

Tamerlane's Heirs

Perspectives on 1991 and Its
Aftermath in Central Asia

by

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Contents

Foreword	1
I. The Train Car on the Siding: Central Asia and the 1991 Coup	2
II. Essays on the Coup and its Denouement in Central Asia, written in Tashkent in mid-September 1991	
Introduction	5
Preface	13
In the Mountains	14
The Putsch of 19-21 August	22
In the Shadow of Lenin	26
Can Private Enterprise Succeed in Uzbekistan?	34
<i>Glasnost'</i> Revisited	36
III. State symbols and national identity: The creation of the new national flag and the replacement of the monuments to the old order.	43
IV. Three Articles Reflecting on Central Asia in the Post-1991 Years	
Central Asia After Eight Years of Independence	[53]
The Need for a New Perspective on Central Asia	[57]
The Authoritarian Politics of Central Asia	[59]
About the Author	[76]

Foreword

This compilation of essays was inspired by the plan to devote a section of the autumn 2011 *Newsletter* of the Ellison Center for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies at the University of Washington to “memoirs” about the events of 1991 leading to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. What follows here then is to some extent addressed to a University of Washington audience, even if I trust the material may be of interest beyond our ivied walls.

My original task was to write a very short memoir concerning what I experienced in 1991, since I was in Central Asia during the August coup against Gorbachev and for some weeks afterwards. I begin here with that piece, written very quickly twenty years to the day when the coup began and with only a couple of minor subsequent edits. As I was writing though, it occurred to me to exhume material written closer to the event. In mid-September 1991, sitting in Tashkent, I wrote several essays for possible newspaper series in Seattle, but they never were printed. Even though some of the material in them perforce duplicates what I put in my short memoir, I include them here, with an introduction and some notes to provide context, perspective and a few essential corrections. Following the 1991 articles is a short, illustrated analysis concerning the articulation of identity and the fate of the Soviet era monuments in Tashkent on which I commented briefly when in Tashkent in 1991 but then a few years later had a chance to revisit there. I recently included some of this material in a talk for a Central Asia lecture series at the Seattle Asian Art Museum. Lastly, while reflecting on 1991 and its aftermath, I think it appropriate to include here three previously published pieces, the first an overview of the changes in Central Asia seen from the perspective of 1999, the second a short talk given at a forum on Central Asia held at the University of Washington in 2001 on the tenth anniversary of independence and in the wake of 9/11, and the third an invited article which I contributed to a publication by the American Forum for Global Education in 2003. My assignment in the latter was to discuss the “democratic process” (or, as was becoming evident, the lack of one) in Central Asia. The inclusion of these pieces results in a certain amount of repetition, but they may be useful to show an evolution of perspective over a period of years.

I. The Train Car on the Siding: Central Asia and the 1991 Coup

Approaching mid-day twenty years ago today I was walking, probably in something of an alcoholic haze, down the main street of Osh in Kyrgyzstan at the head of the Ferghana Valley. My Russian mountaineering friends and I had just returned to town after climbing in the Pamirs. I had gone to Central Asia with a group of the Seattle Mountaineers as part of a climbing exchange. On our arrival in Osh a month earlier, we had become aware that things were changing in the region. At the Osh airport in the very early morning we were ushered into a little dining room, with flower-bedecked tables and a full meal, a surprise welcome prepared at the behest of the local ex-Communist Party boss (a Kyrgyz) who seemed to think visiting Americans might want to invest in his burgeoning private economic empire. On our way out of the city, we were escorted by a police car with flashing lights, the ostensible reason being the authorities were nervous about our safety a year after the Osh riots which had resulted in a lot of bloodshed and property damage. Our antiquated bus survived the arduous climb over the passes to the Kizilsu Valley, and after a stop to cool the overheated engine, bounced its way up to Achikh-Tash, the climbing base-camp situated at an altitude not much lower than 4400 m Mt. Rainier in the lush meadows below 7100 m Peak Lenin. There we heard bitter complaints from the Russian climbers that the same ex-Party boss had taken over the management of the camp, pushing aside the Russian Climbing Federation, the fact of his being a Central Asian adding insult to injury. It came as no surprise to learn that the yurt which housed the liquor store at the camp was part of his commercial empire, run by his wife. For the record, I did not make it to the top of Peak Lenin, my first big mountain, though some members of our team did.

As climbers will do, once down off the mountain and back in Osh we indulged in a certain amount of light-headed frolic, such as co-ed skinny dipping in irrigation canals at midnight. On August 19, we had a late morning breakfast downtown – very good *lagman* (Central Asian noodle soup) washed down by quantities of straight vodka. As we were making our way down the street afterwards, we heard the official radio broadcast coming from a shop – the leaders of the coup against Gorbachev announcing to everyone in what was still the Soviet Union that there was an “extreme situation,” details of which were not revealed. The pithy communiqué kept being repeated. No other news was available, no one quite knew what the outcome might be.

There was no dramatic public evidence that anything important was happening. We did what Russians are very good at – sat around, grim-faced, talking earnestly (and, probably, having a little more vodka). That night I was scheduled to fly off to Dushanbe (Tajikistan) for another adventure in the mountains with two members of the official Russian women’s climbing team who were training

for a possible attempt on Mt. Everest. The Russian mountaineers had traditionally negotiated with the Soviet military for transport; indeed our little contingent headed off to the airport in the back of a military truck, the corporal riding with us plying us with the army's special rations of good quality chocolate. We passed one police checkpoint – a routine traffic stop. At the airport I was waved through the boarding check by a uniformed policeman even though I did not have (as was required in those days) an internal travel visa to go to Tajikistan. The plane, an overworked small jet, did not inspire confidence. My seat was broken, there was no room for luggage, and our big duffels of climbing gear were plunked down in the aisle. The flight crew had to climb up over them to get to the cockpit.

In Dushanbe, there was still little real news out of Moscow, but also no evidence on the streets that anything was amiss. I recall – no particular credit for prescience here – having said to my climbing friends that I thought Yeltsin would emerge as the hero of the moment. (As an aside, I would note that UW students in my Russian history survey the summer before heard my concluding prediction that the Soviet Union would not last another five years.) We finally learned of the counter-coup and the return of Gorbachev from the Crimea while straining to hear a cranky radio news broadcast in a mountain resort complex, where we stayed before moving on to the remote Iagnob area in the upper Zeravshan Valley.

End of story? Not quite. My trip to Central Asia had another goal as well – to represent the UW History Department in an exchange with Tashkent University. On August 31 I arrived in Tashkent, where bold red newspaper headlines were already proclaiming Uzbekistan's independence. Over the next few weeks, I was able to follow, at least in the Russian newspapers (I do not read Uzbek), the official shaping of Uzbekistan's new political status. In the local press, there were heated rebuttals of news analysis published in Moscow, notably in an article in *Izvestiia* on September 14 entitled "The Train Car on the Siding," which blasted Uzbek President Islam Karimov for his opportunism in fence-sitting until he saw the way the cards were falling after the coup and then choosing independence as the way to keep what in effect was the old Communist regime in power. Foreign reporters from some of the major media finally began showing up in Tashkent in a belated attempt to learn what was happening in Central Asia, but none of them knew either Uzbek or Russian. I would summarize for them over breakfast what was being printed in the Russian-language press; at one point I joined them in an interview at the home of a prominent leader of the miniscule opposition movement Birlik. Not to be outdone, it seems, by Russian mountain climbers, a well-known reporter for the *New York Times* got himself bounced at the door of a posh local restaurant when, after too many beers, he tried to barge in without a reservation....

For more on the view from Central Asia as I actually recorded it in September 1991, see the attached essays based on unpublished articles I wrote there at the time for possible publication here in Seattle.

– August 19, 2011

II. Essays on the Coup and its Denouement in Central Asia, Written in Tashkent in mid-September 1991

Introduction

An important feature of the human condition is that we remember. Often the stimulus to remembering is a particular, usually catastrophic event. My mother used to tell me where she was when the news came of the bombing of Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941 (for the record, I was born five days later and thus have no memory of December 7). For my generation, until recently, the moment to remember was when we heard the news of President Kennedy's assassination, November 22, 1963 (I was in my Old Church Slavonic class in my first term of graduate school). As we are reminded on the day when I am writing these lines, September 11, the nation and world are gripped by remembering 9/11. I know exactly where I was when I heard that news and how I felt, although it was a few days later, since on September 11 I was incommunicado in the mountains in Ladakh, Northern India.

Memories though, as former UW history Professor Richard White so elegantly showed in his book on his mother's memories of her younger years in Ireland, are treacherous terrain. Memoirs, such as that above, and even diaries or other kinds of records written as events unfold (generally not at the moment but hours or days later) are not necessarily reliable sources. Even if we try to be objective and accurate, our memories may be faulty. What we record that is going on around us is limited by our personal knowledge and perspective. Moreover, we may exercise self-censorship or tailor the writing with some audience in mind. In the case of the previously unpublished essays which follow here, I was trying to write for a general reader, which perforce meant glossing over detail that might otherwise have been included and which an academic studying the subject might wish to see.

We need context for assessing such material. Part of that context here is to remind ourselves that the events in the Soviet Union which culminated in its dissolution at the end of 1991 caught most of the "experts" by surprise. Even a year or more earlier, there were clear signals the end might be at hand, but they tended to be ignored. I was in Moscow in the late spring of 1990 for a conference. Television news there was devoting a great deal of time to broadcasting the proceedings of the congress of the Russian Federation, an event of a type for which live coverage might well have seemed to an outsider a huge waste of broadcast time. The debates repeatedly came around to the shaping of a declaration of sovereignty. When I returned to Seattle, I could find no indication that those discussions had caught the attention of the international media, even

though in retrospect I think we would agree they were very significant. While in Moscow I also had occasion to meet socially with colleagues, one of whom was a scholar from L'viv in Ukraine with whom I had corresponded over the years. He had been persecuted for his political views, but now, in the context of the changes which were underway in the U.S.S.R., it seemed as though the hopes he and likeminded individuals had for eventual Ukrainian independence might be realized. When we met, I asked him specifically: how long will it be before Ukraine becomes independent? His response: a year. That summer I taught my survey course on Russian history (the whole nine yards in one short, summer term) concluding it with a lecture predicting that the Soviet Union as we had known it would not exist five years hence. My Ukrainian colleague was closer to the mark. Were any of my colleagues in the U.S. making similar predictions to their classes? I don't know.

We know that events which unfolded in the Baltic republics were critical in the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union, but the final straw was the failed August 19-21, 1991, coup against Mikhail Gorbachev. It is almost surreal to look at the grim and uninspiring visages of the three apparatchiki who led the coup, in front of me as I write in a photo of their televised press conference, reproduced on the front page of the August 22 issue of *Komsomol'skaia pravda* after the plot had been overturned. (Yel'tsin's defiant speech from atop the tank on August 19 is printed to the left of the photo.) Gorbachev was off vacationing in the Crimea, not keeping his eyes on his back. Much of the foreign press corps was vacationing

too and out of Moscow. Re-reading the *New York Times* coverage for the last 11 days of August, which I also have in front of me, provides an interesting perspective on what became known. Fairly quickly, reliable news was coming out of Moscow, but there was little on-the-spot reporting from the Soviet republics, none at all from Central Asia.



Of course the academic experts all jumped in with their instant analysis. Richard Pipes was one of the first off the mark with an op-ed piece on August 20. The following day's issue published views by Stephen Cohen, Gail Lapidus, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Condolezza Rice and others under the headline: "Voices of U.S. Scholars: 'These Forces Go Way Back in Russian History.' Scholars See a 'Putsch,' a Gang of Rivals, and Analyze the Plotters' Chances." On the whole,

the instant analysis was sensible enough. Brzezinski, for example, said bluntly “In the long run, the coup will most certainly fail. There is no way of putting the old system back together with a military putsch. The Soviet Union is an anachronism...” Twenty years on, as we look around the political landscape of what succeeded the Soviet Union, we may have to wonder how much of the old system really died in 1991.

My purpose here is not to engage in learned, retrospective analysis but rather to offer a more or less contemporary view of events as seen from Central Asia while I was there in late summer and early autumn in 1991. Careful attention then to what was happening certainly should have given no one optimism that real political change would occur locally. What I wrote back then lays out some of the evidence. I was not the only UW faculty member to be in the Soviet Union during the events of August and their immediate aftermath. My senior colleague in Russian History, Donald Treadgold, was lecturing for an alumni association tour on the waterways of the Russian north and found himself in St. Petersburg at the time of the coup. Prof. Ilse Cirtautas was in Tashkent in September to deliver a paper at the celebration on the occasion of the 550th anniversary of the birth of Uzbekistan’s adopted “national poet,” Mir Ali-Shir Nava-i. Her presentation drew substantial praise in the report on the proceedings published on the first page of the official government newspaper.¹ She and I subsequently presented our (divergent) views on the events both in a meeting of her Central Asian seminar and at a public forum on the occasion of their 10th anniversary.

My presence in Central Asia in summer and early autumn 1991 had two purposes. The first was to participate in a mountaineering exchange. In 1987, a team of some very good American alpinists, most based in the Pacific Northwest, had gone off to climb in the Pamir-Alai Range in southern Kyrgyzstan along the border with Tajikistan (this, before those countries were independent). The event had involved the Seattle Mountaineers and Soviet Mountaineering Federation (then a national body which “governed” the sport). Some of the participants on the Soviet side were resident in Central Asia. A couple of years later, a group of mountaineers, most from Tashkent, came to Seattle. They climbed Mt. Rainier,

¹ I translate the relevant section of the article here: “Substantial work in honoring the memory of the great poet has been undertaken also in the United States of America, especially in Tashkent’s sister city of Seattle. Describing this was University of Washington Professor Ilse Laude Cirtautas, who heads the division of Uzbek Language and Literature in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization. Extending to the attendees in literary Uzbek warm greetings, the guest expressed her pleasure that she could be present at the festivities in an Uzbekistan which had declared its independence. She noted that a people who so passionately love their history and honor the great talents of their land can be confident in the successful development of their national culture” (E. Tukhvaturllina, “1991 god—god Alishera Navoi: Tvorchestvo poeta — rodnik vysokikh dum,” *Narodnoe Slovo*, September 27, 1991, p. 1; republished the following day in *Pravda Vostoka*, p. 2).

Mt. Adams by its semi-interesting north face route, Eldorado Peak and the north ridge of Forbidden Peak in the North Cascades. I had been able to participate in the Mt. Adams and Forbidden Peak climbs (along in part because I could speak Russian, not because of any distinction as a climber). The trip to Central Asia in 1991 continued this exchange between the Mountaineers and the Soviet Federation. Our specific goal was to climb 7134 m (somewhat over 23,000 ft.) Peak Lenin in southern Kyrgyzstan, one of the four highest peaks in the Soviet Union, which had first been open to American climbers in the early 1970s.

Not a difficult peak by Himalayan standards (there are, in fact, no “technical” challenges on the standard routes), it had been much climbed. But, as the summer of 1974 showed, it could be an extraordinarily dangerous place.² A good many climbers died on the mountain that summer when the peak was hit by fierce storms. In 1990, it would be the scene of one of the worst tragedies in mountaineering history, when an earthquake loosed wall of snow and ice that swept away one of the high camps and its occupants. Our attempt on the mountain in 1991 fortunately proved to be “uneventful.” While I did not summit, half of our group did; everyone returned alive. As I learned (this was my first really big mountain), trying to reach 7000 m, even after a reasonable period for acclimatization, is a very different thing from climbing Mt. Rainier. That summer on Peak Lenin saw an unsuccessful attempt by someone to take sled dog team to the top; it also saw a little known Russian climber set a speed record by going from the advanced base camp to the summit round trip in about 12 hours. I gasp for breath at the thought. Among the groups at the mountain was a team of elite Soviet women climbers, who were training and competing for places on an expedition to the Himalayas and possible attempt on Mt. Everest. Some of what follows below involved my interaction with members of that team after my Seattle Mountaineers friends had gone home and I stayed behind.

My second reason for being in Central Asia in 1991 was to participate in another exchange. The University of Washington had had for a good many years

² The events of 1994 are recounted well in Robert W. Craig, *Storm and Sorrow in the High Pamirs* (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1977). One should also look at Frith Maier’s commemoration of the Soviet women who died on the mountain that year, “A women’s climbing tragedy remembered: Peak Lenin, 20 years ago,” *Climbing*, No. 146 (1994), pp. 30, 32-33. Maier was an active participant in the inception of the climbing exchange. A graduate in International Studies from the Jackson School at the University of Washington, she became *the* western expert on hiking and climbing in the Soviet Union. I had the privilege of supervising her thesis when she returned to JSIS for her M.A.; it was subsequently published by University of Washington Press: *Vagabond Life: The Caucasus Journals of George Kennan*, Edited, with an Introduction and Afterword, by Frith Maier, with Contributions by Daniel C. Waugh (Seattle and London, 2003). Vladimir Shataev, the former president of the Soviet Mountaineering Federation, whose wife had been the leader of the women’s team on Peak Lenin and died with them there in 1974, met our 1991 climbing group when we arrived in Moscow on our way to Kyrgyzstan.

exchange programs with its counterpart in Tashkent. The UW History Department also established direct exchange with Tashkent University. A UW Professor, Aldon Bell (one of the active members of the Seattle-Tashkent Sister City Association), had lectured at Tashkent. A Tashkent historian, Goga Khidoiatov, had been in Seattle in 1990 (we hosted him in our home for part of his stay). My visit to Tashkent in 1991 was the next leg in this exchange: while there (remember, this was arranged before the Soviet Union had disintegrated), I was to offer at least a seminar on some aspect of Russian History. I arrived in Tashkent August 31, on the eve of Uzbekistan's declaration of independence, and stayed there through mid-October.³

My stay in Tashkent, to paraphrase Dickens, involved both the best of times and the worst of times. On the positive side, since I had time on my hands, I was able to track down in the national library an early 18th-century Russian manuscript, which somehow had "migrated" to Tashkent after 1917, and which proved to contain very interesting material on the cultural life and historical writing in Viatka (north of Kazan near the western slopes of the Urals) in the time of Tsar Peter the Great. Analysis of this one large book later became the core of a book I published in St. Petersburg in Russian in 2003.⁴ The teaching exchange in Tashkent was disappointing, in that my seminar attracted only a couple of students, whose attendance was indifferent and who had no intention of doing any work for the course but nonetheless expected to get credit for it. I was asking them to read and consider the issues raised by Marc Raeff's *Understanding Imperial Russia*, which had recently been published in Russian translation. I also volunteered on a couple of occasions to be a "native informant" for English language classes being offered at the university and found that to be a rather interesting experience. With prior approval of the teachers, I exposed the class (consisting mainly of co-eds) to aspects of the vernacular they never would have gotten out of their textbooks. Where the history students undoubtedly found me and Russian history a bore, the English classes found baseball terminology at least mystifying and four-letter words perhaps even intriguing.

As a visiting scholar in their department, I was at one point invited to attend a faculty meeting of the History Department at Tashkent University. However, when it turned out that the main item on the agenda that day was to be a

³ While presumably the History Department exchange was not deemed important enough to be reported in Seattle news, in Tashkent my lectures (and the previous ones by Aldon Bell) made all the major newspapers: *Tashkentskaia pravda – Dlia Vas* [a supplement to the regular edition], September 21, 1991, p. 4; *Narodnoe slovo*, September 21, 1991, p. 2; *Pravda Vostoka*, October 10, 1991, p. 3.

⁴ *Istoriia odnoi knigi: Viatka i "ne-sovremennost'" v russkoi kul'ture petrovskogo vremeni*. S.-Peterburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2003.

discussion of a decree that had just been handed down to the effect Russian history in the curriculum was now to be largely eliminated and replaced instead with Uzbek history, I was firmly but politely asked to leave the room. That decree came as a shock, and presented a major challenge to a program where a good part of the curriculum as well as faculty expertise was Russia-oriented.

The essays which follow here were written in Tashkent in mid-September 1991 just before the real academic calendar began (the students, who had registered at the start of the month, were off on the *kolkhoz* picking cotton or sorting onions and cabbages before actually beginning classes). My articles were intended for possible publication in a newspaper such as the *Seattle Times*. I do not recall the exact circumstances that prompted me to write, although I think an editor at that paper had expressed interest in getting a first-hand account of the August events from someone who was there at the time. Not quite knowing what the paper might want, I attempted to write for what I imagined as its general audience. By the time they reached Seattle in late September, my essays proved to be of no interest to the newspaper and thus have sat unpublished for two decades. In retrospect I can see how much of the material probably would have been ill-suited for readers of the *Seattle Times*.

In the circumstances where I was writing rapidly and without access to a library possessing the kind of resources needed to check facts (this was before the age of the Internet), I was not doing serious research for these pieces. Moreover, even though I had a fair previous knowledge of the history of Central Asia, much of the teaching I eventually did about it occurred in subsequent years. I am sure that the essays here would look very different if re-written from my perspective of 2011. Of course the point here is not to write the history as we now might reconstruct it but rather to provide a sense of how things looked back then, as events were unfolding, whatever the limitations then were in my knowledge. Some twenty years after their writing, the essays may read as a curious artifact, rather than a useful source capturing an important moment in history.

I have done some minor stylistic editing, a bit of rearranging of parts, and inserted photographs and explanatory notes, all of the latter being ones added in 2011. As indicated in some of them, there are mistakes, probably the most glaring one being my remark that Islam in Tajikistan is mainly Shiite (the Ismailis in Eastern Tajikistan, yes, but the others are Sunni). Otherwise, the texts stand as I wrote them, with no attempt systematically to re-frame, research, or document points which which might seem questionable today, beyond citation of the news sources I was consulting at the time. Of course now there is a substantial scholarly literature covering some of the same ground, but to review it is not my purpose either. I hope that most errors which remain may only be ones of judgment, not fact.

My main sources were personal observation and the Russian-language media. When the foreign press corps finally made its appearance in Central Asia well after the actual August coup and its immediate denouement, I interacted with the reporters and in one or two cases sat in on interviews they conducted or overheard some of what they were learning. Not speaking or reading Uzbek, and in part having experienced the events through the eyes of my Russian acquaintances, naturally my perspective here can be faulted as one-sided. However, I think that a comparison of what was in the Uzbek-language media with what was being presented in Russian would not in any substantial way change the picture which emerges about the political events.⁵ The local Russian-language press, for example, clearly expressed the views of the Uzbek government. What ordinary citizens were really thinking and what may have been going on behind the scenes are another matter entirely, for which one would have to mine a wide range of additional material.

