

Regional and Religious Politics in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan: Some Preliminary Notes

KEITH MARTIN

This study is dedicated to an examination of factors shaping religious and regional politics in Central Asia, and more specifically in the states of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The particular geographic focus is on the Ferghana Valley, the most densely populated area in Central Asia and home to 20 percent of its total population, but the implications of the eventual findings will be much broader, relating the study of contemporary Central Asia to the study of the Middle East and South Asia. The question itself is one that is clearly very important to both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as to other states: In countries with significant regional (sub-national) differences, such as where regional elites compete for power at the national level, do these regional political cleavages have any impact on the development of Islamic political movements?

Interestingly, while this is a new question in the study of post-Soviet politics, it is also one that is often studied and analyzed in the Middle Eastern context and in the study of other Muslim states as diverse as Indonesia and Nigeria. This, then, represents the secondary focus of this study: to explore the possibility of building analytical bridges between the study of Central Asia and analyses of other Muslim societies, particularly those in the Middle East. As will be seen in detail below, the time for building these bridges is ripe—while the “Soviet” parameters for studying the region remain crucially important, there is also a clear need to redefine how students of Central Asian societies look at the region.

It should be noted that this article represents merely an introduction to the question and does not propose to offer extensive empirical evidence. I have conducted extensive interviews with members of the Tajikistani and Uzbekistani

Keith Martin is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at McGill University in Montréal. He is also senior research associate with JNA Associates, a Washington, D.C.-based consultancy on the former Soviet Union specializing in Central Asian affairs, and the founding manager of *CenAsia*, a 700-member Internet group dedicated to Central Asia-related questions. © Keith Martin, 1997. The author wishes to acknowledge the generous assistance of McGill University's Graduate Fund for its financing of the trip to Istanbul and Moscow.

opposition in exile, in Moscow, Istanbul, and the United States, and with a variety of scholars of and from the region. Many of these interviews, together with a thorough review of the secondary literature and my own experience in the region, form the basis of this article.

Studying Central Asia: The Need for a New Approach

Over five years have passed since the Soviet Union collapsed and thrust its Central Asian republics into unexpected, and even largely unwanted, independence. In this half decade, the states of the region have all reached out to the international community, and particularly to other states with Muslim majorities. Politicians in the Central Asian states, as well as policy makers and analysts worldwide, have stressed the importance of an “Islamic awakening” in the area. While there are vast disagreements about the political dimensions that this revival will (or should) have, there is a virtual consensus that Islam is becoming more important in the daily lives of Central Asians, and that it is high on the agenda of any discussion of these newly independent states’ political future.

Academia, however, has been slow to take full account of these changes. This is not to suggest that Western academics do not stress the importance of Islam in Central Asia—they certainly do. The question is rather about the analytical frameworks being used to examine post-Soviet Central Asia. Perhaps it is not surprising, given the fact that the vast majority of academics studying Central Asia continue to come from a “Sovietology” background, that the points of reference continue to be largely in the Soviet experience or in the pre-Soviet history of the region. It is rare indeed to find any reference to literature on the Middle East or other Islamic states when reading analyses of Central Asian politics, despite the fact that there is a well-established body of quality analysis on a wide variety of political issues in the Middle East and North Africa that have direct relevance for the new politics of Central Asia, especially in the area of the “secularism vs. political Islam” debate.

There are several explanations for this gap in analytical thinking on Central Asia. First and foremost, given its background, the field of Central Asian studies has largely been occupied by those who have a strong grounding in Soviet studies. Since these specialists generally have not simultaneously done much work on the Middle East, there is a natural bias to view post-Soviet Central Asia through the Sovietologist’s prism, heavily emphasizing the Soviet legacy that these states have inherited. Beyond this possible bias, there has also been an unfortunate lack of “cross-fertilization” between specialists of the two regions, therefore, most Sovietologists—even those working extensively on Central Asia—do not have a knowledge of the analytical frameworks used by scholars of the Middle East, and vice-versa.

Political scientists who have worked extensively on the Middle East have not, by and large, jumped on the opportunity that the opening of the Central Asian states is affording them; the same is basically true, albeit to a lesser extent, of students of South Asian politics. In part this is due to language barriers, as well as funding problems (most research funding for Central Asia continues to come

from sources dedicated to post-Soviet studies), structural issues, and so forth. However, it may also reflect a belief that what is *Soviet* in the Central Asian experience somehow makes these new states so distinct that they belong to an entirely different class of states or societies.

Combating this view has been difficult, but there are voices that have been arguing for such an inclusion. Professor John Voll of Georgetown University's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, writes:

Central Asian Muslim communities are distinctive. . . . In this situation, Central Asian Muslims are no different from Muslims in any place in the world. Each Muslim community or group has distinctive and unique characteristics that set it apart from other Muslim groups. It is possible, for example, to speak in some meaningful way about "Moroccan Islam" or "Malaysian Islam," but this does not mean that Morocco or Malaysia are not interactive parts of the Islamic world. Similarly, the distinctiveness of Muslim communities does not mean that these communities are outside of the "real" Islamic world or even isolated from it.¹

The notable exception to the current pattern of scholarship on Central Asia are scholars of Turkey and Iran (and particularly those who are Turkish and Iranian), who have emphasized the cultural, historic, and linguistic links with the "lost brethren" in Central Asia. While much of this work has been very useful,² for example, in relating the continued or renewed importance of the Sufi Naqshibandi order in Uzbekistan (see below), there have also been several problems with the research. First, it has often had a parochial quality, especially with respect to Turkish studies of the region. The studies frequently have a veiled political message, especially in terms of emphasizing the perceived "Turkishness" of the states and of Turkey playing a "big brother" role for the region. Apart from the fact that this is not good politics in Central Asia, it usually also does not result in good academic studies.³

A second problem has been to isolate these studies to phenomena taken to be specific to Turkey or Iran, rather than taking a broader perspective, be it of the Middle East or of the Muslim world in general. Generally, the discussion has pitted Turkish secularism against Iran's pseudo-theocracy without focusing on the myriad other possible examples from the Muslim world.⁴ Finally, a lack of background in the study of Soviet politics has often led to a somewhat simplistic view of the impact of Soviet rule on the region—and therefore of the transition period in which the states now find themselves. This is particularly true in regard to the deep imprint Soviet rule has left on the formation and manipulation of political elites in the region and on their policies toward Islam.

Another reason that models developed for the Middle East and North Africa are not being used in Central Asia is the erroneous assumptions on both sides about the homogeneity of the respective region's politics. This extends beyond the Islamic component by John Voll cited above to the general political framework in both regions. If one realizes that the Middle East experience covers the gamut from Iran's theocracy to Turkey's secular state to the monarchies of Morocco and Jordan, it becomes clear that there is much in the Middle Eastern experience that is relevant for present-day Central Asian states that are struggling to

find their identities on a variety of political, religious, and social levels. While the Soviet legacy has certainly left an indelible mark on these new nations, and particularly on this first generation of post-Soviet political leaders, they also share many of the characteristics of other states that have come to terms with the legacy of colonial rule, an intrusive state, and battles over the role of local and religious political movements.

This article is therefore a first, tentative attempt to bridge the gap between analyses of Central Asian politics and Middle East politics by testing the extent to which a particular model of interaction between regional and religious politics, developed to explain the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syrian politics, can be used to explain certain political allegiances in the Ferghana Valley. This is not to suggest that the politics of present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the main foci of this article, are necessarily similar to specific political developments in Syria, past or present, although some similarities will be outlined below. Additionally, it is clear that this analytical framework will have limitations imposed on it by the impact of the Soviet legacy in the region, and these limitations will be duly noted. Nonetheless, it will be argued that the framework allows us to see politics in the Ferghana Valley on a much wider scale, and to draw inferences from other examples outside the region that would have been missed by limiting the analytical models to those developed from the Sovietology camp. It may also serve to illustrate the utility of using broader conceptual frameworks for the study of other issues in the politics of Central Asia and of the former Soviet Union more generally.

The initial impetus for this research came from my experiences in the Tajikistani and Uzbekistani areas of the Ferghana Valley and is based on what, on the surface, appears to be a paradox. While the two areas of the valley share many characteristics (in particular, a common history, culture, and ethnic mix), conservative, political Islam has emerged as an important movement only on the Uzbekistani side. By contrast, in the civil war that wracked Tajikistan, its part of the Ferghana Valley (the Leninabad region, centered on the city of Khodjent) was staunchly on the side of the Communist *ancien régime*—in fact, for all intents and purposes it was the *ancien régime*⁵—and opposed the democrats and Islamists from the south. Which factors, then, could account for the different course that the political development of these two regions has taken?

Theories of Regional and Religious Politics

When Do Regional Politics Matter?

