

CENTRAL ASIA: POLITICAL LEGITIMATION MODELS

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In his book *The Grand Failure*¹ that appeared in 1989, Zbigniew Brzezinski offered two major conclusions: the Soviet Union would inevitably fall apart to be replaced, nearly everywhere, with authoritarian regimes.

The democratic euphoria of the time distorted these conclusions in shocking and fantastic inventions. They were not, however, pulled out of thin air: they were products of an analysis of the political processes underway in the Soviet Union.

- Today, the first statement looks like a banality.
- The second statement is not as unambiguous.

The national states that sprang into being on the Soviet Union's detritus can be divided into several groups.

The first includes the countries in which the political opposition prevailed and followed the road of revolutionary changes, which included, among other things, nearly total replacement of the Soviet structures with alternative political constructs. This happened in the Baltic countries and Russia, which acquired, as a result, the most stable political systems and institutions of representative democracy across the post-Soviet expanse.

The second group went through a period of revolutionary upheavals much more intensive

and much more violent than those that fell to the first group's lot. The civil, ethnic, and clan wars, however, did not, as a rule, call to life any deep-cutting political changes: no Soviet structures were destroyed to make room for political institutions adequate to the current context and the local traditions and mentality. This group, which includes the Transcaucasian countries, Moldova, and Tajikistan, paid for the resultant systemic inadequacy with either political instability (which brought Georgia and Moldova very close to the "failed state" status) or a more or less severe authoritarian system (Azerbaijan and Tajikistan). The third group is of the greatest interest for the purposes of the present article. At first (in the early 1990s), it included Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Later, however, Ukraine started moving away from this group, but today, in the post-Orange Revolution period, it has preserved some of the group's most important features.² Later Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, and, partially at least, Kyrgyzstan joined this group.

Any description of the group should point to the fact that, as distinct from the first two, this group tends, on the whole, toward an evolutionary model of post-Soviet political development. This is an important, albeit so far superficial, description of this model. To probe deeper into its

¹ See: Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Failure. The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, Liberty Publishing House, New York, 1989.

² For more detail, see: K.M. Truevtsev, "Unifikatsia postsovetskogo prostranstva: tendentsii i proekty," *Politia*, No. 3, 2004; idem, "Ukraina: metastazy raspada," *Politia*, No. 3, 2006.

meaning we should discuss its structural-functional features, including the genetic ones. To do this we must go back to the very beginning.

There are two circumstances that deserve special mention.

- First, in Central Asia, this model emerged as the dominant one, despite the deviations and variants and the civil-clan war in Tajikistan. Today, in 2007, we can say that the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan changed practically nothing. We can say, at least today, that little will change in post-Turkmenbashi Turkmenistan.
- Second, outside Central Asia, this model has been demonstrated and is being demonstrated, partially and occasionally, at various stages of post-Soviet development. It can still be witnessed in Belarus and Azerbaijan, and could be observed in Ukraine in its totality in the early 1990s; its fragments are still very visible there. In Moldova, this model was reproduced in its totality at the early period of Mikhail Voronin's governance at the level of central power, while its fragments are still present in Transnistria and the country's western parts. In Russia, it has survived in several regions.

The above testifies that the model can be described as short of the mainstream of post-Soviet developments: it was the mainstream from the very beginning, the digressions being, in a certain sense, a systemic failure.

Let us go back to 1990.

At the highest point of perestroika, Mikhail Gorbachev expected that real power would shift from the Communist Party to the elected bodies of power (at that time, the Soviets of all levels). This was his main idea.

In the Soviet Union, the Politburo of the C.C. C.P.S.U. gradually ceded its decision-making function to the Presidium of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet.

It was the elections that made power completely legitimate: for the first time in Soviet history they were competitive, based on the majori-

ty principle, and were, therefore, maximally personified.

In fact, this was a project to legitimize the Communist Party, the state and economic *nomenklatura*, and turn it into a public political elite. The elections that embraced all levels—from the republican down to district—changed not only the nature of the political elite, but also the nature of the system of power.

For the first time in Soviet history, the legislative and executive power branches were separated. Throughout 1990 and the first half of 1991, the country elected heads of executive power of all levels, including the republican level. This process occurred at the same time as the elections of people's deputies, but was absolutely separate from them. In this way, the first secretary of a district, city, regional, or republican C.P.S.U. committee had to win the election to consolidate his position. Not all of them won—yet those who lost let a rival from the administrative, economic, trade union, or Komsomol *nomenklatura* carry the day. This was how a shift from the totalitarian to democratic (still Soviet, but not yet post-Soviet) system was devised and realized.

