

## 8. Islam in Society and Politics

### Islam as a Traditional Institution

Islam was another traditional institution that proved to be extraordinarily resistant to the policies initiated by the communist state. While there is little doubt that in Soviet Central Asia 'political institutions and political processes have been completely freed from the influence of religion',<sup>1</sup> Islam retained its position as a source of identity, a transmitter of cultural tradition and, more generally, as a way of life. In regards to the 'survival' of Islam in the Soviet Union, scholars have remarked on the importance of the large 'network' of unsanctioned mullahs who, despite the existence of the officially endorsed clerics of the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM), 'established Qur'an schools, preserved shrines, presided at burials, weddings and other rituals and, in the urban Muslim settings at least, monitored the observation of "traditions" [that is, in the *mahalla*]' during the Soviet era.<sup>2</sup> Religious practice was not, however, confined to just the 'unofficial' mosques. For example, as noted in one village at the very end of the Soviet era, religious practices centred on the village mosque 'represented a small proportion of the total religious activity in the village. For alongside this mosque-based activity, there also existed a whole range of less visible religious practices which were centred either around the household and/or groups of women.'<sup>3</sup>

Secularisation and atheistic education were permanent components of the party line in Tajikistan. The concrete policy towards religious observance, however, fluctuated substantially. Between 1920 and 1927, the secular state had to tolerate the existence of Islamic schools (*maktabs* and *madrasas*), real estate property of mosques (*vaqf*) and *shari'a* courts. The years from 1928 to 1941 witnessed a ferocious attack on the Muslim establishment: certain religious practices were

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1 Shams-ud-din, *Secularisation in the USSR* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1982), p. 206.

2 Martha Brill Olcott, 'Islam and Fundamentalism in Independent Central Asia', in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 24.

3 Tett, *Ambiguous Alliances*, p. 81. On women, Tett further argues (p. 95) that '[d]uring most of the Soviet period, in other words, it appeared that women were carrying the main religious burden in the community ... Just as a woman was able to shame a household through sexual misbehaviour, so too there was a sense in which she could shame the religious and cultural standing of a household and community through her religious misbehaviour'.

outlawed,<sup>4</sup> religious institutions were closed,<sup>5</sup> *vaqf* was abolished and the clergy was thoroughly purged. The predominantly Ismaili population of the Pamirs was prohibited from sending annual tribute to their spiritual leader, the Aga Khan in India, and his representative in Tajikistan, *ishon* Seid Yusofalisho, was arrested in 1931.<sup>6</sup> The Islamic courts were disbanded in November 1927, on the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution.<sup>7</sup> The postwar period was characterised by a somewhat more tolerant approach, with an emphasis on antireligious propaganda rather than blatant coercion.<sup>8</sup> The effectiveness of the seemingly relentless struggle conducted by local authorities on the ideological front, however, was often questioned by Moscow.<sup>9</sup> A special resolution of the CPSU Central Committee on Tajikistan (the only one of its kind throughout the Soviet period) stated in particular that '[p]arty organisations in the republic direct ideological-educational work aimed at the formation of a Marxist-Leninist outlook amidst all working people in an unsatisfactory manner ... Lately atheistic propaganda has weakened and the activities of clergy and religious sects have been on the rise'.<sup>10</sup> Obviously, the anti-Islamic drive in Tajikistan was often maintained as a sheer formality: in 1961, for example, of 43 women's atheistic groups reported in the Panj *raion*, only one was functioning.<sup>11</sup> Even foreign guests to Tajikistan noted the seemingly free practice of Islam.<sup>12</sup>

4 For instance, circumcision was strongly discouraged; but the ritual operation continued to be performed at home regardless, and the number of patients admitted to hospitals with complications after circumcision remained constantly high. See: I. Ermakov and D. Mikulskii, eds *Islam v Rossii i Srednei Azii* (Moscow: Lotos, 1993), p. 105.

5 Until 1989, there was not a single officially registered *maktab* or *madrasa* in Tajikistan, in sharp contradistinction with the pre-revolutionary period: in 1903, the city of Khujand alone had 30 *maktab*s and 30 *madrasas*, where 575 students were trained to become mullahs. See: *Leninobod* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1986), p. 166.

6 M. Nazarshoev, *Partiinaia organizatsiia Pamira v bor'be za sotsializm i kommunizm* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1970), p. 109.

7 'This was a new Soviet tradition—to mark revolutionary holidays with labour and other accomplishments.' G. S. Azizkulova, *Tsikl lektsii po istorii gosudarstva i prava Respubliki Tadjikistan* (Dushanbe: TGU, 1995), p. 180.

8 For example, in 1958, 2056 teams of agitators with a membership in excess of 33 000 operated in the republic, exposing the harmful and reactionary essence of Islam. See: *XI s'ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii Tadjikistana*, p. 68.

9 See, for example, the numerous anecdotes in: Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union: From the Second World War to Gorbachev* (London: Hurst & Co., 2000).

10 'O rabote TsK Kompartii Tadjikistana po vypolneniiu reshenii XXIII s'ezda KPSS', *Partiinaia zhizn'*, No. 1 (January 1969), p. 5.

11 *XIV s'ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii Tadjikistana*, p. 188.

12 For example, a note was left in 1981 by visitors from India in the guestbook of the famous mosque of *mavlon* Ya'qubi Charkhi near Dushanbe: 'We are very excited about seeing the mosque. We are not Muslims ourselves, but we have become convinced that in the Soviet Union, especially in Tajikistan, the Islamic religion is fully fledged and its practice is free. We have seen it with our own eyes and have rescinded the wrong impression we had had before.' See: R. Yormuhammad, *Mavlon* Ya'qubi Charkhi kist? (Dushanbe: Tojikiston, 1992), pp. 15–16. Much earlier, an American anthropologist (and later a noted anti-Soviet activist) visited Tajikistan and noted the free operation of state-approved mosques and the presence of officially sanctioned imams; however, he added that he believed it was partially a facade meant for foreign guests and tourists. See: Louis Dupree, 'Two Weeks in Soviet Tajikistan and Uzbekistan: Observations and Trends', *American Universities Field Staff Reports Service, South Asia Series*, Vol. III, No. 4 (1959), pp. 12–14.

Sergei Poliakov's description of the rural areas shows exactly how little Soviet rhetoric and policies on religion mattered to the people here. The 'unofficial' Islamic institutions had a great deal of relevance. For example, while counting unregistered mosques in northern Tajikistan, Poliakov found that every village had at a minimum one mosque, with some villages having multiple mosques divided by *mahalla*.<sup>13</sup> As for the people who operated these unregistered mosques, Poliakov writes that the activities of the 'unofficial clergy are neither controlled nor administered'.<sup>14</sup> Olivier Roy gives nearly the same description, noting that each village and *kolkhoz* during the Soviet era had a mullah, who was usually registered as a worker.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, there emerged a kind of accommodation between the state and Islam in Tajikistan. It was characterised by two non-contradictory parameters: a) state-sponsored secular institutions and norms of behaviour dominated the *public* realm of social action, and b) religion was tacitly recognised as an integral element of *private* life—an element that would wither away with the progress of the communist project. As Yaacov Ro'i has observed:

[E]ven if at first a departure from religion was imposed upon them by force, in the course of time, this population became basically secularised from conviction, education and/or force of habit. This did not mean that it renounced its Muslim identity, seeing no contradiction in declaring itself at one and the same time Muslim and atheist or non-believing.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, one anthropologist argues that the Tajik villagers she studied 'appeared to recognise a tacit division of labour' between communism and Islam:

Communism, in the eyes of many villagers, was seen not so much as an ideological doctrine but as a *raison d'être* for a certain type of administrative system ... It was not, in general, perceived as a source of personal morality. Islam, by contrast, was seen as the basis of morality and 'belief'—but not as the basis for a state administrative system.<sup>17</sup>

One survey conducted in 1985 showed that 55.6 per cent of Tajik communists regarded themselves as true Muslims.<sup>18</sup> Many people in Tajikistan were able to

13 Poliakov, *Everyday Islam*, p. 96, also pp. 95–112.

14 Poliakov, *Everyday Islam*, p. 106. See also: Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, pp. 346, 351, 357–9.

15 Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 90. Gillian Tett notes that the village she did fieldwork in had a mullah who was officially registered as a mechanic in the *sovkhos*. See: Tett, *Ambiguous Alliances*, p. 81.

16 Yaacov Ro'i, 'The Secularisation of Islam and the USSR's Muslim Areas', in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 15. Khalid remarks similarly: 'Although Muslimness distinguished locals from outsiders in the Soviet context, being Muslim was not counterpoised to being Soviet.' See: Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, p. 98.

17 Tett, *Ambiguous Alliances*, pp. 88–9.

18 A. Ignatenko, 'Islam v bor'be za politicheskoe liderstvo', in *Islam v Rossii i Srednei Azii*, eds Igor Ermakov and Dmitrii Mikulskii (Moscow: Lotus Foundation, 1993), p. 171.

reconcile Islam and communism, as neither was treated as incompatible, but rather as flexible practices. Some took the flexibility of Islam and communism even further and stressed their similarities (equality, justice, and so on). As one brigadier stated, '[e]verything Lenin said is written in the Koran'.<sup>19</sup> Apparently, even Bobojon Ghafurov, former first secretary of the CPT CC, made a pilgrimage to Mecca after retirement, for he was 'a son of a pious Muslim and sincerely yearned to visit the Qa'aba'.<sup>20</sup> Much later, in the late 1980s, first secretary Mahkamov would publicly declare that he was an atheist; but by this time there would be criticism of even those at the highest level. The *Qozikalon* of Tajikistan, Akbar Turajonzoda, in his role as the highest officially sanctioned Islamic leader in the republic, responded that Mahkamov would not be accorded Muslim burial rites upon his death.<sup>21</sup>

In the mid 1980s the Soviet government conducted a sociological survey of religious practices in the Muslim areas of the Soviet Union:<sup>22</sup>

Its findings showed a comparatively extensive practice of [Islamic] traditions, festivals and rites among all socio-demographic groups of the population, including the young, which indicates not only a relative stabilization of the level of religiosity, but also ... a mass basis for Islam's continued existence in the USSR. The results of the survey refuted the widely held opinion that Islam was becoming 'increasingly ritualistic' (*obriadovyi*) and demonstrated that the 'preservation and reproduction' (*vosproizvodstvo*) of religiosity were 'ensured by the existence of a still fairly significant number of believers characterized by a uniformity of religious consciousness and religious conduct.'

The survey revealed the importance of an Islamic-mandated morality in family life, as well as a high level of observance amongst those with high school and university education.<sup>23</sup>

Towards the very end of the Soviet era, the government loosened its restrictions, allowing the *Qoziyot* (the official Islamic governing body) and others to open new Islamic schools and mosques in Tajikistan, as well as to renovate *mazors*

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19 Tett, *Ambiguous Alliances*, pp. 87–8.

20 Muteullo Najmiddinov, 'Sudi jahon dar suhbatu dono shinos...', *Tojikiston*, Nos 1–2 (1995), p. 14.

21 Ludmila Polonskaya and Alexei Malashenko, *Islam in Central Asia* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1994), p. 117.

22 *Sostoianie religioznosti i ateisticheskogo vospitaniia v regionakh traditsionnogo rasprostraneniia islama* (Moscow: Akademiia obshchestvennykh nauk pri TsK KPSS, Institut nauchnogo atizma; Sovetskaia sotsiologicheskaiia assotsiatsiia, 1989), pp. 5–8, as cited in Yaacov Ro'i, 'The Secularization of Islam and the USSR's Muslim Areas', pp. 13–14.

23 *Sostoianie religioznosti i ateisticheskogo vospitaniia*, pp. 5–8, 26, 32, as cited in Ro'i, 'The Secularization of Islam and the USSR's Muslim Areas', p. 13–14. See also: Muriel Atkin, *The Subtlest Battle: Islam in Soviet Tajikistan* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1989).

and to more easily organise *hajj* to Mecca.<sup>24</sup> At independence the number of registered mosques surged. The great increase in the number of mosques—from 19 to more than 3000 between 1989 and 1992<sup>25</sup>—has sometimes been cited as an illustration of the Islamisation of Tajikistan. In reality, this surge should be attributed to simple legalisation and registration of already existing religious institutions, or, rather, traditional gathering places in villages and *mahallas*.<sup>26</sup>

At least two factors contributed to the reasons the Soviet regime did not treat Islam as a serious threat in Tajikistan in the postwar period. First, the so-called ‘official Islam’, or ‘that segment of religious life revolving around the functioning mosques, registered mullahs and officially recognised religious communities’,<sup>27</sup> was closely monitored and regulated by the authorities. All working mosques<sup>28</sup> and clerics were registered with the republican branch (*Qoziyot*) of SADUM, as well as with the Council for Religious Affairs—an organ of the Council of Ministers of Tajikistan. Official mullahs were on a government payroll and their appointment was subject to the authorities’ approval. Second, the ‘parallel’, or ‘popular’, Islam, based on the activities of clandestine Sufi orders and popular cultural traditions and free of all interference from the state, had ‘too apolitical a character and too diffuse a structure to rally believers under an anti-Soviet political banner’.<sup>29</sup>

Popular Islam in Tajikistan had several important characteristics that made it different from similar phenomena in the other republics of the former Soviet Union. Its ideological core—that is, the ‘popular knowledge of Islam’<sup>30</sup>—was always more pronounced for the simple reason that the corpus of Muslim literature that embodied not only ecclesiastic texts but also classic medieval lyrics, stories and anecdotes inherited from the past, had been written mostly in Persian. On the other hand, it would be an exaggeration to say that adherence to the main tenets of Islam or understanding of its theoretical dogmas are stronger

24 Atkin, ‘Thwarted Democratization in Tajikistan’, p. 283; Makhamov, ‘Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan after 1985’, p. 200. Makhamov notes the *quid pro quo*: ‘Representatives of official Islam regularly called on their followers to remain loyal to the government and to observe state laws.’

25 Qadi Akbar Turajonzoda, ‘Religion: The Pillar of Society’, in *Central Asia: Conflict, Resolution, and Change*, eds Roald Z. Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (Chevy Chase, Md: CPSS Press, 1995), p. 268.

26 Many have made this point. For example: Rubin, ‘Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown in the Periphery’, p. 143. Malashenko makes this same point in regards to Central Asia in general in the early 1990s. See: Alexei V. Malashenko, ‘Islam and Politics in the Southern Zone of the Former USSR’, in *Central Asia and Transcaucasia: Ethnicity and Conflict*, ed. Vitaly V. Naumkin (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 111. For an exact anecdote, see Gillian Tett’s description of a mosque’s ‘survival’ in the Varzob Valley: Tett, *Ambiguous Alliances*, pp. 80–1.

27 Azade-Ayşe Rorlich, ‘Islam and Atheism: Dynamic Tension in Soviet Central Asia’, in *Soviet Central Asia. The Failed Transformation*, ed. William Fierman (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), p. 188.

28 In 1963, there were only 18 officially registered mosques in Tajikistan, down from several thousand in the pre-revolutionary period. Until the late 1980s, their number remained virtually unchanged. See: Alexander Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 90.

29 Atkin, *The Subtlest Battle*, p. 28.

30 Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994), p. 30.

among Tajiks in comparison with other Central Asian nationals. Data collected in the field in Tajikistan corroborate the general observation made for Central Asian Muslims by Nancy Lubin in the early 1990s: 'more than three-quarters of those who said they are Islamic believers do not pray at all, and three-quarters say they never fast.'<sup>31</sup> In regards to the private lives of Central Asians and their leaders, life-cycle rituals such as those for births, deaths and marriages continued to retain their 'Islamic' characteristics throughout the Soviet era.<sup>32</sup> Popular Islam in Tajikistan is centred on a seemingly endless succession of ceremonies and rituals, most of which date back to pre-Muslim times. Births, coming of age, marriages and funerals are the landmark events for every Tajik family and kinship or neighbourhood community. Their proper commemoration according to Islamic or, to be more precise, local cultural, tradition is vital for every individual, or any given social group, in terms of maintaining their social status. But even the day-to-day life of Tajiks is largely regulated by a set of beliefs that they perceive as Muslim. In reality, much of it has more to do with ancient fertility cults and various agricultural rites, to which the existence of a thriving institution of shamans testifies.

Shamans in Tajikistan, called *parikhon* and *folbin*, are omnipresent; almost every *mahalla* in a village or city can boast at least one man or woman who is believed to have a special relationship with spirits and can thus: a) diagnose and cure illnesses; b) impose or lift a curse; c) interpret omens and forecast the future; and d) find missing objects and people. People's belief in *ajina*, *chiltan*, *miros* and other supernatural creatures—hardly compatible with Orthodox Islam—has found its reflection in a Tajik saying: '*Khudo zada bosh, arvoh zada—ne*', which means 'If God strikes you—let it be, but don't let the spirits'. In rural areas there still exist whole dynasties of self-styled medics who specialise in treating infertility or pneumonia through exorcism.<sup>33</sup> Generally, in modern times, 'the shamans have never experienced restrictions in their practice and coexisted peacefully with the clergy. There has emerged a sort of cooperation: shamans would send the ailing to mullahs, and mullahs would advise them to go to shamans'.<sup>34</sup> Quite often, particularly in remote areas such as Yaghnob, one person combines the responsibilities of a mullah, hereditary Sufi leader

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31 Nancy Lubin, 'Central Asians Take Stock: Reform, Corruption, and Identity', *Peaceworks* [United States Institute of Peace], No. 2 (February 1995). Moreover, even those who observe the fast (*ruza*) in Tajikistan, especially in the cities, would refer to health considerations for doing so, rather than treating it as a conscientious act of compliance with one of the pillars of Islam. The prevailing explanation for holding the *ruza* in Dushanbe at present is that 'it helps to purify the organism of dross' (Interviews in Dushanbe, February 1995).