It is worth emphasizing that the foreign press representatives who came to Tashkent in this period were not those who had first-hand experience in the Soviet Union or even knew Russian (much less Uzbek). Since the attention of the world focussed first on the drama in Moscow, there was little or no direct reporting from most of the non-Russian republics for 10 days or more after the August putsch. When the press corps finally showed up in Tashkent, it was those who had been re-assigned temporarily from postings in Tokyo, Singapore or other locations. Many of these were distinguished journalists (from the *New York Times*, *Le Monde*, the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the Associated Press), well-informed about Asian affairs, but having little, if any, direct knowledge of the Soviet Union, much less Soviet Central Asia. While in Tashkent, they generally functioned through Russian-speaking interpreters. Like a pack of well-disciplined bloodhounds on a scent, they all seemed to end up in the same places, interviewing the same people (the chief mufti and key Uzbek dissidents were high on the list), and then, I suspect, reporting pretty much the same stories. Insofar as I had any value for the newsmen, it lay in my being able to tell them over breakfast what I had seen in that day's Russian-language press. My reward for this was the occasional free meal and beer. My point here is not that the newsmen necessarily got the story (insofar as there was one) wrong, but that my limitations in my access to sources were not unique – perhaps in some ways I was better equipped than the press corps to figure out what was going on. In fact, I came away from my encounter with international reporters impressed

⁵ See, for example, the “20th anniversary” pieces recently published by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, where one finds evidence and opinions which coincide with the picture I drew in 1991: Farangis Najibullah, “Watching the Soviet Coup from Central Asia,” RFE/RL, August 19, 2011 <<http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/24301711.html>>; Farruh Yusupov and Bruce Pannier, “Rewriting History: Karimov the Brave,” RFE/RL, August 18, 2011 <<http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/24301180.html>>, both accessed August 19, 2011.

by how quick good professionals are in adapting to an environment that is unfamiliar to them and where they do not speak the local languages. Of course, they would do better were they to know those languages.

My essays here (with the exception of one small addendum on the Russian-language press completed a couple of days later) were sent from Tashkent (via someone who would carry them to the U.S.) on September 20. They were then forwarded to Seattle from the East Coast on September 27. In a cover letter to my wife, which I began at 1:20 AM on the 20th, I wrote:

Enclosed is the result of about a day and a half of non-stop writing, with very little revision... I had hoped to do a piece on the mountain, but that can wait... I have very mixed feelings about the quality and interest of the material – it is not exactly news reporting; to a degree it is more like *The New Yorker* [would that I could aspire that high! – DW 2011]. Given some re-write time, I'm sure it could be better.

I am beginning to wish I had not gotten involved in writing the articles and spending so much time with all the newsmen who have been coming through. There is a certain “culture” of the foreign reporters hanging around in a strange capital that is off-putting, and one sees prima donnas who act in ways that are quite inexcusable.... Not clear why everyone keeps thinking there is a story to be had in Tashkent. Probably by the time my pieces arrive, none of it will be news.

Preface

“When you pack,” one of my hiking companions, Elena, told me, “Be sure to leave on the surface long pants to wear through the *kishlak*.” She went on to explain that it was even more important for women not to attempt walking through one of these remote mountain villages in Tajikistan dressed in shorts and a bathing suit top, “for we can be stoned.” Indeed, in the hill country of Central Asia I encountered many examples of traditions and a life style that seem little changed from what one might have seen centuries ago, had it been possible to penetrate then the inaccessible valleys of the Pamirs which lead to the snowy flanks of 7000-meter peaks with jarringly out of place names such as Pik Lenina and Pik Kommunizma. While the legacy of Lenin and Communism seemed little evident in the back country, paradoxically it was all too prominent in the largest Central Asian city, Tashkent, where the failed putsch of August 19-21 has had little of the political impact it did in Moscow. These articles will explore some aspects of tradition and change in this important region in the period around and during the events of August that seem to have transformed forever what we used to know as the Soviet Union.

In the Mountains



The staging point for our small group of Northwest climbers on the way to Peak Lenin was the sprawling, dusty city of Osh near the head of the fertile Ferghana Valley.⁶ Historically the city never was more than a transit point in the flourishing caravan trade of Inner Asia; it has little evidence of the cultural and political importance reflected in the blue-tiled

domes and minarets of a city such as Samarkand. Osh is dominated by a rock outcrop called the "Suleimanka."⁷ Tradition has it that the woman who wishes to have a healthy child should climb the Suleimanka and crawl across a rock considered to be sacred; the very high birth rates in the region (a fact not exclusive to Osh, incidentally) would lead one to believe that local women visit the small shrine at the top many times. The Suleimanka was also a stronghold of the Basmachi rebels, who fought the establishment of Soviet control in Central Asia for many years after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.

In June 1990, Osh made the news as a scene of serious ethnic violence between the local Kirghiz majority and the very numerous Uzbek minority. Official estimates put the number killed at 200-300; Uzbek political activists insist that the real figures are several thousand and lay the blame for instigating the massacre in part at the feet of the local political authorities. Russians, as well as Uzbeks, were among those being attacked. The immediate cause for the events seems to have been a decision by the local bureaucrats to transfer good agricultural land from the Uzbeks, who have a reputation of being excellent farmers, to the

⁶ Osh is located in Kyrgyzstan, but right on the border with Uzbekistan. The Ferghana Valley is largely within Uzbekistan. My comments here on the historic importance of the city are probably a bit off the mark. Certainly in the 19th century, when caravan trade through the mountains along the historic routes of the old "Silk Road" was still very active, Osh was one of the major transit centers.

⁷ This, of course, would be a Russianized version of the name, the Suleiman being the biblical Solomon. By tradition, it is "Solomon's Throne." What I describe here as its perceived importance for women was reinforced in a story told me by Prof. Ali Iğmen, who, while still in graduate school at UW, was in Osh a number of years later when the then Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto made an unpublicized "pilgrimage" to the site at a time when she was expecting a child.

Kyrgyz, whose traditions tend to be those of nomadic herdsmen who do not excel at farming. To a degree, therefore, the conflict may reflect deep historic divisions in Central Asia between nomadic and sedentary peoples.⁸

One of the more important issues though is related to the arbitrary delineation of territorial boundaries in Central Asia in the 1920s and 1930s, which resulted in somewhat artificial creation of the current republics. In 1936, territory around Osh, where at that time there was still an Uzbek majority, was transferred to Kyrgyz control. The result is irredentist claims by Uzbeks which can only exacerbate ethnic tensions. The seriousness of the conflict last June was such that peace was restored only by use of military force, which can hardly be looked on as a genuine solution to the problem.



As we drove out of Osh, our police escort was a reminder of the events a year ago, when martial law meant that the only way to be sure of reaching the first mountain pass was to have an official escort. One had to look carefully to detect any signs of the rioting, for the countryside is quiet now, and only the rare



building still shows signs of fire or broken windows. We very quickly left the Uzbeks of the valleys behind and, as the road climbed, began passing villages of clay and brick, where often the family yurt (round tent) had been erected in the yard, and where each family had an outdoor clay oven in which to bake the round, flat bread (in Russian: *lipyoshka*) common to much of Central Asia. As we drew

nearer the 12,000-foot pass, the Kyrgyz dwellings were the yurts alone, and

⁸ While I think I was somewhat cautious in my word choice in 1991, the comments on “ethnic strife” here and below may well invite some amendment. There has been a widespread tendency in popular parlance to label the conflicts that emerged with the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc (e.g., in the former Yugoslavia) as evidence of “age-old ethnic hatred,” an idea which distorts the reality of multi-ethnic societies where historically conflict based on ethnic or cultural differences probably was the exception, not the rule.

flocks of goats and sheep could be seen grazing in the sparse vegetation of hills that dropped abruptly to the switchbacks of the road. In the winter, the yurts and flocks of the high country would be taken down to the villages.

Driving the mountain roads in Central Asia takes considerable endurance (we were in our small, antique bus for about nine hours), and no little courage, for the roads have no guard rails, and a brake failure could easily send one over the edge and some thousands of feet to the valley below. Our bus overheated, slowed, and stopped well before the pass, but somehow the driver then coaxed it to the summit. The real miseries of the ride began when we left the paved road some two hours before our destination to bounce across the rutted track that gradually ascended toward the snow and ice that had tempted us on the distant horizon for so much of the trip.

The first modern Europeans to explore in the region were in expeditions organized by the Russian military governors of Central Asia more than a century ago, and one can imagine that they found horseback more comfortable than we did the bus. On sighting the mountain that was our goal, these early explorers named it for the Russian military governor in Tashkent, General Kaufman, whereas the indigenous peoples of the region were content simply to call it the “big mountain.” Rather a familiar story to us where Rainier was once Tahoma and McKinley was Denali. It is a sign of the times here that a recent article in Moscow’s *Izvestiia*, calling for the removal of Lenin’s name from more than St. Petersburg, listed Peak Lenin as a likely candidate to receive its former name. Surely though that will not mean a return to General Kaufman, who, for all his “enlightened” rule in Central Asia, symbolizes for too many Central Asians the Russian colonialism which was (and continued to be, under Soviet rule) the stimulus to get involved in illegal, opposition political activity.⁹

The base camp at the “big mountain” is Achikh Tash, a motley collection of frame buildings and walk-in tents that is something of a blight on the landscape of a scenic mountain valley. To the north, on the approaches, are the gentle hills of an old glacial moraine, dotted with small lakes. The walls of the valley, east and west, are the slopes of lesser peaks, bare of snow in late July and August, but striking with the contrasting hues of rust-red and grey rock and scree. To the south is a breathtaking contrast – a wall of glacial ice and snow which rises abruptly as much as



⁹ According to Wikipedia (accessed September 9, 2011), in 2006, the Tajiks renamed the peak, half of which lies in Tajikistan, after Ibn Sina (Avicenna), whereas the Kyrgyz have kept the name Peak Lenin.

11,000 feet above the valley floor. The absence of trees at Achikh Tash's altitude of nearly 12,000 feet makes the landscape at times seem rather harsh, especially when the frequent afternoon showers move through. But a walk up the valley past the monument — a great boulder left by glacial ice — on which are inscribed the too numerous names of climbers who have perished on the slopes above, takes one through alpine meadows bright with flowers, among them the blossoms of the wild onion.

The Kyrgyz herdsmen still call the valley home in summer. Even the young boys are skilled horsemen and are expected to share the responsibilities with the



flocks. With their sheep and goats numbering in the hundreds, the extended family that hosted us one afternoon for their homemade *lipyoshki*, yogurt and *kumyss* (a traditional drink of the nomads made from fermented

mare's milk) is considered to be quite wealthy. We sat on quilts laid out on the dirt floor of the "guest yurt" enjoying the unforced hospitality and a sense of being quite detached from some fixed time in the year 1991.

Yet in some important ways, time and change have come to this area during the period of Soviet rule. When the family returns to town down in the valley at the end of the summer, the children attend school, in some cases at regional boarding schools if their village is not large enough to have a full range of classes. The yurt may have a corral or tethers for the horses, but it also has a motorcycle and a car parked outside, and often the young men in these families of from seven to ten children will not make their living from the flocks but will become truck drivers or find other employment in distant towns. The family we visited is considered to be part of the collective farm system that has so ruined Soviet agriculture, and it is only with some of the economic reforms under Gorbachev's *perestroika* that they have been able to enjoy significant profits from the sale of the wool and meat their flocks produce.

While this family's yurts were some distance from the climbers' base, there was another yurt right at the camp which served as a blatant reminder of some of the very recent economic and political changes in the Soviet Union. This was the gift shop, where one could purchase — for hard currency only — some art and craft objects or post cards. Most importantly, it seemed, for many of the dozens of climbers from various countries who wished to celebrate before heading up the

mountain, or on a safe return, or for no reason at all, the shop sold rather bad champagne and a rather decent cognac produced in the region. The proprietor of the shop was the wife of the former Communist Party boss in Osh who now is busily engaged in feathering his nest as head of a newly-formed private merchandizing organization that those in higher places have blessed. The fact that the Kyrgyz government in effect “nationalized” the climbing camp at Achikh Tash, which formerly had been run by Soviet sports officials in Moscow for the benefit of the Soviet Alpine Federation, was a source of much bitter comment by the Soviet climbers who have in some cases been coming there for all of the some twenty years of the camp’s existence. And the new owner of the camp was none other than the “corporation” run by the former Party official from Osh. All this explained why we had been met at the Osh airport with a 7 AM banquet in the private cubicles of the restaurant and why the ex-Party boss gave a little sales pitch about the wonderful business opportunities in Kyrgyzstan for those who might deal with his firm. Somehow he had received the mistaken impression that we were not merely another group of climbers who would go and spend hard currency in his wife’s shop, but we might instead be people of wealth and connections with American businesses. Such is a taste of the climate of new enterprise here.

At the end of our three weeks on Peak Lenin and at Achikh Tash (the story of the climb will appear in a separate piece¹⁰), we elected to fly back to Osh in the helicopter which served the base, rather than endure the bus again. All the other members of our group then returned to Moscow, while I set out for Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, in the company of Marina and Elena, two of the strongest candidates trying out for a first-ever Soviet women’s expedition to the Himalaya’s next year.¹¹ An FAA official would have suffered cardiac arrest had he been at the Osh airport to see the way our huge backpacks blocked the aisle and the single exit of the small Aeroflot jet in which all luggage is carried aboard. But putsch or no in Moscow (the date was August 19) and safety considerations to be damned, we arrived, found a room in the Hotel Alpinist, and in a couple of

¹⁰ I did eventually (in 1999) write up and illustrate a guide to climbing on Peak Lenin, based on our experience there. Though dated, it is still one of the better such guides on the Internet and can be found at: <<http://faculty.washington.edu/dwaugh/CA/pklenin/pklenin.html>>. The photos illustrate the approaches to Peak Lenin from Osh and the peak itself.

¹¹ Marina Ershova and Elena Glushko. The women’s expedition to the Himalayas fell victim to the collapse of the Soviet Union and (I think) internal politics of the climbing community. Marina, a former member of the powerful Russian Olympic nordic ski team, has carved out a career involving professional guiding for the family business Ersh Travels <<http://www.ersh.sp.ru/>>, including leading successful expeditions to 8000 m peaks in Nepal and Tibet. In 2002, she was the second most highly ranked woman alpinist in Russia. Elena’s hope of returning to the mountains was interrupted by the demands of a successful business career that had her commuting between St. Petersburg and Moscow.

days were back in the mountains at a climbers' base, Varzob, named after the raging mountain river which flows past it.

One of the occupations of the Tajiks who live in valleys like the Varzob is producing honey. Their apiaries – in some cases stacked hives on long trailers – are to be seen in unlikely locations, such as the gravel bars at the bends in the river, but apparently there are enough wild flowers on the arid, rocky slopes in the region for the bees to do their work.

Another common sight along the road is the *chai-hane* or tea house, where one can sit cross-legged on the quilts of a raised platform to drink green tea and often to eat shish-kebab with raw onions. The *chai-hane* near the climbers' camp was a small operation under a large tree in one of the rare level areas at a bend in the road. It may well have been another example of private enterprise; one can be certain that there are no state health inspectors traveling the mountain roads to check for violations. The dishes receive at best a cold water rinse. In the case of one *chai-hane* that had a kitchen producing a rather too greasy version of the very tasty Central Asian soup, *lagman*, I think my appetite would have suffered had I taken a good look inside.¹² Even in the restaurants in towns, one simply accepts the necessity to wave away the flies and cannot worry too much about where they had been before landing on the food.

From the camp at Varzob we drove over a high pass on a road where the occasional memorial plaque served as an uneasy reminder of the fate of those who would go too fast on one of the hairpin turns. Our goal was the village of Maghreb, which is reached via a narrow dirt road off the highway carved into the walls of a narrow gorge.¹³ I kept imagining the consequences of an earthquake (common to the region) at the moment when we were passing under some of the overhanging rock. Among the more intriguing sights on the road to Maghreb were the rock "mushrooms" that erosion had sculpted on the cliffs high above us.

¹² Indeed, as a consequence of eating at this very *chai-hane* on our way to Iagnob, I experienced a major bout of intestinal distress, which prevented me from joining my companions in the serious climbing there.

¹³ The stream that comes down from Maghreb, along which one drives to reach the village, enters the larger, but still steep-sided valley of the upper Zeravshan River. Historically this region was important for the early medieval Sogdians, who retreated here at the time of the Arab invasion in the 8th century. Speakers of a distinctive Iranian dialect who live in the upper Zeravshan/Iagnob region are believed by some to preserve the ancient Sogdian language, a fact concerning which I was unaware at the time I was there in 1991.



Maghreb was a surprise after the crumbling rock of the gorge – an oasis of green tucked in below the dramatic limestone “tooth” of 15,000-foot Iagnob and its equally dramatic neighbors. Typical of the mountain villages I saw, Maghreb has ample evidence of its contacts with the modern world: electricity, a truck making deliveries, a new school, many houses of brick with sheet-metal roofs. But common too was the traditional architecture of field-stone walls and sod roofs, on which bundles of fodder and stacks of dried animal dung (for fuel) had been laid in, anticipating winter. This was where women climbers might be stoned for not covering bare arms and legs.

As interesting to me was what we saw while hiking the hills above the village, where the transportation of choice is the donkey. It was common at the end of each day to see small boys helping the older men lead back to the village donkeys so loaded with bundles of fodder that they looked like four-legged haystacks. For this was the end of the summer, and the food to get each family’s flocks through the winter was being harvested by sickle. That food was a mix of the wild grasses and some cultivated ones (in a few places there were irregular cultivated fields of what appeared to be oats). Where possible, efforts had been made to clear small fields, which would then be protected from grazing herds by stone walls or fences made from the branches of thorny wild roses that grow in the area. Most impressively, these miniscule “cultivated” fields often were watered by hand-dug irrigation ditches that in some cases extended for hundreds of yards or more to the nearest stream or spring.

While most of the village was involved in this harvest, there were still flocks of goats, cattle and horses to be tended in other parts of the hill country. Unlike the Kyrgyz, who live in their yurts in the high country, the Tajik herding families build mountain camps with stone



walls roofed by beams and sod.¹⁴ From a distance, they blend so well into the landscape as to be nearly invisible, and on somewhat closer examination, they are reminiscent of the Inca ruins high in the Andes. The huts have single rooms, and no windows, but for a smoke hole in the wall above the rounded clay fireplace. The fireplaces are designed so that the Central Asian equivalent of a large wok can be set over the fire to prepare, among other things, the flat bread.

On one hike which Elena, her eight-year-old daughter Katya, Marina and I took for several miles in the hills near Maghreb, we stopped at one of these herder



camps which was being tended by the women of three families who spent the summer there with the young children. Even though our ability to communicate was limited – no one there knew much Russian, and we did not speak Tajik – we were immediately invited to sit down for fresh bread (which tasted of smoke from the fire fueled by dried dung), some home-made butter and yoghurt.

I came away with rather mixed feelings – if only such spontaneous warmth to total strangers of different race and language could be the norm in a country that was instead being torn apart by ethnic and cultural conflicts. Among the Tajiks and the Kyrgyz we had visited at Achikh Tash, not to be hospitable to a stranger at your door was simply unimaginable. At the same time, I could not help

thinking that the persistence of this traditional life style among the mountain peoples undoubtedly contributed to the fact that infant mortality and disease rates among children in many parts of Central Asia are much higher than in other areas of the Soviet Union. For all the virtues of fresh air in the mountains, going barefoot among the family animals, rarely seeing a bar of soap, and at least in bad weather, staying confined in a windowless room where the soot on the beams was ample evidence of poor ventilation, could hardly be healthy. Medical care in case of an accident might be hours or even days away. It is difficult to imagine though that much will (or even should) change in the Maghrebs of Tajikistan in the new era that began on August 21 with the failure of the putsch in Moscow. As I had discovered and will relate in my next article, the dramatic political events thousands of miles away had no visible impact even in cities such as Osh.

¹⁴ In fact, in Kyrgyz areas both in Kyrgyzstan and Xinjiang, one sees similar dwellings in many of the mountain valleys.

The Putsch of 19-21 August

Americans of my generation can usually tell a person exactly where they were on November 22, 1963, when they heard the news of President Kennedy's assassination. Here, at least for now, the question that keeps being raised in connection with the events of August 19-21 that most agree mark a historic watershed in Soviet history is not "Where were you then?" but rather, "What side did you support?" With the failure of Yanaev and his junta of military, KGB and Communist Party officials to reestablish totalitarian control, the litmus test for anyone who wishes to remain in a position of responsibility seems to be, "Did you support the putsch, or did you denounce it?" And the new democrats conclude that those who were not for the overthrow of the junta – that is, those who adopted a wait-and-see attitude – were really against democracy.

In Central Asia, my immediate sense was that the historic events were passing us by – nothing seemed to be happening of note: everyone was waiting to see. There was little choice, for the key developments were being played out thousands of miles away. As I will indicate in my next article on politics in Uzbekistan, those somewhat superficial first impressions reflect a deeper political reality that gives some foundation to the suspicions of the democrats about the opponents of democratic change.

The putsch caught me in Osh. Politics were really far from the minds of the women climbers and their "coaches" who had just returned from Peak Kommunizma and were mainly interested in celebrating their successful climb. Life was a round of partying with liberal supplies of champagne, vodka and cognac, swimming at midnight in the irrigation canal with less clothing than modesty might otherwise permit, brunching in town at the open-air restaurants, and strolling through the market where one's senses are assaulted with the aromas and bustle of the "mysterious East."

My climbing friends and I had just finished our mid-morning gluttony on August 19 – steaming bowls of the traditional noodle soup, *lagman*, plates of *plov* (pilaf of rice, shredded carrots and mutton), washed down with milk and a couple of bottles of vodka. As we wandered into a pastry shop in search of coffee, the proprietor informed us with a certain degree of satisfaction about the news – the radio had broadcast (and kept repeating during the day) the first decree of the junta asserting their right to seize power and restore order in the country and the obligation of the population to obey the decree.

