
The Rise of Political Islam in Soviet Central Asia

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This article proposes to challenge the idea that the appearance of Islamists in the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan was made possible, and occurred, only after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Without an understanding of the history of Islam in the region, it is difficult to grasp the current ideological recomposition of Central Asian Islam. Nor is it easy, without a historical perspective, to gauge the real impact of these newer Islamic movements and their social and institutional implantation in regions such as the Ferghana Valley and even inside the official structures of the Spiritual Boards of Muslims. For many decades, Central Asia has experienced considerable internal theological debate among reformers, conservatives, and fundamentalists. These oppositions, however, did not derive from outside influences, but rather have developed as a function of local criteria—regional traditions, references to influential intellectual figures, the relation of the region to the Soviet state, and particular social and economic conditions. Indeed, in Central Asia, Islamic revival has been primarily an indigenous movement. The doctrines of political Islam developed on their own in Central Asia, within the very heart of the Soviet system. It was the Russian repression of reformist Islam leaders that led to the rise of fundamentalist Islam in the region during the Soviet period.

The Birth of SADUM

The modes of passing down tradition and the ideological influences that contributed to building Soviet Islam within an officially atheist state are complex. In the first place, it is essential to retrace the ideological and theological affiliations that gave birth to the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM), the sole official representative body for Islam in Central Asia for the period from 1943 to 1991. With its vision of creating the “New Man,” the Bolshevik regime considered religion to be a mark of the old world. In Central Asia, the regime hesitated at first to confront Islam

directly so long as the regime's power in the region remained weak. After some initial hostilities, the Bolshevik authorities backed down and, between 1921 and 1924, conceded Islam a period of respite. But once the so-called *basmatchi* opposition weakened, Soviet power then recanted on its concessions: Quranic tribunals and religious schools were prohibited, many mosques were closed (of the 26,000 in 1912, only over a thousand remained in 1941), books written in Arabic scripture were burned, practicing Muslims were excluded from the administration, and, in 1934, the remaining Muslim property was requisitioned.¹ Paradoxically, the Jadidists (reformists), the majority of whom had agreed to collaborate with Bolshevik power, were the first victims of the Stalinist repressions.² As a result of their gradual decline the public space of Central Asia opened up for discourses that, instead of appealing to a reform of Islam through modernization, would appeal to reforming it through a mythical return to origins.

Despite the massive repression of Islam, certain figures were able to continue propagating their religious ideas and to train disciples in a hostile ideological environment. Clandestine schools (*Juuja*) continued to hand down Quranic teachings to their students, notably in the Ferghana Valley. Thus, in Turkistan at the time of the 1917 revolution, many fundamentalist figures were successfully pursuing their activities in Tashkent, the capital of the Russian governorate, and in the Ferghana Valley. This is the case, for instance, for Said ibn Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahid ibn Ali al-Asali at-Tarablusi ash-Shami ad-Dimashqi, better known as Shami-damulla (born somewhere between 1867 and 1870), a theologian from the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire who trained many Uzbek theologians. Shami-damulla was educated at the al-Azhar university in Cairo. Accused of Wahhabism by the government of Sultan Abd al-Hamid II (1876-1909), he was forced to leave the Ottoman Empire and subsequently established himself in Tashkent in 1919.³

At the time, the repressive policies carried out by the Tsarist regime and, subsequently, the Soviet state against Sufis, who had traditionally dominated the religious life of the capital, weakened the influence of the latter on the population. Conservative theologians of the Hanafite school then took up the place left vacant by the Sufis. From the moment of his arrival, Shami-damulla, who gave courses and sermons at the Dasturkhantchi Madrasa (*al-Madrasa ad-dasturkhanija*), attracted the attention of the theological milieu of the old town of Tashkent. An adept of the Shafii *madhhab* (school of jurisprudence), his mode of thinking was overtly Salafi: he refused the heritage of the medieval ulamas and proclaimed that the way to deal with contemporary problems was by returning to the sources of Islam, that is, the Quran and the authentic *Hadith* of the Prophet. He denounced the population's ignorance on matters of Islamic dogma and was particularly opposed to the cult of saint worship, which had been a predominant feature in the religious life of Central Asian populations. At first, the Bolshevik regime regarded Shami-damulla as a modernist, and they therefore tolerated him insofar as he combated Sufism, which was perceived as obscurantist.⁴ But sometime around 1924-1925, the local

authorities reprimanded him for his fundamentalist notions, prohibiting him from preaching, with the result that he became involved in clandestine pedagogical activities. In 1932, he was accused of spying for Great Britain and attempted to flee to Chinese Turkistan, but he was arrested in the Khorezm region and died there.

