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CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS*

ISLAM AND ENERGY SECURITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Introduction

This paper seeks to assess the impact of Islam on energy security in Central Asia. Its basic thrust is that at this time Islam does not present a significant threat to energy production and distribution in the area. This is due to a fractured religious environment in which secularism remains strong and the Muslim community divided, political Islam is weak and unable to develop strong organizational and leadership capabilities, and governments have been successful in establishing control mechanisms to limit unwanted political activities by potential Islamic opposition elements. However, there may be problems in the long run that will need to be closely monitored. The most significant of these would be the development of Islam as a rallying cry for those who feel oppressed by what they perceive to be corrupt, ineffective, undemocratic, and un-Islamic governments. As a recent Economist Intelligence Unit report on Uzbekistan notes, "The unofficial Islamic movement—those Muslims who refuse to place themselves under state supervision—will continue to face repression, and resentment will grow steadily, with a home-grown Islamic opposition a long-term prospect" (1997b, p. 6). The integration of religion with ethnicity in opposition to non-Muslim communities within the various republics would be less potentially explosive.

However, any assessment of the impact of Islam on energy issues in Central Asia must first address the religious environment in which Islam is evolving in that region. In Central Asia it is essential to underscore the point that there has been a high level of religious diversity and that this has in part been due to the impact of the Soviet Union's long antireligious campaign. We need to begin by noting the considerable variation in government policies and public attitudes towards Islam over time. In the first years of Soviet control, there was an official tolerance of Islam, which was followed by efforts at suppression under Stalin, a loosening of restrictions on Islam in the late 1980s, and, finally, an Islamic revival since independence. In addition, consideration must be given to the post-World War I dilution of the Islamic population by the immigration of Europeans into the region. The Soviet years brought a significant number of people into several republics who were not indigenous and who did not come from a pre-Soviet Muslim

heritage. At the end of the Soviet period, this was particularly true of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz Republic, whose Russian and other European populations were 50% and 26%, respectively. While the number of these immigrants has declined in recent years, their presence influences the religious character of the states in which they reside.

Within the indigenous populations of the republics, there have been further important differences. The long era of Soviet control led to a weakening of Islam throughout Central Asia in varying degrees. During the Stalin era, there were efforts to diminish the role of Islam, but the impact of these policies varied across the region. These programs took place in urban centers and regions where the process of modernization and Russian immigration were strongest, as well as in rural regions where there was often no institutional support for Islam. There was, however, an unequal pattern of continued Muslim belief in the region. The result was that at the end of the Soviet era, Islam was strongest in some more isolated rural regions and in less developed states such as Tajikistan. On the other hand, it was weakest in the Kyrgyz Republic (although there was a strongly religious community in the southern part of the state that remains) and Kazakhstan, in part because of their large nonindigenous populations and in part due to historic factors in the development of Islam in those states. For example, in the Kyrgyz Republic, while Islam had entered the country centuries earlier, forced Islamization from the seventeenth century onward had only led to full conversion at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and its nomadic population did not always practice the formal tenets of Islam. In later years, Soviet pressure had weakened official Islam to the point where there were but 25 mosques in that state.

Islam in Central Asia also has not been united in its religious leadership or belief system. There is no recognized center of Islamic leadership although, as we shall see, there are regions with stronger Muslim influence. Official Islamic state organizations during the Soviet period were viewed more as means of control by the authorities, although they were a factor in maintaining some sort of public role for Islam. Founded during World War II, the Board of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) lasted until the 1990s, when it was replaced by national boards in the various republics. In both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, these were not independent Muslim organizations.

Muslims in the region have been further divided by long-time religious differences among the believers. Thus, while most Central Asian Muslims are Sunni, there are minorities of Shi'i. There has long existed a Twelver (Ithna Ash'ara) Shi'i community of no more than 100,000 persons in Bukhara in Uzbekistan that has been historically active in maintaining ties to Iran and developing the Persian language. An Ismaili group has resided in the Pamir Mountains with smaller elements in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, Bukhara, and Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan. The Ismailis, an offshoot of Shi'ism, were cut off from their spiritual leader, the aga khan, in India. Persecuted in the pre-Soviet era, they became active politically during the Communist period and have attempted to develop an autonomous region in eastern Tajikistan in recent years. The fact that they populate the volatile region near the Afghan border has added to their significance. There have been historic clashes of Sunni and Shi'I, such as in Tajikistan in the pre-Soviet era. Shi'i numbers, however, are relatively small in most states, and conditions do not appear likely to lead to destabilization such as that in the gulf region (with the possible exception of Tajikistan). Sufism also has a considerable influence in the region, and Sufis have frequently been the target of criticism from the official Muslim religious leadership. Sufi orders have long been important in many areas of Central Asia, and their underground organizations were a major force in maintaining Islamic belief in some urban centers during the Soviet years. Government supported Islamic organizations have accused the Sufis of working with Zionists and Turkey to weaken Islam. Finally, an active Wahhabi element has developed that is reportedly aided by private and public elements from Saudi Arabian that have also been targeted by establishment Islam. The Wahhabis have been influential in the Fergana valley of Uzbekistan but have also recently established a presence in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. There is considerable dispute as to the strength of many of these differing groups in terms of their knowledge of basic Islamic tenets and their understanding of the tenets of their particular sects.

