

**THE ROLE OF ISLAM
IN POST-SOVIET UZBEK HISTORIOGRAPHY**

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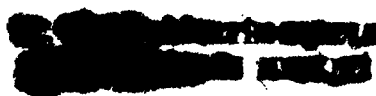
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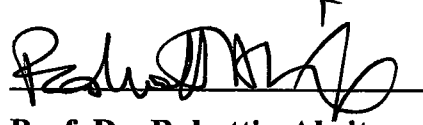
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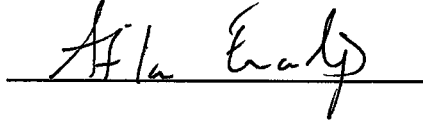
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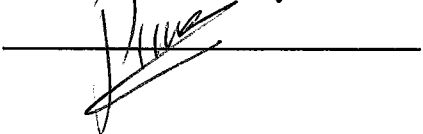
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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF ISLAM IN POST-SOVIET UZBEK HISTORIOGRAPHY

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This thesis studies the role of religion in Uzbekistan in the Post-Soviet era, in an attempt to understand the nature of religious awakening which has increasingly influenced the nation's politics in the past decade. By reviewing theoretical literature on the role of religion in Muslim societies and the meaning of culture, ethnicity and nationalism, and relating that to actual events and political developments in the country, the thesis seeks to establish that religious awakening in Uzbekistan is associated with nationalism and culture rather than political ideology. To achieve that the thesis is divided into six chapters that include an introduction and a conclusion, in addition to four

chapters covering respectively history of Islam in Uzbekistan, the main religious and nationalist movements since the creation of the state, the signs and features of religious influence in the county, and the causes that have led and contributed to the rise of Islam in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Religion, Nationalism, Ethnicity, Culture, Political Islam.



ÖZ

**İSLAMIN SOVYET SONRASI ÖZBEK HISTOGRAFYASINDAKİ
ROLÜ**

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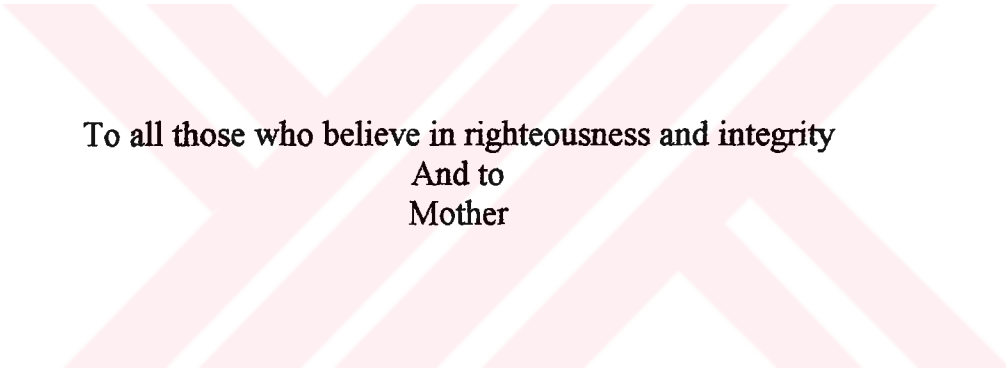
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Tezin amacı dinin Sovyet sonrası Özbekistan'daki rolü ve son on yılda Özbek Toplumunu etkileyen dini uyanışı açıklamaktır. Bu tez teorik literatürü taramakta dinin müslüman toplumlardaki rolünü, Kültür, etnik yapı ve milliyetçiliğin anlamını irdelemektir. Özbekistanda olan olaylara ve siyasi gelişmeler bu teorik çerçeveyi uygulayan bu tez Özbekistan'daki dini uyanışı, siyasi ideoloji değel, aslında miliyetçilik olduğunu ortaya koyuyor. Bunu açıklamak için tez 6 bölüme ayrılıyor. Başlangıç ve sonuç bölümünün dışındaki dört bölümde, Özbekistanın siyasi tarihi, önemli dini ve miliyetçi

akımlar, dini etkinin özellikleri ve İslamın Özbekistan'daki yükselişi anlatılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din, milliyetçilik, etkin, kültür, siyasal islam.





To all those who believe in righteousness and integrity
And to
Mother

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This thesis would not have been satisfactorily completed without the professional guidance and supervision of Prof. Dr. Sha Blkbaođlu, to whom I am thankful. The committed interest of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Pınar Akçalı and the contribution of Assoc. Prof. Dr. İhsan D Dađı also deserve my thanks.

PREFACE

The research work in this thesis is primarily based on library resources. The diversity of authors of the books and journal articles to be used is attentively considered. The works of experts on Central Asia, the former Soviet Union, the Cold War, the Middle East and Islam are also used. Those experts will be chosen from different backgrounds, as articles and books by Central Asian, Russian, Western, Arab and Turkish authors are cited. The reading material also includes some Arabic and Turkish language texts in addition to English. Media reports and internet materials are used as subordinate literature to supplement library sources.

The thesis contains six chapters that cover the following subjects:

1. an introduction;
2. history of Islam in Central Asia;
3. Islamic and nationalist movements in Uzbekistan;
4. Signs of Islamic awakening in Uzbekistan;
5. Causes of Islamic awakening in Uzbekistan;
6. And a conclusion.

The introductory chapter is aimed at discussing Islamic perspectives on the role of religion in the political affairs of the state. It also includes definitions of some of the main concepts as they appear in this research, e.g. the meaning of a nation and what incites nationalism, an identification of culture and civilization, and an examination of the role of religion in creating and arousing such political concepts from an Islamic perspective. The aim of such a theoretical discussion is to lay the ground for the argument that in the case of Uzbekistan, religious awakening is compatible, and indeed perhaps intertwined, with nationalism and the quest for freedom and democracy.

The second chapter gives a historical account of Islam and its role in the region before the independence of Uzbekistan and the other Central Asian republics. It is divided into three parts that cover the following periods: history of the Uzbek people and their origins before Islam, the advent of Islam in Uzbekistan, and Islam in Russian-dominated and Soviet Uzbekistan. This chapter is geared toward serving two purposes. The first is to give a historical background and an orientation of the subject of the research, i.e. Uzbekistan and its people. The second is to explain the kind of relationship that Uzbeks have had with religion throughout history, to indicate that Islam became deep-rooted in Uzbekistan after initially withstanding strong resistance by the indigenous people, and that its current revival is due partly to its strength in depth, not only as a faith, but as an identity and a culture as well.

The third chapter reviews some active Islamic movements in Uzbekistan's recent history and at present. This is to introduce the main elements that have carried out Islamic revival, and to study their patterns of behavior: actions and reactions, understanding of the role of religion in politics, and thereby their goals.

This is followed by a review in the fourth chapter of signs that indicate the revival of Islam and its impact on Uzbekistan. This chapter aims at presenting and discussing the signals and traces of Islamic awakening on two political levels: domestic and foreign. It subsequently studies to what extent Islam has actually influenced Uzbek politics on those two levels.

This in turn is followed in the fifth chapter by an analysis of the key factors that have caused the resurgence of Islam in the country, in an attempt to answer the question of why there has been an Islamic awakening in Uzbekistan. This is of course assuming that the previous chapter had shown that there has been such a phenomenon in the first place.

Finally, chapter six concludes the thesis by a discussion on prospects of the role of Islam in Uzbekistan. It examines the nature of the rise of Islam in the Central Asian nation with an emphasis on distinguishing between two types of religious awakening: one that is based on the use of religion as a political ideology with a political agenda, whilst the other is based on the link

between religion and the national heritage of the people in terms of their culture and identity.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Until 1991, only a few people had probably heard about the existence of five Central Asian republics with predominantly Muslim populations inside the Soviet Union. Apart from experts on Soviet affairs and researchers in Islamic history, those who came across the name of one or more of those republics had a difficulty remembering it, let alone trying to learn about it; if not for the scarcity of information, then for the unpreparedness to remember unfamiliar names all of which end in the same syllable, "...*stan*." Taking into consideration the historic and geographic significance of Central Asia, an important ring was thus obliterated from the chain of history of the world civilization, and a major gateway between the East and the West was closed.

The Soviets had imposed a full black-out on what was going on inside their slack union, for they did all they could to sustain the image of a world super-power that protected the weak and the poor and played the role of the custodian of world socialism. It was, therefore, a red line to blurt out the ills that were eating up the union from within. Something if uncovered to the

world outside would tear the mask off the weak union. This tactic of obliteration, often termed in the West 'the Iron Curtain', remained successful for 74 years until internal problems, mixed with external pressure, inter-reacted in 1991 to explode and tear to bits the giant union.

The multifaceted ethnic and religious heterogeneity in the Soviet Union and the incoherence of the state structure were among the foremost factors that led to the breakup. Ethnic, social and economic divisions among the people were evident in different categories and on various levels: between Slavs and non-Slavs, Europeans and Asians, Christians and Muslims, and among over 100 different ethnic groups.

1.1 Subject of the Study

When the Soviet Union crumbled in 1991, 15 republics emerged out of its ruins. Of those, the international community was introduced for the first time to five independent republics from Central Asia, namely Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. This first introduction soon turned into interest as the region became the arena of many political and economic interactions; from its richness in oil, natural gas, and gold mines to the breakout of internal unrest and the revival of Islam on its soil. More scrutiny was dedicated to the study of the region by both political practitioners and academic researchers, with the aim of understanding its present

developments and potential contribution to world politics and economy. Central Asia had plenty to attract the attention of the world. In addition to its abundant natural resources, it constituted a large market for foreign products and occupied a strategic location at the crossroads between Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Moreover, at this time when much rhetoric is spreading on the rise of religious nationalism across the world, the revival of Islam in Central Asia after more than seven decades of atheist rule set the region as a fertile ground for the study of Islam.

Like its smaller neighbors, Uzbekistan has captured much attention from both political and academic international circles. Indeed the bulk of interest in the region was focused on that republic in particular. For one thing, Uzbekistan's population is by far the largest in Central Asia¹, and the republic is home to non-Uzbek Muslim minorities from all other neighboring republics, whereas considerable Uzbek minorities live in the four other Central Asian republics. Second, it was out of Uzbekistan's land that a number of the greatest scholars and military leaders in the history of Islam like Avicenna, al-Khorezmi, al-Bukhari, Tamerlane, al-Biruni and Shibani emerged. Third, on different occasions, like in the case of the Basmachi rebellion and the rise of the Jadid movement, Uzbekistan was the center of resistance against both the Tsarist and the Communist rules. Finally, the republic has seen a tendency in

¹The population of Uzbekistan is estimated at 23 million, while in the other republics, the populations do not exceed 10 million. Even in the case of Kazakhstan, where the population is 18 million, the Kazakhs constitute only some 45% of the total population.

the past decade on both the popular and official levels toward the revival of its culture and traditions, of which Islam constitutes the core.

This paper seeks to study the role and nature of Islam in Uzbekistan's post-Soviet historiography, and how it is influencing Uzbek politics in the post-independence era. It is intended to examine whether, to what extent and why the Uzbek society has witnessed religious awakening following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It will maintain the view that religious revival in Uzbekistan seems to be a form of political nationalism that could have been enhanced by, among other factors, the appearance of an ideological vacuum following the collapse of communism, economic pressure, political intolerance, efforts of local Muslim clerics, and foreign influence.

1.2 Theoretical Discussion of the Role of Islam in Politics

In most Muslim nations today, there is an ongoing debate on how far religion is intrinsic in political life. This debate has in a number of cases, overpassed its intellectual boundaries and developed into a bloody showdown. From one side's point of view, it was a war on the 'terrorists'. From the other side's, it was a war on the 'infidels' or 'apostates'. The debate has not reached this far in Uzbekistan. But in all cases, Uzbekistan included, Islam has been a universal religion that dwells upon various aspects of life of the individual and the society alike. Whether politics should be based on religion remains

controversial. While some Islamists have insisted that religion and politics are inseparable, various Muslim political thinkers have discussed this debate in a more balanced approach, taking into consideration both the Islamic doctrine and the requirements and conditions of political realities.

In the 11th century, even before political institutions per se were developed in Muslim societies, renowned Muslim scholar Imam al-Mawardi advocated some sort of separation between religion and politics, when he distinguished between *Ahl al-Ijtihad* (those who possessed religious legal knowledge) and *Ahl al-Hal Wal Aqd* (those who took leading political roles in society). While he conceded that the two categories were not necessarily mutually exclusive, he contended that the conditions and qualities required for clergymen were not the same as those required for politicians. *Ahl al-Ijtihad*, according to al-Mawardi, were supposed to be religiously learned and have thorough knowledge of Islamic law, whereas *Ahl al-Hal Wal Aqd* must possess other qualities which he classified as justice, political knowledge and experience, and wisdom and soundness of judgment.²

Within the same context, Abdil Hamid al-Ansari refers to Egyptian political thinker Muhammad Fathi Othman's argument that politics is both an art and a science which requires certain political and social criteria different from those required for clergy. Religious learning and knowledge of Islamic law, therefore, do not suffice to make clergymen eligible for political practice.

²Abdil Hamid al-Ansari. "Ahl al-Shura and Ahl al-Ijtihad in the Islamic State." *Al-Arabi*. (In Arabic.) (September 1998), p. 123.

According to al-Ansari, this argument goes in conformity also with Ibn Khaldun's view that "of all people, (religious) scholars are the farthest from politics and its practices."³

Islamists, on the other hand, argue that Islam is not a mere spiritual faith in isolation of human interactions but rather a comprehensive way of life which deals with and indeed organizes patterns of behavior in the Muslim polity. They, therefore, do not acquiesce in limiting the role of Islam to mosques and the exercise of rituals. What they normally seek is to have religion transcend social manners to include economic and political affairs of society, both internally and in relations with other nations. For them, the application of *shari'a*, or Islamic law, is uncompromisable. The Muslim community is thus bound by the rules of *shari'a* as drafted from the Koran and the *Hadith*. All civil and legal affairs, economic transactions, and political interactions must meanwhile be implemented in accordance with those rules.

As Adeed Dawisha explains: "devout Muslims argue that Islam is a complete social, political, legal and cultural system. In the *shari'a*, the Muslims have a law that deals with all constitutional and legal matters, and as such is treated, in orthodox Islamic theory, as the only legally acceptable code."⁴ It is out of this conviction that Islamist political parties or pressure groups seek to politicize Islam, either through democratic, constitutional channels or by resorting to violence and other illegal acts. Whether tagged as

³*Ibid.*, p. 124.

moderate or extremist, and whichever means they use, such Islamic movements share one goal: the application of Islamic law on all aspects of life, including politics.

Islamist political movements do not however represent a majority in Muslim states, at least thus far. They are challenged by other Islamic schools of thought within the Muslim community. One such is the school that tends to keep a low profile in politics and opts instead for everyday Islam as its main domain of preaching and teaching to reform the society. It does not therefore have an overt aspiration for power but focuses its effort on philanthropizing and purifying the Muslim community. The Muslim Brotherhood, which was founded in 1928 by Egyptian schoolteacher Hassan el-Banna and later spilled over to several nearby countries, is the forerunner of this school.⁵

Pro-Islamic ideology is often contested as well by other political movements in Muslim countries, simply on the notion that "we are all Muslims", and that Islam is such a flexible religion that can accommodate all political schools and may not therefore be monopolized by one 'fundamentalist' line. Some of them also argue that fundamental Islam does not provide for a clear-cut, detailed track whereupon policies must be formed. Such was the argument of Pakistani President Farooq Leghari, when

⁴Adeed Dawisha. Islam in Foreign Policy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 3.

⁵Although the Muslim Brothers reveal their stance on certain political events, this is only done on an ad hoc basis. They have never applied for registration as a political party, neither have they run in parliamentary or presidential elections. When their candidates engage in legal political activities, they only do so as independents or under the umbrella of another political party. However, the Muslim Brothers' overall involvement in politics has recently been on the increase.

addressing leaders of the Organization of the Islamic Conference countries on March 23, 1997, he said: "There are 250 verses in the Koran on legislation but 750 on studying nature."⁶ In his statement, the president of Pakistan was trying to make the point that Islam virtually stipulates the adaptation to developments, rather than sticking to a fundamentalist, dogmatic view.

In essence, the predominant majority of Muslims agree on the basics. To be a Muslim, one must believe in and exercise the five pillars of Islam: the *Shahada* (that there is no god but Allah, and that Mohammed is His messenger); the daily five prayers; alms giving; the fasting of Ramadan; and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Apart from that, Islamic law, as Bernard Lewis explains, divides actions into five categories which may be classified as: commanded; recommended; permitted; disapproved; and forbidden. In man-made systems of law, actions are usually divided into no more than two categories, permitted and forbidden.⁷ Furthermore, in a dictum ascribed to him, Prophet Mohammed preached: "Difference of opinion within my community is a sign of God's mercy." This dictum and the fact that Islam puts forward in legal terms five categories of actions provide an indication of Islam's flexibility and readiness for adaptation to varying circumstances.

⁶Turkish Daily News, March 24, 1997.

⁷Bernard Lewis. Islam and the West. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 46.

1.3 Islam as a Source of Civilization, Identity and Culture

Fundamentalist or modernist, militant or moderate, devout or secular, Muslims share the belief that Islam is not only a religion wherein a set of rituals and commandments must be followed, but is also a founder of a civilization. In his article "The Clash of Civilizations?", Samuel Huntington identifies eight civilizations in the world today. Of these Islam is listed as one, the others being the Western, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and "possibly" African civilizations. In his definition, a civilization is "a cultural entity" and "the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species. It is defined both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people."⁸

In the case of the Islamic civilization, it was Islam that established virtually all the elements of the civilization (both the objective and the subjective as described by Huntington.). In terms of the objective elements, Islam created a whole new civilization virtually from scratch. Before Islam's emergence, Arabs, Pakistanis, Malays and Turks were constituted of either scattered tribes, or semi-civilized small entities in best cases. Even the great civilization of Persia, the only exception, underwent a total conversion after the advent of Islam. It was Islam that founded the history, institutions, and

⁸In Foreign Affairs, volume 72 No. 3, 1993, pp. 23-24.

way of life for its society⁹. In terms of the subjective elements, on the other hand, it was Islam too that united distinct groups of people who had differed lingually, ethnically, racially and geographically into one *ummah*. Until the present day, most Muslims tend to distinguish themselves from other communities through religion.

