Chapter-II
Ethnicity in Central Asia

Historical Background

The first people known to have occupied Central Asia were Iranian nomads who arrived from the northern grasslands of what is now Uzbekistan sometime in the first millennium B.C. These nomads, who spoke Iranian dialects, settled in Central Asia and began to build an extensive irrigation system along the rivers of the region. At this time, cities such as Bukhoro (Bukhara) and Samarqand (Samarkand) began to appear as centres of government and culture. By the fifth century B.C., the Bactrian, Soghdian, and Tokharian states dominated the region. As China began to develop its silk trade with the West, Iranian cities took advantage of this commerce by becoming centres of trade. Using an extensive network of cities and settlements in the province of Mawarannahr (a name given the region after the Arab conquest) in Uzbekistan and farther east in what is today China's Xinjiang Uigur Autonomous Region, the Soghdian intermediaries became the wealthiest of these Iranian merchants. Because of this trade on what became known as the Silk Route, Bukhoro and Samarqand eventually became extremely wealthy cities, and at times Mawarannahr was one of the most influential and powerful Persian provinces of antiquity.

The wealth of Mawarannahr was a constant magnet for invasions from the northern steppes and from China. Numerous intra-regional wars were fought between Soghdian states and the other states in Mawarannahr, and the Persians and the Chinese were in perpetual conflict over the region. Alexander the Great

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1. V.V. Barthhold, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia*, (Leiden), 1956, pp. 145-61
2. Ibid., pp. 167-89
conquered the region in 328 B.C., bringing it briefly under the control of his Macedonian Empire.

In the same centuries, however, the region also was an important centre of intellectual life and religion. Until the first centuries after Christ, the dominant religion in the region was Zoroastrianism, but Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Christianity also attracted large numbers of followers.³

**The Early Islamic Period**

The conquest of Central Asia by Islamic Arabs, which was completed in the eighth century A.D., brought to the region a new religion and culture that continue to be dominant. The Arabs first invaded Mawarannahr in the middle of the seventh century through sporadic raids during their conquest of Persia. Available sources on the Arab conquest suggest that the Soghdians and other Iranian peoples of Central Asia were unable to defend their land against the Arabs because of internal divisions and the lack of strong indigenous leadership. The Arabs, on the other hand, were led by a brilliant general, Qutaybah ibn Muslim, and they also were highly motivated by the desire to spread their new faith (the official beginning of which was in A.D. 622). Because of these factors, the population of Mawarannahr was easily conquered. The new religion brought by the Arabs spread gradually in the region. The native cultures, which in some respects already were being displaced by Persian influences before the Arabs arrived, were displaced farther in the ensuing centuries. Nevertheless, the destiny of Central Asia as an Islamic region was firmly established by the Arab victory over the Chinese armies in 750 in a battle at the Talas River.

Under Arab rule, Central Asia retained much of its Iranian character, remaining an important centre of culture and trade for centuries after the Arab conquest. However, until the tenth century the language of government, literature, and commerce was Arabic. Mawarannahr continued to be an important political player in regional affairs, as it had been under various Persian dynasties. In fact, the Abbasid Caliphate, which ruled the Arab world for five centuries beginning in 750, was established thanks in great part to assistance from Central Asian supporters in their struggle against the then-ruling Umayyad Caliphate.

During the height of the Abbasid Caliphate in the eighth and the ninth centuries, Central Asia and Mawarannahr experienced a truly golden age. Bukhoro became one of the leading centres of learning, culture, and art in the Muslim world, its magnificence rivalling contemporaneous cultural centres such as Baghdad, Cairo, and Cordoba. Some of the greatest historians, scientists, and geographers in the history of Islamic culture were natives of the region.

As the Abbasid Caliphate began to weaken and local Islamic Iranian states emerged as the rulers of Iran and Central Asia, the Persian language began to regain its pre-eminent role in the region as the language of literature and government. The rulers of the eastern section of Iran and of Mawarannahr were Persians. Under the Samanids and the Buyids, the rich culture of Mawarannahr continued to flourish.

The Mongol Period

The Mongol invasion of Central Asia is one of the turning points in the history of the region. That event left imprints that were still discernible in the early twentieth century. The Mongols had such a lasting impact because they established
the tradition that the legitimate ruler of any Central Asian state could only be a blood descendant of Chinggis Khan.\(^4\)

The Mongol conquest of Central Asia, which took place from 1219 to 1225, led to a wholesale change in the population of Mawarannahr. The conquest quickened the process of Turkification in the region because, although the armies of Chinggis Khan were led by Mongols, they were made up mostly of Turkic tribes that had been incorporated into the Mongol armies as the tribes were encountered in the Mongols' southward sweep. As these armies settled in Mawarannahr, they intermixed with the local populations, increasingly making the Iranians a minority. Another effect of the Mongol conquest was the large-scale damage the warriors inflicted on cities such as Bukhoro and on regions such as Khorazm. As the leading province of a wealthy state, Khorazm was treated especially severely. The irrigation networks in the region suffered extensive damage that was not repaired for several generations.

At present Central Asian region covers five nation-states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. These republics were part of the Soviet Union before gaining their independence in 1991. Central Asia is bordered on the north by the Russian Federation, on the south by Iran and Afghanistan, and on the east by the Chinese region of Xinjiang-Uigur. The western boundary of Central Asia is marked by the Caspian Sea. The topography of the region is characterised by several major mountain ranges, including the Tien Shan range and the Pamirs, and extensive deserts, principally the Kara-Kum and Kyzyl-Kum.

Central Asia covers a large part of the geographical region of Turkestan. The principal rivers of the area are the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya. The territories of Central Asia first came under the influence of Russia only in the mid-to late 19th century.

The Russian domination over the whole of Central Asia was established by the late 19th century. Conquest began when the southern part of what is now Kazakhstan and the Kokand Khanate were merged in 1876 to form the province of Turkestan, while the Khiva and Bukhara khanates became vassal states of Russia. Transcaspia (present-day Turkmenistan) was incorporated into the province of Turkestan in 1884. This nominal division of the region ended in 1917–18, with the advent of the Soviet regime. In April 1918 Turkestan became the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and in 1920 the Khan of Khiva and the Emir of Bokhara were deposed and People's Republics set up. The formation of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist republic was the first step towards the founding of national states by the people of Central Asia and as such it was an event of great political significance in their national development.5

Major administrative reorganisations in the 1920s and 1930s shaped the modern regional political boundaries, with the creation (in 1924–25) of the Uzbek and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR); the Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR); and the Kara-Kirgiz, Kara-Kalpak, and Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous oblast. The Tajik ASSR became an SSR in 1929; the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Oblast an ASSR in 1932, which was subsequently incorporated in the Uzbek SSR in 1936; and the Kara-Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast

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became the Kirgiz SSR in 1936. In this same year, areas in neighbouring republics that were populated by Kazakhs were united with Kazakhstan. 6

In the former USSR, the peoples of various ethnic backgrounds intermingled as part of the programme to achieve integration based on Soviet identity. In other words, there was no serious struggle or wish for independence, and Moscow gave independence to these republics, perhaps faster than they themselves would have sought it. In the post-Bolshevik revolution, the Soviet leaders kept the Czarist political structure in as it was for a while in Central Asia. The steppe region became the Kirghiz (or Kazakh) Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), and the Turkistan region became Turkistan ASSR. Both were subjects of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). In 1924, the Turkistan ASSR was divided into Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and both given the status of union republic. Tajikistan was created as an autonomous republic of Uzbekistan later. Kirghizstan, which belonged to the former Turkistan ASSR became an autonomous region and was incorporated into the RSFSR. After two years Tajikistan became also a union republic and the Hojent region of Uzbekistan was transferred to Tajikistan. The Kirghiz (or more correctly the Kazakh) ASSR had an autonomous status and belonged to the RSFSR until December 1936. 7 Furthermore, the Kirghiz ASSR gained its union status in the same year as Tajikistan. Karakalpakstan, which belonged to Kazakhstan was transferred in 1936 to Uzbekistan with the status of ASSR. 8 All these political decisions were taken by Moscow without any regard to the local people. In Samarkand for example, a large number of ethnic Tajiks living were incorporated in Uzbek SSR. In other words all

6 Devendra Kaushik, op cit. p. 182
7 Ibid. p. 132
8 Ibid., p. 135
these Central Asian territories were artificial creations. This shows that when
Moscow created these new borders it did not take any geographical, historical or
demographic realities into consideration.

Geopolitical Importance of Central Asia

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, many both inside of Central
Asia and out assumed that the most important factor that would define the future of
the countries and peoples of the region was Islam. Consequently, many especially
in the West suggested that these countries would inevitably gravitate toward the
West Asia and South Asia and that there would be a significant competition for
influence in Central Asia between the secular Islam of Turkey and the more radical
variant of Iran. 9

That "new great game" between Ankara and Tehran, however, never really
happened. Despite Turkey's advantages in terms of language, resources, and
secularism, Ankara was effectively eliminated from this supposed competition
because it was geographically distant and because nothing coming from Central
Asia could go to Turkey except by crossing a third country. At the same time, Iran
enjoyed the great advantage of geography: Were it not for the poverty of the
Iranian government, its isolation from the West, and the antagonism of Shia and
Sunni Muslims, Iran would have been the bridge to the West. 10

But if this game never happened, it nonetheless highlights an important
point: geography matters profoundly in international affairs -- where a country
stands depends to a large extent on where it sits, but geography is not something
that exists entirely outside of the minds of the people who are on any given map. In

9 Paul A. Goble, "Back on the Map: The Geopolitics of Central Asia", Central Asia and
Caucasus Chronicle, no. 2 (8) 1997, p.16.
10 Ibid., p.19
sum, physical geography is important in the relations among states, but how states view it, that is, how they conceive their political and cultural location, may matter as much or even more.