There were several systemic failures: first, the process of legitimization covered all levels of legislative and executive power, except the highest, the Union level. By the summer of 1991, it had become obvious that the level of political legitimacy of the Union republic presidents was higher than that of the president of the Soviet Union elected by the Congress of People's Deputies, the legitimacy of which by that time had become somewhat doubtful. The absolute majority of Soviet citizens knew that.

The second systemic failure was caused by the fact that in the Baltic and Transcaucasian republics, in Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and most important, in Russia, the elections brought to power a political opposition that refused to accept not only the conservatives in the top party posts, but also the reformers congregating around Mikhail Gorbachev.

Finally, the third failure was caused by the failed coup staged by the politically illegitimate central power represented by the GKChP (the State Emergency Committee), which wanted to go

back to the pre-1990 situation by annulling the results of the legitimate change of power.

Strictly speaking, it was the systemic failures that played the decisive role in the “continuity break,” which happened when the country moved away from its Soviet past to its post-Soviet future.

Not all of the republics experienced the “continuity break.” Central Asia (and its three key countries—Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) is still developing and modifying the model of power politically legitimized in 1990-1991 under Gorbachev’s project.

Before investigating the evolution and modification of this model and its variants, we should scrutinize the genetic descriptions mainly responsible for its most prominent political features, together with the country’s remote past, ethno- and national genesis, political culture, mentality, etc.

While trying to implement his democratization project, Mikhail Gorbachev fell into a methodological trap: the Soviet form of governance was in principle incompatible with representative democracy. The Soviets were a form of plebiscite democracy that functioned according to the principles of democratic centralism, in which the minority, the opinions of which were completely ignored after elections, had to follow the majority, executive power dominated over legislative power (the separation of powers principle was never realized), etc. This was to be remedied by switching to representative democracy, which meant that the Soviets themselves should have changed radically. In the transition period, the Soviet system could have remained manageable if governed by an internal administrator (the C.P.S.U. prior to 1990) or by an external administrator (only an authoritarian regime could have claimed this role). From this it follows that once the C.P.S.U., as an internal administrator, was removed from the system, democratization Soviet style was doomed to authoritarianism, not to representative democracy.

The administrators of all levels, who became legitimized through the 1990-1991 elections, could have become democratic administrators only if balanced out by an efficient multiparty

system and civil society. In the Soviet Union, such counterweights were exceptions rather than the rule, despite everything that happened during glasnost and perestroika. This explains why in the post-Soviet period administrators of all levels, at least a large part of them, developed into authoritarian rulers. This happened to nearly all the heads of the constituencies of the Russian Federation; this also happened to the leaders of the former Soviet Union republics.

This is absolutely true of the Central Asian leaders; in the case of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, the three presidents—Nursultan Nazarbaev, Islam Karimov, and Saparmurat Niyazov—were the first secretaries of the C.C. Communist parties of their republics. In 1990-1991, they became legitimized through elections.

In this sense, they can be described as party functionaries of the Soviet period who, back in 1991, had to assume, all of a sudden, full responsibility for their newly independent states.

They were not among those who initiated the Soviet Union’s disintegration; until the last moment, they hoped that this would not happen.

The absolute majority of the local societies, the political opposition included, shared their leaders’ sentiments. The Islamic Revival Party, which in 1990-1991 claimed the role of an all-Union political party and was one of the most dynamic political forces in Central Asia, wanted to preserve the Soviet Union.

The reasons for this are as follows: the Central Asian countries as state formations and their sociopolitical structures are, to a certain extent, products of the Soviet period to a much greater degree than the other parts of the Soviet Union.

While in the European part of the U.S.S.R. and the Transcaucasus the Soviet Union republics were predated by strong national movements and had a certain amount of experience in national statehood, and while the Baltic republics, on top of this, had twenty years of political independence experience, the Central Asian region had no such experience to rely on. This should not be taken to mean that I dismiss as unimportant their deeply rooted civilizational foundations, the highly de-

veloped states which existed there at certain periods of their history, or the still underestimated forms of nomad civilizations and the very specific states based on them.

