

FLOWER IN THE DESERT: TURKMENISTAN'S
JOURNEY TO INDEPENDENCE

by

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I describe and analyze Turkmenistan's journey toward independence from the earliest times to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and then explore the history of independent Turkmenistan through most of 2014. The journey was difficult and marked by constant threats, both from internal disagreements and from external rivals and enemies, particularly the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. On several occasions during Turkmenistan's history, it verged on independence, but these developments were always precarious, tentative, and ephemeral. It was not until the Soviet Union imploded in 1991 that Turkmenistan finally reached the end of its journey and achieved full independence.

The story of Turkmenistan's journey has never been fully explored. The explanation for this dearth of scholarship is tied primarily to a lack of access to information, the remoteness of Turkmenistan, and language barriers. Before the fall of the Soviet Union, it was virtually impossible to gain reliable information on the five Central Asian Republics (CARs) of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kirgizstan. Scholars who studied the region made assumptions based upon what was happening in other parts of the Soviet Union.¹ After the fall of the Soviet Union, there

¹ See, for example, the pioneering work of Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1987) on Kazakhstan; William K. Fierman, ed., *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), and Nancy Lubin, *Central Asia: An Uneasy Compromise* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994) on Uzbekistan; and Muriel Atkins, *The Subtlest Battle: Islam in Soviet Tajikistan* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), and Teresa Rakowski-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia: The Case of Tadzhikistan* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970) on Tajikistan.

was more information available on four of the CARs, but not on Turkmenistan. It remained outside of Western scholarly pursuit, seemingly because of its inaccessible location, propensity for secrecy and control, and language challenge.² In 1989 there was a breakthrough with the publication of Mehmet Saray's *Turkmenler Imperializm Zamanynda: Turkmen halkynyn we onun Russiya imperiyasyna birikdirilmeginin taryhy* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Printing House, 1989) (*The Turkmens in the Age of Imperialism: A Study of the Turkmen People and Their Incorporation into the Russian Empire*), but it was not available in any language other than Turkish, thus reducing its usefulness, and it covered only the history of the Turkmens that related to their annexation into the Russian Empire. In 2012 there was a solid monograph published with Sebastien Peyrouse's *Turkmenistan: Strategies of Power, Dilemmas of Development* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2012), but it focused on events since 1991. There have also been some other scholarly studies of part of the journey, particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and this study uses them where appropriate, but there is no study that goes from the earliest to current times which is dedicated to the reader who is not a specialist, that is, there is no brief, accessible overview of the Turkmens' entire journey to independence, including the challenges of independence in the post-Soviet period.

This thesis seeks to fill that void. It covers the full history of Turkmenistan's sojourn, including its origin, name, national birth, and survival in a part of the world where the Turkmens were under constant threat from an array of foes and rivals, particularly their neighbors, the Persians, Uzbeks, and Russians. It covers the period

² For example, in *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*, ed. Pauline Jones Luong (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), every CAR except Turkmenistan is covered.

from the earliest to current times for two reasons. Access to Turkmenistan's archive was blocked, at least for me; so a narrow, scholarly, in-depth study, anchored on archival sources, was not possible for me. I compensated by telling a general narrative of independence that still offers, I think, new information and insights. Second, there is, as far as I can find, no accurate, popular history of the Turkmen people that chronicles the entirety of their independence journey, and I think that it is important that the Turkmen know their history in order to know who they are and where they came from, to realize how precarious their independence is, and to adopt domestic and foreign policies to preserve their independence. The audience for this study is, first, the Turkmen people. They need to know their general history. Second, this examination is intended for the Central Asian peoples who might find it interesting in comparison with their own journey to independence. Finally, it is offered to the general public as an introduction to the Turkmen and their struggle for independence. The emphasis is on the Soviet and post-Soviet period when independence was finally achieved. Here the story describes in some detail the major challenges to and of independence. It finally concludes with a series of recommendations to guide Turkmenistan as it moves forward to buttress and secure its independence.

The study relies on both primary and secondary sources that were available in Turkmenistan, Russia, the United States, and on primary sources that have become available on the Internet, particularly the sites known as "Seventeen Moments In Soviet History," (<http://soviethistory.mcalester.edu>), the Wilson Center Digital Archive's international history collection at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/>," and the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System at

<https://hcl.harvard.edu:8001/collections/hpsss/index.html>. It also uses primary sources that are in the public domain, including published speeches, laws, regulations, and memoirs. I tried to gain access to the archives of the Turkmenistan government, but I was turned away after multiple attempts over the course of almost a full year. There was no explanation given for denial, but I believe that it was a consequence of ignorance and fear of free historical research. Having been born and raised in Turkmenistan and having worked for over two years in the archives as an archivist, I know the paranoia and suspicion attached to someone coming into the archives to uncover “secrets.” Regrettably, there is little familiarity with scholarly research and a general tendency toward xenophobia. Even though I was not an outsider, I was doing my research under the auspices of an American university and that, ipso facto, made me suspect. Fortunately, the archives are not necessary to tell the story of Turkmenistan’s road to independence. There are many documented primary sources and published secondary sources about the history of Turkmenistan available on internet. Transliteration from Russian to English follows the Library of Congress system. Three free maps (Russian Empire, Soviet Union, Post-Soviet Central Asia) were found on Google maps and are used for academic and educational purposes only.

For the Soviet period a principal primary source, aside from published Soviet documents, is a revealing and fascinating eye-witness account of life in what the Soviets initially called Turkistan, which was the Tsarist government’s name for the province that encompassed all five Central Asian regions of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan, and Kirghizstan. Even though the Kremlin replaced the name Turkistan in 1922-24 by variations of ethnically or nationally based autonomous republics, Soviet

administrators often continued to refer to the Central Asian regions as Turkistan, which obscures national, ethnic, and tribal differences, but has the value of underscoring the fact that Soviet policy toward Central Asians in general was the same and thus what was done in one region was invariably done in the other regions, a reality that validates and legitimizes a single reporter's observations of Soviet policies in Central Asia and, in particular, in Turkmenistan. The observer is a captain in the Red Army who was born in Turkistan in 1918. He was interviewed after World War II when he ended up as a refugee somewhere in the West. He was not named and his location was not revealed to protect him, but his testimony is genuine and validated by the interviewers who were part of Harvard University's effort to document and describe the nature of the social system in the Soviet Union between 1917 and the mid-1940s. Most of the transcripts of the 705 interviews have now been digitized and are available online and offer truly unique data on the economic, cultural, social, and political circumstances in the Soviet Union. The credibility and value of what is called the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System (HPSSS) has been buttressed by the publication of two major monographs that are largely based on this one-of-a-kind archive, and they are Shelia Fitzpatrick's *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Raymond A. Bauer, Alex Inkeles, and Clyde Kluckhohn, *How The Soviet System Works. Cultural, Psychological, and Social Themes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959). The period of Turkmenistan's independence after 1991 is documented in official materials that are not readily available to the general public, but are viewable in the main library in Ashgabat and were accessed there by me.

This study ultimately argues that Turkmen independence was long in coming, faced many threats and challenges, particularly from the Persians and Russians, and, now that it has been achieved in the post-Soviet period, continues to face dire threats because of its rich natural resources. It shows that Turkmenistan did not achieve independence until there was a vacuum of power in Central Asia with the Soviet Union's implosion. Before that political void developed, Turkmenistan was invariably under a neighboring power's control or within its sphere of influence. It ultimately concludes that as a new power configuration begins to unfold in Central Asia in the twenty-first century Turkmenistan will need the economic assistance and close military cooperation with a major power to protect and maintain its independence. There are a number of possibilities for such an ally, including Russia, India, China, Pakistan, Iran, the United States, and Turkey in association with the United States. It argues that while an alliance with Russia would make sense for Turkmenistan, given its geography and dependency on Russian-based pipelines to deliver its natural gas to global markets and given its present inability to shut down or at least attenuate the massive drug trade originating in Afghanistan and to proscribe the growth and influence of Taliban-backed Islamic fundamentalism and jihadism, such an alliance would place Turkmenistan's independence in jeopardy. Vladimir Putin's Russia is in an imperialist phase and is attempting to resurrect some kind of empire that is reminiscent of Tsar Nicholas I's policy of Russian imperialism that was reflected in the famous phrase that he often promulgated, "Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and Nationality" or even of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Georgii Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, once said that Lenin's idea of cooperation and alliance resembles the way a hungry man unites with a sandwich. Given

Putin's appetite and his former standing as an officer in the KGB and head of Russia's Federal Security Service under Boris Yeltsin, it would be prudent for Turkmen to be cautious with regards to forming a close alliance with the Russians lest they become tasty hors d'oeuvres.

Finding an alternative to Russia, however, is difficult and calls for wise and shrewd leadership and beckons back to the Turkmen attempt in the nineteenth century to play the major competing powers off one another in order to find some measure of breathing space for Turkmenistan. It also calls for recognition of the direction of globalization - a worldwide movement and preference for limited government, the rule of law, separation of religion and politics, and private and free enterprise - a phenomenon illustrated in the history of three of the major alternatives to contemporary Russia, namely China, Turkey, and the United States. Finally, it calls for internal reform on a massive scale, particularly investment in education and transportation and communication infrastructure, border control, a bureaucracy based upon merit, banking and contract transparency, and an end to a massive corruption.



Figure 1.³

³ The Map of the Russian Empire. Found at www.google.com/search?q=free+maps+of+russian+empire+in+central+asia&safe=active&biw=1138&bih=529&tbn=isch&imgil=QZTU- (Accessed October 20, 2014).



Figure 2.⁴

⁴ The Map of the Soviet Union Administrative Divisions. Found at <http://www.russiainmap.org/images/full/historical-polit-89.jpg> (Accessed October 8, 2014).



Map No. 3783 Rev. 7 UNITED NATIONS
December 2011

Department of Field Support
Cartographic Section

Figure 3.⁵

⁵ The Map of Central Asian Republics. Found at <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/centrasia.pdf> (Accessed October 20, 2014).

CHAPTER 2

EARLY HISTORY: THE TURKMEN PEOPLE EMERGE

Sometime in the eighth century, C.E., nomadic, Turkic-speaking tribes called the “Oghuz” migrated from Mongolia to Central Asia and provided the ethno-national foundation of a people who would become the Turkmen and eventually the nation of Turkmenistan. At first, the Turkmen were indistinguishable from the many other Oghuz tribes. The Oghuz tribes settled throughout Central Asia and in parts of Persia or, as it preferred to be called after 1935, Iran. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the name “Turkmen” was applied to those Oghuz tribes who settled in the region of present-day Turkmenistan and who converted to Sunni Islam. The origin of the name “Turkmen” is not known, but some scholars believe it to mean like a Turk or Turkish-speaking and perhaps derived from the Persian word “*Turk-manind*,” meaning “*like a Turk*.”⁶ The population of the Turkmen people in the eleventh and twelfth centuries numbered about 1, 150,000, and the region of settlement was called Turkmenistan, which means “land of the Turkmen.” The majority of Turkmen lived in an area of about 10,000 square miles in the regions between the Amu Darya River, the Karakum (Dark Sand) Desert, the eastern littoral of the Caspian Sea, Afghani Turkestan, and the northern Persian provinces of Khorasan and Astrabad. The population today numbers almost 6,000,000, and one-third of that number reside in northern Iran and about 500,000 live in northern Afghanistan. Sometimes the region east of the Caspian Sea where the Turkmen reside is

⁶ M. Annanepesov, “The Turkmen,” in Chahryar Adle and Irfan Habib, eds. *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, Vol. 5: *Development in Contrast from the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century*, (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2003, 127-140, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001302/130205e.pdf> (Accessed September 8, 2014).

called Transcaspia. The capital city of this far-flung desert region was Ashgabat in southern Turkmenistan.⁷

The Turkmens were and still are divided into tribes, sub-tribes, and clans. There were and are eleven major tribes, including the Alili, Ata, Chovdur, Yemreli, Arsary, Gokleng, Sakhar, Salyr, Saryk, Teke, and Yomut. Each of these main tribes settled in different parts of Turkmenistan and although they are still distinguishable today, there has been much mingling among the tribes, and, as a result, geographic locations within Turkmenistan no longer clearly distinguish the tribes.⁸

The two main tribes were the Teke and Yomut. The Teke tribe was the largest and strongest of the tribes. It mainly lived in the Ahal and Merv (Mary) regions, in the south and the southeastern part of the country that pushed up against Persia, Afghanistan, and the Amu Darya River.⁹ The Yomut resided on both sides of the Turkmenistan-Persian border nearer to the Caspian Sea. The economy of Turkmenistan in the medieval period was mainly pastoral and partially nomadic and largely saw Turkmens living in tent villages and raising sheep, cattle, goats, camels, and horses. There was some agriculture and sericulture (silk worm production) that was made possible by cultivating the fertile valleys of the Amu Darya and the great oasis of Merv. A major engine of growth was Turkmenistan's location as part of the Silk Road, particularly Merv, which was a major transit point for trade with the Tang dynasty in China.

⁷ Basic background information on the early history of the Turkmens comes from Mehmet Saray, *Turkmenler Imperializm Zamanında: Turkmen halkynyn we onun Russiya imperiyasyna birikdirilmeginin taryhy* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Printing House, 1989), (*The Turkmens in the Age of Imperialism: A Study of the Turkmen People and Their Incorporation into the Russian Empire*), 107.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 108.

The conversion of the Turkmen tribes to Sunni Islam opened up not only a new culture and religion to the Turkmen people, but it also soon led to cooperation with and incorporation into the Seljuk Turkish Empire that was comprised mainly of Oghuz tribes who were led by a Turkish chieftain called Seljuk. The Turkmen were an essential part of the Seljuk army and they were known to be fearless and tough soldiers who underpinned Seljuk power as it expanded into Persia, Arab lands, and the Caucasus.

In the eleventh century the Seljuk Turk Empire took over the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad, which opened the world of Islamic high culture to the Turkish tribes, including the Turkmen. The Seljuk Empire lacked the education and sophistication to absorb fully the richness of Islamic Civilization, and their control of the Abbasid Caliphate led inevitably to a decline of Islamic Civilization. However, there was no slackness in the advance of Islam as an international, military movement. What the Seljuk Turks lacked in literacy and high culture, they made up for in military prowess and religious zeal. In 1071 the Seljuk Turkish Empire delivered a devastating defeat to the Byzantine Empire at the Battle of Manzikert.¹⁰ The Turkmen played a vital part in this victory. They also became envoys of Turkic culture when some Turkmen tribes expanded into Anatolia and to the eastern side of the Caspian Sea, to the region of present-day Azerbaijan.

After the Battle of Manzikert, Seljuk power bypassed a siege of Constantinople and pushed across the Middle East to conquer Egypt and replace the Shiite regime with a Sunni dynasty. But then the Seljuk Turkish Empire declined when its rulers argued about

¹⁰ For background on this crucial battle, see Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 3; and Steven Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 124.

strategy and booty and engaged in internal fighting. The Teke tribe used this opportunity of Seljuk weakness to push for Turkmen autonomy and for their control of Turkmenistan in general. Their large size gave them an advantage vis-à-vis other Turkmen tribes, and the Teke did achieve a measure of autonomy, but conditions in Central Asia were too uncertain for a relatively small population like the Turkmens to achieve unchallenged independence.

In the thirteenth century, with the Turks in disarray and the Turkmens attempting to fashion some type of independent status, there suddenly appeared on the steppe of Central Asia a devastating and ruthless conqueror, the Mongols of Genghis Khan. With unsurpassed horsemanship and brilliant and brutal military tactics, the Mongols conquered Central Asia and the northern part of the Turkmen territory, which pressured some of the Turkmen tribes to disperse and flee southward where some reconfigured into new tribes. The Mongols also conquered Kievan Rus, the East Slavic kingdom on the Eurasian Plain, and made it a Mongol satellite called the Golden Horde that was headquartered at Saray, near where the Volga River empties into the Caspian Sea. The Mongols were interested in mainly taxes and manpower and their empire stretched from China to the Golden Horde. In 1243 the Mongols smashed the Seljuk Turkish forces in Anatolia at the Battle of Kosedag and then ravaged Islamic Civilization, including Baghdad, before retreating into the steppes of Central Asia, but remaining as a constant threat to the entire region.