Following the recovery of their independence, the five countries of Central Asia have had to make decisions about three different kinds: the old model that linked them into the Soviet Union and still ties them to Russia, the model of their own region that defines both its limits and their interrelationships, and the new and larger model that defines their relations with various states and regions beyond their own.

**Breaking from the Old Model**

For most of this century, the five countries of Central Asia -- Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan -- were subordinate to Moscow and subsumed in the model defined by Russia. That model was largely accepted both by the Central Asians themselves and by most outsiders. But in 1991, that model was tossed into history, a development that placed enormous challenges on both these countries and other states as well.

Many in Central Asia assumed that their political independence meant that they would have the freedom to choose their orientation and place on the map of the world. Some looked to the Islamic states for inspiration; others looked to the "little dragons" of the Pacific rim; and still others looked to the secular West.  

But very quickly, the Central Asians learned that changing maps by itself did not mean changing geography. On the one hand, the Russian presence could not be ignored. Russia was and remains the most powerful influence in the region. Although it is true that migration of Slavs in general and Russians in particular are

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11 Ibid., p.21
substantially high in numbers—many Russians decided to stay back because in their perception they have fear that if they return to their original homeland, they may not be treated properly. Secondly, according to their qualifications also they may or may not get suitable jobs. These two aspects, to some extent are responsible for hindering them psychologically from leaving Central Asia.

And on the other hand, the Central Asians had to confront a fact that many of them still do not want to acknowledge: They are a landlocked region, surrounded by countries either locked in their own problems or interested in projecting their influence on the Central Asian states. And the Central Asians had to face the fact that while their region is immensely rich potentially, it is also fundamentally poor in fact—not because of the qualities of its populations, but rather because of the difficulties of exporting its resources to create wealth. Nevertheless, despite Central Asia’s geo-political and social affinity with Russia can be traced back to nearly three/four centuries. In the post-independence phase the Central Asian States are guided by real politik, found out that Russia cannot offer them substantial help, most importantly the economic assistance, which is an essential ingredient in sustaining these States and in improving their peoples’ standard of living. Secondly, as more and more of Western countries, United States, Japan and China offer them economic assistance, technological know-hows to exploit their natural resources, so that naturally Central Asian States are turning their affinities to these countries rather than Russia. 

A Model of their own

Having achieved independence, the Central Asian states have also had to draw a new model for themselves. Are they five different countries with few

12 Devendra Kaushik, op cit. p.11
common interests, or are they a single people divided by Stalin's policies of delimitation that must reunite? Are the divisions among them natural or are they the products of Russian imperialism in the past or even now? And equally important, what are the external borders of the place called "Central Asia"? As every student of Central Asia knows, the divisions now in Central Asia reflect the imposition on the region of a European model of identity and development, a model that fails to capture the nature of identity in this part of the world. But to say that is not to say that there are not real differences among these peoples and these states.

Some like the borders of Kazakhstan were imposed from the outside in order to make Central Asian unity impossible. Almaty cannot act exclusively like a Central Asian country or it risks losing control of its ethnic Russian north, but unless it does, Central Asians will not unite because they are unwilling to submit to Uzbekistan's dominance. \(^{13}\)

Drawing a map of the region then presupposes that the countries acknowledge their commonalities and their differences, drawing on commonalities where they can and recognising their differences where they must. And willingness on the part of all concerned to recognise that the map is more complicated than anyone inside or outside had assumed.

But these difficulties within Central Asia as it is commonly understand pale into insignificance relative to defining the limits of Central Asia, the outer line on this new regional map. In Soviet times, the region was always called "Central Asia and Kazakhstan," a reflection of the enormous differences between the former and the latter. Such changes in mental maps are not trivial. If one thinks of Central Asia

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p.38
in one way, certain policies become inevitable. And they become impossible, if one thinks of it in a different way. Moreover, if Central Asians define their region more broadly, then their relations with the outside world will change as well.

Finding a Place on the Map of the World

Because most people saw Central Asia as an appendage of either the Soviet world or the Islamic world, few understood that it would inevitably have other ties as well. Some of these are defined by economics. Given that Central Asia is labour rich but capital poor, it was inevitable that these countries should have linked up with the capital-rich but labour poor states of the Pacific rim.\(^{14}\)

Others are defined by politics. Some are interested in containing Russian power while other people are interested in promoting it. And still others are defined by culture, with some being interested in including Central Asia into the Muslim and even Arab world and other people being interested in preventing that from happening. And because of these multiple and competing interests, Central Asians have a greater chance to define themselves and their map than ever before. They can balance these various forces and thus achieve much, as soon as they recognise that they are very much back on the map and it is one of their own choosing.

Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity in Central Asia

Ethnic identity reflects the awareness of the difference between 'us' and 'them'. It can serve as the basis for the formation of nationalist ideology and provide a sufficient level of group solidarity for the outbreak of short-term ethnic violence, which is often misinterpreted as some type of nationalist upsurge or

\(^{14}\) Ibid., p.42
"ethnic explosion". In present conditions, under the impact of mass media, modern communications and demonstration effects, ethnic identity, having provided the initial push for the emergence of nationalist ideology, is being increasingly shaped by the latter. Ethnic nationalism changes ethnic identity, and the modified identity provides for the further development of nationalist ideology, which supplies rationalisation and provides guidance for organised nationalist movements. As a result, ethnic mobilisation and counter-mobilisation often produce a snowball effect, leading in many cases to ethnic confrontation, large-scale violence and even ethnic wars, i.e. a new type of war, different from both civil and interstate wars. These developments go a long way toward overthrowing the wishful conclusions of liberal social scientists that "where ideologies are in conflict, the appeal to the imagined community [i.e. nation] appears to have defeated all challengers" and that nationalism "is no longer a major vector of historical development". For better or for worse, developments in many regions during the last few years have proved the opposite to be true. In a modern context the origins of nations, as traced by many scholars, particularly by Anthony D. Smith, are relevant for the purposes of studying specific features of particular identities and nationalism. E.J. Hobsbawm has pointed out that the nation "is a social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state, the nation state. Gellner, stresses the element of artefact, invention and social

engineering which enters into the making of nations.\textsuperscript{18} while Benedict Anderson used the term "imagined communities" as a title of his book on nations.\textsuperscript{19}

In the modern world, ethnic identity is far from being a universal phenomenon, ethnic identity tends to be diluted or at least irrelevant in several situations. In ethnically homogeneous areas, ethnicity is in a dormant state until awakened by direct or indirect contact with members of other ethnic groups. Ethnic identity can be irrelevant in a multiethnic milieu, especially in large cities, provided that the diverse ethnic groups are not racially different and there is a lingua franca accepted by everybody. Moreover, under normal conditions, there is an obvious trend towards cultural integration and the emergence of supra-ethnic communities in multiethnic countries. In the erstwhile USSR until the late 80s, millions of persons, particularly those of mixed ethnic origins, identified themselves as members of the "Soviet people". Finally, the relevance of ethnic identity even for members of a particular ethnic group may vary widely, swinging between the "melting pot" and "ethnic paradox" extremes. Thus, in the Soviet Union of the late 80s there was an upsurge of ethnic solidarity, which is still going on in many republics of the Russian Federation and minority areas of other republics, while after the emergence of the independent states, non-ethnic cleavages have become more relevant in other cases such as Uzbekistan or Tajikistan.

All these fluctuations of ethnic awareness are not only possible but also inevitable because ethnic identity is only one among the elements of the identity structure of personality. People identify themselves as members of groups they

\textsuperscript{18} Hobsbawn, n.10, p.10
belong to either by achievement or by ascription. In traditional society, the most
relevant among these were kinship, peer, gender, socio-economic and, in settled
(non-nomadic) communities, territorial groups, the latter coinciding generally with
the village. In regions where several religions or denominations came into contact,
confessional group often gained primary importance. None of these groups and
respective elements of identity structure have disappeared completely in the
modern world. Rather, they have been modified and become more diversified.
Thus, the sense of territorial identity, which traditionally was limited to certain
small areas, expanded vastly to include district, region, and state level. Some other
elements of identity, e.g. class, professional, age group, followed the same pattern.
Many identify themselves as members of specific global, or transnational,
communities.

However, ethnic awareness is not exactly like any other element in the
identity structure of personality. Non-ethnic components generally are liable to
change during the lifetime of the individual. With the growth of social and
territorial mobility, the corresponding elements of identity structure vary, and so do
those determined by membership in such ascribed status groups. Ethnicity is much
more rigidly ascribed and can be changed in a limited number of cases only -
generally through assimilation, provided there is no racial barrier. Thus, Ukrainians
and Byelorussians assimilated easily with Russians, while small Mongoloid groups
like Mansi, Nanayans, Shors, Eskimoes in Siberia, although assimilated culturally
and linguistically, due to their physical difference preserve their separate identity,
especially as Russians, albeit generally not racialist, for the same reason cannot
accept them as "us". In the same manner the Central Asians also distinguished
themselves from outsiders due to cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic reasons.
In fact among themselves they distinguished as Uzbek, Tajik or Kazak. There is also a psychological reason, which hinders assimilation, especially in compact ethnic areas. To adopt the culture and language of some other - usually dominant - group and merge with it means to admit that one's own group is inferior.