Shami-damulla's disciples subsequently formed a community called Jamaat Ahl al-Hadith. They propagated fundamentalist ideas, ignored Hanafi *madhhab*, and were strongly influenced by some specific elements of the Shafii *madhhab* as conceived by Shami-damulla. As part of the Central Asian clerical élite, the group's principal members included figures such as Dzhamal-khodja-Ishan, Hasan-hazrat Ponomarev, Mullah Yunus Khakimdzhanov, Mullah Abd as-Samad, and Ishan Babakhan. In 1936-37, the group's leading figures were arrested and imprisoned, and some of them were executed. However, in 1941, with the Soviet Union's entry into war, Stalin resolved upon a historic compromise with religion. He rehabilitated Orthodoxy and similarly agreed to recognize Islam, endowing it with structures that came to be known as the Spiritual Boards of Muslims.⁵ In late 1941 and early 1942, two members of Jamaat Ahl al-Hadith, Ishan Babakhan and his son Ziyauddin Babakhan, were freed from prison. In April 1942, both men were received by the president of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Iuldash Akhunbabaev, and participated in the Congress of Ulamas Organizing Committee.

In October 1943, the Soviet authorities established a Spiritual Board of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) based in Tashkent. This Board had under its aegis seventy-five percent of all Soviet Muslims, and, with its prestige, symbolically dominated the other Spiritual Boards established in the Caucasus and Russia.⁶ In 1945, the famous *madrasa* Mir-i Arab of Bukhara was reopened and for a long time remained the only institution for Islamic theological instruction in the entire Soviet Union. The teachings of Shami-damulla and his fundamentalist disciples spread, then, via many indirect routes, all the way up to the central institution of SADUM itself. Almost from the moment of its inception, the legitimacy of the Spiritual Board was the subject of many theological conflicts, as its very existence was deemed contrary to Islamic tradition. As the representative of infidels (*kafir*), SADUM was perceived to be the symbol of a secular and atheist power, and it was therefore deprived of theological legitimacy.

The Babakhan Dynasty

The Babakhan dynasty, which ruled SADUM for three generations, succeeded both in giving quasi-institutional support to fundamentalist conceptions of Islam and in introducing elements from other *madhhab* into the predominantly Hanafite Islam of Central Asia. Upon the creation of SADUM in 1943, Ishan Babakhan (1861-1957), already very old at the time, was named first mufti. He was assisted by his son Ziyauddin Khan (1908-1982), who headed the Uzbekistan *qaziyat*, or Muslim directorate (SADUM

had one *qaziyat* for each republic). Upon Ishan's death in 1957, Ziyauddin was then appointed supreme mufti. He enjoyed a certain prestige among the local ulamas since, in 1945, he had been to the Hajj with his father and, in 1947, had been authorized to go to the Middle East, and notably to the al-Azhar University in Cairo. Throughout his career, Ziyauddin Babakhan attempted to incorporate his former colleagues from the Jamaat Ahl al-Hadith into the Spiritual Board. In public, he always tried to appear as an exemplary Hanafite, and never ceased claiming that his family was a member of the Sufi brotherhood Naqshanbandiyya. However, in practice he fought against Sufism and led his private life according to the precepts of Ahl al-hadith. He also granted protection to another group of theologians, born in the 1930s of a split with Ahl al-hadith, namely the Ahl al-Quran. Led by Mullah Sabircha-damulla, this group did not, like the Ahl al-hadith, place the Hadith at the center of its teaching, but rather sought as much as possible to limit their field of application; nor did it not recognize any of the *madhhab*, trying instead to base itself solely on the Quran.

Returning from his first stay in the Middle East, Ziyauddin Babakhan brought with him many Hanbali publications, whose rigorism and puritanism corresponded well to the precepts taught by the disciples of Shami-damulla in the framework of Ahl al-hadith. Moreover, as of the 1960s, the Soviet Union wanted to make a show of its respect for Islam and so made Central Asia, and in particular Uzbekistan, into its propaganda show-piece.⁷ Several high officials of SADUM were authorized to travel to Muslim countries, and Babakhan took advantage of these many occasions to bring back to Uzbekistan numerous fundamentalist works. He then contributed to spreading the ideas of Ahl al-hadith by publishing the Quran and collections of Hadith. He also published several *fatwas* against local tradition and ritual practices, which he denounced as "non-Islamic." Some of SADUM's *fatwas*, for instance, pointed out that circumcision is not obligatory in the Quran and so is only a matter of custom (*sunmah*), others denounced the excessive expenditure occasioned by marriages and the dowry principle (*kalym*), and still others criticized the cult of saint worship (*mazar*).⁸

With his strong grip on the system of confessional teaching, Babakhan also succeeded in weakening the positions of the Hanafi *madhhab*. SADUM controlled the *madrasa* Mir-i Arab of Bukhara, which served as the main base for religious teaching, the *madrasa* Baraq-khan, which was opened from 1956 to 1961, and as of 1971 the Higher Islamic Institute of Tashkent. The level of instruction of these establishments remained low, and the teaching staff was relatively poorly educated. Conversely, the clandestine system of religious education, particularly developed in Ferghana, assured a very good level of education. With Babakhan's protection, a number of ulamas educated within this clandestine system were able to gain entrance to the official establishments, and from there could be appointed to prominent positions on the Spiritual Board. In this way, the official educational institutions made it possible to give legal status to knowledge acquired in the

hujra system. This system being predominantly influenced by fundamentalist precepts, the Hanafite conservatives lost ground.⁹

