STUMBLING BLOCKS AND STEPPING STONES:

THE CROSSING FROM SOVIET DOMINATION TO SELF RULE
IN THE REPUBLICS OF CENTRAL ASIA

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Scholars and practitioners from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and the United States gathered at Columbia University to compare notes on the dramatic events of the recent past in Republics of Central Asia. The theme of the December 3rd and 4th conference sponsored by United States Institute of Peace was "The Emergence of a New State System in Central Asia." It was as if so many observers were recording and assisting a river crossing of entire nations from Soviet domination to self rule. Each observer or participant, in his own section of the river, noted well the hazardous stumbling blocks or the helpful stepping stones. In some areas the crossing was found to be quite dangerous, distant and deep, in others rather short and shallow. Thus each contributor from his own perspective, offered a different prognosis of the prospective value and potential success of the current undertaking. While there was little consensus relating to the crossing, the exercise itself at Columbia was valuable undertaking in at least two respects. First, the lack of concordance indicated unequivocally that a diversity of fates await the five countries, the numerous demographic groupings, and the 50 million individuals involved. Second, the conference charted several of the most perilous sections of the crossing. Potential trouble spots include the confirmation of identity, consolidation of sovereignty, and consonance of ethnic and other demographic groups. Although it was beyond the scope of the conference, the resultant mapping has important policy implications for the United States.
CONFIRMATION OF IDENTITY

Role of Islam:

Attention on enigmatic Central Asia by both the capitalist first world and the socialist second world of recent history has been focused predominantly on the Islamic component. It as fitting that the first presentation was an analysis of the international and regional context of Islam in Central Asia by Professor Richard Bulliet of Columbia University. Central Asia's potential alliance with "outlaw" regimes continues to dominate the conversation. Islamic fundamentalism is still presented as a major threat to be feared and avoided. Bulliet's concluding caveat was that although the scare itself may lack substance, the reality of fear may be self-fulfilling.

Bulliet found little evidence, despite the geography - two of the three non-Soviet countries on which Central Asia borders, Iran and Afghanistan, have Islamic governments - that the Muslim regimes recognize Central Asia as a fertile ground for the spread of the Islamic Revolution. Instead, the interest of the Islamic neighbors manifests primarily in trade relations and civil connections. Bulliet identified four ways in which Islamic extremists traditionally achieve power and concluded that none of the four have a suitable foundation in Central Asia.

(1) A military rule allied with Islamic organizations, as in Pakistan and Sudan, would depend on a powerful Islamic oriented military. The armies of Central Asia are an unlikely place for the growth of Islamic Fundamentalism. Central Asian armies are as young as the republics themselves and are wrought with Soviet influences. The lead time for Islamic organization building within the military would take years, thus a military directed Islamic movement is unlikely. Arustan Zholdasov, the Senior Researcher for "Expert Sociological Center" an independent non-profit research group in Uzbekistan, indicated however, that cadets in military schools are now receiving military training.
(ii) Large scale electoral movements, as in Algeria and Egypt, capitalize on the government's ineptitude in order to gain wide scale popular support. Islamic groups bested state organizations in the provision of potable water in the former and disaster relief in the latter. Although the Central Asian governments are certainly not renowned for their competence, Islamic networks completely lack the cadres and networks for the delivery of services. The construction and rehabilitation of mosques, which is the rising metaphorical thermometer observed by the West, has consumed the bulk of Islamic attention and energy. However, building mosques and providing public services are not comparable undertakings. The number of mosques, up to 300 from 92 in Kyrgyzstan, is still far below pre-revolutionary levels. According to Anara Tabishalieva, a social scholar from the Kyrgyzstan State University, the Islamic movement lacks the means for the protection and restoration of the mosques which have already been returned. Concentration on religious shrines distracts the attention from other social needs. President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan reproached the Islamic movement for ignoring more fundamental needs for schools and hospitals and denounced the further construction of mosques in the Syr Darya region. The corollary to Bulliet's point is, of course, that if under government supervision, the standard of living continues to deteriorate, dissatisfaction will be expressed where people gather and commiserate, at the mosques. This notion was investigated in Anatoly Belov's paper, delivered by proxy. (Anatoly Belov, a member of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences, was denied an exit visa to attend the conference by his government. His paper arrived by fax from Tashkent at about the time he was to have made his presentation.) The declaration of independence and the fall of the Soviet Empire coincided with sharp declines in the standard of living, encouraging citizens to "try on Islam." He claimed that the Ferghana Valley is ready to accept Shariat control. Zholdasov added that the Ferghana valley, most Islamicized region of Uzbekistan, is also where the social and ethnic problems are the most acute.

