

Contagious Jihad: Turmoil in Central Asia

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Introduction

This book focuses on the impact of the Afghanistan-Pakistan conflict and recent large-scale military operations against Taliban militants and international jihadis on the neighboring independent Central Asian states. The study will provide policymakers with comprehensive historical background, analyses, and policy options for developing regional security strategies that closely engage countries of Central Asia in resolving the Afghanistan-Pakistan issue.

Afghanistan's protracted conflict has long attracted militants from all over the world eager to fight a "holy war" against the "unbelievers". During the Soviet-Afghan war they were known as *mujahedeen*. Since the launch of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom and ouster of the Taliban from Afghanistan, these militants have become to be known as *jihadis*.

The jihadi movement is a combination of various militant groups that came to existence with the Western, Saudi, and Pakistani support during the Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. Driven by diverse and, at times, conflicting motives, these major powers bolstered the radical Islamist groups involved in the bloody proxy war in Afghanistan, which marked the final phase of the Cold War. With the collapse of the USSR, the United States lost all interest in Afghanistan, but jihadism left behind in Afghanistan lived on and thrived. In late 2001, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States waged a war against the world jihadis based in Afghanistan, declaring them terrorists and putting pressure on Islamabad to capture these militants and destroy their operational bases.

Jihadism, as manifested in the 9/11 attacks and other al-Qaeda activities, is mostly a modern phenomenon removed from traditional Muslim protest movements. It includes suicide bombing, killing hostages, targeting civilians, etc. In Central Asia and Afghanistan, these kinds of terrorist activities began appearing in the early 2000s, despite the region's long history of conservative and fundamentalist movements and popular insurgency. The core of these jihadi groups is comprised of individuals who are very different from the majority of Central Asian Muslims: they are Western-educated, speak good English and Arabic, adhere to extreme religious ideologies coupled with strong anti-American sentiment, and have loose kinship and cultural ties to their ancestral lands.

Among jihadis in Afghanistan and Pakistan are the individuals from the neighboring Central Asia, mostly Uzbeks and Tajiks, as well as Muslims from other parts of the former USSR and Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous region of China. Here, they often group into ethno-religious and territorial societies - *jamaats*. Along with the Yemeni, Iraqi, Caucasian (Chechen and Dagestani) *jamaats* in Afghanistan, a *jamaat* associated with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is eminent. It is comprised mostly of the members of the banned Islamist organizations originating from the Republic of Uzbekistan and their families, who escaped to Afghanistan between 1993-2001 and later. The group is led by an *amir* – a political, religious and military leader.¹ The IMU

¹ *Jamaats*, led by emirs and often referred to as Wahhabis, have been typical for Northern Caucasus from the mid 1990s to present. They are militarized groups of terrorists, who often clash with local *jamaats* – communities of believers that adhere to traditional Islam. The veterans

leaders claim their *jamaat* is not exclusively Uzbek and it includes Sunni Tajiks, Tatars, Chechens, Kyrgyzes, Turkmen, Uyghurs, and even Burmese. Prominent Uzbek leaders and their subordinates are associated with major Pakistani and Afghan jihadi parties, including the Taliban and have received training in terrorist camps. They have also received substantial support from the Arab mujahedeen with links to al-Qaeda.

In November 2001, the Taliban and their allies suffered a major defeat from the International Coalition and Afghan forces of the Northern Alliance.² The IMU and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), a splinter group of IMU uniting Pan-Turkic jihadis in Europe (Germany) and with strong links to al-Qaeda, retreated to the district of Waziristan of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan. In 2008-2009, the IMU represented the biggest group of foreign fighters in Pakistan. According to Pakistani authorities, of the total 8,000 international jihadis present in Pakistan at least 5,000 were IMU associates.³

Governments of the United States, Central Asia, Russia and China classify IMU and other Taliban allies as terrorists, while Central Asian radicals themselves claim to be *muhajees* - devout Muslims who have escaped religious persecution in their home countries and are welcomed by local Muslims. With the launch of the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), all non-Afghan *jamaats* (including IMU) swore an oath to join jihad under the command of Mulla Omar, whom *muhajees* consider to be the leader of the Taliban and Muslims around the world. All available indications show that Afghan and Pakistani Muslims tolerated the newcomers of the post-Soviet origin. Since 2002, the IMU, as the Taliban affiliate, has been fighting against the coalition forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan, showing little interest in jihad at home – namely Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

In addition to Uzbek *muhajees*, thousands of poor Tajik, Uzbek, Tatar, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz youth have headed to religious schools in Pakistan for study in the past two decades. Many of these schools were engaged in indoctrination of extreme forms of Salafism.⁴ Some schools

of the Soviet-Afghan war imported the violent and radical Wahhabi *jamaats* from the Middle East and Afghanistan to Northern Caucasus. Many of them were of Northern Caucasian origin. Their aim is to secede from Russia, which they perceive as immoral and barbarian, and build an Islamic state based on *Sharia*.

² Northern Alliance was the coalition of northern, non-Pashtun ethno-regional (mostly Tajik and Uzbek) leaders. In September 2001, their Tajik leader Ahmad Shah Masud died from wounds suffered in a suicide bombing, allegedly carried out by al-Qaeda members.

³ Muhammad Bilal, “5,000 Uzbek militants hiding in Waziristan,” *Daily Times*, September 13, 2009 http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009\09\13\story_13-9-2009_pg1_1

⁴ Salafism, as a contemporary movement, began in the early 20th century in Europe and Egypt. Like Wahhabis, Salafis revert to the earliest days of Islam, contending they are following “true” or “unadulterated” version of Islam. In fact, Salafism is a reformist and modernist movement, which has garnered growing support among young Muslims. Salafis propose a common Islamic identity to the fragmented and weak religious and ethno-political identities. Particularly, Salafism advocates for the suspension of the four schools of law (*mazhabs*) in Islam. Most Muslims do not accept Salafism, as it propagates *takfir* (right to declare as “unbelievers” those who, according to Salafis and Wahhabis, violate the norms of “true” Islam).

remained open to pro-jihadi Pakistani parties, which provided their recruits with special training facilities in the Pakistani tribal areas and Afghanistan. The Central Asian governments have perceived these radicalized students (talibs) as potential cadres for terrorism.

Finally, radical Tajik Islamists, the irreconcilable segment of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) involved in the Tajik civil war (1992-1997) have found their own niche in the International Islamic Brigade in South Asia. Having refused to make peace with the secular Tajik government and integrate into the Tajik society, these seasoned fighters opted to join jihad in Afghanistan. Most of them came from the Rasht Valley (Gharm) in Tajikistan.⁵ They have received special training in terrorist camps and usually act as mercenaries for their international jihadi affiliates.

These three groups - IMU with its break-away Islamic Jihad Union, radical pro-Salafi students, and the former UTO combatants represent the bulk of the Central Asian jihad against the United States and its allies. Unlike Chechens, Arabs, Malaysians, Tatars and other non-Afghan jihadis, Central Asians share many similarities with Afghans in terms of culture, race, language and dress. While in exile some of them married local women and integrated into the South Asian society. This is the largest non-Afghan group involved in the conflict in Afghanistan-Pakistan. Nevertheless, the jihadis of the Central Asian origin do not constitute a coherent or unified movement. They have diverse backgrounds and motivations that put them at the heart of the conflict in South Asia. They may have different, if not conflicting approaches, in choosing roles they want to play in the region.

With the international coalition and Pakistani army military operation against the Taliban intensifying and the Obama administration's decision to gradually withdraw from Afghanistan by 2014, non-Afghan militants appear to be reformulating their role in the conflict in Central and South Asia. Furthermore, within the framework of the "Taliban prevention" program launched in 2007, the Pakistani government has applied more military pressure on the Taliban and their supporters and intensified law enforcement in the tribal areas of South Waziristan, which houses IMU and other militant groups.⁶ These initiatives have dampened Pakistanis' willingness to tolerate foreign militants on their territory, creating a less accommodating environment for Central Asians jihadis.

As a result, the IMU and other militant groups of the Central Asian origin seem to be recalculating their jihad strategy. Some are pursuing strategy of survival by leaving Afghanistan and Pakistan for more stable Iran and Turkey, while others are showing willingness to expand the "holy war" to their home countries. The terrorists attacks in Khanabad and Andijan

⁵ Gharm is a major township in the Surkhob River basin in central Tajikistan. This mountainous area was known as *Rasht* in the Arabic chronicles, but was referred to as *Qarategin* in the Timurid period (15th century). In 2001, the Tajik government renamed the Gharm district was to Rasht. Today, this area is also referred to as Rasht Valley. It is populated by Sunni Tajiks, with the exception Jirghatol, which is inhabited by Sunni Kyrgyzes.

⁶ Rahmanullah, "Pakistan tribal area a de facto Taliban state Haven," *San Francisco Chronicle Foreign Service*. June 1, 2007. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/06/01/MNG9MQ5INQ1.DTL&hw=Pakistan+tribal+area+de+facto+Taliban+state&sn=001&sc=1000>

(Uzbekistan) in May 2009 and the September 2010 events in Tajikistan's Rasht Valley, where a militant group with alleged ties to extremists in Afghanistan and Pakistan killed at least 28 soldiers and shot down a military helicopter,⁷ raised some concerns about whether the Afghanistan-Pakistan conflict was spilling over and worsening the security situation in Central Asia. According to one of the leading experts on the Afghanistan-Pakistan conflict Ahmed Rashid, it was the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), a splinter group of IMU who masterminded this operation in the mountainous Rasht Valley. He comes to an alarming conclusion that, "it would make perfect sense for al-Qaeda and the Taliban to expand their operations and bases into the weak southern hinterland of Central Asia, which includes southern Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan."⁸

Whether the Tajik jihadis moved into Tajikistan at the advice of Taliban leadership or the decision stemmed from their internal and independent considerations remains unclear. While at home, these jihadis may combine the insurgency-style warfare with more aggressive terror tactics, including suicide bombings, to weaken the local governments. They may also target the US military base in Kyrgyzstan and the Northern Distribution Network, an alternative supply route for the US-NATO forces in Afghanistan.⁹ As a possible indication of this important and alarming shift, between 2004 and 2011, there was a rise in violence in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. As a consequence, the local governments have grown more nervous and have increasingly restricted freedom of religion and put more pressure on even moderate Islamists. This made many to believe that the conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan are likely to spill beyond their borders. The alarming rhetoric about Islamic terrorism that has dominated regional security talks in Central Asia is based on a belief that local militants are linked to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The Tajik and Uzbek governments' answer to the conflict in Afghanistan-Pakistan has been a serious violation of human rights and freedoms. In the past decade, hundreds, if not thousands, of Muslims have been accused of terrorism and IMU affiliation and sentenced to long-term imprisonment. In Tajikistan, hundreds of students studying in religious schools in Iran, Pakistan, and Egypt were forced to come back home. Under the pretext of fighting terrorism, mosques are under strict control and unofficial religious leaders are continuously persecuted. In Tajikistan, even bearded young men are often the subject of suspicion and harassment by the police. The

⁷ Andrew McGregor, "Jihad in the Rasht Valley: Tajikistan's security Dilemma," *Terrorism Monitor* 8, no. 37 October 4, 2010.

[http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=36990&cHash=c323d4b798](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=36990&cHash=c323d4b798)

⁸ Ahmed Rashid, "Tajikistan: The Next Jihadi Stronghold?" November 29, 2010.

<http://www.ahmedrashid.com/publications/central-asia/articles/>

⁹ "NATO perepravil v Afganistan cherez Tadzhestan 160 tysjach tonn gruzov" [NATO shipped 160 thousand tons of cargo to Afghanistan through Tajikistan], *Regnum Informational Agency*, January 20, 2011. <http://www.regnum.ru/news/fd-abroad/tajik/1366388.html>. In 2010, more than 160,000 tons of transit commercial cargoes of mostly fuel went to the NATO forces in Afghanistan through Tajikistan. The transit is carried out within the framework of the agreement on cooperation signed in February 2009.

government presents the growing interference in religious life of citizens as counter-terrorism and anti-extremism measures. In reality, however, these actions may have just the opposite effect, encouraging the very militancy they aim to prevent.

There is considerable disagreement over how the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan may impact the neighboring Central Asian states. The complex geopolitical processes engulfing the region in the last decades, lack of information, and clashing political interests of the sides involved in this assessment greatly contribute to the divergence of views. These assessments can be grouped into two broad categories:

Encouraging assessment. According to this assessment, the conflict in Afghanistan-Pakistan, by and large, has South Asian parameters. The foreign jihadis who joined the Pashtun strife are developing an exit strategy. This is a good sign that the coalition forces have managed to localize the conflict and diminish the global support for the Taliban. Furthermore, al-Qaeda and the Taliban are amorphous by their structure, have dissimilar agendas, show little enthusiasm in developing a regional strategy, and have limited resources and disinterest in interfering in Central Asia.

The existing Central Asian, Chechen and Dagestani Islamists are local by definition and, in fact, deaf to the Taliban indoctrination. It is not likely that they will support the Pashtun Taliban or the Arab al-Qaeda. Moreover, it is obvious that the Taliban as guerillas have no need for foreign fighters, who are ineffective due to their unfamiliarity with the local context. The discontent among the Central Asian Muslims stems largely from domestic misfortunes, not from a religious doctrine or anti-American sentiment. The militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) as well as Chechens, Tajiks, Uyghurs and Dagestanis operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan are rather a small group of bandits, drug-traffickers, and mercenaries driven by material gain. These people were radicalized due to exclusion and inhuman treatment by their home regimes. They cannot be viewed as part of the Taliban movement.

Jihad, if understood as Muslim rage against the West, is not the case in Central Asia and Northern Caucasus. As a result, the international community should continue focusing on Afghanistan and Pakistan, while limiting its involvement in Central Asia to securing the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). In doing so, the West should cooperate with the local regimes on mostly bi-lateral bases, providing them with aid and various forms of assistance in exchange for their support for the US and NATO policies in the region. At the same time, the US Special Operations Forces should be permitted to enter Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan on a “case-by-case” basis when conducting counter-terrorism operations.¹⁰ Also, in order to avoid radicalization of local Islamists, Central Asian governments should allow more religious freedom.

Alarmist scenario. This assessment paints the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan as showing a vivid tendency of internationalization. The Obama administration’s 2009 troop surge in Afghanistan elicited a matching response from the radical Islamists worldwide eager to fight

¹⁰ Deirdre Tynan, “US Special Forces’ Operations in Central Asia keeping Islamic militants in Check,” *Eurasianet*, March 15, 2011. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/63080>

against the United States and its allies in South and Central Asia.¹¹ Al-Qaeda and the Taliban have solid organizational structures, appeal, and potency, which allow them to spread into Central Asia, Xinjiang, and the Northern Caucasus. Taliban need foreign fighters, as they are better trained and better armed than local Afghan rebels.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asia has been a volatile base for militant Islam. Islamic militancy and insurgency in Central Asia, China, and Russia are on the rise and are linked to the insurgency in South Asia, forming a unified front of Islamic jihad. Al-Qaeda-supported IMU and IJU have training bases in northern Afghanistan and are ready to invade Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Tired of their corrupt secular governments, local Muslims would readily join jihad in order to establish an Islamic Caliphate.

The recent penetration of the insurgents of the post-Soviet origin from tribal regions to Rasht Valley in Tajikistan is an indication of the creeping “talibanization” of Central Asia. The anti-Western and anti-American jihad in Central Asia, therefore, pose a real threat.

As a result, the solution requires a comprehensive and new strategy for ensuring long-term security in the Eurasian continent, encouraging cooperation among the Central Asian states, Russia, China, and relevant international organizations, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and so on.

The above mentioned classification of existing assessments is a great deal of simplification, but it provides clarity and focused analysis. The first group of assessments currently predominates in the strategy of the international community in the region. The alarmist assessment is supported by local Central Asian governments and Russia. Russia particularly, between the two Chechen wars (1996-1999), was keen to prove the existence of ties between rebels in its breakaway republic and the global Islamic cause. Likewise, the Tajik government wants to present itself as the biggest victim of terrorism and a reliable ally in the fight against it.

The US-NATO forces are leaning toward more optimistic assessment of the problem. The principal US objective in Afghanistan has been the destruction of the Taliban and denying al-Qaeda a safe haven. The recognition that Taliban not only survived but also expanded on neighboring territories requires a principal and resource-consuming strategic shift. So far, the United States is not ready to drastically alter its vision of the conflict and has no clear strategy that can secure such a shift.

This book concludes that the assessment of the situation and appropriate recommendations for action fall between these two extremes. In fact, there are no domestic insurgents in Central Asia loyal to the Amir al Momineen Mullah Omar. The only exception is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, based mostly in the tribal areas. However, before making judgments about IMU, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive in-depth analysis of the whole spectrum of Islamic movements in Central Asia. The penetrations of radical Islamist groups in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan from Afghan territory have taken place many times since the 1990s

¹¹Kaswar Klasra, “‘Uzbek militants are becoming very active in Waziristan’ - Senator Ibrahim Khan,” *Fergana News*, September 16, 2009. <http://enews.fergananews.com/article.php?id=2570>

and none of them, including the last one resulted in a visible, not to mention large scale, participation of local Muslims in jihad. The SCO and CSTO did not find it necessary to intervene with a mission in Tajikistan. Despite mostly deserved accusations of weakness, corruption, mismanagement, and incompetence, the government of Tajikistan so far has managed to gradually stabilize the situation relying on its own resources.

Several unanswered questions arise in this connection:

- What are the real reasons for the recent rise in violence in Central Asia? Are they merely homegrown protests stemming from local policies or dangerous terrorist acts imported from Afghanistan and Pakistan, aimed at stirring anti-Western and anti-American sentiments in the region?
- How do domestic manifestations of Islamically-charged socio-political and militant movements in the former USSR, Afghanistan, and Pakistan interact?
- What facilitates the transition from local to global Islamism?
- To what extent should US policymakers take into account the Central Asian and Russian leaders' warning of the Taliban and al-Qaeda encroachment in Central Asia? Is it a real threat or the regional governments' attempt to garner the Western support in quashing any form of dissent?
- Can President Obama's plan to eradicate insurgency in Helmand, Kandahar, and Waziristan bring stability to the "Greater Central Asia"?
- What should be done to bring sustainable peace and stability to Central and South Asia?

This book seeks to find answers to these questions. It consists of five chapters. The first chapter "Central Asia: Land and People" provides readers with a brief introduction to the region's geography, ethnic composition, and links to South Asia. The second chapter, "The 19th Century Great Game" describes state and border formation and their societal impact. The third chapter, "The Evolution of the Insurgency in Central Asia," examines the conflict through the lens of history. This chapter encompasses the period from the 1917 Russian Revolution to the Tajik civil war, to the Taliban rule and to the rise of violence in Central Asia in recent period. Part four, "Prospect of talibanization of Central Asia" contains analysis of recent conflict in Afghanistan-Pakistan and its impact on Central Asia. It provides relevant interpretations of the conflict and its potential sources. The final chapter "Central Asian Partnership in Solving the Afghan-Pakistan Conflict" specifies appropriate conflict prevention responses and policy recommendations.

CHAPTER 1. Central Asia: Land and People

Defining Central Asia

The vast trans-river area of the Central Asian region of *Movarounnahr* ("beyond the river" in Arabic) is the historical residence of the Turkmens, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Karakalpaks, and other smaller groups. The Ancient Greeks called the two rivers the Oxus and Jaxartes. The Persians named them the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya. Arabs called the territory to the south of Amu Darya, adjacent to Movarounnahr, *Khurasan*. It encompassed most of modern-day Turkmenistan, north-eastern Iran, and the northern provinces of Afghanistan.

Khurasan was populated by the above mentioned groups as well as Pashtuns, Hazara and some other smaller groups.

Western and Russian explorers of the nineteenth century introduced the term “Central Asia” to political and geographical terminology. According to Yuri Bregel, in cultural and historical terms, Central Asia is the western, Turko-Iranian part of the Inner Asian¹² heartland, the indigenous population of which consisted of various Iranian peoples. The majority of this population has been Turkicized, while the growing Turkic population has, to various degrees, assimilated to the region’s indigenous Iranian culture. In geographical terms, it stretches from the Caspian Sea in the west to the Altai Mountains (Russia) and Turfan oasis (China) in the east, and from the limits of the Kazakh steppes and Southern Siberia in the north to the Hindu-Kush range (Afghanistan) in the south.¹³

During the Cold War, Central Asia was mostly associated with the five Soviet Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. In more recent studies of the region, some experts have also included Eastern Iran, Northern Afghanistan, and the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous province of China in Central Asia.

Historical narratives often refer to Central Asia as *Turkistan* (or “Turkestan”, i.e. “Land of Turks”). This is somewhat of a misnomer, considering the local population spoke mostly Iranian languages in the medieval times. In the ninth and tenth centuries, Arab writers applied the term *Turkistan* only to the area north-east of the Syr Darya (modern-day Kazakhstan). Thenceforth, however, the number and influence of Turkic tribes in the region increased. They formed powerful ruling dynasties, most notably the empire established by Tamerlane in the 15th century.

In the nineteenth century, the British and Russians adopted the expression *Turkistan* as a geographical term to indicate their assets in Central Asia. This was further subdivided into “Western” or “Russian” *Turkistan* (which is post-Soviet Central Asia), “Southern” or “Afghan” *Turkistan* (northern Afghanistan) and “Eastern” or “Chinese” *Turkistan* (southern part of Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region of China).

In recent times, a new term, “Greater Central Asia”, has been introduced to identify the region under study. This is more a policy-oriented rather than a geographic term proposed by Frederick Starr. In its core is the idea of the US-led project of building a new region by intergrating the post-Soviet Central Asia with the South Asia via Afghanistan. A *Greater Central Asia Partnership for Afghanistan and its Neighbors* project proposes the transformation of Afghanistan and the entire region into a zone of protected sovereignties, sharing practical market economies, secular and open systems of governance with respect to civil rights, and maintaining

¹² Vast territories situated between heartland China and Russia stretching from Manjuria in the east to Mongolia, to Ural mountains, to Tibet plateau, to Xingjiang, and finally to Central Asia, including northern Afghanistan and Eastern Iran. Inner Asia was originally populated by non-Russians and non-Chinese.

¹³ Yuri Bregel, ed., *Bibliography of Islamic Central Asia: Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series, vol. 160* (Bloomington: Indiana University Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1995), viii.

positive relations with the United States.¹⁴ However, most of Central Asian and, especially, Russian politicians and expert community at large are skeptical about the Greater Central Asia project, pointing out to the differences in cultural identities and lack of cooperation between the Central Asians and the people of South Asia in the past.

The Cold War-era definition of Central Asia as five Muslim-majority Soviet Republics east of the Caspian Sea is no longer valid due to the end of the Soviet order. In this book, Central Asia is defined as five post-Soviet “stans” plus northeastern Iran, northern Afghanistan and northwestern part of China. This definition is almost identical to the one introduced by Russians and British more than 100 years ago. It is the appropriate moment in history to reintroduce the term to the political and geographical vocabulary.

Ethnic composition

Central Asia is populated by peoples of Iranian and Turkic origin. The Iranians appeared as early as the second millennium BC. The Turks began to migrate to the region in the sixth century. They gradually established military control and by the 14th century outnumbered the Iranians. Since then, the term “Turku-Tajik” (Turk and Tajik) has been used to designate racial and ethnic composition of cities and oases of *Movarounnahr*. In addition to Turku-Tajik peoples, the steppes and mountains were populated by nomads of the Turko-Mongol origin, who became known as Kazakhs and Kyrgyzs by the 18th century. The Karakum desert was inhabited by Turkmen tribes.

When examining the ethnic composition of the region, one should consider the gradual process of transformation of different groupings into more durable communities. Important milestones, such as wars, political movements, rise of literary masterpieces and charismatic personalities, linguistic reforms, and other important events, gave rise to transformation of the local communities and facilitated national consolidation.

Tajiks

The trans-river area of the Central Asia and Iranian plateau encompassed a vast region stretching from the oases of Tashkent, Bukhara, and Ferghana in the north to Ghazni and Kandahar in the south and from Sistan and Mashad (Iran) in the west to Pamir in the east. In late nineteenth and early 20th centuries, along with Turks, Pashtuns, and other smaller ethnic groups, this region was also inhabited by Persian-speaking aborigines, who called themselves “Tajiks” and ascribed to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam. The origin of the word “Tajik” is disputed. Most Tajik scholars believe that the word Tajik is derived from *toj* (“crown” from Tajiki–Farsi). Some Western and Russian orientologists suggest that it was originally the name of an Arab tribe (*Taj*, or *Tazik*) that invaded Central Asia in the seventh and eighth centuries. In the medieval Tajiki–Farsi literature

¹⁴ Frederick Starr, “A Partnership for Central Asia,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2005.
<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/60833/s-frederick-starr/a-partnership-for-central-asia>

and historical chronicles, the word “Tajik” was used to distinguish Persians from Turks. In the Russian usage of the 16th century and later, Tajik was applied to the urban population of Central Asia, distinguishing them from Uzbek nomads. By the early 20th century, the term was used to identify mountainous Tajiks (the population of Gharm, Mastchah, Darvaz, and Badakhshan), while Tajik speakers of the plains were called Sart. With the establishment of the Soviet rule in Central Asia and the formation of the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924, the term acquired a distinct ethnic connotation and is now applied to Tajiki speakers of Central Asia.

The Tajiks trace their ancestry to the indigenous Iranian inhabitants of Bactria, Sogd, and Parthia. The Tajik language is of Persian (or Farsi) origin and is also referred to as Dari (derived from “darbar-i” or “courtly language”). This language flourished in the ninth and tenth centuries AD, when the Samanids founded their dynasty centered in Samarqand. Dari used Arabic script, but replaced the use of the Arabic language in the Samanid court. Dari was used in official record keeping, science, and literature. Despite the tension and conflicts between the rulers of Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, Dari was commonly used by the population of these regions. A common literary heritage binds Tajiks, Afghans and Persians together. Among the most renowned literary treasures of this language are Abu Abdullah Rudaki (858–941) from Panjruh (Tajikistan) and Abulqasem Firdawsi (940–1025) from Tus (Iran).

The Tajiks living in the vast alpine country of Pamir, the so-called Pamirians are generally Ismailis, and they speak different languages, some of which are incomprehensible to other Tajiks. These languages constitute the Pamir branch of Southeastern Iranian languages.¹⁵ Most of Pamirians live in Tajik and Afghan Badakhshan. Smaller groups live China and Pakistan.¹⁶ There is no written tradition in Pamirian languages. Pamiri Tajiks of Tajikistan and Afghanistan used Dari-Tajiki as their literary language and a means of communication with neighbors.

Tajiks are the oldest ethnic group in Afghanistan. In the 18th and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, the Afghan feudal lords defeated the Tajiks of Kandahar, Kabul and Ghazni. In the 1880s, Afghan Emir Abdur Rahman (a Durrani Pashtun) succeeded in finally breaking the Tajik resistance in the northern provinces of Herat, Qataghan, and Badakhshan. Subsequently, Afghan rulers from the 1880s to 1970 resettled Pashtun dissidents from rebellious eastern and southern provinces to the non-Pashtun Afghan North. These Pashtun newcomers (*nakilin*) were exempt from taxes.

Currently, the estimates of the share of Tajiks in Afghanistan vary widely from 25 percent to 50 percent of the total population.¹⁷ Compared to other ethnic groups, the Tajiks of Afghanistan are socially and economically more developed and urbanized. Tajik-Pashtun relations have not been

¹⁵ The major Pamirian languages include Shughni and Rushani, Yazghulami, Sarikoli, Munji, Sanglechi-Ishkashimi, Wakhi and Yidgha.

¹⁶ In the early 21st century, in addition to approximately 150,000 Pamiris living in Tajikistan, nearly 100,000 Pamiris resided in the adjacent mountainous regions of Afghanistan and some 42,000 in China and Pakistan.

¹⁷ According to official data, in 1989, Afghanistan’s total population reached 15,592,000. Thus, in 1989, Afghan Tajiks could have numbered roughly between 4 million and 8 million. This is more than the number of Tajiks in Tajikistan (3,172,400 in 1989).

hostile as one may expect, because in Afghanistan, tribal, clan, and other kin-based institutions often play more important role than ethno-national ties. The ruling Durrani Pashtuns used to rely more on urbanized Tajiks than on disunited nomadic compatriots.

Similarly, the Tajiks of Afghanistan have not demonstrated separatist sentiments. On the contrary, they have competed with Pashtuns for dominance in a unified Afghanistan. The Tajiks ruled Afghanistan only two times: in 1929 (Habibulla-Bachai Saqqao) and 1992-1996 (President Burkhanuddin Rabbani).

There are also several tens of thousands of Tajiks living in China. Ethnically, the Tajiks of China form a collection of small East Iranian ethnic groups with Wakhani (Wakhi) as a separate faction. A more sizable faction of Tajiks of China is called Sarikoli. The Tajiks of Chinese Pamir adhere to the Ismaili sect of Islam. They use Uighur (Turkic) for communicating with neighbors and do not speak Dari-Tajiki. In the People's Republic of China (PRC) Tajiks are recognized as one of the country's 56 nationalities forming a common unity called the "Chinese people." As Ismailis, the Sarikoli and Wakhani Tajiks do not attend mosques, but perform their rituals at special houses called *jamoatkhona* (communion house). Unlike other (Sunni) Chinese Muslims, the Ismaili Tajiks never revealed their religious zeal to the Chinese "infidels." They did not participate in mass uprisings of local Muslims against the Chinese rule in the 1920s-1930s or later. As Shiites living in a non-Shiite environment, the Tajiks of China accept *taqiya* - the Islamic practice of "dissimulation" for the sake of avoiding persecution or imminent harm. According to the rules of *taqiya*, Islam may be ignored in life-threatening situations. This practice has allowed Tajiks to preserve their unique religion, race, and culture in China. As a result, until recently, the Tajiks of China had not voiced grievances or mistreatment by the Chinese government.

What distinguished Tajiks from their neighbors was Iranianism (speaking in one of Iranian - Western or Eastern - languages, having Farsi as a *lingua franca*), and sedentarism (absence of tribal structures and egalitarian political institutions). In contrast to nomad (Uzbek, Pashtun) tribesmen, Tajik loyalty developed around village (neighborhood) and family. Iranianism connected Tajiks to the great written tradition of Iranian culture rooted in the pre-Islamic times and sedentarism. These "primordial" characteristics gave Tajiks a sense of shared and belonging to the oldest, pre-Turkic civilization and were a crucial starting point in Stalin's nation-building from the 1920s onwards. All in all, Tajiks were a minority in *Movarounnahr* and could not withstand the predominant tendencies of Turkism that grew from the early 20th century. It was only with the formation of the Tajik Republic in 1924 did a unified Tajik nationalism begin to develop.

Pashtuns

Whereas Turkistan and Bukhara was dominated by Turks since the eleventh century, Afghanistan had always developed on Pashtun ethno-cultural and political basis. Persian- and Turkic-speaking peoples were considered minorities. Pashtuns (or Pashtuns, Pathans) speak a distinct Eastern Iranian language and form a dominant, but not a majority ethnic group in Afghanistan. Like Tajiks, they are part of the Indo-Iranian ethnic and linguistic group. Although

disunited, they formed the world's largest tribal society.¹⁸ The true origin of the Pashtuns is unknown, with the exception that their tribes have never been detected crossing Amu Darya River and have no kin communities in Central Asia. Known as Afghans since the third century AD, they ruled Afghanistan all but two times (in 1929 and 1992-1994) throughout the country's history.

