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Soft Power, Hard Power, and Counterinsurgency

The Early Soviet Experience in Central Asia and Its Implications

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NATIONAL DEFENSE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

**SOFTPOWER, HARDPower, AND COUNTERINSURGENCY: THE EARLY SOVIET EXPERIENCE
IN CENTRAL ASIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS¹**

In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks were faced with an immense challenge: consolidating power throughout the lands of the Russian Empire. In the portions of that Empire now known as Central Asia (as elsewhere) they faced armed insurgency as well as a variety of other forms of political opposition.

Although the Soviets initially focused on violent suppression of the revolt, a combination of ideology and expedience soon drove them to a different set of tactics to end and prevent effective opposition so as to secure and assure the Soviet state-building effort. These combined "softpower" approaches of winning over key groups with violent exercise of "hardpower" in the form of targeted arrests and executions (sometimes of the very groups recently co-opted). Both the soft and hard actions were taken to effect the same explicit goals of modernization. This was defined as secularism, sex equality, and mass literacy, as well as, of course, Communist political ideology. This paper discusses the Soviet experience and concludes by drawing some parallels and the disconnects with more recent efforts to fight insurgency and opposition, identifying lessons and implications for the near and longer-term.

Following the Russian revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks, having taken power in the capital, had to consolidate it in the rest of the country. One aspect of this was ensuring that Petrograd's (and, after March 1918, Moscow's) authority over Russia's Imperial lands in Turkestan and Kazakhstan, as elsewhere, would continue under the Revolution. Turkestan comprised the three provinces of Syr Darya, Ferghana, and Zeravashan, with protectorates in Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand. Broadly speaking, it encompassed what is now known as Central Asia, a terminology that did not then include Kazakhstan.² This region

¹ Author's note: This paper is based in part on work carried out at the RAND Corporation in the course of a project on softpower and counterinsurgency. The author wishes to thank her colleagues on that project, Andrew Rathmell, Gage Gvineria, Cheryl Benard, Kim Cragin, Audra Grant, Todd Helmus, and Greg Hannah whose insights and collaboration contributed immensely to this work. Mr. Gvineria deserves additional special thanks for his research and analysis support.

² The creation of the Central Asian republics as we now know them took place in the 1930s. References to cities and regions in this text coincide with their names and locations at the time events took place, although the term Central Asia will generally be used in its modern sense (to include Kazakhstan). This paper will focus on events throughout the region.

was predominantly Muslim and had low levels of literacy and development even by the standards of the day. Bolshevik efforts in the region were geared to ensuring a revolutionary transformation in Turkestan and establishing secular communism throughout the area.

Thus, what the Soviets were seeking to do was to introduce a modern social and political program (communism and its ideals) into a very traditional social and political environment, while establishing new governance structures. Bolshevik ideology called for, in theory if not always in practice, equality between the sexes and rule by the working class, or proletariat. It viewed religion as a mechanism of control and power by the oppressor class, and thus something to be eliminated. The Soviets therefore sought to overturn the existing structure of social and political dominance by men, religious leaders and the wealthy. The most ideological of the Bolsheviks simply saw their approach as right, and the old system as wrong and dangerous. Thus, they expected that those who would benefit (the poor, the workers, women) would support them, and that the only ones who would oppose them would be the exploitative wealthy landowners and religious leaders who did not want to see their power eroded. However, Bolshevik approaches soon alienated many of those whose support they had expected to have.

This paper examines Soviet efforts in Central Asia between about 1917 and 1929. The first section discusses changing approaches by Moscow in the face of violent local resistance. The remainder of the paper focuses in greater detail on Soviet uses of social engineering and of education and information operations, combined with violence, to prevent the development of opposition. The conclusion summarizes some of the lessons of the Soviet experience.

REVOLUTION AND THE BASMACHIS

Background

The first five years of Bolshevik rule (1917-1922) in Central Asia were the most violent, and the most complicated. As elsewhere in the nascent Soviet Union, removing the tsarist governor-general was the first step. This was followed by the creation of a dizzying and ever-changing assortment of councils and structures of Bolsheviks,

Mensheviks, workers, peasants, and, here if not elsewhere, Muslim nationalists. The Muslim nationalists initially expected the new Russian government to be more favorable than had been the old. Jadidist groups, inspired in part by the 1905 failed revolution and in part by the Young Turks, espoused reform and nationalism, of both government and religion. Such groups quickly requested increased autonomy and equality for the region and its peoples. At the end of 1917, Turkestan had various and semi-competing governments in the form of the Menshevik dominated Tashkent Soviet, the Bolshevik council of People's Commissars (composed entirely of Russians), and the Muslim Provisional Government of Autonomous Turkestan, which was based in, and effectively in charge of, Kokand. Bukhara and Khiva, under their Emirs, sought to fight off the Soviet onslaught. The confusion and contest for power was repeated in most locales of the region. Meanwhile, the regional Communist organizations, born primarily of its Russian communities, were slow to seek Muslim members (the Tashkent organization was an exception).

The struggles for power in the region were often violent, and the actions of Red Army forces did little to endear the Soviets to the indigenous Muslim population. For instance, when Soviet troops were commanded by the Tashkent Soviet to take control of Kokand in early 1918, they were successful, but the fight for the city turned into what Michael Rywkin terms a "pogrom," "accompanied by looting and rape." The violent killing of the city's Muslim defenders also took place at Bukhara's gates when the Soviets reached them shortly afterwards. Here, however, they received word that the Emir would negotiate, and was willing to leave power. Instead, all but two members of the negotiating team were killed—and the Russian forces' communications lines cut off. Soon after, local Muslims turned on the city's Russian population, murdering hundreds. The Soviets withdrew to Samarkand, where they eventually were reinforced from Tashkent—and ordered to reach agreement with the Emir. This agreement stopped the fighting and recognized Bukharan independence—for the time being.³

³ Michael Rywkin, "Moscow's Muslim Challenge: Soviet Central Asia," (M.E. Sharpe, Armonk NY, 1982) pp. 23-24; Helene Carrere d'Encausse, *Islam and the Russian Empire*, (London, IB Tauris and Co. Ltd, 1966), pp. 155-156.

