POLITICS OF MODERN CENTRAL ASIA

Edited by
Bhavna Dave

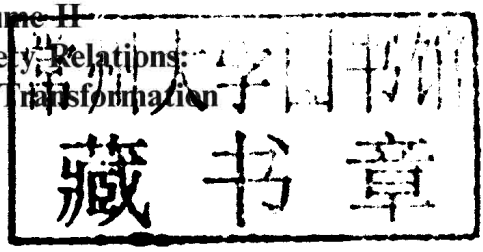
CRITICAL ISSUES IN MODERN POLITICS

POLITICS OF MODERN CENTRAL ASIA

Critical Issues in Modern Politics

Edited by
Bhavna Dave

Volume II
State–Society Relations: Stability and Transformation



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2010
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN, UK

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Typeset in 10/12pt Times NR MT by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
TJI Digital, Padstow, Cornwall

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Politics of modern Central Asia / edited by Bhavna Dave.
4 v. cm. – (Critical issues in modern politics)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-13: 978-0-415-46826-8 (set, hardback)
ISBN-13: 978-0-415-47301-9 (v.1, hardback)
ISBN-13: 978-0-415-47300-2 (v.2, hardback)
ISBN-13: 978-0-415-47299-9 (v.3, hardback)
[etc.]
1. Asia, Central – Politics and government – 1991– I. Dave, Bhavna.
JQ1080.P63 2009
320.958–dc22
2009027297

ISBN 10: 0-415-46826-4 (Set)
ISBN 10: 0-415-47300-4 (Volume II)

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-46826-8 (Set)
ISBN 13: 978-0-415-47300-2 (Volume II)

Publisher's Note
References within each chapter are as they appear in the original complete work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publishers would like to thank the following for permission to reprint their material:

Foreign Affairs (www.ForeignAffairs.org) for permission to reprint Martha Brill Olcott, 'Central Asia's catapult to independence', *Foreign Affairs*, 1992, 3, 108–30. Copyright 1992 by the Council on Foreign Relations, Inc.

Cambridge University Press for permission to reprint Juan R. I. Cole and Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Nationalism and the colonial legacy in the Middle East and Central Asia: introduction', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 2002, 34, 2, 189–203. © Cambridge University Press.

Cambridge University Press for permission to reprint Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Post-colonialism compared: potentials and limitations in the Middle East and Central Asia', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 2002, 34, 2, 279–97. © Cambridge University Press.

Blackwell Publishing Ltd. for permission to reprint Sally N. Cummings and Ole Nørgaard, 'Conceptualising state capacity: comparing Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan', *Political Studies*, 2004, 52, 685–708.

Taylor & Francis for permission to reprint Madeleine Reeves, 'Locating danger: *konfliktologiia* and the search for fixity in the Ferghana Valley borderlands', *Central Asian Survey*, 2005, 24, 1, 67–81. www.informaworld.com

Taylor & Francis for permission to reprint Barnett R. Rubin, 'Russian hegemony and state breakdown in the periphery: causes and consequences of the civil war in Tajikistan', in Barnett R. Rubin and J. Snyder (eds), *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State Building* (Routledge, 1998), pp. 128–61.

Bellwether Publishing Ltd. for permission to reprint Bhavna Dave, 'National revival in Kazakhstan: language shift and identity change', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 1996, 12, 1, 51–72. © Bellwether Publishing, Ltd. All rights reserved.

Taylor & Francis for permission to reprint Edward Schatz, 'The politics of multiple identities: lineage and ethnicity in Kazakhstan', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2000, 52, 3, 489–506. www.informaworld.com

Slavic Review for permission to reprint Shoshana Keller, 'Story, time, and dependent nationhood in the Uzbek history curriculum', *Slavic Review*, 2007, 66, 2, 257–77.

Cambridge University Press for permission to reprint Annette Bohr, 'The Central Asia states as nationalising regimes', in Graham Smith *et al.*, *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 139–64. © Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr, Edward Allworth 1998.

