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Under the Green Banner: Islamic Radicals in Russia and the Former Soviet Union*

IGOR' ROTAR'

Introduction

Islam and war: sadly these concepts, which really have nothing to do with each other, are being seen more and more frequently, in the former USSR at least, as synonymous. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that practically all newspaper articles concerning wars in the Muslim areas of the former USSR include terms such as 'Islamists', '*gazavat*' and '*jihad*'; moreover all these words are used with clearly negative overtones.

It is indeed true that in Chechnya, the Chechen resistance fighters go into battle with the name of Allah on their lips. Enigmatic bearded men with green scarves wound round their heads have already seized Russian towns, declaring they are doing so in the name of the same Allah. In Dagestan, too, terrorist acts and attacks on the Russian armed forces have become commonplace, and in the local bazaars leaflets often appear calling upon all Muslims to support the 'holy war' against the Russian 'heathen occupation forces'.

Disturbing news comes in from Central Asia as well. There have been powerful explosions in the centre of Tashkent, while detachments of Uzbek Islamists have held out in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan for about two months. According to the Uzbek authorities units of Muslim fanatics from Uzbekistan have been formed in special military camps on Pakistani territory, just waiting for the right moment to seize military power in their homeland. In 2001 the southern borders of the CIS were being approached by the Taliban, who were seriously debating whether to follow up their liberation of Afghanistan as a whole by pushing the war further into Central Asia. The leaders of the Central Asian states and Moscow were worried that the Taliban might form an alliance with the local Muslim extremists, with a 'holy war' then flaring up all over the lands of Central Asia and even spreading to areas in Russia.

In this article I shall examine the role played by Islam in the zones of conflict in those regions of the CIS where large numbers of Muslims live. Most of the regional wars within the CIS have in fact taken place in Muslim areas. I shall try to clarify the situation in the zones of conflict in the CIS (including potential zones of conflict) where Islam forms an important part of the ideology of one of the opposing sides. Is

*This article is a translated and updated version of Igor' Rotar', *Pod zelenym znamenem islama: islamskiye radikalny v Rossii i SNG* (AIRO-XX, Moscow, 2001).

Islam one of the factors causing the armed conflicts or will its strict standards of religious morality and its system of law (the *sharia*), finely honed over the centuries, help instead to resolve these conflicts in their latent stage?

In almost all the zones of conflict in Muslim areas of the CIS fundamentalist groups are active. Before analysing this phenomenon I shall offer my interpretation of the concept of Islamic fundamentalism, as it recurs throughout this work. Fundamentalism is basically an attempt to revive the original values of Islam established at the time of the prophet Muhammed, and to purge the faith of later innovations and additions. One of the basic principles of today's fundamentalists is that religious affiliation, not nationality, is important to Muslims, and that all followers of Islam, regardless of the nation to which they belong, should become a united, indivisible force. It is therefore extremely important to ascertain whether the fundamentalist ideology is capable of uniting the followers of Islam or whether the growth of Islamic fundamentalism is itself a factor which provokes interdenominational conflicts among Muslims.

It should also be noted that Islamic conservatism (that is, the wish to bring Islam to bear on every sphere of life) is not supported only by fundamentalists. No less zealous in their support for the Islamic way of life are some of the followers of traditional Islam (made more complex by local customs), which is seen as heresy by the fundamentalists. Thus in Chechnya both Dzhokhar Dudayev and Aslan Maskhadov, his successor, established an Islamic state with the help of the traditional clergy, who were opposed to the fundamentalists. For convenience, I shall call the Islamic conservatives 'Islamists', a term which has come to be widely used – though not entirely accurately – in Oriental studies, and accordingly refer to the ideology they profess as 'Islamist'.

I should point out that my work is not that of a closet academic but of a man with practical experience. As a journalist I have reported from all the regional wars in the Muslim areas of the former USSR and have talked to most of the leading politicians and field commanders from these Muslim areas. Amongst those I have interviewed are: the president of Kyrgyzstan Askar Akayev; the president of Ingushetia Ruslan Aushev; the Chechen field commander Shamil' Basayev; the ex-president of North Ossetia Akhsarbek Galazov; the president of Chechnya Aslan Maskhadov; the Chechen minister of foreign affairs Movladi Udugov; the president of Chechnya Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev; the president of Tajikistan Rahmon Nabiyev; and the leaders of the Tajik opposition Abdulo Nuri and Akbar Turajonzoda. (All these were their titles as at the time of the interviews.) While working as a reporter in these zones of conflict I also got to know many ordinary people: rank and file soldiers, collective farm workers and members of the local intelligentsia.

I also make use of the periodical press – newspapers and journals published by Muslim communities, religious authorities and political organisations. These publications often have a small circulation and come out at irregular intervals. Besides these, I have used pamphlets and proclamations, propaganda videos and audio cassettes distributed by the adversaries in the zones of conflict.

The revival of Islam in the postsoviet vacuum and the role of Islamic political organisations in the CIS today have been the subject of detailed study by many serious scholars in Russia and other countries and this article could not have been written without referring to their works. They include the following: the Moscow and St Petersburg scholars F. Asadulin, B. Bushkov, A. Kudryavtsev, A. Malashenko, G. Miloslavsky, D. Mikul'sky, A. Nurullayev, L. Polonskaya, M. Roshchin, A. Sagadeyev and L. Syukiyainen; the Israeli researcher on Central Asia Yaacov Ro'i;

and the Chechen political researcher Dzhabrail Gakayev.

Among works on the history of Islam on the territory of the CIS I should mention particularly the book *Russia's Conquest of the Caucasus* by the English historian John Baddeley, published in London in 1908, as well as a work by the modern Israeli scholar Moshe Gamer entitled *Muslim Resistance to Tsarism: the Conquest of Chechnya and Dagestan*, the book *Islam v istorii Rossii* by the Russian Arabic scholar Robert Landa, and the monograph *Sheikh Kunta-khadzhi: zhizn' i ucheniye* by the Chechen researcher Vakhid Akayev.

I have made use of the central mass media. Since 1997 *Nezavisimaya gazeta* has been publishing the supplement *NG-Religii*, with a page devoted to Islam, and articles on Islam appear fairly regularly in the newspapers *Izvestiya*, *Segodnya*, *Moskovskiy novosti* and *Vremya-MN*. The journalists who most often write detailed analyses on Islam include A. Dubnov, I. Maksakov, Ye. Suponina, M. Shevchenko and S. Shermatova.

The first (introductory) section of my article gives an ethnic and social description of the area being researched – Central Asia and the Northern Caucasus. Tatarstan and Bashkortostan remain outside the framework of this study, as there have been no armed conflicts or terrorist activity in these areas and there is no reason to suppose that there will be any disturbances there in the foreseeable future.

The second section looks at the role of Islam in the areas of armed conflict in the CIS. It examines how Islamist doctrine was used during the war in Chechnya and Tajikistan and looks separately at the phenomenon of growing support for Islamic fundamentalism on CIS territory.

The third section gives a regional survey of relations between the authorities and the Islamic conservatives, both on the territory of the former USSR and also in the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of China, which borders the Central Asian states. The activities of the Islamists in neighbouring Central Asia have undoubtedly had significant influence on the situation in this region of China, inhabited as it is by Muslims, and the separatist movement in the XUAR, as far as we can tell, is maintaining contact not only with the fundamentalists in Central Asia but also with the Chechen resistance movement.

The fourth section looks at the involvement of criminal networks in the Islamic movement, a very topical issue. Unfortunately it is not unusual for people to become 'true Muslim believers' when in fact they have nothing to do with Islam, but plenty of contacts and influence in the criminal world. This may seem paradoxical, but is fairly easy to explain: criminal groups which have become powerful no longer wish to remain in the shadows but to declare their claims to political power openly. Of course this phenomenon is not confined to Muslim regions: local criminal groups have won elections in Leninsk-Kuznetsky and Nizhni Novgorod. However, it was in the Muslim republics of the former USSR that Islamic doctrine turned out to be the most effective alternative to the secular ideology of the local authorities.

The fifth section examines the question of the consolidation of the Muslims of the CIS into a single force. The complex interethnic relations amongst the various Muslim nations and the rivalry between different regional groups within a single 'ethnos' are the main obstacle to Muslim unification. Experience shows that national or even just regional interests are always stronger than religious solidarity. Attempts to achieve unity amongst Muslims often result in exactly the opposite: bloody clashes between fellow-believers. I shall also be looking at fundamentalist attempts to overcome differences between Muslims of various nations and to unite them into a single force.

The Northern Caucasus and Central Asia: Ethnic and Social Features

The Northern Caucasus and Central Asia are two of the most conflict-ridden areas of the former Soviet Union. In addition to the tensions characteristic of the whole CIS these regions have particular features which have made open conflicts more likely. One of the main factors causing tension in these areas is the way in which national territories were structured in the former USSR. The very principle of territorial and administrative division on national lines is alien to the history of these areas. States here have never been formed on national principles, as the very concept of 'nationality' was understood only in relative terms. In 1921, when the indigenous people of Central Asia were asked what their nationality was, they replied 'Muslim'.

The unsuitability in local conditions of the very principle of territorial division according to nationality was made even worse by the fact that borders were often drawn arbitrarily, without taking ethnic and political realities into account. As a result in Central Asia and the Northern Caucasus today there are about a dozen 'disputed territories' which are simultaneously claimed by two titular nations. As it turned out, the way the international frontier divided the Uzbeks (living in a closely united group close to the border with Uzbekistan in the Leninabad region of Tajikistan and in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan) and the Tajiks (living in the Samarkand and Bukhara regions of Uzbekistan, close to the border with Tajikistan) presented the greatest danger for Central Asia. In 1990 there were bloody clashes in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan between the local Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, resulting in the death of some 320 people. Moreover, the original cause of the conflict (that the local Uzbeks consider this territory to be historically theirs, while the Kyrgyz are seen as a non-native people and 'aliens' there) has still not been resolved. It is difficult to predict what the results of any fresh conflict might be, particularly since it might involve the population of neighbouring Uzbekistan. In 1990 throngs of people living in Andijan *oblast'* in Uzbekistan, who were going to the aid of their fellow-tribesmen, were only just stopped in time on the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border.

The situation within Uzbekistan is fairly complex as well. At the time of the national territorial division of 1924 the ancient centres of Tajik national culture – Bukhara and Samarkand – were allotted to Uzbekistan. The loss of these ancient cities had a harmful effect on the process of the consolidation of the Tajik nation. If the centres of Tajik culture had not been outside the borders of the republic, tribalism (in this case, in the sense of identification with a narrow regional consciousness) might well not have developed in such a distorted way.

The consequences of the mistakes made in national territorial division are equally apparent in the Northern Caucasus. Here interstate borders divide two North Caucasian nations: the Ossetians (living in North Ossetia, part of the Russian Federation, and also in the self-proclaimed Ossetian Republic in Georgia), and the Lezgins (whose main area of settlement includes southern Dagestan (in Russia) and northern Azerbaijan). Quite a number of North Caucasian nations are divided by republican borders. The Kabards, the Cherkess and the Adygei, who mostly live on the plains and only to a limited extent in the foothills, make up the ethnic community of Adygei peoples, who are very close in language and culture. The Balkars and Karachai, who live in the mountains, are also closely related peoples and speak the same Karachai-Balkar language, which is part of the Turkic language group. At present, the Adygei live in three areas of the Russian Federation: Adygeia, Karachayevo-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria. So the Karachai and the Balkars are both now divided by a border. Three subjects of the Russian Federation

(Dagestan, Karachayevo-Cherkessia and Stavropol' *krai*) also include an area where another important North Caucasian ethnic group, the Nogai, have settled in large numbers.

An additional factor in the tense situation in the Northern Caucasus is the problem caused by the rehabilitation of nations repressed in the past (the Chechens, Ingush, Karachai and Balkars). Their deportation in 1944 was accompanied by the abolition of their respective autonomous republics and national *raiony*. Their territories were divided among the neighbouring republics and *kraya*. So the Karachai autonomous *oblast'* was divided amongst the Krasnodar and Stavropol' *kraya* and Georgia; a part of Kabardino-Balkaria, where the Balkars had settled in large numbers, was also transferred to Georgia; the Prigorodny *raion* of Checheno-Ingushetia went to North Ossetia; and the central part of the Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic and the Kizlyar *okrug* of Stavropol' *krai* formed the basis for the Grozny *oblast'* of the RSFSR. After the repressed nations returned from exile in 1957 the 1944 borders were basically restored. However, there were exceptions, which set the scene for many of today's territorial conflicts in the Northern Caucasus. Thus the Karachai autonomous *oblast'* was united with the Cherkess autonomous *oblast'*, the Balkar *raiony* in the Kabardino-Balkar ASSR were reinstated in the middle of *raiony* with a predominantly Kabard population, the Prigorodny *raion* of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR remained part of the North Ossetian ASSR, the Aukhovskiy (Chechen) *raion* was not reinstated in the Dagestan ASSR and the Cossack *raiony* of Stavropol' *krai* – the Naurskiy, Shelkovskoy and Kargalinskiy *raiony* – were now included in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, although they had not been part of it before 1944.

Another significant factor in both Central Asia and the Northern Caucasus is the fact that in these areas the political struggle is to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from the struggle for power among the national and regional elites. In Central Asia the struggle is basically between regional groups within a titular ethnic group ('ethnos'). The Central Asian peoples have not in fact been formed into unified nations (the only exception being the Uzbeks, although even the Uzbeks attribute a great deal of significance to a person's birthplace) and all of them have been broken down into ethnic groups. The result is that most Central Asian peoples preserve a narrow regional consciousness – that is, someone from a particular region thinks of himself primarily as belonging to that region, not as a member of a single nation. Tribalism (here understood as a narrow regional consciousness) is one of the main factors destabilising the situation in Central Asia.

This phenomenon is most obvious in Tajikistan where the struggle for power between the regions escalated into a civil war which has so far taken 40,000 lives. It seems that it will in fact be impossible to achieve a consensus in this republic between the battling regional elites: each clan wants only its own men running Tajikistan.

The problem of tribalism is highly topical in Kyrgyzstan as well. A public survey of the share a representatives of various regions in the power structures caused no surprise in the republic. A local joke goes: 'We used to be building communism; now it's Keminism'. (Kemin *raion* is President Akayev's homeland.) The 'domination by the North' is a subject of serious discussion in the republic's press.

The 'regional question' is also a lively one in Turkmenistan where the tribal division into Tekin, Salyr, Saryk, Goklen, Chaudor and Yomut persists. The potential danger of regional confrontation in Turkmenistan is also a result of the unequal distribution of natural resources within the republic. For example, the main supplies of gas and oil are in the west of the republic, where the Yomut live. For the moment,

however, despite the danger of intertribal hostilities, the situation remains stable. President Saparmurad Niyazov, by birth a Tekin, stresses his 'nontribal' origins, referring to his past life in a children's home. As long as Niyazov is in control none of the regions is likely to try for power.

In the Northern Caucasus, as in Central Asia, most of the indigenous peoples have split into local ethnic groups, but there is much less interregional confrontation within any given 'ethnos'. The explanation is fairly simple. The sheer number of ethnic groups in the region forces the North Caucasian nations to close ranks in order to compete with 'rival' peoples: thus the Ossetians and the Ingush contend with each other over whose territory the Prigorodny *raion* belongs to; the Kabards and the Cherkess struggle for power in their republics with the Balkars and the Karachai; and in multinational Dagestan each of the national elites is trying to install its own man as head of the republic. In fact, however, the question of whether rivalry for power manifests itself at the regional or the national level is not really relevant. What is much more important is that in both Central Asia and the North Caucasus political ideology is no more than a cover: in reality, the fight for power is not between supporters of political convictions of one sort or another, but between leaders of national (ethnic) or regional (tribal) groups.

Central Asia and the Northern Caucasus have one more peculiarity in common. In both areas the so-called 'Asian' employment structure is typical: the indigenous population is basically engaged in agriculture and trade, while immigrants (mainly Slavs) are employed in industry. Both areas have work in plenty, but unemployment affects mostly the rural areas where most of the native population lives. It is indeed the traditional village way of life led by the native population that determines the 'mechanism' by which conflicts arise. Absolute and relative overpopulation in Central Asia and the North Caucasus and the fact that most of the indigenous residents are unable to participate in industrial production give rise to social tensions. Most of the so-called interethnic conflicts in the North Caucasus and Central Asia have arisen over land suitable for agriculture.

It was in Tajikistan that the civil war in Central Asia began: in a republic that of all the Central Asian states has the least amount of potentially fertile land per head of the population. It is significant that the other zone of conflict in Central Asia is the Fergana valley (with pogroms against Meskhetian Turks, slaughter in Osh and fundamentalist demonstrations), which has the highest population density in the area.

The 'land question' is no less acute in the North Caucasus; so it is easy to explain why the authorities in two mountain republics (North Ossetia and Ingushetia) are so stubbornly disputing which territory the Prigorodny *raion* should belong to. Flat and agricultural, it used to be the chief granary of the Ingush, who lost it, and it is now one of the most fertile zones in North Ossetia, which has acquired it. Statements made from time to time by Balkar national congresses about setting up an independent Balkar Republic arouse protests from the Kabards on only one point: inclusion in the newly created state of territory in the foothills which is suitable for agriculture. In Dagestan, too, the most serious conflicts are between mountain peoples and those from the plains. The mass movement of mountain peoples to the fertile lands of the plains is the main cause of territorial disputes, one of the republic's foremost problems.

Both Central Asia and the North Caucasus thus have a whole series of specific traits which have made it highly probable that ethnic and social conflicts should break out there. It is therefore not surprising that as soon as the central authority began to weaken after the start of *perestroika* many hitherto hidden conflicts came

out into the open. As all the indigenous peoples of these areas are Muslims (with the single exception of the Ossetians, who belong to the Orthodox Church), it is not surprising that as the crisis grew, the opposing sides began to appeal ever more frequently to Islam, hoping that they would be able to resolve the new conflicts with the help of their ancestral religion.

The Threat of Islamic Radicalism in the CIS: Myth or Reality?

Nearly all articles analysing the local wars in the Muslim regions of the former USSR refer to the so-called 'Wahhabis'. The overall image created by the mass media of followers of this Islamic movement is of bearded fanatics who behead their secularised fellow-countrymen without hesitation, mercilessly wipe out Russian soldiers, and take journalists and foreigners hostage.

Wahhabis are followers of religious and political teachings in Sunni Islam which were developed in Arabia in the mid-eighteenth century on the basis of the teachings of Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who preached the strictest observance of the principle of monotheism, rejection of the worship of shrines and purification of Islam from later additions and innovations. 'Wahhabism' is similar to the official ideology of Saudi Arabia.

In the USSR 'Wahhabis' were first mentioned in the early 1990s, at the time of the civil war in Tajikistan. Those who were against the Tajik opposition declared that they were fighting not against true Muslims, but against 'Wahhabis'. The term was used even by some religious activists. Thus for example in a discussion with me the *imam-hatyb* (dean) of the chief mosque in Kulyab, Haidar Sharifzoda, stated that he regarded Akbar Turajonzoda as a 'Wahhabi'.¹ The local population gave supporters of the opposition a nickname, which has stuck: '*vovchiki*' (from the word 'Wahhabi'), while their adversaries were called '*yurchiki*'.

The Islamic opposition in Tajikistan certainly made use of certain elements of 'Wahhabi' ideology: for example, they called on people to renounce magnificent weddings and funerals. 'These customs became established during the Soviet era. A Tajik was supposed to invite hundreds of people to his funeral. Ceremonies like that are ruinous enough for the poor of Tajikistan as it is!', Haji Akbar Turajonzoda,² then the *kazikalon* (leader of the Muslims of Tajikistan), told me. Turajonzoda did indeed make a number of statements at that time which gave his opponents a formal excuse to dub the Tajik opposition 'Wahhabis'. For instance, he made no secret of the fact that his world-view had been greatly influenced by the 'Muslim Brothers', the radical Islamic international organisation founded in Egypt in the 1950s, and that he regarded them as excellent philosophers. 'I am convinced that fundamentalism is not extremism, nor religious intolerance', he would say. 'I think that every religious person should be something of a fundamentalist, if by fundamentalism we mean that a man is keeping to the true faith.'³

In fact, however, it is basically incorrect to equate the terms 'fundamentalist' and 'Wahhabi'. The first concept is considerably broader in meaning than the second. In the contemporary literature definitions of the term 'fundamentalism' differ considerably. Some authors define it as essentially a desire to restore the fundamental bases of one's 'own' civilisation, to cleanse it of all alien innovations and borrowings and to restore its 'true' image.⁴ However, others hold that the use of this term is intrinsically incorrect, because it is just a tautology: every Muslim trying to find the true (fundamental) faith is a fundamentalist.⁵ As I mentioned earlier I am using 'fundamentalism' in its broadest sense: the striving to purify Islam of later

innovations and additions and to follow the way of life and beliefs of the early Muslim community.

It is an interesting fact that the leading ranks of the Tajik opposition mostly come from the Central Asian class of *ishan* (leaders of Sufi orders or brotherhoods).⁶ Those regarded as the first Sufis were ascetics, who lived in Iraq and Syria at the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries and tried to discover the 'secret' meaning of the revelation in the Quran. They strictly observed the injunctions of the Quran and the Sunna, with vigils, vows and extra fasts. The name of the movement comes from the Arab word '*suf*', 'wool', as the Sufis wore cloaks made of coarse wool. The devotees of Sufism are united in special brotherhoods or *tariqa* (the Arab word for 'path', in this case meaning the right path to the truth). The Wahhabis believe that Sufism is contrary to the canons of Islam; so clearly the Tajik opposition cannot be classed as Wahhabis. After they were expelled from Tajikistan many of their leaders settled in Shiite Iran, Saudi Arabia's chief ideological rival. We should also note that the backbone of the resistance to Russian military forces during the war in Chechnya in 1994–96 also consisted of followers of Sufism. Akbar Turajonzoda argued to me that 'the term "Wahhabi" was specially promoted by the KGB in order to produce a split among believers'.⁷ One of the leading Russian Muslim academic theologians, Akhmedkadi Akhtayev from Dagestan, holds that

The word 'Wahhabi' is a slogan which ignorant people often attach to groups of Muslims who are quite different from each other. In fact, anyone who openly criticises the official clergy is held to be a 'Wahhabi'. The general label 'Wahhabi' in the CIS includes the Salafi – Muslim religious activists who at various times in history have called for a return to the faith and way of life of the early Muslim community – or just 'fundamentalists'.⁸

Akhtayev's view seems to be correct: in the former USSR 'Wahhabi' is a general term used for all groups of Muslims who openly criticise the regional peculiarities of Islam, which are often shaped by local customs and even by Soviet innovations. As Robert Landa notes, the main secret of the fundamentalists' success is the way they appeal to young people. One of the things they have done is to make use of some of the traditions of men's sports groups, which trace their origins back to the time of resistance to the Mongol conquest. Under the guidance of mullahs these groups took up the study of the Quran and the Muslim classics.⁹ Practically all modern 'Wahhabi' mosques have gymnasiums next to them, where men learn karate and other forms of Eastern single combat (this fact is used to accuse the Salafi of setting up terrorist groups). 'Wahhabis' come to the mosque before dawn for the first morning prayers and often do not leave it until after sunset, spending the day in philosophical discussions and sports activities. Thus the mosque becomes a special club for like-minded energetic young men.

