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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
Monterey, California**



THESIS

**THE TALIBAN AND ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN
CENTRAL ASIA**

by

Todd B. Ebert

June 2001

Thesis Co-Advisors:

Glenn Robinson
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THE TALIBAN AND ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

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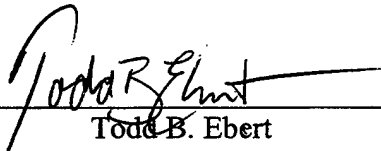
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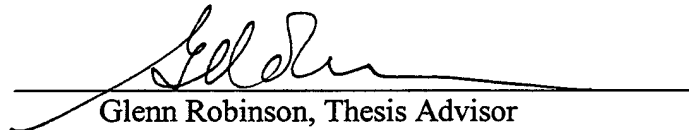
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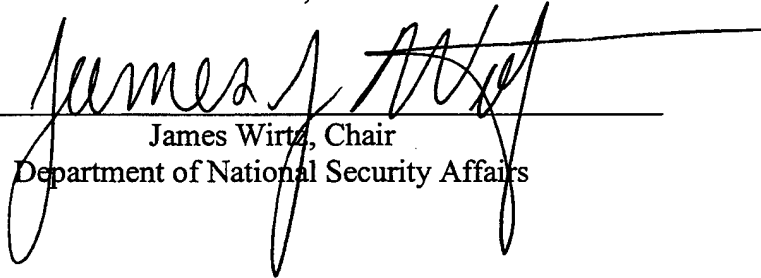

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between Afghanistan's Taliban regime and Islamic opposition movements in the neighboring Central Asian republics. Despite alarming rhetoric to the contrary from Central Asian political leaders, Taliban ideology is unlikely to spread beyond Afghanistan's borders. The Taliban are an idiosyncratic phenomenon whose anachronistic ideology and violent behavior are more attributable to an obscure tribal code and the sociological repercussions of warfare than to any conventional expression of Islam. Islamic culture in the Central Asian republics was somewhat secularized by 70 years of Soviet domination. The small but growing Islamic opposition is attributable not to the appeal of Taliban-style fundamentalism, but to distinctly domestic factors such as political oppression and economic stagnation. Central Asia's authoritarian regimes are essentially causing the Islamic insurgency they seek to suppress; the Taliban are only significant to the extent that Afghanistan's instability exacerbates ongoing economic and political problems throughout the region. These findings have significant policy implications for the United States and other interested powers, which must deal more urgently with Afghanistan's instability, and should augment military support to Central Asian governments with an equal or greater emphasis on political and economic reform.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Afghanistan's Taliban regime is commonly associated with a variety of destructive activities; including human rights abuses, international terrorism, narcotics distribution, and severe Islamic fundamentalism. Central Asian political leaders, along with policy circles in the United States and Russia, warn that Taliban-style ideology will infect the nascent Central Asian republics as they struggle to consolidate their independence and stability. Though militant Islamist groups are present in Central Asia, and the Taliban indeed provide some degree of support to these movements, it is unlikely that the Taliban's unusual creed would find a significant audience in the Central Asian republics. Despite rhetoric to the contrary from political leaders, Central Asian Islamists are not protégés of the Taliban and they do not represent an influx of Taliban ideology. Islamic discontent in Central Asia is a distinctly indigenous phenomenon caused by domestic political and economic conditions. The Taliban are only significant to the extent that their "rogue" behaviors exacerbate Central Asia's economic and political mismanagement.

Though avowedly Islamic (and perceived as such by the West), the Taliban and their interpretations of religion and authority are extremely idiosyncratic, and have less to do with any commonly accepted Islamic doctrine than with secular factors such as anachronistic tribal custom, the sociological repercussions of prolonged warfare, and the consequences of life spent in refugee camps. The Taliban are at odds not only with conventional Islam in Afghanistan, but with Islamic understanding and practice throughout the Muslim world. It is therefore unlikely that Taliban ideology would spread to other Islamic societies—particularly Central Asia, where religion and politics are

comparatively secular after 70 years of Soviet domination and indoctrination. Central Asia's current "Islamic renaissance" is essentially a reassertion of cultural identity rather than an expression of faith or ideology. Strains of political Islam have been present in Central Asia since well before the appearance of the Taliban, and are more consistent with conventional Islamist movements than with the Taliban.

The roots of Central Asia's small but growing Islamic opposition, as well as the real impact of the Taliban, can be found in Central Asia's political and economic problems. The current Central Asian leaders, all of whom are former Soviet *apparatchiks*, inherited an inauspicious political economy from their Soviet forefathers. Since reluctantly acquiring independence in 1991, Central Asia's leaders have failed to reverse regressive Soviet trends. Politics remain staunchly authoritarian; if anything, political oppression has become more severe and autocracy is further consolidated. The Central Asian economies remain stagnant and state-dominated. The current governments are failing to meet popular welfare expectations or to compensate for these failures by granting more political rights and freedoms to the Central Asian people. Consequently, the most oppressed and economically disadvantaged sectors of the population have turned increasingly toward Islamic opposition in parts of Central Asia where religion is more deeply embedded.

Development of the region's latent oil and gas reserves could alleviate economic frustration, but the Taliban's destabilizing behaviors in Afghanistan, along with overblown international competition for pipelines, have thwarted the construction of efficient export routes from Central Asia to lucrative markets in South and East Asia. Additionally, the Taliban's severe fundamentalism and chaotic rule heighten the anti-

Islamic fears of Central Asia's secular dictators, which only reinforces their tendency to oppress internal dissent. The Taliban are therefore an important intervening variable in Central Asia's Islamist insurgency, but Central Asia's leaders bear the greatest causal responsibility for the problem. As in other parts of the Muslim world, the rise of political Islam in Central Asia is most attributable to political and economic frustration.

These findings have important policy consequences for the United States and other interested powers, which must reassess and reconceptualize their objectives and policies in Afghanistan and Central Asia. International policy should work in concert toward peace and stability in the region. Its focus should be shifted away from costly, unproductive competition for energy pipelines and exclusive obsession with the Taliban's idiosyncratic fundamentalism. The United States in particular should put its Afghanistan policy into wider perspective. The peaceful resolution of Afghanistan's civil war should be pursued at least as urgently as the extradition of Usama Bin Ladin. Central Asia's political leaders have played successfully on Western fears of Islamic fundamentalism in order to receive international support for their suppression of Islamic dissent. American analysts and policymakers tend to perceive the Central Asian governments as bastions of secular stability against a violent, "Talibanized" insurgency. They should instead understand that the current Central Asian regimes are, in many respects, brutal dictatorships that are causing their own insurgency problems through political oppression and economic mismanagement. The situation is not unlike that of pre-revolutionary Iran. The United States, Russia, and other outside powers should augment military support to the Central Asian republics with an equal or greater emphasis on political and economic reform.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since its dramatic emergence from Afghanistan's civil war in 1994, the Taliban movement has brought relative order and stability to the Afghan provinces under its control. Most warring factions have been subdued, the population has been disarmed substantially, and roads have been made relatively safe for transit, trade, and smuggling. This basic security, however, has come at a great price for the Afghan people—particularly women—as the Taliban impose their violent and oppressive agenda on the war-torn and economically devastated nation. Shrouded in secrecy, the Taliban rarely issue press statements aside from occasional moral edicts or defiant but opaque responses to Western criticisms; they grant very few interviews—never to Western journalists; and they have never produced an official constitution, manifesto, or any codified body of governmental policy. Few people outside his family and inner political circle have seen Taliban leader Mullah Omar since his rise to prominence. Since coming to power, the Taliban have baffled, frustrated, and often horrified outside observers the world over.

The Taliban's most notorious activities, including human rights abuses, support for international terrorism, and narcotics distribution, are well substantiated and publicized. Less clear, however, is the Taliban's impact on their Central Asian neighbors. Policy circles in Central Asia, Russia, and the United States fear that Afghanistan's volatility and draconian fundamentalism will infect the nascent Central Asian republics as they struggle to consolidate their independence and stability. Such an occurrence would have dire consequences, not only for the economic and political development of Central Asia, but also for international efforts to harvest the region's energy resources, contain the spread of Islamic political violence, and combat the

trafficking of dangerous narcotics. Eager to connect to international markets and exploit their oil and natural gas reserves, Central Asian political leaders warn that Taliban-style fundamentalism is indeed on the rise in their respective nations, and threatens to “undermine the confidence of faithful Muslims in the reforming state, and to destroy the stability and national, civic, and interethnic harmony that are fundamental pre-conditions of transformations for the better.” Militant Islamists “are aiming to discredit democracy, the secular state, and a multi-national and multi-confessional society.”¹ These concerns are echoed by world powers, including the United States, Russia, and China, all of which are targets themselves of Islamic political violence, and all of which seek to develop Central Asia’s largely untapped energy resources.

This thesis examines the relationship between the Taliban and Islamic opposition groups in the Central Asian republics, and evaluates the likelihood of Taliban-style fundamentalism taking root in Central Asia.² Despite the alarming rhetoric from political actors and the evident connections between the Taliban and Central Asian Islamic militias, Taliban ideology is unlikely to replicate and advance in the Central Asian republics. Islamist opposition in Central Asia is, above all, an indigenous phenomenon arising in response to Central Asian political and economic conditions. The Taliban are

¹ Islam Karimov, *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), p. 26.

² The terms *political Islam/Islamism*, *fundamentalism*, and *neofundamentalism* will be used throughout this paper to describe Islamic opposition movements. *Political Islam* or *Islamism* designates modern protest movements that employ Islam as a political ideology to effect social change. Familiar examples are Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, Palestinian Hamas, or Pakistan’s Jamaat-i Islami. The term *fundamentalism* is used to describe movements that interpret religious scripture literally and advocate strict observance of religious practices. Fringe Protestant sects in the American south are the original examples of fundamentalism; in the Islamic world, the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia might be considered fundamentalists. *Neofundamentalism* is borrowed from Olivier Roy, who uses the term to describe post-modern Islamic fundamentalism that has devolved from political Islam. The use of political violence or “terrorism” to achieve objectives is not intrinsic to any of these movements, nor is it exclusive to one type or the other.

only significant to the extent that their destabilizing behavior exacerbates Central Asia's failing economy and oppressive political climate.

A. THEORY, METHODOLOGY AND ORGANIZATION

Two common assumptions about Islamic discontent provide a theoretical backdrop for this study. The first is Olivier Roy's view that political Islam has failed to provide viable alternatives to Western democracy and capitalism. Intellectually, Islamists have failed to reconcile an inescapable paradox: there cannot be an Islamic state without virtuous Muslims, but an Islamic state is required to create a society of virtuous Muslims. In practice, this problem results in the disassociation of Islamist thought from political institutions, the consequence of which is an "Islamist" state that lapses into conventional models of government (usually authoritarian) and economy (state socialism or liberal neoconservatism) while focusing all its energy on the imposition of social morality.

Historically, Islamist models in countries such as Iran, Sudan, and to some extent, Algeria, have demonstrated these failures empirically. Islamic governments have neither invented new societies nor transcended the political boundaries of nation-states. Conventional political and economic systems, along with the logic of modern states, have trumped pan-Islamism. What remains in the wake of political Islam's failure is a "neofundamentalist" mentality preoccupied solely with moral behavior and the corrupting influence of the West. "Islamism is above all a sociocultural movement embodying the protest and frustration of a generation of youth that has not been integrated socially or politically."³ This frustration is the subject of the second theoretical premise, which examines the origins and attributes of Islamist discontent.

³ Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

The phenomenon of politicized Islam has been studied and explained from a range of methodological perspectives, including culture, sociology, and political economy.⁴ A general consensus has emerged among scholars that Islamists are motivated more by economic and political frustration than by theology. As Fouad Ajami explains:

We have looked to the heavens, and we have looked in the scripture, for explanations for the appeal of political Islam. We have spent a generation speaking of "Islamic fundamentalism," of that theocratic force that has come into Arab life. But the truth lies in material circumstances. Theocratic politics blew in when economic growth faltered.⁵

With the notable exception of Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, Islamist movements have not been led by the Muslim clergy.⁶ Islamists are typically middle class, educated (often with highly technical degrees), recently urbanized, and unemployed (or employed beneath their social and economic expectations). Consequently, Islamists are disappointed and frustrated. Islam is simply the ideological venue—the rallying cry—for expression of this economic and political frustration.

Taken together, these theories suggest important questions about the Taliban and political Islam in Central Asia. What factors account for the Taliban's violent and regressive behavior? Are the Taliban constructing a new Islamic society in Afghanistan, or, like Iran and other Islamic states, are they regressing toward familiar authoritarian politics and state-centered economics? Are they capable of exporting their ideology

⁴ See, for example, Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Guilan Denoeux, *Urban Unrest in the Middle East: A Comparative Study of Informal Networks in Egypt, Iran, and Lebanon* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); and Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*.

⁵ Fouad Ajami, "The Arab Inheritance," *Foreign Affairs* 76:5 (September/October 1997), p. 139.

⁶ Even in Iran, the clergy played a smaller role than one might assume. The mullahs that did participate, including the Ayatollah Khomeini, were essentially "outcast" radicals whose ideology was not accepted by the mainstream Iranian clergy.

beyond Afghanistan's borders? What is the economic and political status of Muslims in Central Asia? Do Central Asian opposition groups fit the commonly accepted socioeconomic profile of Islamists? Do the Taliban and Central Asian Muslims alter our understanding of political Islam and its root causes?

In addition to these broad theoretical questions, this study addresses practical issues with policy implications both for Central Asian leaders and international powers. Is the Taliban regime spawning fundamentalist protégés in the newly independent Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union? As Central Asian Muslims rediscover their Islamic heritage after 70 years of Soviet domination, will they perceive the Taliban as a model for Islamic government and social order? Does Taliban-style fundamentalism constitute a threat to stable, secular government in the region? How do the Taliban and Central Asian Islamists affect Central Asia's political and economic development? How should Central Asian governments and interested world powers react to Central Asia's Islamic renaissance?

Two methodological perspectives guide the pursuit of these questions. Chapters II and III employ a sociological approach; social origins, norms, and structures are examined in order to establish a sort of "baseline" for cultural and ideological compatibility between the Taliban and Central Asian Muslims. Given the distinctly economic and political nature of Islamic discontent, Chapter IV considers the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the context of Central Asia's political economy.

Specifically, Chapter II examines the social origins of the Taliban movement. It demonstrates the disparity between Taliban ideology on the one hand, and conventional Afghan notions of Islam and political authority on the other. The Taliban are revealed to

be an anomalous phenomenon, influenced more by obscure tribal code and the alienating effects of warfare than by any conventional expression of traditional or political Islam. Chapter III contrasts the Taliban's history and ideology with that of Central Asian Islam. It examines the impact of Soviet dominion over the region and its culture. The experiences of Soviet secularism and totalitarian government have imbued most Central Asians with a worldview that is predominantly secular and, therefore, seemingly uncondusive to Taliban-style fundamentalism. Violent opposition groups associated with the Taliban are present, but these groups currently command a very small following. A sociological comparison thus casts doubt on the proposition of a causal relationship between the Taliban and Central Asian fundamentalism. It also suggests that Central Asians, on the whole, are not culturally predisposed to Islamist ideology.

Nonetheless, Islamic political violence in Central Asia has increased over the past decade, and evidence does indicate some sort of Taliban connection. If Taliban ideology has not infiltrated Central Asian political discourse, and if militant Central Asian opposition groups did not originate in Taliban training camps, then two questions remain: what factors account for the small but growing Islamic opposition in Central Asia, and what role does the Taliban play in this scenario?

Chapter IV addresses these questions through an examination of Central Asia's political economy. It surveys the political and economic structures of the Soviet era, and explains how the Soviet legacy contributes to contemporary problems of political oppression and economic stagnation. These problems in turn have given voice to political opposition groups, which—as in other states throughout the Islamic world—have mobilized against the status quo governments under the banner of Islam. Lastly,

this chapter examines the political economy of Central Asian Islamism in the regional context of geopolitics, oil and gas markets, and the growth of international crime. From this vantage, the derivative impact of the Taliban on the rise of political Islam and fundamentalism in Central Asia is discernable.

Finally, Chapter V draws conclusions from the findings of this study and outlines policy recommendations for the Central Asian republics and the United States. It recounts some of the issues raised at the outset and raises new questions about the role and future direction of political Islam in Central Asia. It is useful first, however, to place the paper's main subjects in context. The remainder of this introductory chapter sketches the recent histories and defining attributes of both the Taliban and militant fundamentalists in Central Asia.

B. THE TALIBAN: "RECREATING THE TIME OF THE PROPHET"

In an interview with Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid (one of very few journalists who have had access to the Taliban), Mullah Wakil, a senior confidant of Taliban leader Mullah Omar, stated:

The Sharia does not allow politics or political parties. That is why we give no salaries to officials or soldiers, just food, clothes, shoes, and weapons. We want to live a life like the Prophet lived 1,400 years ago and jihad is our right. We want to recreate the time of the Prophet and we are only carrying out what the Afghan people have wanted for the past 14 years.⁷

The deliberate and unabashedly literal fundamentalism implicit in Wakil's statement is readily apparent in the Taliban's ascetic social policies. Over the past five years, the Taliban have prohibited women from education and employment, mandated

⁷ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 43.

short haircuts and full beards for men, banned most forms of entertainment and recreation, suppressed other Islamic points of view, and established Islamic courts to dispense justice according to the Taliban's interpretation of *sharia*. The Taliban's occasional statements and edicts, along with their observable policy actions, indicate overwhelming emphasis on two political objectives: transformation of Afghan social mores according to the Taliban's interpretation of Islam and prosecution of their ongoing civil war. These priorities are pursued at the expense of coherent economic and foreign policies.

No aspect of Taliban rule has attracted as much international scrutiny and condemnation as Taliban policy toward women. Upon taking Kabul in 1996, the Taliban immediately issued edicts forbidding girls to go to school. According to a human rights study by the U.S. State Department, most girls' schools and home-based vocational projects have been closed in Taliban-controlled territories. Formerly co-educational universities no longer admit women, and the women's university in Kabul has been closed. Additionally, many Afghan women are virtually homebound due to the banning of women from mosques and most forms of employment, the strictly enforced dress code requiring *burqas* to be worn, and occasionally violent harassment from Taliban-created religious police.⁸ On the Taliban's official English-language web site, these policies are said to "protect the honor, dignity, and freedom" of Afghan women in accordance with Islam and Afghan tradition.⁹

⁸ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan*, (5 September 2000) [Homepage on-line]; available from http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/irf/irf_rpt/irf_afghanis.html; accessed 8 December 2000.

⁹ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Taleban," *Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan: New York Office* [Homepage on-line]; available from <http://www.taleban.com/taleb.htm>; accessed 8 December 2000.

Though perhaps to a lesser degree, Taliban policies have adversely impacted men as well, particularly non-Pashtuns. In Kabul, men were given just six weeks to grow full beards (in spite of the fact that some Afghan ethnic groups are incapable of growing facial hair), and the mandatory wearing of the *shalwar* and baggy trousers was imposed. Violators have been beaten and arrested in the streets.¹⁰ Both Western-influenced entertainment (such as movies, radio, and television), and traditional Afghan entertainment (including kite-flying, chess, and dancing) have been banned. Toys, photographs, and any artwork depicting human beings have been outlawed as un-Islamic. In March 2001, the Taliban infamously destroyed two ancient Buddhist statues hewn from a cliff side despite unanimous world protest.¹¹ The celebration of traditional holidays, such as Nowruz (the Persian/Afghan New Year's) and the Shi'i holy month of Muharram, is illegal as well. The display of any kind of festivity was outlawed even for Eid al-Fitr, the principle Muslim celebration of the year.¹²

Religious persecution and harsh application of justice are also typical of the Taliban's campaign to recast society in their own image. The Hazara Shia of central Afghanistan have been subjected to much violence and oppression. In retaliation for a previous conflict that resulted in the deaths of 2,000 Taliban soldiers, the Taliban massacred 8,000 Hazara men, women, and children in 1998.¹³ In May 2000 and January 2001, the Taliban executed hundreds more Hazara civilians, apparently as collective

¹⁰ Rashid, *Taliban*, pp. 114-115.

¹¹ Barry Bearak, "Afghan Says Destruction of Buddhas is Complete," *The New York Times on the Web* (12 March 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/12/world/12AFGH.html>; accessed 12 April 2001.

¹² Rashid, *Taliban*, pp. 115-116.

¹³ Michael Sheridan, "How the Taliban Slaughtered 8,000," *London Times* (1 November 1998); available from Lexis-Nexis.

punishment for local residents whom the Taliban suspected of cooperating with opposition forces.¹⁴

All Sunni Muslims are required to pray five times daily; Friday noon prayers at mosques are compulsory. Non-Muslims (whose numbers are few and decreasing) are required to wear a prominent piece of yellow cloth to differentiate them from Sunnis. Islamic courts have been established to dispense swift summary justice in accordance with the Taliban's understanding of *sharia*. Court decisions are final. Offenses such as murder, rape, and apostasy are punishable by execution; thieves are subjected to amputation; adulterers are whipped 100 times or stoned to death; and men found guilty of homosexual acts have been killed by having stone walls toppled over them. All punishments, including executions, are held publicly—sometimes in stadiums before crowds of 30,000 or more. In many cases, the relatives of victims carry out the punishment.¹⁵

In addition to their sweeping imposition of *sharia*, the Taliban's agenda is distinguished by preoccupation with the ongoing civil war. As of April 2001, the Taliban have gained control of approximately 95% of Afghanistan's geography. Only the northeastern-most portions of the country remain under control of Ahmad Shah Massoud and the Northern Alliance. Since 1994, the Taliban, who are of Pashtun ethnicity, have gradually defeated all other warring factions. When the Taliban began their campaign for control of the country, Burhanuddin Rabbani, a former Mujahidin commander during the Soviet-Afghan War, was Afghanistan's embattled president. Though Pashtuns

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, "Massacres of Hazaras in Afghanistan," (19 February 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/afghanistan>; accessed 16 March 2001.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, *2000 Annual Report*.

(Afghanistan's largest ethnic group) had traditionally held power in Afghanistan, Rabbani and his ally, Massoud, are both Tajiks. The Taliban's "jihad" to rid Afghanistan of factional violence and lawlessness in the name of Islam thus took on a distinctively ethnic and sectarian quality as more and more Pashtuns joined the Taliban in their battle against the ethnic Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazara Shia, Ismaili Shia, etc.

The Taliban have demonstrated little interest in aspects of government beyond prosecution of their civil war against the Northern Alliance and imposition of *sharia*. According to Freedom House, "The Taliban have largely neglected most functions of government and rely on the UN and foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to provide basic services, food-for-work programs, mine clearance, and refugee repatriation."¹⁶ Afghanistan's economic devastation has been compounded by drought and famine during the winter of 2000-2001. Nearly 1 million Afghans are at risk of starvation, and hundreds of thousands are crowded into refugee camps along the Afghan borders with Iran, Tajikistan, and Pakistan. Many have fled back to the same Pakistani refugee camps that sheltered Afghans during the Soviet invasion.¹⁷

The Taliban's foreign policies have been equally counterproductive. Their support for international terrorism and the narcotics trade is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter IV, but it is sufficient here to observe that the Taliban's rigid adherence to such "rogue" behavior has succeeded only in alienating Afghanistan from the rest of the

¹⁶ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World: 1999-2000* [Homepage on-line]; available from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2000/countryratings/afghanistan.html>; accessed 13 April 2001.

¹⁷ Barry Bearak, "Fleeing Famine and War, Afghans Again Meet Death," *The New York Times on the Web* (1 March 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/01/02AFGH.html>; accessed 13 April 2001; and Pamela Constable, "Famine Threatens 1 Million People in Afghanistan," *Washingtonpost.com* (22 February 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A36147-2001Feb21.html>; accessed 13 April 2001.

world—including most Islamic states.¹⁸ In light of Afghanistan's bleak outlook, it remains to be seen whether the Taliban—like the Iranian and Sudanese Islamic governments before them—will revert to conventional economic and political models. They have yet to establish any viable alternatives.