Taylor & Francis Books UK for permission to reprint Bhavna Dave, 'Disempowered minorities', in *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power* (Routledge, 2007), pp. 119–39.

Taylor & Francis for permission to reprint Matteo Fumagalli, 'Framing Ethnic Minority Mobilisation in Central Asia: the cases of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2007, 59, 4, 565–88. www.informaworld.com

Taylor & Francis for permission to reprint Sergei Abashin, 'The logic of Islamic practice: a religious conflict in Central Asia', *Central Asian Survey*, 2006, 25, 3, 267–86. www.informaworld.com

Taylor & Francis for permission to reprint Deniz Kandiyoti, 'The politics of gender and the Soviet paradox: neither colonized, nor modern?', *Central Asian Survey*, 2007, 26, 4, 601–23. www.informaworld.com

Taylor & Francis for permission to reprint Marianne Kamp, 'Gender ideals and income realities: discourses about labor and gender in Uzbekistan', *Nationalities Papers*, 2005, 33, 3, 403–22. www.informaworld.com

Cornell University Press for permission to reprint Cynthia Werner, 'Women, marriage, and the nation-state: the rise of nonconsensual bride kidnapping in post-Soviet Kazakhstan', in Pauline Jones Luong (ed.), *The Transformation of Central Asia* (Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 58–89. Copyright © 2001 by Cornell University.

Disclaimer

The publishers have made every effort to contact authors/copyright holders of works reprinted in *Politics of Modern Central Asia (Critical Issues in Modern Politics)*. This has not been possible in every case, however, and we would welcome correspondence from those individuals/companies whom we have been unable to trace.

CONTENTS

VOLUME II STATE–SOCIETY RELATIONS: STABILITY AND TRANSFORMATION

Part 7

'DECOLONIZATION': NATIONS, NATIONALISM AND SOVEREIGNTY

19

CENTRAL ASIA'S CATAPULT TO INDEPENDENCE

Martha Brill Olcott

Source: *Foreign Affairs* 3 (1992): 108–30.

Few peoples of the world have ever been forced to become independent nations. Yet that is precisely what happened to the five Central Asian republics after Russia, Belarus and Ukraine—the three original signatories of the U.S.S.R.'s founding 1922 constitution—met in Minsk on December 8, 1991, and created a new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

That action by the three Slavic presidents left Central Asian leaders with an unpleasant choice: they could go it alone—either singly or as a group—or they could shrug off the intended snub by their Slavic counterparts and agree to join the Commonwealth. After a hurried meeting in Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan's capital, they chose the latter course. If independence had to occur, it was best achieved gradually; the new Commonwealth structures, they conceded, would make it easier to regulate their interdependent economies.

To salve the smart of their initial exclusion the first meeting of the expanded Commonwealth was held in the Kazakh capital of Alma-Ata; the original Slavs-only club was thus recast in a Eurasian mold. That December 21 meeting declared the former Soviet republics sovereign and independent, as well as part of an extragovernmental union. Each republic, for the first time, had full control of its own natural resources and local economic enterprises.

Newly independent nations face extraordinary challenges, even under the best circumstances, and they usually hold the leaders who "won" that independence in high regard. The Central Asian leaders, however, were inadvertent founding fathers. Most were once part of the old Soviet Union's nomenklatura, which was in turn largely drawn from the region's traditional ruling elites. These leaders were neither democrats nor dictators, nor nationalist heroes. Some were opportunists; most were sincere in the desire to secure their countries' economic survival. All were aware of the highly vulnerable nature of their nations' premature births, and each leader recognized the risk of his own ouster.[1]


Russia
Ukraine
Rostov
Kazakhstan
Aral Sea
Georgia
Armenia
Turkey
Azerbaijan
Uzbekistan
Alma-Ata
Bishkek
Tashkent
Kyrgyzstan
China
Caspian Sea
Turkmenistan
Dushanbe
Tajikistan
Iraq
Ashkhabad
Tehran
Iran
Afghanistan
Pakistan
India

