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**Azerbaijan, Central Asia, and Future  
Persian Gulf Security**

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**Prepared for the  
United States Air Force  
United States Army**

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## **PREFACE**

### **RESEARCH TOPIC AND INTEREST**

This Note assesses the emerging linkages between the Transcaucasian and Central Asian countries of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan and the region's most influential neighbors: Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. The study examines the economic, religious, and ethnic connections across the region and how they could lead to future internal and regional instability affecting the Gulf. The political situation in the region and on its periphery is changing rapidly, but the fundamental ethnic, religious, and economic cleavages identified in the analysis will remain and continue to shape regional trends. Other regional papers developed in this project assess Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and the Arab Gulf states themselves, including Iraq.

The overall project objective is to provide a political-military assessment of security prospects in the Gulf over the next several years, challenges the U.S. military is likely to encounter as it supports U.S. national objectives in the region, and the broader implications for future U.S. security planning.

This Note should be of interest to regional analysts, contingency planners, and policymakers.

### **SPONSORSHIP AND CONDUCT OF RESEARCH**

The research was prepared as part of the Future Security Requirements for the Gulf project, and this Note is one in a series of publications documenting that work. The project is jointly sponsored by the Director of Plans, Headquarters, U.S. Air Force, and the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, U.S. Army, and is being conducted through a joint effort by two of RAND's federally funded research and development centers (FFRDCs): Project AIR FORCE (Air Force) and the Arroyo Center (Army).

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George Donohue is Vice President and Director, Project AIR FORCE. Those interested in further information on Project AIR FORCE should contact his office directly at the RAND address.

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Lynn E. Davis is Vice President for the Army Research Division and Director of the Arroyo Center. Those interested in further information about the Arroyo Center should contact her office at the RAND address.

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## **SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

After decades of communist domination, Azerbaijan and the Central Asian Countries (CACs) are reemerging in an increasingly critical, geopolitically significant region of the world. With an estimated 60 million population, and with its natural resources, this area constitutes an important region in its own right. The area's potential volatility could ripple throughout the Persian Gulf and affect Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Those three states are involved in an ongoing struggle over influence in the region, and their policies and actions toward Azerbaijan and the CACs should be watched carefully for signs of increased intervention. Although the rapidly changing political situation within the region and on its periphery may cause details of the analysis to become outdated, the fundamental ethnic, religious, and economic cleavages identified will remain and continue to shape regional trends.

To date, there have been several important policy developments among Azerbaijan, Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf states. The effects of events in Azerbaijan and Central Asia on stability in the Persian Gulf must also be weighed against influences emanating from Europe, the Middle East, and Southwest Asia.

### **A MOVE TO THE SOUTH**

The first important development is the growing interdependency between Azerbaijan and the CACs on the one hand, and Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia on the other. This trend is accelerating as these new countries reject the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as the successor to the former Soviet Union. Azeri and Central Asian leaders see the CIS as unworkable as a result of the systemic breakdown between Russia and the other former republics in political and economic relations. Thus, Azerbaijan and the CACs are developing into distinct states searching actively for foreign assistance in the economic, religious, and ethnic spheres in order to promote independence and legitimacy apart from the CIS. Consequently, Azerbaijan and the CACs seek to distance themselves from their northern neighbor, Russia. No longer trapped in Moscow's economic web of forced exports and limited imports, the Azeris and the Central Asians are turning to other powers for economic assistance. Indeed, Azerbaijan and the CACs might turn away from Russia as a source of everyday goods and services.

## **RUSSIAN ALIENATION FROM AZERBAIJAN AND CENTRAL ASIA**

The second salient development is that Russia is becoming increasingly estranged from Azerbaijan and the CACs in two key spheres: economic relations and the perception of a religious threat to Russian security.

First, Moscow faces a loss of Azeri and Central Asian political and economic participation in the CIS, as the region moves to strengthen its ties with Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Despite the views held by some that Azerbaijan and the CACs are a hindrance, some Russian officials still link their economic recovery to the new relationships forged by Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia toward the CACs and Azerbaijan. Moscow faces immense economic problems itself and simultaneously courts Ankara, Tehran, and Riyadh for financial assistance while seeking to limit their advances for fear of losing influence in Azerbaijan and Central Asia.

Russia may view Turkey's involvement with Azerbaijan and the CACs as a way to limit Iranian economic objectives. But Russia also needs to tap into Iran's economic involvement in Azerbaijan and the CACs. Moscow favors Iran's desire to establish transportation networks from Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan through Iran to port facilities in the Persian Gulf. Moreover, arms transfers to Iran provide a huge source of income for Moscow as well as a way to maintain important ties with Tehran. Finally, Russians view Saudi economic investment as a positive development. Financial support from the Saudi Kingdom could be an important stabilizing factor and help to end the growth of Iranian-style fundamentalism in the region.

Second, Moscow expresses concern over the pace of Islamic revival in Azerbaijan and the CACs. Although the Russian government has not settled on a consistent policy toward the perceived "Muslim problem" to the south, the leadership's commentaries reveal that Moscow sees Islam as disposed to oppression and violence. Additionally, Moscow's defense and security planners see Muslim nations to their south as contributing to instability within the Soviet Union's former borders. They are afraid that the millions of Muslims who live within Russia's southern regions could emulate their neighbors in Azerbaijan and Central Asia.

## **TURKISH, SAUDI, AND IRANIAN INVOLVEMENT IS WEAKENING AZERI AND CAC CENTRAL AUTHORITY**

Ankara's, Tehran's, and Riyadh's penetration into Azerbaijan and Central Asia is causing the fabric of these recently freed societies to change in two critical ways. First, religious aid from Saudi Arabia and Iran undermines the incumbent Azeri and Central Asian regimes. The Koran's distribution to areas in which Islam has enjoyed a revival has been put

to use by embryonic political parties who are fighting for the removal of the current central authorities and the establishment of a series of Islamic states. Second, Turkish and Iranian activity in ethnic affairs undermines Azeri and CAC authority. Iran's activity in the region tends to stimulate the creation of ethnic coalitions, as does Turkey's desire to have the former republics follow its pro-Western model. This competition based on ethnicity is in turn inciting a search for new allies among the CACs, further encouraging the growth of ethnic-based blocs. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan seem to be teaming up in one such bloc whereas Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan could form another. Though partially responsible for such developments, Iran would be alarmed at the emergence of these competitive coalitions and their resulting impact on tensions along Iran's northern border.

### **IRAN AS PRINCIPAL POINT OF IMPACT**

Iran may be forced to react to several different types of developments arising from the growing relationships between Azerbaijan, Central Asia, and Ankara, Tehran, and Riyadh. These developments include the import and export of large volumes of goods across its territory; Tehran's reaction to Ankara's and Riyadh's involvement in Azerbaijan and Central Asia; the removal of current political elites tied to the previous communist ruling circles; irredentism of subtribal units between Azerbaijan and Iran or Turkmenistan and Iran; and ongoing Central Asian border disputes. Iran's revolutionary zeal may pull it further into these problems if these tensions develop.

### **OVERALL OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

*Azeri and CAC leadership succession struggles could greatly destabilize the region, having a direct impact on the Gulf states.* Ethnic and clan rivalries, coupled with economic frustration, pose threats to Azeri and Central Asian leaderships. The absence of any legitimate succession process or participatory politics, coupled with the emergence of extreme nationalism or Muslim fundamentalism, may lead to potential upheaval throughout Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran have vested interests throughout the region and their reactions to a change in Azeri or Central Asian elites may force dramatic fluctuations in policy objectives.

*Azeri and CAC states seem likely to embrace conflicting national policies as a result of Turkish, Saudi, and Iranian influences.* The emerging states of the former Soviet Union will determine their political and security interests in relation to their geostrategic position, foreign and domestic policy orientations, military stockpiles, and potential economic strength. Since these conditions differ from one former republic to another, the erosion of Azerbaijan's and Central Asia's unity of views and actions on political, economic, and

security issues is unavoidable. Significantly, the aggravation of conflicts and the contradictions within and between Azerbaijan and the CACs could mobilize different social and political groups, parties, and movements in the region to look for powerful backing beyond the former Soviet empire in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran.

*Turkey and Iran, through the establishment of regional economic and political organizations, are seeking to compete for influence in Azerbaijan and Central Asia.* Emerging regional organizations such as the Black Sea Consortium and the Economic Cooperation Organization could also compete against each other as surrogate vehicles for Turkey and Iran. Both Ankara and Tehran are eager to cast an economic net in Central Asia, which would then serve as a reliable base for political influence and enhance the prospects for longer-term policy success, since it presupposes more extensive involvement in the area. Ultimately, Azerbaijan and Central Asia could find themselves on opposite sides of existing rivalries in the Middle East and South Asia.

*Saudi Arabia will be in an advantageous position to manipulate Azeri and Central Asian elites and religious groups to limit Iranian economic and political overtures.* Saudi Arabia's distance from Azerbaijan and Central Asia greatly enhances its ability to survive any immediate spillover effects from upheaval within the region. Riyadh's immense wealth allows for a strong economic and religious assistance program designed to entice Azeris and Central Asians away from Iranian aid. However, Iran's regional position may be enhanced at the expense of Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies if Tehran is able to preempt Riyadh's growing overtures to Azerbaijan and Central Asia.

*Turkey may not be economically and politically strong enough to maintain a sustained thrust into Azerbaijan and Central Asia.* To a certain extent, Turkey's rise in Azerbaijan and Central Asia is designed to increase the country's prestige and strategic importance in the eyes of the West, particularly the United States. Washington has openly welcomed Turkey's further involvement in Central Asia, hoping that it might constrain Iranian influence in the region and promote Western values of secularism, democracy, and free market economics. For the moment, however, the Turkish leadership is assessing the benefits and costs of a full economic and political commitment. Despite promises of lucrative contracts and aid packages, especially in transportation, communication, and the oil industry, a full-fledged economic relationship is probably years away.

*Iran will be concerned with its economic, political, and security interests in the states bordering its north.* By all accounts, the policy of the current Iranian leadership continues to be primarily driven by its desire to expand its economic activity while protecting its interests with military might, and not Islamic zeal. The shifting ethnic situation in Azerbaijan and



the Central Asian republics is increasingly becoming a concern for Tehran. The Iranians view the situation as a potential source of danger, rather than an immediate opportunity. Tehran remains cautious in treating a very fluid situation in Azerbaijan and Central Asia but will be deeply involved for the long term.

*Russia will be hypersensitive to events in Azerbaijan and Central Asia.* Russia will retain its interests because of its size, population, and potential military power and will not ignore Azerbaijan's and the CAC's emerging relationships with its neighbors to the south. Specifically, Russia will be concerned with the potential influx of thousands of refugees from the south who will become a drain on Moscow's economic reform plans. Moreover, Russia will be particularly concerned with upheavals in Azerbaijan and Central Asia that have an Islamic or nationalist character. This type of political instability will likely have a serious impact on the Muslims within the Russian Federation, especially in Tatarstan and the North Caucasus. To maintain its interest through the region, the Kremlin will push for continued deployment of CIS and Russian military units throughout Azerbaijan and Central Asia to secure frontiers and protect Russians living outside of Russian territory. Any extension of CIS or Russian military power, however, could provoke upheavals in Azerbaijan and the CACs, and may act as a spur to Turkey and Iran to intervene militarily in the region as well.

*Russia will pressure its neighbors to abstain from asserting influence in states on Russia's periphery.* Russia will want to limit external influences it views as detrimental to Moscow's interests. To varying degrees, Moscow will pressure Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran to restrict their involvement in the area. So far, Turkish political and economic influence throughout Azerbaijan and Central Asia is viewed in Moscow as preferable to the Saudi or Iranian variant. This view, however, could change should Turkey opt to exert greater political (or military) pressure across the region.

*The potential for proliferation of conventional and nuclear weapons and related technology to Iran will remain high as long as instability remains constant in Azerbaijan and Central Asia.* The purchase of Soviet conventional weapons and nuclear components by Iran could serve as a deterrent to local powers such as Saudi Arabia in addition to serving Iranian domestic public opinion. Far more troublesome, however, is Iran's long-term development of an indigenous nuclear weapons capability, especially its growing stockpile of ballistic missiles capable of hitting targets in neighboring countries.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **BACKGROUND**

Before the August 1991 Moscow coup attempt, a central characteristic of the Soviet Union's foreign policy toward the Gulf region was its dedication to the concept of "new thinking." The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and subsequent war between Iraq and American-led forces put this concept to a major test in which the Soviet Union became a marginal player in the conflict. Following the war's conclusion, the Soviet Union struggled to develop a coherent policy toward the region as part of a bitter internal struggle over the critical, immediate needs of the country. The failed coup attempt of August 1991 led to the collapse of the Kremlin's authority and forced Azerbaijan and the Central Asian Countries (CACs) to contend with formulating their own, independent, policy objectives. The coup's failure also opened the door to foreign economic, religious, and ethnic intrusions after 70 years of communist domination.

### **OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH**

This Note identifies and analyzes the emerging linkages among Azerbaijan and the CACs and the region's most influential neighbors: Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. It explores the complex set of evolving economic, religious, and ethnic relationships that have emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Economic links between Azerbaijan and the CACs and Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are promoting new trade patterns and sources of income apart from Russia. Emerging religious ties signal a possible competition over the pace and direction of the "Muslim revival" in Azerbaijan and the Central Asian states. Finally, ethnic links between Azerbaijan and the CACs reveal a possible split on ethnic lines between the new Central Asian countries, including the possible emergence of autonomous tribal movements or specific blocs based on nationalities. The Note concludes that these events could, in turn, have security implications for the Gulf countries, specifically Iran.

### **ORGANIZATION**

Section 2 provides background on the status of Azerbaijan and the Central Asian states. Sections 3, 4, and 5 examine the complex linkages between Azerbaijan and the CACs on the one hand, and Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Russia on the other. These three sections also explore how Russia may attempt to limit external interference in newly

independent Azerbaijan and the Central Asian states. The final section summarizes the findings and suggests probable security implications for the Gulf. Relevant maps may be found in the Appendix.

## **2. BACKGROUND: THE STATUS OF AZERBAIJAN AND THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES (CACs)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Following the August 1991 coup attempt in Moscow, the Transcaucasian republic of Azerbaijan and the five Central Asian republics—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—all declared their independence (see Figure 2.1).<sup>1</sup> There were some common factors in each of these countries. One common factor was that the collapse of the central Communist Party in Moscow severed cleanly the link between the Kremlin and the outlying republics. For another, local forces attempted to fill the resulting power vacuum, and, in most cases, local communist officials were in the best position because they dominated the republics' existing parliaments. However, local power cliques, mafias, ethnic clans, and religious groups—unique to each country—are now emerging as the dominant actors in political institutions and in rural associations. These groups seek to challenge existing authority and could help shape the future of these new countries.

### **AZERBAIJAN**

#### **Population and Nationalities**

Azerbaijan is a highly diverse country with assorted nationalities seeking various levels of autonomy, independence, and statehood. Armenians, Azeris, Kurds, Lezgins, Russians, Talysh, and Udins live within its Stalinist-era boundaries and attempt to influence political trends both locally and in the country's capital, Baku. Although Azeris themselves dominate the country through their numerical superiority (roughly 78 percent), other nationalities make their voices heard through demonstrations for greater autonomy. For instance, the Talysh are an Iranian people living in the southeastern section of Azerbaijan and the Gilan and Ardabil areas of Iran. Their language, distinct from Azerbaijani, belongs to the northwest Iranian language family. According to Armenian sources, Azerbaijan's Talysh population numbers from 200,000 to 300,000, most of whom are Shia Muslims.<sup>2</sup> Another group, the Lezgins, are found in the northern sections of Azerbaijan and the southeastern corner of Dagestan, Russia. The Lezgin speak a mixed dialect that combines features from Azerbaijani, Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Russian. Whereas most Lezgins are

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<sup>1</sup>Maps of each new country can be found in the Appendix.

<sup>2</sup>*Kommunist* (Armenia), January 6, 1990, as quoted in Elizabeth Fuller, "Azerbaijan Rediscovered Its Vanished Minorities," Report on the USSR, December 28, 1990, p. 20.



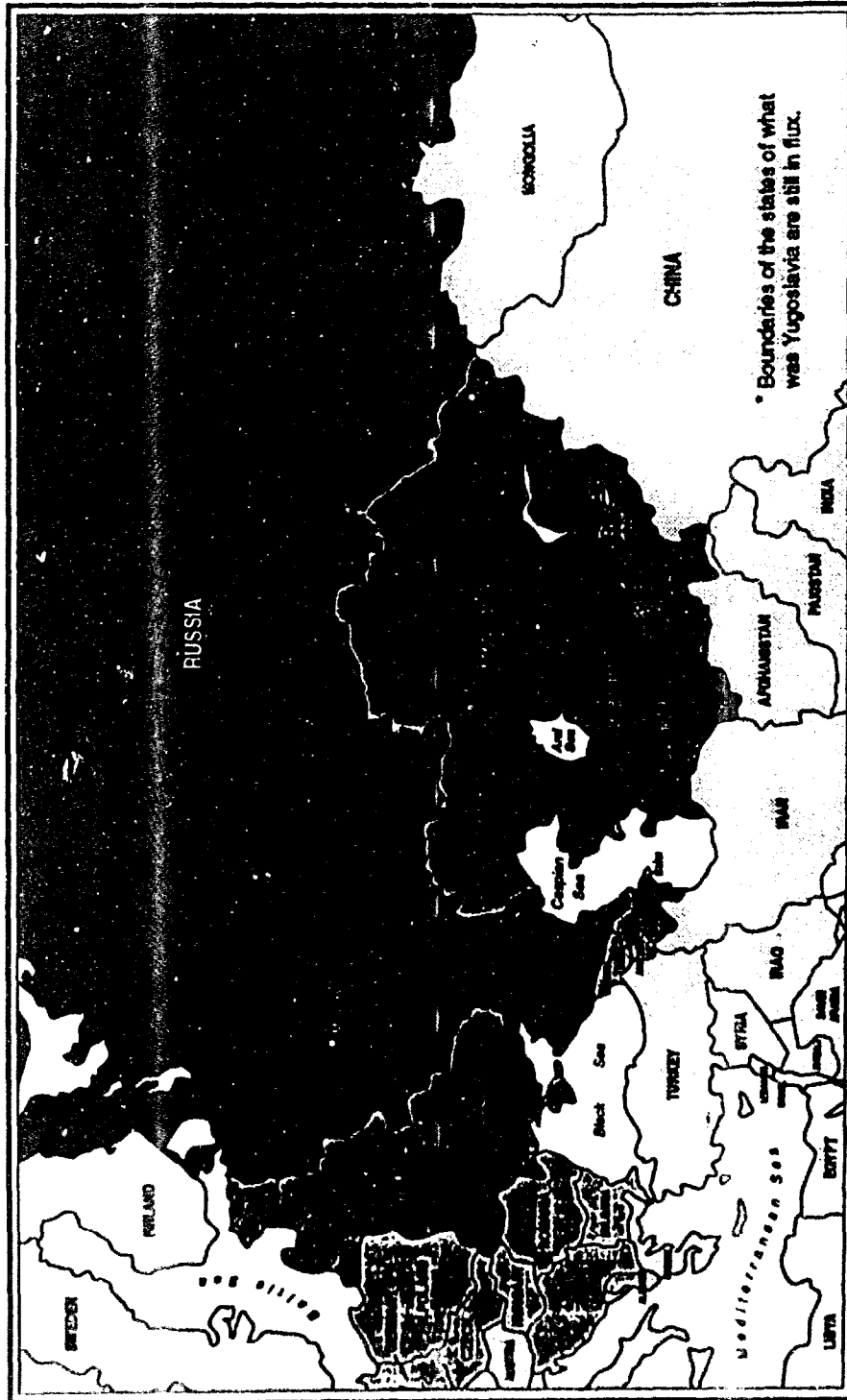


Figure 2.1—Azerbaijan and Central Asia

Sunni Muslims, the remainder are Shia, with an expanding population numbering about 100,000 in Azerbaijan alone.<sup>3</sup> Other smaller groups such as the Udins are concentrated in a few villages in the Kutkashen and Vartashen Raiony (districts) in the north. Significantly, all of these groups have succeeded in preserving their language and traditions because they typically marry within their own clan and raise families according to local customs and laws.<sup>4</sup>

### **Major Azeri Political Groupings and Movements**

Azeri intellectuals play a vital role in the country's political dynamics. In 1988, scientists at the Azeri Academy of Sciences founded a group called the Scientists' Club and over the next two years it grew into a mass, nationalist movement known as the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF).<sup>5</sup> Concurrently, a moderate and a radical wing developed, which forced the group to splinter several times before the August 1991 coup attempt. The last fissure found APF member Etibar Mamedov breaking away from the group to establish the National Independence Party (NIP) in July 1991, just before the Soviet collapse.<sup>6</sup> Currently, the APF fights for retention of the Nagorno-Karabakh region within Azeri boundaries, whereas the NIP seeks to mobilize supporters for a series of mass demonstrations against the Baku government's failures to address critical economic and political reform issues.

