

The New
Great Game in
Muslim Central Asia

M. E. Ahrari



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*A popular Government,
without popular information or the means of
acquiring it,
is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or
perhaps both.
Knowledge will forever govern ignorance;
And a people who mean to be their own
Governors,
must arm themselves with the power which
knowledge gives.*

JAMES MADISON to W. T. BARRY
August 4, 1822

THE NEW GREAT GAME IN MUSLIM CENTRAL ASIA

M. E. AHRARI

with
JAMES BEAL

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CONTENTS

1. The Framework	1
2. Geopolitics and the Dynamics of Domestic Problems	9
Ethnic Problems	9
The Economy	12
Resources	16
Ecology and Health	19
Political Pluralism	23
Islam and the Future of Political Stability	33
Security	37
Control of Nuclear Weapons	40
3. Modalities of the New Great Game	45
Central Asia as an Extension of the Middle East ...	45
Russia, America, and the Great Game	50
New Players: Turkey and Iran	62
Geopolitics and Geoeconomics	66
4. Conclusion	73
Appendix 1: Structure of Muslim Central Asian Economies, 1990-1991	87
Appendix 2: Contemporary Sources of Russia's Dominance in the Near Abroad	89
About the Author	91

THE NEW GREAT GAME IN MUSLIM CENTRAL ASIA

1. THE FRAMEWORK

The dismantlement of the Soviet Union also brought about the liberation of six Central Asian Muslim republics—Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (figure 1). Although Azerbaijan is part of the Caucasus region, it is included in this study because:

- The independence of that country, like that of the Central Asian states, was brought about as a result of the dismantlement of the Soviet Union.
- Azerbaijan, like its Central Asian counterparts, is a Muslim state, and faces similar politico-economic problems. Azerbaijan's conflict with Armenia involving Nagorno-Karabkh reminds one of a number of conflicts in the Central Asian region. These include a seething ethnic conflict in Kazakhstan (involving the Khazaks and the Slavs), the ongoing civil war in Tajikistan along ethnic, national, and religious lines (since the Russian forces are also involved in this civil war), and the ethnic conflict in the Fargana valley that cuts across the borders of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.
- Like the economies of its Central Asian neighbors, the Azeri economy was largely dependent on the economy of the former Soviet Union. Consequently, like its other neighbors, Azerbaijan is also busy establishing economic self-sufficiency, along with strengthening its religious political, linguistic, and ethnic identities.

All these states are ethnically heterogenous, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan having the largest percentage of Russian population; except for Azerbaijan, the Sunni Muslim faith predominates; and the mother tongue of these countries, save Tajikistan, is of Turkic

2 THE NEW GREAT GAME IN MUSLIM CENTRAL ASIA

origin. Although these states appear to have more in common with the Middle East than with other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), quite wisely, these states decided to join that organization. Through this action, they appear to have postponed the political instability that their sudden independence was likely to have caused.

These states are either primarily or substantially Muslim. They have no tradition or institutional memory of a democratic government. The level of education of their population is among the lowest in the region. As these states deal with this unique period of independence, they will also try to find their proper places in the world community. During this time, they will be influenced by various regional and extraregional actors who have their own agendas vis-a-vis these states. The old version of the “great game” might have entered history; the new version began soon after the breakup of the Soviet Union. It is this “great game—post-Cold War style” that is the topic of this study.

The originator of the phrase “great game” was J. W. Kay, who used it in his book, *History of the War in Afghanistan*,¹ but Rudyard Kipling popularized it in his novel, *Kim*, to describe the 18th- and 19th-century rivalry between Britain and Russia over the Indian subcontinent. Peter Hopkirk, in *The Great Game*, establishes that the territory of this struggle—characterized by intrigues and conspiracies—was the land between Russia and India.² The Central Asian territory was then ruled by a variety of local khans. Even though they did not have much knowledge of the world beyond their immediate vicinity, they were indeed quite cognizant of Russian motives and of the British conquest of India. To prolong their own rule, they were able to play these two great powers against each other with considerable skill.

The new great game may not be aimed at the physical subjugation of Muslim Central Asia, but Russia—the only regional actor with the capability to conquer one or more nations of Muslim Central Asia—may indeed resuscitate its own historical will to reconquer one or more nations of Muslim Central Asia, especially if the democratic experience in that country becomes a miserable

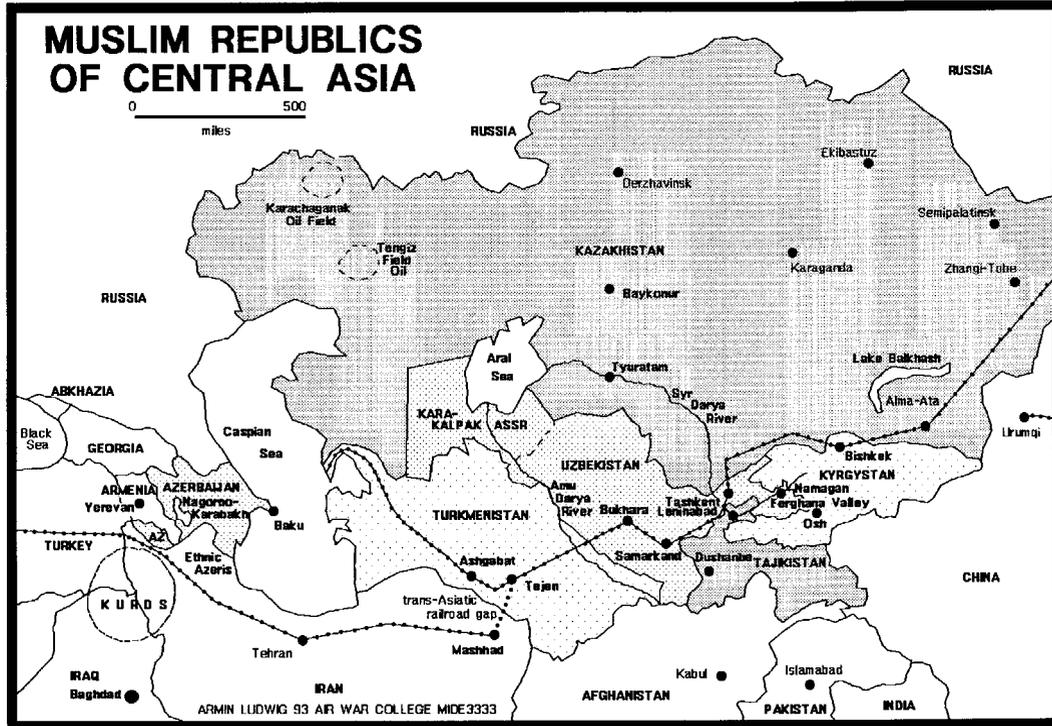


FIGURE 1

4 THE NEW GREAT GAME IN MUSLIM CENTRAL ASIA

failure and if extremists gain control of the Russian government. It is possible, however, that any of these countries would intervene in the affairs of its neighbors in the event of an impending civil war, in the name of stabilizing the troubled area. In that case, Russian troops would be likely to play an important role in pacifying that area; this is exactly what is happening in Tajikistan, where Uzbekistan is reported to have intervened on behalf of the pro-Communist regime of Rahman Nabiyev. The Russian troops stationed in Tajikistan are also reported to be intervening on behalf of the ex-Communist forces.

An important aspect of this new great game is that the Muslim Central Asian republics are playing a crucial role in determining their own future. Such an independent role also entails choosing friends, alliances, government models (an Islamic or a secular one) and economic arrangements (e.g., emulation of the South Korean, Chinese, or Western European models).

A number of great and regional powers are also likely to play an equally crucial role in the new great game. These include Russia, the United States, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. This aspect of the great game is quite crucial, for it involves political, military economic, and, most important, the religious agendas likely to determine the strategic future of Muslim Central Asia. The involvement of these great and regional powers also means that they would bring into the regional arena their respective strategic priorities, which are not of great significance to the Central Asian countries but which might influence the future dynamics of the great game itself. For instance, the Iranian-Turkish rivalry or the Saudi-Iranian rivalry is not of much concern to one or more of these republics, but whichever of these regional powers gains a diplomatic upper hand may have some bearing on the decision of one or more of the Central Asian republics to opt for an Islamic or secular model. One has to be careful about not overplaying or underplaying the significance of the Iranian or Turkish models. In the final analysis, the decision to remain secular or to turn toward Islam will largely be determined, in the near future, by the ruling elite groups. The popular preferences regarding these models are not likely to be apparent anytime soon, mainly because the decisionmaking in most of the Central Asian Muslim republics does not reflect popular preferences. Moreover, the political

sophistication of the population is not sufficiently high in many of these republics to influence these issues in the short run.

The Central Asian states supplied raw material for the industrial part of the former Soviet Union. Since its breakup, these actors are earnestly seeking to adopt plans that would give them economic self-sufficiency. They want to exploit their own natural resources, not export them to Russia; they want to integrate their economies with those of their southern neighbors and Europe, not just with Russia. We might be witnessing the emergence of two dimensions of this new great game in Central Asia—the geopolitical and geoeconomic dimensions.³

An emphasis on geoeconomic objectives motivates a nation-state to seek arrangements aimed at bringing about economic integration and links with other actors; such ties would inevitably lead to escalated political influence. An enhancement of political influence would, in turn, be a crucial aspect of geostrategic dimension. (It could be argued that all economic activities among nation-states may lead to the improvement of political influence, but when a nation-state is interested in systematically converting political influence to incorporate other nations into some sort of a political bloc—even an informal grouping of nations—or an alliance—a formalized and differentiated system— it is indulging itself in geostrategic activities.)

The geopolitical and geoeconomic aspects of the great game are aimed at keeping the inter-state conflicts in that part of the world at a manageable level. Various actors might attach different degrees of significance to its various aspects. For instance, an actor might be emphasizing its economic significance through aid and trade arrangements and through creating economic blocs. Iran, Turkey, and (to a lesser extent) Saudi Arabia might be underscoring this aspect of the great game, but an emphasis of their involvement inevitably leads to an escalation of their geopolitical significance in Central Asia. The Central Asian countries might value the integration of their economies with that of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, or Iran because, under these arrangements, they are likely to be treated as equals.

Russia, on the other hand, might prefer the continuation of economic arrangements that prevailed under the former Soviet Union. Although the continuation of these arrangements would result in the sustained subordination of the economies of the Central

6 THE NEW GREAT GAME IN MUSLIM CENTRAL ASIA

Asian countries to that of Russia, its side payoff might be the willingness of Russia to give these states stability and security. The Central Asian states, however, might view this continued subordination as too high a price to pay for security and stability.

The United States and Europe may attach utmost value to security and stability for the continued survival of the CIS, with or without paying much heed to how these variables are envisioned by the Central Asian states. If any of the preceding preferences are correct, we might be witnessing the making of a highly complicated version of the new great game in Central Asia. This study therefore will focus on the dynamics of geoeconomics and geopolitics from the perspectives of Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, and the United States and Russia.

The first section of this study offers an overview of the domestic problems, such as acute economic underdevelopment, absence of economic and industrial communication and transportation infrastructures, and ecological problems that need urgent remedies. The argument here is that not only is the resolution of these problems at the core of the Central Asian states' diplomatic activities, but that the potential resolution of these problems will also determine the future of peace and stability in that region. The prospects for political pluralism and democracy and the role of Islam are issues requiring a closer examination of these republics. A potential incorporation of democracy by most, if not all, of these states might enable them to shun political extremism of all shades. In this context, they also must try to involve Islamic parties in the ever-escalating pace of political activities in their domestic arena, and not curb the activities of these parties, or even try to ban them by using the excuse of "Islamic fundamentalism." The issue of nuclear weapons involving Ukraine and Kazakhstan is also analyzed.

The second section covers the modalities of the new great game, focusing on the activities of Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United States and analyzing three important observations:

- Although the diplomatic and political maneuverings of these states are aimed at promoting their respective strategic agendas in Muslim Central Asia, it is the political preferences and priorities of the newly independent republics that are going to play a crucial role in assigning priorities to any of these actors.

- While the competitive interactions of the three regional actors—Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia—serve as an important wrinkle of the new great game, one should be careful about assigning undue importance to these interactions. In the final analysis, the future significance of these interactions is most likely to be determined by the Central Asian republics themselves.
- The resurgence of overly assertive, if not aggressive, tendencies of Russia's foreign policy is a development likely to intensify the level of turbulence in an already troubled region. As the sole remaining superpower, the United States cannot long afford to concede a free hand to Moscow in the name of bringing about stability in Central Asia.

2. GEOPOLITICS AND THE DYNAMICS OF DOMESTIC PROBLEMS

The Muslim states of Central Asia have been isolated from their regional neighbors since their conquest by Russia in the late 19th century, an isolation that extends even further into the past, with the closing of the old overland silk route to China. As newly independent members of the CIS, these states are filled with self-discovery and busy establishing extensive contacts and ties with the world in the immediate vicinity as well as beyond. The problems faced by them are both acute and enormous. The proliferation of violent border disputes throughout the region of the former Soviet Union reflects the imperial and arbitrary nature of republican borders, as conceived by the former Soviet authorities. The region traditionally existed as a “shatterbelt” between competing regional powers: Russia and Persia, Russia and China, or Russia and Great Britain.

ETHNIC PROBLEMS

One of the most significant domestic problems faced by these states is that they “were never intended to be truly ethnic states.” The names given to them under the Stalin regime were derived from their tribal designations—Uzbeks, Kazakhs, etc.—and they “were created primarily as a mechanism of divide and rule.” The rationale was “to destroy any idea of a united ‘Turkestan,’ which, with its combined powers, could have threatened Moscow’s hold over the region.”⁴ Commenting on this issue, Marthat Olcott notes:

Stalin drew the map of Soviet Central Asia not with an eye to consolidating natural regions, but rather for the purpose of reducing the prospects for regional unity. Five separate republics

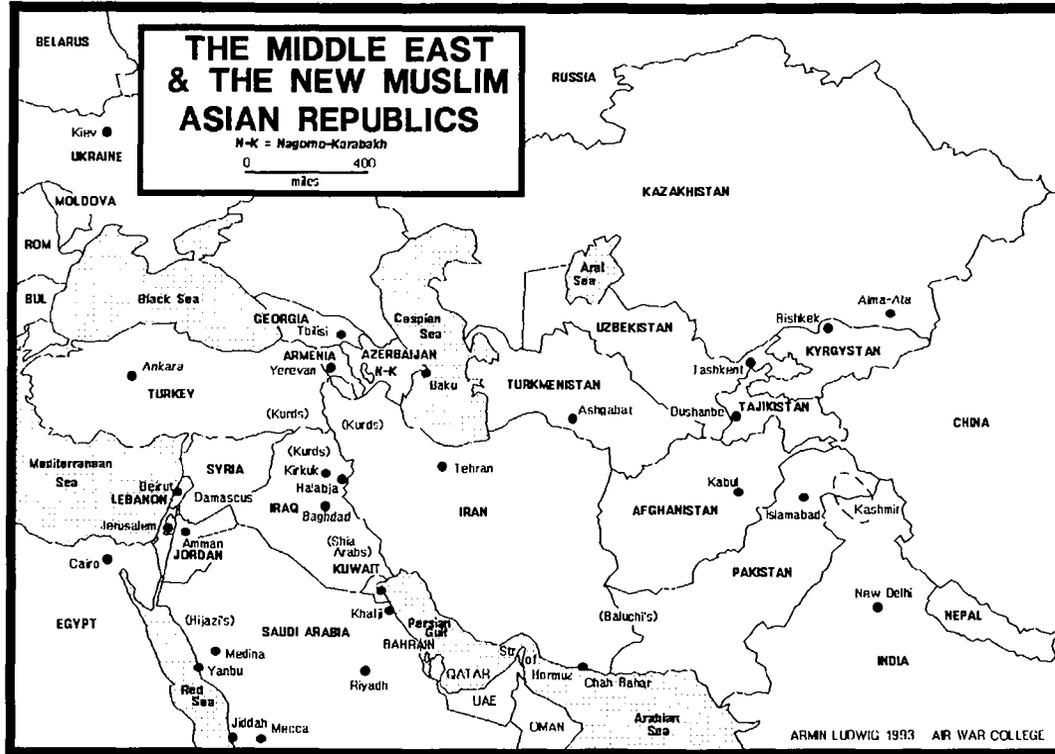


FIGURE 2

were formed, creating national units for ethnic communities that had yet to think of themselves as distinct nationalities. Moreover, boundaries were set to insure the presence of large irredentist populations in each republic.⁵

A related problem is the ethnic diversity of Muslim Central Asia, which promises to be the root cause of a multiplicity of ethnic conflicts. In a region where economic underdevelopment is acute, deep resentment related to the advantageous status of one ethnic group is likely to cause a considerable number of violent outbreaks and indeed even chaos, especially from those groups who regard themselves as victims of exploitation. Another root cause of ethnic conflicts goes back to Stalin's mass relocation campaign. The intent was to dilute the ethnic strength of one dominant group by creating in its midst pockets of ethnic minorities; consequently, when one examines the ethnic breakdown of these republics, one is struck by the prevalence of ethnic diversity.

The major example of ethnic diversity is the republic of Kazakhstan, which contains two major nationalities, Kazakhs and Russians, where Kazakhs are in the minority and where the Kazakh language is not spoken or understood by a majority of population. As Kazakhstan sets out to develop its national personality, it has to fight political battles with Russians (and to a lesser extent, with other ethnic groups) to keep the country intact. The northern and eastern parts of that country are inhabited predominantly by Slavs, and there is always a danger that if they do not like future political developments, they may attempt to secede or ask Russia to take over those regions of Kazakhstan. Even the political parties in Kazakhstan reflect the binational character of that country, with the *Endinstvo* (Unity) movement and the *Azat* (Freedom) party representing and reflecting the fears, aspirations, and political preferences of Slavs and Kazakhs, respectively.

Another problem related to ethnic makeup is that a majority of the productive sectors of Kazakhstan are in the hands of non-Kazakhs. As the country aims its industrial and agricultural policies aimed at privatization, the non-Kazakh part of the population is likely to resent deeply the redistributive policies of the government that are destined to lower its privileged status.

Kyrgyzstan is another state where Russians have a large presence—21.5 percent of the population. Even though President

Asker Akaev has been adamant about maintaining ethnic and cultural pluralism in his country, the Slavic population is destined to feel discriminated against as more and more nationalistic policies are adopted. It should be noted, however, that ethnic problems in Kyrgyzstan do not appear as ominous as they do in Kazakhstan.

Ethnic problems are slightly different in Uzbekistan, the most populous republic of Muslim Central Asia (19.9 million). The presence of Russians, though problematic given their traditionally privileged status, might be diminishing in its deleterious potential because they are leaving Uzbekistan. A potentially destabilizing problem of Uzbekistan is the presence of the Tajik minority, and in fact, two famous Tajik-speaking Islamic centers of Central Asia—Samarkhand and Bukhara—are part of Uzbekistan. When one adds this confused intermingling of ethnic groups with the fact that Uzbeks, because of their number, cause much fear among minority groups that are likely to be assimilated in the larger culture, one is looking at a potential ethnic explosion.

