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The Effect of the
Desiccation of the
Aral Sea on
Central Asia

Mona Hassan Mostafa Abdel Rahman

1998

Thesis
1998/18

The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**The Effect of the Desiccation of the Aral Sea
on Central Asia**

A Thesis Submitted to

Political Science Department

in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

by

Mona Hossam Mostafa Abdel Rahman

(Under Supervision of Dr. Ivan Ivekovic)

May / 1998

The American University in Cairo

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18

The Effect of the Desiccation of the Aral Sea on Central Asia

A Thesis submitted by Mona Hossam Mostafa Abdel Rahman
to Department of Political Science

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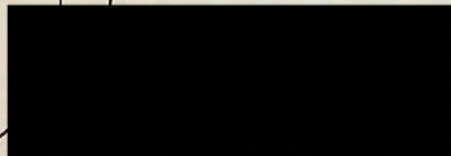
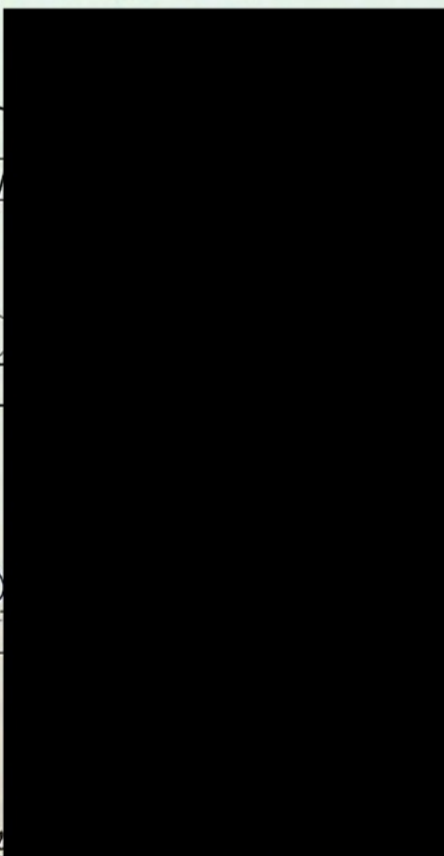
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

has been approved by

Dr. Ivan Ivekovic
Thesis Committee Chair / Advisor
Affiliation _____

Dr. Tim Sullivan
Thesis Committee Chair / examiner
Affiliation _____

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Chapter I

Introduction

Environmental issues are becoming important parts of our lives as people are starting to worry whether life as we know it can continue for more than a few decades. As environmental problems are turning up all over the world, some are beginning to wonder if the road ahead is going to go downhill. It is not just a question of survival, but the question of how the degradation of the environment will effect people's lives and economies. Will they be able to live in peace or is tension and conflict part of the future?

There are many types of environmental problems, but one of the most important is water scarcity. Without water there is no life. Few know this better than the Central Asians. And yet today, the water they depend on is rapidly declining. The quality of their remaining water is annually worsening because of short term economic policies in the region.

During the Cold War period, the Soviet Union wanted to be self-sufficient in as many crops as possible. Among these, cotton was considered to be of major importance. It was named the 'white gold'. Since cotton needs specific weather conditions, Central Asia was chosen for the growth of this crop. The only problem was water. The Soviets realized that the enormous amounts of water needed would eventually lead to desiccation of the Aral Sea. But it was decided that being self-sufficient in cotton was worth the price. Since most of Central Asia is arid, there was not enough arable land and water for both cotton and other agricultural products. Consequently, cotton became the basis of Central Asian economies. More or less all sectors of their economies were related to the growth of this crop.

The Aral Sea, a large lake, receives its water from the annual flow of two major rivers: the Amu Darya and Syr Darya. When the cotton production grew, more and more water from these two rivers were diverted into irrigation canals. As cotton production increased, the amount of water reaching the sea declined.

The desiccation has led to regional environmental degradation which has had a negative impact of the soil and weather conditions necessary for the growth of cotton. The environmental problems are therefore causing a decline in the quantity and quality of the cotton which the currently the basis of the Central Asian economies.

One of the factors intensifying the impact of the environmental degradation on the stability of the region is the population growth rate. While the amount and quality of the arable land is decreasing, the sizes of Central Asian populations are growing. More and more people require land and employment at the same time as the environmental degradation is causing these to diminish. As the unemployment levels rise and incomes shrink people's frustrations and resentment are aggravating relations among ethnic groups and have brought to surface the previously dormant tensions.

The research question of this paper is whether the desiccation of the Aral Sea and its consequent environmental degradation is leading to political tensions within and between the four Central Asian countries of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The hypothesis is that poor countries are vulnerable to environmental degradation as their economies and societies can not afford to lose much more. Therefore, environmentally induced conflicts are likely to occur in Central Asia as a result of the desiccation of the Aral Sea. The environmental degradation will, in time, combined with an unsustainable economy, weak civic

institutions and tense social relations, lead to different degrees of conflict such as deprivation conflicts, ethnic conflicts and civil strife as well as disputes and conflicts between countries.

The thesis will start by determining the extent of the degradation of the Aral Sea and the two rivers, the Amu Darya and Syr Darya. It will examine the effect that the desiccation has had on the region surrounding the sea.

Secondly, the paper will analyze the problems ecological degradation such as water scarcity can create for countries. It will attempt to assess the importance of the physical environment to the national security.

Next, it is important to understand the meaning of political tensions, possibly violence, on the national and regional level. It will look at the different types of political tensions and their causes.

The fourth section of the paper will study each of the four countries (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan) separately. The paper will demonstrate how the environmental problems facing them as a result of the decline of the Aral Sea, together with the demographic explosion, unemployment, ethnic heterogeneity, and mono-culture of cotton, affects other aspects of their societies such as their economies, political structures and political stability.

After considering the problems indirectly caused by the decline of the water levels in the different countries, the paper will analyze the different political tensions that have occurred in recent years in each country. In the end, the paper will examine the different tensions that exist between the different Central Asian countries due to the water scarcity.

Chapter II

The Problem: The desiccation of the Aral Sea and general environmental degradation

Since the creation of the Soviet Union, Moscow has been trying to reconstruct the nature within its border in order to exploit it to the limits. As a result the Soviet Union has left a legacy of widespread environmental degradation and mismanagement. Among the most highly degraded areas is the region around the Aral Sea and the sea itself.

The Soviet Union was the second largest cotton producer in the world until it disintegrated and 95 % of this cotton was grown on irrigated land in Central Asia. This became the region's main crop, but 40 % of Soviet rice, one-third of its fruit and grapes, and one-quarter of its vegetables grew in this arid region as well.¹

The Aral Sea, a large shallow, saline lake, was once the world's fourth largest lake. In 1960 the surface area of the lake was 68,000 square kilometers and it had a volume of 1,090 cubic kilometers. The average depth of the lake was 16 meters. Its average salinity was 10 gram per liter.² Since the 1960s this has changed.

¹Glantz, Michael. "Tragedy in the Aral Sea Basin: Looking Back to Plan Ahead?" Iranian Journal of International Affairs V. 5 (Spring 1993):

²Kotlyakov, V. "The Aral Sea Basin: A Critical Environmental Zone" Environment V. 33, No. 1 (January/ February 1991): 6.

The Aral Sea water level was maintained by the annual flow of two major rivers: the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers. The Amu Darya river is 1,578 miles long. It starts in the Pamir mountains of Afghanistan, and flows through Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The Syr Darya is 1,370 miles long and it starts in Kyrgyzstan before flowing through Tajikistan. They brought an average flow of 56 cubic kilometers per year into the Aral Sea. This was supplemented by 5 cubic kilometers of atmospheric precipitation.³

In the period between 1971 and 1980 the inflow of river water into the Aral Sea was only 16.7 cubic kilometers per year, compared to the previous 56. In the early 1980s there was practically no inflow. The years 1987 and 1988 were years of abundant water so the Syr Darya provided 1.2 cubic km. in the first year and 6.2 cubic km. in the second year, while the Amu Darya provided 8 in the first year and 16 in the second. In 1989, however, the total inflow decreased again to around 5 cubic kilometers.⁴

As a result of this diminished inflow of water, by the early nineties the Aral sea had lost 66% of its volume and 40% of its size. Its depth decreased to 9 meters and its salinity increased to 27 grams per liter (see table 1).

³ Ibid., 7

⁴ Ibid., 6

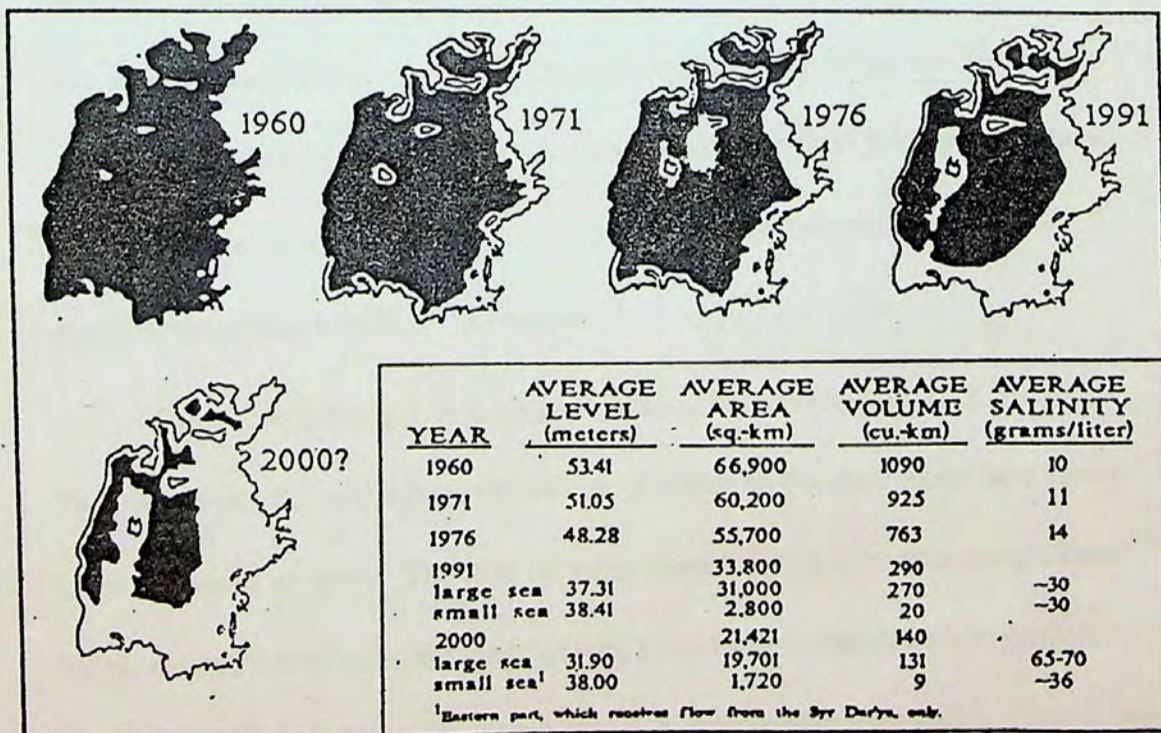
Table 1. Aral Sea changes from 1960 to 1989.

Year	Sea level	Sea area(Km ²)	Sea volume(Km ³)	Mineral (g/liter)	flow into sea
1960	53.3	67,900	1,090	10.0	40
1965	52.5	63,900	1,030	10.5	31
1970	51.6	60,400	970	11.1	33
1975	49.4	57,200	840	13.7	11
1980	46.2	52,400	670	16.5	0
1985	42.0	44,400	470	23.5	0
1989	39.0	37,000	340	28.0	5

SOURCE: V. M. Kotkyakov. "The Aral Sea Basin: A Critical Environmental Zone" *Environment* v.33, No. 1 (January/February 1991): 6.

