

The Foreign Policy of the
Central Asian Islamic
Renaissance Party

Olivier Roy

COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
NEW YORK

The Council on Foreign Relations, Inc., a nonprofit, nonpartisan national organization and think tank founded in 1921, is dedicated to promoting understanding of international affairs through the free and civil exchange of ideas. The Council's members are dedicated to the belief that America's peace and prosperity are firmly linked to that of the world. From this flows the Council's mission: to foster America's understanding of other nations—their peoples, cultures, histories, hopes, quarrels, and ambitions—and thus to serve our nation through study and debate, private and public.

From time to time books, reports, and papers are written by members of the Council's research staff or others are published as a "Council on Foreign Relations Publication."

THE COUNCIL TAKES NO INSTITUTIONAL POSITION ON POLICY ISSUES AND HAS NO AFFILIATION WITH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT. ALL STATEMENTS OF FACT AND EXPRESSIONS OF OPINION CONTAINED IN ALL ITS PUBLICATIONS ARE THE SOLE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE AUTHOR OR AUTHORS.

For further information on Council publications, please write the Council on Foreign Relations, 58 East 68th Street, New York, NY 10021, or call the Director of Communications at (212) 434-9400. Or visit our website at www.cfr.org.

Copyright © 2000 by the Council on Foreign Relations, Inc.

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, in any form (beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and excerpts by the reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publisher. For information, write the Publications Office, Council on Foreign Relations, 58 East 68th Street, New York, NY 10021.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data being processed.

Foreword

Understanding and dealing with Islamic fundamentalism has been one of the more difficult foreign policy challenges for the United States in the last decade. Few policymakers seem to comprehend the ideology behind so-called fundamentalist groups, or the rationales behind their actions. While some analysts call it the successor to the Red Scare and have dubbed it the Green Menace, others contend that these groups are essentially social movements with a religious emphasis. Whichever view is correct, there is broad agreement that the topic of Islamic fundamentalism requires further attention, and the papers from the Muslim Politics Project hope to address this issue.

The goal of the Muslim Politics Project, which began in 1994, was to counter the misperceptions that prevail in influential circles and to present Islamic intellectual and political agendas in all their complexity and diversity. One of its several undertakings was to commission papers on Islamist foreign policy in order to better understand the international political attitudes and policies of various Islamist groups. This resulted in papers on the following movements: Jama'at-i Islami in Pakistan, Hamas, Hizballah, the Taliban, the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party, as well as an analysis of U.S. policy toward Islamism. Each of these papers goes into detail not only about the movements themselves, but how it affects U.S. foreign policy. We believe that they provide insights on a topic that challenges policymakers and will help prevent future misunderstandings.

Lawrence J. Korb

Maurice R. Greenberg Chair, Director of Studies
Council on Foreign Relations

Acknowledgments

The Muslim Politics Project was made possible by the generous support of the Ford Foundation. This project began under the leadership of former Council Senior Fellow James Piscatori and was brought to conclusion by Directors of Studies Gary Hufbauer and Lawrence J. Korb. However this project could not have been completed without the guidance of the Studies staff including Nancy Bodurtha, Rachel Bronson, Richard Murphy, and Barnett Rubin. Patricia Dorff, Miranda Kobritz, Roshna Balasubramanian, and Michael Moskowitz provided copyediting and production assistance. Hilary Mathews provided initial editorial assistance, and Haleh Nazeri completed the editing and supervised the administrative and final production arrangements.

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

Olivier Roy

The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), Hizb-i Nehzat-i Islami in Persian/Tajik, and Islam Uyghonish Partyasi in Uzbek, is a recent movement with few historical roots. Its members are young and enjoyed little access to the external world during the Soviet period. As soon as it was founded, the IRP was caught in the turmoil of the Soviet Union's demise and the formation of the independent states, which split along national lines a previously pan-Soviet party. Thus the party had little time to conceive and establish a coherent foreign policy. Rather than being recognized as a full member of the Islamic militant world, it relied on personal links with other Islamist groups. Among the IRP's various branches, only the Tajik one was able to become a major domestic player—though it lacked the time and opportunity to become a full regional actor.

THE IRP IN THE SOVIET UNION: FOUNDATION AND IDEOLOGY

The all-Union Islamic Renaissance Party was founded in Astrakhan (Russia) in June 1990.¹ The head office was registered in Moscow without difficulty. The elected chairman was Ahmed Qadi Akhtayev, an Avar from Daghestan and a physician by profession, and the deputy chairman was Valiahmed Sadur, a Tatar scholar and specialist in Indonesia. The founding fathers were mainly Tatars or from the Northern Caucasus, like Abbas Kebedev (from Kyzil Yurt) and Mohammad Bahuddin, al-

Olivier Roy

though some Tajiks, like Dawlat Osman, future deputy chairman of the Tajik branch, were also involved. The party had two main publications: *Al Wahdat* (Unity) in Russian and *Hedayat* (Guidance) in Persian.

While the Russian branch had no difficulty registering, problems and pressures arose for the Central Asian groups. The party was banned from the beginning in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. It was explicitly condemned by the heads of the four *muftiyyat* (official religious administrations) and by the authorities of the Muslim Soviet republics. Laws were passed in almost all of the Central Asian republics to ban political activities made in the name of Islam.

Nevertheless, the IRP has taken root in Central Asia, though almost exclusively in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Tajik branch, the largest, was founded on October 6, 1990, in an underground meeting² and became officially recognized in November 1991, in the wake of the crisis of the postcommunist regime. The Uzbek branch gathered in Tashkent in January 1991, but the meeting was disbanded by the police. In Kazakhstan, the IRP was supplanted by another Islamist organization, Alash Orda, probably because the primary constituency of the IRP in this republic has been among non-Kazakh Muslims (Uzbeks and Uyghurs).³ Alash Orda takes its name from the Horde of Alash, a nationalist party of the early nineteenth century named for the mythic ancestor of the Kazakh people. Established at the end of 1990 by Aron Atabek, the party rallied against the mufti of the Republic in December 1991 and proposed that he be replaced by the Imam of Chimkent, an Uzbek. The IRP was similarly displaced in Kyrgyzstan, where the few IRP members seem to have been Uzbeks from Osh. The IRP does not appear to have any significant membership in Turkmenistan. In short, the IRP took root in areas where conservative Islam has traditionally been strong, not in the tribal and more superficially Islamized populations (Turkmen, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz). But even in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the party's constituency has roughly coincided with regional identities—people originating from Ferghana for the former, and from the Gharm valley for the latter. This re-

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

gionalism will continue to be an obstacle for the extension of the party in both countries.