Political camps based on family associations dominate the Azeri political landscape. One such camp is established in Nakhichevan; another is in Baku. These regional fiefdoms house local "mafias" (both criminal and political elements) that pursue interests independent of, and sometimes counter to, each other. A power struggle between two ruling clans dominated the Azeri political scene as Moscow's influence waned. The Nakhichevan clan, headed by former Azeri KGB Chairman and Azeri First Secretary Geidar Aliev, ruled over his region with an iron fist. Aliev, famous for his purges of other ethnic minorities, lived up to his notoriety by ousting minorities who did not belong to his political clique upon his return to power on September 6, 1991.

Baku sought to control Aliev by placing its support behind former President Aiaz Mutalibov. He represented families and their associates from the Baku and Karabakh region. Both Aliev and Mutalibov were locked in a brutal leadership struggle in Azerbaijan.

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<sup>3</sup>Lezgins in Russia number 143,000. See Theodore Karasik, *USSR Facts and Figures Annual*, Academic International Press, Gulf Breeze, Florida, 1992, p. 469.

<sup>4</sup>Fuller, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>Robert Cullen, "Roots," *The New Yorker*, April 15, 1992, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup>*Komsomolskaia Pravda*, July 25, 1991.

Upon his election as Nakhichevan's president, Aliiev called for the removal of Mutalibov as president as well as for greater autonomy for Nakhichevan away from Baku.<sup>7</sup>

### **Current Political Power Struggles**

In March 1992, the Azeri power struggle reached a seeming climax in which Mutalibov lost power. The Azeri Parliament forced Mutalibov to resign because of his inability to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh war in Azerbaijan's favor. Aliiev and his associates immediately stepped in to prevent a power vacuum. The government found Aliiev and his clan an attractive, short-term replacement for the Mutalibov leadership since the Nakhichevan authorities managed to take a forceful position with the Armenians.<sup>8</sup> With this action, Aliiev's popularity grew immensely as he successfully made a temporary peace between his clan and the opposition APF and NIF. Moreover, Aliiev, along with his associate, acting President Yakub Mamedov, led a new coalition government with the APF and the NIF that sought to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis once and for all through confrontation with Armenia.<sup>9</sup> The crisis attracted the attention of the international community, as well as Turkey and Iran, and future fluctuations in Azeri politics can be expected to exert a profound influence upon Baku's foreign policy toward the Gulf region.

In May 1992, the APF seized power and split with Aliiev's faction. While thwarting a comeback attempt by former President Aiaz Mutalibov, the APF vowed to create an independent, democratic, secular state outside the CIS and apart from Russia. Although APF Chairman Abulfaz Elchibey was subsequently elected president on June 7, 1992, the front's long-term consolidation of power will depend on neutralizing the communist old guard led by Aliiev and winning the military campaign to regain control over Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia.

### **Azerbaijan's Links to Turkey and Iran**

Iran and Turkey possess a certain appeal for Azerbaijan. Traditionally, the Azeris define themselves under a banner of national awareness based on religious, nationalist, and ethnic identities that predate the Soviet period and are now reemerging. First, the religious identity surrounding Shia Islam implies a solidarity with Iran and a rejection of imperialism (of the Russian variety). Second is the historical goal to unite all Azeris both in Azerbaijan

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<sup>7</sup>TASS, September 7, 1991.

<sup>8</sup>See, for example, the process described in *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, March 14, 1992.

<sup>9</sup>TASS, March 6, 1992; *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, March 14, 1992. The power struggle continued in May 1992 when Mutalibov attempted to stage a coup against Aliiev's associates and the APF and NIF.

and Iranian Azerbaidzhan into one common space. Finally, many Azeris see themselves as ethnically related to the Turks. A Turkish identity generates an appeal since kinship and solidarity with Turkey could assist in the modernization of the Azeri economy if support from Iran wanes. Significantly, Baku hopes to manipulate both Ankara and Tehran over economic and political aid to the embryonic country.

The APF's seizure of power in Baku will have salient repercussions for Azeri relations with Turkey and Iran. Recent pronouncements by Elchibey reveal a preference for Turkey as the sole valid model of a secular parliamentary democracy, while totally rejecting the Iranian fundamentalist experience. There is, however, a disquieting aspect to the Azeri relationship with Turkey because of Ankara's strategic interest in Azerbaijan. The visit to Azerbaijan in May 1992 by Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel, for example, suggested to some foreign observers that the APF may be Pan-Turkic. Demirel was accompanied by Arpaslan Turkesh of the extreme right-wing Turkish National Labor Party, and, it was reported, some members of the APF militia displayed the Grey Wolf insignia of the Turkish National Labor Party.<sup>10</sup> This development could upset Iran since the APF, under Elchibey's leadership, also has designs on Iran's Azeri provinces. Elchibey regards the unification of Azerbaijan with Iran's Azerbaidzhan region as a long-term foreign policy goal.

An intense subnational awareness survives among various groups that could undermine whatever family or party dominates the Baku government. Struggles between various criminal and political elements such as those found in Baku and Nakhichevan will continue now that the APF is in power. Moreover, subnationalities could threaten the Azeri government's stability, creating a ripple effect throughout the region and into Iran. Talysh, for instance, are fiercely independent and want to rekindle ties with Iranian Talysh in order to establish an open dialogue across international borders. Some even argue that they seek to create an autonomous, self-governing entity.<sup>11</sup> Baku (as well as Tehran) is reluctant to grant such autonomy because it could weaken authority in this critical region. Despite the fact that Azerbaijan does not support such movements, several hundred Talysh every year attempt to cross over into Iran illegally to join their brethren.<sup>12</sup> Similar parallels are found within Central Asian societies.

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<sup>10</sup>*The Independent*, June 13, 1992.

<sup>11</sup>In the long term the Talysh may seek to reconstruct the Talysh Khanate, which existed in the region in the 19th century. See Shirin Akiner, *Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union*, KPI, New York, 1986, p. 263, and Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, "Azerbaijan: The Foreign Influences," *Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies Occasional Paper*, No. 103, April 24, 1980.

<sup>12</sup>See, for example, Mark Saroyan, "The Karabakh Syndrome and Azerbaijani Politics," *Problems of Communism*, September-October 1990, p. 16.

## **KAZAKHSTAN**

### **Population and Nationalities**

Kazakhstan, bigger than any former Soviet republic except Russia and about twice the size of Alaska, contains over 100 ethnic groups. Significantly, the Kazakhs, who emerged in the 1400s as a mixture of Turkic and Mongol peoples, are a minority in the country. Kazakhs make up only 36 percent of the country's 16,538,000 population, whereas Russians living in Kazakhstan consist of about 41 percent of the population. Other major ethnic groups found in Kazakhstan include Uzbeks and Ukrainians.

### **Major Kazakh Political Groups and Movements**

Despite the large numbers of Russians in Kazakhstan and decades of Soviet rule, the Kazakhs dominate the political machinery. Kazakhs are divided into three groups with political influence: the Great Horde, the Middle Horde, and the Small Horde.<sup>13</sup> Descendants of the Great Horde ruled before Russia's conquest of southern Kazakhstan, where traditional society was least affected by Russian, and later, Soviet rule.<sup>14</sup> They are still found in the southern portion of Kazakhstan. The Middle Horde territories are found in northern Kazakhstan, whereas the Small Horde originated in western Kazakhstan. Currently, the Kazakh government appears to favor two of the three groups as Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev is from the Great Horde and Kazakh Vice President Erik Asanbaev is from the Middle Horde.<sup>15</sup>

Several major parties operate in Kazakhstan that are driven by religious and nationalist desires. Edinstvo is a non-Kazakh nationalist organization formed to counteract Kazakh nationalism. Edinstvo's membership consists mostly of Russians, although there are many Russified Kazakhs who belong within its ranks. Its leaders seek to keep the use of Russian language alive within the republic as well as prevent job discrimination against non-Kazakh peoples.<sup>16</sup> Edinstvo's officials hope to capture the attention of Russian officials in an effort to pressure Alma-Ata into paying attention to their needs.

Another registered party is Azat, which seeks to oust Russians from prominent positions within Kazakhstan. Formed on July 1, 1990, Azat is an umbrella party to other

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<sup>13</sup>See, for example, Akiner, p. 288. These groups are divided into dozens of smaller clans and tribes.

<sup>14</sup>Local Russians were able to rise within the party's ranks but usually in alliance with an established Kazakh patronage group.

<sup>15</sup>Nazarbaev is from Alma-Ata Oblast, whereas Asanbaev is from Turgai Oblast. Information from SOVT, the Paris-based biographical database.

<sup>16</sup>See, for example, the interview with Edinstvo Co-Chairman Yuri Startsev in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 4, 1991.

Kazakh informal movements including Alash, Zheltoksan (known as the Kazakh National Democratic Party), the Social Democratic Party, and the National Front. These groups aim to create an independent, national-democratic state in Kazakhstan without border changes. But these groups do not fully agree on all issues. Members of Alash, for example, seek to undermine the Kazakh leadership because they feel that Nazarbaev's reforms do not take into account Islamic needs. Before the August 1991 coup attempt, one of its leaders, Bolatbek Akhmet Ali, defined the party's program goals as the overthrow of the communist regime in order to revive the independent Muslim state, or khanate, of Alash-Orda, which existed on the territory of Kazakhstan from 1917 through 1919. Significantly, Alash's popularity is strong in the southern and western sections of the country where Kazakhs outnumber local minority populations.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, Zheltoksan supports Islamic causes, including those in neighboring states, which could destabilize the region if implemented. In March 1992, Party Chairman Hasan Kozhakmetov urged his followers to volunteer to defend Muslims from "Armenian militants" in Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Current Political Power Struggles**

Kazakhstan was slow to change before the Soviet collapse. The then-Soviet republic declared its sovereignty in October 1990 only after 13 other former Soviet republics had done so. Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbaev wants to maintain close ties to Moscow, which disturbs many of the nationalist groups, such as Alash, who desire greater autonomy. Since the Soviet collapse, however, Nazarbaev faces immense demographic problems between Russians and Kazakhs and Kazakhs and Uzbeks, who struggle over ethnic recognition, privileges, and border issues.

Protests and violence against the Nazarbaev regime are beginning to take shape, and the potential for a larger outbreak is evident. On June 17, 1992, for instance, about 5000 demonstrators from Alash and Zheltoksan protested in front of the parliament to demand the resignation of the government and of the Kazakh Supreme Soviet deputies elected by the Communist Party, Komsomol, and other organizations that no longer exist. Zheltoksan leader Hasan Kozhahmetov threatened that if the demands of the rally were ignored, the group would organize a 100,000-strong demonstration to emulate events in Tajikistan (see below). The Nazarbaev government countered by using force. The next day, Kazakh Special Forces cleared away the demonstrators and the government demanded that Zheltoksan work

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<sup>17</sup>*Rabochaia Tribuna*, April 27, 1991, pp. 1-3 in *JPRS-UPA*, May 16, 1991.

<sup>18</sup>Interfax, March 10, 1992.

in groups that include all nationalities.<sup>19</sup> For instance, to balance the potential political instability within Kazakhstan surrounding these ethnic issues, Nazarbaev supports the formation of the Popular Consolidation of Kazakhstan, a group headed by the popular Kazakh poets Olzhas Suleimenov and Mukhar Shakhanov. Its main goal is to form a Kazakh national consolidation that welcomes all nationalities in preference to the purely Kazakh-Islamic Alash.<sup>20</sup>

### **Kazakhstan Emerges as a Regional Actor**

Kazakhstan perceives itself as an emerging regional actor that needs to build ties with other regional powers. Looking south toward the Persian Gulf, Alma-Ata pursues direct economic ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran, seeing them as a potential source of the funds necessary to retool and modernize Kazakh industry. Beyond the Persian Gulf, Nazarbaev's quest for capital took him to the United Kingdom and brought German, Turkish, and American representatives to Alma-Ata. Moreover, and increasingly salient for Kazakhstan, there is a large amount of natural wealth found within its territory. Petroleum seems to be a driving factor since the Tengiz oil reserves in western Kazakhstan may equal Saudi Arabia's.<sup>21</sup>

Kazakhstan is in a position to exert its influence within Central Asia and probably the Persian Gulf. Independent Kazakhstan has become custodian to over 1700 nuclear warheads on its territory. Nazarbaev argues that Alma-Ata should have the right to control these weapons, at least during an "interim period" until the late 1990s. Nuclear weapons provide Kazakhstan with a degree of leverage over other former Soviet republics and possibly a strategic deterrent against Russia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), India, and Pakistan. Gulf states may also have an interest in Kazakhstan's nuclear weapons potential. Though unsubstantiated, reports that Iran has been seeking components from a Kazakh atomic device should serve as a warning that the balance of power in the Gulf could be upset if Alma-Ata allows a weapons transfer.

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<sup>19</sup>Interfax, June 17 and 18, 1992.

<sup>20</sup>Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asia's Post-Empire Politics," *Orbis*, Vol. 36, No. 2, Spring 1992, p. 264.

<sup>21</sup>The Tengiz field has an estimated 25 billion barrels of oil, more than Alaska's Prudhoe Bay. See *The New York Times*, May 19, 1992.

## KYRGYZSTAN

### Population and Nationalities

Kyrgyzstan, located in the heart of Central Asia, has one of the smallest populations of the CACs. In 1989, its population of 4,372,000 was 52 percent Kyrgyz, 22 percent Russian, 13 percent Uzbek, 2.5 percent Ukrainian, and 1.6 percent other smaller nationalities.<sup>22</sup> Kyrgyzstan's dynamics make it ripe for potential instability.

### Major Kyrgyz Political Groupings and Movements

In Kyrgyzstan, there are three major political clans. One is from Naryn, where President Askar Akaev is based. The second group is from Talas, the home of the Akaev's predecessor Absamat Masaliev. Finally, citizens of Osh function as a third group because they are linked to a patronage network of families that originates from Uzbekistan.<sup>23</sup>

The 1990 Osh incident, in which several hundred Uzbeks and Kyrgyz died, was a rallying call for two of the three groups to unify to remove the Talas-based clan. The Naryn-based communist party organization sought to oust Masaliev and needed to link up with disaffected Osh Uzbeks to achieve this goal. In November 1990, at the Kyrgyz Supreme Soviet, the Naryn group formed a political bloc with disaffected Osh residents. This movement gave birth to the Kyrgyzstan Democratic Movement (KDM). Working together, the Naryn clan and the KDM defeated Masaliev's bid to become president. Instead, they elected Academy of Sciences President Askar Akaev as Kyrgyzstan's first president on October 28, 1990. Importantly, Akaev needs the KDM to survive because he recognizes the organization's importance to his political stability and the country's future. He appointed the co-chairman, Qazat Akhmatov, to Kyrgyzstan's Presidential Council, the highest decisionmaking body within the country.<sup>24</sup>

### Current Political Power Struggles

For Akaev to rely on the KDM will be a risky proposition, especially if the Kyrgyz economy declines. The KDM consists of 36 different groups based on subtribal affiliations and could easily break its affiliation with the Naryn group now that they have succeeded in removing the Talas clan from power.<sup>25</sup> In fact, vestiges of the former communist party from

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<sup>22</sup>*Soiuz*, No. 34, August 1990, pp. 7-8.

<sup>23</sup>Olcott, p. 258.

<sup>24</sup>*Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, April 13, 1991, p. 7, in *FBIS-SOV*, May 7, 1991.

<sup>25</sup>Ashar, for example, advocates the provision of land and housing for Kyrgyz living in Osh Oblast. Another group, Osh Aymaghi (Osh Region), campaigns for the construction of homes but through cooperation with the Bishkek government. Yet another group, the Kyrgyz Democratic Wing,



Talas continue to impede Akaev's liberalization drive. Former Kyrgyz Communist Party functionaries, for instance, have not yet given up their struggle to retain elite privileges. They have launched their own party, the Democratic Movement for Popular Unity, and remain in control of key governmental sectors. The country remains mired in poverty, rising unemployment, and land shortages, and sporadic violence continues between Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz.

### **Kyrgyzstan and the Persian Gulf**

Kyrgyzstan views the Gulf region as an important potential participant in its development. Primarily, the Kyrgyz leadership seeks financial infusions through Saudi assistance in reconstructing Kyrgyzstan's stagnant economy. Although Saudi investment has been flowing into the former republic, most of this assistance goes into religious ventures including imports of Korans and mosque construction. Bishkek authorities also seek Iranian assistance in transporting goods and services. To facilitate commerce between Kyrgyzstan and the international community, in early 1992 Kyrgyzstan joined Tehran's Economic Community Organization as an associate member.

## **TAJIKISTAN**

### **Population and Nationalities**

Tajikistan's 5.1 million people are truly diverse. Tajiks, the titular nationality, make up about 66 percent of the population. Uzbeks (22 percent), Russians (10 percent), and a smaller group located in Gorno-Badakhshan can also be found in the former republic. These numbers are in flux because of substantial migrations. Over 36,000 non-Tajiks—mostly professional and skilled workers—have migrated since 1989, leaving behind them poverty and uneducated workers to carry on medical care and industrial production. One reason for the emigration of non-Tajiks was a 1989 law declaring Tajik the state language. Many Russians and other non-Tajik nationalities unable or unwilling to learn Tajik left to resettle elsewhere within the former Soviet Union.