Soviet troops also contributed to the poverty and hunger of local populations. War had cut off many supply routes--until fall of 1919, Cossack troops kept Turkestan largely cut off from Soviet Russia. As a result, food prices rose steadily. In places such as Bukhara, this was exacerbated by a lack of local production: cotton had steadily taken over fields during past years, leaving the area heavily dependent on food imports from elsewhere in the Russian Empire. The region as a whole faced severe shortages by late 1916, which were then deepened by drought. By 1917, the situation was one of famine. Moreover, the cotton crop, too, was shrunk by the drought, and numerous peasants lost their land as they could not produce the cotton for which they had previously been paid.⁴

During this time, the Soviets did little to get food to starving urban Muslim populations. Quite the opposite, Soviet troops requisitioned grain, other foodstuffs and supplies from the peasants who did produce such things - leaving little, if anything, for the villages themselves, much less others in the region. The Soviets did try to fix the rapidly rising prices of food--but taxes remained high (and, indeed, when Moscow lowered tax rates, local officials simply over-collected). This led to a sharp decline in production and even more starvation. The Tashkent Soviet's view was that the weak should, indeed, die out in a reflection of Marxist principles--the Army was a better use of resources.⁵

Back in the capital, the Bolshevik leadership sought to propagate Muslim Communism and create cells in the region. From the start, Petrograd (and then Moscow) urged the Tashkent Soviet to grant Muslims more political power, but these calls were resisted. Local officials insisted that indigenous Muslims lacked a true proletariat and were not trustworthy.⁶ Rather, local Soviet officials, working to consolidate

⁴ Alexander G. Park, *Bolshevism in Turkestan, 1917-1927* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1957), pp. 34-40; Helene Carrere d'Encausse, *Islam and the Russian Empire*, (London, IB Tauris and Co. Ltd, 1966). Pp. 124-125.

⁵ Park, pp. 34-40.

⁶ Shoshana Keller, *The Struggle Against Islam in Uzbekistan, 1921-1941: Policy, Bureaucracy, and Reality*, PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 1993.

their own power, made little effort to involve local Muslims in government structures or decision-making. The seven person Central Party Committee of the Turkestan Republic had a single Muslim member.⁷ By decision of the Third Regional Congress of Soviets, no Muslims were allowed on the Regional Council of People's commissars and their representation in the Regional Executive Committee was limited to two seats (four in the Regional Council). The Fourth Turkestan Congress of Soviets in 1919 made proportional representation in Soviet organs a matter of preference for the local Soviets.⁸ Moreover, the ethnic Russian Soviet leadership engaged in and allowed highly discriminatory actions. For instance, local officials forced Kyrgyz farmers from fertile lands to the benefit of Russian immigrants, and in some cases allowed for slavery-like treatments of indigenous peasants. Gangs that included Red Army and Party members attacked villages, killing and raiding. Many were forced from their homes into the mountains.⁹

This is not to say that there were no Muslims allied with Soviet forces. In most of the major cities of the region there were small groups of revolutionaries who continued to welcome Soviet rule. There were also nationalist, Jadidist groups who continued to feel that Soviet rule would be preferable to that of the Tsar. Such groups worked, for instance, to bring Soviet troops to Bukhara to overthrow the emir.¹⁰ For some of these groups, the inexorable march of the Soviets through their territory meant that they should join forces with them. However, for much of the local citizenry, and increasingly for the jadids, the Soviets' actions were bloodthirsty and an attack on Islam—both of which, they assuredly were.

The actions of Soviet officials, whether guided from Moscow or not, were driven at least in part by the overall Bolshevik agenda of rapid and radical changes to the political order (surely, they were at times also driven by personal greed and powerlust). Towards this end, they sought to destroy the oppressor classes of feudal lords, the clergy, and

⁷ Rywkin, p. 26.

⁸ Park, p. 34-35.

⁹ Alexander G. Park, *Bolshevism in Turkestan, 1917-1927* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1957), pp. 34-40.

¹⁰ Carrere d'Encausse, pp. 154-157.

"bourgeois nationalists." Because traditional structures which supported the existing social and political order relied on individuals' allegiances to clan, family, and tribe, the Bolsheviks felt it was critical to break down these structures, and replace them with loyalty to the state and the Party. This meant information and propaganda campaigns to discredit traditional elites, such as that against religious leaders which carried forward three broad themes, as explained by Shoshana Keller: "1) Mullas, ishans, and other "cult servants" worked for the oppressing classes to help exploit workers and peasants; 2) Religion was developed as a way for primitive man to understand and control the incomprehensible forces of nature, and could be eliminated with basic scientific knowledge, and 3 Islam brutally oppressed and exploited women."¹¹

It also meant legal and physical crackdowns on religious institutions, in accordance with the law on Separating Church and State of January 23 1918. The law applied to all Soviet territory and eliminated government support for religion, ended religious oaths in court and religious authority over rites of passage and education, and deprived religious organizations of their status as legal persons, thus eliminating their right to own property. In Turkestan, this meant that mosques were seized, Sharia law was abolished, waqf property was confiscated, and religious schools closed. Moreover, here, as with economic policy, a variety of more opportunistic activities were undertaken under the guise of Soviet laws. At the time it was, as noted by Keller, sometimes "impossible to differentiate between the ideological clericalism and random assaults."¹²

The Basmachis

The Basmachi anti-Soviet guerrilla movement (called the Bek or freemen's movement among Turkestani nationalists) originated in the Ferghana Valley but spread throughout the region, crossing tribal and class lines in response to Russian oppression (and at times aligning and cooperating with other counterrevolutionary forces). Their primary

¹¹ Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca, : the Soviet campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941*, Westport, Conn., Praeger, 2001, pp. 162-163.

¹² Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca*, p. 51.

areas of operation were the Ferghana Valley, the Lokay region south of Dushanbe, Bukhara, and the Turkmen Steppes around Khiva, with more action in different areas at different times.¹³ The Basmachis were made up of various local groups, with local leaders and certainly included a number of criminals and true bandits (which is what Turkish root Basmak indicates). The group's rise was rooted not only in current events, but in historical opposition to Russian rule—and violent Russian responses to such opposition. Basmachis helped the Muslim Nationalist government in Kokand in its losing fight against the Soviets, and some of that government's members then joined the Basmachi revolt. Indeed, the losing battle at Kokand did much to strengthen Basmachi ranks and popularity, for it was seen as an indicator of Soviet viciousness.¹⁴

As the group evolved, its leadership came largely from nationalist groups, although it also drew on religion in classing its struggle as a defense of Islam. Tribal and village leaders, sufi sheikhs, jadids who had split from the Soviets, and, late in the movement, Turkish officers joined with some former bandits to lead the campaigns at various times. Although many of these groups had little in common, what brought them together was the fight against the Russian occupier/oppressor.¹⁵ In their heyday, the Basmachis enjoyed tremendous support from the brutalized local population. They had free movement through the region's villages, which enabled them to attack Red Army outposts and trains from mountain bases. Tactics varied across the region, with Ferghana Basmachis favoring hit and run attacks, and Lokay and Turkment groups more prone to larger actions and ambushes. Local support helped keep them operational, too, with peasant warning systems that kept Soviet efforts to strike back from reaching the Basmachis in any consequential way.¹⁶ The Basmachis even joined forces with some of the Russian settlers groups that had initially been create against Basmachi raids—but soon found themselves targeted by the Soviet government.¹⁷ By autumn of 1919, the Basmachis, numbering about 7000 people (perhaps

¹³ Park, p. 31, 41, Marie Broxup, "The Basmachi," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 2, No. 1, July 1983, pp. 59-60.

¹⁴ Rywkin, p. 34, Broxup, pp. 58-59, Park, p. 40.