In its ideology and constituency, the IRP is very close to mainstream Sunni Islamist movements like the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Pakistani Jama'at-i Islami. Mention of the Iranian Revolution can only be found in interviews with Tajik IRP leaders. The official IRP program, released in July 1990, rejected terrorism. The aim of the party, according to its platform, was to "unify the Muslims on all the Soviet territory."⁴ It opposed ethnic conflict and nationalism, pledging to respect the Soviet constitution and not to oppose the existence of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, its discourse and terminology often relied on Islamist vocabulary. The party claimed to be a "social and political organization" (*ijtema'i wa siyasi*). It stressed the need for proselytizing work (*darwat*) among Muslims as well as among Christians. It criticized the official clergy for its lack of militancy and appealed for the building of a high-level Muslim educational network. It advocated an "Islamic social justice" based on *zakat* (doctrinally enjoined alms giving) and *sadaqat* (voluntary donations). The party's only statement on foreign policy was very cautious: "The IRP recognizes all international agreements insofar as their content is not against religion."⁵ One of the few references to foreign policy was a call for the support of the Algerian FIS (Front Islamique du Salut, or Islamic Salvation Front), which was then engaged in a successful electoral campaign.⁶ In short, the slogans, programs, and terminology of the IRP were essentially identical to those of other Sunni Islamist movements, with no visible Iranian influence.

The organizational structure of the party was a combination of two models: the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Communist Party. The party's congress (*anjoman*) was to be made up of deputies (*vakil*) of primary cells (*tashkilat-i ibtida'i*), which elect a fifteen-member Council of 'Ulama that in turn puts forward to the congress the candidacy of an amir who, once elected, appoints a coordination committee (*koordinatsya*). One of the particularities of the IRP, when compared with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Pakistani Jama'at-i Is-

Olivier Roy

lami, is that the *'ulama* (religious authorities) were supposed to have the upper hand in the party's final decisions (they could dismiss the Amir without calling the congress). Yet, at the time of its foundation, there were no real *'ulama* in the party. The party stressed therefore the role of the "intellectuals" (*'aliman*) who, although not considered part of the religious establishment, are able to base their analyses on the Qur'an and *sunna* (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad). Clearly, the reference to "*'ulama*" was wishful thinking, and the "intellectuals" with a secular background have been the real social basis of the IRP—as they are in the other parts of the Sunni Muslim world.⁷ This organizational model is a good indication of the ideological leaning of the IRP, although it was never really implemented due to the splitting of the party along national lines.

The IRP's membership also resembles that of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and of the Pakistani Jama'at: young (born in the 1950s) and educated, mainly in the sciences. Among its leaders, for example, Mullah Nuri is an engineer in geodesics, and Mohammed Sharif Himmatzadeh is trained in mechanics. But many of these intellectuals have also become "parallel" mullahs. This double identity is especially strong in rural Tajikistan, where the urban elites have not penetrated. While the bulk of the local mullahs were officially working as *kolkhozians* (members of a *kolkhoze*, or collective farm) in the Soviet period, some members of the intelligentsia who received secular training in state universities and institutes also became accepted as mullahs in their districts of origin. They received a serious religious education (by Soviet standards) by participating in clandestine educational networks. Nuri and Himmatzadeh attended the courses of Hajji Mohammad Rustamov, alias Mawlawi Qari Hindoustani, an Uzbek who was educated in the traditional *madrassa* (religious school) of Deoband, in India, before World War II.

The IRP is exclusively a Sunni movement. None of the few Shiites of Central Asia seems to have joined it, and the party has no section in Shiite Azerbaijan, where the local Islamic Party, founded after 1992, seems to have operated independently of the IRP. There are, in any case, very few Shiites in Central Asia. The

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

Pamir Isma‘ilis, whose faith is rather different from the Shiite mainstream, are secular-minded.

International contacts were very difficult to maintain during the Soviet period. As we have seen in Tajikistan and Ferghana, some IRP members were in touch with the Deobandi school of thought but were apparently not in touch with the actual Deobandi networks in Pakistan (which supported the Taliban movement in 1994). The Afghan war brought an opportunity to establish channels of communication with modern fundamentalist trends, at least in Central Asia: pamphlets and booklets were smuggled from Afghanistan, while Afghan mujahideen made armed forays into Tajikistan, particularly in 1987. The main contact was with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, whose homeland is in the district of Imam Saheb, close to the city of Pandj in Soviet Tajikistan—a hotbed of Islamic revival.

“Ingeeneer” Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has been the head of the Hizb-i Islami of Afghanistan, the most radical Islamist organization of the Afghan mujahideen movement. From its creation around 1976 to the surge of the Taliban in 1994, the Hizb-i Islami received massive support from the Pakistani military services, the Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI), and from the Jama‘at-i Islami of Pakistan. In April 1997, two raids were launched from the Imam Sahib area into Soviet Tajikistan. Following these events, during a protest in Kurgan Teppe by local Muslims in support of the mujahideen, a young engineer Abdullah Saïdov was sentenced to jail. Freed in 1989, he took the name of Mullah Abdallah Nuri and became one of the heads of the IRP. However, the connection with the Hizb-i Islami did not last after the fall of the Soviet Union. The IRP became closer to the Afghan Jama‘at-i Islami headed by Burhanuddin Rabbani, a Tajik himself, while it established direct links with the Jama‘at-i Islami in Pakistan.⁸

Paradoxically, most new ideas were brought to the IRP by members of the official Soviet *‘ulama*, who were sent during the 1980s to religious faculties in the Arab Muslim world, such as Amman, Cairo, and Tripoli. Although few of these religious officials joined the IRP (the only case is Qazi Akbar Turajan-

Olivier Roy

zade, the chief Islamic judge of Tajikistan), through them more radical ideas penetrated the militant vanguard of the Soviet Muslims. These contacts were exclusively with the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood. No Soviet Islamic authority had ever been sent to Iran. As a consequence, all Soviet Sunni high officials were trained in Arab countries, while the only high-level Shiite cleric, Shukur Pashazade (the Baku's *Shaykhulislam*, chief religious official), never left the Soviet Union to study. At any level, all of the international connections of the Soviet Muslims were with the Sunni world, and for the more radical, with the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood. Iran did not play a role before 1991, even among the Persian-speaking Tajiks.

The sudden liberalization and restructuring of the Soviet system in 1990–1991 was to prove momentous and to have two immediate consequences for the IRP. The party was caught in and split by new national identities, while representatives of foreign religious groups rushed to the Soviet Union in order to sponsor and develop the Islamic revival there.

FOREIGN LINKS

From 1990 to 1992, militant Muslims from all over the world swept into Central Asia to foster the Islamic revival, pouring in money, Qur'ans, and books. However, they did not work in a coherent and organized way. Personal, casual relations played a bigger role than ideological and political links. Mainstream religious organizations were particularly eager not to bypass the official clerics, whom they often got to know during their studies in the Arab world. They were also eager not to antagonize the authorities of the newly independent states. Delegations of the Muslim World League (Rabitat al-'Alam al-Islami), whose staff was usually closer to the Muslim Brothers than to the Saudi Wahhabis (even if the latter were its financial patrons), made regular visits to the different *muftis*, offering to help rebuild mosques and establish Islamic institutes. The sudden influx of "Islamic" money and materials triggered competition among Islamic groups that wanted to have their share of the pie. More radical movements, like the IRP, were upset by

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

the choice of the official *'ulama* as the primary beneficiary of international Islamic support. In 1991, they launched a campaign in Uzbekistan against the Mufti Mohammad Yussuf, accusing him of selling Qur'ans donated by Saudi Arabia. Such campaigns also took place in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Generally speaking, the IRP did not find in the Muslim Brotherhood the political support it might have expected, even if some of its mullahs benefited from financial support to build and staff local mosques. By the same token, missionary movements, such as the conservative Tablighi Jama'at based in South Asia, kept aloof from political involvement but provided opportunities for local members of the IRP, among other ordinary believers, to travel abroad.

