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Nationality or Religion?

Views of Central Asian Islam

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During the past two and a half millennia, Central Asia was buffeted by several political and religious doctrines. Although the invasion of Alexander of Macedon (356–323 B. C.) did not leave an enduring imprint, the event itself might be taken as an early date marker. The later direct participation of Central Asia in world events did, and still continues to influence the political and cultural events in Europe as well as the rest of Asia.^{[1\)](#)}

Locus and Labels

Today, many authors use the designation "Muslim" in their analyses when referring to the territories or people of Central Asia. This is a relatively new phenomenon among a long string of classifications. Central Asia was labelled "Tartary," or "Independent Tartary" by romantic European cartographers and travellers in the 15th–17th centuries, and the inhabitants were called "Tartar."^{[2\)](#)} Perhaps Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593), by writing fiction about Timur (d.1405), with a stretch of imagination calling him Tamburlane,^{[3\)](#)} is one popular source of this peccadillo. But Marlowe's and like-minded authors' writings also betray the inadequate information the Western world possessed on Central Asia despite their fascination with the area. What they did not know, the authors created.^{[4\)](#)} Only later would the Westerners begin to learn the Central Asian languages and dialects, in order to read what the

Central Asians had written about themselves. With the Russian encroachments (East of the Urals, South of Siberia) after the turn of the 18th century, the designation began to be changed to "Kirghizia" and "Kirghiz,"^{[5\)](#)} a tribal confederation.^{[6\)](#)} After the Occupation by tsarist armies, when tsarist bureaucrats began to understand the language and dialects of the region in the 19th century, they commenced employing the terms "Turkistan," "Turk" and "Sart." However, the Imperial Russian bureaucratic designations *inorodtsy* (aliens) and "Muslim" were employed with the establishment of tsarist Military Governorships in Central Asia, especially after 1865.^{[7\)](#)} The designation Turkistan Military District has been in continuous use since the late 19th c. Meanwhile, portions of the population, on some of whom tsarist citizenship was imposed, were still regarded Turk, Tatar, Kirghiz, Sart ; including those living to the West of the Urals (Tatars, Bashkurt), and either side of the Caucasus mountain ranges, including Azerbaijan.^{[8\)](#)} The Central Asians living around the Altai mountain range were assigned still other designations, despite what they called themselves. Moreover, those designations were changed at various junctures. As Denis Sinor points out in his introduction to Radloff's *Proben*,^{[9\)](#)} in the past 100 years, "New, artificial, names have been created and it is not always easy to establish equivalencies."^{[10\)](#)}

This tendency applied to the labels of "languages" as well: Altai was known as Kara-Tatar, later changed to Oirot (doubly misleading, since Oirot is a Mongolian tribal sub-division), and back to Altai ; Tuvinian was originally Soyon and Urinkhai and sometimes Shor; Khakass was called Abakan or Abakan-Tatar; Kachin and Sagay were jointly converted into Khakass; Uyghur first became Taranchi, and later Modern Uyghur; Kazakh was Kirghiz. It should be noted that in no Turk dialect is there any such differentiation as Turkic and Turkish. This distinction is a new introduction into the politics of nationalities, and exists in some Western languages, as well as Russian, with the latter referring to the Ottoman or Turkish republican domains and the former, to other Turks.^{[11\)](#)}

With the advent of the *glasnost* (openness) in Moscow's thinking, the Russian chauvinism began to gain publicity once more. In a recent article on the potential dissolution of the USSR, a Russian nationalist included historically non-Russian lands (the Volga-Urals, Siberia, the Altai) in his picture of a "new Russia."^{[12\)](#)}

The designation "Altai," as Ozbek and Kazakh, are primarily geographical, tribal or confederation names, not ethnonyms. Those appellations were mistakenly or deliberately turned into "ethnic" or "political" classifications by early explorers or intelligence agents arriving in those lands ahead of the Russian armies and bureaucrats. Early in the 8th century, the Turks themselves provided an account of their identity, political order and history. These were recorded on the scores of stelea, written in their unique alphabet and language, and erected in the region of Orkhon-Yenisey.^{[13\)](#)} This information is corroborated in earlier written sources, in the Byzantine and Chinese chronicles, the Turks' Western and Eastern neighbors, respectively. Most mountains, cities, lakes, deserts, rivers in this region, from early historical times until the Soviet period, carried names of Turkish origin.^{[14\)](#)} They are being restored in the late 1980s as demanded by the Central Asians. Turkish language and its many dialect groupings such as Orkhon, Kipchak, Uyghur, Chaghatay, constitute a very large portion of the Altaic family. The dialect currently spoken in the Altai region is related to old Orkhon and Uygur. Only since the Soviet language "reforms," especially of the 1930s, have the dialects been asserted to be "individual and unrelated Central Asian languages." They are mutually intelligible.

After the dissolution of the Mongol empire, the Chinese (Manchu) asserted control over portions of the previous eastern Mongolian territories in the 18th c. (approx. 1757-1912), including a part of a larger Altai region, the "Tuva" area Altaian Turks became vassals of the Chinese. Tuva was designated a "country" for the benefit of the tsarist government, and in 1912, like Mongolia, gained independence from China. It became a Russian "protectorate" in 1914.^{[15\)](#)} During 1921, the Tuva People's Republic was created, much like the Mongolian Republic, theoretically not part of USSR. In 1944, Tuva People's Republic "asked" to join the Soviet Union. The Altaian Turks eventually were incorporated into the Russian Empire, in the Altai okrug, about the size of France and had a total population of 3.6 million, including many Russian settlers. administered directly by the tsarist Cabinet. The inhabitants were counted as inorodtsy (aliens). The number of settlers grew, displacing the native population from their land. During 1907-09 alone, 750,000

Russian settlers came to the Altai region, taking land that had been declared "excess." During the 19th c., the railroad had linked Altaian towns to Russian markets, thus strengthening the exclusive economic links with Russia. A Bolshevik-dominated soviet took power in the capital, Barnaul in 1920. Thus the greater part of Altai region was incorporated into the ever expanding USSR.

These were and are part of the Nationalities Policies originally designed by the tsarist bureaucrats and put into use by Lenin and expanded by Stalin. By and large, these policies subsequently remained in force regardless of the changes in the CPSU leadership.^{[16](#)} Hence, the discussion centering on one appellation may not provide the full understanding of events in Central Asia. Religion --specifically Islam-- has its place in this society as in any other, in the realm of individual conscience or in mass politics. Whether or not religion reached the point of a universal identity for the Central Asians, submerging all other possible identities, has been a matter of prolonged debate. The tsarist era historian (of German origin) W. Barthold (1869–1930) declared that, when asked, a Central Asian would identify himself in a three step process: 1. local (i.e. name of village or tribal origin) ; 2. regional(Bukhara, Khorasan, etc) ; 3. religious (Muslim). Bennigsen reversed that order. Later observers emphasized a crucial fact: the identity of the questioner. The Central Asians may indeed have answered as outlined above, but due to considerations not immediately clear to the questioner. The Central Asian respondent did not know the true motivation for the outsiders' curiosity. Perhaps he was a tsarist colonial tax collector, Bolshevik political agent or military surveyor, none of whom was especially welcome. The Central Asian did not have to bare their souls to those "aliens." Bennigsen, recognizing this phenomenon and the tendency to "conceal the true self- identification" born out of concern for self-preservation, later called that practice (of giving variable responses according to the perceived identity of the questioner) "the tactical identity."^{[17](#)}

The Soviet apparatus had other opinions concerning the identity issue, including the designation of "nationalities" in the smallest possible sizes. No small "nation" could block the creation of a new breed, the "Soviet person" (Sovetskii chelovek) devoid of past affiliations and

allegiances.^{[18\)](#)} The Central Asians' own expressions of identity were contained in their own dialects in their local and regional media. These declarations are by no means a product of the Soviet period, for they go back centuries. Only recently have those examples reached the attention of the outside observers.^{[19\)](#)} Arrival of Islam in Central Asia Islam is the latest religion to reach Central Asia. The indigenous Tengri and Shamanism,^{[20\)](#)} which appears to have co-existed with Zoroastrianism, prevailed even after the arrival of other religions such as Buddhism and Manichaeism.^{[21\)](#)} The introduction of Islam into Central Asia went through roughly three stages: force of arms and alms ; the scholasticist madrasa; Sufism. But the first group to come into contact with Islam in Central Asia were not the Shamanistic or Buddhist Turks. It was the Zoroastrian Persians.^{[22\)](#)}

Within 100 years of the death of the Prophet Muhammad, i.e. by 750, the Muslim Arabs had expanded their political state far beyond the Arab lands. Consequently, the Muslim community of believers, umma, began to encompass ethnicities beyond the Arabs themselves. The first non-Arabs to accept Islam in large numbers were the Persians, whose empire the Arab forces defeated in a series of battles between 637-651.