¹⁵ Broxup, p. 61.

¹⁶ Park, p.41, Broxup, pp. 63-64

¹⁷ Rywkin, p. 35.

10000 with the Russian supporters)¹⁸ controlled the mountains in the Lokay area and all of Ferghana's rural areas (with the exception of the railway line), and enabled a Ferghana Provisional Government which obtained a promise of support from Afghanistan.¹⁹ It is worth noting that many Soviet sources argue that there was significant British support to the Basmachis and other anti-Soviet groups, although some Western sources question or dispute that assertion.²⁰

The initial Soviet response to the Basmachis was to send out military forces to attack and frighten peasant supporters (or suspected supporters) of the Basmachis. This tended to have the opposite of the desired effect. The tide began to turn more realistically after the defeat of the Cossacks and the arrival of Soviet metropolitan troops in Tashkent, ending the region's isolation. This enabled reinforcement of the Red Army garrisons in Ferghana, which somewhat reduced Basmachi freedom of movement.²¹ The surrender of allied Russian settlers in January 1920 further damaged their cause. The Soviets then dispatched the Volga Tatar Brigade, made up of Muslims, to suppress the rebellion. Thousands of Basmachis surrendered, leaving only one chieftain to oppose the Soviets.

Surrendered Basmachi units were integrated into Soviet forces, the Soviet Basmachi units of the First Uzbek Cavalry Brigade.²² This integration of former fighters did little to change the fact that the Red Army itself, even in Central Asia, remained heavily ethnic Russian

¹⁸ Broxup, p. 60.

¹⁹ Park, p.41, Broxup, pp. 63-64.

²⁰ Of the sources utilized for this paper, see K. A. Gafurova, "The Ideological Fight in Central Asia and Kazakhstan in the First Years of Soviet Rule" ("Ideologicheskaya Borb'a v Sredney Azii i Kazakstane v Perviy Godi Sovetskoy Vlasti"), *Voprosy Istorii*, No. 7, 1973, p. 20 for an example of the casual assumption of British involvement. In regards to Western sources, Carrere d'Encausse cites Stalin in asserting British influence in Bukhara (p. 164). Park cites examples of the Emir of Bukhara and Basmachis requesting, but not receiving British help (pp. 26, 41-42) but also cites a Soviet source regarding an alleged British promise to aid the Turkestan Military Organization (allied at the time with the Basmachis), once it took power from the Soviets (p. 31). Broxup describes Soviet assessments of British help (and Iranian) as "highly exaggerated" and specific claims that the British provided arms, ammunition, and uniforms as "absurd" (pp. 64-65).

²¹ Park, p. 42, Rywkin, p. 35.

²² Rywkin, p. 35.

(a major recruitment effort in 1926 brought the Uzbeks to the 5% mark, with other groups lagging behind.²³ It is also worth noting that from 1918-1921, some Basmachis joined with Soviet forces during the winter, to get food and arms, and then rejoined the insurgency in warmer weather.²⁴ But however credible the integration into Soviet forces, the first phase of the Basmachi revolt was over.

The second began soon after, when Soviet forces finally moved to take control of first Khiva and then Bukhara, a thorn in the side since the March 1918 treaty. Khiva had become the site of Uzbek-Turkmen ethnic unrest since the Uzbek nationalist-Communist leadership left in place by the Soviets was unable to suppress Turkmen militias. The Khivan government was supplanted and replaced with one more to Moscow's liking, and a massive purge of Khiva's Party members followed, in which nearly 2000 people were killed.²⁵ Bukhara had become the scene of increasing Muslim nationalism. In September 1920, the Red Army marched on the city accompanied by many of the Jadids who had fled it two years before (although many had been quite ambivalent about the prospect of armed attack). This time, they were successful.²⁶

The Soviet attacks on both Khiva and Bukhara served to thicken the depleted Basmachi ranks, however, as those who had lost joined their ranks. In fact, the response to Khiva likely contributed to the unrest in Bukhara, which led the Soviets to decide to act there.²⁷ In Bukhara, in turn, Soviet harshness led both jadids and peasants to the Basmachis in large numbers.²⁸

By 1920, the Basmachi movement had grown once again, spreading across the region. It had also developed internal schisms. The nationalist liberals found themselves at odds with Islamists, Uzbeks with Kyrgyz, and various tribes with one another. Although all of these groups had reasons to fight the Bolsheviks, and thus to unite with one another, their disagreements at times overcame their common cause. According to Alexander Park, drawing from Soviet sources of the 1920s

²³ Rywkin, p. 39.

²⁴ Broxup, p. 63.

²⁵ Rywkin, p. 37.

²⁶ Carrere d'Encausse, p. 164.

²⁷ Rywkin, p. 37.

²⁸ Carrere d'Encausse pp. 177-178.

and 30s, religious conservatives were taking control of the movement from reformist nationalists. He argues that the Bolsheviks' attack on Islam made religion a very successful rallying cry among the local population.²⁹

Although it would reassert itself, the infighting was brought to a temporary halt by the arrival of Enver Pasha. Enver Pasha, a Young Turk revolutionary, came to the Basmachis in 1921 first as an emissary from Lenin tasked mediate with the Emir of Bukhara and the Basmachis. He switched allegiances, however, and was able to unify the various Basmachi groups against the Bolsheviks under a Muslim unity ideology. By the end of 1921, the Basmachis numbered some 20,000 fighters including a number of defectors from the Soviet government in Bukhara.³⁰

The Basmachis enjoyed considerable success during the short period of Enver Pasha's leadership, much of it due to continuing support from the local population, which was motivated largely by the economic and social impact, including on religious belief, of Soviet rule. Although Enver Pasha's leadership began to fragment as various chieftains and groups bristled under his command, and previous schisms reasserted themselves, the Basmachis were able to carry out a number of successful operations. This, of course, led the Soviets came to see them as a threat that required immediate response. They commenced once again on an effort to recruit (and conscript—with evasion punishable by death) more Muslims to the force, including former Basmachis, an effort that some scholars, particularly Soviet scholars, deemed successful and others, such as Rywkin, not. The Soviets also created a special anti-Basmachi force in Eastern Bukhara.³¹

Softpower: The Key to Victory Over the Basmachis

The fight against the Basmachis was not limited to military might, and, indeed, might not have succeeded if it had been. As Basmachi ranks swelled with disaffected locals, the Soviets came to realize that their

²⁹ Park, p. 50, 213.

³⁰ Rywkin, pp.38-39, Park, p. 51, Carrere d'Encausse, pp. 178. Broxup estimates that the guerrillas had perhaps 18,000 fighters at its peak in spring 1922 and perhaps 15000 in 1921 (Broxup, p. 60).

