

NETWORK STRATEGY AND CONFIGURATION OF THE PARTY SPACE

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“We put country before party”—this post-election statement by Al Gore can be fully applied to the general mood in the Central Asian countries now busy strengthening their national security and transforming civil institutions. All of them have already acquired party constructs, but have so far failed to create an adequate opposition to them. The local democracies’ strong sides are better seen in the context of the difficulties they are coping with and will probably overcome.

There is a commonly shared opinion that the 2005 events in Kyrgyzstan delivered a heavy blow to the parties born in the 1990s: the majority of them are in an obvious crisis. Their ideas have lost their attractiveness,¹ while they can no longer

¹ More often than not the regional parties, which are parties of the old, pyramidal type, become a sort of an appendage to the political system. Most of them are either conglomerates of marginal bureaucrats or charismatic public movements. They simulate and imitate political actions, thus being engaged in political profanation without any signs of progress, philosophies, ideas, platforms, or positions. They lack social groups able to invest their political expectations in such parties—and this is their worst failure. This is typical of all Soviet successor states in which the “party brands are moved to the regions as fran-

enlist new allies. “Network structures”² or “meta-action,” “professional structures”—terms borrowed from specialists—are offered as an alternative to the “troubled political waters.”

Sympathies with the network strategy have become synonymous with the *complexity* of the structure of relations among political actors (prominent public figures, heads of state structures, parties and other civil institutions, etc.), efficient means of human resources management, etc. This explains why the people in power, the strengthening business circles, and society, now aware of its integrity, are showing an ever-growing interest in this topic. It may be said without exaggeration that the network tradition is experiencing another period of high popularity.

chises, while political delimitation into parties is purely theoretical” (“Levyi povorot,” *Russkiy zhurnal*, 19 September, 2006).

² It is commonly believed that developed “network” terminology is a relatively recent phenomenon authored by the Rand Corporation in its famous paper *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (see: [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1382/index.html], 8 November, 2006).

I. A Glance into the Past. The Young Bukharian “Dozens” as Network Prototypes

The East, which lives in the midst of permanent wars and punitive expeditions, could have created the network tradition, this widely shared conviction being confirmed by the still surviving and immutable clan-tribal structure obvious in the vast territory between Israel and Japan, as well as by the surviving might of what remained of al-Qa‘eda.³ This conviction, however, is ill-suited to the history and functioning of the powerful Communist Party of China or of the unique Turkish secular parties.

The network tradition and the centralized party structures *are not mutually exclusive*: they are two independent forms of political struggle, each of which has a *raison d’être* of its own in specific, probably temporary situations. They may interact, intertwine, and even mutually enrich one another. Unlike the term “network,” the network structures are not a recent invention. The histories of the largest political parties of the East (of the 20th and 21st centuries included) offer examples of the obvious domination (in the communist parties, in particular) of a centralized over a network structure.

The Bolshevik party-building strategy includes this principle, together with a national political *newspaper*. We all know that the newspaper as a communication form corresponds to rigidly centralized structures. On the one hand, it is “one for everybody” and demands ideological obedience in a police state; on the other, “nothing will be spared”—human lives are regarded as expendable, “part of statistics,” as one of the Bolshevik leaders put it.

The Young Bukharians, the first democratic opposition party in Central Asia serves as a unique example: it borrowed all the best features of the similar and even eponymous structures of semi-colonial Egypt, Turkey, and Afghanistan. Its leaders and ideologists (Faizulla Khojaev, A. Fitrat, and others) used the national *Uchkun* newspaper and a network structure based on the “dozens” principle that united volunteers into groups, in which each of the twelve members knew only the group’s leader, while the leaders of the dozens were under an even higher leader. Secrecy was not an imperative: the party also operated in emigration (Russia, Kazakhstan, China, and elsewhere). From the very beginning, each of the party members (the core was composed of no more than 300) had a chance to distinguish himself in the political and even physical sphere.

