

Central Asian Integration and Islamic Revivalism

Evgeniy ABDULLAEV

In the decade that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and achievement of independence for the former Soviet republics of Central Asia in 1991, they have replicated the path that virtually all the post-colonialist states have followed in the second half of the twentieth century. The characteristics of post-colonial development have repeatedly manifested themselves among the most diverse states of Central Asia, to wit: an economic decline due to the rupture of the former inter-republic ties; the aggravation of tension and conflict among various ethnic and tribal groups; a vulnerability towards the interference of big powers etc.

Given the growing complexity of the problems facing Central Asia, it is apparent that the individual states cannot resolve these issues by themselves and that they therefore must strengthen regional cooperation. However, as the experience of developing integrated structures in other regions of the world has shown, the existence of common problems almost never provides sufficient grounds for integration. As a rule, four conditions are necessary and sufficient for integration:

- (1) a common ideology;
- (2) a common enemy;
- (3) a commonly recognized regional leader, and
- (4) an extra-regional big power favoring the integration.

For example, in the event of European postwar integration, which is usually regarded as a model, the common ideology was Christian universalism, and an enlightenment belief in peaceful and democratic progress; the common adversary was the Eastern bloc headed by the USSR; commonly recognized regional leader was France, together with West Germany; and the commonly accepted extra-regional big power was United States (to the extent the integration was not *against* the U.S., of course).

On the other hand, one can explain the failure of numerous integration projects within the APEC by lack of these four principles. There is no common ideology between, e.g. the communist China and post-industrialized Japan and South Korea (if one do not exaggerate the role of the Confucian legacy). There is no common enemy and no commonly recognized regional leader there, as Japanese economic leadership has been recently challenged by China. And the U.S., as an extra-regional big power does not favor the integration; as R. Gilpin noted, "the United States is likely to oppose APEC or any other Pacific Asian organization that it cannot control".¹

The present paper examines the application of the above four integration conditions to the Central Asia and their relationships with the ongoing Islamic revivalism in that region. Or, shaping this problem into a question, 'Does Central

¹ R. Gilpin, *The Challenge of Global Capitalism: the World Economy in the 21st Century* (Princeton, New Jersey, 2000), 291.

Asia have these four conditions, and what is the role of Islam in the process of integration?'.

(1) Islamic Revivalism and the Common Integrationist Ideology

With respect to a common ideology, by the early 1990s Central Asia appeared to occupy even more auspicious position than did either Europe or the Asian-Pacific region. All the countries of Central Asia belonged to a common Sunni branch of Islam, and underwent similar processes of revival of Islam. The basic features of this process were the following: (1) a sharp increase in the number of people who openly called themselves Muslim; (2) a rapid proliferation of mosques and religious schools; (3) the recognition of the Muslim holidays of Kurban Bairam (*id al'kurban*) and Uraza Bairam (*id al'fitr*) as official state holidays; (4) the official commemoration by the state of important dates in the lives of the great religious figures of Central Asia; (5) the emergence of the dissemination of information propagandizing the values and norms of Islam (books, brochures, television and radio programs, and the like); (6) reform of the former Soviet system of state control over religion (through the adoption of new, more liberal laws; through an amelioration of the procedure for the registration of religious organizations); and, (7) the expansion of international contacts with Muslim countries and the entrance of Central Asian states into international Islamic organizations (for instance, the Islamic Organization Conference). Moreover, the Central Asian Spiritual Board of Muslims (SADUM), the central regional organ located in Tashkent could have played a role of a spiritual generator of Central Asian integration. This authoritative organ of traditional Islam could have also opposed the strengthening oppositionist Islamic movements.

Nevertheless, SADUM was the first victim of the centrifugal processes prevailing in the region in the early 1990s. The former spiritual directorates (Kaziats) in post-Soviet Central Asian republics formed religious boards (Muftiats), independent from the Tashkent SADUM. However logical, the establishment of "sovereign" muftis eroded the position of official Islam. With "national" muftis dispersed into units and deprived of sufficient authority and experience, Islamic establishment (especially at first) could not repel the challenges posed by unofficial and fundamentalist movements. Moreover, the centrifugal ethnic forces that had caused the schism in SADUM continued to operate within the new muftiats. Various competing groups of clergy constantly appealed to state organs, thereby provoking a repetition of the Soviet practice of state supervision over religion. Having "divided up" SADUM and determined to construct a national ideology for each state, the Central Asian elites also began to divide - along national and territorial lines - both the common Islamic spiritual legacy and its most important representatives.