The satisfaction of the shopkeeper at the news should hardly have been a surprise, for the economic disintegration in the country under Gorbachev has finally reached the point of pinching everyone. Without any prompting,

strangers will complain about soaring inflation and inadequate salaries, the impossibility of finding basic goods in the stores, the lavish excesses of those who have taken advantage of liberalization to make “windfall profits” and flout their new wealth by driving around in a Mercedes. One of the main obstacles to economic reform here has been an ingrained suspicion of profits, market-driven prices, and, especially, private ownership. This sense of dissatisfaction is intensified by the public fears over soaring crime rates and moral decay (the latter concerns being among the reasons for the remarkable revival of conservative religious values). The junta was counting on tapping into this widespread dissatisfaction with the first fruits of *perestroika* and *glasnost*’.

Unlike the shopkeeper, my companions were aghast at the news, for they had come to be encouraged under *glasnost*’ (“openness”) by hopes of genuinely democratic political reform. Most of the Soviet climbers I know are well educated individuals, who, if not always “intellectuals” are nonetheless the descendants of the often liberal or radical intelligentsia of the nineteenth century whose ideas contributed to the overthrow of the tsarist regime. The rather complex spectrum of interests among the old intelligentsia at the beginning of our century embraced, among other things, religion and philosophy, and it is significant that today *glasnost*’ has finally permitted republication of significant works (previously banned in the Soviet Union) by religious thinkers and philosophers such as Vladimir Solov’ev and Nikolai Berdiaev. To a degree, such writings feed the growth of conservative Russian nationalism that is one of the most guilty parties inflaming ethnic tensions here. I was somewhat surprised when I saw one of my friends buying a small booklet explaining the basic elements of Russian Orthodox belief and practice, written by a very popular young priest, Alexander Men, who has already been sanctified in the popular mind because of his martyrdom – he was murdered two years ago, possibly by the Communist opponents of religious revival. I was even more surprised to hear from my companions remarks about non-Russians that in the United States would be censured as racist. The attitudes of cultural and ethnic superiority that the 19th-century Russian conquerors of Central Asia brought with them are, alas, far from dead. At the same time, for my companions as for their intellectual predecessors, freedom of expression and political freedom are essential, a message that one hears even from individuals who have been (and, in the case of Uzbekistan, still are) members of the Communist Party.

So the mood at the climbers’ base in Osh, as people sat listening to the re-broadcast of the junta’s announcement on August 19th, was that of a wake: long faces, silence, or at best hushed conversation expressing fears for the future. I was perhaps the most optimistic in the group, once I had recovered from the initial shock of hearing the official declaration which seemed to promise a return to Stalinism. And later I was to have some satisfaction from the fact that during

those mid-August days I was confidently predicting that the junta could not last, precisely because, as it turned out would be the case, Yeltsin with his rather broad base of genuine popularity, would not accept the diktats of the junta, and because the loyalty of the army could not be guaranteed.

August 19 was also the day my friends and I were leaving for Dushanbe, and the circumstances of my departure in particular were rather revealing about the degree to which the putsch had any visible effect in Osh. Lives continued in their usual patterns, there were no signs of public disorder or extraordinary police or military activity. The army locally had an arrangement to provide Soviet climbers with transportation into the mountains, and army trucks continued to come and go at the climbers' base. Our ride to the airport that night was in a communications truck jammed with radio equipment. The corporal who sat with us in the back of the truck passed around chocolate of a quality that cannot be found in stores here. We were stopped for a traffic check near the airport, but that was probably routine, and no one seemed in the least concerned that I, an American (the enemy to the hard-liners in Moscow), was riding in a military vehicle where I might breach Soviet security. What is even more surprising is that no one at the airport (and my documents were routinely examined by a policeman) seemed to care that I was flying to Dushanbe with no visa allowing me to be in the city legally (foreigners in the Soviet Union still need visas for internal travel).

Things were no different in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, although demonstrations there, ending in violence, had occurred some months earlier, and later, in early September, there would again be politically significant demonstrations pressuring the Tajik parliament to allow political liberalization. But that was well after the putsch had failed.

The first night in Dushanbe, we watched the TV broadcast of the junta's news conference in Moscow. The only surprise was the transmission of some news items afterwards and in the broadcasts on August 20 suggesting that there was some real opposition and doubt in the minds of people in different republics about the legitimacy of the new regime. I would have expected such news to have been suppressed. One of the issues of *Pravda*, the official Communist Party newspaper and normally a bastion of rigid orthodoxy, was even rather amusing, for the editors confessed to their loyal readers that they were embarrassed to admit they could not obtain any information of the whereabouts or well-being of the Party leader, Gorbachev.

Obtaining any news of substance was difficult for me during the brief rule of the junta and in the immediate aftermath of its fall, for I did not always have access to a radio or newspaper. I would pick up somewhat disjointed tidbits of the

latest news third hand, and there was no way to confirm them. I felt quite isolated and badly wished I was in Moscow, where I would have been tempted to join the defenders of the "White House," the headquarters of Yeltsin's government.

After we left Dushanbe and settled in at the Varzob climbing camp, I discovered that the camp director did receive several of the Moscow newspapers, and then I could begin to follow the torrent of news that appeared in the central press after the overthrow of the junta. Staff members of *Izvestiia*, which had been the official and conservative government newspaper, staged a coup of their own, threw out the old editor and began to publish a truly independent paper. *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, the official newspaper of the Young Communist League, re-emerged and strengthened its reputation (dating back to before the putsch) of being one of the most interesting sources of information. In fact, its reporters were subsequently barred from Tashkent, when they attempted to cover opposition political movements here. It was a strange feeling to find myself anticipating the next day's issue of newspapers that I never used to consider worth more than a cursory glance.

Granted, *glasnost'* has for several years meant the development of an increasingly independent press and public opinion in the Soviet Union, but my sense is that one of the most immediate effects of the failed putsch was to break down some of the last barriers to the existence of what one might term a feisty and even militant independent press. The same thing can be seen on television news, where the anchor men for the popular program *Vremia* have perfected the raised eyebrow or thought-provoking final comment familiar to devotees of Walter Cronkite. Unfortunately, this liberalization has not yet been permitted the media of Tashkent [see below].

In the wake of the failed putsch, the greatest surprise here as in the West has been the rapidity with which the old political system collapsed. No one expected such a rapid dismantling of the Communist Party and KGB apparatus, or such rapid confirmation of the independence of the once Soviet republics. But the euphoria among political liberals is tempered by a sober realization that the worst may lie ahead. No government popular now is likely to remain popular long, given the increasing seriousness of economic problems here. Ethnic tensions and militant nationalism, well in evidence earlier, seem to be gaining force. And there are still significant areas where it seems that authoritarian rule is reasserting itself, disguised only thinly in nationalist clothing. Georgia, where violence may well break out soon, is one example, and Uzbekistan, where violence any time soon seems unlikely, with the government firmly in control, is another. The lack of political change in Uzbekistan is the subject of my next article.

In the Shadow of Lenin

The parting shots in a noisy argument caught my ear in Moscow in late July: “It was only Lenin who gave life to the people. He was a truly saintly person!” Two months later, there is increasingly serious consideration being given to removing Lenin’s relics from the shrine on Red Square and giving them a decent burial next to his mother in St. Petersburg (68% of those who were polled in Moscow during the first week in September supported such a move).¹⁵ Everywhere one turns, Lenin’s name is coming down, and an article in the September 17 *Izvestiia* called for much more extensive “de-Leninization” of the country. More significant even is the fact that the party Lenin created, which has monopolized political power throughout Soviet history, has now disintegrated.¹⁶

Even in Tashkent it is tempting to see the beginning of significant “de-Leninization.” Lenin’s name has been dropped from the central square in the city — it is now to be called “Freedom Square,” and a competition has been announced to design an appropriate monument to symbolize freedom. In his interminable speech to the recent congress of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, the president of the republic, who is also head of the Party, Islam Karimov, did not once mention Lenin’s name and repeatedly called for the elimination of irrelevant ideology (read Marxism-Leninism) in the administration and life of the republic. And to emphasize this apparent break with the old order, after some delay but following the example of Moscow, the local authorities removed the undistinguished statue of Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Soviet secret police,

Досье рубрики «Совершенно не секретно»

«Железный» Феликс не устоял

Одним из крупных «проколов» в деятельности нашего КГБ можно считать вчерашнюю сенсацию. Позавчера, возмущаясь со службы, чекисты проходили мимо памятника Феликсу Змудовичу Дзержинскому. Вчера же утром у родного здания увидели лишь постамент.

За ночь с помощью автотранса, компрессора и КамАЗа семиметровую туфовую фигуру демонтиро-

вали и увезли на территорию скульптурного комбината. Якобы на реставрацию.

Однако Дзержинский все равно остался с чекистами — на портретах в их кабинетах, в скульптурных изображениях.

Барельеф Дзержинского напечатан на грамотах, которыми награждает коллегия КГБ, он вышит и нарисован на картинах и гоб-

ленах, подаренных членами Узбекистана по случаю «красных» дат в их календаре.

А вот на постаменте не устоял. Кому-то очень хотелось, чтобы и у нас было, как на Лубинке — без Дзержинского...

Теперь проинициатива рыварь революций? Есть два варианта. Памятник сооружен на средства КГБ и потому является его собственностью. Возможно, чекисты установят его во дворе своих высших курсов.

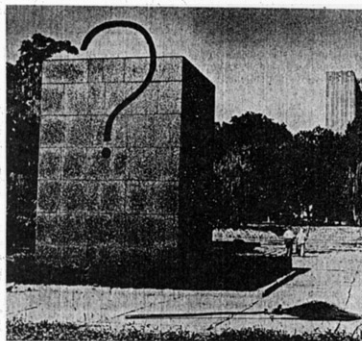
Если же для бывшего председателя ВЧК-ГПУ место окажется неподходящим, то ташкентские скульпторы готовы предложить ему постамент в парке советского монументального искусства, который предполагается создать в Ташкенте.

Кстати, первым новоселом этого парка уже написаны ордера. Два месяца назад снят памятник «всесоюзному старосте» Михаилу Ивановичу Калинин.

— Кто следующий сойдет с постамента? — спрашивало глядящего художника столица Р. Юсупова.

— Знаю, но не скажу, — исчерпывающе ответил Рафаэль Гизатович, который, кстати сказать, сам не одобряет войну с прокляденными искусства.

Л. САВЕЛЬЕВ.



¹⁵ Lenin still rests in the mausoleum on Red Square two decades later, but that does not mean he is there forever.

¹⁶ Of course a Communist Party still exists in Russia, but in 1991, it was not clear that it would survive and to some degree revive.

leaving an empty pedestal in front of the Tashkent KGB headquarters.¹⁷



When the conversation turns to politics these days in Tashkent, the subject is invariably not how far liberalization and “de-Leninization” have come, but, on the contrary, how little meaningful change there has been. Uzbekistan is emerging as the politically most conservative of all the newly sovereign republics, where conservative is understood to mean that the old *apparatchiki* of the Communist Party are still in place, there is limited public freedom of expression, and arbitrary police methods are still employed to maintain the status quo. Lenin’s name may be gone from the central square, but the massive statue to him still glowers over the parade ground and stands to remind us that the square was designed mainly for celebrations of Communist power.¹⁸ On most days

it swelters empty in the late summer sun, a stark symbol of the bankruptcy of the old system.

Karimov’s speech may have ignored Leninism, but the whole purpose of the specially convened Party congress September 14 was to reaffirm the place of the Party as the dominant political force here under a new name (The Popular-Democratic Party). More significant than the absence of Lenin in Karimov’s speech was his emphasis on the need for “firm discipline and order in all spheres of life.” In the resolution adopted by the congress, one is struck by the cynicism of the paragraph which lays the blame for anything wrong in Uzbekistan today at the feet of the central Party leadership in Moscow and absolved the Party leaders in Uzbekistan of any responsibility whatsoever. “They have labored honestly and with a clear conscience for the good of the Motherland [i.e., Uzbekistan – DW] and can look their people in the eye directly and openly.”

And finally, one notes that Dzerzhinsky’s picture still hangs on the wall inside the KGB building as well as in the police stations of provincial towns. That the police have not relaxed their vigilance was amply evident on September 8, when

¹⁷ The overnight disappearance of the statue provoked some tongue-in-cheek reporting by L. Savel’ev, “‘Zheleznyi’ Feliks ne ustoiat,” *Pravda Vostoka*, September 14, 1991, p. 1, accompanied by a photo of the empty pedestal on which the newspaper illustrators had drawn a large question mark (see the photo of the article on the previous page).

¹⁸ On the eventual replacement of the Lenin monument a few years later, see my separate short piece below.

thousands of them cordoned off the center of the city and several arrests were made in an effort to prevent a meeting by the largest opposition party in Uzbekistan, the illegal group Birlik ("Unity"). This was merely the latest step in a campaign to prevent the formation of a meaningful political alternative to the Communist government here: the record of arrests, disinformation, the placing of listening devices in the homes of Birlik leaders goes back nearly to the group's founding in November 1988.

A long and penetrating *Izvestiia* article by Valerii Vyzhutovich, writing from Tashkent on September 14, has attracted a great deal of attention here, because the analysis of Uzbek politics it presents could never appear in the entirely government-controlled local press.¹⁹ Vyzhutovich presented a persuasive case that while treading a thin line, Karimov came as close as he could during the putsch to supporting it, even though he did not actually say so in as many words. The local courts, when sentencing those who were arrested for demonstrating against the putsch, took no pains to conceal the reason for the arrests. Vyzhutovich goes on to argue that the real reason Karimov then hastened to declare Uzbekistan's independence when the putsch failed was to distance himself from the liberalization going on in Moscow and thereby to consolidate the power of the Communist Party here by appealing to a somewhat artificially stimulated nationalism. In so doing, one might note, Karimov was stealing one of the planks of Birlik, which had been advocating a sovereign Uzbekistan well before the Party authorities were willing to support the idea.

¹⁹ Valerii Vyzhutovich, "Ottseplennyi vagon. Uzbekistan posle provozglasheniia nezavisimosti," *Izvestiia*, September 14, 1991, p. 3. I should note that my translation of Vyzhutovich's headline as "The Train Car on the Siding" is a bit free; literally it is the "Detached Train Car," implying, I suppose that it might have been left in the middle of the track as the rest of the train forged ahead. Clearly Vyzhutovich must have hit too close to the mark, as the torrent of angry responses continued for weeks. See, e.g., Sh. Shaislamov, "Popytka stolknut' s rel'sov. Po povodu odnoi publikatsii v gazete 'Izvestiia'." *Pravda Vostoka*, September 24, 1991, p. 2; K. Alieva, "Chto možno uvidet' iz Moskvy?" *Narodnoe slovo*, September 9, 1991, p. 1; Musa Abdurazzakov, "Ostav'te Uzbekistan v pokoe," *Pravda Vostoka*, October 2, 1991, p. 3; V. Chernyshev, "Uzbekskii bronepoezd. Razmyshleniia po povodu izvestinskoi stat'i V. Vyzhutovicha 'Ottseplennyi vagon'," *Narodnoe slovo*, October 10, 1991, p. 3; L. Beliavskii, "Vmesto pomoshchi — pomekha," *Tashkentskaia pravda*, October 12, 1991, p. 2. Shaislamov accuses Vyzhutovich and his ilk of working for forces trying to destabilize the new regime and provoke resistance to it in places such as the Ferghana Valley.

The passage of two decades has not diminished the Uzbek government's sensitivity to accusations of dictatorship. Recently President Karimov's daughter Lola, who is Tashkent's ambassador to UNESCO, sued (unsuccessfully) in France for a libel judgment against a writer who had called her father a dictator.

The most recent indication of Karimov's political ideas came in an interview he gave an Associated Press correspondent on September 16 (a copy is on the right here), in which he said that Uzbekistan is not ready for democracy, for that would bring political chaos, and that his political model is the policies of the current leadership in the People's Republic of China. Although Karimov hastily convened a news conference two days later to claim that he had been misquoted, the record of the interview is fully consistent with his detailed remarks in the speech to the Party congress and with his statements at the time of the putsch.

How long can Karimov and the old order last? Leaders of Birlik give him about a year, even though when they founded their movement, they did so partly because of their concerns over the political passivity of people in Uzbekistan. In many ways, Karimov sounds to me like the Gorbachev of 1985, when he assumed power with the goal of restructuring the Soviet economy and creating a kind of reinvigorated socialism under the leadership of the Communist Party. Karimov quite openly supports the transformation of the Uzbek economy into one based on free enterprise, and even before the most recent events, his government had adopted some measures to strengthen the social welfare system here. However, the continuing control of the local media and the use of police measures to prevent reporters from the outside from covering Uzbek affairs indicate little willingness to adopt genuine *glasnost*'. Even though he used as one argument for revitalization of the Communist Party during its recent congress the idea that the Party would have to be able to compete with other parties in newly democratic conditions, so far there is only one legal opposition party. This is Erk ("Liberty"), a small splinter group from Birlik that was legalized precisely because it was willing to cooperate with the Communist regime.²⁰ In the interview with AP, Karimov indicated that there might be elections next year but that there was no intention of legalizing Birlik.

Известия, 18/IX/91
стр. 2

● УЗБЕКИСТАН
ПРЕЗИДЕНТ СЧИТАЕТ,
ЧТО ЕГО РЕСПУБЛИКА
НЕ ГОТОВА К ДЕМОКРАТИИ

Американское информационное агентство Ассошиэйтед Пресс передало 17 сентября изложение интервью с Президентом Республики Узбекистан И. А. Каримовым.

Президент Узбекистана сказал, что только официально зарегистрированные партии имеют право выдвигать кандидатов. Таких партий в Узбекистане две: переименованная в субботу из коммунистической в народно-демократическую партия (700 тысяч членов) и «Эрк» («Свобода») с 3 тысячами членов. «Бирлик» заявляет о наличии 500 тысяч сторонников, но ей отказывают в регистрации.

Каримов сказал, что хочет следовать китайской модели проведения ограниченных реформ в экономике и сохранять строгий запрет на политические митинги до проведения выборов Президента и парламента в его республике с 21 миллионом жителей. «Может быть, в других частях Советского Союза, в Прибалтике или Москве люди способны часами мирно вести себя на демонстрации», — сказал Каримов. — Но здесь люди быстро возбуждаются, начинается насилие».

Узбекистан — одно из немногих мест в Советском Союзе, где коммунистическая партия полностью удерживает власть. Оппозиционное демократическое движение Узбекистана «Бирлик» («Единство») обвиняет Каримова в создании удельного княжества и отказе соблюдать права человека, такие, например, как свобода слова и собраний.

Каримов сказал, что в начале следующего года могут состояться выборы, если парламент Узбекистана завершит работу над избирательным законодательством. Оно будет предусматривать многопартийность. Однако Каримов выразил сожаление, что «Бирлик» примет участие в выборах. Он отметил, что только официально зарегистрированные партии имеют право выдвигать кандидатов. Таких партий в Узбекистане две: переименованная в субботу из коммунистической в народно-демократическую партия (700 тысяч членов) и «Эрк» («Свобода») с 3 тысячами членов. «Бирлик» заявляет о наличии 500 тысяч сторонников, но ей отказывают в регистрации.

Каримов охарактеризовал выход Горбачева из руководства компартии после путча как предательство. Горбачев пообещал реформировать партию, и миллионы людей поверили ему, отметил узбекский руководитель. Он также сказал о намерении проводить экономические реформы в Узбекистане, но не так быстро, как в других республиках, бросившихся приватизировать промышленные предприятия и «освобождать» цены. Несмотря на провозглашенную 31 августа независимость Узбекистана, республика останется в Советском Союзе как равная среди равных в конфедерации суверенных республик, за которую выступает Горбачев, сказал Каримов. Он добавил, что будет создана символическая национальная гвардия численностью в 700 человек, но независимая армия создаваться не будет, если Кремль будет советовать по военным вопросам с лидерами Узбекистана. Узбекистан обеспечивает около трети призывников. Каримов предупредил, что если с республикой не будут консультироваться по вопросам обороны, то он последует примеру Грузии и перестанет направлять молодых узбеков в Советскую Армию.

²⁰ Erk's political platform was summarized in "Vol'nomu - 'Volia'," *Pravda Vostoka*, October 11, 1991, p. 3.

Given this picture, it is possible that Karimov's regime may have more than a year to live.

On the other hand, the rapidity of political change which has surprised the "experts" on the Soviet Union has made its mark here. Political consciousness and activism are clearly on the increase. Several groups or factors need to be taken into account in any forecast of the political future.

First of all, even among the ranks of the Communist Party, there is dissatisfaction. When asked whether they will continue as members of the "new" Popular-Democratic Party, some individuals have no hesitation in affirming they will (that is, as wolves in sheep's clothing), because they feel that the Party can eventually be "seized" from within and transformed into an agent of genuine political reform.

The leadership of Birlik obviously does not accept this idea, nor does it believe that there can be any meaningful cooperation with the existing political authorities until there is genuine democratization of the political process. While it is significant that Birlik has survived attempts to suppress it, and it claims adherents numbering about half a million (in a population of some 21 million), estimating the real extent of its support is difficult. One might think that the reassertion of authoritarianism by Karimov would work strongly in Birlik's favor, but at the same time Karimov's appeal to nationalism (he concluded his Party congress address with "Glory to free and independent Uzbekistan!") may undercut Birlik. Moreover, Birlik has been fighting what it calls a disinformation campaign by the authorities to depict it as an extremist organization hostile to any but Uzbeks (some 30% of the population in Uzbekistan is not Uzbek). Many Russians with whom one talks here quite openly admit they are afraid of the implications for them in the growth of Uzbek nationalism. They anticipate that it will mean discrimination or even worse. In proclaiming Uzbek independence, Karimov has at least declared his belief that Uzbeks and non-Uzbeks can live in harmony here. Whether or not he really believes that, of course, the forces that create ethnic tensions may well be beyond the control of even the most authoritarian regime. There have been incidents of ethnic violence between Uzbeks and non-Uzbeks within Uzbekistan, not only across the border in Kyrgyzstan. Another of the issues that has been important to Birlik – ecological concerns, especially over the disastrous consequences of the dessication of the Aral Sea – may also have been co-opted by the government.