Far more numerous than the Arabs, and with a tradition of kingship and bureaucracy going back for many centuries, the Persians altered the character of Islam in southwest Asia. As Richard N. Frye has put it, the influx of Persians into the umma "broke the equation that Arab equals Muslim." He calls this process the "internationalization" of Islam. The large number of Zoroastrians in the vast Sassanian bureaucracy (scribes, tax-gatherers, translators, civil and foreign service officials, etc) forced the Arabs eventually to allow them special "protected" status like those of the Christians and Jews, though the Zoroastrians were not people of any "book." Thus administrative practice --including the caliph's rule when it was moved to Baghdad from Damascus in 750-- bore an unmistakable Persian stamp. The language of bureaucracy was Persian, though the language of religion remained Arabic.^{[23\)](#)}

From here, early in the 8th century, the Islamic forces sought to extend their sway into Transoxania, to the Iranian (Samanid Empire centered in Bukhara)^{[24\)](#)} and Turkish (Uygur, Karluk)^{[25\)](#)} Empires centered in their ancient cities.^{[26\)](#)} Beyond the cities were the Chinese. The

campaigns began around 705 and led within ten years to the defeat or subduing of the major cities and empires of Transoxania. This was also the time when Bilge Kagan and Kul Tigin of the Orkhon-Yenisey stelea were rebuilding their empire.^{[27\)](#)} But the death of the leading Arab general in Transoxania and civil wars among the Muslims were coupled with the rise of Chinese power in Mongolia, ended the contests for Transoxania and gave the local rulers some respite.^{[28\)](#)}

Fighting resumed by mid-century. The execution of a Turkish ruler in Tashkent led the people of the town to call for aid from the Arabs and perhaps also from the Karluk Turks.^{[29\)](#)} In July 751, the Chinese forces lost to these combined armies ending Chinese influence in Central Asia. According to Barthold, this day was decisive in determining that Central Asia would be Turkish rather than Chinese. The Chinese, however, were also diverted by an uprising in the center of their own domains and entirely lost Central Asia.^{[30\)](#)}

Thereafter, the local rulers throughout Transoxania and the empires built there --both Persian and Turkish-- partially professed Islam, until the Mongol conquests of Chinggiz Khan and his armies in the 13th c. The members of the steppe societies remained beyond the Islamic lands, and entered into the Islamic world almost exclusively as individuals, as military bondsmen, or mamluks. The mamluks came to constitute an elite cavalry (later palace guard) in many Muslim states, Arab, Persian and Turkish, for no training in a sedentary empire could produce a horseman and warrior equal to the steppe nomad. There are cases in which a mamluk would seize power from a weak ruler and found his own dynasty. Such is the case of Alptigin, founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty (994-1186) that ruled from Ghazna in what is now Afghanistan.^{[31\)](#)}

On the Western edges of Central Asia, other tribal confederations --such as the Karakalpak and the Khazar--held power "in a checkerboard pattern," as Peter Golden points out, centuries prior to the arrival of Mongols. Some had been converted to Judaism, others to Christianity.^{[32\)](#)} Both groups have left Turkic language documents using a number of alphabets, the first one being unique to themselves.^{[33\)](#)} The European missionaries were active among them, and one such group translated an eulogy to Jesus Christ into their language.^{[34\)](#)}

By means of the mamluk phenomenon and by conversion of Turkish empires and populations, a third major people began, slowly at first, to enter the Islamic community and to alter it in their turn. The language of the Turks became the third major language of the Islamic world by the 10-11th centuries --the language of the military and, in sizeable number of cases, of imperial rule.^{[35\)](#)} In the East, the Ghaznavids (dynasty r. 994-1186) and Karakhanids (10th-11th c.);^{[36\)](#)} in the Center, Seljuks/Oghuz (1018-1237)^{[37\)](#)} and the Timurids (15th-16th c.)^{[38\)](#)}; in the West, the Ottomans (13th-20th c.);^{[39\)](#)} the Golden Horde Khanates (14th-16th c.)^{[40\)](#)} to the Northwest. The famed North African origin traveller Ibn Battuta (1304-1368) indicates that Islam was found to be making inroads into Crimea by the 14th century.^{[41\)](#)}

"From the 11th century onwards, the Islamic world became increasingly ruled by Turkish dynasties until eventually, rulers of Turkish origin were to be found in such distant places from their homeland as Algeria and Bengal" writes C. E. Bosworth.^{[42\)](#)} It was in the 11th c. that Kasgarli Mahmud wrote the *Kitab Diwan Lughat al-Turk*, to teach Turkish to non-Turks, as he explained in his introduction.^{[43\)](#)} *Ettuhfet uz zekiyye fil lughat al-Turkiyye*, a mamluk period Kipchak Turkish grammar and dictionary appears to have been written with the same intention, but a bit later.^{[44\)](#)} It was also under the patronage of the 11th c. Turkish Ghaznavid ruler Mahmud that the Persian poet Firdawsi compiled the surviving fragments of the old Persian epic and "resuscitated" Persian in his *Shahnama*.^{[45\)](#)}

In the 13th century, the armies of Chinggis Khan (d.1227), his sons and generals "reinvigorated" Transoxania (and other places from China to the Volga and eventually Budapest) with steppe elements, both Mongol and Turk. The Rus were but one of their vassals. The new empire was religiously tolerant, as were its predecessors, with the khans (rulers) often having Christian or Muslim wives. The khans themselves adhered to their traditional beliefs, Shamanism and, according to at least one source, of Tengri, the monotheistic pre-Islamic religion of the Turks. Within one century after the conquests ceased, however, most of the successor states, except that in China under Kublai Khan, would also embrace Islam, and became markedly less tolerant of other religions. Although this conversion contributed to their own political decline, the

process strengthened the Islamic and Turkish (for the Turkish element was greater in those armies that moved farthest west) patterns that had existed in Central Asia before the Chinggizid conquests.^{[46\)](#)}

After the Mongol irruption, the older political entities began a long process of fusion. Timur and his dynasty arose after that period, uniting Central Asia under his rule. Timur, a Turk of the Barlas clan used Chinggizid legitimacy, even taking a Mongol wife. He and his successors ruled Central Asia and northern India from the 14th century until the end of the Moghul dynasty of India in the 18th century (his direct descendant Babur 1483–1530 founded the Moghul dynasty).^{[47\)](#)} The Ottomans, whom Timur defeated, underwent serious difficulties in reasserting their authority in their former territories.^{[48\)](#)} Thus the three major peoples to accept Islam were firmly established --Arabs, Persians and Turks-- and knowledge was preserved and literature recreated in all three languages.

Scholarship in its many branches--philosophy, theology, law, medicine, astronomy and mathematics, poetry, manuals of statecraft--were produced over the centuries by native Central Asian scholars who adhered to the new religion. Individuals such as Farabi (ca. 870–950)^{[49\)](#)}, and Ibn-i Sina (d.1037)^{[50\)](#)} made original contributions and preserved knowledge of the ancient world when libraries were destroyed in warfare, including the Crusades.^{[51\)](#)} Others, for example, Ibn Turk (10th c.),^{[52\)](#)} Ulugbeg (d. 1449)^{[53\)](#)}, Khorezmi (10th c.)^{[54\)](#)} contributed to the expansion of knowledge, especially mathematics. From their translations Europe was later able to recover that knowledge.