Anticipating this mishmash of various ethnic groups that are either suspicious of each other or even do not like each other, and recognizing that artificially drawn borders among republics might cause an outbreak of hostilities, these republics have carefully guaranteed the permanence of borders in all bilateral agreements. One of the key provisions of the new commonwealth also underscores the inviolability of the present borders.⁶ For Kazakhstan, this is a major fear, stemming from a potential change of heart in Moscow, especially if Boris Yeltsin is replaced by a hardline Slavic chauvinist leader. Other republics also manifest the same concern.⁷

THE ECONOMY

The greatest need for the Muslim Central Asian states is to acquire economic self-sufficiency, which has several characteristics. First, the Central Asian states are interested in breaking away from the old Soviet economic ties in which all were assigned a specific economic role with the chief aim of serving the Soviet economy. At the same time, they are busy reformulating this association in the form of a Central Asian Commonwealth. Second, the Central Asian states are looking for avenues of economic integration with other Muslim

states of the Middle East and Southwest Asia, in which they would not play the role of suppliers of raw materials only. The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) has become an important vehicle in this regard. The third characteristic of their quest for self-sufficiency motivates these countries to seek arrangements for industrialization and joint ventures with Western countries. Appendix I and the following briefs provide economic profiles of these six republics.

Azerbaijan

This country rates high on the scale of industrialization, with its industry accounting for more than 40 percent and its agriculture for 30 percent of the net material product (NMP) of the former Soviet Union.⁸ Azerbaijan led the former Soviet Union in economic growth from 1971 to 1985. It has large oil reserves, estimated to be around 1 billion metric tons. Its annual production declined in recent years, from 13 to 11 million metric tons, about 80 percent of which is produced offshore.

Azerbaijan is one of the few Muslim Central Asian republics that not only exports more than it imports, but whose exports and imports are largely finished goods and industrial raw materials, respectively. Its exports were 46 percent and imports 37 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from 1987 to 1990. Over 90 percent of its exports are refined oil products, machinery, textiles and wines that are shipped mainly to Russia and Ukraine. Of its imports, 70 to 80 percent come from other republics of the former USSR. These include industrial raw materials, crude oil for reexport as a refined product, and processed foods. These figures are destined the decline because of the Azeri-Armenian conflict involving Nagorno-Karabakh, and also because of Azerbaijan's status as a newly independent republic.

Kazakhstan

This nation rates as the most industrialized republic in the region. Kazakhstan's unique feature is that its industrial and agricultural sectors are highly developed, with agricultural products forming 37 percent of its NMP in 1991. Its industrial sector is "geared mainly toward metallurgy, heavy machinery and machine tools, petrol-chemicals, agro-processing and textiles."⁹

Kazakhstan is well endowed in mineral resources. "As of 1990, the country's proven mineral reserves represented over 90 percent of total USSR reserves of chrome and close to 50 percent of the USSR reserves of lead, wolfram (tungsten), copper, and zinc; it accounted for 19 percent of USSR coal production and 7 percent of oil production." The chromite deposits of northwest Kazakhstan, for example, supplied virtually all of Soviet production, with output in the mid-1980s reaching 4 million metric tons annually.¹⁰ Other important mineral resources for Kazakhstan include its gold reserves, which accounted for one-sixth of total Soviet production. Besides raw materials extraction, Kazakhstan also enjoyed a developed chemical and steel industry. Of the total annual Soviet output of phosphate (600,000 metric tons), Kazakhstan produced four-fifths.¹¹ Kazakhstan's steel industry, however, was developed under ideological guidelines, rather than available resources. While possessing sufficient energy and coking coal, the steel mills at Karaganda depend on both imported iron ore and water.¹²

Given the development strategy of Moscow, Kazakhstan's industry was heavily tied to that of the other republics. In some fields Kazakh plants produced the lion's share of a given product. In the chemical and smelting industry, Kazakhstan was often the most vital of all Soviet sources. But even this country is also a victim of specialization that was idiosyncratic to the economy of the former Soviet Union. About one-third of the finished goods consumed in the country are imported. By the same token, three-fourths of its total exports, including interrepublican trade, are intermediate goods and raw materials.¹³

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan's economy is primarily agricultural, but its unique characteristic is the presence of a sizable private sector.¹⁴ In some major crops, the share of the private sector is between one-third and one-half. Agriculture accounted for 40 percent of the NMP in 1990-1991, while the industrial sector accounted for about one-third of the NMP. Another feature of the Kyrgyz economy is its excessive dependence on imports, especially from republics of the former Soviet Union. For 1990, an estimated 98 percent of its total exports were sold within these republics.

Tajikistan

This is the poorest of all the Muslim republics. Its economy is highly dependent on agriculture, which accounted for 38 percent of its NMP in 1990. It is also a major producer of cotton, and accounted for 11 percent of the total cotton production of the former USSR. Tajikistan's industrial sector is substantially state owned. The state's share of fixed industrial assets was around 98 percent in 1990. For the same year, Tajikistan's share of interrepublic trade was between 80 percent and 90 percent of its exports and imports, respectively.¹⁵

Turkmenistan

This republic lies "at the lower end of the scale in terms of social development indicators, with the highest infant mortality rate and the lowest life expectancy at birth."¹⁶ Its economy is primarily agricultural. Cotton is the major crop grown, accounting for more than 50 percent of its arable land and 60 percent of its total agricultural production. Production and processing of energy are also important for its economy. Turkmenistan's gas reserves are estimated to be 8.1 trillion cubic meters; its energy reserves are estimated to be around 700 million tons. The significance of cotton and mineral resources is reflected in its industrial development. In 1991, 61 textile enterprises generated about one-third of its total industrial production. Thirty-eight large state-owned chemical, gas, oil processing, and electricity-generating industries accounted for another third of its industrial production.

Uzbekistan

This is a state where agriculture, oil, and mineral deposits dominate economic activities.¹⁷ Agriculture represents about 40 percent of its NMP and 30 percent of employment, while its industrial production is around 30 percent of its NMP and 18 percent of employment. Its heavy trade dependence on the states of the former Soviet Union is underscored by the fact that its exports to these states form 34 percent of its GDP, while "foreign" exports are only about 4 percent of its GDP. Similarly, its imports from its former Soviet partners and from "foreign" sources are reported to be 30 percent and 6 percent, respectively, of its GDP. Uzbekistan is the fourth largest producer of cotton, which accounts for 40 percent of its entire agricultural production. It also has large reserves of petroleum,

natural gas, and coal. Uzbekistan was a major natural gas producer of the former Soviet Union.

RESOURCES

Perhaps the most critical resource for future development is energy. The six Central Asian states account for 9 percent of CIS oil production, but are known to have 12 percent of total in the CIS proven reserves. Of these, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan "have oil resources comparable to those of the minor OPEC production."¹⁸ For these states, oil reserves not only guarantee a measure of economic independence, but also represent a potential source of hard-currency income, such as Kazakhstan's recent deal with Chevron to exploit the Tenghiz oil field. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan contain large amounts of natural gas, and Kazakhstan is moving to attract foreign investment and development of oil and gas fields at Karachaganak, where oil and natural gas reserves were estimated to be around 1 trillion cubic meters and 80 million tons, respectively. Kazakhstan's energy reserves also include major coal deposits. The coal fields at Karaganda and Ekibastuz were the third largest in the former Soviet Union; annually, some 130 million tons of coal were extracted from these fields for shipment to the Ural steel mills or for use in regional electrical generating plants.¹⁹

In the former Soviet Union, however, Central Asia was also a primary source of natural gas. Because of Central Asia's large reserves and its relative proximity, it met 40 percent of the European half of the Soviet Union's natural gas demand.²⁰ Though there are some reserves in other republics, the most important source for natural gas was Turkmenistan. During the eleventh Five-Year Plan, before the economic disruption of reform, Turkmenistan produced 84.7 billion cubic meters of gas annually and held 70 percent of all Central Asian reserves.²¹ Given their large proven and estimated reserves of energy, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan can enjoy a greater degree of autonomy as a result of their domestic energy self-sufficiency.

The other states in the region have fewer sources of energy, which include some hydroelectric stations. The hydroelectric stations of Tajikistan, however, depend on skilled technical workers, many of whom are Slavs. Thus the loss of Slav

technicians could result in a temporary decrease in output. Uzbekistan also has energy resources of its own. In 1990 its estimated natural gas output was about 41 billion cubic meters, and its petroleum production was about 2.8 million tons. The recent discoveries of oil in the Namangan and Ferghana regions promise to make Uzbekistan self-sufficient in energy.²²

Energy reserves are only a fraction of the natural resources located in Central Asia, albeit the most important. Given the new post-Cold War global order, the location of uranium mining facilities in the region may prove to be a tempting delicacy for a third power, regional or not. Though most of the former Soviet Union's uranium was mined in this area, most processing took place in Russia.

Besides yellow gold, Central Asia was known more for its white gold: cotton. Development of the cotton industry dates back to the 1860s, when the American Civil War deprived Russia of American cotton. Though Central Asia as a region is important for cotton production, cotton growing is concentrated mainly in Uzbekistan, which contributes some 61 percent of total production.²³

The extent and importance of cotton production were increased under the Soviet authorities, especially during the past 30 years. The expansion of production in this arid region has come as a result of a massive increase in irrigation, largely from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya. From 1961 to 1986, land under irrigation in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan increased 62 percent.²⁴ The expansion of the cotton fields has had several negative impacts on the states of Central Asia, however.

Examining the socioeconomic conditions of the region, one can see the impact of the cotton monoculture. Unfortunately for the local population, cotton proved to be extremely profitable for both Moscow and the republican Communist leadership, who benefitted the most from the cotton profits. In an economy suffering from shortages and poor delivery systems, cotton proved to be the ideal crop. Whereas Soviet agriculture tended to lose 20 percent of a given crop between farm and market because of rough handling or spoilage, cotton has the distinct advantage of being imperishable. Fruit or vegetable production requires expensive refrigeration, but cotton can be simply piled on the ground.

Given the Central Asians' reluctance to leave their traditional, rural life, cotton seemed to offer an effective means of exploiting

the situation. Cotton production in Central Asia is labor intensive: over one-half of the harvested cotton is collected by hand. The combination of a high birth rate (Central Asia's average for 1986 was 35 births per 1,000 population), a propensity to remain rural, and a lack of investment in production-related industry translated into growing unemployment. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, unemployment in Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan was estimated to be 16 to 20 percent of the potential labor force.²⁵

The concentration of cotton production in Uzbekistan led to an especially acute situation. Unemployment in the late 1980s was estimated to be around two million people, almost 10 percent of the total population. James Critchlow, in his examination of the Uzbek economy, writes that unemployment was repeatedly cited as a factor in the 1989 Faarghana valley riots in that country. These riots, he maintains, resulted in making more than two-fifths of the Uzbek population "dependent on others, whether relatives or the state."²⁶

Expansion of the cotton monoculture was achieved at great cost in other areas as well. For instance, even though cotton was grown in the Central Asian states, its processing was done in Russia. The underlying intent was to deprive these states of industrialization and keep them dependent on the Soviet Union for the processing of their vital commodity. Second, tax rates heavily favored the Soviet Union. Ahmad Rashid cites telling figures on this issue: "There was an average tax of 400-600 roubles on one ton of raw cotton, while on finished products the tax was in region of 1,200-1,700 roubles."²⁷

To increase production, most arable land was given over to cotton production, and as cotton production increased, an almost equal and dramatic loss in food production also materialized. Now Central Asia, which used to grow enough food to sustain itself, is dependent on food imported from other republics. This trend has been especially evident in the loss of the many fruit orchards. In Uzbekistan, trees used to grow on an estimated 15 percent of the arable land, but by 1987 that percentage had decreased to only 1 percent. As the Soviet Union collapsed, food shortages became quite common in the region. The new states have made efforts to increase the amount of land devoted to food production, but the damage cannot be immediately reversed. As Russia itself tries to reform its agriculture, Central Asia must begin to look for other sources of grain and other foodstuffs. Some Muslim states have

moved to fill this need; already Saudi Arabia has donated 800,000 tons of grain to Uzbekistan.²⁸

Certain other economic characteristics likely to affect the political dynamics and future stability of the Central Asian Muslim republics are worth noting. For instance, the economy of northern Kazakhstan, because this region is predominantly inhabited by the Russian population, is heavily industrial and is more closely linked to Siberia and the Russian republic than it is to its own agricultural south. In Kazakhstan one finds the Baykonur space complex and its related technology, yet the region is also marked by extreme poverty and backwardness.

In the past, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan mainly exported raw materials to other republics for final processing. For example, Uzbekistan produced 5 million tons of cotton annually, but 90 percent of this cotton was exported raw. During 1992-1993, however, that country set out to establish its own cotton processing industry by importing it from the West.

Of these republics, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan appear determined to make steady progress toward becoming liberal and market-oriented economies, while Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—because they are highly authoritarian states—are manifesting greater central control over their economies. It will be some time before Tajikistan, which is experiencing a civil war, will determine its own course of economic development. Much of its economic direction will depend on the type of government that emerges at the conclusion of the civil war. Azerbaijan is also likely to forge ahead with market-oriented reforms in the future. However, like the Tajik civil war, another ongoing political conflict—this one involving Nagorno-Karabakh—will have a major impact on its political leadership, as well as on economic priorities.

ECOLOGY AND HEALTH

Environmental neglect and destruction are not restricted by ideology, and the extent of the ecological damage in the former Soviet Union approaches the realm of science fiction. The following most aptly describes the former Soviet Union's crimes against nature in Central Asia:

Nowhere has the link between the misuse of the land and filthy water been manifested more clearly than in Central Asia. There,

a combination of unfiltered drinking water, untreated sewage, and large quantities of pesticides, herbicides, defoliants, and fertilizers has done massive damage to the population's health, not to mention causing severe economic losses. For decades, pure water from the region's rivers has been diverted to irrigation projects (especially for cotton), and the water remaining in rivers and streams is almost always badly polluted. Noting that more than three billion cubic meters of agricultural, industrial, and human waste flowed into the Amu Darya each year, the minister of health of Soviet Turkmenia [present day Turkmenistan] described that waterway several years ago as "little more than a sewage ditch."²⁹

This systematic neglect and even gross abuse of the environment that the Muslim Central Asian states experienced has its roots in some of the idiosyncrasies of the centrally planned economy of the former USSR.

A substantial portion of resources in the former Soviet economy (approximately 85 percent) were allocated to "production group A." These resources include heavy industries, mining, energy, transportation sectors, and the manufacture of the means of production. On the contrary, only 15 percent of resources were invested in the consumer-oriented sector. "The result was production for its own sake, which increased stresses on the environment."³⁰ Another reason environmental abuse went unattended, especially in Muslim Central Asia, was "the depth of corruption" in that region.³¹ The result was a systematic distortion of statistics, by underreporting the death rates and by falsifying reasons of deaths on a national scale. In other words, when the Communist system was not even willing to face the gross abuse of the environment and its attendant consequences, there was no hope that it would do anything about it. It was only in the early 1970s that Soviet authorities decided to take "positive action to combat first air and then water pollution."³²

The pollution problems of Kazakhstan are more traditional: air pollution from the old, centrally controlled industries and factories, and some radiation problems around the Semipalatinsk weapons test site. In the agricultural (especially cotton) regions of Central Asia, however, the drive to expand cotton production at all costs has presented its bill: water shortages in countries like Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, and poisoning of the land and people of the region; the massive diversion of the Amu Darya and Syr

Darya, leading to a dramatic change in and even perhaps the slow death of the Aral Sea, which is fed by these rivers. The development of a massive system of irrigation canals caused only one-eighth as much water to reach the Aral Sea from the two main river systems in 1989 as in 1960.³³ In fact, in the 1980s it was reported that the Syr Darya no longer reaches this sea. Unless corrective measures are taken soon, the Aral Sea will disappear in our lifetime: its capacity has shrunk by 80 kilometers, its depth has decreased by 123 meters, and it has lost 69 percent of its original volume of water.³⁴ While solutions remain difficult to identify, the cause is more obvious.

Adding insult to injury, the massively developed irrigation network is extremely inefficient. Irrigation canals require not only initial investment for construction, but also continued capital inputs for upkeep. As was often the case in the former Soviet economy, such additional funding is not available. The results are staggering. An estimated 50 to 90 percent of the water diverted for irrigation never reaches the fields, becoming absorbed into the earth in the many unlined and poorly maintained canals.³⁵ The water that does reach the fields often achieves undesired results. The constant use of field flooding as a means of irrigation has over time led to the salinization of the soil.³⁶ In addition, some of the irrigated lands have become useless through rising water tables. In the cotton area, an estimated 8.6 million acres have become waterlogged and have had to be removed from production.³⁷

The picture of environmental disaster gets worse. As land was lost, and as cotton yields decreased, the leadership moved to reverse the trend by increasing the use of chemicals. Thus after flowing through the fields, the water that remained was heavily polluted. To combat resistant insects, the local authorities applied 49 pounds of chemical per acre.³⁸ That remaining water, polluted and saline, constituted the drinking water for the region's population.

A further problem is that infrastructural investments have not been made in water purification plants and this heavily polluted drinking water has taken its toll on the people. In the autonomous republic of Karakalpak (in Uzbekistan), mothers who nurse their infants run the risk of poisoning them.³⁹ In the entire region the drinking water crisis has become particularly acute. Given the chemical cocktail contained in its drinking water and the low state of health care, Central Asia has the highest infant mortality rates of

the former Soviet republics. In Turkmenistan, for example, three-fifths of the maternity clinics, wards, and pediatric hospitals cannot supply hot water, and an additional 127 hospitals have no piped water, resulting in an infant mortality rate of 111 per thousand.⁴⁰

Drinking water is also a problem for the region's mostly rural population, which lives mostly in the cotton belt, is actively involved in cotton production, and is engaged in actually cutting the chemically dusted cotton by hand—and thus faces even further water and health problems. In the republics of Azerbaijan (also a cotton producer), Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, between 44 and 48 percent of the townships have no sewer systems; their waste simply flows into the already stagnant runoff.⁴¹ In some areas, the population is left with no choice but to quench its thirst by drinking directly from these stagnant ponds, since their collective farms do not have any piped water. As Murray Feshbach notes, “only 23 percent of the collective farms in Uzbekistan, 20 percent in Kirghizia, 14 percent in Tajikistan and just 2 percent in Turkmenistan has piped water for farmers’ residences.”⁴²

As the Central Asian states embark on the path of democratization, the lingering problems inherited from “Czar Cotton” will leave their mark. The possibilities contained in the potential oil and gas wealth are seemingly outweighed by the ecological disaster in the region. Restoring the health of the people is inherently tied to the health of the land. As the Aral Sea slowly disappears, the region's climate will also change, with unknown consequences for regional agriculture.