Very few states, particularly postcolonial ones, can be described as homogeneous. Despite the modern concept of the nation-state, most countries are still formed of various ethnic groups, and in many cases there are vast differences between people of the same ethnic group living in geographically distant areas of the same state. For the purposes of this discussion, Alasdair Drysdale's outline of factors shaping regional cleavages in the Middle East (but formulated generically) is most useful.⁶ The most important factors cited by Drysdale are the existence of physical geographic barriers isolating certain parts of the country; the extent to

which the bureaucratic and military power of the central government can penetrate all regions of the nation's territory; uneven social and economic growth (though this may be a point dependent on the preceding ones); and the legacy of colonial divisions that may have separated various regions from one another, or reinforced the hegemony of one region over others.⁷

Despite its relative geographic compactness, regionalism has been particularly pronounced in Syria as a result of four factors. First, the French and British colonial powers that drew the political boundaries of modern-day Syria and Lebanon cut off the southern Syrian cities from their traditional Mediterranean ports (now in Lebanon, Israel, and Turkey). A second factor was that, initially, Damascus and Aleppo were of about equal size, and hence competed for national power, which also meant a different outlook on greater Arab politics: Damascus looking toward Egypt and other, southern Arab states, and elites in Aleppo wishing to pursue closer ties to Iraq. Third, "a high proportion of Syria's leaders have come from Al-Ladhiqiyah, Tartus and other heavily rural and peripheral provinces since 1963. This has aroused resentment in Damascus, Aleppo and Hamah particularly."⁸ Finally, state policies have resulted in political and economic changes that favor Damascus and the regime's regional allies over other areas of the country, especially the northern cities of Aleppo, Hamah, and Homs, resulting in further alienation.

To students of Uzbekistani and Tajikistani politics, a variety of these factors should be startlingly familiar—with the added element of geography further emphasizing the importance of regional politics in the respective countries. Both countries still have to come to terms with the vagaries of Stalin's borders, which threw together regions that previously had not been unified, while separating others that had long been united by historical, cultural, and ethnic links.⁹ Additionally, while the focus on Soviet-era boundaries has generally been focused on the inter-republican level, there is much in the experience of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to suggest that similar "divide-and-rule" tactics were used to devise, and then frequently change, intrarepublican borders, particularly in the creation of oblasts.¹⁰

As will be explored more fully below, a central focus of attention, as in Syria, has been the role of regional elites in power at the top of the central state. Given the extensive, intrusive reach of the government in all three countries, "capturing the state" is particularly vital for interest groups that have little or no other avenues of seeking power. In Tajikistan, the situation throughout most of the Soviet period was clear-cut: the northern Leninabad region dominated the republic's top leadership, leading to considerable resentment from various southern groups.¹¹ Similarly, it is now the Leninabadi elites who feel disempowered, as the Kulyabis, one of the southern groups that supported the northern-based Communists during the civil war, have colonized the state structures far more completely than the Leninabadis ever did.

The Uzbekistani situation is more complex, but regional power plays are quite clearly as central as in Tajikistan or Syria. During the Soviet period, there was significant rotation of cadres, but this did not prevent the top republican leadership from forming strategic alliances with one or another region to secure power

and distribute the spoils of power mainly to the “in” groups. Particularly famous in this regard was Uzbek Communist Party First Secretary Sharaf Rashidov.¹² The belief that someone’s regional origins, even more than ethnicity or other attributes, determine how the spoils of the state will be distributed continues to this day and is a significant source of tension in the Ferghana Valley, where local elites feel shut out of power.¹³

Finally, and not surprisingly, socioeconomic disparities mirror the regional pattern of elite recruitment and policy making. In the Tajikistani case, this meant that Leninabad oblast prospered much more than any other region of the country, with the possible exception of Dushanbe, which was a mere village when it was “appointed” capital of the Tajik SSR. The disparities between the richer north and the poorer south after more than half a century of Leninabadi rule were prime factors in the formation of a (mostly southern) democratic and Islamic opposition in 1989–1992.¹⁴ On the Uzbekistani side, the Ferghana Valley has found itself in a situation that some see as exploitation: While the valley has a large share of cotton and oil, together with gold, the republic’s most important commodities, it receives relatively little in return from the all-powerful central government. It should be noted that it may not be absolute levels of poverty of a region that cause restiveness, but rather a *perception* that the region is contributing considerably more to the central state than it is getting in return.

There are, in addition, similarities between the Syrian and Uzbek cases that should be mentioned, even if they are not crucial to the argument at hand. Both states are governed by a one-party regime in which a “strongman” plays the central role; in Syria and Uzbekistan, Louis XIV’s dictum, “*l’état, c’est moi*,” rings very true. In both states, the regime depends on clientelistic relations with certain regional groups and sectors of the state, particularly the interior ministries and the secret police, to stay in power; similarly, these groups depend on the state for its largesse.¹⁵

The state’s deep penetration of, and control over, the economy is unbroken, even if both regimes have more recently been liberalizing and decentralizing the economy. Very importantly, however, in Syria and Uzbekistan, the process of liberalization has been used by the regimes to reward loyalists and to punish opponents. While the “losers” in Syria can generally be defined more along class lines, in Uzbek they can be more clearly seen as belonging to certain regions, the hardest-hit being the Ferghana Valley.¹⁶

Another similarity is that leaders in both countries have tried to promote a nationalist ideology as a way of overcoming Islamic opposition, and are actively attempting to dominate regional politics in order to cement their claims to “greatness.” In the case of Syria, this dominance has been expressed primarily by its supremacy in Lebanon; Karimov has tried, less successfully, to impose an Uzbek agenda on events in Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan.¹⁷ In both cases, however, the quest for a regional leadership role has been a very important domestic tool for encouraging regime support—and as a means of justifying repression of the opposition.

Two Theories of Contemporary Islamic Political Movements

In general, two main theories have emerged among scholars to explain the rise of Islamic movements in countries such as Egypt, Algeria, and Syria. The first and by far dominant model contends that sociodemographic factors, coupled with a weak economy, led to the formation and support of Islamic groups. In short, high population growth coupled with a stagnant economy result in large-scale unemployment. While the unemployed often form the footsoldiers of the Islamic movements, it is argued that the groups' leaders tend to come from within the religious establishment, which, at its pinnacle, is well-educated and economically quite secure.¹⁸ An important corollary suggests that it is not abject poverty itself that leads to the rise of these movements, but rather a belief that the country has had better times and is now on an inexorable decline, from which only a moral/spiritual and a political renewal under Islam can save it.¹⁹

Few would argue that there are not significant elements of this present in Central Asia today, especially given the virtual collapse of the social safety net, the virtual collapse of living standards, and the rapidly rising youth unemployment rate. Yet, with the partial exception of Tajikistan,²⁰ Central Asia has not witnessed the rise of a mass Islamic movement, like the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) in Algeria. While it is true that the regimes in Central Asia have all banned Islamic political movements,²¹ there are numerous examples of Middle East states attempting to do the same, only to find themselves confronted with large, militant Islamic movements (for example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt).

A second, intriguing argument explains the role of the Islamic movement in Syria in a rather different way, without necessarily challenging the basic validity of the first model. The theory suggests that while an Islamic group may be founded by "true believers," whose ultimate goal is directed at the establishment of a purer Islamic state, this group may be encouraged, financed, and manipulated by political entrepreneurs who have been marginalized by the central power in the state. In the Syrian case, for example, Hinnebusch and others have shown how Sunni economic elites in Hama and elsewhere, began supporting the Muslim Brotherhood *after* President Hafez al-Assad began to increasingly put members of his Alawi kinsmen in positions of economic power, hence undermining the Sunnis' position in society.²² These groups, often organized on a regional or class basis, seek to use the Islamic formation as an umbrella under which to organize opposition to the regime in order to regain their "rightful" share of national power. Given its broad appeal across class and ethnic lines, Islam can be a potent tool for mobilizing the masses against the regime—particularly when that regime can be portrayed as having un- or anti-Islamic tendencies.