By the end of the 1980s the Aral Sea had divided into two separate parts: the 'Greater Sea' and the 'Lesser Sea', or 'Little Aral' and 'Big Aral'. And if the sea continues to shrink there will also be an 'East Sea' and a 'West Sea' (See Figure 2). By 1995, the Aral Sea had lost 75 percent of its volume and 50 percent of its size and the sea is continuing to shrink.

Figure 1 The changing profile of the Aral Sea.



SOURCE: UNEP *The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea* Nairobi; UNEP 1992.

The single dominant cause of the desiccation of the Aral Sea is the huge expansion of irrigation. The Central Asians have used irrigation for thousands of years without causing a decline in the sea level, but when the Soviets took control of the region, the irrigated land increased to levels far above previous levels.

The desiccation of the Aral Sea began when Nikita Khrushchev, in the end of the 1954, started the 'Virgin Lands' scheme. The aim was to grow wheat on the arid steppes of Kazakhstan and cotton in Central Asia in order to lessen the Soviet Union's dependency on imports.

At the time Soviet experts realized that the agricultural expansion would lead to a drastic reduction in the inflow of water to the Aral Sea and that this would reduce the sea level. However, the leadership saw this as a worthwhile tradeoff. Sacrificing a remote desert lake for the sake of economic development was seen as acceptable. A cubic meter of water used for irrigation was worth more than a cubic meter of water just flowing into the lake. Khrushchev stated that "his society could not wait for nature to produce benefits and that society must extract those benefits from nature."⁵

Prior to this period, just under 3 million hectares were under irrigation. This, however, did not reduce the inflow of water to the Aral more than would keep the sea at its level. The loss of water used for irrigation was compensated for by natural reaction in the evaporation, transpiration and filtration processes. By 1980, the irrigated land had grown to 6.5 million hectares, and in 1987 it had

⁵Glantz, Michael. "Tragedy in the Aral Sea Basin: Looking Back to Plan Ahead?" Iranian Journal of International Affairs V. 5 (Spring 1993): 160.

reached 7.6 million hectares,⁶ but now the water level was no longer compensated for by the natural processes. Expansion of irrigated land meant a large increase in the use of water. The irrigation "of huge new areas such as the Golodnaya steppe along the Syr Darya consumed huge volumes of water to fill soil pore spaces, newly created reservoirs required filling and heightened evaporative losses, increased flushing of soils to counteract secondary salination raised water use."⁷

In addition to over-irrigation, a major contribution to the desiccation of the Aral has been the construction of the Karakum Canal. This canal is 1,300 kilometers long and has diverted over 250 cubic kilometers into the Karakum desert of Turkmenistan since it was built in 1956. This canal diverts an average of 14 cubic Kilometers of water annually from the Amu Darya into the desert. Turkmenistan is planning to extend it.⁸

Figure 2 Main irrigated areas



SOURCE: Pryde, Philip. *Environmental Management in the Soviet Union* Cambridge University Press, 1991: 216

⁶Micklin, Philip. "Desiccation of the Aral Sea: A Water Management Disaster in the Soviet Union" *Science* V. 241 September 2, 1988: 1171.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

The desiccation of the Aral Sea has several serious environmental implications for the surrounding region of Central Asia. The Aral Sea basin includes the entire area of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. It also includes parts of Kazakhstan, northern Afghanistan, and North Eastern Iran. The former Soviet area of the Aral Sea basin is about 1,507,500 cubic square kilometers. The last two countries, however, are not seriously affected as they are further away from the Aral Sea.

In 1960, the Aral Sea contained more than 10 billion metric tons of salt. As the level of the water in the sea declined, this salt has accumulated on the former bottom. By the end of the 1980s, over 27,000 square kilometers of this bottom have been exposed, and have become a source of constant dust-salt storms.

The components of the dust exposed from the sea bed is toxic to plants and the soil. The salt and the other chemicals (sodium chloride, sodium sulfate, magnesium sulfate, and calcium bicarbonate) lead to lower soil fertility and lower crop yields.⁹

During the past 25 years, major dust storms were detected by Soviet cosmonauts. In the period 1975 to 1981, twenty nine major storms were identified by weather satellites. During some years, up to ten storms occurred per year. These storms are estimated to annually carry 43 million metric tons of the exposed salt and dust into the surrounding region. The storms generally stretch for 150 to 500 kilometers, but recent reports show traces of Aral Sea salt

in regions as far as 1000 kilometers away. Traces have been found in places such as the Fergana Valley, in Georgia along the Black Sea, and even on the arctic shores of the Soviet Union.¹⁰ Most of these storms move in the southwest direction over the Amu Darya Delta, spreading over 150,000 -200,000 square kilometers. This land is mainly agricultural land.

Research shows that the frequency and magnitude of the dust storms have increased as the size of the Aral Sea decreased. The number of storms have already increased two to three times. Before the Aral Sea began to decline, it influenced the climate of the land surrounding it, within a radius of 200 to 300 kilometers. But as the size of the sea decreases, together with the drying up of the deltas, its influence on the climate is declining.¹¹

The climate is becoming more continental. This means that the summers are becoming warmer and the winters cooler by several degrees Celsius. There is now lower humidity, and a shorter cultivation season. Frost is now more likely to occur earlier in the fall and last later in the spring. The frost free period in the delta region has now shortened to 170 days which is 30 days less than the 200 required for cotton growing. This has forced some areas to shift from the growing of cotton to rice, which is another big water consuming crop.¹²

⁹UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea Nairobi; UNEP 1992

¹⁰Micklin, Philip. Desiccation of the Aral Sea: A Water Management Disaster in the Soviet Union" Science V. 241 September 2, 1988: 1172.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Kotlyakov, V. "The Aral Sea Basin: A Critical Environmental Zone" Environment V. 33, No. 1 (January/ February 1991): 6

As the sea level decreased and the salinity of the water increased, the aquatic production of the Aral Sea rapidly declined. Prior to the 1960s there were twenty-four types of native fish. The annual fish harvest averaged 48,000 - 49,000 metric tons.¹³ By the early 1980s, twenty of these fish species had become extinct and the commercial catch was down to zero.

In the 1960s the fish industry had supported a labor market of approximately sixty thousand people. By 1990, former fishing ports such as Aralsk and Muynak were miles away from shore. Fishing villages are therefore being abandoned. Over 40,000 people left the Kzyl-Orda district in the 1980s.¹⁴

The large withdrawal of water from the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya has had a devastating effect on the deltas. It has affected the ecological value of the area, the raising of livestock and the agricultural yields. Prior to 1960, "these oases surrounded by desert not only possessed great ecological value because of the richness of their flora and fauna, but provided a natural feed base for livestock, spawning grounds for commercial fish, reeds harvested for industry, and opportunities for commercial hunting and trapping."¹⁵

These deltas have greatly desiccated in recent years. By satellite it is clear to see that the desert is expanding rapidly. Raising of livestock is suffering greatly as the land upon which they graze declines rapidly. In the Amu Darya

¹³Micklin, Philip. Desiccation of the Aral Sea: A Water Management Disaster in the Soviet Union" *Science* V. 241 September 2, 1988: 1172.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

delta the area for pastures and hayfields decreased by 81% and yields declined by more than 50%.¹⁶

In the recent past, 173 animal species existed in the Aral Sea and delta region. Out of these only 38 have survived. Only 168 out of 319 bird species have managed to survive. Commercial hunting has more or less disappeared. The harvest of muskrat skins has decreased from an average of 650,000 in the 1960s to 2,500 per year today.¹⁷

Scientists predict that the cotton production in the region will in the future be completely wiped out due to the environmental changes. These environmental changes include the following: "Soil conditions are deteriorating, the salt content of the earth is increasing, and the ability of the Amu Darya water to rinse away soil salts is diminishing; as a result, it is necessary to increase the amounts of water used both for rinsing and for irrigating plants. The end result is that the area of heavily-salted lands is rapidly expanding; such lands do not yield even half of their potential harvest."¹⁸

Out of 420,000 hectares of hay meadows along the Amu Darya delta in 1960, only 70,000 hectares remain. One third of the grazing land disappeared and the productivity of the remaining two thirds has decreased by 50 percent. In the 1960s the Syr Darya delta contained 100,000 hectares of lake area, and the

¹⁶Ibid., 1173

¹⁷Ibid., 1172

¹⁸Critchlow, James. Nationalism in Uzbekistan, 1991: 83

Amu Darya contained 320,000 hectares. By the time of independence, these areas had decreased six and a half times.¹⁹

As the salinity of the soil increases, the more polluted the water that is used to rinse it becomes. The Amu Darya and Syr Darya, which are sources of drinking water, are becoming more and more polluted. There are areas where the water is so polluted that it is black.²⁰

If the desiccation of the Aral Sea continues all environmental factors will be strongly affected. The lake will be replaced with 60,000 square kilometers of sand and salt which will harm the oases. Salt which was collected by the Aral Sea will go to the oases and eventually lead to their desiccation as well.

Despite this obvious tragedy the Soviets still thought they could plan around it. They believed other rivers could be diverted, and new canals could be built without any major environmental effects. The main project that was considered and actually started was the plan to divert the rivers in Siberia thereby increasing the flow of the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya, which as a result would increase the water available for irrigation. The project was canceled for several reasons among them the high cost, environmental hazard and potential climate changes that would be produced in Siberia. This canal would have been 1,600 miles long and would have diverted water from the Siberia to the Aral Sea. The last time that the project was considered was in 1986, but it was already too late for the Soviet Union. When the Central Asia republics received independence in

¹⁹UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea Nairobi; UNEP, 1992: 49 - 51

²⁰Sievers, Erik. "Aral Region Water Quality" Ecotan News (Online) V. 3, No.4, April 1, 1995

1991, they were on their own. There was no longer a central government which could implement such a large scale plan across an entire region.

The Aral Sea basin covers an area of one and a half million square kilometers and contains a population of thirty five million people. Four million Central Asians are acutely affected by the Aral Sea disaster, mainly in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakstan. The remaining thirty million are becoming increasingly affected.²¹ Sources of drinking water are very salinated for millions of people. This salt is not the kind of salt we eat; this salt is toxic. There are areas where infant mortality is as high as 110 per thousand. In Muyanak, Uzbekistan, the environmental situation is so severe that the average life expectancy has been decreasing by one year every year²² since the end of the 1980s.

Several health problems have been documented to be related to the ecological degradation in the region. Among these are: "high infant mortality and morbidity rates, a sharp increase in esophageal cancers... gastrointestinal problems, typhoid, , high rates congenital deformation, outbreaks of viral hepatitis, the contamination of mother's milk, and a life expectancy in some areas about 20 years less"²³ than that for the Commonwealth of Independent States

²¹ Saltmarche, Douglas. "Civil Society and Sustainable Development in Central Asia" Central Asian Survey V. 15, No. 3 (Spring 1996): 393

²² Sievers, Eric. "Aral Sea Situation worsens with the International Interest" Ecotan News V. 1, No. 1, September 1, 1993

²³ Glantz, Michael. "Tragedy in the Aral Sea Basin: Looking Back to Plan Ahead?" Iranian Journal of International Affairs V. 5 (Spring 1993): 174

The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) considers the environmental deterioration of the region surrounding the Aral Sea to be one of the worst in the twentieth century. The disaster is a totally man-made phenomenon, caused by economic greed and the short term policies of the Soviet Union.

It has become clear that the degradation of the Aral Sea has had a serious impact on the societies living in the region. Before examining the affect the degradation has on the region's stability, it is necessary to determine how environmental degradation in general might lead to instability and political conflicts.

The changes associated with the end of the Cold War have been so profound that it has become questionable whether the traditional assumptions regarding conflict are still valid. In other words, whether conflicts between states remain the major source of conflict. Conflicts such as the ethnic-nationalist conflict in Yugoslavia, or the tribal and religious conflict in countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Sudan need to be considered. Terrorism, as well, does not seem to respect national borders.

Chapter III

A Theoretical Perspective on Environment and Political Tensions

A. Theories on Domestic Conflicts

There are various theories on the relationship between environmental degradation and political instability, tensions and, in extreme cases, violence. These theories identify different situations in which the environment might contribute to political conflict.