In one important area, it seems that Karimov and Birlik have similar views; namely, that any Uzbek state should be a secular one. Some observers here feel that the most potent political force in the future may be a fundamentalist Islam. Karimov seems sensitive to the threat, for he has been very explicit in saying that

religion and politics should not mix. The platform of Birlik also is clear enough on that point – leaders in Birlik are not interested in an Islamic republic. But, when queried about the “Islamic threat” in an interview, one of the leaders of the movement, Abdurrakhim Pulatov, had no hesitation in suggesting that such concerns were exaggerated. Islam clearly *is* important here not only as part of the national culture but also because of its connection with politics.

During the Soviet period, Communist ideology and policies have been as hostile to Islam as to other religions. Despite that fact, what one can call “Islamic” traditions in the culture have remained strong, even among dedicated Communists, and active adherents of the faith have remained quite numerous. The Communist regimes in Central Asia have maintained an officially approved Islamic clerical establishment, which in turn has been happy to support the regime, even at the cost of losing support among members of the faith who have turned instead to other “unofficial” clergy. Popular support for the latter group has grown in recent years, and it is from within this group that an interest has developed in the creation of an Islamic state. The picture in Uzbekistan is further complicated by the growing strength of the Wahabi sect, a conservative movement within Islam. If one puts the growth of Islam in Central Asia in a comparative context, clearly it is analogous to the revival of Russian Orthodox Christianity, in that both developments can be connected with relaxation of controls over religion, with concerns in society over the decay of moral and spiritual values, and with an enhanced sense of national cultural identity. In the case of Islam, there is an additional factor – the example of the Islamic state created in Iran (to some, a model to be emulated) and a more general feeling of pan-Islamic solidarity. Even before the Bolshevik Revolution, Muslim intellectuals in the Russian Empire were becoming attracted to pan-Islamic ideas.

Such ideas now find concrete expression in the Party of the Islamic Renaissance, an illegal group whose adherents are to be found in several republics, although its most obvious strength seems to be among the Shiites [*sic* – see note. DW 2011] of Tajikistan²¹ (the Muslims of Uzbekistan are Sunni, and hence could not be expected to cooperate closely with the Tajiks). In recent demonstrations in Dushanbe, the Islamic party and other opposition political groups pressured the national parliament to accept legislation that could legalize the Islamic party for the first time. Whether such legalization could lead to election victories and

²¹ This statement is, quite simply, wrong. While the Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan are Shiites and are numerous in eastern Tajikistan, most other Tajik Muslims are Sunni. A critical factor here, involving leaders of the Islamic Renaissance Party among others, is their being members of Sufi lineages. Sunni Islam is far from monolithic, and any assessment of the potential political role of an “Islamic party” has to take into account this diversity. An informed discussion of some of these issues can be found in Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000; originally published in French in 1997), Chapter 8.

ultimately to the creation of an Islamic state is another matter — the leader of Tajik Muslims in an interview published September 11 insisted that he advocated a secular democratic state, but one in which Islamic law and the concerns of the Islamic clergy would be taken fully into account. In Azerbaijan, the Muslim spiritual administration for Transcaucasia has gone one step farther than the Islamic party in Tajikistan and demanded of the Supreme Soviet that Islam be declared the state religion in the republic.

For years western experts on Islam in the Soviet Union have been pointing to evidence that Islam is a growing force that the Soviet leadership must fear. In the changed politics today, there is ample evidence to support the idea that any Central Asian government will have to accommodate Islamic interests.²² At the same time, many people here feel that society is too secularized to support the imposition of the kind of fundamentalist regime that was imposed in Iran by Khomeini.

In addition to pan-Islamic ideas, pan-Turkic ideas were popular among Turkic intellectuals in the Russian Empire and immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution. Pan-Turkism advocated creating a greater Turkic state uniting peoples ranging from the Tatars of the Volga and Crimea and the Kazakhs, Uzbeks and others in Central Asia, to the Turks of Anatolia. Although the intellectual leaders of the movement were mostly not from Central Asia, its ideas appealed to the Basmachi rebels fighting Soviet control in the 1920s and 1930s. It is perhaps significant today that Abdurrakhim Pulatov of Birlik has visited in Turkey, and some of the leaders of Erk openly talk of their belief in a pan-Turkic state and look to Turkey for inspiration.²³

The problem with either pan-Islamism or pan-Turkism is that they could be too likely to ignore the interests of minorities. There are many non-Muslims, and

²² In the twenty years since I wrote this, we have seen consistent efforts by the Uzbek government to suppress Islamic movements, often labeling them as terrorist whether or not in fact they pose such a threat, arresting popular Muslim clerics, banning symbols of “Islamic” identity such as the public wearing of the *hijab* (headscarf) by women, etc. Very recently, there have been increasing measures taken against Islam in Tajikistan. In general, the Central Asian political regimes, tutored in the Soviet version of Marxist atheism, have treated Islam as a threat. The picture is complicated though by differences among Muslims themselves. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, there are tensions between Muslims who also adhere strongly to popular cultural traditions not part of Islamic orthodoxy and those educated in more formal Islamic practice who are attempting to suppress what they see as un-Islamic practice. On this issue, see Elmira M. Kuchumkulova, “Kyrgyz Nomadic Customs and the Impact of Re-Islamization after Independence,” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2007.

²³ Indeed, in the aftermath of 1991, the Turkish government and businesses were very active in Central Asia and may in the process have overplayed their hand and alienated Central Asians by at least implying the Turks should be accepted as the leaders in any kind of larger Turkic world.

even within the Muslim community in the large sense, there is the major split between Shiites and the majority Sunni Muslims. A pan-Turkic state presumably would exclude the Tajiks, whose language is Iranian, not Turkic, and would have a serious problem in Kazakhstan, where the Turkic Kazakhs do not even constitute half of the population.²⁴ The relations between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the area around Osh should at least give one pause in considering whether the idea of a pan-Turkic state for Central Asia is at all realizable.

An intriguing idea for Central Asia's political future which might avoid the problems with pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism was advanced at a conference on nationality problems held in the second week of September in Bishkek (formerly Frunze, capital of Kyrgyzstan). At that meeting, Professor Goga Khidoiatov of Tashkent University's History Department (and a visiting professor at the University of Washington last autumn) proposed the formation of a "United States of Central Asia." Such a political entity would not be intended to eliminate the existing republics, but would enable them to coordinate policy and resources in ways that might make them much more equal partners in any "union" involving the other former parts of the Soviet Union (especially the gigantic Russian Republic) than would be the case if they acted separately.²⁵ When asked about his opinion of such a scheme, Birlik's Abdurrakhim Pulatov somewhat cautiously agreed that it has merit, but insisted that the immediate political agenda had to be a much narrower one, namely the establishment of real democracy in Uzbekistan.²⁶ And that can happen only when the shadow of Lenin and his heirs, whatever they may claim their ideology is, has been completely removed.

²⁴ The most recent censuses suggest that this is no longer the case; Kazakhs are now in a slight numerical majority.

²⁵ The subject of the various combinations of post-Soviet states for economic or defense purposes in Asia is a large one; suffice it to say that other combinations, however meaningful, have trumped Khidoiatov's idea. Given some of the significant tensions today amongst the Central Asian countries (for example over water rights), it is hard to see that any meaningful political union could ever develop.

²⁶ I was in on the interview with Pulatov in the shade of a grape arbor at his home in Tashkent, a meeting arranged for several of the international press reporters. There he pointed out where the wire for tapping his phone had been concealed. The next year he was severely beaten by thugs, probably at the instigation of the Uzbek political police; he eventually emigrated to Turkey. His brother Abdumannob Pulat also was one of the founders of Birlik and eventually emigrated to the U.S. For the latter's assessment of the prospects for democratization in Uzbekistan, see his "Can Uzbekistan Build Democracy and Civil Society?", in *Civil Society in Central Asia*, ed. M. Holt Ruffin and Daniel Waugh (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1999): 135-157. Among other subjects, he discusses the question of the role of Islam.

Can Private Enterprise Succeed in Uzbekistan?

The reality is that private enterprise is everywhere already, for no one can afford to live without making money on the side. There are always private cars lined up at the airport or the tourist hotel waiting to take passengers. Here and in many Soviet cities the quickest way to get around is to flag down a car and pay the driver five or ten rubles if he can take you in the right direction. I spent my first night in Tashkent in a private "hotel," where I had a modest room to myself that was perfectly clean – one of two, each with several beds, that the owner of the house regularly rented out, presumably mainly to Soviet travelers. Granted, it cost 40 rubles (about \$1.00), high by Soviet hotel standards for Soviet citizens, but substantially less than what a tourist hotel would have charged me. So private enterprise is here, and it keeps many citizens perhaps slightly ahead of inflation.

On the scale of a full-fledged business, perhaps the most impressive example of what has become possible thanks to recent legislation allowing small enterprises to be in private hands, is the small restaurant near the Hotel Uzbekistan where I am staying. To appreciate it, a few words about the restaurant in the hotel, run by the state tourist agency "Intourist," are in order. The hotel restaurant at least in theory should be one of the best in the city, since this is where they squeeze the foreign tourists for their last dollar or Deutschmark. And the fact that the restaurant regularly seems to serve a full house, including many Tashkentians, suggests it has some popularity. By reasonable standards of quality – not just the food, but the ambiance and the service – the place is a disaster. It is a cavernous and gloomy room with a mess hall atmosphere, all too many of the waiters are surly (a few though are very good and pleasant), and dining in the evening is to the accompaniment of live "music" (if it deserves the name), amplified to levels appropriate for an outdoor rock concert. The food is somewhere on the level of what one would expect from a boarding school cafeteria and could be quite deadly for anyone with a cholesterol problem. I think what bothers me most is the total lack of imagination in the kitchen. It is not that the ingredients are necessarily bad – in fact, Tashkent at this time of year has wonderful vegetables and fruits in the markets – but state-controlled restaurants in the Soviet Union have been serving in effect identical menus from Leningrad to Tashkent for as many years as I can remember (my first visit to the Soviet Union was in 1963). Why is it inevitable that there be beef stroganoff, two or three kinds of beef dishes with different names but virtually identical in containing a small piece of unrecognizable meat that has been cooked to death and then covered with the pan drippings, and little else? True, in Uzbekistan, you can be thankful for the "national" dishes on the menu – the *lagman* (noodle

soup) and pilaf are tasty. But once you have eaten in the hotel for three days or so, you have exhausted the menu.

What about private enterprise? The private restaurant is in a small, one-storey building, freshly painted and well-maintained. You enter through a passage where the doors have elegant brocaded drapes and find yourself in a room with small alcoves and lattice partitions so that each table has some privacy in intimate surroundings. Near the center of the room are two columns with carved lion heads from which water is spouting into little pools. There is live music – in the early evening Strauss waltzes and light classical from a string group accompanied on the piano, and later in the evening singing of often romantic songs that do not assault the ear and make good, slow dance music. The evening meal generally begins with a lavish spread of hors d'oeuvres – various cold meats, perhaps caviar, smoked salmon. For the main course, there is a selection, which changes at least partially from one night to the next, and some of the dishes (for example, sauteed mushrooms) would never be seen in a hotel restaurant. The waiters are invariably polite and attentive (at least up to the point when you want the bill).

Lest I be totally unfair to the hotel, I have to admit that one can order nice hors d'oeuvres plates there, with some of the same items served by the private restaurant, and it is true, if your taste runs to red meat, that the private restaurant's chef seems to have no better idea how to cook it than does the hotel chef. And, of course, there is a substantial difference in price – dinner for four at the private restaurant (even without drinks) can run from 200 to 350 rubles (about half of a full professor's monthly salary at Tashkent University). For all that, the restaurant seems to be full every evening (reservations must be made a day in advance) largely with young people. How they can afford it is a mystery to me, given the generally low salaries and the inflation rate here.

Well, the private sector may not be perfect, but clearly someone has developed an understanding of a business that the state monopolies have not found it necessary to run effectively for the simple reason that they have never had to compete in an open market. Of course I do not know the balance sheet for either operation, but it is hard to believe that this private restaurant in Tashkent is anything but a financial success. By Tashkent standards, four stars, by Michelin, none, but it is premature and a bit unfair to apply the latter as our measure yet.²⁷

²⁷ Twenty years out from Uzbek independence, of course there is a great deal that can be said about what has or has not happened in the economy. Private enterprise presumably has been very successful in the relatively rapid transformation of Tashkent – restaurants such as the little one I have described undoubtedly have proliferated; in fact it probably would now seem quaint and old fashioned. However, there have been substantial criticisms by international economic analysts about the continuing degree of state control over key sectors of the economy with its consequent inefficiencies, the failure to reduce poverty, and so on. As in the other countries in the

Glasnost' Revisited

To the consternation of political conservatives and many ordinary Soviet citizens with an ingrained sense that there should be limits of decency to public expression, Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost'* ("openness") has opened the gates to genuinely free expression on a scale unknown to earlier generations of Russians. To a considerable degree, one can argue that the success of *glasnost'* is the key factor in explaining why politically aware and active citizens were willing to risk their lives to stop the August putsch. I have found it particularly interesting to observe various manifestations of *glasnost'*, especially in the media, for so much has changed in revolutionary ways since my earlier stays in the Soviet Union beginning back in 1963.

Book stalls can be quite revealing — at the air terminal in Moscow a used book table offered a well-thumbed sex manual that seemed quite comfortable next to a copy of the Quran. The Moscow Patriarchate (the main Orthodox Church administration) was offering a reprint of Father Georges Florovsky's classic *Ways of Russian Theology*, which had previously been available only in the West in an emigré edition. Important works by the generation of the Russian intelligentsia at the beginning of this century which the Soviets denounced (partly because the authors often were very critical of radical Marxism) are now all being republished — several books by the philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev, the seminal

former Soviet space, there is a great deal of what we would call cronyism and corruption in the economy. Those in the right places and with the right family ties have become extraordinarily wealthy. (Given the growing gap between the super-rich and even the middle class in the U.S., of course we hardly offer a good example to emulate in this regard.) There has been some diversification in agriculture, reducing, if not eliminating, the need to import food. However, growing cotton, with all the ecological problems that exacerbates, still dominates the rural economy despite the fact that at the time of independence, the negative impact of centrally dictated agricultural policies was one of the significant sources for growing disaffection with Moscow.

An example of the intersection between political power and private enterprise can be seen in the case of President Karimov and his family. An American lawyer told me how, in a discussion with Karimov in the 1990s concerning a possible business investment by an American company in Uzbekistan, the Uzbek president indicated that the *quid pro quo* for receiving the contract was that the American firm pay for his children to receive college educations at elite American universities. Since this would have been illegal by American law, the Americans said "No thanks!" and left. Obviously this was only a temporary setback for Karimov's ambitions for his family. His daughters Lola and Gulnara are now jet-setting tycoons, recently ranked among the 10 most influential and best connected Central Asian women, not the least of their distinctions being that their father appointed them to diplomatic posts in Europe. See Farangis Najibullah, "'Central Asia's 10 Most Influential (And Connected) Women,'" RFE/RL, August 2, 2011 <http://www.rferl.org/content/central_asia_most_influential_connected_women/24284829.html>. There is speculation that Gulnara may succeed her father.

collection of essays entitled *Vekhi* (Signposts), and much more. And books on the Romanovs, notably on the last Tsar, Nicholas II, are quite the rage.

The success of *glasnost'* is one of many reasons for these changes; as important is the fact that the reformed accounting system adopted under Gorbachev for Soviet enterprises has forced the state-run publishing industry to look at the bottom line. Book prices have increased sharply, but the publishers now have to think about what will sell. Increasingly small private publishing ventures have begun too.

In the media, changes have been even more dramatic. There are newspapers to cater to every interest. UFOs and supernatural phenomena seem to attract much more serious attention here than in the United States. The tabloid *Ne mozhet byt'* ("It Can't Be"), subtitled "An Almanac of miracles, sensations and secrets," is only one of several such papers. Headlines on one number included: "To whom do aliens from other planets come?"; "A Conversation with an Invisible Woman." The number of papers devoted to business subjects grows steadily; the weekly *Kommersant* is required reading not only for Soviet businessmen but also for those outside the Soviet Union who study its economy.

A genuinely independent press has finally emerged, whereas in much of the Gorbachev period there were definite limits to what his government would tolerate and key newspapers were mostly state controlled. The putsch has given a boost to serious investigative reporting. The papers now competing vigorously for subscribers seem to be falling all over themselves in trying to dig out juicy tidbits on who the guilty parties might be. The best of the reporting and even much of the rest does not tend to follow what we expect of news stories, to the extent that opinion and the facts are generally inseparable. That is, the approach is often that of the editorial page in the United States. Newspapers such as *Izvestiia* now contain not only in-depth material on Soviet domestic affairs but also international news on a scale that was unknown a few years ago. There are even occasional translations of articles from papers such as *The New York Times*.

Unfortunately, serious, objective news coverage is not always available far from Moscow or St. Petersburg. While the central papers can be purchased on a fairly predictable basis, they sell out quickly (there is a serious paper and newsprint shortage here) and may arrive only several days after publication. In my regular visits to the newspaper sales desk in my hotel, I gain the sense that the saleswoman never can be sure from day to day what will be delivered, and papers such as the popular *Argumenty i fakty* published in Moscow in press runs that would be the envy of any American paper never seem to be available in Tashkent.

The situation with the local press here is dismal, since the government has refused to authorize independent papers. In recent days the Russian and Uzbek versions of four or five “different” papers have all carried the full text of Karimov’s speech to the Party congress (it occupied two of the four pages in the typical paper here), selections of congratulatory telegrams received by him on the occasion of the republic’s declaration of independence, and identical information on his various new appointments to republic ministries (including the token woman in his cabinet, appointed to be Foreign Minister even though her background is that of a Young Communist League functionary – the message being, I think, that Karimov will run his own foreign affairs).

This is not to say that all of the papers ignore the interests of readers. A thrice weekly youth newspaper, *Molodezh Uzbekistana* (September 17, 1991, p. 3), ran some rather interesting interviews with students, asking their opinions on matters, ranging from a new “contract” system guaranteeing students education and job placement, to whether the quality of instruction was very high (in both cases the answers showed real divergence of opinion). The local *Vechernyi Tashkent* (“Evening Tashkent”) devotes considerable space to readers’ letters and runs a trouble-shooter column to help readers in matters such as dealing with the local bureaucracy. This material provides an outsider with a rather revealing glimpse of the economic problems that are so prevalent here. At the same time, the advice columns can provide some unintended amusement – my favorite so far is the request from a newly-wed who wanted the newspaper to tell her how to iron her husband’s shirts. The paper dutifully told her.

Whether the official press in Tashkent will be given freer rein soon is doubtful, but perhaps the quotations from a readers’ poll published in *Pravda Vostoka* (the regional Communist Party paper) give some reason for hope. The paper highlighted reader requests that it become independent, and was even willing to print criticism that reveals a genuine flair for the true insult. One reader disliked the paper for its “political toothlessness, infantilism, cowardice, and often – its lack of principle.” As has been the case with so many of the other papers here, very likely many of the staff of *Pravda Vostoka* would like to take it over and make it independent.

The difference between the local press coverage and the coverage of Uzbek affairs in an often critical way by Moscow papers has led to an antagonistic confrontation between Karimov’s government and the “liberal” press, somewhat reminiscent of the situation we have seen in the United States under several recent presidents. Fortunately, our presidents do not have the power to keep out-of-town correspondents from obtaining a story, as Karimov did with reporters from *Komsomol’skaia pravda* who had written something he found to be offensive.

[After writing the above, a couple of days later I wrote several new paragraphs, inserted here, based on further developments with the local press. DW 2011]

It's Done with Mirrors

The Tashkent newspaper *Pravda Vostoka* ("The Truth of the East") proudly informed its readers on September 19 that it had become an independent newspaper. The next day, perhaps anticipating a certain skepticism by those who might search in vain for evidence of this new status, the paper printed a picture of the official certificate that registered its independence. Indeed, some days earlier, the paper had dropped from the masthead the indication that it was the "organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan." The subhead for the newly "independent" version is now "the Socio-Political Newspaper of the Republic of Uzbekistan." Has anything really changed? Alas, the answer is, "No!"

The official, and in authoritarian states generally the only press has as its function to present the programs of the government in the best possible light and to use any tactics to discredit opponents of the regime. It is no coincidence then that the "declaration of independence" of *Pravda Vostoka* followed almost verbatim lines from Uzbek President Karimov's recent speech to the Communist Party congress, at which he waved the flag of Uzbek nationalism, called for order and discipline in society, and denounced those whose goal, he alleged, was to disrupt that order and discredit Uzbekistan.

As if to emphasize further that the "new" *Pravda Vostoka* is to be merely the government's mouthpiece, the paper saved the full report of Karimov's September 18 press conference for simultaneous publication on September 21 with a long article that reinforced the president's message: the liberal Moscow press is out to distort the facts about Uzbekistan and attack its right to pursue an independent political course.²⁸ In his press conference, Karimov apparently made no attempt to refute the thrust of what Moscow newspapers *Izvestiia* and *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* have been publishing – namely, that he is maintaining an authoritarian regime.²⁹ In fact, he once again defended that political choice, and

²⁸ T. Kulevas and G. Figlin, ""Gvozd" so sniperskim pritselom," *Pravda Vostoka*, September 21, 1991, p. 2.

²⁹ His press conference was reported by T. Batyrbekov in three papers: the lead in *Narodnoe slovo*, September 21, 1991, p. 1; *Pravda Vostoka*, September 21, 1991, p.1; *Tashkentskaia pravda*, September 21, 1991, p. 2. Apart from the article by Vyzhutovich mentioned earlier, the Moscow attacks on Karimov continued: "Uzbekistan: Prezident schitaet, chto ego respublika ne gotova k demokratii" [on the AP interview Karimov gave], *Izvestiia*, September 18, 1991, p. 2; A.

he openly indicated his intention that even the foreign press should be manipulated to spread the good word about Uzbekistan.