II. Synergetics as the Methodology of Contemporary Network Structures

The main principle of synergetics says that a system is always bigger than the mere sum-total of its parts. When applied to society, this philosophy does not deny either individual freedom or collective efforts in public activities. When applied to socio-genesis, it may mean either multitude or poly-

³ One tends to agree with Alexander Bard and Jan Soderquist, two Swedish academics, who have pointed out that 11 September, 2001 will develop some time in the future into a symbol of how “the information society replaced capitalism as the dominant paradigm” (A. Bard, J. Soderquist, *Netokratia. Novaia praviashchaia elita i zhizn’ posle kapitalizma*, The Stockholm School of Economics in St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg, 2004, 256 pp.).

centrism; in relation to party-genesis, it implies an effort to introduce *order and dynamics* into the process of party building.⁴

Synergetic principles related in particular to the so-called bifurcation period (transition from instability to stability) make the specifics of party-genesis in transition societies much clearer. The cyclical nature of bifurcation periods may produce any result. It is the job of a responsible politician to identify the *point of bifurcation*, or rather the cluster of trajectories of a political system, in order to realize the desired scenario of social development (contemporary network strategy has recognized, together with synergetics, a political system aptly called plurarchy).

In transition conditions, so-called *fluctuations* (random changes) become even more important: socially insignificant, they may nevertheless change the system's development course. This creates a "charisma effect," which, acting in a definite way at a definite bifurcation point, may resolve a social crisis. Synergetics and rational sociology prefer "small-scale impact with big results," or, to put it differently, non-linear impact.

Today, to a greater extent than before, contemporary network strategy presupposes *open social systems*. According to the synergetic law of increasing entropy, closed systems reach the stage of chaos, which means that any closed system ends up as a disorganized entity. The philosophers of the school of synergetics describe this as a social development law. They are convinced that because of the cyclical nature of public activities of those in power, continuity of the state apparatus should be ruled out.

By way of summing up the above, it can be said that, as distinct from Marxist dialectics, synergetics recommends *openness* (to better respond to external signals), *unity* (to achieve higher results), and *administration* (according to physical and mathematical laws).

III. Fidokorlar and Asar as Products of Political Technologies that Belong to Different Times

Those who set up Fidokorlar in Uzbekistan and Asar in Kazakhstan used methods that largely correlated with synergetic philosophy and even network strategy. The authors of this *social experiment* wanted to create a "unique laboratory of social innovations," "to tap into new sources of human energy," "to find new types of public temperament," and to discover "non-standard schemes of decision-making." It turned out that Asar of Kazakhstan was born by the need "to step up inner competition in the camp of pro-president parties."⁵

In both cases, the organizers, probably for different reasons, appealed to the *multitude of administration centers*. The network organization uses the "expert" method of self-management: a decision on any specific issue belongs to the person whom the cell recognizes as the most competent in any given sphere. He acts in the name of the cell, but is personally responsible for the results. Finally, the rules of both parties presupposed that membership was strictly voluntary. In fact, even leaders found it hard to upgrade the territorial units' efficiency.

Both parties *attached special importance to media* that were slightly oppositional; both parties did their best to attract the "centers of confidence" (people whom the nation respected) to their

⁴ When talking about the importance of defining the methodology of network party-genesis, we agree with Vladislav Surkov, President Putin's aide, who has pointed out that today competitive ideology has become much more important than competitive commodities or services.

⁵ [www.asar.kz], 8 November, 2006.

side.⁶ From the very beginning, Asar relied on “the urban and rural intelligentsia: engineers, teachers, doctors, academics, farmers, inventors, journalists, petty businessmen, and the active part of the youth.”⁷

The leaders of the two Central Asian countries have repeatedly announced that they wanted to create a *patriotically-minded administrative elite*, the interests of which would coincide with those of the nation for the sake of the nation’s education and development. This is seen as the key to success. After the elections, both parties acted as developed network organizations and continued shaping the elite out of local leaders tested by party work: obviously, the parties had not been set up only for the limited purpose of participating in elections.

IV. Extrapolation of Western Tradition. Partocracy under Conditions of Netocracy

The situation in which *Western network policies scored certain points in Central Asia in the 1990s* with the stated aim of “promoting democratization processes” suggests a fresh approach to many of the local social processes. Today, certain specific tasks have become obvious: we should identify the segments of the international organizations network; study in detail the system of influences, impulses, and manipulations; master the methodology of “netcentrist operations,” etc. We all know that the establishment of a network of journalist clubs by the Open Society Institute, of the Civil Society Support Centers by IREX, and the opening of territorial divisions in the regions, districts and cities by CAFÉ (the latter two organizations instituted by the United States) were the most successful Western projects.