The various motley groups of fundamentalists are united in one respect: they all have a conservative or indeed radical outlook. They do not approve either of the former communist system or of the western model of development which has replaced it. Most Salafi consider that Muslims should not obey the secular authorities and call for the establishment of an Islamic state operating according to sharia law.

As a rule, those who join fundamentalist groups are the more reflective young people from a traditional, nonindustrial social background (peasants, traders), not linked with criminal organisations. This situation is perhaps particularly dangerous for the authorities. In the areas where 'Wahhabism' is widespread (Tajikistan,

Uzbekistan, Dagestan and Chechnya), about 70 per cent of the people live in a traditional society. Their lifestyle remained practically unchanged during the years of Soviet rule, and the fact that the best of them are coming out against the new system of values can only arouse alarm.

'Wahhabis' are not the only Islamic conservatives in the CIS, however. No less zealous champions of the Islamic way of life are some of the followers of Sufi Islam. In Chechnya both Dzhokhar Dudayev and his successor Aslan Maskhadov were trying to found an Islamic state with the help of the Sufi clergy. The ideologists of the Tajik opposition could also be regarded as Islamic conservatives, though they are certainly not Salafi.

The phenomenon of Islamic conservatism in the former USSR was the outcome of a more serious problem, which could be defined in the words of Samuel Huntington as a 'conflict of civilisations'. Until *perestroika* began, Moscow had succeeded in assimilating the country's various peoples to the communist ideology, although culturally they were so diverse. However, this was possible only under a totalitarian system. The Western European democratic institutions, taken as a model by the Kremlin, turned out to be completely ineffective in the Muslim areas of the disintegrating empire. In 1991 Muhammadsharif Himatzoda, the leader of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, explained his views to me:

Our democracy is incompatible with the western sort. In the West, individual rights are so little restricted that, in practice, the rights of society are hardly recognised, and because of the permissiveness of the western way of life the West is heading for collapse. On the other hand, until very recently in the Soviet Union individual rights were extremely limited. We shall try to steer a middle course.¹⁰

One thing which has helped the Islamic conservatives to broaden their social base is the lack of legal order now characteristic of most of the Muslim regions of the former USSR. In Dagestan, for example, power is divided between the former Party nomenklatura and the so-called 'New Dagestanis': criminal associations with their own armed units. 'Wahhabis' from the Dagestani village of Karamakhi first came into conflict with the official authorities in Makhachkala after refusing to pay tribute to local criminals. Meanwhile, in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, an 'official racket' – corrupt state officials – is having success in replacing the local mafia. In situations like these, many Muslims lose faith in the effectiveness of the secular authorities and come to the conclusion that legal anarchy can be tackled only if society starts to live according to sharia laws.

The success of the fundamentalists is due in large part to their financial power. Many fundamentalist groups receive regular financial aid from organisations abroad such as the World Jihad Front and the Muslim Brotherhood party.¹¹ In fundamentalist madrassahs students receive grants of US\$20–100, while new converts joining fundamentalist groups receive 'relocation expenses' of hundreds of dollars. In the North Caucasus and Central Asia that is quite a lot of money.

'It goes without saying that this is rubbish, that Asian civilisation cannot be redrawn in the western style. It can only be driven into Sunday schools or elections at the point of a gun', wrote Rudyard Kipling.¹² It is symptomatic that in practically all the Muslim republics, both in Russia itself and in the newly-independent 'Near Abroad', power is still in the hands of the former Party nomenklatura, whose style of rule has hardly changed since Soviet times. Communist and Islamic ideology share certain features. They both reject the West's classic principle of division of authority:

the traditional Islamic state was headed by the caliph, the communist state by the Party's general secretary – in other words, secular and spiritual (political) power were united in one person. A somewhat harsh, but nevertheless accurate, description of Islam comes from Dmitri Trofimov, who believes that Islam involves 'the use of double standards, a clearly expressed communal anti-individualism, intrusive surveillance of both general and personal morality and an obvious preference for form over content; it allows the use of any means to achieve its specified aims and has an unprecedented potential for mobilisation'.¹³ According to Aleksei Malashenko, 'Islam is the only religion which proposes its own code of law – the sharia – as a way of controlling relations in society as a whole. This kind of interference in non-religious life is unacceptable to (relatively) secular Europe.'¹⁴

Perhaps it is factors like these which explain why many ordinary Tajik militant Islamists have told me that they are 'for the Soviet Union and Islamic republic'. Even Chechen resistance fighters have been known to blame Gorbachev for 'destroying' the Soviet Union and have recalled nostalgically the days before *perestroika* when, to put it bluntly, there could have been no discussion at all of any Chechen independence. Georgi Zaalishvili, who was held as a hostage by the Chechen resistance, once told me that

Almost all the bandits who were holding me hostage were fighting against the [Russian] Federal forces, defending the independence of Chechnya. But the most interesting thing was that these same people recalled Soviet times as the best days of their lives. I particularly remember a former tractor driver, who had lost all his savings at the time of Pavlov's monetary reforms. For some reason he blamed me personally for his misfortune. He would often beat me up, constantly repeating 'Under the communists I was a rich man, but now I have to fight the Russians and trade in hostages!'¹⁵

It seems that it was Islam which turned out to be the only possible practical ideology for the revolutionary movements in the Muslim republics of the CIS. Any opposition movement whose slogans were exclusively democratic or national was doomed to failure.

In the early 1990s Dzhokhar Dudayev spoke out as a secular politician in support of an independent secular national state established according to western standards. In 1991 he responded to those elders who were trying to persuade him to proclaim an Islamic state.

The roots of Islam have been seriously undermined by the communists and it is going to take years to reestablish them. I respect your perseverance, but I regard it as premature. If we were to declare today that life was to be lived according to the sharia, then tomorrow you would demand that I start chopping off the heads and hands of sinners, without taking account of the fact that this would mean that the day after tomorrow there would be hardly any participant in this congress who would have a head or arm left. You are not prepared for that and neither am I. So let us establish order according to the Quran in our souls – and according to a Constitution in everyday life.¹⁶

Dudayev was soon forced to change his stance. As the orientalist Aleksei Malashenko has pointed out, Chechnya is the only Muslim region in the Russian Federation in which islamisation – in its more extreme form – has been the result of

external pressure.¹⁷ In an interview with *Time* magazine Dudayev said that ‘Russia ... forced us to take the way of Islam, although we were ill prepared to adopt Islamic values’.¹⁸

The situation in Tajikistan developed along similar lines. In the view of the mufti of Uzbekistan Muhammad Sadyk Yusuf, who fell from favour and fled abroad,

The Muslims of Tajikistan also wanted to exercise their lawful rights. They founded the Islamic Revival Party (*Islamskaya partiya vozrozhdeniya*) of Tajikistan and joined the democratic bloc. Yes, it was the democratic movement that they joined, as they considered themselves democrats too. But the democratic world, in spite of its many promises, was not prepared to accept them.¹⁹

During my unofficial conversations with many opposition activists, including some from the democratic opposition, they confirmed the views expressed by Muhammad Sadyk Yusuf: according to them, democratic slogans had turned out to be completely alien to the Tajik peasantry, and if the opposition had used purely Islamic ideas they would have received more support from the republic’s population.

It should also be noted that Islamic ideology is organically interwoven with nationalism. The Chechen separatists and the Tajik opposition alike have defended their national identity and opposed Russian cultural ‘expansion’. ‘This man is not one of our circle at all – at home he speaks Russian’, Akbar Turajonzoda let slip during a conversation with me.²⁰ It is interesting that the leadership of the Tajik opposition included quite a number of people who spoke practically no Russian (very unusual in Tajikistan), but had a good command of Arabic – for example, Said Abdullohi Nuri, leader of the Islamic Revival Movement (*Dvizheniye islamskogo vozrozhdeniya*) of Tajikistan, and Muhammadsharifzoda Himatzoda, president of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan. The concept of Tajikistan’s ‘real independence’ played an important role in the ideology of the Tajik opposition; they would accuse their adversaries of having assimilated to Russian ‘Soviet’ culture to such an extent that they were no longer really Tajiks. ‘Under the present government [this conversation took place before the establishment of the coalition government – IR], Tajikistan has in fact become a Russian satellite, one of its provinces. We demand that our state should be independent not just on paper but in reality’, said Akbar Turajonzoda in conversation with me.²¹ The leader of the Uzbek nationalist party *Erk*, Muhammad Salih, told me ‘I am not a religious man, but I understand perfectly well that Islam is an integral part of our culture and that only with the help of religion can we defend our independence’.²² Islamic ideology, counterposed to that of the Orthodox system and of the Soviet system which succeeded it, served as an excellent barrier against cultural expansion from the North. It is interesting that similar tendencies have been characteristic of other parts of the Muslim world too. The Islamic revolution in Iran, for example, was the reaction of a traditional society to attempts by the shah to put through a fundamental modernisation of the country, to turn it into one more Southern European state. The Islamic scholar Yuri Polyakov believes that ‘the successful growth of the well-known “Muslim Brothers” movement in Egypt was a consequence of the reaction of Egyptian society to the introduction of western models of capitalist development and their clash with traditional forms of capital’.²³ As Robert Landa correctly remarks, ‘to every nationalist, even an unbeliever, Islam is that “everyday life” which must be defended against invasion and against a modernisation which many take to be forcibly imposed. So Islam is an integral part of nationalism’.²⁴ In this context we should note that one of the most prominent

radical Islamic ideologists in Russia today, Geidar Dzhemal', believes that if Russians want to free themselves from what he sees as the destructive influence of the West they will simply have to convert to Islam.²⁵

Islamic Conservatives and Political Power: a Regional Survey

It is thus clear that Islamic conservatism in the Muslim areas of the CIS has been growing in a rich and fertile soil. Let us take a brief look at the way Islamic conservatism has manifested itself in various regions of the former USSR.

Chechnya

There is no nation in the Russian Federation which has put up such a stubborn resistance to central authority as the Chechens have. The national liberation movement began at the end of the eighteenth century and went on without interruption until 1917. Even after the Caucasian War ended uprisings still flared up from time to time and the so-called '*abreki*', the 'noble bandits' peculiar to the region, used to go on their sprees in the republic, attacking both Russian settlers and representatives of the authorities. The liberation movement broke out anew in the early 1930s, provoked by collectivisation. In 1940 a number of mountain districts in the republic came under the rule of the rebels. In 1942 Chechen insurgents issued an appeal to the population of the republic saying that they would greet the German troops according to the laws of Caucasian hospitality on condition that they recognised the independence of the Caucasus.

When Russian troops entered Chechnya in 1944 Russian and foreign journalists had the opportunity to discover for themselves some unexpected characteristics of the Chechens. These mountain-dwellers astounded them by the intransigence of their struggle against the Federal forces – a struggle in which, it seemed, the whole population of the republic was involved. Even the children, with green scarves wound round their heads and toy machine guns, were playing at being the new heroes: Shamil' Basayev or Salman Raduyev. One thing that stood out was the honourable behaviour of the individual Chechens. There were cases of Chechen fighters shielding Russian journalists with their own bodies against shots fired by Russian snipers. People who had lost close relatives in indiscriminate raids by Russian aircraft did not 'go for' Russian journalists, but told them that it was the Russian government that was to blame for the tragedy, not the Russians themselves. After the Russian military withdrew, however, these same Chechens began to take journalists hostage, although many of the latter had done a lot to help the separatists win. Indignant at this duplicity, the journalists turned against the 'proud and freedom-loving' people they had so recently favoured. In fact there was nothing inconsistent about the Chechens' behaviour. 'First they showed their good qualities, now they're showing their bad ones', a Dagestani told me, only half joking. Certainly hospitality, restraint in showing emotion, chivalry and protection of the defenceless have been respected for centuries in Chechen society. However, from the same Chechen moral viewpoint (the traditions of the *abreki*), raids into foreign territory and the capture of infidels are not sins, but, on the contrary, evidence of vigour and bravery.

The Chechen political scientist Dzhabrail Gakayev argues that

The Chechen people can be divided into three fairly large regional groups located respectively in Nadterechny *raion* and in the areas historically known as Greater and Lesser Chechnya. We can speak of three sub-ethnic groups of the Chechen nation. The most distinctive is the one from Nadterechny *raion* – the *terkkhoi*. They had already migrated to the plain by the sixteenth century and they have been the ones who have been most influenced by the nations surrounding them, including the Russians.²⁶

Besides the regional differences, there are also the different *teipy*. There is no agreement among scholars as to what a *teip* is, but most of them are inclined to regard it as a commonality of clan and territory. A *teip* unites Chechens whose remote ancestors migrated from the same place. Before the first Chechens migrated onto the plain, each of their groups controlled a particular hill, and the *teip* unites the ancestors of those who migrated from the same hill. Today there are about 180 *teipy*.

As Dzhabrail Gakayev notes, the Chechen *teipy* can be classed as ‘elite’ (*znatnyye*) – those which over the many centuries of their history have never sullied their noble (*uzdenskoye*) origins or their honour – or as ‘plebeian’ (*leikskiy*). They are also subdivided into ancestral Chechen *teipy* (*chistyye*) and those not of Vainakh origin (*nechistyye*), which are descended from other tribes. (‘Vainakh’ is the term used for Chechens and Ingush when they are referred to as a single ethnic community.) The latter include the *gunoi*, who trace their descent from the Terek Cossacks, the *zumsoi*, who are of Georgian descent, the *kharachoi*, of Cherkess descent, the *tarkoi*, of Kumyk descent, and others.²⁷ The interests of regions and *teipy* usually coincide: as a rule, those who belong to the same *teip* live in the same region. About 80 *teipy* are from the plains: most of their members left the mountains some centuries ago.

Sometimes, however, *teip* and regional interests differ. In such cases regional attachment (when a number of generations of Chechens have lived on the same territory) is stronger than attachment to the *teip*. In 1989 the Chechen-Ingush regional committee (*obkom*) of the CPSU elected Doka Zavgayev from Nadterechny *raion* as first secretary, and in 1990 he was elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the republic. Zavgayev was the first Chechen to become leader of Checheno-Ingushetia in all the years of Soviet rule. However, the initial national rejoicing soon turned into a struggle for power between *teipy* and regions. The election of a Chechen as republican leader set a precedent which gave rise to a new temptation: to install a representative of one’s own region or *teip* as the leader of an autonomous republic. Keeping his balance at the expense of his authority until 1991, Zavgayev became a victim of the events of August of that year and was overthrown as a supporter of the coup.

It seems, however, that long before the August events a structure had already been set up which would make it possible to change the republic’s leader. The National Congress of the Chechen People (*Obshchenatsional’ny s’yezd chechenskogo naroda*) (NCCP) brought together representatives of *teipy* who were dissatisfied with the domination of the ruling structures by the Nadterechny Chechens.²⁸ Originally the opposition to Zavgayev did not consist exclusively of ‘mountain men’. Beslan Gantemirov, for example, one of the most radical members of the opposition and founder of the Islamic Way (*Islamsky put’*) party, belonged to the influential *chonkhoi* *teip*, which is based on the plains in Urus-Martan *raion*.

The first split in the ranks of the anti-Zavgayev opposition took place at the Second Congress of the Chechen People. The executive committee led by Dudayev succeeded in getting a motion passed dissolving the Supreme Soviet of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, together with its chairman, Zavgayev, and proclaiming the sovereign

Chechen Republic of Nokhchi-Cho. The executive committee of the Congress, renamed the executive committee of the NCCP, was declared the temporary organ of authority in Nokhchi-Cho. At about the same time, Dzhokhar Dudayev set up a headquarters mainly staffed by mountain teipy. Robert Landa gives an interesting and, I think, correct interpretation of Dudayev's move: 'There were a number of social, historical and even geographical reasons. The mountain [teipy] are more militant and active, more nationalist in their attitudes, as they were the ones which suffered most persecution, both before and after 1917.'²⁹

After Dudayev was elected president the new government's authority was not recognised in Nadterechny *raion*, where as noted above Zavgayev's family came from. Then after the Grozny city assembly headed by Beslan Gantemirov was dissolved, Urus-Martan *raion* also refused to submit to Dudayev. Dudayev thus lost control of practically all the plains of Chechnya. In the view of the Chechen political scientist Vakhit Akayev

The idea that under Dzhokhar Dudayev power was usurped by the 'mountain men' is not without foundation. It was under his rule, for example, that the republic began officially to be called Chechnya-Ichkeria. Ichkeria is the mountain region of Chechnya. My view is that in choosing this new name the 'mountain men' were emphasising the consolidation of their power.³⁰

The propaganda emanating from Grozny began to develop a theory concerning the 'purer' Chechen teipy from the mountains and the 'impure' ones, mostly from the plains, with their admixture of foreign tribes. Thus, for example, Salambek Khadzhiyev was 'accused' of being of Avar descent and Ruslan Khasbulatov of Cherkess. The conflicts between teipy and regions seriously weakened Dudayev's regime and it became clear that a transfer of power was not far off. In December 1994, however, Moscow made a terrible mistake: Russian troops were sent into Chechnya. It would have been difficult to imagine a better gift to Dudayev's regime. A Chechen is above all a Chechen and only second a member of one or another *tariqa* or *teip*. So the mass murder by Russian troops of a peaceful population, including women and children, meant that former fervent opponents of Dudayev now began to swell the ranks of the resistance movement.

After the withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya in 1996 the conflicts between regions and teipy flared up again even more forcefully. In the presidential elections the current president, Aslan Maskhadov, took the whole of Nadterechny *raion*, where his *teip* came from, while his chief rival, Shamil' Basayev, won a clear victory in his native Veden *raion*. In this situation there was no possibility for Maskhadov to exercise full power as president. The whole republic was in fact divided up into zones of influence under field commanders, each of whom was complete master of his estate. RNTV television reporter Il'yas Bogatyrev recalls that

When I was travelling around Chechnya in September 1999 every field commander guaranteed my safety only on his 'own territory'. At the border of 'his zone' of influence I would be handed over (and signed for) to the field commander whose lands I was entering. During my week's stay in Chechnya I crossed five zones of this kind.³¹

The return of Russian troops to Chechnya in 1999 pushed the conflicts between regions and teipy into the background, but it is clear that as soon as the situation in the republic stabilises they will come to the fore once again.

The Religion is the Same but the Leaders Change

The main form of Islam practised in Chechnya is Sufism, a mystical and ascetic school. As mentioned earlier, followers of Sufism come together in special brotherhoods or *tariqa*. The *tariqa* are subdivided into *viridy*. In Chechnya there are two main *tariqa*. Most of the Chechens in the plains belong to the 'Naqshbandiya' brotherhood, while most of the mountain people belong to the 'Qadiriya' brotherhood, which has become well known through television broadcasts of the loud *zikr*, its own unique form of devotion. During the Caucasian war in the nineteenth century it was the Naqshbandiya *tariqa* which became associated with the holy war (*gazavat*) and which offered the most resolute opposition to the Russian forces. Imam Shamil himself and his *murid* (disciples) belonged to this brotherhood. The Naqshbandiya *tariqa* became the official religious denomination during the imamate of Shamil. The spread of the teachings of the Qadiriya *tariqa* in Chechnya is associated with a famous Chechen preacher, Sheikh Kunta-khadzhi Kishiyeu, who called for submission to Russian occupation in order to save the nation. Some believe that it was only the suspicion and intolerance of the Russians towards any movements and activities which were not under the control of the authorities that prevented them from using the Qadiriya *tariqa* against Shamil.³²

Over the past century, however, the two brotherhoods have reversed their positions. It seems that the defeat of Shamil and his Naqshbandiya *tariqa* led to the latter's sudden loss of authority. After the Caucasian war ended most of the Naqshbandiya leaders took up a pro-Russian position, while the Qadiriya brotherhood became the new bulwark of anticolonial resistance.

In the first years of Soviet rule the GPU skilfully made use of the conflicts between the *viridy* in Chechnya. Its operatives started by recruiting the poor *murid* communities of the Qadiriya and then, with their help, undermined the influence of the more antisoviet rich sheiks of the Naqshbandiya and later eliminated them. Soon it was the turn of the Qadiriya sheiks. In the end all 38 Chechen sheiks were killed. Their successors as leaders of the Chechen Sufi brotherhoods survived the Stalinist tyranny only by cooperating with the NKVD and the KGB.³³ The imam-hatyb of the Nasark-Yurt mosque, Salambek-khadzhi Ivloyev, a leading figure in the Qadiriya brotherhood of Ingushetia, told me that

Many of the Naqshbandiya religious leaders took the view that it was necessary to cooperate with the atheist, communist authorities. Even in Soviet times most Chechens remained true Muslim believers, and the KGB tried to rule the country with the help of the Naqshbandiya. Formal members of this *tariqat* were also appointed to the top posts in Checheno-Ingushetia. Doku Zavgayev, for example, is from the Naqshbandiya.³⁴

Over the years of Soviet rule the Qadiriya turned into the principal bastion of opposition to the communist regime. Dudayev's alliance with the Qadiriya of the mountains is thus easily explicable. It is interesting that Qadiriya *zikry* were regularly heard during the period when the Checheno-Ingush Supreme Soviet was losing political power, and during both the recent wars in Chechnya no meeting demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya could take place without *zikr* devotions.

From Soviet times right up to 1993 the Muslim Spiritual Board of Checheno-Ingushetia (after Chechnya lost its autonomy) was under Naqshbandiya leadership. These higher ranks of the clergy had long since become part of the Party nomen-

klatura and were wholly dependent on the local communist authorities, so their reaction to Dudayev's rise to power could not be other than hostile. Most of the religious activists in Chechnya were drawn into a bitter internal political struggle. A considerable number of the lower clergy supported Dudayev, as 'the imam of Chechnya'. Other clergy, notably mufti M.B. Arsanukayev and his supporters, and also the Naqshbandiya community, came out in opposition to him.³⁵ It was quite natural that in this situation Dudayev should start to depend on the Qadiriya clergy, who were not linked with the former rulers.