Ziyauddin Babakhan's theological ideas were profoundly marked by the notion of a return to "pure Islam." His puritanism led him to regard the Central Asian traditions as superstitious practices contrary to the renewal of Islam. His rigorism was originally influenced by the Shafism of Shami-damulla and his disciples and was reinforced through his Hanbali readings. His particular fundamentalist orientation, then, favoured a non-Hanafite re-Islamicization of the young Soviet generations. As a result, the conservative-leaning Hanafite ulamas mostly disapproved of the *fatwas* SADUM issued, and countered with *fatwas* of disavowal (*raddiyya*). In the midst of an officially atheist Soviet Union, the ulamas did battle by issuing interposed *fatwas*. These antagonisms rendered the boundary between official and unofficial conceptions of Islam rather unstable. Paradoxically, however, the political authorities preferred to support the fundamentalist theologians rather than the conservative elements and the Sufi movements, even if the latter sought conciliation with the secular atheist power.¹⁰

If such ideological affiliations were possible in the Soviet Union, it is also because the local élites had managed to maintain their places in society despite the repressions and purges of the Soviet system. The Babakhans, for instance, belonged to a holy filiation called *khodja* (descendants of saints). This noble family of Tashkent had been well known since the nineteenth century.¹¹ It seems that all the *qaziyat* were led by *khodja*: Hodji Akbar Turajonzoda in Tajikistan, Nasrulla Ibadullaev in Turkmenistan, Yusuphon Shakirov in Kyrgyzstan. *Khodja* families dominated in the cultural, educational, scientific and medical domains. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, fifty percent of the degree holders in sciences during Soviet times were of noble or "holy" origin. Likewise in governmental structures, where, for example, Inom Usmankhodzhaev, president of the presidium of the Soviet Supreme of Uzbekistan in 1978, succeeded Sharaf Rachidov in 1983 as the first secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party. The traditional Central Asian élites thus succeeded in penetrating the Soviet system, in which favoritism and a corporatist spirit ruled, and in maintaining their positions via a patronage system and traditions of endogamy that are still in existence today.¹²

The Schism Between Conservatives and Radicals

During the 1950s and 1960s, with Ziyauddin Babakhan at the head of SADUM, the Muslims of Central Asia witnessed the beginnings of a schism between Hanafite conservatives and the newer, much more fundamentalist, informal movements influenced by Hanbalism and Shafism. This schism took on its full magnitude in the 1970s around the two major figures of Mullah Hindustani (1892-1989) and his student, Mullah Hakimjan-Qori Morghiloni. Both men left a profound mark on Muslim revivalism in

Central Asia and influenced numerous clandestine Quranic schools in the region. Whereas, on the one hand, Hindustani was regarded as a conservative Hanafite who had remained faithful to his madhhab, on the other hand Mullah Hakimjan-Qori was often presented as the “father” of the Wahhabites of Ferghana. Based in the town of Marghilan, Mullah Hakimjan-Qori is supposed to have broken with Hindustani early on, accusing him of being too respectful of secular power, and to have disseminated Salafist ideas since the 1950s. Yet, later, he came too, at least in part, to oppose the development of fundamentalist currents.

Mullah Hindustani was educated in Islamic theology in Kokand, Tashkent, and in Afghanistan. After the normalization of relations between the Bolshevik power and Kabul, he left for Kashmir, and while there adopted the surname Hindustani. He returned to Kokand in 1933 and was promptly arrested and deported to Siberia. Once set free, he successfully had himself appointed as the imam of a small mosque in Dushanbe, and, having been rehabilitated after Stalin's death in 1953, obtained a position at the Tajik Academy of Sciences. Tajikistan, considered as a peripheral republic, was indeed much freer than Uzbekistan, where Soviet political pressure was much more brutal. He rapidly became one of the major, most-respected figures of clandestine Islam, a reputation that earned him several prison sentences and ambivalent relations with the KGB.¹³ At the time of the thawing of relations under Khrushchev, he started up a religious clandestine school that educated the majority of imams still working in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan today.¹⁴

However, in the 1970s, many of Hindustani's disciples began to reject his classic Hanafite vision of Islam and propagate more fundamentalist ideas. Some broke even with the more radical Mullah Hakimjan-Qori Morghiloni, denouncing his lack of commitment to a militant defense of the faith. The most famous of these antagonists were Rahmatullah Allama (1950-1981), who was inspired by the traditions of Ahl al-hadith, and Abduvali-Qori Mirzoev (1952-1995?), who was influenced by Ahl al-Quran. Both were based in Andijan. Abduvali-Qori was particularly famous for his virulent remarks against Hanafites, proclaiming that, according to Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the founder of the Hanbali school, the other schools of Islam should not be recognized.¹⁵