We all know that not all operations aimed, and will aim in the future, at democratization. The “network vs. the state” dilemma was created by the 21st-century practices. On the whole, there is still the real danger of transforming the Central Asian states into “nominal states” in which power will be controlled by network structures (religious-extremist structures like Hizb ut-Tahrir are not excluded). The countries risk losing their sovereignties to become an area in which alien interests clash. We feel that the leader of the former Asar party was quite right when he said: “We spent a long time traveling along the road by means of the roadmaps of democracy printed in the West. We even diligently translated them into the Kazakh language to adjust them to our mentality and adapt them to our conditions. Yet they remained Western... Today we see that Russia, China, and the West have gone their separate ways. We feel this. We do not want to become a battlefield for our neighbors.”⁸

The Internet remains a neutral enclave of information warfare. Free access to it and its worldwide nature have made it a contemporary network structure. As distinct from TV, it cannot be subjugated to the limited interests of any nomenklatura group. The Internet is the ideological basis of a contemporary network structure by force of its decentralization.⁹ It is highly unlikely that Western traditions can be ignored in a post-industrial information society.

⁶ Significantly, in Nicaragua the Sandinistas (a network structure) pulled village quack-doctors to their side.

⁷ [www.asar.kz], 8 November, 2006.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Swedish academics A. Bard and J. Soderquist have described the community of “virtual entities” (or, better still, “people of the Network”) as a “plurarchy.” Its population is guided by its own system of values—the netiquette designed to ensure the Network’s uninterrupted functioning (see: A. Bard, J. Soderquist, op. cit.).

V. Will “New Wave” Parties Appear?

The Bishkek and many other events left few who doubted that the time was ripe for *political parties of a new type* with an original organizational structure and a different type of relationship with their electorate and supporters orientated toward post-material values and exhibiting a “style behavior” of their own. The old rules of political struggle are in crisis, the classical parties lost their prestige; they alienated themselves from civil society and moved dangerously close to the state. President Karimov justly pointed out that the party should demand that “its members, founders, and prominent activists in particular look out for the most frequent hazards: careerism, ambitiousness, conceit, and overestimation of their own powers.”¹⁰

The recent political inventions in Uzbekistan demand the existence of (1) a ruling party (the Uzbek Liberal-Democratic Party with the premier among the leaders) and a constructive opposition party; and (2) a parliamentary majority (the Democratic Block of Factions set up in February 2005) and parliamentary minorities (the People’s Democratic Party of Uzbekistan—PDP). The government is exhibiting an unmistakable interest in transferring the huge masses of socially vulnerable groups to the PDP during elections. The PDP’s initiation of the removal of some of the heads of local administrations (khokims) from their posts was widely covered by the press in August 2006, which suggests that this structure was designed for longevity.

In Kazakhstan, it was a political novelty “not to suppress the shoots of dissent,” to “encourage public discussions and living thought,” and “to support the Committees of Public Confidence and reception rooms of the People’s Control structures that express the hopes and dreams of the third sector—civil society institutions.”¹¹ It seems that the methods of *reception rooms* should be improved so that they do not become “emergency rooms” for all citizens with their everyday problems. It should be noted that these structures and “public reception rooms” should attract more volunteers.

Decentralized decision-making, when the lower levels control the party leaders, may be possible in the near future. A *genuine network approach* can be realized when (1) local organizations are relatively independent from the higher party structures; (2) the rank-and-file voters are given a chance to become more active; (3) personnel rotation is registered in the relative documents; (4) the leaders obey the decisions of the local party units regarding “general party” issues, etc. When moving toward its decline, the C.P.S.U. started using some of these methods; today Otan in Kazakhstan and PDP in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan also resort to some of these tools.

The network structure will permit the leaders of territorial units to strictly control the members and ensure strong leadership and coordination of actions. The members, in turn, will be able to carry out their difficult and never-ending work: they must study the needs of their areas, maintain ties with the local businessmen, etc. They can receive their *payment* from various sources: some of the network activists may find employment with state and public organizations as well as acquiring donations from trade and industrial companies that need patents or are seeking contracts.