The process of assimilation, except the cases of persons with high achievement and status, at the early stage is thus accompanied by ethnic inferiority complexes and marginal status as experienced by Central Asians vis-à-vis Russians. In many cases a segment in the process of assimilation is simultaneously rejected by its own group and not yet accepted by the assimilating group. Therefore, assimilation is not pursued readily unless there is strong motivation, generally in the form of social rewards and benefits at least for the next generation.

**Table I**

**Interethnic Marriage, 1998 (Selected Nationalities)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationalities</th>
<th>Men marrying women from another nationality</th>
<th>Women marrying men from another nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukranians</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byelorussians</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbeks</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirghiz</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmen</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Due to strong traditional bonds the share of ethnically mixed among the titular population is less compared to the European counterparts. Girls marrying outside their nationality was generally discouraged. As a result only 3 percent or less of the married women in the Central Asian republics had spouses outside their
own nationality.²⁰ It is interesting to note that Russians in Central Asia as well as those in the Russian Federation, the share of women involved in the mixed marriages exceeded that among men. In case of Central Asian republics in general and Uzbekistan (6.6% for Uzbek men versus 5% for Uzbek women) share of men involved in mixed marriages out of the total men exceeded that for married women.²¹ Like wise the divorce rate was low in Central Asia among the titular population compared to the European counterparts in former USSR.

Ethnic identity as the expression of group membership is supported by specific features, which make the particular group different from its immediate neighbours. Language, some specific cultural traits and religion in most cases serve to create and reinforce the group boundary and identity. However, it is territory, regarded as homeland, and the belief in common descent and history that constitute the universal basis of ethnic identity. A territorial dimension of ethnic identity is particularly characteristic of farming communities, while among semi-nomadic cattle-breeding groups and many hill tribes the idea of common descent, in many cases from a mythological ancestor, is considered much more important.

The Post-Soviet Situation

The break-up of the Soviet Union into 15 independent states radically changed the ethno-political situation in the post-Soviet era. Consequences differed widely for particular nations and ethnic groups; they defy sweeping generalisations and conclusions. In Central Asia, where political liberalisation and nationalism had a slow start, some kind of nation-state ideology remained to be invented in order to rationalise both the legitimacy of the regimes and their opponents' bid for power.

²⁰ Ajay Patnaik's, Central Asia: Between Modernity and Tradition, New Delhi, Konark Publishers, 1996, pp.103-104
²¹ Ibid., p.104
Ethnic minorities in Russia and the newly-independent states faced difficult dilemmas after the Union centre, upon whose support they relied in their effort to assert their autonomy and to raise their status, disappeared following the Yeltsin-Kravchuk-Shushkevich pact of December 1991 on the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. Ethnic Russians, until recently the integrating core of what was called the "Soviet people", became minorities in the newly-independent states, and even the Russian majority in the Russian Federation is feeling uncertain about the future of their country.

Table: II
Central Asia: Ethnic Configuration 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central Asian republics</th>
<th>Ethnic Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakh 46%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Russian 34.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian 4.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German 3.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatar 1.9%, others 7.1% (1996)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyz 52.4%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Russian 18%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Uzbek 12.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian 2.5%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>German 2.4% others 11.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajik 64.9%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Uzbek 25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian 3.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others 6.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmen 77%, Uzbek 9.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian 6.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakh 2%, other 5.1% (1995)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbek 80%, Russian 5.5%, Tajik 5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakh 3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karakalpak 2.5%, Tatar 1.5%, other 2.5% (1996 estimate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Extracted and compiled from the country wise data of Europa Year Book, Europa Publications, London, 2002

All these changes, although often overshadowed by the unprecedented economic crisis, affect the nationalist ideology and ethnic identity of virtually all post-Soviet nations and ethnic groups. In the present situation, more or less unstable in most republics and regions, it is hardly possible to generalise about the

22 Benedict Anderson, op.cit. n.13, p 34
attitudes and identity changes of diverse groups. Nevertheless, certain observations concerning the main preoccupations of the nationalist ideology and conjectures about their impact on the ethnic identity of particular nations and groups seem to be fairly safe.

All kinds of nationalisms, present on the post-Soviet scene, contain some or all items from the universal set of issues characteristic of any nationalism, viz. group status, territorial security, ethno-demographic situation, historical memory, normative status of the language and culture. The ranking of the issues along the priority scale may be different and some specific issues can be added in particular cases but most of these basic elements are always present. Generally, the most significant dividing line falls between the nationalism of the dominating majorities and that of the minorities. In the post-Soviet era this distinction is particularly relevant. Although the dominating majorities in the newly independent states have not yet overcome the survival syndrome, which formed the core of their nationalism during the Soviet period, the aim of consolidating the nation-state has become the central problem. It includes, in different sequence, e.g. the problem of territorial integrity is the top priority for Uzbekistan and all other Central Asian republics. Ethno-demographic issue, i.e. the presence of huge minorities, is very conspicuous, the problem of normative language and culture is anything but solved in many post-Soviet states, particularly in the Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstàn.

Nationalism of the ethnic minorities is generally dominated by the survival syndrome as virtually everywhere these groups are apprehensive of losing everything they have as ethnic communities: their historic homelands, language, culture, status and, finally, their own identity. These fears have become so
pervasive that elites of the minorities tend to regard democracy as meaningless if it means the majority rule: to quote a Tatar scholar, "human rights have no meaning outside the context of the nationalities' rights". Another important difference between the nationalism of majorities and minorities is that leaders and ideologists of the latter are much more preoccupied with the problem of promoting and maintaining solidarity and unity among the group members and with maintaining group boundaries as marked as possible. This is especially the case in conflict situations.

Nationalism of Majorities

It has undergone several changes during the initial years after the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. The first stage of the renascent nationalism for a short while was remarkably "green" since at the early stage of political liberalisation (1987-88) environmental grievances were the safest means of ethno-political mobilisation. Preoccupation with environmental issues made the people ecology-conscious and had obvious nationalist overtones since all the damage to the environment was interpreted as a consequence of the Kremlin policies in non-Russian republics. Another important aspect to be highlighted is that of Gorbachev's policies on Prestroika and Glasnost had some influences on Central Asia. In which number of nationalistic organisations highlighted the excessive environmental degradation that took place in Central Asia due to over utilisation of natural resources and radioactive harms caused to the general public by nuclear testing in Kazakhstan. The Birlik movement, which formed during this period highlighted the excessive cotton cultivation resulting in depletion of Aral sea and

23 Khakim, Rafael, Twilight of the Empire (in Russian). - "Tatar ilefl'atarskiye kraya" (Kazan), # 12, 1993, as cited in CSSC, working Papers, n.9.
salination of cultivable lands, put tremendous hardship on general Uzbek population, particularly rural inhabitants.\textsuperscript{24} As they were not able to grow other food products due excessive cotton cultivation. Similar movements also came up in Kazakhstan also named as \textit{Nevada Semipalatsnik} movement and \textit{Alash}, a nationalist party, who were in the forefront during this period urging to close all radioactive nuclear experiments.\textsuperscript{25} After the break-up of the Soviet Union and in the context of the deepening economic crisis environmental issues and green movements became relegated to the background in the newly independent states. The subject of the repressive, assimilationist and humiliating policies of the Soviet regime also lost its top position in the nationalist ideology, and has been replaced by argumentation in support of the legitimacy of the existing nation-states within their present borders.

Similarly, the theme of total domination by "Moscow" has given way to the pride and satisfaction, albeit short-lived, over the expanding international relations and the fact that the new states have been recognised as legitimate members of the international community of nations. Combined with such attributes of independent statehood as national currency, postage stamps, foreign embassies, etc., these changes in nationalist ideology undermine the minority complex and the uncomfortable awareness of being a periphery of a huge state ruled from far-off Moscow. Although it may take few more years before independent status is taken for granted by a majority of the population, the survival syndrome vanishes alongside with the complexes characteristic of subjugated groups.

\textsuperscript{25} Bees Brown, "Public Role in Perestroika in Central Asia", \textit{Central Asian Survey}, vol. 9, no.1, 1990, p.888
Failure to reach consensus on national interests is caused by different reasons. In Central Asia nationalists of a modern type are a small minority, divided among themselves on attitudes towards Islam and secularism and by sub-regional loyalties, while the rural majorities with their parochial ethnocentrism, form an amalgam of local and tribal groups and have not constituted themselves as modern nations. Moreover, the post-Soviet period has witnessed revival of sub-ethnic identities and ethnic consciousness which for several generations have not been recognised by official Soviet statistics and were considered as assimilated by larger groups.

Reappearance of Kipchaks in Central Asia, several regional communities in Tajikistan and other states, shows that a number of nationalities have not much of socio-cultural cohesion and "national" identity, and can hardly be regarded as modern nations. As different groups often pursue incompatible goals, "intra-national" conflicts develop, causing the further growth of sub-national identities. The power-struggle among various sub-ethnic groups can easily lead to strife and even civil war (as in Tajikistan till 1996) in case the regimes relax, or lose, existing ideological and political constraints. In the absence of consensus over national aims and interests, existing regimes (role of state) seem to be the instrument capable of containing latent conflicts and pursuing consistent nation-building strategies.