There have also been differences in beliefs and practices within the general Sunni community. A major issue within Central Asia's Muslim world (an issue that needs considerably more empirical investigation) is the actual depth of knowledge of and allegiance to Islam among indigenous peoples. Although the degree of change has been

in dispute, there is no question that under Stalin there was a weakening of Islam's hold on the population. Twenty years after the revolution, some 15% of the adult Muslim population stated that they were unbelievers (Panarin, 1994, pp. 22-23), and that percentage increased in the following decades. Public and institutional Islam were particularly vulnerable to Soviet efforts to limit the influence of religion in the region. The number of mosques in the Soviet Union declined from 26,279 in 1912, to 1,312 in 1942, and approximately 450 in 1976 (Rywkin, 1990, p. 87). By the mid-1980s, Central Asia had some 230 functioning mosques in addition to a large number of unregistered religious communities (Rorlich, 1991, p. 188). Those years also saw a major decline in religious activities of all sorts, including education (religious schools decreased almost to extinction), relations with Muslim communities outside the region, and public lectures and sermons by religious teachers and leaders. Central Asia was largely isolated from the rest of the Muslim world, and religion in general remained on the defensive. All of this does not mean that Islam was without any vitality prior to independence. There were many areas where an active unofficial Islam flourished throughout the decades of Soviet rule. This varied by region and age of the believer. Even in the last years of Soviet control, there were signs of renewed interest in Islam, and party leaders in Central Asia expressed worry about the apparent revival of Islam.

Evaluating the Threat of Islam

In evaluating the impact of Islam on energy security in Central Asia it may be useful to state the threat Islamic elements could possibly pose as identified for a similar analysis of the Middle East. Four basic assumptions were detailed at that time:

1. Major dangers to American energy interests in the Middle East from "the Islamic threat" could emerge from the following: (a) violent attacks or the threat of such action by Muslim groups targeting our personnel or facilities in the region, (b) the curtailment of the operations of American energy firms in avowedly Islamic countries put under sanctions by the U.S. for their perceived involvement in "terrorist" activities, or (c) the weakening or overthrow of governments friendly to our interests by Islamically oriented organizations.

2. There is nothing intrinsic in the Islamic religion that presents a threat to oil and gas production and distribution, but elements of that religion can and have been used by individuals and groups antithetical to those activities.

3. Where states identify themselves as Islamic, the danger to the production and distribution of energy differs according to whether they are friendly or unfriendly to Western states and particularly to the United States. In the former instance, problems arise from Muslim groups who see the government in control as "un-Islamic" in some fashion; this perception may endanger the present leadership. In the latter instance, the danger to oil and gas interests arises primarily from the reactions of Western states, particularly the United States, to alleged actions by unfriendly Muslim governments, particularly the support of "terrorist" activities.

4. Islam is used by groups that perceive themselves as exploited by governments they see as politically, economically, and religiously oppressive. This is particularly dangerous to foreign oil and gas interests if they are identified with the allegedly oppressive regime.

In Central Asia most of these potential threats could develop in the future. A major exception now would be the presence of unfriendly Islamic governments in the region since no republic is presently led by an Islamic elite and is not likely to be in the near future. With regard to most possible dangers, the impact of Islam on energy can be viewed as severely limited or potentially dangerous. At this point in time, it would appear that Islamic issues have only a limited negative effect on energy security in the region.

The Limited Perspective

S. Frederick Starr wrote in a recent paper that "[i]n spite of dire warnings from Moscow, fundamentalism is an insignificant force in Central Asia and will likely remain so" (n.d., p. 9). There is considerable evidence to back the view that Islam at the end of the 20th century is not a major threat to energy security in Central Asia. Domestic factors supporting this interpretation are (a) the heterogeneous nature of the Muslims and the secularized nature of the population in much of the region, (b) the weakness of political

organization among Muslim activists, and (c) actions by the political leadership of Central Asian states to control political Islam.