Uzbeks

Uzbeks are another dynamic grouping of the region that appeared in early 14th century. Uzbeks comprised the dynasties of the last khanates of *Movarounnahr*, including the Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand. In the 20th century, they made up the largest ethnic group in Central Asia. Turkism and Sunni Hanafi School were common characteristics that united various tribes and ethnic groups in a common Uzbek nation. Another characteristic of this group was the sense of belonging to the strongest and largest ethnic group in the region. All Uzbeks speak one language and practice one religion. While their closest neighbors Karakalpaks, Uighurs, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh speak in similar to Uzbek languages, Sunni Hanafi Islam is practiced also by Tajiks and other distant populations. Unlike Tajiks, Uzbeks have never lived in the mountains and never comprised an overwhelming majority of the main urban centers, including Samarqand and Bukhara. Although almost all of Uzbeks got settled by 20th century, tribalism was not alien to them. Some continued their semi-nomadic lifestyles, as the unique tribal heritage from Genghis Khan became an integral part of the Uzbek national pride. Uzbeks are unified by the Chaghatai-language¹⁹ literary work of the middle ages, which was largely influenced by the Tajik-Persian literature.

Two Turkic groups constituting the Uzbek nation were 1) descendants of the pre-Mongol period, who came to the region mostly between sixth and thirteenth centuries AD, prior to the invasion of Genghis Khan; 2) the descendants of the more recent tribes of Uzbeks, who came to *Movarounnahr* from *Dasht-i Qipchaq* (a wide zone of steppes from Caspian Sea eastward to Altai mountains) together with Shaybani Khan in 16th century. Throughout their history of living in Central Asia, all of these Uzbek groups maintained their identity and tribal names. In the beginning of the 20th century, their neighbors, both Farsi and Turkic speakers distinguished each of the Turkic ethnic groups as a single and independent ethnic unit. The term "Uzbek" was applied only to the later tribes of Shaybani Khan's at the beginning of the 20th century, while the earlier group of Turkic speaking peoples simply called themselves Turks. Uzbek is a most Iranized language of Central Asian Turks, a direct successor of Chaghatay, a language of great literature and science in times of Timur and the Timurids.

¹⁸ As of early 21st century, the total population of the group is estimated to be close to 50 million.

¹⁹ "Chagatai" is derived from a proper name and is associated with Genghis Khan's son Chagatai, who possessed a large portion of Khorasan and *Movarounnahr* in 15th century. The language of Turks in the period of Timurids was referred to as "Chagatai". One of the more famous poets, who wrote in Chagatai and lived in Herat was Alisher Navoi (1441 – 1501). Often, Chagatais are grouped into a separate ethno-cultural grouping, differentiating them from other Turko-Mongol groups because of the Chagatais' close association with the sedentary (Tajik) population.

The Uzbeks of Afghanistan constituted a majority group almost equal in number with Harazaras (about 9 percent of total population). They lived mostly in mixed Uzbek and Tajik villages in the north of the country. All Afghan Uzbek communities have their origin in Central Asia and almost all of them speak Farsi-Dari as a second language. After the demise of the Timurid dynasty in the early 16th century, the Uzbeks of Sheibani Khan established several principalities in the north of the country nominally loyal to either Bukhara or Kabul. In the late nineteenth century, with the help of the British, Ahmad Shah Durrani subjugated these Uzbek principalities. The mass exodus of Uzbeks after the establishment of the Soviet power in the 1920s forced almost 200,000 Uzbeks to flee to Afghanistan.

Turkmens

Turkmens are another grouping who has resided on both banks of the Amu Darya River. This Sunni-Muslim group speaks in Oghuz subgroup language of the Turkic language family, which is distinct from the languages of Uzbeks and Kazakhs. At the end of the nineteenth century, Central Asian Turkmens found themselves in five different states: the Khivan Khanate, the Bukharan Emirate, Russian *Turkistan*, Afghanistan, and Persia. The compact settlement of kinsmen on a specific territory in separate *auls* (villages) was typical for Turkmens. In one *aul* the kin of one tribe could live together, but it was impossible to find *auls*, where kin groups of different tribes lived together. The Turkmens did not ever have their own state. Instead, they depended on a traditional tribal and kin structure to protect community property, particularly cattle, pasture, and water. The disputes over pasture use and criminal-legal cases were subjects of *maslahat*, or *genesh* (councils) of tribal chiefs, and of the *adat* (traditional code). In case of direct military threat, a kin group organized its own defense. Turkmens (like Pashtuns) survived due to a well-adjusted military organization, which was formed based on the tribal structure. On the other hand, tribal and kin structure of Turkmen society hindered national consolidation and promoted the development of religious sectarianism. One such case, the unyielding clashes of Yamuds Jafarbai and Yamuds Atabai, at the end of the nineteenth century, created such hostility that the rival kin groups declared holy war - jihad - against each other.

Orthodox or traditional Islam was not popular among Turkmens. Like nomadic Uzbeks, Turkmens chose to practice Ishanism, which was a form of Sufism - a mystic sect of Islam incorporating many elements of centuries-long cultural practices and beliefs. Ishans, informal religious leaders, enjoyed authority among the nomadic Uzbeks and Turkmen. They acted as representatives of these communities in negotiations with the Russian, Bukharian, Afghan, and Persian rulers. During wars, they served as spiritual inspiration and, at times, as the leaders of armed tribal groups.

Turkmens in Afghanistan came from east of the Caspian Sea and Karakum Desert territory, known as Trans-Caspian. There were two major waves of Turkmen migration into Afghanistan and both were caused by the Russian advancement into Trans-Caspian. The first wave of migration coincided with the Russian invasion in the late nineteenth century and the Red Army attacks in 1918-1923. Turkmens in Afghanistan are farmer-herdsmen. They are best at *karakul* sheep breeding and carpet making in Afghanistan. In addition to almost five million Turkmen population of the Republic of Turkmenistan, nearly one million of ethnic Turkmens reside in Afghan provinces along the Afghan-Turkmen and another million live in Khurasan and Golestan

provinces of Iran. Along with Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, they represent the least integrated Afghan ethnic group.

Kazakhs and Kyrgyz

Until the beginning of 20th century, both Russian and Western historiographies failed to accurately identify Kazakhs and Kyrgyz as separate peoples, as there were disputes about their ethnogenesis. Some, mostly local, historians claim their people are aboriginal dwellers of Central Asia. While the majority of historians support the so-called migrational concept of the origin of Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, which states that these Central Asian nomads are descendants of recent (15th-16th centuries AD) migrants and have nothing in common with the ancient indigenous Indo-Iranian substrate. It is generally accepted that Kazakh people came as a result of consolidation of the Turkic tribal groups in vast *Dasht-i Qipchaq* steppe, which had been completed in the end of 16th century. Most of Kyrgyz completed their migration from southern Siberia to high valleys of the Tien Shan, Pamiro-Alai, and Qara Qorum (Karakorum) in 16th and 17th centuries. Kazakhs are known as steppe nomads, while Kyrgyz as mountain nomads. Both honored unique tribal history based almost exclusively on rich oral tradition and were less exposed to outside influence than Tajiks and Uzbeks. Their sedentarization began with the establishment of Russian and later Soviet rule.

Domination of Turko-Mongols and Pashtuns in Central Asia was not a result of inter-ethnic antagonisms. Rather, it was largely a reflection of cultural, socio-economic, and political conflicts between nomadic tribes and sedentary, and mostly urban, population. Such conflict would not be avoided even if Tajiks were Indians and Pashtuns and Turks were Arabs. Nomads captured cities that were traditionally governed by the local merchants and craftsmen. The consequences of such conquests were deterioration of urban culture and development of ethno-geographic, religious, and tribal loyalties at the expense of civic solidarity. The establishment of largely agrarian culture and weakening of the urban influence in the late middle ages, accompanied by the establishment of troubled and violent Uzbek dynasties in Kokand Bukhara, and Khiva, as well as liberation of the Greater Kandahar region from Iranian control, and the formation of the local Pashtun dynasties in the 18th century, led to the demise of the region. Semi-literate tribal aristocracy of nomads-cattle herders deeply resented the urban culture and considered civil professions dishonorable. The aristocracy imposed heavy taxes and suppressed once free tradesmen of the cities and oases. This led to the near-extinction of urban communities as centers of civilizations of Central Asia by the nineteenth century. Urbanization lagged also because this region was far from the sea and the aridness of much of the region made agriculture difficult. As a result, the Turko-Mongol and Pashtun nomads, the world's strongest warriors, dominated the region since early medieval times to the mid nineteenth century.

No unified pan-Iranian movement ever took place in the region. When Shah Ismail declared Shiism state religion of Iran in 1501, it dealt a blow to the Persian world. Sunnis of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Ottoman Turkey began perceiving Iran as the adversary and did not maintain strong cultural connections. The Shiite-Sunni strife contributed to the growth of fanaticism, religious dogmatism, increased role of Islamic clergies, and restriction of freedom of thought and expression. It also strengthened Central Asians' ties to Turkey and Turks. From the early 20th century, Central Asia's elite readily traveled to Turkey with the aim of receiving modern

education. Istanbul – not Tehran – became their “window to the world”. Consequently, pan-Turkism – not pan-Iranism – became a powerful ideological movement in Central Asia.

Brief Historical Background

The region under study has been continuously inhabited since the early Stone Age. Bactria, Sogdiana, Merv, and Khwarezm were the principal areas of the ancient Central Asia. Sogdiana was located partly in the modern northern Tajikistan and central part of Uzbekistan, while Bactria encompassed northern Afghanistan and some areas of modern southern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, including the capital city Dushanbe. Bactria is believed to be the birthplace of Zoroastrianism during the Achaemenid period (550 BC - 329 BC). Sogdiana and Bactria were provinces of the Persian Empire until they were conquered by Alexander the Great. Bactrians and Sogdians showed fierce resistance to the Greek invaders. To pacify them, Alexander married Roxana (Rukhshona), the daughter of a local ruler. Much of southern Central Asia became part of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom in the third century BC.

The Macedonian conquest launched a period of vibrant commercial relations and cultural exchange between the eastern Persia (ancestral home of modern Tajiks) and the Mediterranean world. However, the eastern Scythians and Tokharians defeated the Hellenic Seleucids and established the powerful Kushan Empire in 30 AD. The Kushan Empire competed with the Romans, Parthians, and Chinese Hans. The Kushan king Kanishka exported Buddhism from Central Asia to China. In 228 AD, Ardashir I destroyed the Parthian Empire, giving rise to the Sassanid era in Iran. Meanwhile, the nomadic Chionites and the Hephthalites conquered the weakened Kushan Empire in 410 AD. Turks defeated the Hephthalites in 565 AD and the Eastern Turkic Khanate was established in Central Asia.

The Islamic period in the Central Asian history commenced with the Arab conquest in 710 AD and lasted until 1218 AD. Prior to the Arab conquest, the main religions practiced in Central Asia were Zoroastrianism, Manicheanism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Nestorian Christianity, and Judaism. None of these religions enjoyed predominance. The Arabs invaded the divided Sogdian and Bactrian principalities and brought Islam with them during the period of the Umayyads (661-749). Most of *Movarounnahr* was conquered by Ibn Qutaiba, a governor of *Khurasan*, between 710 and 715. The people of Sogdiana and Bactria were converted to the religion of their conquerors and the tongue of the Quran (Arabic) became the language of government and religious instruction. The second dynasty of the Islamic Empire, the Abbasids (749-1258), reinforced political and cultural unity between the Near East and Central Asia, which allowed the ancestors of present-day Tajiks and Persians to fuse the precious heritage of the Sassanid Iran with Arab-Islamic civilization.

In the middle of the ninth century, the Samanid dynasty came to power in *Khurasan* and *Movarounnahr*. The Samanids were the first local Persian dynasty to return to power after the Arab conquest and encouraged the development of the modern Persian language (Dari), as well as trade and culture. Under their rule, Bukhara and Samarqand were the focal points of the old Persian civilization and the sites of the rebirth of the much-celebrated Perso-Tajik literature. Not

surprisingly, modern Tajiks consider Ismail Samani to be the founder of the first Tajik state and erected a monument in the center of Dushanbe in 1999 to honor him.

With the incursion of the Turkic peoples into the Abbasid Empire at the end of the tenth century, the Samanids were defeated and political and military dominance in Central Asia passed to the Turk-Mongols. Between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, a number of kingdoms succeeded one another in Central Asia, including the Ghaznavids, Karakhanids, Ghurids, and Khwarezmshahs.

Mongols, Timurids, and Uzbeks ruled Central Asia from 1218 to 1880s. In 1218–1221, Genghis Khan invaded Khwarezm, conquering the entire area and destroying the cities of Bukhara and Samarqand and looting and massacring the local population. At the end of the 14th century, Tajiks and Persians suffered further invasion by ruthless Turko-Mongolian rulers. Timur, a member of the Turkicized Mongolian Barlas tribe and nicknamed Timur-e Lang or Timur the Lame (which became Tamerlane in English), founded his empire in 1370.

Khurasan and *Movarounnahr* were principal centers of a global civilization connecting the East and West. For many centuries, they served as trade hubs. However by the 16th century, the region had lost its importance as a pivot of the world's politics, culture, and economy. This coincided with the last and largest Turkic migration into Central Asia. The Turko-Mongol newcomers from Dasht-i Qipchaq²⁰ led by Shaibani Khan Uzbek invaded *Movarounnahr* and defeated the Timurids in Samarqand. Timur's grandson Babur was forced to leave for Kabul. Thereafter, Shaibani marched to Balkh and Herat seizing the territory of today's northern Afghanistan. Ismail I, the founder of Safavid Dynasty in Iran, stopped the march of Shaibani's troops to the south. In 1510, he defeated the Uzbek force near Merv (today - the city of Mary in Turkmenistan), killed Shaibani Khan in a battle, retook Herat, and made a truce with the Uzbeks. According to the truce, most of districts of what is today north-western Afghanistan (Herat area) were handed to Iran. Later Babur, supported by Shah Ismail's army of Qyzilbashes²¹ tried to retake Samarqand, but was again defeated by Uzbeks again. Following a series of setbacks, Babur entered the Punjab plains in 1525. He proclaimed himself the legitimate ruler of India, as his grandfather brutally subjugated India in 1398-1399. Having enlisted support of local leaders, Babur destroyed the Delhi Sultanate ruled by Lodi dynasty of Ghilzai Pashtuns and founded the Mogul Empire of South Asia that lasted until the nineteenth century.²²

Samarqand, and later Bukhara, became the capital of the Shaybanid state (1506–1598). The Astar Khanid (Janid) dynasty, also descendants of Genghis Khan took over from 1598-1740. In 1740, the Janid khanate was conquered by the Persian ruler Nadir Shah. After Nadir Shah's

²⁰ Sometimes spelled as Dashti Kipchak, this region encompasses modern-day northern Kazakhstan.

²¹ Ismail, the shah of Iran in his struggle against Sheibani Khan created an army that received the name "Qyzilbash" or "Kizilbash" ("red heads"), as those warriors carried turbans with twelve purple stripes in honour of Shiite imams.

²² Although Zahiriddin Babur (1483-1530) came from the family of Islamized and Turkicized Mongols, his background, training, and culture were rooted in the Persian tradition of Khorasan and Movarounnahr. Persian was *lingua franca* of the Timurid elite. Babur's rule in India was largely responsible for the expansion of the Persian cultural influence in the Indian subcontinent, with remarkable results in arts, literature, music and historiography.

death in 1747, the Manghyt tribe chief Muhammad Rahim Biy was proclaimed leader of Bukhara. Since the Manghyts were not of Genghis Khan's descent, they assumed the title of emir. Bukharan Emirate was the last and the biggest independent Central Asian kingdom that was destroyed by the Red Army in 1920. The Emirate covered a territory of 180,000 square kilometers (69,498 square miles) and its predominantly Tajik-Uzbek-Turkmen population stood at approximately 2 million in the late nineteenth century. Tajiks and Uzbeks made up approximately 80 percent of the population of the Emirate. Part of the present-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan's territories were also included in the Kokand (Khuqand) Khanate, which emerged in the Ferghana Valley in the mid-18th century and was ruled by the Uzbeks from the Ming tribe. Fifteen percent of the population of the above-mentioned states lived as nomads and semi-nomads (Turkmen, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh tribes), while the urban population formed about 10 percent of the population of the Bukharan Emirate and the Kokand Khanate. The remaining 75 percent lived in agricultural oases. In the nineteenth century, a highly effective irrigation system was developed by Tajik and Uzbek rural communities in the Fergana Valley. Developing and maintaining this system for common good required mutual cooperation of various ethnic groups.

During the Turko-Mongol-Uzbek period of Central Asian history the region witnessed the use of Islam – the dominant religion of the region since the eighth century – in wars and conquest. Many contenders to dominance in Central Asia often invaded and looted non-Muslim territories under the pretext of defending Islam and spreading the “true religion”.²³ In addition, the region became a scene of the uncompromising Shiite-Sunni political friction. In the 16th century, the Safavids declared Shiism as state religion of Iran, not just as a strategy to consolidate their domestic influence, but to also target the Sunni Ottomans, Afghan Emirs, and Central Asian Khans. The Shiite-Sunni strife led to the spread of slavery in the region²⁴ and contributed to further deterioration of Central Asia, which was already engulfed in bloody feuds.

The ongoing dynastic and inter-state wars and inter-sect clashes, in addition to gradual clericalization of the educational system, enduring communalism and tribalism in societal life, technological relapse, scarcity of resources, and lack of motivation for modernization among the ruling pastoral elites led to the gradual decay of Movarounnahr and Khurasan. This decline is usually attributed to the discovery of maritime trade routes that connected the cold and warm seas and displaced the long established caravan routes. The old “Silk Road” gradually fell into a

²³ However, Amir Timur broke the rule of “sparing co-religionists” in 1399-1402, when he defeated the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid and sacked Damascus, Baghdad, Aleppo and Ankara, killing thousands of innocent Muslims. For that reason, Muslim writers of the time declared him the enemy of Islam. Timur himself explained this attack as his dedication to Genghizid legitimacy and bringing back “rightful” Seljuq rule. Seljuqs headed the Turko-Perisan Sunni Muslim Empire in Khurasan, mainland Persia, Anatolia, parts of Central Asia, and Caucasus in eleventh through thirteenth centuries. Timur claimed that Mongols granted the rule to Seljuqs. In fact, in the 1260s, Mongols invaded Anatolia and divided Seljuq state into small Ghazi emirates.

²⁴ The Turkmen (Sunni) tribes of the Karakum desert invaded Eastern Iran, kidnapping and enslaving Shiite Persians. In doing so, they often invaded the Herat-Balkh area, enslaving peaceful villagers and selling them in the Bukharan slave market and portrayed them as true “infidel” Persians (even though, they were Sunni Tajiks). According to Sardiddin Ayni's famous novel “The Slaves,” this practice lasted until the late 19th century.

state of desolation and formerly powerful empires of Central Asia devolved into small and relatively weak khanates. This period of decline coincided with the rise of powerful European states that launched offensives to the East, seeking political and economic control over distant regions in Asia.

Chapter 2. The 19th Century Great Game

State and border formation

The expansion of the European powers into the heart of Asia gave Central Asia a new geostrategic importance. Although Central Asia was weak and Muslims were about to lose control over their territories, *Khorasan* and *Movarounnahr* still possessed vast human and natural resources. In the nineteenth century, the area turned into a sphere of rivalry between three empires: Russia, Britain and, to a much lesser extent, China. This political contestation often referred to as the “Great Game”, pitted three powers that, at a first glance, had dissimilar interests.

The British, who were primarily concerned with India, arrived in Central Asia indirectly through their control of Afghanistan. The British sphere of influence, however, was limited to the plains north of the Hindu Kush Mountains in Afghanistan, not only as a result of the Russian political and diplomatic pushback, but also the fierce Afghan resistance. The three bloody Anglo-Afghan wars dampened Britain’s colonial zeal. These circumstances were fateful for the peoples of *Movarounnahr* (first and foremost for Tajiks and Uzbeks), who were involuntarily absorbed into the Russian sphere of influence.

Russians arrived in Central Asia directly by invasion. After defeating the Kazakhs and incorporating the steppe and occupying Tashkent, Russians moved south, where they occupied the right bank of the Amu Darya. The Emir of Bukhara became a Russian vassal in 1869. Russia also conquered other Central Asian states of Khiva and Kokand (Khuqand) and incorporated them into Turkistan General-Gubernatorial, with the capital at Tashkent.

It was on the juncture of three crumbling Central Asian khanates – Ashtarkhan (Uzbek), Safavi (Persian), and Moghul (Indian) - in the area of Kandahar, where *Khurasan* and *Hindustan* (that is Land of River Indus) meet, that the Afghan state was formed in the early 18th century. In 1747, Hotaki (Ghilzai) Pashtuns passed the throne to Abdali (later named Durrani) Pashtuns and the state became known as the Durrani Empire. In the following years, the Afghan (Pashtun) army of Ahmad Shah conquered present-day Afghanistan almost in its entirety, including the northern areas populated by the people of Central Asian origin (mostly Tajik and Uzbek), as well as Indian territories. By the nineteenth century, the Durrani power gradually waned and much of the Empire’s territory, including Punjab, Kashmir, and Sind was ceded to British India. Internal wars among various Pashtun leaders contributed to further fractionalization of the Durrani Empire and led to the independence of the Afghan Turkistan, Badakhshan, and Hazarajat.

In 1880, a Durrani leader Sardar Abdu Rakhman Khan crossed the Amu Darya and proclaimed himself emir, thus launching the modern period in Afghanistan’s history. Afghanistan, created by

the Russian and British Empires as a buffer zone between Southern and Central Asia, has sought to remain an independent and unitary state for over a hundred years. Until 1919, when the British were defeated in the third Anglo-Afghan war and the country got its internationally recognized name “Afghanistan”, the British enjoyed exclusive influence in Afghanistan, while also keeping an eye on Central Asia. Central Asia became of a special importance to the British after the latter divided the Pashtun territories along the Durand line in 1893. As a result, over half of all Pashtuns remained in the British India (modern-day Pakistan), while the rest remained in Afghanistan. In case of suppression and ill-treatment of the Afghan Pashtuns, they could have chosen to reunite with their brethren on the other side of the Durand line, thus reversing the Anglo-Russian “Afghan project” and establishing an independent Pashtunistan. What would have happened to the Tajik, Uzbek, and Turkmen populations of northern Afghanistan under the transformation of Afghanistan to Pashtunistan is unclear. The viable options were 1) to remain in Pashtunistan and be subjected to even greater discrimination, 2) to form their own Islamic government of Khorasan, or 3) to develop close ties with their brethren on the other side of the river. Consequently, having a British-friendly Pashtun government in Afghanistan, while also preventing a unifying Pashtun nationalism, became the main concern of the British and later (since 1947) of Pakistan.

London sought to restrain the Russian advancement toward Britain’s Indian frontiers. The “Afghan buffer” and its northern edge, which is the Amu Darya’s²⁵ stream from Lake Victoria (Zor Kul) in Eastern Pamir, served as a natural line of defense between the empires. At that particular time using Amu Darya, a clear river demarcation, was more advantageous than using mountain ranges to avoid confusion about who controlled what. From a “scientific” point of view, mountain ranges were more appropriate historic divider in the area, but the Europeans found they were difficult to accurately map. Many Britons of the “scientific frontier” school saw the Hindu Kush as the natural defensive boundary of India. This meant occupying Afghanistan and the bid was refused.²⁶ Had the British demarcated the territories along the Hindu Kush, the region would have followed a significantly different trajectory.

Negotiations for the division of Russian and British spheres of influence concluded with the Russian-British Agreement of January 1873 and consequent Demarcation of 1895. According to these agreements, Russia could not claim any territories south of the Amu Darya River. Strictly demarcated borders drawn along indisputable lines were a fixation for the European colonial powers in the 19th century. Clarity of demarcation took precedence over any local concerns. Europeans drew the boundaries usually with no conception of local context or much concern about the impact such division would have on local populations. As a result, the new frontiers were often artificial and not grounded in ethnological realities of the region.

Through this process of drawing borders, Central Asia was disjointed and alienated from its own cultural, historical, and economic traditions in order to serve the interests of distant powers playing the “Great Game”. Local rulers, emirs of Afghanistan and Bukhara, played a passive role

²⁵ From its upper stream in Pamir until it converges with the Wakhsh River, Amu Darya is called Panj river.

²⁶ John Dacosta, *A Scientific Frontier or The Danger of a Russian Invasion of India* (London: W. H. Allen & co., ltd, 1891).

in the “Great Game”. Moscow “promoted” the interests of Bukhara, while London provided support for Kabul. In search of new territories, the Afghan feudal lords turned their gaze to the northern neighbors – khanates of Southern Turkistan, parts of which were under the nominal rule of the Bukharan Amir. In the 1850s and 1860s, with the active support of the British, Afghans conquered the bordering khanates of Balkh, Shibirgan, and Herat. The emir of Bukhara, who lacked genuine sovereignty, easily agreed to cessation of the territory south of Amu Darya. The British helped transfer the independent Pamir governorates of Rushan, Shughnan, and Wakhan, situated along the both coasts of the Amu River, to Afghanistan in 1883. The Russian government strongly objected, claiming that the transfer violated the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1873. Following the drawn-out diplomatic negotiations, military expeditions and skirmishes, khanates of Rushan, Shughnan, and Wakhan located on the right bank of the river were definitively transferred to Russia (and then to Bukhara). In other words, Britain and Russia drew up the Afghan-Bukhara borders along the Amu Darya according to the 1873 agreement.

Amu Darya became the dividing line between the Russia proper and Afghanistan and no bridges were built on the river. Up until early 20th century, the river served as the main water artillery of the region. Steamship line was only developed between Termez and Chardjui.²⁷ Afghan conquest of South *Turkistan* and enslavement of local populations led to an economic crisis. The cities on the left bank of Amu Darya gradually became deserted. With the Afghan settlement in Tashkurgan, once once a home to twelve thousand inhabitants, only about seven thousand inhabitants remained. The rest fled to Bukhara.

Until the Bukharan “revolution” in September 1920, which resulted in the establishment of the Soviet power, the Afghans and Bukharans maintained close relations. Amanullah’s mother, Ulya Hazrat, member of the powerful Barakzai family, treated Alim Khan, the last emir of Bukhara, as her son. Afghan forces and officers constituted the core of the Bukharan armies and were the most dedicated personal guards of Bukharan emirs. Afghan subjects – merchants, laborers, and others – lived in Bukhara and *Turkistan* up until the arrival of the Bolsheviks in 1920. Afghan labor migration to the “Russian” Central Asia in the beginning of the 20th century was linked to the revival of trade and economic growth as a result of the Russian capital flow into Turkestan and Bukhara. The Soviet invasion and the wars that commenced in 1921 forced them to return to Afghanistan.²⁸ The central government of the Soviet Union established firm monopoly of foreign affairs and no Central Asians were allowed to have contacts with their Afghan brethren.

The Chinese, unlike the Russians, who regarded Central Asia as Russia’s trophy, never intended to directly rule this region, maintaining in mind a clear distinction between “tributary areas” and China proper. However until mid-nineteenth century, China’s Central Asian borders were clearly defined. The Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) established the Chinese control over its northwestern

²⁷ Today in Termez, the Soviet-built Friendship Bridge crosses the river to connect Uzbekistan to Hairatan in Afghanistan.

²⁸ However, some Afghans remained in Tajikistan, contributing to its development. One of them was Nisar Muhammedov, a Peshavar-born Pashtun-Yusufzay, People’s Commissar (minister) of Education of the Tajik Soviet Republic from 1926-1930, and professor of the Central Asian State University in Tashkent in the 1930s. He was arrested on October 8, 1937 and died (or was killed) during the investigation on October 22, 1937. One of the streets of Dushanbe bears his name.

frontiers, which gradually extended the Chinese influence westward into the area that is now the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region (historically also known as Eastern or Chinese *Turkistan*). This region, which today makes up about one sixth of China's territory, has been populated by various ethnic groups of the Central Asian origin.

The decay of the Qing power resulted in the loss of Eastern *Turkistan* to locals, who often allied with Muslim (Uzbek-Kyrgyz-Tajik) forces in the neighboring Kokand Khanate. According to a treaty with the Khan of Kokand signed in 1835, Kokand was allowed to open commercial agencies in the Altishahr and an embassy in Kashghar. Despite diplomatic exchanges and some privileges granted to the Tajik, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz traders, the conflict between the Muslims of the region and the Chinese authorities continued. It culminated in a Muslim incursion into Kashghar allegedly by a Tajik adventurer from Fergana Valley Yaqub Bek. In 1864, he drove the Chinese out of the region and established his kingdom of Kashgaria. Having concluded treaties with Great Britain and Russia and receiving the support of the Ottoman Empire, he sought support from all sides involved in the Great Game. In the end the aid offered to Yaqub Bek by the British proved to be insufficient. Meanwhile, Russia supported General Zuo Zongtang to destroy the independent Kashgaria, also known as *Jettyshahr* ("Seven cities"). In 1878, within a half a year of Yaqub Bek's death, the Qing Dynasty reconquered Kashgar and renamed the province to "Xinjiang" ("New Domain"). Despite his defeat, Yaqub Bek's rapid rise to power set a precedent for subsequent generations of Xinjiangese Muslims to demand independence from foreign domination. According to the Chinese interpretation, the Kashghar Emirate established by Yaqub Bek was a foreign invasion.

After the demise of Yaqub Bek, Russians renounced their territorial claims in exchange for various trade privileges and concluded a peace agreement in Sankt Petersburg in February, 1881. The battle for influence over Central Asia, which had lasted for four and a half centuries, ended and Xinjiang again came under Chinese control. At that time, Manchus saw this region as a "tributary area" protecting China proper. According to General Zuo Zongtang, "Sinkiang [Xinjiang] was the first line of defense in the Northwest. It protected Mongolia, which in turn protected Peking. If Sinkiang were lost, Mongolia would be indefensible and Peking itself threatened."²⁹

Until the end of the nineteenth century, the border between China and the territory of modern-day Tajikistan and Afghanistan was only outlined in general terms. The Russian and British foreign ministers did not draw the line eastward to meet the Chinese boundary in the mountainous Wakhan, which bordered not only on China, but also on north-western outermost tip of the British India. The sides finally decided that their frontiers should not converge, providing Afghans with access to China. Wakhan formed a narrow wedge (panhandle, 10 miles wide in certain areas), separating Russian territories in Pamir from the north-western borders of India (Hunza, Chitral and Gilgit). As one of the British high diplomats noticed, the Afghan Wakhan became "the long attenuated arm of Afghanistan reaching out to touch China with the

²⁹ Morris Rossabi, *China and Inner Asia From 1368 to the Present Day* (New-York: Pica Press, 1975), 167.

tips of its fingers.”³⁰ On the outermost eastern tip of the Wakhan corridor is the Little Pamir – uninhabited alpine region – where Hindu Kush, Pamir, Karakoram, and Himalayas as well as three empires, Britain, Russia, and China adjoined. Today the Wakhan corridor is an Afghan territory sparsely inhabited by traditional Tajik and Kyrgyz pastoralists which separates Tajikistan’s southern border from Pakistan’s north.

While the borders established in the late nineteenth century have been maintained until present, the states themselves have changed. Various Russian-British demarcations in 1895 created a Russian-Afghan frontier with a total length of 2,330 kilometers (1448 miles). With the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1924-1929, this boundary was transformed into segments of the Afghan-Turkmen (802 km or 498 mi), Afghan-Uzbek (140 km or 87 mi) and the Afghan-Tajik (1,334 km or 829 mi) borders. The Russian-Chinese boundary was created by the Peking Treaty of 1860, which demarcated a line between the Russian Pamirs and Chinese Xinjiang. With the fall of the Soviet Union, this line was recognized as the legal boundary between China and Tajikistan (430 km or 267 mi).

By the end of nineteenth century, the region was relatively peaceful. In the beginning of the twentieth century, British-German and Russian-German disagreements led to increasingly tense relations between London and Moscow. The British-Russian agreement of 1907 was the second step on the path to completing the separation of spheres of influence. It laid the foundation for the creation of a military-political bloc between Russia, France and Great Britain - the Entente.

While the compromise among the empires proved to be satisfactory in terms of preserving international security, the outcome for the locals was problematic. The compromise between the great powers was intended to maintain the stability of the three colonial empires. Each part of Central Asia was expected to develop peacefully within its own imperial sphere. None of the imperial powers considered the possibility of changes that would bring about the demise of their respective empires. Meanwhile, they were reluctant to fully develop subjugated areas, fearing that such development would lead to the achievement of independence and formation of national ethnic states in Central Asia.

