ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN POST-SOVIET UZBEKISTAN AND KYRGYZSTAN: REAL OR IMAGINED THREAT

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ABSTRACT

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Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been much concern among observers and analysts around the world over what role Islam is to play in the political, economic and social spheres of life in newly independent Central Asian states. Traditionally, Islam is the dominant faith, but had been strongly influenced by the Soviet atheist ideology during the last seven decades before Central Asia became independent in 1991. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, some observers in the West depicted Central Asia as an extension of the Middle East, invoking fears that Islamic fundamentalism was to pose a serious threat to the stability in the region of Central Asia. In this thesis I analyzed the dynamism of Islamic revival in Central Asia's two post-Soviet states of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan through the prism of the imported phenomenon of 'Islamic fundamentalism'. The thesis demonstrates that

Islam in Central Asia is a natural process determined primarily by internal socio-economic and political conditions and not influenced by outside forces. In order to support this argument, I approached the problem by analyzing both external factors and internal conditions. The concluding argument is that even if Islam is to be radicalized it will be because of internal factors, such as authoritarianism, violation of human rights and repression of moderate manifestations of Islam from within, rather than because of the influence of Islamic fundamentalist forces from abroad.

Keywords: Islamic fundamentalism, Islam, Central Asia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan.

ÖZ

SOVYET SONRASI ÖZBEKİSTAN VE KIRGIZİSTAN'DA İSLAM KÖKTENDİNCİLİĞİ: GERÇEK YA DA HAYALİ TEHDİT

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Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra dünyanın birçok ülkesinde araştırmacıların ve gözlemcilerin dikkati, bağımsızlıklarını yeni ilan eden Orta Asya ülkelerinde siyasi, ekonomik ve sosyal alanlarda İslamiyet'in nasıl bir rol oynayacağı üzerinde toplanmıştır. Geleneksel olarak bölgede İslam çoğunluğun dinidir, ancak bu din, Orta Asya ülkeleri 1991'de bağımsızlıklarını elde edene kadar geçen yetmiş yıl boyunca Sovyet ateist ideolojisinden önemli ölçüde etkilenmiştir. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra, Batılı bazı gözlemcilerin görüşlerine göre Orta Asya, Orta Doğu'nun bir uzantısıdır ve İslam köktendinciliği Orta Asya bölgesinin istikrarına bir tehdit oluşturma potansiyeline sahiptir. Bu çalışmada Sovyet sonrası dönemde Özbekistan ve Kırgızistan'daki İslami canlanma, ithal edilmiş "İslam köktendinciliği" olgusu açısından analiz edilmiştir. Çalışma, Orta Asya İslamı'nın,

doğal olarak ve öncelikle, toplumsal, ekonomik ve siyasi koşullar tarafından belirlendiğini ve dış güçlerden fazla etkilenmediğini gösterecektir. Bu argümanı desteklemek üzere tezde hem dış faktörlerin hem de iç koşulların analizi yapılmıştır. Sonuç olarak bölgede İslamiyet radikalleşme sürecine girse bile bu sürecin, dış köktendinci İslami güçlerden çok, otoriter rejim, insan hakları ihlali ve ılımlı İslam'a karşı alınan sert tavırlar gibi iç faktörler yüzünden hız kazanabileceği öne sürülmüştür.

Anahtar sözcükler: İslam köktendinciliği, İslam, Orta Asya, Özbekistan, Kırgızistan.

In Memory of my Father

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Central Asia has become an important subject for academic studies since the emergence of the five independent states of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan in 1991 and their integration to the international arena as independent actors. After decades of Russian and Soviet domination, Central Asia is now emerging as a geo-politically critical region in world politics. Although Central Asia has re-emerged as a result of the unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union, the region, due to several crucial factors, assumes strategic importance. The region enjoys a unique geo-strategic position not only because it lies in the center of Asia and in the heart of Eurasia, but also because it is located at the intersection of different civilizations (Turkic, Arabic, European, Chinese and Persian), therefore forming a link between the West and the Islamic world.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union initiated a process of transition from a failing Soviet system built on command economy to a democratic one based on free market economy. In Central Asia this transition stage is confronted with complex issues, involving such problems as defining nationhood and statehood, economic challenges, ecological crisis, democratization and human rights, trans-national crime and weapons proliferation, drug trafficking, corruption, territorial integrity and security issues, and ethno-nationalism and religious revivalism.

In this general context, the issue of Islamic revival in general and of Islamic fundamentalism in particular have been increasingly emphasized and singled out from among a range of problems, faced by Central Asia in the transition period. The aim of this thesis is to explore Islam in two Central Asian states of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan since the break-up of the Soviet Union. By doing so, it aims to explore whether there is any threat of Islamic fundamentalism and if there is such a threat, then to what extent this threat is serious. Consequently, an effort will be made to determine genuine sources of such a threat. To achieve its aim, the study will concentrate on internal and external factors that may influence the dynamics of Islamic revival in these two states in the form of fundamentalist trend. The study focuses on Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, because these two states exemplify two distinct cultures of sedentary and nomadic populations, which in turn have a direct impact on Islamic traditions in the region.

The main argument of this thesis is that Islam in Central Asia has its own specific characteristics, but in order to understand its distinctiveness it should be analyzed by looking at both external and internal factors. Since independence Central Asian states have entered the international arena as independent actors and have naturally attracted attention of international community, including Muslim countries. However, the dynamics of Islamic revival in Central Asia today are determined mostly by internal conditions, rather than by external factors. The thesis will demonstrate that religion in Central Asia operates as a force reaching beyond its politicization to the social fabric of daily life. Fundamentalism in Central Asia has its own characteristics and is not the same as in the Middle East and in the rest of the Muslim world. In terms of ideology and political practices of Islamic

fundamentalism in Central Asia, it is important to maintain a sharp distinction between what I call *labeled* and *real* fundamentalist groups. *Labeled* fundamentalism is the activity of any religious group which is in opposition to the government and whose activities are regarded by the government as illegal. These groups are only seemingly fundamentalist and are usually labeled by the governments as such. Contrastly, *real* fundamentalism uses violence to promote Islamic ideas and it should be viewed from outside, given the non-indigenous origins of such a phenomenon. Thus, it is further argued in the thesis that any manifestation of *real* Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia has been influenced by outside forces. More importantly, it is essential to indicate that further radicalization of Islamic groups in Central Asia occurs primarily due to the repressive regimes from within the governments against moderate Islamic expressions and not due to the outside pressures exerted from the broader Muslim world in the form of ideological and financial support.

1.1 Literature Review

As far as the issue of Islamic revivalism in Central Asia is concerned, the conducted literature review reveals that there are two widely held assumptions or groups of scholars, with opposite points of view. The first group of scholars expresses an opinion that Islamic revivalism is closely associated with a 'threat', deriving from the developments taking place in other parts of the broader Islamic world. According to their interpretations, Central Asia was particularly susceptible to the rise of Islamic fundamentalist doctrines similar to those that brought about the downfall of the Shah of Iran in 1979; to the growing anti-Soviet sentiment in Afghanistan, that would have

a contagious effect in Central Asia as a result of the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan, as well as to the transformations that took place in neighboring Afghanistan after the rise of Taliban. More than that, these observers assumed that the rise of nationalism in Western parts of the Soviet Union in the wake of Gorbachev's reforms would necessarily be followed by the rise of similar sentiments among Central Asian populations, backed by a fundamentalist fervor and Muslim fellow-feeling. Thus, they maintain the view that since the region would join the rest of the Islamic world, further radicalization of Central Asia is inevitable. The other group, on the contrary, suggests that even though Islamic revival is evident in Central Asia at present, this revival should not be discussed in terms of posing a 'threat'. In addition, they hold that even if there is a 'challenge' of Islamic revivalism in both positive and negative senses, this challenge is purely an indigenous phenomenon.

1.1.1. First Group of Scholars

Unlike numerous challenges brought about by political developments taking place during the last years of the Soviet Union and since independence in the five Central Asian republics (such as economic disintegration, ethno-nationalism, regionalism, and tribalism), Islamic revivalism is the issue that was already widely discussed long before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As early as the late 1970s, some scholars were already expressing an opinion that the main threat to the integrity of the Soviet Union would come from its Muslim population, especially from the part of it that was concentrated in the Soviet Central Asian republics. In 1979, a prominent French observer on Soviet studies had written:

> …the findings of insightful analysis have prompted Communist officials to admit that Islam is a problem not of the past but of the present and future of Soviet Society in the process at integration.[1]

Another French scholar also warned about the problem of Islam in the following way:

> … to a very large degree, the future of the Soviet Union – and this means also the future of the entire world – depends on the development of the Soviet Islam during the next two or three decades. And that means the problem of Islam in the Turkistan[2] and the Caucasus will be one of the most vitally important elements of the general political problem which will face the world in the future.[3]

These general findings were expressed deriving from the political transformations that took place in the Muslim countries bordering the former Soviet Central Asia to the south. According to this group of scholars, the 1979 Revolution in Iran and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan had had a destabilizing effect on the Islamic population of Central Asia and appeared as a potential source of trouble for the whole Soviet Union. Thus, in their book *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State*, Alexandre Bennigsen and Marie Broxup wrote:

> The revolution in Iran and in Afghanistan, followed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan… destabilized not only their own countries but the entire Middle East, transforming this relatively quiet territory into a boiling revolutionary cauldron, whose upheavals may have unpredictable consequences all around, and first and foremost for the Soviet Union. The first direct consequence was the destabilization of the entire southern frontier of the USSR. By force of circumstances, the Iron Curtain along the Afghan frontier had to be raised, whilst on the Iranian frontier it became more breachable.[4]

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[1] Helene Carrere d'Encausse, *The Decline of an Empire: The Soviet Socialist Republics in Revolt*, New York: Newsweek Books, 1979, p. 240.

[2] In different sources the area of Central Asia is termed variously. The most commonly used names among them are: Turkistan (turkic), Transoxania, Transoxiana (greek), Maverranahr (arabic).

[3] Alexandre Bennigsen, *Islam in Soviet Union: General Presentation*, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 1985, pp. 11-12.

[4] Alexandre Bennigsen and Marie Broxup, *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State*, Croom Helm, London & Canberra, 1983, p. 108.

By saying this, they suggest that in contrast to the stable pre-1979 Muslim world, Middle East appeared as a potential source of trouble particularly for the USSR, to where various subversive and radical ideologies might have penetrated and 'contaminated' Soviet Islam.

In this context, there is a tendency to emphasize the weakness of the Soviet system in suppressing the religious consciousness of Central Asian Muslims, despite the long-term and large-scale anti-religious propaganda. Thus, Alexandre Bennigsen suggested that, "in spite of the efforts of the Soviet authorities Islam remains the main and probably the unique unifying bond between various Muslim nations of the USSR".[5] He further pointed out that inconsistency and unattractiveness of Marxism-Leninism as opposed to more attractive Islamic heritage may re-ignite the Islamic sentiments of Central Asian nations.[6]

According to Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, in addition to political reasons, such as the ineffectiveness of the 'iron curtain', there are also other obvious reasons like the demographic explosion of Central Asian populations and technological advances of modern world that make the region vulnerable in terms of Islamic threat:

> During the last five years, for various and obvious mainly technical reasons, such as the appearance of the cassette, of the video-cassette, of the more numerous and more powerful radio broadcasts from abroad the iron curtain has been rapidly pulled down and is becoming permeable. As a consequence, Soviet Muslims are now discovering that they belong to the *Dar-ul Islam*, to the *Ummah* of 800 million of Muslims and not only to the Soviet Empire led by the Russians – who represent only a little more than 150 million. So, the pretension that their 'Elder Brother' is this relatively small Russian

[5] Bennigsen, *Islam in Soviet Union*, p. 10.
[6] Ibid., p. 11.

> community and not the 800 million of religious brethrens is being questioned now.[7]

In particular Alexandre Bennigsen and his associates draw a great deal of attention to the fact that the Muslim citizens of the Soviet Union made up a huge part of the population of the country. Their observations heavily focus on the challenge of Central Asia's ever growing Muslim population as "an important factor to recon with".[8]

More recent observations of the Soviet era also suggested that the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan played an important role in stimulating Islamic sentiment in Central Asia. Alexei Malashenko, for example, has pointed to the gradual change in attitude of ordinary people and local intelligentsia as more people took the side of rebels. He maintains that "the idea of Islamic *jihad* against the Soviet occupation in the long run became part of a mass consciousness of the local population". He goes on to say that "without democratic change in the USSR sympathies for Afghanistan may have remained hidden, but at the same time it was the Afghan *jihad* that stimulated the Islamic renaissance in Central Asia".[9] He admits, though, that,

> under present conditions in the USSR what we call 'fundamentalism' is not the same as the ideology and political practice of, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood. Similarly, the Muslim enlightenment movement is different from the phenomenon that occurred in the Middle East.[10]

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[7] Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, *The Afghan War and Soviet Central Asia*, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 1986, p. 7.

[8] See Alexandre Bennigsen, *Islam in Soviet Union – General Presentation*, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 1985, p. 1; Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, *The Afghan War and Society: Central Asia*, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 1986, p. 9; Alexandre Bennigsen, *Soviet Muslim Intelligentsia in Central Asia: Ideologies and Political Attitudes*, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 1986, pp. 1, 9; Alexandre Bennigsen and Marie Broxup, *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State*, Croom Helm, London & Canberra, 1983, pp. 1, 111, 124-135.

[9] Alexei Malashenko, *Religious and Political Change in Soviet Muslim Regions* in State, Religion and Society in Central Asia: a Post-Soviet Critique, Vitaly Naumkin, ed., Ithaca Press Reading, 1993, pp. 167-168.

[10] Ibid., p. 174.

As is well known, Gorbachev's reforms of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) gave a new impetus to Islamic revivalism. Such reforms were primarily aimed at restructuring the Soviet society in order to deal with the challenges inherited from the stagnation period of 1960s and 1970s. In other words, reforms were needed first and foremost to revitalize the declining economy, to eradicate corruption and to enhance the social safety network, as well as a myriad of other problems with a purpose of achieving the ultimate goal of communism, which was to create a uniform, proletarian 'Homo Sovieticus'. Although the priorities of *perestroika* and *glasnost* were not necessarily aimed at stimulating religious revivalism,[11] in Central Asia such an outcome was inevitable given the overall nature of such reforms. Some observers suggested that the significance of Islamic resurgence was underestimated during Gorbachev era and that Islam would play a decisive role in the future of the Soviet Union. As was indicated by Amir Taheri in 1989, "The role that Islam is likely to play in either the success or the failure of Gorbachev has hitherto been largely underestimated in the West"[12]. He goes on to say that,

> the crucial role of Islam was bound to play in shaping the future of the USSR. More than seven decades of Communist propaganda against Islam made it difficult for many Soviet officials to recognize Islam not necessarily as a subversive force in Soviet society but as the undeniable and legitimate culture at a substantial section of the population of the USSR.[13]

Immediately after independence in 1991, numerous scholars and commentators suggested that Central Asian region would join the greater Muslim world to the south

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[11] Early Gorbachev was not different in his attitudes toward religion from his predecessors, especially as far as Islam was concerned. During his tenure traditional Islam in Central Asia was criticized and equated with backwardness, underdevelopment and an obstacle to progress (See Martha Brill Olcott, *"Islamic Consciousness and Nationalist Ideology"* in *From the Gulf to Central Asia: Players in the New Great Game*, ed. by Anoushiravan Ehteshami, University of Exeter Press, 1994, p. 9).

[12] Amir Taheri, *Crescent in a Red Sky: the Future of Islam in the Soviet Union*, Hutchinson, London-Melbourne-Auckland-Johannesburg, 1989, p. 233.

[13] Ibid.

to form a fundamentalist bloc and add to a broader anti-Western movement. In the West the widely held assumption was that after the collapse of communism the next enemy would be Islam. As Akbar Ahmed has indicated, "Most recent opinion polls in the West confirm the impression that Islam is seen as the major 'next' enemy after communism".[14] In his well-known article *"The Clash of Civilizations"* Samuel Huntington suggested that Iran is the 'true' inspiration behind the rise of Islamism in Central Asia.[15] Another example that contributed to the urgency of the issue of Islamic threat to post-Soviet Central Asian states was the situation in neighboring Afghanistan. Given the region's proximity to this country it was a common perception in the West that Central Asia was a potential Afghanistan, racked by religious conflict and threatened by extremist groups. In his recent work *Jihad: the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, Ahmed Rashid has indicated that the biggest threat to Central Asian stability came from the ongoing civil war in Afghanistan and that "the problems in the region have also been exacerbated by the growth of Islamic extremism and terrorism associated with Osama bin Laden and his Arab-Afghans, who have considerable influence with the Taliban, the IMU [Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan], and Islamic *jihadi* groups in Pakistan".[16]

1.1.2. Second Group of Scholars

Such concerns are in a way understandable, given transformations that took place in the Muslim states bordering Central Asia for the last several decades, as well as the strong regional inclination towards Islam and the Islamic heritage of Central Asian

[14] Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992, p. 37.
[15] Samuel P. Huntington, "*The Clash of Civilizations"*, Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993.
[16] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2002, p. 228.

populations. But as history has shown, forces quite different from Central Asia's inclination towards Islam have brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union. Neither the demographic factor of ever-growing Central Asian Muslim populations nor the Islamic factor *per se*, have played any significant role in the process of Soviet disintegration. Anticipations of widespread nationalist and fundamentalist movements did not materialize in Central Asia by the time of the Soviet disintegration to the degree it was evident in former Soviet Union's other parts. In fact, former Soviet Central Asian republics were the least prepared and enthusiastic ones to face the Soviet dissolution. Its leaders were among the last supporters to hold the Soviet Union together. Therefore, there has been some skepticism among the other strand of scholarly literature to the continued claims of an Islamic threat in this region. As a result, they come up with a qualitatively different approach: Central Asia as a whole and Islam in particular, should not be viewed through the prism of the 'Great Game' as an extension of the 'Cold War' period.[17] Some of them even challenge the view of the primacy of Islamic identity in Central Asia and agree that over time religious identity has decreased in importance. As early as 1982, Martha Olcott, for example, suggested that even if Islam influenced social and cultural life in Central Asia, the people were not "deeply religious", they were "Muslims by practice, but their faith is simplistic. They do not hold Muslim world views, or judge events by the moralistic yardstick of a true believer. Nor do they have a strong commitment to restore the primacy of Shari'a law".[18] Contrary to the interpretations of the first group of scholars, she further argues that after nearly seven decades of

[17] In particular, this new approach served as an opening article (Paul Goble) of the book *From the Gulf to Central Asia: Players in the New Great Game*, compiled by Anoushiravan Ehteshami in 1994.

[18] Martha Brill Olcott, "Soviet Islam and World Revolution", *World Politics,* Vol. 34, No. 4, 1982, pp. 498-499.

Soviet rule and anti-religious policies, the very nature and practice of Islam had changed and the dominance of the traditional Islam has, for the most part, been destroyed in the region.[19] Others suggest a good deal of optimism over the issue of Islamic fundamentalism and clearly state that it has no future in contemporary Central Asia. In particular, Shirin Akiner suggests that, "it would be impossible to establish Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia today for the very important reason that Islam is based on a highly developed legal system".[20] According to her, it is "not feasible" to create an Islamic state because this body of knowledge, as well as theoretical and practical understanding of Islam is lacking significantly in all of Central Asian republics today.[21] Recognizing the distinctive nature of Islam in Central Asia, this second group of scholars suggests that a closer look from within is needed. According to them, in order to understand the nature of Islam and to predict its future, one should study it by looking at its indigenous history and domestic conditions within which Islamic revivalism is taking place, rather than adopting general patterns that took shape elsewhere. As Meghrdad Haghayeghi has pointed out:

> It may be argued, however, that the dynamics of Islamic revival are for the most part determined not by the pressures exerted from the Middle East, but by balance of Islamic and Western-oriented democratic forces within each republic.[22]

Within the framework of this qualitatively new approach, the general findings of the second stream of scholars reveal that the role of Islam as an undermining force for stability is often exaggerated in the West as well as in Russia, leading to justification

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Shirin Akiner, *Central Asia: New Arc of Crisis?*, Royal Institute for Defence Studies, 1993, p. 56.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, "Islamic Revival in Central Asian Republics", *Central Asian Survey*, 1994, 13(2), p. 249.

by some of the Central Asian ruling elites of authoritarian regimes against oppositional forces, including Islamic ones. As John Esposito has indicated:

> Cognizant of a Western tendency to see Islam as a threat, many Muslim governments use the danger of Islamic radicalism as an excuse for their own control or suppression of Islamic movements, they fan the fears of a monolithic Islamic radicalism both at home and in the West, much as many in the past used anticommunism as an excuse for authoritarian rule and to win the support of Western powers.[23]

Another conclusion that the Islamic 'threat' was overemphasized by the authorities of Central Asian governments derives from the old Soviet rhetoric to systematically treat Islam as a subversive activity, backward religion and an enemy of progress. As Muriel Atkin has indicated:

> The Soviet era had its emotive vocabulary of Islamophobia. For many years, the Islamic bogeyman was evoked by such labels as 'Sufi' and 'fanatic'. Sufism, with its organizations of devotees, conjured up fears of underground conspiracies. 'Fanaticism', by definition, implies extreme, blind devotion to something; given the tenor of Soviet atheist propaganda, a religion would be an unworthy object of such devotion even in moderation, let alone to an extreme degree.[24]

Given the fact that in almost all Central Asian republics the old communist leadership has been retained, such an exaggeration of an old rhetoric is not surprising. The problem is, as Muriel Atkin says, that

> …the use of polemics which conjure up fears of an international, radical Islamic menace obscures the real nature of the political problems and encourages antagonism toward a large and diverse group of people.[25]

In dealing with the possibility of Iran having a contagion effect of spreading its Revolution among the population of Central Asia, this second group of scholars

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[23] John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?*, New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 172. Note: Although John Esposito writes generally about Islam in the Middle East, his this indication is relevant to present situation within Central Asian context.

[24] Muriel Atkin, "The Rhetoric of Islamophobia", from *http://www.ca-c.org/journal/eng-01-2000/16.atkin.shtml*

[25] Ibid.

comes up with a general finding that Iranian type of Islam has little appeal in Central Asia. This conclusion is based primarily on the doctrinal diversity between Shi'a Iran and predominantly Sunni Central Asia. As Cornell Swante and Maria Sultan have pointed out,

> As for Iran, its possibilities to influence the Central Asian republics were grossly overestimated in the early 1990s. The sectarian difference between Shi'a Iran and overwhelmingly Sunni Central Asia meant that the Iranian brand of an Islamic state could master little appeal in Central Asian society.[26]

Contrary to the argumentations of the first group of scholars, who strongly emphasize the weakness of the Soviet state in suppressing Islam, they come up with a conclusion that Soviet atheist ideology had played its decisive role in shaping Islam in Central Asia, by stating that its legacy had left a "deep mark on Central Asia".[27] On the overall character of Islam in Central Asia they have this to say: "Although a religious revival has, naturally, taken place, the role of Islam in the mainstream of Central Asian society is moderate".[28]

In dealing with the situation when armed incursion by radical Islamists, whose declared aim was to establish a religious state in Central Asia, into the territory of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000 and when a series of terrorist bombing in February 1999 in Tashkent occurred, John Schoeberlein said that "the participants and sources of support behind this insurgency are difficult to identify".[29] He commented that the threat posed by IMU was limited as the party was handicapped by being forced out and made to operate from the bases in neighbouring Tajikistan

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[26] Swante E. Cornell and Maria Sultan, "The Asian Connection: the New Geo-politics of Central Eurasia", Cornell Caspian Consulting, Caspian Brief, December 2000, from http://www.cornellcaspian.com/pub/0011ventraleurasia.pdf

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Source: *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization and Regional Security*, Vol. 2, No. 11, November 21, 2000, from *http://www.ceip.org/files/news/schoeberleinolcott.asp*

and Afghanistan. Likewise, he expressed an opinion that groups like IMU had only limited public support. He also pointed out that Afghanistan's role in promoting the incursions should not be exaggerated. By saying this he suggests that the official accounts on the incursions, which put the whole blame onto the Islamists like IMU, inspired by outside forces, are too simplistic. Instead, he suggests not neglecting internal conditions, such as the economic difficulties of transition stage, which have left large groups of Central Asia's population disillusioned with current political regimes.[30]

As has been mentioned earlier, Islamic revival in Central Asia is a unique example in the sense that its moderate form is not influenced by outside pressures, exerted from the Middle East. The fundamentalist trend in Central Asia is different as there is a serious lack of understanding of what *real* fundamentalism is. But this does not mean that Islam in Central Asia is devoid of *real* fundamentalist expressions, as understood in the broader world. The activities of such movements as IMU, Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami and Wahhabism, active throughout Central Asia, bear clearly fundamentalist connotations, such as calling for an armed overthrow of the ruling establishment, creating an Islamic Caliphate, and purifying Islam from the 'evils' brought by modernization. But even here one cannot be sure about how genuinely these groups can be regarded as fundamentalist. Even though fundamentalism is a typical phenomenon in conditions of economic uncertainty, social unrest and political instability, it is not easy to know how to call these people in Central Asia. As Martha Olcott has argued,

> Given how cut off the region was from direct contacts with the rest of the Islamic world, it is difficult to know how to define fundamentalists in Central

[30] Ibid.

> Asian context. Is it just a member of an illegal anti-government organization, seeking to overthrow the existing order in favour of a vaguely worded call for an Islamic democracy? Or is it anyone who subscribes to a radical Islamic agenda?[31]

In trying to answer the questions above, she comes up with the following conclusion:

> …the 'Islamic fundamentalist threat' has become a slogan around which to rally the population – and, more importantly, to use the crackdown against potential political rivals, secular and religious, rather than as an expression of genuinely conceived political threat.[32]

She further suggests that even if Islamic fundamentalism, as it is called here, poses a serious challenge to political stability in the region, political stability in other non-Muslim post-Soviet republics is far from being better than it is in Central Asia.[33]

Within this general context, Ferghana Valley is considered to be the area sensitive to Islamic fundamentalist expressions in the region. The valley is Central Asia's most densely populated area, inhabited by more than 10 million peoples of different ethnic origin. It was divided arbitrarily between the Soviet Republics of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan during Stalin's delimitation policy in the 1920s. The area, given its fertile soil, favorable climatic conditions and abundance of water resources, had always given rise to numerous conflicts and claims. It was, for example, the place where the anti-Soviet Basmachi movement took root in the 1920s. The Soviet legacy has left Ferghana Valley with numerous environmental, economic, social problems and inter-ethnic conflicts: under the Soviets its fertile soil had been exploited extensively with little regard to ecological balance in order to provide the center with cotton; 'unreliable' peoples, deported from Crimea, Caucasus and other parts of the Soviet Union, had forcefully been settled in Ferghana during the Second

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[31] Martha Brill Olcott, "Islamic Consciousness and Nationalist Ideology in Central Asia: What Role for Foreign Actors?" in *From the Gulf to Central Asia: Players in the New Great Game*, ed. by Anoushiravan Ehteshami, University of Exeter Press, 1994, p. 18.
[32] Ibid., p. 20.
[33] Ibid.

World War, causing inter-ethnic conflicts; demographic explosion had caused mass unemployment and social discontent of millions of peoples, inhabiting the area. Even though endowed by generous natural resources, Ferghana Valley was turned into one of the poorest, most backward areas of the Soviet Union, plagued by ethnic conflicts, border and water disputes and infrastructure problems. Consequently, it can be suggested that all of these disadvantages have prepared a breeding ground for fundamentalist expression in Ferghana. But even so, it is doubtful that extremism can find a widespread appeal among masses. As John Schoeberlein has indicated,

> The tendency toward extremism, meanwhile, is in no way inherent to Central Asian culture of Islam. On the whole, the population of the Ferghana Valley has been distinguished by its commitment to moderation, despite political upheaval, provocations and the myriad tensions which have accompanied the collapse of the Soviet economy and the introduction of often marginally successful market relations.[34]

As has been mentioned earlier, with regard to fundamentalism in Central Asia, it is important to maintain a distinction between *labeled* and *real* fundamentalisms. In Uzbekistan, for instance, the government is fearful of all kinds of opposition, not only those groups which use Islam as a political tool. Uzbek President Islam Karimov, has retained his position from the Soviet past and his policies are primarily based on the old-style authoritarianism, which is justified, however, as a vital instrument for maintaining 'stability'. Given the Islamophobic character of the ruling authoritarian elite, inherited from the Soviet atheist ideology, any kind of political Islam is often labeled as 'fundamentalist'. It is largely in this sense that fundamentalism in Central Asia should be regarded differently from its counterpart in the Middle East. At the same time, it would not be true to state that there are no

[34] John Schoeberlein, "Islam in the Ferghana Valley: Challenges for New States" in *Islam and Politics in Russia and Central Asia: Early Eighteenth to Late Twentieth Centuries,* ed. by Stephane A. Dudoignon, Komatsu Hisao, London – New York – Bahrain, Kegan Paul, 2001, p. 338.

expressions of *real* fundamentalism in Central Asia and that all of its manifestations are *labeled*. It must once again be emphasized that the ideologies and activities of IMU, Hizb-ut-Tahrir and the Wahhabis, which became active in Ferghana Valley in late 1980s and throughout 1990s, had clearly fundamentalist overtones. What should be underlined with regard to *real* fundamentalism in Central Asia is that a fertile soil was already there to accept it, but the ideology itself is not indigenous, and was imported from abroad. On the non-indigenous nature of religious extremism in Central Asia Ahmed Rashid has this to say:

> … it remains true that the Islamic ideologies of the IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) are based not on the indigenous Islam of Central Asia, the birthplace of Sufism (the tolerant form of Islamic mysticism) and nineteenth century *Jadidism* (the modernist interpretation of Islam), but on imported ideologies. Their message of extremism originated with the Taliban in Afghanistan, the militant *madrassah* culture of Pakistan (where many IMU and HT adherents studied), and extreme Wahhabi doctrine of Saudi Arabia.[35]

It is largely in this sense that the *real* fundamentalist expressions that have recently taken root in Central Asia are influenced by external pressures exerted from the Middle East. Since the destruction of Taliban by the US-led forces in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 attacks and the worldwide anti-terrorist campaign, the danger of this imported threat has considerably been reduced. This has not prevented, however, the government of Uzbekistan from continuing its authoritative methods and repressive policy against Islam, which is still to a large extent perceived as a fundamentalist threat. In fact, after the US-led bombing of Afghanistan in response to September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, governments of Central Asian states, especially that of Uzbekistan, have intensified their repression

[35] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 10.

of Islamic opposition groups, hoping that their alliance with the US would limit criticism of their crackdown on Islamic groups.

Consequently, it is further argued, that not fundamentalism exerted from abroad but the repressive measures, applied by indigenous governments against any form of political opposition, including religious opposition, which brings about further radicalization of existing groups, poses a real threat. According to John Schoeberlein, without allowing positive participation of Islamic groups, the governments run into a risk of letting Islam to serve as an effective means of mobilizing political opposition, which can take an extremist form.[36]

This study argues that the dynamics of Islamic revival are for the most part determined not by the pressures exerted from outside, in our case – from the Middle East – but primarily by internal factors, such as economic, social and political conditions. Islam in Central Asia, together with its various manifestations, has its own specific characteristics, so in order to understand what Islam really is all about in Central Asia today, one should study it from inside rather than from outside. Indeed, Islam has been increasingly politicized in the region, since independence. This is obvious primarily in the regions, which are characterized by a high population density and low living standards, particularly in the Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Such politicization, which is usually illegal and often in opposition, is usually regarded as a fundamentalist threat backed by external forces. But it should once again be emphasized that politicization of Islam occurs due to domestic socio-economic conditions, rather than external manipulations. This phenomenon is typical of societies, which are going through a deep crisis. In our case

[36] John Schoeberlein, *"Islam in the Ferghana Valley"*, p. 338.

it is the transition period from planned economy to market economy, as well as social change in moral values. People, disillusioned by the communist past and uncertainties, which they face at present during the transition period, resort to religion as a political tool in an effort to find a way out of economic and social hardships. In general terms, the resurgence of Islam in Central Asia has taken the form of primarily cultural, educational and narrowly religious activities of indigenous nature and only secondarily assisted by foreign powers. More than that, as some observers firmly state, the moderate nature of Islam in the region will prevent it from becoming a contending force in Central Asia's future.[37]

The concluding argument is that even if Islam is to be radicalized, it would not be because of outside influence, it would be the result of anger and despair that will continue to grow if existing orders will continue applying old-fashioned authoritative and repressive measures to the people.

As the chosen subject is broad, only specific points and limited number of actors (countries) and views will be considered. As the title of the given work suggests, the main focus is the region's two neighboring states of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The given choice has been motivated by historical differences in these two states, based on sedentary vs. nomadic traditions that are considered to be very important for the purpose of the study.

As far as the external factors are concerned, the focus will be primarily on the countries, which had a more or less visible impact on the process of Islamic revival in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. These include the immediate neighbors Iran and

[37] Ghonchen Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia: a Potent Force or a Misconception?" *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 20, No. 1, March 2001, p. 82.

Afghanistan on the one hand and other countries located farther south and south-west - Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey on the other.

In terms of internal factors that have emerged out of domestic conditions, that had a direct involvement in the process, several factors or challenges of transition period such as economic crisis, authoritarianism and repression, and adherence to Islam will be considered.

The timeframe of the study is limited to the period since the discussed countries have become independent in 1991. However, the aim of the study would not be achieved without considering several important events that took place earlier. Therefore, the scope of the study is not strictly confined to the period indicated in the title and whenever necessary, the Islamic past of the region is also analyzed.

The format of the study is based on a comparative analysis and a comprehensive and historical outlook of the specific events and opinions. In carrying out the research, books, articles, journals, newspapers and World Wide Web sources have been used extensively.

The thesis is organized in four major Chapters. After the Introduction in Chapter 2, the historical background of the region with regard to Islam, which provides useful information in terms of understanding the distinct nature of Central Asian brand of Islam is given. Chapter 3 is the bulk of the thesis where the dynamism of Islamic revival in post-Soviet Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is analyzed. It begins with the evaluation of the external factors that might have had a certain impact on the process of Islamic revival and its fundamentalist expression in the region, are reflected. It continues with the analytical review of domestic conditions that have taken place in

post-Soviet Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, by which the dynamics of Islamic revival, including both positive and negative manifestations is determined. It also describes the activities of several important Islamic parties that have emerged on the political scene of both countries. Chapter 4 concludes the main arguments of this thesis. It sums up the major views, and in a broad sense provides an overview within the information and evidence provided in the study.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In order to understand both the distinctiveness of Islam in Central Asia as a whole and the degree of diversity of Islamic practice in the region's different parts, it is necessary to look at the historical background of Islam in Central Asia: how it emerged, how it evolved and has acquired its present shape.

Although this thesis aims to analyze Islam by looking at the examples of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the post-Soviet period, historical aspect requires that the region of Central Asia should be viewed as a whole. The reason for that lies in the fact that the notion of nation-state in the region is a relatively new phenomenon and until the establishment of the Soviet rule it was alien to all Central Asian societies. As indicated by Kulchik et al., "…nation-states, as they are understood in Europe, did not form in Central Asia for many centuries. Local emirates and khanates never relied on any one ethnic community. No ethnic criteria were kept in mind in forming the state elite".[38] Moreover, nature, history and culture offer persuasive grounds for seeing the region as a cultural whole, bound together by shared natural resources, by a common history, and by a common Turkified Perso-Islamicate culture, that has produced artists, poets, statesmen, and warriors, renown throughout centuries. Therefore, within a historical perspective it is expedient to analyze the region of Central Asia as a whole. In this chapter, the historical background of Islam in the

[38] Yuriy Kulchik, Andrey Fadin, Victor Sergeev, *Central Asia after the Empire*, Pluto Press, London-Chicago, IL, 1996, p. 2.

region is presented under two general headings – Pre-Soviet period and Soviet period. Each topic is further subdivided into sub-topics, relevant to the purpose of this chapter. Thus, Pre-Soviet period is viewed under such topics as 'The Importance of Geography', 'Arab Conquest', 'The Turkic Period', 'The Mongol Period and the Timurid Dynasty', 'Post-Mongol Period: Central Asia under Turkifized Chingizid Rulers', 'The Tsarist Conquest', and 'The Jadid Movement'. The Soviet Period is viewed under the following general sub-topics: 'Soviet Religious Policy', 'Official Islam', 'Parallel Islam', and 'Islam and Perestroika'.