Prior to assessing these domestic factors, it also might be useful to note that, at this time, no significant international powers publicly support Muslim political actors in Central Asia. The Russians have not shown themselves as sympathetic to Muslim interests, the Iranians have been relatively quiescent in the religiopolitical sphere recently, and the changed government in Turkey limits that government's involvement. The People's Republic of China also has not been disruptive. Because it sees political Islam as a problem in its own Xinjiang autonomous region, China has a common desire with its Central Asian neighbors to assure that Islam's influence remains contained. It has continued a pattern of consolidating Han control over western China and follows policies not dissimilar to other regimes in the area.

As previously noted, the population of Central Asia has major religious divisions. There are those of European origin who are outside the Islamic heritage, and a significant portion of the indigenous population does not adhere to any religious faith. These groups form sizable minorities or even majorities in several states. While the vast majority of Muslims are Sunni and of the more liberal Hanafi school, and the Shi'is are limited in numbers, we have noted that there are other important divisions. These include differences between the traditional Islamic establishment and Wahhabi, Ismaili, and Sufi elements as well as varying levels of knowledge and practice of the faith. This lack of unity has limited the ability of Muslim activists to gain the broad support they seek in most of the region. A fragile power base also exists today for Muslim activists in most states of Central Asia, in part due to the combination of religious diversity and the weakening of Islamic practice and knowledge during the Soviet era. This does not mean that areas with obviously stronger cohesion and commitment to Islamic causes in places such as Tajikistan and the Fergana Valley have not existed.

Secondly, to be a major political player in states of the region, Muslim activists need strong organization and leadership, at least at the local level. During the Soviet period, any Islamically based leadership was eliminated, co-opted, or marginalized. The closing

of mosques and religious schools denied incipient Muslim elites the substructure for the maintenance of power. An already relatively weak foundation of religious scholars was restricted in their activities. These scholars were not afforded the opportunity to interrelate with the worldwide Islamic community of scholars either by travel or by importing religious literature. As noted, the official religious establishment formed in the later years of Soviet rule was largely a control mechanism to assure that Muslim organizations did not carry out antistate activities.

When we investigate the ability of Muslim activists to organize and assert political power in the post-independence era, we find only limited success, at least in part due to government efforts to keep Islamic political activity contained. In several states Muslim organizations have been particularly fragile. As noted, Islam in the Kyrgyz Republic has traditionally been weak, except in the southern region (Pryde, 1992). There has been some recent growth in interest in Islam in the republic, and some Muslim leaders have called for "a mosque in every village" (Andreev, 1994, p. 55). There still remains a major difference between rural and urban elites, and one study found that rural school teachers were much more religious than urban university students (Sultangalieva, 1996, p. 30). However, the founding of the Islamic Renaissance (or "Rebirth") Party brought very few adherents. The moderate Kyrgyz Democratic Wing has supported the government while calling for the renovation of mosques and religious schools.

The civil violence in Tajik in the early 1990s did bring some armed Muslim forces into the more religious Fergana Valley, presenting the republic's government with a perceived Islamic threat. Kyrgyz authorities, however, have rather effectively dealt with the possibility of religious opposition. In part, this can be traced to the government's desire to assuage the fears of the country's sizable Russian minority. In the process, the government has tried to maintain a division between itself and religion, but two Muslim feast days have been turned into state holidays. Religiously based political parties were banned, and the government obtained the agreement of a parliamentary commission to drop a reference in the constitution's preamble to spiritual rebirth based upon Islamic values (Hiro, 1994, pp. 138-139). In 1996 the government created a new state commission of religious affairs, ostensibly to promote tolerance and freedom of

conscience and to oversee laws dealing with religious matters. Both Muslim and Christian groups have been suspicious of state efforts dealing with religion, particularly requirements for the regulation of all religious organizations and the use of the phrase "national security" in commission statements. Christians and Muslims with foreign support have apparently been especially targeted (U.S. Department of State, 1997b, p. 6).

Islam has also traditionally been comparatively weak in Kazakhstan. Religious knowledge was relatively undeveloped even though traditional Muslim customs and ceremonies continued to be important within sections of the population during the Soviet period. The government made major efforts to control official Islam in that era: only some 30 mosques remained at the end of Stalin's reign, and the capital, which had once included over 60 mosques, was left with only one. Official Islam, even after Stalin, was controlled by a Muslim religious board that acted to ensure a compliant Islamic order. This began to change in 1990-1991, when under a new, more independent mufti, Muslims sought to open new mosques and the first madrasah of the modern era was founded. However, as illustrated by the study of rural teachers and urban university students cited above, significant differences remain between rural and urban elites. Also during the early 1990s, those who wished to unite the idea of Turkism with Islamic "fundamentalism" founded the Alash Party. Although relatively small and with a quite young membership, it became very active in the republic. Its dual Turkic-Islamic ideology attracted many ethnic minorities. Central authorities had longed feared the development of a political Islam, and the party was soon declared illegal. Special efforts have been made to control foreign involvement, which now must be coordinated with the government; these moves, however, appear to be directed more at Christian missionary activities. Like other Central Asian governments, the government of Kazakhstan considered the conflict in Tajikistan their possible future if Muslim activists were allowed to freely speak and organize.