Party programs will become a product of wide, genuinely democratic discussion (Fidokorlar, Asar, and the UzLiDeP have already created precedents). *Contemporary political technologies* demand that the precincts should reach every apartment and every voter, etc. The higher party

¹⁰ I.A. Karimov, *Mirnaia zhizn’ i bezopasnost’ strany zavisiat ot edinstva i tverdogo voli nashogo naroda*, Uzbekistan Publishers, Tashkent, 2004, p. 31.

¹¹ [www.asar.kz], 8 November, 2006.

structures will devote their time to serving the lower party activists; they will be engaged in fundraising to pay for business trips, lectures, distribution of printed matter, radio and TV presentations, etc.

I do not suggest that the American experience should be borrowed indiscriminately: the American network structures are based on a unique political institutional design and *specific political culture*. We all know that political reforms in Central Asia are impossible if infantilism and slavish obedience are not wiped out; self-respect and awareness of dignity should be cultivated together with rebuffs to those doing the bossing around.¹²

VI. Ummah as an Ideal Network

The traditional *Islamic influence* is an important factor that adds to the advantages of network strategy and, at the same time, diminishes them. The Muslim community held together by common religion and the Shari‘a offers daily proofs of its cohesion and activity and rejects formalism and bureaucracy. The so-called cartoon scandal, the Israeli-Lebanese conflict, etc. demonstrated the ummah’s social mobility, while most of the Central Asian parties remained silent.

We all know that the Central Asian parties of today have not yet reached the mosque level, for example, in their care for the people, even though, thanks to the Soviet past, all of them still carry more political weight than another civil institution, namely religious organizations (it is noteworthy that the government has not yet included them in the system of civil institutions as equal members).

The Islamic network structure bridges the gap between the public and the private and satisfies property aspirations with *cooperative property* (a special property type) eagerly accepted by the vast number of those who have failed so far to become adjusted to the market economy. Islam offers an attractive solution to another problem, namely, division of society suggested by the party strategy that aims either at the widest possible platforms to attract the greatest number of voters, or at creating a limited yet clearly delineated group of followers. More often than not, the government wants its party satellite to be as clear about itself as possible—party rivalry encourages a multi-party system, but it alienates many potential voters.

On the whole, in Central Asia, political stylistics is largely determined by *interest groups* (“behind-the-scenes” bustle, to quote Ivan Ilyin, prominent Russian philosopher).¹³ As elsewhere, in Central Asia, the definitions of parties and interest groups should partly coincide, intersect, or become superimposed, because we are not dealing with discrete phenomena.¹⁴ All, or nearly all, leaders are apprehensive of fundamentalists (communist and, partly, religious-extremist), on the one hand, and of rash neo-liberal efforts to speed up the reforms and impose ultra-democratic rules of the game on the nation, on the other.

¹² “The slogan ‘the country needs more parties, good and varied’ is deeply erroneous,” according to what S. Markov has to say. We do not need many parties; the country needs several strong political parties able to compete among themselves and able to fulfill their functions in the common political system” [www.kreml.org].

¹³ The situation in Uzbekistan is somewhat different from the rest of the region’s countries: the media form an interest group, while the criminal community has not yet developed an interest in party-building at the current stage of political modernization.

¹⁴ See: G. Jordan, “Gruppy davlenia, partii i sotsial’nye dvizhenia: est’ li potrebnost’ v novykh razgranicheniakh?” *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia*, No. 1, 1997.

VII. Party Modernization in the Light of Network Strategies

After the 2005 events, it became obvious that civil society institutions had become indispensable to the extent that the government had to accelerate modernization of the party structure. Politics displayed its new forms as orange revolutions and emerged in a different public segment unrelated to the sphere of power. Prominent Russian political scientist Sergey Markov was probably quite right when he said that in the 21st century all sorts of foundations and NGOs, in short, the *nongovernmental sector*, would display more political activity and would look more like parties than the official parties.

It looks as if the government has set about building unassailable and interconnected structures in earnest. The local Central Asian political technologists have returned to two old *system-forming elements*: force and the enemy. Force is presented, as usual, as a national idea, while threats to national security play the role of the enemy. Force (the national idea) of Kazakhstan has been formulated as joining the world's top 50 competitive states; in Uzbekistan this role belongs to the idea of a state that guarantees a future to one and all and in which Peace, Prosperity, Progress, etc. will dominate.