Such caution has also been obvious as far as Tehran was concerned. The Iranian authorities lacked the personal contacts that the Muslim Brothers enjoyed with the official *'ulama*. Tehran was also eager to maintain a good relationship with Moscow, in order to thwart American and Turkish inroads in Central Asia, and it did not try to compete with the Saudis in funding mosques or institutes.⁹ Moreover, Tehran maintained a balance between the local authorities and IRP militants. For example, in June 1990, the first Tajik delegation to be invited to Iran for the first anniversary of the death of Imam Khomeini numbered six officials—all communists—and six *'ulama*, including IRP members such as Abdulghaffar Khodaydad, who became the head of the most radical Islamist militiamen in Dushanbe during the civil war. It is thus clear that Iran has not endeavored to export the Islamic revolution to Central Asia. This decision was upheld for two reasons: the lack of Shiite leverage—particularly of any clerical network—in the area; and the fact that more radical Iranian institutions, like the Revolutionary Guards or some clerical networks, did not challenge the policy of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Central Asia, as they had in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

In contrast, the Pakistani Jama'at-i Islami, like most of the Pakistani authorities, was skeptical about the ability of the old nomenklatura to survive. Pakistan did not need, or wish, to placate the Russians, whose withdrawal from Afghanistan was seen

Olivier Roy

as a Pakistani victory and a first step toward a total evacuation of Central Asia. The Jama'at adopted a more militant stand against the former communist authorities in Central Asia. Although it lacked the financial power of the Saudis, the Jama'at-i Islami invited Islamic delegations to Pakistan. Jama'at-i Islami guest houses for pilgrims en route to Mecca played a significant role in bringing together isolated IRP militants and their foreign counterparts. Islamic literature—for example, the writings of Abul'1 A'la Mawdudi and Hasan al-Banna—found its way through Central Asia, thanks to the Jama'at printing press and networks. Books were translated into Central Asian languages or Russian, printed in Lahore or Peshawar, and then brought to Central Asia by the many delegations of individuals who used to travel there. PIA, the Pakistani airlines, had for some time a biweekly Islamabad-Peshawar-Tashkent flight until the Uzbek authorities imposed a severe crackdown on visas in 1992.

Under these conditions, the IRP was unable to become the main interlocutor and channel of foreign Islamic militant movements, except with the Pakistani Jama'at. It got its share of financial help through personal contacts, not as a privileged partner of external forces. In fact, the political alignments of the IRP with foreign countries had more to do with local circumstances than ideology. The rise of the Tajik IRP, the linguistic proximity of Tajikistan to Iran, and the Pakistani strategy to carve a corridor to Central Asia through Afghanistan put the Tajik IRP into the limelight, although the party did not have time to establish in-depth foreign connections. For these reasons, the IRP has been more passive than active in building a foreign policy, bowing to circumstances and finding itself embroiled in a regional strategic context it did not master.

SPREAD AND SPLIT

The IRP's influence spread among young Muslim intellectuals and “parallel” mullahs. But with the exception of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the party had some difficulty finding a popular constituency. From the beginning, there was a discrepancy be-

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

tween the Central Asian IRP cadres and the “Russian” ones; i.e., Tatars and northern Caucasians. On the very day of the first congress, the Tajik delegation condemned the destruction of Islam by the Mongols—a clear allusion to the negative effect of Turkization and also a veiled reference to the medieval writer Ibn Taymiyya, who has influenced many modern Islamists. The implication is clear that, like Ibn Taymiyya, who criticized Muslims for accepting non-Muslim, Mongol rule, the Tajik IRP felt impelled to distance itself from the “Russian” branches of the party for their acceptance of non-Muslim rule. In contrast, the Tatars and the Daghestanis, who had little hope of carving an “Islamic state” inside the Russian federation, stressed the need for conversion in the Slavic population. They did not favor independence but wanted to maintain a huge Muslim population within the Russian fold to prevent isolation. This moderation is comparable to the reluctance of the Jama‘at-i Islami’s founder, Mawdudi, to accept the partition of India.

The split with the Tajik branch occurred in December 1991, after the federal IRP pledged support for Rahmam Nabiev, former head of the Tajik Communist Party, in the November presidential elections. The Tajik IRP endorsed the candidacy of Dawlat Khodanazarov (a democrat and an Isma‘ili) and thus joined the democratic and nationalist opposition, which was advocating a complete split from Russia and a re-orientation of Tajik foreign policy toward Afghanistan and Iran. The Tajik branch was strongly criticized by Moscow’s headquarters and subsequently became independent. This split was approved and followed by the Uzbek branch, led by Abdullah Utaev, which retained close links with the Tajik IRP in the name of the common fight for establishing an Islamic state in place of national divisions.

THE IRP IN TAJIKISTAN

Three factors gave the Tajik IRP a higher profile in Tajikistan than in other areas: its alliance with the head of the official clergy; its popularity with a local regionalist faction (the Gharmis); and the building of a coalition with the nationalist and democratic

Olivier Roy

forces. In Tajikistan, the official representative of the Soviet clergy, Qazi Akbar Turajanzade, although not a member of the party, advocated its registration with the government in 1991—a rare instance of collaboration between the IRP and official clergy. Close personal relations between the Qazi and the leaders of the IRP led to speculation that he was in fact an IRP leader. He consistently denied this, but when the IRP pushed forward a front organization in 1994 (the Islamic Movement of Tajikistan), the Qazi became deputy chairman. The association of the IRP with a significant popular faction was a consequence of the highly politicized regional factionalism in Tajikistan. Of the four main regional factions, two were identified with the communist elites (the Leninabadis and the Kulabis). One (the Pamiris), secular-minded and active in the Sovietization of the republic, was pushed out of government in early 1992; the last (the Gharmis) never associated with power-sharing, remained traditional-minded, and underwent a process of Islamic radicalization during the late 1970s and 1980s. The Qazi was a Gharmi, like Mullah Nuri and Mullah Himmatzade.

The alliance of the IRP with the Democratic Party, the nationalist Rastakhiz movement, and the Pamiris was not only a coalition of those excluded from power. It was an alliance firmly rooted in a common Tajik nationalism. These parties conceived of the Tajik identity as the heir and the last testimony of the Persian culture that has shaped Central Asia since the end of the first millennium. Such nationalism is part of a broader cultural identity and is not just the expression of narrow ethnic nationalism, as it is in Uzbekistan. The policy of the IRP is intrinsically related to this connection between Islamic and nationalist identity in Tajikistan. This connection makes it more understandable why Tajikistan is one of the few places in the Muslim world where a lasting common front has been established between an Islamist movement and nationalist or democratic parties. Islam is seen as a pillar of national identity that has been endangered by both the Soviet system and Turkization. Such a synthesis has been supported by Qazi Turajanzade himself.¹⁰ This also explains the ambivalent attitude toward Iran, which is

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

seen as the birthplace of modern Islamic revolution and the repository of the old Persian tradition. In fact, Iran and Afghanistan are the only Muslim countries that were regularly mentioned in the IRP journal *Nejat* in 1992.