Each president headed a country whose economy was still fully intertwined with those of its neighbors. Only the U.S.S.R. had collapsed. Its interregional economic links, though damaged, still remained: southern Kazakhstan still got its electricity from Kyrgyzstan, while northern Kazakhstan helped service Siberia's energy grid; Turkmenistan still sent part of its oil to Russia to be made into jet fuel, but it processed Siberian oil in its own refineries. While each new nation continued to depend on its neighbors' basic inputs—fuel, energy and raw materials—the coordinating structures that regulated such commerce shrank or entirely disappeared.

As Soviet central structures withered, so too did subsidies from Moscow that had long helped feed Central Asia's ever increasing population. The region's leaders were left with sole responsibility for keeping their economies afloat. Yet technological and diplomatic expertise was sorely lacking in these new states. Each nation has tried to varying degrees to diversify its economy and exploit the interest of regional powers—most often, Iran and Turkey. But those efforts are hindered by transportation and communications links that still follow old colonial routes through Russia. Finally, large fragments of the former Red Army's conventional and nuclear arsenals were left behind. The presence of former Soviet troops and, in Kazakhstan's case, nuclear weapons and facilities complicates the task of securing the five states' physical safety and economic viability.

The first-order challenge now facing the states of Central Asia, therefore, is to emerge from political obscurity and economic isolation. Nationhood was reluctantly accepted. It has carried with it enormous burdens—mostly economic—for which none of the region's leaders could have been prepared and which even the most able consistently tried to avoid.

II

With hindsight it seems obvious that the developments of December 1991 were preordained by the failed August coup. Yet no one was more outspoken in defense of a revitalized U.S.S.R. than Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbaev. Shortly after the coup it was Nazarbaev who appeared before an agitated Supreme Soviet to deliver Mikhail Gorbachev's appeal to save a looser union. In October it was also Nazarbaev who hosted a meeting of republican leaders to reach an economic agreement among the 12 remaining Soviet republics.

As head of a republic with several thousand miles of common border with Russia and whose population is almost evenly divided between Kazakhs and Slavs, Nazarbaev was anxious to minimize a potential split between Kazakhstan and Russia. Then as now his position was that Kazakhstan was unique—"a link between Central Asia and Russia"—and its strategic role would be enhanced if the union were preserved.

Despite the declarations of independence by other Central Asian republics—beginning with Kyrgyzstan on August 31, 1991—Nazarbaev lobbied his fellow republican presidents to sign a new union treaty, which was completed in October. In the end all but Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov agreed to sign. Angered by Russia's refusal to pay higher prices for cotton and fueled by his own personal ambition, Karimov decided that both Uzbekistan's fate and bargaining position would improve through a more independent stance.

Even after the Minsk accord Nazarbaev made one last and unsuccessful plea for reorganization of the Soviet republics as a loose confederation. Finally on December 16, 1991, when the state's political emancipation was already an accomplished fact, Kazakhstan joined the other republics in declaring independence.

While Nazarbaev was obviously the most reluctant Central Asian leader, none was genuinely enthusiastic about the idea of national independence. All—save Askar Akaev, Kyrgyzstan's physicist turned president—had spent most of their careers closely tied to the management of their economies. Each was well aware of the economic vulnerability of any republic that might try to go it alone.

Reports of freight backups at local rail yards and flights canceled for lack of jet fuel—regular features on the local news throughout autumn 1991—were obvious reminders of the fragility of Central Asia's existing transportation and communication links to the outside world. Yet these leaders knew that alternative foreign access routes—through Iran, across China's Xinjiang mountains or by way of war-ravaged Afghanistan—were more tenuous still.