2.1. Pre-Soviet Period

2.1.1 The Importance of Geography

One of the most distinctive features that shaped the history of Central Asia in general and that of Islam in particular, is geography. In fact, the history of Central Asia is a product of its geography. Geographically, the land of Central Asia, which today comprises Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, is a massive landlocked territory, located at the heart of the Eurasian continent. The area is divided into three major zones: oases of the two major deserts of Kyzyl-Kum and Kara-Kum in the West, mountains of Tien-Shan, Alay and Pamir in the East and the vast area of the steppe region in the North. The ranges of Tien-Shan and Pamir are only surpassed by the Himalaya and Karakoram, containing some of the biggest glaciers in the world outside the Arctic Circle and feeding Central Asia's two major rivers Syr-Darya and Amu-Darya.[39] The annual snow pack and permanent glaciers have provided a reliable and steady source of water to the lowland oases for

[39] Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire: the Turks of Central Asia and Stalinism*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1967, p. 15.

millennia, providing the basis of large-scale irrigation systems and thus human civilization. Such geographical conditions have given rise to two quite distinct cultures. Those are the sedentary populations of the oases of Samarqand, Bukhara and Ferghana and the nomadic tribes of the steppe and mountain regions. The sedentary populations settled in oases along the banks of the region's major rivers, particularly Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya and engaged in agriculture to sustain their livelihoods. Concentration in one place gave birth for large urban centers with distinct settled culture and civilization. Among the populations of the mountainous zone and the steppe region, livelihoods were dependent on animal husbandry. This caused seasonal migrations of people and their herds from one place to another in search for water and new grasslands. These were the tribal-nomadic communities of the mountain and the steppe.

In ancient times Central Asia was considered to be the center of the world, not only being a place of contact for indigenous nomadic riders and sedentarized merchants, but also linking China and Europe by means of the famous Silk Road. The Silk Road was not only a throughway between East and West, but also a road through which Central Asia made its important, rich and lasting contributions to the world civilization. In addition to the art treasures found in Scythian tombs, the frescoes of Panjikent, architectural monuments like Tamerlane's tomb and the Registan in Samarkand, there were many scientific contributions made by Central Asian scholars such as the geographer al-Balkhi, the polymaths al-Biruni and al-Khwarezmi, the mathematician-astronomer al-Kashi, as well as the patrons who supported them, such as Mahmud of Ghazni and Ulug Beg of Samarkand.[40] Furthermore, the region was

[40] R. D. McChesney, *Central Asia: Foundations of Change,* The Darwin Press, Inc., Princeton, New Jersey, 1996, p. 27.

at a crossroad of different civilizations and religions of Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Nestorian Christianity, Hinduism, Manichaeanism and finally, Islam.[41]

The general observation by many historians and scholars is that conversion to Islam was more effective in case of sedentary populations and lacked depth and substance in case of nomadic societies[42]. Thus, Uzbeks and Tajiks, being settled populations, were converted to Islam relatively earlier as compared to the nomadic Kyrgyz, Kazakhs and Turkmen, whose conversion process continued up until the 19th century. Thus, in the northern nomadic part of Central Asia, geographically divided between the Kazakh steppe region and the Tien-Shan Mountains (areas that correspond to today's Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) the progress of Islam was slow and faced with opposition from the nomads. According to Alexandre Bennigsen, Islamization of nomadic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz took place from two different directions and in two successive ways: first, from the south during the 14th and 15th centuries and mainly through the missionary activities of the Sufi brotherhoods, the Yasawi and the Kubrawi, and later in the 15th and 16th centuries of the Naqshbandi; second, during the 15th to 18th century, Islam was brought from the northwest direction by the Kazan Tatar merchants and the Islamic *ulema*. However, according to him, nomadic Kazakh and Kyrgyz tribes were only superficially Muslims when the Russian Soviets came to establish their power in the region.[43] Consequently, in mountainous regions and steppes of northwest Central Asia, Islam was never

[41] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, pp. 15-16.
[42] See Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia*, Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, New York – Washington, 1964; Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire: the Turks of Central Asia and Stalinism*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1967; Alexandre Bennigsen, *Islam in Soviet Union: General Presentation*, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 1985; Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1996; Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2002.
[43] Alexandre Bennigsen, *Islam in the Soviet Union, General Presentation*, p. 2.

practiced to the same degree of orthodoxy as amongst the settled populations of the oases belt. Similarly, a group of Russian authors indicate that Islam was practiced as a way of life predominantly among the nomadic communities of Central Asia, where proclivity to Islam was generally weaker than among the sedentarized ones. As such, "the Turkmen, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz are much less religious. Their Islamization took place much later (non-Islamic tribes existed among them as recently as late 19th century). Just as in other areas where Islam was late in coming, it took root only inasmuch as it absorbed their common law (the *adat*)".[44] On how differently nomadic and settled populations absorbed the Islamic tradition Shirin Akiner has this to say:

> There are historic differences in the way the Central Asian people responded to Islam: the settled communities of the south (Uzbeks and Tajiks) were traditionally more orthodox in their belief and practices than the nomads (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen). Each of these are still apparent today. The formerly nomadic peoples still tend to regard Islam more as a loose cultural affiliation rather than as a way of life governed by set teachings and precepts; the religious fanaticism that has taken root in some parts of the south is alien to their tradition.[45]

Given the regional diversity of the region, the proclivity towards Islamic faith in Central Asia is defined mainly by this sedentary versus tribal structural dichotomy. However, it is useful to indicate at this point, that the strength of Islamic proclivity throughout Central Asia is closely related to the presence of the Uzbek population.[46]

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[44] Yuriy Kulchik, Andrey Fadin, Victor Sergeev, *Central Asia after the Empire*, p. 5.
[45] Shirin Akiner, *Central Asia: New Arc of Crisis?*, 1993, pp. 38-39.
[46] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1996, p. 78

2.1.2 The Arab Conquest

During the first centuries of A. D., various groups, such as the Huns, Sassanids, Turks and Chinese, contended over the territory of Central Asia.[47] Islam was introduced to the region by the Arab conquest in the early eighth century. The Arabic warlords sought to establish an Arabic caliphate in Transoxania, a historic name of the region which literally means 'the land beyond the Oxus River'. Mehrdad Haghayeghi categorizes the early conversions to Islam in the area into two phases. According to him, the first phase began with the Arab invasion in 649 and ended in 715 and was responsible for the successful establishment of Arab rule in the region. At the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th century the Arabs were advancing Transoxania through its southern frontier, defeating the Persians and bringing important centers of Khorasan – Badghis, Herat and Balkh – under their rule. After the establishment of an effective centralized administrative system over Khorasan under Qutayba ibn Muslim, the Arabs expanded their area of the conquest to the north of Oxus and conquered Tukharistan, Bukhara and Samarkand between 706 and 709. By 715, the Arab power was consolidated over significant territories in the Jaxartes provinces as far as Shash and Ferghana.[48] In 751 Arabs defeated the Chinese army in Talas, in present-day Kyrgyzstan, thus bringing Chinese ambitions to an end.[49] The conversion to Islam following this defeat was accepted by many people in order to avoid further conflict, to reduce the financial burden and to escape overexploitation by the local rulers. The second phase of the Arabic conquest was realized by the Muslim merchants and missionaries, and ended soon after until the

[47] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 21.
[48] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* pp. 73-75. The author's accounts here are mainly based on H. A. R. Gibb's *The Arab Conquest in Central Asia* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1923).
[49] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 21.

middle of the 10th century. Those people exposed the Central Asians to Islam along the trade routes, in particular the Silk Road. Haghayeghi indicates that during this second phase, Islam finally assumed the dominant status among the region's other faiths and religions.[50]

Although direct rule by the Arabs lasted only for a short time (as the Arab conquest came to an end in the middle of the 8th century[51]), the advance of Islam and Islamic culture proceeded apace under Persian Samanids, who established a strong empire between 874 and 999 in Central Asia with its capital at Bukhara. They came from Balkh to enforce Hanafi Sunnism, which was regarded as a rigorous form of Islam at that time. The enforcement of this sect by the Persian Samanids was perhaps stimulated by Buddhism, which was also prevalent in the region at that time.[52] According to Olaf Caroe, the influence of Buddhism on Islam, which supplanted it with the arrival of Samanids, was strong and that the name 'Bukhara', which became the capital of Muslim Samanid Empire, is of a Sanskrit origin. Thus, he suggests that,

> …In the Hindu Kush, not far South of the rim, the great idols of Bamian, hewn in the rock, still stands to attract the strength which Buddhism once had on the southern fringe of Turan, and it has been suggested that the prevalence of theological schools (*medreses*) in Bukhara and other Turkish cities is to be explained as a relic of Buddhist influence. The Sanskrit word *vihara* means a monastery, and the name Bukhara is probably derived from it.[53]

With a well-organized army and bureaucracy the Samanids regulated and expanded the Silk Road, spreading the Persian language and making Bukhara a trade, transport, and cultural center of Islamic world.[54] Central Asia became a center of learning. In

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[50] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, pp. 73-75.
[51] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia*, Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, New York – Washington, 1964, p. 22.
[52] Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire*, pp. 49-50.
[53] Ibid., p. 50.
[54] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 21.

the oases regions of Central Asia, particularly in Khorezm and Bukhara, Arabic influence left behind a rich intellectual legacy. The great Central Asian scholars such as Al Khwarezmi, Abu Rai Raihan Al Biruni and Abu Ali Ibn Sina, produced their works in the region.[55] These luminaries ensured that the Samanid rule would leave an indelible mark on the development of the Persian language and culture, and importance that would not be eroded in Central Asia for centuries.[56]

By the end of the 10th century the Samanid dynasty of Persia was regarded as the north-eastern frontier of the Islamic world. To the north lay the land of Turks, nomads, who has not yet accepted Islam but were beginning to enter into cultural relations with the Persians.[57]

Historically, there was an essential difference between the settled cultivators and townsmen of the scattered oases of Transoxania and the nomads of the northern and the western steppe in the way these diverse populations responded to Islam. As we shall further observe, the formerly nomadic peoples tended to regard Islam more as a loose cultural affiliation rather than as a way of life governed by a set of teachings and precepts. As such, religious fanaticism that had taken root in southern parts was alien to their tradition.[58] As was indicated by Olaf Caroe,

> A sedentary oasis population is peculiarly prone to the excesses of a morose clericalism, such as flourished in Transoxania at least as long as the early part of the present century. On the other hand, the nomads of the steppe – the successors of the Mongol *ulus* or hordes, themselves not Islamized for the best part of a century after Chingiz Khan – naturally sit lightly to establish orthodoxy or indeed to congregational worship of any kind. It is easy to simplify and the margins are blurred, but it is true in the broad to say that one of the essential differences of Persian and Turk is visible in the attitude of

[55] Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States: Discovering Independence*, Westview Press, 1997, p. 29.
[56] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 21.
[57] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History*, p. 22.
[58] Shirin Akiner, *Central Asia: New Arc of Crisis?*, pp. 38-39.

> each to religion – an excessive formalism susceptible to the fanatical appeal, set against an easy nonchalance which may indeed recognize the immanence of God, but sees him more clearly upon the mountain than within the mosque.[59]

2.1.3 The Turkic Period

The Samanid Empire came to an end in 999 with the arrival of a new wave of Turkic tribes. According to Geoffrey Wheeler, the year 999 is a historical landmark of considerable importance because from that year on and until the arrival of the Russians (except the two brief intervals following the invasion by the Karakitays in 1125 and the Mongols in 1220), Central Asia remained under predominantly Turkic Muslim rulers.[60] The Ghaznavids took over Khorasan, the Karakhanids captured Bukhara, and later Seljuks arrived to defeat them and conquer Central Asia and Turkey. By the middle of the 11th century, the Seljuk troops were standing outside the gates of Baghdad. For the next two hundred years the Seljuks ruled the area from the Pamir Mountains as well as the borders from China to Iraq. This was the first time that the region was under Turkic hegemony.[61]

By the beginning of the 12th century, most of the area of Central Asia could be described as Muslim, although Islamic influence was less on the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz.[62] By the middle of the 12th century the Karakhanids were overthrown by the Buddhist Kara-Kitays, who ruled over the territory of Central Asia until the end of the 13th century. They were probably of Mongolian origin, but although being nomads they had absorbed Chinese culture to a much greater extent than other nomadic invaders. However, unlike the Mongols, they never embraced Islam. At the

[59] Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire,* p. 35.
[60] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History*, p. 23.
[61] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, pp. 21-22.
[62] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History*, p. 25.

beginning they were successful in submitting their Muslim vassals, but eventually they came into conflict with the rulers of Khorezm, together with whom they were overrun by the Mongols in the early 13th century.[63]

The role of Sufism which found a fertile soil for its expression and development in Central Asia from 12th century on was very important in the process if Islamization of native region. In fact, Sufism was responsible for more moderate and liberal orientation of Islamic belief in the region, thus making it distinct from more strident forms of Islamic expression practiced in other parts of Islamic world[64].

2.1.4 The Mongol Period and the Timurid Dynasty

The Buddhist Mongols were the next to sweep through the territory of Central Asia in the 13th century. Under Chingiz Khan the Mongols captured Bukhara in 1220 and killed thirty thousand people in retribution for 450 Mongol merchants murdered by the Seljuks in 1218.[65] It should, however, be noted that the general perception that Mongols were brutal devastating invaders who destroyed everything on their way, showing disrespect to whatever culture and religion, and thus, leaving a long-lasting negative imprint in Central Asia, should not be overestimated. According to Geoffrey Wheeler, the notion of 'Mongol hordes' pouring into Central Asia and settling there is quite mistaken. The vast majority of the Mongols remained in Mongolia, where Chingiz Khan himself returned after military operations were over.[66] What they did was that they changed the balance of power between the nomad and settled regions,

[63] Ibid.
[64] A more detailed account on Sufism will be provided under the sub-heading 'Parallel Islam' later in this chapter.
[65] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad* p. 22.
[66] Geoffrey Wheeler, The Modern History, p. 23.

bringing the Turkic nomad element of the steppes to the towns.[67] Soon after the Mongol state was established in Central Asia, the Mongols themselves would assimilate with Turks, embracing their language, culture and religion. According to Geoffrey Wheeler, the Turkification of the Mongol rulers appears to have started very early after the establishment of the Mongol rule, much earlier than their conversion to Islam. Chingiz Khan's second son, Chaghatay, who ruled over Transoxania after Chingiz himself left, was a resolute enemy of Islam. According to him, it is possible, that the Mongols adopted Muslim culture some time before they embraced Islam, which did not become fashionable until about the middle of the 14th century, when the Mongol empire was already breaking up.[68]

What is remarkable is that under the Mongols the Silk Road which had broken down as a result of incessant invasions was reconstructed: the rest houses along the way were built and a postal service instituted. It was possible for caravans to travel in safety from Istanbul to present-day Beijing.[69]

The unity that Mongol political control brought to Central Asia paved the way for the growth of commerce that took place during the two succeeding centuries. According to Gregory Gleason, it was only after the establishment of the *pax Mongolica* that trade began to flourish richly along Central Asia's Great Silk Road.[70]

A descendant of Chingiz Khan, Timur (Tamerlane)[71] created the first indigenous empire in Central Asia.[72] Timur was born near Samarkand and made it his capital in

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[67] Ibid., p. 24.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad,* p. 22.
[70] Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States*, p. 30.
[71] Ibid., p. 31.
[72] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 22.

1369[73]. During his reign, Turkistan was brought under one ruler and his expeditions ranged over a huge area stretching from Yelets in Russia to Kucha in Sinkiang and from Izmir to Delhi.[74] His main achievement was breaking down the tribal and clan structure and creating an overarching loyalty to one leader, by subordinating the tribal hierarchy to the centralized command structure.[75]

Although he was a great conqueror, Timur's expeditions were not entirely destructive. It was under his rule that Samarkand became one of the greatest architectural marvels of the world, for Timur brought in artisans and architects from all the conquered regions. During his reign, the region had become established as the center for Turkic influence in Central Asia and of resistance to Persian cultural and political domination. He even replaced Persian with the Chagatay dialect of Turkish as the court language.[76] Finally, Timur is a good example of how the Mongol civilization was absorbed by the Turkish civilization. According to Olaf Caroe:

> …the Mongol civilization was absorbed by the Turkic civilization in Transoxania, just as it was absorbed by the higher culture of China and Russia. The name of Chagatay, the second son of the Mongol Chingiz, even became that of the literary Turkic language of the Eastern Turks, and less than two centuries later, Timur himself, belonging to a tribe of Mongol origin, had become in all essentials a Turk.[77]

Under Timur the nomadic Turks have increasingly been embracing the Islamic tradition which was strong among sedentarized populations which he conquered. His conquests resulted not only in assimilation of the Mongols by the Turkic civilization, but also in assimilation of Turks themselves by the Islamic civilization. According to Olaf Caroe, Timur was the great assimilator, and although he was the conqueror,

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[73]Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?* Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 82.
[74] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History,* p. 24.
[75] Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 85.
[76] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 23.
[77] Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire,* p. 36.

he initiated the process of adaptation of Turkic culture to the traditions of Islam, bringing about a synthesis of Turkic prowess with Arab-Persian civilization: "Timur, having conquered, set aside his barbarities, and aimed at the ennoblement of the Turkish political tradition by infusing it with the stream of Islamic thought, in his time modern".[78] What is also notable about Timur is that he was a follower of Sufi Naqshbandi order, which flourished during his reign.[79]

Timur's grandson, Ulughbek (1394-1449), one of the exceptional Turkic-Mongol leaders being not only a ruler but also a scientist, was the last of the Timurid rulers in Central Asia. During his time there was a genuine flourishing of the arts and sciences in Samarkand and Bukhara.[80] For example, he constructed an observatory that was superior to all other observatories in the world until the twentieth century.[81]

Thus, the Mongol period is regarded as crucial in the history of Central Asia as it was a time of intermingling and assimilation of different cultures and traditions. As a result of Mongol conquest, Mongol tribes and rulers, in spite of representing a formidable power of rule, eventually were assimilated with the Turks, embracing their language, culture and religion. Furthermore, nomadic Turks and Turkified Mongols as a result of further thrusts, came increasingly into contact with sedentarized populations of oases and conquered such important centers of Islamic civilization as Samarkand and Bukhara. The effect of this contact was further assimilation of the nomads with town-dwellers and eventual embracement of Islam as the religion of their own.

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[78] Ibid., p. 63.
[79] Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 85.
[80] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History* pp. 24-25.
[81] Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States* p. 31.

Although Mongol rulers and warriors spoke Mongol, they brought in their waves large numbers of Turkic-speaking populations. Moreover, Turkic vernacular became the dominant language as a result of destruction by nomads of the Arabic and Persian centers of learning and commerce. What is essential is that even as the Turkic languages gained popular ascendancy, the cultural tradition of Islam, left as a legacy by the Arabs, proved more enduring than the weak cultural affiliations of the Turks and Mongols[82].

At the same time, even though great and lasting the effect of Islam on Central Asia was, the effect of the Mongol conquest and the Timurid dynasty which followed it, should also not be underestimated. The combination of elements of the Turko-Mongolian political and military system, with elements of Muslim tradition, and a legacy of Arab and Persian culture was very critical.[83] It can be concluded that the Mongol period in the history of Central Asia is closely associated with fusion of the Turkic tradition with that of the Islamic tradition in a process of mutual assimilation.[84]

2.1.5 The Post-Mongol Period

2.1.5.1 Central Asia under Turkifized Chingizid Rulers

At the beginning of the 16th century Uzbeks, who traced their genealogy back to Uzbek Khan, a grandson of Chingiz Khan, invaded Central Asia from the North-East under Shaibani Khan, defeated the Timurids and set up their capital at Bukhara.[85] Although the Shaibani Uzbeks may have been less cultured than the Timurids, they

[82] Ibid., p. 30.
[83] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History,* p. 25.
[84] Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States,* p. 30.
[85] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad,* p. 23.

still promoted the native cultural progress. For example, under Shaibani rule Turkic (Uzbek) language[86] and a rich native historical literature flourished, whereas the historians of the Timurids mainly came from Persia.[87] The great Uzbek poet Ali Şir Nevayi (1441-1501), who created the first Turkic script that replaced Persian,[88] wrote at this time. Also, some buildings erected by the Shaibanids were scarcely inferior to those built under Timur and Ulughbek.[89]

It is interesting to note at this point, that if the Mongol and later Turkic periods of rule in Central Asia had eventually brought about the integration of the territory of Central Asia and its population, first sedentary and later nomadic, into a broader Islamic world, the next period in its history may be viewed as the reversal of this process. The next period in the history of Central Asia is characterized by its relative isolation from rather than integration into the broader Muslim world, now known as the Middle East.[90] This tendency had been stimulated by the growth of Shiism in Safavid Persia in the 16th century, causing a theological disparity between Sunni Transoxania and Shi'a Persia, and consequently considerably reducing the Persian domination over religious issues in Central Asia.[91,92]

Another reason for partial isolation of Transoxania from the rest of the Muslim world and relative decadence of Islam in the region, was caused by the decline of the Great Silk Road, which connected Central Asia with the Middle and Far East since the

[86] Ibid.
[87] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History,* p. 25.
[88] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad,* p. 23.
[89] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History*, p. 25.
[90] Ibid., p. 29.
[91] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad,* p. 29.
[92] The main ideological belief of Shi'ites is based on major disagreement with the Sunnis over the question of succession after the death of Prophet Muhammad. Shi'ites believe that Ali ibn Abu Talib is a legitimate third heir after the Prophet, whereas Sunni Muslims argue that Ali is the 4th ruler after Abu Bakr. This fundamental dispute has so far prevented the development of any religious solidarity between the two.

second century BC.[93] With the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope (on the southern rim of Africa) in 1497 by a Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama on his way from Lisbon to India,[94] and the formation of British, Dutch and French companies a century later, the trade along caravan routes through Turkistan also faded.[95] Turkistan was no longer a center of power and commerce as caravan trade routes were now succeeded by maritime ones. Similarly, the Islamic tradition, which remained the only common bond, keeping Turkistan together was also in decline. As Olaf Caroe has indicated,

> Once the through routes were empty to traffic, the only remaining attraction keeping Turkistan within a southern orbit was the gravitational pull of a common Islamic tradition. Even this began to weaken as communications broke down. Religious and cultural bonds began to snap, and local religions to spring up.[96]

2.1.6. The Tsarist Conquest

After the fall of the Timurid empires in Central Asia and the Safavid dynasty in Iran, the area from the Tigris–Euphrates to the Altai mountains broke into a number of relatively small states, compared to the empires that preceded them. In the 18th century, the region was characterized by the steady economic decline and by general instability deriving from several conflicts and wars waged between rulers of these fragmented territories.

The decline of the territorial empires of Asia coincided with European expansion and accumulation of colonies. The Russians, Central Asia's nearest neighbor, was attracted to this area by lure of reputed riches in cities along the former Silk Road. In

[93] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History*, p. 29.
[94] Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States,* p. 30.
[95] Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire,* p. 27.
[96] Ibid., p. 28.

addition, from a geographical point of view Central Asian routes northwards were relatively free of obstacles. Consequently, the balance of trade had shifted to northward direction and this new relationship acquired major economic significance. When the American Civil War (1861-1865) cut off vital cotton supplies to Russian factories, the urge to conquer Central Asia was inevitable. The move of the Russians to Central Asia was at the same time stimulated by the gains of the British in the Indian subcontinent in the 19th century. This competition appeared to be more urgent after the defeat of Russians in the Crimean War (1854-1856), when Russia set out more concrete plans to capture as much of Central Asia as possible.[97]

The conquest of Central Asia by the Russian Empire began in the mid-19th century and lasted until the early 20th century, when the Soviets succeeded to the area. After the conquest of Kazan in 1552 and Astrakhan the following year, The Tsarist Russia began its imperial thrust eastwards and southwards, incorporating one after another new Muslim territories.

The expansion of the Russians to the steppe began in the 18th century, when Peter the Great invaded the area and began building Russian forts, among which the first was at Omsk in 1716.[98] By the mid-18th century the Kazakh khans, who saw the Russians as their best protectors against the raids of marauding Uzbeks, had all signed treaties with Moscow.[99]

By the time of the Russian advance Islam had little influence over the social and legal structures of nomadic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, whose social relations were based on clan system – union of a number of families. Islam reached the nomadic tribes of

[97] Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States,* p. 33.
[98] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 24.
[99] Ibid.

the steppe and mountain regions relatively late and as such did not change either social or legal systems of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz at large. The main effect of Islam upon the tribal societies was on their culture. But even here it was strictly limited by the conditions of nomadic life. The Kazakhs and Kyrgyz of the steppe were converted to Islam in the late 18th and early 19th century by the Volga Tatar Muslim merchants, thanks to policies of Catherine II of Russia, who hoped that Islam would moderate these populations and make them more receptive to the expansionist policies of the Tsarist Empire. She allowed the Tatars to represent her court in Transoxanian trade. On the way, the merchants were encouraged to form settlements and convert nomads. Even today, the Kazakh and Kyrgyz retain much of their pre-Islamic way of life including mastery of horse, drinking kumis and extensive personal independence of women, so characteristic of nomadic societies.[100] As Shirin Akiner has indicated, at this time Islam had only superficial significance upon the population of steppes and mountains. Later, in the 19th century, it gained a stronger hold but among these nomadic tribes of the northeast Islam "was never practiced with the same degree of orthodoxy as amongst the settled peoples of oasis belt".[101] As Geoffrey Wheeler has indicated,

> During the early stages of the Russian advance into the Steppe Region [from where the Russians had started their expansion to the whole of Central Asia] Russian Government regarded Islam as a stabilizing and pacifying influence, and actually ordered the building of mosques in the Kazakh Steppe.[102]

On the eve of the Russian advance in 1860, the densely inhabited oases of Turkistan were divided into the Khanates of Khiva and Kokand, and the Emirate of Bukhara,

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[100] Source: H. B. Paksoy, "Nationality or Religion? Views of Central Asian Islam", from http://www.ku.edu/carrie/texts/carrie_books/paksoy-6cae02.html

[101] Shirin Akiner, "Post-Soviet Central Asia: Past is Prologue", in *The New Central Asia and its Neighbors*, ed. by Peter Ferdinand, The Royal Institute of Internal Affairs, Pinter Publishers, London, 1994, p. 9.

[102] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History*, p. 186.

ruled by the khan or emir. The population structure of the three principalities was despotic in nature[103] and rulers were running highly oppressive and totalitarian states.[104] As the economy along the old Silk Roads declined, these impoverished khans survived by slave trade and by imposition of heavy taxes on the population.[105]

Russian troops captured Tashkent in 1865 and Samarkand in 1868.[106] In 1867, General Constantin von Kaufman was appointed the first Governor-General of Turkistan.[107] He succeeded in extending the Tsarist administrative control over most of Turkistan territories. The nomadic population of northern Turkistan was exposed to taxation and other purposes of the new administration. In the southern regions Kaufman was met with opposition and hostility by the religious establishment whose livelihoods was severely affected by these transformations. To this end, he skillfully approached the Tashkent elite through a series of diplomatic actions, in which he implied obedience as well as protection against the despotic rule of the khan. As a result, by 1868 his administrative control was established over these native subjects too.[108] The Emirate of Bukhara became a Russian Protectorate in 1868, followed by Khiva in 1873. In 1876 the Khanate of Kokand was annexed.[109] Tashkent was made the capital of the new governor-generalship of Turkistan.[110]

General von Kaufman ruled Turkistan from 1867 to 1881 as Governor-General.[111] The core of his policy toward native subjects was formulated by Catherinean frontier

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[103] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 2.
[104] Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 86.
[105] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 23.
[106] Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 86.
[107] Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States,* p. 33.
[108] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 4
[109] Shirin Akiner, *"Post-Soviet Central Asia"*, p. 10.
[110] Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 86.
[111] Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca: the Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917 – 1941*, Praeger – Westport – Connecticut – London, 2001, p. 6.

policy, within which all religions deserved to be recognized and tolerated, and not persecuted. Muslim laws and religious practices were to be respected in order to establish an effective imperial rule over Muslim subjects. Religious tolerance for him, as it was for Catherine II, was a matter of political significance. Kaufman himself was a firm proponent of secularism and had little regard for any religion, including Orthodox Christianity.[112] With regard to Islam in Turkistan, however, he chose neither to persecute Islam nor to protect it. According to him "the Muslim faith in Turkestan will henceforth be tolerated but not protected".[113] Under him, public institutions and leaders were weakened. His major concern was not to allow Muslim solidarity between Muslims across Russian territories. His policy was conducted in such a way that he was able to combine progressive colonial policies of Catherine II and to break apart the solidarity of the Muslim community.[114] Kaufman did not interfere directly with religious observance but did all he could to minimize the authority of Muslim dignitaries. He thought that this way Islam would eventually wither away.[115] In general, indifference was his formula with regard to Islam. Overall, despite important economic and political changes brought by Tsarist administration in the late 19th early 20th centuries, the regime did not try to change (unlike the Bolsheviks) the traditional social structure of local populations of Central Asia. Although the Tsarist rule wanted to weaken Islam in the region, it attempted to do this by ignoring rather than directly attacking religion.[116]

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[112] Daniel Brower, "Islam and Ethnicity: Russian Colonial Policy in Turkestan", in *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, ed. by Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1997, p. 120.
[113] Quoted in Daniel Brower , "Islam and Ethnicity", p. 120.
[114] Daniel Brower, "Islam and Ethnicity", p. 120.
[115] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History*, p. 187.
[116] William Fierman, "The Soviet 'Transformation' of Central Asia" in *Soviet Central Asia: the Failed Transformation*, ed. by William Fierman, Westview Press, Boulder - San Francisco – Oxford, 1991, p. 13.

Russians brought industrialization to the region, in order to exploit the newly acquired territories. So, they started to build canals for irrigation, railroads and telegraph lines. The first irrigation canal was started in 1874, and the transportation rail line was built in 1881.[117] A large wave of Russian settlers arrived via this newly constructed line. Cotton had become an important commodity for trade and was exported to Russia also through this railroad, and introduction of its long-staple type in 1880s put the economy of Turkistan on a cash basis, creating conditions for appearance of merchants as highly influential urban class.[118] It was in the interest of this new mercantile bourgeoisie to be more and more involved with the Russians, and to absorb their culture and language in order to improve their economic wealth.

Motivated primarily by economic imperatives, this process of industrialization with concomitant economic changes took place with little concern for the needs of local farmers. The effects of the newly introduced cash crop economy, imposition of heavy taxes, lack of experience with usury and share-cropping, and corruption of the local elite, were disastrous for ordinary peasants. Under such conditions it was natural that protests against the Russian domination emerged, first in 1885 in the form of sporadic rural riots, in the cotton-rich Ferghana, and culminating in the anti-Russian Andijan mass revolt in 1898, backed by the Sufi Naqshbandi order. The leader of the Naqshbandi order Dukchi Ishan organized attacks against the Russians in the cities of Andijan, Osh and Margelan. Although the revolt was suppressed and Dukchi himself executed, the Russians were astonished by the fact that such an act could have taken place while they were totally unaware. [119] Because the revolt was masterminded by a religious leader, this action is usually described as a form of

[117] Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca*, p. 8.
[118] Ibid., p. 10.
[119] Ibid., pp. 10-11 and 16-18.

Islamic resistance to Russian domination. In fact, however, this resistance was not a religious war against unbelievers, but was a protest against worsened conditions into which the ordinary masses found themselves as a result of changes imposed from outside. As Shoshana Keller has put it,

> Turkistani peasants were protesting for reasons familiar from many peasant cultures confronting industrialization: impoverishment and lack of control over rapid change. Because the agents of their misery were Russian infidels, it was natural for the protests to take on a decidedly religious cast.[120]

In the aftermath of the Andijan revolt the Russians revised their policy towards the local population. They realized that their lack of knowledge of Turkistani life and their deliberate ignorance of Islam resulted in the worst possible approach to the establishment of an effective imperial rule over Muslims of Central Asia. As a result, Governor-General Vrevskii under whom the revolt had taken place, was recalled and replaced by S, M. Dukhovskoy,[121] whose program was aimed at increasing mutual knowledge of Russian and local cultures through education of Turkistani youth. Dukhovskoy announced that Kaufman's policy based on indifference was no longer applicable under such conditions in which there was an upsurge in Turkistan of 'fanatical' Islam against the Russians. As he stated "the further disregard of Islam is not only undesirable, it is impossible",[122] so a revision of policy was necessary.

As a result of Russian colonization, by the beginning of the 20th century the region of Central Asia was transformed into a supplier of raw materials. Industrialization and Russian settlement policies had, however, a devastating effect on local population, such as insufficient food production, economic decline and impoverishment.[123] Increased taxes and deliberate expropriation of wheat from the region caused a

[120] Ibid., p. 16.
[121] Ibid., p. 18.
[122] Quoted in Daniel Brower in "Islam and Ethnicity", p. 132.
[123] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 9.

massive famine. When the Tsarist administration issued a decree in 1916 that required drafting of Central Asian population for the efforts of World War I, the response to this decree as well as to other Tsarist policies had taken a form of massive rebellion that engulfed almost the whole region of Central Asia. The revolt was initiated by Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads, who refused to fight for the Russians in Europe, but quickly swept through the rest of the region.[124] This rebellion, however, was put down by Tsarist forces as it was the case with previous revolts. Although it was suppressed quickly, it had left tens of thousands of dead and wounded. In putting down this rebellion, the Russian forces were aided by Cossack army, which carried out reprisals in the Tien-Shan Mountains against the Kyrgyz, by killing their stocks of animals, destroying their homes and thus forcing them to flee across the border in large numbers.[125] The 1916 rebellion was the last response to the Tsarist regime and although it was quickly suppressed, it had awakened a strong anti-Russian feeling among the local populations. Once again, Islam was utilized as a potent anti-colonial instrument. The event of 1916 in no way reflected the Russian attitude toward Islam, but according to some scholars it "undoubtedly aroused Muslim religious fanaticism directed against the Russians".[126] For the Russians the outcome of the rebellion was the realization of the volatility of the situation which demanded reformulation of the main policy line toward Central Asia. The Bolsheviks would rely considerably on this experience, and their approach to region, at least in the beginning, was more or less cautious and accommodating, as compared to that of their Tsarist predecessors.[127]

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[124] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad.*, p. 25.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History,* p. 188.
[127] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, pp. 9-10.

2.1.7 The Jadid Movement

The Islamic resistance to the Russian occupation in Central Asia had also found its expression in the form of the Jadid movement, which took its name from the Muslim reformers active in Samarkand and Bukhara. Their method of teaching was called *usul-i-Jadid* (the new method) in contrast to the *usul-i-Qadim* (the old method) of the *maktab* and *medrese* that was prevalent among the Muslims of Russia at the end of the 19th century.[128] The father of this movement was a Tatar reformer from Crimea, Ismail Bay Gaspirali (1851-1914), founder of the influential Tatar-language newspaper *Tercuman*, through which he suggested that all Turks should unite under a common literary language and culture and resist the ossification of Tsarism and mullahs. The goal of this movement was to reform Islam and seek in varying degrees to reconcile the problems associated with exposure to Western modernism with Muslim religion and culture.[129] Religious and educational reform were the major undertakings upon which this movement embarked on in Central Asia.[130]

The key points of the Jadidist message, as formulated by Gaspirali, included among other things redefinition of education by adopting analytical and critical thinking; incorporation of changes in the attitude of the faithful towards religion with the idea of progress, as opposed to the stagnant worldview which glorified only the past; encouragement of cultural borrowing from non-Islamic civilizations as well as reliance on Russia with the aim of achieving cultural synthesis; strengthening community sense among Muslims, emphasizing not only religious ties but also

[128] Mobin Shorish, "Back to Jadidism: Turkistani Education after the Fall of the USSR", *Islamic Studies,* Vol. 33, Summer – Autumn 1994, p. 161.
[129] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 30.
[130] Helene Carrere d'Encausse, *Islam and the Russian Empire: Reform and Revolution in Central Asia*, University of California Press, Berkley – Los Angeles – London, 1988, p. 78

feeling of common linguistic and ethnic affiliation within Islamic context placing human beings more in logical than divine scheme; and rededicating pious endowments (*waqf*) to social purposes (in particular education). His modern pedagogical curriculum envisaged inclusion of scientific disciplines, such as history, geography, mathematics, languages as well as subjects supporting the moral upbringing of children. An intention was also to move the role of women from marginal to more central status in society through extensive promotion of education among female population. The Jadids wanted a clearing away with such traditional restrictions placed on women such as veiling and inequitable practices associated with divorce and polygamy.[131]

The Jadid movement sought a new, independent Turkistan, free of both Russian rule and the old conservative, despotic, and corrupt religious establishment. The Jadids, or Young Bukharans as they were also called, saw Turkey as a model for a modern Muslim state. They organized secret societies where they met to discuss new ideas coming from Europe and Turkey. Jadids went to study in Istanbul and on their return set up schools in order to disseminate modern ideas. They strived to revive the Turkic languages and develop a modern Turkic culture. For the first time they analyzed local history, culture and politics in a modern way through the literature they generated and through public gatherings they organized. By 1916, 40,000 pupils in Samarkand district alone were attending schools run by Jadids and more than a dozen of newspapers and journals were being issued by Jadids.[132] Through their public appeals in front of the emir of Bukhara and the Russians they demanded

[131] Edward J. Lazzerini, "The Jadid Response to Pressure for Change in the Modern Age" in *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*, ed. by Jo-Ann Gross, Durham – London, Duke University Press, 1992, pp. 161-163.
[132] Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 88.

reform of education and an end to the power of the mullahs. One of the most distinguished figures of Jadid movement in Bukhara, a poet and reformer Abd ul-Rauf Fitrat openly denounced the clergy, whom he considered responsible for the spiritual decline of his country. He accused the mullahs for their corrupt practices, their debauchery and their utter lack of religion, who deliberately held the people of Bukhara in ignorance in order to retain their privileged positions and better dominate them. He criticized the official clergy for being entirely unreceptive to the modern world and for ignoring all branches of knowledge through their idleness and distorted interpretations of Islamic rules.[133]

The eventual vision of the Jadid argument was that the old elites should give way to a new elite – the Jadids, who would lead the people to an enlightened and purified Islamic culture. At the same time, in their aspirations to purify Islam, the Jadids saw Islam itself as a self-contained system of knowledge, in which one can discern the roots of an indigenous tradition of secularism.[134]

Within this context, the term 'pure Islam' had its own unique interpretation for the Jadids. For them, 'pure' Islam was synonymous with progress and civilization, achieved through knowledge. As Adeeb Khalid has pointed out, for Jadids,

> ... purified Islam was based on rational interpretation of the scriptural texts, the prerequisite of which was mastery of 'contemporary' or modern knowledge. Knowledge, indeed, became the panacea for all ills of society and faith. It was knowledge that made nations strong and wealthy, and allowed them to embark on the path to progress.[135]

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[133] A detailed account on Fitrat's works *Munazara* (The Discussion), *Tales of an Indian Traveller*, and others, in which he expresses his views is given by Helene Carrere d'Encausse in her work *Islam and the Russian Empire: Reform and Revolution in Central Asia*, University of California Press, Berkley – Los Angeles – London, 1988, pp. 105-112.

