

EMERGING PATTERNS IN THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF CENTRAL ASIA (Part I)

by Mark N. Katz*

Developments in the newly independent states of Central Asia have engaged the attention of policy-makers and scholars both in the region itself as well as far beyond it. This is because the future course of Central Asia's international relations affects the interests of many nations outside the region.

There are several reasons why this region is of concern to the outside world. First, it borders on three nations or areas that have often had antagonistic relations with one another: Russia, China, and the Islamic world. Second, it is potentially a very important region economically due primarily to its enormous wealth in oil, gas, and other natural resources. Third, the region has become important due to the fear or hope (depending on one's point of view) that it might be susceptible to Islamic revolution. And fourth, Central Asia has become important because others think it is important; the region has become an arena where several nations hope to extend their own influence as well as fear the consequences of their opponents doing so.

Much has already been written about the international relations of newly independent Central Asia. For the most part, however, this analysis has focused on the foreign policies of outside powers toward this region. The states of Central Asia tend to be treated as relatively passive actors in the foreign policy field. But outside powers seeking to pursue their various goals in the region will only succeed to the extent that domestic politics in the region allow them to. An outside power is only likely to be influential in any given Central Asian state if the group enjoying political predominance there allows it to be. The groups which are, or become, politically predominant in the five Central Asian states, then, will have a crucial effect on their countries' relations with the rest of the world.

Outside powers, of course, play an important role in assisting various groups to retain power, or with somewhat more difficulty, to gain or regain it. Hence it is important to understand the goals of important outside powers toward the region as well as how capable they are of pursuing them. But it is also important to understand how the evolution of domestic politics in each of

the Central Asian republics can affect their relations with outsiders.

At present, there appear to be three possible paths that the political evolution of Central Asia might take. The first is preservation of the status quo in which the Communist Party apparatus, however renamed, continues to exercise predominant or monopoly power. The second is the evolution of pluralist democracy. This path does not rule out political participation by former Communists or by Islamists. The third is the emergence of radicalized Islamic regimes in the area which are both anti-Communist and anti-democratic.

This paper will first examine Central Asia's political evolution as well as the foreign policies favored both by ruling and non-ruling parties in the region. Next, the foreign policies toward Central Asia of important external powers will be studied in order to explore how they might affect the region's political evolution. Lastly, there will be a discussion of how both the political evolution of the various Central Asian states and the foreign policies of external actors toward them interact and may affect the region's international relations.

Central Asian Political Evolution

There has been a significant degree of variation in the political evolution of the five different Central Asian republics since they became independent.

Kyrgyzstan has made the most progress along the path toward pluralist democracy. Non-ruling parties have been allowed to operate relatively freely. There is a free press. The Kyrgyz government has demonstrated a commitment to the protection of human rights.¹

In Kazakhstan, the former communist party elite continues to predominate both the government and the media. Two non-ruling parties, though, have been allowed to register. The activities of others are tolerated to some extent. There is some degree of press freedom. While the Kazakh government has acted primarily to preserve the political status quo, it has also displayed

*Mark N. Katz is an associate professor of government and politics at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA.

¹U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent Republics* (January 1993), pp. 170-77.

some willingness to allow gradual progress toward democratization.¹

Uzbekistan's government appears firmly committed to preserving the status quo of continued rule by Communist apparatchiks not only in Uzbekistan, but in neighboring Tajikistan as well. Only one real opposition party, Erk, was allowed to register; its candidate ran unsuccessfully for president in December 1991. After that, however, the government has severely limited the activity of all non-ruling parties. The media is also very tightly controlled.²

Turkmenistan's government is even more firmly committed to preserving the status quo of continued rule by the renamed Communist party. Unlike Uzbekistan where some opposition party activity was permitted for a time, such activity has not been tolerated in Turkmenistan at all. The press is very firmly controlled by the regime.³

Tajikistan has experienced a brutal civil war. While this civil war is in one sense a dispute between various regions of Tajikistan, it can also be seen as a conflict between forces wishing to preserve the status quo and forces seeking to bring about political change. The forces seeking change claimed that they want to bring pluralistic democracy to Tajikistan. Those opposing them claimed they sought to establish an anti-democratic, radicalized Islamic regime. At independence it was the former Communists, or forces seeking to preserve the status quo, who were in power. By mid-1992 they had become so unpopular that they were driven first to sharing power with and then ceding it to the forces seeking change. By the end of 1992, however, the forces seeking to preserve the status quo had forcibly regained power. The civil war, though, continues with the involvement of Russian and Uzbek armed forces.⁴

Central Asian Foreign Policies

Ruling and non-ruling parties in Central Asia, as well as everywhere else, pursue or advocate foreign policies within the specific domestic political context in which they operate. Yet even though they may disagree on domestic issues, there are often some areas of agreement shared by ruling and non-ruling parties in the foreign policy sphere. For instance, both ruling and non-

ruling parties seek broad recognition for their country as well as foreign aid, investment, and trade. Additionally, both ruling and non-ruling parties usually seek to maximize their country's independence and avoid foreign dominance.