32 Rainer Freitag-Wirringhaus, 'Atheistic Muslims, Soviet Legacy and Islamic Tradition in Central Asia and the Caucasus', in *The Islamic World and the West: An Introduction to Political Cultures and International Relations*, ed. Kai Hafez (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 222.

33 Andreev, *Tadzhiki doliny Khuf*, pp. 78–80.

34 V. N. Basilov, *Shamanstvo u narodov Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana* (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), p. 281.

and shaman.<sup>35</sup> Common people in Tajikistan usually do not bother themselves with the fine demarcation of these terms and tend to refer to anybody with religious charisma, obtained through position, training, inheritance, divine intervention or otherwise, as *ishon*—a word that originally carried a strictly Sufi connotation.<sup>36</sup>

According to Bennigsen and Wimbush:

[P]arallel Islam is represented in Tajikistan by the adepts of some Sufi brotherhoods (mainly of the Naqshbandiya) which are more structured than in the other Central Asian republics ... The representatives of parallel Islam control numerous holy places which, in absence of working mosques, tend to become the real centres of religious life.<sup>37</sup>

These same authors, however, made quite a different assumption in their earlier work:

In Tajikistan ... Sufi brotherhoods are less active and play a relatively minor role in the preservation of the religious feelings of the population. In this republic the holy places are less numerous and enjoy but a moderate prestige among the believers and the unbelievers. The religious life of the Tajiks is less dependent on parallel Islam and for this reason the role of the holy *mazors* is lesser than in Turkmenistan and Kirghizia.<sup>38</sup>

This issue may indeed be confusing, so long as popular Islam in Tajikistan is viewed as an extension of official Islam *par excellence*, which has become important mainly due to the atheistic onslaught of Soviet authorities. It is reasonable to adopt the approach whereby popular Islam represents a certain way of life in its wholeness, far beyond the confines of a religious creed, and as such cannot be measured quantitatively. The statement that 'there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that Soviet Muslims have ever been less (or more) devoted to their faith than they are now'<sup>39</sup> then makes perfect sense.

*Mazors*, or holy places, in Tajikistan, in a contradistinction with the situation in other Central Asian countries, are not necessarily linked to a burial place of some real or mythical Sufi saint. The number of such shrines in the republic is

35 In the Zarafshon Valley, a mullah is required to spend 40 days in fast, seclusion and prayer to qualify as an exorcist. See: O. Murodov, 'Predstavleniia o devakh u tadjikov srednei chasti doliny Zeravshana', *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, No. 1 (1973), p. 154.

36 Abduvali Qushmatov, *Vaqf: Namudhoi zamindorii vaqf dar Shimoli Tojikiston dar solhoi 1870–1917* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1990), p. 39.

37 Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, p. 91.

38 Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1985), pp. 150–1.

39 Akiner, *Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union*, p. 12.

relatively small; the two most revered are the *mazor* of *mavlon*o Yaqubi Charkhi near Dushanbe, and the mausoleum of *khoja* Ishoq 'Makhdumi Azam' in Hisor (both date to the sixteenth century).<sup>40</sup> The bulk of the *mazors* in Tajikistan, however, are related to the primordial cult of trees, springs and stones, which are believed to harbour evil and benign spirits. It is not infrequent that the trunk of a 'sacred tree' constitutes the minaret of a village mosque.<sup>41</sup> In rural areas every *avlod* has at least one *mazor*, and the living members of the family pay homage to them regularly, usually on Fridays and Sundays, to placate the souls of the dead.<sup>42</sup>

Some *mazors* are devoted to animistic deities (for example, *bibi* Seshambe, the patroness of maternity, and *bibi* Mushkelkusho, the spirit of good fortune), or even Zoroastrian religious symbols, such as a rather popular temple of the sun, 'Shokambar Oftob', in Vakhan.<sup>43</sup> The pre-Islamic elements in Tajik Sufism (and wider Islamic rites)<sup>44</sup> form an enormous subject in themselves,<sup>45</sup> however, it appears that in everyday religious practice a thick layer of traditional beliefs is barely covered by Muslim rites, distorted as they are almost beyond recognition from their canonical versions.

Medieval Sufism in Central Asia had all the attributes of classical mystical Islam: several competing brotherhoods, hierarchal structure, degrees of initiation, missionary activity, and so on. In the nineteenth century, however,

the link with the original Sufi orders was rather weak, Sufism degenerated into *Ishonism*—every big *ishon* virtually gave rise to a separate order, headed thereafter by his descendants. The dissociation of the Sufi brotherhoods led to the situation whereby an *ishon* became the only authority for his disciples, the sole source of spiritual authority that, according to the demands of the Sufi doctrine, was absolute.<sup>46</sup>

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40 Bennigsen and Wimbush wrongfully place both sites in Hisor and identify 'Makhdumi Azam' with a certain Molla Junayd. See: Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, p. 91. For an interesting discourse on the subject, see: Sherzod Abdulloev, 'Justuju dar atrofi ta'rikhi "Makhdumi Azam"', in *Dar justujui farhangi vodii Hisor*, ed. N. N. Ne'matov (Dushanbe: Mamnu'gohi ta'rikhi-madani Hisor, 1992), pp. 13–23.

41 Peshchereva, *Yagnobskie etnograficheskie materialy*, p. 74.

42 A typical case of the establishment of a new *mazor* was reported in 1957 in the *kolkhoz* named after Karl Marx: 'the kolkhoz worker Abdullo Umarov while being sick had made an oath that he would repair one [of his relatives'] tomb. Umarov's organism overcame illness and he convalesced. After that, Umarov mended the tomb and conveyed the whole story to his relations. In their turn, they shared the news with others. That's how the pilgrimage to this burial commenced.' See: *XI s'ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii Tadzhikistana*, p. 144.

43 A. Z. Rozenfeld, 'Materialy po etnografii i perezhitkam drevnikh verovaniia tadzhikoiazychnogo naseleniia Sovetskogo Badakhshana', *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, No. 3 (1970), p. 117.

44 Niyazi notes: 'The ancient agricultural rites and festivals of the Zoroastrian and pre-Zoroastrian period are widespread amongst Sunnis and Ismailis alike; these are primarily linked with the worship of nature and the cults of fertility, fire, water and earth.' See: Aziz Niyazi, 'Islam in Tajikistan: Tradition and Modernity', *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1998), p. 41.

45 An excellent review of the problem can be found in: V. N. Basilov, 'Simvolika sufizma i narodnye verovaniia', *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, No. 6 (1994), pp. 88–91.

46 O. A. Sukhareva, *Islam v Uzbekistane* (Tashkent: Fan, 1960), p. 52.

Thus *ishons*, who originally were the middle link in the *murshed–murid* (Sufi teacher–disciple) chain, found themselves in a unique position: they wielded great power, without having proper knowledge and education.

In Tajikistan, the surviving members of traditional status groups (*sayids*, *khojas*, *mirs* and *tura*) are often treated as *ishons*. In the early 1990s, a certain police lieutenant in Mastchoh, who was also a *tura*, acted as *ishon* for a group of people living in neighbouring Uzbekistan and collected *sadaqa* (alms) from them in this capacity.<sup>47</sup> It is difficult to draw a dividing line between a collectivity of *murids*,<sup>48</sup> an extended patriarchal family and a solidarity network coalesced around representatives of a traditional elite stratum. It appears, however, that purely religious *murshed–murid* dyads are quite rare in Tajikistan. In modern times the most prominent Sufi teacher in the republic was *hazrat* Pirmuhammad Sangi Qulula, who died in 1968 in the village of Olimtoy near Kulob. His funeral was attended by thousands of people from all over Central Asia, including several dozen high-ranking party officials.<sup>49</sup> He was not, however, the only eminent Sufi *sheikh* in Tajikistan. Other well-known *sheikhs* were active throughout the country in the late Soviet era.<sup>50</sup>

In summary, there is much truth in the conclusion that for Tajikistan ‘the most important dimension of Sufism is not the sophisticated mysticism practised by the Sufi adepts but the Sufi embodiment of folk Islam’.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, popular Islam incorporates

people’s ancient beliefs, vestiges of magic and elements of folklore culture. Thus this is a national phenomenon and [is] perceived by many as such ... The non-conflictual co-existence of various, often directly opposite ideas, is characteristic of it ... Popular Islam is loyal to the authorities and calls for the rejection of political struggle.<sup>52</sup>

With this in mind, it would be easier to avoid the temptation to explain the retention of traditional customs as a manifestation of religious zeal aimed against the secular state—a theme favoured by some Western scholars from the time of Soviet rule to the present day.<sup>53</sup>

47 Bushkov and Mikulskii, ‘Obschestvenno-politicheskaia situatsiia v Tadzhikestane’, p. 9.

48 Every *ishon* may have from one to more than 50 disciples. See: S. M. Demidov, *Sufizm v Turkmenii* (Ashkhabad: Ylym, 1978), p. 103.

49 Muhabbatsho, ‘Foijai Uljaboev’, p. 29.

50 Stephane A. Dudoignon, ‘From Revival to Mutation: The Religious Personnel of Islam in Tajikistan, from De-Stalinization to Independence (1955–91)’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2001).

51 Atkin, *The Subtlest Battle*, p. 23.

52 Olimova and Olimov, ‘Obrazovannyi klass Tadzhikestana v peripetiiakh XX v.’, pp. 99–100.

53 See, as one of many examples: Ronald Wixman, ‘Ethnic Attitudes and Relations in Modern Uzbek Cities’, in *Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation*, ed. William Fierman (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 172–3.

There are few reliable data on the religious affiliation and observance of the eponymous population of Tajikistan. A survey conducted in the Qurghonteppa region in 1989 revealed that 81 per cent of those polled 'were under the influence of Islam, its traditions and rituals'.<sup>54</sup> Another survey showed that Islamic mores affect broad sections of Tajik society and are successfully reproduced in younger generations.<sup>55</sup> In 1991, the percentage of weddings conducted with the presence of a mullah was 86.5 per cent in Tajikistan.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, 55 to 82 per cent of polled women consider Islamic funeral ceremonies necessary, while 'in fact a much higher percentage (approximating 100 per cent of population, including atheists and non-believers) practices them'.<sup>57</sup> Still, such attitudes and shared understandings cannot be regarded solely as products of Islamic belief; they are part of a wider cultural order or the 'Great Tradition', and are 'so deeply rooted that they flow *almost* automatically'.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, Islamic mores appear to be highly particularistic, especially in the area of marital arrangements—for example, Quranic views on exogamy are strictly observed amongst Tajiks whose ancestors had migrated from Herat (Heroti), whereas mountain Tajiks by and large ignore them.<sup>59</sup>

In modern Tajikistan the dividing line between *adat* and *shari'a* is rather blurred. Under conditions where the society retains strong elements of patriarchy and where the stratum of carriers of orthodox Islam is thin, the job of interpreting the principles of common good and establishing codes of honour and decency—the privilege of the *ulama* in most Muslim countries—is inevitably relegated to traditional communal leaders: heads of *avlods*, elders in the *mahalla* committees, patrons of solidarity networks and members of ascribed prestigious status groups.<sup>60</sup> On the whole, Islam of any form or description in Tajikistan has failed to impose a set of universalistic values on the society, and thus can hardly be seen to play an overarching integrative and mobilisational role today.

54 S. Boronbekov, 'Religioznye verovaniia, obychai i ugotovno-pravovoe soznanie', *Izvestiia AN TSSR. Serii: filosofii, ekonomika, pravovedenie*, No. 4 (1991), p. 66. The methodology of the poll is not quite clear, but presumably the respondents did not include the so-called Russian-speaking population.

55 In regards to the 'Percentage of Believers amongst Tajiks' according to occupation and age, 64.8 per cent of engineers and agricultural experts, 61.3 per cent of intellectuals and professionals (doctors, teachers, and so on) and 89.1 per cent of pensioners and housewives reported being believers, while 71.3 per cent of eighteen–nineteen-year-olds, 73 per cent of twenty–four-year-olds and 77.9 per cent of twenty–five–twenty–nine-year-olds answered the same. Source: L. Bashirov, 'Islam v nashi dni', *Slovo lektora*, No. 1 (1989), p. 33.

56 F. N. Iliashov, 'Skolko stoit nevesta', *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, No. 6 (1991), p. 69. This was compared with 80.1 per cent in Turkmenistan and 32.4 per cent in Kazakhstan.

57 M. A. Tolmacheva, 'The Muslim Woman in Soviet Central Asia', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1993), p. 542.

58 Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989), p. 230. It has even been argued by one author that the ratio between people who observe Muslim rituals and those who really believe in the Muslim faith is four to one. See: Saidbaev, *Islam i obschestvo*, p. 195.

59 Sukhareva, 'Traditsiia semeino-rodstvennykh brakov u narodov Srednei Azii', pp. 119–20.

60 The Tajik saying '*Avval khesh, ba'd darvesh*' ('Relatives [come] first, dervish—afterwards') connotes the primacy of the kinship allegiance over the religious one.

## The Failure of Islam as a Unifying and Mobilising Force

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Barthold wrote that a Central Asian 'feels he is first a Muslim and second a resident of a specific town or location'.<sup>61</sup> While identifying as a Muslim may be important for some when interacting with a non-Muslim,<sup>62</sup> does an Islamic identity have much relevance in Central Asia when locals interact with each other? Muriel Atkin stresses that while there is some 'strength' in the Islamic identity for Central Asians, it does not mean that the identity is accompanied by some 'supranational' Islamic unity as embodied in the idea of the *umma*, the idealised concept of a unified community of all Muslims.<sup>63</sup> Others have argued the opposite. For example, Roland Dannreuther has pronounced that in Tajikistan

radical Islam also has the attraction of combining radical political objectives within an outwardly traditional framework ... For people used to the all-encompassing and intrusive ideology of Marxism-Leninism, it can be reassuring to find a more authentic replacement which provides a similarly comprehensive interpretation of the world with the backing of a global internationalist brotherhood.<sup>64</sup>

This eloquent generalisation may be too far-reaching; it is somewhat doubtful whether members of a mosque-*gapkhona*-men's club somewhere in Qarotegin would be interested in *any* universalistic interpretation of the world—Marxist, Islamist, or otherwise. Traditional communal life is a self-sufficient microcosm for them, and it is unlikely that any ideas coming from any 'global internationalist brotherhood' could move any significant mass of them to action.

Concerning Central Asians' interactions with the broader Muslim world community, while Central Asians may see Russian models as unsuitable, they are also not interested in replicating the Muslim societies of their neighbours. Schoeberlein-Engel argues that greater exposure to the outside Muslim world since the mid 1980s has, for Central Asians, confirmed to them a 'sense of its

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61 Barthold, *Sochineniia*, Vol. 2, Part 2, p. 528. Quoted in Abashin, 'The Transformation of Ethnic Identity in Central Asia', p. 32.

62 As noted by Nazif Shahrani: 'It is in relation to Barthold, a Russian Christian, that the Turkistanis define themselves, first as Muslim, then as residents of a particular town or village and finally, if nomads, as members of specific, named kinship categories or groups. One cannot doubt that had the same questions been posed by a non-Turkistani Muslim rather than a Russian Christian, the order and types of self identity expressed would have been significantly different.' See: M. Nazif Shahrani, "'From Tribe to Umma': Comments on the Dynamics of Identity in Muslim Soviet Central Asia', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1984), p. 29.

63 Atkin, 'Religious, National and Other Identities in Central Asia', p. 47.

64 Dannreuther, *Creating New States in Central Asia*, p. 18.

being alien to them'.<sup>65</sup> This viewpoint is echoed by Nazif Shahrani, an Afghan-American anthropologist; however, instead of blaming increased awareness, he points to ignorance. He found during his fieldwork in Central Asia that:

In general the peoples of former Soviet Central Asia are very poorly informed, especially about the Muslim countries to the south and west. What the post-Soviet Central Asians say about these areas is often negative and demeaning and always accompanied by an exaggerated sense of their own progress and modernity.<sup>66</sup>

According to these views, Central Asians do not feel any strong sense of unity with the outside Muslim world. For a quantitative example, a survey of Uzbeks and Kazakhs in 1993 asked respondents to name the countries that Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan should keep the greatest distance from. While Israel was listed at number four, the top three answers were Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.<sup>67</sup>

Additionally, there is no Islamic unity between Central Asians themselves (even discounting sectarian divides such as Sunni versus Ismaili) when measured against other categories of identity. Nancy Lubin, remarking on the results of the abovementioned survey, concluded that there are 'schisms as much within Central Asian and Muslim communities as between them and others' and that 'divisions among nationality groups in Central Asia run deep'.<sup>68</sup> Talib Saidbaev argues that secular social categories often prevail over religious categories. He stresses that economic interests are a more important factor than religious ones. Issues of agricultural resource access, employment and other material interests are assigned more importance than the ideal of Islamic unity. A sign of the primacy of non-religious factors is the fact that it is common for the different ethnic groups in the towns of Central Asia to have their own Muslim clergy and their own mosque.<sup>69</sup> Sergei Poliakov gave a similar description of separate communities within a larger rural community having their separate

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65 Schoeberlein-Engel, *Identity in Central Asia*, p. 251. The opposite view can be found at the pinnacle of official Muslim leadership. Writing about the then *Qozikalon* of Tajikistan, Akbar Turajonzoda, Mavlon Makhamov says that Turajonzoda 'and his adherents emphasized the advantage of the Islamic way of life, maintaining that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had achieved great success in economic development and secured high living standards for their population only through their devotion to Islam'. See: Makhamov, 'Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan after 1985', pp. 200–1.

