

ISSN 1226-4490

*International
Journal of
Central
Asian Studies*

Volume 3 1998

**Editor in Chief
Choi Han-Woo**

**The International Association of Central Asian Studies
Institute of Asian Culture and Development**

Political Islam in Central Asia:

Leaving Political Scene or Gathering Momentum

by

Rafis Abazov

La Trobe University

Political development in the post-Soviet Central Asian republics (CARs) is a complex puzzle due to many reasons. There are many internal and external factors that make the region quite unstable. Severe economic crisis of the 1990s impoverished the entire population of the CARs. Growing radical nationalism, religious fundamentalism and sharp, sometimes uncompromising, competition between clan and personal interests have destroyed the political balance existed during the Soviet era. Moreover, the region, that is twice of size of the Western Europe and situated in the key geopolitical area of the Eurasian continent, experienced painful social transition with growing unemployment, falling standards of living and rising corruption.

Among many factors, that undoubtedly predetermined the political development of the Central Asian region, many researchers specially noted the Islamic factor. Return to the national civilisational roots could be easily observed everywhere in Central Asia. There are more and more talks about Islamic cultural and moral values and needs for stronger Islamic self-identity in the society. These ongoing changes have been displayed through a mass construction of mosques (only in Kazakhstan the number of mosques increased from 64 in 1991 to 5,000 in 1997^{[1\)](#)}) and establishment of numerous Islamic schools or Madrased. Moreover, the strengthening of Islamic religious values in the public consciousness and national psychology as well as in the political orientation of the society has come along with an attempt of some Islamic groups to enter political process and the power struggle in the region.

Increasing political significance of the Islamic factors in the region is proved by the fact that the Islamic Party of Resurgence (IPR) became the leading opposition power in Tajikistan since the early 1990s. In Uzbekistan, some Islamic leaders had made an attempt to promote their candidates during the presidential elections in December 1991. At the beginning of 1990s, the political dynamic was impressive: in 1990–1993 different Islamic political organizations came out of the underground as separate, uncoordinated groups that called themselves fighters for the faith or *mojaheds*. They established themselves as quite organised political groups in many places of the region and showed that they are capable of challenging the positions of the CARs ruling elite.

As a new political phenomenon, the Islamic political activity raised a number of questions. The most crucial issues could be divided into three groups. First, what is the place of the Islamic political groups in the modern political life in the Central Asian republics and what is the perspective of expansion of their political involvement? Second, what are their views on political process, levels of their radicalism and perspective of their interrelations with the present state institutions? Third, what are their organizational structure and geography of their activities?

In this article, first, the author tried to trace some of the historical peculiarities of relationship between Islam and state institutions as well as peculiarities of political activity of the movements and organizations with Islamic orientation in the Central Asian region (Section 1). Second, to analyse the structure and organizational composition of the Islamic political groups and geography of their activity (Section 2). Third, to examine the political platforms of the organizations and views of their leaders (Section 3). Fourth, to assess the peculiarities of the relations of the Islamic groups with the present state institutions and the features of the CARs government policy towards the Islamic organizations during the 1990s (Section 4). In conclusion the author evaluated the developmental perspective and various scenarios of participation of the Islamic organizations in the social and political life in the countries.

The empirical part of this work was based on the following materials. First, the Central Asian database of *IMA-Press* Agency of 1990–1993. Second, the results of the field studies of 1991–1992 of the *Aziya* Agency with co-operation

of the information group *Panorama*. Third, the works and researches of different research groups on the theme Civil movements and Non-government organizations in Central Asian republics conducted through 1989–1992.

1. Islamic in Central Asia: A Historical Background

Historically Central Asia was a key point of interaction between the ancient settled civilizations of the Middle East and the nomadic peoples of the Inner Asia. In the last millennium the penetration of Turk and Mongol tribes had been witnessed in the vast area from the Altai Mountains to the Caspian and Black Sea. The process was accompanied by close interactions between Persian culture and its strong statehood traditions on the one hand, and Turkic tribal democracy and social organizations on the other. For centuries these relations have primarily been determined by a geographic factor. Modern Central Asia region was railed off from its southern neighbours by the highest mountain ranges of Tian Shan, Pamirs and Kopetdag. Rivers, that started their long ways in the mountains, gave a life to numerous oases and cities stretched out from the East to the West. For long time the region was known as Trans-Oxiana or Maveranahr and later it was called Turkistan. The economy of the region prospered owing to a trade route that was connecting Europe with China. The *Great Silk Road* was the main source of the prosperity of the regional ruling dynasties. Moreover, new ideas travelled along with the traders from the West and East. Local free thinkers used them as a basis for their incredible discoveries that significantly contributed to the Middle Eastern and South Asian civilizations.

All together, the following factors predetermined some peculiarities of Central Asian political development in modern era:

- the traditions of relationship between the state and religious institutions;
- the peculiarities of establishing state systems;

- the dualism of traditions in the settled and nomadic regions;
- the gap in continuity of the political traditions.

It seems difficult to combine in one section the analysis of the regions political history with the history of the development of political institutions. Nevertheless, a brief excursus into the history and analysis of some important social and political milestones will assist in better understanding of the CARs modern political development.