Kazakhstan has emphasized its secular foundations. The country's president, a self-proclaimed atheist, has stated, "We want to build a normal democratic state with an open economy, which is completely incompatible with any religious fundamentalism. . . . One

must take into account that in our republic there are various faiths. . . . But none of them can become [a] state [religion]."

While Turkmenistan had an active Muslim movement in the 19th century, czarist and Soviet efforts sharply diminished the public role of Islam by the end of the Soviet era. Although the country had 481 mosques in 1911, it had but 5 in 1941 (Hiro, 1994, p. 144). Although Muslims in the republic tended to maintain traditional religious practices, political Islam was repressed. The Islamic revolution in Iran began to influence local Muslims after 1979, and small, clandestine Islamic groups appeared. Since independence, those in authority have sought to display their symbolic support of Islam with membership in the Islamic Conference Organization and presidential state visits to Saudi Arabia and Iran. The government gives some financial aid to the Council of Religious Affairs. Religious organizations are required to register with the authorities, but apparently none have been refused to this point. Although permission is needed for mass meetings for the purpose of proselytizing, no efforts to block religious literature are apparent (U.S. Department of State, 1997c, p. 5). Political opposition, however, is not welcome in the republic, and the Islamic Renaissance Party has been banned. Islamic political activism thus remains weak, disorganized, and generally underground. In the early 1990s, the Turkmenistan foreign minister, much like the Kazakhstan president, remarked, "We are not going to elevate someone's ideology to the state level, even Islamic [ideology], which has roots in our country. Turkmenistan is neither Islamic nor Soviet, but a secular and democratic state."

The last years of Soviet rule in Uzbekistan saw a growth in interest in Islam within both the Communist Party and the general public. The Fergana Valley, with some quarter of the country's population, has long been a center of Islamic activities. Party officials expressed concern over the organizational and public support of Islam, and party members were expelled in the mid-1980s for participating in religious rituals. At the same time, some 60% of the undergraduates at Tashkent University with Muslim backgrounds described themselves as Muslims (Hiro, 1994, pp. 162-163). In the post-independence era, the government has followed a policy of supporting Islamic personal values while attempting to control any Islamic involvement at the political level.

Uzbekistan's post-independence leader, Islam Karimov, declared that "[c]onsideration for religion and Islam plays an important part within our internal and international politics and conduct. . . . It manifests itself in the way of life of the people, their psychology and in the building of spiritual and moral values, and in enabling us to feel rapport with those who practice the same religion." (Hiro, 1994, p. 182).

The Islamic political opposition to the Uzbek regime has not been able to present a major threat. As with other states, the official clergy has not supported the Islamists, and wide religious divisions, including differences between orthodox Sunni elements and Sufi and Wahhabi groups, remain. The Wahhabi movement arose in what is now Saudi Arabia in the 18th century as a revivalist drive seeking to rid Islam from what it considered un-Islamic accretions that had attached themselves over time. The official religious establishment has vigorously attacked the Wahhabi, accusing them of extreme fanaticism, while Wahhabi leadership has not cooperated with other Muslim, nongovernmental elements. The Wahhabis have been very active in the Fergana Valley, where economic problems have exacerbated living conditions and been a factor in increasing Islamic identity. According to one, perhaps overly alarmist, observer, "It is the Wahhabi movement in the Fergana valley that is the most determined and best-organized of all the fundamentalist movements seeking the overthrow of the government" (Rashid, 1994, p. 100). Many Islamically oriented parties, some only briefly active, have existed over the years. Three early organizations were Islam and Democracy, the Islamic Democratic Party, and the clandestine People's Front of Uzbekistan (Haghayeghi, 1994, pp. 1887-1888). The Islamic Renaissance Party, which reportedly once had 40,000-50,000 adherents, is perhaps more well known. In addition the Adolat (Justice) organization, a grassroots organization, has apparently enjoyed considerable public support. Adolat has among its adherents a significant number of younger members and has tended to portray itself as a defender of Islamic morals. Neither the Islamic Renaissance Party nor Adolat has found it easy to work with other opposition-secular parties.

