

## REVIEW ESSAYS

Atkin, Muriel. *The Subtlest Battle: Islam in Soviet Tajikistan*. Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1989.

Critchlow, James. *Nationalism in Uzbekistan: A Soviet Republic's Road to Sovereignty*. Boulder: Westview, 1991.

Fierman, William, ed. *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation*. Boulder: Westview, 1991.

Rumer, Boris Z. *Soviet Central Asia: A Tragic Experiment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

A growing body of literature has emerged in the past decade on a hitherto neglected aspect of the Soviet polity: Soviet Islam. The Soviet Union is no more, but the Muslim borderlands, the southern periphery of the ex-Soviet Union, have become a major concern to Western policymakers, analysts, and scholars. This whole region, which has at least two millennia of history, was the cradle of Turkic civilization, moulded by a Persian heritage, and is now seething with political and economic turmoil.

The Muslim periphery of the former Soviet empire is not a part of the "troublesome crescent" that comprises the Middle East. But the six former Soviet Muslim Republics — Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Kirgizistan — cannot be impervious to political developments in the Arab Middle East. However, at the same time, these regions and their ultimate fate are intimately bound up with the fortunes of Russia in the north, and Turkey and Iran in the south. The Great Game of competition that had once been played out over this area by the superpowers has given way to regional political dynamics.

Scholarship about this region has been dominated mainly by two groups of European writers. There are the French academics led by the late Alexandre Bennigsen and Hélène Carrère d'Encausse (now of the French Academy). The English specialists congregate around the "Society for Central Asian Studies," whose inkwell produced what I call the "Indian old boys" coterie of writers such as Colonel Geoffrey Wheeler, Sir Olaf Caroe, and their latter-day protégés like Enders Wimbush and Marie Broxup. Clearly, two schools of thought emerged in regard to Central Asia and Azerbaijan: one claiming that there will be a Muslim fundamentalist revival that would sweep across the face of Eurasia and the Middle East and the other maintaining that interethnic strife will destroy the economies and the social fabric of the entire region. Neither the French nor the English sit on opposite ends of the fence here. In any one school of thought, there can be both Frenchmen (and Frenchwomen), Englishmen (and Englishwomen). The best among them is a British sociologist named David Lane, who is absolutely isolated from, or ostracized by, the rest.

The only common thread binding the others is the hackneyed thesis that the Soviets, and the Russians before them, have done irreparable damage to the Central Asian Muslims. A weaker scholarship did emerge on the North American continent around Kamal Karpat, later improved upon by Martha Brill Olcott and Mary Lubin, but laced with the old Central Asian faithfuls like Edward Allworth. Indeed, new breakthroughs have been made by women writers like Lubin, Olcott and Azade-Ayse Rorlich. In a sense, these three have been trailblazers who have established far more subtle patterns than their predecessors — and there are now many serious scholars enquiring into the manifold problems of this region.

Of the four books under review, Muriel Atkin's is the worst of the lot. Her conclusion that "neither the disappearance of Islam nor the disappearance of Soviet rule in Central Asia is a likely prospect" is now too facile a summary, even if she did write it in 1989. If she is an expert in the study of this area, she should have known better. The worst part about her book is that she offers nothing new. Even her chapter "Will Muslims Challenge the USSR?" is a recapitulation of what has already been done in far greater detail by Alexandre Bennigsen *et al.* This is not a book about a political power struggle, which was her initial intention, but about Islamic life in Tajikistan, facts all too well known. She states that there has always been opposition to the Soviet regime, but then plunges into a rambling discussion about "folk Islam" and "establishment Islam," about Muslim women, Sufism, and so forth. Her style of writing is disjointed, fragmented, and, frankly, boring. The discussion of Muslim activism and influences from Iran and Afghanistan on Central Asia is garbled, and the conclusions very confused. In summary, it is the worst piece of writing on Soviet Islam that this reviewer has read since Rosanne Klass's *Afghanistan: The Great Game Revisited* (1987). Like the latter, Atkin is so viscerally anti-Soviet that her work faithfully reproduces American scholarship of the 1950s and early 1960s — a Cold War treatise. She clearly has problems assessing the true value of Soviet sources (she likes calling them atheist propagandists) and uses all of these sources disingenuously, reading into them things that were never said or meant and very selectively reinterpreting Russian-language and Tajik-language materials to fit schemas as in a Procrustean bed, often moralistically judging what these Soviet writers ought to have said. She does this with Ghafurov's *History of the Tajiks* and she thinks — she is not the only neophyte to the problems of the area — that Saidbaev's *Islam i obshchestvo* is one of the best Soviet books on Soviet Muslims in recent years. Worst of all is her pitiful discussion of the Basmachi. It is so methodologically and substantively poor as to make it reminiscent of past, Cold War hagiographies. But Atkin did come up with the best map I have ever seen of Soviet Tajikistan.