(iii) A clergy directed movement, as in Iran, capable of providing compelling arguments to prevent irreligious government requires
extensive and highly trained clergy. State sponsored atheism and Soviet control of the Spiritual Board eradicated the vestiges of an eloquent and highly trained clergy and abolished all elaborate autonomous religious networks. Furthermore, universalization of Soviet education created a society which, in Zholdasov's view, is too educated to accept orthodox Islam. Some Central Asian authors have gone even farther to suggest that the Muslim connection has contributed to Central Asian backwardness. While literacy rates are comparatively high, general public awareness of religious and worldly matters remains rather low. Belov identified the Saudi Arabian model as the most popular in Uzbekistan but had to admit that many people, even those who favored the model, did not know what it entailed. While literacy in Russian or the titular language is high, literacy in Arabic, the language of Islam, is low. Almas Chukin, of the Kyrgyz Embassy to the United States, noticed no great desire or drive of Central Asians to learn Arabic. Central Asians are Muslim by culture, not by conviction. Few people know or follow the five pillars of Islam. The practice of Islam consists primarily of life cycle rites such as marriages, circumcisions and funerals. Nor is Islam yet a political force. Of the seven political parties in Kyrgyzstan, only three have a religious component while six are led by former communists figures. None could be described as fundamentalist. Nevertheless, by Zholdasov's count, the numbers of trained clergy are rapidly increasing.

(iv) The Afghan model is one of tribal struggles for ruling power. Bulliet contended, without formal evidence, that clans and tribal mosaics do not seem as extensive in Central Asia as in neighboring Afghanistan. The character of the recent civil war in Tajikistan, however, may offer some disturbing similarities. Unfortunately, the republic of Tajikistan (and Turkmenistan) were largely un-represented at the conference either by Western scholars or by the Central Asian participants. Abdujabbar Adbuvakhitov of Meros Akademia in Tashkent presented an Uzbek perspective on the splintering into regional or tribal groups. Tribalization would depend substantially on the nature of the national government. Therefore, Muslim leaders have been invited to join Uzbek ministries in advisory roles recalling Khoja Ahrar. Ahrar
was a Naqshbandi leader who had an unofficial role and an unusual significant influence in the Timurid government. The coincidence was not lost on the participants of the conference that the newly appointed Mufti in Tashkent is also a Naqshbandi Sufi and President Karimov's roots are Naqshbandi too.

Bulliet concluded that for the absence of mechanisms to assume power the Islamic alternative in Central Asia seemed remote for at least the next 20 years. Zholdasov agreed that the prospects were dim, but primarily because the Islamic movement is still dependent on the government, and from his point of view - as it should be. President Karimov, whose popularity continues to ride above 70% in polls in Uzbekistan, maintains great influence in the selection and placement of Muslim leaders. He replaced one Mufti as soon as the head of the Spiritual Board began to ply into politics. The specifics of the case involved support of the opposition movement in Tajikistan which contradicted the official policy of Uzbekistan. Thus the "Islamization of Karimov" supersedes in importance the Islamization of Uzbekistan. Were Karimov to don a Chalma and visit the mosque, the rest of Uzbekistan would follow. Further, Zholdasov opined, Karimov's dominant role is justified because politics is an art form like music or poetry, to be reserved for those with the talent. The government should do politics and the Muftiate should adhere to spiritual matters. The essence of the argument seemed to be that government intervention in religion was essential to enforce the separation of church and state. In a broader generalization, Zholdasov claimed that authoritarianism is an essential step from totalitarianism toward democracy. Furthermore, the appropriateness of democracy in Uzbekistan remained an open question. Nobody challenged Zholdasov's assertion, although Abduvakhitov attempted to smooth some of the potentially rough political edges. The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) is not banned, he stated. The IRP is simply denied registration. IRP activists do not support Abdurahim Pulatov who has been discredited as a seeker of personal gain. Pulatov, himself, cannot be found in any prison in Uzbekistan. Instead, he may be somewhere in Afghanistan, Abduvakhitov guessed. Echoing Bullet's caveat - with a twist - Abduvakhitov admonished the United
States to pursue its interest of avoiding war, in the first place, by avoiding hysteria, presumably with respect to civil rights.

Tabishalieva credited an oppressive regime in Uzbekistan with creating the conditions for more progressive Islamic thought in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Harkening back to before the revolution, she reminded that there was a movement across Central Asia to bring Islam closer to capitalism. In present times, Christianity is also growing rapidly in these two countries. Zholdasov reported that 20% of the young people in urban areas are now members of the Anglican Church. Almaty is the center of missionary activity. Christian services are conducted in the native languages of the regions. Currently, Uzbekistan relates peacefully to the new churches although missionary activity is forbidden in Uzbekistan and Shariat would suggest that the perpetrators should be punished. In response to the proselytization elsewhere, the Muftiate in Tashkent sent out about 50 Muslim missionaries to counteract what it perceives as a threatening trend.