The government has cracked down on both Adolat and the Islamic Rebirth Party, arresting their leaders and other activists and denying them official recognition. Islamic militants have been accused of developing secret armies, receiving military training in

abroad, and collecting arms to overthrow the government. Authorities have also attempted to sponsor "loyal" Muslim activities and to dampen any religiously based political activity while continuing to support personal Islam. The state-controlled Spiritual Directorate for Muslims funds some Muslim religious activities. The government has attempted to control the content of the immams' sermons and religious tracts. Muslim leaders have been detained or fired from their government-appointed positions. Those fired have been charged with failing to pass an "immam test" designed by the authorities that included questions about secular economic and political issues (U.S. Department of State, 1997d, pp. 7-8). Independent Islamic clerics have been the most critical of Uzbekistan's human rights practices (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1997, p. 7). In 1997, there were rare public protests to government policies, and in the same year, Tashkent's last two madrasahs were closed. It has been argued that President Karimov moved against the Islamists by defining them as extremists in part to show potential energy investors that the government had control over Islamic "fundamentalism" (Polonskaya & Malashenko, 1994, p. 135).

In Central Asia the greatest threat by far from Islamic elements to a post-independence regime has been in Tajikistan, and the conflict there has illustrated to those in power elsewhere in the region the necessity of holding political Islam in check. It is not the intention here to go into detail regarding the civil war that raged in the republic in the early 1990s. However, several points need to be made to elucidate the issue of instability and political Islam. First, the Islamists ultimately were unable to capture permanent political control of the capital although they did bring down the government and temporarily placed those sympathetic to their cause in power. There is no question that organized Islamic military and political elements have played very important roles in Tajikistan, and considerable sympathy for and belief in the Muslim cause remain. However, it would be inaccurate to present the disunity in the republic as purely religious in nature. Tajikistan was the poorest state in the Soviet Union. A relatively low level of economic development and serious problems with living conditions were important catalysts in generating antagonism towards those in authority. In addition, the nation had the weakest sense of national identity upon obtaining independence. Not only did

religious divisions exist, but major ethnic and regional tensions were at work as well, and these played out in the civil disturbances that developed.

Central Asia, particularly Tajikistan, is a place where external events and influences were essential elements in defining the role of Islam in domestic developments. The growth of Islamic identity was aided by the Soviet conflict in Afghanistan. The Tajik military sent into Afghanistan with other Soviet troops came into contact with Muslim-oriented Afghan forces, and the war spilled over into Tajikistan. Later, defeated remnants of the opposition involved in the Muslim movement against the Tajik government fled into Afghanistan and continued raids across the border. Iran also contributed to the Islamic movement with funds and supplies and allegedly with weapons to Islamic militia forces. However, in general, Iran has not played a major political or military role in the Central Asian republics.

The military involvement of Russia and Uzbekistan and, to a lesser extent, Kazakhstan was vital in the ultimate defeat of the armed Islamic movement in Tajikistan. Worried about the apparent overthrow of an established government by forces including Muslim activists, both Moscow and Tashkent sent in their own armies and deployed their air forces. Uzbekistan continued to aid the secular government in Tajikistan, and for a period, some called Tajikistan a client state of Tashkent. However, more recent efforts to establish a coalition of previously opposing forces in Tajikistan have strained relations with Uzbekistan. Russian troops remain in the area, supposedly to guard the Afghan border. In 1993, a Russian general became defense minister. This military intervention aided the ultimate defeat of the Muslim-backed movement and helps maintain the present government in power.

Finally, the control of political Islam in Tajikistan has included not only the arrest of dissidents and the banning of opposition organizations but also serious atrocities in the civil war. Both secular and religious opponents of the government, including hundreds of Ismaili Muslims who expressed no strong political agenda, were targeted for murder, rape, torture, and pillage. In spite of these efforts, the Tajik authorities and their foreign allies did not entirely control the republic, and there was a long period of simmering

antagonism within the Islamist population. In the past 2 years, there have been moves to bring the two sides closer together and efforts to show closer ties to Muslim interests. In 1996 Tajikistan joined the Islamic Development Bank, but the civil war has delayed any financial aid from that institution. Recent agreements between the government and its Muslim political opposition also give some reason for hope. In 1997, a compact was reached between Tajikistan's rulers and the Islamically oriented United Tajik Opposition giving the latter 30% of the posts in the cabinet. Although the full implementation of the coalition agreements needs to be worked out, and the disarming of militia groups has not been completed, there is greater optimism than before.