The end of stateless “free ride”?

Colonization put an end to the stateless “free ride” in Central Asia. Urban dwellers mostly accepted the establishment of the Russian administration, while rural tribal segments of the Central Asian society showed fierce resistance.³¹ One may argue that rural resistance was Islamic in nature: it was local *jihād* of tribes to whom Islam had always been intertwined with tribal network. Others may argue that these tribal elements would have resisted any form of government - native or foreign. Both arguments are valid. It is important to recognize that various behavioral patterns stem from Central Asian cultural legacy rather than Islam. Muslims of the region are different in terms of lifestyles, languages, gender roles, cuisine and patterns of politesse. There is also variance within Islamic practices in Central Asia. Sunni Islam of urban

³⁰ William Habberton, *Anglo-Russian Relations Concerning Afghanistan 1937-1907* (Urbama: University of Illinois Press, 1937), 67

³¹ Uprising led by Madali or Ishani Dukchi in 1898 in Fergana Valley is an example.

centers with its emphasis on centralized authority, centrality of religion, and preference for a government has differed from sectarianism and rebelliousness of the Sufi orders that flourished in the Central Asian periphery.

The establishment of an effective state control in the vast Central Asian territories was a prerequisite for the new European-dominated world order. This order required the formation of nation-states with clearly-defined and rigid borders in order to protect national sovereignty and reinforce national symbols and values. This Westphalian legal and political framework for modern inter-state relations did not apply to Muslim countries, as colonizers did not see a “basis on which principles of national self-determination can build”³² in these territories. For the first time in history, Central Asian Muslims were subject to jurisdiction of non-Muslims, which imposed a secular vision contradicting Muslims’ worldview. It undermined the customary way of life, especially in rural areas of the region.

As a result of the European advancement, most of the Muslim world was subjected to the Western rule by the beginning of 20th century. The French controlled Africa, Lebanon, and Syria. The British controlled Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Arabian Gulf, India and Southern Asia. The Dutch dominated in Indonesia, while the Russians took hold of Central Asia. Only Iran and Turkey remained relatively untouched by the direct control of Westerners. Although one may argue that colonial rule introduced more or less effective governance, educational opportunities, innovation, and modernization, it, nevertheless, led to a deep identity crisis in the region. The locals were not enthusiastic about the international system, market economy, or secularization. Rapid industrialization and urbanization were alien to most Muslims, especially nomads and semi-nomads, as the new order dramatically changed their place in society. Project of secularization caused a clash between cultural identity and foreign political order: Could Muslims ever hold on to their identity and be ruled by non-Muslims?

The establishment of the Russian rule in the region launched the consolidation effort of disparate tribal, local, ethnic identities into larger identity groups. Most of Central Asians became the citizens of the Russian Empire. Because they were non-Slavs and non-Christians, the Tsarist government discriminated against them and labeled them as *inorodets* (heterodox). They shared this status with other minority peoples in the Russian Empire, such as the Kalmyks (the indigenous peoples of Siberia), Jews, and other non-Slavic peoples. This status limited access to educational institutions, military or state service, and places of residence. However, the Tsarist regime attempted to win over the tribal and patrimonial leaders and local aristocracy by granting them special privileges. This gradual incorporation of ungoverned tribes into proto-national units played an important role in nation-building in Central Asia.

Dividing Central Asia into the three spheres was an afterthought of the colonial expansion and it happened to work out. Because these areas were primarily buffer zones, there was no direct collision between Great Britain, Russia and China during their two centuries of rivalry in Central Asia. In other words, the participants of the Great Game in Central Asia played peacefully and according to the rules established by themselves and for themselves. Conflicts rarely amounted to anything more than short-term military expeditions.

³² India Office Library (IOL)/P&S/11/142.

By the beginning of the 20th century, the vast strategic buffer zone between the empires encompassing Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, Afghanistan, and Central Asia was formed. Russian Central Asia (*Turkistan*, Bukhara, Semirechie, Khiva, Turkmenia) proved too rich in human and natural resources for the Tsarist colonial regime to fully develop. Moscow was unable to implement a successful cultural transformation of large populations, with their own historically established identities. As a result, Central Asia did not fully integrate into the Russian world order - politically or economically. Russian cultural influence in Central Asia was also not as pronounced as it was in the Caucasus, where close cultural ties between the colony and parent-state had begun to take shape by the nineteenth century. In Central Asia, Russians established structural means of control in region, such as building railways and other infrastructure. Only the insignificant portion of the local elite (mainly Kazakhs, Russia's closest neighbors) adopted the Russian culture.

The influence of some Muslim religious-reformist ideas developing in other parts of Russia (the Caucasus, the Volga region) had little impact in Bukhara, Samarqand, and other cultural centres of the region. Consequently, Central Asian Muslims did not form a strong political opposition to the European colonialism.

Colonial powers employed a strategy aimed at the fragmentation and weakening of Islam as a political force capable of resisting their advancement. To that end, they employed the well-known formula of "divide and rule". The artificial boundaries served them well in preventing ethnic and religious unity and mobilization of the peoples with common interests. Some argue that the main Muslim response in Central Asia was one of military defense, a call to clash with the enemy - the West. Others argue that it was a manifestation of internal crisis of Islamic society and the encounter with the colonial Europe only exacerbated this crisis. From this viewpoint, the colonization of Islamic states was not a treacherous Christian incursion, but a rational response of the emerging empires to the weakening neighbors and former adversaries. The leading reasons thus were historical, not ideological and/or deep-seated animosity between religions.

However, this is not to say that the concept of "clash of civilizations" is not applicable to interrelations of the empires in Central Asia. They invaded these territories with a Eurocentric concept of "modernization". In this simplistic model the southern borders of Central Asia were considered the frontier between a capitalist Russia and eastern stronghold of the Christian West against a feudal Muslim world. This confrontation had its roots in the West's historical memory of the nomads of Central Asia as aggressive "barbarians" bent on destroying urban civilization and the image of the "fanatic Muslim" as an enemy. The imagined threat of what later was labeled as "Islamic fundamentalism" was created and fanned by the empires that took part in the "Great Game". In light of this "clash of civilizations", Russia appeared to be the defender of the West from the "wild" East, even though in other contexts Russia itself was often condemned as a bulwark of "eastern" autocracy and backwardness.

The inhabitants of the region paid the price for peace between the empires. Their policies resulted in the fragmentation of historic, political, national and social relationships that accelerated the decline of Central Asia. Thus, in the middle of the nineteenth century, the region

was politically and economically dependent on the West. By the end of the nineteenth century, the roots of future conflicts and social shocks were already in place leaving the region on the brink of a catastrophe at the end of the twentieth century. Instead of remaining as stable buffers between the empires, Afghanistan, Xinjiang, and adjacent territories of the “Russian” Central Asia turned into hotbeds of permanent political instability.

Chapter 3. The Evolution of the Insurgency in Central Asia

The Basmachis: mujaheds, bandits or liberators?

Following the successful military campaign against the Turkish general Enver Pasha in 1923, who was driven by Pan-Islamist ideals and led the Central Asian Muslim guerillas (Basmachis),³³ Commander Leon Trotsky warned the Soviet government: “We have removed the tops of the weeds, but not the roots.” He understood that the military defeat of the Basmachis did not equate to complete destruction of this anti-Soviet movement. Indeed, it took the Soviet government and its Red Army (one of the strongest at the time) almost 14 years to crush the movement of the poorly equipped, disparate bands of Uzbek, Tajik, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen peasantry.

This popular revolt sprung up spontaneously as a reaction to the Bukharan Emirate’s inability to resist the Soviet expansion in the region. The Basmachi insurgency began in 1918 in Fergana Valley. The Soviets employed harsh military tactics against the rebels, their families, and supporters and applied political, social, and economic pressure on anyone sympathetic to the movement. This policy, arguably, led to the elimination of the movement. Receiving no substantial external support, failing to unite with the emerging nationalist movements, and being entrapped in conservative and radical tribalism, tightly intertwined with quasi-Sufi (*Ishani*) networks, the Basmachi resistance gradually weakened and disintegrated by mid-1930s. A segment of insurgents surrendered and opted to live peacefully, concentrating on the preservation of faith in families and local communities, away from the direct rule of the “infidels”. Many of them later joined the majority of Central Asians in the Soviet project of large-scale secular modernization, which included nation-building and economic and social development.

The history of Central Asian Basmachism attracted little scholarly attention after the movement disintegrated. The discourse was muted partly because of the Soviet censorship. Soviet historiography forbade debates on this issue, promoting only one accepted position that Basmachism was an “anti-people, reactionary movement” and an agent of “world imperialism.”

³³ Turkish General Enver Pasha (1881-1922), one of the leaders of Young Turks Government, was known among Central Asian Muslims as Pasha - a successful military leader and Damad (son-in-law) of Grand Sultan. After World War I, Enver Pasha was invited to Moscow. At that time, the Bolsheviks were captivated by the idea of uniting Islamism and Communism. Enver Pasha was supposed to be part of this scheme. Enver Pasha, however, turned against the Bolsheviks and joined the Basmachi movement in Bukhara in late 1921. He was killed in a battle close to the Afghan border in August 1922. Buried in Kulab, Tajikistan, his grave served as a shrine to Muslims throughout the Soviet period. With the consent of the Tajik government, the grave was excavated and Enver Pasha’s remnants were transported to Turkey in 1996.

Leon Trotsky's warnings were unheeded. He had warned that a military incursion into a Muslim-populated state would have long-lasting repercussions for a "great power": it would damage its international prestige and give rise to Islamic insurgency, civil war, refugee flows, and hostility toward the invaders.

Almost 70 years after Basmachism was eliminated, the discourse about this movement became relevant again during the Soviet-Afghan War (1979 – 1989). Another movement of Muslim militants – the Taliban in alliance with global terrorist networks – had emerged. Just as Basmachis harbored Enver Pasha, a dreamer of an Islamic utopia, the Taliban provided a safe haven for Osama bin Laden. Again, as in the 1920s, the Western powers were eager to put an end to the stubborn rebellion, bring durable peace, and restore effective governance in a desperately poor and fragmented region.

So, who were the Basmachis?

Basmachis represented a religiously-motivated and anti-modernist militant resistance movement in Central Asia. For Basmachis secularism and modernism that the Russian "infidels" embodied were antithesis to Islamic values. They considered fighting to preserve Islam from the outsiders their holy duty. However, since it was largely comprised of ethno-religious, tribal, territorially-oriented militant groups, led by religious radicals, Basmachism failed to become a goal-oriented political movement. One notable characteristic of Basmachism, as an apolitical and fundamentalist phenomenon, was that *mullahs* (religious leaders) were often more influential than the pragmatic and calculating *qurbashis* (military and political leaders of the movement), who strove to form a united front with a concrete ideology and specific goals. However, as in any other fundamentalist movement, in Basmachism value systems prevailed over pragmatic and worldly considerations. Basmachism rejected politics as a means of achieving goals.

The fundamentalist and apolitical character of the movement was both the strength and weakness of Basmachism. On one hand, fundamentalism – characterized by religious fanaticism, martyrdom, and obstinacy – served as a steadfast mobilizing tool against modernization and secularization. On the other hand, Basmachis' apolitical character hindered their ability to unite the masses under a constructive goal.³⁴

Although the Basmachi movement had some organizational structure (elected and appointed leaders, military ranks, treasurers, clerks, etc), it, nevertheless, was not a distinctly organized political or military movement. Officially, the movement's leadership was based in Bukhara, led by Alim Khan – unlawfully ousted sovereign. In reality, however, the quasi-ideology and organization of the movement was based on religion and religious leadership. In a Muslim society, only Islamic jurists could sanction violence against the civilians and attacks on the

³⁴Analogous to the fundamentalist Basmachi movement in Afghanistan was the Taliban movement at the end of the 20th century. Taliban withstood against the Islamist Parties of Northern Alliance. Similar to the Basmachis, the Taliban put values before politics. Their barbaric destruction of the Buddhist monuments in Bamiyan, which turned the whole world against them, was a manifestation of this kind of irrationality.

government based on Quran, Hadiths,³⁵ local traditions (adat), and precedents from the Islamic history. These jurists invoked slogans for jihad and preservation of Islam in order to strengthen Muslim solidarity in the face of a threat emanating from aggressors, whose distinguishing characteristic was being “infidels”. Obviously, this was not a war of Muslims against Christians or Jews. All those deemed “godless”, irrespective of their ethnicity or religious beliefs, were subject to punishment. Since killing Muslims was prohibited, ascribing local Muslims (supporters of the Soviet regime) to “infidels” was a necessary condition for sanctioning violence against the local population.

As a result, the idea of jihad, as a symbolic and mystical act, attracted many who genuinely believed that they were protecting Islam at large rather than just protecting their societies. Therefore, Muslims considered it their honorable duty to sympathize with and provide support to *mujahedeen*, no matter where they lived - Bukhara, *Turkistan*, Afghanistan, Xingjian, Turkey, India, the Caucasus and Balkans, and elsewhere. Such religious legitimization of the movement strengthened it and served as a powerful mobilizing tool. At the same time, however, the religious foundation of the movement hindered it, as it prevented the development of an organizational structure. Jihad, as an emotional individual act and expression of loyalty to Islamic ideals, resisted regulation and administrative organization akin to any political movement. Thus, Basmachism failed to become a cohesive political movement.

Purely from a military stance, Basmachi wars possessed many of the characteristics of tribal wars. In Central Asia, wars were fought for a long period of time, with few losses incurred. Basmachis occasionally resorted to negotiations, made a peace deal, surrendered, and then joined the resistance again. Tribal wars would temporarily cease due to agricultural work and religious holidays and resume as soon as the opportunity presented itself. Tribal (ethnic) solidarity formed the basis of military groupings. For example, the leader of nomadic Uzbeks would not fight in the neighboring Darvaz populated by highlander-Tajiks.

Basmachis could not exist without their tribal ties. In their tribal villages, they found support, treatment, shelter and food, and new recruits for the resistance. This connection to the people gave them confidence, validated their righteousness, and served as justification for violence. Furthermore, each military unit could only rely on their fellow tribesmen. Many resorted to robbery and violence while on a different tribe’s territory. It is difficult to point to a more localized, isolated, and grassroots manifestation of militancy than Basmachism.

This territorial and tribal attachment of insurgency was the main roadblock for Enver Pasha in his effort to form a unified Muslim resistance to the Soviet Red Army. Tribalism precluded the development of clear political and military objectives. Paradoxically, however, this tribal aspect of Basmachis rendered the fight against them very difficult. Low levels of institutionalization of Basmachism made it almost invincible from a military stance.

The Central Asian brand of Islam also played an important role in the Basmachi resistance. Central Asians have traditionally expressed their religious devotion not only through reverence

³⁵ *Hadiths* are stories about Prophet Muhammad’s deeds and sayings. The compilation of all *hadiths* that are deemed authentic constitute the *Sunnah*.

for God and Prophet Muhammad, but also through revering and seeking guidance from various ‘saints’ and spiritual leaders. Uzbek, Tajik, Pashtun, and Turkmen Muslims believe in the existence of intermediaries between themselves and God, who can be summoned to help them. This can be a saint or simply an enlightened and pious man. As a result, spiritual leaders – *ishan*, *sheikh*, *khoja*, *mir*, *tura*, *hazrat*, *shah*, *akhun*, *sayyid*, *mian* – have traditionally commanded great respect not only from the laypeople, but also the rulers, who believed piety was the highest manifestation of devotion to God. The power of such real and imagined saints is rooted in Islamic mysticism (i.e. Sufism).

Sufism in Central Asia (mainly in Eastern Bukhara and Northern Afghanistan) never had an elitist character, but embraced popular roots. The classical forms of Sufism usually had an institutional structure of orders that carried out missions and maintained and disseminated its beliefs. Central Asian Sufism generated its own orders, which gradually moved away from classical Sufi orders. Russian colonization, revolution, wars, and introduction of secular popular education contributed to the erosion of ideological ties between Central Asia Sufi orders and classical Sufi orders. Removed from its classical ideological origins, Central Asian Sufism transformed into a tribal form of Ishanism. Ishanism was based on the loyalty to fraternity, family, and countrymen. In the 1920s, Ishanism that supplanted Sufism formed the backbone of the Basmachi movement.³⁶

Ishanism maintained the general traits of Sufism: tight internal organization and discipline. A member of the order (*murid*) remained under the guidance of his *Ishan* (spiritual leader) throughout his life. Nothing could be accomplished without *Ishan*’s blessing. Many *Ishans* were often uneducated and not well-versed in the Quran. Instead, these charismatic leaders could manipulate the masses. Not surprisingly, the Basmachi strongholds were in the remote regions, where *Ishans*’ influence was strong, while Soviet-sanctioned clergy’s authority was weak. *Ishans* provided the ideological inspiration for Basmachis’ *jihad* and helped recruit new members into their ranks.

Central Asian Sufi Ishanism can be considered as an important forerunner of political Islam and jihadism in the region for it represented the only Islamic force to overcome both regionalism and monoethnicism of disparate bands of rebels. Its activists propagated Islamic unity and taught that Islam is an ideological brotherhood and does not recognize linguistic, cultural, or racial differences. Most prominent *Ishans* discarded indigenous self-identity to the benefit of shared Muslim origin of *mujahedeen* and *muhajirs*. To some extent, they can be considered as the first leaders to head an Islamic insurgency in Central Asia.

However, *Ishans*’ influence on Central Asian societies was not omnipresent, since religiosity manifested differently in urban areas and rural periphery. Islamic orthodoxy with its emphasis on centralized authority, obedience to power holders, and readiness to accept coercive measures by the government was uncontested in urban centers. In contrast, sectarianism and rebelliousness flourished in the peripheries, where the reach and authority of the state was limited.

³⁶ The same *Ishani* groups were among the leading parties in political struggle and military clashes in Tajikistan in the 1990s.

In the wake of collapsed statehood in the region, Basmachism surfaced with the intention to keep relative order in a decentralized society and maintain and strengthen local loyalties as a defense mechanism from external threats. As soon as the Soviets imposed a new order, Basmachism transformed into a protest of the peripheral communities, which refused to disarm and become subjected to centralized governance. These were free riders, who would resist any government and not just a government run by “infidels” or Russians. Unlike urban dwellers, who laid down their arms, recognized the authority of state and tolerated an oppressive regime in exchange for relative order and stability, peripheral tribes never had the intention to disarm and let the state assume the responsibility for defense and security. Not surprisingly, Basmachis failed to achieve mutual understanding and cooperation with the urban Muslim reformers and nationalists, often referred to as Jadids. Indeed, urban dwellers rarely sympathized with the peasant insurgency, following the golden rule that, “bad government is better than no government.” Furthermore, although Basmachism began as communal self-defense and resistance movement, it gradually degenerated to attacks on civilians and banal robbery. To survive, Basmachis resorted to routine raiding and pillaging of villages and caused massive displacement of the population. All of these contributed to the gradual marginalization and, later to the elimination, of the Basmachi movement.

However, the defeat of Basmachis cannot be attributed to just the fragmentation, mismanagement, and limited social base, and other internal weaknesses of the resistance. There were several other factors that helped the Bolsheviks to strengthen their position in the region and break the Basmachi resistance:

- Most of Central Asians supported the “Reds” against the “Whites” in the Russian Revolution and civil war that ensued, because the former promised land, freedom, and peace for all the people irrespective of nation and religion.
- By the end of the 1920s, the Soviets presented themselves as the only effective - albeit unjust – alternative for a government. Emirs, Khans, and Russian provisional government failed and discredited themselves in the eyes of the majority of the population. Prolonged civil strife and instability cultivated a tradition of political resignation and submission among Central Asians, who accepted the Soviet order.
- What the Bolsheviks called for was anti-imperialistic and not exclusively Russophile. Bolsheviks were regarded by neighboring Eastern countries as allies in their struggle for independence. The Bolsheviks re-established Russian rule in Central Asia in part because Turkey and Afghanistan saw them as a power against Western imperialism. Neither King Amanullah nor Mustafa Kemal Ataturk provided substantial support to the Basmachis. This international isolation of the anti-Soviet resistance strengthened the position of the Soviets in both defeating the Basmachis and successfully imposing their authority in Central Asia.

Despite their defeat, Basmachis left a print on the Central Asian society and culture. Ethnocentrism of the Bashmachi movement, which was expressed in intolerance and prejudice against non-members, promoted isolationism and conservatism in politics, social sphere, and culture. This tribal bigotry gave birth to what would later be mistakenly called “Islamic fundamentalism”. In fact, tribalist or communal ideology resisted (and still resists) not only atheism and unity of all peoples promoted by the Communists, but also nationalism. Moreover, tribal solidarity was in conflict with normative Islam and religious mysticism. Neither the Jadidi

nationalist ideas, nor General Enver Pasha's Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turkic slogans, nor Afghani Amir Bacha-i Saqqao's calls for ethno-confessional unity could overcome the tribal *asabiyya* (spirit of kinship). In light of this, the widely spread belief about "deep religiosity and fundamentalism" of Tajiks and Uzbeks is inaccurate. This tribal, ethno-confessional, and territoriality-oriented ideology was well preserved throughout the seventy years of the Soviet rule and remains an important characteristic of Tajik and Uzbek identity. Exactly these sub-national solidarities, having been utilized by regional political entrepreneurs and quasi-Sufi (Ishan) groupings, enabled mobilization during the second Tajik civil war in 1992-1997.

Another important impact of Basmachism was dampening the expansionary ambitions of the Bolsheviks. Unsuccessful yet fierce Basmachi opposition stopped the "Red Cavalry attack on the feudal East" at the banks of the Amu Darya and foothills of the Hindu Kush. It also dispelled the romantic revolutionary illusions of some Comintern leaders that the revolution was broadly welcomed and accepted by the masses. The fire of revolutionary war waged by the Bolsheviks in 1917 faded and burned out in Central Asian deserts and mountains by the middle of the 1920s. As a result, the war did not spread into the neighboring Afghanistan, India, China, or Iran.

Basmachism also had an impact on the neighboring Afghanistan, which was home to exiled Basmachi leaders and emigrants. Most Afghan Muslims sympathized with their brethren's struggle against the Bolsheviks. During the Bukhara uprising led by Enver Pasha in 1922, a group of volunteer fighters from Panjshir – among them Habibullah Kalkani (aka Bachai Saqqao), the future emir of Afghanistan – headed to Bukhara. There are divergent views about Habibullah's personality and what drove him to join the Basmachi struggle. Tajik and some Afghan scholars consider him a Tajik nationalist standing up against the Pashtun chauvinism, while others underline his commitment to Islamic ideals and consider his aspirations as religiously-driven.³⁷

Since the beginning of his reign in Afghanistan (1929), Habibullah ruled not as an Afghan tribal leader, but as Muslim ruler. He sought to influence not only Afghans, but the entire *ummah* (Muslim community), including in India and Soviet Central Asia and called Muslims to liberate Bukhara. Habibullah's support base was fundamentalist and non-tribalist north in his opposition to the Pashtun south. Orthodox clergy and Sufi leaders legitimized Habibullah's rise to power by portraying him as an Islamic Emir – as opposed to Amanullah, whose leadership rested on Pashtun tribalist solidarity. For his supporters, Habibullah's struggle against tribalism embodied an Islamic ideal of a government based on shared faith, as opposed to blood kinship. However, Habibullah could not overcome Pashtun chauvinism and prevalent lawlessness in Afghanistan, struggling with the same problem many of his predecessors faced: unruly local tribesmen resisting central government. Civil war was inevitable.

Mobilization for this war, as in any other in the Afghan history, took place along the ethnic, regional, and tribal lines. Tribal militias constituted the core of military organization. Important factor in success of one or another tribe was the monetary support of the external actors (mainly Russia and Britain) and the drive to profit from neighbor's or enemy's demise. However,

³⁷ Olivier Roy describes Bachai Saqqao as a fundamentalist. Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 66-67.

opportunistic and criminal motivations were not the only factors. Despite the seeming chaotic arrangement of military groups, there was more or less a clear north-south divide, with mostly Tajiks representing the north and backing Habibullah and Pashtuns representing the south and east of Afghanistan and fighting against Habibullah.

This divide was supported and strengthened by outside actors. The Soviets blamed the British for instigating Amanullah's overthrow and Habibullah's rise to power, which they considered a blow to Soviet plans in Afghanistan. They sought to establish a Soviet-friendly regime in Afghanistan. Amanullah enjoyed the support of the Pashtun south and had anti-British and anti-imperialistic potential. On the other hand, Habibullah, according to the Soviet calculations, being from the north, would soon grow ambitious toward the Soviet Central Asia. Based on these assessments, the Soviets sent a limited military contingent known as Expedition of Primakov-Gulyam Nabikhan to Afghanistan. They hoped that the military contingent would expand by the local rebels joining its ranks and contributing to establishment of a puppet government that would shortly after join the USSR. It is not surprising then that it was exactly in 1929 that the Soviets promoted the status of Tajikistan from an autonomous republic within Uzbekistan SSR to a separate constituent republic. The British viewed this move by the Soviets as a challenge.³⁸ It was an obvious call to the Tajiks and Uzbeks in Afghanistan to follow suit.

For Basmachis, Habibullah's rise to power signified a triumph of the "true faith" and revival of the struggle for liberation of Bukhara and Turkistan from the Bolsheviks. Alim Khan, the exiled ex-emir of Bukhara who was living in Kabul beginning 1922 under a house arrest, was convinced that the League of Nations backed him and that all foreign nations would support his reinstatement to the throne in Bukhara. It is possible that Habibullah encouraged the Basmachi emigrants' military excursions into Soviet Central Asia in 1929. However, the new Afghan government was mostly preoccupied with the struggle against Amanullah, Nadir, and Gulam Nabikhan and was hardly capable of carrying out aggressive measures against its neighbors. Habibullah sought international recognition for his government and normalization of relations with the Soviet Union and supporting hostile Basmachi excursions into the Soviet territory was not in his interests. Most likely, the Basmachis sought to take advantage of the chaos and weakness of the central government in Afghanistan and resume their fight against the Bolsheviks. However, exiled Basmachi leaders did not accomplish this task. This was partly due to the similar factors that contributed to the disintegration of the Basmachi movement in the first place: territorial and tribal connection and commitment that the exiled leaders had already established living in Afghanistan prevented them to leave everything behind to fight for Alim Khan's or anyone else's interests.

By mid-1930s, the Bolsheviks firmly sealed off the Soviet-Afghan border to stop all kinds of contacts between the kin communities and continued the serious transformation efforts in Central Asia. The national delimitation and formation of five "stans", growing economic development, successes of secular education, and emancipation of women changed the ideological climate in Central Asia and contributed to the gradual rise of nationalism, emergence of official state-sponsored religious institutions, and co-optation of the religious class into the state structures. As

³⁸ Arnold Fletcher, *Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1965), 210.

a result, Central Asia's Muslim community accepted political quietism and submission to political authority of the Soviets (despite the latter's non-Islamic practices) and lost touch with their kin in Afghanistan.

These years of "muted" Islamic politics", however, ended with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. This led to the formation of religious opposition groups, such as Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), that emerged under the direct influence of the jihad in Afghanistan in 1980s. These religious pressure groups on both banks of the Amu River – including the IRPT which later constituted the core of the opposition in the Tajik civil war of 1992-1997 – were mostly preoccupied with a particular political agenda rather than selflessly fighting to support their fellow Muslims.

The Soviet Afghan War and Central Asians

In December 1979, with the request of the pro-Moscow Afghan regime, 50,000 Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan. The Soviet authorities justified the invasion by the necessity to fight against Islamic fundamentalism and stop it from spreading into Central Asia. Along with deploying military force, the Soviet strategy included provision of economic aid and launching propaganda campaigns to defeat Afghans - a strategy employed also against the Basmachis in the 1920s.

The Soviet invasion revealed the Afghans' inability to organize a cohesive national movement. Resistance to the Soviet occupation (1979 – 1989) took place in a spontaneous manner, with scattered armed groups forming in the peripheries. The efforts to unite the disparate bands of armed groups under the banner of Islam did not succeed.³⁹ As it happened throughout the Afghan history, the resistance to the Soviets was factionalized along the ethnic and tribal lines. The heterogeneity of the Afghan society and the lack of trust and camaraderie among different tribes and ethnic groups meant that, in the absence of a reliable central government, each group sought to strengthen their tribal and ethnic ties to ward off external threats. In this aspect, the Afghan resistance was similar to the Bashmachi movement in Central Asia in the 1920s.

However, in the 1980s, the Soviets faced a much less favorable international environment than in the 1920s. As mentioned earlier, the Basmachis received almost no external support in their struggle against the Soviets. On the contrary, the Afghan mujahedeen in the 1980s enjoyed support in the form of modern weaponry, training, and financing from the United States, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and many other countries. The United Nations condemned the invasion and mounted a great deal of diplomatic pressure on the USSR. Increasingly, the war became unpopular within the Soviet Union itself.

With Mikhail Gorbachev coming to power in 1985, the USSR shifted the policy toward negotiations and reorganizing of pro-Communist government. Following the Geneva Agreements of April 1988, the withdrawal process began, with the last of the Soviet troops leaving the country in February of 1989. The Soviet-Afghan War cost the lives of almost one

³⁹ The term "mujahed" entered into widespread use during the Soviet-Afghan War.

million Afghans and non-Afghan Muslims. Five million became refugees in Pakistan and Iran. The war cost the Soviets the lives of about 15,000 troops and the overall losses provoked a strong backlash in the USSR. The war in Afghanistan was one of the reasons for the demise and dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the wake of the Soviet collapse, the Afghan *mujahedeen* emerged victorious and the idea of jihad that had framed the Soviet-Afghan war became widely popular. The demise of the Soviet Union legitimized jihad as an effective ideology capable of uniting people of various nationalities and mobilizing them against powerful national armies.

Among the fighters against the Soviet Army were the descendants of the Basmachi émigré from Central Asia. Majority of them belonged to Burkhanuddin Rabbani's *Jamiyati Islami* party. Despite their Central Asian descent, this group of fighters was well-integrated into and the Afghan society, did not maintain relations with their kin in the Soviet Central Asia or represent the newcomer émigré-mujahedeen from USSR. Along with Tajik-Uzbek bands of fighters, there were also purely Turkic (Uzbek-Turkmen) groups fighting in Afghanistan. The more prominent Turkic mujahedeen were Abdulkarim Maqдум and Azadbek.⁴⁰ It was the Turkic groups that led the Islamic Union of the Northern Provinces of Afghanistan. In February of 1981, Maqдум and Azadbek received the first batch of 350 AK-47s.

Like Enver Pasha who led the Basmachis in 1920s, Azadbek was a Turkic militarist seeking to unite Turkic world and liberate the Turkic republics of Soviet Union. According to the Indian scholar Warikoo, Azadbek's people, along with fighting the Soviet army, delivered weaponry, supplies, and subversive literature to the Islamists across the river, who were getting stronger and more influential in the Soviet Uzbekistan and Tajikistan during the *perestroika* years. These operations were financed and guided by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (with the tacit US support). The person in charge of Pakistan's Central Asia policy was General Mirza Aslanbek, also a descendant of Central Asian mujahedeen and relative of Azadbek.⁴¹

Azadbek was the sole leader of the *Islamic Union*, who recruited Turkic peoples within the *mujahed* communities and sent them out to training bases in Miranshah, Pakistan. Azadbek was a Pakistani citizen, with ties to the Pakistani army intelligence services, known as the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). ISI was influential and nearly autonomous agency leading the mujahedeen in Afghanistan and taking part in human trafficking and illicit drug and arms trade from 1983 to 1997. The Pakistani ISI trained and deployed 83,000 mujahedeen to Afghanistan.⁴²

Azadbek was more concerned with the fight for *Turkistan* than jihad. After receiving training in Azadbek's training camps in Pakistan, Turkic mujahedeen were sent to the north of Afghanistan,

⁴⁰ Azadbek Karim was born in Islamabad, Pakistan in 1952. He was the grandson of the Kokand ruler Khudoyar Khan (while other sources indicate he was the grandson of Nasreddin Khan). Ahat Andican, *Turkestan Struggle Abroad: From Jadidism to Independence* (Haarlem: SOTA Publications, 2007), 635, 654.