The post-Mongol period reflected the flexible use of languages. Babur (1483–1530) wrote his memoirs, the celebrated Baburname^{[55\)](#)} in Turkish, while his cousin held his court in Herat^{[56\)](#)} and produced enduring works of both Persian and Turkish poetry. Meanwhile, Fuzuli (d. 1556) was creating some of the best examples of poetry of the period in Turkish.^{[57\)](#)} In the famous correspondence of 1514 between Shah Ismail (r. 1501–1524), the Turkish founder of the Safavid dynasty of Iran (dynasty r. 1501– 1736)^{[58\)](#)}, and the Ottoman sultan Selim I (r. 1512–20), Selim wrote in Persian, while the Ismail wrote in his native Turkish. Selim would defeat Ismail later that year in the famous battle of Chaldiran in 1514 thereby preserving his hold over eastern Asia Minor.

Political legitimacy in Central Asia always required mass communication. Perhaps the *Shibaninama*⁵⁹⁾ of the early 16th c. is a good example, seeking to convince the population that this ruler, Shiban of the Ozbeks, was every bit a good and capable ruler as those preceded him.⁶⁰⁾ This task, in an age before movable type, was accomplished through the medium of literature. Poetic anthologies, often in manuscript, were duplicated by copyists in palace libraries or by private savants. The contents of these collected treasures (or single poems) were committed to memory by individuals for later oral recitation. The "minds and hearts" campaigns were used more often than armed troops, for the poetry proved more effective than the sword in convincing the Central Asians. In this manner, the rulers also wished to preserve the history of their reigns.

The impetus for communication also came from the people, wishing to safeguard their heritage. The Oghuz, also called the Turkmen,⁶¹⁾ constituted the basis of the Seljuk empire.⁶²⁾ After the fall of the Seljuk empire, the Oghuz/Turkmen groups did not disappear. Abul-Ghazi Bahadur Khan (1603-1663), ruler of Khiva, was asked by his Turkmen subjects (which constituted a large portion of the population) to compile the authoritative genealogy of their common lineage from many extant written variants. He prepared two, under the titles *Secere-i Terakime* (probably completed in 1659) and *Secere-i Turk*.⁶³⁾

These genealogies are quite apart from the *dastan* genre. The two constitute parallel series of reference markers on the identity map. The *dastans* are the principal repository of ethnic identity, history, customs and the value systems of its owners and composers, which commemorates their struggles for freedom.⁶⁴⁾ The Oghuz Khan *dastan*, recounting the deeds and era of the eponymous Oghuz Khan was one of the fundamental *dastans*.⁶⁵⁾ Despite their non-Turkish titles, genealogies, histories, or political tracts belonging to the Turks were originally written in Turkish. An example of this phenomenon is *Firdaws al-Iqbal*,⁶⁶⁾ written in the Chaghatay dialect. This is also true of Ali Shir Navai (1441-1501) and his *Muhakemat al-Lugateyn*.⁶⁷⁾ Quite a few of those original Turkish works were translated into Persian and Arabic, and came to be known in the west from those languages rather than the original Turkish.

Thus language alone was no sure indicator of ethnicity, for the educated came to be versed in the major languages of the Islamic world at --Arabic, Persian and later, Turkish. Yet, the differences among them remained. Many pre-Islamic values of each culture survived the transition to Islam and was preserved in the native language of each people. Islamic period works of various courts reflected the retention of traditional values. Among the "mirror for princes" works⁶⁸⁾ the earliest is the Turkish-Islamic work of statecraft, the 11th c. Kutadgu Bilig. It calls upon the king to be a just ruler, mindful of the needs of the people, and thereby echoes older traditions.⁶⁹⁾

Those Central Asians farthest from the border of Islamic lands were the last to adopt Islam and retained their traditional beliefs to the greatest degree. The Kazakh and Kirghiz of the steppe were converted to Islam only in the late 18th-early 19th centuries by Volga Tatars thanks to policies of Catherine II, of Russia (r. 1762-96), who apparently hoped that Islam would soften those populations and make them more receptive to the tsarist empire. She allowed the Tatars to represent her court in Transoxania trade. On the way, the merchants were encouraged to form settlements and convert nomads.⁷⁰⁾ The Kazakh and Kirghiz, even today, retain much of their pre-Islamic way of life including mastery of the horse, drinking kumiss⁷¹⁾ and extensive personal independence of women so characteristic of steppe societies.⁷²⁾

Thus Arabs remained Arabs; Persians, Persians; and Turks remained Turks. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the non-Arabs would debate the real meaning of Islam for them and its role in their identities. The tension, even hostility, among them remained as well, and is documented by the slurs and stereotypes, and by frequent warfare (up to the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s) despite the ideal and rhetoric and dreams of Islamic brotherhood and the indivisibility of the umma.

Sufism

Sufism, one of the forces responsible for spreading Islam, is the "mystical dimension of Islam," as the preeminent scholar of Sufism, Annemarie Schimmel called her classic work on the subject.⁷³⁾ In each of

the topics referenced in this study, the Western reader relying only English-language works, must be extremely cautious. This is true also on the subject of sufism. Over the centuries, excesses and indulgences also took place in the name of sufism. More than a few Western writers have described the entire complex phenomenon of Sufism on the basis of such exaggerated events. Schimmel remains the most reliable, and sympathetic, source available in English. Her approach takes account of sufism as an individual mystical quest and as the basis for organized brotherhoods called tariqa. Because the tariqa develop later in history than sufism itself, she addresses them toward the end of her volume.^{[74\)](#)} One of the earlier sufis was Ahmet Yesevi (lived and died in current day Kazakhstan), wrote his major work Hikmet in Turkish in the 12th c.^{[75\)](#)}

Meanwhile, the other key institution responsible for the diffusion of Islam, the madrasas (scholastic schools), declined in quality; failing to square themselves to the changing social and economic conditions around them.^{[76\)](#)} They had not clarified a method of comparing and contrasting their own methods against the state of evolving knowledge in the world. As one result, the rote system in use sapped the vitality of original thinking and calcified what remained.

Tsarist Expansion

The tsarist state had been expanding across Asia since the conquest of the Volga in the 1550s by Ivan IV "the Terrible" (r.1530–1583). In the 19th century, it began its southward expansion toward Transoxania from forts on the steppe. In the south, the British East India Company had established itself at the end of the 18th century in India, destroying independent princedoms in the South and the last of the Moghuls in the North. In post 17th century Central Asia, the earlier powerful land empires that held sway had been mortally wounded by internal and external forces-- struggles, even civil wars, for the thrones were fought for by an overabundance of heirs and other claimants; and the shift to maritime trade routes drew commerce to the coasts. After the falloff of the Timurid empires in Central Asia and the later Safavid dynasty in Iran, the area from the Tigris–Euphrates to the Altai mountains broke

into a number of relatively small (compared to the empires that preceded them) states. In the 18th century, the political landscape was marred by warfare among these states. Their economic decline continued.

This decline of the landed empires of Asia coincided with European expansion and accumulation of colonies. The Russians, perhaps the most expansionist of powers and Central Asia's nearest neighbor, was drawn to Central Asia by the lure of reputed riches in cities along the former Silk Road and the prestige of colonial holdings. An arch of forts built across the steppe south of Siberia during the 18th century was one step in the process of expansion. Catherine "the Great" not only used the Tatars to spread Russian influence in Transoxanian, but in an equally subtle policy, established a "Muslim Spiritual Board" in Orenburg. Ostensibly an instrument of "Muslim self-government," the Board operated according to strict state regulations. Under Nicholas II (1825–1855), two more would be established in Tbilisi for Sunni and Shi'i populations.^{[77](#)}

Russian expansion in Asia would be further spurred in the 19th century by military defeats in other theaters. The most humiliating defeat was the Crimean War (1853–56) in which European states successfully blocked Russian pretensions in the eastern Mediterranean, including the tsar's claims for privileged access to the Holy Land as "protector" of the Orthodox in Ottoman domains (a claim first made by

Catherine in the Treaty of Kuchuk Kaynarja [1774]). The now fragmented Central Asian states, proved more vulnerable targets than European rivals. The tsarist military occupation of Central Asia was done between the 1865 invasion of Tashkent and the massacre of the Turkmen at Gok-Tepe in 1881. Millions of Central Asians (and enormous amount of territory containing untold amount of natural resources) were added to the empire. The Central Asians comprised just under 20% of the population according to the 1897 Census.