This endeavor to coalesce Islam and nationalism, reminiscent of the effects of the Iranian revolution, and the call for the restoration of an “Islamic Persian identity” have inevitably brought the IRP closer to Iran. Yet each side understands Islam and nationalism in a different way: The Tajiks are Sunni and anti-Uzbek; the Iranians are Shiite and regionally oriented. Neither side has been able to turn a common cultural heritage into a common strategy.

The IRP had little direct connection to the outside world. However, delegations from different Sunni organizations came to Dushanbe. The Saudi authorities sponsored rebuilding of the main mosque, while the Pakistani embassy also had close contacts with the IRP. Contacts were further established between the Qazi and Melli Gorush, the European branch of the Turkish Refah Party. But the Turkish connection did not go very far. The strong “Persian” identity of the IRP, and thus its anti-Turkic bias, thwarted the extension of contacts with Turkish radical networks, even though they shared the same mixing of Islamism and nationalism. Although militant Islamic Turkish organizations had opened offices in the Turkic republics, none of them, including the Nurçiler, Naqshbandis, or Fethullatchi, opened an office in Tajikistan. A representative of the Turkish official Islam (the Diyanet—Directorate for Religious Affairs) was appointed to the Turkish embassy in Dushanbe but did not play any role.

There have been no permanently based IRP envoys outside the country. Contact was made through the travels of IRP leaders—mainly Himmatzade, Osman, and Nuri—usually at the invitation of the Pakistani Jama‘at-i Islami. Even during the limited period in 1992 when the IRP was a member of the coalition government in Dushanbe, it did not push for the establishment of embassies in Afghanistan, Pakistan, or Iran. Yet, as we shall now see, it was the IRP’s participation in this coalition gov-

Olivier Roy

ernment in 1992 and its subsequent exile in Afghanistan that necessitated the articulation of a foreign policy.

THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE IRP

Sources

Written sources on IRP foreign policy are very scarce. The party published some writings between 1991 and the end of 1992, when the coalition government in which it was participating collapsed under the weight of a military offensive carried out by pro-Russian conservatives. During its subsequent exile in Afghanistan, the IRP ceased all publishing. Thus, its subsequent foreign policy has had to be understood through analysis of the party's actions.

The IRP program mentions in general terms the foreign policy it advocates for Tajikistan: "complete independence" (from Russia), a full diplomatic apparatus for the republic, and "multilateral relations—economic and political—with other independent Muslim-majority countries in Central Asia."¹¹ The program also stresses the priority of "civilisational, cultural, economic, and political relations with countries with the same language and religion." Although specific countries are not named in this quotation, the reference is to both Iran and Afghanistan—whose cultures mix Islam and Persian pasts. It also expresses support for national and liberation forces, "especially in muslim countries."¹²

Nejat published eight issues from March to September 1992. Every issue contained articles praising Iran and advocating closer links with the country, stressing the common cultural heritage more than revolutionary Islam. The newspaper used to criticize Turkey's secularism¹³ but carefully avoided any criticism of Saudi Arabia. Support for Chechnya and the African National Congress in South Africa were also mentioned. Interestingly enough, there was also a small attack against the United States—articles complained that Islamist movements were misunderstood by the West, which had dubbed them "fundamentalist" and "extremist," and had used double stan-

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

dards as far as democracy was concerned.¹⁴ No articles appeared condemning the U.S. presence in the Gulf; strangely, the only article on the Gulf dealt with the idea that the participation of women in the armed forces is not against Islamic tradition. This article also noted the high number of American women serving as troops.¹⁵ One of the few articles mentioning current conflicts where other Muslims have been oppressed—namely Bosnia-Herzegovina, Palestine, and Lebanon—placed responsibility on “the communist system,” which, although collapsed, was compared to a “scorpion with seven tails.”¹⁶ The lack of interest in the rest of the Muslim world, with the exception of Iran and Afghanistan (and some anecdotal articles on Muslims in Sri Lanka), is striking. The only avowed support for the Algerian FIS (Islamic Salvation Front), at a time when it was not banned, came from an interview with Mullah Nuri in the newspaper *Sokhan* which is democratic and pro-opposition.¹⁷ Also surprising, the IRP made no statements on the jihad in Kashmir.

Articles appeared regularly praising Borhannuddin Rabbani, head of the Afghan Jama'at-i Islami party (but a Tajik himself), with no mention of the other Afghan political leaders. Many articles linked Tajik identity with Islam and took a “nationalist” stand against Uzbekistan.¹⁸ The general cautiousness of the party's views on foreign policy is clearly related to the situation in Tajikistan. The party had a close relationship with Iran and also had links with the Saudis, who provided some money to the Qazi for enlarging mosques. On bad terms with the Russians and on the verge of civil war, the party could not afford to oppose the Americans, who, at that time, had a powerful embassy in Dushanbe with an ambassador, Stanley Escudero, who never hid his hostility toward Iran. In fact, the IRP was convinced that it would have to adopt a low profile in order to be a member of a coalition government. Such a low profile in the IRP's foreign policy is in line with its lack of international experience and its focus on domestic problems—particularly clan and ethnic divisions in Tajikistan—and on its search for a synthesis between Islam and Tajik (or Persian) nationalism.

Olivier Roy

Practice

After the street demonstrations of April 1992, a coalition government was established in May with Dawlat Osman, deputy chairman of the IRP, appointed as deputy prime minister. The IRP remained part of a coalition government from May to November 1992. During this period, the IRP retained a close relationship with Iran. After the coalition's defeat and the flight of tens of thousands of refugees from Afghanistan, two trends are noticeable. First, during the armed struggle waged from Afghanistan, the IRP's connections with Iran lost importance as its Sunni connections—mainly with Pakistan and Afghanistan—gained favor. Second, the IRP avoided declarations of jihad against Russia, even though there had been many skirmishes between its fighters and the Russian border-guards in Tajikistan. The IRP remained eager to keep contact with the Russian government.

The Iranian Connection

As previously discussed, the Tajik IRP was oriented toward the Sunni world, specifically the Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Saudi-sponsored networks. But in Tajikistan, Iran played a more active and specific role than in other parts of Central Asia. Although the Tajik IRP entered into an "Iranian connection," this had less to do with the Islamic revolution than with the image of an "eternal Iran." Nationalist secular circles (like the Rastakhiz movement and the democratic party of Tajikistan) stressed the Persian identity of Tajikistan and advocated a return to the traditional Arabic alphabet. This attitude was even shared by scholars close to the communist nomenklatura, like the chairman of the Academy of Sciences, Mohammed Assimov (or Assimi). Both nationalists and Islamists shared a common view about the Tajik identity, even though the clerics tended to stress Islam and the secularists the pre-Islamic heritage (Zoroastrianism). But all agreed that the language of Tajikistan is not "Tajiki" but "Persian," they share the same Persian culture with Iran, and they have to fight against "Turkic" hegemony.