66 M. Nazif Shahrani, 'Islam and the Political Culture of "Scientific Atheism" in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Future Predicaments', in *The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. Michael Bourdeaux (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), p. 291, n. 24. Shahrani goes on to say that attitudes are beginning to change as Central Asians visit other Muslim countries. This is essentially the opposite of what Schoeberlein-Engel states: more contacts with other Muslim countries bring a more favourable opinion.

67 Nancy Lubin, 'Islam and Ethnic Identity in Central Asia: A View from Below', in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 67.

68 Lubin, 'Islam and Ethnic Identity in Central Asia', pp. 63–5.

69 Talib Saidbaev, 'Inter-Ethnic Conflicts in Central Asia: Social and Religious Perspectives', in *Ethnicity and Conflict in a Post-Communist World: The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China*, eds Kumar Rupesinghe, Peter King and Olga Vorkunova (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), p. 168.

mosques; however, he notes that it was the *mahalla* that had its own mosque, rather than ethnic groups (this would also be a de facto ethnic segregation if the *mahalla* is mono-ethnic).<sup>70</sup> Roy also noted the primacy of kinship over Islam in the collective farms where kinship groups who feel marginalised start a secondary, ‘oppositional’ mosque. These marginalised kin-based groups ‘thus tend to identify with Islam as one way of consolidating their opposition to others—although of course everyone would claim to be Muslim’.<sup>71</sup> In a case study undertaken in an Uzbek village in Tajikistan, Sergei Abashin found that the contestation between competing religious authorities was referred to by the locals in ‘terms of kinship’.<sup>72</sup> This is just one anecdote Abashin provides in his article, wherein he argues that at the local (rural) level ‘religious conflicts are often submerged within the dynamics of local political, kinship and economic relations, with each Muslim community containing its own interest groups and means of legitimacy’.<sup>73</sup>

At a higher level, Abdujabar Abduvakhitov expressed his doubts in late 1991 about the possibility of Islam as a politically unifying factor:<sup>74</sup>

[During *perestroika*] Islamic activists in the Muslim community began their social activity with an appeal to the Muslim *umma*. Their appeal excluded the growing sense of nationalism. Pan-Islam, as practised in the Muslim world, was not a power that could unite millions ... In the Central Asia republics, where people have for many years been united by the Muslim community, the national identity of the different peoples has limited this factor of pan-Islam. The activist movement, which includes Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, and others, must preserve itself from a growing nationalism. Tribalism and regionalism also remain strong in Central Asia. Thus it is difficult to see how pan-Islam can be a uniting factor in the political life of Central Asia.

Similarly, Aziz Niyazi noted the splits along regional and political lines amongst the ‘Islamic clergy’: ‘There have never been any disputes on strictly theological questions amongst these groups; schisms have occurred chiefly as a result of political affiliation and regional allegiances. Tajik Islamic thought has thus not formulated many clear ideas about a desired state structure and social order.’<sup>75</sup>

70 Poliakov, *Everyday Islam*, p. 96.

71 Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 90.

72 Sergei Abashin, ‘The Logic of Islamic Practice: A Religious Conflict in Central Asia’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2006), p. 275.

73 Abashin, ‘The Logic of Islamic Practice’, p. 268.

74 Abdujabar Abduvakhitov, ‘Islamic Revivalism in Uzbekistan’, in *Russia’s Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross-Cultural Analysis*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 95.

75 Niyazi, ‘Islam in Tajikistan’, *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1998), pp. 43–4.

## Islam in the 1970s and 1980s

Regarding the political significance of religiosity in Tajikistan, Grigorii Kosach maintains that the 'Soviet experience showed quite clearly that youthful dissidence more often than not gave way to career considerations and adaptation to ideological and political realities'.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, in the 1970s and 1980s, 'underground and semi-underground' Islamic groups were operating in southern Tajikistan.<sup>77</sup> Early Islamists<sup>78</sup> from the 1970s onwards were strongest in Qurghonteppa Province among those resettled from Qarotegin/Gharm.<sup>79</sup> One group of Islamists in Tajikistan was reported in 1978 in the Qurghonteppa region, in the areas populated by Gharmi settlers.<sup>80</sup> They consisted primarily of young men who, as a rule, did not have formal religious education, represented marginal strata of traditional society and criticised the Soviet and Islamic establishments from positions of 'pure Islam'.<sup>81</sup> Their grievances focused on

- the graft and corruption of local communist bosses
- the ignorance, licentiousness and greed of official and supernumerary mullahs
- Soviet involvement in Afghanistan.

The issue of Afghanistan was clearly also on the minds of those at the top levels of the scholarly community of *ulama*, as can be seen, for example, in videotaped debates from the early 1980s that include the top official Islamic leader in Tajikistan, *Qozikalon* Mirzo Abdullo Kalonzoda, the eminent scholar *Mavlavi* Hindustoni, and a prominent Sufi *sheikh* from the Hisor area, *Domullo* Sharif Hisorī.<sup>82</sup>

It was argued earlier in this chapter that Islam could not play an integrative and mobilising role throughout Tajik society. That does not mean that Islamic ideology could not appeal to certain sections of the republic's population—namely, those sections that experienced a high level of deprivation as a result of

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76 Kosach, 'Tajikistan', p. 133.

77 Olimova, 'Opposition in Tajikistan', p. 247. By 'semi-underground', Olimova means that the authorities were aware of the activities but took no action.

78 For the purposes of the present study, this term is employed to distinguish 'the activist, militant "true believer", and born-again Muslim from the run of the mill Muslim who takes his/her religion for granted, viewing Islam as a matter of *'aqaid* and *'ibadat* (a set of beliefs and specific acts of worship), plus a certain basic ethical code, inherited traditions, cultural conventions, and so on'. See: Sadik J. Al-Azm, 'Islamic Fundamentalism Reconsidered: A Critical Outline of Problems, Ideas and Approaches, Part I', *South Asia Bulletin*, Vol. XIII, Nos 1–2 (1993), p. 99.

79 Shirin Akiner and Catharine Barnes, 'The Tajik Civil War: Causes and Dynamics', in *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process*, eds Kamoludin Abdullaev and Catharine Barnes (London: Conciliation Resources, 2001), p. 20.

80 *Jumhuriyat*, 17 December 1991.

81 *Grazhdanskie politicheskie dvizheniia v Tadjikistane: 1989 – mart 1990g.* (Dushanbe: TsK LKSM Tadjikistana, 1990), p. 46.

82 Dudoignon, 'From Revival to Mutation', p. 68.

Soviet modernisation efforts. In Tajikistan, those were residents of Mastchoh, Gharm and Qarotegin; those who were constantly resettled, whose villages were destroyed while hydro dams were erected, and who were forced to forgo their traditional occupations for the sake of building socialism. To borrow from John L. Esposito:

[Losses] of village, town, and extended family ties and traditional values were accompanied by the shock of modern urban life and its Westernised culture and mores. Many, swept along in a sea of alienation and marginalisation, found an anchor in religion. Islam offered a sense of identity, fraternity, and cultural values that offset the psychological dislocation and cultural threat of their new environment ... Islamic organisations' workers and message offered a more familiar alternative which was consistent with their experience, identified their problems, and offered a time-honoured solution.<sup>83</sup>

'Underground' Islamic education started as soon as the traditional institutions of Islamic education were closed by the Soviets in the 1920s;<sup>84</sup> however, the use of 'underground' here needs to be qualified. Parviz Mullojonov, describing Tajikistan's 'underground Islamic circles' that gained momentum in the 1970s, argues that

it is doubtful that, in the general conditions of the USSR, such underground religious circles could have escaped the KGB's gaze for more than 15 years. In fact the KGB's national departments, which used to employ a broad network of agents among the Muslim clergy, knew from the very beginning about the existence of these Islamist circles.<sup>85</sup>

Mullojonov believes that the Soviet authorities were obviously aware of the young mullahs' activities, but decided to leave them alone and let them weaken the 'authority of the conventional clergy, which in the 1970s and early 1980s was considered by the Soviet power as the main evil'.<sup>86</sup> In regards to the lower-level leadership (provincial, city, farm and factory officials) in the Vakhsh Valley, the leader of a network of Islamic teachers stressed that

[a]lthough they were Communist Party members, in secret they maintained their original faith since they were the children of Muslims. Their connection to Islam was strong. As a result of this, even though

83 John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 16.

84 Ashirbek Muminov, 'Fundamentalist Challenges to Local Islamic Traditions in Soviet and Post-Soviet Central Asia', in *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia*, ed. Tomohiko Uyama (Sapporo: Slavic Research Centre, Hokkaido University, 2007), pp. 249–62, esp. pp. 258–9.

85 Mullojonov, 'The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period', p. 228.

86 Mullojonov, 'The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period', p. 228. For a similar narrative in Uzbekistan, see: Abduvakhitov, 'Islamic Revivalism in Uzbekistan', pp. 82–5.

they still did not help us, they deliberately overlooked and ignored our connection to this work [that is, unofficial Islamic schooling]. Through this behaviour they facilitated the dissemination of progressive ideas and the spirit of striving for freedom in the Vakhsh Valley.<sup>87</sup>

By the mid 1980s, however, the authorities began to see the 'unofficial' mullahs and underground Islam as a bigger threat and began to use the official clergy against the 'unofficial' mullahs.<sup>88</sup> If Mullojonov is right and the security services considered the official Soviet-sponsored clergy to be more of a threat than this speaks even more about the Soviet Union's inability to control society. Their tactic of using the two groups against each other—if that was actually the case—shows the further ineffectiveness of the state's repressive measures. An effectively repressive state would just simply eliminate both groups; however, by the mid 1980s the Soviet security services did begin to arrest and 'harass' Tajik Islamists.<sup>89</sup>

## Sayid Abdullo Nuri and the Roots of the Islamic Revival Party

The origin of the Islamic Renaissance/Rebirth/Renewal/Revival Party (henceforth IRP)<sup>90</sup> of Tajikistan was a group led by Sayid Abdullo Nuri that formed an underground organisation or network in 1973. This group, which eventually took the name Nahzati Javononi Islomii Tojikiston (Revival of the Islamic Youth of Tajikistan), operated mainly in Qurghonteppa and the wider Vakhsh Valley.<sup>91</sup> Adeb Khalid describes this group as not just an 'organisation',

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87 Sayid Abdullohi Nuri, 'Hizbe, ki resha dar ormoni mardum dorad', Interview by Qiyomiddin Sattori (2 February 2003), in *Mujaddidi Asr: bakhshida ba 60-umin solgardi zodruzi ustod Sayid Abdullohi Nuri (r)*, ed. Qiyomiddin Sattori (Dushanbe: Devashtich, 2007), p. 158. More on this leader below.

88 Mullojonov, 'The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period', pp. 228–9.

89 Mullojonov, 'The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period', pp. 230–1.

90 In Tajik: *Hizbi Nahzati Islomi*. The word 'nahzat' has roughly the same meaning as 'rastokhez' (revival) but originates from Arabic.

91 Nuri, 'Hizbe, ki resha dar ormoni mardum dorad', pp. 155–8; Stephane A. Dudoignon, 'From Ambivalence to Ambiguity? Some Paradigms of Policy Making in Tajikistan', in *Tajikistan at a Crossroads: The Politics of Decentralization*, Situation Report No. 4, ed. Luigi Di Martino (Geneva: Cimera, 2004), p. 126, citing Qiyomiddin Sattori, ed. *HNIT, Zodai Ormoni mardum: Ba iftixori 30-solagii ta'sisi Hizbi Nahzati Islomii Tojikiston* (Dushanbe: Imperial-Grupp, 2003); Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 139–41; Olimova, 'Opposition in Tajikistan', p. 248; Conciliation Resources, 'Profiles: Said Abdullo Nuri', online: <<http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/tajikistan/profiles.php>> The IRP name came later with the formation of a Tajikistan branch of the federal IRP in 1990. See: Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 139–41; S. Olimova and M. Olimov, 'The Islamic Renaissance Party', Conciliation Resources, n.d., Accessed online March 2009: <<http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/tajikistan/islamic-renaissance-party.php>>

but also an ‘underground network’, which, according to Khalid, ‘represented *hujra* students who rejected the political caution of their teachers and advocated a social, if not political status for a purified Islam’.<sup>92</sup>

Nuri was born Abdullo Saidov in 1947. His place of birth is Tavildara, in the now defunct Gharm Province.<sup>93</sup> In 1953 the government sent his family to the lower Vakhsh Valley as part of its agricultural resettlement programs. Specifically, Nuri’s family lived in the ‘Turkmeniston’ *sovkhos* (state farm), located in the Vakhsh District of Qurghonteppa Province. His father, Nureddin Saidov, was a *sovkhos* director and a member of the Communist Party, while his older brother held a position of some importance in the local party apparatus. Nuri’s education was at a technical school and he worked as a driver, equipment inventory manager and government land surveyor—occupations that allowed him extensive travel around the province and numerous opportunities to preach to a wider audience.<sup>94</sup> According to Roy, Nuri was given religious lessons at home by his father and by an unnamed ‘unofficial cleric’ before studying under Muhammadjon Hindustoni.<sup>95</sup> In an interview, Nuri named this ‘unofficial cleric’ as *domullo*<sup>96</sup> Siyomuddin, stressing that ‘89 per cent’ of his studies were completed under this teacher. After studying under Siyomuddin, he moved on to become a student of *Mavlavi*<sup>97</sup> Hindustoni, a well-known Islamic scholar, for two to three years.<sup>98</sup>

Nuri commented on the activities of his group, which he mostly refers to as a *sozmon* (which can be translated as ‘organisation’ or ‘society’), but also as a *jumbish* or *harakat* (both translate to ‘movement’). In his recollection, preparations for the formation of this group began in 1971. Nuri stresses that this process was quickened by a February 1973 KGB raid in the Hippodrome *mahalla* of Dushanbe that resulted in the arrest of 30 students in Nuri’s network. This raid, which narrowly missed catching Hindustoni in class, gave a sense of

92 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, p. 147. *Hujra* here refers to secret Islamic lessons.

93 Akiner, *Tajikistan*, p. 53; Conciliation Resources, ‘Profiles: Said Abdullo Nuri’. Akiner gives his origin as Vakhyo (another name for the Tavildara Valley) in the ‘Karategin-Darvaz’ region, while Conciliation Resources refers to Tavildara being in Qarotegin. Qarotegin and Darvoz were both regions that were incorporated into the Gharm *oblast*. Conciliation Resources states that Tavildara was known previously as Sangvor. Note that there is currently a small settlement also named Sangvor approximately 80 km up the Khingob River from Tavildara.

94 Akiner, *Tajikistan*, p. 53. Conciliation Resources, ‘Profiles: Said Abdullo Nuri’; Roy, ‘Is the Conflict in Tajikistan a Model for Conflicts throughout Central Asia’, p. 34; Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 154; Olivier Roy, ‘The Impact of the Afghan War in Soviet Central Asia’, in *In a Collapsing Empire: Underdevelopment, Ethnic Conflicts and Nationalisms in the Soviet Union*, ed. Marco Buttino (Milan: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 1993), p. 344; A. V. Kudriavtsev and A. Sh. Niyazi, ‘“Politicheskii islam”: nachalo 90-kh’, in *Sovremennyi islam: kultura i politika* (Moscow: IVRAN, 1994) p. 124; V. Rabiyeu, ‘After the Trial: Going Nowhere’, *Kommunist Tadzhikistana* (12 February 1987), p. 3, in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, Vol. 39, Issue 9 (1 April 1987), pp. 10–11.

95 Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 154; Conciliation Resources, ‘Profiles: Said Abdullo Nuri’.

96 *Domullo* is a title used for religious teachers.

97 *Mavlavi* is a title given to well-established Islamic scholars.