Bulliet recounted with irony the single instance during his travels through Central Asia in which a religious fundamentalist proclaimed that Islam and Christianity will clash in Central Asia. The protagonist was a Protestant minister. Central Asian participants too noted and were disturbed by proselytization and antagonization of religious groups arriving from the West. The relationship between these groups and the Western governments are not clear to the Central Asians steeped in totalitarian tradition. The murky water is further agitated in those cases where religious groups are receiving federal funds for the provision of technical assistance. However, Central Asian policies for visa, housing and registration are themselves partially culpable for the relatively high proportion of western groups with religious agendas. Lingering xenophobia, economic isolationism, Soviet-style laws plus growing nationalism all contribute to policies which severely restrict the ability for foreigners to arrive and work productively. With raised costs for living and working in Central Asia, the organizations for which a cost-benefits calculation can yield a positive result must often have additional or alternative, often religious, agendas which may not
be compatible with the most urgent needs of the people nor the wishes of their leaders. Ominously, Zholdasov remarked that extensive missionary activity and religious tension could easily become a source of future conflict.

Language and Alphabet:

Language is at least as intrinsic to a national self definition as religion. Alphabets have been a battleground in Central Asia for three generations. Since the Russian Revolution of 1917, Uzbeks have been taught to write their language in several variations of three distinct alphabets: Arabic, Roman, and Cyrillic. Abduzuhur Abduazizov, a Scholar of the Tashkent State University described the changes in language policy. Russification in the Soviet era, successful to the extent that Russian is now a "second native language," was a deliberate attempt to erase and discard local culture and values. When, Uzbek was reestablished as the official language in October 1989, the selection of an official alphabet remained the subject of speculation. The choice was considered to be a weathervane for Central Asian political orientation: Arabic pointing South, Roman turning West or Cyrillic facing North. With independence in September of 1991, Uzbekistan organized a State Language Commission. All documents, laws, meetings, conferences, public media and most books are now to be published, presented or prepared in Uzbek. Another responsibility of the commission is to codify and purify the Uzbek language. Additionally, courses in Uzbek are being arranged for the local Russians who have, until the most recent past, been ignorant of the Central Asian languages and customs. In contrast, some other newer arrivals such as the entrepreneurial Korean community do speak the language of the titular population quite profitably.

Alphabet reform, in addition to the linguistic aspects, has important economic and psychological facets. According to Abduazizov, none of the three alphabets fully embody the Turkic essence of the language. The Cyrillic script is too cumbersome. Some common sounds had to be
expressed in more than one Cyrillic character while other letters, such as the palatalized vowels, are superfluous. He did not mention the symbolic significance of throwing off the Russian yoke; Cyrillic is the script of the Russian colonizers. The Arabic script also lacks certain key vowel sounds. Although some Central Asian students will learn Arabic in schools and universities in order to be able to read certain historic documents and the Koran, state emphasis will not be directed toward Arabic. Again Abduazizov refrained from mentioning any ulterior motive. Arabic is the language of Islam, a flame which the old communist leaders in the government are loathe to fan. As Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh noted, the Central Asians define themselves more by who they are not, than who they are. They are not Russians and they are not Arabs.

Only the Roman alphabet (Latin is considered to be a language not an alphabet) has a one-to-one correspondence. Uzbek history justifies this choice. Roman letters were was used in Uzbekistan for ten years earlier in this century. A Roman phonetic scheme comprising 37 letters was proposed in Uzbekistan in 1929. It was one of three schemes which were used in Central Asia and is very similar to the scheme which was successfully adopted by Turkey in 1933. This Roman script is to be integrated into schools in Uzbekistan by 1995 and the language program is expected to be completed by the year 2000. One likely offshoot of this alphabet grafting program is that connections to Turkey will mature more quickly than to other countries for which language barriers will remain large.

**History and Heroes:**

Religion and language are conscious social choices. Both can and will be justified by the selective use of history. Cassandra Cavanaugh of Columbia University presented the case that the collapse of the Soviet empire provided an historic opportunity for the revision of Central Asian history. The process, however, had begun several years earlier during Gorbachev's perestroika. By the time sovereignty was thrust upon
the Central Asian states, all taboos guarded by the Soviet ideologues had already been broached. However, access to records and information continues to be limited for political considerations. President Karimov who ascended to power during the Soviet era opposes wholesale bemoaning of the communist past claiming that there are positive values which ought to be retained. Tadjbakhshh, identifying one of Karimov's potential problems, asserted that historical rewrites will be more difficult to control than the access to information. The invention of Uzbek history and Soviet nostalgia will be at constant odds because Uzbekistan, as the other Central Asian states, is a Soviet creation. Before the Russian Revolution, the territory of today's Uzbekistan was populated by diverse and mobile people. When Tadjbakhshh questioned some Tajiks about the choice of national heroes, the surprising answer they gave her was that if Tajikistan hadn't nationalized a certain tenth century figure, then Uzbekistan would have. The selection of contemporary heroes is not more transparent. The rehabilitation of Secretary Rashidov, implicated in the infamous cotton scandals of the seventies, and a statue erected in his honor across from Independence Square (formerly Lenin Square), seemed a curious choice to many observers.