1. The traditions of relationship between the state and religious institutions.

Muslim Arabs first appeared in Central Asia in the middle of the 7th century and brought Islamic teaching to the region. Despite gradual penetration of pagan Turkic tribes in the 9th and 10th centuries and the devastating Shamanist Mongol invasion in the 13th century, Islam retained and strengthened its position in the region. Eventually the Turks and Mongols, who remained in Central Asia assimilated themselves in a mix of Turkic and Persian environment, converted to Islam. However, for many centuries forward the Chinghiz Khan dynasty remained the ruling force in all the states of the region. The Mongols also introduced some peculiarities into the political tradition of the region, and they brought in an unique pattern of kinship and intricate tribal structures of social relations. Khans and militant tribal leaders always dominated the political arena. While the Muslim clergy (Ulama) played a significant role but were not independent politically. Meanwhile, the representatives of Sufi orders (Yasavia, Nakshbandia, Qudravia, etc.) and their leaders (sheikhs) enjoyed considerable independence and autonomy from Medieval Khans. Both the clergy and Sufis significantly contributed to the balance between competing feudal groups and to forming legitimacy of the ruling dynasties. By the 18th century the Central Asian clergy and some of the Sufi leaders were incorporated into one of the government institutions.

Advancement of the Russian Empire into Central Asia and annexation of most parts of the region to the Empire has changed the regions territorial-administrative system and political organization of the society. During the initial period of the Imperial rule (1860–1890) the new authorities faced multiple riots in the region. A change in the imperial policy was introduced later to solve the problem, which significantly altered the Russias attitudes towards the political, religious and intellectual elite of Central Asia. The government attempted to integrate the most liberal representatives of the local political elite and Islamic clergy into the state administrative system of Russia. The Turkistanese were granted some seats in the Russian Parliament, i.e. III and IV State Dumas in 1907²⁾. Moreover, the official clergy of the regions was given guaranties on special privileges.

The Soviet regime, which in 1917 brought to the end the Empire, did not have a constant policy towards Islam and Islamic civilization throughout the Soviet era. The regime established its political control over the region only after the civil war of 1918–1922. The Communists, who had to fight and suppress the *Basmachi* movement during 1918–1926, also considered integration of the Muslim clergy and the most influential part of the liberal intellectuals (Jadidists) into the state political and administrative structures. However, during the time of the great leap in 1928–1937 the political pendulum moved to reversing of this policy and the Kremlin leaders expanded the anti-religious campaign that was accompanied by severe terror against all confessions. Nevertheless, the next stage brought up reconstruction of the official clergy in 1943 as SADUM (the Russian abbreviation for the Central Asian Religious Board of Muslims). The prominent and authoritative Muslim ulama, Sheikh Abdulmajid Babakhan (1861–1957) was appointed as the Mufti (spiritual leader), which symbolised the legalisation of the official clergy. So, finally the Soviet government returned to the long lasting tradition of keeping the clergy as the part of the state institutions. Although there were some anti-

religious campaigns, they have never again turned to be a purge against the official clergy.

2. The peculiarities of establishing state systems.

In their primary pattern, state and administrative system and territorial borders of Central Asia started their formation in the 15th–18th centuries³⁾. During this time Kazakh *Zhuses* (units of tribal confederation) consolidated into amorphous nomadic states, and Khanats such as Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand re-emerged from the chaos of the medieval wars. The Russian Empire continuously collided with the *Zhuses* and the Khanats during its expansion into the region in the middle of the 19th century. After annexing a sizeable part of the region to the Empire, the Tsarist government decided to conduct there its first territorial and administrative reform in 1867. The newly annexed land became a part of the Turkistan overnor-Generalship that existed until 1917. Meanwhile, the vassals of the Russian Emperor: Khiva and Bukhara preserved a formal independence. The year 1917 became the end point of the Russian Empire. However, the Communist regime established a full control over the region only several years later because of the persistent resistance of the local population to the new regime (known as Basmachi movement). As a part of the political modernisation of the early 1920s, Stalin, by his directive, significantly redrew the map of Central Asia during 1924–1926, and the region was subdivided into union republics. The territorial borders were slightly corrected in 1936 and the areas occupied by each of the five Central Asian republics remained unchanged until the disintegration of the USSR. It was an artificial division of the region into the nation states because it had preceded the formation of national consolidation and had not fully reflected the realities of the ethnic composition in the region.

Circumstances of gaining independence in 1991 also contributed in a unique way of the CARs nation state formation. The republics became

independent not because of a long lasting national liberation struggle or a mass political movement, as it happened in the Baltic republics, but because of a political occurrence. The former Soviet national elite remained in power, and none of the newly created political parties, including the Islamic groups, were able to claim dominance in the political arena. Thus, the region was not affected by the activity of the political organizations based on the national liberation or the Islamic political doctrines, although there were exceptions of the transitional period in 1991–1993, that will be analysed in the following sections.

3. The dualism of traditions in the settled and nomadic regions.

The differences between the traditionally settled and nomadic people of Central Asia have remained considerable throughout the history of their co-existence. In the settled regions Islam had a deep history of more than one thousand years. Establishment of Islam protracted up to the 17th–18th centuries among the nomadic people of Central Asia, and Sufi Sheikhs and Orders (Tarikats) played an important role in converting the nomads into Islam. An important feature of the Sufi Sheikhs activity was a tolerance to some animistic nomadic traditions and a flexible approach to dealing with the nomads in their everyday life. Sufi teaching was closely intertwined with local tribal habits and rituals and even with pre-Islamic beliefs⁴⁾.