[134] Adeeb Khalid, "Reform and Contention in Central Asian Islam: A Historical Perspective", from http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav022400.shtml

[135] Ibid.

Although these reformist tendencies of the Jadid movement were stimulated by externally imposed challenges, such as Russian conquest, without which there would be no space for Jadid activity, its followers believed that the causes of Islam's spiritual decline were of internal origin. For them, their movement was clearly a movement of change from within. The debate among Jadid circles was internal reinterpretation of Islam so as to accommodate it to new circumstances.[136]

The idea of 'nation' figured prominently in Jadid discourse, which envisioned a single, unified Muslim Turkistani nation that would be distinct from Tatars, Armenians and Jews around them for the first time. This nation was not pan-Turkic or even pan-Islamic, as the exclusion of Tatars shows, but was bounded by both geographic and religious differences. As Khalid asserts, the origins of contemporary Uzbek, Tajik, Kyrgyz and other nations in the region lie not in the Soviet-imposed decrees but in these Jadidist pre-Revolutionary debates.[137]

The idea of modernism advocated by the Jadids brought them into conflict with both the Russians and *ulema*. For their part, the Russians, who considered the Jadids reactionary and obscurantist, had encouraged the *ulema* to continue their practice of conservative interpretations of Islam in order to counter the anti-Russian Islamic and nationalist sentiments. About the attitude of the Russians towards the Jadids Mehrdad Haghayeghi has this to say:

> The Russian strategy was to defeat the movement by supporting the traditional clergy who were adamantly against the reformist tendencies of the *jadid* movement. The logic of the Tsarist action stemmed from the overriding principle that any meaningful cultural change should be in the direction of Russification rather than a modification of the existing Islamic culture.[138]

[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 9.

Given such conditions, when the Jadids of Central Asia were strongly despised by the Russians, it was therefore natural that the Jadids rendered their support to the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution, who adopted, at least initially, more accommodating and reconciliatory approach than their Tsarist predecessors.

During the first years of the Bolshevik rule many Turkistani leaders, who were Jadids, (Faizulla Khojaev, Hamza, Abd ul-Rauf Fitrat), saw the new regime as the best chance for realizing their ideas, because the modernizing goals of the Jadids were in harmony with some parts of the Bolshevik program. When the emir of Bukhara entered into an alliance with the White Army officers for a struggle against the Red Army and the Jadids, the latter began to gravitate towards the Tashkent Soviet, which was established not long before as the center of Bolshevik attempts to spread the revolution to Central Asia. After the Bolsheviks destroyed the Emirate of Bukhara with the arrival of General Frunze and his Red Army troops, the so-called Peoples' Republic of Bukhara was formed with an alliance of the Jadids and the Bolsheviks. Many Jadids supported the Bolsheviks during the anti-Russian Basmachi uprising, which began in 1918 in the Ferghana Valley, believing that the Basmachi were a reactionary force led by mullahs.[139] As the 1920s ended, however, it became clear that the Bolsheviks were not in any position to share Jadid's interests.

The period of greatest activity of the Jadid movement was from 1905 to 1917. Although their pace was slowed down with the arrival of the Bolsheviks, however, they continued to be active well into the late 1930s when Stalin's repressions reached its peak. During the purges, many former Jadids, who later became communists, were accused of treason and executed subsequently. For example, Faizulla Khojaev,

[139] Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, pp. 88-89.

who resisted the cotton monoculture imposed by Moscow on the Uzbek economy and further partition of Uzbekistan, was accused of treason in. He was charged with alleged contacts with British agents and was executed after the trial.[140] Fitrat was executed in 1938 for defending his convictions about Central Asian literary identity.[141] Munawwar Qari, Cholpan, Qadiri, Haji Muin and Ubaydullah Khodjaev perished in the Gulag in the 1930s.[142] Among Jadids of Central Asia, only Ayni died of natural causes, the rest being either killed or forced to perish in prisons and camps by the regime.[143]

2.2 Soviet Period

2.2.1 Soviet Religious Policy

Before the establishment of the Soviet rule in Central Asia, the Islamic proclivity among Muslims of the nomadic tradition – Kyrgyz, Kazakhs and Turkmen – was much weaker as compared to the historically sedentarized communities of Uzbeks and Tajiks. As such, the former societies were "far less orthodox in their beliefs and practices"[144] than the latter ones. The overwhelming majority of Central Asian Muslim population (with the exception of a numerically small Isma'ili in Pamir mountains) were adherents of Sunni tradition of the Hanafi School, noted for its moderate form of expression of faith and liberal orientation. The founder of Hanafi School – Abu Hanifeh ibn Zuta (699-767) – advocated a more tolerant use of

[140] Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, pp. 90-91.
[141] Edward Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks: From the Forteenth Century to Present*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, California, 1990, p. 228.
[142] Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, University of California Pres, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 1998, p. 300.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Shirin Akiner, "Post-Soviet Central Asia", p. 20.

analogy (*qyias*), public consensus (*ijma*), and personal opinion (*ra'y*) in administration and interpretation of Islamic principles.[145]

Despite the traditional division, for both sedentary and nomadic societies of Central Asia Islam was, as it still is, the main defining feature. Without any doubt, Islam was an integral part of the cultural identity of Central Asians. It was hardly possible to find a native Central Asian who would not identify himself as Muslim.[146] But when Islam was introduced to the social landscape of Central Asia in the 7th century, it was adopted to ethnic and tribal peculiarities of native communities that had shaped the life of the people in earlier centuries.[147] Under the specific conditions of Central Asia Islam was redefined as a form of cultural defense and represented a symbolic link with the world of their forefathers. Native people of Central Asia, whose genetic heritage was linked to its land for centuries, would almost without exception identify themselves as Muslims. According to them, Islam was both tradition and heritage, and therefore a way of life rather than a set of laws. And although Islam found its way into the region through military means, it had a lasting imprint not as a creed with organized political objectives, but simply as a way of life.[148] In other words, in Central Asia religion found its expression in symbolic observance of rituals and ceremonies linked to the rites of passage, or the so-called life-cycle rituals such as birth, death, marriage, etc. In performing these rites, it was not as important how correctly they were performed according to the rules of Islam. Nevertheless, these rites were revered, because they had been incorporated into their lives as traditional

[145] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, "*Islamic Revival"*, p. 251.
[146] Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States,* p. 170.
[147] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, "*Islamic Revival"*, p. 251.
[148] Ibid.

proceedings, and therefore accompanied every aspect of their lives. As Shirin Akiner pointed out,

> The ritual may not have been correctly performed, it may not have been understood, and it may not even have been Islamic (all traditional practices were assumed to be Islamic), but the perception was that it was 'right', that it imparted dignity and legitimacy to the proceedings.[149]

Islam reflected the living practice of the religion among ordinary people in the areas where it was strong, as well as in the areas where it was weak. As such, it was above all manifested in the texture of society, the family structure, and the accepted rules of interpersonal behavior.[150]

When the Soviet rule was established in Central Asia in 1918, the new regime had to have a more consistent and solid policy for Islam, which was probably the most important identity for the Central Asian people.

The approach of the Bolshevik leaders towards religious issues, as in other issues, rested basically upon the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Theoretical approach of Leninism to religion was based on Marxist anti-religious framework, which emphasized religion's exploitative function. For both Lenin and Marx, the fight against religion was synonymous with the class struggle against capitalism and exploitation in Russia. In dealing with religion Lenin wrote:

> Religion is one of the forms of spiritual oppression which everywhere weighs down heavily upon the masses of the people, overburdened by their perpetual work for others, by want and isolation. Impotence of the exploited classes in their struggle against the exploiters just as inevitably gives rise to the belief in a better life after death as impotence of savage in his battle with nature gives rise to belief in gods, devils, miracles and the like. Those who toil and live in want all their lives are taught by religion to be submissive and patient while on earth, and to take comfort in hope of a heavenly reward… Religion is the opium for the people. Religion is a sort of spiritual booze in which the slaves

[149] Shirin Akiner, "Post-Soviet Central Asia", p. 20.
[150] Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States,* p. 170.

> of capital drown their human image, their demand for a life more or less worthy of man.[151]

Lenin's thought on religion was in that it could not be allowed to flourish under a socialist framework. His anti-religious design, however, was focused, first and foremost, on the Russian Orthodox Church, which was openly hostile towards Bolsheviks. Islam also became the target of some criticism, but for a number of pragmatic and tactical reasons, suppression of Islam proceeded more slowly than that of Church.[152] Before they could attack Islam directly, the Bolsheviks needed to win support from millions of non-Russians in the former Tsarist empire to strengthen their position in newly gained territories. For them, it was quite inexpedient to reject Islam when their power had not yet been consolidated, because for the majority of Central Asians Islam was the main indicator of identity. Keeping in mind the failures in dealings with native population of their Tsarist predecessors, such as the 1916 revolt, the Bolsheviks had to compromise on many fronts, including religion in order to transform society. Although Lenin himself advocated a hostile stance toward religion,[153] in dealing with Islam he modified his approach. In trying to justify the establishment and consolidation of the Soviet rule, he strongly condemned the excesses of Tsarist imperialism and mistreatment of subject peoples. In exchange, he offered a completely different treatment based on equality, freedom of conscience and sovereignty.[154] Although Lenin's thought on religion was that it cannot flourish under socialism, he believed that when the oppressed peoples "were 'liberated' either with or without Soviet assistance, they would naturally and quickly gravitate towards

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[151] Quoted in Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995, p. 13.
[152] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 14.
[153] Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca*, p. 48.
[154] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History,* p. 99.

a Marxist form of socialism".[155] It was, therefore, decided not to eradicate religion completely, because it would be impossible to do so right from the beginning, but to allow its moderate expression, to co-opt it with a vision that under developed communism religion would eventually wither away. Thus, at the initial stage Lenin's modified approach was formulated in the Declaration issued by the Council of People's Commissars in 1917, which granted a number of concessions, including the right of equality and sovereignty of all people, the right of self-determination and even secession. This Declaration was followed by a Manifesto specially addressed to 'All toiling Mohammedans in Russia and the East', which also gave Muslims the freedom to practice Islam:

> Mohammedans of Russia, Tatars of the Volga and Crimea, Kirghiz and Sarts of Turkistan, Turks and Tatars of Transcaucasia, all those whose mosques and prayer-houses were destroyed and whose religion and customs were trampled upon by the Russian Tsars and tyrants! Henceforth your faith and customs, your national and cultural institution are proclaimed free and inviolable. Build up your national life freely and unhindered. This is your right.[156]

Soon after, the Quran of Uthman, which had previously been confiscated, was returned to Muslims as a gesture of good will.[157]

Still, the religious institutions of Muslim community in Central Asia were subject to anti-religious policies and restrictions imposed by the new Soviet government on all religious activity. Deriving from the Marxist belief that religion was an obstacle to modernization and social development, a campaign was launched against all religious institutions, including Muslim ones.

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[155] Ibid., p. 121.
[156] Olaf Caroe, *Soviet Empire*, p. 105.
[157] Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca*, p. 62.

When Tashkent Soviet was created in 1917 to ensure consolidation of Bolshevik power in Central Asia, members of local Muslim community were totally excluded from it, despite the willingness of some members of *ulema*, headed by Shir Ali Lapin to collaborate with the Bolsheviks.[158] Moreover, Lenin's modified approach, which intended to avoid harsh treatment of the Muslims, was hard to materialize in reality due to physical remoteness and lack of communication between the center and periphery.[159] In response to the exclusion of Muslims from power, an Extraordinary all-Muslim Conference was soon summoned to demand autonomy within Soviet federated Russia. But these demands were ignored once more and Russian military forces were stationed in Tashkent. When the third Congress of Soviets convened in November 1917 in order to formulate the foundations of Soviet power in Turkistan, the congress expressed strong opposition to Central Asian participation in government.[160] During the Congress, Kolesov - President of the Turkistan Council of People's Commissars – resolutely stated that:

> It is impossible to let the Muslims in the revolutionary government at this time, because the attitude of the local population toward the authority of the Soviets is doubtful, and because the indigenous population has no proletarian organizations which the (Bolshevik) groups could welcome into the highest organs of the regional government.[161]

The supposedly accommodating approach towards Muslims didn't prevent, however, the center from formulating its anti-religious propaganda. In parallel to what was happening in Tashkent, the center was laying down the legal framework for the religious activity. The first law on religion, 'On the Separation of Church and State'

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[158]Helene Carrere d'Encausse, "Civil War and New Governments", in *Central Asia: A Century of Russian Rule*, ed. by Edward Allworth, Colombia University Press, New York & London, 1967, pp. 224-225.
[159] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 17.
[160] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History,* p. 104.
[161] *Quoted in* G. Safarov, *Kolonial'naia revoliutsiia, opyt Turkestana*, Moscow, Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1921, p. 70, double quoted by Carrere d'Encausse, *"Civil War and New Governments",* in *CentralAsia: A Century of Russian Rule*, ed. by Edward Allworth, Colombia University Press, New York & London, 1967, p. 225.

was issued in 1918.[162] The law demanded closing down Shari'a courts and religious schools and confiscation of religious endowment lands *(waqf)*[163] and also reduction of religious officiating over the life-cycle rites such as birth, death and marriage.[164]

One of the most serious consequences of Soviet policies in Turkistan was the Basmachi revolt that began in 1918. It was a form of fierce resistance to the establishment of the Soviet rule that prevented political participation and local autonomy. By 1924 the revolt had weakened, but continued in Ferghana Valley until 1928.[165] The term 'Basmachi', which was associated with banditry, was used derogatively by the Soviets in order to underscore the subversive nature of the insurgency, but the rebels called themselves Qurbashi, which was a name for a local night watchman, responsible for curfew the previous century.[166] The revolt is often referred to as religious movement, as it involved some Sufis,[167] but in fact the resistance was a clear indication of dissatisfaction of the Central Asians with the new order, deriving from mistreatment by the new rule, exacerbated by famine and impoverishment.[168]

After the Basmachi uprising was suppressed, the earlier policy of the Tashkent Soviet regarding the admission of Muslims into the Communist Party was reversed and the Central Asian Muslim Commissariat (Muskom) was established in 1918.[169] In 1919 a special Commission for Turkistan Affairs (Turkkomissiia) was created in

[162] Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca*, p. 50.
[163] Ghoncheh Tazmini, *"The Islamic Revival"*, p. 64.
[164] Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca*, p. 50.
[165] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 17.
[166] Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca*, p. 47.
[167] Ghoncheh Tazmini, *"The Islamic Revival"*, p. 64.
[168] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History,* p. 107.
[169] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 19.

order to stop the excesses of the local Russian 'revolutionaries'.[170] As a part of reconciliatory approach in 1922 the Politburo ordered the return of the confiscated religious land and recognition of Muslim court.[171] Now the strategy was "to co-opt and assimilate the Muslim Communist sympathizers into the party structure through a system of sanctions and incentives".[172] Some Communists began to portray Islam as a revolutionary doctrine which did not contradict Communism. According to Alexei Malashenko, a relative peaceful coexistence of Islam and Communism was possible because both ideologies had many concepts in common. For example, both Communism and Islam placed collective weal above individual and in both systems power was embodies in a strong ideological or spiritual leader.[173]

Similarly, some Muslims also embraced Communism. A Kazan born Tatar Mir Said Sultan Galiev was the inspirator of setting up a Muslim Communist Party, first in the Tatar lands and later in all Muslim Turkic lands of Russia and Central Asia. He modified and adapted the Marxist theory to the needs of Asiatic society.[174] His program incorporated "the progressive adaptation of traditional structures to the new regime".[175] In carrying out this program, Sultan Galiev insisted on the creation of Muslim Communist Party, participating in the Russian Communist Party on federal basis and also on national cultural autonomy for the Turks of Russia.[176] He had a Muslim background, but he was a dedicated Marxist. As such, his focus was not on

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[170] William Fierman, "The Soviet 'Transformation'", p. 16.
[171] Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca*, pp. 47-48.
[172] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 19.
[173] Alexei Malashenko, "Islam versus Communism: the Experience of Coexistence" in *Russia's Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross-cultural Analysis*, ed. by Dale F. Eickelman, Indiana University pres, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1993, p. 63.
[174] Alexandre Bennigsen, "Sultan Galiev: the USSR and the Colonial Revolution" in *The Nationality Question in the Soviet Union*, ed. by Gail W. Lapidus, New York & London, Garland Publishing, 1992, p. 401.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid., pp. 406-407.

the preservation of the Islamic religion, but on preservation of Islamic society and culture[177] within which the Revolution would be successful. As Sultan Galiev frequently stated, the anti-religious propaganda should be postponed, because when the activities of the Communist Party were expanded and the administrative and economic activities of Muslims were empowered, Islam would naturally lose its hold on society.

In Central Asia the vision of Sultan Galiev on the creation of the separate Muslim Communist Party was reinforced by some local Communists such as Turar Ryskulov, Nizametdin Khojaev, and Mukhitdinov. Adopting a slogan that 'East is not West, Muslims are not Russians' which was pronounced by some Muslim Communists during the Congress of Peoples of the East on September 20, 1920,[178] they demanded the creation of the Turkic Communist Party in 1920. Although for a brief period, such a demand was satisfied in 1920 and these people would conduct their activities within this party for several more years.[179]

Taking into consideration the mistakes of the Tashkent Soviet, the outcomes of the Basmachi event and the suggestions made by Sultan Galiev about rethinking Lenin's tactics, the regime decided to delay the implementation of anti-Islamic campaign until 1923-24,[180] and in an attempt to redeem its trust among the Muslims, the confiscated *waqf* property was returned, mosques and Islamic schools were reopened and the practice of the Shari'a law was resumed.[181] However, after 1923, when the

[177] Alexandre Bennigsen, Enders S. Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonia World,* The University of Chicago Pres, Chicago & London, 1979, p. 50.
[178] Ibid., p. 48.
[179] Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca*, p. 56.
[180] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* pp. 14-15.
[181] Ibid.

Bolsheviks won the civil war against the Whites, and when order was restored, Lenin resumed his anti-religious strategy.[182] Through a number of decrees and laws the institutional organization and financial autonomy of the clerical establishment, as well as clerical power structure had all become subject to attack. For example, the practice of Muslim customs such as polygamy and bridal payment (*kalym*), were outlawed,[183] *waqf* property was confiscated, and the legal status of Shari'a and Adat Courts was invalidated.[184]

When Stalin came to power, the Soviet attempt to undermine all religions, including Islam, was further intensified. The number of mosques and prayer-houses was sharply reduced from 26,279 to 1,312 by 1942. 14,000 mosques and religious schools were closed in Central Asia. The clergy also became a target of persecution as their numbers drastically fell from 45,339 to 8,872 for the whole of the Soviet Union.[185] This was accompanied by the action called *hujum* (the assault) on women to liberate them from veil, polygamy, bridal payment and other traditional practices. In late 1920s, in order to destroy the power of Islam completely as a social and political force, the party replaced the Arabic and Persian script by a new Latin alphabet for Turkic-speaking people of the USSR.[186] As for Stalin, the elimination of 'outward' attributes of Islam was important, three of the five pillars of Islam – the payment of the *zakat* (alms), the *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca, and the observation of

[182] Ghoncheh Tazmini, *"The Islamic Revival"*, p. 64.
[183] Note: many of traditional practices, including *kalym* (bride-price), *kaytarma* (retention of the bride until *kalym* had been paid, and *amengerstvo* *becoming of a woman the wife of his dead husband's brother) which were popular among nomads, had nothing to do with Islam, but were regarded by Soviets as Islamic in nature and attributed them to manifestations of backwardness and as such as a hindrance to progress. See Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History of Central Asia*, p. 183.
[184] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 20.
[185] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 23.
[186] Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca*, p. xv.

the fast of Ramadan – were outlawed.[187] Thus, the campaign against Islam greatly intensified during the first Five Year Plan (1927-1933), when crude propaganda and violence were widely used to fight religion and 'emancipate' women from veils and many traditional family roles.[188]

As a part of this renewed anti-religious campaign, Stalin set out the cleansing of the Communist Party from the residues of the so-called nationalist deviationists. People like Sultan Galiev of Tatarstan and Akmal Ikramov of Uzbekistan were considered dangerous and reactionary for their thinking, which conflicted with their own ideology. Stalin's nationality policy and his anti-religious campaign were closely connected to each other. When it became clear that local Muslim leaders of Communists Parties in the newly formed Soviet Socialist Central Asian republics were firm in defending both nationalist and Muslim cause, Stalin set out his purges at full. In 1932, Central Asian elites began to be consumed by his purges, which culminated in the 1937-38 trials. There were many executions of prominent Muslim Communist leaders during these two years.[189] Practically all heads of local Communist Parties were exposed to repression, arrest, and execution. For example, in Uzbekistan Fayzullah Khodzhayev, who held the position of the Prime Minister, was accused of having buried his brother according to Muslim customs and Akmal Ikramov – Secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party – was accused of being a nationalist. Both men were arrested and found guilty on a number of additional charges and were executed in 1938.[190] The clergy, too, were accused of and severely punished for collaboration with national deviationists, sabotaging the collectivization

[187] Shirin Akiner, *Political and Economic Trends in Central Asia*, London: British Academic Press, 1994, p. 176
[188] William Fierman, "The Soviet 'Transformation'", p. 27.
[189] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 26.
[190] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History,* p. 142.

campaign and practicing the ritual of circumcision.[191] This high level of anti-Islamic propaganda was maintained throughout the rest of the period until the World War II.

2.2.2 Official Islam

During the World War II it was decided by the Soviet authorities that a special board dealing with the religious affairs of the soviet Muslims should be established. At this time a somewhat more accommodating policy towards Islam was adopted by the authorities in order to facilitate the strategic issue of mobilizing the military work force from the periphery. During and after the World War II four Muslim Spiritual Directorates were created in the USSR, each located in a geographically suitable area. For Central Asia, it was the Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM), based in Uzbek capital Tashkent in October 1943. It was the most important Directorate among others because in Central Asia 75 percent of all Soviet Muslims resided. The official language of the Directorate was Uzbek. The Directorate was represented in each of the five Turkistani republics by a *kaziyat* (delegation).[192] Ishan Babakhan Abdumajitkhanov was elected as the Mufti of SADUM,[193] and together with the vice-chairman Zia al-Din Babakhanov, he conducted sermons in which he called the population of Central Asia to participate in the war.[194] Control over Spiritual Directorates was assumed by the Council for the

[191] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 26.
[192] Alexandre Bennigsen and S. E. Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide*, London: Hurst & Company, 1985, p. 15.
[193] Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union From the Second World War to Gorbachev*, Hurst & Company, London, 2000**,** pp. 104-105.
[194] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 27.

Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC), created in 1944 and was accountable to the Council of Ministers of the USSR.[195]

The creation of SADUM was among the most significant shifts in the Soviet policy toward Islam, because previously all the religious institutions were banned and closed.[196] As a part of this revised policy, the repression of Islam and the Muslim clergy almost ceased and a number of previously banned Islamic customs and rites were allowed to be practiced. For example, the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) was resumed, partly in order to demonstrate to the Muslim countries the freedom enjoyed by Soviet Muslims. Other Islamic practices such as Islamic income tax (*zakat*), the Ramadan fast, Friday prayer and daily prayer (*salat*) were to some extent allowed to be observed.[197] Even though the creation of Muslim Spiritual Directorates was motivated by need in military manpower, it helped, although temporarily, to revitalize the religious activities of believers.

From the state's perspective, the major task of these Directorates was to coordinate and guide the segments of religious life revolving around the functioning mosques, registered mullahs and officially recognized religious communities.[198] The membership and recruitment were tightly controlled by the center. Among the responsibilities of the Directorates was the appointment of the Mufti of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan as well as the Qadi of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. It was no secret that in order to move up the ranks of the board, the members were to

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[195] Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History,* p. 191.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 27.
[198] Azade-Ayse Rorlich, "Islam and Atheism: Dynamic Tension in Central Asia" in *Soviet Central Asia: the Failed Transformation,* ed. by William Fierman, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991, p. 188.

support, albeit tacitly the official policies of the Soviet government.[199] Under the Soviet legislation, any kind of religious activity outside the working mosques was illegal and strictly forbidden. All Muslim clerics must have been registered with the Directorates and the Council for Religious Affairs of the country. Furthermore, they were paid and nominated by the Directorates. Unofficial clerics were branded as 'parasites' and hunted down for performing various religious rites.[200] The registered clergy were basically controlled and supervised directly by the Soviet regime, and they were by definition identified with the Soviet state.[201]

Thus, the role of the official Islamic establishment was to control and curb Islam rather than to promote its development. Instead of adopting harsh anti-religious policies, the state would have to settle for close control of religion through the 'official' clergy, while maintaining pressure against 'unofficial' religious observance. The rationale behind which the Spiritual Directorates were created, was in that such an official institution was to ensure Islamic conformity and loyalty to the regime. The primary consideration of the officially appointed clergy was, in fact, to ensure active participation of Muslims in the 'socialist construction' and to encourage the 'patriotic activity' among the Muslim population. Through a number of organized *kurultays*, clergy would "call upon believers to fulfill their obligations to the state".[202] In one of his numerous public speeches Ziautdin Babakhanov stated:

> Islam is an active adherent of the construction of socialism and communism in our country. The Spiritual Directorate of Muslims, indeed all the leaders of the religious organizations of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, see their chief

[199] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 67.
[200] Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, p. 16.
[201] Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, p. 385.
[202] Ibid., p. 112.

> assignment as carrying for people's moral improvement and guiding Muslims on the path of Islam and Socialism.[203]

On their part, the Spiritual Directorates were aware that their patriotic position would enable them to get increasingly in touch with the Muslim world, from which Soviet Muslims were isolated since the prewar times. Such contacts became possible when the World Peace Movement was established in late 1940s and early 1950s, in which Soviet religious leaders played a considerable role.[204] Soviet leadership was now to make use of the Directorates in order to increase Soviet prestige and influence in the Muslim World. The victory over the Nazi Germany boosted the international image of the USSR, especially among the peoples of the Third World. Soviet leaders began to perceive the national liberation of various Asian and African peoples as the first phase of socialist revolution there. From the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, the USSR supported the liberation movements in Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, and contributed extensively to assist them in building socialist mode of life. As a result of such activity, Soviet military presence was established in Egypt in 1955, and pro-Soviet regimes were established in Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Syria, Libya and South Yemen in 1960s.[205] On the attractiveness of Soviet Central Asia as a model for other Muslim states to follow, Wheeler wrote in 1954:

> There is another innovation in the methods which the Soviet Government is using to implement its policy towards Asian countries, This is the greatly increased use of the eastern, largely Muslim, republics of the USSR as a shop window with which to impress the outside world with Soviet achievements in areas which have many affinities with under-developed countries in the Middle East and South-Asia… in their standard of living, in general and technical education, and in industry and agriculture they are far ahead of many independent eastern countries… hardly a day goes by but what some

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[203] Quoted in Nagman Ashirov in *Evolutsiia Islama v SSSR*, Moscow: Politizdat, 1972, p. 77, double-quoted by Yaacov Ro'i in *Islam in the Soviet Union From the Second World War to Gorbachev*, Hurst & Company, London, 2000**,** p. 150.
[204] Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union***,** p. 39.
[205] Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey*, Palgrave, 2002, p. 125.

> delegation from the Arab countries, from Pakistan and from Indonesia, is present in Central Asia… and it would be foolish to suppose that the delegation are not impressed, if only because they have been told by the Western propaganda that conditions in Soviet Asia are deplorable.[206]

The importance of the Islamic factor in the national-liberation movement in Africa and Asia forced Soviet leaders to moderate their official position on Islam. Therefore, some of the Islamic practices, that would convey to outsiders the impressions of a normally functioning Islam in Soviet Union, were encouraged. For example, a small number of believers were allowed to perform pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in 1944 and 1945, and the Journal of the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, later renamed *Muslims of the Soviet East,* was allowed to be published in 1940s. [207] Also two religious seminaries (medreses), the Mir Arab Seminary in Bukhara and Babak-Khan Medrese in Tashkent were reopened in 1946 and in 1956 respectively.[208]

In the meantime, however, anti-religious propaganda did not entirely cease. Atheistic propaganda, which had halted during the war period, was resumed right after the war on the grounds that "religion was going from strength to strengths" and that "the success of religion was due first and foremost to neglect of the propaganda front".[209] This propaganda was enforced through indoctrination of the "natural-scientific knowledge among the population", through the activities of "an *activ* of propagandists, comprising lectures, teachers, agronomists and doctors".[210] As part of a larger anti-religious propaganda, the number of practicing mosques and *medreses*

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[206] Quoted in Will Myer in *Islam and Colonialism: Western Perspectives on Soviet Asia*, RoutledgeCurzon, London & New York, 2002, p. 18.
[207] Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union***,** pp. 172 and 167.
[208] Ibid., p. 163.
[209] Ibid., p. 36.
[210] Ibid.

was reduced once again. Muslim holy places of worship were either destroyed or converted to museums of atheism, anti-religious circles or poorly maintained tourist attractions.[211] During the last years of Stalin's rule there was a clear move to close down the prayer houses and to deprive associations of registration.[212] Mehrdad Haghayeghi summarized the Soviet religious policy under Stalin during and after the World War II as the following:

> Stalin saw no contradiction in pursing an anti-religious propaganda policy on the one hand, and allowing a limited government-sponsored Islamic revival on the other. After all, he was chiefly motivated by his foreign policy concerns in the Muslim World, for which his Spiritual Directorates and official clergy seemed to have erected a somewhat perfect façade to mask the realities of Soviet religious life.[213]

When Nikita Khrushchev came to power in 1954, a period of relative liberalization between 1955 and 1958 would emerge as a part of his de-Stalinization campaign, which aimed to eliminate some of the harsh policies.[214] Again, such liberalization did not mean that anti-religious propaganda subsided. It simply differed from Stalin's harsh treatment of religion, under which Islam was severely repressed and clergy executed. According to Khrushchev, propaganda should be directed against religious ideology and not against the clergy. At the same time, Soviet leadership was concerned with the degree of religious revival that occurred during the war and feared that it may get out of control, and subsequently challenge the Communist ideology. To this end, a number of decrees were issued by Soviet authorities. In November 1954 a resolution entitled 'On Errors in the Conduct of Scientific-Atheistic Propaganda among the People' was issued. It focused on the need to rely

[211] Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States,* p. 171.
[212] Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union***,** p. 24.
[213] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 28.
[214] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 39.

primarily on scientific explanations of nature of society and condemned the abusive way in which anti-religious campaign was carried out previously.[215]

After 1958 and until his fall in 1964 Khrushchev adopted the hard-line approach, as can bee seen from the nature of decrees issued after 1958. In October 1958 a resolution on enhancing atheistic work among the population and in November – 'On terminating pilgrimage to so-called 'holy places'' were issued.[216] In 1962 a proposal to bring the practice of religious rites under criminal liability was approved and in 1964 the activity aimed at replacing religious rites with secular ones was started.[217]

Although initially his attitude toward religion was relatively moderate, "Khrushchev's building of communism could clearly not tolerate any compromise with religion as one of the most 'reactionary' and 'backward' holdovers from capitalism".[218] Even when religious relaxation would take place, it was, for Khrushchev, as it had been previously for Stalin, done to address an audience abroad rather than for domestic considerations since the appearance of the 'Islamic factor' in Soviet foreign policy.[219] On the international level, Soviet Islam could serve as a model for other countries to follow in their anti-capitalist liberation movements. But on domestic level Islam was still feared as of having a potential of being used by reactionary forces to undermine the Soviet state.[220]

With Khrushchev's displacement in 1964, the anti-religious campaign assumed a less hostile character. Thus, when Brezhnev came to power, the Soviet leadership

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[215] Mehrdad Haghayeghi in *Islam and Politics,* p. 30.
[216] Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union***,** p. 43.
[217] Ibid., p. 47.
[218] Ibid., p. 41.
[219] Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders S. Wimbush*., Soviet Strategy and Islam*, London, Macmillan, 1989, p. 29.
[220] John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, Palgrave, 1999, p. 90.

considerably loosened its firm hold on religious activity. It did not, however, mean that anti-religious propaganda was completely terminated. Under Brezhnev the leadership did not show any particular concern with religious issues, but propaganda continued in the form of regular party and government resolutions, that was a part of general ideological work. Little was done to change the nature of anti-religious propaganda. For example, the 1977 Brezhnev Constitution changed the nature of anti-religious propaganda only slightly, by replacing the phrase 'freedom of anti-religious propaganda' with 'freedom of atheistic propaganda',[221] which promised guaranteeing, rather than merely recognizing freedom of conscience. Like it was under the early years of Khrushchev, initially Brezhnev decided to focus more heavily on socialist and atheistic education, especially among the youth, rather than attacking religion directly. Within the framework of this 'not-so-new' approach, it was argued that,

> …the basic efforts should be concentrated on the steady reduction of the reproduction of religiousness among the new generations of Soviet society. This is why it is necessary to improve in every way the atheist education in family and school, show special attention to children from religious families, and seek the most lively, emotion-packed and aesthetical forms of anti-religious propaganda among children, teenagers and young people. [222]

One of the most significant signs of change in Soviet policy regarding Islam at that time was related to the traditional approach that derogated Islam as a reactionary force used for the spiritual oppression of the peoples of the East. Under Brezhnev the 'progressive' nature of Islam was emphasized and religion was praised as part of the

[221] Mehrdad Haghayeghi in *Islam and Politics,* p. 35.
[222] Bohdan Bociurkiw, "Religion in the USSR after Khrushchev", in *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev and Kosygin: The Transition Years*, ed. by John W. Strong, New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1971, p. 139.

anti-colonial ideology. Subsequently, compatibility of Islam with Marxism was further recognized.[223]

The change in the religious policy also derived from the Communist Party's interpretation that Soviet society had evolved into a stage of 'mature socialism'. According to the concept of 'mature socialism', Soviet socialist society was no longer vulnerable to any form of anti-Communist ideology, including religion. To this end, it was recognized that Islam was totally integrated within the Soviet system and therefore, no longer posed a threat to the Communist regime.[224]

After the Islamic Revolution broke out in Iran in 1979, the relatively stable relations between the Soviet authorities and Islam were somewhat undermined. In response to the events in Iran, the Soviets decided to strengthen security and law-enforcement in Central Asian republics. This was mainly because of their proximity to Iran, which would supposedly destabilize the entire region by potential foreign ideological subversion. Therefore, security forces were stationed and KGB presence was substantially increased both within the republics and along the borders with Iran and Afghanistan. In addition to that, propaganda activity was resumed across Central Asia and a number of articles appeared in the press criticizing both Islam and ineffectiveness of atheistic education and propaganda.[225] At the same time, however, the revolutionary movement itself was characterized as anti-imperialist and it therefore was welcomed as progressive.[226] Following the Iranian Revolution, a number of conferences were held in the USSR in order to demonstrate the accommodating orientation of the Soviet regime with respect to Islam. For example,

[223] Mehrdad Haghayeghi in *Islam and Politics,* p. 35.
[224] Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam,* p. 130.
[225] Mehrdad Haghayeghi in *Islam and Politics,* pp. 36-37.
[226] Ibid., p. 35.

the tenth anniversary of the publication of *Muslims of the Soviet East* was celebrated during the first conference, held in 1979. The second one, held in 1980, was organized to celebrate the 15th century of *Higra*.[227]

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 had further strained the relations between Soviet regime and the Islamic republics of the USSR. Many Soviet soldiers of Muslim origin were sent to Afghanistan to fight against local *mujahedin* (Islamic warriors) for the Soviet cause in its confrontation with the West. In contrast to the situation during World War II (when most of Islamic leadership supported mobilization of Muslims to fight against the Germans), the reaction to involvement of the USSR in the Afghan war was different. In spite of the fact that Spiritual Directorates officially supported Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, in practice the majority of Muslims responded negatively to it.[228] Shortly after the war had started, close ties were established and 'widespread fraternization' took place between Soviet Muslim soldiers and local population of Afghanistan. As a result of such contacts, many soldiers proved unwilling to fight for the Soviets and changed sides by joining *mujahedin*. Consequently, the loyalty of Central Asian soldiers was questioned and the majority of them were called back and replaced mainly by Slavs.[229] This particular case had revealed the sobering reality for Soviet leadership that despite long-term efforts to eradicate and influence Islam, it remained a strong force, capable of posing a threat to the Soviet regime. As Pınar Akçalı has indicated, the impact of Afghan war and the involvement of Soviets Muslims in it had shown that Islam, as a 'common bond' between Muslims on both sides of the border, played a crucial role

[227] Ibid., pp. 35-36.
[228] Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam,* p. 131.
[229] Pınar Akçalı, "Islam as a 'common bond' in Central Asia: Islamic Renaissance Party and the Afghan mujahidin", *Central Asian Survey*, 17(2), 1998, p. 275.

in bringing them closer, despite a persistent and systematic attack to undermine the position and modify the nature of Islam.[230]

The Soviet Afghan war on Central Asia rekindled Islamic sentiments among its populations. The Soviet authorities were quick to respond by tightening their control over religious activity and a number of resolutions were passed in 1981 and 1983 that called for reinvigoration of atheistic propaganda aimed at the Islamic community of the Soviet Union.[231]

In spite of the fact that Soviet atheistic propaganda was not reduced under Brezhnev, the regime tolerated widespread observance of many practices generally associated with Islam. During this time local party officials could be the members of the CPSU and at the same time participate in religious ceremonies. They could even support construction of local mosques and 'tea-houses' that served religious purposes.[232] Many officials in Central Asia would not hesitate to show their allegiance to Islam and would "demonstrate their religiosity after their retirement".[233] Moreover, the collaboration between official and unofficial Islam increased after Stalin and continued well into the Gorbachev era. In theory the two were mutually antagonistic, as the former denounced the unregistered clergy to the secular authorities, and the latter criticized the Spiritual Directorates as Soviet agents. Yet, there were many instances of cooperation between the two versions of Islam. Unregistered clergy attended registered mosques and even made contributions for their upkeep, and they would come to the Spiritual Directorates for advice on some specific issues regarding Islamic law and practice. The official clergy, for their part, often sought to bring

[230] Ibid., p. 282.
[231] Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam,* p. 132.
[232] William Fierman, "The Soviet 'Transformation'", p. 27.
[233] Alexei Malashenko, "Islam versus Communism", p. 65.

underground mullahs and groups under their tutelage.[234] For example, in the Bukhara oblast in Uzbekistan, representatives of official clergy entertained close links with unregistered clergy by giving them instructions on the correct conduct of religious activity and mass-prayers among the population. In the Osh oblast in Kyrgyzstan, the registered clergy would often accept donations given to unofficial clergy. In response, they would grant unregistered groups privileges in form of income tax exemptions for these moneys.[235] A clear example of interaction of official and unofficial Islam was seen in the case of the first postwar mufti of SADUM, Ishan Babakhan ibn Abdul Mejid Khan (1943-57), who was a Naqshbandi murshid, as was his son Ziautdin Babakhanov, who succeeded his father in this post in 1957 and remained the mufti until 1982.[236] As Alexandre Bennigsen had pointed out, "the official Islamic establishment never attacked Sufism directly but only picked away at some of its less subtle aspects... For their part the Sufis never ... attacked the official Islamic establishment".[237]

This ambiguous and contradictory policy continued until the era of Gorbachev.

