Muslim world is an obvious potential source of funds.

Both of these are reasons why Central Asia's leaders have embraced and encouraged the "good" Muslims who live in their countries. At the same time, however, as President Karimov appears already to be discovering, Islam is a religion and cultural force which is notoriously difficult to contain.

Culturally, demographically, and historically, the peoples of Central Asia most resemble those of south Asia, but the creation of societies like those of Pakistan, Afghanistan, or Iran would be taken, both by the present leadership and by most of the world community, as a defeat. Thus the leaders, and most of their elites, see it as their duty to preserve as many features of the Soviet, Europeanized past as they possibly can.

This is also due to the presence of the "stranded" Russians, who are a factor in each of the new states (from about 9 percent of Uzbekistan to 38 percent of Kazakhstan). It is not just their numbers which make the Central Asian leaders fear them; these Russians are the remains of an imported Soviet elite, who still control many important positions, as well as continuing to enjoy patronage within Russia, so that the Central Asian Russian communities have been able to get considerable attention. History is such that any imposition of Islam upon the internal Russian populations would be taken not just as a loss of past privilege, but as a distinct defeat, in a battle between Christianity and Islam which was first joined half a millennium ago.

Thus, the rise of Islam among the general population is seen as, if not actually dangerous, at least a phenomenon which is to be closely monitored and contained. For now the leaders of the new Central Asian states are more concerned with the negative task of restricting the potential spread of radical Islam, than with the positive one, of creating the preconditions necessary for the development of a stable secular elite, because this would drive the current regimes from office.

All over the former Soviet Union people are battling for control of resources, using any means at their disposal. Islam does not cause those battles, any more than does ethnicity, Orthodoxy, capitalism, or communism. Islam does offer, however, a powerful rallying banner which, when raised, will gather large parts of a population both behind and before it, some ready to fight and die to spread Islam, others equally ready to die to stop it.

Thus the future may well hold more Tajikistans, but not for reasons of "destabilizing Islamic fundamentalism". The present "destabilization" of Central Asia in fact began in Moscow, under Andropov and Gorbachev. The programs of both men destroyed long-established power and trade relationships, mandating the creation of new elites, and new power relations. This "democratization" and "transfer to the market system" would have been "destabilizing" in any society, but particularly so in societies as poor as those of Central Asia. The economic "pie" was never large there, meaning new parties could claim pieces only by taking privilege and position from those who already held them; indeed, as Soviet support withdrew and the economies of Central Asia collapsed, even without redistribution everyone's share has grown markedly smaller.

Thus the leaders of Central Asia are probably right to fear the spread of Islam. What they seem not to understand, though, is that this spread is not a disease, but rather is a symptom, a social response to their own inability to control their economies, their societies, and their states. Their attempt to nip Islamic fundamentalism in the bud without dramatically reversing economic and social conditions is far more likely to hasten the growth of more strictly observed Islam, as the secular authorities demonstrate their own spiritual and material poverty.

THE FUTURE OF FUNDAMENTALISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

Tajikistan: Unique Event or Harbinger?

This clearly is the question with which Central Asia's leaders are most concerned, as are US and Russian policy-makers, for none of these parties wishes to see events in Tajikistan repeat themselves, nor do they want to see Islam "spread", since they see the politicization of Islam to be an important factor in producing the clash of interests which occurred in Tajikistan, leading to the virtual breakdown of that state.

Of course, the rise of religion and the breakdown of state authority need not be connected. The political and social impact of Islamic leaders may—and probably will—continue to increase in Central Asia, in a process which the current leadership may be able to slow, but not forestall entirely. This however need not produce Tajik-style political clashes.

The fears of Central Asia's current leadership are right in at least one respect, that the present leaders are likely to remain the target of radical Islamic leaders, who are not interested in the subtleties of macro-economic theory. The Islamic opposition in Central Asia does not accept the argument that it is more important for the future economic health of their societies that some economic sector accumulate private property, than it is to question who it is that constitutes the sector. For the Islamic opposition the continued inequality of income in their society is the more important issue, and the fact that it is the old communist class which is becoming the new entrepreneurial class appears to them another abuse of Islam. Consequently, if the elite which currently dominates these regimes maintains its stranglehold on political and economic power then the increasing "Islamicization" of the Central Asian states could lead to more such clashes.

This does not mean that the creation of more Tajikistans is preordained. To some extent, the civil war in Tajikistan was a unique event, the product of regional, ethnic, economic, and political differences which had simmered for decades, if not longer. As suggested, in many important ways Tajikistan never was a single country, so that it should not be surprising that it fell apart. Islam was undoubtedly an element of the civil war which ripped the nation apart even before it could be born, but it was no more than one of many elements. That this is true is demonstrated by the fact that civil war in Tajikistan continues, despite the expulsion of most of the IRP and the official clerical structure. Conversely, as the situation in neighboring Afghanistan exemplifies, where the civil war continues even after the Soviet troops are long gone and the pro-Soviet Najibullah regime long since ousted, competing regional and

ethnic groups are able to keep a country at war even when all factions are "Islamic", to one degree or another.