By the time Soviet power reached Central Asia, it had no state formations to serve as the building material for contemporary national states (the Khiva Khanate and Bukhara Emirate could hardly claim the honor). The forces that opposed Soviet power (the Basmachi [members of anti-Soviet movement in Central Asia] in the first place) proceeded from religious rather than national considerations.

This explains why the region acquired national states under Soviet power; the process was launched in earnest in the late 1930s when the Union republics were formed. State- and nation-building occurred at essentially the same time.

We can dismiss the result as a quasi-statehood, since nation-state-building proceeded under the Soviet Union's supervision, while the political structure was entirely Soviet. It should be taken into account that neither society nor the political elite was aware of any other form of contemporary national statehood, and they were reliably protected against any alien experience. For this reason, the political structure they were offered and which was imposed on them looked absolutely adequate.

In Central Asia, the traditional forms of grass-roots political organization (the village and urban communities) were less distorted than elsewhere.³ They gradually merged with the Soviet system, while the upper floors of the political edifice were filled with clan elements that rose from the grass-roots level and gradually spread to all the Soviet structures. In the 1960s, the process enveloped the entire country: clan elements spread far and wide as a phenomenon inseparable from the *nomenklatura*.

The experience of a reverse shift of a high official from the state to the party structure supplied by the dismissal of Khrushchev and Brezhnev's appointment as General Secretary of the

³ Kazakhstan was a serious, albeit relative, exception; we can say practically the same about Kyrgyzstan, although the distortions there were a little less than in Kazakhstan.

C.C. C.P.S.U. (which merely pushed the political system a little away from ideal totalitarianism to authoritarianism) was spread to Central Asia with much more tangible results.

At least in three Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) this shift took place in different forms still under Soviet power and to a certain extent (at least, technologically) anticipated and prepared the transfer to an authoritarian form of governance. More than that, when in Kazakhstan the republic's head appointed in this way was replaced at the very beginning of perestroika with a Moscow appointee (a quite legitimate step within the *nomenklatura* tradition), this stirred up serious unrest among the Kazakhs. The local people, as well as all the other Central Asian nations, were obviously convinced of their leader's political legitimacy.

The election campaigns that swept Central Asia in 1990-1991 (with the exception of Tajikistan) made the republican leaders politically legitimate for the reasons described above—the technological shift from a totalitarian to authoritarian system, the absence of real political counterweights, and the fact that the majority accepted this as normal. It should be added that the elected leaders had a certain political and administrative resource from the very beginning; they controlled the power-related structures and the Soviet system, which remained nearly intact at the regional, city, and district levels, if not in form then in content, with one serious reservation—it preserved its influence in the representative (legislative) power branch, while the local administrators were normally appointed by the head of state. This was well suited to the general scheme of authoritarian governance.

I have already written that Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were not part of the discussed scheme, therefore they have been left outside the scope of this article. Their later shift toward this model merely confirmed that this exception proved to be the rule.

The authoritarian model inherited from the Soviet past developed into the main form of government, organization, and evolution in the Central Asian political systems.

Its general features should be identified to establish it as a regularity clearly seen below the surface of Central Asian specifics, which essentially illustrates the nearly universal features of the emergence and consolidation of national states.

This is where the common features end: each of the local states has already acquired specific inimitable features; each of the national modifications of the common Central Asian model is following its own development trends.

Kazakhstan: Pliable Centrist Authoritarianism

Kazakhstan is the country which most faithfully followed the road described here as Gorbachev's model for certain rather superficial as well as more profound reasons.

Within the model, the political leader acquires importance which stretched, in the Soviet past, beyond the republic's limits and continues to stretch beyond the national limits within the CIS: he is a figure of all-Union importance. Indeed, he was a consistent reformer while the Soviet Union was alive and a staunch opponent of the Soviet Union's disintegration. He remains a consistent reformer, which makes him the most, and probably the only, consistent unionist across the post-Soviet expanse.

As distinct from the other Soviet successor states, which preferred their own way, this country is following, on the whole, the road laid in the Soviet period. It has already advanced fairly far with good results.

This cannot be explained by the leader's personal features alone.

Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan (found in a special cultural-civilizational area separated from the others by an invisible yet hardly negotiable border, the latter deserves special investigation) as well as Russia are the strongest players claiming the role of regional powers in the post-Soviet expanse.