On 23 April 1992 Dudayev signed a decree setting up a National Committee for Religious Affairs attached to the president's office. The president's adviser on religious affairs, Mukhammed-Khusein Alsabekov, a member of the Qadiriya tariqa, was appointed chairman of the Committee. One of the tasks of the new body was to prepare the ground for changes in the leadership of the muftiate. In January 1993 some clergy of the Qadiriya tariqa – Dudayev's supporters – founded a Spiritual Centre for Muslims of the Chechen Republic to challenge the Muslim Spiritual Board of Chechnya. On 14 April 1993 the National Committee on Legal Reform of the Chechen Republic registered the Spiritual Centre as the leading Muslim authority in Chechnya and annulled the registration of the Muslim Spiritual Board.³⁶ The Qadiriya clergy thus finally consolidated their role as spiritual leaders in the republic. 'Representatives of the Naqshbandiya tariqa used to be in power, but now we have come to power', the Chechen political scientist Vakhid Akayev told me in 1994. He is a highly placed member of the Chechen Qadiriya clergy.³⁷

Having declared their support for Dzhokhar Dudayev the Qadiriya clergy demanded that he proclaim an Islamic state. As noted earlier, as a former general of the Soviet army and a thoroughly secular man Dudayev did not have this on his agenda. He did not want to upset his new allies unnecessarily, however, so in the end he did as they asked, although he himself refused to become imam of Chechnya, and in practice the proclamation remained a formality only. Thus alcohol was sold openly throughout Chechnya, and even during the holy month of Ramadan, when drinking, eating and smoking are forbidden from sunrise to sunset, cafes and restaurants were full of people. Under Dudayev the emphasis was in fact not on Islam but on the national idea. Propaganda developed the theme of the Chechens' uniqueness and of their special role in the history of mankind. Dudayev asserted, for example, that the Chechens were the founders of the Muslim faith and even recommended to the mufti of the republic that he should set about working out a new approach to the ethnographical genesis of Islam. According to Dudayev a great religion like Islam could not have originated with nomadic tribesmen in the lifeless Arabian desert but must have emerged in an idyllic spot amongst a people with an exalted culture of mutual association and respect. Dudayev also believed that Noah's Ark had come to rest on top of the Chechen mountains and that Noah's family were the ancestors of the modern Chechens.³⁸

The situation changed dramatically in 1994 after Russian troops were sent into Chechnya. Islamic doctrine turned out to be the most suitable ideology to unite the Chechens into a single force opposing the Russians. In the Chechen resistance units flogging with rods was introduced as a punishment for offences against sharia law, and most of the fighters renounced alcohol and began to take pride in calling themselves 'mujaheddin'. After the withdrawal of Russian forces Chechnya became in the words of Aslan Maskhadov a 'besieged fortress'. The establishment of an Islamic state went ahead at an ever-increasing rate. The new Criminal Code adopted by Chechnya-Ichkeria was practically indistinguishable from that of Sudan, one of the

most orthodox states of the Islamic world. A decree of President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev made it compulsory for schools to put Islamic law and the Arabic language on the curriculum (although a severe shortage of teachers meant that only a few schools were able to offer the latter). All sale of alcohol was forbidden, secular courts ceased to function and criminals began to be tried according to the sharia law. The speed of islamisation increased still further after the election of Aslan Maskhadov as president of Chechnya. As in Iran, buses were divided into two sections, male and female. Television and cinema were forbidden to show 'sexual scenes'. Sometimes this led to curious incidents. For example, I was once watching a football match on television in Grozny, transmitted from Moscow. When the players scored a goal and started embracing the screen immediately went blank: Chechen TV evidently considered this scene impermissible from the viewpoint of Muslim morality.

There had been similar efforts to impose Islam by force in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first person in the Northern Caucasus to use Islam as a means of uniting the mountain people in the fight against Russian colonisation was Sheikh Mansur. Although he did not succeed in his attempt to unite the wild tribes of the mountains and forests, he was the first to suggest to them that, without a reformed Islamic creed, they would not achieve the freedom or independence which they prized so much.³⁹ In the nineteenth century, Sheikh Mansur's work was brilliantly continued by Imam Shamil. He tried to give the resistance to the Russians a specifically religious character, since only Islam could unite the tribes, so very different in their customs, which were often at odds with each other. On the territory under his control Shamil therefore inflicted merciless punishment for any violation of Islamic law: for example, for failure to recite prayers five times a day or for not paying the *zakat* (a tax on property and income laid down by sharia law) the penalty was death.

It should be noted that Maskhadov's attempts to islamise Chechnya were not particularly successful. In buses, despite all directives from above, men still sat together with women. Although the sale of alcoholic drinks was forbidden, medical spirits were sold all over the place, ostensibly for disinfecting wounds. The whole situation was rather reminiscent of communist times, when despite all efforts to impose Marxism from above people continued living their own lives without regard for ideology. Islamisation under Maskhadov produced the same kind of result. Islam replaced the former communist ideology and united society in the same sort of inefficient way.

A New Force

By early 1997 many western political scientists had started predicting that a civil war in the republic might be sparked off not by conflicts between teipy but by internal conflicts within religious confessions.⁴⁰ However, for a long time Grozny tried to give the impression that there simply was no religious problem in the republic. In 1998 Akhmed Kadyrov, then mufti of Chechnya, told me:

During the war in Chechnya detachments of Wahhabi volunteers came to us from the Arab countries. They were very well armed and so our own Chechens willingly joined them. Many of them went over to this new teaching and began trying to teach us as well, asserting that we were distorting Islam. For a long time we tried to avoid washing our dirty linen

in public, asserting that there was no 'Wahhabi' problem in the republic. We tried to come to a peaceful agreement with the Wahhabis: 'Please do as you like, but don't force your convictions on us, don't accuse us of being heretics'. Alas, the dialogue did not get anywhere.⁴¹

It is easy to see why Grozny did not want to quarrel with the fundamentalists. In the words of Akhmed Kadyrov,

We have to admit that during the war with the Russian troops the 'Wahhabis' fought bravely and gained the respect of a good many people. We too were mindful of the services they had rendered and so we tried as far as possible to avoid any conflict. We understood quite well that any internal schism among us would play into the hands of Moscow, whose dream was to play the Chechens off against each other, to split up a united nation by teipy or religion.⁴²

According to Kadyrov 'Wahhabism' spread most actively in Chechnya during Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev's presidency. 'He was the person most responsible for the fact that "Wahhabism" got such a foothold in Chechnya!' he told me.⁴³ Yandarbiyev himself took a different view:

I believe that there is no basis for this kind of confrontation in Chechnya, though Russian state policy over the past few decades has been to force Islam to split up into warring movements and sects. Even before the war Russian special forces in Chechnya were trying to do this through our so-called muftis, including the present mufti, Kadyrov. But Dzhokhar [Dudayev] made it clear that in Chechnya all Muslims who pray facing Mecca are one, no matter which vird they belong to.⁴⁴

The Chechen authorities took decisive action against the fundamentalists only in July 1998, when serious clashes took place in Gudermes between armed fundamentalist formations (the sharia guard and a special Islamic battalion (*batal'yon osobogo naznacheniya*) and military tariqa divisions which led to the deaths of over 50 people. Shamil' Basayev tells us that these clashes involved several thousand people on both sides and that even artillery was used.⁴⁵ Aslan Maskhadov accused the 'Wahhabis' of organising the disturbances and began to take action to neutralise them. He issued a presidential decree disbanding the sharia guard and the special Islamic battalion, made up of fundamentalists. He ordered four foreigners who were actively propagating 'Wahhabism' to be deported from the republic. A number of supporters of 'Wahhabism' were removed from the supreme sharia court of the republic and the chairman was replaced.

In fact, however, Maskhadov was simply not powerful enough to prevail against the fundamentalists. Mullah Bagauddin, leader of the Dagestani 'Wahhabis', for example, was sentenced to deportation by Maskhadov, but went on living undisturbed in Urus-Martan *raion*, which had become a fundamentalist mini-state which Maskhadov's guards would not risk entering. The reason for Maskhadov's weakness lay in the fact that the 'Wahhabis' in Chechnya were supported by too many influential field commanders, above all by Khattab.

Khattab (full name Khabib Abd al-Rakhman ibn al-Khattab) is a legendary figure in Chechnya. He was born in 1963 to a prominent Cherkess family in Jordan. Mikhail Roshchin has provided the most detailed biography for him.⁴⁶ He tells us that Khattab graduated from the military academy in Amman and over the next few years

served in King Hussein's 'Cherkess guard'. Khattab has spent most of his life in hot spots around the world where Muslims are fighting 'infidels'. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan he was fighting on the side of the mujaheddin; it was there that he first met the Saudi millionaire Osama Bin Laden. During the war in Bosnia he set up military camps where he trained local Muslims who became the scourge of the Bosnian Serbs. In 1994 Khattab moved to Chechnya. Soon afterwards he married a girl from the village of Karamakhi (one of the centres of Dagestani fundamentalists). After the Russian invasion Khattab became one of the most influential field commanders in Chechnya. In March 1996 one of his detachments attacked a column of Russian troops near the village of Yarysh-Mardy, killing over 70: this was the most important military operation carried out by the 'Dudayev forces'. After Russian forces were withdrawn from Chechnya in 1996 Khattab set up a network of military camps there to train not only fundamentalists from the North Caucasian republics but also Georgian supporters of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and even, according to some reports, Muslims from the Central Asian republics.⁴⁷

Immediately after the clashes in Gudermes Maskhadov still had the support of the leading field commander Shamil' Basayev and of the chief ideologist of the Chechen resistance movement, Movladi Udugov, but just a few months later they both went over to the fundamentalist side. Basayev's change of heart is an interesting phenomenon. I first met him in 1993 in Abkhazia where he was leading confederate fighting brigades. At the headquarters of the North Caucasus volunteers in Sukhumi I asked a shortish young man where I could find the commander. 'And who are you?', he asked. 'A reporter.' 'Well, I'm Basayev. What do you want to know?' At that time this now famous terrorist struck me as rather shy. I suspected he was not used to dealing with journalists and was trying to avoid having to answer 'provocative' questions.

The second time I met Basayev was soon after he had carried out his famous terrorist action in Budennovsk. Here was quite a different person. His body language indicated that he was confident of his strength, but he had a sad and weary expression. Our conversation got off to a slow start. It seemed as if Basayev was sick to death of journalists asking him all the same old questions. The situation was unexpectedly saved when Lawrence Uzzell, the Moscow representative of Keston Institute (and now its director), who was with me at the meeting, asked Basayev: 'How can you, a religious believer, use the deaths of innocent people to advance your cause, no matter how good it is?' Basayev was really cut to the quick by this question and we went on discussing philosophical and theological problems until four in the morning. We felt that these innocent people's deaths were giving the conscience of this famous terrorist no peace and that he wanted to prove to himself that he had behaved in Budennovsk as a true Muslim should. Interestingly, Basayev even promised Uzzell to allow a Russian priest to bless the graves of Russian soldiers near Vedeno.⁴⁸

I had another meeting with Basayev about six months later. Once again it seemed to me that I was talking to a stranger. Any tolerance of his adversary had gone.

I'm not allowing any Orthodox priests on my territory! Uzzell is an American spy and I'm not interested in his views. The Russians had to learn that they can't attack Muslims. Russia's a sick country. Look at your coat of arms – when did you ever see a bird with two heads? While you've got mutants as your symbol you're just going to bring trouble, not peace.⁴⁹

Even in 1996 Basayev had a fairly negative view of the fundamentalists. 'I don't know much about their teachings, but I've been in "Wahhabi" units a few times and I didn't like their contempt for people who don't share their views'.⁵⁰ By the time of Gudermes, however, Basayev was standing up for them:

Wahhabi is a good word and it shouldn't just be applied to Muslims when they do bad things. Yes, we have a movement of this kind. We have our differences. People go to extremes. But extremes are always extremes. These are mainly young people, striving for purity of faith. Everyone chooses his own path, and people make blunders. But this is a problem that can be solved.⁵¹

Let us try to understand what it was that impelled Basayev, Udugov and many other less influential Chechens to become friendlier with the fundamentalists. One obvious cause lay in the realities of life in postwar Chechnya. When it withdrew its troops the Kremlin left the half-ruined republic with an almost wholly destroyed economy. It was practically impossible for people to feed themselves if they were not involved in criminal business. The main means of survival for the population became trading in hostages, pillage raids on Russian territory and the illegal sale of oil products. This could not continue for long, however: it is unrealistic to imagine that the economic basis of an entire republic could consist indefinitely of openly criminal business activity. The situation was complicated by the fact that the field commanders could not agree on how to divide up the republic's territory: civil war could have broken out at any moment. Neither was there any hope that the Kremlin would pay Chechnya the compensation it had promised: poverty-stricken Russia was simply not capable of doing so. In this situation, perhaps the only way of reuniting the Chechens into a single force was the outbreak of a new war with Russia. Another factor making this likely was that since 1991 hardly any schools had been open, and since that time a whole generation had grown up with no knowledge of anything but the skills of war. The RNTV television reporter Il'yas Bogatyrev told me that

When I was being held hostage by the Chechens in 1997 my guards used to yearn for the days when they were fighting the Russians. First thing in the morning they would already be cursing Maskhadov, who was trying to come to an agreement with the Kremlin, and waiting impatiently for a new war to start.⁵²

For men like these, the fundamentalist ideology was a real salvation. The mullah Bagauddin, an ideologist of the Dagestani 'Wahhabis' (see the section on Dagestan for more details about him), called from his base in Urus-Martan for a jihad throughout the Northern Caucasus and criticised the Chechens for failing in their duty as Muslims in not coming to the aid of their Dagestani fellow-believers, who were suffering, as he put it, under the yoke of the Russian kafirs. The field commander Khattab set up a network of military training schools, preparing saboteurs for terrorist activity, not only in the Northern Caucasus but also in the Transcaucasian states and even in Central Asia. To the unemployed young men of Chechnya men like Khattab were saviours: they were not just giving them a real cause to defend, but also providing them with a fair amount in expenses.

The success of the fundamentalists in Chechnya was also due to the fact that they were receiving significant support from sympathisers abroad. Chechnya was recognised as an independent state only by the Taliban government of Afghanistan: the Taliban were classical followers of 'pure' Islam. Moscow alleges that from the

start of the latest military campaign in Chechnya the Chechens were receiving financial and military aid from Afghanistan. There may well be some basis for these accusations. Khattab once fought in Afghanistan alongside Bin Laden, and later, as Shamil' Basayev himself admitted to me, Khattab and his men made three journeys to visit military camps in Afghanistan. We should also remember that the investigation into the last attempt on the life of President Shevardnadze of Georgia revealed that it was carried out by terrorists trained in special camps in Chechnya led by instructors from other Muslim countries.⁵³

Nevertheless, we should perhaps not exaggerate the role of Bin Laden and his like in the events in the Northern Caucasus. At least during the first war in Chechnya (1994–96) the basic material aid to the Chechens came not from abroad but from the Chechen diaspora in Russia, and the Chechens used the money to buy arms even from Russian troops. This system still seems to be operating today. The Chechens fighting in Dagestan were equipped with the latest Russian weapons, and the explosives used in the bomb attacks in Moscow in September 1999 certainly did not come from sympathisers abroad but were simply bought from arms factories in Moscow.⁵⁴

Basayev and Udugov were impressed by the geopolitical perspectives of the fundamentalists. At the time of the first war in Chechnya Basayev had already started to think about the prospects of 'exporting' the Chechen revolution, even though his position was far more moderate at that time than it was later. About six months before the end of the first war Basayev said to me:

It's obvious that we're going to beat the Russian army. The question is how things will develop after that. After the liberation of Chechnya some of the other North Caucasian republics will follow its example. We shan't be giving them direct military aid but we shall naturally be showing full solidarity with them and trying to put pressure on the Kremlin. I'm sure that, in the end, a North Caucasian confederation will be established, as a united bloc confronting the Russian Empire. This is my dream as a former active member of the Confederation of Caucasian Peoples (*Konfederatsiya narodov Kavkaza*) [in 1992–93 Basayev was leading the group of confederates in Abkhazia – IR].⁵⁵

What happened in fact exceeded Basayev's most daring hopes. Movladi Udugov, Chechen foreign minister at the time, founded the 'Islamic Nation' (*Islamskaya natsiya*) movement, which was joined by Dagestani as well as Chechen political parties; its aim was 'to reestablish Dagestan within its historical borders' as they were at the time of Imam Shamil – in other words the union of Dagestan and Chechnya. As Udugov said to me, 'Ichkeria is an integral part of Dagestan. In the Chechen language "Dagestan" means "land of our fathers" and historically our peoples have very close ties, so it is quite natural for the nations of Dagestan and Chechnya to wish to live in one united Islamic state.'⁵⁶ Soon afterwards a congress of the peoples of the two republics chose Basayev as imam of Chechnya and Dagestan. All the ground was thus laid for the 'liberation' of Dagestan.

The Chechen fundamentalists began to search for the most vulnerable spots on the Dagestan-Chechen border: small mobile units of fundamentalists carried out sorties into Dagestan almost daily, learning the weak and strong points of the Federal troops. From early August 1999 there were border incidents almost every day. Basayev and Khattab finally decided that Botlikh *raion* in Dagestan would be the best place to begin the intervention. They hoped to find support there among the local 'Wahhabis',

who had a lot of influence in the Avar villages Ansalt, Shorod, Rakhat and Tando. It was decided that the Dagestani fundamentalists who had undergone training in camps on Chechen territory would form the backbone of the fighting forces in Dagestan. The commanders, Basayev and Khattab, reckoned that they would quickly seize Botlikh *raion* and continue their offensive along the river Andiiskoye Koisu in order to seize the village of Tlokh, from which they could go on advancing towards central Dagestan.⁵⁷

We cannot rule out the possibility that the Chechen attack on Dagestan coincided with the plans of the Kremlin, which needed an excuse for a new invasion of Chechnya. Vakha Ibragimov, who stood for vicepresident in alliance with Basayev in the 1996 presidential elections in Chechnya, gave me his own interesting interpretation:

The Kremlin deliberately provoked Basayev into invading Dagestan. In August 1999 Russian troops were withdrawn from Botlikh *raion*. Meanwhile envoys from Dagestan were sent into Chechnya, and it later became clear that they were provocateurs from the Russian security services. They assured Basayev that the local population was just waiting for the Chechens to liberate them from the rule of the infidel. In this situation, Basayev as a true Muslim simply had to come to the aid of his fellow-believers.⁵⁸

At the end of August 1999 armed detachments led by Basayev and Khattab invaded Dagestan. Basayev explained the aims of the campaign in an interview with the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Aman*:

What is now going on in Dagestan is a mighty 'jihad', a holy war to expel the infidels from an Islamic land, a land which has been in the Islamic fold for thirteen centuries. ... We are fighting to cleanse Dagestan from Russian troops ... for the proclamation of an Islamic republic and the establishment of a greater Chechen empire in Chechnya and Dagestan, and later also in Ingushetia.⁵⁹

In another interview Basayev stated that he would 'continue this holy war until the whole world is lit up by a blue flame ... until Muslims from the Volga to the Don have been liberated.'⁶⁰ An even more arresting interpretation of the invasion was given by Movladi Udugov, who declared that in Dagestan the Chechens were fighting not the Russians, but world Zionism, and that the final aim of the war was 'the liberation of Jerusalem'.⁶¹

Before the present hostilities began the Chechens were fairly tolerant towards Jews, but today antisemitism is very widespread amongst the Chechens, soldiers and civilians alike – much more so even than in Russia. I have heard all kinds of people in Chechnya saying things like 'the Chechens are the victims of a world Zionist conspiracy' and 'the Jews are using the stupid Russians to kill Muslims'. The most zealous antisemites are the fundamentalists. Georgi Zaalishvili, who spent a year as a prisoner of the Chechens, recalls: 'The fundamentalists supplied me with literature which was practically indistinguishable from that disseminated in Moscow by *Pamyat*' and similar organisations. The Jewish-Masonic conspiracy was a popular topic among the "Wahhabis".⁶²

After the Russian invasion of Chechnya in 1999 the conflicts between fundamentalists and tariqa members receded into the background, as the Chechens once again demonstrated their ability to unite when faced with an outside threat.

Nevertheless, during the second military campaign Chechen society turned out to be less monolithic than during the first one (1994–96). A great many Chechens have spoken to me on the following lines:

When the Russian troops left Chechnya in 1996 we hoped we could start to live a normal peaceful life, but it was just one nightmare after another. Armed bands divided Chechnya up into zones of influence, while Maskhadov, who was so popular at the time, could do nothing but watch the anarchy from his official residence. Today we hate the Russian Federal forces, who indiscriminately kill civilians, just as much as we hate our ‘Wahhabis’, who are only waiting for the next war to begin.

Some of the leading field commanders did not wish to fight alongside the fundamentalists and started to cooperate with the Kremlin instead, for example Akhmed Kadyrov, mufti of Chechnya, who accused the fundamentalists of causing the new war. President Putin even appointed Kadyrov head of the provisional administration in Chechnya. It would be difficult to accuse Kadyrov of being a traitor as he had fought against the Russians throughout the previous war, but this time his hatred for the fundamentalists, who had made four attempts on his life, overcame his dislike for the Kremlin. Thanks to Kadyrov’s great authority in his ‘home town’ of Gudermes the Federal troops succeeded in entering the town without a fight. Kadyrov also succeeded in persuading some field commanders to join him in the struggle against ‘Wahhabis and foreign mercenaries’. There were also a good many tariqa members who while continuing to fight against the Federal troops did not want to do so alongside the fundamentalists: some of them told me that they would fight on against the Russians until they won, but they would do so on their own and did not want any contact with the ‘Wahhabis’.

Dagestan

The most easterly of the North Caucasian republics, Dagestan is uniquely multi-ethnic. Nowhere in the former Soviet Union, and indeed in few places in the world today, do such a large number of small nations live in such a limited area, speaking different and mutually incomprehensible languages, and 30 of them have been in Dagestan for centuries. Dagestan is perhaps the most religious of all the Muslim republics of Russia. Islam took root here earlier than in the rest of the Northern Caucasus. It is not surprising, then, that the nineteenth-century anti-Russian movement was led by a native of Dagestan, Imam Shamil. Today there are over 1700 Muslim associations in the republic – over half the total number in the whole of Russia. These include 965 main mosques, 464 district mosques, 178 madrassahs and Muslim schools, and 15 Muslim universities and colleges.⁶³

In Dagestan, as in neighbouring Chechnya, Sufi Islam predominates. Three Sufi tariqa are active in the republic: Qadiriya, Naqshbandiya and Shadiliya. In the early 1990s virtually every nationality in Dagestan tried to set up its own Muslim Spiritual Board. The Kumyk and the Dargins succeeded. The Laks and the Muslims of South Dagestan came close. In 1994, however, the republic’s Supreme Soviet passed a law that there was to be only one Muslim Spiritual Board, as in Soviet times. In the Spiritual Board for the Muslims of Dagestan (*Dukhovnoye upravleniye musul’man Dagestana*) thus created, which is now trying to exert control over all registered mosques in the republic, the key posts have been taken by Avars.⁶⁴ So far at least, despite attempts by every nationality in Dagestan to obtain key posts on the Board,

the Sufi spiritual leaders are fully loyal both to the secular Dagestani authorities and to the Kremlin.