C. MILITANT ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA

Since acquiring independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, all five Central Asian republics—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—have witnessed a revival of Islamic culture. Of these, only Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan have experienced a proliferation of Islamist opposition parties and militant fundamentalist groups, though fear of Islamic insurgency permeates all five governments. Central Asia's leaders jealously guard their states' secular status, an inheritance of the Soviet legacy that still exerts enormous influence over politics in the region. The rise of Islamist and fundamentalist opposition is seen as a growing threat to secular government and regional security, and Central Asian leaders—particularly Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov—adamantly assert that the Islamist threat emanates from Afghanistan.

According to President Karimov:

We need to resist manifestations of extremism and fanaticism on our territory . . . First [opposition groups] are being trained in religious doctrine and then in modern forms of terrorist activity and then they return here . . . they have been trained to demand the creation here of a caliphate. That is, at the end of the 20th century they want to take us back to the reality of the 7th-8th centuries, to the times of the Prophet Muhammad . . . We cannot fail to be aware of this threat, and it is being fed by the war in Afghanistan and the fanatical Taliban movement.¹⁹

¹⁸ Only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates recognize the Taliban as the official government of Afghanistan. Of these, Saudi Arabia and UAE have increasingly distanced themselves from the Taliban in recent years.

¹⁹ Interview with Islam Karimov by Arkadiy Dubnov, "Perhaps It Is a Shortcoming of Mine That I State My Goals in Full," *Moscow Vremya*, in Russian, 19 October 1998, translated in FBIS (5 November 1998).

Kyrgyzstan's President Askar Akayev echoes Karimov's sentiments: "The terrorists are trying to get deep into the republic to destabilize the situation in Kyrgyzstan and all Central Asia . . . but we will never allow anyone to trample on our holy land with weapons in their hands."²⁰

Despite their fierce competition for access to Central Asia's oil and gas resources, major regional and extra-regional powers are united in their concern over the Taliban and Islamic insurgency in Central Asia. Russia, the United States, Iran, China, Turkey, and India, all of which seek political influence in the region, have accused the Taliban of fomenting Islamic terrorism in Central Asia. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Trubnikov attended an emergency meeting of the Central Asian presidents in January 2001 to discuss strategies for countering "aggression" from "Afghan-based Islamist insurgents who have staged incursions into the region." Under the aegis of the "Shanghai Five" security alliance, China has joined the Russian and Central Asian presidents in previous summits to address the same concerns.²¹ In September 2000, the US State Department added the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) to its list of 28 foreign terrorist organizations. In a statement announcing this decision, a State Department spokesman said that "IMU fighters have trained in camps in Afghanistan, some controlled by Usama bin Laden," and that the IMU "receives assistance from the

²⁰ "Kyrgyz President Says Rebels Threatening Regional Stability," *Agence France Presse* (31 August 2000); available from Lexis-Nexis.

²¹ Anthony Davis, "Afghanistan Top of Central Asia Security Agenda," *Jane's Defence Weekly* (17 January 2001); available from Lexis-Nexis. Turkmenistan's Saparmurad Niyazov, who has developed a cordial relationship with the Taliban in hopes of eventually building oil and gas pipelines through Afghanistan, abstained from both the Shanghai Five and the January 2001 meeting.

Taliban and other groups and individuals based in Afghanistan.”²² That month, General Tommy Franks, commander in chief of the US Central Command, pledged new military aid to Uzbekistan, stating, “The fighting in Afghanistan is a threat to security in the whole region.”²³ Uzbekistan also accepts military assistance from China, while substantial Russian forces are stationed on Tajikistan’s border with Afghanistan. In December 2000, the United States and Russia jointly led the United Nations in a measure to impose further punitive sanctions against the Taliban. India, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan cosponsored this resolution, which passed without objection. (China abstained in order to support the measure without contradicting the general Chinese policy of opposition to UN sanctions.)²⁴

In short, the governments of Central Asia have touted Islamic militancy as a threat that is both exigent and essentially foreign (i.e., sponsored and encouraged by the Taliban). Outside powers, particularly the United States, Russia, and China, have accepted this assessment and structured their Central Asian policies accordingly. A general consensus has emerged among Central Asian states and the major world powers that Taliban-style fundamentalism presents a threat to stability in Central Asia. The validity of this assumption will be taken up in the following chapters. The remainder of this section surveys recent conflicts between militant Islamic groups and the Central Asian governments.

²² Statement by Richard Boucher, U.S. Department of State (15 September 2000) [Homepage on-line]; available from <http://secretary.state.gov/www/briefings/statements/2000/ps000915b.html>; accessed 4 March 2001.

²³ Ahmed Rashid, “On the Spot,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* 163:42 (19 October 2000) [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.feer.com/001019/p28region.html>; accessed 14 March 2001.

²⁴ See Resolution 1333, SC/6979, United Nations Security Council (19 December 2000) [Homepage on-line]; available from <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/sc6979.doc.htm>; accessed 14 March 2001.

The Tajik civil war, which raged from 1992 until 1997, served as a primary catalyst for Central Asia's contemporary Islamic political violence.²⁵ This conflict is often mischaracterized—or at least oversimplified—as a war between militant Islamic fundamentalists and the secular communist government. In fact, Tajikistan's civil war entailed a more complex clash of political, economic, ethnic, and regional interests. Islamists and fundamentalists constituted one faction of a broader anti-government coalition of nationalists, democrats, and cultural revivalists. The conflict caused many Tajik refugees and opposition fighters to flee over the border into northern Afghanistan, where they were sheltered by rival Mujahidin factions such as those of the Afghan Tajik Ahmad Shah Massoud and the Uzbek Abdul Rashid Dostum. Eventually, these refugee camps became rear bases for the Islamist elements of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO).²⁶

Meanwhile, in Uzbekistan, an Islamic political movement called *Adolat* ("Justice") organized demonstrations in the Ferghana Valley city of Namangan. As the civil war in neighboring Tajikistan raised the Uzbek government's anxiety, President Karimov cracked down not only on *Adolat*, but also on other Islamic groups that engaged in much less political activity. By the end of 1992, Uzbekistan had begun to drive its Islamic opposition into Tajikistan and Afghanistan, where these elements became more militant. Many joined the UTO in its struggle against the secular Tajik government. In

²⁵ While Tajikistan's civil war contributed heavily to the radicalization of current Islamic opposition groups, it did not mark the *naissance* of political or fundamentalist Islam in Central Asia. The deeper historical roots of Central Asian Islamism and fundamentalism are discussed in Chapter III.

²⁶ See Julie R. Sirrs, "Mixed Messages: The Contrasting Reactions of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan to the War in Afghanistan," *Central Asia Monitor*, No. 2 (2000), pp. 1-3, and International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization and Regional Security*, ICG Asia Report No. 14 (Osh/Brussels, 1 March 2001), p. iv. Available on-line at http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/asia/centralasia/reports/A400245_01032001.pdf (accessed 3 March 2001).

June 1997, the Tajik government and the UTO formally ended their civil war with the establishment of an interim coalition government charged with implementing peace agreements and repatriating refugees. The peace process has been far from perfect, but most exiled UTO leaders and tens of thousands of refugees have returned from Afghanistan.²⁷ After the rapprochement between Tajik government officials and most Tajik Islamists, the militant Uzbeks in Tajikistan and Afghanistan shifted their campaign back to the Uzbek government. Uzbek militants, loosely organized as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), have been responsible for most of the political violence that has rocked Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan in recent years.

Relatively little is known about the IMU. The group's political leader is Tokhir Yuldashev, a former leader of Adolat, and the military commander is Juma Namangani, a native Uzbek who was a major leader of the militant UTO fighters. Since 1993, Namangani is alleged to have received training in Afghan Mujahidin camps. He is also believed to have received training from both Pakistani and Saudi intelligence officials.²⁸ Estimates of IMU membership range from as little as 100 up to several thousand, though most sources place the total membership at about 2,000.²⁹ Beginning in 1999, the IMU initiated several incursions into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan from Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Most of the violence has occurred in the Ferghana Valley, a historically

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Tajikistan: Human Rights Developments," in *World Report 2001* (Human Rights Watch, 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available at <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k1/europe/tajikistan.html>; accessed 19 March 2001. For detailed analysis of the Tajik peace process, see also R. Grant Smith, "Tajikistan: The Rocky Road to Peace," *Central Asian Survey* 18:2 (June 1999), pp. 243-250.

²⁸ See "Uzbekistan Politics: Islamist Insurgence," *EIU Viewswire* (21 Sep 2000), available from Lexis-Nexis; and International Crisis Group, "Recent Violence In Central Asia: Causes and Consequences" (Central Asia/Brussels, 18 October 2000), p. 3. Available on-line at:

<http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/asia/centralasia/reports/>; accessed 3 March 2001.

²⁹ See, for example, International Crisis Group, "Recent Violence in Central Asia," p. 5, and Ahmed Rashid, "Central Asia Crisis Talks Over Islamic 'Invasion'," *The Daily Telegraph* (11 January 2001); available from Lexis-Nexis.

religious region that is shared by Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Interstate borders in Ferghana are circuitous and porous (see Figure 1), which has exacerbated the insurgency problem and drawn all three countries into the conflict.

The IMU first became militarily active after a series of bombs exploded in Tashkent in February 1999. Within an hour and a half, six bombs detonated at symbolically important buildings throughout the city—one of the explosions occurred at a site where President Karimov's motorcade was about to arrive. The attacks remain unresolved, but the Uzbek government quickly blamed them on Islamist insurgents and initiated a series of sweeping arrests. IMU leader Tokhir Yuldashev denied responsibility for the bombings, though he warned that more such bombings would occur if Karimov did not step down.³⁰ A non-violent Islamist opposition group, *Hizb-ut-Tahrir-al-Islamii*, also denied responsibility, though many of its members and associates were arrested in the wake of the incident.³¹

Beginning in August 1999, the IMU led a series of armed incursions in and around the Ferghana Valley. On 6 August, several Kyrgyz officials were taken hostage and released a week later after a ransom of \$50,000 was paid. On 22 August, several dozen hostages were taken, including a Kyrgyz general and four Japanese geologists. After military retaliation from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, as well as a reported \$6 million ransom from Japan, the insurgents withdrew and released the hostages. Their

³⁰ Several factors have contributed to suspicion that Karimov's security apparatus engineered the Tashkent attacks in order to justify a crackdown on Islamist opposition. First, none of the assailants involved in any of the six bombings were apprehended, despite the crowded and secure areas in which most of the attacks occurred. The precise timing, incredible breaches of security, and coincidence with other political developments have also generated speculation. See International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization*, pp. 5-6.

³¹ Hizb-ut-Tahrir is an international movement that is active throughout the Muslim world. It advocates reestablishment of the Caliphate in concert with *sharia*-based rule. The organization maintains a website at <http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org>.



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Figure 1. Map of Central Asia with Detail of the Ferghana Valley. (From Nancy Lubin and Barnett R. Rubin, *Calming the Ferghana Valley: Development and Dialogue in the Heart of Central Asia* (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 1999)

reason for the invasion and hostage taking was the demand to pass freely through Kyrgyz territory in order to penetrate Uzbekistan.

The Uzbek and Kyrgyz militaries engaged the IMU in several cross-border skirmishes in August and September of 2000. During this period, IMU fighters temporarily occupied two villages in Uzbekistan, attacked an Uzbek police outpost, and kidnapped American mountain climbers in Kyrgyzstan.³² On 14 August 2000, the IMU issued a list of demands to the Uzbek government. These included the release of all IMU members imprisoned in Uzbekistan, the reopening of mosques that had been shut down by the Uzbek government, the sanctioning of Muslim dress in Uzbekistan, and the implementation of sharia.³³

As winter set in, the IMU forces retreated through Tajikistan to Afghanistan, where they were believed to have received refuge from the Taliban until further attacks could be conducted in the spring of 2001. The IMU maintains offices in Kabul and military training camps in Taliban-controlled Afghan territory.³⁴ The Taliban have rebuffed official Uzbek requests for extradition of Yuldashev and Namangani.³⁵ There is no question, then, that some sort of relationship exists between the Taliban and the IMU. The nature and extent of this relationship, however, is subject to dispute.

³² This kidnapping precipitated the U.S. State Department's addition of the IMU to its list of international terrorists.

³³ For detailed chronologies of IMU incursions, see the International Crisis Group reports, "Recent Violence: Causes and Consequences" and *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization*.

³⁴ International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization*, p. 11.

³⁵ Sirrs, pp. 3-4.

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II. THE TALIBAN AND AFGHANISTAN

Western journalists and politicians typically characterize the Taliban regime as another manifestation of Islamic fundamentalism. This depiction, while not entirely inaccurate, is doubly problematic: first, as commonly understood and applied in the West, the term “fundamentalism” reinforces negative stereotypes of Islam generally, which is too often perceived as monolithic, anachronistic, and violently anti-Western. Second, and more importantly, the fundamentalist label (or any label with exclusively Islamic connotations) fails to capture the unique set of circumstances that has informed the Taliban’s severe and unyielding belief system—circumstances that distinguish the Taliban and their destructive behavior from other Islamic movements.

Though outsiders from Uzbekistan to the United States may characterize the Taliban as typical fundamentalists, and the Taliban may indeed regard themselves in deliberately (if not exclusively) Islamic terms, this chapter contends that the Taliban’s interpretations of religion and authority are extremely idiosyncratic, and have less to do with *any* commonly accepted Islamic doctrine than with secular factors such as tribal custom and the sociological repercussions of warfare. Accordingly, Taliban ideology would be an irrelevant and improbable development outside the borders of Afghanistan.³⁶

As the previous chapter demonstrated, the Taliban regime has sought to impose its austere interpretation of *sharia* on the Afghan population as a whole—regardless of sectarian, cultural, or ethnic distinctions between Afghan citizens. They have come to

³⁶ Though not the subject of this study, Pakistan is the most significant exception to the argument that Taliban ideology is unlikely to proliferate in neighboring states. Pakistan is the only country that shares close ethnic, religious, and historical traits with Afghanistan and the Taliban. As this chapter will demonstrate, Pakistan was an integral part of the Taliban’s genesis. If Taliban-style fundamentalism does present a threat to any other state, Pakistan is most at risk.

power via military victory over rival factions and conquest of all Afghan provinces, an endeavor that they consider jihad. Though indeed religious from the Taliban's point of view, their civil war/jihad also entails ethnic undercurrents. The Taliban's conception of Islam, then, is ascetic, compulsory, and non-negotiable; and their political legitimacy derives from self-proclaimed religious devotion, their ethnic status, and growing monopoly of coercive force. The first two sections of this chapter contrast these interpretations of Islam and political authority with conventional Afghan Islamic culture. Traditional Afghan Islam has been distinctly moderate and tolerant, while strains of political Islam in Afghanistan have essentially mirrored Islamist movements throughout the Muslim world. The third section examines the ideological and sociological origins of the Taliban movement—origins rooted in the violence and alienation resulting from twenty years of constant warfare.

A. TRADITIONAL AND POLITICAL ISLAM IN AFGHANISTAN

Generally speaking, Islam in Afghanistan has been practiced and understood in both traditional (or popular) terms and more ideological, politicized terms. Islam is inextricably intertwined with Afghan custom and world-view; as such, it plays an integral role in the legitimization of political authority. The basic attributes of traditional Afghan Islam, the development and impact of political Islam, and the nature of Afghan political authority are the subjects of this section.

As Roy cautions, it would be a mistake to draw too distinct a contrast between traditional/popular religion and political Islam. Not only has Afghanistan historically been comprised of a variety of Islamic traditions and cultures, but there is often much overlap between traditional Afghan Islam and the fundamentalist or politicized variants

that derive from it. Accordingly, "traditional Islam" will be used here to designate the broadest common denominators among Afghan understanding and practice of Islam; an Islam "which derives from a world-view common to all [Afghan] social categories, which provides the basis for the more intellectual constructions of the 'ulama (Muslim law) and the intellectuals (Islamist ideology)."³⁷ Ralph Magnus and Eden Naby distinguish traditional Islam as encompassing "all Afghan political players who were specifically not bound within Marxism or conscientiously and deliberately Islamists. Most Afghans would fall within this category whether they are Sunni or Shi'a."³⁸

Given these conceptual parameters, several factors have affected traditional understandings of Islam across sectarian or ethnic lines in Afghanistan. These include ethnic and religious diversity, the diffusion of society over rugged terrain that virtually isolates some tribes and villages, and the prominence of Sufism. Together, these (and undoubtedly other) factors have contributed to an Islamic tradition that is notably tolerant, personal and localized, and relatively apolitical.

Islam is virtually the only thing that all Afghans have in common. Apart from several thousand Hindus, Sikhs, and a few hundred Jews, all Afghans are Muslims. Of these, approximately 80 percent are Sunnis of the comparatively liberal Hanafi juridical system. The remaining 20 percent are comprised of Twelver and Ismaili Shias. Despite the overwhelming majority of Hanafi Sunnis, which might seem to suggest a relatively homogeneous population, Afghanistan's demography is further complicated by a wide array of ethnic groups that break down into a wider array of tribal factions—most of

³⁷ Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 31.

³⁸ Ralph Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), p. 71.

which adhere to distinct identities and some of which are rivals. The many tribes of the Pashtun majority are predominantly Sunnis, as are most Tajiks and Turkic ethnic groups. The Hazaras, Qizilbash, and some Tajiks adhere to Shi'ism. Fifteen or more smaller ethnic groups are also scattered throughout Afghanistan. Further dividing these religious and ethnic groups is a bewildering assortment of languages and dialects spanning several language families, from Indo-Persian to Turkic to Mongolian.³⁹

While Islam is the sole element binding these disparate groups together (albeit tenuously), these many religious and ethnic distinctions have prevented any centralized, uniform interpretation of Islam from coalescing and taking root throughout Afghanistan. Afghanistan's rugged geography, which segregates many ethnic groups and tribes from one another, has also contributed to the decentralized nature of traditional Islam. Allegiance to Islam, then, has been imbedded in the community level of tribe, village, and family—not in any centrally organized notion of religious doctrine. Specific religious practices have therefore varied from region to region depending on local interpretation.⁴⁰

Though typically decried by fundamentalists such as the Taliban and the Saudi Wahhabis, Sufism has long been a popular and influential component of Afghan religious tradition. Mobile Sufi networks, particularly those of the Naqshbandiyya order, have served as moderating forces among the various ethnic and tribal groups.⁴¹ Sufism has

³⁹ Magnus and Naby, pp. 9-17.

⁴⁰ Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, p. 30.

⁴¹ The word "moderate" has become a Western cliché used to describe Muslims who agree with the West. In this context, the word "moderating" is used in the sense of "mediating" or "tempering." Despite many religious, ethnic, and cultural differences, Afghans have not traditionally mobilized against each other under the banner of Islam. In this respect, factors such as diversity, geography, and Sufism have had a moderating effect on the way Afghans have traditionally expressed religious symbols and reacted to other religious points of view. Prior to the Saur Revolution in 1978, Islam was an important but essentially private and apolitical matter for most Afghan Muslims.

penetrated most religious and ethnic traditions in Afghanistan except for Shia groups.⁴²

Roy suggests that the anti-clericalism of Afghan Sufis held enduring appeal for traditional Afghans, who appreciated the unobtrusive way in which Sufism accommodated their local religious and tribal customs.⁴³

The integral yet decentralized and temperate character of traditional Islam in Afghanistan is well summarized by Rashid:

Islam has always been at the very center of the lives of ordinary Afghan people. Whether it is saying one's prayers five times a day, fasting in Ramadan or giving zakat . . . few Muslim peoples in the world observe the rituals and the piety of Islam with such regularity and emotion as the Afghans . . . But no Afghan can insist that the fellow Muslim standing next to him prays also. Traditionally Islam in Afghanistan has been immensely tolerant—to other Muslim sects, other religions and modern lifestyles. Afghan mullahs were never known to push Islam down people's throats and sectarianism was not an issue until recently.⁴⁴

Referring to the Taliban, Rashid continues: "For the first time in Afghanistan's history the unifying factor of Islam has become a lethal weapon in the hands of extremists, a force for division, fragmentation and enormous blood-letting."⁴⁵

Though traditional Islam remained by far the prevalent religious culture amongst most Afghans, reactionary movements employing Islam as a political ideology also evolved over time. Like other Muslim countries in the early twentieth century, Afghanistan was host to a wave of intellectual and political thinking (*salafiyya*) aimed at the problems of Western imperialism, modernization, and the comparative failures of the Islamic world. In Afghanistan, at least two factors contributed to this development.

⁴² Ashraf Ghani, "Afghanistan: Islam and Counterrevolutionary Movements," in *Islam in Asia: Religion, Politics, & Society*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 81.

⁴³ Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, pp. 40-41.

⁴⁴ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 82.

⁴⁵ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 83.

First, the return of former exiles introduced the modernist Islamic thinking of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and the Young Turks. The second factor was Afghanistan's long-standing ideological connection to India, where many Afghan *ulama* had traditionally been educated in the Deoband school.⁴⁶ The Deoband tradition, which combined theological fundamentalism with strong anti-colonial pan-Islamism, was crucial to the development of both traditional and political Islam in Afghanistan. (Deobandism, incidentally, accepted and incorporated Sufism, which distinguishes it from the exclusive fundamentalism of the Wahhabis or the Taliban.)⁴⁷

Certain attributes are common to the political Islamists of the early twentieth century, and these qualities stand in sharp contrast to the modern-day Taliban. First, both the modernists and the pan-Islamists were comprised of educated members of the Afghan *ulama* and intelligentsia. Second, these movements conceived of Islam in broad sociopolitical terms. Whether from a religiously orthodox or modernist perspective, they advocated sweeping agendas aimed at transforming, liberating, and modernizing the Afghan nation.

According to Magnus and Naby, "It is useful to note that in every case in which Islamic revivalism has succeeded, regardless of the range within the spectrum of Islamic traditionalism and Islamist idealism, the societal context has been either extreme secularism or pro-Marxism."⁴⁸ Prominent examples include the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria during the 1960s, and Khomeini in 1970s Iran. Such was the case with Afghanistan as well. In the wake of the pan-Islamic movement, Afghanistan had

⁴⁶ Asta Olesen, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan* (Richmond: Curzon Press Ltd, 1995), p. 107.

⁴⁷ Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, pp. 57-58.

⁴⁸ Magnus and Naby, p. 139.

proceeded for several decades on a program of intermittent and increasingly secular modernization. By the 1960s, Afghanistan was becoming more and more dependent on Soviet patronage. This patronage was accompanied by the rise of pro-Soviet Marxist parties in Afghanistan, who would come to power in a 1978 coup d'état. Though a minority movement, Islamism developed in opposition to secular modernization and especially Marxism.

Afghan Islamism essentially mirrored the Islamist movements arising throughout the Middle East at this time. Consistent with the political economy theory of Islamic discontent, Afghan Islamists were young, recently urbanized, educated (typically in engineering or some other science), and thoroughly disenchanted with the economic failures of modernization efforts.⁴⁹ They based their ideology on the writings of influential Islamists such as Egypt's Sayyid Qutb, Pakistan's Mawlana Maududi, and even Ayatollah Khomeini—whose revolutionary movement was seen as an inspiration in spite of its Shi'i orientation.⁵⁰ Like their fellow Islamists in other countries, the Afghan movement was a distinctly modern phenomenon. "For them, the problem is to develop a modern political ideology based on Islam, which they see as the only way to come to terms with the modern world and the best means of confronting foreign imperialism."⁵¹

Though many Islamist leaders, including Hekmatyar and Rabbani, went on to become prominent Mujahidin commanders in the Soviet-Afghan War, Islamism in Afghanistan never attracted a substantial following. Attempted counter-coups by the

⁴⁹ See Denoeux's *Urban Unrest in the Middle East*, and Magnus and Naby, p. 145.

⁵⁰ Olesen, p. 229.

⁵¹ Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, p. 69.

university-based Islamists were not supported by traditional peasant masses or the *ulama*, which did not consider the Islamists to be the bulwark of Islam.⁵²

Like the Islamic modernists and pan-Islamists that preceded them, the contemporary Afghan Islamists envisioned Islam as a comprehensive social, political, and economic system. Though they rejected many of the Western influences of their predecessors, the Islamists sought to instill Islamic society as a viable alternative to secular capitalist democracy and atheist communism. The Islamists' modern, politicized outlook contrasts with the ascetic, fundamentalist preoccupations of the Taliban; and their failure to attract the vast, rural segments of society underscores the dominance of traditional, tribal Islam in Afghan society.

B. POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN AFGHANISTAN

Given the centrality of religion to the lives of Afghans and the history of the Afghan state, leaders and their regimes have never been able to secure the legitimacy of their rule without coming to terms with Islam. This is not to suggest, however, that Afghans have historically perceived their political leaders in religious terms or their religious figures in political terms. On the contrary, political legitimacy in Afghanistan has depended on the leader's ability to strike the proper balance between Islam and political administration. The leader must protect and defend Islam, but mustn't assume the mantle of religious authority for himself. Likewise, the leader must administer the affairs of state, but not interfere with tribal custom and authority. A legitimate Afghan leader, then, is one who rules on the periphery and defends Islam when it is threatened by

⁵² Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, p. 76. Incidentally, the establishment of Mujahidin political parties marks a distinction between the Islamists and the Taliban, the latter of which believe political parties are un-Islamic.

outside forces. To best understand this notion of political legitimacy, it is necessary to examine three important shapers of political authority: tribal politics, the role of the religious establishment, and the Afghan tradition of jihad.

Afghanistan's founding Durrani empire (1747-1818) derived power from its tribal constituents, and had no interest in enforcing a particular form of religious interpretation through the power of the state. It was taken for granted that the state was Islamic, but Islam was not the key determinant of the state's legitimacy. Tribal law was at least as authoritative as *sharia*.⁵³ Afghanistan's founding myth is that of the *loya jirga*, a defining element of tribal politics in Afghanistan. According to lore, Afghanistan's Durrani leaders were selected by the *jirga*, an assembly of all tribal warriors. The elected leader was first and foremost a warrior chief, and his relationship with his followers was contractual; he ruled with their consent.⁵⁴ The extent to which the *loya jirga* has been exaggerated and idealized over the course of time is debatable, but its influence on Afghan politics is evident. In the twentieth century, Afghan tribes (especially the Durrani and other Pashtuns) continued to see the central power as their representative. The state existed on the periphery but was "no more than the means of continuity. As far as their own territory [was] concerned, the presence of the state would seem to be redundant and totally unnecessary."⁵⁵ In recent history, both the Afghan Marxist regime and the subsequent Mujahidin commanders have invoked the *loya jirga* tradition in hopes of gaining legitimacy.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ghani, pp. 82-83.

⁵⁴ Magnus and Naby, p. 32.

⁵⁵ Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, p. 13.

⁵⁶ Magnus and Naby, p. 32.

From the late nineteenth century until the 1970s, Islam emerged in Afghanistan as the dominant discourse in response to the rise of European imperialism, the decline of the Ottoman Empire, and the twentieth century dilemmas of modernity and Westernization. The new ascendancy of Islam, however, was mostly symbolic; the power of the religious establishment did not increase significantly, and a centralized, state-imposed religious interpretation did not emerge.⁵⁷ This development has much to do with the persistence of traditional Islam and the culturally accepted roles of local mullahs and the *ulama* establishment.

The role of the *ulama* in Afghanistan has never been explicitly political. They have historically supported any ruling regime as long as its policies were generally consistent with *sharia* and it defended the Afghan *umma* from outside threats. Except amongst some minority Shia, the *ulama* have never had any intention to create a theocratic state.⁵⁸ Their moral authority and concern for civil society have been important in Afghan society, but the *ulama* have never had a formal hierarchy or any national level organization. Consequently, for most Afghan citizens, religious affairs were administered by local mullahs and Sufi pirs.⁵⁹

The traditional Afghan mullah, first and foremost, is a member of the village and not the *ulama* clergy. He is not connected to any institutionalized body—religious or political—and is selected to serve by the collective decision of his village. He has a monopoly on all local religious activities, frequently mediates disputes, and typically administers education. He may not, however, exercise any political power.⁶⁰ The

⁵⁷ Ghani, pp. 83-84.

⁵⁸ Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, pp. 49-50.

⁵⁹ Olesen, p. 37.

⁶⁰ Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, p. 32.

relative removal of the *ulama* from local religion, as well as the apolitical roles of both the *ulama* and the village mullahs, contribute significantly to the localized nature of traditional Islam in Afghanistan.

The extent to which the Taliban have violated Afghan notions of religious and political propriety is evident in Mullah Omar's claim to the Islamic title, 'Commander of the Faithful.' In April 1996, Omar appeared on the roof of a building in Kandahar, wrapped in the Cloak of the Prophet, which had not been removed from its shrine for many decades. While Omar's devout followers cheered his self-proclamation, most Afghans saw the incident as "a serious affront to propriety that a poor village mullah with no scholarly learning, no tribal pedigree or connections to the Prophet's family should presume so much . . . Moreover, there was no sanction for such a title in Islam, unless all of the country's *ulama* had bestowed it upon a leader."⁶¹

In addition to tribal politics and the traditional roles of religious actors, the Afghan interpretation of jihad is an important part of legitimate political authority. Political leaders have historically succeeded in bolstering Afghan solidarity through appeals to jihad. As previously mentioned, part of the ruler's legitimacy indeed stems from his protection of the Afghan *umma* against infidel threats. As Roy emphasizes, however, there is a crucial distinction in Afghan culture between jihad and tribal warfare. Jihad implies a shift in power relations away from tribal leaders (*khan*) and toward non-tribal charismatic leaders, who rose above tribal politics and inspired loyalty through a combination of Islamic zeal and superior military command. While tribal warfare may involve coalitions between tribes, it is inter-tribal in nature and motivated by vengeance

⁶¹ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 42.

or political gain. Jihad, on the other hand, unites Afghan tribes against a common external threat.⁶² (Though most Islamic movements throughout the Middle East have interpreted jihad as extending to illegitimate domestic regimes, this interpretation has not been common in Afghan history.) During the Soviet-Afghan War, the spirit of jihad was successfully superimposed over the existing ethnic, tribal, religious, and political divisions in the heterogeneous Afghan population. When the Soviets left, however, the jihad quickly devolved into violent tribal warfare.⁶³

Following the Afghan warriors of the Great Game and the Islamists of the Soviet-Afghan War, the Taliban have cloaked their violent crusade in the sacred mantle of jihad. Unlike these previous conflicts, however, the Taliban's jihad smacks of ethnic tribal warfare.

The Taliban were acting in the spirit of the Prophet's jihad when they attacked the rapacious warlords around them. Yet jihad does not sanction the killing of fellow Muslims on the basis of ethnicity or sect and it is this, the Taliban interpretation of jihad, which appalls the non-Pashtuns. While the Taliban claim they are fighting a jihad against corrupt, evil Muslims, the ethnic minorities see them as using Islam as a cover to exterminate non-Pashtuns.⁶⁴

The Taliban's imposed neofundamentalism, then, is at odds not only with the decentralized, tolerant nature of traditional Afghan Islam and the ideological modernity of Islamism, but with all notions of legitimate political authority as well. To be sure, Afghanistan has seen its share of tribal conquerors and palace coups, but the Taliban's military conquest is totally inconsistent with the theoretical traditions of the *loya jirga* and tribal dynasties. Their political and religious intrusion into all spheres of Afghan

⁶² Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, pp. 59-61.

⁶³ Olesen, p. 294.

⁶⁴ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 87.

society—from the urban centers of state power all the way down to the tribal village and family—is without precedent. The elevation of semi-literate village mullahs to political prominence is equally unorthodox. Finally, the Taliban's questionable version of jihad, conducted first against outlaw warlords but increasingly against all non-Pashtun and/or non-Sunni resistance, contradicts the historical Afghan notion of jihad.

If the Taliban are not the products of conventional Afghan sociological influences—religious or political, then perhaps the basis for their unusual neofundamentalism can be found in the unique sociological circumstances of their development and rise to power.

C. THE TALIBAN: CHILDREN OF WAR

According to the Taliban's official web site, the Taliban movement has existed since the Saur Revolution of 1978, when they "used preaching and religious guidance as the major means of fighting against the atheist ideology and corruption." After the Red Army invaded in 1979, "the Taliban played a paramount role in mobilizing, planning, and directing the holy jihad."⁶⁵ This version of history is only half true, and even the true half is greatly exaggerated. The oldest members of the Taliban regime, including Mullah Omar, are currently in their 30s and early 40s. Many of these individuals, again including Omar, indeed fought in the Soviet-Afghan War. They were not major commanders, however, and did not even constitute their own Mujahidin faction. The few Taliban that fought in the war joined the more prominent Pashtun tribal factions and

⁶⁵ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "Taleban," *Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan: New York Office* [home page on-line]; available from <http://www.taleban.com/taleb.htm>; Internet; accessed 11 December 2000.

earned their war wounds as foot soldiers.⁶⁶ These older Taliban were rural Durrani Pashtuns. Some of them—most notably Omar—were village mullahs. The vast majority of the Taliban constituency did not fight in the war at all. They were too young, and spent most of their lives outside of their war torn homeland in the refugee camps of Peshawar and Quetta in neighboring Pakistan.

The Taliban, then, are a coalition of “backwoods” Durrani Pashtuns and young war refugees. The culture of the rural Durrani Pashtuns is shaped by *Pashtunwali* (the tribal code of the Pashtuns), which in many ways is more severe than *sharia* in its restrictions and prescribed behaviors. As former refugees, the younger Taliban are the legacy of 20 years of constant warfare: they are alienated from Afghan society and culture; they grew up illiterate and unfamiliar with the opposite sex; and they were indoctrinated in refugee camps with a bizarre hybrid of radical Pakistani Deobandism and Saudi Wahhabism. Far more than anything in traditional or political Islam, this potent union of conservative *Pashtunwali* with the estranged children of war is responsible for the Taliban’s draconian “Islamic” agenda.

Given the fact that Pashtuns comprise the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, it must be acknowledged that *Pashtunwali*, in and of itself, is certainly not new or alien to Afghan culture. Indeed, *Pashtunwali* was central to the founding concept of the *Loya jirga*, and has at times complimented or conflicted with Afghan *sharia* throughout history.⁶⁷ *Pashtunwali* has been practiced, however, in varying degrees across the

⁶⁶ Rashid, *Taliban*, pp. 18-19. The Islamist Mujahidin factions, such as those led by Rabbani or Hekmatyar, received the overwhelming majority of resources and funding from the CIA/Pakistani ISI pipeline. Parties organized along more secular tribal lines, such as the above-mentioned Durrani Pashtun factions and some Uzbek factions, were largely ignored by international support and consequently were not as influential in the conduct of the war.

⁶⁷ Olesen, p. 33.

Pashtun belt and has certainly never governed the processes of non-Pashtuns. The rural Durrani, who come from “the poorest, most conservative and least literate southern Pashtun provinces of Afghanistan,” have been virtually untouched by modernity.⁶⁸ Unlike other Pashtun tribes from other regions—particularly more urbanized groups—the Durrani tribal Pashtuns proudly adhere to a very old canon of *Pashtunwali*; a canon unattenuated by social change or even Islam.

Literally meaning “way of the Pashtun,” *Pashtunwali* is both an ideology and a body of law. In essence, it is a chivalrous code of behavior revolving around the key concepts of honor (*namus*), notions of dishonor (*pighur*) and shame (*sharm*), and the equality and freedom of the male individual, who autonomously controls his immediate family within the tribe. Individuals are not technically Pashtun by descent alone; they must continuously demonstrate their “Pashtun-ness” on a daily basis through honorable behavior.⁶⁹ According to orthodox Pashtuns, there is no contradiction between Islam and *Pashtunwali*:

Paradise in Islam is acquired through Pashtu [a verb form of Pashtun, meaning ‘do’ or ‘practice Pashtun’] . . . the countless graces of Paradise come through Pashtu to the Pashtuns. A Pashtun is by definition a Muslim; hence, Pashtunness and Muslimness do not have to coalesce; they are within each other and the interiority of the former is assumed in the latter.⁷⁰

As a matter of praxis, however, there are and have always been certain sharp contradictions between Islamic *sharia* and *Pashtunwali*. Due to the exalted centrality of honor and shame amongst conservative Pashtuns, *Pashtunwali* prescribes strict measures

⁶⁸ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 110.

⁶⁹ Inger W. Boesen, “What Happens to Honour in Exile? Continuity and Change Among Afghan Refugees,” in *The Tragedy of Afghanistan*, ed. Bo Huldt and Erland Jansson (New York: Croom Helm, Ltd., 1988), pp. 222-223.

⁷⁰ Olesen, p. 33.

for keeping these concepts in proper equilibrium. Such measures often exceed or contradict provisions of *sharia*. Blood vengeance and the treatment of women are prominent juridical areas where *Pashtunwali* deviates from *sharia*. (Notably, these are two of the most significant factors that distinguish the Taliban's policies from those of other Islamic regimes.) Granted, honor is a crucial concept throughout Islamic society; many Islamic states impose severe punishments and many Muslim males tie their own honor to that of their female relatives. Nonetheless, *Pashtunwali* is unique in its excess and deviation from commonly accepted Islamic principles.

First, vengeance (*badal*) is commanded by the Pashtun code, while the *sharia* attempts to limit the occasions on which it can take place.⁷¹ Generally speaking, *Pashtunwali* punishment is based on "the revenge of degradations of personal integrity rather than on the precise punishment of derelicts laid down in the *sharia* and its definitions of punishment as communal interest."⁷² The Taliban's fervor for *Pashtunwali*-style vengeance is evident in both their bloody retributions against rival factions and their fervor for frequent whippings, amputations, and executions conducted as public entertainment in large sports stadiums. The fact that victims or relatives of victims usually carry out the punishments further underscores the influence of *Pashtunwali*.

Second, and more complex, is *Pashtunwali*'s handling of women and gender issues. According to the *sharia*, adultery requires at least four witnesses if it is to be proven, while hearsay alone constitutes sufficient proof under *Pashtunwali*. Pashtun women are strictly forbidden from inheriting property, which would contradict the crucial

⁷¹ Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, p. 36.

⁷² Olesen, pp. 34-35.

tribal principle of patrilineage. The Qur'an, in contrast, grants to women half the share of the male.⁷³ *Purdah*, literally meaning "curtain," is the guiding principle of gender relations in *Pashtunwali*. *Purdah* is:

the physical and symbolic isolation of the Pashtun women from the outside world, through confinement to the home or screening-off by a veil or all-covering garment (burqa) . . . Control of the women is one of the central elements of the basis of a man's and an agnatic family's honor . . . women are perceived as the passive property of men, a view that is widely expressed and shared by Pashtun men.⁷⁴

Again, this protective and heavily restrictive view of women is not uncommon in the Islamic world, but orthodox Pashtuns are distinguished by the degree to which they restrict their women. In addition to the un-Islamic absence of legal rights for women, *Pashtunwali* gives men free reign to use corporal punishment and, in the case of adultery, kill their wives.⁷⁵ Given the low (and un-Islamic) burden of proof for adultery, it theoretically doesn't take much for a man to kill his wife legally. When Mullah Omar and his Taliban followers came to power, they

transposed their own milieu, their own experience, or lack of it, with women, to the entire country and justified their policies through the Koran . . . But in a country so diverse in its ethnicity and levels of development, there was no universal standard of tradition or culture for women's role in society. Nor had any Afghan ruler before the Taliban ever insisted on such dress codes as compulsory beards for men and the burqa.⁷⁶

Considering the tendency of Pashtuns to make no distinction between *Pashtunwali* and Islamic law, it becomes apparent that the Taliban have justified a relatively secular and extremely idiosyncratic view of women in broad religious terms.

⁷³ Roy, *Islam and Resistance*, pp. 35-36.

⁷⁴ Boesen, pp. 223-224.

⁷⁵ Boesen, p. 224.

⁷⁶ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 110.

Turning now from *Pashtunwali* to the circumstances of refugee camp life during the anti-Soviet war, one can observe other unique sociological phenomena that have influenced the Taliban. Poor education, segregation of genders, unusual religious indoctrination, psychological trauma (“shell shock”), and general alienation from Afghan culture are predominant features of the camp milieu.

Both in the camps and in Afghanistan, the education of an entire generation was one of many casualties of the war. Throughout the twentieth century, Afghan education had been steadily expanding as public schools and state universities increasingly augmented the traditional village madrasas administered by mullahs and the religious institutions of the *ulama*. Illiteracy has always been the norm in the more remote parts of Afghanistan, but the war drastically worsened this problem as teachers joined the resistance, schools closed, and families fled for Pakistan.⁷⁷ By the mid-1990s, after many years of anti-Soviet war and internecine conflict, 90 percent of girls and 60 percent of boys were illiterate. Countless schools had been destroyed.⁷⁸ (The Taliban thus aggravated an ongoing crisis when they closed most of the remaining schools and universities—especially those for women.) Education in the refugee camps was sparse and inconsistent. Semi-literate Afghan or Pakistani mullahs administered most of it. History, mathematics, and science were neglected in favor of religious teachings, which varied from traditional to Islamist to fundamentalist, depending on the teacher or sponsoring organization. (Educational sponsors ranged from Islamist Mujahidin parties

⁷⁷ Magnus and Naby, p. 77.

⁷⁸ Rashid, *Taliban*, pp. 107-108.

to Saudi Wahhabi groups and Pakistani Islamists.)⁷⁹ Of the various schools established in the camps, girls typically comprised about 6 percent of the student population.⁸⁰

The segregation and virtual exclusion of Afghan girls from camp schools occurred for several reasons, including scarcity of educational resources and the influence of fundamentalist mullahs. Perhaps the most significant factor, however, was the increased severity of *purdah* that occurred in the camps. As traditionally isolated village families found themselves crowded with strangers on foreign property, *purdah* became one of the few remaining symbols of honor and control. Accordingly, the seclusion of women from society became more extreme.⁸¹ The sudden exclusion of girls and women from education marked a drastic change from pre-1978 Afghanistan, when girls (primarily in more urban areas) “had taken education for granted and looked forward to a variety of career opportunities.”⁸² The young boys who grew up to become Taliban were raised with this unusually harsh perspective on women and gender relations—a perspective conducive to that of the rural Durrani mullahs who initiated the Taliban movement.

The camp madrasas were the scene of the most unusual ideological influence on the young Taliban: the blending of fundamentalist Saudi Wahhabism with Pakistani Deobandism, an unlikely merger that has occurred nowhere else. Wahhabis have a strong disdain for Sufism, which has always been tolerated by the Deoband school. In addition,

⁷⁹ Sayd Bahaouddin Majrooh, “Past and Present Education in Afghanistan—A Problem for the Future,” in *The Tragedy of Afghanistan*, ed. Bo Huldt and Erland Jansson (New York: Croom Helm, Ltd., 1988), pp. 88-89.

⁸⁰ Batinshah Safi, “Afghan Education During the War,” in *The Tragedy of Afghanistan*, ed. Bo Huldt and Erland Jansson (New York: Croom Helm, Ltd., 1988), p 117.

⁸¹ Boesen, p. 237.

⁸² Nancy Hatch Dupree, “The Role of VOLAGS,” in *The Tragedy of Afghanistan*, ed. Bo Huldt and Erland Jansson (New York: Croom Helm, Ltd., 1988), p 257.

as previously discussed, Sufism is a popular component of traditional Islam in Afghanistan. In spite of the mutual animosity between Afghans and Wahhabis, numerous madrasas in the camps were sponsored by Saudi Arabia, which sought to “enlighten the ignorant Afghans” and eliminate the “un-Islamic customs and traditions that have found their way into their lives.”⁸³

After Pakistan split from India in 1947, Deobandism there took several different incarnations, some of which no longer resembled the original anti-colonial, reformist Deobandism that had been influential in Afghanistan for at least a century. The history of Deobandism in Pakistan is too long to relate here, but of particular significance is the Jam'iyat-ul-'Ulama-i-Islam (JUI), a contemporary fundamentalist derivative of Deobandism. The JUI operated in opposition to Pakistani Islamist groups such as Maududi's Jama'at-i-Islami, which was used by the ISI to distribute aid to Pakistan's preferred Islamist Mujahidin factions during the anti-Soviet conflict. The JUI program of Deobandism was deeply fundamentalist, socially progressive, anti-imperialist, and specifically anti-American. Excluded from the war effort by Zia al-Haq and the Pakistani Islamists, the JUI focused its efforts on establishing madrasas along the Afghan-Pakistani border and in the refugee camps. Their instruction was characterized by two prominent ideas: deep bitterness and cynicism toward the Islamist Afghan Mujahidin and their Pakistani benefactors, and the influence of *Pashtunwali*.⁸⁴ The nature of the relationship between the JUI and the Saudi Wahhabis during the war remains unclear. Perhaps their mutual fundamentalism overshadowed their ideological differences and allowed them to

⁸³ Olivier Roy, “Modern Political Culture and Traditional Resistance,” in *The Tragedy of Afghanistan*, ed. Bo Hultdt and Erland Jansson (New York: Croom Helm, Ltd., 1988), p 257.

⁸⁴ See Graham E. Fuller's *Islamic Fundamentalism in Pakistan: Its Character and Prospects* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1991), pp. 1-9, and Rashid, *Taliban*, pp. 88-91.

cooperate; or perhaps they functioned separately, but their teachings were so prevalent that they became synonymous. In any case, their combined ideologies resulted in a unique neofundamentalism characterized by distrust of Islamists, anti-modernism, and indifference—if not disdain—for traditional Afghan religion.

Finally, all of these sociological problems—poor education, gender segregation, and extreme religious indoctrination—occurred in the culturally and psychologically destabilizing context of war. Nancy Hatch Dupree describes the fundamental cultural dilemma of the refugee condition:

To the burdens of idleness and dependency come the problems of maintaining the central elements of their culture and moral system and to transfer them to the young generation. Most of the young children . . . have never seen the Afghanistan of which their elders speak with such longing . . . Together with the very limited possibilities of secondary education and vocational training, tendencies toward a weakening of the traditional Afghan values of honesty, independence, industry, and 'soberness', are the most negative prospects for the future of the Pashtun culture, and of Afghanistan, since they affect the young generation most seriously.⁸⁵

The Taliban are living evidence of the extent to which the Afghan social fabric was frayed by the years of warfare and exile. The plight of Afghanistan's children— orphaned victims of landmines and deadly toys booby-trapped by the Soviets—has been well publicized. Part of the Taliban psychology undoubtedly has been shaped by their relentless exposure to violence. Rashid interviewed a UNICEF representative who conducted a survey of Kabul's children. UNICEF discovered that most children had witnessed extreme violence and did not expect to survive. "Two-thirds of the children interviewed had seen somebody killed by a rocket and scattered corpses or body parts . . . Every norm of family life had been destroyed in the war. When children cease to trust

⁸⁵ Dupree, p. 231.

their parents or parents cannot provide security, children have no anchor in the real world.”⁸⁶

As children of such violence, many of the Taliban and others of their generation were likely traumatized or desensitized to violence. Indeed, the most dangerous movements are often comprised of war orphans, who are alienated, unsocialized, and as a result, exceptionally brutal. Cambodia’s Khmer Rouge and Sierra Leone’s Revolutionary United Front are good examples.⁸⁷ With their ongoing civil war/jihad and penchant for bloody punishment, the Taliban are perhaps engaging in the only political behavior they’ve ever known.

Though avowedly Islamic (and perceived as such by the West), the Taliban’s ideology and practices have less basis in Afghan traditional Islam or political Islamism than they do in *Pashtunwali* and the legacy of constant warfare. “The Taliban embody a lethal combination: a primitive tribal creed, a fierce religious ideology, and the sheer incompetence, naïveté, and cruelty that are begot by isolation from the outside world and growing up amid war without parents.”⁸⁸ In spite of their ideological incongruity with traditional Afghan culture, the Taliban found—at least initially—a sufficiently receptive audience for their agenda. In a context of complete social breakdown and lawlessness, the Taliban’s promise of order and security was more appealing to Afghans than their severe fundamentalism was offensive.

⁸⁶ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 109.

⁸⁷ Robert D. Kaplan, “The Lawless Frontier,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 286:3 (September 2000), p. 72.

⁸⁸ Kaplan, p. 72.

III. ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA

As the previous chapters contend, the Taliban phenomenon is an aberrant and unlikely outgrowth of Afghan Islamic culture. Absent the destabilizing context of warfare, exile, and foreign indoctrination, it is difficult to imagine such an ideology emerging *sui generis* from Afghan tradition. Despite the frequently expressed concerns of Central Asian political leaders, Taliban-style ideology is even less likely to find a substantial receptive audience in the Central Asian republics, where religion and politics are both comparatively secular.

This chapter demonstrates the incompatibility between Central Asian Islamic culture and Taliban-style neofundamentalism. In many ways, the basic attributes of Central Asia's moderate religious heritage mirror those of traditional Afghanistan. Most Central Asians, for example, are Sunnis adhering to the Hanafi juridical sect. As in Afghanistan, varied tribal groups, traditions, and languages dispersed over a wide geographic area have contributed to a localized and nonhierarchical religious tradition. Second, Indo-Persian influences, most notably in the forms of Naqshbandiyya Sufism and Deobandism, have been long integrated into the Sunni tribal traditions of Central Asia. (The Naqshbandiyya order in fact originated in the historic cities of Bukhara and Samarkand in modern-day Uzbekistan.) Finally, Central Asian Islam has functioned in parallel patterns similar to those in Afghanistan; the official Islam of the educated ulama coexisted with local tribal variants, and traditional Islam coexisted with modern politicized movements.

In spite of these broad historical and cultural similarities, however, Central Asian Islamic culture evolved over time into something quite different from that of

Afghanistan. The dispositive intervening variable, of course, was Russian and Soviet imperialism, which accomplished in Central Asia what it never could in Afghanistan—conquest and virtual assimilation. The first sections of this chapter examine the two key tenets of the “sovietization” process: secularization and nationalization, which drastically altered the scheme of religion and politics in Central Asia. Secularization diminished Islam’s potency as a universal spiritual and ideological force, and the systematic nationalities policy reinforced secularization by strategically dividing Central Asia into artificial ethnic and national identities. The last section evaluates contemporary Central Asian Islam in relation to the Taliban’s neofundamentalism. Though sovietization largely succeeded in secularizing Islamic culture, both political Islam and fundamentalism are present in Central Asia. Neither of these movements, however, are likely conduits for Taliban ideology.

A. THE SECULARIZATION OF ISLAM

The contemporary form and substance of Islam in Central Asia cannot adequately be assessed without comprehending the legacy of the Soviet period. Russia’s gradual advance into Central Asia began with Ivan the Terrible in 1552 and continued through the late nineteenth century, when the Russians consolidated their suzerainty over the entire region as part of their “Great Game” with Great Britain. Prior to the collapse of the tsarist empire, however, little attempt was made to alter fundamentally the social and political structures of Central Asia.

More than any other Russian imperial territories, [Central Asia] resembled right up to 1917 a colony of the normal European type . . . Its native peoples were classified as *inorodtsy* (aliens) and no attempt was made to Russify or convert them to Christianity. Their elites, unlike those of the Caucasus, were not incorporated into the Russian nobility, though they

were allowed to continue exercising most of their pre-existing powers under a Russian military Governor-General. The Islamic law courts were left undisturbed to exercise their prerogatives, at least in local affairs.⁸⁹

These policies changed drastically after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Islam, like other religions, was anathema to the staunch atheism of the Bolsheviks' materialist ideology. Deplored as the "opium of the masses," religion was a first-tier public enemy in the socialist struggle. Accordingly, "the Soviet regime had no alternative but to suppress all [religious] manifestations and institutions that had been formed during the period of capitalism and the exploitation of man by man, the vestiges of which the Bolsheviks were committed to destroying as they set about constructing socialism."⁹⁰

When applied to Islam in Central Asia, this general policy became all the more exigent. The Bolsheviks perceived Islam not only as a theoretical Marxist problem, but also as a tangible threat to the territorial integrity of their new southern empire. Pan-Islamism, prevalent throughout the Muslim world in the early twentieth century, seemed capable of uniting otherwise diverse Central Asian tribal groups against Russian dominance. As a new, unconsolidated regime embroiled in a civil war for control of the Russian empire, the Bolsheviks would have been hard pressed to contain a massive Muslim revolt. For reasons both ideological and strategic, then, secularization was an essential prerequisite for "mobilization of the Muslim 'toiling masses' and the creation of a new Soviet man" in Central Asia.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 38-39.

⁹⁰ Yaacov Ro'i, "The Secularization of Islam and the USSR's Muslim Areas," in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (Essex: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1995), p. 5.

⁹¹ Ro'i, p. 6.

In the tumultuous early years of Bolshevik dominance, the Soviet central government treated Central Asian Islam with cautious appeasement. During this time, Central Asian communists led by the Tatar Sultan Galiev sought to reconcile communism with Islam. As advisor to Lenin and Stalin on the Muslim areas in the *Narkomnats* (Commissariat for Nationality Affairs), Galiev cautioned against an abrupt eradication of Islam. He advocated instead the retention of a gradually secularized form of Islam, which could be preserved as an instrument of social progress. Stalin's tolerance for Islam expired, however, when Galiev and his followers began agitating for a separate Muslim communist party that would be more sensitive to local cultural conditions. Galiev was arrested for "nationalist deviation" in 1923 and disappeared during the violent Stalinist purges of the 1930s.⁹² This bloody episode in Russian history coincided with the first Soviet campaign against Islam in Central Asia.

Between the late 1920s and 1940, Stalin launched a direct attack on Islamic institutions and customs. This new offensive was designed to fight against "Oriental" societies in the Soviet Union and punish "crimes constituting survivals from the past."⁹³ The Muslim clergy was heavily persecuted; thousands of mullahs were executed or sent to gulags. Mosques were shut down in vast numbers. In 1917, there were an estimated 26,000 mosques in Central Asia. By 1940 only 1,312 remained. (In 1985 there were only about 400 active mosques throughout the Central Asian Soviet Republics.)⁹⁴ In

⁹² Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 30-31. As observed by Rashid, Sultan Galiev's ideas remain salient today. First, Galiev's attempt to reconcile communism with Islamic tradition offered an opportunity for greater unity between Central Asia and Russia, which could have positively altered the twentieth century history of the region. Second, the post-communist *nomenklatura* of contemporary Central Asia now face Islamic revivals in their respective republics. Karimov and other secular leaders would do well to take a cue from Galiev's political sensitivity and penchant for ideological synthesis.

⁹³ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 79.

⁹⁴ Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 32.

addition, *waqf* property was confiscated by the state, *madradas* and *sharia* courts were closed, and anti-Islamic propaganda increased dramatically. In accordance with the tenets of Stalinist historiography, the Russian conquest of Central Asia was rewritten as a triumph of socialist revolution over tribal tyranny and backward, oppressive religious traditions. To maximize its influence, this history was distributed not only in Russian but also in various indigenous languages.⁹⁵

A central cultural component of this campaign was the *hujum*, or 'assault,' that was launched for the emancipation of women. Following Kemalist Turkey, the Soviet government implemented forced unveiling in 1927. More radically, the Soviets made substantial efforts to bring women out of *pardah* and into the labor force and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The long-term impact of the *hujum* was mixed; women indeed comprised a greater portion of the labor market and party apparatus than they otherwise would have, but many tribal and Islamic customs remained quietly in place.⁹⁶ Most important for this study, though, are the implications of the Soviet *hujum* program vis-à-vis Taliban policies toward Afghan women. The scaling back of *pardah* and active participation of women in public life stand in sharp contrast to the tenets of Afghan *Pashtunwali* and Taliban *sharia* discussed in Chapter II. Central Asia's communist legacy therefore includes a relatively egalitarian notion of gender roles that is inimical not only to Taliban ideology, but most likely to any Islamic fundamentalist creed as well.

⁹⁵ John Anderson, *The International Politics of Central Asia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 44.

⁹⁶ Roy, *The New Central Asia*, pp. 79-80.

As Yaacov Ro'i observes, the Islam that remained in Central Asia after the anti-religious campaign of the late 1920s through the 1930s was greatly subdued.

Islam seemed no match for the combination of brutality and sophistication that characterized the regime's anti-religious policy. Religious worship and the fulfillment of religious rites virtually disappeared.⁹⁷

In the 1940s, the central government changed tack in its handling of Islam in the Soviet Union. Having greatly suppressed its institutions and praxis, Stalin now sought to reshape and control an "official" state version of Islam. His establishment of four spiritual leaderships for the totality of Soviet Muslims echoed the earlier Russian policies of Catherine the Great and Nicholas I, who created imperial *muftiyyas* to regulate and "functionarize" the Muslim clergy. The new spiritual leaderships performed two strategic functions for the Soviet government: they continued the ongoing process of secularization by incorporating the clergy into the state, and fractured pan-Islamism through strict compartmentalization of religious authority.

Continued secularization was assured by the appointment of conservative mullahs who preached a relatively "harmless" Islam in concert with Soviet policies and objectives. The spiritual directorates fulfilled instructions from Moscow, sharply curtailed access to religious education, and painstakingly devised a limited practice of Islam that was compatible with Soviet ideology.⁹⁸ Ro'i provides a typical example of the official state clergy in action: in 1948, *fatwas* were issued with the intent of preventing material damage that might occur to the economy as a consequence of Muslim ritual. These decrees "forbade absence from work on religious festivals, explained that . . .

⁹⁷ Ro'i, p. 9.

⁹⁸ Martha Brill Olcott, "Islam and Fundamentalism in Independent Central Asia," in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (Essex: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1995), p. 23.

certain categories of people were exempt from fasting on Ramadan, including people engaged in hard work, and that payment of the *fitr* (or *zakat*), had lost all significance under conditions of socialism, which had liquidated poverty and need.”⁹⁹

While the policies of the Soviet *muftiyyas* diluted the substance of Islam, their administrative structure was designed to handicap pan-Islamist unity. Division of the directorates into separate administrative entities precluded religious discourse on two levels: internally among Soviet Muslim regions, and externally between the Soviet Muslim community as a whole and the rest of the Muslim world. Central Asia’s directorate, the Central Asian Spiritual Directorate of Muslims (SADUM), functioned as the sole authorized intermediary between the other Soviet Muslim directorates and the external Muslim world. Consequently, Tatars were effectively isolated from Central Asian Turks, Azeri Shia were cut off from Iranian influence, and the Soviet *umma* as a whole operated in virtual isolation from the rest of Islamic culture and society.¹⁰⁰

As much as the *muftiyya* system controlled Islamic expression, its influence never fully penetrated all levels of Central Asian society. Two more major offensives against Islam followed Stalin’s original campaign—one under Khrushchev in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and a final crackdown under Gorbachev in 1986. Of the two, Khrushchev dealt the heavier blow: 25 percent of the remaining mosques were forced to close between 1958 and 1964. Most of these were located in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where Islam was most consolidated in Central Asia.¹⁰¹ Today, the state *muftiyya* concept remains in place, though the independent Central Asian republics have instituted their

⁹⁹ Ro’i, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 53.

¹⁰¹ Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 150.

own directorates, closely modeling Turkey's Directorate of Spiritual Affairs (the *dyanet*). Although Islamic culture is resurfacing gradually in Central Asia, and the various Central Asian political leaders endeavor to associate themselves with Islamic symbols, the *muftiyyas* are still tightly controlled. Consequently there is no supranational manifestation of Islam among the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia. Islam is attached officially to each state government and is compartmentalized institutionally within state borders; it does not therefore represent an independent, transnational political force.

B. THE SOVIETIZATION OF CENTRAL ASIAN IDENTITY

As with secularization, the related nationalities policy fulfilled objectives that were simultaneously ideological and strategic. While seeking ostensibly to mobilize the "Muslim masses" and create a fusion of revolutionary, Russian-speaking, Soviet republics in Central Asia, the Bolsheviks also sought to break up large solidarity blocks such as pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism, which might challenge the emerging Soviet empire. Stalin's approach to both objectives was to create new ethnicities and corresponding nationalities within the previously undemarcated expanse of Central Asia. At the time, this hasty conjuring of artificial nationalisms was intended only to speed up the Marxist social evolution and solve geostrategic problems; Stalin could not have foreseen that the products of his improvised social engineering would ultimately outlive the greater Soviet Union itself.

Until Stalin, Central Asia had never known the concept of creating a state by correlating a particular territory with an ethnic or linguistic group. The entire region was essentially one geographical and historical entity built on loyalty to dynasties and fidelity

to Islam. As explained by Naby, Central Asian identity was associated with tribe, clan, or religion, with a sedentary or pastoral lifestyle, but not typically with a distinct ethnicity or nationality. Individuals or solidarity groups understood themselves to be politically affiliated with one of the various Central Asian *khanates*, but such affiliation was not necessarily characterized by territorial borders, language, or any distinguishing characteristic that contemporary Westerners might understand as ethnic or nationalistic. In many areas, populations were and remain so intermixed and bilingual that "two brothers born of the same parents in the same location can be different ethnically today: one can be Uzbek and the other Tajik."¹⁰²

Central Asian identity, then, was generally Islamic, clan-based, and broadly Turkic-Persian; socioeconomic existence was nomadic or sedentary (but pre-industrial and predominantly rural in either case); and political structure was tribal and dynastic. These facts of Central Asian identity and politics were doubly problematic for the Bolsheviks as they sought to instill Marxist ideology and socialist structure. First, these characteristics underscored the reality that Central Asia was (according to Marxist theory) a pre-capitalist society that had yet to reach the ideal developmental stage for proletarian revolution. The Bolsheviks thus were confronted with a serious lack of indigenous revolutionary cadres. Communist-Muslim Tatars, such as Sultan Galiev, lobbied eagerly to assume these much-needed leadership roles. Practical as this solution

¹⁰² Eden Naby, "The Emerging Central Asia: Ethnic and Religious Factions," in *Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union*, ed. Mohiaddin Mesbahi (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1994), pp. 37-42.

might have been, the Russians were unwilling to extend Tatar influence into Central Asia.¹⁰³

As Central Asian resistance against the Bolsheviks increased, Lenin sought to indigenize the "revolution" as quickly as possible. Between 1918 and 1920, Moscow announced the formation of various Central Asian republics, all of which were autonomous but attached to the Russian Federal Socialist Republic. In practice, this initial process amounted merely to changing the names of administrative territories and principalities that had been established under the tsars. (These pre-Soviet structures had likewise been based on indigenous *khanates*. In effect, the basic Central Asian political structures had not been altered under either the tsars or the early Bolsheviks.) Simultaneously, the Bureau of Muslim Organizations in Turkestan, which had been created in hopes of rallying Muslims around a communist structure of their own, was officially absorbed into the CPSU.¹⁰⁴ Finally, young indigenous Muslims were promoted into the party system and Soviet bureaucracies. In structure, if not substance, the socialist revolution had been superimposed onto Central Asia by the mid-1920s.

Assimilating the former *khanates* into the emerging Soviet structure did not, however, solve Moscow's second problem: the threat of united Central Asian resistance against the Soviet center, or even worse, a pan-Islamic front including Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Russian Tatars. In spite of Lenin's warnings to the contrary, Stalin sought to break traditional Turkic and Islamic bonds once and for all through the strategic

¹⁰³ The Tatars played an ambiguous role in Russia and the surrounding region. They saw themselves as the vanguards of the Muslim community, which led them frequently to negotiate with the Russians for positions as privileged intermediaries. Consequently, the Tatars were seen as Russians by Central Asian Muslims, and as Muslims by Russians. They were not completely trusted by either party. (See Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 57.)

¹⁰⁴ Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 170-171.

demarcation of Central Asian nation-states.¹⁰⁵ These new states would not follow traditional patterns; instead they deliberately would break up *khanates* and tribes. Given its purely *realpolitik* intent, Stalin's nationalities project was not easily reconciled with the ideological precepts of Marxist-Leninism. If Marx and Lenin abhorred colonial imperialism and extolled national self-determination, how could the Soviet Union externally impose statehood on essentially colonial territories? Furthermore, without an indigenous proletariat or bourgeois intelligentsia, how could a loose confederation of tribal *khanates* "determine" themselves to be socialist republics?

Stalin previously had addressed these concerns in his 1913 treatise, *Marxism and the Nationalist Question*, which provided the theoretical foundation for his Central Asian nationalities policy in 1924. Stalin's views on nationalism and ethnicity offered a basic justification for the external imposition of nation-state structures, as well as the criteria for distinguishing one ethnic group (nationality) from another. The nationalities policy was grounded in the Marxist stages of socioeconomic development: tribal, slave, feudal, capitalist, socialist, communist. If capitalism is a prerequisite for socialist evolution, and the nation-state is a unique and defining feature of the "capitalist epoch," then expeditious conversion of pre-industrial, tribal societies to modern nations is essential.¹⁰⁶ Since socialist revolution necessarily follows capitalism, this external manipulation simply hastens an inevitable and ultimately beneficial outcome.

Thus dispensing with the "self-determination" issue, Stalin outlined criteria for the demarcation of separate states within Central Asia. In reality, of course, borders were

¹⁰⁵ Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," in *The Essential Stalin*, ed. Bruce Franklin (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), pp. 65-84.

carved according to the basic “divide-and-rule” stratagem, but Stalin’s own writings necessitated an ostensibly more material and historically-grounded rationale. In *Marxism and the National Question*, Stalin defined an ethnic nationality as “an historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.”¹⁰⁷ Given these criteria for nationality, cadres of Soviet linguists, historians, and other academics received the dubious task of “discovering” distinct ethnic groups that corresponded to the meandering state boundaries drawn by Stalin. While this process was relatively easy in the Caucasus, where groups such as Georgians and Armenians always did possess a sense of nation—ethnically and territorially, the same could not be said for Uzbeks or Tajiks.

Thus languages were invented as the occasion demanded: since it had been decided that there was a Tajik ethnic group, there would have to be an accompanying language—Tajik—since an ethnic group was defined by the fact of its having a language. In another example, Chaghatay was defined as Old Uzbek even though there were no Uzbeks among the populations that spoke Chaghatay before the sixteenth century . . . The nature of the process thus becomes clear: the ethnic group in question is not first defined by scientific analysis and then given administrative status. On the contrary, first it gets its status, and then it is up to the experts to find it a *post facto* scientific foundation.¹⁰⁸

Though language was the centerpiece of the nationalities policy, the same sort of revisionist science was applied in other fields such as history and economics. The result was a new map of “historically constituted” nations, each of which maintained two official languages: an indigenous national language¹⁰⁹ and Russian, the latter of which

¹⁰⁷ Stalin, p. 60.

¹⁰⁸ Roy, *The New Central Asia*, pp. 62-64.

¹⁰⁹ The process of determining national languages was often purely academic: preexisting languages were simply classified in various ways that distinguished them from otherwise identical dialects in neighboring republics.

gradually became the *lingua franca* of the Central Asian republics. The alphabet in all the new Central Asian Soviet republics was changed from Arabic to Latin and then permanently to Cyrillic. These alphabetic changes alone had enormous impact on Islamic culture, cutting Soviet Muslims off from their own religious heritage, the heritage of the whole Islamic world, and contemporary Islamist movements that operated outside the Soviet Union.¹¹⁰ The communist educational system replaced traditional *madrasas*. The Soviets blended regional culture with Soviet culture, using local history, languages, epics, folklore, and arts to carry the socialist message. The state confiscated land and organized the state populations into collectives, or *kolkhoz*, which essentially reproduced the *soviet* structure at the local level. The Central Asian political economy is discussed in greater detail in Chapter IV, but the *kolkhoz* system also had social implications that are important here.

The *kolkhoz* was more than just a unit of production; it was a socioeconomic community. As such, it functioned in much the same way as tribes and informal networks had always functioned in Central Asian society. The *kolkhoz* "took care of work, administrative identity, social welfare, public works (irrigation, etc.)."¹¹¹ The key difference, of course, was that the *kolkhoz* substituted communism for Islam as its unifying ideology and source of authority. The *kolkhoz* system thus became an effective tool for secularization and nationalization; it penetrated society effectively because it so closely resembled traditional social structures. Likewise, because the *kolkhoz* blended so

¹¹⁰ Sergei A. Panarin, "The Ethnohistorical Dynamics of Muslim Societies within Russia and the CIS," in *Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union*, ed. Mohiaddin Mesbahi (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1994), p. 26.

¹¹¹ Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 88.

effectively into traditional society, it contributed greatly to the overall process of sovietization.

On balance, Stalin's attempt to elevate a manufactured ethnic nationalism above Islam was effective. The strategic division of territory broke up tribal and religious solidarity groups, created economic dependence on the central Soviet government, and greatly reduced the ideological strength of religion. The greatest testament to Stalin's success is the fact that the Central Asian republics, with their secular governments and intertwining borders, have outlasted the Soviet Union itself. The Soviet intent, of course, was not to create viable, autonomous nation-states, but simply to break pre-Soviet social bonds and reduce Central Asia to an administrative template more conducive to eventual fusion into the Soviet whole. As Roy suggests, however, the systematic process of sovietization resulted in satellite republics that were better equipped for independent nationhood than Russia itself ever was.¹¹²

C. POPULAR AND POLITICAL ISLAM IN THE POST-SOVIET ERA

While a local, traditional practice of Islam quietly persisted throughout the Soviet era, politicized and fundamentalist movements have reappeared openly for the first time since the early Bolshevik period. None of these three variants, however—popular/traditional, Islamist, or fundamentalist—are likely to channel Taliban-style ideology into Central Asian discourse. The most common expression of Islam by far in contemporary society is the popular tradition, which over time has lost much of its spiritual or ideological context; what remains is a ritualized, familial tradition that signifies culture and identity more than faith or ideology. Modern political Islam in

¹¹² Roy, *The New Central Asia*.

Central Asia resembles older movements that opposed Russian imperialism and Soviet communism. Like their nineteenth century predecessors, the post-Soviet Islamists are typically educated and willing to work within the prevailing political system. Fundamentalist movements are the most radical political element in the Central Asian republics. Unlike political Islamists or mainstream "traditionalists," they do interact significantly with Afghanistan's Taliban regime. These groups have very little following, though, and their connection to the Taliban is more a matter of expediency than ideological conformity.

Despite 70 years of secular Soviet domination, Central Asians have managed to retain vestiges of their Islamic heritage. Religious institutions have reopened in substantial numbers, dormant traditions are reawakening, and hollow Islamic conventions are regaining spiritual and cultural substance. The extent and character of this "Islamic renaissance" is not yet clear. The impact of the Soviet period undoubtedly has been profound, and Islam is but one variable—albeit an important one—in a larger Central Asian transformation involving identity, politics, and economics. Not only is the role of religion evolving in Central Asia, but it is doing so in a politically closed atmosphere. Consequently, reliable studies of popular religiosity in the region are lacking. Available analyses are quickly outdated, and are more often anecdotal rather than empirical. Any scholar attempting a survey of religious proclivity in Central Asia is challenged by the difficulties of obtaining truly representative samples and—given the oppressive political climate—of eliciting uninhibited responses.

These caveats notwithstanding, it is reasonable to conclude that, for the majority of Central Asia's citizens, the recent Islamic revival is more a matter of culture and

identity than faith or political ideology. Several factors contribute to this relatively secular notion of religion. First, Islam came late to much of Central Asia and never fully took hold in the vast expanses of Kazakhstan and parts of Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. While the more sedentary cultures of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and southern Turkmenistan became major Islamic centers as early as the ninth century, the nomadic populations of the northern steppes were not converted in substantial numbers until at least the fifteenth century. Even then, Islam never fully permeated tribal structures and shamanistic traditions. Ironically, the efforts of Sufi missionaries contributed to the persistence of shamanism as both traditions inter-penetrated each other over the years.¹¹³ As Mehrdad Haghayeghi explains:

The combination of Islam's relatively late entry into the Kazakh Steppe, the Kyrgyz mountains, and the Turkmen grasslands and the survival of the tribal social structures have produced an Islamic landscape with mild ideological colorings that have continued to survive until today . . . within each of the five republics there exists considerable regional diversity, which has so far been an obstacle to the wholesale radicalization of Islam in the region.¹¹⁴

Second, the Soviet policies discussed in the previous sections of this chapter have consolidated the relative secularism of the north while diluting the deeper religiosity of the south. After decades and generations of secular education, propaganda, and government, Central Asian Islamic practices have been divested of much of their spiritual meaning. Current social trends suggest that the Islamic renaissance therefore represents a Central Asian assertion of a cultural identity independent of Russia and Soviet communism. In 1994, Nancy Lubin conducted a survey of religious and ethnic attitudes in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. She concluded that personal understanding of Islamic

¹¹³ Haghayeghi, p. 77.