The selection of history and heroes is more than an esoteric exercise. Edward Allworth, Professor Emeritus and founder of the Center for Soviet Central Asian Studies at Columbia University, in his presentation on the cultural identity of Central Asian leaders postulated that social harmony would be contingent on the congruence of value systems between the leaders and the governed. A leader's cultural identity, which he equated with "value identity," would dominate over national or ethnic identity in determining public acceptance. Of two dozen or so concepts shared around the world as inherent values, Allworth observed "justice" as preeminent in Central Asian tradition. The Central Asian connotation of justice is evenhandedness, equity and fairness: "Don't treat me worse than other people in the country." This value was subordinated during Soviet times, perhaps explaining some of the discord, but is making an obvious comeback during the transition. Zholdasov corroborated Allworth's observations with one of his own, the statue of Amir Timur
(of dubious Uzbek origin), replacing the prominent bust of Karl Marx in the central square, is inscribed in both Uzbek and Russian with the word "Justice." Justice, Zholdasov concurred, is also the most fundamental word of Islam.

CONSOLIDATION OF SOVEREIGNTY

National Armies:

Primary among the considerations of sovereignty are national security and economic autonomy. Critical to the former is a national army and control over borders. Barney Rubin, Director of the Center for Central Asian Studies at Columbia University viewed the independence of the Central Asian states, which had come without independence movements, as irreversible. However, he cautioned, the manifestation and character of that independence are, as yet, undefined. Central Asia exists somewhere on the continuum between empirical provinces and sovereign countries. None of the Central Asian States possess a national army peopled by citizens and motivated by some sense of patriotism. Tajikistan does not even have a citizenship law. Military leaders in Uzbekistan are ethnic Russians and non-citizens of Uzbekistan. The army recognizes its duty as protecting Russia's interests in Uzbekistan. Abduvakhitov objected, praising the army of Uzbekistan as the most powerful and loyal in Central Asia. He rationalized "a small contingent of Russian officers" with the assertion that the army must balance the interests of both Uzbekistan and Russia. The Uzbek Army would be the successor to the Russian border guards. Of course, the longer that Russian troops remained in Central Asia, Rubin argued, the more difficult Central Asian pretensions to independence would be to execute. Newly established juridical sovereignty is now accompanied by trends leading toward reconciliation for which the Russian Army is a centripetal force. The counteracting centrifugal force is the Russian Central Bank. Economic self-sufficiency - namely the property rights and availability of hydrocarbons and mineral wealth - is the fulcrum upon which the balance teeters. Turkmenistan which has a 5.4% positive trade balance is the
most autonomous of the Central Asian Republics, while civil war and the
Russian Army greet Tajikistan which had been receiving the largest
subsidies from Moscow.

External Borders

Although only Kazakhstan has a border with Russia, fifteen thousand
Russian troops guard Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan. Rubin
observed that there is no other defensible border between Russia and the
chaos of Afghanistan. The drug and weapon trades are palpable threats.
Nevertheless the Russian presence begs the question of the Russian goals
and framework within Central Asia. Elizabeth Valkenier, a Soviet
Scholar at Columbia University, listed three competing policy strains:
(i) Passive benevolence resulting in a Slavic/Islamic schism through the
former empire - The Slavs would turn toward Europe and the West and the
Muslims would look to the East and South. The introduction of the
Central Asian states into the long dormant Economic Cooperation
Organization sphere could potentially fill the power vacuum in the wake
of Russian disengagement. (ii) Institutional withdrawal under the
auspices of CIS institutions - Interaction would be guided by
friendship and cooperation treaties. (iii) Hegemonic claims invoking
the unique role of Russia on the Eurasian land mass - Russia's priority
would be national security and Russia's role in Central Asia would be
peacekeeper. Although the Russian far right is keeping alive the
outright imperialist option - Zhirinovsky, for example, is clear in his
vision of Russian soldiers washing their boots in the Indian Ocean -
Valkenier was emphatic in her distinction between Russian hegemony and
Russian imperialism in Central Asia. Imperialistic aspirations are
rationally forestalled, first by the absence of an all-embracing
ideology such as the unity of the proletariat. Second, pragmatic and
technocratic economic calculations lead inescapably to the conclusion
that Russia cannot afford to control an empire for the sake of power.
Third, Central Asians will fiercely protect their independence.
Alexander Motyl, a historian at Columbia University agreed with the rational arguments that Russia could no longer prevail as an imperialist in Central Asia but served an extra dollop of pessimism. He described a recipe for morass as a typical post-imperial power with left behind national and ethnic settlements, with military units still stationed in the former provinces, with a lingering imperialist mentality which bordered on or embodied racism, and with economic chaos and a discredited central government at home. Rationality is not likely to be a guiding principle. Hardening of positions and ultimately tension may be inevitable. The temptation to rescue suffering brethren could be overwhelming. Thus, massive Russian interventions and repetitions of Moldova seem probable. Only after the trouble would Russia become a "normal state" and the republics of Central Asia "normal third world countries."