The case is quite different with the fundamentalist groups in the republic: they are in open conflict with the republican authorities and with Moscow. Estimates indicate that 6–7 per cent of Dagestan's population today are fundamentalists.⁶⁵ Fundamentalism gained most followers among two of the mountain peoples, the Avars and the Dargins. Perhaps the most influential fundamentalist preacher among the Avars is Mullah Bagauddin Magomedov (Magomed). Most of his support is in the Avar villages of Khasav-Yurt and Botlikh *raiony*. As noted above, Basayev and Khattab deliberately chose Botlikh *raion* as the point to invade Dagestan as they reckoned they would find support there among the local fundamentalists.

The most important Dargin fundamentalist centre is the village of Karamakhi, which was really a kind of Islamic mini-state until it was destroyed by Russian troops in September 1999. A placard on the road into the village warned 'You are entering a sharia law zone. The import of alcohol and drugs is forbidden', and anyone arriving was thoroughly searched by armed men at a guard post. Karamakhi itself certainly felt like a different state. You were struck by the order on the streets and the well-maintained houses. Practically every house had a car in its yard and a lot of people had mobile phones. Virtually all the women wore veils and the men had long beards ('Wahhabis' are forbidden to shave). 'We don't drink or smoke and, like true Muslims, we work hard', Khalif Atayev, one of the leaders of the Muslim community in Karamakhi, told me. 'That's the secret of our wealth. But during Soviet times a whole generation of people grew up who get upset when other people live as true Muslims. They're the ones who call us "Wahhabis".'⁶⁶ We may assume that Atayev was exaggerating when he told me that their prosperity was the result of honest labour alone. The fundamentalists in Karamakhi themselves told me that their weapons included the most modern rifles and even anti-aircraft equipment; they also had their own high-powered monitoring centre where they kept the biographical details of all leading Dagestani politicians on computer and an extensive video library of political programmes broadcast in the republic. They were clearly receiving substantial financial assistance, most probably from the Chechen field commander Khattab, who had married a Karamakhi girl and had even lived there for a while until the Russians invaded Chechnya in 1994. 'Khattab regards our village as his home,' Khalif Atayev told me, 'so, naturally, if we run into trouble, he'll come to our aid at once.'⁶⁷

The intentions of the Karamakhi fundamentalists were in fact far from peaceful, as is clear from the report of a researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, who wishes to remain anonymous. Claiming to want to get closer to 'true Islam', he spent a month in Karamakhi.⁶⁸ The community's day was divided into two parts. The fundamentalists spent the morning at sport, doing press-ups and jogging over broken terrain. 'Mujaheddin keep their legs in good shape', the 'brethren' would tell him. 'It's hard to run in the mountains, but when we go down to take Makhachkala, we'll really be running.' Once when the 'brethren' were out running, three of them started falling behind. 'If you can't keep the pace up here,' their *amir* (instructor) admonished them, 'how are you ever going to take Moscow?' In the second half of the day the brethren would study Islam under the guidance of *ulemy* (teachers) who had been trained in the madrassahs of Syria, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. A punishment was laid down for every misdemeanour: usually cane strokes, press-ups or a run over broken terrain. The visitor was amazed that when the teacher had ordered a particular punishment he did not bother to check

whether the pupil had carried it out: he assumed that he would in order to expiate his sin before God. Films were often shown, particularly on Fridays, shot in various places where there were conflicts between Muslims and ‘infidels’. At the end of each three-week course the students had to take exams, reciting 15 sutras learned by heart and answering questions on subjects covered during the course. Those who passed were allowed to go on to the second part of the course – military training, including hand-to-hand combat, the use of various weapons from pistols to antiaircraft guns; and tactics, including waging war in mountain country.⁶⁹

Open confrontation between the Dagestani fundamentalists and the republican authorities began after an attack in 1998 by persons unknown on a Russian military unit in the town of Buinaksk. The Makhachkala authorities stated publicly that the attack had been carried out by a detachment led by the Chechen field commander Khattab and that he had had support from the Karamakhi ‘Wahhabis’. The Russian authorities agreed: according to Ivan Rybkin, secretary of the Russian Security Council, ‘the security services know perfectly well that most of field commander Khattab’s camps and training bases are on Dagestani territory’.⁷⁰ Indeed, it was in this context that the Russian deputy prime minister, Ramazan Abdulatipov, criticised the relevant ministries: ‘The security services talk about fighters being trained on the territory of the Chechen Republic under the banner of “Wahhabism”, but they don’t do anything about it.’⁷¹

The arrests of fundamentalist leaders in Dagestan began. The Dagestan Supreme Soviet passed a law on extremist organisations which to all intents and purposes outlawed them; but its effect was the opposite of that intended. Extremists started distributing leaflets at the bazaars. The underground Central Front for the Liberation of Dagestan (*Tsentrāl’ny front osvobozhdeniya Dagestana*) claimed responsibility for the raid on Buinaksk:

By the grace of Allah we took up arms against the Russian kafirs (heathens), and the fact that the Afghan and the Chechen peoples have been victorious in battle against the Russian aggressors demonstrates that Muslims are victorious because of their faith, not because of their numbers or equipment. We want to free Dagestan from the Russian kafirs so that they will no longer be able to give us orders or to teach us how to live and how to die, so that they will not take our children into their army. ... Arm yourselves and learn how to drive the Russian kafirs out of our land. Anyone who wants to rise up against the Russian kafirs can come to us for training. We will unite into a single force. While we are together, the world will be at our feet, and that is not a bad possession. Allah Akbar!⁷²

At first sight one might suspect that the leaflets and indeed the underground organisation itself were a provocation by the Dagestani authorities, simultaneously pursuing the two aims of obtaining additional subsidies from Moscow for the republican budget and dealing with the local Islamic radicals. In this case, however, such a suspicion seems to be groundless. It was Mullah Bagauddin, the leader of the Dagestani fundamentalists, who declared that ‘Dagestan can remain part of Russia only if Russia becomes an Islamic state’, and it was his idea to transform the Chechen war into a jihad, which meant that young ‘Wahhabis’ in Dagestan could be mobilised and special Dagestani detachments created. On 20 December 1998 the Chechen field commander Salman Raduyev not only signed an agreement on mutual military assistance with the ‘armed forces of the Islamic Dzhamaat of Dagestan’ (*vooruzhennyye sily Islamskogo Dzhamaata Dagestana*), but also declared them to

be 'the only legitimate authority in Dagestan'. The text of this important document is as follows:

1. Both parties undertake, in the case of aggression by a third party, to render assistance to each other, both militarily and in other ways.
2. On the basis of the aims and undertakings laid down in this agreement, both parties undertake to cooperate in establishing peace and stability in the Caucasus and in regulating religious and interethnic conflicts.
3. This agreement is to be observed only in accordance with the sharia, on the basis of the Quran and the Sunna of the messenger of Allah. Praise be to Allah, Lord of all worlds! May Allah bless our lord Muhammed, his family and all his comrades in arms.

Raduyev explained why the agreement had to be signed:

We know that the Russian security services are trying to split the Dagestani people along religious lines. They are trying to play off various religious movements against each other by pointing to the 'advance of Wahhabism'. We must avoid falling for their provocations. We all believe in the one almighty Allah! ... Today we have concluded an agreement on mutual assistance between Dagestan and Ichkeria. This is because today the Islamic Dzhamaat of Dagestan represents the interests of the Dagestani nation, which are linked with serving Allah. At the same time the 'army of General Dudayev' has the right to represent the whole Chechen nation, as the army resolutely follows the way of Allah, the way to the freedom and independence of the Caucasus. ... Our common foe, that world-scale infidel the Russian Empire, is making every effort to stay in the Caucasus in order to prevent sharia law from becoming established and a united Islamic state set up. Today's Dagestani-Chechen alliance is an extremely significant, joyful event. It will lead to the union of all the nations of the Caucasus: they will soon be joining us. We all have the same aim: to set up a single Islamic state in the Caucasus, including Ichkeria, Dagestan, Kabardia, Balkaria, Ingushetia, Karachayev-Cherkessia and Azerbaijan.⁷³

In 1998 the Congress of Nations of Dagestan and Chechnya (*Kongress narodov Dagestana i Chechni*), founded by Movladi Udugov, announced the setting up of a single Muslim state ('imamate') to include Chechnya and Dagestan; Shamil' Basayev was proclaimed the imam. The Kremlin's attempts to neutralise the Dagestani fundamentalists ended in failure. Mullah Bagauddin declared that the Dagestani leadership was wallowing in 'heresy and paganism' and left for Chechnya, and about 1000 young fundamentalists went with him. Most of them went off for military training in the camps run by Khattab and Basayev. So the 'liberation of Dagestan' became only a matter of time: the Dagestani fundamentalists and their Chechen sympathisers were just waiting for the right moment to launch the military campaign.

However, it turned out that the Chechen and Dagestani fundamentalists had miscalculated. Most of the local people regarded the invasion of Dagestan in August 1999 by armed detachments led by Khattab and Basayev as an act of aggression. They formed self-defence units and fought against the invaders alongside the Russian army. In Chechnya the population regarded the Federal troops as an occupying force; in Botlikh *raion*, by contrast, they were greeted as liberators. The invasion of Dagestan by Khattab and Basayev fatally tarnished the fundamentalists' image in the

eyes of most Dagestanis. 'Joining up with the Chechens to attack Dagestan, they've shown themselves as the traitors they are', I was told by soldiers in the Dagestani self-defence units. 'These people aren't Muslims and there's no place for them on our earth!' Most of these local Dagestani soldiers were extremely religious men. They held that in Botlikh *raion* they were fighting not just against Chechen aggressors but also against 'heretics' who were trying to distort true (Sufi) Islam. The invasion of Dagestan by Khattab and Basayev gave the Kremlin a pretext for launching a military campaign against the Karamakhi fundamentalists. This was of dubious legality: in 1998 the Russian minister of internal affairs, Sergei Stepashin, had concluded an agreement with them whereby Moscow promised not to interfere in the affairs of the Karamakhi community, while the 'Wahhabis' promised to limit their activities to their 'own' territory. The Karamakhi fundamentalists do not seem to have broken the agreement; at least there was no record of their having participated in the events at Botlikh. The Federal troops nevertheless literally wiped Karamakhi off the face of the earth. The Kremlin's military operations in Karamakhi allowed the Dagestani fundamentalists to declare that it was impossible to negotiate with the 'atheist powers' and that Muslims simply had to defend their rights by force of arms.

Georgia

The postsoviet history of Georgia basically consists of a series of local wars: in South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Megrelia. In the early 1990s the backbone of the Georgian army comprised so-called volunteers and members of armed units created by local 'authorities' which were not subordinate to Tbilisi. These men, dressed in a strange variety of clothing – I even saw some in cowboy costumes – were more concerned with getting rich than with restoring the territorial integrity of Georgia. I have watched government forces 'at work' fighting the 'Zviadists' (supporters of former president Zviad Gamsakhurdia) in western Georgia. Military vehicles full of stolen goods were streaming in an unbroken line towards Tbilisi. The soldiers made themselves at home in the houses of local residents, who had had the foresight to flee, and fed the stoves with the owners' furniture. These defenders of law and order made themselves so comfortable that they could not be bothered to go outside even to answer the call of nature. One of the leaders of the government forces in western Georgia, Jaba Ioseliani, justified to me this looting by his men: 'War is war! They're not really looters. We shouldn't be bothering about minor matters like these; we should be thinking about how to destroy the chief looter – Gamsakhurdia.'

In the end President Shevardnadze succeeded in putting a stop to this licensed anarchy, and most of the leaders of the military units not controlled by Tbilisi, including Ioseliani, are now sitting in gaol, but Georgia will be licking the wounds caused by this chaos for a long time yet. The republic is relatively stable at the moment, but as before, the stability is fragile and unreliable. 'Your only problem is that you're a Russian', a middle-aged Chechen I met in a cafe in central Tbilisi told me in March 2000. 'In the last war the Chechens didn't touch journalists, but these days people regard any Russian as their enemy.' The Chechen – let's call him Ibragim – is a native of the Panki gorge. This part of Georgia is close to the border with Chechnya and largely populated by Kistin, a Chechen ethnic group. A year earlier Ibragim had still been a hunter, but now he had taken up working as a guide, illegally taking people over the mountain trails from Georgia to Chechnya. He told me that since the beginning of the war several dozen Panki gorge natives had taken

up this profitable line of business. His clients had included journalists and foreign Muslims wanting to fight in Chechnya.

The longest of the routes for smuggling weapons and moving the mujaheddin from one place to another passes not only through Georgia but through Dagestan as well. At the checkpoint in the Georgian village of Omalo, on the border with Dagestan, there are about 30 guards, but they are incapable of catching all the lawbreakers. On the Russian side, the border is wholly exposed: there is no permanent checkpoint and only occasional inspections by mobile patrols. The motor route starts on the Russian side of the border and links this mountainous part of Dagestan with the Chechen villages of Serzhen'-Yurt and Shali. In Dagestan the road passes through the unsafe Botlikh *raion*, which as we have seen Basayev chose for his invasion of Dagestan in 1999. Not far away is the birthplace of Mullah Bagauddin, leader of the Dagestani 'Wahhabis', and quite a number of his followers, supporters of the Chechen separatists, live in the villages nearby.

It certainly seems that the Chechens think the Georgian sector is strategically significant in their campaign. The Russian embassy in Tbilisi estimates the staff at the 'diplomatic mission of Chechnya in Georgia' at about 100. These include quite a number of people who have fallen foul of Russian law. In spring 2000, for example, Basayev's treasurer Khamzat Piriyeu was arrested on the territory of the Russian Federation; up until then he had been working openly at the Chechen mission in Georgia.

What sparks off the instability in Georgia is the Panki gorge, which has become a Chechen bridgehead. The Chechens settled here several centuries ago. One story has it that they were invited by a Georgian king in order to guard the border against raids by Ossetians and mountain tribes from Dagestan. In general the Georgians had fairly friendly relations with their new neighbours. When Stalin was deporting the Chechens the Georgian authorities protected their fellow-tribesmen in Georgia by allowing them to transform their surnames into Georgian ones (replacing the '-ov' ending with '-shvili') and to go on living in the republic. The Chechens had gradually developed as a distinct ethnic group, the Kistin, with significant differences from their fellow-tribesmen on the other side of the mountains. Living for centuries alongside the Georgians, the Chechens adopted many of their customs and habits. Many of them have Georgian first names, for example, and although the Kistin are Muslims, practically every householder has a wine-cellar, just like his Georgian neighbours, which would be inconceivable in Chechnya. The Kistin dialect also differs significantly from Chechen.

After the end of the first Russo-Chechen war many Chechen field commanders began to show interest in this district of Georgia where their fellow-tribesmen were living in close communities. Salman Raduyev instructed one of his most trusted assistants, the Kistin-Chechen Aleksei Kavtarashvili, to work out a plan for uniting the Panki gorge with Chechnya. According to information from the Georgian security services, Khattab and Basayev were working on the same plan. It also had the support of at least some of the Kistin. In 1998 the local inhabitants tried to declare the Panki gorge a 'self-governing Islamic territory' and even to open a branch of Khattab's school for saboteurs there. Then, when the new war in Chechnya began, according to Apollon Gaurgshvili, a member of the village soviet of Duisi, the main village in the Panki gorge, some 6000 refugees from Chechnya crossed into the gorge – about as many as the Kistin themselves.⁷⁴ At that point Tbilisi finally lost control of the district and is now trying to isolate its 'little Chechnya'. Concrete blocks on the roads into the gorge slow motor vehicles right down and entry is

controlled by reinforced Georgian police units.

The Kremlin has repeatedly stated that there are about 1000 Chechen fighters in the gorge. This is disputed by the Georgian authorities, who assert that they allowed only women and children into Georgia. If you spend some time in the gorge you soon realise that on this occasion what the Russians are saying is closer to the truth. A significant percentage of the refugees are men of call-up age and I have seen for myself an armed guard post on the road into Duisi, the 'capital' of the gorge, manned by both Kistin and 'refugees' from Chechnya. Even the Georgian authorities do not deny that weapons are to be found in practically every house in the gorge. It is not really so important whether there are manned military bases in the gorge or whether there are simply well-armed refugees from Chechnya living in ordinary village houses: these amount to the same thing, in fact. The crucial thing is who these people are against. If Russian troops continue to advance into the mountains of Chechnya the resistance fighters will simply be forced to withdraw to the Panki gorge and it will eventually be transformed into a fortified district from which the Chechens will launch their diversionary attacks on the Federal forces.

Things might well develop in a different way, however. The radical Chechen commanders might try to 'set alight' the whole of the Caucasus. The Panki gorge, located as it is near the Georgian border with Azerbaijan and Dagestan, is well placed for this. The Georgians already have bitter experience of armed clashes with Chechens during the war in Abkhazia and Chechens were involved in the attempt on Shevardnadze's life which failed only through sheer chance. As the arrested terrorists themselves later admitted, they had all been at Khattab's training school in Chechnya, under the instruction of a citizen of Pakistan. It is not only Chechens, then, who have been showing an interest in Georgia – so have their fellow-believers from further abroad.

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is the only Muslim republic of the former USSR where Shiite Islam is predominant. Various estimates put Shiites at 60 – 70 per cent of the republic's Muslims. Geographically they are in the majority in the southern regions bordering on Iran, in central Azerbaijan and in Baku; Sunnis predominate in the north and west.⁷⁵ Another peculiar feature of Azerbaijan is that the Muslim Spiritual Board for the Caucasus, headed by Sheikh-ul-Islam Pashe-Zade, has authority over both Shiites and Sunnis. The head of the Board is traditionally a Shiite and his deputy a Sunni. In contrast to the practice in most Muslim countries, the Shiites and Sunnis here quite often pray in the same mosque.

Remembering what happened in the Islamic revolution in Shiite Iran, at the start of *perestroika* many experts assumed that it would be Azerbaijan that would become the stronghold of Islamists in the former USSR. Certainly, as the researcher Andrei Polonsky notes, 'in the troubled situation at the end of the 1980s Iranian preachers were very active in the villages around Baku, in Nakhichevan' and in Lenkoran' (the so-called Islamic belt); portraits of Khomeini and related symbols were to be seen in the windows of private houses and small shops'. The local media alleged that Teheran spent about US\$800,000 at that time on ideological propaganda in Azerbaijan.⁷⁶ However, this activity soon abated and today the Iranian model has very little support in Azerbaijan.

There seem to be two reasons for this. First, Azerbaijan is far more secularised than most of the Muslim areas of the former USSR. The development of the oil

industry at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries resulted in massive western cultural expansion in the region. In the early twentieth century Baku already looked like a typical European city. The intelligentsia was drawn towards Western European culture, contrasting it with the spiritual heritage of the Islamic world. Azerbaijan was the first Muslim country in the world to open a European-style opera-house. During its short period of independence in 1918–20 the Azerbaijan state was predominantly secular, like the Turkey of Kemal Atatürk.

The second factor, no less important, which prevented the spread of Islamist movements in Azerbaijan was the traditional state of conflict between the Azerbaijanis and the Iranians. Since the early nineteenth century the Azerbaijani nation has been divided by the state border, which runs along the River Araks, and today while 7.5 million Azerbaijanis live in independent Azerbaijan, 25 million live in Iran,⁷⁷ where they are not allowed Azerbaijani-language schools and where Azerbaijani-language publications are severely restricted. Many Azerbaijanis, on both sides of the Araks, see this as national discrimination. In the early 1990s the idea of annexing the Azerbaijani-populated part of Iran was quite popular in Azerbaijan, and there was support for separatism amongst Iranian Azerbaijanis too. Fear that Azerbaijan's increasing strength might lead to an increase in separatist sentiment in Iran led Teheran to give covert support to Armenia during the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorny Karabakh and this naturally led to a worsening in Iranian-Azerbaijani relations.

As Andrei Polonsky notes, Islamist sentiment in Azerbaijan is linked with sympathy towards Iran, while secular nationalism looks to Kemalist Turkey and the West. It was widespread anti-Iranianism in Azerbaijan in the early 1990s that led to the union of practically all the anticommunist movements in the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (*Narodny front Azerbaidzhana*), which announced its support for a secular, independent and democratic state in the Azerbaijani political tradition. Its leaders hoped to popularise the concepts which had guided the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (1918–20). This aim became especially evident while the Popular Front was in power (from summer 1992 to spring 1993). The interpretation of 'Turkism' which was disseminated throughout the liberal-nationalist establishment focused on the secular ideas of Atatürk and his successors and ruled out any role for religion in politics. The Popular Front thus dug the grave for islamisation in Azerbaijan. The Muslim option was squeezed out by the nationalist, pro-Turkish and pro-western model, which in the early 1990s seemed as if it was going to be more effective.⁷⁸ At that time the mass media, which were under government control, carried virtually nothing of the anti-American rhetoric so widespread in the Muslim world. In 1997 Khikmet Gadzhizade, an intellectual close to the Pan-Turkist democrats, a member of the editorial board of the journal *Tsentral'naya Aziya* and vice-president of the Baku 'Far Center' (*sic*), recalled nostalgically the events at the beginning of the decade:

Society was ecstatic about capitalism, which was supposed to start up as soon as parliament passed the appropriate laws. Margaret Thatcher came on a visit in autumn 1992 and was greeted with rapture. We all saw Iran as a hotbed of obscurantism. Most politicians and intellectuals were calling for the unification of the 7.5 million citizens of Azerbaijan with the 25 million Azerbaijanis living in Iranian Azerbaijan. A single Azerbaijan was a key element in the national idea.⁷⁹

It is noteworthy that even the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan was not seen in

Azerbaijan as a religious war. The Azerbaijani propaganda machine used hardly any Islamist rhetoric, while the mufti of the republic, Pashe-Zade, refused to declare a jihad against Armenia. All the same, it would not be true to say that Iranian ideological influence on Azerbaijan was nonexistent. The main proponent of the Iranian model of development was the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan (*Islamskaya partiya Azerbaidzhana*) (IPA), founded in November 1991 in the village of Nordaran not far from Baku and officially registered in 1992. Its leader, Al Akram Haji, is a typical member of the postsoviet 'lumpen-intelligentsia' of a kind not often found in Baku; a philologist by education, he worked for a long time as a shelf-stacker in a grocery store.⁸⁰ The party's programme was based on the conviction that Islam alone was essential for building an independent Azerbaijan. According to Al Akram Haji, the republic would not be able to escape from crisis unless its leaders adopted Islamic values and Islamic political models.