In the fourteenth century, the Mongols declined, and the Turkish tribes in Anatolia regrouped under a different tribal branch led by Osman (r. 1299-1326) and were

henceforth known as the Ottoman Turks.¹¹ The Ottoman Turks could not penetrate the still lingering Mongol khanates in Central Asia, so they could do little to or for the Turkmens, but they immediately rekindled the Seljuk Turkish conflict with the Byzantine Empire and successfully managed to conquer the Balkans, including the defeat of the kingdom of Serbia at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. They then set about preparing to lay siege to the capital of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople.

However, they were interrupted in their plans when a new military movement emerged among the Mongol-Turkish tribes in Central Asia under Tamerlane or Timor (r. 1370-1405). He was a powerful and ruthless general, and the Turkmens quickly agreed to pay taxes to him and to accept his overlordship. Timor led his army southward and met the Ottoman Turks at the Battle of Ankara in 1402. The Ottoman Turks, who were then fastening a rope around Constantinople, were decisively defeated. But then Timor died in 1405 and his military empire imploded. It was not strong and congealed enough to survive his death.

With Tamerlane's military order collapsing, the Ottoman Turks quickly recovered and again laid siege to Constantinople. In the Turkmen lands and in Central Asia a remnant of the Tamerlane dynasty was able to hold onto power, but its grip was feeble. At the end of the fifteenth century the last Tamerlane-related leader was overthrown by an Uzbek chieftain, Mohammed Sheybani, who soon established an Uzbek sphere of influence in Central Asia. The Uzbeks established two khanates called Khiva and Bukhara to control the south Central Asian region and these khanates succeeded in

¹¹ For a solid history of the Ottoman Empire, see Karen Barkey, *Empires of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); also see Jason Goodwin, *Lords of the Horizon: A History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1999).

maintaining a measure of intermittent control over the Turkmen tribes. However, firm rule was difficult because of distances, the desert environment, and the nomadic ways and unruliness of the Turkmen.

At about the same time that the khanates of Khiva and Bukhara emerged, the Mongol Empire splintered into various khanates. Its weakness gave opportunity for independent action not only among the Central Asians, but also among the Russians who lived on the Eurasian Plain and were ruled by the Mongols in the so-called Golden Horde. As Mongol power decayed, the Russians built a new state called Muscovy, with its capital at Vladimir and then Moscow. The Russians were determined to fill the void created by Mongol weakness. The type of government that Muscovy evolved was not much different than that of the Mongols, a type of despotism backed by a powerful army, a loyal boyar class, and a large and subservient peasant or serf population. An indication of the Russians preference for autocracy or absolutism was revealed in correspondence between Tsar Ivan IV, also popularly called Ivan the Terrible, and his close advisor, Andrei Kurbskii, who decided to leave Ivan's service and give his loyalty to the Lithuanians with whom Ivan was warring in 1560s. In a letter to Kurbskii, Ivan complained that, "their [Western] rulers do not rule, they follow the directions of their subjects. Russian rulers, by contrast, do not follow the whim of their nobles and aristocrats, they are sovereign."¹²

The Russians represented a potential new threat to the tribes and khanates of Central Asia, but in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, that challenge

¹² For the key parts of the correspondence related to Muscovy's preference for absolutism and Ivan's disappointment with Kurbskii's defection, see *Perepiska Ivana Groznogo s Andreyem Kurskim*, (Leningrad: Nauka, 1979), 123-26.

remained remote. To be sure, the Russians in the sixteenth century defeated and annexed two of the remnants of the Golden Horde, namely the Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, and reached where the Volga River empties into the Caspian Sea, but they then focused on conquering of the sparsely populated region of Siberia and remaining north of Central Asia. They also kept away from the Caucasus, the Crimea, and the Black Sea region because they were not strong enough to challenge the Ottoman Turks who had conquered Constantinople in 1453. The Russians advanced into the Balkans and Eastern Europe, taking a huge part of Hungary from the Holy Roman Empire after the Battle of Mohacs in 1526, and controlled the Crimean Tartars and other tribes in the Caucasus.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century the government of the Khiva khanate briefly divided the Turkmen from the Uzbeks and allowed the Turkmen a measure of autonomy over their own territory.¹³ The Uzbek-Turkmen relationship was tense and bitter and included a string of rebellions and uprisings among the Turkmen who hoped to be free of Uzbek control.

The Turkmen achieved that goal, but unfortunately for the Turkmen, Uzbek control was replaced by Persian control. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, a Persian Shah called Nedir conquered the Teke, Alili, and Yomut tribes and then in quick succession took control of all of the other Turkmen tribes and their lands.¹⁴ In 1747, when Nedir Shah died, the Turkmen rebelled against the Persian government. The Persians brutally repressed the rebellion and thousands of Turkmen rebels died in the ensuing conflict. The evidence was strong that Turkmen wanted to be free to rule themselves. They had risen in rebellion against both Uzbeks and Persians and suffered

¹³ Saray, *Turkmenler Imperializm*, 112.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

great losses to establish their right to self-rule. However, their leaders were increasingly aware of the fact that they were surrounded by enemies who were determined to prevent Turkmen independence, particularly the Persians and Uzbeks. The latter had set up a third khanate called Kokand in 1709 that, when added to the khanates of Bukhara and Khiva, increased Uzbek leverage against the Turkmen. Faced with these threats, the Turkmen leaders concluded that they needed help to thwart their foes and chart a course to independence.

CHAPTER 3

THE RUSSIAN EMBRACE: THE TSARIST PERIOD

By the time the Turkmen leaders began to search for allies to check and balance their enemies, the Russians were powerful. They had transformed Muscovy into the Russian Empire and had expanded across Siberia to Alaska, pushed into Ukraine and Belarus, moved their capital to St. Petersburg on the Gulf of Finland, and had become a major power in Europe and Asia. Their armies and navies had inflicted defeats on Swedes, Poles, Turks, and Crimean Tartars. Under Peter the Great (r. 1689-1725) the Russians had also made war on and defeated Persia in 1722-23 and taken from Persia the entire western and southern shores of the Caspian Sea, including the towns of Baku and Derbent. The Russians returned that territory to Persia in the 1730s in order to obtain Persian assistance in a war against Turkey. The Russians also were lodged in the Kazakh region of Central Asia after the Kazakhs of the Lesser Horde tentatively accepted Russian rule, thereby extending Russian influence virtually to the Aral Sea into which the Amu Darya emptied. Some nine years later the Kazakhs of the Middle Horde also agreed to nominal Russian rule. The Russians consolidated their growing power in Central Asia by establishing forts and commercial centers on various rivers, including Orsk (1735) and Orenburg (1743) on the Yaik River (renamed the Ural River in 1775) and Petropavlovsk (1752) on the Ishim River.

Turkmen leaders decided that Russia could be a valuable and powerful ally in the drive for Turkmen independence, but asking for Russian help was a gamble because there was a possibility that the Russians could be as bad as or worse than the Persians or Uzbeks. In the end, the Turkmen concluded that the risk was worth the possibility of a potent ally who could check Turkmen foes, particularly the Persians. The Russians

responded positively to the Turkmen plea of help, but their assistance turned out to be marginal, limited, and keyed to their own self-interest. The Russians decided that the Turkmen plight was an opportunity to gain a foothold in and possibly control of a lucrative part of the Silk Road trade and to expand Russian influence in Central Asia, the western part of Turkmen territory, the Caspian Sea, Persia, and possibly Afghanistan, which bordered on the British crown colony of India. In 1763 the Russians started to build a commercial fortress, which also served as a military fort, on Turkmen land. The Turkmen objected, and the Russians agreed to halt construction. The Russians then became distracted with other priorities, including war with the Ottoman Empire, the Partitions of Poland, and the French Revolution. The Turkmen-Russian alliance slipped into abeyance. For the next few decades, the relationship remained tentative and undefined.¹⁵

Meanwhile, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the Turkmen strengthened their political organization and were better able to protect their land. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, with the Russians distracted by the Napoleonic Wars, growing animosity between the Turkmen and the Persians again brought disaster for the Turkmen people. The Qajar dynasty came to power in Persia and immediately decided to try to bring the Turkmen people under its sway.¹⁶ With brutal force, the Persians invaded and reestablished control over the Turkmen. Turkmenistan again turned to St. Petersburg for help and hoped that the protean alliance could burgeon into a military intervention that would lead to a restoration of Turkmen independence.

¹⁵ Saray, *Turkmenler Imperializm*, 115.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The Russians were then preoccupied in Europe and unable to assist the Turkmen and halt the Persians, but they did not forget their interest on the eastern side of the Caspian Sea. When a lull occurred in the Napoleonic Wars as a result of the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807, the Russian government again turned its attention to Persia with consequences for Turkmen. In the 1810 war, started between Russia and Persia, Russia was victorious and imposed the Treaty of Gulistan [Golistan] on Persia in 1813. This agreement had multiple parts, but the key article that affected the Turkmen deprived Persia of any rights to sail ships-of-war on the Caspian Sea.¹⁷ This fortuitous stipulation enabled the Turkmen people, under the watchful eye of the Russian navy, to assume control of the eastern and the southern part of the Caspian Sea. As a result, the Turkmen began to prosper, expand their trade, and grow in power. They established a robust trade with the Russian Empire and other Central Asian regions. Needless to say, the British were disturbed by the growing influence of Russia in both Persia and Central Asia.¹⁸

The combination of being prohibited from using the eastern and southern part of the Caspian Sea and of observing Turkmen wealth and power grow eventually disconcerted the Persian government. In 1839 it asked Russia to lift the ban on its ships, particularly naval vessels, to navigate on the Caspian Sea. It clearly planned to check the Turkmen's burgeoning power. Tsar Nicholas I granted the Persian request, but also decided to use the plea as an excuse to send a large Russian navy squadron into the Caspian Sea on the grounds that such a fleet was necessary in order to facilitate peace and

¹⁷ Muriel Atkins, *Russia and Iran, 1780-1828* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 143; J. C. Hurewitz, ed. *European Expansion, 1535-1914*, Vol. 1 of *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record*, 2nd rev. ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 197-199.

¹⁸ David Urquhart, *Diplomatic Transactions in Central Asia, from 1834 to 1839* (London: Thomas Brettell, 1923), 200.

order between the Turkmen and the Persians. The Russians basically moved in to take advantage of both the Turkmen and the Persians. In 1840 with the purpose of bringing more profit for themselves, the Russians started to build a wharf on a Persian island in the southeastern part of the Caspian Sea. This encroachment on Persian sovereignty prompted the Persian government to form a united front with the Turkmen in 1843 to try to contain Russian influence in the region, but Russian power was already too strong and the Persian-Turkmen effort to frustrate Russian expansion was ineffective and futile.¹⁹

The Turkmen now decided to try to work with the Russians, mainly on trade relations, but the Russians wanted political and economic control. Increasingly, Turkmenistan slipped into the sphere of influence of the Russian Empire. The Russians did not have full and literal control, but they had the advantage in an unequal political, economic, and military relationship. There were several dustups and disagreements between Turkmen and St. Petersburg in the mid-nineteenth century, mainly relating to Russia's unwillingness to make a full payment for goods that it bought from Turkmen businessmen, and Turkmenistan's decision to retaliate by holding Russia's commercial vessels and their crew members in Turkmen ports until the Russians made full payment. Exasperated by the Turkmen activities, the Russians dispatched a naval squadron to the eastern Caspian Sea, which bombarded Turkmen settlements on the coastline. As a result, the trade relationship between Russia and Turkmenistan was suspended in 1860.²⁰

In 1860, when the Turkmen cut their relationship with Russia, they were, in theory, independent in the sense that no outside power ruled over Turkmenistan, but it was a very precarious independence. Persia was weak, but Russia was strong and

¹⁹ Saray, *Turkmenler Imperializm*, 111.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

seemingly everywhere. From approximately 1840 and into the 1850s, Russian power expanded across south Central Asia. Russia strengthened its control of the Lesser and Middle Kazakh Hordes in the nineteenth century and then took control over the Elder Kazakh Horde in 1847, which brought Russian power to the doorstep of the weak khanates of Kokand, Bukhara, and Khiva. In a brutal campaign of military conquest that lasted for three decades, Russian forces conquered and then annexed these three khanates. The military campaigns were long because much of the area was desert without infrastructure, towns, and permanent settlements. Nonetheless, the Russian expansion went forward. Tashkent was taken in 1865, Samarkand in 1868, and the capital city of Khiva in 1873. All of these regions were then put into a new administrative division called the governor-generalship of Turkestan, which was set up in 1867 and headquartered at Tashkent. In effect, the Russians had outflanked the Turkmen tribes. In 1869 Russian troops established or re-established (initially founded in 1713 but then abandoned) the naval and commercial port on the eastern Caspian Sea shore called Krasnovodsk. The Russians used this base to patrol the Caspian Sea and to support the new province of Turkestan. Russian armies were now lodged to the north and east of Turkmenistan. They also controlled the right bank of the Amu Darya River. In 1869 the Russians and Persians agreed upon the lower Atrek River as their mutual border, and Russian troops then occupied the virtually uninhabited shore of the southeastern Caspian Sea as far south as the Atrek River. This agreement established Russian power on all sides of Turkmen land and transformed Turkmenistan into an isolated island in a Russian sea, in effect a part of the Russian Empire.

In order to try to corral and block the encroaching Russians, the Turkmen reached out to Khiva, Herat, and Kabul. The reason for trying to build a good relationship with these towns was to find friends who could balance the Russians. Khiva proved to be unavailable because Russian power was already advancing there. But Herat and Kabul were different. They were the principal cities of Afghanistan and significant trade centers. Above all, the Turkmen knew that the British were in Afghanistan and attempting to control it in order to restrain the Russians from expanding toward India and to hold it as a buffer against both Russia and Persia. The goal of the Turkmen's Herat-Kabul overture was to build a good relationship with Great Britain in order to counter the Russians.²¹ The Turkmen were attempting to use the Great Game, the ongoing rivalry between the British and Russian Empires for power and influence across Asia, from the Ottoman Empire to Persia to Afghanistan to India to China, to find a formula that would achieve their goal of independence.²² It was a classic case of a minor power attempting to line up with one of the world's major powers in order to check an immediate threat from another major power.

However, the Turkmen were not united. Some of the major tribes soon fell out and splintered. In particular, the Yomut and Teke tribes argued over leadership and policy. The Yomut tribes, who primarily lived in western Turkmenistan, refused to accept the leadership of the Teke tribes, who were attempting to contain the Russians and cultivate the British. The Yomut tribal leaders wanted to work with the Russians. The

²¹ Saray, *Turkmenler Imperializm*, 127.