Yet Central Asia's leaders remain convinced that the spectre of Tajikistan exemplifies the internal dangers which encouraging Islam presents, a lesson which they are using to shape their domestic policies. Karimov of Uzbekistan has made the necessity to prevent instability a broad justification for imposition of a draconian one-man rule, which specifically limits the intrusion of Islam into the civic sphere. Even the more democratically inclined presidents, Kyrgyzstan's Akaev and Kazakhstan's Nazarbaev, have also seen the lesson of Tajikistan to be that Islam must not be allowed to intrude on the functions of state, and that "stability" must be preserved, even at the cost of the growth of an independent political culture.

At the same time, however, the Central Asian presidents are seeing with Russia what they have earlier seen with the west, though now in a closer and more bare-fisted way, that while Russia will accept no responsibility for alleviating conditions which encourage further disintegration of the social fabric--the continued and growing unemployment, the rising crime, the evaporation of social benefits, and the official incompetence and corruption--its armies stand ready to intervene, with international approval, if the conditions which it has in large part created lead to changes in the present political structure.

In general the leaders of these states remain more concerned with the negative task of restricting the potential spread of radical Islam, than with the positive one, of creating the preconditions necessary for the development of a stable secular elite. To do the latter means to accept the succession of elites, which could drive the current regimes from office. No leader in Central Asia, no matter how seemingly democratic, is yet prepared to let power extend beyond the limits of the old "nomenklatura" and their children.

What ascribing instability in Tajikistan to fundamentalist Islam disguises is that many parts of the former Soviet Union are equally unstable, as all of Central Asia's leaders are well aware. As noted, war has already shattered Georgia and done tremendous damage to Armenia and Azerbaijan. Moldova too has suffered civil war, while in Ukraine the possibilities of either civil war or war with Russia, or both, loom ever larger.

The Georgian civil war has pitted the family networks of the western part of the country (foremost among which are the Mingrelians, of whom Ziad Gamsakhurdiya, the ousted President, was one) against those of the eastern part of the country, while Muslim and Christian Abkhaz fight together against the Christian Georgians. The religious differences between the Christian Armenians and the Muslim Azerbaijanis are certainly a major reason why Armenians did not want to live under Azerbaijani rule in Karabakh, where the current

battle began, but neither side now could be termed to be fighting a religious war. Similarly, in Moldova, the Moldovans are Roman Catholic and the Russians of the break-away Transdniestr republic are Russian Orthodox, but the tension there developed not over religion, but because Moldova became independent, and Russians do not want to live in a Moldovan dominated state. Similarly, many Russians and Ukrainians share cultures, languages, and even religions, yet the prospect of conflict between the two states is real and growing.

The fact that Islam has nothing to do with any of these conflicts suggests that the future may well hold more Tajikistans, but not for the reasons of "creeping fundamentalism" which most observers, especially those in Russia and the west, suppose. All over the former Soviet Union people are battling for control of resources, using any means at their disposal. Islam in Tajikistan, or in Central Asia, does not cause those battles, any more than does ethnicity, Orthodoxy, capitalism, or communism. What Islam does offer, however, is a powerful rallying device, a banner which when raised will gather large parts of a population behind it, but will also gather large numbers in front of it, people who are as ready to fight and die to stop the spread of Islam as those following the flag may be to spread it.

"Good" Islam and Central Asia's Foreign Policy Dilemma

The Muslim heritage of Central Asia faces the current leaders of all five republics with a virtually irresolvable paradox. None of these five new states was ever a nation in the past; indeed, all of them were created by Stalin with the intention of making independence, or even separatism, all but impossible. Economically more interwoven with Russia than are the vital organs of even the most tangled of Siamese twins, demographically multi-ethnic in a world which increasingly equates ethnicity with citizenship, each of the Central Asian states faces long odds against survival as real independent states. It is unlikely that any will prosper unless foreign assistance is obtained, and some may not even survive. These states require proactive international recognition---not just from Russia, which remains capable of ending their independence at will---but also from a group of wealthier nations who would be willing to supply the investment, assistance and expertise that these states need to make the transition from being dependent appendages to becoming independent nations. In theory, this assistance could come from the West, from Asia, from the Muslim world, or from a combination of sources.

All nation-states were artificial creations at some point in time, and all are today multi-ethnic, to varying degrees. The creation of the Central Asian states, though, came at a

particular point in time, when western societies were viewing both mono-ethnic and confessional societies with particular suspicion. The Central Asian nations were also propelled into existence by a peculiar set of circumstances, the ideological and economic bankruptcy of a world power.