The reporters for *Pravda Vostoka*, in their own tirade against the liberal press even went so far as to suggest that the call for political liberalization in Uzbekistan is little more than an effort by Moscow to keep Uzbekistan in political subordination to the center. Both the president and the newspaper developed the idea that criticisms of Uzbek politics reflect the ideas of those who merely wish to bring about chaos in the republic by exacerbating ethnic tensions. The program of the so-called liberals in Moscow is merely parroting the program of the illegal opposition group Birlik and as such is an attack on the Uzbek people and their right to sovereignty. To support this argument, the newspaper's reporters threw out a mish-mash of "facts" designed to undermine the credibility of the Moscow papers and Birlik's leaders. Anyone who wants to know the facts, they asserted, simply has to ask for them at the editorial offices of *Pravda Vostoka*.

It appears then that the truth in the "Truth of the East" is a very selective one and the "new" version of the paper is anything but independent. The criticism one reader launched at the "old" version of the paper remains valid: it still displays "political toothlessness, infantilism, cowardice, and often – lack of principle."

Even in the "hotbeds" of liberal politics such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, there have been some interesting cases testing freedom of expression. *Glasnost'* has brought with it widespread sales of erotica. In St. Petersburg, the city authorities have decided to crack down and have at least for the time being eliminated open sales of printed pornography. Prosecutions have been based on existing statutes of the Russian Republic criminal code, but, as *Komsomol'skaia pravda* suggests in the article that reported the story, there are serious legal questions that need to be raised as to whether the definition of pornography in the code is a defensible one. Clearly some of the same kinds of free expression issues that have been raised in such cases in the United States will need to be addressed if the government here is going to take seriously the new bill of rights that has been adopted. A footnote to this story is the unhappiness of the St. Petersburg authorities that they cannot stop the sale of pornographic videocassettes, since the existing laws pertain only to printed material.

Even the new hero of the democratic movement in Russia, Boris Yeltsin, has crossed swords with those now passionately concerned to defend free

Platkovskii, "V Tashkente khorosho, a v Pekine luchshe," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, September 21, 1991, p. 2. On September 26, *Izvestiia* (p. 1) painted with an even broader brush regarding Central Asia, its article focusing on events in Tajikistan published under the provocative title, "Diktatura v Srednei Azii: Tadzhikistan, Uzbekistan, dalee – vezde?"

expression. He came under heavy criticism for his decree right after the putsch that temporarily shut down *Pravda* and several other publications that had openly supported the junta. Yeltsin quickly reversed his position, but the example has not prevented similar cases from arising in the wake of the August coup. There seems still to be a dangerous tendency of the new political leaders here to act according to Russian political traditions where law and rights normally did not have any independent force.

Since arriving here, I have spent much more time in front of the tube than I have in the past fifteen years at home, watching everything from MTV-style presentations of rock concerts to execrable films based on subjects from 17th- and 18th-century Russian history. It is difficult to give a good overview of TV, since Tashkent receives only one of the two central channels in Russian (not the most worthwhile of the two, I am told), and I do not watch the two Uzbek channels (I do not know the language). The one Russian channel does have some interesting programming – a lot of in depth interviews, for example, one of the memorable ones being weight lifter Iurii Vlasov, who is a respected writer and liberal politician now. News reporting covers a good range of foreign and domestic material, although it suffers from not having enough good footage. Much of each program is simply read by the anchor man. Sports coverage is spotty, at least in the sense that few contests are broadcast in their entirety. It has been interesting though to hear the frank comments of the sportscasters about the financial difficulties the central television is experiencing now that the state has cut off the subsidies. Unless a sponsor can be found, fans of Soviet soccer will not be able to watch some of the upcoming international matches involving Soviet teams. It remains to be seen whether even an event like the Olympics will be something Soviet TV can afford.

On the frivolous side, I find the one game show to be amateurish and dull – contestants have to guess words that pertain to the single theme; many of the questions involve a knowledge of trivia in Russian literature (e.g., the name of the horse one of Tolstoi's women rode in a particular scene in *War and Peace*). I have yet to see anyone win a prize of real substance and value, and the game seems rigged so that it is virtually impossible to win the grand prize – that is, the last questions are much too obscure for the rather ordinary contestants to guess.

On the sublime side, there has been a series of late evening fireside chats by an Orthodox bishop explaining basic concepts of Christianity. The series is sponsored by the Moscow Patriarchate and by the Russian Cultural Fund. I have found the bishop to be an engaging speaker, and he comes across as a rather endearing personality, with his flowing white beard and simple monastic garb.

Advertising tends to be concentrated in relatively few spots. Much of it is not very sophisticated or attention-getting, but even in the time I have been here, there seems to be an increasing use of effective computer graphics. There was one rather risqué attempt to use sex to sell, of all things, construction materials (or was it the machinery to make them? Anyway, I never did figure out why the naked woman in the bathtub...). The best of the ads I have seen is one that surely must have been done by a non-Soviet agency. One by one, cute little raggedy dogs troop into a store, each picking up its copy of the newspaper *Argumenty i fakty*. One of the sad-eyed canines arrives too late – the last paper is gone – and as he sits up on his hind legs to beg, the grandfatherly sales clerk leans over the counter and suggests that the newspaper is so popular it is best to subscribe if you want to be sure of receiving a copy.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the TV channel is the amount of wasted time – every second is money in or out of the bank for American TV. Here it is not unusual for a series of still-life designs or photographs of scenic countryside to remain on the screen for a minute or more until the next program is ready. Judging from that and a substantial amount of critical commentary in the newspapers about the quality of TV, Soviet television still has some growing to do.

III. State Symbols and National Identity: The Creation of the New National Flag and the Replacement of the Monuments to the Old Order.

What I observed in Tashkent in 1991 stimulated my interest in how identities are constructed or de-constructed in public symbols. There are divergent opinions on whether the new nations in Central Asia are “artificial” constructs, an amalgam of Soviet-created national identities and their post-Soviet embodiments as independent nations. To go into such matters seriously would require invoking a huge academic literature on ethnicity and nationalism and standing in the crossfire of competing interpretations. My task here is a much simpler one, first to lay out how the new Uzbek national flag was presented to the nation during my time in Tashkent in 1991, and secondly to review briefly what happened when Soviet-era monuments that had decorated the Uzbek capital were replaced. For both of these, I draw on materials I presented a good many years ago to the Central Asian seminar at the University of Washington and more recently discussed in the conclusion to my opening lecture for a Seattle Asian Art Museum series on Central Asia earlier this year.

What caught my eye in the October 10, 1991, issue of *Pravda Vostoka* was not so much the photo of the happy women cotton harvesters in the upper right of the front page who, according to the accompanying article, were making record-breaking efforts to bring in the valuable crop in such places as the *kolkhoz* (collective farm) “Communism” in the Ferghana Valley. That article and photo harked back to an earlier time when this was standard fare to exhort the country to greater efforts in the interest of the national economy. Rather, of greater interest here (to the degree that I saved the whole number of the paper), was the lower left quadrant of

Собрано 3.000.000 ТОНН ХЛОПКА

Сдали хлопок-сырца на 9 октября

(первая колонка — в процентах к плану, вторая — в тоннах с начала сезона)

Бухарская область	88,23	397.033
Ферганская область	83,77	338.443
Кашкардаринская область	73,17	347.213
Сырдарьинская область	71,06	247.279
Джизакская область	69,15	225.256
Сурхандаринская область	64,14	275.784
Наманганская область	61,01	196.462
Анжлийская область	59,53	219.868
Ташкентская область	53,68	177.602
Самаркандская область	52,90	190.514
Хорезмская область	50,11	153.842
Республика Каракалпакстан	44,02	144.266
По Узбекистану	65,55	2.913.662



ФЕРГАНСКАЯ ОБЛАСТЬ массовый сбор светлого хлопка начался в колхозе «Объединенный» Куйбиского района. С каждого из 1,79 гектаров хлопководы наметили получить по 20 центнеров высококачественного сырья.

В бригаде Садырар Рухиевой вымче заняты на уборке урожая 37 арендаторов, каждый из них ежедневно собирает в среднем от 150 до 180 килограммов хлопка.

На снимке: арендаторы Гулнора Ахунова (слева) и Лола Арсланова. Каждая из них собирает ежедневно по 180 килограммов сырья.

Фото Ш. АЛИНОВА (УПАТ).

КОММЕНТАРИЙ
Третий миллион собран за шесть дней.
В стране — пик машинного сбора, на полях работает свыше 25 тысяч хлопкоуборочных машин — это 80 процентов всего парка. В ряде областей этот показатель еще выше. Машинами собрано 1,7 миллиона тонн.

Первыми в республике сверхплановый хлопок начали сдавать колхозы Алтaysкого, Бухарского и Говитанского районов. Главная в азиатском рубле — в целом земледельцы Бухарской области — об этом можно судить по приросту сдачи.

На темпах страды, а еще и на истинной эффективности хлопководов благополучно складываются три принципиальных решения, принятых по инициативе Президента республики. В первую очередь — это демонтаж пилковой системы налогообложения колхозов и совхозов к негнущему большинству. Теперь сельхозпредприятия избавлены от уплаты в бюджет налогов с прибыли и от пресловутой 11-процентной отчисления от фонда оплаты труда. С пониманием воспринято на селе и повышение закупочных цен на сырец и волокно, хотя после предыдущего акта не прошло и девяти месяцев.

Но если для этих решений находится в прежнем административном русле и только исправляют на время последствия «всплеска» цены, начавшейся в экономике (стремительное дорожание техники, удобрений, машин и т. д.), то последнее стоит особняком и дает возможность колхозам и совхозам, другим сельхозпредприятиям сделать самостоятельный шаг в подлинно рыночные отношения.

Пять процентов от установленного задания и все сверхплановое волокно разрешено теперь самим производителям реализовывать как внутри страны, так и за ее пределами. Для предпринимателей бартер, биржа, совместные предприятия с иностранной открытием отдельные перспективы. Но с другой стороны зачем всех стричь под одну гребенку? Кто по неуменьности с трудом распределяет «сборняк» хлопка, а для другого это лишь незначительный прирост. В рынок стрекать не надо, а так и так интернационал — это существующий рынок для самых предпринимательских людей. Поднять ценники — значит ограничить.

Р. МАГДЕЕВ.

page one, devoted to the proclamation of the new Uzbek national flag, with a sketch of it and a long explanatory article about its symbolism.³⁰ That explanation raises interesting issues about how identities may be constructed out of historic traditions (or at least out of some current interpretation of what they are) and what the possible pitfalls in the process may be. The adoption of national symbols is hugely significant, as any American can understand when looking at Old Glory and the way it is displayed and sometimes contested within our culture.



The new Uzbek flag replaced the Soviet-era one, which had two broad horizontal red stripes flanking a blue one framed in narrow white stripes and a yellow hammer and sickle and star in the upper left. Obviously that symbol had to be relegated to the dustheap of history. The main field of the new flag of independent Uzbekistan has wide horizontal bands, from bottom to top, green, white and blue. The middle band is framed by narrow red stripes. In the upper left corner on the face is a crescent moon facing an array of 12 stars. The

explanations about the design are certainly intriguing, because of the way in which an attempt was made to connect with what was considered to be important in Uzbek historical tradition and because of the very careful invocation of the Islamic past while keeping it at arm's length.

30 The communication about the flag's adoption at a special session of the congress of the Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan, the date of whose meeting was not specified, is "Gosudarstvennyi flag Respubliki Uzbekistan" (see the image above). The accompanying article describing the symbolism was signed by two members of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences and an award-winning People's Author of Uzbekistan: Pirimkul Kadyrov, Akhmadali Askarov, and Buribai Akhmedov, "O simbolike novogo Gosudarstvennogo flaga Respubliki Uzbekistana," *Pravda Vostoka*, October 10, 1991, p. 1. Presumably this authorship lent weight to the fact that the symbolism was supposed to connect with important historical and cultural currents of the Uzbek past, concerning which it was undoubtedly necessary to consult academic experts. The official explanation of the symbolism currently on the website of the Embassy of Uzbekistan in the U.S. <<http://www.uzbekistan.org/uzbekistan/symbols/>>, accessed September 11, 2011, is largely a condensed version of what was published on October 10, with the addition of a reference about the respect for nature coinciding with the goals of a movement such as Greenpeace. Interestingly, the official website states the adoption of the new flag occurred at the "Extraordinary 8th Session of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Uzbekistan on November 18, 1991." Does that mean that the extraordinary session referred to in the October 10 article, the date of which is not mentioned, was a fiction?

According to the explanation, the symbolism on the flag emphasized the continuity between the current Uzbek state and previous ones which occupied the same territory, the continuity in cultural traditions and the natural environment of the country. So the blue stripe was both the sky and water, at the same time that it was the color of Amir Timur's (Tamerlane's) standard. The white band stands for peace, moral purity, and the green for nature and new life, with the preference for that color especially common in countries with a Muslim population. Red is for life force (indirectly, the coursing of blood in living beings). The crescent moon connects with historic tradition (unexplained, but surely in part Islamic) and symbolizes the new beginning of a newly independent state.

All sorts of meanings connect with the stars – the traditional solar calendar, the names of the months, the twelve constellations (signs of the Zodiac), the spring Nawruz festival. However, as the article took pains to emphasize, that symbolism has nothing to do with religious belief. The authors go on to explain that Uzbekistan is unique in showing these twelve stars on its flag. They connect with the historic interest on its territory in science, as illustrated by Ulugbeg's 15th-century star catalogue (which indeed was an important landmark in traditional astronomy in the pre-telescope era). In our day and age, there is growing interest in the world in the 12-year calendrical cycle, embodied here in Uzbek tradition and in the new symbolism of the flag and supported by modern scientific observations about solar cycles. The historic traditions concerning the number 12 involved important philosophical ideas concerning the basic elements (earth, air, fire, and water) in their manifestations at three cosmic levels of creation ($3 \times 4 = 12$). Hence, the symbolism of the stars denotes the attempt to encompass all of creation and to achieve perfection. As if that were not enough, the symbolism also extends to the political order. Mir Said Barak, Tamerlane's teacher, and the late Timurid historian Muhammad Khond Amir viewed the number 12 as denoting the 12 most important rules of governance, rules which include justice, right conduct, tolerance, loyalty, etc.

No wonder then, that on hearing these explanations, the deputies who voted to adopt this design over the competition, showed such excitement about it, rose to their feet and gave a lengthy ovation. All this aimed at helping to consolidate the healthy forces in building the new Uzbek society.

The interpretation of the flag connects in important ways with the transformation of public space and its monuments which followed upon the declaration of independence in 1991. Those changes continue; my observations here are confined to what I saw on return visits to Uzbekistan in the 1990s.

What we see here is a good example of a common phenomenon in various parts of the world, which we might call a “search for a usable past.” That is, in the process of self-definition, a people and/or its government may in certain circumstances deem it important to emphasize elements of what they at the time consider to be national tradition and history. Whether or not their perceptions of that history are accurate is not so important here – all too often in fact, it seems that “tradition” as seen in modern times is an invention or distortion of historical reality.³¹ The significant thing is that one be able to assert the claims to the past in a way that justifies and reinforces the beliefs of the present. Of course part of this process inevitably will involve the rejection of alternative claims to “tradition.”

In the Soviet Union, there were conflicting forces at work when it came to the invocation of “tradition.” Many elements of the past had to be rejected as they were deemed incompatible with Marxism-Leninism and the policies of the Soviet regime. In the case of non-Russian peoples, many of whom had never known an independent national political existence, Soviet nationality policy tried to shape identities, in the process often distorting genuine national traditions and culture. National cultural figures often were condemned as inappropriate models; national histories were re-written according to Marxist precepts and the requirements of Soviet politics (the two did not necessarily coincide). These distortions applied to Russians as well as to non-Russians. In a real sense, the treatment of “national” histories was “anti-national” in its essence, since in the long run, according to Marxist doctrine, national differences were supposed to disappear.

In the case of Central Asia, reformers who began to emerge by the early 20th century among intellectuals – many of them known as *jadids* – were suppressed. Naturally the Basmachi rebels of the 1920s and 1930s were condemned. But even important figures in the earlier history – Amir Timur or Tamerlane is a significant example – became “non-persons,” in that to discuss them could only be to condemn them. Of course, a figure such as Tamerlane, whose reputation was that of a brutal conqueror, might well be the subject of conflicting interpretations. A parallel case for Russian history is that of Tsar Ivan IV “the Terrible.” The vicissitudes of Tamerlane in modern historical memory are analogous too to those of Chingis Khan, who is today a hero in Mongolia, but was too dangerous as a symbol of Mongolian nationalism in Communist times.

³¹ A pioneering and still standard treatment of this is Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1983); another influential treatment of the broader subject of national identity is Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London; New York: Verso, 1991; first published 1983). There is, of course, a huge literature on these subjects which has appeared since those books were published more than a quarter century ago.

To a limited degree even before 1991, especially in the period of *glasnost*, it became possible to write about some of the national historical and cultural figures who had earlier been condemned under the excesses of Stalinism. Independence in 1991 opened the doors more widely, but reinforced the dangers of a different kind of distortion of history, involving selective emphasis that glossed over inconvenient facts. In Uzbekistan, the elevation of Tamerlane to the status of national hero exemplifies this.



The immediate decision in Tashkent in 1991 to re-christen “Lenin Square” as “Independence Square” made perfectly good sense, even if for a time the huge statue of Lenin had to remain in place. I learned, incidentally, that back in Soviet days some of the mountain climbers in Tashkent would earn extra money by climbing the Lenin statue to scrub off the pigeon droppings. When it was finally replaced in the mid-’90s, the winning design was a globe with an enlarged map of Uzbekistan dominating the side facing out on the square (a similar one was later erected in Bukhara, I understand). Proportionately, it was really inadequate, since the massive base for the Lenin statue was left in place. Somehow I cannot but think here of

the map I saw in an Air Uzbekistan flight magazine, where all the air routes converged on Tashkent as the center of the world. In 2006 a further change (which I have seen only in pictures) was the addition of a large “mother image” at the base of the pedestal, which probably helps correct for the visual disproportion and also conveys an important message that softens the original, somewhat impersonal concept representing “independence.” Further landscaping and rearranging has made at least a significant part of Independence Square into a nice park.

Leaving Independence Square, one can take a passage under the busy street, coming out at the entrance to the Tashkent subway on the other side, which also had been named after Lenin but then rechristened “Independence Square” in 1991. A bronze relief decorated the stairway down into the subway. In 1991, there still had not been time to alter it. Lenin strode in the middle, behind him a banner with the Bolshevik slogan (in Russian), “All Power to the Soviets!” At one side was a quotation from the opening line of the second verse of the Soviet National Anthem: *Skvoz grozy sialo nam solntse svobody* – “Through the

thunderstorm shone on us the sun of freedom.” To have included the next line — “And great Lenin illuminated our path” — would have been redundant. The rest



of the panorama was filled with happy multi-national Uzbek citizens, working, celebrating, etc. When I saw this relief again a few years later, it had been transformed. The figures blowing long trumpets formerly on the left edge were



now in the center, replacing Lenin. The quotation from the national anthem had been chiseled off, and a similar, less successful attempt had been made to eliminate the slogan on the banner (the words could still be made out), a banner which now had been transformed into the flag of newly independent Uzbekistan. Somewhat cynically, one might see in this an analogy with what had happened to the former Communist Party of Uzbekistan, transformed merely by changing its name and dropping the nominal adherence to an ideology that no longer was deemed acceptable.



A short walk from the Independence Square Metro entrance is the building

which housed the KGB, in front of which in a garden rose the monument to the founder of that despised institution, Felix Dzerzhinsky. As I have noted above, his statue was one of the first to disappear in 1991, following the example of the removal of his statue in Moscow from the square in front of KGB headquarters there. At the time of my visits to Tashkent later in the 1990s, Iron Felix had not yet been replaced; one could see the holes on the face of the empty base to his monument where once his name had been attached.



The nice park situated in front of the Hotel Uzbekistan and, on another side of the circle, the older buildings of Tashkent University, had at its center in 1991 a massive bust of Karl Marx, with the inscriptions on its pedestal repeating the slogan “Proletariat of All Countries, Unite!” in various languages. In 1993, Marx was replaced by an equestrian statue of Tamerlane, the base of which bore the legend “In Strength is Justice,”



apparently a quotation from his official historian of the early 15th century. Those who came to decry the political regime of Islam Karimov saw in this choice of words a somewhat cynical invocation of the past as a justification for the authoritarian rule of the present. As we have seen though, the sentiments are fully consistent with Karimov’s statements at independence in 1991, emphasizing the need for firm control in a country he deemed not yet ready for real democracy and threatened by various potentially de-stabilizing forces.

The invocation of Tamerlane extended beyond this one monument.³² There is now a Tamerlane Museum across the street from this same park, in which quotations from Karimov extol the Timurid legacy to the Uzbek people and the imagery in the central hall under the large dome presents a kind of idealized collage of the glorious past. Samarkand, Tamerlane's capital, has been much transformed. There is now a huge statue of Tamerlane, stern in visage, holding a sword and seated on a throne. His family mausoleum, the Gur-i Amir, has undergone an extensive "restoration" involving repainting and re-tiling in the interior (some of it very controversial), the suspension of a large electrified chandelier from the center of the dome, and the use of reinforced concrete to



rebuild the minarets outside, which had fallen down long before modern times. Many of the mausolea in the historically and architecturally important Shah-i Zinda complex on the outskirts of the city have been rebuilt, and the imposing Bibi Khnaum mosque Tamerlane had erected for his favorite wife, and which was but a ruin by modern times,

has been rebuilt almost from scratch, as has her tomb just across the street from it.³³ Since 1991, I have not been in Shahr-i Sabz, Tamerlane's home town south of Samarkand, but at least one change there has been the addition of a large statue to the local boy who made good.

³² The best review of the interpretations of Tamerlane down to the present is by Beatrice Forbes Manz, "Tamerlane's Career and Its Uses," *Journal of World History* 31/1 (2002): 1-25. She does not say a great deal about physical monuments, but she explains clearly why he has been deemed so important to current Uzbek constructions of Uzbekistan's past. Where publication of a biography of Tamerlane back in the Soviet period could be a problematic undertaking, among those who rode the wave of Tamerlanomania in the wake of 1991 was Prof. Khidoiatov. He translated into Uzbek the not very good popular biography of Tamerlane by Hilda Hookham, a book difficult to obtain. When he visited Seattle in 1990, I had given him my copy.