On a number of occasions, Islam has proved to be an essential source of identity, not only for individuals, but more importantly for nations or collective societies. This has been the case with the independence of Pakistan, the war of independence in Bosnia, and decades earlier, the resistance in Central Asia against Russian rule. The latter in particular still casts its shadow on Russia's relations with Central Asia's Muslim republics even today. According to Huntington, as part of the clash between the Islamic and the Slavic-Orthodox civilizations, the relations between Russians and Muslims in Central Asia are tense, and Russia has deployed troops to protect its interests in the Caucasus and Central Asia. "Religion reinforces the revival of ethnic identities and restimulates Russian fears about the security of their southern borders," he explains.¹⁰

Although such fears are not often noted in Russian political rhetoric which is nowadays rather focused on internal problems as well as the enlargement of NATO toward the east, i.e. Russia's border, ultra-nationalist

⁹Most modern Muslim states correlate their history with that of Islam, especially the days when Islam reached its zenith by conquering many parts of the world and turning them into Muslim territories. This drive can be noticed in the mass media, school curricula, and speeches by political leaders.

¹⁰Huntington, p. 33.

Russians like Vladimir Zhirinovsky confess to those fears out loud. In many of his written works, Zhirinovsky repeatedly reveals his suspicion of the intentions toward Russia of several countries, including Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, and he is particularly antagonistic toward the Muslim Turkic nations of Central Asia, maintaining that "the Muslim danger must be suppressed [and] the Turkish-speaking world must be cut away."¹¹

Islam thus is widely viewed by both Muslims and non-Muslims to be a principal component and primary denominator of an Islamic community's culture, which in turn is congruent to the formation of a nation. As Ernest Gellner argues, where culture is defined as "a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating," two people are considered to be of the same nation if they share the same culture and tacitly recognize each other as belonging to the same nation.¹² In other words, a group of people may be identified as a nation if its members, in addition to having the will and voluntary adherence to the same group, share the same culture.

¹¹Alan J. Koman. "The Last Surge to the South: The New Enemies of Russia in the Rhetoric of Zhirinovsky." Studies in Conflicts and Terrorism. 3 (January-March 1996), p. 285.

¹²Ernest Gellner. Nations and Nationalism. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983, p. 7.

1.4 Islam and Nationalism

Nationalism, as Gellner defines it, is primarily a political principle which obliges the congruity of the political and national unit, and which is aroused by the feeling of anger if this congruity is breached, or the feeling of satisfaction if it is fulfilled.¹³ Because religious awakening in Uzbekistan, which had started well before the republic's independence, exhibits characters of nationalism, especially in its calls for independence, freedom and indigenization of power and authority, and because religion -as explained earlier- is intrinsic in a Muslim community's culture and is almost synonymous with Uzbek nationalism¹⁴, this paper will conceive of religious awakening in Uzbekistan as rather another form of the overall Uzbek nationalist movement. The argument in this respect as presented in chapters Four and Five maintains that while the bond between religion and nationalism set the ground for religious awakening in the country, several other factors have played a role in partly turning nationalism into religious awakening.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁴Besides the fact that Uzbeks have always cherished their identity as a *Muslim*, Central Asian people, many *nationalist*, political movements such as the Jadid in the past and Birlik and Erk at present have identified themselves one way or another with Islam as a source of culture and identity, if not as a source of political ideology. (See chapter Three.)

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL REVIEW

2.1 Origin and History of the Uzbek People

Uzbekistan as a nation-state is a mere Soviet creation. Its establishment was the product of the Soviet delimitation process, through which Stalin sought to divide the huge land of Turkestan inherited by Tsarist Russia, so that it can be easier to control. For many centuries before, the land on which modern Uzbekistan was created had been inhabited by a mixture of Iranian, Mongol and Turkic races. Those were later joined by Arabs in the wake of Islamic expansion, and Russians and other Europeans and Asians in the wake of Russian and Soviet rule. Nowadays Uzbekistan continues to be home to people of different ethnic backgrounds. Ethnic Uzbeks, however, constitute the predominant majority. It is they who lead the political life of the republic, be it government or opposition, and it is about them that the larger part of research and study on Uzbekistan -and indeed the entire Central Asia in some aspects- is focused.

The history of the Uzbeks can only be understood in the context of the history of Central Asia as a whole. But even in this case, Uzbeks' - as are Central Asians' origins remain ambiguous. Central Asians are known to be the people who have occupied the lands that run for 4000 miles connecting the East and the West. A huge territory that sheltered nomadic tribes, as well as settled populations around Bukhara, Samarkand and Merv. Since they had no recorded civilization, very little is known about their ancient background. In his account on *History of the World*, J. M. Roberts notes the following:

No one knows the ultimate origins of the peoples of Central Asia. They seem distinctive at the moment they enter history, but more for their culture than for their genetic stock. By the first millennium BC they were specialists in the difficult art of living on the move, following pasture of their flocks and herds and mastering the special skills this demanded. It is almost completely true that until modern times, they remained illiterate and they lived in a mental world of demons and magic except when converted to the higher religions.¹⁵

The historical roots of the Uzbeks as a distinctive ethnic group are not much deeper than their roots as a people or a nation. This is due partly to the nomadic nature of their ancestors and their continuous migration from one spot to another, and partly to the fact that during this process they intermarried and mingled with other ethnic groups, most notably Central Asian Persians. It

could be argued that those nomadic Turkic tribes are today's Uzbeks, while those ancient Persians are today's Tajiks. However, given the scale of mixing and intermarrying that took place *and still does* between the two, it seems more tenable to see the ethnic Uzbeks of today as the offspring of both, probably with some additional Asian and European blend. Such a mixture may also be evident in the diversity of the Uzbeks' facial features and complexion. Thus, in terms of origin, the Uzbeks are the offspring of a multi-ethnic mixture. In terms of self-identification, they are a Muslim, Turkic Central Asian people altogether.

History accounts on Uzbekistan date back to as far as the fourth century BC, when Alexander of Macedonia, enroute to conquer India, stopped near Samarkand, and married the daughter of a local chieftain. At that time the inhabitants of that land were ethnic Persians. It was at a later stage that the Turkic tribes began to arrive to the sedentary centers of the area and mix with its people. A process which continued through the seventh century AD, when the Arabs began their influx into the region and brought Islam with them.¹⁵ Until that point, the people of the region had no recorded identity. They were a mere combination of settled Persians and nomadic Turks without a unified ethnic identity, language or religion. Islam, as will be explained in the next chapter, played a major role in introducing a sedentary and more orderly life to the local inhabitants. But it was not until many centuries after Islam's advent

¹⁵J. M. Roberts. History of the World. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 255.

¹⁶James Critchlow. Nationalism in Uzbekistan. Boulder: Westview Press, 1991, p. 5.

that Uzbek became a distinct ethnic identity, through which the Uzbeks were able to distinguish themselves from other groups in Central Asia.

The renowned scholar and Basmachi leader, Zeki Velidi Togan, traces back the roots of the Uzbek identity to the 14th century, when the term Ozbek was used in Central Asia to distinguish a *Togmak* tribe and its warriors from other groups like the Tatar and Kipchak. According to him, those who became known as Uzbeks -after Genghis Khan's grandson Ozbek Khan (1312-1340)- were the "dominant military-nomadic Tatar and Kipchak amalgamation of the Jochi Ulus (the sovereign entity of the Golden Horde.)".¹⁷ Russian sources, on the other hand, define "Uzbek" as "the proper name of a tribe of Tatars (sic) comprising the main population of the *khanate* of Khiva," whereas "Uzbeks" are "a conglomerate of tribes in which the Turkic element is mixed with Mongol."¹⁸

The people of the region were united in the late 14th century for the first time since the Arabs had once united them under the banner of Islam. Tamerlane, an Islamized, Turkified Mongol who was born in 1336 near Samarkand, began his unification expedition in 1382. By the time of his death in 1405, he had subdued Transoxiana, Transcaucasia, Khurasan, and North India; a vast territory that extended from Delhi to Moscow and from Kashgar to Herat.¹⁹ His birthplace, Samarkand, was made the capital of this large

¹⁷Zeki Velidi Togan. "The Origins of the Kazaks and the Ozbeks," in H. B. Paksoy, ed. Central Asia Reader. New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1993, p. 28.

¹⁸Critchlow, pp. 3, 4.

¹⁹ Kashgar. The chief city in western Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan) on the Silk Road.

empire. However, shortly after his death, the large empire he built began to disintegrate as local warlords vied for power shortly after his death.²⁰

While Tamerlane is hailed in present day Uzbekistan as the ultimate father of all Uzbeks, special tribute is also paid to another Turko-Mongol leader and descendent of the aforementioned nomadic tribe of "Uzbeks" that had seceded from Genghis Khan's Golden Horde. Muhammad Shibani is widely viewed as a second father of Uzbeks and the founder of Uzbek identity. Proceeding with the campaign that his grandfather Abul Khayr (d.1469) had launched, Shibani was able to capture a vast territory of land, including Samarkand in 1501, Khiva in 1505, and Herat in 1507, before his death in battle at Merv in 1510. Although fighting continued for some time after his death, his successors managed to keep together most of the territory which he re-unified.²¹ To the Uzbek people, Shibani's victories mark days of glory to cherish even today, for the final outcome of his campaign was the emergence of a people with a new identity in the region. These were the kin-ancestors of the ethnic Uzbeks of today.

If Tamerlane is the father of Uzbeks as a *people* and Shibani is the founder of the Uzbek *identity*, Faizulla Khojaev is evidently the founder of the Uzbek *nation*. Born in 1898 in Bukhara and the son of a wealthy merchant, Khojaev joined the secret Bukhara branch of the Jadid movement that was

Herat. Currently in Western Afghanistan.

²⁰Shirin Akiner. "Post-Soviet Central Asia: Past is Prologue," in Peter Ferdinand ed. The New Central Asia and its Neighbours. London: Printer Publishers, 1994, p. 8.

²¹S. A. M. Adshead. Central Asia in World History. London: Macmillan, 1993, pp. 153, 154.

known as the Young Bukharans. When the Jadids were divided between those who took an uncompromising stance against the Bolsheviks and those who opted to cooperate with them, he joined the latter. His collaboration on the Red Army to overthrow the Emir of Bukhara, and his personal charisma and attractive character soon gained him the respect and admiration of Soviet leaders (who at the time were searching for allies among native leaders in Central Asia.)

With his proximity to the center of power in Moscow, Khojaev played an instrumental role in the national delimitation of Central Asia, which led not only to the emergence of Uzbekistan as a republic, but also as the strongest unit in the region. Uzbekistan's gains from the national delimitation were evident in terms of population, resources and territory, which covered current day Tajikistan as well as Uzbekistan. They were also evident in its incorporation of the most important cities and arable lands in Central Asia, including the historical and cultural centers of Bukhara and Samarkand, the strategic center and Russian stronghold of Tashkent, and the largest part of the fertile Ferghana valley. Khojaev, who became the chairman of the Uzbek government, then steered a comprehensive development effort in almost all sectors, including education, agriculture, industries and trade.

Typically, Stalin and his entourage, who were keeping a close eye on Khojaev, began to feel worried about his ambition and objectives and, like they did all the other Jadid reformers, decided to eliminate him. Their action

was swift and hard as stone, coming in a series of moves at short intervals. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Tajikistan was made to secede from Uzbekistan and was given the status of republic, the capital was moved from Samarkand to Tashkent, and the collectivization policy was initiated. By 1938, Khojaev's journey came to a dramatic end with his public trial in Moscow and subsequently his death.²²

2.2 Advent of Islam in Uzbekistan

When Islam emerged in the seventh century and overwhelmed Arabia, Prophet Mohammed and the Pious Caliphs after him set forth to spread Islam outside the Peninsula as stipulated in God's word. The first move toward the east came when the Prophet sent a message to the king of Persia, Khusrau Parwaiz, inviting him to enter into Islam. The king rejected the invitation and humiliated the Prophet's messenger. This incident revoked the option of propagating Islam through preaching and left the Muslims with the other option, the sword. The conquest of Persia was significant not only because it brought Islam to one of the world's largest empires at the time, but also because it paved the way for overstepping the boundaries to Central Asia and China.

²²For details on the rise and fall of Faizulla Khojaev, see Donald S. Carlisle. "Soviet Uzbekistan: State and Nation in Historical Perspective," in Beatrice F. Manz. Central Asia in Historical Perspective. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, pp. 111-123.

The Prophet himself passed away before the capitulation of Persia. The ten years he had lived since the migration (the Hijra) from Mecca to Medina in 622, where he established and guided the Muslim community in a state-like structure until his demise in 632 were not enough to start the Islamic surge across Arabia, as he spent most of those years fighting the idolaters of Mecca and surrounding areas, and preaching the teachings of Islam to his followers. Abu Bakr, his close associate and friend who took over as the leader of the Muslim *Ummah* after the Prophet's demise, spent the two years of his caliphate fighting the apostates. He too did not live long to see the Muslim army conquer Persia.

It was during the era of Caliph Umar, Abu Bakr's successor and the second Pious Caliph, that the Muslims, under the command of Saad ibn Abi Wakkas, defeated the Persian armies in 635 and started the Islamic surge to the region.²³ Following the conquest of Persia and the capitulation of Khurasan, Mu'awiya, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty and its first caliph who seized power after the death of the fourth Pious caliph Ali in 661, ordered the conquest of Sijistan.²⁴ After many years of stalemate due to the ebb and flow in battles between the Muslims and the indigenous armies on the one hand, and continuous rebellions in Khurasan and nearby cities under Muslim rule on the other hand, the Muslims finally began to advance in 667 and seized more territories in their march toward the east. But the distance of the

²³Agha Hussain Hamadani, "Advent of Islam in Central Asia (First Century A. H.): A Study in Political History." *Journal of Central Asia*, 2 (December 1995), pp. 87-88.

²⁴Territory south of Khurasan, on the Afghan-Iranian border. Also known as Sistan and Nimruz.

Muslims' command center at Basra made it difficult to conquer major cities in the region. The governor of Basra, Ziyad ibn Abih, therefore moved the army's center of command to the city of Merv, which had been captured since 651. This move proved tactful as the Muslims were able to suppress rebellions and assumed full control over Khurasan by 671, while their armies continued their march until they reached Khwarizm.²⁵

In 673, Bukhara, one of the major cities in Turkestan and modern Uzbekistan, was conquered. But its queen, who had initially admitted defeat and paid allegiance to the victorious Muslim army, revolted against it and joined other cities in Turkestan in their uprising against Muslim rule.²⁶ Although that revolt was crushed instantly, it was not until years later that Bukhara was totally subdued.

The Muslims' campaign in Central Asia took a new turn in 697, when Hajjaj ibn Yousof, the governor of Iraq during the reigns of Umayyad Caliphs Abdulmalik and his son Walid, appointed Qutaybah ibn Muslim as administrator of Khurasan, a subdivision of the governorate of Iraq. Soon after taking command, Qutaybah launched a successful expedition in Central Asia, where cities began to fall one after another, until he reached the Ferghana valley and conquered the town of Kashan. He then marched to Sijistan and conquered it, imposing the tribute on its people who in turn admitted defeat

²⁵Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu. "Early Introduction between the Arabs and the Turks (from the Beginning until the emergence of the Ottomans.)" Arab-Turkish Relations. (In Arabic.) Istanbul: Islamic Center for Historical, Cultural and Scientific Research, 1993, p. 21.

²⁶*Ibid.* pp. 21-22.

and made peace with him. During that period (710-715), Qutaybah led yet another successful campaign to recapture Bukhara, which had once again revolted against the Muslim rule, and went on to capture Samarkand, another major city. Shortly thereafter, he extended his successful expedition to Khojand and Kashan in Ferghana. Qutaybah subsequently marched toward China but stopped at its border upon a call for peace from the Chinese king. The Muslim campaign thus came to a halt with the signing of a peace treaty with China.²⁷

By 715, Central Asia was virtually under Muslim rule. However, the military campaign that extended for 75 years to control the region had not succeeded comprehensively in bringing the people to the new faith. Indeed not only did the majority of people in large cities cling to their traditional beliefs, but they also resisted the Muslim rule viciously. No sooner had the main body of the Muslim army left a conquered city, than its people revolted against the Muslim garrison that was left there and toppled its commander. Bukhara alone, for instance, was conquered four times before it was completely subdued. Force, therefore, served only to capture land. To win people to the side of Islam, some other means had to be used. It was a long, gradual process in which, persuasion, assimilation and addressing the interests of the indigenous people were used to gain proselytes.

²⁷Hamadani, pp. 89-91.

At the early stage of their arrival in Central Asia, the Muslims tempted the indigenous people in converting to Islam by offering financial rewards to attendants of Friday prayers. Trade, an important source of income for sedentarized communities in the region, also played a vital role in bringing people closer to Islam. For Centuries, The Arabs had known trade, either directly or indirectly, with Central Asia through the Silk Road that connected China with Europe across Tashkent, Samarkand and Merv down to Baghdad and the Mediterranean.