Nevertheless, the disagreements between ruling and non-ruling parties on domestic issues have an important effect on their respective approaches to foreign policy issues. For ruling parties in Central Asia, the primary domestic political goal is to remain in power. They all pursue a foreign policy which they believe assists them in doing so. Similarly, the primary domestic political goal for non-ruling parties in Central Asia is to gain or share power. The foreign policies they advocate or pursue are ones they hope will help achieve this objective.

The above statements, of course, are generalities which are true for the foreign policies of ruling and non-ruling parties in all countries. What are the specifics with regard to Central Asia?

Ruling Parties

Despite their differing attitudes toward political evolution in their respective countries, the ruling parties in all five Central Asian republics have pursued remarkably similar foreign policies. Unlike in Ukraine, the ruling parties in all five Central Asian republics have chosen not to maintain large defense establishments themselves but to rely primarily on Russia to provide them with security. Apart from Armenia, only four Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) signed the May 15, 1992 CIS collective security treaty with Russia. This collective security agreement specifically forbade the signatories from joining alliances directed at other signatories to this one. Through this treaty, the Central Asian signatories essentially agreed to maintain an exclusive security relationship with Russia and not ally militarily with any nation outside the CIS. Although Turkmenistan did not sign this treaty, it did sign a bilateral security agreement with Russia in June 1992 which also established an exclusive military relationship between the two countries.⁵

Why those ruling parties seeking firmly to maintain the status quo (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and the former Communists in Tajikistan) would seek a close military relationship with Russia is clear: they want Moscow to help them stay in power. (Why Russia would want to do this will be addressed later.) A similar motive may be present for the ruling party in Kaza-

¹*Ibid.*, pp. 189-204.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 205-21.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 178-88.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 222-32. For coverage of the civil war, see the "Events in Tajikistan" section of *Central Asia Monitor* beginning with issue no. 3, (1992) onward.

⁵Robert V. Barylski, "Central Asia and the Post-Soviet Military System in the Formative Year: 1992," *Central Asia Monitor*, no. 6 (1992), p. 24.

khstan. Here, though, the issue is complicated by the ethnic situation in that country.¹ Any effort to rapidly replace the predominantly Russian military establishment with a predominantly Kazakh one might increase secessionist sentiment within the Russian population predominant in northern Kazakhstan.

The motive for the democratizing government in Kyrgyzstan to ally with Russia is also comprehensible. Kyrgyzstan is surrounded by larger, more powerful neighbors whose governments are either hostile to or ambivalent toward democracy. Because of its remote location, it is highly doubtful that meaningful security assistance would be available from the Western democracies if Kyrgyzstan's democracy was threatened. An alliance with democratizing Russia, then, is probably the best external guarantee for the preservation of democratization in Kyrgyzstan.

In its brief period in office, the democratic/Islamic government in Tajikistan called upon Russia to intervene in the civil war there.² It seems to have hoped that a democratizing Russia would have an interest in defending a democratizing government in Tajikistan as well as preventing the Communist apparatchiks from returning to power. This hope, however, proved to be unfounded.

In addition to the military sphere, the foreign policies of the five Central Asian republics have been similar in other respects. All have joined the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as well as a host of other international groupings. All have sought good relations with the West (meaning here not just the U.S. and Western Europe, but also Japan and South Korea), China, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and even Israel, as well as others.

Even those status quo Central Asian governments which have most loudly denounced all opposition parties as being Islamic revolutionaries (whether the charge was accurate or not) have sought friendly relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The most striking example of this was the visit of Uzbekistan's President Karimov to Tehran in November 1992 to improve relations with that country coinciding with the Uzbek-assisted suppression of the democratic/Islamic government in Tajikistan.³

¹For a detailed study of this issue, see Philip S. Gillette, "Ethnic Balance and Imbalance in Kazakhstan's Regions," *Central Asia Monitor*, no. 3 (1993), pp. 17-23.

²See "Civil War in Tajikistan," *Central Asia Monitor*, no. 5 (1992), p. 8; and "Events in Tajikistan," *Central Asia Monitor*, no. 6 (1992), pp. 2, 4.

³Christopher J. Panico, "Uzbekistan's Southern Diplomacy," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 26 March 1993, pp. 42-4.

There appears to be a two-fold incentive for Central Asian governments to have good relations with Iran: 1) to dissuade Iran from undertaking actions hostile toward them; and 2) to raise concern among the many Western and Middle Eastern nations which fear that "Iranian influence is rising in Central Asia" and thus induce them to provide assistance to Central Asia -- much as many Third World nations played on Western fears of expanding Soviet influence to obtain aid from the West during the Cold War.