In general, the Soviet official religious policy between 1917 and the 1980s, has an ambiguous and contradictory nature. During this time Islam was, by turns, severely repressed, cautiously compromised, repressed again, and finally, reluctantly recognized. This ambiguity derives from the ongoing tensions and irreconcilable ideological conflict between atheism and Islam. At the time of the World War II, when the Soviet leadership realized that religion was there to stay for the foreseeable

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[234] Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, p. 719.
[235] Ibid., pp. 267 and 269.
[236] Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union*, Hurst and Company, London, 1985, pp. 44-45.
[237] Ibid., p. 45.

future, it resolved the issue by creating an instrument from within the religious establishment in order to better contain and regulate Islam. One of the most important outcomes of Soviet official policy toward Islam was in that it contributed to the flexibility of Islam: in conditions of constant control, at times severe and at other times relaxed, Islam was to adapt to conditions of communism in order to survive. The Soviets managed for a time to subordinate Islam through an officially-sponsored religious establishment and allowed some of its manifestations within the framework of its own interests. Yet much of the traditional Islamic culture of Central Asia managed to survive through unofficial activity, forced by the regime to go underground. This was 'popular' or 'parallel' Islam which was kept alive by unofficial practitioners. It remained a crucial component of culture and the basic way of life of many Central Asians.

2.2.3 Parallel Islam

The extent to which Islam was allowed at official level was far less satisfactory for the religious needs of the believers. By initiating the process of official administration for controlling spiritual affairs, the authorities failed to eradicate the religiosity of Muslims. On the contrary, they had driven it deeper, forcing the adepts act clandestinely. At the beginning of the 20th century A. V. Lunacharsky quite fairly noted that "Religion is like a nail: the more you hit it, the deeper it goes in".[238]

During the Soviet period it was unofficial, or 'parallel' Islam, that kept religion alive. It was a phenomenon which developed underground as a reaction to the narrow limits of official Islam. It became quite popular and was actually more powerful than

[238] Quoted in Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 22.

official Islam and had a strong and numerous following. People would arrange religious teaching at their homes, come together and pray at night and visit shrines and tombs as sites of pilgrimage. Itinerant mullahs, who were not attached to any particular mosque, carried out essential Islamic rites from region to region, surviving through donations from the communities among whom they were highly venerated.[239]

The centers of 'parallel' Islam were shrines and underground mosques, which were concealed in non-religious public places such as clubs, *chaikhanas* (tea-houses), bakeries, etc. The number of unofficial mosques much exceeded the number of registered ones. In the 1980s, alongside 230 registered mosques there were at least 1800 unofficial mosques in Central Asia.[240] These mosques were guarded by unofficial mullahs, *pirs, shaykhs, ishans* and *khojas*, who conducted major Islamic rites.

An important aspect of 'parallel' Islam that pertains to the specific nature of Islamic expression in Central Asia was the prestige enjoyed by Sufi orders and the influence they exerted on its population. Sufism was an ideological ramification of the Islamic faith, which appeared soon after the establishment of Islam in reaction to the formal legalism of the dogma.[241] It was a mystical doctrine aimed at achieving personal union with God, through the journey on the path (*tariqa*) led by a spiritual master (*sheikh, pir, ishan*).[242] Sufism was a deeply individual, quiet expression of faith that needs no amenities for formal prayers or clerics to retain its essential spirit. Sufism is

[239] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 40; Jeff Haynes, *Religion in Global Politics*, London: Longman, 1998, p. 152; Azade-Ayse Rorlich, "Islam and Atheism", pp. 202-203.
[240] Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam,* p. 128.
[241] Azade-Ayse Rorlich, "Islam and Atheism", pp. 201-202.
[242] Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars*, p. 2.

also a belief in the power of saints, whose shrines number in hundreds throughout Central Asian holy places. It was also notable for being overtly tolerant of non-Islamic influences and divergence from strict commands of Quran and puritanical Islam. On the tolerant nature of Sufism, practiced in Central Asia Ahmed Rashid has this to say: "For centuries Sufism has been the most tolerant expression of Islam, incorporating Buddhist, Shaman and even Christian beliefs and it has helped mould the tolerance towards all religions that existed in Central Asia."[243]

Originally Sufism rose as an ascetic movement. During the 9th century's Arab Caliphate, numerous ascetics refused all earthly things, recognized not the outside, but the inner purity, despised luxury and wealth. In their views the quietism towards the surrounding world dominated.[244] Many scholars agree on the fact that asceticism, which was the defining characteristics of early Sufi missionaries, was borrowed from Christian spirituality. In particular, it is attested that the very word *sufi* has been seen as reflecting a Christian influence, being derived from the Arabic word for wool (*suf*), which was the characteristic clothing material of eastern Christian monks, and was adopted by the early mystics of Islam. On the origins of the word Sufism and its pertinence to asceticism, deriving from Christianity, Reynold Richolson has this to say:

> Noldeke in an article written 20 years ago, showed conclusively that the name was derived from *suf* (wool) and was originally applied to those Muslim ascetics who, in imitation of Christian hermits, clad themselves in coarse woolen garb as a sign of penitence and renunciation of worldly vanities.[245]

Similarly, Titus Burckhardt suggests that, *tasawwuf*, which means literally 'wearing wool' (*suf*) is the garment of pure wool worn by early Sufis, following the example

[243] Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 246.
[244] Source: Vyacheslav Hamisov, from http://www.assamblea.kg/em10_2_2.htm
[245] Reynold Richolson, *The Mystics of Islam*, Schocken Books, New York, 1975, p. 4.

of Jewish and Christian ascetics, who covered themselves in wool in imitation of St. John the Baptist, who was wearing the sheepskins in the desert.[246]

Sufi orders, which assimilated aspects of native religious traditions more readily than the dogmatic versions of Islam, played a major role in disseminating Islam in Central Asia. Given its tolerant nature towards other religions and pre-Islamic elements, Sufism in Central Asia was influenced by other religions and beliefs such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Shamanism. On the influence on Sufism of Zoroastrianism and Buddhism Laleh Bakhtiar says that:

> Zoroastrianism, the religion of ancient Iran, also influenced Sufism. The twin concepts of 'There is Law in Nature. There is Conflict in Nature' helped to develop the great Sufi cosmological themes. The Master of Illumination, Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, extended certain Zoroastrian ideas in his angelology of lights.[247]

Bakhtiar further indicates that Avicenna based his story "Salman and Absal" on stories about Buddha.[248] Similarly, Julian Baldick suggests some evidence of a direct influence from Central Asian shamanism upon Sufism, among which the use of the Sufi dance, which itself resembles the shamanistic practice, and the veneration of beauty are some examples attested among the Turks of Central Asia before they were converted to Islam.[249]

It is useful to note that the ideological framework of Sufism has been gradually changed in Central Asia. What we can see is that the ascetic trends which were the core of Sufi ideology at its inception phase, are much less pronounced in contemporary Central Asian context. As Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders Wimbush

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[246] Titus Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, Thorsons, 1995, p. 15 (footnote 1).
[247] Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sufi Expressions of the Mystic Quest*, Thames and Hudson, 1976, p. 7.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*, I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd Publishers, 1992, p. 21.

suggested, it is erroneous to compare 20th century Sufism with the early mystics of the 8th to 11th centuries. According to them, 20th century Sufism "is not monarchism, it does not reject the world, and has no ascetic trends".[250]

Another characteristic feature of Central Asian Sufism is that the role of women was very important in keeping religion alive right from the beginning. It was not only in sustaining Islamic traditions and culture at home, but also in serving, cleaning and maintaining the Sufi shrines, for people to gather and pray.[251] As Helene Carrere d'Encausse has indicated, "Sufism was also widespread among women, who attended the *zikr*, generally presided over by the wife of an *ishan*".[252]

Therefore, Central Asia, which was a frontier of the Islamic world and which faced non-Muslims nearly on all sides, became one of the most active areas of Sufi expression after the region was isolated from the rest of the Islamic world due to the reasons discussed earlier. It is useful to note, that Sufism became active among the formerly nomadic areas, where the tribal or clan system of society was (and still is) strong.[253] Central Asia offered a most fertile soil for Sufi expansion and even emerged as the birthplace of three of the most celebrated *tariqa*: the Kubrawi and Yasawi in the 12th and Naqshbandi in the 14th centuries.[254] In addition to these *tariqa*, Qadiri *tariqat* which originated in the 12th century in Baghdad was also influential in Central Asia.

The Kubrawi *tariqat* was founded in the 12th century in Khorezm by Najm al-Din Kubra (d. 1220), played an important role in the process of Islamization of nomadic

[250] Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars,* p. 47.
[251] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 41.
[252] Helene Carrere d'Encausse, *Islam and the Russian Empire*, p. 34.
[253] Alexandre Bennigsen*, Islam in the Soviet Union, General Presentation*, p. 10.
[254] Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars,* p. 3.

tribes of the Golden Horde. The Yasawi order was founded in the 12th century by the poet Ahmed Yasawi (d. 1166) in the city of Turkistan in present-day southern Kazakhstan. It also played a crucial role in converting the Turks of the steppes to Islam, but declined and became marginal after the founding of the Naqshbandi order. Today, 'Hairy Ishans', and Laachi branches of the Yasawi order are one of the most dynamic brotherhoods in Central Asia.[255] The Qadiri order was founded in the 12th century in Baghdad and was introduced to Central Asia during the 13th century.[256] Much later, after World War II, the deported Chechens and Ingush also kept the Qadiri belief alive in the region. The Naqshbandi order was founded in the 14th century by Bahauddin Naqshband (d. 1391) in Bukhara. It played a central role during the rule of Timurid and Shaibanid empires and later against the invasion of Buddhist Oirats in the 17th–18th centuries. Nearly all Central Asian poets were followers of this order: Alisher Navoi, Abdurrahman Jami, Mahtum Quli and Zelili.[257]

The defining feature of Sufi brotherhoods in Central Asia was that although Sufism incorporated many pre-Islamic elements, Sufis played the role of defenders of Islam, when it was threatened by non-Muslims. Thus, according to Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders Wimbush,

> In the 12th century, when for the first time in the history of the Muslim world Islam was threatened by infidel invaders – the Qarakhitai in the East, Crusaders in the West, Sufism swelled into a popular mass movement of organized brotherhoods of adepts, who were grouped around a master and bound by compulsory rulers which regimented every aspect of their life.[258]

[255] Ibid., p. 33
[256] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 27.
[257] Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars,* pp. 31-33.
[258] Ibid., p. 2

As was mentioned above, Sufism in Central Asia, among other things, has many elements from shamanism. This holds true especially for the northern regions. The absorption by Islam of nomadic tradition of shamanism gave rise to the heterodox practice, disseminated and supported by dervish orders of Sufi brotherhoods, known generally as 'parallel' or 'popular' Islam. The role of dervishes is still strong among formerly nomadic populations even today.[259]

In trying to place Sufism in Central Asia within the framework of Soviet Islam, Carrere d'Encausse also mentioned shamanistic influence:

> It is hardly possible in the current state of our understanding to place the brotherhoods within Soviet Islam. It seems, however, that if, in the region where *muridism*[260] was strong before the Revolution – the North Caucasus and Dagestan – the tariqa have maintained purely Muslim traditions, in Central Asia, where they were clearly decadent, they are getting closer and closer to Shamanism.[261]

The main aspect of Sufism throughout Central Asia was visit to the tombs or shrines of the 'Sufi saints'. Pilgrims traveled great distances to these shrines where they prayed for a recovery from diseases, fertility, prosperity or happy marriage. Sufis came to these holy places each year to perform their centuries-old rite of *chilla* - forty days of solitary meditation with just bread and water.[262] Some of the most important shrines of Sufi saints included the tomb of Bahauddin Naqshband; the shrine of Ahmed Yasawi; the tomb of Najm al-Din Kubra at Urgench, to name but few. The Solomon's Throne (Sulayman Gora) in Osh, southern Kyrgyzstan, was also

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[259] Giampaolo Capisani, *The Handbook of Central Asia: A Comprehensive Survey of New Republics*, I. B. Tauris Publishers, London – New York, 2000, p. 235.
[260] *Muridism* – conditional term used to define the national-liberation movement of high-landers of the Northern Caucasus against the Tsardom during the Caucasian War of 1817-64. It combined Sufism with active participation in *jihad* (Sourse: Soviet Encyclopedia, 1985, ed. by A. M. Prohorov, Third Edition, p. 849).
[261] Quoted in Will Myer, *Islam and Colonialism: Western Perspectives on Soviet Asia*, Routledge Curzon, London and New York, 2004, p. 142.
[262] Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, p. 246.

an outstanding monument of Sufi practice, considered by the inhabitants to be the second to the pilgrimage to Mecca, and gathering as many as 100, 000 pilgrims on some of the major festivals even at times when the Soviet anti-religious campaign was operating at full.[263]

The central element in Sufi ritual was performance of the *zikr* – a special kind of prayer, accompanied by peculiar breathing and physical movements. The *zikr* was a complicated and compulsory spiritual rule, performed by Sufi adepts (*murids*), which was preparing the adept for a state of strong mental concentration.[264] Depending on the *tariqat*, the *zikr* might be either loud or silent. The *zikr*, which would take place at least once a week, and also at special occasions, such as births, marriages, funerals, etc, was the most important element of Sufi expression.[265]

Because Sufism was a deeply personal and silent expression of faith, which did not require mosques, formal prayers and mullahs to retain its essential spirit, it kept Islam alive in Central Asia throughout its Islamic history. The ubiquitous presence of *ishans*, *sheikhs* and *murids* in areas of holy places, which attract large numbers of visitors shows how great their influence was upon the faithful.[266]

Thus, Sufism has made significant contributions to the spread of Islam and the development of various aspects of Islamic civilization (e.g., literature and calligraphy). Especially, after Central Asia entered a long period of isolation from the rest of the Islamic world following the decline of the Silk Road at the end of 15th

[263] Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union***,** pp. 95, 371-372.
[264] Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, "Muslim Religious Conservatism and Dissent in the USSR", *Religion in Communist Lands*, 6:3, autumn 1978, p. 155.
[265] Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, "Islam in the Soviet Muslim Republics" in *Islam and the State in World Today*, ed. by Olivier Carre, New Delhi: Manohar, 1989, p. 148.
[266] Azade-Ayse Rorlich, "Islam and Atheism", p. 203.

century and adoption by neighboring Iran of Shi'ite branch of Islam in the 16th century, Sufism assumed an important role of keeping religion alive. In other words, it enabled the Islamic tradition to continue, even in times of repression, while at the same time adding substantially to distinctiveness of Islam in Central Asia.

In Soviet literature the Sufi type of religion was generally described as 'ishanism' or 'muridism' and was associated with armed opposition to both Russian imperial rule and to the Soviet regime. One of the most violent armed resistances before the Bolshevik Revolution was led by a Naqshbandi ishan in 1898 in Andijan. After 1917 Sufis played a prominent role in the uprising of the Qurbashi (Basmachi). Because the *tariqa* were secret societies, into which an adept was accepted only after performing a long ritual of initiation and remained under the control of his master (*ishan, pir, murshid*), 'ishanism' and 'muridism' were regarded by Soviet authorities as 'sectarianism'. As such, Sufism was associated with backwardness and intellectual obscurantism, opposing all progressive change and was therefore accused of intolerant fanaticism. According to the Soviet line,

> Sufism represents the most reactionary trend in Islam. In Sufism religion takes the coarsest, the most primitive form of intellectual obscurantism. The Sufis practice the most brutal religious oppression. Sufism poisons the minds of our citizens with religious opium.[267]

Especially during Stalin's rule Sufism was not tolerated because it was regarded as intrinsically anti-Communist. It was vilified as extreme mystic manifestation of Islam, whose members led a 'parasitical' way of life, performed mysterious and ecstatic rituals in public and stirred up fanaticism.[268] Itinerant mullahs or *ishans* were an inalienable part of social structure in Central Asia and their presence during life-

[267] Quoted in Bennigsen, *Mystics and Commissars,* p. 99.
[268] Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union***,** p. 389.

cycle ceremonies was very important. In order to discredit their activity, Soviet officials denigrated them as opportunistic seekers of material gain who used religion for wealth accumulation. Many Sufi *ishans, pirs, shaykhs, ustadhes* and their *murids* were persecuted and repressed in the 1930s and the holy places where they gathered were secularized and transformed into places like museums, libraries, and cultural centers. Still some of the holy places survived and remained the centers of secret Sufi activities. For example, in southern Kyrgyzstan, in Osh, as many as 60 000 pilgrims would gather on some of the festivals in late 1940s.[269] In Uzbekistan, the tomb of Qusam ben Abhas in Samarkand continued to operate as a site of secret Sufi pilgrimage.[270]

In 1958, during revitalized anti-religious campaign the issue of wandering mullahs, *shaykhs, ishans* and other 'parasitical elements', who gathered at holy places and 'manipulated' religious feelings of believers, was discussed extensively and resulted in closure of *mazars* and *ishans* were forced to stop their religious activities.[271] Persecution of *ishans* didn't stop throughout the following decades and their arrests and imprisonment continued on the grounds of spreading superstition and fanaticism.

In the aftermath of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Soviets were further concerned with the possibility of spillover effect and potential of Sufis in stirring up anti-Soviet sentiment and nationalism. The Council for religious Affairs sent a report to the CPSU, noting that,

> …the most reactionary element of the unregistered clergy (namely, over 200 descendants of *ishans* operating in Central Asia, the leaders of about 400 *murid* brotherhoods functioning in the North Caucasus republics, and a few more extremist mullahs) are inciting the population to refuse to serve in the

[269] Ibid., p. 371.
[270] Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam,* p. 129.
[271] Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union***,** p. 405.

> Soviet Army and to prohibit their children joining the Pioneers and Komsomol. They are also setting up underground schools for the teaching of religion to children and adults, duplicating and distributing materials of foreign radio stations and instigating religious fanaticism and nationalist mood.[272]

Under Andropov and Chernenko there were increased and violent media assaults directed against Sufism and we see that leadership favored a more severe and intensified pressure on Sufism.[273]

In general, we can assume that because Sufism was, unlike official Islam, out of the control of Soviet rule, it managed to survive and even thrive in some parts of Central Asia. Despite the deliberately destructive nature of Soviet policy toward religion, Islam survived to a large extent due to this 'parallel' level. Although driven underground, Sufism helped keep Islam alive in the areas not affected by Soviet anti-religious propaganda.[274] The specific features of Islam, such as its ability to operate outside mosques without clerics, secured its survival in its popular form. While official Islam was integrated within the Soviet system, 'parallel' Islam assumed its dominant role in regulating everyday life of Muslims.[275] Unlike official Islam, that helped to promote proletarian ideology of communism, Sufism played its crucial role in preserving social and cultural origins of Central Asian societies, accommodating them to the conditions of the communist society. Thus, active repression of Muslim clergy and destruction of mosques did not undermine the Islamic faith as a way of life among Muslims in Central Asia. 'Popular' Islam was responsible for the resilience and flexibility of this faith – qualities that characterized Islam during the next period of openness, as well as after the collapse of the USSR.

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[272] Ibid., p. 426.
[273] Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars,* p. 110.
[274] Jeff Haynes, *Religion in Global Politics*, p. 152.
[275] Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam,* p. 127.

2.2.4 Islam and Perestroika

The period of Gorbachev (1985-1991) which is directly associated with the period of democratic transformation of the Soviet society under the policies of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness), aimed at restructuring the stagnant society left from Brezhnev period. The major target of Gorbachev's reforms was economy. Neither Central Asia nor Islam ranked high on his agenda at the beginning of his tenure. In fact, he was the only Soviet leader who did not have a well-defined anti-religious agenda, similar to that of his predecessors.[276] From the outset he was mainly concerned with economic issues, putting the religious question aside. However, he did not abandon a general line of anti-religious policy, adopted by his predecessors. Gorbachev's first direct reference to religion came in 1986, when he repeated Brezhnev's view, which focused on indirect scientific propaganda rather than direct attacks on religion:

> The Party will use all forms of ideological influence for the wider propagation of a scientific understanding of the world, for the overcoming of religious prejudices without permitting any violation of believers' feelings.[277]

When reforms slowly reached the region, the first priority that needed to be dealt with was corruption. A massive anti-corruption campaign was mounted across Central Asia in order to reestablish a tighter control. The so-called 'cotton scandal'[278] was the cause of increased concern of central powers in Central Asia. Following the death of Sharaf Rashidov - the first secretary of Uzbek Communist Party – a group of

[276] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* pp. 54 and 48.
[277] Ibid., p. 54.
[278] 'Cotton scandal' (began in 1983) was a criminal case brought against a number of high-ranking officials in Uzbekistan, who were involved in falsification of cotton production quotas through an elaborate system of bribe-taking and padding reports, that revealed embezzlement of large sums of money from the central budget. It is notable for involvement in it of such top-level persons as Uzbekistan's Communist Party first secretary Rashidov, Brezhnev's son-in-law Churbanov, as well as a number of other officials.

KGB investigators was dispatched to Uzbekistan to deal with corruption in local party apparatus and the cotton affair. As a result of the investigation, it was revealed that billions of rubbles were embezzled in the cotton affair. The investigation entailed arrests and imprisonment of a number of high-ranking officials.[279]

In the process of this investigation Islam was identified as a major cause of Central Asia's 'backwardness' and wide-spread corruption. When Gorbachev was in Tashkent in November 1986, he delivered a public speech in which he openly denounced the errors committed by local authorities and expressed concern over the religious situation in the region, urging for "uncompromising battle against all religious phenomena".[280] It was decided that in order to deal with corruption, the authorities should deal first of all with religion. Therefore, Gorbachev called for an urgent re-intensification of the antireligious campaign and more strict enforcement of religious legislation.[281] As a result of Gorbachev's such intervention, 53 members of the Uzbek Communist party were excluded from its ranks within a period of six months for "organizing religious rituals and taking part in them".[282]

Dissatisfied by the level of corruption in Central Asia, Gorbachev openly criticized Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and embarked on further tightening of control. He saw sources of corruption in region's culture and religion and thought that imported cadres could improve the situation. The first move in this direction was the replacement of Dinmuhammed Kunaev – the first secretary of Kazakh Communist Party and a native Kazakh – with a native Russian, Gennady Kolbin.

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[279] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 52.
[280] Ibid., p. 55.
[281] Ibid.
[282] James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan: A Soviet Republic's Road to Independence,* Boulder: Westview Pres, 1991, p. 175.

On the popular level, however, such an anti-corruption drive that entailed a widespread anti-religious campaign as well as the replacement of local leaders with Russians, was received negatively. People knew that, corruption was a reaction to the artificially low prices for Central Asian cotton, set deliberately by Gosplan (State Planning Agency) officials in Moscow. As Mehrdad Haghayeghi has pointed out,

> It was precisely the unfair pricing of cotton that had forced the farmers and local managers to contemplate ways in which they could increase their share of what they perceived to be their just entitlement.[283]

Moreover, the Uzbeks at large had a positive attitude towards the actions of their supposedly corrupt elites, as they considered themselves beneficiaries rather than victims of this system. According to them, illegal activities were not aimed at accumulation of wealth of a particular person, but were directed to the benefit of the community at large and helped improve local conditions such as construction and maintenance of public facilities and provided goods and services that had been otherwise non-existent.[284]

In Kazakhstan, the replacement of Kunaev led to the first sizeable outburst of ethnic violence in Central Asia in December 1986, when young Kazakhs staged a series of protests against the appointment of a non-Kazakh to the post.[285]

Combination of these two factors, as well as a number of others, brought about the positive change in Gorbachev's attitude toward Central Asia in general and towards Islam in particular. When glasnost and reformist intentions were challenged by strong anti-reformist tendencies from below, he chose to include the religious matter into his agenda with change of policy towards religion. This change was motivated

[283] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 51.
[284] James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan*, pp. 44-45.
[285] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 136.

by Gorbachev's realization that reforms in the economic sphere would be hard to implement unless they were accompanied by reforms in the ideological structure. The change became an urgent issue also because Gorbachev's reforms increased economic hardships of the Soviet population. By granting religious freedom, he believed he could offer some spiritual relief at a time of material deprivation.[286] Another and perhaps the strongest reason for the change in the policy was the increasing pressure exerted by believers from below, who wanted *glasnost* and *perestroika* be extended to the spiritual realm of the Soviet life.[287] When Gorbachev visited Tashkent again in April 1988, he spoke of religion amiably.[288] By the end of 1988, a greater tolerance for Islam was evident: party members were no longer excoriated for taking part in Muslim life-cycle rituals; interviews with Muslim religious figures showing more accommodating attitude appeared in press.

With *perestroika* and *glasnost*, Islam (and other religions) was given a freedom for the first time since it was curbed by Lenin's religious campaign of 1920s.[289] Islam began to be promoted in positive light as the guardian of ethical values, and an instrument to fight corruption, fraud and other social ills. To this end, many mosques were reopened in late 1980s early 1990s, religious literature that gave useful information on Quran appeared and there was a dramatic rise in facilities for the study of Quran. The historic tradition of Islam as reflected in the works of medieval scholars such as al-Bukhari and al-Tirmizi was emphasized. In such favorable conditions, it was natural for religious activism to gain its momentum.[290]

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[286] Ibid., p. 62.
[287] Ibid., p. 60
[288] James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan*, p. 178.
[289] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 60.
[290] Shirin Akiner, "The Politicization of Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia", *Religion, State and Society,* Vol. 31, No. 2 , 2003, pp. 98 and 99.

The first signs of religious activism in Central Asia were seen in late 1980s. In 1988, in Uzbekistan (Central Asia's most religious republic), religious activists joined demonstrations staged in Tashkent by Uzbek students, who demanded the restoration of Uzbek language and culture.[291] Soon after, another protest was carried out by Muslims in Tashkent, demanding the resignation of mufti of SADUM, Shamsuddin Babakhanov. He was accused of being ignorant of Quran, subservience to secular authorities and violation of Islamic codes of behavior by drinking alcohol and womanizing.[292] Babakhanov was replaced by Mufti Mamayusupov, who became much more active in both religious and secular aspects of public life.[293] As compared to his predecessor, he was firmly committed to giving a faith a greater public role in society and to increasing knowledge and practice of Islam among the population at large.

One of the most striking outcomes of the Gorbachev period was the formation of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). Initially, the party was conceived as a movement that would embrace all the Muslims of the Soviet Union. This trans-regional, trans-ethnic character was reflected in the IRP's founding congress, which was held in Astrakhan, in Russia, and included delegates from the Caucasus and from Tatarstan in addition to Central Asians. It grew out of a desire to protect the Islamic identity of the Soviet Union's Muslims during the 1980s. As such, the party gained a great deal of publicity within the Soviet Union. Initially the party had some noteworthy ideas, such as raising the Islamic awareness and understanding among the Muslims of the Soviet Union, as well as representing them and coordinating a united stance towards

[291] James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan*, p. 176.
[292] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* pp. 66 and 162.
[293] James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan*, p. 177.

the Communist regime. However, the party fragmented since it had regional branches for each republic of the USSR.[294]

Another event that was associated with the increase of Muslim activism at this period of time was the conflict in Ferghana Valley between Meshketian Turkic minority and local Uzbeks. In June 1989 a conflict flared up between the two groups, resulting in mass violence and massacres that led to death of more than a 100 people. The Meshketians[295] became an object of local hatred of Uzbeks, who killed them and destroyed many of their homes and much of their property.[296] An estimated 14, 500 Meshketian Turks were expelled from the Ferghana Valley.[297] Although both attackers and the victims were Muslims, it was believed that it was caused largely by religious motives.[298]

The rise of Islamic activism in Central Asia sent alarming signals to European parts of the USSR. In media there appeared articles which expressed fears of further ethnic unrest and distrust of Islam. Concerns were raised that the Muslim border regions were vulnerable in terms of foreign religious threat. Especially in the aftermath of Iranian revolution there were increased fears of Islamic fundamentalism. In particular, in Moscow the Wahhabite sect of Islam was blamed for being instrumental in fomenting the anti-Meshketian disturbances. Such allegations

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[294] Source: Shireen Hunter, *Religion, Politics, and Security in Central Asia*, available at: http://it.stlawu.edu/~govt/361F02Hunter.html; *A History of Islam in Central Asia* from: http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Park/6443/CentralAsia/ca_hist3.html

[295] The Meshketian Turks were among the peoples, who had been deported from their homelands in the Caucasus during World War II by Stalin on the grounds of alleged disloyalty.

[296] James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan*, p. 178.

[297] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 193.

[298] James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan*, p. 178.

suggested a threat from outside to the stability of the region, given the proximity of Afghanistan and India, where Wahhabis had many adherents.[299]

Negative memories of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, when the dominant elements of the *mujahedeen* fighters supposedly belonged to Wahhabite sect, supported by United States and Saudi Arabia had been rekindled and considerably added to the alarmist tendencies signaled from Moscow.[300]

This particular case has shown how simplistically authorities could approach southern problems. Lack of understanding of Islamic distinctiveness in Central Asia and the lack of experts dealing with ethno-religious issues coupled with traditional hostility towards Islam by Soviet authorities led to conclusions that Islamic factor was instrumental in fomenting conflicts like this. The fact that the conflict flared-up between Muslim groups was totally dismissed and there was no desire to conduct more detailed investigation of genuine causes of the conflict. This simplistic understanding of conflict regarding Central Asia and other peripheral parts of the former Soviet Union was typical for Soviet authorities in dealings with them. Whenever there was a problem, be it corruption, economic inefficiency or ethnic conflict, Muslimness of communities and negative impact of Islam on these communities was the first thing to be blamed and the first thing to be fought as an expression of some sort of threat. As will be shown later in this work, such a simplistic approach by authorities will be continued after Central Asia's independence.

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[299] Ibid., p. 179.
[300] Muriel Atkin, *The Rhetoric of Islamophobia*, from *http://www.ca-c.org/journal/eng-01-2000/16.atkin.shtml*

Putting aside the allegations regarding the Wahhabite threat, which were mainly based on Russian prejudices against and traditional distrust of Islam and searching for genuine causes of the conflict, it is not difficult to see that here the threat of Islamic fundamentalism, this time in kind of Wahhabism, was not the case. Rather, it was the economic aspect of the conflict, which was instrumental in fomenting the disturbances. The underlying cause of the ethnic violence was the existing economic inadequacy between Meshketians, who were relatively better-off and the economically deprived Uzbeks. Many Uzbeks, involved in the violence, were convinced that the Meshketian's departure from the region would bring more chances for the natives to improve their socio-economic conditions.[301] Furthermore, as was indicated by one observer, it was wrong to identify some expressions of Islamic activism in Muslim regions of the former Soviet Union with Wahhabism, because Wahhabism was a movement which reflected the specific conditions of 18th century Arabian society. The term Wahhabism was misleadingly introduced with its Soviet interpretations by the KGB and the mass-media to describe this and similar conflicts that took place in late 1980s in Ferghana Valley.[302] In fact, title 'Wahhabi' was applied by Soviet sources to any non-conformist Islamic group, to discredit them as imported reactionary counter-revolutionary force.

In final analysis, seventy years of Soviet rule had a profound secularizing effect on lives of Central Asian Muslim populations of the USSR. The main impact of Sovietisation of Central Asia was in that the region, which historically had been an integral part of the broader Muslim world, produced many characteristics that it does not share with the rest of the Muslim world. Furthermore, much of the history of

[301] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics,* p. 193.
[302] Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam,* pp. 185-186.

political Islam passed by Central Asia, which was cut from the mainstream Muslim world by Soviet frontiers. The economic growth in the region, as well as comprehensive free secondary education and the accessibility of free higher education for everyone, changed the social appearance of Muslim regions of the USSR. Muslim women were emancipated and acquired equal economic and social status with men. The outcome of the standardized Soviet education system was that Soviet Muslims were far ahead of their co-religionists abroad in terms of education and professional qualifications. Furthermore, they enjoyed the advantages of free modern health-care, which contributed to elimination of a number of diseases and to substantial growth of Muslim population in Central Asia throughout 1940s and 1980s.[303] Intensive Russian immigration did not cause major ethno-religious tensions between immigrants and the indigenous Muslim population and relations between them were relatively free from discrimination and rivalry, which were characteristic of relations between Europeans and Muslims of the European colonies in the Muslim East.[304]

On the other hand, Soviet Muslims alongside the whole multi-ethnic population of the USSR, also suffered from the excesses of the Soviet regime. Overexploitation of land and water resources, excessive use of agro-chemicals and nuclear testing led to extreme ecological problems. Soviet Muslims were exposed to systematic cadre purges, deportations and other manifestations of totalitarian regime. The dual alphabet change (from Arabic to Latin, then to Cyrillic), adversely affected the literary heritage, a substantial part of which was lost. This alphabet reform also increased the cultural and communication isolation of Central Asian Muslims from

[303] Ibid., p. 135.
[304] Michael Rywkin (ed.), *Moscow's Muslim Challenge*, London, Sharpe, 1990, p. 61.

their co-religionists abroad. Intensive ideological brainwashing was aimed to promote a Russified and class-defined version of the history of various Muslim peoples of the USSR.[305]

In dealings with Islam, the regime severely persecuted it and its infrastructure was almost entirely destroyed. During World War II a small, state-sponsored religious infrastructure was built in order to control rather than promote the religious activity in the country and some of the formal elements of religious observance were allowed to be practiced, while 'parallel' Islam went underground. Yet, campaign to secularize society and to replace religion by 'scientific atheism' was the main goal of such a co-option. As a result of such policies, by the end of the 1980s Islam was rather a sign of cultural and ethnic identity, than an active spiritual commitment for the majority of Central Asians. Allegiance to Islam was limited to celebration of life-cycle ceremonies such as male circumcision, birth, marriage and burial. Also, observance of folk traditions, such as veneration of saints and pilgrimages to holy places, accompanied by associated rituals was widespread. Knowledge of Islamic doctrine, prayers and of basic Muslim pillars was limited to a very small number of predominantly elderly people.