That is why the Islamic tradition in Central Asia is characterised by a strongly heterogeneous structure in many parts of the region. The situation did not change during the Soviet time. The area of oases and ancient cities (Ferghana Valley, Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Tashkent and others) remained a firm stronghold of Islam even during the Soviet time. Meanwhile, the vast territories of Karakalpakstan (that is a part of Uzbekistan), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan significantly differ. Here the Islamic tradition was not so deep and the Communist policy of de-Islamisation was more successful.

4. The gap in continuity of political traditions.

Seventy years of Soviet power resulted in discontinuity of the political traditions and political culture of the pre-Soviet era in the CARs. In fact, in 1917–1919 numerous political organizations emerged in Central Asia, such as *Alash*, *Shura-i-Islamiya*, *Ulema*, *Turan*, which were very active at that time. Many of them adhered to the traditional Islamic values and the Soviet literature often called them pan-Islamists⁵⁾. However, after the eventual establishment of the Soviet regime in Turkistan, almost all activists of these movements emigrated and those who remained in Central Asia vanished in the chaos of the 1920–1930s.

There is one fact of Central Asian intellectual political thoughts of the 1920s that is worth mentioning: the movement of reformers or *Jadidists* (modernists). Their ideas of modernisation of the Islamic society and activity towards promoting reforms in education, intellectual thought, etc. greatly contributed to the development of intellectual life and social changes in Central Asia in the first quarter of the 20th century. Some of the *Jadidists* joined the so-called Basmachi movement and fought against the Red Army, but some of them such as members of the group *Yosh Bukharolilar* joined the Soviet governments of the Central Asian republics. Faizulla Khodzhayev (1896–1938), who was a an influential member of the first Uzbekistans government, is still honoured in Uzbekistan as one of the fathers of the modern Uzbek state and as a prominent thinker. However, in the 1930s almost all of the Jadidists vanished during Stalins great purge and their writing have been locked from the public in secret archives.

Although political groups and organizations of the early 20th century left rich intellectual heritage, they practically did not have any intellectual continuity after almost 70 years of the Soviet rule. Most probably many of the political activists of the early 1990s were not even aware of and familiar with

the works and ideas of their predecessors, which were developed during their activity in Turkistan and later in the emigration. A simple example is that a periodical *Yash Turkistan* published in Paris in 1929–1939 by a group of prominent emigrants led by Mustafa Chokaioglu (Chokaev) was not available for public until 1991 in a majority of the regions public libraries.

Concluding the brief excursus into the political history of Central Asia several major factors could be highlighted. For a long time the central authorities, first, of the Russian Empire and later of the USSR, arbitrarily maintained political balance in the region. Although during the Soviet era people of the CARs maintained their Muslim identity, they have never had any strong nation-wide anti-colonial movement. Perhaps, it was one of the reasons that interest groups in Central Asia have been mainly formed in the line with clan and tribal affiliations. Patron-client relations were quite developed and were even able to reshape themselves under the Soviet system.

Another point is that due to the peculiarities of national and state formation in the region during the Soviet era, Islamic political organizations did not play a significant role as a mobilising force or as an independent political entity (except in the early 20th century). Practically the tradition of political activity of Islamic parties in intellectual and political life of the republics has never been established. Moreover, some traditions and thoughts of the early 20th century have been never maintained and developed until the 1990s.

Finally, the history of Central Asian development illustrates that the republics have never been homogeneous in the terms of development of the political and cultural traditions. Artificial boundaries of the CARs brought together not only different ethnic groups but, what is more important, different cultural and political traditions such as the heterogeneous nomadic traditions and centuries-long Muslim culture of the settlers.

2. Roots and Sources of Political Islam in Central Asia

Appearance of the Islamic political groups and organizations in the political arena in the CARs in the late 1980s early 1990s was a new phenomenon in the public life of the region. However, it is hard to believe that it was something spontaneous and unexpected. In fact, already in the 1970s–1980s there were existing all indications that Islamic traditions and practises not only have been preserved throughout the Soviet era, but they maintained influence on the society and adopted themselves to the new realities of everyday life in the Soviet system⁶⁾.

Officially, in the 1960s–1970s there was a limited number of functioned mosques and Madreseh in Central Asia that were under the control of the Soviet administration through SADUM. The Religious Board of Central Asian Muslims represented the so-called *official clergy*. Various official sources of the Soviet time indicated that there were around 100–200 mosques in the region. However, Muslims of Central Asia continued to follow the most important Muslim traditions and practices in their everyday life and in the most important events in the family and community life (such as wedding, birth of the children, etc). There was a great demand for Muslim clergy who would perform important Islamic rituals for people. There was a wide net of unregistered mosques and unregistered Muslim clergy (often Sufis/Ishans) that were supported and financed by the local communities (*mahallya*) and was never controlled by the state official appointees. This apparently facilitated the establishment of the influential group of unofficial *Mullahs (Islamic clergy)*, who played an important role in the community life, but have never been actively and openly involved in the public life and politics.

The situation significantly changed in the late 1970s beginning of 1980s. These changes occurred because of several important reasons. One of them was relative liberalisation of the political regime in the USSR in the 1970s and lesser involvement of the Kremlin leaders in the internal affairs of the region in return to the political loyalty of the CARs leaders. Another important reason was the influence of the Iranian Islamic revolution and the War in Afghanistan,

both events clearly contributed to the rise of national and religious feelings among the people of Central Asia. The third reason was a natural replacement of the older generation of the Muslim clergy, who was tolerant to the existing system with new young and energetic generation of unofficial Muslim clergy, who was more radical and active.