Islam offers each of these new states a number of important qualities, which could help to shorten the odds against their survival, holding the societies together during the impossibly trying periods which lie ahead. Morally the religion provides the sort of internal cohesion which can prevent the descent into complete primordial chaos, while culturally it provides an identity which, while not extending to embrace the Russian and European populations of each state, at least would obviate to some extent the tensions between, for example, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan, or between Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, and the large Uighur population in both states, who are beginning to press for a "homeland" of their own (which would include their fellows across the Chinese border).

This is what has prompted Central Asia's leaders to embrace the "good" Muslims who live in their countries, and to develop the state-licensed national Islamic boards which register clerics, mosques and religious schools, with the intention of allowing Islam to be state managed. At the same time, however, as President Karimov appears already to be discovering in Uzbekistan, and as Presidents Nazarbaev, Akaev, and even Niyazov may soon discover in their respective states, Islam is a religion and cultural force which is notoriously difficult to contain, restricting it solely to domestic practice and private functions. These leaders are also all concerned to prevent Islamic institutions and organizations from accumulating economic power, as they are able to do under the new legal conditions, in which property has been returned to religious establishment and in which capital accumulation by individuals and groups is not only sanctioned but actively encouraged. Islamic activists are as free as any other entrepreneurs to start their own businesses, and to enter into partnership with foreign firms. Such conditions make it possible for the international Islamic community to aid Central Asian religious organizations in what is a clandestine but potentially very effective fashion.

Islamic actors are also able to influence the policy process in Central Asia in much more direct ways. Initially, the leaders of the Central Asian states, none of whom had any experience in international affairs, expected that the ethnic and religious heritages of their nations would be a major "trump card" in the international community, allowing them to trade on their "Turkishness" or "Persianness", as well as on their "Muslimness", to receive massive amounts of credits, grants, and aid.

There was no foreign state considered too dangerous to associate with. For all his anti-Islamic rattlings, Tajikistan's Makhkamov was rumored to have courted uranium-seeking Libyans (who are reported to have gone home empty-handed) just prior to his ouster. Islam Karimov spent much of 1992 and 1993 railing against "foreign" actors in Tajikistan, dropping enough hints in his speeches to make it clear that it was chiefly Iran he was referring to, but when the prospect arose of improved economic cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan, Karimov warmly welcomed Iran's President Rafsanjani to Tashkent. So too did Kyrgyzstan's Askar Akaev,¹ who even outdid Karimov, by participating in public prayer sessions with Rafsanjani. Turkmenistan's Sapurmurad Niyazov makes no secret of his close ties with the neighboring Iranians, who serve as Turkmenistan's conduit to the outside world, and who hope to develop into the republic's second largest trade partner, after Russia.

Indeed, much of the anti-Iranian rhetoric in Central Asia seems targeted at a Western audience, to encourage westerners to invest in an autocratic but secular Central Asia. In off-the-record sessions, Central Asia's own leaders admit that Iran is not playing a great role in the Islamic revival of Central Asia, as is to be expected in a Sunni region. By contrast, Saudi Arabia is openly funding SADUM and other official Muslim groups, and is generally assumed to be indirectly funding the vigorous missionary work in the Fergana Valley by Islamic activists from Bangladesh and the Gulf States. Saudis also provide a scholarship program for the religious education of Central Asians in Saudi Arabia, and are said to be the source of funding for scholarships offered by fundamentalist groups in Turkey as well.

There is almost no public criticism of Saudi Arabia's role. In fact, in an interview given just prior to his October 1992 visit to Saudi Arabia, Kyrgyzstan's Akaev said that if the price was right he would become a pilgrim himself.² Karimov and Niyazov have also made well publicized trips to Saudi Arabia; the latter has immortalized his haj in an official statue erected on Ashgabat's main square. Only Nazarbaev, the leader of a nation nearly half Christian in population, has been careful to keep relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia from taking on a personal dimension, concentrating official rhetoric instead on the development of economic ties. Following the defection of ousted mufti Mamiusov to Saudi Arabia, and as his

¹ Vechernyi Bishkek 22 October 1993.

² Komsomol'skaia pravda, 14 October 1993.

diplomatic skills have grown in general, Karimov too has become more subtle in his treatment of Saudi Arabia.

The diplomacy of the Central Asian leaders has proven to be no match for that of Turkey or the Muslim Middle Eastern states, all of which have managed to provide far more rhetoric than actual investment to support the new Central Asian nations. Saving the souls of the Central Asian leaders has not been a priority for Iran, Turkey or any of the Middle Eastern leaders, and the financial involvement of all of these in Central Asia has been less than that of the major Western states. Moreover, like the Western governments, the Muslim states have been concerned to shape their Central Asia policies by keeping a close watch on Russia's response, because none of these states will put the advancement of Islam above their individual national interests. For all of these nations Russia remains a far more valuable potential ally; it is a major market, is a key future player in the international oil market, and is potentially an arms merchant of great importance, which matters especially to Iran.