98 Nuri, ‘Hizbe, ki resha dar ormoni mardum dorad’, p. 153. More on Hindustoni below.

urgency to Nuri and his associates. On 20 April 1973, Nuri met with four senior scholars,<sup>99</sup> including Hindustoni, and was selected to lead an underground Islamic movement that later gained many members from Nuri's generation (as opposed to the four senior scholars who selected Nuri), including the IRP's first official leader, Muhammadsharif Himmatzoda, and deputy leader, Davlat Usmon.<sup>100</sup> For the first one or two years, Nuri's group operated without a name until one was agreed upon: Nahzati Javononi Islomii Tojikiston<sup>101</sup>—referred to by members as Nahzat ('revival') or Jamiyat ('society'). Nuri is clear on the goals of Nahzat:<sup>102</sup>

With the creation of our own organisation, we did not have any goals of anti-state activities; we only wanted to disseminate the beliefs of Islam amongst the youth. In essence, our organisation or movement in the beginning was a movement for Islamic social reforms, not a political movement. The main goal was to invite [those Muslims who had strayed] back to Islam, as well as the education of Muslim children.

Nuri's Nahzat had several departments: 1) proselytising (*davat*), 2) security (from KGB efforts to ascertain their activities),<sup>103</sup> 3) finances, and 4) education. Nuri argues that this structure borrows nothing that is foreign, which he uses to bolster his argument for the indigenous nature of Nahzat—an organisation that he stresses needed nothing and received no influences from outside local society.<sup>104</sup> The Islamists were few, they did not advocate changing the Soviet system and, generally, they kept a low profile. Kudryavtsev and Niyazi state that before the 1990s the underground Islamic activists in Tajikistan '[s]till retained a belief in the strength of the Soviet Union, within which the dream of an Islamic polity seemed absurd'.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, there were some exceptions. In 1978, a handful of them, led by Nuri, by this time a self-proclaimed spiritual leader of Gharmi settlers in the Vakhsh *raion*, held a rally in front of the Qurghonteppa CPT *obkom*; Nuri was arrested, but otherwise the authorities ignored the incident and no large-scale reprisals took place.<sup>106</sup> During the mid 1980s, Nuri

99 Muhammadjon Hindustoni, Ishoni Nematullo, Kholidi Abdusalom and Hoji Qalandar.

100 Nuri, 'Hizbe, ki resha dar ormoni mardum dorad', pp. 154–5. These later members include: *ustod* (professor) Muhammadsharif Himmatzoda, *Mavlatvi* Muhammadqosimi Rahim, Davlat Usmon, *ishon* Qiyomiddini Ghozi, Zubaydullohi Rozik, Mullah Muhammadsharifi *shahid*, Mullah Abdughaffori *shahid*, Mullah Haqnazari Sohbnazar, Mullah Ayomiddini Sattorzoda, Mullah Muhammadrasuli Salom, Mullah Abdullohi Khitobi *shahid*, Mullah Saididdini Rustam, Mullah Muhammadii Navid, *ishon* Mirzoyusuf, *ishon* Shamsiddinkhon and Mullah Ubaydulloh. Note: '*shahid*' (lit. 'martyr') indicates that they were killed.

101 Literally, 'Revival of the Islamic Youth of Tajikistan'.

102 Nuri, 'Hizbe, ki resha dar ormoni mardum dorad', pp. 155–6.

103 Nuri notes that members—concerned with potential KGB activities—generally did not take notes in their meetings. When they did, they wrote in code. See Nuri, 'Hizbe, ki resha dar ormoni mardum dorad', p. 157.

104 Nuri, 'Hizbe, ki resha dar ormoni mardum dorad', pp. 156–8.

105 Kudryavtsev and Niyazi, "'Politicheskii islam'", p. 112.

106 Safarali Kenjaev, *Tabadduloti Tojikiston*, Vol. I (Dushanbe: Fondi Kenjaev, 1993), p. 259.

was operating an underground Islamic school in Qurghonteppa.<sup>107</sup> His work did not go unnoticed. Soviet authorities warned Nuri to desist with his religious activities in 1983.<sup>108</sup> Khalid writes that Nuri, while not providing exact details of his plans for the form of the future state structure, began ‘arguing in public, usually at well-attended feasts marking life-cycle events, for the establishment of an Islamic state in Tajikistan’.<sup>109</sup>

One oft-mentioned factor in the activities of underground Islamists is the role played by the Soviet war in neighbouring Afghanistan. Of course, at the official level of the Islamic leadership there was vocal support for the war in Afghanistan.<sup>110</sup> *Qozikalon* Mirzo Abdullo Kalonzoda publicly condemned the mujahideen, accusing them of ‘burning mosques and killing innocent old people and children’.<sup>111</sup> But there was dissenting opinion away from the state-sanctioned Muslim leadership. Monica Whitlock writes of the effect of the Soviet–Afghan war on Nuri and his network:<sup>112</sup>

Nuri and his circle had been critical of the war in Afghanistan from the start. ‘It was an act of aggression against a fellow Muslim country. We said nothing in public, but of course we were dissidents,’ said one of the study group who met at Hindustani’s house. Hindustani had listened to all the news he could from Afghanistan, but made no comment except that to say that what was happening was absolutely dreadful. Some of his younger students were less reserved. Contemporaries remember that Nuri and others toured the villages, praying and giving homilies against the war in people’s houses. Nuri won an audience among families who had lost their sons for reasons they did not understand in a country only a couple of hours’ drive away.

In 1986, Nuri was finally arrested for producing and distributing religious materials.<sup>113</sup> The incident that precipitated this action was when Nuri, inspired by Gorbachev’s *glasnost*, sent a letter to the twenty-seventh CPSU congress expounding his ideas on freedom of religious belief. Moscow’s reaction was swift: on direct orders from the Kremlin, he was again put behind bars, and 24 of his comrades were sentenced to imprisonment for ‘anti-state propaganda’.<sup>114</sup>

107 Mullojonov, ‘The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period’, p. 230.

108 Conciliation Resources, ‘Profiles: Said Abdullo Nuri’.

109 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, p. 146. See also: Rabiye, ‘After the Trial’, pp. 10–11.

110 SADUM was itself involved in assisting the war effort. Its members even deployed to Afghanistan. See: Eren Tasar, ‘The Central Asian Muftiate in Occupied Afghanistan, 1979–87’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2011), pp. 213–26.

111 Thom Shanker, ‘Afghans Aren’t Defeated; They’re Being Remolded’, *Chicago Tribune* (3 August 1986), p. 4.

112 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 140.

113 Mullojonov, ‘The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period’, p. 230; Conciliation Resources, ‘Profiles: Said Abdullo Nuri’. Olivier Roy’s account (*The New Central Asia*, p. 154) of Nuri being arrested in 1987 for leading a pro-mujahideen demonstration is incorrect.

114 Kudriavtsev and Niyazi, ‘“Politicheskii islam”’, p. 112.

When Nuri was arrested in the Vakhsh district in the summer of 1986 and taken into custody, his friends and kin, apparently concerned that Nuri would disappear in custody, held a demonstration in Qurghonteppa City outside the police building, demanding Nuri's release.<sup>115</sup> Whitlock frames the incident as an accidental boost to Nuri's profile:<sup>116</sup>

The Afghan war was still going on, and a young teacher who was there said he saw the demonstration dove-tailing with other worries. 'Four coffins had just arrived from Afghanistan ... All dead were local boys. Maybe a hundred or a hundred and twenty people came, mainly relatives, and held a mourning meeting. Then a thousand more people came and wrote a petition, demanding that their sons be brought home from Afghanistan. Because Nuri was against the war, it looked like a demonstration for him, and he grew stronger then because people did not trust the authorities any more.

Nuri was sentenced for his subversive activities<sup>117</sup> to 18 months in prison camp, the only prominent religious teacher among his contemporaries to be given this punishment. Whitlock maintains that this incident gave Nuri a higher level of popularity than other young clerics. One supporter remarked: 'The Soviet Union was getting weaker, we could feel it. People wanted a mulla to follow, they looked around, and they found Nuri.'<sup>118</sup> Yet, results were mixed. In the wake of this mini-purge, the Islamist movement in Tajikistan experienced a change of leadership: 'domination gradually shifted to representatives of old influential religious families, mostly those of *ishons* (i.e., heads of clans of Sufi mystical brotherhoods, such as Qadariya and Naqshbandiya).'<sup>119</sup> The result was further moderation of the movement's platform on the one hand, and a perceptible surge in the number of followers and material resources of Islamists, on the other.<sup>120</sup>

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115 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 142–3; Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, p. 146; V. Rabiyeu, 'Into the Classroom with a Koran?' *Kommunist Tadjikistana* (31 January 1987), p. 2; and Rabiyeu, 'After the Trial', pp. 10–11. Whitlock refers to the protest, debatably, as 'the first unsanctioned demonstration of any size held in Tajikistan'.

116 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 142.

117 Nuri was put on trial for subversive activities; however, Whitlock provides a version whereby, for reasons unknown, every witness against him recanted. As a result, the only charge that stuck was possession of marijuana, which Whitlock calls a 'standard Soviet charge against subversives'. Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, pp. 142–3. Kudryavtsev and Niyazi provide a different version in their very brief mention of Nuri's arrest. They state that Nuri's sentence was reduced after 'an impressive protest rally of his supporters in front of [the] Qurghonteppa executive committee'. See: Kudryavtsev and Niyazi, "'Politicheskii islam'", p. 124, n. 12. In regards to the content of the 'subversive material', Kudryavtsev and Niyazi write that '[t]he "Anti-government Propaganda"', in fact, largely prevailed in their criticism of the arbitrariness of local authorities, the misconduct of the official clergy, and the senseless bloodshed in Afghanistan'. See: *ibid.*, p. 112.

118 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, pp. 142–3. See also: Mullojonov, 'The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period', p. 230.

119 Bushkov and Mikulskii, 'Obschestvenno-politicheskaia situatsiia v Tadjikistane', p. 27.

120 Bushkov and Mikulskii, 'Obschestvenno-politicheskaia situatsiia v Tadjikistane'.

Nuri, after his release from jail in 1988, was given a job by *Qozi* Turajonzoda as editor of *Minbar-i Islom*, the official publication of the *Qoziyot*.<sup>121</sup> He even went on *hajj* with the official Tajikistan delegation in 1990.<sup>122</sup> Around the time of his release, Nuri 'became aligned' with other politically active men who would go on to form the Tajik branch of the IRP.<sup>123</sup> Nuri soon became a high-ranking leader in the Tajik IRP, but still behind others such as the top leader, Muhammad Sharif Himmatzoda, and his deputy, Davlat Usmon.<sup>124</sup> Nuri would eventually eclipse these men and become the top leader once the IRP was exiled.

## Formal Beginning of the IRP of Tajikistan

The IRP of Tajikistan was officially established on 6 October 1990 as a branch of the Soviet Union-wide IRP, which was formed three months earlier in Russia.<sup>125</sup> Dudoignon speculates that in 1990 the Tajik IRP was given some support by the Kremlin leadership. The reason for this is that the Kremlin leadership saw the IRP as a force that could take support away from nationalists while also pushing against the recalcitrant segment of the Communist Party in Tajikistan that was giving the Kremlin problems.<sup>126</sup> Whatever the case at the union level, Tajik first secretary Mahkamov's government spared no efforts to suppress the Islamist movement. In November 1990, the CPT CC officially condemned the attempt to set up a branch of the union-wide IRP in Tajikistan. In December 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR outlawed the IRP and ordered the republic's KGB, Ministry of Interior and the Prosecutor's Office to prevent any IRP activities. Even before this series of events, a media campaign was launched to portray Tajik Islamists as terrorists trained in Afghanistan and Pakistan,<sup>127</sup> or, alternatively, in Saudi Arabia and Iran with CIA money, who desired to 'found an exclusively Islamic society through physical elimination of ideological

121 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 143; Conciliation Resources, 'Profiles: Said Abdullo Nuri'. Whitlock doesn't portray Turajonzoda and Nuri as well acquainted with each other. She notes that Turajonzoda first met Nuri in 1983 or 1984 when Turajonzoda was briefly a student of Hindustani.

122 Roy, 'The Impact of the Afghan War in Soviet Central Asia', p. 344.

123 Conciliation Resources, 'Profiles: Said Abdullo Nuri'.

124 Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 155.

125 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 139–41; Saodat Olimova and Muzaffar Olimov, 'The Islamic Renaissance Party', in *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process*, eds Kamoludin Abdullaev and Catharine Barnes (London: Conciliation Resources, 2001); Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, p. 147. The leader of the IRP of Tajikistan at the time of its founding was Muhammad Sharif Himmatzoda, with Nuri one of its 'important' leaders. See: Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 139–41. The conference at which the Tajik IRP was established was held in the Dushanbe outskirts, in Chortut. See: Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', p. 281.

126 Dudoignon, 'Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia', pp. 15–16.

127 *Komsomolets Tadjikistana*, 25 February 1990.

opponents and non-believers, and general genocide'.<sup>128</sup> The IRP was even accused of organising the riots in Dushanbe in February 1990 on behalf of 'the Wahhabis and other fundamentalist Islamic forces from abroad'.<sup>129</sup>

Mahkamov's government refused to enter into a dialogue with Tajik Islamists, but at the same time it failed to follow the hard line of Uzbekistan's leader, Isom Karimov, who clamped down on the nascent IRP of Uzbekistan in the summer of 1990, arresting some 400 delegates of its first conference.<sup>130</sup> The Tajik government confined itself to half-measures, such as imposing fines on Islamist activists; eventually, not a single person was tried in the republic for defying the anti-IRP legislation. Lacking the political will for either compromise or drastic action, the authorities tried to weaken the Islamist movement by wooing the official Muslim establishment. On 8 December 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan passed a law 'On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations', which resolutely broke with the communist tradition of atheism, allowed religious organisations and individuals to take part in political life, provided for the re-creation of the institution of *vaqf* and permitted religious education for children over seven years of age.<sup>131</sup> The ban on the IRP would eventually be temporarily lifted in September 1991 during the brief administration of interim president Qadriddin Aslonov, before being reinstated when Aslonov stepped down. Legal recognition finally came at the end of 1991.<sup>132</sup> On 26 October 1991, the IRP of Tajikistan held its first congress in a former Communist Party centre, with 657 delegates, 310 guests and 50 journalists attending. The congress, which was opened by Dushanbe mayor, Maqsud Ikromov, elected Muhammad Sharif Himmatzoda as leader and Davlat Usmon as the first deputy leader.<sup>133</sup>

The Tajikistan branch of the IRP soon broke relations with the wider IRP. Not only was the existence of an official clergy an obstacle to the Soviet-wide IRP, the nationalist cleavages within the organisation hurt coordination, while the ambitions of the overall leadership conflicted with those of the Tajik IRP. The IRP's federal leadership, which had supported the continuation of the Soviet Union, endorsed the communist candidate Rahmon Nabiev in October 1991 for the upcoming elections while condemning the Tajik IRP for allying with nationalists, whom the Tajik IRP had earlier criticised. This ended relations

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128 *Tojikistoni Soveti*, 20 November 1990.

129 *Pravda*, 16 May 1991.

130 Bess Brown, 'The Islamic Renaissance Party in Central Asia', *Radio Liberty Report on the USSR*, 10 May 1990, p. 14.

131 *Novye zakony Respubliki Tadzhikistan. Sbornik. (Chast' II)* (Dushanbe: Kontrakt, 1991), pp. 26–31.

132 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 140, citing *Izvestia*, 22 November 1990. Kilavuz mentions the alleged IRP involvement in the February 1990 riots as a pretext for banning the organisation. See *ibid.*, p. 145. On the banning and reinstatement of the IRP in the second half of 1991, see *ibid.*, pp. 145, 148.

133 Kudryavtsev and Niyazi, "Politicheskii islam", p. 117. Sayid Ibrahim Hadoev was elected as second deputy leader.

between the Tajik IRP and the federal organisation.<sup>134</sup> By mid to late 1992, the IRP leadership was claiming a membership of 30 000, making it the second 'strongest' in terms of numbers behind only the Communist Party.<sup>135</sup>

## IRP Influences and Interactions: Muhammadjon Hindustoni

Muhammadjon Rustamov (1892–1989), better known as 'Hindustoni' for his time spent in India (*Hinduston* in Tajik), studied Islam near his place of birth in Kokand (now in Uzbekistan) and then in Bukhara. During the Bolshevik revolution he went to Afghanistan and studied in Mazar-i Sharif before returning to Bukhara with his Afghan teacher. He soon accompanied his teacher, Muhammad Ghawth (also 'Ghaus'), to the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad where Ghawth was appointed as the *Qozi*. From Jalalabad, Hindustoni went to India, where he studied at the Usmania *madrasa* in Ajmer for eight years, completing his studies. He returned home and settled in Kokand in 1929. During the anti-religious communist attacks of the 1930s, Hindustoni served two jail terms, including three years in Siberia. In 1940 he took up employment in a Kokand factory before being drafted into the military in 1943. He was badly wounded on the eastern front in Belarus and spent the next three years in hospital. After a year at home he moved to Dushanbe where SADUM officials eventually appointed him *imam-khotib* of a local mosque. After almost a year in Tajikistan, he was denounced and served more than four years in prison. In 1953, after Stalin's death, Hindustoni was rehabilitated and appointed to a post in Tajikistan's Academy of Sciences, where he spent most of his time translating Arabic texts and teaching Urdu. From the early 1960s Hindustoni developed a full Islamic curriculum that he taught in secret.<sup>136</sup>

134 Roy, *The New Central Asia*, pp. 155–6; Dudoignon, 'Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan, 1989–1993', p. 65; Dudoignon, 'Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia', p. 16. As an example of nationalist cleavages in the federal IRP, Roy notes that the 'Moscow IRP was also split, between Tatars and Caucasians: the former wanted to impose Tatar as the preaching language in Moscow mosques, while the latter wanted to keep Russian. In fact, the IRP was imploding on all sides, along ethnic lines of cleavage.' See: Roy, *The New Central Asia*, pp. 155–6. In regards to the IRP's alliance with other opposition parties, Roy writes that secularists and even atheists joined an alliance with the Islamists. See: Roy, 'Is the Conflict in Tajikistan a Model for Conflicts throughout Central Asia', p. 135.