James Critchlow's book is all that Atkin's should have been. He more effectively uses Uzbek and Russian-language sources than Atkin does with her Russian and Tajik. The reason for this is that his conceptualization is better, his premises are not flawed, and it is far better balanced methodologically and stylistically.

The author's tone is unassuming. Although studies of the Uzbek people have been done before, the author makes no claim to be doing a definitive study. The second chapter deals with the emerging nationalism in the republic which foreshadowed the events leading to the 1990 declaration of Uzbek sovereignty. He explains the patrimonial society created after Stalin and how the tranquility brought about by this society created the opportunity for nationalism. Due perhaps to the strength of native languages and Islamic customs, the 1960s saw derussification in language, cadres and history and the resurrection of the pre-Revolutionary past. This happened long before Brezhnev consolidated his power. Thus, a Soviet Muslim elite was created to press Moscow for greater autonomy. One positive feature of Critchlow's study is his definition of the term "elite," which is straightforward and unambiguous. He tells us that he likes Milovan Djilas' view of an elite class as basically one that wields political power.

The author also suggests that Uzbekistan was made more open to outside influence from the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America during this period. The third chapter deals with the post-Brezhnev crackdown when Uzbekistan was singled out as an example of wayward non-Russian nationalists. The elites were particularly targeted since they were at the cutting edge of Uzbek nationalism. After Brezhnev's death, Moscow wanted to tighten central control of cadre policy to root out "negative phenomena" (especially corruption) that reached intolerable proportions during Brezhnev's era.

Part two of Critchlow's book is titled "Uzbek Nationalism Today: Selected Themes" and is divided into seven chapters. In a brief introduction, Critchlow states that the elites also used the media to press economic and social issues that went straight to the ethnic sensitivities of their co-nationals. The first chapter deals with the cotton monoculture. He deals with the history of cotton in the republic and its importance in the colonialism of the central authorities. Moscow's drive to increase production led to terrible environmental damage, loss of foodstuffs (not enough acreage was used to grow food), low per capita earnings (inherent in the industry), and unemployment. High population growth hasn't helped. The condemnation of the monoculture provided the elites with political and psychological weapons. The second chapter deals with the rape of the environment with cotton as the chief culprit (leading to a loss of water due to irrigation, the shrinkage of the Aral Sea, health problems caused by pesticides, wind erosion and deforestation). Nuclear contamination is also a problem especially with the nuclear dump located outside of Tashkent.

The fifth chapter deals with the progressive hardening of their resistance to central authority. After the February 1986 Moscow Party Congress, where Gorbachev virtually declared war on Uzbek elites, there were a number of both direct and indirect examples of Uzbek resistance. Regardless of the central government's assertions, they failed to shake up the Uzbek party and government apparatus. The Uzbeks themselves were able to get rid of MVD General Eduard Didorenko as a symbol of alien authority. Uzbeks have thus rewritten some aspects of their history.

Critchlow's is the most up-to-date book on the Uzbeks the reviewer has seen, right up to the latest nationalist tremors. I also agree with his conclusion that historically the strong men of Central Asia tended to be secular, not religious. That said, the main problem with Critchlow's book is that, in his chapter on the Islamic factor, he provides the reader with an inadequate linkage between religion and national identity. There is more to religious influences, especially external religious influences, like Saudi Arabian Wahhabism, than Moscow had made it to appear. The influence of Khomeini's Iran should likewise not be underestimated. Another point that Critchlow fails to notice is that, when there is an increasing pervasiveness of Islamic practices, this could translate into political action. Events in Iran and Afghanistan are more capable of influencing opinion among Soviet Muslims than the other way around, even if the former Soviet Muslims are economically more developed. Thus, Islam may transcend ethnic frontiers, the way a Marxist internationalist, supranational system failed to do. It is worth noting, however, that some analysts (Ann Sheehy for example) have pointed to a pervasive interethnic conflict in Muslim Central Asia and do not see Islam as a major force.

I certainly think religion is a potential apocalyptic force. When the religious identity takes over, the elites in place risk losing control and power. Critchlow speaks at length about Uzbek elites; for them the problem of identity is a problem of power — the elite accepts the identity which best corresponds to its interest. Therefore, Islam can be an integrative cultural force, imparting a sense of cohesive identity regardless of elite-mass distinctions. In short, Islam can aspire to political power. Furthermore, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that this area could one day be turned into a single Muslim federation or confederation. For instance, the Islamic Renaissance Party was formed in 1990 in Tajikistan.