³³ For a discussion of the Bibi Khanum mosque with illustrations of the stages in its reconstruction up through 1999, see my web page at Silk Road Seattle <<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/cities/uz/samarkand/bibi.html>>.

Of course in principle there is nothing wrong with all this. We need our national heroes and our imagined histories; one can find plenty of analogous examples whether in London, or Washington, D. C., or Paris. My home campus of the University of Washington is graced with a huge and rather clumsy statue of George Washington, who, of course, had nothing to do with the place beyond the fact that the state, settled by white men, which came into being long after his death, was named for him.

I do think that much of the “renovation” and “re-building” which has been pushed in Uzbekistan in part because of the elevation of Tamerlane to the status of “father of the Uzbek nation” (Beatrice Forbes Manz’s words) has been done badly and with little concern for the historical integrity of the architectural monuments. But I am far from alone in believing this.

Probably the more interesting issue here is to wonder what the impact of all this has been on Uzbek conceptions of national identity. Do people care? Has their pride in being Uzbeks (or at least citizens of Uzbekistan, even if they are not ethnic or linguistic Uzbeks) grown as a result? What has been the impact of replacing the old, distorted Soviet version of Uzbek history (in which the Russians were the good guys) with a new nationalist version? I don’t have the answers here, although I assume specialists on the region have been investigating them. Whatever one may think about the degree to which there was any Uzbek “national consciousness” prior to the Soviet period and 1991, starting with the latter year, an active policy of building a national identity has been underway. It is a subject which deserves close attention, since it may inform us about very important issues that are relevant in the world of the 21st century, just as they were with the emergence of modern nationalism in the 19th century, in the aftermath of the First World War, and with the disappearance of European colonialism in many parts of the world later in the 20th century.

IV. Three Articles Reflecting on Central Asia in the Post-1991 Years

These are all previously published. In order, earliest first, they are:

1. "Central Asia After Eight Years of Independence," *REECAS Newsletter* [of the Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies Center, Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington], Fall 1999, pp. 1, 3-5.
2. "The Need for a New Perspective on Central Asia," *REECAS Newsletter*, Autumn 2001/Winter 2002, pp. 3-4. This was the lead presentation at a forum marking UW's October 2001 Day of Remembrance, where the theme was "Central Asia: What Are We Getting Into?"
3. "The Authoritarian Politics of Central Asia," in: *The Democratic Process: Promises and Challenges. A resource guide produced for the Democracy Education Exchange Project (DEEP)*, Ed. Donald Bragaw (New York: The American Forum for Global Education, 2003): 37-53. The boxed insertions in the text, photos and quotations, are not part of my text but are there to connect the issues raised with other parts of the book. This is an invited essay, one of three by UW experts which were written for the project. The entire book is available on-line at <<http://www.globaled.org/DemProcess.pdf>>.

REECAS NEWSLETTER

RUSSIAN, EAST EUROPEAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES CENTER

JACKSON SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON FALL 1999

Central Asia After Eight Years of Independence

BY DANIEL C. WAUGH



The Timurid Museum, Tashkent

In 1991, I learned of the Moscow coup against Gorbachev on a morning walk in the streets of Osh (Kyrgyzstan) and arrived in Tashkent August 31, the eve of the formal declaration of Uzbekistan's independence. I flew home from Tashkent on August 31, 1999, leaving a capital where, apparently well before the beginning of the summer, preparations had been underway to celebrate the eighth anniversary. During those eight years, I have been fortunate to visit Central Asia several times lecturing on a faculty exchange, doing research in the National Library of Uzbekistan (granted, on a Russian History topic), and spending time in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan. Here are some anecdotal impressions from my most recent visit, over two months this summer, which may illustrate the tension between the Soviet past and the challenges of change at the end of the twentieth century.

In the eyes and lives of many individuals in Central Asia, independence has been at best a mixed blessing. Economically, the Central Asian republics under Soviet rule

had been amongst the poorest; although as everywhere in post-Soviet space there are now the nouveaux riches, many ordinary citizens feel that they are worse off. I spent one evening in Tashkent answering questions about what my family's life in the U.S. is like and then finding myself being mildly harangued by my polite Uzbek interlocutors, who could not imagine how any household should need, much less be able to afford, two cars and feel squeezed on a University of Washington Associate Professor's salary. This family's income amounted to about one dollar a day. It seems, my Tashkent acquaintances noted somewhat bitterly, that President Karimov is more interested in erecting fancy government buildings than in improving the lives of ordinary citizens. And in fact there is ample evidence in the still largely run-down Soviet ambience of Tashkent that expensive new public buildings are a priority. This and the rather lavish expenditures on the independence day celebrations seems not dissimilar from old Soviet campaigns of encouraging

continued on page 3

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public enthusiasm for the regime and its accomplishments.

Yet not everyone expresses this discontent. Another of my new acquaintances, a Russian who works for one of the businesses that is flourishing in the “new” economic climate in Uzbekistan, was considerably more positive about the achievements of the regime. His company pays him all of \$10 a day, pointing out, rather proudly, the fact that an Uzbek-Korean auto venture is now producing a good range of small cars, and also that the roads in Uzbekistan are substantially better than those in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. Indeed, the strategically important new road being constructed over the mountains to connect Tashkent with the Fergana Valley is impressively engineered, at the same time that the National Library struggles for want of adequate government support.

The economic situation in rural Kyrgyzstan seems to be substantially worse than in Uzbekistan. According to Western theorists, this should not be so, given the fact that Kyrgyzstan has taken more meaningful steps in the direction of privatization than most of the other Central Asian countries. Yet, in the small towns on the edge of the Pamir-Alai mountains, privatization of farm land has left many families on the edge of economic disaster. If they could not make the adjustment to life where the state no longer provided services and material support. In many cases too, individuals whom the state had employed as educated professionals (for example, as geologists and engineers) found themselves without jobs at the end of the Soviet era. Even the families who have managed to do well in the herding economy of the area readily admit that there are no jobs for the young people. Government family assistance programs are so poorly funded that some families now do not even bother to apply for the meager financial support. In most of these rural Kyrgyz households, wheat flour is one of the essentials in the traditional diet. Thanks to the fact that a year ago the Kyrgyz government sold off much of its wheat reserve in order to pay its energy debt to Uzbekistan, the price of flour more than doubled within a year. To add to these woes, this year a late spell of cold weather in the spring totally



Monument to Uzbekistan's independence, Tashkent

destroyed the apricot crop, which is an important source of income in the region.

Some of the families now rely very heavily on income from the brief summer trekking season, during which they lead the baggage trains and help with food preparation for foreign clients. In one very sad case, one of these horsemen died unexpectedly two years ago, leaving his widow to bring up five daughters. For this family, renting out the lone horse they own to the summer treks is of critical importance to make ends meet. A perception that too few families might be profiting unduly from the treks has led to pressure from local officials that a much broader range of individuals be allowed to share in the very limited “largesse.” Whether such pressure can be resisted remains to be seen, for in general, as everyone hastens to remind you, the problem of corruption and the absence of an effective legal system is one of the greatest obstacles to economic progress throughout Central Asia today.

Although independence has too often seemed to undermine an already poor economic situation in Central Asia, it has had the benefit of allowing Central

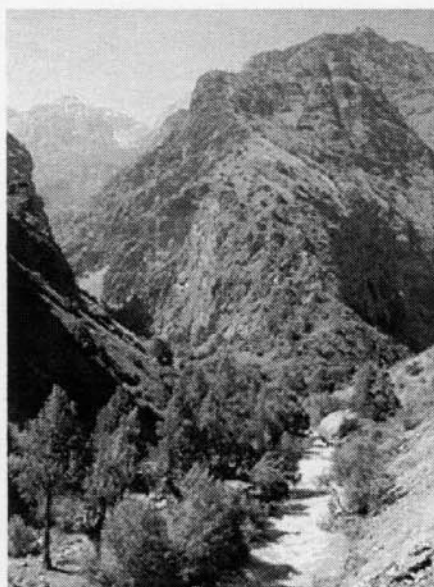
Asians to recover or reassert aspects of their history and traditions that had been suppressed under Soviet rule. One can see this at various levels in society, an obvious example being the promulgation in Uzbekistan of what we might term an official “cult of Tamerlane.” Substantial government expenditures in connection with celebrations in 1996 accelerated major restorations in Samarkand, his capital in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. The same year saw the construction of the Timurid Museum in Tashkent, a rather elegant building in somewhat fanciful pseudo-Timurid style, which weaves in its exhibits a somewhat misleading cultural genealogy of the Timurids. Clearly in the first instance the audience is Uzbek, since the major narrative descriptions in the museum are only in that language. However, the President’s statement that Timurid achievements are a testimony to the greatness of the Uzbek people (even though the Timurids were not Uzbek) is also displayed prominently in English. A statue of Tamerlane has replaced the bust of Marx in the adjoining central park. In analogous fashion, a disproportionately small globe with a disproportionately

continued on page 4

continued from page 3

large Uzbekistan at the center of the world now rests like a golf ball on the pedestal that in 1991 still supported a colossal statue of Lenin. This “re-stated” and renamed “Independence Square” is an excellent reminder that one important challenge for newly independent Central Asia is to create the symbols for a new national identity.

In most parts of the former Soviet Union, rehabilitation of the victims of Stalin began in the waning years of that empire and continues apace. In Kyrgyzstan, the main square in the center of the capital Bishkek retains its Lenin statue in front of a striking modern building that houses the state museum of history and culture. While an apotheosis of Lenin still dominates the grand staircase inside the building, the main exhibits remaining open are the ones dealing with “pre-history” and the persistence of traditional material culture in the twentieth century. The floor that had been devoted to the Soviet era is closed, presumably for want of funding for renovation but perhaps as well because decisions are still being made as to what version of the country’s history to present. At the same time, a special exhibit of photographs and documents celebrating the prominent Kyrgyz author Chingiz Aitmatov was very explicit about the fact that his father had been arrested and executed during the purges in the 1930s. Similarly blunt



Location of Turdali Mergen’s last stand, Laylyak Valley, Kyrgyzstan

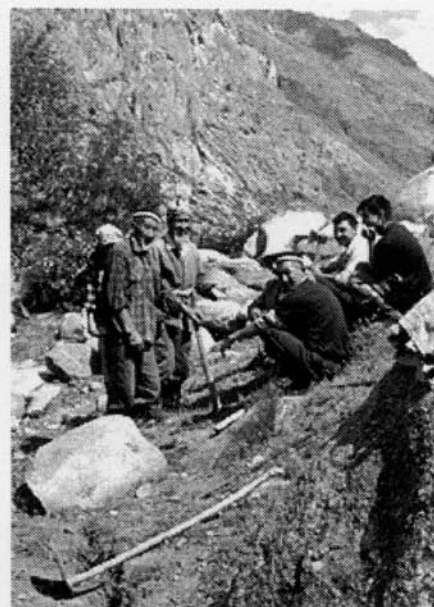
treatment of the impact of Stalinism on Kyrgyz cultural leaders was to be seen in the tiny but rich display of the local museum in the distant resort town of Chopan Ata on the shores of Lake Issyk Kul.

For me, the most interesting manifestation of the rehabilitation of a suppressed past was in one of the scenic mountain valleys of the Pamir-Alai. At the intersection of the Uryam and Laylyak, two rushing glacier-fed streams that pass through dramatic gorges, stands a newly built herder’s hut, in front of which “Mergen’s House” is spelled out in graffiti on rocks.

This was not there three years ago. What is now being commemorated is the location where Turdali Mergen, the last of the Kyrgyz leaders of the Basmachi rebellion against Soviet rule, died in the mid-1930s. A stone-walled enclosure marks his burial place at the foot of the adjoining rocky spur where he held out until, as the story goes, his own followers murdered him. Open discussion of, much less veneration of, the Basmachi would have been impossible a few years ago.

My last vignette to illustrate the intersection between the past and the situation at the end of twentieth century is from the Karavshin valley region in the Pamir-Alai. The granite faces carved by glacial action eons ago now lure extreme rock climbers to reaches of this valley system. In the lush green below the cliffs, several families now herd sheep, cattle and yaks, and some of their homes suggest substantial prosperity by local standards. Of course, following tradition, it seems that the women still bear the greatest burden of the family’s work; all one has to do is contrast the youthful appearance of the men with the faces of women old before their time to get a sense of how difficult the women’s lives must be. In one case, as we were photographing a young woman at work separating the cream from the milk (the processing of milk products is one of the most important daily tasks), her husband, dressed in his “Adidas” sweats, insisted on jumping into the picture primarily in order to display his new boom box.

While one might conclude that the new is fast encroaching on the old, it was interesting to meet, about a mile down



Digging of a new irrigation ditch, Karavshin Valley region, Kyrgyzstan

the valley, Sharip, a vigorous 73-year-old, who was supervising a small work crew.

They were using traditional technology (pick-axe and mattock) to dig an arik (irrigation ditch), that would help restore some agriculture to what had at one point been a small village stretched along the central part of the valley. Sharip had been born there, and his father and grand-father before him. In the Soviet period, with government support during collectivization, the village grew from a summer encampment to a year-round settlement. Then, with the shift toward state farms (sovkhozy) in the mid-1950’s, when there was an effort to replace what were considered to be the more “backward” collective farms (kolkhozy), the government evicted the villagers, leaving behind houses now in ruins, and the shells of a former school and a store, identifiable as such now only by a rusting scale next to its crumbling wall. What Sharip is trying to do, now that this is permitted, is bring his birth village back to life. As he explained, there is a saying in Central Asia to the effect, “First you bring the water, and then the people come.” It would be nice to think that he may succeed—after all, in some of these remote mountain valleys, the potential for relative prosperity such as has developed in analogous areas in, say, northern Pakistan, could develop in part based on labor-intensive cultivation of small plots. Yet, as the boombox culture

of his young neighbors up the valley might suggest, enlisting the younger generation in the venture may prove to be impossible. The unfortunate attractions of "modern" culture lure them away. While a few impressions are not sufficient to elaborate a vision of what we might expect on the anniversary of

Central Asians' independence in a decade or two, it seems clear that reality is substantially more complex than Western policy makers and pundits would like to have it. 1991 certainly did not mark the "end of history" any more than it ushered in an era of capitalist prosperity.

The author is Associate Professor of History and International Studies at the University of Washington and co-editor (with M. Holt Ruffin) of *Civil Society in Central Asia* (University of Washington Press, 1999).

REECAS NEWSLETTER

RUSSIAN, EAST EUROPEAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES CENTER

JACKSON SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON AUTUMN 2001 / WINTER 2002

The Need for a New Perspective on Central Asia

BY DANIEL C. WAUGH

Let me begin with a few comments on the importance of Central Asia and on political aspects of the current crisis. A recent article in *The New York Times* (October 10, 2001) was headlined "Five Ex-Soviet Asian Republics Are Now Courted by the US," and it began as follows:

"The five countries that emerged in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union a decade ago — Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan — are unknown to most Americans but are now being urgently courted as the United States seeks to destroy terror bases in nearby Afghanistan..."

"Unknown to most Americans" but "courted." And, I would predict, just as quickly forgotten once the current crisis has ended. My first point then is this: Central Asia is important, deserving of our continuing attention and study, and, I might emphasize, the commitment of Washington State and UW resources to maintain our offerings on this campus.

Historically the region has played a key role in connecting the peoples of Europe,

Asia and Africa. The civilizations of Central Asia are amongst the oldest and richest in the world and deserving of our attention not in the first instance because of the recent tragic events and the current crisis. I have been referring to "Central Asia" as an entity, but that is only convenient shorthand for a region whose complexity and interconnectedness with other areas are quite remarkable.

My second point is a corollary of the first: Central Asia is not Russia. Yet we must recognize that whether or not we like it, the Russian impact on the region is substantial, and Russian interest in what happens there is not going to disappear. Russian and, I would also emphasize, US interest in Central Asia has and will likely continue to be dictated primarily by selfish (if understandable) considerations.

At least at one time (and I suspect this may still be true), Seattlites would often refer to Tashkent as our *Russian* sister city. Of course as I hope you all now know, Tashkent is the capital of Uzbekistan, and Uzbekistan and the four other Central Asian states have been independent already for ten years. It is about time we

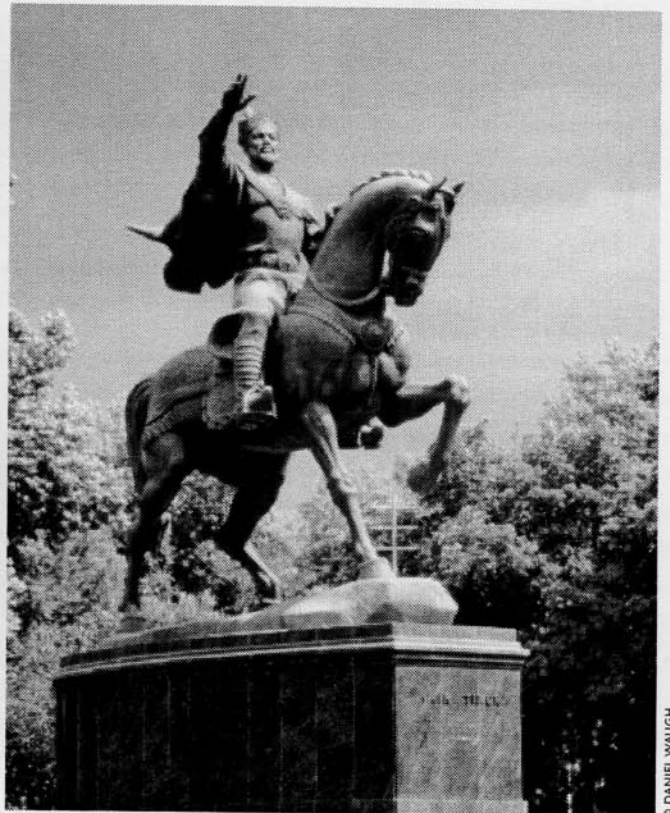
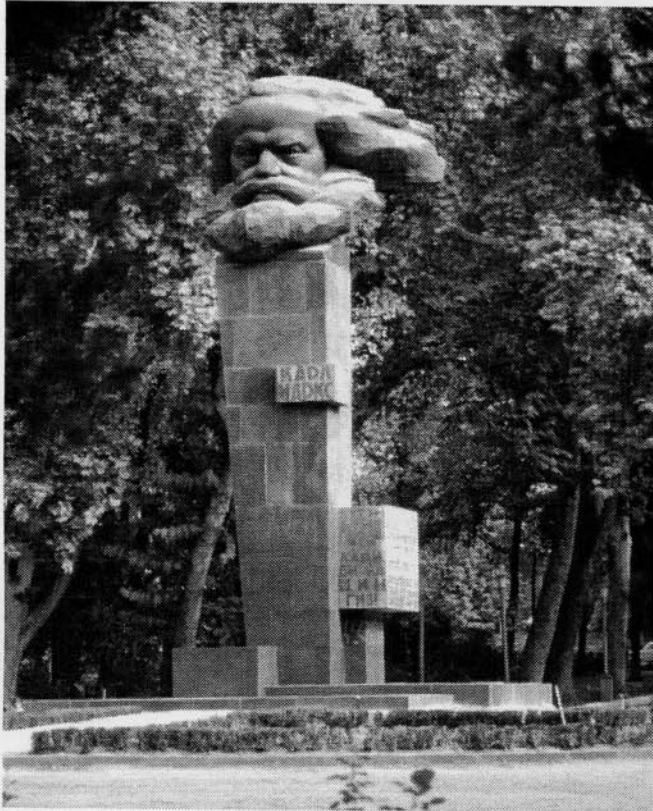
started to treat them as such and not, following *The New York Times'* example, continue to refer to them as the "Five Ex-Soviet Asian Republics."

The common perceptions of Central Asia in international politics today mirror to a considerable degree the attitudes of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The region then was treated as simply a pawn in the schemes of neighboring powers — especially Britain and Russia — to expand and defend their empires (this rivalry is commonly called "The Great Game"). In the case of Russia today, not only a lingering yearning to restore lost empire but very real considerations of security ensure that Russia will continue to play an active role in the region. From the standpoint of the Central Asian states, geography alone dictates that Russia will continue as an important focus of their foreign policies and have an impact on their economies.

The US role in the region is, I am afraid, equally dictated in the first instance not by any altruistic concern for the people of Central Asia. There are, of course, notable exceptions in the activities of

continued on page 4

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Where Marx once inspired the proletariat in the central park of Tashkent, the dreaded conqueror of Central Asia Tamerlane now holds sway with the slogan, "Strength in Justice." The first of those virtues is as abundant as the second is absent in the policies of the Karimov regime.

NGOs such as the Seattle-Tashkent Sister City Association. Understandably, US policy is guided in the first instance by concerns for our own security, and by the fact that several of the Central Asian countries have something we badly want: petroleum resources. Quite bluntly, no oil and no Osama bin-Laden would guarantee that Central Asia would not even be on the other Washington's map. The only way we can ever hope to change this indifference is by supporting and expanding a Central Asian focus in our learning, teaching, and activism.

My final point concerns challenges of US policy in the current crisis. I should stress here that I am not going to detail what that policy might be, but simply offer some cautionary words: There is a real danger that the United States may contribute to a potentially even more serious crisis in Central Asia if we focus too narrowly on "courting" support and bases for the fight against terrorism, and thereby fail to address the serious political and economic challenges faced by the five countries of the region.

The governments of all five Central Asian countries today are, to put it diplomatically, far from being democratic. Furthermore, these countries still have weak economies, whose underdevelopment is in part the legacy of Soviet rule, but in part, too, the result of the continuation of Soviet-era policies, the lack of the rule of law, and rampant corruption. These political and economic conditions are helping to fuel the discontent that governments such as that of Uzbekistan ruthlessly suppress and are quick to brand with the label of Islamic fundamentalism. The US clearly must not be condoning such regimes, and in fact must work seriously to encourage and facilitate change. This does not mean our goal should simply be to make them "more like us." As we all know, there may well be aspects of American culture and society that others would choose wisely not to emulate. Furthermore, what we might determine are "traditional" Central Asian values, some of them rooted in Islam, in fact correspond very well with values we espouse.