A further foreign-policy impulse to this destructive process derived from the notorious choice between the "Turkish" and the "Iranian" models, with the decision being made in favor of the former. With respect to integration, that choice was tantamount to rejecting religious affiliation as the foundation of na-

tional identity and, instead, opting in favor of a supra-ethnic Turkic identity. However, this choice not only signified the painful exclusion of the non-Turkic Tajiks from this process, but also bound it to the complicated dynamics governing the relations between the Central Asian states and Turkey. However, as a result of the chill in Uzbek-Turkish relations in the second half of the 1990s, the integrative slogan of "Turkestan as the Common Home" became significantly less popular in Uzbekistan.

Thus, by the mid-1990s, it had become obvious that Islam was not an effective integrating ideology. The creation of particularistic national ideologies outweighed the need to find an ideology of integration – a function that Islam had indeed performed in the course of many centuries. Hence A. Khazanov has good reason to label as "armchair speculations" the assertion that the feeling of Islamic identity in Central Asia is stronger than any particularistic national state considerations.²

(2) Islamic Revivalism and the Common Enemy

At the same time, Islamic revivalism was slightly transformed into a common foe of all the states in Central Asia. Significantly, joint resistance to oppositionist Islam became the most substantive dynamic in the development of regional integration in 1999-2000.

It was a necessity for the former Communist party elites, which agilely flowed into the state apparatus of the newly formed states, to proclaim a "secular path of development". First, this motto defended the privileged position of these elites against claims leveled by some religious leaders. Second, it was dictated by the specific role of non-Muslim minorities in the region, which represented not only a reserve of a highly skilled labor force, but – to the extent that these minorities were given protection from the fears of "Islamic threat" – their loyal subjects. Finally, beginning with the dilemma in choosing between "Iranian" and "Turkish" models, the ideology of a secular path possesses a significant appeal in the dialogue between Central Asian countries and the West, not to mention the fact that a sizeable part of the Europeanized Central Asian elites react to Islamic revivalism with a "cultural allergy."

But the main engine of the integration against Islamic revivalism was the overestimation of the latter's role in the Tajik civil war in 1992-1993. This interpretation was also supported and promoted by Russia, which used it as a justification for its peacekeeping involvement into the Tajik conflict³. The alliance between Russia and Uzbekistan, which also supported at that time the president Rakhmonov's secular government, became the kernel of the later integration against the radicalizing Islamic revivalism.

² A. Khazanov, *After the USSR: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States* (London, 1995), 123.

³ D. Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan* (London, New York, 2000), 158.

During a visit by President I. A. Karimov of Uzbekistan to Moscow on 5-7 May 1998, three countries - Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Russia - adopted the "Tripartite Union against Extremism." The initiative came from Uzbekistan, which had come to feel most acutely the "threat from the south."⁴ The formation of this union had been preceded by a discussion of measures to combat religious extremism at a working conference of the foreign ministers of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan in Dushanbe (on 3 March 1998). However, the union was mainly on paper: it lacked the supporting package of corresponding agreements and failed to create a special infrastructure to integrate the campaign to neutralize the Islamic opposition. And, what is more important, it comprised only two Central Asian states, while the three others were apart from it.

The explosions in Tashkent on 16 February 1999 reportedly organized by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IDU) provided the first powerful impulse for the leaders of Central Asia to coordinate their efforts against the oppositionist Islamists. On that very same day President Islam Karimov held telephone conversations with the presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, with the latter expressing their condolences and offered assistance in finding and arresting those who perpetrated the terrorist act.⁵ Three days after the terrorist attack, on 19 February, in an interview given before flying to Kazakhstan for a meeting of the Inter-state Council, Karimov reiterated the need for joint action against religious extremism as well as measures to strengthen the security of state borders.⁶ Nevertheless, the participants at the meeting in Kazakhstan did not sign any joint documents to coordinate the struggle against religious extremism.