In this sense, biographies of the political leaders of the IPR of Tajikistan Mahammadsharif Khimmatzoda and Dawliat Usmanov and such activists as Rakhmatulla and Abduvali (Uzbekistan) were typical. From propaganda of Islam they gradually turned to the political activity: agitation, printing and dissemination of the Islamic literature, studying and popularisation of foreign Muslim thinkers (Al Maududi, Al Bana, Said Kutb and others), teaching in underground medreseh as well as fund rising for different purposes. Eventually their own ideological views became more or less systematic. One of the original concepts developed by Rakhmatulla implied establishment of an Islamic state that he called *Musulmanabad*.

As a whole, in the 1970s – early 1980s, the activity of the unofficial clergy usually included observance of the most significant Islamic principles, studying and teaching of Arabic language and the Quran and basics of the Shariah. Their representatives maintained close relations with each other and sometimes with the official clergy and usually abstained from the political activity. However, in the 1980s the group of young, enthusiastic and energetic activists strengthened their voice across the region. They started to be seriously involved in the politics and sharply criticised the existed regime and its policy.

Nevertheless, their activity has still continued underground and they did not openly and directly intervened into the public life of the region. One of the key events that manifested the ongoing changes was an unsanctioned mass demonstration of the people in front of Muftis office in Tashkent in 1989. A large group of demonstrators gathered in front of the office and demanded the resignation of Mufti Shamsuddin Bobokhan (in the office since 1982), accusing

him in absence of initiatives in defending the interests of believers and charging him with corruption and misbehaviour. Under the pressure of the unsanctioned demonstration, the Mufti resigned and in March 1989 the new Mufti, thirty-seven-years-old Mohammad Sadiq Mohammad Yusuf, was appointed as the head of the SADUM.

Undoubtedly, this event symbolised an important political change, because for the first time during many decades of the Soviet history, the political Islam openly and actively demonstrated its power in the public life of the region.

3. Islamic Political organizations: Their Structure and organizational Arrangement

Under the influence of Gorbachevs policy of democratisation and *glasnost* various political parties, organizations, and groups began mushrooming in Central Asia of the late 1980s. Peak of their activity fell on 1990–1992. These three years brought to life about 150–200 different political organizations in the CARs⁷. But at the same time, due to various reasons, the escalation of social and inter-ethnic tensions in the region was manifested through the numerous bloody conflicts in Alma-Ata (1986), Ferghana (1989), Osh-Uzgen (1990), Dushambe (1990–1991) and some others places. From the very beginning, the Soviet officials accused these organizations as being financed from the overseas⁸. They also were inclined to consider those events as a part of the activity of the Islamic extremist groups. However, closer observations and analysis of these events indicated that it was not necessarily true. In 1986–1990, these Islamic groups were a part of a growing wave of independent political movements and organizations. It was unlikely for young Islamic groups alone to organise such mass riots.

Only at the beginning of the 1990s one group of these political organizations and movements distinguished themselves from other organizations and declared their systematic devotion to the religious (Islamic)

political platforms and ideological principles. We must bear in mind that the organizations and movements had different weight and influence, different levels of organizational and ideological structure and various levels of activity in the different republics of the region. Even the leaders of the Islamic groups themselves had difficulties in evaluation of the organizations size, organizational structure and political declarations due to lack of co-ordination. In fact the groups did not really represent organizations or parties in the modern western meaning of the term. Activity of the Islamic organizations were rather spontaneous and grassroots NGOsthan that than well organised political groups on the nation-state level. The peculiarities of the political tradition in the region and also the tradition of one-party system of the Soviet style greatly contributed to their jumble nature.

For this study all data about the Islamic organizations and movements were gathered: (1) during field studies and interviews with the representatives of the independent movements, including Islamic groups; (2) through systematisation of the information received from mass media (from both the official and independent sources). A significant part of information was collected in 1990–1992, partly in 1993 and was updated later.

The groups and organizations for the analysis were selected according to the following criteria: (a) organising and/or participation in different public actions; (b) appearance in the mass media, mass-meetings, demonstrations, publication and dissemination of independent information; (c) formation or an attempt of formation of the organizational structures, arrangement of the formal membership; (d) apparent formulation of their aims, demands, political platforms and ideological provisions expressed in their statutes (projects), programmes or declarations in the mass media, own publications, etc.

It is appeared that twenty Islamic groups and organizations have more or less established themselves in the CARs (See Table 1). Seven of them (35%) were located in Uzbekistan, six (30%) were active on the territory of Kazakhstan, 4 (20%) selected organizations were in Kyrgyzstan, 2 (10%) were

suitable for the analysis in Tajikistan and only one (5%) organization met the selection criteria in Turkmenistan (Abazov, 1992). There was also a group of *Bakhaists* in Turkmenistan. However, its activity was oriented on purely religious affairs and had not been related to political issues.

Geography of the groups activity should also be taken into consideration. The religious archetype was more established in the settled areas of the region (i.e. Ferghana valley) rather than in the nomadic territory (i.e. central and northern Kazakhstan). The nation-state delimitation of Central Asia broke up this for centuries-established pattern of political and administrative shape of the region. The broken pieces were distributed among different Central Asian republics. The Ferghana Valley was subdivided between the present Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. *Chash* (Tashkent) oasis became a part of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Southeast Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Western Tajikistan shared Maveranahr with its Muslim holy places and one thousand years of Islamic tradition. Presently the most intense processes of the Islamic resurgence and Islamic political activation take place exactly along these geographical and territorial breaks. Not surprisingly that 70% of all selected organizations were active in two areas: the Ferghana Valley and the territory of the former *Chash* (Tashkent) oasis.