There is no such border between Russia and Kazakhstan, the exchanges between which take the form of mutual penetration that cuts deep, while disintegration of their common country cut much deeper than in the other Soviet republics, with the exception of Belarus.

Kazakhstan was the target of an unprecedented Soviet experiment in social engineering to the same or even greater degree than Russia and Ukraine. This experiment, which can be described as an attempt at genetic modification (and vivisection at the same time), inevitably affected the very essence of political and social relations at mega, macro-, and microlevels.

The country survived two internationalization waves: in the 1930s and especially in the 1940s when "the enemies of the nation" and repressed peoples (Germans, Chechens, Ingushes, Balkars, Meskhetian Turks, and others) were moved to Kazakhstan. The second wave came as a campaign to develop the virgin soils and the resultant industrialization, which included several gigantic projects, ranging from Djezkazgan to Baykonur.

This resulted in ethnic, demographic, and sociopolitical modernization which brought the republic closer to the Russian Federation: both were multi-ethnic countries with similar internal structures; the nature and vector of modernization were likewise similar and produced very similar results by the end of Soviet power.

If these processes had continued during the Soviet period, the republic could have become a federation. But this did not happen.

Unitarianism Kazakhstani style at first glance forms a very tough shell for the country's unity and territorial integrity. A second glance reveals that it is not a tough shell, but rather Pandora's box stuffed with national, ethnic and territorial problems without, however, clear political dimensions.

This is not so much a factor of the relations between Kazakhstan and Russia. There are more or less obvious ones: the Russian tongue is the second state language in the republic, while Russian speakers can freely develop education and culture in their native tongue.

Kazakhstan, which shares rigidly delineated cultural and civilizational borders with Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and China, cannot develop "explosively." Its development vector is tuned to an "implosive" dominant, which suggests intensified internal political development.

Kazakhstan has managed to create a nearly ideal model of centrist totalitarianism, which in the post-Soviet reality turned out to be a reliable foothold for later modernization.

Such vastly different countries as Turkey, Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Egypt, Tunisia, South Korea, and Malaysia tested the model at different development stages and enjoyed, as a result, decades of stability and, in some cases, evolution toward representative democracy.

Centrist authoritarianism deals harshly with both rightist and leftist political extremes and encourages development, albeit slow, of liberal institutions. In this way, democracy is acquiring a gradually expanding basis.

The starting conditions in Kazakhstan were even better than in any (Asian and African in particular) of the countries enumerated above.

As distinct from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, two of its closest neighbors, the political opposition there has not been and is not excluded from the political process. It takes part in elections and gets seats in the parliament, even if its activities and representation are severely limited by the administrative resource. There is some sort of freedom of the press, but the mass media on the whole are limited and controlled.

As distinct from Russia's monocentric nature, which has finally taken shape and which is a fairly novel political phenomenon for post-Soviet Russia (it is manifested in the president's response to numerous crises resolved with its help), monocentrism is an inherent feature of Kazakhstan. From the very first days of its independence, it has served as the backbone of the regime and the political system as a whole.

The Constitution of Kazakhstan does not limit the president's power in the same tough way we find in the Russian Constitution, where the presidency of one person is limited to two terms of four years each. In Russia, only the Constitutional Assembly has the right to change this regulation: any attempt to convene the Constitutional Assembly (which itself is a far from simple procedure) would threaten the constitutional order, something that neither the political class nor the nation's majority needs.

In Kazakhstan, such politically tested limitations are much milder. As a result the monocentric structure⁴ has been developing throughout the political process without major crises, let alone cataclysms.

This does not mean that the country has escaped structural and functional changes, although due to the inborn monocentric presidential power, they took place either in the vertical of power or below it (in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches) or next to it. In fact, to a large extent, these changes, which manifested themselves relatively recently, some three or four years ago, were a product of the nature and structure of power.

⁴ In this context, the monocentric structure is regarded as mild, centrist authoritarianism, since it is of a structural (institutional and normative) and functional (expressed through the political regime) nature.

For example, while in Russia the oligarchs appeared outside the power sphere in general, and presidential power in particular, and developed under its partial and mainly indirect influence, in Kazakhstan the oligarchs genetically belong to the government.

Having emerged as a functional part of a fairly homogenous political class, they demonstrated political emancipation at an early stage, moved away from presidential power, and used their money to fund the opposition.