It should be noted that political group behavior of this type is not limited to Islamic movements, or to any specific geographic area. As students of political science move further away from area studies,²³ it is clear that political entrepreneurship, involving the founding and support of "umbrella" groups by certain political elites who feel excluded from power, or at least sense an erosion of their power base, but do not have a specific allegiance to the ideology that their umbrella group is espousing, is very widespread. Arguably, one can see many of the

democratic and socialist movements in sub-Saharan Africa this way, to the extent that they were founded or manipulated by regional or tribal groups excluded from power at the center. Particularly during the cold war, this was a very effective vehicle for attracting foreign assistance.²⁴

In Europe, too, examples of entrepreneurial politics abound, and run the gamut of the political spectrum. The “remaking” of certain formerly Communist leaders in Eastern Europe and Russia into staunch nationalists and free-marketeers is an obvious example.²⁵ In Western Europe, the new political agenda developing since the 1970s around so-called “post-industrial values” and “new politics,” as well as the collapse of traditional, socialist-oriented themes such as nationalization (particularly in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet empire) have led the established parties to reverse earlier positions and co-opt agendas that before would have been alien to them. In this context, the “greening” of Germany’s Christian Democrats and the rapid, rightward shift of many of Europe’s largest Left parties (the French Socialists, Britain’s Labour Party, and Italy’s Party of the Democratic Left, the former Italian Communist Party) are clear evidence of the pervasiveness of political entrepreneurship.²⁶ Similarly, regional politics could also be understood through the prism of a corporatist model, as has been done in discussions of Belgian and Swiss politics.²⁷

Political entrepreneurship by itself is not a theory or model of politics, even if it does hold significant value in explaining the rapid transformations of political agendas across short periods of time. As in the Syrian case, the model must take into account the more specific circumstances to which this exercise in political versatility is responding; clearly, in a non-democratic setting, the type of organization, as well as the methods and goals of the group set up by political entrepreneurs, will be different than in a democracy. Whereas democracies have open, institutionalized parties and little or no legal barriers to founding new parties with new goals and ideologies,²⁸ the same cannot be said of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. Furthermore, the regime’s own claim on absolute power and truth forces opposition groups (usually in the underground) to stake out extreme or absolute claims of their own, often by appealing to particularly broad groups of the nation’s citizenry (as opposed to appeals limited to members of their own class or region). In the case of Islamic organizations, the groups will frequently go even further, calling for a struggle against an “unholy” regime that must be supported by all believers—and not necessarily only those who are citizens of the states in question.²⁹

The Ferghana Valley: An Overview

A brief overview of the Ferghana Valley is needed in order to understand its importance to Central Asia as a whole, and to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in particular. In addition to being the region’s most populous area, with about eleven million inhabitants (or 20 percent of Central Asia’s total population) and very high population growth rates approaching 3 percent per year, the valley also holds the largest concentration of arable land in Central Asia. Despite these statistics, the Ferghana Valley is relatively small, accounting for less than 3 percent of the region’s land mass, and measuring less than 300 kilometers in length and 20 to

70 kilometers in width. Its inhabitants, and those of nearby Tashkent, Central Asia's largest city, with a population of nearly four million, are heavily dependent on the Syr Darya river, which, upon leaving the Ferghana region, traverses northern Uzbekistan and western Kazakhstan on its way to the Aral Sea.

The peculiarities of the region's geography, and of Soviet cartography,³⁰ resulting in the drawing of boundaries that now form the basis of international borders in the area, compound what would already be a complicated situation in the best of circumstances. On the one hand, there are no natural borders between the Uzbek, Tajik, and Kyrgyz areas of the valley; throughout pre-Soviet and Soviet days, the region was fully integrated. In fact, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during the Emirate of Kokand, almost all of the valley was united as a distinct political unit for the first and only time in its long history.³¹ At the same time, the respective parts of the valley are geographically isolated from their own republics. For example, access from Tashkent to the Uzbek parts of the Ferghana Valley is far easier through the northern Tajik Leninabad region than over the mountains east of the capital that separate it from the Uzbekistani part of the valley. Additionally, because republican borders carried little significance for Soviet planners, the only rail link and main road connection between the Uzbekistani parts of the valley and Tashkent run through northern Tajikistan. Even more pronounced is the isolation of the Leninabad region from the rest of Tajikistan: Only one road connects north and south, and it is open only sporadically in the summer months, when the two 3500 meter-high passes are not snowbound. The north is totally dependent on Uzbekistan for trade, energy, and other supplies, especially since the civil war in southern Tajikistan virtually destroyed the economic output of the south.³²

The irony of this isolation is that the Uzbek and Tajik areas of the valley are vitally important to their respective state's economy. Uzbekistan's main oil fields, one of two oil refineries and the majority of its cotton and other agricultural products come from the valley.³³ Five of the ten largest cities in the republic are in the region, and Tashkent itself is less than 120 kilometers from the Tajikistani part of the valley. Finally, Uzbekistan's largest single foreign investment to date, the South Korean Daewoo automobile factory, which began car production in 1996, is located in Andijan, near the Tajik and Kyrgyz borders³⁴.

For Tajikistan, the importance of its Ferghana Valley region is even greater. Before the civil war, the Leninabad region accounted for 65 percent of Tajikistan's GDP, and that figure is likely to have risen, since the region was the only part of Tajikistan spared the ravages of the civil war.³⁵ Since Leninabadis were in charge of the republic in Soviet times, the north is relatively industrialized, and most foreign investment in Tajikistan (85 percent, by some accounts) has gone to the northern region. Despite growing differences between the Rakhmonov regime and the leaders of the north, Khodjent has continued to pay taxes to Dushanbe, and accounts for the central authorities' only stable source of revenue.³⁶ It should be noted that while northern Tajikistan's economy has suffered less than that of the war-torn south, the region is much worse off now than it was a few years ago. While this is due partly to the civil conflict (and the influx of refugees from the south), it is also

the result of policy decisions by the southern, Kulyab-dominated Dushanbe regime and of measures along the Uzbek-Tajik border in the valley that have curtailed the hitherto free flow of goods through the valley and to Tashkent.³⁷

Regional Politics

Uzbekistan

From early Soviet times, the Communist leadership, both in Moscow and in the republican capitals (Tashkent and Dushanbe) recognized that there was fierce competition for republican power between different local and regional political

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elites. In the case of Uzbekistan, Moscow chose to rotate the lead positions among groups from different areas, though this should not suggest that local groups did not have ways to subvert the system or create their own power bases.³⁸

Efforts were made to minimize allegiance to a specific region by rotating oblast-level Communist Party first secretaries

around different areas of Uzbekistan, though this did little to diminish the importance of the regional factor.

The Ferghana Valley, despite its relative importance for the republic, enjoyed no special benefits, although there is no evidence that it was systematically excluded from central power. Until 1959, elites from the Ferghana Valley were well-represented at the top of the republican Communist Party leadership. However, during the nearly quarter-century of Sharaf Rashidov’s rule (1959–1983), he favored groups from his native Zhizak region and from Samarqand. Upon his death in 1983, a Ferghana Valley native, Usmonkhodjaev, became the Uzbekistan Communist Party first secretary, and tried to rapidly consolidate power by filling the many positions vacated by the Rashidov cotton scandal with cadres from the valley. He was able to maintain power only until 1988, and his successors, Rafiq Nishanov and Islam Karimov, reversed many of the gains the Ferghana Valley elites had made.³⁹

As a result of Karimov’s ascent to power, elites in the Ferghana Valley have had a strong perception of being excluded from decision making at the highest levels. Given the continued prevalence in Uzbekistan of strong central control over almost all spheres of life, this matters to a much greater degree than it might in Western Europe or North America. President Karimov’s policies have done little to dispel the Ferghana elites’ impression: on numerous occasions, he has personally criticized the economic performance and political leadership in the area’s three *hokimiyats* (the former oblasts of Andijan, Namangan, and Ferghana).⁴⁰ All three regional governors, or *hokims*, have been dismissed since November 1996.⁴¹

Although the evidence to date is sketchy and anecdotal, there is reason to

believe that President Karimov's personnel policy further reflects a bias toward the Samarqand region and, to some extent, toward certain Tashkent groups, to the detriment of the Ferghana area. For example, few senior ministers are reported to be from the valley, and there does not appear to be significant recruitment of lower-level central administrators from the Ferghana Valley.⁴² While the hokims are from their respective regions, or from other parts of the valley, this appears to be a precautionary measure by President Karimov to avert open confrontations with groups in the valley. By contrast, it appears that local Interior Ministry and secret police officials are rotated in by the center, and are expected to be unconditionally loyal to Tashkent, and more particularly to President Karimov.⁴³

A particularly interesting case of personnel policy is the appointment of the official mufti of Uzbekistan, the top official religious leader in the country. While the Babakhanov dynasty (three generations of Babakhanovs filled the mufti position from its inception in 1943 until 1989) had distant roots in the valley, they were firmly seen as being fixtures of the Tashkent establishment, and were firmly aligned with the secular, Communist forces in charge of the republic.⁴⁴ By contrast, the mufti who replaced Shamseddin Babakhanov in 1989, Mufti Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf, was from a prominent, conservative religious family in the Namangan area of the Ferghana Valley. Given the new Mufti's independent reputation, and his links to the valley—where supporters had even suggested that he run against Karimov in the 1991 presidential elections—it is not surprising that the Uzbek President began orchestrating campaigns to force the ouster of Mufti Sadiq. He was finally forced out of office, and out of the country, in 1993.⁴⁵ Finally, President Karimov's appointment of Mukhtarkhan Abdulaev of Bukhara as mufti can be considered a double blow to the valley's conservative religious activists. First, the regional element further undermines the influence of Ferghana Valley clergy in the official religious establishment. Second, and more subtly, the recruitment of Abdulaev, who headed the Naqshibandi Sufi mosque in Bukhara, represents another step in President Karimov's efforts to cultivate and co-opt the Naqshibandi order as a regime-supporting group that could counter more radical, political movements operating in the valley.⁴⁶

Other indicators, such as foreign direct investment and U.S. aid, paint a clearer picture of relative exclusion, particularly given the resources of the region. It is also clear that investment in the region is very closely monitored and controlled by the central authorities in Tashkent; reports suggest that all important shipments abroad of cotton from the valley must be personally approved by the president.⁴⁷ The public redemption of the former Uzbek first secretary, Rashidov, who was known as the "cotton king" under Brezhnev, and only thinly disguised the massive fortune he made from illegal cotton dealings, has increased suspicions about the president and his inner circle, particularly in the valley.