Gorbachev's period was crucial in transforming almost every aspect of Soviet citizen's life, including religion. *Perestroika* offered religious freedom to Central Asian republics among other things. With Gorbachev's changed policy on religion there was an impetus for enhancing the role of Islam in society in late 1980s. Islam was welcomed and promoted as a guardian of social mores of Central Asian society. Some forms of political activism by religious groups emerged in response to positive

[305] Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam,* pp. 135-136.

change, but there was too little time for growing influence of official and unofficial Muslim organizations to bring about any significant transformations in society before the time of independence. Such organizations were generally welcomed by public at large. By the end of Soviet era there was a widespread consensus, that Islam's role in society should be greater, but there was not any concept as to how Islamic norms should be understood and observed in on-going conditions. As such, for the overwhelming majority of the population, Islam was still primarily interpreted in terms of tradition, culture or symbol.[306]

[306] Shirin Akiner, *"The Politicization of Islam",* p. 99.

CHAPTER 3

ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN POST-SOVIET UZBEKISTAN AND KYRGYZSTAN

3.1 Introduction

Independence did not come to Central Asia as a result of a struggle for liberation, but it was imposed upon by certain circumstances that developed far beyond the confines of the region. One major event decided the fate of the Soviet Union, opening the way to independence for all 15 republics that constituted the former Soviet Union, including the Central Asian ones: the abortive coup that had been staged by the conservative strand of CPSU on August 1991 in Moscow against Gorbachev's reforms. Although the coup failed, it inevitably entailed the dissolution of the Union. As a result, Central Asian republics became independent subsequent to the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) by the presidents of Russia, Byelorussia and the Ukraine in December 1991 in Minsk. This second event officially abolished the USSR. Few days later Central Asian republics joined the Commonwealth as independent states.[307]

Despite the predictions made by many observers during the 1980s, forces quite apart from the increased Islamic awareness or solidarity among Soviet Muslims brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, independence came unexpectedly for

[307] Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asia's Catapult to Independence", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (Summer 1992), p. 108; Shirin Akiner, *Central Asia: New Arc of Crisis?* p. 32.

both the local leadership and the peoples of Central Asia, and was accepted by them only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union had become an accomplished fact. More than that, Central Asians were "the most fervent and persistent supporters of the Union" when the USSR was still there[308] and its leaders were among the most determined supporters of Soviet Union's preservation when such efforts were made shortly after the failed August coup.[309]

By the time the Soviet Union dissolved, there was a growing interest in Islam among Central Asian populations. During the first years of independence there was much controversy over what role Islam was to play in the process of construction of new political and social order. Initially, there was much enthusiasm on the part of the elites to support Islamic revival, because Islamic card would help them gain support of masses in consolidating their powers as well as fill the ideological vacuum created by the demise of Marxism-Leninism.[310] They did not, however, depart from the techniques of co-option, by which Islam was to be kept under control. Central Asian authorities (all of them products of Soviet upbringing and education and all of them former heads), had become more and more antagonistic towards forms of Islamic expression that were on the rise in the region soon after independence. Lack of experience, education and expertise in dealing with religious issues prompted these elites to use old Soviet era mechanisms of control over religious activity, often retaining Communist Party's traditional hostility towards Islam. But apart from concerns of the elites, this increased interest in Islam did not immediately translate into the growing political threat, capable of challenging stability within these new countries. There is no doubt that Islam is deeply ingrained in Central Asian ethnicity

[308] Shirin Akiner, *Central Asia: New Arc of Crisis?,* p. 1.
[309] Martha Brill Olcott, *"Central Asia's Catapult to Independence"*, p. 111.
[310] Shirin Akiner, *"The Politicization of Islam"*, p. 101.

and culture. However, it is important, firstly, not to underestimate the effects of the Soviet legacy that weakened Islam; and secondly, specific features inherent to Central Asia among the nomadic and sedentary populations.

By looking at the region's immediate past that is associated with legacies of the former Soviet Union, it is obvious that personal understanding of Islamic doctrine in Central Asia is much limited or distorted because religious teaching and practice were forbidden or co-opted by the political regime. Although the Soviet regime did not cause Islam to entirely disappear, it eventually caused total de-Islamization. As such, expression of Muslim piety was repressed, formal religious education was abolished, and the *ulema* was persecuted.[311] The closed borders isolated Soviet Muslims form the mainstream political expressions of Islam that were taking place in the broader Muslim world just across the border. As such, Islam in Central Asia became a totally local phenomenon and tended to be defined primarily in traditional and cultural terms. Certainly, today, Islam remains one of the strongest sources of identity, but being a Muslim for Central Asians means adherence to customs and traditions that developed in the course of many centuries there, but not the Islam that was and still is being observed in other parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East. In Central Asian context, being a Muslim does not necessarily mean to lead a Muslim way of life (attending mosque, fasting, performing pilgrimage, etc). As it was indicated by a report prepared by International Crisis Group (ICG),

> A person is a Muslim because he or she is, say, Kyrgyz, regardless of personal faith. It is entirely possible to identify as Muslim and have no faith whatsoever, or indeed to be hostile to all manifestations of Islam.[312]

[311] *Central Asia: Islam and the State*, ICG Asia Report No. 59, 10 July 2003, p. 2.
[312] Ibid.

The diversity of Islam in Central Asia's various parts is an important aspect of a more distant history that predated the establishment of the Soviet rule. This diversity, however, is instrumental in defining contemporary Islam today in the region. As was mentioned earlier in this study, the degree of loyalty to Islam is strongest in the mentality of historically sedentary societies and lacks depth and substance among historically nomadic tribes. As such, historically sedentary Uzbeks and Tajiks (who are the dominant ethnic groups famous for religious activity throughout the Islamic history in Central Asia, such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand) are the groups where Islam took an early and strong hold, touching almost every aspect of their life. Nomadic Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Turkmen are relative late-comers to Islam. Their Islamization took place much later as non-Islamic tribes existed as late as 19th century.[313] Consequently, religious fanaticism, that is present in some parts of the south, is not characteristic of nomads, located in the north. [314]

The effects of this historical distinction can still be strongly felt today. Soon after the Central Asian republics became independent, Islam was instrumental in identifying the course of events among the sedentary Tajiks and Uzbeks. In Tajikistan, Islamic factor was manipulated to be the dominant tool in the struggle for power, resulting in the bloody civil war with major human losses. In Uzbekistan, fears that the situation in Tajikistan would easily spill over and challenge the authorities resulted in the establishment of an extremely authoritarian regime by the Uzbek President Islam Karimov. Another important observation is that proclivity to Islam throughout Central Asia is closely related to the presence of region's numerically largest Uzbek

[313] Kulchik, et al, p. 5.
[314] Shirin Akiner, *Central Asia: New Arc of Crisis?,* p. 38-39.

population.[315] By contrast, in historically nomadic societies of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, where Islam came relatively late (just not long before the establishment of Soviet rule only to be marginalized after the Soviet rule was consolidated), Islamic factor did not play any significant role in political life in post-Soviet period.

This traditional division into sedentary and nomadic communities, however, has little relevance to the issue of Islamic fundamentalism in contemporary Central Asia. It does not mean that historically sedentary Uzbeks and Tajiks have a strong potential for the rise of fundamentalist movements similar to those that evolved in the course of several last decades in the Middle East. It is rather an indication to the fact that nomadic societies were even less religious than sedentary ones and not vice-versa, and that in the process of Islamic revival this is still apparent.

In general, Islamic revival in post-Soviet Central Asia can be characterized as moderate, given, first of all, lack of political experience in Islam, and the legacy of the Soviet rule, which had a major secularizing effect on Central Asian societies. Fears of genuine Islamic threat in the form of fundamentalist or radical movements that are supported by outside forces and resort to violence in achieving their goals are largely ungrounded. In fact, the issue of Islamic radicalism featured far from top in the list of serious problems that newly independent Central Asian states and its leaders faced in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union.[316] Establishment of close diplomatic ties with Muslim states neighboring Central Asia during the first years of independence was not the expression of Central Asia's commitment to Islam

[315] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, pp. 77-78.
[316] Robert Freedman, "Radical Islam and the Struggle for Influence in Central Asia", in *Religious Radicalism in the Greater Middle East*, ed. by Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Efraim Inbar, Frank Cass, London-Portland, OR., 1997, p. 217.

or its willingness to grant Islam the upper hold in decision-making, but was rather conditioned by economic and geographic aspects of such relations.[317]

Later in the post-Soviet period, some concerns were raised about Islamic activism and fears were conjured up about the possible threat emanating from Islam's extreme forms coming from abroad. Immediate measures were taken by the Central Asian elites to suppress different forms of Islamic expression, often labeling the ordinary believers 'fundamentalists'. But to what extent these groups were really fundamentalist backed by outside Islamist forces is a controversial issue. In this context, it is necessary to point out that in post-Soviet Central Asia, Islamic revival is a natural process after a long period of suppression. But because the region was isolated from the broader Islamic world for a long period of time and developed on its own, it had to absorb customs and traditions of local communities and adapt to circumstances imposed from above. As a result, Islam in Central Asia took its moderate shape, free from fanaticism or political ambitions. Therefore, there is no breeding ground for genuine politicization of the faith, even if there are efforts by outside forces to import more radical form of Islam to Central Asia. However, if Islam is to be radicalized, it will still be not because of outside influence but conditioned by the discontent of people within the region, faced with the challenges of unstable economies and the excesses of authoritarian regimes that are increasing their powers across Central Asian republics at present.[318]

In the chapters that follow, I will analyze Islamic revival in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the post-independence era, taking into consideration the aspects

[317] Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy and Regional Security*, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington D. C., 1996, p. 31.
[318] Shirin Akiner, *Central Asia: New Arc of Crisis?*, p. 69.

outlined above. I will argue that the Islamic revival that is now taking place in Central Asia is a natural process, determined first of all by indigenous culture and tradition of Islam, which developed in isolation from its trends in broader Muslim world and preserved its specificity, being primarily a way of life and having a stronger hold in tradition of historically sedentary communities and being weaker in historically nomadic societies (although moderate in both). In addition to this historical legacy of Islam, this revival process is currently being influenced by internal socio-economic conditions and political situation. Given the specific nature of Islam practiced in Central Asia throughout its history, there is no scope for influence from external Islam, including its dangerous forms. Although there is some activism in political Islam in the region, it is not influenced by outside forces of religious extremism or radicalism, but it is an expression of discontent with current economic decline and authoritarian regimes. There is much speculation, primarily by the elites, that population of Central Asia is exposed to the negative influence of Islam from abroad that poses a dangerous threat to the stability in the region. This speculation led to labeling moderate groups as 'fundamentalist' or 'Wahhabi' in order to justify harsh measures taken against them. But this is not so for a variety of reasons, which will be discussed below. Overall, at present there is no threat to the stability of the region emanating from outside influence of Islam on indigenous population. With regard to Islam, "one has to take into account the very different historical root that Islam took in Central Asia to determine whether current events can actually be called a politicization of Islam".[319] The limited oppositional political activism of some Islamic groups is not a threat to the stability in society but is a

[319] Petra Steinberger, "'Fundamentalism' in Central Asia: Reasons, Reality and Prospects" in *Central* Asia: Aspects *of Transition*, ed. by Tom Everett-Heath, RoutledgeCurzon, London & New York, 2003, p. 223.

threat to the position of elites that want to remain in power. The liberal orientation of the dominant (Sunni) Islamic doctrine and prevailing doctrinal diversity at the republican level are critical elements in shaping the criteria for Islamic adherence in Central Asia, that contributed to a moderate Islamic revival, thus limiting the activities of fundamentalist Islam to a few isolated cases of influence.[320] Radicalization of Islam, if it ever takes place, will not be because of outside influence, but will be the result of discontent with economic hardships and inability of authorities to build a just society with democratic principles. To support this argument, the remaining chapters of this thesis will analyze the parameters of external and internal factors that shaped Islamic consciousness in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

3.2 External Factors

Since the Central Asian republics entered the international arena as independent actors, they were to formulate their foreign policies independently from Moscow. Although domestically all Central Asian leaders were committed to the development of secular societies, on foreign level, Islamic dimension was an important aspect to reckon with as institutionalization of Islam seemed to bring many advantages. As Martha Brill Olcott indicated, Central Asian leaders were primarily interested in Islam for financial reasons.[321] In the first years of independence, Muslim countries, especially oil reach Gulf States were regarded as potential sources of foreign investment. Even though Islamic adherence varied considerably from one Central Asian state to another, all Central Asian leaders made references to Islam. For

[320] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 80.
[321] Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's New States: Independence,* p. 31.

example, presidents of both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan swore their presidential oaths on both constitution and Quran, and traveled extensively to Gulf States and to Turkey.[322] But symbolic adherence to Islam did not immediately translate into reality. Central Asian states would equally pursue contacts with other non-Muslim, European states for investment. As Petra Steinberger argues, contacts of Central Asian countries with the Islamic world can be characterized as limited in comparison to other countries. For example, Uzbekistan, although a 'Muslim state', "was quick to establish contacts with Israel and the West in preference to the financially and economically deficient Arab and Muslim states".[323] Steinberger also says that this trend continues, especially when the exploitation of hydro-carbon resources of the region needs the financial and technical support of Western oil companies.[324]

The aim of this chapter is to show that external factors are not the primary drive in the process of Islamic revival in Central Asia. The scope of relations between Central Asian states and international community is established with the primary focus on economic cooperation and is not limited to only Muslim states. Although the emergence of the region into the international scene attracted attention of several Middle Eastern countries, it had little or no impact on the process of Islamic revival in Central Asia. In order to clarify these points, relationship of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan with Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia will be analyzed.

[322] Shirin Akiner, *"The Politicization of Islam"*, p. 102.
[323] Petra Steinberger, "'Fundamentalism' in Central Asia", p. 225.
[324] Ibid.

3.2.1 Iran

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the explicit concern in the West regarding the five Central Asian republics was their presumed susceptibility to external influence of Islamic fundamentalism. In particular, the Islamic Republic of Iran, with which Central Asia has a long border and shares common historical, linguistic and religious ties, was of a big concern. This fear of imported fundamentalism was invoked primarily by Western stereotype to view all Islamic fundamentalists as being manipulated by Iran.[325] A closer look at the process of building relations between Iran and the newly independent Central Asian republics, however, reveals that this process is conditioned primarily by economic rather than politico-religious aspects. Despite its Islamic rhetoric, Iran has taken most cautious and pragmatic steps. Iranian involvement on ideological questions in the region remained low-key. For example, Iran did not exploit the unraveling of the USSR to export its revolution to Central Asia. Instead Iranian policies emphasized the development of economic and cultural relations with Central Asian states.[326] Fears of incipient fundamentalist threat to Central Asia are, therefore, an exaggeration, given general anti-Western orientation of Islamic fundamentalist ideology. In fact, "Iran's view on its role in Central Asia is not the promotion of Islamic activism but the promotion of mutually beneficial economic activities".[327] Thus, it is unlikely that Iran, seen as an external factor, may have any significant, not to mention negative, influence to the process of Islamic revival in Central Asian republics.

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[325] Eric Hooglund, "Iran and Central Asia", in *From the Gulf to Central Asia: Players in the New Great Game*, ed. by Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1994, pp. 114 and 115.
[326] Lena Jonson, *The Tajik War: A Challenge to Russian Policy*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatam House, London, 1998, p. 38.
[327] Eric Hooglund, "Iran and Central Asia", p. 117.

The causes for pragmatism of Iranian foreign policy are rooted in Iran's domestic political and economic policies that underwent considerable transformation since late 1980s. For the first time since the 1979 Revolution, constitution of the Islamic Republic was allowed to be reformed, following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in the summer of 1989. The reform stipulated promotion of the country's 'national interest' within the framework of a more pragmatic thinking. To achieve this, it was realized by the Iranian elites that domestic policies and strategies should be more sensitive and responsive to the region's geopolitical realities. At the foreign policy level, this line required "de-emphasis on ideological differences with other countries and a redoubling of efforts to find common ground for cooperation, particularly in the economic realm".[328]

The prevalence of economic aspect over ideological one in Iran's foreign policy is evident. The dissolution of the Soviet Union offered Tehran an unexpected opportunity to exercise its ideological influence in the decades-long closed region of Central Asia. But in its relations with these new republics, Iran preferred to avoid spreading Islamic Revolution to the region. This non-interference into the ideological realm of Central Asia was motivated by two things. First, Iranians were quite aware of how different Muslims of Central Asia were.[329] The tendency of secular, ex-

[328] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iran and Central Asia: Responding to Regional Change" in *Security Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States: the Southern Belt*, ed. by Mehdi Mozaffari, Department of Political Science, University of Aarhus, Denmark, 1997, pp. 91-92.

[329] In his article "Iran and Central Asia" Eric Hooglund argues that the term 'Muslim Central Asia" is inaccurate given the fact that 70 years of Soviet rule transformed Central Asian countries into secular, even militant atheistic societies and that none of current Central Asian governments base their legitimacy on Islam. He further suggests that depicting Central Asia as Muslim is a Western stereotype to view Iranian Islamic fundamentalism as a major threat to the stability of Central Asia. Iranians seem to be fully aware of the negative consequences of such stereotypes for Iran's foreign policy perspectives in the post-Cold war period. With pragmatism being dominant in their decision-making since late 1980s, Iranians preferred to stay ideologically relatively impartial to the region bordering it to the north, thus implying that it is the US which speculates the issue of Iranian-inspired Islamic fundamentalism in order to establish its influence in the region. See pp. 114-115 and 124.

communist leaders of the region to view any Islamic activity with suspicion was already a formidable obstacle in relations between the two regions. The promotion of Shi'a version of Islam among the predominantly Sunni Central Asia would only exacerbate their assigned task. Against the background of economic perspectives that Central Asia might offer Iran to become the main gateway to Central Asia and its vast natural resources, or as the vital bridge between Central Asia's landlocked heartland and international markets beyond Persian Gulf, Tehran skillfully avoided pursuing its ideological agenda and chose to establish state-to-state contacts and form trade ties.[330]

Second, Iran was preoccupied with not spoiling long-term good relations with Moscow, established during the Soviet times. For Iran, the Soviet Union, and later Russia, was viewed first of all as a potential supplier of advanced weaponry which Iran needed. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia continued supplying Iran with modern weaponry, including submarines in 1992 and 1993, and it further promised the supply of a nuclear reactor.[331] Therefore Iran tried to formulate its relations with Central Asia without alienating Moscow. One of Russia's main concerns, as well as of Central Asian governments' themselves, regarding Iran was "the export of its Islamic revolution or any close and transparent allegiance with the Islamist movements of Central Asia".[332] In this respect, Iran's own strategic aim to curb the growth of Sunni Islamic radicalism, whether manifested in the Taliban in Afghanistan, the IMU in Uzbekistan, or Sunni extremists in Pakistan, converged with Russia's concerns.[333] Thus, the policy line expressed during the Iranian Foreign

[330] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 220.
[331] Robert Freedman, "Radical Islam ", pp. 226-227.
[332] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iran and Central Asia", p. 95.
[333] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad,* p. 220.

Minister Ali Akbar Velayati's visit to Central Asia and Moscow in 1991 emphasized that Iran's policies in Central would be coordinated within the framework of Tehran's relations with Moscow.[334] This line remained almost unchanged after Central Asian republics became independent.

A particular concern for the purpose of this study is Iran's response to the situation on post-Soviet Tajikistan, with which Iran shares the closest linguistic, cultural and historic ties. With the Tajik civil war unleashed by mutually hostile pro-communist government and Islamic oppositional groups, Iran was supposedly supporting the Islamic anti-governmental forces during the war. In the West Iran was suspected of being interested in supporting the nascent Islamic movements which were in turn labeled 'fundamentalist'. However, turbulence in Tajikistan did not cause Iran to depart from its official line. Contrary to speculations that Iran might provide support to Tajikistan's Islamic opposition, it adopted a non-interventionist position by stating that it had no intentions to be involved in the internal affairs of Tajikistan.[335] Iran signed an agreement with Russia, according to which the two countries promised not to resort to force and not to let their respective territories be used as targets of aggressions, subversive or separatist actions against each other, or against countries friendly to either side. This document was signed basically regarding Tajikistan.[336] Iran's relatively neutral stance towards Tajik Islamicists was partly because of the reflection of Tehran's recognition of the primacy of Russian interests in Central Asia, and partly because of the Iranian awareness that transforming Tajikistan into an Islamic state along the Iranian model did not appear to be an immediate possibility. This was mostly due to the fact that Tajikistan was not ready to accept the Iranian

[334] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iran and Central Asia", p. 88.
[335] Robert Freedman, "Radical Islam ", p. 227.
[336] Ibid.

ideology because of its lack of solid Islamic knowledge and foundations.[337] Iran has dissolved any doubts on exporting its revolution, when it has assumed an important role as peace-making negotiator of the Tajik conflict together with Russia, beginning from 1994.[338] In June 1994 Iran hosted a round of talks on the Tajik conflict and in September of the same year, it conducted a consultative meeting on the ceasefire agreement. Iran also played the role of mediator between Rakhmonov and Nuri when they both attended the summit in Tehran.[339] It was precisely the collaboration between Russia and Iran that moved the Tajik conflict toward the settlement: Russia persuaded the Rakhmonov's government to come down to the negotiation table with the opposition, while Iran succeeded in convincing the Islamic opposition in the need for negotiations and compromise. With the fall of Kabul to Taliban, the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Tajikistan became a high priority for both Russia and Iran. Collaboration of these two chief countries in the process of resolving the Tajik conflict has ultimately resulted in the final agreement of June 1997.

Another factor that contributed to Iran's preference to act in economic, rather than ideological realm in the post-Cold war period, was Iran's own economic problems, rooted in its weakened oil markets and its continuing dependence on oil revenues. This in turn encouraged the Iranian government to take steps toward modernization of its industrial base through attempts to liberalize its economy and reduce the state control over economic activity.[340] Thus, the Iranian government realized that success in economic reform implied inclusion of international dimension that also required

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[337] Shirin Akiner, *Tajikistan: Disintegration or Reconciliation?* (Central Asian and Caucasian Prospects), The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatam House, London, 2001, p. 49.
[338] Lena Jonson, *The Tajik War*, p. 38.
[339] Tetsuro Iji, "Multiparty Mediation in Tajikistan: The 1997 Peace Agreement", *International Negotiation*, 2001, Vol. 6, Issue 3, p. 366.
[340] Hamid Hosseini, "The Change of Economic and Industrial Policy in Iran: President Rafsanjani's Perestroika", in *Islam, Iran and World Stability*, ed. by Hamid Zangeneh, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1994, pp. 168-86.

changes in Iran's foreign policy. Therefore, it was recognized that moderation of its foreign relation and a closer integration into the international economic system was a necessary step in achieving economic success.[341] This and several other factors including Iran's increased regional isolation from Arab Gulf states (caused by mostly U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf region and its policy of 'dual containment') helped Iran to direct its attention northwards.[342]

For similar reasons mentioned above, Iran was also an enthusiastic proponent of inclusion of Central Asia into Economic Cooperation Organization, which was emerging as an important regional organ.[343] Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) is the oldest inter-governmental regional organization established in 1964 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey for the purpose of sustainable socio-economic development of the member states. At the time of its establishment it was functioning under the name of Regional Co-operation for Development (RCD) as an off shoot of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). CENTO was disbanded in 1979 with the overthrow of Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi's government in Iran. Soon after, the RCD was also dissolved, only to be revived in 1984 as the ECO.[344] In 1992, the Organization was expanded to include some of the Central Asian states. At the end of 1992, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan entered ECO as full members, and Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan as observers.[345]

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[341] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iran and Central Asia", p. 92.
[342] Ibid., p. 93.
[343] Ibid., p. 96.
[344] Tchangiz Pahlevan, "Iran and Central Asia" in *Post-Soviet Central Asia*, ed. by Touraj Atabaki and John O'Kane, London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1998, p. 87.
[345] Vitaly Naumkin, "The Political and Security Linkages between the Gulf and the Muslim States of CATR", in *From the Gulf to Central Asia: Players in the New Great Game*, ed. by Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1994, p. 211.

The scope of ECO activities in relation to its new Central Asian members remained purely economic, although there were offers from Pakistan and Iran to transform ECO into a political organization. Central Asian states met this with opposition. Moreover, they favor inclusion of other non-Muslim states in the region, for example Armenia, to the organization.[346] Most probably, ECO will remain as a mechanism for cooperation in the region, but it is unlikely that its role will exceed the economic realm.[347] The position of Russia as a still powerful figure in the post-Soviet region (a vital market, a major future player in the international oil market, and, in case of Iran, a potential arms merchant) is instrumental in relations between ECO member states. Moreover, Central Asian leaders themselves do not put the advancement of the cause of Islam above that of securing their own national interests.[348]

Therefore, it is hardly possible that Muslim states bordering Central Asia will have any significant impact on the process of Islamic revival taking place inside the region. In fact, as the example with ECO shows, relations of Central Asian republics with Muslim states bear purely economic connotations.

3.2.2 Turkey

When the Soviet Union dissolved, Turkey saw the opportunity of expanding its influence over Central Asia, where the majority of population was of common Turkic stock and Turkic language was widely spoken among them. Turkey was the first country to recognize the independence of the Central Asian states and to establish

[346] Ibid., p. 212.
[347] Ibid.
[348] Martha Brill Olcott, "Islamic Consciousness and Nationalist Ideology", p. 21.

diplomatic relations with them.[349] In doing so, leaders in Turkey saw the linguistic ties as an important component for Turkey's involvement in the region. At the same time, Turkey was encouraged by the West in the presumed competition with Iran for influence in Central Asia, since officials in the West were anxious to prevent the possible expansion of Iranian influence in the region, especially the spread of Islamic Revolution.[350] This rivalry, however, did not materialize for a number of interrelated reasons mentioned above, primarily because Iran showed no interest in such a competition projected by the West. More than that, the fact that both countries jointly cooperated with Central Asian states through ECO, testifies for the inconsistency of the theory that Iran and Turkey were locked in rivalry for the influence in Central Asia.[351]

Although fear of Iranian-inspired 'fundamentalism' might be overestimated, it was still vital for Central Asian leaders, leading them to look at Turkey for a model of secular Islamic state.[352] Initially, all Turcophone Central Asian republics greeted Turkey with welcome. Presidents of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, when they visited Turkey following the dissolution of the Soviet Union as early as December 1991, praised their hosts and expressed willingness for extensive cooperation in many spheres, stressing the 'Turkish model' as the most acceptable for development of their own states. Uzbek President stressed that he looked at Turkey as an 'elder brother' (*ağabey*) and noted that there was a lot to learn from Turkey for all the

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[349] Gareth Winrow, "Turkish Policy in Central Asia" in *Security Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States: the Southern Belt*, ed. by Mehdi Mozaffari, Department of Political Science, University of Aarhus, Denmark, 1997, p. 109.
[350] Gareth Winrow, *Turkey in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (Former Soviet South Project), The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995, p. 13.
[351] James Critchlow, "Nationalism and Islamic Resurgence in Uzbekistan", in *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects,* ed. by Hafeez Malik, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1994, p. 238.
[352] Ibid.

newly independent Central Asian states. President Akaev of Kyrgyzstan called Turkey as a guiding path for the Turkic republics.[353] In an interview to local newspaper Karimov spelt out that,

> The Turkish path of development is more acceptable to us, firstly as a secular civilized path of societal development. We must work out our own path of development, relying on Turkey's experience. The Iranian model is not acceptable to us… It seems to me that this is the opinion of Central Asia as a whole.[354]

Turkey, on its part, has developed a feeling of Turkic solidarity and declared that Central Asia was the land of their forefathers and that their culture and history originated there.[355] Closer ties were established between the republics and Turkey during a number of official visits and agreements on cooperation in a variety of spheres were signed.[356] Unlike Iran, Turkey felt more comfortable to broaden its relations with Central Asia to include the cultural and religious spheres. The spread of Fethullah Gülen's movement throughout Central Asia is of a particular concern in this regard.

Fethullah Gülen is the leader of semi-legal Nurcu sect with its origins in Turkey, but became very active in Central Asia in 1990s. Nurcu is a religious group that preaches Islam and 'modernity', and it is an important component of understanding contemporary Islam. Technology and science are important tools for disseminating religion and attracting younger generations for its cause. The objective of the Nurcu is to demonstrate that Islam belongs to the present and the future, just as much science and modernity do. In Central Asia their mission is to help people to

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[353] Gareth Winrow, *Turkey in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, p. 13.
[354] Quoted in Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "New Frontiers: Iran, the GCC and the CCAR", in *From the Gulf to Central Asia: Players in the New Great Game*, ed. by Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1994, p. 105.
[355] Gareth Winrow, "Turkish Policy in Central Asia", p. 109.
[356] Oleg Smolansky, "Turkish and Iranian Policies in Central Asia" in *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, ed. by Hafeez Malik, New York, St. Martin's Press, p. 293.

rediscover their Islamic identity after being exposed to a long-term Soviet domination. To fulfill its mission it strongly relies on modernized education. Their curriculum includes scientific subjects such as biology, mathematics, physics and computer science. Languages of instruction are English and Turkish, as well as local languages.[357]

Fethullah Gülen sees the role of his schools in missionary work among the youth and focuses its attention on preparation of future Turkish-oriented elites. According to him, "Our schools are missionary like other missionary schools of Europeans and Americans. Our purpose is to carry out missionary activities and to prepare the suitable conditions for creating a Turkish lobby and to train bureaucrats".[358] The main focus of Fethullah schools is indeed Islam. Their Islamic orientation can be revealed in the behavioral patterns of teachers, their preferred clothing style, the contents of the literature they publish and TV programs they air. At the same time, Fethullah Gülen is known as representative of moderate Islam compared to other more fervent supporters of Islam in Turkey.[359]

Because of its strong presence in Central Asia, Gülen's movement was a vital element in the development of Ankara's policies there. For example, they reiterated the official Turkish line that Central Asia is the land of Turks' forefathers. According to Gülen, Anatolia is indebted to Central Asia for its high degree of civilization, achieved during the reign of the Ottoman Empire. He suggests, that "in the distant past Islam and Turkish culture arrived in Anatolia from Asia as a result of the

[357] Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spread of Turkism and Islam", *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003, p. 160.
[358] Quoted in Engin Demir, Ayşe Balcı and Fusun Akkök ,"The role of Turkish Schools, in the Educational System and Social Transformation of Central Asian Countries: the Case of Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan", *Central Asian Survey*, (2000), 19 (1), pp. 150-151.
[359] Ibid., p. 151.

missionary activities of dervishes and of mystics called *alperen*".[360] He often refers to these *alperen* and compares his followers to them. Therefore, he feels that by promoting activities in Central Asia he is repaying a moral debt. His followers, when asked about their motivation to arriving to Central Asia, repeat that they came to pay their moral debt *vefa borcu*.[361]

During the first years of independence it was easier for *fethullhaci* to spread their ideology. They saw the atmosphere, in which Islam was welcomed in order to indicate the break with the Soviet past and some of Islamic values were integrated into the new national identity, as an advantage to conduct their missionary activity openly. For example, the instructors at schools run by Fethullah Gülen taught the pupils *namaz* and recommended that girl wear headscarves.[362] Later, the community encountered difficulties in propagating its idea, due to the tendency of authorities to regard religion with suspicion. In Uzbekistan, for example, the first sign of deteriorating Uzbek-Turkish relations appeared when Turkey supported Uzbek opposition leader Muhammad Salih after his party Erk was banned in Uzbekistan, providing him a political asylum. A chain of Fethullah Gülen schools were closed in Uzbekistan as a consequence. Uzbek authorities accused Fethullah Gülen of supporting oppositional activities.[363] Since then Nurcu missionaries turned to indirect method of proselytizing – *temsil*, stating that openness on the part of the movement would be possible only after the governments in Central Asia change their attitude toward Islam.[364]

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[360] Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia", p. 161.
[361] Ibid.
[362] Ibid., p. 157.
[363] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad,* p. 222.
[364] Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia", pp. 162-163.

The popularity of Gülen community schools (primarily among elite's children) can be explained by the fact that they admit non-Muslim students and high quality of education they provide.[365] Equally important in this regard is that students attending these schools tend to embrace what they consider important and dismiss issues which they consider unimportant.[366]

3.2.3 Afghanistan

Since the period of independence, the only external factor contributing to the growth of instability in the region was Afghanistan, where Taliban arouse as a dominant militant force with its ambitions to control the whole territory of Afghanistan.[367]

The Taliban movement grew in Qandahar in 1994, when religious students, led by Mullah Omar, set to eliminate crime in that region of Afghanistan. They received military support from Pakistan and gained influence across much of Afghanistan as a movement appealing to establish law and order. The movement consisted of Pashtuns (Afghanistan's largest ethnic group), members of the former Khalk faction (a dissident element of old communist party), and fighters from a variety of Arab and other Muslim countries who had joined Osama bin Laden or identified with his anti-U.S. *jihad*.[368]

In Central Asia two countries (Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) were actively supporting the enemies of Taliban, the government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani and the

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[365] Bülent Aras, "Turkey's Policy in the Former Soviet South: Assets and Options", *Turkish Studies*, Spring 2000, Vol. 1, Issue 1, p. 49.
[366] Personal interview with a graduate from *Sebat* lyceum based in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
[367] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad,* p. 209.
[368] Central Asian Perspectives on 11 September and the Afghan Crisis, *ICG Central Asia Briefing Paper*, 28 September, 2001, p. 3, footnote 3.

anti-Taliban political coalition known as the United Front, as well as their military ally, the Northern Alliance. The Northern Alliance was a coalition of military forces loyal to the United Front and controlled the small part of territory in the northern Afghanistan. It was composed of about 15, 000 ethnic Uzbek and ethnic Tajik rebels, united by their opposition to Taliban.[369]

The Uzbeks are the third largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. About one million ethnic Uzbeks live in the area adjacent to Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan has a relatively small border with Afghanistan, but is connected to Afghanistan by the Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Jalalabad-Peshawar highway.[370] Uzbeks in Uzbekistan had reportedly been supporting general Dostum through supplying fuel and military means to help him counter the Taliban offensive.[371]

In terms of foreign policy, the Taliban showed little intention of spreading their version of Islam abroad, stating that it was only for internal consumption.[372] In a message sent to Central Asian states, one of the Taliban leaders Mullah Mohammad Rabbani reassured that Taliban's military operations in Afghanistan did not constitute any threat to Central Asia:

> The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan wants the establishment of friendly relations with all countries in the world, especially the neighborly and regional countries, on the basis of accepted international principles, peaceful coexistence and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.[373]

However, this prospect of peaceful co-existence was revised in 1996 after Osama bin Laden joined the Taliban in the wake of its capture of Kabul. Earlier, few Taliban

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[369] Ibid., footnote 4.
[370] Matinuddin Kamal, *The Taliban Phenomenon: Afghanistan 1994-1997*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 172.
[371] Ibid., p. 173.
[372] Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A New History,* Routledge, 2002, p. 195.
[373] BBC *Summary of World Broadcasts*, FE/2933/A/5, 31 May, 1997.

leaders had nurtured the idea of 'liberating' the holy Muslim cities of Bukhara and Samarkand and most of them did not even know where these cities were situated. With bin Laden, joined by thousands of militants from all over the Arab and other Muslim countries, the perspective of global Islamic radicalism was adopted by Taliban, and its expansionist visions toward Central Asian republics became a part of their military agenda.[374]

In Uzbekistan, where in the period since independence a relatively secure military infrastructure was maintained in comparison to Central Asia's other republics, fears of direct Taliban offensive on its territory were less pronounced. However, some observers suggested that there were practically no chances for Taliban-led or Taliban-inspired invasion of Central Asia and that there was no direct threat to the territorial integrity of Uzbekistan or Karimov regime.[375] The major concerns were that in case of Taliban victory in Afghanistan, a large number of ethnic Uzbek refugees would rush toward Uzbek border, bringing in their waves heavily armed and disobedient paramilitaries.[376] This would also cause the increased flow of drugs, as well as the spread of ideological influence among certain groups in Uzbekistan susceptible to Islamic rhetoric,[377] especially among those who are disenchanted with economic difficulties.[378]

In circles close to President Karimov's office there was a view that contrary to Moscow promoted idea, there was no direct threat from Taliban and that Uzbekistan

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[374] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad,* p. 211.
[375] Tom Everett-Heath, "Instability and Identity in a Post-Soviet World", in *Central* Asia: Aspects *of Transition*, ed. by Tom Everett-Heath, Routledge - Curzon, London & New York, 2003, p. 191.
[376] Ibid., p. 192.
[377] Anthony Hyman, "Russia, Central Asia and Taliban", in *Fundamentalism Reborn?: Afghanistan and the Taliban*, ed. by William Maley, New York University Press, 1998, pp. 110-111.
[378] Tom Everett-Heath, "Instability and Identity in a Post-Soviet World", pp. 192-193.

was capable to repulse Taliban-led offensive if it takes place.[379] But, when faced with the real possibility of a hostile Islamic regime in Afghanistan (after the seizure by Taliban of Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif), the Karimov government chose to align firmly with Moscow.[380]

After Kabul was captured by Taliban in the autumn of 1996, Russia and several Central Asian republics, above all Uzbekistan, negotiated on a joint effort in preserving the common borders of the CIS. Taliban was determined as 'a dangerous source of military, political, criminal and economic turbulence' representing a 'direct threat to their national interest and security'.[381] With the fall of Mazar-i-Sharif and the spread of Taliban influence to northern Afghanistan, further meetings were held and declarations made on readiness to take any military action to protect the southern borders of the CIS:

> The Russian leadership states that in the event of a violation of CIS borders, the mechanisms of the treaty on the collective security of the CIS member states will immediately be brought into effect […]. There is a threat to the security of the CIS countries, above all Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.[382]

As was mentioned above, Uzbekistan's concern was not the direct Taliban incursions on its territory, but other problems, resulting from the establishment by Taliban of full control over the territory of Afghanistan. Among these problems the most important one seen by the government of Uzbekistan was the spread of ideological influence of militant Islam in Uzbekistan, with its potential challenge to topple Karimov regime. In this context, the role of the *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* (IMU) is important. As will be discussed later, after the Tashkent bombings and incursions in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan by radical Islamist militia, the IMU was

[379] Anthony Hyman, "Russia, Central Asia and Taliban", p. 110.
[380] Ibid., p. 111.
[381] Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A New History,* p. 195.
[382] BBC *Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2928/B/8, 26 May, 1997.

blamed to be the organizer of those terrorist acts. Soon after, the IMU was determined as a terrorist organization with global significance by US administration. After being banned in Uzbekistan, the IMU was forced out to operate from its encampments in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, developing close ties with Taliban. It was feared that with the victory of Taliban, the IMU would gain strength and resume its anti-governmental military actions. In this context, the IMU in alliance with Taliban should be viewed not as the international terrorist organization of global significance, but simply as a regional radical force that challenges the regime.[383]

3.2.4 Saudi Arabia

Wealthy Arab states are geographically situated far from Central Asia. Therefore their influence regarding the newly independent states is determined not only by geographical position, but also by a limited choice of investments available to them. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, Saudi Arabia too had not refrained from exerting its influence in newly-formed and still evolving Central Asian states. This involvement, however, pursued goals that had almost nothing to so with Central Asian states themselves. First of all, Saudi Arabian involvement was stimulated by Iran's foreign policy goals. As was mentioned above, even though for Iran, the collapse of the Soviet Union offered a fertile ground for spreading its revolutionary ideas in Central Asia, Iran had limited its engagement in the area to purely economic realm. For Iran, its role and presence in the Gulf remained a priority in pursuing its foreign policy goals. Saudi Arabia, on its part, by greater involvement in Central Asia, and especially in the areas where Iran was active, was pursuing its own goal of

[383] Central Asian Perspectives on 11 September and the Afghan Crisis, ICG Central Asia Briefing Paper, 28 September, 2001, p. 5.

distracting Iran from the Gulf region.[384] Seen in this light, Saudi Arabia was interested in spreading its Wahhabi version of Islam on the one hand and the establishment of economic contacts on the other. Proceeding from the material which I used in analyzing Saudi Arabian and Central Asian relations in the post-Soviet Central Asia, it is obvious that in the period since independence, Saudi Arabia was most active in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan.