As distinct from Russia, where power became more homogeneous when the oligarchs blended with part of the bureaucracy, in Kazakhstan a similar process produced a different result: a thriving political opposition.

As distinct from Russia, where political parties could be created from above and from below or through mixed processes, in Kazakhstan, where political parties were previously created and controlled by the government, they have recently begun appearing from above and a bit to the side of the president and in confrontation with him.

If the regime fails to monitor the process and remains ignorant of the real situation in the lower part of the political spectrum, it might be dangerous for the regime. In this case it is hard to predict which of the sociopolitical processes will be affected by the fairly superficial party development, where it might strike root, and what results it will produce.

It should be said in all justice that as distinct from the ruling elites of most of the Soviet successor states, the Kazakhstani leaders are able to forecast political developments and act accordingly.

Early in the 1990s they prevented a rising ethnic and confessional crisis in relations with Russia, not so much by using repression as by allowing the Russians greater involvement in the religious, linguistic, cultural, and other spheres.

Later the government exploited its resource to switch from natural to monetary benefits—a step that did not cause a wave of discontent similar to that in Russia.

On the other hand, today the country's leaders have to cope with an unprecedentedly acute political challenge which is putting the country's continued evolutionary political development at stake.

The harsh measures, which developed into legislative norms, taken to limit the scope of the local political opposition's involvement can be described as a response to the developments in other CIS countries, Kyrgyzstan in particular. This caused a wave of protest in the opposition inside the country and in the international circles beyond it which are extending political support to the local opposition.

At the same time, President Nazarbaev recently promised a legislative initiative that would make the posts of akims (regional heads) elective.

This and other similar measures are aimed at alleviating the monocentric nature of the local political regime. They might help to unblock the current situation and alleviate long-term political tension that has so far been manifesting itself only superficially.

The main question is to what extent is the Kazakhstani political system capable of performing the required U-turn?

On the one hand, the *Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbaev to the People of Kazakhstan* of 18 February, 2005 outlined a national program of political reforms designed to usher in a "new stage of the country's democratization" by decentralizing executive power, introducing elected posts of regional and local heads, and several other measures.⁵

On the other hand, the recent vectors and dynamics of the political process demonstrate that potential is fairly limited, in the same way as the democratic potential of the constitutional order.

⁵ See: [\[\[http://www.president.kz/articles/state/state_container.asp?lng=ru&art=Posl_k_narodu_2005\]\].](http://www.president.kz/articles/state/state_container.asp?lng=ru&art=Posl_k_narodu_2005)

No matter how mild centrist authoritarianism is in Kazakhstan, its monocentric structure is the most rigid part of the entire building. If partly removed or even moderated, it might undermine the present regime and the political system as a whole.

This has been amply illustrated by the Georgian and Ukrainian developments and the events in Kyrgyzstan, where the political regimes were changed while the structural problems inherited from the past (where they were concealed by a seemingly solid façade) became visible as threats to the countries' stability, validity, and territorial integrity.

Potentially Kazakhstan is not free from similar threats, but their level is much lower than in the above-mentioned countries.

In Georgia and Ukraine, for example, the phenomenon of "regionalism" survived the Rose and Orange revolutions and is still fraught with confederalization at least, while Kyrgyzstan might split into the secular North and the fundamentalist South.

This factor is practically unknown in Kazakhstan because of the traditionally different social stratification of the Kazakhs and the more secular nature of local society, which is much less affected by fundamentalist trends than any other Central Asian society. In this context, "regionalism" can hardly be regarded as a serious threat.

From this it follows that despite the challenges (in fact, no political regime and no political system of the transition period are immune to them), the evolutionary model of Kazakhstan's political development has not yet exhausted its potential.

At the same time, the threats identified here, which analysts describe as real ones, are mainly (for the time being) of a very superficial nature and will remain such unless blended into a development vector with much deeper cutting structural threats.

This may happen in the future if the fairly successful structural reforms are suddenly discontinued.

At the same time, liberal reforms, if too hasty and unbalanced, might undermine stability to an even greater extent than if they were absent.

In any case, the current state and dynamics of the political system in Kazakhstan do not suggest that political evolution is bound to be disrupted.

