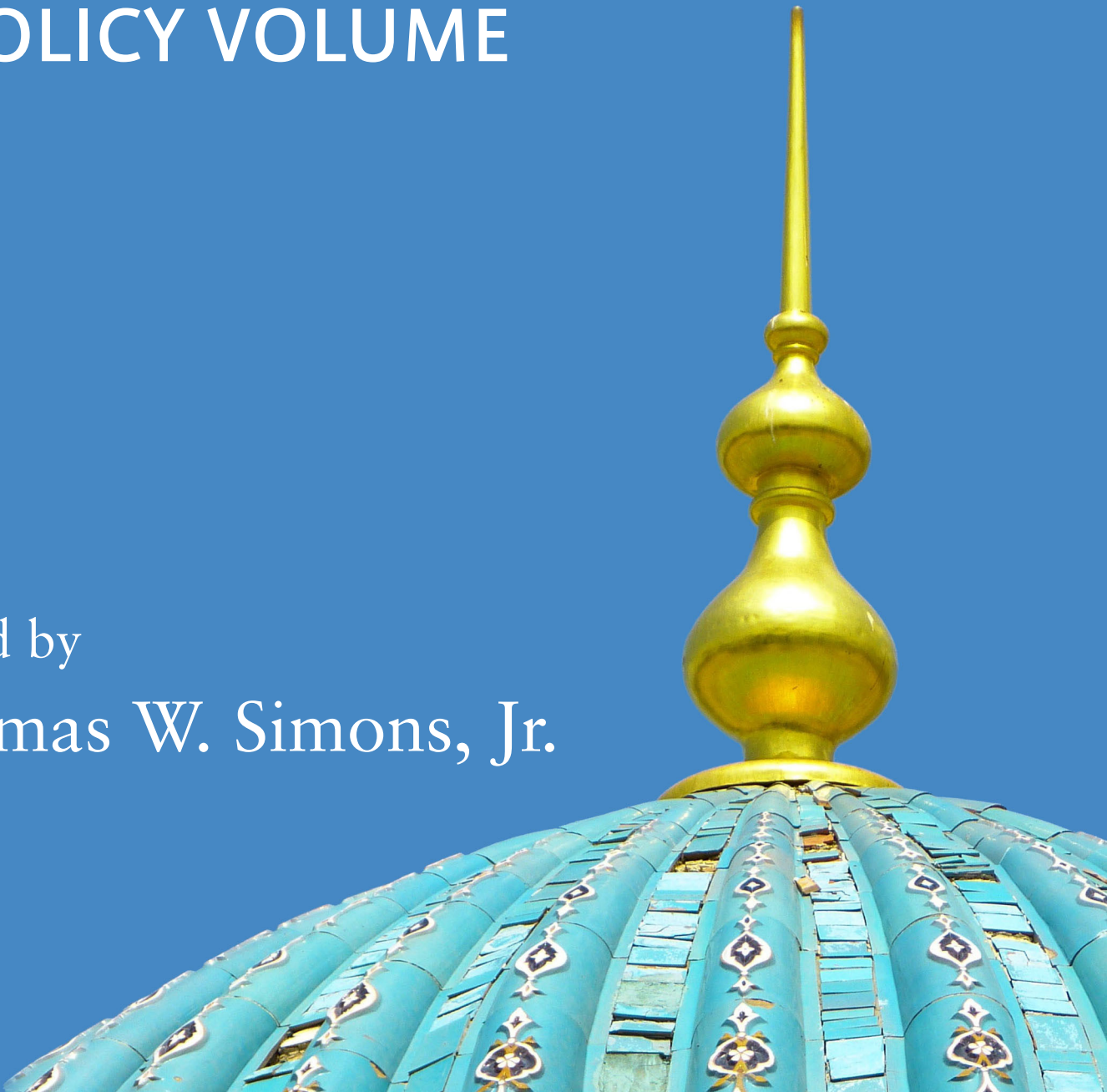


# ISLAM IN EURASIA

A POLICY VOLUME

Edited by  
Thomas W. Simons, Jr.



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## Project on Islam in Eurasia at the Davis Center

The premise of the Project on Islam in Eurasia is that very important changes in the social roles of Islam in Central Asia have significant implications for the politics of the region, but have not been adequately examined in the existing literature. The Project examines these trends, with two objectives: to identify and promote original, empirically sound research on Islam in Central Asia; and to develop a network of Central Asian scholars who can effectively communicate their results to academics and policymakers in the United States.

The work of the Project on Islam in Eurasia is made possible with grant support from Carnegie Corporation of New York.

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# Conference Summary

*Thomas W. Simons, Jr.*

Islam has been fundamental to the life of Eurasia almost as long as there has been Islam. Today, six of the fifteen newly independent states that emerged when the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991 have Muslim majorities, and the Russian Federation itself has upwards of ten million Muslim citizens. With independence came new opportunities for US engagement in Central Asia and elsewhere in the Caspian Basin, so US policy has been concerned with Islam in Eurasia for over two decades. That concern became especially intense once military operations in neighboring Afghanistan took center stage in late 2001, but it is likely to continue now that US combat operations there have wound down.

Yet Eurasian Islam has been but one element in US policy toward the region, much about this variety of Islam is unknown, and much of the little that is known has been shaped by outdated Western prejudice or by Soviet and Middle Eastern points of view that do not do justice to its richness and specificity. US policy must also take into account the views of area governments and Western academics and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who may be closer to the realities, but who may also have a special interest in how official Washington perceives them. The US policy perspective on issues involving Islam in Eurasia has had an uncertain and shifting focus as it struggles to learn, to resist partisan or interested analysis along the way, and to integrate what it learns into successful policymaking.

The Islam in Eurasia Policy Conference, held in Washington, DC on June 6–7, 2013, sought to sharpen and stabilize that focus by bringing together academics, NGO representatives, and US officials involved in the policy process to consider the best and latest academic research on Islam in Central Asia and Azerbaijan and to discuss the implications for US policy going forward.

Generously supported by the Carnegie Foundation of New York, and cosponsored by Harvard University's Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies and the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the conference was a culminating event of a multiyear Project on Islam in Eurasia. Managed by the Davis Center, the project began in 2008 and has been marked by numerous milestones, including an academic conference on "The Changing Social Role of Islam in Post-Soviet Eurasia," held at Harvard March 20–21, 2009 under the leadership of Professor John Schoeberlein, and a workshop to prepare an edited volume entitled *Islam, Society, and Politics in Central Asia*, held at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor November 9–10, 2012 under the leadership of Professor Pauline Jones Luong. The volume will include some of the most current scholarship on Islam in Eurasia available today, by both area and Western scholars, with an introduction and conclusion by Professor Jones Luong.

The 2013 Washington conference provided a unique opportunity to engage scholars and policymakers in intensive discussion of the policy object (in this case Islam in Eurasia); the policy present, as the United States was drawing down in Afghanistan and was becoming an

energy exporter; and the policy future, once the US combat role in Afghanistan would end. After a keynote address by Professor Eric McGlinchey of George Mason University, the one-and-a-half-day event was divided into five segments, with a primary focus on Central Asia: (1) a review of the project's academic findings, chaired by Professor Jones Luong; (2) a presentation of four policy papers describing key elements of the policy context and the key challenges for the future, chaired by Ambassador Thomas W. Simons, Jr.; (3) a separate panel on Azerbaijan, as one variant of the Islamic problematic in Eurasia and a point of reference for Central Asia; (4) a luncheon address by the Honorable Robert O. Blake, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, speaking for the Obama Administration; and (5) a discussion of future policy, chaired by Professor S. Frederick Starr, Chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University.

## The Keynote Address: "Predictable Indeterminacy"

McGlinchey's keynote address set a tone of venturesome inquiry by arguing that "predictable indeterminacy" is the appropriate idea with which to approach Central Asian political futures, since the same factors at work in many areas can lead to both democratic and nondemocratic outcomes, and neither can be assumed beforehand. Social mobilization in the region tends to be fickle and/or sudden, and political entrepreneurs in the right place at the right time can use it for either liberal or nonliberal ends. He urged policymakers to think ahead when they want to stimulate civil society, and to "cook" this indeterminacy "into the policy."

## The Academic Findings

In introducing her panels, Jones Luong stressed the overarching goal of simply improving the meager state of our knowledge about Central Asian states, societies, and Muslims. Like the volume she is editing, the panels were structured around four viewpoints:

1. **A View from Below:** the everyday practice of Islam, and what Islam means for individuals and organized groups. Here rapporteur Morgan Liu of Ohio State University noted the explosion of "Islamic phenomena" in Central Asia, but also the extreme diversity of what Islamic participation means to different people and communities, as shown in the four case-study chapters he described. Three findings in particular stood out: (a) for very many, especially among women, older people, and rural people, Islam is about morality, and ritual is less important than good conduct; (2) some Islamist movements appeal because their goals are outside current politics, and they threaten because they offer alternatives to state-determined narratives (as did dissidents in the East European 1980s); (3) and the proliferation of networks of pious Muslim businessmen, like those whom the massacred crowds were defending at Andijon in 2005, is worth watching: they threaten today because they offer services the state no longer provides, and tomorrow because they could serve as a basis for Central Asian versions of Turkey's AK Partisi.
2. **A View from Above:** state policies toward Islam, and the interactions of controllers and the controlled. Rapporteur Bayram Balci of the Institut d'études politiques (Sciences Po) in Paris and the Carnegie Endowment in Washington presented papers defining a variety of

Central Asian models for managing Islam, from Soviet times to the present. Late-Soviet policies shifted between repression and tolerance and were ambiguous throughout; today's state of Uzbekistan has complex interactions with Islamic institutions, co-opting them to control and prevent competition with itself; the value placed on Sufism has switched from "bad" under the Soviets to "good" today, but reabsorbing it into the state tends to discredit it in society. The focus of future research should be on this constant negotiation between the state, with its institutions for managing Muslims, and "its" Muslims. Jones Luong commented that the state is trying to homogenize expressions of Islam, but along the way networks are created that may determine the direction of social mobilization, e.g., among businessmen. Still, Balci named ethnicity as the most important threat to stability in Central Asia: more people have been killed there by ethnonationalism than by Islamist radicalism.

3. A View from Within: sources of and competition for religious authority. In introducing four papers that describe variants in different situations (including his own), rapporteur Alisher Khamidov of Newcastle University (UK) argued strongly that Islamic radicalism has received exaggerated scholarly and government attention; that its influence has been waning for a variety of reasons (among them repression, migration, and ideological/theological competition); and that it is much more interesting and important to study the Islamic establishments operating between the state and the faithful: vast, wealthy patronage networks, often led by well-established, competing families of religious leaders, with real influence upward and downward. Especially at local level, the Central Asian state needs them.
4. A View from Outside: the activities of Muslim institutions and missionaries from beyond Central Asia, and their influence. Rapporteur David Abramson of the State Department presented a series of papers dealing with various forms of international Islamic intervention and influence since independence. After careful review he concluded that while that influence was not trivial in the early years in specific places and situations, nor is it insignificant today, issues have generally been defined and outcomes driven by indigenous factors, and after the initial postindependence surge, outside influences have generally declined.

## The Context for US Policy

The next segment, chaired by Ambassador Simons, presented four commissioned papers treating aspects of Central Asia's situation that have provided parameters for US policymaking and will continue to do so. Their texts are included in this publication, so only the highlights will be mentioned here:

- In his "US Policy toward Independent Central Asia: The Record and Key Variables," Harvard M.A. Geoffrey Wright reviews the basic continuities of US policy since 1991, particularly its support for the sovereignty and viability of these new states, but he also makes clear that since 2001 the needs of supporting the war effort in Afghanistan have taken primacy over its other elements. The implication: there is hope that after 2014 a balance more reflective of the range of US interests can be reestablished.

- Harvard M.A. Noah Tucker then presented a paper, entitled “Domestic Shapers of Eurasia’s Islamic Futures.” In it he calls for new scholarship to fill the gap between inherited visions of Central Asian Islam (and the perceived threats they generate) and today’s realities. He then illustrates the virtues of his approach with new scholarship of his own, based on an examination of two Uzbekistani public intellectuals, that suggests how most Central Asians live comfortably between literalist/rigorous Islam, on the one hand, and mystical/communitarian Islam on the other. The implication: US policy should inhabit the same middle ground, without exaggerated fear that one or the other will dominate Central Asian politics.
- In her paper entitled “Energy and Natural Resource Exports and the Islamic Future of Central Asia and Azerbaijan,” University of Haifa Professor (and Georgetown University Visiting Researcher) Brenda Shaffer details the structural reasons why her two areas of interest resemble the Middle Eastern states where Islamist radicalism arose in the 1970s, and also the structural reasons why they are different. These include earlier and deeper modernization (under the Soviets), more robust institutional resistance to Islamism (inherited from the Soviets but carried on), and, despite corruption, relatively more rule-based and transparent economic policies. The implication: Central Asia and Azerbaijan are on balance unlikely to generate powerful Islamist radicalisms on Middle Eastern models.
- Professor and Dean Roger Kangas of the National Defense University presented “Central Asia after 2014: Is There a Role for Outside Powers?” He finds that there is a role for outside powers, including the United States, but that the roles of outsiders are still to be defined. He argues this is not only because of the many regional uncertainties emerging from the Western drawdown in Afghanistan and the flood of shale gas onto world energy markets, but also because Central Asian states have, since independence, improved their capacities as states, their skills at defining their interests and balancing among outside partners in pursuit of those interests, and their self-confidence. The implication: even with diminished inputs, US policy can still seek a role in Central Asia, if it can decide why it should, and if Central Asians decide a US role is in their interest.

## Islamism and Today’s Azerbaijan

The panel of recognized experts on Azerbaijan was one of the day’s most informative, both as a case study and as a counterpoint to the conference’s emphasis on Central Asia. Unique among countries with Turkic-speaking populations, Azerbaijan has a Shi’a majority, and—even more than Central Asian countries—its independence has opened it to outside Islamic inputs and influences from both secular Sunni Turkey and revolutionary Shi’i Iran. Yet Iran was quickly seen as a threat, the more so since it supported Armenia in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. And its Sunni Islam counted against Turkey, the more so since Sunnis in Azerbaijan are mainly from its northern minorities, stirred by relatives in Russia’s turbulent North Caucasus. Robust post-Communist leadership under Soviet Politburo veteran Haidar Alijev proved adept at manipulating (and creating) institutions for managing relations with Azerbaijan’s Muslims. These historical influences have resulted in a Muslim-majority country where Islam has played little role in politics. An unhealthy increase in Sunni-Shi’a tension is still a problem for the future. Implied: Islamic situations in Eurasia are very country-specific.



## The Obama Administration's Point of View

Unsurprisingly, Assistant Secretary Blake's luncheon remarks, reprinted in this volume, reaffirmed the Obama Administration's determination to stay engaged in Central Asia after the end of the US combat role in Afghanistan in 2014. They describe the policies—the “sunk costs,” so to speak—that validate a vigorous, continued US role, and they quite properly stress the security cooperation component, directed at Islamist threats. Blake's remarks are clear about Central Asian fears and concerns over abandonment that they were intended to address, and they are perhaps surprisingly forceful in asserting a causal connection between indiscriminate repression and bad governance, on the one hand, and Islamist radicalism on the other. In 2015, these remarks still fit US policy.

The agenda for US engagement that results, from the New Silk Road vision of regional infrastructure cooperation, including the TAPI gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to India, through state-building and rule-of-law reforms to local community projects, is very broad. Whether the United States can find the reasons and resources to sustain it post-2014 is an open question.

## The Discussion on US Policy

The conference ended with two panels on US policy, chaired by Professor S. Frederick Starr, and with broad discussion among over one hundred representatives of the US government, academia, and NGOs.

Professor Alexander Cooley of Barnard College and Research Professor Marlene Laruelle of George Washington University provided keynote speeches. In his intervention, entitled “Central Asia and the Problems of External Cooperation in a Multipolar Order,” Cooley argued that the main external players—Russia, China, and the United States—have very different definitions of how to pursue their ostensibly common goals for Central Asia—stability, economic development, and regional integration—and that these differences make cooperation among them elusive. Provided they are recognized for what they are, however, cooperation is still possible. While the United States can have a role as one of several partners in the region, exercising that role will require a differentiated policy—dealing with individual countries rather than the region as a whole—and more modesty and nimbleness than we are used to.

As Chair, Professor Starr made clear his view that the main issue facing US policy in the region was no longer the size of the Islamist threat (and hence how far we should acquiesce in regime repression to combat it, at the risk of creating it), but rather why we should care about Central Asia at all once our combat role in Afghanistan ends and shale gas and oil shrink our interest in Central Asian energy resources far below the levels of the past two decades.

NGO voices from the floor responded that with US security and energy interests declining we should have more space in policy for attention to widespread and endemic human rights and rule of law abuses. Why, it was asked, should we not declare Uzbekistan officials *persona non grata* in the United States, or why should US officials in Central Asia not be instructed to mention human rights in every meeting with their host-country counterparts?

Responses came from three former US ambassadors to Central Asia and the Caucasus, Joseph Presel and John Herbst (Uzbekistan) and Richard Miles (Azerbaijan and Georgia); Richard Kauzlarich (a former ambassador to Azerbaijan) was also present. Miles noted that reports that the United States has had no policy toward Central Asia are surely false, since we have been talking about it, but he argued that US officials should think more about and work more with religion, even though it may be uncongenial to them. He joined his former colleagues in pointing out from experience that exclusive focus on one set of issues can damage the chances for progress on many other issues in the US interest in an important part of the world, and can generate a tin ear for repetitious whining. Also a former ambassador to Ukraine, Herbst drew a contrast between targeted sanctions on individuals there, which were likely to have an effect because of Ukraine's diffuse elite structures, and sanctions in Uzbekistan, where the elite is so tightly integrated that sanctions will have no impact. The implication: US policy situations in Eurasia are various, and should be shaped by that diversity.

## Ambassador Simons's Concluding Remarks

Simons ended by thanking the participants and the organizers, and by listing a few takeaways:

### *On Islam in Eurasia*

- It is hard to get to and to grasp the realities of Islam in Eurasia, so we should heed the injunction we have heard here to be humble: there is so much we do not know.
- The situations of Muslims in Central Asia and Azerbaijan are diverse and dynamic. They are not single and stationary, they are not path-dependent, they change, they have been changing, and they will continue to change over time. Hence it is important to be specific when it comes to defining norms and deviations. Especially for policymakers allocating scarce resources, anything less can get things terribly wrong, and cause waste and even damage.
- Politics and religion are inextricably intertwined across the region; they develop in dynamic interaction with each other. No regime is purely secular, and most regimes feel the urge to define the faiths of their subjects and control their expression; conversely every believer's faith and practice is shaped by the structures the state and believers create together in public life, which reach into private life too. Various symbioses are possible: one worth watching is the Islamization of the nation-state together with nationalization of belief.
- The danger from Islamist radicalism is not trivial in Central Asia and Azerbaijan, and it is defined partly by outside influences and inputs. However, it varies from country to country and from region to region, and it is but one of several actual and potential responses—along with exclusivist ethnic nationalism and emigration—to political repression and socioeconomic constraints.

- Finally, we should pay attention to the rise of “Islamic societies” within several of these Muslim-majority states: the emerging phenomenon of a growing pious Muslim middle class. Over time it can change many of the givens we have been discussing. Central Asia and Azerbaijan are not yet Turkey; it is too early to base policy on such a prospect. But it is a focus that surely has a future.

#### *On US policy toward Central Asia and Azerbaijan*

- Since the independence of the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan, the United States has pursued a number of interests in the region rather consistently, but all have been modest except for support for the war effort in Afghanistan. The policy question now is: What will keep us engaged in Central Asia and Azerbaijan once our Afghanistan combat role ends and shale oil and gas transform world energy markets?
- US interest in the Islamist threat to countries in the region has been secondary and derivative of larger interests: in the last two decades, our interest in the stability and viability of the region’s independence, and, since 9/11, as a component, albeit a subordinate one, of our interest in combatting the larger international terrorist threat. That interest will continue after 2014, but only as a function of the larger threat, which will still be there; as our concern over the region’s contribution to global energy stability also shrivels, we will be less willing to understand Islamism as an acceptable excuse for local political repression.
- Even if counterterrorism and energy security recede as drivers of US interest in Central Asia and Azerbaijan, the original objectives that brought us into the region in the 1990s will remain valid, even if diminished; Administration statements have echoed Ambassador Blake in confirming this. The question is: “What will give us the drive to pursue those objectives in a time of budget constraint at home and greater challenges elsewhere?” We heard at this conference that most countries of the region have been growing stronger as states, more capable of identifying options and making choices toward multi-vector relations with the outside world; we have helped with these developments. Yet they are also growing more and more distinct, their state-building efforts are works in progress, and their relations with each other are still rudimentary. So they can all use outside help, and dealing with them as adults will surely make us more attractive partners. But the most promising candidate for US interest described at our conference has been helping to create a broader zone in which the United States, Russia, and China compete with each other, but can also cooperate to reinforce stability and prevent state failure. The Ukraine crisis could make such cooperation more difficult, unless it is remembered that one of its causes has been Ukrainian state weakness. At our conference Alex Cooley warned us that the three main outside powers have different definitions of what may seem to be common objectives, and we should remember that if we wish to pursue stabilizing cooperation in Central Asia and Azerbaijan. But that kind of cooperation will still be the most promising new objective, alongside more familiar bilateral vehicles, for US policy.

# Conference Program

*Thursday, June 6, 2013*

## Opening Remarks

Welcome by **William E. Pomeranz**, Acting Director, Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC; and the **Honorable Thomas W. Simons, Jr.**, Visiting Scholar, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University

Address by **Eric McGlinchey**, Associate Professor of Government and Politics, George Mason University

## Panels on Academic Findings

Chaired by **Pauline Jones Luong**, Professor of Political Science, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor

### *Panel I*

“A View from Below: Islam and Society in Central Asia”

Reviewed by **Morgan Liu**, Associate Professor and Interim Chair, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, Ohio State University

“A View from Above: Islam and the State in Central Asia”

Reviewed by **Bayram Balci**, Visiting Scholar, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC

### *Panel II*

“A View from Within: Sources of Religious Authority in Central Asia”

Reviewed by **Alisher Khamidov**, Analyst, Independent Consulting Group, Washington, DC

“A View from Outside: International Islam and Central Asia”

Reviewed by **David M. Abramson**, Analyst, INR, Department of State

# Friday, June 7, 2013

## Panels on the Policy Context

Chaired by **Thomas W. Simons, Jr.**

### *Panel I*

Presentation by Ambassador Simons on “US Policy toward Independent Central Asia: The Record and Key Variables”

Authored by **Geoffrey Wright**, graduate of Harvard’s M.A. Program in Russian and Eurasian Studies (REECA)

“Domestic Shapers of Eurasia’s Islamic Futures: Sheikh, Scholar, Society and the State”  
**Noah Tucker**, REECA graduate

*Commentator:* **David M. Abramson**, Analyst, INR, Department of State

### *Panel II*

“Energy and Natural Resource Exports and the Islamic Future of Central Asia and Azerbaijan”

**Brenda Shaffer**, Professor, School of Political Science, University of Haifa, and Visiting Researcher, Center for Eurasian, Russian and Eastern European Studies, Georgetown University

“Envoi: Central Asia after 2014: Is There a Role for Outside Powers?”

**Roger Kangas**, Academic Dean and Professor of Central Asian Studies, National Defense University

*Commentator:* **Nathaniel L. Reynolds**, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Russia and Eurasia, National Intelligence Council

## Panel on Islamism and Today’s Azerbaijan

**Thomas De Waal**, Senior Associate, Russia and Eurasia Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC

**Brenda Shaffer**, Professor, School of Political Science, University of Haifa, and Visiting Researcher, Center for Eurasian, Russian and Eastern European Studies, Georgetown University

**Bayram Balci**, Visiting Scholar, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC

*Commentator:* **Richard D. Kauzlarich**, former US Ambassador to Azerbaijan; Deputy Director, Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center, School of Public Policy, George Mason University

## Friday, June 7, 2013, cont'd.

### Luncheon Address on US Policy

**Robert O. Blake, Jr.**, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs,  
Department of State

### Panels on US Policy

Chaired by **S. Frederick Starr**, Chairman, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University

#### *Panel I*

**Alexander Cooley**, Tow Professor of Political Science, Barnard College

**Catherine Cosman**, Senior Policy Analyst, US Commission on International Religious Freedom

**Richard M. Miles**, former US Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Chargé d'affaires in Turkmenistan

#### *Panel II*

**Marlene Laruelle**, Research Professor and Director of the Central Asia Program, Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, George Washington University

**Joseph A. Presel**, former US Ambassador to Uzbekistan

### Concluding Remarks

**Thomas W. Simons, Jr.**

# Remarks on US Policy

*Robert O. Blake, Jr.*

Good afternoon. I would like to thank the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies and the Kennan Institute for the invitation to speak here today. I am delighted to be here with so many friends and colleagues, and I am especially pleased to have the opportunity to speak with you about our policy priorities in Central Asia as we enter a critical and dynamic phase in our relationship with this important part of the world.

It's a particularly relevant time to talk about Islam and Central Asia. This is a time of change in the region. On June 5, Secretary of Defense Hagel and his NATO counterparts met in Brussels to plan a new NATO mission after 2014, to train, advise, and assist Afghan forces. The process of Afghans assuming full responsibility for security is already well under way.

We're also helping Afghanistan transition economically—to more private sector- and trade-led growth and less dependence on aid. And of course there's also a political transition going on, as Afghanistan's electoral institutions prepare for the critical 2014 presidential and provincial council elections. Credible and inclusive elections will be an important milestone for Afghanistan's political transition. Amidst all of that change, there is understandably some anxiety in the region, particularly about the impact of our troop drawdown on regional security.

Despite the real gains in stability in Afghanistan, the Afghan National Security Forces' enhanced capabilities, and the absence of major recent terrorist incidents in the Central Asian states, there continues to be a shared concern in the region that a reduction in the international force presence in Afghanistan will lead violent extremist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan to focus their attention once again on Central Asia. There is also some fear across the region that Central Asian facilitation of the Northern Distribution Network—increasingly important for our shipments out of Afghanistan—could invite terrorist retribution.

Some observers have gone farther, predicting dark scenarios of Central Asia falling to extremist Islamic groups coming out of Afghanistan, as the United States loses interest in the region after 2014. These concerns are misplaced for a number of important reasons.

First, the United States is not pulling out of the region. On the contrary, we are committed to an enduring partnership with Afghanistan and its people in the years ahead. As the President said, "As Afghans stand up, they will not stand alone." And a very important part of that is continuing to engage with Afghanistan's neighbors in Central Asia and elsewhere—as Deputy Secretary of State Burns and I did just over a month ago in Almaty—to work toward our common goal of a secure, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan integrated into its region.

A second and important factor is the nature of Islam in Central Asia. Islam has a long and peaceful tradition in Central Asia. Islam has been a central feature of the cultural life of the region for more than a millennium. As the hub of the Silk Road, Central Asian cities flourished as bastions of Islamic learning and scientific thought, making enormous contributions to science and culture. Those of you who have had the privilege of traveling in Central Asia, as I have, know the grandeur of the Registan in Samarkand and the quiet beauty of the madrassahs and caravanserais of Bukhara. Today we pay homage to those traditions by cooperating with governments and civil society across the region to support the preservation of the region's historically significant Islamic heritage.

As this audience knows well, since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the people of the region have rediscovered their Islamic heritage and rekindled beliefs and practices that were lost or obscured during the Soviet era. But many controls and restrictions on freedom of religion persist, a risk I will return to later.

A small number of people, however, have turned to radicalism and violence. We know that several Islamist militant groups with ties to Central Asia have spent much of the last decade operating from Pakistan and Afghanistan, and claimed credit for attacks on Afghan and Coalition forces or targets inside the region. Groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan are likely to continue to operate in northern Afghanistan, while looking for opportunities to expand their currently limited presence in Central Asia.

These groups, however, number in the tens or hundreds, not thousands, and do not pose an imminent threat to Central Asian states. Their violent ideology is overwhelmingly rejected by the populations of Central Asia. And while counterterrorism capabilities are uneven across the region, they have generally been sufficient to prevent groups from establishing secure operational bases in any of the Central Asian states.

But the limited threat currently posed by Islamic militancy in Central Asia and the failure of radical ideology to take root are no reason for complacency. Central Asian states face real security challenges not only from violent extremists but also from cross-border threats such as drug trafficking and from organized crime.

Our security assistance aims to strengthen the ability of the Central Asian states to address a broad range of such threats. In 2012, the United States provided approximately \$215 million of security assistance to the countries of Central Asia through a combination of Department of State, Department of Defense, and Department of Energy programs. The bulk of this assistance is focused on strengthening border security and increasing the capabilities of law enforcement agencies to counter transnational criminal activity, including terrorism, narcotics trafficking, trafficking in persons, and nuclear non-proliferation.

Turning to some of our specific priorities, the Antiterrorism Assistance program is active in four of the five Central Asian countries and supports stronger border control and investigative capabilities. We are engaged in talks with the fifth country, Uzbekistan, to re-launch that program there as well. Through the Central Asia Regional Strategic Initiative, we encourage greater counterterrorism cooperation in the border areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, while the FBI provides tools such as the Automated Fingerprint Information System to Uzbekistan.



Our interest in combating terrorism and other cross-border threats is shared by others, so we are engaging with other countries that are active in Central Asia to cooperate on regional security and stability. I have made it a personal priority to expand our consultations with Russia and China on Central Asia. Since 2006, over 2,000 counternarcotics officers from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and all five Central Asian states have received training through a NATO-Russia joint project called the NATO-Russia Council Counternarcotics Training Project.