### **Major Tajik Political Groupings and Movements**

Tajikistan has two major clans, the Khojent group (based around the former Soviet city of Leninabad), whose territory borders on Uzbekistan and the Fergana Valley, and the

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seeks greater religious tolerance through the construction of mosques and medresses. Finally, Uzbek Adalet (Uzbek Justice) argues to preserve Uzbek culture by calling for Uzbek to be a state language within Kyrgyzstan and that the Osh region should become an autonomous Uzbek republic. All of these organizations operate under the KDM.

weaker Kurgan-Tiube-Kuliab clan from southern Tajikistan along Afghanistan's border.<sup>26</sup> The Khojent group is more powerful because it controls Tajikistan's cotton industry where all former and current leaders have come from. The two men who have controlled Tajikistan in the past decade—Rakhmon Nabaev (1982–1985, 1991 to present) and Khakar Makhamov (1985–1991)—are both from Khojent.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the dominance of one clan over another within Tajikistan, there are three major opposition groups: the secular Tajik Democratic Movement (TDM), Rastokhez, and the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). The TDM is a moderate nationalist group with Russian as well as Tajik members, including many intellectuals. One of its leaders, Davlat Khudonazarov, ran against Nabaev in the November 1991 election for president. The other two movements, Rastokhez and the IRP, are purely Tajik in membership. Both advocate Muslim revival within Tajikistan, although Rastokhez is less radical than the IRP.

The leaders of both groups seek to make poverty—and the need to improve their flocks' economic lot—a key issue in their drive to establish an Islamic state. Rastokhez emerged in February 1990 when demonstrations broke out in Dushanbe over Makhamov's inability to reverse poor living conditions. The IRP, which claims several hundred thousand members, appeared in early 1990. It received much of its initial intellectual and financial support from fundamentalist Muslims in Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup> The IRP also seems to be linked to the Kurgan-Tiube-Kuliab clan. Captain Davidov Savriddin, deputy police chief in Ducti, 15 km from the Afghan border, reported that recent raids on mosques in the Islamic fundamentalist southern valley of the Kurgan-Tiube-Kuliab clan led to the discovery of weapons and ammunition built up by the IRP.<sup>29</sup>

Between September 21 and October 8, 1991, Tajikistan was the site of a struggle between these multiple groups. The opposition succeeded in forcing the resignation of President Kakhar Makhkamov in August following accusations that he supported the August 1991 coup attempt. Makhkamov's replacement, Supreme Soviet Chairman Kadriddin Aslonov, banned the Communist Party, which ignited a wave of protests supporting the rise of alternative groups to replace the communists. The conservative Tajik Supreme Soviet responded by dismissing Aslonov and installing Nabaev, who sought to control the restive Muslims. Ultimately, the widespread unrest led to a crisis in confidence over the new

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<sup>26</sup>This clan is certainly not unified. It is composed of several tribal units who believe in both Islamic fundamentalism and democracy for Tajikistan. Their combined forces seek to oust Rakhmon Nabaev's government. If Nabaev is ousted, it is unknown to what degree this clan will stay together.

<sup>27</sup>Olcott, p. 258.

<sup>28</sup>TASS, October 26, 1991; Olcott, p. 261.

<sup>29</sup>*Foreign Report*, April 30, 1992, pp. 4–5.

government's ability to correct Tajikistan's backward economy. Nabaev called for a presidential election as well as the legalization of the three opposition parties noted above. This served as the basis for a pluralistic election between Nabaev and Dawlat Khudonasarev on November 24, 1991. Nabaev won with 59 percent of the vote.<sup>30</sup> The calm which followed the election was temporary, however, as several new groups have emerged to complicate the Tajik political spectrum.

### **Current Political Power Struggles**

In 1992, Tajikistan is in a state of uneasiness as several new parties have formed. In February 1992, the Popular Unity Party was organized. It describes itself as representing entrepreneurs and appears to be a noncommunist but conservative group close to the government. The chairman of the organizing committee of the new party is former *Pravda* correspondent Otakhon Latifi, who claims that the group opposes demands that the present parliament be dissolved and new elections held. This demand has been advanced many times in recent months by the TDM. Tajik government leaders reject this demand, claiming that political chaos would result. Another party, the Republican Party, is a spinoff from the TDM. Established in March 1992, it rejects religious or ideological orientations and proclaims itself to be opposed to separatism and to favor close cooperation with other former republics. The former deputy chairman of the TDM, A. Ochilov, was chosen to head the organizational committee of the new party. Significantly, other former TDM members continue to join the Republican Party. They seek membership in the new organization as a protest against TDM efforts to break up Tajikistan.<sup>31</sup>

In April, May, and June 1992, protests against Nabaev increased, with the IRP taking a more active role in these demonstrations than in the past. Each day, 5000 to 8000 men gather in Martyr's Square in front of the Tajik Parliament and call for the dissolution of the government, elections by the end of 1992, and the release of all political prisoners. IRP members are reportedly paid 1000 rubles a month from a local mosque to carry out these protests. The IRP's deputy chairman, Davlat Usmon, claims that the source of the money is from "our brothers abroad."<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the tensions between the IRP and Nabaev have increased to the point where the Tajik president has called for reinforcements from his native area of Khojent to stabilize the volatile situation.<sup>33</sup> Violence between the Khojent clan and

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<sup>30</sup>TASS, November 26, 1991.

<sup>31</sup>Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) *Daily Reports*, March 23, 1992.

<sup>32</sup>*Foreign Report*, April 30, 1992, pp. 4-5.

<sup>33</sup>*Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1992.

the Kurgan-Tiube-Kuliab clan-supported IRP broke out during this period and its escalation into a full-scale civil war continues to be a real possibility.<sup>34</sup>

### **Tajikistan's Link to Iran**

Tajikistan has ethnic connections with Iran. Both countries share similar languages and historical ties that could grow in the future. There is also the crucial link between Tajikistan and Iran against further Turkish penetration of the Central Asian region. In this relationship, both Dushanbe and Tehran could play an important role in limiting Ankara's advances in the other Central Asian states.

## **TURKMENISTAN**

### **Population and Nationalities**

Turkmenistan's population is one of the fastest growing in Central Asia. According to the 1989 census, Turkmenistan's population of almost four million is divided among Turkmen (68 percent) and minorities such as Russians (13 percent), Uzbeks (9 percent), and Kazakhs (3 percent). In regional terms, Turkmenistan has had the second highest increases in population in the last decade (the first being Tajikistan). Turkmenistan's population has grown almost 30 percent since 1980; 2.7 percent of non-Turkmen have migrated.<sup>35</sup>

### **Major Turkmen Political Movements and Groupings**

The Turkmen are divided into two main tribal groups, the Yomuts and the Tekke. Two competing groups of party leaders have developed around them. The Tekke, with their national ties to the cities of Khorezm and Bukhara in Uzbekistan, are the dominant group of the two. Thus, the Tekke dominate the current government and have completely eliminated Yomuts from the leadership.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the Tekke's close ties with the Uzbeks based on their tribal relations guarantees that Turkmen-Uzbek relations will be closely linked.

All opposition parties are banned. There is one major unregistered group in Turkmenistan, Agzybirlik (Unity), and it is unknown to what degree the clans played a role in its formation. Agzybirlik, founded in February 1990, seeks to give greater rights to ethnic Turkmen. Its leader, Ak-Mohammed Velsapr, is a prominent writer who sees inequalities in life between the Turkmen and Russians and seek the latter's ouster from Turkmenistan.

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<sup>34</sup>In fact, these regions are requesting autonomy and even succession from Tajikistan if their demands are not met. See, for example, *Vesti*, May 15, 1992.

<sup>35</sup>Karasik, pp. 498-499.

<sup>36</sup>Olcott, p. 258. Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1986, pp. 93-95.

### **Current Political Power Struggles**

Primarily, President Saparmurad Niiazov seeks to promote an independent Turkmenistan on the remnants of the Turkmenistan Communist Party dominated by the Tekke clan. According to the Turkmenistan president, veteran communists can rally into this party without interference from the local police.<sup>37</sup> Simultaneously, Turkmenistan remains a closely controlled police state. Publications from outside Turkmenistan are banned because the regime regards them as "too liberal." The Turkmen leadership continues to harass and suppress the activities of dissidents. On January 19, 1992, the regime arrested 22 members of Agzybirlik for trying to organize an anti-government meeting. A crackdown on opposition figures was also instigated just prior to U.S. Secretary of State James Baker's visit to Ashkhabad<sup>38</sup> on February 12, 1992.<sup>39</sup>

The former Communist Party power structure remains intact and President Niiazov is the least tolerant of democratic opposition among Azeri and CAC leaders. Niiazov ran unopposed for both the chairmanship of the conservative Supreme Soviet in 1990 and the June 1992 presidential race. He has ruled without difficulty, claiming a mandate from the Turkmen people. The Turkmen leader follows a slow course loaded with reform rhetoric and Turkmen nationalism. Many of Niiazov's speeches and decrees seek to boost his popularity by giving lip service to democracy but preserving his own power based on communist values.

### **Turkmenistan and Iran**

The tribal and clan consciousness that predominates in Turkmenistan drives most of its policymakers to open ties with Iran. Turkmen feel themselves to be unique among the Central Asian peoples and seek to distance themselves from prominent tribal units elsewhere. They want to create their own special relationship with Iran. Turkmenistan and Iran share a border (about 500 km) and, since independence from the former Soviet Union, Niiazov has sought to maximize economic support from Iran. Turkmenistan, which possesses petroleum and natural gas industries, quickly secured agreements from Tehran to exchange natural gas for Iranian consumer goods. Significantly, Iran will act as a transit point for these goods, and to facilitate this, Turkmenistan joined Tehran's Economic Community Organization in early 1992. Moreover, Turkmenistan's leadership wants to

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<sup>37</sup>*Moscow News*, February 23-March 1, 1992.

<sup>38</sup>The presidium of Turkmenistan's Supreme Soviet has instructed that place names in Turkmenistan will be transliterated into Russian directly from Turkmen. The Russian version of the towns of Tashauz and Chardzhou are to be Dashkhovuz and Chardzhev. Kushka, on the Afghan border, will be Gushgy, whereas Turkmenistan's capital will be written as Ashgabat. See *TURKMEN-PRESS* (TASS), May 5, 1992.

<sup>39</sup>*Foreign Report*, February 20, 1992, p. 4.

emulate Iran's constitution.<sup>40</sup> But Turkmenistan also recognizes that Iran's northern border areas contain Yomut tribal units who have fought against the Tekke in the past. The Yomuts could disrupt Turkmenistan's internal political stability. A balance between open relations and a close watch on possible destabilizing factors involving ethnic minorities in the border areas makes Turkmen-Iranian relations precarious. This potential destabilization may be one reason why Turkmenistan and Russia signed a defense accord in June 1992.

## **UZBEKISTAN**

### **Population and Nationalities**

Uzbekistan has the largest population (19,906,000) of any of the CACs; 69 percent are Uzbek, 11 percent Russian, 4 percent Tatars, Kazakhs, and Tajiks, 2 percent Kara-Kalpaks, and several other smaller ethnic groups. Uzbeks, the major nationality, are increasing much faster than the other communities. Just as in Tajikistan, non-Uzbek professionals continue to migrate from Uzbekistan to avoid economic hardships.<sup>41</sup> They are also leaving an unsettled internal situation because they fear for their safety.

### **Major Uzbek Political Movements and Groupings**

In Uzbekistan, political movements and groupings are based less on ethnic affiliation than on geographical location. Separate political groups represent the Fergana Valley, Samarkand, and the key regional centers in the western and eastern parts of the republic. The regional hierarchies found in these areas are fairly stable and autonomous from Tashkent.<sup>42</sup>

Three major political movements exist in Uzbek politics. The Birlik movement's leaders, who formed the group in November 1988, seek to achieve several goals, including the attainment of a leadership position in this populous republic. Moreover, Birlik leaders want to limit the migration of Central Asians from Uzbekistan, promote the migration of Russians and other non-Uzbeks, and force the Uzbek leadership to break away from Moscow's economic stranglehold. In addition, the group seeks to resolve the use of Uzbek and Arabic script instead of Russian.

Another organization, Erk (Independence), is a spin-off from Birlik. Erk's leaders separated from Birlik because, they argued, of the latter's drift toward extremism. Founded in February 1990, Erk's five thousand members are headed by writer Muhammed Salih, who

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<sup>40</sup>IRNA, June 8, 1992, in *FBIS-NES*, June 11, 1992.

<sup>41</sup>Karasik, pp. 498-499.

<sup>42</sup>Olcott, p. 258.

seeks to work within the framework of a renewed Soviet federation or confederation. Erk criticizes Birlik for fueling ethnic conflicts between different communities. The Uzbek leadership recognizes that Erk could be used to their advantage since it represents a small group that Tashkent can manipulate to make it appear as if democracy has arrived in Uzbekistan.<sup>43</sup> Chiefly for this reason, Erk was allowed to field a candidate to oppose Uzbek President Islam Karimov in the December 19, 1991 presidential election.<sup>44</sup> Finally, another group with an apparently large following is the Islamic Rebirth Party (IRP). According to members of Birlik and Erk, the IRP is gaining influence because of its views on nonsecular issues on Uzbekistan's future.<sup>45</sup>

### Current Political Power Struggles

Uzbekistan remains under the influence of former Communist Party structures following the Soviet collapse. President and former Communist Party leader Islam Karimov chairs the National Democratic Party (the Uzbek Communist Party's successor). The Uzbek president advocates a "slow approach" to the introduction of democracy in the country and argues that Uzbekistan is too volatile and "hot-headed" to tolerate any drastic changes in governmental structures and philosophical outlook.

Karimov's inability to provide basic goods and services has led to a sharp economic decline since independence. Following the coup attempt and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, prices rose dramatically because Uzbekistan traditionally received most of its goods through barter agreements with other former Soviet republics, especially Russia. Today, these products are not making their way into Uzbek markets, or if they are, they arrive in small quantities. Food lines have become commonplace, prompting violence in early 1992 in which several students were killed in Tashkent.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, Russians no longer feel safe in the midst of this potent ethnic mix. Uzbekistan is the site of some of the most bloody ethnic fighting recorded in recent years.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>RFE/RL *Daily Report*, April 23, 1990; "Dismantling the Soviet Empire," *Swiss Review of World Affairs*, January 1992.

<sup>44</sup>Erk's candidate, Muhammad Salih, won 12.4 percent of the vote. See *Foreign Report*, February 27, 1992, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup>*The Referendum on Independence and Presidential Election in Uzbekistan*, The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Washington, D.C., January 31, 1992, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup>TASS, January 19 and 20, 1992.

<sup>47</sup>For example, in June 1989, Uzbek Sunnis attacked the Meskhetian Shias over economic mobility and language issues. Several hundred were killed. See Annette Bohr, *Violence Erupts Between Uzbeks and Meskhetians*, via SOVSET, June 6, 1989. For Russian language reports, see Anatolii Golovkov, "Zatmenie," *Ogonek*, No. 29, July 15-22, 1989; "O Tragicheskikh Sobytiakh v Ferganskoi Oblasti i Otvetstvennosti Patiinykh, Sovetskikh i Pravookhranitelykh Organov," *Izvestia TsK KPSS*, No. 10, 1989, pp. 91-103.

Incidents between Russians and non-Russians have increased, especially in food and gasoline lines.<sup>48</sup> Russian-language Uzbek papers report that Russians are harassed as busloads of Birlik supporters shout obscenities at them on the street.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, the public ferment in the country has reached the point where it is unsettling Uzbek leaders, posing a threat to their legitimacy. In response, the leadership is limiting freedom of expression; any attempt to unseat the government is met with violence.

#### **Uzbekistan's Link to the Persian Gulf States**

Uzbekistan seeks closer relations with Iran as a transit point for its goods and services. To facilitate commerce between Uzbekistan and the international community, Tashkent joined Tehran's Economic Community Organization in early 1992. But Tashkent is not only interested in Iran, as it also has interests in the other Gulf states. The former republic looks for added assistance from the Gulf monarchies involving desperately needed grains and oil extraction technology. In fact, Uzbekistan links its economic survival to this assistance from the Gulf region.

#### **AZERBAIJAN AND THE CACs: SETTING THE STAGE FOR NEW GEOPOLITICAL LINKAGES**

By the end of 1991, Azeri and CAC leaders agreed to join the commonwealth established earlier by Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. It was one of the most important steps in the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) because the additions prevented an uncontrollable political and economic collapse. The Azeri and CAC leaders viewed the CIS's birth as a salient event through which the countries emerging from the Soviet empire's demise would enjoy maximum control over their own affairs.

Yet, Azerbaijan and the CACs are disturbed by several trends that have forced them into a new geopolitical relationship with states located to their south, away from the CIS and Russia. One source of disquiet was the apparent willingness of the Slavic republics to initially exclude them from the CIS. The declaration to join the commonwealth that was signed in Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan, by the Central Asian presidents demanded equal participation and rejected any preferential ethnic orientation of the CIS. Despite initial Central Asian participation, Russian political observers questioned whether it was in Moscow's best interest to have the region participate economically in the CIS. They maintained that Central Asia's economic underdevelopment damaged Russia's chances to

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<sup>48</sup>*Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 1991.

<sup>49</sup>James Critchlow, "Uzbekistan: Underlying Instabilities," *RFE/RL Research Report*, February 7, 1992, p. 9.



heal its own economy, and that severe social problems might cause the people of the region to turn to Muslim fundamentalism.

Central Asia was long perceived in Moscow as a major drain on scarce Russian resources. Some Central Asians disputed this view, arguing instead that the subsidies from Moscow offset the low prices that Russian industry paid for Central Asian raw materials. Other leaders saw the commonwealth's formation and their inclusion in it as a mistake because it limited their economic independence. For them, the CIS was unworkable. Turkmen Foreign Minister Avdy Kuliev highlighted these sentiments when he claimed that, as far as Turkmenistan was concerned, the political and economic relations within the CIS were anything but constructive. Kuliev referred to the indecisive meeting of commonwealth foreign ministers as a "basic incompatibility" of orientation between Russia and Turkmenistan. Rather, he posited, the time was ripe for Turkmenistan to develop relations with its southern neighbors.<sup>50</sup>

#### **A MOVE TO THE SOUTH**

Despite initial fears that their region could not survive on its own, Azerbaijan and the CACs are emerging as distinct states searching actively for foreign assistance in the economic, religious, and ethnic spheres as a way to promote independence and legitimacy outside the CIS. Consequently, Azerbaijan and the CACs will break away from their reliance on Russia, preferring to forge closer ties with their southern neighbors.

How to proceed with regional integration with Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia continues to be a topic of discussion among Central Asian political leaders and intellectuals as they search for alternative resources to replace Russian subsidies. The following discussion looks at the fundamental question of how these ties are to be implemented. Specifically, what could the south offer Azerbaijan and the CACs in the economic realm? Will these new linkages affect ties between the former Soviet republics and Russia?

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<sup>50</sup>Quoted by DPA, January 14, 1992.

### **3. AZERI/CAC REGIONAL ECONOMIC LINKAGES**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The break-up of the Soviet Union changed the face of regional economic relations and opened up opportunities for powerful neighbors of the former Soviet Union's southern republics—Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran—to develop new economic contacts in the region.

#### **TURKISH ECONOMIC OVERTURES TO AZERBAIJAN AND CENTRAL ASIA**

Turkey was the quickest to capitalize on the new openings. Turkish officials point out that trade between Turkey and the old Soviet Union increased from \$350 million in 1987 to \$2 billion in 1991, so the foundations for further cooperation have been in place for some time. One of the primary attractions of Turkey for Azerbaijan and the CACs is Turkey's perceived status as a stepping stone to Europe. Central Asians and Azerbaijan need Western aid and technology to modernize and repair their damaged economies. Turkey, a Muslim but democratic and pro-Western state, believes it offers a natural model for Azerbaijan and the CACs.