Confronted with this dissent, Hindustani continued throughout his life to disseminate *samizdat* texts and cassettes seeking to counter the development of fundamentalist currents. He accused his former students of being “Wahhabites.” The term, however, is somewhat inappropriate: in the Soviet Union, as in the post-Soviet states today, the term “Wahhabite” was employed as a general term of disqualification against all the fundamentalist currents that appeal to a literal reading of the Quran and believe that Islam can be reformed only by returning to its origins. But it is quite often the case that currents accused of “Wahhabism” are not influenced by the thought of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), nor by the Saudis, and belong to various different schools. Indeed, the opponents of Hindustani, for their part, rather define themselves as restorers and

present their movement as a *mujaddidiyya* (reformation). This name was taken from that of a Sufi brotherhood that preached a return to the Islam of the four Caliphs, and which was active in Central Asia, especially in the Ferghana region, since the second half of the eighteenth century.

The antagonisms between conservatives and fundamentalists touched on very diverse aspects of religion. Some concerned the relation of Islam to modernity. Hindustani, who was educated at the time of the conflict between the Jadidists and the Qadimists (traditionalists) in the 1910s and 1920s, disregarded the idea of the possible “purification” of Islam, something that he considered to be a heresy and a foreign importation into Central Asian Islam. Opposing him, the fundamentalists criticized the incompetence of local imams, the general ignorance of the population concerning religious questions, and the submission of conservative ulamas to secular power. At issue in these polemics were also ritual practices and interpretations of the Quran. The young theologians educated in the clandestine schools regarded the numerous local traditions as innovations (*bida*) not in conformity with *sharia*. For example, the young theologians invited men to grow their beards long and to wear the skullcap, and women to return to wearing the *hijab*, despite the political risks run by such acts in an atheist state. They equally condemned the reading of certain *ayats* at funeral rites (*djanaz*) and the practice of paying imams for prayers. They refused to perform certain gestures during collective prayer (*namaz*), and, as well as speaking out against saint worship (*ziyarat*), criticized pilgrimages to tombs of Sufi masters, the sumptuousness of marriages, and so on. Moreover, the debates were eminently political. In 1979, during a public meeting, Rahmatullah Allama gave speeches that were both anti-communist and anti-Hanafite. He declared that the *ummah* could not exist outside of an Islamic state, and accused the ulamas of refusing to fight against secular power in order to protect the *ummah*. Hindustani, by contrast, who had suffered from the Soviet atheist purges, considered that Islam should rejoice at conciliation with the state and not seek to confront it with violence.

Throughout the 1970s, the schism between conservatives and fundamentalists increased in magnitude whenever the Soviet regime was less violent in its repression of religion. It also intensified with the arrival of the new theologians, who, educated in clandestine schools, had succeeded in being incorporated into SADUM and being able to teach in state institutions, and thus occupied official positions. Fundamentalists seem to have been dominant in the Uzbek Ferghana Valley (Ferghana, Marghilan, Andijan, Kokand) as well as in the surrounding towns, Osh (Kyrgyzstan), Ura-Tyube, and Khudzhand (Tajikistan). Although deeply rooted in rural milieus, the fundamentalists also controlled several mosques in the capitals, in particular in Tashkent and Dushanbe. SADUM played an ambiguous role in this schism since Ziyauddin Babakhan himself contributed to the spreading of anti-Hanafite literature in Central Asia. Several witnesses have confirmed, for example, that the religious writings brought by the Saudi delegation to the Soviet

Union were given to SADUM, which then proceeded to disseminate them through its own channels. Some Saudi works were even studied in the clandestine schools in Andijan. In any case, it seems that, even if they made use of foreign literature, fundamentalist circles did not receive external financial support and operated on their own funds. It is also difficult to define them as “Wahhabites” in the strict sense of the term: their puritan and rigorous fundamentalism was clearly inspired by the Hanbalite, and occasionally Shafii, traditions, the development of which had occurred in the region without a proclaimed need either for a brutal rupture between the *madhahib* or for a total condemnation of Hanafism.

The Social and Political Embedding of Radical Ideas

The two Brezhnev decades (1964-1982) were marked by the discreet return of Islamic practices in the daily lives of Central Asian peoples.¹⁶ The Central Asian communist leaders found it easy to close their eyes to officially prohibited religious practices, as they were themselves believers. They openly practiced the important Muslim feast days and the various rites of passage (circumcision, marriage, burial) alongside Soviet festivities. The spring New Year holiday (*navruz*), the start of Ramadan, the feast of the Breaking of the Fast (*id-al-fitr*), and the sacrifice feast (*kurban bayram*) were observed by Soviet Muslim citizens who continued, at the same time, to drink alcohol and eat pork. A number of *chaikhana* (tea houses) were used as mosques, and many Party officials even diverted public funds to finance places of worship.¹⁷ The fundamentalists thus attempted, in their own way, to enlist in and contribute to this process of re-Islamicization already underway, a process understood to be a generalized rehabilitation of previously repressed values. However, they were distinct from it insofar as they were opposed to practicing traditional Islam, preferring instead purification of dogma and of rites in the name of a “return” to an original Islam.