Competitiveness may play a great role in party-building if the leader and the ruling elite are guided by long-term, rather than short- or mid-term aims. No one will quarrel with the idea that competitiveness can be achieved through expansion (or strengthening to a certain extent) of the social basis, identification and "translation"¹⁵ of people's interests, and ensuring civilized rivalry over the electorate's votes in particular.

Tajikistan,¹⁶ Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan are busy looking for the most effective inner party structure, which, given a huge party budget, should have effective management. The experience gained by the UzLiDeP, Otan, and PDPU has demonstrated that their technologies are suggested by an *allergy to the forms and methods the C.P.S.U. used at one time*, on the one hand, while political technologists cannot help but recognize that the C.P.S.U. was an effective and influential force. This can be seen in contemporary Central Asian structures when they mention "the Central Committee," "Secretariat," "Executive Committee," etc. in their speeches.¹⁷

Inner party *discussions* are welcome; the most active *members of the younger generation* with a "competitive" education and creative approach should be drawn into party activities together with the public opinion leaders. The people at the top have obviously come to the conclusion that, first, an inflow of active elements from among the *ordinary people* will mean that the public has accepted the party; and second, that true party functionaries are raised from those who want a *political career*.

VIII. Control and Responsibility

What is more important: to act within the law or to seek victory by any means; to achieve a broad public response or to draw the largest possible number of people into an event? These fairly tricky

¹⁵ The term is an apt description of subtle interference (see documents of Otan's Ninth special congress [www.otan.kz]).

¹⁶ Its party-building experience is interesting not only because there is a religious party—the Party of Islamic Revival of Tajikistan. According to official statistics, there are 8 political parties and 2,700 NGOs there. The so-called Public Council is another important feature.

¹⁷ This occurs when party members call for the party not to be turned into a bulky bureaucratic structure and avoid duplication of functions of the ruling bodies.

questions, which are raised in any more or less free society, call for further improvement of the political parties' *legal, normative, information, and analytical bases*. We should admit that the local political elites tend toward the German experience of party-building, in which every step is supplied with legal formulas and where developed education foundations operate.

Reality does not supply (with few exceptions)¹⁸ examples of open confrontation between the government and political parties.¹⁹ The ruling elites are finding unassailable and interconnected political institutions, network organizations, able to rebuff the "network enemy" increasingly attractive. A network community has no clear center; ideally this role belongs to a super-idea akin to a national idea.

Will the government be able to *coexist* with relatively independent party leaders? After all, hierarchical structures destroy the leading body of any non-conformist organization it has chosen as its aim. Left without guidance, the latter either falls apart or waits for another "boss." The government will find it much harder to dispose of network structures and their charismatic leaders: it will either have to tolerate them or plunge into political and even financial manipulations.

Today, the party-building process is facing two *threats*: between election campaigns, local party structures degenerate into discussion clubs or, worse, are torn apart by personal conflicts and squabbles. The former ailment is created by the absence of an action plan; the latter, by the chance to achieve personal enrichment at the expense of the party. Both ills spring from the very low political culture of the people and party functionaries who, in fact, are expected to plant this culture among the people.

Today, four *approaches* can be used to *set up a network of party functionaries*: party bureaucrats can be appointed from among those employed by subsidiary or basic structures controlled by the party leaders; involvement of regional public figures in the party and offering them corresponding everyday and financial conditions; unification of several public-political organizations into a more compact one; and restoration of a wide party educational network.

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The genesis of the Central Asian political field in the context of political modernization calls for a detailed and deliberate investigation. A network strategy coupled with the rapid reform of the state administration structures, special services, academic science and information sphere could provide a symmetrical answer to the threats, risks, and challenges. Part of the political system should be impetuously cleansed of alien network segments (religious-extremist included) in the shortest time possible; the political system should be switched to exceptional operating conditions and used to set up an adequate network system based on the changing ideology.

¹⁸ The never-ending discussions between the political opponents and E. Ertysbaev, a former presidential aide who now serves as minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, are fairly interesting. Seen from abroad, however, they are regarded as a way for "letting off steam."

¹⁹ We can obviously not object to those who say that "without feedback between the government and civil society, without public control over power, and without raising the role of local self-administration, it will be impossible to raise the standard of living to any acceptable level" (*Materialy Mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii "Dinamika politicheskikh protsessov v Tsentral'noy Azii,"* 15 November, 2005 [www.asar.kz]).