But in August 1999, as the IDU's activities spilled over into Kyrgyz territory, the confrontation between secular régimes (above all, Uzbekistan) and the Islamic opposition entered a new phase. The key event was the movement of armed detachments of IDU from Tajikistan into the Batken Raion of Kyrgyzstan and into the Ferghana Valley; their objective was to organize a jihad against the Karimov régime in Uzbekistan and, in the long term, against all the secular states in the region. The very fact that the extremists directed their attack not only against Uzbekistan (as had previously been the case) brought new urgency to the need for a coordinated self-defense by the states of Central Asia.

In the "Bishkek Declaration" (adopted at the time of the Batken events), the Shanghai Five - Russia, Tajikistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan - proclaimed the importance of effective counter-measures against religious extremism. By this point, all of the parties had already encountered growing problems with the Islamic opposition. Russia, disturbed by the waxing strength of the Islamic extremists in the Caucasus, also welcomed the opportunity to enhance its military influence in the region. China had every reason to fear that religious extremism might unleash separatist demands in the Muslim autonomous region of Xinjiang-

⁴ See E. Abdullaev and L. Kolesnikov, "Islam i religiozniy faktor v sovremennom Uzbekistane," *Uzbekistan: Obretnenie novogo oblika*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1998), 1: 255-57.

⁵ *Narodnoe slovo*, 1999, no. 32, p. 1; *ibid.*, 1999, no. 35, p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Uyghur. Even in Kazakhstan authorities had arrested a group of religious extremists who had been receiving military training in the Makpal canyon.⁷

In a short period of time, representatives of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan created an operational headquarters which prepared a strategic plan to destroy the armed insurgents, and their ministers of defense met in Moscow to hold further discussions. When in November 1999 the armed units of IDU temporarily suspended activities because snowfall blocked the mountain pathways, the states of the region intensified their efforts to integrate their campaign against oppositionist Islam. They focused their efforts on the following:

- expand military cooperation to prepare for a new wave of conflict with armed units of the Islamic opposition through meetings of defense ministers from countries in the region, in the course of joint military exercises, and the like; e.g. between 23 March and 3 April 2000, Tajikistan hosted joint anti-terrorist exercises for military units from Russia and the Central Asian states, which simulated battle conditions similar to those that arose during the assault by armed units of IDU in 1999;
- coordinate the efforts of law-enforcement organs to interdict the activities of oppositionist Islamic movements;
- formulate a multifaceted approach to the problem of confronting religious extremism in the broader context of the struggle against terrorism and the drug traffic; e.g. on 20 April 2000 by the heads of all Central Asian states signed in Tashkent "Agreement on Joint Actions to Combat Terrorism, Political and Regional Extremism, Transnational Organized Crime, and Other Threats to the Stability and Security";
- help to regulate the Afghan conflict, which is the primary source of oppositionist Islam in the region.

In August 2000, armed detachments of IDU launched another attempt to break through into the territory of Uzbekistan, but – as in the previous assault – were repulsed by the armed forces of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Although these military actions once again demonstrated both the positive gains in the joint struggle against IDU as the most radical faction of the Islamic revivalism, they also revealed serious weaknesses. First, full-scale regional integration against religious extremism is impossible as long as Turkmenistan retains its special neutrality, Tajikistan remains politically unstable and the common borders with Afghanistan remains anxious. Second, conflicts in the national interests in other spheres continue to intrude. This factor, indeed, prevents Uzbekistan from assuming leadership in this process, notwithstanding its attempts to do so ever since the beginning of the 1990s.

⁷ Iu. Tyssovskii, "Vialotekushchii konflikt v Kirgizii chrevat vzryvom," *Vek*, 23 September 1999.

(3) Islamic Revivalism and Regional Leadership

The issue of regional leadership, the most acute facing the region, is a legacy of the Soviet era, which fostered competition among the states of Central Asia (especially Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan). As the conflict between secular régimes and the religious opposition intensified, both these factors affected the integrating and disintegrating processes at work in the region.