Two aspects of the IPA's programme reflected typical Azerbaijani preoccupations: anti-Turkism and antisemitism. As they saw any form of nationalism as '*shirk*' – worshipping something other than Allah and thus a violation of strict Muslim monotheism – the Azerbaijani Islamists rejected ideas of a Pan-Turkist type, regarding them as dangerous utopianism. From their point of view Pan-Turkism was harmful precisely because it could become a substitute for the universal model of human community, the *Umma*.⁸¹ The leaders of the IPA assumed that an Islamic society must form a barrier to the spread of the American model of civilisation, which reduced everything to the same level and was basically anticultural. For all that, the chief enemy of the Muslim world was not the West, but the world Masonic conspiracy, a network allegedly centred on Israel. The party held a 'Jerusalem Day' demonstration and burnt an Israeli flag.⁸²

By late 1994 the IPA had branches in over 70 *raiony* and towns, totalling some 50,000 people. Young Azerbaijani Shiites began to go to Iran for training.⁸³ The Azerbaijani authorities were quick to react. In 1995 the IPA was refused re-registration and its activities were deemed contrary to the interests of the state. In 1996 the party leaders were arrested and put on trial early in 1997. The top leaders were accused of spying for Iran and of planning a coup d'état. One of the charges was that they had sent 2000 young men to Iran for training in military camps as the backbone of the 'Islamic Revolutionary Guards' in Azerbaijan. They were sentenced to ten years in prison. The liquidation of the IPA more or less marked the end of Iranian political influence in Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani authorities had banned Iranian television broadcasting, so Iranian preachers had no way of making themselves heard inside Azerbaijan. In January 1997 the republican parliament changed the law on freedom of religion to stipulate that 'citizens of foreign countries and persons without citizenship have no right to engage in religious propaganda in the republic of Azerbaijan'. Only ten per cent of the mosques in Azerbaijan have been built with Iranian assistance.⁸⁴ Iran has no significant religious influence in the republic.

A much greater danger is posed to the Azerbaijani authorities by the various fundamentalist groups. So-called 'Wahhabism' has practically no influence among the Azeris themselves, but enjoys a certain limited popularity among the national minorities, above all the Lezgins. The Lezgins live in roughly equal numbers in Dagestan and northern Azerbaijan. The break-up of the USSR meant that they were suddenly divided by an international border. A new Lezgin movement, *Sadval*, began demanding the establishment of a single 'Lezginstan' as part of Russia. Tension between the Lezgins and the Azerbaijanis probably accounts for the

popularity of fundamentalism among some of the Lezgins, who are using it to free themselves from Azerbaijani rule. In 1996 Asul Kasymov, a member of the Muslim Union of Russia (*Soyuz musul'man Rossii*) and a right-hand man of its chairman Nadyr Khachilayev (for more details on whom see the section 'Islam and Crime' below) proclaimed himself imam of all the Lezgins. His career was short: Baku accused him of attempting to provoke a conflict between Russia and Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani investigators claimed that Kasymov's men had planned to open fire on pilgrims on the *haj* to Mecca as they were crossing the Russian-Azerbaijani border in order to provoke an exchange of fire between Russian and Azerbaijani border guards. Kasymov was arrested and given a lengthy prison sentence.

In July 2000 the Azerbaijani security services arrested the fundamentalist group Warriors of Islam (*Voiny islama*), which included Lezgins and Avars from both Russia and Azerbaijan. Members of the group had killed the famous Azerbaijani psychic Etibar Ekrchin, had carried out an attack on a Krishna community and were allegedly planning to overthrow the Azerbaijani government and establish an Islamic state in the republic. The situation has become more complicated because of the second war in Chechnya. All the Azerbaijanis sympathise with their Chechen fellow-believers in their fight against the Federal troops. In 1999 the head of Muslim Spiritual Board for the Caucasus, Sheikh-ul-Islam Pashe-Zade, sent a furious letter to President Yel'tsin demanding that he put a stop to the mass murder of Muslims. Reports have appeared in the Russian press about Chechen soldiers being treated in Azerbaijani hospitals and I am personally convinced that this is true.

It certainly seems that the Chechen resistance movement intends to set up in Azerbaijan a rearguard for the Chechen resistance to the Kremlin. It is no coincidence that since the start of the current military campaign the Chechen mafioso Khozh-Akhmed Nukhayev has been more or less permanently based in Baku (for more details on this man see the section 'Islam and Crime' below). During the first Russian-Chechen war Nukhayev was appointed head of the internal intelligence service by Dudayev and organised fundraising abroad in aid of the Chechen rebels. According to some reports, in the town of Zakataly, where the inhabitants are mostly Avars and Lezgins, attempts are being made to set up a crossing-point where mujaheddin can enter Chechnya.⁸⁵ However, the situation today should not be over-dramatised. Azerbaijan is extremely concerned about its territorial integrity, so Baku simply has to express solidarity with the Kremlin on the Chechen question. So far at least Baku has succeeded in preventing the local Islamic radicals, who sympathise with the Chechen resistance movement, from becoming a threatening force.

Tajikistan

The Tajiks are the only large nation in Central Asia who speak a language related to Persian. Their relations with their Turkic-speaking neighbours have been complex. Tajik intellectuals seriously discuss the threat of forced assimilation by Turkic speakers. They even give concrete examples. They believe, for example, that the most important centres of their national culture, Bukhara and Samarkand, were taken from them by force and handed over to Uzbekistan, and that the native Tajik populations of those cities were compulsorily registered as Uzbeks. The ethnogenetic developments which led to the formation of the Tajik people date from the end of the second or the beginning of the first millennium BC. In the first half of the first millennium BC the ancestors of the present-day Tajiks – the Bactrians and Sogdians – formed the basic population of the oldest slave-owning states of Central

Asia, Bactria and Sogdiana. In the ninth and tenth centuries the territory of modern Tajikistan formed part of the vast Samanid state, which comprised the regions of Maverannakhr (the area between the rivers Amu Darya and Syr Darya) and Khorasan (the territory to the south-west of the Amu Darya) with their well-developed cultures. At that time Samarkand and Bukhara were important centres of handicraft and trade – they traded with South-East Europe, Rus', the Caucasus, the Baltic, Iran, China, Mongolia and India – and also of science, literature and art. It was within the framework of the Samanid state that the Tajik nation was finally formed. Tajiks are proud of their history and regard themselves as the heirs of the ancient Central Asian culture. There is constant rivalry between Tajik and Uzbek historians as to which of the two nations made the greater contribution to the spiritual heritage of Central Asia.

Clans instead of Parties

In May 1992 the anticommunist opposition in Tajikistan tried to seize power from the republic's leadership, which consisted almost wholly of the former party nomenclatura. It was the start of a bloody civil war, which in practice abolished the frontier with Afghanistan: the Russian border guards defending it were simply unable to stop the massive flow of smuggled weapons from this neighbouring Islamic state. A year later, opposition military units were forced to flee into Afghanistan, but as the war continued they regularly made armed sorties into Tajikistan. In 1996 the Tajik opposition gained control of the Karategin mountain valley, where most of the population supported them. Over 40,000 people were killed in the war, and hundreds of thousands were made homeless. An uneasy peace followed an agreement on a coalition between the government and the opposition in 1997. However, even the combatants themselves admit that the civil war was not so much a political struggle as a fight for power between different ethnic groups of Tajiks, who still have not developed into a single nation. A popular saying describes the roles played by natives of the various regions: 'Leninabad rules, Karategin trades, Kulyab guards, Pamir dances'.

For decades power was continuously in the hands of the northern Tajiks: from the late 1930s the first secretaries of the Communist Party of Tajikistan were all natives of Leninabad *oblast'*. In May 1992 the opposition, made up primarily of mountain Tajiks (natives of Karategin and Pamir), tried to seize power from the 'Northerners' by force of arms. The natives of Leninabad and Kulyab leapt to their own defence, and the civil war which followed divided the republic into two irreconcilable camps. At the height of the war, in 1992, some of the opposition leaders accused their adversaries of not being genuine Tajiks. Shodmon Yusuf, chairman of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (*Demokraticheskaya partiya Tadjikistana*), assured me that 'the pure Persian-speaking tribes are known for their great spirituality'; this 'democrat' went on to explain that the 'inhuman behaviour' of the natives of Leninabad and Kulyab was the result of their 'mixing with Turkic tribes and the leftovers of the Mongol conquerors'.⁸⁶

The New Muslims

The 'mountain men' had religious authorities as their leaders: by the time of their attempt to seize secular power they had already taken spiritual authority into their hands. Since 1989 the head of Spiritual Board of Tajikistan has been Akbar Turajonzoda, now one of the most influential leaders of the Tajik opposition. In

Soviet times, when the official clergy, and especially the top hierarchs, were just members of the Party nomenklatura in disguise, it was quite unusual for a man like Turajonzoda to emerge as head of a Spiritual Board and indeed as a new kazikalon or traditional Muslim leader. Akbar Turajonzoda was born in Karategin, into a family of hereditary Islamic theologians who belonged to the Sufi Qadiriya brotherhood. His grandfather was arrested and exiled to Siberia. His father spent a long time as an illegal preacher in mountain villages, hiding from the KGB. He graduated from the Faculty of Law at the Jordanian Islamic Institute and thus received a good theological education even by the standards of Muslim countries abroad. He has the advantage of an approachable personality: he shows no trace of arrogance and wins people over with his friendliness and almost youthful energy. Once when I was talking to him in a hotel room in Islamabad we heard a hubbub on the street outside (it later turned out to be a wedding procession). The venerable kazikalon immediately leaped up onto the windowsill to watch what was going on.

The new kazikalon energetically set about reforming the *kaziat*. He brought many new people onto the Board, mostly mountain Tajiks, many of whom had no links with the official religious leadership of Soviet times and had even been dissidents imprisoned for their beliefs – for example, Said Abdullo Nuri, the present chairman of the Islamic Revival Movement of Tajikistan (*Dvizheniye islamskogo vozrozhdeniya Tadzhikistana*). Even though in 1990 Deputy Turajonzoda had voted against the legalisation of the Islamic Revival Party (*Islamskaya partiya vozrozhdeniya*) (IRP) in the Tajik Supreme Soviet, from 1991 the *kaziat* and the IRP were the main allies forming the opposition and its principal power base. This alliance was of great significance. The founders of the IRP had in Soviet times been the main enemies of the official clergy, who had more or less merged with the communist leadership. I first met the leaders of the IRP in 1990, when it was still leading a semi-underground existence. Perhaps what struck me most of all was the fact that these people had managed to escape Russian and Soviet influence. Many of them, for example IRP chairman Muhammadsharif Himatzoda, speak hardly any Russian, but do speak Arabic. Most of them wear national dress and their way of life does not seem very different from that of the Tajiks before Russian colonisation. ‘Once we had a visit from an American woman journalist, who came dressed in shorts’, IRP deputy chairman Davlat Usmon told me. ‘We very much wanted to help her understand the situation, but her barbarous way of dressing embarrassed us so much that our conversation never really got started.’⁸⁷

The programme and structure of the IRP are derived from those of various Islamic groups which appeared in Tajikistan and some other parts of Central Asia in the 1970s. At that time the local and the national press were quick to dub the members of these groups ‘Wahhabis’, possibly following the lead of semi-qualified experts from Moscow.⁸⁸ As the Russian researchers V.I. Bushkov and D.V. Mikul'sky have noted, there are two theories about the origin of these groups. According to the first theory, the original groups of Islamists consisted of people on the borders of society, mainly from towns, sometimes from villages. They were people whose traditional ties with their clans and neighbourhoods had become weak, and this meant that their ideological aims were extremist. The leaders and rank-and-file members of these groups denounced traditional Tajik rituals as heretical and those who practised them as false Muslims. They called for the forcible cleansing of Islam and the restoration of its ‘pure’ form which they said existed at the time of the Prophet Muhammed and his successors. In their social status and ideological aims, then, the Islamists of the 1970s closely resembled the ‘classical’ fundamentalists of the Islamic world, whose

ideas are derived from the teachings of Muslim thinkers such as Seiid Kutb and Muhammed al-Banna.⁸⁹ The second theory holds that these groups originated in youth groups which formed in the 1960s and 1970s around underground Islamic schools operating under the guise of tea houses (*chaikhan*), which had been spreading through Kulyab and Kurgan-Tyube *oblasti* in the areas inhabited by immigrants from Karategin. The teachers in these underground schools were Sufi elders (*ishan*). It seems that these *ishans* would spend their time visiting villages where they would gather together the boys and young men and give them a few weeks' intensive instruction in Arabic, the Quran and the Hadiths. All this would go on under the poster of the Politburo which hung on every tea-house wall. The teaching was so intensive that when they went back to their ordinary Soviet school some of the boys would write from right to left, in the Tajik manner, even in Cyrillic, and everyone knew that they had been spending time with the *ishans*.⁹⁰

Bushkov and Mikul'sky note that these two theories are not mutually exclusive but complement one another. The two movements could have existed independently for a while and then have merged. However, the IRP as a whole has been a Sufi-inspired movement. The IRP leaders mostly come from the distinguished Central Asian social class of *ishans* – leaders of Sufi mystical orders or brotherhoods mainly belonging to the Qadiriya tariqa. 'Since the Russian conquest of Central Asia,' note Bushkov and Mikul'sky, 'resistance in society to the spread of one form of western culture – Russian culture – and indeed to any social changes has had the *ishan* class at its core.'⁹¹ In the early twentieth century D.N. Lagofet was writing of the *ishans* that

they are a well-organised force, and the Russian government will inevitably come into conflict with them sooner or later in the Bukhara khanate, particularly since most of the leaders of the *ishan* and *pir* societies are extremely hostile to everything Russian and are strongly attracted towards the neighbouring Muslim states.⁹²

In the nineteenth century in Central Asia, as in the Northern Caucasus, resistance to the Russian military forces was largely the work of members of the Naqshbandiya tariqa. Virtually all the leaders of anti-Russian campaigns in Central Asia were Naqshbandiya sheikhs: for example Hoja-*ishan* of Kulkara, the leader of the 1871 rising in the Chirchik valley; Kurban Murat, the leader of the Turkestani tribes of Geok-Tepe *oblast'* in 1879–81; and the *ishan* Mohammed Ali from Min-Tyube, the leader of the 1896 rebellion in Andijan in the Fergana valley.⁹³ It seems that it was the defeat of the anticolonial campaigns led by the Naqshbandiya sheikhs in the nineteenth century that led to a sharp fall in the authority of this brotherhood, both in Central Asia and in the Northern Caucasus. After Russian troops suppressed the resistance movements in these two areas the Naqshbandiya leaders mostly adopted a pro-Russian position, while the Qadiriya brotherhoods became the champions of anticolonial resistance.

Democracy or Islam

As early as 1991 the Islamic leaders were already attempting to establish an Islamic state. Muhammadsharif Himatzoda, the leader of the IRP, told me quite openly that this was the party's aim:

In Tajikistan over 80 per cent of the population are Muslims and of course

we hope – it is the dream of every Muslim – that Islam will be recognised as the state religion and that we shall live in accordance with the laws of Islam. But we are going to have to prepare the people for this, and the Islamic state must come about through peaceful means ...⁹⁴

The Tajik authorities made clever use of Himatzoda's statement. My interview with Himatzoda and Turajonzoda was published in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* of 18 September 1991 and then reprinted in the official Tajik newspaper *Narodnaya gazeta*. A propaganda campaign was then launched in the local press warning people that they were about to be plunged back into the Middle Ages. The campaign was so effective that the IRP leaders had to issue statements making it clear that Tajikistan was not yet ready to introduce Islamic law and that an Islamic state would be established only if a majority of the republic's inhabitants wished it. In the presidential elections of 1991 the Tajik opposition united in support of the well-known film director Davlat Hudonazarov. This choice was quite a subtle move by the Islamists: Hudonazarov was not just a secular man of the world with no experience of politics, but he was also a native of Pamir.

Although formally the nationalities of Pamir (the Yazgulyam, Rushan, Bartagan, Oroshor, Shungan, Huf, Bajui and others) are regarded as Tajiks they are in fact separate peoples. Not only do the Tajiks and the Pamir peoples speak different languages (the former belong to the West Iranian subgroup of languages, the latter to the East Iranian) but they also practise different forms of Islam. The Tajiks are Sunnis but the Pamir peoples belong to the Ismaili sect, which is Shiite with considerable Neoplatonist and Buddhist influence. A key feature of Ismailism, as the specialist on the Pamir people Hayelbek Dodihudoyev notes, is that 'it does not acknowledge the strict limits laid down by the sharia, but sees a knowledge of the world as of paramount importance'.⁹⁵ Relations between Sunnis and Ismailis have always been problematic. Many Tajiks do not consider the Pamir peoples to be Muslims. Thus the very fact that the Islamists agreed to put Hudonazarov forward as their candidate was designed to give the impression that they saw democratic values, rather than religious ones, as the most important.

It seems, however, that the leaders of the Tajik opposition realised that it was a mistake to rely on democratic slogans and that it would be more sensible to campaign openly under the green banner, without disguising their aims. Moreover, it was not only the 'pure' Islamists who came to this conclusion, but also some of the Tajik opposition whose ideal was national revival rather than democracy. As early as June 1992, at the very start of the civil war in Tajikistan, Mirbabo Mirahimov, one of the leaders of the *Rastohez* movement, told me that he had come to the conclusion that the Tajik opposition would receive no help either from the Russians or from the western democrats and that therefore they would look first of all towards the Islamic states.⁹⁶

After the armed detachments of the Tajik opposition were expelled from Dushanbe, field commander Rizvon Sodirov and Mullah Azam proclaimed an 'Islamic republic of Garm' in Karategin, the Tajik Islamists' centre, which lasted until this region was captured by government forces in February 1993. After the United Tajik Opposition (*Ob''yedinennaya tadjhikskaya oppositsiya*) was expelled abroad it renamed itself the Movement for the Islamic Revival of Tajikistan (*Dvizheniye islamskogo vozrozhdeniya Tadjhikistana*) (MIRT) and religious activists became its leaders. The well-known Islamic dissident Abdullohi Nuri became chairman, with Akbar Turajonzoda as his first deputy. The Tajik opposition thus

reshaped itself as a religious force. Many prominent opposition activists with purely democratic views left the MIRT, including Hudonazarov, the opposition's candidate for the presidential elections in 1991, and Shodmon Yusuf, chairman of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (*Demokraticheskaya partiya Tadzhikistana*).

In 1996 the Tajik opposition drove the government forces out of the Karategin valley and set up a medieval-style regime. The very appearance of the partisans from the mountains struck horror into their former fellow-villagers: they all had long beards and shoulder-length hair. These mujaheddin threatened punishment for all local people who failed to go to the mosque to pray five times a day. Women had to veil their faces, except only for their eyes, before appearing in public. The sale of spirits and cigarettes was strictly forbidden. Wrongdoers were beaten in the mosque – for some reason not with a stick as prescribed by sharia law but with a hand grenade launcher. Smokers got 20 strokes, drinkers 40, adulterers 100. Anyone convicted of spying for Dushanbe was hanged on the village square.

Even the few journalists who risked visiting 'Islam Valley' (*dolina Islama*) were subject to strict Islamic law. The mujaheddin had no liking for journalists, suspecting them of being security agents. They threw one foreign journalist accused of spying over a cliff, not forgetting to remove his shoes first: shoes were in short supply locally. Many of these warriors for pure Islam took care to see to their own personal enrichment. In 1998 four members of the UN mission in Tajikistan were murdered in Karategin and it was later established that the motive was not political: there had been rumours that the victims had had a case with them stuffed with hundred-dollar bills. The only profitable business in Karategin was drug-smuggling. Cannabis grows practically everywhere in the mountains and stronger drugs like heroin and opium come in from neighbouring Afghanistan. When they took control of Karategin the mujaheddin also took control of the drug trade. Many of them were addicts themselves. The men checking my documents on the road into one village could hardly stand from the effects of heroin.

In Foreign Lands

In the autumn of 1993 the armed units of the Tajik opposition fled into Afghanistan. Hundreds of thousands of mountain Tajiks from Karategin fled with them to avoid persecution by the 'anti-Islamists' (the 'Reds' had slaughtered whole villages). Practically all the refugees settled in the north of the country, an area inhabited largely by Afghan Tajiks. Interestingly, these people, regarded as Islamists in their homeland, complained to me in their refugee camps that Islam in Afghanistan was 'too strict'. The women refused to wear the veil (*paranja*), which almost all Afghan women did. The refugees enjoyed watching Russian television and this astonished their Afghan fellow-tribesmen who had taken in these 'shuravi' (refugees) fleeing from shameful defeat at the hands of the occupying kafirs.

In internal Afghan feuds all the refugees supported their fellow-tribesman Ahmadshah Masud, leader of the Afghan Tajiks, who was at first fighting against the Pushtun *Hekmatiyar* and then against the fundamentalist Taliban movement, which was also mainly supported by the Pushtuns. Many of the Tajik opposition even joined Masud's forces. Their contacts abroad were not limited to Masud's movement alone, however. When the Tajik mujaheddin took control of the Karategin valley in 1996 the only military training camp there was run by a Pakistani; and a Sheikh Abos from Saudi Arabia became one of the leading field commanders in the region.

It seems that the Tajik Islamists also tried to establish contact with their Chechen

counterparts. One of the bodyguards of the leading Tajik field commander Shoh was a Chechen and there is some evidence that part of his job was to help the 'Tajik brothers' to organise a proper defence system for Karategin. After the end of war in Tajikistan emissaries from Chechnya were frequent visitors, offering the now unemployed mujaheddin money to go and fight in Chechnya. 'When we left Tajikistan,' Akbar Turajonzoda, first deputy chairman of the United Tajik Opposition, told me,

we tried to establish closer contact with neighbouring Muslim countries as a priority as we thought that their politicians would have most influence in solving the Tajik crisis. In view of the fact that most of the Tajik refugees had settled in Afghanistan we decided that the chairman of our movement would live there too, while his two deputies would take up residence in Iran and Pakistan.⁹⁷

At the same time the leaders of the Tajik opposition also began to establish contacts with fundamentalist Islamic organisations. In 1995 I visited a madrassah for children of the mujaheddin near Peshawar in Pakistan. It was subsidised from Saudi Arabia and taught over 300 Tajik children, whose fathers were fighting for 'the victory of Islam', and a similar number from Afghanistan and Kashmir. They all followed the same curriculum, except that the Tajik children were taught Russian too: the opposition leaders were sure that they would soon be needing it. Naturally there was a special emphasis on religious studies and also on Arabic. This was not a European-style education: any pupil who had not learned his lesson was caned on the hand. Tajik pupils were sent to the madrassah on the recommendation of the opposition, who attached great importance to this education process: the madrassah was under the personal supervision of Akbar Turajonzoda himself. Within a year pupils from this madrassah would be in the Taliban movement, creating a classic fundamentalist state in the part of Afghanistan they controlled.⁹⁸ In the late 1990s some at least of the leaders of the Tajik opposition decided to make the Taliban movement their main ally. According to the newspaper *Vremya-MN*, after the creation of a coalition government in Dushanbe they tried to persuade the Tajik government, and even foreign diplomats working in Dushanbe, to come out in support of the Taliban.⁹⁹

One of the more likely explanations for this is that relations between the Tajik opposition and Ahmadshah Masud had cooled. Fearing a Taliban victory, Moscow had given Masud military assistance. In 1997 I visited Masud's airbase in the Tajik town of Kulyab. In view of the fact that the Tajik-Afghan border was patrolled by Russian border guards it was obvious that the airbase was there with the Kremlin's blessing. However, the Kremlin's help limited Masud's independence: whether he wanted to or not, he was forced to pay attention to the views of Moscow's proteges, the leaders of Tajikistan, and this of course displeased the Tajik opposition.