One more reason why nationalism of the majorities became less militant is the fact that what was called 'national revival', unlike similar movements of the past, did not grow into a consistent cultural movement. After a brief phase when it was preoccupied with the issues of language and re-interpretation of history, it became a political movement pure and simple. After the dissolution of the USSR,
de-Sovietization of culture, which meant in practice renouncing much of what has been created during the preceding 70 years, economic crisis and the large expenditure on creating and maintaining state infrastructure, particularly the armed forces and external relations, relegated the needs of cultural development and education to the background. The 'national' culture in most of the newly-independent states simply proved unable to withstand the stream of mass culture from the West or neighbouring Asian countries, while the impact of the 'national' culture is reduced to the growth of vernacular schools, replacing those with the Russian medium, and to acquiring some traditional artefacts (carvings, musical instruments, etc.).

All these shifts in nationalist ideology produced a marked impact on ethnic identity of the majorities. The number of the people who tended to identify as Soviet, especially high among Russians, declined dramatically. Opinion polls showed that the peoples of the former Soviet Union attached more importance to their ethnic affinity than ever before. Similarly, expansion of external relations and conflicts with local minorities have made the members of all titular nationalities more aware of national interests. These changes in ethnic identity make the majorities responsive to the ideas of nationalism as a dominant ideology and provide support for efforts of the regimes to transform the ex-Soviet republics into nation-states.

All in all, the prevailing trend of nationalism has become much more moderate than it was several years ago, and this trend is likely to continue unless a

26 Ibid.
genuine threat to independence and territorial integrity of the newly-independent states is posed by minorities or by some foreign power.

Nationalism of Minorities

There is need for closer examination at least for two reasons. The ideology of minorities' nationalist movements only of late started attracting attention of social scientists, and so far its study remains seriously handicapped by the scarcity of source materials and reliable information. Second, nationalism of small minorities often appears irrational and parochial to an outside observer, especially in the cases when a small minority challenges a relatively large majority.

Like any nationalist ideology, nationalism of minorities in the post-Soviet states reflects primary interests and concerns, as interpreted by their dominating groups. As the trend - and policies - of consolidation of nation-states intensifies in all post-Soviet republics, the minorities become increasingly apprehensive about their present and future status and survival syndrome is emerging as the central issue of the minorities' nationalism. To a large extent, minority nationalism is a reaction to the nationalism of the dominating majorities.

Obviously, nationalism of the Russian minority in the newly-independent states deserves special attention as the Russian diaspora forms the largest minority in all but few republics and collectively comprises nearly 25 million persons of Russian origin. The challenges faced by Russians in such states like Uzbekistan or Tajikistan being widely different, the main issues of Russian nationalism in

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28 However, over half of this number are concentrated in the Ukraine (11.4 million in 1989) and Belarus (1.3 million) where the problem of accommodation does not exist, and over 6 million more are settled in Kazakhstan - mostly in its northern industrial region and the capital Almaty, Valery Tishkov, Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and After the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame, London, Sage Publications, 1997, pp.115-123.
particular states are also diverse. However, it has several features common to the Russian minority in all republics.

The loss of the former special status and the very necessity to adapt themselves to the conditions of independent nation-states (first of all, to learn the official language) is interpreted by militant factions of Russian nationalists and a fairly large section of Russian communities in the new states as humiliating and affecting their "honour" and "dignity". Psychologically, many of them are not ready to accept the new realities, especially as the "elder brother" syndrome, inculcated during generations, developed superior attitudes towards non-Russian indigenous population, particularly in the southern republics. The basic assumption, sincerely accepted by most Russians in Russia and other post-Soviet states is that Russians saved the peripheral peoples from subjugation by powerful neighbours (Turkey, Persia, China), introduced modern culture and technology, set up and developed industries, and actually "fed" the natives. Some of these assumptions are not totally false (although the grievances of the indigenous nationalists are also anything but baseless), besides, ethnic Russians remain the most advanced (after the smaller and diminishing Jewish communities), urban section of the population and constitute the majority of skilled labour and technical personnel.

Therefore, they have enough reasons to regard this positive self-image as absolutely true and to expect the "natives" to be grateful enough to preserve the special position Russians enjoyed in the former Soviet state. These expectations are supported not only by militant Russian nationalists but also by the top-ranking officials of Russia, who have on numerous occasions reiterated they would "use

29 CSSC Working Papers, op cit. n.9
30 Ibid., p32

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every means to safeguard the interests, honour and dignity of the compatriots" and insist that ethnic Russians should be granted not only all political and social rights, but also the right to acquire the citizenship of both the country of residence and of Russia.31

All these factors reinforce uncertainty among Russian Diaspora in the newly-independent states about their status and rights, cause many of them to reject allegiance to the country of residence, or produce conflict of incompatible loyalties. Unlike Russian immigrants in Western countries, Russian Diaspora in the post-Soviet states tend to preserve their quasi-imperial nationalism and are unwilling to accept socio-cultural integration. This is one of the principal reasons why thousands of ethnic Russians are leaving not only the Central Asian states, but also the North Caucasian republics of the Russian Federation, while repatriation from the Baltic states, despite the much-publicised complaints about discrimination against Russians, is very insignificant.32

To sum up, semi-spontaneous ethnic assertions are one of the major consequences of the formation of nation-states in the post-Soviet area and of the growth of nationalism among both Russians and the indigenous majorities. This trend is opposite to the process of global integration, but is inevitable in the post-Soviet area, which has a number of features characteristic of a post-colonial situation. It can be safely predicted that the "Russian problem" in the post-Soviet republics will remain as a vital issue in domestic policies and international relations in this part of the world for at least a decade more. The majority of Russians will emigrate from Central Asian republics except Kazakhstan (which can only safely exist as binational state) and the Transcaucasian states, while in the

31 Ibid., p.35
32 For details see Martha Brill Olcott, "The Myth of Tsentral Azia", Orbis, 38/4, Fall, 1994.
western republics of the former Union significant sections (a large majority in the cases of the Ukraine and Belarus) of ethnic Russians are likely to adapt themselves to the conditions of the independent nation-states.  

Non-Russian Minorities

They generally face a similar set of issues: the prospect of cultural and linguistic assimilation, territorial disputes with neighbouring groups, the problem of collective status. However, unlike the Russian Diaspora who have at least several alternatives (appealing to the homeland power, repatriation, industrial action, accommodation), non-Russian indigenous minorities in the post-Soviet states have few options to choose from in their efforts to safeguard and promote their interests. In most cases they can rely only upon their ability for collective action and group solidarity. For this reason, nationalist ideology and education are considered by minority leaders as the principal means of survival.

The core of the nationalist ideology is historical memory or, rather, history reinterpreted to suit the needs of national revival and ethno-political mobilisation. What is more striking is the fact that ideologues of some groups who never formed separate states in the past also tend to regard the pre-annexation period as a source of pride and inspiration.

The stress on past achievements and glories is characteristic of all post-Soviet history writing. In the case of minority interpreters of history it is caused by several common factors: the Soviet negation of their past history, modern Russian history-writing which stresses the greatness of the former Russian Empire, in numerous cases also by conflicting territorial claims. So far the present history writing of the non-Russian groups follows basically the same pattern. However, the

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33 CSSC Working papers, n.9 p.45
minority historians divide themselves into two opposite camps on the issue of incorporation of their homelands into Russia. The differences are caused rather by current political exigencies than by available historical facts.

Several generations of non-Russians have been taught that thanks to the "unselfish assistance of the great Russian people" they had been saved from subjugation by enemies, acquired modern culture and advanced rapidly in all spheres of life. During the last few years the assessment of the consequences incorporation has, with few exceptions mentioned above, changed dramatically.

Thus, Tatar historians and nationalist politicians stress the fact that after annexation much of their lands was taken away and distributed among Russian colonists, mosques were destroyed, the Tatars were not admitted into universities, and the negative image of Tatars as wild and cruel natives was consistently reproduced in Russian literature and school textbooks. In their writings, the Tatar scholars and analysts quote ample evidence to prove that Tatarophobia was and remains integral part of the Russian mentality, despite the fact that since the end of the 19th century the Tatar nation could boast one of the highest literacy rates in the Empire, a numerous class of modern entrepreneurs and intellectuals, and intensive cultural life despite all the constraints imposed by the Russian administration.34

The theme of expropriation and oppression is also very popular in the press of North Caucasus.

Similar views are shared by intellectuals of those numerous groups who so far have not been able to launch popular nationalist movements and to start some kind of 'national revival'.