Although its actions are no longer ideological, Russia continues to be something of a protector for the Soviet Union's former client states, as illustrated by the threat, in autumn 1993, to veto UN condemnation of Libya. There are also significant support blocs for Iraq within the Russian military and government. Most important of all, Russia remains a far more important trading partner for all of the Muslim states, including Iran, than does Central Asia. Turkey learned of the dangers of a direct association with potential "kin" states during the Elchibey presidency in Azerbaijan, when Baku's effort to avoid any contact with Russia forced the government to rely upon Turkey; as Azerbaijan's war with (Russian-backed) Armenia expanded, Turkey increasingly found itself being dragged toward a conflict it did not want to sustain. That war also has presented Iran with difficult choices, as Armenian troops have pushed closer to the Azerbaijan-Iran border.

At the same time, the policy of encouraging an "Islamic directed" foreign policy presents a number of dangers to the Central Asian leaders. This is particularly true in the present international environment, in which the Western states upon whose economies the Central Asian countries must depend for assistance increasingly define "Islamic fundamentalism" as inimical, and inherently destabilizing. The Western community is watching Central Asia closely for signs of growing Islamic influence, to a great extent making investment and assistance contingent upon continuation of Soviet-era "secularity".

Largely unaware of the degree to which they have assimilated Christian values and religious practices into cultures which are now defined as "secular", the Western societies, foremost among them the United States, watch the nations of Muslim heritage particularly

closely for signs that they are "going Muslim". This fear of Islam is especially striking given that the resurgence of the church in other post-communist societies, such as Poland, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and even Russia is widely taken as a sign of the regeneration and normalization of society. The wide-spread intrusion of the Catholic church into school curricula in Poland (often in the same time slots once devoted to "scientific atheism") has caused very little concern in the west, while even discussion of an attempt in, for example, Uzbekistan, which has approximately 18 million Muslims, to take even so small a step as to make Friday the day of rest, rather than Sunday, would be literally unthinkable in the current political environment.

Central Asian regimes are keenly aware of the West's likes and dislikes. The Central Asian states all rushed to "join Europe" by signing up for CSCE membership shortly after independence, with little consideration of what specific role Europe and America could play in the economic and political reconstruction of their countries. Now somewhat more soberly, these regimes look to other potential partners as well, but they recognize just how difficult their economic situation will remain if they do not have the support of the Western-dominated financial community. These types of considerations have constrained the Central Asians in their search for developmental partners, forcing them to proceed slowly with the Iranians, for example, despite Teheran's eagerness to increase rail, highway, air, and telecommunications links, all badly needed in the area.

Culturally, the leaders of the Central Asian regimes feel far more of an affinity to the non-Muslim societies of Europe and Asia than they do to the Muslim ones; even Turkey is more "Muslim" than many are personally comfortable to live in. The East Asian regimes, especially the "Four Dragons", are easier for the Central Asian leaders to identify with, since each of these communist-trained politicians can understand the logic of opting for economic efficiency over democracy. However, most understandable of all is the model of Russia, and the revamped Soviet elite which is running it.

That attraction for "the Russian model" is heightened by the fact that foreign, and especially western, interest and assistance has largely proven to be a disappointment. Not only are foreign funds much slower to arrive than was expected, but they also come with many more conditions than the Central Asian elites are use to, or comfortable with accepting. That growing disillusionment is compounded by the obvious western tilt toward Russia and, to a lesser degree, the Baltics and Eastern Europe. The Central Asians are generally coming to the understanding that any attention they will get from the west will be negative, the result of "instability", while the reward for their continued "stability" will be to be ignored.

That is even more true of another constituency, whom the Central Asian leaders genuinely fear; this is the Russians. "Stranded" Russians are a factor in each of the new states, constituting anywhere from about 9 percent of Uzbekistan to 38 percent of Kazakhstan. Their influence, however, is more than simply numeric; these Russians are largely the remains of an imported Soviet elite, who still control many important administrative, financial, and technical positions. Moreover, many of these Russians still enjoy patronage and support networks within Russia, so that the Central Asian Russian communities have been able to get considerable attention, from the world community and even more so from within Russia, for issues affecting their loss of previous privilege.

A rise in ethnicity, and especially in the public presence of Islam, is widely feared by the Russian populations, in no small part because decades of Soviet propaganda and centuries of Russian patriotism have defined Islam both as inherently backward and as inimical. To an astonishing degree Russians still ascribe the evils of their own society to the legacy of "the Tatar yoke", the period from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century when the Golden Horde of Chingiz Khan controlled what today is southern Russia and Ukraine; perhaps even more apropos, Russian national consciousness sees the beginnings of its self-defined growth to greatness coming specifically in the victory over the Tartars and Islam, a fact reflected in the many Orthodox churches whose cupolas sport crosses triumphant above recumbent crescent moons.