135 Henry Dunant Centre, 'Humanitarian Engagement with Armed Groups: The Central Asian Islamic Opposition Movements, *Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue* [Geneva] (2003), pp. 12–13.

136 Bakhtiyar Babadjanov and Muzaffar Kamilov, 'Muhammadjan Hindustani (1892–1989) and the Beginning of the "Great Schism" among the Muslims of Uzbekistan', in *Islam in Politics in Russian and Central Asia (Early Eighteenth to Late Twentieth Centuries)*, eds Stephane A. Dudoignon and Komatsu Hisao (London: Kegan Paul, 2001), pp. 197–200. The authors mistakenly place the Usmania *madrasa* in Kashmir. Rather, it is in Rajasthan. See: Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, pp. 34–5, 146. For a longer discussion of Hindustoni's background, see: Vitaly V. Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) pp. 44–9.

Hindustoni went on to become a teacher of both Nuri and Himmatzoda. Hindustoni's 'clandestine' *madrasa* in Dushanbe was closed by the KGB in 1973, but students and teachers 'came out of it safely, thanks to family connections and corruption'.<sup>137</sup> Adeb Khalid summarises Hindustoni's beliefs:<sup>138</sup>

In his teaching and his writing, he took consistently conservative positions rooted in the local Hanafi tradition. He had little use for modernist reform ... Two aspects of his conservatism are worth noting: he defended local customs and traditions against attacks from all directions, and he took a resolutely quietist stance on questions of politics. Soviet rule was a test for believers, in which success lay in reliance on God (*tavakkul*) and patience (*sabr*) rather than in political or military struggle.

Khalid goes on to describe how some of Hindustoni's students rebelled against him and his 'conservatism and his quietism' in particular.<sup>139</sup> Before the disagreements expanded into a larger dispute about broader issues within the 'milieu of underground Islamic learning (hujra)',<sup>140</sup> the hostilities started with Hindustoni's students adopting Hanbali rituals as opposed to the dominant Hanafi forms practised in Central Asia. The students' view was that the Hanbali school was more closely associated with Arab countries and therefore purer and 'uncontaminated by local traditions'.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, Hindustoni did not approve of the way some of his former students were mixing religion and politics. Whitlock hints that it was his long view of human ambitions and failings that made him conservative on this issue.<sup>142</sup> Hindustoni felt that some of his former students in the Ferghana Valley were advocating a confrontation with the Soviet state that would be disastrous for Muslims, especially considering the recent gains in freedoms they had made. The arguments at the time (mid 1970s to mid 1980s) became quite heated, as can be seen in excerpts—both defensive<sup>143</sup>

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137 Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 154.

138 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, pp. 113–14.

139 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, p. 145.

140 Khalid makes clear that these disputes were confined to a narrow social group: 'The mere fact that such a dispute could take place is testimony to the vitality of underground Islam, although given the numbers involved, this rebellion was very much a storm in a teapot at the time.' See: Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, pp. 144–5.

141 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, pp. 144–5. See also: Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia*, p. 54.

142 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 146.

143 For example: 'It is a shame that you do not know [my] biography; if you knew, you would be more discriminating and just. In my life, I have been deprived of my freedom three times on the charge that I was inciting the people against the Soviet government. The first time I was sentenced to one year in prison, the second time to three years, and the third time—to 25 years. I suffered such deprivations for this anti-government activity! And yet you call on me to take up the jihad? You admonish me, as if I were lost in ignorance.' See: Muhammadjan Hindustani, 'Answers to Those Who are Introducing Inadmissible Innovations into Religion', Appendix in Babadjanov and Kamilov, 'Muhammadjan Hindustani (1892–1989) and the Beginning of the "Great Schism" among the Muslims of Uzbekistan', pp. 210–18.

and offensive<sup>144</sup> in nature—from Hindustoni's open reply to those who accused him of apostasy and of being beholden to an atheist state. Nor did Hindustoni approve of the theological views of his former students.<sup>145</sup> Khalid writes:<sup>146</sup>

The students called themselves the *mujaddidiya*, the renovators, while calling their opponents *mushriklar*, polytheists. Hindustoni, for his part, argued that local customs were based on a long tradition of Hanafi jurisprudence, which in itself was based on the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet, and that by forswearing accepted Hanafi dogma, his critics had placed themselves beyond the bounds of the Sunni community of Central Asia and had become 'Wahhabis.' Hindustoni's use of this term owed a lot to his time in India, where such debates over ritual purity were common and where opponents of the purists had long dubbed them Wahhabis. Thus, the term Wahhabi entered religious debate in Central Asia, from where it was to spread throughout the lands of the former Soviet Union.

## Wahhabism

Mohammad Abd al-Wahhab, who lived during the eighteenth century in Najd Province of Arabia, preached a 'strictly puritanical doctrine', gaining momentum when he made an alliance with what was to become the Saudi royal lineage.<sup>147</sup> Khalid stresses that the term 'Wahhabism' was used mostly as a 'polemic foil in sectarian arguments among Muslims', including in British India, as both colonial authorities and locals used the label 'Wahhabism' to denounce reformists and 'troublesome Muslim opponents'.<sup>148</sup> Accusations of Wahhabism were also common in the late Soviet era. Surprisingly, some analysts in the West took these agitprop invectives in good faith and enthusiastically announced to the world that 'in some areas of Central Asia, particularly but not exclusively in central and southern Tajikistan, there has also been a resurgence of Wahhabism'.<sup>149</sup> The question of how exactly the 'puritanism and militancy

144 Later in the same open letter: 'What are you afraid of? You are like a dog, barking from behind a fence. Close your eyes and consider your evil inclinations. All the faults and mistakes you accuse me of actually belong to you! Alright, then! If you are a man, go into the street and call people to make holy war! But, in any case, such boldness is not characteristic of you, and you are not capable of such action.' See: Hindustani, 'Answers to Those Who are Introducing Inadmissible Innovations into Religion'.

145 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, p. 145; Babadjanov and Kamilov, 'Muhammadjan Hindustani (1892–1989) and the Beginning of the "Great Schism" among the Muslims of Uzbekistan', pp. 200–1.

146 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, p. 145. See also: Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia*, p. 51.

147 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, p. 46.

148 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, p. 46.

149 Yaacov Ro'i, 'The Islamic Influence on Nationalism in Soviet Central Asia', *Problems of Communism*, No. 4 (July–August 1990), p. 52.

of the Wahhabis'<sup>150</sup> might have become rooted amongst a population practising folk Islam characterised by broad humanism, tolerance and a liberal approach to other religions obviously never crossed their minds. For their part, Tajik academics have convincingly shown that the teachings of Mohammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, as well as radical doctrines of other Islamists such as Sayyid Qutb, are inherently alien to the majority of the eponymous population of Tajikistan.<sup>151</sup>

Khalid further notes that in the former Soviet Union 'Wahhabism' has 'come into indiscriminate use to denote any and all expressions of nontraditional Islam'.<sup>152</sup> In Tajikistan, the use of the term 'Wahhabi' as a pejorative for the Islamist opposition was used even by the mullahs who supported the government. They juxtaposed the alleged Wahhabism of Saudi origin with a local Sufi-influenced 'national and traditional Islam';<sup>153</sup> however, a few scholars (for example, Dudoignon and Matveeva) and some local analysts have used the term as well—in a somewhat more neutral manner.<sup>154</sup> For an example of a more systematic treatment, Niyazi acknowledges that a 'very tiny section' of the religious community in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan started to refer to themselves as Wahhabis, in particular after leaders of these groups returned from the *hajj* in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He completely rejects, however, any possibility of Wahhabi influences amongst the Gharmi Tajiks (that is, from whom the IRP draws most of its support). He blames a 1990 article written in Tajikistan by the head of the Committee for Religious Affairs for popularising 'Wahhabi' as a term of abuse locally.<sup>155</sup> Niyazi also notes the use of the slang term '*Vovchik*' (diminutive for the name Vladimir, but here used for 'Wahhabi') as an epithet against the 'Islamic opposition'.<sup>156</sup> While Niyazi's article cited above is mainly a tract in praise of Naqshbandi Sufism, he cites the survival of pre-Islamic nature

150 An expression coined by Rafiq Zakaria in his book *The Struggle within Islam: The Conflict between Religion and Politics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 160.

151 M. Hazrati and I. Saidiyon, *Islam: raviya, mazhab va firqahoi on* (Dushanbe: Oryono, 1992), pp. 67–70.

152 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, pp. 46–7.

153 Roy, 'Is the Conflict in Tajikistan a Model for Conflicts throughout Central Asia', pp. 139–40.

154 For example, Dudoignon cites the 'wahhabite origins' of the IRP (Dudoignon, 'Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan, 1989–1993', pp. 66–7), while Matveeva notes the claims of local analysts that foreign Wahhabi groups had been 'penetrating' Tajikistan—especially amongst Gharmis in Qurghonteppa and in the Ferghana Valley—as early as 16 years before the civil war. The local analysts (Ahad Mahmoudov and Faredun Hodizoda) also mention the influence of foreign Islamists through Tajiks participating in the *hajj* and Islamic education abroad, as well as through audio recordings and literature. Matveeva, 'The Perils of Emerging Statehood', p. 9.

155 Aziz Niyazi, 'Islam and Tajikistan's Human and Ecological Crisis', in *Civil Society in Central Asia*, eds M. Holt Ruffin and Daniel Clarke Waugh (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), p. 195, n. 7. The article in question is: Sunnatullo Ibragimzoda, *Todzhikistoni Soveti*, 11 December 1990.

156 Niyazi, 'Islam and Tajikistan's Human and Ecological Crisis', p. 195, n. 7. For more recent uses of 'Wahhabi' in the discourse of academia and in the media of Russia and the West—particularly of the past 15 years—see: Alexander Knysh, 'A Clear and Present Danger: "Wahhabism" as a Rhetorical Foil', *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2004).

worship and elements of Zoroastrianism (both abhorrent to ‘Wahhabis’) in Gharm to refute the idea that Wahhabi Islam has made inroads here, rather than stressing the presence of Sufi Islam in the region.<sup>157</sup>

The debate over Wahhabism in Tajikistan during the late Soviet era suffers from lack of a clear definition. Neither Dudoignon nor Matveeva makes an effort to define Wahhabism for the brief use in their articles cited above. A more well-defined discussion of Wahhabism is found in the work of Bakhtiyar Babadjanov and Muzaffar Kamilov, which focuses on Hindustoni’s defence of traditional Hanafi doctrine and his arguments with certain reformist *ulama* in the Ferghana Valley (particularly in Kokand). They do note that Abd al-Wahhab’s work was available—but very rarely acquired—in Central Asia as early as 1979, whether acquired on *hajj* or directly from the SADUM libraries (which held Arabic works by Wahhabi writers). Despite the similarities between the reforms that many of the *mujaddidiya ulama* were asking for and Wahhabi doctrine, they find the use of the label ‘Wahhabi’ to be inaccurate.<sup>158</sup>

## Other ‘Foreign’ Islamic Influences

Dudoignon notes Iranian influences in the IRP, but not religious ones. Obviously, the Shia Islamist ideology of the Iranian rulers would have limited applicability to a Sunni party like the IRP;<sup>159</sup> but the Islamic revolution in Iran did provide a demonstration effect. Abdullo Nuri explained in 1994:<sup>160</sup>

The revolution in Afghanistan was an impetus to our movement. But the basis of our movement was the victory of Islamic revolution in Iran in which all the forces in the [Islamic] movement and all the Muslims

157 Niyazi, ‘Islam and Tajikistan’s Human and Ecological Crisis’, esp. pp. 183, 195, n. 7. Elsewhere, Niyazi writes: ‘It is characteristic that Tajik fundamentalism is also tolerant of various manifestations of so-called popular Islam such as the worship of local saints or the worship of fire inherited from Zoroastrianism.’ See: Niyazi, ‘The Year of Tumult’, p. 280.

158 Babadjanov and Kamilov, ‘Muhammadjan Hindustani (1892–1989) and the Beginning of the “Great Schism” among the Muslims of Uzbekistan’, esp. pp. 200–6. Unfortunately, Babadjanov and Kamilov’s work does not include an analysis of those who would go on to form the core of the IRP in Tajikistan.

159 Dudoignon maintains, however, that there were some areas in which the IRP was influenced by Iran. He cites ‘Khomeynist points of reference’ such as Persian nationalism and anti-Western sentiments in the IRP’s rhetoric. Furthermore, according to Dudoignon, this occurred when ‘the IRP attempted to correct its internationalist “image” and dissociate itself from the Soviet chaos, seeking an alliance with the Islamic Republic [of Iran] in order to limit the influence of the *qazi kalan* Turajanzada, the favoured client of the Saudis.’ Dudoignon does not elaborate on the Saudi relationship. See: Dudoignon, ‘Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan’, pp. 66–7.

160 Pinar Akcali, ‘Islam and Ethnicity in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Renaissance Party’, *Mediterranean Quarterly* (Winter 1998), p. 148, citing *FBIS-SOV* (15 March 1994), p. 40. Speeches by Ayatollah Khomeini did circulate in the late 1980s in southern Tajikistan. See: A. Alimov, ‘Business in Opium’, *Kommunist Tadjikistana* (13 May 1988), *SWB SU*, 0212 (25 July 1988), B/1.

trusted. After the Islamic revolution in Iran, these forces were convinced that when Islam was able to prevail in Iran, the same could happen in other countries, too. This gave the people self-confidence.

Foreign Sunni ideological influences would seem to be more likely sources. The Deobandi school of Islam that began in India gets an occasional mention as an influence on Islam in Tajikistan. Niyazi writes that some mullahs travelled to the Ferghana Valley and to Termez in Uzbekistan to visit teachers. In Termez some *sayids* kept Deobandi teachings alive during the Soviet era;<sup>161</sup> however, the only possible link between Deobandism and the IRP is the very weak connection between IRP leaders Himmatzoda and Nuri on one hand, and their one-time teacher Hindustoni on the other. Hindustoni's students and Turajonzoda claim that Hindustoni studied at Deoband during his time in India—even though Hindustoni makes no mention of Deoband.<sup>162</sup> Another South Asian influence may be the writings of Abu Ala Maududi—a Pakistani Islamist writer and founder of Jamaat-e-Islami—which circulated in the network that was to become the IRP.<sup>163</sup>

Ideological influences from the Muslim Brotherhood seem somewhat more likely. Like Wahhabi works, some Muslim Brotherhood writings were circulating in secret as early as 1979 in the Ferghana Valley.<sup>164</sup> Kudryavtsev and Niyazi note that among the literature seized from Nuri's underground circle in 1985–87 were works by Muslim Brotherhood leaders Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Qutb.<sup>165</sup> Nuri was clearly familiar with the work of at least one Muslim Brotherhood figure, which was demonstrated when he quoted from and referred to the group's founder, Hassan al-Banna, in reverential terms at a 2003 Islamic conference in Iran.<sup>166</sup> Both Roy and Olimova stress the influence of the writings of the Muslim Brotherhood in the ideology of the IRP. Roy explicitly

161 Niyazi, 'Islam and Tajikistan's Human and Ecological Crisis', p. 185.

162 According to Whitlock, Hindustani's students and others claim that Hindustani studied in Deoband; however, Hindustani makes no mention of Deoband and instead mentions the Usmania *madrasa* in Ajmer, Rajasthan. Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, pp. 34–5, 146; Turajonzoda, 'Religion', p. 268. The Usmania *madrasa* is of the Chisti Sufi order. See their web site: <<http://ajmersharifdargah.com/AJMER-sharif.html>> See also: Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, p. 113.

163 Olimova, 'Opposition in Tajikistan', p. 248; Kudryavtsev and Niyazi, "'Politicheskii islam'", p. 112. See also: Alimov, 'Business in Opium'.

164 Babadjanov and Kamilov, 'Muhammadjan Hindustani (1892–1989) and the Beginning of the "Great Schism" among the Muslims of Uzbekistan', p. 202, n. 13. An example given is Sayyid Qutb's *Al-Aqida*. The authors note that Hindustani authored a satirical work that mocked 'one of the sources of inspiration of the Muslim Brotherhood'. *Ibid.*, p. 205. See also: Alimov, 'Business in Opium'.

165 Kudryavtsev and Niyazi, "'Politicheskii islam'", p. 112. Similarly, Alexei Malashenko notes that writings by Muslim Brotherhood author Qutb and al-Banna were popular in 'Koranic clubs and schools' among Soviet Muslims circa 1990. See: Malashenko, 'Islam and Politics in the Southern Zone of the Former USSR', pp. 116–17. See also: Alimov, 'Business in Opium'.