²² For background, see Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kosdansha International, [1990] 1992). For the rivalry in Europe, see Evgeny Sergeev, *The Great Game, 1856-1907: Russo-British Relations in Central and East Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

explanation for this position is complex. The Yomuts had a successful trade relationship with the Russians due to their geographical location on the Caspian Sea. They supported Russia's occupation of the eastern part of the Caspian as a way of increasing their trade with the Russians. In addition, the Russians bribed some of the Yomut tribe leaders who then opposed any policy that was contrary to Russian interests. Finally, the Yomuts and other Turkmens believed Russian propaganda that claimed that Russia's only goal in Turkmenistan was to expand its trade relationship with Turkmens and to enhance Turkmen trade with all the regions of Central Asia. A Yomut elder, who was interviewed in 1880 during his pilgrimage to Mecca by Turkish officials and the British ambassador in Constantinople, Austen Henry Layard, declared that, "Ten years ago the Russians deployed their forces in Krasnovodsk city [present day Turkmenbashi]. They told local people that they were route checkers and their goal was to build a route towards Herat and Afghanistan in order to improve their trade. They promised to pay local people very well for their services and goods if they assisted them. Also, they said that they fully support all countries that they pass through to become an independent country and they had no intention to get involved in their internal affairs."²³ In short, the Yomuts were duped and once the Russian army was in place, it was too late to resist Russian forces and establish a basis for Turkmen independence.²⁴

At any rate, as a result of the Yomut-Teke dispute, the Turkmens found themselves divided and weakened. Before long, because of their refusal to cooperate with the Teke, the Yomuts found themselves falling under the control of the Persians,

²³ Saray, *Turkmenler Imperializm*, 138.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

who exploited the tribal schism to advance their power and control among the Turkmen generally. In 1864 the Persians forced the Yomut tribes to become citizens of Persia. They also mistreated and humiliated them, particularly in the region of Astrabad. This mistreatment led to a major rebellion of the Yomut tribes against the Persians in 1867, which the Persians had a difficult time repressing. In September 1869, the Persian forces organized a surprise attack on the Yomut tribes and occupied Garrygala in the southwestern part of Turkmenistan along the Persian-Turkmen border. Knowing that they would not be able to hold the city in the face of Turkmen opposition, the Persians forced the entire population to evacuate to Persia where they were held as hostages. This outrage led the Teke and Yomut tribes to unite and organize a joint force to free the captives. In November 1869, the allied Turkmen force invaded Persia and assaulted the two Persian cities where the Turkmen hostages were held, liberated them, and returned them to their homes in Garrygala. The Russians now stepped in. On the grounds of halting the conflict between the Persians and Turkmen, St. Petersburg deployed a massive fleet into the eastern Caspian Sea. It also sent a powerful army into the western part of Turkmenistan in 1878, which stayed there as an occupation force on the grounds that it was necessary to separate Turkmen and Persians.²⁵

After ten years of occupying and controlling the western Turkmen, the Russians moved against the Teke Turkmen in the southern part of the country. In June 1879 a Russian Commander Ivan Davidovich Lazarev sent a small force of 2,260-armed troops with four canons to the Ahal region under the commandship of Vasily Andreyevich

²⁵ Ibid., 132

Dolgorukov.²⁶ This military expedition engaged the Teke tribes, but failed to defeat them. Even though thousands of Turkmens, their wives, and children were killed in this battle, the Turkmens were able to force the Russian forces to retreat to Krasnovodsk.

The Russians launched a second military assault on the Ahal region in December 1881 under the commandship of General Mikhail Dmitriyevich Skobelev. This time the Russian forces consisted of 35 infantry companies, 7 cavalry squadrons, 700 Kazakh cavalries, 67 canons, 2 heavy rocket canons, and 4 machineguns—a total of 5,770 troops.²⁷ On January 24, 1881, Skobelev took the major town of Geok-Tepe. In the siege of Geok-Tepe and other battles in nearby towns and villages, the Turkmens lost approximately 14,500 people.²⁸ In 1884 the Russians conquered Merv and, finally, in 1885 they took over the Turkmen-Afghan border region around Kushka. All of Turkmenistan now succumbed and became an unwilling part of the Russian Empire. Between 1881 and 1885 Russian troops poured into Turkmenistan and ruled with harsh hand. A railroad was built connecting the Caspian Sea port of Krasnovodsk to Samarkand. It brought Russian settlers and Russian Orthodox priests into Turkistan. It also brought cotton out of Central Asia. Under Tsar Alexander III (r. 1881-94) and Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the Over-Procurator of the Holy Synod, the Russians pushed a general policy of Russification, fostering the use of the Russian language and conversion to Russian Orthodoxy, throughout Turkmenistan and the rest of the Russian

²⁶ Ibid., 155

²⁷ Ibid., 115

²⁸ Ibid.

Empire.²⁹ The Russian Minister of Finance called Turkistan, obviously borrowing verbiage from Great Britain's imperial dictionary, "the jewel in the crown of the Russian tsar." Attempting to make the best out of a bad situation and unmistakably reflecting the geopolitical reality of Russia's imperial ambition in building the railroad, the municipal Turkistan government declared that the Russians were "bringing the benefits of European Civilization that will illuminate the Central Asian Muslim world" and will hasten "the unification of two peoples in one general Russian [russkuiu] family."³⁰ Eventually other railroad spurs were built to connect Tashkent, Alma-Ata (Almaty), and other cities in Russian Turkistan. In 1906 the Russians added a railroad link from Orenburg in the Urals and part of the great Trans-Siberian system to Tashkent, which then connected Central Asia with a railroad system that stretched from Vladivostok to Moscow to St. Petersburg to Europe. Interestingly, the railroad system in Central Asia became the main transportation method for Muslims in Central Asia to go on pilgrimage to Mecca.³¹

From 1881 to 1916 there were small skirmishes between the Russian forces and various Turkmens, particularly Turkmens in the northeastern part of Turkmenistan. The Russian Empire's involvement in World War One was not popular in Turkmenistan or Central Asia, particularly when it became clear that Tsar Nicholas II was an incompetent military leader and that Tsarist troops were not properly armed and trained and were losing battles to the Germans. In 1916 a significant Turkmen revolt exploded against Russian rule and over forced military conscription. In the town of Tejen many Russian

²⁹ For general background, see A. Iu. Polunov, *Pod vlast'iu oberprokurorai: gosudarstvo i tserkov' v epokhu Aleksandra III* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 1996); and Robert F. Byrnes, *Pobedonostsev: His Life and Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).

³⁰ Daniel Brower, *Turkistan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 81-82.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

settlers and officials were murdered. The Russian army repressed the revolt, but it was a premonition of both declining Tsarist power and of the persistent Turkmen's desire to control their own affairs and rule their own country.³²

The ultimate winner in the tribal strife between the Tekes and Yomuts was neither the Persians nor the Turkmen, but the Russians. They used conflict and disunity to divide and conquer the Turkmen and cut short Turkmenistan's drive for independence, but in the waning days of World War I the tribes were again united and determined to find the road to independence.³³

³² Edward Allworth, "*Turkmenistan*," November 25, 2013 update, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/610152/Turkmenistan/214562/History> (Accessed September 20, 2014). Although an encyclopedia entry, it was written by a respected scholar of Central Asia.

³³ Saray, *Turkmenler Imperializm*, 128

CHAPTER 4

THE SOVIET PERIOD

The Russian Government of Nicholas II fell in February/March 1917 as a result of the strain of World War I and the government's incompetence.³⁴ It was followed by a temporary government called the Provisional Government that was drawn from the Duma. It proved to be ineffective and incompetent, too. It should have withdrawn Russia from World War I, set up procedures to hold an election for a representative government, and dealt with the land question. It failed to do any of these things in a timely fashion and, as a result, it quickly lost popular support and, most importantly, the backing of the soldiers and sailors.

On November 7, 1917, the Provisional government was toppled by the Bolsheviks, who set up the Soviet of People's Commissars regime or Soviet Russia led by Lenin.³⁵ The Bolsheviks were installed by the soldiers and sailors who wanted to get Russia out of World War I. The rank and file military had little use for the ideology of the Bolsheviks, who changed their name to the Communist Party in early 1918, but they were the only party on the political landscape that wanted to withdraw Russia from the war.

³⁴ The reason for the dual dates is that the Soviets adopted the Gregorian calendar shortly after taking power and it was thirteen days ahead of the Julian calendar, thus, the abdication of Nicholas II is in February on the old calendar and in March on the new calendar, and the Bolshevik Revolution is on October 25 on the old calendar and on November 7, 1917, in the new. The bifurcation continues today because the Russian Orthodox Church continues to use the Julian calendar to celebrate religious holydays, including Christmas and Easter.

³⁵ For the decree establishing the Soviet government, see Vladimir Lenin, "Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, Proclamation to the Workers, Soldiers and Peasants," November 7, 1917 (October 25). Available at: <http://soviethistory.maclester.edu/index.php?page=article&ArticleID=1917cpsul&SubjectID=1917party&Year=1917> (Accessed October 19, 2014).

Shortly after taking power, the Communist government of Lenin signed a ceasefire with the Germans and then negotiated a peace treaty. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed in March 1918, ending Russia's involvement in World War I. No sooner was the treaty signed, then civil war broke out in Russia. The Communists, called the Reds, were opposed mainly by the monarchists and supporters of the old regime, who hoped to bring the tsarist system back and to again involve Russia in World War I, and they were called the Whites. Needless to say, the Whites had virtually no support among the peasants, workers, various socialist parties, and many minority nationality groups, including the Turkmens, who opposed any return of the tsars. On the other hand, the Communists had little support, too, because virtually no one liked their idea of ending private property and abolishing religion. Given the choices, either Reds or Whites, most elements in Russian society sat the civil war out and hoped for a better day and a better regime.

Meanwhile, with the Russia Civil War raging, World War I came to end when the Central Powers surrendered in November 1918. The Communists were happy about this turn of events because they now tore up the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which, among other things, had given independence to Ukraine. No one really expected the Communists to last in power for long, but they did. The explanation for their success was tied to Lenin's shrewd and competent leadership, the inane policies of his opponents who either advocated massively unpopular policies or simply adopted policies of procrastination and passivity, and Lenin's action on forging the key institutions of coercion that backed up his government. Lenin quickly moved to strength his regime by creating, with the help of Leon Trotsky, the Red Army and by growing a huge secret police apparatus called at first

the Cheka (Emergency Commission) under Felix Dzerzhinsky and then in 1922 the GPU (State Political Directorate) of the NKVD (*Narodnii Kommissariat Vnutrennykh Del* or People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs). After World War II, the NKVD was renamed the KGB (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti* or Committee of State Security).

Lenin's government eventually defeated the Whites in 1921 and then set about imposing its policies of nationalization of private property, atheism, and the repression of national and civil rights. He was prevented from an outright government takeover of land by a massive peasant rebellion in 1921 called the Green Movement, which was backed by sailors from the Kronstadt naval base. This broad-based opposition to land nationalization or collectivization forced Lenin to adopt the policy of the so-called New Economic Policy or NEP, which allowed the peasantry to control, not own, the land and allowed small businesses to exist. This massive concession to the peasantry ended the opposition and saved Lenin's regime. However, it split the Communists, who were philosophically opposed to private property whether the peasants had literal ownership or not. For Lenin, though, it was an expedient move. He acted to stay in power. He was dead by 1924 and his successors, principally Stalin, also looked upon NEP as a transitory policy that would be replaced by collectivization as soon as the Communist government had built up its power and was ready to transform Soviet Russia into a truly Communist state. By the end of 1928 Stalin was ready to push forward. He repealed the NEP and launched the policy of collectivization. His plan was to take ownership of the farms and their produce, convert the farmers into wage-earning employees of the state, and then sell the produce and use the profits to obtain the capital to begin a massive and intense

industrialization of the economy. He did exactly that in a series of so-called Five-Year Plans that henceforth became characteristic of the Soviet Union's centrally planned economy. The Soviet government faced massive opposition from the peasants, but it had control of the army and police and rode roughshod over the people, killing millions of peasants and others in the process either through terror or famine. Many of the Communist elite opposed Stalin's brutality and violence, and he dealt with them in a series of purges that dominated the late 1930s.³⁶

Although the Communists were forced to back off of their economic plan by 1921 and did not implement it until the end of the 1920s, they had no such hesitation about their policy on minority nationalities and religion. Religion was attacked immediately in 1917-18, and the Soviet government made few concessions to religious sensibilities. Similarly they pilloried minority nationalism, although they tried to dupe the people by arguing that they favored nationalism when the tsar was in power, but now that they were in power and represented a new stage of development, they had to repress nationalism because it was a figment of the old bourgeois, imperialist era. Stalin summed it by writing, "the October Revolution, having put an end to the old, bourgeois movement for national emancipation, inaugurated the era of a new, socialist movement of the workers and peasants of the oppressed nationalities, directed against all oppression -- including,

³⁶ See John Arch Getty, J. Arch Getty, Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); and Hiroaki Kuromiya, *The Voices of the Dead: Stalin's Great Terror in the 1930s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); and Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

therefore, national oppression -- against the power of the bourgeoisie, 'their own' and foreign, and against imperialism in general."³⁷

During the turmoil of the collapse of the Tsarist government and the ensuing Civil War, many parts of the former Russian Empire declared their independence or made moves toward independence. With the Communist victory, all of these drives or independence movements were challenged and repressed. The Red Army moved into Ukraine, then the Caucasus, and, finally, Central Asia. In every instance, it repressed indigenous independence movements and imposed the rule of the Communist party. In 1922 the former Russian Empire was reconstituted as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In a token nod to minority nationalism, the Soviet government in Moscow set up national republics in the Soviet Union, including republics in Central Asia. However, the republics were really only camouflage for the Communist dictatorship in Moscow. Communist cadres or *nomenclatura* (the bureaucratic elite) controlled the essential positions of power in these republics and maintained a minority national as the puppet leader to make it appear as if it were representative of the dominated nationality. In fact, Moscow controlled all aspects of life in these national republics and they used force, both the Red Army and the secret police (the Cheka, then the NKVD, and eventually the KGB), to enforce its will.

In the case of Turkistan or Central Asia generally, there was a spirited independence movement called the Basmachi Revolt, which had its roots in

³⁷ J. V. Stalin, "The October Revolution and the National Question," in *Works*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 167 (found at <http://marx2mao.phpwebhosting.com/Stalin/ORNQ18.html> at <http://soviethistory.macalester.edu/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=1917empire&Year=1917>).

independence aspirations dating back to the annexation of Central Asia into the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century. The Basmachi included nationalist fighters and rebels from all regions of Central Asia, including the Turkmens.³⁸ The Soviet regime called the rebels “bandits.”³⁹ The Red Army and NKVD battled the Basmachi and largely had control of the cities and railroads by 1924, but they did not have power over most of the countryside until 1928 and still faced challenges from two large underground resistance movements until 1934.⁴⁰

Nonetheless, despite the ongoing opposition to Soviet control and to assimilation into the Soviet Union, the process of the Soviet Union’s determination to absorb and establish full power over Central Asia went forward. The Soviets established the political, administrative, economic, security, and cultural framework to push their ideology, control, and world outlook, and it is within that reality that Turkmenistan is studied and analyzed below.

The Soviet Union was an ideological state dedicated to ending private property, extinguishing religion, and building a socialist order. What the Communists did in Turkmenistan was not much different from what they did elsewhere in the Soviet Union, and rather than simply repeat or summarize that story, which is well known, I thought it

³⁸ For a fascinating, first-hand account of the Basmachi movement, see E. B. Paksoy, “Basmachi Movement from Within: Account of Zeki Velidi Togan, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (June 1995): 373-399, at “1921: The Muslim East: Central Asia and the Muslim East,”

<http://soviethistory.macalester.edu/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=1921muslim&Year=1921&navi=byYear>.

³⁹ *Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule B, Vol. 8, Case 221 (interviewer J.R.). Widener Library, Harvard University*, at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:964924?n=14>, page 4 (seq. 4) (Accessed October 18, 2014).

⁴⁰ *Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule B, Vol. 8, Case 221 (interviewer J.R.). Widener Library, Harvard University*, at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:964924?n=14>, page 19 (seq. 19), (Accessed October 18, 2014).

would be interesting and novel to use the eye witness account of a Soviet citizen from Central Asia who was a captain in the Red Army to describe Soviet objectives and strategies in Turkmenistan, as well as Central Asia, in terms of five critical aspects of Soviet rule: Soviet nationalities policy, Soviet religious/cultural policy, Soviet economic policy, Soviet political policy, and Soviet geopolitical policy. This eyewitness account related to these major aspects of Soviet rule in Central Asia and, by extension, in Turkmenistan has not been done before and therefore represents not only new knowledge but also fascinating new detail and perspective on the micro-level of Soviet quotidian policy in Central Asia. I also use other sources to supplement or enlarge his testimony when it is cryptic.