Thus any imposition of Islam upon the internal Russian populations is understood not just as a diminution of privilege, but as a distinct defeat, in a battle which was first joined half a millennium ago. What makes that fact so weighty for the present Central Asian leadership is that Russia proper has not only the obvious means, but also an increasingly apparent inclination to view the internal affairs of the "inner abroad", or nations within the former Soviet borders, as its legitimate concern.

Islam and the Masses

Russia's concern to limit the role of Islam in Central Asian societies simply reinforces the predisposition of the region's current leaders, each of whom has gone on record any number of times to express concern that fundamentalist Islam could challenge his rule, increase social unrest and complicate the attempt to entice foreign investment into his respective republic. The necessity to defend against such instability has become the justification for imposition of totalitarian rule in Uzbekistan, and for imposition of limitations on civil liberties

in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. As noted, the instability which Islam threatens is one of the justifications which Moscow has advanced in its efforts to get world support for reimposition of a form of Russian hegemony throughout the old Soviet empire.

What raising the specter of "destabilizing Islam" ignores, however, is that the present "destabilization" in fact began in Moscow, first under Yuri Andropov, and then, aggressively, under Mikhail Gorbachev. The programs of both men destroyed long-established power and trade relationships, mandating the creation of new elites, and new power relations. As the campaigns for perestroika and glasnost grew, peoples began to be encouraged to return to their own histories, to seek the roots of their spiritual values, and to participate again in a society which for seven decades had excluded and ignored them.

By the end of 1991 the entire world community had taken up these campaigns, exhorting the former Soviet republics to transform their political structures, their economic bases, and their systems of spiritual values, in the interests of "democratization" and the "transfer to the market system." This sort of radical, forced transformation is "destabilizing" in any society, but particularly so in societies as poor as those of Central Asia. The economic "pie" in Tajikistan was never very large, so that new parties could claim pieces of it only by taking privilege and position from those who already held them; indeed, as Soviet support withdrew and the economies of Central Asia collapsed, even without redistribution everyone's share grew markedly smaller. This meant that the stakes were very high on all sides. Those who got control of the government would have houses and cars and quality medical care and the chance to educate their children abroad; those who failed could not be certain of being able to afford even bread.

In the past the defacto inequalities of life were explained away in ideological terms, but under Gorbachev the ruling ideology was stripped of all of its authority. Though the authority of communism in Central Asia had never been much more than symbolic, the people living in these societies were used to living in an ideological state, in which ideology provided a program by which to order life, giving it meaning, purpose, and direction. In general ideology continues to be a useful tool for gathering political support, especially among a brutalized, impoverished, and confused population, but this is doubly true in the former USSR, where the population has been trained for decades in both positive ideology, as espoused by the Communist Party, and, perhaps even more importantly, in negative ideology, the various generations of "enemies of the people" who have loudly been declared responsible for the nation's ills.

Though the old official ideology is gone, and the main instrument of ideological transmission, the communist party, with it, the various successor states all have dozens, perhaps hundreds of people in both the government and the opposition who are skilled at mobilizing the population on the basis of ideology. Similarly, the population remains one which has been trained to seek ideological causes and solution for most of its grievances.

In that regard Islam especially seems to be serving a double function in Central Asia. For a population which knows that it historically is Muslim, and which has little else by which to define itself, particularly as even those rude benefits and services which the Soviet system provided disappear, Islam and the values it espouses are attractive. Indeed, at least among the rural population of Central Asia, Islam never really disappeared during the Soviet years, but rather was converted into a folk-maintained religion which was all the more powerful for becoming ritual-based, rather than dogma-based.

For the greatest part of the populations of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and some parts of Tajikistan, the practices associated with this "underground Islam" were integral parts of national identity; Russians did not engage in the practices, and non-Russians did. Now that independence has come, it is all too easy for that simple formula to be reversed, to make Islamic worship something that, for example "Uzbeks do", while those who do not become virtually Russians, or their agents.

Thus Islam will play an important role in the process of nation-building, because it is integral to the definitions of all the peoples for whom the new states are named. This shows most clearly in the case of Kazakhstan, where almost none of the Kazakh citizens are able to pursue the nomadic pastoralism which largely defined "Kazakhness" as recently as two generations ago, and where as much as 40 percent of the adult population can not speak the Kazakh language. This leaves the practice of Islam as the one important cultural "marker" which a Kazakh can adopt with comparative ease, to distinguish and define himself; even urban Kazakhs are now returning to the mosques and are publicly practicing Islamic life-cycle rituals.