Uzbekistan

The Heirs of Tamerlane

On the central square of the Uzbek capital there stands an unusual monument, which the local people call 'the globe of Uzbekistan'. A stone sphere on a pedestal has the outline of only one country on it – Uzbekistan – taking up almost half the planet. According to the new Uzbek historiography, the founder of the Uzbek state was Timur (Tamerlane), who is here described as master of three parts of the world –

Europe, Asia and Africa. In the recently built and staggeringly grandiose Timur Museum there is a map showing the territories from which the great ruler levied tribute, including not only North Africa and northern India, but also a considerable part of modern Russia, including its present capital. Schoolteachers relate how this same Timur saved Russia from the Mongol yoke.

It is clear from Uzbekistan's foreign policy that it aims to become the regional superpower. The idea of Turkestan as a single common home is a recurring theme in the Uzbek president's prolific writings. First of all Tashkent tried to increase its influence over its weaker neighbours, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Its methods included the use of force and also economic coercion: Kyrgyzstan depends on Uzbek gas, and Uzbekistan supplies electricity to northern Afghanistan, which was under the control of General Dustum, an ally of Tashkent. Here Uzbekistan relied on the large Uzbek communities located in neighbouring states along its whole perimeter and which are a kingpin in Uzbek foreign policy. For example, Tajik Uzbeks played a decisive role in the November 1991 elections, securing the victory of Rakhmon Nabyev, which Karimov wanted – buses full of 'voters' sent from Uzbekistan were also very effective here – and later in contributing to the victory of the 'anti-Islamist coalition' in the Tajik civil war. It is also common knowledge that Tashkent gave assistance to the leader of the Afghan Uzbeks, General Dustum. For many years now Dustum has had a private residence in Tashkent, where all his family lives. Dustum's soldiers would withdraw to the Uzbek town of Termez, on the border with Afghanistan, to recuperate after hard fighting in Afghanistan.

In the autumn of 1998 Colonel Mahmud Hudoiberdyev started an uprising in Northern Tajikistan (Leninabad *oblast'*), with the support of Tashkent. If he had succeeded in establishing himself there Leninabad would have become a buffer zone controlled by men taking their orders from Tashkent. However, the uprising was crushed and Hudoiberdyev and his followers sought refuge in Uzbekistan. Tashkent's tactics naturally aroused the extreme displeasure of the Tajik authorities. Soon after Hudoiberdyev's defeat a meeting took place in Dushanbe between Said Abdullo Nuri, chairman of the United Tajik Opposition, and Juma Namangani, one of the leaders of the Uzbek Islamists who had settled in Tajikistan, and soon afterwards the Uzbek Islamists attempted to return to their own homeland, taking their weapons with them.

A Dangerous Neighbourhood

The 1992 civil war in Tajikistan thoroughly alarmed the Uzbek authorities. Not without reason, Tashkent feared that the violence in the neighbouring state might spread to its own territory as well. It was at this time that Islam Karimov made two remarks which came to be seen as significant: 'We're not ready for democracy; in our country every political meeting ends in pogroms' and 'Better to have a hundred people arrested than a thousand killed'.¹⁰⁰ To bring home the president's message Uzbek television broadcast regular footage of the bloody conflict in neighbouring Tajikistan. Having prepared public opinion Karimov launched a forceful campaign to repress the national democratic opposition. Almost all his opponents were forced to emigrate and the opposition simply ceased to exist as an organised force. However, as the journalist and researcher Sanobar Shermatova notes, no sooner had the president successfully defeated and scattered the secular national-democratic opposition than he was unexpectedly confronted with a new and far stronger political force. No free press or democratic public institutions existed in the country, but the

mosques had turned into centres of dissent; public dissatisfaction built up in them. We know that sometimes believers tape-recorded Radio Liberty news reports and played them at the mosque. After the disappearance of Abduvali-Kori, a theologian well known in Islamic circles, his relatives travelled to Moscow to bring the violation of human rights in Uzbekistan to the attention of Russian democratic organisations and Islamic associations. Earlier the national democratic opposition had done the same thing.¹⁰¹

The Centre of Instability

The main centre of 'informal' Islam in Uzbekistan is the Fergana valley. Even in Soviet times a whole network of semi-underground madrassahs and mosques was active there, beyond the control of the communist authorities. The Fergana valley is a unique region of Uzbekistan: separated from the rest of the republic by mountains, it is linked more closely economically with regions of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan which are also located in the Fergana valley. It has the densest population in Central Asia: indeed, one of the densest populations in the world. One village flows into another down the whole length of the valley. Many experts believe that there are no religious or ethnic causes for conflict here and that the main, and indeed only, factor capable of provoking violent clashes is the shortage of fertile land; but this makes the Fergana valley the most dangerous place in the region.

President Islam Karimov does not have happy memories of the Fergana valley. In 1991 a movement called *Adolat* (Justice) unexpectedly took shape in Namangan, the main town of one of the *oblasti* in the valley. Among the believers who formed the backbone of *Adolat*, people from the opposition Ataullo mosque enjoyed great authority. Unofficially this mosque was called Gumbas and was regarded as 'Wahhabite'. *Adolat* set up an equivalent to the Iranian 'Islamic Revolutionary Guards'. Young men with green headbands began appearing unexpectedly all over the town and taking it into their own hands to deal with people they judged to be breaking the law. The punishment meted out to thieves and prostitutes was fairly exotic, from a western legal perspective: they were paraded through the town sitting facing backwards on donkeys; they were tied to posts in public places where people would spit in their faces; they were flogged in the mosques. Crime was pretty well wiped out in the town. The people of Namangan remember nostalgically how they could leave their cars unlocked and tradesmen could leave their goods out all night. The undisputed leader of this 'Islamic militia' was 24-year-old Tahir Yuldashev.

At first President Karimov looked favourably on the activities of *Adolat*, but quite soon he realised that he was no longer master in Namangan. Things came to a head when he visited the town. Tahir Yuldashev addressed a huge crowd which had assembled on the square: 'Here he is, the dictator: he's been forced to come back here and appear before you all'. Then he started asking Karimov questions about what he was doing for the country. Karimov flushed, 'My dear boy, you've got so many questions! Let me answer just a few!' He tried to grab the microphone, but Yuldashev pushed his hand away: 'You're not the master here today! You can speak when we ask you to.' He turned to the crowd again. 'Do you want a president like him?' he asked them three times; and three times the crowd shouted 'No!' Karimov was so intimidated by this unexpected reception that he agreed to donate the Namangan Regional Committee building for use as a Muslim women's hospital and even promised to say prayers there. When the crowd asked him if Uzbekistan was going to become an Islamic state Karimov replied that parliament would have to decide.¹⁰²

The Uzbek president could not forgive this humiliation. A few weeks after his departure the Adolat activists were arrested and sentenced to many years in prison, but Yuldashev and a few of his followers managed to get out of the country. Tashkent then launched a campaign against Islamic dissidents throughout the republic. All the Muslim leaders who were independent of the official authorities were thrown into gaol or fled abroad. Yuldashev first escaped to Afghanistan, then illegally crossed over into Tajikistan. It was just at this time that President Karimov was warning of the danger presented by Islamic fundamentalism for the Muslim republics of the CIS. In fact, the use of the term 'Islamic fundamentalism' in this case was incorrect. There were indeed fundamentalist groups active in Uzbekistan, especially in the Uzbek part of the Fergana valley, but some of the Adolat group had nothing to do with them. Yuldashev, for example, was a Sufi; he could not stand the 'Wahhabis', nor they him.¹⁰³

Unfortunately for Karimov, crushing the Islamic dissidents in his country did not solve the problem, but merely put off the danger threatening him. His tough, repressive methods provoked the Islamic dissidents into mounting an armed struggle for power. Most of them fled into the mountainous part of Tajikistan, where the Tajik opposition helped them to organise military detachments. The rest was just a matter of time: the refugees only had to build up their strength in order to proclaim a holy war – a 'jihad'.

'Wahhabism' and 'Enlightened Islam'

In 1998 unknown persons beheaded a high-ranking police officer in Namangan. The authorities immediately announced that the crime had been committed by 'Wahhabis'; but the campaign they launched struck not so much against 'Wahhabis' as against sincerely believing Muslims. According to Holly Cartner, executive director of the Europe and Central Asia section of Human Rights Watch, 'The government is treating all Muslims alike – those who may have criminal intentions as well as peaceful believers who wear beards and go to the mosque.'¹⁰⁴ 'New presidential elections are to be held in 2000, and President Karimov has already begun to prepare for them', Mikhail Ardzinov, chairman of an unregistered independent society for human rights in Uzbekistan, told me.

He knows quite well that it is the Islamists who are his main rivals. If the elections were to be held now, their candidate would undoubtedly win about 70 per cent of the votes. So Karimov simply has to get rid of this dangerous rival before it is too late.¹⁰⁵

However, declaring war directly on Islam in a Muslim country is a risky business, so Tashkent disguised its aims a little. Officially, the campaign was directed not against Islam, but against 'Wahhabism'. 'Wahhabis say that you have to pray five times a day, without fail, and observe all the fasts; and that anyone who doesn't do so isn't a true Muslim', Mahmud-haja Nuritdinov, head of the International Centre for the Study of Islam (*Internatsional'ny tsestr po izucheniyu islama*), told me in 1998. 'They say that women's clothing must cover their whole face and body. But most Muslim scholars would say women should be completely covered only when they're praying, and that normally their face and hands can be uncovered.'¹⁰⁶

To an outsider, Nuritdinov's assertions are astonishing: an Islamic theologian is trying to prove logically that the basic rules of Islam are not compulsory. However, all becomes clear when we discover that the centre headed by Nuritdinov was set up

(in 1995) by order of the Uzbek Ministerial Cabinet. The state supplies half the funding and the other half comes from the muftiate. Its official purpose is to bring secular and Islamic learning into accord with each other through the combined efforts of academics and theologians. As Nuritdinov puts it, the centre is a special kind of bridge between the state authorities and the muftiate. In a conversation with me lasting more than two hours Nuritdinov made no mention of any theological disagreements between the 'Wahhabis' and the proponents of traditional Islam in Uzbekistan, saying only that the 'Wahhabis' were fanatics who adhered blindly to the rules of Islam. Nuritdinov himself, and therefore the official authorities too, are in favour of the so-called 'enlightened Islam' (*prosveshchenny islam*).¹⁰⁷ The meaning of this concept is not entirely clear; but what is clear is that Tashkent considers as unenlightened Muslims all those who want to abide obediently by the precepts of their religion. It would be hard to describe the actions of the 'enlightened Islamists' as anything other than a fight against religion. The Spiritual Directorate issued a special decree forbidding loudspeakers for the call to prayer. After a registration check, half the mosques were shut. 'After *perestroika* mosques started springing up in our country like mushrooms after rain,' Nuritdinov told me,

but there was a real shortage of people who knew anything about Islam, so we ended up with the imam in one mosque saying one thing and the imam in another saying exactly the opposite. Now we're introducing some order into people's views. So we're not fighting against Islam; we're fighting for it.¹⁰⁸

A special amendment was introduced into the Uzbek Criminal Code forbidding the use of religion to damage social harmony, disseminate libellous fabrications destabilising society or do anything to disturb norms of behaviour or public safety. Obviously these provisions could mean almost anything. The maximum penalty was five years' imprisonment. As usual in such situations, rank-and-file officials would often be overzealous in applying the law. Rumour has it that in one of the larger *oblasti* the top man himself personally took scissors to the beards of 'Wahhabis'. Bearded men under 40 vanished from the streets: the police would snap them up. People lived in constant fear. A taxi-driver assured me that if people got to hear that he had driven a foreign journalist who had written a 'bad' article about Uzbekistan he would simply disappear and his family would never even find out where he was buried.

An Attempt at Revenge

The new campaign of repression did not achieve the desired result. On 16 February 1999 there was a series of powerful explosions in the centre of Tashkent. Eyewitnesses say they went off more or less simultaneously and the whole place felt like a battlefield. One of the bombs went off on Independence Square at the very moment when the presidential cortege was due to arrive, but Karimov was lucky: he was late and thus avoided certain death. Within hours the authorities were blaming the 'Wahhabis'. Over 2000 suspects were arrested. Nevertheless, there was more trouble for Karimov in August 1999: a detachment of Uzbek Islamists burst into Kyrgyzstan from Tajikistan. They were led by Tahir Yuldashev and Juma Namangani, the leaders of Adolat, which Karimov had dissolved. Their aim was to cross a narrow section of Kyrgyz territory in order to enter Uzbekistan, 'liberate' the Uzbek part of the Fergana valley and establish an Islamic state there. 'These people were ordinary

believers,' said the Kyrgyz human rights activist Tursunbek Akunov, who had been negotiating with the insurgents,

but they were forced to take up arms in order to take revenge on the Uzbek government for its persecution of political and religious activists, which started in 1992 and has got a lot worse in recent years. These people want to set up a true Islamic system in Uzbekistan. Whatever Allah tells us to do, they say, that's how it will be. They don't want to fight against the Kyrgyz. They have a different enemy – the Uzbek state.¹⁰⁹

In the end, after long and bloody battles with the Uzbek and Kyrgyz armies, the insurgents returned to Tajikistan. A year later, however, war broke out again; and this time the insurgents invaded not only Kyrgyzstan but Uzbekistan as well (Surkhandar'ya *oblast'*). 'We have a clear goal', said Yuldashev: 'to overthrow the Uzbek regime, liberate about 100,000 of our brothers and sisters who are pious Uzbek Muslims and make Uzbekistan a place where Muslim believers are free to practise their faith.' Yuldashev also completely ruled out any possibility of negotiating with Karimov.¹¹⁰ This time the Kyrgyz and Uzbek armies failed to defeat the Islamists, and they returned with almost no losses to their bases in the mountains of Tajikistan.

A Leaflet War

At this point a new force unexpectedly began to make its presence felt. Leaflets started to appear in the markets of the towns of the Fergana valley: 'The Jewish kafir Karimov and his state apparatus are not letting up their mad aggression against the Hizb-ut Tahrir party, which is calling for Islamic observance ... Muslims, don't lose heart!' The radical Islamic party Hizb-ut Tahrir is illegal in practically all Islamic countries. Its clandestine headquarters are in Jordan. Its aim is to unite all the world's Muslims in a single caliphate. It maintains that there is not a single genuine Islamic state in the world today, that Muslims must reject western democracy and that sharia law must regulate their lives. Years in the underground have shaped harsh discipline in the party: its members are divided into five-man cells, which frequently know nothing of each other's existence.

When I met members of Hizb-ut Tahrir I found them very critical of Namangani and Yuldashev: they believe that it is wrong to attack one's country from outside, and that at the moment the policy should be to use persuasion, so that 'Muslims realise they are being ruled by unbelievers'. Ideally an Islamic state should be built as it was in Muhammed's time, on a popular base. Nowadays, however, there are so many Muslims that any attempt to do so 'would end up in the farce of so-called European democracy', so decisions about setting up an Islamic state should be taken by 'the people with most influence' (top politicians and businessmen). If the 'unbelievers' then still insist on clinging to power 'the enlightened populace can remove them by force'.

It seems that the Uzbek authorities are taking the programme of the 'enlighteners' seriously. They immediately arrest anyone in possession of a Hizb-ut Tahrir leaflet. These measures have not yet achieved their aim, however: the 'subversive literature' is still being secretly distributed. Meanwhile the trials of Hizb-ut Tahrir members turn into antigovernment meetings: the accused, mostly young people, declare their joy at suffering in the name of Allah and condemn Karimov for his crimes.

Hizb-ut Tahrir activity is not confined to Uzbekistan: it is spreading to the Tajik part of the Fergana valley and, alarmingly, into Kyrgyzstan.

Exporters of Islamic Revolution

In virtually every speech about the Islamic extremists the Uzbek president asserts that they are receiving financial help from Islamic radicals abroad. Certainly some Uzbek Islamists have been trained in Taliban military camps in Afghanistan and in similar camps in Pakistan. We know that Yuldashev has been living in Afghanistan since 1995, in close contact with the Taliban leader Mullah Muhammed Omar who has been helping to finance him. Ahmadshah Masud says that Mullah Omar and Yuldashev were planning to set up an Islamic Emirate of Fergana together.¹¹¹ The Taliban practise a fundamentalist form of Islam and this may well mean that Yuldashev has now abandoned Sufism.

The closest links the Uzbek Islamists have is with the Tajik mujaheddin. Uzbeks fought alongside the Tajik opposition in 1992. In 1996 one of the leaders of the Uzbek Islamists, Juma Namangani, became second-in-command to the leading field commander in Tajikistan's Karategin valley, Mirzo Ziyeyev (who is now head of the Tajik Ministry for Emergencies (*Ministerstvo po chrezvychainym situatsiyam*)). Large-scale emigration from Uzbekistan to Tajikistan began after the Tashkent bombings in February 1999, when the Uzbek authorities, thoroughly alarmed, launched mass arrests of religious dissidents, many of whom had no links with the underground insurgents. Tashkent protests too loudly about foreign Islamic radicals, however. It seems as if the Uzbek authorities are ready to accuse anyone in order to cover up their own impotence in the struggle against the local Islamic radicals. After the Tashkent bombings, for example, President Karimov announced that the 'Wahhabi' terrorists had received support from 'Hezbollah', the radical Shiite organisation directly supported by Iran, the main ideological opponent of the fundamentalists in the Islamic world.

Despite continuous repression of the dissidents, then, the threat of an Islamic revolution in Uzbekistan still remains a real possibility. It is true that the openly totalitarian Uzbek regime is probably still the main factor helping to hold back the spread of radical Islam in the country. This well-organised repressive machine maintains total control over society, so that it is impossible to own an illegal weapon, for example. Anyone sympathising with the insurgents is thus unable to offer them any effective help. People's movements are monitored and any terrorist groups are quickly dealt with. However, the current policy of the Uzbek authorities may not be effective for long. The average monthly wage in the republic is less than US\$20, and in rural areas, where over 70 per cent of the population live, people work on collective farms left over from the communist era without being paid at all. 'Karimov stubbornly refuses to apply shock therapy, and seems to be proud of the fact that the country is slowly moving towards the abyss', a western diplomat in Tashkent told me. 'We don't understand whether they really intend to create a modern capitalist society in Uzbekistan, or whether they just want to make a few changes to the old communist system.'¹¹² If Tashkent does not get a grip on the situation soon and take steps to head off economic collapse there will be revolts sparked off by famine and then this smooth-running repressive machine will probably begin to fail.

It is indeed very probably a lack of faith in his own powers which has made it necessary for Karimov to try to find allies in like-minded countries for his struggle against the Islamic radicals. In May 1998 Moscow, Tashkent and Dushanbe concluded a triple alliance to coordinate their efforts in this struggle. When President Putin visited Tashkent in June 2000 Karimov announced that he was asking Russia for aid and that he was sure Russia would defend Uzbekistan against international

terrorism. Only a year earlier it would have been hard even to imagine Karimov openly making pronouncements of this kind. At that time Uzbekistan was emphatically distancing itself from the former Soviet capital and had even withdrawn from a collective security treaty.

To be fair, we should note that the Kremlin had its own good reasons for its rapprochement with Tashkent. In the early 1990s hundreds of young men started coming from Chechnya and Dagestan to study Islam in the underground madrassahs of Namangan, and many of them went on to become well-known field commanders. The student the Namangan instructors most pride themselves on is probably Salman Raduyev. I would often hear people saying things like 'We'd only need half a dozen Salman Raduyevs to capture the whole of Namangan. The Chechens embraced Islam while they were here in Namangan. Now it's their turn to help their teachers.' The Uzbek and Chechen mujaheddin are receiving military training in Taliban camps in Afghanistan, and the suspects for the September 1999 Moscow bombings include one native of Central Asia as well as immigrants from the Caucasus. According to some reports, a representative of Tahir Yuldashev went to see field commander Khattab in Chechnya, where they apparently discussed plans for co-ordinating their efforts in the fight against the infidel. Aleksandr Zdanovich, head of the press centre (*tseñtr obshchestvennykh svyazei*) at the Federal Security Service of Russia, believes that Chechens probably helped to plan the February bombings in Tashkent in February 1999.¹¹³

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is much more multiethnic than any other Central Asian republic. Only 52 per cent of the population are Kyrgyz; 21.5 per cent are Russians and 12.5 per cent Uzbeks. Originally nomadic cattle-breeders, the Kyrgyz have traditionally lived in the mountains, and it is a paradox of history that the nation which gave its name to the republic is often in a minority in the more fertile 'prestigious' regions. This geographical inequality is thus perfectly explicable, but because of a shortage of fertile land it has become a stumbling-block in relations among the various peoples living in the republic. The attitude of many Kyrgyz was reflected in the preamble to a law on land passed by the republic's parliament, which stated that 'the land belongs to the Kyrgyz people'. In the interests of lowering tension, President Askar Akayev vetoed this formulation.

The situation is made more complicated by the fact that the various peoples of this newly-independent state have had different initial opportunities on entering the market economy. The Kyrgyz have turned out to be the least well adapted to life in competitive conditions. Asan Ormushev, leader of national revival party *Asaba*, told me that when small enterprises are auctioned off the national minorities make big profits because of the Kyrgyz lack of competitive spirit, and this means that the indigenous population is being pushed out of private business. It may sound paradoxical, but it is because relations among the national groups are so complex that Bishkek has a genuine interest in stopping Russians leaving the republic. President Akayev told me that the Slavs form a buffer between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks, and that if they left, conflict would be more likely.¹¹⁴

In June 1998 I was trying to take photographs in the Kyrgyz town of Karas, on the border with Uzbekistan, and was almost torn to pieces by the local people, who were Uzbeks. 'Expose that film now!' they shouted. 'When "journalists" like you have been around, our people start disappearing!' It later became clear that they thought I

was working for the Uzbek security services.

'We are constantly confiscating fanatical religious literature sent in from Kyrgyzstan', I was told by Mahmud-haja Nuritdinov, head of the International Centre for the Study of Islam, which was founded by the Uzbek Cabinet of Ministers. 'There is also a centre here which arranges pilgrimages to Mecca, and Wahhabis from Uzbekistan are always using it. So our authorities have no alternative but to take certain measures.'¹¹⁵ 'Certain measures' turned out to mean that the Uzbek security services started arresting Uzbek religious dissidents who had escaped into hiding in Kyrgyzstan.