With the advent of Islam, trade flourished further, as the Central Asians found a large market in Arabia for their production of leather and fur. This trade also played an important role in the spread of the Arabic language in the region. Although the Central Asian layman continued to use his original language, which was either Persian or a Turkic dialect, Arabic, being the language of the Muslim empire, was common among merchants, administrators, thinkers and members of upper classes. This in turn opened the door for Central Asians to be exposed to Greek philosophy and thought, which was at the time a major source of knowledge and science. The Arabic language also served to establish cultural, economic, and social bonds between Central Asians and the Islamic centers at Mecca and Medina.²⁸

If the Arabic language was a good channel for bringing Central Asians closer to Islam, the assimilation policy which was first adopted by the

²⁸Faik Bulut. Islamci Orgutler. (In Turkish.) Tumzamanlar Yayıncılık, 1993, pp. 580-81.

distinguished Umayyad Caliph Umar ibn Abdulaziz and then continued through the Abbassid rule also played a major role in integrating the new converts into the Islamic faith. This policy was evident in the settlement of the indigenous people in Muslim areas and vice versa; intermarriage: an example of which was the governor of Armenia, Yazid ibn Ussayd's marriage to a local Hazar princess; and the appointment of Turks in senior administrative and military posts, as was in the cases of Mubarak al-Turki who was in charge of the Caspian governorate, and Abu Salim who was appointed as governor of Tarsus.²⁹

The third mechanism that pushed forward the proselytes to embrace Islam was persuasion. The Arabs had realized since their seizure of Turkestan that in order to sow the seeds of their faith into the region they needed to convert its people by self motivation, and not only by punishment and reward. *Imams* were sent in to explain the teachings and virtues of Islam to the locals. One of those early missionaries was Abu Sayda, who began his mission in Samarkand during the reign of Hisham ibn Abdulmalik in the first half of the eighth century. This was at a time when Islam was still a new faith to the natives. As Agha Hussain Hamadani puts it, "while the Muslim warriors had to come with swords in their hands, the Muslim saints understood the woes of the people and gave the teachings of Islam to them."³⁰

²⁹See Ihsanoglu, pp. 22-29

³⁰Hamadani, p. 93.

The efforts of the early Muslim missionaries in Turkestan were soon enhanced by Sufi Muslims, who had a wide appeal among the Uzbeks and other people in the region. Sufism was popular in its early years because it had not yet included practices and rituals alien to Islam. Rather, early Sufism seems to have emerged as a result of a conviction among some early Muslims not to be distracted from the vision and practice of Prophet Muhammad by the rapid expansion of Islam over vast new territories with foreign cultures.³¹ Subsequently, however, Sufism took a negative image. Starting from the medieval ages onward Sufism was viewed by many Muslims as a mystical, antinomian practice which deviated from genuine Islam by adopting non-Islamic rituals such as the austere asceticism of Khurasan and Hindu asceticism of Kashmir.³² In Uzbekistan, it was thus early Sufism that contributed positively to the spread of Islam in the newly conquered territories of Central Asia.

Uzbekistan became entirely Islamized by the mid eighth century AD., when Islam was established throughout Central Asia. Since the rise of the Abbasid dynasty to power in 749, Samarkand, Bukhara and other Uzbek cities had increasingly become over the years important centers from which some of the most renowned Muslim scientists, scholars and philosophers came. Avicenna is one of them. Born in 980 near Bukhara, and better known in the history of Islam as Ibn Sina, he was the greatest physician of his time,

³¹John Bowker, ed. The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 925, 926.

and indeed is still considered by many as the founder of modern medicine. He was also a famous philosopher, and politician -a *vizier*- during the Hamdani era in Persia. From Bukhara also came the famous scholar al-Bukhari, who spent his life preaching Muslim values and most notably compiling the larger number of Prophet Mohammed's *hadiths*.

Islam became so deep-rooted in the territories of modern Uzbekistan that people continued to cling to their Muslim heritage, despite the chaos and instability that swept the region after the downfall of the Muslim empire. Even the Mongol occupation could not force the Uzbeks into relinquishing their faith. Instead, the Mongols themselves converted to Islam. It was not until the incursion by neighboring Russia that things began to change substantially in Central Asia, Uzbekistan included.

2.3 Islam in Uzbekistan under Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union

Russo-Central Asian confrontation dates back to the 16th century, when the armies of Ivan the Terrible invaded Astrakhan in 1556. Since then, contacts between the two sides and Russia's influence in the region continued steadily due to the importance of the latter as a passageway for Russia's trade with China, Russia's need to reach warm seas, and the potential threat that a united Central Asia would wage against the tsar's crown, with the memories of

³²In its early days, sufism emanated as a reflection of 'the love of God' devoid of any mystical practices. It was only at a later stage that it became associated with spiritual rituals alien to Islam.

the Mongols' empire, established in 1206 by Genghis Khan, and the danger it posed still in the minds of the Russians.

For more than three centuries, Russia exercised its influence in the region but was willing to leave the political entities of Central Asia under one form of sovereignty or another as long as the safety of its interests was guaranteed. In the 18th century, Tsarist Russia began to reveal openly its hegemonic ambitions in Turkestan and the Kazakh steppe. The extension of Russian control over Central Asia was not however an easy task. Throughout the first half of the 19th century, severe and often organized resistance by the indigenous people was waged against the Russians, who had to use coercive measures to suppress it. But the Russian mission was facilitated all the same by internal quarrels among local leaders, which weakened the resistance and hindered the unification of its efforts.³³

As a consequence of Russian expansionist ambitions, Russian settlers were brought into Central Asia starting from the second half of the 18th century and were given superior privileges over the native population of the three *khanates* that made up the Central Asian land, namely Khiva, Bukhara and Kokand (currently cities in the Republic of Uzbekistan.) Although Russian settlers initially inhabited the northern part of the Kazakh steppe, many of them opted to settle in Turkestan, especially in the 19th century when cotton and other industries were introduced to the region. In 1865, a wide

³³William Fierman, ed. Soviet Central Asia. Oxford: Westview Press, 1991, p.12.

scale confrontation broke out between the tsar and the local leaders, beginning by the tsar's campaign against the emir of Bukhara. The Russian armed expedition did not stop until it swept all the Asiatic territories, reaching until the Afghan borders in 1887.³⁴

Since the early beginning of the Russian intrusion in Central Asia, revolts had never stopped. Both armed and political resistance movements emerged at different times in different parts of the region. In the following years leading to the Bolshevik revolution, the Russians sought to limit their presence exclusively to sustaining their new three interests in the region: cotton, surplus land and markets. Therefore, they refrained from infringing on local religion and culture.

As Michael Rywkin describes it, this Russian policy had a boomerang effect. Instead of serving to calm down anti-Russian sentiments, it paradoxically led to the mounting of Central Asians' resentment of Russian presence. First, Russia set up a large cotton industry in Uzbekistan, which consumed up vast areas of arable land originally utilized for grain production. The cultivation of cotton - a commercial commodity - at the expense of grains - a basic food item - transformed Uzbekistan from the privileged position of a grain-producer to the vulnerable position of an importer of Russian and other

³⁴Michael Rywkin. Moscow's Muslim Challenge. New York: M. E. Sharpe Inc., 1990, pp. 12-14.

republics' grains. Meanwhile, the beneficiary of the production of cotton was almost exclusively Russia.³⁵

Second, Russia's interest in surplus land meant that more and more lands were expropriated by the Russians, who began to settle in larger numbers in both Turkestan and the Kazakh steppe, being attracted by large areas of arable lands, and by the new employment opportunities that the central government in Moscow had created through setting up new industries in the region. The third interest, markets, coupled with the first two interests, made the native Muslims not only substantially dependent on Russia, but also the less privileged citizens in their own land. The accumulation of feelings of frustration and injustice among the native Muslims led to the 1916 rebellion which began in Kazakhstan and spread to other areas. Despite the intensification of Russian cruelty and oppression, the rebellion had not been completely suppressed until the February 1917 revolution took place.

When the February Revolution overthrew the tsar regime in Moscow in 1917, its effects reached Central Asia at once. A new government was formed in Turkestan by a nine-member committee, five Russians and four 'liberal' Muslims. But the Muslim layman was hardly thrilled by the new communist regime. Indeed Muslim nationalists responded by establishing a Central Muslim Council that called for national autonomy, the application of

³⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 14-17.

shariat, and the replacement of cotton by grains (as was the situation before Russian control of Central Asia.)³⁶

The movement of the Muslim nationalists did not, however, produce tangible results, as the whole Central Asian land fell into turmoil. Conflicts went in all directions. Conflict of interests and ideology appeared between the local Muslims and the Russian settlers. Among the Muslims themselves disagreements between contending factions and parties like the Basmachis and the Jadids hindered the integration of Muslim efforts. Among the Russians, rivalries evolved between the communists and their opponents on the one hand, and among the revolutionaries themselves: the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks, and the Social Revolutionaries on the other hand. If anything, the perseverance of all these hostilities underline the absence of peace and stability in the region.

In October 1917, The Bolshevik minority turned the table against the Mensheviks and emerged victorious in Moscow and all the major cities in Russia. Central Asia was to enter as a consequence into a new phase: the Leninist-Stalinist phase. Although it appears unfeasible to summarize in a few paragraphs Moscow's measures to impose its own rules of the game on Central Asia in the period between October 1917 and October 1924, when the entire region was incorporated into the Soviet Union, it may be useful to point out to some major developments that led to the delimitation of Central Asia. This is

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 19.

especially important for examining the establishment of Uzbekistan as one of the 15 Soviet republics, and for studying the nature of the role of Islam during that period as a prologue for the future role of religion and its association with nationalism.

Lenin had received a difficult heritage from Tsarist Russia. The heritage became even heavier after the events that occurred between February and October 1917. By the time he assumed full command, he had to face the challenge of incorporating Central Asia in the Soviet Union. A task that was by no means an easy one, with the local population having sour memories about Russian dominance, which they thought had not only robbed them of their lands and economic privileges, but also downgraded their culture and national aspiration. Such fears on the side of the local population were exacerbated in the period between 1920-22, when Soviet Russia imposed a series of treaties on the khanates of Bukhara and Khiva, which were far from equal and gave Moscow full control over all issues related to the economy, the military, public finance, transportation and communication.³⁷

To the new regime in Moscow, the importance of incorporating Central Asia was probably instigated by three considerations. The first was its economic and geographical value. Central Asia was significant to the Soviet economic interests with its vast arable lands and strategic geographic location that would logistically facilitate trade and communication with the Middle

³⁷Steven Sabol. "The Creation of Soviet Central Asia: the 1924 National Delimitation." Central Asian Survey. 14(1995), p. 232.

East and South Asia on the one hand, and serve as a bulwark against any possible British expansion from India on the other hand.³⁸ The second was Central Asia's historical (albeit recent) posture as traditionally part of Moscow's sway. For a newly established regime, like Soviet Russia, which had an agenda to extend its influence to new territories beyond its borders, it was rationally imperative, both for practical reasons and out of self-prestige, to consolidate control over territories within its borders. The third consideration was the significance of Central Asia to the communist propaganda effort. Keeping the region under Soviet control, Lenin hoped, would serve the endeavor to legitimize the communist revolution on the one hand, and propagate socialism as a universal and ideal model of government on the other hand. It was out of this conviction that Lenin, together with his heir Stalin, began their mission in Central Asia with the policy of self-determination. They believed that the self-determination policy was important in the sense that it, as Steven Sabol puts it, "... could do many things, such as placate the hostility of native peoples toward the new Russian government, incite hostility toward existing capitalist governments and, where desired, encourage people to overthrow these governments..."³⁹

However, Moscow's plans to consolidate its control over Central Asia were seriously disrupted as relations deteriorated between the Tashkent Bolsheviks and the native Central Asians shortly after the Bolshevik

³⁸See Critchlow, p. 8.

³⁹Sabol, p. 227.

revolution due to the exclusion of the latter from political authority. The Muslims in Central Asia held the Fourth Turkestanian Extraordinary Congress in Kokand in December 1917 and proclaimed the autonomy of Turkestan. The Tashkent Bolsheviks responded by invading Kokand and massacring over 10,000 residents. Most Kokand officials, who were predominantly Jadidist leaders, fled the city. As a direct result of this massacre, resistance was escalated, and the Basmachi rebellion against the Tashkent Bolsheviks broke out. Moscow felt things were getting out of hand and decided to run Central Asian affairs directly without the Tashkent Bolsheviks.⁴⁰

Since then, events moved in the direction of Moscow's favor. Little by little, Stalin managed to get rid of the traditional nationalist and religious leadership of Central Asia and installed Moscow's allies as the sole local leaders. During the period from 1918 until the end of 1923, new entities based on regional-national autonomy emerged and were recognized by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, although real power remained in the hands of Moscow. By October 1924, the new republics and autonomous regions of Central Asia were established. Within this partition of the region, Moscow envisaged equitable distribution of economic wealth among the newly established republics, alongside the nationally-based division.⁴¹

In 1924, two union republics, the Uzbek SSR and the Turkmen SSR, were officially created out of Central Asia. The republic of Tajikistan was

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.

created in 1929, and it was not until seven years later that the Kyrgyz SSR was made. Because delimitation was by and large a de facto application of *divide et impera*, these republics were made to replace the original Bukharan and Khorezmian units, which were feared by Moscow to induce separatist-nationalist sentiments.⁴² Such fears had lingered on since the establishment of the Turkestan Soviet Federal Republic (TSFR) in 1918, the constitution of which aggravated Moscow's skepticism of the intentions of that entity's founders. For instance, one source of Moscow's worries came from the TSFR's reservation of the right to legislation and administration in Turkestan, a step rejected by Stalin who had stressed that the central authority must control final decisions and delegate to the republics of the union matters of cultural and administrative character.⁴³

Naturally, the delimitation of Central Asia was not an abrupt decision made only to counter national, pan-Islamist or pan-Turkic ideologies in the region. Nor was it a mere reaction to the Basmachi rebellion. Rather, it came as a result of a cumulative conviction on the side of the central authority in Moscow that this was the only remaining option for the integration of Central Asia into the evolving communist entity, which was to be named *the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*. Lenin and Stalin, in their quest to extend their full control over Central Asia, had apparently learned from the tsarist experience that coercive measures alone could not fulfill their goal. The Basmachi

⁴¹See *Ibid.*, pp. 232-236 for details.

⁴²Fierman, p. 17.

rebellion against the Tashkent Bolsheviks enhanced this belief. Thus, they opted to follow another path. This was to create pro-Moscow local leadership in the area to simultaneously guarantee pro-Soviet loyalty and cater for autonomy demands; and that was the essence of the *Korenizatsiia* policy.

Korenizatsiia was adopted in Central Asia in the mid-1920s as a subordinate policy to the delimitation process, with the aim of consolidating Soviet control. It was simply the indigenization of Soviet administration in Central Asia, in an attempt to cater to the national aspiration of the people of the region. However, Stalin soon discovered that the loyalty of the only local leaders on whom he could rely was not guaranteed, as national sentiments were enhanced by none other than some of the Moscow-established local leaders themselves. Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, one of the most prominent Muslim members of the Communist Party, set a clear example of this, when he started to call for the preservation of the particularities that distinguished Central Asia from Russia, arguing that Russian interpretations of Marx were "inherently unsuited to the Muslim world, and their direct application would be indiscernible from Great Russian chauvinism." Therefore, Sultan-Galiev maintained, Russian communists should remain in their own territories, and a Soviet Turkic Republic should be established in Turkestan. In Stalin's eyes, this was close to a separatist movement, and accordingly he ordered the arrest

⁴³Sabol, p. 231.

of Sultan-Galiev for treason and Muslim nationalism and expelled him from the party.⁴⁴

Russia's policies in Central Asia were episodes in a series of attempts to incorporate the region into the Soviet Union. Some succeeded like the delimitation, some others like *Korenizatsiia* stumbled. In Uzbekistan, a virtually new nation-state was created, albeit affiliated with the Soviet Union. Its distinct religion and ethnic background from those of the European part of the Union prompted Moscow to continue to exert excessive efforts to neutralize the roles of religion and ethnicity in its society.

The Soviet policy toward religion in Central Asia can be described as one that wanted to *keep the cake and eat it too*. On the one hand, the Soviets wanted to detach the native populations from their religious affiliation, which was viewed as a threat to Moscow's control, simply because it rang the bell of the Central Asians' glorious past, and reminded them of their distinctive identity and culture from those of the Russians. On the other hand, Moscow was aware of the importance of religion to its Muslim subjects to the extent that it had to acknowledge its appeal through the establishment of four Islamic directorates in 1943 in four Cities: Tashkent, Baku, Makhachkala and Ufa, the first being the largest and most active of the four. According to Yaacov Ro'i,

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 233.

the initial role of this kind of state-sponsored Islam -or 'official Islam'- was to curb the establishment of a united body for the whole Muslim population.⁴⁵

However, such a limited role for official Islam was not to last indefinitely. With the ascending of social problems like crime, corruption, and drug abuse to the surface, the Soviet authority under the leadership of Gorbachev in 1989 had to give Islam a larger role for the purpose of fighting those social problems.⁴⁶ Soon things started to run out of Moscow's hand with womanizer and drunk-all-the-time Moscow-appointed *muftis* -as was the case with Shamsiddin Babakhanov- being rejected by the people, while at the same time other representatives of official Islam deviated from the official line and sincerely adopted Muslim attitudes as was the case with Mufti Mukhamadsadyk Mamayusupov.

Almost simultaneously the impact of parallel Islam which was often working underground escalated. More religious schools were opened secretly by the local *mullahs* as of the mid-1980s and served to tie religion with nationalism. As a result, Gorbachev opted for an intolerant policy toward Islam, despite the freedom that was given to the practices of other religions, most notably Orthodox Christianity.⁴⁷ In October 1986 at a meeting of the

⁴⁵Yaacov Ro'i. "The Islamic Influence on Nationalism in Soviet Central Asia." Problems of Communism. (July-August 1990), p. 50.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 50,51.

⁴⁷Gorbachev's equivocal treatment of Islam in the Soviet Union while acquiescing with Christianity was probably induced by his fear of political Islam or Islamic extremism, which he feared could lead to the secession of the Muslim republics from the Union. Whereas in the case of Christianity, such fear was baseless for two reasons: first, Russia was the place of the central authority, and thus there was no fear of it seceding. Second, unlike Islam, Christianity had no recent or concurrent tradition of being politicized.

republic party central committee in Uzbekistan, the first secretary announced the party's condemnation of attempts to use religion against the interests of society and individuals. One month later, Gorbachev himself expressed his displeasure with signs of Islamic revival in the Central Asian republic when, during a visit to the republic, he called upon local leaders to carry out "an uncompromising struggle against religious manifestations." Moscow also harshly criticized republic party members who observed religious traditions and launched a press campaign aiming at discouraging all forms of Muslim practices.⁴⁸

This inconsistent policy by Gorbachev which fluctuated between criticizing religion and attempting to suppress its role in the period between 1985 and 1988, and resorting to Islam to counter social problems from 1989 onwards⁴⁹ certainly did not help the Soviet authority in sustaining its control over Central Asia. With the creation of the *Birlik* movement in 1988 in Uzbekistan, which was shortly thereafter followed by the establishment of similar movements in other Central Asian republics, and their utilization of religion to give momentum to their nationalist aspirations, the situation reached its peak.⁵⁰

⁴⁸William Fierman. "Policy toward Islam in Uzbekistan in the Gorbachev Era." Nationalities Papers. 1(1994), pp. 6, 7.