Ankara campaigns hard for its own role in Azerbaijan and the CACs, recognizing that important links could be developed with these emerging, independent countries. For instance, under the supervision of the Turkish Standards Institute, Azerbaijan and the CACs discussed the adoption of common currencies, measurements, and flags, as well as a common alphabet. Moreover, Kazakh, Uzbek, and Turkmen businessmen are being given internships in Istanbul. Kurban Obezmuradov, the chairman of the Turkmenistan entrepreneurs' association, signed an agreement with Turkish officials for Turkmenistan businessmen to take courses in Turkey.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, Ankara paid \$21 million for improved telecommunications between Azerbaijan and the West and promised Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan financial help in their new transportation links and joint economic ventures. The Turkish-led Black Sea Economic Cooperation Region, formed in January 1992, could serve as a future outlet to markets previously dominated by the former

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<sup>1</sup>Postfactum, February 14, 1992.

CMEA.<sup>2</sup> Its members include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine.<sup>3</sup>

Ankara is also instrumental in establishing oil, gas, and rail projects with Azerbaijan and the CACs via Iran. Turkey seeks to establish energy links with these new states as an alternative to those managed through the former Soviet center, Moscow. Turkmenistan, for one, responded that it invited Turkish interests to link the two countries closer together. Projects planned include the construction of a natural gas pipeline to Turkey and Azerbaijan from Turkmenistan, although it is unclear exactly how the gas will be delivered. Also, Ashkhabad plans to build a liquified natural gas plant in the Caspian port town of Krasnovodsk, in which Turkish companies have expressed interest before.<sup>4</sup>

Turkey, to some degree, is replacing Russia as a supplier of key foodstuffs, notably grains. With the collapse of the interrepublic distribution system, Azerbaijan and the CACs increasingly look outside the boundaries of the former Soviet empire for these goods. Turkey is a critical player in this regard, but only toward Azerbaijan, because transportation problems prevent immediate exports to the other CACs. Since the Soviet collapse in fall 1991, Turkey has sold and shipped Azerbaijan one million tons of wheat and one hundred thousand tons of flour.<sup>5</sup>

However, Turkey's rapidly growing but still relatively underdeveloped (in European terms) economy limits Ankara's ability to assist Azerbaijan and the CACs because it may not be strong enough to sustain a potent, long-term economic assistance program. Although the Turkish Gross National Product has grown significantly in the past several years, Ankara's decline in Gross Domestic Product, increased reliance on exports, a rise in inflation, and a budget deficit hampers a strong assistance program.<sup>6</sup> The Turks, for instance, were unable to deliver 10,000 manual typewriters to Azerbaijan that Baku needed to begin conversion to the Latin alphabet. Moreover, Turkish universities announced that they could only

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<sup>2</sup>CMEA, or the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, was a regional group organized in 1949 by the Soviet Union to integrate the economies of Eastern Europe. Its membership included Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Romania, and later included East Germany, Cuba, and Mongolia. It was disbanded in 1991 following the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe.

<sup>3</sup>Turkish President Ozal proposed the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Region as a substitute for CMEA's collapse. Ozal argued that the organization will make the entire region more attractive to Europe. For the moment, Turkey denies that the project was an alternative to existing European institutions.

<sup>4</sup>Reuters, February 20, 1992.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.* Turkey planned to ship 400,000 tons of wheat from Trabzon to Sarp, Georgia. Azerbaijan would then transport the grain by rail to its facilities.

<sup>6</sup>*Turkey 1991: An International Comparison*, Dis Ekonomik Iliskiter Kurumu (DEIK), Foreign Economic Relations Board, Istanbul, Turkey, 1991, pp. 39-42, 55-56; *Turkey Country Report*, The Economist Intelligence Unit, No. 1, 1992, pp. 21-23. For more on Turkey's inability to assist Azerbaijan and Central Asia, see *The New York Times*, August 4, 1992.

accommodate several hundred Azeri or Central Asian students instead of several thousand as promised earlier.<sup>7</sup> Turkey's limited ability to capitalize on its relationships with Azerbaijan and the CACs creates opportunities for Iran.

#### **IRANIAN ECONOMIC DESIGNS FOR AZERBAIJAN, KAZAKHSTAN, TAJIKISTAN, AND TURKMENISTAN**

Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan all link Iranian economic support to any hope of an economic recovery. In October 1991, prior to the Soviet collapse, a trade fair in the Turkmen capital of Ashkhabad displayed products from the Iranian provinces of Khorasan, Mazandaran, Gilan, and Semnan. Turkmen officials expressed interest in cooperation with Iran in poultry farming, livestock breeding and food industry, and cold-storage facilities.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Azerbaijan invited Iranian assistance for its struggling economy. A branch of the Bank of Iran was opened in Baku, which allowed Azerbaijani access to hard-currency trade with Iran. Iranian-Azeri trade in petroleum products is believed to be part of the reason the bank sought a branch in Baku.<sup>9</sup>

Azerbaijan and the CACs also seek Iranian help in the transportation of goods and services across international boundaries. The ceremonial opening of the Ashkhabad-Mashhad-Tehran highway illustrated the advancement of interregional trade. The new road helps increase commodity exchange between the two states and has promoted expanded cooperation.<sup>10</sup> Concurrently, the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic called on Iranian assistance as a result of Armenian blockage of rail freight (in retaliation for Azerbaijan's action against the status of Nagorno-Karabakh). Nakhichevan Supreme Soviet Chairman Geidar Aliev, a former Politburo member who served under Brezhnev and won election to the chairmanship in November 1991 on a nationalist platform, called on Iran to assist his republic in delivering food and energy supplies.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, Iranian Foreign Minister

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<sup>7</sup>*Newsweek* (International Edition), February 3, 1992, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup>Reuters, September 27, 1991. Yet, Iran's struggle against Western influences accompanies these developments. The trade fair contained a display labeled "Islamic Propaganda" that featured a painting of a human skull superimposed over the American flag. Not only is this act interpreted as anti-Western but also anti-Turkish and anti-Saudi because of their support for the U.S.-led coalition during the 1991 Gulf War.

<sup>9</sup>*Moscow All-Union Radio Maiak Network*, December 3, 1991 in *FBIS-SOV*, December 6, 1991, p. 82.

<sup>10</sup>Reuters, October 11, 1991.

<sup>11</sup>*Moscow Central Television First Program Network*, October 8, 1991, in *FBIS-SOV*, October 18, 1991, p. 68. It is important to note that Aliev asked Turkey for food aid and received it promptly. This event may have contributed to a quick Iranian entry into Nakhichevan since both Ankara and Tehran sought to influence the Transcaucasus region.

Velayati signed an agreement with Azeri officials that allowed a joint rail project on Iranian territory to supply the besieged republic.<sup>12</sup>

Rail projects are planned to allow Azerbaijan access to Iranian ports in the Persian Gulf (see Figure A.8 in the Appendix). Here, Azeri and CAC access to the Persian Gulf is the most salient point, especially in regard to oil exports. Kazakhstan, for one, recognizes the significance of this access since it does not want to rely on preexisting pipelines through Russia. Significantly, Iran has approached Kazakhstan about creating a joint shipping company operating across the Caspian Sea. This option would provide a straightforward solution for shipping crude oil from Kazakhstan's Mangyshlak Peninsula to refineries in Iran and then abroad without going through Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in January 1992, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmud Vaezi announced that the pipeline carrying Iranian gas to the former Soviet Union would now supply only Azerbaijan. A few days later, Iranian Oil Minister Gholamreza Aqazadeh arrived in Baku to discuss ways of exporting Iranian crude oil to other markets, including Europe, through Azerbaijan's advanced pipeline network. This would give Iran an alternative to its present oil export routes through the Persian Gulf.<sup>14</sup>

Just as with Turkey's Black Sea Economic Cooperation Region free trade zone, Iran is seeking to integrate Azerbaijan and the CACs into the international market through its own regional grouping. In February 1992, Tehran rekindled the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. The organization was formed to reduce customs tariffs and promote commerce but until 1991 achieved few of its objectives. Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan joined the ECO in January 1992 and Kazakhstan took an associate membership. The ECO's first summit since the Soviet Union's collapse, however, gave Iran an important regional forum in which to reiterate the special significance it attached to relations with Azerbaijan and the CACs. Tehran claimed that it was fulfilling its natural geopolitical role of providing a bridge between the outside world and landlocked Central Asia.<sup>15</sup> It was indeed possible that a more active Iranian foreign policy, and the prospect of new alliances among Muslim states, were turning the ECO into a more meaningful economic group with immense regional potential. Moreover, the

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<sup>12</sup>*Moscow All-Union Radio Maiak Network*, December 3, 1991, in *FBIS-SOV*, December 6, 1991, p. 82. The goods were also delivered via automobile before the latest outbreak of Armenian-Azeri hostilities in 1991-1992.

<sup>13</sup>*Trud*, January 15, 1992.

<sup>14</sup>*Reuters*, February 14, 1992.

<sup>15</sup>A follow-on meeting of the ECO occurred in Ashkhabad between May 9-10, 1992. Interestingly, the Iranian press reported that the group's results may help to stop "U.S. meddling in the Central Asian region." See *RFE/RL Daily Report*, May 6, 1992.

ECO's political accomplishments may also have significant implications as the final statement of the conference referred to support from the member countries to the "peoples of Kashmir, Afghanistan and the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine," as part of their agendas.<sup>16</sup> From an economic standpoint, the final statement called for the removal of trade barriers between the six member countries as soon as possible. ECO also planned to create a modern and efficient infrastructure between member states as presidents Mutalibov, Niiazov, and Karimov failed to see any future for the CIS as an economic organization.<sup>17</sup>

The ECO summit, nevertheless, was filled with tension as Iran and Turkey competed for influence over the new members. The creation of a rival Caspian Sea Cooperation Zone (CSCZ) made up of Iran, Russia (invited to join), Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan was considered "one organization too many" by Turkey's President Ozal, who correctly perceived the group as a way to remove Turkey from active participation in the region. Ozal's complaints notwithstanding, the CSCZ was formed on February 17, 1992, with its headquarters in Tehran. Thus, Iran moved to ensure that Azerbaijan and the CACs are dependent on it as a distribution hub for exports and imports.

#### **SAUDI ECONOMIC OVERTURES TO KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, AND UZBEKISTAN**

Azerbaijan and the CACs link their economic recovery to Saudi Arabia's vast potential as a benefactor, beginning with an initial three billion dollar investment into the region in 1991-1992. Although most of the financial aid is for religious purposes (see Section 4), there are economic benefits as well. For instance, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which supplied the former Soviet Union with part of its gold, uranium, natural gas, and oil, welcome Saudi investments to develop these precious resources, but for export away from Russian markets.<sup>18</sup> The Saudi business conglomerate Dallah al-Baraka also commenced the development of the country's oil industry at the Tengiz oil field. The bank's activities included investment and equity participation in local projects, trade finance, and the leasing of imported industrial equipment for oil extraction and modernization of oil refining at Karaganda.<sup>19</sup>

Another valuable economic interest for Saudi Arabia is the potential of Central Asia as a source of labor. Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks are resourceful people who could function in various levels of labor and management. Despite language differences, two or three

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<sup>16</sup>Reuters, February 18, 1992.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>For more on the CACs' material wealth, see Akiner, 1986.

<sup>19</sup>Reuters, October 27, 1991.

thousand Kyrgyz were expected to work in Saudi Arabia.<sup>20</sup> Uzbeks are also likely candidates for expatriate employment in Saudi Arabia because of the existence of some 1000 Uzbek families in the Kingdom.<sup>21</sup> Finally, in September 1991, Kazakhstan created the Kazakh Space Agency, which offers foreign access to space launch facilities. The Saudis might recognize the potential for themselves, as well as the Central Asians, in financing communication projects or reconnaissance satellites.

#### **THE RUSSIAN RESPONSE TO TURKISH, IRANIAN, AND SAUDI ECONOMIC OVERTURES**

Despite the views held by some Russian officials that Azerbaijan and the CACs are a hindrance, other officials link Russian economic recovery to the new relationships forged by Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia with Azerbaijan and the CACs. Moscow faces immense economic problems itself and simultaneously is courting Ankara, Tehran, and Riyadh for financial assistance while seeking to limit their political advances for fear of losing influence in Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Russia, for instance, may view Turkey's involvement with Azerbaijan and the CACs as a way to limit Iranian economic objectives. Sporadic Russian warnings on Turkey's role in Azerbaijan and Central Asia serve to impede any quick advances by Ankara.<sup>22</sup>

Turkey is moving faster than any other country to keep up with and take advantage of the tumultuous changes in the former Soviet Union. Yet, Ankara does not want its moves to jeopardize its relationship with Moscow. At stake in Russia and Ukraine are the jobs of 12,000 Turkish engineers and workers on construction projects. Likewise, Russia needs Turkish investments and a continuing trade relationship to boost its own economy. More than four-fifths of Turkey's trade with the old Soviet Union, worth about \$1.6 billion in 1991, was with the Russian Federation. In addition, Moscow wants Ankara to help settle its housing problems for former Soviet soldiers. A Turkish building company, Gama, had won a

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<sup>20</sup>Interfax, June 11, 1991. Another optimistic report listed as many as 150,000 people to be sent to Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait in 1992. See *Moscow All-Union Radio Maiak*, August 17, 1991, in *FBIS-SOV*, August 19, 1991, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup>Based on interviews with Bess Brown of the RFE/RL Research Institute on November 22, 1991, Florida International University Professor Mohiaddin Mesbahi on November 23, 1991, and George Mason University Professor Mark Katz on November 24, 1991. I am also indebted to Graham Fuller of RAND for background on Uzbeks in Saudi Arabia. The Uzbek families arrived in Saudi Arabia during the 1920s after fleeing the Bolsheviks. The Saudis seek to illuminate these ties. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faysal emphasized the common roots of the Uzbeks and the Saudis when he announced to an Uzbek religious audience that "a Muslim people in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stands behind them." See *Saudi Press Agency*, February 21, 1992.

<sup>22</sup>See, for example, ITAR-TASS, May 25, 1992.

coveted subcontract to build \$35-million worth of housing for Russian soldiers returning from Eastern Europe.<sup>23</sup>

Russia also needs to tap into Iran's economic involvement in Azerbaijan and the CACs by helping Tehran feel more secure amid a flurry of interest by Turkey and Saudi Arabia in Azerbaijan and the CACs. Arms transfers, for example, provide a huge source of income for Moscow. In fact, the Yeltsin government announced that it wanted to increase its arms export industry by several billion rubles, and both Iranian and Russian sources confirmed in January 1992 that Tehran had made major arms purchases from Moscow based on a 1988 Soviet-Iranian agreement worth four billion dollars. According to these sources, Iran received Russian weapons including MiG-29s, Sukhoi-24 fighters, T-72 tanks, and SAM-5, SAM-7, and SAM-23 missiles.<sup>24</sup> In addition to this hardware, Iran purchased three Kilo-class submarines for coastal defense in the Strait of Hormuz. The sale may have been a principal means to keep Russian-Iranian relations on good footing even though the proliferation of submarines in the Persian Gulf could become a future concern to the West.

Moscow also looks favorably on Iran's desire to establish transportation networks from Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan through Iran to port facilities in the Persian Gulf. The Yeltsin government views this as a positive development because it could, eventually, lead to more direct Russian access to the Persian Gulf and address Moscow's age-old desire for access to a warm water port.

Finally, Russians view Saudi economic investment as a positive development even though Riyadh's overtures carry Sunni Islamic values. Riyadh's three billion dollar investment, which mostly flows to the Central Asians, can help quell any potential Iranian-styled fundamentalism in Azerbaijan and the CACs by providing medical goods, water enhancement technologies, and consumer goods.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Russia recognizes that its new relationship with Saudi Arabia, based on their establishment of diplomatic recognition in September 1991, could help assure future Saudi economic cooperation for Russia itself.

#### **IMPLICATIONS OF THE TURKISH, IRANIAN, AND SAUDI ECONOMIC LINKAGES ON AZERBAIJAN AND CENTRAL ASIA**

In Azerbaijan, and throughout the Central Asian region, the race is on to establish economic links. In the competition for influence, some observers foresee a renewal on

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<sup>23</sup>*Middle East Economic Digest (MEED)*, February 14, 1992.

<sup>24</sup>See, for example, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, February 28, 1992, and *Mideast Mirror*, January 9, 1992.

<sup>25</sup>*Izvestiia*, December 27, 1991.



different terms of the game played in the 19th century between Russia, Turkey, Persia, and the British Raj in India during which Tsarist Russia swallowed up Central Asia.

Turkey's activity is in partial response to the European Community's inaction on the question of Turkish membership. Ankara's drive to set up a Black Sea economic cooperation zone may be Turkey's attempt to shift its economic activity eastward. The Iranians, for their own reasons, do not want to see instability along their northern borders. Their enhanced economic ties with Azerbaijan and the CACs are aimed at securing Tehran's long-term influence in the region. Concurrently, Iran seeks economic leverage against Moscow by signing deals with other former Soviet republics outside of Azerbaijan and the Central Asian countries. Tehran's 1992 deal to supply Ukraine with three billion cubic meters of gas and four million tons of crude oil in exchange for chemicals, refined products, oil equipment, scrap metal, and weapons from Ukraine's huge defense industrial sector has served as an important initial step in creating new economic links. Significantly, in the next few months or years, Azerbaijan and the CACs could tap into the Ukrainian-Iranian deal as a way to distance themselves from Russian influence. This prospect evidently concerned the Russian government since the deal prompted warnings to both Kiev and Tehran that they should not cooperate against Russia.<sup>26</sup>

Iran's shipping of oil and gas to Ukraine via Azerbaijan (and presumably through Georgia or the southern parts of the Russian Federation where support for Moscow was limited) could pose a potential source of friction with Turkey. Iran is planning to build three oil and gas pipelines to supply Europe by 1996, as a joint venture with Ukraine (45 percent) and Azerbaijan (10 percent). The pipelines would be in addition to an Iranian-proposed line to France through Turkey, now under study by Gaz de France. If tensions increase between Tehran and Ankara, the Iranian-Azeri-Ukrainian project could become an important alternative outlet for Iranian oil and gas to Europe.

Concurrently, Azerbaijan and the CACs, as independent states, are trying to manipulate Turkey, Iran, and to a lesser degree Saudi Arabia over economic policy. Azerbaijan's relationship with Iran is unique. It seeks to extract financial support from Iran while building a relationship with Turkey. Baku plays Turkey against Iran to gain political and economic favor with both countries. Baku plans to send Azeri army officers to Turkey for training, which heightens Iranian fears of long-term Turkish intentions. In addition, Baku has counter leverage through its agreement to permit the construction across Azerbaijan of a

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<sup>26</sup>Reuters, February 7, 1992.

\$7.5 billion pipeline carrying Iranian oil and gas in exchange for goods from Ukraine, which might include more weapons for Iran.

The CACs also believe that tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia can be manipulated. These states know that Saudi Arabia sees them as a weak flank along Iran's northern border. Riyadh sees aid for CAC economic development as a way to secure its influence there.