Uzbekistan succeeded in preserving its military capacities succeeded from the Soviet era to a greater degree than the neighboring states. Since 1999, Tashkent has made regular purchases of weapons from Russia, China, and the United States; beginning in 2000, it has also undertaken to reform its armed forces. Although the increase in the military budget constitutes a heavy burden for the economy, and although Kazakhstan increasingly lays claim to leadership in the economic sphere (because of its oil exports), Uzbekistan continues to remain the main political power in the region.

Nevertheless, neither Uzbekistan nor Kazakhstan is currently the kind of force that could spearhead regional integration, even in its most successful sphere – the confrontation with religious extremism. The mutual distrust of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan; Turkmenistan's non-participation in all the anti-extremist measures, the dominance of centrifugal processes – all these factors render highly improbable any real leadership in unifying secular régimes against the threat of militant Islam.

Moreover, the fear of Islamists' militant intervention makes the regional governments to strengthen national state boundaries, which, in its turn, deteriorates the relationships among Central Asian states. Because of the numerous disputed territories, and also because of territorial enclaves, significant conflicts have erupted over the use of borderland land and water resources. The decision by Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to mine segments of their borders (to defend themselves from religious extremists) have inflicted unforeseen human sacrifices among the local population in Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, which is psychologically unprepared for such a rapid closure of the roads and paths that linked neighboring population centers over many centuries.

Under these conditions, the slogans of the Islamic revivalists that exploit the supra-national identity of Islam have a certain appeal. Partly for this reason, the revivalists' idea of a caliphate of all Muslims (regardless of nationality) finds support in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan; the groups of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan are also multinational in their composition. Given the unfortunate tendency of Central Asian states to close their borders, the appeal of oppositionist Islam and a supra-national identity (fusing with the local Islam of Bukhara, Ferghana, and Osh) will increase.

Thus, the challenge of Islamic opposition gives good justification for Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to increase their military and security power and thus reinforce their leadership potentials in the region. But on the other hand, increase of military expenditures and inter-boundary tensions and problems leads to dete-

rioration of the living conditions of common people and increases the attractiveness of Islamists' slogans.

(4) Islamic Revivalism and Extra-Regional Big Powers.

Though many extra-regional powers actively influence on the situation in Central Asia and its integrative processes, only two of them can be considered as a real players in the new regional 'Big Game', namely Russia and the United States. Their involvements, though being very different in particular ways and results, have some common features. Both Russia and the U.S. have mainly geopolitical rather than economic interests in Central Asia, due to its proximity to such regional centers of power as China, India, Pakistan and, of course, Russia itself. Secondly, both the U.S. and Russia are interested in transit routes and pipelines infrastructure building in and via Central Asia, though having in mind different directions (the U.S. prefers the Southern and South-Western directions while Russia is keen on preserving the Northern routes passing through its territory). And last but not least, both big extra-regional powers are concerned with the proliferation of religious extremism to which Central Asia seems to be highly vulnerable. Though the U.S. cooperated with the Central Asian secular regimes, especially Uzbek and Kyrgyz, providing them with military equipment and expertise against Islamist guerillas, till September 2001 it was Russia, not the U.S., that has been actively involved in the resistance of the regional regimes to Islamic revivalism, especially in its most radical and militant form.

From the early 90s Russia did participate in various initiatives to combat religious extremism and was one of the sponsors of the intra-Tajik reconciliation, but until mid-1999 its presence in the region was essentially passive. It was a decade of Russia's withdrawal from Central Asia – starting from Soviet military withdrawal from Afghanistan, followed by proclaiming of independence by the former Soviet Central Asian republics, and completed by the wave of Slavs' emigration from the region. Gorbachev's Atlantic vector of the foreign policy was succeeded and remained predominant in first years of Yeltsin's presidency. Behind Russian foreign policy's populist rhetoric on "the interests of Central Asian Russians" there was no clear understanding of Russia's own interests in the region. Its sponsorship in the reconciliation of the Tajik civil war was determined only by the purposes of continuation of her military presence on the Afghan border. Anti-Western wing in Russian political elite associated with the then-Foreign minister (later Prime Minister) E. Primakov, failed to create any new approach towards Central Asia, focusing more the Middle Eastern and Balkan directions.