But while seeking good state-to-state relations with Iran and other Muslim governments, the status quo regimes in particular have tended to denounce opposition parties as being Islamic revolutionaries even if they are not. In addition to its domestic political implications, this policy appears designed to deflect or mute criticism from the West as well as Russian democrats of status quo regimes' internal policies. The fact that status quo regimes denounce as Islamic revolutionary non-ruling parties which are not suggests that these regimes may calculate that Western and Russian democratic fears of Islamic revolution coming to Central Asia outweigh their desire to foster democracy in the region. And to the extent that the West and Russia fears Islamic revolution, status quo regimes hope that external pressure on them to democratize will be minimized.

Non-ruling Parties

In addition to the ruling parties, there are a host of non-ruling parties in Central Asia which pursue a variety of political goals. There are parties which are primarily democratic, others which are primarily nationalist, and still others which are primarily Islamic. These different programs, though, are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Each of these parties tends to gravitate toward those states with which they share common views of what is a desirable political order. Islamist parties tend to seek support from Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Secular nationalist parties in the republics with ethnic and linguistic links to Turkey often see Turkey as a role model. Democratic parties seek sympathy for their cause from Western as well as other democracies.

In the immediate post-independence period, though, these non-ruling parties were not hostile to external powers that have an internal political structure different from the one which each party seeks to build in its republic. For example, the Islamic parties were not implacably hostile toward the United States and the West. Nor were the democratic parties implacably hostile toward Iran. On the other hand, these Central Asian non-ruling parties were not so enamored of the external power with the political system they admired that they want that

foreign country to have particularly strong influence in their republics. Secular nationalist parties, for example, which saw Turkey as a model to emulate did not want their republics to become subordinate to Turkey. Similarly, Islamist parties did not necessarily want to see their republics become subordinate to Iran or establish an Iranian-style Islamic republic.

This last point is worth elaborating on. A staff report of the U.S. Congress's Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe noted that while many people describe the Alash party in Kazakhstan as extremist, "its leaders maintain they favor a multi-party democracy and are opposed to fundamentalism and dictatorship of all kinds."¹ The co-chair of Alash, Saltanat Ermekova, stated, "If an Islamic regime came to power in Kazakhstan, we would be the first to fight it."²

In a series of interviews published during the summer of 1992 (*i.e.*, before the return to power of the Communists) in the Tajik weekly *Tojikiston*, leaders from many political parties did indicate a desire for close relations with Iran, with which Tajikistan has cultural and linguistic ties. Often, though, a desire for broader relations with the outside world or for limiting ties with Iran to some degree were also indicated. The leader of the Rastokhez National Front, Tohir Abdujabbor, said his party seeks close ties with Iran, but that "we are ready to establish industrial and economic ties with any country that is so inclined" On the role of Islam, he said that "the government system, the state organs, and the prosecutor's office must not interfere with people's lives, nor have anything to do with ideology."³ The founder of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, Shodmon Yusuf, called for a Tajik-Iranian alliance, but also called for freedom of religion.⁴ Two officials of the Islamic Revivalist Party did call for the creation of an Islamic government, but specified that such a government must have a parliament and leaders "chosen by the people." They called for close relations with other Muslim countries, but stated, "We are not funded by any other country and we are completely independent."⁵

What this shows is that while Islamist parties opposed preserving the status quo, they did not necessarily support the goal of establishing a radical, anti-democratic Islamic regime. Alash, for example, advocates the

establishment of a pluralist democracy, while several parties in Tajikistan envisioned an Islamic government being democratic. Those who fear these parties, however, claim that such moderate statements are merely propaganda intended for Western consumption and that their true aim is to establish anti-democratic, Islamic regimes.

But except for Russian nationalist groups (mainly in Kazakhstan), different non-ruling parties in Central Asia have tended to have similar views about states outside the region. Just as Russia is seen by the ruling parties as an ally acting to help them stay in power, it is viewed as an opponent by non-ruling parties seeking change. Non-ruling parties in general have hoped that the concern for democratization on the part of Western countries would lead them -- as well as democrats in Russia -- to support their efforts to bring about political change. Non-ruling parties see a whole host of countries -- Western, Asian, and Muslim -- as potential sources of aid, trade, and investment. Finally, Muslim governments are seen as supporters of change, but also states to be kept at arms length to a certain extent. Non-ruling parties in Central Asia do not want to see their countries go from being dominated by Russia to being dominated by any other state.