¹¹⁴ Haghayeghi, pp. 77-78.

doctrine in Central Asia remains limited or distorted, and that few respondents in either country hoped for an Islamic state. Fewer than half (46 percent) of those surveyed in Uzbekistan and only one quarter of participating Kazakhs identified themselves as “believers” who practiced Islam. In Uzbekistan, where Islam is most deeply ingrained, Islamic belief appeared weakest among the younger population; only 39 percent of 18-29-year olds saw themselves as Muslims. If accurate, this observation does not suggest a popular embrace of political Islam, which typically is supported by younger generations.¹¹⁵ Much of the middle class—another definitive element of Islamism—remains adamantly opposed to Islamist ideology. While it may support secular democratic alternatives to the current regimes, the middle class majority “holds firmly to the belief propagated during Soviet times that Islam is dangerous, backward, and repressive.”¹¹⁶

Many observers note the resurgence of Islamic practices and rituals. Rites of passage such as circumcision, marriage, and burial are routinely practiced throughout Central Asia according to Islamic tradition. As Haghayeghi notes, however, these types of observances are in essence the most marginal and least time-consuming aspects of Islamic practice.¹¹⁷ Lubin’s study supports Haghayeghi’s suggestion that more regular and disruptive practices such as praying five times per day, mosque attendance, and fasting occur less frequently and among relatively few members of the population.¹¹⁸ There has not been a substantial conversion to Islamic dress. In Central Asian cities,

¹¹⁵ Nancy Lubin, “Islam and Ethnic Identity in Central Asia: A View from Below,” in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro’i (Essex: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1995), pp. 53-57.

¹¹⁶ ICG, *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization*, p. 18.

¹¹⁷ Haghayeghi, p. 98.

¹¹⁸ Lubin, p. 57.

most residents dress in Western clothing, and women do not generally cover their hair.¹¹⁹ All in all, Islamic practices are very much alive, but in a watered-down and contradictory form. As Roy observes, many Central Asians don't eat pork, but they drink plenty of vodka.¹²⁰

Finally, traditional submissiveness to authority and preference for order and stability work against the spread of radical Islamic ideologies. Many Uzbeks, for example, support President Karimov despite his oppressive tactics, and insist that Uzbekistan's problems are due to "corrupt bureaucrats" that surround him.¹²¹ According to Lubin's survey, Central Asians in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan cited the maintenance of order and stability in the wake of post-Soviet economic and political turmoil as their most important concern. Given this concern for order, Uzbek support in the survey for Karimov is less surprising. Even the few respondents who claimed to favor an Islamic state named Karimov as their most respected leader, giving comparatively low marks to the Muslim clergy. As Lubin cautions, however, concern about providing the politically correct answer undoubtedly influenced the answers of at least some respondents.¹²²

In addition to the factors of historically weak and diffuse Islamic traditions, Soviet secularization, and deference to status quo authority, Ahmed Rashid cites ethnic rivalries, high literacy levels, continuing Slavic and now Western cultural influences, and the chaotic examples of Afghanistan and Tajikistan as factors that militate against popular acceptance of political or fundamentalist Islam. The Taliban have set an example

¹¹⁹ As Chapter IV demonstrates, avoidance of Islamic dress, particularly in Uzbekistan in the latter 1990s, is due at least in part to government persecution of anyone appearing "too Islamic."

¹²⁰ Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 82.

¹²¹ ICG, *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization*, p. 17.

¹²² Lubin, pp. 61-62.

that is horrifying to most Central Asians.¹²³ Despite this general ambivalence toward religion in Central Asia, Islamic opposition movements do exist. These groups, however, do not currently attract a significant amount of popular support. Furthermore, they are firmly rooted in Central Asian history and contemporary circumstances, and do not represent an influx of Taliban ideology.

As in Muslim colonial situations the world over, Russian imperialism in Central Asia and the Caucasus stimulated a current of Muslim intellectual responses. Foremost among these new movements was the *usul-i jadid*, or “new method,” which had its origin among wealthy and educated Tatars, whose experiences with Russian culture made them sensitive to their own heritage and comparative backwardness. The most famous *jadid* leader was Isma’il Gasprinskii (1851-1914), a European-educated Crimean Tatar who sought to rid Islam of its archaic aspects and modernize it through education and sciences borrowed from the West. In this respect, the *jadid* movement resembled contemporaneous Islamic reform movements that swept the Islamic world during the *salafiyya* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹²⁴

The *jadid* movement’s greatest source of appeal was also its ultimate weakness: unlike the pan-Islamism of the Young Ottomans, which advocated modernization through strict adherence to purified Islamic principles; and unlike the subsequent Young Turks, who espoused a secular Turkish nationalism, the *jadid* assimilated *both* contradictory viewpoints into their agenda. This inclusive ideology allowed the *jadid* movement initially to function as the hub of otherwise disparate opposition groups, ranging from

¹²³ Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 246.

¹²⁴ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 790-792.

Sultan Galiev's Muslim Communists to the tribal fundamentalists of the *basmachis*. Unfortunately, the inherent tension within the *jadid* between pan-Islamic reform and pan-Turkic secularism erupted after the Bolshevik Revolution, when some *jadid*-allied opposition groups sided with the Whites, others joined the Bolsheviks, and still others resisted all Russian factions. The *jadid* themselves vacillated between resistance to the Bolsheviks and alliance with them.¹²⁵

Throughout most of the Soviet period, political Islam disappeared from public view. Under Brezhnev in the late 1960s, theology students were permitted to study abroad in places such as Egypt and Jordan. An unintended consequence of this policy was that students returned deeply influenced by the Islamist thinking of the Muslim Brotherhood. An Islamist undercurrent generated momentum in the Soviet Muslim community during the anti-Islamic crackdown of the mid-1980s, and then found its first public expression during Gorbachev's subsequent policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.¹²⁶ In 1989, the new policy of "openness" toward religion was made manifest in the opening of numerous mosques, shrines, and *madrasas* throughout Soviet Muslim regions.¹²⁷

By 1990, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) had emerged as the dominant expression of political Islam in Central Asia. Headquartered in Moscow, the party established branches in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Several factors have limited the IRP's appeal to Central Asians at large and underscored its ideological incompatibility with the

¹²⁵ Roy, *The New Central Asia*, pp. 36-37, and Lapidus, p. 799. This confusion among the *jadid* arose in large part because of the divergent interests of its Tatar leadership versus its Azeri and Central Asian constituency. The Tatars, including Gasprinskii himself, favored limited autonomy within the Russian empire, while the Azeri and Central Asian *jadid* wanted not only autonomy but independence as well.

¹²⁶ Gorbachev's policies toward Islam in the 1980s also correspond to the Soviet war in Afghanistan, which only exacerbated Islamist sentiment among Soviet Muslims. Gorbachev's suppression of Islam came at the apex of the Soviet Afghan offensive, while his subsequent appeasement of Islam coincided with Soviet efforts to disentangle themselves from the protracted conflict.

¹²⁷ Haghayeghi, pp. 67-68.

Taliban. First, like their *jadid* forefathers, IRP leaders were predominantly of Tatar origin and favored a limited Islamic revival within a preserved Soviet structure. This caused a rupture between the party's central leadership and its branches in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Second, the Central Asian IRP's pan-Islamist/pan-Turkic agenda also mirrored that of the *jadid*; in the post-Soviet order of the 1990s, however, such sentiments ran counter to the prevailing nationalisms that had taken root in the former Soviet republics. The failure of pan-Islamist ideas to captivate a sizeable audience in Central Asia accentuates the long-term impact of Stalin's secularization and nationalities policies. Finally, the IRP has fractured along national, ethnic, and ideological lines. Some factions are closely connected to official state clergies while others remain isolated and opposed to the secular states and their *muftiyyas*.¹²⁸ The coalition government in Tajikistan, formed in the wake of the bloody Tajik civil war, is a good example of how political Islam has been "de-Islamicized." After supporting the fundamentalist Islamic Movement of Tajikistan in a violent campaign against the secular government during the war, the Tajik IRP now works legitimately within the government framework, and espouses a line that is more nationalistic and democratic than Islamist.

The vast differences between Central Asian political Islam and the Taliban are readily apparent. The Central Asian IRP factions have functioned as political parties that generally work within the prevailing political system. IRP leaders in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have expressed preference for parliamentary democracy and equal rights for ethnic and religious minorities. They have publicly disavowed any intent to replace secular government with Islamic government.¹²⁹ The Taliban, in contrast, have advanced

¹²⁸ Roy, *The New Central Asia*, pp. 154-157.

¹²⁹ Haghayeghi, pp. 87-90.

their agenda through violence and do not perceive themselves as a political party. They have, in fact, banned all political parties in Afghanistan. Additionally, Central Asian Islamists are not Islamic fundamentalists; they advocate Islamic revival and *sharia* as the basis of a *modern* political and economic system. As evidenced by Mullah Wakil's statement about "recreating the time of the Prophet" (see quotation on page 7), the Taliban's outlook is distinctly regressive and strictly fundamentalist. A senior leader of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Central Asia commented on the differences between his organization and the Taliban in an interview with Ahmed Rashid:

Hizb-ut-Tahrir believes women must work and be educated but also wear the *hejab* [the covering of the head but not the face]. We support the Taliban and many Hizb-ut-Tahrir members have fled to safety in Afghanistan to escape the crackdown in Central Asia. The Taliban have some good ideas. They want a pure Islamic state. The difference between [them and] us is that we want a modern life here on earth, to create a heaven on earth and also to prepare people to go to heaven in the afterlife; the Taliban only want an afterlife.¹³⁰

Finally, the character and substance of Central Asian Islamism is very much a product of the legacy of sovietization in Central Asia. Secularization and nationalization may have given rise to the Islamist movement, but these same phenomena have also tempered it substantially. The Taliban's sociological origins are vastly different, and have exacerbated rather than moderated the regime's extreme religious interpretations and radical behavior.

Such obvious distinctions cannot be drawn between the Taliban and Central Asian fundamentalists, though the latter are no more likely than Central Asian Islamists to spread Taliban-style neofundamentalism in the Central Asian republics. Like

¹³⁰ Ahmed Rashid, "Only Allah Knows," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (9 November 2000) [journal online]; available from <http://www.feer.com/001109/p030region.html>; accessed 5 March 2001.

contemporary Islamism, Central Asian fundamentalism has antecedents in the Bolshevik conflict of 1917. The *basmachis* revolt¹³¹ was a conservative, rural movement consisting of several Central Asian clans, primarily Uzbek, Tajik, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen. The *basmachis* were led by an assortment of local mullahs, khans, or tribal chiefs. They initially rose against the Bolshevik attacks and requisitions, and then against imposed Soviet reforms of the 1920s, which threatened local tribal structures and religious practices.¹³² The *basmachis* fought a decentralized guerilla war that bears comparison to the Afghan Mujahidin's resistance to the Soviet invasion of 1979. Like the Afghan Mujahidin, the *basmachis*' tenacity and skillful application of guerilla tactics were hindered by lack of coordination, clan rivalry, and limited resources. Whereas the modern Mujahidin were led primarily by Islamists such as Hekmatyar and Massoud, however, the *basmachis* were devout fundamentalists who opposed not only the Bolsheviks, but the Islamist *jadid* and the secular Muslim Communists as well.¹³³

Central Asia's contemporary fundamentalist militias have much in common with the *basmachis*. Roy argues that today's rural, fundamentalist conflicts cannot be explained adequately without reference to the history of the *basmachis* period.¹³⁴ First, today's fundamentalists emerged from Central Asia's Ferghana Valley, which was a principal *basmachis* stronghold. As a traditional bastion of conservative Islam, Ferghana was a prime target of Stalin's nationalities policy. His meandering borders are at their most circuitous here. As Figure 1 demonstrates, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan

¹³¹ The Russians took the derogatory term "*basmachis*," which means "robber" or "bandit" and applied it to the rebels. Over time, as the term became more associated with nationalism or Islam than banditry, the *basmachis* used it themselves.

¹³² Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 167.

¹³³ Haghayeghi, p. 17.

¹³⁴ Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 48.

all share a piece of the valley. While this imposition of borders has undoubtedly hindered the development of a broader solidarity among rural fundamentalists, it has also created ongoing security problems for the three republics that share it.

Second, the *basmachi* revolts were at least as much about clan, territory, and rebellion against government despotism as they were about Islam. The Tajik civil war of the 1990s echoed these same themes. During the Soviet period, the displacement of rural clans into *kolkhoz* collectives created antagonisms among solidarity groups that had not previously competed for land. The alignment in 1992 of the Islamist IRP and fundamentalist clans with nationalist groups against the communist state and pro-state clans was incidental to the core issue, which was “competition for power and assets among regions in the context of economic collapse.”¹³⁵

Consideration of Central Asian fundamentalism in historical perspective reveals that, as in the case of political Islam, contemporary fundamentalist groups emerged indigenously and in isolation from the Taliban. Indeed, today’s fundamentalist groups appeared in Central Asia at least as early as 1992—several years before the Taliban emerged in Afghanistan. Regardless of the claims of Central Asian governments, fundamentalism does not therefore represent a “foreign invasion” by the Taliban or any other group. Ferghana Valley fundamentalism has deep roots in Central Asian history.

Additionally, claims that the IMU is a protégé of the Taliban fail to reconcile important contradictions. The Afghan civil war, for example, is largely an ethnic contest between the Pashtun Taliban and the Uzbek/Tajik Northern Alliance. How, when, and why did the IMU transfer its allegiance from its Uzbek and Tajik brothers in northern

¹³⁵ Nancy Lubin and Barnett R. Rubin, *Calming the Ferghana Valley: Development and Dialogue in the Heart of Central Asia* (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 1999), p. 19.

Afghanistan to their mortal Pashtun enemies in Kabul? Even if the Taliban and the IMU are allied in some way, it seems unlikely that their association could be a comfortable one given the ethnic dynamics involved. Also, the Northern Alliance controls the border regions between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. How does the IMU traverse this territory in order to reach sanctuary in Taliban-controlled areas?¹³⁶ There are currently no clear answers to these questions, though they nonetheless cast further doubt on the assertion of a paternal relationship between the Taliban and the IMU. If anything, Taliban support for the IMU is probably based on little more than a Machiavellian formulation—both entities share common enemies in the Central Asian governments that oppose them. In any case, regardless of whether or not the IMU shares Taliban ideology, the organization's overall numbers are miniscule relative to the general population of even a sub-region of Uzbekistan—let alone Central Asia as a whole.

Ultimately, the Soviet legacy is perhaps no more eradicable for the new Central Asians than Islam proved to be for the Soviets. The emergent Islamic culture is likely to be the product of Central Asia's conflicting legacies; the political landscape will be de-secularized somewhat by Islam, but extremely conservative or radical Islamist tendencies will be tempered by popular adherence to secular institutions and principles. Popular aversion to radical opposition groups is due in no small part to the example set by the Taliban in Afghanistan. It would thus appear unlikely that Central Asians would be receptive to such an ideology in their own countries. Given the political and economic implications of Islamic discontent, however, Central Asia's political climate and economic outlook are the dispositive variables in determining the function of Islam in

¹³⁶ ICG, *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization*, pp. 9-10.

society and politics. The following chapter evaluates Islamic opposition in the context of Central Asia's political economy, and considers the Taliban's role in this equation.

IV. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA

This study has focused thus far on elements of social structure to explain the relationship between the Taliban and Islamic opposition groups in Central Asia. The previous chapters located the separate and distinct social origins of these political movements, thus dispelling any notion of one group spawning the other. Additionally, cultural norms and institutional constraints have undoubtedly influenced the behavior of actors in both Afghanistan and Central Asia. For the Taliban, these factors include the *Pashtunwali* tribal code, the alienation of life in refugee camps, the desensitizing effects of warfare, and unusual religious indoctrination. In Central Asia, prominent cultural norms and structural features include the juxtaposition of Islamic and tribal traditions against the imposed institutions of secularism, communist government, and constructed nationality. While these sociological explanations go a long way toward illustrating the Taliban's anomalous nature and Central Asia's comparatively secular proclivity, they don't explain completely the contemporary rise of Islamic opposition in Central Asia or the nature of these groups' relationship to the Taliban. To understand these relationships more fully, we must consider not only their cultural and sociological origins, but also the dynamic context in which they function. To this end, it is useful to examine Islamist opposition through the theoretical lens of political economy, which places analytical emphasis on rational choice and self-interest. As suggested in the first chapter, politics and economics offer the most compelling explanations for the rise of political Islam.

Through analysis of Central Asia's political economy, this chapter therefore argues that the rise of militant Islam in Central Asia is attributable not to the infiltration of Taliban ideology, but rather to the endogenous politics and economic conditions of the

Central Asian republics themselves. The Taliban are only significant to the extent that their political and economic failure in Afghanistan exacerbates political and economic problems in Central Asia.

The first section examines the impact of the Soviet period on Central Asia's contemporary political economy. As with other former Soviet republics, much of the region's current economic troubles and authoritarian tendencies are directly attributable to the Soviet legacy. The next section assesses current political and economic trends in the Central Asian republics. Since acquiring independence from Moscow in 1991, the Central Asian governments have become consolidated dictatorships. The Central Asian economies remain inefficient and stagnant, and the various governments have failed either to meet popular welfare expectations or to compensate for these failures by granting more political rights and freedoms to the Central Asian people. As a result, the most oppressed and economically disadvantaged sectors of the population have turned increasingly toward Islamic opposition in parts of Central Asia where religion is deeply embedded. Finally, this chapter considers the Central Asian political economy in the broader context of regional geopolitics—particularly Central Asia's exigent need to exploit its oil and gas resources and the international competition to control these resources. The Taliban's destabilizing behaviors, including narcotics distribution, support for international terrorism, and civil war, are important variables in Central Asia's quest for international credibility, consolidated sovereignty, and economic advancement.

A. THE SOVIET LEGACY

Prior to the height of Russian imperialism in the late nineteenth century, Central Asia was in a state of decline and isolation. The region's thriving tripartite economy, in which sedentary farmers and pastoral nomads operated in synergy with caravan traders, was disrupted by the European discovery of sea routes to India and China. As the Silk Road's importance diminished, so too did Central Asia's prominence as the crossroads of civilization and commerce. Over the next few centuries, the region remained essentially pastoral and agricultural. The Central Asian political economy was similar in substance if not form to that of other Muslim communities to the south. Political power and economic resources were held exclusively by the great *khans* of the three main principalities: Bukhara, Khokand, and Khiva. In principle, all land belonged to the *khans*, who divided it into state lands, private lands (with the *khan's* tacit approval), land temporarily allocated to relatives or friends of the *khan*, and religious endowment land (*waqf*). Sharecropping arrangements, exploitative taxes, and surplus expropriation left the majority of the population destitute.¹³⁷

Meanwhile, the Central Asian economy as a whole grew increasingly dependent on trade with Russia to the north. By the turn of the twentieth century, Russia exercised colonial dominion over Central Asia, extracting its resources (primarily cotton) and selling them back in the form of finished products. By World War I, the growing Russian industrial base obtained 87 percent of its raw cotton from Central Asia. 2,670 miles of Russian-built railways traversed the region and facilitated Moscow's extraction of

¹³⁷ Haghayeghi, pp. 2-3.

resources.¹³⁸ Thus, when the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917, Central Asia was already an indispensable economic asset of the nascent Soviet empire. Recognizing this reality, the Soviets set out to reconquer the region in their own right, in accordance with Soviet ideology and Soviet objectives. Whereas Tsarist Russia sought only to extract resources while leaving basic political and cultural structures intact, the Soviets embarked on a much more ambitious project: “the transformation of Central Asia by a supposedly superior Russian model, a process entailing ideological, political, and physical coercion and socioeconomic revolution from above.”¹³⁹ Ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the legacy of the Soviet project continues to permeate every aspect of Central Asia’s political economy.

The sovietization of Central Asia was comprehensive in scope and totalitarian in intent. Chapter III explored two key tenets of this process: secularization and nationalization, both of which broke down traditional social structures and altered the nature of Islamic culture in Central Asia. This section examines the political and economic integration of Central Asia into the Soviet Union.

The Bolsheviks’ primary political objective in Central Asia was to capture political power and subordinate it to the centralized control of the communist party-state apparatus. This process required the breakdown of both Tsarist and indigenous political structures. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Tsarist colonial governors in Central Asia were replaced with new Soviet cadres. Secularization policies disrupted religious authority by closing mosques, persecuting clergy, and co-opting the *ulama* into the state

¹³⁸ Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 52.

¹³⁹ Stephen Blank, “Soviet Reconquest of Central Asia,” in *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, ed. Hafeez Malik (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 39.

apparatus. Stalin's delineation of artificial states and corresponding ethnicities broke down tribal structures. After the creation of the five Central Asian Soviet republics in the 1920s, Moscow recognized the need for indigenous leadership. *Korenizatsiya* ('nativization') became the key word in dealing with the new republics. Finding capable and reliable native cadres proved more difficult in practice, however. Issues of loyalty and reliability were "accentuated by the low levels of literacy and education that remained until well into the 1930s, so that even in the middle of that decade over 90 percent of city soviet chairmen in Uzbekistan had only a primary education."¹⁴⁰ Consequently, Russian Slavs retained many positions of authority in administrative, security, and industrial sectors. Aggressive communist-oriented education greatly improved literacy and ideological indoctrination over the next few decades, but *korenizatsiya* was never fully implemented—Slavic Russians permeated the Central Asian party structure throughout the Soviet period.

Alastair McCauley identifies several political features of the Soviet era that have had detrimental consequences for the post-Soviet independence of the Central Asian republics. First, the centralization of political authority in Moscow left the post-independence republics with very little executive experience. Several critical areas of policy-making, including economic planning and foreign policy, were all conducted from Moscow. Central Asian political elites were simply local *apparatchiks* tasked with enforcing a party line that was dictated to them. Second, the centralization of political authority was accompanied by centralization of administrative responsibility. Here again, the new republics and their local institutions were ill equipped to carry out the normal functions of government. Finally, centralized planning and trade monopoly meant that

¹⁴⁰ Anderson, p. 32.

the new republics had neither the experience nor the personnel to comprehend international trade institutions or technical functions such as those involving foreign currency.¹⁴¹ With regard to contemporary Islamist discontent in Central Asia, however, one aspect of the Soviet political inheritance is perhaps the most salient: the absolute suppression of all political dissent. Throughout the Soviet years, the “possibility of any challenge to Soviet-installed power was minimized through a systematic series of purges, liquidations, and decapitations of potential or actual native leaders, and as a result no credible opposition was ever allowed to emerge.”¹⁴²

The consolidation of Soviet political control enabled Moscow to employ the overwhelming power of the state to achieve its primary economic objectives in Central Asia: extraction and the promotion of total Central Asian dependency on the Soviet center. As discussed above, these processes were initiated under Tsarist imperialism, but the Soviet Union expanded economic control from colonial imperialism to virtual totalitarianism. Central Asian society and economy were substantially restructured from the bottom up. Two general policies were instrumental in this sweeping process: collectivization and specialization.

Central Asia’s economy was completely destroyed during the civil war between the Bolsheviks and the Whites, which began in early 1918. Railway blockades by the White army cut off trade between Russia and Central Asia; no grain and other imports could arrive and no cotton could be exported. By 1920, peasant farmers lost 50 percent

¹⁴¹ Alastair McCauley, “The Economies of Central Asia: The Socialist Legacy,” in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro’i (Essex: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1995), pp. 257-259.