In Dushanbe, the United States and Russia both play leading roles in managing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Border Management Staff College, which provides specialized training for senior management of border security agencies from across Central Asia, the wider OSCE region, and Afghanistan. I just visited the college in February and came away impressed with its contributions to strengthening border security across the region.

The Central Asian states share many of our security objectives in the region, and they have been good partners in this cooperation. But they also face a broad range of challenges that, as in many other societies, could fuel radicalism over time if left unaddressed. As they have sought to reduce their countries' vulnerability to perceived terrorist threats, they have at times failed to distinguish clearly between the right to peaceful worship and the need to combat religious extremism. Some have used the threat of extremism as a reason to repress political opposition, media freedom, and civil society.

We know that in most cases in Central Asia, the principal threats are not from violent extremist groups, but rather internal: growing restrictions on the exercise of a range of democratic freedoms and lack of economic opportunity. Non-religious factors, such as denial of political rights and civil liberties; significant restrictions on the ability of civil society to organize, receive funding, and operate; corruption; transnational crime; limitations on freedom of expression and conscience; weak rule of law; and leadership succession questions, are more likely to trigger the kind of protracted instability that could threaten the security and interests of the Central Asian states themselves, and of the United States and our allies.

Tajikistan, for example, has circumscribed the role of Islamist groups in society and in some cases has imposed restrictions on religious freedom, including banning women from attending mosque and imposing restrictions on wearing the hijab in school. Law enforcement and judicial bodies in Uzbekistan have continued to use charges of terrorism and alleged extremist ties not only as grounds to arrest, prosecute, and convict suspected terrorists, but also to suppress legitimate expression of political or religious beliefs. The government of Kazakhstan has cited the threat of violent extremism to justify recent limitations on political opposition and media outlets.

When governments in the region employ methods to counter radicalization and violent extremism that are inconsistent with respect for the fundamental rights of citizens and the rule of law, they undermine long-term stability rather than strengthen it. Freedom of expression and an active civil society, far from being threats, are valuable feedback mechanisms that can help governments be more responsive and pressure-release valves that provide societies with peaceful means to air grievances.

Likewise, weak rule of law and pervasive corruption have a corrosive effect on the Central Asian states, undermining the confidence of people in their governments and their ability to attract the investments necessary to spur broad-based economic growth. And the tendency to blame neighbors and outsiders for problems within one's own borders hinders the kind of cooperation needed to address transnational challenges—and seize new opportunities.

To address these challenges, our engagement with Central Asia goes beyond the security assistance I outlined, to also encourage meaningful, sustainable progress on human rights and democratic reforms; and advocate for the New Silk Road vision of greater regional economic cooperation and integration. To achieve these objectives, we use a combination of diplomatic engagement and bilateral and multilateral assistance.

On the diplomatic front, the annual consultations that we hold with each of the five Central Asian countries form the cornerstone of our bilateral relationships. They provide us a venue not only to review the full range of priorities in our relations with senior government officials, but also to deepen our engagement with civil society and build stronger economic ties. In these engagements, we consistently underscore the importance of protecting fundamental civil and political liberties, including the rights of ethnic, religious, and other minorities. We urge governments across the region to ensure space for civil society, the media, political activists, and religious actors to operate freely and peacefully, so that they can contribute to the advancement of their countries. And we stress to our Central Asian partners that these issues, like our security cooperation, are integral aspects of the bilateral relationship, and that lack of progress in one area hinders our ability to move forward in others.

We are clear-eyed about these issues, and progress is, quite frankly, slow and halting. The instinctive reaction in the region to upcoming leadership successions and elections is to tighten control. And Russia's recent efforts to curb the activities of independent NGOs have also found their echo in Central Asia. But we also have seen some positive results in our engagement. During the last round of our annual bilateral consultations in Tashkent, for example, the government of Uzbekistan, for the first time, held a civil society forum with independent civil society. I was heartened by the frankness of the dialogue, and we want to continue and expand on it.

Our engagement on these issues also takes the form of assistance programs designed to improve compliance with international human rights standards and principles of government accountability and transparency. In FY 2012, we provided \$26.6 million in support of such efforts.

In addition, in Kyrgyzstan, we are supporting security sector reform, which, along with assistance efforts in the judicial sector, is helping to strengthen the rule of law and bring about a fairer and more transparent justice system. In Tajikistan, we have a very successful community policing program that is working at the grassroots level, building trust between law enforcement, local government, civil society, and the community, to address local problems related to crime and security. Such programs help stabilize communities in vulnerable areas like Rasht Valley and Khorugh, while encouraging policing methods consistent with respect for human rights and the rule of law.

We are also exploring how to tailor projects to counter violent extremism, to offer positive alternatives to local communities that are most at risk. These programs have proven effective in other parts of the world and are designed to reduce the vulnerability of targeted or at-risk segments of the population to the appeal of violent extremism. We see this as a promising avenue for helping our Central Asian partners strengthen their defenses against the threat of terrorism and violent extremism, while at the same time encouraging a respect for the fundamental rights of citizens that is essential to the long-term stability of the region.

That long-term stability requires not just defenses against threats but also a positive vision for the future. That's why we have championed so strongly the New Silk Road vision of greater regional economic cooperation and integration. Increased connectivity and trade between Central Asia and Afghanistan, South Asia, and Europe will help forge the physical, cultural, and commercial links that can be the building blocks for a more stable, secure, and prosperous future in the region. This is especially true for Afghanistan, where an important economic transition is underway and where increased economic integration with the wider region can also support efforts to improve security and bring a political end to the war in Afghanistan.

To take just one example, the proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline, or TAPI, would connect the vast gas reserves of Turkmenistan with the hungry energy markets of South Asia, while providing much-needed revenue to Afghanistan. While we have a long way to go, TAPI is closer to reality today than many would have thought possible even two years ago.

And trade liberalization, the "software side" if you will, is no less important than physical infrastructure like TAPI. And here, too, we see encouraging signs. Kyrgyzstan was the first Central Asian state to join the WTO, and Tajikistan became a member earlier this year. Afghanistan and Kazakhstan are well along in their accession processes, and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have shown renewed interest in the WTO, which we strongly support, because we believe that transparent and inclusive trade regimes benefit everyone and increase economic opportunity for the people of Central Asia.

Let me conclude by stressing that while it can be slow and challenging to accomplish far-reaching change, I am optimistic about the future of the region and our engagement with the governments and people of Central Asia. Islam will clearly feature as an important dimension of Central Asia's development, and one to which we must give due attention. Your conference will add to our understanding of these important currents.

But the core issues ahead for Central Asia remain squarely centered on the need for continued progress in political and economic reform where we will continue to work together. As the transitions in Afghanistan continue, we will continue to work with our Central Asian partners to tackle the shared challenges posed by transnational criminal activity, to develop more open societies, and to bring about more connectivity and economic opportunity in the region. This region, at the crossroads of East and West, surrounded by some of the most dynamic economies in the world today, is much too important for us to walk away from.

And with that, I welcome your questions and look forward to a good discussion.

# Policy Papers

# US Policy toward Independent Central Asia: The Record and Key Variables

*Geoffrey Wright*

As the United States approaches the end of NATO's combat operations in Afghanistan in 2014, it is easy to forget the path that cooperation between the United States and Central Asia has taken over the last twenty years. We also often, in our focus on the present, lose sight of what was important in the past. This paper takes a regional approach to the "variables" that drove US-Central Asian cooperation, particularly in the security realm. It does not attempt to conduct in-depth analysis of internal political situations and individual bilateral relationships—all of which are well handled by other authors in other forums. Nor does this paper attempt to delve into the intricate web of impacts of NATO's efforts in Afghanistan on the region—again, all of which are ably handled elsewhere. Instead, this paper briefly outlines the scope of US security policy goals in Central Asia before the Afghan War and how those goals changed during the course of the Afghan War. Finally, the paper discusses competing models for Central Asian-US cooperation after the conclusion of NATO's combat operations in Afghanistan in 2014.

Over the last twenty years, US policy in the region has focused on several key priorities: removing the threat of "loose nukes" and unsupervised Soviet weapons of mass destruction (WMD) through cooperative threat reduction (CTR) programs, countering terrorism and the narcotics trade through border security initiatives, and establishing military cooperation in support of US national objectives. US efforts have also striven to set the conditions for democratic governance and the cooperation of individual Central Asian states with each other, while simultaneously integrating the region with international (especially Western-oriented) organizations and markets beyond its immediate region—a new "Silk Road." The United States has been most successful at reducing the risk from WMD and developing strong bilateral military programs focused at the tactical level. After twenty years, Central Asia is not governed or manipulated by a resurgent Russian revanchist power, American-oriented democratic development, or Chinese economic hegemony. Individual Central Asian states have demonstrated greater confidence in their abilities to make choices from a "multivector" range of policy options, which must condition US policy approaches to the future of US-Central Asian relations.

## Developing Initial Relationships and Initial Priorities

Following the end of the Soviet Union in December 1991, over a dozen newly independent states emerged from the former Soviet space. Few of these countries had any substantial history of independent political existence or democratic civilian governance. Most worryingly, Kazakhstan

and Ukraine inherited nuclear weapons previously held by Soviet forces stationed on their territories. The involvement of elements of the Soviet military in a coup attempt against the leadership of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev caused concern at the perceived lack of civilian control over military forces, particularly when nuclear weapons were involved.

The Freedom Support Act of 1992 provided the initial foundation for US cooperation with the newly independent states. The law set as goals safeguarding nuclear weapons and materials, countering possible proliferation of nuclear materials and knowledge, converting the military infrastructure of the USSR to civilian use, and expanding “military-to-military contacts between the United States and the independent states.”<sup>1</sup>

Because of the large number of nuclear weapons and the amount of nuclear material in the Soviet Union, ensuring accountability for nuclear programs emerged as the top priority of US engagement with the former Soviet Union. The US Congress took initial steps in 1991 with passage of legislation, the “Soviet Nuclear Threat Reduction Act of 1991,” popularly known as the “Nunn-Lugar Act.” Though opposed in some quarters due to its reallocation of US defense dollars towards aid to the Soviet Union,<sup>2</sup> sponsoring Senator Sam Nunn warned that “we are on the verge of either having the greatest destruction of nuclear weapons in the history of the world or the greatest proliferation of nuclear weapons, nuclear materials, and scientific know-how on how to make these weapons, as well as chemical weapons, ballistic missiles, even biological weapons, the world has ever seen.”<sup>3</sup>

Within Central Asia, Kazakhstan’s open steppes contained a large number of weapons, storage facilities, and testing grounds. While Kazakhstan initially expressed concern about denuclearization, the promise of US financial assistance led to Kazakhstan’s promising to remove its nuclear arsenal,<sup>4</sup> and the two countries signed a Cooperative Threat Reduction Agreement in December 1993.<sup>5</sup> Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev gave strong but quiet support for removing the Soviet weapons legacy from Kazakhstan, and US CTR programs were able to facilitate the transfer of nuclear weapons to Russia by 1995.<sup>6</sup>

More dramatically, according to the *Washington Post*, US CTR programs in Kazakhstan in 1994 were able to identify and remove over 1,300 pounds of highly enriched uranium from the former Soviet research facility at Ust-Kamenogorsk, in northern Kazakhstan, with the personal permission of President Nazarbaev.<sup>7</sup> Besides the removal of uranium, by 2000 US-Kazakh CTR

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<sup>1</sup> The Freedom Support Act, Pub. L. No. 102-511, 106 Stat. 3320 (1992), available at: <http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/ctr/docs/s2532.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Wood and Jason Bernstein, “The Origins of Nunn-Lugar and Cooperative Threat Reduction,” (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2010). Available at [http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/casestudies/CSWMD\\_CaseStudy-3.pdf](http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/casestudies/CSWMD_CaseStudy-3.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Amy F. Woolf, “Nonproliferation and Threat Reduction Assistance: US Programs in the Former Soviet Union,” CRS Report for Congress (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 6, 2012). Available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RL31957.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. McCarthy, *The Limits of Friendship: US Security Cooperation in Central Asia* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2007), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Giragosian, “The Strategic Central Asian Arena,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (2006): 133–53. Available at: [http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/cef/quarterly/february\\_2006/richard\\_giragosian.pdf](http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/cef/quarterly/february_2006/richard_giragosian.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Syed Bukhari, “Cooperative Threat Reduction: The Case Study of Kazakhstan,” *Eurasia Review*, June 13, 2011. Available at <http://www.eurasiareview.com/13062011-cooperative-threat-reduction-case-study-of-kazakhstan-analysis/>

<sup>7</sup> David E. Hoffman, “Half a Ton of Uranium, and a Long Flight,” *Washington Post*, September 21, 2009.

programs had led to the transfer of 1,400 nuclear warheads, the transfer and destruction of over one hundred Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) silos, and the destruction of a nuclear test center and biological weapons facility.<sup>8</sup>

CTR stands as an example of a successful, if expensive, American program. From a moment in the 1990s when key senators were warning of the “diversion or unauthorized use of weapons, diversion of fissile materials, and possible participation of Soviet weapons scientists in proliferation efforts in other countries ... a threat to US national security,”<sup>9</sup> the programs were indeed successful in identifying, transferring, and making safe a large number of weapons.

After this initial surge of concern in the early 1990s, by the mid-1990s CTR programs had become one leg of a variety of US programs focused on promoting regional security, particularly in the wake of the Tajik Civil War and the Taliban’s victory in Afghanistan. American concerns with potential WMD proliferation to problematic regimes like Iran or Iraq and to terrorist groups ensured the continued funding of these initiatives in Russia and other former Soviet states.<sup>10</sup> In 1996, Special Envoy for the Newly Independent States James Collins outlined six general areas of effort for the United States in Central Asia:

- (1) support for their independence and security; (2) assistance in the establishment of free markets and democratic governments; (3) integration of the states into the world community of political and financial institutions, and participation in the Euro-Atlantic security dialogue; (4) encouragement of regional cooperation and the settlement of disputes with international mediation; (5) prevention of trafficking in weapons of mass destruction and other transnational threats such as terrorism, drugs, and environmental degradation; and (6) enhancement of US commercial interests and the diversification of world energy supplies.<sup>11</sup>

Many, if not all of these goals demanded additional US attention to the capacity of Central Asian states to establish sovereignty over their own territories, and preferably cooperate with neighbors in common efforts to do the same.<sup>12</sup> The initial concerns about “loose nukes” in the immediate post-Soviet period changed to a focus on the ability of transnational terrorist groups, Al Qaeda among them, to take advantage of ungoverned spaces under poor border control to move nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and materials through the region. In addition, the region’s proximity to Afghanistan and Iran, the violence of the Tajik Civil War, and challenging interstate borders led some analysts to believe that Central Asian states could be susceptible to violent extremism.<sup>13</sup> The attacks by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU),

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<sup>8</sup> Nuclear Threat Initiative, “NTI Country Profiles: Kazakhstan” (Washington, DC: NTI, August 2012). Available at: <http://www.nti.org/country-profiles/kazakhstan/>

<sup>9</sup> Bukhari, “Cooperative Threat Reduction.”

<sup>10</sup> Woolf, “Nonproliferation and Threat Reduction,” 6.

<sup>11</sup> Jim Nichol, “Central Asia’s New States: Political Developments and Implications for US Interests,” CRS Issue Brief (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 19, 1996). Available at: <http://www.fas.org/man/crs/93-108.htm>

<sup>12</sup> McCarthy, *Limits of Friendship*, 27.

<sup>13</sup> Nichol, “Central Asia’s New States,” 10.

striving to establish a caliphate in the Fergana Valley between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in 1999, underlined the seriousness of these concerns<sup>14</sup> and led the United States to designate the IMU as a foreign terrorist organization in 2000.<sup>15</sup>

The United States also combated these issues through security cooperation activities—focused on the training, equipment, and education of partner military nations. Whereas early cooperation centered on Kazakhstan, due in large part to the quantity of nuclear weapons located in the state, cooperation by the mid-1990s increasingly included Uzbekistan. The United States signed military cooperation agreements with Kazakhstan in 1994 and Uzbekistan in 1998, underlining both the interest of the United States in greater cooperation in Central Asia and Central Asian leaders' growing interest in partnership with the United States.<sup>16</sup>

The United States, alongside NATO partners, used several military cooperation programs to build closer ties with Central Asian countries in the security sphere. NATO's Partnership for Peace program, a US-supported initiative designed to improve interoperability and democratic control of the military with a view towards peacekeeping operation participation, gained the entrance of all Central Asian states by 1994 other than Tajikistan, which joined in 2002.<sup>17</sup> Partnership for Peace served as a framework for a number of military-to-military, defense reform, and civil-military relations programs designed to underpin democratic transition in the former Warsaw Pact. These programs were supplemented by additional NATO and partner initiatives, such as the United States' Warsaw Initiative Fund of 1994, which provided additional funding for defense reform and defense planning courses in support of Partnership for Peace objectives.<sup>18</sup>

Partnership for Peace also provided the impetus for the formation of a combined Central Asia Battalion (CENTASBAT) in 1995, earmarked for participation in UN peacekeeping missions but also designed to be a forum for Central Asian cooperation.<sup>19</sup> Built around a unit of about five hundred soldiers drawn from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, the combined unit conducted several high-profile combined exercises with US partners in both the United States and Central Asia between 1998 and 2000.<sup>20</sup> Although the mission attracted the attention of senior Central Asian leaders, internal difficulties between the participating nations, as well as the start of combat operations in Afghanistan, led to the quiet demise of this initiative.<sup>21</sup>

The United States most directly attempted to improve state capacity in Central Asia through bilateral training activities and events. US Army Special Forces conducted training programs in Uzbekistan beginning in approximately 1999,<sup>22</sup> with similar medical and mountain training

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<sup>14</sup> Ted Donnelly, "Fergana as FATA: Central Asia after 2014—Outcomes and Strategic Options," *CONNECTIONS: The Quarterly Journal* XI, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 4.

<sup>15</sup> Nichol, "Central Asia's New States", 19.

<sup>16</sup> Giragosian, "Strategic Central Asian Arena," 141.

<sup>17</sup> McCarthy, *Limits of Friendship*, 35.

<sup>18</sup> See "Warsaw Initiative Fund," <http://www.dsca.mil/programs/warsaw-initiative-funds>

<sup>19</sup> McCarthy, *Limits of Friendship*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> Kenley Butler, "US Military Cooperation with the Central Asian States" (Middlebury, VT: James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, September 17, 2001). Available at: <http://cns.miiis.edu/archive/wtc01/uscamil.htm>

<sup>21</sup> McCarthy, *Limits of Friendship*, 45.

<sup>22</sup> C. J. Chivers, "Long before War, Green Berets Built Military Ties to Uzbekistan," *New York Times*, October 25, 2001.



occurring simultaneously in Kazakhstan. These efforts were paralleled by an array of other military-to-military activities, including an expanded program to provide professional military schooling to Central Asian defense and military leaders, as well as donated equipment.

In addition to military training, the general concern for borders and governance also spurred additional programs to enhance border security efforts in the region, culminating in a Central Asian Border Security Initiative (CASI) launched in 2000.<sup>23</sup> Enhancing border security, besides supporting broader goals of improving state capacity and countering the threat of trafficking of WMD materials, had the additional bonus of countering the flow of narcotics across Central Asia, seen by many regional countries as a major security threat.<sup>24</sup>

In Uzbekistan, US border security efforts were subordinated to the Export Control and Related Border Security (EXBS) program, created originally to coordinate CTR efforts across civilian agencies. The United States provided training and instruction on a broad range of human rights and technical issues.<sup>25</sup> In Kazakhstan, US security assistance programs focused on developing infrastructure and equipment for the Kazakh State Border Service and Customs Service, to include the delivery of patrol boats in 1995 and 1996 and the survey of maritime security port facilities at the city of Aktau on the Caspian Sea.<sup>26</sup> Turkmenistan received a large patrol boat in 2000 to assist its own patrolling efforts in the Caspian.<sup>27</sup>

US programs also attempted to assist Central Asian states in improving their energy market options. Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, with substantial deposits of oil and gas, were bound to Soviet-era pipelines routed through Russia, which often had difficulty paying for the energy supplies. In response, Turkmenistan refused to sell gas to Russia for an extended period beginning in 1997.<sup>28</sup> The United States, in concert with Turkey and other regional states, began pushing for the establishment of a trans-Caspian pipeline to link Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to Western markets<sup>29</sup> through a pipeline to the Mediterranean across Azerbaijan and Georgia, a proposal that annoyed Russia and enraged Iran.<sup>30</sup> These efforts did lead to agreements on paper promising the sale and delivery of hydrocarbons across the Caspian Sea,<sup>31</sup> but a combination of Russian and Iranian opposition, uncertainty arising from the undemarcated Caspian maritime borders, and increasing costs resulted in only the Azerbaijan-to-Turkey pipeline (the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline) being built.

By the end of the 1990s, the United States appeared to be gradually moving towards utilizing the energy resources of Central Asia as a means to secure the sovereignty of the newly independent states. By the end of the decade, most of the highest-profile CTR programs had been completed

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<sup>23</sup> Giragosian, "Strategic Central Asian Arena," 142.

<sup>24</sup> Seth Jones, et al., "Securing Tyrants or Fostering Reforms: US Internal Security Assistance to Repressive and Transitioning Regimes" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006), 52. Available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG550.html>

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>26</sup> McCarthy, *Limits of Friendship*, 31

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>28</sup> S. Frederick Starr, Charles Fairbanks, C. Richard Nelson, and Kenneth Weisbrode, "A Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia, 1999–2000" (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, January 2001). Available at [http://www.fbird.com/assets/publication\\_\\_7152003192748.pdf](http://www.fbird.com/assets/publication__7152003192748.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> "Central Asia: Pipeline Poker," *The Economist*, February 5, 1998. Available at <http://www.economist.com/node/112340>

<sup>30</sup> "World: Iran's Fury over Caspian Pipeline," *BBC News*, February 21, 1999. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/283325.stm>

<sup>31</sup> For example, see "International Business: 2 Nations Agree on Gas Pipeline," *New York Times*, October 30, 1998. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/10/30/business/international-business-2-nations-agree-on-gas-pipeline.html>

or were on the way to completion. The US Congress in 2000 passed the Silk Road Strategy Act, which emphasized the creation of an east–west pipeline route and other infrastructure as a means of improving regional stability. The act also posited that US strategy “should be narrowly targeted to support the economic and political independence as well as democracy building, free market policies, human rights, and regional economic integration of the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia.”<sup>32</sup>

US military assessments of the region combined the prevailing view of economic uncertainty with vague hopes for regional cooperation. In Congressional testimony from April 2000, General Anthony Zinni, the commander of US Central Command (which had assumed military responsibility for Central Asia in 1999) outlined a view of Central Asia as “struggling centralized governments searching for new economic alternatives,” with significant regional stability difficulties arising from the recently ended Tajik Civil War and the Taliban “victory” in Afghanistan. However, at the same time, Zinni’s military cooperation priority, puzzlingly, was establishing “apolitical, professional militaries, capable of responding to regional peacekeeping and humanitarian needs.”<sup>33</sup>

## Assessing the Initial US-Central Asian Relationship

Overall, the United States had a mixed record of policy successes in the first years after the independence of the Central Asian States. The CTR effort stands as the most successful of US programs—a success highlighted by the high strategic priority placed on the program. Border security programs built on the successes of CTR and likely improved the ability of Central Asian states to understand modern border procedures after the loss, in many cases, of Soviet and Russian border expertise. Military engagement has a more mixed record. While US military personnel worked through new legislation and challenging bureaucracies to establish initial contacts and relationships with military counterparts, begin international education and training programs, and conduct high-visibility exercises, the US military had little success in developing multinational peacekeeping units. The US also had little initial success in developing coherent energy delivery solutions on the east shore of the Caspian that met market needs or significantly reduced transit dependence on Russia. Perhaps most notably, none of the US engagement programs seems to have had much success in promoting stronger democratic governance. In fact, in the highest-priority engagement countries, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the late 1990s were marked by increased political repression and violations of the charter of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other standards of free press and assembly.

## Variables in the US-Central Asia Relationship after 2001

The response to the Al-Qaeda attacks against New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, launched the second phase of US-Central Asian engagement. The resulting basing agreements and logistical activities in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan were described as “support for

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<sup>32</sup> Silk Road Strategy Act, 106th Congress, S-579, May 11, 1999. Available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-106s579rs/pdf/BILLS-106s579rs.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Statement of General Anthony Zinni to the Senate Armed Services Committee, February 29, 2000. Available at <http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2000/000229az.pdf>

counterterrorism.” The scope and size of these engagements, combined with more substantial military partnership agreements, impacted other security cooperation activities, energy cooperation, and efforts to reform governance.

Assistant Secretary of Defense J. D. Crouch, speaking to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in June 2002, outlined how efforts in Afghanistan and the desire for bases had greatly changed the priorities for cooperation. Prior to 9/11, Crouch testified, the United States’ efforts were “aimed at eliminating the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction, strengthening these states’ sovereignty and independence and supporting defense reform . . . promoting regional peacekeeping capabilities and fostering greater regional cooperation.” These efforts had undoubtedly facilitated the ability of the United States to gain needed logistical support in the region, but the priority now would be “to support actions to deter or defeat terrorist threats” like the IMU and work with partners towards “eliminating terrorism” in the region.<sup>34</sup>

Sustaining these newly invigorated relationships required a significant commitment of personnel and financial resources in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Michael McCarthy has described the year following the attacks as the “high water mark of US security cooperation efforts in Central Asia.” Efforts to obtain bases and the ability to fly over sovereign territory required high rent payments to the host governments. Additionally, security cooperation programs saw significant budget increases. During the 1990s security cooperation programs in Central Asia were not a significant financial priority, particularly compared to Ukraine. By 2001–2002 military aid to the region was four times as high as the total expenditures for the previous four years,<sup>35</sup> though this initial surge tailed off quickly as initial US combat operations in Afghanistan declined in scope. These high-profile efforts have continued, with the establishment of a US-funded “antiterrorist” center in Kyrgyzstan a notable example of the US bilateral focus on partnering with (often elite) units capable of conducting domestic counterterrorist operations.<sup>36</sup>

The emphasis on counterterrorism in Central Asian relationships had a number of other indirect costs. Increasing the size of military commitments in Central Asia exposed the United States to the fragilities of Central Asian domestic politics. Protests in 2005 resulted in the fall of the Kyrgyz government of Askar Akayev and the rise of Kurmanbek Bakiyev to power. At the same time, rising domestic discontent in Uzbekistan seems to have led to a reconsideration by Uzbek President Islam Karimov as to whether the presence of American bases enhanced or degraded regime stability and security. Uzbekistan, which since the late 1990s had adopted an arms-length posture towards Russia, even going so far as to join a loose grouping with other Western-oriented post-Soviet states, began to have a far more tense relationship with the United States. The reaction of the United States, partially based on human rights concerns, to the shooting of Uzbek protesters in the city of Andijon in May 2005 provided the final cause of Uzbekistan’s request for the United States to cease operations in the country, although

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<sup>34</sup> Statement of the Honorable J. D. Crouch II, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, June 27, 2002. Available at [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/congress/2002\\_hr/shrg627.pdf](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/congress/2002_hr/shrg627.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> It is important to note that Tajikistan joined the Partnership for Peace in 2002 and became eligible for US military assistance at this point. See McCarthy, *Limits of Friendship*, 105 for a graphical depiction.

<sup>36</sup> Erica Marat and Den Isa, “US Assists Kyrgyzstan in Constructing and Anti-Terrorist Center in Balkan,” *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, March 11, 2010.

Germany was permitted to continue operations.<sup>37</sup> The “Color Revolutions” also led to Russian concern that US democracy-promotion programs were designed to undermine states in the region.<sup>38</sup>

The resulting dependence of US support operations on the transit center at Manas further exposed the United States to Kyrgyz domestic political events. Kyrgyz President Bakiyev, reacting in part to Russian pressure to close Manas, announced that US operations would cease in 2009. Regime changes in 2005 and 2010 were followed both by Kyrgyz government overtures to Moscow and by demands to close the base, which were only quieted by significant increases in rent payments to the Kyrgyz government.<sup>39</sup>

The establishment of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), a network of road and rail connections, in 2009 has proven to be an expensive, if generally effective, solution to the occasional loss of or threats to other transit options to Afghanistan. Costing an estimated \$500 million per year by 2012,<sup>40</sup> the NDN has succeeded in diverting much of the “nonlethal” cargo for support of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) away from Pakistan through more secure, if slower, lines of communication. It has also represented a means of connecting Afghanistan, and by extension Central Asia, to the EU states through routes via Russia and Georgia.

## Russia, China, and the CSTO/SCO

After achieving initial support from Russian President Vladimir Putin, the seeming open-ended nature of the US presence in Central Asia also complicated the US-Russian relationship in the region. Russia launched efforts to reinvigorate the Collective Security Treaty through the founding in 2002 of a new multinational organization focused on counterterrorism, the Tashkent-based Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which included most Central Asian states along with Belarus and Armenia. Besides sponsoring numerous military operations in the region, the CSTO also publicly announced the establishment of “CSTO” military bases in Tajikistan and Kant, Kyrgyzstan, not far from the US transit center at Manas.<sup>41</sup> Russian senior figures have publicly questioned the need for a continued US presence in Central Asia, as they simultaneously have expressed concern about the future of the region without a significant NATO presence: Russian acquiescence to a US military presence has always been conditioned on a US commitment to end that presence once the Afghanistan war was won. With the US and Afghanistan contemplating a continued US military presence after 2014, Russia has launched efforts to extend its military and border presence in Central Asia.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Alexander Cooley, “The New Great Game in Central Asia: Geopolitics in a Post-Western World,” *Foreign Affairs.com*, August 7, 2012. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/central-asia/2012-08-07/new-great-game-central-asia>.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, “Putin Calls ‘Color Revolutions’ an Instrument of Destabilization,” *Kyiv Post*, December 15, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Cooley, “New Great Game.”