The Saudi government eased the conditions of pilgrimage to Mecca for Central Asian Muslims and provided for a continuous flow of religious literature into the republics. The Saudis have been organizing Islamic schools, constructing mosques and distributing Qurans in these republics.[385]

Despite its willingness to spread Saudi Wahhabism and certain actions undertaken in this direction, it appears difficult for Saudi Wahhabism to impose itself on Central Asia. The major obstacle is the nature of Central Asian Islam itself, which is incompatible with the strict Wahhabite doctrine. Although Saudi Wahhabism belongs to Sunni trend, unlike Iranian Shi'a version, Central Asian Islam preaches more liberal Sunni Hanafite, whereas Saudi Wahhabism belongs to a rigorous Hanbalite version. Home to the reformist Islamic traditions (manifested in Jadidism, as well as some of Sufism's most popular brotherhoods, known for their veneration of saints and holy places), Central Asia doesn't look favorably at more radical ideas of Wahhabism and its 'purifying' doctrine. As Riad El-Rayyes indicated, Wahhabism "is least attractive to the Central Asian mentality and tradition of Islam,

[384] Valeria Piacentini, "Islam: Iranian and Saudi Arabian Religious and Geopolitical Competition in Central Asia" in *From the Gulf to Central Asia: Players in the New Great Game*, ed. by Anoushiravan Ehteshami, University of Exeter Press, 1994. p. 43.
[384] Ibid., p. 42.

except for the possible financial windfall it would bring with it".[386] In promoting Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia was most active in those Central Asian states, where the position of Islam was the strongest. For example, in Tajikistan Saudis helped bring and disseminate Quran in large numbers, organized courses teaching Islam in Arabic and invested heavily in the Tajik IRP.[387] In Uzbekistan they were particularly active in the Ferghana Valley, but after the disruptive activities of fundamentalist groups in Saudi Arabia, President Karimov expelled tens of Saudi imams from Uzbekistan in 1992.[388] Kazakhstan was particularly attractive for Saudi Arabia in the economic field. For example, it appeared as a mediator between Alamti and U.S. Chevron in exploitation of the oil fields in Kazakhstan.[389] In Turkmenistan, Saudis were active also economically and offered attractive loans, including interest-free credits by making Turkmenistan a full member of the Islamic Development Bank. They also invested in the construction of a road connecting Turkmenistan with Middle East through Iran.[390]

Overall, the Saudi involvement in Central Asia was stimulated by Iranian presence in the Gulf region and its engagement in Central Asia was characterized by spreading its Wahhabite version of Islam, primarily in Tajikistan. For commercial considerations Saudi Arabia was active in oil-reach Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Because Saudi Wahhabism is unlikely to take a firm root in Central Asia due to

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[386] Riad Rayyeds, "An Arab Perspective on the Central Asian Republics in the Context of the New World Order" in *From the Gulf to Central Asia: Players in the New Great Game*, ed. by Anoushiravan Ehteshami, University of Exeter Press, 1994, p. 227.
[387] Irina Zviagelskaya, "Central Asia and Transcaucasia: New Geopolitics" in *Central Asia and Trancaucasia: Ethnicity and Conflict*, ed. by Vitaly Naumkin, Greenwood Pres, Westport, Connecticut – London, 1994, p. 153.
[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid., p. 133
[390] Hooman Peimani, *Regional Security and the Future of Central Asia: the Competition of Iran, Turkey and Russia*, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut-London, 1998, p. 58.

doctrinal incompatibility with Central Asian Islam, Wahhabism in Central Asian understanding is something quite different form its Saudi counterpart.

3.2.5 September 11 Attacks

The attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001 followed by the U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan have intensified the scrutiny of Islamist movements across Central Asia. The involvement of Central Asia in the 'war on terrorism' as the major regional ally of the United States, have resulted in the debates among Central Asians over who is going to benefit from such a military cooperation. The people of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are considered to be more religious than the populations in other republics of Central Asia. But all five Central Asian states generally support secular governance. At the same time, very often, the region's non-democratic leadership has chosen repression as an instrument of dealing with religion and civil society as a whole. This is particularly true of Uzbekistan, where authoritarianism has been used in order to justify crack-down on any opposition to the government, including religious groups without making any distinction between moderates, radicals or extremists. Uzbekistan was also among the first and most enthusiastic countries to welcome the U.S. military presence in Central Asia in general and Uzbekistan in particular. By allowing the United Stated to gain access to Uzbek airbases, President Karimov considered American involvement a unique opportunity both to silence international criticism of his government's pressure on economic reforms and human rights, and to gain international support to eliminate the IMU, which, according to Uzbek official line was behind the Tashkent bombings

in 1999.[391] Within the country there has emerged a great deal of concern about this international anti-terrorist campaign, and it has pointed out that the campaign would enable President Karimov to intensively crack-down on legitimate opposition and religious groups. As one imam at a mosque in Tashkent warned:

> Our government wants to use the American anti-Taliban campaign in its own interests. [It believes] there are three major benefits for Uzbekistan in collaborating in military operations with American troops against Afghanistan… the major interest of Uzbekistan is to destroy the IMU. The second benefit is that Uzbekistan's participation in a military operation will soften America's stand toward violations of human rights in our country. The third important factor is the economic benefits that Uzbekistan will expect from the United States for supporting American troops.[392]

Another Uzbek, a governmental official said the following:

> The U.S. government will fight the Islamic terrorists, and our government will get full support from the West to fight against those our government declares terrorists. Since the West has little understanding or interest in distinguishing between devoted Muslims and extremists or terrorists, all opponents of the government will be easily jailed.[393]

Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, is known for its most liberal attitude toward religious expression of its citizens across Central Asia. But after Islamists incursions on its territory in 1999 and 2000, Kyrgyzstan, too, strengthened its stance towards Islamism. The country joined the U.S.-led anti-terrorist campaign and allowed the establishment of U.S. military airbases on its territory. Although in Kyrgyzstan attitudes toward the West are in general not antagonistic (especially among the ruling elites), on popular level the reactions to the U.S. presence differed. Many criticized this move and believed that the use of force against other Muslims, especially so

[391] Central Asian Perspectives on 11 September and the Afghan Crisis, *ICG Central Asia Briefing Paper*, 28 September, 2001, p. 4.
[392] Quoted in Ibid., p. 5.
[393] Quoted in Ibid.

close to home, was not good. As one devout Kyrgyz said, "I would never let my neighbor use my house to shoot at my other neighbor either.[394]

In general, the popular attitudes of Central Asians toward the West are not negative as it is the case in other parts of the Islamic world. But after the United States has established its military presence in Central Asia, many people in the region started to believe that Western countries and organizations support corrupt, repressive regimes and are hypocritical about genuine democratic values. After they have established military bases in Central Asia, the Americans themselves appear to realize that by rushing into the region militarily, but doing nothing to eliminate the genuine sources for instability, rooted in economic and political conditions, they may create additional problems in their foreign policy running instead of resolving the existing ones. As ICG has recommended,

> … the international community will be making a serious strategic blunder if it allows Central Asian leaders to continue or intensify their autocratic ways at the price for cooperation in the fight against global terrorism. For example, if Uzbekistan had been more tolerant of legitimate religious practices, the IMU might not even exist today, at least not in its present relatively robust form.[395]

3.3 Internal Factors in Uzbekistan

3.3.1 Political Conditions

Uzbekistan is home to Central Asia's largest (26,5 million)[396] and most devout Muslim population.[397] The Uzbeks account for 71 percent of the total population of Uzbekistan. About six million Uzbeks live in other Central Asian republics and form

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[394] Is Radical Islam Inevitable in Central Asia?: Priorities for Engagement", *ICG Asia Report* No. 72, December 22, 2003, p. 21.
[395] Central Asian Perspectives on 11 September and the Afghan Crisis, *ICG Central Asia Briefing Paper*, 28 September, 2001, p. 14.
[396] CIA, 2000 *World Factbook*, from: http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/uz.html
[397] Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asia's New States", p. 117.

substantial minorities there. 13 percent of the population of Kyrgyzstan are ethnic Uzbeks.[398]

Uzbekistan is the most uniformly religious of all Central Asian republics, where Islam has an important imprint in the everyday Uzbek way of life, society, culture and history, forming an inseparable factor in everyday relations of ordinary citizens. During the short period of *glasnost*, the old traditional celebration of *Ramazan, Kurban Hayit* and *Navruz* reemerged as major festivals. By the time of independence there was a substantial political opposition movement in Uzbekistan impelled by the last years of Gorbachev era, when important aspects of society, including religious one, were given considerable freedom of expression.

During the first years of independence Islam was welcomed by Uzbek authorities as a useful means to pursue a number of goals, vitally important in the initial stage of nation-building. With Uzbekistan's relatively homogenous population, which was at the same time religiously more devout, Islam's role was to fill the ideological vacuum after Marxism-Leninism was discredited. Its positive role as a guardian of spiritual wealth of the whole nation was embodied in the concept of 'national heritage' that had hitherto been forbidden. Furthermore, Islamic dimension would be useful in pursuing contacts with oil-reach Gulf states in order to attract investment and support. Although Uzbek leadership was committed to the development of a secular state, the importance of Islam was made explicit when the Uzbek President Islam Karimov swore his presidential oath on both the country's constitution and the Quran, and made reference to Islam.

[398] Uzbekistan: An Overview, from *http://www.iles.umn.edu/faculty/bashiri/Courses/Uzbek.html*

In such conditions it was natural for groups with Islamic orientation to be on the rise. As a result of this accommodating policy towards Islam, a number of politically active parties were created, mainly with the aim of enhancing the socio-political improvement of society. *Islamic Renaissance Party* (IRP), formed during the Soviet times, gained a popular support among the population of Uzbekistan, *Adolat* (Justice) was established to address corruption and economic crisis in Namangan, *Wahhabism* gained some popular support among some believers in Ferghana. Although initially Islam was welcomed by Uzbek authorities, repression became more and more pronounced in dealing with opposition groups, including Islamic parties in the period soon after independence. In fact, the government of Uzbekistan has taken the occasion on this new resurgence to emphasize that the country was under severe threat coming from organized insurgent militant groups that challenged stability in the whole region.

In December 1991, when Karimov was not yet the President of independent Uzbekistan, Muslim opposition leaders had gathered in the city of Namangan in Ferghana Valley in a demonstration with protests, demanding a constitutional provision in which Islam would be considered the state religion, the establishment of Islamic Republic of Uzbekistan and legalization of IRP, which was not allowed to conduct its activities on the territory of Uzbekistan. The demonstrators were calmed down but none of the demands were met afterwards.[399] Contrary to the expectations of demonstrators (including the members of *Adolat*, IRP, Wahhabi groups and some others), the government, after having consolidated its power, embarked on repression against politically oriented religious opposition parties. With the Article 57 of the

[399] William Fierman, "Political Development in Uzbekistan: Democratization?" in *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, ed. by Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 382.

new constitution, the law prohibited registration of parties with Islamic agenda. In 1992 Karimov launched a crackdown on *Adolat* in which over a hundred of its leading activists were arrested and the party was forced to cease its activity not long afterwards.[400]

Historically, political extremism trends mirror the general discontent of groups of the population with the existing political situation and socio-economic conditions. In this context, accumulation of popular dissent is the result of internal dissatisfaction with political restrictions and limited socio-economic opportunities. With regard to the internal roots for violence caused by restriction of political expression, Hooman Peimani points out that,

> … it is the 'natural' outcome of an environment in which the state is hostile to any type of expression of political views excluding those sanctioned by the state itself; it therefore closes all doors to peaceful expression of popular dissatisfaction with the current situation.[401]

In this context, exclusion of the people from the political process and failure to address their demands leads to a situation when non-extremist channels of political administration become bankrupt and unattractive for the benefit of groups using political violence as the sole solution for people's demands.[402]

In Uzbekistan, in the period soon after independence, favorable climate for the formation of political extremism was created, when government distanced itself from democratic principles and increasingly became identified with repressive authoritarianism.

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[400] Annette Bohr, *Uzbekistan: Politics and Foreign Policy* (Central Asian and Caucasian Prospects), Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998 p. 27

[401] Hooman Peimani, *Failed Transition, Bleak Future? War and Instability in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut , London, 2002, p. 91.

[402] Ibid.

Since 1992, a relative freedom of religious and political expression came to an end after being allowed for a brief period since Gorbachev reforms of *perestroika* and *glasnost* until then. Unraveling of civil war in neighboring Tajikistan, where coalition of Islamic and democratic opposition succeeded in forcing President Nabiev to accept some of its members in his government, inspired Karimov's policies of repression against his own opposition and crackdown on Islam as a major subversive force. He immediately condemned this limited power-sharing arrangement and said that liberation of opposition ambitions would inevitably lead to the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia.[403]

Although the fear that the Tajik conflict might be repeated in other parts of Central Asia did not materialize, this did not prevent President Karimov from intensifying his crackdown on political and Islamic opposition groups at home. Quite the contrary, repression was intensified: the term 'Wahhabi' was used for any group that was more devout to an Islamic vision of society that the government wished them to be, arbitrary arrests involved detention of anyone whose appearance suggested religious piety and the concept of existing a genuine threat of Islamic fundamentalism was created.[404]

Repression was intensified in 1997 when several police officers had been killed in Namangan and the perpetrators were immediately identified as Wahhabis.[405] By the end of 1997 the government made public claims that 'Wahhabi' groups, which received training abroad, were involved in terrorism in Uzbekistan. In May 1998

[403] Bess Brown, "Tajik Civil War Prompts Crackdown in Uzbekistan", *RFL/RL Reserch Report*, Vol. 2, No. 11, 12 March, 1993, p. 3.
[404] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 46.
[405] Ghoncheh Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia", p. 73.

President Karimov called for severe measures to eliminate the threat posed by violent fundamentalists, stating that "such people must be shot in the head".[406]

The repressive policies against Islamic activism resulted exactly in what President Karimov feared: extremist Islamic militancy. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which grew out of the banned *Adolat* in 1992, became a major powerful militant Islamic group with its base in Tajikistan and periodically carried out incursions to the territories of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The movement is considered to be the direct product of Karimov's refusal to allow Muslims practice their faith freely and participate in the process of state-building.[407] The IMU was blamed as a major force behind Tashkent bombings in 1999 after which a new wave of massive crackdown was instituted. The *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, an international radical Islamist organization, which received some popular support after the repression of Islam in Uzbekistan began, was also among the groups blamed as extremist and being engaged in international conspiracy network aimed at overthrowing Karimov and his regime.

Repression was directed not only against groups of Islamic orientation. *Birlik* (Unity) was a democratic-nationalist party whose program was explicitly secular in nature but was sharply critical of regime on a variety of issues. When *Birlik* forged an alliance with the IRP and joined the demonstrations in Namangan in support of an Islamic center, it became an object of persecution. *Birlik* was an influential opposition movement with large following and was outlawed out of fear that it might create a firm base for all Uzbek opposition groups. Its newspaper *Khalk Suzi* (The Word of the People) was banned, its leader was beaten cruelly and the party itself

[406] Uzbek Radio II, Tashkent, 3 p.m., 1 May 1998, in *Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/3218 G/3.
[407] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad,* p. 85.

was not allowed to register.[408] *Erk* (Freedom), which was allowed to register (mostly due to its initially accommodating stance towards Karimov's policies), was not an Islamic party either. But in 1992 *Erk* was banned and its leader, together with *Birlik*'s leader was forced into exile.[409] Both parties were accused this time for being involved in the plot to kill the President after the Tashkent bombings, even though they were in exile.[410]

In response to criticisms, mainly by Western observers, concerning undemocratic authoritarianism and constant violation of human rights, Karimov and his government justified their actions by stating that strict state control was necessary to ensure stability in transition to a democratic system. Uzbekistan was described as having a long-lasting historical tradition of authoritarian rule and there was a sense of traditional submissiveness to authority among Uzbeks.[411] According to this 'Uzbek model', the hasty imposition of a Western-style democratic model might cause crisis and conflict. President Karimov repeatedly stated that a strong executive hand was needed to reserve stability, for which he was "prepared to pay any price, however high".[412]

Deteriorating socio-economic conditions and the failure by the government to improve the plight of ordinary people was decisive in mobilizing support for the Islamic movement. In conditions of growing poverty and limited economic opportunity, the demands to address those problems were much greater than usual.

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[408] Cassandra Cavanaugh, "Crackdown on the Opposition in Uzbekistan", *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 31, 31 July 1992, p. 21-23.
[409] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad,* p. 84.
[410] Shirin Akiner, "The Politicization of Islam", p. 107.
[411] Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization and Regional Security, *ICG Asia Report No. 14*, Osh/Brussels, 1 Match 2001, p. 18.
[412] Annette Bohr, *Uzbekistan: Politics and Foreign Policy*, p. 20.

Inability to meet such demands exacerbated the tension experienced by social groups and inspired the formation of opposition movements that organized themselves along ethnic or religious parameters.[413]

3.3.2 Economic Conditions

Soviet economic legacy has left Uzbekistan with weakened infrastructure, over-dependency on cotton as a single crop worth exporting, and deteriorated environment. This situation led to acute economic problems since relative stability maintained through an elaborate system of planned economy withered with the Soviet Union.

Following independence in December 1991, the government sought to maintain a kind of command economy through subsidies and tight control on production and prices. This resulted in high inflation rates which forced the government to introduce some reform policies in 1994. By doing do, the Uzbek government expanded the privatization process, tightened monetary policies, moved to reduce the role of the state in the economy, liberalized prices and improved opportunities for foreign investment. Despite this, the government continued to play its major role in the economy and reforms had not resulted in structural changes to establish a market economy.[414]

Liberalization of prices was met with resentment since new equivalents for salaries, pensions and stipends introduced under this reform were too inadequate and belated.

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[413] Tom Everett-Heath, "Instability and Identity in a Post-Soviet World", p. 199.
[414] Uzbekistan, Economic overview, Source:
http://www.gesource.ac.uk/worldguide/html/1056_economic.html

This led to protests and unrest, especially among the students, who gathered in a demonstration in Tashkent which resulted in a number of deaths.[415]

In 1996, the IMF suspended its investment to Uzbekistan because of Uzbekistan's failure to meet its criteria. This resulted in government's further tightening control in an already closed economy. These economic policies significantly curbed foreign funding, leading to a serious economic crisis.[416] Furthermore, high inflation rates and drop in production were exacerbated by country's continuous reliance on cotton as a single most important crop. By 1997 economic situation in Uzbekistan was described as follows by an Uzbek official:

> Uzbekistan imports 80 percent of the wheat, all of the tea and sugar, 40 percent of the meat and meat products, and 35 percent of the milk and milk products its residents use. We export more than 70 percent of our cotton, more than 50 percent of our fruit. Since Uzbekistan imports 80 percent of its needs… we understand that cotton is the only real opportunity for us to earn hard currency.[417]

With cotton remaining the only source for exportation, the temptation to continue cotton monoculture in the agriculture is strong, but without a self-sustainable food production base, the rapidly growing population becomes vulnerable than ever.[418]

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[415] Shirin Akiner, *Central Asia: New Arc of Crisis?,* p. 34.
[416] Trade Report, Uzbekistan, Source: http://www.tradeport.org/countries/uzbekistan/01grw.html
[417] Quoted in Meryem Kirimli, "Uzbekistan and the New World Order", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 16 (1), 1997, p. 59.
[418] Tom Everett-Heath, "Instability and Identity in a Post-Soviet World", p. 198.

Table 1. Uzbekistan: Output of Selected Agricultural Products, 1993-99
(in thousands tons)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Raw cotton	4,235	3,938	3,934	3,350	3,641	3,206	3,750
Grains	2,142	2,467	3,215	3,549	3,788	4,148	4,813
Of which							
Wheat	876	1,363	2,347	2,737	3,073	3,556	3,740
Rice	545	498	328	445	394	373	535
Potatoes	472	567	440	490	686	692	672
Vegetables	3,039	2,975	2,713	2,481	2,348	2,403	2,485
Fruits	560	555	602	585	546	543	510
Grapes	381	353	621	474	505	336	376
Livestock and poultry	841	827	853	854	801	809	825
Milk	3,764	3,732	3,665	3,390	3,406	3,495	3,595
Eggs (millions)	1,788	1,574	1,232	1,057	1,075	1,165	1,304
Wool	27	25	20	15	15	15	16
Karakul/sheepskin (thous)	1,517	1,540	1,393	1,370	1,411	803	724
Silk cocoons	30	23	24	22	21	20	19
Tobacco	9	11	17	12	31	34	34

Source: IMF Staff Country Report[419] based on the information from the Ministry of Macroeconomics and Statistics of Uzbekistan

Unemployment in conditions of high population growth rates is another serious blow to the well-being of the citizens. According to the Uzbek State Planning Agency, 60 percent of population of Uzbekistan is under the age of 25 and the majority of them are unemployed. Inflation was growing at rate of 60 percent and in rural areas the farmers were still forced to grow cotton but received too little for its collection.[420] Unemployment, especially among the youth, inevitably leads to the drastic rise in crimes and violence. The disintegration of the old bureaucratic structure is a contributory element to the growth of crimes, as there is much confusion over issues of jurisdiction and authority. This encourages corruption, which is now rampant.

[419] Leif Hansen, *et. al, Republic of Uzbekistan: Recent Economic Developments* , International Monetary Fund Staff Country Report No 00/36, IMF, Washington, D. C., March 2000, p. 41.
[420] Ahmed Rashid, Jihad, pp. 179-180.

Table 2. Uzbekistan: National GDP and Real GDP Growth, 1993-99
(in millions of sums)

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Agriculture	1,421	22,356	85,113	125,383	276,037	358,374	521,627
Industry	1,140	11,031	51,735	99,713	152,449	204,362	283,425
Transport and communications	281	3,768	22,053	37,646	63,962	84,687	120,125
Construction	457	4,704	21,369	46,111	70,984	105,304	149,803
Trade	317	4,834	15,844	39,315	82,473	114,935	169,344
Other services	1,016	12,845	66,878	130,243	209,991	280,285	399,882
GDP at current factor costs	4,632	59,538	262,990	478,410	855,895	1,147,946	1,644,206
Indirect taxes minus subsidies	481	5,340	39,798	80,662	120,932	210,835	297,903
GDP at market prices	5,113	64,878	302,787	559,072	976,826	1,358,781	1,942,109

Source: IMF Staff Country Report[421] based on the information from the Ministry of Macroeconomics and Statistics of Uzbekistan

These deteriorated economic conditions, with its lowering of living standards and increase of poverty, have created an atmosphere of anger and dissatisfaction among population. In particular, the above mentioned *Adolat*, with its explicitly Islamic agenda, was created in the Ferghana Valley to address problems of corruption and crime.

To conclude, exclusion of the peoples to participate freely in the political process, the increasing obstacles for the local population to sustain their livelihoods, coupled with rapid population growth in Uzbekistan, created a breeding ground for extremist groups to gain popularity among disillusioned and impoverished segments of population. As was pointed out by a report of the International Crisis Group,

> Since in Uzbekistan… there is little possibility for ordinary people to influence the country's political direction in a legally sanctioned manner, the Islamist movement, with its claims of answers for economic problems, is gaining credibility among the poorer population.[422]

[421] Leif Hansen, *et. al, Republic of Uzbekistan*, p. 38.
[422] Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization and Regional Security, *ICG Asia Report No. 14*, Osh/Brussels, 1 Match 2001, p. 17.

3.3.3 Religious Conditions

3.3.3.1 Wahhabism

One of the groups described as fundamentalist in the region is Wahhabism. Wahhabism is a relatively young movement and is ideologically different form Islam's other interpretations. It was born in mid-18th century in Saudi Arabia out of ideas of Muhammad ibn Abd-al Wahhab based on strict monotheism (*tawhid*) and purification of Islam from numerous later accretions (*bidaat).* The teaching of Wahhabism belongs to extreme principles of the Hanbali school in Islam. The Wahhabis refuse to recognize the *mazhabas* (Islamic trends) and calim that all the Muslims should, in any case, strictly follow the practice of Islam that existed during Prophet Mahammad's lifetime. They also preach social equality, fraternity and unity in their community, strict adherence to the traditions and moral values characteristic of Islamic community at the dawn of Islam. They call for armed *jihad* against the unbelievers, polytheists and those Muslims who diverted from the principles of early Muslim society. Wahhabism is a teaching of religious fanatics who resort to extreme methods in dealings with political and religious rivals.[423]

The Wahhabi movement was introduced to Central Asia in the early 19th century not from Saudi Arabia, but from India, to where the Wahhabi faith was introduced in 1822 by an Indian pilgrim to Mecca Seyyed Ahmad. Upon his return he began to spread the faith among communities in northern part of the Indian subcontinent. He declared *jihad* against Sikhs and their British allies but was defeated and died in 1830. But some of his disciples continued to spread Wahhabi Islam in other parts of

[423] Marat Murtazin, "Muslims and Russia: War or Peace?", *Central Asia and the Caucasus, Journal of Social and Political Studies*, Sweden, No. 1, 2000, p. 139.

India and eventually brought their faith to Central Asia where they also found a refuge in the inaccessible region of the Ferghana Valley.[424]

In Central Asia, the most prominent leader of Wahhabism was Mohamed Rustamov Hindustani (b. 1892 in Kokand and d. 1989 in Dushanbe), who departed for and received his education in Deoband, India, during the October Revolution.[425] Subsequent to his return to Andijan in Uzbekistan, Hindustani began to spread the teaching of Wahhabism for which he was arrested and exiled for 15 years. When he was freed he continued to spread the faith clandestinely. Among his disciples were Said Abdullah Nuri, Mohammed Sharif Himmatzade (future founders of the Tajik branch of IRP), Rahmatollah Allama, whose puritan views gathered a considerable following in Marghilan, and Abduwali Qari Mirzayev, who later began to propagate political Islam.[426] Some of his basic interpretations of Wahhabism, however, suggest that what he was perceiving as such was not exactly the same Wahhabism as it was practiced in Saudi Arabia. For example, in his views, he condemned the use of force in the struggle for the faith (*al-Jihad as-saghir*), stating that it should be the last resort when no other means for success were left. He argued that it is extremely sinful to doom oneself to blind self-destruction when faced with a stronger enemy, and called for compromises when nonbelievers or secular state have peaceful intentions or show liberal attitude toward Muslims.[427] Finally, what contrasts sharply with Saudi Wahhabite aspirations to purify the Islamic faith form impurities, Hindustani had a strongly hostile stance toward what he perceived as exported ideas

[424] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 93.
[425] Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*, New York University Press, 2000, p. 154.
[426] Ibid.; Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 93.
[427] Bahtiar Babadzhanov, "Islam in Uzbekistan: From the Struggle for 'Religious Purity' to Political Activism", in *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?* ed. by Boris Rumer, M. E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, London, England, 2002, p. 307.

to purify Islam, emanating form the leaders of religious-political parties in Arab countries.[428] At the same time it was Hidustani who introduced the term and preached what he called 'Wahhabi' ideas to Central Asia. As Bahtiar Babadzhanov suggests, the term 'Wahhabite' was used by Hindustani to profess the righteous path of Islam, because he was most familiar with this trend when he was on his *haj* in 1929.[429] The movement slowly gained popularity during late 1980s in Ferghana Valley, where the concentration of practicing Muslim population was highest for all Central Asia. Its followers initially had some success in recruiting peoples in early 1990s, partly because of Wahhabis commitment to 'purify' Islam after 70 years of Soviet rule.

In December 1991, the Wahhabis and other Islamic organizations, including the Uzbek IRP, *Towba* and *Adolat*, took part in anti-government demonstrations in Namangan in which the participants demanded the establishment of an Islamic center, recognition of *Shariah* laws and Islam as a state religion.[430] The demonstration was an act of resentment against the support of official clergy on behalf of all Muslims for Karimov's candidacy to the post of president. Demonstrations quickly transformed into a rally with a strong popular support. Thus, Muslim opposition leaders set up a parallel Islamic government in Namangan in defiance to the authorities. This Muslim government, which had initially been recognized by President Karimov, was later dissolved and the organizers of the movement were arrested.[431]

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[428] Ibid.
[429] Ibid., p. 308.
[430] Abdujabar Abduvakhidov, "Independent Uzbekistan: A Muslim Community in Development", in *The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. by Michael Bourdeaux, Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 1995, p. 297.
[431] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 94.

Since Wahhabism had always sought purification of Islam by using methods typical of movements which could legitimately be called fundamentalist, Wahhabis laid foundations for many of the radical, violent Islamist movements that emerged in the 1990s, such as Al Qaeda and the IMU. Therefore, any inclination towards Wahhabism in Central Asia was of particular concern, especially in Uzbekistan, because it provided a potential for the growth of radical groups.[432]

But there is a controversy over what Wahhabism actually is in Central Asia. *Real* Wahhabism, as presented by many observers and political commentators, supports the 'pure' and 'authentic' Islam that existed during Prophet Muhammad's live. In line with this view, the main goal of Wahhabi adherents is to bring Islam to its original purity as they interpret it. This means, first of all, to cleanse Islam from impurities that have penetrated the Muslim tradition in the course of the fourteen centuries of its existence.[433] In this context, Wahhabism rejects local customs and traditions that have been incorporated into Islam by different Muslim groups around the world. As such, Wahhabism, for example, considers Sufism (which incorporates many pre-Islamic practices, including veneration of saints and which enjoys a considerable following in Central Asia) as deviation from true faith, condemning the building of shrines and holy places. For them, the Quran and *hadith* are the only legitimate sources according to which any Muslim community should conduct its actions. Thus, *real* Wahhabism invalidated many customs and traditions that shape Islamic faith in Central Asia. Consequently, among the majority of Muslims in Central Asia who adhere to the Hanafi school, known for its general liberal

[432] "Is Radical Islam Inevitable in Central Asia?: Priorities for Engagement", *ICG Asia Report* No. 72, December 22, 2003, p. 9.
[433] Alexander Knysh, "A Clear and Present Danger: 'Wahhabism' as a Rhetorical Foil", from http://www.saudi-american-forum.org/Newsletters/SAF_Essay-21.htm

orientation with its emphasis on private opinion (*r'ay*) and public consensus (*ijma*) in administration and interpretation of Islamic principles, *real* Wahhabism does not have a widespread appeal.[434]

The situation with the 'Wahhabi' case is complicated in Central Asia given the tendency of officials to label strong religious figures whom they consider potential threats as 'Wahhabis' in an attempt to discredit them. Such a tendency derives from old Soviet rhetoric to name any non-conformist Islamic group 'Wahhabi' in order to discredit them as imported reactionary counter-revolutionary force.[435] This caused confusion in distinguishing between the *real* Wahhabis, who are the followers of Abd-el Wahhab and have a reputation of militant Islam and other groups, which are either unofficial or in opposition. As Alexander Knysh has pointed out,

> The term 'Wahhabism' is deployed by the 'neo-Communist' rulers consistently and indiscriminately against anyone who dares to raise their voices against the inequities of their rule. These verbal invectives are followed by ruthless suppression of anything that can be interpreted as 'Islamist' opposition.[436]

In Central Asia, with 'Wahhabism' having been used widely to suggest the existence of Islamic threat, Sufism has become welcomed as a moderate form of Islam as opposed to the radicalism of the implicit Wahhabis.[437] In Uzbekistan, authorities actively promote the ideas of Sufi Naqshbandi order, with its deep roots in Uzbek society in order to pit its citizens against the appeals of Islamic fundamentalism. To achieve this, Uzbek authorities proceed by promoting scholars who propagate Naqshbandi principles, by erecting billboards with sayings of Bahauddin Naqshband

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[434] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 95.
[435] Petra Steinberger, "'Fundamentalism' in Central Asia", p. 226.
[436] Alexander Knysh, "A Clear and Present Danger: 'Wahhabism' as a Rhetorical Foil", from http://www.saudi-american-forum.org/Newsletters/SAF_Essay-21.htm
[437] Muriel Atkin, *The Rhetoric of Islamophobia*, from http://www.ca-c.org/journal/eng-01-2000/16.atkin.shtml

and by renaming the main avenue in Bukhara named after Lenin with this 14th century founder of Naqshbandi mystic brotherhood.[438]

Some observers suggest that the term 'Wahhabi' was adopted by Russian and Western scholars from the British tradition on the Indian sub-continent, where this term was used to define all radical reformers who opposed the colonial power.[439]

Recent observations by scholars suggest that there were no contacts maintained between Central Asian Islamic activists and Saudi Wahhabis until 1990s, although there were some supporters who sympathized with some ideas, such as Islamic resurgence and preservation of strict Islamic tenets.[440] Moreover, it is generally accepted that even though there were some supporters, they for the most part rejected violence.[441]

Further evidence suggests that Islamic movements that emerged in Ferghana Valley are quite different from puritanical conceptions of Saudi Wahhabism. Even though some gave a strict stance against alcohol and dress codes, there are no ideological ties with Saudi Arabian Wahhabism. The Wahhabis aroused some interest, especially among the youth, but did not have a wide following.[442] More importantly, even though there are people favoring Islamic revival, they have in their mind the kind of traditional Islam, in which local traditions constitute a substantial element. As such,

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[438] Paul Goble, "Uzbekistan: Analysis From Washington – Fighting Fundamentalism with Sufism" from http://www.naqshbandi.org/events/us2000/uzbek_pres/rfe_uzbekistan.htm
[439] Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia,* p. 153.
[440] Petra Steinberger, "'Fundamentalism' in Central Asia, p. 226.
[441] Ibid.
[442] Shirin Akiner, "Post-Soviet Central Asia", p. 21.