All of this should not suggest that President Karimov is unaware of sentiment in the Ferghana Valley or that he has tried to exclude it altogether from power or economic growth. He is clearly seeking to increase employment and avoid unrest in the region through a combination of selective incentives and co-optation on the one hand, and heavy-handed, authoritarian political controls on the other. Given

that ultimate political power rests in the hands of Karimov and his regional allies, and that the main profits from the Ferghana Valley's cash crops do not stay in the valley, it remains to be seen if regional elites will become more restive than they already are. The conservative Islamic movement in the region is poised to be an invaluable ally in that struggle.

Tajikistan

The story of Tajikistan's Leninabad region is quite different, although it has become less so in the last three years. As indicated above, from the 1930s until 1992, all of Tajikistan's rulers came from the north. In part, this is explained by the fact that the main Tajik cultural and political centers, Bukhara and Samarkand, were "awarded" to Uzbekistan by Stalin's mapmakers. Until the 1960s, Leninabad (which reverted to its original name, Khodjent, in 1990; the region retained the Leninabad nomenclature) was Tajikistan's largest city. While Dushanbe grew very rapidly after World War II, in part through colonization by Russians and Leninabadis, most of the south remained rural and undeveloped.⁴⁸ One of the deeper causes of the civil war was the fact that large numbers of Tajiks from the mountains (the Pamiri and Vakhshi people) were resettled, often against their will, in more fertile areas of the Kurgan-Tyube and Kulyab oblasts, which at that time were not densely populated. Demographic pressures, combined with the collapse of central control, both Soviet and subsequently Tajik, resulted in a situation where long-time settlers of the region, eager to regain land they believed to be rightfully theirs, killed or forced into exile large numbers of the more recent Pamiri and Vakhshi settlers. While the Kulyabis paraded under the banner of communism and secularism and claimed that the Pamiris and Vakhshis were trying to bring about a fundamentalist Islamic Tajikistan, it is clear that ideology had much less to do with the conflict than did regional differences.⁴⁹

Throughout the Soviet period, the Leninabadi political elites in charge of central power in Dushanbe had closely paralleled (perhaps on orders from Moscow) the pro-Russian distribution of power practiced in the Kremlin. While the official at the pinnacle of power was always from Leninabad, middle and lower-level officials were recruited from various southern regions, and were rotated. On the one hand, this ensured that officials from the south would always be beholden to decision makers from the north for their positions. Understandably, however, it also created considerable discontent among the southerners; many intellectuals from the south saw in Gorbachev's demokratizatsiya and glasnost the tools that they needed to wrest power from the Leninabadis in a democratic, peaceful way.⁵⁰ The top party leadership, from the north, recognized the threat Gorbachev's reforms posed to their hold on power, and did as little as possible to allow autonomous groups to emerge in the republic. When the Tajik first secretary, Ghahar Makhkamov, implicitly sided with the coup-plotters who attempted to force aside Gorbachev in August 1991, it was clear that he could not remain at his post, particularly under growing pressure from reformist groups that had managed to emerge despite the hostile official climate.⁵¹

The presidential elections of November 1991 were the first semi-democratic

exercise in Tajikistan. The Communists, rather than choosing a reformist northerner or someone from the south, nominated Rakhmon Nabiev, a hard-line former republican first secretary from Leninabad whom Gorbachev had removed in 1985. The opposition fielded Davlat Khudonazarov, a popular film-maker and chair of the Soviet cinematographers' union. A member of the Pamiri minority of southern Tajikistan that is predominantly Isma'ili, not even Nabiev could argue that Khudonazarov was a fundamentalist. The elections were won by Nabiev, but were widely criticized by opposition figures and outside observers as having been manipulated.⁵² Importantly, however, Nabiev and the inner political circle from the Leninabad region had cultivated an alliance with Kulyabi groups from the south, of whom they had a rather patronizing view as footsoldiers who would do the pedestrian work needed to enforce northern control in the south.

The largely southern opposition continued to defy Nabiev's rule through non-stop demonstrations in downtown Dushanbe, with the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) playing a leading role in organizing and feeding them. When President Nabiev chose to escalate the confrontation by arming a presidential guard and later undermining the work of a coalition government, he chose the Kulyabis as the closest, most reliable group to do his bidding; it is important, in this context, to recall the Leninabad oblast's geographic isolation from the rest of Tajikistan.⁵³ The Kulyabis, led by the so-called Popular Front of Sangak Safarov,⁵⁴ were indeed eager to take up Nabiev's call, not out of allegiance to the president, but rather to settle old scores with those who had been moved into the area after World War II.

When Imomali Rakhmonov, a former collective farm chairman from Kulyab, was elected chairman of Tajikistan's Supreme Soviet and *de facto* head of state at its special session in Khodjent in November 1992 to break the civil war induced impasse, the Leninabadi clearly felt that they had succeeded in imposing a candidate who would continue to act in their interests. Instead, Rakhmonov has acted primarily in the interests of his own survival, which has meant primarily supporting Kulyabis at all levels of administration. Despite the north's importance for the economy of the republic, it has received only a minuscule proportion of state investment funds since Rakhmonov took over.⁵⁵ Furthermore, given the regime's total dependence on Russian troops and supplies for its very existence, it has generally followed Moscow's policies to the letter, which is the only explanation for its recent signing of a peace agreement with the United Tajik Opposition (UTO).⁵⁶

Over the past three years, Rakhmonov's policies, both specifically toward the Leninabad region and more generally in favor of Russia, have been very detrimental to Leninabadi interests. While the northern region long had privileged ties to Moscow, it has also been even more closely associated with Uzbekistan, is home to a very large Uzbek minority, and is dependent on Uzbekistan for exporting its goods and for importing raw materials.⁵⁷ In fact, its trade with the Tashkent region is more important than with the rest of Tajikistan. As a result of the growing rivalry between Russia and Uzbekistan for influence in Central Asia, northern ties to Russia have been hurt. For example, the former deputy speaker of Tajikistan's parliament, who hails from Khodjent, was recently arrested in

Moscow, signaling a possible anti-Leninabad alliance between the Tajikistani government and certain Russian policy makers.⁵⁸

In fact, there has been nothing subtle about the Kulyabis' attempt to "freeze out" the traditional Khodjent elites from power. When the position of president was re-established in 1993, Rakhmonov ran against a northerner and former prime minister, Abdumalik Abdullajonov. Not only did Rakhmonov win the "sham" elections (none of the previous opposition parties, such as the IRP, were allowed to participate), but he tried to have Abdullajonov, one of Tajikistan's richest men, arrested and tried on corruption charges.⁵⁹ More recently, Abdullajonov and two other former prime ministers from the north have formed the National Revival Movement (NRM), also dubbed the "third force," which primarily represents the north's political interests.⁶⁰ Despite the risk that the north might secede or join Uzbekistan, the NRM was excluded from a recent peace agreement between the Tajik government and the UTO. Although the UTO has paid lip service to the idea of allowing the NRM to join ongoing peace talks and to include it in the National Council of Reconciliation currently being formed, it seems likely that these efforts were more about extracting concessions from the Tajik government than about a genuine willingness to include the NRM.

In light of the aforementioned exclusion of northern Tajikistan from the Tajik peace process and from central power, the attempt on the life of President Rakhmonov on 30 April 1997, during a visit to Khodjent, should not come as a surprise. The attack left two dead and seventy-one others injured, including the head of the Leninabad region. Many in the south were quick to blame Abdullojanov for the attack, although the government has officially said it believes that "criminal elements" were behind the assassination attempt and Abdullojanov has denied all responsibility. In any case, it does signal an alarming escalation of events and serves as a warning that northern Tajikistan—and therefore the entire Ferghana Valley—might yet get caught up in the cycle of civil violence that it had so far been spared. Furthermore, if any more concrete evidence of the importance of regional factors in Tajik politics was needed, the attack is certainly as strong an indicator as one can imagine.⁶¹

While the events of the past three years in Tajikistan may have little impact on the argument made above concerning political entrepreneurship and political Islam in the short term, they are very important for a number of reasons. First, there is not enough analysis of events in Tajikistan in general, and this belies the fact that events there are crucial to stability throughout the region, especially considering the Taliban successes in Afghanistan, as Kremlin officials appear to have recognized, given their sudden willingness to push Dushanbe into a peace deal with the UTO.⁶² Second, while certain Western academics, such as Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, Nancy Lubin, and Donald Carlisle, have begun to note the importance of local and regional politics in Tajikistan and neighboring countries, whenever this has surfaced in less academic settings, it appears as "clan politics." The term "clan" generally denotes some kind of family ties, or kinsmanship, which is not necessarily the case—in Uzbekistan or Tajikistan. It is therefore important to study the conflict in Tajikistan through a wider prism, and to analyze the internal

regional conflicts without preconceptions about “clan” fighting between warlords that suggest a pre-modern, feudal struggle.