¹⁴² M. Nazif Shahrani, “Muslim Central Asia: Soviet Development Legacies and Future Challenges,” in *Central Asia and the Caucasus After the Soviet Union*, ed. Mohiaddin Mesbahi (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1994), p. 60.

of their cultivated land, nomads lost two-thirds of their animal stock, and the population as a whole was greatly reduced by famine, warfare, and emigration. "The communists thus inherited an almost nonexistent economy, a devastated infrastructure, ruined cities and a population that was seething with unrest and revolt."¹⁴³

In the late 1920s, after Stalin had replaced old *khanates* and Russian colonial districts with new Soviet republics, the campaign for collectivization was launched, along with an effort to force the sedentarization of the nomads. Coming on the heels of the civil war's devastation, and proceeding simultaneously with Stalin's infamous purges and secularization policies of the 1930s, forced collectivization compounded Central Asia's misery and devastation exponentially. In December 1929 Stalin ordered the liquidation of the *kulaks* (land-owning peasants) as a class. The campaign was made more brutal by the speed with which it was carried out; by March of 1930 10 million peasant holdings were brought into the collective farm system across the Soviet Union. Approximately 6.5 million nomads, *kulaks*, and urban dwellers perished throughout the Soviet Union—more than 1 million of these were Central Asians.¹⁴⁴

The effectiveness of collectivization was at best ambiguous. On the one hand, the re-grouping of Central Asia into units of production (*kolkhoz*) imposed legibility on the economy and enabled centralized planning. The *kolkhoz* also served, to some degree, to filter communist ideology and praxis down to the lowest social levels. On the other hand, it also allowed traditional clan and tribal structures to maintain their solidarity through a

¹⁴³ Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 53.

¹⁴⁴ Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 54.

reconstituted socioeconomic system that resembled traditional networks in many respects.¹⁴⁵ In terms of actual agricultural production, collectivization was disastrous.

Production fell in virtually every sector as peasants put up resistance, directly or indirectly, and as repression often carried away the most productive individuals in the village community . . . More importantly, collectivization created a legacy of bitterness which subsequent economic development could not overcome.¹⁴⁶

Despite some urban industrialization, particularly in Kazakhstan, the Soviet central planners preferred to utilize Central Asia as an agricultural producer. Both industry and agriculture were conducted autonomously in relation to Moscow's objectives; there was no local articulation between these sectors. Throughout the Soviet era, regional specialization favored cotton in Central Asia. By the 1980s, Central Asia produced 95 percent of the Soviet Union's cotton. Uzbekistan alone devoted 70 percent of its sown area to cotton. Cotton constituted 65 percent of Uzbekistan's gross economic output, consumed 60 percent of its resources, and employed 40 percent of its total labor force.¹⁴⁷ 96 percent of Central Asia's raw cotton was shipped to the Russian republic and other Soviet republics for processing and manufacturing. Despite Central Asia's considerable oil and mineral deposits, these resources were substantially ignored by the Soviets in favor of cotton "super-specialization."¹⁴⁸

The consequences of collectivization and specialization have been profound in Central Asia. Most importantly, these policies created a legacy of dependency; the Central Asian republics were totally dependent on the Soviet center, while Central Asian

¹⁴⁵ For a detailed explanation and analysis of the *kolkhoz* system, see Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 85-100.

¹⁴⁶ Anderson, p. 38.

¹⁴⁷ See Anderson, pp. 38-40, and Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, pp. 59-60.

¹⁴⁸ Shahrani, p. 61.

citizens learned to depend on the social welfare state. Despite the region's vast agricultural and industrial potential, central planning and cotton specialization rendered the Central Asian republics unable to support themselves. Foodstuffs and manufactured goods were all imported from other Soviet republics. Just as the Central Asian republics were dependent on Moscow, so were the Central Asian people dependent on the state for employment and social welfare. This dual-level economic dependency adds extra pressure to the contemporary post-Soviet republics, which must modernize their economies while satisfying public welfare expectations. As Kate Schecter explains:

The social contract between the state and workers during the Soviet era ensured cradle to grave security for all citizens in exchange for their individual freedom. This "bargain" between the state and its citizens also created a widespread mentality that survived the fall of communism. Citizens of the transition nations still expect the state to provide the basic necessities of life. The abrupt switch to a market economy left both workers and managers without the skills to survive and compete in the new environment.¹⁴⁹

Additionally, central planning and specialization distorted the economies of the new republics in several ways. First, the Soviet system lacked a well-developed banking system and other institutions necessary for the formulation and implementation of effective macro-economic policy. From a micro-economic perspective, central planning and public ownership resulted in enormous allocative inefficiency. Structural distortions are also apparent, not only in the disastrous cotton specialization, but also in the generally over-developed manufacturing and agricultural industries and the underdeveloped services sector.¹⁵⁰ A final enduring consequence of Soviet economic policies in Central

¹⁴⁹ Kate Schecter, "The Social Sector: A Failure of the Transition," in *Nations in Transit: 1999-2000*, ed. Adrian Karatnycky, Alexander Motyl, and Aili Piano (Freedom House, Inc., 2000), p. 31. Available online at: http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/nitransit/2000/pdf_docs.htm; (accessed 16 March 2001).

¹⁵⁰ McCauley, pp. 259-263.

Asia is ecological: the cotton monoculture has had a devastating impact on the environment. Decades of one-crop farming have ruined much of the soil, over-irrigation has increased water salinity, and heavy reliance on chemical fertilizers has created enormous health and environmental problems. As a result, Central Asia's agricultural capacity is now diminished and its already tenuous water supply is decreasing.¹⁵¹

The post-independence Central Asian republics, then, have inherited an inauspicious political economy from their Soviet forefathers. When the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, the new republics were led by authoritarian political leaders with little policymaking experience and no tolerance for political dissent. Central Asian citizens were acclimated to receiving state employment and basic social services in lieu of civil liberties and participation in political processes. The state's ability to provide these services depended on the Soviet center, which extracted local resources and managed all aspects of the local economy. In the absence of external subsidies, and with a decimated agricultural capability, the post-Soviet Central Asian regimes now are challenged to maintain their absolute political control while meeting the economic expectations of their respective citizenries.

B. POLITICS, ECONOMICS, AND ISLAM IN THE POST-SOVIET ERA

Since acquiring independence in 1991, the current Central Asian governments have failed to reverse the political and economic trends of the Soviet period. Politics remain staunchly authoritarian; if anything, political oppression has become more severe and autocracy is further consolidated. The Central Asian economies remain stagnant and state-dominated. The different republics disagree on development strategies and models,

¹⁵¹ Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, pp. 60-61.

but none of their various plans involve significant liberalization in the near future. This section examines the contemporary political economy of Central Asia, and relates these findings to the potential for Islamist political violence in the region.

The Central Asian governments were completely unprepared for independence when it was thrust upon them in 1991. Unlike other Soviet republics or the former colonies of Western imperial powers, the Central Asian republics neither sought nor desired autonomy; on the contrary, they unanimously supported the abortive hardliners' coup of August 1991, which sought to preserve the Soviet Union under communist rule. Independence, then, did not significantly alter the existing power structures in Central Asia, leaving intact communist regimes whose authority is challenged by any reform of extant political and economic structures. Consequently, all five presidents (all of whom rose to prominence through the Soviet *nomenklatura*) have resisted pressures to democratize.

Despite President Islam Karimov's claims that he presides over a democratic republic, Uzbekistan has developed into a consolidated autocracy since acquiring independence in 1991. Karimov has eliminated any challenges to his authority by banning opposition groups and ensuring that elections are neither free nor fair. Normal elements of civil society, including independent trade unions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are few in number and heavily restricted. Despite a constitutional framework for press freedom, the media is curtailed and serves primarily as a mouthpiece for the government. While Uzbekistan's constitution and legal code detail various freedoms and rights, the government demonstrates little regard for these provisions.¹⁵²

¹⁵² Karatnycky, Motyl, and Piano, p. 695.

Karimov has argued since the beginning of Uzbekistan's independence that the stresses of the transformation to a market economy require a strong hand . . . Karimov has interpreted "opposition" in ever broader terms, so that now even a neutral absence of enthusiastic support for his government can be defined as illegal dissent.¹⁵³

Consequently, political opposition figures, religious groups, and ethnic minorities all experience discrimination and oppression. Of these, Karimov directs most of his distrust, blame, and oppression at religious opposition. Two prominent Islamic parties, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) and Adolat ("Justice") are banned and have never been allowed to register. A September 1996 law on political parties prohibits the formation of parties based on religious grounds, thus sealing the fate of these and other Islamic-oriented opposition movements.¹⁵⁴ (Ironically, organizations such as the IRP and Adolat first became active during the later Soviet period, and had been allowed to function under Gorbachev's liberal *perestroika* policy.) Karimov's disproportionate apprehension for Islamic mobilization borders on the paranoid: according to Human Rights Watch, government harassment extends beyond outlawed Islamic organizations to independent citizens who simply display Islamic dress or other expressions of religious devotion. Punishments are severe and inhumane.

State authorities punished independent Muslims with discriminatory arrest, incommunicado detention, torture, and prison sentences of up to twenty years for violations of strict laws on religion and alleged 'anti-constitutional' activity . . . Torture and ill-treatment in prisons was rampant, and there were several shocking reports of deaths in custody from torture in prisons.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Martha Brill Olcott, "Ceremony and Substance: The Illusion of Unity in Central Asia," in *Central Asia and the World*, ed. Michael Mandelbaum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994), p. 43.

¹⁵⁴ Karatnycky, Motyl, and Piano, p. 697.

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch, "Uzbekistan: Human Rights Developments," in *World Report 2001* (Human Rights Watch, 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available at <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k1/europe/uzbekistan.html>; accessed 19 March 2001.

Islamic opposition groups in Uzbekistan have been forced underground or abroad; they are afforded no legitimate means of participating in political discourse. Given the state's excessive and violent oppression, the appearance of Islamic political violence is hardly surprising—nor is it a “foreign” phenomenon, as Karimov and other Central Asia leaders disingenuously claim. When IMU leader Tokhir Yuldashev claimed responsibility for a series of violent incursions with Uzbek authorities in August 2000, he demanded the release of an estimated 100,000 wrongfully jailed Muslim prisoners, and called for greater religious freedom in Uzbekistan.¹⁵⁶ Hizb-ut-Tahrir claims that 50,000-100,000 Muslims are imprisoned in Uzbek concentration camps. Though these figures are unconfirmed, the Uzbek government acknowledges the existence of such camps, and fieldwork by the International Crisis Group (ICG) indicates that arrests have been occurring on a large scale.¹⁵⁷

Uzbekistan's political climate since independence has been extremely conducive to violent opposition. After a brief embrace of Uzbekistan's “Islamic Renaissance” in 1991, President Karimov has grown increasingly intolerant of *all* Islamic activity—political or otherwise. Militant resistance has grown in tandem with Karimov's oppressive policies. As Henry L. Clarke, former US Ambassador to Uzbekistan, warns, “Excessive crackdowns by law enforcement agencies serve no one: such tactics seem more likely to cause the politicization of Islam, and to push believers into extreme, illegal actions, than to prevent them.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch, “Uzbekistan: Human Rights Developments.”

¹⁵⁷ See Gareth Evans, “Force is Not the Way to Meet Central Asia's Islamist Threat,” (International Crisis Group, 11 March 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available at <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=249>; accessed 19 March 2001.

¹⁵⁸ Henry L. Clarke, “An American View of Uzbekistan,” *Central Asian Survey* 18:3 (September 1999), p. 379.

Though Uzbekistan's autocratic political environment and anti-Islamic policies are perhaps the most severe, both are generally consistent with those of the other Central Asian states. All five Central Asian republics are governed by strong executives that dominate the judicial and legislative processes. All five governments are secular and respond to organized Islamic opposition with varying degrees of oppression. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which share the turbulent Ferghana Valley with Uzbekistan, have experienced both political gains and setbacks since 1991, but recently both have drifted toward Islam Karimov's autocratic stance.

Kyrgyzstan's growing reputation as an "island of democracy" in a repressive region was shattered in 2000, when President Askar Akayev manipulated polls for parliament and the presidency, and placed heavy restrictions on free speech, press and association, minority rights, and religion.¹⁵⁹ In light of growing economic problems, Akayev has felt compelled to clamp down on opposition groups and parties. His fear of militant Islamic opposition has spurred government military action in the Ferghana Valley along Kyrgyzstan's border with Uzbekistan.¹⁶⁰ According to Human Rights Watch, Kyrgyzstan intensified its repression of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in 2000, arresting tens of the group's followers and sentencing them to prison on grounds of "inciting religious and racial hatred."¹⁶¹

Tajikistan's post-independence politics have been characterized by civil war, political violence and state repression. In June 1997, the authoritarian government of

¹⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch, "Kyrgyzstan: Human Rights Developments," in *World Report 2001* (Human Rights Watch, 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available at <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k1/europe/kyrgyzstan.html>; accessed 19 March 2001.

¹⁶⁰ Karatnycky, Motyl, and Piano, p. 349.

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Watch, "Kyrgyzstan: Human Rights Developments."

President Emomali Rakhmanov signed a peace treaty with the secular and Islamic opposition groups of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). A key provision of the treaty involved the appointment of UTO representatives to 30 percent of senior government positions. Though progress has been made, this quota has not been met, and Tajikistan has yet to see presidential or parliamentary elections that could be classified as free and fair. Parliamentary elections held in February 2000 were flagrantly fraudulent and marked a significant step backward for Tajikistan's political development.¹⁶² Constitutional guarantees of press freedom and association are largely ignored, and religious groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir are persecuted despite the limited inclusion of Islamic-oriented UTO members in the government.¹⁶³ The Tajik government remains in a state of post-conflict transition, but progress to date does not point to significant democratization in the near future.

Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have not experienced an appreciable rise in political or militant Islam over the past decade. Though Presidents Niyazov (Turkmenistan) and Nazarbayev (Kazakhstan) are no less autocratic than their counterparts in the other three Central Asian republics, they preside over societies that are comparatively more secular. This development is attributable to several historical, geographical, and demographic factors. First, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan exist on the periphery of Central Asia's Islamic center—the nomadic populations of the steppes were simply farther removed from the more religious, sedentary enclaves of Bukhara,

¹⁶² See United Nations Press Release, SC/6859 (12 May 2000) [Homepage on-line]; available at <http://www.un.org>; accessed 20 March 2001, and Human Rights Watch, "Tajikistan: Human Rights Developments," in *World Report 2001* (Human Rights Watch, 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available at <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k1/europe/tajikistan.html>; accessed 19 March 2001.

¹⁶³ See Human Rights Watch, "Tajikistan: Human Rights Developments," and Karatnycky, Motyl, and Piano, pp. 617-622.

Samarkand, and Ferghana. Second, their populations are smaller and more diffuse relative to their geographic size. Finally, ethnicity plays a significant role—especially in Kazakhstan, where Russian Slavs constitute at least half of the overall population.¹⁶⁴ Despite the scarcity of Islamist mobilization in their respective states, Niyazov and Nazarbayev have not demonstrated an especially greater tolerance for religious expression or popular participation in political processes.¹⁶⁵

In all five republics, authoritarian politics are accompanied by failing economic policies. As discussed in the previous section, Soviet centralized planning created an economy in which Central Asians were dependent on the state for social welfare, and the state was dependent on Moscow for imports and transfers.

By thousands of threads, from electricity grids to oil pipelines to telephone lines, the Central Asian republics were tied into Russia. Moscow was an economic and financial spider's web from which no [Central Asian] leader . . . could ever see himself disentangled.¹⁶⁶

When the Soviet "web" disintegrated, Central Asian leaders were forced to administer their new states and meet the expectations of their populations without subsidies from the central budget. The most obvious course of action was to seek foreign direct investment (FDI), international aid, and new trading partners. This strategy, however, would require a firm commitment to liberalization, which the formerly communist regimes perceived as a threat to their rule. Accordingly, all of the Central

¹⁶⁴ Haghayeghi, pp. xix-xxii. Many Russian Slavs have emigrated back to Russia over the past decade. While Slavs constituted over half of Kazakhstan's population in the 1980s, their actual proportion might be less than half as of 2001.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, Human Rights Watch, "Turkmenistan: Human Rights Developments," and "Kazakhstan: Human Rights Developments," in *World Report 2001* (Human Rights Watch, 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available at <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k1/europe.html>; accessed 19 March 2001, or Karatnycky, Motyl, and Piano, pp. 640-651 and 326-338.

¹⁶⁶ Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 4.

Asian republics except Kyrgyzstan¹⁶⁷ paid lip service to economic liberalization without seriously pursuing it. Since 1992, most Central Asian regimes have eschewed even the notion of liberalization, emphasizing instead the virtues of stability and gradual reform over liberal “shock therapy.” According to President Niyazov of Turkmenistan, “We should determine the rhythm and pace of our reform ourselves on the basis of local conditions, not according to the demands of some sort of classic, democratic formulas or perceptions worked out in some prosperous Western country.”¹⁶⁸

Consequently, ten years after gaining independence, the Central Asian economies remain largely statist, stagnant, and underdeveloped. Basic economic and social indicators suggest that the autocratic regimes are failing to uphold their end of the social contract. Wages have not kept pace with inflation and population growth, particularly in the rural agricultural sectors. Literacy rates that were nearly universal under the Soviets are falling, again in rural areas, as schools close or receive inadequate state support. Basic social infrastructure, from hospitals to schools and universities, is increasingly strained.¹⁶⁹

Of the five republics, only Kyrgyzstan and—by a slim margin—Kazakhstan exhibit private sectors that account for majorities of their gross domestic product (GDP). Kyrgyzstan’s private sector contributes 70 percent of its GDP, while the Kazakh private sector hovers at a more modest 55 percent. Private ownership as a percentage of GDP in the other three republics is as follows: Uzbekistan (45 percent), Tajikistan (30 percent),

¹⁶⁷ Kyrgyzstan is the only Central Asian republic that has been admitted into the World Trade Organization. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan currently hold observer status. See *World Trade Organization* [Homepage online]; available from: http://www.wto.org/wto/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/org6_e.htm; accessed 27 March 2001.

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Haghayeghi, p. 133.

¹⁶⁹ Sherman W. Garnett, Alexander Rahr, and Koji Watanabe, *The New Central Asia: In Search of Stability* (New York: The Trilateral Commission, 2000), pp. 4-5.

and Turkmenistan (25 percent).¹⁷⁰ Of these three, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan remain predominantly statist by choice, while Tajikistan's economic development has been set back substantially by its civil war. In any case, the legitimacy of Central Asian privatization efforts is questionable. As Rashid observes, privatization has not generated a real modern, capitalist business elite. Instead, the old party *apparatchiks* have simply become business rather than state managers.

They run their enterprises as they did in the past except that their rhetoric has changed from one of socialism to one of the market economy. Most of them have refused to sell off their enterprises, while others do so only at the cost of ensuring large payoffs for themselves and their families. This grip on industry by the old bureaucracy remains unshaken.¹⁷¹

Each of the Central Asian republics hopes to develop economically on its own terms based on its particular strengths and resources, but all are dependent on access to international markets and capital investment—both of which have proven somewhat elusive thus far. Given their broader resource and labor bases, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have the greatest potential for viable economies, though this very potential also serves as a disincentive for liberalization. These three states possess considerable oil and gas reserves, and hope to base their economies on export revenues from these resources.¹⁷² In both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Niyazov and Karimov control the energy sector, and there are no plans to privatize any of it. Kazakhstan's government has sold some of its national oil company to private investors, but all three presidents are banking to some extent on energy rents to shore up their failing economic policies and secure the legitimacy of their rule. The geopolitics of oil and gas are

¹⁷⁰ Karatnycky, Motyl, and Piano, pp. 326, 348, 616, 640, and 694.

¹⁷¹ Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 70.

¹⁷² Anderson, p. 126.

discussed in the next section, but foreign investment in export routes remains the biggest obstacle to expanded development and exploitation of Central Asia's energy resources.

The development outlook in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is more complex and even less certain. Unable to rely on a wealth of oil and gas reserves, these states are harder pressed to redevelop their economies. Both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are highly dependent on Russia and their Central Asian neighbors for energy supplies, and both have found themselves in conflict situations resulting from their inability to pay for such resources on schedule. Two industrial sectors, hydroelectric power and mineral mining, offer the potential for some economic sufficiency. "As in other areas, however, problems stem from dependence on Russian markets and the need to modernize often primitive technologies and plants, all of which requires considerable capital investment."¹⁷³ Instantly recognizing its dire need for foreign aid, Kyrgyzstan submitted to austerity measures mandated by the World Bank, IMF, and other lending agencies soon after attaining independence. As a result, Kyrgyzstan was admitted into the WTO in 1998.¹⁷⁴ In recent years, however, its economic development has faltered along with its democratic reforms. In the wake of its civil war, Tajikistan has endeavored to meet macroeconomic stability commitments to the IMF, but "the transition to a market economy has been hampered by the civil war, geographic isolation, natural disasters, and a lack of political will . . . Privatization has proceeded slowly and has been plagued by corruption and insider dealing."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Anderson, pp. 127-128.

¹⁷⁴ See *World Trade Organization* [Homepage on-line]; available from: http://www.wto.org/wto/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/org6_e.htm; accessed 27 March 2001.

¹⁷⁵ Karatnycky, Motyl, and Piano, p. 617.

The most pressing regional crisis, however, involves Central Asia's Ferghana Valley, an agricultural region that is also Central Asia's bastion of Islamic fundamentalism. Shared by Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, the Ferghana Valley is the most volatile manifestation of Central Asia's political and economic problems. Like other rural agricultural areas, it is wracked with greater poverty, illiteracy, and other socioeconomic problems. The Soviet legacy of cotton specialization and ecological damage exacerbates the problems of inefficient state planning and low capital investment. Most Ferghana inhabitants work on collective farms that are bankrupt and falling apart, and many live on whatever they can produce on the side, rather than the cotton that is supposed to be the mainstay.¹⁷⁶

Nancy Lubin and Barnett R. Rubin identify several repercussions of the Ferghana Valley's economic deprivation and decline, all of which contribute to the rise of Islamic mobilization in the region. First, the Ferghana provinces are stigmatized as "losers" relative to the other parts of their respective countries. This has resulted in expressions of resentment that the valley is excluded from economic decision-making and does not stand to benefit proportionately from government investment and foreign aid. Second, economic hardships have ignited tensions between ethnic groups as competition for increasingly scarce resources—land, water, jobs, etc.—intensifies throughout the valley. These problems are compounded by the effects of poor economic planning: high inflation, corruption, and wage payment arrears.¹⁷⁷

Coming on top of their inability to meet the socioeconomic needs of the Ferghana Valley, the governments' political oppression and aggressive persecution of Islam simply

¹⁷⁶ Lubin and Rubin, p. 60.

¹⁷⁷ Lubin and Rubin, pp. 59-72.

add fuel to the fire of Islamist opposition. The majority of state crackdowns and cross-border skirmishes with opposition forces have taken place in and around the Ferghana Valley. "The government's tendency to overreact to security threats will continue to be one of the most important factors pushing devout Muslims towards Islamic fundamentalism and political violence. The failure of the government's economic policies and the resulting hardship will prove to be a fertile ground for Islamist dissent."¹⁷⁸

As the Ferghana Valley simmers, Central Asian leaders are thus faced with the task of mitigating popular discontent in order to limit the appeal of political Islam and preserve state security. This could be accomplished in one of two ways: improvement of economic conditions or alleviation of political oppression. The simultaneous implementation of both options would be ideal, but such a solution is beyond the political will or capability of any Central Asian government in the short term. Considering these options separately, political reform carries the greatest risk for the current regimes. Enhanced political participation, along with an easing of religious persecution, would probably function as an effective "pressure valve" for growing social unrest. It is just as likely, however, to weaken the regimes' power in the process—especially if political freedom comes without economic improvement. Additionally, given the secular states' anxieties about Islamist mobilization—particularly in Uzbekistan, where Karimov has instigated the most tension between Islamists and the state—Central Asian leaders are unlikely to ease religious oppression any time soon.

¹⁷⁸ "Business Outlook: Uzbekistan," *EIU Crossborder Monitor* (22 January 2001); available from Lexis-Nexis.

Economic development, by contrast, promises to reduce Islamist discontent while serving the interests of the Central Asian regimes. Flourishing economies alleviate popular frustration while shoring up regime legitimacy and strength. Strengthened Central Asian governments would then have a solid basis from which to initiate gradual political reform or reinvigorate the authoritarian welfare state. As many analysts observe, however, “the economic future of Central Asia indeed depends in no small measure on the successful development of regional energy resources, concentrated in the Caspian Basin.”¹⁷⁹ Since the development of the region’s energy reserves depends entirely on FDI, it is useful now to examine the international politics of oil and gas pipelines in Central Asia.