In February 1992, members of the CIS (with the exception of Ukraine) signed an interrepublican agreement, “On Cooperation in the Area of Ecology and Environmental Protection,” in which the parties agreed:

- To promote environmental protection through the drafting and enforcement of environmental legislation and regulations, monitoring and assessing environmental quality, pursuing sustainable economic development, preserving wilderness areas and biodiversity, and supporting environmental education
- To harmonize methodologies, procedures, and standards of environmental assessment and regulation and to make them compatible with international practice

- To pursue joint environmental research and protection programs, including the dismantling of chemical and nuclear weapons
- To create an “interstate ecological information system” and common list of endangered species
- To form an “interstate ecological council” composed of the environment ministers of the participating states
- To finance an “interstate ecological fund” aimed primarily at rendering disaster assistance.⁴³

Turkmenistan refused to be a party to financing the activities of the interstate ecological council. Given the grossly poor record of environmental management, the signing of this document is definitely a leap forward. Now, it remains to be seen how seriously the signatories will adhere to the letter and the spirit of the document.

POLITICAL PLURALISM

The issue of political pluralism is very complicated in Muslim Central Asia. Yet, the future dynamics of this topic will not only determine the political personality of all these states, but it will also determine how stable these countries are likely to be in the coming years.

Like human beings, states are affected by their social and political milieu. This milieu includes historical, cultural, and political traditions not only of the Central Asian societies but also of their immediate neighborhood. Culturally and historically, these countries are tribal and nomadic societies that were not allowed free existence. The czarist regime incorporated them in its empire, and when the imperial rule came to a bloody end, the Communist “czars” proved equally determined, and no less ruthless, in maintaining the system of colonial rule and subjugation of these states. Under both systems, the Muslim states were forced to exist under an assumed and alien entity, first as part of the Russian empire, then as citizens of the Soviet empire. Although their ethnic identity was maintained as an administrative necessity, their real existence as Muslims was suppressed and denied. According to one study, Stalin's policies were clearly aimed at shattering the “hopes of pan-Islamic or pan-Turkic movements” in Central Asia; he divided the Central Asian people in separate ethnic groupings,

killed their hopes for having “a common homeland, a common language, and a common destiny” and clearly wanted to “pit one republic and one ethnic group against another.”⁴⁴ This was not enough. The Communists invested their best efforts in eradicating the presence of Islam through massive anti-Islamic propaganda, by banning the use of Arabic and replacing it with a Latin script first and then Cyrillic, and by closing mosques. This anti-Islamic campaign was effective: there were 26,000 active mosques in 1971, but by 1985 there were only 400. These systematic anti-Islamic policies were explained away by the Communist rulers by saying that they were, in reality, attempting “to create a new Soviet man.”⁴⁵

One of the reasons no independent political movement took root in Russia was because the native elites were extremely small in number, remained deeply divided, and failed to broaden their support base among the masses. Consequently, when the Communists won the civil war after the 1917 revolution, they co-opted the Muslim elites into the Communist system and thus made the political transition from czarism to nationalism, and then to socialism within a single generation. Muslim leaders who refused to go through this transformation were killed. This treatment of Central Asian Muslim leadership “was only a continuation of the early refusal of the Bolsheviks to acknowledge any of the local political trends or popular aspirations.”⁴⁶ The Soviet system thus established a veneer of indigenous educated elites, who identified themselves as both Soviet and Communist, and a majority population in Muslim Central Asia that identified itself as neither. Moreover, a substantial part of this population remained uneducated and inward looking, and, most important, continued to identify itself with Islam.

In the 20th century, the political traditions with which the Central Asian states are familiar are either communism, which prevailed in the former Soviet Union, or authoritarianism, which prevailed in the Middle East. There is also the Turkish model of democratic secularism; however, the chances of its incorporation on a permanent (or even for the long-term) basis are questionable, at best.

When the Soviet Union collapsed from within, Muslim Central Asian leaders were reluctant to accept the sovereign status of their republics. In every state, these leaders were handpicked by the authorities in Moscow, because of their impeccable credentials as

loyal Communist apparatchiks. When the Communist Party was disbanded in Moscow, these leaders scrambled to find a new and a “democratic” identity, because democracy came into vogue in almost all corners of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe—but these leaders had no experience with democracy. More important, they were presiding over societies that were similarly lacking any experience in democracy and were economically underdeveloped. Some of the most significant questions faced by the Central Asian leadership were how to preside over such societies; how to bring about economic development without being autocratic; and whether to allow political pluralism (or how much pluralism to allow) as they endeavored to move toward market economies (otherwise known as economic pluralism).

Another crucial question was whether political pluralism and economic pluralism would be simultaneously introduced. The Gorbachev experience—his decision to introduce *glasnost* and *perestroika* eventually brought about the collapse of the Soviet empire—was an uneasy reminder that the simultaneous introduction of both economic and political pluralism may lead to cataclysmic changes. No Central Asian leader was willing to accept such a potential outcome. They were, however, aware that pluralism had also been introduced in a number of Eastern European countries, so the path they had to take was not clearly marked. There were serious risks hanging over their respective political horizons. The actual performance of the Muslim Central Asian leaders regarding political pluralism requires closer examination.

The politics of Azerbaijan since the collapse of the Soviet Union have been turbulent. Because it was a part of the Soviet empire for so long, and because it had no political experience with democracy, its post-independence approach to democracy has been shaky. Even its membership in the CIS was consummated on an undemocratic basis, when the former President Ayaz Mutalibov signed an agreement to join in December 1991, despite opposition from many Azeri nationalists. Today, the future of democracy and political pluralism in that country rests with the future dynamics of two major issues: the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the pace of economic development. At times, the country appears to be so consumed by the Karabakh conflict that the political fortunes of major politicians are made and destroyed by episodic development involving this conflict. For

instance, when the Armenian forces killed several hundred Azeri civilians in the Karabakh town of Khodzhaly, President Mutalibov was forced to resign on March 6. The election of President Abulfaz Elchibey, who was the chairman of the Azerbaijani Popular Front (AZPF), in June 1992 was carried out in the aftermath of another skirmish over Karabakh—which resulted in the fall of Susha to the Armenian forces (figure 3).⁴⁷

FIGURE 3. *The Armenia-Azerbaijan dispute*



In the absence of any resolution of the Karabakh conflict, one can only hope that the emergence of political pluralism in Azerbaijan rests largely with the ability of some politicians “whose program promised economic wealth to rival Kuwait’s.”⁴⁸ The number of politicians with radical solutions to this conflict appears to be growing as the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), or the neighbors of Azerbaijan, continue to fail in their attempts to negotiate a political solution. A continued impasse on this conflict appears to be a time bomb close to the heart of political pluralism in that country; in fact, in June 1993, that time bomb exploded when rebel commander Colonel Surat Husseinov seized power from President Elchibey. This power struggle was directly

related to the way the Karabakh conflict was handled by the Elchibey government. The Azeri parliament voted to strip Elchibey of all his power, and Heydar Aliev, who was appointed as speaker of the parliament by Elchibey in an attempt to avert the impending civil war in that country, took over. Aliev's rising political fortunes also cast a dark shadow on the political landscape of that country because of his checkered career under the former USSR, as a former KGB general, a Communist Party boss of Azerbaijan in the 1970s, and a politburo member in the 1980s.⁴⁹

The future of political pluralism appears better in Kazakhstan, simply because President Sultan Nazerbaev—a former Communist—has adopted a steady course for his country. Even though Nazerbaev cannot pass for a genuine democrat, given the special character of his country he has been quite successful in bringing about a political transition for Kazakhstan from a Communist society to one that is independent and relatively open. The source of concern related is that his personal leadership has become too important an entity for the future of Kazakhstan. In other words, the notion of political legitimacy that is so crucially linked with political institutions as a precondition for the evolution of democracy is sorely lacking in Kazakhstan. Instead, political legitimacy is revolving around the personality of Nazerbaev. Consequently, whether Kazakhstan would be able to make a successful transition from personal legitimacy to institutional legitimacy remains a question.

While one considers the issue of legitimacy, one should not forget that in 1993 Kazakhstan became one of the hopeful symbols of the capability of a Muslim Central Asian state to develop political pluralism. This is a country next door to Russia, whose northern half is predominantly Russian and which keeps a wary eye on political developments in Russia. Kazakhstan is also a nuclear state. It is a society where the indigenous population as well as its Slavic section remain overly sensitive about their respective future political status and fortunes. Kazakhstan is a polity where even political parties thrive along ethnic lines. Where possible, Nazerbaev has sought to limit the contentious nature of governing a multiethnic, multireligious state. His opposition to Islamic political parties is matched by his opposition to all religious parties. Though an atheist, he states his opposition to religious

organizations not on dogmatic grounds, but rather on political realities.⁵⁰

Despite the political sophistication with which Nazerbaev has been managing political events, it should be noted that he has expressed his ambivalence toward the evolution of political pluralism and democracy in his country on more than one occasion. He is reported to be “nervous about relinquishing his personal power too rapidly” and has expressed profound agreement with the view that “the path from totalitarianism to democracy lies through enlightened authoritarianism.”⁵¹ He might have been thinking of the Gorbachev experience when he observed that “one would have to possess a heart of ice and a mind of concrete to limit freedom to small doses for people who have been deprived of it for nearly seven-and-a-half decades.”⁵²

Kyrgyzstan is a shining example of a Muslim Central Asian state's experience with political pluralism. This country is led by the physician-cum-politician Askar Akayev, who takes pride in the fact that he was responsible for the establishment of the first multiparty democracy in the area and who apparently does not share the apprehension of Nazerbaev about rushing headlong into democracy. Akayev also believes in the simultaneous evolution of political as well as economic pluralism, and his example is likely to be watched with interest by the political leaders of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. Unlike Azerbaijan, however, Akayev's country is not saddled with a conflict of the size of Nagorno-Karabakh. Furthermore, unlike Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan does not have to worry about the presence of a very large number of Russians whose political alienation could result in a division of his country. The evolving political and economic pluralism does face one disadvantage—Kyrgyzstan relies heavily on the technical talents of Slavs.

The other two Central Asian republics—Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—rate highly on the scale of authoritarianism. In both states, former Communist bosses are serving as Presidents—Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan and Saparmurat Niyazov in Turkmenistan. Karimov has “a reputation as the most authoritarian leader in Central Asia.”⁵³ His political preference is precisely summarized in the phrase, “stability at any price.”⁵⁴ This preference was also expressed when President Karimov stated that China continues to serve as a role model for economic reform in Uzbekistan.⁵⁵

Although he later denied ever making this statement, it is clear that as a former Communist who is presiding over a former Communist state, he was intrigued by one "central principle" of the Chinese strategy: "encouraging economic but not political initiative."⁵⁶ As a result of his extensive trip to Southeast Asia, Karimov is reported to have been fascinated with the "Indonesian model" of economic development. There are a number of factors in common between Uzbekistan and Indonesia—Islam, large population, history of colonial domination, etc.—but it appears that Indonesian economic development under authoritarian political rule is the reason for this interest.

Turkmenistan's President Saparmurad Niyazov, like his Uzbek counterpart Karimov, insists that political stability is the most important variable for fulfilling the vision of a democratic and secular state that he wants for his country,⁵⁷ but that explanation becomes his excuse for presiding over another highly authoritarian state of Central Asia. Political power in this country remains firmly in the hands of the old Communist Party *nomenklatura*, and "the overall direction of policy is under Niyazov's personal control."⁵⁸ Niyazov's own views of democratic freedoms are reflected in the treatment of this issue in the Turkmenistani constitution. "In sections of the constitution dealing with basic rights and freedoms, one-third of the articles leave the final say to bureaucratic agencies."⁵⁹ In an interview on the subject of personal freedoms, Niyazov noted, "These freedoms are all observed at present [in our country], although during the transitional stage the *state* must regulate the functioning of these concepts in the interest of society as a whole."⁶⁰ One cannot help noticing the striking resemblance of this statement to the old Marxist rhetoric related to establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a state of transition toward the creation of a classless society. This condition is supposed to bring about the "disappearance of the state."

The supreme ruling body of Turkmenistan is known as the People's Council, a vehicle devised by Niyazov. This council "masks the authoritarian nature of Niyazov's rule with a structure intended to hark back to the tribal assemblies of Turkmenistan's past."⁶¹ Moreover, there are no officially recognized political parties in Turkmenistan.

No definite statement can be made at this time about political pluralism in Tajikistan, where a civil war has been in progress since

May 1992, the purpose of which is to dislodge the rule of former Communist President Rahman Nabiyev, who was heading another authoritarian regime in that country. This civil war has been variously described as a battle between ex-Communist and anti-Communist forces, or a struggle between ex-Communist and nationalist-Islamic forces. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, a specialist in the Tajik affairs, describes it:

The battle in Tajikistan is not propelled by ideology: the driving forces are not Communist, Islamic, nationalist or democratic values. These ideologies are only labels used in the legitimization of different regional clashes. Strong regional rivalries (“mahalgaroi,” translated as “regionalism” or “localism”), which have been encouraged by the Moscow policy of divide-and-rule since 1924, determine today’s political loyalties.⁶²

The real reason for this civil war is a combination of the second and third positions: it is a struggle between ex-Communist and nationalist-Islamic forces, in which “regionalism” or “localism” is also playing a catalytic role (figure 4). These different groups, led by different “warlords,” seem “to be organized around two major regions (Leninabad in the north and the southern Karategin faction) which enjoy clientele relationships with other towns and cities.”⁶³ Because the conflict is brewing in a Muslim country, it is only inevitable that Islam will play a role in it, especially when “the speedy politicization of Islam [was] carried out by ambitious groups of interested people.”⁶⁴

The troubling aspect of the role of Islam in this conflict is related to two developments. First is the position taken by the united opposition—a grouping of the Democratic Party, the Rastokhez National Front, and the Islamic Revivalist Party (IRP)—during the antigovernment demonstrations held during April-May 1991. This group made “vague promises of a future Islamic state but [had] a more pertinent goal of re-Islamization [read renativization] of society to replace the “Sovietization” of



FIGURE 4

institutions.”⁶⁵ As a response, the progovernment groups and the Russian army portrayed the opposition as “Islamic Fundamentalists.” The speaker of the parliament, Emomali Rakhmonov, blamed Haji Akbar Turajonzoda, the *Qazi* (religious judge) of Kalan, for conducting the civil war. But in reality, “only a small minority of the fighters actually belonged to the Islamic Revivalist Party; most fighters were politically secular.”⁶⁶ Although the ex-Communist forces (still Communist in all but name) gained an upper hand and the nationalist Islamic coalition forces suffered a setback, the civil war is far from over. If the ex-Communist forces gain a clear victory, authoritarian rule will be reinstated in Tajikistan. Even then, in all likelihood, Tajikistan will remain an unstable polity.

What is most disconcerting about this civil war is the participation of Uzbek and Russian troops on behalf of ex-Communist forces; neither state has “behaved as if it considered Tajikistan as a genuinely sovereign and independent country.”⁶⁷ In 1995, Tajikistan as a sovereign state exists only on paper. The Rahmonov government is too dependent for its existence on the presence of the Russian and Uzbek forces. The government’s supporters in the southern part of that country are not interested in a political compromise that will lessen their political power. The opposition parties are divided between those who seek a political solution and power sharing, and those who want an all-out victory over the Rahmonov government. The Russian, Uzbek, and Tajik axis, to its credit, has expressed its interest in seeking a political dialogue with the opposition forces under the intense scrutiny and criticism of such entities as international amnesty groups and some European countries over their treatment of the opposition forces and gross violations of human rights.

The prospects for the reemergence of Tajikistan as a truly sovereign nation are not exactly dim, however. Imagine the ominous implications of the precedent of a potential disappearance of a nation-state due to the ethnic-based warfare in the entire region. At the same time, one has to recognize the immensely complicated nature of the protracted civil war in that unhappy country, which is also tied to an equally complicated and protracted civil war that has been continuing in Afghanistan.⁶⁸

To summarize, the prospects for political pluralism are, at best, mixed in Muslim Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan is the best example of

political pluralism, while Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have a mixed record. At least Kazakhstan is stable and benignly authoritarian. Azerbaijani politics have some way to go before a stable pattern of political pluralism is to emerge. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are under authoritarian regimes that are likely to plunge into civil war, if their present acute economic underdevelopment continues. The Tajikistani example is keeping the attention of both Niyazov and Karimov. But in all likelihood, they both are likely to increase the level of authoritarian control over their populations since they value political stability so much.

ISLAM AND THE FUTURE OF POLITICAL STABILITY

A discussion of political stability in any Muslim polity must also take into consideration the role of Islam. The absence of the Western notion of separation of church and state in Muslim countries makes it only inevitable that Islamic parties of all shades—the moderate as well as the radicals—will enter the political arena. Given this reality, the important question is, what will be the relationship between Islam and the state in the Central Asian countries in coming years?

The Tajik civil war does not bode well for the peaceful and constructive evolution of this relationship, and the prospects for a peaceful and stable future in any of these Central Asian countries do not look very bright. To begin with, almost all states, save Kyrgyzstan, are under authoritarian rule, which means that the present regimes are not likely to allow for political compromises among a number of groups—especially Islamic groups—on various crucial political, social, and economic issues faced by these countries. It is worth noting that political compromise has its roots in the character of a democratic political culture. It is nurtured through a process of socialization at all levels. Political leaders are old hands at forging compromises before they reach the uppermost echelons of decisionmaking.

The political culture of Central Asia, on the contrary, has been heavily influenced by tribalism, centralized control, political and religious repression, and democratic centralism. All these characteristics, save tribalism, are typical of Communist societies. When the Soviet Union collapsed, those who were at the helm of

affairs in Central Asian countries were trained Communists. As such, they not only ignored the “forewarning of the impending collapse” of the USSR, but “supported the failing union to the end, making no contingency plans for its possible demise.”⁶⁹ After they reluctantly became independent, they changed the names of Communist parties in their respective countries to some sort of “democratic” parties, but those parties in reality remained Communist. These leaders had no experience with democracy. They were also presiding over polities that were teetering at the brink of political chaos if direly needed economic development and progress did not materialize. In order to focus on economic development, a number of them (save Akaev of Kyrgyzstan) were convinced that they must continue with authoritarian control. Such a political posture allows no room for compromise, unless pressure becomes acute. Even then, a natural reaction of an authoritarian regime is to retaliate against those who are perceived as “enemies” of the regime. Regarding the Islamic parties, a “standard” response of a number of Central Asian states is to either outlaw them or repress them so much they go underground.