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

The Iranian revolutionary “touch” is visible in the writings of the Tajik IRP and in slogans and attitudes of activists (such as wearing white headbands bearing Islamic slogans). Some Iranian Islamic thinkers, like Morteza Mottahari, were quoted in the Tajik IRP press but were ignored by other IRP branches. Under the coalition government, the state television broadcast hours of films, news, and pedagogical programs borrowed from Iranian TV.

But the rapprochement between the IRP and Iran was based on a misunderstanding. The IRP was never ready to enter the fold of the Iranian revolution or to become a tool of Iran’s regional strategy. On the other hand, Iran’s support for the IRP was limited by its wish not to antagonize either Russia or the Turkic republics. For Iran, Tajikistan was a figure in a far broader picture.

The extent of the Iranian involvement in Tajikistan is still under debate. Has there been a grand Iranian strategy toward Central Asia? In fact, the Iranian policy in Central Asia is more defensive than offensive: Tehran is obsessed by an eventual Turco-American breakthrough in Central Asia following a total Russian withdrawal. Thus the priority for Iran is still to maintain a close relationship with Moscow, in the hope that Russia will remain a regional power able to thwart American dominance—at least until the newly independent states become strong enough. One problem for Iran is that it has little leverage among the Turkish-speaking Sunni populations. The only place in which Iran had some appeal was Tajikistan, but the danger has been that too great an involvement would antagonize the more important “Turkic” states like Uzbekistan, with which relations have been rather cold. So Iran never considered making Tajikistan a bridgehead in Central Asia. The idea was more to use Iranian influence in Tajikistan in order to become an actor in Central Asia, and thereby to enhance the Iranian hand in its negotiations with Russia.

In the course of its first contacts with the newly independent states and again after the 1992 civil war, Iran followed a two-track policy: maintain relations with both the official authorities and the IRP. This policy was facilitated by the appointment of a high-profile ambassador, Ali Ashraf Mojtahed-Shahbestari,

Olivier Roy

who was the scion of a well-known clerical family and a professional diplomat. During his five years of assignment, Mojtahed-Shahbestari was able to maintain channels of communication with all Tajik sides. Although clearly sympathetic to the Islamist movement, Iran avoided any direct involvement during the 1992 events.¹⁹ Another indication of the ambivalent Iranian attitude was that after the fall of Dushanbe in December 1992, the Iranian embassy was not closed and the ambassador was not recalled, while the Pakistani diplomats packed and closed both the embassy and the consulate.

After the defeat of the opposition, Iran was eager to appear more as a broker than as a supporter of the IRP. Tehran's message to the Russians was: bring your guys to the table, and we will bring ours. The Iranian policy was then drawn into a broader picture where the priority was keeping the Russian alliance. The IRP slowly became more of a burden than an asset. In January 1996, Ali Akbar Velayati, the Iranian minister of foreign affairs, clearly told the Tajik delegation in Tehran, headed by Qazi Turajanzade, that it would have to find an agreement with Dushanbe and that it would no longer be supported. That same month, an international conference on Central Asia brought delegations from different countries to Iran. The only Tajik delegation was that of the Dushanbe government, with no IRP representation.

The IRP had apparently been unable (or unwilling) to find channels of communication with Iranian officials other than those in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The lack of IRP contacts among the Iranian clerics is striking, as was the IRP being left without any leverage to lobby for Iranian support after 1995.

The Quest for Russian Neutrality

The IRP position on Russia is not analogous to that of the Algerian FIS position on France. Whereas the FIS has been dismissive of France's role in Algeria, the IRP has always considered the importance of the Russian role in Tajikistan. Still, the attitude of the IRP toward Russia has been ambiguous.

The Tajik war was a civil war. There is no comparison with the Afghan war against Soviet troops; neither Russian troops

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

nor officers was harassed during the 1992 civil war. In the following years, the IRP was involved in attacks against Russian personnel in Tajikistan, but it did not extend terrorist actions into Russian territory or launch a jihad. IRP militants and sympathizers traveled through Russia without much trouble, except for petty harassment from militiamen. The IRP encouraged the Russians to stay neutral, but the Russians sided unambiguously with the Kulabi faction in November 1992. Nevertheless, the IRP has been eager to maintain dialogue. This policy paid off when the Russians reluctantly changed their policy toward the IRP. In the summer of 1996, Moscow decided that a coalition government forged between Rahmanov and the Islamist opposition would better serve its interests. Moscow had two concerns. The first was the growing assertiveness of Uzbekistan as a regional power, directly backed by the United States, and the ensuing Uzbek hostility toward the Russian presence in Central Asia.²⁰ The second was the rise of the radical fundamentalist Taliban movement in Afghanistan. Both Rahmanov and the Islamist opposition were on bad terms with the Uzbeks. By the same token, the IRP leaders based in Afghanistan—mainly Mullah Nuri—sided with Ahmed Shah Masud, not with the Taliban. Masud used to get weapons from Russia in an effort to thwart the Taliban offensive. Suddenly, the IRP found itself with the same foes as Russia, although its misgivings toward the latter were still deeply entrenched. After the June 1997 agreement signed in Moscow between the United Tajik Opposition (where the IRP played the main role), fighting stopped and the opposition came back to Dushambe.

Its experience with the civil war and the flight to Afghanistan made the IRP aware of the prevalence of national and ethnic identities in the area. IRP leaders have been cautious in light of this regional situation. None of them expected the Islamic movement to spread throughout Central Asia, and all were particularly aware of the ethnic balance in favor of the Uzbeks. The leaders of the IRP, who have been exclusively Tajik, shared with other Tajik nationalists an obsession with Uzbek hegemony in Central Asia. They feared, probably rightly, that a

Olivier Roy

total Russian withdrawal would allow Uzbek expansionism. Nonetheless, IRP leaders never advocated a redrawing of the regional map—for example, by creating a “greater” Tajikistan, Iran, or Pakistan.

Misgivings about Uzbekistan may provide a common ground between some government circles (like the former strongman of the Kulabis, Abdulmajid Dustiev) and many IRP leaders, like Nuri, who would prefer to create a national coalition to preserve an independent Tajikistan than to weaken definitively the Tajik nation in the pursuit of jihad.

This, however, did not prevent the IRP from trying to mend fences with Uzbekistan in 1995. Its meeting with Uzbek President Islam A. Karimov in the spring of 1995 was initiated by his government, which had been antagonized by the Russian refusal to let it play a role in Tajikistan.