⁴¹ K. Warikoo, "Cockpit of Central Asia: Afghanistan Factor in Tajikistan's Crisis," in *Afghanistan Factor in Central and South Asian Politics*, ed., K. Warikoo (New Delhi, Trans-Asia Informatics, 1994), 1-22.

⁴² Raman, B. "Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)". <http://www.acsa.net/isi/index.html>

where they would join and fight under the authority of the *Islamic Union* commanders. The Pakistani ISI looked favorably upon Azadbek's activities. They viewed him as the implementor of the "strategic depth" policy of Pakistan, which involved securing the support of the Muslim Central Asia in a potential military conflict with India. However, the Turkic nationalism and strife for the liberation of *Turkistan* concerned both the Soviets and Afghans of both Pashtun and Tajik origin. Turks and Tajiks of northern Afghanistan usually united and resisted against the Pashtuns and "infidels", whereas Azadbek recruited only Turks into his ranks. Since Azadbek had a steady flow of funds from Turks and Pakistanis, fighters joined him with enthusiasm. To be accepted into Azadbek's bands one had to prove their "Turkic origin".⁴³ Such ethnic exclusion was foreign to many Afghans and contradicted the widely accepted ideas of the Muslim umma and jihad.

After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Azadbek did not recognize the interim mujahedeen coalition government formed in Pakistan. He took an opportunistic position vis-à-vis mujahedeen and began cooperating with the pro-Soviet Najibullah regime (1986-1992), which pursued national reconciliation and recognition of the Turkic autonomy within Afghanistan. According to Olivier Roy, Azadbek's party was a "Trojan horse," implanted by the Najibullah regime with the intention of causing split among the mujahedeen.

The Uzbek contribution to the Afghan jihad was insignificant because the Uzbek intelligentsia was greatly subjected to secularization and nationalism and did not concern itself with political Islam. Furthermore, the majority of illiterate Uzbek and Turkmen mujahedeen (just as their Basmachi antecessors) were not interested in Turkic nationalism and more enthusiastically joined moderately traditional and fundamentalist groups, such as Harakati Inqilab, Jamiyati Islami, and even Hezbi Islami led by the Pashtun Gulbeddin Hikmatyar rather than joining Azadbek's movement.⁴⁴

When the Uzbek General Abdulrashid Dostum formed his *Junbeshi Millii Islomii Afghoniston* party in 1992,⁴⁵ Azadbek expressed his discontent with the fact that the leadership of the party did not exclusively consist of Turks. He urged Azadbek to strengthen the Turkic elements within his party. His Pan-Turkic slogans did not gain support among the mujahedeen in northern Afghanistan, including the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Turkmens. Shortly, all commanders, who had previously supported Azadbek, joined General Dostum, who managed to strengthen his reign in the north.

Dostum did not identify himself as an Uzbek, but as an Afghan Uzbek. Dostum's party had representation from a range of political and ethnic groups (except for Pashtuns) from Afghanistan's north. According to Antonio Giustozzi, the party was a coalition of all peoples of

⁴³ Oliver Roy, "Ethnic Identity and Political Expression in Northern Afghanistan," in *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*, ed. Jo-Ann Gross (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books 1992), 80.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 79-81.

⁴⁵ Antonio Giustozzi, "The ethnicisation of an Afghan faction: Junbesh-i Milli from its origins to the Presidential elections," *Crisis States Research Centre, Working Paper no.67* (2005): 2. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/13315/1/WP67.pdf>

northern Afghanistan, where Uzbeks enjoyed a special status. In 1992, Uzbeks constituted about 14 percent of the party leadership. Furthermore, Dostum never promoted Uzbeks at the expense of relegating non-Uzbek party members.⁴⁶ Since both the Dostum's *Junbesh* party and the Tajik *Jamiyati Islami* party were Islamic parties, they avoided nationalistic particularism. They sought to attract as many followers from as many different ethnic groups as possible. The only ethnic factor in their agenda was to oppose Pashtun hegemony.

Azadbek, who was a Pakistani concerned exclusively with the struggle for *Turkistan*, much of which lay outside of Afghanistan, became isolated. He had good relations with Pakistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan and was able to attract substantial funding for *Junbesh*. However, he was no match for Dostum's military might.⁴⁷ As a result, Azadbek's influence diminished by 1994 and he left *Junbesh* for Pakistan. By then, the Taliban had already entered the political arena and begun capturing one province after another. As the Taliban approached the Kunduz province in 1997, Dostum fled to Iran and Abdulmalik assumed the leadership of Afghan Uzbeks in the north. As an ISI officer, Azadbek once again sought to pursue leadership position in the north of Afghanistan, but his plans never materialized. His life was cut short, when he crashed in a mysterious helicopter accident near Mazar-i-Sharif on May 29, 1997. According to historian Ahat Andican, the Iranian government was likely in charge of Azadbek's death. Meanwhile, Giustozzi believes the Taliban had a hand in his death, since for them Pan-Turkism propagated by Azadbek was a major threat to the unity and territorial integrity of the Afghan state.

Pan-Turkism as an alternative to Afghan nationalism and Islamic jihad did not set roots in Afghanistan. Turkmens – the second largest Turkic group in Afghanistan – fully backed the mujahedeen in the north during the war against the Soviet Union. As a result, *Turkestani* Azadbek found himself on the same side with those supporting and training the Taliban. Joining the jihad in Afghanistan, most Afghan Tajiks and Uzbeks aligned themselves with Jamiyati Islami of Bukhanuddin Rabbani. Rabbani and the military leader of this group legendary Ahmad Shah Masud traced their spiritual origins to the sheikhs of Dahbedi Sharif (Maqdami A'zam). For them, Central Asia remained a source of inspiration - not a target.

During the Afghan-Soviet war, many Muslim and even Western authors sympathized with the mujahedeen movement in Afghanistan, considering it the continuation of the Basmachi struggle of the 1920s. One such book, "Against the Russian Communism," was published in 1983 and translated from English into Dari by Abduljabbar Sabit.⁴⁸ Sabit wrote in the foreword: "I am presenting this book to my countrymen so that they can study the reasons of Muslims' defeat in Central Asia and avoid suffering the same fate."⁴⁹ This and other publications about Basmachis were disseminated in Afghanistan to inspire and boost the morale of those fighting against the Soviet Army.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ The Soviet Army obtained a copy of this book during one of the battles. Bahadur Burikanov, who at the time worked as the interpreter in Afghanistan, later obtained this copy. In late 1980s, Burikhanov gave the book to the author of this book.

⁴⁹ Fasl al Rahim Khan Marwat, *Dar Muqobili Kommunizm-i Rus* [Against the Russian Communism], Peshawar, 1983.

As a result of the Afghan-Soviet War, interest toward the 1920s Basmachi movement in the Soviet and international historiography revived. Many parallels were drawn between the Basmachi movement and the Afghan resistance of the 1980s. The Soviet historians portrayed imperialism as the instigator of the civil war. They wrote about “history lessons” on the supremacy of the Red Army and futility of the Muslim resistance.⁵⁰

Many in the political and academic circles of the West considered Central Asia the “Achilles heel” of the Soviet Union in its war against Afghanistan. Given the ethnic, cultural, and religious ties of Central Asian Muslims with their brethren in Afghanistan, they forecasted that Central Asia’s Muslims would initiate the fall of the Soviet Union and establish a unified Turko-Islamic government. That view, however, was inaccurate. Muslims of the Soviet Central Asia did not play a significant role in the demise of the Soviet Union. In fact, well until 1991, Central Asians supported the Communist regime in their republics. Furthermore, Muslims of Central Asia did not express strong support to the mujahedeen during the Afghan war of the 1980s. Like the majority of the Soviet people, Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh soldiers considered the invasion a mistake. However, they readily assumed their duties as Soviet citizens and took part in the war against Afghanistan.

Civil war in Tajikistan: jihad or chaos?

In the wake of the Soviet collapse, all post-Soviet republics were constitutionally declared as democratic, unitary, and secular states. Multi-party system emerged as a universal path to democracy and pluralism. In 1990-1992, several nascent political parties and movements rushed to fill the political void created by the collapse of the Communist party. In Tajikistan almost all of them had regional origins and pursued regional agendas. The main rivalries formed between those originating from Khujand in the north, the Badakhshanis from the Pamir Mountains to the east, and forces from the south – Gharmis and Kulabis. All southern elite felt victimized and excluded, because since 1946, the Tajik elite from the north, particularly from Khujand, had enjoyed prominent positions in the government and Communist party of Tajikistan. In October 1992, nine presidential candidates contested the first multi-party elections. Rahmon Nabiev, the former leader of the Communist Party of the Khujandi origin won the elections. Tensions between the supporters of the new government and the opposition parties intensified to the point where different factions took up arms. Unaware of the realities in Tajikistan, the West provided support to the opposition, viewing its protest as a justified rebellion against the Communist rule. Less than a year after independence, Tajikistan was engulfed in a civil war. As a result of the brutal civil war, nearly 50,000 people lost their lives and more than 650,000 people - one tenth of the population – were displaced (60 000 alone fled to Afghanistan). More than 35,000 homes were destroyed and the total damage of the war is estimated at \$7 billion.

Tajikistan became one of the centers of Islamic activism in the Soviet Union. In the late 1970s, an underground group of young Islamists emerged in Wakhsh Valley among the Gharmi

⁵⁰ B. Lunin, ed., *Basmachestvo: Social'no-politicheskaja suwnost'* [Basmachism: Socio-political essence], Tashkent: Fan, 1984.

community.⁵¹ In October 1990, they formed the core of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Gharmis are the least urbanized, most isolated, and conservative sub-ethnic group in Tajikistan. Similar to other rural groups in Tajikistan, Gharmis' identity is tied to their territory, dialect, values, and customs. These elements of the Gharmi identity are, in turn, closely intertwined with their religious piety and devotion. This is largely an influence of the the Hanafi School of Islam in the region. Hanafi Islam, which emphasizes internal harmony, has allowed Tajik communities, including the isolated and mountainous ones, to preserve their pre-Islamic customs and traditions, as well as their Persian cultural heritage.

As a result, religious devotion and expression in Tajikistan has formed not around religious institutions, such as mosques, but stable, long-lasting, emotionally charged, often kin-based associations like family, *avlod* (extended family), broader community, and neighborhood. This manifestation of Islam in Central Asia is often referred to as popular or people's Islam.

Consequently, the so-called "Islamic" or "Muslim" movements in Central Asia, including the Gharmists' protest activity in early 1990s, were in fact social movements, which developed in Islamic cultural context and represented group interests. Similarly, political behavior and aggressive imperatives stemmed not from religious dogmas, but rather from cultural and historical precedents.

It is also important to note that even religiously devout Tajiks never insisted on establishing an Islamic state or imposing *Sharia* (Islamic law). For religious leaders of isolated communities, "Islamic state" was a vague and mostly new concept. Most Tajiks who took to the streets of Dushanbe in 1992 were guided not by modern Islamists in IRPT, but by old-fashioned unofficial religious leaders - mullahs. These mullahs have traditionally promoted local customs and even pre-Islamic beliefs, which played an important role in preserving national practices under the Soviet rule. Unofficial mullahs have focused on preserving and strengthening Islam at the level of the family, tribe, and regions. Mullahs are not politically savvy and rarely intervene in politics. Furthermore, many of these mullahs lack official religious education. They are often self-taught or are disciples of Sufi mentors (ishans, shaikhs, makhsums). Almost every village under the Soviet rule had tea houses, which doubled as Islamic congregations led by unofficial mullahs. These mullahs conducted all religious and traditional rituals for the community. In 1990, there were about 1,400 unofficial mullahs in Tajikistan. Many of these mullahs were incorporated in the official religious structure under the leadership of Qazi Kalon (Grand Judge) Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda in 1988-1992. He combined qualities of a Sufi, modern Islamist, and official mullah. As one of the leading figures of the Islamic opposition, he was keen to unite an atomized Islamic realm in Tajikistan under an umbrella of a modern and dynamic political organization.⁵²

⁵² This effort did not succeed. Excluded from IRPT in 1998 and from the government in 2005, Turajonzoda is now a mid-level businessman and a devout religious leader who enjoys the support of his community.

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The Tajik civil war showed a tendency toward internationalization. Islamic delegates from neighboring Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, North Caucasus, and even Iran were present at mass demonstrations in Dushanbe. Some of them later formed the backbone of the jihad waged against the pro-Communist government.⁵³ During the public demonstrations in 1992, a mob of demonstrators shouted “Death to America” – the slogan of the Iranian Revolution. However, the anti-American sentiment did not resonate with most Tajiks, since they were angry at Russians and Communists, not Americans. America never colonized Central Asia and showed little interest in this region in the 1990s. The anti-American slogan was thus quickly withdrawn from the protests, most probably at the request of Iranians. Iran, which at first saw an opportunity in the post-independence chaos in Tajikistan, quickly realized the futility of trying to export an Iranian-style Islamic revolution to Tajikistan. Although Tajiks and Iranians share common cultural and linguistic heritage, they differ in their religious observation. Unlike Iranians, who are Shiite, the Tajiks are Hanafi Sunnis and are unfamiliar with theocratic rule. In contrast to other Sunni schools of thought, Hanafi Islam is more tolerant of local or “popular” Islam. The adherents of the Hanafi School believe that popular traditions, including visitation to local tombs and mausoleums are compatible with the *Sharia* principles.

Furthermore, fundamentalist Sunni movements have always been hostile to the Iranian theocracy. Tajiks, Uzbeks, Pashtuns, and other Central Asians never allowed mullahs to rule. From the ninth through mid-nineteenth century, they lived in a society where political power belonged to secular figures (often the toughest tribal grouping) that enjoyed the support of religious experts. Rulers used Islam to legitimize their rule as sacred and indispensable. Therefore, Orthodox Islam has long been associated with established secular systems of government. Religious hierarchy of Shiite Islam does not exist in Sunni Islam and, as a result, religious authority is fragmented. In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, religious authority has traditionally been divided between the state-controlled official mullahs, underground, militant Islamists that appeared in the 1980s, and illetarate yet charismatic and apolitical mullahs.

As a result of the atheist Soviet policies, the Tajik society in the 1990s was secular, suspicious of mullahs, and unaware of even the basics of Islamic thought. Iranians’ attempts to export the Islamic revolution could never succeed, as there were no Islamic leaders in Tajikistan who could unite and mobilize masses under a revolutionary message.

In addition, the late Soviet period saw the growing influence of Wahhabiya⁵⁴ from Saudi Arabia, a fervent foe of Iranian Shiism. In the first years of independence, the Saudi charities distributed

⁵³ Samir Saleh Abdullah Al-Suwailem or Amir Khattab. Born in 1969 in Saudi Arabia to an Arab father and a Circassian mother, Khattab worked with Chechen mujahedeen in 1996-2002. He also participated in the war in Afghanistan in 1984-1994, in Tajik civil war in 1993-1995, and in the war in the former Yugoslavia. In 1998, along with the major Chechnya warlord Shamil Basayev, Khattab created the Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade (IIPB), also known as the Islamic Peacekeeping Army. He was poisoned in 2002. Arab Emir Abu al-Walid succeeded Khattab, but was killed in 2004 in Chechnya.

⁵⁴ Wahhabism (or Wahabiyya) is a puritanical movement in Sunni Islam, formed in Arabia in the 18th century. The name Wahhabism is derived after its founder, Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1787). Dominant in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Wahhabism teaches a return to the origins of Islam, as

hundreds of thousands of freshly minted copies of Quran throughout Central Asia and Caucasus. Saudi Wahhabis were mostly engaged in peaceful indoctrination of “true Islam” and criticized “popular” Islam as distorted and unorthodox. They financed construction of mosques mostly in Northern Caucasus and Fergana Valley. As a result, Saudi and Wahhabi influence was growing in parallel with increasing popularity of Iran in Tajikistan. This contributed to the irreconcilable divergence between the religious (Sunni) and cultural (Iranian) identities as a crucial element of the Tajik political culture.

Arms from Afghanistan and arsenals of the former Soviet Army turned the Tajik conflict into bloody chaos. In November 1992, a Kulabi-dominated government came to power with the help of Russia and Uzbekistan and the supporters of the Islamic opposition found themselves on a losing side. The Islamic political forces in Tajikistan, rife with rivalry, sectarian goals, and territorial loyalty and influenced by outside Islamic groups, failed to form a cohesive political agenda based on Islamic values.

The core of the Tajik opposition consisted not of political parties, but a group of uncompromising highlanders from Gharm-Tavildara region (Gharmis). Living in close proximity to other groups of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Arabs,⁵⁵ and Turkmens, these highlanders showed little enthusiasm in abandoning their local identity to form a larger Tajik identity. As mentioned above, community and *mahalgari* (territorial solidarity) has been a big impediment to the formation a unified Tajik civic identity. It has also served as an obstacle to the creation of the broader Tajik identity, encompassing all Tajiks living in Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. The lack of interest in being part of the *ummah* (Islamic community) or forming any other kind of transnational identity also stems from this *mahalgari* phenomenon.

In late 1992, about 60,000 Tajiks mostly of the Gharmi origin, chased by pro-governmental bands of *Popular Front*, crossed the Amu Darya River to seek refuge in the Mazar-i-Sharif and Kunduz regions of northern Afghanistan. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) established refugee camps for those near Mazar. This area was under the control of a local Uzbek warlord Abdul Pashid Dostum, who was sympathetic to Muslims from Central Asia. The majority of the exiles, however, arrived in regions controlled by the Afghan fundamentalist

practiced by Prophet Muhammad. Wahhabism rejects esoterism, mysticism, and saint-worshipping, including visiting the tombs and mausoleums (an exception is made only for visiting the tomb of the Prophet) –all what constitutes Islam for Tajik, Uzbek, Turkmen, Chechen, and Afghan communities. There is no apparent support for Saudi Wahhabism in Tajikistan. However, some features of Wahhabi teachings, such as strict observance of Islamic rituals and rejection of excessive display of wealth are appealing to Islamic activists. The terms "Wahhabi" and "Salafi" are often used interchangeably.

⁵⁵ As one of the ethnic groups in Tajikistan, Arabs (Sunni Muslims) left their lands and settled in Central Asia in the eighth and 15th centuries. Having settled in Central Asia, they were gradually assimilated to the sedentary culture of Central Asia and adopted the two main languages of the region: Tajik and Uzbek. In 1989, nearly 20,000 Arabs resided in Tajikistan. Overpopulation and the lack of arable land in southern regions of Tajikistan caused violent conflicts between Arabs and Gharmi Tajiks in the 1960s and 1980s. In the 1992-1997 civil war, the Tajikistani Arabs supported the pro-governmental faction against the Islamic opposition.

leader of Hezb-i Islami Gulbuddin Hekmatiar. Due to overall insecurity of the area, Tajik refugees here received irregular and insufficient relief supplies. Some exiled Tajik commanders managed to cooperate with the leader of Afghan Tajiks Ahmadshah Massoud. Afghanistan's mujahedeen government was unable to stop the Tajik bands from crossing the porous border, trafficking weapons, and establishing military training camps for the Tajik opposition. As a result, cross-border assaults on Tajikistan by the exiled Tajik opposition became commonplace in 1993.

Uzbekistan, fearing the spread of fundamentalism into its portion of the Fergana Valley, provided military support to the Kulabi faction. Furthermore, Uzbekistan wanted to see an Uzbekistan-friendly and government in charge in Dushanbe. The Uzbek government has repeatedly used the Tajik conflict as an excuse to quash its own opposition.

The exiled Tajik opposition did not want to give up. It formed the Movement for Islamic Revival in Tajikistan (MIRT) at the end of 1993 in Taluqan (Afghanistan). MIRT sought to coordinate all exiled Tajik opposition activists and their military forces. MIRT's leaders were Said Abdullo Nuri (chairman),⁵⁶ Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda (first deputy chairman), and Muhammad Sharif Himmatzoda (deputy chairman). The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan was at the core of MIRT and commanded between 8,000 and 15,000 fighters. Between 1993 and 1996, MIRT acted, in effect, as a government in exile. In addition to leading an armed jihad in Tajikistan, MIRT tried to perform active diplomatic functions in order to attain international recognition. In 1995, MIRT leaders visited the United States, Western Europe, Moscow, and Tashkent and established contacts with the United Nations, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and various international nongovernmental organizations. MIRT leaders also visited Libya, Iran, and other Muslim countries. In 1994-1995, MIRT stopped its armed confrontation with the Tajik government and entered the Inter-Tajik Peace Talks as the principal party to the United Tajik Opposition (UTO).

This shift from war to peaceful negotiations was possible partly because all major external stakeholders in the Tajik conflict were uninterested in seeing Tajikistan become another Afghanistan, which, in 1992-1994, was engulfed in a bloody feud between different mujahedeen groups. Some even feared that tens of thousands of MIRT members, many of whom had become seasoned fighters by serving in the Soviet Army, would join the civil war in Afghanistan. It would have been the worst-case scenario for all Central Asian states, Russia, Iran, as well as Pakistan.

⁵⁶ Said Abdullo Nuri (1946-2006) was a self-taught mullah and college-trained technician, born to a family of poor Gharmi Tajiks living in the Wakhsh Valley. Nuri was a pioneer of political Islam in Tajikistan and one of the founders of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Nuri began his political career as a radical Islamist and militant jihadi and transformed into a moderate charismatic Muslim leader and peacemaker. As the officially recognized United Tajik Opposition (UTO) leader, he co-signed the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in June 1997 along with President Emomali Rahmon, which ended the Tajik civil war.

The position of the Afghan government also played an important role in ending the violent conflict in Tajikistan. In 1992-1994, Burhanuddin Rabbani headed the mujahedeen government in Afghanistan. Rabbani received military assistance from Russia. Their pragmatic interests outweighed their ideals of forging cross-border nationalism and supra-national Islamic solidarity. To secure Russian support in the fighting for domination in Afghanistan, the Jamiyati Islami ceased their support to Tajikistani counterparts fighting against the official Dushanbe. As a result, under the pressure of Buhanuddin Rabbani and Iranian governments, the Tajik opposition joined the UN-sponsored peace process to reconcile with its ideological rival – the secular pro-Russian government. The Rahmon government had initially rejected the idea of peace talks with “Islamic fundamentalists,” but later agreed to enter the negotiations under the Russian pressure. By 1996, the Taliban ousted the mujahedeen government and the pro-Rabbani force Northern Alliance (NA)⁵⁷ continued the insurgency war against the Taliban. Throughout the 1990s, the Northerners received military assistance from the Russian bases in Tajikistan. Tajikistan indirectly supported the Northerners by acting as the interlocutor delivering military assistance from Russia and Iran to the Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara groups fighting against the Taliban in Afghanistan. The joint Tajik-Russian military base and airfield at Kulob served as the linchpin for the NA forces in the Panjshir Valley and northern Afghanistan. In the late 1990s, India set up a hospital at Farkhor (Kulab province), providing treatment to the combatants fighting Taliban near Afghanistan's northern. For that reason the leaders of NA were interested in a stable and friendly Tajikistan with no preference about its ideological and political platform.

Burhanuddin Rabbani, a pioneer of political Islam in Afghanistan, was one of the peace brokers for the Tajik reconciliation. His mujahedeen government encouraged mediation and supported the Inter-Tajik Peace Talks.⁵⁸ The first rounds of the talks (in Moscow, Tehran and Islamabad) bore no results until May 1995, when the President of Afghanistan arranged a meeting between the Tajik President Rahmon and his adversary Mullo Abdullo Nuri in Kabul. It was the first meeting between the two rivals.

⁵⁷ Known as the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan or Shura-i Nazar during the intra-Afghan war in 1994-2002, the Northern Alliance was a Tajik-dominated anti-Taliban coalition of commanders affiliated with Ahmadshoh Massoud. The Taliban claimed the Northern Alliance had hidden motives and received help from (Shia) Iran, Russia, and the United States. In September 2001, the leader of the Northern Alliance Massoud died from wounds suffered in a suicide bombing, allegedly carried out by al-Qaeda. The Northern Alliance was the only ground force supporting the international coalition in the Operation Enduring Freedom (October 7 - December 9, 2001), which ousted the Taliban, fragmented it as a political force, and widely discredited as an ideological movement. In early 2002, the Northern Alliance virtually ceased to exist. Many Afghans and even Tajikistani youth considered Ahmadshoh Massoud a national hero.

⁵⁸ Inter-Tajik Peace Talks was a series of talks between the government of President Emomali Rahmon and the United Tajik Opposition under the aegis of the United Nations and with the endorsement of Russia and Iran. It was eight rounds of talks, consultative meetings, and meetings between Rakhmonov and Nuri. The talks began in April 1994 and ended in June 1997 with the signing of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Moscow.

The Taliban's capture of Kabul in September 1996 provided further impetus for Tajik reconciliation. On December 11, 1996, Rahmon and Nuri met again under Rabbani's sponsorship in the Afghan village of Khos Deh, where they signed an important protocol about the ceasefire. This marked a turning point in the peace process.

The Taliban's advancement to the Northern provinces in 1997 forced almost all Tajik exiles to return to Tajikistan. According to Nuri, Tajik Islamists did not approve of the Pashtun nationalism and strict interpretation of Islam promoted by the Taliban leadership, whom they perceived to be ignorant mullahs from the Pakistan-based madrasas.⁵⁹ The Taliban, on the other hand, were suspicious of the Tajik Islamists' close ties with Iran and the predominantly ethnic Tajik and Uzbek political and military leadership in northern Afghanistan. The lack of agreement to form an alliance between the two sides left Said Abdullo Nuri with no other option but to make peace with Dushanbe.

Iran maintained amicable relations with the Tajik opposition throughout the conflict in the 1990s. As mentioned earlier, Tehran supported the emergence of the Tajik opposition in 1991-92 and it hosted the opposition leaders between 1993 and 1998. However, Iran never officially supported the Tajik Islamists' aspiration to topple the secular regime and establish an Islamic state in place. Iranians directed their efforts towards a peaceful settlement of the civil war, since Tehran was interested in maintaining good relations with Russia. Both states wished to prevent greater involvement by the Taliban, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in Tajikistan. Furthermore, Iran, just like Russia, sought to minimize the U.S. and Turkish influence in the region and keep them away from the inter-Tajik negotiations. As the key initiator and official observer of the negotiations, Tehran closely cooperated with Moscow in brokering a peace agreement between the Rahmon government and the Tajik opposition.

Pakistan's involvement in the Tajik civil war is unclear. Pakistan was an official observer of the Inter-Tajik negotiations and Islamabad hosted the third round of the Inter-Tajik Peace Talks in October-November 1994. However, Pakistan provided a refuge for a number of Tajik opposition leaders and it is quite possible that groups based in Pakistan supplied weapons and other forms of military support to the Tajik opposition, with the complicity of the Pakistani officials. However, there is no solid evidence to confirm this suspicion.

Islamabad's propensity to use radical movements as a tool to boost its security has always been a serious impediment for trust-building between Pakistan and the Central Asian states. Until the early 2000s, the Pakistani-Tajik relations were not amicable. In the course of the 1980s and 1990s, the countries supported rival forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan, which has a sizable Pashtun minority, preferred a Pashtun-led and Pakistan-friendly government in Afghanistan. The Pakistani army, backed by the United States, supported the Afghan mujahedeen groups fighting against the Soviet Army in the 1980s. In 1994, Pakistan helped form the Taliban and assisted them in capturing almost all of Afghanistan by 1998. Meanwhile, Tajikistan and Russia supported the Northern Alliance, which eventually helped to overthrow the Taliban regime in late 2001. However, the events of 9/11 changed the geopolitical landscape in Central and South Asia. Pakistan had no choice but to support the international effort in fighting terrorists and the

⁵⁹ Personal interview with S. A. Nuri in October 2002.

Taliban. Accordingly, it redirected its policy toward cooperation with Central Asia, engaging in political and economic cooperation, with the intention to shed Pakistan's image as a sponsor of jihadism in Central Asia.

The Tajik peace process was one of the best-coordinated peace processes in recent history. The United Nations and regional governments (mostly Russia and Iran) became sponsors of the Tajik reconciliation. Fortunately for the Tajiks, international environment favored the Tajik peace process. The fear of "Talibanization" of Central Asia had brought together interests of main sponsors of the warring parties. As mentioned earlier, Russia put pressure on the Rahmon government, while Iran pushed the Tajik Islamists to come to the negotiation table. While external factors were decisive in reaching a peaceful solution to the Tajik conflict, these very factors make the Tajik politics very susceptible to outside influences. As such, a change of the international environment may well instigate new wave of violence.

The United Nations opted for a relatively narrow but realistic peacemaking formula that focused on ending the warfare. As in many other peace processes, the priority of ensuring security first prevailed over a more comprehensive, representative, and transparent peacemaking. While the "security first" approach was successful in stopping the war, it was not as successful in establishing more democratic governance in Tajikistan. Parties and movements that refrained from violence did not have a seat at the negotiation table, nor did they have representation in the transitional government.⁶⁰

The idea that guided the 1997 General Agreement was the principle of power sharing for a transitional period and then full integration under a unified state. The ultimate goal was to turn opponents into partners in the difficult task of governing. The 30-percent quota granted to the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) provided the opposition a place in the government. Incorporating militant Islamists into a secular national government did not turn out to be as risky as initially thought. Tajik Islamists were not ready to govern. They struggled with finding skilled and educated cadre to fill the quota. Most of the former UTO members joined the ruling party without making an effort to form a coalition government or advance their agenda as a political party. None of them insisted on introducing the Sharia rule or building an Islamic state in Tajikistan.

Since coming to power, President Rahmon's first priority has been consolidating his authority in all parts of Tajikistan, including the UTO-controlled Gharm and Badakhshon. The majority of Tajiks have welcomed the consolidation of power. Rahmon has also succeeded in eliminating the central government's dependency on warlords. The "field commanders" and their fighters, who committed gross human rights violations during the war, were guaranteed amnesty in the 1997 General Agreement. In the aftermath of the civil war, they took advantage of the fragile national institutions to pursue power and personal enrichment.

⁶⁰ Kamolludin Abdullaev and Catherine Barnes, eds., *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process* (London: Conciliation Resources, 2001). <http://www.c-r.org/accord/tajik/accord10/index.shtml>

In the parliament (Majlisi Oli) of 1995-1999, there were approximately 20 former field commanders from the pro-governmental *Sitodi Melli* among the 181 deputies. During the “privatization” campaign that followed the peace agreement, many of the so-called “people’s generals” and field commanders were granted state assets and profitable positions with formal and informal income, with the sole aim of convincing these potential peace-spoilers that peace could be more profitable than war. Some, including the former Kulabi military leaders Generals Salim Yaqubov and Ghaffor Mirzoyev, were brought to justice for crimes committed after the proclamation of the general amnesty by the 1997 General Agreement. In 1999, a quick and effective campaign was undertaken to confiscate arms and introduce a ban on carrying of weapons by unauthorized persons. Along with its efforts to bring stability co-opting potential peace spoilers, the government restored national institutions by forming a national army, police, and legal system.

These measures bore some positive results. In the next bicameral parliament *Majlisi Oli* of 2000-2005, there were virtually no warlords among the deputies. In general, the majority of the Tajik population welcomed these initiatives by the central government, as they promised to bring stability and facilitate the decline of warlordism in Tajikistan.