Wahhabism and other groups that can legitimately be called fundamentalists are opposed.[443]

3.3.3.2 Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is a coalition of Islamic militants from Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries who oppose the current Uzbek regime. Until the anti-terrorism campaign in Afghanistan, the IMU sought to overthrow the existing government by force and to establish an Islamic state in Uzbekistan. To this end, IMU leader Tahir Yuldashev declared a *jihad* against the government of Uzbekistan. Its members included individuals who fought in Tajikistan's 1992-97 civil war. Since early 1999, its activities have become more violent, including bombings and kidnappings. It was banned by the Uzbek authorities as a fundamentalist movement and since then it conducted its activities clandestinely or in exile, primarily from its bases in northern Afghanistan.[444]

The IMU was cited as a terrorist organization of particular concern following September 11 by the U.S. President George W. Bush. This was done to help secure Uzbekistan's cooperation in combined military action in Afghanistan, but also because IMU was involved in incursions into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in late 1990s and early 2000, and was allegedly behind the bombings in Tashkent in February 1999. The IMU was also involved in high profile kidnappings in Kyrgyzstan during 1999 and 2000, and took hostages, including a Kyrgyz official and Japanese and American tourists. In September 2000 IMU was declared a

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[443] Muriel Atkin, *The Rhetoric of Islamophobia*, from *http://www.ca-c.org/journal/eng-01-2000/16.atkin.shtml*

[444] Source: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Metareligion, from *http://www.meta-religion.com/Extremism/Islamic_extremism/islamic_movement_of_uzbekistan.htm*

'Foreign Terrorist Organization' by Clinton administration.[445] The IMU and its leadership have periodically used Afghanistan as a base of their operations, and the organization allegedly had close ties with the al-Qaeda terrorist network.[446]

As was mentioned earlier, the IMU was created by Tahir Yuldashev and Jumaboi Hojaev (also known as Juma Namangani) in 1998, calling for a *jihad* to topple the Uzbek President Karimov.[447] But its roots go back to the early 1990s, after a relative freedom of religion was brought to Central Asia during the last years of the Soviet rule, opening a way for the creation of a number of religious groups and parties in Uzbekistan. Tahir Yuldashev, who was the leader of Uzbekistan's *Adolat* Party at the time, wanted to establish law and order on the basis of the *Sharia*.[448] The party came out with certain demands to the Uzbek Government, including declaration of Islam as the state religion, transfer of several government buildings in Namangan for the movement's offices and recognition of all opposition organizations.[449] This situation alarmed government circles. This was the beginning of the confrontation between the Uzbek leadership and the country's religious groups, seen by the authorities as posing a direct challenge to their power. The response was repression. The party was banned. Many leaders were arrested but its main leaders Tahir Yuldashev, Juma Namangani and some of their supporters escaped to Tajikistan and joined the Islamic opposition during the civil war there.[450]

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[445] Quoted in *The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghan Campaign*, ICG Asia Briefing Paper, 30 January 2002, p. 2.
[446] Swante Cornell and Regine Spector, "Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists" *The Washington Quarterly*, 25:1, Winter 2002, p. 196.
[447] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad*, p. 148.
[448] Ivan Alexandrov, "Is the Islamic threat to Uzbekistan Real?", *Russia and the Muslim World*, Bulletin of Analytical Reference Information, 2001 N. 12 (114), Moscow, p. 42.
[449] Abdujabar Abduvakhidov, "Independent Uzbekistan", p. 297.
[450] Yehudit Barsky, "Terror in Tashkent: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb Al-Tahrir", *from http://www.ajc.org/InTheMedia/PubTerrorism.asp?did=1124*

Juma Namangani, who came from the Namangan region of Uzbekistan, served in ranks of Soviet army during the Soviet-Afghan war. On his return, he became involved in religious activity and was one of the organizers of the *Towba* (Repentance) movement, which was engaged in studying and propagating Islam. In his work, Namangani was helped by Muhammad Sharif Himmatzade, one of the leaders of the Party of Islamic Revival of Tajikistan. Later on, he was sent to Afghanistan to be trained in a camp meant for the Tajik opposition.[451] He continued his training at a base of the Islamic organization *Dzhamaat-e-Islami* in Tahar province. He received military training by Pakistani and Saudi Arabian Intelligence officers.[452] In 1993, after his return to Tajikistan, he set up a network of training camps financed by Pakistani intelligence and various Islamic organizations. He took active part in the civil war in Tajikistan on the side of the United Tajik Opposition. In 1996, he again went to Saudi Arabia, where he studied at one of the religious centers supervised by Saudi intelligence.[453] In 1998, along with Tahir Yuldashev and others, he formed the IMU. Tahir Yuldashev was described as the political mentor of Juma Namangani, while Namangani was the military leader of the IMU.

The ideology adopted by the IMU is militant pan-Islamism.[454] The group called itself IMU because it was a mainly ethnic Uzbek organization aimed at overthrowing the Uzbek President and establishing an Islamic state in Uzbekistan. In an interview in 2000, Tahir Yuldashev explained that, "the IMU has declared a *jihad* in order to create an Islamic religious system based on the pure Sharia laws stemming directly

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[451] Novikov Dmitry, "Central Asia may be turned into a Powder Keg", *Russia and the Muslim World*, Bulletin of Analytical Reference Information, 2001, N.11 (113), Moscow, p. 48.
[452] Ibid.
[453] Ibid.
[454] Source: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) from http://cns.miis.edu/research/wtc01/imu.htm>

from the Prophet, a system he did not think had existed either in Afghanistan or any present-day country".[455]

As discussed earlier, IMU received sizable support and training from the Taliban. Therefore, it offered its full support to the Taliban,[456] during its fight against U.S. forces. It was reported that IMU fighters were among the foreign mercenaries that provided the most serious resistance to the U.S. forces and the forces of General Abdul Rashid Dostum during the battle to take Kunduz and Mazar-i-Sharif.[457] IMU members were also among the Taliban prisoners who launched an uprising in the fortress of Qalai-Jiangi, near Mazar at the end of November 2001. About 11 men were captured when the rebellion was put down. They were transferred to Shibargon prison, 120 km east of Mazar-i-Sharif, and then handed over to the Uzbek authorities.[458]

However, one cannot say for sure whether the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan completely destroyed the IMU forces as a whole. According to unconfirmed media reports Juma Namangani, the military leader of the IMU, was killed during the U.S. operations in Afghanistan and the IMU suffered heavy losses during the battles. The events in Afghanistan have also brought to a stand its financial backing from the

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[455] Emma Sandstrom, "Central Asia- a New Afghanistan? - The Consequence of the Socio-economic Environment for Religious and Ethnic strife" in *From Taiwan to Taliban: Two Danger Zones in Asia, Scientific Report, Swedish Defence Research Agency*, ed. by Ingolf Kiesow, Stockholm, February 2002. p. 299.

[456] Schriek Daan Vander, "The Central Asian Taliban", *The Times of Central Asia*, Bishkek, October 18, 2001, p. 5.

[457] Galima Bukharbaeva, "US Fails to Curb IMU Threat", RCA No. 103, 8-Feb-02, Tashkent, from *http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/rca/rca_200202_103_2_eng.txt*

[458] Tamara Makarenko, "The Changing dynamics of Central Asian Terrorism", *Jane's Intelligence Review,* February 2002, 14 (2), p. 35.

Taliban and Al-Qaeda. If these reports are true, then indeed there is a decline of the IMU.[459]

3.3.3.3 Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Party of Islamic Liberation)

Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami appeared in Central Asia in early and mid-1990s and began to increase in number in the late 1990s. Hizb-ut-Tahrir grew out of radical Islamic movements in the Middle East in the 1950s and called for the peaceful overthrow of governments across Central Asia and the establishment of an Islamic caliphate throughout the Muslim world.[460] Unlike the IMU, Hizb-ut-Tahrir rejects violence and the use of force. According to its ideologues, the party wants to achieve its aims through dialogue and debate, by conducting a strong propaganda campaign against secularism and by promoting the idea of several benefits and advantages under the rule of Islam.[461] Hizb-ut-Tahrir is a transnational movement with considerable support among young Muslims in Western Europe and a large organizational base in London. Although it is difficult to estimate the resources and membership of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, it numbers thousands of members across Central Asia.[462]

The Hizb-ut-Tahrir advocates a view of political Islam under which social problems such as corruption and poverty would be resolved by the implementation of Islamic law and administration. However, it does not have a clear program as to how this will be

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[459] Poonam Mann, "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan: Will it Strike Back", *Strategic Analysis: A Monthly Journal of the IDSA*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Apr-Jun 2002, from http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/sa/sa_apr02map01.html

[460] *The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghan Campaign*, ICG Asia Briefing Paper, 30 January 2002, p. 6.

[461] Zamira Eshanova, "Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Kyrgysztan Differ in Approach to Hizb-ut-Tahrir", *RFE/RL Prague*, 12 July, 2002, from http://www.rferl.org/features/2002/07/12072002171856.asp

[462] *The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghan Campaign*, ICG Asia Briefing Paper, 30 January 2002, p. 6.

achieved and do not address many difficult questions raised by political Islam. The statements are often strongly anti-Western, anti-Semitic and anti-Shi'a. Nevertheless, its utopian vision has gained political significance because of the region's economic problems and social discontent. Overall, in Central Asia the Hizb-ut-Tahrir has used a combination of historical events, as well as arguments about local socioeconomic and political conditions and promoted a sense of international Islamic solidarity in the struggle against the authorities and establishment of a more just society under the rule of a Caliphate. To make its message heard, the organization relies heavily on leaflets, which usually include the movement's religious theory, excerpts from the Quran, description of events in the region and discussions of issues such as the Palestinian conflict and Chechnya as a way to gain support. The concept of transnational Muslim solidarity has been the main element in its mobilization efforts, and it has tried to use its international character to imbue it with moral authority. For example, leaflets suggest that all Muslims have common problems and that conflicts in Chechnya, Israel and Afghanistan are pertinent to Central Asian Muslims. The Hizb-ut-Tahrir is largely a marginal movement in most Muslim countries, and its ideology is generally seen as heretical by most mainstream Muslims. However, in Central Asia, where Islamic knowledge is narrow among the general population, Hizb-ut-Tahrir finds it relatively easy to convince people, especially the youth.[463]

Given the utopian nature of Hizb-ut-Tahrir's goals, it is unlikely that the party, as a major political force, will gain a wide-spread support in any Central Asian country, but seems to gain some popularity due to the lack of alternative movements in the region.[464] In Central Asia the Hizb-ut-Tahrir is mainly associated with Uzbekistan, where the party aims to topple President Karimov and establish a Caliphate. Most of Hizb-ut-Tahrir

[463] Ibid., p. 7.
[464] *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, ICG Asia Report, No. 58, 30 June, 2003, p. 5.

members are ethnic Uzbeks, but the organization also includes ethnic Kyrgyz and Tajiks.[465]

Relative popularity of Hizb-ut-Tahrir during late 1990s and early 2000s can be explained by the lack of religious plurality, caused by repression of similar groups by the government, particularly in Uzbekistan on the one hand,[466] and by the demise of the IMU following the U.S. - led anti-terrorist campaign in Afghanistan in 2001 on the other.[467]

Officials across Central Asia reacted differently to the rising popularity of Hizb-ut-Tahrir and its activities in the region, but Uzbekistan has taken the hardest line. In its actions it made little distinction between the IMU, Hizb-ut-Tahrir or Wahhabism in terms of arresting extremist people[468]. The Uzbek government believes that Hizb-ut-Tahrir is not a peaceful organization and that its pronouncements of advocating the dialogue and debate are illusive. It is concerned with Hizb-ut-Tahrir's central goal of toppling secular states in Central Asia and fears that in doing so the organization will use any means, including violence.[469] In carrying out its repressive policies, the government relied heavily on the security police. For the police the campaign against Islam has become a lucrative source of income, as well as a means to exercise their power upon population. Arbitrariness and excessive powers of the police officers often resulted in detentions of ordinary people, although theoretically the government repression was only directed at radical groups, such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Sometimes the police can device cases with no evidence, and the campaign against Islamists

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[465] *The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, p. 8.
[466] *Radical Islam in Central Asia*, p. 14.
[467] *Central Asia: Islam and the State*, ICG Asia Report, No. 59, 10 July, 2003, p. 5.
[468] *The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, p. 10.
[469] Zamira Eshanova, *Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Kyrgysztan Differ in Approach to Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, RFE/RL Prague, 12 July, 2002, from http://www.rferl.org/features/2002/07/12072002171856.asp

merely provides the necessary grounds for arrests. In an interview conducted by the ICG, an old villager from Surkhan-Darya region of Uzbekistan told of one man who disappeared in summer 2001:

> He was called to the police one day late in the evening, and since that time nobody has seen him. He was a very religious person, knew the Quran and the *hadiths* very well, but did not have any relations to terrorist or religious organizations. His brother 'Ravshan' also spent a year in prison.[470]

According to villagers, this detainment had little to do with the religious orientation of the detainees, but was merely caused by their refusal to please the local police officer, whom they did not give a lift in their car.[471]

Overall, the range of Hizb-ut-Tahrir activities in Central Asia is rather limited. Because the party is forced underground, it cannot attract the masses. Their leaflets reach only insignificant number of people. At the same time, the clandestine nature of the party's work provides them with an advantage not to demonstrate publicly how limited its support is among masses.[472]

Despite repression, Hizb-ut-Tahrir has some popularity especially among the youth, who lack religious knowledge. Restrictions imposed upon religious education contribute to the growth of religious groups, including Hizb-ut-Tahrir. As one imam from a small mosque in Tashkent complained,

> The majority of our Muslims are people with a very limited knowledge of Islam, which allows Hizb-ut-Tahrir to interpret *ayats* [verses from the Quran] and *hadith* as suits their political ideology. But the tragedy is that my colleagues and I are under the same restriction as Hizb-ut-Tahrir – just like them, we are also not allowed to teach legally. So, in these conditions, of course extremism groups will grow regardless of repression.[473]

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[470] Quoted in *Central Asia: Islam and the State*, p. 11.
[471] Ibid.
[472] Quoted in *Radical Islam in Central Asia*, p. 24.
[473] Quoted in *Central Asia: Islam and the State*, p. 9.

Another imam from Surkhan-Darya said:

> Young people have an interest in Islam, but in the conditions of a ban on learning about Islam, there will always be a certain group of young people who will join Hizb-ut-Tahrir because of their lack of education.[474]

Because the government does not want people to become extremists, it limits the quantity and the scope of religious material in the country. As a result, there is a serious lack of information to develop counter-arguments to radical groups. In this information gap, any literature is welcome, regardless of the origin and ideology.[475] Hizb-ut-Tahrir activists in Central Asia seemed to use the advantage of this situation. The language which Hizb-ut-Tahrir used while delivering its message was simplified and adapted to secularized audience. Hizb-ut-Tahrir requires no religious knowledge other than what is contained in a short list of books, pamphlets, and leaflets, written in an understandable and attractive language.[476] Therefore, Hizb-ut-Tahrir achieved some success in attracting the youth with little or no religious knowledge of Islam. In the literature they disseminate, Hizb-ut-Tahrir tries to address worldly needs of the population, such as unemployment, poverty, corruption and provides simple explanations of why people have not achieved success. The lack of a perspective for the future, contrasted with the certainty and stability under the Soviet system, the feeling of being prevented by 'the system' among the youth make them easy targets, and Hizb-ut-Tahrir's not-too-much sophisticated answers to their misfortunes are usually accepted.[477]

Finally, the very repressive nature of the Uzbek government and unwillingness of political elite to acknowledge the damage their policies cause, is the main reason

[474] Quoted in Ibid.
[475] Ibid., p. 10.
[476] *Radical Islam in Central Asia*, pp. 16-17.
[477] Ibid., p. 15.

behind the growth of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir and similar groups. Although repression in some cases is certainly effective in moving the people away from joining religious groups and from practicing religion at all, in many cases it brings the opposite results, radicalizing ordinary believers, breeding the mentality of conflict and creating a widespread support for repressed Muslims, whether Hizb-ut-Tahrir members or not.

Political Islam in Uzbekistan had little initial popular support and would have probably disappeared soon or could have been directed into a normal political channel if different decisions were made in time. The parochialism of the government in dealing with religious issues created the breeding ground for radical Islamist movements to emerge and gain strength among populations that would otherwise follow normal non-radical Islamic (or other) parties. As one imam put it:

> If the negative tendencies in our society do not stop, and corruption, unemployment continue to grow, and the police continue to terrorize people, then in the place of state organs, underground anti-state structures will begin to emerge. This will happen not today but when young people, who have passed through underground education in the humiliating conditions of suppression of Islam, and children, whose fathers sit in prison, mature politically. Then an explosive situation will arise.[478]

3.3.3.4 Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP)

The founding congress of the Islamic Renaissance Party (Partiia Islamskogo Vozrojdeniia) was held in June 1990 in Astrakhan, on the shore of the Caspian Sea).[479] The congress was attended by delegates from a variety of Muslim regions of

[478] Quoted in Ibid.
[479] Shireen Hunter, "Religion, Politics and Security in Central Asia", SAIS Review V. 21 no. 2, Summer/Fall 2001, from *http://it.stlawu.edu/~govt/361F02Hunter.html*

the country, including Central Asian ones.[480] The IRP emerged as the only all-Union political organization, embracing the Muslims.[481] The party's stated objective was to unite all Muslims of the Soviet Union, enabling them to follow Islamic precepts and encourage their religious, cultural, social, political and economic participation.[482] It openly criticized official Muslim clergy for collaboration with the Soviet authorities.[483] The IRP promulgated its idea through the newspaper *Al Wahdat*, which it had been publishing since January 1991.[484] The party denounced ethnic conflicts, denied any form of extremism and terrorism and respected constitution, but still its platform had a lot in common with fundamentalism.[485] It, for example, preached conversion to Islamic faith,[486] denounced official Muslim clergy,[487] called for the rule of *Sharia* law, demanded Islamic teaching in schools and establishment of Islamic state.[488] In addition, in its pronouncements the party supported Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (FSI),[489] established relations with Sudan, Pakistan, Egypt and Iran[490] and nurtured antagonism toward the West.[491] The article published in *Al Wahdat* and entitled "Demokratiia – demokratam, Islam – Musulmanam" (Democracy for Democrats, Islam for Muslims), addressed its audience in the following way:

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[480] Alexei V. Malashenko, "Islam and Politics in the Southern Zone of the former USSR", in *Central Asia and Transcaucasus: Ethnicity and Conflicts*, ed. by Vitaly Naumkin, Westport, Connecticut – London, Greenwood Press, 1994, p. 118.
[481] Pınar Akçalı, "Islam as a 'Common Bond", p. 270.
[482] The Program and the Rules of the Islamic Renaissance Party, p. 6.
[483] Mavlon Makhamov, "Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan After 1985" in *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, ed. by Hafeez Malik, New York, St. Martin's Press, p. 201.
[484] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 87.
[485] Oliver Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 155.
[486] Ibid.
[487] Mavlon Makhamov, "Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan After 1985", p. 201.
[488] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 87.
[489] Rashid Khatuev, *Al Wahdat*, 9 January, 1991, p. 3. (in Russian).
[490] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 87.
[491] Pınar Akçalı, "Islam as a 'Common Bond'", p. 271.

> Can we, Muslims, follow the various secularist systems which are based on teachings, whether they are about the dictatorship of the proletariat and class welfare or about nationalism and radical exclusivity or about Western democracy and absolute freedom, which leave God's teachings to the side, the teachings which raised us to a high level of civilization?[492]

The fundamentalist nature of the initial IRP was also made explicit in its program, which stipulated that "the far-fetched schemes of social development have led humanity to a total crisis in every sphere of life. The only salvation is in following the word of Allah".[493] The attitude of the party toward women and their role in society was conservative. According to the party's platform, emancipation of women, as a result of Western influence, had negatively affected the basic family values, causing alienation of women from their families. According to Vali Ahmed Sadur, the member of the IRP council *ulema*,

> The emancipation introduced in our country under the influence of the West has had the result of estranging women from family and home. We have seen how marriages and families are suffering from this. Islam proceeds from the premise that women must above all be keepers of the home and rearers of children.[494]

The party stated that it:

> …favors the enhancement of the role of women in families, believing that a woman is in the first place the mother of her children and only afterward an industrial worker, public figure, etc. The society must provide them with the opportunity for education and all-round development, but the main thing is to give them real opportunity to be keepers of the family hearth.[495]

After it was founded in Astrakhan, the IRP tried to spread its influence in all Muslim regions of the FSU. In Central Asia, the party was most active in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where respective regional branches of the initial IRP were established.[496]

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[492] Quoted in Ibid., p. 272.
[493] The Program and the Rules of the Islamic Renaissance Party, p. 8.
[494] Quoted in Pınar Akçalı, p. 273.
[495] Double-quoted in Pınar Akçalı, p. 273.
[496] Alexei V. Malashenko, "Islam and Politics in the Southern Zone of the former USSR", p. 118.

The Uzbek branch of the IRP was established in January 1992, but since it provoked arrests of its 400 participants on the orders by Uzbek authorities and led to banishment of its organizing members, the party was denied registration and was subsequently banned. Since then, the party had conducted its activities clandestinely.[497] The basic demands of the Uzbek branch at the initial meeting included teaching the real meaning of the Quran and Hadith and living in accordance with Islam; fighting national and radical discrimination, impudence, crime, alcoholism and other things forbidden by Sharia; education of the youth in Islamic principles; strengthening Islamic solidarity and development of religious contacts with other Muslim countries; cooperation with other democratic parties and state organizations; creation of philanthropic funds and securing the principles of Islamic economy; strengthening the family and ensuring rights of women and children.[498]

Upon their return to Uzbekistan, the IRP activists have distanced themselves from the idea of establishment of the Islamic state.[499] An Uzbek scholar Abdujabar Abduvakhitov stated that the IRP in Uzbekistan did not advocate anti-democratic principles and further argued that theoretically the party was willing to participate in a democratic political process but "at present time, with democratic structures undeveloped, revivalists cannot accept democratic methods of political activity".[500] Thus, the objective of creating an Islamic state was postponed for some time in the future. It can be argued, however, that such moderate position was adopted for pragmatic reasons when party members realized that IRP's objectives can be fully

[497] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 89.
[498] Abdujabar Abduvakhitov, "Islamic Revivalism in Uzbekistan" in *Russia's Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross-Cultural Analysis*, ed. by Dale F. Eickelman, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993, pp. 96-97.
[499] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 90.
[500] Abdujabar Abduvakhitov, "Islamic Revivalism in Uzbekistan", p. 96.

realized only when such an Islamic state is established.[501] So, the initial fundamentalist tendencies of the IRP were dropped and its objectives were modified and became more moderate. Such a transformation occurred primarily due to the government crackdown and out of the necessity to adapt to the existing unfavorable circumstances. Therefore, although the Uzbek government's continuous repression of the IRP was hardly justifiable, for Uzbek President Islam Karimov, the party remained one of the few forces for alternative political organization in Uzbekistan, capable of challenging his power. The crackdown he instituted on the group can be explained by the fear of what happened in Tajikistan, where the former President Rakhmon Nabiev was ousted by the Islamic-oriented opposition.

3.4 Internal Factors in Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is a multi-ethnic state and this diversity reflects the religious affiliations of its citizens. Muslim religion is traditional largest but the citizens of Kyrgyzstan resort to religion only on special social occasions such as weddings and funerals. By the time of independence ethnic Kyrgyz made up 52 percent of the population of Kyrgyzstan. Other traditionally Muslim nations (most of them Uzbeks) made up another 20 percent. Russians constituted 21 percent, with further 5 percent shared between other non-Muslim European ethnic groups.[502] According to official sources, about 80 percent of the inhabitants are Muslims. There are about 120 mosques and *madrassas* and two institutions of higher Islamic teaching.[503]

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[501] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 91.
[502] Felix Corley, "Kyrgyz State Commission Gives Registration Statistics", Keston News Service, HRWF, 29 January 1999, from *http://www.hrwf.net/html/kyrgyzstan1999.html*
[503] Source: *http://wrc.lingnet.org/kyrgyzst.htm*

The vast majority of today's Kyrgyz are Muslims of the Sunni branch, though religious beliefs are generally considered to be taken relatively lightly among formerly nomadic Kyrgyz. Limited public knowledge of the tenets of Islam and superficial familiarity with the Islamic faith was further reinforced by Soviet-imposed isolation and led them to favor the non-scriptural traditional (folklorik) value of Islam.[504] Proclivity to Islam in Kyrgyzstan can be understood within a north-south geographic division and like in the rest of Central Asia is closely associated with the presence of Uzbek population. In the south, where Uzbek population is substantial and Uzbek culture has had its lasting imprint, more Kyrgyz became 'better' Muslims. The north, geographically and culturally closer to Russia, does not have a strong connection to Islamic tradition. The gap between the two regions with regard to religion is visible in outward expressions and behavior. For example, southerners wear longer, more closed clothes. They perform Islamic rituals and attend mosque. Religious matters, such as female chastity before marriage are very important for them. Arranged and early marriages are also important manifestations of their increased religiosity.[505] Religious practice in the north is more heavily mixed with animism and shamanistic practices, giving worship a resemblance to Siberian religious practice.

The Kyrgyz generally practice their religion in a specific way influenced by earlier tribal customs. Islam combines elements of totemism, the recognition of spiritual kinship with a particular type of animal. Under this belief system, which predated Islam, Kyrgyz tribes adopted reindeer, camels, snakes, owls, and bears as objects of

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[504] Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Political Islam in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan", *Central Asian Survey*, London, Vol.20, No.4 (2001), p. 460.

[505] Rustam Mukhamedov, *"Is Islam in Kyrgyzstan Dangerous for Government"*, Central Asia-Causcasus Analyst, August 14, 2002, from *http://www.cacianalyst.org/2002-08-14/20020814Islam_Kyrgyzstan.htm*

worship. The sun, moon, stars and heaven also played an important religious role. The strong dependence of the nomads on the forces of nature reinforced such connections and fostered belief in shamanism and black magic. Traces of such beliefs remain in the religious practice of many of today's Kyrgyz.[506]

Heroic epic 'Manas' – the greatest heritage of verbal poetic creation in which the centuries-old history of the Kyrgyz is reflected through artistic narration – is regarded as the encyclopedia of popular life of the Kyrgyz. 'Manas' reflects the attitude, *weltanschauung* (worldview), customs and traditions, popular mentality, communal consciousness, and morality of the Kyrgyz, including their understanding of religion. As far as religious notions in the epic are concerned, one can clearly observe that the ancestors of the Kyrgyz worshiped *Tengri* (God of Heaven), *Umay Ene* (Goddess of Childhood) and *Jer-Suu* (God of Earth and Water). High spirituality of main characters is upheld by guardian angels and spirits of their ancestors through notions of totemic magic, which endow them with miraculous qualities.[507] The nature of religious concepts, taking place in the epic 'Manas' suggests that shamanism, one of the most ancient beliefs, which was absorbed by the ancestors of the Kyrgyz, had been strongly preserved in the structure of the epic, expressing the belief of the Kyrgyz in miraculous abilities of nature and animals.[508] The epic also tells how elements of totemism are harmoniously combined with the elements of Islam. For example, Sagymbay Orozbakov – one of the most outspoken narrators of the epic who was also known as a deeply religious person – resorted to norms of morality, preached in Islam, thus lifting the artistic potential of the epic. The narrator gets

[506] John Anderson, "Religion, State and Society in the New Kyrgyzstan", *Journal of Church and State* (USA), No. 41, Vol. 1, 1999, p. 100.
[507] B. J. Isakov, "Diniy Yralrdyn Evoliutsiiasy", *Izvesiia Vuzov*, No. 2, Bishkek, 2004, p. 15.
[508] Ibid., p. 16.

Manas – the main character – through shamanism first, and then makes an association of the image of Manas with Mecca – the main center of Islam.[509]

Inside the republic, some ethnic minorities such as Uygurs, Turks and Dungans (Chinese Muslims) are the strongest adherents to Islam. This can be seen in the quantity of mosques in districts populated by these groups, where they gather to perform prayers that strengthen their sense of Muslim community (*umma*).[510] In May 1993, as a result of a statistical work conducted by Inforex Ltd., it was revealed that the most religiously-minded people in Kyrgyzstan are of Uzbek origin, of whom 74,6 per cent considered themselves as such. For comparison, only 64 per cent of the Kyrgyz considered themselves Muslim. Furthermore, of these, 36,4 percent of the Uzbeks considered themselves as deeply religious, whereas only 15,4 percent of the Kyrgyz considered themselves as such.[511] Although in the last several years concerns were raised about the spread of imported Muslim fanaticism, in Bishkek – capital of Kyrgyzstan – the atmosphere is very relaxed and people do not really care about religious attachment as long as basic rules of common living are respected and extreme forms of religiosity are not manifested.[512] In relatively liberal Kyrgyzstan, Islamic activity is concentrated in Osh region, where relations between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks remain tense. Islam is more widespread among Uzbeks, who consider themselves deprived in an increasingly 'Kyrgyz' state. It is possible that Islamists on both sides of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border have links. In general, however,

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[509] Ibid.
[510] Rustam Mukhamedov, *Is Islam in Kyrgyzstan Dangerous for Government.*
[511] E. Jorobekova, "Vozmojen li Religioznyi Renessans v Respublikah Tsentral'noy Azii", *Tsentral'naia Aziia i Kul'tura Mira*, No 1-2 (12-13), Bishkek, 2002, pp. 53-54.
[512] Source: Kyrgyzstan, Basic Facts, Area Studies, Independent States, from http://eng.gateway.kg/religion

Kyrgyz authorities are more tolerant to Islamists than their peers in Uzbekistan.[513] Thus, Islamic traditions in Kyrgyzstan are generally regarded as mild in contrast to those in neighboring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, although some rites such as male circumcision and burial according to Islamic laws are almost universal among traditionally Muslim ethnic groups.

3.4.1 Political Conditions

The political developments in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan which revolved around the issues of independence, democracy and market economy have created a fertile ground for drastic changes concerning religious situation in the country. In December 1991, the Law on Religion and Religious Organizations was passed by the Kyrgyz parliament. It states that every citizen of Kyrgyzstan has the right to "freely and independently determine his attitudes toward religion ...and to express and disseminate convictions associated with religious attitudes". According to the new law, Church and State are separate.[514] The only restriction on religious freedom is a ban on religions organizing their own political parties. Article 8 of the Kyrgyz Constitution, passed in May 1993, affirms the separation of religion and state, but forbids the "creation of political parties on religious basis" and the "interference of ministers of religious organizations and cults in the activity of the state authorities".[515] The government does not support any particular religion and teaching of religion (or atheism) in public schools is forbidden. At the same time, Islamic

[513] Anna Matveeva, "The Threat of Islamicism in Post-Soviet Eurasia", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4, Vol. 5, 1999, pp. 99-100.
[514] Commission For Security And Cooperation In Europe, *Implementation Of The Helsinki Accords: Human Rights And Democratization In Europe,* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993, p. 172.
[515] Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted at the 12th Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* (in Russian), 21 May 1993, pp. 2-3.

revival was encouraged by Kyrgyz officialdom. Its positive role in fulfilling the ideological vacuum was emphasized by attributing it the qualities of 'national inheritance'. This was made explicit when President Askar Akayev swore his presidential oath on both country's constitution and Quran, and made two traditional Islamic feasts national holidays.[516]

Since the period of independence, especially in the first half of 1990s, the Kyrgyz government took the leading position in respecting human rights in Central Asia. It has allowed opposition political parties, non-governmental human rights organizations, and independent media to conduct their activities freely. In contrast to Uzbekistan, a considerable degree of political tolerance has been displayed by President Askar Akayev. Kyrgyz authorities, for example, resisted to pressure from Uzbekistan, when a leading Uzbek journalist Abdumannob Pulat, was abducted by Uzbek secret police in Bishkek while he was attending an international human rights conference.[517]

Until 1993 Muslims in Kyrgyzstan were subordinate to SADUM based in Tashkent and did not have their own mufti. Now the mufti acts independently and is no longer subject to control neither by this institution, nor state structures as it is the case in some countries such as Uzbekistan.[518] The number of mosques since 1991 grew from 39 to 1200 in 2002, most of them (almost 80 per cent) being located in the south. There are 10-12 individual *medreses* and about 40 *medreses* attached to mosques in

[516] Shirin Akiner, "Islam, the State and Ethnicity in Central Asia in Historical Perspective", *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 24 (2/3), 1996, p. 26.
[517] Nancy Lubin, Keith Martin, Barnett R. Rubin, *Calming the Ferghana Valley: Development and Dialogue in the Heart of Central Asia*, The Century Foundation, 1999, p. 110.
[518] Anara Tabyshalieva, "Vzgliad na Religiiu v Kyrgyzstane", *Tsentral'naia Aziia i Kul'tura Mira*, No 1-2 (12-13), Bishkek, 2002, p. 129.

Kyrgyzstan. During the Soviet period religious institutions, such as currently functioning Islamic Institute in Bishkek and Tokmak, were absent.[519]

Two Muslim newspapers "Islam Madaniiaty" and "Shariat", dedicated to Islamic issues in Kyrgyzstan, are being published in Bishkek, and several more newspapers in the Uzbek language are published in the south. However, these newspapers publish materials which are highlighting two themes: raising public awareness regarding religious festivals and criticism against 'Wahhabis'. Nevertheless, these publications still fail to explain why 'Wahhabism' is dangerous for the society. The lack of information about Islam among the population as well as the lack of competent experts in religious issues enable journalists to label any person, whose views are different from generally accepted ones as a Wahhabi.[520]

Religion has not played an especially significant role in the politics of Kyrgyzstan. Unlike the situation in Uzbekistan, in Kyrgyzstan Islamic parties were absent from the political scene during the last years of Soviet period when a relative degree of freedoms, including religious one, were allowed. As was mentioned above, limited public knowledge of the tenets of Islam, reinforced by Soviet-imposed anti-religious propaganda, has resulted in favoring non-scriptural traditional Islam. This low Islam remains an obstacle to the growth of Islam as a political ideology.

The policy of religious tolerance adopted by the government of Kyrgyzstan has caused an influx of Uzbeks from neighboring Uzbekistan. They come to Kyrgyzstan to head for pilgrimage to Mecca, because the crackdown on Muslim fundamentalism prevents them from doing so on their own territory. Many of these Muslims are

[519] Ibid.
[520] Ibid., p. 131.

spreading their brand of Islam among the youth who lack religious knowledge. Pressure on Islam in Uzbekistan also undermines the relatively liberal attitude of the Kyrgyz authorities toward Islam. This is especially evident in the Kyrgyz part of Ferghana Valley. Labeled 'Wahhabism' had become a useful instrument in persecuting Muslims, enabling the Uzbek government to interfere to the internal affairs of Kyrgyzstan. In December 1997 the minister of National Security, Felix Kulov announced that his ministry would create a special department to control activities of alleged 'Wahhabis'. In 1998 a Religious Affairs Commission was created to deal with the problem. The same year, Imam Karimov, a refugee from Tajikistan was expelled for disseminating 'Wahhabi' ideas.[521] In spring of the same year, about twenty ethnic Uygurs were arrested on illegal possession of weapons and 'Wahhabi' video material.[522] Furthermore, an extremist Uzbek opposition group, aimed at creation of a theocratic state in Ferghana and based in Tajikistan may become a serious destabilizing force in whole Central Asia. It threatens the regional states by carrying-out terrorist attacks in Kyrgyzstan if the country decides to cooperate with Uzbekistan in suppression of Islamic leaders.[523]

Armed incursions of Islamist militants into the territory of Kyrgyzstan from August to October 1999 and August 2000 increased the government's concern regarding political Islam and the actions of its followers. Presidential decree number 319 states that any religious organization may be denied registration if its activities do not comply with Kyrgyz law or is dangerous to state security, social stability, inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations, or the health and morals of the people. On

[521] Source: "News and Information on Religious Freedom in Central Asia", Human Rights Watch/Division Europe and Central Asia, 8 October 1998.
[522] Ibid.
[523] Anara Tabyshalieva, "Vzgliad na Religiiu v Kyrgyzstane", p. 131.