Finally, Azerbaijan and the CACs seek to distance themselves from their northern neighbor, Russia. No longer trapped in Moscow's economic web of forced exports and limited imports, the Azeris and the CACs are turning to other powers for economic assistance. Indeed, Azerbaijan and the CACs can become self-sufficient in everyday goods and services.<sup>27</sup> As early as 1989, for example, the Tajik government released a study showing that the Central Asian republics grew enough fruits and vegetables for themselves and for export.<sup>28</sup> In addition, if Russia is completely removed from the Central Asian economies, a radical growth in food production might occur. *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* revealed that if the quantity of imports of food and agricultural products were based on a per-capita basis without exports to Russia, the Central Asian republics were least dependent on most food imports.<sup>29</sup> Already, Azerbaijan and the CACs are receiving assistance to counter the loss of Russia's input where they are deficient. A notable example is a case where, in late 1991, Saudi Arabia and "Arab Shaykhs," acting as guarantors for Canada, underwrote the shipment of 1.8 million tons of grain to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan—a crop previously received from Russia.<sup>30</sup>

In sum, new economic linkages are being forged between Azerbaijan and the CACs and Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia which could have a dramatic impact on trade relationships throughout the former Soviet empire. Russia seems to be losing in the struggle to maintain

<sup>27</sup>Following an on-site examination of food availability in Central Asia, the U.S. Agency for International Development reported that the Central Asian countries are not experiencing a food problem. See *Washington Post*, April 22, 1992, p. 26.

<sup>28</sup>*Kommunist Tajikistana*, September 7, 1990, p. 2, in *JPRS-UEA*, January 18, 1991. The following chart represents Central Asian levels of food self-sufficiency, in percent, for 1989:

Food	Kazakh	Uzbek	Kyrgyz	Tajik	Turkmen
Meat	134	76	108	77	71
Milk	96	73	92	67	56
Potatoes	88	64	76	85	30
Eggs	103	98	96	94	75
Vegis and melons	94	195	163	164	170
Fruits and berries	73	175	127	802	210

<sup>29</sup>*Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, December 4, 1991.

<sup>30</sup>*Pravda*, January 22, 1992.

economic ties with Azerbaijan and the Central Asian countries as its influence wanes. But the economic links between Ankara, Tehran, and Riyadh cannot be separated from the role of religion in solidifying ties. The success of Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia in spreading or limiting Islamic values throughout the region and the effects of this religious aid on the political fabric of Azerbaijan and the emerging Central Asian states represent critical variables to which we will now turn.

#### 4. AZERI/CAC REGIONAL RELIGIOUS LINKAGES

##### INTRODUCTION

Religion plays a critical role in the linkages between the Azerbaijan and the CACs and Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. Turkey, as a secular Islamic country, has had little to do with the export of Muslim influence into the region. Instead, Ankara chooses to rely on its economic ties and ethnic heritage with Azerbaijan and the CACs (see Section 5 for the ethnic link). Significantly, Iran and Saudi Arabia quickly moved to compete for Azeri and CAC believers who practiced Islam despite persecution from communist authorities. Tehran and Riyadh are now struggling to shape Central Asia's religious cultures. Whatever the precise extent of Muslim belief among Central Asians, Islam's hold on the region is strong, making it a political factor with formidable potential.

##### IRANIAN RELIGIOUS AID

Iran's religious thrust into Azerbaijan and Central Asia has been relatively successful because these emerging countries desperately need Iranian economic aid and seem to be willing to acquiesce to Tehran's religious advances in exchange for greater access to world markets. Iranian religious aid is accepted despite the fact that there are major differences between the Iranian Shias and Central Asian Sunnis.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati illustrated his country's intent when he claimed that religion, as well as economic contacts, should be used as a link between Tehran and Azerbaijan and the CACs.<sup>1</sup> To support such an initiative, Iranian leaders had allocated the equivalent of \$130 million to send 700 mullahs bearing political and religious material to the region.<sup>2</sup> Tehran has also used its monies to build new mosques and educational institutions in Tajikistan.<sup>3</sup> But this aid has produced by-products that tear at the delicate fabric of Tajik society. Some Tajik intelligentsia, for example, reacted positively toward Iran as a model to be emulated even though this contradicts the stated aims of the Tajik government.<sup>4</sup> But Tajik religious leaders, who recognize the significant differences between Shia and Sunni Islam, fight not only against Tehran's religious aid, but against the economic

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<sup>1</sup>Reuters, February 19, 1992.

<sup>2</sup>Iran's Mujahadeen Khalq, a dissident group, reported this sum in the *Wall Street Journal*, December 17, 1991. The number of mullahs was quoted from *Conflict International*, May 1992.

<sup>3</sup>*Newsweek* (International Edition), February 3, 1992, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup>Many Mountain Tajiks are Shia. See Bennigsen and Wimbush, pp. 92-93.

aid linked to it. Tajik spiritual leader Qazi Akbar Toradzhon Zoda, for example, views Iran's religious penetration with suspicion and is trying to prevent its further propagation.<sup>5</sup>

Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan seek Iranian religious support as well, since they look to increase trade opportunities along Iran's northern border. Former Azeri President Aiaz Mutalibov, in an effort to gain more Iranian economic assistance, cynically called for a "spiritual revival" within his country.<sup>6</sup> A by-product of Mutalibov's "spiritual revival" policy was Iranian support in establishing an Islamic judiciary in Azerbaijan. In November 1991, Iranian Prosecutor General Ayatollah Abolfazl Musavi-Tabrizi arrived in Azerbaijan to brief Azeri judiciary officials on how Iran's criminal system operated within an Islamic republic.<sup>7</sup> Azerbaijan's Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic has also sought Iranian religious assistance linked to increased economic aid. A cultural agreement between the autonomous entity and Tehran stated that Iranian religious officials from Marand would teach for one year at religious schools and Nakhichevan University while Iran would help deliver economic aid to the isolated Azeri enclave.<sup>8</sup>

#### SAUDI RELIGIOUS AID

Saudi religious aid to Central Asia consists of spreading Sunni values throughout the region as a counterweight to Iranian Shia overtures. Central Asia contains some of the most holy Islamic religious sites outside of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. Riyadh seeks to protect these important historical and cultural landmarks within the Sunni sect.<sup>9</sup> In light of this fact, Riyadh's financial assistance to Central Asia has been mostly in the construction or refurbishing of mosques, medresses, and the import and distribution of Korans.

Financially, the Saudis seem to be much better organized than the Iranians in sending religious aid to the region. For example, the establishment of the Islamic Kazakh-Saudi International Commercial Bank (IKSICB) in Alma-Ata illustrates their abilities. IKSICB, with holdings nearing several hundred million dollars (at least twice as much money as the total Iranian Central Asian investment in this one venture alone), finances the reconstruction of mosques and medresses within Kazakhstan as well as the introduction of

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<sup>5</sup>*Newsweek* (International Edition), February 3, 1992.

<sup>6</sup>*Rabochaia Tribuna*, August 9, 1991.

<sup>7</sup>IRNA, November 19, 1991 in *FBIS-NES*, November 21, 1991.

<sup>8</sup>*Tehran Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran First Program Network*, November 15, 1991 in *FBIS-NES*, November 21, 1991.

<sup>9</sup>Saudi Arabia recognizes that Islam arrived late in some parts of Central Asia. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the late 19th century, for instance, the Sunni Hanafi school had little time to take root and specific traditions failed to develop. The Saudis argued that there was little difference between their religious overtures based on Hanbalism and their Kazakh, Kyrgyz, or even Uzbek "brothers" who practice under the Hanafi school.

Saudi preachers into Central Asia.<sup>10</sup> The bank also established a new television company, Asia-TV.<sup>11</sup> Television can be employed as a vehicle for transmitting Islamic values as well as a means of mass communication, political propaganda, and visual displays. Alma-Ata's strategic location in Central Asia could serve as a telecommunications distribution center for Saudi religious interests throughout the region. The Kazakh capital lies not far from other Central Asian capitals including Tashkent and Bishkek, which could easily receive Asia-TV transmissions.

Saudi distribution of Korans, however, has been one of Riyadh's most active programs, especially to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakh religious authorities have received over one million copies of the Koran. Saudi Arabia also supported its publication in the Kazakh and Uzbek languages.<sup>12</sup> Religious authorities distributed the Korans to Muslims in Akt, Alma-Ata, Chimkent, Gurev, Dzhambul, Kyzyl-Orda, Semipalatinsk, Taldy-Kurgan, and Turgai despite the fact that Kazakh Sunnis were from the Hanafi school and not the Saudi Hanbali school.

Significantly, an important by-product of Riyadh's program has been the use of the Korans by embryonic Kazakh political parties who are fighting for the establishment of an Islamic state in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's Alash Party, whose party program calls for new geopolitical formations based on the 18th and 19th century Central Asian khanates, finds the Koran's presence helpful in their drive for destruction of the current Kazakh political system. Moreover, Kyrgyz religious officials also receive the Korans and distribute them into the southern parts of the country in Osh and Naryn Oblasty—the base of many of the more radical factions of the Kyrgyzstan Democratic Movement. Some citizens of Osh, as well as nearby Uzbeks from the Fergana Valley, consider the area as one of the religious centers of Central Asia (some indicate that Osh itself is a "holy city").<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Based on an interview with Muhammed A. Al-Duhaim, managing editor of the Saudi newspaper *Al-Yom*, November 19, 1991. In addition, see *New York Times*, October 9, 1991.

<sup>11</sup>TASS, April 26, 1991.

<sup>12</sup>TASS, July 11, 1991.

<sup>13</sup>Based on interviews with Florida International University Professor Mohiaddin Mesbahi and Moscow's IMEMO scholar Assan Nougmanov conducted on November 23, 1991 and November 26, 1991, respectively. Significantly, the Sufis controlled numerous holy places in the Fergana Valley and some of them were among the most venerated of all Central Asia. The Throne of Solomon near Osh, for example, was called "the Second Mecca." See Bennigsen and Wimbush, p. 82.

## THE RUSSIAN RESPONSE TO IRANIAN AND SAUDI ISLAMIC OVERTURES

### The "Threat from the South"

The Russian Federation has exhibited a great deal of fear over the growth of Iranian and Saudi supported Islam in Azerbaijan and the CACs. Many Russian analysts call the "threat from the south" the most serious issue facing Russia's future development. In the 1990s, this "threat" refers primarily to the spread of Islam into Azerbaijan, the CACs, and finally, Russia itself from the Near East. During the 1991 Gulf War, for example, Soviet military leaders warned that the Muslim reaction to regional events would spread into the Soviet Union. Although then First Deputy Minister of Defense Vladimir Lobov labeled this a serious "threat from the south" because of the proximity of U.S. forces, the implicit meaning of his comment suggested that he was more concerned with the reaction of the Muslim republics.<sup>14</sup> Although the Russian government hardly ever mentions Saudi Arabia or Iran by name, their religious links in Azerbaijan and the CACs does not enhance Russian security in the post-Soviet order.

### Perceptions of the Muslim Threat in the Post-Coup Period

Following the failed 1991 Moscow coup attempt, intellectuals voiced their concern over the Muslim threat to Russia from Azerbaijan and the CACs. Academician Dmitrii Volskii asserted that destitution and unemployment forced many people in this area to return to Islam, which, in turn, was undermining secular authority.<sup>15</sup> Section Chief at the Institute for the USA and Canada Konstantin Pleshakov noted that the "strengthening of Islamic fundamentalism in the Near East was fraught with the most unpleasant consequences for the Transcaucases, the Northern Caucasus, and Central Asia" and a serious detriment to future Russian security interests.<sup>16</sup>

Russian specialists have warned that Moscow should pay close attention to the increasing interaction between Azeri and CAC Muslims and Islamic countries. Political commentator Simon Kordonskii has warned that the "upsurge of Islamic fundamentalism and national-patriotic movements in Central Asia are gravitating to Iraq . . . and Iran."<sup>17</sup> Dmitrii Volskii agreed, since Shias in Iran "clearly do not intend to remain removed from

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<sup>14</sup>See *New York Times*, August 31, 1990, and *New Times*, August 18-24, 1990.

<sup>15</sup>Dmitrii Volskii, "Mirazh v Pustyne," *Radikal*, No. 39, October 6, 1991, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup>Konstantin Pleshakov, "Nashi Natsional'ne Interesy v Perekhodnyi Period," *Mezhdunarodnaia Zhizn*, No. 10, October 1991, pp. 20-21.

<sup>17</sup>Simon Kordonskii, "Where Was The Army?" *New Times*, No. 36, 1991, p. 14.

change in Central Asia and are already encouraging Muslim fundamentalism in the region."<sup>18</sup>

Even Russian newspapers with liberal leanings expressed alarm at the Muslim revival in Azerbaijan and the CACs. *Moscow News* attacked the political awareness of Muslims and linked their revival to the "backwardness of people's attitudes." *Komsomolskaia Pravda* took an alarmist view of Islam in Central Asia as well. An article in the newspaper argued that the politicization of Muslims could only lead to upheaval as demonstrated by Iran's revolution in the late 1970s. Significantly, the newspaper maintained that the CACs were incapable of producing anything but Islamic governments. The author used Tajikistan as a prime example. He argued that Tajik mullahs would come to replace the incumbent party because of continued economic problems coupled with internecine strife.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Russian Leadership and the Muslim Threat**

The attitudes of intellectuals are echoed by various members of the Russian government. Although the Russian government has not prescribed any policy toward the perceived "Muslim problem" to their south, the leadership's commentaries reveal that Moscow sees the Muslims as a threat and attempts to picture them as "uncivilized." One of Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin's advisors, for instance, sees Muslims as disposed to oppression and violence. Ethnic advisor Galina Starovoitova argues that Muslims lack a democratic tradition, pointing to their propensity to "conduct pogroms" in pursuit of their goals.<sup>20</sup>

Additionally, Moscow's defense and security planners see Muslim nations to their south contributing to instability within the Soviet Union's former borders. CIS Defense Minister Shaposhnikov discussed the perceived threat clearly. When asked how Georgia had armed itself in creating the Georgian National Guard, Shaposhnikov blamed Iran and Azerbaijan for sending weapons across both international and former republican borders.<sup>21</sup> Russian officials viewed these events with alarm, arguing that weapons sales could spread into the Russian Federation.<sup>22</sup> Russian Federal Security Service Chief (formerly the KGB)

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<sup>18</sup>Volskii, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup>*Moscow News*, No. 24, June 16-23, 1991, p. 6, and *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, July 16, 1991, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup>See, for example, the transcript of Starovoitova's lecture at the National Endowment for Democracy, Washington, D.C., October 18, 1991, and her interview in *Krasnaia Zvezda*, January 22, 1992.

<sup>21</sup>*Moscow Russian Television Network*, September 9, 1991 in *FBIS-SOV*, September 10, 1991, pp. 45-47.

<sup>22</sup>Russian Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi revealed that many of the Chechen nationalists carried Uzi submachine guns. It was unlikely that these weapons came from any Russian source. See *SOVSET*, November 16, 1991.



Viktor Ivanenko warned that the Islamic factor was a serious threat to his government.<sup>23</sup> Although he was referring to the predominantly Muslim region of Chechen-Ingushia within the Russian Federation, the Russian leadership's concern centers on their interpretation of the Muslim threat from Azerbaijan and the CACs themselves and its effect upon the Muslims of Russia. Quite possibly, Yeltsin's initial reaction to send troops to suppress the Islamic upheaval in Chechen-Ingushia in November 1991—which he later reversed because of Kremlin infighting—was the result of this perception.

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE RELIGIOUS LINKAGES

There are two major implications of Saudi and Iranian activities in the region. First, Saudi and Iranian intrusion will likely help to make Islamic parties a permanent feature in Azeri and Central Asian politics. These groups might, in turn, seek to topple Central Asian rulers. Members of the Uzbekistan's Islamic Rebirth Party, for instance, seized the former Namangan Communist Party Oblast Committee headquarters and called for Karimov's resignation and the establishment of an Islamic state.<sup>24</sup> Since then, they have begun to share power with the local government,<sup>25</sup> a pattern of growing authority likely to be repeated throughout the region in the next several years.<sup>26</sup>

Second, Russian governmental responses to Iranian and Saudi overtures to Azerbaijan and Central Asia could take various forms, some of which may run counter to Western interests. The Russian government, for example, may seek to increase arms sales—as a political tool—to Iran and the Arab Gulf region as a way to limit their drive into Azerbaijan and Central Asia. This, in turn, would create additional tensions in a region where Western initiatives on arms control have fallen on deaf ears since the conclusion of the 1991 Gulf War. The United States and its Western allies, while seeking closer ties to Moscow since communism's collapse, will not be pleased with Moscow's desire to furnish more weapons to the unstable Gulf region.

Moreover, Moscow senses that Islam's rise in Azerbaijan and Central Asia potentially threatens the Russian state. For Russia, the international border to the south now lies much closer to Moscow following the Soviet collapse, which means greater vigilance is needed to protect Russian territory. Indeed, reports suggest that Russian intelligence agencies are

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<sup>23</sup>*El Pias*, September 1, 1991, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup>*Radio All-Union Radio First Program Radio-1 Network*, December 11, 1991, in *FBIS-SOV*, December 16, 1991.

<sup>25</sup>*The Referendum on Independence and Presidential Election in Uzbekistan . . .*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>26</sup>In May 1992, attempts to form a coalition government in Tajikistan found several opposition parties such as the Islamic Renaissance Party sharing power with former communists. See *New York Times*, May 11, 1992.

increasing their activities related to the "Islamic problem" by focusing more attention on Persian Gulf, Azeri, and Central Asian affairs, not least because of the Iranian and Saudi intrusions.<sup>27</sup> The appointment of Near East expert Evgenii Primakov to head the Central Intelligence Organization (the former KGB's first main directorate), and later the Russian Foreign Intelligence Organization, illustrates the new direction the agency is taking.<sup>28</sup> One of his top priorities is the perceived "Islamic threat" to Russia. The agency's tactics are likely to be the same as its Soviet predecessor, including attempts to disrupt moves away from Moscow in the new countries bordering Russia, and the sponsoring of propaganda and subversion.

The religious links that Iran and Saudi Arabia are forging in Azerbaijan and in the CACs also have ethnic overtones. Indeed, Azeri and Central Asian Muslims have a rich ethnic heritage. Coupled with their religious heritage, they also identify themselves with their nationalities: Azeri, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, and Uzbek, or a member of the smaller dozen or so subethnic groups. Thus, the religious reawakening and the subsequent formation of embryonic political organizations and parties translates into a reawakening of ethnic affiliation. Turkey and Iran's success in tapping into this ethnic revival and its possible ramifications are the subject of the next section.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Based on interviews with former Soviet officials who requested anonymity.

<sup>28</sup>The appointment of Ivan Gorelovskii in January 1992 as first deputy chief supports this move as well. He was Azerbaijan's KGB Chairman during Moscow's January 1990 crackdown in Baku against Azeris who spread havoc amongst the city's Armenian population. His experience with Muslim rebellion could be invaluable. See *SOVSET Daily Analyses*, January 20, 1992.

<sup>29</sup>Saudi Arabia is not discussed in this context since there is no true ethnic link.

## 5. AZERI/CAC REGIONAL ETHNIC LINKAGES

### INTRODUCTION

Ethnic ties play a critical role in linking Azerbaijan and the CACs to their neighbors. Turkey and Iran are the major actors, and both seek to influence the development of Turkic and Persian identities in the region. They differ, however, on the implementation of these preferences. The Turks call for the development of a secular government, opposing the implementation of Islamic law. On the other hand, the Persian ethnic variant calls for an identity that carries with it the prospect of Islamic fundamentalism.

### TURKEY AND THE PAN-TURKIC IDEA

Turkic ethnic connections, which run across the Transcaucasus and Central Asia right to the borders of China, attract elements of Ankara's political elite. Far more Turkic peoples—estimated to be between seventy million and one hundred million—live outside Turkey's borders than within it.<sup>1</sup> Some Turks on the political margins seek to revive the idea of a pan-Turkic identity. These individuals support the establishment of a pan-Turkic identity as a way to create a barrier against Iranian influence. The Turkish press reports that this idea is receiving an enthusiastic reception among some groups in Turkey. These groups are excited about the rediscovery of ethnic cousins in Azerbaijan and the CACs following the Soviet collapse and the resurrection of the vast Turkic civilization along the ancient Silk Road.