The definition of national security has changed enormously over the years. Traditionally it was seen as the pursuit of interstate competition of power. The state was the main unit of analysis. It was mainly concerned with military threats and terms such as 'the enemy' or 'national interest'.²⁴

The changes associated with the end of the Cold War have been so profound that it has become questionable whether the traditional assumptions regarding conflicts are still reliable; in other words, whether conflicts between states remain the major sources of conflict. Conflicts such as the ethno-nationalist conflict in ex-Yugoslavia, or the tribal and religious conflicts in countries such as Afghanistan, Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Sudan come to mind. Terrorism, as well, does not seem to respect national borders.

²⁴Porter, Gareth. "Environmental Security as a National Security Issue" Current History (May 1995): 218

Many of these conflicts would suggest that severe threats to stability come from within societies and not from external states. These threats can be described as ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic, or class oriented.

In the 1980s and the 1990s, it has become increasingly clear that environmental issues are an essential component of a country's national security. Environmental security departs from the traditional national security concept. It "addresses two distinctive issues: environmental factors behind potentially violent conflicts, and the impact of global environmental degradation on the well-being of societies and economies."²⁵ This view stresses that threats to the earth's life support system and renewable resources and their consequences are just as serious as another state's military threat.

Presently, around one and a half billion people live in poverty in different regions of the world. Most of these people have inadequate food supplies, housing and clean water. Some of these people live in societies which have achieved high GDPs. (Gross Domestic Products) All over the world people and their governments are becoming increasingly aware of the price of substituting or living without goods previously taken for granted - goods that were freely provided by a healthy environment.

In order to examine the relationship between the environment and the political tensions, it is necessary to look at the other aspects of society. It is important to understand how they work together with the degradation in order to produce the tensions.

²⁵ Ibid.

One of the important aspects of society is the population growth rate. The relationship that links the population growth with the resource base is complex. The technology available in society, government policies, as well as political institutions determine how seriously an economy will be affected by a large population growth. These three factors will decide whether an environment which continues to degrade can continue to provide for more and more people.

If the relationship between population growth and the resource base is not carefully addressed by the state, the consequent economic decline can lead to public resentment and frustration, unrest or in some cases to civil war. The degree of conflict depends on how much the living standard decreases and over how long a period the decline occurs.

When studying the influence of environmental degradation or scarcity, it is important to know what caused it. Societies bring about "scarcities of renewable resources in three principal ways. First, people can reduce the quantity or degrade the quality of these resources faster than they are renewed. This phenomenon is often referred to as the consumption of the resource's capital: the capital generates income that can be tapped for human consumption. A sustainable economy can therefore be defined as one that leaves the capital intact and undamaged so that future generations can enjoy an undiminished income."²⁶

²⁶Homer-Dixon. "Environmental Change and Violent Conflict" Scientific American (February 1993): 40.

The second source of scarcity is population growth. As the number of people in society grows, the resource has to be divided among a greater number of people.

The final source is change in the distribution of a resource within a society. When the resource is concentrated in the hands of a few, the rest of society faces extreme scarcity. According to Homer Dixon "these three origins of scarcity can operate singularly or in combination. In some cases, population growth by itself will set in motion social stress."²⁷

The environment can lead to conflict in different ways. Environmental decline "occasionally leads directly to conflict, especially when scarce water resources must be shared. Generally, however, its impact on nations' security is felt in the downward pull on economic performance and, therefore, on political stability. The underlying cause of turmoil is often ignored; instead governments address the poverty and instability that are its results."²⁸

After knowing how the environmental problems have begun, it is necessary to understand how the weakened environment affects different aspects of society. It can do so in several ways.

A diminishing economic base can weaken the administrative strength and authority of the government, which may increase the likelihood for violent challenges to the regime by political contenders. By contributing to rural poverty and rural-urban migration, environmental scarcities increase the number

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Mathews, Jessica T. "Redefining Security" *Foreign Affairs* V. 68, No 2, (Spring 1989): 166

of people needing assistance from the state. This expanding gap between the demands on the state and the state's capabilities may worsen frustrations and conflicts among the people.

Environmental scarcity can weaken the state's capabilities and legitimacy in several ways. For instance, in order to lessen the social effects of the loss of water and agricultural soil, the state must invest large amounts in industry and infrastructure that were not previously necessary. These infrastructures include new dams, irrigation systems, larger amounts of fertilizers, and so on.

As the soil is degraded rural populations get displaced. As they move to urban areas, they require food, housing, and new employment. In many cases, the state introduces or increases food and energy subsidies, to lessen the suffering of these dislocated people. This drains governments revenues, revenues most developing countries cannot afford to lose.

If this expanding gap occurs rapidly at a time of uncertainty, the potential for conflict and crisis pressures on the governments are substantial. In the situation of negative sum game the chance that group conflict will occur intensifies, as the politics of distribution changes. It is no longer possible for the state leadership to lessen frustrations by offering a larger piece of an expanding pie.

There are six major environmental scarcities that might lead to conflict within and between developing countries. These scarcities are large scale and caused by humans. They tend to have long term and irreversible consequences.

These scarcities are :

1. greenhouse - induced climate change;
2. stratospheric ozone depletion;
3. degradation and loss of good agricultural land;
4. degradation and removal of forests;
5. degradation and pollution of fresh water supplies;
6. depletion of fisheries.”²⁹

There are four major social issues linked to environmental degradation that may on their own or combined increase the possibility of conflict. These issues are decreased agricultural production, general economic decline, population replacement, and disruption of relations between state authorities and society. Several of them are often interrelated and reinforce each others.

There are three groups of theories that link the above social issues to different degrees of conflict. The first trend is called Frustration Aggression theories. These theories look at the individual in order to explain conflicts such as strikes, riots, coups, revolutions and so on. According to these theories “individuals become aggressive when they feel frustrated by something or someone they believe is blocking them from fulfilling a strong desire. An important subset of these theories suggests that this frustration and aggression can be caused by relative deprivation, when people perceive a widening gap between the level of satisfaction they have achieved ... and the level they believe they deserve.”³⁰

²⁹Homer-Dixon “ Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict” International Security (Summer 1994): 7.

According to this theory, individuals calculate their interests in a zero-sum game caused by the resource scarcity. There are three main resources that especially cause conflict. These are river water, fishing and agricultural land. These resources are considered to be essential for society's survival and they are resources that can be seized or controlled by segments of society.

This trend states that 'Relative Deprivation' conflicts may develop as the economy produces less wealth because of the resource scarcities, and the gap between the individual's achievement and the perceived level that he deserves widens. The quicker this gap increases, the greater the discontent. The discontent will be more likely among the poorer sectors of society. This is mainly due to the fact the elites will use their power to maintain the standard of living despite the fact that the economic pie is diminishing. The frustrated groups will become violent with the people they perceive as responsible for their losses, or with the people they perceive as receiving an unfair share of the material goods.

Group-Identity theories, the second trend, look at nationalist, ethnic and religious conflicts. They are based on the 'we' versus 'they' divisions in society. Conflict results from "rational calculations of actors in the face of perceived external conflicts. The structure of an actor's social situation is the perceived set of possible interactions with other actors and the perceived likely outcomes of these interactions. This structure is determined by physical factors such as number of actors, resource limits, and barriers to movement or communication;

³⁰Homer-Dixon "On the Threshold: Environmental Changes as Causes of Acute Conflict"
International Security V.16, No. 2 (Fall 1991): 105.

by social factors such as shared beliefs and understanding, rules of interaction, and the set of power relations between actors.”³¹

A common situation in many countries is intergroup, clan or ethnic conflicts. This type of conflict occurs between groups that differ in certain traits such as religion, language, national origin, social class, or ideology.

Intergroup conflicts tend to take place when one group is dominant. The dominant group is in the position of power, and often has some kind of control over the other groups in society. Its position gives it the chance to enjoy privileges such as better schools, jobs, neighborhoods, and so on. Tensions or conflicts tend to arise over these privileges. The other groups perceive it as discrimination.

Ethnic groups are those whose members share a unique social and cultural heritage passed on from one generation to the next. The groups tend to be identified by their patterns of family life, language, religion, and other customs as well as a perception of shared values and traditions. Ethnic groups often live in separate neighborhoods.³²

These conflicts are likely to “arise from large scale movements of populations brought about by environmental change. As ethnic and cultural groups are propelled together under circumstances of deprivation and stress, we should expect intergroup hostility, in which a group would emphasize its own

³¹ Ibid.

³² Rose, Peter and Myron Glazer. Sociology: Understanding Society Prentice Hall, 1990

identity while denigrating, discriminating against, and attacking outsiders.”³³

For example, in Pakistan shortages and maldistribution of good land, water and forest led to the migration of large numbers of rural people into major cities, causing the urban population to grow by 4 to 5% annually. This produced fierce competition and often violence between ethnic groups over land, basic services, and political economic power.³⁴

In South Africa, severe land, water and fuel wood scarcities drove millions of blacks from their homelands into settlements in the main cities. This scarcity has provoked inter-ethnic rivalry and feuds between settlement warlords and their followers within the settlements, thereby jeopardizing the country’s transition to democracy.³⁵

Finally, Domestic Structural theories maintain that civil conflict will probably arise if there are well organized groups within society who can “articulate, channel and coordinate discontent”³⁶ When there is an increase in frustrations and tensions among certain groups in society, this gives challengers to present authorities an opportunity to use these frustrations in order to overthrow the state leadership. This will occur when these groups feel that peaceful attempts to influence the government are not possible, that overthrowing the government is the only way to obtain change.

³³Homer-Dixon “On the Threshold: Environmental Changes as causes of Acute Conflict” International Security V.16, No. 2 (Fall 1991): 108.

³⁴Homer-Dixon, Thomas. “Environmental Scarcities and Violent conflict” International Security V. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994): 33.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Homer-Dixon “On the Threshold: Environmental Changes as causes of Acute Conflict” International Security V.16, No. 2 (Fall 1991): 106.

This means that regimes which are not totally repressive or completely democratic will be more vulnerable. In repressive states, it is difficult for opposition groups to organize, while regimes that are semi-repressive allow groups to develop, but at the same time do not allow them to obtain their goals through peaceful methods.

Moreover, a state that is "debilitated by corruption, by falling revenues and rising demands for services, or by factional conflicts within elites will be more vulnerable to violent challengers, by political and military opponents."³⁷ In other words, the state will be more vulnerable if society is clearly divided by ethnicity, religion, or class.

Another important factor in the Domestic Structure theory is the legitimacy of the leaders in the eyes of the people. This theory states that an "economic crisis must first lead to a crisis of legitimacy before widespread civil strife can occur. A perception that the political and economic system is legitimate will moderate a citizen's sense of relative deprivation and will hinder the mass mobilization of discontent."³⁸

A number of scientists have gathered evidence around the world that suggests that scarcities of renewable resources are already contributing to violent conflicts in many regions of the developing world. These conflicts may foreshadow a rise of similar violence in the near future, especially in poor

³⁷ Homer-Dixon, Thomas. "Environmental Scarcities and Violent conflict" International Security V. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994): 27.

³⁸ Homer-Dixon "On the Threshold: Environmental Changes as causes of Acute Conflict" International Security V.16, No. 2 (Fall 1991): 114.

countries where shortage of water, forests, and particularly fertile land, combined with rapidly expanding populations, already cause great burden³⁹

Water is declining in many parts of the world. Many countries have come to the point where water scarcity is perceived as a major threat to development, prosperity, public health, and national security.

Environmental scarcity or degradation is rarely the sole source of violence. It usually interacts with other cultural, economic and political factors to produce different degrees of conflict. It can, however, aggravate a situation that the government might otherwise have overcome.

B. Theories on Regional Conflict

After having looked at theories on the relationship between environmental degradation, scarcity, and domestic political tensions, this section will look at how it might influence the foreign relations between neighbor countries. In the coming century, water and water related problems are more likely than ever before to become the objectives of military operations and in extreme circumstances, war. Conflict is especially possible in regions where there is an increasing demand for fresh water due to a combination of population growth and an uncertain supply of water.