There has, however, been a change in the foreign policy outlook of some non-ruling parties following the reimposition of Communist rule in Tajikistan as well as the political crackdown in Uzbekistan. Their hopes that Russian democrats would support parties seeking democratic evolution have been dashed. Hopes that America and the West would also provide assistance in bringing about political change have also been disappointed. A leader of the exiled Democratic Party of Tajikistan, Dr. Dust Muhammad Dust, stated, "It is a bitter irony that the West would prefer the old 'communist' guard to stay in power simply because the only alternative, in their perception, is Islamic fundamentalism. Nothing could be further from the truth."⁶ Shukhrat Ismatulaev of the Birlik Party in Uzbekistan warned, "When democratic organizations are suppressed, the initiative can pass to extremists, and a peaceful course can [no longer] be the way to control dissatisfaction."⁷

In other words, when non-ruling parties seeking peaceful political evolution are crushed, the opposition may become radicalized and dominated by leaders who do seek to establish an anti-democratic Islamic republic. This may well be happening. The anti-communist democratic/Islamic parties in Tajikistan appealed for help

¹Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, p. 191.

²*Ibid.*, p. 199.

³Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, "The 'Tajik Spring of 1992,'" *Central Asia Monitor*, no. 2 (1993), p. 23.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

⁶Quoted in Marat Akchurin, "Tajikistan: Another Bosnia in the Making?" *Central Asia Monitor*, no 3, (1993), p. 9.

⁷Quoted in Tadjbakhsh, p. 14.

from the West and even from Russia during the autumn of 1992 when they were trying to prevent the Communists from returning to power. Since then, however, what remains of these democratic/Islamic parties are receiving the bulk of their assistance from extremist Islamic groups in Afghanistan. Similarly, while the Uzbek government crackdown may have ended the activities of the two main democratic parties, Erk and Birlik, Muslim fundamentalist groups in Uzbekistan are apparently still active -- and may also be receiving assistance from extremist groups in Afghanistan. As Bess Brown

of the RFE/RL Research Institute put it, "The repression of the democratic Uzbek nationalists may prove to have removed an important moderating force from the political scene, and the country may find its conservative communist leadership facing an Afghan-supported Islamic insurgency that would finish off hopes for rapid integration into the outside world."¹

¹Bess Brown, "Tajik Civil War Prompts Crackdown in Uzbekistan," *RFE/RL Res. Report*, 12 March 1993, p. 6.

The Rule of Law Initiative of USAID in Central Asia

In a first meeting of its kind, the senior staff of Chemonics International (Washington Office) met with embassy personnel from the Central Asian representatives to the United States to discuss how the rule of law project is projected to operate in each of the countries of the region. Represented in person were the governments of Kazakhstan (Almaz Khamzaev, Charge d'Affaires), Kyrgyzstan (Roza Otunbayeva, Ambassador) and Uzbekistan (Faith Teshabaev, Charge d'Affaires). A fax from the Tajik representative to the United Nations, Lakim Kayumov, addressed the subject of the meeting. The Turkmen representative had not responded by the time the meeting adjourned.

Each of the representatives, beginning with Ambassador Otunbayeva, expressed the nuance of need in terms of rule of law within his or her country. The Ambassador stressed especially the importance of training -- intensive legal training seminars such as those conducted by the International Law Institute -- which can benefit local legal experts, as well as utilizing the training of Muskie Fellows in law from Central Asia in developing in-country projects. She also pointed to the need to deal with the problem of duplicated projects that can occur without an in-country tracking system when so many international, national and private funders are becoming involved with Central Asia. Others stressed the need for development of business and investment law, election law and constitutional law.

The Chemonics team will spend several of the winter months establishing a base in Almaty and assessing the specific projects they will undertake over the next three years. The meeting with official representatives of the countries in which they will work provided a valuable opportunity to continue the process of becoming attuned to the region and its needs.

Many of the participants in the Rule of Law project emphasized the importance of communications among groups working within each country, and among those concerned with specific issues such as environment or democracy. The *Monitor* will also attempt to keep readers informed of major projects and to this end urges recipients of *CAM* to send information about projects with which they are involved.

EMERGING PATTERNS IN THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF CENTRAL ASIA (Conclusion)

by Mark N. Katz*

External Powers and Central Asia

In this section, the foreign policies toward Central Asia of the major external powers which do or could play an important role in the region will be examined to determine which outcome in the domestic political struggle within Central Asia the policies of these outside powers support as well as how strongly they do so. These important external actors include Russia, America and the West, Muslim states, and important non-Muslim Asian states. It must, of course, be kept in mind that nations do not pursue foreign policies monolithically. Often, a nation's foreign policy is ambiguous. This may be the case because there are different groups struggling for power in which competing foreign policy visions are a part of their overall rivalry. Ambiguity may also occur even when a government is firmly controlled by one group which deliberately pursues a dual strategy.