4.1. Soviet Nationalities Policy

Soviet nationalities policy in Turkmenistan was complex and paradoxical. On the one hand, it aimed to first erode tribal tradition and replace it with a sense of nationalism, which would be a mechanism or vehicle to begin the modernization of the Turkmen people. On the other hand, it sought then to use nationalism to break any sense of unity among the Turkish-speaking peoples of Central Asia and then to transition from local nationalism to Soviet patriotism. The latter policy was geared to give the appearance of respecting the national feelings of the Turkmen while simultaneously working to repress and extinguish such nationalism. And Russians or Slavs were always in control of the levers of power in the CARs.⁴¹

Details of the general policy were provided by the Red Army captain from Central Asia. He reported that the Soviets prohibited the teaching of any Turkmenistan

⁴¹ Edward A. Allworth, ed., *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Domination, A Historical Overview*, 3rd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 527, 571-72.

history in schools and of the playing of Turkmenistan music. The only history that was permitted and fostered was Soviet history and the history of Communism. Only one Turkmen-related name appeared in that history and that was Tamerlane, who was given a passing mention. The only films and music available came from European Russia, including operas and ballet, which were foreign to Turkestanis. The Soviets, while trying to generate nationalism for purposes of modernization, hoped simultaneously to replace nationalist sentiment with some sort of pro-Soviet sentiment or loyalty, but this contradictory policy was very difficult to square. A major part of the problem, according to the witness, was that the Turkmens and other Central Asians did not trust the Communists and could easily penetrate behind the Soviet face to see strong evidence of Russian nationalism. He said that the only Turkestanis who cooperated with the Communists were some members of the so-called intelligentsia. The overwhelming majority of Central Asians looked upon such people as “traitors” and upon the Russians as their “enemies.” He claimed that the Central Asians made no distinctions among the Russians—“all are just Ivans.”⁴²

Our witness further said that the Russians had a formidable task in reaching the Central Asians because most of them did not speak their language. The Russians used mainly Russian and insisted that Russian be the language of education and government. In short, he concluded that the Communists helped build a sense of nationalism but failed in developing a sense of loyalty to the Russian-dominated Soviet Union.⁴³ In his opinion, the creation of five different republics in Central Asia, which was set up in 1922-24 and

⁴² *Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule B, Vol. 8, Case 221 (interviewer J.R.). Widener Library, Harvard University, at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:964924?n=14>, page 1 (seq. 1), (Accessed October 20, 2014).*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, page 1,4 (seq. 1, 4), (Accessed October 20, 2014).

formalized in the Soviet constitution of 1936, was not a concession to nationalism, but an attempt to divide and conquer the Central Asians by setting up artificial barriers to concerted Central Asian opposition to Soviet rule.⁴⁴ Interestingly, his view supported a school of scholars who held that Soviet administrative and nationalities policies helped foster nationalism in Central Asia, but at the same time corroborated a new group of scholars who hold that, although there was a growth of nationalism, there was a much stronger sense of regionalism in which the CARs looked beyond nationalist agendas to regional and interregional cooperation, perhaps fostered by Soviet economic policy.⁴⁵

During and after World War II, the Soviet government continued to try simultaneously to build and undermine the growth of nationalism in Central Asia and build a Soviet citizenry in its place. The effort proved frustrating and eventually the Kremlin tried to use the Islamic concept of the community, the *umma*, as a mechanism to foster a sense of Communism, but this proved unproductive since the *umma* was fundamentally a religious construct that conflicted with Soviet atheism.

⁴⁴ Ibid., page 39 (seq. 39), (Accessed October 21, 2014).

⁴⁵ On Soviet nationalities policy as producing nationalism, see Mark R. Beissinger, “Elites and Ethnic Identities in Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics,” in Alexander Motyl, ed., *The Post-Soviet Nations: Perspectives on the Demise of the USSR* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 141-169; Rogers Brubaker, “Nationhood and the national question in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account,” *Theory and Society* 23(1994): 47-78, at http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/brubaker/Publications/10_Nationhood_and_the_National_Question.pdf [Accessed October 30, 2014]; Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *The End of the Soviet Empire: The Triumph of Nations* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Vitaly Naumkin, *Central Asia and Transcaucasia: Ethnicity and Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Praeger, 1994); and Philip G. Roeder, *Red Sunset: The Failure of Soviet Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). On the policy generating regionalism, see Pauline Jones Luong, *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Eric McGlinchey, *Chaos, Violence, and Dynasty: Politics and Islam in Central Asia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

Nationalism continued to strengthen in the Soviet Union, which turned out to be a double-edged sword. It helped end tribalism and thus prepared the way for modernization, but it also led to centrifugal forces that tore the multinational empire apart. On June 29, 1988, Mikhail Gorbachev reported to the Central Committee of the CPSU that while nationalism had a role in Soviet society, it was now fragmenting the USSR.⁴⁶

In the end, the Soviet nationalities policy did achieve something rather important. It built a sense of nationalism that formed part of the basis of five new nation states in Central Asia, namely, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kirgizstan, and it helped erect a sense of regionalism.⁴⁷ In addition, nationalism in Central Asia grew, too, in the period between World War II and the fall of the Soviet Union, because religious leaders saw it as a way to protect their followers and positions.⁴⁸

4.2. Soviet Religious/Cultural Policy

The Soviet government was intent upon eradicating Islam in Turkmenistan and Central Asia and replacing Muslim social and moral custom with Communism. However, such a policy did not find favor with Muslims so the Soviet government largely relied upon force and dissimulation in effecting its policies. From the beginning of Soviet rule in 1917-18, the antireligious policies were put in place, but the Soviet

⁴⁶ *Pravda*, June 29, 1988, found at “1985: Gorbachev and Nationalism,” <http://soviethistory.macalester.edu/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=1985national&Year=1985> (Accessed November 3, 2014).

⁴⁷ See footnote 45 above. Also see the excellent bibliographical study of Pauline Jones Luong, “Introduction: Politics in the Periphery: Competing Views of Central Asian States and Societies,” in *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*, ed. Pauline Jones Luong (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1-29.

⁴⁸ Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union: From the Second World War to Gorbachev* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 682-712.

government denied that it was attacking Islam or any religion. The major effort against religion in the period between 1918-23 related primarily to the Russian Orthodox Church, the largest religion in Soviet Russia and a pillar of the old order. By 1923, however, the Soviet regime was menacing Muslims, and the British government, among others, was publicizing the antireligious campaign. The Soviet regime reacted by claiming that the British were lying and that it was the friend of all Muslims. On May 23, 1923, a Soviet agency called the Russian Administration for Religious Affairs of Russian Muslims typified the Soviet response. It denounced the British and proclaimed that the Soviet government gave Islam “freedom” and “has always shown its care for the needy Muslim people.”⁴⁹

Of course, Moscow was doing everything in its power to undermine Islam and the Muslim way of life. It closed mosques, prohibited Muslims from making the hajj, prohibited the wearing of the veil by women, introduced the Latin alphabet to replace the Arabic of the *Quran*, refused to recognize Sharia law, and organized a spirited effort to equate Muslim custom with backwardness and repression.⁵⁰ Of the 26,000 mosques that existed in Turkestan in 1912, only 1,200 were still operational in 1941.⁵¹ Our Red Army captain provided interesting testimony to the Soviet policy in Central Asia. He declared that the Central Asian practice of a groom and his family giving a bride’s family a

⁴⁹ *Moskovskie Izvestiia*, 12 June 1923, found in Boleslaw R. Szczesniak, ed. and tr., *Russian Revolution and Religion: A Collection of Documents Concerning the Suppression of Religion by the Communists, 1917-1925* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 171-72, and reprinted at “1921: The Muslim East: Central Asia and the Muslim East,” <http://soviethistory.macalester.edu/> (Accessed October 20, 2014).

⁵⁰ Alexandre Bennigsen, “Modernization and Conservatism in Soviet Islam,” in *Religion and Modernization in the Soviet Union*, ed. Dennis J. Dunn (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977), 245-46.

⁵¹ Bennigsen, “Soviet Islam,” 245.

payment, a sort of reverse dowry called the “bride prize,” was depicted by the Soviets as a form of slavery or a “selling” of a girl. He also reported that traditional weddings were prohibited and replaced by so-called “*krasnaia svad’ba*” or “red weddings,” which were sterile affairs lacking in grandeur and reverence and amounting to a simple registration. In addition, he noted that the Communists prohibited the traditional washing of a corpse because it was a religious practice.

The Red Army captain, however, revealed that the Communist campaign ignited a secret underground movement where traditional weddings, the “bride prize,” and the washing of bodies continued. He did note that the Soviet effort against the wearing of the veil was largely successful except among older women and that the Soviet education policy did lead to a great reduction in illiteracy.⁵² In the end, however, the Communists found it quite challenging to push their ideology and, in particular, the notion of atheism. The Turkestanis dismissed the Russians as “atheists,” according to our Red Army captain.⁵³

When the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the Soviet government modified its campaign against Islam. In exchange for a pledge of loyalty and support of the war effort, the Soviet regime pursued a policy of cold toleration. In the postwar years, even during Khrushchev’s reinvigorated campaign against religion, Moscow continued the wartime *modus vivendi*.⁵⁴ The campaign against Islam was tough going. In 1973 the first secretary of the Turkmen Communist Party complained publicly that

⁵² *Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule B, Vol. 8, Case 221* (interviewer J.R.). Widener Library, Harvard University, at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:964924?n=14>, page 27-35 (seq. 27-35), (Accessed October 20, 2014).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, page 13 (seq. 13), (Accessed October 20, 2014).

⁵⁴ Benningsen, “Soviet Islam,” 246.

Islam is a reactionary force that helped prop up outdated national traditions and worked against the advance of scientific-atheistic education in the schools.⁵⁵

After the Iranian Revolution (1979) and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Kremlin tried to develop a more accommodating policy toward Islam. To be sure, it continued to attack Islam, but the effort now and until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 centered on education and science, and not police and administrative tactics.⁵⁶

By the time the Soviet Union fell, the result of the constant battle between the Kremlin and the Islamic culture and religion of the Central Asians, including the Turkmens, was mixed. On the one hand, secularism advanced across Central Asia, Islam was increasingly treated as a private affair, educated Turkmens treated Islam as one part of their cultural legacy but were not firm or fanatical believers, and Islamic leaders were divided between reformers and conservatives. On the other hand, Islam remained a powerful force that influenced morality, culture, and nationalism, and proved to be an insurmountable barrier to the advance of Communist ideology.⁵⁷

4.3. Soviet Economic Policy

Soviet economic policy in Central Asia followed the general pattern elsewhere in the USSR. In the initial years following the Bolshevik coup, there was general chaos in the region and independence movements were strong. The Turkestanis were eventually brought to heel by the early 1920s, but then the Communists abandoned their policies of war communism and adopted the NEP. Under the NEP the economy of Central Asian

⁵⁵ Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan, *Turkmenskaia iskra*, April 3, 1973, found at “1973: Shakeup in the Republics,” <http://soviethistory.macalester.edu/index.php?page=article&ArticleID=1973turkm1&SubjectID=1973shakeup&Year=1973> (Accessed November 3, 2014).

⁵⁶ Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, 551.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 682-712.

began to stabilize in parallel fashion with the rest of the Soviet Union. The so-called “scissors crisis,” which resulted from depressed prices for grain because of the surplus created by NEP and the high prices of finished goods, which the farmers wanted to buy (high because the Soviets refused to invest in such goods and refused to allow demand to be satisfied by foreign imports), gave the Communists the excuse that they were looking for to abandon the NEP and moved toward forced collectivization.

Collectivization in Central Asia was pushed from 1929 through the 1930s. Farmland was converted into kolkhozes, which were collective farms in the villages where peasants controlled a small plot of land, and sovkhoses, which were huge agricultural centers across the country where the state owned all of the land and tools and the peasants were employees. From the point of view of the Soviet government, the ideal was the sovkhos and it strove in every Five Year plan to replace the kolkhoz with the sovkhos type of farm right down to the day when the USSR collapsed. In any event, collectivization was an inefficient form of agriculture, but it did achieve government control of the country’s agricultural wealth and of the peasantry and it gave the government the capital it needed to initiate swift and intensive industrialization. The collectivization of agriculture was not undertaken to improve food production or efficiency. It was set up to give the Soviet government control of the economy, which it did. Its purpose was to enhance central control and put the wealth of the country in the hands of the Communist party, which wanted to use it to industrialize, to strengthen the army, and to push the international revolution.

Different parts of the USSR had different roles to play in the economy. In Central Asia, with the exception of Kazakhstan, where there was some industrialization, the

emphasis was upon agricultural production, mainly cotton and wheat, which called for intensive irrigation. According to our Red Army captain, the head of the sovkhos and kolkhos in the CARs was always a Russian.⁵⁸ He stressed again and again that the Russians did not trust the Central Asians and the Central Asians viewed the Russians as enemies.⁵⁹

In the 1960s the Soviets initiated a series of policies to increase production of agriculture, particularly of cotton, in Central Asia. These policies included draining off the water of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya Rivers for irrigating the desert, a disastrous policy that led to massive environmental disasters and the virtual death of the Aral Sea, until recent times the globe's fourth largest lake. It is now about one-third of its normal size and salinity has increased over a hundred-fold. It no longer can support many species of fish and has and is damaging animals and human beings who are dependent upon it for basic water.⁶⁰

In the decades immediately before the Soviet Union fell apart, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union publicly complained about inefficiencies, alcoholism, attacks upon public property, and the huge underground economy.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule B, Vol. 8, Case 221 (interviewer J.R.). Widener Library, Harvard University, at <http://mrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:964924?n=14>, page 27-35 (seq. 27-35) (Accessed October 20, 2014).*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pages 1, 12-13 (seq. 1, 12-13) (Accessed October 20, 2014).

⁶⁰ See "The Aral Sea Crisis," at <http://www.columbia.edu/~tmt2120/introduction.htm> (Assessed October 20, 2014); and "Requiem for a dying sea," *People and the Planet* at <http://www.peopleandthepplanet.com/index.html@lid=26149&topic=27§ion=37.html> (Accessed October 15, 2014).

⁶¹ Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union *Pravda*, September 11, 1939, pp. 1, 3, found at "1980: Underground Economy,"

4.4. Soviet Political Policy

The Soviet political policy was dictatorship under the Communist regime in Moscow that was partly distinguished by the patina of a Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republican government that had a Turkmen at its head but had a Russian in real control, and both of whom answered to Moscow. The Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic was set up in May 1924. Our Red Army captain reported that the number-two position was invariably a Russian and that the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, or the NKVD, was “always a Russian.”⁶²

In the opinion of our witness the political machinery reflected the control of Moscow. It was overly bureaucratic, centralized, and out of touch with local interests and needs. The language of the government was Russian and all of the key positions were in the hands of Russians or occasionally a Ukrainian. The Russians, as a rule, did not trust the Turkestanis and thought of them as backward. In fact, according to the Red Army captain, there was not only a lack of love between the Russians and the Turkestanis, but there was also bitter animosity and hatred. He told a story that reflected the spiteful relations. During World War II, when the Nazis occupied Ukraine and captured large numbers of Red Army soldiers, they found that the prisoners were both Russians and Central Asians. The Russian POWs told the Nazis that the “Muslim boys” were Jews and offered as evidence the fact that the Muslims, like Jews, were circumcised. The Nazis executed quite a few of the Muslims before they realized that

<http://soviethistory.macalester.edu/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=1980underground&Year=1980> (Accessed November 3, 2014).

⁶² *Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule B, Vol. 8, Case 221 (interviewer J.R.). Widener Library, Harvard University, at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:964924?n=14>, pages 15, 17 (seq. 15, 17) (Accessed October 20, 2014).*

they had been duped.⁶³ Such was the animosity between Muslims and Russians and such was the despicable and abhorrent behavior of both the Nazis and the Communists.