Environmental scarcities and degradation rarely remain within the borders of one country. Today "environmental strains that transcend national borders are already beginning to break down the sacred boundaries and national

³⁹Homer-Dixon. "Environmental Change and Violent Conflict" Scientific American (February 1993): 38.

sovereignty, previously rendered porous by the information and communication revolutions and the instantaneous global movement of financial capital. The once sharp dividing line between foreign and domestic policy is blurred.”⁴⁰

Most of the environmental problems cross national borders and demand regional solutions. Hence “on the political front, the need for a new diplomacy and for new institutions and regulatory regimes to cope with the world’s growing interdependence is even more compelling (as) our accepted definition of the limits of national sovereignty as coinciding with national borders is obsolete.”⁴¹

Environmental degradation might lead to tensions in several ways. Environmental problems in one country can lead to migration to neighboring countries. This can create frictions with the receiving countries, especially if its economy is not much better off. It can cause tensions between religious and ethnic groups due to the new land distribution as well as changes in political and economic powers.

The renewable resource that has the highest potential of leading to conflict and war across state borders is river water. Water, more than any other resource, is critical for the survival of a nation and its people. River water that is shared among two countries or more means that one country’s access to that water is influenced by the action of the other or others.

⁴⁰Mathews, Jessica T. “Redefining Security” *Foreign Affairs* V. 68, No 2, (Spring 1989): 162 - 177: 162.

⁴¹Ibid., 174.

Conflict is most likely when a down-stream state is highly dependent on the water, while at the same time stronger than the up-stream state/states. Down stream states many times fear that the up-stream state might attempt to use that water to coerce it on other matters. This is especially dangerous if the down stream state has the military power to ensure that this does not happen.

Conflicts over water are not new . In 1975, Iraq, Syria and Turkey almost went to war over the water of the Euphrates river. Conflict over the Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej rivers caused conflict and tensions between India and Pakistan, as well as tense relations between India and Bangladesh, tensions over the Mekong river in Indochina, and so on.

Many rivers run through several countries, and what happens at the source affects the down-stream countries. Development can therefore not be made in the upper part of the river without taking into consideration what will happen down-stream.

For example, it is in the interest of Egypt to have weak states up the stream of the Nile. If Sudan and Ethiopia were to consolidate they would be able to construct hydroelectric and irrigation dams. Moreover, they might attempt to regulate the water flow in order to prevent floods and droughts, and to expand the amount of land used for agriculture.

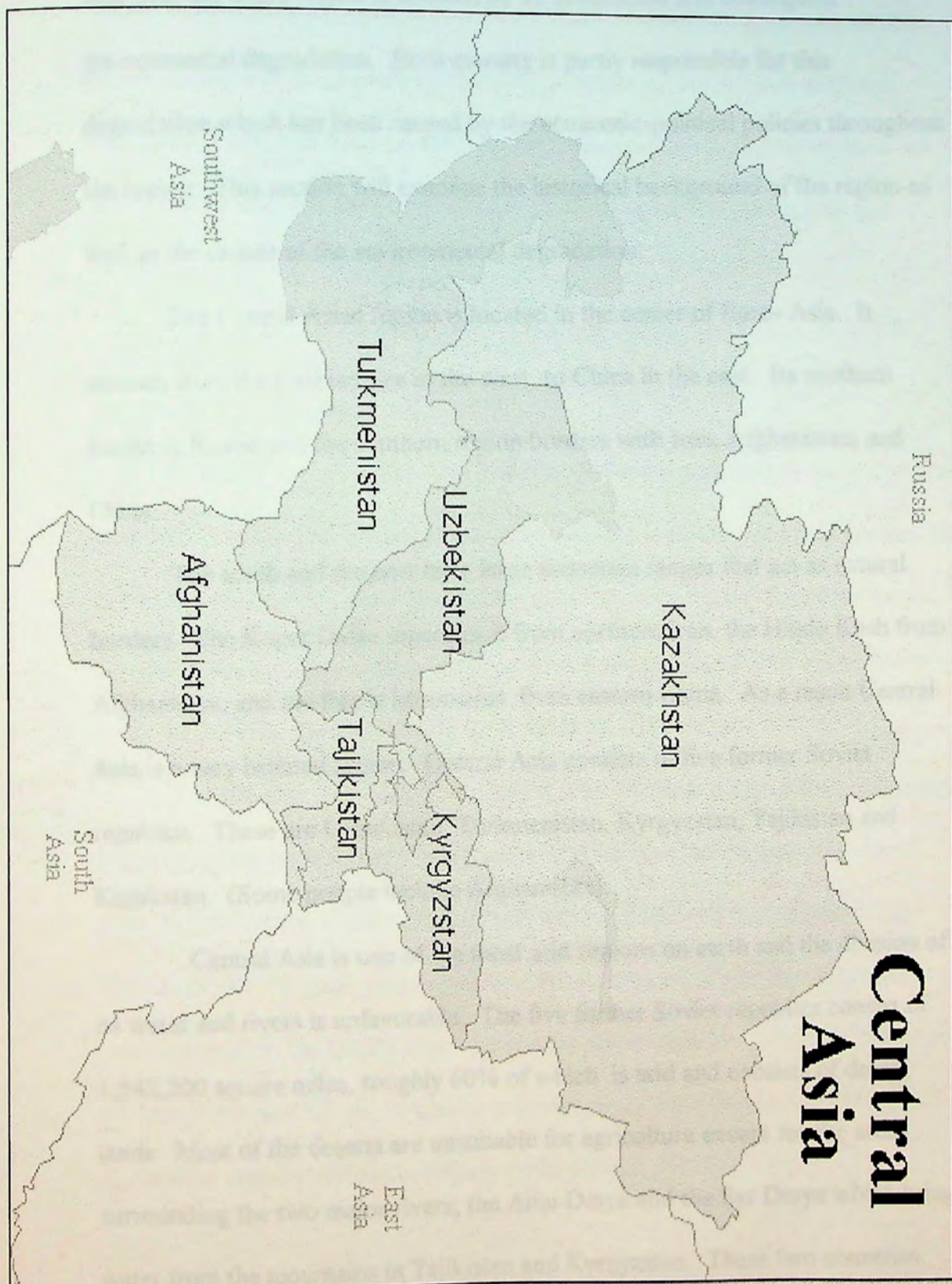
River water supply varies and is always uncertain. This makes a state reluctant to allocate water equitably. Drought is a possibility that states in arid regions always take into consideration. Up stream states therefore have the incentive to capture the water before it moves beyond their control.

Most water disputes around the world lead to negotiations and non-violent resolutions, but in certain regions of the world such as Central Asia and the Middle East “water is a scarce resource that has become increasingly important for economic and agricultural development. In these regions, water is evolving into an issue of ‘high politics’, and the probability of water-related violence is increasing.”⁴²

To understand why water scarcity and environmental degradation might lead to violence and conflict in Central Asia, it is important to understand the role that water plays in the region’s economies and societies. It is necessary to examine the recent history of the region as well as the degradation.

⁴²Gleick, Peter. “Water and Conflict” *International Security* V. 18, No. 1 (Summer 1993): 80.

Chapter IV Central Asia



Although only Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have actual borders with the Aral Sea, the entire region is affected by its desiccation and consequent environmental degradation. Each country is partly responsible for this degradation which has been caused by the economic-political policies throughout the region. This section will examine the historical background of the region as well as the causes of the environmental degradation.

The Central Asian region is located in the center of Euro-Asia. It extends from the Caspian Sea in the west to China in the east. Its northern border is Russia and the southern region borders with Iran, Afghanistan, and China.

The south and the east have large mountain ranges that act as natural borders. The Kopet Dagest separates it from northern Iran, the Hindu Kush from Afghanistan, and the Pamir Mountains from eastern China. As a result Central Asia is a very isolated region. Central Asia consists of five former Soviet republics. These are Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. (Some people include Afghanistan).

Central Asia is one of the most arid regions on earth and the division of its water and rivers is unfavorable. The five former Soviet republics consist of 1,542,200 square miles, roughly 60% of which is arid and consists of desert lands. Most of the deserts are unsuitable for agriculture except for the areas surrounding the two major rivers; the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya which bring water from the mountains in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. These two countries have little arable land. Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have most of

the arable land but little water. As a result, approximately 90% of all the agricultural land is irrigated.⁴³

The Aral Sea basin contains 151,200,000 hectares of land. Out of this total it is possible to cultivate agricultural products on 99,000,000 hectares. Currently, 8,300,000 hectares are actively farmed while 6,000,000 hectares are hayfields, 89,400,000 are pastures, 6,000,000 are perennial plantations and 300,000 are fallow.⁴⁴

Historical Background

The desiccation of the Aral Sea is not a recent occurrence. It has been a long-term process that started in the early 1960s due to the economic policies of the Soviet Union. It is therefore necessary to examine the history of the Soviet Control over the Central Asia region and the Soviet cotton policy which is the main cause of the desiccation and environmental degradation.

For the past two centuries, Central Asia has been dominated by Russians, but prior to the Soviet Union, there were no Central Asian republics in the modern sense of the word. Central Asia was an ill-defined region called Turkestan. At the time, there were no distinct nationality groups. Changes were enforced in the region when the Bolsheviks consolidated their control over it in the 1920s and 1930s. It was during that period that the current borders of the Central Asian countries were arbitrarily created.

⁴³UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea Nairobi; UNEP, 1992: 31.

⁴⁴Ibid.

To undermine anti-Bolshevik movements as well as pan-Islamic and pan-Turkish movements, Lenin and Stalin decided in the first half of the 1920s to divide the region creating new administrative units. Inevitably, these new boundaries did not quite reflect the ethnic and cultural patterns of the area. As a result, all the five Central Asian republics are highly heterogeneous.

Stalin used Central Asia for dumping entire communities he considered disloyal to the Soviet Union. These people were relocated by force. Peoples such as Meskhetian Turks, Crimean Tatars, ethnic Koreans, northern Caucasians, and Germans were forced to settle all over Central Asia. This flow of immigrants continued long after the death of Stalin, as the agricultural potential of the region was realized. By the 1980s the Kyrgyz and Kazaks ended up as the minorities in their own countries. The Kazaks are currently around 43% of the population, while the Kyrgyz are 52% due to the fact that in recent years large numbers of Russians have left the country.⁴⁵

Despite Russia's enormous size, it has no region suitable for growing cotton. It therefore had to import it from the United States. Prior to the industrial revolution, this was not a problem. The situation changed, however, when the supply of cotton was cut off because of the American civil war in 1861. The need for cotton in the new industries was an important factor in Russia's decision to conquer Central Asia in 1864 - 1885.

⁴⁵Pannier, Bruce. "President Acquires More Power in Kyrgyzstan" Transition February 7, 1997: 94.

The Tzars gradually increased the cotton production in the region. The expansion of cotton was turned into a clear policy after the Russian Minister of Agriculture made a trip to the area in 1912. He wrote that "the present development of cotton plantations ... can and should be intensified still further by means of further reduction in the quantity of grain crops. Every extra pood⁴⁶ of Turkestan wheat means competition for Siberian and Kuban wheat; every pood of Turkestan cotton means competition for American cotton."⁴⁷ But it was not before the Soviets took control of the region in the 1920s that the cotton production truly expanded. To do so they brought industrialization, urbanization, and education into the region, as well as communication and transportation networks. Since the 1930s the number of hectares devoted to cotton has continued to grow.

The Soviet policy was that whatever the social, economic or environmental costs, the amount of cotton produced in the region would have to increase. Consequently, the republics were strongly discouraged from growing any other crop, even basic foods. In the past Central Asia had been famous for its fruits and vegetables. Now some of the countries can not sufficiently feed their own populations.