Russia is still the most influential external power in Central Asia. As was mentioned before, Moscow has close ties with all the existing governments. It continues to maintain tens of thousands of troops in the region and to have very close economic ties with it. The foreign policy of Russia's hard-line Communists and ultra-nationalists toward Central Asia is fairly clear. Seeking to preserve the power of the former bureaucrats and limit democratization in Russia itself, they also support the preservation of the status quo regimes in Central Asia as well as Russia's predominant influence there.¹

While opposed to the hard-line Communists and the ultra-nationalists on most domestic issues, Yeltsin and the democrats also generally support the status quo regimes in Central Asia. Even Andrei Kozyrev -- the reformist Foreign Minister who has been highly criticized by the conservatives -- has defended Russian intervention in the Tajik civil war by claiming that it is needed to halt "the spread of Islamic nationalism."² Russia's

democrats do indeed genuinely fear that Islamic nationalism will spread throughout Central Asia and into the predominantly Muslim regions of Russia itself. They may also maintain this position so as not to allow Russia's conservatives to credibly accuse them of being insufficiently nationalist. Russia's democrats, in other words, see preserving Moscow's influence in Central Asia to be important for domestic political reasons in Russia.

Russian democrats, then, also support the preservation of the status quo in Central Asia. In the summer of 1993, Moscow sent an additional 10,000 Russian troops to guard Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan, from where the opponents of Tajikistan's restored Communist regime receive arms and sanctuary. These Russian border troops have even launched raids into Afghanistan. On the other hand, fears in Russia have reportedly risen about the possibility of Moscow becoming dragged into another costly guerrilla war as in Afghanistan. President Yeltsin has called upon the Tajik government to negotiate with its opponents (something that government has been unwilling to do) and has asked Afghanistan, Pakistan, and even Iran to help negotiate a peace settlement in Tajikistan.³

Thus, while Moscow has been willing to undertake some military action in order to preserve the status quo in Central Asia, it is not clear whether the democrats or the nationalists in Russia would be politically able to undertake a prolonged and/or expanded effort to do so. In other words, Russian commitment to preserving the status quo in Central Asia is relatively firm if the effort needed to do so is relatively modest. The more difficult the task becomes, however, the more doubtful Russia's commitment to preserving the status quo may become.

The United States government has actively promoted democratization in Central Asia. As with other former Soviet republics, American recognition of the newly independent states of Central Asia only occurred after they agreed to abide by CSCE principles. Washington has praised Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan for the progress they have made toward democratization, and has criticized the

¹On the foreign policy of Russia's right-wing, see Vera Tolz, "The Burden of the Imperial Legacy," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 14 May 1993, pp. 41-6.

²"The Empire Strikes Back," *The Economist*, August 7, 1993, p. 36.

³*Ibid.*, and Fred Hiatt, "Yeltsin, Central Asian Leaders Meet on Tajik Conflict," *The Washington Post*, August 8, 1993.

lack of such progress in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.

Yet while Washington would ideally prefer democratization to the status quo in the region, it definitely prefers the status quo to the possibility of Islamic revolution. Thus, despite its tense relations with the status quo regimes, Washington seems prepared to work with them, as well as Russia, to prevent the coming to power of Islamic fundamentalist forces. Many in Washington -- often outside the administration -- warn that encouragement of democratization may be the best way to dampen the popularity of Islamic revolutionaries.¹ But in practice, Washington has been unwilling to press the status quo very hard to democratize. Nor is it likely that the U.S. could or would do much itself to protect the status quo regimes if they were seriously challenged by Islamic revolutionary forces.

Western Europe, Japan, and South Korea would all welcome democratization in Central Asia, but are less vocal about promoting it than the United States. Central Asia's economic potential is of more importance to these countries than either its political development or its strategic importance.² They are willing to work with all the existing regimes, whether democratizing or firmly status quo, and would definitely prefer not to see Islamic fundamentalist regimes come to power in the region.

But Japan, South Korea, and most of Western Europe were able to quickly establish good working relations with the revolutionary regime in Iran soon after the downfall of the Shah. If Islamic revolutionary regimes came to power in Central Asia, it is probable that Japan, South Korea, and most of Western Europe would be able to establish friendly relations with them too. For external powers with primarily economic interests in the region, the maintenance of order under any regime which allows them to trade and invest peacefully is preferable to civil war or other forms of disorder which would make these activities difficult or impossi-

ble. Thus, while Western Europe, Japan, and South Korea can be said to favor the status quo in Central Asia, they are not wedded to it.

China has one important security concern with regard to Central Asia: Beijing does not want to see the independent states of the region support the secessionist efforts of their ethnic kinsmen, the Uighurs, in Xinjiang, the Chinese province which borders the region. China has sought to forestall this by offering economic incentives to the newly independent states -- which are not eager to annoy their more powerful neighbor anyway.³

The Chinese government probably prefers the status quo ex-Communist regimes in the area to either democratizing or Islamic revolutionary governments. Beijing, though, has displayed a willingness to peacefully co-exist with democratizing Kyrgyzstan. And just as it enjoys good relations with revolutionary Iran, Beijing may well be able to establish friendly ties with Islamic regimes in Central Asia -- especially if they have hostile relations with Russia and the West. Thus, while China prefers the status quo, it is primarily concerned with preserving it only in Xinjiang -- a task which Beijing can probably accomplish whether or not the status quo in Central Asia is maintained.