In the wake of conquest, direct military rule was imposed (except in Khiva and Bukhara, which became protectorates for a spell^{[78](#)}), Christian missionary activity strove to shape education, literature and publishing. One tsarist missionary was ingratiating himself to the Tashkent ulema with:

You cannot understand how I feel. Islam is the most perfect religion on this world. What makes me most depressed is that some of the youth of Turkistan are inclined towards Russian schools. They are studying in such schools. This causes them to lose their religious feelings. They are shaving their beards and mustaches, wearing Russian style clothes, neckties and boots. As a result, I can see that they are becoming Christians. This makes me melancholy.

This remorseful Christian was the advisor to the tsarist Military Governor in Tashkent, and his known activities suggest the existence of items other than Christianity or Islam on his operational agenda. He was attempting to prevent the Central Asians from learning tsarist methods of control, to forestall the time when the Central Asians could take a more knowledgeable stand against tsarist colonialism.^{[79\)](#)}

Perhaps, the tsarist policies showed remarkable similarity to Roman policies in Britain. During the First century A. D., the Roman statesman and historian Tacitus wrote:

Once they [Britons] owed obedience to kings; now they are distracted between the warring factions of rival chiefs. Indeed, nothing helped us more in fighting against their very powerful nations than their inability to cooperate. It is but seldom that two or three states unite to repel a common danger; thus, fighting in separate groups, all are conquered.... Not only were the nearest parts of Britain gradually organized into a province, but a colony of veterans also was founded. Certain domains were presented to King Cogidumnus, who maintained his unswerving loyalty down to our own times --an example of the long-established Roman custom of employing even kings to make others slaves....^{[80\)](#)}

Agricola had to deal with people living in isolation and ignorance, and therefore prone to fight; and his object was to accustom them to a life of peace and quiet by the provision of amenities. He therefore gave private encouragement and official assistance to the building of temples, public squares, and good houses. He praised the energetic and scolded the slack; and competition for honour proved as effective as compulsion. Furthermore, he educated the sons of the chiefs in the liberal arts, and expressed a preference for British ability as compared with the trained skills of the Gauls. The result was that instead of loathing the

Latin language they became eager to speak it effectively. In the same way, our national dress came into favour and the toga was everywhere to be seen. And so the population was gradually led into the demoralizing temptations of arcades, baths, and sumptuous banquets. The unsuspecting Britons spoke of such novelties as 'civilization,' when in fact they were only a feature of their enslavement.^{[81\)](#)}

Combination of cooptation by selective rewards, demoralization by pressure and corruption by comfort was practiced by the Russians. Later Russian peasants were settled in Central Asia to wage demographic battle. A strategically important railroad leading to the Far East was begun, employing many Russian workers who reinforced Russian presence and would be fertile ground for socialist agitation (some 200,000 Chinese laborers also working on this project were later armed by the Bolsheviks against all National Liberation Movements in Central Asia). The Russian state extracted natural resources, and imposed cotton cultivation to compensate for the loss of the U.S. cotton supply in the 1860s. Russia's growing textile and munitions industries acquired new source of cotton;^{[82\)](#)} Central Asia lost its food crops. In the 20th century, after a century of irrigation and the pesticides required to fulfill repeated Soviet Five Year Plans, Central Asia would lose the Aral Sea. After the first shock of conquest, Central Asian resistance to the Russians began. Initially it was limited to the literary field. Soon, armed struggle also began.^{[83\)](#)}

The Great Game

The "Great Game," the Anglo-Russian competition for land and influence across Asia, was played in two adjacent arenas. The main arena was Turkistan-Afghanistan, where tsarist armies moved south to annex the former as the British tried to keep them north of the latter, in defense of British India. Second, but in some respects more complex, was the Caucasus-Iran theater. Caucasia was the place where the Great Game met the Eastern Question, the multipower struggle over the eastern Mediterranean and the fate of the Ottoman Empire. The Russian conquest of the Caucasus entailed two Russo-Iranian wars (1806-1813

and 1826-1828) and one Russo-Ottoman war (1828-1829). Russian power was now closer to the Mediterranean (and therefore Suez, a gateway to India) and to India's neighbor Iran. Perhaps more worrying for the British, the Russo-Iranian Treaty of Turkmanchai (1828) granted Russia concessions in Iran: Russian goods imported into Iran would be exempt from internal tariffs; Russian subjects would not be subject to Iranian law; only Russia could maintain a fleet on the Caspian. The latter potentially enabled Russian forces to land on the southeast Caspian shore, closer to Herat (Afghanistan), a possible stepping-stone to an invasion of India, or so the British feared. England thereafter strove to gain a foothold in Iran as both she and Russia competed for legal and economic concessions there as a means to exert political influence.^{[84\)](#)} The Great Game also had a Far Eastern component manifested in its advances against China and a series of unequal treaties signed with Chinese rulers after 1858.^{[85\)](#)}

Later in the 19th century, competition for colonies and for influence in Central Asia grew sharper. Political deadlocks in Europe often led the Powers to carry their rivalry to Asia or Africa. Russian gains in the Russo-Turkish war of 1875-1877 alarmed Europe which feared a Power imbalance, but especially Britain, always concerned over lines of communication with India. The resulting Congress of Berlin (1878), hosted by German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, deprived Russia of the fruits of her victories and also awarded the island of Cyprus to the British, assuring British dominance in the eastern Mediterranean. Though this arrangement by Bismarck and British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli soothed British nerves, it angered the Russians, seriously damaging German-Russian relations. To the Russians, expansion in Central Asia promised more certain returns on Russian "investments."

During the 1890s, the British and Russians negotiated the Russian-Afghan border, established Afghanistan as an official "buffer" under English influence in 1907-1909 and thereby called a halt to the Great Game, at least for the time being.^{[86\)](#)} Perhaps Britain had been pushed to the limit of tolerance and Russia knew that in a direct military conflict, victory could not be assured. Certainly both Powers feared the rise of Germany, mainly in Europe and on the seas, but also in the scramble for African colonies and because Germany was entering the Great Game.

German interests envisioned a railroad from Berlin to Beijing, through the length of the Ottoman Empire and Central Asia. Due to the political and military conditions on the ground, the project was scaled down, and the railroad turned south towards Baghdad --remained entirely within the Ottoman Empire.

The Great Game was not limited even to these political, diplomatic and economic moves. European states systematically acquired, stored and studied knowledge of the "Orient" in the proliferating state-sponsored Oriental Institutes.^{[87\)](#)} European Orientalists, in service of their governments, laid the foundation for policies like Christian proselytization in education and publishing, but also elaborated justifications for Europeans' "civilizing" the peoples of Central Asia. Among these was the notion of "Pan-Turkism."^{[88\)](#)}

"Pan" Movements

"Pan-Turkism" or "Pan-Turanism" was ostensibly a movement by Turks to establish hegemony over the world, or at least Eurasia. In fact, this "Pan" movement has no historical ideological precedent among Turks and has been documented to be a creation of the Westerners. Around the time of the occupation of Tashkent by Russian troops in 1865, the doctrine called or "Pan-Turkism" appeared in a work by Hungarian Orientalist Arminius Vambery. The premise of this notion was that since the overwhelming majority of the Central Asians spoke (and still speak) dialects of Turkish, share the same historical origins and history, "they could form a political entity stretching from the Altai Mountains in Eastern Asia to the Bosphorus," where the capital of the Ottoman Empire was located.^{[89\)](#)} This pseudo-doctrine was then attributed to the Turks themselves, and the Russians and Europeans claimed it was a revival of Chinggis Khan's conquests, a threat not only to Russia, but the whole of Western civilization.^{[90\)](#)} In this tactic, attributing aggressive designs to the target, seemed to justify any action against Central Asia, a new "crusade" in the name of "self-defense." After the Germans joined the Great Game, to undermine British control in Central Asia, Germans manipulated both "Pan-Turkism" and "Pan-Islamism."^{[91\)](#)} The Pan-Islamic Movement was

an anti-colonial political movement of the late 19th century, and must be distinguished from the "orthodox" Islamic unity of all believers, the umma. Jamal Ad-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897) established the movement in its political form, striving to achieve the political unity of Muslims to fight against colonialism and the colonial powers. It was popular among Indian Muslims and in north Africa. However, the movement also served the colonial powers well. Painted as a reverse-Crusade --without necessarily using the terminology, but through graphic allusions--the Colonial powers could mobilize both Western public opinion and secret international alliances to fight the "emerging threat." The Germans, after the death of al-Afghani, sought to make that threat as real as possible for the British in India.^{[92\)](#)} The manipulation of both "Pan"s would not die with the old century.