Others talk of exploiting linguistic links between Turkey and Azerbaijan and the CACs. Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are linked linguistically to Turkey, and Turks, Turkmen, Azeris, and Uzbeks understand one another. Thus, a native speaker of any of these languages would only need a few weeks of study to achieve a reasonable level of

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<sup>1</sup>The breakdown of Turks within Azerbaijan and the CACs (in millions of people) are as follows:

State	Population	Turkic Peoples	Percentage
Azerbaijan	7.0	5.5	78.1
Kazakhstan	16.5	6.3	38.1
Kyrgyzstan	4.3	2.3	52.7
Tajikistan	5.1	1.3	25.0
Turkmenistan	3.5	2.8	79.8
Uzbekistan	19.9	15.7	78.8

Source: Theodore Karasik, pp. 492-495.

fluency.<sup>2</sup> Acting on this notion, Ankara has pursued a policy designed to encourage Azerbaijan and the CACs to switch from Russian to Turkish. Ankara provides technical assistance to help Azeris and the CACs in their linguistic work. The country's first communications satellite, Turksat, delivers Turkish programming throughout the region in conjunction or competition with Saudi-supported Asia-TV.<sup>3</sup> In January 1992, the Azeri government abandoned the Cyrillic alphabet imposed by Moscow in 1937 and adopted the Latin alphabet used by Turkey.<sup>4</sup> This action implicitly rejected adoption of the Arabic alphabet, despite missions from Saudi Arabia and Iran pressing for Arabic's readoption (Arabic had been used for Turkish languages prior to 1930).

There is a certain risk in the promotion of pan-Turkic ideas. Elites within Turkey largely repudiate any desire to revive pan-Turkic dreams because they are afraid that a preemptive barrier against Persian influence could cause political upheaval not only within Azerbaijan and the CACs, but also between Turkey and Iran. As a result of seventy years of socialist politics and nation building in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, these new states are unlikely to submerge their emerging identities into a broad notion of pan-Turkism. In fact, the promotion of pan-Turkism is likely to frighten non-Turkic peoples in Central Asia such as Iranian Tajiks who live in Tajikistan and in Uzbekistan's Tajik cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. These people seek closer links to Tehran. Thus, Iran has been quick to champion a revival of Persian ethnic identity as a counterweight to Turkish activity.

#### IRAN AND THE PERSIAN IDEA: A MIXED PICTURE

For centuries before its conquest by the Russian empire, Persia dominated large segments of Azerbaijan and Central Asia. These areas were part of Persia's cultural sphere, although most inhabitants were ethnically Turkic. In the post-Soviet order, Iran's sphere of ethnic activity is mainly confined to Azerbaijan and Tajikistan as well as other regions throughout the CACs where Iranian Azeris, Iranians, or Persians live in small pockets. However, there exist other subethnic groups, particularly the Talysh of Azerbaijan and the Turkmen/Turkomen of Turkmenistan/Iran, who have the potential to cause disruptions in Iran's northern provinces.

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<sup>2</sup>Based on an interview with Graham Fuller. See also Bennigsen and Wimbush, pp. 98-99; and James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1991, pp. 99-108.

<sup>3</sup>MEED, February 14, 1992. Service began in May 1992.

<sup>4</sup>TASS, January 23, 1992.

### **The Iranian-Tajik Ethnic Link**

A common historical and linguistic background and geographical proximity link Iranians and Tajiks (through Afghanistan) and this fact leads Tehran to pursue common Persian interests into the former Soviet Union. The Tajiks are one of oldest peoples of Central Asia who belong to the Persian linguistic group. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the former ethnic territory of the Tajiks shrank as the Uzbek population expanded. Under this pressure, the Tajiks turned to Persia for assistance.

After the Soviet collapse, Iran sought to enhance their historical Persian ties with Tajikistan. In February 1992, Tehran proposed establishing a Persian-speaking "cultural organization" within the former Soviet republic of Tajikistan in association with Afghan mujahideen guerrilla groups which found support in Iran proper. The new group brought together for the first time Iranian officials, Afghan fundamentalists, and Tajik officials.<sup>5</sup> Language is also a key issue between Tehran and Dushanbe. Iran seeks to assist the Tajiks in replacing Cyrillic with Persian using Arabic letters. Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Maleki stated that Tehran will publish textbooks and other literature for this project.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, Tajiks share tribal and ethnic kinship with Iranians and so they are likely to be more receptive to Tehran's influence than to Turkey's overtures. One cannot rule out that this new linkage will work, given the fact that Tajiks feel overwhelmed by the emerging Turkic environment to their west.

### **The Talysh as a Disruptive Factor Between Azerbaijan and Iran**

One subethnic group likely to cause disruptions in Iran's northern provinces are the Talysh. The Talysh peoples of Azerbaijan, who practice Shia Islam and number between 200,000 and 300,000, look south across the Iranian border toward Iranian Talysh as a source of ethnic inspiration since they never had to live under communist rule. Both are descended from indigenous tribes located in the southeastern corner of Azerbaijan and into the neighboring Iranian provinces of Western and Eastern Azerbaidzhan (specifically in and around Ardabil).<sup>7</sup> Their language is not Azerbaijani; rather it belongs distinctly to the northwest Iranian language family.

Talysh communities can be a potential source of instability between Azerbaijan and Iran because they avoided assimilation.<sup>8</sup> Talysh often disregard international boundaries

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<sup>5</sup>Reuters, February 19, 1992.

<sup>6</sup>Moscow Radio Moscow World Service, January 12, 1992, in *FBIS-SOV*, January 14, 1992.

<sup>7</sup>Please see Figure A.1.

<sup>8</sup>Lemercier-Quelquejay, "Azerbaijan: The Foreign Influences."

between Azerbaijan and Iran, as frequent migration and visits attest. In the past few years, several thousand Talysh attempted to cross over into Iran to join their brethren.<sup>9</sup> Iranian elites recognize the potential threat to their control over northwestern Iran if the Talysh situation gets out of control. Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani visited the border region in October 1991 and argued that official crossings should be increased to quell any potential uprising against central authorities in both Baku and Tehran. He urged Talysh who lived in Iran to assist their kin in maintaining peace. The Iranian leader stated to Iranian Talysh leaders that they are "neighbors to a people just released from the burden of Marxism and are duty bound to help them."<sup>10</sup> The most salient point here is that Iran felt a great need to keep all parties calm and not to cause any great upheaval that could reverberate within Iran itself. Baku, on the other hand, has done little to alleviate Tehran's fears. The ongoing power struggle in Baku coupled with all-out war over Nagorno-Karabakh preoccupies the Azeri leadership.

#### **The Turkomen and Turkmen as a Disruptive Factor Between Turkmenistan and Iran**

Turkomen tribes in Iran's Khorasan and Mazandaran provinces share common historical links with some Turkmen in Turkmenistan, and could be a disruptive factor between Tehran and Ashkhabad.<sup>11</sup> The Turkomen, who number several hundred thousand, are Turkish-speaking peoples who feel trapped within a Persian state. Their counterparts in Turkmenistan are from the Yomut tribe and are suppressed by the ruling Tekke tribe.<sup>12</sup> The Turkomen have had a deep distrust of Tehran throughout the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> In the early 1900s, for instance, the Turkomen assisted rebel groups who sought to oust the ruling elites in Tehran.<sup>14</sup> During the Iranian revolution in 1979, the Turkomen formed the Cultural and Political Society of the Turkomen People. This organization and other tribal groups in the region near Gorgan rebelled over land distribution and demanded greater autonomy.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>*Kommunist*, January 6, 1990.

<sup>10</sup>Reuters, October 4, 1991.

<sup>11</sup>The difference between a Turkmen and a Turkomen is small. The nuance here is simply in spelling between Turkmen and Persian.

<sup>12</sup>Nikki R. Keddie, *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shiism from Quietism to Revolution*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1983, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup>These campaigns occurred in early 1900s. See Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1979, pp. 23-65.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Dilip Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, Routledge & Keegan Paul, New York, 1987, pp. 103, 111-112; U.S. Government (Represented by the Secretary of the Army), *Iran: A Country Study*, Government Publications Office, Washington, D.C., 1989, pp. 52, 295.

Following the Soviet collapse, Iran recognized the potential destabilizing threat from Turkomen among its northern border. Tehran sought to temper Turkmen-Turkomen relations by quickly establishing a dialogue with Turkmenistan and opening an embassy in Ashkhabad. With "recitation of verses from the Koran," a border crossing was reopened between Iran and Turkmenistan at the Incheborun Bridge in Mazandaran province. Beside the economic significance of the border opening, Turkomen and Turkmen from the Yomut tribe could visit each other four times a year and stay with each other for up to 15 days on each trip.<sup>16</sup> Both Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati and Turkmenistan President Niiazov (from the Tekke tribe) indicated that Tehran and Ashkhabad shared a number of highly significant interests in terms of religion, history, customs, and religion.<sup>17</sup> The audiences for these new initiatives are the ethnic Yomut and Turkomen, who, if dissatisfied with their respective governments, may have the tendency to destabilize the entire area by pressing for greater autonomy. Both sets of tribesmen, in an area subject to traditional brigandage, could form robber bands and roam the countryside at will if the situation slips out of Tehran's and Ashkhabad's control.

#### **THE RUSSIAN RESPONSE TO FOREIGN ETHNIC INTRUSIONS IN AZERBAIJAN AND CENTRAL ASIA**

As with the Islamic threat, pan-Turkism is also a concern for Russia. Promotion of pan-Turkism is especially frightening to conservative Russian politicians who fear that a movement based on territorial expansion where race and language are unified could spread into Russia and cause upheaval within the large Muslim community. Consequently, Russians may be inclined to establish a pan-Slavic group to counter this movement.

Russians are historically suspicious of Turkish influence on Muslim Turkic nations that fell under Moscow's rule during the past several hundred years. This suspicion is rooted in the centuries-long battle between the Ottoman and Russian empires over regional influence. If perceived as such in the 1990s, the deployment of CIS or Russian forces cannot be ruled out if Russian territory or citizens are threatened. It would be another issue as to whether Azerbaijan and the CACs would allow Russian troops on their territory for the purpose of deterring Turkey. A compromise might be the establishment of joint Russian-CAC deployments. For example, the Russian-Turkmen defense agreement signed on June 7, 1992, calls for military cooperation between the two countries if either one is attacked. The

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<sup>16</sup>*Moscow Teleradiokompaniia Ostankino (Television First Program Network)*, January 19, 1992, in *FBIS-SOV*, January 22, 1992.

<sup>17</sup>*Tehran Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran (First Program Network)*, January 17, 1992, in *FBIS-NES*, January 23, 1992.

treaty allows Turkmenistan to build its own armed forces but their control will be administered jointly by Moscow and Ashkhabad.<sup>18</sup>

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THE ETHNIC LINKAGES: THE EMERGENCE OF ETHNIC BLOCS?

A by-product of Turkish and Iranian activity in Azerbaijan and Central Asia is the possible emergence of two ethnic-based blocs. Iran's activity in the region tends to support the creation of blocs as does Turkey's desire to have the former republics follow its pro-Western model. Both Iran and Turkey, however, emphasize that competition continues to be an important factor in international politics and now regard alignments as unavoidable for the emerging CACs. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are learning this lesson quickly and, in fact, are actively looking for new allies.

Kazakhstan leads Kyrgyzstan in one bloc.<sup>19</sup> The current Kazakh and Kyrgyz governments have chosen the Turkish path, which means that they embrace, at least publicly, democratic values and a capitalist system as their economic linkages have grown. But the Kazakhs do not completely rely on pan-Turkic feelings—their regional influence is seen to rest at least as much on their own economic might and weapons reserves. To be sure, Alma-Ata could become a regional hegemon based on its resources, particularly if strategic nuclear weapons are placed on its territory under a CIS-led nuclear umbrella.<sup>20</sup> With these powerful weapons, Alma-Ata may indeed seek to intimidate its neighbors or, at a lower level, influence Uzbek politics by encouraging unrest among the Kazakhs who live in the northern regions of Uzbekistan. In terms of economic might, Kazakhstan can at its own discretion regulate the delivery of oil, coal, and grain to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan which rely on these goods from Alma-Ata, perhaps pushing them toward Iran.<sup>21</sup>

Uzbekistan, with its rich, Turkic cultural heritage, dominates Turkmenistan in a second bloc. Uzbekistan claims this role by virtue of its population, economic weight, and demand for a strong, central authority.<sup>22</sup> Even if the Uzbek government should fall in the next two to three years, its successors may feel even more strongly about dominating other weaker, regional powers such as Turkmenistan. The Uzbeks, regardless of who wins a future

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<sup>18</sup>ITAR-TASS, June 7, 1992.

<sup>19</sup>Azerbaijan is left out of this scheme although IMEMO scholar Assan Nougmanov claims that Azerbaijan would be ready to join Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan against an Uzbek-led bloc.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>For more on Central Asia economic patterns, see "Aggregate Economic Developments in the Fifteen Former Soviet Republics," 1980-1991, *PlanEcon Report*, March 27, 1992, pp. 26-27.

<sup>22</sup>Tajikistan's orientation is not entirely clear, although Dushanbe seems to be drawn to Persian culture with its strong, centralized government, which means that it would not be part of these new blocs.



internal succession struggle, may come to have a greater say in Turkmen politics if members of the ruling Tekke tribe in Ashkhabad continue to rely on their national ties to the Uzbek cities of Khorezm and Bukhara. The Tekke, for their part, having freed themselves from the dictates of Moscow as the Soviet Union collapsed, may reject the supervision of another regional leader, such as Tashkent. Moreover, Birlik's, Erk's, and the Islamic Rebirth Party's stirring commentaries on Uzbek nationalism frighten its neighbors, particularly the ruling elites in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>23</sup> Recognizing the psychological effect these activities are having, Tashkent, whether under the current government or any of these groups, might feel compelled to interfere in Tajik affairs by stirring up Tajikistan's Uzbek populace with the aim of solidifying their hold over Tajikistan.

External powers such as Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Russia would express alarm at the emergence of these competitive blocs. Turkey and Iran could see their economic ambitions thwarted against a background of heightened tensions between Ankara and Tehran over assistance to Alma-Ata and Tashkent and influence in Central Asia. In addition, tensions on Iran's northern border could destabilize the rest of the Persian Gulf region. Saudi Arabia would not only be forced to react to this development because of its growing ties to the region, but might also struggle over whether to support Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan, since its religious investments mostly flow to Alma-Ata but also to Tashkent. Finally, Russia, no less than other states, would want to maintain stability on its southern borders. The Kremlin would have to debate the benefit of intervening to protect the millions of Russians who live in the region.

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<sup>23</sup>*Sovetskaya Rossiya*, January 14, 1992.

## **6. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE GULF SECURITY**

The emergence of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan as independent states has potential ramifications for longer-term Persian Gulf security. This analysis has attempted to identify salient developments linking Azerbaijan and Central Asia to Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. To what degree are interdependencies being developed that alter the geopolitical dynamics of the region? Could countries that border Azerbaijan and Central Asia become entangled in future conflicts in that region?

### **AZERBAIJAN AND THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES INCREASINGLY TURN TO THE SOUTH**

As previously discussed, there is a growing interdependency between Azerbaijan and the CACs and Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. This interdependency is strongly reinforced by the Azeri and Central Asia leaders, who for the most part believe that the CIS is unworkable both politically and economically. Thus, Azerbaijan and the CACs are pursuing independent policies while actively searching for foreign assistance. Whatever assistance is received is to promote independence and legitimacy apart from the CIS and from their northern neighbor, Russia. No longer trapped in Moscow's economic web of forced exports and limited imports, the Azeris and the Central Asians are now turning to other powers for economic assistance. This development is manifesting itself in various forms such as the expansion of oil pipelines and transportation networks through Turkey and Iran away from Russian territory.

A salient by-product of Azerbaijan's and the Central Asian countries' turn to the south is that Russia is becoming increasingly estranged from this part of the former Soviet Union. Moscow faces a loss of Azeri and Central Asian political and economic participation in the Soviet successor, the CIS, as the region moves to increase its ties with Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Despite the views held by some that Azerbaijan and the CACs are a hindrance, some Russian officials still link their economic recovery to the new relationships forged by Azerbaijan and the CACs with powerful economic actors to the south. Moscow faces immense economic problems itself and simultaneously courts Ankara, Tehran, and Riyadh for financial assistance but also seeks to limit their participation for fear of losing political influence in Central Asia and Azerbaijan. Second, and interpreted as a more severe threat to Russian authority, Moscow expresses concern over the pace of Islamic revival in Azerbaijan and the CACs. Although the Russian government has not prescribed any policy

action on what to do about the perceived "Muslim problem" to their south, the leadership's commentaries reveal that Moscow sees the Muslims as an unstable factor within the Soviet Union's former borders. Thus, Moscow can be expected to be involved to some degree in the geopolitical struggle over this region. Any Russian reaction forced by a chaotic situation in Azerbaijan and the Central Asian countries could create major problems for other powers including Turkey and Iran.

### **IRAN AS THE PRINCIPAL POINT OF IMPACT**

Iran may be forced to react to several different types of Azeri or Central Asian developments based on greater interdependencies between them and the Persian Gulf region, Russia's sensitivity, and unintentional by-products of Turkish, Saudi, and Iranian involvement in the region. These developments include increased Iranian concern over maintaining stability in the region resulting from the creation of an Iranian transportation hub, the involvement of Ankara, Riyadh, and Tehran in undermining the social fabric of Azerbaijan and Central Asia, elite turnover, irredentism of subtribal units between Azerbaijan and Iran or Turkmenistan and Iran, and the nonresolution of border disputes.

#### **Creation of an Iranian Transportation Hub**

Iran's potential role as a hub for Azeri and Central Asian goods will serve as a central feature of the changing geopolitical relationships in the Persian Gulf. Tehran seeks to provide the necessary logistical support to get these goods into the international market. Iran could attempt to transport Azeri and Central Asian products across its territory via three routes: northern, western, and eastern. (See Figure 6.1.) In the first case, Tehran may support further development of a northern route over which Azeri/CAC goods can be transported from Tehran through Tabriz, into Turkey, and finally to Europe. This route has to take into account the fact that as the competition between Iran and Turkey continues over Azerbaijan and Central Asia, Tehran may not have an incentive to export through Turkey or, even more likely, Ankara could shut the route to further its own position against Iran. Moreover, the Iranians could use their emerging energy relationship with Azerbaijan and Ukraine as a means to get commodities to Europe. Another potential problem with the northern route is the Kurdish, Talysh, or Azeri reactions. It is unclear whether they will support Tehran's push to develop the necessary infrastructure to get Azeri and Central Asian goods to European markets. Kurds, Talysh, or Azeris could have the means to disrupt or even prevent the transport of goods and services if tensions rise in the area. In this case, the former Soviet army within Azerbaijan could become a unique source of weapons for ethnic groups seeking to resist the policies of governments in the region.