That changed, however, when V. V. Putin came to power and when the conflict with the Islamic opposition in Central Asia entered a new-armed-phase. As it has often occurred in Russia's political history, the change of the ruler resulted in the change of the policy. Henceforth Moscow became actively involved in all the anti-Islamist initiatives in the region, especially those proposed by Uzbekistan. During Putin's visit to Uzbekistan on 11 December 1999, Uzbekistan and Russia signed a treaty to expand cooperation in the coming five years, with provisions to

extend the agreement another five years if both parties agreed. The principal goal of the treaty was to raise the defense capabilities of Uzbekistan so that it could combat the armed detachments of Islamic oppositionists. These same problems constituted the primary focus of Putin's next visit to Tashkent in May 2000; his first foreign trip after inauguration as president of the Russian Federation, it evoked a significant political resonance. On the basis of agreements reached at these meetings, Russia was to provide Uzbekistan with automatic weapons, sharpshooter rifles, hand grenades, and other weapons that had been in short supply as the Uzbek army waged counter-terrorist operations against the armed insurgents of IDU in August-September 2000. Right until October 2000, Uzbekistan and Russia strengthened their cooperation to combat religious extremism, an issue that became a regular item on the agenda of meetings between the heads of the Central Asian states and the Russian Federation in 2000. The same was true for visits by high-ranking Russian officials to Central Asia, for meetings held within the framework of the Treaty on Collective Security (with Uzbekistan participating as an observer), and for summits of the heads of state in the CIS.

But in the second half of the year 2000, Russia showed a certain retreat from the positions it had earlier assumed in the region. In particular, it became obvious that Russia could not affect a resolution of the Afghan problem (any more than it could totally suppress the extremists in Chechnia); nor could it deliver, in a short period of time, the requisite arms as stipulated in its agreements with Uzbekistan. Many integrative initiatives of Russia in the sphere of combating religious extremism in the region, such as establishment of the Anti-terrorist Center in 2000, have proved to be of minor efficacy – partly because of the shortage of financing, partly because of the traditionally more pro-U.S. position of the Uzbek government.

Moreover, as already demonstrated by Putin's visit in May 2000, the post-Yeltsin Russia – like Uzbekistan, if for different reasons – now assigned higher priority to bilateral agreements. Above all, such accords correspond more to the traditional policy of "divide and rule" (as typified, for example, in Russia's support of Dushanbe as a counterweight to Tashkent). Furthermore, Russia needs integration first and foremost to preserve its status as a superpower and to pacify its domestic "imperial" lobby, and only secondarily to ensure the security of its southern borders. In short, the integration of Central Asia is inconceivable *without Russia*; currently, however, it is impossible to achieve that goal *with Russia*.

In sum, in considering the necessary conditions for any process of integration, an analysis of the role of Islam and the Islamic opposition in the integrating processes in the region leads to the following conclusions:

- The adhesion of states to a single Islamic community did not become a factor favoring consolidation on the inter-state level. That was apparent from the division of SADUM into national muftiyats and the total subordination of the latter to secular régimes. Nevertheless, at the present time the other secular ideological constructions that have been designed for purposes of integration (Turkism, Eurasianism) have in fact never served this purpose.
- The recognition of the common threat that oppositionist Islam poses to

the political elites encouraged a significant increase in military cooperation in 1999-2000; however, because of the continuing economic and territorial contradictions between the states of Central Asia, this process has as yet not become consistent and irreversible.

- The problem of leadership in the unified campaign against the Islamic opposition (above all, the IDU) remains the most vulnerable point in the relations of the Central Asian states with each other and with Moscow. Although Russia's active support of the secular régimes against religious extremism could be seen as a significant stimulus for merger in this sphere, there is a lack of precise priorities and integrationist goals in Russia itself.