None of the organizations were able to cover all five Central Asian republics with an exception, perhaps, of few attempts of the Islamic Party of Resurgence (IPR). The IPR unsuccessfully tried to co-ordinate actions of the Islamic activists in the different republics. Only the Islamic Party of Resurgence (IPR) attempted to organise itself regionally as an independent regular political party. However, it received the significant support only in Tajikistan (at some stage they claimed support of 15,000–20,000 people).

Often Islamic organizations were unable to expend their activity to the republican level (with exception of the IPR of Tajikistan). The *Islamic Party of Turkistan* in Uzbekistan and *Alash* in Kazakhstan made some attempts to organise themselves as organizations appealing to the common Turkic and

Islamic heritage. These two parties quite clearly expressed their political platforms and tried to establish their own regular publications and network of supporters (despite their claims, they never got mass support and had a very small group of followers). Also they made some steps to be organised as regular parties with formal membership, local representatives, etc. However, majority of the organizations (80%) functioned on a sub-regional level, for example in the Ferghana Valley, or locally. Only four of them (20%) were able to find mass support from different groups of the society. The other half of the organizations were quite small in number.

Islamic Cultural Centres and *Religious and Cultural Unions* were another type of organizations, appealing to Islamic values. Usually their activity was legalised and they inclined to gather permanent members and supporters. This type of the Islamic organizations was quite active politically, although it could not be viewed as a typical political party. Activity of the Islamic Centres and Religious and Cultural Unions usually was sanctioned by the governments of the CARs and often were associated with the official clergy. In most cases they had their own publications, they frequently appeared in the mainstream mass media and participated in different public actions. Their supporters usually adhered to liberal and moderate political stands and did not have overwhelming political ambitions.

Among twenty groups and organizations selected for the analysis, five (25%) organizations were highly active in the beginning of the 1990s. What seems important is that majority of them were located in Uzbekistan. During the transitional period of 1986–1992, these small but extremely mobile groups developed energetic work propagandising their ideas and trying to attract wide masses of the public into their actions. Other five (25%) organizations demonstrated a moderate level of the activity. Four (20%) organizations displayed very low activity. The groups that conducted few actions and further disappeared should be considered separately (30%). Most probably, their disappearance is directly related to the political and administrative pressure:

some Central Asian governments have taken severe measures towards the leaders of the Islamic political groups.

In fact, the Islamic political organizations were unable to create formal political structures with strong and serviceable horizontal and vertical links. Neither they were able to create appropriate political programmes with clear indications of their place in the present political environment. Nevertheless, they have created effective personal and group networks that have covered relatively large areas in every republic. Exceptional case is the IPR of Tajikistan (IPRT). It was supported by the wide masses (mainly, but not exclusively, from rural areas of Southern Tajikistan) and became a central point of almost all political actions in the republic in the 1990s⁹⁾. Two reasons provoked the exclusiveness of this case. First of all, the IPRT leaders were able to mobilise community and clan support due to the excessive rivalry within the ruling elite. Second, the IPRT created an effective political structure not only in many rural places of the republic but what is more important in the capital city as well¹⁰⁾.

4. Political Platforms and Programmes

The appearance of the political organizations and movements in the political arena of Central Asia in the early 1990s naturally brought a question of political platforms and political outlook that they intended to follow as well as their readiness to accept compromises to be a part of the political process.

Due to a long time of isolation from the Muslim world and discontinuity of traditions of public discourse on Islamic politics, the political manifestation of the Islamic groups rather represented views of the individual charismatic leaders than views of the coherent political groups or organizations. Also, in many cases this manifestation was more enlistment of several slogans than a comprehensive programme of the actions.

Activity of a majority of the analysed groups (40%) was based on religious-cultural and religious-educational work (i.e. League of Muslim Women). Only 30% of the analysed groups paid strong attention to a direct participation in the political and social lives in their countries (IPRT, Alash). Practically all Islamic organizations rooted in underground and semi-underground groups that studied and disseminated Islamic faith since the 1970-1980s (the so-called *parallel Islam*). Only later some representatives of the official Islamic establishment, such as spiritual leader of the Muslims of Tajikistan Qazi-Kolon Akbar Turanzhonzoda, joined them.

The Islamic groups and organizations were quite different in terms of their political orientation, level of radicalism, etc. and could be subdivided into three subgroups. A very important part of the organizational structure of almost all groups was personal networking. Each link in the network usually consisted of the leader (amir) and a group of the closest adherents (shura) of 10-15 people. Each member of shura usually also had a group of close supporters. Activity of such organizations often did not exceed a local level (*inter-raiyn* and *inter-oblast* level).

There were several groups of the organization active in the political arena of the republics.

First type of groups were the radicals. They adhered to the idea of immediate establishment of an Islamic state, declaration of the *Shariah* as a sole norm and law of the society (the *IPR of Tajikistan*, *Hezbollah* of Uzbekistan). On the background of the social crisis, spiritual and ideological vacuum the radical actions seemed very attractive for some ultra-radicals. The representatives of these groups were often quite intolerant to the government establishment and quite critical to the CARs official clergy. Their activity was mostly directed towards mobilisation of people for different actions, mass-meetings, etc. In terms of the organizational activity, they used traditional for the Middle East forms of mobilisations such as a personal network, community relations, etc. In fact, their influence was limited in certain communities and areas.