Iran has an Islamic revolutionary regime, and would like to see this form of government spread to other predominantly Muslim states, including those in Central Asia. But Iranian foreign policy is complex. The Iranian leadership is confident that Islamic revolution will occur in these countries in the long run. In the meantime, Tehran seeks to establish good relations with the existing governments of the region, including those which are anti-Islamic. The Iranians fear that a premature effort on their part to promote Islamic revolution could lead to a nationalist, anti-Iranian backlash in the region which would only enhance the influence of America, Turkey, and other rivals of Tehran. Thus, Iran reportedly did little to assist the democratic/Islamic forces in the Tajik civil war. Tehran apparently feared that the victory of these forces in Tajikistan, the one Central Asian state with predominant cultural links to Iran, would alienate the four other states in the region with predominant cultural links to Turkey.⁴

On the other hand, if status quo regimes in Central Asia become unpopular and Muslim opposition to them grows strong and turns to Tehran for support, Iran would

¹There is a growing literature on the U.S. and Central Asia. See David Hoffman, "Power Competition in Central Asia," *The Washington Post*, February 14, 1992; "Congressional Hearing: United States Policy toward Central Asia," *Central Asia Monitor*, no. 2 (1992), pp. 21-31; James Rupert, "Dateline Tashkent: Post-Soviet Central Asia," *Foreign Policy*, no. 87 (Summer 1992), pp. 175-95; and James Critchlow, "What Is the U.S. Interest in Central Asia's Future?" *Central Asia Monitor*, no. 5 (1992), pp. 27-9.

²On Central Asia's foreign economic ties, see Sheila Marnie and Erik Whitlock, "Central Asia and Economic Integration," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 2 April 1993, pp. 34-44.

³Bess Brown, "Central Asia: The First Year of Unexpected Statehood," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 1 January 1993, p. 29.

⁴Panico, pp. 43-4. See also Shireen T. Hunter, "Central Asia and the Middle East: Patterns of Interaction and Influence," *Central Asia Monitor*, no. 6 (1992), pp. 13-14.

be in a good position to assist them. Iran, then, would prefer Islamic revolutionary regimes to come to power in Central Asia, but realizes this is unlikely to occur soon. But aside from Islamic regimes, Tehran probably prefers to see firmly anti-Islamic status quo regimes in Central Asia rather than democratizing ones; for an authoritarian status quo regime which does not permit a democratic opposition to arise may serve as a better incubator of an anti-democratic Islamic revolutionary opposition than would a democratizing government which would allow non-ruling parties to bring about change without resort to violence.

Iran, though, is not the only country whose actions support Islamic revolution. While strife-torn Afghanistan does not have a unified government, most of the various factions there are Islamic. The democratic/Islamic forces in Tajikistan have been receiving military assistance from various groups in Afghanistan. It is also reported that Gulbudin Hekmatyar, the radical Islamic Pushtun leader, is providing them with military aid.¹ This assistance seems to be going to the Islamic revolutionary elements within the Tajik opposition, thus strengthening them vis-a-vis the democrats who had been stronger during their brief period in office.

Pakistan has sought to establish good relations with the existing Central Asian governments. But Pakistan is also the primary supporter of Hekmatyar in Afghanistan. If reports that he is aiding the Tajik opposition are true, he is probably doing so with Islamabad's blessing. Pakistan's policy toward the region, then, may be similar to Iran's: willing to work with the status quo regimes, but able to support Islamic revolution when the opportunity arises. Despite its ambitions to play an important role in Central Asia, however, Pakistan's ability to do so may be quite limited due to its relative poverty.²

Saudi Arabia is a conservative Muslim state which opposes Islamic revolution. It has provided assistance, especially in the form of revitalizing Islam, in the hope of limiting the influence of Iran and other revolutionary Islamic regimes, as well as offering its own version of Islam as a non-revolutionary model for Central Asians.

But Saudi Arabia's policy toward Central Asia is somewhat complicated. It opposes Islamic revolution, but it also opposes democratization -- which the Saudi royal family does not wish to see spread to the Middle East. The Saudi government is more comfortable with the status quo regimes of the region, but its own efforts

to promote Islam may actually undercut them; many of the missionaries and other aid workers sent over by Saudi Arabia are, in fact, Islamic zealots whom Riyadh prefers to send out of the Kingdom. And just as with many of the young Saudis who went to help the Afghan mujahideen when they were fighting against the Soviets, many of those sent to Central Asia have an Islamic revolutionary agenda which they hope to implement not only in Central Asia, but in Saudi Arabia itself. In addition, many wealthy Saudis provide generous financial assistance to Islamic revolutionaries throughout the Muslim world, including Central Asia. Some do this unwittingly, thinking only that they are somehow "helping Islam." Others, however, oppose the Saudi monarchy and support Islamic revolution elsewhere in the hope that its success in other Muslim nations will increase the prospects for it in Saudi Arabia itself.³ Thus, while the Saudi government may support the preservation of the status quo in Central Asia, both its own actions as well as those of some of its citizens may serve to undercut the status quo and promote Islamic revolution.

