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SOVIET LEGACY AND IMAGINED PAST CONVERGE IN LEVANT BATTLEFIELDS

INTRODUCTION

Since late 2017 Russia has been witnessing upsurge in terrorist attacks mostly in urban areas even in a scale considerably lower than it had witnessed amid II Russian-Chechen war in turn of the second millennia. Long before the defeat of ISIL in Levant prompted by Moscow's military intervention in Syria in September 2015 at request from the Syrian president Bashar Assad, Russian president Putin and top intelligence chief termed the return of fighters from the ex-Soviet republics as a real threat while urging to establish a broad international anti-terrorist coalition (*Putin: Nearly half of 20,000 foreign fighters in Syria hails from CIS*) However, the threat came not from fighters from Northern Caucasus region of Russia, as was expected, but from former Central Asian led religious organizations. An ethnic Uzbek from Kyrgyzstan blow himself up on 3 April 2017 at a metro station in the second largest Russian city of St Petersburg which claimed 15 lives. At the end of the same year, an explosive device was detonated at a supermarket in St Petersburg also wounded 13 people. Just few days prior to the blast, Russian media outlets reported about a thwarted terrorist attack in the same city thanks to an intelligence trip received from the US. Two years later, intelligence received from White House was essential in preventing large scale terrorist attack on the eve of New Year for which Russian president thanked his American counterpart (*Putin: Nearly half of 20,000 foreign fighters in Syria hails from CIS*) News disseminated by the Russia media outlets on July 2020 about arrest of a Tajik citizen preparing mass shouting in Moscow as well as detention of a group of fighters affiliated with the Uzbekistan Islamic Movement suggests the threat remains serious despite the devastating blow the ISIL suffered in Levant (*Russia arrests alleged 22 ISIS agents*).

One can find a close connection between the reasons behind rise of Central Asian-originated terrorist attacks in Russia and outcomes of military operations against ISIL in Syria.

The paper is a humble attempt to shed a more light on developments turning the region once acting as hotbed of communism turned into one of recruitment sources for religious jihadi networks. While acknowledging the role of economic hardships, lack of religious freedom and state repression prevail in the region previously mentioned on the broad literature on the subject I also point out to the role of ideological disorientation in further triggering the recruitment process. The paper starts with presentation of argument and theoretical framework of the study. The next section compares post-

independent official ideological narratives with the Soviet one. The section three examines how the Uzbek and Tajik states framed their ambivalent ideological narratives policies while elaborating on its apparently contradictory and controversial aspects. The following section tried to illuminate root causes of the problem dwelling on deep exposure of the current day national leaders to Soviet ideology and ways of governance. The final section sums up the findings of the study.

ARGUMENT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The argument advanced in the paper mitigates external-internal factors' dichotomy prevailing in the IR debates in this regard. The paper aims to make several scholarly contributions to theoretical developments, to bridge the gap between contradicting puzzles of internal and external factor – based explanations. The principal argument of the paper rests on the assumption of ideological disorientation to be driver of the terrorist recruitments, which does not necessarily exclude the above-mentioned explanations for the radicalization while bridging gap between them and casting more light on the root-causes of the problem. I argue that the continuation of the Soviet-era practices including reproduction of the Soviet ideological narratives not only fails to fill the ideological vacuum continuing since the collapse of the Soviet Union but also acts as a breeding ground for the recruitment of Central Asian youth to the global terrorist networks equipped with the modern recruitment techniques.

The approach termed as path dependence is better suited to fully comprehend the various facets of post-Soviet ideological practices causing the ideological disorientation, which lays the foundation of the problem. The path dependence posits the difficulty of exiting the particular path as more steps in this path might further deepen engagement along with the same path and that historical changes are partly conditioned by transforming the very cultural categories shaping and constraining human action (Sewel, 1996: 263). This approach highlighting the impact of events in earlier point on set of events happening in the later point in history is better equipped to explain the political mindset and very essence of the ideological policies implemented by them (Pierson, 2000).

To sum up before engaging with the details, our argument is based on the assumption that slightly refashioned reproduction of the Soviet ideological narratives and political practices constitute the core cause of the current day ideological disorientation and cacophony in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Such ideological disorientation further triggers religious extremism while turning these countries into easy targets for transnational religious groups. Comprehensive analyze of the Soviet and post-Soviet political and ideological discourses point to the deep exposure of the current day state apparatus to the Soviet ideology.

POLITICAL CONTEXT AND SOCIAL PURPOSE OF SOVIET IDENTITY POLICIES

Obviously the robustness and acceptance of any state sponsored ideology could be better tested in situations where the subject citizens are exposed to different ide-

ologies and propaganda materials. From this perspective the fact that the majority of people fighting with ISIS had been recruited in Russia from Tajik and Uzbek seasonal migrant workers in Russia and Turkey could be attributed among others, to the failure of state ideological policies in shaping consciousness of its citizens who are become easy target for the global terrorist networks skillfully exploiting religious feelings. Relatively smaller number of fighters who joined the terrorist organizations directly from mainland, on the other hand, is the result of strict state control and limitations in contact with terrorist groups' emissary. However, some reports show how state bodies in charge of promoting ideological narratives are heavily challenged by sources of alternative ideologies.