The early 20th Century

In 1905-1906 the defeat of the tsarist Russians by the Japanese began a new chapter against the Russian colonial rule in Central Asia. Since the tsarist military occupation of Central Asia, one of the inflexible Russian policies was the imposition of limits on printed material in Central Asian dialects by Central Asian authorship. Beginning with 1906, this long-standing ban against Turkish dialect publications were circumvented by the Central Asians through various ruses.^{[93\)](#)} Thereafter, there was a veritable explosion of periodicals and monographic publishing. According to one catalog, in one territory, more than one thousand different books were issued in less than ten years.^{[94\)](#)} This activity was to be ended by the Red Army's occupation of Central Asia. Soviet censorship took on an additional face, employing new and revised methods.^{[95\)](#)}

Before all the elected Central Asian Delegates could reach St. Petersburg, the First Duma (1906) was abrogated by tsar Nicholas II.^{[96\)](#)} A number of the assembled Central Asian Delegates signed the 1906 Vyborg Manifesto, protesting the Duma's dissolution. The meeting was carefully planned, with a touch of cloak-and-dagger to escape the tsarist

secret police.⁹⁷⁾ The act itself marked a new resistance to the Russians, but the basic issues were already articulated on the pages of the bilingual Tercuman newspaper, published by Ismail Bey Gaspirali in Crimea.⁹⁸⁾

The Second Duma (1907) was abrogated within three months, and the new electoral law of 1907 utterly disenfranchised Central Asia. They had no representatives in the Third and the Fourth Dumas. The memory of the occupation and resentment of the occupiers' repressive policies were fresh in the minds of the Central Asians, when the tsarist decree of 25 June 1916 ordered the first non-voluntary recruitment of Central Asians into the army during the First World War. The Central Asian reaction marked the beginning of the Turkistan National Liberation Movement. Russians were to call this struggle "Basmachi," in order to denigrate it. The resentment was enhanced by historical memories: Central Asian empires antedated the first mention of the word Rus in the chronicles,⁹⁹⁾ and some had counted the Russians among their subjects.

The Turkistan National Liberation Movement was a reaction not only to conscription, but to the tsarist conquest itself and the policies employed by the tsarist state in that region. Zeki Velidi Togan (1890–1970) was for over half a century a professor of history [and shared similar objectives with his contemporary colleagues Czech Thomas Masaryk (1850–1937) and Ukrainian Michael Hrushevsky (1866–1934)]. A Central Asian himself and a principal leader of the 1916 Turkistan National Liberation Movement, Togan described the sources and causes of the movement as follows:

Basmachi is derived from baskinji, meaning attacker, which was first applied to bands of brigands. During tsarist times, these bands existed when independence was lost and Russian domination began in Turkmenistan, Bashkuristan and the Crimea. Bashkurts [in Russian language sources: "Bashkir"] called them ayyar, by the Khorasan term. In Crimea and, borrowed from there, in Ukraine, haydamak¹⁰⁰⁾ was used. Among Bashkurts such heroes as Buranbay became famous; in Crimea, there was [a leader named] Halim; and in Samarkand, Namaz.

These did not bother the local native population but sacked the Russians and the Russian flour-mills, distributing their booty to the population. In Ferghana, these elements were not extinct at the beginning of 1916.after the proliferation of cotton planting in Ferghana the

economic conditions deteriorated further. This increased brigandage. Among the earlier Basmachi, as was the case in Turkey, the spiritual leader of the Uzbek and Turkmen bands was Koroglu. Basmachi of Bukhara, Samarkand, Jizzakh and Turkmen gathered at nights to read Koroglu and other dastans.^{[101](#)} What has the external appearance of brigandage is actuality a reflection and representation of the thoughts and spirit of a wide segment of the populace. Akchuraoglu Yusuf Bey reminds us that during the independence movements of the Serbians, the *hoduk*; the *kleft*; and *palikarya* of the Greeks comprised half nationalist revolutionaries and half brigands. The majority and the most influential of the Basmachi groups founded after 1918 did not at all follow the Koroglu tradition, but were composed of serious village leadership and sometimes the educated. Despite that, all were labelled Basmachi. Consequently, in Turkistan, these groups are regarded as partisans; more especially representing the guerilla groups fighting against the colonial power. Nowadays, in the Uzbek and Kazakh press, one reads about Chinese, Algerian and Indian Basmachi.^{[102](#)}

The Roman historian Tacitus also records the resistance of the Britons to the Romans, in the words of the Britons: We [Britons] gain nothing by submission except heavier burdens for willing shoulders. We used to have one king at a time; now two are set over us--the governor to wreak his fury on our life-blood; the procurator, on our property. Whether our masters quarrel with each other or agree together, our bondage is equally ruinous. The governor has centurions to execute his will; the procurator, slaves; and both of them add insults to violence. Nothing is any longer safe from their greed and lust. In war it is at least a braver man who takes the spoil; as things stand with us, it is most cowards and shirkers that seize our homes, kidnap our children, and conscript our men--as though it were only for our country that we would not face death. What a mere handful of our invaders are, if we reckon up our own numbers! Such thoughts prompted the Germans to throw off the yoke; and they have only a river, not the ocean, to shield them. We have country, wives, and parents to fight for; the Romans have nothing but greed and self-indulgence. Back they will go, as their deified Julius [Caesar] went back, if we will but emulate the valour of our fathers. We must not be scared by the loss of one or two battles; success may give

an army more dash, but the greater staying-power comes from defeat.... For ourselves, we have already taken the most difficult step; we have begun to plan. And in an enterprise like this there is more danger in being caught planning than in taking the plunge.^{[103](#)}

Comparing Roman Britons to Russian held Turkistan, it appears that the Russians have not been as successful as the Romans and the Central Asians were also aware of their predicament.

One of the first actions of the Turkistan National Liberation movement was to establish educational societies, and prepare for the founding of universities. Though precedent existed in US, Europe, Togan states that the Central Asians were not acting on such Western examples^{[104](#)}, as the tsarist censorship kept the Western works out of reach. The Central Asians were simply recalling their own past from their own sources, and wished to proceed with the educational reforms. Even though considerable amount of those manuscript sources were forcibly collected by the Russians and transported out of Central Asia.^{[105](#)}

The Turkistan Extraordinary Conference of December 1917 announced the formation of Autonomous Turkistan, with Kokand as its capital. Bashkurdistan had declared territorial autonomy in January of 1918; the Tatars also took matters in hand in forming their autonomous region. Also in spring 1918, the Azerbaijan Republic and others came into being in the empire's former colonies. It seemed as if the Russian yoke had ended and freedom reigned. However, since the overthrow of the tsar (February 1917), local soviets were established, again by Russian settlers, railroad workers and soldiers, for Russians to rule over the Central Asians. These soviets were increasingly encouraged by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, especially after the October 1917 coup.