As a result of this illiberal peacemaking, however, most former militia leaders, although disengaged from militant pursuits, continue to increase their personal wealth. Some maintain control of the drug trade with Afghan dealers and are involved in criminal activities including tax evasion, illegal taxation and barter deals, smuggling, illicit production and, so on. They are thus less likely to squander these privileges by deciding to return to war. As such, these elites are, in effect, guardians of the shaky peace in Tajikistan and the only force that may stop the jihadi incursion from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The assessments of the Tajik peace vary. The UN considers the Tajik peace settlement as one the most successful they have ever sponsored. Official Dushanbe and many Tajiks would agree with this judgment, as they believe the peace process saved the nation from a catastrophe and helped national consolidation. Yet many in the West and Tajikistan itself consider the Tajik peace an exclusive bargaining deal between the two regional forces represented by pro-Communist Kulabis and Gharmi-dominated Islamists, who enriched themselves and attained positions of power in the wake of the peace process. Nevertheless, the Tajik peace process offers important lessons, which may be useful in the context of the current crisis in Afghanistan:

- The priority in peacemaking effort should be given to protecting the civilian population;
- The conflict should be mapped accurately and its convergence with other conflicts in the region should be minimized if not avoided;
- Motivations of all external stakeholders in stopping the war is essential;
- Negotiated settlement is the most preferable option to end the civil war;
- Peace talks with those who are ready for such talks is a practical tool to stop the war;
- Peace talks should focus on the conditions, where militants would be prepared to put down their weapons and the benefits they would receive for doing so;
- Individual groups of fighters can be absorbed into the country's police or armed forces, while their political leaders can be given chance to be represented in government at both the national and local levels.

- Islamists are not inevitably and hopelessly radical and anti-systemic. They would engage in constructive dialogue out of pragmatic considerations.

The Tajik case, however, hardly represents an ideal solution. The problem of relationship of the secular state with Islamism was never addressed. The Islamic Renaissance Party was legalized, while secularism remained central to Tajikistan's constitution. It means that in the long-term, the tension between secularism and Islamism remains unresolved in the Tajik politics.

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan joins Afghan Jihad

The ties between the Central Asian and Afghan insurgencies began developing in mid-1996. This was when the Taliban provided Osama Bin Laden a safe haven in Afghanistan and the leaders of Uzbek militant Islamists Juma Namangani and Tahir Yuldashev crossed the Tajik-Afghan border to Kabul and Peshawar. For these three young Muslims – one Arab and two Uzbeks – it was not the first trip to Afghanistan. The Yemeni-born and from an affluent family, Osama was a frequent visitor to the region since the beginning of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. From 1986-1988, his permanent abode was in Pakistan. During this time, he built several training camps for non-Afghan mujahedeen, who were recruited by his Maktab al-Khidimat offices worldwide (including in Detroit and Brooklyn). In 1988, with the first signs of victory over the Soviets, Osama enthusiastically embarked on setting up an international terrorist network– al-Qaeda. That was the year, when a 19-year old Soviet college graduate, a poor Uzbek from Fergana Valley Juma Namangani (then Juma Hojiev) fought as a Soviet paratrooper in Afghanistan against the mujahedeen. When the Uzbek government banned the Islamic parties and organizations in 1992, many members of these parties fled to Tajikistan to join the opposition in the civil war. There, they formed the Namangan Battalion, the core of which was comprised of fighters from the Namangan town of Fergana Valley. Juma Hojiev (who later took the nickname of Namangani) became the leader of the battalion. It was during the first years of the Tajik civil war that the cooperation between radical Islamists of Central and South Asia began. In February 1993, Juma Namangani illegally crossed the Tajik-Afghan border to join the Afghan mujahedeen's ranks. He received training in the Pakistani ISI-run camps Bader 2 and Miran Shah in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Upon his return from Afghanistan in the summer of 1993, Juma Namangani, with the financial support of ISI and other Islamist groups, established his own training camp in Qarategin Valley in Tajikistan. Meanwhile, Namangani maintained contacts with the regional posts of ISI in the northern Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In September 1996, when the Taliban captured Kabul and proclaimed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, religious extremists from Pakistan, Central Asia, and other regions moved to Afghanistan under the pretext of waging jihad against “infidels”. In reality, many of them were marginalized and outlawed religious groups in their own countries and sought refuge in this isolated country. Meanwhile, the war in Tajikistan was coming to an end. The irreconcilable members of the Tajik opposition fled to Afghanistan and Pakistan and joined the international terrorist network. Among those who fled Tajikistan was the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). IMU was formed in the territory of Tajikistan in mid-1996. However, other sources claim it was formed in Kabul or even in Istanbul. IMU mostly consisted of the exiled members of Uzbek Islamic parties, such as *Adolat*, *Islamic Renaissance Party*, *Islamic Party of Turkistan*,

Islam Lashgari, and others. The exiled Uzbek Islamist Tahir Yuldashev emerged as IMU's political leader, while his compatriot Juma Hojoyev (Namangani) led the military arm of the organization. They had unsuccessfully attempted to introduce *Sharia* in Fergana Valley. Persecuted by the Uzbek regime, most of these activists fled to Tajikistan, where they fought alongside the Tajik Islamists against the secular Tajik government in 1992-1996. However, ethnic-nationalist rivalry between Tajiks and Uzbeks and the Tajik opposition's acceptance of the peace deal with the Rahmon government ended this alliance. Tahir Yuldashev accused the Tajik Islamists of "betrayal", lamenting that, "We were only 15 kilometers away from capturing Dushanbe and victory was within reach, but UTO betrayed our ideals for just a few seats in the parliament." IMU, being deprived of political participation in Uzbekistan, having been "betrayed" by Tajik Islamists, and finding no place in reconciled Tajikistan, had no other option but to flee to Afghanistan.

Under the Taliban rule (1996-2001), Afghanistan attracted Muslim militants from Central Asia, Kashmir, western China, and Northern Caucasus. IMU became one of the biggest non-Afghan jihadi groups in Afghanistan. Until early 2002, the IMU headquarters was located in Kandahar, which was essentially the capital of the Islamist Taliban movement. In September of 2001, the US government added IMU to the list of terrorist organizations.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the West was anxious about Central Asian Muslims' reaction to the terrorist acts against America and the subsequent war against the Taliban. They worried that the war may stir jihadi sentiments in the post-Soviet Central Asia, as it did in Pakistan, where two major parties, Jamiyati Ulemai Islam and Jamaati Islami tried to use the war in Afghanistan for populist aims. Some expected bin Laden's International Islamist Front to become a center of gravitation for Central Asian Islamist organizations. It was reported that some descendants of the Uzbek and Tajik Basmachi émigré in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia provided shelter and cash for their co-ethnics who escaped the "infidel" government of Uzbekistan. However, the large-scale anti-American sentiment and sympathy for the Taliban as was witnessed in Pakistan did not occur in Central Asian states. Uzbekistan was the first Central Asian state to receive American combat aircraft, notably at the Karshi-Khanabad Air Base. In October-November 2001, this base was used for aerial patrol and strike missions against the Taliban. United States and France also negotiated a deal with the Tajik and Kyrgyz governments concerning aircraft deployment to their territories. A few months later another important allied base, Manas Air Base, was established in Kyrgyzstan. In early 2002, Dushanbe provided its airport to the French forces.

Although the US airstrikes evoked some negative public opinion and criticism by some Tajik politicians, the Tajik people in general opposed the Taliban and expressed support for the international coalition mission in Afghanistan. Polls conducted in late September 2001 found that 99 percent of respondents approved punitive measures against the terrorists. Tajik Islamists, now incorporated in the Tajik government as the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), were equally apprehensive of the rise of the Taliban. Tajikistan was primarily concerned that the Taliban would defeat the Northern Alliance, causing immense refugee flows from northern Afghanistan into Tajikistan. In addition to these political concerns, there were ethnic and religious grounds for the prevalent anti-Taliban and anti-al-Qaeda sentiments in Tajikistan. Two days before the attack on New York and Washington DC, the Northern Alliance leader Ahmad

Shah Massoud was killed by Arab suicide bombers in northern Afghanistan. For many Tajiks on both banks of the Amu Darya River, Massoud's resolute struggle against the Taliban was a symbol of national courage and dedication. Furthermore, the memory of a destructive civil war that took the lives of over 50,000 people was still fresh in Tajik people's mind and they did not want to see the replay of that scenario.

In May 2001, IMU as well as other jamaats recognized Mullah Omar as Ameer al Momeneen – the leader of all Muslims. In 2001, IMU temporarily changed its name to Islamic Movement of Turkistan, but later retracted that move, most likely at the Taliban's demand. Generations of Uzbeks have sought to create *Turkistan*, which would include, among others, the northern territories of Afghanistan. Not surprisingly, the Taliban would never tolerate any *Turkistan* aspirations potentially threatening the territorial integrity of Afghanistan. Furthermore, the Taliban was indifferent to IMU's original goals of toppling the Karimov and other regimes in Central Asia. The Taliban needed IMU as military force fighting against the Northern Alliance and, later, the coalition forces.

The Uzbek authorities claim that IMU has established branches in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to plot terrorist acts against the Karimov and Nazarbaev regimes. They also accuse IMU of being responsible for a number of terrorist attacks that took place in the early 2000s. It is difficult to confirm whether these terrorist acts in Uzbekistan were actually masterminded by the IMU or its affiliates. According to Tahir Yuldashev, while in Afghanistan, IMU disavowed its initial goal of toppling Islam Karimov's regime in Uzbekistan and adopted al-Qaeda's ideology of the global jihad against the United States and the West. It is obvious that IMU, as well as other non-Afghan militant groups, have agreed to this change of objectives and accepted the Taliban leadership out of necessity to secure their presence in the territory of Afghanistan.

Mullah Omar strove to strengthen internal cohesion of the Taliban and other militant groups in Afghanistan. It was reported that in the spring of 2001, he appointed Juma Namangani as the Deputy Defense Minister of Afghanistan. By appointing an IMU leader to a prominent position, Mullah Omar sought to limit and control foreign groupings in Afghanistan, which did not always recognize the Taliban's authority and posed a serious threat to the Taliban government in a case of a conflict.

This policy of balancing the Taliban's interests and aspirations of non-Afghan jihadis proved effective. Even after being ousted in early 2002, Mullah Omar was able to keep different jihadi groups under his influence and coordinate their activities. He was able to ensure, through persuasion or threat, that non-Afghans recognize the priority of the Afghan jihad over all other interests.

During the first days of the Operation Enduring Freedom, the coalition forces were able to inflict major losses to and practically destroy the infrastructure of the Taliban and terrorist groups in Afghanistan's territory. In October 2001, Juma Namangani's car was destroyed by an aerial strike in the Kunduz province. The Taliban's major defeat in the Kunduz province and death of Juma Namangani led to the leadership crisis within IMU. Tahir Yuldashev told his fighters to look after themselves and their families, without offering much guidance. Uzbek fighters, fearing for the safety of their families, had no choice but to retreat to Waziristan, Pakistan.

While in Pakistan, Uzbek fighters, failing to overcome internal and external pressures, split up. The uncertainties in face of mass bombardments, heavy losses, and the lack of leadership made the fighters to think twice about their own well-being and pragmatic considerations. One group of IMU fighters wanted to continue jihad against the coalition forces. Their leader Najmiddin Jalolov made the decision to join al-Qaeda and become its Central Asia cell. This splinter organization is now known as Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and has about 350-400 fighters. In 2005, the United States included IJU to its list of terrorist organizations. According to US government officials, IJU was responsible for the terrorist acts in Uzbekistan and attacks on US and Israeli embassies in Tashkent and General Prosecutor's Office of Uzbekistan between 2002 and 2005.

The rest of IMU continued operating along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, with their permanent base in South Waziristan, Pakistan. While in Pakistan and Afghanistan, Uzbeks sought the locals' sympathy by claiming to be devout Muslim *muhajirs* (émigré), who had escaped oppression and unjust rule to find refuge in a Muslim country. However, the residents of South Waziristan turned against them because of the violence committed by Uzbeks against the local tribes. During the conflict in the region of Wana on March 29, 2007, local Pashtun tribal militia led by Taliban commander Maulvi Nazir attacked the Uzbeks. A few days later, a *jirga* of the Zallikhel and Tojikhel clans of the predominant Ahmadzai Wazir tribe declared jihad against the Uzbeks and their supporters. According to some sources, the son of the famous Afghan mujahed Jalaluddin Haqqani Siraj Haqqani tried to mediate the conflict between the Uzbeks and local Pashtuns, but to no avail. The spokesperson for Pashtun militias accused IMU not only of killing tribesmen, but also failing "to participate in the jihad in Afghanistan for the past four years." Some witnesses claim the Pakistani government's artillery supported the Pakistani Taliban and fired on the Uzbek bunkers. The IMU lost between 150 and 230 fighters (out of total 1000 Uzbek force) as a result of the assault.

This episode highlights the tension between al-Qaeda, its regional affiliates like the IMU, and local Taliban groups. Al-Qaeda has been a global movement uniting various Salafi groups, Sunni Muslims of all races and cultures under the banner of *jihad*. Al-Qaeda rejects folk traditions in favor of religious unification of the like-minded Muslims. Meanwhile, the Taliban, as the followers of the strict Pashtun code of conduct (Pashtunwali), distinguish themselves from the neighboring Muslims. They may commit crimes against Hazara, Uzbeks, and Tajiks for the mere fact that they are non-members of the community, even if they adhere to the shared Islamic ideology. However, according to al-Qaeda's interpretation of jihad, Muslims must forego their ethnic and tribal allegiances to fight the common enemy or the "infidels". Many fundamentalist Arab members of al-Qaeda, who had received Western education and/or grew up away from their homes, made the transition from local to global identity more effortlessly. Similarly, it is easier for many "born-again" Muslims from traditionally secular communities in Europe, like Tatars and Bosniaks, as well as Muslim converts of Western origin, to forego their local identities and assume the role of a global jihadi. The Taliban, on the other hand, never succeeded in embracing Wahabbism in its entirety. As a result, there has always been a conflict between the Wahabbiya and Pashtunwali and between Pashtun and non-Pashtun jihadis in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In August 2009, the US predator airstrike in South Waziristan killed Tahir Yuldashev. Usman Odil was announced the new leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. In late 2009, the Pakistani army carried out a massive operation against Taliban and its allies, eliminating most of their bases in South Waziristan. Most militants retreated to North Waziristan and the mountainous areas of the Afghan-Pakistani border. The Taliban leader in North Waziristan Hafez Gul Bahadar and the top Taliban commander in the Mir Ali region Sadiq Noor provided shelter for Central Asian jihadi groups. Qari Zia Rahman, who operates in Pakistan's Bajaur tribal agency and Afghanistan's Nuristan and Kunar provinces, is another patron of Central Asian jihadis. Rahman's fighters include Chechens, Arabs, Uzbeks and Turkmens. Most of Central Asian jihadis have found safe havens in the tribal regions under the direct Taliban control. In these regions, the Taliban impose *Sharia* rule, run courts, collect taxes, maintain security forces, and provide other basic services to the public, while also collaborating with the Pakistani Army.

Between September 2010 and January 2011, the US air force increased the pressure on the Taliban in North Waziristan. Many of the air strikes targeted bases of the IMU splinter group Islamic Jihad Union. More recent reports indicate that the IMU is penetrating the northern Afghan provinces through its base in northwest Pakistan. IMU also appears to be active in Kunduz and Takhar provinces, which border Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The Taliban have skillfully utilized IMU in promoting their interests. They have appointed some IMU leaders to top-level positions in the Taliban-run "shadow governments" of Afghan provinces. By working with IMU, the Taliban seek to create pro-Taliban sentiment among traditionally anti-Pashtun communities of the Afghan north. As non-Pashtuns, Uzbeks also have an easier time infiltrating traditional anti-Taliban parties, particularly the Tajik-dominated Jamiyati Islami. This is contributing to the growing instability in the Afghan north.

According to International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the Taliban and its ally IMU maintain a strong presence in the northern Afghan provinces of Badakhshan, Baghlan, Balkh, Faryab, Jawzjan, Kunduz, Samangan, Sar-i-Pul, and Takhar, where they have established suicide training camps. Reportedly, some Taliban commanders are in touch with their counterparts in Central Asia. Some Afghan officials have confirmed these reports, noting that Central Asians have been spotted in northern Afghanistan, where they closely cooperate with the Taliban and engage in illegal drug-trafficking.

Today IMU is not a small band of militants focused solely on toppling the Uzbek regime. It has a much wider reach and more ambitious goals. It is clearly engaged in propagating global jihad and recruiting more jihadis along the Afghan border with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. IMU uses different online tools in its promotion of jihad. It has frequently updated websites, *Furqon.com* and *Furqon.info*, which contain an array of brochures, poems, audio-messages, lectures, videos, and photos that promote extremist Islamist ideology and violent jihad. The websites are run by IMU's media wing Jundullah studio, which is staffed by, among others, professional Uzbek journalists. Jundullah produces and disseminates videos showing mujahedeen from Russia, Germany, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Tunisia, and Tajikistan training and even engaging in real-life operations against the Pakistani military South Waziristan.

Recent rise in violence in Central Asia

Central Asia experienced relative calm beginning late 2001. Many attributed it to the coalition success in defeating the Taliban. This calm did not last long, however, with violence breaking out in the spring of 2009. In May 2009, one of the former opposition field commanders Mullo Abdullo (Rahimov) came back to Tavildara region of Tajikistan. Having rejected the peace agreement that ended the Tajik civil war in 1997, Mullo Abdullo had fled to Afghanistan with his fighters. After the United States launched the Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, Mullo Abdullo, along with some Taliban fighters, fled to Pakistan's tribal areas. His re-appearance in Tajikistan in May 2009 caused panic, with the local media portraying him as the Tajik Osama bin Laden.

One potential explanation for his return to Central Asia has to do with the Pakistani government's policies toward eliminating foreign terrorist groups from its territory. As mentioned earlier, the Pakistani government, for quite some time, employed conciliatory approach in dealing with the Taliban on its territory and avoided full-scale military confrontation. In September 2006, Pervez Musharraf's government brokered a peace deal with local tribesmen in North Waziristan to stop the cross-border movements of militants and sheltering of foreign fighters on Pakistan's soil. However, the Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan or TTP) breached the deal in the spring of 2007 and the situation in the region deteriorated. In February 2008, the peace truce with TTP was restored and Taliban coalition pledged not to shelter foreigners. When the local Taliban violated the truce again, the Pakistani army began full-scale military operations against the Taliban in May 2009, with the intent of establishing complete control over the Swat Valley. According to official reports, in the course of fierce battles, nearly a thousand fighters were killed and two million people were displaced.

It is likely the deteriorating situation in Pakistan and lack of motivation to fight alongside the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan prompted Mullo Abdullo and his 100 fighters to leave Pakistan and head to Tavildara, which served as Mullo Abdullo's stronghold during the Tajik civil war. On May 15, the Tajik government began its operation "Poppy 2009" allegedly aimed at eliminating opium production in the region. The motives of the operations were immediately questioned, since the climate of the mountainous Gharm region is not at all conducive to poppy production. Upon his return home, Mullo Abdullo tried to establish contact with the government and former opposition leaders. However, neither the government nor former UTO leaders were interested in a dialogue with him. By 2009, many of the former UTO leaders were either imprisoned or co-opted and joined the Rahmon government. One of the former UTO leaders Mirzo Ziyoev was forced to resign in 2006 and relocated to his native Tavildara. However, despite his grudge against the Rahmon regime, Mirzo Ziyoev refused to cooperate with Mullo Abdullo, as he did not want the war to resume.

Meanwhile, on July 8, 2009, an armed skirmish took place between the Tajik armed forces and Mullo Abdullo's fighters. As a result, 17 people died from both sides. In retaliation, Mullo Abdullo's band attacked the local police department in Childara. The sequence of these events reminded many analysts of the situation during the 1992-1997 civil war, where the opposition

engaged in guerilla warfare in the mountainous regions and the government forces unsuccessfully fought back to pushed them out.

However, Mirzo Ziyoev's involvement in these events remains a big mystery. The Tajik authorities claimed that Ziyoev fought with Mullo Abdullo's forces and that he was involved with IMU and financed his activities through drug-trafficking. During the July 8 operations Ziyoev was arrested. He supposedly agreed to cooperate with the government forces by showing the weapons cache and engaging in negotiations with Mullo Abdullo's fighters. However, a couple days later on July 11, Mirzo Ziyoev was killed in a battle between the government forces and Mullo Abdullo's fighters. The government claims that "during the operation in the Surkhob valley village of Aghba, an illegal group of gunmen suddenly attacked and killed Mirzo Ziyoev." However, such illogical behavior of changing sides by the former opposition fighter Mirzo Ziyoev raised questions among the analysts. As an experienced insurgent, Ziyoev knew that the opposition in Tajikistan was weak and had no motivation to fight against the government, which, despite its deficiencies, was regarded as legitimate by the majority of the population. Ziyoev did provide shelter for IMU in 1994-2000 and considered Juma Namangani his combatant in arms but he was never been part of this Uzbek movement. IMU leader Tahir Yuldashev confirmed this during his audio-message broadcast on Radio "Freedom" Uzbek service, when said that Ziyoev was never a member of IMU and that he was killed by Tajik Special Forces. Most probably, Ziyoev sought to mediate the conflict between the Mullo Abdullo forces and the government. However, the government feared that he would join Mullo Abdullo and eliminated him.

The next wave of instability in Tajikistan broke out in August 2010, when a group of 25 prisoners escaped from the State National Security Committee's detention center in Dushanbe – just blocks away from the presidential residence. The escapees had been charged with plotting against the state and sentenced to a long-term imprisonment. Among them were 15 Tajiks (mostly former UTO opposition figures), five detainees of the Caucasus origin, four Afghans, and two Uzbek nationals. According to Tajik authorities, the escape was organized by Ibrohim Nasriddinov, reportedly a former inmate of Guantanamo Bay. The escapees somehow managed to keep the detention center under their control for four hours before killing five guards and fleeing to the Gharm region. They were able to arm themselves with 20 pistols, seven AK-47s, a machine-gun, and grenades. A few days later, on September 3, two suicide bombers hit the police station in Khujand – Tajikistan's northern capital. The explosion killed four people and injured dozens. By then, the government had launched a military operation in Gharm in order to capture the fugitives. On September 19, at least 28 government troops were killed in a sudden attack in Kamarob Gorge. On October 6, at least 27 government troops were killed in a military helicopter crash. The Tajik Defense Ministry insisted that fighters from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Chechnya were part of the ambush.

Government officials accused Mirzokhuja Ahmadov (aka Belgi) for providing shelter to Mullo Abdullo since the latter's return from Afghanistan. Finally, after negotiations with the government officials, Ahmadov re-joined the government and helped locate and capture Mullo Abdullo and his men. Later another prominent commander Shoh Iskandarov decided to join the government and offered assistance in fighting militants in the mountains. In mid-April 2011, the government forces killed 61-year old Mullo Abdullo and his 14 men were in Gharm, which supposedly marked the end of the operations that began in August 2010.

The recent outbreak of violence in Tajikistan seemed to confirm the alarmist prognosis that the conflict in Afghanistan was spilling over to Central Asia and that Central Asia was fast becoming the next hotbed for the jihadi activities. The Tajik government, for once, did not spare the opportunity to portray the events as the Tajik government's successful fight against terrorism. However, the involvement of the former opposition figures from the Tajik civil war period certainly raises questions about whether these events were truly a spillover from the Afghan crisis or leftovers of the Tajik civil war. This is the subject of analysis of the next chapter.

Chapter 4. Prospect for Talibanization of Central Asia

Previous chapters provided a historical background for Muslim movements and the post-9/11 outbreak of violence, which provides an analytical framework for assessing the conflict in Afghanistan-Pakistan vis-a-vis Central Asia. The risk of Afghanistan and Pakistan falling into the hands of Islamic radicals after the US withdrawal in 2011-2014 remains grave. However, it is not clear whether the departure of US troops from Afghanistan will directly affect security in Central Asia by opening a way for the radical "Islamic alternative" to the incumbent secular regimes. This chapter focuses on the major factors that may radicalize Central Asia and trigger the spillover effect.

The prevalent visions of the probability of the talibanization of Central Asia

Theoretically and empirically, there are two polar visions about the impact of the conflict in Afghanistan-Pakistan on Central Asia. The first claims that the risk of the rapid radicalization of Islamism in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in case of the US withdrawal is relatively low. This vision asserts that the *jihad*, as it has been manifest in Afghanistan and Pakistan, is a local trend and its non-Afghan component is easily removable. Al-Qaeda, as an international terrorist network, therefore, should be seen as a distinct phenomenon, separate from the Taliban, which is an Afghan mujahed force.⁶¹ In light of Osama bin Laden's demise on May 1, 2011, al-Qaeda is likely to focus more on surviving in Pakistan rather than executing significant operations elsewhere. Furthermore, al-Qaeda realizes that Talibanism is effectively a Pashtun phenomenon imbued in the Afghan history rather than a pan-Islamic movement targeted against "infidels".

These claims have a merit. Indeed, there are no Tajik or Uzbek Taliban similar to the Pakistani Taliban that emerged in Pakistan's tribal zone or African Taliban that surfaced in Somalia and Nigeria in 2004-2007. Talibanism is not an ideological movement that can easily apply across national borders. Although the Pakistani Taliban share ethnic ties with their Afghan comrades and support their jihad, they are, in fact, citizens of a different state and follow their own political trajectory. Pakistani authorities are well aware of this difference and are seeking to widen this gap. They attack only the Taliban who fight against the Pakistani state, ignoring the groups that are fighting against the Afghan government and the US forces in Afghanistan.

⁶¹ Radha Vinod Raju, "Can the Taliban be convinced to renounce al Qaeda?" *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Article no. 3335*, February 23, 2011
<http://www.ipcs.org/article/pakistan/can-the-taliban-be-convinced-to-renounce-al-qaeda-3335.html>

Afghanistan is central to the global jihad. According to jihadi ideologues, Afghanistan should serve as the core and center of the Islamic Caliphate. This country embodies a convergence of two notions of a global caliphate (macro level) and regional ethnic movement (micro level).⁶² Osama Bin Laden himself, as well as all other foreign mujahedeen, pledged allegiance to Mullah Omar as the ruler of all Muslims of the world. In this sense, Afghanistan is not a national Afghan state, but a pan-Islamic state for all Muslims and members of the *ummah* (Islamic community). As a result, the main task for non-Afghan Muslims, including Central Asians, should be helping the Taliban to retake the country.

Have the Central Asian Muslims responded to this call for *jihad*? The answer is likely to be “no”. No Taliban emerged and no Muslim rage has been detected in Central Asia against the West. There have not been protests against local rulers for supporting the US invasion of Afghanistan. This has a historical precedent. As mentioned in the previous chapters, in the 1920s Afghans provided a very limited and mostly symbolic support to their Central Asian brethren fighting against the Bolsheviks. Throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s no *mujahedeen* or Taliban force directly targeted Central Asian neighbors despite the latter’s support of the Soviet and Western military missions. Pan-Islamism, pan-Turkism, pan-Iranism and other trans-national movements never prevailed over national interests in Central Asian political agenda.

Against this backdrop, IMU appears to be a suppressed group of militants that joined the Taliban out of hopelessness and not because of a deep-seated desire to build a caliphate with Afghanistan at its core. The majority of Uzbeks is not likely to embrace the idea of jihad in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Most of Afghan Uzbeks are descendants of Central Asian immigrants, who arrived in Afghanistan between 16th and 20th centuries. During the Soviet-Afghan War, the Afghan Uzbeks’ contribution to jihad was negligible. Throughout the 1980s and 2000s, Afghan Uzbek leaders maintained amicable relations with Uzbekistan and Turkey. For Afghan Uzbeks, jihad propagated by the Taliban as a war against the US forces and Karzai government has not been as attractive as the more tangible idea of *Turkistan*.

Most IMU members trace their origin to Fergana Valley. Fergana Valley is relatively small (300 km long and about 70 km wide), but is known as a major agricultural, industrial, and cultural oasis in the very heart of Central Asia. Unlike the nomadic Pashtuns, Uzbeks of Fergana Valley are sedentary, with strong ties to their territory. In 1918-1923, Fergana Valley served as a home to a religiously-inspired national resistance to the Bolsheviks. Since the collapse of the USSR, all of the problems of Central Asia have manifested in a concentrated form in Fergana Valley. With the current population of nearly twelve million, Fergana Valley is divided between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Its population density on average is 360 persons per square kilometer, whereas the overall population density in Central Asia is a mere 14 persons per square kilometer. The Valley suffers from chronic unemployment and lack of arable lands.

⁶² Brian Glyn Williams, “The Failure of Al Qaeda Basing Projects from Afghanistan to Iraq,” in *Denial of Sanctuary. Understanding Terrorist Safe Havens*, ed. Michael Innes (London: Praeger, 2007).

With almost 80 percent unemployment rate, most of the population is forced to work in Russia as unprivileged and underpaid labor migrants.

Similar to IMU, the irreconcilable elements of the Tajik opposition suffered internal problems at home. They have shown no interest in fighting in support of the Taliban, who have long been antagonistic toward the Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance. Likewise, no feeling of solidarity has been developed between Afghanistan-based Tajik and Uzbek communities, mirroring the actual “cold war” between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The number of ethnic Tajiks in IMU is relatively low.

In light of recent rise in violence in Central Asia and alleged return of Central Asian fighters from Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is important to examine the motivations behind the return. The militants’ motivation to cross the border to return home has a historical precedent. Ibrahimbek, the Basmachi leader of the semi-nomadic Lokai Uzbek tribe, was forced to flee to Afghanistan after fighting against the Bolsheviks in 1921-1926. In 1928-1931, Ibrahimbek was caught up in inter-Afghan feuds, where each party sought to exploit Uzbek fighters for their own aims. Available sources indicate, however, that the emigrant population’s first and foremost concern was their safety and survival. Perpetually unstable Afghanistan, populated by unfriendly tribes, was not welcoming to Central Asians. As a result, Ibrahimbek and his tribesmen chose to cross the river and return to the Soviet Tajikistan in 1931. Understanding the circumstances that led Ibrahimbek and his men to leave Afghanistan and return home may help interpret the motivations and reasons for Tajik and Uzbek mujaheds crossing the same border in 2009-2011. Ibrahimbek and his men had two options: 1) to resume the anti-Soviet insurgency in Tajikistan, but not before making sure that he is supported by the local population and tribesmen. For him it was clear that insurgency in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is possible only if the insurgents may use Afghanistan as a supporting base and shelter. Making sure that Afghanistan is available has always been a crucial prerequisite for Central Asian insurgency; 2) to make a peace deal with Bolsheviks in order to save the families, but without harming Ibrahimbek’s personal prestige as a holy warrior. In other words, he wanted to gain a sufficient level of legitimacy for his insurgency before integration into the Tajik society. Ibrahimbek understood he would most likely never succeed in pursuing either option, but his desire to abandon the unsafe and unfriendly Afghanistan prevailed. His worst expectations came true: neither of the two options he had hoped for worked out. The Basmachis did not gain the support of the local population. Moreover, the Soviet authorities declared Ibrahimbek “an agent of England and world imperialism” and ignored his calls to make peace, which he conveyed to authorities before crossing the border. A truce would have been possible, if the Soviets were not sure that they could solve the problem without damaging their legitimacy and compromising their interests and values.

It would be a mistake to equate the Basmachis to modern mujahedeen. Jihad of Central Asians in the 1920s had its source in religious-cultural conservatism and tribalism rather than in Islamism as a political ideology. Modern Islamists are united and managed by professional administrators, experienced fundraisers, sophisticated infrastructure, modern weaponry, and a means of communication. However, the people, their culture and value system, behavioral patterns have not drastically changed. Undoubtedly, however, modern Islamism in Central Asia emerged partly within a tradition rooted in the 1920s. As such, historical parallels may work well in shedding

light on the current situation in the very same region that include Fergana Valley, Eastern Bukhara (central and southern Tajikistan), and Afghanistan. Historical parallels are especially relevant if they provide clues about how to bring stability to the region. Central Asia and Afghanistan were indeed stabilized by the mid-1930s and not even a minor jihad had taken place in the region until the very end of the 1970s.