An official letter from Abdurahim Holiqov, the former head of the State Body on Religious Affairs to the Tajik president dated August 2010 implies that state religious institutions suffer from problem of lack of credibility and authenticity. In his letter Holiqov voices his anxiety emanated from the huge influence of the religious experts on the youth through their audio and video recordings disseminated across the country. Defining the state's most important duty as the suppression of political Islam, he further urges state to intensify propaganda tools to challenge non-official clergy in issues such as morality, including TV plays by famous actors based on classical literature (Epkenhans, 2017: 186–187).

In external context, the vulnerability of official ideologies is more obvious due to the availability of cheaper and stable Internet connection, lack of strict state control over religious activities and some social factors such as family ties and etc. Migrant workers is termed as the “the single most important factor” for the recruitment of the Central Asian youth to the ranks of global jihadi networks. According to Tucker, overwhelming majority of the Central Asian fighters had been recruited outside the borders of their relevant states (Tucker, 2015: 11). Lemon also argues that about 80% of the recruitment of the Tajik fighters happened in Russia (Lemon, 2015: 71).

It is estimated that between four and five million migrants from Central Asian republics travel Russia every year, which were around 60,000 during the Soviet rule (Roche, 2017). The number of the officially registered Uzbek citizens in Russia in 2014 was around 2.3 million people, according to the Russian Federal Migration Service (Lewis, 2015: 145). The number of Tajik seasonal migrant workers in Russia is also believed to be more than one million. The flow of migrant workers to Russia has a great impact on national economy and politics as remittances sent by them for their families in Tajikistan, for instance, constitute 52% of the GDP (Lemon, 2015: 71).

Observations suggest the exposure of migrants to distinct ideological and religious narratives also prompted the rise of the recruitment. Observations made by various experts suggest the vast majority of the Tajik and Uzbek migrants were recruited at mosques in Russian Federation. Most of them were frequent visitors of mosques led by preachers from North Caucasus (Deutsche Welle, 2015). In a survey conducted among Uzbek migrant workers in Russia about 13% of the interviewers pointed to stable and cheap Internet connection compared with their home countries and 5% of them termed smartphones as main sources of access to extremist ideologies. Almost half of the respondents suggest that on-line communications is the most effective way of recruitment (Alshimi, 2018: 33–34).

The total number of Central Asian fighters joining terrorist organizations is estimated to be around 4000 people. In 2016, the Tajik and Uzbek fighters constitute the largest number compared with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan which is 1300 and 1500 respectively (Barrett, 2017: 13). One should not neglect the fact that fighting along with terrorist organizations in Levant is considered comparably distinct fighters as they share no common ethno-linguistic ties or territorial interests at stake alike. In other words, considerable part of fighters coming from Europe share common ethnic ties with the region as they have risen from Arab immigrant families. Other groups like Turkomans, Shias, Alawites and Assyrians populated in those particular areas and directly exposed to the outcomes of the military operations and flow of their compatriots from abroad could be explained with such ties. From this point of view, Tajiks and Uzbeks fighting along with the terrorist organizations do not have ethnic and linguistic affinity with the region and are not part of the any territorial and political conflicts there. In this sense the geographically removed Tajik and Uzbek fighters' involvement in such conflicts is regarded somehow as *sui-generis* while paving the way for speculations about the motivation behind it (Sakiev, 2020: 190).

This fact itself actually excludes ethno-geographic affinity while bringing ideational and identity related assumptions to the central focus. Ideological narratives adopted in Central Asian successor states following their independence show a clear connection with the Soviet-era nationalism policies. Namely, both policies share the same political purpose of marginalization of the existing social structure, antagonist national and religious forces the close examination of which would give us a more nuanced picture of their common features.

The very essence of the Soviet nationalism project in Turkestan, corresponding to the current day Central Asian republics and southern Kazakhstan, could be briefly termed as the destruction of traditional social structure, including the replacement of the existing identity grounded on religion with a new ethnic identification based on language. The Soviet nationalism policies launched in the mid-1920s was designed to ensure short term tactical political goal such as the destruction of the existing social coherence of the Central Asian population stemming from their shared Turkestanian identity. This mega-political project also pursued a far-reaching strategic goal of further assimilation of the Central Asian nations into the single Soviet Man identity. The imminent threat emanated from the shared Turkestanian identity was the fact that it acted as ideological source for the political concept of "Republic of Turan." This identity envisaged common motherland and bounded with strong bonds of shared history, culture, and language constituted a big challenge for the Bolsheviks plans thus forcing them to embark drastic political measures. The Republic was suggested as an independent and sovereign unit vis-a-vis the Russian Federation and called for the unification of all Muslim-Turkish people in Turkestan, the Muslim populated regions of the Middle Volga and Caucasus posing serious threat for Stalin seeking to eliminate native communist leadership (Bennigsen, Wimbush, 1979: 67).