(5) The U.S.-led anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan and its implications for the Islamic revivalism and integration processes in Central Asia

Since the beginning of the antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan headed by the U.S. the situation in the region has changed dramatically. The appearance of the U.S. military bases in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan clearly shows the fragility of Russia's 2000 "back to Central Asia" policy. On the other hand, the anti-Taliban attacks of the U.S. are being led under the same slogans of fighting religious extremism, which have been on the agenda of Central Asian secular regimes and Russia's regional policy for the several previous years. And the Taliban's regime had been repeatedly referred to as the haven for religious extremist militants threatening the secular governments in Central Asia.

Nevertheless, it is easy to fall into simplification about the real effect of the current anti-Taliban campaign on the prospects of Islamic revivalism in the region. First, one should look with more soberly at the real influence of Taliban and radical Islamism in Afghanistan on the situation in the post-Soviet Central Asia. Certainly, the regime of Taliban represented an extreme of Islamic revivalism. But that was a war regime basing, as any war regime, on the terror and coercion. Secondly, the religious radicalism of the Taliban was provoked by strong outside isolation and non-recognition. Thirdly, that was a regime for which Islam could provide the *only* source of legitimacy. But all these reasons have mainly domestic application, and very minor affect on the neighboring Central Asian states.

What really mattered in the case of post-Soviet Central Asia was the place of the Taliban in the international vicious circle of the illegal businesses, namely, making 'dirty money'. It can be cash gotten from drugs trafficking, but not necessarily, as there are a lot of other economic activities and transactions, which can produce a surplus of 'dirty money'. One way to wash this money off is to establish a foundation or a network of foundations with the declared purpose of charity, or education etc. But it does not mean that these foundations will limit themselves only with charity activities. As they enjoy some international 'civil society' status, they can easily slip away from any governmental control, and use this 'donations' with very wide discretion. They can as well invest this money into politics, sponsoring political parties or figures at home or abroad, and sometimes

even militant movements. The Taliban is just one of the largest recipient of such 'generosity', both because of its size and fame of 'pure religious movement', and because it spent the most of this money for the weapons. Those weapons were bought illegally, in spite of the UN prohibitions, through various mediators and smuggling mafias profiting from those transactions. Thus the vicious circle is closed: from one illegal business the money rotates through different foundation to the Taliban and from it back to the illegal business. This is how this general 'credit-line' looks like, though some amount of money can fall out from this circle. And Islamism itself, even in its Taliban's mode, plays quite a minor role in this context. It just provides the spiritual framework for washing-off of dirty money – to make another dirty money gotten from the purchase of weapons. And the number of these military items possessed by Taliban eloquently indicates, how huge is the flow of finance within this vicious circle.

The worst thing is the fact that the Central Asian countries have already been partly involved into this circle through drug, weapon and other illegal transactions – and may be involved even more in future. It means, that there is a danger of reproduction of the 'Afghanistan scenario', in which illegal economics and 'iron hand' politics are in the triplet with an extremist religious ideology. And the main problem here is not open confrontation with the Talibs themselves or with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan hosted by them. The two unsuccessful breaks of the IDU into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999-2000 showed that the regular troops can resist such attacks. But one should be less optimistic about the ability of economics and politics of five Central Asian states to resist invisible attacks from the illegal economic and political framework, which has managed to keep the fire of Afghan war for a decade. The framework, which legitimizes itself through Islamic slogans of the Taliban or IDU or whatsoever, and, on the other hand, prioritizes from attraction of wide public attention to the barbarities of Talib's Islamism, while the real barbarities of illegal business network safely slip away from international concern.

And from this point of view the Central Asian region appears to be extremely vulnerable. The main factor is the protracted economic crisis, which has caused massive immiseration and made the region vulnerable to radical oppositionist movements. This situation has made it significantly easier for radical factions to exert a broad appeal to the local population. Under conditions where the income of the majority of the population (especially in rural areas) is very low, it is hardly surprising that, despite the fear of law-enforcement organs and the very vague notions of the ideology and goals of the Islamic opposition, many people are nonetheless prepared to tolerate and even support it.