The Sunni Militant Connection

Kabul fell into mujahideen hands some days before the victory of the opposition coalition in Dushanbe in May 1992. Because the Afghan-IRP connection was not direct but rather was channeled through some local Hizb-i Islami commanders and the Pakistani Jama‘at, the IRP had been unable to establish a working relationship with the new Afghan government. Although the governments in both Kabul and Dushanbe were Tajik and largely Islamist, no synergy took place between them. The Afghan government, whose minister of defense from 1992 to 1995 was Ahmed Shah Masud, did not interfere in the Tajik civil war. The feuds that soon erupted between Masud’s troops and Hekmatyar puzzled the Tajik IRP. The Afghan diplomats appointed in Tajikistan after the fall of the communist regime in Kabul were not activists; many of them were former communist bureaucrats who joined Masud on ethnic grounds.

After the fall of the coalition government in December 1992, most IRP militants found asylum in Afghanistan, along with some 100,000 civilians. They established their headquarters near Taloqan, the former “capital” of Commander Masud, who at the time was acting minister of defense for the Afghan Islamic govern-

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

ment. For his part, Turajanzade opened an office in Tehran, while Nuri and Himmatzade traveled extensively from Afghanistan to Pakistan. After settling in Afghanistan, the IRP turned into the “Islamic Movement of Tajikistan,” a supposedly broader front. In fact, the movement was little more than the IRP.

The decrease in Iranian involvement and the IRP retreat into Afghanistan pushed the party toward other potential sources of support in the Sunni world. The IRP headquarters in Afghanistan was caught between two contradictory influences. On one hand, the Rabbani and Masud government, which holds the Taloqan area where Mullah Nuri was based, needed Russian neutrality and was at odds with the Pakistani-sponsored networks of radical Islamist militants. On the other hand, the Jama‘at-i Islami had established a joint venture with some radical Arab networks (the so-called “Afghans”—that is, militants who came to Afghanistan from different parts of the Middle East to learn jihad). The International Islamic Relief Organization, headed locally by a Saudi citizen, had a satellite in Kunduz and provided help for Tajik refugees. These radical movements tried to enlist the IRP in their strategy of exporting militant Islam into Central Asia. In November 1995, IRP member Himmatzade participated in a huge gathering sponsored by the Jama‘at in Lahore, where all radical Islamist organizations were represented.

From Afghan territory, the IRP waged jihad in Tajikistan. Armed forays succeeded in establishing an IRP stronghold in the Gharm area. After the IRP took the town in November 1996, it was able to threaten the capital, Dushanbe. In this effort, the IRP received support from the Sunni Islamist hub of Peshawar with the help of the Jama‘at and militant Arab “Afghans.” The IRP had three bases in Afghanistan for training Tajik fighters. The first, near Mazar-Sharif, a town controlled by General Rashid Durtom, was mainly for civilians. The Saqi refugee camp was under the supervision of the United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and was not used for military purposes. The second base in Taloqan, the area controlled by Masud, was both the political headquarters of the IRP

Olivier Roy

and the point at which armed groups waylaid before entering Tajikistan. The third base was in the area of Kunduz—outside of Masud’s control and, after 1996, in the hands of pro-Taliban groups—where foreign Arab militants both brought humanitarian aid for civilian refugees outside of UNHCR control and administered a program of ideological, religious, and probably military training. However, it seems that the bulk of the militants who crossed the border have in fact been trained for short periods in other camps, in the tribal areas between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. While it carried out its jihad, the IRP also entered into negotiations with the Dushanbe government under the aegis of the United Nations. During these talks, the IRP formed a common delegation with the other opposition forces.

This double approach gave rise to a two-headed organizational framework for the IRP. While Qazi Turajanzade had established his headquarters in Tehran, Mullah Nuri was placed in Northern Afghanistan. The Qazi was in charge of the “official” world—that of the regional states, the big powers, and the United Nations—while Nuri was more at ease with the militant networks around the Jama‘at-i Islami and the so-called “Afghans.” This gave the Qazi a moderate image and Nuri a radical one, although the picture was actually more complex. Nuri is certainly more ideologically minded than the Qazi, but they had the same objective: to be recognized by the Russians and the United Nations as the principal opposition and to establish a coalition government where they could be on equal footing with the Dushanbe government of Imamali Rahmanov. Because of the localized bases of their party, the IRP leaders were aware that Islamic revolution of the Iranian kind would not sweep Tajikistan. Rather, they relied on a combination of military pressure and diplomatic action to push the Russians into an agreement.

IRP Diplomatic Action

This double approach (pairing military action with diplomacy) was certainly justified by the stubbornness of the Russian government, which from 1993 to 1996 supported the Kulabi gov-

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

ernment in Dushanbe and did not push for a real settlement. The IRP tried to convince the West of its willingness to negotiate. The Qazi made several trips to Europe and the United States, but to no avail. The European countries, which agreed to send a mission of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe into Tajikistan, did not want to interfere with the U.N. peace process. The United States was not willing to facilitate the return of the IRP to any Tajik coalition government, fearing that it would also mean an increase in Iranian influence.

Five rounds of negotiations under U.N. auspices took place from March 1993 to July 1996. Atakhan Latifi, a secular democrat and journalist, was acting secretary of a united opposition delegation for all routine meetings, while the Qazi chaired the delegation on more important occasions. The delegation included democrats, nationalists, and Pamiris under the label of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). The opposition asked for the creation of a coalition government, in which it would share the bulk of the power with the Kulabis. It also asked for a ceasefire, the release of prisoners, and international monitoring of free elections. In addition, the delegation requested that the Russians guarantee the security of opposition members. A ceasefire was signed in Tehran in September 1994, and a joint delegation was supposed to monitor it, along with a U.N. military mission. In the event, however, the ceasefire was never really implemented and the negotiation process went on, along with the fighting, until dramatic new events intervened.

Indeed, the fall of Kabul into the hands of the Taliban on September 27, 1996, decisively changed the picture. The Taliban movement, which the U.S. State Department did not believe to be exporting Islamist revolution,²¹ had in fact restored links with most of the radical Islamist networks present in Afghanistan, including the Jama'at. For their part, the Russians worried about the impact of the Taliban victory in Central Asia. The IRP was under pressure from its Sunni radical sponsors to escalate the war in Tajikistan. Hundreds of Tajik fighters, trained in the Afghan tribal areas, were sent to Kunduz in summer 1996 with Jama'at support and the Taliban's green light. The

Olivier Roy

Rabbani government, which desperately needed Russian support, asked Mullah Nuri to de-escalate the fighting. It advocated a ceasefire and direct negotiations between the IRP and the Imamali Rahmanov government under Russian auspices.

At this point, the IRP had to make a choice between committed negotiation and military escalation. Discussions were apparently fierce inside the party. Tensions between Nuri and Turajanzade were based less on ideological disagreements than on differences in approach: Turajanzade was more involved in the U.N.-sponsored peace talks, while Nuri was closer to Rabbani and more open to direct negotiations with Rahmanov.