C. THE NEW GREAT GAME: GEOPOLITICS, PIPELINES, AND THE TALIBAN

Alluding to the romanticized description of Great Britain’s nineteenth century struggle with imperial Russia for empire in Central Asia, many journalists and academics have attempted to characterize contemporary politics in Central Asia as a new “Great Game.” For the past ten years, there indeed has been a great deal of international speculation about the extent of the region’s latent mineral wealth, and major powers including Russia, the United States, Turkey, China, Pakistan, and Iran—not to mention countless private corporations and consortiums—have jockeyed for position in the race to harvest these resources. The days of empire building are over, however, and by almost any measure, Central Asia’s oil and gas reserves fall far short of the Persian Gulf’s quantity and quality. Michael Collins Dunn is perhaps more accurate when he describes

¹⁷⁹ Garnett, Rahr, and Watanabe, p. 12.

the current scene in Central Asia as a mosaic of “many smaller games, rivalries and counter-rivalries, crisscrossing national and ethnic interests.”¹⁸⁰ Competition for pipeline contracts is one of many contests that include secularism versus Islam, India versus Pakistan, Shi’i Iran versus Sunni Pakistan and the Taliban, the United States and Turkey versus Russia and/or Iran, and various ethnic and national rivalries throughout the region.

Amidst this myriad of games both great and small, the Central Asian governments—particularly Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—desperately hope to profit from their largely untapped resources in order to bolster their floundering economies and fledging independence. As the previous section observed, foreign capital investment is a prerequisite for economic development in Central Asia. Though the region’s mineral resources may be comparatively modest, revenues from these resources could have enormous impact on the region’s small and inert economies, providing the basis either for meaningful market reform or reinvigoration of the welfare state. Additionally, such improvement might then provide incentive for additional FDI in other Central Asian industries. The result, Central Asian regimes hope, would be enhanced popular legitimacy for their rule and reduced popular appeal for Islamic opposition groups. This section examines the prospects for the development of Central Asia’s oil and gas reserves—prospects that hinge not only on the strategic competition between would-be foreign investors, but also on the rogue behaviors of the Taliban, which create substantial disincentives for FDI in the region.

Estimates of Central Asia’s oil and gas reserves have varied wildly over the past decade. The purpose here is not to explore in depth the region’s various energy fields or

¹⁸⁰ Michael Collins Dunn, “Great Games and Small: Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and the New Geopolitics of Southwest Asia,” *Middle East Policy* 5:2 (May 1997), pp. 142-149.

conduct a precise cost-benefit analysis, but rather to provide a general sense of the stakes involved for the Central Asian republics and other interested powers, and the ways in which the Taliban regime interferes with these interests. As estimates emerged in the early 1990s that were much greater than Soviet-era estimates, some touted the Caspian Basin as a “new Persian Gulf.”¹⁸¹ Subsequent studies have dampened expectations somewhat. At best, the North Sea is perhaps a better comparison, though much more exploration needs to be done. As Tables 1 and 2 indicate, the largest oil reserves are in Kazakhstan, while Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan hold the lion’s share of natural gas reserves. Hilary McCutcheon and Richard Osbon analyzed 32 key development projects in the Caspian region and estimated that the cost of bringing 18 billion barrels of oil to market over the next 30 years would average about \$10 per barrel. This estimate includes capital expenditures, operating expenses, and transportation.¹⁸² As Garnett, Rahr, and Watanabe observe, these relatively high cost estimates indicate that the world energy market outlook will be vital in determining the profitability of Caspian oil and gas development.¹⁸³ The current oil market as of April 2001 has undoubtedly provided some measure of reassurance to investors concerned about development costs.

Over time, Caspian gas is of greater commercial interest than oil. Though Uzbekistan is a leader in gas potential, it is geographically farther removed from the hub

¹⁸¹ “Caspian Basin” refers to the Caspian Sea itself as well as the geographical area surrounding it. This includes the Caucasus to the west, northern Iran to the south, southern Russia to the north, as well as the energy-rich portions of Central Asia—namely, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

¹⁸² See Hilary McCutcheon and Richard Osbon, “Coming to Terms with Risk in Caspian Region Yields More Realistic Production, Investment Outlook,” *Oil and Gas Journal* 98:34 (21 August 2000).

¹⁸³ Garnett, Rahr, and Watanabe, p. 14.

| | 1990 | 1995 | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 | 2020 |
|---------------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Kazakhstan | 516 | 409 | 716 | 1,390 | 1,684 | 2,186 | 2,531 |
| Azerbaijan | 251 | 186 | 290 | 530 | 1,285 | 1,320 | 1,093 |
| Turkmenistan | 114 | 97 | 146 | 239 | 307 | 304 | 251 |
| Uzbekistan | 68 | 169 | 172 | 159 | 118 | 107 | 97 |
| Total | 949 | 861 | 1,324 | 2,318 | 3,394 | 3,917 | 3,972 |

Table 1. Oil Production Potential in the Caspian Basin (thousands of barrels per day). From Hilary McCutcheon and Richard Osbon, "Risk Management, Financing Availability: Keys to Winning in Caspian Region," *Oil and Gas Journal* 98:30 (24 July 2000)

| | 1990 | 1995 | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 | 2020 |
|---------------------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Turkmenistan | 8,491 | 2,960 | 4,286 | 6,190 | 8,515 | 10,839 | 12,732 |
| Uzbekistan | 3,935 | 4,607 | 5,253 | 5,745 | 5,813 | 6,109 | 6,421 |
| Kazakhstan | 643 | 434 | 1,009 | 1,917 | 3,457 | 5,039 | 5,729 |
| Azerbaijan | 969 | 643 | 606 | 1,027 | 3,114 | 3,813 | 3,973 |
| Total | 14,029 | 8,644 | 11,154 | 14,879 | 20,899 | 25,800 | 28,855 |

Table 2. Gas Production Potential in the Caspian Basin (millions of cubic feet per day). From Hilary McCutcheon and Richard Osbon, "Risk Management, Financing Availability: Keys to Winning in Caspian Region," *Oil and Gas Journal* 98:30 (24 July 2000)

of pipeline activity in the Caspian Basin (see Appendix) and could lose out to other gas producing states in the region. Given its comparatively low oil reserves and greater socioeconomic tensions, the stakes here are particularly high for Uzbekistan. According to McCutcheon and Osbon, Uzbekistan, despite its resources, is at risk of failing to meet even its own domestic energy needs. "Unless considerable efforts and investment are made in exploration in the near future, the country risks becoming a net oil importer again by 2005." Without access to convenient markets, "Uzbek gas production will probably reflect internal demand rather than production capability."¹⁸⁴

The key for the Central Asian side of the Caspian Basin, then, is access to convenient markets with high long-term energy demand. Such a market lies to the south

¹⁸⁴ Hilary McCutcheon and Richard Osbon, "Risk Management, Financing Availability: Keys to Winning in Caspian Region," *Oil and Gas Journal* 98:30 (24 July 2000), pp. 39-40.

and east, from India and Pakistan to China, where energy analysts predict that demands for gas imports will outpace those of Europe within two decades.¹⁸⁵ Asian markets offer the most direct and cost-effective export routes from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to South Asia and/or the Arabian Sea. These routes must traverse Afghanistan or Iran, however, and herein lies the rub. International politics and the Taliban's destabilizing "rogue" behavior have thus far prevented any development of pipelines through these southern routes. Longer routes through Russia, the Caspian Sea, and Turkey have been pursued instead, though comparatively high costs and complex logistics have delayed completion of these projects.

Given its staunch political opposition to both the Taliban and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the United States has been a major spoiler of pipeline routes through Afghanistan or Iran. The most prominent example is the Unocal debacle, in which an American-led consortium was forced to abandon its plans for oil and gas pipelines across Afghanistan and Pakistan to ports on the Arabian Sea. In 1996, the American energy corporation Unocal entered into a series of agreements with Uzbekneftegaz, Uzbekistan's national oil company. In 1997, the Unocal project coalesced into a consortium called "CentGas," which included oil companies from Japan, South Korea, and Pakistan. Though Afghanistan's political situation was volatile, Unocal had taken great pains to develop a business relationship with the Taliban. After investing tens of millions of dollars in the pipeline project, Unocal began to receive pressure from domestic groups in the United States opposed to the Taliban's treatment of women and other human rights abuses. Unocal was forced to withdraw from the CentGas consortium after the United States

¹⁸⁵ "Where Angels Fear to Tread," *The Economist*, (U.S. Edition, 30 September 2000); available from Lexis-Nexis. See also Garnett, Rahr, and Watanabe, p. 14.

launched missile attacks on camps in Afghanistan linked to Saudi dissident Usama Bin Ladin in August 1998. Subsequent unilateral and bilateral sanctions against Afghanistan, along with the Taliban's ongoing civil war, have prevented any resumption of the project.¹⁸⁶

The collapse of the CentGas deal was particularly disappointing to Pakistan, which has supported the Taliban regime mainly in hopes of turning Afghanistan into a strategic bridge between Pakistani and Central Asian markets. Since the shortest distances between Central Asia and the Indian Ocean lie through their territory, the Pakistanis stand to be not only a pipeline outlet for oil and gas, but also a major port for Central Asian commerce in general.¹⁸⁷ Iran, on the other hand, sees advantage in the blocking of pipelines through Afghanistan. While doggedly pursuing its own pipeline deals with Russia, Sweden, and other nations, Iran seeks to keep the Taliban as politically and economically isolated as possible. If trans-Afghan pipelines are exporting *Iranian* oil, however, the Islamic Republic has demonstrated a willingness to negotiate. Both Iran and Turkmenistan have pursued separate negotiations with Pakistan and India in hopes of keeping alive the prospects for trans-Afghan pipelines.¹⁸⁸

On a more global scale, the United States, Russia, and China each seek to exploit Central Asian energy resources while preventing one another from gaining hegemonic influence in the region. In an effort to deter Russia, Iran, and the Taliban while simultaneously promoting Turkey's interests, the United States adamantly supports

¹⁸⁶ See "Uzbekistan—The Afghan Option," *APS Review Gas Market Trends* 14:55 (2 October 2000); available from Lexis-Nexis; Rashid, *The Taliban*, pp. 170-182; and Lubin and Rubin, pp. 120-121.

¹⁸⁷ Dunn, pp. 142-149.

¹⁸⁸ "Afghanistan Economy: The Pipeline Story Continues," *EIU ViewsWire* (5 June 2000); available from Lexis-Nexis.

construction of pipelines from Baku in Azerbaijan to Ceyhan on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey (see Appendix). Despite the Baku-Ceyhan project's enormous costs, the Clinton administration argued that it offers the most secure export route and obviates the need for increased tanker traffic through the Bosphorus. Though the American government has (somewhat forcefully) held a consortium together, many investors and analysts question the project's commercial viability.¹⁸⁹ Like the secular Central Asian governments, Russia and China are notoriously intolerant of Islamic dissent. Given the substantial borders that they share with Central Asia, both great powers are driven by security concerns as well as economic interests. Russia naturally favors pipeline routes that traverse Russian territory on their way to European markets, while China has considered the construction of massive pipelines from Kazakhstan directly to China. Though China is deeply concerned about meeting its future energy demand, the costs of such an undertaking are prohibitively high in the near term.

While competition among a variety of outside powers with varying strategic interests has hindered Central Asia's ability to connect with South Asian markets, the greatest obstacle to this end clearly has been the Taliban and their destructive behavior in Afghanistan. Absent the ongoing civil war and atrocious human rights issues in Afghanistan, the CentGas project—and probably other ventures as well—would likely be completed and operational by now. Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan would already be receiving steady income for oil and gas exports to Pakistan, India, and other South and East Asian markets, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan would at least have the benefit of new markets for their non-energy goods such as cotton and minerals. Though Islam Karimov is prone to exaggeration when discussing the “Islamic threat” from

¹⁸⁹ Garnett, Rahr, and Watanabe, p. 17.

Afghanistan, he is quite right to lament the Taliban's impact on the Central Asian economy:

The war in Afghanistan ... is today the major constraint for new transport links which would allow the Central Asian states to have access to 'warm sea' ports and would help to integrate them into the existing system of world trade. This, consequently, holds back the development of national economies, because it is a well-known fact that the shortest and most stable transport links are necessary for an effective commodities exchange.¹⁹⁰

In addition to civil war and human rights abuses, Taliban activities such as narcotics distribution and support for militant Islamist groups also deter foreign investment and contribute to security problems in Central Asia. In 1999, Afghanistan became the world's largest source of opium, single-handedly producing over three quarters of all the opium on the world market.¹⁹¹ As part of the opium-producing region known as the "Golden Crescent," Afghanistan has long been a source of illegal narcotics. Upon their rise to power in the mid-1990s, the Taliban initially turned a blind eye toward poppy farmers, who had no other income alternatives in Afghanistan's devastated economy. As time went on, however, the Taliban increasingly used opium profits themselves to fund their civil war against the Northern Alliance. The Taliban expanded the areas available for poppy production and facilitated trade routes, pocketing at least \$20 million a year in opium taxes and even more on the side.¹⁹²

The Taliban's escalation of the narcotics trade has had devastating consequences for Central Asia's economy and security—particularly in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan,

¹⁹⁰ Karimov, pp. 16-17.

¹⁹¹ "Afghanistan "Threat" to Central Asia," *BBC News* (19 October 2000) [Homepage on-line]; available from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/south_asia/newsid_980000/980251.stm; accessed 16 March 2001.

¹⁹² Rashid, *The Taliban*, pp. 117-127.

which have become major export routes for Afghan opium. It is estimated that up to 65 percent of Afghan opiates are exported via Central Asia. The growing drug trade exacerbates income disparities, distorts the formal economy, gives rise to corruption and organized crime, impedes the rule of law—especially when law enforcement officials are involved in the trade, and constitutes a health epidemic as more and more Central Asians become heroin users.¹⁹³ In April 2001, Tajikistan's Deputy Interior Minister, who headed a government crackdown on organized crime, was assassinated by Tajik drug lords.¹⁹⁴ This gangland-style killing highlighted the power of organized crime and the state's vulnerability to this growing problem. Worse yet, the troubled Ferghana Valley, where economic failure and Islamic fundamentalism cohabit, is a major hub of the narcotics pipeline. The Taliban's drug trade thus pumps illicit funds into the heart of Central Asia's Islamic opposition.¹⁹⁵

In August 2000, the Taliban publicly outlawed poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, though it is impossible for international observers to confirm fully the validity of this claim. Many analysts speculate that the Taliban intend only to drive opium prices up and then reinstate production. In any case, enormous stockpiles from previous harvests remain in Afghanistan. Unless the Taliban destroy these as well, the impact of their alleged ban on cultivation would not impact the international narcotics trade for up to five years.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Lubin and Rubin, p. 71.

¹⁹⁴ Gregory Gleason, "Tajikistan Minister's Murder Points to Drug Route Conflict," *Eurasianet.org* (16 April 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available from: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav041601.shtml>; accessed 25 April 2001.

¹⁹⁵ Lubin and Rubin, pp. 70-71.

¹⁹⁶ Kate Clark, "Taliban Outlaws Poppy," *BBC News* (31 January 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/south_asia/newsid_1146000/1146640.stm; accessed 16 March 2001. U.S. Department of State, "Fact Sheet: The Taliban and the Afghan Drug Trade" (20 December

Finally, though the Taliban are not responsible for the rise of militant Islam in Central Asia, there is little question that the regime indeed provides shelter, supplies, arms, funds, and perhaps paramilitary training to the IMU and other militant Islamists throughout Central Asia and the Muslim world. Detailed information about the Taliban's support for international terrorism is not publicly available, but Afghanistan's numerous training facilities—many of which remain from the Soviet-Afghan War—are widely believed to host a variety of militant Muslims. Whether these groups are the guests of the Taliban or Usama Bin Ladin (or both) is unclear. Bin Ladin has publicly declared his financial support for the IMU, though the extent of the IMU's financial resources is unknown.¹⁹⁷ According to recent reports, Bin Ladin helped IMU leader Juma Namangani purchase two helicopters, which are based in an IMU camp in Afghanistan. Additional funding comes from the drug trade, as the IMU participates in the cross-border smuggling of Afghan opium.¹⁹⁸ Yuldashev and Namangani maintain offices in Kabul, and the Taliban has refused official Uzbek requests for the IMU leaders' extradition. The U.S. State Department accuses the Taliban and Bin Ladin of training and funding the IMU.¹⁹⁹

Additionally, the Taliban regime permits the operation of training and indoctrination facilities for Islamic militants waging jihad in Chechnya, Kashmir, Tajikistan, Dagestan, and China's Xinjiang province, where Muslim Uighur separatists seek independence from Beijing. In addition to the IMU, organizations such as Bin

2000) [Homepage on-line]; available from: http://www.state.gov/www/regions/sa/facts_taliban_drugs.html; accessed 22 March 2001.

¹⁹⁷ International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization*, pp. 18-20.

¹⁹⁸ Ahmed Rashid, "Pamirs Offer IMU Secure Base," *The Times of Central Asia on the Web* (14 April 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available from: <http://www.times.elcat.kg/times.cgi?D=article&aid=1016936>; accessed 29 April 2001.

¹⁹⁹ U.S. State Department, "Fact Sheet: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan" (15 September 2000) [Homepage on-line]; from <http://secretary.state.gov/www/briefings/statements/2000/ps000915b.html>; accessed 4 March 2001.

Ladin's al-Qaida, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), and al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (IG) all find safe haven and some measure of support in Afghanistan.²⁰⁰

The Taliban thus contribute to Central Asia's Islamic discontent in two ways: first, they exacerbate the region's failing political economy by deterring vital FDI in Central Asia's energy resources and by instigating a dangerous rise in criminal activities. Second, they provide safe haven and support to the militant Islamists that arise in response to Central Asia's failing political economy. These are serious problems; Central Asian leaders and interested world powers are entirely correct to be concerned about the Taliban's impact on the rise of Islamist violence in Central Asia. The Taliban are indeed a destabilizing force throughout the region, and they are directly involved with groups such as the IMU.

It must be reemphasized, however, that Central Asia's Islamic opposition did not originate with the Taliban. There is no reason to assume substantial ideological conformity between the Taliban and Central Asian political Islam or fundamentalism. Militant Islam in Central Asia is a distinctly indigenous phenomenon, arising in response to indigenous political and economic conditions. To the extent that the Taliban regime contributes to these extant problems, it can be considered an intervening variable in Central Asia's Islamist problem, but little more than that.

²⁰⁰ There is a paucity of substantive open-source information on the Taliban's support for the IMU and other militant groups. In addition to the references cited in footnotes 196-198, this brief overview was culled from the following sources: U.S. State Department, *Patterns of Global Terrorism—2000* (30 April 2001) [Homepage on-line]; available from <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2000/>; accessed 30 April 2001. Zalmay Khalilzad, "Afghanistan: The Consolidation of a Rogue State," *The Washington Quarterly* 23:1 (Winter 2000). "Islamic Opposition in Central Asia Seeking New Methods of Gaining Power," *Delo No—Bishkek*, in Russian, 1 March 2000, translated in *BBC Worldwide Monitoring* (8 March 2000); available from Lexis-Nexis. Rashid, "The Taliban: Exporting Extremism," *Foreign Affairs* 78:6 (November/ December 1999). Rashid, *The Taliban*, pp. 128-140. Anwar Iqbal, "Pakistan's Move Surprises Many," *United Press International* (4 January 2001); available from Lexis-Nexis.

One might inquire why this distinction matters. As long as the Taliban are a significant part of the problem, does it really make a difference whether they caused it or not? Shouldn't Central Asian leaders and world powers take action to stop the Taliban's destabilizing behavior? The answers to these questions are "yes" and "yes," but the appropriate policy responses differ in important ways depending on where we locate the crux of Central Asia's Islamist insurgency. Policy implications, along with general theoretical conclusions and summation of key findings, are the subjects of the next and final chapter of this study.

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V. CONCLUSION: THE TALIBAN AND CENTRAL ASIA

Under scrutiny, the Taliban are revealed to be little more than a violent aberration of Islamic culture, an anachronistic regime tenuously reigning over a chaotic, economically devastated nation. Their severe ideology, amorphous governmental structure, and general disregard for affairs of state (beyond enforcement of their obscurantist *sharia*) indicate that the Taliban are indeed a particularly dismal variant of Roy's "neofundamentalism." The Taliban, like the neofundamentalist model, appear to be "concerned solely with reestablishing Muslim law . . . without inventing new political forms," meaning that they wallow unproductively in "traditional ethnic, tribal, or communal divisions."²⁰¹

Several factors distinguish the Taliban from the model of "failed Islamism," however, and these are worth exploring. First, unlike that of other neofundamentalists (or fundamentalists or Islamists), the Taliban's ideology is much less attributable to an ascetic or radical interpretation of Islamic *sharia* than it is to relatively secular factors. Given their underlying political and economic frustration, it must be granted that all Islamist opposition is grounded in both spiritual and temporal concerns. There are nonetheless common intellectual threads that link most Islamist or fundamentalist groups. The influence of seminal thinkers and movements such as al-Afghani, Qutb, Maududi, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Jama'at-i-Islami, is present throughout contemporary Islamist ideology. Though their sociopolitical contexts differ, most Islamist movements base their ideologies on common Islamic notions of justice, equality, jihad, etc. The Taliban are a notable exception to this trend. The Taliban's obsession with blood

²⁰¹ Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, p. ix.

vengeance and pathological disdain for femininity contradict fundamental Islamic precepts, but are quite consistent with the Taliban's obscure tribal code—particularly when this code is unattenuated by education or other aspects of normal Afghan socialization. Their unusually violent and regressive behavior is also the product of a childhood disrupted by brutal warfare. Like Cambodia's Khmer Rouge, the Taliban are very much the children of war—culturally alienated, unsocialized, and desensitized to violence. Additionally, their time spent in the refugee camps was filled with a unique religious indoctrination that was simultaneously ultra-conservative and radical. In short, the differences between the Taliban on the one hand and all other Islamic movements on the other are greater than the differences among all other movements. If one were to schematize Islamic movements on an oversimplified continuum ranging from conservative fundamentalism to radical Islamism, the most accurate position for the Taliban might be outside this continuum in a category of their own.

The idiosyncrasy of the Taliban and the Afghan context make it extremely unlikely that Taliban-style ideology would find a receptive audience beyond the borders of Afghanistan. Other Islamist ideologies with far more conventional allure than that of the Taliban have failed to transcend local borders. Iran's revolutionary Islamism was differentiated by its Shi'i context, Marxist subtext, and the Ayatollah Khomeini's idiosyncratic concept of theocratic government (*velayat-e-faqih*). Palestinian Hamas employs a mixture of Islamism and socialism against the particular milieu of the Arab-Israeli conflict, while Algerian movements such as the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)—and especially the ultra violent Armed Islamic Group (GIA)—are the products of Algeria's tortured nationalism and enduring colonial legacy. If the appeal of these

Islamist movements is bound by local particularities, then the same is doubly true for the Taliban regime, which most other Islamist movements regard as backward and extreme.

Second, despite their utter political and economic failure, the Taliban have not reverted to conventional authoritarian and/or socialist models. They have been no more successful than other Islamists or fundamentalists in delineating effective political and economic policies, but they have stubbornly resisted any pressure to address these fundamental aspects of government. True to their principles, the Taliban have remained single-mindedly focused on transforming Afghan social mores and cultural norms. This focus is maintained at a tragic cost to Afghanistan and its future, but the Taliban to date have betrayed no concern for the negative consequences of their policies. This fact marks a departure from the accepted model of political Islam in power. The Islamic Republic of Iran, for example, despite its theological basis, exhibits many conventional institutions of government, including a constitution, a parliament, and elections. Iran's concern for its economic progress and international standing are evident in its active foreign policy and aggressive efforts to attract FDI and trading partners. Iran is by no means a thriving capitalist democracy, but its conventional political institutions and economic policies are prime examples of Islamism's tendency to recede in the face of political and economic necessity. The result, as Roy observes, is an ostensibly "Islamic" government that actually differs very little in form or function from conventional models.