As in all Muslim polities, however, the relationship between Islam and government must be worked out over a period of time. In this regard, the Central Asian states share an important characteristic with other Muslim polities, where the relationship between government and Islamic parties is far from settled. In most Muslim societies, this relationship has been a rocky one: Egypt and Algeria are recent examples. In others, Islam and government are so fused that the latter has tried to sound like the extension of the former. Pakistan is an example of this, as is Saudi Arabia, where the ruling family has been acting not only as the guardian of Islamic shrines, but, arguably, also as a “guardian” of Sunni Islam.⁷⁰ (Indeed, the Saudi religious elite has remained, since the founding of this dynasty, a symbol of legitimacy for the Saudi rule, and as such, the religious elite serves the political objectives of the Saudi rulers.) The prevailing relationship between the government and Islam in these countries, however, cannot in any way serve as prototypes for any Central Asian country. Central Asian countries must develop their own relationships with Islam, relationships that reflect the political and economic realities that prevail *within* each Central Asian country, or *within* the region. Islam is destined to figure prominently in the politics of these states, and the present

rulers of Muslim Central Asia are well aware of this likelihood. That might be one reason why they are striving so hard to postpone the inevitable.

An Islamic revival is underway throughout the territory of the former Soviet Union, from the Caucasus to the Pamirs. Indeed, one can identify a trend among republican leaders to co-opt Islam as a means of securing legitimacy, in the same manner others pursue national identity. As the strength of the Communist Party began to dissipate, many leaders began to associate themselves publicly with Islam, such as Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan.⁷¹

Despite their profession of Islamic faith, many of Central Asia's leaders have been anything but hospitable toward the different Islamic-oriented political movements in the region. Given the region's proximity to Iran, raising the excuse of "fundamentalism" has given them a convenient means to secure their political end—to maintain power. As the Moscow-based Islamic Renaissance Party began to spread throughout Central Asia, it encountered many obstacles. In Tajikistan, the Islamic Renaissance Party was not allowed to register as a political party until after the aborted August coup of the Soviet Union in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Religious-based parties are still not allowed to register.⁷² Efforts to portray Muslim politicians as ruthless "fundamentalists" are present in almost every state; for example, in Uzbekistan, Muslim followers of the *Muahid* sect were blamed for starting the Ferghana riots of 1989. The highly authoritarian ruling style of President Karimov and his deep fear of a potential repetition of the Tajik-style civil war in his country might be two variables that are driving his continued suppression of Islamic parties in Uzbekistan.⁷³ Similarly, in Kazakhstan, the Islamic movement *Alash* has been harassed and labelled a "fascist" organization, and the former leader of Tajikistan, Nabiyeu, categorized members of the Islamic Renaissance Party as fundamentalist extremists who want to create a new Iran on Tajik soil.⁷⁴

The real threat from the Islamic Renaissance Party, however, lies not with any religious fundamentalism, but rather with its strength as a political movement. As in many other republics of the former Soviet Union, there is a growing desire among many people to purge the government of the old Communist *nomenklatura*. While the Islamic Renaissance Party does profess a desire for all Muslims to live in accordance with the Quran, they also state the

desire to achieve such a goal through constitutional means.⁷⁵ Even in conflict-ravaged Tajikistan, the local Islamic Renaissance Party has continued to express its desire to achieve an Islamic order slowly through legitimate, peaceful means. In an interview with *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Chairman of the Tajik Islamic Renaissance Party Mukhamad-Sharif Khimmatzoda stated:

This is what we want. We realize that 100,00 or 200,000 people attending a rally do not have the right to foist their will on the entire republic. People are not ready yet. We believe the time will come when the children and grandchildren of those who today oppose Islam at the nationwide referendum, will say "yes."⁷⁶

The Islamic question is a multidimensional one. Attempts to portray the Islamic parties as "fundamentalist" or "extremists" are just as erroneous as claims of a pan-Turkic threat to the region. Besides the split between Sunni and Shia Muslims, the Muslim community around the world does not act as a monolithic or unified bloc; why should Central Asia prove to be the exception? Many regional problems in Central Asia aggravate trends toward a splintering rather than a fusing of Islamic forces. The rural-urban divide and the existence of regional loyalties are important factors in this regard. Many of the main parties or factions are centered in urban areas and almost exclusively comprise intellectuals. When 50 to 60 percent of the population is rural, largely uneducated, and living in squalid conditions, it cannot be taken as a given that the urban Muslims speak for the rural believers. The divide between the two also represents the deepest split among Central Asian Muslims: the Muslim intellectual elites with their *jadidist* (reformist) heritage and the rural masses, who view Islam as a populist movement.⁷⁷

In the near future, Islamic parties are likely to emerge among the major opposition parties in almost all Muslim Central Asian states. Whether these parties will play a role in stabilizing or destabilizing these polities depends on two factors:

- *The extent of success of economic development in these states.* If these states were to make effective and steady economic progress, then the purported "necessity" for sustaining authoritarian rule (as presidents of various republics

claim) would disappear. Under such circumstances, Islamic parties are also likely to participate, along with other political groups, in the political process.

- *How Islamic parties are likely to be treated by the ruling elites, regardless of the pace of future economic progress in those countries.* If these parties are suppressed or outlawed, then they will have no choice but to acquire the form of insurgencies. Under such circumstances, their political posture and rhetoric might also be dominated by radical elements. If, on the other hand, the Islamic parties are allowed to remain as part of conventional opposition in these states, then their own style and rhetoric is likely to remain moderate.

SECURITY

The most pressing security issue for the new states of the CIS is that of ethnic relations within their republics. The war in Georgia and the ongoing war in the Caucasus between Azeris and Armenians offer stark evidence of the dangers that exist in the post-Soviet world. The republics in Central Asia have so far been spared any major outbreaks of ethnic violence or widespread interrepublican violence, although in the past few years there have been isolated attacks, such as in Osh or the Ferghana Valley riots. So why should ethnic tensions be a source of concern for Central Asia?

In only a few Central Asian republics does the titular nationality have a majority. Even these republics have a sizable group of minorities living within their border, and many of these minority groups are geographically concentrated. In Kazakhstan, for example, most of the Russian minority lives in the northern areas, where Kazakhstan's industrial base lies. For the three republics sharing the fertile Ferghana Valley, the Soviet-drawn borders have encompassed sizable groups of minorities from the surrounding republics. Central Asia thus represents a quilt of nationalities.

The danger of ethnic conflict is not based on long-standing hostilities, such as in the former Yugoslavia. Before the Soviets entered Central Asia, many of these people did not even identify with a national group; rather, they differentiated among themselves through their lifestyle—settled or nomadic. In the context of social upheaval, however, the prospect of using the “new nationalism” as

a source of legitimacy brings with it many risks. Currently there exists a movement to establish an identity separate from the Soviet period, removing traces of Russian domination. The Tajik party Rastokhez, for example, bases its program on a "renaissance of national language, culture and the better traditions and customs." The attempts to legislate issues of national identity, however, are fraught with conflict, especially in the multiethnic realities of the Central Asian states. For example, attempts to create a "Slavic University" in Bishkek were met with widespread protest by many Kyrgyz nationalists.⁷⁸

Attempts to solidify national identity on religious or linguistic lines have also led to a dramatic emigration of many Russians or other groups. Unfortunately for the new states, these groups often possess the vital technical skills needed to run the factories and energy plants, thus their exodus could lead to a short-term worsening of the economic situation. The Tajik conflict has already spurred a massive emigration of Russian-speaking inhabitants. Of the 400,000 Russian speakers living in Tajikistan before the civil war, not more than 70,000 remain there today.⁷⁹ Perhaps in efforts to stave off such an exodus and calm fears among minority groups, the states of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan originally declined membership in the Islamic Conference Organization and moved to restrict Islamic movements from the political scene in their states.⁸⁰ Such moves, naturally, run the risk of alienating "national" support for such leaders. In the ongoing civil war in Tajikistan, we can see the potential for conflict, either interregional or interethnic.

When the new government was formed after Nabyev's removal from power, many of the residents of the Leninabad oblast threatened to secede to Uzbekistan, a valid threat because the oblast is heavily populated by Uzbeks living in Tajikistan. In the fighting in Dushanbe, many of the attacking soldiers claimed they were Uzbeks, and many of the vehicles used in the assault on the capital had Uzbek license plates.⁸¹ By the summer of 1993, the continuing civil war was changing the political landscape of Tajikistan. There was a sizable presence of Russian forces, who were responsible for both internal and external security. Russia was regularly using the excuse of protecting the interests of Russian minorities in Tajikistan, not only to continue its intervention in the internal affairs of that country, but also to push the rubber-stamp Tajik legislature to pass a dual citizenship law. The passage of such a law

was to be used to legitimize future intervention, at a time when the Russian troops would no longer be stationed in Tajikistan.

The Uzbek troops and air force were reportedly also present in Tajikistan, making sure that the Russian presence had the semblance of a CIS-wide approval. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, fearing a domino effect of this civil war on their own polities, also gave their approval to the presence of Russian and Uzbek forces in Tajikistan. However, both these governments remained wary of the future implications of the growing activism of Russia and Uzbekistan for their own sovereignties.

Another aspect of the fighting in Tajikistan is the creation of large groups of homeless refugees now moving around the region. Refugees have been fleeing the conflict and violence into the surrounding states, including Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan. The number of refugees crossing into Afghanistan has been particularly high because of its proximity to the southern regions of Tajikistan, regions involved with the opposition forces. During the height of the Communist reconquest of Dushanbe, an estimated 100,000 refugees crossed into Afghanistan.⁸² Perhaps concerned for Kyrgyz people living in Tajikistan, Vice-President of Kyrgyzstan Felix Kulov called for the introduction of peacekeeping troops from his republic into the fracas in Tajikistan.⁸³

The collapse of the Soviet Union has also raised the specter of regional border conflicts, not only between the new states but also over disputed territory with China. The Chinese claim territory currently held by the states of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, having in fact over 12 different disputes with the latter state.⁸⁴ Given the presence of nuclear weapons both in Russia and, for now, in Kazakhstan, it is unlikely that China will act on these claims. Of greater interest might be the destabilizing factor within China resulting from the independence of the Central Asia states. Many of these peoples—Kazakhs, Uighurs, Kyrgyz—have relatives across the border in China. How these Turkic groups will react to changes in the region is a question that will be answered only over the next decade or so. Kazakhstan has authorized citizenship to any Kazakh in the world wishing to return to the homeland. Moscow and Beijing long tried to instigate rebellion in each other's Turkic hinterlands, and now that Soviet Central Asia has gained its independence, Beijing finds itself in an uncomfortable position.

The final element, which could lead to conflict in the region, is the densely populated Ferghana Valley. Not only is the valley a mixture of ethnic groups and languages, it is also the agricultural heart of the region, with the greatest concentration of population. As clean water becomes scarce and competition for agricultural resources increases, this tension could rapidly spread in an area already marred by ethnic violence. Another important element has also entered the picture: the Uzbek discovery of oil near Namangan, which happens to lie in the Ferghana Valley. As the new states seek to rebuild, modernize, and diversify their economies, foreign capital will prove to be extremely important.

CONTROL OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The issue of nuclear weapons in the CIS is a source of considerable concern in the West because, aside from Russia, the other republics where nuclear weapons are stationed are Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. The first two have shown their reluctance to give up these weapons. Ukraine was consistently opposed to this transfer without obtaining certain guarantees and payoffs from the West; Kazakhstan later adopted a similar policy. It was apparent that the variable that was to play an important role in determining whether they would give up their nuclear weapons was the dynamics of domestic politics in these countries, especially true in the case of Ukraine.⁸⁵ In the West, however, this was largely viewed as a proliferation issue. The Western countries regarded possession of nuclear weapons by Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus as inherently destabilizing, and because these states were viewed as “both unstable and not sufficiently ‘mature’ to deal with the command and control of nuclear weapons on their territory,” Western thinking was (and continues to be) that they might, wittingly or unwittingly, become sources of leaking of these weapons to other states.⁸⁶

In the case of Kazakhstan, there was that perennial Western fear of the emergence of an “Islamic bomb.” That country had based at Derzhavinsk and Zhangiz-Tobe 104 SS-18 intercontinental ballistic missiles, the largest missiles in the inventory of the former Soviet Union. Kazakhstan also contains the Baikonur-Tyuratam space launch facility, the mainstay of the Soviet space program, and Sary-Shagan, a site for an anti-ballistic missile air defense system.⁸⁷

Kazakhstan's own nuclear policy was greatly shaped by the attitude of Ukraine on this issue, even though the former sought

closer economic and security ties with Russia because of its binational character—about 40 percent of its population are native Kazakhs and the other 40 percent are Russian. In the case of Ukraine, its reluctance to give up nuclear weapons is largely related to its fear of the Russian imperialism that enslaved that country for centuries; as Lepingwell notes:

The Ukrainians argue that they are being asked to disarm even though the Russian parliament continues to raise questions concerning the Crimea's status as part of Ukraine. To eliminate nuclear weapons on Ukrainian territory under such circumstances will require a combination of strong incentives and reassurances about Ukraine's territorial integrity.⁸⁸

A number of other aspects of Ukraine's position on nuclear weapons influenced Kazakhstan.⁸⁹ Ukraine stated that its own willingness to ratify START I was contingent upon the fulfillment of certain conditions. First, Kiev sought guarantees from the leading Western nuclear states that Russian nuclear weapons, and especially those transferred from Ukraine, would not be directed against it. Second, Ukraine linked the ratification of SALT I to the "need for economic assistance [from the West] to dismantle and destroy its nuclear weapons." Third, Ukraine wanted "compensation for the nuclear material contained in the dismantled warheads."

Another variable that was not well publicized but played a critical role for both Ukraine and Kazakhstan, was that the ownership of these weapons was a source of national prestige. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, it seems that the West has paid attention to countries like Ukraine or Kazakhstan largely (if not solely) on the issue of nuclear weapons. These two countries understood this reality and were keen on exploiting it to their advantage.

Originally, Kazakhstan refused to make a firm commitment to acquire a nonnuclear status by transferring its nuclear weapons to Russia. In January 1992, President Nazerbaev agreed to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a nonnuclear state. This was his gesture to Washington and other Western states that his country would not be the source of the transfer of nuclear weapons to a Muslim country of the Middle East. Kazakhstan was to transfer

its weapons to Russia in early 1992. By April of that year, however, Nazerbaev had another change of heart, when his country announced that it would retain nuclear weapons on its territory. In so doing, Kazakhstan noted its security concerns emanating from the presence of nuclear weapons in two of its important neighbors, Russia and the People's Republic of China. Alma Ata also attributed its change of policy to the growing signs of imperial tendencies in Russia. At the same time, in order to soothe Western concerns, Kazakhstan announced its willingness to sign the NPT as a nuclear state.

This apparent change on the part of Kazakhstan was not a real change if one closely examines the controversy. Alma Ata not only ratified the "Lisbon protocol" to the START I treaty but the treaty itself, in which the former USSR agreed to eliminate half of the SS-9s and SS-18s that were much feared by the United States. The START II treaty provided for the destruction of SS-18s and eliminated the loophole (contained in START I) whereby the former USSR could transfer these missiles to any other state. From Kazakhstan's perspective, this provision was not acceptable since it would foreclose any opportunity for it to acquire Russian nuclear missiles in the future.⁹⁰ Nazerbaev's flip-flop on the issue of nuclear weapons was, as previously noted, closely tied to the domestic politics of his country. After he signed the Lisbon protocol, "one of the Khazak opposition parties warned that it would call for the resignation of the government if the parliament ratified the nonproliferation treaty."⁹¹

In November 1994, the Ukrainian Parliament agreed to join the NPT. This "strategic deal" struck in January 1994 between President Clinton, Russian President Yeltsin, and Ukraine's then-President Krevchuck was regarded as directly responsible for the Ukrainian decision of November 16. This deal linked the U.S.-Russian nonproliferation objectives to the security and economic concerns of Ukraine. The most important aspect of Ukraine's decision for this study was that it set an excellent precedent for the Kazakh leadership, especially the part of the strategic deal that linked Ukrainian willingness to transfer nuclear weapons to Russia to the security assurance furnished by the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia. Equally important were provisions of this agreement in which the United States agreed to furnish economic assistance to Kiev. Undoubtedly emulating the Ukrainian example,

Kazakhstan, as a precondition for transferring its nuclear weapons to Moscow, was expected to insist on Russia's "respect" for "the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders" of Kazakhstan; the application of the "CSCE Final Act, to refrain from economic coercion designed to subordinate to their own interest [i.e., the interests of Russia and the United States] the exercise by" Kazakhstan "of the rights inherent in its sovereignty and thus to secure advantage of any kind;" the promise of U.N. Security Council action to furnish assistance to Kazakhstan as a nonnuclear weapon state, if it were to face an act of aggression or a threat of aggression in which nuclear weapons were used; and economic assistance from Washington and the Western European countries.⁹²

As it turned out, Kazakhstan got a similar deal from Washington for agreeing to transfer the 104 long-range SS-18 missiles with 10 atomic warheads to Moscow. The United States appropriated \$91 million for that country in 1993; that amount was expected to go up to \$311 million for 1995. Some of the money was to be used for dismantling the warheads. What Kazakhstan did not get from Washington or Moscow was explicit guarantees respecting its borders and provisions of security that were given to Ukraine. After the discovery of 25 million tons of oil and gas reserves in Kazakhstan, Washington was beginning to perceive that country as "a valuable strategic ally." However, the implications of such an American perception for Alma Alta remained unclear, given its proximity to Russia, and the presence of a sizable number of Russians within its borders.

A major breakthrough on the nuclear issue involving Kazakhstan came when that country agreed to transfer more than half a ton of bomb-grade uranium to the United States. This action might turn out to be the beginning of a symbiotic relationship between Washington and Alma Alta. The United States was extremely concerned about the possible acquisition of weapon-grade uranium by Iran, Iraq, or North Korea. Kazakhstan, taking advantage of the American concern, worked out an agreement for the transfer and gained that country tens of millions of dollars. More to the point, by agreeing to transfer that uranium, Kazakhstan expected a variety of economic and trade agreements from the United States and the West.⁹³

In summary, the signing of the NPT by Ukraine and Kazakhstan, the strategic deal among the United States, Russia, the

United Kingdom, and Ukraine, and the transfer of weapon-grade uranium from Kazakhstan to the United States, along with the related economic packages offered by Washington to Alma Alta and Kiev, have greatly lessened the specter of nuclear proliferation in that region. However, the continued economic problems, the attendant political uncertainties, and the availability of a large pool of unemployed and underemployed nuclear scientists in the former Soviet states warrant continued vigilance on the part of all those who do not wish to see the emergence of new nuclear states in or around Central Asia.

3.

MODALITIES OF THE NEW GREAT GAME

CENTRAL ASIA AS AN EXTENSION OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Since the dismantlement of the Soviet Union, a number of Middle Eastern actors have escalated their activities in Central Asia. This activism may be viewed from two perspectives. On a more mundane and nonstrategic level it may be seen as an endeavor on the part of a number of Middle Eastern actors—such as Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan—to establish diplomatic ties and look for trade opportunities. Seen as such, the activities of these countries appear to be quite benign. But from a strategic perspective, an entirely different picture of their activism emerges.