In 1979, two external events shook Central Asian societies, and in particular the border republic of Tajikistan: the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Central Asians made up a large percentage of the military personnel sent to Afghanistan, the Soviet authorities having at first thought that the invasion would be better accepted if it took the form of citizens who shared the same religion and even the same language. Very quickly, however, Moscow became aware of the birth of a Muslim solidarity that led a number of Central Asian conscripts to sympathize with the Afghani *mujahidin*. In 1980, thirty Tajikistanis headed illegally to Peshawar to put themselves in the service of the Afghans, meanwhile riots erupted in Alma-Ata (Kazakhstan) at the occasion of the burying of Muslim soldiers killed in Afghanistan in a military cemetery. In March 1980, less than four months after the start of conflict, Moscow decided to recall a large number of the Central Asian reservists sent to Kabul.

These events provoked another reversal on religious policy in Central Asia: the scheduled Islamic conferences were cancelled, visits by muftis in countries allied to the USSR were suspended, and anti-Islamic propaganda was re-launched. Still, in 1984 displays of protest against the Soviet presence in Afghanistan reverberated throughout the bordering zones of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Afghan conflict played a crucial role, therefore, in crystallizing Islamism in Central Asia.¹⁸ For instance, the leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Juma Namangani, acknowledged having become a “born-again” Muslim after having served in the Soviet army in Afghanistan.

In the 1980s, as the Soviet system started to seize up, the theological schism took on more distinctly political and economic overtones. Although they belonged to other *madhhab*, the fundamentalists’ changes concerning ritual practices were not in any way illegitimate, since a diversity of rituals is usual in Islam. The changes in ritual practice were, however, utilized to assert political differences in the conception of Islam’s relation to secular power.¹⁹ The more the Soviet state weakened on the ideological level, the more the fundamentalist movements went on the offensive, proclaiming the impossibility of any coexistence between the *ummah* and a secular state. In addition, the economic disintegration of the Soviet system reinforced these movements. In the 1970s, a petite bourgeoisie emerged, in particular in the wealthy valley of Ferghana, made up of merchants, clandestine producers, particularly in the textile industry, and of people working in the tertiary sector. During Soviet times, these lucrative activities were prohibited, and individuals belonging to these social categories could not hope to capitalize on the fruits of their labor. Their religious puritanism was thus accompanied by a political will to put an end to the Soviet state’s centralized system and to establish an Islamic state in which these economic activities would be legalized and would serve as a basis for charitable religious activities.²⁰ The commercial milieu of the Ferghana, therefore, played an important role in giving material support to fundamentalist movements. These commercial activities financed the construction of numerous mosques, both clandestine and official, the aim of which was to attract ordinary believers with little knowledge of dogma or of the political roots of the conflict.

During these same years, SADUM lost control of various Muslim communities. The son of Ziyauddin Babakhan, Shamsuddin Babakhan, who was appointed to head of the Spiritual Board in 1982, was not highly regarded by the ulamas. They thought of him as incompetent and unconcerned by the religious schism reverberating through Central Asian Islam at the time. In March 1989, they succeeded in having him dismissed and having Muhammad-Sodiq Muhammad-Yusuf (later dismissed in 1993) appointed in his place. Muhammad-Sodiq was educated in mostly radical, clandestine schools. His ascent confirms that many ulamas educated in the fundamentalist schools were able to gain entrance to the official institutions of SADUM.²¹ However, once he became mufti, Muhammad-Sodiq played a more nuanced role, seeking to preserve the unity of Central

Asian Muslims, while at the same time trying to develop their ability to engage in independent political action.

Despite the appointment, the supporters of the two theological tendencies continued to confront each other openly, especially in the Ferghana Valley, where certain mosques refused entry to Muslims of the opposing current. Muhammad-Sodiq himself was especially opposed to Abduhvali-Qori, who preached at Andijan's main mosque (where he remained until 1994), and to the radical Salafite imams who dominated several mosques in Namangan. This city was divided into opposing movements that organized theological disputes between some leading figures such as Umar-khon domulla, Dowud-khon Ortikov, the *qazi* of Ferghana Abdurauf-khon Gafurov, and Abdulahad Barnayev, the imam of the Gumbaz mosque, known for his Wahhabite stance.²² In May 1990, Muhammad-Sodiq succeeded in reuniting all the ulamas in a plenary session at SADUM at which it was decided to issue a common *fatwa* intended to govern questions of dogma; in reality, however, it worked only to aggravate the conflict.²³ In 1991, the theological conflict was overrun by a new schism, political this time, which tore SADUM apart: with the collapse of the Soviet Union, each *qaziyat* proclaimed its independence, resulting in the splitting of the central institution into five new institutions, each one corresponding to one of the new Central Asian states, a phenomenon obviously encouraged by the political authorities.