Soviets were often headed by professional revolutionaries arriving from Moscow. Generous promises were made to the Central Asians, including indemnities for all property expropriated earlier. It proved to be a time-buying ploy. As Togan demonstrated, the soviets had no intention of allowing the much-touted "self-rule" in Central Asia. This became clear when the Bolshevik forces burned Kokand on March 1918, and again massacred the population. The struggle not only had to continue, but became harsher. After a final series of conferences with Lenin, Stalin and the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, Togan realized that

the aims of the Bolsheviks were not different than those of their predecessors. Organizing a secret committee, Togan set about forming the basis of the united resistance, the leadership of which moved south to Samarkand and environs. A new, large-scale, coordinated stage of organizing the Turkistan National Liberation Movement commenced.^{[106\)](#)}

From 1918 into the 1920s Central Asia declared and exercised independence. Despite the Red Army's reconquest, several areas continued to hold out into the late 1920s and even the 1930s. The Turkistan National Liberation Movement was shaped directly by the attempt of the Bolsheviks to reconquer Turkistan. It must also be seen, however, as a culmination of a long process of Russian intrusion into Central Asia as reflected in the "Eastern Question" and what Kipling dubbed the "Great Game in Asia."

The Soviet Era

Bolshevik take-over of Central Asia occurred, like the tsarist conquest, in stages. Bolsheviks employed a combination of internal and external armed force, deception, promises and political pressure, as documented by Richard Pipes.^{[107\)](#)} Brutal conquest took another form in the Stalinist liquidations. With forced settlement of nomads and a man-made famine, caused by collectivization, millions of Central Asians perished. This is not unlike the Ukrainian experience.^{[108\)](#)}

Only after defeating prolonged resistance and establishing military, political and economic control could the Communist regime consolidate its power by social and cultural policies, including the anti-religious campaigns of 1920s and 1930s. They embellished the cultural imperialism policies of the tsarists and used a firmer hand. The Central Asians fighting Bolsheviks in the 1920s saw in their Russian adversaries the sons of 19th century military expansionists and missionaries as well as the "godless" Marxists they proclaimed themselves to be. Echoing tsarist claims to a "civilizing" mission in Central Asia, and the Bolsheviks said they were "liberating" colonial peoples. In efforts to attribute an aggressive, expansionist character to Central Asia and their defensive unity, both imperial and Bolshevik Russians portrayed the Central Asians

as a threat. The nature of this threat was still said to be "Pan-Turkism" and "Pan-Islamism."

Despite its European origins and apart from its European goals, the Pan-Turkism notion took root among some Central Asian emigres (in Central Asia, the idea has had few adherents), as a means to remove the Russians from their homelands. Yet, accusations of "Pan-Turkism" were employed freely in the Soviet Union (and outside), not against political action, but cultural movements or scholarly works on the common origins and language of the Turks.^{[109](#)} The latter studies are irksome to Moscow, for they refute the Russian position that the dialects are separate and distinct languages, a claim that the regime has exerted much effort to propagate.^{[110](#)} Even the distinction Turkic and Turkish is alien to the Turks themselves, who before the arrival of the Russians, communicated unhindered, apparently oblivious to the fact that they were speaking "totally separate and distinct languages."

The most articulate and thus dangerous opponent to Russian hegemony under the new "Communist" label was Mir Said Sultangaliev (1880-1939?).^{[111](#)}

Sultangalievism

If a revolution succeeds in England, the proleteriat will continue oppressing the colonies and pursuing the policy of the existing bourgeois government; for it is interested in the exploitation of these colonies. In order to prevent the oppression of the toiler of the East we must unite the Muslim masses in a communist movement that will be our own and autonomous.^{[112](#)}

Sultangaliev used the English example as a thin cloak for his true thoughts against the ideology and practise of the RCP(b).^{[113](#)} One had only to substitute the word "Russian," to understand the meaning of the statement. Having served as the deputy Commissar of Nationalities, as Stalin's assistant, Sultangaliev was well aware of Bolshevik methods and means of control. He, like many other non-Russians in the RCP(b), had seen the direction of the Bolshevik revolution: Russian domination. The

only path to salvation was to form a separate party and political union to fight for independence.

Sultangaliev was briefly arrested in 1923 and Stalin denounced his former deputy: ...Iaccused [Sultangaliev] of creating an organization of the Validov^{[114\)](#)} type... nevertheless, a week later, he sent... a secret letter... to establish contact with the Basmachi and their leader Validov...^{[115\)](#)}

Sultangaliev was purged and disappeared in 1928, along with other adherents of the movement. But even the existence of the idea presented by Sultangaliev was causing nightmares for Stalin. Frequent exhortations against Sultangalievism among nationalities, especially Central Asians were made:

The ideological and organizational destruction of Sultangalievism does not yet mean that our offensive against nationalism must come to an end. The Tatar Obkom invites all members of the Communist party to hunt down Sultangalievists, to reinforce the struggle against all kinds of national manifestations among backward masses, and to unmask the still numerous bearers of Sultangalievism in our party and Soviet apparatus.^{[116\)](#)}

Of course, the bogey-man Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism were once more put on display, this time even in more contradictory terms such as "Pan-Turkic Nationalism." Under the guise of slogans such as "internationalism," "brotherhood of nationalities," "coming closer," and "merging of nationalities," the policies beneficial to the Russians were pursued by the Soviet leadership in Moscow. The purges decimated the ranks of the educated Central Asians. A Russian dominated bureaucracy attempted to destroy Central Asian history, subvert their indigenous literature, exploit the Central Asian natural resources. While doing so, the regime destroyed the pristine environment. Not all of these crimes are yet known in the West, but more are gaining attention.

Central Asian issues under Gorbachev^{[117\)](#)}

Only recently have the results of decades of political, economic, social, cultural, environmental abuse been aired. The Bolsheviks

castigated tsarist use of Turkistan as a colony, but followed in their predecessors footsteps extracting cotton and raw materials for Soviet industry despite cost to the local population or environment. The cotton, irrigation, fertilizer "triad" has caused monstrous ecological and human health damage. Due to the overuse of chemical fertilizers and growth stimulants, infant mortality has jumped. Mothers were warned not to nurse their babies because their own milk is polluted. Shortened life expectancy plagues all Central Asian republics.

In 1987 almost one-third of all fish in the Volga basin died from pesticide poisoning. In many regions, pesticides are now turning-up in the water supply. According to Goskompriroda [State commissariat for the environment] more than 10,000 hectares of land contain concentrations of DDT above sanitary norms, some two to eight times the established norm. In one case, students were sent to the field to gather the onion crop. They were poisoned from handling the onions. It was discovered that the crop and the soil contained 120 times the norm prescribed for pesticides. The farm's director maintained that the students were suffering from exhaustion--apparently at the behest of local party officials worried about "alarming" the public.

Komsomolskaya Pravda reported in April 1990 that 43 persons, including 37 children, were hospitalized in Uzbekistan after eating a meal of mushrooms which turned out to be toxic. Two of the children died. The mushrooms were of an edible variety, but they were contaminated with "...toxic chemicals, pesticides, and other muck" which had leached into the soil after heavy rains stated the paper.

Perhaps the most dramatic result has been the destruction of the Aral Sea, well known thanks to mass media coverage. Several US universities have either conducted conferences on the subject, or are planning to do so.^{[118\)](#)} The waters of the Aral Sea have been used to irrigate cotton, the reason for its disappearance. This has profound effects. In addition to the destruction of the sea's fish (and fishing industry), salt driven by winds from the dry sea bed has destroyed vegetation as far away as Chimkent [Green City], 450 miles to the east. Plague, claimed Radio Moscow in May, threatens the region. A television marathon in Kazakhstan (which bordered the sea on the north) raised

almost 40 million rubles for a fund to help the people whose health and livelihoods have been destroyed by the drying up of the Aral Sea.

Kazakistan has other environmental damage as well. In 1990, a Danish television documentary stated that inhabitants of a village in Kazakhstan's Semipalatinsk Oblast were used as guinea-pigs during an atmospheric nuclear test in 1953. The documentary, summarized by the French News Service (AFP), included an interview with a Kazakh man who had been one of the 40 guinea-pigs made to stay behind when other villagers were evacuated before the test. According to the report, all 40 contracted cancer, and 34 have already died from the disease. This report would not be news to the inhabitants of Semipalatinsk--the effects of the August 1953 test have been frequently described in great detail in the Kazakh press.