The Soviet administrative structure was federal and had a command economy and political structure, which was controlled by national and regional cadres that answered to Moscow. Under Stalin, there was a reliance upon force and police measures to effect the Kremlin's will, but under his successors, including Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, Konstantin Chernenko, and Mikhail Gorbachev, the emphasis was upon persuasion and propaganda, with enticing promises of modernization and improvement in the standard of living. The federal structure and the integration of the Central Asian economies with one another and with the broader Soviet Union did enhance regional political power. By the time the Soviet Union fell, there was a tradition of regional cooperation that allowed governance and economic life to persist.⁶⁴ At the end of the 1980s, Gorbachev repealed the famous Brezhnev Doctrine, which was a symbol of the Soviets' willingness to use force to maintain their empire in Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

The Soviet Union unraveled quickly once the threat of force was removed as the glue keeping the Soviet Empire together. In 1991 one SSR after another declared its independence. On December 8, 1991, the Minks Agreement was signed that established the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). On December 25, 1991, Gorbachev resigned and the Soviet Union vanished.

⁶³ *Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule B, Vol. 8, Case 221 (interviewer J.R.). Widener Library, Harvard University, at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:964924?n=14>, page 2 (seq. 2) (Accessed October 20, 2014).*

⁶⁴ Luong, "Introduction," 12; Luong, *Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, chapter 3.

4.5. Soviet Geopolitical Policy

In the 1920s the major threat to Soviet Central Asia came primarily from the influence of Kemal Ataturk and the Turkish reform movement that led to a strong nationalist government in Ankara and to basic reforms, including rights for women, progressive education, limited government, and separation of politics and religion. The Communists supported Ataturk in his war against the English and French after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, but once he won and set up a Turkish Republic, he quashed the Turkish Communist Party and kept the Soviet Union at arm's length. When the Bolsheviks were consolidating their power and thinking in terms of international revolution, including working with nationalists like Ataturk, they neglected the growing influence of Turkey in Central Asia. As a result, according to our Red Army captain, progressive and nationalist schools proliferated across Central Asia and classrooms invariably featured a picture of Ataturk on the wall. After Ataturk turned against the Communists, the Soviets quickly and forcibly cracked down on the progressive schools and cut short Turkish influence among the Central Asians, including the Turkmens.⁶⁵

The Kremlin did not initially recruit Central Asians into the Red Army, but in the late 1930s, when the international scene became increasingly threatening, it introduced conscription throughout Central Asia. According to our witness, the Red Army created three Central Asian divisions of 20,000 soldiers each and they gave them some basic military training. However, they permitted them to train with only one rifle per brigade, which had to be passed around. In effect, the soldiers had no weapons training. The

⁶⁵ *Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule B, Vol. 8, Case 221 (interviewer J.R.). Widener Library, Harvard University, at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:964924?n=14>, page 1 (seq. 1) (Accessed October 21, 2014).*

reason for this, according to our reporter, was that the Soviets did not trust the Turkestanis. Once they had their very basic training, these divisions were split upon and diluted in terms of their ethnic and national components among Russian troops. In addition, only Russian troops were trusted to guard the borders between the Soviet Union and its Central Asian neighbors, including the border with Afghanistan, Iran, and China.⁶⁶

The major threat to the Soviet Union in the late 1930s and 1940s came from the Axis Powers, particularly Nazi Germany and Japan. As far as the Central Asians were concerned, the Nazi invasion and siege of Stalingrad were most pressing. Many fought against the Nazis and died and many others were captured. The Soviet government, however, deemed it could not trust these soldiers and tended to condemn the Turkestanis generally as unreliable. When the victory was achieved against the Nazis, Stalin, our witness observed, gave only credit to the Russians and Slavs.⁶⁷

After World War II, the Soviet government pursued a policy of expanding Communism globally and it did not overlook Central Asia as a location for pushing its ideology in Asia. Turkey was a member of NATO, so it was somewhat impervious to Soviet expansion, but Afghanistan and Iran were potential targets. In 1979 Iran went through a fundamentalist Islamic Revolution, which curtailed Soviet ideological expansion there, but opened up the opportunity for collaboration between Iran and the USSR because they were both opposed to the United States, NATO, and Turkey.⁶⁸ In that same year, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to prop up a wobbly Communist

⁶⁶ Ibid., page 10-11 (seq. 10-11) (Accessed October 21, 2014).

⁶⁷ Ibid., page 12 (seq. 12) (Accessed October 21, 2014).

⁶⁸ The best book on the Iranian Revolution is Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

regime in Kabul. This invasion turned out to be a nightmare for the USSR and brought together against the Soviet Union the United State, China, and the conservative and fundamentalist Sunni regimes of the Middle East. The Soviets did not use Central Asian soldiers in this conflict except in very limited settings. By the end of the 1980s, the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, leaving behind a chaotic void that a radical Sunni Islamic group called the Taliban quickly filled. By 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed.

CHAPTER 5

INDEPENDENT TURKMENISTAN: INDEPENDENCE AND ITS CHALLENGES

On October 27, 1991, Turkmenistan declared its independence, and less than two months later the Soviet Union imploded. Turkmenistan was finally free of Soviet control, but now it had to deal with the challenge of independence. The challenge of independence had multiple parts, and the Turkmen had to face each aspect, analyze the challenge, and fashion policies to solve the problems and promote the reality of Turkmen independence. This chapter explores that challenge in the five categories that were highlighted in the previous chapter, namely nationalities policy, religious policy, economic policy, political policy, and, finally, geopolitical policy.

5.1 Turkmen Nationalities Policy

Communism repressed tribal sentiments among the Turkmen and promoted a new sense of Turkmen nationalism that was supposed to be a step toward creating a modern citizen who could then be moved to a higher level of modernization, affiliation, and identity, that of a Soviet citizen, who was supposed to be a member of future, global society, an advanced world citizen who had no attachments to nation, tribe, or religion, but only to a world Communist movement and an eventual society where there would be no unhappiness and everyone would give according to his ability and receive according to his need. Communism did not succeed in fostering such a Soviet citizen, but it did succeed in weakening tribal allegiance and religious sentiment. It also erected a unifying sense of nationalism and an awareness of modern political and economic institutions and ideas among the Turkmen.⁶⁹ However, the protean sense of nationalism was fragile and

⁶⁹ See the references on the development on Turkmen nationalism in footnote 45.

had to be reinforced. This issue had to be addressed immediately by the new independent government of Turkmenistan.

The first president of Turkmenistan was Saparmurat Niyazov (r. 1991-2006), who had been the First Secretary of Turkmenistan SSR since 1985. Upon assuming his new title of president but continuing role as chief executive, he knew that he had to keep the Turkmen united and simultaneously stoke their sense of nationalism both as a unifying force and as a way to divine and protect Turkmenistan's national interests. He wanted to make the people understand that independence was of paramount importance to the fate of their new nation and was the culmination of a long historical journey that started centuries ago in the desert sands of Transcaspia.

During the first two years of independence, there was much chaos in the country and the Turkmen people took some measure of relief in the fact Niyazov represented continuity. There was hope that he could make the transition from a Soviet republic, which was managed like a franchise dictatorship under the watchful eye of the Kremlin, to an independent, national state smoothly and orderly. Niyazov was careful, shrewd, and conscious of the need to keep the Turkmen together. He knew that Turkmenistan was a new construct and that the tribes and various clans could fall out, splinter national unity, and descend into chaos and perhaps anarchy. He also knew that change represented an opportunity for new developments and for personal dictatorship but without the infrastructure backing of Soviet coercive institutions or of Communist ideology, which had proven bankrupt as a modernizing philosophy.

From the very beginning, Niyazov tried to avoid any internal ethnic and national conflicts similar to those occurring in many other post-Soviet countries and regions. For

this reason, Niyazov decided in his every public action to connect the Turkmen's newfound independence with their historical struggle for independence. He constantly referenced the many battles fought for independence and those Turkmen heroes of all tribes who sacrificed their lives to defend their country. His major effort in this regard was writing and publishing a book called *Rukhnama*, which literally means *Book of the Soul*.⁷⁰ Although self-glorifying and turgid, it lauded Turkmen culture, history, sacrifice, determination, patience, and perseverance on the road to independence. Niyazov required that all school children read the book and knowledge of the book was necessary to pass examinations for licenses, including a driver's license. By stressing the struggle and sacrifice of past generations, Niyazov, who was a very eloquent and spellbinding speaker if not captivating writer, was able to keep peace in the country and build a sense of nationalism and shared sacrifice and destiny. He was very successful in promoting harmony and nationalism over tribal loyalty and identity. He also promised a bright future for all Turkmen, which encouraged a sense of patience, hope, and common purpose among the general population.

In short, Turkmenistan did not devolve into fissiparous tribal groups, but remained a viable national state. This outcome was the result of Soviet policy that had cultivated nationalism, admittedly not for purposes of creating an independent Turkmen state but for the goal of building a modern Soviet state under Russian control, and of Niyazov's skill as a politician, a dictator, and a prodder of Turkmenistan's national destiny. He was particularly effective in developing what this author views as a version of Joseph Campbell's "hero's journey" by transferring to the whole Turkmen people the

⁷⁰ Saparmyrat Turkmenbasy, *Rukhnama*, 2 Vols. (Ashgabat: The State Publishing Service of Turkmenistan, 2005).

role of the hero who undergoes long trials to ultimately produce a great and transforming achievement, in this case, modern Turkmenistan.⁷¹ He also cast himself in the role of hero to the point of generating a nauseating and stifling cult of personality, which ultimately led him to declare himself to be “God’s messenger” and “Turkmenbashi,” which means “father of all Turkmen.” By the time of his death in 2006, he had decorated the country with his portrait and erected a gold statue of himself in the middle of Ashgabat that rotated so that it always faced the sun.⁷²

5.2. Turkmen Religious/Cultural Policy

With independence, Turkmenistan had to address the issue of religion. Under the Soviet system, the practice of religion had been discouraged and persecuted. Having been under the Soviet influence for almost seventy years, the Turkmen were deprived not only of the opportunity to practice Islam, but they were also banned from following certain traditions, such as circumcision and Islamic burial (the body must be buried within 24 hours of death, head facing Mecca and wrapped in a shroud instead of a coffin). There were only four mosques operating in the country at the time of independence.

After Turkmenistan gained its independence, Niyazov encouraged a revival of Islam, but with certain restrictions. The old traditions were revived and Islamic principles were allowed to be taught in public schools. In addition, he allowed over 350

⁷¹ See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces (The Collected Works of Joseph Campbell)*, 3rd Ed. (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008).

⁷² Daniel L. Burghart and Theresa Sabonis-Helf, eds., *In the Tracks of Tamerlane: Central Asia’s Path to the 21st Century* (Washington: National Defense University, Center for Technology and National Security Policy, 2004), 14, 56; Sebastien Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan: Strategies of Power, Dilemmas of Development* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2012), 51-62; *New York Times*, January 4, 1998; August 11, 2002; December 21, 22, 2006.

mosques to be built, and the largest mosque in Central Asia was constructed in Gypjak, Niyazov's birthplace.⁷³ It was called the "Spirit of Turkmenbashy."

Officially, the new Turkmen government announced a policy of religious toleration. The new constitution that came into place in 1992 proclaimed separation of politics and religion. Article 11 states, "The government guarantees freedom of religion and faith and the equality of religions and faiths before the law. Religious organizations are separate from the government, and may not perform governmental functions. The governmental system of education is separate from religious organizations and is secular in nature. Everyone has the right independently to determine her or his own religious preference, to practice any religion alone or in association with others, to practice no religion, to express and disseminate beliefs related to religious preference, and to participate in the performance of religious cults, rituals, and ceremonies."⁷⁴

However, the government was not anxious to support religious freedom. To be sure, the Turkmen government was officially tolerant of religion in the country, but kept under the strict government supervision all religious activities. The majority of the population were and are Sunni Muslims, but they are not fervent Muslims and do mix into their relaxed practice of Islam, many Turkmen cultural traditions that fundamentalist Muslims would find objectionable. According to the Country Report on Turkmenistan that is published by the Federal Research Division of the U. S. Library of Congress, about

⁷³ Asian Studies Presents. Windows on Asia, "Turkmenistan: Religion." Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University (Accessed October 18, 2014). http://asia.isp.msu.edu/wbwoa/central_asia/turkmenistan/religion.htm.

⁷⁴ G. Berdimuhamedov, Turkmenistanyň Prezidenti, Turkmenistanyň Konstitusiyasy. 26 Sentyabr, 2008 ýyl (Ashgabat: State Publishing Service of Turkmenistan), http://minjust.gov.tm/mmerkezi/doc_view.php?doc_id=8124#m1_1 (Accessed November 10, 2014).

eighty-nine percent of the Turkmen population practices a form of Sunni Islam.⁷⁵ In addition, nine percent of the population are Russian Orthodox, and the other two percent or so are grouped as “others” without a specific denomination. The last category of “others” was not initially defined by denomination due to registration requirements.

Even though the Turkmen constitution (Article 11) guarantees freedom of religion and faith, religious activities are under the government control in order to avoid any fundamentalist religious groups such as existed in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Syria, and to prevent any political activity that the regime could not control. The government’s way of proscribing the growth of fundamentalism or of any group that might create division in the country that, in turn, could present an extremist group with fertile ground for creating unrest and religious division, was registration. Every religious group had to register in order to gain legal status in the country. Unregistered religious activities are illegal and are punishable by administrative fines.⁷⁶

The regime supported Islam, but at the same time, the government was in fear of foreign Islamic influence. Therefore, in order to avoid such possibilities, the government banned any non-official Islamic activities and organizations and such activities were persecuted by law enforcement agencies. According to the 1995 law on religion (amendment to 1991 Law on Religion), in order to gain legal status, religious groups had to have 500 registered members in each locality where they wanted to worship. This

⁷⁵ United States Government, Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, "Country Profile: Turkmenistan," 5, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Turkmenistan.pdf>, (Accessed October 10, 2014).

⁷⁶ United States Government, Department of State, "Turkmenistan," 1, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/171762.pdf> (Accessed October 10, 2014); Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan*, 98-102, 121-123.

made it impossible for minority religious groups to gain legal status, except Sunni Muslims and the Russian Orthodox. However, due to international pressure, the 1991 law on religion was amended in 2005 to allow as few as five persons to register as a religious group, but still required fifty local persons in order to register as an organization. As a result, by 2005 restrictions on minority religious groups had declined and nine small religious groups, including Protestant groups as the Jehovah Witnesses, had registered. The government discouraged proselytism, which hampered religious freedom, but also tended to keep peace among the established religious and secular traditions.

From the time of independence in 1991 to the present, Turkmenistan has not experienced any major religious turmoil on its borders with neighboring countries or within the country itself, even though fundamentalist Islamic groups were burgeoning in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Arab world. The fact is that the majority of population in Turkmenistan are Muslim, but they are not strong followers of Islamic principles. Instead, as mentioned, Turkmens integrated their traditional beliefs and ceremonies into their Islamic religion.⁷⁷ In addition, the Soviet regime had promoted secularism and modernization, and much of the Soviet legacy, particularly secularism, persisted in post-Soviet Turkmenistan. The growth of secularism also opened opportunities to women and prepared Turkmen society for involvement with the larger world where globalization and interdependency were in place and reflected in instantaneous communication, free and mass media, jet-age transportation, and various international organizations. There was a

⁷⁷ Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan: Country Studies*, March 1996, U. S. Library of Congress, Federal Research Division (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1997), 320-322; Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan*, 98-102, 121-123.

strong reluctance in Turkmenistan, particularly on the part of the government, to jeopardize these fledgling moves toward modernization.