If we consider this logic and arguments as valid and then apply them to the current situation, then IMU's actions can be explained as more of a survival strategy than ferocious jihad. In that case, headlines by local and international media about IMU's increasing terrorist risk should be read with a great deal of skepticism.

There are also conspiratorial explanations for IMU's activities. Documents published in April 2011 by the Wikileaks informed that Oybek Jabbarov, an Uzbek inmate at the Guantanamo Bay prison, claimed to be an officer of the Uzbek National Security Service (SNB). According to Wikileaks, prior to this, a Kyrgyz politician asserted that Uzbekistan runs a network of its agents in Afghanistan-Pakistan, including those planted in IMU. He also claimed that this is an important element of cooperation between the United States and Uzbekistan.⁶³ These suspicions reinforce the claims of one of the former UTO commanders, who referred to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) as "Islamkarimov Movement of Uzbekistan."⁶⁴ While these allegations cannot be completely confirmed, intelligence service's involvement in the conflict should be taken into account, given the fact national security services in the post-Soviet Central Asian States are heirs of the KGB.

In support of the view claiming Central Asia's relative distance from global jihad, one may point out that Central Asia is not a territory "occupied by the infidels," such as Chechnya, Xinjiang, and Kashmir. Central Asia is not in the "jihad zone", since no images portraying Muslim suffering and death in Central Asia are available on TV or Internet to attract volunteers for jihad from all over the world. In light of this, one should be skeptical of Tajik and Uzbek authorities' interpretation and the media coverage of terrorist activities in their territories. More importantly, negotiating and opening dialogue with rank-and-file fighters, their family members, including women can be a realistic and even desirable approach to peacebuilding in the region. Building bridges and enhancing mutual understanding aimed at achieving peace and national conciliation should be central to these informal and formal meetings and talks. Given the painful, vain, and even humiliating attempts to negotiate with much more powerful and dangerous Taliban, a proposal to talk to Uzbek and Tajik mujahedeen based in Afghanistan-Pakistan sounds even more realistic, promising, and inexpensive.

Underestimating the power and aggression of radical Islamists is no less harmful than overestimating them. Therefore, considering the opposite, more alarmist assessment of the jihadi network's strength in Central and South Asia is important. Those who support this view have

⁶³ "Wikileaks sheds light on Uzbek Guantanamo inmate," *The Times of Central Asia*, April 28, 2011.

⁶⁴ Olga Tutubalina, "M. Ahmadov: 'My dostanem ih i v pravitel'stve'" ["M. Ahmadov: 'We will get them even within the government.'"], *Asia-Plus*, January 12, 2011.

<http://news.tj/ru/newspaper/article/m-akhmadov-my-dostanem-ikh-i-v-pravitelstve>

stated that the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan is “internationalizing.” Many experts argue that, in fact, al-Qaeda is a de-centralized organization, consisting of several groups, which operate independently. They believe that the Obama administration’s plan to bring more troops to Afghanistan before leaving the country in 2014 and the demise of Osama bin Laden in May 2011 have caused adequate reaction among global jihadis keen to target the United States and its allies in South and Central Asia. In their view, al-Qaeda and the Taliban have managed to preserve the ability, organizational structure, charisma, and strength that attract the like-minded radical Muslims of Central Asia, Xinjiang, and the North Caucasus. They also point out that non-Afghan jihadis are an important asset to the Taliban and al-Qaeda, as they are better trained than local Afghan rebels and their presence in Afghanistan-Pakistan provide a great deal of legitimacy for jihad against United States and its allies.

In support of their assessment, proponents of the alarmist assessment argue that from the late Soviet period, Central Asia has been a center of militant Islam and growing radicalization of Islamism since the demise of the USSR. They also tend to see linkages between the various jamaats in Afghanistan-Pakistan and their connection with insurgency in South Asia. Pointing out the presence of IMU and IJU bases in Pakistan and Afghanistan, they argue that the unified front of Islamic jihad stretching from Xinjiang to North Caucasus is a reality. Finally, they argue that international jihadis’ infiltration from Afghanistan-Pakistan into Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and their acceptance by the oppressed Tajik and Uzbek Muslims is a scenario that cannot be rejected. Mullo Abdullo’s recent attempt to establish a base in Rasht Valley in Tajikistan can certainly be indicative of this scenario. The comeback of the irreconcilable UTO fighters has all grounds to be interpreted as initial, albeit unsuccessful, phase of the Talibanization of Central Asia.

Virtually all Central Asian regimes support this alarmist assessment. In late April 2011, the head of State Committee on National Security of Kyrgyzstan declared that about 400 Kyrgyzstani citizens of the Uzbeki origin formed a terrorist organization, Islamic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, in Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁶⁵ Prior to this, he made an alarmist forecast that in 2011 a war between Afghanistan-backed insurgents and authorities would break out in Tajikistan.⁶⁶

It is plausible that, in an attempt to escape persistent American drone attacks against the Taliban bases in Pakistan’s tribal zone, jihadis from Central Asia have begun returning home. Their aim is to establish new sanctuaries for the Taliban and al-Qaeda in the territories Tajikistan poorly controlled by the corrupt and weak Emomali Rahmon regime.

In fact, people in Central Asia are increasingly associating their future with growing the Taliban and even al-Qaeda influence. Even if the threat is not real, people’s overall perception is

⁶⁵ “Glava kirgizskoj spetsluzhby rasskazal o sozdanii Islamskogo dvizhenija Kyrgyzstana” [“The head of the Kyrgyz intelligence services talked about the creation of IMU”], *Fergana News*, May 2, 2011. <http://www.fergananews.com/news.php?id=16680&mode=snews>

⁶⁶ The Kyrgyz intelligence services are convinced of the imminent clashes with militants in Tajikistan.

pessimistic. The threat of radical Islamism emanating from Afghanistan and Pakistan has been deeply entrenched in the political culture of the Afghan neighbors since the Soviet-Afghan war. It justified the building of foreign bases and enhancing military cooperation within the framework of the region's major international organizations led by Russia and China – Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), respectively. Accordingly, outsiders see Central Asia through the same lens of radical Islam and as an arena for potentially “another Afghanistan.” Alteration of this paradigm is a tough challenge and major domestic and international stakeholders including Russia and China seem unwilling to dispense this overstated threat, which has them served as a universal political tool in achieving their goals.

In both of the above assessments, it is obvious that the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan will have mid- and even long-term impact on the region. With the death of Osama bin Laden, the United States might consider the anti-terrorist mission in Afghanistan largely accomplished and proceed with the planned troop withdrawal beginning in July 2011. Yet many believe that improvement of the security situation in Afghanistan and positive developments in Pakistan will take a long time to achieve. As a result, the declared condition-bound US withdrawal may result in long-term American commitment to remaining the principal security provider in the region of Central and Southern Asia even after 2014.

It is also clear that, in order to meet the challenge, the US policymakers need a better understanding of Central Asia. Utilizing this knowledge, the US should not only seek to keep Central Asia outside of the Taliban and al-Qaeda's sphere of influence, but to also employ the region's resources and potential for bringing durable peace and prosperity to Central and South Asia.

What triggers spillover effect?

The preconditions for a possible expansion of radical Taliban-type insurgency in Central Asia are as follows:

- Local jihadi organizations and groups, working in cooperation with or in the spirit of Al-Qaeda;
- Lawless and under-governed regions that make ideal sites for terrorist training camps and launching site for the “Islamic Emirate”;
- Protest mobilization framed as a violent jihad with the sole aim of achieving an Islamic state and rejecting the notion of forging alliances with secular-democratic and Islamo-Nationalist groups;
- Cross-border ethnic groups as carriers of radical ideology from one country to another;
- Western military assistance to local dictatorial regimes that restrict religious freedom and marginalize moderate Islamic groups.

Each of these preconditions will be discussed separately to determine whether they are in place in Central Asia and can facilitate the spread of “Talibanism” in the region.

1. Local jihadi organizations and groups, working in cooperation with or in the spirit of al-Qaeda.

All Central Asian states are following secular, democratic (at least *de-jure*) nation-state building projects without a clearly articulated and established strategy for dealing with Islam as an ideology and a political force. Outwardly, all pay respect to Islam and claim Islamic civilization a part of national legacy, yet deprive it from open political participation and competition. All but Tajikistan have forbidden religiously-based political parties and movements from participation and have emphasized separation between religion and state.

Rapid rise of Islamic activism throughout the 1990s prompted the local elites to respond differently. Uzbekistan adopted a law “On liberty of conscience and religious organizations” on May 1, 1998, while Tajikistan a year later amended its Constitution’s article 28. Both measures were opposite in content. Uzbekistan confirmed previous restrictions and added the authority of state to limit liberty of conscience “if it is needed for securing national safety, civil order, life, health, ethics, rights and liberties of other citizens.” This law has legalized a severe oppression of the Islamic activism in Uzbekistan and laid the foundation for further marginalization and radicalization of IMU.

Meanwhile, in 1999, Tajikistan amended its Constitution, authorizing the formation “among others, parties of a democratic, religious, or atheistic character.” This legal framework is poorly formulated, because it suggests that parties can be either democratic or religious, but not both. This formal imperfection underscores the hasty manner in which the Tajik Constitution was reformed in the aftermath of the civil war. The changes to the Constitution were made under the pressure of international guarantors of the Tajik peace process. The activity of IRPT was legalized. Today, Tajikistan is the only state in the region, where an Islamic movement after ten years of open confrontation, chose to participate in political process, within quasi-democratic structures.

The departure of IRPT from its original objective of an “Islamic state” to “Islamic society”⁶⁷ may, hypothetically, contribute to the growing polarization and split within the Tajik Islamist camp and gradual radicalization of the fundamentalist wing, dissatisfied with the “corrupt” leadership. Thus far, the leadership of IRPT managed to keep the party within the framework of secular legislature. Legalization provided political space for believers in Tajikistan, thus creating an opportunity for dialogue and dampening the threat of terrorism. However, legalization of IRPT has not contributed to the overall liberalization of the political life in the region. The IRPT as well as secular Central Asian parties emerged from the Soviet past, with no tradition of democratic development or political dialogue. The party of the Tajik Islamists is built on both the model of Muslim Brotherhood and Communist party. It is based on loyalty to the leader and rife with corruption and cronyism.

Nevertheless, Tajikistan represents an example of a relative success, in which conventional Sunni Islamist movement was able to secure a stable electorate within their own country. Even

⁶⁷ Farangis Najibullah, “Tajikistan's Islamic Renaissance Party Rebrands, Using Social Projects To Reach Voters,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 1, 2011.

http://www.rferl.org/content/tajikistan_irp_islamic_renaissance_party/16799265.html

under the influence of the Soviet-Afghan war, Iranian revolution, and Soviet atheism, Tajik Islamists never joined transnational terrorist network, but focused on national politics with the goal of replacing corrupt post-communist ruling elites, while resisting localism and ethnic nationalism. The inclusion of IRPT represents an example of a successful bargaining of the government and Islamic militants. It showed that “Islamic politics” is not inevitably and hopelessly radical, anti-systemic, and violent.

In Kyrgyzstan, especially in the south (Osh, Batken, and Jalalabad), fundamentalist movements (including Hizb ut-Tahrir, an outwardly peaceful party supporting military jihad against the United States) are receiving growing support. In contrast, Islam in Kazakhstan does not show visible political activity, but may emerge as in south of Kyrgyzstan in the south (especially in the cities of Chimkent and Turkistan, which are known as the region’s traditional centers of Islam). In outwardly secure Turkmenistan, with its strong authoritarian regime based on a stable tribal hierarchy, Islam, closely intertwined in the social fabric, has not yet entered political arena. State agencies of Turkmenistan have thus far succeeded in controlling the selection, promotion, and dismissal of all mullahs or clerics. Yet, because of the oil and mineral wealth, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are another (after Tajikistan and Fergana Valley) likely target for Islamic extremist groups.

Table I. Profile of political Islam in Central Asia

	Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan	Hizb ut-Tahrir
Date of foundation	1990	1996	1950s
Home base	Central, Northern and Southern Tajikistan	Uzbek part of the Fergana Valley	Based in London. In Central Asia covers mostly Fergana Valley
Type	Sunni Islamist militant movement	Sunni Islamist militant movement	Supra-national radical movement
Objective	“Islamic Society”	“Islamic State”	“Islamic State” (Caliphate)
Strategies	Militant jihad against Tajik regime (in 1991-1997) Gradual introduction of basic Islamic principles by the way of participating in legal politics (since 1999)	Militant jihad against Uzbek regime, and “Global Jihad” against the United States and Coalition force in Afghanistan and against Pakistani Army in the tribal zone	Non- violent jihad in three stages: 1. clandestine indoctrination 2.Public campaign 3.taking over power
Targeted against Christians/ Jews?	No	No	Yes
Connected to international	No	Yes	Not yet

terrorism?			
Legal Status	Legal in 1991- 1993 and since the end of 1999	Illegal, under severe repression, leaders sentenced to death in absentia	Illegal, clandestine, under severe repression
Attachment to ethic nationalism	Close	Moderate	None
Today it is...	integrated into national politics	joined regional geopolitics (al-Qaeda and the Taliban)	growing increasingly influential, despite being driven underground

The divergence of Islamic manifestations in the Post-Soviet Central Asia shows that this dominant religion has never been a central strategic factor in the region. Political configurations are based on state-backed ethnic nationalism, not religion. Central Asian Islamists never thought of creating a unifying political movement to pose an “Islamic threat” to other “civilizations”.

Ultra-strict Salafism is not widely accepted by Central Asian Muslims. This creed, in part, has been imported by the Tajik civil war refugees who had fled to Pakistan in the late 1990s. Salafism is popular among Tajik, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz alumni of Islamic madrasas and universities in the Middle East and Pakistan as well as prisoners across Central Asia. According to Salafis, their number in Tajikistan reached 20,000 in 2009. They oppose IRPT, claiming that there should be no parties in Islam. Religious authorities and majority of the population has shown resistance to Salafi missionary activities within Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, and among Central Asian labor migrants outside the country (particularly in Russia). In Tajikistan, traditional mullahs restrict Salafis’ attendance in local mosques due to their different rites and rituals. Referring to their attack on the Hanafi traditions and hostility to Iran and Shiism, the traditional Tajik Muslims believe that Salafis pose a threat to the integrity of the established Muslim identity in Tajikistan. Most of Tajik and Uzbek Muslims, including Sufis, view Salafism as hostile to local customs and traditions, often labeling it as Wahhabism to indicate its foreign (Saudi) origins. Tajik religious leader Akbar Turajonzoda has even stated that Salafis are a tool in the hands of foreigners, including the Americans and Saudis, who are targeting Iran from the Tajik soil. In mid-2008, when Salafism was on rise, the government of Tajikistan did not outlaw Salafism referring to its non-violent character. At that time, some local religious authorities believed that Tajik Salafis enjoyed hidden support from the government. At the end of 2008, the ruling National Democratic Party of Tajikistan made a sudden change of direction, calling Muslims to oppose Salafism in Tajikistan. In January 2009, following an appeal from the Prosecutor General, the Supreme Court outlawed the Salafi religious movement in Tajikistan. Hundreds of Salafis have since been detained in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Salafism in Central Asia is not a sect or organization, but a creed shared by a minority group. Nevertheless, its popularity is growing due to governmental pressure and restriction of religious freedom and education. Despite its rigid teachings, being an adherent of Salafism does not necessarily make one a terrorist. Salafism is still a non-violent movement popular among Muslim minority of Central Asia. Some Salafis join Hizb ut-Tahrir or propagate their ideas in their

communities, prisons, private religious schools, while others choose to cross the border and join jihad in Afghanistan.

In Uzbekistan, two clandestine fundamentalist groups are especially active: Akromiya and Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Their aim is to establish a Sharia state in Uzbekistan and then unite all Muslims of the world under one Islamic Caliphate. In this aspect they are similar to al-Qaeda. However, both Akromiya and Hizb-ut-Tahrir claim to be working toward their aims in purely peaceful and non-violent manner. The leaders of these organizations denied the charges about their involvement in organizing the terrorist acts on February 16, 1999 in Tashkent. At the same time, however, it is among the members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Akromiya that IMU is recruiting into its ranks.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir has a sizable following, especially among the youth in Uzbekistan, northern Tajikistan, and southern Kyrgyzstan. Ideologically, Hizb-ut-Tahrir supports the Taliban – al-Qaeda alliance. However, Taliban (from the Islamic viewpoint) are conservative fundamentalists and Pashtun nationalists. As such, they are removed from the Islamic “internationalist” slogans of Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

The principal reason for the growing influence of these radical groups in Central Asia is not massive external support, but deteriorating economic and social problems. It is often the unemployed and underprivileged youth between the ages of 18-25 that constitute the core of these radical groups. The lack of opportunities and sense of worthlessness among the youth is facilitating the dissemination of extreme religious views. Another reason for the durability of an Islamic opposition is the lack of a positive and non-violent policy for dealing with the Islamized segment of the society and increasing restriction of religious freedom.

The jihadi movement or global jihad began in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989. The rapid proliferation of grassroots operatives happened mostly in the 1990s and after September 2001. The decentralization and internationalization of the movement resulted in forming of jihadi groups in Africa, Middle East, and the West, particularly in UK, US, and Germany. The Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) formed in 2002 as a split group of IMU. It is comprised of Uzbeks, Turks, and Muslim converts of German nationality. IJU conducted several terrorist acts in Uzbekistan in 2004, including the suicide bombings of the US and Israeli Embassies and the Uzbekistani Prosecutor General’s office in Tashkent. In 2007, German authorities disrupted an IJU plot against unidentified US or Western facilities in Germany.⁶⁸ IJU operates in Pakistan’s tribal zone and Germany. There are no jihadi offshoots operating in the territory of Central Asia akin to al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP) and Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. Since 2004, the level of terrorist risk IJU possess has been diminished.

Islam in Central Asia is in constant flux. Fifteen years ago, IMU and Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) were close allies. The two were engaged in jihad with a shared aim to build an Islamic state in Central Asia. In 1994-1999, IRPT, and the Tajik government sponsored at least a part of IMU, using them as a tool to pressure the Uzbek President Karimov. The link between IRPT and IMU broke in 2000-2001. Today, IMU is a terrorist organization, while IRPT is a legitimate and internationally recognized political party in Tajikistan.

⁶⁸ “Islamic Jihad Union (IJU),” The National Counterterrorism Center, accessed June 28, 2011. <http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/iju.html>

In general, political Islam is more a potential threat than a real conflict driver. French scholar Oliver Roy has interpreted the destruction of IMU's military, financial, and administrative potential and incorporation of IRPT into the Tajik government as the end of open Islamist movements. He claims that in face of economic modernization and nation-state formation, Islam is in decline as a political force and is losing its revolutionary drive in Central Asia. Oliver Roy stresses that [Islamist movements] "reached a crossroads: they could either opt for political normalization within the framework of modern nation-state, or evolve towards what I [Oliver Roy] term neofundamentalism, a closed, scripturalist and conservative view of Islam that rejects the national and statist dimension in favor of the *umma*, the universal community of all Muslims, based on *Sharia* (Islamic law)." ⁶⁹

While Roy proclaims the failure of political Islam, US expert Graham Fuller claims that Islamism (or political Islam) in its various forms will be a dominant intellectual current for some time to come. The aim therefore, he assumes, is to bring liberalism in Islamism through organically evolving liberal Islamist trends at the grassroots level than from imported Western modules of instant democracy. ⁷⁰ Graham Fuller supports the Western strategic response to Islamically-inspired terrorism, which considers the establishment of democracy in Islamic societies as the key to combating terrorism.

The approach put forward by Graham Fuller and other scholars and prevailing in the modern US policy involves encouraging dialogue among Muslims in Central Asia, with the aim of widening the rift between global jihad and local ethno-national protest movements. Divorcing global jihad from the local protest movement was a successful strategy in Bosnia, where, in accordance to the Dayton Agreement, jihadis were expelled from the country.

In any case, addressing the emerging Islamic, and mostly oppositional, movements is of vital importance. In order to comprehend the complexity of Islamic politics, one needs to distinguish between relative autonomy of religious political activism and Islamization of the society. Contemporary Central Asian society is becoming increasingly Islamized, with more people observing main Islamic rituals and ceremonies. Islamization is gaining more ground not only in traditionally religious rural regions, but also among the secular-oriented urban population, including women and youth. Gradual and voluntary Islamization is a positive sign of emerging pluralism and reinterpretation of Islam by the Central Asians. Dialogue among Muslims making conscious choice about Islam and Islamism, including Sufism and Salafism, should only be encouraged. This is the only way to avoid "creeping Talibanization", that makes distinctions between "good Muslims," "bad Muslims", and "infidels," and imposes strict rules of morality, such as banning music, harsh treatment of women, glorifying violent jihad, and so on. This kind of "Talibanization" is not yet a possibility in Central Asia. This region remains mostly secular and outside of what Osama bin Laden labeled as the "Global Islamic Front."

⁶⁹ Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Umma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 1.

⁷⁰ Graham E. Fuller, "The Future of Political Islam," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2002, 48-60.

2. *Lawless and under-governed regions that make ideal sites for terrorist training camps and launching site for the “Islamic Emirate.”*

Mountainous regions of Tajikistan, including Gharm, Tavildara, and Darvaz have served as a refuge to countless dissidents and free-riders during the early period of the Soviet rule. The Soviet power in Darvaz was established only in 1923. Between 1921 to early 1934, Gharm saw frequent Basmachi incursions from the Afghan territory. The Soviets succeeded in establishing strong control over the area and integrated it to the rest of the country via motor roads and other infrastructure. However, the opportunities for economic development were limited. In the 1950s and 1960s, thousands of Gharmis were resettled in Wakhsh Valley to cultivate cotton. Since independence in 1991, this region bordering the Afghan Badakhshan and Kulab to the south, Fergana Valley to the north, Hissar Valley to the west, and Kyrgyz Pamir-Alai to the east, became the center of the Islamic opposition and training base for IMU. In 1993, IMU even declared an Islamic State in Gharm.

During conflicts, ungovernable regions are often controlled by non-state armed leaders or “warlords”. The expression “warlord” has been used to explain the disintegration of states and loss of the state monopoly over the means of coercion. These are leaders capable of forming sub-national militarized groups that resist the restoration of central authority and are involved in illicit activities. The socio-political nature of warlordism varies. In Afghanistan and Central Asia, people followed warlords not because of the leaders’ prestige and military status (like in China between 1911 and 1927) or as means of survival (like in sub-Saharan Africa of the post-colonial period), but to support particular localized loyalties and in defense from external threats. The principal aim was to provide rural survival in a stateless society. Having emerged from popular insurgency, these sub-state armed forces were principally united by the desire to ensure the sustainability of continual status-groups like kin and locality through establishing political control over respective areas and use of illicit ways of attaining resources. This guaranteed exceptional cooperation and coordination both in defense and material gain.⁷¹

In an environment characterized by the absence of a reliable central authority, local Tajik groups were motivated by the goal of strengthening local community and ethnic group structures that could ensure basic security and defend communities against external and internal threats. Thus, the Gharmi warlordism appeared not as a particular kind of politics, but as “a function of the surrounding instability and security.”⁷²

Since coming to power, President Rahmon’s priority has been to establish authority over all parts of the country, including the UTO-controlled Qarategin and Badakhshon. Rahmon avoided direct marginalization of his opponents. Instead, he secured his power through the familiar patronage system. Rahmon continued the Soviet-era tradition of continually nominating a Gharmi as the Speaker of the Parliament. In times of instability, President’s clients have served as

⁷¹ Kamoludin Abdullaev, “Warlordism and Development in Afghanistan,” in *Beyond Reconstruction In Afghanistan. Lessons from Development Experience*, eds. John D. Montgomery and Dennis A. Rondinelli (New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2004).

⁷² Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Book, 1996), 350.

intermediaries between the insurgents and the government.⁷³ The Rahmon regime also employed co-optation as another strategy for placating potential spoilers. Most former militia leaders, although disengaged from militant pursuits, continue to enrich themselves. Some maintain control of the drug trade and are involved in criminal activities including tax evasion, smuggling, illicit production, and so on. This does not mean, however, that they may opt to secede or rebel against the state. The warlords-turned-tycoons are less likely to squander their privileges by returning to armed resistance.

Theoretically, al-Qaeda may take advantage of ethnic and religious factors to advance into Tajikistan, but these factors alone are insufficient to turn Tajikistan into another Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan or Afghanistan. The government and state institutions in Tajikistan are far more efficient, legitimate, and powerful than those in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The national consolidation is stronger. More importantly, compromise has become a normal phenomenon in Tajik politics.

3. Protest mobilization framed as a violent jihad with the sole aim of achieving an Islamic state and rejecting the notion of forging alliances with secular-democratic and Islamo-Nationalist groups.

Jihadism and Talibanism is not just another form of Islamically-charged protest movement aimed at the regime change. If a “holy war” is waged against both the secular government and local traditions with the sole aim to implementing “Islamic order”, then one can speak of the spillover of the Afghan-Pakistani-type jihadism into Central Asia. In other words, jihadis would have to be categorically opposed to local customs, including popular festivals, modern weddings, music, dancing, which make up the rich Central Asian culture. This radicalism makes their alliance with secular-minded opposition groups impossible. Like the Pakistani Taliban, Central Asian Taliban would have to fight in two fronts: against the government and their own people in order to create a space for themselves in Central Asia. The majority of the population would shun such a Central Asian Taliban, akin to the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where most people fear and detest the Taliban for killing innocent people.

Talibanism is not an international movement; at its roots are local concerns and problems. It was the war exhaustion and lawlessness in Afghanistan that prompted people to welcome any force that promised peace and order. Talibanism in Afghanistan absorbed elements of Wahabbism (in particular, its tradition of killing people both in the name of Islam and state), Iranian *veloyati faqih* (supreme authority of ulama), Deobandism (pan-Islamic and Sufi-inspired tradition that guided tribal wars in South Asia in the nineteenth century and was preached by Pakistani Islamist parties in Afghan refugee camps), and a great deal of Pashtunwali (Pashtun code of ethic often at odds with the Islamic *Sharia*). The same is true of the Pakistani Taliban, which is an internal problem of Pakistan. The war in Afghanistan had a secondary role in their emergence.

⁷³ Shukurjon Zuhurov, Chairman of Majlisi Namoyandagon (lower chamber of Majlisi Oli-Tajik parliament), was instrumental in settling the conflict between insurgents and the government and was a member of the governmental team during the Inter-Tajik Peace-talks 1994-1997. Ibid.

As political organization, Tehriki Talibani Pakistan surfaced in 2007 – 12 years after the Afghan Taliban was founded. Talibanism in Pakistan was mostly a reaction of a century-long statelessness and lawlessness to the challenges of the 21st century. The problem of the Pakistani Taliban can be solved through a dialogue between the government, insurgents, and tribal leaders. Negotiations should be accompanied by a state-led program of modernization of the traditional Pashtun society. To seal the process and bring peace to Afghanistan and Pakistan and Central Asia, the Durand Line should be recognized the state border but only after tribesmen are fully integrated in Pakistan.

Fundamentalism and radicalism, however marginal, are a reality in Central Asia. However, the extent of lawlessness, radicalization, and Islamization of the society is not comparable to that of Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has allowed the Taliban to emerge and flourish. As mentioned earlier, the Tajik peace was mostly a deal between the Kulabi-dominated government and the predominantly Islamist Gharmis of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). The government has violated the agreement on several occasions, but it is unlikely that the civil-war era field commanders from Gharm would allow foreigners and mercenaries to freely operate in their territory. Former field commanders are aware of the benefits of cooperation with the government against the “terrorists” and use it as a bargaining chip in exchange for more concessions and inclusion. Mirzokhuja Ahmadov and his militia’s cooperation with the government in the recent anti-terror operation indicates the international jihadi penetration into Tajikistan from Afghanistan. Ahmadov, a former field commander, decided to cooperate with the government, abandoning the idea of joining forces with the newcomers seeking to topple Rahmon’s regime and establish an Islamic state in its place.

As such, it is safe to conclude that al-Qaeda’s “Tajik plot” (if it indeed existed) failed in 2010-2011. The plan was to take advantage of the mounting instability and economic difficulties, growing dissatisfaction of Tajikistanis with the regime, and deepening conflict between the former UTO and Rahmon. Al-Qaeda possibly sought to destabilize the overall situation in central Tajikistan and Fergana Valley and further complicate the coalition efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

4 Cross-border ethnic groups as carriers of radical ideology from one country to another.

Ethnicity has played a substantial role in insurgency throughout the region. Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmens, Kyrgyzes, and even Kazakhs have kin communities in Afghanistan. Sense of fraternity has in the past sparked also between the kin communities along Afghanistan’s northern border. Several hundreds of Afghans fought in Bukhara against the Bolsheviks in 1921-1922 and during the Tajik civil war in 1992-1994. Since the collapse of the USSR, students of madrasa, exiles of Tajik civil war, and others of the Central Asian origin have acted as carriers of radical ideologies from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Central Asia. However, cross-border ethnic loyalty in Central Asia is not as strong as it has been in Pakistan, where some Pashtun tribes have shown sympathy toward their Taliban co-ethnics in Afghanistan. While doing so, even the Pakistani Taliban has rejected the idea of merging with the Afghan Taliban. For the majority of Central Asian Muslims, importing Talibanism and serving as direct agents of this alien and unpopular

movement means endangering and betraying their nation. This factor is an important ideological counterweight to the spread of radicalism.

The peoples of Central Asia have not had an incentive to get involved in the inter-Afghan strife. The national sentiments that started to emerge between the Central Asians and their brethren in Afghanistan in the 1990s have not yet resulted in unified cross-border nationalisms. The actions of Tajik, Uzbek, and Turkmen groups living on both sides of the border appear largely rational, security-driven, and state-centered. Afghans of the Central Asian origin are not interested in projecting influence in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and vice versa. However, if ethnic divisions are exacerbated in Afghanistan, the Taliban returns to power, or the conflict between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan intensifies, the situation may deteriorate, causing cross-border and inter-ethnic strife and creating a fertile ground for al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups to spread their ideologies.

5. Western military assistance to local dictatorial regimes that restrict religious freedom and marginalize moderate Islamic groups.

The end of the Cold War provided an opportunity to end the arms race, develop new understanding of homeland and international security, and reorient billions of dollars in defense budget to long-overlooked domestic needs. Two decades following the independence of Central Asian states, however, marked the growing authoritarianism of the local regimes, which have enjoyed the legitimacy of the West and used military approach to secure their reign.

The five post-Soviet Central Asian states have competing, rather than complementing economies. Threat perception among Central Asian states vary as well. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are in conflict over their understanding of the sources of terrorism and of the nature of political Islam. Uzbekistan uses the struggle against Islamic fundamentalism as the pretext to oppress any kind of dissent. Meanwhile in Tajikistan, Islamic opposition is tolerated and incorporated into political processes. The Uzbek government considers Tajikistan a haven for radical Islamic groups, especially the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The Uzbek government also fears that a part of the sizable Tajik population residing in Uzbekistan may support Islamic extremism. In general, local regimes and their close non-Muslim neighbors – China and Russia – identify radical Islamist mobilization as a threat to national security interests. As a consequence, the region is undergoing a rapid, burdensome, and dangerous militarization. Governments have chosen authoritarianism and violence as the only response to all kind of security challenges.

Incapable of resolving problems arising from Islamist mobilization and driven by the Soviet-era authoritarian impulses, the Central Asian governments seek external support and receive millions of dollars from the United States to suppress the Islamic dissent. In the aftermath of 9/11, the Central Asian governments have utilized the rhetoric of the “war on terror” to justify their crackdown on the opposition. As a reaction to their governments’ actions against the real and imagined Islamic militants, Central Asian youth is particularly at risk of turning to extreme forms of dissent associated with Hizb-ut-Tahrir and IMU. It is particularly a possibility among hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek illegal youth migrants, returning from Russia, where they are often subject to anti-Muslim sentiment and racism.