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There is something like a conceptual version of minority nationalism emerging, mostly in the writings of Tatar authors, representing the largest and fairly advanced non-Russian minority in the post-Soviet area. Ideologues of the Tatar nationalist movement consider the right to self-determination, i.e. independence as self-evident and concentrate on proving that disintegration of Russia (otherwise the independence of Tatarstan does not make much sense) is imminent and inevitable. Russia, according to their view, like the Soviet Union, is a conglomeration of mutually alien nations, an empire, created by conquest, and can survive only by suppressing the freedom and rights of the non-Russian groups, i.e. pursuing policies, incompatible with democracy and human rights. 35

Another prominent idea is that the existing international system is obsolete and undemocratic, especially as some 200 member-states of the United Nations and other international organisations constitute a kind of elitist club, while several thousand nations and ethnic groups are deprived of their natural right to take part in international affairs and are relegated to a second-rate status. According to the view of some Tatar nationalists, this unjust system, increasingly questioned by many ethno-cultural and linguistic minorities in the developed countries (Basques, Flemish, Walloons, Quebecois and others) has to be replaced by a new world-order, ensuring equality and freedom for each group. 36

35 "Tatar ile "Fatarskiye kraya", # 4, 1993, cited from CSSC Working papers, op cit.n.9
36 Rafael Khakimov, advisor to the President, member of the State Council of the Republic of Tatarstan in the "Nezavisimaya gazeta" (Moscow), Sept. 30, 1992, has commented "The international community lives under illusion that the world consists of states, while actually it is the world of peoples... There are some 5,000 ethnic groups, but only 180 have the internationally recognised statehood. The peoples are accorded different grades, and that is not justice". As the first steps of the "second decolonisation" the quoted author proposes to adopt a Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples to be followed by creation of the second chamber within the U.N., representing the groups which do not have states of their own. (Quoted in, CSSC, Working papers, n.9).
This vision reflects the positive view of nationalism as a movement towards democracy and freedom. However, in most cases nationalist ideology and ethnic identity contain negative images of other ethnic groups and tend to promote enmity between interacting ethnic communities. Similarly, Russian nationalism, especially that of the Russian settlers in non-Russian regions, invariably contains negative attitudes towards the indigenous groups.

The emerging indigenous "philosophy" falls within the broad category of ethnic nationalism, because in both cases the driving force is the will-for-survival of ethnic communities, and the principal argument lays its stress on the uniqueness of the group. According to this line of reasoning, the culture of mankind is rich because it is varied and diverse, with each group contributing some unique feature. Accordingly, the world becomes poorer with the disappearance of each, however small and 'backward' group with its unique culture, language and mentality. If the world community is concerned about the vanishing species of flora and fauna, and registers certain populations of animals, birds, and plants in the red books of the environment, there is much more reason to care about the weakest human groups. On many occasions ideologues of the indigenous groups have stated this view straightforwardly: "We also should be in the red book!".

This argument need not be understood literally - it serves, rather to stress the point that modern indigenous groups, despite the fact that their ancestors did not reach the stage of becoming "historical" communities, need not feel inferior, because they had produced a unique culture and way of life which enabled them to survive for centuries in forbidding conditions. Finally, in the context of extensive damage caused to the environment by the exploitation of natural resources, the indigenous intellectuals stress that the traditional way of life, in harmony with
nature, contrasted favourably with modern industrial activities that cause pollution of waters and devastation of landscape.

**Inter-Ethnic Relations**

The effects of prolonged impoverishment on inter-ethnic relations in such heterogeneous societies as those of Central Asia are likely to be unfavourable, because poverty is seldom evenly spread between ethnic groups, and minorities are often made scapegoats for it. The Russian-majority Northern Kazakhstan are concentrated in urban centres and higher-paid occupations as skilled workers, managers and professionals. So far, however, inter-ethnic violence has mostly been between locals rather than specifically anti-Russian. But with growing local nationalism, erosion of former privileged status, worsening economic conditions compared to Russia's, and a pessimistic view of a future in which locals will be in charge and fluency in their language obligatory, Russians who can obtain work elsewhere, i.e. in general the best qualified, have been leaving in quite large numbers especially from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. However, this exodus only intensifies a trend, which began in the late 1970s, and accelerated in the years of perestroika. Between 1980 and 1990 emigration of Russians from

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37 Since the signing of a cease-fire and power-sharing agreement between the government and the United Tajik Opposition in December 1996 there have been a number of killings of Russians in Tajikistan. These are denounced by both sides, and appear to be perpetrated by local "warlords" who benefited from the disorder of the Civil War. See for details in Olga Oliker and Thomas S. Szayna, *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus*, Rand Arroyo centre, 2003, pp. 320-325.

38 Per capita GNP at Purchasing Power Parity in 1996 is calculated at $US 789 in Tajikistan, 1788 in Kyrgyzstan, 2318 in Uzbekistan and 2572 in Kazakhstan, versus $4293 in Russia. Wheatcroft, op cit, p. 8.

Central Asia exceeded immigration to there by 850,000; their numbers increased very slightly in Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan, but fell in the other three republics and their proportion of the population fell substantially in all five because of the indigenous' much higher birth-rates. Already in 1990 more than twice as many Russians left Central Asia as arrived there. Awareness of the economic damage continuation of this exodus could do prompted Turkmenistan to grant dual citizenship to its Russian population in December 1993, and Tajikistan to follow suit in September 1995, but Presidents Nazarbaev of Kazakstan and Karimov of Uzbekistan have declared themselves opposed to the very principle of dual citizenship (apparently for fear that to grant it to Russians could engender pressure for similar concessions from the large numbers of Central Asians who live as minorities in other Central Asian countries, e.g. Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, or Tajiks in Uzbekistan), and President Akayev, while declaring himself in favour of it, failed to persuade the Kyrgyz Parliament to approve it. In Kazakhstann and Kyrgyzstan parliamentary elections in 1995 and 1996 respectively have given Russians cause for additional apprehension, as in both countries the number of Russian Deputies returned is far lower than their proportion of the electorates.

Regionalism

French scholar Olivier Roy, singled out "the influence of political loyalties based on geographic origin" in the conflict in Tajikistan, defining it as

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41 Between the 1979 and 1989 censuses the Russian population in Central Asia increased by 2.2%, while the indigenous ethnicities increased by 20.6%. Rybakovskiy, L L, Sotsiologicheskie Issledovaniya 9/1995, p. 91.
42 179,000 arrived, 366,000 left. Source, Ibid.
"localism". Roy's work, however, is somewhat sketchy, and its other major postulate, that the present fragmentation is largely a product of the Soviet period, could be misleading. Region could be taken as an area which has: (a) distinctive physical traits, e.g., climate, length of growing season, vegetation; (b) special cultural characteristics – e.g., dialect, costume, architecture, use of given tools, rituals, what is referred to as a 'culture area' in anthropology; (c) natural and artificial barriers, e.g., mountain ranges, administrative borders; (d) a focus, such as a trade centre and/or political or historical capital; and (e) an ad hoc problem: environmental pollution, crime, ethnic tension, etc.

Administrative demarcation in Soviet Tajikistan was largely implemented along pre-existent boundaries. The six constituent regions became incorporated into the all-union division of labour, but economic integration between them remained low. For example, 75% of Tajikistan's light industry was located in the northern Leninabad oblast, and most of its output, primarily textiles, was exported to other Soviet republics; at the same time, the southern regions had to import fabrics from Russia. Soviet economic policy, however, was only one element in Tajikistan's intricate mosaic of inter-regional interests and contradictions.

Statements by Soviet authorities that the spread of literacy, general rise of culture caused by industrialisation and reconstruction of agriculture had made the groups of Tajiks closer to each other were not convincing. No "Socialist Tajik nation" ever eventuated; moreover, tensions among the six historico-geographical regions of Tajikistan intensified as the grotesquely uneven development patterns

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45 Ibid.
endured. They could be checked temporarily by coercion (such as campaigns against *Mestnichestvo* or ‘localism’ under Stalin and Khrushchev) or by channelling more resources from the centre (as under Brezhnev), but they were always present.\(^{46}\)

Interaction amongst regional elites has formed and forms the core of all symbolic processes (including political ideas, public ideologies and development strategies) and practical endeavours. During the Brezhnev era, the party-state structure demonstrated an almost infinite capacity to control regional ambitions in the republics. Moscow's "*stabil'nost' kadrov*" (stability of cadres) policy allowed the web of informal "understandings" and exchanges amongst regional elites to become institutionalised. As long as a region fulfilled its economic obligations to the Union and complied with the general line prescribed by the CPSU, Moscow did not seem to object to the peculiarities of local personnel policy.

In Tajik Academician Tursunov's words, "regionalism has firmly settled in the consciousness of our people, and not its backward section at that; regionalistic self-awareness manifests itself at all levels of social stratification, especially, to our shame, amidst the intelligentsia".\(^{47}\) Within the rigid framework of the Soviet system it could never acquire the form of violent political action. Moreover, it had been *de facto* institutionalised and, henceforth, could be controlled and manipulated to some extent. The ruling regional elite from Leninabad did not need to invoke traditional institutions of power to maintain its privileged position - its legitimacy was guaranteed by Moscow. Generally, in the Soviet period traditional social structures and popular Islam on the one hand, and regionalism on the other


\(^{47}\) Ibid.
operated on different planes - private and public. However, these phenomena were closely linked, and there always remained a possibility that informal networks would be activated as the primary mechanism for establishing the authority of a regional clique.