In the 1940s the cotton production of the Soviet Union was estimated to be 2.24 million tons. By 1980, the amount had increased to 9.10 million tons per year. Most of this cotton was harvested in Central Asia, especially in

⁴⁶ According to Merriams Webster's Collegiate Dictionary pood is a Russian measurement and equals 16.38 kilograms

⁴⁷ Libovsky, Igor. "Central Asian Cotton Epic" Central Asian Survey V.14, No. 4 (1995): 531.

Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. The increase in cotton was mainly the result of the expansion of the number of hectares specializing in cotton. The expansion was made possible by huge irrigation systems that took all the water that had previously been allowed to flow all the way to the Aral Sea.

Number of Hectares cultivating Cotton

<u>Year</u>	<u>Hectares</u>
1940	2,080,000
1960	2,190,000
1970	2,750,000
1980	3,150,000
1985	3,320,000
1986	3,470,000

SOURCE: James Critchlow. Nationalism in Uzbekistan
Boulder; Westview Press, 1991: 63

In addition to the cotton production, Central Asia including Kazakhstan produced 75% of the Soviet Union's raw silk and 67% of its wool. At the same time, the region has to import most of its food.⁴⁸

All of Central Asia is currently suffering from water problems as a result of decades of cotton monoculture on irrigated fields. There is a major shortage of drinking water in urban areas while the farm and pasture fields are turning into deserts. Seen from the air the region resembles a snowbelt because of the salt deposits that the wind has carried from the Aral Sea.

The Central Asians did not strive for independence. They received it when the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991. The caution of the ruling elites

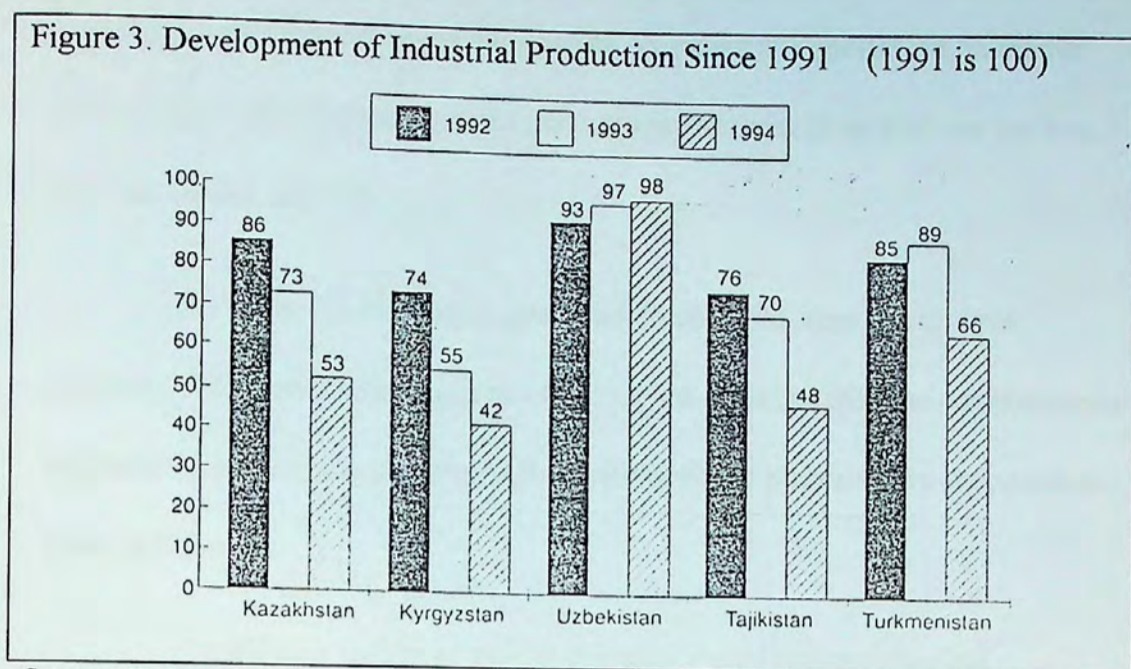
⁴⁸UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea Nairobi; UNEP, 1992: 13.

from the communist era has kept the old order more or less intact. But the new regimes are in fact very fragile. Each of the countries are facing numerous socio-economic problems. Unless these are solved, the local leaders will not be able to maintain the confidence of their people.

Currently, the Central Asian regimes are in weak positions. Their political and socio-economic problems make it difficult for them to overcome the problems caused by the environmental degradation. Prior to independence, republican governments only received the basic prices for their raw materials. Most of the cotton was processed in Russia and other Soviet republics. This meant that the Central Asian percentage of the profit was very low. As a result, the republics depended on grants from Moscow to cover large parts of their budgets. In 1991, which was the last year for the Central Asians to receive these grants, between 20 and 45 percent of the public spending was dependent on Moscow: "Tajikistan received 45 per cent of its public spending budget from Moscow, Uzbekistan received 43 per cent, Kyrgyzstan received 35 per cent, and ... Turkmenistan received 25 per cent"⁴⁹

Since independence in 1991 the Gross National Product (GNP) in all of the Central Asia countries has been decreasing. Even Kyrgyzstan, which employs International Monetary Fund (IMF) advisers is not doing much better than Tajikistan which has been ravaged by civil war

⁴⁹Rashid, Ahmed. The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism ? Oxford UP, London, 1994: 65.



Source: Herbert Dieter. "Regional Integration in Central Asia: Current Economic Position and Prospects." *Central Asian Survey* No. 3 (1996): 375.

Social tensions are increasing due to the worsening economies. The different governments are trying to keep the frustrations of their citizens down by maintaining subsidies that are 'crippling' the state budgets. Prices of basic food goods remain at 1962 levels in many places despite the fact that prices and incomes increased considerably until 1991. Until the fall of the Soviet Union the bill for these subsidies went to Moscow. But now the local governments have to pay it for themselves.

Throughout the region, the Soviet policy of relocating people according to Moscow's needs has left a legacy of ethnic tensions. Today, the new independent states are attempting to prevent the emigration of other ethnic groups such as the Russians by trying to convince them that they are not threatened by the native populations. But these ethnic groups feel highly threatened in their daily lives. The "non-natives encounter

growing antagonism and menacing threats on public transportation, in public places, and at the market. It is not uncommon for them to be told on the bus, 'Get out of that seat'.⁵⁰

Each of the Central Asian presidents realize that they are in weak positions. The economic concerns of the region together with the environmental degradation adds to the awareness that their political positions are very insecure. Each of them are

“walking a tightrope amidst complex social forces; none has the support of a cohesive, full-fledged party or a reliable social base. None can effectively implement whatever policies he might design. Central Asia has not yet generated coherent interest groups that can offer viable political support. People who voted for the presidents of the Central Asian republics do not feel any true allegiance to them and are easily mobilized, in moments of crisis and conflict, to join protests and movements against them.”⁵¹

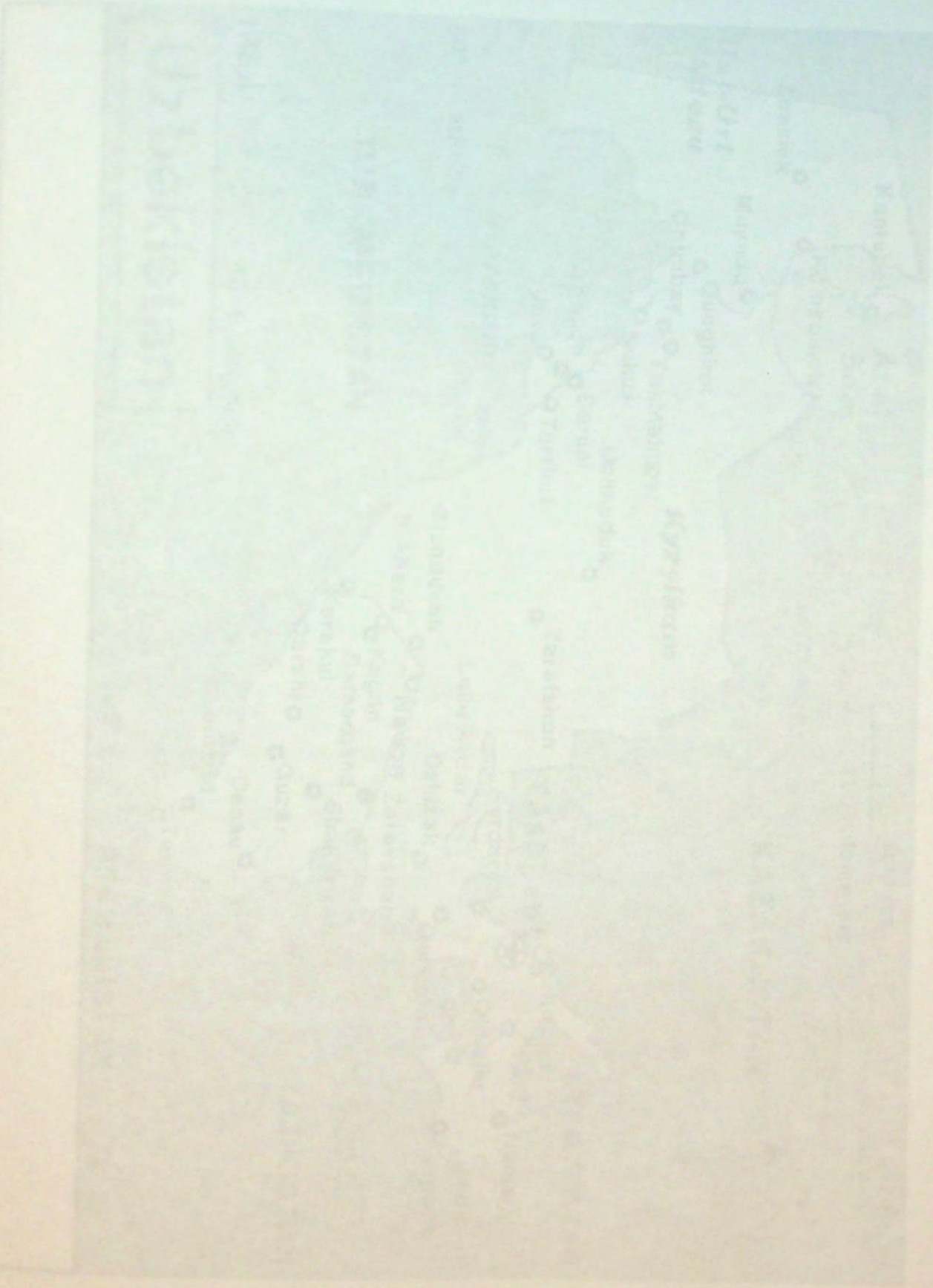
This makes it very difficult for any of them to take strong stands on the environment and consequently economic reform.