The Taliban regime's drastic departure from Islamist norms and its eschewing of conventional government do not mean that the Taliban have succeeded where other Islamists or fundamentalists have failed. On the contrary, the Taliban have not transformed Afghanistan into an Islamic ideal capable of substituting effectively for

either socialist authoritarianism or capitalist democracy.²⁰² Unwillingness (or inability) to govern does not constitute a viable alternative to conventional government. The Taliban's failures, however, are problematic in themselves. Failed states are desperate, unstable and destabilizing. Since the Taliban's brutal ideology is relatively uninformed by commonly accepted Islamic principles, it is therefore unconstrained by such principles. This frees the Taliban to pursue any and all means necessary to achieve their primary goals: conquering all remaining resistance and recasting Afghan society in the Taliban's image. All's fair in the Taliban jihad: the slaughter of fellow Muslims, narcotics and weapons smuggling, harboring of international fugitives, and meddling with insurgencies in neighboring countries. They have no frame of reference other than violence and abject misery. In the face of economic ruin and international isolation, the Taliban have very little to lose.

Turning now to fundamentalism and political Islam in Central Asia, it is clear that Islamic opposition movements are indigenous phenomena arising in response to domestic economic and political concerns. Both Islamists and fundamentalists have antecedents in Central Asia's history, and both were present in their current forms before the Taliban rose to prominence in Afghanistan. At most, the Taliban have exacerbated the conditions favoring Islamic discontent, but they did not instigate Central Asia's Islamic violence. The national conditions that attended the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan (popular trauma and fatigue resulting from 20 years of constant warfare, the lawless violence that filled that the power vacuum, and the failure of secular or Islamist Mujahidin parties to

²⁰² Of course, any measure of the Taliban's achievement depends upon one's criteria for success. The Taliban themselves, for example, probably do not measure their success in practical or material terms, and would likely disagree with a negative assessment of their performance.

solve these problems) are not the conditions of the Central Asian republics, which are all quite stable despite recent Islamist violence. On the whole, Central Asian society is probably too secular and stability-minded to accept any Islamist or fundamentalist agenda. If so, the Taliban's violent and ascetic neofundamentalism should be especially unappealing. To the extent that the IMU is associated with the Taliban, its popular appeal may therefore be further limited.

The rise of Islamic opposition in Central Asia generally follows the widely accepted political economy explanation for Islamist discontent, though it deviates in certain respects. Though economic and political frustration is the driving force behind groups such as the IMU, these movements do not strictly fit the Islamist socioeconomic profile. Political Islam typically involves educated, middle class males who have moved to the city only to be disappointed by the lack of suitable employment opportunities. In urban mosques or on university campuses, Islamist groups are able to recruit from among growing masses of frustrated, recently urbanized Muslims. Their collective frustration is then directed against perceived political, social, and cultural corruption, and is expressed in politicized Islamic terms. Variations of this basic pattern can be found virtually anywhere that Islamist organizations operate—from Algeria to Saudi Arabia to Iran. In Central Asia, however, Islamic discontent is *not* urban, middle class, or predominantly educated.

As Roy observes, the Central Asian republics did not experience a rural exodus in the latter twentieth century. Central Asian society remains predominantly rural. If anything, post-Soviet emigration of Russian Slavs contributed to a slight decline in urban populations. Additionally, Central Asian societies all have experienced declining rather

than accelerating birth rates.²⁰³ One consequence of this demographic stability is a growing socioeconomic rift between industrial urban centers and failing agricultural sectors. In the latter, militant fundamentalism and Islamism have arisen from the economic desperation of the post-Soviet farm collectives. The Ferghana Valley is the most volatile example of Central Asia's rural Islamist phenomenon. Though Central Asian literacy is relatively high on the whole, literacy rates are falling in rural areas where people are historically less educated. Poverty is also rampant in the aftermath of the damaged ecology and failed collective system. Central Asia's Islamism, then, is rural, relatively uneducated, and lower class.

This atypical Islamist profile suggests two possible consequences. Either political Islam has taken a new form that calls the conventional model into question, or political Islam in Central Asia is unlikely to develop into a viable social and political movement. While Central Asian Islamism indeed differs from the conventional profile, this is most likely an indication of Islamism's ideological poverty in the region. Absent an educated middle class cadre or strong urban networks, politicized Islamic movements probably have little chance of acquiring a broad base of popular support. This prognosis, however, depends heavily on two related variables. The first is the character and depth of Central Asia's popular Islamic renaissance, and the second is the future political and economic climate in the Central Asian republics.

Through description and analysis of geographical, cultural, and institutional constraints on Islamic ideology and praxis in Central Asia, this study has attempted to provide an accurate measure of popular religiosity in the region. Some empirical data were brought to bear, but current studies of popular Islam in Central Asia are lacking.

²⁰³ Roy, *The New Central Asia*, pp. 83-84.

Accordingly, it cannot be claimed here with a high degree of certainty that most Central Asians are categorically opposed to Islamic political movements. Most available indicators suggest that Central Asian Islamic culture is comparatively secular, moderate, and apolitical, but further empirical inquiry is needed in this area. Even if the average Central Asian prefers not to mix religion with politics, this could change if the economy does not improve and politics remain authoritarian and repressive. The despair and frustration of the countryside has not yet wracked the urban centers, where support is comparatively high for Karimov and the other Central Asian presidents. Economic and/or political reforms are urgently needed to stem the tide of Islamic discontent in Central Asia. As the next section demonstrates, both reforms may be necessary to alleviate socioeconomic tensions and reduce the appeal of political Islam.

A. "DUTCH DISEASE" AND THE RENTIER STATE

A central contention of this study is that Central Asia's economic progress depends in no small measure on the ability to efficiently and profitably exploit the region's oil and gas resources. The Taliban inhibit this process by deterring FDI in pipelines and disrupting the Central Asian economy with massive heroin trafficking and the resultant growth of organized crime. With incoming wealth from energy exports, the Central Asian republics—at least Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (where Islamist opposition is strongest)—could shore up their failing economies, mitigate economic frustration among the populace, and lay the groundwork for political reform. This outcome, however, is a best-case scenario. It depends on the willingness of the current regimes to use energy revenues wisely and with foresight. It also requires them to open willingly the authoritarian political processes that sustain their rule. While

economic and political liberalization are the ideal consequences of energy wealth, two other outcomes are more probable. These are the complicated problem of “Dutch disease” and the rentier state phenomenon.

“Dutch disease” is the term used by economists to designate the stagnation in manufacturing and agricultural sectors that often occurs in developing nations with inflows of energy wealth. As Fairbanks, Nelson, Starr, and Weisbrode observe, Dutch disease functions in two ways. First, the sudden windfall of revenues creates higher inflation in the newly energy-rich state than in its trading partners. This development increases the cost of imports with corresponding decreases in the local currency value of revenue from international trade. Second, increased government spending raises demand for both tradable and non-tradable goods (mainly services).

But, while international competition may keep down the prices of tradable goods, it is less likely to hold down the prices of services, which become relatively more costly and more rewarding to those who provide them. Capital and labor move to the more dynamic service sector of the local economy, while agriculture and manufacturing stagnate. The energy-rich nation thus becomes less competitive internationally.²⁰⁴

The Dutch disease effect has been particularly strong in the former Soviet Union, where trade has boomed while production stalled. “These trends lead generally to massive flight to the cities where the population cannot be adequately fed or controlled.”²⁰⁵ As the previous section observed, Central Asia has averted thus far the problem of urban migration, which in turn fuels Islamist discontent. Additionally, the region’s current socioeconomic frustration is highest in agricultural sectors, which the

²⁰⁴ Charles Fairbanks, C. Richard Nelson, S. Frederick Starr, Kenneth Weisbrode, *Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia* (Washington, DC: The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and The Atlantic Council of the United States, 2001), pp. 28-29. Available on-line at http://www.cacianalyst.org/Strategic_assessment.pdf; accessed 1 May 2001.

²⁰⁵ Fairbanks, et al, p. 29.

Dutch disease problem would only intensify. While energy wealth offers enormous development potential for at least three of the Central Asian republics, the cycle of hope and disappointment that usually follows revenue windfalls could exacerbate Islamic discontent if these issues are not managed properly.

Another backlash associated with energy revenues is the theory of the distributive—or “rentier”—state. The rentier state phenomenon is most commonly associated with the oil producing states of the Persian Gulf and North Africa. It designates governments that receive most of their national income from external rents on a natural resource rather than from domestic taxation or capital-producing agencies of the domestic economy. (Dutch disease is partially subsumed into the rentier process, insofar as the benefits of the state’s rent-producing enterprise are isolated from other sectors of the economy.) All revenues received from the export of the rent-producing resource remain in the hands of the state rather than being diffused among the population. As Palmer, Alghofaily, and Alnimir observe, the rentier state benefits from economic advantages not available to less prosperous developing nations. “In particular, the rentier state possesses the capital necessary to create (by purchase), over a few years, an economic infrastructure of roads, drainage networks, and telecommunications that might otherwise take generations to construct.”²⁰⁶

In addition to providing the state with a steady inflow of economic leverage, external rents have far-reaching political effects as well. Rentier dictators are able to structure their social contract with the populace in such a way that satisfies social welfare

²⁰⁶ Monte Palmer, Ibrahim Fahad Alghofaily, and Saud Mohammed Alnimir, “The Behavioral Correlates of Rentier Economies: A Case Study of Saudi Arabia,” in *The Arabian Peninsula: Zone of Ferment*, ed. Robert W. Stookey (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1984), p. 18.

expectations without reducing the state's monopoly on political power. Traditional state-society relations, in which the state grants certain political rights and powers to society in exchange for the resources it extracts from society, are subverted. Both bargaining and coercion become less critical for the state as it essentially purchases its legitimacy by "bribing" the population into political acquiescence.

The state is expected to provide a certain level of economic security, in exchange for which society grants state leaders considerable political autonomy. Indeed, if anything, the slogan of the American Revolution—"no taxation without representation"—is reversed: In a rentier state, state-society relations seem predicated on the principle of "no taxation, no representation."²⁰⁷

As long as energy rents sustain the state's ability to maintain both its security apparatus and the welfare state, there is essentially no domestic pressure on the authoritarian state to open its political process to the population. The results of the rentier phenomenon can be observed in states such as Libya, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Algeria. Some rentier or semi-rentier states, such as Iran and Jordan, have taken tentative steps toward political liberalization as oil rents increasingly fail to support the distributive economy. In most cases, however, the populace remains essentially submissive while non-oil sectors of the economy remain underdeveloped or distorted.

How, then, might the rentier problem affect the political economies of the Central Asian republics? Given the varying estimates of the region's oil and gas reserves, along with the complex and slow-going efforts to harvest and export these resources, it is presently difficult to predict the amount of energy revenues that each state will receive. While Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are likely to accrue enough rents to implement and

²⁰⁷ Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, and Paul Noble, eds., "Introduction: Theoretical Perspectives on Arab Liberalization and Democratization," in *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World; Vol. 1: Theoretical Perspectives* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1995), p. 15.

sustain a rentier social contract with their citizenry, the outlook is less certain for Uzbekistan and doubtful for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. On the Arabian Peninsula, non-oil producing states such as Jordan were able to maintain rentier economies based on transfers from oil-rich states such as Saudi Arabia that had oil revenues to spare. Even if Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are able to subsist on energy rents alone, it is highly unlikely that they'd be able or willing to support the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments. In any case, there is little reason to assume that the Central Asian dictators would use energy rents as a pretext for political liberalization. Given their public statements and policy actions throughout their first decade of independent nationhood, it is more likely that the post-communist leaders would use rents to enhance their legitimacy, increase defense spending, and further consolidate their rule. Even if this process involves judicious liberalization and diversification of the Central Asian economy, it is unlikely to lead intentionally toward political liberalization. As Glenn Robinson and Shibley Telhami aptly observe:

The preeminent lesson from state-building enterprises throughout the ex-colonial world in the past few decades is . . . 'how you start significantly determines how you finish.' That is, 'many well-meaning officials in emerging states rationalized early excesses as necessary, or emergency, compromises that would be corrected in the future, only to discover that these mistakes often become permanent features' of the new states, with their own bureaucratic defenders.²⁰⁸

If Central Asia's past and present are indeed the best indicators of its political future, then the prospects for political liberalization are bleak with or without economic progress. Though oil and gas rents will probably strengthen most of the status quo

²⁰⁸ Glenn E. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 198, quoting Telhami's speech to the United Nations Conference on Palestine, 30 June 1995.

regimes, the probable onset of Dutch disease and the possibility of rentier dictatorship are not likely to diminish Islamist agitation. As long as the current regimes remain in power, they are unlikely to implement meaningful political reform. Their continued oppression of Islamic opposition groups will exacerbate the insurgency problem, and energy rents will probably do little more than enhance their ability to do so. Economic progress is therefore a necessary but insufficient condition for the reduction of Islamic political violence. If further conflict between militant Islamists and the secular governments is to be avoided, international influence and pressure must be brought to bear. The next section concludes this study with policy suggestions for the United States and the Central Asian governments.

B. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The following policy recommendations are predicated on two basic assumptions. The first is that political Islam in power is an undesirable outcome. Given Islamism's demonstrated failure to provide open, effective, constructive government in other parts of the Muslim world, this study assumes that an Islamist coup would be no less disastrous in Central Asia. Second, it is assumed—in light of Chapter IV and the previous section of this chapter—that economic *and* political reform are the best guarantors of Central Asia's long term stability and freedom from Islamist violence. Additionally, these recommendations are restricted to the problem of containing effectively both militant Islam in Central Asia and the Taliban's destabilizing behaviors. It is not the intent of this study to propose broad U.S. policy toward Afghanistan or Central Asia.

Afghanistan and the Taliban present significant foreign policy challenges for the United States and the world. Aside from containing international terrorism and

maintaining regional stability, the United States has no real interests in Afghanistan per se. The country is poor in resources, devastated in terms of economics and infrastructure, and the combination of multilateral sanctions and international “donor fatigue” has stanchied the flow of humanitarian relief. If the United States government is concerned about the Taliban’s impact on Islamist insurgency in Central Asia, it must rethink its myopic policy toward Afghanistan—policy that revolves exclusively and inflexibly around the Taliban’s sheltering of Usama Bin Ladin and support for international terrorism. Current U.S. policy objectives are reflected in UN Security Council Resolution 1333, which:

- Demands the Taliban comply with Resolution 1267 and cease providing training and support to international terrorists.
- Insists the Taliban turn over indicted international terrorist Usama Bin Ladin so he can be brought to justice.
- Directs the Taliban to close all terrorist training camps in Afghanistan within 30 days.²⁰⁹

This study contends that the Taliban are best characterized as a failed regime tenuously presiding over an unstable—and regionally *destabilizing*—state. Current international policy toward Afghanistan does not seriously address regional security issues. While the Taliban’s continued harboring of Bin Ladin and other militant Islamists is politically frustrating and morally deplorable, the single-minded American obsession with this issue is more emotional than practical or strategic. Bin Ladin should not be the beginning and end point of American policy toward Afghanistan. The United States and the United Nations have chosen to pursue these narrow objectives through the imposition

²⁰⁹ Quoted in U.S. State Department, *Patterns of Global Terrorism—2000*.

of political and economic sanctions. As in most other cases where sanctions have been employed, the Afghan sanctions have failed completely to achieve policy objectives or alter the Taliban's behavior in any appreciable way. As previously argued, the Taliban are essentially unconstrained by either conventional Islamic precepts or concern for the material welfare of the Afghan people. There is no reason to expect sanctions to achieve anything but further isolation, suffering, and desperation in Afghanistan.²¹⁰

There are no easy answers to the foreign policy dilemma presented by Afghanistan. The U.S. government's narrowly defined objectives and increasingly shrill rhetoric have essentially painted policy makers into a corner. It would be difficult at this point to change tack without appearing to back down or appease the Taliban. In light of the current policy's empirical failure, however, some degree of policy broadening and constructive engagement is in order. Peaceful resolution of the Afghan civil war should be pursued at least as urgently as Bin Ladin's extradition. As long as it continues, the war is not only a security threat to the states on its borders, but it also drives narcotics and weapons smuggling throughout the region. According to Fairbanks and company, "There is also a diminishing likelihood that the major powers—including China, Iran, Pakistan, and Russia—will be able to accommodate one another's interests in this region so long as they continue to support opposing sides in the Afghan conflict."²¹¹

The U.S. government should regularly test the Taliban's willingness to engage in dialogue. Again, destabilizing behaviors such as narcotics and weapons smuggling are

²¹⁰ The U.S. State Department refers to the December 2000 UN sanctions as "smart sanctions" because they are intended to punish the Taliban while permitting humanitarian relief for the Afghan people. Nonetheless, humanitarian aid is hindered by the Taliban's uncooperativeness, the ongoing civil war, and the near total isolation of Afghanistan brought about by international sanctions.

²¹¹ Fairbanks, et al, p. 3.

largely features of economic desperation. Analysts such as Ahmed Rashid and Tamara Makarenko have suggested economic incentives as a means of ending the Taliban's civil war and criminal behavior. Peace could perhaps begin with the promise of a substantial reconstruction package provided by international governments, organizations, and charities, which would be bestowed after the Taliban and the Northern Alliance reach a ceasefire agreement. "Such a package would essentially represent a bribe to the warlords while acting as an incentive for the people of Afghanistan to pressure both parties to reach an agreement."²¹²

Makarenko makes the case for a more limited incentive—the construction of oil and gas pipelines through Afghanistan. Acting as a transit country for pipelines might be more financially lucrative for the Taliban than heroin distribution. Pipelines could also foster healthier relations between Afghanistan and its neighbors through the establishment of economic interdependence. The economic and security benefits for the energy-producing states of Central Asia are obvious—Afghanistan has long been an ideal but unavailable export route. Granted, any engagement-oriented policy would likely be rejected by the United States. As Makarenko argues, however:

. . . the USA should realize that a more realistic attitude towards the region is required. Once peace is attained in Afghanistan, regardless of whether it is done through economic bargaining chips, the USA would quickly realize benefits of its own: relatively secure access to the region's energy sources and the ability to deal with terrorism more closely.²¹³

The United States and /or the United Nations could certainly use diplomatic pretexts to justify shifts in policy. The Taliban's official banning of poppy cultivation,

²¹² Tamara Makarenko, "Seeking Security in Central Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 13:1 (1 January 2001); available from Lexis-Nexis.

²¹³ Makarenko, "Seeking Security."

for example, has been dismissed out of hand by the United States without regard for whether or not the claim might be true. If the Taliban have in fact halted poppy production, the American government or the United Nations might respond in kind with some sort of economic gesture. Further incentives, of course, would depend on the Taliban's response to this initial gesture. In any case, the United States and the United Nations must put their Afghan policies into wider perspective. Regional peace, stability and independence, containment of intra-regional conflicts, and prevention of inter-regional disputes constitute international strategic interests. Isolated acts of terrorism, however deplorable, do not.

Turning now to Central Asia, the United States and other interested powers must also reevaluate their policies. Absent the galvanizing issue of Bin Ladin and international terrorism, however, there is more room in Central Asia for policy maneuvering. Currently, the United States is committed to supporting the secular Central Asian governments in their bid to quell domestic Islamist insurgencies. With regard to the Islamist problem, American objectives are to:

- Strengthen cooperation between regional counterterrorism and security policymakers to enhance regional capabilities to counter terrorism
- Forge a common diplomatic front toward the problem of international terrorism
- Provide additional information on law enforcement techniques to enhance international investigation and prosecution of terrorists²¹⁴

²¹⁴ U.S. State Department, "Fact Sheet: Central Asian Terrorism Conference" (15 April 2000) [Homepage on-line]; available from http://www.secretary.state.gov/www/travels/2000/fs_000415_terrorism.html; accessed 22 March 2001.

While competing for pipeline concessions, the United States and Russia have provided substantial military support to the Central Asian governments. The United States has increased military-to-military contact and assistance programs, while Russia maintains troops on Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan. While security and stability are of primary importance in the region, international powers must avoid strategies that seek these objectives through competition and unconditional military and political support for the current Central Asian governments. Such policies serve no state's long-term interests, and only exacerbate conflict between militant Islamists and the Central Asian regimes.

The United States, in particular, needs to reassess and clarify its purposes in Central Asia. No one seriously argues that America has vital interests in the region. Most strategic assessments of Central Asia don't even categorize Caspian and Central Asian energy resources as *strategic* interests—let alone vital.²¹⁵ At most, the maintenance of peace, stability, and independence, along with the prevention of regional disputes and containment of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), are American strategic objectives, while the promotion of the region's modest energy markets is an important but lesser interest. The same cannot be said, however, for other interested powers such as Russia, China, Pakistan, and Iran, all of whom share geographic borders with Central Asia and certainly have greater stakes in the region than does the distant United States. The U.S. government's current policy of pursuing Caspian and Central Asian energy exports at enormous cost while aggressively seeking to deny these markets to Russia, Iran, and Afghanistan is out of sync with American objectives in the region.

²¹⁵ See, for example, Fairbanks, et al, or Anatol Lieven, "The (Not So) Great Game," *The National Interest* (Winter 1999/2000); available from Lexis-Nexis.

This policy projects two inaccurate implications: 1) that the U.S. government considers the region's energy resources to be of vital or strategic importance, and 2) that the United States seeks hegemonic influence in the region. Both implications contradict actual American interests, which are the promotion of stability and the prevention of conflict—objectives that are best achieved through a *cooperative* effort to enhance regional security, develop energy markets, and promote meaningful political and economic reforms. The first two objectives have been pursued separately and competitively by various powers, though no single interested power is capable of guaranteeing them. The last objective, which this study contends has primary importance for the containment of Islamist discontent, has not been pursued at all.

The United States must revise its assessment of the Islamist problem in Central Asia. Instead of perceiving the Central Asian governments as bastions of secular stability against the violent, "Talibanized" Islamic insurgency, American analysts and policymakers should understand that the current Central Asian regimes are, in many respects, brutal dictatorships that oppress human rights, deny popular participation in political processes, and stunt economic reform. As in pre-revolutionary Iran, the appearance of politicized Islam is symptomatic of these domestic conditions. Policies that bolster the secular regimes' security apparatuses without an equal emphasis on political and economic reforms are counterproductive. "The readiness demonstrated by governments such as that of the U.S. to provide security assistance has led some in Central Asian governments to conclude that their commitment to fight drugs and radical

Islam is more important for Western capitals than promoting a just and tolerant political system.”²¹⁶

To counter this perception and effectively neutralize Islamist agitation, the United States should work cooperatively with the United Nations and/or other interested powers to link Central Asian security, stability, and independence to political reform. Security assistance should in fact be conditional, at least to some degree, on such reform.

Foreign governments and international organizations must support unwaveringly and unequivocally the position that regional security can only be assured if religious freedom is guaranteed and the legitimate activities of groups and individuals are not suppressed. This is not just because human rights are important in themselves, but because their suppression inevitably leads to militant responses. Central Asia can be compared with pre-Revolutionary Iran, where foreign support for an unpopular leader fostered worse leadership and antagonism toward both the leader and the external supporter.²¹⁷

Regardless of specific policy choices, the United States and other interested powers must reassess and reconceptualize their broad objectives and policies in Afghanistan and Central Asia. International policy should work in concert toward peace and stability in the region. Its focus should be shifted away from exclusive obsession with the Taliban's idiosyncratic fundamentalism, which admittedly has problematic aspects (not the least of which is support for international terrorism), but certainly doesn't amount to a strategic threat to be "contained" like Soviet communism. Afghanistan should instead be treated as a dangerously unstable and destabilizing state, while the Central Asian governments should be viewed as dictatorial regimes that, much like the Shah of Iran before them, are causing a growing Islamic backlash in their respective nations. Development of energy markets is an important part of economic reform, but

²¹⁶ International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization*, pp. 29-30.

²¹⁷ International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization*, p. 29.

without simultaneous or subsequent political reform, economic progress might lead simply to other undesirable outcomes such as “Dutch disease” or rentier dictatorship. In the case of Central Asia, liberal values such democratization, human rights, and religious freedom are more than altruistic precepts; they are guarantors of security, stability, and progress.

APPENDIX. OIL AND GAS EXPORT ROUTES FROM THE CASPIAN BASIN



From National Geographic Society, 1999, reprinted in Sherman W. Garnett, Alexander Rahr, and Koji Watanabe, *The New Central Asia: In Search of Stability* (New York: The Trilateral Commission, 2000).

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