Since Iran's Islamic revolution of 1978-1979, Saudi Arabia and Iran have initiated a strategic competition for enhanced influence in, or even domination of, the Persian Gulf and the contiguous areas. As the military might of Iran was used up by the fury of the Islamic revolution, Saudi Arabia saw an opening that it could not help but exploit for its own advantage. It responded to Iranian threats to regional stability by creating the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), an organization that turned out to be a vehicle for establishing Saudi military dominance of the Arabian Peninsula. While Iran was busy fighting a protracted war with Iraq between 1980 and 1988, Saudi Arabia was building its own military infrastructure.

The Nixon administration's policy of the 1970s of relying on a regional actor to promote or safeguard U.S. interests has never been abandoned by Washington. The focus was on Iran until the Islamic revolution. Since 1980, this focus has shifted to Saudi Arabia. Washington's *carte blanche*—that the Nixon administration had offered to the Shah of Iran to purchase American weaponry after 1970—was now extended to the Saudi monarchy. The presence of

large oil reserves made Saudi Arabia vital to the West, and by the 1970s, thanks to OPEC's maneuvering of oil prices, the Gulf states acquired enormous financial capabilities and considerable political clout.

The regional politics of the Persian Gulf also worked in favor of the Saudis after 1980. The Islamic revolution of Iran and threats of its potential exportability to the neighboring states necessitated strengthening of the Saudi security apparatus. The Iran-Iraq war was perceived by the United States and the peninsular Arab countries (except Yemen) as a serious enough reason to concentrate on strengthening the military capability of the Gulf sheikhdoms. The Persian Gulf War of 1991 both proved and disproved these concerns. It proved the concern of the Arab states in the sense that this war occurred within less than 3 years of the cessation of the Iran-Iraq war. It disproved the capabilities of the GCC, because when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, that organization ceased to exist. But for Riyadh and Washington, this development did not serve as an obstacle in the way of continued development of Saudi military power.

For Iran, the growing Saudi military capabilities are a source of friction and concern. Given the small population of Saudi Arabia, and considering the fact that it will be a long time before Saudi forces will be able to develop an effective use of American weaponry, Iran does not perceive that kingdom as a real military challenge to its own ambitions to dominate the Gulf and its contiguous areas. These perceptions notwithstanding, Iran cannot afford to sit on its laurels. After all, it fought a bloody war with Iraq in which it was attacked by chemical weapons, and its cities absorbed barrages of missiles from Iraq. Iran is not about to take a chance and not rebuild its own military power, so the arms race between Tehran and Riyadh is on—but this is only a side show. The real game is about which country will emerge as a dominant actor. (For now, Iraq is out of the picture as a military threat.) The emergence of Central Asian Muslim states only widens the geographic area of strategic competition between these two Persian Gulf nations.

The Iranian and Saudi presence in Central Asia is, *inter alia*, also aimed at enhancing their political influence. The Islamic variable remains as one more instrument to exercise this influence. These two states have different stakes in the region, and both have

certain advantages they can overlay, but each encounters certain disadvantages the other party may be able to exploit.

Iran and Central Asia

Contiguous to two Central Asian republics—Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan—and closer to the other republics than Saudi Arabia, Iran has high stakes in the region. It can look actively for a variety of trade agreements with these republics and has made quite a bit of progress in this regard. It also has a powerful cultural affinity with Azerbaijan, because a substantial portion of the population in that country is of the Shiite faith. Similarly, the ethnic and linguistic commonality between Iran and Tajikistan can also become a powerful basis for cooperation, as the Tajiks are culturally Iranian rather than Turkic and speak an eastern dialect of Farsi (Persian).⁹⁴ To the extent that Iran can continue to escalate the pace of its diplomatic and trade activities, its closeness to Muslim Central Asia is advantageous. However, given the nature of irredentist tendencies on the part of Azerbaijan, this propinquity could become disadvantageous. Similarly, a potential escalation of political instability in Turkmenistan may also turn out to be a source of grave concern for Iran, as the continuation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict already has.

Aside from the geographic proximity, the second advantage that Iran enjoys in Central Asia is its experiment with an Islamic government. It is true that a number of heads of Central Asian states have expressed their antipathy to the Iranian model, but one should not regard this reality to be permanent. Most heads of these countries are former Communists and as such they might feel more comfortable with secularism. What is significant is the popular response to the notion of Islamic government in the future. In the aftermath of the breakup of the former Soviet Union, the Muslim Central Asian peoples are in the process of discovering two realities that had eluded them for a long time: their independence, and their ability to practice Islam without any fear of repression from the state. This notion of independence also means that a number of political parties, especially the Islamist parties, are also likely to gain bases of operation in those politics. This emerging political pluralism will enable them to look at Islam, along with other systems, as a political arrangement. At that time, the utility of the Iranian model is also likely to be examined. This is where the

Shiite nature of the Iranian model might turn out to be to its disadvantage, but such a disadvantage may not affect the very principle of incorporation of Islamic government. At that point, the utility of the Saudi or the Pakistani model may also be examined.⁹⁵

The disadvantages faced by Iran in Central Asia are economic and religious. As a country whose economy has experienced devastations stemming from the revolutionary turmoil since 1978, and from the war against Iraq between 1980 and 1988, Iran's economic capabilities are quite limited. Even though a substantial portion of its revenues (90 percent or so) come from oil, Iran has been operating in an environment of depressed oil prices since the early 1980s. While its oil income is down, its expenditures have skyrocketed. It is spending enormous amounts of money rebuilding its economy. In addition, Iran has also adopted an ambitious program of military buildup. Given these major outlets for huge capital expenditures, Tehran can offer few monetary enticements for the Central Asian states, whose economies are badly in need of capital investments. What Iran can do—and it has been active along these lines—is to supply in-kind assistance, such as establishing air and railway linkages, signing joint exploration and production ventures, etc.⁹⁶ It cannot, however, offer these countries generous cash subsidies to start a number of economic projects.

The religious variable may also turn out to be a disadvantage for Iran in Central Asia. As a Shiite Muslim state, it cannot become an effective force in that area, where, save for Azerbaijan, the predominant portion of the Muslim population belongs to the Sunni sect. Lest one overstate this point, it is important to note that Iran has the potential to overcome this disadvantage by remaining a proponent of an Islamic government. The fact that Iran has implemented such a system in the aftermath of a revolutionary change may be viewed as a source of illustration and inspiration for the Central Asian states, whose independence became a reality only as a result of another revolutionary change, the dismantlement of the Soviet Union.

Despite reports of Iranian involvement in the growing violent activism of the Islamist forces in North Africa, Tehran has maintained the scope of its activities in the Central Asian countries along the conventional lines of seeking economic and trade ventures. In this regard, the government of President Ali Hashemi Rafsanjani scored a major victory when Azerbaijan gave Iran a \$7.4

billion share (or 20 percent of the total) of its international oil consortium. Iran also signed an agreement with Turkmenistan to lay pipelines to carry Turkmeni gas to Europe through Iran. Kazakhstan and Iran signed an agreement for the transfer of 2 million tons of crude oil from Kazakhstan through the Caspian Sea to Iran. Tehran worked out a variety of agreements with a number of Central Asian countries, including weekly flights to Iran, a number of border crossings, and building bridges and repairing roads.⁹⁷

As an Islamic republic, Iran continues to emphasize the pan-Islamic aspects of its foreign policy through Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. It is worth emphasizing that the Iranian focus on pan-Islamism is a development on which a number of Arab governments—e.g., Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco—are keeping a wary eye. But at the popular level, this pan-Islamism has the potential to attract a considerable amount of sympathy, indeed even euphoria, in almost all Muslim countries. Similarly, at the popular level, pan-Islamism in Central Asia is bound to gather ample sympathy and momentum as the dust from the breakup of the former Soviet Union settles within the next few years.

Saudi Arabia and Central Asia

Saudi Arabia has a considerable advantage over Iran in Central Asia, especially in economics and religion. As the largest producer of oil, it can afford to make loans and grants to a number of these countries, and the Saudis have already invested \$4 billion in that area. Riyadh has been interested, along with Iran and Turkey, in investing in the oil industry in Turkmenistan, which has also received \$10 billion in credit from Saudi Arabia.⁹⁸

There is no doubt that Saudi Arabia has been concerned about the escalated pace of Iranian activism in Central Asia. For instance, the diplomatic trip of Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal Al-Saud during February 1992 to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan was clearly aimed at not only underscoring a high degree of Saudi interest in the region but also at expressing its anxiety over the formulation of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Obviously, the Saudis did not want to be left out. Riyadh has also been channeling large sums of

money through joint ventures in a number of Central Asian countries. The Al-Baraka-Kazakhstan Bank is one such example.

As the birthplace of Islam, Saudi Arabia holds a special place in the hearts of the Muslims of Central Asia; since a majority of Central Asian Muslims are of the Sunni faith, Saudi Arabia has a tremendous advantage in offering Islamic education to the Central Asian Muslims. The Saudi monarchy has been quite active in furnishing free Hadj to pilgrims from different Central Asian countries, in supplying millions of copies of the Quran, and in funding thousands of new religious schools and mosques. On these matters, Tehran has no choice but to take a second place.⁹⁹ The Saudi Government invited Central Asian states to attend the Jeddah-based Islamic Conference Organization (ICO) which led to full membership in the organization for Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Kazakhstan has attended as an observer. Members are entitled to obtain funds from the Islamic Development Bank.

Besides its distance from Central Asia, Riyadh's other major drawback is that Saudi Islam is conservative. It is very much oriented toward stability and status quo, while Iranian Islam is highly politicized, proactive, and anti-status quo. More important, Iranian Islam, or at least its public rhetoric, is aimed at creating a new balance of power in the region, from the Persian Gulf to Central Asia. It has unsuccessfully tried to create a new balance of power in the Persian Gulf, where the predilections of oil sheikhdoms have been overwhelmingly conservative, pro-Western, and for maintenance of the status quo. The politics of Central Asia, because political instability has been the *sine qua non* of their history, may be receptive to suggestions for the creation of new power centers (or a new balance of power), especially in the name of Islam. In this sense, Iran may have a considerable advantage over Saudi Arabia. This aspect of the new great game might be only in its initial phase.

RUSSIA, AMERICA, AND THE GREAT GAME

In the post-Soviet era, as leaders and the foreign policy elites in Moscow examine the realities of power in the international arena, the significance of the "near abroad" region becomes abundantly clear to them.

The former Eastern European satellite states are scrambling to become a part of Western economic and security systems. Western Europe and the United States have maintained their strong strategic ties emanating from their membership in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and NATO. In fact, the latter has become so important that it has had to find a new mechanism—"partnership for peace" (PFP)—to accommodate the growing desire of the former Warsaw Pact nations to join. Even Russia came to the conclusion that it cannot afford to be left behind and decided to become one of the signatories of the PFP.¹⁰⁰ For their security concerns, these countries continue to assign a great deal of importance to Washington. Even the Middle East has become a region where American prestige—stemming from the 1991 Gulf War—remains high. The snail-paced progress in the Palestinian-Israeli peace has taken the steam out of one of the most contentious issues of the Middle East. Consequently, the conventional hardline states—Syria, Iraq, and Libya—lost their erstwhile significance as the "spoilers" of a potential peace process. The demise of the Soviet Union has also eliminated the major source of military support and weapons supply for them; Iraq has been eliminated as a major military actor as a result of its crushing defeat in the Gulf War of 1991.

About the only region that is left in which Russia can build its strategic significance as a great power is its immediate neighborhood, the near abroad. The foreign policy elites in Moscow know full well that:

- The security of their country is inextricably linked with political developments in the near abroad
- In order to emerge as a great power, Russia must concentrate on building close ties with these states
- Moscow must focus on sustaining the extant economic ties with the former members of the USSR and creating new ones (of course, it is no secret that an important objective underlying these economic relationships is to sustain the dependency of these countries on Russia)
- Russia must insist that the former Soviet states should not only retain but strengthen security arrangements with Moscow. It is also well-known that the main purpose of these arrangements is to make sure that these states do not develop security relations with Muslim states of the Middle East, or

with other states of the far abroad.¹⁰¹ Appendix 2 shows an overview of the thinking of the Russian foreign policy elites regarding the dynamics of their country's strategic ties with its neighbors.

Since the emergence of Russia as heir to the Soviet Union, its own perspectives regarding the near abroad have gone through two phases. During the first year of the creation of the CIS, Russia was too busy with its domestic turbulence emanating from the disappearance of the Soviet Union and too preoccupied with obtaining massive economic assistance from the West to focus on Muslim Central Asia. Besides, it was quite natural to think that any stable patterns of foreign policy were going to take some time before they gelled. It was expected before too long that Russia was bound to act as a great power.¹⁰² Since early 1993, there has been a dramatic turnabout in Russia's relations with its neighboring states. Elaborating on this shift in Russia's foreign policy, Porter and Saivetz write that Russia "has employed a wide range of political, military, and economic pressures and inducements to reassert its influence throughout the Near Abroad." They note further that Russia's activities in this area are "rapidly becoming fulcrums of political leverage throughout the former Union."¹⁰³

There is a clear nostalgia in Russia about the former Soviet empire and about the status of that country as a superpower. Not even an Atlanticist is expected to be totally free from moments of remorse about the loss of international status for Russia in the post-Soviet days. Even if the Atlanticists were to raise themselves and truly pursue the pro-Western, democratic, and free market orientations, they would remain vulnerable to criticisms from Eurasianist and other groups that are advocating a neo-imperialistic policy for Russia.¹⁰⁴

Even if Russia's economic status improves, the ultranationalist groups are not likely to wither away or become irrelevant in the foreseeable future and are likely to remain politically active and potent for a number of reasons:

- The strategic environment of the Muslim Central Asian countries is likely to remain vulnerable to the manipulation of Russia. The events of the recent past in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan have already resulted in Russia's intervention. It should be noted that Azerbaijan and Georgia were "avant-garde states" in their endeavors "to exit Moscow's sphere of

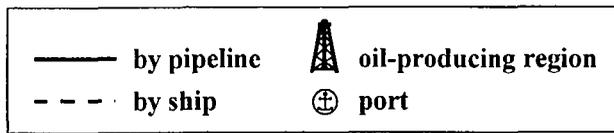
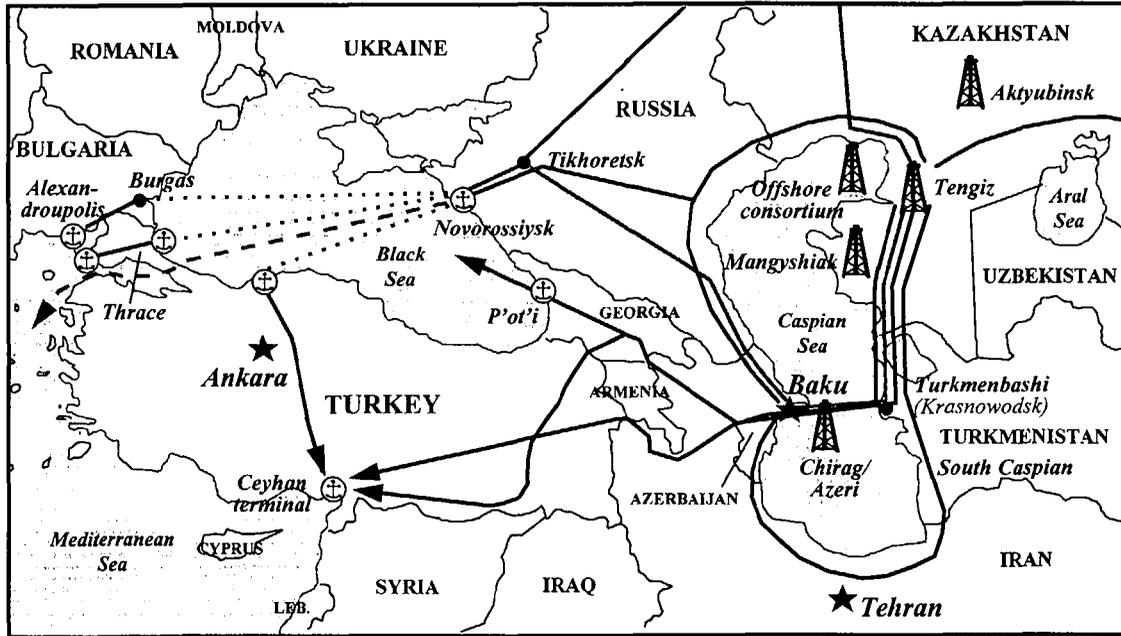
influence,” thus they became “the prime targets of a Russian 'object lesson' designed to teach other states how to stay in line.”¹⁰⁵ The price extracted from these countries was quite steep, and they were given little choice but to accept Russia's demand to join the CIS. In the case of Georgia, President Eduard Shevardnadze was also forced to sign a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, accept stationing of Russian troops in Georgia, and grant the use of three bases in his country. In return, Russia saved Shevardnadze's government from being defeated by the forces of the former dictator of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

- In the coming years, the growing nationalism in Muslim Central Asian countries (with a varying percentage of Russian population, whose total number for that region is around 25 million) is likely to result in an increased migration of Russians to mother Russia. This reality, along with continued concern in Moscow about the plight of Russians still residing in the Central Asian countries, is going to serve as a catalyst for jingoistic and ultranationalistic rhetoric of the Eurasianist and neo-imperialist groups for assertive and imperialistic overtures of Russia toward its neighbors. This issue is likely to affect Kazakhstan in a most significant way, as Russians are reported to be between 38 and 40 percent of its population.
- The growing influence of Islam is a variable that has always created acute paranoia among the Russian political elites. On this issue there appears to be a congruity of interests between Moscow and the present rulers of all Muslim countries of Central Asia. The authoritarian type of governments in all of these countries, except for Kyrgyzstan, does not allow for political dissent, especially when it comes from the Islamic groups. In its dealings with Islamic groups, even the record of President Akaev's government is not much different. Any challenge from these groups will be dubbed a challenge from “Islamic fundamentalism,” a phrase well understood by Moscow. In fact, the Russian intervention in Tajikistan which was endorsed by all the Muslim countries of Central Asia except Turkmenistan, was done under the pretext of uprooting the “fundamentalist” forces.
- Russia will be concerned about the growing foreign policy activism from Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan. In the case of Iran

and Pakistan, the concern is also related to the previously mentioned paranoia about Islam. In the case of Turkey, the Russian concern will be about the potential growth of pan-Turkism, which is also one of the historical Russian worries.