<sup>40</sup> Deidre Tynan, “Central Asia: Who’s the Big Winner in the NDN Sweepstakes?” *Eurasianet.org*, February 7, 2012. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64969>

<sup>41</sup> Richard Weitz, “The CIS Is Dead: Long Live the CSTO,” *CACI Analyst*, February 8, 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Erica Marat, “Russia Seeks Long-Term Military Presence in Central Asia,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, September 22, 2011.

In the view of Alexander Cooley, Alexandros Peterson, and Raffaello Pantucci, China has quietly become the most significant economic actor in Central Asia.<sup>43</sup> China has made significant investments in both Central Asian hydrocarbon production and transit. The Central Asia–China pipeline and a similar pipeline from Kazakhstan have underwritten an overall increase in trade from \$527 million in 1992 to \$40 billion in 2011, with additional pipelines from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in the works, potentially with connections to India and Pakistan.<sup>44</sup>

Without question, China and Russia remain major actors in the region, but their attempts at multilateralism as expressed in the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) have mostly fallen flat. Peterson and Pantucci have described the SCO as a “a powerfully symbolic, but institutionally empty actor,” while Cooley points out that the SCO “has failed to translate its official announcements into actual regional cooperation,” in part because China and Russia have differing views of what regional cooperation should mean and tend to adopt their own bilateral approaches.<sup>45</sup> The CSTO, likewise, has difficulty convincing its members to conduct major exercises. As with the United States, Russia and China tend to accomplish the most when acting bilaterally with individual Central Asian states.

## Assessment of the Variables of US Relations with Central Asia 2001–2013

The focus of US–Central Asian engagement on support to operations in Afghanistan represented a shift in effort from the previous ten years. During the 2000s, the military-focused nature of cooperation both massively increased the monetary value of assistance and engagement and changed the nature of the relationship to one akin to a series of business transactions. While previous efforts at CTR and energy security continued, in the context of the US–Central Asia relationships they were subordinated to ensuring continued support for operations in Afghanistan. However, the United States has managed to utilize its bilateral relationships to ensure continued support for troops in Afghanistan.

In contrast to the Central Asia of the 1990s, the stability of which Fiona Hill described as “threatened by their extreme domestic fragility,”<sup>46</sup> the Central Asian states of the late 2000s to differing degrees have demonstrated the ability to balance and make strategic choices. Kyrgyzstan’s savvy 2009 efforts to negotiate new basing agreements with the United States and Russia at the same time indicate confidence that it can work between regional powers to its own advantage.<sup>47</sup> Its recent negotiation with Russia of a long-term basing agreement at Kant while recently announcing the end of US operations in 2014 suggests that Kyrgyz leaders are confident in their abilities to balance competing powers. Likewise, Uzbekistan’s relationship to the Russian-led CSTO—from standing apart to participation to withdrawal in 2012—indicates

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<sup>43</sup> See Cooley, “New Great Game”; Alexandros Peterson and Raffaello Pantucci, “China and Central Asia in 2013,” *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, January 18, 2013. Cooley has since published these thoughts in *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> Fakhmiddin Fazilov and Xiangming Chen, “China and Central Asia: A Significant New Energy Nexus,” *The European Financial Review*, April 19, 2013. Available at: <http://www.europeanfinancialreview.com/?p=6451>

<sup>45</sup> Alexander Cooley, “Cooperation Gets Shanghaied: China, Russia, and the SCO,” *Foreign Affairs.com*, December 14, 2009. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2009-12-14/cooperation-gets-shanghaied>

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Daniel Burghart, “The New Nomads? The American Military Presence in Central Asia,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (2007): 6.

<sup>47</sup> See “Russia Wins Military Base Extension in Kyrgyzstan,” *Russia Today*, August 16, 2012; Joshua Kucera, “Kyrgyzstan ‘Cancels’ US Air Base Lease; Washington Not Giving Up,” *Eurasianet.org*, May 21, 2013. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66993>

a sense that it has strategic orientation options, particularly after the United States began to slowly warm bilateral ties.<sup>48</sup> The ability of Russia to dominate energy transit in the region has been significantly undercut not just by the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan outline for oil but now by the development of pipeline routes from Central Asia to China and by the increasing adoption of liquefied natural gas in the European Union.

True regional cooperation within Central Asia—through the efforts of the United States, China, or Russia—has been difficult to achieve. For all the discussion of the CSTO’s crisis management capabilities, it proved singularly unable to act decisively during two periods of instability in Kyrgyzstan, likely in large part due to the reluctance of member states to act collectively in another member state.<sup>49</sup> Russia’s bilateral relations with Central Asian states are generally much stronger than their relationships with the CSTO. The United States, likewise, has achieved short-term policy objectives with individual Central Asian states<sup>50</sup> but has not yet been able to use initiatives like the Northern Distribution Network as a platform to encourage better Central Asian cooperation with Afghanistan. American efforts to overcome regional issues to establish a trans-Caspian pipeline remain stalled. Michael McCarthy points out that by 2005, it was already difficult to find a US military planner who remembered what the CENTASBAT was or why it faded away.<sup>51</sup>

The sources of domestic instability, from Tajikistan’s political divisions, to the ethnic unrest in the Ferghana Valley, and especially the unclear leadership succession scenarios in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan remain largely unaddressed. Erica Marat points out that Central Asian states have not developed lasting mechanisms across similar agencies to develop and implement regional solutions to challenges of instability.<sup>52</sup> The looming end of NATO’s combat operations in Afghanistan in 2014 has leaders across the region worrying about the impact of Afghan instability on their own states.

## The Post-2014 Variables: The New “New Silk Road”?

What variables will be most salient after 2014? In 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton laid out a vision of a “New Silk Road” to support the development of a stable Afghanistan by linking it to its Central and South Asian neighbors—in the words of Under Secretary of State Robert Hormats, if Afghanistan is “firmly embedded in the economic life of the region, it will be better able to attract new investment, benefit from its resource potential, and provide increasing economic opportunity and hope for its people.”<sup>53</sup> Based on many of the ideas of longtime Central Asia expert Frederick Starr,<sup>54</sup> this program largely bases the future of Central Asia and

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<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Joshua Kucera, “CSTO Takes Stock of Uzbekistan’s Departure,” Eurasianet.org, December 26, 2012, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66342>.

<sup>49</sup> Erica Marat, “Tsentr-2011 Gambles on Central Asia’s Participation,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, September 30, 2011.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Weitz, “Averting a New Great Game in Central Asia,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer (2006), 162.

<sup>51</sup> McCarthy, *Limits of Friendship*, 121.

<sup>52</sup> Erica Marat, “Soviet Military Legacy and Regional Security Cooperation in Central Asia,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (2007): 110.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Hormats, “The United States’ ‘New Silk Road’ Strategy—What Is It? Where Is It Headed?” Address to the SAIS Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and CSIS Forum, September 29, 2011. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/e/rls/rmk/2011/174800.htm>

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, S. Frederick Starr, “A Greater Central Asia Partnership for Afghanistan and Its Neighbors,” Silk Road Paper (Washington, DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, March 2005); “New Silk Road Strategy: Problems and Perspectives. An Interview with S. Frederick Starr,” Jamestown Foundation Blog, November 22, 2011, <http://>

Afghanistan on creating or recreating regional economic ties based primarily on US bilateral programs in the region. Many, including Joshua Kucera and George Gavrilis, have pointed out that in fact Central Asian states have shown a remarkable lack of economic cooperation with each other, much less with Afghanistan, taking actions from closing borders to demanding primacy in development projects to the detriment of the region.<sup>55</sup>

Alternatively, Jeffrey Mankoff, in his comprehensive study of the region, advocates couching US-Central Asian relations within a broader zone of cooperation between the US, China, and Russia to maintain stability and prevent state failure—particularly as the US moves its focus elsewhere in the world.<sup>56</sup> Army Colonel Ted Donnelly cautions against a complete disengagement from the region and advocates a tighter focus on border security and counterterrorism programs in concert with Afghanistan in place of the often unfocused or slow-adapting security cooperation programs of the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>57</sup>

The United States, at different times and places, has attempted to reduce the risk of nuclear and biological weapons programs, improve border security, enhance regional cooperation, reduce dependence on energy transit monopolies, and improve overall governance and human rights. The United States should learn lessons from the changing variables of US-Central Asia relations of the last two decades. The United States has generally had the greatest success acting bilaterally in programs with a small physical presence in Central Asia and focused on specific threats. Adopting the approach of CTR, the United States should assume that regional cooperation will develop slowly, if at all, and that agreement on a common goal with Russia and China on countering specific militant organizations or promoting individual development projects has the best chance of success. Central Asia will likely lose much of its prominence among US policy officials in the next decade, but a decade of investment in the future of Afghanistan should caution against allowing discouragement to drive policy.

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jamestownfoundation.blogspot.com/2011/11/new-silk-road-strategy-problems-and.html

<sup>55</sup> George Gavrilis, “Why Regional Solutions Won’t Help Afghanistan: The Myth of Neighborly Harmony,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 18, 2011; Joshua Kucera, “Clinton’s Dubious Plan to Save Afghanistan with a New Silk Road,” *The Atlantic.com*, November 2, 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/11/clintons-dubious-plan-to-save-afghanistan-with-a-new-silk-road/247760/>. For an example of a lack of regional cooperation in the energy sphere, see Erica Marat, “Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan Disagree on CASA-100,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, June 22, 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Jeffrey Mankoff, “The United States and Central Asia after 2014,” (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2013).

<sup>57</sup> Ted Donnelly, “Fergana as FATA: Central Asia after 2014—Outcomes and Strategic Options,” *CONNECTIONS: The Quarterly Journal* XI, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 11-27.

# Energy and Natural Resource Exports and the Islamic Future of Central Asia and Azerbaijan

*Brenda Shaffer*

This paper explores the influence of Central Asia and Azerbaijan's resource-exporting economies on the future of Islam in these states. In many of the established oil- and gas-exporting states of the Middle East, the countries' petroleum-oriented economic base has strengthened the role of political and radical Islam. This article examines whether similar factors are in place in Central Asia and Azerbaijan that could support a Middle East-style trajectory of the rentier economies and governance patterns that lend support to the flourishing of radical Islam. The economies of Central Asia and Azerbaijan are based primarily on natural resource exports, and in half of the states of the region, oil and gas are the principal exported resources. In all of the states of the region, energy and other mineral exports are the main sources of export revenue, and in most states they are the primary sources of government revenue as well. Most of the states of the region are also rentier states.

Why does the structure of the economy matter for Islamic radicalism? States that derive the majority of their income from oil, gas, and mineral exports often follow similar economic, social, and political patterns. These patterns include: economic underperformance, lack of transition to democracy, and higher propensity for involvement in military conflicts. These trends associated with resource-exporting states are collectively called the "resource curse."<sup>1</sup> States that experience the resource curse are typically also rentier economies. In a rentier economy, three factors are present. First, income derived from the state's natural resources is the most significant input into the economy. Second, the majority of this revenue comes from abroad. Third, only a small part of the population is engaged in generating the rent.<sup>2</sup> A corollary of the fact that few citizens are engaged in the generation of rent is that the state is the primary recipient of the rent revenue.<sup>3</sup> Rentier states also possess emblematic economic and political

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the resource curse, see Jeffrey Frankel, "The Natural Resource Curse: A Survey," in *Beyond the Resource Curse*, ed. Brenda Shaffer and Taleh Ziyadov (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 17-57; Brenda Shaffer, *Energy Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 28-46; Michael L. Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (2001): 325-61; Terry L. Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Hazem Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World," in *The Rentier State*, ed. Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (New York: Croom Helm, in association with Methuen, Inc., 1987), 51.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.



development patterns. States that border rentier states often possess semi-rentier economies and share some of their associated characteristics, since a large proportion of their labor force and economy is often linked to the economic activity in the resource-rich neighboring country.<sup>4</sup>

Due to the special circumstances of rentier states and the influence of the resource curse, most energy- and mineral-export economies possess attributes that can foster Islamic and other radicalism: boom-and-bust economic cycles, high unemployment rates, low human development levels despite financial wealth, ruling governments' capacity for co-optation, and high corruption rates. This paper discusses the influence of these factors associated with resource-based economies on the development of radical Islam, and the specific characteristics of the economies and governments of Central Asia and Azerbaijan in this context. The concluding section of this paper addresses the policy implications of this analysis.

## Boom-and-Bust Economies

Economies based on natural resource exports, and especially oil, are extremely volatile.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, economies of this type are subjected to recurring cycles of boom and bust, which have important implications for the growth of radicalism. During times of high energy prices and large state revenues, energy and natural resource exporters tend to undertake large-scale state spending, often aimed at satisfying popular demands. For instance, oil-exporting states tend to maintain large public subsidies for fuel, electricity, water, and food that consume a large share of their state budgets. When the price of the commodity they export falls, the states are left with these expensive spending commitments and a substantially reduced ability to meet them, leading to fiscal crisis. This provision of services and goods followed by deprivation creates inherent social dissatisfaction that in turn spurs radicalism, which can include religious radicalism.

Major oil exporters with large populations find it especially difficult to sustain their national budgets under the built-in conditions of oil price volatility. Since the collapse of global oil prices in August 2008, most energy exporters with large populations have maintained a large gap between their budgets and their energy export revenues. Oil- and gas-exporting states with small populations can sustain bust cycles more easily since they often maintain extensive fiscal reserves and need smaller amounts of funds to keep their smaller populations afloat.

States with boom-and-bust economies are not effective in developing public goods over time. These states operate in an environment of constant uncertainty, which creates a built-in challenge to budgets on every level of government. This uncertainty leads to unstable state investments and thus often produces inadequately maintained infrastructure, such as roads and electricity grids. It also creates difficulty in building human capital over the long term.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Beblawi, "Rentier State," 59–62; Rex Brynen, "Economic Crisis and Post-Rentier Democratization in the Arab World: The Case of Jordan," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 1 (March 1992): 69–97.

<sup>5</sup> See Jan Dehn, "The Effects on Growth of Commodity Price Uncertainty and Shocks," *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 2455* (World Bank Development Research Group: Rural Development, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Brenda Shaffer, "Introduction," in Shaffer and Ziyadov, *Beyond the Resource Curse*, 1-13; Theresa Sabonis-Helf, "Power to the Producers: The Challenge of Electricity Provision in Major Energy-Exporting States," in Shaffer and Ziyadov, *Beyond the Resource Curse*, 161-200.

Most economists in energy-producing states and international financial institutions see these countries' large subsidies for consumer goods like fuel as a major obstacle to economic growth.<sup>7</sup> For instance, after the election of President Mohammed Morsi in Egypt and under the government that followed there, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) set conditions on new loans to Egypt that required such subsidies to be reduced. Despite the wide consensus on the need to cut or reduce the extensive subsidies in the Middle East and other energy-based economies, most of these governments keep them in place, due to the (justified) fear that their reduction would unleash civil disorder that could encourage radical protests and threaten stability.

## High Unemployment Rates

Countries where oil, gas, and mineral production predominate often suffer from high levels of unemployment. These sectors generally require relatively small numbers of laborers. In addition, skilled laborers in the energy sector (such as engineers and geologists) are often foreign citizens posted in the producing states. Furthermore, major oil and gas exporters often experience an economic phenomenon known as “the Dutch disease.”<sup>8</sup> This happens when energy exports create a high influx of foreign currency that raises the value of the local currency, making export of other local goods uncompetitive on the global market. Consequently, many local industries and agricultural enterprises shrink, leaving oil and gas exports as the only significant sector of economic activity and contributing to further unemployment.

The collapse of the agricultural sector in many energy-exporting and other resource-exporting economies uproots populations that seek work in urban areas close to the country's energy production industry. These internal migrants often live in “shantytowns,” poor neighborhoods in capital cities or urban centers situated near resource-production facilities that are not prepared to absorb population growth and do not provide proper services to these migrant populations.<sup>9</sup> Away from the moderating effects of the familiar cultures and extended family structures that provide a safety net in their native villages, these migrants are even more susceptible to radicalism. In addition, economies of this type generally have very large income gaps, creating relative deprivation that can also feed radicalism.<sup>10</sup> The high unemployment and underemployment of these economies leave vast numbers of citizens who seek activity and meaning in their daily lives more susceptible to joining radical movements.

The lack of demand for labor in energy-exporting economies contributes significantly to women's low levels of integration in the labor forces of these countries. There is also less of an incentive to educate women if they are not needed in the labor force. Thus, birth rates tend

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<sup>7</sup> See for instance: Ahmad Mojtahed, “The Illusion of Unlimited Supply: Iran and Energy Subsidies,” in Shaffer and Ziyadov, *Beyond the Resource Curse*, 110-137; Vitaliy Kramarenko, Leo Bonato, and Roman Zyttek, “Islamic Republic of Iran: Selected Issues,” *International Monetary Fund Report* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund Publications Services, 2008), 23-34; and Trevor Morgan, *Reforming Energy Subsidies: Opportunity to Contribute to the Climate Change Agenda* (Geneva: United Nations Environment Programme, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> See Mohsen Fardmanesh, “Dutch Disease Economics and Oil Syndrome: An Empirical Study,” *World Development* 19, no. 6 (1991): 711-17.

<sup>9</sup> Residents of these shantytowns were mobilized and played an important role in the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. See Brenda Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 80.

<sup>10</sup> See Thorvaldur Gylfason and Gylfi Zoega, “Inequality and Economic Growth: Do Natural Resources Matter?” in Eicher and Turnovsky, *Inequality and Growth: Theory and Policy Implications*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 255-92.

to be higher in these societies. Given these trends, Michael Ross has claimed that oil and gas exports actually contribute to gender inequality. This economic factor thus contributes to an outcome that is generally associated with Islamic societies, but may be more rooted in the fact that many of these countries are oil exporters.<sup>11</sup>

## Low Human Development Levels

A corollary of the low employment rates in resource-exporting states is that they tend to have low levels of human development as defined by the indicators of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).<sup>12</sup> Low demands for labor and foreign workers' monopolization of skilled labor positions contribute to these low human development rates. This trend is especially intriguing in light of the fact that many of these same states have sufficient wealth to sponsor education and other human development initiatives.

In fact, the lack of demand for labor (and especially skilled labor) in energy-exporting and other resource-exporting economies means that states can attain relatively high levels of wealth without making some of the modern transitions generally associated with a developed economy (higher education rates, development of good trade and communications infrastructure, reduction of corruption, meritocracy, transparency of economic data, social and labor mobility, and the rule of law in financial transactions). In many energy- and resource-exporting states, the population uses modern technology, but does not embrace modernity. These are completely distinct phenomena with entirely different influences on social and political trends.

## Co-option Capacity

States with resource-based economies where the government is the main beneficiary of export revenue usually can use these funds to buy off political constituencies and stay in power as long as the revenue flow continues. This capacity to co-opt has a number of implications for the growth of radical Islam in Muslim-majority resource-exporting states. These regimes possess extensive capacity to endure domestic challenges to their rule due to the dedicated loyalty of key powerful segments of the population.

The ruling regimes in energy-exporting states tend to enjoy longevity except in the case of external intervention. Few regime changes not involving external intervention have taken place in major oil-exporting countries since the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> Giacomo Luciani refers to a state with a rentier economy as an "allocation state."<sup>14</sup> Through the creation of an extensive welfare system,

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<sup>11</sup> On the status of women in oil-exporting economies see Michael L. Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 111-144; and Michael L. Ross, "Oil, Islam, and Women," *American Political Science Review* 102, no. 1 (2008): 107-123.

<sup>12</sup> In a 2009 report issued by the UNDP, oil-based economies were considered the major impediment to human development in oil-rich Arab states. See Ali Abdel-Gader and Khalid Abu-Ismail, *Development Challenges for the Arab Region: A Human Development Approach*, vol. 1. UNDP report, RBAS (New York: United Nations Publications, December 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Smith, "Oil Wealth and Regime Survival in the Developing World, 1960-1999," *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 2 (April 2004): 232-46.

<sup>14</sup> Giacomo Luciani, "Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework," in *The Arab State*, ed. Giacomo Luciani (London: Routledge, 1990), 65-84.

the rentier state acquires legitimacy and support. Energy-exporting states tend to spend large amounts on public welfare and infrastructure. The state also has discretion to decide how the revenue is spent, further increasing its power.

For many regimes, public economic demands serve as an important impetus to mobilizing the population for regime change. In contrast, in major energy-exporting states, the economic motive is absent. Those who are loyal to the regime are most likely to receive employment and the greatest economic benefits, while those who oppose it can lose access to employment and benefits. Major oil-exporting states tend to offer employment to their university graduates, creating a large bureaucratic class beholden to the regime.

The results of the “Arab Spring” illustrate the influence that resource-based economies can have on political developments. During the wave of mass protests and regime changes that swept the Middle East beginning in late 2010, the energy-exporting states were the ones best endowed to weather the challenges to their rule. A major trigger of the protests was the rise in fuel and food costs that had occurred over the year preceding the outburst of demonstrations. In response to these demonstrations, Middle East energy-exporting states dramatically increased their public subsidies, blunting the impact of the rise in fuel and foods costs to the population. In contrast, their resource-poor counterparts did not possess this capacity. States that have gone from being energy exporters to energy importers, such as Egypt, and states with dwindling oil production rates, such as Syria, were not able to mitigate the effects of rising fuel and foods costs through increasing subsidies, since they no longer had extensive revenues from energy exports. In the case of Egypt, the state did not have access to sufficient domestically produced energy resources. Thus, we see that with the exception of Libya, which was a target of external intervention, all of the ruling regimes that fell during the “Arab Spring” were not major energy exporters and the oil-rich countries in the region survived the challenge.

In addition, ruling regimes in the Middle East fund large segments of their countries’ religious establishments and thus enjoy their allegiance. However, this alliance between mainstream religious forces and ruling regimes creates attraction to more radical religious forces that lie in juxtaposition to the ruling regimes. Thus, support for radical Islam becomes a major venue for expressing resistance to the ruling regimes.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout most of the twentieth century, most states that shared alliances with Middle Eastern oil producers (especially the United States and the United Kingdom) tacitly or directly supported this alliance between ruling regimes and Islamic forces, believing that this alliance contributed to these states’ stability. During the colonial period in the Middle East, Britain reinforced the Islamic authorities’ power and monopoly on education in countries they ruled in the Middle East in exchange for these authorities’ compliance with British rule and support for suppression of public challenges to it. Thus, external forces unintentionally played a role in empowering religious authorities in the region and leaving generations of people in the Middle East cut off from secular education.

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<sup>15</sup> A corollary to this trend is that radical Islamic forces often view the United States and other Western states as enemies of Islam due to their shared alliances with most of the ruling regimes in the major Middle East oil-producing states.

## Corruption

Resource-based economies tend to have high levels of corruption.<sup>16</sup> Despite formal proclamations and legal arrangements, few major oil exporters have genuine market economies. The state generally collects most of the profits from energy exports, and allocates them according to its political needs, thus becoming the dominant actor in the economy. Even the limited private sector in these countries is also dependent on state contracts and permission to conduct its affairs.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, state dominance of the economy often breeds corruption. It also makes it difficult for political opposition groups to obtain power, since they do not have access to significant wealth. At the same time, even after political transitions, ruling regimes in resource-based economies rarely change the role of the state in the economy, due to the benefits they gain once in power from their access to revenue from resource exports.

## Central Asia and Azerbaijan: Both Rentier and Modern

Will the factors associated with resource-export economies in the Middle East produce the development of radical Islam in Central Asia and Azerbaijan? Oil, natural gas, and minerals play a predominant role in a number of the economies of Central Asia and in Azerbaijan.

### *Kazakhstan*

Revenue from oil, natural gas, and minerals accounts for 27 percent of Kazakhstan's GDP.<sup>18</sup> In addition, 46.5 percent of government revenue is derived from mineral extraction and oil exports.

### *Turkmenistan*

Revenue from oil, natural gas, and minerals accounts for 43 percent of Turkmenistan's GDP.<sup>19</sup> Oil and gas made up 90 percent of Turkmenistan's exports and 54 percent of the government's revenue.<sup>20</sup>

### *Uzbekistan*

Oil, natural gas, and minerals account for 24 percent of Uzbekistan's GDP.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Carlos A. Leite and Jens Weidmann, "Does Mother Nature Corrupt? Natural Resources, Corruption, and Economic Growth," *IMF Working Paper 99/85* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund Publication Services, 2001); and Xavier Sala-i-Martin and Arvind Subramanian, "Addressing the Natural Resource Curse: An Illustration from Nigeria," *National Bureau of Economic Research*, no. w9804 (Cambridge, MA: NBER, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Giacomo Luciani, "Resources, Revenues, and Authoritarianism in the Arab World," in *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*, vol. 1: *Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Rex Brynen, Bahdat Korany, and Paul Noble (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995): 215.

<sup>18</sup> World Bank, World Development Indicators (Online database, 2010). Customized report available at: [databank.worldbank.org/data/Central-Asia/id/f8b45094](http://databank.worldbank.org/data/Central-Asia/id/f8b45094).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> IMF, *Macroeconomic Policy Frameworks for Resource-Rich Developing Countries* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund Publication Services, August 2012), 48. Available at: <http://www.imf.org/external/np/pp/eng/2012/082412.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> World Bank Group, *Uzbekistan Country Program Snapshot* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, April 2014). Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Uzbekistan-Snapshot.pdf>.

### *Kyrgyzstan*

Mining and energy account for 14 percent of Kyrgyzstan's GDP (10 percent mining and 4 percent energy).

Despite its small portion of Kyrgyzstan's GDP, mining accounts for 26 percent of the country's tax revenue and 50 percent of its export earnings.<sup>22</sup>

### *Tajikistan*

Aluminum accounts for 10 percent of Tajikistan's GDP and 50 percent of the state's exports.<sup>23</sup>

### *Azerbaijan*

Oil, natural gas, and minerals comprise 53 percent of Azerbaijan's GDP. Revenue from energy and minerals account for 60 percent of government earnings.<sup>24</sup>

A number of the factors that have contributed to the growth of radical Islam among the oil and gas exporters of the Middle East are present in the majority of the states of the Central Asia and Azerbaijan region: boom-and-bust economic cycles, capacity of the state to co-opt its citizens through financial allocations and jobs, and high levels of corruption. At the same time, one critical element is fundamentally different: the states of Central Asia and Azerbaijan experienced extensive modernization, in most cases, prior to the advent of extensive energy and mineral export. Consequently, the states of the region enjoy high levels of human development<sup>25</sup> and do not suffer from the high rates of unemployment and underemployment that are typical of the energy producers in the Middle East. All of the states of Central Asia and Azerbaijan achieved extensive modernization prior to the Soviet breakup and the advent of independent oil export; the states and most of their populations are secular as are the educational systems. Their populations enjoy nearly universal literacy, both men and women are highly educated, women are fully integrated in the workforce, there is social and occupational mobility and in some states meritocracy, and there are strong ties between citizens of the state that transcend local or regional identities. Moreover, a number of the states' economies were diverse and not dependent on energy or mineral exports prior to the development of larger-scale energy and other resource exports.

There are several other factors that differentiate oil-exporting states in Central Asia and Azerbaijan from those in the Middle East. First, the oil industry and revenue funds in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are managed in a relatively transparent manner under the rule of law. Second, foreign forces active in Central Asia and Azerbaijan do not reinforce an alliance between the ruling regimes and Islamic leaders, as was the case at least tacitly in the Middle East through most of the twentieth century. Third, due to the small populations of most of the states of the Central Asia and Azerbaijan region, the ruling regimes can deal more effectively with the boom-

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<sup>22</sup> World Bank, *Kyrgyz Republic Overview* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, April 2014). Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic/overview>.

<sup>23</sup> World Bank, *Tajikistan Republic Overview* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, October 2014). Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tajikistan/overview>.

<sup>24</sup> IMF, *Republic of Azerbaijan: 2011 Article IV Consultation*, IMF Country Report No. 12/5 (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund Publication Services, January 2012). Available at: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2012/cr1205.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> See the 2011 UNDP Human Development Index report for a full list of country development rankings. Available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2011\\_EN\\_Table1.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2011_EN_Table1.pdf).

and-bust cycles of oil-based economies. In addition, higher education trends promote a mixed influence on the Islamic future of the region. Lastly, some of the ruling regimes in the region have succeeded in creating meaningful, collective, ethno-national identities.

## Oil and Gas Production and the Rule of Law

In the case of the major oil exporters of the region, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, the domestic oil industries and oil revenue are managed in a completely different manner than in most Middle Eastern oil-producing states. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan developed their oil and gas industries through partnerships with Western oil companies in the framework of production-sharing agreements (PSAs). The conditions of these PSAs are transparent, and in Azerbaijan they have been approved by the parliament. Furthermore, the revenue from oil and gas exports in state oil funds is monitored transparently. In addition, the national oil companies' budgets are run separately from the state institutions and do not have the same level of murky co-mingling found among most Middle Eastern oil- and gas-producing states. Thus, in contrast to the established oil-producing states in the Middle East, the main sector of the economy in Azerbaijan, and to a certain extent also in Kazakhstan, is governed transparently and by the rule of law. However, once these funds reach the state budgets, the accounting is significantly less transparent.

## Role of Foreign Actors

An additional major difference between established oil-producing states in the Middle East and those in Central Asia and Azerbaijan that affects the status of radical Islam is the role of foreign actors. As discussed earlier, in the early part of the twentieth century Great Britain and other foreign actors inadvertently augmented the power of Islamic religious forces and their monopoly on education in the Middle East in order to achieve stability under colonial rule and for the monarchies they established after the formal end of colonial rule. In contrast, the foreign actors most engaged in economic activity in Central Asia and Azerbaijan (i.e., the United States, Russia, China, and European Union countries) do not support a powerful role for Islamic forces in these states and do support the secular character of the ruling governments in the region in most cases.