Uzbekistan: Frozen Despotism

Genetically the variant of the Uzbek political system is almost identical to the Kazakhstani one, if we ignore the very important fact that from the very beginning Kazakhstan, as a national state, was a polyethnic formation, while in Uzbekistan, the home of various ethnic groups, Uzbeks dominated as the titular nation as early as the Soviet era. From the very first days of independence, the trend toward a monoethnic state inevitably became more pronounced.

As early as Soviet times, the Uzbek ruling elite obviously wanted to see their republic as the leader of the Central Asian region, a status that aroused never ending competition with Kazakhstan. The idea of a strong state and the bias toward authoritarianism at the national and regional level go back to the postwar years; in the 1960s-1980s they became even more intensified.

In fact, the traditional civilizational centers on its territory, Samarkand and Bukhara in particular, and Tashkent as Central Asia's largest modern civilizational center were the republic's trump cards in its competition with its neighbors. The development of the virgin lands and the confrontation with China tipped the scales in favor of Kazakhstan. Aware of Kazakhstan's geopolitical importance and of the invisible line that separated it from the rest of the region, the Soviet leaders never counted

Kazakhstan as a Central Asian republic. Unable to compete with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan developed, for objective reasons, into if not the dominating then at least the leading republic to the south of Kazakhstan.

The Afghan war changed everything: the factor of the Tajiks as a divided nation (most of whom lived in Afghanistan) tipped the regional balance of forces once more.

Toward the end of perestroika, when the Soviet Union pulled out of Afghanistan and relations between the Soviet leaders and the Kazakhstani elite noticeably cooled down, while Uzbek leader Rafik Nishanov was promoted to the all-Union level, the Uzbek ruling class tried to take advantage of the favorable situation, but it was too late. The Soviet Union fell apart.

In the early post-Soviet period, Russia's unwillingness to preserve a common state in the form of "Russia plus Central Asia" changed the development vectors.

Kazakhstan, contrary to the centrifugal trends across the post-Soviet expanse, continued its consistent unionist policy in relation to Russia. All the other Central Asian states, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in particular, withdrew into their shells and started moving toward an autarchy and closed society.

This happened not only because the local political elites and most of the common people were afraid of the changes and wanted to preserve the familiar Soviet order of things.

This fear was fed not only by the sudden disappearance of the old country, but also by the Tajik developments.

Uzbekistan was very much concerned with the situation in the Ferghana Valley, which threatened to become a source of trouble for the entire region.

The valley, where the borders of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan meet, can be described as the solar plexus of Central Asia; it is a mêlée of all the ethnic groups living on all sides of the three borders. Since the Soviet Union's disintegration, this intertwining of ethnic, national, and state contradictions has been throbbing. Border clashes between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are not rare; the Uzbek side even went as far as mining its stretch of the border, claiming numerous civilian lives.

The social situation in the Ferghana Valley is no less volatile partly because of the demographic situation: the demographic explosion has developed into a continuous process there. Several decades of this have created overpopulation, massive unemployment, economic stagnation, and undermined the overburdened health care and educational systems. Most of the locals are living on the brink of poverty or even worse.

No wonder the valley has developed into a breeding ground for all sorts of extremist Islamist movements, some of them connected with al-Qa'eda and the Taliban. Juma Namangani started his terrorist career in the valley; the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Uzbek part of Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami, and other radical Islamist organizations and groups have their headquarters here. The valley is crisscrossed with drug trafficking routes.

This is a volatile region with a lot of negative potential for the region's future.

This has been already demonstrated, albeit on a limited scale, by the events in the south of Kyrgyzstan, the results of which spread across the country and caused a sociopolitical explosion in Andijan.

An objective and sober analysis of the events in the Uzbek part of the valley, which has nothing to do with the conspiracy variant favored by some officials in Tashkent, will nevertheless demonstrate that the course and results of the political processes in Kyrgyzstan did influence the situation on the other side of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border.

The effect would have been less destructive, had the revolutionary wave from Kyrgyzstan not merely added vigor to the already tense situation. In other words, we all witnessed a domino effect on a local scale produced by the impossibly strained social and political context. The local social factors

described above were enough to produce an explosion; they were heated up by the regional imbalance at the government level and the unfair regional and clan representation at the very top. They have become too obvious, together with Tashkent's dismissive attitude toward the local people treated as outcasts. An explosion could not be averted.

There was another equally important factor.