Today the Turkmen government continues to control and monitor all religious activity, not so much for the purpose of discriminating against religion, but more to keep religious groups from affecting public harmony. In an indication of its nuanced policy, the Turkmen government, according to Forum 18, a religious news service located in Oslo, Norway, arrested and imprisoned nine Jehovah Witnesses and Muslims for various infractions, some fabricated and others related to conscientious objection related to military service, but on October 22, 2014, it released eight of the nine prisoners on a presidential amnesty. Some prisoners of conscience, both Muslim and Christian, remain in Turkmen prisons.⁷⁸ Religious groups are unhappy with the government's interference and restrictions, and Turkmenistan is often cited by Forum 18 as a discriminatory and sometimes persecutory environment for religion, but the upside of the policy is that extremist groups, who use religion for political purposes, are kept at bay and citizens, if they are so inclined, can practice their religion as a private affair.

5.3. Turkmen Economic Policy

Turkmenistan's exit from the Soviet Union and Soviet economic network created immense economic challenges, including a legacy of debts and credit obligations and disrupted markets. Niyazov kept the central planning mechanism of the Soviet-era economy, kept the bloated bureaucracy that was laden with followers whose main attribute was loyalty rather than ability and skill, and kept the patronage network that was oiled by bribes and reciprocal benefits, usually at the expense of the Turkmen people and

⁷⁸ "Turkmenistan: Eight Prisoners of Conscience Amnestied," October 28, 2014 at http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2009 (Accessed November 1, 2014).

invariably hidden from public view and accountability. However, he did work toward a program of building a stable economy. He could have done so more competently, more expertly, and more popularly, but he at least put Turkmenistan in a position where it could eventually control its economic destiny.

Of course, in the early 1990s the country was not able to adequately provide the population with basic every day necessities. People from other regions had to travel to the capital city just to buy some bread. Basic necessities were rationed by the government, including food, oil, and hygienic goods. All this happened because the economic ties between former Soviet republics had been disrupted and every other newly formed independent country was totally involved in its own internal affairs and lacked the wherewithal and technical knowledge to find regional solutions to what were regional problems.

During the Soviet period, Turkmenistan's economy was tied to the Soviet ministries. Almost all mineral resources, industrial and agricultural products had to be exported to any of the other SSRs as determined by Moscow. In return, the country received very little and it was always said that Turkmenistan was reliant upon subsidies.⁷⁹ For example, in 1988, in the Soviet Union Republics a total of 770 million cubic meters of natural gas was produced. Of that total, 88 million cubic meters were produced in Turkmenistan. If Turkmenistan had been able to convert this product into the equivalent amount of crude oil, it would equate to 80 million barrels of crude oil. This meant that Turkmenistan in the production of oil would not only be ahead of Nigeria, but also would

⁷⁹ K. B. Muhammetberdiyev and Ya. Orazgyljov, *Turkmenistanyn Taryhyndan Materiallar* (Materials from the History of Turkmenistan) (Ashgabat: State Publishing Service of Turkmenistan, 1997), 173.

surpass Kuwait where the per capita living standard was among the top in the world. Turkmenistan would have been one of the top ten countries in the world in the production of oil.⁸⁰ Of course, it was near the apex in terms of natural gas production.

During the first two years after independence, the majority of the government's efforts were focused on reorganizing state economic structures and building trade relationships with neighboring countries. The two principal countries of Turkmenistan's interest were Iran and Russia. Iran supplied Turkmenistan with wheat and other necessities. This was a lifeline. As for Russia, the relationship was more complicated.

Niyazov had to manage the Russian relationship very carefully. He wanted good relations with the Russians because the main source of revenue for Turkmenistan was the export of its natural gas. The only major pipeline that had huge capacity to transport gas was built via Russia during the Soviet period. Therefore, the Turkmen government had to agree with whatever conditions Russia put forward. The Russian government refused to treat Turkmenistan fairly. It paid a below market price for Turkmenistan's gas. Even though the Turkmen government openly reprimanded the Russian government for its unjust treatment of Turkmenistan, government officials could not cut their relationship with Russia.

Niyazov thought that he had a way to handle the Russians. Turkmenistan also had many debts due to Russia that dated from Soviet times. After the demise of the Soviet Union, there were debts and credits between the former USSR republics, which had to be settled with the help of international and financial institutions. The credits of Turkmenistan on separation from the USSR, up to December 4, 1991, were fixed at

⁸⁰ Ibid., 174.

(U.S.)\$ 1,087,000,000. The debt Turkmenistan owed to the USSR was \$ 707,000,000. The final account that was agreed to was that the USSR owed Turkmenistan \$3,80,000,000. This debt had to be paid by the Russian Federation, which was the heir of the USSR.

Based on his own judgment, without consultation with his cabinet and the Parliament, Niyazov decided that Turkmenistan would not be able to get its credits due to the tight economic situation in all of the former USSR republics, including the Russian Federation. In order to facilitate a peaceful separation from the former Soviet Union and to ingratiate himself with the Russians, Niyazov proposed to the Russian president Boris Yeltsin that he would like to cancel the Russian debt. Boris Yeltsin gladly accepted his proposal.⁸¹

The main resentment between Niyazov and his foreign minister A. Kuliyeu, which is detailed below, started due to this decision to donate government money to the Russian Federation without consulting the Parliament. In 1991 Turkmenistan and the Russian Federation signed an Agreement to regulate the legal matters pertaining to the debts and credits of the former USSR to foreign states. Article 2 of the Agreement, which was dated October 28, 1991, stated, "The parties confirm that the share of debts determined for Turkmenistan is equal to 0.70%, a ratio which was fixed by one indicator in the former USSR's debts and credits to foreign states." Article 4 of the same agreement states, "Because of the position of the former USSR on 1 December 1991, the

⁸¹ Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama*, Vol. 1: 51.

Russian Federation accepts the share of Turkmenistan from the state credits. Turkmenistan transfers the stated credits to the Russian Federation."⁸²

Of course, Niyazov thought that his generosity would earn him political credit in Moscow, and, banking on that and on Turkmenistan's vast natural gas resources, he thought he could launch a new economic policy that would make Turkmenistan wealthy and on a par with Kuwait. In 1992, Niyazov announced the "Ten Years of Prosperity" plan, which turned out to be so much rhetoric. On January 17, 1994, however, he became more serious and organized the first convention of the National Revival Movement. Here Niyazov made a public report explaining the goals and contents of his "Ten Years of Prosperity" program, and the responsibilities of the National Revival Movement. In his report Niyazov explained what he had in mind. He said that the National Revival Movement "is about a nationwide struggle to bring Turkmenistan up to the standards of the more developed countries of the world; to help its citizens lead happy and comfortable lives within the next ten years. This struggle is the holy struggle of a nation that has made peace, solidarity, and consolidation their banner in order to achieve prosperity. He also declared "The spiritual pillar of the National Revival Movement is to raise the human dignity to a higher level..."

Niyazov went on and declared, "I believe that with the expansion of the National Revival Movement, social organizations would continue to support the nationwide policy on making the foundation of our independent country steadfast, raising the spirituality of the nation, developing the economy, and increasing the international reputation of

⁸² Ibid., 53.

Turkmenistan. He concluded by exhorting his countrymen to “let, the National Revival Movement prosper in our country and bring peace and well-being to our people.”⁸³

The first phase of the program was to maintain a Soviet system of planned management. This was to be accompanied with extensive social benefit programs for the Turkmen population. As a result of the program, the Turkmen population was provided with free natural gas, electricity, and water for an indefinite period. Gasoline was also cheaper compared to other Central Asian Republics. Taking into account its rich natural gas and oil deposits, and also its comparatively small population, the plan got off to a good start and its promise of Kuwait-type economic prosperity seemed feasible.⁸⁴

But the primary strategy for realizing the "Ten Years of Prosperity" program was the exportation of Turkmenistan's natural gas to non-Russian foreign markets, principally Europe and then India. Niyazov's plan called for gas routes to European countries via the Caspian Sea and to India via Afghanistan and Pakistan. The first project was called "Nabucco" and the second one was called "TAPI (Turkmenistan - Afghanistan - Pakistan - India).” But these alternatives had fundamental problems. The former plan was complicated because the Caspian Sea was not divided into spheres of control between its bordering countries (Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Russia). Each country had conflicting national claims, and without unanimity and the full approval of all Caspian states, no single country could build an underwater Transcaspian pipeline.⁸⁵ Russia, for one, blocked the plan. Niyazov's attempt to foster good relations by

⁸³ Muhammetberdiyev and Orazgylyjov, *Turkmenistanyn*, 207.

⁸⁴ Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan*, 169-174; *New York Times*, January 4, 1998.

⁸⁵ Bertil Nygren, *The Rebuilding of Greater Russia: Putin's Foreign Policy toward the CIS Countries* (London: Routledge, 2008), 168-171.

cancelling Russia's debt paid no dividends when Turkmenistan attempted to circumvent the Russian pipeline network.

The other pipeline to India via Afghanistan and Pakistan depended upon foreign investors and in order to entice foreign investment in Turkmenistan, the government passed laws in 1992-1993 regarding regulations on foreign investment, banking, property ownership, and intellectual property rights. However, the laws did not promote transparency, accountability, and contract enforcement. In addition, foreign investors were discouraged by the hostile geopolitical environment, given Russian and Iranian interests in the region. As a result, the TAPI pipeline was shelved because Turkmenistan could not attract enough foreign investors to pay for the cost of building a transnational pipeline and then the United States attacked the Taliban government in Afghanistan in 2001 after the Taliban refused to turn over Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the United States who had set up his headquarters in Afghanistan. Turkmenistan also tried to export gas via Iran, but here again it could not find foreign investors to bankroll the project. In the end, Turkmenistan's only option was to meet its budget by exporting its natural gas to Russia, which had the virtue of at least keeping stability in the country.

With the plan of exporting natural gas to non-Russia markets failing, Niyazov renamed the "Ten Years of Prosperity" program the "Ten Years of Stability" program. Its main focus was upgrading the basic infrastructure of Turkmenistan, including starting a national airline; building a new international airport; reconstructing roads; building

residential and governmental buildings and hotels in the capital city of Ashgabat, and adorning the country with pictures and statues of Niyazov.⁸⁶

In short, the Niyazov's plan of development was ambitious, but it was not tied to practical realities.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, in the opinion of this author, Niyazov's policy towards the Russian government was correct, even though the Russians were not good neighbors, because, at that time, there was no immediate alternative to the Russian market. Turkmenistan could not support its population without money from the gas exports to Russia. The unfortunate fact was that the Russians knew that, too, and took full advantage of Turkmenistan's dilemma.

Turkmen frustration and disappointment with Russia opened the door to other trade partners as the economic and geopolitical situation changed in the world and Central Asia in the last few years. After Niyazov died in 2006, his successor, Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, who has developed his own personality cult and likes to be called "Arkadag" ("The Patron"), looked for alternatives to the Russian market. The most significant development was that China emerged as a major market for Turkmen oil and natural gas, and the Chinese provided the investment money and technology to build a new pipeline called the Central Asia-China pipeline in 2007-2009 from China to Turkmenistan via Uzbekistan that continues to expand and is scheduled to deliver 55 billion cubic meters of gas to China by the end of 2015. China surpassed Russia as the

⁸⁶ Dilip Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2009), chap. 3.

⁸⁷ The basic problem was that Russia controlled the main artery for the export of natural gas. See Burghart and Sabonis-Helf, *Tamerlane*, 14-15; Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan*, 204-205.

main market of Turkmen natural gas in May 2014.⁸⁸ Thanks to its natural gas and oil, Turkmenistan today is emerging as one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Its main worry is water, but its wealth should give it the opportunity to address this weakness. It receives 90 percent of its water from the Amu Darya River via the huge Karakum Canal. It is now taking steps to build reservoirs, reduce cotton crops that use large amounts of water, and develop food crops that will make the country self-sufficient in agriculture.⁸⁹

5.4. Turkmen Political Policy

The collapse of the Soviet Union was disconcerting for politicians in Turkmenistan. The downfall was unexpected, so when it happened there was no plan to pick up the pieces of a fractured imperial structure. There no longer existed a Red Army, a secret police, an imperial bureaucracy, a general party secretary residing in Moscow, a Politburo, and an economic planning commission.

To Niyazov's credit, he rose up to the challenge of maintaining a semblance of order in the midst of turmoil and disorder. He tried to create a Turkmen military force. With all the governmental restructuring and the placing of correct, loyal people in top government positions, Niyazov prepared his ruling circle. Many organizations and ministries like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs existed only on paper until 1991. From 1992 the Foreign Ministry started to function and carried out the foreign policies of

⁸⁸ Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan*, 182-183; "Desert Ceremony Celebrates Turkmenistan-China Gas Axiz," Reuters News Service, May 7, 2014, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/07/gas-turkmenistan-china-idUSL6N0NT2QS20140507> (Accessed November 2, 2014).

⁸⁹ For Turkmenistan's water resources, see Igor S. Zonn and Andrey G. Kostianov, eds., *The Turkmen Lake Altyn Asyr and Water Resources in Turkmenistan*, (Berlin Heidelberg: Springer, 2014), <http://link.springer.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/book/10.1007%2F978-3-642-38607-7>. Also see "Turkmenistan," <http://www.waterunites-ca.org/themes/15-turkmenistan.html>. (Accessed November 2, 2014).

Turkmenistan. Membership in the United Nations was initiated in March 2, 1992. The Defense Ministry of Turkmenistan that was established in January 1992 remained more of an idea than a reality through 1994.⁹⁰ What military existed was a Turkmen-Russian joint force that was disbanded in 1994. Importantly, he first made preparations for a new constitution. Until 1992, Turkmenistan was governed by the old constitution that was adopted in 1978, which was a Soviet document that gave ultimate power to the Communist Party, which was subject to Moscow's control. On May 18, 1992, a new constitution was adopted, and it established a government based on the principle of separation of powers into legislative, executive, and judicial branches, each of which functioned independently and checked and balanced one another. The constitution also proclaimed that it was the supreme law of the land and could not be breached or superseded.

The Constitution of Turkmenistan, Section 1, Article 5 states, "The government and all its organs and officials are bound by the law and the constitutional order. The Constitution of Turkmenistan is the Supreme Law of the state, and the norms and provisions secured in the Constitution have direct effect. Laws and other legal acts, which contradict the Constitution, have no legal force. The legal acts of governmental organs are published for general notice or are popularized in some other manner, except for those acts, which contain state or other legally protected secrets. Legal acts which

⁹⁰ United State Government, Department of Justice, Immigration & Naturalization Service, INS Resource Information Center, "Alert Series Turkmenistan: Political Conditions in the Post-Soviet Era. 1993. <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/ins/turkme94.pdf>. (Accessed September 22, 2014).

affect the rights and freedoms of citizens and for which there is no general notice are invalid from the moment of their adoption."⁹¹

Now the new Constitution did increase the powers of the president because it made the president both the prime minister and supreme commander-in-chief of the armed forces of Turkmenistan, but still there was a possibility of limited and representative government evolving in Turkmenistan. However, that did not happen. The constitution turned out to be largely a theoretical document. In effect, there was no real separation of powers and the constitution, as the fundamental law of the land, turned out to be subject to the whim and interpretation of Niyazov.

Since Turkmenistan gained its independence only cosmetic changes in the leadership and bureaucracy have occurred. In the beginning, Niyazov portrayed himself to be a reform-minded and a democratic leader, but by 1992 he had abandoned all pretense at democracy and exercised authoritarian power. Government officials who showed the slightest opposition to Niyazov's policies and edicts were immediately subjected to severe criticism, repression, and removal. For example, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, Avdy Kuliev, who was mentioned earlier, began to criticize Niyazov for his growing authoritarianism, particularly his cancelation of Russia's debt. The constitution promised various freedoms and separation of powers, but practice was quite different from what the Constitution stated. People, especially government officials, could easily be sent to prison under a prefabricated charge (drug

⁹¹ G. Berdimuhamedov, *Turkmenistanyn Prezidenti, Turkmenistanyn Konstitusiyasy*. 26 Sentyabr, 2008 yyl (Ashgabat: State Publishing Service of Turkmenistan), http://minjust.gov.tm/mmerkezi/doc_view.php?doc_id=8124#m1_1 (Accessed November 10, 2014).

smuggling or corruption). Criticism, which was equated with disloyalty, was not tolerated by Niyazov.