³¹ Carrere d'Encausse, p. 179, Rywkin, pp. 39-43, Park, p.52, Broxup, pp. 66-67.

policies were helping to drive Basmachi recruitment. Moreover, they saw that the support of the local citizenry was what gave the rebels their operational advantages. As the effort to increase the Muslim ranks of the Red Army indicates, Moscow realized that political measures must be implemented alongside military, to shrink the Basmachi's popular support. These efforts included a propaganda campaign, describing the Basmachis as bandits. They also included a number of conciliatory steps, geared to wooing the local population.

Alienating the indigenous peoples had never been the Bolshevik intent, and Moscow began to insist on greater outreach. In 1919, the Turkkommissia was established to adapt central Party and state policies to local needs. It would serve as an intermediary structure between central and local authorities, the liaison between the executive committee of Turkestan (TurkTSIK) and the council of People's commissars (SOVNARKOM) in Russia. Although one of its first steps was to reinforce Red Army personnel fighting the Basmachis, it went on to implement a variety of policies rolling back discriminatory and anti-Muslim actions, starting primarily in 1921.³²

The Communist Party was one target. Statements at the Baku Congress argued that assaults on Islam had fostered counter-revolution and denounced "narrowly nationalistic tendencies" of European Russians. A 1920 letter from the Moscow Central Committee instructed the local Communist Party to rid itself of "all the Turkestanian Communists who are contaminated with colonizing fever and Great Russian Nationalism," and the Party reinvigorated its efforts to expand its Muslim membership. Some Russian members of the Tashkent leadership, accused of chauvinism, were ousted, and replaced by a different breed of Communist, albeit also from Moscow (Broxup notes a high proportion of Jews and Muslims among the newcomers). Jadid groups, such as the Young Bukharans and Young Khivians, were welcomed into the Party. Muslim religious institutions were also courted, and their properties, which had been seized during the revolution, were returned. Some Muslims were even accepted into

³² Broxup pp. 66-67.

leadership roles. Sharia courts were reopened, as were mosques, and Muslim schools began operating once again.³³

This more conciliatory approach was bolstered by the New Economic Policy (NEP), introduced in 1921 in realization that draconian policies throughout the empire had backfired. The NEP permitted broader economic activity, including private enterprise. Taxes were rethought and rationalized and property rights protected (including for women, who had some rights under Islamic law, but were granted, formally at least, equal rights under Soviet law).³⁴ In addition, regions where the Basmachis enjoyed support were visited by propagandists bearing free seeds and other supplies, and explaining the benefits of the new Soviet structures.³⁵

These policies did, indeed, diminish support for the Basmachis, making it more difficult for them to operate and equip themselves. Helene Carrere d'Encausse writes that "The population of Turkistan was tired of struggle; the return to an order in conformity with its traditions was seen by it as a sufficient guarantee to abandon the Basmachi movement."³⁶

Meanwhile, as infighting between the rebels continued, the Soviets continued their own military offensive, but also offered amnesties, which looked increasingly appealing. Thousands of Basmachis took advantage of them and laid down their arms.³⁷ The fact that more Muslims were on the Soviet side no doubt also had an impact, and, indeed, when territory was reconquered, the new leadership installed had strong local (Muslim) representation. The new tactics called for occupying the territory and then handing it off to native forces and

³³ Park, pp. 52-54, Carrere d'Encausse, p. 165, 179-180.

³⁴ Marianne Kamp, "Land for Women, Too: Islam, Communism, and Land Reform in Uzbekistan, 1925-28." On-line conference proceedings (unpublished paper), The Columbia Caspian Project conference, Women in Central Asia: The Politics of Change, April 15, 1998. Accessed at http://web.archive.org/web/19990910120506/http://sipa.columbia.edu/RESO/URCES/CASPIAN/wom_p12.html January 2008.

³⁵ Park, pp. 52-54, 167, Carrere d'Encausse, p. 165, 179-180.

³⁶ Carrere d'Encausse, p. 180.

³⁷ Rywkin, p.42.

administrators to control.³⁸ Enver Pasha was killed on August 8 1922, and the Basmachi coalition of nationalists, Islamists, peasants, and others opposed to the Soviets continued to fall apart. By 1924, the movement, such as it was, was operating only in the mountains, with some help from Afghanistan, to which many of its leaders had fled. With Enver Pasha killed in battle in August of 1922, the Soviets were able to steadily thin the ranks of the remaining Basmachis. Although it continued to win adherents and fighters into the 1930s (due in part to a small resurgence in 1929 as a result of collectivization), the Basmachi force had dwindled to about 2000 men.³⁹

A CONTINUING REVOLUTION: FIGHTING OPPOSITION THROUGH HARDPOWER, SOFTPOWER, AND REFORM

The elimination of the Basmachis set the tone for a pattern of behavior that would last for several decades. Hard and soft tactics combined and alternated in the years to come, with purges followed by efforts at conciliation followed by purges. Although nothing akin to the Basmachi movement developed in significant numbers again throughout the Soviet period, it could be argued that this was a direct result of these push-pull actions on the part of the Soviets, which ensured that rebels would not again be able to gain the popular support and aid the Basmachis had enjoyed. Much as the Soviets had used both violence and softpower to fight the Basmachi insurgency, they used these same tools to fight non-violent and nascent forms of opposition, as part of their effort to build and sustain a successful state. The challenge that this posed was increased by the fact that they did this not simply for the purpose of retaining power, but also in the service of broader goals of transformation: through reforms, oppression, education, and propaganda, the Soviets sought to change the preferences of the population, aligning them with their own.

³⁸ Broxup, p. 67-69. Broxup cites high numbers of Muslims incorporated into key Russian units (up to 40%) and special Muslim units. She argues that Muslim fighters represented one third of the Red Army, a very high number compared to other sources, as noted above.

³⁹ Carrere d'Encausse, p. 179, Rywkin, pp. 39-42, Park, p.52. Broxup estimates up to 8,000, spread throughout the region in 1923 (Broxup, p. 61).

This process is important to understand, as the Soviets' need to garner popular support was consistently at odds with their unpopular agenda. The effort to change the very social core of a number of different peoples in favor of a new world-view was bound to engender opposition. By co-opting and destroying various groups at various times, the Soviets were able to keep that opposition from gaining the strength it might need to truly challenge the regime.

Cooptation and Building a Constituency

Even with the perceived rollbacks of NEP, Soviet goals had not changed. Ultimately, the Soviets still aimed to create new administrative structures populated by a revolutionary proletariat. The next generation, who would be educated in Soviet schools, were the long-term hope. In the meantime, there were also populations that the Soviet leadership felt would be natural constituents in the near term—or, at least, could be co-opted for a time. All of these were the focus of Soviet campaigns. These groups included progressive intellectuals, reformist clerics, workers, women, peasants, and youth.