The logic of expectations and the Islamic fighters' readiness to act, as well as the mode of their actions, made them the core, the brain center, and the striking force of the Andijan uprising. This logic can be clearly seen in the nature of this upheaval, which can be described as a political provocation typical of the entire history of terror starting with the 19th century, which always accepted bloodshed as a positive result. Russia, Europe, and the Islamic world are well aware of this; the revolutionary terrorist mode of action could be clearly discerned in what happened in Andijan.

There was a third factor—the nature and logic of what the Uzbek officials did.

- First, the nature of their actions testify that, no matter how limited, the uprising, its scope and intensity, caught the Uzbek leaders unawares: it took them a long time to move against the rebels and quench the uprising.
- Second, the authorities acted under a spell of fear. They feared the Islamists and the opposition in general. This alone can explain the disproportionate and inadequate response that claimed many of the fighters' lives and an even greater number of civilian lives (it seems that information about the true figures was partly suppressed).
- Third, it follows from the above that Tashkent hardly took the trouble to assess all possible repercussions: the positive side of the cruel lesson is short-lived. In the long-term perspective, the country's leaders might be confronted with much more determined fighters who would resort to "shakhidism" as a common and preferred weapon and to radicalization of the previously moderate opposition.

It should be said here that fear was not the only reason and the motivating factor. In Andijan, the Uzbek leaders, who followed the normal logic of their relations with the political opposition, demonstrated absolute consistency: they exploited the real Islamist threat to suppress all other opposition groups and differently minded people. The Uzbek authorities accused all the opposition forces, the liberal-democratic opposition included, of contacts with the Islamists. This was done to isolate them from the public and repress them.

Even if this logic has been consolidating the nation's majority around the ruling regime for a decade, we cannot help but wonder whether it is as effective today.

To answer this question, we should look into the past and find out how the Islamic world dealt with the Islamist opposition.

The Arab countries have accumulated rich experience: at different times, different regimes tried everything from mollifying the opposition to mercilessly suppressing it. It is clear by now that all previous attempts to integrate the Islamists into the political system as a systemic opposition were futile. Suppression, on the other hand, sometimes produced positive or, at least, acceptable results.

In the early 1980s, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad suppressed, with unprecedented cruelty, the uprising of the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama. Artillery fire nearly razed the besieged city to the ground and exterminated almost all of its residents. The Islamist threat as a national factor disappeared: today, the Syrian Islamists prefer to act elsewhere. So far, President Bashar al-Assad, the son and heir of the late president, has not been troubled by them.

It should be said that the former Syrian president succeeded because the action, no matter how cruel, was carefully prepared and no less carefully executed. It was predated by a wide-scale cam-

paign of isolation of the Islamists and consolidation of society through non-repressive means. Most of the leftist forces and the leftist center, as well as ethnic minorities, were united into the national-patriotic front headed by the ruling party. The president headed both the party and the front; all other parts of the opposition were disunited and isolated through what can be described as mild repressive measures.

The Uzbek regime opted for different tactics: it mercilessly suppressed the Islamists and won the rest of the isolated and suppressed opposition over to their cause.

This worked well and was more or less justified after the Tashkent explosions: it could be described and accepted as a not entirely adequate, but understandable response. In any case, it allowed the country's leaders to unite part of society around their regime to a certain extent.

The post-Andijan situation is different, its development and dynamics being absolutely clear. It looks as if the opposition, and the fighters, acted with better reason than the authorities. In any case, the opposition has obviously come to stay: as a permanent factor, it can oppose the government and undermine its consolidating efforts. On the other hand, by what he did, the Uzbek president pushed different opposition groups into one consolidated camp. Today, the ordinary people, especially those who live in the Ferghana Valley, and the world public find it harder to distinguish between the Islamists and other fragments of political mavericks.

The motives that drove the opposition and the Islamists are seen from abroad, and inside the country, as a good reason for the insistent demands to legalize the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (with its obvious Islamist component); it is working hard to pass for a moderate and constructive opposition.