Such policy goal has been achieved through an ethnic engineering project launched from 1928 to 1932. As a part of the project, Turkestan was divided into five republics and the Soviet leaders "have encouraged ethnic identification based on language

and have systematically combatted ethnic identification based on religion” (Takeyh, Gwozdev, 2004: 110). All current day national borders and national identity-related issues, to a great extent are a product of the project, and as Silezkine puts Stalin, “became the true father of nations” (Slezkine, 1994: 414). This multi-faceted politico-economic-social project, turned into “celebration of ethnic diversity that any state had ever financed” (Ibid.). Stalin’s project was a practical measure to bring an end to the traditional social structure in Central Asia representing a rival authority to the Soviet regime which “involved identities and bonds of loyalty based on tribal organization as well as on religious authority” (Haugen, 2003: 211). The Soviet leaders tried to separate Muslim groups in Central Asia as much as possible into distinct nationalities in a bid to prevent any pan-Islamic or pan-Turkic unity from happening (Takeyh, Gwozdev, 2004: 110). Here Arne Haugen captured the striking paradox in the Soviet national policies as everywhere internationally-minded Bolsheviks eradicated multi-ethnic political entities in Central Asia while making “national identity the main principle of the territorial political organization” (Haugen, 2003: 2, 233).

In terms of far-reaching strategic goals, this policy paved the way for further assimilation of Central Asia into a Soviet Man identity. Needless to say, the loss of Turkestan which “deprived the people of a common homeland, a common language, and a common destiny” (Rashid, 1994: 32) would eventually act as breeding ground for further assimilation as “over time the Soviets would develop distinct languages, literature, and histories for each of the republics, selecting dialects that were as far apart from another as possible” (Keller, 2001: 79) in ethnically homogenous territorial units. The new generation learned the Soviet version of their history which downgraded the importance of national and religious identity into rudimentary level. The institutions of Literature, History, and Language established by Moscow in new Central Asian republics propagated the role that “great Russian people” played in liberating and civilizing their younger brothers while prompting their incorporation into a new supra-national identity of Soviet People (Yemelianova, 2010: 22).

As a part of the Stalinist policies pitting “one republic and one ethnic group against other” (Rashid, 1994: 32) the national borders were delimited in such way that each republic gained a considerable portion of ethnic minorities in its territory, and overlapped across borders with their own identities which proved to be source of tension between Central Asian republics during and after the Soviet rule. The hardest was the Tajiks claims over Samarkand and Bukhara located in Uzbekistan. Moreover, the Uzbeks claimed the entity of the Ferghana Valley and the Kazakhs claimed the Uzbek capital of Tashkent (Kudaibergenova, 2014: 168). Brutal clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the Osh district of Kyrgyzstan in May–August 1989, between Tajik and Kyrgyz in the Isfara district of Tajikistan and the Batken district of Kyrgyzstan (June–July 1989), as well as among the ethnic groups in the Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Republic of Tajikistan and in Dushanbe, claimed hundreds of deaths and injuries. Even, calls by the Uzbek Muslim leader Muhammad Yusup saying that, “We used to be one people and we will be one people in the future, I hope. Common religion will help us to resolve disputes and conflicts” referring to the pre-Soviet common identity, obviously fell short in preventing violent clashes (Takeyh, Gwozdev, 2004: 118).

REFASHIONED OLD-NEW SOVIET IDEOLOGICAL NARRATIVES

Despite the breakdown of the USSR the Soviet culture ideological legacy mostly survived in Central Asian republics, to which scholars point. The local communist party branches are still dominant political forces in all the post-Soviet Central Asian republics, albeit under changed party names. By the same token the ideological narratives were also subject to tiny alterations. Although Lenin's statues were gradually replaced by statues of the medieval rulers Tamerlane and Ismail Samani in Uzbek and Tajik capitals, however it did not translated into transformation of the old political and social institutions inherited from the Leninist rule to the new one. As nicely phrased by Diana Kudaibergenova, the national narratives and symbols used in the Central Asian successor states "are still Soviet in content and anti-Soviet in form" (Kudaibergenova, 2014: 160–162).

Post-Soviet national imagination was actually the present incarnation of the Leninist nationality policy based on flourishing of distinctive ethnic and primordial identities, at times artificial creations, under different name of independence. Like the Soviet era, the post-independence ideological narratives served almost the same social purposes: from weakening nationalistic ideas, preventing local nationalist sentiments and social coherence curbed during the Soviet rule from revitalization, to "neutralizing political opponents propagating Islamic, ethno-nationalist, and Western democratic values (Laurelle, 2018: 262). Only slight difference could be "forging an image of national leaders from the figures of current presidents, as nation and state builders" (Dagiev, 2014: 1–2).

However there was a short period coinciding with the early years of the independence which could be characterized as a period of accomodation with the opposition demands, rupture with the Soviet legacy, including the restoration of cultural values suppressed by the Soviets and more place for Islam in social life. Such change first of all is explained with the rise of nationalist, religious, and democratic forces in all ex-soviet republics once suppressed for their pro-independence inspirations by the deposed Soviet rule in early 1990s which seriously embattled the old communist nomenclature across. Nationalist forces led by Zviad Gamsachurdia and Abulfaz Elchibey, both imprisoned for anti-Soviet activities, came to power in Georgia and Azerbaijan in 1992. A 25-year long war (1844–1869) led by Muslim cleric Imam Shamil against the Tsarist Russian occupation, was a source of emulation for a new anti-Russian insurgency in Russia's North Caucasus region. Forces struggling for independence from the USSR replaced old communist leaders in three Baltic republics, as well as in Armenia and Moldova. Pro-democracy forces also gained momentum in Russian politics. In such political context immediate concern was how maintain power and the ex-communist leaders which in turn necessitated distancing themselves from their discredited Soviet past and to introduce a new political platform. In compliance with new realities on the ground Karimov was supporting the idea of collective Turkestani identity destroyed by the Soviets and agitated by the nationalist forces, praised the Basmachi movement fighting the Bolsheviks in early 1920s as heroes of the national liberation movement. The Tajik leadership adopted a law on the replacement of the Cyrillic alphabet with the Arabic script used for more than thousand years prior to the Soviet occupation.