The new openness of local Communist Parties to "loyal" intelligentsia and "left wing" clergy, such as those from the Jadid movements that sought reform within Islam served multiple purposes. It helped gain support for the Soviets and to marginalize more traditional clergy. Reformist clergy were even allowed to develop a Muslim Spiritual Administration. In February 1923, the Turkestan Central Executive Committee authorized the creation of Party controlled spiritual administrations for Central Asia. These were to propagate Muslim reformist ideas—and to replace old spiritual administrations. They oversaw waqf income, certified religious teachers and judges, and supervised religious courts.⁴⁰

But if the Soviets were showing openness to aspects of old ways of doing things, they were also eager to introduce new ones. Clinics and health care programs were set up to provide needed services to populations that had lacked them. Broad-scale local elections were held in 1925-1926 and 1926-27, albeit with some undesired results. These

⁴⁰ Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*, pp. 61-62.

included low voter turnout, voting along ethno-tribal lines, and the election of tribal, religious, and clan leaders.⁴¹

Bringing the people of the region into the Soviet fold was a key effort. Widening party membership access was one aspect of this. Trade unions were another. Strong efforts were made to involve more indigenous workers in Union structures (a difficult enterprise given their lower representation in industrial work). Youth clubs and programs, such as the Komsomol, were one of the largest efforts in this sphere, bringing the youth into contact with the ideals of Communism, rather than Islam, early and often.⁴²

Land reform was also an important component of social policy, undertaken from the start to cultivate abandoned land, destroy the power of the traditional elites, and to gain the loyalty of the poor peasant who would benefit. The Koschi, part agricultural trade union and part cooperative farm, was created as a means of breaking down village structures of land use.⁴³ If the Soviets had started off badly in the agricultural sector, with the seizure of land, as discussed above, they had improved with the above mentioned provision of seed and other aid to peasants that helped break the backbone of the Basmachi rebellion. By 1925-1926, seed loans were made available to peasant cooperatives. Additional funding for agriculture also came from a variety of local and central government sources. With the New Economic Policy permitting some private ownership, this proved an effective means of encouraging production.⁴⁴

Whatever other groups were targeted, however, women were the largest of the "surrogate proletariats," the Soviets sought to bring over to their cause. The Soviets felt that the level of discrimination against women by religious and tribal structures (including veiling, polygamy, lack of land ownership rights, and a general lack of legal

⁴¹ A. Kuchkin, "Sovietization of the Kazakh Aul (1926-1929) ("Sovietizatziya Kazakhskogo Aula (1926-1929)," *Voprosy Istorii*, No. 10, 1946, pp. 3-23 (election issues are discussed throughout the paper, which is focused on Kazakhstan. The success of tribes, and voting by tribe, is discussed on p. 8), Park, pp. 197-199.

⁴² Park, pp. 139-142.

⁴³ On unions and agricultural organization, see Park, pp. 143-149.

⁴⁴ Kamp, Park pp. 308-309, Kuchkin pp. 22-23.

rights) made them natural supporters of the new order. Thus, an important component of their campaign was the promotion of women's liberation. This, it was believed, would garner the support of at least half the population, undermine the clergy, and help revolutionize society.

The first regional Zhenotdel, or women's division of the Communist Party, was established in 1921 in Bukhara. It aimed to combat polygamy (which was actually fairly rare), child marriage, and female illiteracy. Zhenotdels and women's clubs flourished, as the Central Asian Bureau prioritized the liberation of women even above its antireligious propaganda efforts. Although in 1925 the regional Central Committee balked at outlawing polygamy due to fear of reprisals, laws were passed to outlaw sexual relations with children and bride purchase. Polygamy was finally outlawed in 1931. In addition to the articles, films, demonstrations, and so forth typical of Soviet propaganda, demonstrations were held in which women tore off and burned their veils. Some activists, with police assistance, organized public liberation meetings at mosques during prayer. In order to develop under conditions of traditional opposition, women's education clubs were given their own buildings, with a library, a reading room, a school, courses on technical training and legal information, shops for making clothes or carpets, and often child care, pharmacies, and clinics, as well as recreation areas.⁴⁵ Women were also strongly encouraged to participate in public life, and to run for office.⁴⁶

The combination of the liberation campaign and land reform made it easier, at least from a legal standpoint, for women to acquire and own land. Widows were the first to take advantage of this, although a number of women held land inherited from their fathers. It is also possible, however, that a documented rise in women's land ownership reflected family strategies to avoid the loss of land - simply by

⁴⁵ Shoshana Keller, "Trapped Between State and Society: Women's Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926-1941," *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 10, Issue 1, 1998;" Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*, pp. 66-67, 102-105, 115-118.

⁴⁶ Kuchkin, p. 14.

allocating it to as many different family members as possible, so that it did not appear to be owned individually.⁴⁷

Literacy, Education, and Propaganda⁴⁸

Information operations and education were key methods for the Soviets in Central Asia as in other theatres. Literacy, for adults and children, was a top priority, and not just in Central Asia. The effort was Soviet-wide, as the population in Russia, too, was largely illiterate. The All-Russia Extraordinary Commission to Combat Illiteracy was established in June 1920, to comply with Lenin's decree that everyone should learn to read and write in their native language or the Russian language. Special textbooks for adults were developed, and teachers were trained in special one to five month courses, including in native languages of the various regions. The Soviet effort in Central Asia began with a broad adult literacy campaign for Party members, which included political education along with reading and writing. The "Down With Illiteracy" society trained thousands of teachers, and short term courses for teacher training were set up throughout the country. Pocket-sized pamphlets on reading and writing were widely distributed. Newspapers were printed with special sections for those just learning to read, with lessons for group and individual study. Women's, youth, and other magazines had lessons printed on their covers. Free libraries and reading rooms were spread out in factories and collective farms, and propaganda emphasized the benefits of education. Red Yurts, which were mobile structures comprising libraries, and providing access to newspapers, posters, and government personnel to answer questions, moved around the region. Gramophone records with lessons recorded on them

⁴⁷ Kamp.

⁴⁸ Unless otherwise noted, the material on education and women's education draws on Gaga Gvineria, "Bolshevik Policies in Central Asia," unpublished paper, December 2005. Gvineria cites Avantdil Rukhadze, "How Illiteracy was Eliminated in Soviet Central Asia, On the Road to Progress. Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1966 and R.A. Tuzmukhamedov, *Natsional'noe Osvobozhdeniye Narodov Srednei Azii*, English, *How the National Question Was Solved in Soviet Central Asia (a Reply to Falsifiers)*, translated by David Fidlon, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1973 on these issues.

were also distributed. ⁴⁹ Because the campaign was so broad, supplies sometimes ran short. Soviet historians report that in Central Asia, students and teachers used coal to practice writing on wool felt.⁵⁰ Women, workers, peasants and youth were particularly targeted by educators.