The Institutionalization of Fundamentalist Movements

The political liberalization initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* enabled the proliferation of contacts between Central Asians and other Muslim countries. The mufti of Uzbekistan Muhammad-Sodiq and the *qazi* of Tajikistan Akbar Turajonzoda went, for example, to Libya and Jordan and made contact with Islamist currents, in particular with the Muslim Brotherhood. Publications from Saudi Arabia, but also from Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Jordan, began to flood in and were disseminated among the Muslim communities. The beginning of the 1990s also saw Arab militants from al-Qaeda circles begin to appear in the Ferghana Valley. But while this external ideological input is undeniable, Central Asian Islamism nevertheless remained an indigenous movement.

Indeed, there is a direct continuity between the actors of the 1970s schism and the Islamist leaders who emerged in the 1990s. This was the case, for example, with the founding fathers of the Islamic Rebirth Party, Said Abdullo Nuri and Sharif Himmatzade, who were educated by Hindustani and participated in the polemics with Rahmatullah Allama. Said Abdullo Nuri (1947-2006) in particular can be regarded as a key figure linking the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. As early as 1973 he was imprisoned by the Soviet authorities for distributing Islamic literature. Then, after leaving prison in 1974, he organized the first Islamic Organization of youth in the Soviet Union called "Islamic Renaissance,"

which was inspired by the writings of Hindustani. He was sentenced to prison once more by the Soviet courts in 1987 after a demonstration in Kurgan-Tepe in support of the Afghan *mujahidin*. Then, from 1988 to 1992, he edited *Minbari Islom*, the publication of the Tajik Spiritual Board of Muslims.

Founded clandestinely by Nuri in 1973, the Islamic Rebirth Party (IRP) obtained a legal pan-Soviet status in June 1990 in Astrakhan. Its principal members were Tajiks and Dagestanis. In Moscow, it was presided over by Akhmed-Kadi Akhtaev, a man of Avar extraction—an ethnic group present in Dagestan—and assisted by the philosopher Geydar Dzhemal (1947), a former dissident who became one of the most original Russian Muslim thinkers of the post-Soviet period. The only regional conference held by the party took place in the summer of 1992 in Saratov with the aid of Mufti Mukaddas Bibarsov. From the time of its founding, the movement was already deeply divided because its third leader, Vali Sadur, an Orientalist by education, constantly opposed the former two.²⁴ Sadur quickly ceased his activities in the Islamic Rebirth Party and subsequently created the Islamic Congress of Russia. The IRP ideology was close to that of the Muslim Brothers: to establish an Islamic state by combining preaching and political action. Some of them were inspired by Saudi Arabian Wahhabism, whereas others were inspired and drawn to a variety of other radical movements, including the Muslim Brotherhood (Akhtaev, for instance), or Khomeini's revolutionary Shiism (Dzhemal, for example), or Turkish Islamism.

In winter 1991, the IRP divided into national branches. The party's leadership, based in Moscow, agreed to support the candidate of the Tajik Communist Party, Rahmon Nabiev, at the presidential elections. This support provoked a split with the Tajik branch, which organized into an autonomous, specifically Tajik party under the leadership of Said Nuri, Sharif Himmatzade, and Davlat Osman, with the discreet support of the qazi of Tajikistan, Akbar Turajonzoda. The Tajik IRP was granted official recognition on 4 December 1991, and at the time counted nearly 20,000 members, making it the principal Islamic party in the whole Soviet Union. Although inspired by Islam, the party also had national aims. It gave itself the task of initiating a spiritual renewal among Tajik citizens, gaining economic and political independence for Tajikistan, and of progressively Islamicizing state structures. At the 1991 presidential elections, the party's candidate, Davlat Hudonazarov, officially obtained thirty-one percent of the votes (forty percent, according to the opposition).

The Uzbek branch of the IRP did not, for its part, succeed in its bid for official recognition. Tashkent in effect had much more repressive policies than Dushanbe and had to contend with multiple groupuscules that openly challenged the state's legitimacy. These groupuscules had bastions of popular support in the Ferghana Valley. Among these groupuscules, it is important to mention the Hezbollah Party and the Turkistan Islamist Party, both of which quickly disappeared from the political scene. One of the principal

movements of the time was Adolat (Justice), which first emerged in 1988 in Namangan under the leadership of Hakimjan Satimov. Adolat was essentially composed of young men organized into district militias (of up to 8,000 members²⁵) who patrolled the streets and attempted to regulate market prices. They aimed to replace the local authorities and proclaimed that *sharia* should govern the public order. The movement was very clearly financed by commercial groups seeking to institutionalize a security service subject to their interests.²⁶ In 1990 at the latest, the movement became radicalized and was transformed into Islom Adolati or Islom Lashkarlar (Warriors of Islam), led by Tahir Yuldashev after the latter distanced himself from the Wahhabi imam Abd al-Ahad, who headed the Gumbaz mosque.