Since late 1990s after the ex-communist leaders cemented their grip on power the Soviet-era ideologies re-introduced which were slightly tailored by the same former communist ideology secretaries and adjusted to new realities. According to Kudaibergenova, “the instruments, players and, to some extent, even the content of the ideological production in Central Asia were heavily influenced by the recent Soviet past.” (Kudaibergenova, 2014: 170). The communist leaders of the successor states resorted to similar ideological rhetoric even did not change design of the monuments while repeating forms and symbols they used to employ during their communist tenure. The ruling elite in charge of new-old ideology producing were Soviet-trained unfamiliar with alternative ways of doing politics and therefore applied the available patterns and templates in creating ideological narratives which is in total compatibility with the path dependence approach (Ibid.). In Uzbekistan, Ozod Sharafadinov a former secretary of Uzbek Communist Party in ideological issues was among leading ideologists shaping a mega narrative of Uzbek national consciousness (Laurelle, 2018: 264). Tajik President Rahmon’s advisors involved in drafting national ideology were also Russian trained (Marat, 2008: 13).

After passing fragile period Islam Karimov introduced the transcendental idea of national independence which allowed him to avoid the re-valuation of the Soviet past and ideological reshuffles. This audacious idea absorbed medieval thinkers, Jadidi reformists and even communist leaders in Uzbekistan, into the direct line linking Tamerlane to Karimov fighting for the same goal of Uzbekistan’s national independence. The Uzbek leadership embarked to redefine all famous historical and intellectual figures including Tamerlane, the Islamic medieval thinkers and atheist communist leaders, which were at odds with each other, to bring them in compatibility with the new notion. As a part and parcel of and represent them as struggling for a common set of values and the idea of national independence reaching its apogee in the ideological and political achievements of the Soviet and post-Soviet leader Islam Karimov (March, 2002: 374).

However, redefining politico-social figures with diametrically opposite worldviews as persons struggling for the single goal is not an easy task and is full of controversy as political purposes they had pursued hardly be termed having something common with the nation state. Medieval Islamic scholars resided in modern day Uzbekistan, for instance, were concerned with the constructing an Islamic conception of the ‘virtuous city’ and the notion of national state developed with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 was an irrelevant and would be beyond the realm of their comprehension. The Jadidis were seeking to modernize teaching methods in school and establishing a multiethnic pan-Turkic Islamic state unifying Muslim population residing in the Tsarist Russia. Faizulla Khodjaev was an early Uzbek communist leader sided with Russians to defeat independent seeking Basmachi movement. Sharaf Rashidov, a native Soviet leader and known as communist party writer, variously awarded with the Order of Lenin for his services before the Soviet state (Gleason, 1986: 136–137). In Gleason’s terms, in his writings Rashidov belittled past Central Asian, including the Uzbek culture as backward, to the point of cultural insult while urging his people to demonstrate gratitude to their Slavic elder brothers for ideological and technical assistance (Ibid.: 142). His name also was closely associated with corruption scandal revealed after Brezhnev’s

death, involving the inflation of cotton production figures and the embezzlement sheer amount of money (March, 2002: 379–380).

By the same token Tajik president was facing the similar challenges who had borrowed an old Tajik Aryanism discourse anchored in Soviet science turning it into cornerstone of the identity policies. Rahmon incorporated figures and movements as diverse and contradictory as founders of the Islamic dynasty to the Soviet era atheist communist leaders, pro-Islamic the Jadidist modernizers as well as medieval theocrats, into the same pantheon united by the drive for preserving the Aryan civilization heritage. The list thus produces some strange associations with including Cyrus and Darius of Achaemenid dynasty, Ismail Somoni the founder of the Samanyd state Islamizing Central Asia, Shirinsho Shotemur one of the pioneers of the establishing the Soviet rule, a Jadidi figure Sadridin Ayni, and Babajan Gafurov leading the Tajik Soviet Republic in mid-1950s who authored several books on the Ariyan origins of the Tajiks (Marat, 2008: 21).