It is worth noting, however, that the alphabet that was introduced was not the Arabic one traditionally used for the languages of the region, but the Latin alphabet. The complexity of Arabic and its status as a tool of the oppressor was cited as the reason for this. Other factors certainly included its contribution to the capacity to read Islamic texts, and the broader goal of secularizing society. Eventually, in the mid and late 1930s, the Latin alphabet was replaced with Cyrillic.⁵¹

Schools for children were no less critical, being the key to developing the cadres of the future. Although building a complete system took time, the 1919 Party Conference budgeted for the building of schools, with lessons to be taught in the native language (though not, as noted, necessarily the native alphabet), throughout the country. Universal, compulsory, free, and secular education was a key tenet of the Soviets. In Turkestan, schools were established, teachers trained, and textbooks translated and written in the teens. An Uzbek educational journal was launched. As part of the effort to limit opposition, girls and boys were separated in the secular schools as well as in Islamic education. However, the government budget crunch associated with the NEP made it difficult to maintain the pace. The then legal Islamic schools flourished and the Soviets accepted them as part of their effort to build up support in and for the reformist clergy. Reformist schools taught secular subjects alongside religious ones.

⁴⁹ In addition to Rukhadze and Tuzmukhamedov, see Kuchkin, p. 11, T. Yu Krasovitzkaya, "The First Challenge is Literacy" ("Perveyshey Zadachey Yavliayetsia Gramotnost"), *Voprosy Istorii*, No. 5, 1979, pp. 107-120.

⁵⁰ Krasovitzkaya, p. 114.

⁵¹ Rywkin, p. 93. On replacement with Cyrillic, see also L. M. Zakh and M. I. Isaev, "The Problems of Written Language for the People of the USSR in the Cultural Revolution" ("Problemi Pis'mennosti Narodov SSSR v Kul'turnoy Revolyutzii"), *Voprosy Istorii*, No. 2, 1966, pp. 16-20.

There were a number of reasons that literacy and education were important to the Soviets. On the one hand, they were seen as a genuine and basic public good, for the individual and society. In addition, the Soviets knew that literacy would increase their ability to inculcate the population with Marxist-Leninist thinking—that, in fact, the literacy campaigns themselves could be used to this purpose, by integrating propaganda into the lesson plan. Information campaigns were a crucial part of Soviet efforts to convert the local populace to their communism. They were used to propagate information and arguments regarding religion, as well as more general Soviet ideals and Marxist-Leninist theory. Another goal of propaganda was to foster regional identity to help overcome clan and tribal identities, while forestalling Pan-Turkic or Pan-Islamic projects that could compromise allegiance to Moscow.

In terms of broader information operations, most government agencies in Central Asia had special agitation and propaganda (agitprop) sections. Ideological education was incorporated in all literacy and educational programs, whether for children or for adults.

With literacy a critical goal, and women crucial to the Soviet agenda in Central Asia, female literacy was particularly important. The right of women to an education was not only part of Soviet feminist ideals, it was crucial to women's political, social, and economic empowerment. An educated woman would be a far stronger ally to the Soviets. Thus, the education of women was central to Soviet writing and thinking.⁵² The Zhenotdels, with their women's clubs and courses, of course were the center of much of the effort of educating women in Central Asia. But efforts preceded their presence in the region, as well. In 1919, Russian women were first sent to teach in the region, and the Higher Teacher's Training College, later the Institute of Education, was established in Tashkent that year. For the first two years the focus was on teaching illiterate women to read and write. After that, more attention was devoted to teaching teachers. In 1920, another Institute of Education was established, and the graduates of these Institutes went on to teach still more women.

⁵² L. D. Filippova, "Letters and Notes: From the History of Female Education in Russia," ("Pis'ma i Zametki: Iz Istorii Zhenskogo Obrazovaniya v Rossii"), *Voprosy Istorii*, No. 2, 1963, pp. 210-211.

As will be discussed below, there was resistance in the Central Asian region to the education of women. As a result, the Soviets established separate women's schools, and introduced education by way of clubs for Muslim women. Sewing schools were established, which, while they indeed taught sewing, knitting, and embroidery, also undertook to teach their pupils to read and write.⁵³

Backlash and Reversal

It is not surprising that Soviet efforts met with mixed success. The efforts at social engineering drew vigorous and sometimes violent opposition. The Latinization of local alphabets was fiercely opposed by religious and other local leaders, who saw this (quite rightly) as an attack on Islam and an effort to disempower those who read and wrote in Arabic.⁵⁴ Women's rights and equality proved a particularly difficult sell. Female equality was most popular in urban areas, least popular in the countryside. Women faced retribution, including often from their own families for taking part in unveiling ceremonies or seeking greater rights. Some were assaulted, including by family members. Some were murdered. Schools were burned. Some mullahs sought to counter liberation efforts by holding religious classes for women.⁵⁵ Tribal and clan leaders also tried to make use of Soviet efforts to liberate women, for example encouraging women (and men) to run for Soviet office to further the interests of those groups.⁵⁶

At the same time, the efforts were successfully splitting some of the Soviets' enemies. Women's liberation, along with the Soviets' welcoming of reformist religious leaders, helped divide Muslim clergy, and deep schisms erupted. Some mullahs sought to counter liberation efforts by holding religious classes for women, and creating their own clubs. Others argued that it should be Islam and its clergy that should

⁵³ Krasovitskaya, p. 119.

⁵⁴ Zakh and Isaev, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Keller, "Trapped Between State and Society," Krasovitskaya, p. 119.

⁵⁶ Kuchkin, p. 14.

unveil and free women, rather than letting atheist Communist take the credit.⁵⁷

The Soviets had sought in part to undermine traditional religion with reformist religion, and, where possible now, and eventually everywhere, to undermine all religion and replace it with scientific atheism. The first component of this was clearly proving more effective than the second. In their drive to push it along, the Soviets began to see their allies in the moderate clergy as a threat. This coincided, not surprisingly, with the end of the NEP period, and a general hardening of Soviet policy, in the late 1920s. Co-optation, it seemed, had served its purpose.

The secret police were tasked with monitoring Central Asia's spiritual administration, and then Communist leaders withdrew their support from clergy and their schools. An "unmasking the enemies" campaign included the purging of the Communist Party of practicing Muslims and seizing control of waqfs and schools once more. Rigged elections in Muslim spiritual administrations were used to rid them of their stronger leaders. Punitive taxation efforts were applied and key individuals arrested. Ishans were also induced to issue competing fatwas of renunciation, to spread strife and discord amongst them. The religious court system, which had been allowed to function in parallel on certain cases, was weakened through a series of new laws that limited their purview further and made clear the supremacy of secular courts. Waqfs, returned in the early 1920s, were seized once again - to be finally eliminated as a system as one of the many casualties of collectivization. Muslim schools also faced increasing restrictions, including on what and whom they could teach. For instance, a prohibition was issued on young people under 14 years of age from studying in religious schools (16 if the school taught only religion). A variety of legal requirements were also used to shut down religious schools.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Keller, "Trapped Between State and Society," Krasovitskaya, p. 119.

⁵⁸ An excellent discussion of this can be found in Keller, *To Moscow Not Mecca*, particularly Chapters 4, 5, and 6, from which this discussion is drawn.