The so-called Wahhabits formed a separate group close to radicals. They advocated the puritan ethics in Islam. Actually *Wahhabits* were not direct followers of Mohammad Abdul Wahhabs doctrine as the people of Saudi Arabia. The Central Asian *Wahhabits* (sometimes called kara sakalar, for wearing black beard) were known for their quite radical interpretation of the Islamic doctrine and puritan ethics. Without forming a separate organization, representatives of the group, mainly young people, consistently followed their own view of the Islamic teaching. Moreover, they also demanded others to follow their ideas.

Second type of groups were the moderates. Their efforts were put in cultural and educational activity, propaganda and dissemination of knowledge of Islamic teaching and practice, and gradual integration into the political process. These were *Islamic Party of Turkistan* (Tashkent), *League of Muslim Women* (Kazakhstan), *Islamic Cultural Centre* (Kyrgyzstan), etc. Quite often the representatives of traditionally oriented intelligentsia of the cities and towns of the region have formed these groups. Therefore, they tend to organise their groups as political parties, which included formal membership, regional branches, professional politicians, etc. In their political mobilisation they often used such form of type of activity as dissemination of the publications (newspapers, leaflets, etc), they tried to organise congresses for their members and supporters, etc.

Third type of groups were the conventionalists. These groups were represented by small, usually spontaneous (grassroots) movements. They held very moderate positions and there was no so strong aspiration to convert their groups to strong political parties or organizations. Usually they consisted of representatives of conservatively oriented intelligentsia and often included middle rank representatives of the official clergy. They were quite critical to the so-called western values and life-style and expressed strong concern about preserving traditional morality within the society. These groups had a flexible structure and represented quite an established and organised network of confederates.

Majority of the leaders of these groups had quite a blurring picture of their platforms and programmes of the actions. They lacked integrity of ideas and experience in their political activity, and because of this, outstanding charismatic persons prevailed among the leaders of these organizations. The charismatic leadership often filled in the lack of organizational work and systematisation of views of the members. Most probably, that after several mass and spontaneous actions, many such organizations disappeared from the active political arena owing not only to their unorganised and unsystematic structure, but also to the absence of any comprehensive programmes or a orderly approach to the political activity.

Two peculiarities of the Post-Soviet development of these organizations should be taken into consideration because they will gradually change the intellectual environment in the CARs. The first is the expanding relations of the Central Asians with the world. Within the USSR, the *iron curtain* prevented sustainable relations with foreign countries in general. Contacts with other Muslim countries were sporadic. However, these links became stronger after gaining independence. A number of youth received a chance to be educated in Islamic universities all over the Muslim world from Iran and Pakistan to Turkey and Libya. The second, during last 10 years the region was flooded by a huge number of translations into the local languages of theoretical works by the modern Islamic thinkers. That was very important for the development of the Islamic political thought in Central Asia. During the Soviet era and first years of independence the political thought among Islamic activists has been quite eclectic, and most probably that in the near perspective it will be transformed and will gain a more systematic shape.

5. Relationship with State: The Modern Dynamic

In 1990–1992, the political situation in the Central Asian republics as well as on the whole territory of the former Soviet Union was characterised by an

extremely high political activity of the masses. One of the indications of such an activity was performance of numerous political movements and organizations. They organised a number of different actions: demonstrations, mass-meetings, etc. and mobilised a significant number of people for participation in these events. Some of the political organizations became a prominent phenomenon in the political life of the republics and a serious alternative to the dominated Communist Party and its local structures.

For some time the potential of opposition political organizations, seemed to be very impressive because of several reasons. First, the rapid growth of the members and supporters of proto-party groups was observed virtually in every republic of the region. Second, on a certain stage demands of the organizations reflected the urgent needs of the society and the government officials were not able to resist them.

Nonetheless, the vector of the political changes turned diametrically when it became clear that the collapse of the USSR was definitive and the CARs independence was real. The years 1992–1993 became a period of a significant consolidation of the power within the state institutions in all Central Asian republics, except Tajikistan.

In fact, immediately after gaining the independence the CARs leaders have tried to form their coherent policies toward all oppositions groups, including Islamic organizations. Nevertheless, they have not been unanimous in their approach to this issue. The presidents of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan persuaded a more liberal and pluralistic approach allowing activity of various political organizations, while the President of Turkmenistan affirmed the old style of one-party system and was intolerant to any kind of opposition. The president of Uzbekistan initially was ready to allow at some extent political liberty among the intellectuals. However, he changed his mind after experiencing an attempt of a parliament coup, students uprisings in Tashkent, etc. Only Tajikistan was an exception. The IPR of Tajikistan took part in the presidential elections in the country in 1991. In the autumn of 1991 the opposition led by the IPRT put

forward an alternative candidate to the president Dawlyat Khudonazarov. According to official data, he received 31% of the votes (or more than 40% according to the assessment of the opposition). It was the only example of a direct participation of the Islamists in free presidential elections. The first open and competitive participation of the IPRT attested the high electorate potential of the opposition ¹¹⁾. However, very soon the relations between the Tajik government and the Islamic opposition became worse and turned into open clashes and fighting¹²⁾.