China, Central Asia's other powerful neighbor, maintains strict control over its border although (or perhaps because) there has been civil disorder Xinjiang. China is apprehensive about increasing unrest spreading from Central Asia. Robin Lewis, Director of the International Affairs Program at Columbia University, commented that at an international conference in Almaty to which people of Central Asian origin worldwide were invited, the Chinese contingent was conspicuously absent. Chinese products, however, are ubiquitous in Central Asian bazaars. A successful invasion into the enormous commodity-starved market to the north-west, even with inferior goods produced by low cost labor, can substantial support Chinese economic growth. Chinese peddlers will encounter some inhospitality in those countries where buying, selling and making profits has been considered both illegal and immoral. Abduvakhitov confirmed a growing anti-Chinese sentiment in Central Asia. Kazakhstan passed an anti-Chinese law because the Chinese were "raising prices too high." Another complaint was that the deluge of Chinese goods was forcing locally produced goods out of the market. Abduvakhitov further claimed that the anti-Chinese prejudice was producing a more favorable pro-Russian attitude, as though targets of racism are substitutable. With different view of China, Valkenier suggested that the People's Republic could offer an alternative model
for economic reform. Lewis suggested that China could offer an alternative route to the sea to avoid Afghanistan and Iran. Either possibility could coax the economic prosperity of China's south-coastal region toward the spread north-west.

Regarding the other bordering states, Afghanistan remains a cauldron of disarray and Iranian presence in Central Asia is minimal even in Tajikistan where a Farsi-based language is spoken. Islamization of Central Asia could precipitate another "Great Game." Rubin saw a potential contest this time between Iran and Turkey. Turkey and Pakistan have had the most visible business, education, and technical assistance programs yet a number of Pakistani and Saudi Arabian preachers have been expelled from Uzbekistan for engaging in missionary work. Saudi Arabia has donated a little bit of money for charity and a lot of Korans. All the Central Asian states have political relations with Israel and some have international flights to Tel Aviv. Rubin linked this with Israel's "ring-around-the-ring" strategy. Central Asians showcase the relationship to demonstrate that they are not Islamic fundamentalists, plus Israel has low water irrigation technologies of local interest.

Internal Borders

Borders within Central Asia have a definite potential to be volatile. Since, as Rubin noted, the ethnic minorities are not territorially centralized, independence could easily lead to the reorganization of borders, revanchist claims, and ethnic violence. The elaboration of an inter-republic regime which embraces the inviolability of borders is essential to the security of the region. Few spots on the earth have been gerrymandered so intricately as Stalin's handiwork in Central Asia. Traveling south-west as the crow flies from Almaty to southern Turkmenistan, one would leave from Kazakhstan into Kyrgyzstan, into Uzbekistan, into Tajikistan, back into Kyrgyzstan, back into Tajikistan, back into Uzbekistan and finally into Turkmenistan. Stalin's objective was to eliminate any threat of unity against Moscow. In some cases ethnic comrades are separated by national borders, such as the Tajik
majority in Samarkand. In other cases, islands of one county are completely surrounded and sealed off by another country. In the case of Tajikistan, the country is divided by geographic barriers making its national integrity essentially indefensible. For optimists like Ibrahim Yuksel of Columbia University, the border ambiguity can also be perceived in the light of "continuity of culture" which gives rise to a hope for supra-national identity and regional communities of "united interest zones." Pan-isms such as the Islamic Umma and the historic Turkestan are no longer threatening to the outside world as they once were. Nomadic heritage, cosmopolitan and charismatic leaders, and shared history of subjugation encourage the creation of a federation. Positive signs along this path which Yuksel observed are the emerging joint management of water resources and the regularly scheduled summits. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are not competing for the leadership but rather are collaborating. Signs to the contrary are also apparent. Turkmenistan remains aloof, presumably so that it will not be compelled to share its treasure of mineral wealth. Yuksel regretted that Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan failed the opportunity to jointly introduce new currency although a program for economic union was announced a month later in Tashkent on January 10, 1994.

National Currency

By the time of the conference, four Central Asian republics had introduced their own currencies. Kyrgyzstan blazed the trail in May seven months earlier with the "som." Rubin asserted that the other Central Asian states were also forced out of the "Ruble Zone" by the Russian Central Bank. The first major blow came in the summer of 1992. Accounting and exchange rates were differentiated by republic. In other words, Kazakh rubles, for instance, were no longer equal to Ukrainian or Uzbek rubles. Each republic could access rubles only to the extent that they had rubles in their national account with Russia. The Russian Central Bank stuck the fatal blow when it issued new Russian bank notes in August but did not distribute them to Central Asia. All of Central Asia except for Kyrgyzstan was bound to the old bank notes even after they became worthless pieces of paper in Russia. Old Russian rubles,
unconverted by the August 8 deadline, flooded south where they created massive inflation. In August, rubles in Tashkent were being traded at rate of about 1,000 to the dollar. By the time Uzbekistan introduced the "sum" on November 14, the exchange rate had fallen to 40,000 to 50,000 rubles per dollar. No one reported on the status of the Uzbek sum for the two weeks marked by the conference, but Chukin logged a favorable report on the progress of the Kyrgyz som. He said the downward trend in which the som lost 42% of its value from May to August was slowing. The unpredictability of economic policy out of Russia was erased by the establishment of a sure and stable independent economic policy. This bold act, vindicated by Russia's unexpected and devastating currency switch, enabled Kyrgyzstan to sidestep the worst ramifications. A September salary increase in the social and agricultural sectors spurred an inflationary spike, but in general, despite the fact that Kyrgyzstan had received only $45 million of the stabilization fund, planned for $400 million over 3-4 years, the absence of the predicted economic collapse demonstrated the substantial resources in the system. Chukin identified capital investment to support privatization as the most critical current need.