## Small Populations, Booms, and Busts

With the exception of Uzbekistan and its twenty-nine million people, all the states of Central Asia and Azerbaijan have relatively small populations. This allows them to manage the booms and busts of a resource-export economy more effectively. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have established well-managed state revenue funds that endow their states with the means to sustain the economy and subsidies during periods of low oil and other commodity prices. However, the proved oil reserves that Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan possess are limited. Thus, with declining production rates and declining capacity to continue many public subsidies and economic initiatives, each state will need to develop alternative economic bases rather than rely on oil

production and export. If they cannot, it is anticipated that these states will confront radical challenges, potentially from radical Islam. Moreover, in cases where there is a significant gap between the oil price calculated as the basis of the state budget and the actual oil global oil price sustained for a long period of time, cash reserves can dwindle. This would lead to significant stability challenges.

## Higher Education Trends

Most of the states in Central Asia and Azerbaijan have established programs to funnel part of the profits from oil and other resource exports to fund higher education for their citizens in top universities in the world. The most developed programs are Kazakhstan's Bolashak program and Azerbaijan's education program funded through the State Oil Fund (SOFAZ).<sup>26</sup> Interesting trends in higher education destinations are emerging that can influence the role of Islam in the states in the region. The top destinations for higher education seem to be the United Kingdom, Russia, Turkey, and South Korea. Few of the students funded through such state programs are studying in Middle Eastern states. At the same time, despite the high level of education in the United States, this has not been a top destination for students from this area. The influence of students attending schools in Turkey on Islamic trends in the home states is not clear. Many of the students embrace religion and a religious lifestyle during their sojourn in Turkey.

## Collective Ethno-National Identities

In the post-Soviet period, most of the states of Central Asia and Azerbaijan have succeeded in building on existing ethno-national identities and promoting collective identities that have significant meaning for most of their citizens. Azerbaijan has been particularly successful in this regard. Consequently, most of the members of the main ethnic groups in the region will be less attracted to transnational and universal identities such as Islam. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan seem to have been less successful in coalescing around meaningful common national identities for their polities than others in the region. In both places, strong regional identities still seem to override national identity.

## Conclusions and Policy Implications

This analysis maintains that the resource-exporting economies of Central Asia and Azerbaijan have a mixed influence on the factors that affect the development of Islam in the region. Most of the states of the region share qualities with the established oil- and natural-gas producing states of the Middle East, qualities that have contributed to the development of radical Islam there: boom-and-bust economic cycles, the capacity of the ruling regimes to co-opt the

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<sup>26</sup> For more on these programs and higher education trends in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, see Regine A. Spector, "Education Reform in Energy-Exporting States: Post-Soviet Experience in Comparative Perspective," in Shaffer and Ziyadov, *Beyond the Resource Curse*, 225-258.



citizenry, and high levels of corruption. At the same time, the region differs from the Middle East in fundamental ways. First, the ruling governments in Central Asia and Azerbaijan have not formed alliances with Islamic forces or granted them substantial influence in the sphere of education. In fact, all of the states of the region observe strict separation of religion and state, and most forbid religious political parties or religious education of children.<sup>27</sup> Second, in stark contrast to their counterparts in the Middle East, the states and societies of Central Asia and Azerbaijan experienced extensive modernization prior to the advent of large-scale energy and mineral production in the post-Soviet period. Also, the foreign powers active in Central Asia and Azerbaijan do not support an alliance between the ruling regimes and Islamic forces. Third, due to the small populations of most of the states of the region, the ruling regimes can better manage the boom-and-bust cycles of oil-based economies. Lastly, many of the ruling regimes in Central Asia and Azerbaijan have succeeded in creating meaningful, collective, ethno-national identities. In sum, compared to the Middle East, important differences in experience and structure substantially reduce the preconditions for a surge of Islamist radicalism in Central Asia and Azerbaijan. In studying the conditions of Islamic radicalism, it is important for policy makers to make a strong distinction between use of modern technology and embracing of modernity. Too often Western policy makers assume that they go hand in hand. But they do not. And, in fact, modern technology has empowered many radical and fundamentalist groups and is used effectively to spread anti-modern thinking.

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<sup>27</sup> In most of the states, after-school religious programs are allowed, but not licensed for regular school education.

# Domestic Shapers of Eurasia's Islamic Futures: Sheikh, Scholar, Society, and the State

*Noah Tucker*

For most of the past century in the United States and Europe, the topic of Islam as a social or political factor in Central Asia has attracted the serious attention of only a small group of narrow specialists. Central Asian Muslims only became part of policy discourse in the grand theories of Sovietologists, who used a casual acquaintance with data and a flair for imagination to wax ecstatic about the USSR's supposed "soft Muslim underbelly." In-depth field research was nearly impossible until the very end of the Soviet period, which segregated Western scholars and thinkers from both the ordinary population of Central Asia and from their academic counterparts in the USSR. While these factors may excuse the poor level of public and political discourse about Islam in Central Asia until 1991, the discussion remains nearly as impoverished two decades after the "Iron Curtain" fell as it was when the Soviet Union collapsed, and continues to be informed by many of the same myths that originated during the Cold War.

Perhaps policy discourse remains poorly informed in no small part because analyses of Islam as a social and political factor in Central Asia are plagued by the same debates and misconceptions as these discussions anywhere else. But the questions of how individuals and groups who derive social and personal meaning from Islam behave differently than those who hold different beliefs—and how these behaviors might influence political outcomes—remain, I would argue, even less informed by relevant current research for Central Asia than when the same questions are asked about Egypt, Pakistan, or Indonesia.

And though the policy discourse is impoverished, it continues to grow quickly. In the past two decades, assessments of Central Asia's geopolitical significance have increased rapidly at the same time as many observers have noted—or rather warned—that the region is experiencing an equally rapid "Islamic revival." The question of how to describe this revival accurately is a subject of much debate. There are many scholars, political analysts, and journalists who have volunteered policy insights about the behavior and opinions of Muslims in Central Asia and how these might influence political outcomes and stability. There continues to be a tremendous gap, however, between many of those voices offering policy advice and the small but growing number of social and political scientists who have done firsthand research in the region and—most of all—the voices of Central Asian Muslims themselves.

In a 2007 special feature in *Central Asian Survey*, Nick Megoran outlined an explanation for what hinders the policy and academic community from finding a more closely unified picture of Islam and its role in society and politics.<sup>1</sup> Megoran proposed that those security/international relations scholars who attempt to create a grand, unified model for the way an increasingly Muslim public will engage in politics too easily dismiss evidence from anthropologists and ethnographers who focus intensely on smaller areas or aspects of the question. In fact, this ethnographic evidence very rarely fits well with the security-focused models, which posit that an Islamic revival in Central Asia is likely to result in the spread of “radical Islam,” or some form of “political Islam,” and which view this as a serious threat to both regional security and Western policy goals in the region. Many anthropologists and political ethnographers, on the other hand, find little evidence to support such concerns and hesitate to attempt to identify broad trends based on highly focused and relatively narrow research.<sup>2</sup>

This paper will make a modest attempt at bridging this gap. The past several years have witnessed a spike in new research from a growing number of young scholars who have conducted significant, long-term fieldwork in Central Asia, bringing a wealth of data to bear against questions that for most of the 1990s were answered in broad generalizations about “ideological vacuums,” “mushrooming” mosques, and “hotbeds of simmering radicalism.”

The lack of better-informed analysis could once be explained by the broad gaps in available data. But this paper argues that new research and data now make it possible to challenge many of the assumptions held by those who have viewed Islamic revival in Central Asia primarily as a security problem, and to do so convincingly. The paper identifies basic misconceptions about Islamic groups and practices in the region that previously seemed to support the idea that Islamic revival would primarily have destabilizing political consequences, and challenges the idea that there is a necessary connection between an increased interest in Islam as a religion and Islamism as a political system for most Central Asian Muslims.

The first section of this paper identifies critical flaws in common past approaches to describing independent Islam in Central Asia and summarizes broad trends in the increasing popularity of public religious practice (“Islamic revivalism”) as explored by the new research described above. These trends can be broadly divided between two ends of a spectrum:

1. Those that emphasize personal mystical experiences and focus on the reproduction of “ancestral practices,” who are organized into groups like Aq-Zhol in Kazakhstan and Naqshbandiyya/Qadiriyya Sufi groups in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and
2. Those text-focused piety groups that emphasize individual interaction with scripture, textual exegesis, and individual adherence to religious law (or shari’a).

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Megoran, “Author-Critic Forum: ‘Radical Islam in Central Asia,’” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 1 (March 2007): 141–43.

<sup>2</sup> The author would like to clarify that while this statement is true of many anthropologists working in Central Asia, it is certainly not true of all of them. David Abramson and John Schoeberlein are two very notable exceptions, whose work (both published and presented at numerous policy engagements) has had a strong influence on this project.

The common interpretation of Islamic revival in Central Asia is that most groups (and individuals) fall solidly into blocks that are “good, indigenous, and moderate” or “radical and foreign.” This project argues that most religious groups in Central Asia combine elements of the emphases described above in their practice, and that labels like “good, indigenous, and moderate” or “radical and foreign” are used primarily for political ends; that for as much as believers from both ends of the spectrum argue with one another, they have more in common than not; that both ends of the spectrum are mostly apolitical aside from advocating an increased role for Islam in social and political life; and that while foreign actors and ideas have influences, both of the broad trends we identify have a long history in domestic religious debates.

The second section provides examples from nonstate Islamic authorities and Central Asian Muslims themselves that highlight current debates and illustrate the way that, although state interventions in Islamic practice and theology shape the developing Islamic public sphere and affect religious freedom, “independent” Islam does not primarily oppose the state or secular government in principle, or espouse violent political ideologies. While independent Islamic authorities will often criticize the state when displeased with its actions or policies—just as many nonreligious citizens do—most ultimately argue for religious solutions to social problems (in a bottom-up approach) rather than radical political change.

Finally, the third section attempts to bridge the gap between scholarship and security concerns, addressing radical political ideologies and Islamist groups that remain the justifiable concern of those focused on security and stability. This section suggests that—based on the more nuanced understanding now available to us about Islam as a social factor in Central Asia—the difference between religious revivalist groups and political Islamist groups is straightforward: the first mobilizes for religious ends, and the second political. There is no necessary link between the two. This project will adopt and expand an argument made by political scientist Eric McGlinchey<sup>3</sup> that radical Islamist groups appear in Central Asia primarily in places where the population feels driven to adopt radical political solutions (in response to repression and lack of political representation) rather than those places that are simply “more religious,” “have more Wahhabis,” or in the most common but least satisfactory argument “more religious because they are poor.” Following this line of argument, the increased level of popularity of parties like Hizb-ut-Tahrir among ethnic Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan and northern Tajikistan is explained primarily by their level of political marginalization compared to the titular nations in those republics, rather than the common explanation that they are somehow “more religious” than Kyrgyz or Tajiks.

Lastly, I argue that populations or subpopulations amenable to radical political solutions are susceptible to recruitment and mobilization by non-Islamist political groups as well, e.g., ultranationalist groups, ethnopolitical groups, regional rebellions, and class-based mobilizations that respond to the same set of political problems. Thus we would expect mobilization of these kinds of groups to correlate frequently with mobilization of radical Islamist rebellions, and vice versa. This hypothesis can be proved in a variety of social and political conflicts resulting in violent mobilization in Central Asia across the past twenty years (the Tajik Civil War, ethnic

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<sup>3</sup> Eric McGlinchey, “The Making of Militants: The State and Islam in Central Asia,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 25, no. 3 (2005): 554-56.

and Islamist unrest in the Uzbek Ferghana Valley between 1989 and 1992, more recent unrest in southern Kyrgyzstan, etc.), providing a useful metric for both explaining the rise of violent Islamism in the past and predicting—or preventing—its occurrence in the future.

## Part 1: Directions of Islamic Revivalism in Central Asia

Observers across several disciplines have agreed on a broad trend of Islamic revivalism in Central Asia beginning in the late Soviet period and accelerating rapidly after independence in 1991. Approaches to describing this religious revival vary widely, however. A number of good surveys have been conducted that confirm broad and rapid increases in people self-identifying as Muslims, attending mosques and religious functions, and pursuing specialized religious education both at home and abroad. Far less satisfyingly, however, the most commonly used proxy for measuring “religiosity” or the “Muslimness” of newly independent societies has been to reproduce estimates of the number of mosques registered in each country by the state boards<sup>4</sup> overseeing Islamic activity. Though both approaches confirm that the number of people engaging in public worship has demonstrably increased over the past two decades, and that the postindependence generation is much more publicly religious than the one that came before it, they provide only superficial data at best and make it difficult to draw conclusions about exactly what kind of religion, or what sorts of theological interpretations, are represented. They offer even less insight into the motivations of individuals who choose to make Islam an important aspect of their lives and self-orientation and how this might affect their political behavior.

### Are Central Asians “Real” Muslims?

Broad attempts to interpret these qualitative questions have tended to be trapped in an awkward dialectic. This approach, shared by authors from a variety of Central Asian, Russian, and Western perspectives, has produced an almost infinite variety of assessments of the Islamic religious life of the peoples of Central Asia that insist on placing it at one end or another of extremes, with little nuance in between. In this analysis, the religion practiced in Central Asia is either “real Islam,” which means a wide variety of things (though most often something dangerous and foreboding), or is a special “Central Asian” Islam that is by implication not “real.” The latter in various contexts serves as a sort of euphemism for shamanism dressed up as Islam, institutionalized folklore, secular religion, or national cultural practices that have some vague historical relation to a religion brought to the region by Arab conquerors and Sufi missionaries centuries ago.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The state boards, usually called the “Directorate of Muslim Affairs” are agencies that exist in each of the five states as a legacy of the Soviet approach to managing religion; in most countries these are subordinate to a government agency (a cabinet-level ministry in some states, like Uzbekistan) that oversees mandatory legal registration of all religious groups across confessions and denominations. In all Central Asian states, participation in a nonregistered (nonapproved) religious group is illegal and subject to heavy fines or criminal prosecution.

<sup>5</sup> An expanded version of the material for this section appeared previously on *Registan.net*. See: Noah Tucker, “They Might Be Muslims?!” (Parts 1&2), *Registan.net*, March 13, 2009, available at: <http://registan.net/2009/03/13/they-might-be-muslims-part-1-of-a-critique-on-the-study-of-religion-in-central-asia/>. Accessed October 17, 2012.

As Devin Deweese reminds us in his *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde*, the idea that somehow Central Asian Islam is not real or authentic remains one of the most common stereotypes about the region. Academics and social commentators advance this conclusion to different ends. Many Central Asians themselves defend their modernity and progressive development in high-modernist terms, citing an old assumption common in the Soviet era that religion is a disease that afflicts backwards or impoverished societies; they seek to distance themselves from it, asserting that they were either “never really Muslims in the first place” or that communism or modernity had severed them once and for all from that part of their history. In an influential outsider version of this argument, some American scholars claim that the Soviet experience of antireligious fervor and persecution combined with rapid modernization in forced isolation from the rest of the *ummah* (nation, community) permanently altered the character of Islam in the region, wrapping religious practice into national and local identities.<sup>6</sup>

On the other end are those commentators, scholars, and members of Central Asia’s own Muslim community who accept the above argument but contend that an Islamic revival in Central Asia means “real” Islam is being reimported into the region, and therefore Central Asians are subject to all of the generalizations that accompany it. Many commentators who share this belief view it as a source of danger. A revival—or a reimportation—of “real Islam” in Central Asia in this line of thinking has explicitly political consequences because it will, they believe, lead to increased support for violent Islamist organizations like al-Qaida, the Taliban, or Central Asia’s “own” Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and therefore pose a significant threat to places as far off as Washington and London.

Claims like these are the heart of the religion-as-security literature, and—particularly if they turn out to be unfounded—have the potential to be harmful to the people of Central Asia because they are consistently used to promote support for repressive authoritarian (but “safely secular”) regimes and serve to legitimate further curtailment of already painfully limited civil and human rights in countries like Uzbekistan. Tellingly, rebuttals aimed at this “alarmist” camp often do not question the basic premise of the logic being used; it is as if they are passively agreeing that if Central Asian Islam is real—or coming increasingly under the influence of globalized Islam—then it is inherently violent, dangerous, and categorically opposed to modern secular government.

Instead of posing a challenge to this basic premise, responses tend to fly back to the opposite pole of the paradigm, defending Central Asians as safe and benign people who are, after all, “not really Muslims” or are actually Sufis (the “good kind” of Muslim), shamanists, or scientific atheists who merely enjoy their national traditions and folklore. Yet Sufism is hardly un-Islamic, and the practitioners of prehistoric religions would seem hardly more amenable to modern liberal civil society than Muslims. These bizarre assertions are no more coherent than those arguments that praying five times a day, going to Mosque on Fridays, fasting during Ramadan, or circumcising boys should be taken as a sign of a secret desire to overthrow secular government, kill Christians and Jews, and stone women to death for showing their faces to strangers. And yet in the security-focused literature of the past twenty years, these external indicators of religiosity—along with a superficial increase in the number of mosques built in

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<sup>6</sup> Adeeb Khalid, “A Secular Islam: Nation, State, and Religion in Uzbekistan,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35 (2003): 575–98.

each country—have been taken as a signifier of exactly such gathering storms, while ignoring what Central Asians themselves say about what they believe or the kind of political order in which they wish to live.

As poorly as the false dialectic may work to describe real life, there are aspects of Central Asia’s recent history that helped initiate and perpetuate these categories. The historical experience of communism under the USSR and the cycles of harsh religious persecution that targeted several generations of religious teachers, their texts, and institutions make the Central Asian Muslim experience unique in many respects. Recent scholarship has added much more nuance to the common conception of the 1990s that religious knowledge was all but completely destroyed in the Soviet period, but undeniably the space that was allowed for open religious practice—and importantly for religious education—was painfully small. Thus, the idea that most Central Asian Muslims were until recently poorly aware of the heritage, theology, or proper practices of Islam is not an idea imposed only from the outside. The debate about whether Kazakh or Uzbek Islam is “real”—and whether or not there can even be such a thing—is one that Central Asians themselves engage in regularly. “Real” and “fake” are categories many Central Asians use in their own debates about authentic faith and practice, making it tempting—albeit counterproductive—for outside observers to adopt them too.

## Islam as Competing Discourses: Mystical Communities and Individual Piety

The common thread of these flawed approaches is that each views “Islam” as a monolithic ideology. The conception of this imagined monolith usually centers around selected discourses from the Arab world that are taken as normative and uniform—overlooking the inconvenient fact that religious practice in the Arab world is by no means uniform. The problems with interpreting Islam as a comprehensive religio-political system that supposedly creates identical and predictable social orders in diverse societies and socioeconomic circumstances have been debated for decades. Without revisiting that debate in detail, it suffices to say that perhaps nowhere else in the world than in Central Asia is it so clear that the everyday religious practices and theological beliefs that self-identified Muslims describe as Islamic are varied, diverse, and by no means monolithic.

The study of Islam in Central Asia has flourished in the past decade, and this scholarship almost unanimously suggests a different approach. Rather than describing a shift to “real Islam” (as reimported from elsewhere where “real Islam” is practiced) from local folk religion, the vast majority of recent scholarship on religion as actually practiced and described by Central Asians themselves follows Talal Asad’s influential critique of the study of “Islam” as a monolithic object.<sup>7</sup> New scholarship describes the religious landscape of Central Asia as an evolving (and reviving) tradition made up of competing discourses and practices.

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<sup>7</sup> Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1986).

Just as Asad described elsewhere in the Islamic world, these discourses are intertwined with relationships of power, secular authority, and economic resources, and—in Central Asia especially—these are closely refereed by the state. As participants in the Islamic tradition compete for authority, they often make claims themselves about who has a right to define what is “real” Islam and what is mere heresy or *bi'da* (innovation). For every discourse claiming to represent “real” Islam there are many others that challenge it. The idea that the proliferation of mosques or an externally observable increase in religiosity creates predictable political outcomes as Central Asian Islam supposedly becomes more monolithic is flatly not supported by a wealth of new fieldwork. It follows that the idea that a “more religious” population would automatically begin to exhibit certain set political beliefs and behaviors and to progress toward a uniform political order (Islamism, or a caliphate in the Ferghana Valley, as is often claimed) cannot be supported in light of actual data about how the Islamic revival in Central Asia progresses.

As anthropologists and scholars of religion have examined the discourses that Central Asians use themselves—rather than those simply assumed about them or ascribed to them by government officials or “experts”—they have found that competing ideas about practice and authority can be described on a spectrum emphasizing text-based, individual piety at one end and a community-based focus on reproducing tradition and personal mystical practices on the other.<sup>8</sup> While these two modes of religious thought and activity are found in many religions, as Asad argues in his foundational text, the specific content of the competing discourses and the social structures in which they play out are unique, making broad, structuralist-type comparisons to other religions not particularly useful.

Additionally, one of the most important insights drawn from the scholarship of the past decade is that while some individuals belong to clearly defined groups or religious orders whose beliefs and practices fall solidly on one end of this spectrum, most Muslims in Central Asia fall somewhere in between and often engage in active debates about which discourses are best. Very few individuals or groups fall neatly into one type, and neither the ends nor the middle represent uniform beliefs about the role of Islam in secular society or the role Islamic leaders or parties should play in government. As the role of religion in many people’s lives increases, people at both ends of this spectrum (bearded “Salafis” and chanting Sufis alike) advocate increased government recognition and support of the role of Islam in society and for an increased role for Islamic figures in government. Field research among Muslims about their own narratives and discourses reveal no uniform movement toward a distinctly political platform such as Islamism or support for a caliphate, though these exist as separate *political* dialogues among some specific populations, as will be discussed in part three.

## Text/Piety

Groups at the “text/piety” end of the spectrum are the most externally visible because of their emphasis on strict dress codes and religious habits that signal personal submission to rules outlined in foundational Islamic texts. As anthropologist Wendell Schwab describes what he terms “pietists” from his fieldwork in southern and southeastern Kazakhstan, beyond the superficial sartorial rules that made the groups stand out in the relaxed and sometimes libertine

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed examination of mystical practices in Islam, see: Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).



styles of Almaty, the key aspect of pietists' beliefs is a focus on individual interaction with sacred texts (the Qur'an and the Hadith). While believers meet in groups and are encouraged to attend prayers regularly, primary emphasis is on the authority of these texts and an individual duty to read, interpret, and obey them, and to learn from the examples of the *sahoba* (the companions of the Prophet) and model their lives after them.<sup>9</sup>

Believers whose approach falls closer to this end of the spectrum are found across Central Asia, and their influence is growing not only in the region, but across the Muslim world.<sup>10</sup> Most Central Asian Muslims who adopt this approach interact with texts translated into their own languages (only a tiny minority of people read and understand Arabic) and learn from imams and teachers within their own communities, rather than from foreign missionaries, as has often been supposed by overviews written in the past. Work by David Montgomery,<sup>11</sup> Julie McBrien,<sup>12</sup> and Noor Borbieva<sup>13</sup> in Kyrgyzstan; Manja Stephan<sup>14</sup> and Helene Thibault<sup>15</sup> in Tajikistan; and Allen Frank,<sup>16</sup> Johan Rasanayagam,<sup>17</sup> and Irene Hilgers<sup>18</sup> in Uzbekistan add regional depth to Schwab's research in Kazakhstan and find many broad similarities. One of the most interesting of these is that very often members of these groups are, as Thibault aptly puts it, "born-again Muslims," who narrate a conversion story not unlike the testimonies of American evangelical Christians who similarly share a text-focused, individual piety approach to their religion.

Many pietists sharply criticize the society they live in and the "type" of Islam that they were taught as children and that is practiced by their elders. They frequently reject practices or habits common among their neighbors that are not supported directly by the foundational texts, and are particularly critical of the "Europeanization" or "Russification" of their society (especially alcohol consumption and what they describe as immodest fashions and behavior). Their new habits of dress and comportment mark their conversion and the start of a new life. Very often,

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<sup>9</sup> See: Wendell Schwab, "Traditions and Texts: How Two Young Women Learned to Interpret the Qur'an and Hadiths in Kazakhstan," *Contemporary Islam* 6, no. 2 (2012): 173–97; "Establishing an Islamic Niche in Kazakhstan: Muslim Publishing House and Its Publications," *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 2 (2011): 227–42.

<sup>10</sup> On the rise of literacy and expansion of the role of individual textual interaction in Arab Islam, see Dale F. Eickelman, "Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies," *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 4 (1992): 643–55.

<sup>11</sup> D. W. Montgomery, "The Transmission of Religious and Cultural Knowledge and Potentiality in Practice: An Anthropology of Social Navigation in the Kyrgyz Republic" (PhD diss., Boston University, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Julie McBrien, "Listening to the Wedding Speaker: Discussing Religion and Culture in southern Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 25, no. 3 (2006): 341–57; "Mukadas's Struggle: Veils and Modernity in Kyrgyzstan," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 (2009): S127–S144; "Extreme Conversations: Secularism, Religious Pluralism, and the Rhetoric of Islamic Extremism in southern Kyrgyzstan," in *The Postsocialist Religious Question: Faith and Power in Central Asia and East-Central Europe*, ed. C. M. Hann, 47–74 (Muenster: Lit Verlag, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Noor Borbieva, *Islam and the International Sector: Negotiations of Faith in the Kyrgyz Republic*, Kellogg Institute for International Studies Working Paper #364 (Notre Dame, IN: Kellogg Institute, University of Notre Dame, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Manja Stephan, "Education, Youth and Islam: The Growing Popularity of Private Religious Lessons in Dushanbe, Tajikistan," *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 4 (2010): 469–83; "'You Come to Us Like a Black Cloud': Universal vs. Local Islam in Dushanbe, Tajikistan," in Hann, *Postsocialist Religious Question*, 148–67.

<sup>15</sup> Helene Thibault, "Born-again: Post-Soviet Attitudes towards Religion in Tajikistan," paper presented at the Association for the Studies of Nationalities 2012 Annual Convention, Columbia University, New York, April 19–21, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Allen Frank and Jahongir Mamatov, *Uzbek Islamic Debates: Texts, Translations and Commentary* (Springfield, VA: Dunwoody Press, 2006); see also: B. M. Babajanov, A. K. Muminov, and A. von Kugelgen, *Disputy musulmanskix Religioznix Avtoritetov v Tsentralnoy Azii v XX Veka* (Almaty: Dayk Press, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> See, among others: Johan Rasanayagam, *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: The Morality of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Irene Hilgers, *Why Do Uzbeks Have to Be Muslims? Exploring Religiosity in the Ferghana Valley* (Halle: Lit Verlag, 2009).

they contrast the highly ordered and disciplined habits they have adopted to a sense of chaos and disorder that followed the post-Soviet collapse and the deterioration of the predictable social order that they experienced under the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup>

While they frequently refer to recovering Islam as a critical part of their authentic national identity, at the same time they are quick to criticize many of the practices and beliefs commonly associated with Islam as practiced in the region. Pietists refer to their interpretations of the Qur'an, Sunna, and stories about the *sahaba* as sources of authority that allow them to claim to represent “real” Islam, in contrast to common practices such as pilgrimage to the graves of saints or other holy sites, which they describe as *shirk* (polytheism, a grave sin in Islam).

In places, pietists are referred to derogatorily as “Salafis” or, most commonly since the 1980s, as “Wahhabis.” Almost universally, though, they never refer to themselves this way. Many of the pietists (a famous group of which in the Ferghana Valley used to identify themselves as “*mo'jaddidiyya*,” or renewers) argue stridently that they are not Salafists, and even many of their critics have come to acknowledge that they objectively never had any connection with the Saudi Wahhabi movement that originated in the eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Though their style of dress and some conservative beliefs coincide with those held or practiced by these Middle Eastern groups, their real commonality is the text-based approach to Islam. Most Central Asian pietists do not openly reject traditional jurisprudence as Salafis do, nor do they embrace a political approach to Islam like that of the Salafist-associated Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

## Tradition/Mysticism

At the other end of the spectrum are those whose religion emphasizes a personal, mystical interaction with spiritual beings (or their human representatives) and reproduction of “ancestral” traditions. These groups vary widely in their type, practice, and organization, and because of their focus on ancestral traditions, they are more localized and have less in common across the region than the text/piety groups that rely on common sources of authority. While in most cases not contradicting the idea that their primary identity is as a member of the universal Muslim *ummah*, believers who focus on traditional mystical practices often experience their religion as something deeply tied to family, local community, physical geography, and national identity.

Rich examples of this mode of practice continue to grow. Bruce Privratsky's work in Turkestan (Kazakhstan), where for centuries locals and pilgrims from near and far have venerated the tomb of Ahmed Yasawi, the founder of the Yasawiyya Sufi order, was one of the first rich ethnographies to challenge the notion that Islamic revival in Central Asia was unfolding in a uniform way that emphasized conservative reformism.<sup>21</sup> Maria Louw's fieldwork in Bukhara

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<sup>19</sup> Thibault, “Born-again: Post-Soviet Attitudes.” See also Noah Tucker, “The Disorder of Things (Osh, Part IV)” *Registan.net*, July 6, 2011. Available at: <http://registan.net/2011/07/06/the-disorder-of-things-osh-part-iv/> (cited in Thibault).

<sup>20</sup> This connection was symbolic and somewhat sarcastic, and has been disproven enough in the literature to not require an extensive list of citations. To give a good one, Abdujabbar Abdvakhitov says, “It was rumored that they were Wahhabis [Unitarians, influenced by the strict Saudi sect of that name] or were financed by the Wahhabis. I searched for a tie between Uzbek activists and Saudi Wahhabis but found none.” “Islamic Revivalism in Uzbekistan,” in *Russia's Muslim Frontiers*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 84.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce G. Privratsky, *Muslim Turkistan: Kazak Religion and Collective Memory* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001).

at the shrine of Bahauddin Naqshband, founder of the largest Sufi order in the world, the Naqshbandiyya, similarly explores another site that has global significance and is a point of great national pride in government rhetoric.<sup>22</sup> At the same time that they have national and international significance, the shrines are sites that shape local identity and reinforce the conviction that local practices—like the veneration of saints and performance of rituals associated with their mausoleums that are meant to confer specific blessings—are indisputably Islamic in the minds of believers, in spite of reformist claims that they lack clear precedent in the foundational texts.