⁴⁹Islam prohibits adultery, drug abuse, theft, murder, etc. Moscow thought that by giving some room for religious awareness among young Muslims, it would find an ally in fighting such social problems. At the same time, the Soviet authorities were always wary in case Islam should take a political frame that could jeopardize Moscow's control over Central Asia.

⁵⁰Ro'i, pp. 55,56.

Moscow was no longer able to control the Islamic revival in Central Asia to the extent that Islamic consciousness, ironically often portrayed by Western and Soviet ideologues as the first enemy of women's rights, had the upper hand in making urban Central Asian women politically active. As Martha Brill Olcott explains, with the increase of their religious consciousness, women in Central Asia developed their own activist groups and rallied around a variety of causes. One such example in Uzbekistan was the mothers' movement campaign against the draft, which resulted in a government promise to stop sending local youths to serve in construction brigades outside their own republics.⁵¹

Parallel to their effort to curb the role of religion in Central Asia, the Soviet authorities also strove to assimilate the ethnically distinctive Central Asians into the European-dominated Soviet society. As far as ethnic and demographic trends were concerned, there was a sharp difference between Central Asians and Slavs. With the Central Asian population growing more than three times as fast as the Russian population⁵², the ethnic cleavage in the Soviet society became more visible. The growth of the Central Asian population at such a pace implied that a fast-growing proportion of the Soviet society was comprised, as Nancy Lubin puts it, "of the ethnically Muslim

⁵¹Martha Brill Olcott, "Women and Society in Central Asia," in Fierman, Soviet Central Asia, pp. 250,251.

⁵²According to Russian official statistics, the population in Uzbekistan grew from 15,389,000 in 1979 to 19,810,000 in 1989, at a population growth percentage of 28.7; whereas the population in Russia for the same period grew from 137,410,000 to 147,022, at a growth percentage of 7.0. In other Central Asian republics, the population growth percentage for the same period was as follows: Tajikistan (33.8), Turkmenistan (27.4), and Kyrgyzstan (27.4). See Nancy Lubin. "Implications of Ethnic and Demographic Trends," in *ibid.* p. 39.

Central Asian nationalities with a language, history, culture, and contemporary concerns vastly different from those of the Russians."⁵³

In Uzbekistan, Central Asians and Russians generally resented one another. Neither party was apt to accept, let alone adopt, the other's culture and tradition. Russians living in Uzbekistan tended to look down upon the indigenous population and denounce them as violent, dishonest, noisy, and unable to learn Russian well. Moreover, Russian mothers described Uzbek and other Central Asian children as 'dirty and wild.' The native Uzbeks, on the other hand, criticized Russians for different reasons, the least of which not being their cooking, especially the smell of pork.⁵⁴

Despite the universal suspicion that Moscow favored Slavs, and particularly Russians, over Central Asians in certain aspects like education and employment, it certainly sought to integrate the latter in the Soviet society by different means. Cross-nationality migration was encouraged and efforts were made to ensure that different ethnic communities would live in the same neighborhoods and share the same work places. Nonetheless, as Ronald Wixman explains, although on the surface, Europeans and Central Asians had good working relations, they rarely sat, socialized, or exchanged visits with each other. According to him, the two groups' mutual resentment was incited by a number of problems that included "overt and perceived ethnic prejudice,

⁵³Lubin, p. 36.

⁵⁴Ronald Wixman. "Ethnic Attitudes and Relations in Modern Uzbek Cities," in *Ibid.* pp. 162, 163.

competition for jobs, promotions, positions and housing, and incompatible life styles..."⁵⁵

After independence, Uzbeks' awareness of their cultural and national identity was invigorated. With the declaration of Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, the new republic began at once to manifest its pride in its glorious past. The president of the republic, Islam Karimov, started off his post-independence presidency by rehabilitating the former first secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party, Sharaf Rashidov, who had been charged by Moscow of corruption in the scandal that was known as the "cotton affair." Rashidov and other local officials were then accused of falsifying production figures, and fabricating millions of tons of cotton.⁵⁶

Uzbeks felt that Rashidov was the victim of a Russian drive to use local Central Asian leaders as scapegoats for the corruption that overshadowed the Soviet Union. By rehabilitating such a local leader, who was indicted by the 'Russians' years after his death, Karimov hit two targets: first, he acted in conformity with popular demands, and second, having himself been first secretary of the Communist Party in Uzbekistan, ensured that he would not be implicated by any possible charges of corruption against the leaders of the former Uzbek branch of the Communist Party.⁵⁷

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁵⁶Cassandra Cavanaugh. "Uzbekistan Reexamines the Cotton Affair." RFE/RL Research Report. 37 (18 September 1992) p. 7.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 11.

Further, to enhance the character of the newly independent republic, President Karimov set up a commission in June 1992 comprised of communist, nationalist, and Muslim leaders to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Rashidov's death. In that year, the Muslim holiday Kurban Bayram (Eid el-Fitr) was also celebrated for the first time in Uzbekistan since the inception of the Soviet rule.⁵⁸ However, such chanting of Uzbek nationalism was translated into anti-Russian, anti-Bolshevik slant, taking an ethnic shape that jeopardized Uzbek-Russian coexistence in the republic, despite Karimov's calls for halting Russian out-emigration.⁵⁹

Soon, relations between Karimov and nationalist and Muslim leaders began to deteriorate. The government's over-emphasis on stability prompted it to abort opposition activities, even if they lay within the frame of the democratic game. President Karimov, who had wanted to distinguish his new nation-state from Russia and rally his people around him through upholding religious and cultural awakening probably felt that the opposition's popularity was soaring high, and that could jeopardize his rule; or he feared that political opposition might lead the country into chaos and upheaval. Thus he had to act swiftly. In December 1992, the nationalist movement, *Birlik*, that had a wide popular appeal was banned from registration as a political party, lest its leader runs as a presidential candidate against Karimov. Islamic movements were also banned from legal political participation, and political movements were

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 11.

prohibited from receiving financial support from religious organizations.⁶⁰ A new stringent policy was initiated to suppress political opposition and prevent the rise of political Islam. In many instances, this policy targeted the rise of apolitical Islam as well.



⁶⁰Bess Brown, "Tajik Civil War Prompts Crackdown in Uzbekistan." RFE/RL Research Report. 11(12 March 1993) pp. 3,4.

CHAPTER 3

MAINSTREAM ISLAMIC AND NATIONALIST

MOVEMENTS IN UZBEKISTAN

Since its arrival to Uzbekistan, Islam has endured a flux of events that did not put it across the friendliest of circumstances. At the beginning of its advent in the region as a new religion, Islam fell in a bitter struggle with resolute local resistance. Then it narrowly escaped extermination at the hands of Hulagu and his Mongol soldiers in the 13th century. More recently, it had to withstand Russian Orthodox missionaries and resist an antagonistic communist regime. The reasons for its survival can certainly be argued and disputed. For a true believer, it is God's will. For a communist, it is the local people's illiteracy and the failure of the Soviet regime to indoctrinate communist values properly. A Western researcher would probably look for reasons inside the political, economic and social conditions of Uzbeks. Whichever justification is given for Islam's resilience, the role of Muslim activists, the local clergymen and Islamic movements in safeguarding religion remains evident.

The Islamic rise in Uzbekistan's recent history has taken three different forms that may be categorized as government-sponsored (official) Islam, parallel (unofficial) Islam and political opposition Islam.⁶¹ Each of these categories has contributed in its own way to the survival of Islam, despite the differences in their objectives, which varied from the extreme of containing religion and keeping it under the control of the government to the other extreme of seizing power and Islamizing the society. However, the role of government-sponsored Islamic officials was limited by the criticism and lack of credibility it sustained from many Uzbeks. The role of political opposition Islam, on the other hand, was largely undermined by the government's refusal to register opposition parties, which resulted in forcing them to either go to exile or work underground.

3.1 Sufis, Jadidists, Basmachis and Local Imams

Official Islam can simply be identified in the shape of the aforementioned four religious directorates in the Soviet era and the imams and clerics appointed by the government in the post-independence era. Parallel Islam may in turn be identified in three shapes. The first is spontaneous observance by ordinary Uzbeks, particularly the elderly and those living in rural areas, of religious duties and rituals without any political motivation or consideration. The second is what was represented by the Sufi orders, or

⁶¹ This refers to the more organized, but banned, political parties and associations.

tariqahs, most common of which is the *Naqshbandiyya*. This *tariqah* was first introduced to Central Asia in the 12th century by Khoja Abu Yaqub Yusuf Hamdani. It was then revived in Bukhara by Baha ad-Din Naqshband (1318-1398), after whose name it was called. Reintroduced in the days ensuing the Mongol invasion, in a period when the majority of people were secluded from true Islam, Naqshbandiyya gained a wide appeal in the Central Asian society.⁶²

Although it first started as a spiritual movement, whereby sessions of meditation and *dhikr* (praise) were held, it soon took a more organized form with a hierarchy of leadership and social esteem. Its role in society was highlighted by its clandestine nature, despite the large number of followers it attracted. On certain occasions, it even expanded its activity into political action, especially in standing against the Buddhist Kalmyks in the 17th century and the Russians and Soviets in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, due to the bizarre and enigmatic spiritual sessions of Naqshbandiyya and other *tariqahs*, like *Kubrawiyya* and *Yasawiyya*, they were harshly criticized by other Islamic movements and some went as far as dubbing them as servants of Zionism.⁶³

The third shape of parallel Islam is embodied in the politically-oriented opposition movements. This form of political Islam which has been the most significant form of Islamic rise in Uzbek modern history, meanwhile

⁶²Adshead, p. 157.

is traced back to the two influential movements that incorporated religion in their nationalist aspiration: the Basmachis and the Jadids. Those two movements appeared at a time when the Soviet incursion into the region in 1917 had eased its way through a vacuum of political influence that handicapped any native resistance. Not withholding the significance of the opposition waged by the Kokand Autonomous Government, this vacuum was only to be filled by the revolt of the Turkestan National Liberation Movement, better known as the Basmachi. Together with the Jadid movement, it constituted the zenith of local Muslim opposition to Russian domination.

The Basmachi movement itself had been latent in the Ferghana valley prior to the 1918 Kokand massacre. Many Basmachi leaders, including Zeki Velidi Togan and A. Inan, were not only military leaders, but scholars and thinkers, who led their people's struggle for cultural and political independence. Their struggle was fueled by years of tsarist repression, until it culminated in what became known as the Basmachi rebellion which broke out in response to the Bolshevik massacre of thousands of Muslims in Kokand. It was therefore hardly a spontaneous reaction to the massacre. However, it was depleted by being a large, loose movement that lacked a political strategy, due mainly to the diversity of the political backgrounds and agendas of its leadership which was eventually split up between those who favored a

⁶³For more details on Sufi orders, see *ibid.*, pp. 156-158, and John O. Voll. "Central Asia as a Part of the Modern Islamic World," in Manz, pp. 65-66.

compromise with the Bolsheviks, and those who favored the continuation of the rebellion.⁶⁴

Although the Basmachi resistance continued until the 1930s, its influence on society had begun to fade little by little since 1924, when the Soviet forces chased its leaders out of Turkestan. The impact of the Basmachi defeat was devastating to nationalism in Turkestan. The Basmachis, an appellation invented by the Soviet authorities which literally meant "gangsters," together with other nationalist leaders, became outlaws on the run from Soviet authorities. Most of them either sought asylum in Europe, fled to Afghanistan, or were killed by Soviet forces.⁶⁵

One major problem with Turkestan's resistance to foreign domination was the absence of unity among its nationalist-Islamic movements, which weakened the internal front. While the Basmachis, seen by many as conservative Muslims, gained tangible popular support in the form of tens of thousands of Uzbek followers, they were rivaled by another equally appealing Muslim movement, with a substantially different line: the *Jadid* movement. The rivalry between the two was based on what kind of Islam they sought for an independent Turkestan.

The Basmachis envisaged the application of Islam in its traditional conception and the imposition of *shari'a*. They were opposed to any change in the theory and practice of Islam and its form of education. Had they lived in

⁶⁴Sabol, p. 230.

our present-day, they would have probably been described as fundamentalists. The Jadids, on the other hand, had a more liberal outlook. They called for the reform and modernization of Islam so that it can cope with advance in science and technology, and developments in the world outside. They maintained that the Muslims were lagging behind the West because of the authoritarianism of conservative clergymen. Their quest for a new *-Jadid-* realm of Islam saw them call upon Muslims not to reject the entire European civilization, but rather to learn from it what can be useful for the modernization of the Muslim society.⁶⁶

Jadidism itself was not created in Central Asia. It was rather founded in Crimea by the Tatar intellectual, Ismail Bey Gaspirali (1851-1914) -or Gasprinski- as he was known by his Russian name. His slogan of *Dilde, Fikirde, Ishte Birlik*, and his call for reform and modernization were largely influenced by the teachings of Jamaledin Afghani (1838-1897) and his disciples Muhammad Abdoh and Rashid Rida in Egypt. The Jadidist ideology was first transferred to Uzbekistan through Gaspirali's travels in the Russian empire and through his Tatar missionaries. It was then spread through the Terjuman newspaper, which published and propagated Jadidist ideas.

A group of local intellectuals, including Munavvar Qari, Abdurashidov, and Behbudi carried on the mission of activating the Jadid movement in Turkestan. Their aim was to reform and modernize education,

⁶⁵Bulut, p. 585.

with the ultimate goal of establishing an independent, modern Turkestan. Young members in the movement went to study in Istanbul and set up Jadid schools upon their return. By 1916, 23 Jadidist newspapers and journals were published in Central Asia, and 40,000 students in the Samarkand district alone were attending schools to study the teachings of the Jadid movement.

The Bolshevik victory in Russia and Central Asia produced the first major blow to an otherwise strong and unified Jadid movement which was set to sweep Turkestan and achieve its goal. The arrival of the Bolsheviks induced a split within the movement. Some Jadidist leaders, like Munavvar Qari, joined the Bolshevik party with the hope that by doing so they would be able to make changes from within, reaching eventually to the establishment of an independent Turkestan. Other leaders meanwhile strongly opposed any truce or alliance with the Russians and opted instead to join the Basmachi movement. The Bolsheviks, in turn, did not trust their new Jadid cadres, nor were they willing to acquiesce in their goal. The reason why they had to bear with them at the beginning was only because the Bolsheviks did not want to open a new front, while the Basmachi revolt was still in action. Once they crushed the Basmachis and wiped out the sovereign Bukharan state, they turned right away against the Jadids. By the end of the first decade of Soviet rule, many Jadid leaders and activists were executed. The long list included

⁶⁶Critchlow, pp. 169, 170.

Abdullah Qadiri, Chulpon, Abdur Rauf Firtat, Usmon Nosir, Tawallo, and Munavvar Qari himself.⁶⁷

With the elimination of the Basmachi and Jadid movements, Islam in Uzbekistan and the rest of Central Asia suffered a major blow, but it did not vanish. Thanks in part to the underground Islamic education and performance of religious rituals, especially active in villages and rural areas, Uzbeks remained in touch with their ancestors' faith, albeit a very distorted form of it that was often based more on traditional rituals than on the actual teachings of Islam. While the government-sponsored mullahs (clerics) ran the few mosques that were functioning under the permission of the authorities, their contact with local people was limited to the Friday prayers. By contrast, locally-designated imams and sheikhs gained the trust of worshippers and met with them as frequently as everyday in some cases.

Sheikhs did not function from mosques, which were controlled and regulated by the government. Their "work place" was the *mazar*: usually a spot in a Muslim cemetery, prepared to perform prayers and receive pilgrims. Being a sheikh was occasionally a lucrative business, as many sheikhs charged money in return for their advice and 'religious' services. Sometimes profit was made through yet more sinful means, like *riba* (debt interest) which is prohibited in Islam. Nevertheless, sheikhs' overall contribution to Islam in

⁶⁷For more details on the Jadid movement, see Abdujabar Abduvakhitov. "The Jadid Movement and its Impact on Contemporary Central Asia," in Hafeez Malik, ed. Central Asia. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, pp. 67-75, and Ahmed Rashid. The Resurgence of Central Asia. London: Zed Books, 1994, pp. 87-89.

Uzbekistan remains positive in two respects: They retained contact between people and religion, and their followers were an important source of pro-religion propaganda. Some sheikhs undertook the yet more risky task of criticizing Soviet anti-religious practices.⁶⁸

3.2 Present Political Movements

Unofficial Islam remained almost the only active bond between Uzbeks and religion for more than half a century. With the inception of perestroika and the freedom and liberty it entailed, Islam had a new opening to show its resilience in Uzbekistan. Since nationalism and religion have always been intertwined in Central Asia, the birth of a new nationalist movement in the 1980s was accompanied by the restoration of an Islamic upsurge. The new nationalists gathered under the umbrella of a political party called *Birlik* (Unity.)

3.2.1 Birlik

The Movement for the Preservation of Uzbekistan's Natural, Material and Spiritual Riches, better known by its shortened name Birlik, was established in November 1988 by 18 Uzbek intellectuals. By the time the

⁶⁸Sergei P. Poliakov. Everyday Islam - Religion and Tradition in Rural Central Asia. New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1991, pp. 108-112.

movement convened its first congress six months later, it was able to gather 300 delegates who elected prominent science Professor Abdulrahim Pulatov chairman. In October 1989, the first major activity of the new movement came in the shape of a massive demonstration in Tashkent in which some 50,000 participants called for installing Uzbek as the republic's main language.⁶⁹ The Soviet authorities remained adamant in their decline to grant Birlik a formal recognition despite its wide appeal and broad-based membership, which is self-claimed to exceed one million. Birlik was finally recognized by the Uzbek government in November 1991 as a public movement. Its hope of having more room for action under the independent Uzbek government, however, was soon put to a halt when the Uzbek government refused to recognize it as a political party.