The constituting elements of the Tajik national narrative trace the origins of the Tajiks to Aryan civilization, link the formation of the Tajik nation to the Somonid dynasty and present Zoroastrian as national religion of the Tajiks. Such configuration exhibits a little rapture with the Soviet ideological narratives and is actually its reinterpretation. The both pursue the social purposes identical to the Soviet narratives: keeping in distance ideological narratives suppressed by the Bolsheviks like ethno-nationalism, Islamism, the common Turkestani identity. The controversial Aryan identity which lacked any solid consensus placing current day Tajiks in the realm of Aryan civilization was actually developed by the works of Soviet scholars Yakubovski. It further was developed by the former head of the Tajik Communist Party Bobojan Gafurov. The promotion of the Aryan notion was a part of the Soviet strategy goal to replace religion based identity with language based one. The Aryanism fitted to these interests as it treated the Turkish-speaking neighbors as non-friendly and the Uzbeks were depicted as usurpers of the Tajik lands. More importantly, To this end Soviet scholarship connected historical past of the modern nations to the mythologies with less practical implications, loos connections and open to manipulation to downgrade the status of Islamic faith in national consciousness. However, with the removal of iron curtains by the collapse of the Soviet Union the Aryan race might bring Tajiks close with Persian speaking nations and Iran in particular. Thus the promotion of the Islamic-Tajik Samanid dynasty ruling Central Asian region from 819 to 1005 was aimed at distancing the Tajiks from the Iranians (Epkenhans, 2017: 187–188). However, Ismail Somoni's name is closely associated with the Islamization of Central Asia and he was praised as a pious Muslim in medieval authors' works like ibn Al-Kathir thus may enhance the role of Islam in society. The declaration of Zoroastrian as the national religion and second pillar of the promoted identity is supposed to neutralize side effects of the possible strengthening of Islamic feelings caused by the promotion of Islamil Somoni. The most importantly, the notion of the Aryan heritage and the inclusion of the former communist leaders of Tajikistan among other historical figures serve to prevent reassessment of the Soviet ideological past and to keep all things together. To sum up, post-independent identity policies in Tajikistan were not designed to

build a new idea but to moot or relegate or keep at arms-length identities marginalized during the Soviet period. It's every carefully selected pillars serves particular strategic goals such as neutralizing

School textbook on history which according to Jonathan Friedman is “the official voice of the state itself” might be another illustrative example of the mentioned claims. While terming the politics of identity as “anchoring the present in a viable past” he highlights that “the past is, thus, constructed according to the conditions and desires of those who produce historical textbooks in the present” (Blakkisrud, Nozimova, 2010: 174).

From this perspective, systematic analyze of the state approved history curriculum and the Soviet era textbooks conducted by Helge Blakkisrud and Shahnoza Nozimova reveals two important things: 1) Ideological narratives align to the Soviet identity were denied in rehabilitation and re-claiming its pre-Soviet status in society and 2) the 70 year long Soviet period is still presented through a positive, at times even nostalgic, lenses and in no way resembles the revolt of a former colony against the colonizer and disassociation of the “Tajik “self” from the metropolitan Russian “other.” Due to the lack of a post-colonial turn in modern Tajik historiography, the Russians illustrated as “the elder brother” and “the leading nation” during the Soviet Tajik historiography now are introduced as an “external self” to the Tajiks (Blakkisrud, Nozimova, 2010: 175, 183–184).

Post-independence textbooks simply omitted quotes from Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and copied and pasted certain passages from the Soviet era books in regard to the Tsarist occupation of the Central Asia. The Tajik scholars actually reproduced the Soviet version of the events depicting the Russians as the civilized and civilizing “older brother” who brought radical changes to all spheres of life (Ibid.: 181).

Chapters related to the Soviet occupation of the region also present almost identical narratives of the Soviet textbooks. The Bolsheviks are depicted as he heroes, whereas the Basmachi movement fighting the Russian troops is described as “terrorist groups” who killed Soviet activists and burned schools and villages (Ibid.: 182).

However, contrary to such interpretations, the famous Basmachi movement consolidating large strata of the then Turkestanian society under the banner of the Islam in a war against the Soviet rule “had left an indelible psychological and political heritage which remains alive even today” (Bennigsen, 1988: 21). Pinar Akchali terms the political struggle on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union as the war between next generations of the Bolsheviks and Basmachis in Central Asia. According to her, about 30–40% of the Soviet troops stationed in Afghanistan in early months of the Soviet invasion in December 1979 where large number of were consisting of Central Asian conscripts which put them against the successors of Basmachis seeking shelter in Afghanistan showed these memories to which extent are alive. The calculations of the Soviet military leaders aiming at gaining support from local population sharing a lot in common with the conscripts from the Central Asia did not live up to the expectation as Central Asia – originated soldiers refrained from active fight against their brethren. They in some cases even showed venues of the ammunition storages to the Afghan mujahids which forced the Soviet military to replace them with troops from Slavic republics (Akcali, 1998: 275).

The negative image of the religion which was prevail in the Soviet era textbooks not only has been upheld – but also reinforced – in the contemporary readings. Islam is depicted as align religion forcefully imposed as the result of the devastating Arab invasion whereas extinct Zoroastrianism is seen as a historically positive unifying force with a link to the Aryan heritage and an integral part of the historical “self.” Islam, the dominant religion in Tajikistan, occupies a far more ambiguous position as what the authors termed the “internal other.” Despite the close linkage between the Tajik proto-state of the Samanyds and Islam as it was “only during Samanid rule that the population at large was drawn into Islam” this passage completely omitted from the textbooks although even the Soviet-era books briefly mentioned it (Blakkisrud, Nozimova, 2010: 184–185).