Resurgent Russian nationalism has vividly manifested itself in the oil, gas, and pipeline issues involving Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. As table 1 shows, these three countries have substantial gas and petroleum reserves. Oil industry analysts believe that, together with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan could form the world's third largest oil producing region, after Siberia and the Gulf. Rudyard Kipling is reported to have observed once that the fate of the great game in Central Asia would be won by the country that succeeded in building the largest network of railroads. In the contemporary version of this great game, oil and gas pipelines appear to have replaced the railway network in strategic significance. The issue of pipelines involving the states of the former Soviet Union, Turkey, and Iran has been marred by controversies over its routing, which, in turn, promises to determine the future modalities of the New Great Game. The first controversy, commonly referred to as the Caspian Sea development issue, involves the pipeline routes to carry oil from Azerbaijan to the West. The second one concerns pipelines to carry oil from the Tengiz fields of Kazakhstan to the West. The pipeline routes to carry gas from Turkmenistan to the West constitute the third issue of controversy (figure 5).

Russia, the United States, Turkey, and Iran are promoting their respective agendas related to the pipeline routes. For Russia, the issues of energy and pipelines are inextricably linked to its determination to keep the economies of the Central Asian nations and Azerbaijan dependent on its own. In this sense, Moscow views the endeavors of these countries to establish joint ventures with Western entrepreneurs as a clear challenge, if not an outright threat, to its dominant position in that region. Consequently, Russia has used subtle threats and blatant policy positions to dissuade Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan from going too far in the pursuit of economic independence.



*prepared by Gail Smith
AFSC 10-95*

FIGURE 5. Projected Russian, Turkish, and Iranian routes for transporting oil and gas from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan

TABLE 1: Oil and gas reserves and production in the CIS (1991 data)

	<u>Proved Reserves*</u>	<u>Probable Reserve Additions*</u>
Azerbaijan	1.2	4
Kazakhstan	3.3	12
Turkmenistan	1.4	3
Uzbekistan	0.3	2
Kyrgyzstan	0.3	1
Tajikistan	0.3	1
TOTALS	6.8	23
Russia	50.0	99

* Billions of barrels

NATURAL GAS STATUS

	<u>Est. Proved Reserves*</u>	<u>Probable Reserve Additions*</u>
Azerbaijan	19	19
Kazakhstan	15	35
Turkmenistan	189	175
Uzbekistan	88	80
Kyrgyzstan	1	2
Tajikistan	1	2
TOTALS	313	313
Russia	1,437	1,269

* Trillion cubic feet

Source: Extracted from Joseph P. Riva, Jr., *Petroleum in the Muslim Republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States: More Oil for OPEC?* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, September 1, 1992), CRS 6.

The Caspian Sea Pipeline is an issue on which the new great game remains in its most complicated form. Countries bordering the Caspian Sea—Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan—could not independently decide on the exploitation of their part of the shelf because of several reasons. First, the sea's boundaries and navigational rights had not been defined. Second, the sea constituted one ecosystem and required one international

organization to decide on its exploitation.¹⁰⁶ Needless to say, this issue alone was highly controversial. Third, the assets used by the former Soviet states were built mainly by Russia during the days of the USSR. This reality was used by Moscow to claim a veto power over any oil and pipeline deals that either excluded Russia or were not acceptable to it.

The Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC), an 11-member consortium (British Petroleum and Ramco of the United Kingdom; Amoco, Unocal, McDermott, and Pennzoil of United States; Statoil of Norway; Turkish Petroleum; Russia's largest oil company, Lukoil; Delta, a private Saudi company; and the Azeri company, Socar, which has a 20 percent interest), is involved in developing three Azeri oil fields in phases. In the early phase, lasting through 1997, the production was to reach 80,000 barrels per day. The peak output of these fields was expected to reach about 700,000 bbls/day.¹⁰⁷

The competition to win contracts to transport oil exports from the Caspian Sea developed into a contest that pitted Moscow against Washington. Russia was pressing for what may be termed the northern pipeline option, a route that was to take the Azeri oil through neighboring Chechnya to the main Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. The Azeri crude would then be transferred to tankers, which would pass through the Bosphorus en route to the Mediterranean refineries. As an incentive to the AIOC, Moscow offered tariffs at least 20 percent lower than the ones offered by Georgia, and this discount offer was to be raised if the oil consortium were to use the Russian pipelines to export at least part of its crude during the later phase of production.

Turkey, on the other hand, promoted a proposal to pipe oil extracted during the early phase of production to the Georgian port of Supsa. From there, it would be taken to northern Turkish ports and sent by rail to markets in Central Anatolia. Washington supported this routing as a way of reducing the region's dependence on Russia and also to exclude potential Iranian participation in the Azeri consortium. In fact, U.S.-Turkish pressure led to the rescinding of an Azeri offer to give Iran 5 percent out of the Azeris' own 20 percent share of the consortium.¹⁰⁸ The contest between Russia and Turkey over their respective pipeline options was so intense that at one point the Turkish Prime Minister, Mrs. Tansik Ciller, threatened that "not a drop of oil will pass through the

Bosphorus if Turkey loses the contest to attract the early oil production from the Azeri oil project."¹⁰⁹

The AIOC finally came up with a compromise whereby 5 million tons per year of early oil would be split between a Russian pipeline and the Turkish-sponsored route that runs through Georgia. As a result of this compromise, Turkey was willing to allow a 2.5 million tons of oil destined for Russia to pass through the Bosphorus. This compromise was characterized as "a major victory for the Turkish-U.S. diplomacy."¹¹⁰

Russian high-handedness on the energy issue was apparent when Moscow coerced Azerbaijan into granting its Lukeoil Company a 10 percent stake in the Azeri consortium.¹¹¹ The most significant aspect of this announcement was that not only was it linked to the Russian mediation on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but Moscow was explicit in arguing that the development of the Caspian Sea oil resources must be based on the participation of *all* Caspian countries. Regarding the Russian attempts to link the oil issue with the Karabakh conflict, Azerbaijan sent an unmistakable signal by seeking and winning the support of Washington, Paris, London, and Ankara for the presence of peacekeeping forces from the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe over the Russian peacekeeping forces within its borders.

Russia also put pressure on Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to agree to swap their debts for equity in those republics' oil and gas firms. Kazakhstan's vast Tengiz oil field could be producing 700,000 million barrels per day at its peak in 2010. Moscow blocked the exports of Kazakh oil starting in May 1994, thus depriving that country of hard currency and Western contacts. By August of that year, Kazakhstan relented by granting the Russian oil company Rosneft 1 million tons of oil as transit fees. At the same time, Alma Alta also kept intact its Western option by signing an agreement with Chevron to develop the Tengiz oil field, while another contract was signed with Bechtel of the United States to build a pipeline from Tengiz to Novorossiysk, linking with the existing facility from Baku, Azerbaijan, to Grozny, Russia.

Turkmenistan was handled in a similar high-handed fashion by Moscow. Russia invited itself to the oil and gas consortium of Turkmenistan and participated in negotiations with Iran and Turkey for a pipeline deal to transport oil and gas to Europe. In addition, Russia purchased gas from Turkmenistan at a low price and resold

it to Turkey with a markup of 300 percent. In an attempt to maintain other energy trade options, Turkmenistan signed a cooperation agreement with Iran to lay a pipeline to carry Turkman gas to Europe through Iran. Yet another agreement was signed between Iran and Kazakhstan for the transfer of 2 million tons of crude oil from Kazakhstan through the Caspian Sea to Iran. The two countries were also discussing a potential oil pipeline deal.

Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan have encountered a tremendous disadvantage emanating from their economic backwardness and dependency on Moscow. More important, they also suffered because Washington was pressing its own agenda, especially on Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, of excluding Iran from the gas and oil deals.

What are America's interests in countries that were once a part of the former Soviet Union? Aside from helping Moscow make steady progress toward democracy and toward creating a free market economy, the foremost American concern is to create political conditions for the transfer of nuclear weapons from Ukraine, Belarus, and Khazakshtan to Russia. Of these, the transfer of nuclear weapons from Belarus is complete. As previously noted, with the signing of the NPT by both Ukraine and Kazakhstan, with the strategic deal involving the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine, and with the transfer of the weapon-grade uranium from Kazakhstan to the United States, this issue has largely been defused, at least for the time being.

The third American interest in the areas surrounding Russia and its neighbors is regional stability. On the surface, this is a reasonable concern, but what is problematic is that America's preoccupation with regional stability enables it to regard Russia as the primary (if not the sole) legitimate actor to determine the modality of this stability. Moreover, Washington does not want to question the tactics Moscow uses to bring it about. What is even more disconcerting is that Washington appears oblivious to the fact that, in its zeal to bring about regional stability in some of the former states of the Soviet Union, Moscow appears to be creating conditions that would end their status as independent countries. Describing Russia's perspective on the freedom of maneuverability that it has with the connivance of the West, Allen Lynch writes, "Russia cannot expect serious western opposition to the exercise of

Russian political-military influence as long as it remains confined to the CIS and, possibly, the Baltic States as well.”¹¹²

In his 1994 State of the Union message, President Clinton observed, “We will seek to cooperate with Russia to solve regional problems, while insisting that if Russian troops operate in neighboring states, they do so only when those states agree to their presence, and in strict accordance with international standards.” Three problems exist with this position:

- There is clearly no Western or United Nations scrutiny of how such an agreement will be brought about. In the case of Azerbaijan and Georgia, Russia was reportedly involved in creating impossible security conditions in their respective conflicts. Then, Moscow made its help a condition for these states to join the CIS and required the stationing of Russian forces within their borders. In the case of Tajikistan, the neighboring states' purported concerns about the civil war were clearly aimed at propping up the neo-Communist forces in that country. This Russian behavior was clearly not what Clinton meant when he alluded to “strict accord with international relations.”
- This position is likely to accept Russia's interpretations of threats to regional security and to forestall any genuine attempts within Muslim Central Asian countries to bring about political changes.
- Finally, allowing Russia a wide latitude in determining regional security would also enable Moscow to create conditions that would prolong the acute economic dependence of these countries on Russia, a reality that all of them are earnestly trying to end. An example of the wide latitude in Moscow's actions in the near abroad were the Russian attempts to link its troop withdrawals from the Baltic states to the resolution of what it described as a “violation of human rights” of the Russian-speaking population of those states. Clinton initially accepted this Russian position without scrutiny.

The *carte blanche* that Washington has given to Moscow in the realm of regional stability becomes a crucial source of legitimacy, at least in the view of Moscow, in its dealings with the Muslim states of Central Asia. There are no vital U.S. interests involving those countries; perhaps there are only secondary interests, as long as Kazakhstan remains a nonnuclear country.

There is also a congruity of interests between Moscow and Washington regarding Islam. "Islamic fundamentalism," though pejorative and imprecise in its meaning, is viewed as the next "enemy" by both sides. All the present rulers of the Central Asian countries concur with Moscow and Washington in their perception of Islam. This congruity of interests underscores the fact that the regional hegemon (Russia) should be allowed to use whatever means it feels are warranted to cope with the Islamic challenge. Moscow has already exploited this opportunity and has established bilateral military agreements with all the states of Central Asia.¹¹³ The collective security agreement signed in May 1992 in Tashkent by all the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan adds another layer of legitimacy for Moscow's intervention in any political turbulence within the borders of its signatories. As long as Moscow can crush the Islamic forces, the United States does not need to be involved in this exercise and thus does not face any potential deleterious spillover effects of brutalizing these forces in a region very important to the security concerns of Washington—the Muslim Middle East.

Moscow's intervention in the Tajik civil war was brought about as a result of the Tashkent collective security agreement and at the "invitation" of the Muslim states of Central Asia (save Turkmenistan), thus making it a "perfectly legitimate" action in the eyes of Washington. No one cares to recall that a few years ago—1979—the world was told that the Soviet Union was also "invited" into Afghanistan by the government of that country. Now a non-Communist Russia is fighting a potential enemy of Moscow, the existing governments of Central Asian countries, and Washington—"Islamic fundamentalists." Moscow will continue to intervene to safeguard the current governments, while the authoritarian rulers will also continue to crush all political dissent. Islam Karimov, that inveterate autocrat of Uzbekistan, has been quite instrumental in using the Russian card to prolong his own rule. This is a tradition that promises only to make the politics of Muslim Central Asia quite turbulent in the coming years.

How far will this emergence of a "cooperative condominium" between the United States and Russia go before they part company regarding Muslim Central Asia?¹¹⁴ In an imaginary (or unspoken) strategic hierarchy of states of that area, Washington would be more sensitive to the security issues of the Baltic states and Ukraine first,

or perhaps even Georgia. The Muslim states would be at the very bottom of America's strategic concerns, unless there is a major conflict that would open up the weak seam that is keeping the Russian population a part of Kazakhstan. Alternatively, Washington might be jolted out of its Pollyanna attitude toward Moscow if the democratic forces were ousted and Russia adopted a pronounced authoritarian/imperial posture.

In summary, the modalities of the sphere of influence are increasingly determined by Moscow on the basis of a growing consensus within Russia that, as a great power, it must strengthen its hegemonic presence in the near abroad. Even if Russia were to emerge as a democratic nation, the hegemonic aspects of its foreign policy would likely be pursued much more vigorously in Muslim Central Asia than toward Ukraine or in the Baltic states, for these states enjoy cultural proximity and religious commonality with the West. At the same time, the Clinton administration's lackadaisical attitude toward Central Asia gives Moscow almost a free hand in that area.

A continuation of hegemonic foreign policy also means that Russia would do everything to ensure that the current rulers of the Central Asian countries stay in power. At the same time, as the politics of these societies become more mature, and politically and religiously more conscious, they are likely to experience an increased amount of cultural and religious activism and political pluralism, which are only going to be suppressed by the authoritarian rulers. Such a scenario does not bode well for the political future of the states of Muslim Central Asia, especially if their economic lots are also left to the whims and fancies of the politicians in Moscow.

NEW PLAYERS: TURKEY AND IRAN

After the end of the Cold War, Turkey lost its significance as a country contiguous to the former Soviet Union. Even its attempt to become a member of the European Economic Community or Common Market (EEC) has been delayed because of pressure from Greece and because some Western European countries have serious misgivings about the Turkish human rights record and its treatment of the Kurdish minority. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, did give the Turks a new strategic relevance, and a new area—Muslim Central Asia—where they could exercise their

influence. And because the United States, as the only remaining superpower, is concerned about the stability of the CIS, Ankara and Washington have found a new basis for strategic cooperation.

One should also keep in mind that within the Turkish political arena, there appears to be a reexamination of some of the most "revered Atatürkist traditions—so valuable and critical to the national survival in an earlier era of Turkish history." Some of the variables are "isolationism" and "avoidance of Islamic and Pan-Turkic ideological interests."¹⁵ In Central Asia, Turkey has definitely replaced its isolationist tradition with a high pace of activism and involvement aimed at establishing cultural and trade ties. There is no hesitation on the part of political leaders in Ankara in admitting that Turkey must seek economic integration in the Central Asian and the Black Sea regions. On the issue of "avoidance of Islamic and pan-Turkic ideological interests," however, Turkey remains indecisive. In the 1990s, when it is so fashionable to look for the threat of "Islamic fundamentalism" in every corner of the Middle East and Central Asia, Turkey remains excessively cautious. Even pan-Turkism remains an issue of suspicion and concern in that part of the world, but the Turkish secular model is a variable that is viewed favorably by the United States.

From the perspective of the Bush and Clinton administrations, Turkey needs to play its ethnic card in that region. The Turkish "secular model"—which emphasizes separation of church and state—should be extended as a source of emulation and, most important, as a competing alternative to the Iranian Islamic model. Washington hopes that the acceptance of the Turkish model by the Central Asian states would also enable them to avoid political instability.

Although it appears that not much clear thinking has been done on this issue, one can extract certain underlying assumptions. First, because a noteworthy characteristic of the "Iranian model" is anti-Americanism, it is assumed that an adoption of Islamic-oriented government on the part of any Central Asian Muslim country would automatically lead to anti-Americanism. A related notion is that Islamic resurgence would inevitably lead to extremism and anti-Westernism. Granted that the Iranian revolution has done everything to prove this fallacious notion, not much thought has been given to the fact that there are other countries at least as

Islamic as Iran—Saudi Arabia and Pakistan—that are nonetheless allies of the United States. Both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are practitioners of traditional Islam, but their overall dealings with the international community cannot be labelled examples of Islamic extremism.

Western thinking now realizes that Islamic societies are not likely to become examples of liberal democracy. There are certain cultural and religious idiosyncrasies of those societies that would not allow them to assume the liberalism of the United States or Western Europe. However, this does not mean that Muslim polities would not adopt some form of democracy. Islamic orthodoxy and democracy can be made compatible, as long as the governments practice some form of secularism without necessarily flaunting it. Any domestic debate along the line of “Islam versus secularism” in any Islamic country is bound to create unmanageable tensions, indeed even potential instability. A not-so-subtle assumption underlying such a debate would be that, somehow, secularism is “superior” to Islam, and such a proposition would not be accepted by a majority of the people in any Islamic society. Even Turkey can be called an example of a secular government merely presiding over a Muslim society.

The second assumption related to the Iranian model is that Iran's involvement in Central Asia is inherently destabilizing. As previously noted, Iran is seeking conventional types of relations with Central Asian states in the form of joint economic ventures, trade ties, etc. Moreover, Tehran's increasing reliance on Russia for weapons and, lately, for nuclear technology, would ensure from it a foreign policy behavior in Central Asia that would not jeopardize Russian strategic interests. As a major state of the region, Iran is likely to remain highly active in Central Asia in the coming years.

Not much attention is paid to the fact that Iran remains nervous about a possible unification of the republic of Azerbaijan and its own eastern and western Azerbaijani sections. In fact, the Iranian involvement in mediating the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a good example of how complicated and delicate that region is for Iran. It would suit Iran that this conflict, even if were not resolved, should remain manageable. Any intensification of war between Armenia and Azerbaijan is destined to spill over into the Iranian Azeri section. Iranian maneuvering regarding this conflict has also resulted in frequent criticisms from the republic of Azerbaijan that

Tehran does not really want to resolve it. In order to establish its credibility with Armenia, Iran became the first Muslim state outside the CIS to establish diplomatic ties with it.¹¹⁶ This move lowered suspicion in Yerevan about possible Iranian complicity in this conflict, but the Karabakh issue remained far from being resolved.

It should also be remembered that even though a majority of the Azerbaijani population is Shiite, they are of Turkish origin. As such, they also have a strong ethnic affinity and preference for Turkey. In fact, Azerbaijan, as previously noted, is on record for its preference for Turkism and Islam. Whether such an intermingling would mean an emulation of the Turkish “secular model” or a variation more suitable to Azeri politics remains to be seen. Azerbaijan has also replaced its Cyrillic alphabet with the Turkish Latin alphabet.