Critchlow also does not make a distinction between collective identity and ethnic identity. There is now an increasingly vocal and politically active Turkic element in Central Asia and one wishes to know whether this Muslim population will seek out a new federalist relationship with Russia or whether it will be a sovereign, independent player in Central Asia and Azerbaijan. Given the fact that the Turkic world itself is not a monolith, it becomes essential to any investigation to determine whether or not Russia would differentiate between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan and how Moscow would perceive the nationality issue when there is interethnic conflict between Uzbek and Tajik or between other groups.

Yet nationalism can be a complex phenomenon. In Central Asia it can be so complex as to reflect on one of the sub-identities in a given polity. So, the problem of nationalism may or may not be viewed as one of collective identity. The inference I am drawing here is that there are options with respect to collective identity — the Uzbek identity in particular, given its population and culture, has the potential to emerge as the dominant one, and given the right combination of circumstances. Still, the Uzbek collective identity cannot triumph in the political arena without being sustained by preeminent or char-

ismatic individuals and/or some form of organization. In a word, the Uzbeks would need an all embracing ideology or philosophy. In the political reality of Uzbekistan, that would have to be Islam or something competing with Islam. Now that Marxism is clearly out of the picture, what else could it possibly be if not an Islam driven by external influences? Critchlow fails to address this issue.

William Fierman's edited volume is one of the best, if not the best, study I have seen in a very long time. It has a stellar group of contributors and Fierman's own writings and analyses are first-rate. It is a pity, however, that Fierman chose Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone to write the foreword. Rakowska-Harmstone, who writes in the same vein as Muriel Atkin, likes absolutely nothing about this real estate we call Central Asia, and dislikes Soviets, Russians, internationalists, and Marxists even more.

The rest of the book, nevertheless, chronicles the "failed transformation of Central Asia." There is much here about ecological disasters, unemployed youth, poverty, mismanagement, cultural and linguistic cleavages, and ethnic stirrings. There is anarchy here, and potential for war.

The second section is titled "Politics" and contains two chapters. The first of these, "Power and Politics in Soviet Uzbekistan: From Stalin to Gorbachev" by Donald S. Carlisle, discusses the problems of center-periphery political relations in Central Asia. In doing so, he focuses on the history of the problem using specific instances and personalities beginning with the Stalinist era and its creation of a dual society (i.e. Russians versus natives). The second chapter of this section is called "Prelude to "Independence": How the Uzbek Party Apparatus Broke Moscow's Grip on Elite Recruitment." Written by James Critchlow, it is very much like his own book on Uzbekistan.

In the next section, Ronald Wixman's "Ethnic Attitudes and Relations in Modern Uzbek Cities" is done especially well. It is a political culture piece based on interviews done in Bukhara, Samarkand and Tashkent during the summer of 1985. Wixman interviewed different ethnic groups and different social groups in different settings. His chapter is also based on personal observation. He concluded that little socializing took place across traditional cultural lines and that many Russians looked down on Central Asians. He goes on to describe instances of Russians denigrating Central Asians as backward. Many Central Asians were forced to learn Russian but very few Russians learned Central Asian languages. There was also widespread discrimination and competition for positions, jobs, and housing. In his conclusion, Wixman states that the Russians seemed unwilling or unable to recognize and respect Central Asia's heritage. The Central Asians feel as if they are hosts and the Russians are poor guests who don't return their hospitality with proper behavior and respect.

Azade-Ayse Rorlich's "Islam and Atheism: Dynamic Tension in Soviet Central Asia", deals with official and parallel Islam. She states that changes have made it easier for officials at all levels to promote Islam. She also discusses various dimensions of Islam. She also examines changes in the promotion of atheism and assertive Islam. The third chapter is called "Forging

a Soviet People: Ethnolinguistics in Central Asia” and was written by Isabelle Kreindler. It examines the importance of language and the imposition of the Russian language on Central Asians. But that is nothing new.

The final section, “Socioeconomic Issues”, consists of two chapters. The first one is “Women and Society in Central Asia” by Martha Brill Olcott. Olcott’s main thesis is that Soviet rule has failed to fully integrate women into Central Asian life. Their primary function in this society is still to be a good wife and mother. Women tend to marry young and have many children. They have a low employment rate and minimal role in government, but have increased their religious consciousness.