Economic Reform

As observers of Ukraine have learned watching that republic start down this same path toward sovereignty a year or two earlier, it is easier to acquire the ornaments of independence such as a national currency and a national army than it is to secure sovereignty economically. As in Ukraine, genuine economic reforms in Central Asia are scarce, small and slow. Carol Henderson of Columbia University reported on one pioneering attempt to privatize agriculture in the Chuli Valley of Kyrgyzstan. The goal of the program was to privatize 35-40% of the agricultural land. The first offering was of 400 partitions. Antiquated and inappropriate technology, insufficient tractors and equipment, scarce petrochemicals, government owned stud animals and reliance on a non-functioning distribution system all weigh heavily against the new small farmers. Labor intensity and benefits from scale economies created the incentives to merge. Of the 400, there are now 140 operating units. From
Henderson's empirical data, the optimal division of labor seemed to be 2 brothers, one as head farmer the other as herdsman, each with large families. Often one family stayed active in the public sector to preserve access to state benefits. Supplementary entrepreneurial activity included fish-farm partnerships, meat for land barter with neighboring factories, barn rental, stored value in old machine parts, crop sharing, etc. The land allocated to this showcase privatization was not prime, located on the alluvial plane neither on the rich hillsides nor close to the main irrigation streams. Yet, none of the homesteaders Henderson interviewed complained about the quality of their tract. As the original state owners presumably shed their marginal land to privatization, their economic performance would likely improve also. Enhanced productivity is obviously a key programmatic objective but privatization in Kyrgyzstan is considered to be more an equity issue than a pure economic efficiency question regarding the allocation of productive goods and resources. Ethnicity matters. Native Kyrgyz are afforded preference. The rationale is that the Kyrgyz were moved off the land to create collective farms. If land were simply transferred to those currently cultivating, the displaced Kyrgyz would be discriminated against. There appears to be no limited of access to land based on gender. The privatization program distributes permanent use rights such as production, management, mortgage and limited sale over the land's surface and minerals. However this does not all sum to the same thing as legal ownership. Inheritance is still a question. Water rights, in a separate class both legally and emotionally, can not be sold.

Water Resources

River analogies are particularly apropos in Central Asia where two rivers, the Amu Darya and Syr Darya represent the source of both life and conflict. Erika Weinthal of Columbia University documented the watershed problem as independence transformed the situation from a domestic issue into an international dispute over common property. Consistent mismanagement of water resources has caused environmental degradation including the "death of the Aral Sea" which has received international attention. International bodies such as the World Bank
are reluctant to intervene until the Central Asian States themselves define their priorities. Among the reasons, aside from the "problem of the commons," that feeds the reticence of Central Asian governments to introduce market mechanisms which would limit water usage is that market reforms would undermine the social control inherent in water control. Governments are more inclined to graft additional institutional structures on to administrative bodies. The Central Asian governments established an Inter-State Water Coordinating Commission in February 1992 to develop new terms for a water sharing agreement based on the principle that no government would take measures that would damage any other. Commission administration is headquartered in Uzbekistan which, along with Kazakhstan, has the greatest water demand. Weinthal quantified Uzbekistan's need at 4.2 million hectares of irrigated land comprising 65 percent of the economy. The republics from which the two rivers originate, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, are comparatively poor and need the water for power generation and, according to Weinthal, have the least incentive to cooperate. Almas Chukin, Economic Officer for the Kyrgyz embassy to the United States, objected to this opinion on the meteorological grounds that preservation of the Aral Sea is critical to Kyrgyz interests also. The sea provides a "warm pillow" which protects against cold North-West winds and the associated spring frost. Although an international structure is now in place, real problem solving has not yet begun. In fact, a meeting of the heads of state has been continually delayed.

Water in Central Asia has been traditionally treated as a free good with few restrictions on its use. Inefficient water usage programs continue. Weinthal reported that in Uzbekistan there are 175,000 kilometers of canals. Many are in poor repair. Only 20-40% of the water actually reaches the fields. Less than 10% of the irrigation ditches are lined to reduce evaporation. By highlighting the similarities of the Central Asian watershed with those of other post-colonial regimes such as the Nile and the Indus, Weinthal emphasized the potential roles for international organizations: pressing for problem resolution, setting agendas and providing incentives through technical assistance. George Gruen, Professor of International Relations in the Middle East Institute
at Columbia University, citing a parallel between the Tigris and the Euphrates to the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya, informed that World Bank funding hinged on the designation of these waters as international or not. The World Bank will not finance projects such as the construction of dams on international waters. The Ataturk dam, for instance, was built completely by Turkish funds which Turkey hoped to recoup through payments for storing water.