Finally, and most importantly, the events in Tajikistan will provide more evidence of how regional and religious politics interact. Given the relative disenfranchisement of the northern region, the theory posited above, that suggests that excluded secular groups use religious organizations to further their agendas, would expect to find a growing use by local elites of religious groups to oppose the Kulyabi-led regime in Dushanbe. There already have been meetings between the leaders of the Islamic opposition and the ex-Communist and formerly anti-Islamic top officials of the new Leninabadi movement, the NRM, in Tashkent.⁶³

While these were only tactical talks, resulting in the aforementioned offer by the UTO to include the NRM in the peace negotiations, it remains to be seen if more politically assertive Islamic movements, similar to those in the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley, will arise in the Leninabad region.

“A second aspect of the Soviet legacy is the heavy-handed attempt by the central government (formerly Moscow, now Tashkent) to control the official religious establishment, and in particular the mufti.”

Religious Politics

Islam has a very long history in Uzbekistan, and it would be impossible to do that history any justice in these few pages.⁶⁴ It is important to note several legacies of the interaction between Soviet rule and Islam, however, as these represent key factors in the current development of relations between the state and religion and in the interplay between the various regions of Uzbekistan. First, while the muftiate was established in Tashkent, the only fully official *madrese*, or religious school, allowed to operate in Central Asia was in Bukhara, the ancient center of Islamic learning (and of Tajik/Persian culture). In practical terms, this meant that the Ferghana Valley, even then known as a seat of conservative Islam, was remote, both in relation to the muftiate and to the main center of official religious learning.

A second aspect of the Soviet legacy is the heavy-handed attempt by the central government (formerly Moscow, now Tashkent) to control the official religious establishment, and in particular the mufti. At the same time, the desire to control Islam is not unique to the Soviet Union or Central Asia, nor is the dichotomy between “official” and “parallel” (unsanctioned and sometimes illegal) Islam; these occur in almost all predominantly Muslim countries, from Turkey to Saudi Arabia, and represent the interaction between Islam and the modern nation-state.⁶⁵ What was different in the Soviet context was the atheist framework, which allowed only a hopelessly small number of official clergy to emerge, opening wide the field to unofficial or “parallel” Islam, despite government prohibitions. In the context of Central Asia, this means that there has been a further unique development since the late Gorbachev period, as the number of mosques and

madreses has exploded. The numbers alone have resulted in a significant, if potentially transitory, loss of control by the central official religious establishment over most mosques, imams, and mullahs. The official organization does have significant clout, however, since much of the funding received from other Muslim countries flows through its hands.

Soviet rule may also have unintentionally reinforced the hold of political Islam in the Ferghana Valley by partially adopting elements of the traditional village structures, for example in Uzbekistan. In particular, by dividing urban areas into districts following the pre-Soviet *mahalle* (neighborhood) divisions,⁶⁶ it was easier for many of the traditional aspects of urban life to survive, including the role of respected elders, who often were local mullahs, or religious leaders. It should be noted that to a great extent these mullahs and the other practicing Muslims would not have seen their exercise of faith as anything political *per se*, although they clearly would have been aware that Soviet policy made much of the mullahs' activities illegal. This is why, in analyzing the exercise of Islam in post-Soviet Central Asia in general and in the Ferghana Valley in particular, the line between a simple renaissance of Islamic faith, or rather a resurfacing of it—to a great extent, it continued in Soviet times, but underground—and a more political manifestation of Islam is blurred.

In the development of Islam generally and of political activism on behalf of religious ideals in particular, the Ferghana Valley has played a key role in post-independence Uzbekistan. Long known as a seat of conservative Islam, the region also displays many of the socioeconomic characteristics one has come to expect in areas of rising Islamic activism: already largely rural, poor, in part due to exploitation by the “center,” be it Moscow or Tashkent, and under increasing demographic pressures before the demise of the Soviet Union, the economic situation has steadily worsened, while the Soviet-era social safety net has frayed. The combination of sustained high population growth rates and a massive decline in industrial output has also resulted in high unemployment, especially among young people, although official statistics do not yet reflect this trend.⁶⁷

It is not surprising, therefore, that Islamic political movements have already formed and that they even managed, albeit briefly, to seize local administrative power in Namangan in late 1991 and early 1992. The Adolat (Justice) movement, made up mostly of young people, stormed the former regional Communist Party headquarters, assembled a militia, and began to enforce Islamic rule in Namangan.⁶⁸ They also demanded discussions with President Karimov and asked him to introduce measures in the legislature that would, *de facto*, have turned Uzbekistan into an Islamic state. Through a mixture of persuasion and threats, Karimov was able to restore central control over the region, and six leading members of Adolat were sentenced to prison terms in 1993.⁶⁹

Residents of the Ferghana Valley, and especially of Namangan, also organized demonstrations in favor of Mufti Muhammad Yusuf Sadiq, both in his quest to defend that position, and in favor of his running against Karimov in the 1991 presidential elections.⁷⁰ There are also persistent, if unconfirmed, reports that armed Islamic militias continue to operate in the valley, and that on-the-spot Islamic jus-

tice is meted out, including the cutting off of thieves' hands.⁷¹ Despite their persistence, these reports should be taken with a great deal of caution. First, given the efficacy of the Uzbek regime's "power ministries," particularly the secret police, it is unlikely that armed militias would escape detection and be allowed to continue to operate. Second, there is a wide variety of parties (the Uzbekistani, Russian, and Western governments, as well as the press in those states) that have a vested interest in playing up the threat of a "fundamentalist" threat to Uzbekistan's secular government. Similarly, reports of "Wahhabis" in the valley, and in southern Tajikistan, have generally been very polemical, with the specific religious aims of the Wahhabi movement being lost; in Russia and Central Asia, "Wahhabism" has become a mere synonym for that other stereotype-laden word, "fundamentalism."⁷²

The regime also responded quickly to suppress the republican-wide formation of the Uzbekistani Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), which sought to further the agenda of political Islam on the basis of an official political party, just as the Tajikistani IRP did. Originally founded as a republican branch of the all-Union IRP in December 1990, the founding congress for the independent Uzbekistani IRP took place in January 1992, and was immediately suppressed, with 400 participants being arrested. From the beginning, the stronghold of the IRP was in the valley, and especially in Andijan and Namangan. It is also reported that the IRP participated in the Namangan events of late 1991 and early 1992. The leader of the party, Abdullah Utaev, originally hailed from the Ferghana Valley, although his family was moved to the southern Surkhandarya region during the collectivization of the 1930s. President Karimov's virulent repression of the IRP may be seen in the fact that Utaev was taken into custody in December 1992 and has never been tried or released.⁷³

Despite the waning of the Tajik civil war, which was President Karimov's excuse for the initial crackdown on all forms of political Islam, any hint of Islamic political activism continues to be suppressed. Although not known to be active politically at all, one of the Ferghana Valley's most popular, independent religious figures, Shaykh Abduvali Mirzoev of Andijan's Juma mosque, was abducted at Tashkent airport on 29 August 1995 together with his assistant, almost certainly by government forces. Neither have been heard from since; as in Utaev's case, there have been no trials, sentencing, or even official confirmation of their detention.⁷⁴

One particular area where an examination of the Middle East, and particularly Turkey, may help us better understand the transformations in Central Asia is in the realm of *regime-supporting* Islam—in other words, forms of Islamic activity or organization usually orchestrated by the regime that are designed to enlist the support of the state's Muslims for the government. While there was some co-optation of Islamic elites by the secular authorities in the Soviet period, none of it can be characterized as specifically supporting the regime. By its very essence, that is, the atheist foundation of the regime, Soviet power could not claim an Islamic mantle. The new states of Central Asia, however, are not saddled with this legacy, even if the first generation of independent leaders were almost all Communist Party activists.

In Uzbekistan, in particular, President Karimov is fully aware of the potential power of religion and has been attempting to harness it for his own purposes. The late president of Turkey, Turgut Özal, is a prime example of such a strategy and the leader who President Karimov has most clearly tried to emulate.⁷⁵ Regime-supportive Islam extends beyond Karimov's personal displays of faith (for example, taking the oath of office on a Qur'an and performing the *haji*, the traditional pilgrimage to Mecca). Arguably the most effective, and certainly most secretive, effort to cultivate a politically supportive sector of Islam has been his relationship with the Naqshibandi (Sufi) order, which originated in present-day Uzbekistan, but is now widespread throughout the Sunni Muslim world, and especially Turkey.