Even after the testing has stopped, the effects will linger. A recent news report indicated that out of the total population of Kazakhstan, seven million now suffer from some form of cancer. During 1990 a private philanthropic fund was established to provide medical assistance to children affected by nuclear testing in Semipalatinsk. The people who suffer from the ills of this state-caused disaster are spending their own money to find a cure.

Economic policies inflicting less overt damage involve trade between Moscow and the individual republics. In the case of Kazakhstan, the Kazak trade deficit is over one billion "trade rubles." This, despite the large exports of varying commodities from Kazakhstan to the Russian republic. The primary reason is that Moscow sets the prices and the republics have to sell their produce at artificially low prices, well below those of the world market. On the other hand, they must pay much more for their imports from Moscow usually at market prices. The republics never had control over the transactions; Gosplan (the Central State Planning Office) decided who manufactured what, where and when, including investment for construction of facilities. The same maybe said of every Central Asian republic.

The economic issues are linked to fundamental matters of national identity and culture. Following again the tsarist precedent, the Soviet regime retained sharply divided education (technical education is in Russian), linguistic and attempted social and biological russification

campaigns, low investment in Central Asia, and settlement of Russian workers as the "price" of new factory construction. The terminology has been changed, but the substance has not.^{[119\)](#)} Among the legacies of Moscow's rule was the death and destruction of forced collectivization, and against this protest has been pronounced.

A group of writers who made up an advisory council to the Kazakh literary weekly Qazaq Edebiyeti have called for the erection of a monument to the Kazakhs who died in the collectivization campaign in the 1930s. According to their appeal, published on the front page of Qazaq Edebiyeti April 13, 2.5 million Kazakhs perished under Stalin. The writers would like the memorial to be completed by 1992, the sixtieth anniversary of the collectivization-caused famine.

Anarchy in Central Asia?^{[120\)](#)}

Central Asians' long standing demands can be summed-up in two broad categories: 1) the end of centrally ordered quotas, ranging from out-of-region-origin cadre appointments to colonial-style forced cotton production, and settlement of non-native populations; 2) an end to environmental pollution from nuclear tests to pesticide poisoning. Central Asians, like other non-Russians, have been interested in economic justice and greater autonomy in their internal affairs. But accurate information on Central Asia not readily available to Western journalists or policymakers. Moscow has been able to use that ignorance to play on various Western fears and prejudices, raising the specter of political chaos, nuclear proliferation and, the successor to the Pan-Islamic threat, Islamic Fundamentalism.

First, the "Treaty Principle of the Soviet Federation," raised by Gorbachev at the 28th Party Congress, was not abandoned after the coup attempt of August 1991. Treaty bonds are still said to have "the enormous advantages of the new Soviet federation," which would foil the plans of "all kinds of separatists, chauvinists, and nationalists" who are trying to "deal a decisive blow to perestroika which threatens their far-reaching aims."^{[121\)](#)} Whatever the nominal power relations in a new union treaty, the old economic realities would preserve Central Asia's de facto

colonial position vis-a-vis Russian industry. Moreover, the "economic logic" of continued ties to Russia would make it that much more difficult to alter the pattern, and Central Asia would have to go on supplying raw materials for still higher priced Russian manufactures constructed under the Soviet regime.

Second is Moscow's "Revival of Islam" offensive. After the Bolshevik revolution, the Oriental Institute was gradually Bolshevized and attached to the USSR Academy of Sciences. It was reorganized many times between the late 1920s and late 1950s. The "Muslim Spiritual Boards" were revived in 1941, seemingly along the very same lines as under the tsars. The new Islamic ulama is trained by the state.

Both tsarist and Soviet regimes have blamed "Islam" for anti-colonial actions by the Central Asians against Russian conquest, colonization, economic exploitation, political discrimination, and russification. Many repressions by the center have been carried out to suppress alleged Islamic movements, "Pan-Islamism" in the last century, "Islamic fundamentalism" today. The "usual suspects" are targets: "zealots, fanatics, feudal remnants..." Gorbachev used these accusations the day before ordering troops to open fire in Baku in January 1990.

More recently, a "senior member" of the Oriental Institute (Leningrad) has spoken of the danger of an "Islamic Explosion." The speaker stated that the "European-centered approach to Islam" had caused the USSR to pursue incorrect policies in Central Asia. He advocated the rejection of that approach in favor of one that treats Islam on its own terms.^{[122\)](#)}

The Orientalist's words may have been meant to incite a debate within the Western scholarly community concerning perestroika in academe. The wish in the Soviet Oriental Institute may have been to keep the Western specialists too busy to pay attention to these demands Central Asia shares with other nationalities. This treatment of Islam is not only not new, it continues to err in the same way as before -- attributing all of the grievances of the Central Asians to Islam, as if Moscow's understanding of Islam can help the government make better cotton policies. Is it lack of understanding Islam that led to the destruction of the Aral Sea?

Further, by the continuing attribution of unrest to Islam, the government signals the West that no action is too drastic to quell it. If Western analysts grasped more clearly that national autonomy or political liberty were at the root of Central Asian discontent, Western governments might look upon it with a very different eye, one less tolerant of Moscow's use of force. Along the same lines, Moscow employs a "Sociological Approach." The anti-religious campaigns that started in the 1920s by the Bezbozhnik (Godless) League later became the task of the "Institutes of Scientific Atheism." The next step now appears to be embodied in the Institutes of Sociology, fathoming the depths of the society, attempting to conduct an opinion poll to determine the hold of Islam in Central Asia. A Soviet journal reportedly published one such survey, which revealed, contrary to the official line, that the USSR had not become a land of convinced atheists; Religious beliefs are not declining every year; Religion is not confined to more "backward groups"--women, the elderly.^{[123\)](#)}

What probably began as a means of keeping responsible committees informed, may now be a public relations tool as well. Under the authority of a "Scientific Institute," the results can be disseminated and endorsed to form the bases of future actions. It can also serve as the seal of approval from the "intelligentsia," supporting the actions of the Center.

A recent program announced by several US scholarly societies and associations aims to develop Soviet Sociological Research Projects. One hopes that such an endeavor would develop to remove the abuses of such "opinion poll taking."

An especially popular, if unimaginative, tool of the Soviet government is "Corruption Charges." Since the Andropov period, several cycles of corruption charges have been brought against the Central Asians. Throughout the USSR, there are no doubt genuine cases of corruption as defined in a democratic society: influence peddling, embezzlement, bribe taking, skimming money from the cotton crop. On the other hand, some of these charges appear trumped-up to root out Central Asian efforts to gain some measure of local control over their own economy. What is labelled corruption by the Center, can be directly aimed at independently minded Central Asian elites. During the Gorbachev period, a similar crack down was undertaken.^{[124\)](#)} The Special Prosecutors

were later accused of using "inhuman methods to extract confessions" from the suspects. Soon afterward, the former Prosecutors themselves came under investigation for their excesses.

Gorbachev also attributed the problems in Transcaucasia to representatives of the shadow economy," i.e. the sort of entrepreneurship which perestroika purported to allow. This not only cast aspersions on the nature of his economic "restructuring," but also suggested that he nurtured a different vision of perestroika for Central Asians than for Russians or Balts.