Central Asia's leaders were also aware that, although each republic was named for a local nationality, none was a "national homeland." The Kirghiz, Uzbeks and Tajiks all have border claims on one another—and large irredentist populations on which to base them—as do Uzbeks, Turkmen and Kazakhs. Stalin's map-making skills were sufficient to ensure that no Soviet republic would have an easy transition to nation-statehood. There is no historically recognized border between Russia and Ukraine, certainly none between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Russian "migrants" make up a far greater percentage of the population in the three Baltic republics than they do anywhere in Central Asia, other than Kazakhstan.

There is, however, one striking difference between those cases and the republics of Central Asia. The popular movements for independence that paralyzed the communist-led governments of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in the late 1980s, then Moldavia, Armenia, Georgia and finally Azerbaijan and Ukraine in the early 1990s, did not exist in Central Asia prior to the August coup.

Gorbachev's reforms prompted the same cultural and religious revival in Central Asia as occurred elsewhere. But Communist Party elites in these five republics were better able to insulate themselves from the fallout. They became patrons of their national arts, benefactors who helped transform

state-owned buildings, mosques and religious institutions, and champions of the shift from Russian to their own national languages in public life.

For now at least, most have been successful and, with the exception of Tajikistan's Rahmon Nabiev, those that failed went quietly. Unlike in much of the rest of the Soviet Union, the roots of Central Asia's Communist Party elites reached down into traditional society. In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan their power was perpetuated through regionally based economic "clans." In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan these ties were linked to tribal origin and reinforced through economic patronage. As one fundamentalist Islamic cleric from Uzbekistan put it, "Our communist leaders may have been nonbelievers, but no Uzbek was really a communist—a liar yes, but not a communist."[2] That insight applies throughout the region.

Given the intertwined nature of the party, local economy and traditional society, these republics' communist elites can fall only when attacked from within. That was precisely what happened in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In October 1990 Kyrgyzstan's Supreme Soviet chose the head of the Academy of Science, Askar Akaev, to be the republic's president, instead of party First Secretary Absamat Masaliev. Masaliev's defeat occurred only because many of Kyrgyzstan's leading communist politicians had lost faith in his ability to rule. They thus preferred to join forces with Kyrgyzstan's small democratic movement to bring in a political dark horse with which both groups could live.

Similarly Tajikistan's President Kakhar Makhkamov was brought down in September 1991 when Nabiev, the Communist Party leader Gorbachev ousted in 1985, temporarily joined forces with the Islamic revivalist and democratic opposition groups.

In those two republics proclamations of independence had an important political component: they were part of an effort to distance the new state from its communist past. After winning election as president, however, Nabiev again legalized Tajikistan's Communist Party and returned its property, shattering the political alliance that had briefly brought peace to the republic. After a month of peaceful demonstrations paralyzed public life, Nabiev used pro-government militia in May 1992 to try to squelch the protests. Pro-opposition forces overwhelmed Nabiev's own defenders, however, leaving the government in disarray under an uneasy coalition comprised of representatives of the communist elite as well as their democratic and Islamic opponents.

In Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan the communists—now renamed socialists, democrats and national democrats—pressed for independence, with only minimal public support. It was rumored that support for Uzbekistan's independence bill was so lukewarm, in fact, that President Karimov had to make a formal motion to mark its passage with applause. Although the Communist Party technically no longer existed, most Uzbekistani legislators voted for independence simply to toe the party

line. For some the vote was an expression of support for the goal of eventual independence. But few if any who gathered in that Tashkent hall believed that Uzbekistan had seceded from the U.S.S.R by virtue of its own legislation.

Uzbekistan's leaders were using "independence" as a synonym for full economic autonomy.[3] With substantial shortfalls in Russian deliveries of grain, wood, construction materials and oil, President Karimov was looking for new legal grounds to deny Russia the cotton and gold that Uzbekistan was required to supply U.S.S.R. enterprises. The logic behind the independence decree of Turkmenistan—rich in oil and natural gas—was similar.