Thus, if we view the present security threat of Islam in Central Asia, it is possible to present a rather optimistic scenario to those interested in a stable political and economic environment. Muslims in the region tend to be divided by sect and degree of secularization. Political activities have been hindered by often weak leadership and organization. Governments in Central Asia, fearing the potential influence of the Islamists, have employed an array of control mechanisms to ensure that the movement remains politically weak. The forcing of radical Islamic organizations underground makes it difficult to assess their present strength, and from time to time, religiously influenced violence has broken out (Economist, 1998, p. 40). However, at this time, the political Islam remains domestically weak. There has also been little international support. As we saw in Tajikistan, when there was a real danger of Islamist success, Russia and other regional governments were not cautious in sending their own armed forces into another republic to bolster a regime more secular in nature. Finally, neither China nor Iran has been a disruptive force. China agrees with the government leadership of Central Asia about the need to control political Islam, while Iran has increasingly appeared to be primarily interested in economic cooperation with the region.

Islam and the Future

If we look into the future, several potential developments that involve Muslims could have a negative impact on oil and gas security in Central Asia. Perhaps the most important of these would be an increased Islamic activism aided by external sources.

While in itself a Muslim resurgence need not be a major problem, it could become a threat if joined with other social or political forces. The use of Islam as a rallying cry by those who perceive themselves as economically and politically oppressed by an "anti-Islamic" regime would be of particular importance; in addition, the employment of Islamic identity against nonindigenous and other non-Muslim populations would reinforce ethnic-religious tensions. It should be emphasized that these are not major problems for the immediate future, but are issues that may become more salient in the next 10-20 years and need to be monitored.

The past decade has seen a major growth in interest in Islam after decades of Soviet efforts to weaken its public and private influence. External manifestations of this growth can be seen in the increase in the number of mosques, schools, and Muslim religious organizations. Some of these institutions have been funded by governments seeking popular support, while others have been built by local private organizations or sustained by foreign financial aid. The opening of new mosques and religious schools began during the last years of the Soviet era but increased exponentially after independence. Studies show that, for example, in Uzbekistan some 3,000 mosques had been built or restored by 1992, and 130 main town mosques were operating in Tajikistan that same year (Polonskaya & Malashenko, p. 115). A 1995 analysis, while recognizing problems of statistical reliability, found some 1,500 mosques (including those under construction) in the Kyrgyz Republic in that year; 500 (again including those under construction) in Kazakhstan in the same year; about 300 registered mosques in Tajikistan in 1992; and 204 registered mosques in Turkmenistan in 1994 (Trofimov, 1995, pp. 21-25). In 1997 it was reported that there were 4,000 registered and 6,000 other mosques in Uzbekistan alone (Shahrani, 1997, p. 9). Remember that during the mid the region had only 230 functioning and some unregistered mosques.

In addition to these institutional changes, there has also been an increased observance of Islamic rituals. A greater interest in regular prayer and attending the mosque on Fridays has developed. Observance of Ramadan has apparently increased. After the years of Soviet control, the number of individuals making the pilgrimage to Mecca has risen although the numbers remain quite low. It should be underscored that this pattern is by no

means universal, and a significant portion of the populace of the Central Asian republics remains that is either secular or weak in its knowledge of Islamic tenets and lax in its ritualistic practices. Islam in the region has often been described as more traditionally cultural than religious. In fact, given the suppression of political Islam in the region, the major efforts of the many Muslim "revivalists" has been to expand the knowledge of the basic tenets and practices of Islam among the believers. Muslim groups have actively targeted women's education.

External groups have aided this increase in Islamic identity. Governmental support for Muslim religious causes has come from Saudi Arabia, the gulf states, Turkey, Pakistan, and other Islamic countries. Aid has included the sending of hundreds of thousands of Korans and financial contributions to the mosques and religious schools. The Saudi government has been particularly active in this regard. In addition, private organizations and individuals, in many cases quite conservative in their religious beliefs, have sought to increase Islamic knowledge and identity in the region. Funds have gone into the construction of mosques and madrasahs and into educating religious teachers and mosque officials. It has been argued that this religious support, combined with financial aid to development programs, has been a Saudi attempt to counter Iranian influence in the region (Piacentini, 1994). The importation of Muslim religious literature in various languages has greatly increased, as has the general populace's access to these books and pamphlets in recent years. Central Asian governments have sought to contain this external influence, fearing that it will eventually undermine their authority and increase political Islam. They have not been totally successful.

An increased awareness among Central Asian Muslims of their religious inheritance or the practice of the tenets of Islam presents no intrinsic danger to Western energy interests in the region. Islam as a faith need not hinder close economic relations between Western firms and Muslim states, as seen in our long-term partnership with strongly Islamic governments in Saudi Arabia, the gulf, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. However, Islam's potential to provide a religious foundation to popular dissatisfaction in the region needs to be closely monitored. Two particular issues may become especially important in

the next 2 decades: uneven political and economic development, and ethnoreligious divisions.