Among the other Islamist movements requiring mention are Tawba (Repentance), eliminated in 1995, the Khalifatchilar movement (Partisans of the Caliphate), and Akromiyya, which subsequently became well known for its participation in the insurrection in Andijan in May 2005.²⁷ Violent actions multiplied after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the constitution of new independent states. Thus, in December 1991, a group of young Islamist militants from Tawba and Adolat, headed by Tahir Yuldashev, took control of the building of the former Communist Party in Namangan. They demanded that the political authorities confirm that the new independent state would be an Islamic one, that *sharia* would be implemented, that separate schools for girls and boys would be established, and that local Muslims would be given one of the administrative buildings of the town. On 19 December President Islam Karimov went to Namangan to speak with the insurgents and seems to have been deeply impressed by the massive support the Islamists enjoyed among the local population.²⁸ This event probably played a role in the hardening of the regime and the will of the Uzbek president to use repressive means to fight against Islamism.²⁹

In the spring of 1992, again in Namangan, members of Tawba took representatives of the local authorities hostage and destroyed public buildings. The negotiations failed, and President Islam Karimov was compelled for the first time to send in the army to liberate the hostages. Several militants were arrested, but their leader managed to escape. In December 1992, the leader of the Uzbek IPR, Abdullah Utaev, disappeared in prison, and Adolat and Tawba were dissolved by the authorities. Their militants gradually merged with those of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, itself in the process of being formed, and sought to unify all the small Islamic movements.³⁰ In Kazakhstan, the Alash party, which was of Islamo-nationalist persuasion, was also quickly repressed. As of 1992-1993, throughout Central Asia, the political authorities had organized a repression of Islamic movements; these latter then exited the public stage and went underground.³¹ Only the Tajik IRP would come to regain official status in 1999.

Rethinking Islam in the Soviet Period

Theological debates about the place of Islam in the heart of a non-Islamic state were only very briefly interrupted during the Soviet period. Even in the 1920s and 1930s, the worst years of Stalinist repression, the local ulamas opposed each other in their readings of Islam and continued to train disciples. SADUM, despite its apparent subservience to official communist discourse, enabled the discreet intercourse of theological discussion and the pursuit of debates among reformers, conservatives, and fundamentalists. From the 1970s onward, but probably from even the 1960s, the Ferghana Valley became the main region in which fundamentalist conceptions of Islam crystallized, and a leading battleground between Hanafite conservatives and fundamentalists inspired by Hanabalism and Shafīism. The doctrines of political Islam did therefore not come to the region simply via external influences from the Middle East, but developed within the Central Asian Soviet milieu itself.

A knowledge of the historical roots of Islamism in Central Asia is essential to properly understanding the contemporary situation. Contemporary Islamist currents in Central Asia, from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan to the Hizb ut-Tahrir, did not spring up on virgin soil.

The local population, hit hard by the pauperization it has experienced since the fall of the Soviet Union, is now often the involuntary actor of antagonisms between differing conceptions of Islam. The inhabitants follow the teachings proffered by the local imams (themselves having been educated by different currents and inspired by different spiritual masters), support them financially, and protect them from the repression carried out by the state, but are not necessarily aware of the political stakes implied by these differing interpretations of Islam. The deterioration of the economic situation and the political instability of the region merely contribute to fertilizing the compost already prepared in the Soviet past.

NOTES

1. S. Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917–1941* (Westport: Praeger, 2001); M. Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2004).