Direct negotiations between Nuri and Rahmanov opened in December 1996, while Turajanzade remained aloof. In any case, this shows the evolution of the IRP's approach to a more nationalist one. The Kulabis and Gharmis, former enemies, share a common Tajik identity that they feel is threatened more by Uzbekistan than by Russia. An agreement was thus signed in Moscow in June 1997 between the government and the UTO under U.N. auspices, paving the way for a coalition government in Tajikistan. Some split occurred in the government's ranks, while relations between Rahmanov and the Uzbek government also became tense. Tashkent apparently supported a revolt in the government armed forces in August 1997, protesting the peace agreement. The failed revolt was headed by an ethnic Uzbek of the Tajik army, Mahmud Khodaberdayev. The IRP also almost split on the peace issue. Abdullah Nuri came to Dushanbe from Afghanistan as early as October 1997, while the Qazi Turajanzade waited until March 1998, when he was appointed deputy prime minister, to make a move from Tehran to Dushanbe. Despite his appointment, his followers are still embroiled in infighting with government troops. The situation remains confused in Tajikistan, and no significant IRP forces or leaders were based abroad since mid-1998. Conversely, it is Masud who established a base in Tajikistan in Kulab—Rahmanov's stronghold—stockpiling ammunitions and weapons provided by Russia. Thus the strategic picture of the area has changed dramatically between 1992 and 1998. Russians and Iranians are

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

supporting the Afghan Northern Alliance—which includes the Sunni Tajiks Rabbani and Masud, the Uzbeks of General Rashid Dustom, a former communist, and the Shiite Hazara—against the Taliban, a deeply fundamentalist Sunni movement with close ties to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia as well as with radical Islamist networks.²² In this evolution, the IRP has lost most of its “Islamic” nature to become a purely Tajik party, deprived of any basis abroad.

The IRP has reentered domestic Tajik politics. The main broker is neither the United Nations nor Muslim countries or movements, but Russia. The IRP has been unable, and probably unwilling, to enter the world ideological arena by joining the Islamist *umma* against the West and Russia. It has distanced itself first from Iran, then from the radical Sunni movements. But it has been unable to capitalize on its moderation and alliance with other democratic forces in order to be recognized by the West as a legitimate opposition movement. Ironically, Iran’s shadow has remained on it, even though it has lost all Iranian support. Thus the IRP’s only choice has been to play on the fears of both Russia and Dushanbe, in order to reenter the game as a lesser evil than the Taliban and a hegemonic Uzbekistan. But in reentering the political process, the IRP has been losing its identity to clan and personal feuds. Tajikistan is no longer the main scene of Islamic militancy in Central Asia. The spotlight is turning again to other branches of the IRP that were thought to have been suppressed after 1992.

IRP In Uzbekistan

In the wake of the split of the Soviet IRP in 1991, the Uzbek branch, contrary to its Tajik counterpart, failed to become a significant player in Uzbekistan. First, the Uzbek IRP did not have a monopoly on Islamic political opposition: although officially secular, the main opposition party Birlik (Unity) stressed the Islamic component of Uzbek identity; another Islamist party, Adalat (Justice), prevailed in the Namangan district; and the well-known singer Hassan Dadanov founded his own organization in Ferghana. Second, repression was severe:

Utaev was arrested in December 1992 and disappeared in jail, as did Shaykh Abdoul Vali, imam of the Andijan Jami mosque, in August 1995. As a consequence, the Uzbek IRP had to go underground. From 1992 onward the Uzbek government tried to cut off the local IRP from its foreign contacts by limiting the approval of visas, especially for Pakistanis. It extended its grip on the *muftiyyat* by sacking Mohammad Yussuf in spring 1993. The government also played cleverly on less politicized Muslim networks, like the Naqshbandi brotherhood. In 1993, the government celebrated with great pomp the 600th anniversary of Bahauddin Naqshband in Bukhara and appointed a Naqshbandi from Bukhara, Hajji Mukhtar Abdullah, as mufti of the republic that same year. Finally, in order to demonstrate further its “Islamic” credentials, the government joined the Organization of the Islamic Conference and made Muslim feasts official.

But this double-track policy of repression and cooptation did not preempt the spreading of Islamist unrest in the Ferghana Valley. Incidents occurred in the city of Namangan during winter 1997–98. The attempt on the life of President Karimov (on February 16, 1999) was attributed by the government to the Islamist militants and former members of the Uzbek IRP Juma Namangani and Tahir Yoldashev. Both were based at that time either in Afghanistan, with the Taliban, or in Tajikistan. Interestingly enough, at the same time when the Tajik IRP shifted from pan-Islamist radicalism to Tajik nationalism, the Uzbek militants endeavored the reverse path: they became closely linked with supranational Islamic radical movements.

In February 1998, the Uzbek minister of foreign affairs, Kamalov, issued a strong public statement accusing different Pakistani religious movements (this time the Jamiat-i Ulama-i Islami) of training Uzbek Islamists in Lahore, in connection with the Taliban in Afghanistan and the *Harakat-ul Ansar* in Kashmir.²³ Soon after, Tahir Yoldashev announced the creation of the *Hizb-ul Tabrir*, or Liberation Party. The fact that the name of the party is in Arabic is evidence of the transnational approach of the radical Uzbek militants.²⁴ The connections of this party are mainly with the new web of Islamic militant movements

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

based in Afghanistan and Pakistan, whose cores are no longer made of modern Islamist parties (like the Jama'at-i Islami) but of traditional Sunni movements, which recruit in the growing networks of *madrassa* (religious schools). The *deobandi* movement, represented in Pakistan by the Jamiat-i Ulama-i Islami, headed by Mawlana Fazlurrahman, exhibits the traditional Sunni reformist school,²⁵ which experienced a radicalization in the wake of the Afghan war and the Gulf War. The Afghan Taliban are an offspring of this movement. Contrary to what happened in most of the mainstream Islamist movements, which became Islamic and Nationalist (Palestinian Hamas, Lebanese Hezbollah, Algerian FIS, and Turkish Refah), the *deobandi* school became more and more supranational, claiming to recreate the Muslim *umma* beyond the national divide. Now staffed by veterans of the Afghan war coming from different countries, these networks are actively engaged in all the jihad waged at the periphery of the Muslim world: Kashmir, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Bosnia. Their militants used to discard their own citizenship, claiming to be first-of-all Muslims. The ex-Saudi activist Usama bin Laden, who is based in Afghanistan and is accused by the FBI of having masterminded the August 1998 bombings of the U.S. Embassies in East Africa, is one of the head figures of these networks, although he has never been linked with what is going on in Uzbekistan.²⁶

The divergent paths of the Tajik and Uzbek heirs of the IRP had been dramatically underlined in August 1999. A group of Uzbek Islamist militants, headed by Juma Namangani, who came to support the Tajik Islamists, were disbanded in July 1999 under the agreement between the UTO and the government. In fact, they had no more place in a nationalist Tajikistan, where ethnic Uzbeks are seen as possible tools for Uzbekistan. On their way to the Ferghana Valley, they crossed the Kyrgyz border, took several hostages, and faced a combined attack from the Kyrgyz, the Uzbek, and the Tajik armed forces. Islamic solidarity has been unable to create transnational solidarity in Central Asia, but the linking of the Uzbek Islamist radicals and the interna-

Olivier Roy

tional Islamist networks has, in a sense, brought Uzbekistan into the Middle East and South Asia.