The Andijan events have produced the following results:

1. Inside the country: the opposition was suppressed, but not destroyed; its social basis manifested a trend toward extension; people tend to consolidate around it partly because of the political regime's failures. In Uzbekistan, the Islamist fighters are more strongly motivated than anywhere else, they rely on real organization deeply rooted in the country's past and in the present social context. This has increased and is increasing their chances of becoming the core of the widening opposition.
2. Outside the country, the regime has been isolated on a global and regional scale. The world actors—NATO, the U.S, the European Union, and a large part of the Islamic world—responded negatively to the regime's cruelty; some of the actors have resorted to practical measures to isolate the country politically. The American base was removed from Uzbekistan in response to the Andijan events, which could merely deepen the country's isolation. Russia and China unequivocally supported the Uzbek regime, but in the absence of common borders with Uzbekistan their position would be hardly effective. The U.S. and NATO, on the other hand, can put pressure on Uzbekistan through the territory of Afghanistan and the adjacent countries.

Isolation is mounting on the regional scale as well: this is amply shown by the border issue. The previously strained relations with Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan have become aggravated by a new coil of tension with Kyrgyzstan, to which the Uzbek authorities tried to shift the blame for the Andijan events and the training of fighters. Uzbekistan's former involvement in the Afghan developments through the Uzbek minority there is rebounding with negative results.

Uzbekistan is developing into the "sick man" of Central Asia. It is too early to speak of the Uzbek regime as doomed, but the threat that it may lose its grip on the situation looks very real indeed.

Turkmenistan: Despotism of the Authoritarian-Totalitarian Type

Under present-day conditions, authoritarianism as a transition type of political order has demonstrated two opposite typological models in its structural-functional development.

- First, the evolutionary model described above using the example of Kazakhstan.
- Second, a closed autarchic model of political consolidation realized mainly through repressions. Uzbekistan displays certain features of this model, but it is not an extreme example of a Central Asian despotic state.

The analytical community agrees that the regime that still exists (or at least has existed until now) in Turkmenistan is the harshest type of despotism.

Such regimes are described as authoritarian-totalitarian: Turkmenbashi's regime was obviously one of them.

Cruelty, total control, and the leader's personality cult are not the only features of a totalitarian state. There are outward manifestations of the same: mass actions designed to demonstrate popular support of the regime, expressions of labor and other types of enthusiasm, and mass festivities in support of the leader and his policy. This finds its visible reflection in monumental sculptures and architecture, which faithfully reflect the regime's internal architectonics, and its ideally organized structure in full conformity with what the leader and his cronies planned.

In fact, Saparmurat Niyazov was the only post-Soviet leader who realized the dream of the C.P.S.U. conservative wing: he used the nation's support he received in the very beginning to transform the state he inherited from the Soviet Union of the perestroika period into something that brings to mind the Soviet Union of the 1930s-1950s with certain authoritarian adjustments. He preserved the Soviet system and the principle of party (or quasi-party) governance, the *nomenklatura* closed to newcomers, and the equally closed system of personnel employment and rotation. The Soviet "power triangle," which relied on the apparatus and power-related structures, Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov⁶ wrote about was preserved and even strengthened.

The leader personally controlled all of the power structures: he headed not only the executive branch as prime minister, but also the legislative and the power-related structures. Since 1994, when Turkmenbashi was made president as a result of a referendum, there have been no presidential elections. In 1999, he was announced president for life; in 2003, he was appointed Chairman of the country's highest legislature—Khalk Maslakhaty—on the same conditions.

His death confronted the political elite with a crisis known to all authoritarian regimes with no mechanisms of power transfer. Repressions against the real and potential oppositionists and rivals drove the most prominent politicians into emigration; those who stayed behind found themselves in prison or even dead.

Almost immediately after the president's death, the *nomenklatura* mechanism of power organized itself into a collective leadership that brought to mind the Soviet Union in March 1953.

As distinct from the March 1953 event that followed Stalin's death, the collective leadership of Turkmenistan announced a competitive presidential election.

Experts very skeptical about its real competitiveness all agreed that this step, and certain others, was the sign of a tentative shift away from the rigidly monocentric system to a milder, oligarchic form of government.

⁶ See: A. Avtorkhanov, *Tekhnologia vlasti*, Posev Publishers, Frankfurt/M, 1983.

Time alone will show whether they are right: so far this step, if not resolving the power crisis, has at least alleviated it and postponed further actions until after the election.

The sure victory of Berdymukhammedov and his election to the post of the country's president did not upset the balance of political forces. He has enough power either to follow in his predecessor's footsteps or find his own road.

In any case, the political situation will change; the new president promised several reforms, fairly limited at first—their vector and true scope will become clearer later.