Many Muslims believe the shrines, tombs, and holy sites liberally scattered across even the most remote geography of Central Asia are unique locations at which interaction with God or with the spirits of ancestors who have closer access to the spiritual world is attainable. As Stephane Dudoignon's work in Khujend shows, for example, for many this way of understanding space has the effect of creating a spiritual geography that overlays the physical.<sup>23</sup> Beliefs about exactly how this interaction works or how it might convey benefits on a pilgrim or neighboring resident are as diverse as those who hold them. Not all who visit the sites—which as David Montgomery and others point out include many natural geographic features like lakes, rocks, and waterfalls—believe they possess any special spiritual power at all, but may instead view pilgrimage as an act of obedience and purification.<sup>24</sup> Many believe that a certain number of “minor pilgrimages” to selected Central Asian sites will be received by God as equivalent to performance of the hajj. Though the pilgrimage to Mecca is accepted by most Central Asian Muslims as a pillar of Islam, it is a feat that is both financially and politically out of reach for the vast majority, who in addition to paying for the travel must first navigate local and national government bureaucracies that control access to the special hajj visas.

The Sufi orders survive in Central Asia as more than tombs; in addition to the Yasawiyya and Naqshbandiyya orders, the Qadiriyya order (which practices the “loud *zikr*,” chanting and singing audibly in contrast to the silent meditation of the Naqshbandiyya) is also present in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where some of the most famous and well-regarded religious scholars are also *pirs* or *ishans*, the hereditary leaders of the orders.<sup>25</sup> The revival of the formal orders has been slower than many had expected—perhaps because the narrowness of their survival in many areas was underestimated by outside scholars who had no access to the region during the Soviet period—but, as Benjamin Gatling's excellent new study shows us, their influence remains significant, especially in Tajikistan.<sup>26</sup> The revival of Islam in general has included a strong resurgence of interest in the writing and teaching of local historical *pirs*, saints, and Sufi poets whose works have become central to the canon of national literature in Uzbekistan

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<sup>22</sup> Maria Elisabeth Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Stephane Dudoignon, “Local Lore, the Transmission of Learning, and Communal Identity in Late 20th-Century Tajikistan: The *Khujand-nama* of Arifjon Yahyazad Khujandi,” in *Devout Societies vs. Impious States? Transmitting Islamic Learning in Russia, Central Asia and China through the 20th Century*, ed. Stephane Dudoignon (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2004), 213–42.

<sup>24</sup> Montgomery, “Transmission of Religious and Cultural Knowledge.”

<sup>25</sup> See: Vernon James Schubel, “Post-Soviet Hagiography and the Reconstruction of the Naqshbandi Tradition in Contemporary Uzbekistan,” in *Naqshbandis in Western and Central Asia: Change and Continuity*, ed. Elisabeth Ozdalga (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1997), 73–87; and Sergei Abachin (Abashin), “Le Soufisme: Populaire en Asie Centrale,” in *Islam et Politique en ex-URSS: Russie d'Europe et Asie Centrale*, ed. S. Peyrouse and M. Laruelle (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 309–22; and David Montgomery, “Namaz, Wishing Trees, and Vodka: The Diversity of Everyday Religious Life in Central Asia,” in *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*, ed. J. Sahadeo and R. Zanca (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 355–70.

<sup>26</sup> For a study of the revival of traditional Sufi texts and authority in Tajikistan, see: Benjamin Gatling, “Post-Soviet Sufism: Texts and the Performance of Tradition in Tajikistan” (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2012).

and Tajikistan especially, where government support for the mass republication of works by Alisher Navoiy, for example (the father of Uzbek language literature), is promoted by secular nationalists and revivalist Muslims alike.

In addition to interaction with spiritual geographies and Sufi orders, in many areas beliefs in direct interaction with spirits or deceased ancestors through ceremonial practices or specially gifted intermediaries are an important part of the Islamic revival as well. Although pietists frequently claim these rituals have close corollaries in shamanic religions from the pre-Islamic history of the region, many Central Asian Muslims see no conflict between such rituals and Islam. Researchers like Johan Rasanayagam have noted that in Uzbekistan, for example, the practice of “healing with spirits”—in which a specially gifted healer interacts with spiritual beings in dreams or visions on behalf of clients—has been adapted to an increasingly scripturalist Islamic cosmogony. Thus, for example, a healer who in the 1980s may have interacted in dreams with ancestors’ spirits or different types of *jinn-paris* began by the 1990s to see dreams about the famous saints of Islam like Ali (ibn abi Talib), the son-in-law of Muhammad, who would instruct the healer on how her clients could achieve healing.<sup>27</sup>

In other cases, such as the Aq Zhol movement in Kazakhstan documented by Pawel Jessa, prayers to and veneration of ancestors, supernatural healing and revelations, pilgrimages, and the study of the Qur’an and holy texts are all integrated together in a movement that considers itself fully compatible with Islam as it has been practiced by Kazakhs for generations.<sup>28</sup> Members are untroubled that this praxis may not closely resemble the Islam of the pietists or other Muslims in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere. The primary authority informing their beliefs comes not from texts interpreted by individuals today but from the traditions that have sanctified the lives of ancestral generations and are passed on and reproduced by the current one. As Wendell Schwab’s work shows, in areas where they overlap, the pietist and Aq Zhol movements compete with one another for followers and for the authority to define authentic Islamic practice. The victory for some kind of “real” Islam is by no means a foregone conclusion: both movements claim equal right to that descriptor and continue to coexist peacefully within the same communities where most members subscribe to neither.<sup>29</sup>

## Authority, Reproduction, and Debate

The two emphases described above are most specifically suggested in the work of Wendell Schwab and David Montgomery, who in two distinct fieldwork sites (Schwab in Kazakhstan and Montgomery in southern Kyrgyzstan) contrasted groups from each end of the spectrum. Independently of one another, they reached the conclusion that the primary differences that created the contrasts in beliefs and practices were not that one was “foreign” and the other “indigenous” (or one real and the other false), but were located instead in the sources of authority and method of reproduction for the discourses.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Johan Rasanayagam, “Healing with Spirits and the Formation of Muslim Selfhood in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12, no. 2 (2006): 377–93.

<sup>28</sup> Pawel Jessa, “Aq Jol Soul Healers: Religious Pluralism and a Contemporary Muslim Movement in Kazakhstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 25, no. 3 (2005): 359–71.

<sup>29</sup> Schwab, “Traditions and Texts.”

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*; Montgomery, “Transmission of Religious and Cultural Knowledge.”

In the text/piety groups, as discussed above, central authority lies in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Because of advances in literacy, wider access to texts translated in local languages, and theological positions that allow nonspecialists to interpret the sacred texts without specialized education,<sup>31</sup> these movements instruct believers to interact with the texts personally with no clerical intermediary. They teach specific techniques for this interaction that privilege the texts above traditions—no matter how widely they may be held in the surrounding community—and stress individual responsibility for purity in an unmediated relationship with the one God, who has no representative on earth except the Prophet and his message.

At the mystical/tradition end of the spectrum, authority by contrast lies in tradition and its reproduction. While traditions are changed and modified each time they are reproduced, the authority on which the reproduction rests is the precedent of the past and the example of godly ancestors; this focus allows believers to participate in practices that cannot be found in the Qur'an or the Sunna or sometimes are objectively syncretic elements added to the Islamic tradition centuries after the period of the Prophet and his companions. Reproduction of these traditions focuses on maintaining links and continuity with family and community, and many practices are passed down within families.

As outlined in the section above, much Western scholarship on Islam and Islamic debates in Central Asia has accepted the idea that inside the Central Asian Islamic tradition there are “foreign” or “imported” factions opposed to “indigenous” or “national” practices, that groups tending toward one end of this spectrum represent historical practices in the region while the other does not, or that one side supports the state and is supported by it while the other opposes the state and is persecuted by it. In reality, recent scholarship of both contemporary debates and history has shown that each of these categories is instrumentalized in indigenous discourses by all sides.

The pietists claim the mantle of history just as the ecstatic Qadiriyyas or spirit-healers do. Especially in Uzbekistan, the historical homeland of Al-Bukhari—author of one of the most famous collections of hadith—the text-pietists claim a historical mantle far older than the written histories of spirit healers or even Sufi adepts, and they can do so with the full support of Uzbek state authorities, who actively promote Al-Bukhari's legacy and subsidize histories, reprint his work, and have even sponsored a film about his life that was distributed across the region. At the same time, opponents of the pietists can accuse them of being Wahhabis or Islamists on grounds no stronger than their habits of dress or length of their beards, turning the rhetoric of the state and the region-wide fears of Islamist terrorism against them.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Reaction to this theological discussion (about who has the right to *ijtihad*, to interpret the texts and make jurisprudential conclusions about Islamic law) is extremely diverse, and many ordinary Central Asian Muslims do not make reference to it at all. Most read the texts with help from guides and manuals written by religious specialists and do not claim a right to make legal opinions themselves, instead referring to trusted specialists or teachers. Whether or not these teachers make reference to a specific school (*madh'hab*) of jurisprudence seems to rarely be an issue in popular discourse, and many Central Asian Muslims are only superficially aware of the schools or of detailed theological arguments over their necessity. Religious specialists from the text/piety movements tend to draw from all the schools and neither limit themselves to Hanafi rulings nor openly reject their obligation to remain faithful to the traditions (*taqlid*). When making a ruling, most text/piety specialists prefer to draw their reasoning directly from the foundational texts, as members of the Salafiyya movement do, but without referring to the movement or its theological underpinnings. Especially in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, where the Hanafi school of jurisprudence is advocated by the state, almost all scholars (and most non-Isma'ili Muslims) self-identify as Hanafis whether or not they actually specialize in Hanafi *fiqh* or prefer it in issuing opinions.

<sup>32</sup> See: McBrien, “Extreme Conversations,” and Johan Rasanayagam, “I Am Not a Wahhabi: State Power and Muslim Orthodoxy in Uzbekistan,” in Hann, *Postsocialist Religious Question*, 99–124.

Weighing these claims to authenticity and authority made by competing discourses—and carefully navigating the shifting framework the state lays out for the debate—is a vital part of religious revival in Central Asia for ordinary people. Their engagement in this process is documented in all of the fieldwork described above, and many informants narrate the way that their views and opinions (and their place on the spectrum between the two emphases) evolve and change. The state’s role in refereeing the competing discourses has been one of the most unpredictable and frustrating aspects of the revival for its participants, especially in Uzbekistan, the most active and focused of the state participants. In Uzbekistan, the shift from being “government-approved” to “terrorist” can happen shockingly quickly, and often takes a religious scholar or his followers by surprise (see the case of Hayrullo Hamidov described in Part II, for example).

Narratives about history and authenticity play important roles in the decisions that Central Asian Muslims make in their evaluation of these discourses, and so it is worth noting in the close of this section that new research about these issues challenges much of the initial scholarship published in the West about these questions, and similarly challenges the state narratives often used to referee the debate.

In the 1990s, very few texts on the Islamic revival were available, and through the early and mid-2000s almost all of the secondary literature published in the West relied on several articles that focused on the emergence of “Wahhabism”—which as we have seen is more accurately described in retrospect as a strong emphasis on the text/piety end of the revivalist spectrum—in the Ferghana Valley. These narratives became heavily mixed and sometimes confused with state-sponsored narratives condemning a few popular imams, like Obidxon qori Nazarov<sup>33</sup> and Abduvali qori Mirzoev,<sup>34</sup> leading many in both the West and in Central Asia to associate the entire pietist movement with “Wahhabism” and terror.

In reality, subsequent scholarship has shown that the doctrines debated between Hanafi traditionalists and Ferghana Valley reformists had come to Central Asia already in the 1920s, shortly after the reformist discourse began in the late nineteenth-century Middle East, founded by scholars like Jamaluddin Afghani (whose work was popular in Turkestan and other parts of the Russian Empire) and the early Salafists like Rashid Rida in Egypt. These reformist doctrines, which emphasized the primary authority of foundational texts instead of traditional jurisprudence and sharply criticized extra-textual, mystical practices, were handed down through several generations of scholars who were protected and supported by the muftiate (juridical bodies) of Central Asia in the Soviet era.<sup>35</sup> As recent scholarship has amply shown, these reformist doctrines—rather than being seen as a political threat to the USSR—were sometimes instrumentalized and amplified by Soviet policies that criticized and condemned many of the syncretic, mystical practices of the traditionalists as backward superstition. Many of the reformist emphases were reflected in fatwas issued by the mufti of Central Asia, and reformers within the official religious establishment took advantage of this state–religion partnership to advance their teaching, using the state’s authority to enhance their own.

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<sup>33</sup> Nazarov, a political asylee, was shot in an attempted assassination outside his home in rural northern Sweden in February of 2012. The Swedish government has announced there is significant evidence that the Uzbek National Security Service was involved in the attempted murder.

<sup>34</sup> Mirzoev disappeared from the airport in Tashkent in 1995 on his way to a conference in Moscow. He has never reappeared, and it is widely understood that he was kidnapped or murdered by the Uzbek National Security Service.

<sup>35</sup> Ashirbek Muminov, “Chami Damulla et Son Role dans la Constitution d’un ‘Islam Sovietique,’” in Laruelle and Peyrouse, *Islam et Politique*, 241–262.

The first in-depth history of the muftiate of Central Asia that used the institution's own archives in local languages (rather than the Moscow-based Russian archives of the Union-wide Council on Religious Affairs that had been the basis of all prior histories) was completed by Eren Murat Tasar at Harvard in 2010. In sharp contrast to previous scholarship based on those few 1990s sources about the “great schism” in Central Asian Islam, Tasar found that the dominant narrative of a wide rift between the Soviet-sponsored muftiate and the “unofficial” or “parallel” clerics was largely unsupported in the historical record.<sup>36</sup>

In fact, the common assumptions about an “official” and a “parallel” Islam—a shadowy world in which Wahhabism supposedly infiltrated the Soviet Ferghana Valley from abroad—were also largely unsupported. Instead, what emerges is a picture of a collaborative relationship between “official” imams and teachers and their unregistered counterparts; the “official” space was far too small to accommodate the depth of interest in maintaining mosques, holy sites, and religious instruction. Many “official” imams and teachers rotated in and out of positions that appeared on the actual roster of registered mosques and schools and back into those that didn't but were openly tolerated. Even those scholars who would go on to become muftis themselves had often been trained at least partially outside the auspices of the muftiate, and there was little distinction in practice between registered and unregistered individuals and institutions. The “renegade” imams who came to be the face of alleged Wahhabism in the mid- and late 1990s were in fact members of the state-sponsored religious establishment (as Nazarov was until 1996) or were closely related to it. Abduvali qori Mirzoev, for example, was the brother-in-law of the last deputy mufti for the Kyrgyz SSR; the Muftiate's archive shows no alarm about this relationship, even though its Uzbekistani successor would later go along with Tashkent's claims that Mirzoev's teaching supported terrorism only a few years later.<sup>37</sup>

The Islamic tradition of Central Asia has been a site of these competing discourses for nearly a century; what has changed most significantly in the intervening years is not the content of the theological debate, but the conditions and terms that successive governments have imposed on it. The fabric of Islamic tradition in Central Asia has been made up of the competing discourses of judges, sheikhs, mystics, and saints for many centuries before, and then as now the competing discourses have not so much created predictable political outcomes as they have been shaped by politics, power, and authority.

## Part 2: Revivalism in Practice—Independent Voices, Islamic Media, and Visions for Social Reform

Part 1 emphasized theological debates about the practice of Islam and its theology, and about who has authority to approve and reproduce religion. Recalling that most Muslims in Central Asia fall somewhere along this spectrum, taking elements from each emphasis, Part 2 provides examples from independent Islamic authorities and Central Asian Muslims themselves that show how current debates result in opinions about the role of Islam in society, the duties of

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<sup>36</sup> Eren Marat Tasar, “Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943–1991” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 539–48.

individual Muslims to reform their own societies to bring them into closer harmony with the morals advocated by their religion, how they see themselves as members of their own nations and ethnicities, and how they relate to the state.

Although state interventions in Islamic practice and theology shape the developing Islamic public discourse, independent (that is, “unofficial” or unaffiliated with state-funded institutions) Islam does not primarily oppose the state or secular government in principle, or espouse violent political ideologies. While independent Islamic authorities will often criticize the state<sup>38</sup> when displeased with its actions or policies—just as many nonreligious citizens do—most argue for an individually focused, religious approach to social problems rather than political reform. Their solution is to have a society of better Muslims, not to create an Islamic state.

## Uzbek Muslims: Independent Voices, Underground Media

Most of the alarm about the “threat” of Islamic revival outlined in the security-focused literature of the past twenty years has focused on Uzbeks, who are often characterized as the “most religious” and “most fundamentalist” of all the Central Asian peoples. Alarmist claims about rising extremism apply to Uzbeks not only in Uzbekistan, but also on their indigenous minority populations in southern Kazakhstan, southern Kyrgyzstan, and northern Tajikistan. Analyses that have viewed Islamic revivalism primarily as a security issue have focused very narrowly on the rhetoric of extremist and political groups with the assumption that this rhetoric was a dominant or significant part of the nonstate, Uzbek-language religious discourse. In almost all cases, with the exception of one or two native scholars closely associated with the Uzbekistani state, the authors writing from the security focus cannot read or speak Uzbek, and so rely on secondary scholarship—often also written by analysts who do not read or speak Uzbek—or state-sponsored analysis.

The rich discourse in independent, Uzbek-language religious media is completely left out of these analyses, and, as is true of the theological emphases of the religious revival, many of the assumptions made in the religion-as-security literature are unfounded in or contradicted by primary sources—that is, in the discourses of Central Asians Muslims between and about themselves. The most popular and influential independent religious authors and teachers, even those whose work is forced underground in Uzbekistan because the Uzbek state withdrew its approval for the author, have little in common with radical groups like Hizb-ut-Tahrir or the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). In spite of this, literature by or sympathetic to these extremist groups is often wrongly assumed to make up a significant part of the unofficial Uzbek religious media market in print, audio, or online.

As in the Soviet tradition of samizdat literature, a heavy censorship regime does not prevent society and individuals from engaging in debates about their identity, sources of moral authority, and basic questions about what it means to be a good Muslim, to live an admirable life, or what it means to be an Uzbek in the first place. The trend of Islamic revival has meant that many

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<sup>38</sup> That is, they will criticize the constitutional order of the state or the concept of secular government; this does not necessarily imply endorsement of specific politicians. Some influential independent Islamic scholars are closely associated with harsh criticism of specific regimes—Obidxon Qori Nazarov, for example, was a vociferous critic of Islam Karimov, but expressed this criticism in calls for the government to obey its own constitution and abide by international standards, rather than advocating an Islamist revolution or a supra-state caliphate.



are interested in specifically Muslim debates about these basic questions, and new media in particular have facilitated a vibrant underground literature of thinkers and writers from various backgrounds who engage in independent dialogue about these questions. The doctrine and ideas of groups like Hizb-ut-Tahrir or the IMU appear in these debates as well, but contrary to many expectations they occupy only a small and relatively insignificant part of the debate.

This section illustrates these generalizations with examples from the lives and work of two popular (and representative) contemporary authors from Uzbek-language independent religious literature, Hayrullo Hamidov and “Muniyb” (aka Ubaydullo Avvob, both pseudonyms). Neither of the authors are formally trained clerics, but they engage one another and the society they live in on questions of deep importance to their audience. As many individual believers do, each falls unevenly onto the spectrum described in Part 1, but their work leans toward opposite ends that engage and interact with one another. Each responds to questions that inform opinions about what kind of state Uzbeks should live in, what kind of society they should form, and how to reach those goals once they are agreed on. In spite of their different backgrounds and perspectives, they and many of their revivalist contemporaries reach broadly similar conclusions about the role of religion in shaping society.

## Hayrullo Hamidov: The First Religious Celebrity of the Independence Generation

Hayrullo Hamidov (b. 1975) is among the most public and mainstream of all the “underground” authors—much of his work was initially published or broadcasted on legal commercial platforms or government-approved websites before his ultimate arrest in January 2010.<sup>39</sup> He is, in a way, an accidental underground figure. Hamidov’s arrest was unexpected, and drew the attention of the international media and human rights organizations primarily because he had built a much wider reputation as a sports journalist before he began actively publishing and speaking on religious issues in 2006 or 2007, becoming Central Asia’s first independent religious celebrity. After a summary trial in the spring of 2010, he was convicted of “leading or organizing a religious extremist or militant group” and sentenced to six years in prison. Among other alleged evidence (most of which was never produced in court according to rights activists, during a process closed to independent observers) he was accused of possessing recordings of sermons by Obidxon Qori Nazarov and Abduvali Qori Mirzoev, evidence deemed sufficient to convict hundreds of other observant Muslims over the past decade.

Trained as a print and broadcast journalist at Tashkent State University in the early 1990s, Hamidov is part of the first generation to come of age in the post-Soviet era, and his life (and his fate) are typical of many of his peers—which may be part of the key to his wide popularity as both a charismatic young sportscaster and an appealing religious teacher. He took advantage of the openness in Uzbek society in the mid- and late 1990s to study both Arabic and Persian and the broadcasting techniques and styles used in the Arab free media. Hamidov gained success at

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<sup>39</sup> Curiously, in spite of his conviction and the seriousness of the charges brought against him, in either an act of open defiance or a sign that even authorities don’t take the accusations they make all that seriously, several legally operating web portals hosted in Uzbekistan continue to feature Hamidov’s poetry and religious essays with apparently no legal consequences. All the same, keeping his work on these sites is clearly a risky and provocative act on the part of the sites’ owners and editors, especially given the Uzbek government’s recent crackdowns on physical stores that distribute even legal and approved religious literature.

the national level as a soccer commentator, working on national television and radio programs and in editorial positions at nationally syndicated newspapers up to the period just before his arrest.<sup>40</sup>

Though we know relatively little about his religious beliefs or interests until the mid-2000s, in interviews he has said that around that time he joined the religious circle of Sheikh Muhammad Sodik Muhammad Yusuf, whom he greatly admired. Within a few years he became one of the most visible students in the sheikh's circle. Muhammad Sodik, the last official mufti of the Uzbek Soviet Republic and first mufti of independent Uzbekistan, is an internationally renowned Muslim scholar and cleric who was forced to live in exile for several years after falling afoul of the Karimov government in the early 1990s. He returned to Uzbekistan in the late 1990s and has established himself, by many accounts, as the most respected and influential independent Muslim scholar in the country.

Around late 2006, with the blessing of his teacher and (according to Hamidov) explicit approval from the state-sponsored muftiate, Hamidov launched a second career as a social and religious journalist and as a religious teacher. His work over the period 2007–2010 crossed multiple genres and forms and transcended the common stereotype (and legal structure in Uzbekistan) that insists religious teaching and education is a field only for religious professionals. He founded and briefly edited a newspaper called *Odamlar Orasida* (Among the People) that became one of the most popular print publications in the country before it was shut down after only a handful of issues. After this project closed down, his most famous one began: Hamidov produced and hosted a religious radio program called *Xolislik Sari* (Towards Fairness/Justice) on a Tashkent-based commercial FM station that featured basic religious education topics and poetry. Both of these ventures offered a Muslim perspective on some extremely controversial social issues.<sup>41</sup>

Sheikh Muhammad Sodik's large digital publishing enterprise *Islom.uz* chose Hamidov to host a series of documentary-style video programs meant to introduce Uzbeks to the basic tenets of Islam and the deep historical legacy of Islam and Islamic scholars in the territory of contemporary Uzbekistan.<sup>42</sup> Long after these publications and broadcasts were closed down, Hamidov's work enjoys a healthy second life, reproduced digitally to reach a global audience on the Internet and copied onto CDs that reportedly sold well in markets in Uzbekistan and continue to sell in Uzbek-speaking areas of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—where his work has never been banned.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Much of Hamidov's personal background given here comes from his own accounts in an extended interview given to BBC Uzbek in 2008. "Bi-bi-si mehmoni: Xayrullo Hamidov" [BBC Guests: Hayrullo Hamidov], *BBC Uzbek*, September 29, 2008. Available at: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/news/story/2008/09/080929\\_hayrullo\\_hamidov.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/news/story/2008/09/080929_hayrullo_hamidov.shtml); accessed April 28, 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Commentary on *Odamlar Orasida* and links to some of the issues in PDF form (which were hidden/protected on sites outside of Uzbekistan) were still available as of spring 2010 on a popular Uzbek language discussion forum. Materials available from author upon request. Episodes of "Xolislik Sari" are widely available on the Internet on sites like YouTube and on Uzbek file-sharing sites as MP3s. Many of the popular poems by Hamidov that are also widely available (and frequently referenced and quoted by his supporters) appear to have been first broadcast/published on the radio program. For example, see: <http://modernhmong.com/?w=U8ftZPRkwqM&title=odilbek> (accessed April 7, 2011). It's interesting to note that on this site, as on many others, Hamidov's materials are presented right alongside pop culture songs and videos and not necessarily given a specific religious compartmentalization.

<sup>42</sup> Hayrullo Hamidov, "Islom: Haq Din" ["Islam: The True Religion"], *Islom.uz*, 2007. The series of seven programs/parts can be viewed on YouTube, e.g., [www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNZerioulvU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNZerioulvU).

<sup>43</sup> I collected multiple examples of Hamidov's work on sale in southern Kyrgyzstan as recently as August 2012.

Through all these genres Hamidov established a reputation for himself as a talented poet. Though his other work has survived by being spread virally across Internet file-sharing sites, his poetry appeals to the broadest number of his fans and readers and was collected by *Islom.uz* in a book called *The Night the Prophet Wept: Poems from "Towards Fairness."*<sup>44</sup> Hamidov is one of only a small handful of contemporary poets presented by a major Uzbekistan-based literary website alongside the classics of Uzbek literature and the famous works of the major *jadid*<sup>45</sup> authors of the early twentieth century that make up the core of popular nationalist literature.<sup>46</sup> Like those of several other poets who have been persecuted or jailed by the Uzbekistani government, many of Hamidov's most popular works openly (though subtly) challenge the Uzbek government's narratives about nearly everything: What is Uzbek history and when did it begin? What kind of country is Uzbekistan becoming, and what kind of society are the Uzbeks? Who were they in the past, and who should they try to become in the future? Most of all, he sharply contradicts the government's rosy appraisals of the status quo and paints the current situation in Uzbekistan as one of collapse, decay, and moral failure. Rather than embracing the official slogan that "Uzbekistan is a state with a great future," Hamidov declares that while Uzbekistan may have been a very great state in the past—for different reasons than the government narrative would have Uzbeks believe—it has fallen far from that greatness into darkness and shame, and the path the country is currently following seems only to be making the situation worse.

As described in Part 1, Hamidov is a good example of a believer who draws from both sides of the spectrum of beliefs and practices. Although trained by a scholar whose teaching emphasizes the foundational texts, according to his own description and judging from his style, Hamidov is also deeply influenced by medieval Turko-Persian Sufi and mystical poetry and by popular religious songs and poems from the pre-Soviet era.

## Muniyb: An Uzbek Muslim Response to Contemporary Suffering

Muniyb<sup>47</sup> (Persian: "one who calls to repentance") is the author of a unique underground work that first appeared in August of 2010 in the aftermath of the bloody ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan that left hundreds, mostly Uzbeks, dead and tens of thousands homeless. The violence shook the Uzbek-speaking community around the world, and prompted a wide variety of responses and commentary wherever Uzbeks could speak freely—that is, primarily on new and underground media.

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<sup>44</sup> Hayrullo Hamidov, *Xolislik Sari Turkimidan: Rasululloh Yig'lagan Kecha (She'rlar)* [The Night the Prophet Wept: Poems from "Towards Fairness"] (n.d.). References on the hosted site make it appear that the book was published possibly as a print version in 2007 or 2008. Available from author on request.

<sup>45</sup> The Jadids are a group of authors, scholars, and educators named after an education reform effort they championed (*usul-e jadid*, "the new method") in Muslim areas of the Russian empire and Turkestan, whose efforts continued through the early Soviet period. They were a major early modern Islamic and social reform movement that promoted synthesis of European technical and scientific knowledge (and some art forms) with Central Asian culture and religion. Many of the Jadid authors are revered as the founders of modern Uzbek literature and credited with first adapting the Uzbek language to forms like the Western novel.

<sup>46</sup> Hayrullo Hamidov, "Zamonaviy O'zbek sher'riyati: Hayrullo Hamidov" [Contemporary Uzbek Poetry] (n.d.). Material available from author on request; the material is available on the web, but the link is withheld to avoid attracting attention to the Tashkent-based website.

<sup>47</sup> The author also calls himself Ubaydullo Avvob (in Uzbek/Arabic: "servant of God"; in Persian: "one who calls people to the Faith") at times—all of these are pseudonyms.

Out of the clamor of Uzbek voices searching for meaning and direction in this shocking tragedy, Muniyb published a two-part, book-length response to the violence, addressing the situation in southern Kyrgyzstan specifically and the problems of human suffering and evil in general. The first part of this volume, called *Suffering and Misfortune: An Epistle of Tears and Grief, Part 1*, is a moving pamphlet published as a PDF on a number of religious and political opposition websites and republished many times by readers who found it compelling.<sup>48</sup> Written in the Turko-Persian literary tradition of *dardnoma* (a letter written to express grief for someone else's loss or suffering), the short book is filled with deep tones of sadness and sympathy and describes the violence in graphic terms.