The Soviet drive to modernise Central Asia yielded ambiguous results. Accelerated economic development, growth of education, secularisation of culture and political mobilisation of the masses altered the fabric of society considerably. The profundity and irreversibility of these changes, however, were questionable. After all, seventy years of the Communist experiment was not comparable in historical perspective with millennia of a continuous cultural tradition. Modernity presumes that "local ties and parochial perspectives give way to universal commitments and cosmopolitan attitudes; that the truths of utility, calculation, and science take precedence over those of the emotions, the sacred, and the non-rational; that the individual rather than the group be the primary unit of society and politics... that the identity be chosen and achieved, not ascribed and affirmed... The most important failure of Soviet rule consisted in its inability to reform the Weltanschauung, traditional allegiances and omnipresent spirit of collectivism, that made an individual completely dependent on such institutions as the family, neighbourhood, solidarity network and coterie of fellow-regionalists".48

In a handful of cities, at industrial enterprises and scholarly institutions, in government agencies, social praxis ostensibly was no different from patterns of mono-organisational Socialism elsewhere in the USSR. At the same time, in rural areas that were of little interest to Moscow-based industrialists, and where even the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) proved uninterested in or

48 Ibid.
incapable of setting up a network of informers, an ethno-cultural mentality based on traditional patrimonialism, popular Islam and regionalism survived, and any breakdown in the mechanisms of social control would inexorably transpose it into the realm of political action. The collapse of the Soviet Union was just such a breakdown.

Soviet Policies and Its Impact on Ethnicity

Sovietisation of Central Asia envisaged establishing a modern industrial-type society devoid of social antagonisms, where social interests would be uniform and national distinctions erased. Implementing this policy involved (a) accelerating economic growth, urbanisation and cultural development to "catch up" with the European USSR; (b) secularising the societies, liquidating traditional patterns of socialisation, dismantling local ties and parochial loyalties; (c) installing a new mode of socialisation, based on uniform communist values; and (d), creating viable "Soviet" nations based on existing ethnic groups.

Why this Soviet experiment ultimately failed is very pertinent. It is, however, imperative to try to understand why over almost seven decades it failed to assimilate Central Asians as "new Soviet men". It appears that three factors - the family, religious community and sub-ethnic regionalism - were able to challenge the state agencies' monopoly on making and enforcing rules. The traditional family in particular retained its main values and its adaptive role vis-a-vis society almost intact; a sociological survey conducted in eleven republics and regions of the USSR in 1988-90 showed, for example, that 49% of Tajiks were guided in their

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behaviour primarily by rules prescribed by the family, versus only 26% of Muscovites.\textsuperscript{50}

In times of political instability and economic decline, traditional institutions have tended to play an increasing part in providing security and welfare to the Central Asian populace. Communism, though the only sanctioned political system, could not transform the "second level" of organisational activities, i.e. traditional collectivities and communities, "whose systemic boundaries are organised or patterned around symbols or likeness of common attributes and of participation in them, but which are not necessarily structured as systems with clear organisational boundaries".\textsuperscript{51}

Economic Indicators and Social Factors

Nearly twelve years into an unsought independence, the Central Asian states, which were among the poorest in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) appear, except for Tajikistan, to have experienced a smaller average economic decline than any other part of the CIS. Nevertheless, the declines have been very substantial. Their extent can be illustrated by the fact that Uzbekistan is considered an economic success story because its per capita GNP in 1996 was 82-84\% of its 1989 level. Declines elsewhere in the CIS have been far greater, with 1996 per capita GNP ranging from 58\% of 1989's in Russia to 20\% in Georgia. Among the Central Asians, during the same period, Kyrgyzstan, with a per capita GNP 50-55\% of the 1989 level, has done slightly better than the FSU average, and Kazakhstan (45\%) slightly worse. No figures are available for Turkmenistan, because its official data, which show consistent year-on-year growth since


independence, are no longer considered credible. Uzbekistan and Kazakstan both claimed a 1% increase in GNP in 1996, but this is well within margins of statistical incompleteness or error, and even if correct, too small to be taken as evidence that their economic decline has yet bottomed out. As for inflation, the lowest annual rate in Central Asia in 1996 was 31.9%, in Kyrgyzstan. In Tajikistan per capita GNP declined in 1996 by 18%, to only around 37% of its 1989 level, at which Tajikistan was already the poorest country in the FSU. For comparative purposes, it should be noted that in the first three years of the Great Depression, per capita GNP in the United States declined by 1932 to 78% of the 1929 level. The general economic decline within the FSU is therefore far greater than that which affected the capitalist world in the 1930s, and has been accompanied by high inflation, which was not the case in the Great Depression. So it is not unreasonable to regard it as the greatest economic crisis of all time, and to be skeptical about statements from the World Bank and elsewhere, which describe it as a "temporary decline in welfare" or a purely transitional problem. Poverty, like wealth, is seldom shared out equally between or within ethnic groups, but inequality of poverty is far harder to bear than inequality of wealth, and because Central Asia, like the rest of the FSU, had become accustomed over several decades to a modest but gradually improving or at worst stable standard of living backed by non-cash benefits in the shape of comprehensive health, education and welfare services. The decline, which began in the perestroika period and accelerated after independence has accentuated inter-ethnic and inter-regional tensions.


53 Ibid.

Problems in inter-ethnic relations in Central Asia are sometimes attributed to the arbitrary nature of the inter-state boundaries laid down by Stalin early in the Soviet period. The reasons for making the delimitation included factors which made arbitrariness unavoidable. But more important were that the sedentary societies of the previous Emirates and Russian Turkestan had been separated by deserts rather than demarcated frontiers, that the ethnic groups had over centuries become so intermingled that any state based on one major local ethnicity was bound to have significant minorities of the others (and of Russians) within its borders, and that nomadism, inconsistent with fixed borders, was the dominant way of life of the major ethnic group (the Kazaks) in the former Steppe Governorate, and widespread in the rest of Central Asia.\textsuperscript{55} Considerations such as ensuring reasonably equal access to water for agriculture also played a part in the drawing of the borders.

But problems of ethnic relations arising from the way the borders were drawn are paralleled by economic problems arising from Soviet planning which ignored the borders altogether, and treated the entire Union as a single economic space. Thus Uzbekistan, despite being the largest fruit and vegetable producer in the FSU, is not self-sufficient in food, because over 40% of its agricultural land is devoted to cotton-growing; despite producing 90% of the FSU's cotton, it had to import cotton textiles, which were manufactured elsewhere in the Union; and despite producing one-third of Soviet gold, it was in per capita GNP the second poorest republic in the FSU. Tajikistan's northern province produced cotton and textiles, but exported them to Russia, while its southern provinces imported cotton textiles from Russia; and one of the world's largest aluminium smelters was built in

\textsuperscript{55} CSSC Working Papers, op cit. n.9
Tajikistan, even though of the three main requirements for aluminium production - bauxite, cryolite and electricity - it possesses only the last.56

Similar problems can be found all over the FSU, in agriculture as well as in industry. In all the Central Asian republics agriculture occupies a far higher percentage of the population than in Russia, but only Kazakhstan is self-sufficient in food production. Grandiose Soviet-era irrigation projects undertaken in the interests of cotton production have reduced the Aral Sea to one-third its former area, while leakage, evaporation and uneconomical use of water (supplied free of charge, so that there was no incentive to economise in its use) meant that up to two-thirds of the water extracted from the rivers is wasted.57 The scale of the wastage can be inferred from Table-I figures for non-domestic water consumption in cubic meters per capita per annum. They are for 1994, but the disparities they show between countries are too large to be significantly altered in the period since then. The first column contains five high-income industrialised countries, the second four countries with climates similar to Central Asia, the third Russia and the Central Asian countries.

Table-III
Scale of water wastage: A comparison

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56 Ibid.

Turkmenistan's extremely high per capita water consumption derives mainly from its small population and dependence for irrigation water on the *Kara Kum* (now Turkmenbashi) Canal. This runs well over 800 km from the Amu Darya through the Kara Kum Desert, where summer temperatures engender high losses from evaporation, added to which there is substantial seepage through the unsealed banks and bed. But all the Central Asian republics show very high consumption compared to Australia and to the four countries in Column 2, which have similarly hot climates and economies in which agriculture, including cotton growing, occupies an important place.

A similar problem created by arbitrarily fixed Soviet-era low prices and indifference to costs is exceedingly inefficient use of energy. In the table below the same countries are compared, this time in terms of the GDP per capita in US Dollars generated in 1994 for a given consumption of energy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>$3.20</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>9.50</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>Uzbek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>10.30</td>
<td>Turkmen -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The unit of energy consumption is one kilogram of oil equivalent.


Where, as in the FSU, exceedingly uneconomic use of such basic resources as water and energy has become entrenched over more than two generations, no quick recovery can be expected, and any recovery at all is dependent on large-scale capital investment in both agriculture and industry. Soviet-made equipment,
produced by enterprises safeguarded against foreign competition by import bans or
tariff barriers, and usually possessing at least regional monopolies which ruled out
domestic competition, has not often proved the best of its kind, and tended also to
be retained in service far longer than is usual in non-Communist industrialised
countries, so a massive capital investment in updating is necessary. However, in
Central Asia gross domestic investment in 1996 compared to 1988 was 97.2% in
Tajikistan, 65.9% in Uzbekistan, 55% in Kyrgyzstan, and only 15.5% in Kazakstan
(Turkmenistan claimed an unbelievable 210.8% in 1994, and data for subsequent
years are not published). In Russia it was only 26.2% of the 1988 level, so Russia
cannot currently serve as in the Soviet period as a significant provider of capital
investment to Central Asia. Most funding therefore has to come from outside the
CIS, whether as private sector investment or as grants or credits from governments
and international institutions.

Ethnic and Cultural Divisions

Ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic differences are sources of conflict
and impediments to the co-operation that is necessary to combat radicalism and to
improve economic conditions.