166 Sayid Abdullohi Nuri, 'Biyoed, Muvaqqati Ikhtilofro Kanor Biguzorem', Conference speech in Iran (22–23 December 2003), in *Mujaddidi Asr: bakhshida ba 60-umin solgardi zodruzi ustod Sayid Abdullohi Nuri (r)*, ed. Qiyomiddin Sattori (Dushanbe: Devashtich, 2007), p. 114. The terms Nuri uses are '*hazrati ustod*' (roughly: 'most venerable scholar') and '*(r)*' for 'Rahmatullah Alaih' (added to names of respected religious figures).

classifies the ideology of the IRP and of Nuri and Himmatzoda in particular as that of the Muslim Brotherhood, while Olimova instead just notes the influence of Muslim Brotherhood writings in the IRP's platform.<sup>167</sup>

## Academia and the Intelligentsia

When the All-Union IRP was formed in July 1990 in Astrakhan, it was heavily influenced by Islamist intellectuals rather than by the *ulama*.<sup>168</sup> Concerning the Tajikistan branch of the IRP and the movement for political Islam in general, Mullojonov notes the support from and membership of Tajikistan's 'university intellectuals'.<sup>169</sup> Niyazi notes that academics often had better levels of knowledge of Arabic and Islamic sources and thought than did mullahs and *ishons*.<sup>170</sup> Niyazi himself, while not explicitly endorsing the IRP in his publications, actually provides a good example of an intellectual who favourably views the role of Islam in society. He writes:<sup>171</sup>

The ideals of an Islamic state concerning justice, equality, and brotherhood in our opinion are completely compatible with the commonly accepted contemporary understanding of civil society ... The idea of a state ruled by law took root in the East on the basis of the universally accepted sharia law, which in theory eliminated estate, racial, and class privileges for the observers of the law, thus making the rights of the rank-and-file Muslim and the ruler equal.

Niyazi goes on to note that the 'Islamic opposition' did become radicalised right before the outbreak of conflict, but that this was as a response to the government's counter-opposition tactics. He stresses that '[b]efore the start of the bloodshed, supporters of "pure Islam" in Tajikistan were a wholly moderate movement'.<sup>172</sup>

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167 Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 154; Roy, 'Is the Conflict in Tajikistan a Model for Conflicts throughout Central Asia', p. 141; Olimova, 'Opposition in Tajikistan', p. 248. Roy cites an interview with Nuri in the Tajik journal *Sukhan* (No. 18, 12 July 1991) wherein Nuri rejects the separation of politics and religion, endorses 'Islamic economy' versus communism and capitalism, 'discreetly criticizes' the official *ulama* and traditionalist mullahs and endorses the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front. The Muslim Brotherhood writers—whose works circulated amongst the network that would become the IRP—listed by Roy and Olimova are Sayyid and Muhammad Qutb and Sayyid Hawa.

168 Dudoignon, 'Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan, 1989–1993', pp. 63–4.

169 Mullojonov, 'The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period', pp. 249–50.

170 Niyazi, 'Islam and Tajikistan's Human and Ecological Crisis', p. 185.

171 Niyazi, 'Islam and Tajikistan's Human and Ecological Crisis', p. 193.

172 Niyazi, 'Islam and Tajikistan's Human and Ecological Crisis', p. 190.

## Sufism

Mavlon Makhamov notes the prominent role that the Naqshbandi and Qadiri Sufi Muslim orders played during the pre-Soviet era in the religious life of the people living in the areas of what is now Tajikistan. It is his opinion, however, that the Soviet government destroyed these orders during the 1920s and 1930s—evidenced by the ‘overwhelming majority’ of Muslims in Tajikistan who are ignorant of these Sufi orders.<sup>173</sup> Makhamov does stress that while the orders—particularly the leading theologians and Sufi leaders who had an authoritative understanding of Sufism—may have been ‘destroyed’, Sufi *pirs* continued their work in a leaderless fashion.<sup>174</sup>

[T]he institution of *pir* (spiritual and religious mentors), though somewhat transformed, has survived in Tajikistan, particularly in the rural areas. *Pirs* were not officially registered, but they directed all ceremonial rites in the rural area. *Pirs* are regarded with greater reverence than *ulama*, representing official Islam. Some *pirs* have disciples and adherents (*murids*), and this fact is not concealed. They function openly, though not very actively.

The role of Naqshbandi Sufism in society as protectors of the powerless against rapacious rulers is appraised glowingly by Niyazi: ‘In spring 1992, as government authorities continued to ignore the interests of a desperate peasantry, authoritative *ishans* from the southeast of the country rose to their defense. The *naqshbandi* tradition of intervention on behalf of land-workers and craftsmen was reborn.’<sup>175</sup> The Sufi notables of Tajikistan, however, also rose to the defence of other interests. The result was that Sufi *pirs*, *ishans* and their *murids* supported various factions in the conflict,<sup>176</sup> overwhelmingly on the basis of regional affiliation.

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173 Makhamov, ‘Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan after 1985’, p. 203. A similar view on Sufi practices is conveyed by Oumar Arabov: ‘If we ask passers by in the streets of Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, what is Sufism, not many of them will be able to answer, and yet they sometimes carry out Sufi rituals. In other words, Sufism exists but is not easily discernible by people.’ See: Oumar Arabov, ‘A Note on Sufism in Tajikistan: What Does it Look Like?’ *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (2004), p. 345.

174 Makhamov, ‘Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan after 1985’, p. 203.

175 Niyazi, ‘Islam and Tajikistan’s Human and Ecological Crisis’, pp. 189–90.

176 Kamoludin Abdullaev and Shahram Akbarzadeh, *Historical Dictionary of Tajikistan*, 2nd edn (Lanham, Md: The Scarecrow Press, 2001), pp. 173–4; Arabov, ‘A Note on Sufism in Tajikistan’, p. 347. This view is reinforced by Roy, who argues that ‘Sufi affiliations do not necessarily correspond to political affiliations’. See: Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 149.

## Afghanistan

While it is true that following the revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the trickle of Islamist ideas coming to Tajikistan from abroad increased, in 1984 Alexander Bennigsen urged caution in assessing their impact.<sup>177</sup> Even after the withdrawal of Soviet troops in February 1989, Afghan *mujahideen* failed to establish permanent channels of communication with their ‘oppressed brethren’ in the north (despite earlier fanciful claims).<sup>178</sup> As one of the Jamaat-e-Islami leaders in Peshawar complained in February 1990, ‘there are absolutely no contacts between field commanders of the Resistance in the North of Afghanistan and citizens of Tajikistan’.<sup>179</sup> It seems, however, that Islamist propaganda from Afghanistan was doomed to fail because of the lack of any positive demonstration effect—in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when some Soviet Tajiks were finally allowed to visit their relatives in Afghanistan, they were not impressed by its social progress achieved under Islam.<sup>180</sup> In regards to the Soviet–Afghan war, the loyalty of Soviet Muslims was put to the test in Afghanistan, and, on average, Central Asian soldiers in the Red Army (including Tajiks) showed the same level of loyalty as any non-Muslims in the ranks.<sup>181</sup>

## IRP Platform

The Soviet Union-wide federal IRP was formed in July 1990 in Astrakhan, Russia. The ideology of this organisation was based on adherence to the statutes of the Koran and *Sunna*. The IRP, as spelled out in its charter, saw itself up against not just certain non-Muslim forces, but also a Muslim community that was acting against ‘universal morality and the *sharia*’, and which was ‘divided, ignorant, downtrodden, and infected with the nationalist and democratic ideas’.<sup>182</sup> The attack on ‘democratic ideas’ is likely a reference to the

177 Alexandre Bennigsen, ‘Mullahs, Mujahidin and Soviet Muslims’, *Problems of Communism*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 6 (November–December 1984), p. 44.

178 For example, one French journalist with good connections to the *mujahideen* was told that in Tajikistan there were ‘2,500 card-carrying Jamaat-e-Islam members’. See: Edward Girardet, ‘Afghan Resistance: Familiar Pattern?’ *Christian Science Monitor* (26 July 1992), p. 1.

179 *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 15 February 1991. As for another *mujahideen* group (Hizb-i Islami ‘Hekmatyar’), Mavlon Makhamov claims that ‘[l]eaders of official Islam visited Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Pakistan, where they met in May 1990 Gulbeddin Hekmatyar, with whom they made an arrangement of cooperation and mutual aid’. See: Makhamov, ‘Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan after 1985’, pp. 200–1.

180 As an example, a resident of the Tajik city of Panj reminisced on his stay in Afghanistan: ‘I went to visit my brother, whom I hadn’t seen for 30 years. My God, how poorly they live, it is pitiful to look at them.’ See: *Grazhdanskije dvizheniia v Tadzhikistane*, p. 112.

181 Christian Bleuer, ‘Muslim Soldiers in Non-Muslim Militaries at War in Muslim Lands: The Soviet, American and Indian Experience’, *The Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (2012).

182 Igor Ermakov and Dmitrii Mikulskii, ‘Islamskaia Partia Vozrozhdeniia’, in *Islam v Rossii i Srednei Azii* (Moscow: Lotos, 1993), pp. 181–5.

'Western-style' democrats of the Soviet Union/Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) rather than to elections, as the IRP advocated for its goals to be achieved through democratic means. In its publications, the IRP attacked the official Muslim clergy, the leadership of the Muslim republics of the CIS, the 'national-democratic movements' in those republics, the use of Islam by those movements, the history of Russian and Soviet oppression of Muslims, and the 'state of ignorance, superstition, disunity and individualism prevailing among ordinary Muslims'.<sup>183</sup>

Tajik delegates participated actively in the first conference of the Islamic Revival Party of the USSR (IRPU), held in Astrakhan on 9 June 1990, and a close associate of Sayid Abdullo Nuri, Davlat Usmon, was elected chairman of the mandate commission of the newly established party and a member of its supreme body: the Council of *Ulama*. Shortly afterwards, the IRPU program was published in the underground bulletin of Tajik Islamists. Its main tenets could be summarised as follows:<sup>184</sup>

- the IRPU is a socio-political organisation which operates on lofty Islamic principles;
- the party consists of honest Muslims who fight for a revived and pure Islam by spreading the truth of the Quran and Sunna amongst the people;
- the party operates on a constitutional basis, condemns terrorism and reactionary theory and praxis, and respects all international treaties and agreements if they are not in violation of Islamic norms;
- the party respects human rights and upholds legal equality between Muslims and non-Muslims;
- the party demands cessation of state-sponsored atheistic propaganda, and contrives to establish Islamic educational centres, train qualified personnel, organise lectures, discussions and other events to spread the knowledge of Islam;
- the party strives to protect the honour and dignity of women, appreciates their active role in society and helps them to realise themselves fully in all capacities;
- the party favours modern economic development based on Islamic principles of pluralism; it supports environmental protection and health programs, and strong and durable families.

The IRPU advocated a federation of Muslim states that would include the Muslim-dominated areas of the CIS and some neighbouring Muslim regions. This federation would have elected Muslim leaders in a system that would

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183 Ermakov and Mikulskii, 'Islamskaia Partiiia Vozrozhdeniia', p. 185.

184 *Hidoyat*, No. 5 (July 1990), p. 5.

implement a new era of the 'Righteous Caliphs'.<sup>185</sup> The IRPU provided some specific examples of what the new political and social order would entail. These included *zakat* (Islamic tax) and *sadaqa* (Islamic charity), the introduction of *shari'a*-compliant banking, as well as *dhimmi* status<sup>186</sup> for Christians and Jews,<sup>187</sup> despite their earlier declaration of legal equality. Dudoignon notes that the IRPU was 'classically neo-fundamentalist' in its tenets such as proselytising, resisting the official clergy and advocating the Islamic taxes of *zakat* and *sadaqa*; however, he also notes the organisation's attempt to reassure the broader public of its moderate character through the use of 'fairly well-known' rhetoric (for example, Islam is 'humanist', 'pacifist' and 'progressive').<sup>188</sup>

The IRPU was registered in Moscow, but when its Tajik members applied for official recognition of the republican IRP, the authorities in Dushanbe turned them down. Nevertheless, the union-wide IRP illegally convened a regional conference organised by Davlat Usmon in the village of Chortut near Dushanbe in October 1990.<sup>189</sup> For the Tajikistan branch of the IRP in 1990 there was little coherence in organisation, platform and public message.<sup>190</sup> The message at the top levels of the party, however, was somewhat clearer. And once again, the IRP's *publicly* enunciated political agenda appeared to be rather moderate; according to Davlat Usmon, the party did not have the aim of establishing an Islamic state even in the remote future.<sup>191</sup>

What the early Tajik IRP lacked in organisation, it compensated for in enthusiasm. Niyazi, writing in late 1990,<sup>192</sup> assesses the IRP's motivations in a very favourable manner:<sup>193</sup>

Now [IRP] fundamentalist activities are primarily aimed at strengthening religion. These people are united in their desire to free religious life from ubiquitous state supervision and to restore society's morals in accordance with Islamic ethics contained in the *fikh*. They want to restore and build new mosques, promote religious education, and urge Moslems to fulfill properly the prescribed rites and ceremonies. Many

185 That is, the *Rashidun*: the first four caliphs after the death of the prophet Muhammad.

186 This entails fewer rights for, and a special tax on, non-Muslims.

187 Ermakov and Mikulskii, 'Islamskaia Partiiia Vozrozhdeniia', pp. 190–1.

188 Dudoignon, 'Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan', pp. 63–4.

189 *Komsomolets Tadzhikistana*, 21 November 1990; Kudryavtsev and Niyazi, "'Politicheskii islam'", p. 115.

190 Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', pp. 281–2.

191 The reason for this, according to Usmon, is that 'it is impossible even in principle. We operate within the framework of international law and all-Union legislation ... We represent the interests of the faithful Muslims. These interests lie not only in the sphere of religion, but also extend to the political, economic and social realm. But, I would like to stress it once more, our activities take place in strict compliance with the existing legislation ... the IRP does not strive to make the political situation in the republic more acute.' See: *Komsomolets Tadzhikistana*, 21 November 1990.

192 The work cited is published in 1993, but it is clear that this is based on work written in late 1990.

193 Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', p. 282.

are demanding permission for women to attend sermons in mosques. They are appealing to their coreligionists to live modestly, to be humble and to refrain from wasting money on sumptuous parties at the expense of family well-being. It is having an effect. In many regions people are spending less on weddings, funerals, rituals of circumcision and so on. The consumption of alcohol in rural areas has decreased and Moslems in the towns have also become more moderate in their drinking.

In other words, the fundamentalists have succeeded where the state has failed. A specific example is important here. In the field of politics the Tajik IRP is against any party having a monopoly of power. It seeks to establish a legal state with normal parliamentary activity based on equal rights for all political forces in the republic. It is willing to cooperate with all reasonable political forces, including the communists. The leadership of the party undertakes to act in accordance with international and union laws and condemns nationalism in all its forms.

The official charter and platform of the IRP of Tajikistan were adopted at its October 1991 congress. The published IRP platform<sup>194</sup> included references to the importance of cultural,<sup>195</sup> social,<sup>196</sup> 'moral' and political factors in Tajikistan and advocated national independence, free elections and a multiparty democracy, a 'decent life' for all citizens regardless of religion<sup>197</sup> or ethnicity, and education of the people in Islamic principles. The platform reaches beyond religious and moral advocacy, and includes full sections on the economy, science and culture, ideology, health, and environmental protection. The call for democratic independence is clearly stressed:<sup>198</sup>

The IRP stands for a multiparty system and free competition for the party. The IRP maintains links with all the democratic forces of the Republic and with all the democratic and Islamic movements from foreign countries.

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194 Islamic Revival Party, 'Programma Islamskoi Partii Vozrozhdeniia Tadjhikistana' [26 October 1991], in *Tadjhikskaia Revolyustiia i Grazhdanskaia Voina (1989–1994 gg.)*, eds V. I. Bushkov and D. V. Mikulskii (Moscow: Rossiyskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1995), pp. 183–90.

195 In particular, the IRP program defends local/ethnic traditions, stressing that 'our national traditions did not differ from Islam nor do they contradict Islam'. See: Islamic Revival Party, 'Programma Islamskoi Partii Vozrozhdeniia Tadjhikistana', p. 187.

196 In the dedicated section on the 'social sphere', the IRP advocates for the '[p]rovision of basic needs for shelter, food, clothing, purchase of medicines, education, parenting, family formation', regardless of religion or ethnicity. See: Islamic Revival Party, 'Programma Islamskoi Partii Vozrozhdeniia Tadjhikistana', pp. 188–9.

197 Specifically, the program states that the IRP '[r]ecognises all heavenly religions and is sympathetic to their followers'. See: Islamic Revival Party, 'Programma Islamskoi Partii Vozrozhdeniia Tadjhikistana', p. 188. Also see the above footnote.

198 Islamic Revival Party, 'Programma Islamskoi Partii Vozrozhdeniia Tadjhikistana', p. 185.

The IRP calls for the unity of all parties and movements in order to cooperate for the sake of independence and national freedom in the name of liquidating all vestiges of colonial dependence.

Islam is, however, mentioned first, last and most often—even beyond the affirmations of some of the basic tenets of Islam. The program opens with these two lines:<sup>199</sup> ‘IRP develops its program based on pure Islamic religion. Islam for us is a law and a guide for all political issues. The overriding purpose of IRP is the implementation of education of the people on the principles of Muslim religion.’