The US military presence in Central Asia and Afghanistan has had a stabilizing effect in the region. Nonetheless, the direct Western involvement did not lead to democratization or decentralization of power in the region. The main beneficiaries of the “war on terror” have been Central Asia’s authoritarian regimes. The international mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan has indirectly strengthened the ruling regimes at the expense of democratic change and liberalization. Ordinary people and civil society actors have gained very little from the Western presence in the region.

The transition from local dissent to violent global rage is not inevitable and Central Asian Islamists do not pose a major threat to stability. However, the shift from local Islamism to global jihadism may occur, if the current oppressive state policies continue. Demonization, repression, and exclusion of Islamists by local regimes, restriction of freedom of religion, and the growing distrust of corrupt secular rulers, who manipulate ethnic nationalism, may drive religion underground and radicalize large segments of populations in Central Asia. Continued US cooperation with the local authoritarian regimes may also redirect anger toward the United States and garner support for al-Qaeda’s anti-American rhetoric.

The Central Asian governments have realized that direct US engagement and expansion of Western political culture would, soon or later, reveal the incumbent presidents’ reluctance and inability to “democratize” and may threaten their authoritarian regimes. The US administration welcomed the success of non-violent “colored revolutions” followed by the regime change in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan in 2004-2005 and the revolutions in the Arab world in 2011. As of mid-2011, the dictatorial regimes of Central Asia, their democratic opponents, the public as well as the international jihadis are in alert about the US policies in Central and South Asia. International jihadis usually avoid interfering with complexities of local politics, but are eager to use domestic disturbances to fuel an anti-American mobilization and target democracy. The United States and Central Asia face a difficult task of developing a strategy that both favors democracy and serves the immediate and long-term national strategic interests. Supporting the local regimes in their struggle against the real and imagined Islamic terrorist threats, while ignoring social ills that plague the region, is not likely to succeed.

Today, Central Asians are divided not along the Islam versus secularism, left versus right, or pro-versus anti-America, but along the ethno-regional and/or tribal divide.⁷⁴ The main element of power generation in Central Asia is non-ideological, “organic”, and competing peripheral sub-national structures. National consciousness is weak, but ethnic (non-civic) nationalism, ethno-regional localism, and clanism are as strong as ever. Consequently, the probability of a rapid spread of anti-American Islamist policies in Central Asia is low.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ The so-called “colored revolutions” in Kyrgyzstan and popular uprising in Uzbekistan in the spring of 2005 (and, partly, the Tajik civil war of 1992-1997) were initiated and conducted by non-ideological, kin-based and regional protest groups. These groups demonstrated popular support for democracy, without exhibiting any pro or anti-American sentiment.

⁷⁵ It is difficult to imagine, for example, that the oppositional Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, whose legal status has been secured by the decisive international (particularly

All states in the region suffer (to a varying degree) from the lack of domestic legitimacy. For that reason, the prospects for terrorism-prone anti-American sentiment taking root in the region in the foreseeable future are bleak. The Central Asia's socio-political and cultural life is not settled enough to develop anti-Americanism as an authentic home-grown concept. The author disagrees with the rightist and neoconservative experts like Daniel Pipes, who tend to lump Central Asians with the global "Muslim village". They argue that all Muslims are, at least, potentially anti-American, while secular leaders of Muslim states are the "guardians of bastions of pro-American sentiments."⁷⁶

So far, the assertion of the US military power in Central Asia and Afghanistan and the strategy of a 'long-term export of security'⁷⁷ have contributed to the opening of the political process and launch of unprecedented debates over the issues of democratization and human rights in region vis-à-vis Russian, Chinese, and American influence and security initiatives. This international engagement has become an important source of both pro- and anti-American sentiments in the region.⁷⁸ Not everyone in Central Asia approves the US actions in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The perception is that the threat emanating from Afghanistan is not imminent or direct. As a result, Central Asians view the presence of US military bases in the region as redundant or even dangerous, since it may potentially drag the whole region into the conflict. By supporting Americans, they believe, Central Asia may become a target for terrorists. Not surprisingly, "official" anti-Americanism arises, as a rule, as a troublesome sign of upcoming national elections especially in Kyrgyzstan. It comes up not as a cause but as an effect of insecurity.

Recent violent clashes in Central Asia had nothing to do with the Taliban or anti-American sentiment. Instead, they reflect domestic grievances. Most of Central Asian states and Russia have exaggerated the Taliban threat both to justify strong cooperative international security measures against the perceived common threat and to gain support and assistance from the Western governments.

The situation in Gharm is gradually stabilizing due to the compromise achieved between the Gharmi leaders and the government. The threat of al-Qaeda's arrival in Tajikistan, as portrayed by the world media, is exaggerated. However, the international community should not ignore this "Afghan penetration" into Rash Valley. The Afghan penetration should be a wake-up call for the international community involved in Afghanistan and Pakistan not to regard the neighbors to the north just as a supply route. By failing to acknowledge and help address various economic and

Western) support, would take an anti-American stance. Nevertheless, this party has criticized American policies in the Middle East.

⁷⁶ Daniel Pipes, "Who Is the Enemy?" January 2002, accessed June 28, 2011.

<http://www.danielpipes.org/article/103>

⁷⁷ Thomas P. M. Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map* (New York: GP. Putnam's Sons, 2004), 179.

⁷⁸ Shirin Akiner, "Violence in Andijan, 13 May 2005: An Independent Assessment," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Paper*, July 2005, 39. Akiner overstates popular displeasure with the West, while omitting Uzbeks' hopes for Western support and for democracy in the Uzbek society.

political challenges afflicting Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, the international community runs the risk of allowing the Taliban to establish a stronghold in the region.

The study of war and peace in Central Asia reveals an alarming and paradoxical tendency of a conflict sustained by those who assume the role of “conflict mitigators”. Not only state authorities, but also stakeholders on local level strive for the special “conflict prone” status to benefit from extra funding that comes for “fighting fundamentalism”. This was particularly evident throughout the author’s discussions with authorities in Isfara (Tajik part of Fergana Valley). When asked about major security problems, district authorities immediately stated that their region “had a high conflict potential,” while the villagers of the area spoke of a wide range local problems – unemployment, water shortage, bad harvests, and insufficient land – but never mentioned conflict or militant Islamists.

In the Central Asian context, factors that have driven the conflict in the past may paradoxically play a positive role in conflict prevention and reconciliation. For example, *mahalgari* (localism) and clanism that divide Tajiks was partly responsible for the Tajik civil war in 1992-1997. As a result, Tajiks strive, albeit unsuccessfully, to get rid of localism and build civic identity and pluralism in politics. However, these ethno-territorial communities (mahals) as “organic” and stable kin-based associations have served as a useful conflict prevention mechanism. It was these ethno-territorial ties that laid the basis for a negotiated settlement between the major peace spoilers and armed groups, namely Kulabis and Gharmis, during the civil war. This deal excluded other groups from the power-sharing arrangement, which many experts view as the major shortfall of the Tajik Peace Agreement. Despite its shortfalls, however, the peace agreement has ensured peace and stability in Tajikistan since 1997.

Similarly, the recent penetration of militants from Afghanistan and Pakistan into Tajikistan did not evolve into a full-blown crisis because of the bargaining between the two civil war-time factions, namely President Rahmon’s supporters and Gharmi commanders Shoh Iskandarov and Mirzokhuja Ahmadov. This bargaining neutralized the threat of jihad in Tajikistan at a relatively low cost and without a third-party intervention.

The Kulabis occupy top positions in the Tajik government, including the power ministries. This has contributed to the endemic corruption in Tajikistan. However, the Kulabi commanders were among those, who relentlessly chased Mullo Abdullo and his men in Gharm until they were eliminated in April 2011. Jihadis were defeated not by professional army equipped by hi-tech weaponry, but by communalists armed with light weapons. Authoritarian rule has been instrumental in defeating Islamic militants and al-Qaeda emissaries in the region. Similarly in Uzbekistan, the central government is viewed as the guarantor of security, source of rule of law, and the major conflict prevention instrument. However, in light of IMU’s history, Islam Karimov’s authoritarian rule seems effective in preventing civil war internally, while, at the same time, serving as a source of international violence and terrorism.

Thus authoritarianism is both a problem and solution while dealing with conflict and conflict resolution in Central Asia. Under different circumstances, the same factors may serve both as conflict triggers and as conflict preventers. In Central Asian context, distinguishing between conflict triggers and conflict mitigating factor presents a challenging task.

One of the most important conflict drivers stems from the deficiencies of the Tajik peace agreement. The Tajik elites—the Kulabi dominated secular government and IRPT-dominated United Tajik Opposition (UTO)—have secured and maintained their positions through civil war. They are inclined to choose violent responses for future challenges. For many Tajiks, the IRPT is a regionalist group of Gharmis, who came to power through violence and are now protecting their privileged positions attained during the war. In Tajikistan, the military elite is comprised of former adversaries—hardened militias from pro-Communist Popular Front and United Tajik Opposition. These groups have retained their semi-independence from the state and loyalty to regional political entrepreneurs and field commanders, who control the remote regions, protect the Tajik-Afghan border, and are involved in illegal trafficking.

A significant conflict trigger would be the breakdown of the consensus between the Kulabis and Gharmis. The Tajik opposition is still capable of mobilizing the support of the dissatisfied rural youth under the Islamic banner. The government, on the other hand, controls the levers of the security apparatus capable of suppressing any uprising by violent means. Should one or both sides decide to employ these mechanisms, a violent conflict would be inevitable.

The challenge is to promote both a strong government and political pluralism. Genuine reforms are key to keeping Tajikistan stable. Tajikistan cannot undergo another civil war or even a revolution without a total destruction. A revolution (even if bloodless, which is highly unlikely) aimed at dethroning President Rahmon will unleash the forces previously kept under control. Disenfranchised and destitute, these forces may utilize the slogans of “people power” and thus worsen the security situation and open the way to Islamists. There is, unfortunately, no easy fix or universal formula in solving the ages-long dilemma of ensuring security and promoting democracy.

Chapter 5. Central Asian Partnership in Solving the Afghan-Pakistan Conflict

Central Asian state policies toward Afghanistan and Pakistan

Central Asia and South Asia represent a vast region stretching from Sri Lanka in the south to Kazakhstan in the north. Strong cultural, historical, religious, and commercial links have connected these two distinct regions. Afghanistan and Pakistan served as a refuge for Muslims of Central Asia during the early Soviet period and after 1991. With the Russian advancement into Central Asia, followed by the demise of Bukhara as a center of Islamic learning, Hindustan (South Asia) became the major attraction to those who later became prominent teachers of Islam in Central Asia. Muhammadjon Hindustani, an Uzbek from Fergana Valley and a graduate of madrasa in Ajmer (Rajasthan), was one of them.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Muhammadjon Rustamov, also known as Mawlavi Hindustani (1892-1989), was born in Kokand and studied Islam in Bukhara, Afghanistan and India from 1916-1927. Due to his popularity and religious/theological credentials, the Soviet authorities jailed him two times. Hindustani fought in the Soviet Army during World War II and from 1946 until his death worked

In the past, Muslims of Central and South Asia had much closer historical and cultural bonds. Peoples of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan have a shared Perso-Islamic culture. Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1939), a great Muslim poet and the conceptual founder of Pakistan, remarked that Pakistan would be situated in South Asia but it would be facing Central Asia. In Tajikistan, Iqbal is revered as a national writer. In his poems, written mostly in Persian rather than Urdu, he promoted ideas of greater Islamic political cooperation and unity and called for the setting aside ethnic differences. Establishment of the Soviet power and sealing external borders of Central Asia severed cultural contacts and exchanges between the kin nations for the most of the 20th century.

The Soviet-Afghan War, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, dramatically changed the situation in the region. Outside of direct Russian control, Central Asia found itself in a common regional security complex with Afghanistan and Pakistan. Of all the former Soviet Central Asian states, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have by far the strongest vested interest in the outcome of the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Tajikistan is the closest Central Asian state to Pakistan – a nuclear power, the sixth most populous country, and the second largest Muslim population in the world. Karachi is the nearest port city for Central Asian states and Dushanbe is only one-hour's flight from Islamabad. Only a narrow, 15 kilometer-wide (9 mi) strip of the high-altitude Afghan territory separates the Tajik Pamirs from Pakistan.

The shortest path from South Asia to Central Asia is through Afghanistan. From Chitral, a 36km (22 mi) road links Pakistan with the Tajik border. Not surprisingly, Afghanistan is destined to play a crucial role in building cooperation between Central Asia and South Asia. Nevertheless, Central Asian states hesitate to collaborate with its nearly-stateless, unstable, economically backward, and drug-producing southern neighbor. Pakistan is both a major victim of and breeding ground for terrorism. In its confrontation with the traditionally superior "Hindu India", Islamabad strives to form a strategic bloc of "Muslim Central Asia". For that reason, Pakistani militaries have supported tens of pro-Salafite and pro-Wahabbite radical groups, including the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba over the years.⁸⁰ Pakistan's proclivity to draw on radical Islamist groups as a means of enhancing its defense is a major reason why the secular Central Asian states have distanced themselves from Islamabad.

Nevertheless, the post-Soviet Central Asia is discovering South Asia not as an object for political solidarity but as a potential investor and a partner in boosting regional security and the implementation of major economic projects. As potential economic partners, Central Asian states can assist Pakistan in transforming its political culture from much exaggerated strategic depth

as an official imam and underground teacher of Islam in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. From 1952-1956 he was jailed again. Most of religious class of Central Asia and Islamists are Hindistani's students and disciples. Among them are leaders of political Islam in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, including Said Abdullo Nuri (founder of IRPT and leader of UTO), Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, and many others.

⁸⁰ "Nothing is simple in Pakistan," Strategy Page, May 27, 2011, accessed June 28, 2011.

<http://www.strategypage.com/htmw/htterr/articles/20110527.aspx>

fears. Instead of offering military cooperation, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and other states of the region focus their policy toward economic cooperation and trade.

Opportunities for non-military cooperation between Central Asian states and Afghanistan and Pakistan are numerous. Since independence, Tajikistan has continually focused on developing country's huge hydropower resources. In terms of specific indices of hydroelectric potential in stock, Tajikistan is number one in the world and number eight in terms of absolute indices (300 billion kilowatt hour per year). Since the 1990s, electric power generation in Tajikistan is the second industry after nonferrous metallurgy. Tajik government intends to make Tajikistan a major exporter of hydropower in the region by finishing the delayed Soviet power projects and building new ones. The most ambitious hydroelectric energy project is the Roghun hydroelectric station (on the Wakhsh River, the tributary of Amu Darya). The proposed capacity is 3,600 megawatts and the embankment's planned height is 350 meters (1150 ft). This station is expected to make Tajikistan the biggest exporter of electricity in the region. In the Tajik government's view, the construction of the Roghun hydroelectric power station will benefit all the countries of the region, including Afghanistan and Pakistan. The regulation of water flow by the Roghun reservoir will make it possible to ensure the 90 percent provision of land irrigation in the Amu Darya river basin.

Another important way to improve non-military cooperation is the realization of the project aimed at developing a regional electricity market known as the Central Asia South Asia Regional Energy & Trade (CASA-1000). This \$865 million project will transmit 1000 megawatts of surplus electricity from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Pakistan with power transit through Afghanistan. The total length of transmission line is 750 km (466 mi). The project is planned to be on public-private partnership basis with the support of the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, and International Finance Corporation.

Uzbekistan is opposed to the CASA-1000 plan. Uzbekistan's resistance to this deal is rooted in its opposition to Tajikistan's planned completion of the massive Roghun dam. Tashkent believes that a 350-meter (1150-foot) dam will disrupt the water supplies the country needs to maintain its vital cotton sector. Tashkent asked Islamabad to urge Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to follow international norms on the use of trans-boundary water resources.⁸¹

Because of their geographical isolation, Afghanistan and Central Asia are loosely integrated into the modern world economy. As such, they are providers of cheap labor for the extraterritorial production and shipment of goods and services to the First World. As much as 80 percent of the heroin seized in Europe and 95 percent of the heroin seized in Great Britain is estimated to originate from poppy fields in Afghanistan, with majority of that transported through Central

⁸¹ Khaleeq Kiani, "Uzbekistan opposes Pakistan's plan to import electricity from Tajikistan," *Dawn*, March 14, 2011. <http://www.dawn.com/2011/03/14/uzbekistan-opposes-pakistans-plan-to-import-electricity-from-tajikistan.html>

Asia.⁸² In fact, drug-trafficking is even a bigger threat to security in Central Asia than Islamist extremist groups.

Opium has been one of the most important sources of income for the Taliban. They officially state that narcotics are religiously prohibited, yet taxing cultivation and trafficking is justified by war demands. The Taliban dealt with narcotics in the same way the Kuomintang did in China in the 1920s and 1930s. Chan Kai-shek saw the building of a drug monopoly as part of his campaign to unite China. Similarly, the Taliban monopolized the drug “industry” with the stated aim of uniting Afghanistan and fighting regional separatists.

To date, the Afghan drug trade does not appear to have been significantly damaged by the war on terrorism and the US military presence in the region. Having opted for a strategy of non-confrontation with the local leaders and warlords, many of whom are deeply involved in drug dealing, the Afghan administration risks losing the support it has developed should it initiate a direct, wide-scale attack against drugs production. As a result, from 2005 to 2008 the Taliban made \$450-600 million in total from taxing opium cultivation and trade in Afghanistan. According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Taliban received about \$150 million in funding from the opium trade in 2009.

Though the Taliban established control over drug production facilities and trafficking routes, in general, local, ethnic warlordism takes precedence over warlordism of drug and arm dealers. Overall lack of security (for individuals and their property), absence of nation-wide financial and political structures, poor transport infrastructure, as well as unstable conditions in neighboring countries (Central Asia, Pakistan, Iran) have prevented the unification of small, competing autonomous commanders and drug dealers into transnational narco-mafia. As a result, in Afghanistan, drugs sustain and further ethno-regional conflict and insurgency rather than the opposite. The current political situation in Afghanistan makes it possible for the Taliban and their allies to operate in the countryside and for the expansion of narco-business to continue apace. Drugs provide an essential means of survival for the peasants that the Taliban control, and a way for insurgents to sustain their own organizations. This situation weakens the power of the central government and contributes to chaos, which prolongs economic paralysis and poverty.⁸³

Drugism is not equal to Talibanism. The Taliban and their allies, including IMU, are not the only ones benefiting from this lucrative business. Afghan, Tajik, Russian, Kazakh, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, Uzbek criminal groups, border guards, and even government officials also take a cut. Putting all the blame on the insurgency diverts attention from the complexity of this problem.⁸⁴ The

⁸² Nancy Lubin, Alex Klaitis, and Igor Barsegian, “Narcotics Interdiction in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Challenges for International Assistance,” *Open Society Institute Report*, 2002, 5. http://www.jezail.org/03_archive/01_narcotics_afgh.pdf

⁸³ Hooman Peimani, “Afghanistan-based International Drug-trafficking: a Continued Threat,” *Caucasus and Central Asia Analyst*, May 8, 2002. http://www.cacianalyst.org/2002-05-08/20020508afghan_drugs.htm

⁸⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Addiction, Crime and Insurgency. The Transnational Threat of Afghan Opium,” October, 2009. http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Afghanistan/Afghan_Opium_Trade_2009_web.pdf

governments of all Central Asian states have profited substantially through informal involvement in the trade, but reliable information on the extent of involvement is difficult to obtain.

Tajikistan is probably the most vulnerable state in Central Asia that suffers from opium production in Afghanistan. Since the 1990s, Tajikistan has been one of the major transshipment zones for opiates and heroin from Afghanistan to Russia and Eastern Europe. For the drug mafia, Tajikistan provides an attractive target, due to the weakness of the state following the civil war (1992-1997) and the fact that it suffers from the lowest levels of human development in Central Asia. Until 1996, trafficking consisted primarily of opium. With the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, in 1996 the first heroin seizures in Tajikistan were made. The withdrawal of the Russian troops from the Tajik-Afghan border in 2005 has further worsened the problem, since Tajik border guards were insufficiently equipped, paid, trained, and susceptible to corruption. The main routes for smuggling drugs go through the Kulob sector of the border and the passage through the mountainous areas of Badakhshon.

The border security on the Afghan side is weak and many of the Afghan officers in charge of border control have links to the drug trade. The language and ethnic connections that span the Tajik-Afghan, Uzbek-Afghan, and Turkmen-Afghan borders provide communal support for the trafficking network. Furthermore, Central Asians, most of whom are fluent in Russian and do not need visas to travel to Russia, make the coordination and communication all the way to Russia and Eastern Europe possible. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report, in 2002-2008, up to a hundred tons of heroin moved through Tajikistan each year, which is equal to the annual heroin demand in Western Europe and North America combined. Since 2005, about 20 percent of the Afghan heroin produced has left the county to travel to the north through Central Asia toward the Russian Federation. According to Tajikistan's Drug Control Agency and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the country accounted for more than 90 percent of Afghan drugs seized in Central Asia in 2007. In Tajikistan, the annual income from heroin trade generates between \$500 million and US\$1 billion. This means that one-third of the country's GDP is linked to drug-trafficking.

Countries of Central Asia are only seizing around 5 percent of the 90 tons of heroin that cross their territory. The rates of interception of the opiate flows in the Islamic Republic of Iran (20 percent) and in Pakistan (17 percent) are more significant.⁸⁵

Tajikistan ranks third in drug seizures worldwide, after Iran and Pakistan. From 1999-2008, on the territory of Tajikistan more than 60 tons of opium group of drugs, including over 28 tons of heroin were seized from illicit trafficking. In the first half of 2008, the share of Tajikistan's drug seizures of opium drugs in the CIS amounted to 43 percent and 66 percent in Central Asia.

Drugs that remain in Central Asia contribute to the increased levels of crime, corruption, drug addiction, and HIV/AIDS. In Tajikistan, addiction affects up to 1 percent of the population (more than 70,000). Some 80 percent of them are heroin addicts. Widespread poverty and unemployment pushes more Tajiks, Uzbeks and Kyrgyzes into drug smuggling. Many of the traffickers arrested in Russia are Tajik nationals. In 2010, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime

⁸⁵ Ibid.

(UNODC) named Tajikistan the first line of defense to disrupt the flow of drugs from Afghanistan, which poses a serious threat to security and development throughout Central Asia. It is estimated that approximately 15 percent of all Afghan opiates and 20 percent of heroin is trafficked through Tajikistan.⁸⁶ UNODC helped establish a national Drug Control Agency and through it Tajikistan has dealt with 900 drug-related cases and seized around 10 tons of narcotics in the last eleven years. Narcotics production in Afghanistan and its trafficking through Central Asia to Russia has become very intense and its effect on the population so tough that Russia has begun publicly accusing the United States of intentionally trying to harm their interests by not doing enough to stop trafficking.⁸⁷

Terrorism in Central and South Asia is a trans-border phenomenon. Border security in Central Asia is one of the key dimensions of any strategy aimed at combating terrorism and other non-traditional challenges. For that reason, EU and NATO provide a significant help for the development of the Central Asian border guard structures. In 2003, the Austrian government established the Central Asia Border Security Initiative (CABSI) in order to provide a forum for coordination and discussion on program activities and strategic objectives of the European Union funded assistance program “Border Management in Central Asia” (BOMCA).⁸⁸

Water issues are the core of the environmental, political and economic problems in Central Asia. Out of total 130 cubic kilometers of annual surface of the Central Asian water, 40 percent is formed in Tajikistan, 30 percent in Kyrgyzstan and 5 percent in Uzbekistan. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the region’s governments have failed to agree upon water management issues due to conflicting interests of those states located up and down the streams of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers. The downstream Uzbekistan (consumes almost 50 percent of Amu Darya and Syr Darya’s water) and Kazakhstan need water in the summer for irrigation, while the energy poor upstream Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan use water in the winter for electricity production. During the Soviet period, the allocation of water among Central Asian republics was based on quotas and special regulations approved by the central government. Tajikistan was tasked with collecting water in its reservoirs in the winter and discharging it downstream to Uzbekistan in the spring. In response, Uzbekistan was responsible for providing Tajikistan with the fuel and natural gas needed for the winter. This barter system proved inefficient in the 1990s and later. The agreements between the two states arranging the water for gas barter were not fulfilled. Tajikistan had no choice but to purchase energy and gas from Uzbekistan at almost global market prices.

⁸⁶ “Tajikistan key to preventing drug trafficking from Afghanistan – UN official,” UN News Centre, December 1, 2010.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?Cr1=&NewsID=36927&Cr=UNODC>

⁸⁷ Joshua Foust, “Post-Soviet Central Asian National Interests in Afghanistan,” *A Century Foundation Report*, 2010. <http://tcf.org/publications/2010/9/post-soviet-central-asian-national-interests-in-afghanistan/pdf>

⁸⁸ “The 9th Conference of the Central Asia Border Security Initiative (CABSI),” Border Management Programme in Central Asia, accessed June 28, 2011. <http://www.bomca.eu/cabsi.html>

In the hydrocarbon poor Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, electricity is the main source of energy. They believe that the water allocation system is unfair, as it does not provide for the construction of potent hydropower stations to cover need for electricity. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan seek to become a leading power exporter, while the construction of hydropower stations in these upstream countries, especially in Tajikistan was always a headache for Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan has asked for guarantees that the construction of new hydroelectric stations will not harm the interests of the downstream states.

Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan form the Amu Darya River Basin. The shortage of water resources and poor management may result in conflicts both among Central Asian countries and within them, particularly in the Fergana, Wakhsh, and Zarafshon valleys. In the future, water allocation may get more problematic due to growing needs of Afghanistan. In the recovery phase, Afghanistan might claim a bigger share of water for the economic development of its northern provinces. The water of Amu Darya is going to gain greater prominence as the international community invests in the country's agriculture sector following the ouster of the Taliban government. By ignoring the interconnectedness of water-related problems between Central and South Asia, the United States may aggravate regional tensions. United States should be more deliberate in delivering water-related assistance in Central and South Asia to maximize its peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts.⁸⁹

For Central Asia, the removal of the Russian control and the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan created new possibilities for transboundary cooperation and regional security. Since 2003, Dushanbe, despite lacking energy resources for local consumption especially in the winter time, has traded its hydroelectric power to northern Afghanistan, supported the construction of bridges across the Amu Darya, and promoted cross-border cooperation with Afghan communities. In 2009, Uzbekistan began supplying electricity to Kabul around the clock.

The United States and international community in Central Asia: Cooperation for peace

The US effort to focus more on diplomacy in 2011 and attempt to integrate other nations in the region to make the US withdrawal by 2014 a realistic goal requires Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbors to be active participants in transition from war to peacebuilding. This is an urgent task that should start without delay. Limited involvement of Afghanistan's neighbors is among major reasons the international effort in Afghanistan has failed to deliver peace, security, and stability.⁹⁰

On August 26 2007, the Dusti (Friendship) Bridge joining Tajikistan and Afghanistan was officially opened. It has been the largest US government-funded (\$37.1 million) infrastructure project in Tajikistan. In addition, the French military, which has maintained an airbase in the

⁸⁹ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Avoiding water wars: water scarcity and Central Asia's Growing importance for stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 112th Cong., 1st sess., February 22, 2011.

⁹⁰ S. Frederick Starr, "Afghanistan Beyond the Fog of Nation Building: Giving Economic Strategy a Chance," *Silk Road Paper*, January 2011.

<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1101Afghanistan-Starr.pdf>

Tajik capital city since late 1992 for the purpose of supporting humanitarian operations in Afghanistan, launched a reconstruction of the runway of the Dushanbe airfield to make it capable of bearing heavy airplanes.

It seems that the United States seeks to secure access to political and economic influence here in order to prevent the possible dominance of China and Russia, which have traditionally excluded any American presence in Central Asia. By financing the construction of five bridges across the Amu Darya, the United States, Britain, and their partners intend to secure control over the emerging Eurasian transport corridors and communication networks (Northern Europe-India, Western Europe-China-Japan), as well as various pipelines. This US- and EU-financed regional transport infrastructure is capable of securing military operations in this strategically important region. Particularly, the Tajik-Afghan bridges may be used for military purposes by connecting the American base in Kyrgyzstan with Afghanistan via the Tajik territory.

Central Asian nations have sympathetically viewed the US efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan. In October 2001, the Central Asian states provided their air space for operations in Afghanistan and, eight years later, opened their ground transport corridor for the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). The NDN is a series of commercially-based logistical arrangements the US military uses to ship cargo overland through Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia into Afghanistan.⁹¹ The increasingly aggressive attacks by the Pakistani Taliban on the major supply routes from Karachi through Peshawar and to Afghanistan through which over 70 percent of the supplies for the coalition are transported, forced the international coalition to seek alternative routes. In January 2009, the transit agreements were signed with Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In March 2009, the Uzbek government allowed US soldiers to enter Afghanistan via the German base at Termez. By the mid-2009 the United States had established its supply hub at the Uzbek airport of Navoi and extended the lease agreement for the US base at Manas in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, the Turkmen government allowed the US Air Force to run small refueling and resupply operations at an unspecified location in Turkmenistan.⁹²

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are members of NATO the Partnership for Peace program. Kazakhstan is the first country in Central Asia and Caucasus to receive an Individual Partnership Action Plan, designed for countries that have the political will and ability to deepen their relationship with NATO. In May 2011, Kazakhstan made a careful move toward becoming the first nation of the ex-Soviet Central Asia to send its militaries to join the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In response, the Taliban warned Kazakhstan that its decision to send troops to the NATO-led war in Afghanistan would have severe consequences and was not in its regional interest.⁹³ The Kazakh government rushed to

⁹¹ “Northern Distribution Network (NDN),” Center for Strategic and International Studies, accessed June 28, 2011. <http://csis.org/program/northern-distribution-network-ndn>

⁹² Cornelius Graubner, “Implications of the Northern Distribution Network in Central Asia,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, September 1, 2009. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5169/print>

⁹³ Amie Ferris-Rotman, “Taliban warns Muslim Kazakhstan on entering Afghan war,” *Reuters*, May 22, 2011. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/05/22/us-afghanistan-kazakhstan-taliban-idUSTRE74L0K920110522>

state that the Afghan deployment is non-combat and the “main task of the four officers who are to be sent to Afghanistan is to assist the government in preparations for a peaceful life.”⁹⁴ It is unlikely that any Central Asian nation will join NATO-led military campaign in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Many in the Central Asian capitals believe that greater NATO engagement and advancement into the former Soviet territory may bring problems for Central Asian nations.

In 2010, the United States proposed a \$10 million bid to the Tajik government to build a military training center near the capital. Tajikss reaction to the US offer has been ambivalent. Some think that Tajik militaries may turn the deal into another corruption scheme and doubt that having a US training center could make a big difference for Tajikistan’s security. Some Tajiks are willing to take up the offer only after making sure that the Tajik ownership in this initiative is secure. Others believe that the US may use this center to strengthen its foothold in Afghanistan, which will result growing dissatisfaction of Russia and other countries that have their interest in Tajikistan.⁹⁵

The United States and NATO forces are extending their operations in independent Muslim-majority Central Asian nations. NATO troop deployment, use and improvement of bases, armed combat operations, air patrols, capture or kill operations, and armed forces training programs are now taking place in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. Despite the deadly riots in 2010, the United States and NATO have significantly increased the operation of troops through Kyrgyzstan for the 150,000-troop force in Afghanistan. In Uzbekistan, German NATO troops remain at the Termez airbase despite the US military being ousted in 2005. Even in the “neutral” Turkmenistan, the United States has gained access to almost all the military airfields, including the airport in Nebit-Dag near the Iranian border.⁹⁶ Americans footed the bill for the reconstruction of this airfield.

There is also a clear indication of US military’s direct involvement in counter-terrorism operations in Central Asia. US Special Operations Command (SOCOM) issued a directive to establish a framework for the US Special Forces’ involvement in the region on August 21, 2009. According to the directive, the Special Forces’ 3rd Group was tasked to “be prepared to conduct foreign internal defense and security forces assistance to assist partner nations improve their ability to provide for their own security in Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.”⁹⁷ Although neither Americans nor their Tajik counterparts

⁹⁴ “Kazakhstan: Napravljajemye v Afganistan ofycery ne budut uchavstvovat’ v bojevyh dejstvijah” [“Kazakhstan: The officers sent to Afghanistan will not participate in combat operations”], *Fergana News*, May 26, 2011.