Islam and the Elite

Islam also fulfills an ideological function for the leadership. All of the presidents and their respective elites are the products of a system which justified all of its practices and policies in terms of an over-riding ideology, even if that ideology had become so abused as to be meaningless, and the gymnastics of justifying policies openly hypocritical. The disappointments of the "market system" have been many, in each of the new states: the

majority has been greatly impoverished, while a tiny minority has prospered in a way that can only seem rapacious, if not obscene; productivity has plummeted, and shows little prospect of recovery; and the condition of most people's lives has gone from threadbare-but-tolerable to intolerable. Perhaps the greatest disappointment, however, has been the discovery that the "market system" provides so little philosophy, especially in the almost Darwinian sense that it is being practiced in this period of the collapse of authority.

In that sense Islam offers enormous advantages to the civil authorities of the Central Asian nations. Strictly observed, with its injunctions against usury and the imposition of the obligation to provide charity, the religion softens many of the features of capitalism which seem most obnoxious to ex-Soviet citizens. The ban on alcohol and, to a lesser extent, gambling, provide important checks against social practices which can become debilitating, especially in conditions of cultural collapse. The obligations of education, obedience to elders, respect of property, and observation of the duties of family and civic life all give substance to behavior which any state would want to encourage. Without Islam, however, the Central Asian states have no grounds or justifications on which to cultivate that behavior.

Although social conditions (mass unemployment, widespread obvious official corruption, and growing poverty) seem, ironically, to make the appeal of it timely, communism has been widely denounced, and officially discredited; it would be extremely unlikely that a version of communism or socialism might be re-instituted as a state ideology under any of the current leaders (save Rakhmonov). "Democracy" is widely understood as a synonym for, at best, chaos and, at worst, crime.

Conditions are so severe throughout the region that all of the region's states have begun to unravel to varying degrees. Each of Central Asia's leaders is seeking an ideology which will give political groups some incentive to rise above regional and clan interests. However, the only possible alternative to Islam as a philosophy which might provide justifications for socially useful behavior is ethnic nationalism, which is not only fragile in every case, but also often is as potentially explosive as is Islam, while providing far fewer social benefits (to say nothing of the fact that a major constituent of any Central Asian ethnicity is going to be Islam anyway).

Although the policy of encouraging Islam presents a number of political dangers to the Central Asian leaders, all of the region's leaders have been actively encouraging the dissemination of Islam. This, however, is a hard sell for all of them, for like the secularized intelligentsia more generally they see "survivalist Islam" as closely associated with rural life, with only a minimal intellectual component. For the elite educated during the Soviet period,

rule of Islam is synonymous with rule by the crowd, which would mean the loss of privilege and life-style for the urbanized elite.

Russian contempt for the Central Asian populations was never a secret, but the baldness with which Russia seems now to be reasserting dominance in Central Asia, demanding, for example that the each of the states, if they wish to continue to use rubles, not only convey most budgetary functions and decisions to Moscow, but also place on deposit huge reserves of gold and dollars, means that Central Asians will increasingly be pushed to define themselves and their states as distinct from Russia.

Culturally, demographically, and historically, the peoples of Central Asia most resemble those of south Asia, but the creation of societies like those of Pakistan, Afghanistan, or Iran would be taken, both by the present leadership and by most of the world community, as a defeat. Thus the leaders, and most of their elites, have taken as their duty the attempt to preserve as many features of the Soviet, Europeanized past as they possibly can. For that reason, the rise of interest in and support for Islam among the general population is seen as, if not actually dangerous, at least a phenomenon which is to be closely monitored and contained. Yet at the same time, the exigencies of ruling these newly independent states are forcing the current elite to develop official national ideologies which champion the positive role of Islam in their people's history, even though they know that if they are too successful in doing so they, and those they most directly represent, will all be forced from power.

Looking Toward the Future: The Contradictions of the Situation

Central Asia's leaders seem doomed to be transitional figures, although it is not clear what they will be transitional to. There are two processes of Islamic revival occurring simultaneously in Central Asia: a wide-spread revivification of the Muslim practices of the past; and another process, with far fewer participants, which is exploring true Islamic literalism, attempting as in other states of Muslim heritage to reduce to as small a minimum as possible the difference between the tenets of the religion and the civil administrative practices of those who profess to belong to the faith.

The existence of two such strains is not unique, and may be compared to dialogues within the Israeli community between the Orthodox observant and the less religious or non-religious, or to the dialogues in American politics about issues of public morality, such as abortion; in all three instances the religious enjoy a certain advantage over the non-religious,

by virtue of being able to turn the religious components of common culture back upon the less religious. In most cultures in recent decades this advantage has had a tendency to push civic life in a direction more acceptable to the religious, so that, for example, in Jerusalem Sabbath traffic is more restricted, while in American life abortion loses federal funding.