Kuliev was forced to resign. He left Turkmenistan and moved to the Russian Federation as a political refugee where he organized an opposition group against the Turkmen regime. In August 1993, the Russian government granted registration to the Turkmenistan Fund, an opposition group that Kuliev led and that was based in Moscow.⁹² Kuliev continued to criticize the Turkmen government until his death in April 10, 2007, in Oslo, Norway.

After Niyazov removed Kuliev in 1991, he appointed Boris Shikhmuradov, a young, energetic Russian, who was deputy foreign minister, to be foreign minister. Like Avdy Kuliev, however, he became concerned over Niyazov's growing totalitarian regime and asked to resign, starting in 1999, the year Niyazov was appointed president for life. According to Shikhmuradov's wife, Niyazov responded to his requests with the warning, "only from the grave."⁹³ In December 2000 Shikhmuradov was removed and sent as Turkmenistan's ambassador to the People's Republic of China where he stayed only slightly over a year. In early 2002 he was ordered to return to Turkmenistan where he was publicly accused of trying to organize a government coup and assassination attempt against Niyazov. Unlike Kuliev, Shikhmuradov was not allowed to leave Turkmenistan. Instead, Niyazov had him arrested and then organized a Stalin-like show trial on television where Shikhmuradov confessed to all crimes of which he had been accused,

⁹² Ian Preston, ed., *A Political Chronology of Central, South and East Asia* (London: Europa Publications Limited, 2001), 265.

⁹³ Crude Accountability, "Prove they are alive: International Campaign to Protect Those in Turkmen Prisons, Boris Shikhmuradov," <http://provetheyalive.org/the-disappeared/shikhmuradov-boris/> (Accessed September 21, 2014).

including being the ringleader in the coup and assassination plot and a drug addict. He appeared in court to be disoriented and possibly the victim of torture. He was sentenced to twenty-five years in a notoriously harsh prison in December 2002, a sentence that was changed quickly to life imprisonment. As of December 2012 there has been no news about him, and he is presumed to be still in prison or dead.⁹⁴

When the Soviet Union broke up and Turkmenistan gained its independence, there was initially a hope that different political parties, representing various constituencies, would proliferate, coexist, and vie for the support of voters. However, Niyazov by 1992 had made Turkmenistan a one party state. To be sure, he did away with the Turkmenistan Communist Party (TCP), which had been in existence since Turkmenistan became part of the USSR, but then he resurrected it—the same party—with a new name, The Turkmenistan Democratic Party (TDP). At the 25th Congress of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan, the party members decided to dissolve the party and replace it with the Turkmenistan Democratic Party (TDP). Niyazov was confirmed as the new TDP Chairman. The TDP was the main party that dominated all political activity in the country.

To make the mockery of the political process even more farcical, the TDP also promoted another party proposed by Niyazov called "Peasant Justice Party." The new party was composed of regional secretaries of the TDP and was registered in 1992 as an opposition party.⁹⁵ So Turkmenistan had a two party system, but both parties were

⁹⁴ See Luiza Khudaykulova, BBC Uzbek, December 28, 2012, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-20815114> (Accessed November 1, 2014).

⁹⁵ Curtis, *Turkmenistan*, 357-358.

controlled by Niyazov and his henchmen. Niyazov decided to keep in place the same bureaucracy and repressive laws of the Soviet era.⁹⁶

On June 21, 1992, an election was held. Not surprisingly, Niyazov ran unopposed for the office of president and he won with 99.5% of the votes cast, an amazing figure that paralleled undemocratic elections in the erstwhile Soviet Union. In 1999 Niyazov was declared president for life.

Niyazov's dictatorship revolved around loyalty and bribes rather than merit and rewards. Many of Turkmen's most talented people were cut off from opportunities and from joining the political and economic elite. There was a general lowering of intelligence and good ideas in the general bureaucracy and governing system. Corruption, a measure of nepotism, and mediocrity became the hallmarks of Niyazov era. He stayed in power until he died in 2006.

Niyazov had created a hermit-like and reclusive state. He used torture against opponents, and smacked down dissidents by exiling them or putting them in psychiatric clinics. He set up a personality cult that suffused society with his image, presumed omniscience, and police force. The Internet was highly controlled and access limited. He invested money on ridiculous projects like a ski resort, a Cypress-tree forest that aimed to change the climate of the desert, a mammoth man-made lake in the middle of the desert, and statues of himself. Very little money went to the people.

⁹⁶ Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan*, 71-72, 78-83; United State Government, Department of Justice, Immigration & Naturalization Service, INS Resource Information Center, "Alert Series Turkmenistan: Political Conditions in the Post-Soviet Era. 1993. <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/ins/turkme94.pdf>. (Accessed September 22, 2014).

When Niyazov died on December 21, 2006, a multi-candidate election was held in February 2007 for the first time in Turkmenistan's history. The winner was Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, the health minister and longest serving member of Niyazov's cabinet. There was some hope that he would attenuate the dictatorship and he initiate some reforms related to lifting travel restrictions, allowing Turkmen to study abroad, and Internet access, but the essentials of dictatorial rule remained in place.⁹⁷ He was reelected in 2012 under conditions that the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe claimed were not open, free, and competitive. In effect, Berdymukhamedov has continued the dictatorship and cult of personality of Niyazov, although his megalomania is not as pompous and glaring as the former president. When he took power initially, there was some hope that he might loosen the dictatorship and improve the lives of the people. He did make a few changes that were positive, including opening up Internet access, although this remained controlled and monitored in government Internet cafes. He also allowed Turkmen to travel and study abroad. In many other respects, however, he has maintained the dictatorship of Niyazov. The media and press are strictly controlled. He is not seen fit to invest in the people of Turkmenistan and, according to international observers, unemployment in Turkmenistan is close to 50%, although the government claims it is at 5%. It is one of the wealthiest countries in the world and is in the fourth position in the world in terms of proven natural gas reserves. It has the possibility of being another Kuwait, but so far the government

⁹⁷ Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), "Turkmenistan: Prospects for Change: Hearing Before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe," One Hundred Tenth Congress, Second Session, November 19, 2008, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2013, 1-4, 13 at <http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/gpo33988/1119081.pdf>

has maintained strict control over the natural gas and oil reserves, refused to share the wealth with the Turkmen people, blocked political decentralization, and has not taken the essential steps to entice foreign investment other than the Chinese, who have little interest in the wellbeing of the Turkmen people.⁹⁸ In 2012 Berdymukhamedov was re-elected president with 97% of the vote, which surpassed Niyazov's winning percentage.⁹⁹

5.5. Turkmen Geopolitical Policy

As Turkmenistan surveyed its security challenges in the twenty-first century it found disconcerting realities. There was the threat of the Taliban in Afghanistan. This was primarily the danger of Islamic fundamentalism. The Niyazov government did not have the military resources to control the Afghan-Turkmen border, and the Taliban were a ruthless and fanatical group. And yet the Turkmen-Afghan border remained one of the most peaceful and stable boundaries anywhere in the world. How did this happen? According to a report by Andrei Serenko, a specialist on Central Asia at the Center of Contemporary Afghan Studies in Russia, many authorities believed that the "the government of Turkmenistan and the 'Taliban' movement" worked out a collaborative arrangement "in order to guarantee... peace in Ashgabat."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid, 4,11-13, 18; on the media and press, see Luci Anceschi, "Reinforcing Authoritarianism through Media Control: The Case of Post-Soviet Turkmenistan," in *After the Czars and Commissars: Journalism in Authoritarian post-Soviet Central Asia*, ed. Eric Freedman and Richard Shafer (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2011), 59-78; Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan*, 98-99, 117-118. Also see Mirian Elder, "Turkmenbashi II? Asian Country's Slide from One Personality to Another," *The Guardian*, November 1, 2009, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/02/turkmenistan-president-berdymukhamedov-niyazov> (Accessed November 1, 2014). Voters were offered only a Soviet-style candidate slate in the election in 2006. See *New York Times*, December 27, 2006.

⁹⁹ *New York Times*, February 13, 2012.

¹⁰⁰ Nurmuhammed Khanomov, Interview by *Deutsche Welle*, 2014.

This suspicion was confirmed by the former Turkmen Ambassador to Turkey, Nurmammed Khanomov, who is presently exiled as an opposition leader in Vienna. In an interview that he gave to Germany's international news agency called *Deutsche Welle* (DW), he said that the Turkmen government sought to create a friendly relationship with the head of the Afghani Taliban, Mullah Omar, in order to keep the border peaceful. Ashgabat, according to the ambassador, supplied the Taliban movement with petroleum, oil, and lubricants. In return, the Taliban guaranteed a peaceful Turkmen-Afghanistan border. This cooperation lasted until NATO forces invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 and broke the unity of the Taliban.¹⁰¹ In short, Turkmenistan solved the Taliban menace by forging a policy of practical accommodation. It showed the same expediency toward the coalition forces that entered Afghanistan. It supplied them with oil, petroleum, and lubricants. Thus, the ongoing war against the Taliban in Afghanistan pushed the Taliban further away from the Turkmen-Afghan border until the coalition forces started to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014.

Beyond the Taliban danger, another major threat to Turkmenistan was its lack of a military force, which was necessary both for border security and internal policing. In the wake of the Soviet Union's implosion and the withdrawal of the Red Army from Turkmenistan, Turkmenistan and the Russian Federation signed two short-lived treaties to protect Turkmenistan's borders. The first was called the "Joint Measures to Create the Armed Forces of Turkmenistan", and it was signed on July 31, 1992. According to its

<http://www.dw.de/turkmenia-druzba-s-mulloi-omarom-po-nasledstvu-ne-peredelas/a-17888600> (Accessed September 24, 2014).

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

terms, Moscow guaranteed the security of Turkmenistan. Based on this treaty, in order to facilitate the efforts of both countries in the defense sector, a task force from the Russian Ministry of Defense operated in Ashgabat from 1992 to 1994. In 1994, an operational group of the Russian Federal Border Service was established. The group consisted of a total of 3,000 men, including the 170th Air Regiment, the 46th independent border patrol boat flotilla, and an NCO training establishment. The personnel of this group cooperated with the Turkmen border troops to protect Turkmenistan's border with Iran and Afghanistan.¹⁰²

The second agreement on military cooperation between Turkmenistan and the Russian Federation was signed on September 2, 1993. According to the agreement, Turkmenistan took full responsibility for the cost of stationing Russian armed forces on its territory after January 1, 1994, and Russia agreed to maintain some bases in Turkmenistan and assist in modernizing the Turkmen army.¹⁰³ But the military cooperation between the two countries soon ended due to the cooled relations between the Turkmen and Russian authorities. As a result the joint force was disbanded.¹⁰⁴

At the end of Russian-Turkmen military cooperation, the Turkmen army was still forming, lacked training, and could not exercise control in the entire country and could

¹⁰² For post-Soviet Russian-Turkmen military ties, see Bertil Nygren, *Greater Russia*, 202-206.

¹⁰³ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Russia and Asia: The Emerging Security Agenda*. 1999.

<http://books.sipri.org/files/books/SIPRI99Chu/SIPRI99Chu.pdf>.

(Accessed September 30, 2014).

¹⁰⁴ Vladimir Paramonov and Oleg Stolpovski, "Russia and Central Asia: Bilateral Cooperation in the Defence Sector," 20, (Wiltshire: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, May 2008)

<http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&lng=en&id=92591> (Accessed September 29, 2014).

not fully secure the long borders with Iran and Afghanistan. There were also shortages of local commanders, officers, and military personnel in the Turkmen Army. This lack of command opened the door to two dire threats—drug smuggling and human trafficking.

In the police and military vacuum that was Turkmenistan's reality, some miscreant members of the local population, especially those who had some influence or connection with either government officials or the inchoate military, enriched themselves by smuggling opium (heroin) from Afghanistan and Iran. This was a major disaster not only for the Turkmen population, but also for the neighboring Central Asian countries as well. According to a report called "Working Papers; Drug Trafficking on the Great Silk Road: The Security Environment in Central Asia" by Martha Brill Alcott and Natalia Udalova, "United Nations drug control experts, 80 percent of heroin consumed in Western Europe originates in Afghanistan and Pakistan. One half of these drugs (about 120 tons of heroin equivalent per year according to some estimates) travels to Europe via Central Asia, a dangerous cargo to pass along the revived ancient Great Silk Road."¹⁰⁵

In other words, Turkmenistan was the major highway for drug smuggling from Central Asia to Europe and Russia. The consequences were readily noticeable in Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan was flooded with a heroin that was at one point cheaper than a bottle of vodka. The widespread unemployment in the country, low wages, and high corruption also helped to spread drug addiction. This resulted in the growth of a drug-addicted young population that grew at an alarming rate in the country. The

¹⁰⁵ Martha Brill Alcott and Natalia Udalova, *Working Papers. Drug Trafficking on the Silk Road: The Security Environment in Central Asia*, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2000), 4 at <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/drugs.pdf>. (Accessed September 26, 2014); also see Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan*, 138-141, 206-207.

majority of young adults aged between 18 and 35 were trapped in the narcotics web. The drug issue was further exacerbated and made more widespread among low-income individuals who were struggling to support their families. In the beginning the drug trade made low income families wealthier until a majority of them became drug addicted. Those who made enough money without becoming addicted were able to transfer their businesses from illegal drug trafficking to legal businesses by creating their own companies such as construction, food processing, and manufacturing businesses. For drug lords and paid officials, drug trafficking became one of the most lucrative businesses in the country.¹⁰⁶

The consequences were also apparent in Kazakhstan, Russia, and Europe, with the Kazakhs and Russians serving as the principal purveyors of drugs to the European markets. The government could do very little to protect its borders with Iran and Afghanistan due to the lack of experienced military personnel and sufficient technology. To this day, drug smuggling continues to be a problem. However, since the inauguration of the interim President, Gurbanguli Berdimukhamedov in 2007, there has been a great improvement. He closed the door to drug trafficking from Afghanistan.

The other internal threat to Turkmenistan is human trafficking. Traditionally, females were taught to be good housewives since their early childhood. Few females had the opportunity to continue their education while males had more autonomy and educational opportunities. Therefore, as adults, females heavily relied on their husbands

¹⁰⁶ For some background on drug issue, see CSCE, "Turkmenistan," 9; and Olcott and Udalova, *Drug Trafficking on the Silk Road*, 5-31. The latter study is detailed and discusses the domestic and foreign complications.

for economic support.¹⁰⁷ Those who could continue their education would go either to medical or educational schools where wages were the lowest.

Traditionally, females were brought up to focus on certain responsibilities, such as taking care of children and doing different household chores. But, by 1993 the drug issue totally changed this tradition. Many male breadwinners had become drug addicted and could not even support themselves, and females could find no work that provided enough remuneration for a family's survival. As a result, in order to save their families, wives and young sisters started to travel outside the country, mainly to Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. They would become private-house servants and work at restaurants if they were lucky enough to find these jobs, but most of the time, due to the legal rules and regulations imposed on foreign labor, they had to agree to do whatever they were asked to do, which unfortunately meant human trafficking. According to Professor Patt Martin of the University of Massachusetts - Lowell, "Turkmenistan is a source country for women trafficked primarily to Turkey but reportedly also to the UAE, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Pakistan for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. Men and women are trafficked to Turkey for the purpose of domestic servitude and forced labor, specifically in textile sweatshops."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Jointly organized by the OSCE and the Republic of Kazakhstan, *"Trafficking in Persons in Central Asia: The Scope of the Problem and the Appropriate Responses,"* 15, (Astana, 2006). <http://www.protectionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/trafficking-in-persons-in-central-asia-scope.pdf>. (Accessed September 30, 2014).