Anti-Islamic propaganda, which never went away but which had been somewhat tempered, returned in force. Soviet views on religion were propagated through newspapers, journals, public demonstrations, radio broadcasts, posters and films. In fact, a good number of anti-Islamic films were produced from the mid 1920s to the 1930s, depicting the economic exploitation of peasants by unscrupulous mullahs, and the social and sexual oppression of women by clergy.⁵⁹ With the NEP period drawing to a close and the collectivization drive beginning at the end of the 1930s, Soviet propagandists argued that Islam, along with its other faults, was also a barrier to higher production.

According to Keller, this process, although unevenly and inconsistently applied, "wiped out the most learned and active clergy and destroyed several generations of teachers, so that succeeding generations had to rely on fragmentary and fading memories of prayers, texts, and rituals."⁶⁰ It also left officially sanctioned and controlled Islam as the only legal religious outlet in the region. However, it is worth noting that when the campaign against religion was diminished once more, in the mid 1930s, religious activity in various forms rapidly increased.

The Muslim clergy were not the only victims of the new Soviet policy—collectivization would soon claim the lives of millions. It is worth noting that they were also not the first. Although the true reversal came at the end of NEP, a foreshadowing occurred a few years before, even as other policies were becoming more lenient. As noted, Moscow had long urged the opening up of regional Communist Parties, and as the fight against the Basmachi took on political aspects, this finally began to occur from 1919 onwards. The result was rapid growth of those Parties. However, within one or two years, it became clear that the growth had, perhaps, been too quick, and the Parties too inclusive. Complaints that many of the new members were not fully in line with Party doctrine, lacking understanding of, much less agreement with, the Party's goals no doubt had excellent basis in fact, given the enthusiastic recruiting. Former Jadids of various stripe, mullahs,

⁵⁹ Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*, pp. 99-100.

⁶⁰ Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca*, pp. 254-255.

merchants, landowners and so forth had, indeed, joined up. The first purges thus followed fast on the heels of the recruitment drives. In 1921, the Turkestanian Party expelled over 10,000 members. In 1923, the Bukharan Communist Party purged some 15,000 (and the local government was similarly thinned). The situation repeated itself in Semirechie, Kirghizia, and Khoresm.⁶¹

And, even this reversal of a gentler Soviet approach was not the first, it was also not the last, change in policy towards culture and religion in Central Asia (and elsewhere). As the 1930s progressed, the pressure eased up once again. Where early revolutionary excesses had led to a rethinking of the approach in the past, the violence of collectivization did the same a few years later. In Central Asia, this meant Islamic observance was allowed to return somewhat. By the late 1930s and the German invasion, the Soviets feared that continuing emphasis on atheism would hamper the war effort, and religion enjoyed a resurgence throughout the USSR. The 1930s also saw sporadic efforts to include more Muslims and indigenous peoples in various structures, Party, government, and industry, including in leadership roles. And, of course, the period saw the time of some of the Soviet Union's ugliest and bloodiest purges.⁶²

RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CENTRAL ASIA

The Soviet effort in Central Asia, both during the time when the Basmachi insurgency was active and afterwards, had a number of components, comprising both hard and soft power elements. Repressive and hard power measures included discriminating against and repressing traditional elites, religious and otherwise. Force, arrests, secret police tactics, killings, and deportations were all used. During the period of the fight against the Basmachi insurgency, hard power of course also included a variety of military tactics.

Soft power tactics were no less critical, from the initial fight against the Basmachi through the decades to follow. While the Soviet

⁶¹ Carrere d'Encausse, pp. 182-183, Park, pp. 129-130. For a Soviet take on the evolution of Party structures and inclusiveness, see Gafurova.

⁶² Keller, "Trapped Between State and Society," Rywkin, p. 88, Keller, *To Moscow Not Mecca*, p. 211, 213-246.

goal was political re-engineering of society, they went about it by shifting and adjusting their tactics. After the initial failure of hard power alone, the Soviets supported and co-opted secular reformers and supported, co-opted, and mobilized reformist minorities within the clergy, so as to overthrow the traditional majority leadership. They also sought to improve, and to promise still greater improvements in, the lives of the local populace. The purpose of this was, in part, simply a component of Soviet ideology—many indeed thought they were building a better world. It also, however, served to minimize support for opposition elements, insurgent or otherwise. In addition to the building of schools and the provision of education, the Soviets built clinics and brought other social services. The period of the New Economic Policy, which allowed for more private commerce, also helped cement the defeat of the Basmachi revolt.

The effort to rebuild the very nature of society, in Central Asia and throughout the Soviet Union, was also first and foremost a matter of ideology and belief. It, too, however, was also meant to minimize dissent, in this case because most people would quite simply agree that Soviet rule was the best and most effective. Aspects of social engineering undertaken by the Soviets included anti-religion propaganda campaigns; support for secular and (for a while) reformist religious schools; the literacy campaign and the inclusion therein of Communist propaganda; improvement to the rights and freedoms of women, in part in an effort to galvanize women as an oppressed class; and the effort, in part in line with this, to break down traditional family and tribal roles and structures. Other mechanisms included introducing non-Arabic (first Latin, later Cyrillic) alphabets in education, government, and local culture and, through education and propaganda, fostering regional identity to help overcome clan and tribal identities.

It is also interesting to note that some of the Soviet successes were due to alternating tactics of co-optation (soft power) and suppression (hard power) strategies. For instance, the impact of first co-opting reformist religious leaders and then purging them was to effectively take control of and de-legitimize religion. The combination of soft power tactics to win over the population that had been drawn to the Basmachi revolt with hard power tactics to eliminate the Basmachi

insurgents also accomplished what hard power alone had not been able to do.

Finally, the Soviet efforts can now be seen in a long-term perspective. Some of the measures did not have the desired immediate effects, but may have led to changes in the long-term that were even more significant than expected. For instance, the effort to galvanize women as a class had mixed results in the short term. However, the broader effort to increase literacy, for women and men, may well have helped in the long term to overcome traditional power structures more than almost all other policies combined.

The tactics of hard power and soft power against the population of Central Asia certainly proved an effective means of preventing successful opposition to Soviet rule for many decades, just as they did elsewhere in the USSR. The limited appetite Central Asians showed for independence in the early 1990s may indicate just how effective these policies proved. Their success in truly bringing the local population over to Soviet ideals, and in wiping out such scourges as religion, is rather more mixed. In fact, over time, the Soviet policy that emerged towards Islam, in Central Asia and elsewhere, was arguably less virulent than that taken towards, say Christianity and Judaism.⁶³ Islamic observance of various sorts continued in Central Asia for some time, both under the auspices of government sanctioned mosques and mullas, and in the form of underground observance through Sufi orders and other means. Levels of observance were certainly far lower than in pre-Soviet times, but they were not nonexistent.⁶⁴ The fact that interest in religious belief never died is testified to by the resurgence in Islamic observance since the collapse of the USSR.

The impact of the female liberation campaign was similarly mixed. By 1939 women's literacy levels in the Central Asian region were nearly the same as men's. But while the effort to educate women was eventually successful, the goal of liberating them remained incomplete (as it does

⁶³ Rywkin, p. 88.