The situation in southern Kyrgyzstan had become even tenser by June 1998. A minibus was blown up in the city of Osh and a few days later there was an explosion in a private block of flats. The investigation first found that both incidents were terrorist strikes made possible by elementary infringements of safety procedures; but in mid-June three people from Osh were arrested and charged with causing the explosions. It was announced that they were Islamic fundamentalists and that 'Wahhabi' literature had been found on them. (It was eventually established that Islamic extremists from the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region in China were in fact responsible.) The authorities were afraid that comrades of the arrested men might seek vengeance and stepped up police patrols in the city. The conditions in which the detainees were held aroused serious concern among local human rights activists. 'It is very worrying that as soon as these men were arrested, and before they went on trial, they were being referred to as criminals', Natal'ya Ablova, director of the Kyrgyz human rights organisation Human Rights and Legality (*Prava cheloveka i soblyudeniye zakona*), told me.

This probably means that they won't have a fair trial. It looks as though someone wants to use the press to launch a big campaign against the so-called 'Wahhabis'. In our view a real, organised 'Wahhabi' underground doesn't exist in Kyrgyzstan. We have religious dissidents, certainly, but they're not the kind of people who break the law.¹¹⁶

'Today the word "Wahhabi" is no more than a label', Sadikjan Kamaluddin, the president of the Islamic Centre of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, told me.

As soon as two imams quarrel it's not long before they start calling each other 'Wahhabis', but they don't know what the word really means. There are some believers who really try to follow the rules laid down in early Islam and to dispense with things added later; but it's basically incorrect to call these people 'Wahhabis'.¹¹⁷

Kamaluddin is quite a well-known figure in Kyrgyzstan. From 1987 to 1990 he was the mufti of Kyrgyzstan and from 1990 to 1994 he was a deputy to the Kyrgyz parliament. He still takes pride in the fact that it was he who nominated Akayev as presidential candidate.¹¹⁸ He is an Uzbek by nationality (large numbers of Uzbeks live in Osh *oblast'* in Kyrgyzstan) and is one of the most authoritative leaders of the local Uzbek community. The Kyrgyz press calls Kamaluddin a 'Wahhabi' from time to time and also accuses him of receiving money from Saudi Arabia for 'subversive activity'.¹¹⁹

Until the Uzbek Islamists invaded Kyrgyzstan in August 1999, however, the Uzbek security services were not regularly involved there. Karimov had to take account of the views of the Kyrgyz president, Askar Akayev, who did not share Karimov's fears about the fundamentalist threat. In June 1999 Akayev told me that

he did not regard the word 'Wahhabi' as negative in meaning and that he was opposed in principle to repressive measures against Uzbeks identified as such.

The danger of 'Wahhabism' for our republic has been greatly exaggerated. I feel that it is basically wrong to equate extremism with any specific religious movement. The word 'Wahhabism' does not have a negative meaning in itself: it means Muslims who are trying to attain a pure faith. Extremists exist in any religion, not just in this or that particular form of Islam. Exerting pressure on any particular group of believers can lead to negative results: forcing them to go underground really means nudging them towards terrorism. Personally I have a great deal of respect for many of our 'Wahhabis' – there are many literate, educated people among them. ... I don't think that conflicts within or between religious confessions are possible in our republic, as religious tolerance is characteristic of Kyrgyzstan.¹²⁰

After the Uzbek Islamists invaded Kyrgyzstan, however, Akayev's views changed fundamentally. He declared that this incursion and the war in Dagestan were two links in the same chain, and that the insurgents in both regions were financed by Bin Laden and other Islamic extremists. Quoting the Kyrgyz media, Radio Liberty reported that the terrorists' headquarters were in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek and that this was where 'Khattab's disciples' had awaited the signal to organise the Tashkent bombings.¹²¹ With Akayev's permission, Tashkent started to bomb the Uzbek Islamists in Kyrgyzstan, while the Uzbek security services began extensive operations against the so-called 'Wahhabis' there. Wrong-footed by these unexpected developments, Akayev decided to close his eyes to Tashkent's activities in Kyrgyzstan.

We should note that Osh *oblast'* is one of the most vulnerable regions of Central Asia. As early as 1990 there were bloody clashes between local Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, with considerable loss of life, and the effects of this conflict are still felt today. The local Uzbeks still regard this region as their own and greatly resent what they see as Kyrgyz interference in the business sphere and oppressive Kyrgyz political control. The current peace is fragile and could be upset by one careless move. People began talking about the danger of a new outbreak of Uzbek-Kyrgyz conflict a few years ago when fundamentalist Islamists, dubbed 'Wahhabis' by the local people, appeared in the region. 'The problem is that most of the so-called Wahhabis in Kyrgyzstan are Uzbeks', Sadikjan Kamaluddin, the president of the Islamic Centre of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, told me in 1998, 'and articles have appeared in the Kyrgyz press groundlessly calling all the Uzbeks in Tajikistan Wahhabis. One gets the impression that certain people want a replay of the Osh tragedy, but this time with an added religious flavour.'¹²² The situation is now much tenser: local Uzbeks are not just being called Wahhabis but are being accused of abetting the 'aggressive invader'.

The Uzbek-Kyrgyz conflict is not the only serious problem in southern Kyrgyzstan. There are ongoing territorial disputes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The border between the two states is quite capricious and full of enclaves. Most summers see Kyrgyz and Tajiks skirmishing for water in the part of Osh *oblast'* where the Uzbek Islamists have been encroaching; and we should note that in this case the word 'Uzbek' is not entirely accurate since a good many of the Islamists are in fact Tajiks.

The Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region (China)

It is surely more than a coincidence that at the same time as the fundamentalists of

Central Asia were moving into action the Uighur separatist movement in China started up, likewise invoking the Islamic factor. Official Chinese statistics give the population of the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) as 15 million, of whom Turkic-speaking Muslims number about 9 million, or 60 per cent of the population. Of these, over 7 million are Uighurs, 900,000 Kazakhs and 130,000 Kyrgyz.¹²³ The historical name of the XUAR is Eastern Turkestan. The indigenous population are the Uighurs. In ancient times they had a thriving civilisation, which greatly influenced China as well as Central Asia, but they lost their independence in 1759 when Manchurian-Chinese armies captured their territories and renamed them 'Xinjiang', or 'New Frontier' in Chinese. Since the incorporation of the XUAR into China the Uighurs have staged over 400 rebellions.¹²⁴

Uighur resistance did not cease after the communists came to power in China. During the period 1980-1990 alone there were 53 mass uprisings in the XUAR against the Chinese authorities, the largest in May 1989 in Urumchi when 1000 people were arrested. In 1990 a partisan detachment led by Muhammed Hassan, Zeinetdin Yusup and Kurban Muhammed 'liberated' the district of Barin from Chinese rule. According to unofficial reports the revolt began after the authorities refused believers access to a mosque. Some 200,000 troops were deployed to suppress the uprising; armoured units reduced eight villages of Barin district to rubble. Altogether 2000 Uighurs were killed and 3700 arrested.

Beijing thus defeated the rebels, but was unable to crush the Uighur underground, and acts of terrorism became an everyday reality in Xinjiang. In February 1997 there were mass clashes between Chinese and Uighurs in the town of Yining in the XUAR. There are two quite different versions of what happened: the official Chinese version and the version of the Uighur dissidents.

According to the Chinese authorities, a few thousand Uighurs aged about 17 or 18 attacked a group of Chinese celebrating the Chinese New Year, killed some of them and set fire to their corpses. The police and militarised detachments tried to put a stop to the outrage but were forced to withdraw, carrying the wounded. The clashes grew into mass anti-Chinese demonstrations, which were brought to an end after a number of the instigators were arrested.¹²⁵

I heard the Uighur version from Ahmed Shayar, an Uighur underground activist in China:

In the town of Kulja [Yining in Chinese – IR] on 4–5 February, the eve of the important Islamic festival of Uraz-Bairam, the Chinese authorities carried out what they called a 'purge of the town's criminal elements', but the first people they arrested were not criminals but supporters of the separation of Uighurstan from China. We estimate that over 1000 people were arrested. On 6 February young Uighurs organised a peaceful demonstration against the arrest of their comrades, carrying quite moderate Islamic slogans. However, the army and the police started to break up the demonstration. There were clashes, and 55 Chinese and 25 Uighurs died. By morning the rising had been crushed. The Chinese authorities had 30 young Uighur activists, including 12 girls, publicly shot. When news of this got about, Uighurs rose spontaneously in other towns in Eastern Turkestan: in Urumchi, capital of the XUAR, Khotin and Kuchar. Unfortunately, all these risings were crushed. We do not know the exact number of victims.¹²⁶

According to Shayar, the most powerful organisation in Uighurstan advocating

separation from China is the Islamic Revival Party, which maintains close contacts with fellow believers, in organisations of the same name, in the Central Asian republics.¹²⁷ Shayar's opinion is backed up by other sources. It seems that the Uighur separatists have links with the Chechens. Two Uighur Chinese citizens who had fought on the separatist side were arrested in Chechnya. In December 1997 Muhammadamin Turkistoni, a citizen of Saudi Arabia but an Uighur by nationality, gave the Uzbek Islamic radical leader Tahir Yuldashev US\$260,000 to buy weapons, on condition that half of them were passed on to the Uighur separatists in China.¹²⁸ Six months later, Uighur Islamic radicals carried out two big bomb attacks in southern Kyrgyzstan. In 2000 Negmat Bazakov, the president of *Ittipak*, the cultural and educational society for the Uighurs of Kyrgyzstan, was killed in Kyrgyzstan by terrorists from China; a Chinese official was also killed. In Almaty the security forces discovered an apartment where underground Uighur terrorists from the XUAR were living. They offered armed resistance and were killed in the shootout.

The main aim of the Uighur Islamists in Central Asia today is to collect funds for their struggle with the Chinese authorities. The most important contribution is the 'tribute' paid by the 300,000-strong Uighur diaspora in Central Asia. The reason why Bazakov was killed was that he refused to give money to the armed underground in China. Collecting money is not the only reason why Uighur separatists are in Central Asia. Ethnically and culturally Eastern Turkestan is part of the Central Asian region, and if both sides of the frontier can be destabilised this will make things much more difficult for the Chinese authorities and the Central Asian leaders alike.

'The liberation movement of the peoples of Turkestan began in Central Asia, but it was a good example for us', Ahmed Shayar told me. 'We shall carry on the struggle whatever happens, even if millions die. Sooner or later the Chinese will have to get out of their colonies too.'¹²⁹ It is clear to me that the underlying cause of the Chinese-Uighur conflict is religious. A big source of discontent is the Chinese law limiting the birth rate to two children per family. 'According to our Muslim traditions, more children mean more happiness in the home', Uighurs tell me. 'The Chinese law is an insult to our faith.' An Uighur will never enter a Chinese food shop as the food there is not prepared according to Islamic rules.

The Chinese authorities find themselves in an even more difficult position because of the sizeable Uighur diaspora in the Central Asian republics. In Central Asia (mainly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) members of this diaspora maintain links with the Uighur underground, through their own people, usually travelling with goods to sell but also taking pamphlets and forbidden books into Uighurstan. They even have their own people in Chinese prisons where Uighur revolutionaries are held. 'The aim of our movement is to set up an independent democratic Uighurstan', Yusupbek Muhlisi, the chairman of the Eastern Turkestan Liberation Front (*Front osvobodzheniya Vostochnogo Turkestana*) told me.

But we must never forget that the most important element in Uighur culture is Islam, which is what shapes our unique nature. This explains why Islam has become the mainstay of the national liberation movement. A great deal of the literature we send illegally to Eastern Turkestan is religious in content.¹³⁰

Beijing is trying to protect the country from 'harmful' influences from beyond its western borders. The border control system has been tightened up considerably. Satellite television is permitted throughout the rest of China except Tibet, but in the XUAR aerials which can receive programmes from the former USSR are forbidden.

Islam and Crime

It is unfortunately the case that a good many of those who become 'true believing Muslims' have closer ties with the criminal world than with Islam. Criminal mafia networks played a very active role in the Tajik civil war, for example. In all fairness I should stress that most of these were supporting the enemies of the Tajik opposition. The man who became leader of the anti-Islamist coalition, Sangak Safarov, was a criminal with multiple convictions. A no less colourful figure was the other powerful field commander of the anti-Islamist coalition, Yakub Salim, who had been one of the most influential racketeers in Dushanbe before the civil war, and who after the defeat of the opposition became the Tajik minister of internal affairs. Quoting local sources, Bushkov and Mikul'sky note that people of this kind know how to get to the top at the critical moment, thanks to the cult of the 'noble' and 'just' criminal which had gradually evolved in Soviet society of the Central Asian type.¹³¹

There were, however, quite a few powerful criminal groups which fought on the side of the Tajik opposition. In various parts of the city of Dushanbe, for example, criminal groups of young people had developed, and some of these supported the Islamic Revival Party and Akbar Turajonzoda.¹³² In the summer of 1992 the rather unusual phrase 'the young people of the city of Dushanbe' began appearing in the Tajik – and later in the Russian – press. It was a new name for a new force which had appeared on the political scene in the republic, formally independent, but nevertheless acting wholly in accordance with the aims of the Tajik opposition. In early September 1992 it was 'the young people of the city of Dushanbe' who forced the Tajik president, Rahmon Nabiyev, to sign his resignation. Despite this enigmatic pseudonym, everyone in the Tajik capital knew quite well that 'the young people of the city of Dushanbe' was in fact the local criminal network, which supported the Islamists. The presidential candidate of the United Tajik Opposition, the famous film director Davlat Hudonazarov, made no secret to me of his misgivings about criminal networks playing an active part in the political life of the republic. When I asked him what kind of people 'the young people of the city of Dushanbe' really were, he replied 'They live here, all right; and they're armed,' then unexpectedly added: 'It's a very bad business. You know, I really grieve for this country!'¹³³

It seems that the Uzbek Islamic radicals have not been squeamish about engaging in criminal activities either. According to *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, in August 1999 a group led by Abduvali Yuldashev (alias 'Abdulaziz'), ransomed some hostages they had taken – the *akim* of Batken *raion* and two Kyrgyz law-enforcement officers – for US\$50,000. Later, in October, they received about US\$3 million for four Japanese geologists.¹³⁴

Mafia groups are even more actively involved in the Islamic movements in the Northern Caucasus. During the first Chechen war one of the people active in financing and supplying weapons to the Chechen resistance movement was Khozh-Akhmed Nukhayev. He is an enigmatic figure. At the Moscow Regional Authority for Fighting Organised Crime (*Moskovskoye regional'noye upravleniye po bor'be s organizovannoi prestupnost'yu*) I was told that Nukhayev, three times convicted, is one of the leaders of the Chechen mafia group in Moscow. His main professional activity is racketeering. He told me himself that he had contacts with all the important Moscow criminal bosses. His business links thus not only rise to the Olympic heights of Russian finance and politics, but also include the powerful Moscow mafia networks. Rumour has it that it was the energetic expansion of Chechen mafia groups in Moscow in the years preceding the first Chechen war, at

the expense of the Moscow banking world and the Moscow mafia networks, that was one of the reasons for the start of the military operation in Chechnya and the anti-Caucasian campaign in Moscow. A week before the war began the big Chechen smart operators, including Nukhaye, left Moscow.¹³⁵

Nukhaye does not regard himself as a simple criminal, however. 'What some people called mafia activity was in fact a continuation of our fight for independence', he told me. 'We used the money we obtained not to make ourselves rich but to strengthen our underground networks.'¹³⁶ Nukhaye himself relates how in the early 1980s, when he was studying in the Faculty of Law at Moscow State University (he was eventually expelled after criminal charges were brought against him for drug smuggling), he and a fellow-student and fellow-Chechen, Said-Khasan Abumuslimov, organised a student committee for the liberation of Chechnya. They disseminated books by Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov and printed leaflets; but Nukhaye thought these activities were only half-measures: in his view it would be necessary to organise an armed uprising in Chechnya and liberate the country from the 'Russian colonisers' by force of arms.¹³⁷ Remarkably, nothing was known of this side of Nukhaye's activities until the early 1990s, and he himself never spoke about his revolutionary past.

On his release from his latest spell of imprisonment in the early 1990s Nukhaye met the writer Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, chairman of the Vainakh democratic party *Bart*, who at that time was the undisputed leader of the national liberation movement, and he has maintained contact with the ideologists of Chechen independence ever since. After the Russian invasion of Chechnya the president of Chechnya-Ichkeria, Dzhokhar Dudayev, appointed Nukhaye head of his foreign intelligence service. At first Nukhaye lived in Moscow; later he moved to Istanbul. One of his main tasks was to collect 'donations' from the diaspora in Russia and other foreign countries for the purchase of weapons.¹³⁸ These days the famous criminal Khozh-Akhmed Nukhaye has become a true Muslim: he does not smoke or drink, although he says he used to like spirits, and he prays regularly. His mannerisms clearly reveal his criminal past, however: he uses a lot of prison slang, for example; and he once warned me at the start of our conversation that if there was something he didn't like in what I published 'that would be the worst mistake of your life'.¹³⁹

After the withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya in 1966 crime in the republic reached unprecedented levels. The Russians left Chechnya half-destroyed and its economic base in ruins. It was almost impossible for people to feed themselves without resorting to criminal enterprise. Trading in hostages, raids to plunder Russian territory and the illegal sale of oil products became the basic means of survival. Experts estimate that one hostage requires five men to guard him, just as many to capture the 'commodity' and as many again to act as intermediaries. Up to the start of the new Russian military campaign in Chechnya about 1000 hostages were being held there, so around 15,000 men were involved in this slave-trade, or roughly 15 per cent of the male population of the republic. If we take into account the fact that as a rule wives and children would know what the head of the family was up to, the number of people indirectly linked with the slave trade rises to fantastic heights.

I once gave a lecture at an American university on hostage-taking in Chechnya. The audience were quite upset at the barbarous cruelty I was describing; but one man spoke up against the mood:

You just don't understand what makes these people tick. They don't

regard 'foreigners' as the same as themselves. In South Yemen, where I come from, a tribe of nomads captured a tourist and his dog in the desert and held them hostage. They kept them in two separate cages and gave them the same food. They didn't see anything wrong: they were normal people, but this was some creature wearing ridiculous clothes and not even speaking Arabic, and they couldn't see how it could be suffering like a human being.

The analogy with Chechnya may seem far-fetched; but I would say it was accurate for Chechnya at the time of the Caucasian War in the nineteenth century. For a mountain-dwelling Chechen at that time raiding a Cossack *stanitsa* and seizing hostages would certainly have been an ordinary and perfectly acceptable piece of business, and none of his fellow-tribesmen would have questioned its lawfulness. Certainly things seemed to change: during the years of Soviet rule the Chechens were wholly integrated (at least outwardly) into Russian culture and it is hard to believe that there is the same attitude to 'noble banditry' (*abrechestvo*) in Chechnya today as there was in the nineteenth century.

However, tradition dies hard. It almost seems that a nation's historical memory has something genetic about it: in times of crisis people suddenly revert to how their ancestors behaved. In the wake of the 1996 Khasav-Yurt peace treaty between Russia and Chechnya I would often hear quite well-disposed and well-educated Chechens saying things like 'It's our tradition that a man has to provide for his family at any price. Chechnya is lying in ruins and it's impossible to work for a living any more. A lot of people are thinking about taking up trading in slaves, like our great-grandfathers used to do.' At the time, this kind of talk sounded like pure fantasy, but only six months later kidnapping people had become just about the biggest business in Chechnya.

So what kind of people are these modern 'traders in human flesh'? The story of Georgi Zaalishvili, chairman of the League of Georgian Patriots, who spent a year (spring 1998 to spring 1999) in Chechen captivity, helps us form a picture.¹⁰⁰ He was constantly being moved from one place to another, with different guards, so he got acquainted with a fairly wide circle of slave-traders. Ironically, two years earlier he had emerged as a strong supporter of an independent Chechnya, seeing it as a strategic ally for Georgia in the struggle against Russian imperialism. He paid several visits to Chechnya, meeting President Aslan Maskhadov and key field commanders. He was captured, strictly speaking, on Georgian territory – in the Panki gorge, where a lot of the republic's Chechens live – and it was only later that he was moved to Chechnya on horseback. He spent the whole year of his captivity handcuffed to a radiator. The handcuffs were removed for only two hours a day, so that he could take some exercise (fearing pursuit, his captors kept moving him about, and they wanted him in good physical shape so that he could walk the mountain tracks). About once a week they would beat him up. Officially this was called sparring, but it would have been very dangerous for him to win a fight. Once he watched another hostage – a Russian – having a bare-fisted bout with a guard and winning, whereupon the furious guard broke the Russian's hand.

Some of Zaalishvili's guards were Islamic fundamentalists. They made it clear to him that they had committed no sin in taking him hostage. In order to enjoy the protection of Muslims, a Christian must pay them duty. Georgians did not pay this duty to the Muslims and therefore could not count on their protection. At the same time, the fundamentalists treated Zaalishvili much better than the other guards did.

because Muslims believe that one should not cause a living creature unnecessary pain: you may cut a ram's throat, but in such a way as to minimise the animal's suffering. Nevertheless all the kidnappers, including the fundamentalists, felt no shame about the trade they were engaged in. 'The bandits forbade me to draw animals or people,' Zaalishvili, who is an artist by profession, told me,

as Islam doesn't allow it, but it didn't occur to them that by trading in human beings they were committing a far worse sin. They would even bring me their children and I would teach them to paint, still handcuffed to the radiator. Sometimes a neighbour would call in, look me over as if I was just an object and remark politely to his hosts 'So he's still sitting there, then?', and then start drinking tea, forgetting all about me. In Chechnya today, the trade in human beings is regarded as just a normal form of business.¹⁴¹

Crime is a serious problem in Dagestan as well. At the start of *perestroika* the local intelligentsia wanted to get involved in politics, but they were quickly pushed aside by much more dynamic rivals. 'If you want to get elected as a deputy,' say Dagestanis, 'you have to be really good at wrestling or boxing.' Many of these sportsmen-cum-politicians turned out to be criminal bosses as well. Virtually every registered national political movement has a unit of armed men attached to it, officially as bodyguards.

One colourful figure is the chairman of the Union of Muslims of Russia (*Soyuz musul'man Rossii*), Nadyr Khachilayev, formerly a Dagestani deputy to the Russian State Duma from Dagestan, who was arrested on a charge of organising disturbances in Makhachkala in May 1998. Just a few years ago Khachilayev was completely unknown in the religious world and many Muslim theologians are very sceptical about his knowledge of theology. He is not the classical image of a theologian: rather gloomy and laconic, he looks more like a mountain warrior than a religious scholar. When I tried to talk to him about the aims of the Union of Muslims of Russia that he had founded, he showed no interest at all in the topic – 'That's all in the statutes' – but was keen to discuss the fighting in Chechnya.