The first volume is divided into several different sections: it immediately introduces a religious perspective on the events and centers the focus of the discussion on the Muslim belief in *qiyomat* (Judgment Day), and both the eternal consequences to be suffered by those who committed the violence and the eternal justice and reward to be received by innocent victims. The piece goes on to describe and sympathize with the confusion about the causes and actors behind the events, and to locate this suffering in the larger narrative of Uzbek suffering under the Karimov regime, the persecution of religiously active Muslims in Uzbekistan—including an entire section on Hayrullo Hamidov—and, ultimately, the whole experience of human suffering and the basic questions of theodicy and the problem of evil.

In a style common to much of the independent religious literature published on the Internet, Muniyb intermixes anecdotes; material taken from the Web; news reports; many of his own poems; excerpts from classical Uzbek poetry, the Jadids, and Hamidov; extensive quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith, and several charts and graphic art designs to weave his narrative in a uniquely modern form. In spite of his relatively more reformist approach, Muniyb is clearly influenced by Hamidov, quoting him extensively and writing a long poem in tribute to him. He mentions many of the other most famous underground religious authors in a list of what he says are the great contemporary Muslim scholars and teachers (including Abduvali qori Mirzoev and Obidxon qori Nazarov) who have been repressed by the Karimov regime—killed or forced to leave their homeland in what he depicts as a great loss to the Uzbek people and as part of the general narrative of contemporary suffering.

A few things can be tentatively said about Muniyb based on the scant hints he gives about himself in the text and the content and style of his writing.<sup>49</sup> Like Hamidov, he does not appear to be a professional religious cleric, though unlike Hamidov he claims not to be well known in his secular career. He is an avid consumer of Uzbek literature and very interested in the same poets, thinkers, and historiographies that are popular in the Uzbek nationalist political opposition and frequently discussed on nationalist forums on the Web.<sup>50</sup> At the same time he is clearly also deeply influenced by very conservative religious beliefs that are informed, if

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<sup>48</sup> The first part of *Musibat va Munosabat* was published nearly simultaneously on two websites: *Muslim Uzbekistan*, a US-based conservative religious revivalist and political opposition site, and *Yangi Dunyo* (New World), a Sweden-based opposition site run by author and journalist Yusuf Rasul. From there it was republished on a number of other sites. Part 1 can be found at <http://yangidunyo.com/?p=13851> (August 8, 2010), and Part 2 (November 12, 2010) can be found here: <http://yangidunyo.com/?p=15772>. Accessed April 7, 2011.

<sup>49</sup> During fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan in 2011, several informants told me that Muniyb was an Uzbek originally from southern Kyrgyzstan but now living in Russia. Though none of them seemed to know his real identity, this was the story they had heard about him.

<sup>50</sup> *Yangi Dunyo*, one of the sites on which Muniyb published, is a good example of this type of forum. The site is full of articles and discussions of many of the same poets and thinkers that Muniyb refers to in his text.

not by outside sources, then by Uzbek reformers from the far end of the text/piety side of the spectrum. The religious education material and short lectures that comprise most of the second volume, for example, closely resemble strict Salafist theology while avoiding Islamist politics.

## “What Is Becoming of the Uzbeks?” Dominant Narratives about Uzbek Identity

The first commonality between these authors and many of their contemporaries is that they write specifically in Uzbek for an Uzbek audience, embrace and use specifically Uzbek cultural and literary forms, and accept a number of claims about Uzbek identity that conform at first glance to many of the Uzbekistani government’s main narratives. They write from a distinctly Muslim perspective and often write specifically to advance religious ends—that is, to persuade or convert readers to accept or become more faithful to an international, universalist religion—but they do so in a uniquely Uzbek idiom. Rather than rejecting ethnic or national identity in favor of a universal religious one, as is often supposed to be an important and universal aspect of the Central Asian Islamic revival, they affirm the existence and importance of *O‘zbeklik* (unique Uzbekness). In almost all cases, though, to borrow a famous phrase from Soviet history, they accept the national form but dispute the content, challenging dominant official narratives of the past, present, and future.

Hamidov and Muniyb, like most of their contemporaries, accept the official nationalist construction of Uzbek history that pushes the existence of the Uzbek people centuries or millennia into the past. They agree with the broad outlines of the official national history books: Uzbeks were the envy of all Central Asia, the most educated and civilized nation ever to live in the region, and the source of many great advances in world civilization. This projection of Uzbek history into ancient times accommodates the inclusion of a number of world-famous giants of Islamic civilization who were born or lived in Transoxiana, like Imam al-Bukhari, Ibn Termizi (at-Tirmidhi), Ibn Sina (Avicenna), the mystic Bahauddin Naqshband, and the great Chaghatai and Persian mystical poet Alisher Navoiy.

All of these are major figures in the pantheon of officially promoted heroes of Uzbek culture. Streets, cultural buildings, universities, and even cities in Uzbekistan were named in their honor and countless statues erected to them in the postindependence effort to promote a unique Uzbek culture separate from the Russian and Soviet imperialist legacy and in competition with neighboring countries and peoples (especially Tajikistan) who in many cases have an equal historical case for claiming them as illustrious forefathers. In official usage, however, they are often purged of their religious significance—they become “heroes of world civilization” without any theological context, and emphasis on figures like Ibn Sina is placed on their contributions to science and national prestige, as if they were Muslims merely by the accident of being born on Muslim land. In the underground literature, however, the “personal faith” and righteous behavior of all these figures and their contribution to Islamic theology and jurisprudence are moved front and center, evidence that Islamic civilization is not somehow inherently backwards or “behind” the West.

While these figures are often discussed, these authors are much less interested in the conquerors, another category of national heroes even more important to the official pantheon. First among these is Amir Temur, fashioned by the Karimov government into the chief national symbol for Uzbekistan and—as Muniyb notes in a sarcastic jab at Karimov—often used in government propaganda for a cult of personality by proxy. In Hamidov’s poem “An Uzbek’s Declaration” (O’zbekning Iqrori), he personifies the Uzbek people as a narrator and gently notes that Uzbekistani history books have gotten longer and longer since independence, and advises interested readers to skip over whole sections of previously obscure conquerors and warriors and the boasts about the ever-extending antiquity of Samarqand and Bukhara. The true history of the (“true”) Uzbek people begins, he says, when the Uzbeks became Muslims: nothing outside of that is worth remembering or using to build the future. He does not dispute that the people who lived on the territory of the modern state of Uzbekistan were always Uzbeks from pre-history—instead he argues that Uzbeks were not really Uzbeks before they received the message of the Prophet, a spiritual sea-change that he credits for every worthwhile achievement of Uzbek culture.

*O’n to’rt asr bo’ldi mo’minligimga  
Rosul kelgan kuni odam bo’lgandim.  
Olovlarni sanam, suvni xudo deb  
O’sha davrgacha ruhsiz o’lgandim*

*Fourteen centuries have passed in [the] faith  
The day the Prophet came I became human  
Fire was my idol, I called water a god<sup>51</sup>  
Until that time [of the Prophet] I was dead and  
soulless*

[ . . . ]

*Dunyo belanchagi atama meni,  
Qora o’tmishlarga tutmagin yaqin.  
Agar bilmoq bo’lsang mening yoshimni  
Rosul kelgan kundan boshlab sanagin  
Men o’sha kun asli odam bo’lgandim!*

*Though I’m known as the cradle of civilization,  
The darkness of the past is closer than you would think.  
If you would know my age  
Begin counting from the day the Prophet came  
That day I became a real person!<sup>52</sup>*

This embrace of the Uzbeks’ expanded nationalist history is highly selective and thereby subversive. It accepts the main thrust of the official narrative—that the Uzbeks are a great and ancient people—but argues that the source of that greatness is not only some innate creativeness or brilliance in the Uzbek gene pool (though this is not denied), but the light, creative energy, and moral clarity that come from Islam. This emphasis reassigns mere strongmen like Amir Temur (and by proxy his ersatz heir, Islam Karimov) to the backbench of history at best and the wrong side at worst. Thus all the efforts undertaken by the official cultural production apparatus to constantly remind contemporary Uzbeks of their past—the explosion of rebuilt and restored architectural masterpieces of the great Muslim empires, the museums, statues, history books—all become fields of contested meaning, ubiquitous visual symbols for the author’s argument that the light (*nur*) of Islam is the key element of Uzbek history.

Expanded narratives about the past greatness of the Uzbek nation are deployed by the official cultural production to imply that the current government, having inherited this mantle of national achievements, can surely lead the Uzbek nation to a future as bright and great as the past. These

<sup>51</sup> The “fire” in this line refers to Zoroastrianism, the dominant pre-Islamic religion in Uzbekistan, and “water” likely refers to pre-Islamic pantheistic beliefs among the nomadic population of the region.

<sup>52</sup> Hayrullo Hamidov, “O’zbekning Iqrori,” n.d.

narratives are selectively accepted by the underground authors, however, to do exactly the opposite: they appropriate the narratives of past greatness instead as a weapon against the present and a scathing tool for criticizing not only the present government, but society as a whole.

Narratives of the present from both authors are grim, bordering in Muniyb's case on literally apocalyptic. The past greatness of the Uzbeks is only a sign of the height from which they have fallen. Hamidov's best-known work is a long poem called "What Is Becoming of the Uzbeks?" in which the final line of each stanza repeats the title question with an intensity that builds as the text becomes more dire with each cycle. Once the Uzbeks produced the greatest scholars, poets, and theologians of their age—but now what? Once the Uzbeks were the masters of all Central Asia, but today even the wild Turkmen can stand and mock them. If once the Uzbeks were a light to all other nations, today they have plunged into such darkness that the very opposite is true. Hamidov writes:

<i>Chetdan kelgan har qanday odam,</i>	<i>Any kind of foreign-born person,</i>
<i>Hayron bo'lar tashlasa qadam,</i>	<i>Who accidentally stumbles into [Uzbekistan],</i>
<i>Hamma uchun tunda yoqqan sham,</i>	<i>Is candlelit for everyone in the night,</i>
<i>O'zbeklarga nima bo'lyapti?</i>	<i>What is becoming of the Uzbeks?</i>

Muniyb is so taken with this assessment of the present day that he not only quotes it extensively, but writes his own poem as a tribute to Hamidov, which includes Hamidov's arrest and secret trial as further evidence that the Uzbeks have lost their way and slipped far off the path that led them to past greatness.

In the eyes of both these authors and many of their peers, however, the state is not the only source of trouble for Uzbeks—or even the most important. As discussed in Part 1, over the past several decades the Muslim communities in Central Asia have at times been divided by bitter debates over traditions, authority, theology, and how to react to the influx of external religious movements and authorities that first trickled and then flooded into the region in the late and post-Soviet periods, from Salafi missionaries to Turkish Sufi sheikhs and South Korean evangelical Christians, all armed with proverbial bags of cash.<sup>53</sup>

While these external influences are problems that both authors consider, the greater issue is identified as bad behavior on the part of believers who went to extremes. Even those who used their new freedoms to search for religious meanings allowed sectarian debates to divide them. Instead of uniting together to serve the common purpose of reviving Central Asian society and returning to the light and the lost greatness of the past, the authors argue, too many have focused their energies on attacking fellow Muslims. Though Hamidov and Muniyb are not without opinions on these debates, they both agree that precious opportunities to form a new and better society in the post-Soviet window had been squandered in useless infighting among the believers.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See Frank and Mamatov, *Uzbek Islamic Debates*; Abduvahitov, "Islamic Revivalism"; Tasar, "Soviet and Muslim"; Babajanov, Muminov, and von Kugelgen, *Disputy Musulmanskiy*.

<sup>54</sup> Hayrullo Hamidov, "Insof" [Conscience], n.d.; "Zarvorli Yuk" [The Heavy Burden], n.d.; "Qusur" [The Failing], n.d.

Those outside religion, according to both authors, have tended to fall prey to the illusions of the “new materialism” that swept the former Communist bloc in the postindependence period and distracted many from the true source of meaning and happiness (Islam) and from the true culture and values of the Uzbek people—family, duty, working for the collective good—and deepened their sleep and ignorance by adding drunkenness (*kayf-safó*) and drug addiction (*bangilar*) to the problems that many must overcome to see the truth.<sup>55</sup>

All of these problems are described by a master symbol of Islamic literature—the path or way.<sup>56</sup> Life without the true faith is a narrow, twisted path. According to Hamidov, Muniyb, and all the other authors of the Islamic revival, following the way of Islam and the example of the Prophet and his righteous companions is the wide and bright path: according to their argument, navigating life according to the Creator’s directions is easier and less hazardous than using faulty information or going one’s own way.<sup>57</sup> Living according to other values—be they secular nationalism, materialism, communism, or excessive liberalism—is described as a narrow, difficult way that leads only to trouble and social dysfunction.

## What Is a Good Uzbek, a Good Person?

In spite of the texts’ open defiance of official narratives and sharp criticism of the government of Uzbekistan and the region, neither author ultimately blames the state for the problems of society. Unlike Islamist literature that focuses on “regime change” and implementation of religious values (or shari’a) from above, the worst problems with the status quo—from the ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan to the oppression of religiously active Muslims in Uzbekistan—are portrayed by these authors and many others in independent revivalist literature as social failures (*qusurlar*) rooted in individual moral choices.

Unjust government is a form of suffering, according to Muniyb, and one that is an acute reality for Uzbeks all over Central Asia and a frequent theme in the texts. But worse than that is betrayal by brothers, by one’s own people, who sell one another out for a little bit of earthly power. The real problem that must be addressed (and for which Muslim authors offer a religious solution) is not the secular state, or even a state hostile toward believers, but the failure of individuals to act morally in their given circumstances and fulfill their duties to their families, their compatriots, and their fellow Muslims.

In Hamidov’s poem, “Majnuntol” (The Willow Tree), he levels his most poignant criticism at the Uzbekistani government for creating an atmosphere of moral decay with a graphic symbol of a willow tree in the National Garden where immoral young men lure virgin schoolgirls to be deflowered. Even here, where the state has created the infrastructure for one of the more

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<sup>55</sup> Muniyb frequently alleges that the ethnic Kyrgyz gangs who attacked the Uzbeks in Osh and Jalalabad were high on drugs (*bangi*), and Hamidov often criticizes his neighbors for being too busy getting drunk or high to tackle their own moral shortcomings, much less those of society. In “What Is Becoming of the Uzbeks,” he writes: “[The Uzbeks’] piety is made of drugs / Their life made of debauchery / Their good works made of hypocrisy / What is becoming of the Uzbeks?” See also, Hayrullo Hamidov, “Hazrati Umarning Nasihati” [Hazrat Umar’s Counsel], n.d.; “Ummat” [The Umma], n.d.

<sup>56</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 63-66.

<sup>57</sup> Sura 1:6, “Guide us on the straight path,” is a part of the *Fatiha* (The Opening), the first section of the Qur’an that is a preface to daily prayers for all Muslims. See Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs*, 63.



explicit signs of moral collapse available in conservative religious vocabulary, Hamidov lays the true blame for what happens under this tree not on the government or on Karimov (who built the garden), but on society itself, on the family, and ultimately on the individuals who abandoned their duty to protect their daughters and sisters from young men whose parents and families had similarly failed to teach them to behave correctly.<sup>58</sup>

So while governments may be bad, and it may be the lot of many to suffer injustice from above, the focus of both authors is on changing society from below, one individual, one family, one neighborhood (*mahalla*) at a time. This brings our focus to the primary questions of this project—what kind of change do they propose, then? If Central Asians must better themselves as individuals, what does it mean to be a good person, a good Muslim, a good Uzbek (or Kyrgyz, or Kazakh)?

The first step to a good life for revivalist teachers, as evident in Hadidov's comments above, is to accept individual agency and responsibility. Though they also stress the importance of fulfilling one's duties to family and community (primary traditional Central Asian values) this does not relieve each person from a highly modern and almost existentialist construction of individual moral responsibility.

The next step after accepting individual agency is to apply it to becoming a better Muslim. The light of the Prophet and the teaching of Islam—whether these are approached primarily through the foundational texts or through the reproduction of tradition—are presented as the ultimate blueprint that underlies being good in all the categories above, including being a good Uzbek. The authors argue that while one can be a good Muslim without being a good Uzbek, one cannot be a good Uzbek or even a good pan-Turk without being a good Muslim. *O'zbeklik*, being Uzbek, is portrayed as a blood tie, a broad family that each Uzbek is born into. Since God is all powerful and all wise, all things have a purpose, including being born into the family of Uzbeks. This theocentric perspective on *o'zbeklik* sacralizes ethno-national belonging and identity. Being a good Uzbek is part of each Muslim Uzbek's duty before God, just as is being a good son or daughter, a good brother or sister, and a good husband, wife, or parent.

In these constructions the imaginary wall that compartmentalizes modern, national identity and universalist (premodern) religion is erased for these authors and their fellow travelers. Islam becomes another element of habitus or identity that composes the imagined nation—a common religion is explicitly added to language, history, origin story, culture, and territory that define what it means to be Uzbek.

Being a good person, a good Muslim, and a good Uzbek are therefore intertwined for those whose fate it is to be born Uzbeks. Each person must take individual moral responsibility for the circumstances in which God decided to place him or her—rich or poor, Uzbek or Kyrgyz (or Kazakh, Turkmen, or Tajik), free or oppressed.

For as many political implications as there are in the underground attacks on the status quo, there is remarkably little that is immediately political about these definitions of right belief and right behavior in this literature. Their theology varies little or not at all from the teaching of the state-sponsored muftiate of Uzbekistan, which in Hamidov's case apparently approved the work

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<sup>58</sup> Hayrullo Hamidov, "Majnunol" [The Willow Tree], n.d. Material available from author on request.

that has now been forced underground since the state declared him a terrorist. Yet their work is all the same full of political consequences, as are their lives in the attempt to live out these beliefs. According to this literature, being a good Muslim and a good citizen means that each person has a duty to protect the oppressed, to pursue justice, and to refuse to allow states created by men to dictate the terms of religion or put secular national identity above a religious national one. If the authors—and their contemporaries across Central Asia—argue that they live in an unjust state that oppresses its people, or that the state will not allow them to be faithful Muslims and good citizens at the same time, these conflicts become fraught with consequences.

### Part 3: Political Islam and Violent Extremism

After identifying directions of Islamic revivalism in Central Asia and defining the Islamic revival as a discourse involving competing interpretations of “true” Islam in Part 1, the concrete examples of this discourse presented in Part 2 illustrate that even authors and teachers whose approach comes heavily from the text/piety end of the spectrum agree broadly with their mystical/traditionalist colleagues that Islamic reform is a duty that begins with the individual and only then extends to society. This broad agreement includes the vast majority of participants in the religious revival. It does not, however, account for the radical fringes at society’s edges, like the small but vocal minority of Central Asians who belong to groups like Hizb-ut-Tahrir (the Party of Liberation) and call for revolutionary political changes that would impose social reform at the top rather than from below, abandoning the model of secular, plural statehood. Even further at the fringes of mainstream society are those groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and its offshoot the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), who embrace violent methods for these political goals, have engaged in political violence in Central Asia in the past, and currently fight as allies of the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan’s western borderlands.

Much of this project has been devoted to arguing that these groups play a far less important role in the Islamic revival in Central Asia than has been supposed by much of the literature on security and regional stability, and that a wide gap exists between the Islamic revival as described by ethnographic and religious scholarship and the way it is portrayed in security-focused literature. This final section attempts to bridge that gap between scholarship and security concerns, addressing radical political ideologies and Islamist groups that remain the justifiable concern of those focused on security and stability. Based on the more nuanced understanding now available to us about Islam as a social factor in Central Asia, the results of this project suggest that the difference between religious revivalist groups and political Islamist groups is straightforward: the first is religious and the second is political, and although there is sometimes overlap between them on the individual level, there is no necessary link between the two.

This is not a novel conclusion, and Central Asia is not atypical in that many of the theological beliefs held by people at the most reformist ends of the text/piety side of the spectrum are similar to the reformist teachings associated with, for example, the Deobandi-influenced madrassas in northern Pakistan that trained the religious scholars of the Taliban movement.<sup>59</sup> As has been discussed above, the decisive break with traditional jurisprudence and the emphasis on

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<sup>59</sup> Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

the period of the Prophet's life, the reign of the "four rightly guided caliphs," and their original Muslim state typify some of the stricter reformist beliefs in Central Asia. These also characterize the basic Salafist doctrine held by, for example, Abdullah Azzam, the ideological founder of al-Qaida and mentor of Osama bin Laden. But neither al-Qaida nor Hizb-ut-Tahrir are theological schools, they are political and—in the case of al-Qaida—militant movements.<sup>60</sup> Radical political and militant movements mobilize in response to political conditions to achieve political ends. Religion sometimes informs the way that individuals organize themselves into these groupings and their interpretation of their religion sometimes shapes the way they envision radical changes to their political environment. In other words, a specific interpretation of religion shapes and informs the way these groups organize, but it is not the primary or even the necessary driver for violent mobilization.

In order to propose an explanation for why some Central Asians respond to Islamist or jihadi militant political mobilization, this project adopts the hypothesis that radical Islamist groups appear in Central Asia primarily in places where the population feels driven to adopt radical political solutions. That is, these movements emerge in response to repression and lack of political representation in places where people lack options to change the system from within, rather than those places that are—as standard arguments in the security-focused literature have argued—"more religious," "have more Wahhabis," or simply poorer. Following this hypothesis the increased level of popularity of parties like Hizb-ut-Tahrir among ethnic Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan and northern Tajikistan, for example, can be explained by their level of political marginalization compared to the titular nations in those republics, rather than the standard explanation that they are somehow "more religious" than their Kyrgyz or Tajik compatriots.

## Standard Explanations and Their Shortcomings

The argument that militant groups are most likely to mobilize followers successfully in areas that are "more religious" than others is problematic for a wide variety of reasons, in spite of the fact that it has been repeated so often that it is frequently left unquestioned. Uzbekistan, for example, is explained as the place of origin for the most violent Islamist militant groups in Central Asia because "Uzbeks are historically more religious." This facile argument fails to explain, however, why some of the areas of Uzbekistan with the longest religious tradition—Bukhara and Samarqand, home to some of the greatest Muslim thinkers and scientists of world history—produce zero religious militant groups. Similarly it fails to explain why what appears to be Kazakhstan's first Islamist militant suicide bombing happened in 2011 in Aytrau, in the desolate west of the country.

The broader modification to that argument, that regardless of history Islamist movements happen primarily where people are "more religious" in the present, or where they are experiencing an Islamic revival, is contingent on the assumption that all Islamic revival is monolithic and leads believers to nearly identical theological and sociopolitical conclusions. This idea has been disproven by a wealth of scholarship from across the Muslim world, including—as the first two sections of this paper illustrate—in Central Asia. Islam is no monolith, and this is true in Central Asia perhaps even more than in other parts of the world that have more social,

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<sup>60</sup> Andrew McGregor, "'Jihad and the Rifle Alone': 'Abdullah 'Azzam and the Islamist Revolution,'" *The Journal of Conflict Studies* (Fall 2003). <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/view/219/377>

economic, and demographic similarity. Becoming “more religious” in Central Asia is at least as likely to motivate a believer to climb Mt. Suleiman in Osh or visit a spirit healer in Andijon as it is to motivate them to memorize hadiths, grow a long beard, or wear hijab, and none of these latter have any more connection to whether or not that individual adopts a desire to overthrow their government than does visiting a spirit healer.

Similarly, the common argument that the Ferghana Valley, for example, is a “hotbed of Islamist militants” (or will become one in the near future) because it “has more Wahhabis” is flawed on multiple levels, as has been demonstrated in the first two sections of this paper. In Central Asia this term is a political weapon, not a theological description. Its definition is so flexible as to be nearly empty, and while the ultimate control over the category belongs to the state, multiple ethnographic studies show that ordinary people can use it against one another for social or economic leverage (much as people were branded “*kulaks*” in Stalin’s USSR or “reds” in McCarthy-era America).<sup>61</sup> Moreover there is the problem that many (or most) people who hold conservative, reformist beliefs like those originally branded “Wahhabis” in the 1970s have no political platforms and adopt a bottom-up, individually focused program of social change. In the face of this evidence, then, it is difficult to argue that there is some inherent political aspect to reformist beliefs.

Finally, the most common assumption in the security-focused literature about Islamist militant groups in Central Asia is that they take root primarily among the very poor. As Graeme Blair, Christine Fair, and their co-authors note in a recent groundbreaking study questioning the link between poverty and militant groups in Pakistan, the idea that Islamist militancy and poverty are positively correlated is often taken for granted, and rarely questioned or even problematized, despite the number of easily accessible counterexamples (Osama bin Laden, al-Qaida leader and multi-millionaire heir to a real estate empire, for example).<sup>62</sup> The Blair study found that when actually put to the test with empirical evidence, poverty—especially urban poverty—had a negative correlation to support for Islamist militants.<sup>63</sup> Other recent studies have found no (or even a negative correlation) between poverty and participation in militant Islamist groups, that suicide bombers tend to be significantly better educated than the populations from which they are drawn, and that the support for political violence is positively correlated to higher levels of education.<sup>64</sup>

No similar studies have been done to date in Central Asia, but a brief overview of the situation is enough to show that there are serious problems with viewing relative poverty as the primary causal factor for alleged popular support of Islamist movements. In the Ferghana Valley, for example, poverty is frequently cited as an explanation for the presence of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Relatively, however, the valley region is far better off economically

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<sup>61</sup> Rasanayagam, “I Am Not a Wahhabi.”

<sup>62</sup> For a detailed economic analysis of terrorism and support for militant groups, see: Alan B. Kreuger, *What Makes a Terrorist? Economics and the Roots of Terrorism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>63</sup> Graeme Blair, C. Christine Fair, Neil Malhotra, and Jacob N. Shapiro, “Poverty and Support for Militant Politics: Evidence from Pakistan,” *American Journal of Political Science* (2012): 1–19.

<sup>64</sup> Efraim Benmelech, Claude Berrebi, and Esteban F. Klor, *Economic Conditions and the Quality of Suicide Terrorism*, NBER Working Paper No. 16320 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010); Efraim Benmelech and Claude Berrebi, “Human Capital and the Productivity of Suicide Bombers” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21, no. 3 (2007): 223–28. A version (with a different title) is available as NBER Working Paper No. 12910.

than desolate Karakalpakstan in Uzbekistan, for example, or than barren Naryn province in Kyrgyzstan—and, according to the data we have available, neither of these areas has any meaningful Islamist presence.

## The Authoritarian Hypothesis and Explanations for Islamist Violence in Central Asia's Recent History

Political scientist Eric McGlinchey offers an alternative hypothesis to explain why radical Islamist groups attract more support and activity in some parts of Central Asia instead of others: “Islamist movements in Central Asia are first and foremost a response to local authoritarian rule: the more authoritarian the state, the more pronounced political Islam will be in society.”<sup>65</sup> He continues:

More specifically, domestic opposition groups adjust their strategies according to the degree of contestation allowed under a given authoritarian regime. In authoritarian states where limited contestation is allowed, where opposition groups can find voice in Parliament or in the press, these opposition groups are more likely to see their interests as best served by lobbying for incremental reform and liberalization. In totalitarian states, in contrast, where contestation is not allowed and where the opposition is fully disenfranchised from the political system, opposition movements are more likely to press for revolutionary change.<sup>66</sup>

In his case studies, McGlinchey examines the popularity of Hizb-ut-Tahrir and incidents of Islamist antigovernment violence among ethnic Uzbeks in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and finds that both scenarios fit the hypothesis well. Since all political opposition is barred from contestation in the legislature, the press, and public life, Uzbekistan is a straightforward case. In Kyrgyzstan, however, we see a bifurcation of political opportunities along ethnic lines: political contestation is a viable strategy for ethnic Kyrgyz oppositionists, but ethnic Uzbeks (even before the 2010 ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan) were represented much more poorly, and their limited political representatives tended to be allies of the ruling regime rather than voices for change or contestation. Therefore, the relatively higher level of willingness to seek revolutionary political change among ethnic Uzbeks can be explained by their political situation, without reference to theology, poverty, or historical religiosity.

I propose to broaden the hypothesis slightly and test it against several other cases in Central Asia's recent history—all of which are usually explained in the religion-as-security literature with reference to religiosity, theology, or poverty as discussed above. In demonstrating that the hypothesis explains past Islamist political mobilization, I suggest that it may be useful for predicting future areas of mobilization and potential conflict.

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<sup>65</sup> Eric McGlinchey, “The Making of Militants: The State and Islam in Central Asia,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 25, no. 3 (2005): 559.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 560.

Radical Islamist groups are likely to be able to influence and potentially mobilize elements of the population in areas that fit two conditions:

1. Islam is a register on which people communicate and a point of reference in making personal and communal moral decisions; and/or
2. Some social groups within this first population feel significantly dissatisfied with, disengaged from, and unrepresented in the political process at the local or national level; they seek radical or revolutionary political solutions because they believe they face radical political problems.

As evidence that Islamic political mobilization is primarily a political response, we would expect that populations or subpopulations amenable to radical political solutions would be susceptible to recruitment and mobilization by non-Islamist political groups as well, e.g., ultranationalist groups, ethno-political groups, regional rebellions, or class-based mobilizations, which would indicate that social actors are reacting to a shared political problem in more than one way, rather than being driven to revolt because they are, bluntly put, “too Muslim to be ruled by secular government.” Thus we would expect mobilization of Islamist groups to correlate frequently with mobilization of radical secular groups, and vice versa. This hypothesis can be proved by analyzing a variety of social and political conflicts that resulted in violent mobilization in Central Asia across the past three decades. As our historical cases, we will briefly consider the same three most often cited by the religion-as-security literature as evidence for the idea that Islamic fundamentalism is the primary cause of instability in the region: the war in Afghanistan, the Tajik Civil War, and unrest in the Ferghana Valley in 1989–1992.