The Tajik civil war demonstrates that the tug-of-war between ex-Communist and nationalist-Islamic forces has only begun. It was the authoritarian character of the former President Rahman Nabiev that did not allow for the emergence of a political compromise between these groups. This bloody civil war, and the Uzbek-Russian intervention on behalf of the ex-Communist forces, has not only established a dangerous precedent but also sent unambiguous signals to similar forces elsewhere that the current regimes in other Muslim Central Asian states are likely to manifest a similar attitude toward political dissent. Such a reality does not bode well for future peace and stability in these states. The Tajik civil war has established the fact that Iran has stayed away from playing any role, so when or if the nationalist-Islamic coalition forces gain an upper hand in this civil war, it is not likely that they would adopt an Iranian model of Islamic government.

An important variable underlying the promotion of the Turkish secular model was also related to the overplaying of the Turkic ethnic factor in Central Asia. It should be noted that any underscoring of Pan-Turkism may also trigger feelings of pan-Slavism and pan-Iranianism (on the part of the Tajiks and the Iranians). The United States is not paying attention to the fact that such an emphasis also underscores the notion of Pan-Turkism in the region, which is feared by Russia, Armenia, Tajikistan, and Iran.¹¹⁷ Greeks and Arabs have already accused Turkey of reviving *Turan*, or Greater Turkistan—from China, across Asiatic Russia, to the Adriatic sea.¹¹⁸ Moscow charged that the real intention underlying

the increased Turkish activities is to obtain nuclear weapons that were in the possession of Kazakhstan, "and of applying 'racial criteria' in its efforts to establish a belt of Turkic-speaking republics south of Russia."¹¹⁹

Although Turkey made numerous official statements to assuage the fears of its neighbors that it has no pan-Turkic ambitions, the euphoria about the Turkic variable in the Central Asian Muslim states that was felt in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the heightened Turkish activism made Russia, Iran, Armenia, Greece, and Tajikistan nervous.¹²⁰

GEOPOLITICS AND GEOECONOMICS

There appears to be a worldwide surge among nation-states, especially after the conclusion of the Cold War, to seek geoeconomic objectives actively. This is done through concerted efforts to bring about economic integration and to seek economic links with major economic actors inside and outside their regions. Needless to say, such successful endeavors have their payoffs in terms of an enhancement of geostrategic influence. As major regional actors, Iran and Turkey have manifested strong predilections toward systematically converting their political influence into formulating politico-economic blocs, thereby enhancing their geostrategic influence.

It is possible that the high international visibility given to the potential emergence of the EEC as a powerful entity in the 1990s might have stimulated Iran and Turkey to promote similar arrangements in Central Asia. Then, there is an equally important variable of growing strategic cooperation, discussed in the preceding sections.

Both Iran and Turkey operate in an area where the rhetoric, not the reality, of Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism has prevailed at least since World War II. Iran can become a part of the Arab world only by emphasizing pan-Islamism, and in fact, Iran has been underscoring this phenomenon since the early 1980s. However, pan-Islamism is not a slogan that could promote solidarity between Arab countries and Iran, especially when it comes from Tehran. The Shi'ite Islam of Iran, the long-standing rivalry between the Arab and Persian civilizations, and Iran's own hegemonic tendencies in the Persian Gulf region emerge as some of the chief obstacles in the

way of Iranian-Arab solidarity based on Islam. Iran has won some friends among Arab countries, such as Sudan, Libya, and Syria, but no persuasive case can be made that Islam is the predominant basis of cooperation in any of these examples. Sudan is the only country where the rhetoric of Islamic solidarity is used by both sides. However, Sudan is also an economic basket case, and Iran is reported to have injected large sums of money into that country. Libyan and Syrian cooperation with Iran is largely, if not primarily, based on the mutuality of political and strategic objectives, not Islam. In general, none of these actors serves as promising source of economic ties.

In Muslim Central Asia, Iran is not competing against even the rhetoric of pan-Arabism. There are, to be sure, rumblings of pan-Turkism; however, it has not yet become a fully developed exclusionary phenomenon like pan-Arabism. In this part of the world, Iran can emphasize pan-Islamism a bit more successfully than in the Middle East, and the Muslims of the Central Asian states can be religiously mobilized by using this slogan. Nevertheless, the Shiite Muslims of Iran continue to serve as a significant constraint even in Central Asia.

The Central Asian Muslim countries offer Iran a wide range of potential economic activities, and Tehran has been pursuing it. For instance, Iran has activated the moribund Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) established in July 1964. In the February 1992 meeting in Tehran, the original membership of this entity, which included Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey, was expanded to include Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (figure 6). Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan also attended as observers, and in the course of this meeting Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan became full members. Afghanistan also renewed its request for membership.¹²¹

The Iranian perception of the role of the ECO was manifested by its depiction of this organization by President Rafsanjani as a "bridge between north and south." As if to assure each other, as well as the West, both Iran and Turkey emphasized the exclusive economic nature of this organization. This meeting also witnessed the growing rivalry between these two major members. While the late President Ozal insisted that all member states must accept the free market system, President Rafsanjani reacted by accusing Turkey of "trying to impose a Western system to the detriment of tradition Islamic culture."¹²² At its May 1992 meeting, members of

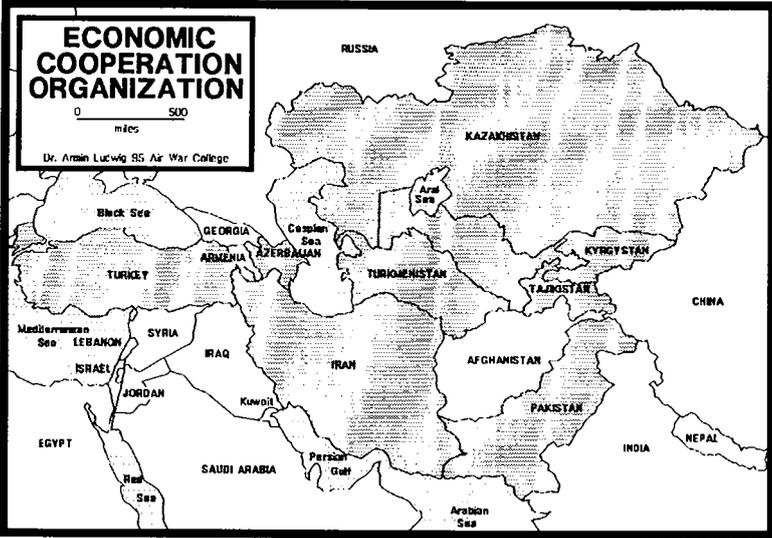


FIGURE 6

ECO agreed to grant each other most-favored-nation (MFN) status. This agreement also provided for a plan to expedite development of the Tejen-Sargt-Mashhad trans-Asiatic railroad line by 1995 and to construct a gas pipeline to carry fuel from Turkmenistan to Iran, Turkey, and Europe.¹²³

On a different economic front, Iran also proposed the formation of an Organization of the Caspian Sea states, whose membership is to include Russia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. Turkey characterized this proposal as "superfluous,"¹²⁴ while Russia expressed some apprehensions. Moscow was concerned that after the April 1992 division of the Caspian Sea military fleet among Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan, Iran would increase its own strategic presence in that area; Russia's concerns were not baseless. Since the division of the Caspian sea fleet, Iran considers the 1828 treaty—which granted only Russia the right to maintain a navy in that sea—invalid.¹²⁵ Iran has also established military and trade ties with Ukraine. In 1992, it exported 4 to 5 million tons of oil to that country. Tehran and Kiev signed an agreement on a joint venture to build three gas pipelines to carry Iranian gas to Ukraine and on to Europe. Azerbaijan is also a party to that agreement.¹²⁶

Turkey is a state that, like Iran, is not a part of the Arab world. Under the legacy of Kemal Ataturk, it has remained loyal to the dual traditions of secularism and pro-Westernism. Because of its secular character, it has nothing to do with Pan-Islamism, at least officially.¹²⁷ In Central Asia, however, Turkey has found the commonality of Turkic the variable, although it cannot go too far in playing up this variable without triggering charges of racism on the part of Russia, Greece, and the Arab countries.

An interesting aspect of the Turkic variable is that it appears significant when examined from outside that area. However, when viewed from within the region, even the Turkic languages in all the Muslim Central Asian countries (save Tajikistan) do not allow for free communication among these states. So, while Turkey and the rest of the Central Asian countries (save Tajikistan again) may feel euphoric about being Turkic, there is no guarantee that that fact alone could become a basis for cooperation. The highly divisive legacy of pan-Arabism serves as a constant reminder that nation-states are more likely to cooperate based on mutual tangible interests than on a highly emotive and charged concept, such as Arab nationalism. It may not be too long before the Central Asian

countries will also experience this uneasy reality. The United States has emphasized the Turkic variable largely because it hoped that all Muslim Central Asian states would gravitate toward Turkey instead of Iran.

Turkey has also intensified its economic activities in Central Asia. In the ECO, Turkey must share the limelight with Iran. Ankara felt that it needed a separate economic forum, and so it established the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization in 1992. Its signatories included Turkey, Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Armenia plus the Balkan states of Romania, Albania, and Greece. From the perspective of economics, the Black Sea Organization does not have tremendous potential. Aside from Greece, Turkey is the only member which is at all advanced and has a self-sufficient economy. The remainder of its membership has to undergo a major transformation from a state-controlled to a market-oriented economy. Its biggest problem in the initial phase of its creation is finding direly needed capital investments. It is from the perspective of politics that this pact achieves major significance.

The Black Sea Organization is likely to serve several foreign policy objectives of Turkey:

- Ankara can use it to enter the trans-caucasian, Central Asian, and Russian markets. In all these areas, Iran is likely to pose a source of competition, because it has also escalated the pace of its economic activities.
- If Turkey remains outside the EEC, the Black Sea Organization could serve as a useful vehicle to do business with Europe. Russian membership in this fledgling entity could become an important source of attracting European capital in the near future, as Western Europe remains keenly interested in the stability of the CIS.
- Ankara could potentially exploit its enhanced significance—stemming from this organization and from its heightened activism in the CIS region—to gain membership in the EEC in the not-too-distant future. The membership of Greece in the Black Sea Organization is also likely to improve the relationship between Ankara and Athens. Such a mended relationship might stop Greece from objecting to Turkey's entry into the EEC. Before Athens end its opposition, however, the issue of the continued division of Cyprus must also be resolved.

- The incorporation of Armenia in the Black Sea Organization might turn out to be a major step toward defusing the historical conflict between Ankara and Yerevan. Moreover, through their membership in this organization, both Azerbaijan and Armenia might be able to find a negotiated solution of the Karabakh conflict. Ankara has the potential to emerge as a credible mediator at some point.

Keeping the growing international trend of establishing regional economic arrangements in mind, Turkey also proposed a Turkic Common Market. Its aim is to establish a common currency. This proposal is also aimed at making Turkey the center of a variety of economic activities involving the Turkic states of Central Asia. It will be a long time before a proposal of this nature gathers momentum, however.

4. CONCLUSION

The path on which the states of Central Asia have embarked is long and treacherous. World history, indeed current reading of a newspaper, is littered with examples of countries that attempted to reform and failed. The states of Central Asia, ironically enough, owe their very existence to a state that failed to reform and transform itself successfully. The challenge now remains to overcome the serious obstacles for these new countries, rebuilding the economy, feeding their people, and ensuring a relatively better quality of life, which includes providing clean ecological conditions, clean water, and better health care. As witnessed by events now underway in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Czechoslovakia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and Chechnya, the roles of etho-nationalism and religion are indeed becoming unmanageably powerful. In Muslim Central Asia, the conflict thus far has been limited to Tajikistan and Nagorno-Karabakh; the question is, however, how long this will last before it surfaces in other neighboring countries.

The future dynamics of the new great game in Muslim Central Asia will be determined by a number of developments, both within and in the immediate vicinity. The first and foremost variable is the scope of political and economic developments in these countries in the coming years. The intensely assertive foreign policy of Russia, and indeed the future of democracy in that country, will also influence the dynamics of this new great game. In the new great game, the Central Asian states are playing an important role in determining the modalities of political and economic exchanges. Their fate is no longer determined by outside actors and events out of their control. Since these political and economic exchanges are so important, the prospects for the survival of the CIS become equally important. If the Commonwealth survives, the process of politico-economic change within the polities of its member states

is likely to be more manageable and less unpredictable. The future of Russia is also important, because it is inextricably linked to the developments in domestic politics of Muslim Central Asian states. For instance, if the authoritarian rule is challenged in one or more of these countries, as was done in Tajikistan, then the response of the government is most likely to be increased repression of the forces of change. If such a response were to lead to an outbreak of violence, then the response of Russia to such a development would become very significant. As previously noted, if Russian participation in defeating the nationalist-Islamic forces in Tajikistan became a pattern, then the prospects for political stability of Muslim Central Asia are likely to become grim.

A related issue is the relationship between political and economic pluralisms. The Chinese and South Korean models underscore the possibility (not the inevitability) that economic development and pluralism must precede the measures enhancing political pluralism. At the same time, the Gorbachev experience points to the dangers of allowing political and economic pluralisms simultaneously. When introduced simultaneously, in all likelihood political pluralism would get out of hand and even create acute pressures on the political system, resulting in a cataclysmic change, with unanticipated or even deleterious consequences. At the same time, no one really knows how long any government can disallow political pluralism but promote economic pluralism, before the absence of the former would create so much pressure on the government that it would not only undermine the pace of economic pluralism but also create political instability.

Another issue is the role of Islam in the Central Asian states. The political leaders of these countries remain extremely wary of the potential power of Islam in their societies. As former Communists, they not only least understand Islam but, in almost all instances, tend to parrot the purported threats of "Islamic fundamentalism" to their rule. It behooves them to first define what exactly they mean by this pejorative phrase. If they define it as "Islamic radicalism or extremism," then they should also understand that extremisms of all sorts thrive only under conditions of economic misery and political repression. Almost all Islamic parties in Central Asia are currently not part of any extremist movements. If these parties underscore the role of Islam in the social and political lives of their societies, this should not be

automatically depicted as extremism. As a pragmatic political strategy, the Muslim Central Asian countries must allow free participation of Islamic parties in the political process, because, if allowed to participate in the process of government, they would have little chance of indulging in extremism. Only by letting them become players in the political arena would these leaders expose them to the realities and complexities of governance, in which simple-minded extremism plays no role.

Regarding the significance of the role of the three major actors of their neighborhood, the pendulum of advantage is likely to swing between Iran and Turkey, with Saudi Arabia playing an important role in heightening the Islamic consciousness of Muslim Central Asia. There is little or no relationship between this enhanced Islamic consciousness of these republics and their acceptance of religious extremism or anti-Americanism. The future of all extremisms is likely to be determined by the future capabilities of these countries to grow and prosper economically.

Among the three Middle Eastern actors, Saudi Arabia's role is very important because it is aimed at giving religious orientation to the Central Asian Muslims. Iran faces some disadvantages, because of its Shiite nature, but its advantage becomes apparent in the political aspect of Islam. Islamic government has been established in that country recently and as a result of revolution. The Central Asian Muslims witnessed the making of this phenomenon up close, seeing its ups and downs, its aspirations, and its furies. They cannot remain indifferent to the possibilities of adopting an Islamic government. Afghanistan, one of their neighboring states, is well on its way along this path, although the route has been bloody and turbulent. No Muslim Central Asian country necessarily has to undergo the Afghani example to adopt an Islamic government, unless the existing government becomes determined to foreclose any compromise with indigenous Islamic forces. The Saudi and Pakistani examples are also present in their region and are more relevant to the Sunni masses of Central Asia, especially in the sense that the establishment of Islamic government in those countries has not been as in Afghanistan. The Turkish secular model is also useful, although whether the Central Asian states would accept the Kemalist legacy in its totality is questionable. What Kemalism did was to find a scapegoat in Islam, and it adopted Westernism and its attendant secularism as a panacea for its social, political, and

economic decline. The Central Asian states have not experienced the peaks and nadirs of the Ottomans, and are not looking for scapegoats. In fact, they appear eager to acknowledge their Islamic heritage by increasing their systematic orientation to it. Once this orientation is complete, they have to decide how much of Islam they would like to incorporate in their polities.

The future incorporation of the Turkish secular model or the Iranian Islamic model is not likely to be determined in these states in the near future, and there is not likely to be one model for all these countries. The Muslim population in Central Asia has to come to grips fully with its Islamic identity first; only then will it be in a position to judge the path that *each* nation must take. The present flirtations with the Turkish secular model by a number of Central Asian countries are only manifestations of the elite's preferences. Whether such preferences are going to emerge as more or less a stable and across-the-board phenomenon will be determined in the next 5 to 10 years. Even then, one cannot state with certainty that such a trend would last for a long time. The dust on this issue is far from settled yet.

The mid-1990s is a time when pan-Turkism or pan-Slavism is lurking on the horizon. There is also a suggestion of the potential rejuvenation of Eurasianism (*Yevrazist*). This phenomenon envisages a potential union between the Slavs and the Turkic steppes, which is based "on mutual respects and not [on] assimilation or absorption."¹²⁸ These tendencies, especially their darker sides, will gain an upper hand only if economic hardships are prolonged in the CIS, but especially if they become worse.

After gaining independence, Muslim Central Asia is not likely to remain either politically or economically subservient to Moscow, growing Russian assertiveness in that area notwithstanding. To ensure their independence, these states are scrambling to integrate themselves into international and regional economic arrangements. In this regard, the United States and Western Europe have the potential to play a crucial role. What these actors must do—especially the United States—is to help these countries stabilize themselves economically.

In its endeavors to help the CIS, the West must focus on a "balanced" investment of its economic assistance. A balanced approach to investment means that no one state should be allowed to take a lion's share by depriving especially the nonindustrial states

of the CIS. If the Central Asian Muslim states were to make steady economic progress, the chances are that they would avoid all types of extremism, political as well as religious.

NOTES

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2. Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game*.

3. Michael T. Clare discusses geoeconomic and geostrategic objectives in "Policing the Gulf—And the World," *Nation*, October 16, 1990, 401-405. Edward N. Luttwak also discusses these concepts in his "From Geo-Politics to Geo-Economics," *National Interest* (Summer 1990), 17-23.

4. Graham Fuller, *Central Asia: The New Geopolitics* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1992), 4.

5. Martha Olcott, "Central Asia's Post-Empire Politics," *Orbis* (Spring 1992), 253-268.

6. Fuller, 24.

7. *Ibid.*, 14 and 21, *passim*.

8. The entire discussion of the Azeri economy is based on *Economic Review: Azerbaijan* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, May 1992).

9. The entire discussion of Kazakhstan's economy is based on *Economic Review: Kazakhstan* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, May 1992).

10. James H. Bater, *The Soviet Scene: A Geographical Perspective* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), 212. Kazakhstan also contained the principal source of Soviet copper ore at Dzhekazgan.

11. *Ibid.*, 215.

12. *Ibid.*, 1.

13. *Ibid.*, 1.

14. The entire discussion of the economy of Kyrgyzstan is based on *Economic Review: Kyrgyzstan* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, May 1992).

15. The entire discussion of the Tajik economy is based on *Economic Review: Tajikistan* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, May 1992).