Should we fail to encourage developments that will enhance the well-being and long-term stability of the independent countries of Central Asia, it is entirely possible that those countries, which are still consolidating their national identities, will go the way of Afghanistan. That is, they will continue to be pawns in the modern version of the Great Game, and they never will enjoy the blessings of political stability and prosperity. A long-term commitment of an American public and political leadership well informed about Central Asian affairs, languages and culture, could help to ensure that such a bleak scenario does not become a reality. ♦

Daniel C. Waugh was Acting Chair of REECAS in Autumn 2001. He has traveled extensively in Central Asia, and teaches courses on Central Asia's early history of cultural and economic interactions along the Silk Road. During the 2001-2002 academic year he is coordinating a series of public education programs about the Silk Road.

The Authoritarian Politics of Central Asia

by Daniel C. Waugh, The University of Washington (Seattle)

The current U.S. State Department assessments of human rights practices in the Central Asian countries introduce the respective reports as follows:

- Turkmenistan is a one-party state dominated by its president and his closest advisers, who continue to exercise power in a Soviet-era authoritarian style despite Constitutional provisions nominally establishing a democratic system.
- Tajikistan is ruled by an authoritarian regime that has established some nominally democratic institutions.
- Uzbekistan is an authoritarian state with limited civil rights.
- The Constitution of Kazakhstan concentrates power in the presidency . . . [and] permits the president to dominate the legislature and judiciary, as well as regional and local governments.
- Although the 1993 Constitution defines the form of government [in Kyrgyzstan] as a democratic republic, President Askar Akayev dominates the Government . . . The executive branch dominates the judiciary, and the Government used judicial proceedings against prominent political opposition and independent media figures in numerous instances.

Indeed, there is little in the history of Central Asia since 1991 to suggest that democratic values and institutions will emerge there in the foreseeable future. None of the Central Asian states has enjoyed much of a public process, which might lead to resolution of the "value tensions" seen as inherent in any democratic system. The priorities of Central Asian governments dictate that there be no meaningful democratization—we are not even talking here of "varieties of a democratic experience." If this blunt assessment comes as a shock, it does so only because of the wishful thinking in the West about what kind of political and social systems might emerge after the Soviet demise. To the degree that there was once any hope that even a single one of the Central Asian states might develop democratically, sad to say, such hopes are now dwindling, although some still feel that Kyrgyzstan might "make it" without having a revolution to bring about a change in regime. To understand what may seem to be an overly gloomy assessment, we need to consider first what these still-young countries inherited from their experience as parts of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union.



Independence Square, Kiev

Even in an age when democracies were still rather new and democratic ideals not widely shared throughout the world, the Russian Empire was behind the democratic curve. Only when forced to at the beginning of the twentieth century did the Russian Emperor grant a constitution and a modicum of parliamentary government, and then he fought to limit its powers and to retain as much authoritarian control as possible. The ancient regime fell in 1917 not because of any widespread popular commitment to democratic principles but because of the failures of government, failures that in part might legitimately be attributed to its unwillingness to allow for the development of meaningful political participation. The pressures of modern war were too great for an empire with an "underdeveloped" economy, a huge gulf separating rich and poor, and incompetent political leadership. Without World War I Russia might have gradually developed meaningful parliamentary democracy. However, the war prevented that from happening and exacerbated social unrest, which played into the hands of a dedicated but small group of revolutionaries. Nothing in the Imperial Russian experience could have meaningfully served as the basis for development of dem-

ocratic institutions under a new regime that gave lip service to democratic principles, but in fact imposed centralized, one-party control (this was known as "democratic centralism").

The rhetoric "evil empire" substantially oversimplifies the complexity of the Soviet experience. Yet there can be no question but that the Soviet political system was totally at odds with western (in particular, American) concepts of democracy. As in the case of the post-Soviet states, there developed some of the external trappings of democracy—a constitution proclaiming to guarantee basic human rights, an extensive body of law and a court system, and various levels of elected organs of government. Until Mikhail Gorbachev, no opposition to centrally determined policies was tolerated, and key decisions were made by the upper echelons of the single, legal, Communist Party. While at the lower levels elected councils (soviets) had some meaningful input into the implementation of government policies, they were only a façade of "constitutional" government. Elections offered no choice of candidates and served merely as a mechanism for affirmation of the regime's claim to legitimacy. This is not to say that local and even national political figures could

or would invariably ignore what were perceived as the needs of ordinary people. However, to the degree that such needs were met, it was not because of anything resembling meaningful political participation. The interests of state, if not purely private interests of the political elite, always ranked ahead of the interests of the commonwealth. In the first instance, the career patterns of those who rose through the political ranks in this system would guarantee that they defend the status quo, their own positions, and those who benefited most directly from their patronage. It is clear that in practice statute law trumped higher law, the commonwealth was not served and freedoms were not protected. Insofar as diversity was encouraged, this was not as a matter of principle, but as a calculated means of ultimately achieving uniformity in society. There was nothing in the Soviet system, as it became entrenched under Stalin beginning in the late 1920s, that could have provided an understanding of democracy and laid the basis for the genuine development of democratic institutions in the event that the Soviet system collapsed. True, as recent and often controversial scholarship has shown, behind the façade of monolithic and harsh politics, Soviet citizens often did develop strategies for defending their private and, on the local level, collective interests. However, such strategies had nothing to do with lofty democratic ideals but rather were simply defensive mechanisms for survival.

By the 1980s, after a long period of economic stagnation, the Soviet system was in crisis. Communist Party First Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev came to power determined to revivify and save the system, but not to change it in any fundamental way. The surprising result of his policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) was to unleash forces which would break up the Soviet Union. The late 1980s saw strikes and demonstrations, and the beginnings of legal, public criticism of the regime and its policies. The pace with which democratic movements developed varied considerably. The Baltic

"Republics" of the Soviet Union (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) had in fact some memory of western democracy from their brief period of independence following World War I. Thus they were among the first to develop serious independence movements and have continued to set an example for the development of democratic institutions in the post-Soviet world. In contrast, the Central Asian republics were artificial national constructs of the Soviet regime and had never previously experienced independence in territory contiguous with their Soviet republic boundaries. As a result they only reluctantly seized the opportunity for independence and a decade after they achieved it are far from having democratic institutions. True, a democratic past as a nation is not necessarily a prerequisite for or guarantee of a democratic future, but having such a past could help a great deal.

Our examination of the case of Central Asia will begin with an overview of political developments since 1991 in each of the five countries—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Then we will synthesize some of the reasons for the failure of democratization and, in conclusion, suggest the principal challenges for the future. Our focus will be on the first three of these countries—the ones of greatest interest to Americans and for the lessons they may teach about the obstacles to democratic development in the region.

KAZAKHSTAN

Considerations of geopolitics, demographics and economic resources are very relevant to an understanding of the politics and societies of the countries of Central Asia. Kazakhstan, the largest of the Central Asian states, is blessed with abundant natural resources (most notably vast petroleum reserves), and shares a long border with Russia. In certain respects, the situation of Kazakhstan is unique, primarily because the titular ethnic group, Kazakhs, at the time of independence constituted less than half the population, being outnumbered by

Russians, Ukrainians and several other ethno-linguistic groups. Kazakhstan was an excellent example of a Soviet republic that was largely an artificial creation: encompassing a region once largely inhabited by Kazakhs or other nomadic peoples who spoke Turkic languages, this area, even well before the Bolshevik Revolution, had come to include large numbers of non-Kazakhs—farmers, miners, and small but growing numbers of urban workers. While some sense of what might constitute Kazakh identity had begun to develop among a few Kazakh intellectuals prior to 1917, the Soviet regime was responsible for institutionalizing a sense of Kazakh cultural nationhood, something to which the non-Kazakhs in Kazakhstan could not be expected to subscribe. Non-Kazakhs tended to adopt the typical colonizers' view of the "natives" and saw no reason to learn the Kazakh language. In fact, the development of the Soviet education system in the republic meant that many educated Kazakhs forgot their own tongue or in most circumstances chose to use the commonly understood language, Russian. Other aspects of Kazakh tradition—

notably their nomadic lifestyle—were viewed as having no place in the modernizing Soviet world, but the process of "modernization" and "sovietization" was not intended to create a sense of community and loyalty to Kazakhstan, as opposed to some sense of belonging to the larger Soviet community and polity.

That Kazakhs resented Russian political and economic hegemony became clear in 1986. The appointment that year of a Russian official as head of the Communist Party in Kazakhstan provoked serious popular protests in the Kazakh capital, Alma Ata. This should not be taken as a sign that government officials could rule only with the consent of the governed, but was at least an indication that popular discontent might well need to be taken into account if the government was to rule effectively. The prime minister of the Kazakh republic at the time was a rising star in the Soviet political elite, Nursultan Nazarbayev, a Kazakh who would be appointed to the key post of Communist Party First Secretary in 1989 and assumed the republic presidency in 1990, and through uncontested "elections" and other maneuvering since, has ensured that he will be president for life. Nazarbayev's career is typical of that of most current Central Asian leaders. He was a Soviet-era bureaucrat who seized the opportunity to consolidate his rule in undemocratic ways and ensure that genuine political pluralism would not emerge.

Some analysts remind us of the difficult situation Nazarbayev has faced precisely because of the ethnic division of the population of Kazakhstan. In his first years in power he seems to have entertained the idea that Kazakhstan would really be better off not as an independent country but rather reunited (or at least closely federated) with some kind of rejuvenated Soviet Union. The danger seemed to be that the northern, primarily non-Kazakh areas of the country would either be annexed by or attempt to split off and join Russia. One of the primary tasks Nazarbayev faced was "nation-building" in a country that had no sense of national unity. For

VIEWPOINTS ON:

KAZAKHSTAN

Nothing much has changed - I've just got older. Five years ago I was unemployed. Then everything got sorted out, and I'm doing the job I was trained for. Were it not for help from my children, things would be harder. A builder's salary now is insufficient to cover expenses and costs. But the thing that is extremely annoying is the lawlessness on the streets and the chaos in state structures. The bureaucrats don't have time for anyone but themselves and lining their own pockets.

-Alexander He, 55, builder



Kazakhstan to develop the basis for a harmonious multi-ethnic future would require, however, that the non-Kazakh population see its interests served by a government in which it played a meaningful role. That has not in fact happened, as Kazakhs dominate the key positions in the government, and real power lies increasingly in the hands of Nazarbayev and his family. Some see in Kazakh politics the influence of the traditional clan structures that antedate the Russian incorporation of Kazakhstan. To the extent that this is true, non-Kazakhs can never have a meaningful place in the system: whereas once it was the Russians who dictated to the Kazakhs, the situation has now been reversed. One consequence of the inability of the government to build the basis for multi-ethnic loyalty is that non-Kazakhs have been leaving the country in large numbers, taking with them some of the educated expertise that is vital for economic development. Where they once were a minority, Kazakhs now form a bare majority in their country, and the balance is continuing to shift in their favor.

In the period between 1990, when partly contested republic elections were held to the national soviet, and 1995, when Nazarbayev dissolved the parliament, there was some evidence of incipient political pluralism. Relatively unfettered political debate was possible, and some potential candidates for the presidency began to emerge. The turning point came in 1995. When the parliament became too obstructionist for Nazarbayev's taste, he dissolved it and ruled by decree for the better part of a year. He also insti-

tuted a new constitution and managed by referendum to extend his presidential term by another five years. The new constitution, which is still in place, reserves for the president political powers that for all intents deprive the parliament of any meaningful role in decisions and appointments. Even though several political parties formed in

the run-up to the presidential election in January 1999, most were, in effect, the creations of the regime. The control of the media largely by members of the president's family has meant that opposition candidates really have no effective means to compete against government candidates. In the past two years, the government has moved against any political figures that

might constitute a threat to the regime, using what now has become the typical tactic of indicting them for corruption or other malfeasance. Surely this is a good example of the pot calling the kettle black, but with the force of the police and judicial apparatus to back up the accusation.

As things currently stand, the political picture in Kazakhstan is bleak by any standards of democracy. The president rules as an autocrat; there is no end to his term in sight, given the fact he is in a position to manipulate the constitution pretty much at will. In the judgment of western observers, the elections that have been held were unfairly contested. The Kazakh media, while still showing surprising signs of vigor, have experienced a steady erosion of their independence. Self-censorship is the norm, the president's family or those close to him control all the major media outlets, and journalists

VIEWPOINTS ON:

UKRAINE

I remember as a child I really thought: "How good that I live in the USSR, the best country in the world!" And now that great country is no more. Even the economy is in tatters. I used to try to sell things at the market, although I have higher education and am a music teacher. Thankfully my husband has now found a good job, so I can stay at home for now with my baby.

-Svetlana, housewife, Kiev





Lavra Monastery, Kiev

whose criticism touches a nerve are silenced. Prosecutors and courts abuse libel laws as a means of silencing alternative views. In short, there is nothing resembling genuine public process and debate. One recent news article raised the possibility that the Nazarbayev regime may have begun to alienate a combination of business and political interests to such a degree that opposition forces will coalesce, but so far that is only speculation.

A key factor in this gloomy picture is the control of economic resources, which in the case of Kazakhstan are substantial. In the first instance this means oil, but there are also valuable mineral resources. Kazakhstan has actively been courted by the international community because of the oil and has benefited from substantial foreign investment. However, contracts

have often been arbitrarily torn up and the fees required to obtain them siphoned into the pockets and foreign bank accounts of the ruling elite rather than being used to address the very serious social and economic problems facing the great majority of the Kazakh population. Only gradually has the Kazakh government taken seriously the necessity of establishing, at least in the commercial sphere, a reliable juridical framework to encourage economic development and investment. However, so far that effort has not extended to creating transparency in many kinds of economic transactions. Political controls may be ensuring stability (the argument is that without authoritarian politics the sprawling country might disintegrate along ethnic or regional lines) but it is a stability designed to protect the interests of the few. Genuine democratization and the relative chaos of democratic politics would not be in the interests of the Kazakh elite. Unfortunately the same picture can be found in most of the other Central Asian states.

UZBEKISTAN

With the largest population of any Central Asian state (some 25 million) and its strategic location in the south-central part of the region, Uzbekistan is considered by some analysts potentially the most important politically of all these states. Unfortunately, its recent political history is strikingly similar to that of Kazakhstan. Authoritarian rule in Uzbekistan has been the norm right from the moment of independence, and by most accounts, its regime is the more repressive of the two. Uzbekistan was another case where on the eve of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, dictates from Moscow provoked the disaffection of at least some in the distant republic. In the Uzbek case, the issue was the arrest of the local party leader on corruption charges stemming from

falsification of the figures for the cotton harvest. As required by Moscow's dictates regarding economic planning, cotton was the principal economic contribution of Uzbekistan to the rest of the Soviet Union. Clearly by the late Soviet period, Uzbek leaders and intellectuals had begun to support policies and ideas aimed at carving out some modicum of meaningful autonomy, at least culturally, from the dictates of Moscow. So there was a basis of incipient dissatisfaction on which independence might be built, even though for ordinary Uzbeks there probably was no articulated sense of national identity.

In contrast to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan is culturally more homogeneous—about 80 percent of the population being Uzbek and a significant percentage Tajik, linguistically different but sharing some of the same cultural values. Without the artificial boundaries erected by the Soviet regime between the Tajiks and Uzbeks, there would undoubtedly have been an even more pronounced sense of sharing in a common culture based to a considerable degree on Central Asian traditions. Ironically, in areas where Tajiks (speaking a language very close to Persian) and Uzbeks (speaking a Turkic language) do not know each other's tongue, the medium of communication is generally Russian, something that is likely to cease being the case with the maturing of the younger generation.

Like Nazarbayev, Islam Karimov, the president of Uzbekistan since independence, simply assumed his new position on the strength of his being first secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party. And like Nazarbayev, he was hesitant to seize the opportunity for independence until he was certain which way power would fall at the time of the August 1991 coup attempt against Gorbachev. Not being faced with the same challenges of location and demographics, as was Nazarbayev, Karimov could more readily use independence to consolidate his power rapidly. At the time of Uzbek independence, the Birlik (Unity) movement, an incipient political party with rather wide backing, had already devel-

oped, its platform advocating political reform and greater government efforts to deal with the ecological and economic problems of Uzbekistan. From the very start of his regime, though, Karimov did all he could to undermine Birlik, first encouraging a split in its ranks, recognizing the splinter Erk (Freedom) group as a legal political party, but then squeezing it out of any meaningful political role. The leaders of both Birlik and Erk were soon forced to flee the country, and by 1993 organized political opposition became impossible. Only recently, the Uzbek government tried to have the Erk leader deported from Europe to face trial at home and a predictable imprisonment. The Uzbek internal security apparatus is pervasive, and especially since an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Karimov in 1999, has stepped up its repression of even the most harmless potential opposition.

As in the case of Kazakhstan, the Uzbek president has manipulated the constitution and elections to extend his term in office into the indefinite future and reserve full authority to make all key political decisions and appointments. There has been some discussion of changing the formal parliamentary structure from unicameral to bicameral, ostensibly to broaden representation and make parliament more effective. However, such a change would have no impact on political decision-making. As in the Kazakh case, the control of regional governments by presidential appointees guarantees that local elections will return the candidates the government wants. We do not always know the details or real significance of traditional clan or regional loyalties in the working of Uzbek politics. Yet it seems clear that, as in the Kazakh case, they play a role. Just as clearly, clan or regional politics have nothing to do with democracy, as we would understand it, since they do not mean that ordinary people have any input into the political process.

From the very beginning of his regime, Karimov's rationale for authoritarian control has been to maintain the stability necessary to ensure badly needed economic growth. Thus, he has

looked to the model of authoritarian regimes in Asia that have had some success in promoting economic development while at the same time resisting political change. Increasingly the Karimov regime has been seen as the main threat to its control the revival of Islam within Uzbekistan and the threat of "militant" Islam from without. In events such as the 1999 bombing in Tashkent, the government has found it convenient to blame "Islamists," even though some observers suspect the perpetrators were potential rivals within the government. Areas such as the Ferghana Valley in Eastern Uzbekistan have been the ones most receptive to a revival of conservative Islamic values, but the government response has been to arrest or (it is assumed) do away with local religious leaders who have become too popular. The American "War on Terrorism" has provided a convenient excuse for Karimov to crack down even more harshly on potential dissidents or leaders of popular movements.

True, not all the targets of Uzbek government action are necessarily harmless to an avowedly secular regime determined to maintain stability. The militant Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), with links to the Taliban and al-Qaeda, has as its goal the violent overthrow of the Uzbek government. The group seems to be small and may have been substantially undermined by losses during its involvement in the recent Afghan war, but it has been able to exploit the porous borders in the mountains south of the Ferghana Valley to create some instability. A potentially more formidable Islamic movement is the transnational Hizb-ut-Tahrir ("Party of Islamic Liberation"), which

claims to support only peaceful change but proclaims its goal to be the establishment of an Islamic caliphate. It too has a base in the Ferghana Valley, although it also has supporters in adjoining areas of southern Kyrgyzstan and in Tajikistan.

As in the case of Kazakhstan, an important subtext for Uzbek politics is control of economic development and resources. While there has been some meaningful foreign investment in Uzbekistan, reportedly the contracts go only to those who are willing to pay substantial bribes to Uzbek officials. The inefficient (and ecologically disastrous) emphasis on cotton cultivation has con-

tinued despite the complaints at the time of independence that this was an exploitative imposition on the Uzbeks by the authorities in Moscow. The government has not done much to alleviate the relative poverty of much of the population. Yet it has lavished resources on public buildings and commemorations of prominent figures of the past, such as the

fifteenth-century conqueror Tamerlane, who have become emblematic of the newly invented "national" history.

Government policies regarding minorities (in particular with regard to the role of the Russian language) have not encouraged their sense of belonging to a common citizenry of Uzbekistan. Many of the best-educated members of the population, who in Soviet "colonial" days occupied key positions, have left. Interethnic tensions thus exist, with the most serious potential problem being the numerical preponderance of Tajiks in some of the historically important centers of the southern part

VIEWPOINTS ON:

ESTONIA

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a great blessing for me because straightaway there were many interesting opportunities for work and study. It gave us the motivation to carry on living. But it's true that in the Soviet Union there was not the need to sell oneself that has appeared with today's market economy.

- Anneli Berends, town official, 41, Tallinn



of the country (notably Bukhara and Khiva). Despite government efforts to develop the symbols of national identity and promote patriotism, it is not clear that much of the population has been much animated by the campaigns. Official patriotism is no substitute for civic engagement. What little there is of the latter is largely the work of NGOs, which must tread carefully so as not to incur the suspicion of the government. Unfortunately, too many of the services the government might reasonably be expected to provide (for example, good medical care) have to be addressed by NGOs, but with limited resources.

KYRGYZSTAN

A country dominated by some of the highest mountains in the world, with a population of somewhat under five million and a host of economic challenges, Kyrgyzstan nonetheless is strategically important because of its border with China. At least in the first years of independence Kyrgyzstan seemed to be developing some genuine features of democracy. In part the explanation is that the current president, Askar Akayev, is the only Central Asian head of state that was not previously a professional Communist Party apparatchik. That said, like his counterparts in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, he has held power since independence. The country preserves some features that might eventually facilitate the establishment of genuinely democratic institutions, but there have been alarming indications that Akayev is following the other Central Asian heads of state along the path to authoritarian rule.

The characteristic pattern here is the strengthening of the executive power of the president. This has been accomplished in part by constitutional change (three such revisions of the Kyrgyz constitution took place in the 1990s), the manipulation of elections, and/or by the circumvention or overruling of parliamentary actions and stifling of political opposition. Important steps in Akayev's

consolidation of power were the 1995 elections, in which key opposition candidates were disqualified at the last minute, and a court ruling in 1998, which allowed him to run for what in effect would be a third (and therefore constitutionally illegal) term in 2000. The politically motivated arrest of a parliamentary critic of Akayev's in early 2002 resulted in public protests that local government officials met with deadly force. As a consequence of continuing public demonstrations, Akayev forced the government to resign, but this did not result in the inclusion of representation from the political opposition when the new government was formed. On the one hand, one might argue that the crisis in 2002 shows the potential for meaningful public impact on the political process, but on the other hand, there is so far no indication that the government is moving away from its policies of undermining the ability of its critics to organize and conduct overt political campaigns. Positions of power are still in the hands of people close to the president and often related to his family, a pattern that is echoed in all the other Central Asian countries today.