On his first trip to meet the late President Özal, himself very closely associated with the order, Karimov brought with him a religious delegation, headed by the leader of Uzbekistan's Naqshibandi.⁷⁶ Furthermore, as mentioned above, the current Mufti, Mukhtarkhan Abdulaev, was formerly the imam of the Naqshibandi mosque in Bukhara, and is from the Bukhara region. It is unclear whether President Karimov has fostered the Naqshibandi in the Ferghana Valley, or to what extent he has actual control over the order; further research is needed in this area.

In general, however, he has clearly been positioning the Naqshibandi as a bulwark against politically more activist Islamic groups, which are most active in the valley. This is expressed through the cooperation of the Uzbekistani Ministry of Education with Turkish Naqshibandi-oriented *vakifs* (non-profit, generally religious, foundations) in establishing private, *vakif*-run and -funded schools in Uzbekistan. While the schools are forbidden from proselytizing, it seems likely that their long-term goal is to increase the presence of their orders in Central Asia; undoubtedly, the Uzbekistani regime is also aware of this possibility.⁷⁷

Conclusion

Religion today does not just help cleanse the soul of lies and hypocrisy—it helps to restore high moral values and ethical qualities. For the overwhelming majority of Uzbekistan's population, Islam is a way of life, an invaluable generator in the process of revival of the national self-consciousness [sic].⁷⁸

The ethnic designator *Uzbek* does not refer to a single unified identity because significant regional differences exist. The majority of so-called Uzbeks tend to experience their primary loyalty to their home region. While the process of building a national identity is moving forward rapidly, Uzbekistan still exists as a patchwork quilt stitched together to form a single nation.⁷⁹

The above quotes illustrate an aspect of Central Asian politics that is only now becoming clear: that both faith in Islam and allegiance to one's home region are primordial identity markers for many ordinary Central Asians. In this, the people of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are not unique—these same multiple identities can be found in most Muslim countries, to one extent or another. These two identities, however, do not exist in a vacuum, one artificially separated from the other. In fact, there is a distinct *political* link between them, in that regional elites competing for power recognize the power and universality of Islam to further their

own agendas. Clearly, the evidence is circumstantial so far and needs to be bolstered by significant field research. There is, however, a *prima facie* case to be made for such a link, particularly given the rise of an Islamic political movement on the Uzbekistani part of the Ferghana Valley, and the absence of any significant, similar group only a few miles away, on the Tajikistani side of the border.

It is clear that much evidence still needs to be gathered to better determine the scope and nature of the interaction between regional and religious forces, as well as the role of the state in influencing both actors. One question, for example, is: To what extent do local elites in the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley control or influence Islamic movements in their region? The answer to this will be difficult to ascertain, but one of the keys will be to determine the extent to which there is overlap between traditional local political elites and the leadership of local mosques and medreses. In this sense, the current situation appears to be more openly connected to pre-Soviet traditions, many of which survived in a veiled fashion under Soviet times. In other words, initial interviews suggest that, traditionally, leaders of local neighborhoods (*mahalles*), would often be local religious notables, usually *mullahs* or *imam-khatibs*.

A second area for research will be on the state itself and its interaction with regional elites: To what extent does the state try to manipulate regional political forces, or to suppress them? Does the repression of certain popular religious figures from the Ferghana Valley appear connected to any such policy? Also, since the state is clearly not an autonomous actor: How do responses in the region shape the state's policies? And in the case of Tajikistan: Is there any indication, given the state's firm rejection of Khojandi interests, that there is a rise in political Islamic activity in the north? Further research will undoubtedly also reveal many other aspects and connections that are presently obscured or not even being considered.

The experience of Middle Eastern and other countries with a strong central power, important regional competition, and militant Islamic movements can tell us much about the current processes in Central Asia. While religion and regionalism may, in themselves, be primordial markers, there is nothing in them that makes them, *a priori*, political factors. With respect to religion, as we have seen, it is often a confluence of sociodemographic and economic changes, as well as the nature of the political system, that stimulates the creation and growth of movements that have overt political goals. From the FIS in Algeria to the Iranian revolution, there is strong evidence to suggest that militant Islamic groups flourish not only where the population is growing at a high rate and the economy is in relative decline, but the response of the state is also critical in shaping both the size and the direction of the Islamic response. Similarly, there are many countries with strong regional identities that do not have regionalism as a strong political marker. Excessive centralization and the creation of a strong, "winner-take-all" state may be as crucial in pushing regional identity into the political arena as is the socioeconomic development of certain regions in relation to others.

I have argued that two analytical bridges need to be created or strengthened. The first is between the two regional fields of Middle East studies and Central Asian studies. Undoubtedly, there is much in Central Asia's present political life

that can be understood only with a firm grounding in the study of Soviet politics. At the same time, many of the mysteries or anomalies of Central Asian politics can be better understood by taking into account a broader view that encompasses a range of Muslim states. While many commentators have compared the Central Asian states to Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, with which the new countries have particular affinities, there is a dire need to go beyond these limited—and limiting—examples. The interaction between modern, semi-secular states, which have their own political agendas vis-à-vis Islam, and anti- or non-governmental Islamic groups is a feature of most countries in North Africa and the Middle East. Additionally, because of historical factors and the strategic importance of the

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Middle East to the West, there is a large, diverse body of scholarship from English, American, French, and German scholars, among others, upon which to draw.

Beyond the Central Asian region, there have been more general efforts since the 1970s to bring the Soviet Union into the broader realm of comparative politics and to emphasize

less what is unique about its case than how it is similar to other states in specific issue areas, such as the competition for power among political elites.⁸⁰ As the other states of the former Soviet Union move toward political structures that more easily conform to Western-developed models of politics, this transition is being completed. There seems nothing in the case of the Central Asian states to suggest that they should be, for some reason, excluded from these broader developments in the field of political science. In fact, given the very nature of Soviet development in the region, it can be strongly argued that comparisons by *issue*, for example, center-periphery relations, collective action models of political group behavior, and so forth, will be able to vastly enhance our understanding of the political processes under way in Central Asia.

In this sense, this study indicates that a second analytical bridge, between the study of religious and regional politics, needs to be further developed. The cases of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan should prove particularly instructive in that development, just as previous studies of the interaction between these factors in other states, such as Syria, help shed light on these two cases. While there are particular similarities between states with Islamic polities that make them very useful references, the political link between regionalism and religious factors is interesting in a large variety of settings, from the interaction of Germany’s predominantly Protestant north with its mostly Catholic south, to the development of Ukrainian nationalism around the Ukrainian Catholic (Uniate) church of western Ukraine.

The initial reaction of many observers, particularly in the 1970s, was to dismiss discussion of religion in the political realm as being a fading, pre-modern

factor. Looking at religious politics became unfashionable, except in specific Third World states, where it was generally taken to be a sign of backwardness or anticolonial sentiment that would become less important as these states reached a higher stage of political and economic development. It has become ever more evident, however, that modernity⁸¹ everywhere breeds a certain backlash, be it in a religious form (as in the United States, where fundamentalist Christian groups have become potent political forces) or through a resurgence of virulent nationalism (such as the recent resurrection of xenophobic right-wing political groups in Western Europe). I argue, therefore, that the study of religious politics needs to be amplified and given its due, rather than to be dismissed or relegated to the periphery of political science. Even the recent wave of studies on Islamic fundamentalism has often portrayed these political movements as isolated, pre-modern phenomena. Other analyses, such as Sayid Eddin Ibrahim's examination of Egyptian Islamic militants, have, however, shown us that these movements can frequently be best understood as a type of new social movement, which arises in specific circumstances that have everything to do with modernity.⁸²

Finally, the study of regionalism is also in need of analytical strengthening, and needs to be tied more to studies of political elites and of the state. Ever since Theda Skocpol's "Bringing the State Back In,"⁸³ there has been a strong movement to reassess the role of the state, its functions, and its ability to control actors, as well as being controlled itself. Here, the study of regional elites as representatives of a larger study of "in" and "out" political elites and their interaction with the state are both areas meriting further study. By bringing closer together studies of the Middle East and Central Asia, on the one hand, and of regional and religious politics, on the other, a clearer picture will emerge of the relationship of these factors to one another, as well as a better understanding of the state as an actor. At the end of the process, these bridges will hopefully draw together more closely islands of theory and of geography, which are islands only in the mind.

NOTES

1. John Voll, "Central Asia as a Part of the Modern Islamic World," in Beatrice Manz, ed., *Central Asia in Historical Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 63; emphasis added.

2. See, for example, Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

3. This view applies not only to Turkish scholars; several examples can be found in H.B. Paksoy, ed., *Central Asia Reader* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1994).

4. See, for example, Allen Hetmanek, "Islamic Revolution and Jihad Come to the Former Soviet Central Asia: The Case of Tajikistan," *Central Asian Survey*, 12 (1993): 365–78.

5. The Leninabadi elite ruled Tajikistan throughout most of the Soviet period and until the November 1992 election of Imomali Rakhmonov as speaker of the parliament, and therefore de facto head of state. For a fuller discussion of regionalism in Tajikistan, see Keith Martin, "Tajikistan: Civil War without End?" *RFE/RL Research Report 2* (20 August 1993):18–29.