If the northern route proves difficult, the western route constitutes a credible alternative.<sup>1</sup> The infrastructure already exists for the transport of goods through Tehran, Esfahan, Shiraz, and then to Bandar Khomeyni or Bandar Abbas. Essentially, this is a route through the western portion of Iran that would end at the Iranian coast of the Persian Gulf. It would also have security ramifications. Both Bandar Khomeyni and Bander Abbas are inside the Strait of Hormouz and have come to replace Khorramshahr, which was heavily damaged during the Iran-Iraq war.<sup>2</sup> If Tehran chooses this route, it will feel a growing need to protect access to these ports with its growing fleet.<sup>3</sup> Misunderstandings between Iran and Saudi Arabia, or Iran and the Gulf Shaykhdoms, over the status of this transportation network could heighten tensions within the Gulf region as well. No matter how problematic these tensions may prove, it may be more difficult to enhance the infrastructure already in place because of the terrain. Pipelines and roads in this part of Iran are few in number because of the rugged Zagros Mountains, whose peaks reach from 10,000 to 14,000 feet.

Finally, the eastern route from Meshhed to Chah Bahar could become a viable third option. Commodities would run from Meshhed through Birjand, Zahedan, and finally to a natural harbor, Chah Bahar, on the Gulf of Oman. Main roads already exist from Meshhed to Chah Bahar via this route. But a well-developed transportation system does not yet exist. Tehran may feel inclined to create this new infrastructure to bring Central Asian goods, as well as its own, to Chah Bahar.<sup>4</sup> The Meshhed to Chah Bahar route would pass through the arid Dasht-e Kavir and the Dasht-e Lut deserts. But Iranian civil engineers would find it is easier to build the necessary infrastructure in this region because it lacks the mountainous features of the western route toward the northern Persian Gulf. Interestingly, the Meshhed-Chah Bahar route faces the same potential destabilizing problem as does the northern route. Too make this particular scheme work, Tehran would have to work with Baluchi separatists despite their stormy relationship in the past.<sup>5</sup>

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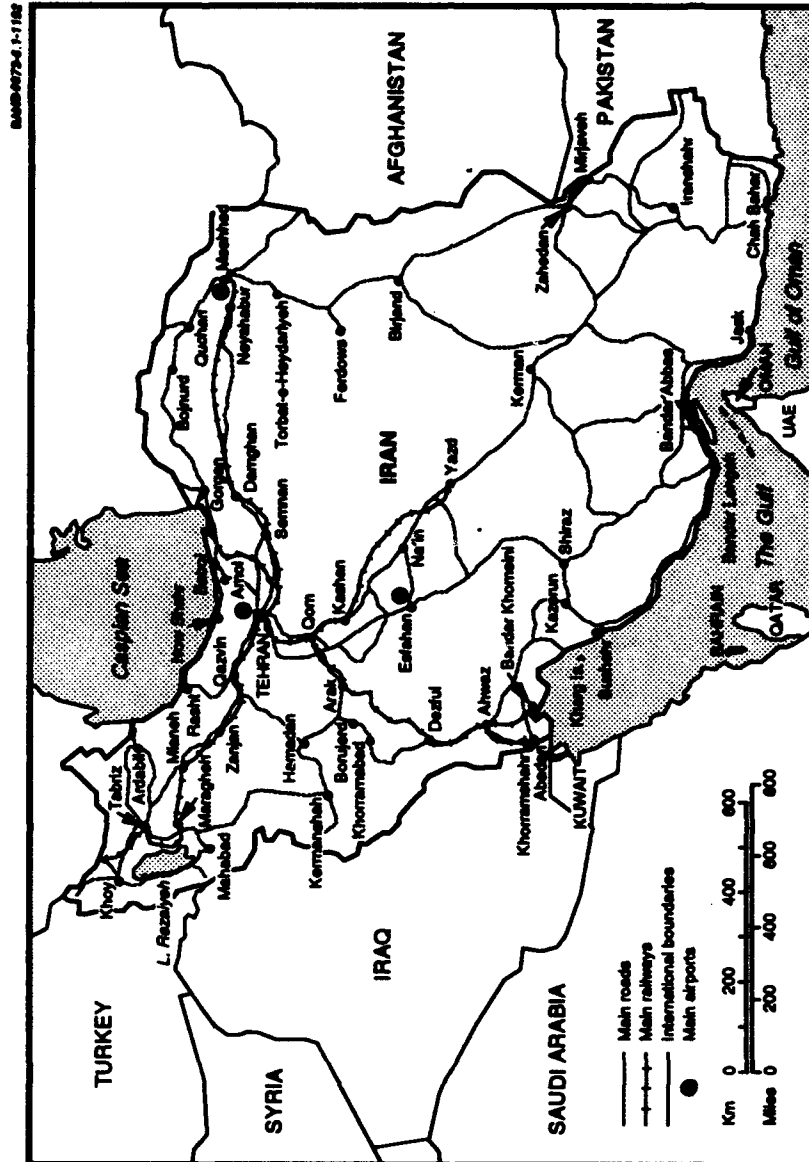
<sup>1</sup>The western route is favored among Iranian infrastructure specialists. See *Kayhan International*, April 22, 1992 in *FBIS-NES*, May 28, 1992.

<sup>2</sup>"Iran: Country Profile, 1991-1992," *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, 1991, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, the interview with Rear Admiral Ted Shaefer, director of United States Naval Intelligence, in *Defense News*, February 17, 1992, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Activity at Chah Bahar has increased in the last few years as an alternative to Persian Gulf ports. See *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Cottam, p. 336.



Reprinted by permission from *The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Iran: Country Profile," London, 1991-1992, p. 21.*  
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Figure 6.1—Major Transportation Routes in Iran

### **Turkish, Saudi, and Iranian Involvement Undermining Azeri and CAC Authority**

As a result of the Turkish, Saudi, and Iranian competition over Azerbaijan and Central Asia, the entire fabric of the latter's recently freed societies may be subjected to dangerous transitions in two critical ways. First, religious aid from both Saudi Arabia and Iran undermines the incumbent Azeri and Central Asian regimes. Distribution of thousands of Korans to areas where Islam has enjoyed a revival has been put to use by embryonic political parties such as Alash and groups involved in the Kyrgyz Democratic Movement, who are fighting for the overthrow of incumbent Azeri and CAC regimes and the establishment of a series of Islamic states.

Turkish and Iranian policies that support ethnic linkages also weaken Azeri and CAC governmental authority. Iran's activity in the region tends to aggravate the creation of blocs based on an ethnic Persian identity as does Turkey's desire to have the former republics follow its pro-Turkic model. This competition based on ethnicity is in turn inciting a search for new allies among the CACs, resulting in ethnic-based blocs. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan seem to be teaming up in one such bloc whereas Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan could form the other. Though partially responsible for such developments, Iran especially would be alarmed at the complete emergence of these competitive blocs and their impact on tensions along Iran's northern border.

### **Azeri or Turkmen Elite Turnover Among Tribal Units Along the Iranian Border**

The collapse of the incumbent governments in Azerbaijan or Turkmenistan and the installation of alternative clan or nationalist parties could destabilize Iran's northern border. In Azerbaijan, for instance, the struggle between the Azerbaijani Popular Front, the National Independence Party, the Nakhichevan and Baku clans, and the Talysh could ignite fighting between these groups that could spill into Iranian Azerbaijan. Moreover, in Turkmenistan, the collapse of the Tekke's ability to govern could pave the way for the reemergence of the Yomuts, who are linked to the Iranian Turkomen. A struggle for power between the Tekke and the Yomuts could spark increased activity among Iranian Turkomen. To be sure, any Iranian military movements from the southern regions to the north could indicate that Tehran perceives a threat from these groups, especially now that the "Soviet" threat is no longer a permanent consideration.

### **Irredentism Along Iran's Northern Border**

From the eastern border of Turkey, through Iraq, Azerbaijan, Iran, to Turkmenistan, irredentist movements could threaten Tehran's hold on the country's northern border. In

this region, Kurds, Talysh, Iranian Azeris, and Turkomen all express irredentist tendencies of varying strength. In every case, these groups stress their ethnic, religious, and cultural differences which are fueled by policies from Ankara, Baghdad, Baku, Tehran, and Ashkhabad. For Iran, irredentism becomes a critical issue for the future, as any separatist movements pose the potential threat of dismemberment of the Iranian state. Historical claims made by the Talysh, Iranian Azeris, and Turkomen which transcend Iran's borders could result in these groups forming autonomous entities.<sup>6</sup> Any movement by one or more of these groups in this direction could draw a harsh Iranian reaction. Even more dangerous is the possibility that these ethnic groups could receive their inspiration from Turkey or Saudi Arabia as part of a greater geopolitical puzzle. Iran would then have to contend with these states, perceiving their actions as interference in Iran's internal affairs. For example, if the Sunni Turkomen begin receiving sympathetic support from Riyadh, then Iran could pressure the Gulf Shaykhdoms to distance themselves further from Saudi Arabia and its policies.<sup>7</sup>

### **Border Disputes**

Further complicating matters are the numerous territorial disputes that exist within Azerbaijan and the CACs. The most likely dispute is between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Central Asia's two main Persian-speaking cities, Samarkand and Bukhara, are in Uzbekistan, and the Tajiks insist that borders be redrawn to incorporate them in their state. Uzbeks, in turn, claim all of the Fergana Valley, which includes Kyrgyzstan's Osh region and part of Khojent oblast in Tajikistan. Tashkent also claims that southern Kazakhstan and eastern Turkmenistan belong within its boundaries. Should border disputes emerge in Central Asia, Iran will most probably support Tajikistan in any confrontation with the other CACs based on ethnic grounds. Here too, Iran could find itself in a confrontation with Turkey if Ankara should come to support Uzbekistan against Tajikistan. Iran may also find itself supporting the Turkmen government ruled by the Tekke tribe if the Yomuts or Uzbeks attempt to change Turkmenistan's borders.

### **Iranian Pragmatism, not Islamic Zeal, to Dominate in Azerbaijan and Central Asia**

Overall, Iranian leadership policy toward Azerbaijan and Central Asia is driven by economic and security imperatives. Primarily, the leadership's conduct is influenced by regional dynamics and patterns of behavior of the other salient players in the region. Tehran

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<sup>6</sup>Uprisings partially related to irredentist movements within Meshhad and Tabriz started in June 1992. See, for example, IRNA, June 5, 1992, in *FBIS-NES*, June 8, 1992.

<sup>7</sup>The Saudis have financed several irredentist movements. See Ahmad Rashid, "Losing Their Grip," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 21, 1990, p. 32.

remains cautious in treating a very fluid situation with care. The Iranians appear to be in no hurry to give support to any specific party or organization and Tehran has refrained from stirring up Islamic fundamentalist groups against existing regimes. But Iran will search for and ultimately define their own legitimate sphere of interests in Azerbaijan and Central Asia as regional dynamics fluctuate. To the degree that their interests may become threatened, Tehran will inevitably be drawn into the Azeri and Central Asian political processes.



## 7. OVERALL OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

*Azeri and CAC leadership succession struggles could greatly destabilize the region, having a direct impact on the Gulf states.* Ethnic and clan rivalries, coupled with economic frustration, pose threats to Azeri and Central Asian leaderships. The absence of any legitimate succession process or participatory politics, coupled with the emergence of extreme nationalism or Muslim fundamentalism, may lead to potential upheaval throughout Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran will have vested interests throughout the region and their reactions to a change in Azeri or Central Asian elites may force dramatic fluctuations in policy objectives.

*Azeri and CAC states seem likely to embrace conflicting national policies as a result of Turkish, Saudi, and Iranian influences.* The emerging states of the former Soviet Union will determine their political and security interests in relation to their geostrategic position, foreign and domestic policy orientations, military stockpiles, and potential economic strength. Since these conditions differ from one former republic to another, the erosion of Azerbaijan's and Central Asia's unity of views and actions on political, economic, and security issues is unavoidable. Significantly, the aggravation of conflicts and the contradictions within and between Azerbaijan and the CACs could mobilize different social and political groups, parties, and movements in the region to look for powerful backing beyond the former Soviet empire in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran.

*Turkey and Iran, through the establishment of regional economic and political organizations, are seeking to compete for influence in Azerbaijan and Central Asia.* Emerging regional organizations such as the Black Sea Consortium and the Economic Cooperation Organization could also compete against each other as surrogate vehicles for Turkey and Iran. Both Ankara and Tehran are eager to cast an economic net in Central Asia that would serve as a reliable base for political influence and enhance the prospects for longer-term policy success, since it presupposes more extensive involvement in Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Ultimately, Azerbaijan and Central Asia could find themselves on opposite sides of existing rivalries in the Middle East and South Asia.

*Saudi Arabia will be in an advantageous position to manipulate Azeri and Central Asian elites and religious groups to limit Iranian economic and political overtures.* Saudi Arabia's distance from Azerbaijan and Central Asia greatly enhances its ability to survive any immediate spillover effects from upheaval within the region. Riyadh's immense wealth allows for a strong economic and religious assistance program designed to entice Azeris and

Central Asians away from Iranian aid. However, Iran's regional position may be enhanced at the expense of Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies if Tehran is able to preempt Riyadh's growing overtures to Azerbaijan and Central Asia.

*Turkey may not be economically and politically strong enough to maintain a sustained thrust into Azerbaijan and Central Asia.* To a certain extent, Turkey's rise in Azerbaijan and Central Asia is designed to increase the country's prestige and strategic importance in the eyes of the West, particularly the United States. Washington has openly welcomed Turkey's further involvement in Central Asia, hoping that it might constrain Iranian influence in the region and promote Western values of secularism, democracy, and free market economics. For the moment, however, the Turkish leadership is assessing the benefits and costs of a full economic and political commitment. Despite promises of lucrative contracts and aid packages, especially in transportation, communication, and the oil industry, a full-fledged economic relationship is probably years away.

*Iran will be concerned with its economic, political, and security interests in the states bordering its north.* By all accounts, the policy of the current Iranian leadership continues to be primarily driven by its desire to expand its economic activity while protecting its interests with military might, and not Islamic zeal. The shifting ethnic situation in Azerbaijan and the Central Asian republics is increasingly becoming a concern for Tehran. The Iranians view it as a potential source of danger, rather than an immediate opportunity. Tehran remains cautious in treating a very fluid situation in Azerbaijan and Central Asia but will be deeply involved for the long term.

*Russia will be hypersensitive to events in Azerbaijan and Central Asia.* Russia will retain its interests because of its size, population, and potential military power and will not ignore Azerbaijan's and the CAC's emerging relationships with its neighbors to the south. Specifically, Russia will be concerned with the potential influx of thousands of refugees from the south who will become a drain on Moscow's economic reform plans. Moreover, Russia will be particularly concerned with upheavals in Azerbaijan and Central Asia that have an Islamic or nationalist character. This type of political instability will likely have a serious impact on the Muslims within the Russian Federation, especially in Tatarstan and the North Caucasus. To maintain its interest through the region, the Kremlin will push for continued deployment of CIS and Russian military units throughout Azerbaijan and Central Asia in order to secure frontiers and protect Russians living outside of Russian territory. Any extension of CIS or Russian military power, however, could provoke upheavals in Azerbaijan and the CACs, and may act as a spur to Turkey and Iran to intervene militarily in the region as well.

*Russia will pressure its neighbors to abstain from asserting influence in states on Russia's periphery.* Russia will want to limit external influences it views as detrimental to Moscow's interests. To varying degrees, Moscow will pressure Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran to restrict their involvement in the area. So far, Turkish political and economic influence throughout Azerbaijan and Central Asia is viewed in Moscow as preferable to the Saudi or Iranian variant. This view, however, could change should Turkey opt to exert greater political, and potentially military, pressure across the region.

*The potential for proliferation of conventional and nuclear weapons and related technology to Iran will remain high as long as instability remains constant in Azerbaijan and Central Asia.* The purchase of Soviet conventional weapons and nuclear components by Iran could serve as a deterrent to local powers such as Saudi Arabia in addition to serving Iranian domestic public opinion. Far more troublesome, however, is Iran's long-term development of an indigenous nuclear weapons capability, especially with its growing stockpile of ballistic missiles capable of hitting targets in neighboring countries.

**Appendix**

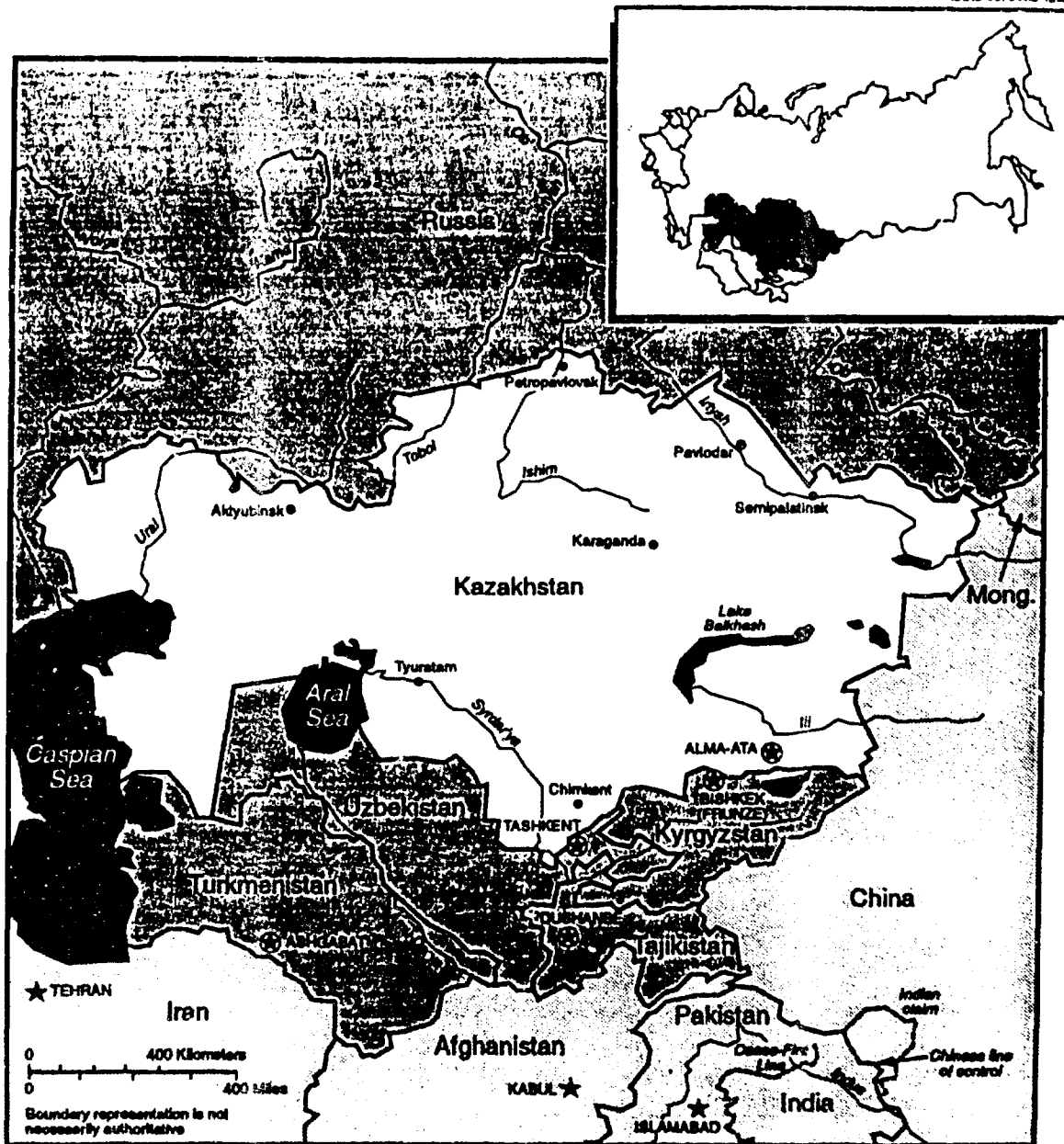
**MAPS OF AZERBAIJAN, THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES, AND THEIR OIL AND  
RAILROAD NETWORKS**



SOURCE: *The States of the Former Soviet Union: An Updated Overview*, Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, OSE 92-10017, September 1992, p. 13.