As a broad-based nationalist organization, Birlik's objectives include the resignation of Islam Karimov, the installation of democracy, and the return to the Arabic script in place of Cyrillic or Latin. Its ultimate goal is the establishment of a Pan-Turkic alliance of the people of Central Asia. Although Birlik still generates wide respect among Uzbeks, its activities have been substantially handicapped, not only as a result of government repression, but also because of the diversity of its members. In addition to its intellectual leaders, Birlik also includes ultra Uzbek nationalists, Pan-Turkic activists and Islamists.⁷⁰ Its emphasis on the revival of the national culture and the presence

⁶⁹Rashid, p. 98.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 98,99.

of pro-Islamic members within its ranks give its nationalist agenda religious coloring.

Although this dichotomy of nationalism and religion in the agenda of Birlik may appear paradoxical at first glance, it is in reality in conformity with the belief that religious awakening in Uzbekistan can be viewed primarily within the context of national awakening. So it is in line with this that Birlik has attracted support from such wide a spectrum which included Islamists in addition to nationalists. The role of religion in Birlik's ideology can also be noticed in the name of the party itself which lists 'spiritual' riches besides natural and material sought to be preserved by the party. However, despite the wide appeal that Birlik potentially enjoys among both the nationalists and the religiously-devoted, its chances of winning general elections and its ability to maneuver have been undermined by its closure by the government and the earlier break-away of Muhammad Salih with a number of his supporters.

3.2.2 Erk

Salih had left Birlik in the wake of a persistent disagreement with Pulatov on the movement's order of priorities. To him, Uzbekistan's independence from Moscow was more important than democracy, and so, he was prepared to adopt a compromising stance toward Karimov's regime. Pulatov, supported by the majority in the movement, viewed democracy and

the toppling of Karimov's regime as the foremost priority. Against this background, Salih expatriated himself in April 1990 and went on to establish the Democratic Party of *Erk* (freedom.)⁷¹ The split between the two movements became wider when Salih decided to compete in the presidential election, a right of which Pulatov was deprived by the authorities. However, *Erk* itself began thereafter to suffer government harassment and was subsequently banned. With the bulk of their leading activists in hide-out or asylum, and having to put up with the same kind of pressure, *Birlik* and *Erk* eventually eased their rivalry and began to work in close cooperation and coordination.

Birlik and *Erk*, with their nationalist-Islamic orientation, were a source of serious worry for the Uzbek government. But the emergence of purely Islamic parties, with power aspiration, was an alarming development. This is because politicized Islamists claim that their programs are based on divine rather than human legitimacy, which makes it harder for their opponents to criticize their *divine* agendas and fortifies their popularity, especially in light of the fact that Muslims traditionally resort to divine and spiritual forces in times of crisis. Worse, Islamic parties appeared at a time when Islamic revival was on the rise. The first response by the Uzbek government to this threat was to enforce the December 1992 ban of all religion-based parties. As was the case with the nationalists, the Islamists were

⁷¹Dilip Hiro. Between Marx and Muhammad. London: Harpers Collins Publishers, 1995, p. 170.

repressed and never given any room for political action, often accused by the government of extremism and collaboration with foreign powers. Their propagation as a result was substantially undermined. Yet, they managed to create their own constituencies, most notably in the populous Ferghana valley, where more than one third of Uzbekistan's population lives.

3.2.3 IRP

The first Islamic party to emerge in Uzbekistan was the *Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP)*, also known as the Islamic Revival Party. It was originally founded in June 1990, when delegates from different parts of the Soviet Union held the party's founding congress in the port city of Astrakhan in the Russian Federation. At its inception, the party's membership was limited to several hundred activists, mainly Tatars and Daghestanians, with a few Central Asian representatives. They demanded that religious freedom be granted to Muslims similar to that granted by Gorbachev to Orthodox Christians.⁷² As stated by the party leaders, their objective was to create, through political means, living conditions for Muslims conducive to the teachings of Islam. They defined the party as a political-religious organization that encompasses Muslim activists who obey and disseminate Islamic

⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 173.

teachings and engage in religious, cultural, social, political and economic activities.⁷³

Though it started weak and peripheral, the influence of IRP soon gained momentum. A few months after its establishment, IRP spread to Central Asia. In October 1990, it opened its Tajikistan branch, which was later to grow powerful and join an alliance that toppled the communist regime and formed a short-lived government which was eventually overthrown by force. In Uzbekistan, the IRP branch held its first conference on January 26-27, 1991 in Tashkent under the leadership of its chairman Abdullah Utayev and his deputy Abdullah Yousuf. The conference was held in defiance of the republic authorities which had refused to grant it permission and dispersed its convention thereupon only hours after its inauguration. IRP, ever since, had to go underground to escape government repression, which culminated in the sudden disappearance of Utayev. However, unlike its main branch in Russia, the Uzbek IRP was born strong in a society that provided a suitable culture for the resurgence of Islam, and it managed to survive. Though there are no precise figures on the size of IRP's membership, it is believed to include some 30,000 members. Its supporters arguably put the figure at as high as 100,000.⁷⁴

Abdujabar Abduvakhitov, who had been assigned to observe IRP closely since its creation and make the necessary recommendation to the Uzbek authorities, was among the first to sense the rise of IRP's influence on

⁷³Alexei V. Malashenko. "Islam and Politics in the Southern Zone of the Former USSR." In Vitaly V. Naumkin. Central Asia and Transcaucasia. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994, p. 118.

the Uzbek society. He noted that the main reason for the rising popularity of IRP was police repression, which created the image of martyrdom for party activists. In his report, he recommended that IRP be legalized, but the authorities declined to consider his recommendation. The program of IRP as Abduvakhitov notices, does not contain any anti-democratic trends that might jeopardize the country's stability or ethnic unity, and that is in contrast to government claims.⁷⁵

The IRP program, rather, calls for democracy, stability and national unity. According to the text of the program, the IRP aims "to fight national and racial discrimination...to seek for the relationships [with the Muslim world] equal rights with representatives of other religions... [and] to cooperate with other democratic parties and state organizations in all fields."⁷⁶ Although party programs do not necessarily always indicate the real agendas of the party and might well be used as a cover-up for the real intentions, such programs may be an essential source to evaluate the party's political agenda so long as there is no other evidence on the existence of hidden intentions that are contrary to the announced programs.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁷⁵Abdujabar Abduvakhitov. "Islamic Revivalism in Uzbekistan." In Dale F. Eickelman. Russia's Muslim Frontiers. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, 86. (IRP program,) p. 96.

⁷⁶See full text of the program of IRP in *ibid.*, p.96.

3.2.4 Adalat

The second largest Islamic movement in Uzbekistan was the socio-economic association, *Adalat* (Justice), which had been founded in 1991 by Khamijon Shakimov. Unlike IRP, Adalat was not established as a political party per se. Its structure was modeled on the Muslim Brotherhood movement in the Arab countries, which claims to have no political aspiration, but rather seeks to Islamize the society through preaching and religious advice. Based in Namangan, Adalat's domain of influence was the Ferghana valley and its environs. It became widely acknowledged for the groups it despatched on the streets to battle crime and behavior prohibited by Islam. The violators they arrested were sentenced to labor on the construction of mosques, and the perpetrators of serious crimes were handed in to the police.⁷⁷

Like IRP, Adalat was banned by the government shortly after its foundation. Eleven of its leading members were arrested in March 1992 and remain in jail today. In February 1995, a new government-supported party was founded under the same name and claimed to be a reinvention of the original Adalat. The new version of Adalat disassociated itself from Islamic ideology and adopted a leftist social and economic program, which gained the support and loyalty of Fifty deputies in the *Oly Majlis* (parliament).⁷⁸ Abdumannob Polat, chairman of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan and brother of Birlik's leader Abdulrahim Polat (Pulatov), described their version of Adalat

⁷⁷Hiro, pp. 178, 179.

as a party that was founded "in response to the direct "advice" of Karimov." According to him, "many parliamentarians were 'recommended' by the government to join...and they did so."⁷⁹

3.2.5 Wahhabis

A third Islamic faction which Uzbek officials accuse of extremism is known as the *Wahhabi* movement. The Uzbek Wahhabis are often mistakenly described as an offshoot of the Arabia-based religious movement that led a successful social revolution at the turn of the century against ignorance, superstition and pseudo-mysticism. This Sunni sub-sect is believed to be Saudi Arabia's current base of laws and norms. It is widely viewed as a strict, fundamentalist form of Islam that favors men and denies women their rights. This view of Wahhabism is certainly subject to debate. But what is of more interest is that describing young Muslim activists in the Ferghana valley as Wahhabis might not be based on concrete evidence. In his observation of the rise of political Islam in Uzbekistan, Abduvakhitov found no trace of a possible connection between those activists and the Wahhabis of Arabia. He noted that until 1990, they had no contact with foreign Muslim activists. Even when some of them visited Saudi Arabia that year to perform *hajj* and had

⁷⁸"Central Asian Political Parties." Published on the Internet by Interactive Central Asia Resource Project (ICARP). Website address: (www.rockbridge.net/personal/bichel/politics.htm) page 6 of 11.

⁷⁹Abdumannob Polat. "New Karimov-Organized Party in Uzbekistan." December 30, 1998. Published on the Internet in Birlik's website at: (www.birlik.com).

contact with some Saudi Wahhabis, they did not maintain any ties with them upon their return to Uzbekistan.⁸⁰

The so-called Wahhabis in Uzbekistan, thus, seem to be rather groups of young Uzbeks who seek to educate people about *shari'a* and Islamic teachings, build new mosques, and propagate fundamental Islam. Even those academics and researchers who fall in the pit of describing such young activists as extremist Wahhabis whose aim is to overthrow the government do not provide solid evidence for their argument. Rather than being regarded from a political perspective, such youths may as well be viewed in terms of the socio-economic nature of their emergence. They are mostly unemployed young Uzbeks who live in the overpopulated Ferghana, where social care is way below the standards of Tashkent and other large cities. Their religious activism is almost the only way through which they feel they are contributing to their society. There is no recorded trace in their activities of illegal or violent conduct.

The campaign against the young Muslim activists in Uzbekistan originated in Moscow, rather than Tashkent, as they appeared in the late 1980s to gain more and more appeal among the Uzbek people. Following the riots in Uzbekistan in 1988 and 1989, a campaign was waged in Moscow-based newspapers against the Islamic activists, who were described as "Wahhabis" and blamed for igniting violence. Given the fact that Wahhabism has strong

⁸⁰Abdovakhitov, in Eickelman, pp. 84, 85.

bases in Afghanistan and India, in addition to Saudi Arabia, such accusations were implying the involvement of foreign powers in the violent incidents,⁸¹ an excuse often used by authoritarian regimes to justify internal unrest.

The Russian newspapers, however, did not invent the term "Wahhabis." What they did was only to capitalize on a misconception by the local Uzbeks that all young Islamic activists, who propagated fundamental Islam, and whose political allegiances were not known, were in fact implementing the strict Wahhabi order and were therefore Wahhabis. In a newspaper interview in 1989, the popular Uzbek mufti, Mukhamadsadyk Mamayusupov, explained how those groups came to be known as Wahhabis (or Wahhabites) as follows:

When the old people saw the young people were acting in a "Wahhabite" way, they began to call them "Wahhabites." At first the young people protested -"why are you calling us that?"- but then they got used to it, and now many are calling themselves "Wahhabites."⁸²

In addition to IRP, Adalat, and the so-called Wahhabis, there are several other smaller Islamic movements in Uzbekistan. On top of them are Tawba, the Islamic Democratic Party, Barakah and Ahle Sunnah . *Tawba* (Repentance) was one of the first organized groups to emerge in Ferghana. It started as a pro-Iranian political movement, but later transformed its efforts

⁸¹Critchlow, p. 179.

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 181.

into the social activities of preaching.⁸³ *The Islamic Democratic Party* was set up in August 1990 by Uzbek intellectuals as a rival to IRP. It is led by Dadakhan Hassanov. Like IRP, it demands the imposition of shari'a. Unlike IRP, it is willing to work with the government, not against it.⁸⁴ *Barakah* (Blessings) and *Ahle Sunnah* are yet smaller movements. Their activities are mainly focused on building mosques and religious schools and preaching.

⁸³Shireen Hunter. "Islam in Post-Independence Central Asia: Internal and External Dimensions." *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2(1996) p. 298.

⁸⁴Rashid, p. 100.

CHAPTER 4

SIGNS OF RELIGIOUS AWAKENING

The previous chapters have thus far aimed at introducing the Uzbeks and Islam and describing the nature of relations that Uzbeks have had with religion throughout history. One fact comes out as a result. Ever since Islam forced its way into the lands of today's Uzbekistan, the new faith became intrinsic into the social life of Uzbeks, so much so that culture and religion became interchangeable concepts in Uzbekistan. This facet of Islam had more social than political aspects to it so long as the Uzbek *national* identity was not threatened. When that identity was threatened by the Russian invasion, the role of Islam entered the sphere of politics, most notably through the organized resistance against Russian occupation. However, in that case as well, the political role of Islam was more associated with nationalism than religious ideology.

Recently much rhetoric has been devoted to religious awakening in Central Asia in general and in Uzbekistan in particular, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, not many people have distinguished between religious revival in a national-social context, and religious revival in a

political context that seeks to overthrow the government and apply the rule of Islamic law dogmatically. Therefore, one needs first to study the signs of religious awakening in Uzbek society and politics before defining the nature of the role of Islam in Uzbekistan, and with which of the two categories it can be identified.

Evidence of the revival of religion in Uzbekistan has been manifested through several features and signs that have marked the post-Soviet Uzbek society. Though Islam has not exclusively governed the Uzbek political life, traces of its impact can be clearly detected, particularly in the country's internal affairs. Such features as the building of new mosques, the foundation of active religious movements, and the sight of bearded men and head-covered women in Uzbek cities may be direct signs of religious awakening in the Uzbek society. In foreign politics, on the other hand, Uzbekistan's involvement in the upheaval in Tajikistan and its vigilance to the rise of religious militancy in Afghanistan, as well as the development of the republic's ties with Muslim countries outside Central Asia, all constitute rich grounds for studying the impact of Islamic revival on the foreign politics of post-independence Uzbekistan.

Though traces of religious awakening in the domestic Uzbek society at times seem to be emphatically conspicuous, they tend to be more a product

of parallel Islam than organized political Islam.⁸⁵ Traces of religious influence on foreign policy issues on the other hand are minimal; and when detected, seem to be conducive to material interest rather than coming from religious commitments. Indeed, on several occasions the Uzbek government itself paradoxically appeared to encourage some religious activities, so long as first, they matched its interests of highlighting the distinction of Uzbek identity from that of Russia, which in turn is compatible with popular *national* demands, and second, they balanced the government's crackdown on the opposition which was often dubbed as comprised of outlawed Islamic extremist elements.⁸⁶

4.1 In Domestic Affairs

4.1.1 The Press

The early signs of the revival of religion on the Uzbek domestic level came in the late 1980s, when Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost provided more room for public liberties and freedom of expression. Prior to the

⁸⁵Political Islam here is used to refer to the Islamic political parties and factions that aspire to seize the government, while social (folk) Islam refers to the observance of Muslim practice and the exercise of Muslim rituals such as weddings, funerals... etc.

⁸⁶The Uzbek government often justifies its intolerance of political opposition by equating it with Islamic extremism that causes instability, commits terrorist and criminal acts, and seeks to overthrow the government. For instance, shortly after the bomb explosion incident on February 16, 1999 in Tashkent, which was reportedly targeting President Karimov himself, the government accused the Islamists of plotting to assassinate the president.

independence of their republic, Uzbeks began to rediscover their identity and became more vocal in highlighting their Muslim culture and in rehabilitating their religion. One important medium that demonstrated this tendency was the press. A leading such example was set by the *Zvezda Vostoka* (Star of the East) journal, which began to publish extracts from the Qur'an in Russian. Then another journal, *Nauka i Religia* (Science and Religion), published a Russian translation of a number of chapters from the Qur'an and several articles on the life of Prophet Muhammad and the importance of Hajj in its January, May and June 1989 issues. Soon, other publications followed suit and began to publish religious material.⁸⁷

4.1.2 Government Gestures

This trend of tolerance of religion continued after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first sign of religious resurgence in post-independence Uzbekistan came indeed from President Karimov himself, when he took his oath of office on the Qur'an.⁸⁸ The Uzbek flag, the symbol of independence, meanwhile was designed to carry an Islamic motif. These two signs marked a clear implication: Uzbekistan was no longer communist or Russified. It has a different identity, and that identity is based on ethno-religious distinctiveness.

⁸⁷Hiro, p. 169.

⁸⁸Hunter. Central Asia since Independence, Westport (Praeger): The Washington Papers/168, 1996, p.36.

Karimov later went on to promote the role of social (but not political) Islam. After taking the oath of his presidential office on the Qur'an, he performed the *'Umrah'* in Mecca. Then he began prefacing his speeches with the religiously commended sentence of *Bismillah* (In the name of Allah.) He also reaffirmed the importance of establishing closer ties with Muslim states and allowed a religious program to be relayed weekly on state television. In a statement attributed to him, Karimov once said: "Consideration for religion and Islam plays an important part within our internal and international politics and conduct. It manifests itself in the way of life of the people, their psychology and in the building of spiritual and moral values, and in enabling us to feel rapport with those who practice the same religion."⁸⁹

4.1.3 Bearded Men and Head-Scarved Women

Another visual sign of Islamic revival was evident in the increasing number of young bearded men and young women wearing white scarves to cover their hair. While this was more of a traditional drive among older men and women in rural areas, the transfer of such a phenomenon to city youths in the last five years of communist rule was a clear indication of growing religious tendencies which continued on after independence. "I have a girlfriend who has become a Wahhabi and now she does not see me," said a

⁸⁹Hiro, p. 182.

Namangan school teacher, commenting on the new growing phenomenon.⁹⁰ Taking into consideration that many Uzbeks considered anybody adopting fundamental religious teachings a Wahhabi, the comment of the frustrated boyfriend thus seems to be rather a spontaneous reflection on the new trend of religious consciousness among Uzbeks.