Evolution of the relationship between the official state authorities and Islamic organizations in other republics could be demonstrated on an example of Islamic activists in Namangan Hokimiat (*oblast*) of Uzbekistan known as *Adolyat* (Justice).

Groups of fighters for faith or mojaheds appeared in several districts of Namangan and some of the suburban areas since the early 1990s. They mostly consisted of young people who kept the order and looked after observance of the Shariah norms in their *mahallahs* (communities). They also organised patrols in the streets, controlling observance of the Islamic norms of behaviour (ahlak) and trying to stop street hooliganism, theft and robbery. Members of *Adolyat* fought for the purity of the peoples morality and ran legal proceedings punishing people for violation of the Shariah norms¹³⁾.

The local officials were tolerant to such an activity until the movement did not obtain a political character. The activity of *Adolyat* gradually was radicalised and eventually, they organised a mass-meeting of many thousands during the presidents of Uzbekistan visit to Namangan. They brought to the President their demands that included hand over of the building of *Obkom* of Communist Party of Uzbekistan (CPU) to the Islamic hospital (very symbolic!) and the building of *Gorkom* of CPU to the Islamic Centre, etc. These demands were partially satisfied but soon some of the *Adolyat* activists were arrested and the organization was banned.

Escalation of the so-called Tajik events from political confrontation within the established norms of the political process into a full-scale horrible civil war of 1992–1997 was another hard lesson for all of the CARs leaders. They understood that it was an oversimplification to evaluate the political conflict in Tajikistan only as a fight between the IPRT and the Communist Party. In reality, a complex of factors was combined here: clan, ethnic, socio-economic factors, etc. The Tajik syndrome has increased the CARs concern about activity of Islamic organizations and the opposition in general. In 1997–1998 they widely condemned the growth of the so-called *Wahabbism* and called for a greater control over the activity of various Islamic groups.

As a whole, the experience of the interactions between the government authorities and the Islamic opposition in the 1990s was quite disappointing for both sides, and had several important consequences for the CARs policy.

First, by 1996–1997 all CARs leaders silently accepted the concept stability by any cost, first mentioned by Uzbekistans President Karimov¹⁴⁾, and even Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan gradually started to build up a more tough approach to the political opposition including Islamic. Under the direct pressure of the government bodies many active political organizations of the CARs were marginalised and forced out of the political arena.

Second, all Central Asian republics tried to reinforce the old tradition of integration of the Islamic institutions into the nation-state system. Thus, every republic created their own religious body, which ended almost fifty-year-existence of the regions united spiritual body or SADUM. The governments legalised all mosques that were previously maintained by the local communities and declared a full state support to construction of the new mosques and *medrese*. All together among other things, this means that all mosques and *medrese* came under the state control.

Third, there was a law introduced eventually almost in every Central Asian republic, which prohibited activity of the Islamic political organizations. Participation of the religious organizations in the political life of the republics

was banned by the legislative acts of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The corresponding statute, for example, is stated in the law of the Kyrgyz Republic About Freedom of Confession and Religious Rituals.

Last, but not least, there is an important moment in the modern policy of the CARs towards Islam. In spite of numerous references to the secular Turkish model of development, the CARs leaders do not follow a consistent secularisation policy. In contrary, they strive to transform Islam into one of the state institutions, following and continuing the historical tradition of the political development and they try to emphasize that Islam is their important cultural heritage, which suppose to be out of politics. This direction of the Central Asian governments will probably determine the further development of the relations between the state and the Islamic institutions.

6. Conclusion

The experience of Tajikistan of 1991–1997 clearly illustrates the fact that at a certain stage of aggravation of the relations between participants of the political process, the conflict may overgrow the limits of a normal political process and easily turn into an armed collision. In this case it was the conflict between traditional regional clans strengthened by Islamic political groups and the conservative ruling elite. The power of the state system allowed to defeat and to suppress the opposition at the early stage. However, the new political tactics of the opposition turned the political fight into the conflict of low intensity, including guerrilla actions. The tactic has exhausted both sides and paralysed the whole state and social systems in Tajikistan. In this republic, the Civil War had broke the society into uncompromisingly competing clans and tribes and it is very difficult to reassemble the collapsed mechanism of the state and society after several years of the chaos. That is why every action of the official authorities and the political opposition of the CARs will be checked against the example of Tajikistan for a long time ahead.

In this sense, the official policies of the Central Asian republics in the near future seem to be a continuation of the present line of integration of Islam into the official ideology and institutions of the state bureaucratic system. Most probably, that this policy will vary in different republics of Central Asia. Presently, it is more moderate in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. However, this policy is much deeper in Uzbekistan. Perhaps it will dominate in Tajikistan as well. Turkmenistan represents a more complex perspective that will fit somewhere in between of these two main lines.

Islamic political organizations began their formation during the Soviet time. They were also quite an influential political phenomenon during the first years of independence of the Central Asian republics. However, at the first stage of the CARs independence the organizations visibly disappeared from the political arena of the region as the political entities, although their supporters and their network have retained a certain level of influence at the local level in some parts of the region. There is a combination of reasons for that. On the one hand, the official clergy that received support from the state were able to sustain themselves as an institution and absorbed a part of unofficial clergy. Thus, the Islamic organizations lost an important chain of their network that served as a significant source of their supporters. Moreover, the government authorities quickly reacted to the Islamisation of the society through conducting corresponding reforms. It included legalisation and construction of a large number of mosques, state support of *Hajj* (pilgrimage), official opening of several *medrese*, etc. Finally, the so-called Tajik syndrome forced the ruling elite to integrate a part of demands of the Islamic opposition into the programmes of activity of the state and government institutions.