Turkey is a Western-oriented, secular, democratic state. It has sought to extend its influence in Central Asia as well as limit that of Iran there. But while the Turkish government favors democratization, it also fears the spread of Islamic revolution. Like the United States, then, it prefers the existing status quo regimes to the prospect of Islamic revolutionary ones.⁴

The very existence of democracy in Turkey, though, serves as a model for those ruling and non-ruling parties in Central Asia which also favor democratization. But democracy is not completely secure in Turkey. There have been occasions when the army has seized power. There is also a growing movement which wishes to see the secular state replaced with an Islamic regime. If either the army or an Islamic revolutionary government came to power in Ankara, Turkey would no longer work to promote democracy in Central Asia. But despite its cultural links to four of the five Central Asian republics and its desire to play a large role there, Turkey's ability to affect the political evolution of Central Asia is limited by its geographic distance from the region. In addition, although Turkey's economy has grown significantly in recent years, it is not in a position to provide large-scale economic assistance to Central Asia.

¹"Events in Tajikistan," *Central Asia Monitor*, no. 3 (1993), p. 5. See also Bess Brown, "Central Asian States Seek Russian Help," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 18 June 1993, pp. 87-8.

²Hunter, pp. 14-15.

³Steve Coll and David Hoffman, "Radical Movements Thrive on Loose Structure, Strict Ideology," *The Washington Post*, August 2, 1993.

⁴Hunter, pp. 12-13.

The Correlation of Forces

Apart from certain Muslim states, most external powers support the existing governments in Central Asia, whether they are democratizing or firmly status quo. Except for Russia, however, external support for these Central Asian governments is not particularly strong. Russia is probably the only government willing and able to intervene militarily in support of the existing Central Asian governments. There may, however, be a limit to how much the Russian public might be willing to tolerate military intervention there if it appears that a quagmire of Afghan proportions is developing. On the other hand, with the exception of support from various factions in Afghanistan to Islamic forces in Tajikistan and possibly elsewhere, external powers which want to see political change of one sort or another come to Central Asia are not working especially vigorously to bring it about. Thus, despite press accounts describing active rivalry among external powers for influence in the region, the political evolution of Central Asia may actually depend more on the relative strength of the various internal forces there vis-a-vis one another.

What can be said about the prospects for each of the possible directions -- maintenance of the status quo, democratization, and Islamic revolution -- in which Central Asia might evolve politically both in the short-term and the long-term? This questions requires a discussion of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the ruling and non-ruling parties in Central Asia pursuing these alternative political paths as well as the effects of the foreign policies pursued by external powers in the region.

Maintenance of the Status Quo.

In the short term, status quo regimes consisting of ex-communists can easily maintain themselves in power, especially with Russian help. The ruling parties have the power to deny non-ruling parties the ability to legally and peacefully compete for power. And in case of armed struggle with their opponents, the ex-Communists either possess greatly superior forces to their potential opponents, or as in the case of Tajikistan, can call upon external allies who do.

In the long term, however, the prospects for the survivability of the hard-line status quo regimes are probably poor. This statement can be made with some confidence simply based on the fact that the demand for democratization has spread to many countries throughout the world where it has never or rarely been present before. Many dictatorial regimes, including Communist ones once thought to be invulnerable, have fallen. Most of the rest are on the defensive. It simply defies all credibility to believe that the people of Central Asia are

somehow different from people everywhere else, and that Central Asians prefer the status quo of being ruled by Communist apparatchiks to making decisions for themselves. And while Russian military assistance may help status quo regimes remain in power, it will not necessarily make them more stable. Indeed, popular discontent with status quo regimes may well be inflamed by the perception that they are the puppets of a foreign power. Finally, if a status quo regime weakens and civil war erupts, Russian military involvement may not be sustainable if it becomes unpopular with the Russian public. And without Russian assistance, the survivability of an unpopular status quo regime is highly doubtful.

Democratization

To the extent that governments in Kyrgyzstan and, to a lesser extent, Kazakhstan have permitted democratization, the populace has embraced it. But where Central Asian governments do not permit democratization, it appears to have no real prospect for occurring in the short term.

In the long term, the prospects for Western-style democratization in the nations with status quo regimes is open to question. While Islamic revolution appears to be far less popular than Western-style democracy among Central Asians now, the forces seeking democracy could suffer serious disadvantages vis-a-vis the forces seeking Islamic revolution if civil war erupted. In a situation where Moscow was aiding a status quo regime in a war that was unpopular in Russia, Islamic states were aiding the Islamic revolutionaries and no one was helping the democrats, Islamic revolutionary forces may be in the best position to come to power after the downfall of the status quo regime. This might be avoided if the status quo regime permitted democratization to occur peacefully -- but it is highly doubtful that any of them will do this any time soon.