Perhaps the most serious future problem may be the "Algerian analogy." Algeria most clearly illustrated in the 1990s (though it has been evident elsewhere) the use of Islam where a government is perceived as being corrupt, ineffective, "un-Islamic," and tied to foreign interests. In those circumstances, Islam becomes a rallying cry for those who see themselves as politically and economically deprived by uncaring and insufficiently Islamic authorities. Additionally, in this pattern Muslim religious schools frequently become homes for the discontented. Young men who are unable to enter prestigious institutions of higher education gravitate to these school, where they become sources of dissatisfaction against those in authority.

The seeds of this scenario are already to be found in most of the Central Asian republics, but they could take some time to germinate. None of these republics can lay claim to being liberal democratic systems. Using the Freedom House categories of not free, partly free, and free, only the Kyrgyz Republic can be classified as even partly free: the rest is defined as not free. Even in the Kyrgyz Republic, there appears to be a movement toward greater authoritarianism, and in 1997, President Askar Akayev told an American audience that it could take at least 2 decades until the republic had a truly democratic society (Economist Intelligence Unit, 1997a, p. 10). A review of the United States Department of State country reports on human rights shows a similar pattern throughout the region. Restrictions on the political rights of citizenry varies from state to state, with the more egregious records to be found in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. However, all have problems with freedom of the press and other forms of free expression, all limit the ability of the people to change their governments peacefully, and all do not necessarily follow their own constitutions with regard to rights of the accused and freedom of association and religion.

Beyond issues of political freedom, there is the continuing problem of corruption at both the local and national levels. As in other parts of the former Soviet Union, corrupt practices have increased significantly in the 1990s. The involvement of state officials at

the local and national levels in such questionable practices is a fact of life in many of the new republics. These activities can only undermine the legitimacy of those in authority, particularly if they continue over time.

Nor can it be argued that at this point in time, the economies of the republics are successfully meeting the needs of their people. Like most of the rest of the former Soviet Union, they are going through the painstaking transition from the old planned economies and have not yet reaped the profits from their oil and gas resources. There are signs of improvement for the rest of this decade for most of the republics, but according to the World Bank, these states remain at a lower economic base than in the Soviet era. For example, looking at the 10 years from 1985 to 1995, the average annual growth has been -6.9% for the Kyrgyz Republic, -3.9% for Uzbekistan, and -8.6% for Kazakhstan (World Bank, 1997, p. 214). None of these had a GNP per capita of at least \$1,000 in 1995. There were other problems as well. The Kyrgyz Republic has suffered severe trade imbalances in recent years, Uzbekistan had been troubled by high levels of inflation reaching an annual rate of 50% as of June 1996 and 147.1% a year later, and it has not been able to eliminate continued difficulties with its government deficit. Turkmenistan and Tajikistan did not have reliable figures but would probably be even lower. The Economist Intelligence Unit placed real GDP growth in Turkmenistan at -3% in 1996 and an estimated minus growth in 1997 and 1998, while Tajikistan also had a significant minus growth in 1996 (1997a, pp. 37 and 23). In the former case, the largesse coming from the export of gas to Russia and other former communist states ended in 1993, when Russia closed its only pipeline to Eastern Europe and cash-strapped neighbors could not pay for new deliveries (New York Times, 1998). Tajikistan started with the unenviable reputation of the former Soviet Union's poorest state, went through a devastating civil war, and now faces an uncertain future with the central government not able to completely control all of the country's territory. While all of these republics project greater growth in the final years of this decade, Kazakhstan being especially optimistic, they have a long way to go to make up for past deficits.

Thus, the questions that arise from the Algerian analogy are at least unsettling. Conditions today are generally ones of limited democratic freedoms and weak economies.

Will these republics be able to exploit their energy reserves sufficiently and in a timely fashion and meet popular economic and political pressures? When funds do flow into these countries, will they remain in the hands of a small majority, creating greater differentials in wealth that lead to demands for greater equity? Will the new profits reinforce tendencies toward corruption and ostentation that could increase dissatisfaction with the governing elite? Finally, as in Algeria, under these conditions can we expect Islam to be a rallying cry for the politically and economically dispossessed?