<http://www.fergananews.com/news.php?id=16785&mode=snews>

⁹⁵ Joshua Kucera, “Pros and cons of the US training center in Tajikistan,” *EurasiaNet*, September 1, 2010. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61836>

⁹⁶ Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, “Is the US Violating Turkmenistan's Neutrality with the NDN?” *EurasiaNet*, August 1, 2010. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61652>

⁹⁷ Deirdre Tynan, “US Forces to Build Special Ops Base in Northern Afghanistan” *EurasiaNet*, July 6, 2010. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61473>

confirmed these claims,⁹⁸ according to a Eurasia.net source, in September 2010, the US Special Operations Forces provided “crucial tactical” support in helping Tajik government to fight “an attempted Islamic militant incursion.”⁹⁹ In March 2011, the US Central Command confirmed that the US Special Operations Forces had permission to enter Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan on a “case-by-case” basis when conducting counter-terrorism operations.

This has led to an even closer US engagement with the local governments. Greater attention to Central Asian states as strategic partners has led to the softening of the line toward the local leaders. This has meant downplaying the importance of regime type and internal politics and instead focusing on the external behavior. The US has viewed the autocratic and dictatorial regimes in Central Asia friendly to its policies in the region, which is an important factor in the US fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Central Asian states are among the most corrupt in the world. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan ranked as the most corrupt Central Asian states, coming in at 172 out of the 178 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for 2010. Kyrgyzstan was pegged at 164th, while Russia and Tajikistan tied for 154th place.¹⁰⁰ The facade of a Western patterned legal arrangements hide a remarkable blend of secular and traditional features that poorly connect civil and political society and promote the perceived interests of individuals and different solidarity groups. Quasi-democratic rule is being built on a highly fragmented society without genuine respect for civil liberties. This foundation feeds growing corruption in society and government. Non-inclusive character of the government and absence of free competition for leadership positions results in disproportionate distribution of power among regions, generations, and social groups.

In Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, natural gas and oil exports generate most of the country's income. Uzbekistan is rich in cotton, some hydrocarbons, and gold. The resource-poor Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan use mostly foreign aid and credits to stay in power and provide for minimum domestic security.

None of Central Asian presidents are interested in cooperation amongst themselves. As a result, economic development in Central Asia widely varies. For example, the economic situation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are not comparable in terms of GDP. This has resulted in Kazakhstan's disinterest and disincentive to trade with and invest in Kyrgyzstan. Similarly, Uzbekistan, vying for the leadership in the region, does not see a beneficial partner in Tajikistan. Turkmenistan, endowed with natural gas, has not shown any interest in integration with its neighbors. As such, Central Asia has not developed a sense of belonging to one region, which is attributable to the policies of each of its presidents. Regional cooperation, they believe,

⁹⁸ “Assistant Secretary Blake's Press Stake in Dushanbe,” *Asia-Plus*, April 14, 2011.

<http://news.tj/en/news/assistant-secretary-blakes-press-stake-dushanbe>

⁹⁹ “US denies intention to deploy troops in Central Asia,” *The Voice of Russia*, April 1, 2011.

<http://english.ruvr.ru/2011/04/01/48328019.html>

¹⁰⁰ “Corruption Perceptions Index 2010 Results,” Transparency International, accessed June 28, 2011. http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/results

requires delegation of the part of decision-making powers upward thus creating risk of instability, if not losing office. For that reason, the Western schemes to promote regional cooperation akin to the Marshall Plan so far have been doomed to failure in Central Asia.

The US officials believe that the Taliban and al-Qaeda are the most pressing threats and the insistence on targeting corruption could create a governance vacuum in Central Asia. In most cases, Washington accepts as valid that stability in Central Asia is more important to the United States than human rights and good governance. However, stability should not be regarded as the only objective, because authoritarian leaders cannot secure steady development and durable peace.

According to the Open Society Foundations (OSF), in 2007, the United States spent at least six times more on military aid for the mostly authoritarian states of Central Asia than on efforts to promote political liberalization and human rights in the region.¹⁰¹

A lion's share of US payments related to the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) have, in fact, strengthened the local authoritarian regimes and, thus, added to the discontent of the local populations. An FBI investigation in 2005 exposed the companies controlled by then-president Askar Akayev's son Aidar and son-in-law Adil Toiganbaev, who misused tens of millions of dollars of the Pentagon-awarded fuel contracts for the Manas base.¹⁰² In late March of 2005, the co-called "Tulip Revolution" ousted Akayev and the lucrative fuel contracts went to the next Kyrgyz president Kurmanbek Bakiyev's son, Maxim Bakiyev. In April 2010, Kyrgyzstan's second president Bakiyev was similarly deposed amidst violence on the streets. It was followed by a violent ethnic riot in the southern city of Osh situated in the Fergana Valley. Contest for oil contracts adds to the overall political instability in Kyrgyzstan. Since 2009, the United States has paid around \$200 million per year for the Manas airbase, which amounts to more than 4 percent of Kyrgyzstan's GDP.¹⁰³

In Uzbekistan, the United States spent significant sums in weapons and security services to the Uzbek army in addition to millions spent for directly base-related costs in 2002-2005. United States paid the Uzbek government one million dollars per month for using the base. In 2004 alone, Pentagon spent \$163 million in Khanabad, \$114 million of which were spent on fuel. The

¹⁰¹ Lora Lumpe, "US Military Aid to Central Asia, 1999–2009: Security Priorities Trump Human Rights and Diplomacy," *Open Society Foundation Central Asia Project, Occasional Paper no.1*, October, 2010.

http://www.soros.org/initiatives/cep/articles_publications/publications/occasional-paper-20101015/OPS-No-1-20101015.pdf. According to this report, there is no unified US foreign military aid budget that catalogues all of the military assistance and cooperation the US government is providing to the armed forces of each of the Central Asian states.

¹⁰² Cornelius Graubner, "Implications of the Northern Distribution Network in Central Asia," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, September 1, 2009.

<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5169/print>

¹⁰³ Joshua Foust, "Post-Soviet Central Asian National Interests in Afghanistan," *A Century Foundation Report*, 2010. <http://tcf.org/publications/2010/9/post-soviet-central-asian-national-interests-in-afghanistan/pdf>

US base-related payments became a source of tension between the governments of the region as well as an important element in the family property struggles in Central Asia.

Fostering the credibility and legitimacy of the U.S. partners needs to be the key strategic objective. It is a big challenge for the Obama administration to avoid informal patronage networks and make sure that the money spent by the Pentagon for NDN operation actually benefits the “right” companies and legal institutions that pay taxes. Otherwise, the NDN operations may indirectly fuel domestic conflicts, increasing the popular aversion to the U.S. polices in the region.

The NDN endeavor can add to the internal instability of the transit countries. Some may resist the NDN operation in their territories out of fear that the Taliban and al-Qaeda may use it as a pretext for invasion and launching terrorist acts. Also, the local regimes view the supply route related payments as a bounty paid to them directly for their pro-American performance in the international arena. On the other hand, however, NDN may serve as an important mechanism for the U.S. interaction with transit states. Strong commitment to the future of the region, reinforced by the contribution to economic and political development has to define the US role in Central Asia. Priority projects include the completion of the Afghan Ring Road and Kabul-Herat highway and linking them to continental trunk routes, especially to the Pakistani port at Gwadar. Also important is the \$7.5 billion trans-Afghanistan Pipeline (TAPI) connecting Turkmenistan natural gas fields through Afghanistan with Pakistan and then with India. Equally important are the trans-Afghan rail lines linking Afghanistan with Central Asian railway, as well as the above mentioned CASA-1000 electrical transmission lines linking Central Asia, Afghanistan, northern Pakistan, and India.¹⁰⁴

How the United States manages these challenges and opportunities for cooperation with Afghanistan’s Central Asian neighbors will be critical to the success in Afghanistan and Pakistan, especially given the growing tension in the U.S.-Pakistan relations. After the death of Osama bin Laden in May 2011, the Pakistani Taliban’s retaliation may result in more attacks on US convoys in Pakistan and Afghanistan transit points, thus proving the role of the NDN more important for the success in Afghanistan in 2011-2014.

Central Asia is a major hub for providing mobility and security support to the international mission, but it is not a priority for US and NATO efforts in Afghanistan. Central Asia largely stands outside of what is going on in Afghanistan, benefiting from providing services for the US-led campaign in Afghanistan. As such, the Central Asian states accept the centrality of the United States in solving the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan and its exclusive responsibility for the future of the region.

Russia’s role in Central Asia and the conflict in Afghan-Pak

¹⁰⁴ S. Frederick Starr and Andrew C. Kuchins, “The Key to Success in Afghanistan A Modern Silk Road Strategy,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program in cooperation with the Center for Strategic & International Studies*, May, 2010. http://csis.org/files/publication/100610_key_to_success_in_afghanistan.pdf.

Russia, a key US partner in the NDN enterprise, has long-term interests in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. In the first years after the 1917 revolution, Russia unsuccessfully strove to make use of Pan-Islamism to instigate, with the Turkish support, a Pashtun revolt along the Durand Line against the British authorities as part of its global revolution agenda. Beginning in the late 1920s, the Soviet Union changed its strategy toward South Asia. It abandoned the idea of invading India from Central Asia to the more pragmatic plan of “building socialism” in one country – the USSR. This strategy required lessening revolutionary zeal and replacing it by the growing cooperation with a friendly, albeit non-Communist Afghan regime. This lasted only until 1979. The revolutionary mission of the Russian proletariat, which was helping Afghan workers in their resistance to Western imperialism, served as an ideological justification for the invasion in 1979, followed by the disastrous Soviet-Afghan war that lasted until 1989.

Today, Russia asserts its political and military position in Central Asia on the basis of bilateral agreements and as the leader of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). It has military presence in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. The CSTO considers the Afghanistan-based Sunni militants as a major security concern because of their attempt to destabilize the situation in Central Asia and Northern Caucasus. In 2009, CSTO allowed the US to send military supplies to its forces in Afghanistan across the Russian territory.

Russia’s and its Central Asian allies’ animosity to the Taliban and al-Qaeda began long before the US and NATO launched their military mission in Afghanistan. Since 1990s, Russia supported the Northern Alliance (Tajiks and Uzbeks), while Pakistan backed the Pashtun forces of Gulbudin Hekmatyar and the Taliban. Moscow as well as Central Asian capitals would prefer keeping Karzai and Tajik/Uzbek warlords in power over the Taliban’s return to power, even within a coalition government. Russian and Central Asian leaders would consider the complete Taliban takeover a disaster. At the same time, Russia declines to join the fight against the Taliban by sending its own forces. It is vexed both by the Taliban pervasiveness and the continuing US presence in close proximity to the Central Asia region. In return for providing support to US mission in Afghanistan, Moscow is asking for significant concessions from NATO. In general, however Russia does not want the US to fail in the Afghan mission. Russia is well aware that the NATO failure in Afghanistan may create a spillover effect and destabilize Central Asia and even Russia itself.

China’s contribution

China’s 47-mile border with Afghanistan is located in the remotest part of the Wakhan corridor, which divides Afghanistan from Tajikistan, Pakistan, and China. During the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s, China, like United States and Pakistan, acted against the USSR by supporting the mujahedeen in Afghanistan. After the fall of the USSR, China reinstated its cooperation with Russia. Today, China, a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Central Asia’s richest and closest neighbor, does not have a military presence in the region but is eager to intervene and secure its strategic interests in Central Asia.

Since the early 2000s, the north-western region of Xinjiang has been seen as an economic hub, partly to suppress the remaining separatist rebellion of Uighurs, in particular the Turkistan

Islamic Movement¹⁰⁵. China keeps close ties with Pakistan as a means of weakening India, its regional rival. In comparison with Moscow and Delhi, Beijing is less concerned about the Pakistan-backed Taliban coming to power.

By the late 2000s, Afghanistan remained rather untouched by the Chinese investments. This situation changed in 2008, when China's Metallurgical group invested \$3.5 billion in Afghanistan's Aynak copper field project. The copper field is estimated to be one of the largest in the world. The investment involves not only mining but also the construction of a railway from Tajikistan to Pakistan to support the exploration activities.¹⁰⁶ This project will make China the biggest investor in Afghanistan. Foreign investments to Afghanistan will create more jobs, enhance infrastructure, and support Afghan state budget, thus boosting Kabul's control over the country.

In contrast to Western offers, China and Russia cooperation and financial assistance does not come with strings attached in terms of improvements in democracy, religious freedom, and human rights. China is ready to cooperate with almost any kind of stable government that is able to meet its economic interests. However, it goes without saying that a secure and calm Afghanistan is China's priority, as it allows increased investments in Afghanistan.

Views about US, China, and Russia are divided in Central Asia. Fighting terrorism, while having Russia and China as strategic competitors and ideological opponents may create problems for US mission in Afghanistan, accelerate tensions between the United States' Central Asian allies and create pejorative incentives for local authoritarian regimes to gain short-lived benefits at the expense of enduring regional security. Russia, US and, China have a difficult task to find common interests they share in addressing transnational problems in Central and South Asia.

Conclusion

Despite the announced plans to complete the drawdown of troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014, the US strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan remains largely undefined. As of the summer 2011, the outcome of the US and NATO engagement in the region is uncertain. Not surprisingly, Central Asians have also failed to clearly articulate their approach toward the conflict in their South Asian "near abroad". In general Russian and Central Asia governments are employing passive "wait-and-see" approach and are doubtful about the positive outcome of the NATO campaigns in Afghanistan-Pakistan.¹⁰⁷ This uncertainty, along with the lack of progress

¹⁰⁵ Known as *Doğu Türkistan İslâm Hareketi* and East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), TIM is a mujahedeen organization, which was founded in 1993 in Hotan (Xinjiang). It moved into the Taliban-controlled Kabul in 1997 and to Pakistan's tribal zone in 2002. The Chinese government alleges that TIM receives funds and training from al-Qaeda. TIM was accused of attacking the US embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁰⁶ Nicklas Norling, "The Emerging China-Afghanistan Relationship," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, May 14, 2008. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4858>

¹⁰⁷ Ekaterina Evashenko, "Mezhdunarodnaja konferencija po Afganistanu: O nacional'nyh interesah stran regiona, rossijskoj pozicii i amerikanskih zhelanijah" ["International Conference

in Afghanistan and Pakistan, contributes to the growing anxiety and tension among the major stakeholders in the region.

As discussed throughout the book, two opposing views regarding the future of Central Asia's security vis-a-vis the conflict in Afghanistan-Pakistan vye for the recognition to shape the US policy in the region. At one extreme are those who adhere to the alarmist assessment and contend that insurgency and jihadi activities in Afghanistan-Pakistan are already spilling over into Central Asia and destabilization of the region is well underway.¹⁰⁸ On the other extreme are those who are more optimistic about the stability of Central Asia and contend that jihad manifested as anti-Western anger will not take root in Central Asia.

Careful examination of the current situation as well as the history of people's movements, insurgency, and manifestations of jihad in the region reveal that conclusions drawn from either extreme assessment do accurately not reflect the complexities of Central Asia's history, culture, and political landscape. This book concludes that the assessment of the situation and appropriate recommendation for action falls between these two extremes. In fact, the conflict in Rasht in 2010-2011 had little to do with "jihadism", Taliban, al-Qaeda or even with the US presence in Afghanistan. It was rather a continuation of the Tajik civil war between the two major factions. There are no domestic insurgents in Central Asia loyal to the Amir al Momineen, Mullah Omar. No uncontrolled territories exist in Central Asia that could attract attention of jihadis willing to relocate from Pakistan's tribal zone to continue their attacks on local governments and Western targets. The penetrations of radical Islamist groups into Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan from the Afghan territory had taken place many times since the 1990s and none of them, including the last incursion, resulted in a visible, not to mention large scale, support or participation of the local Muslims in "jihad."

Despite the mostly deserved accusations of weakness, corruption, mismanagement, and incompetence,¹⁰⁹ the government of Tajikistan has so far managed to gradually stabilize the situation relying on its own resources. The government has employed counter-insurgency tactics that include more negotiation and mediation than direct combat actions. Tajikistan and other Central Asia states have been able to avert the threat of jihad spreading on their territories. Useful lessons can be drawn and tendencies encouraged that have allowed Central Asia stay outside of the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other jihadist-terrorist organizations' sphere of influence and ensure stability in the whole region.

First of all, ethnic identity as a tool for political mobilization and nation-state formation is playing a prominent role worldwide. The essence of this process is the politization of ethnic and

on Afghanistan: National interests of the regional states, Russian position, and American wishes"], *Fergana News*, June 9, 2011. <http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=6985>

¹⁰⁸ Yuri Shevtsov, "Central'naja Azija pokryta opornymi punktami SShA i NATO" ["Central Asia is covered with US and NATO bases"], Interview by Mikhail Pak, *IA Regnum*, June 3, 2011. <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1411956.html#ixzz1OJNNYGPB>

¹⁰⁹ "Tajikistan: The Changing Insurgent Threats," *International Crisis Group Asia Report* no. 205, May 24, 2011. According to the International Crisis Group analysts, "Tajikistan has almost no capacity to tackle a dedicated insurgent force."

national identities. Tajikistan's experience with civil war and the rise of IRPT proves that political Islam and national awakening may well develop in a parallel fashion when juxtaposed within the framework of legal political process. After the long colonial and Soviet rule, Muslims of Central Asia for the first time in their history have embarked on the nation-state formation. The very concept of nation-state is, in fact, a secular one. States within their defined geographical and cultural borders, specific symbols, and so on have become central actors in shaping societies and domestic political arena has opened up for local communities, religious leaders, and modern political entrepreneurs for competition. The ethnicization of the nation has become the foundation for both international order and domestic political competition and conflict.

This political modernization has eroded religious links and metaphorical fraternal bonds that had existed between the kin communities residing on both banks of the Amu Darya River. Tajiks and Uzbeks in Afghanistan entered the process of becoming Afghans, while their brethren on the Soviet side gradually embraced the Soviet identity and later "transformed" to Tajiks and Uzbeks in the framework of ethnic, state-based and state-shaped nationalisms. They have also preserved their strong attachment to more localized, sub-ethnic coalitions. They have been known as Pansheris, Heratis, Qandaharis, and so on in Afghanistan. In Tajikistan, Sughdi, Kulabi, Gharmi and Pamiri distinct ethno-territorial and cultural communities remain powerful. In Uzbekistan, people have formed similar groups of Ferghanachis, Tashkendis, Samarqandis, etc. In Afghanistan, these solidarity groups are usually defined as "qawm" (tribe), while in Tajikistan they are referred to *mahal* (locality). These sub-national groups based on shared language, culture, and territory are likely to remain central to Central Asian politics for years to come.

The removal of foreign control and growing role of states gave way to growing tendencies of a state-led national and sub-national (ethnic) mobilization in Central Asia. Consequently, it was not political parties, but rather subnational (regional) structures, that became the main drivers of political process. Similarly, ethnic (non-civic) nationalism, supported by state and imbued with regionalism, became the principal element of national identity and consciousness. Needless to say, these political processes have downgraded the role of religion in forming a larger, supranational coalition and mobilization of the Muslim community that would be neutral to ethnicity and nation-state concerns.

Is politization of ethnicity a positive side-effect that would aid in countering religious radicalization? Can Central Asian policy of creating ethnic states find its followers in a multi-ethnic Afghanistan? If the answer is yes, we should expect the rise of ethnic particularism and, as a consequence, eclipse of jihadism, and transformation of Talibanism as a form of Islamic extremism into Pashtun nationalism. It will mean factual "de-Talibanization" and rising prominence of nationalism and ethnic policies in the post-jihadi Central and South Asia. Ethnic and national statism, with its worldly symbols and secular values and interests, has served as the most effective vaccine in preventing a contagious jihad in Central Asia. Central Asians have been attracted to secular nationalism rather than jihadism - an ideology without regard to actual history, territory, or cultural preferences of its adherents.

Shaping of the Tajik, Afghan, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Pakistani nation-states and forming interstate alliances in the region under study, has given unprecedented boost to the role of state, society,

and their contestation with religion. The governments strive to domesticate religion and utilize its power in their own interests. They restrict religious activism and freedom. By suppressing democratic institutions and procedures, they strive to monopolize the right to use religious symbols. This is a risky endeavor, because suppressing these freedoms may exacerbate social conflicts and push people toward radicalism.

Another important factor in preventing radicalization and spread of jihadism has been the modernization of Central Asia. Despite numerous conflict drivers, Central Asia has remained relatively peaceful for the past ten years after the completion of the Tajik reconciliation and commencement of the US engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Terrorism-related violence in the post-Soviet Central Asia and the number of casualties have been relatively low. The main reason for the low level of terrorist activity is the Soviet legacy of zero tolerance for organized violence and weapons possession. Since the elimination of Basmachism in the early 1930s, the Soviet state brutally yet successfully demilitarized Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz and secured the exclusive right to the use of force. Central Asians have long viewed state-led and state-controlled violence as preferable to the power vacuum, chaos, and uncontrolled and spontaneous violence by non-state actors. For this reason, Central Asians accepted Stalin's cruel policies in the post-Basmachi insurgency period.

In a similar fashion, in 1997-2003 the Tajik government reached the pique of its legitimacy by restoring major state institutions and, more notably, by extricating itself and the society from warlord dependency. The government successfully drove the violent non-state actors out of the red-zone of mass killings to the less alarming zone of lucrative business and open political competition. This has served as an important conflict mitigation strategy in Tajikistan. This task of demilitarization of the society and restoration of state power as part of the modernization plan is yet to be implemented in Afghanistan and tribal zones of Pakistan.

Along with the above mentioned conflict mitigating factors, Central Asia faces a series of challenges that may destabilize the region, thus opening a way to radicalization and "Talibanization" of the region. Since independence, Central Asian states have been developing at a very slow pace. Healthcare and education systems are afflicted with high levels of corruption and heavily depend on foreign aid. The populations of the region, who were once famed for their ability to write, are still largely literate, but there is not much to read. In the Tajik capital, for example, there are no modern bookstores or newspapers that are published on a daily basis.. Customary practices take precedence over civil law. Cronyism, nepotism, and polygamies have become the norm. Agricultural sector is falling apart. Meanwhile, cities are flooded by unemployed youth, who are growing frustrated. Big Central Asian cities today are not capable of rapid urbanization and incorporation of ghettos that are developing on the outskirts of these cities. As a result, many Central Asians have been forced to leave their homes to earn a living as migrant workers in Russia and Kazakhstan. Their integration especially into the Russian society has been problematic. Uprooted and unwelcome abroad, these masses are susceptible to radical Salafi ideologies and joining jihad.

Survival and stability of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are largely provided by the support of the international actors, including US, Russia, European and regional governments, international financial institutions, UN, OSCE, and some international NGOs. However, the external aid is

uncoordinated, irregular, and unstable. The lack of agreement among the major powers that influence the security in Central Asia further exacerbates the situation. These powers, namely US, Russia, and China, have often clashing interests in the region.

As a result, threats to the Central Asian security are both internal and external. The weakness of political parties and rule of law, lack of independent media, civil society, and corrupt police and justice system further exacerbates the situation. As evidenced by the recent events in the Middle East as well as the events in the post-Soviet domain a few years ago, democratization, even with its potentially destabilizing consequences, is increasingly embraced by many throughout the world. People are becoming less tolerant of injustice and lack of positive reforms in their societies. However, revolutions in Central Asia are pointless, since one group, not much different from its predecessor, will most likely end up taking over. Precisely this phenomenon was observed in Kyrgyzstan, which has experienced two bloody revolutions since 2005. Revolutionary (even if bloodless, which is not likely) removal of the ruling regimes will unleash the forces, including religious groups, political movements, ethnic communities, that these regimes hold under control. These disenfranchised groups may utilize the slogans of democracy to further their interests, thus destabilizing the whole region.

In Central Asia, the major security threat largely lies not in the radicalization of “Muslim policies” but in the failure of political and economic transformation, growing authoritarianism, widespread corruption, and other political, social and economic ills that have little or no connection to religiosity or the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. If these problems are not addressed, even the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan will not eliminate the threat of “talibanization,” as a destructive de-modernization and involution process, in Central Asia.

The historical backdrop presented in this book illustrates that Central Asia so far is not part of the “Muslims versus West” contest that is taking place in the Middle East, Western Europe, and elsewhere in the world with a history of colonial conquest and exploitation. Central Asians do not largely consider their Soviet past as merciless colonial exploitation and national humiliation. Their recent anti-Russian sentiment is benign and has nothing to do with religious bias or ethnic hatred. It is chiefly a reaction to the waning Russian power, failed expectations, and general disillusionment with its incapability to modernize. Also, independent Central Asia is now eager to diversify its foreign policy options, which inevitably leads to gradual removal from the Soviet/Russian past and closer cooperation with immediate kin neighbors, including Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. However, Central Asia will continue developing in the direction of modernization and secularism inherited from the Soviet past. South Asia is not a priority for local leaders who are hesitant of implementing radical reforms in domestic or foreign policy. Central Asian still mostly consider Afghanistan and Pakistan a part of a “different world”¹¹⁰ associated with Islamic fundamentalism, militancy and, endless conflict.

¹¹⁰ “Afghanistan’s Other Neighbors: Iran, Central Asia, and China,” [Conference Report, organized by the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies and the Hollings Center for International Dialogue, Istanbul, Turkey, July 2008].
http://0303ffd.netsolhost.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/07-2008_Afghanistans_Other_Neighbors.pdf

Despite the lack of reliable information on the jihadi infiltration in Central Asia, it is too early to claim al-Qaeda's or Taliban's presence in Tajikistan. Objectively, the chances of the local populations welcoming Taliban and supporting their Salafite ideologies in Central Asia are low. The reason for this partly lies in their mostly foreign (Pashtun) and "international" (Arab) origins and largely unpopular anti-American zeal. Furthermore, historically Central Asian rulers have not allowed clerics to govern in a predominantly Sunnite Central Asia. It is true that from time to time religious radicals and sectarian leaders, in coalition with secular political entrepreneurs, have managed to draw popular support among particular Muslim communities to further their political goals through inciting violence at the sub-national level (as happened in Tajikistan in 1992-1993). It is also true that members of IMU and some other de-territorialized and marginalized radical groups of Central Asian, Xinjiangese, and Russian origin participated in the fights against the coalition forces in Afghanistan and against government forces in Pakistan's Waziristan in 2002-2011. Whether they have done so due to their predisposition to global jihad and anti-American sentiment or because of the pressure of circumstances has to be studied thoroughly before rushing to conclusions such as "clash of civilizations."

Applying the alarmist "domino theory" to explain the effects of the crisis in Afghanistan and Pakistan on Central Asia, Xinjiang, and beyond^{111 112} and viewing "jihadism" as a contagious anti-Western movement akin to Communism of the Cold War era is dubious at best. During the Vietnam War, the Western powers similarly feared that, if not stopped, the epidemic of Communism would spread to the entire region of South-Eastern Asia and even further to Australia. In the 1980s Afghanistan, the same panic brought about mujahedeen – godfathers of the Taliban - as a counter-force to prevent Communism from spreading in South Asia.

The so-called "Islamists" are not a monolithic threat to the Central and South Asian security. There is need to open political space for moderate Islamic parties in the region. Currently, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) is the only Islamic party in Central Asia to be included in the political process. Over the years, the IRPT has moved toward moderation, despite governmental pressures and largely ungrounded charges of terrorism. IRPT is the only Islamic party that succeeded in gaining popular support and achieving visible political results.

The mere fact of IRPT's legalization as a political party, however, does not mean its rapid moderation and overall liberalization of the political life in the region. The IRPT and even secular Central Asian parties have emerged from the Soviet past, with no tradition of democratic development or political dialogue. Furthermore, the party of Tajik Islamists is built on the model of Communist party and Muslim Brotherhood: it is based on loyalty to the leader and does not act as a modern political party. The IRTP cannot be cherished for just joining the government, as the very Tajik government is neither liberal nor democratic, but is corrupt, authoritarian, and based on personal patronage and localism.

¹¹¹ Ahmed Rashid, "The Taliban: Exporting Extremism," *Foreign Policy*, November/December 1999. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/55600/ahmed-rashid/the-taliban-exporting-extremism>

¹¹² Tom Gjelten, "Afghan War Could Spill Over Into Central Asia," *NPR*, December 31, 2009. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=121973427>

Central Asians are products of their history; their behavior may change, sometimes strengthening and other times weakening their attachment to an idealistic and obscure “Islamic order”. These changes originate not from the creed, but from politics, economic life, and social environment. In other words, “Islam” is an additional dimension to the ordinary politics in Central Asia as well as other parts of the world. As such, the future of political Islam in Central Asia (and worldwide) is uncertain. However, most of Central Asian Islamists’ attachment to their historical territory, culture, and society are much stronger than their connection to the abstract universalist aspirations of buiding an Islamic Caliphate “on the ruins of the Western civilization.”

The US military presence in Central Asia that aims to eliminate Al Qaeda affiliates and other terrorist groupings is likely to create more problems and alienate the Central Asian public. This mostly because, as in every military campaign, US use of drones, Special Forces, and so on leads to inevitable loss of innocent lives. Such an approach would risk the rise of local jihad directed against Americans and possible merger of local jihadis with Pakistani and Afghan Taliban and Al Qaeda.

Various historical forms of jihadism have proved to be incapable of achieving their original goals. Central Asian and Afghan fundamentalist movements like Basmachism, Mujahedeen, and the Taliban, had, in fact, emerged as heroic emancipation movements aimed at fighting colonizers, invaders, and their local sympathizers. As such, they enjoyed a great deal of indigenous support. However, they failed to bring about ideal societies and polities free from repression and poverty. Their understanding of jihad as liberation and independence has lacked strategic depth of what exactly should follow a successful jihad. As a result, victorious insurgency has turned into a new form of oppression and abuse of power.

Despite their diverse ideological trajectories, all states of the region under study are confronted with similar internal problems, which are supplemented by external tensions. Domestic conflict triggers include discredited elites drawn into parochial feuds and near-collapsed state institutions. Throughout Central and South Asia, Muslims encounter various problems including poverty, health, unemployment that produce complex responses, including tolerance of radicalism, militancy, and violence. Sense of misery, hopelessness, uncertainty, insecurity, and inability to bring about positive change may push the local population to embrace Islam in its most radical forms.

The United States cannot win its battle in Afghanistan and Pakistan or ensure stability in Central Asia without taking these realities into consideration. Rather than just forming anti-jihadi coalitions with the local governments in its war in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the US administration needs do more to help the region address its own problems. Deploying a large number of troops, opening transit points, or building military bases in Central Asia is not the answer. Recent violent clashes in Central Asia have little to do with the Taliban; instead they largely reflect internal instability. Most of Central Asian states and Russia have exaggerated the threat of the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other terrorist groups both to suppress domestic opposition and attract assistance from Western governments. Much of this activity is misconceived and counterproductive. The repressive policies aimed at the local population, under the pretext of

fighting IMU, Hizbut-Tahrir, and other groups, are more likely to create the very threat the Central Asian governments seek to counter.

Instead of building up the military capabilities by channeling millions of dollars to corrupt governments, the United States should seek to strengthen national political institutions and processes, support state and civil society-building, aid economic development, and help the regional governments in fighting drug-trafficking. Such a strategy would have a great potential of addressing the challenges in Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as ensuring stability in Central Asia.

It would be a mistake to leave Central Asia at the mercy of the kleptocratic regimes and hope that they will secure lasting peace and stability. The 2011 revolts in the Middle East and North Africa targeted authoritarian rulers that long enjoyed international legitimacy as the guardians of Western interests and guarantors of stability in Muslim-majority states. The effect of these anti-governmental uprisings may be catastrophic, as they may result in civil wars and failed states. These events illustrated that stability should not be viewed as the only objective for the international community while regulating the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan and bringing peace to South and Central Asia.