Islamic Revolution

Hard-line, Iranian-style Islamic revolution appears unlikely in the short run not only because the existing governments and Russia are strong enough to defeat it, but also -- indeed mainly -- because it simply is not a particularly popular ideology in Central Asia now.

If Western-style democratization is not allowed to occur peacefully, however, the prospects for Islamic revolution may increase. This could occur, as was mentioned before, if outside powers were aiding Islamic revolutionaries and no one was aiding the democrats. But the popular appeal of Islamic revolution within Central Asia might increase if its proponents are successfully able to persuade enough people that 1) Russia and the West do not want democracy to come to Central Asia

and hence help the former Communists stay in power; 2) Islamic revolutionary states opposed to Russia and the West are Central Asia's "true friends;" and 3) Islamic revolution is "true democracy" -- something that all revolutionaries claim about their ideology. In a situation where an unpopular, foreign-backed dictatorship is strong enough to suppress democratic opposition, Islamic revolution may look increasingly appealing to a populace that is impatient for change and disillusioned with Russia and the West. This might also be an opportunity for Islamic revolutionary governments to become involved and extend their influence, just as the Soviet Union used to do with Third World Marxist revolutionary movements at the time that the unpopular regime they were fighting against was weakening.

Conclusion

This analysis suggests that while status quo regimes are likely to remain in power, their ability to do so in the long term is highly doubtful. Such regimes tend to become unpopular domestically. And while there is some external backing for these regimes, it may prove to be relatively limited. The public in Russia, America, and the West have shown in the past that they are unwilling to tolerate prolonged efforts to prop up unpopular regimes abroad. It is highly doubtful that their attitude will change in the future.

But if status quo regimes are unlikely to last in Central Asia, it is still very much an open question whether liberal democracy or Islamic revolution will come there. It is obviously too early to judge in which direction Central Asia's political future will evolve.

Ironically, the most important factor in shaping Central Asian public opinion about the relative merits of liberal democracy and Islamic revolution may be the attitude of the status quo regimes. If these governments recognize that their ability to remain in power over the long term is probably limited, they themselves are likely to prefer democratization to Islamic revolution. For under democracy, the supporters of the current status quo would have a chance to participate in free elections. They may actually win such elections and remain in power. But even if they lose, they can at least remain as a loyal opposition party with the prospect of winning subsequent elections -- as the former Communists have done in Lithuania.

If an Islamic revolution succeeds, however, the supporters of the current status quo regime recognize that they will probably not be allowed to play any significant political role after falling from power. A status quo regime recognizing its own mortality, then, is likely to work to bring about democratization since its supporters are likely to fare better under it than if Islamic revolu-

tion succeeds. Russia, America, and the West may be able to help bring about democracy if the status quo regime invites their assistance in bringing about the transition.

On the other hand, those status quo regimes which think they can retain power indefinitely without democratizing may actually serve to strengthen the prospect for Islamic revolution occurring. For while status quo regimes can easily suppress their democratic opponents, they are unlikely to avoid becoming increasingly unpopular domestically. People impatient for change may see externally-armed Islamic revolutionaries as more capable of deposing the hated status quo regime than unarmed democrats receiving no meaningful foreign support.

As Islamic revolutionary opposition to the status quo regime grows, the latter may realize that it probably cannot survive without instituting reform. But such efforts may come too late. The attempt to institute democratization by a status quo regime when it has become extremely unpopular may be seen as a sign of weakness which may only serve to accelerate armed opposition on the part of the Islamists who not only wish to oust the regime, but also prevent their democratic opponents from being able to come to power through peaceful means. Neither Russia nor the West is likely to be willing or able to successfully intervene if conditions deteriorate to this extent. On the other hand, even limited external assistance from external Islamic revolutionary regimes may prove decisive in assisting Central Asian Islamic revolutionaries achieve their aims.

Some might argue that democratization in Central Asia is extremely risky. They argue that if the status quo regimes allowed democratization, this may simply lead to Islamic revolutionaries coming to power via elections. This, of course, is possible. But even if it did occur, the likelihood that the Islamists would be under the influence of external Islamic powers appears less if they came to power by democratic means without Iranian or Afghan help than if they came to power through armed struggle with their assistance.

But while it is possible that an Islamic revolutionary party could come to power through electoral means, this does not appear likely. It is highly significant that in those Central Asian states where democratization has proceeded the furthest -- Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan -- Islamic parties have not attracted much of a popular following. The truly ominous case is Tajikistan where the democrats held the upper hand in the anti-status quo coalition that ruled there briefly in 1992, but where the Islamic revolutionaries appear to be gaining the ascendancy within the opposition after the forcible return to power of the Communist apparatchiks.