A second, and perhaps less dangerous, future problem may be the employment of Islam as a symbol of identity in periods of ethnic tension. Issue surrounding ethnic and linguistic divisions are explored in another essay in this collection, so the possible impact of Islam in this area will be handled only briefly here. At one level, this has not a major issue. As Martha Olcott has noted, ethnic violence and hostility were not a major problem at the height of the Soviet period, when ethnic toleration predominated (1995). Also, there has been a decline in the number of Russians and other Europeans in the population of Central Asia. However, past patterns of behavior and attitude from the Soviet era have changed, and the possibility of Muslim activists attempting to integrate religious and ethnic identity against "foreign" elements remains. This has historically been true elsewhere, particularly during periods of economic difficulties and where the non-Muslim groups have been perceived to be in more economically dominant positions. This pattern has been seen in antagonism towards the Chinese in Southeast Asia and has been a factor in religious-ethnic alliances among Muslim minorities in Asia.

These two long-term issues, the Algerian analogy and religioethnic conflict, need to be monitored. They are not necessarily problems of the 1990s, particularly given the combination of the fractured, weak religious and political presence Islam now claims and strong governmental controls over political Islam. However, they are possible issues for the future.

Addendum On Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan shares many similarities with the Central Asian republics but is separated by one significant difference. Like the others, Azerbaijan continues to be ruled by an undemocratic regime that rules under a constitution that guarantees human rights but that does not always follow its strictures. Its economy has suffered since obtaining independence, and there are major differentials in wealth. It was only in 1996 that there was an end to negative growth in the GDP. In part the country's plight is because of the long conflict over Nagorno Karabakh, an Azerbaijanian territory conquered by the Armenians with Russian help.

Azerbaijan is also constitutionally a secular state that supposedly allows all religions the right to practice their religions freely. Christians have reportedly not received equal treatment because of the Armenian controversy. Like in its Central Asian counterparts, there has been an effort to assure that political Islam is contained. Islamic religious organizations are under an umbrella bureaucratic institution, the Directorate of Caucasus Muslims. Parliament has also decreed that the production, importation, and dissemination of religious literature must receive the permission of local government authorities (U.S. Department of State, 1997a, p.7). Being a secular state has not stopped the country from joining the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Islamic Development Bank.

The one significant difference from the other republics analyzed in this paper is that Azerbaijan's Muslims are primarily Shi'i. The Shi'i were not allowed to practice openly some elements of their faith during most of the Soviet period. Efforts to visit Shi'i holy places in Iraq and Iran were discouraged. It was not until 1988, after Soviet authorities allowed the millennium celebration of the Russian Orthodox Church, that Azeris took to the streets to hold Ashura processions. (Among Shi'i there are ceremonies in the first month of the Muslim lunar year mourning the murder of Imam Hussein ibn Ali.) Violence followed between Shi'i and security forces (Hiro, 1994, p. 85-86).

Religious activity in the republic has increased in the post-independence era. While any increase in the total number of mosques has been diminished by the destruction of many

of these buildings during the conflict with Armenia, there has been growth in mosque attendance and openings of new religious schools. Azerbaijan also has a legal Islamic party: the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, a pragmatic organization attacked by some clerics as a party of "non-Islamic cynical bureaucrats," was registered in 1992 (Trofimov, 1995, p. 50). A largely Shi'i organization that claims over 100,000 members, it probably has considerably fewer. Far more militant and "fundamentalist" has been the "Tovbe" society, which has not been given governmental sanction

The Shi'i factor has led to a considerable amount of speculation as to the impact of religion on domestic and international issues. Some have considered the conflict between Christian Armenia and Muslim Azerbaijan to have strong religious overtones, and there were demonstrations in the capital against the Armenians with the green flag of Islam waving and religious spokesmen employing Islam as a rallying cry. However, most would not term the conflict as having significant religious causes. As one observer declared, "The religious factor does not play a major role in the conflict. This conflict is rather based on territorial dispute than on religious fanaticism and antagonism" (Sabri-Tabrizi, 1994, p. 164).

Long-term relations with the major Shi'i power in the region, Iran, may be more problematic. Relations are clouded by the large Azerbaijani population in Iran and the desire of both countries to assure that the idea of a united Azerbaijan does not gain credence. Other difficulties have arisen over fears in Azerbaijani political circles of religious influence from the south, and Teheran has not been pleased with what it sees as Azerbaijan's unilateral exploitation of Caspian sea oil resources. Although pressured by its own Azeri population to support Azerbaijan against Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, Iran sought to mediate the conflict. While there have been problems in the past, at this point Iran does not appear significantly involved in spreading its religious influence into Azerbaijan and has displayed more pragmatic economic interests.

Thus, Azerbaijan appears to present the same short- and long-term picture as its Central Asian counterparts. At present political Islam is in check, and external forces are not seriously attempting to subvert the government through religion. However, there are

similar potential long-term issues of Islam being employed against a system perceived to be oppressive, ineffective, and "un-Islamic," and religion becoming closely identified with ethnicity in communal conflicts.

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