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20. *Ibid.*, 43.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, 1.

23. "Soviet Economic Performance in 1989: Prelude to a Major Recession This Year," *PlanEcon* 6, nos. 7-8, 6.

24. James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan: A Soviet Republic's Road to Sovereignty* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), 65.

25. Bater, 262.

26. Critchlow, 68.

27. Ahmad Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), 60.

28. "Pulse of the Day," *Pravda*, Moscow in Russian, 22 January 1, in FBIS-SOV-92-016, 24 January 1992, 98.

29. David E. Powell, "Crimes Against Nature," *Natural History*, August 1992, 73-75.

30. Georgii S. Golitsyn, "Ecological Problems in the CIS During the Transitional Period," RFE/RL Research Report 2, no. 2 (8 January, 1993), 33-46.

31. Patricia M. Carley, "The Price of the Plan: Perceptions of Cotton and Health in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan," *Central Asian Survey* 8, no. 4 (1989): 1-38.

32. Golitsyn, 34.

33. Feshbach and Friendly, 74. These authors also detail the demise of the Aral Sea: its water level has dropped by 47 feet, its volume has decreased by two-thirds and its area by 44 percent. See also D. J. Peterson, *Troubled Lands: The Legacy of Soviet Environmental Destruction* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993), 111-118.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*, 74-75. The salinization has been further worsened through the evaporation of the Aral Sea. Massive storms often blow salt and sand onto the local fields (1/2 ton per acre). Such storms often reach Belarus, which is 1,200 miles away, depositing salt and sand there as well. See also

- David R. Smith, "Salinization in Uzbekistan," *Soviet Geography*, 21-33.
37. Feshbach, 76.
 38. Critchlow, Nationalism in Uzbekistan, 64. Another expert found that pesticide use in the Amu Darya basin was 10 times the U.S.-recommended level. See D. J. Peterson, *Troubled Lands*, 114.
 39. Feshbach, 73. See also Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan*, 83.
 40. Bater, 262. See also, Feshbach, *Ecocide*, 75 and 79.
 41. Feshbach, *Ecocide*, 5-6.
 42. *Ibid.*, 6.
 43. D. J. Peterson, "The Environment in the Post-Soviet Era," RFE/RL Research Report, 8 January, 1993 2, no. 2., 43-46.
 44. Ahmad, 32.
 45. *Ibid.*
 46. *Ibid.*, 27.
 47. Elizabeth Fuller, "Azerbaijan After the Presidential Elections," RFE/RL Research Report 1, no. 26 (26 June 1992): 1-7.
 48. *Ibid.*, 4.
 49. For instance, see "Azerbaijan Rebel Claims Power and Support," *The New York Times*, June 24, 1993; and "Azerbaijan Parliament Votes to Strip President of Power," *The New York Times*, June 25, 1993.
 50. Boris Giller, interview of President Nazerbaev, "IA by Khotel dovesti do kontsa Kurs. Kotoryi my vybrali," *Karavan* (Alma Ata), no. 14, 9 April 1993, 3.
 51. James Critchlow, "Democratization in Kazakhstan," RFE/RL Research Report 1, no. 30 (24 July, 1992): 12-14.
 52. *Ibid.*, 13.
 53. Graham Fuller, *Central Asia: The New Geopolitics*, 14.
 54. Bess Brown, "Tajik Civil War Prompts Crackdown in Uzbekistan," RFL/RE Research Report 2, no. 11 (March 1993): 1-6.
 55. "Help from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan," *Ekspress Khronika*, 21 October, 1992.
 56. Cassandra Cavanaugh, "Uzbekistan Looks South and East for Role Models," RFE/RL Research Report 1, no. 40 (October 1992): 11-14.
 57. Bess Brown, "Turkmenistan Asserts Itself," RFE/RL Research Report 1, no. 43 (30 October 1992): 27-31.
 58. *Ibid.*, 28.
 59. Christopher J. Panico, "Turkmenistan Unaffected by Winds of Democratic Change," RFE/RL Research Report 2, no. 4 (22 January 1993): 6-10.
 60. *Ibid.*, 7, emphasis added.
 61. *Ibid.*, 7.
 62. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, "Causes and Consequences of the Civil War," *Central Asia Monitor* 1 (1993): 10-14.

63. Ibid., 10.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., 11.

66. Ibid.

67. Michael Collins Dunn, "Uzbek Role in Tajik Civil War Is Ominous Portent for Central Asia," *The Washington Report Middle East Affairs* 11, no. 8 (March 1993): 20.

68. For a recent and excellent treatment of this immensely complicated subject see Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, "Tajikistan: From Freedom to War," *Current History*, April 1994.

69. Martha Brill Olcott, "Islam, Fundamentalism, and Public Policy in Central Asia," (Washington, DC: The National Council for Soviet and East European Research, 1993).

70. The Muahid (or "unitarian") tradition of Saudi Arabia goes back to the days of Muhammad Ibn-al-Wahab, who, in the 18th century, wanted to cleanse Islam from a number of traditions introduced by the Sufi movement. In a more popular sense, this tradition is also described as the "Wahhabi" tradition. I have avoided using this pejorative phrase in this study.

71. Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan*, 167 and 178-85.

72. Boris Giller, interview with Nazerbaev, 3.

73. For instance, see Roger D. Kangas, "Uzbekistan: Evolving Authoritarianism," *Current History*, April 1994, 178-182.

74. Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan*, 178; James Critchlow, "Democratization in Kazakhstan," *RFE/RL Research Report* 30 (24 July, 1992); Bess Brown, "Tajikistan: The Fall of Nabiyeu," *RFE-RL Research Report*, 10 September.

75. Bess Brown, "Islamic Renaissance Party in Central Asia," *Report on the USSR* 3, no. 19 (May 10, 1991).

76. U. Babakhanov and A. Ganelin, "Will There be a Square of the Victorious Opposition in Dushanbe?" *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Moscow, 22 May 1992, 1, in FBIS-SOV-92-106, 35.

77. Critchlow, 200.

78. "Asaba' Protests Against Dedication of the Slavic University," *Ekspress Khronika*, 28 October 1992. Such a generous move stands in stark contrast to the legislation passed by the Kyrgyz Parliament stating that all land will be in the possession of the "Kyrgyz people," disregarding the large presence of non-Kyrgyz peoples in the states. See G. F. Morozova, "Sovremennii migratsionnii iavleniia: Bezhtentsy i emigranty," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, Nr. 3, 1992. Text translated into German, *Osteuropa*, March 1993, A116-A122.

79. Oleg Panfilov, "Tovarishchi po oruzhiiu," *Moskovskie Novosti*, 23 May 1993, p. 12A. To place these numbers in the context of a pattern of

Russian emigration, during the 1980s some 37,000 Russians left Tajikistan (9.4 percent of the Russian population). See Roland Scharff, "Migration und ethnische Mobilisierung," *Osteuropa*, March 1993, A115.

80. Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asia's Catapult to Independence," *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1992).

81. "Communist Attempt Coup in Tajikistan," *Ekspress Khronika*, 28 October 1992.

82. Edward A. Gargan, "Refugees Fleeing Tajikistan Strife," *New York Times*, 14 January 1993. See also Molly Moore, "Tajiks Trade One Nightmare for Another," *Washington Post*, 19 January 1993.

83. "Help from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan," *Ekspress Khronika*, 21 October 1992. The issue of sending U.N. "blue helmets" to CIS hotspots was also discussed during a recent trip to Washington by Foreign Minister Kozyrev.

84. Alexander Knyazev, Moscow Radio Rossii Network, in Russian 1900 GMT, 30 May 1992, in FBIS-SOV-92-105, 1 June 1992, 53.

85. For instance, see John W. R. Lepingwell, "Introduction: The Problems of Former Soviet Nuclear Weapons," *RFE/RL Research Report* 2, no. 8 (19 February 1993): 1-3.

86. *Ibid.*, 1.

87. John W. R. Lepingwell, "Kazakhstan and Nuclear Weapons," *RFE/RL Research Report* 2, no. 8 (19 February, 1993).

88. Lepingwell, "Introduction," 2.

89. This discussion is based on Suzanne Crow, "START II: Prospects for Implementation," *RFE/RL Research Report* 2, no. 8 (19 February, 1993): 14-18.

90. Lepingwell, "Kazakhstan and Nuclear Weapons," 59-61.

91. Crow, 17.

92. Extracted from "U.S., Russian and British Security Assurances to Ukraine," *Arms Control Today*, January/February 1995, 11.

93. "U.S. in a Secret Deal, Removes Bomb Fuel in Ex-Soviet Republic," *The New York Times*, November 23, 1994; and "Months of Delicate Talks in Kazakhstan Atom Deal," *The New York Times*, November 24, 1994.

93. For a brief overview of Iranian interests in Central Asia see "Iran's Relations with the Southern Members of the Commonwealth of Independent States," *Background Brief* (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, London, March 1992), 1-5.

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region should be viewed as in transition politically, caught somewhere between tradition and modernity." "Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks," *Problems of Communism*, September-October 1991, 23-44.

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98. *CIS & ME* XVII, no. 5 (1992): 23.

99. Cherif J. Cordahi, "Central Asia Emerges into the Muslim World," *Middle East International (MEI)*, 3 April, 1992, 16.

99. "Russia, NATO Sign Historical Agreement," *The Norfolk Virginian Pilot*, June 23, 1994.

100. Also see Allen Lynch, "After the Empire: Russia and Its Western Neighbors," *RFEIRL Research Report*, 25 March 1994, 10-17.

101. M. E. Ahrari, "Moscow and the Middle East: The Future of Strategic Relationships," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* XVII, no. 4 (Summer 1994): 1-19.

102. Bruce D. Porter and Carol R. Saivetz, "The Once and Future Empire: Russia and the 'Near Abroad,'" *The Washington Quarterly* (Summer 1994) 75-90.

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105. Thomas Goltz, "Letter from Eurasia: The Hidden Russian Hand," *Foreign Policy*, 92-116.

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107. "Azerbaijan Oil Deal Signed in Face of Russian Protests," *The Financial Times*, September 21, 1994.

108. "Azerbaijan Wants to Keep Up Iran Ties," *The Financial Times*, May 8, 1995.

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111. "A Russian Oil Giant Grows Powerful," *The New York Times*,

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112. Lynch, 13.

113. For background see Bess Brown, "Central Asian States Seek Russian Help," *RFE/RL Research Report*, June 18, 1993, 83-88.

114. Brzezinski, 78.

115. Graham Fuller, *Turkey Faces East: New Orientations Toward the Middle East and the Old Soviet Union* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1992), 4.

116. *CIS & ME* XVII, no. 3 (1992): 15.

117. For a critical analysis of U.S. policy in Central Asia, see Shirin Hunter, "The Muslim Republic of the Former Soviet Union: Policy Challenges for the United States," *The Washington Quarterly* (Summer 1992): 57-71.

118. For different views on Turan see Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey—A Study of Irredentism* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1981).

119. "Turkey Extends a Helping Hand," *World Press Review*, July 1992, 12-13.

120. For a discussion of Ankara's steps to calm the fears of its neighbors, see Gareth M. Winrow, "A Stabilizing Influence in a Fragile Commonwealth?: Turkey and the Former USSR." Paper delivered at the 33rd Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Atlanta, GA, 31 March-4 April, 1992.

121. *CIS & ME* XVII, no. 2 (1992): 20.

122. *Ibid.*, 8-9.

123. *Ibid.*, no. 5, 3.

124. *Ibid.*, no. 2, 9.

125. *Ibid.*, no. 5, 4, and no. 6, 13-14.

126. *Ibid.*, no. 4 (1992): 11.

127. The evidence on this issue is somewhat mixed. Even though Turkish officials have continued to insist on the secular nature of their country, they have been no less shy in emphasizing in Central Asia that Turkey is also a Muslim country. By so doing, they cannot be described as explicitly sympathizing with pan-Islamism; but at the same time, they are not exactly disassociating themselves from it either.

128. Quoted in "Borders and Alignments Begin to Change in Central Asia," *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, July-August 1992, 14-16.

APPENDIX 1: Structure of Muslim Central Asian Economies, 1990-1991

AZERBAIJAN

Population:	7.2 million [47% urban, rural 53%]*
Agricultural Production**	30
Industrial Production**	40
Main Agricultural products:	grapes, cotton, tobacco, wines
Main industries:	oil production equipments, petrochemicals, light industry, electrical equipment, textiles
Natural Resources:	oil, natural gas, iron ore

KAZAKHSTAN

Population:	16.7 million (urban 57%, rural 43%)
Agricultural Production:**	40
Industrial production:**	28
Main agricultural products:	grain, wool, meat
Main industries:	metallurgy, heavy machinery, machine tools, petrochemicals, agroprocessing, textiles
Natural resources:	coal, iron ore, oil,chrome, lead, wolfram, copper zinc

KYRGYZSTAN

Population:	4.4 million (urban, 38%, rural 62%)
Agricultural production**	40
Industrial production**	30
Main agricultural products:	livestock, cotton, wool, leather, hemp, vegetables, fruit, grain
Main industries:	metallurgy, agricultural and other machinery, food processing, electronics
Natural resources:	coal, gold, mercury, uranium

TAJKISTAN

Population:	5.3 million (urban 33%, rural 67%)
Agricultural production**	38.3
Industrial production**	28.6
Main agricultural products:	cotton, wheat, dairy products
Main industries:	hydroelectricity, aluminum, food processing
Natural resources:	iron, lead, mercury, tin, gold, coal

TURKMENISTAN

Population:	3.8 million (urban 45%, rural 55%)
Agricultural production**	46.4
Industrial production**	15.7
Main agricultural products:	livestock, cotton
Main industries:	textile, chemical, gas and oil process, electricity
Natural resources:	gas, oil, iodine, sodium sulfate, salts

UZBEKISTAN

Population:	20.4 million (urban 41%, rural 59%)
Agricultural production**	43
Industrial production**	33
Main agricultural products:	cotton, grain, vegetables, fruits, silk cocoons
Main industries:	Agricultural and textile machinery, chemical products, metallurgy, aircraft
Natural resources:	Petroleum, gas, gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc

* Gosudarstvennii Komitet SSSR po Statistike, *Itogi Vsesoyuznoi Perepisi Naseleniia 1989 goda. Tom 1 Chislennost' i Razmeshchenie Naseleniia SSSR, Chast 1.*

** As a percentage of net material product (NMP)

Source: Except for the information on Azerbaijan, this table was compiled by Sheila Manie and Erik Whitlock from IMF Economic Reviews (Washington, DC: 1992). The data on Azerbaijan are compiled by the author from *Economic Review of Azerbaijan*.

APPENDIX 2: Contemporary Sources of Russia's Dominance in the Near Abroad¹

* *The original document of the CIS:*

Article VII underscores the need for close cooperation in the realm of foreign policy. This document also discusses a "common military strategic space," which can be created by placing Russia at its helm.

* *A military doctrine presented by the Russian General Staff (May 1992):*

Russian security is inseparable from that of the CIS states. The security of the CIS can be effectively established by "joint efforts of the CIS countries with centralized operational leadership of their collective defense." There is an identity of security interests between Russia and the remainder of the CIS countries. Russia has an effective veto over the security policy of these states. Any introduction of foreign troops or acquisition of military strongholds in the CIS states is viewed as a direct military threat to Russia. Russia reserves the right to protect the Russians living anywhere in the former Soviet territory.

* *Colonel General Igor Rodinov:*

Former Soviet states are Russia's primary allies, not just part of any buffer zone.² These states should use the Russian defense system to integrate their own military forces.

* Civic Union (One of Russia's most politically influential groups) :

¹ This table is prepared by the author from the analysis in Mark Smith, *Pax Russica: Russia's Monroe Doctrine*, (London: The Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies, 1993); Mohiaddin Mesbahi, "Russian Foreign Policy and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus," *Central Asian Survey*, 1993, 181-215; and Allen Lynch, "After the Empire: Russia and its Western Neighbors," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 25 March 1994, 10-17.

² Another Russian writer rejects the notion of creating a buffer zone. Even though she does not go into the reasons for rejecting this idea, it is prudent to surmise that buffer zones do not really offer the kind of security Moscow is seeking in its immediate neighborhood. Irina Kobrinskaya, "Russia's Home and Foreign Policies," *International Affairs*, October 1993, 42-50.

No foreign country should be allowed to create a sphere of influence in the states of former the USSR. Such activities would create multiple conflicts, political instability, and even a potential disintegration of the union.

* *Abartsumov:*

Advocated the creation of Russia's Monroe Doctrine in the states of the near abroad and its related political and strategic implications for countries of the area. In this perspective Russia's objective of creating a sphere of influence where the states of the near abroad would be treated as its satellites is quite apparent.

* *The Tashkent treaty and collective defense of the CIS states (May 1992):* Any attack on one member of the union will be regarded as an attack on all (a provision similar to the one that is used in NATO).

* *Sergey Stankevich:*

Atlanticist vs. Eurasianist vision of Russia's foreign policy: the former advocates of Western orientation, market economy, and democracy; the latter favors an eastward shift in Russia's foreign policy, and an "assertive defense" of the near abroad.

* *Advocates of "loose hegemony" and "tight hegemony" toward the ex-Soviet republics:*

Both these positions are variations of the Eurasianist position that is described above.

* *Andranik Migranyan:*

"Russia should declare to the entire world community that the entire geopolitical space of the former USSR is a sphere of its vital interests . . . that it is opposed to the formation of any closed military political alliances . . . and that it will regard any steps in this direction as unfriendly."

* *Sergey Rogov's perspective:*

He presented an interesting three concentric circle analogy describing Russian foreign policy. The first circle, according to this analogy, comprises Russia's relation with the states of the near abroad; the second circle comprises Eastern Europe, the Near East, and the Far East; and the third comprises the West. Obviously, this perspective is the most benign of all the perspectives presented here, for it only emphasizes the significance assigned to the former Soviet states by the present Russian foreign policy elites.

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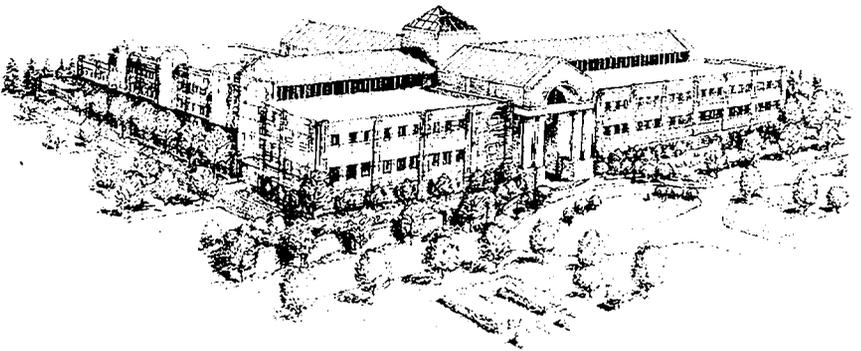
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