4.1.4 Spread of Mosques and Religious Education

Mosques and religious education constitute an unmistakable sign of the rise of Islam. Although there seems to be no reliable, precise figures on the current number of mosques in Uzbekistan, it is widely believed that thousands of new mosques have been built or restored in the country since 1991. By some independent estimates, around 5000 new mosques have been built across Uzbekistan since 1991.⁹¹ In the city of Namangan alone, the number of mosques has increased from two before independence to twenty-six in the following couple of years, while the province of Namangan accounted for 130 mosques.⁹² Most mosques house and sustain schools that provide religious education to young children. Classes in small neighborhood mosques account to five to ten pupils each, and in larger mosques the numbers are much higher. In addition, many *madrasahs* teach hundreds of young men and women

⁹⁰Rashid, p. 101.

⁹¹Dmitry Solovyov. "Islam Thrives in Uzbekistan amid Soviet-Era Habits." Broadcast on BICNews, February, 5, 1998. Published on the Internet at website address: (www.iol.ie/~afifi/BICNews/Islam/islam34.htm). See also previous note on Malashenko's estimation of 3000 mosques built or restored in Uzbekistan by the beginning of 1992.

⁹²Hiro, p. 179.

religion and literature.⁹³ While many pupils attend such classes as private tuition additional to their formal secular education, some are not exposed to secular education at all, and religious schools are their only source of learning.

Attendance of prayers at local mosques has also increased notably, especially in the Ferghana Valley. In the city of Margilan, for instance, the sight of a conglomerate of children and young men clad in modern shirts and trousers, and elderly men clad in traditional Uzbek outfits, streaming together in local mosques has become common. As the *imam* of the city's central mosque, which is one of the few Uzbek mosques that were allowed to function during the Soviet era, explained: "Before independence we had far less people coming to worship ... in those days it was only old men who came to pray. Now you can see people of all ages. On Fridays we get anywhere between 5,000 to 7000."⁹⁴

Despite its skepticism and intolerance of political Islam, the Uzbek government itself has contributed to the revival of 'social' Islam in the shape of mosques and religious centers, mostly through foreign funding. Like many of their Arab and Muslim counterparts, Central Asian leaders tend to co-opt moderate, social Islam in society. By tolerating this form of Islam, they avoid public criticism and accusation of anti-religion, which could in turn mean anti-nationalism, given the link between religion and nationalism in Central Asia. By repressing political Islam, meanwhile, they ensure that politicized Islamists

⁹³Abduvakhitov, in Eickelman, p. 88.

will not gain strength that is capable of jeopardizing their authority. In Shireen Hunter's assessment, the motivation behind this stance of the Uzbek and other Central Asian governments likewise is their awareness of "the hold of Islam over large parts of their populations" and their realization of "the importance of Islam as a factor in shaping an independent sense of national identity for their countries and peoples."⁹⁵

4.1.5 Extra-Constitutional Activities

Islamic resurgence has also been visible in an extra-constitutional form, i.e. demonstrations. University students in Tashkent and Islamists in Namangan alike have occasionally taken to the streets in protest against government policies and living conditions. Although in the case of the Tashkent demonstrations the main motive behind demonstrating was to protest price increases and poor living conditions, the students also raised slogans of opposition movements.⁹⁶ In the Namangan disturbances, the demonstrators rampaged the streets and occupied the building of the ruling party branch in the city, demanding the proclamation of an Islamic Uzbek state.⁹⁷

⁹⁴Mike Collett-White. "Uzbeks Keep Wary Eye on Islamic Revival." Published by Reuters on August 27, 1998 on the Internet, website address: (www.halaqa.net/articles/turk/uzbekistan.htm1).

⁹⁵Hunter, in Journal of Islamic Studies, pp. 300, 301.

4.1.6 Intellectuals' Support to Role of Religion

Notwithstanding the significance of all the above signs of Islam's domestic influence, perhaps the foremost contribution of religion lies in its shaping of Central Asia's culture and civilization, particularly in the case of Uzbekistan. More recently, Uzbek intellectuals and writers have spearheaded a campaign to rejuvenate Islam's role in Central Asia's culture, citing its intrinsicity in their traditional legacy. Their great ancestors that include the likes of al-Biruni and ibn Sina, they maintain, were influenced by the religious environment in which they lived and were able to prosper; and therefore Islam, they maintain, should be given the right credit instead of being discriminated against. As Yaacov Ro'i explains: "Yet, even for intellectuals in Central Asia...the search for national traditions inevitably leads back to religious motifs."⁹⁸

4.2 In Foreign Relations

The role of religion in Uzbek foreign policy seems to be visible only as long as it serves the interest of the state in drawing economic benefits and meeting public demands to emphasize national identity and independence from Russia. This trend has been apparent in Tashkent's relations with Muslim countries in the Middle East and South and South-East Asia. In cases where

⁹⁶Allison, p. 22.

⁹⁷Abdovakhitov, in Malik, p. 74.

religion either does not serve or endangers the interests of the state or the government, its role accordingly subsides. This trend was demonstrated in the case of the conflict between the Muslim Azeris and the Armenians, and the growing role of religion in the cases of Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

4.2.1 Azeri-Armenian Conflict

Uzbeks had shown sympathy and support to their fellow Azeri Muslims, following the military intervention by Moscow against Azerbaijan in January 1990. Hundreds of Uzbeks attended a rally to protest the intervention and read prayers and texts from the Qur'an for the souls of Azeris who were killed by the Russian Forces.⁹⁹ While that incident gave a clear indication of Uzbek sympathy on the popular level with Azeris, a feeling that was also extended to the Azeri territorial dispute with Armenia, the Uzbek government in contrast showed no interest in supporting Azerbaijan in the latter case.

Initially, Tashkent found itself caught up in a dilemma. For one thing, it had to follow the pulse of the street by supporting the fellow Muslims in Azerbaijan, of whom Turkey also was a definite supporter. At the same time, Armenia was a member of the regional mutual security pact under the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States, of which Russia was a member, as well as Uzbekistan itself. Eventually President Karimov took a

⁹⁸Ro'i, p. 55.

⁹⁹*Ibid.* p. 57.

neutral stance, despite his announced sympathy with Azerbaijan. "We as Muslims and Turks are with our Azeri brothers, but for now we must stay out and not get involved while other quarters are not causing any harm," he told the *Turkiye* newspaper on April 9, 1992.¹⁰⁰

4.2.2 Tajikistan

Another regional Islamic challenge to Karimov and his struggle to crack down on *political* Islam came from Tajikistan, where the Islamists with their democratic allies forced their way into the Tajik government in September 1992. Karimov's immediate reaction was to support the Tajik president, Nabiev, in his bid to regain power and oust the Islamic opposition. The Uzbek authorities trained and armed a pro-communist Tajik brigade which by December was able to launch a successful attack on Dushanbe and chase the Islamists out to the Badakhshan region.¹⁰¹ Nabiev's successor, President Imomali Rakhmonov, signed a peace accord with the Islamists in June 1997 as part of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), which ended the civil war in the country. Shortly thereafter, a rebellion erupted in the north of the country --near the Uzbek border-- in protest to the peace accord. Although the Uzbek government denied it had played any role in the rebellion, the Tajik

¹⁰⁰Henry Hale. "Islam, State-Building and Uzbekistan Foreign Policy." In Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (ed.) *The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and Its Borderlands*. New York: I. B. Tauris, 1994, p. 148.

¹⁰¹Hiro, p. 185.

government insisted that Tashkent was providing shelter and training to the rebels led by a former army colonel and a former prime minister.¹⁰²

4.2.3 Afghanistan

In Uzbekistan's southern neighbor, Afghanistan, where Islamic *mujahidin* had overthrown the pro-Moscow Communist regime, only to be overthrown themselves by the more militant *Taliban* militias, the Uzbek government remains vigilant to any threat caused by the Afghan civil war. Although the Uzbek involvement in Afghanistan was only evident in the shape of a diplomatic campaign calling for the end of the civil war, which was conducted through bilateral meetings with foreign officials and international forums, there have also been allegations by warring factions in Afghanistan of direct Uzbek intervention in the Afghan conflict.¹⁰³ This Uzbek involvement has apparently been motivated by four objectives: to prevent fighting from spilling over to Uzbek territories, to stop the smuggling of arms and drugs from Afghanistan to Uzbekistan, to obstruct fundamentalist factions from seizing power in Kabul, and probably to protect the Uzbek minority in Afghanistan.

¹⁰²Salimjon Alioubov. "Tajikistan/Uzbekistan: Ripples from Deteriorating Relations Spread through CIS." Published by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty on November 16, 1998 at website address: (www.rferl.org/nca/features/1998/11/F.RU.981116132659.html).

¹⁰³Hale, p. 159.

Outside the former Soviet Union region, Uzbekistan's foreign policy has been characterized by two parallel goals: first, consolidating the new status of the country as an independent republic with a distinct culture and identity from those of Russia, which in turn appeased public, *nationalist* demands; and second, drawing economic benefits through attracting foreign investment and if possible aid, and increasing trade exchange. For achieving both goals, religion had a useful role. In other words, religion was an effective factor in encouraging Uzbekistan to consolidate its relationship with other Muslim countries, but only in its capacity as a psychological and political motive for nationalism, just as much as it was economically and materially rewarding. Whilst interests are what generally determines the scale of relations amongst states, commonalities tend to create the right atmosphere for cooperation and understanding, and therefore, make the consolidation of relations a much easier task. In the case of Uzbekistan, religion served the foreign policy of the state in the two respects, as a source of both interests and psychological proximity.

4.2.4 ECO

In his bid to consolidate ties with Muslim nations shortly after the declaration of independence, President Karimov opted together with the leaders of the four other Central Asian republics and Azerbaijan to join the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) which already had three of the

world's largest Muslim countries in its membership: Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. Though largely inactive and bearing no documented reference to any Islamic identity, ECO was widely viewed as a grouping of Muslim nations.¹⁰⁴ This notion was further verified when its 1992 summit approved the membership of the six newly independent predominantly Muslim states, whereas an application by Romania for membership was virtually overlooked.

In political terms, solidarity among ECO member states simply does not apply. Strategic differences among the three large Muslim states can be identified easily, as Turkey and Iran represent the two opposite extremes of governments in Muslim nations: secularism as opposed to fundamentalism, while Pakistan and Iran actively vie for influence in Afghanistan. The three countries have shared one thing in common, nonetheless: adversity to Russia, especially during the communist era. It was obviously in this context that Karimov thought he could make some political gains in the form of asserting his republic's independence, or at least to balance its excessive dependence on Moscow, which he still needed for economic and security considerations. In economic terms, most of the few achievements of ECO remained on paper. However, the organization came away with limited agreements like trade tariffs reduction, the establishment of a common market for agricultural

¹⁰⁴*ibid.*, p. 163.

products, and the exchange of expertise.¹⁰⁵ Whether such agreements have actually been implemented is another question.

As far as Uzbekistan's inter-Islamic bilateral relations are concerned, the Uzbek government sent early positive gestures of its eagerness to build strong ties of cooperation with other Muslim countries. Shortly after Uzbekistan's independence, President Karimov went on an extensive tour abroad that took him to Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Indonesia.¹⁰⁶ The selection of these countries as his destination was a subtle one. Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Indonesia are four of the largest Muslim countries in terms of population and international weight. Establishing strong ties with them, therefore, was vital to give Uzbekistan political and moral support. Saudi Arabia and Malaysia, on the other hand, were two of the wealthiest nations in the Muslim world. Their friendship is likely to bring along economic support.

4.2.5 Arab Countries

The Arab World is an important center of Islam. Prophet Muhammad was an Arab, the language of Qur'an is Arabic, and the two holiest shrines of Islam in Mecca and Medina lie in Arabia. The Arab land also contains more

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 163, 164.

¹⁰⁶Z. I. Munavvarov. "Uzbekistan and the Gulf Co-operation Council: Perspectives of Political and Economic Co-operation." In Anoushiravan Ehteshami, ed. From the Gulf to Central Asia. Exter: University of Exter Press, 1994, p. 84.

than one fifth of the world's petrol reserves, while the Arab world's 230 million inhabitants constitute an attractive large market. It was only natural as a result that Uzbekistan would seek the Arabs' friendship, as it saw in them not only Muslim kinspeople, but also an important source of economic profit and political support. However, the scale of Uzbek-Arab relations should not be overestimated. The fragmentation of Uzbekistan's foreign diplomacy approach between Russia, Europe, Turkey, Iran and Arab countries made it move half-heartedly in either direction; and most of all, it was the timing of its independence that substantially strained the progress of its relations with the Arabs.

Traditionally, there are four states that are widely considered most influential in the Arab world: Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia. When Uzbekistan emerged as an independent state a few months after the 1991 Gulf War, the devastation that entailed the war was immeasurable. The Arab world was fragmented and weak, and the once extravagantly rich Persian Gulf states were gasping to catch up with the financial liabilities of the war. Although Egypt at the beginning tried to approach and establish close ties with Uzbekistan, the geographic distance between the two and the limitation of Egypt's economic strength, among other reasons, hampered the pace of the development of relations. Iraq was licking its wounds after the war and was practically out of the international arena. Syria, which had been the closest Arab ally of the Soviet Union, was now preoccupied with the Middle East peace process and had no will to invest in new large-scale diplomacy beyond

that. Thus, only Saudi Arabia and its smaller neighbors in the Gulf, despite the financial constraints, managed to build active relations with Uzbekistan as part of their Central Asia policy.

In early 1992, Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries allocated US\$3 billion in aid to Central Asia. By the spring of that year, Saudi Arabia alone reportedly spent US\$1 billion in that region.¹⁰⁷ Given the geographic distance that separates Saudi Arabia from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and the latter's reluctance to emphasize the Muslim identity of their republics due to their multiethnic nature, and given the instability and unrest in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan became the hub of Saudi aid to the region. This status was also enhanced by the historical importance of the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand and the contributions of 'Uzbek' scholars to Islam on the one hand, and the presence of a sizable and active Uzbek community in Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries, on the other hand.¹⁰⁸

Much of the Saudi interest in Uzbekistan is centered around cultural and religious ties. During his February 1992 visit to Tashkent to establish diplomatic relations with Uzbekistan, the Saudi foreign minister brought along one million copies of the Qur'an and pledged to sponsor Uzbek pilgrims to Mecca for the following two Hajj seasons. Saudi Arabia has also been a major source of funding for religious institutions in Uzbekistan, either directly or through the OIC and the Saudi-based *Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami* (Muslim

¹⁰⁷Robins, p. 69.

World League.) The Saudi support and consolidation of bilateral ties came in other forms as well, most notably the establishment of a bank in Uzbekistan and the inauguration of an air route between Tashkent and the Saudi port and second largest city of Jidda.¹⁰⁹

4.2.6 Iran

In addition to Saudi Arabia and Arab countries, Uzbekistan has sought to establish close ties with its other Muslim neighbors. Iran, a large Muslim nation not too far from Uzbek borders, seemed to be an inevitable destination for broadening Uzbekistan's inter-Islamic relations. Karimov had repeatedly declared that his government was not prepared to adopt a religious-based type of rule, and that his favorite model has rather all along been the other extreme, a Turkey-modeled secular government. At the same time, however, the prospects of economic cooperation with Iran and the political benefits that Uzbekistan could gain thereunto were too tempting to be turned down.

In economic terms, the Iranian interest in Uzbekistan came at an early stage, when Iran's foreign minister informed Uzbek officials during a visit to Tashkent in November 1991 of his country's plans to make Tashkent the center of the Iranian airlines service to the entire region and to launch a cargo train service between the two countries. In political terms, although bilateral

¹⁰⁸Munavvarov (p. 88) estimates the number of Uzbeks in Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries, most of whom had migrated there in the early 20th century, at 300 thousand.

ties were by no means as promising, the Uzbek government was eager to widely publicize any signs of political proximity, no matter how superficial, with Tehran. To the Uzbek government, relations with Iran were useful not only in reinforcing Uzbekistan's independence from Moscow but in pressuring the West into making concessions, especially concerning Uzbekistan's human rights record. Such a policy proved worthwhile as the United States, fearful of the spread of Iranian influence, rushed to establish diplomatic relations with Tashkent, despite the Uzbek government's decline to meet US demands for democracy and respect for human rights.¹¹⁰

Uzbek-Iranian economic relations received a tangible boost with Karimov's visit to Tehran in November 1992. During the visit, the Uzbek president's accompanying delegation of diplomats and economists reached agreements with their Iranian counterparts covering the fields of economic, industrial and scientific cooperation. The two sides also agreed on the establishment of intergovernmental airline links, Iran's assistance in the development of the Uzbek banking and finance sector, coordination between the respective central banks, and the development of investment opportunities in Uzbekistan. Late in the same year, a joint venture for handicraft products geared for exportation was setup in Uzbekistan as well.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹Hale, pp. 160, 161.

¹¹⁰Hale, pp. 154, 155.

¹¹¹Ehteshami, p. 106.

4.2.7 Turkey

Uzbekistan has much in common with Arab countries and Iran in terms of history, religion, and potentially economic interests. But for the time being, the country that should hypothetically be closest to Uzbekistan is Turkey, with an extensive net of relations that include moral, political and economic interests. Not only does Turkey share the common moral elements of historical, cultural, religious and geographic proximity with Uzbekistan, but it inhibits two other important bonds: ethnic background and secularist rule; two commonalities that Karimov has repeatedly emphasized. This is in addition to the potential economic benefits that close ties between Turkey and Uzbekistan could yield.