Although the different countries within the Central Asian region have a lot in common, their various political and economic problems make it necessary to examine each case separately. Each country has

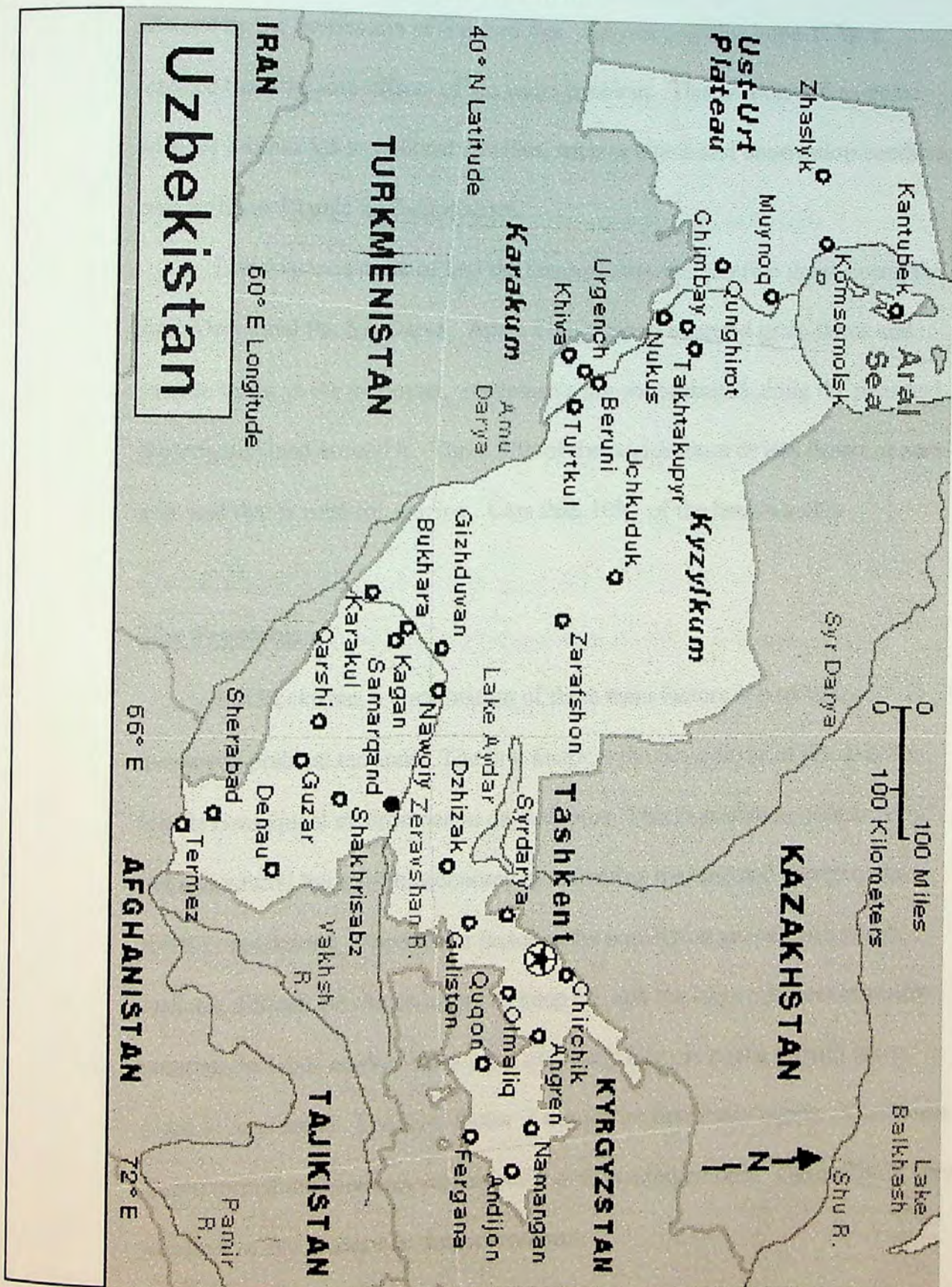
⁵⁰Rumer, Boris. "The Gathering Storm in Central Asia" *Orbis* (Winter 1993): 98.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 101.

been affected by the environmental degradation differently, and consequently different problems have occurred.



Chapter V
Uzbekistan



Uzbekistan is the first of the four Central Asian countries that are affected by the dessication of the Aral Sea. Several negative impacts have resulted from the side-effects of the water problem. This section will examine whether this has led to political tensions, such as ethnic and deprivation conflicts, civil strife, or Islamic fundamentalism.

Uzbekistan is more or less the territory between the two great rivers, the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya. Apart from the non-irrigated grain farms and pasture lands in the piedmont, settlements are concentrated along the river and the irrigated land around it. Three fifth of the land is more or less desert or semi-arid land that is used for grazing. Less than 10% of the land is arable.

The Problems

In Uzbekistan, a combination of three main factors is leading to increasing political tensions. The first factor is the desiccation of the Aral Sea and its consequent environmental degradation. This degradation is destroying the agricultural basis of the economy by salinating the land and changing the weather conditions. The second factor is the population growth rate which makes it difficult for the economy to keep up with the large numbers of people entering the labor market every year, especially as most of the growth takes place in rural areas. The third factor is the Soviet Economic legacy. The Soviet Union turned the economy into a totally cotton oriented one. This makes it very sensitive to any changes in the environment.

A. Aral sea

Apart from Kazakstan, Uzbekistan is the only country which has borders with the Aral Sea. It is therefore more affected by its crisis than any of the other Central Asian Countries.

When the sea level declined and the remaining water became increasingly salinated, the fish population more or less died out. Muynak is one of the fishing towns in Uzbekistan on the coast of the Aral Sea. It in the past provided jobs for more than sixty thousand people and enough fish for most of the rest of the country. Now it is a ghost town forty miles away from shore. There are no fish left and the ships are lying stranded in the sand. The people are migrating to other towns in the hope of finding other jobs.

As the sea level declined, the salt on the bottom of the sea has been exposed and spread to the surrounding land. As a result, soil conditions are deteriorating rapidly. The soil is becoming very salinated. Since Uzbekistan is the downstream country it does not have the water to rinse the huge amounts of toxic salt away. In 1982, 38.3 percent of the total irrigated land was salinated. Out of this land 7.5 percent was severely salinated. In 1985, just three years later, the percentage of salinated land had increased to 42.8 percent, out of which 12.5 percent was severely salinated.⁵² Today 40% of the irrigated land is

⁵²UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea Nairobi; UNEP, 1992 : 37.

completely salted, and "areas with middle and high salinity comprise 35% to 70% of the total" land.⁵³

In the area closest to the sea, farms have been forced to abandon cotton and cultivate other agricultural products because of the climate change. The previous 200 days season has declined to 170 days. Therefore, cotton can not grow there anymore.

B. Population Growth

Almost as rapidly as the environment is being degraded, the population of Uzbekistan is growing. Most of this growth is taking place in the rural areas which are affected by the decline of the Aral Sea. Uzbekistan does not have the finances to provide new markets and industries to find new types of employment as the agricultural market is getting smaller and smaller.

Uzbekistan has 22 million people thereby making it the largest population in the region. In 1991 close to 60 percent of this population was under the age of eighteen. Forty one percent of the population is presently under 15 years of age.⁵⁴ This means that during the next decade huge numbers of people are entering a labor market that already has large unemployment (est. 20-25%). Around 62% of the population lives in rural areas, and depend on agriculture for employment. Unless the government is able to turn around the declining economy, this economy and the environment will be unable to provide for these people.

⁵³Ibid., 36

⁵⁴1997 World Population Data Sheet Population Reference Bureau, 1997

Large families are traditional and a source of ethnic pride. In the 1979-1989 period, the growth rate was an average of 2.61%.⁵⁵ The Soviets realized this would create economic problems and would hinder economic development. There were attempts by the central authorities to lower it, but such attempts led to additional tensions in relations with Moscow.

The first secretary of Uzbekistan added to his unpopularity by pressing for lower birth rates. In a speech at the Republican Central Committee in 1988 he spoke of the goal of limiting children to five or six per family. But even that goal seemed unattainable. Population growth is currently 2.1%. Within a few years, the population will be 25 million people. By the year 2010, the population is expected to increase to 29.4 million.⁵⁶

In the last thirty years, employment was concentrated on farming on extended irrigated land. But now water is decreasing even faster than the number of people entering the diminishing labor market. This declining amount of water will have to be divided among larger numbers of people.

C. Soviet economic legacy

Uzbekistan had the best conditions in the region for cotton growing. As a result, this production 'usurped' fruit and vegetable cultivation. Uzbekistan therefore became a prime example of mono-culture. It has been cited by several Soviet leaders as a classic example of total specialization in cotton products.

⁵⁵"Uzbekistan" CIA Fact Source Book (online), 1995

⁵⁶World Population Data Sheet Population Reference Bureau, 1997

In 1940, Uzbekistan produced 75% of the regions 2.24 million tons of cotton. By 1980 this amount had increased to 75% of 9.10 million tons. This increase was made possible by increasing the hectares of cultivated land, and not by improving efficiency, quality, or yields per hectare.

Expansion of irrigation in Uzbekistan was made possible by the construction of the Great Ferghana Canal. This canal is 215 miles long. It starts in Tajikistan and continues into Uzbekistan. 177 miles of the canal is within Uzbekistan. Over 180,000 farmers work along it growing cotton.

Number of hectares cultivating cotton (million)

Year	Hectares	Increase, 1940-1986 (Percent)
1940	0.924	122
1971-1975	1.714	
1976-1980	1.823	
1981-1985	1.932	
1986	2.053	

SOURCE: James Critchlow. Nationalism in Uzbekistan, Boulder, Westview Press, 1991: 64

In order to meet the cotton quotas set by Moscow, rotation of crops was stopped, therefore leading to further soil erosion, and increased use of pesticides. Despite the fact that the Uzbeks increased the number of hectares in an attempt to meet Moscow's increased cotton targets, the annual cotton production only increased slightly. In the period 1976 - 1980 the cotton yield per hectare was 31.3 centner⁵⁷, while in the period 1981 - 1984 the yield per hectare was 29.7.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ One centner equals 100 kilograms. See UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea Nairobi, UNEP, 1992: 48

⁵⁸ World Population Data Sheet Population Reference Bureau, 1997

Uzbekistan was unable to meet the Soviet target in that last period. Local leadership therefore falsified the cotton numbers. So although the official statistics given to the central government showed that Uzbekistan's production of cotton increased in the period 1976 - 1980 from 5704 thousand tons to in the 1981 - 1985 period 5724 tons, the numbers were in reality considerably lower.⁵⁹ At a Central Committee Plenum of Uzbekistan in 1986, it was revealed that there was widespread corruption in the economic management of the country, starting at the top. This means that the yields per hectare were probably even worse than the 29.7, especially if we compare it with the Turkmen number of 22.7. The two countries are experiencing the same kinds of environmental problems.⁶⁰

Increased Pressures

The combination of environmental problems, population growth and the legacy of cotton monoculture has put considerable pressure on the Uzbek state. First, it has led to a decline in the economic production. As most of the economy is related both directly and indirectly to the growth of cotton, the environmental degradation is having a severe impact on the entire economy

Second, it has led to a decrease in the already low living standard. The number of people living below the poverty line is increasing and so is unemployment.

Third, it has brought ethnic tensions to the surface as different ethnic groups are competing for scarce employment and housing.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Fourth, it is undermining the legitimacy of the regime by increasing the people's concern with the social and economic conditions of the country and showing the state's inability to improve the situation.

A. Decreased economic production

After independence the state pursued a gradual approach to state capitalism. President Islam Karimov declared his commitment to market economy, but after student demonstrations occurred when he liberalized prices in 1992, he slowed down. Thereafter, gradualism and stability became the main principles of his economic program. Growing political opposition shifted his focus from economic reforms to consolidation of his power.

Changing to market economy is difficult under average circumstances, but it is extremely difficult when the economy is based on one crop. President Karimov therefore "identified five principles of the 'Uzbek road to capitalism': the de-ideologization of the economy; the maintenance of the state as the main reformer; the primacy of the law of the land; a strong social policy to protect the vulnerable segments of the population; and a 'stages approach' to building a market economy".⁶¹

After 1993, President Karimov seemed determined to speed up the transition to a market economy. He stated that the economic program's task

⁶⁰Martin McCanley in Shireen Akiner Political and Economic Trends in Central Asia London; British Academy Press, 1993: 95.

⁶¹Islam, Shafiqul in Michael Mandelbaum Central Asia and the World: Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan New York; Council on Foreign Press, 1994: 169.

was to create a multi-sector economy, competitiveness, and gradual liberalization of prices. In a speech he called on the people to drop their free ride mentality.⁶²

The most serious problem facing the Uzbek leadership is how to introduce a market system into an economy that is based on the monoculture of raw cotton. There is almost no other crop or industry in the country. The Soviet Union was the world's second largest cotton producer. Two-thirds of this cotton was grown in Uzbekistan, which on its own produced almost as much as the United States.