Language barriers and different alphabets further complicate
communication and co-operation. With the use of different alphabets (Cyrillic in

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58 Two examples; Soviet machine-picked cotton on the international market was found to contain
too much trash to secure top prices; gold-extraction machinery left enough gold behind to
justify Uzbekistan letting a major contract to an Australian company to reprocess an enormous
tailings dump, and Kyrgyzstan to entrust the exploitation of its own gold deposits to a
Canadian firm. See for details, Fiona Hill and Regine Spector, The Caucasus and Central

59 Abel Aganbegyan, one of Gorbachev's economic advisers, stated publicly that by the beginning
of perestroika 71% of machinery in Soviet industry was obsolete, See for details in S. Bialer,
(eds.), Politics, Society and nationality Inside Gorbachev's Russia, Boulder, West view Press,
1994.

60 Paul Goble, op cit. n.4

61 Ibid.
Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and Latin in Uzbekistan), the basis for understanding and co-operation in interpersonal and interstate relations is lessened. These barriers also preclude the possibility of the development of a common, regional news media. News sources frequently distort the news or retell stories of past atrocities to create biases against other ethnic groups and religions. Russian is the primary language of interethnic communication and, because of regional language differences, much of Central Asia's news comes from Russian sources that overemphasise struggles of ethnic Russians in the region while underreporting the oppression of other ethnic groups. Additionally, debates about the primary language of education and language requirements for citizenship have been very divisive, especially in nations with significant minority populations.

Large minority populations exist in all the Central Asian states. Today, nearly half of the population in Kazakhstan is not ethnic Kazakhs. In Kyrgyzstan only 52.4 percent are ethnic Kyrgyz. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are slightly less diverse, but in each approximately 25 percent of the population is an ethnic minority. The added pressures of transition to a post-Soviet system contributed to interethnic tensions.

"The social structure of various nationalities remained uneven in spite of broad evenness found in terms of economic modernisation...Socio-cultural modernisation was key to the process of mobility and nationality process in Central Asia." As early as the late 1980s, as the Soviet Union was on the decline, riots began to break out in Central Asia. The struggling economies and high

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unemployment pitted formerly peaceful ethnic groups against each other. Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks had coexisted peacefully in Uzbekistan's part of the Ferghana valley for years. However, as unemployment skyrocketed, ethnic Uzbeks blamed the Turks for taking Uzbek jobs and believed that the solution to their economic problem was to expel the Meskhetian Turks.\textsuperscript{65} In June of 1989 a small disagreement in a bazaar became a large-scale riot in which 103 were killed and 1,000 were wounded (most of whom were civilians). Nearly all of the Meskhetian Turks living in the region were forced to flee.\textsuperscript{66}

Similarly, in June 1989 the Osh massacre occurred. In Osh the riots began between Kyrgyz and Uzbek groups as an isolated conflict over the redistribution of land to local residents. The conflict escalated into widespread ethnic cleansing on a much greater scale than the previous Uzbek-Meskhetian violence—300 were killed, more than 1,000 wounded, and more than 5,000 crimes were committed including the destruction of many homes.\textsuperscript{67}

The Ferghana valley—a major centre of Islamic extremism—is the prime example of this ethnic divide. The valley is located between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The state borders are so intertwined that it is difficult to identify the valley on political maps. Although ethnic Uzbeks predominantly occupy the Ferghana valley, the valley crosses three state borders and also includes ethnic Tajiks, Kyrgyzs, and Kazakhs. Uzbekistan has constructed maximum-security fences in the Ferghana valley to prevent the migration of militant Muslims and any flow of support to them—either monetary or in the form of supplies.

\textsuperscript{65} Stalin forced the Meskhetian Turks from their homeland in Georgia during World War II after which they fled to Uzbekistan and lived peacefully until the 1989 riots, Tabyshalieva, \textit{The Challenge of Regional Cooperation}.

\textsuperscript{66} Tabyshalieva, The Challenge of Regional Cooperation, p.20.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
Recently, President Karimov accused Tajikistan of supporting Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan (IMU) fighters and wanted to expel ethnic Tajiks residing in Uzbekistan’s part of the Ferghana valley.\(^{68}\)

Ironically, the IMU has in a sense overcome the region’s ethnic divide as it recruits its volunteers without any ethnic bias and emphasises the common bond of Islam. A farmer in Sangor commented, “Every day there were lines of people coming to see him [Namangani]—Arabs, Chechens, Uighurs, Pakistanis, Kashmiris, and Central Asians from every nationality—they all want to join him and do jihad in Central Asia.”\(^{69}\)

While the IMU shows no ethnic preference in recruiting, Central Asia’s governments, particularly Uzbekistan, have implemented strict, discriminatory measures against ethnic groups from any state believed to be aiding the rebels. Ethnic tensions are especially significant in relation to the rise of Islamic militancy as these tensions frequently preclude co-operation between the Central Asian states and the ability to address the problem of attacks by the IMU. Uzbekistan even aims to expel thousands of ethnic Uzbeks who fled to Uzbekistan from Tajikistan during Tajikistan’s civil war. The risk of refugees, arising from such expulsions, is an additional threat and a destabilising factor for Tajikistan, especially in light of its shaky economy.

Proposing to subsume these differences in the context of a broader Islamic *Ummah*—no matter how unrealistic it may be—appeals to those who have suffered though this ethnic strife.


Unemployment and Poverty

Central Asian states represented the weakest sector of the former Soviet Union and as a result have been witnessing the most difficult transition period compared to other former Soviet republics. Economic deprivation also contributes to the IMU’s appeal. Widespread unemployment drives men to join the IMU. In one of the most economically depressed regions, the Ferghana valley, unemployment is as high as 80 percent. One schoolteacher in the Ferghana valley noted that, “It’s the same everywhere—the villages are empty of young men—either they have gone to Russia to look for work or they join Namangani because at least he pays them.”

Unemployment and poverty throughout Central Asia is crippling and affects predominantly the young—those most eligible to fight. In Uzbekistan, for instance, in 1999, 59 percent of the unemployed were between the ages of 16 and 30. The most recent World Bank statistics indicate that in 1993 in Uzbekistan 26.5 percent of the population lived on less than two dollars a day. Given Uzbekistan’s recent economic decline the current figures can be expected to be substantially worse. Some reports speculate that the percentage of the population living below the poverty level in Uzbekistan is actually between 60 and 80 percent. In 1997 in Kyrgyzstan, more than half of the population lived below the poverty level. In Kazakhstan, 34.6 percent of the population lived beneath the poverty line.

Economic development is the most promising means by which Central Asian states can decrease the incentive to fight for militant groups. Because

70 Ajay Patnaik, op cit. n.54, p.174
71 Ibid.,n.59
72 World Bank Development Indicators, 1999.
Central Asia lacks the capital to overcome its poverty alone, foreign investment is necessary. Larger countries such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan will be critical in attracting investments because they have the largest markets.

In 2000, all of the Central Asian nations showed some GDP growth. Turkmenistan, the most dynamic country in the region, had 18 percent GDP growth; Kazakhstan, 10 percent; Tajikistan, 8 percent; and Kyrgyzstan, 5 percent. Uzbekistan had the least GDP growth at less than 1 percent and a significant decline in export growth as well. Uzbekistan’s exports increased only 1 percent in 2000 and its imports fell by 5 percent. Uzbekistan’s increasing isolation has prevented it from achieving significant economic growth. Karimov’s refusal to disclose economic statistics and implement market reforms also led to the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) withdrawal from the country this past March.

The Political Repression

Following the dissolution of the USSR the number of mosques as well as opportunities for Islamic education in Central Asia increased significantly. The emergence of Central Asia as open society made the leadership nervous because they feared the influence of militant Islamic groups like those fighting in Afghanistan. In response, all Central Asian states banned religious based political parties in their constitutions. The harsh measures designed to stifle Islam’s role in the political sphere caused an enormous backlash from Islamic groups, deepening the crisis.

Under Uzbekistan’s current leadership, there is virtually no tolerance for Islamic groups even non-militant ones and harsh crackdowns are regularly implemented to control support for the IMU. In 1998 alone, the government has

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74 *The Monitor* 7, no. 81 (Jamestown Foundation Publication), April 26, 2001.
jailed more than 6,000 people accused of being involved in rebellious activities. In 1998, the Uzbek government passed legislation that implemented the most severe measures of religious persecution in Central Asia, including a ban on proselytism and any religious education that the state does not organise as well as also requiring registration for all religious groups. Uzbekistan's constitution also provides that members of religious groups cannot run for the office of president and the establishment of religious political parties is similarly banned.

Soviet-era leaders continue to rule in Central Asia. In Uzbekistan, Karimov—who has served in the government since 1983—has officially been president since 1991, but has been only elected twice with unrealistically wide margins. In the most recent elections in December of 2000, Karimov reportedly won an unbelievable 91.9 percent of the vote. The Uzbek government's domination of the media also prevents the emergence of any true opposition party, and certainly any party that would be more tolerant of Muslim groups.

Turkmenistan, which has a single-party government with centralised power, is very similar to Uzbekistan in its governmental structure. Control of the state rests with the president and his close advisors. Human rights violations and political oppression are widespread, religiously based political parties are banned, and there is no independent media.

Kazakhstan is a much larger and richer nation and is at a much lower risk of internal fighting. Nevertheless, it too is faced with problems of social instability.