2. A. Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley and London: The University of California Press, 1998).

3. For a biography of Shami-damulla, see A. Muminov, "Shami-Damulla i ego rol' v formirovanii 'sovetskogo' islama," in *Islam, identichnost' i politika v postsovetovskom prostranstve* (Kazan: Kazan Institute of Federalism), 13, no. 1 (2005), 231-247.
4. V. V. Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle* (Lanham and Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 40.
5. A. Bennigsen and C. Lemerrier-Quelquejey, *Les musulmans oubliés. L'Islam en Union soviétique* (Paris: Maspéro, 1981); C. Poujol, "L'Islam en héritage: nouvelle approche d'une problématique persistante, entre résistance participative et acculturation passive," in S. Peyrouse, ed., *Gestion de l'indépendance et legs soviétique en Asie centrale: Cahiers d'Asie centrale*, nos. 13-14 (2004), 199-214; C. Poujol, "How can we use the concept of transition in Central Asian post-soviet history? An attempt to set a New Approach," http://www.cimera.org/sources/7_19.pdf; Y. Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union: From the Second World War to Gorbachev* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
6. In 1944 the Spiritual Board of Shiite and Sunni Muslims of Transcaucasia and the Spiritual Board of the North Caucasus and Dagestan were also created. The Spiritual Board of European Russia and of Siberia succeeded the Spiritual Assembly created by Catherine II in 1783. The administration of official Islam concerned only Sunnis and the Twelvers Shiites: the Ismaelians, the Baha'I, the Ghulats, and the Yezidis did not dispose of any recognized Soviet structure (they don't have any Spiritual Board representing them).
7. S. Ershahin, "The Official Interpretation of Islam under the Soviet Regime: A Base for Understanding of Contemporary Central Asian Islam," *Journal of Religious Cultures* 77 (2005), 1-19.
8. B. Babajanov, "O fetvakh SADUM protiv neislamskikh obychaev," in M. B. Olcott and A. Malashenko, eds., *Islam na postsovetovskom prostranstve: vzgliad iznutri* (Moscow: Carnegie Center, 2001), 170-184.
9. B. Babajanov, "Sredneaziatskoe dukhovnoe upravlenie musulman: predystoriia i posledstviia raspada," in M. B. Olcott and A. Malashenko, eds., *Mnogomernyye granitsy Tsentral'noi Azii* (Moscow: Carnegie Center, 2000), 55-69.
10. Interviews by V. V. Naumkin confirm that the Soviet political authorities were aware of supporting the fundamentalists against the Sufi movements. Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia*, 52. On Sufism as a key element of alternative Islam in the USSR, see A. Bennigsen and E. Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985).
11. The term *hodja* appeared in the names of several representatives of the Central Asian élites, especially in the form of Khodzhaev. Other titles such as *said*, *ishan*, *tura*, and *emir*, can also be found in surnames and first names, once again indicating belonging to the "descendants of saints," as the title *khan* (*khon*) can be added to some masculine first names to indicate the ancient nobility of the family.
12. S. Abashin, "Les descendants de saints en Asie centrale: Élite religieuse ou nationale?," in Peyrouse, *Gestion*, 215-230.
13. M. B. Olcott, "Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," *Carnegie Papers*, no. 77 (2007), 17.
14. For a detailed biography of Hindustani, see B. Babadjanov and M. Kamilov, "Muhammadjan Hindustani (1892-1989) and the Beginning of the 'Great Schism' among the Muslims of Uzbekistan," in S. A. Dudoignon and H. Komatsu, eds., *Islam in Politics in Russia and Central Asia (Early Eighteenth to Late Twentieth Centuries)*, (London, New York, and Bahrain: Kegan Paul, 2001), 195-219.
15. A. Muminov, "Traditional And Modern Religious-Theological Schools in Central Asia," in L. Jonson and M. Esenov, *Political Islam and Conflicts in Russia and Central Asia* (Stockholm: The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 1999), 101-111.
16. A. Bennigsen and E. S. Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
17. W. Fierman (ed.), *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation* (San Francisco, Oxford, Westview Press, 1991), 27.
18. A. Bennigsen, "Soviet Islam since the Invasion of Afghanistan," *Central Asian Survey* 1, no. 1 (1982), 65-78 and, by the same author, "Islam in Retrospect," *Central Asian Survey* 8, no. 1 (1989), 89-109.

19. B. Babajanov, "Ferganskaia dolina: istochnik ili zhertva islamskogo fundamentalizma?" *Tsentral'naia Aziia i Kavkaz*, no. 4(5) (1999), 125-131.
20. A. Kariev, "La vallée du Ferghana dans les années 1970-1980, aspects économiques et sociaux du mouvement islamiste," in M. Laruelle and S. Peyrouse, eds., *Islam et politique en ex-URSS* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 263-271.
21. A. Abduvakhitov, "Independent Uzbekistan: A Muslim Community in Development," in M. Bourdeaux, ed., *The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (New York, M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 192-305.
22. For more details about these figures see Olcott, "Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," 20-25.
23. Muhammad-Sadik Muhammad-Yusuf has published an analysis of the aspects of dogma involved in this schism in *Ihtiloflar hakida* (Tashkent, 2003).
24. A. Malashenko, *Islamskoe vozrozhdenie v sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow: Carnegie Center, 1998), 121.
25. A. Abduvakhitov, "Islamic Revivalism in Uzbekistan," in D. E. Eickelman ed., *Russia/Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross-Cultural Analysis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 89.
26. Muminov, "Traditional And Modern Religious-Theological Schools in Central Asia."
27. A. Il'khamov, "The Phenomenology of "Akromiya": Separating Facts from Fiction," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, 4 (2006), 39-48.
28. Information provided by my Uzbek interlocutor.
29. B. Babajanov, "Islam officiel contre islam politique en Ouzbékistan aujourd'hui: La direction des musulmans et les groupes non-hanafi," *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*, 31, no. 3 (2000), 151-164.
30. O. Roy, "Qibla and the Government House: The Islamist Networks," *SAIS Review* 21, no. 2 (2001), 53-63.
31. Z. Baran, "Radical Islamism in Central Asia," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* (Washington D.C., Hudson Institute), 2 (2005), 41-58.