May 1, 2001, the Procurator General proposed amending the Criminal Code to include tougher sentences for individuals convicted of 'religious extremism'.[524]

Some observers have expressed the opinion that in certain cases politicians could openly manipulate the religious feelings of the people under the conditions of worsened economy, especially in the more religious south during elections. As Anara Tabyshalieva has pointed out,

> the politicians will probably play on contradictions within Islam. Most of Kyrgyz politicians are the successors of the Communist Party, rather then representatives of religious groups, feelings of which they, however, manipulate aptly enough. The following generation of politicians will be more prepared in using religious issues in their struggle for power.[525]

The outcome of the 'tulip revolution', following the parliamentary elections held in late February and mid-March 2005 (which were widely regarded as fraudulent), has clearly demonstrated, however, that in Kyrgyzstan religious factor was far from being decisive during the times of political crisis, aggravated by economic decay. Although the revolution was initiated in the country's southern regions of Jalal-Abad and Osh, where the population is most religious, religious factor still didn't play any significant role in mobilizing people against Akaev's long-lasting regime. During the anti-Akaev demonstrations there were no claims by religious extremist groups, demanding, for example, the creation of theocracy, or more freedom for religious expression by religiously-minded Uzbeks, who comprise significant number of the population in the south. Surprisingly, both Uzbeks and Kyrgyz of the southern regions were united in their common struggle against economic deprivation, corruption and human rights violations. A Russian observer, Sergei Borovikov,

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[524] Source: International Religious Freedom Report, released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, from *http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2001/5598.htm*

[525] Anara Tabyshalieva, "Vzgliad na Religiiu v Kyrgyzstane", p. 132

analyzing the revolutionary situation and elections in Kyrgyzstan has expressed the following view:

> Legalization of Hizb-ut-Tahrir under close guidance of western community has not led to radicalization of Muslims in the south of Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, according to a number of sources, even Kara-Suu and Jalal-Abad cells of Hizb-ut-Tahrir are not inclined to conduct acts of diversion and terror attacks. And they are least interested in elections as such. Hizb-ut-Tahrir is an instrument against Islam Karimov first of all in neighboring Andijan Oblast and other Uzbek regions of Ferghana Valley. For Askar Akaev it doesn't pose any threat.[526]

Clearly, the country's main problems were basically economic rather than political. It is exactly the anger caused by pervasive corruption and the slow pace of economic change which have fuelled this movement against the Kyrgyz President.

3.4.2 Economic Conditions

Before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan played its integrated role in the country and had a highly specialized economic niche in the communist economic system. The economy of Kyrgyzstan, like those of the other Union republics of the former Soviet Union, was oriented toward the production of goods and services for the intra-Union markets. Kyrgyzstan's greatest role in the all-Union economy was to provide primary commodities for industries located in the European parts of the Soviet Union. Moscow initiated the industrialization of the predominantly agrarian Kyrgyzstan in order to develop agricultural machinery, electric motor production and light manufacturing. During and after the World War II many industrial plants were moved to Kyrgyzstan, bringing Slavic workers,

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[526] Sergey Borovikov, "Russia should not be Mistaken in Kyrgyzstan" RBC Daily News Agency, March 21, 2005, from *http://daily.rbc.ru/news/person/index.shtml?2005/03/21/200549*

engineers and technical personnel. In the 1960s and 1970s Moscow heavily invested in the republic's hydro-electric power generating sector, mining and metallurgical plants.[527] In terms of agriculture, Kyrgyzstan contributed to the Soviet Union's total output by producing preserved vegetables, animal fats, plant oils, meet and sugar beet.[528] The share of inter-republican trade made up a significant 39,63 percent in GDP. This was the result of central planning decisions, which in an administrative fashion assigned particular production specializations to each republic within the Soviet Union.[529]

The Kyrgyz economy suffered serious declines in output following the break-up of the Soviet Union. The industrial portion of its economy was narrowly designed to supply defense industry and included little manufacturing capacity that processed materials produced in Kyrgyzstan. As a result of the fall of the Soviet Union and radical changes in the economies of all post-Soviet states, many Kyrgyz enterprises, especially those in the defense and machine industries, lost their traditional markets.[530]

In 1990, almost 100 percent of Kyrgyz exports were sent to other parts of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the Kyrgyz economy was severely affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union, resulting in a very bad economic performance in the early 1990s which was worse than anywhere else in the former Soviet Union, except war-torn Armenia, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan.[531] The total collapse of the Soviet era economy

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[527] Rafiz Abazov, "Economic Migration in Post-Soviet Central Asia: The Case of Kyrgyzstan", *Post-Communist Economies,* Vol. 11, No. 2, 1999, p. 239.
[528] Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asia's New States", p. 97.
[529] Marek Dabrowski and Rafal Antczak, "Economic Reform in Kyrgyzstan", *Studies and Analyses*, CASE Foundation, Warsaw, No. 28, September 1994, p. 6.
[530] Marek Dabrowski and Rafal Antczak, "Economic Reform in Kyrgyzstan", p. 7.
[531] Kyrgyzstan: Background Note, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U. S. Department of State, from http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5755.htm

in Kyrgyzstan helped to consolidate a political consensus behind a strong commitment to reforming the economy along market-oriented lines.

Economic change and reform has been an important feature since independence in 1991. Kyrgyzstan is one of the most progressive countries of the former Soviet Union in carrying out market reforms and willing to be integrated into the world economy.[532] In early 1992 the prime minister of Kyrgyzstan Tursunbek Chyngyshev visited the countries of the European Community (EU) with the aim of bringing EU aid in reviving the Kyrgyz economy. One of the major features of this visit was a clear expression of Kyrgyzstan's adherence to open and secular governance and its dedication to prevent the spread of 'Islamic radicalism' and 'ethnic rivalry', which caused massive upheaval and chaos to neighboring Tajikistan.[533] The Kyrgyz government followed an intensive agenda of structural and industrial reforms in order to help develop its private sector. Much of the government's stock in enterprises was sold and new financial legislation was passed. This strong commitment to economic reform, however, was a natural response to the severely affected national economy following the collapse of the Soviet Union in order to establish sustainable economic growth and attract the support of international community and donor agencies. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan's limited resource endowment (unlike the neighboring states of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan possesses only insignificant deposits of oil and gas) and substantial natural obstacles (Kyrgyzstan is a geographically landlocked country) constrained its real progress.

[532] Gregory Gleason, *Markets and Politics in Central Asia: Structural Reform and Political Change*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003, p. 69.
[533] Nozar Alaolmolki, *Life After the Soviet Union: The newly Independent Republics of the Transcaucasus and Central Asia*, State University of New York Press, 2001, p. 89.

Therefore, Kyrgyzstan at first seemed unattractive for Western investors.[534] Despite unfavorable conditions, the government of Kyrgyzstan was actively engaged in the process of political and economic liberalization. New laws were adopted and new decrees were issued, including legislation on investment, customs regulations, insurance of private business, massive privatization and land reforms. Kyrgyzstan was the first former Soviet republic to move away from the ruble zone and to introduce its own currency in May 1993.[535] Kyrgyzstan was also the first Central Asian country to approve negotiations with the IMF under which the IMF sponsored a multi-million Systemic Transformation Facility and guaranteed full current account convertibility and non-discriminatory currency arrangements.[536] In September 1992 Kyrgyzstan became a member of the World Bank. The following year the World Bank started carrying out projects to help revitalize economy, develop private sector, reduce poverty and promote good governance. During the first ten years of its operation in Kyrgyzstan, the World Bank invested US$ 607 million for its 27 projects.[537] Being one of the most economically liberal regimes in the region, Kyrgyzstan was granted full membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the autumn of 1998.[538] However, Kyrgyzstan's economic reform did neither lead to the estimated increase in economic output, nor resulted in improvements in social welfare. Economic reforms did not also bring any real improvement in the government's capacity to protect civil rights and it had a negligible influence on the

[534] Eugene Huskey, "An Economy of Authoritarianism?: Askar Akaev and Presidential Leadership in Kyrgyzstan" in *Power and Change in Central Asia*, ed. by Sally N Cummings, Routledge, London and New York, 2002, p. 75.
[535] Richard Pomfret, *Central Asia Turns South?: Trade Relations in Transition* (Central Asian and Caucasian Prospects), The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatam House, London, 1999, p. 17.
[536] *Kyrgyzstan: The Transition to a Market Economy*, A World Bank Country Study, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 1993, p. iii.
[537] Gregory Gleason, *Markets and Politics in Central Asia*, p. 155, footnote no. 2.
[538] Eugene Huskey, "An Economy of Authoritarianism?, p. 75.

process of political liberalization. Introduction of national currency, the som, has caused a great deal of trouble for Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan, which once had been a major trading partner of Kyrgyzstan, responded with cutting off all major links with Kyrgyzstan and demanding payments for natural gas exports at 80 percent of world price and in dollars.[539] In addition to this, the introduction of the som caused a very high level of inflation.[540] For industrial sector, the output declined by about 50 percent and production in machine, electrical and electronic industries fell even grater.[541] As economist Andrew Birch has pointed out, "the fragile state of the economy and the country's lack of foreign reserves will ensure that the som remains vulnerable to external shocks, with a lingering risk of sudden and significant depreciation".[542] After budgetary subsidies from Moscow were cut, Kyrgyzstan, which was heavily dependent on center, was severely affected by economic crisis, with inflation reaching 1, 200 percent in 1993.[543] Mass and rapid privatization and 'shock therapy' were perceived as the pillars for alleviating the country's economic crisis. In 1991 the government announced a comprehensive privatization program.[544] Although, Kyrgyzstan's privatization program is generally regarded as the most progressive in Central Asia, the implementation of the privatization process was complicated by the weak normative and legal bases and by difficulties in pricing,

[539] Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's New States*, p. 100.
[540] Nozar Alaolmolki, *Life After the Soviet Union,* p. 90.
[541] Marek Dabrowski and Rafal Antczak, "Economic Reform in Kyrgyzstan", p. 11.
[542] Kyrgyzstan: Quarterly Forecast Analysis, Global Insight, prepared by Andrew Birch, p. 9.
[543] Ahmed Rashid, "The New Struggle in Central Asia: A Primer for the Baffled", *World Policy Journal*, Winter 2000/2001, Vol. 17, No, 4, p. 42.
[544] The Law on 'General Principles of Privatization and Entrepreneurship in the Kyrgyz Republic' was adopted on 20 December 1991.

since most of the privatized entities were sold well below value, often at symbolic prices.[545]

The economic crisis negatively affected the quality of life for Kyrgyzstan's population. Poverty is a serious problem with the level of per capita declining from US$ 1160 in 1991 to US$ 700 in 1995.[546] In 1996, 71-75 percent of the population lived in poverty.[547] By 2003 the percentage of the poor in the republic somewhat improved declining down to 40 percent of population living below the poverty line, but nominal GDP per capita was only US$ 379.[548]

Unemployment is another grave problem in the post-Soviet period. The rate of real unemployment is very high, although official estimates showed the levels of unemployment at only 3.6 percent of the economically active population in 1996.[549] In 1997, the number of officially unemployed was 4 percent of the republic's working population.[550] By the year 2003, the level of unemployment increased by 6.2 percent with the number of unemployed persons making up 9.0 percent of the population, reaching the highest level since independence.[551] According to Dabrowski and Antczak, the number of the unemployed people will certainly increase in the near future, necessitating increased expenditures on unemployment benefits and putting pressure on the system of pensions.[552] As a result of decline in production and the ineffectiveness of the government itself in carrying out reforms,

[545] N. A. Volgina, M. S. Gafarly and N. N. Semenova, "The Transition to a Modern Market Economy" in *Central Asia: Political and Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, ed. by Alexei Vasiliev, Saqi Books, 2001, p. 254.
[546] Human Development under Transition: Europe and CIS, UNDP, May 1997, p. 122.
[547] Kyrgyz Republic: National Human Development Report, Bishkek, UNDP, 1996, p. 33.
[548] Kyrgyzstan: Quarterly Forecast Analysis, Global Insight, prepared by Andrew Birch, p. 3.
[549] Rafiz Abazov, "Economic Migration in Post-Soviet Central Asia", p. 243.
[550] N. A. Volgina, *et al*, "The Transition to a Modern Market Economy", p. 254.
[551] Kyrgyzstan: Quarterly Forecast Analysis, Global Insight, prepared by Andrew Birch, p. 5.
[552] Dabrowski and Rafal Antczak, "Economic Reform in Kyrgyzstan", p. 23.

Kyrgyzstan accumulated a mountain of international debt. In 1995 alone its debt was increased by 35,25 percent, reaching US$ 473,39 million by January 1996, which equaled to 27,92 percent of the national GDP. By mid-1999, Kyrgyzstan's external indebtedness was US$ 1531 million, reaching 59 percent of the GDP.[553]

Growing unemployment, mass pauperization, sharp decrease of living standards, and growing political unrest had prompted President Akaev to strengthen his power. Although Kyrgyzstan was considered to be the only country in Central Asia to hold free elections, to enjoy freedom of press and to allow a vibrant political opposition, in mid-1990s the situation changed for worse. Although formally there was a strong opposition movement in Kyrgyzstan, capable of challenging the authorities, the corruption and incompetence of the bureaucratic apparatus created favorable conditions for the president to increase his power. Widespread corruption hindered the development of a strong democratic state and the introduction of a market economy. This was evident in the every day workings of law and administration, in the privatization of state property and in foreign ventures.[554] Little was done to fight corruption and when there were cases of prosecution, they often looked like government's revenge against opposition figures.[555]

In short, although President Akaev was initially the most progressive of the Central Asian leaders, after 1996 he began to apply authoritarian methods as a response to social strains triggered by economic decline, growing unemployment, political scandals over power sharing, and rise of corruption. As a result, Akaev's credibility diminished at home and abroad.

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[553] N. A. Volgina, *et al*, "The Transition to a Modern Market Economy", p. 264.
[554] Eugene Huskey, "An Economy of Authoritarianism?, p. 93 footnote no. 43.
[555] Gregory Gleason, *Markets and Politics in Central Asia*, p. 77.

Nevertheless, in Kyrgyzstan, economic crisis and decline in living standards did not result in mobilization of religious opposition capable of challenging the existing regime, as is the case in neighboring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. But repression of religiously-minded opposition there was a sensitive issue for Kyrgyz authorities too, and contributed significantly, though not solely, to Akaev's tightening his grip on power. Indeed, since mid-1990s authoritarianism was employed by Akaev in response to the social upheavals caused by economic decline. His desire to remain in power as long as possible at the expense of democratic principles shook his initial image both at home and abroad.

Economic reform and freedom of confession enjoyed in Kyrgyzstan have been met with criticism on the part of Uzbek authorities. Firstly, as was mentioned earlier, Uzbekistan cut its oil and gas exports to Kyrgyzstan, in response to the introduction of Kygyz currency, the som, of which Kyrgyzstan was the first to introduce among other CIS states.[556] Secondly, President Karimov, resenting the use of Kyrgyzstan as a haven for Uzbek Islamic activists who faced persecution at home, had exerted his influence by demanding a ban of an Uzbek language religious journal in Osh[557] and blaming Kyrgyz authorities in issuing false passports and other documents for Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan.[558] As is known, in 2000 amid parliamentary and presidential elections, a deepening economic crisis and the incursion of Islamic militants in the southern region of Batken, Akaev resorted to more strident tactics of an authoritarian ruler to retain his hold on power.

[556] Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's New States*, p. 100.
[557] Ibid., p. 108.
[558] Eugene Huskey, "An Economy of Authoritarianism?, p. 88.

It must finally be pointed out that if Kyrgyzstan's economic grievances are not addressed, this may have potential negative political consequences. There are already signs that the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan is regrouping in the Ferghana Valley in southern Kyrgyzstan.[559] However, it is quite questionable whether religious extremism is still a major threat in the region, capable of influencing people in conditions of social unrest. In an interview for IRIN, David Lewis, the head of the Central Asian Project of the International Crisis group said that although there are some signs of IMU, "…in most cases their activities have been somewhat exaggerated. They do still pose a potential threat in small numbers to the region, but they are probably not quite as effective as perhaps some people in security forces think they are".[560] As recent developments taking place in Kyrgyzstan after the conduction of fraudulent parliament elections in February and March 2005 have demonstrated, in situations of major social upheaval, it is unlikely that the people and opposition will allow the government to manipulate the issue of religious extremism. For the first time since independence, the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks have united in a common struggle to establish justice against the arbitrariness of the President and his entourage. The Kyrgyzstanis of all ethnic origins have shown a unity and determination towards the change for the better, without any manipulation by authorities.

[559] Central Asia: Focus on Security Threat from Radical Islamic Groups, from *http://www.plusnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=38916&SelectRegion=Central_Asia*
[560] Jihad in Central Asia, *Jihad Watch*, January 15, 2004, from *http://www.jihadwatch.org/archives/000642.php*

3.4.3 Religious Conditions

3.4.3.1 Wahhabism

In Central Asia Wahhabism is increasingly active in Ferghana Valley, primarily in its Uzbek part. Recently it has been slowly increasing its influence among the Uzbeks of Osh and Jalal-Abad oblasts in Kyrgyzstan. Known as the puritans of the Islamic faith, the Wahhabis believe in the establishment of a Muslim community similar to that which exited at the time of the Prophet Muhammad when Islam dominated all aspects of believers' lives.[561]

In Kyrgyzstan Wahhabism is active in Osh and Jalal-Abad oblasts, where 25 percent of the population is Uzbek. The movement is particularly strong in two villages of Bekabad and Suzak in Jalal-Abad, where the Wahhabi imams from Namangan and Andijan come to propagate their faith and spread their activity. It is said that the mosques set by the Wahhabis are well attended in those villages. The majority of Wahhabis in Kyrgyzstan are of Uzbek origin.[562]

On the grassroots level it is believed that Wahhabism as political Islam has little appeal in southern Kyrgyzstan. On the contrary, the government is concerned about the threat of political Islam, whose followers are labeled 'Wahhabi'. The government perceives these Islamists to be a threat to national stability, particularly in the southern part of the country. The government of Kyrgyzstan, like that of Uzbekistan, fears that Islamists in general, and Wahhabis in particular seek to overthrow the secular government and establish theocracy. These concerns, however, are not groundless. After incursions by Islamic militants into the country in August to

[561] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics*, p. 92.
[562] Ibid., p. 95.

October 1999, which were repeated in August 2000, the government increased its concern regarding political Islam and the actions of its followers. A number of decrees have been passed to restrict the activities of Islamic militancy. Amendments have been incorporated to the Penal Code, which includes tougher sentences for those convicted of 'religious extremism'.[563]

3.4.3.2 Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

In the years prior to the anti-terrorist campaign, militants of IMU had established encampments in Afghanistan from where they launched raids during the summers of 1999 and 2000 into Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In August 1999, and armed IMU group, which had entered the Batken district of southern Kyrgyzstan through high mountain passes from Tajikistan, took several Kyrgyz officials hostage, releasing them a week later after a multi-million dollar ransom has been paid. Later the same month a new group of several dozen hostages was taken, including a Kyrgyz General and four Japanese geologists. The confrontation continued for two months, during which Kyrgyz troops appeared powerless to expel the insurgents, who agreed to release hostages and to withdraw after Japan paid a large ransom.[564]

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[563] Sources: Vicken Cheterian, Where is Juma Namangani? Eurasia Insight, December 6, 2002, from *http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav071700.shtml;* Religious Freedom Report, from *http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2001/5598.htm*; Religious Freedom in the Majority Islamic Countries, 1998, Report, Kyrgyzstan, from *http://www.alleanzacattilica.org/acs/acs_english/report_98/kyrgyzstan.htm*; Morgan Y. Liu, Evaluating the Appeal of Islam in the Ferghana Valley, Eurasia Insight, January 8, 2000, from *http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav080100.shtml*

[564] Morgan Y. Liu, Evaluating the Appeal of Islam in the Ferghana Valley, Eurasia Insight, January 8, 2000, from *http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav080100.shtml*

Aside from the intention of bringing down the Uzbek government and the demand for ransom, the insurgents also insisted that the Kyrgyz government give them leave to pass freely through the Kyrgyz territory to Uzbekistan, which was their central target.

The incursions were repeated in August 2000, this time initially in Uzbekistan's southern province of Surkhan-Darya, in a high-mountain area on the border with Tajikistan. Within several days, separate incursions had begun in several places in southern Kyrgyzstan mainly in Chong-Alay and Laylak districts. Insurgents took several American mountain climbers hostage, but they escaped by overthrowing and killing the guard. Though this escape avoided the possibility of direct US involvement, the capture of the Americans prompted the US State Department to include the IMU in its list of world terrorist organizations.[565]

The authorities in Kyrgyzstan reacted to the events by creating a new administrative district (oblast), separating the Batken region from Osh oblast. This move was supposed to reinforce the local administration and improve its response capabilities, as well as provide for more efficient use of state resources to combat poverty in the region.

IMU incursions helped focus attention on the economic factor in the rise of Islamic radicalism. The impoverishment of a significant portion of Batken's population has been identified as a contributing factor in the rise of Islamic militant activity.

In 2002, there were numerous warnings on the part of Kyrgyz officials and security services that Islamic militancy was growing stronger and there was a threat that they

[565] Central Asia: Islamist Mobilization and Regional Security, *ICG Asia Report No. 14*, Osh/Brussels, 1 Match 2001, p. 8.

would make incursions to the area despite the ongoing U.S.-led anti-terrorist campaign in Afghanistan.

Many IMU fighters, including the movement's charismatic leader, Juma Namangani, are reported killed during the U.S. onslaught in Afghanistan. However, Central Asian leaders are not sure whether Namangani is indeed dead and are raising possibility that the IMU and other Islamic radical groups, may attempt to carry out acts of sabotage in the nearest future.[566]

It has been reported by the Kyrgyz media in 2002 that two citizens apprehended during summer were affiliated with the IMU. The Kyrgyz Minister of Defense claimed that there were several hundred Islamic militants located in Afghanistan's Paktika provinces. As he told the Kabar news agency, "The U.S.-led anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan has not yet achieved its goal. There is a danger – at least at present time – of destabilization of the situation in Central Asia by the remnants of bandit formations".[567]

3.4.3.3 Hizb-ut-Tahrir

Though a small number of Hizb-ut-Tahrir cells nurtured by foreign missionaries existed throughout the early and mid-1990s in Central Asia, the organization began to expand dramatically in the late 1990s.

Most Hizb-ut-Tahrir members are ethnic Uzbeks, but the organization also includes ethnic Kyrgyz and Tajiks. The Hizb-ut-Tahrir mostly associated itself in Central Asia

[566] Central Asian Authorities Keep IMU Threat Alive, 16 September, 2002, Eurasia Insight, from *http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav/1020902.shtm*
[567] Ibid.

with Uzbekistan, and overthrowing President Karimov is clearly a central goal. The organization has, however, become much more active in Kyrgyzstan in recent years because of the government crackdown in Uzbekistan.

Members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir are seen as dissidents and as people with a conviction sharply contrasting with the image of state officials. The group's main tenets – the just distribution of resources, profits, and property, just governance, the elimination of corruption and the common 'brotherhood' of the entire Muslim world are a direct challenge to the moral authority of leaders in the region. One Hizb-ut-Tahrir member in Kyrgyzstan claimed:

> Nobody is allowed to remain hungry under the caliphate. For example, the caliph who will sit in Bishkek, will put me in charge to look after the local population here. If I have one hungry family and do not do anything about it, then the caliph will punish me for not looking after my people.[568]

Although the Hizb-ut-Tahrir rejects violence in theory, for some of its members, and apparently for some of its leaders as well, support for armed resistance or even the IMU is not impossible. Sometimes they resort to violence to achieve their goals.[569]

Official responses to the Hizb-ut-Tahrir have varied across the region. In contrast to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstani officials have expressed relatively moderate attitude toward Hizb-ut-Tahrir. The Kyrgyz government has taken a more careful approach to the Hizb-ut-Tahrir because of its potential to reignite ethnic tensions between ethnic Uzbek and ethnic Kyrgyz in the south. Uzbekistan has exerted considerable influence

[568] *IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghan Campaign*, ICG Asia Briefing Paper, 30 January 2002, p. 10.
[569] Ibid., p. 8.

over the Kyrgyz government to suppress the Hizb-ut-Tahrir and other Islamist groups.[570]

The Kyrgyz National Security Service, has recently, however, expressed concerns about violent and criminal activities of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir. The director of this Security Service said to Interfax that the Hizb-ut-Tahrir has allied itself with drug traffickers and other Islamic militant groups to emerge as a 'third force' that seeks to destabilize Kyrgyzstan.[571]

Officials estimate that the membership of Hizb-ut-Tahrir includes around 3,000 people in Kyrgyzstan. Other observers say the number of adherents largely exceeds official estimates. The Chairman of the Kyrgyz State Commission for Religious Affairs, Omurzak Mamayusupov, claimed that Hizb-ut-Tahrir agitators are emerging from underground in many parts of Kyrgyzstan, especially the south. The movement publishes propaganda materials and makes them available in great numbers in many southern markets.[572]

Imankulov, the Kyrgyz Security chief said that Hizb-ut-Tahrir activists rise from among the country's increasingly impoverished population (almost 80 percent of Kyrgyz live at or below the poverty line). According to him, Hizb-ut-Tahir is likely to get financial aid from radical foreign organizations and individuals.[573]

Some political analysts suggest that the success of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in establishing itself in southern Kyrgyzstan should not be surprising given the region's rising

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[570] *Ibid.*, p 11.
[571] Alisher Khamidov, Islamic Radical Organizations Steadily Increases Support Base in Kyrgyzstan, Eurasia Insight, 5 September, 2002, from *http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav090502a.shtml*
[572] Ibid.
[573] Ibid.

discontent with President Askar Akayev's policies in Bishkek. Anti-government protests pervaded southern Kyrgyzstan throughout the summer 2002, led by Akayev's mainstream political opponents, including MP Azimbek Beknazarov. Many southerners were unhappy with Akayev's administration, which is dominated by northern-based interest groups and increasingly excluded other clans from access to power.

In August 2002 an incident involving the arrest of a Hizb-ut-Tahrir activist reflected the extent of the anti-Akaev spirit in the south. Demonstrators surrounded police in the town of Arslanbob – in the same Jalal-Abad region that was the scene of March riot that left at least five dead – after officers took the Hizb-ut-Tahrir activist into custody. The police used force leaving one man wounded.[574]

Muhamedjan Urumbayev, an Osh-based political analyst who visited Aslanbob following the conflict, confirmed that the incident testified for a trend that Hizb-ut-Tahrir's support is crossing ethnic lines. Support for Hizb-ut-Tahrir has traditionally been strongest among Uzbeks, many of whom are found in southern Kyrgyzstan. But, as Urumbayev indicated: "Many Kyrgyz in [towns] Nooken, Tash Kumir, Shamdali Sai have joined the group for various reasons. The movement's membership in Arslanbob is also [ethnically] mixed".[575]

In the early 1990s, there was a fierce inter-ethnic rioting between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh. It seems that today Hizb-ut-Tahrir is emerging as a unifying force. "It [the

[574] Ibid.
[575] Ibid.

Arslanbob incident] brought Uzbeks and Kyrgyz together against the police brutality", said Tolibjan, a Jalal-Abad region resident who has links with the party.[576]

The movement has effectively cast itself as an outlet for those disaffected by political and economic transition with official corruption and abuse of power. The appeal of Hizb-ut-Tahrir is mainly rooted in the call for rule of law in society.

Unemployment, declining living standards and vague prospects for the future lead both ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks to back the movement's goal of establishing Islamic law.

Some observers suggest that authorities are exaggerating the security threat emanating from Hizb-ut-Tahrir. At the same time, the government's efforts to prevent the group from spreading its influence have proven ineffective. Many argue that the government's reliance on repressive measures is actually counterproductive, and thus, enables radicals' attempts to involve new members, rising popular discontent.[577]

According to Urumbayev, the government is changing its approach. "An indiscriminate and widespread crackdown on anyone who has links with the group has stopped. Now police are targeting individual leaders and taking them to court. And the courts are often imposing large fines... instead of jailing them", he said.[578]

At the same time, Urumbayev and other local observers express concern that Hizb-ut-Tahrir's support will continue to grow amid continuing political and civil turmoil. Some also believe Kyrgyzstan will become increasingly volatile, cautioning that another relatively localized riot like the March confrontation in Ak-Syi could potentially spark broader unrest.

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[576] Ibid.
[577] Ibid.
[578] Ibid.

Some local experts assert the best way for Central Asia governments to combat Islamic radical groups is to vigorously pursue economic reforms and political liberalization. In Kyrgyzstan's case, some organizations are calling on the government to legalize Hizb-ut-Tahrir's activity and attempt to engage the Islamic group in a dialogue.

Efforts by the government to suppress religious movements such as the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which established a solid foothold in southern Kyrgyzstan, add to the current atmosphere of instability.[579]

Most Muslim leaders in the region are sharply critical about Hizb-ut-Tahrir. For instance, Imam Rahmatullah Kasimov, the President of the Scientific-Cultural Centre 'Abuziya' in Osh, Kyrgyzstan stated that, "The party's Islamic ideology strongly contradicts in some parts the Islamic teachings of the Quran and *Hadiths* [narrations about the Prophet's acts and his commands to his followers]". Others have argued that the Hizb-ut-Tahrir is above all a political, not a religious, organization and that Muslims should avoid politics. However, majority of imams have not been willing to exclude Hizb-ut-Tahrir members out of their mosques, and many moderate Muslims in Central Asia who reject the movement's aims and ideology still feel sympathy for the repression they undergo. [580]

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the process of Islamic revival that is now taking place in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is a natural process conditioned by internal historical, socio-economic and political conditions. Overall, the nature of this revival can be defined as moderate. Islamic fundamentalism, that advocates a literal

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[579] Alisher Khamidov, Islamic Radical Organizations Steadily Increases Support Base in Kyrgyzstan, Eurasia Insight, 5 September, 2002, from http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav090502a.shtml

[580] *The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghan Campaign*, ICG Asia Briefing Paper, 30 January 2002, pp. 6-7.

interpretation of the Quran and *sunna*, opposes accommodation to tradition or to changing social conditions, and espouses a return to an idealized vision of Islam as practiced at the time of Muhammad and/or the caliphates, has no appeal in these two countries. The form of Islam traditionally practiced in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in neither puritanical nor fundamentalist. However, historical differences in ways of life between sedentary Uzbeks and formerly nomadic Kyrgyz show that the degree of religiosity is stronger with the former and weaker with the latter. Fundamentalist Islam is opposed not only by the great majority of political and economic elites, but also by the traditional Muslim establishment, which views it as a threat to its influence and position. People in general and urban professionals in particular, find the asceticism of Islamic fundamentalism very difficult to accept. Even more importantly, fundamentalism has to overcome the many national, ethnic, clan, and regional lines of cleavages in the region. Indeed, only in Uzbekistan is religion the most salient political cleavage today. Emergence of indigenous Islamic groups in the period since independence falls under the category of moderate Islam. International Islamist, fundamentalist and radical groups do not have a widespread appeal in both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Military Islam has relatively few supporters, even in the Ferghana Valley, and there are powerful obstacles to its politicization in the region. The only external threat capable of destabilizing the region was Taliban, but had been eliminated when the group was put down by international war on terrorism and the presence of U.S. military stationed in Central Asia.

Although the leaders of both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (however to varying degrees) embraced Islam as a cornerstone of their identity and legitimacy, there is no evidence enough to suggest politicization of Islam.

While external factors are less significant, internal factors are more important. Among them economic grievances and political repression are among factors that may prompt radicalization of societies in both countries. In fact, Central Asians are proud of their distinctive indigenous culture, traditions and Islam and do not look at other countries in defining their identities. Radicalization of Islam, if it takes place, will be the result of internal discontent with the lack of economic opportunities and increasingly authoritarian regimes.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In this study I examined the process of Islamic revival in Central Asia's two states of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan since they gained their independence in 1991. In doing so, I focused on the issue of Islamic fundamentalism and its role in this process and approached the issue from two different perspectives, namely, including the significance of external and internal factors. The conducted literature review, outlined in Chapter 1, reveals that regarding the issue of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia, there are two different opinions among scholars. My observation is that the older generation of scholars stresses the influence of external factors to the process of Islamic revival and suggests that Islam in its fundamentalist manifestation is a serious threat capable of challenging stability in the region. On the contrary, observations made by younger generation of scholars suggest that Islamic revival in Central Asia is determined primarily by internal socio-economic, political and religious conditions and that the 'threat' of imported Islamic fundamentalism is often an exaggeration. The main argument in this thesis converges with the assumptions of the second group of scholars.

In Chapter 2, I provided the historical background against which the Islamic revival is now taking place in Central Asia. This chapter covers the whole pre-independence period beginning from the Arabic conquest of Central Asia, the Turkic and Mongol

periods, the Tsarist conquest, and the Soviet period until 1991. The aim of this chapter was to reveal the distinctiveness of Central Asian Islam and this was achieved by describing the specific conditions under which conversion of Central Asian populations to Islam took place. First, I underscored the nature of sedentary vs. nomadic dichotomy, which was instrumental in the process of conversion to Islam during the waves of Arabic conquest. Next, I described the conquests undertaken by Turkic and Mongolian nomads later in this period and indicated the peculiarities of their conversion to Islam after they arrived to Central Asia. Then, I described the policy of Tsarist Russia toward Islam after it conquered Central Asia in the 19th century. The Jadid movement and Sufi Brotherhoods are the most important parts of this chapter because they conspicuously reflect the distinctiveness of Central Asian Islam, each in its own way. Then I moved to the Soviet period, and described the changing face of Islam as a result of Soviet Union's constantly shifting and often contradictory policies toward Islam right from the beginning of the Soviet rule well into the period of perestroika and the declining years of the Soviet Union. In the process of writing the historical background, I came to the conclusion that in Central Asian context it is possible to analyze Islam by taking the sedentary vs. nomadic cultural diversity as the basic pattern, applicable throughout the region. By this, what I mean is that by taking one sedentary and one nomadic culture as examples of comparison, it is possible to replicate this pattern in Central Asia's other sedentary and nomadic communities and still draw the same conclusions.

In Chapter 3, I analyzed the dynamism of Islamic revival in post-Soviet Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The contents of this chapter is structured in such a way so as to question the objectivity of the two generally held assumptions regarding the issue of

Islamic fundamentalism. I began with analyzing the influence of external factors on the process of Islamic resurgence in the region. To achieve this, I have chosen some Muslim countries, which were equally interested in Central Asia in spreading their own influence, but were pursuing different Islamic agendas. These countries included Iran – the immediate neighbor of Central Asia which has the reputation of being the bulwark of Islamic fundamentalism in the world; Turkey – a secular Muslim state, geographically separated from but linked linguistically to Central Asia; Afghanistan – another immediate neighbor which until recently was associated with Islamic militancy and international terrorism; and Saudi Arabia – an oil-rich Gulf country, the center of Islamic world, place of birth of Prophet Muhammad and a site of Muslim pilgrimage. The general outcome here is that external factors did not play any significant role in the process in Islamic revival in post-Soviet Central Asia. This was primarily due to the fact that although each of these countries are Muslim by definition, by being involved in Central Asia, they pursued their own foreign policy goals, which did not necessarily comply with the nature of Islam they preached at home. For example, Iran, although a Muslim country, for a number of pragmatic reasons distanced itself from the idea of exporting its Islamic revolution and clearly demonstrated its willingness to foster economic ties in its relations with Central Asia. Turkey's involvement in the region was, indeed, the strongest, especially in the religious sphere, but it was mostly interested in spreading modernized Islam and preservation of secular forms of governance. Saudi Arabia's involvement was primarily determined by Iran's ambitions in the Gulf region. By trying to get involved in Central Asia, Saudis attempted to distract Iran from the Gulf region and to eliminate its presence in the Gulf. Afghanistan was the only external country capable of presenting a serious threat to the stability in Central Asia. However, this

potential threat was eliminated with the destruction of Taliban. In the rest of this chapter, I analyzed the dynamism of Islamic revival from the perspective of internal developments that took place in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the post-Soviet era. These internal factors were determined by local political, economic, and religious conditions, each of which has been reflected in each respective sub-chapter. In conjunction with the main argument, it is precisely these internal factors that shaped the course of Islamic revival in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

In Uzbekistan, economic and political reforms have largely remained idle under President Karimov. Although at the beginning Karimov embraced Islamic revival as a tool for building popular support and legitimacy, his rule has sought increasingly tight control over religious observance and organizations. It continued the Soviet practice of recognizing of what it viewed as acceptable or non-threatening Islam and severely restricting the Islamic groups that it considered non-conformist and therefore destabilizing. In spite of the fact that Uzbekistan is a home for Central Asia's largest, most homogenous and religiously most devout Muslim population, with authoritarianism on the rise it became the most repressive country in dealings with non-conformist Islamic groups. Repression, however, is justified by the Uzbek government as a vital instrument in preserving stability. By invoking the threat of religious fundamentalism, the Karimov government has cracked-down even on moderate Islamic opposition parties. This large-scale suppression of religion has contributed to the sharp rise of social tension and created an environment where people are more inclined to support an armed opposition. As a result, Islamist opposition movements have become the most serious threat to the government of Uzbekistan. Due to the worsening economic conditions and state repression, there is

a concern that non-militant opposition will become increasingly ready to join the ranks of militant Islam against the regime. The use of the threat of Islamic fundamentalism has undermined both the political system and the economy. Given the evidence that real public support for Islamic governance is weak and fragmented, repression of Islam in Uzbekistan is not justifiable. In addition, even if there is some support for militant Islam among Uzbek population, much of this support stems not from religious piety but from political exclusion and discontent with widespread corruption and economic failure.

Finally, in Kyrgyzstan, Islam is being treated with considerable tolerance. In comparison with Uzbekistan, the Kyrgyz state has retained a largely liberal approach to religious practice. But fears of Islamic extremism have provoked more attempts to control Islam, often in an uncoordinated and haphazard way. However, as the example with recent political developments has shown, even in conditions of major upheaval, caused by economic decline, pervasive corruption and violation of human rights, Islamic factor is unlikely to be invoked in Kyrgyzstan.

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