The Islamic organizations also contributed into the process of their own degradation. First of all, they were unable to form the firm horizontal and vertical structures and could not work out a systematic organizational structure. Also they were not capable of formation of integral programmes and ideology of the post-Soviet period. The government of the republics and other political

organizations overtook political initiatives promoted by the Islamic organizations. Finally, they could not elaborate any acceptable tactics of the actions and transform themselves from the action oriented into regular organizations. Confrontation tactics that were quite fruitful during the early transitional period in 1990–1992 did not work during the period of political stability. That is why, the Islamic organizations were unable to gain a place in the political establishment of the Central Asian republics, while other parties, such as the nationalistic, incorporated themselves into the present political hierarchy.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that Islamic political organizations totally disappeared from the political arena of Central Asia. There are still many ordinary members and some leaders of these organizations can be found locally, who are ready to continue their active participation in the political process in their republics and in the region. The Islamic political appeal gradually becomes stronger, because it promise to establish more equal society and to fight corruption and immorality. The activity of the Islamic organizations laid a foundation for a relatively new tradition of a political activity in the region. The success of the IPR of Tajikistan became a political precedent of active participation of an Islamic organization in the life of the society. That is why it is only the question of time when and in what shape the Islamic political organizations will return to the political arena of the Central Asian republics.

References

- Abazov, R., "Islamskoye Vozrozhdeniye v Tsentralnoaziatskikh Novykh Nezavisimyykh Gosudarstvakh" (Islamic Resurgence in Central Asian Newly Independent States), *Politicheskoye Issledovaniya* 3, (1995):61–67.
- Abazov, R., V. Vasilivetskii, V. Ponomaryov, *Islam i Politicheskaya Borba v Stranakh SNG (Islam and Political Struggle in the CIS Countries)*, (Moscow: Panorama, 1992).

- Akbarzadeh, Shahram, "Why Did Nationalism Fail in Tajikistan?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 7, (1996):1105-1129.
- Akiner, Shirin, *Political and Economic Trends in Central Asia*, (London: British Academic Press, 1993).
- Asfandiyarov, Sandjar, *Istoriya Kazakhstana (S Drevneishikh Vremyon) (The History of Kazakhstan (From Ancient Times)*, (Alma-Ata: Kazak Universeti, 1993).
- Basilov, V. N., "Honorable Groups in Traditional Turkmenistan Society", in *Islam in Tribal Societies*, ed. by Akbar S. Ahmed and David M., (Hurt, London, 1984).
- Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, ed. by Hafeez Malik, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1993).
- Grazhdanskiye Dvizheniya v Kirgizstane (Civil Movements in Kyrgyzstan)*, (Moscow: Akademiya Nauk, 1991).
- Grazhdanskiye Dvizheniya v Tadzhikistane. Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov (Civil Movements in Kazakhstan. Documents)*. (Moscow: Akademiya Nauk, 1990).
- Haghighi, Mehrdad, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1995).
- Herzig, Edmund, *Iran and the Former Soviet South*, (London, 1996).
- Hiro, Dili, *Between Marx and Muhammad: The Changing Face of Central Asia*, (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1994).
- Ibraghimzade, Sunnatollo, "Wahabism i Islamskaya Partiya (Wahbalism and Islamic Party)", *Komsomolets Tadzhikistana*, (26.12.1990).
- Islam v Stranakh Blizhnego i Srednego Vostoka (Islam in the Middle East)*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1991).
- Istoriya Kirgizskoi SSR (History of Kirgiz SSR)*, vol. 3, (Frunze, 1986).
- Karimov, I. A., *Uzbekistan: Svoi Put Obnovleniya i Progressa (Uzbekistan: Its Own Way of Renovation and Progress)*, (Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 1992)
- Kozlov, S., "Islamskii Fundamentalism v Kazakhstane? Skoree 'Net' Chem 'Da' (Islamic Fundamentalism in Kazakhstan: Rather No Than Yes)", *Rossiia I musul'manskii Mir*, No. 2, (1993).
- Lukin, A., A. Ganelin, "Podpolnyi Obkom Deistvuyet (Secret Obkom is acting)", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, (23.04.1991).
- Malashenko, A., "80-ye: Novyi Politicheskii Start Islama? (The 1980s: A New Political Start of Islam)", *Vostok/Oriens* 5, (1991):52-63.

Mirskii, G., Natsiya, Etnos, *Religiya v Tsentral'noaziatskom Kontekste (Nation, Ethnos, Religion, and Politics in Central Asian Context)*, MEIMO 12, (1993): 5–10.

Musulmanskiye Strany. Religiya i Politika (70–80 gg.) (Muslim Countries. Religion and Politics (The 1970s–80s)), (Moscow: Nauka, 1991).

Ponomaryov, V., *Samodeyatel'nye Obshchestvennye Organizatsii Kazakhstana i Kirgizii 1987–1991 (Independent Public organizations of Kazakhstan and Kirgiziya)*, (Moscow: 1991).

Srednyaya Aziya: Spravochnye Materialy: Istoriya, Politika, Ekonomika (Central Asia: Reference Sources: History, Politics, Economics), (Moscow: Institut Gumanitarno–Politicheskikh Issledovaniy, 1992).