METHODS TO MITIGATE CONTROVERSIES

To overcome theoretical challenges, two methods were explored. The first, which was widely used by Karimov, the potentially dangerous historical and cultural figures and ideologies were claimed as own, but their ideas were prevented from to be recasted as relevant to the post-independence way (March, 2002: 379–380). Such tactic clearly manifested itself when Uzbekistan abandoned public celebrations of the Andijan uprising of 1898 against the Tsarist Empire due to its ideological and political implications. The issue is that the uprising was led by a religious figure Dukchi Ishan and Uzbek official were concerned that “the public would fasten on Dukchi Ishan’s desire to restore a “righteous” Islamic state rather than see him simply as a fighter for national independence (Olcott, 2012: 201). Even Khoja Ahrar well-regarded Sufi theologian and state leader exhibiting Uzbeks historic role in developing Sufism was denied in jubilee celebrations because of his “political credo.” The Uzbek state relegated the jubilee celebrations and an international conference in 2004 to a small conference for local scholars as soon as the Presidential Council received a detailed memo on his political activities and thoughts religiously justifying the engagement of the brotherhood in politics under some circumstances (Ibid.). Not surprisingly a Soviet era historical book written by the former Tajik communist leader Babojonov reprinted in Tajikistan in 2017 still describes Hoji Ahrar’s reign as “the darkest period in the history of the Central Asian people” marks no change from departure from the Soviet mindset (Bodzanov, 1972: 513).

Another tactic mostly used is neutralizing not-suitable historical persons through redefining their missions in ways not-contradicting to states policies. Such methods usually utilized regarding persons whose ideas could not be prevented from being projected in society which the case of Ismail Somoni the founder of the Somonid dynasty is an illustrative example. Ismail Somoni’s name is closely associated with the Islamization of Central Asia and he was praised as a pious Muslim in medieval authors’ works like ibn Al-Kathir thus may cause the promotion of the role of Islam in society. The campaign for the Islamization of Central Asia was cornerstone of his political ambitions and predicated his power on piety and, above all, holy warfare to Islamize others, including vestiges of the Zoroastrian faith. However, the Tajik president

Rahmon sees “a close but unknown link” bridging two great periods stretching from Zoroastrianism and emergence of Islam. He deduces that despite being pious Muslim, “Ismail Somoni remained unfailingly faithful... to the elements of Aryan statehood,” while allowing “the wise implementation, through the state apparatus, of the spiritual standards of Islam and their fusion with the Aryan heritage” (Laurelle, 2007: 54–55).

However, the de-Islamization of Abu Hanifa does not necessarily require creating linkage between him and the Aryan identity. For the Tajik state leader, Abu Hanifa first of all is a Tajik merchant largely concerned with fairness and justice in trading. Thus he specifies Abu Hanifa’s works as “mirror of princes” and integrates it into larger body of the Persian deductive literature while omitting its religious content. In Rahmon’s interpretation, Hanafa urged fellow Muslims to show respect to the ruler, to admit someone’s position in society (Epkenhess, 2017: 191).

Similarly, mainstream Uzbek scholarship tries to redefine Islamic-Platonist text *al-Madina al-Fadila* (The Virtuous City) by the logician and philosopher al-Farabi (872–950/51) in particular and medieval Islamic philosophy, in general to legitimate the secular state concept and to validate the authoritarian politics preferred by president Karimov. According to an Uzbek scholar Tadzhev, the Islamic philosophers, including Farabi emphasized the priority of reason over faith because the rational” allows for the stronger and firmer organization of human association” to which strongly opposes equation of reason with secularism and terming as antithetical noting that “that would hardly have been even communicable to the likes of Farabi” (March, 2002: 379–380).

Many experts and scholars based on their observations and surveys conducted suggest that population mostly dismiss state initiated national identity narratives. In Tajikistan, for the increasing percentage of the population segments particularly among youth, Islam constitutes an important element of an ‘authentic’ Tajik identity and acts as a moral – spiritual guidance. Moreover, over the past decade there is a considerable increase of the public observation of Islam practices (Nozimova, Epkenhans, 2019: 966). The mentioned developments logically point to the failure of the ideological and religious policies in shaping state sponsored identity narratives which could be explained with the deep controversy and contradiction of the state narratives, their little or no everyday relevance to the Tajik society and ineffectiveness of state repressive policies due to technological developments.

Practically speaking, state narratives about the glorious past, Aryan identity, historical heroes of the Tajiks are visible in some banners on the streets and textbooks thus bearing very little tangible repercussions whereas large strata of the people is suffering from the exploitation as second class labor force in abroad, political and social marginalization people from the periphery by their fellow Tajik countrymen from the core regions, nepotism of the dominating elite propagating these ideas (Nozimova, Epkenhans, 2019: 966; Epkenhans, 2017: 174). Islam, by contrast, emphasize on justice and rule of law while providing an alternative explanation for the Tajik national identity acts as a marker of cultural authenticity transcending the Soviet legacy (Epkenhans, 2017: 173–174) and “regained a relevant, dynamic, and public place in Tajikistan’s society as a source of identity and moral-ethical orientation” (Nozimova, Epkenhans, 2019: 135).