The most important point is inserted as a main point in the section on ‘ideology’, wherein the IRP states that it ‘recognises no law that contradicts the *shari’a*’;<sup>200</sup> however, the IRP does not publicly state in its program what exactly it believes ‘contradicts the *shari’a*’. As for how the IRP would restructure the state and society, Kudryavtsev and Niyazi stress that the leaders of the Tajik IRP ‘made no secret ... [of] their ultimate goal—adoption of an independent Islamic republic of Tajikistan’.<sup>201</sup> As late as 1991–92, the IRP’s goal was the creation—but not immediately—of an Islamic state. This was to be achieved, according to the IRP, through an election victory and then a referendum; however, this desired end-state was modified when the IRP realised that this goal was not supported by many people in Tajikistan.<sup>202</sup> During the lead-up to the civil war, representatives of the IRP, as well as *Qozi* Turajonzoda, stated to audiences both foreign and domestic (including when addressing supporters) that an Islamic state, however desirable in the long term, could not be a model for Tajikistan in the near term as the people were not ready, nor did they want it.<sup>203</sup> Khalid argues that at this time the focus of the IRP leadership was ‘on breaking the hold of the incumbent elites on power—rather than on imposing Islamic law or Islamic norms on society’.<sup>204</sup> The Henry Dunant Centre notes that in official party statements the IRP stressed that it would take 50 to 60 years to accomplish their goal of educating ‘the people in the Islamic spirit’, but that ‘many had the impression that the opposition was not going to wait that long’.<sup>205</sup>

199 Islamic Revival Party, ‘Programma Islamskoi Partii Vozrozhdeniia Tadzhiqistana’, p. 184.

200 Islamic Revival Party, ‘Programma Islamskoi Partii Vozrozhdeniia Tadzhiqistana’, p. 188.

201 Kudryavtsev and Niyazi, ‘“Politicheskii islam”’, p. 116.

202 Sergei Gretsky, ‘Civil War in Tajikistan: Causes, Developments, and Prospects for Peace’, in *Central Asia: Conflict, Resolution, and Change*, eds Roald Z. Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (Chevy Chase, Md: CPSS Press, 1995), p. 237; Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 139–41; Roy, ‘Is the Conflict in Tajikistan a Model for Conflicts throughout Central Asia’, p. 134; Atkin, ‘Tajikistan’, p. 611; Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, p. 147.

203 Atkin, ‘Tajikistan’s Relations with Iran and Afghanistan’, p. 100; Atkin, ‘Tajikistan’, p. 616; Niyazi, ‘The Year of Tumult’, p. 279. As Tett noted about the Tajiks she studied: ‘On the one hand, most of the villagers said that they were delighted that the mosques and mullahs were operating freely. But on the other hand, they insisted that they were vehemently opposed both to the Islamic “fundamentalists” and to any suggestion of an Islamic state.’ See: Tett, *Ambiguous Alliances*, p. 201.

204 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, pp. 151–2.

205 Henry Dunant Centre, ‘Humanitarian Engagement with Armed Groups’, p. 9.

Atkin writes that in response to the IRP's attempt to portray itself as a moderate organisation willing to work in cooperation with other political forces, the incumbent political elites and their supporters framed the post-independence political struggle as one of 'modern, secular democracy against radical Islamicizers, who[se] secular coalition partners were mere window dressing'.<sup>206</sup> A decade later Davlat Usmon, the former IRP deputy leader, was still ambiguous regarding the goals of the IRP when he remarked that '[t]he mistake of the Islamic opposition was that at the beginning it expressed its opinions too clearly. It frightened Russia and neighbouring Uzbekistan.'<sup>207</sup> Within Tajikistan the rejection of an Islamic state is shown clearly in two polls conducted in late 1991 and mid 1992.<sup>208</sup> The key findings from the respondents in Tajikistan were<sup>209</sup>

- in 1991–92, 'Islamicisation in Tajikistan' was supported by only 5–6 per cent while 74–77 per cent of respondents wanted to 'preserve the secular state'
- in 1992, 18.6 per cent of respondents in Qurghonteppa Province and 14.7 per cent in Dushanbe 'supported the idea of establishing an Islamic republic in Tajikistan. However, this idea was almost fully rejected in Leninabad and Kulab oblasts, as well as in Gissar [Hisor] and Tursunzade.'

The increase in support for an Islamic state in Dushanbe and Qurghonteppa over the national average shown in the above statistics also corresponds with the level of support for the IRP voiced by respondents, of 17.5 per cent in Qurghonteppa Province and 18.4 per cent in Dushanbe.<sup>210</sup> The scepticism of the potential for an Islamic state in Tajikistan was summarised by Asliddin Sohbnazarov of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan: 'It would be easier to build communism in America than to create an Islamic republic in Tajikistan.'<sup>211</sup>

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206 Atkin, 'Tajikistan', p. 616.

207 Henry Dunant Centre, 'Humanitarian Engagement with Armed Groups', p. 9.

208 Regarding these polls, Grigorii Kosach writes: 'In October–November 1991 and in June 1992, the Moscow-based Russian Academy of Management conducted sociological surveys in Tajikistan. They covered the north of the republic (Leninabad oblast) Kurgan-Tiube and Kulab Oblasts in the south, the capital, Dushanbe, and several of its neighboring towns and raions, such as Tursunzade and Gissar. Despite all the errors, which are unavoidable in this type of work, these surveys obtained information on the social base of the political parties which can be considered generally accurate.' See: Kosach, 'Tajikistan', pp. 133–4.

209 Kosach continues: 'Sixteen per cent of respondents in the technical professions, 10.9 per cent of professionals, and 9.3 per cent of the students favoured Islamicization. This was resolutely opposed by industrial workers and the government apparatus.' See: Kosach, 'Tajikistan', pp. 134–6, citing *Ozhidaniia i nadezhdy liudei v usloviiakh stanovleniia gosudarstvennosti*, pp. 29–43.

210 Kosach, 'Tajikistan'.

211 Chris Bowers and John Rettie, 'Russia Reinforces Embattled Russian Garrison', *The Guardian* (30 September 1992), p. 7.

## Regional Support Base

Since the late 1970s the network of 'non-official *ulama*' that would go on to form the IRP was active mainly in the mountainous areas of Qarotegin/Gharm and the lower Vakhsh Valley,<sup>212</sup> with Qurghonteppa City as its original base.<sup>213</sup> In late 1990 Niyazi described the IRP as having a rural support base and being 'headed mostly by young unregistered spiritual teachers'.<sup>214</sup> Tajikistan, however, was not an easy recruiting ground for an Islamist organisation, aside from the obvious restrictions of the Soviet era on independent political and religious activity. Dudoignon argues that the rural nature of Tajikistan made it difficult for Islamists to recruit, as their successes have usually been in urban areas. He goes on to note the history of 'problematic relations' between the IRP leadership and the 'traditional religious elites' in rural Tajikistan, especially those affiliated with the official *Qoziyot* who also had a following among Gharmi Tajiks.<sup>215</sup> This may have hindered the IRP in its recruitment; however, the IRP did manage to create a politically significant support base. Its original support base had a significant number of teachers and students who were educated in the city, yet who had a rural background.<sup>216</sup> Other sources point instead to unofficial mullahs recruiting young men as being more important.<sup>217</sup> Nevertheless, the IRP developed a base that was heavily skewed towards one region. The IRP had a significant presence in Mastchoh in northern Tajikistan, Khovaling in the northern Kulob region, in the Gharm/Qarotegin region and among the Gharmi/Qarotegini migrants who were sent to the Vakhsh Valley.<sup>218</sup> The broad consensus, however, is that the IRP's strongest support came from Gharmi Tajiks, at home in the Gharm region and especially among the Gharmi migrants in the Vakhsh Valley,<sup>219</sup> leading the party

212 Dudoignon, 'Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia', p. 11. Dudoignon also notes the 'strong links with the non-official madrasas of the Ferghana valley, in Uzbekistan'.

213 Nuri, 'Hizbe, ki resha dar ormoni mardum dorad', p. 156.

214 Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', p. 281. This article was published in 1993 based on Niyazi's earlier work from late 1990.

215 Dudoignon, 'Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia', pp. 11–12, citing V. I. Bushkov & D. V. Mikulskii, *Anatomija grazhdanskoi voiny v Tadzhikestane*, pp. 106–14; Dudoignon, 'Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan', pp. 66–7. Dudoignon notes that the IRP's main recruiting success in Dushanbe in the early part of the civil war was partly due to the number of rural refugees flooding into Dushanbe.

216 Matveeva, 'The Perils of Emerging Statehood', p. 9, citing Giampaolo R. Capisani, *The Handbook of Central Asia: A Comprehensive Survey of the New Republics* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 161–204.

217 Rubin, 'Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown in the Periphery', p. 143.

218 Dudoignon, 'From Ambivalence to Ambiguity', p. 126. Akiner and Barnes also note the IRP had some success among 'marginalized urban youth'. Akiner and Barnes, 'The Tajik Civil War', p. 20.

219 Olimova and Olimov, 'The Islamic Renaissance Party', p. 26; Akiner and Barnes, 'The Tajik Civil War', p. 20; Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 156; Roy, 'Is the Conflict in Tajikistan a Model for Conflicts throughout Central Asia', p. 139; Rubin, 'Russian Hegemony and State Breakdown in the Periphery', p. 143; Dudoignon, 'Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia', pp. 11–12, citing Bushkov and Mikulskii, *Anatomia grazhdanskoi voiny v Tadzhikestane*, pp. 106–14; Freizer, 'Central Asian Fragmented Civil Society', p. 117; Said Akhmedov, 'Konflikty v Tadzhikestane: Prichiny i Posledstviia', in *Etnicheskie i regionalnye konflikty v Yevrazii. Volume 1: Tsentralnaia Aziia i Kavkaz*, eds Alexei Malashenko, Bruno Coppeters and Dmitri Trenin (Moscow: Ves Mir, 1997) n.p., online: <<http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/etni-1/>>

to become a platform for the interests of Gharmis/Qaroteginis, with the majority of that community supporting the IRP.<sup>220</sup> The authors cited above who point to a Gharmi regional agenda in the IRP generally, with some exceptions,<sup>221</sup> do not provide details of how this pro-Gharmi agenda manifested during the latter half of 1991 and through late spring 1992. Since the IRP was not in any position of power until they received a share of the positions in the Government of National Reconciliation (GNR), there were few opportunities to use government structures to benefit Gharmi interests; however, the perception of the IRP as a ‘vehicle’ of Gharmi interests would have been sufficient to discourage most non-Gharmis from joining. The overwhelming dominance of Gharmis in the leadership<sup>222</sup> and in the base of support would suffice to create this perception. If there was any doubt about the IRP leadership’s regional agenda, the summer 1992 cleansing of Kulobis from IRP third-in-command Nuri’s home collective farm would most likely have solidified people’s perceptions of the IRP as a Gharmi organisation.

The simple explanation that Gharmis were more religious than the Kulobis—leading the former community to rally to the IRP—is rejected by Roy, but with a weak supporting argument.<sup>223</sup> Niyazi, on the religiosity of the Gharmis, writes that ‘communal patriarchal relations and ties were strong, and age-old customs were held in high esteem. The local population was marked by a particular piety.’<sup>224</sup> Nuri’s views are far closer to Niyazi’s outside assessment, demonstrated clearly by his answer to the question of why an Islamic movement appeared

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akhmedov.htm> Mullojonov also mentions that the IRP was strongest amongst Gharmis in their home region and amongst those forcibly resettled from Gharm; but he also mentions support for the IRP in a few suburbs of Dushanbe. See: Mullojonov, ‘The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period’, pp. 233–4, 250. Regarding the north, Mullojonov writes: ‘Because of its anticommunist inspiration, the IRP could not seriously count on the northern regions of the republic, where the positions of the ruling Leninabodi clan were monopolistic.’

220 Mullojonov, ‘The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period’, p. 250; Olimova and Olimov, ‘The Islamic Renaissance Party’; Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia*, p. 213.

221 In Dushanbe, DPT and IRP activists, after joining the coalition government, attempted to nationalise the ‘joint ventures’ created the previous winter by Khujandi and Kulobi elites. See: Dudoignon, ‘Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia’, p. 19.

222 In regards to the second deputy leader, Sayid Ibrohim Hadoev—a Kulobi—nothing further was heard from him after his selection at the IRP conference in late 1991.

223 Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 156. Roy discusses the Gharmi dominance in the IRP: ‘This does not necessarily mean that the Gharmis were more religious than their Kulabi adversaries: we have seen the role played by the Kulabis in the basmachi war. The Kulabis also experienced a religious revivalism: during his report to the Twentieth Congress of the Tajik Communist Party in January 1986, the secretary Mahkamov denounced the shortcomings of atheist policy, and explicitly attacked the two provinces of Kulab and Kurgan-Teppe.’

224 Niyazi, ‘Tajikistan I’, p. 151. Similarly, Igor Rotar remarks that ‘Karategin is a very special region of Tajikistan. People here are much more religious than elsewhere in the whole of Central Asia.’ See: Igor Rotar, ‘View Central Asia through the Eyes of Journalist Igor Rotar’, *Ferghana News Information Agency* (26 April 2011), Accessed online May 2001: <<http://enews.fergananews.com/article.php?id=2708>>

‘solely’ in the Vakhsh Valley. Nuri, as a clearly unabashedly patriotic Gharmi, mainly credits the Gharmi population’s religiosity with the group’s success in mobilising in the Vakhsh Valley:<sup>225</sup>

This is a good question. As a matter of fact, at the time when our organisation or movement was coming into being, one is amazed as to why it originated in, or why it was established in, that place. I think that the main reason is this, that 60% of the inhabitants of the Vakhsh Valley are composed of people from the Qarategin and Vakhyo Valleys [that is, the former Gharm Province], and from ancient times, compared with people of the other areas of *Movarounnahr* [Central Asia], they more so fell in love with Islam, were involved with Islam, and established the revealed religion of Islam—and amongst them were many scholars of *sharia* studies. On the other hand, these people had a boundless/incomparable desire, striving and love for the religion of Islam—their children more so took to Islamic studies and education. And in this way they continued. Another reason is that these people, as a result of ability and hard work, had become very well-off and wealthy and sent their children to the city of Dushanbe and other Islamic cultural centres. As a result, these students advanced and became skilled. From Dushanbe, where a majority of the young students of the Vakhsh Valley studied Islamic science and education, they returned to their places of birth. Amongst them were very many enlightened and freedom-loving people.

Others point instead to political and economic reasons for the Gharmi dominance in the IRP. An important event occurred around mid 1990 when the government introduced export restrictions and price controls on farm products—changes that hurt the farming communities of the Vakhsh Valley. After this, ‘young radical activists’ of the IRP (as well as of the DPT) began to ‘openly advocate’ for the resettled population of the Vakhsh and for the mountain populations—both of which are predominantly Gharmi—against the ‘technocrats of the planned economy’.<sup>226</sup> Dudoignon argues that by late 1991 ‘[t]he *Nahzat* [IRP] changed quickly its social status during and after the November 1991 presidential elections, transforming itself from a mass organization of urban youth in [sic] a party of sufi notables with a strong basis in the Dushanbe-Kafirnihon region and in Qarategin [Gharm]’.<sup>227</sup> Dudoignon does not say, however, whether this was a simple IRP strategy to gain more support in this community or if it was a reflection of the IRP leadership’s region of origin.

225 Nuri, ‘Hizbe, ki resha dar ormoni mardum dorad’, p. 157. The question was prompted by Nuri’s singling out of Qurghontepa City and the Vakhsh Valley as his group’s centre. See: *ibid.*, p. 156.

226 Dudoignon, ‘Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia’, p. 12.

227 Dudoignon, ‘Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia’, pp. 16–17. Dudoignon continues: ‘But in doing so, the *Nahzat* lost all interest as a political instrument for Moscow. From

Niyazi certainly is of the opinion that many religious leaders had a Gharimi regional agenda, even if it was borne of the noblest intentions: 'the political struggle of Islamic nonconformists was not conducted to establish the rule of the clergy, but in the first instance for a wider representation of the mountain-dwellers in the structures of power and against the violence being done by the industry minded elite on traditional culture.'<sup>228</sup> More cynical political motivations on the part of Gharimi government elites from outside the IRP are cited by authors such as Olimova, who argues that the Gharimi/Qarotegini 'regional elites, having achieved economic clout, sought to change the balance of forces in their own interest and used the newly emerging opposition movements to this end'.<sup>229</sup> Regional elites from the Pamirs and Gharm increasingly began to use the political parties and the Gorbachev reforms to make political gains as the government appointed mostly Pamiri and Gharimi reformists to the newly vacated positions. Soon, as argued by Olimova, 'regional origin exerted a major influence on the choice of behavioural strategy of the new elites', while support for or opposition to the 'Soviet imperial centre' was 'determined by regional affiliation'.<sup>230</sup> The strength of the IRP among Gharmis was matched by the dominance of Gharmis in the leadership of the IRP. For example, the three most powerful party leaders (Nuri, Himmatzoda and Usmon) were all Gharimi Tajiks.<sup>231</sup> There is also the possibility that the IRP's core from the very beginning was Gharimi. Nuri himself proudly described the important role played by Vakhsh Valley *muhajirs* from Qarotegin and Darvoz (that is, Gharm Province) in the initial formation of the network that would go on to be the basis for the IRP.<sup>232</sup> As networks of solidarity in Tajikistan so often form along lines of blood relations, the likelihood that the early precursors to the IRP did the same is high. Indeed, the IRP was especially keen to use traditional organisational structures: in 1992, 12 members of the Ulama Council of the IRP belonged to one *gashtak*, and functionaries at lower levels were habitually heads of kinship entities in their respective territories.<sup>233</sup> With many Gharimi elites in the IRP and the base of support being largely Gharimi, the party soon became a vehicle for the interests of Gharmis. The ideology of the IRP mixed with regional political issues, leading members from other regions to withdraw from the party.<sup>234</sup>

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then on, Russia would deal mainly with the technocrats and the liberal intellectuals of the elder generation, who appeared to the Kremlin as the best possible advocates of continuity, in front of the now combined threats of nationalism and fundamentalism.'