## Afghanistan, 1973–1978

Afghanistan is never far removed from the conversation in contemporary discussions of political Islamism and its potential effects on Central Asia. The long war in Afghanistan is often cited as a cautionary tale for Central Asia that justifies repressive measures and careful social management by authoritarian regimes, warning that without these steps the “Wahhabis would take over just like they did in Afghanistan.” Attention is almost always centered, however, on the threat of the Taliban or the IMU, with little focus on events before the genesis of the Taliban in 1994 or the circumstances of their emergence.

The political situation in Afghanistan that shapes the environment in which these actors operate was created by violent political contestations that go back well into the 1970s and gave rise to the factions—many of them Islamists supported financially and tactically by the West—whose internecine conflict sparked the Taliban insurrection in the early 1990s.<sup>67</sup> Many of the politico-military leaders who dominated Afghan politics and war from the 1980s to nearly the present, including former president (1992–1996) Burhanuddin Rabbani (d. 2011), Northern Alliance leader Ahmed Shah Massoud (d. 2001), and Taliban-allied militant leader Gulbuddin

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<sup>67</sup> See: David B. Edwards, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

Hekmatyar, founded their organizations and first adopted militant tactics in the period after 1973, when Daud Khan overthrew his cousin King Zahir Shah and introduced authoritarian reforms that persecuted political opponents to his regime.<sup>68</sup>

This period of economic stagnation and political persecution energized not only Islamist fundamentalist militants like Hekmatyar and his faction (Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin). Two opposing camps each embraced revolutionary political change, and neither was given an opportunity to contest political power in a meaningful way. Islamist Muslims and Communist atheists alike increasingly embraced violent tactics: first against the Daud Khan regime that was successfully overthrown by the Communists in 1978, and then against one another in the aftermath. Hekmatyar, in fact, first gained notoriety for his exceptional cruelty not as a result of attacks against the state, but for involvement in the attempted murder of Communist Party activists at Kabul State University whom he viewed as his rivals in the political opposition.

The struggle between radical Islamists and radical Communists in Afghanistan began as a response to the same political crisis. It resulted in a state of extreme protracted violence—albeit one in which the sides, actors, and external supporters have all changed—that has lasted for nearly forty years. As Afghanistan’s society further fragmented and fractured during the long war, by the time the Taliban emerged (two decades later) they were forced to compete for power and allegiances with groups formed along regional, ethnic, and criminal lines. Thus, while some Afghans drew on their religious identity as a common language of mobilization and were motivated by political circumstances to join Islamist movements, a great number of others responded to the same circumstances by joining class-, region-, or ethnicity-based political groups.

## The Tajik Civil War

Similarly, the Tajik Civil War is an oft-cited case for the supposed dangers of letting Islam develop unchecked by careful state management. As in Afghanistan, this description is made to fit by focusing only on the late period of the civil war, when it devolved primarily into a battle between neo-Communists in Dushanbe and rural eastern groups mobilized around Islamic leaders, some of whom received support from Islamist factions in neighboring Afghanistan. The vast bulk of the actual violence in the Tajik Civil War, however, happened in the first year of the war in 1992, and included multiple factions that had nothing to do with Islam (and in which Islamic leaders fought on both sides, that is, on behalf of both the Popular Front that would eventually be headed by Emomali Rahmon and the United Tajik Opposition (UTO)).

The political crisis that devolved into war in the summer of 1992 emerged in part as the reaction of these multiple factions against the long rule of Communist Party elites from a single region (the northern district of Leninobod (Sughd)), who dominated the political and economic resources of the Tajik SSR from its founding to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The UTO was formed first in opposition to these northern elites at the end of the Soviet period, and was a diverse organization comprised of secular Tajik nationalist intelligentsia from the Rastokhez

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<sup>68</sup> Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

party, Gorno-Badakhshani ethno-political groupings who advocated for autonomy for their own region (which is ethnically, linguistically, and religiously distinct from the rest of Tajikistan), and the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) led during the war by Said Abdullo Nuri.

Only after the UTO was militarily defeated by the Popular Front in central Tajikistan and Emomali Rahmon was installed as the new national leader in late 1992 did the broad UTO coalition fall apart as other groups mostly withdrew from the fighting. The militant wing of the IRPT continued fighting until 1997, when it—and other members of the UTO—were included in the government by the terms of the peace accords negotiated that year. In exchange for inclusion into the political process, the IRPT agreed to support the secular constitution of Tajikistan; it is now the only legal Islamic—but not Islamist—party in Central Asia.

The Tajik Civil War, then, is a prime example of *both* the way a repressive political environment creates radical political organizations that mobilize multiple ideologies and identity categories *and* the way these same organizations can then demobilize and return to peaceful tactics in response to inclusion in the political process. If the process that began the Tajik Civil War had indeed been triggered primarily by religious factors—or as a result of a sharp increase in Islamic revivalism—we would not expect to see revolutionary political organizations of different types emerge at the same time. Yet this is exactly the case, suggesting that religious identity or shared theology was not the cause of the conflict, but only one of several social identities that could be mobilized by political groups that were attempting to overturn the same authoritarian system or were competing for power in the chaos following its successful overthrow.

## Ferghana Valley Unrest, 1989–1992

Just as in the cases above, the emergence of the IMU/IJU as a group willing to adopt political violence in Central Asia in 1999–2004 (and in Afghanistan more continuously) is often explained only with reference to their mature period, when they emerged as operational militant organizations. The conditions that supported them in 1999 and now—like funding and training from al-Qaida and the Taliban in Pakistan—are often read back onto their origin in the Ferghana Valley of 1992, when a famous confrontation between Karimov and an angry group of Islamic activists, including the IMU's ideological founder Tohir Yo'ldoshev, took place in Namangan.<sup>69</sup> Namangan and Andijon of the late 1980s are often regarded as the birthplace of violent domestic Islamism in Central Asia, and yet apart from some minor scuffles over mosque leadership—such as the one that occurred in Kokand in 1989<sup>70</sup>—and the formation of a few vigilante militias, there was in fact no organized Islamist violence in the Ferghana Valley until the minor armed incursion of the fully formed IMU nearly a decade later in 1999.

This is not to say that the “restive” Ferghana Valley didn't deserve this characterization in the late Soviet period and immediately following the Soviet collapse. There were a number of incidents of serious civic violence that killed hundreds during that period: most notably, a series of riots that began in Kokand against Meskhetian Turks in 1989, the 1990 ethnic conflict between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Uzgen and Osh, and a disorganized antigovernment riot in

<sup>69</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia*, Carnegie Papers no. 77 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007).

<sup>70</sup> Nasriddin Domulla Toychiev, “Alamli dil nidosi,” in Babajanov, Muminov, and von Kugelgan, *Disputy Musulmanskix*.



Namangan that same year allegedly sparked by drunken Soviet soldiers' assaults on local girls.<sup>71</sup> What these riots all have in common, as John Schoeberlein-Engel described it in his excellent 1994 study, was not Islamic mobilization, but “[an] atmosphere dominated by general social discontent stemming from poverty, unemployment, and a sense that the government, in allocating resources and opportunities, engages in corruption and favoritism.”<sup>72</sup>

The collapse of the Communist Party and the Soviet economy created a political crisis in which dissatisfied populations fractured and were mobilized by a wide variety of political actors. Entrepreneurial politicians and social leaders rallied followers around several different communal identities. These mobilizing entrepreneurs sometimes created social disorder, and sometimes emerged in response to it or in response to state brutality.

Angry youth were mobilized against ethnic minorities that they believed had benefited unfairly from the Soviet economy, and nationalist parties like *Birlik* (Uzbekistan) and *Rastokhez* (Tajikistan) emerged to champion local interests ahead of Soviet and Russian priorities. Criminal groups organized around martial arts or sports clubs proliferated and volunteer societies of Soviet Army veterans and religious groups were formed to counteract criminals and social disorder. Islamic social groups emerged as well, and some groups combined members across these categories.

None of these Ferghana Valley violent incidents were confrontations between Islamists and the state or other parties, although press reporting in both the West and the Soviet Union (and Russia) frequently assumed the involvement of “Islamic fundamentalists” without bothering to look for evidence. Though the violence and disorder of the late-Soviet period is often associated with the foundation of the IMU, that organization would not be formed until probably 1998, under very different circumstances in Afghanistan and Pakistan where it was shaped not by the “restive” Ferghana Valley, but by the Taliban, al-Qaida, Pakistan’s Interservices Intelligence Directorate, and the influence of what Joshua White has called the “entrepreneurial” culture of jihad-as-vocation that coalesced in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in the chaos of the long Afghan war.<sup>73</sup> As Adeb Khalid puts it, the IMU was formed where “Uzbekistan’s homegrown dissent met the jihadist culture that had emerged in Afghanistan and became entangled in its global networks.”<sup>74</sup>

As the years passed in the Ferghana Valley more stable political institutions developed in Uzbekistan, all but completely eliminating the potential for alternative political organizations to emerge. Just across the border on the Kyrgyzstani side, however, relatively more political freedom and less control by the central state allowed the continued proliferation of alternative political organizations. While much is made of the fact that ethnic Uzbeks, particularly in Kara-Su, Uzgen, and Osh, continued to be drawn in small numbers to the Islamist group *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, much less attention is addressed to the fact that far greater numbers organized around other political movements to shape their environment and political economy in response to the same problems.

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<sup>71</sup> For a complete list of late Soviet civil conflicts in Central Asia, see: John Schoeberlein-Engel, “Conflict in Tajikistan and Central Asia: The Myth of Ethnic Animosity,” *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 1, no. 2 (1994): 20–21.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>73</sup> Joshua T. White, *Pakistan’s Islamist Frontier: Islamic Politics and US Policy in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier*, Religion & Security Monograph Series, no. 1 (Arlington, VA: Center on Faith & International Affairs, 2008).

<sup>74</sup> Adeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 156.

Many more ethnic Uzbeks organized around the “cultural societies” of the late 1990s and the 2000s,<sup>75</sup> while ethnic Kyrgyz politicians based in the south—like Osh Mayor Melis Myrzakmatov—addressed what they viewed as radical socioeconomic disparities and southern marginalization by rallying around hardline ethnic nationalism. Others from all ethnicities participated in organized criminal activity, smuggling, and drug trafficking. When in 2010 southern Kyrgyzstan was again engulfed in ethnic violence for the second time in twenty years, it became clear that the same sociopolitical and economic conditions that motivate a small number to join Islamist parties continue to motivate many more to mobilize around ethno-nationalist lines and with much deadlier and more destructive results.<sup>76</sup> Fears that the Valley will become “a new FATA” and a staging ground for Islamists have consistently obscured the fact that ethnic-based violence has been a far greater danger; since the late Soviet period conflicts along ethnic lines have emerged more often and cost many more lives and homes than any violence related to religious or Islamist groups.

In all three of the most commonly cited historical cases for arguing that religious revival is a security issue in Central Asia, we find that religious political movements were not themselves the cause of social disorder, conflict, or mobilization. Instead, they were only one group among many that arose in response to the same political crisis or problem, in most cases in response to authoritarian policies that left parts of the population dissatisfied with the political process and shut out from other, nonviolent or nonrevolutionary methods for contesting political power. I argue therefore that political Islamist groups in Central Asia are first and foremost *political* mobilizations, not religious or theological; they are most likely to emerge not where the population is “most religious,” but when and where other political movements emerge and in response to the same issues. The current revival of interest in Islam and its role in shaping society in Central Asia will not automatically become a political or militant mobilization; Islam is only one of many salient identity categories that can be used by social and political actors in the region to mobilize communal responses.

## Conclusions

Among the underlying themes of this project is the wide gap, suggested by Nick Megoran in 2007 and elaborated by many others since, between the security-focused literature on Islam in Central Asia and the fieldwork done by scholars working in anthropology, religious studies, and political ethnography. Among the key differences identified here is that religion-as-security literature frequently treats Islam in Central Asia as a monolithic object, and Islamic revival as a linear trend that leads to predictable social and political outcomes.

However, as Part 1 demonstrates, a sharp growth in new field research shows that becoming “more religious” in Central Asia is at least as likely to motivate believers to climb Mt. Suleiman in Osh or visit a spirit healer in Andijon as it is to motivate them to memorize hadiths, grow a

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<sup>75</sup> See: Brent Hierman, “What Use Was the Election to Us? Clientelism and Political Trust amongst Ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan,” *Nationalities Papers* 38, no. 2 (2010): 256.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example: Noah Tucker, “‘Ordinary People’ and the Violence of Collapse, Osh Part III,” *Registan.net*, June 26, 2011, available at: <http://registan.net/2011/06/26/ordinary-people-and-the-violence-of-collapse-osh-part-iii/>. Accessed May 6, 2013.

long beard or wear hijab. Just as importantly, none of these latter have any more connection with whether or not that individual adopts a desire to overthrow their government than does visiting a spirit healer.

As Part 2 shows, many conclusions have been made over the past twenty years about the internal discourses of revivalist Muslims in Central Asia, their values, and their political preferences following the assumption that much of the “religious market” not closely managed by the state is strongly influenced by foreign religio-political movements like Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Many of these assumptions were made based on scant data in Russian- and English-language secondary sources (or state-affiliated interlocutors) that obscure or overlook the discourse itself, especially as much of it takes place in Uzbek. Upon closer analysis, we find that there is a broad, living discourse catalyzed by new media and sustained interest in religious approaches to organizing everyday life. The most popular and influential independent religious authors and teachers, even those whose work is forced underground in Uzbekistan, have little in common with radical groups like Hizb-ut-Tahrir or the IMU.

Instead, we find individuals engaging in debates about their identity, sources of moral authority, and basic questions about what it means to be a good Muslim, to live an admirable life, and what it means to be an Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, or Tajik. The trend of Islamic revival has meant that many are interested in specifically Muslim debates about these basic questions. But rather than advocating a top-down approach to social change as political Islamists do, most authors and discussants in this debate see politics as entirely secondary; instead they emphasize individual responsibility for organizing personal and family life around the tenets of Islam to live a moral and virtuous life. They acknowledge and sharply criticize a myriad of social problems, but advocate for justice and social change through individual reorganization around Islamic principles and values, not political reforms.

Lastly, after establishing that Islamist groups seeking radical political changes occupy only the fringes of Islamic discourse in Central Asia, Part 3 draws some conclusions about where, when, and why these groups appear. After examining and dismissing commonly used paradigms that suggest we find radical Islamist mobilization primarily in areas that are “more historically religious,” “experiencing more religious revival,” or “more religious because they are poor,” I argue that radical Islamist groups are first and foremost political mobilizations that arise in response to political problems. Thus we would expect to see them arise in areas where a portion of the population faces radical social, economic, or political problems for which they seek radical or revolutionary political change, and I suggest that where we see violent Islamist mobilization we would also expect to see violent mobilization around other available identities in response to the same political crises.

Finally, Part 3 tests this hypothesis with three major historical cases of civic violence that are often cited for Islamist mobilization in the Central Asian region: The Afghan “Long War” (1973–present), the Tajik Civil War (1992–1997), and the Ferghana Valley unrest of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In each of these cases the emergence of violent Islamist groups was accompanied by other violent mobilizations in response to the same political crises. In the case of the Ferghana Valley—often cited as a “hotbed” of militant Islamism in Central Asia—ethnic mobilization has happened far more often and with far deadlier results than conflicts that involved Islamist groups. This suggests that the prevailing theory that religious revival is a primary indicator of the potential for violent unrest is not only founded on poorly grounded assumptions, but can be analytically misleading and obscure political and economic problems and other potential violent mobilizations that present a more direct threat to stability and security.

# Envoi: Central Asia after 2014—Is There a Role for Outside Powers?

*Roger Kangas*

Recent discussions about the future of Central Asia have been dominated by attention to the increasing role of China, the efforts of Russia to remain engaged, and the declining interest of the United States in the region, especially after the drawdown of US troops in Afghanistan and the changing security mission of NATO (from International Security Assistance Force [ISAF] to Resolute Support Mission [RSM]). All of these issues are inextricably linked and yet not necessarily dependent upon each other. Each major outside actor will carry out programs and policies in the region that are more reflective of how such efforts can best affect that particular country's national security interests. Placing such decisions within narratives of "Great Game" politics is more the domain of pundits and analysts than of reality.

Keeping this in mind, the security transitions that are taking place in 2014–2015 will cause nations in the region to re-examine their own security and engagement policies. Moreover, external actors—the so-called great powers—will also redefine their own roles for the simple fact that the primary security environment in Central Asia is changing. The presidential election of 2014 was a significant, but not fatal, problem for the status of outside forces in Afghanistan. The first round took place on April 5 with a second round finally taking place on June 22. The results were not announced until weeks later and an agreement that allowed the declared winner, Dr. Ashraf Ghani, created further delays. He was finally sworn in as President on September 29, 2014 and promptly signed the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the United States on October 1<sup>st</sup>. At its foundation, the BSA will support President Obama's goal of having 9,800 US troops in Afghanistan through 2015. These forces will focus largely on training and modernizing the Afghan National Security Forces, in addition to other limited and defined roles. This reduced presence will also apply to other NATO nations who will participate in the proposed RSM and will contribute approximately 4,500 troops. While financial commitments to Afghanistan will likewise diminish, it is assumed that the international community will remain engaged to help in this "decade of transition." The same could be said for the Central Asian states to the north. External actors are at a crossroads with respect to determining the importance of these regional countries to their overall foreign and security policies. For example, as the United States reduces its security presence in Afghanistan, the "securitized" nature of US policy in Central Asia may shift to other areas of engagement, be they in political, economic, or social matters, such as human rights and minority concerns. Moreover, the consequences of such attempted policies as the "pivot" or "rebalance" to Asia by President Obama will further affect how much time and resources the United States will spend in the broader Central Asia region.

In light of these transitions, it is important to better understand the objectives and limits of the United States and other external actors in Central Asia. After reviewing the current challenges of the five Central Asian states, this article turns to an examination of US policy in Central Asia and the impact that the Afghanistan campaign has had on it. Equally important is the future trajectory of US engagement. It is often assumed that once the United States decreases its presence, other states, such as Russia and China, will fill the void and expand their engagement. These critical dynamics are examined in the final section of the article.

## I. The Central Asian Landscape

The reasons for questioning the political image of the “Great Game” are simple: the region itself has changed over the past twenty years, and this must be taken into account when examining the influence that outside countries actually have on the respective countries. Kazakhstan, for example, is a more confident player in the region and has asserted itself in international organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), holding the chairman-in-office roles of these structures in 2010 and 2011, respectively. Its foreign ministry, especially under Erlan Idrissov, is successfully becoming more of a presence in countries throughout the world. Its military can now take part in UN peacekeeping missions, thus presenting the country as an “international security provider.” Kazakhstan is a key global oil exporter, and in this capacity, energy firms are dealing with a more competent base of Kazakhstani talent that is capable of managing the country’s resources, paralleling the experience of the energy-producing states in the Middle East.

Turkmenistan remains the perennial underachiever of Central Asia, although this is slowly changing. The continued discoveries of gas fields in the country and recurrent symposia of energy experts and companies underscore the fact that the country has great potential. That said, this “potential” remains only partially realized due to the opaque nature of decision making as well as the limited access outsiders have to government offices and state-run energy firms. Mistrust of these outside actors and a desire to reinforce the policy of “positive neutrality” limit opportunities for foreign direct investment and even foreign understanding of the country itself. The evolution of the trans-Afghanistan or “TAPI pipeline,” which would transit Turkmen gas through Afghanistan into Pakistan and India, has been a diplomatic and economic challenge for the country. If successful, it would help reshape the energy market in South and Central Asia and integrate Turkmenistan into the international economy. The project has the full support of President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov and is a central piece in his strategy to engage with outside powers.

Uzbekistan continues to perfect its autarkic approach to economic and energy development, ensuring that it can be as self-sustained as possible. Increasingly, it has begun to engage in energy and trade networks, ranging from regional energy pipeline routes to the “Northern Distribution Network” employed to supply NATO forces in Afghanistan. Perhaps success in these specific instances of being a transit state will lead to a more cooperative and open approach to regional development. Perpetual tensions with neighbors, especially Tajikistan over the construction of the Rogun Dam, have resulted in borders being closed or heavily monitored to the point of inhibiting regional trade. Uzbekistan’s relations with Kyrgyzstan include differences of opinions

over the plight of ethnic Uzbeks in the Osh and Jalalabad regions of that country, as highlighted by the 2010 events in Osh and Jalalabad cities, that continue to stymie true regional cooperation. Outside analysts increasingly raise questions about President Islam Karimov's succession policy, given the age of this long-term leader.

Tajikistan faces problems of resource scarcity, energy dependency, a labor market linked to remittances from citizens working in Russia and elsewhere, and possible marginalization should large-scale transit routes circumvent its territory. Tajikistan has the added stress of being part of a *negative* transit route of the narcotics trade emanating from its neighbor, Afghanistan. Current estimates suggest that 25 percent of all opium and heroin trafficking from Afghanistan passes through Tajikistan.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, over the past two years, criminal and terrorist groups have conducted attacks in various parts of the country, such as the Rasht Valley and parts of remote Badakhshan. This has led some experts to argue that the Rakhmon government must address the challenges of social unrest and instability in the coming years before Tajikistan is subjected to another episode of violence or division.

Kyrgyzstan also shares the challenges of being a transit state for illegal goods and trade, as well as the concerns of economic integration that affect Tajikistan. Internal politics have also been problematic in the country, with its political leadership twice overthrown (2005 and 2010), as well as the ethnic-fueled violence of the summer of 2010. In June 2013, the Kyrgyz legislature voted 91–5 to close the US transit center at Manas. Popular opinion had been pushing for the facility's closure for some time and this latest action was not of great surprise to the US government, although it will clearly have an impact on continuing operations in Afghanistan. When the US government formally handed the transit center over to the government of Kyrgyzstan on June 3, 2014, it actually took place with little fanfare. Perhaps this was an indication that Kyrgyzstan itself will greatly diminish as an American security partner as a result of this action. Speculation remains that this will become a Russian base through the vehicle of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). If this happens, it will only strengthen Russia's grip on Kyrgyzstan's security framework.

In spite of these challenges, all five Central Asian countries increasingly look at the world not in terms of "Russia versus the West," but rather in a "360-degree manner," in which they have greater ownership of their strategic and economic choices. These countries' official foreign and security documents indicate that they all look to a wider range of nations with which to trade and develop relations. Moreover, there is an understanding that their futures lie not in being dominated by one country or alliance, but rather in establishing multi-vectored foreign and security policies.

It is also important to stress that time has passed and, for outsiders, the attraction of engaging in Central Asia has likewise diminished. Central Asia is no longer seen as a "new region of development" or the object of a "new Great Game." This rhetoric of the 1990s, when numerous conferences and writings focused on the lure of Central Asian natural resources, has been replaced by a more sober and selective approach to the region. This is especially telling with respect to energy. In the first decade of independence, the questions were: "Where would the main export pipeline be?" and "Who would control the resources and routes?" This "either-or"

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<sup>1</sup> "Opiates Flow through Northern Afghanistan and Central Asia: A Threat Assessment" (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012).

approach has been replaced by an “and-and” view of potential pipelines. Because more oil and gas is available for export, and because the need for energy exists both east and west, routes have developed in all directions. With over 30 billion barrels of estimated oil reserves and 600–700 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves, the next several decades could be lucrative for Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and to a lesser extent, Uzbekistan. As a result, the recently built or planned oil and gas pipeline routes to China can actually coexist with the routes to and through Russia, as well as the West, Iran, and perhaps Afghanistan. Because the global energy market will continue to change, especially with the introduction of shale gas and shale oil from the United States, in addition to new finds in different parts of the world, the long-term strategic value of Central Asian energy is most likely limited. Consequently, for some, particularly the United States and other countries in the Western Hemisphere, the broader Caspian region holds less of an attraction. Regardless of trends in other parts of the world, the Caspian basin should remain critical to immediate neighbors, but will have to compete more intelligently for attention and investment to bring in outside interest.

With these initial points raised, what are the challenges presently facing the Central Asian countries? The business and policy climate of Central Asia will be dependent on a number of issues, for the short term, looking ahead to 2016, but also for longer-term projections looking toward 2035 or 2050. Among them are the following:

- What is the state of the respective legal regimes in the countries of Central Asia? Can they be strong enough to manage and maintain cross-border traffic and commerce?
- What is the investment and finance climate in each of the countries? At what point will foreign direct investment go beyond the energy sector and engage with other aspects of their economies?
- To what extent does corruption remain a fundamental challenge to the region? According to organizations like Transparency International and Freedom House, corruption continues to plague economic development in Central Asia. Transparency International’s corruption perception index, which ranks 175 countries worldwide, ranks the Central Asia countries 140 (Kazakhstan), 150 (Kyrgyzstan), 154 (Tajikistan), and 168 (a tie of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan).<sup>2</sup> More to the point, corruption erodes the ability of the respective regimes to maintain legitimacy among the populations.
- Can the infrastructures of the Central Asian countries allow for greater local usage and engagement? With all the discussion of “modern silk roads” and “new silk roads,” will the local capacity be enough to make these sustainable? The physical conditions of the regional transit routes are of varying quality, and to ensure effective cross-border trade, these must be brought to a level to make it possible to trade.
- How critical is environmental degradation for the economic stability of the region? Non-governmental organizations such as Crude Accountability highlight this in their own research.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, even a new entrant into the Central Asian region, such as China, has government and university research offices focusing efforts on better

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<sup>2</sup> Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index 2013 ([www.transparency.org/cpi/2013/results](http://www.transparency.org/cpi/2013/results)).

<sup>3</sup> Data and research reports can be found on the website [www.crudeaccountability.org](http://www.crudeaccountability.org).

understanding the impact of environmental degradation on regional security. Such topics are more readily discussed, underscoring the connection between environment and societal stability.

- Finally, on the issue of stability and security, the situation in Afghanistan remains a paramount concern for the Central Asian countries. Will the security problems of that country seep into the broader region, or, more to the point, will they adversely affect the ability of the respective regimes to instill a sense of security within their own boundaries? This may affect Central Asian regional security in three ways:
  1. Actual insurgent groups based in Afghanistan can cross over into Central Asia and create problems within the countries. This is a concern for Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and, to a lesser extent, Kyrgyzstan.
  2. The instability in Afghanistan will perpetuate a power vacuum in the region, allowing transnational threats to cross over into Central Asia. These are not just specific terrorist actors, as noted above, but drug traffickers and other illegal groups that will adversely affect local social and economic conditions in Central Asia.
  3. Instability in Afghanistan will thwart any broader regional plans to include pipelines such as TAPI or the so-called modern Silk Road efforts advocated by the United States and other outside powers. Effectively, an unstable Afghanistan will limit any chance of north–south economic engagement.

By no means is this list complete, but it demonstrates the range of problems that must be managed concurrently. Moreover, for the countries of Central Asia to address them effectively, it is evident that external engagement is required, and that interests abroad need to be refocused on the region. Such outside powers could provide funding, expertise, and perhaps a leadership role in some of the more complex cross-border concerns. In an ideal scenario, such a power would act as a true partner, rather than playing the role of an “elder brother” to the Central Asian states.

## II. The Changing Role of the United States in Central Asia

The reality is that some outside states, such as Russia, have looked at the states of Central Asia as subordinate entities that must remain in a specific sphere of influence. Others have viewed them more in a strategic manner, developing policies that reflect a broader regional interest or goal. The United States, for example, falls into this second category. At times, it has looked at the five states of Central Asia as “objects” of policy—be it democratization efforts, human rights concerns, or economic development. It has also “instrumentalized” the states when considering other, more pressing security and foreign policy interests. A full analysis of US policy towards Central Asia is not the emphasis of this article, but it is possible to make a few observations. Perhaps most importantly, the reality is that US policy has been fairly transparent since 1991. Official documents and presentations over this timeframe outline the sorts of objectives expressed by the US government. Consistent themes include: political development



and democratization, economic development and the creation of free-market economies, human rights and social stability in the region, regional security, and energy development and the diversification of routes and markets (in the 1990s, this was subsumed under economic development).

For all who followed these trends, or have been part of the process, these themes are nothing new. Of course, the importance of these specific “lines of policy” has changed over time. In the early 1990s, the focus was on political, economic, and human rights development. However, it is important to note that during these early years, the United States pursued what one could call a “Russia first” policy. To better foster ties with the new government of Boris Yeltsin, the United States simply paid less attention to states on the periphery, what the Russians regularly called their “near abroad.” It was also the case that American and Western European attention was focused on the problems in Bosnia and the broader Balkan region, as well as out-of-theater concerns such as Somalia and Rwanda through the 1990s. Thus, the civil war in Afghanistan, let alone the burgeoning civil war in Tajikistan, were followed by a limited number of policy officials and academics, but remained outside of the mainstream policy discussions. To say these were “Russia’s problems” is perhaps overstressing it, but it was clear that Russian security interests trumped others when it came to Central Asia. Arguments ranging from national interests to the personal ties between Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin have been used to illustrate this conclusion. Statistically, US assistance to the entire region ranged from \$60 million to \$250 million per annum in the 1990s, amounts dwarfed by those given to Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia, let alone other countries in the world.

When US–Russian relations began to fall apart in the mid-1990s, however, interest in Central Asia as well as the broader Caspian region increased. For the remainder of the decade, one saw a proliferation of “energy studies” efforts in the United States. From dissertations to think tank programs, “Caspian energy” became a useful catchphrase and topic of countless conferences and programs. This was the “new Great Game” as some readily claimed—thinking that Central Asian energy resources would only go in one direction, as opposed to the multidirectional reality of today. In spite of calls by officials such as Strobe Talbott to dispense with “game” terminology, such phrasing was too good to resist for armchair analysts and media officials alike.