DEEP ROOTS OF SOVIET LEGACY

The reasons behind the reluctance of the Uzbek and Tajik leadership to rupture with the Soviet governance methods could be better comprehended with their deep exposure to the Soviet ideology. The Central Asian, including Uzbek and Tajik communist leaders had stronger will to preserve the Soviet Union, compared with their colleagues in other Soviet republics, to which historical evidences attest. In Martha Brill Olcott's terms, none of them was "genuinely enthusiastic about the idea of national independence" (Olcott, 1992: 111). The very emergence of the independent Uzbek and Tajik states happened despite all efforts made by the old communist and incumbent national leaders of Central Asia to prevent the Soviet state from collapse. Two major facts, namely the referendum held in March 1991 to preserve the Soviet rule and the Central Asian republics' enormous support for the coup attempt in August 1991 initiated by the Soviet KGB chief to keep the USSR alive are the most telling evidence supporting this argument.

In the first case, what is striking is that only Central Asian republics and Azerbaijan supported a futile effort made by Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia while the referendum was boycotted in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia, seeking more independence from Moscow. Ironically, voters in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in a "near unanimous support" voted "suspiciously like standard Soviet-era "election" results" (96,2%, 95,4%, respectively) whereas just 75,4% of voters voted for the continuation of the Soviet rule in Russia, would-be successor of the USSR (Khaleed, 2014: 128–129).

The Tajik and Uzbek communist leaders' support to the coup attempt initiated by Kryuchkov, the head of the Soviet KGB in August 1991 to re-install strict communist rule failed thanks to resistance from democratic forces in Moscow. Karimov leading the Communist Party of Uzbekistan openly declared his support for putsch masterminds noting that Gorbachov's policies led to the abolition of order and discipline, and thus such a leader shouldn't return to power. On the other hand, Uzbek police arrested dozens opposition party members protesting against the coup attempt (Rashid, 1994: 93). The Uzbek government jammed TV channels broadcasted from Moscow whereas any communiqué issued by the coup leaders found wide media coverage in the state media. Consequent developments forced Karimov to get parliament's nasty declaration of independence from the USSR on 31 August 1991 just 10 days after the failure of the coup which is regarded a last resort to save his power and prevent conflict with Gorbachev, imprisoned temporarily by the masterminds of the coup. The declaration of independence meant the parliament acting "against the will of their own people" who had overwhelmingly voted against it just 5 months ago (Rashid, 1994: 5, 94).

As with other Central Asian republic leaders, the failed August 1991 coup attempt also received Tajik communist leader Mahkamov's support, which caused huge wave of continuing demonstrations outside the parliament eventually bringing about his resignation on 7 September 1991 (Rashid, 1994: 173).

The unwillingness of the Russian leadership to keep the USSR caused its demise despite all efforts by communist leaders of the other republics. Remarks made during the Ashkabat meeting of 1991 by Yegor Gaidar would be Russian Prime Minister "Why should we bailout these strife-torn regions of Central Asia, who share nothing

with us – least of all our religion,” arguing that Russia might turn into a great power again on its own (Rashid, 1994: 3) shows that the Central Asia had no choice but, to borrow from Colcott “to catapult to independence” (Olcott, 1992: 110).

Such desire of the native communists to preserving the Soviet rule and unwillingness to independence could be explained, with their, – “the class of 38,” in particular, to borrow from Carlisle – deep exposure to the Soviet propaganda (Carlisle, 1986: 99). Being raised in state-run orphanages, as it was case with the last Uzbek communist leader Islam Karimov (1938–2016) (Dagiev, 2014: 218), and his Turkmen counterpart Saparmurat Niyazov (1940–2006), (Cummings, 2002: 118) lacking parents and having humble backgrounds, and standing at the margins of society were common features of this group (born approximately in 1938s). The group rises to power and prominence owing to the Soviet state, and thus they were very loyal to the Soviet rule (Khaleed, 2014: 81).

CONCLUSION

The collapse of the Soviet Union did not bring new political forces and ideologies to dominate political realm in successor states of Central Asia. The incumbent communist elite severely curbing pro-independence inspirations of its own people refashioned itself within a period varying from 10 days to 2 months from the staunchest supporters of the Soviet rule to the founding fathers of the new national states to which they had opposed strongly. The ideological narratives of the communist rule were slightly adjusted by the same former communist ideologists and aimed to moot Islamic, nationalistic and democratic ideas in newly independent states. Such political reconfiguration could partly prevent the mentioned ideas from re-establishment but failed to fill the ideological vacuum eventually leading to ideological disorientation.

Nationalistic ideas suppressed during the Soviet period were denied a ground in newly established states. Policies designed by the Soviet scholars to eliminate social coherence and national unity of Central Asian people were re-introduced for new identity building in post-Soviet states. The Soviet national narratives was designed to replace religious affinity based and unifying Turkestan identity, as it posed serious threat to secure Bolsheviks’ power, with an identity grounded on language and ethnic affinity to disintegrate and prevent re-emergence of natives as unified political force. To this end Soviet scholarship connected historical past of the modern nations to the mythologies with less practical implications, loose connections and open to manipulation to downgrade the status of Islamic faith in national consciousness. Post-independent national narratives were also grounded on the glorification particular passages of national history on highly pick and choose base excluding nationalist figures and movements associated with Islam and acting as unifying factor of Central Asian nations while accommodating the Soviet era national figures.