CONCLUSION

The short history of the Soviet IRP and its epigones—the Tajik and Uzbek ones—shows the specificity of the Islamist movement in Central Asian countries. They suffered from the long-term severing of links between Soviet Muslims and the rest of the world in that they did not have the opportunity to establish deep working relations with other sister organizations. They desperately needed money and found more of it in Saudi Arabia than in Iran. They were also caught in the complexities of the new republics: in only one case were they among the agents of the new nationalisms (in Tajikistan), able to formulate foreign policy principles congruent with the interests of the Tajik state; in the other cases they ran counter to the dominant movement based on ethnic nationalism. The problem for the Islamist movements in developing a regional strategy is to find allies. For that, they have to take into account the complexity of the strategic landscape: the strategic interests of Uzbekistan ran counter to that of Russia, but both claim to fight against the “Islamic Threat;” Iran is a strategic partner of Russia, while the main supporters of the Afghan Taliban are Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, two countries closely allied with the United States that have declared Usama bin Laden public enemy number one. The different set of alliances does not fit well together.

Iran, as we have seen, is not playing on Islamism in Central Asia in the absence of a significant Shiite community and in order to keep a close relationship with Russia. Pakistani and Sunni radical groups are working through unofficial networks, while Afghanistan is not a real state. Under these conditions, it is difficult for the Islamist movement in Central Asia to elaborate a foreign policy in strategic terms, through the identification of friendly and hostile states. As in other countries, Islamism can formulate a long-term foreign policy that is different from ideological slogans only when it is identified

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

with a state—as in Iran, and to a lesser extent, Chechnya and perhaps Tatarstan. If not, it remains a purely reactive movement, relying on deep sociological and cultural roots to protest on behalf of populations excluded from the political game, as in the Ferghana valley.

By allying itself with the more radical foreign Islamist groups, the Uzbek militants have little chance to find some support in the West, even if the ruling Uzbek regime comes under criticism for its poor human rights records.²⁷ On the other hand, by working in close contact with the United Nations and by abiding generally with the agreements it signed, the Tajik IRP has gained some credibility but has lost support among the international Islamic militant networks. It has experienced the same fate as Masud in Afghanistan—becoming moderate does not necessarily trigger more support from the West.

NOTES

¹ Announcements and information on the meeting, including the new party's program, can be found in the monthly *Hedayat*, written in Tajik, (July 1990), published by the IRP itself.

² The official newspaper *Tajikistân-i shuravi* has condemned in its headline the announcement of the creation of the Tajik branch of the IRP, under the title "A Provincial Clandestine Committee Under The Banner Of Islam" (May 17, 1991).

³ Ahmed Rashid, *Central Asia* (London: Zed Books, 1994): 122.

⁴ The party's program has been published in several languages. See *Hedayat* 1, (June 1990) (in Tajik). All the following questions are from this issue.

⁵ Article 7 of IRP program, *Hedayat*, p. 5

⁶ *Al Wabdat* 3 (September 1, 1991) (in Russian) in an article signed Rashid Khatuev; FIS is called "a fundamentalist organization," which succeeded through elections and democracy. In an interview given to the Tajik journal *Sukhan* (December 7, 1991), Mullah Sayyid Abdullah Nuri said: "Any Muslim should be a member of the IRP." He said he favored a third way between Communism and Capitalism, and spoke on favorable terms of both Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two countries where he had traveled. He also supported the FIS.

⁷ Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁸ It is interesting to note that in his memoirs, a deputy head of the ISI, General Mohammad Yousaf, dismisses the role of Hekmatyar and claims credit for the forays into Tajikistan, and for sending thousands of CIA-purchased Qurans to Central Asia. See *The Bear Trap* (Lahore: Jhang Publishers, 1992): 193.

⁹ Interestingly enough, the journal of the Tajik IRP, *Nejat*, reprinted in its first issue (March 1992) an article written by Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, president of Iran, taken from the Iranian newspaper *Keyhan-hawa'y* entitled "The West is Benefiting from Soviet Events," which paradoxically expresses concern for the dissolution of the Soviet Union and warns about its negative effects—namely American infiltration of the area.

¹⁰ *Religion: The Pillar of Society*, in *Central Asia: Conflict Resolution and Change*, Roald Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower eds. (The Center for Post-Soviet Studies, 1995).

¹¹ There is no mention of culture here. Clearly, the Tajik IRP does not feel that there is a "Central Asian cultural identity."

The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party

¹² Statutes of the Tajik IRP, pp. 11, 26 (October 1991) (printed copy, Dushanbe).

¹³ “*Islam wa syasat*” (“Islam in Politics”), *Nejat*, 1, p. 6.

¹⁴ “Can We Trust the West about Democracy?” *Nejat* 3.

¹⁵ “Islamic Customs,” *Nejat* 4.

¹⁶ “He [God] Increases Infidels Only with Evils,” *Nejat* 8. Note that the title is a Quranic quotation, *surat al-Isra*, 81–82.

¹⁷ *Sokhan* 18 (July 12, 1991): 3.

¹⁸ “The Hostile Designs of Islam Karimov in the Newspaper *Libération*,” *Nejat* 8, quoting an interview of the Uzbek president in the French paper *Libération*.

¹⁹ Although, according to U.S. diplomats who were present in Dushanbe at that time, weapons were brought to the main mosque of Dushanbe, headquarters of the Islamist groups, by Iranian diplomats.

²⁰ Tashkent openly backed the “third force” in Tajikistan, that is the Leninbadis, headed by Abdulmalik Abdoullajanov, a former ally of Rahmanov.

²¹ Declarations of Robin Rafel, “They have no intention to carry Islamic propaganda abroad.”

²² The Taliban give protection to Usama bin Laden, a Saudi radical Islamist who is said to have subsidized many terrorist groups in the Middle East.

²³ The Harkat-ul Ansar recruits volunteers from the Muslim world to fight jihad in Kashmir.

²⁴ The Hizb ul Tahrir, historically, was a splinter group of the Muslim Brothers, established in Amman, Jordan, in 1953. Now based in London, it advocates the establishment of a modern Caliphate. Connection between this party and the Uzbek party remains unclear, but the choice of the reference has not been made by sheer hazard.

²⁵ The Deobandi University was founded in 1867 near Delhi.

²⁶ On the shift from ideological islamism to radical Sunni neofundamentalism, see Olivier Roy, *Changing Patterns among Radical Islamic Movements*, in *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* (Winter-Spring 1999)VI:I.

²⁷ See the *Human Rights Watch* publication, *Crackdown in Farghona 1998*.

OLIVIER ROY is a senior researcher at the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS).

Also published by the Muslim Politics Project

The Foreign Policy of The Taliban

BY WILLIAM MALEY

The Foreign Policy of Hamas

BY MUHAMMAD MUSLIH

International Relations of an Islamist Movement:

The Case of the Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan

BY VALI NASR

Hizballah of Lebanon:

Extremist Ideals vs. Mundane Politics

BY AUGUSTUS RICHARD NORTON

U.S. Policy Toward Islamism:

A Theoretical and Operational Overview

BY ROBERT SATLOFF