228 Niyazi, 'Islam and Tajikistan's Human and Ecological Crisis', p. 190. Niyazi speaks glowingly of Gharm: 'The mullahs and ishans here have become renowned for their knowledge of Islamic sciences, and the population is notable for its piety. More than 95% of Garm Tajiks are peasants or craftsmen. Communal and patriarchal ties are strong. Traditional morals—*adab*—are honored. It was no accident that in the 1980s the crime rate in this region was the lowest in the republic.' See: *ibid.*, p. 189.

229 Olimova, 'Opposition in Tajikistan', p. 249. Olimova also notes this strategy among Pamiri elites.

230 Olimova, 'Opposition in Tajikistan', p. 249.

231 Abdullaev and Akbarzadeh, *Historical Dictionary of Tajikistan*, pp. 158–9, 258–9, 368–9.

232 See the section above on the early roots of the IRP.

233 Bushkov and Mikulskii, 'Obschestvenno-politicheskaia situatsiia v Tadzhikestane', p. 8.

234 Olimova and Olimov, 'The Islamic Renaissance Party', p. 26; Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 156; Erica Marat, 'The State–Crime Nexus in Central Asia: State Weakness, Organized Crime, and Corruption in

## Competition and Cooperation: *Qozi* Turajonzoda

[O]ur hopes can come true when there is a veritable democratic, rule-of-law and, however strange one may find it, secular state. As [a] Muslim leader, I certainly dream of living in a state governed by the laws of Islam, but, if one is realistic, one should realize that our society is not yet ready for this.

— *Qozi* Turajonzoda, September 1992<sup>235</sup>

The IRP did not and does not hold a monopoly in terms of Islamic leadership. Other leaders have been able to wield influence and attract supporters. The most prominent was and still is *Hoji* Akbar Turajonzoda. Turajonzoda was born Akbar Qaharov in 1954 near Vahdat (Kofarnihon) in the village of Turkobod, about 30 km from Dushanbe. Turajonzoda traces his prominent Sufi family lineage seven generations back to Samarkand. His grandfather, Sufi Abdukarim, was a Sufi leader exiled to Siberia in the 1930s, while his father, Ishon Turajon, was a Sufi *ishon* who possibly had as many as 1000 *murids* (committed followers). At age eighteen, Turajonzoda was sent to study at the Mir-i Arab *madrasa* in Bukhara. Afterwards he went on to study at the Islamic Institute in Tashkent before going to Jordan to study Islamic law at Amman University as one of a few officially approved students from the Soviet Union. After returning, he worked for the Department of International Relations of the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM).<sup>236</sup> He was appointed as the *Qozikalon* (the highest rank of Islamic judge/administrator in the *Qoziyot*)<sup>237</sup> of Tajikistan in 1988 at the age of only thirty-four. In 1990 he took on the additional position as a deputy in the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan.<sup>238</sup> At this time the leaders of the

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Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan', *Silk Road Paper* (October 2006), p. 106.

235 Quote from an interview with Turajonzoda. See: *ITAR-Tass*, 1252 gmt (16 September 1992), in *SWB SU*, 1490 (19 September 1992).

236 This Russian acronym is most commonly used. SADUM was the Soviet governing body for religious affairs, literally the 'Spiritual Administration for the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan'. For a more complete description, see Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, esp. pp. 78–9, 110–14.

237 The *Qoziyot* was the official Islamic administrative body in Tajikistan.

238 Niyazi, 'Islam and Tajikistan's Human and Ecological Crisis', p. 196, n. 13; Dudoignon, 'Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia', pp. 11–12; Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 169; Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, pp. 143–6; Conciliation Resources, 'Profiles: Khoji Akbar Turajonzoda', Accessed online March 2009: <<http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/tajikistan/profiles.php>>; Sergei Gretsky, 'Qadi Akbar Turajonzoda', *Central Asia Monitor*, No. 1 (1994), p. 16; Roy, *The New Central Asia*, p. 149. Whitlock maintains that Turajonzoda read Muslim Brotherhood literature while in Jordan. Also, Whitlock writes that he was in Jordan from 1982 to 1987 while Conciliation Resources instead gives the dates as the late 1970s to early 1980s. Kilavuz refers to Turajonzoda's Sufi lineage as being Naqshbandi while Dudoignon and Roy instead mention the Qadiri Sufi order. Turajonzoda's father, *ishon* Turajon, was a disciple of the prominent Sufi leader *mavlavi* Said Qalandarshoh from Qandahar in Afghanistan, who eventually made him a powerful Naqshbandi leader of Kofarnikhon, Gharm and Qarotegin. The IRP chairman, Mohammadsharif Himmatzoda, born in Gharm in 1951, spent his formative years in a village adjacent to Turkobod and knew

officially endorsed Islamic bodies were supportive of the government as they were dependent on it for their careers. This was reinforced in September 1990 with a *Qoziyot* decree/treaty agreement with the *imam khotibs* (top imams) of local mosques forbidding participation in politics, with a specific prohibition against membership of any political party—likely a response to the recent appeal by the union-wide IRP for the *ulama* to become involved in politics.<sup>239</sup>

For a short period, Turajonzoda had been a student of Muhammadjon Hindustoni<sup>240</sup> and had, in 1983 or 1984, met Sayid Abdullo Nuri, the eventual leader of the IRP. When Nuri was released from jail in 1988, Turajonzoda hired him as the editor for the official newspaper of the *Qoziyot*, *Minbar-i Islom* ('Tribune of Islam').<sup>241</sup> Despite whatever relationship Turajonzoda may have had with Nuri, he was disinclined to endorse the IRP as it 'advocated a different path to Muslim revival' and was a threat to his power as *Qozikalon* as it was a political party that advertised itself as the 'vehicle of revival' rather than the *Qoziyot*.<sup>242</sup> Kilavuz qualifies this competition:<sup>243</sup>

A dispute emerged between the traditionalists and the IRP over the latter's status as an Islamic party, which the traditionalists saw as contrary to Islam. They did not object to existing relations between state and religion, or approve of the direct involvement of religion in politics. Accordingly, they accused the IRP of disrespecting or betraying Sunni Hanafi tradition. The Qazi had good relations both with the IRP and the traditionalists, who were composed mostly of Naqshbandi and Qadiri Ishans. Although these groups were suspicious of each other, in September 1991 Turajonzoda was able to convince them to unite against

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Turajonzoda well. Himmatzoda introduced Said Abdullo Nuri to Turajonzoda, and the latter entrusted Nuri with editing the *Qoziyot's* newspaper. According to some sources, the IRP deputy chairman, Davlat Usmon, is a distant relative of Turajonzoda.

239 Alexander Karpov, 'The Clergy is Outside [Political] Parties', *Izvestiia* (25 September 1990), p. 2, in *The Russian Press Digest* (25 September 1992); Niyazi, 'The Year of Tumult', pp. 280–1. Niyazi notes that some official religious leaders' support for the government increased as they were the target of accusations of wrongdoing by the 'fundamentalists'; however, he also notes that some were supportive of the 'fundamentalists'. In regards to the *ulama* being dependent on the state, see also: Makhamov, 'Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan after 1985', p. 200.

240 A full discussion of Hindustani is included in the analysis on IRP influences.

241 Whitlock, *Land Beyond the River*, p. 143; Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 170.

242 Conciliation Resources, 'Profiles: Khoji Akbar Turajonzoda'. There is some disagreement on the communities in which Turajonzoda and the IRP's popularity overlapped. Dudoignon stresses that Turajonzoda's *Qoziyot* was in competition with the IRP for the loyalty of believers, with both entities having their main base of support in Gharm and amongst the Gharmi communities in the Vakhsh Valley. See: Dudoignon, 'Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia', pp. 11–12, citing Bushkov and Mikulskii, *Anatomiia grazhdanskoi voiny v Tadjikistane*, pp. 106–14; Dudoignon, 'Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan', p. 64. On the other side, Vitaly Naumkin writes that Turajonzoda 'was especially popular in Zerafshan, Aini, and Matcha and also among a part of the population of Dushanbe; but contrary to the opinion of certain researchers, he did not command a support base in the Gharm group of regions—Karategin, Tavildara, Kofarnihon—and in the Leninabad region, nor did he fully control any sizable part of Dushanbe's population.' See: Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia*, p. 215.

243 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, pp. 170–1.

the government. His intervention helped prevent a possible clash between the 'official' imams of the mosques, and the 'unofficial' mullahs and the political wing of Islam represented by the IRP. He was a figure who could be accepted by both sides, and who had relationships with all relevant groups.

Initially, Turajonzoda maintained a distance from the IRP and the opposition parties and continued instead to work from within the government as a deputy and as the *Qozikalon*.<sup>244</sup> In December 1990, Qahhor Mahkamov held an unprecedented conference with influential mullahs, where he said, in particular:

[W]e treat religious sentiments and requests of the believers with great respect. Only during the past year—year and a half—in excess of 70 mosques and hundreds of meeting-houses were built, and an Islamic Institute was opened in the republic ... In the nearest future we shall create a consultative group together with you and ... subject to good will and mutual compromise, we shall be able to solve rather complicated issues in a humane and good-natured manner.<sup>245</sup>

The *Qozikalon* expressed appreciation of the government's efforts, but at the same time put forward several demands, the implementation of which, according to him, 'would be conducive to further strengthening of public confidence in the leadership of the republic'.<sup>246</sup> They included

- proclaiming high days of Islam public holidays
- shifting the weekly day off to Friday
- introducing the Quranic method of cattle slaughter (*halal*)
- exempting mosques and other holy places from taxation.

In the meantime, the official Islamic clergy promised not to support the IRP. Turajonzoda made the following public announcement:

We have stressed more than once that Islam is a party in its own ... The emergence of various parties in any state that call themselves 'Islamic society,' 'Islamic party,' 'Islamic renaissance' and so on, has led to the

244 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 171. Similarly, Atkin writes: 'The country's most influential religious figure, Qadi Akbar Turajonzoda, was not a member of any political party but supported political and economic reforms as well as recognition of Muslims' rights to practise their faith openly and without hindrance.' See: Atkin, 'Tajikistan', p. 611. In regards to the religious leadership in general, Makhamov writes: 'soon the *ulamas* registered their displeasure with the fact that the government allowed them only the opportunity to engage in purely religious matters. They wanted to determine state policy, insisting on transforming Tajikistan into an independent Muslim state.' See: Makhamov, 'Islam and the Political Development of Tajikistan after 1985', pp. 200–1.

245 *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 9 January 1991.

246 *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 9 January 1991.

weakening and dispersal of the Muslims. Taking this into consideration, the *Qoziyot* administration has made efforts to guarantee and preserve the Muslims' unity.<sup>247</sup>

Those few *imams* who explicitly denounced the activities of the IRP in Tajikistan won a reprieve from the Muslim spiritual board.<sup>248</sup>

The turning point was when Turajonzoda's proposals in the Supreme Soviet—regarding religious holidays, observance of Friday as a non-working day, *halal* regulations in abattoirs and land tax breaks for mosques—all failed.<sup>249</sup> In late 1991, Turajonzoda and the IRP had a 'rapprochement and then alliance' as the *Qozikalon* announced his support for the opposition demands.<sup>250</sup> As Mahkamov's administration was in no hurry to cater to the aforementioned demands of the *Qoziyot*, Turajonzoda gradually abandoned his neutrality. As Turajonzoda wrote in 1995,

[T]here was a serious need to establish a political party for Muslims ... The IRP through its official activities intended to play a role in the spiritual self-realisation and development of the nation and to defend the rights and demands of Muslims, who constitute the majority of the country's population.<sup>251</sup>

Turajonzoda had, from late 1991, a moderating influence on the IRP, as argued by Dudoignon.<sup>252</sup>

The rapprochement between the *Qozikalon* and the Islamists was not unexpected—they had essentially the same power base. Aziz Niyazi thus characterised the IRP: 'These were mainly peasants and part of the town population from the Gharmi group of regions, or people who were originally from these regions who are now living in the Qurghonteppa *oblast*, Hissor Valley, Leninsky *raion*, and the city of Dushanbe.'<sup>253</sup> On the other hand, it was well known that 'the Supreme *Qozi* in his day-to-day activities relies on fellow-regionalists<sup>254</sup> from Gharm, which stirs resentment in other regions of Tajikistan'.<sup>255</sup> While one may

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247 *Javononi Tojikiston*, 29 January 1991.

248 *Komsomolskaia pravda*, 23 March 1991.

249 Kilavuz, *Understanding Violent Conflict*, p. 171.

250 Mullojonov, 'The Islamic Clergy in Tajikistan Since the End of the Soviet Period', p. 237, n. 25.

251 Akbar Turajonzoda, 'Tajikistan—Politics, Religion, and Peace: A View from the Opposition', *Problems of Post-Communism* (July–August 1995), p. 25.

252 Dudoignon writes: 'At the same time, the increasing influence of qaziyat and its leader Hajji Akbar Turajanzada among the opposition favored the phenomenon of "deradicalization" of the Islamist party itself.' See: Dudoignon, 'Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia', p. 16.

253 Niyazi, 'Tajikistan', p. 183.

254 Referring to Turajonzoda as a Gharmi would require overstretching the definition of Gharm to include everything east of Dushanbe.

255 Bushkov and Mikulskii, 'Obschestvenno-politicheskaia situatsiia v Tadzhikestane', p. 24. Dudoignon also notes the dominance of 'Kuhistanians' (that is, Gharmis) in the *Qoziyot*, but rejects the idea that Turajonzoda had any regional agenda strategy. See: Dudoignon, 'Communal Solidarity and Social Conflicts in Late 20th Century Central Asia', p. 23.

question Narzullo Dustov's opinion that Turajonzoda 'organically hated the people of Kulob',<sup>256</sup> there is ample evidence of a strained relationship between Turajonzoda and religious figures in Kulob and Leninobod, especially in early 1991 when the *Qozikalon* attempted to replace Kulob's spiritual leader, Haydar Sharifzoda, with his own loyal appointee, Mullah Abdurrahim. Not only did Sharifzoda successfully repel this attack, he actually secured confirmation of his investiture directly from the SADUM, thus gaining autonomy from the *Qoziyot*.<sup>257</sup> In the Leninobod *oblast*, the congregations intensely disliked Turajonzoda's appointees, believing them (as well as their high-placed patron) to be 'spoiled' by years of study in Uzbekistan.<sup>258</sup>

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By mid 1991, in many areas of central and southern Tajikistan, it had become difficult to distinguish between official and unofficial mullahs, the IRP functionaries and traditional strongmen. They had all coalesced into a somewhat obfuscated yet potent entity with a common background and agenda (Gharmi regionalism), ideology (Islam) and organisational principles (traditional consanguinal structures and *gashtaks*). Loosely called the 'Islamic opposition', it possessed tremendous organisational and financial resources,<sup>259</sup> and was preparing to play a more active part in political struggle. Once again, it is imperative to reiterate that 'the use of Islam by a political opposition, and indeed the mere emergence of an opposition, became possible only under conditions of relative democratisation, and then not so much in the Muslim provinces as at the centre'.<sup>260</sup>

256 Dustov, *Zakhm bar jismi vatan*, p. 14.

257 Nasriddinov, *Tarkish*, p. 147.

258 Interview with *hoji* Husain Musoev, *sarkhatib* of the Leninobod *viloyat*, 9 March 1995.

259 Apart from private donations, profits from commercial activities and foreign assistance, tax-deductible transfers from various institutions formed an important part of the Islamic establishment's income. In 1991, the Vakhsh chemical fertiliser plant alone transferred US\$100 000 to the *Qoziyot* for 'charitable' purposes. See: Kenjaev, *Tabadduloti Tojikiston*, Vol. I, p. 116. By the end of 1991, declared cash reserves of the *Qoziyot* alone had reached an impressive 9.4 million roubles. See: V. I. Bushkov and D. V. Mikulskii, *Istoriia grazhdanskoi voyny v Tadjikistane (etno-sotsial'nye protsessy i politicheskaya bor'ba, 1992–1995)* (Moscow: Institut etnologii i antropologii RAN, 1996), p. 103.

260 Malashenko, 'The Eighties', pp. 31–2.