6. Alasdair Drysdale and Gerald H. Blake, *The Middle East and North Africa: A Political Geography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 170–72.

7. *Ibid.*, 172–73. It is important to note the degree to which these factors are interdependent, even if the reach of the modern, bureaucratic state and military is much greater

than only fifty years ago. Drysdale also duly notes the importance of concentrating “wealth in primate capital cities, that through cumulative causation experience self-perpetuating growth.” This is clearly happening in the case of Tashkent, much to the chagrin of other regions and cities of Uzbekistan.

8. *Ibid.*, 174.

9. To cite but two examples: Tajikistan’s northern region, in the Ferghana Valley, was made a part of Tajikistan despite the fact that its ties were much closer to Uzbekistan, particularly Tashkent. On the other side, Bukhara and Samarqand, cities with predominantly Tajik populations at the time and long the main centers of Tajik culture and history, were left in Uzbekistan.

10. In Tajikistan, for example, there was bloodshed over the creation of the Khatlon oblast in the south, which united the Kulyab and Kurgan-Tyube oblasts, but under Kulyabi dominance. The issue arose again during the civil war, when the two regions (reunited under Soviet rule) once again were joined. See Kirill Nourzhanov, “Alternative Social Institutions and the Politics of Neo-Patrimonialism in Tajikistan,” published on the Internet, 7.

11. Martin, “Tajikistan,” 18–29.

12. See Donald Carlisle, “Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks,” *Problems of Communism* (September–December 1991): 26–28.

13. For an in-depth analysis of regionalism in Uzbekistan, see Daria Fane, “Ethnicity and Regionalism in Uzbekistan,” in Leokadia Drobizheva, ed., *Ethnic Conflict in the Post-Soviet World* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), 271–301.

14. Martin, “Tajikistan,” 18–19.

15. On Syria, see Raymond Hinnebusch, “State and Civil Society in Syria,” *Middle East Journal* 47 (Spring 1993): 243–57; for Uzbekistan, see Fane, “Ethnicity and Regionalism in Uzbekistan,” 288–90.

16. While I have not yet gathered statistical evidence on the Ferghana Valley’s economic problems, all anecdotal evidence to date indicates that this is true. It can also be seen in the republican press, which has singled out the Ferghana Valley oblasts’ administrations particularly frequently, criticizing them for their slow transition to market economy.

17. On Syria, see Alasdair Drysdale and Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1991), 30–35; on Uzbekistan, see *Jamestown Monitor*, 2 October 1996.

18. For a general overview, see Olivier Roy, *L’Echec de l’Islam Politique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994), 70–79; for an excellent case study, see Saad Eddin Ibrahim’s trailblazing piece on Egyptian Islamist activists in Saad Eddin Ibrahim, ed., *Arab Society: Social Science Perspectives* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 1985), 494–507.

19. See Olivier Roy, *L’Echec de l’Islam Politique*, 70–73; this is consistent with other studies of revolutions, such as Barrington Moore’s classic *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

20. In fact, I would argue that, unlike political Islam in Uzbekistan, the theory of socio-economic factors accounting for the rise of Islamic movements can go a great way toward explaining the rise of the IRP in Tajikistan, though any such model must be coupled with an analysis of the regional factors that shaped the 1992–93 civil war. Unfortunately, space does not permit a fuller exploration of this theory within this article.

21. All Central Asian states, including “democratic” Kyrgyzstan, have specific laws or articles in their constitutions banning sectarian parties or other parties that have a specific religious focus. It should be noted that these laws also specifically forbid ethnically-based parties that could foment ethnic unrest. In Uzbekistan, for example, these laws have been used to ban the Uzbekistani IRP, the main opposition group *Birlik*, and an association for the promotion of Tajik culture, *Samarqand*; see Cassandra Cavanaugh, “Crackdown on Opposition in Uzbekistan,” *RFE/RL Research Report*, 31 July 1992, 20–24.

22. See Hinnebusch, “State and Civil Society in Syria,” 243–57.

23. While this is not the focus here, theories of political entrepreneurship have become especially attractive in rational choice models, since they conform to theories about how

leaders assess strategies to stay in power and maximize their opportunities for attaining power. On political elites, see George Lenczowski, "Some Reflections on the Study of Elites," in George Lenczowski, ed., *Political Elites in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1975), 1–15; on adapting rational-actor models to the (post-Soviet) context, see Mancur Olson, "The Logic of Collective Action in Soviet-type Societies," *Journal of Soviet Nationalities* 1 (1990): 8–27.

24. Here, too, as in the study of Central Asia, it is interesting to see how cold war politics have shaped the study of politics as well. Only recently has it again become fashionable to analyze more thoroughly the regional bases of politics in Africa. Not surprisingly, while some of the socialist movements represented truly socialist ideals of nation building and independence from colonial dependence, in states such as Somalia this simply camouflaged competition for central power between various tribes or regions of the states shaped by colonial forces.

25. On the nationalist end, Slovakia's prime minister, Vladimir Meciar, is an excellent example; on the "capitalist" side, there are now any number of Communists-turned-free marketeers running countries such as Poland and Russia. For an excellent, early analysis of the reordering of East Europe's domestic political landscapes, see Herbert Kitschelt, "The Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe," *Politics and Society* 20 (March 1992): 7–50.

26. The causes of these realignments are thoroughly analyzed in Peter Mair's "Political Parties, Popular Legitimacy and Public Privilege," *West European Politics* 18 (July 1995): 40–57.

27. For a general discussion of corporatism, see Phillippe Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism," *Review of Politics* 36 (January 1974): 85–131.

28. This is not to suggest that there are not numerous and difficult practical obstacles to party formation—and even more importantly, to making a party successful. These range from access to financing and the media to difficulties overcoming electoral barriers (especially in countries such as Great Britain and the United States that have first-past-the-post electoral systems). See R. Inglehart and J.-R. Rabier, "Political Realignment in Advanced Industrial Society," *Government and Opposition* 21 (Autumn 1986): 243–68.

29. The founding philosopher of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Sayid Qutb, for example, argued that the rulers of contemporary Arab states are *jahalliya*, people in a state of ignorance about Islam, and ought to be overthrown by "true believers" in the quest for re-establishing the *umma*, i.e., the Islamic collectivity without state boundaries. See Sayid Qutb's main work, *Milestones* (Indianapolis: American Trust, 1990), for a detailed analysis.

30. It should be noted that borders were not drawn by Stalin accidentally—they were designed to keep significant ethnic "pockets" in neighboring states, leaving Moscow as the ultimate arbiter of interrepublican and interethnic relations. See M. E. Ahrari and James Beal, "The New Great Game in Muslim Central Asia," *McNair Paper* 47, published on the Internet, January 1996.

31. See M. A. Olimov and S. K. Olimova, "Regionalism in Tajikistan and its Impact on the Ferghana Valley," *Perspectives on Central Asia* 1 (January 1996); they also discuss the purported desire among many residents of the valley to form a new state within the borders of the Kokand Khanate.

32. See Kozim Abdurahmanov, "The Socioeconomic Situation in Khojand," *Asia-Plus Bulletin* 10, December 1996.

33. For data on output of oil, see the Department of Energy Country Report on Uzbekistan, 27 December 1996; for general information on gold, cotton, oil, and macroeconomic policy, see the BISNIS Uzbekistan Report of December 1996.

34. *OMRI Daily Digest*, 22 July 1996.

35. Interfax, as cited in FBIS-SOV, 3 June 1992, 56.

36. *Asia-Plus Bulletin* 10, December 1996.

37. Border clashes, involving unknown "assailants" and Tajik and Uzbek border guards,

took place on 23 January and 15 February 1997; at least five Tajik border guards were killed and eight Uzbek guards were injured. As a result, the Uzbekistani government issued warnings to the Tajikistani government and to the Leninabad oblast administration, and stepped up controls on the border. *Uzbekistan in the News*, Cyber-Uzbekistan, 20 February 1997.

38. For an in-depth analysis of local/regional factors, as well as the interaction between Moscow (and Slavs sent in to check up on the Uzbek elites) and the native leaders, see Donald Carlisle, "Power and Politics in Soviet Uzbekistan: From Stalin to Gorbachev," in William Fierman, ed., *Soviet Central Asia—The Failed Transformation* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), 93–130.

39. *Ibid.*, but also see Fane, "Ethnicity and Regionalism in Uzbekistan," 281–82, for a regionally based analysis.

40. Two examples may suffice: President Karimov's critical remarks of the three *hokims* has been publicized in the republican media; and, in a report on natural gas wastage, the Tashkent-based newspaper *Narodnoye Slovo* criticized the three Ferghana Valley regions for their performance. See *Narodnoye Slovo*, 29 October 1994, cited in FBIS, 16 November 1994.