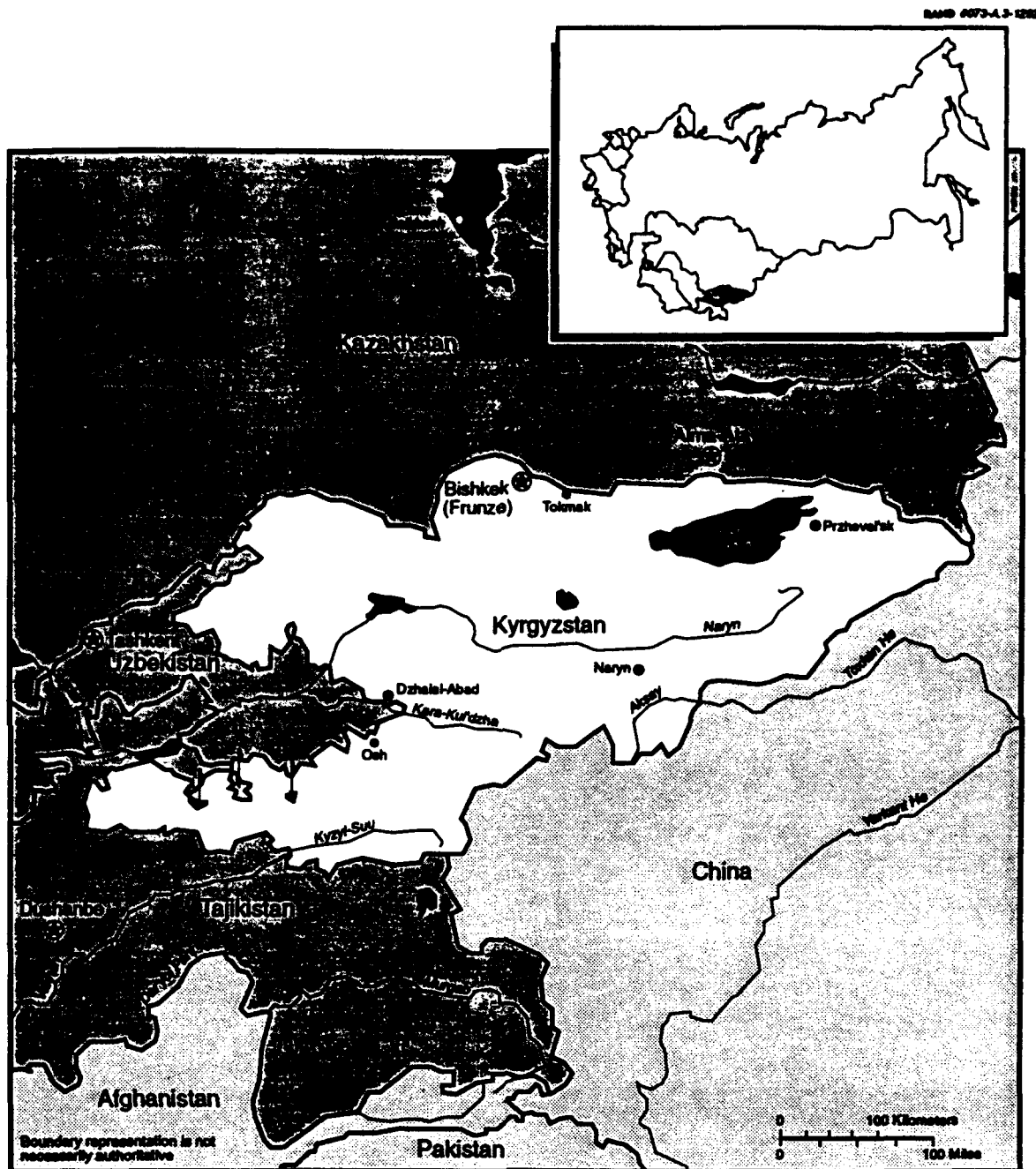
Figure A.1—Azerbaijan

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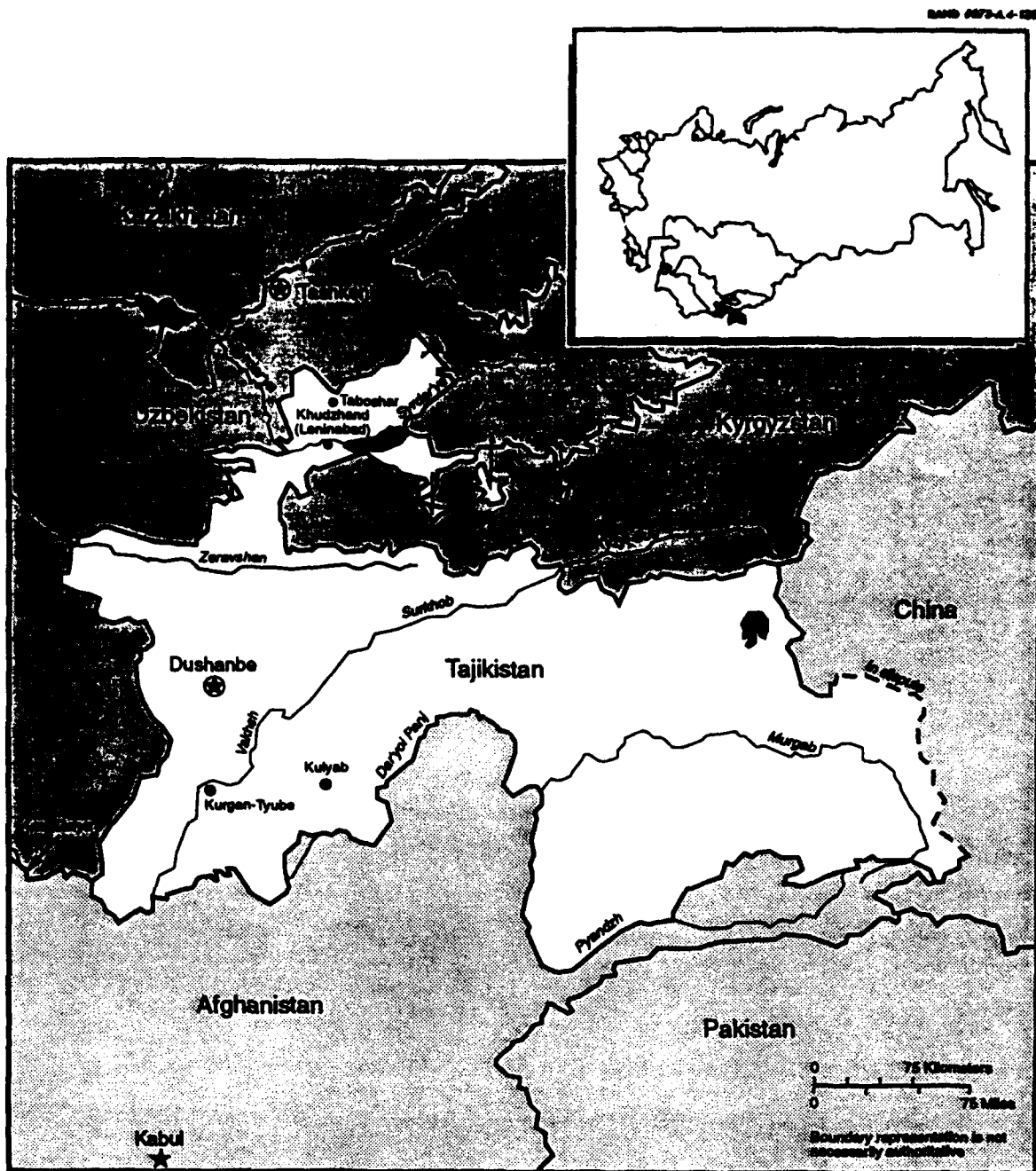
SOURCE: *The States of the Former Soviet Union: An Updated Overview*, Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, OSE 92-10017, September 1992, p. 21.

Figure A.2—Kazakhstan



SOURCE: *The States of the Former Soviet Union: An Updated Overview*, Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, OSE 92-10017, September 1992, p. 23.

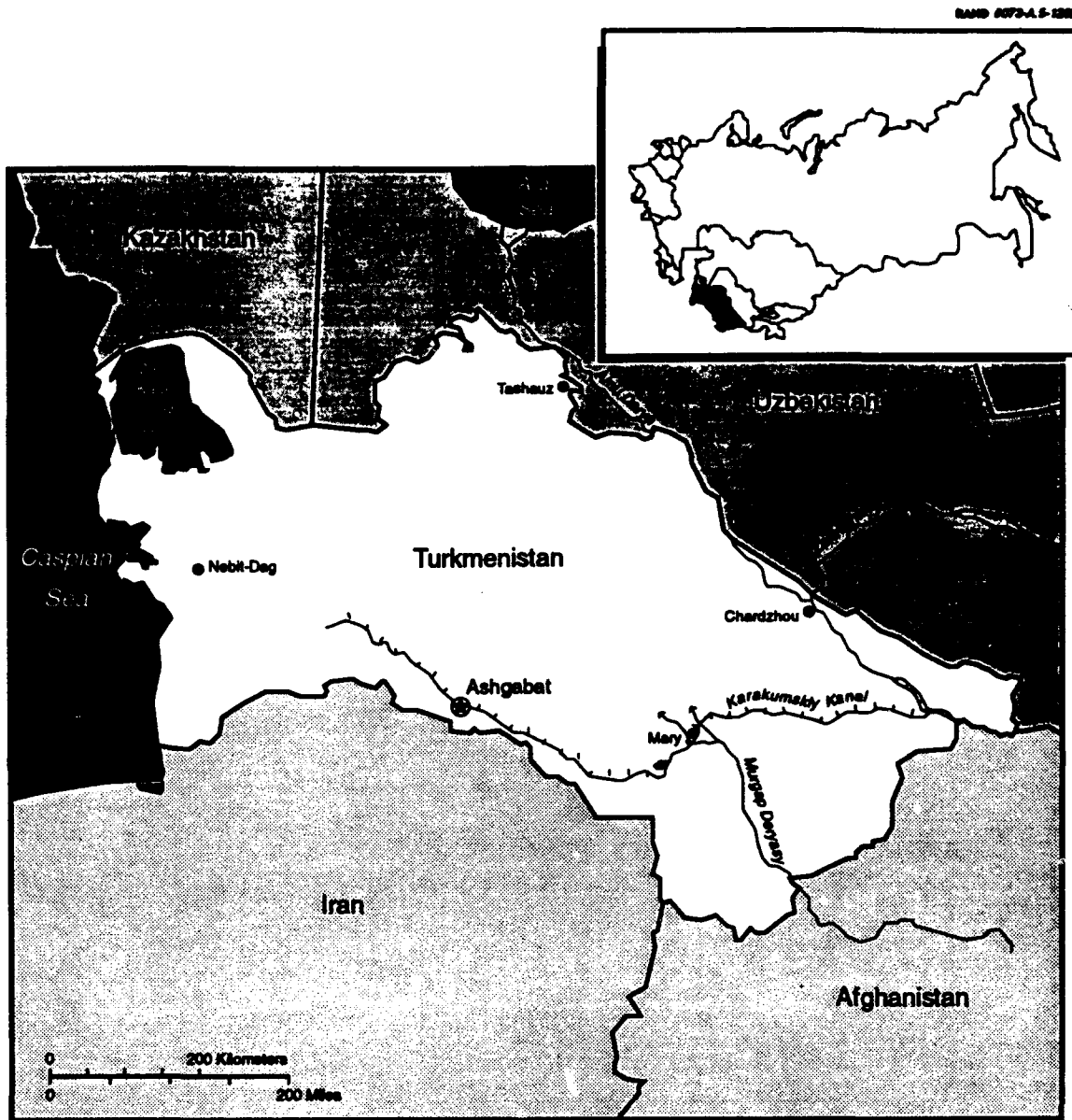
**Figure A.3—Kyrgyzstan**



SOURCE: *The States of the Former Soviet Union: An Updated Overview*, Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, OSE 92-10017, September 1992, p. 19.

Figure A.4—Tajikistan





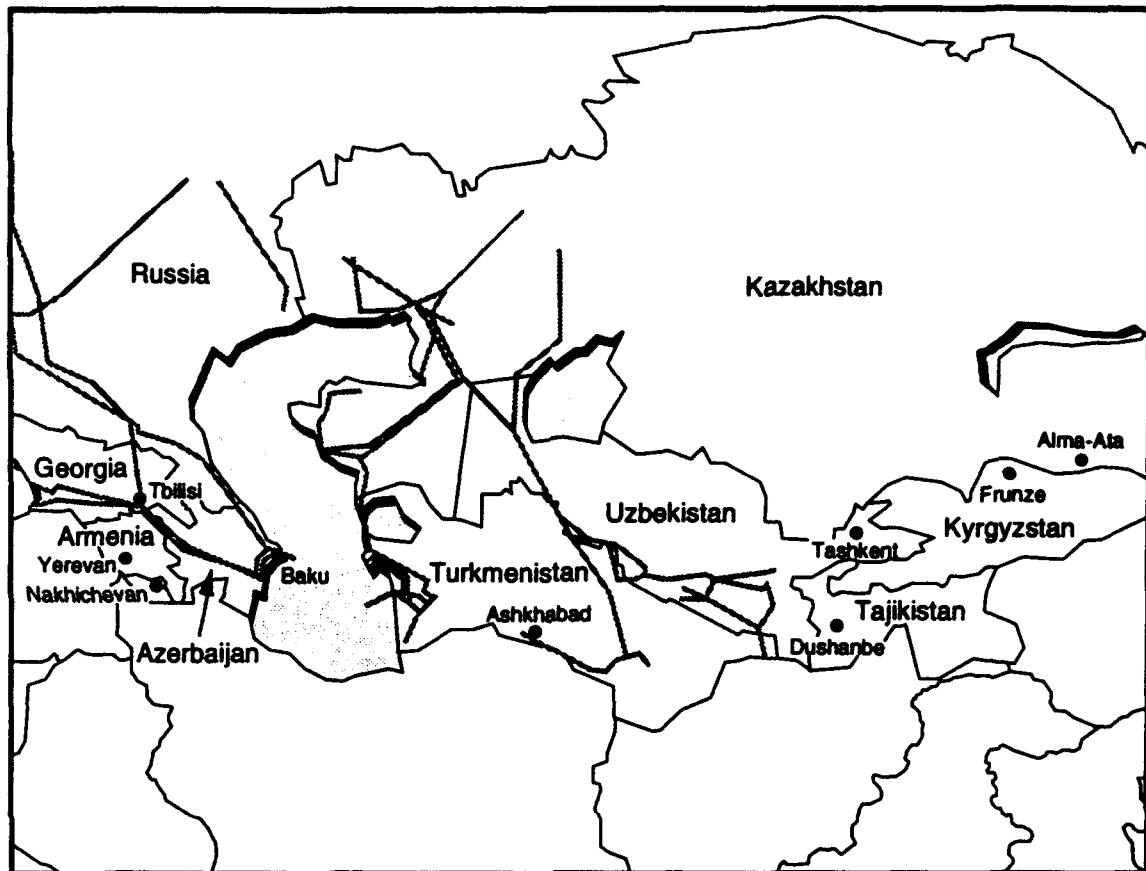
SOURCE: *The States of the Former Soviet Union: An Updated Overview*, Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, OSE 92-10017, September 1992, p. 17.

**Figure A.5—Turkmenistan**



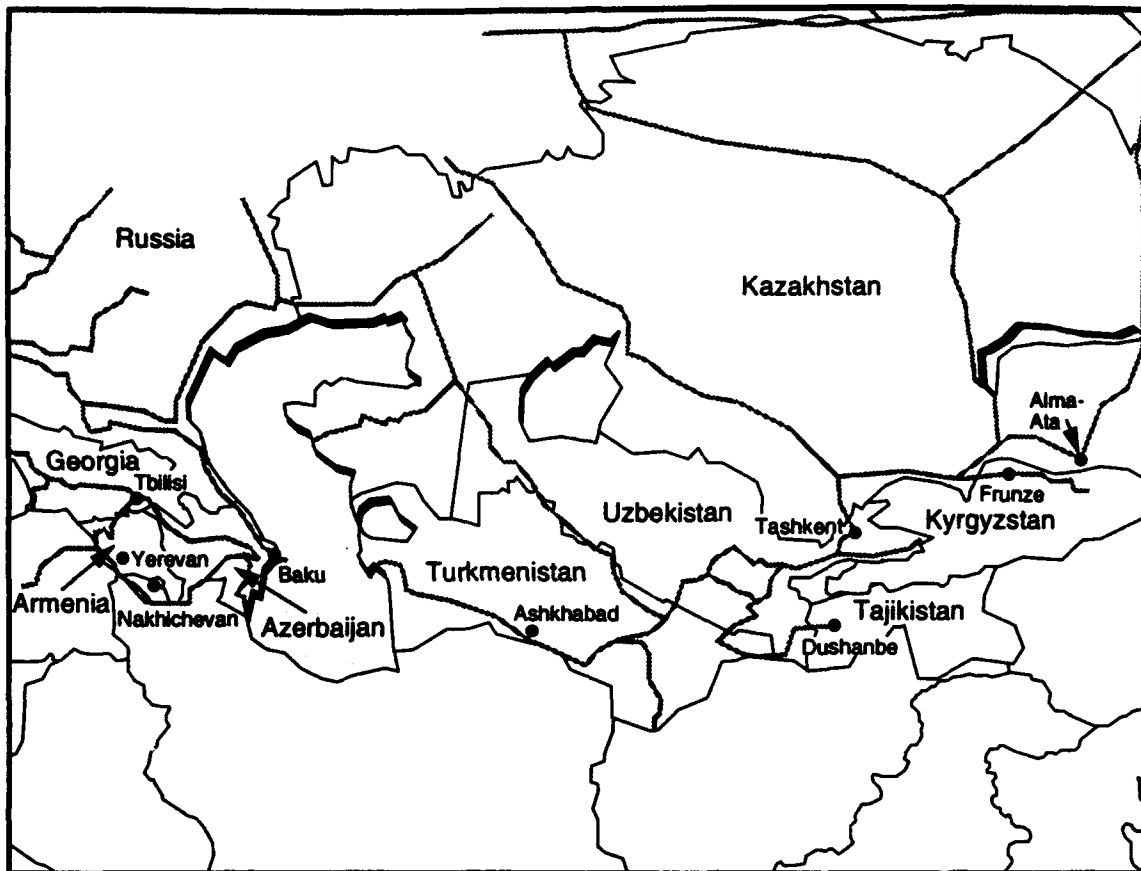
SOURCE: *The States of the Former Soviet Union: An Updated Overview*, Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, OSE 92-10017, September 1992, p. 15.

Figure A.6—Uzbekistan



SOURCE: *The USSR Energy Atlas*, Central Intelligence Agency, January 1985, p. 21.

**Figure A.7—Oil and Gas Pipelines in Azerbaijan and the Central Asian Countries**



SOURCE: *The Soviet Union at the Crossroads*, Deutsche Bank, Frankfurt, Germany, 1991, pp. 31-43.

**Figure A.8—Major Railways in Azerbaijan and the Central Asian Countries**