As in those other cases, a key issue is control of economic resources, although in some ways Kyrgyzstan has moved much further in the direction of economic liberalization than have its neighbors. Privatization of farming has occurred, and the legal framework for entrepreneurship put in place. Furthermore, the activities of NGOs, many of which have focused on fostering entrepreneurial activity, have been at least mildly encouraged, with many of the NGOs operating with relatively little government interference. This pattern is quite different from what one observes in, say, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Despite this somewhat encouraging picture as far as the institutional framework for economic development is concerned, the economic realities in Kyrgyzstan are grim. The country is poor in economic resources, and independence of farmers resulted not in their becoming prosperous but rather, in too many

instances, in their very quickly going bankrupt. NGO initiatives that succeeded initially in establishing cooperatives of small producers soon saw their work undermined as members of the local elite gained control of production and distribution. The country's economic problems have been exacerbated by the fact that it is dependent on its neighbors for petroleum, and there have already been disputes with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan regarding rights to the water from rivers flowing out of the Kyrgyz Mountains, a significant portion of the irrigation water for some areas of those neighboring countries. Increasing demand for scarce water has the potential to lead to serious conflict in the region.

TAJIKISTAN

In many respects, Tajikistan resembles its somewhat less populous Kyrgyz neighbor to the north. It is a country of high mountains and a weak economy. In 2000, its per-capita gross domestic product (a measure of the total economic output, which can be used to estimate prosperity) was a mere \$154, and the inflation rate was 33 percent. Strategically its long border with Afghanistan complicates its position. If at least for a time the political situation in Kyrgyzstan gave some optimism about the prospects for democracy in Central Asia, events in Tajikistan have, from the start, been cause for pessimism. The current regime of President Imomali Rakhmonov came to power in 1992 after several months of political instability that broke out at the time of independence. For its first year or so, Rakhmonov's government was engaged in a very destructive civil war, which officially came to an end only in 1997 with an agreement that guaranteed the opposition a place in the government. The civil war was a product of regional political factionalism, exacerbated by the country's geography and ethnic divisions and by the interference of neighboring Uzbekistan and of Russia. Unlike in Uzbekistan, where Islamic politics have been uniformly suppressed, in Tajikistan the political land-

scape has included an active moderate Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), which has been allowed to function openly and has collaborated with the government. However, Tajik members of the more "fundamentalist" Hizb-ut-Tahrir (see above) have been arrested. There are indications that growing discontent at the government's inability to address basic economic and social problems is driving many to support the groups with more radical programs. In one assessment, "by 1997 Tajikistan was effectively a failed state, with only the outward appearance of coherence," and it seems clear that in many areas until very recently the government has been too weak to curb the power of local warlords. There has been some recent but still very limited progress in overcoming regional divisions.

The most recent elections—for president in 1999 and parliament in 2000—are generally regarded as seriously flawed. The vast majority of parliamentary seats are occupied by members of the president's own party; analysts have noted how Rakhmonov's tactics have fragmented the opposition and thereby rendered it practically meaningless. At the same time, it seems as though the strength of regional factions may have prevented the president from consolidating his power in the same way that Karimov in Uzbekistan has done. Patronage and traditional loyalties are still central to the politics of the country. Whether Rakhmonov will step down when his term ends in 2006 or whether he will manipulate the system to extend it as his counterparts have been doing remains to be seen.

Among the few encouraging developments in Tajikistan is the survival of a rather weak independent media. This is in sharp contrast to the total government control over the media in Uzbekistan. However, as in Kazakhstan and increasingly in Kyrgyzstan, the Tajik media have come under government pressure, and there have been some egregious examples of intervention to silence critics. Apart from government actions, the media in Tajikistan as in other parts of Central Asia have struggled for want of economic resources.

Advertising revenues are practically non-existent; most people cannot afford newspapers. Television does not reach many remote areas, and its content often has little of substance on important current events. Rumor is a poor substitute for real news, which might help to create an informed public.

Tajikistan was the poorest of all the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union, and little has occurred since independence to improve the bleak economic picture. This fact and its sharing of a porous border with Afghanistan have contributed to its unenviable reputation as a major channel for drug traffic. One of the few bright spots in building for the future has been the activity of the Aga Khan's programs to encourage self-help development projects and education. The eastern third of Tajikistan (Mountain Badakhshan) is inhabited largely by the Pamiris, who are Ismaili Muslims and whose spiritual leader is the Aga Khan. These development initiatives have involved safeguards to ensure that funding is not simply pocketed by the local elite. An important investment for the future is the establishment of a new university, which the Aga Khan is funding.

TURKMENISTAN

In a discussion of democratization in Central Asia, Turkmenistan requires few words indeed, because there has been no democratization and will be none so long as the current head of state, Saparmurad Niyazov, remains in power. His is a case of a Stalinist personality cult so extreme that Stalin himself might have blushed. It is not uncommon for Niyazov to be characterized as a buffoon for the extremes to which he has taken this cult. In fact, the strategic location of the country on the southern flank of the former Soviet Central Asia (Iran and Afghanistan occupy its southern borders) and its control of immense reserves of natural gas mean that Turkmenistan has to be taken seriously. Unfortunately, for all the potential wealth, ordinary people have seen few benefits, since so many

resources have been used to build extravagant presidential palaces, mosques, gilded statues of the great leader that rotate to face the sun, and luxury hotels that remain largely empty since so few foreigners have any reason to visit the country. The only significant opposition voices to have emerged are from members of the elite who dared to speak up only when safely abroad in diplomatic or other capacities. The government response, naturally, has been to accuse them of various kinds of malfeasance and try to secure their extradition.

THE REASONS WHY

With these bleak histories of the past decade in Central Asian politics as background, we might summarize some of the key institutional features of these states to help us understand the lack of democratic development.

First, though, it is worthwhile emphasizing that the terminology of democratic politics may conceal practices that are anything but democratic. Even the U.S. State Department, which justifiably assesses the human rights records of these regimes in such negative terms, describes them as having republican governments and notes the existence of constitutions that ostensibly frame a political system of checks and balances, guarantee basic rights, and provide for elections. Were constitutional law to be upheld in a meaningful way, then at least some meaningful elements of what we would judge democracy might be found. Unfortunately, much of what we see on paper has little to do with anything but the most superficial aspects of political reality.

Most Western observers of politics agree on a range of features characteristic of democracies. We talk of the ability of the public to exercise citizenship, which requires that there be institutions of civil society providing a sphere of activity autonomous from government control and direction. Furthermore, there has to be an administrative and legal framework that can function honest-

ly and transparently. Diversity of opinion and individual rights must be protected. Government must be responsive to the public. There have to be mechanisms such as fair and free elections to hold those in government accountable. The public must have the opportunity to be informed from sources that may provide a diversity of views. Thus, an independent media is important. Many would insist as well that there couldn't be meaningful democracy without the existence of private enterprise and a strong middle class.

Now, we need not argue whether all such features must be present for a political system to be democratic. The important question here is whether any of them are to be found in Central Asia. For the most part, the answer is no.

The challenges to democratic development exist at all levels. Recent analysis has suggested that to a considerable degree the nature of elite politics, inherited from the Soviet era, is responsible. Key figures in the political leadership of all these countries were also Soviet-era functionaries, educated in a system that was anti-democratic, and in the post-independence era, dedicated to preserving their political power by any means. Close analysis of the makeup of the elites ten years after independence does reveal a substantial representation of a new membership, but these individuals do not owe their emergence to any kind of democratic process but rather to their being co-opted into a system already in place and enjoying the patronage of the leadership that emerged in the 1990s. In many instances

the new elite's basis for power is its control of economic resources rather than its political background. A key question for any attempt to project the future of politics in Central Asia is whether the current elite will come to realize that its interests may not be best served by encouraging meaningful popular participation in government. So far that has not happened, and politics are governed from the top down. Some may argue, not without justification,

that the current shape of politics is simply a continuation of the previous traditions in many parts of Central Asian society, whereby patronage and power were personalized and generally exercised through clan or tribal structures that guaranteed loyalty. It would probably be a mistake, however, to assume that such tradition is so entrenched that it has to govern politics into the indefinite future.

At least for now, the control over politics by authoritarian leaders has been ensured by their ability to manipulate constitutions, elections and elected institutions. Thus, presidential terms keep being extended, political parties or opposition politicians discredited or subjected to persecution, and political positions filled by appointees or by those selected by such appointees. While all the Central Asian states have some kind of parliament, none of those bodies has for long, if at all, been able to operate as a counterbalance to overwhelming executive power. Nowhere in Central Asia are there opposition political parties with an institutional base and the means to contest elections

VIEWPOINTS ON:

UZBEKISTAN

Our family came to Uzbekistan in the 1970s. We didn't think it would be for long, but it turned out to be for 30 years. I've always wanted to go back to my homeland, but the children were at school, and then life got more difficult. They declared independence. At the beginning of the 1990s, when anti-European feelings ran high, the children went back to Russia. It's been difficult for me, of course, and I'm dependent on money from my son. I will move back too when they have enough money.

-Lidia Aleksandrovna, pensioner



effectively. Governments have erected barriers to registration and have devised means to fragment the opposition. Those who might represent serious opposition have been suppressed, leaders arrested or driven abroad.

Such actions have been possible in part because of the control and manipulation of the judiciary. None of the Central Asian countries has an independent judicial branch, since in all cases the extension of executive power has given the presidents or the ministers they appoint the control over judicial appointments. This is merely a continuation of the situation that existed in the Soviet Union, which, of course, under Stalin was known for its show trials illustrating how the regime wished to give an aura of legality to its suppression of real or imagined political opponents. Politically motivated legal proceedings are among the human rights abuses catalogued in detail in the U. S. State Department's reports.

Such abuse of government power is facilitated by the weakness if not total absence of independent media. A signal of what would be the norm in Uzbekistan was seen in the first days of independence in 1991, when the local government-controlled media, in response to criticisms raised in Moscow (where a substantial freedom of the media had developed), printed facsimiles of documents purporting to show that the Uzbek media were independent. Such "documentation," of course, was no different from a constitution that claims to guarantee political freedoms at the same time that the police are rounding up any who spoke out against the government. In Kazakhstan, which at one time had a fairly vigorous independent media, increasingly the noose has been tightening; most significantly, the sale of licenses to authorize radio and television broadcasting has resulted in these key media ending up in the hands of members of President Nazarbayev's family or their close associates. Deprived of independent media outlets, potential opposition political movements are severely undermined if they wish

to gain a following and be able to compete in elections. The populace may know of official malfeasance on the basis of personal experience, but without critical investigative journalism, such malfeasance is generally unlikely to spark coordinated movements for political change. A profound level of corruption distinguishes all the Central Asian countries, which is totally antithetical to any possibility of democratic development.

It is not enough to note that "opposition" exists and thus to see this as evidence of democratic possibilities within these Central Asian states. Opposition movements may themselves not be dedicated to or understand democratic principles. Wishing to replace an existing regime may mean merely wishing to exercise power and ensure privilege in the same fashion. For opposition movements to hold the promise of real democratic pluralism requires that there be an accepted legal and institutional framework to support democracy. Such a framework does not currently exist in any of the Central Asian countries.

THE FUTURE

Is there any hope for democratic change in Central Asia? Most analysts are justifiably pessimistic. Even Kyrgyzstan, the one Central Asian country that seemed to hold promise for real democracy, has moved decisively in an authoritarian direction. All the political leaders have taken steps to extend their terms in power and ensure that the electoral process will not dethrone them. The suppression of opposition figures proceeds apace. We may not even begin to sense the possibilities for the future until the time comes when the current presidents die or, possibly, attempt to transfer power to designated successors.

Given the depth of economic and social problems in most of these countries and the disparities between the wealth of small elites and the mass of their populations, the transition in political power could well create instability, which would then be

exacerbated by possible discontent. We have seen only a few hints of such discontent so far (e.g., in the recent political confrontation in Kyrgyzstan); so it would be unwise to project genuine popular revolution. Even if it were to happen, the result, as we know from the experience of other revolutions, may not be the establishment of democracy. Many have noted how the policies of the current regimes seem to be having as an unintended consequence the radicalization of groups that might otherwise be willing to participate peacefully in the political process. In particular such observations have been made about moderate Islamic groups, suppressed by the government of Uzbekistan and to a considerable degree discredited in Tajikistan. Thus in certain regions, especially among the young population, which seems to have little hope for the future, there has emerged some support for radical Islamic political movements. Ironically, then, the suppression of moderate Muslims in the name of suppressing dangerous Islamic radicalism has backfired.

Another challenge for the future lies in the multi-ethnic nature of the Central Asian states. Is it possible for political stability to be maintained and democracy to develop in a situation where national borders often divide major ethnic groups and where governments may be adopting policies that emphasize exclusiveness and unity rather than the creation of a framework for pluralism? Many analysts agree that in the short term, the most important priority has to be simply the creation of democratic institutions, but at the same time the issue of pluralism will need to be addressed. Perhaps the most serious challenge is in Kazakhstan, where Kazakhs currently have political preference for almost all the key government positions. The out-migration of non-Kazakhs since independence and high birth rates have shifted the population balance—Kazakhs are as yet only slightly more than half the population. Apart from Kazakhstan, there are other areas where the potential for ethnic violence and state disintegration is substantial. On the eve of the

disintegration of the Soviet Union, there were major riots pitting Uzbeks against Kyrgyz in the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh at the head of the volatile Ferghana Valley. The patchwork nature of national borders separating Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in that region is a source of continuing tension. In Uzbekistan prior

VIEWPOINTS ON:

LITHUANIA



In 1991 I unexpectedly lost my job and had to begin a new life. For a few years I used to travel to Turkey with large suitcases, buy cheap goods, and sell them here at the market. I remember how ashamed I was when I met people at the market who remembered me from my past life. But in time those exhausting trips raised enough capital for my friends and I to open a hairdressers.

-Rasa Martsinkyavichnyė, 53, hairdresser

to 1991, there were serious incidents in which Uzbeks set upon a Meshkhetian Turkish minority (a population that had been forcibly resettled in Central Asia by Stalin). The current Uzbek government policy of undermining opportunities for Tajik-language education has potentially serious consequences, given the preponderance of Tajiks in some of the southern regions of Uzbekistan. It is not clear that the current government in Tajikistan can be expected to hold together a country that likewise has substantial ethnic diversity and strong regional centers of political power. The list of such problems can readily be multiplied, and the dangers posed by nationalist exclusionary politics are real.

One of the hopes for democratic change is to build gradually, from the ground up, the institutions of civil society. Ironically, perhaps, in the eyes

of one astute student of Central Asia, one of the most important building blocks in the foundation of what might become "civil society" is the Soviet-era institution of the Collective Farm, which has served as a mechanism to provide for the needs of its members in a variety of ways. However, the collective farms institutionalize patronage, not democratic participation, and cannot be expected to serve as the basis for the development of private entrepreneurship. The Uzbek government has also promoted the urban mahallas, local neighborhood councils that can serve as a kind of low-level mechanism for administration and welfare. However, this does not mean the strengthening of institutions that might lead to democratic change. Rather, what we have here is the example of co-opting communal institutions to serve the government's purpose.

If institutions of civil society are to develop, the responsibility will probably fall to NGOs, for the creation of which there really is no precedent in the region. A substantial amount of foreign investment has supported their establishment, but with very uneven results. Among the more significant efforts have been ones aimed at developing standards of professional journalism, at addressing serious medical and environmental problems, and at developing the financial mechanisms to support small enterprises. The greatest successes are to be seen in Kyrgyzstan, in large part because there the government has felt less threatened by NGO activity than have the governments of the other Central Asian countries. Notably, the climate in Turkmenistan has been thoroughly hostile to NGO development; in Uzbekistan NGOs live in the shadow of government disapproval. Unfortunately, even where NGO development has not been hampered by government interference, it has been difficult to develop an understanding that the organizations are not simply devices for funneling foreign funds into private pockets. The greatest successes have come when communities have been brought to understand that NGO activity can empower them to solve local problems pre-

cisely because a concentration of even meager local resources and the will to cooperate in their use can often make a significant impact. Whether this NGO development can serve as the catalyst for what might become meaningful local political participation remains to be seen.

There is some potential for pressure by the international community to bring about political change in Central Asia. Clearly, at least some of the governments are very sensitive to international criticism, since that can affect the levels of economic support and military aid that they may receive. So far, it seems that the United States, in its eagerness to negotiate for use of Central Asia as a staging area for the Afghan War, has not done enough to insist on the necessity for meaningful political change and the observance of basic norms of human rights. There is a real danger here of providing too much support for repressive regimes that may prove to be a cause for instability rather than guarantors of the future stability of the region. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has done some monitoring of elections and is involved in other projects that could promote democracy and economic development. So far, however, the OSCE commitment to the region is very small and would need to be substantially increased if it is to have much impact.

In conclusion, it is clear that Western optimism about democratic development out of the ruins of the Soviet Union was naive and arguably based more on wishful thinking than on any kind of informed assessment of political, economic and social realities. Having seen the realities that have emerged even in a country as well endowed with natural resources as Kazakhstan, some predict not success in state-building, but, rather, a failure akin to the one in a country equally blessed with natural wealth, Nigeria. The concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a corrupt elite is both symptomatic of and responsible for the dismal political and economic picture there. Others

would compare Central Asian states with South America, where some countries are still struggling with serious economic and political problems, but the democratic process has also seen some successes. However, there is little merit to the arguments of some Central Asian presidents such as Nazarbayev and Karimov that authoritarian controls in the short term are essential to maintain stability that can ensure democratic development in the future. There is at present no clear indication of how a transition to a democratic future might take place. Increasingly, the predictions are that the current stability will ultimately result in violent instability unless mechanisms are developed to encourage meaningful participation in the political process by groups that are being suppressed in the current situation.

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Central Asia is M. Holt Ruffin and Daniel Waugh, eds., *Civil Society in Central Asia* (University of Washington Press, 1999), which includes essays by Central Asian activists.

There is a substantial literature containing scholarly analysis and debate on specific topics relevant to the question of democratization in the former Soviet Union. See, for example, Vladimir Shlapentokh et al., eds., *The New Elite in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (Texas A & M Press, 1999), which includes an excellent analysis of the Kazakh political elite by Rustem Kadyzhanov and an overly optimistic analysis of the elite in Uzbekistan by William Kandinov. While the main focus is not on Central Asia, there are some stimulating ideas in Graham Smith, *The Post-Soviet States: Mapping the Politics of Transition* (Arnold, 1999). The title notwithstanding, a lot of relevance to Central Asia can be found in Will Kymlicka and Magda Opalski, eds., *Can Liberal Pluralism Be Exported? Western Political Theory and Ethnic Relations in Eastern Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2001). One essay deals specifically with Uzbekistan.

Fortunately for those wishing to keep up with current politics in Central Asia, there are several excellent resources available through the Internet. In addition to short daily news reports, regular reporting of some substance is available in the weekly "RFE/RL Central Asia Report" from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. It is archived at www.rferl.org/centralasia/, and one may receive the weekly electronic mailing free by subscribing at www.rferl.centralasia/contact.asp. One-stop shopping linking the RFERL daily reports, but also providing a variety of other analysis, materials, and links, is to be found at the Soros Foundation's Eurasianet (www.eurasianet.org). Another good source of analytical news articles is the bi-weekly Central Asia Caucasus Analyst (www.cacianalyst.org), published and archived on the web by the Central Asia Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins University. A significant focus of each issue is on the Caucasus; there is an emphasis

on the international dimensions of the news stories and on what we might call "political economy."

Several recent reports on Central Asia that can be read on-line or downloaded in printable Adobe format (.pdf-format) have been produced by the International Crisis Group (www.crisisweb.org). These are written by some of the best-informed experts on the region. While the purpose of the reports is to point out areas of crisis that should be of concern both to the governments in Central Asia and to the international community, the reports generally provide a substantial amount of carefully researched background material and also draw upon extensive interviewing. The reports devoted to specific countries are the single best source of information about each country's respective recent political history. The ICG reports include Uzbekistan at Ten: Repression and Instability (21 August 2001); Kyrgyzstan at Ten: Trouble in the "Island of Democracy" (28 August 2001); Kyrgyzstan's Political Crisis: An Exit Strategy (20 August

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While representing the official viewpoint of the U.S. government, the U.S. State Department (www.state.gov) does offer on-line background information for Central Asian countries and, in separate files, annual, detailed human rights reports. The information in the latter is probably reliable and seems to be based, in the first instance, on material gathered by international human rights organizations. Further information on human rights issues can be found in the very extensive materials made available in electronic form by Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

A Harvard Ph.D. in History, Professor Daniel Waugh teaches in three departments at the University of Washington (Seattle): History, International Studies, and Slavic Languages and Literature. He is a former Chairman of the Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies Program there. Much of his published research is on early modern Russia. He has also co-edited (with M. Holt Ruffin) *Civil Society in Central Asia* and (with Frith Maier) the forthcoming *Vagabond Life: The Caucasus Writings of George Kennan*. His current project is an edition of the letters of C.P. Skrine, the British Consul in Kashgar (Xinjiang) in the early 1920s. Professor Waugh teaches a variety of courses on Central Asia and is the project director of Silk Road Seattle (www.uwch.org/silkroad), a significant electronic resource for the study and teaching of historic interactions across Eurasia.

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At his retirement in 2006, Daniel Waugh was a member of three UW departments: History, The Jackson School of International Studies, and Slavic Languages and Literatures. While he came to Seattle as an early Russia specialist, he also taught Byzantine history and the history of Central Asia. He edits *The Silk Road*, the journal of the Silkroad Foundation on whose board he serves, and has the primary responsibility for "Silk Road Seattle" (<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad>), a major resource for learning about the early history and culture of Eurasia. From 1991 to 1996 he chaired the Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies Program in JSIS. His CV, a list of publications and copies of a good many of them are linked to his personal website <<http://faculty.washington.edu/dwaugh/index.html>>.