41. The Namangan *hokim* was replaced in early November 1996 (*Uzbekistan in the News*, Cyber-Uzbekistan, 12 November 1996), and the other two were replaced in January and March 1997. *Uzbekistan in the News*' report, quoting the Uzbek-language newspaper *Halq So'zi*, is remarkable: "In a speech, President Karimov said that the social and economic reforms in the rural areas of the province are going very slowly. . . . During the last three years, four judges and sixty-six militia have been charged with bribery and abuse of power. 120 militia, eleven regional and provincial *hokims* and deputy *hokims* and five People's Deputies have been removed from the positions."

42. Interview with Abdumannob Pulat, Washington, DC, 6 April 1997.

43. *Ibid.*

44. The Babakhanovs headed the Muslim Religious Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, which oversaw all official Islamic institutions in Central Asia, not only Uzbekistan. For a detailed analysis of the official structures, see Mark Saroyan, "Authority and Community in Soviet Islam" in Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Accounting for Fundamentalisms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 513–30.

45. Fane, "Ethnicity and Regionalism in Uzbekistan," 285–87.

46. The classic work on Sufi orders in Central Asia, which urgently needs to be updated, is by the late Alexandre Benningsen: *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

47. While there is, understandably, little hard evidence of this, it has been frequently reported by foreign businessmen and by opposition figures; the latter argue that Karimov has built up a massive fortune stored away in Swiss bank accounts. The Russian newspaper *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, not exactly a "scandal rag," writes, "That [typical peasant] family probably raises cotton—the very crop that only the people closest to the president may sell. The income from cotton sales bypasses the kolkhoz coffers and enables the members of the ruling clan to live in comfort." 3 April 1997, 3.

48. Author's interview with Davlat Khudonazar, July 1996.

49. See Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, "Causes and Consequences of the Civil War," *Central Asia Monitor* 1 (1993): 10–14. For a highly Kulyabi-oriented view, see Svetlana Lolaeva, "Tajikistan in Ruins," *Demokratizatsiya* 1 (Fall 1993): 32–43.

50. The *Rastokhez* movement, for example, also included many northern Tajik nationalists and intellectuals who opposed Communist rule.

51. See Bess Brown, "Setback for Conservatives in Tajikistan," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 4 October 1991, 18–21.

52. Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, 143–45.

53. *Ibid.*, 145–48.

54. Despite the attempt by some people to develop a hero worship around Safarov (Svet-

lana Lolaeva, for example, writes of him as “*bobo*, ‘people’s father,’ Sangak, whose presence in the session was greeted by a standing ovation by the deputies”), the fact is that he was, according to almost all accounts, a hardened criminal who lived and died by the sword; see *Central Asia Brief* 1 (1993). In a 1994 interview with the author, Tajik opposition leader Davlat Khudonazarov accused Safarov’s Popular Front of genocide and ethnic cleansing in the southern Kulyab and Kurgan-Tyube regions.

55. See *Asia-Plus Bulletin* 4 (November 1996); for the political aspects of Northern resentment, see Bruce Pannier, “Tajikistan’s Last Safe Haven,” *OMRI Analytical Brief*, 15 May 1996.

56. The rapidity with which the Tajik government signed the agreement, which concedes far more than it had been willing to concede before, has caused most observers to be extremely skeptical about its chances of success. See, for example, *The Economist*, 15 March 1997, 39.

57. See *Asia-Plus Bulletin* 10 (December 1996).

58. Akhmadzhon Saidov had been living in Moscow since 1994; the Rakhmonov regime issued a warrant for his arrest in August 1996 on charges of abusing his authority and embezzlement, which are similar to the charges leveled against former Prime Minister Abdullajonov. He was arrested in Moscow on 7 February and faces deportation. See Amnesty International Urgent Action Bulletin, 11 March 1997.

59. For Abdullojanov’s own perspective, see his interview in the Russian newspaper *Novoe Vremya*, December 1996, 20–21. He claims that, “in Dushanbe, the price on my head has been set at two million dollars,” and says of the November 1994 presidential elections: “In my homeland, people remember them this way: ‘Abdullojanov won, but another man became president.’”

60. *Jamestown Monitor*, 31 July 1996.

61. While the mayor of Dushanbe and others in the south have accused Abdullojanov (and, behind the scenes, the Uzbek government) of being behind the attack, most evidence to date points to a connection to prison riots that took place in Khodjent earlier in April, and that were violently suppressed by Interior Ministry troops, apparently leaving scores dead. Those arrested after the assassination attempt included relatives of the dead prisoners. Most of the prisoners who died had been sent to jail for participating in antigovernment demonstrations in May 1996 in Khodjent and other towns of the north, and the riots took place when the prisoners were to be transported from Khodjent to the south. For details of the assassination attempt and subsequent arrests, see Interfax, 30 April to 4 May; on the prison riots, see *Voice of Free Tajikistan*, 18 April 1997, as quoted in FBIS, 19 April 1997.

62. One example of the perceived gravity of the situation in Afghanistan among Central Asian and Russian leaders was a 25 February 1997 summit in Tashkent; the Central Asian leaders (except Turkmenistan’s president) were joined by Russia’s defense minister, Igor Rodionov. They agreed that any Taliban move toward the Uzbek and Tajik borders could result in the CIS invoking its mutual security pact. Interestingly, the Taliban have controlled territory bordering on Turkmenistan for over a year, without incident or alarm on the part of other states. See Interfax, 25 February 1997, and *OMRI Daily Digest*, 26 February 1997.

63. The November 1996 meeting marks a turn-around for both groups; Abdullajonov had previously criticized the UTO as Islamic fundamentalists, and they had charged that he was corrupt and did nothing to prevent the civil war. It is also certainly not coincidental that the meeting took place in Tashkent, and shows President Karimov’s continued commitment to maintaining his influence in Tajikistan’s domestic affairs. See *OMRI Daily Digest*, 6 November 1996.

64. Since the focus of this article is on Islamic politics in the Ferghana Valley, this section is dedicated to a discussion of the Uzbek part of the valley; the religious question is currently much less acute in northern Tajikistan. For a good history of Islam in the region, see Alexandre Benningsen, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide* (Bloomington, Ind.:

Indiana University Press, 1986); for a more contemporary account centered on the political role of Islam, see Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*.

65. John Voll writes: "It is very important to recognize that the emergence of this dichotomy [between official and "parallel" Islam] is not unique to the modern Soviet context. . . . This pattern . . . has deep roots in Islamic history." He goes on to illustrate how the two types of Islam play an integral role in modern Arab states, with parallel Islam often having antigovernment overtones. Voll, "Central Asia as Part of the Modern Islamic World," 72–74.

66. For an extensive discussion of how Soviet rule adopted the *mahalle* structure, see Sergei Polyakov, *Islam and Tradition in Rural Central Asia* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1992), 56–58.

67. For an example of President Karimov's thinking on Islam and the Ferghan Valley, see *Narodnoe Slovo*, 15 August 1996, 1–2.

68. See Cavanaugh, "Crackdown on Opposition in Uzbekistan," 20–21.

69. Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, 93–94.

70. Fane, "Ethnicity and Regionalism in Uzbekistan," 285.

71. The *Economist*, writing only a few months after independence, said: "In the Ferghana Valley, Islamic justice is supplanting the legal system. . . . Enthusiastic young Muslims have set up courts in mosques. . . . Two men accused of robbery in Uzbekistan had their hands cut off on the orders of a court." *The Economist*, 29 August 1992, 30. I would note that these kinds of reports appear frequently in the Russian and Western press and remain to be confirmed by any anecdotal or first-hand experience; I have never met anyone who witnessed such events.

72. See Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, 92–94, for an excellent, unbiased discussion of Wahhabism, its origins, and goals.

73. Fane, "Ethnicity and Regionalism in Uzbekistan," 285.

74. For details, see Roger Kangas, "Human Rights in Uzbekistan: What Price Progress?" *OMRI Analytical Brief*, 24 May 1996.

75. Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asia's Catapult to Independence," *Foreign Affairs* 71 (Summer 1992): 125.

76. *Ibid.*

77. These figures are from an American graduate student who has been doing research on the Fethullahcilar movement in Turkey and Central Asia; according to her information, there are more than 200 schools in the former Soviet Union, including sixteen in Uzbekistan alone; those sixteen schools have 3500 students and are rapidly expanding.

78. From the Uzbekistani Russian-language newspaper, *Narodnoe Slovo*, 15 August 1996, 1 (from FBIS-SOV-96-208).

79. Fane, "Ethnicity and Regionalism in Uzbekistan," 273.

80. See, for an early example, Valerie Bunce and John M. Echols, "From Soviet Studies to Comparative Politics: The Unfinished Revolution," in *Soviet Studies* 31 (January 1979).

81. While there is much disagreement about the terms "modernity" and "modernization," I mean them here in the broad sociopolitical context first suggested by Emile Durkheim in his study on *anomie*, which highlights the atomization of society in the modern world. On the relation of this concept to religion, see Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. J. W. Swain (New York: Free Press, 1956).

82. Ibrahim, *Arab Society*.

83. See Theda Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In," in P. Evans, ed., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 423–74.