When Afghanistan became a concern for the United States after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent campaign targeting al-Qaida and their Taliban hosts, the issue of security rose to the top of the US government priority list. Central Asia as a region was once again viewed through the prism of another national interest. American concerns about the viability of supporting the campaign in Afghanistan became the core reason to request and receive base and fly-over rights from all five Central Asian countries. While there was some discussion that this was done with “Russian approval,” the reality was that the United States negotiated with each country on its own terms. Bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan were the primary and most visible nodes of engagement, but the broader regional interest in making sure that military operations within the Afghan theater of engagement would continue dominated any subsequent bilateral negotiations between the United States and the individual Central Asian counterparts. Even Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan negotiated fly-over rights and some transit capability to support the US efforts in Afghanistan.

The “securitization” of US policy toward Central Asia had a cost. After the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, human rights organizations and academics stressed the challenges of promoting democracy and human rights while vast sums were being spent on military operations. Likewise, the events in the Andijon region in May 2005 shattered the 2002 Strategic Partnership Agreement between the United States and Uzbekistan. Not only were there differences of opinion on the use of force against demonstrators in the city of Andijon, but also over the narrative of what transpired in that instance. The resultant split was actually the last in a series of disagreements between the two countries, prompting President Karimov’s government to demand the closure of the US base facility in Karshi-Khanabad on July 29, 2005. When the base closed in November of that year, it was clear that the strategic partnership lost both the US strategic interest in Uzbekistan and the Uzbek sense of having a partner in the United States. It has taken nearly a decade to return to a level of significant cooperation between the two countries.

The focus on security cooperation during this time did not necessarily mean that other areas of US interest vanished. The “human rights OR security” dichotomy was, and is, simplistic and misrepresentative of the efforts made by US government officials in the State Department, the Defense Department, and other offices to continue the lines of policy interest noted earlier. Educational exchange programs and healthcare assistance increased during this time. However, because the security efforts were so highly visible, countries neighboring Central Asia emphasized the security presence as proof of US force posturing in the region, which subsequently underscored a sense of zero-sum competition. Again, in spite of constant refrains of “no Great Games or competitions for influence,” the sad reality was that major powers in Eurasia did consider what the US and its allies were doing and judged such actions comparatively. Russian and Chinese academic writings cast the US presence in the region as threatening and suggesting encirclement, themes repeated in official declarations of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Collective Security Treaty Organization (usually in terms of “non-hemispheric power projection”).

As one looks at the security situation in the current decade, changes in the US posture will once again invite actions by other major countries. Without question, fundamental limitations on US engagement will center on the changing nature of the NATO-ISAF mission in Afghanistan beginning on January 1, 2015. As noted earlier, on December 31, 2014, the NATO-ISAF mission will cease to exist in its previous form. Presumably, the security responsibilities in the country will be taken over by the Afghan National Security Forces and the government of Afghanistan. The US role will be limited to training and some counterinsurgency efforts yet to be defined. Troop levels, originally thought to be in the range of 20,000–25,000 are now going to be 9,800. At present, the United States’ NATO partners will deploy half as many troops, suggesting a total of 15,000 for the newly established Resolute Support Mission (RSM). In light of such significant reductions in troop levels, which actually started in 2011, it is logical that the financial commitment to support these efforts, as well as civilian reconstruction projects and other forms of assistance, will decrease. Present estimates suggest that the United States is committed to providing over \$4 billion per year to Afghanistan in direct assistance, although the final numbers will most likely remain a moving target. Statistically, when US military forces leave a theater of

conflict and reconstruction, assistance from the US government drops by over a third.<sup>4</sup> If this happens in Afghanistan in the coming years, one can expect to see a spillover effect, with US assistance and engagement in Central Asia declining at an even faster rate.

Exacerbating this downward spiral is the oft-repeated phrase highlighting an important domestic matter in the United States: budget austerity. At present, the US government is wrestling with a mounting national debt and deficit and one sees a fundamental shift in how policy is being framed. Indeed, it appears that national security is increasingly based on budgetary grounds (What can we afford?), as opposed to national interests (What should we do?). One can't emphasize enough the budgetary challenges facing any set of programs and potential policies towards Central Asia, let alone foreign engagement in general. With the exception of a limited number of special cases, the US public's appetite for funding programs overseas is minimal. Moreover, the national debt and deficit crises that have plagued the United States since 2008 continue to affect funding options among government agencies, in general. Whether it is "sequestration" or simple percentage reductions in programs ("do more with less," which really means "do less with less"), the past decade of increased money for international engagement will come to an end. And, as the Afghan conflict fades, perhaps even in the same swift manner that the Iraq campaign exited from the US collective memory, the "strategic value" of Central Asia drops precipitously. Barring a unique interest on the part of a particular congressman or senator, it is unlikely to see the value of Central Asia ever return to that of the past decade. The budget request for FY15 for US foreign assistance to Central Asia is \$113.7 million, which is a decrease of nearly 24 percent from the \$148.9 million granted in 2011. This downward trend is expected to continue.

With the decrease in energy interests and an absence of major security concerns, will it now be the case that the United States views Central Asia as "unimportant"? Given the trajectory of past policies, it would seem that such a conclusion is at least worthy of honest discussion and debate. Such a discussion has to acknowledge the challenges of imagination in how the US even views the region. To assume that the states ought to only look westward and maintain ties with NATO, the EU, or "Europe and Eurasia" is ignoring the reality on the ground.

Even the curious turn of a phrase "pivot or rebalance to Asia" that one hears today is vague about whether Central Asia is deemed part of Asia. As this policy idea becomes operationalized, it most likely will result in the US moving away from Central Asia and include a decrease in the amount of expertise and attention devoted to the region.

Reviewing the challenges to US policy toward Central Asia highlights a critical reality on the ground: any outside power cannot assume that it is working in a static environment. Indeed, as outside actors' policies have changed because of their own geopolitical circumstances, the same could be said for the countries in the region. As the United States recalculates its policy priorities for the coming years, several key factors need to be kept in mind:

**Central Asian states are independent states with their own views of national security, national interest, and international relations.** One just has to look at the evolution of Kazakhstani national security documents from the 1990s to the present. For example, as

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<sup>4</sup> This has been researched by Anthony H. Cordesman of CSIS and can be found in several of his publications on [www.csis.org](http://www.csis.org).

researched by Roger McDermott,<sup>5</sup> “Cold War ideas” of state-on-state conflict, global conflicts, and Soviet-era language have been replaced by serious discussions of transnational threats, cooperative security, and engagement in peace support operations so that Kazakhstan can be a security provider in the region and beyond. Other states in Central Asia have also shifted their views on security to match current trends. That transnational threats dominate the discussion, at the expense of bilateral or global relations, is logical from the vantage of the respective Central Asian capitals. It is no surprise that Uzbekistan, for example, focuses on violent extremist groups, terrorism, and trafficking as significant national threats.

**Central Asian governments are engaging with other states that are equally concerned about remaining involved in the region—so bargains are being made all the time.** In terms of economic development and assistance, one sees trade coming from a much broader range of countries. In the 1990s, assumptions were made that economic links would remain within the post-Soviet space and especially with Russia. Outside engagement would be limited to European countries and perhaps the United States. Today, there is a diversity of outside actors, including states of the Middle East and Gulf region, South and Southeast Asia, and beyond. For example, Chinese state firms have played the most significant roles in the energy market since 2010. The same can be said for security cooperation. Military links, including professional military education, exercises, and weapons purchases, are now much more diverse than ten or fifteen years ago. As noted by researcher Dmitry Gorenburg,<sup>6</sup> India, Ukraine, and Israel are significant providers of weapons and other security measures in the region, in addition to the usual list of Russia, the United States, the European Union, and China. The specific dynamics vary by supplying country—and within Central Asian countries—but it is clear that diversity in security cooperation exists.

**Media and the news—and how to interpret events—still exist through filters that the West might not appreciate or understand.** Whether one is looking at the coverage of the 2003 US war in Iraq, the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia, or the current events in Syria and the international stand-off with Iran, media coverage maintains some of the older framing ideas, especially paralleling those expressed in the Russian media. The coverage of US goals in Afghanistan is particularly vexing, with regional media often casting them as a way to control or manipulate the Eurasian space. The argument that the United States “occupied Afghanistan” to control oil and gas pipelines has even been noted. Not surprisingly, these narratives color how citizens of the Central Asian countries view outside nations, especially the United States.

In this respect, **US standing in the world has changed—as viewed by Central Asian officials and public.** Whether it is the perception that the United States was supportive of the so-called colored revolutions for nefarious reasons, or the reality that the US fiscal crisis of 2008 resulted in a restricted ability to fund programs in the region, officials and academics from Central Asia are more open to discussing the viability of engaging other countries of the world. It is not that the United States has vanished from their purview, but rather that it is now part of a broader mix of other countries, as opposed to being first among equals. Thus, while the “idea” of the United States may have faded over time, it is ultimately not irrelevant to the region

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<sup>5</sup> Roger N. McDermott, *Kazakhstan's 2011 Military Doctrine: Reassessing Regional and International Security* (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, *External Support for Central Asian Military and Security Forces* (Stockholm, Sweden: SIPRI, January 2014).

as a political actor. Today, one cannot expect to go back to the 1990s, when the attitudes toward the United States were so overwhelmingly positive that one takes for granted the positive perception of the “American model of development” that was so enthusiastically advocated years ago. In the post-2014 era, the United States must be more strategic in how it executes policies in Central Asia.

What is the risk of the United States descending into irrelevance as far as the Central Asian region is concerned? That is a possibility if the limiting factors noted earlier are exacerbated. An illustrative example is the closure of the previously mentioned Manas Transit Center in Kyrgyzstan, operated by the United States. Since 2005, regular conversations and speculations about the imminent closure of the facility have swirled around policy communities in Washington, Bishkek, Moscow, Beijing, and Kabul, to name a few. At its basic level, the transit center was an essential component of the military operations taking place in Afghanistan. It provided opportunities for refueling of close air support, reconnaissance, and transportation missions of the US Air Force. It also became the de facto transit point for the majority of US military personnel going into and out of Afghanistan. When troop levels were at their peak, roughly 30,000 personnel transited through the center in any given month. Plans to decrease the total commitment of US personnel in Afghanistan from nearly 100,000 to a figure as low as 4,500 or zero by 2017, made clear that the utility of Manas would decrease or disappear completely. The Kyrgyz legislature’s decision to support a shutdown of the facility, and the US handover of it to the Kyrgyz government in June of 2014, meant that operation of the base had come to an end. It is important to note that because of the “perception challenges” that surrounded the base for much of its existence, the likelihood of any regional country requesting a US facility is quite low, if not at zero. Could the closure of Manas mean that the United States will purposefully reduce cooperation with Kyrgyzstan as a retaliatory measure? One hopes not, but periodically, emotions can adversely affect bilateral relations among states.

In a broader sense, as priorities develop in other parts of the world, it is clear that the United States will be unable to project power so readily and will have to engage more selectively. If this is the case, would a crisis in Central Asia trump one in the Middle East? East Asia? Latin America? Would the United States ever place Central Asia above these other parts of the world, or even value it to the extent it did in the period 2001–2014? Most likely, this will not happen, and any expectation of US engagement and commitment to Central Asia ought to be couched in more conservative and limited terms. The regional actors have already drawn this conclusion; the question remains as to the extent to which the United States will frame its future presence.

### III. Limits to Other Major Powers

At the same time, does the reduced role of the United States in Central Asia mean one has to assume Russia and China are now de facto *dominating* Central Asia? Does this ignore the fact that both of these countries also rank their own priorities, and could very well experience crises that would further challenge their power projection in the classic definition of the term? Russia itself has to focus on other border regions, such as the South Caucasus and Europe, and it is limited in terms of what it can militarily support. The 2014 takeover of Ukraine’s Crimea and the subsequent efforts to destabilize significant portions of that country have been the focus of Russia’s security forces. Politically, this has already resulted in a stronger effort to engage, or

thwart, efforts of the West in the so-called near abroad. Likewise, the Chinese security focus continues to look eastward, although increasingly it must balance out interests to the west that go beyond economic development and trade. The “Go West” ideal that underpins a desire to increase trade through Central Asia and onward to Europe requires a stronger security relationship between China and the states of Central Asia. While all five, to varying degrees, are of modest importance, both Russia and China envision themselves as *the* primary external actor. The lessening presence of the United States may open up some possibilities, but one can’t calculate this in a zero-sum formula.

It is important to stress that Russia’s relations with the Central Asian states will continue to be shaped by mutual perceptions and interpretations of history. Both are results of the long and influential Imperial and Communist periods, when the Central Asian region was contested and controlled in a colonial fashion by Russia and then the Soviet Union. Countless articles and books have been written on this dynamic and, even from the point of view of Central Asian scholars, the “special relationship” that exists between Russia and the region is recognized by both sides.

In the present era, what are the Russian government’s goals vis-à-vis Central Asia? Are its ambitions tempered by forces similar to those already mentioned with respect to the United States? To some degree, the answer is yes, although the impact and relative levels of importance vary. In the medium and long term, Russian goals in Central Asia can be couched in terms of political, economic, and security spheres. In the first, the political dynamics with the respective states are slightly more nuanced than they were years ago. In the 1990s, the notion of “control” as part of a “near abroad” policy dominated Russian thinking with respect to Central Asia. How Russia’s aggressive policies toward Ukraine will affect relations southward remains to be seen. Today, there is no questioning the independence of the states in the region, but the “elder brother” perspective permeates the bilateral ties Russia has with each. It doesn’t hurt that three of the five leaders have tenures longer than Vladimir Putin’s in Russia, effectively making them “elder statesmen” in Eurasia even if only in a symbolic way. However, does a resurgent Russia conclude that it must manage levers of control over these states to the south for purposes of regional security and blatant power politics?

Russian economic ties are dominated by the energy sector, especially with respect to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. As oil and gas routes continue to develop eastward to China, Russia may find itself as a competitor to these very states, and not the country that imagined it could control the flow of hydrocarbons out the region. Other economic trade is equally important, and also diminishing. Since 2009, Russian trade has dropped by over 22 percent for the region as a whole, with the bilateral trade between Russia and Kazakhstan dropping over 30 percent alone. The reality is that all five states are opening their markets to other countries and, while Russia may remain a large trading partner, it is by no means the dominant actor. Indeed, in 2013, China surpassed Russia to be the most significant trading partner of all five Central Asian states.

The economic dynamics between Russia and three of the Central Asian states—Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and to a lesser extent, Uzbekistan—highlight the issue of labor migration and remittances. There are approximately 6.5 million documented and undocumented laborers in Russia today, supplementing regional GNPs by an estimated \$10 billion per annum. Over a million laborers come from Tajikistan and hundreds of thousands originate from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. While migrant workers often face challenges such as discrimination, abuse, and

even murder in Russia, their remittances back home are invaluable to the local economies. Some economic estimates suggest that remittances are the leading source of income for Tajikistan and, likewise, rank highly in Kyrgyzstan. The question of labor migration, among others, may be better managed, from a Russian perspective, with the evolution of the Eurasian Customs Union, which currently includes Kazakhstan and may very well also have Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as full members within the next several years.

In terms of security, Russia's position reflects what Moscow sees as the primary threats emanating from the south. With the potential collapse of the Afghan state—highlighted by comparisons to the demise of Najibullah's regime in 1992—Russian analysts stress that the country must engage with the Central Asian states to stem the tide of instability that will come from Afghanistan. Specifically, the existing problem of narcotics trafficking must be addressed, as it is already affecting Russian society. There is a \$20 billion turnover in narcotics revenues in Russia and the human toll is devastating, with an estimated 1.7 million addicts and over 30,000 deaths a year attributed to this scourge. Much less attention is paid to the threat of violent extremist groups, as these are all deemed “manageable” in Russia today, even in the North Caucasus region.

The 2014 timeframe potentially “solves” a concern repeated in political rhetoric: the expansion of NATO in the post-Soviet space and the basing of foreign troops in neighboring states. With the Manas Transit Center closure in 2014, there are no US troops based in Central Asia, and soon there will be a minimal force in Afghanistan. The situation will most likely return to that of 2001, the last time Russia was the only major outside power with military personnel in Central Asia. To better position itself in the region, Russia is promising a series of bilateral assistance programs, such as a \$1.1 billion agreement with Kyrgyzstan and a \$200 million enhancement program in Tajikistan. The Russian bases at Kant, Kyrgyzstan and Dushanbe, Tajikistan have been extended to 2032 and 2043, respectively. The downside of this scenario is that if the security challenges in Afghanistan overwhelm the country, Russian officials may very well miss the presence of the US and NATO forces.

Similar comments can be made about China, which is a more recent entrant to the Central Asian theater. While the government in Beijing has worked with the regional states since the early 1990s, the level of activity has increased dramatically in the past several years. The past decade has seen the level of Kazakh–Chinese, Kyrgyz–Chinese, and Tajik–Chinese trade increase so much that the neighbor to the east is now the dominant economic actor. While discussions of China's inevitable domination of energy resources and minerals in the region are constant, the ability for that country to effectively project power—economic and security—is still a “work in progress.” Debates about how to manage the expansion of China's presence in the world continue within the country's leadership and a clear direction for future action has yet to be determined. What is the end-state of the “Go West” policy espoused by the current regime of President Xi Jinping? Equally important, internal challenges may arise that will require the government to devote greater attention to the economy, the environment, social stability, and other issues. The recent 18th Party Congress in Beijing outlined a list of reform programs for the country and highlighted security concerns that tend to focus on the Pacific Ocean region. That China is slowly recasting itself as a “continental power” and is engaging with Eurasian, South Asian, and Central Asian states is still something Central Asian officials, academics, and media outlets can't quite grasp.

Indeed, for China, as well as for other, less involved states, Central Asia as a region could very well have limited appeal and usefulness in terms of energy development, economic trade and exploitation, and even security. It is the “security” emphasis that has been most regularly placed on Central Asia with respect to outside powers. Dispensing with a Cold War framework, it is possible to evaluate the Central Asian interests of other countries. As has been noted in other writings, the economic interests of countries such as Russia and China are fairly obvious—control of raw materials, hydrocarbon reserves, and potential trade and commercial routes. It is when these interests converge that instances arise in which cooperation takes place. This is most evident in the regular discussions on the security challenges presented by the notion of “post-2014 Afghanistan.” The worst-case scenario presented by Russian analysts entails an Afghanistan that implodes or is taken over by Taliban-like forces. Civil war ensues, and transnational extremist groups, drug traffickers, and the like are free to use Afghanistan as a base, from which they adversely affect neighboring states, including those in Central Asia. While this would never pose an existential threat to Russia itself, it would require the country to expend resources and attention on defending its southern borders, invest more heavily in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and potentially base additional military units in the Central Asian region. Maintaining stability in Central Asia—and managing chaos in Afghanistan—would become a policy that has no real end and could continue in perpetuity. The reality is that Russia itself has no true capability to actually solve those problems and would be forced to focus on “minimizing the threat.” Moreover, such a scenario would draw resources and attention away from the European and East Asian regions, where greater national interests exist. In short, a chaotic post-2014 Afghanistan would be a “tax” on Russia’s security forces and the economy in general.

The same could be said for China, a country that is investing billions of dollars in Afghanistan and Central Asia, particularly in the areas of transportation and resource extraction. While their Central Asian operations would not necessarily be stymied, increased security requirements would escalate the price and risk of any further business undertaking in the region. Moreover, as a country that is not used to projecting hard power outside of its borders, China would have to consider stationing troops and participating in region-based security frameworks that go beyond conversations and photo opportunities. At present, this option is not likely.

If the future of post-2014 Afghanistan is less hazardous, then the opportunities for Russia and China to engage with the Central Asian countries increase, but are still limited by their own interests and capabilities. In this instance, they will have to balance out real interests in Central Asia with those in other regions. Central Asia will remain of secondary importance. If the situation in the region is largely stable, and if the United States is therefore minimally engaged, one could expect the Russians to adopt more of a “maintaining a presence” status without additional expenditures. This would free up the Russian foreign ministry to address issues in the Middle East, Iran, East Asia, and Europe—traditional areas of former Russian and Soviet power projection and ones in which the current administration would like to see Russian involvement. For China, a stable Afghanistan and Central Asia would mean that resources could shift elsewhere and engagement in this region could be managed in a predictable manner. Such a situation would allow the Chinese government to feel more confident about stability within its own borders: Xinjiang next to a stable and friendly Central Asia is less of a problem than next to an unstable and unfriendly region.



The perceptions of these powers—just like those of the United States—need to be better understood. Over the past twenty years, Kazakhstan has been able to develop a more sophisticated approach to neighboring powers and, although recognizing the comparative geopolitical advantages that both Russia and China have, Kazakhstan’s efforts to connect with other states better is an effort to balance them bureaucratically. President Karimov’s administration in Uzbekistan has had a cyclical relationship with Russia in particular. The second suspension of CSTO activities is important in that it underscores the Uzbek government’s concern about being part of organizations that are dominated by a single nation. To the extent that other “outside powers” engage with Central Asia, the past twenty years have shown that Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have been better able to proactively establish their own national security goals. While the same cannot necessarily be said for Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the leaders of both states have at least made efforts to court other countries. President Rahmon’s periodic nod to the “Persian community” in the region—Iran, Afghanistan (Dari), and Tajikistan—is a case in point, as is his fostering better ties with India. In both instances, there has been some flirting with security relations, particularly between the Tajik and Indian militaries. President Atambayev doesn’t quite have that luxury in Kyrgyzstan, although recent debates about the value of the Eurasian Customs Union underscore the fact that the country is not completely beholden to either Russia or China. In short, countries such as Russia and China have to evaluate the political, economic, and security relations with each of the regional actors, keeping in mind that these will continue to evolve as the partners evaluate the respective relationships. In the coming years, the focus will very much be on managing transnational threats, as well as the tensions emanating from areas of potential cooperation: energy, water, and transportation. How these issues are resolved will illuminate the extent to which broader Eurasian relations are possible.

#### IV. Conclusion

In the end, one is left with a rather mixed impression of how effective external actors can be in Central Asia. As noted, there are changes on the horizon and an understandable opacity about the future role the United States can, and will, play in the region. However, other nations are struggling with similar challenges and will undoubtedly have to establish a range of options that apply to each of the countries involved. In short, Central Asia will become more of a collection of five independent states with different security and foreign policy priorities and the external actors had better understand these in order to effectively engage in the region. It also seems that, in spite of dire warnings given about Afghanistan’s future, events to the south of the Central Asian states will simply be one more factor to consider in a long litany of issues to be addressed in their foreign and domestic politics. As each of the Central Asian states more actively manages its own foreign and security policy, we can expect to see the bilateral ties between these major states vary in importance and intensity.

Two final important characteristics about the post-2014 world should also be noted. First of all, regardless of how stable or unstable it might be, Afghanistan will continue to exist in 2015 and beyond. The region will not experience a complete breakdown with resultant anarchy. Indeed, there are those who strongly support the belief that the Taliban will never regain power completely and that, at best, we’ll see a poor country with limited capabilities fighting a long-simmering conflict in specific areas, most notably in the eastern provinces bordering Pakistan.

To this end, there will remain a Western and even international organization presence in Afghanistan. So the “worst case scenarios” ought to be understood, but not necessarily assumed as faits accomplis.

The second fact is that the issue of “polarity” is interestingly being played out in Central Asia. If it’s not a bipolar, unipolar, or even multipolar world, can one be confident in simply referring to the future geopolitical space of Central Asia as “nonpolar”? In the geostrategic understanding of Central Asia, a nonpolar world would suggest that no single power dominates the region and that there are so many different dynamics at play—in terms of politics, economics, security, and even nontraditional areas—that the whole notion of thinking of the region as a single entity is less applicable. Indeed, in future years, it may be more fitting to focus on bilateral dynamics and understand the sum total of these various parts to better explain the interests of regional and international actors. As is seen elsewhere, for instance in Latin America, Africa, or Southeast Asia, the need to better understand the powers of the region is increasingly more important than just comparing the roles of outside powers. If the United States foreign policy community can nimbly adapt to this environment, it will pay dividends in the long run. The same could be said for other outside powers. And, most importantly, if understood clearly by the respective leaderships in the five Central Asian countries themselves, chances for cooperation and constructive engagement would increase. At the same time, there are dangers that, if left unchecked, can arise that would foster instability. These ought to be the real concerns in the coming years for the international actors who express interest in Central Asia.

# Notes on Contributors

**Robert O. Blake, Jr.** is the United States Ambassador to Indonesia. At the time of the Islam in Eurasia Policy Conference, he served as Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, an appointment he held from May 2009 until November 2013, when he assumed his current position. As Assistant Secretary, he oversaw US foreign policy with India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. He previously served as Ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives from 2006 to mid-2009 and Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Mission in New Delhi, India, from 2003 to 2006. Since he entered the Foreign Service in 1985, he has served at the American Embassies in Tunisia, Algeria, Nigeria, and Egypt. He has also held a number of positions at the State Department in Washington, including Senior Desk Officer for Turkey, Deputy Executive Secretary, and Executive Assistant to the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. Mr. Blake earned a B.A. from Harvard College in 1980 and an M.A. in international relations from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in 1984. He is married to Sofia Blake, with whom he has three daughters.

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**Thomas W. Simons, Jr.** is currently a visiting scholar at Harvard's Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. He holds a B.A. from Yale and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Harvard, and during a thirty-five-year US Foreign Service career, he specialized in East-West relations, including service in Warsaw, Moscow, and Bucharest, and as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State responsible for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (1986–1989). During the 1990s he was US Ambassador to Poland, Coordinator of US Assistance to the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union, and US Ambassador to Pakistan. Simons is the author of dozens of articles on the European East, Eurasia, and the Subcontinent, and of four books, including his most recent, *Eurasia's New Frontiers: Young States, Old Societies, Open Futures* (Cornell, 2008). He has taught at Brown, Stanford, Cornell, and in Harvard's Government Department ("Post-Communist Islam" and "Islam in Central and South Asia" (2007–2010)), and he taught there on Central Asia in the spring of 2014.

**Noah Tucker** is a researcher and consultant on Central Asian social and cultural issues. He received an M.A. (2008) from Harvard in Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies (REECA), specializing in anthropology and religion. Noah worked as an NGO project manager in Tashkent for three years (2002-2005) and has returned to the region multiple times for fieldwork, most recently to Osh in the summers of 2011 and 2012. He currently works as a research analyst, covers Central Asia for Freedom in the World (Freedom House), and writes for [Registan.net](http://Registan.net).

**Geoffrey Wright** served with the US Army in Afghanistan in 2011. He has a Master's Degree in Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies from Harvard University. The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the US government.

# Acknowledgments

The conference that this volume records took shape as part of a multifaceted project on Islam in Eurasia that has been underway since 2008. It has been generously supported from the start by the Carnegie Foundation of New York, a beacon for scholarship throughout the land and the world, and it has benefited from the wise guidance of the project's Principal Investigator, Timothy J. Colton, Morris and Anna Feldberg Professor of Government and Russian Studies at Harvard University and currently Chairman of its Government Department.

The project began at the initiative of John Schoeberlein, then of Harvard's Anthropology Department, and one early milestone was an academic conference he organized on "The Changing Social Role of Islam in Post-Soviet Eurasia," held at Harvard in March 2009; he is currently Director for Eurasian Regional Studies at Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan. For most of the project's life, however, it has been led by a compatible troika that, in addition to the writer, includes Dr. Alexandra Vacroux, Executive Director of Harvard's Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, and Pauline Jones Luong, Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. With handsome support from her university, in November 2012 Professor Jones Luong chaired a successful workshop there to prepare an edited volume entitled *Islam, Society, and Politics in Central Asia*, with chapters by both area and Western specialists: it will set the standard for scholarship on the area for years to come.

The "policy conference" that this volume records was my special responsibility, as a Visiting Scholar at the Davis Center since 2002, after a US Foreign Service career specializing in East-West relations (1963-1998). It was held June 6-7, 2013, at the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. Co-sponsored by the Davis Center and the Kennan Institute, its organizers owe a large debt of gratitude for superb logistical (and much appreciated financial) support to Dr. Blair A. Ruble, then the Institute's Director, to Deputy Director William E. Pomeranz, and to their staffs. Equally superb were the key movers and shakers from the Davis Center, Events Planner Penelope Skalnik and Communications and External Relations Officer Sarah Failla. Most of all, of course, we thank the scholars and US policy officials whose thoughts and insights are recorded above: it is our hope that this volume will make a substantial contribution to both academic and policy discourses on an important world region as the end of the US combat role in Afghanistan alters the geopolitical landscape. But its arrival in print will be mainly thanks to Ms. Failla's dedicated hard work over the two years since the conference ended.

Thomas W. Simons, Jr.

Important changes taking place in the social roles of Islam in Central Asia and Azerbaijan have significant implications for the politics of the region, yet these changes have not been adequately examined in the existing literature. This volume describes a rich encounter between the latest scholarship and US policymaking in Washington, DC, updated to early 2015. At its core are four specially commissioned policy papers framing the major challenges the US government faces in the region. These works were originally presented at an Islam in Eurasia Policy Conference in June 2013, the proceedings of which are also summarized here. The conference was a culminating event of the multiyear Project on Islam in Eurasia at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University, undertaken with generous grant support from Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The Kathryn W. and Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies is the intellectual home of Harvard scholars and students interested in this critical region of the world. Its mission is fourfold: to generate and disseminate original research and scholarship on Russian and Eurasian studies, to promote the training of graduate and undergraduate students interested in the region, to create and sustain a community of scholars at all levels of academic achievement, and to ensure that society at large benefits from the exchange of information and ideas as a result. The Center's more than three hundred affiliates include faculty, students, and scholars from Harvard University, the greater Boston area, and around the world.



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