In political terms, the Uzbek government finds in Turkey a strong ally, in case it is needed, against Russian sway and more importantly against political Islam. Given its long experience in promoting secularism and combating the politicization of religion, Turkey could be helpful both by sharing its expertise with the Uzbek government and by providing an example to be followed. In economic terms, the experience of Turkey's free economy and entrepreneurship appears to be a model as well to follow for the Uzbek government and business people alike. The Uzbek leadership's interest to emulate the Turkish experience in this respect was reiterated by President Karimov himself. "My country will go forward by the Turkish route," he was quoted as saying shortly after independence. He had also once told the Turkish

daily *Cumhuriyet*: "We want to implement a free market . . . I don't think fundamentalist Islam has much chance [in Uzbekistan]. Turkey's secularism is also a model for us."¹¹²

To exhibit the close relations between the two nations, Turkey was the first state to recognize Uzbekistan's independence and set up a Turkish cultural center in Tashkent to promote bilateral ties on the popular level. President Karimov visited Ankara in December 1991, where no fewer than nine protocols were signed to illustrate cooperation between the two countries. The protocols covered such diverse fields as a treaty on inter-governmental relations, and pacts on cooperation in economics, trade, culture, education, science, transport and communication. Under these pacts, several agreements were reached, including agreements on the establishment of a joint bank and the launching of Uzbek airlines flights to Istanbul.¹¹³

When President Suleyman Demirel (then prime minister) of Turkey arrived in Tashkent in March 1992 to inaugurate the Turkish embassy, more agreements were reached, including the exportation of Turkish wheat and sugar in aid to Uzbekistan, security guarantees to Turkish investments, and collaboration in transportation. Turkey's assistance to Uzbekistan also included training Uzbek diplomats and helping introducing Uzbek banks into the international banking network. In October that year, Turkey hosted a summit for leaders of Turkic-speaking countries, the outcome of which was

¹¹²Hiro, p. 176.

the signing of the 'Ankara Doctrine.' While the doctrine reiterated the desire to pursue close economic cooperation between the signatories, its political section stipulated that ties between Turkic nations were unbreakable and that a joint action would be taken to resolve local conflicts and ensure local stability.¹¹⁴

The Turkic summit played a significant part in laying solid grounds for Uzbek-Turkish ties in the sense that it put bilateral relations in an institutionalized frame. Since that first summit in Ankara, the progress of relations between Turkey and Uzbekistan went through some stages of stagnation, particularly between 1994 and 1997 as Tashkent accused Ankara of providing shelter to Uzbek opposition leaders, most notably leaders of Birlik and Erk. However, relations between the two countries returned to normal after 1997 and were boosted by an exchange of visits of high-ranking officials. During the recent visit of President Demirel to Tashkent in March 1999, the two presidents reaffirmed the strength of bilateral ties between their countries, as the Turkish president assured his Uzbek counterpart that Ankara was not hosting the runaway Erk leader Muhammad Salih¹¹⁵, and that it will not allow Uzbek opposition to work against the Uzbek government from Turkish territories.

¹¹³Hale, p. 156.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 156, 157.

¹¹⁵Salih fled Uzbekistan shortly after his party was banned by the Uzbek government in 1992. Since then he has been living in asylum abroad. He was recently accused by the government of masterminding terrorist attacks in Uzbekistan, including the recent explosions in Tashkent in February 1999, which President Karimov described as an assassination attempt against him.

4.2.8 South and Southeast Asia

Besides Arab states, Iran and Turkey, Uzbekistan has also been interested in establishing close relations with other Muslim countries in Asia. But the geographical distance between Tashkent and the Muslim states in Southeast Asia and the preoccupation of the latter with regional cooperation, e.g. ASEAN and APEC, not to mention the recent economic slowdown in Southeast Asia have strained any prospects for a significant development of relations between Uzbekistan and major nations in the region like Malaysia and Indonesia.

There had also been mutual interest between Uzbekistan and South Asian nations, most notably Pakistan to develop political and economic ties. Pakistan was among the first Muslim nations to send a high-level delegation, headed by the economic affairs minister, to Uzbekistan after its independence. President Karimov visited Pakistan twice in 1992, and Pakistan's prime minister went to Tashkent the same year to open the Pakistani embassy. Afghanistan, which separates the borders of the two countries has been the major common political issue between Uzbekistan and Pakistan, both of whom were believed to support rival factions in that troubled republic. The situation in Afghanistan has also hindered the building of a logistically vital railway line between the Pakistani port of Karachi and Central Asia, which could well enhance trade and transportation between the two sides. In the

meantime, Pakistan remained interested in promoting joint ventures with Central Asia in tourism, banking, cement, textiles and English-language training.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶Hale, p. 162.

CHAPTER 5

CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS AWAKENING

A lot of debate has been devoted to the reasons why so many Muslim nations are witnessing a religious revival. It is widely agreed though that there are certain common, interacting factors which enhance the movement toward religious awakening in Muslim societies. Lack of democracy, poverty and unemployment, and the presence of an ideological vacuum caused by the failure or collapse of a certain dominant ideology, be it for example socialism-communism (as was in the case of Marxism) or secular nationalism (as was in the case of Nasserism), all represent examples of such common factors.

In many cases, the tendency toward Islamic revival is also enhanced by the support it receives from foreign governments and factions. Such support may come in the shape of direct aid in terms of finance, manpower or arms, or it may come in the shape of propaganda and the psychological shape of the success of a religious revival in a nearby nation, which could spillover and inspire a similar revival elsewhere.

It remains highly debatable, however, as to what it is that triggers religious revival in the first place. Most governments argue that Islamic

revival is merely politically motivated and is supported by foreign parties, which are often antagonistic regimes or organizations. They also accuse Islamists of hoisting crime and terrorism and threatening peace and stability. Thus was the justification of the Uzbek government for its repression of opposition.¹¹⁷ Proponents of religious awakening meanwhile argue that Islamic revival is perpetual and never vanishes. It comes to certain intervals of quietness and erupts again once it is given the right environment. That right environment can well be made up of poverty, and government corruption and repression which may then be instigated by other factors such as foreign support and political motivation.

5.1 Domestic Factors

5.1.1 Religion-Nationalism Link

By studying the previous chapters -- first on the history of religion in Uzbekistan, both upon the advent of Islam and in relation to Uzbek resistance against tsarist Russian and Soviet rule, and second, on the signs of religious awakening in Uzbekistan -- it may be established that Islam and nationalism have been used synonymously in Uzbekistan to denote one thing: national

¹¹⁷See Daniel Williams. "Uzbeks Caught between Secular, Islamic Currents," from Washington Post Foreign Service, September 27, 1998. Website address: (w1.920.telia.com/~u92003997/wposteng.html).

identity. This link between religion and nationalism therefore seems to have formed the basis of the resurgence of religious awareness among Uzbeks. It was then apparently that additional factors, i.e. the presence of an ideological vacuum following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the appeal of Islam as a faith and its values, charisma of local Islamic leaders, corruption, poverty, repression, and foreign influence, intermingled and led to the sustenance of religious revival in the country.

Aside from the role that religion had played in expediting the predominantly nationalist Jadid movement, and the role that nationalism had played in enthusing the predominantly Islamic Basmachi rebellion, the link between religion and nationalism in modern Uzbekistan is also exemplified in the mottoes and slogans of Birlik, Erk, IRP and other movements. Such is the strength of the link between religion and national identity in Central Asia that the two are inseparable. As Mariel Atkin explains: "The link between religious and national identity is an axiom in the study of the peoples of Soviet Central Asia. The two identities are inextricably intertwined, so that national customs are viewed as Islamic and Islamic practices are viewed as national traditions."¹¹⁸ Shireen Hunter agrees, "what made the case of Islam even more difficult to deal with, and yet at the same time urgent, was the great extent to

¹¹⁸Mariel Atkin. "Religious, National, and Other Identities in Central Asia," in Jo-Ann Gross ed. Muslims in Central Asia. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992, p. 46.

which it was intertwined with the people's sense of their national and ethnic identity."¹¹⁹

As linked to and virtually synonymous with national identity, religion also serves as a source of national pride. First, Islam has at more than one time in history been the faith of the largest and most powerful state in the world. This was the case with the Umayyad, Abbassid and Ottoman empires. Second, Uzbekistan was at one point an important center of Muslim civilization. Third, Uzbekistan introduced to Islam, and indeed to the world at large, great scholars, scientists and military leaders, whose achievements and contributions are still evident until today. In other words, the revival of Islam in Central Asia was based, as Ahmed Rashid explains, on "a historical and cultural memory of the past, even though its details were somewhat hazy, that Central Asia had been the home of vast Islamic empires that once ruled Russia and the world."¹²⁰

Uzbeks thus have for long looked upon Islam not only as a faith, but as an identity that, on the one hand represents a source of national pride, and on the other hand serves to distinguish Uzbeks and fellow Central Asians from other communities like Slavs, Germans and Koreans. During the Soviet rule in Uzbekistan, even Uzbek communists used to observe Muslim practices like celebrating holy occasions, circumcision, and Muslim funeral services. So intrinsic in Uzbek society Islam is, that the Soviet authorities could not delete

¹¹⁹Hunter, in Journal of Islamic Studies, p. 290.

it from the mind of their own loyal, pro-communist men, let alone those who adhered to it spiritually.

5.1.2 Ideological Vacuum

As a result of the inseparable link between religion and national identity, it was natural that the national euphoria which engulfed Uzbekistan in the years leading to independence and shortly thereafter would entail religious awakening as well. If this religion-national identity bond did not create Islamic revival per se, it has at least provided the ground on which it grew. It was then the impact of the other factors that have seemingly contributed to religious revival. One of those factors was the emergence of an ideological vacuum following the collapse of communism. With the proclamation of Uzbekistan's independence, its people suddenly found themselves citizens of a country without an ideology or systematic policy. The return of communism was out of the question. Capitalism was an alien concept that people knew little about and the state lacked the tools and fundamentals to adopt. An ideological vacuum was thus in place, and Islam seemed to be the suitable alternative to fill it. Shireen Hunter sums up the qualities that pushed Islam to the surface after the collapse of the Soviet Union as follows:

¹²⁰Rashid, p. 244.

Islam has certain characteristics that make it a credible alternative for many Muslims. It is a coherent system of legal codes and moral principles. It incorporates the principles of social justice and the sanctity of property. The Islamic provision that needy Muslims should be assisted from the "Dar-al-Mal" (State Treasury) is akin to the notion of a welfare state. Thus it provides both a value system and guidelines for action.¹²¹

5.1.3 Characteristics of Islamic Values

To put it in simpler words, a 44-year-old resident of Samarkand, explaining the importance of Islam, says: "Islam means a good life for ordinary people, respect for the elderly and the younger generations." A 23-year-old Friday prayer attendant adds: "I am happy I took part in the prayer. You have this incredible feeling of purity, and your soul becomes closer to God."¹²² If this may indicate that the appeal of Islam itself with its values and practices has helped install it into the ideological gap that ensued the fall of communism, another related factor appears to promote the appeal of religion among many Uzbeks: the charisma and personal influence of some local clergymen.

¹²¹Shireen T. Hunter. Central Asia Since Independence, p. 35

¹²²Solovyov, p. 1.

5.1.4 Charisma of Local Imams

A number of Muslim imams and preachers possessed certain personal appeals and charisma that gathered people around them and drew them closer to religion. As Daniel Williams describes: "Many (mosques) are run by self-educated imams armed with flinty righteousness, incessant prayer and enough charisma to fill the mosque on Fridays."¹²³ According to Abdumannob Polat (Pulatov), such prominent clergymen as Abduvali Mirzaev and Obidhon Nazarov brought together thousands of Muslims on Friday and holiday prayers. Their mosques were so overcrowded that many worshippers had to stand up. Hundreds of thousands of religious tapes authored by such popular imams were sold and circulated in the country.¹²⁴

5.1.5 Economic Difficulties, Poverty and Unemployment

Another factor that seems to have drawn people closer to religion is the pressure of economic difficulties, and the poverty and unemployment that they entail. Poverty and unemployment mean a shortage in basic needs and frustration, and there is where the role of religion becomes reinvigorated and perhaps politicized. Though poverty and unemployment alone do not necessarily invoke religious awakening or politicizing Islam, they create an atmosphere congruent in resorting to religion and theological abstracts as a

¹²³Williams, p. 2.

source of comfort and reassurance. As Dmitry Solovyov explains: "Many Uzbeks have been turning to God for relief from the stresses and strains accompanying the country's slow and reluctant shift towards a more market-based economy after decades of state socialism."¹²⁵

In addition to being a source of comfort, religion may also be used in times of economic stress as a channel to oppose government economic policies. First, Islam rejects many of the measures and aspects of modern economic transactions like financial interests and the absence of some beneficial Islamic concepts like *Takaful* and *Zaka*.¹²⁶ Second and more importantly, Islam fights corruption, which many Uzbeks view as a major element contributing to their economic woes. Abdumannob Polat warns: "Many people are now angry with the government and consider that independence worsened their living conditions. The poverty of the majority combined with the wealthy life style of a small minority of "New Uzbeks" and the absence of a notable middle class, makes Islamic radicalism quite possible in the near future."¹²⁷

Like poverty, unemployment could also have contributed to religious awakening. First, unemployment not only means deprivation from income, but it also produces ample free time that needs to be filled by any activity. Second,

¹²⁴Abdumannob Polat. "Does Islamic Fanatism Threat to (*sic*) Stability?" Published on October 16, 1998 on Birlik's Internet website at: (www.birlik.net).

¹²⁵Solovyov, p. 2.

¹²⁶*Takaful* is an Islamic version of social welfare which requires every capable Muslim to be benevolent and attentive to fellow Muslims' needs. *Zaka* (alms giving) is the compulsory allocation of a certain percentage from every 'capable' Muslim's wealth and assets for charity purposes.

¹²⁷Polat. "Does Islamic...", p. 2.

the status of unemployed people in society is often not favorable. By resorting to religion, and perhaps joining organized Islamic movements, the unemployed can both fill their excessive free time with a new activity and simultaneously improve their social status, given the high esteem that pious Muslims who fight vice and injustice enjoy in Muslim societies. The Islamic association, Adalat, for instance had drawn its popular support mainly from unemployed young men and women. Roy Allison explains, "One major reason why the Adalat units attracted volunteers is widespread unemployment; this affects over 30 percent of young men in many areas of Ferghana. To belong to these Adalat groups raised the status of such unemployed people in society."¹²⁸ The presence of an ideological vacuum, the appeal of Islam and its values, the personal influence of Muslim preachers, poverty and unemployment, all appear to form key factors that have together contributed to the awakening of religion in Uzbekistan, after it was first initiated by the rise of nationalism in the wake of independence. As Abdujabar Abduvakhitov explains: "As a means of solving political, social, and economic problems, Islam unites people in contemporary Muslim societies as effectively as did the *Sufi* brotherhoods of medieval times."

5.1.6 Government Repression

The Uzbek government, which had understood the implications of the strong bond between religion and nationalism and the considerable influence

¹²⁸Roy Allison, ed. Challenges for the Former Soviet South. Washington DC.: Brookings Institution Press, 1996, p. 23.

of religion and clergymen, attempted initially to inaugurate the post-independence era by promoting religious signs and gestures to fill in the ideological gap and to assert the republic's national identity. However, as it soon felt threatened by the opposition, the government adopted a new policy, less tolerant to the opposition, both nationalist and Islamic. Has this policy suppressed religious revival, or has it been ineffective and perhaps by contrast backfired to become an additional important factor in the emergence of religious awakening?

Shortly after the declaration of independence on September 1, 1991, President Islam Karimov displayed his unwillingness to open the door for a Western-modeled democracy. Born in 1938, Karimov joined the Communist Party in 1964 and held several key posts in the Uzbek SSR before being appointed first secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party in June 1989, a title which virtually meant head of the republic. In the first presidential elections after independence, he won 86 percent of the vote. Only one opponent was allowed to run against him, Muhammad Salih, the leader of the relatively small Erk party. The largest two parties, which actually had the potential of defeating Karimov in the elections: Birlik and the Islamic Renaissance Party had already been banned.¹²⁹

Citing the importance of stability and economic progress, President Karimov used harsh, and sometimes what appeared to be extreme, measures to

¹²⁹James Critchlow. "Nationalism and Islamic Resurgence in Uzbekistan," in Malik, p. 239.

secure his presidency and suppress any potential threat to it. In June 1992, Abdulrahim Pulatov, President Karimov's most prominent rival and leader of Birlik, was attacked and severely beaten with iron bars by unknown men whom he described as Uzbek intelligence agents. He said after being hospitalized and treated for 20 days, doctors informed him that they were ordered to stop his treatment. He then secretly fled Uzbekistan to Turkey through Azerbaijan. His escape enraged President Karimov, who reacted by suspending all flights from Tashkent to Baku.¹³⁰ Six months later, Pulatov's brother, Abdumannob, who was attending a regional conference on human rights in Kyrgyzstan in his capacity as chairman of the Uzbekistan Human Rights Association, was kidnapped in Bishkek by Uzbek intelligence agents. His kidnappers transferred him back to Tashkent, where he was tried by an Uzbek court which charged him with insulting the president and sentenced him to jail. The kidnapping took place on December 8, 1992, the same day on which the new constitution was adopted.¹³¹

The same year also witnessed several other incidents that marred any signs of government tolerance of opposition and freedom of expression. In December, IRP leader Abdullah Utayev abruptly 'disappeared', never to be seen again. His wife claimed that he was arrested near his home by government authorities. All other opposition organizations, including Islamic

¹³⁰Rashid, p. 79.

¹³¹Hiro, p. 187.

parties, were in the meantime banned and outlawed.¹³² The country's only independent publication, *Biznesmyen*, was closed down after it criticized the government's undemocratic practices. Then, a series of more kidnappings and 'disappearances' took place in the following years. Amnesty International, which has kept track of many such incidents, pointed to several cases where people related to the Uzbek opposition either mysteriously disappeared or were abducted and severely beaten by 'unknown' assailants. This is in addition to those who were sentenced to long terms in prison.¹³³

The government has repeatedly insisted that its campaign against the Islamists is not aimed at undermining Islam as a faith or terrorizing devout Muslims but rather targets outlawed criminal or terrorist elements. "Such people should be shot in the head. If necessary I'll shoot them myself," President Karimov uttered before parliament in May 1998. One government-appointed *imam* of a large Namangan mosque, referring to the ouster of his predecessor by the police, echoed government contention by charging that subversive preachers received training abroad to deceive the people into making the state their enemy.¹³⁴ In reality, however, Uzbek opposition and some independent international organizations claim that government repression has stretched at times to any signs or symbols of Islam, regardless of their background intonation and motivation. According to Human Rights Watch in New York: "The (Uzbek) government is painting all Muslims with

¹³²Polat. "Does Islamic...", p.3.