Post-independent identity policies are not designed to build a new idea but to moot or relegate or keep at arms-length identities marginalized during the Soviet period. The constituting elements of the Tajik national narrative tracing the origins of the Tajiks to Aryan civilization, linking the formation of the Tajik nation to the Somonid dynasty

and presenting Zoroastrian as national religion of the Tajiks shares common purpose with the Soviet narratives in keeping in distance ideological narratives suppressed by the Bolsheviks like ethno-nationalism, Islamism, Turkestani identity. The controversial Aryan identity which lacked any solid consensus placing current day Tajiks in the realm of Aryan civilization was designed to replace religion based identity with language based one. On the other hand, to avoid close ties with Tajiks and Iranians the Islamic-Tajik Samanid dynasty ruling Central Asian region from 819 to 1005 was promotion to distance the Tajiks from the Iranians. The declaration of Zoroastrian as the national religion second pillar of the promoted identity is supposed to neutralize possible enhancement of religion's position in society due to close association of the Somonid dynasty with the Islamization of the region which constitutes a part of identity. Uzbekistan neutralized national political and historical figures and ideas associated with political Islam through re-defining and de-Islamizing them. politically motivated national The most importantly, the former communist leaders were placed in the same pantheon with the influential historical and political figures as defenders of the Aryan heritage in Tajikistan and struggling for the national independence throughout the history in Uzbekistan served to prevent reassessment of the Soviet ideological past thus securing the preventing the re-emergence of the pre-Soviet ideological environment and kept all things of the Soviet time together except slight alterations.

Such ideological cacophony was a byproduct of the state policies acting as source of ideological disorientation. However, due to globalization and geostrategic factors surrounding the mentioned countries, such factors made vulnerable youth and accelerated their recruitment by global terrorist networks.

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes main drivers of the revitalization of the Soviet ideological narratives in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. A key impetus for the study has been ever increasing number of the terrorist attacks claiming dozens of lives in Russia committed by Central Asian originated fighters as well as arrest of dozens of members of the various religious organizations banned in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The hypothesis rests on the assumption that ideological cacophony stemming from deep controversies embodied in the refashioned Soviet ideological narratives to me major cause of the problem. While employing the path dependence approach, I mainly point to interaction between the surge in the religious extremism and ideological disorientation caused by ideological disorientation in the region continuing since the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991 to address main research question “what are external implications of post-Soviet ideological narratives in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan?.” The paper finds out that the post-independent identity policies are not designed to build a new idea but to moot or keep at arms-length identities marginalized during the Soviet period. The Soviet legacy constitutes the core of the neo-ethnic identities introduced by former communist leaders just slightly refashioned with highly selective and politically motivated supplements. Sharp contradictions embodied in these narratives designed to ensure policy goals is among drivers of the ideological disorientation which in its turn acts as a breeding ground for the recruitment of Uzbek and Tajik youth to the global terrorist networks.

Keywords: Identity, Soviet legacy, terrorism, path dependence, Central Asia

SOWIECKIE DZIEDZICTWO I WYIMAGINOWANA PRZESZŁOŚĆ SKUPIONE NA POLU BITWY LEWANTU

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł analizuje główne siły napędowe rewitalizacji sowieckich narracji ideologicznych w Uzbekistanie i Tadżykistanie. Kluczowym bodźcem do podjęcia badań jest stale rosnąca liczba ataków terrorystycznych, w których zginęły dziesiątki ofiar śmiertelnych w Rosji, popełnio-

nych przez bojowników pochodzących z Azji Środkowej, a także aresztowania kilkudziesięciu członków różnych organizacji religijnych zakazanych w Uzbekistanie i Tadżykistanie. Hipoteza opiera się na założeniu, że ideologiczna kakofonia wywodząca się z głębokich kontrowersji zawartych w przerobionych sowieckich narracjach ideologicznych jest główną przyczyną problemu. Stosując podejście „path dependence”, wskazuję przede wszystkim na interakcję między gwałtownym wzrostem ekstremizmu religijnego a dezorientacją ideologiczną spowodowaną dezorientacją ideologiczną w regionie trwającą od rozpadu Związku Radzieckiego w 1991 roku, aby odpowiedzieć na główne pytanie badawcze: „Jakie są zewnętrzne implikacje post-sowieckich narracji ideologicznych w Uzbekistanie i Tadżykistanie?” Z artykułu wynika również, że post-niepodległościowa polityka tożsamości nie ma na celu budowania nowej idei, ale dyskusowania lub trzymania na dystans tożsamości marginalizowanych w okresie sowieckim. Sowiecka spuścizna stanowi rdzeń tożsamości neoetnicznych wprowadzonych przez byłych przywódców komunistycznych, tylko nieznacznie przerobionych z wysoce selektywnymi i politycznie umotywowanymi dodatkami. Ostre sprzeczności zawarte w tych narracjach, mające na celu zapewnienie celów politycznych, są jednym z czynników napędzających ideologiczną dezorientację, która z kolei działa jak wylęgarnia rekrutacji młodzieży uzbeckiej i tadżyckiej do globalnych sieci terrorystycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość, spuścizna sowiecka, terroryzm, zależność od drogi, Azja Centralna