Until Khachilayev decided to get involved in politics he was well known as a sportsman – the republican karate champion – and also as one of the richest men in Dagestan. His three-storey private residence in the centre of Makhachkala was designed by his own architect. A guard was on duty in the entrance hall 24 hours a day, watching what was going on outside on closed-circuit television. Khachilayev was particularly proud of the special prayer hall on the second floor, with room for 300 people. He also owned an estate in the mountains, with a swimming pool and a zoo. He would drive around in a luxury armoured 'Khammer' car. It is said that he once owned a private helicopter too, but that the Russians shot it down by mistake during the first Chechen war. Where this former sportsman got his wealth is unknown – in the Caucasus it is not done to show too much interest in other people's incomes. However, the words of another of the richest men in the republic, Nadyr's elder brother and closest comrade-in-arms, Magomed Khachilayev, probably give us a clue. 'Some people are amazed at my wealth and want to know where it came from. Well, first of all, I'm a businessman, and, secondly, I have a great many friends throughout Russia who help me: they can get me things free or very cheap.'¹⁴² Anyway it is clear that before Nadyr Khachilayev decided to become a true Muslim and a politician he was already in possession of all worldly goods, with one exception: officially legalised power.

Nadyr Khachilayev did not go straight into politics: the former sportsman seems to have realised that physical fitness was not going to be enough in itself and set about creating a new image for himself. The first thing to appear was a story called 'Khachilav' in the journal *Oktyabr*.¹⁴³ It is about a youth from a remote mountain village who arrives in Makhachkala and becomes the leader of one of the local criminal groups. Khachilayev wrote the story in the Lak language, but succeeded in getting it translated into Russian by Igor' Volgin, a venerable writer. In translation at least, the story was certainly an impressive work of art.

Fame as a writer and a sportsman did not seem to be enough for Khachilayev, however. In 1997, not long before the Dagestani elections to the State Duma, an unexpected piece of news was greeted with astonishment and some frank incredulity: Khachilayev's family were supposedly of ancient aristocratic descent. Khachilayev was no longer content to be merely Nadyr and began to call himself Nadyrshakh, and as such he was elected as a Dagestani deputy to the State Duma in 1998. He did not make much of a mark on Russian political life. He hardly ever attended meetings of the 'Our Home is Russia' ('*Nash dom – Rossiya*') group, which he had joined, and was very rarely present at sessions of the Duma. According to Aleksandr Shokhin, chairman of '*Nash dom – Rossiya*', 'He would give his deputy's card to someone else, who would vote on his behalf.'¹⁴⁴

Nadyrshakh Khachilayev achieved Russia-wide fame in May 1998, however, when the Khachilayev brothers' men seized the headquarters of the Dagestani government and held it for almost 24 hours. The reason was rather strange. The police had tried to stop a vehicle with Nadyrshakh Khachilayev's men in it, but they had offered resistance and after a short fight had gone to ground in Nadyrshakh's house. He took the incident as a personal insult and seized the government building in retaliation. From a Western European standpoint what he did seems barbaric, but local custom says that he could not have acted differently. Dagestanis love to tell the following story – or legend – about the Khachilayev brothers. There were originally three of them: Magomed, Nadyr and Adam. One day a group of armed Chechens ambushed Adam's car on a mountain road and killed him. His brothers swore revenge. Without warning they led an armed detachment down onto the village where Adam's murderers were living. According to one version, they killed their enemies on the spot; according to another, they took them to Makhachkala and executed them after a token interrogation. Local custom says that the Khachilayev brothers could not have acted otherwise if they were real men. People saw the May events in the same way: some rank-and-file policemen had besieged the house of a respected man like Khachilayev, so what else could he do but seize the government building?

It is clear, then, that the Kremlin today has run into an extremely serious problem. Until *perestroika* Moscow had successfully assimilated widely differing peoples and cultures throughout the country to the communist ideology, but this was possible only under a totalitarian system. Nevertheless, it has become ever more clear that Western European democratic institutions, which were taken as a model for imitation by the Kremlin, have turned out to be completely ineffective in many areas of the disintegrating empire. 'We are developing state structures on the basis of sharia law'. Chechen foreign minister Movladi Udugov told me in 1996.

So-called Roman law, which is so widespread throughout the world, is not natural for Chechens: people don't understand it, and therefore they don't obey it. We have to base a legal system on something that the people are

going to accept. For the Chechens, this is Islam. Otherwise we'll end up with an ungovernable armed mass of people, and this will cause all kinds of problems for everyone, including Russia. So there is no need to fear Islam – and everyone, including Russia, should be helping us to build an Islamic state.¹⁴⁵

Udugov has a point. It is a sad fact that Western European democratic institutions have been ineffective not only in Chechnya but also in many other Muslim areas of the Northern Caucasus and Central Asia. It certainly does not follow from the above that I am calling for the creation of republics living according to sharia law in the Russian Northern Caucasus, but it is certainly necessary to understand how difficult it will be to assimilate this area to the western model of development.

Islam in Politics: a Factor for Consolidation or Strife?

Form armed units immediately throughout Dagestan to resist the occupation forces. ... Begin combat operations immediately against the Russian troops on Dagestani territory. Dagestani brothers, kill or take prisoner at least one Russian soldier a day. ... Rise up, Dagestan, rise up for the 'gazavat'!

I read this pamphlet, signed by Dzhokhar Dudayev's representative in the 'Eastern defence zone', Salman Raduyev, in January 1995, in the town of Khasav-Yurt in Dagestan.¹⁴⁶ The local inhabitants did not carry out his orders. Contrary to all predictions by political experts, the reaction of the nations of the Northern Caucasus to the Russian invasion of Chechnya was fairly sluggish. It is especially significant that it was not only the republican authorities, who might have been accused – with reason – of being dependent on Moscow, who acted passively, but the ordinary people of the North Caucasian republics. Meetings expressing Muslim solidarity with the people of Chechnya did not attract more than a couple of thousand people and there was no mass movement of volunteers to join the Chechen resistance movement.

During the Kremlin's second military campaign in Chechnya the majority of Dagestanis openly supported the Russian military operations. Openly anti-Chechen attitudes prevailed in Dagestan after August 1999, when units under Basayev and Khattab invaded the republic; most people regarded the Chechen action as an attempt to occupy their motherland. Large numbers of people signed up as volunteers. The Federal troops fighting against the Chechen invaders were greeted as liberators by the local inhabitants. From the orthodox Muslim viewpoint this was strange behaviour. Basayev and Khattab sincerely believed they had come to liberate their Muslim brothers, languishing under the yoke of the infidel, and they were quite astonished at the reception they got.

The volunteer movement in the Northern Caucasus to assist the Abkhazian separatists during the 1992–93 war in Abkhazia was far bigger than the one to assist the Chechen resistance movement. The reason is quite simple. The Abkhazians are very close to some of the peoples of the Northern Caucasus – the Abazas, Adygei, Cherkess and Kabards – in language and culture and form the single ethnic community of the Adyg. It was the peoples of the Adyg group, who number over half a million in the Northern Caucasus, who were the first to offer assistance to the supporters of Abkhazian independence. In this case, then, it was national rather than religious solidarity which proved to be important. Chechnya also supported the Abkhazians, but this was a different matter: it was support at 'state' level, on the

initiative of President Dudayev.

Practical support for the Chechen resistance movement during both wars came only from the Ingush, who are related to the Chechens – the Chechens and the Ingush are sometimes even referred to as a single ethnic community, the Vainakh – and from the Chechen-Akkinty, one of the subgroups of the Chechen 'ethnos'. There are no more than 250,000 Chechen-Akkinty and Ingush altogether: considerably fewer than the Adyg, the relatives of the Abkhazians. During the wars in both Abkhazia and Chechnya, then, ethnic solidarity turned out to be of greatest importance, while the Chechens' call to support a 'gazavat' was virtually ignored in the other North Caucasian republics.

In Central Asia, Islamic solidarity was only partially effective. The war in Tajikistan remained essentially a civil war, an internal affair: fellow-believers from other Central Asian republics did not rush to the aid of the Tajik Islamists. As mentioned earlier, in 1993 Uzbek Islamists took part in the civil war in Tajikistan for a short period, on the side of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, but the number of volunteers was relatively small and this cannot be called mass support. The mountain Tajiks fighting on the side of the opposition were confronted not only by the Kulyab Tajiks but also by the Uzbeks of Tajikistan. Devotion to Islam played a secondary role: the main factor deciding which side of the barricades any inhabitant of the republic would find himself on was the region and nationality he belonged to. When they checked people's documents both sides would first look at the residence permit to find out what region they came from. Uzbeks from Tajikistan fighting against the Islamists even received help from tribes related to them in Afghanistan. 'I illegally crossed the Tajik-Afghan border and reached the local field commanders', one of the anti-Islamist field commanders in Tajikistan, an Uzbek by nationality, told me. 'At first they treated me distrustfully: after all, in Afghanistan they saw our war as a war between communists and Muslims. But when I showed them a video of so-called Muslims killing Uzbek women they sat up and took notice. After that they helped me with weapons, money and men.'¹⁴⁷

It is incorrect to speak of a unified Muslim movement throughout the former USSR. The integrating power of Islam has turned out to be limited. The Islamic movement has divided into 'national compartments'.¹⁴⁸ Leaders of the Tajik opposition and the new Chechen authorities alike have told me that their aim is to create their own model Islamic state, different from other Muslim countries. Perhaps the most categorical is the Chechen Khozh-Akhmed Nukhayevev who told me that 'there is only one Islamic state in the world: Chechnya-Ichkeria'.¹⁴⁹ At the same time, however, both in the Northern Caucasus and in Central Asia there are also Muslims for whom a common religion means more than common nationality. They are commonly called 'Wahhabis'. Fundamentalism, which demands that Islam be cleansed from later additions and national customs, is trying to unite all Muslims without reference to their nationalities. At a ceremony to sign a military agreement between the members of a 'dzhamaat' (a group of Dagestani fundamentalists) and Salman Raduyev, a Chechen journalist said 'We know that there are representatives of all the Dagestani nationalities in your dzhamaat, so this means that at all the peoples of Dagestan are fighting against Russia!' The response was unexpected: 'Nationality means nothing to us. We are fighting for the rights of Muslims!'¹⁵⁰

It is above all fundamentalism's potential for integration, its aspiration not to shut itself up in 'national compartments', but to give active assistance to Muslims wherever they live, that is its chief attraction for Islamic radicals from all over the CIS. With his vast energy potential frustrated by the end of the first Russo-Chechen

war, Basayev abandoned Sufism and went over to the fundamentalists. Some of the Tajik opposition leaders, as well as one of the most influential Islamic radicals of Uzbekistan, Tahir Yuldashev, originally a Sufi, eventually allied themselves with the Afghan Taliban fundamentalists. From the mid-1990s Tahir Yuldashev based himself in Afghanistan, where he gained the protection of the Taliban leader Mullah Omar. Yuldashev gradually succeeded in turning the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan into a well-organised and effective army. Some of its military camps remained on Taliban-controlled territory in Afghanistan until the antiterrorist coalition began its manoeuvres. This tendency is quite normal. The local peculiarities of Islam make it difficult to unite Muslims from different areas into a single force, so in order to act together Islamic radicals have to abandon the regional accretions to their religion and demonstrate that religious loyalties are much more important than national or ethnic ties.

It is interesting to look at the history of the military camps of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) which were located in Tajikistan. After the Tashkent bombings in February 1999 the shaken Uzbek authorities started indiscriminately arresting religious dissidents, many of whom had no connections with the underground insurgents. At this time whole families started leaving Uzbekistan to settle in Tajikistan, and soon there were strong Uzbek communities in Karategin, a mountainous part of south-east Tajikistan. Tajik politicians started seriously thinking about assigning the Uzbek refugees their own territory in the Karategin valley as a kind of 'free Islamic Uzbekistan in exile'. Alongside the civilian population there were also Uzbek military camps in Karategin. Let me quote a fighter for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan who lived in IMU training camps in Tajikistan between November 1997 and May 1998. For obvious reasons I cannot disclose his name.

The daily regime in the camp was as follows: physical education in the mornings, followed by instruction in how to use various types of weaponry. In the evenings we were shown films about Islam ... [and] about those regions of the world where Muslims fight against non-believers. We were told that it was the duty of Muslims to fight until they had freed Muslims throughout the world from the rule of non-believers ... We were only allowed to read religious literature. We were not allowed to listen to music, as that is a sin for Muslims ... Two foreigners, the teacher Abilbaba from India and Sheikh Abas from Pakistan, taught us sabotage work. They were very experienced mujahaddin. Abilbaba had previously fought in Kashmir, while Sheikh Abas had fought against the Soviet army in Afghanistan.¹⁵¹

The Uzbek Islamists were accompanied in their raids into Uzbekistan by detachments belonging to some of the Tajik field commanders, including Mullah Abdullo from Komsomolabad and a commander called Sheikh from Tajikabad. Kyrgyz soldiers have told me that equipment and provisions for the Uzbek mujaheddin were carried in planes belonging to the Tajik Ministry of Emergencies which is headed by Mirzo Ziyeyev.

At least for the time being, however, most Muslims in the CIS are not prepared to adopt 'pure' Islam. In practice, the growth of fundamentalism is not only failing to achieve Muslim consolidation, but is in fact undermining it. As noted earlier, the growth of fundamentalism in Kyrgyzstan could lead to conflicts between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the republic.¹⁵²

In Dagestan, too, there is the danger that the spread of fundamentalism will

provoke clashes between nationalities. Most of the fundamentalists in Dagestan are Avars and Dargins, who live in the mountains; there is virtually no fundamentalism among the traditionally plains-dwelling Kumyk. Relations between the two groups have always been strained. The Kumyk strongly resent the mountain people moving into the plains; and now fundamentalism is an additional issue. Kumyk have complained to me that Dargins and Avars are not only moving into traditional Kumyk lands but are bringing in their own religion which has nothing to do with Islam. One Kumyk taxi driver told me in all seriousness that members of 'Wahhabi' communities practised group sex, and 'You can't live with people like that'.

The main danger, however, is intraconfessional strife between people of the same nationality. In Uzbekistan there have been incidents in which fundamentalists have been expelled from the *mahalla*, and by no means always at the prompting of the authorities. 'We Uzbeks are used to doing everything together', I was told in a village in the Fergana valley. 'We do marriages and funerals together. There was a Wahhabi in our village, and his mother died. He didn't even invite his neighbours to the funeral. Our elders got together and decided that he was going to have to go.'

There is a real danger of religious war in the North Caucasus, particularly in Dagestan and Chechnya. After Khattab and Basayev invaded Dagestan the local inhabitants started driving people they thought were 'Wahhabis' out of their villages,¹⁵³ while in Chechnya the head of the republic's provisional administration since 1999, mufti Kadyrov, had some success in persuading field commanders to join him in purging the country of 'foreign mercenaries and Wahhabis'.

To be fair, we should note that intraconfessional conflicts may be the result not only of disagreements among Muslims belonging to different movements but also of deliberate provocation on the part of the secular authorities: many fundamentalist groups aspire to power and are among the most dangerous of rivals for local governments. However, by depriving the fundamentalists of the opportunity to act legally, the authorities are in fact provoking an 'Algerian option' and themselves helping to transform the fundamentalist groups into secret conspiratorial terrorist organisations.

I mentioned earlier the activity of the international radical Islamic party Hizb-ut Tahrir. It has been active in Central Asia since about 1999 and is having an effect amongst Muslims of various nationalities. Hizb-ut Tahrir was founded in 1953. It calls itself 'a political party, an ideology which is Islam'.¹⁵⁴ Its aim is to bring Muslims back to an Islamic way of life: 'all aspects of life must be based on the norms of the sharia'. It believes that this will be possible only by establishing one united Islamic world, a theocratic state or caliphate. It views countries such as the USA, Great Britain and Israel as the spawn of Satan. It rejects violent methods and relies on winning hearts and minds. Its main activity in Central Asia is distributing leaflets. Some of these contain antisemitic utterances. One I saw called Uzbek president Karimov 'Satan and Jew, who hates Islam with his whole body and soul and who is the enemy of the Quran and Muhammed (blessings and peace on him)'.¹⁵⁵ Another dealing with the Palestine situation asserted that the Jews are 'a nation cursed by God'.¹⁵⁶ The Russian diplomat and Arabic scholar Dmitri Trofimov, who was in Uzbekistan as first secretary at the Russian Embassy from 1998 to December 2000, says that

These leaflets are usually straight translations of leaflets the party distributes in the Near East: I have often seen exactly the same texts in Egypt, in the Arabic language. Antisemitic slogans may sound a chord

with a lot of people in the Near East, but they have little resonance in Central Asia, where most people have never seen a Jew.¹⁵⁷

Hizb-ut Tahrir activists in Central Asia, who wish to remain anonymous, have confirmed to me that the texts are compiled abroad. The leaflets carry the same message in all the countries they work in; 'this is intentional, because we want to demonstrate that the Muslims are a united force throughout the world'. The headquarters of Hizb-ut Tahrir today is located in Great Britain. From country codes and other details on the Hizb-ut Tahrir website (<http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org>) it is clear that its internet server is in London. The site has information in Arabic, Turkish, English, German, Urdu, Malay and Russian.

Territorially Hizb-ut Tahrir is divided up into different vilayets or regions, each of which may include several countries. Until 2001 all the countries of the former Soviet Union were in one vilayet, but then the party's leadership decided to make Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan into separate vilayets in view of the fact that the political situation in each country is so different. Hizb-ut Tahrir is repressed in all these countries, but much more fiercely by the authorities in Tashkent than by those in Bishkek and Dushanbe. Members of Hizb-ut Tahrir have told me that the aim is to found the caliphate in the Near East and add the other Muslim countries, including those of Central Asia, later.

Most members of Hizb-ut Tahrir I have spoken to are young men between 25 and 30. They will typically say that a few years ago they were not genuine Muslims, neglecting to fast and even drinking alcohol, but that the damage Central Asian society has suffered over the last decade, with unprecedented levels of drug abuse and prostitution, has led them to the conclusion that 'only an Islamic state can give people a life of dignity'. It is unlikely that the economic situation in Central Asia is going to improve in the near future, and so more and more young people are likely to be joining Hizb-ut Tahrir. In comparison with the early 1990s the approach to the new millennium saw increasing integrationist tendencies among Islamic radicals in Central Asia. Since the start of the antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan these integrationist tendencies have become somewhat less apparent, since the radicals used to receive significant support from the Taliban, but one may predict that they will soon begin to reassert themselves.

Conclusion

In the coming years the influence of Islam on the political situation in the Muslim areas of the former USSR is going to increase rather than decrease. It is in fact Islamist doctrine that has turned out to be the most acceptable ideology to those opposing the present authorities in the Muslim republics of the CIS. We have already seen how Islamist ideology is used by a whole variety of movements, some of which are at odds with each other. Islam is invoked in regional intertribal conflicts as well as by nationalist organisations using religion as a means of preserving their unique national character from the destructive influence of an alien culture.

Islam is extremely successful in rallying a people to resist foreign aggression, as shown most clearly in the wake of the Russian invasion of Chechnya. Islamist doctrine turned out to be the most effective ideology for turning the Chechens into a united force opposing the Russian troops. The creation of an Islamic state in Chechnya began only after the invasion. Islamic terminology began to be widely used and sharia courts started to operate in the areas controlled by the resistance

forces. 'Russia ... forced us to take the road of Islam, although we were not at all ready to adopt Islamic values', observed Dzhokhar Dudayev, the first president of Chechnya.¹⁵⁸ As we saw earlier, something similar had already happened in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries under the leadership of Sheikh Mansur and Imam Shamil.

The Islamist ideology often also proves to be the best doctrine for consolidating a particular ethnic group in a tribal confrontation within a single nation. During the civil war in Tajikistan, for example, the Islamist ideology was used by one of the opposing sides – the mountain Tajiks, who originally came from the Karategin valley. In both Tajikistan and Chechnya Sufis have become the mainstay of the Islamist movement. Here too there is a parallel with the past. In the nineteenth century Sufism inspired those who came out against the dissemination of western (Russian) culture and opposed any changes in society. In the Northern Caucasus both Sheikh Mansur and Imam Shamil were Sufis. While annexing Central Asia Russian troops met with resistance not so much from the local feudal hierarchies, the state administration or the armies of local rulers, as from the local Sufi brotherhoods. Almost all the leaders of anti-Russian uprisings were Sufi sheikhs.¹⁵⁹

In the nineteenth century the Sufis resisting the Russians belonged to the Naqshbandiya. Today in both Chechnya and Tajikistan the Islamist movement is led by members of the Qadiriya order. As we saw earlier, apparently it was the defeat of the nineteenth-century anticolonial uprisings led by the Naqshbandiya sheikhs which led to a decline in the order's authority. After Russian forces crushed the resistance movements in the Northern Caucasus and Central Asia most of the Naqshbandiya leaders adopted a pro-Russian position and the Qadiriya order became the mainstay of the anticolonial resistance. Nevertheless, it would seem that the significance of the Sufi orders as a political force in the modern CIS will gradually wane. Both the Kremlin and the secular authorities in the Muslim republics of the CIS are likely to be most worried about the fundamentalist groups. The CIS mass media call these people 'Wahhabis', although most fundamentalists regard the use of this term as an insult. Their annoyance is well-founded. The term 'Wahhabis' is in fact used in the former USSR as a generalisation for any groups of Muslims who openly criticise the regional peculiarities of Islam, which are quite often a complex of local customs and even Soviet innovations. Usually these groups have nothing in common with Wahhabism as such.

There is one thing which unites the uncoordinated and rather motley groups of fundamentalists: they reject both the former communist system and the western model of development which has replaced it. Typical members of these groups are the more thoughtful young people from traditional, nonindustrial social backgrounds (peasants or traders), with no links with criminal networks. Shamil' Basayev and Khattab became famous throughout the world when they were only just over 30, while Tahir Yuldashev led a revolt against Islam Karimov when he was 24. It is the new generation of a traditional society which is feeling the attraction of fundamentalism and this makes it particularly dangerous for the authorities. In the areas where 'Wahhabism' is widespread (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Dagestan and Chechnya) over 50 per cent of the population live in rural districts and the fact that the younger generation is coming out against the new system of values probably means that over the coming years fundamentalism will be an ever-growing threat. The potential for integration provided by fundamentalism and its aspiration to reach out to Muslims throughout the world are among its chief attractions for new converts.

At the moment it is not very likely that the fundamentalists will come to power.

as the vast majority of Muslims are continuing to practise the form of Islam traditionally observed in their own district, including the local customs and rituals. However, there is a distinct possibility that local religious wars may break out between traditionalists and fundamentalists. As conflicts in other parts of the world have shown – in Algeria and Northern Ireland, for example – in order to create a situation of crisis in a country it is quite enough for relatively small but well-organised groups, convinced of their own rightness, to be prepared for armed conflict with the authorities.

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- ¹⁵⁷ Author's archive: shorthand record of a conversation with the Russian diplomat Dmitri Trofimov, October 2001.
- ¹⁵⁸ 'Terms of war and peace', p. 19.
- ¹⁵⁹ Landa. *op. cit.*, p. 125.

(Translated from the Russian by Marite Sapiets and Philip Walters)