William Fierman’s “Central Asian Youth and Migration” deals with out-migration as a response to poor health conditions, poor economic conditions, and unemployment. Although there is definitely an economic crunch in Central Asia, much of the population refuses to move away. Most natives believe that they would be less welcome in other areas of the country despite government programs to entice them to move. Rather than leave in order to attain a higher standard of living, Central Asians are beginning to demand that the government raise the standards of living in their native region.

What the reviewer found most satisfying about this book is Fierman’s excellent conclusion. He states that one of the central themes of the book is the failure of the Soviet political system to direct political and social change in Central Asia. To prove this, he analyzes the concept of political development as abstracted from a theoretical study called *Crises and Sequences in Political Development*, a volume by Leonard Binder and others. The five areas they discuss are: penetration, identity, distribution, participation, and legitimacy. In the Soviet Union, Moscow’s ability to penetrate society and get what it wanted from the people decreased since the end of the Stalinist political terror. Central Asians tended to have many identities, of which “Soviet” is only one, and not a very important one to them at that! The participation of Central Asians in getting language laws and other cultural protection laws passed slowed the center’s penetration of their society. Moscow’s legitimacy (defined as the basis and degree to which government decisions are accepted by society as being correct) was, in the past, considered secondary to its campaign of terror against the Central Asians. Thus, after the end of terror, the central government’s legitimacy declined. The Party reduced its activity to create a Soviet people and realized that the Central Asians will remain Muslims. The regime’s legitimacy among Central Asians relies in part on its ability to raise living standards. Thus Gorbachev tried to improve participation and the economy. However, the center had to be careful, for if its leaders tried to improve one of the five areas, they could lose in another (for example, if they try to improve their legitimacy, they may lose their chances at penetration). Although Central Asia did supply the center with raw materials, Moscow could replace any leader, and Soviet power was successful in curtailing the mass manifestations of Islamic and Turkic identities. Central Asia’s development did not proceed along the lines Moscow wished; the center never eliminated the cult phenomenon that linked Central Asians to one

another and to other Muslims, and Fierman concludes that the Soviet leaders had only limited success in inculcating Central Asians with a sense of "Sovietness." Gorbachev, himself, first tried to rein in Central Asia. When that didn't work, he tried to salvage the Soviet empire by agreeing to a political system with less ambitious goals, with a limited degree of penetration through legitimacy. Moscow's failure on all of these fronts has been celebrated by Central Asians who feel that they have finally freed themselves of the Russian yoke. This conclusion throws up new ideas that deserve to be explored. That, in itself, makes this a book worth reading.

One of the most striking features of the Central Asian environment is the potential conflict, even outright war, between Uzbeks and non-Uzbeks, between Central Asians and non-Central Asians. Donald Carlisle has even focused on cleavages and friction within the Russian Slavic community in Central Asia. Critchlow reminds us that, ever since the Tsarist occupation of the last century, authority in Central Asia has been wielded by officials sent to govern by the center, "first from Imperial St. Petersburg, later from Soviet Moscow." Now the Central Asians have to go it alone. But are they really capable? No one — except Hedrick Smith in his monumental *The Russians* — has even come close to analyzing the unique Orientalism (the "*Aziatschina*") that has been characteristic of the area for generations. I do not wish to stereotype the peoples of this region but it must somehow be said that the center has had more than its share of troubles and blame for failures that are more than just the result of poor central administration and mismanagement. Studies in anthropology and psychology, in addition to history and modern economics, will be needed in future to formulate typologies on the unique culture and ways of life in the region.

Does Boris Rumer offer an answer to this? In an excellent book which discusses every aspect of Central Asian economics from industrialization to the cotton industry to problems with water, labor, and the standard of living to the shadow economy and organized crime to the impact of Gorbachev's reforms, Rumer draws on the most up-to-date (1989) Soviet sources available to draft his conclusions on this area's economic future. His research has shown that Central Asia's vast cotton, oil, gas, and precious metal resources have always been taken to Russia for processing. This suggests that Moscow has a vested interest in preserving Central Asia as a peripheral region used to provide raw materials for the "advanced industrial complexes of European Russia." By way of solution, Rumer suggests that all of the economic, demographic, and ecological problems of the region could be solved by a coordinated social-economic conception of development that is based on the real resources of the region and the development of labor-intensive industries. However, he believes that Moscow cannot or does not want to address these problems. His final conclusion, that the Soviet leadership refused to deal with these problems until a full-blown emergency made it necessary, was remarkably prescient.

Miron Rezun  
University of New Brunswick