The pressure which literal revivalist, or fundamentalist, Muslims are able to bring to politics in their societies may be inherently greater than is true in Judaism or Christianity, because of Islam's claim to be completed prophecy. This would presumably make it easier for mullahs than it is for rabbis, priests, or pastors, to assert that a person must live according to the tenets of the faith, or run the risk of being defined as apostate, even if one is head of state. That would be a particularly powerful tool at least in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, where the current "Islamic leaders" once were active in enforcing Moscow's anti-religious policies.

What is much more important in Central Asia, however, and in many of the other societies of the Muslim world where Islam is increasing in influence, is that, unlike in Israel or in America, the non-religious side of the argument today has very little to offer. That was not always the case. Even a decade ago the Soviet system was able to provide goods and services to most of the population which were superior to those provided to all but a handful of elite in other Muslim countries. As noted, the Central Asians who were able to compare found conditions in their own republic to be much better than those in neighboring Muslim states, and took great pride in the development of Alma-ata and Tashkent as modern cities, with the subways and skyscrapers which Kabul and Karachi lacked.

Although there was an obvious sub-theme of racial hatred beneath the surface of the Brezhnev years, on the surface there was real scope for advancement of non-Russian personnel, to the degree that "Muslims" even constituted about 15 percent of the Politburo (Rashidov, Kunaev, and Aliev, out of 19 positions); lesser Central Asian mortals like Askar Akaev, could occupy senior positions in research labs in Leningrad or, like present Kyrgyz ambassador to the United States Roza Otunbaeva could, though junior, have positions in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs which offered secondary postings in Paris and New York, or, like the writers Olzhas Suleimenov and Chingiz Aitmatov (Kazakh and Kyrgyz respectively), could travel the world, as representatives of the "progressive USSR", or, like poet-turned- politician Mohamed Salikh (of Uzbekistan), could make a comfortable living, adequate for raising six children, as a poet. Even less well connected and less ambitious Central Asians could, if they wished, aspire to education in any of the institutions of higher education in the Soviet Union, could, if necessary, receive medical treatment in Moscow or other specialized centers, could vacation at the Black Sea or visit the Pacific, have a

refrigerator, buy a car, own an apartment. Their societies were largely crime-free, their basic needs of food, shelter, education, and medical care were met, and they were able, within fairly loosely defined boundaries, to preserve their cultures.

Indeed, although only a handful of the Central Asians may have wished to recognize the fact, for many of the nationalities of the Soviet Union it was only the policies of the USSR which preserved them as distinct ethnic groups. National groups with long written histories and well-articulated self-definitions such as the Uzbeks possess would probably have survived almost any historical process intact as a nation, but less numerous and less well-established peoples such as the Turkmen and Kyrgyz might well have been assimilated into non-existence without the Soviet Union, and would certainly have been unlikely to emerge as possessors of their own states.

In short, at least in the short-run, the collapse of the USSR has taken far more from the societies of Central Asian than it has given them. Save for a rapacious few, life since independence has gotten very much worse, while even for those few it has grown more circumscribed; borders which once stretched from Berlin to the Bering Sea have not only shrunk much smaller physically, but now seem effectively smaller still, because gasoline is exorbitant and hard to find, airline schedules erratic and tickets expensive, and train travel physically dangerous, because of the likelihood of theft.

Ultimately, the fact that the secular side can bring only promises of a better future--- promises with which people are thoroughly familiar, and thoroughly skeptical about, because communism too promised a "radiant future"---means that the leaders of Central Asia are probably right to fear the spread of Islam.

But what they seem not to understand is that this spread is not the agent of instability and the competing power center which they take it to be, but rather is a response to their own inability to control their economies, their societies, and their states. Unless some unanticipated miracle succeeds in bringing comparative prosperity to Central Asia, it seems likely that the appeal of Islam will continue to grow, placing further stress on the present societies, and their presidents.

Religious leaders like Turajonzade and Muhammed Sadyk agree that the low level of religious education in Central Asia makes it impossible to think of creation of Islamic governments in the region for at least two or three decades. Secular leaders like Islam Karimov have interpreted this to mean that Islam must be contained now, at its present level, in order to cut off political Islam before it can grow. What seems more likely, however, is that the attempt to nip Islamic fundamentalism in the bud without dramatically reversing the economic

or social conditions of the Central Asian states, is far more likely to hasten the growth of more strictly observed Islam, as the secular authorities demonstrate their own spiritual and material poverty.

In practical and human terms, the question of most moment for Central Asia is whether the regional leaders will draw the appropriate lessons from the experience in Tajikistan. Given the present dynamics of Central Asia and, very importantly, of Russia, the answer seems more likely to be no rather than yes. Many of the conditions of Tajikistan are repeated in some form in other Central Asian states. Kyrgyzstan, for example, shows the same sort of differentiation by region and by clan as did Tajikistan, as well as sharing the same poverty and lack of resources which might be developed. Uzbekistan too exhibits some of the ethnic splits which brought Tajikistan to grief, as well as having a larger and more articulate revivalist Islamic elite than Tajikistan did. Kazakhstan shares with Tajikistan the presence of a Russian community; in Kazakhstan though, that community is much larger, and what the state possesses is of much greater strategic interest to Russia, making it likely that Russia would intervene militarily at a far earlier stage.