Weinthal claimed that the technical know-how to resolve the water usage problems exists in Central Asia and reported an increased in the water flow to the Aral Sea this past year by 28 cubic kilometers. The political problems, however, create a potential for conflict, visible even in this scholarly forum. Speaking for Kyrgyzstan, Chukin explained that his government is not asking for payment for water, but is instead requesting cost sharing for the construction of dams which provide the entire region with electricity. From an Uzbek ideological perspective, Zholdasov argued that neither land nor water are to be bought or sold, although both are done illegally. His compatriot Abduvakhitov, added that water has no international price, such as oil. By international convention, water is distributed by allocation agreements, not prices. "Does Mexico pay the United States for water from the Colorado river?" Abduvakhitov demanded. Chukin appealed to allocation difficulties including contradictory seasonal considerations. The highest demand for the electricity upstream in the mountainous climates occurs during the cold winter months. The highest demand for agricultural irrigation water downstream is in the spring. Abduvakhitov indicated that Uzbekistan intended to increase the number of irrigation lines and had agreed with Turkmenistan to increase the amount of agricultural land by 1.5 to 2 times. Padma Desai, a scholar of the Soviet economy from Columbia University, recognized that pricing systems for agricultural resources are very difficult to implement under the best of circumstances. Nevertheless, proper price signals will be necessary to encourage the switch from cotton to other crops. Summoning comparative advantage, it ought to be cheaper to grow food in fertile Uzbekistan rather than in mountainous Kyrgyzstan, Desai recommended a water-for-crops barter mechanism. Abduvakhitov envisioned a radically different
solution, to reroute water to Uzbekistan from the Indus River (recalling the ill conceived and aborted Soviet "project of the century" to redirect Siberian rivers to Central Asia.) Apparently, some discussions on this topic have already begun between the responsible governments. Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan, producing 13-14 billion kilowatts of power per year, 3-4 billion for export, is also looking beyond its traditional trading borders. In the past, Kyrgyzstan sold energy primarily to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Chukin reported that the production demand has fallen and Kazakhstan has refused to purchase Kyrgyz energy. Therefore, the Kyrgyz have begun searching for new energy markets in Pakistan and China.

CONSONANCE OF DEMOGRAPHICS

Nationalities and Migration

The crossing from Soviet domination to self rule in Central Asia involves population flows in myriad directions. Peter Sinnott, a geographer at Columbia University, identified two general classes of relocation streams which will have long lasting effects. The intra-republic migration from the urban to the rural areas is without precedent in developing countries. Census data from Kyrgyzstan, for instance, shows an increase in the percentage of population in rural regions from 61.6% to 62.7%. The urbanization efforts in Uzbekistan, strong until 1988, are now continuing to weaken. Sinnott distinguished several causes for ruralization. In the villages, fertility is high and families are young, while in the cities labor is in surplus. Job growth is stymied by the remnants of the "cotton monoculture" and the European prejudice for skilled jobs. Zholdasov, however, contradicted that Tashkent, a city of more than 2 million, had only 4,000 jobless persons. Henderson added the non-availability of goods in a deficit economy to the list of incentives for a movement back to the farm. She also colored the ruralization picture with an ethnic brush. The largest concentrations of ethnic minorities are in the cities and many of them are emigrating.
Inter-republic migration represents a return to ethnic homelands. The enormous shifting of ethnic sands measured in gross terms are five time greater than the net migration statistics. Russian colonization and Stalin's forced relocations left large populations of Slavs, Tatars, Jews, Koreans, Germans, Azeris and numerous other ethnic groups displaced in Central Asia. The exodus and accompanying "brain drain" is sounding official alarms. Policies adopted to guarantee the protection of minorities have not been able to stem the reversal of ethnic heterogeneity. Exiting Slavs would seem to open cities and job opportunities for indigenous groups but Sinnott does not see this in evidence. Desai's market based solution would be to create incentives favoring urbanization through investment strategies. Targeted industries would produce farm equipment to ease the intensity of labor in the rural regions. Henderson questioned urbanization "push" versus ruralization "pull." Citing Chinese experience, she offered an alternative investment vision. Small factories established in rural areas have contributed greatly to economic development while foregoing conventional urbanization.