⁶⁴ Much has been written about this topic, both during Soviet times and since. Alexander Benningsen was known as the premier expert during the Cold War. See, for example, Alexandre Benningsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the USSR*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.)

to this day). It is worth noting that when, in the mid-1930s, the Soviets became far less aggressive in pursuing liberation goals, large numbers of child marriages were registered (Keller speculates that the practice had never actually gone away, just its registration).⁶⁵ Some scholars argue, moreover, that it was not until after WWII and a generational change combined with population movements and rapid industrialization, that true change began to take effect for Central Asian women.⁶⁶ The backlash against feminism throughout the former Soviet Union since the USSR's collapse can also be seen in part as a reaction to the intensive feminist propaganda, often not matched by true improvements in women's lives, of Soviet times. That said, the improvements in Central Asia over what had been before were phenomenal, and even if they did not come to fruition until the time of the Second World War, the generational change in question would in large part have been impossible without the Soviet policies of the 1920s and 1930s. When compulsory education was introduced, girls were one-third of attendees. By 1939, according to Soviet sources, girls made up half of all schoolchildren.⁶⁷

It is, in fact, probably education that was the most successful of Soviet policies. The laws of 1926 onwards that shut down many Islamic schools (for a second time under Soviet rule), also instituted a variety of new requirements. These requirements made the teaching of sciences mandatory, and later all schools were required to adhere to the Soviet school curriculum, effectively ensuring the secular takeover of education. In 1930, a law on general compulsory primary education was introduced for the entire USSR. By 1931-1932 laws that mandated that children from the ages of 8-12, and illiterate adolescents from age 11-15, attend primary school were implemented in Uzbekistan.

The reach of education throughout Central Asia was a significant accomplishment which should not be undervalued. While progress in some

⁶⁵ Keller, "Trapped Between State and Society".

⁶⁶ Northrop, Douglas Taylor. *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia*, 1st ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.

⁶⁷ Gvineria. Rywkin (p. 105) states that Muslim "girls" only reached the 50% mark in 1959, but he refers to secondary school and university education, whereas the Soviet sources are likely addressing primary school enrollment.

areas was slow, with only 1850 general and professional institutions in all of Uzbekistan and 530 in Turkmenia as of 1927, it is likely that basic literacy levels were increased exponentially. According to Soviet sources, at the time of the revolution, some 90% of the population in the area was illiterate. By 1932, this number had dropped to half. By 1941, universal literacy had been virtually attained. Some western experts argue that these figures are inflated, counting as literate people with the capacity to read and write very little. But even accepting lower numbers of 50% for "full" literacy, the improvement over pre-revolutionary levels was astounding.⁶⁸

IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS BEYOND THE SOVIET UNION

It is not difficult to see parallels between the Soviet enterprise in Central Asia and a wide range of counterinsurgency and state-building efforts underway today. The failure of the Soviets' initial efforts in fighting the Basmachis, their eventual recognition that political and economic benefits could help win over the population, their promotion of secular government, their information campaigns, even their campaign for the rights of women and oppressed peoples, as part of an effort to bring to all what they saw as a better system of government—all of these are echoed in not only in the Soviet experience many years later in Afghanistan, but also in British, U.S. and other fights against insurgency and efforts at statebuilding: Malaysia, Vietnam, and Iraq and Afghanistan today present similar tactics, realizations, course corrections, and problems—all with rather less success.

What, then, are some of the things that differentiate the Soviet case from, say U.S. and allied efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan today? One critical difference is that the Soviets were acting in territory they not only controlled for the time being, but territory they intended to continue to control and administer for the long term. While they found clear benefits, as do most counterinsurgent campaigns, in utilizing native forces and cadres to the extent possible, they also planned to continue to administer the region for the foreseeable future. Thus, they had the benefit of time—time to try various approaches, time

⁶⁸ For a discussion of this debate, see Rywkin, pp. 103-105.

to wait out enemies, time for generational change to take its course. They certainly did not expect the effort to take as long as it did when they started, but they had no choice but to wait it out once they did. Although the native population of the Central Asian region may have seen them as occupiers, as they saw the Tsarist Russians before them, the Soviets saw themselves as being at home. The fact that Russians had been ruling the region for many decades before also assisted in this, in that Central Asians, much as they may have hoped for self-rule, were perhaps more prepared to accept its absence than those subject to a more immediate occupation.

Another critical difference is the alternation of hard and soft power tactics discussed above. In most successful cases of counterinsurgency, one sees a certain nativization of the process, evident in Central Asia, and one also sees the success of soft power tactics paired with hard power. The policies of co-optation, followed by purges of those co-opted, as in the attack on reformist clergy at the end of NEP, may or may not have been intended as a means of eliminating every last vestige of opposition, but it did function that way. We cannot know if, given time, the schisms between the reformist clergy, supported by the regime, and the traditional clergy, marginalized by the government, might have resulted in an equally acceptable situation for the Soviets. Similarly, we cannot know if various nationalist groups could have found a *modus vivendi* within the Soviet Union, or what gains might have been had if the tribal leaders that won the elections of the mid 1920s had been allowed to take and remain in office. These approaches did not fit well with Soviet ideology, and were never given a chance. As a result we can only guess to what extent Soviet success was dependent on these particular tactics, as opposed to other policies. Comparison with cases from elsewhere, where parallels along these lines can be identified, would be a useful next step in answering this question.

Another interesting phenomenon of the Soviet experience is that of their social engineering efforts. Soviet approaches to improving literacy and empowering women met with mixed success in the early years, and may have had relatively little impact on the fight against insurgency in the near term. In the state-building effort, the campaign

to liberate women and the Latinization of local languages may even have been counter-productive, in that these engendered strong, sometimes violent, opposition. Yet, it is worth noting, that decades later these steps can be seen to have transformed local politics and culture. Insofar as the ideological goals underlying these efforts were true, it is entirely possible that without the groundwork laid in the 1920s, they would not have come to pass. While the Soviets eased up on religion during the NEP period, they did not ease up on the rights of women or literacy—these remained central tenets. Areas such religion and tribal rights, where they did ease up for a time, and returned to the attack later, were ones where they had far less long-term success. This raises questions as to the validity of arguments that such social engineering efforts should wait until a state is stabilized.

While lessons can be learned, or at least identified, from the Soviet experience, it need not necessarily be held up as an ideal example. It is certainly useful evidence of the continuity in insurgency and counterinsurgency approaches over the decades. It provides some lessons in the benefits of co-optation and the short and long-term successes and limitations of soft power efforts. It raises interesting questions regarding the mechanisms of effective state building and social engineering. Finally, in light of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the nearly two decades of independence for the Central Asian states, where the resurgence of tribalism and religion have been marked, lead us to consider the durability of such efforts—and whether and which aspects of the Soviet approach may have planted the seeds for its longer-term failure.