Also important is that the general collapse of the Soviet military, the flow of arms to fight the civil war in Tajikistan, and the munitions legacy of the war in Afghanistan, means that arms are plentiful throughout Central Asia. The brutal imposition of the Rakhmonov government in Dushanbe has driven many Tajiks into Afghanistan, where some are reported to be receiving training as mujahedin. Important too is the suitability for much of Central Asia for cultivation of opium poppies, meaning that there are ready sources of cash, for those who wish to purchase weapons.

What would seem to make subsequent implosions almost inevitable is that the confluence of political, social and economic conditions which created the first Tajikistan have not been alleviated anywhere in Central Asia. The war in Tajikistan was about division of power, acquiring religious overtones in part because some groups of disaffected population had found meaning and support in Islam, and in part because other groups had found the threat of Islam to be a useful rallying cry, as well as an internationally acceptable justification for foreign military intervention, and the use of force.

Just as it was in Tajikistan, Islam in the rest of Central Asia is simultaneously two things: the only social factor offering most of the region's population something to believe in and to live by; and the single greatest fear of the present leaders, the Russians, and the outside world. The inability or disinclination (or both) of any of the latter group to pay the price necessary to improve the lives of the Central Asian population will only increase the strength

of the appeal of Islam, making more likely that the civic authorities, or outside powers, will feel it necessary to resort to coercion or force to contain that appeal. Because, however, such force will only demonstrate the more vividly the failure of secularism, the effect seems likely to further radicalize and politicize Islam.

Post-communist societies are facing a difficult challenge, having to create a new political order at a time of economic crisis, which can make all of them seem strange places; the five new Central Asian states, however, can seem stranger than most. For these republics, the break-up of the Soviet Union has meant the beginning of decolonization. The old pro-colonial administration is still largely in place, but their political agenda has changed. A large number of "colonizers" still live in the region, but their social and political status is now sharply diminished.

However, unlike many of the newly decolonized states of the 1950s and 1960s, the Central Asian societies are as modern as they are underdeveloped. The entire region is electrified and over ninety percent of the homes have televisions; the entire population is literate, in the local language and a great many of them in Russian. Part of the society, and all of the elite, were raised in a secular society and have lived in the modern world. Moreover, this elite is a larger proportion of the population than was the case in most other decolonizing states. By the same token, the traditional village and clan leadership structure was partly destroyed and partly usurped during the seven decades of Soviet rule. Nonetheless, life in rural Central Asia remains very different from life in the city; certainly it would be impossible to call life in the countryside representative of a modern, secular world.

It is from this that the contradiction between the goals of society at large and those of the ruling elite particularly grows. The ruling elite are fully secularized, without exception. As such, they feel themselves to be a particular target of the fundamentalists, and are fearful or indignant of the changes to their life styles that greater empowerment of religious activists in their societies would produce.

This fracture between the secularized and non-secularized parts of society, and the elite fears of a populace beginning to seek empowerment which the collapse of communism has brought to the surface in Central Asia, are not problems which are exclusive to Islamic societies. The Catholic Church is already playing a far greater political role in Catholic-dominated post-communist societies than Islamic "fundamentalists" are playing in Muslim ones. Importantly, although it is the state which has granted the Church this exercise of power, the secularized part of the population has objected vigorously to the growth of Church influence.

The Catholic Church believes it has a moral right to insure that civil society helps uphold religious law, on which basis it has successfully lobbied for a new, highly restrictive abortion law in Poland. It is also pushing for similar legislation in Hungary. In Poland and in Lithuania state schools already teach religion as part of the curriculum, often taking precisely those timeslots in which "scientific atheism" was once taught. Polish, Lithuanian and Hungarian intellectuals, very few of whom are devout and some of whom are atheists, are equally uncomfortable with the situation.

No elite group likes to be pushed from power. All of Central Asia's rulers would sacrifice their new-found democratic values rather than permit a popular movement to defeat them. Blaming instability on Islamic "extremists" may make "strong-man" tactics more palatable to foreign leaders, leaving aid-flows intact and buying current leaders some additional time in power. In the long run, though, particularly given the dismal economic picture throughout the region, the reversion to politics of repression is likely both to increase the popularity of Islamic activists, and to encourage the activists to join up with the clandestine fundamentalist organizations which are forming throughout the area. As the long campaigns against the Muslim Brethren in Egypt or the clerical movement in Iran have shown, Islamic opposition groups can survive extended periods of government persecution. The Central Asian states gained their independence without a revolutionary struggle; it is only now, with their independence thrust upon them, that they may begin to produce the heroes of a revolution yet to come.