Gender Roles

Islamization and de-Sovietization will have profound effects on gender roles as did the emancipation of Muslim women, a critical element of the Soviets' de-Islamization campaign. Tabishalieva contended that the imperative of stripping the Islamic religious veneer was so intrinsic to the Communist Party agenda that women in Asia were emancipated to a greater extent than the women in the European parts of the former Soviet Union. Reluctance to emancipation was considered to be class resistance. Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh of Columbia University reminded that the Soviet emancipation was a tragic process leading to the death of many women, pawns caught between socialist imperatives and ethnic traditions. The current nationalist perspective is that the "Russians enslaved our women and put them in European clothes."
Tabishalieva was also careful to distinguish emancipation in the West from the fundamentally different process in Central Asia. In the former, women mastered and mixed into traditionally male professions. In the latter, simultaneous emancipation, cultural revolution and industrialization resulted in new professions which were completely dominated by women. Characteristically these were the lowest paid professions in the social sector, prompting Tabishalieva to claim that burden of building socialism in Central Asia was borne predominantly by the women. The extraordinary toll of responsibilities in both the productive sector and in the home manifested in high death rates, maternity deaths, stillborn children and birth defects. Tabishalieva reported maternal deaths in Tajikistan as 178 per 100,000 and in Uzbekistan 143 per 100,000. On the collective farms, Tadjbakhsh said, each autumn brings an epidemic of hepatitis cases traceable to the use of defoliants in the harvesting of cotton which women pick by hand. Women work not because they want to but out of economic necessity. In Tabishalieva's data, only one women in sixteen worked because she wanted to. Nor do the economic reforms bode good tidings. Economic crises and transitions tend to have the greatest detrimental impact on the most vulnerable elements of the society. Maternity and other social welfare benefits are disappearing for lack of funds. Feminization of certain lower status lower wage jobs is increasing as men move into business. Social and scholarly interest in the plight of women is just now materializing. The first conference on women's issues held in Central Asia was in 1993. The topic was the "victims of the huge social experiments by the Soviets."

**IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES**

Some regions of Central Asia, may be swallowed by tumultuous whirlpools of chaos, as parts of Tajikistan. In other areas, Kyrgyzstan perhaps, political agility and favorable winds of change are more conducive to successful crossings. This conference to observe and to record the first steps off the brink and into the drink demonstrated a diversity of futures and identified many of the major trouble spots. It may, in
fact, be true that Central Asia is a region on the globe with a more uncertain future and thus perhaps highly susceptible to outside interventions. These observations have definite implications for United States policy which, although beyond the scope of the conference, are critically important. How can and should the United States assist the crossing to self rule in Central Asia?

Central Asia itself is not a homogenous community. Definitions of self are treacherous but imperative steps which have not yet been taken. Broad generalizations are as arrogant as they are dangerous, yet the United States places all the Central Asia policy eggs in the same USSR basket crowded by the dominant Russian dinosaur egg. Policies that may be favorable to hatch Russian democracy do not necessarily boil down to what it best for Central Asia, or for the United States with respect for Central Asia. It would be similarly erroneous to include the Baltics or with Eastern Europe with Russia in a single portfolio of one Ambassador-at-Large. The United States should address Central Asia as a unique entity, not solely as an appendage of the former Soviet Union. Closest diplomatic ties in Central Asia with the United States are with Kyrgyzstan. In Washington corridors, Askar Akaev, the Kyrgyz president, has even been referred to as "Askar Jefferson. However, after Kyrgyzstan's bold plunge into market reforms, aid from the international community, including that from the United States, has been disappointing and less than what was promised. Some commentators contend that the Central Asian portions are diminished by the voracious appetite of the giant to the north, since all the Newly Independent States (NIS) are feeding from the same plate. Disassociating policy in Central Asia from Russian predominance would involve several concrete steps.

- The United States should examine the geopolitics of Central Asia in various contexts other than Russian hegemony. Not doing so is risky. Conceding Russia's suzerainty may be interpreted by Moscow as tacit approval of Russian adventurism, perhaps leading to another Bosnian like catastrophe. Some experts have warned that Russian neo-imperialism to the South could be the spark that would ignite reactionary Muslim extremism. The independent policy toward the
Baltics provides a good counter-example. Russo-centric policies also miss historic opportunities. As the epic crossroads of the mystical Silk Road to China, an economically vibrant Central Asia could connect Europe by land to the burgeoning economies of Asia and invite the spread of economic reform in China into the western provinces. In an alternative scenario, as a part of the Greater Middle East, an Islamic Central Asia, educated and friendly with the West, could contribute to confidence building in the Arab/Israeli conflict and help avert a Muslim/Christian clash of cultures.

- **The United States should identify its own interests specific to Central Asia.** A potential Central Asian drug bazaar and increasing arms trade could have far reaching effects on our side of the globe. Keeping contraband out of Russia, thus support for Russian troops on Tajik-Afghan border, may be an important first line defense. Nevertheless, United States interests in the region are not inclusively encompassed by Russian security needs. US regional objectives warrant specific consideration and clarification.

- **The United States should encourage and assist global interconnectivity for Central Asia.** Forced isolation, lingering xenophobia and abysmal telecommunications infrastructure have limited Central Asia to a single model for behavior within the community of nations - the confrontational Soviet model. Fortunately Western groups on-the-ground in Central Asia are introducing educational/exchange programs and "information revolution" technology to expand these horizons. The United States should promote and support these active grassroots initiatives and encourage the development of others. The purpose would be to expand the menu of options from which the Central Asian States can choose their future.

- **The United States should respect the rich history of Central Asia that extends well beyond the Russian Revolution.** The historic culture is one that thrived in the market place and valued justice but never aspired to democracy. United States policy should be
founded in the search for common ground in economic reform which will improve living conditions for all Central Asians, not in the antagonistic quagmire of demands for a western-style democracy.