III

Central Asia's leaders knew that the mere act of declaring independence would resolve few of their economic or political problems. They saw these decrees as a logical step in the battle for economic control waged between Moscow and the republics, a battle begun in 1987. Republics first requested financial accountability, then economic autonomy, and only then pressed for sovereignty and finally independence. The Baltic republics led the way; the Central Asian republics invariably pulled up the rear.

Thus even before the collapse of U.S.S.R. central structures, republics had received a degree of economic autonomy. They had been given the right to negotiate directly with foreign governments and companies, provided that plans were coordinated with appropriate central ministries and profits were deposited with central banking institutions. Republics could also invite in foreign banks—as Kazakhstan did with Saudi lenders in 1990. But they could not use those banks as repositories for foreign earnings. Moscow still owned the natural resources and finished goods that republics produced, and so the earnings went to the center.

Greater republican autonomy was intended to strengthen the Soviet economy as a whole as well as those of individual republics. For example, at a time when Sino-Soviet relations remained somewhat strained, direct ties between Kazakhstan and China's Xinjiang province led to completion of a rail link between Alma-Ata and Urumchi in July 1991, to the benefit of all concerned. Generally Gorbachev hoped that by ceding some authority to republics he could placate their demands for greater financial autonomy and, at the same time, increase the scope of foreign investment. Soviet laws were modified to encourage development of joint ventures that would introduce new forms of technology into various republics; but the strategies for investment were originally worked out in Moscow.

The U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers thus invited Chevron to develop the Tengiz oil field in Kazakhstan. Kazakh President Nazarbaev, however, did not join these discussions until 1990, a year after the initial agreements were signed. Even then his involvement is said to have come only because Chevron

pressured Moscow for his inclusion. The Kazakhs did not become principals in the deal for another year. Public pressure and the findings of an independent foreign expert commission retained by the Kazakh government then prompted Nazarbaev to give Chevron a choice: completely reopen negotiations or withdraw from the deal. Even today Kazakhstan is not an entirely free actor in the project; it retains financial obligations to Moscow due to earlier investments by the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Oil and Gas.

IV

None of the Central Asian republics yet have complete control of their economies. To some degree this is the product of confusion over the purpose of the Commonwealth itself—whether it is designed to be a coordinating body between republics or a device for preserving an integrated economic zone on the territory of the former U.S.S.R. Adding to that confusion from the onset was the nature of Russia's relationship to the CIS—whether it was an equal partner in the union, first among equals or the inheritor of the U.S.S.R.

Russia's leadership has variously played each of those roles. Russian President Boris Yeltsin was quick to take control of the U.S.S.R.'s foreign holdings and ministries and to use economic blackmail to press republics to accept Russia as the center of a single financial system and currency zone. When CIS republican presidents gather, Yeltsin makes symbolic gestures to reinforce the image that all are on an equal footing. Yet everyone knows that Yeltsin does not treat them as equals. When Yeltsin felt pressed to free prices in Russia, for example, all were pushed to adjust their price structures in accordance with Russia's own timetable.

Though each president must now defend the "national" interests of his republic, all are expected to allow Russia's interests to take precedence over their own. This has been a particular problem in a number of Central Asian republics, where the leadership's limited foreign policy experience may have made them appear pliable to economic pressure from Moscow. Central Asia's leaders, however, have proven less malleable than expected. Rather than ceding power back to Russia, Central Asian presidents have increasingly sought foreign partners to help them develop their economies in ways that are beneficial to their own republics but of little advantage to Russia.

Turkmenistan, for example, which produces just over ten percent of all natural gas exported by the former U.S.S.R., temporarily shut down foreign gas shipments in early 1992; the Russian successor to the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Oil and Gas was not passing on hard-currency earnings to a now independent and sovereign Turkmenistan, which still shipped all its oil and gas through Russia. Turkmenistan is obviously still sensitive to Russian pressure. In April 1992 Moscow got Turkmenistan to cut off gas shipments to Azerbaijan, and some see the Turkmen decision to increase by more than