Most of the agricultural land is in the Ferghana valley and around the rivers. Approximately, 42.8% of this land has been salinized to different degrees. According to the UNEP, 12.5% of this land is strongly salinized and another 33.2% is salinized above average. As a result the average yield per hectare has decreased over the years.⁶³

In the period 1976 to 1980 the average yield per hectare was 29.4 centners. By 1986 this had decreased to 24.3 centners per hectare.⁶⁴ The gross harvest in the first period was 5.4 million tons, while in 1987 it was 4.9 million tons. Since 1991 Uzbekistan's production levels have been declining with an average of 10% per year.⁶⁵

⁶² Ayubi, Shaheen. "Uzbekistan's Long Road to Democracy and Political Stability" Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. V. XVIII, No.3 (spring 1995): 15.

⁶³ UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea Nairobi, UNEP, 1992: 37.

⁶⁴ Martin McCanley in Shireen Akiner Political and Economic Trends in Central Asia London; British Academy Press, 1993: 95.

⁶⁵ Ayubi, Shaheen. "Uzbekistan's long road to Democracy and Political Stability." Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies v. 18, No3, (Spring 95): 15.

Although the government has tried to give every agricultural worker a small plot of land, the total irrigated land does not allow each family to be allocated more than half a hectare for growing cotton and about a one sixth of a hectare near the house for vegetable gardening.

Even if this land was cultivated by an expert farmer with the best knowledge, this small piece of land can not provide for the needs of an entire family, and especially not the large families that most Central Asians have. Most of the land is not fertile. It has been exhausted by the decades of cotton growing. It is practically impossible for farmers to increase their crop yield, especially with such a small water supply.

In 1996, only 72% of the grain and 80% of the cotton quotas were achieved, thereby thwarting the government's goal of becoming self-sufficient in the food production and acquiring hard currency from the cotton sales.⁶⁶

Grain production only covers a quarter of the consumption, so grain is a major import. There were attempts in 1995 and 1996 to increase the grain production but these attempts failed. On the contrary, the grain production of 1996 was so poor, that Uzbekistan agreed with Russia to exchange 100,000 metric tons of grain for 18,200 tons of cotton. The country needs 4.5 million tons of grain per year while the 1996 harvest was only 2.7 million tons.⁶⁷ The state was unable to increase the production of grain because of poor yields per

⁶⁶ Kangas, Roger. "Holding the course in Uzbekistan." *Transition* Feb 7, 1997: 90.

⁶⁷ Kangas, Roger. "Uzbekistan to buy Russian Grain" *Omri Daily Digest* December 11, 1996.

hectare and it was unable to increase the number of farms because of the lack of water.

As a result of the high population growth rate, the Uzbek government, has to find as much employment as possible if it wants the country to remain stable. Cotton production provided 30 times more jobs than the production of grain, four times more jobs than for vegetables and fruit.⁶⁸ As the lack of water means the country cannot increase the number of hectares used for agriculture, an increase in grain production would have to mean a decline in cotton cultivation. Such a change would therefore lead to additional unemployment.

If an economy is diversified, then that economy could rely on other sectors, when there is a decline in the agricultural sector. But in Uzbekistan, even the industries are related to the agriculture.

The manufacturing sector was originally developed in relation to the cotton industry. Machinery for the cotton sector was the main output in addition to food processing industries. They were mainly fertilizer factories and machines used for the harvesting of cotton. These were brought to the country during World War II, and expanded during the 1960s. But the machines are so old and low quality that they are technically obsolete.

There are 1,600 factories along the 3500 kilometer long railways and a network of more than 80,000 kilometers of roads. But these factories are mainly run by non-Uzbeks, especially Russians. Since the end of the 1980s around two million of these Russians have left Uzbekistan because of the ethnic tension, the

⁶⁸Libovsky, Igor. "Central Asian Cotton Epic" Central Asian Survey V.14, No. 4 (1995):

perceived discrimination in the Uzbeks' favor, and the declining living standards. As a result the factories are suffering and some have been forced to close. Very few Uzbeks have technical training, as the training center's classes were conducted in Russian. Thus far, there is no one to replace the Russians who have emigrated.

As the industrial production is closely related to the cotton, it declined in 1990. In 1992, it was 6% less than it was at the time of the fall of the USSR.⁶⁹

B. Living standard

Although Uzbekistan is the world's third largest cotton exporter, a major producer of natural gas and gold, it is one of the poorest states in the former Soviet Union. Sixty percent of its population lives in overpopulated rural communities.

According to the UNEP (United Nations Environmental Program) 73.8% of the labor force works in cotton and cotton related production. When the cotton production declined, the living standard declined with it. This started in the first half of the 1980s, but Moscow subsidized 42.9% of Uzbekistan's government budget.⁷⁰ This allowed it to continue employing a large number of

⁶⁹Islam in Michael Mandelbaum, Central Asia and the World: Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikstan, Kyrgyztan and Turkmenistan. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994: 162.

⁷⁰World Bank Statistical Handbook: States of Former USSR, 1992. Found in Mandelbaum, Michael. Central Asia and the World: Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikstan, Kyrgyztan and Turkmenistan. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994: 209.

people on losing plantations. When Uzbekistan received independence in 1991, the problems came to the surface.

In 1988, "45 percent of Uzbekistan's population had an average per capita income from all sources of 75 rubles or less a month, in other words below the basic subsistence level of 78 rubles a month"⁷¹ This means that over nine million Uzbeks live below the poverty line.

In 1987, when conditions were better than they are in 1990s, the consumption of meat was only 26 percent of the average in the Soviet Union. The consumption of milk was 42 percent and fruit was around 50 percent.⁷²

In the 1990s the number of poor has increased with the increased number of people who are unemployed. Even for the people with their own small plots of land for vegetable gardening, the living standard has declined. In many areas the damaged soil does not provide enough food for the families to survive.

There were not many changes by 1997. The average monthly income is currently \$51.⁷³

C. Increased ethnic tensions

Uzbekistan has one of the most uncomplicated ethnic divisions in Central Asia. At least the Uzbeks are not a minority in their own country as some of the others are. The Uzbeks are 68.7 percent of the population. The Russians are

⁷¹Critchlow, James. Nationalism in Uzbekistan, 1991: 68

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Kangas, Roger. "Holding the Course in Uzbekistan" Transition February 7, 1997: 90

10.8 percent, the Tajiks are 3.9 percent (the Tajiks claim their percentage is higher. According to unofficial sources the Tajiks are estimated to be between 10 to 15 %), the Kazakhs are 4 percent.⁷⁴ There are many other small minorities.

Ethnic tensions have been growing in recent years, as competition for scarce jobs and housing is growing. Tensions are especially growing between the Uzbek and the Tajik because they are both competing for larger shares of the agricultural market.

By 1994, the Tajik University in Samarkand and other Tajik language schools were closed down. Uzbek authorities justified these actions by saying that because of the war in Tajikistan, inter-ethnic relations had deteriorated. This action fits well with the general anti-Tajik policy of the state and its efforts to eliminate the Tajik culture within Uzbekistan through forced assimilation.

D. Increased pressure on civic institutions

The economic situation caused by the degradation of the Aral Sea has made it very difficult for the Uzbek regime to maintain its legitimacy in the eyes of the people. After independence the Uzbek elite managed to remain in power by 'drawing' on the existing bureaucratic institutions. This meant that the old

⁷⁴Rumer, Boris. "The Gathering storm in Central Asia." *Orbis* (Winter 1993): 95.

structures of power remained 'intact'. They attempted to legitimize their continuing rule by using nationalistic tones.

The political system is inseparable from president Islam Karimov. The regime controls all forms of mass media and does not tolerate any kind of independent political action.

Islam Karimov became an important figure in politics in 1983 when he became Minister of Finance. Three years later he became the deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers. By June 1989 he was the first secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan. When the republic declared independence, he became its first president.

In the first presidential elections on December 30, 1991, Islam Karimov received 86% of the votes against his opponent Muhammad Salih. In 1994, his term of office was extended to the year 2000 by a parliamentary decision.

In order to increase his legitimacy in the eyes of the population, President Karimov suspended the Communist Party of Uzbekistan (CPUz) and 'banned' its activities. On November 1, 1991, the party was renamed the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (PDPU). There were practically no changes in its structure or personnel.

One month later, the large 500 seat Soviet parliament was changed to an assembly of 250 seats. This new assembly continued to be filled with the old Communist deputies and local bureaucrats loyal to the president. Fourteen seats went to the nominal opposition party of Vatan Tarakkieti.

On paper, Uzbekistan seems to be a democracy that gives the people all its rights and allows them to choose their leader and parliamentary representatives. But the opposite is true.

Article 20 of the post independence constitution on basic rights and liberties states that their exercise "must not violate the legitimate interests, rights, and liberties of other persons, the state and society."⁷⁵ These legitimate interests are not clarified, thus enabling the state to interpret them as it wants.

President Karimov has organized the political structures in such a way that all the power is centralized in his hands. He rules by presidential decrees that could implement any policy without parliament voting on it. According to the constitution, the parliament, Oliy Majlis, is the ultimate power in Uzbekistan. Officially it is "responsible for debating and approving legislation, as well as for directing government policy. A presidium, cabinet and prime minister are selected from this body."⁷⁶

This paper democracy is 'marred' by several factors. The first is that the representatives in parliament are from the old Communist party. They ran unopposed in the 1990 elections as none of the opposition parties were allowed to run for election. Ninety-six percent of representatives are from the People's Democratic Party (PDPU).

To make it look like a multiparty democracy, there are several loyal opposition parties. Although they are legally separate entities, they are in fact

⁷⁵Hunter, Sherin. Central Asia Since Independence West port; Center for Strategic and Independence Studies, 1996: 60.

⁷⁶Kangas, Roger. "Uzbekistan: Evolving Authoritarianism" Current History (April 1994): 178.

'extensions' of the PDPU. The Fatherland Party, the Peasants Party and the Communist Party of the Workers of Uzbekistan openly support the Karimov's ruling party.

Despite the regime's continuous attempts to wipe out any opposition, the growing concerns of the people has led to the support of several opposition parties which are legally banned and work underground. Among these opposition groups are the Islamic Renaissance Party, Birlik and Erk.

The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) has been officially banned, but it has a small office and is gaining in popularity among the young people who see Islam as a better hope for a more equitable economic system. Imam Kahtib Sobitkhan, the ideological leader of the party, admits that these youth generally join the party due to disillusionment.

The government is trying to keep the opposition voiceless. Birlik (unity) was not allowed to register for the 1991 elections. The main objectives of Birlik are economic reform, an end to cotton monoculture, privatization, decentralization, the creation of textile industries and trade links with the rest of Central Asia, and environmental protection.

The Birlik movement was founded in 1988 from a coalition of writers, professionals, and students, in response to the growing concern over the ecological devastation resulting from the monoculture of cotton. By 1989, it was estimated to have approximately 300,000 members. Their continued concern with the social and economic conditions of the country has gained them a large following despite the fact that they have no access to the mass media.

Birlik's main form of protest has been the organization of large demonstrations. In October 1989, they managed to bring together over 50,000 people to protest the restricted use of the Uzbek language. This protest took place on the opening day of the Uzbek Supreme Soviet session.

Most of the problems responsible for the formation of the Birlik movement remained or worsened after independence. Feeling that the new parliament is inadequate, many Uzbeks bring their complaints to Birlik concerning the health of the population, the arbitrary exercise of power by the executive branch, and few cultural resources. But the party has no power to solve any of their problems. The demonstrations that they organize every once in a while have brought no changes in government policies.

The only real legal opposition party is Erk (freedom). It received only 12.4% of the vote in the 1991 elections. It is allowed to publish its own newspaper, but the number of copies is limited to 60,000. The paper is highly censored, and during election periods the party has almost no access to the media. Moreover, it is not allowed to criticize the regime or government policies. The fact that the party is legal has given it no legal powers. It has no influence in parliament as all major policies are determined by the president.

The decline in the economy has to a certain extent weakened the administrative strength and legitimacy of the government. But president Islam Karimov does not allow any kind of political opposition or criticism of government policies. The government has therefore managed so far to keep the opposition in the background.