¹³³AI (Amnesty International) Report 1997: Uzbekistan. Published on the website of Amnesty International at: (www.amnesty.org).I

the same brush -- those who have criminal intent and average Muslims who simply wear a beard or go to mosque. It is subjecting all Muslims on a mass scale to beatings, show trials, expulsions from universities and jobs, and lengthy prison terms."¹³⁵

This iron-fist policy has not always been successful. In many cases it rather seemed to produce opposite effects, so long as religious awakening continued to thrive, if not in public. When the authorities for instance ruled out Islamic education from public schools, Islamists resorted to *madrasahs* and other informal education centers attached to mosques, which were on the increase. As Ahmed Rashid sums this up, "The refusal of Central Asian governments to allow Islamic education in government schools resulted in the spread of unofficial Islamic schools."¹³⁶ According to Dmitry Solovyov, an estimated 5000 mosques have been reopened or built in Uzbekistan since independence.¹³⁷ One Muslim preacher, who took to refraining from making political comments for fear of government repression apparently, told a Western observer: "They (the authorities) are always harassing us. First they reduced the time of prayer, now they have eliminated it altogether. They said the public call to prayer bothered people. Lies."¹³⁸

¹³⁴Williams, p. 1, 2.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹³⁶Rashid, p. 245.

¹³⁷Solovyov, p. 2.

¹³⁸Williams, p. 3.

5.2 Foreign Factors: Spillover and Propaganda

All the factors, which have been mentioned thus far, and which seem to contribute to religious awakening in Uzbekistan, are the product of domestic environment and politics. However, religious awakening seems to have been influenced as well by external factors. One such external factor has been the spillover of Islamic revival from neighboring countries. This, coupled with another equally important factor: pro-Islamic propaganda beamed from anti-communist Muslim states, e.g. Iran aimed mainly at raising Central Asians' religious awareness. The 1978-79 Islamic revolution in Iran had set the psychological environment for the reintroduction of Islam into the region, despite the fact that it did not produce a radical reaction among Central Asians due to two reasons: the iron fist of Soviet rule and the differences between Shiite and Sunni Islam.¹³⁹ In any case, the significance of the Iranian revolution lay in its aptness to invoke the sense of identity and self-perception of a Muslim majority which was ruled by an atheist, foreign power. The real potential spillover of Islamic revival though came from two other neighbors: Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

¹³⁷Solovyov, p. 2.

¹³⁸Williams, p. 3.

¹³⁹The Shiites constitute less than 10 percent of the world Muslim population worldwide. In all five Central Asian republics Sunni Islam is the predominant faith; and the Shiite concept of *wilayat alfaqih* (the undisputed leadership of the top clergyman) does not apply in Sunni Islam. In addition, Sunnis traditionally reject and are skeptical of some Shiite principal practices and beliefs such as *taqiyya* (hiding of plans and intentions) and criticism of some close companions of Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, the emergence of an Uzbek Khomeini was not feasible. For other details on differences between Shiite and Sunni Islam, see Philip Robins. "The Middle East and Central Asia." In Peter Ferdinand (ed.) The New Central Asia and its Neighbours. London: Printer Publishers, 1994, pp. 68, 69.

Troubled by civil war and chaos, Afghanistan with its large Uzbek minority has been a source of persistent worrying for Tashkent. This Uzbek anxiety came to its peak in 1997, when the fundamentalist Taliban movement upset the balance of power in Afghanistan and looked to be dominating the battlefield. Uzbekistan responded by launching a diplomatic campaign aiming at enforcing a ceasefire in Afghanistan. President Karimov sent letters to the United Nations secretary general, the chairman of the United Nations Security Council, the president of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the head of the European Parliament, calling upon the international community to intervene and put an end to the civil war in Afghanistan. The Uzbek government also voiced its support for convening an international conference on Afghanistan. The Uzbek fear clearly did not come solely from the spread of fighting across the border, but mainly from the spread of political Islam, which had first captured the attention of Uzbeks and other Central Asians when it defeated the mighty Soviet army in Afghanistan by what was broadly perceived as a holy war - a *jihād*.¹⁴⁰

Many of the Soviet soldiers deployed in Afghanistan to fight the *Mujahidin* were Central Asian Muslims, who had the rare opportunity of direct contacts with other Muslim peoples. Their presence there, tangled with an Islamic propaganda directed to Central Asia via radio transmission by the Mujahidin from their headquarters in Peshawar, Pakistan, had played a major

¹⁴⁰See Rashid, p. 245.

role in highlighting the incompatibility between Islam and communism, and reviving the Islamic consciousness of Central Asians. The earlier Iranian propaganda in the form of radio broadcasts and cassettes of Khomeini's lectures that were distributed in Central Asia, had already set the stage for an increasing religious awareness among Central Asians.¹⁴¹ Most of the Soviet Muslim soldiers in Afghanistan were aware of their religious identity and like many other Muslims in the Soviet Union had suffered from poverty, unemployment and inequality as compared to Russians and other ethnic groups. Such propaganda therefore focused its effort on equating communism with atheism, which was the ultimate sin in Islam, and on reminding Central Asians of their glorious past and the anguish inflicted upon them by the Soviet system.

In the meantime, the situation in Tajikistan was not any better as far as Uzbekistan was concerned, when in May 1992, a coalition of nationalists, democrats and Islamists, having mounted large popular support in Dushanbe that exploded in street demonstrations and riots, forced their way into the Tajik government alongside President Rakhmon Nabiev's ruling Communist Party. Although the Islamists had limited influence in the government compared to the nationalists, President Karimov took a firm stance against

¹⁴¹Hunter, in Journal of Islamic Studies, p. 288.

what he considered a fundamentalist government and sought to isolate Tajikistan diplomatically and physically.¹⁴²

His efforts to topple the Tajik coalition subsequently paid off, when the pro-communist Tajik forces, which were backed and aided by the Uzbek authorities, defeated the Tajik Islamists in December 1992.¹⁴³ When the 1997 peace accord was signed by the Tajik government and the Islamic-led opposition to end the stand-off, an armed rebellion broke out in the city of Khojand, near the Uzbek border, to protest the exclusion of the once dominant northern province of Leninabad from that accord. The Tajik government accused Uzbekistan of providing shelter and training to the rebels and described the Uzbek role in the rebellion as amounting to military intervention.¹⁴⁴ The Uzbek involvement in curbing the rise of political Islam in the region can only be understood within the context of President Karimov's worries that an Islamist takeover of government in a neighboring country could inspire replication in Uzbekistan.¹⁴⁵

While the propagation of pro-Islamic ideology from neighboring countries into Uzbekistan is evident through various channels like radio transmission and audio cassettes, the infiltration of political Islam from outside is based mainly on Uzbek government claims and seems to lack tangible evidence. President Karimov lists Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan

¹⁴²Brown, p. 4.

¹⁴³Rashid, p. 102.

¹⁴⁴Alioubov, p. 1.

¹⁴⁵Hale, p. 159.

among the countries which host training camps for Islamist dissidents.¹⁴⁶ Tajikistan, and more recently Chechnya, have also been added to the list. Following the Tashkent bomb explosions of February 16, 1999, President Karimov charged that some of the perpetrators were trained in Chechnya, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, before he redirected his accusation toward nationalist leader Muhammad Salih.

If the allegations of an actual spillover of Islamic armed rebellions from neighboring countries into Uzbekistan are contentious, the psychological and moral impact of religious revival in one country in the region seems destined to have repercussions in another country. Given the geographic and cultural proximity, ethnic blending and mingling of nations in the region, and importantly the link between religion and nationalism in Central Asia, the influence of religious awakening that crosses national borders has already been evident in Tajikistan. In Uzbekistan, one Samarkand resident, who during the month of Ramadan confessed he would "relax and have a drink" once fasting was over, did not hide his admiration for the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. "I am not afraid of the Taleban. They want to return to real Islam which existed ages ago," he said while speaking with enthusiasm about Timur and blaming the "kofirs" (infidels) for desecrating his grave during the Soviet rule.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶Collett-White, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷Solovyov, p. 3.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Since the advent of Islam in Central Asia in the eighth century, religion has continued to occupy an important aspect of Uzbek culture and tradition and to play a notable role in Uzbek society. In certain intervals, the influence of religion faced serious tests that threatened its role altogether, as has been in the case of the 75-year-long Soviet rule of the 20th century. However, such periods were only short terms in the 1250 years of history of Islam in Uzbekistan. Moreover, despite the nature of Soviet rule and its communist ideology that undermined any role of religion in the Union's republics, Islam continued to play a role in the Uzbek society. That role varied from a mere practice of rituals which was an extension of cultural and traditional heritage to the more politicized role of defending national identity and advocating independence from Russian domination.

As Uzbeks were celebrating freedom and independence in the early 1990s by reviving their culture and national identity -- a struggle that had been initially instigated by the Jadid movement and the Basmachi rebellion in the early decades of the century but which then went into oblivion until the

late 1980s when the Soviet state began to disintegrate -- they embarked on a process of religious awakening. The nature of that awakening is subject to debate. Is it another classic example of the rise of Islam as a political ideology in resemblance to what happened in the cases of Iran and Afghanistan, or is it a countenance of the overall rise of nationalism in Central Asia? Then, what was it that motivated and stimulated religious awakening? A study of Uzbekistan's history and the role of Islam in that history, a review of the signs and traces of Islamic revival inside the Uzbek borders and in neighboring countries may carry some answers to these questions.

To be able to understand the role and nature of Islam in post-Soviet Uzbekistan and how it is influencing modern Uzbek politics, a differentiation must first be established between Islamic revival as an ideologically-inspired political aspiration, and religious awakening as a culturally-inspired nationalist movement. In the first case, the revival of Islam is motivated by and directed toward one goal: seizure of government, with one purpose: establishment of an Islamic state. Individuals and organizations with such orientation tend to be uncompromising and often accused of militancy. What they actually do, according to Mark Juergensmeyer, is they "*religionize* politics" rather than "*politicize* religion". By his definition, such individuals and groups adopt "Ideological Religious Nationalism", examples of which include the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the outlawed al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in Egypt.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸Mark Juergensmeyer. "The Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism." Journal of International Affairs. 1(1996), pp. 5-6.

In the second case, religious awakening by contrast takes a less definite goal and purpose, and it is similar in many ways to secular nationalism. Juergensmeyer calls it "Ethnic Religious Nationalism", and he describes it as linked to "communities bound by race, history or culture, who feel oppressed or limited within an old social order and who wish to establish a political identity of their own, usually in a geographical region of their own. Religion, then, may become fused with a culture of domination or liberation." The Muslims' endeavor in Chechnya to assert their independence from Russia and in Tajikistan to assert a "cultural element" to the country's nationalism are given as examples of this form of religious nationalism.¹⁴⁹ As has been shown in the latter example of Tajikistan, religious awakening that is based on cultural revival and national independence is willing to compromise in the issue of government control.

In the case of the Muslim faith, to put it in other words, religious awakening takes two forms: one that is stimulated by the use of religion as the uncompromising source of political ideology and practice, and another that is stimulated by the use of religion as a source of cultural identity and national independence. By studying the role of Islam in Uzbekistan, in terms of its history, modern signs and traces, and factors leading to its recent revival as reviewed in the previous chapters, it would appear that religious awakening in the country tends to fall within the definitions of the second form, i.e. as a source of cultural identity and an assertion of national independence.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 4.

It is sometimes given the image of the first form of militant political Islam by the Uzbek government. On several occasions, President Karimov himself has dubbed the Islamic opposition as groups of criminals and terrorists. However, critics of Mr. Karimov, including Uzbek opposition leaders and independent international organizations claim that the government's allegations against the Islamic opposition are not based on reliable evidence but are rather trumped up.¹⁵⁰ As to why signs of Islamic revival are viewed with suspicion and often antagonism by the Uzbek government, one of the apparent explanations lies in Mr. Karimov's wariness of the spillover of political Islam or the infiltration of Islamist elements from neighboring countries such as Iran, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and more recently Chechnya. The rise of Taliban in Afghanistan and the recent alliance between the Islamists and the secular government in Tajikistan only serve to increase Karimov's worries.

The second apparent explanation is related to President Karimov's effort to maintain his power control. As he tightens his grip on power through an authoritarian rule, the Uzbek president repeatedly attributes his government's uncompromising approach toward the opposition to the importance of giving priority to stability and economic development and to the inadmissibility of allowing "those who use Islam to achieve non-Islamic objectives"¹⁵¹ to rule the country. Uzbek opposition and human rights activists

¹⁵⁰See Polat, "Does Islamic ..." p. 1, and Amnesty International 97 Report, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵¹From the statement given by President Karimov on March 1, 1999 during a joint press conference in Tashkent with President Stephanopolis of Greece.

contend that the government intentionally exaggerates the role of political Islam in the country, especially in relation with violence, as a justification for its indiscriminate clamp down on the political opposition.¹⁵²

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its communist doctrine in 1991, religious awakening in Uzbekistan has been conspicuously evident. Thousands of new mosques have been built. The sight of beards and head scarves in cities as well as country has become common. In the build up to independence and shortly thereafter, the local press encouraged religious awakening, while people held gatherings that sometimes turned into demonstrations for a Muslim cause. However, such indications of religious awakening should be studied and analyzed with scrutiny. At first glance, they seem to be a reflection of the rise of political Islam in Uzbekistan which could emulate the experiences of Iran or Afghanistan. A scrutinized examination of the situation in Uzbekistan tells otherwise.

Religious awakening appears to have started in Uzbekistan as part of the nationalist resistance against Moscow's rule. After decades of lurking under the surface, nationalism began to grow during the 1980s as the Soviet state appeared to be crumbling. With nationalism, religious awakening became more conspicuous, as it represented an integral part of the nationalist movement which sought independence from Russia and rehabilitation of the local culture and national identity. The intertwining of religion and

¹⁵²See previous notes on government's campaign against the political opposition in general, and the Islamic rise in particular.

nationalism in Uzbekistan was most clearly demonstrated when the newly-independent state launched its post-Soviet era by adopting Islamic symbols to underline its distinct national identity from that of Russia.

As religious revival flourished in an environment marked by the emergence of an ideological vacuum following the collapse of communism, and the rising level of poverty and unemployment amidst allegations of widespread corruption, the government's tolerance of the role of Islam staggered. On the one hand, President Karimov insisted that his government was not against Islam, which he admits is not only a religion but also a source of identity for the nation.¹⁵³ He also enhanced his verbal claims by practice as he went for Umrah and prefaced his speeches with Islamic phrases. On the other hand, President Karimov was apprehensive of the rising role of religion in society and apparently viewed it as a threat to his rule. He repeatedly charged the Islamists of committing crimes and terrorist acts in the country and accused them of using religion as a cover-up to achieve their political objectives and impose their own agenda, which he often associated with foreign powers' conspiracies.¹⁵⁴ His fear was heightened by the situation in neighboring countries and its possible influence on Uzbekistan, hence government's campaign of repression of Islam in the country.

¹⁵³See Hiro, p. 182 for a quotation of President Karimov's statement on the importance of Islam to Uzbekistan.

¹⁵⁴During his joint press conference in Tashkent with the president of Greece, Karimov said: "Uzbekistan is not against Islam, but it is against the use of Islam for the achievement of extremist objectives which contradict the spirit and principles of Islam."

If the Islamic rise in Uzbekistan's recent history and until shortly after independence had been diversified into the three forms of official, unofficial and political opposition Islam, religious revival in the country's post-independence historiography may be divided into the following three categories:

1-Political parties, which are the organized political institutions that were established in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the overt aspiration to reach power through legal means but were denied formal registration by the government. Their leaders and many of their senior cadres have since either mysteriously 'disappeared', gone into exile or been imprisoned. An example of this category is represented by IRP.

2- Groups and individuals, represented mainly by those who received religious education such as imams and *shari'a* students and their followers. They strictly observe religious duties and rituals. Many of them would like to see Uzbeks rid themselves of some traditional and social habits which they consider contradictory to Islamic teachings and which vary from alcoholism to the traditional excessive spending on occasions associated with religion such as circumcision celebrations and funerals. Although such groups and individuals may not be as politicized as the Islamic political parties in the first category, they are not totally apolitical either. However, they have not shown interest in seizing power, and their political objectives are focused on lobbying rather than vying for office. Examples of this category include the disbanded

Adalat and the observant Muslims known as Wahhabis. Such groups persistently deny having any political aspiration.

3- Ordinary Uzbeks who have showed more religious awareness and devotion in the past decade, especially in terms of performing the daily religious duties and refraining from acts deemed by Islam as great sins such as alcohol drinking and extramarital relationships. Many such individuals explain their religious awareness as part of their culture and identity, while others explain it as a spiritual source of comfort and reassurance in light of social and economic difficulties. Their religious orientation thus does not appear to bear a political tone.

In all three categories, religious awakening seems to have sprung out of nationalism and was then strengthened by certain factors that beset Uzbekistan in the buildup to independence and shortly thereafter. The political role of Islam per se has not crystallized in Uzbekistan, despite the government's apprehension. Rather, the role of religion thus far has been confined to a social, cultural dimension. Even where religion crossed lines with politics as was in the case of the establishment of Islamic political parties and other active organized groups, the role of religion was intertwined with nationalism, and both Islamists and nationalists were outlawed and repressed by the government in that case in its bid to suppress opposition. However, whether religion will have any major role in Uzbek politics in the future

depends on the evolution and progress of the factors which had contributed to its awakening.

That role of religion in Uzbekistan may be reflected in a nutshell in Shirin Hunter's following statement on Islam in Central Asia:

Islam's position as an important element of these peoples' individual and collective self-identity, along with its inextricable mixing with their cultures, has guaranteed its survival and present strength. Developments in the Islamic world during the last two decades, notably the Afghan war, the Iranian revolution, and events associated with them, have also contributed to Islam's vibrancy in this region.

Currently Islam does not play an openly important political role ... But Islam-including its politicized and ideologized form-remains a potent force, albeit underground. Therefore it is conceivable that in the future it may yet come to play an important social and political role. This will especially be so if current trends towards authoritarianism in Central Asia continue, if the development of secular democratic institutions and channels of popular expression are stultified, and if current governments fail to improve their people's living conditions. In that case, Islam may emerge as the only vehicle for the expression of grievance and dissent, as has been true in many other Islamic countries during the last two decades.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵"Islam in Post-Independence Central Asia: Internal and External Dimensions", p. 303.

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