So long as the incomes of the main mass of the population in the states of this region remain at this level, the possibility of recruiting supporters rather cheaply will persist. Recruitment of government officials is especially dangerous, since it increases the probability that oppositionist Islam will succeed in penetrating the state apparatus itself. In this respect, the declaration of an unidentified leader of the Uzbek branch of the Hizb ut-Tahrir, an Islamist movement, sounds very troubling: "There are many people in the government who are good people

so it's [a] good time to break the government from inside, as some people are certain to join us."⁸ Comparing these words with those uttered in an interview (stating that Tashkent has approximately 60,000 members of Hizb ut-Tahrir (doubtlessly a four-times exaggeration), one can infer that a certain segment of this faction's supporters come from the ranks of state employees. In Kyrgyzstan, law-enforcement organs accused a deputy of the national Parliament of involvement in the activities of this organization.⁹ As for Tajikistan, members of Hizb ut-Tahrir are reported to have recently turned up in the ranks of the military personnel serving under the Committee for the Protection of the Border.¹⁰

In this opinion, however, the growth of corruption and economic crimes among state employees in Central Asia represents an even greater threat, for it is precisely this problem that significantly facilitates the activities of the Islamic opposition. Such corruption always appears as a major source of popular discontent, which the Islamic revivalists can actively exploit for purposes of propaganda. Thus, in the interview just cited, the leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir identified the factors that, in his opinion, will bring his party to power: "There is too much corruption and bad policies. There are no jobs; the economy is very bad." In other words, the economic problems besetting the states of Central Asia constitute one of the main sources of social discontent, which is manifested in support for the oppositionist Islam. And activity of Hizb ut-Tahrir is just one manifestation – among the many others – of the close interrelation between the ineffective economic policies and radical Islam.

It is too early to concoct 'prognoses' or 'scenarios' for the situation of Central Asia, as it remains under the strong influence of the impetuous military events in and around Afghanistan. But if this military attack on the radical Islamism will not be accompanied by serious economic and political attack on that international illegal framework, which sponsored it and profited from it, the real success of current war with the Taliban and even the planning assistance from the U.S. to Central Asian U.S.-supporting countries will be doubtful. Bringing new weapons and new money into the region without making domestic and international framework more transparent can only reinforce the abovementioned vicious circle. And the radical Islamism too – as its inalienable, though exaggerated, component.

As far as the integration in the Central Asia is concerned, it is clear, that the recent events will have rather disintegrative effect. The U.S.-Uzbek alliance, no matter how long it will last, though concluded now with the silent consent of Moscow, will bring to the further split between Uzbekistan on the one hand, and more Moscow-oriented Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Though Uzbekistan did not suspend its membership in the integrative structures of Russia-dominated CIS or the Shanghai Forum, it is clear, that from now on this membership will be more and more formal. But even if the U.S.-led campaign against Islamic extremism in Afghanistan is a success, the problems (economic, ethnic, ideological etc.) causing

⁸ A. Rashid, *Interview with the Leader of Hizb-e Tahrir* (www.cacianalyst.org/Headline2.htm).

⁹ 'Kabar' News Agency, February 27, 2001.

¹⁰ A. Sadulloev, *Siuzhety iz teatra absurda* (www.ferghana.ru/news03/706.html).

this extremism will not disappear in one night. Moreover, the ongoing competition between the U.S. and Russia for the influence in the post-war Afghanistan will heat their competition in Central Asia. Because both powers do not have any vital economic interests in the region and thus the Central Asian states cannot be real partners to any of these powers, such a competition may have predominantly negative affect, provoking the suspiciousness of the regional states to each other and dependency on the welfare sops and political caprices of the extra-regional powers.

To sum up, the prognoses of the early 90s predicting the quick integration in this homogeneously-looking region on the one hand, and the quick political Islamicization on the other, both proved to be exaggerated. The Islamic revivalism has been severely but successfully suppressed by the ruling elites; the ongoing state-building processes have been correlated with closing of state-boundaries and construction of other artificial boundaries – economical, ethnical, ideological. All the four political conditions for integration (a common ideology, common enemy, commonly recognized regional leader, and a commonly accepted extra-regional big power favoring the integration) are now even less available than in the end of the 80s. But still the unclear future of the post-Taliban Afghanistan leaves some uncertainty in the fate of both secular regimes and their Islamic revivalist opposition in the future.