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75 In Article 57 Uzbekistan's constitution states, "It is forbidden to form or operate political parties, as well as other social associations, that have as their goal violent change of the constitutional system; protest against the sovereignty, integrity, or security of the republic or the constitutional rights and freedoms of its citizens; advocacy of war, social, national, racial, or religious animosity; encroachment on the health or morality of the people; or that are militaristic formations or ethnically or religiously based political parties". [Italics added.] Similar clauses can be found in all of the constitutions of the Central Asian states. See Ahmad Rashid, "The Fire of Faith in Central Asia", World Policy Journal, Spring, 2001, p.54
Although Kazakhstan prohibits religious political organisations, the government in 1999 refused to consider more severe restrictions on religion.

Kyrgyzstan passed a new electoral code in 1998 that allows for greater transparency in elections and has achieved a greater level of democracy than other Central Asian nations. Although Kyrgyzstan's government routinely suppresses the independent media with libel suits, tax inspections, and break-ins, and prohibits the formation of religiously based political parties, religious groups in Kyrgyzstan are not as oppressed as ones in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Political repression only works in favour of Islamic groups. As noted by Sharif Himatzade, a member of Tajikistan's parliament and the head of its Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), "Tajiks and others are joining the IMU extremists because the regimes don't change their attitudes towards such Islamic movements. If there was a legal, constitutional way in Uzbekistan for Namangani to play a political role he would take part in politics and there would be no need for such military action."76 As a former military commander for the IRP during Tajikistan's civil war, Himatzade experienced the consequences of political exclusion in Central Asia

The Role of External Actors

The involvement of regional and international actors further complicates the picture. Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, China, Russia, and the United States each pursue policies based on their specific economic and strategic interests. In terms of the Islamist phenomenon, the activities of Afghanistan and Pakistan have had the greatest impact by trying to use Islamist elements to advance their regional goals.

76 Ibid., p.61-63
Afghanistan’s civil war (Taliban regime period) was extremely destabilising for Central Asia because it fostered intra- and inter-regional disputes and rivalries and encouraged support for militant Islamist groups. To illustrate, Osama Bin Laden had direct ties to the IMU, a fact confirmed by the IMU’s bases in northern Afghanistan. Because of Afghanistan’s civil war then, Uzbek culture and the Uzbek language in the Taliban-controlled regions of northern Afghanistan has surged. Whereas before Uzbeks living in Afghanistan identified themselves as “people from the north,” now they identify themselves as ethnic Uzbeks.77 Significantly this means that Muslim Uzbeks living in northern Afghanistan have strong cultural ties with Uzbekistan and are more likely to offer monetary support to Namangani and Yoldash.

Regional rivalries over Afghanistan’s future have perpetuated conditions favourable to the development of militant groups. Pakistan supported the Taliban in order to consolidate its influence in Afghanistan and establish a trade route through Afghanistan to Central Asia. Pakistan is also seeking to counter Iranian ties with Central Asia. Pakistan’s ties with Afghanistan and support for the Taliban have led to accusations that it may have been involved in training Uzbek Islamists. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have also played a role in regional power politics as they recognised and supported the Taliban.78 Iran’s attempts to counter Pakistani influence and check the success of the Taliban have prolonged the civil war, especially given Iran’s support of the Northern Alliance. This competitive dynamic between Pakistan and Iran has made it extremely difficult for Central Asian states to co-operate as regional mistrust is so prevalent.

78 News reports indicate that ethnic Uzbeks living in Saudi Arabia are significant contributors to the IMU.
These rivalries have also created incentives for many to aid militant Islamic groups in Central Asia. 79

In addition, great power rivalry has affected the formation and evolution of Islamic militancy. Russia has taken the lead in aid to Central Asia and has frequently used the threat of attacks by militant Islamic groups to justify military intervention in Central Asia. In October 2000, immediately following spring and summer attacks, a Collective Security Treaty was signed between Russia and several countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belarus, and Armenia) committing Russia to intervene in the internal affairs of these nations should militant Islamic groups attack. Russia and these nations also established a joint military force to take pre-emptive military action against the IMU—the plan involves deploying 70,000 to 80,000 Russian troops during peacetime that can deal with any possible rebellion.80 Although monetary restraints may limit Russian intervention, Russia has formed ties that allow it a strong foothold in Central Asia.

Russia is interested in creating and maintaining control in a strategic region. Russia has a vested interest in maintaining leverage over the region’s economic growth—the power to occupy parts of Central Asia at its discretion gives Russia substantial control over the region’s oil resources. The United States’ neglect of Central Asia’s problems and its reluctance to alter its policy of isolation toward Iran provides a favourable environment for Russia to expand its influence.

Chinese influence has also played a role in regional security in that China has joined regional security forums, notably the Shanghai Forum (formerly the Shanghai Five, it now includes Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, 79 Shireen T. Hunter, “Islam, Politics and Security in Central Asia,” SAIS Review XXI, no. 2, (summer-fall 2001).
and Uzbekistan). China’s role has been very similar to that of Russia. China, like
Russia, has oil interests in the region as well as finding the rise of militant Islamic
groups similarly threatening. One of China’s primary concerns is the rise of the
Islamic separatist movement of ethnic Uighurs in its Xinjiang region and the
possible support for these groups from militant Islamic groups in Afghanistan and
Central Asia. These fears have prompted China to encourage military approaches
to handle Islamists, as it wants the rebellious elements in its own territory to be
strongly repressed, and it has supplied Central Asian states with military
equipment.

One sign of greater regional co-operation is the recent inclusion of
Uzbekistan in the Shanghai Forum, which in the summer of 2001 was transformed
into a regional co-operation organisation. This development has two implications.
First, it is consistent with the history of Central Asia, where militant threats
provoked exaggerated responses and many security alliances and forums (like the
Shanghai Forum). Second, and more promising, Karimov has ushered in a new
level of co-operation. The Shanghai Forum, while including Russia, shows a trend
toward greater regional co-operation. Uzbekistan previously shunned the group
and refused to participate on the grounds that Russian influence was too great.

As part of its Central Asian Security Initiative in 2000 the United States
gave approximately $9 million ($3 million each to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and
Tajikistan) in military aid and communications equipment as well as monetary
support for political reforms in the context of the Freedom Support Act.82

The rise of Islamic militancy in Central Asia is a direct result of the region's economic deprivations, political repression, and regional and international rivalry for influence in the region. Moreover, the threat that armed militants pose to the survival of current regimes is exaggerated. The real threat lies in the lack of progress in economic, social, and political fields. Although security measures as part of a comprehensive strategy to combat militant attacks are important, to address the appeal of militant groups to unemployed and oppressed populations they are insufficient. Until the issues of poverty, ethnic tensions, and authoritarian tendencies are addressed, militant Islamic groups will continue to recruit fighters. Until the issues of poverty, ethnic tensions, and authoritarian tendencies are addressed, militant Islamic groups will continue to recruit fighters.\textsuperscript{83}

Democratic reforms and economic growth will do more than security forums or military aid to mitigate the appeal and threat of Islamic militancy and thus reduce the ability of militants to destabilise Central Asia and surrounding regions.

The phenomenon of nationalism has been regarded as evil by both Marxist and liberal scholarly tradition. Militant and extreme nationalism of both majorities and minorities has proved to be the ideology of conflict up to its extreme and violent forms. However, the absence of nationalism in the sense of broad consensus on ethno-regional interests and aims, in newly-independent states can become one of the major causes of socio-political fragmentation and intra-ethnic conflict either among the political elites or both on the political scene and at the mass level in each case undermining stability of the new polities.

Preoccupation with the survival issue, reinterpretation of history, particularly its ethno-political aspects, efforts to reintroduce vernaculars in public life and schools, the adoption of acts promoting the rights and interests of the indigenous groups, combine to produce a wide-ranging impact on the ethnic

identity of minorities. More and more people identify themselves in the first place as members of particular ethnic groups and assess the political realities in terms of the groups rights and status.

This trend raises several issues. First, a very complicated problem of the relationship between individual human rights and group rights arises, especially as the human rights phraseology is often used to uphold group interests and privileges. Second, the ongoing ethnic awakening, in its turn, enhances the confidence of nationalist leaders, who become increasingly assertive.

The present economic crisis, which has grown worse since the disintegration of the USSR, has affected the well-being of the majority of the population, irrespective of ethnic group, in all newly-independent states, and nationalist movements today, unlike those of the late 80s, cannot offer visions of a welfare state as the immediate result of independence or 'sovereignty' and expected foreign assistance.

However, the psychological climate has undergone a significant and, in mid-term perspective, an irreversible change. Ethnic cleavages, especially those between the minorities and dominating majorities, have become the crucial factor, shaping group solidarity and the framework of political mobilisation. Reinterpretation of history has played a major part in shaping the identity structure of large sections of the population. Since ethnic differences have been recognised as basic socio-political cleavages, there is no way of escaping ethno-political polarisation. The ethnic identities grow stronger, and the group boundaries more rigid in ethnically heterogeneous regions. It can be safely concluded that the assertion of ethnic identities and ethno-political contradictions will stay as the main axis of political development in the Central Asian region. The incongruity
continues to persist between the ethnic identities (nation) and state formations. In the forthcoming chapters it could be seen how Uzbekistan has been coping with these challenges in its nation building and state (institutional) formation.