¹⁰⁸ United States Government, Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report. Turkmenistan.* 2009 at <http://gvnet.com/humantrafficking/Turkmenistan-2.htm>. (Accessed October 1, 2014).

Even though Turkmenistan was a member of the UN and pledged to comply fully with its resolutions and laws, including the prohibition against human trafficking, the Turkmen authorities have made very little effort to prevent this crime, which is now controlled by organized crime syndicates.¹⁰⁹ What were the obstacles facing the Turkmen authority in the prevention of the human trafficking in the country?

The first reason was that the authorities did not acknowledge that human trafficking was a problem in the country. Because many victims, especially young girls did not report the crime to the government for fear of being known and criticized by the public. The Turkmen population, due to their cultural values, also tried to hide these activities if trafficking were a problem in their families. Young girls had to get married and married women tried to keep their families united. But, due to the Muslim tradition that females had to be untouched until their marriage, any disparaging information about these girls' involvement in trafficking would not only put an end to their future marriage possibilities, but also would hurt males' reputation within the family because it was evidence that they could not protect their women. In addition, no decent families would want to give their daughters to a male from such a family. Therefore people, instead of addressing the issue to the authorities and requesting them to take immediate steps to stop these criminal activities, hid the crime, thus facilitating the rise of transnational human trafficking.

¹⁰⁹ United Nations. Charter of the United Nations. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter2.shtml> (Accessed October 1, 2014); Office on Drugs and Crime. United Nations. 2004. https://www.unodc.org/documents/middleeastandnorthafrica//organised-crime/UNITED_NATIONS_CONVENTION_AGAINST_TRANSNATIONAL_ORGANIZED_CRIME_AND_THE_PROTOCOLS_THERETO.pdf (Accessed October 2, 2014).

The second reason was illiteracy. The social benefits people received from the government during the Soviet era, coupled with the fact that the majority of the population were engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry, meant that Turkmen families did not consider that education was necessary for females. Females were brought up to help with farming and agriculture. Females were supposed to do the same jobs after their marriage. As a result, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, females had little education and limited knowledge of their rights. For these females, males were thought to be above females and without males' consent females could not make any major decisions. Therefore, given this opportunity, organized criminals used female illiteracy to their own benefit, thus giving rise to the transnational organized crime of human trafficking.

There was another factor that probably facilitated the rise of human trafficking in Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan compared to other Central Asian countries was and still is more isolated. Access to official statistics about Turkmenistan are almost impossible to obtain. Any form of statistics that might possibly hurt the country's reputation is considered to be a State secret. Therefore, due to the lack of access to the country statistics, international organizations such as OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) could not take adequate preventive measures against human trafficking in Turkmenistan. The only measures that were taken by international organizations were limited to carrying out meetings and organizing presentations about human trafficking with law enforcement representatives.

What did the Turkmen authority do to the victims of human trafficking after they were returned to their home country? Instead of trying to understand the deep root of the

problem and solve the issue nationwide, the government banned victims of human trafficking from leaving the country for a long period, normally from five to ten years. But banning did not help to solve the problem. Instead, it created a favorable atmosphere for law enforcement personnel to earn extra money. Those who had better [illegal] employment opportunities in foreign countries could negotiate with law enforcement personnel for money and leave the country. Thus, law enforcement representatives instead of helping to prevent human trafficking, became unwitting accomplices of the criminal activity of human trafficking.

In 2014 Turkmenistan's geostrategic policy and security are under new pressures. Besides the ongoing issues of drug and human trafficking crimes, the world has changed and new threats are appearing. One of the major threats is the return of the Taliban. In a recent interview that reporter Shamerdanguly Myrady of Radio Azatlyk in Afghanistan obtained with the head of the local police force in the Turkmen region contiguous to Afghanistan, a man known as Commander Buby, it was reported that the Taliban attacked in August 2014 two border control points of Turkmenistan and that the Turkmen border patrol officers abandoned their posts.¹¹⁰ So far the Turkmen media, which is under strict government control, has not reported the Taliban activity on the Afghan-Turkmen border, but clearly this is a significant threat. The Taliban has no religious base or following in Turkmenistan, but its patent willingness to use violence and terror to expand their influence and beliefs is worrisome. The Turkmen government has started to take necessary steps to enforce the Turkmen-Afghan borders in order to avoid from

¹¹⁰ Azatlyk Radiyosy (Radio Liberty), "Turkmenistanyn Postlaryna hujum edildi", (Turkmenistan border posts were attacked) found at <http://www.azathabar.com/content/article/26565040.html> (Accessed October 24, 2014).

possibly future Taliban influence in the country, but its military forces are weak and untrained.

In addition to the Taliban menace, Iran was a potential threat. Its government is a fundamentalist Shiite regime that has emerged as a viable regional power in Central Asia, the Persian Gulf, and the Middle East. At the moment, the threat is in check because of Teheran's desire to keep the price of oil and gas stable and because of Western economic sanctions imposed because of Iran's threats to the region and its program to obtain nuclear technology and possibly weapons.

The major threat but also potential ally of Turkmenistan is Russia. The Russians have historically exploited the Turkmen people, but they have also helped with their modernization. According to Bertil Nygren, Putin's foreign policy goal is to rebuild Greater Russia's influence through control of the oil, gas, and pipelines of the former Soviet satellites, including Turkmenistan.¹¹¹ Russia can be balanced by outreach policies to China, India, and the West. So far Ashgabat has managed the Russian enigma. In order to keep the region safe, Turkmenistan needs an international support from powerful countries, such as Russia, Turkey, Europe, and USA. The need for careful and deft diplomacy calls for leadership, and it remains to be seen if Turkmenistan has the leadership qualities to protect its independence.

¹¹¹ Nygren, *Greater Russia*, 4, 172.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Turkmenistan faces many challenges. The following recommendations are based upon its history and relationship with its neighbors.

Domestically, Turkmenistan needs to open up opportunities for its young people on the basis of merit and talent. Secondly, it needs to follow the models of Turkey, Malaysia, Bangladesh, and perhaps Indonesia and avoid encouraging or endorsing fundamentalist Islam. It needs to make separation of religion and politics a consistent reality. Thirdly, it needs massive investment in education and technical training, open to both men and women. Fourthly, it needs to embrace the secular tradition developed during the Communist era. By all means, it should allow religious freedom and conscience of choice, but there must be absolute freedom of religion and religion should be a private affair.

Internationally, Turkmenistan must wean itself off of dependency on Russia. Russian imperialism has flashed its face in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and is threatening the Baltic States. The lesson of history is clear—Russia's idea of a partnership is very similar to what Plekhanov said about Lenin's idea of alliance, that is a relationship between a sandwich and a hungry man. Turkmenistan has options. It can develop new pipelines and investments with India and China. It already has a major economic nexus with China based upon the Central Asia-China pipeline that sends Turkmen natural gas east and brings money to Ashgabat.

It can also work closely with the United States. It can strengthen its relationship with Turkey. Its two traditional enemies have been Iran and Russia. Ironically Turkmenistan needs close ties with the Russian military to check Taliban and Iran from

fracturing or threatening it. There is another possibility, and that is closer ties with Turkey, a member of NATO. However, the Turks are preoccupied by the conflict in Syria, by internal threats to cohesion from the Turkish Kurds, and by their own ambivalence over Islam, Western values, and the process of democratization and free enterprise. The road to independence is fraught with dangers. It calls for brilliant leadership in order to navigate between the dangers of Russian imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism. Hopefully, the Turkmen will find such leadership.

APPENDIX SECTION

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE¹¹²

750s-1500s	Early Period
750	Arabs completed conquest of Central Asia, imposing Islam and new culture.
8 th -9 th centuries	Golden Age of Central Asia, under Arab Abbasid Caliphate; Bukhara became a cultural center of Muslim world. Turkic Oghuz tribes migrated into Central Asia.
10 th century	The term "Turkmen" first applied to southern Islam Oghuz tribes.
Late 10 th century	Seljuk Empire was founded, based on Oghuz tribes, including Turkmens.
1219-25	Mongols conquered Central Asia, pushing Turkmens westward toward the Caspian Sea.
14 th -16 th centuries	Turkmen tribes reorganized and consolidated.
1550s	Muscovy reached Caspian Sea.
1700s-1917	Tsarist Era
1722	The Russian Empire moved toward Central Asia.
Mid 18 th century	Turkmen Yomud tribes invaded Khorazm.
1867	Guberniia (Governorate General) of Turkestan was established as central Russian administration, eventually including present-day

¹¹² Timeline from 750 to 1916 was guided by http://econc10.bu.edu/economic_systems/Country_comparisons/Central_Asia_Chronology.htm website. (Accessed November 3, 2014). From 1916 to February 19, 1994, it was guided by Muhammetberdiyev and Orazgylyjov, *Turkmenistanyň*, 273-277. Timeline from September 1994 till the present was guided Preston, *A Political Chronology*.

	Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.
1869	Russians establish foothold in Turkmen territory at Krasnovodsk.
1881	Russians crush Turkmen resistance at Geoktepe fortress; Turkmen territory was annexed into Guberniia of Turkestan.
1916	Kazakh, Turkmen, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz rebel against Russian land confiscation and conscription
1917, February 27	Victory of the Russian bourgeoisie-democratic revolution and the demise of the Tsarist rule.
1920 - 1991	Soviet Period
1917, October 25 (November 7)	Bolshevik (Communist) Revolution. Lenin in power.
1920, February	The beginning of "Basmachi War" (Guerilla War) in Turkmenistan.
1921, August	Renaming of trans-Caspian oblast into Turkmen oblast.
1923, October	Establishment of the Turkmen autonomous oblast in the structure.
1924, October 27	The establishment of the Turkmen SSR; Stalin succeeds Lenin.
1928	Establishment of functioning cotton and silk factories in Ashgabat and Collectivization begins.
1928-29	Official transformation from Arabic into Latin alphabet.
1939, September	Beginning of World War II; Nazi-Soviet Alliance.
1941, June 22	Nazi Germany attacks USSR.
1943-44	Petroleum refinery in Krasnovodsk established.
1945, May 9	The end of the Great Patriotic War (WWII). Stalin credits Slavs alone with victory.

1954	Construction of Karakum Canal started.
1956, Feb-March	20th Congress of the Soviet Socialist Communist Party and condemnation of Stalin's cult of personality.
1958	The Turkmen TV station in Ashgabat commenced broadcasts.
1960s	Natural gas, oil, and petrochemical work developed in Turkmenistan.
1962, May 12	Karakum Canal reached Ashgabat.
1965	The opening of the Kushki-Herat-Kandahar motor highway.
1966	Development of the largest gas reserve in Turkmenistan "Gazojak."
1973	First time 1 million tons of cotton was harvested in Turkmenistan.
1981	Karakum Canal was lengthened to reach Gazanjyk.
1990 - 2014	Independence Period
1990, August 22	The adoption of Declaration about Turkmenistan's Independence.
1990, October 27	S. A. Niyazov named President of Turkmenistan.
1991, August	Coup d'état in Moscow defeated, but USSR begins implosion.
1991, October 27	Declaration of Democratic-secular state of Turkmenistan.
1991, December 25	Gorbachev resigned. End of Soviet Union.
1992, January 27	The establishment of the Defense Ministry of Turkmenistan
1992, March 2	Turkmenistan was admitted to membership in the United Nations.
1992, May 18	The Constitution of Turkmenistan was adopted.
1992, June 21	S. A. Niyazov selected again as president of Turkmenistan.
1992, August 11	Establishment of the Border Army of Turkmenistan.

1992	First pilgrimage of group of Turkmen elders to Mecca-Medina.
1992, December	"Ten Years Prosperity" program was launched.
1993	Citizens of Turkmenistan use gas, electricity, and water for free.
1993	Construction of railroad from Gazanjyk to Bender Turkmen (Iran).
1993, August 3	The establishment of the Turkmen National Air Defense Force.
1993, September 1	The opening of the Military Institute of Turkmenistan.
1993, October 15	Niyazov met with historians to discuss the important factors of writing Turkmen history.
1993, December 24	Meeting of CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) leaders in Ashgabat.
1994, January 15	Niyazov's presidency extended another five years without election.
1994, February 19	Celebration of Niyazov's birthday as a nationwide holiday.
1994, September	Naseerullah Baber, Pakistan's interior minister, arranged a peace convoy to run rice, clothing and other gifts through Afghanistan to Turkmenistan.
1994	Referendum was passed to extend the rule of Niyazov, who had renamed himself Turkmenbashi (Father of the Turkmen).
1996, May 14	Turkmenistan and Iran opened a rail link.
1996, July	Niyazov changed his last name to Turkmenbasy, i.e. Father of all Turkmen.
1996, November	The president opened a human rights agency.

- 1997, December 29 Turkmenistan and Iran activated 125 mile gas pipeline.
- 1999, December 28 The parliament voted Niyazov (59) president for life.
- 2001 Niyazov published *Rukhnama* (Book of the Soul).
- 2002 Boris Shikmuradov jailed for life.
- 2002, April 24 Summit of Caspian Sea nations failed to reach agreement on dividing the region's oil and gas reserves.
- 2002, August Niyazov renamed the months of the year after family members.
- 2002, August 13 Niyazov issued a decree that extended adolescence until age 25 and postponed old age until 85.
- 2003, February 22 Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan invited India to join their \$3.2 billion natural gas pipeline project.
- 2005, December 29 Russia bought up gas supplies from Turkmenistan to prevent Ukraine's purchase. Russia demanded a quadruple increase in gas prices.
- 2006, January In Turkmenistan some 100,000 people had their pensions cancelled and another 250,000 pensions were severely cut back.
- 2006, March 20 Niyazov told his nation's youth to read his book *Rukhnama* three times a day in order to go to heaven.
- 2006, April China and Turkmenistan signed a gas-supply deal.
- 2006, May 27 Unemployment in Turkmenistan was estimated at over 70%.
- 2006, September 9 Five central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) sign a nuclear-free zone treaty, but it did not cancel out a 1992 agreement to allow Russia to transport

- and deploy nuclear weapons there under certain circumstances.
- 2006, October 25 Niyazov announced that he would provide citizens with natural gas and power free of charge through 2030.
- 2006, December 21 Niyazov (66) died. Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov succeeds.
- 2007, January 3 Wider Internet access permitted. Internet cafes established.
- 2007, May 12 Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan reached a landmark pipeline deal
- 2007, December 30 Turkmenistan turned off gas supplies to Iran, citing technical problems after Iran balked at a price increase to \$140 per thousand cubic meters, almost double the contracted rate.
- 2008, April 23 Berdymukhamedov abolished Niyazov, 's calendar .
- 2009, June 6 China lends \$3 billion to develop Turkmenistan's vast South Yolotan natural gas field.
- 2009, June 16 China's Pres. Hu Jintao announced a \$10 billion loan to Shanghai Cooperation Organization, founded in 2001 and included China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.
- 2009, July 15 Berdymukhamedov led a ceremony for channeling water across hundreds of miles to create Golden Age Lake in Karakum Desert, a Soviet-style engineering feat.
- 2009, December 14 China's Hu Jintao and leaders of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan gathered at the Saman-Depe gas field in Turkmenistan and inaugurated a 1,139-mile gas pipeline running through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to China's Xinjiang province.

- 2010, April 2 UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon pushed Turkmenistan to improve its human rights record.
- 2010, December 11 Turkmenistan signed agreements with Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan on the 1,700-km (1,050-mile) TAPI pipeline.
- 2011, April 26 Turkmenistan drops requirement to study *Rukhnama*.
- 2011, November 23 Turkmenistan agreed to boost natural gas supplies to China.
- 2012, February 12 Berdymukhamedov (54) wins 97 percent of vote in reelection.
- 2014 Berdymukhamedov develops his own cult of personality.

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