Failing verbal dissuasion and political pressure, Gorbachev has been as willing as his predecessors to use force. He coupled it with justification, another tactic for international opinion that may be called "The Stick" (or, the Praise for the Armed Forces"). The use of lethal force during January 1990 in Azerbaijan, in the city of Baku was also meant as a demonstration to Central Asia. Similar brutality was used against Kazakhs in 1986,^{[125](#)} and Georgians in 1989, though it was worse in Baku where two hundred or more were killed by the Red Army. Later, Gorbachev warmly praised the armed forces for keeping order and warned the Soviet media not to engage in anti- Army propaganda. The message was clear: if you do not accept our political solutions, we shall use Leninist-Stalinist muscle, no matter what the new vocabulary. The citizens of the Baltic Republics, along with those Central Asians have been experiencing this "stick." Moscow seems to create conditions in which it can use force. The decision to "announce," or "leak the news" of the settlement of Armenians in Tajikistan antagonized the housing- poor Tajiks. It is inconceivable that Moscow would not have anticipated a Tajik response. The media, predictably, report on "a Muslim population's violence." Such manipulation was by no means isolated. The retired KGB General Oleg Kalugin stated that the KGB probably had a role in inciting the anti-Armenian violence in Baku: "Naturally, it is their job to stir up everyone against everyone else." Kalugin sharply criticized the Moscow leadership for withholding information on the KGB's involvement in Sumgait and in Tbilisi.^{[126](#)}

In this light, perhaps the events connected with the Kirghiz-Ozbek, Georgian-Ossetian, Ozbek-Meskhetian^{[127](#)} confrontations of 1989-1990, and the Kazakh-Russian "incident" of 1986, ought to be reexamined as

well.^{[128\)](#)} Even the center's support for creating of "hostage" pockets in ethnically uniform populations seems aimed at diluting homogenous areas capable of mounting national movements and to incite inter- ethnic enmity.^{[129\)](#)}

If "the Stick" was applied to Central Asia, "the Carrot" is used elsewhere. The invitation to the West to believe that the USSR has been trying very hard to become just a Western democracy was yet another aspect of the image manipulation. Anyone in the West expressing doubts as to the genuineness of the Soviet efforts was dubbed "a grave digger of perestroika." Further, Soviet spokesmen stated that they "are confident that West would decide against those individuals."^{[130\)](#)} To fortify the image of efforts being expended to make the transition to a Western type democracy, a number of other public relations demarches were also undertaken. Authorities grant exit visas to Jews, and hold talks with the Iranian government on border crossing points for the Azerbaijan Turks. These, of course, addressed the humanitarian issues raised in the West with respect to reuniting divided families.

Whether or not the Center was expecting "Anarchy in Central Asia," Moscow clearly anticipated Western impatience with "turmoil," especially if it threatens to upset the status- quo. This appears to be true even when the elements of the existing government, which assaulted human rights throughout its existence, attempted to seize power in a coup and the challenge is mounted by a population seeking to regain its independence. Nonetheless, current democracies seem to prefer dealing with one great power they know than numerous new and small powers. The view is similar to those when the Bolshevik regime was in its infancy but Great Powers at Versailles refused to recognize independence of most tsarist colonies except Poland and the Baltic. Such refusal policies are more easily justified when those groups seeking independence can be dismissed as "fanatical" or at least "anti-democratic;" even if the challenged power is not democratic or democratically elected.

As if to help his Western counterparts support him and the empire-- and in case Moscow decides to use force as in Azerbaijan--Gorbachev provides justification for their fears and his use of force. Russian spokesmen continue to claim in the 1990s that they "civilized" Central

Asia, protected and fed it. Western observers seem rarely to ask how Russia "civilized" a demonstrably older civilization than itself, from whom Russia protects Central Asia, or how the Central Asians managed to feed themselves before the arrival of the Russians and their cotton agenda.

Perspective on the "Post-openness" prospects President Franklin Roosevelt (1882–1945), in his famed 5 October 1937 "Quarantine speech," stated:

...Those who cherish their freedom and recognize and respect the equal right of their neighbors to be free and live in peace, must work together for the triumph of law and moral principles in order that peace, justice and confidence may prevail in the world. There must be a return to a belief in the pledged word, in the value of a signed treaty. There must be recognition of the fact that national morality is as vital as private morality.... It ought to be inconceivable that in this modern era, and in the face of experience, any nation could be so foolish and ruthless as to run the risk of plunging the whole world into war by invading and violating, in contravention of solemn treaties, the territory of other nations that have done them no real harm and are too weak to protect themselves adequately.^{[131\)](#)}

World War II began two years after this speech. It would not be a credible assertion today to claim that the Central Asians are preparing to attack the Russian Federation. But the Russians are behaving just as Hitler did in the period when F. D. Roosevelt gave his speech: demanding more land.

The coup attempt of August 1991 might represent a new turn in Russian politics. Whether this turn is towards true democracy with its full implication of freedom, or a turn towards yet another kind of Russian domination, it is too early to surmise. Some pronouncements from the "center," immediately after the failure of the hardliner's coup attempt, began talking of "border adjustments" in favor of the Russian Federation should the republics opt to secede. Those "adjustments" are precisely in the areas where the Russians have earlier expropriated lands from other nationalities; for example, in Kazakhstan.^{[132\)](#)} A "border agreement" was soon signed between the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. The Bolshevik leadership, too, had signed a variety of agreements with the Bashkurts and other Central Asian polities in the 1920s but shortly

afterward disregarded them as "so much paper."^{[133](#)} It was also the USSR that signed the United Nations Charter in 1945, and the very next day demanded land from another UN Charter Member, the Turkish Republic; precisely in the areas covered in the 1921 border treaty signed between the two states.^{[134](#)} The idea is still not abandoned in Moscow, or the Russian circles, and public policy speeches are being delivered on the subject.^{[135](#)} In fact, the newly constituted Russian Rapid Deployment Forces are also seen as the instruments of this policy, in preparation for anticipated action. The ostensible reason, of course, is going to be the "protection of Russians" in "those" territories. This is clearly seen in the behavior of the 14th Russian/CIS Army in Moldova during 1991 and 1992.

Russians have no significant experience with democracy. Many Russian thinkers and groups have fought democracy at every turn.^{[136](#)} Slavophiles and even some Westernizers of the 19th century tsarist empire preferred an "organic link" of autocrat and subjects to the artificial guarantees of constitutions and the rule of law. Though the tsar declared Chaadaev insane to discredit his "dangerous" notions,^{[137](#)} it was society that produced the People's Will terrorists, the Union of the Russian People,^{[138](#)} Lenin, and Stalin and Dzerzhinsky,^{[139](#)} who despite their actual ethnic origins, sprang from the ruling Russian society. Konstantin Pobedenostsev, legal scholar, head of Holy Synod and tutor to Alexander III and Nicholas II, wrote of "The Falsehood of Democracy."^{[140](#)} The lack of a Russian legal consciousness or sense of legality has been analyzed.^{[141](#)} It was an environment in which private initiative was always suspect. What caused the citizen to heed the commands of the state was not a sense of citizenship, or civil consciousness, but compulsion, often coercion by the state. After the fall of the tsarist regime and its Okhrana, that body's place was taken by the Bolshevik Cheka, and its successors.

Two days "at the barricades" during August 1991, around the Russian Federation Parliament, is not likely to transform and "democratize" the deeply autocratic experiences of the Russian tradition. Yeltsin's proclamation that Russia had "saved democracy for Russia and the world" gave no hope that "democratic Russia" --should it ever materialize-- foresaw any place for non-Russian democracy.

After the failed coup of August 1991, the Central Asians have again taken to organizing and publicly articulating their wide ranging

grievances. To restrict our view of Central Asia's troubles to the economic realm alone is to overlook the essential threat to their conscious existence as a people. Overt demonstrations against economic policy or political administration have been possible only rarely. But Russian and Soviet cultural policies have affected the way the Central Asians could see themselves and describe their custom and past for future generations. Recovery of the true sources of history and regeneration of the true identity has been in progress, continuing a conflict in the cultural realm that Central Asia conducted against tsarist policy a century ago. Political and cultural responses are different aspects of the same struggle for greater control over their own lives and land. Whether the former Communists leadership of Central Asian polities have also reformed themselves overnight, as they have stated, remains to be seen.

At the moment Boris Yeltsin, career communist, is now regarded as the "Savior" of democracy in Russia, and as its guide. "A nation's guides are those who can awaken their people from their witless slumber of ignorance.... The Savior of every tribe shall come."^{[142](#)} If the awaited savior causes harm to other "tribes" in the process, knowingly or not, there can be vast repercussions. This is also true of the former Communist leadership in Central Asia. "Four freedoms" are enshrined in the United Nations Charter. If the "Four Freedoms" cease to apply uniformly, they may cease to exist altogether.