The government, however, is constantly fighting the increased rural poverty. Year after year, larger and larger numbers of people are falling below the poverty line (around 9 million). The state's diminishing income has made it very difficult for it to continue paying for subsidies that were previously supported by Moscow and taken for granted by the population.

To lessen the social and economic effects of the loss of water and the degradation of the salinated soil, the government has to renew and improve the old infrastructure built by the Soviet Union. Many of the dams and irrigation systems date back to the end of World War II and the early 1960s. But the government does not have the money to rebuild. Not only does it take a long time to re-educate the population, but it also takes a lot of money to build new industries which are not dependent on agricultural products.

These social and economic problems are all taking place at a time of great uncertainty. After seventy years of Soviet domination, the Uzbeks are suddenly on their own. In the past, the political institutions and the regime had Moscow to blame for all the problems. Now they alone are responsible to the people. At a time of economic crisis it is very difficult for a new regime to gain the trust of the people.

Conflict

Despite the many pressures on society and the state, the Uzbek regime has through its repressive nature managed to keep the domestic conflicts to a

minimum. There have, however, been several incidents which the state was able to suppress.

A. Ethnic conflicts

Like in most of the region, the declining living standards and increasing unemployment has led to tensions between the ethnic groups; tensions that were previously below the surface.⁷⁷

There are two main reasons for the minor incidents of ethnic conflicts that have occurred over the last few years. The economy has changed for the worse and all ethnic groups in society have felt the impact. Some ethnic groups have reacted by emigrating to their country of origin, such as the Russians. But most of them have no place to go. They are therefore fighting for their share of the remaining economy. The dominant groups, the Russians and Uzbeks, are fighting in order to retain their dominant economic position, while the other groups feel that the discrimination has increased after the economy has worsened. Even though not many conflicts have actually occurred, the frustrations, tensions and aggression are just under the surface waiting for any instance to flare the tension up.

In Ferghana Valley, Uzbeks clashed with minority Meshkhetian Turks in June 1989, killing at least one hundred and forcing the evacuation of more than 74,000. More than 700 houses were destroyed. Meshkhetian Turks are punished people who were deported by Moscow in World War II. The actual fighting

⁷⁷The Uzbeks are 68.7%, Russians 10.8%, Tajiks 3.9% and the Kazaks 4 %

began when rumors circulated that the Meshkhetian Turks would receive housing until they returned to the north Caucasus. These rumors greatly angered the Uzbeks, many of whom were unemployed, who were living in crowded areas.⁷⁸ In 1990 Uzbeks and Kyrgyz fought over land and water rights in the Ferghana city of Osh, killing more than three hundred people and wounding over 1,000. More than 5,000 crimes were committed and hundreds of houses were destroyed.⁷⁹

There are growing social tensions in regions like Samarkand and Bukhara, where many of the Tajiks live. The Tajiks often voice the opinion that the Uzbeks are increasing the discrimination against them, both socially and economically

B. Deprivation conflicts

Economic decline and the consequent frustrations are the major problems facing the Uzbek people. President Karimov's repressive methods have kept the population relatively quiet, but every once in a while incidents of violence flame up.

Deprivation conflicts tend to develop when the economy produces less wealth and employment as a result of the resource scarcities. Conflict is especially likely to occur when the gap between the individual's actual achievement and the perceived level that he deserves increases at a rapid speed.

⁷⁸UNHCR. "Central Asia on the Move" Displacement in the Commonwealth of Independent States. 1996.

⁷⁹Tabyshalieva, Anara. "Flash point of Ethnic Conflict: Ferghana Valley" Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative (LGI) 1997.

Moreover, violence is more likely to take place when certain groups in society have been able to maintain their economic status and standard of living.

In Uzbekistan, this gap has taken place within one generation. People still remember what it was like just a few years earlier. There have been no major conflicts, but there have been numerous minor instances of violence where people are fighting over water which is seen in the rural areas as the basis of their economic problems.

Not long after he was elected president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov made the following speech at a party plenum:

“We already today have dozens of conflicts over land and water, including those in Ferghana, Samarkand and Bukhara. Hundreds of people stirred up by demagogues from different ‘informal’ organizations, in the presence of striking passivity and helplessness of the local authorities, come to the Central Committee imploring that we solve their problem at the expense of their neighbor”⁸⁰

Although the incidents have so far been minor, they are an indication of possible future conflicts. The political “potential of such interethnic conflict is illustrated by reports that Komosol volunteer activists formed ‘water posses’ making night raids along borderland irrigation canals to combat water poaching by other nationality groups.”⁸¹ Villagers in the Ferghana valley have fought repeatedly over water rights.

⁸⁰Gleason, Gregory. “Uzbekistan: From Stationhood to Nationhood” in Ian Bremmer, *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993: 352.

⁸¹Ibid., 353

Decreasing living standards are also causing tensions in Uzbekistan. Many Uzbeks have been living for less than what was the average in the rest of the Soviet Union. But in recent years things have become even worse. Many cannot afford even the basic food and clothing as they have lost their jobs. Many people living on minimum wages or on pensions can not survive after the government has been decreasing the subsidies.

In January 1992, there were student riots during which at least two students were killed and several seriously wounded. Police tried to stop students from marching to Karimov's residence to protest late bread deliveries and against the government's failure to raise their monthly grants.

The Uzbek government is very repressive. People have to be very desperate before they risk strikes or riots, as they risk several years of imprisonment and torture. But if economic conditions continue to deteriorate, more strikes and riots will occur in the next few years.

The Russians that have remained in Uzbekistan have more or less been able to maintain their standard of living as most of them live in the industrial sector of the economy. With their skill they have enough job opportunities to secure stable incomes. On the other hand, a large percentage of the Uzbeks have suffered financially because of the problems in the agricultural sector. These differences in standard of living have caused obvious tensions between the two ethnic groups, although no actual conflict has taken place.

C. Civil Strife

Civil strife occurs when well organized opposition groups feel that peaceful means of communication will not influence the governments' policies. These groups must be able to channel the frustrations of the people in order to organize demonstrations, coups and revolutions.

As long as the regime remains repressive, the political opposition does not have many opportunities to organize and challenge the government. There have, however, been several incidents where the opposition has publicly demanded change in the political system.

There are three renewable resources which are generally responsible for conflicts around the world. These are river water, fish, and agricultural land, as they are essential for the livelihood of large segments of societies. They are also the ones which cause tensions because their future can be determined by government policies.

If individuals feel that their government is responsible for the degradation of these resources, or if they perceive that their government is not actively preventing the continuance of degradation, often their frustration leads to strikes, riots, and if the environmental conditions are severe, coups and revolutions. These types of conflicts are calling for changes in the political system or sometimes just a change in the political leadership.

After perestroika, several famous writers, journalists, and political movements made the Uzbek people aware of the causes and result of the desiccation of the Aral Sea. The people therefore know that the economic conditions they are going through are caused by man-made economic policies

and that if their current regimes do not solve the Aral Sea crisis, their economic situation will worsen

Despite many attempts to increase the agricultural production, the output remains lower than hoped for. To prevent the people from blaming the leadership, there has been a trend in the last few years to put the blame on regional governors. Several have been fired on the grounds of mismanagement.⁸²

Since the mass media is totally repressed, it is very difficult to get a census of public opinion and whether they consider Karimov to be a legitimate leader. There have, however, been several incidents of discontent.

In February 1992, there was a student rally in a student village which houses over 30,000 students. They called for Karimov's resignation and the holding of real elections. This rally was dispersed by armed police.⁸³

During the same month there was another strike. They were protesting against the state press committee in order to get Birlik's publications registered.

On July 2, 1992, Birlik had planned to hold a demonstration to demand genuine democratic elections. Many of their leaders were arrested and tried for resisting law enforcement officers.

The Birlik and Erk parties and their leaders have been under serious attacks numerous times, including beatings and arrests. Their leaders are continuously harassed and arrested.

⁸² Kangas, Roger. "Holding the Course in Uzbekistan" *Transition* February 7, 1997: 90.

⁸³ Hunter, Sherin. *Central Asia Since Independence* Westport; Center for Strategic and Independent Studies, 1996

The opposition parties seem to be working toward changes within the political system and not overthrowing the government. The parties want a bigger influence on the government policies in order to improve the economic and political situation.

D. Islamic fundamentalism

Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are the countries in the region with the highest possibility for Islamic fundamentalism. In order to improve his nationalist image, president Karimov 'sponsored' the revival of Uzbek culture. Along with this revival, there was an emphasis on Islam, which was becoming increasingly popular. In the period before the presidential elections in 1991, Karimov spoke about the importance of Islam in Uzbek life and he sponsored numerous religious celebrations and holidays. He established an Islamic Center for International Studies in Tashkent.

However, events in neighboring Tajikistan where the Islamic movement was involved in the civil war as well as increasing foreign investment in religious institutions led Karimov to change his strategy. His government began to see the Islamists as possible threats to its secular rule.

The Wahabi movement in Ferghana Valley is the best organized opposition to the government and seeks to overthrow it. Many fear that fundamentalism will spread in the valley and turn violent. A senior official from the Uzbek Interior Ministry was quoted in 1993 as saying the following:

“Ferghana can explode any time. People are just waiting for it to happen and nobody can stop it.”⁸⁴

Ferghana Valley is the most populated region of Uzbekistan. Around one-third of the total population lives there. It is over populated and has a severe land shortage. Added to this there is an unemployment rate in the area of over 35 percent.⁸⁵ This economic crisis is giving the fundamentalists a strong political base.

Uzbek officials claim that the fundamentalists are creating an army and teaching students to use weapons in order to create disturbances at the right time. They have, however, no strategy for preventing this. Nor have they been able to improve the economic situation in the valley. The National Democratic Party seems unable to mobilize support from the people. The fundamentalists have little influence in the capital Tashkent or in the southern regions of Uzbekistan where nationalist tendencies seem to be stronger.

The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), which is banned from politics, is also based in the Ferghana Valley. It seems to have considerable support. But since it is officially banned there are no statistics.

Although Uzbekistan closely monitors religious activities, it remains concerned with what it calls Islamic fundamentalism. In 1996, the government detained several Islamic clerics from Ferghana Valley on various charges. In December 1997, disturbances in the city of Namangan revived the fear of Islamic

⁸⁴Rashid, Ahmed. The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism Oxford UP; London, 1994: 100

⁸⁵Ibid.

fundamentalism. Three incidents in Namanagan in the Ferghana Valley have shown that the valley is not as stable as Karimow has been attempting to portray. At least six local officials and policemen were killed and hundreds of people linked to mosques were arrested.⁸⁶

Tensions rose in early 1998 when seven policemen were killed in a clash in the valley. The government blamed the incident on religious extremism and Karimov stated that Islamic fundamentalism was the main threat to the region.⁸⁷

Conclusion

In the current economic and political situation, Uzbekistan is definitely reducing the quantity as well as the quality of its renewable resources faster than they can be renewed. Therefore, it does not have a sustainable economy that leaves its resource capital intact for future generations.

Before and after independence, the government of Uzbekistan has been having a short term policy of attempting to address the poverty and political instability that are results of the environmental degradation caused by the desiccation of the Aral Sea. The problems are therefore not being solved, but postponed for a short time. Until they are solved the original problem continues to worsen.

One of the reasons that most Uzbeks have remained passive despite the severe economic situation is the strength of the security forces and police. The

⁸⁶ "Uzbek Violence Threatens Stability in Islamic Trouble Spot" BBC News (online) December 19, 1997.

⁸⁷ Eggleston, Roland. "Uzbekistan: President and OSCE chief Discuss Police Action" RFE/RL April 21, 1998.

National Security Service is the new name for the old KGB apparatus. Average citizens are afraid to participate in political debates or demonstrations.

Uzbekistan has a number of natural resources that it can exploit. It has a large amount of natural gas. At the time of independence, it produced over forty billion cubic meters. But it is estimated that the oil reserves will only last another 30 years and that the natural gas reserves will last 20 years. These natural resources can therefore not be the basis for a new economic orientation.⁸⁸

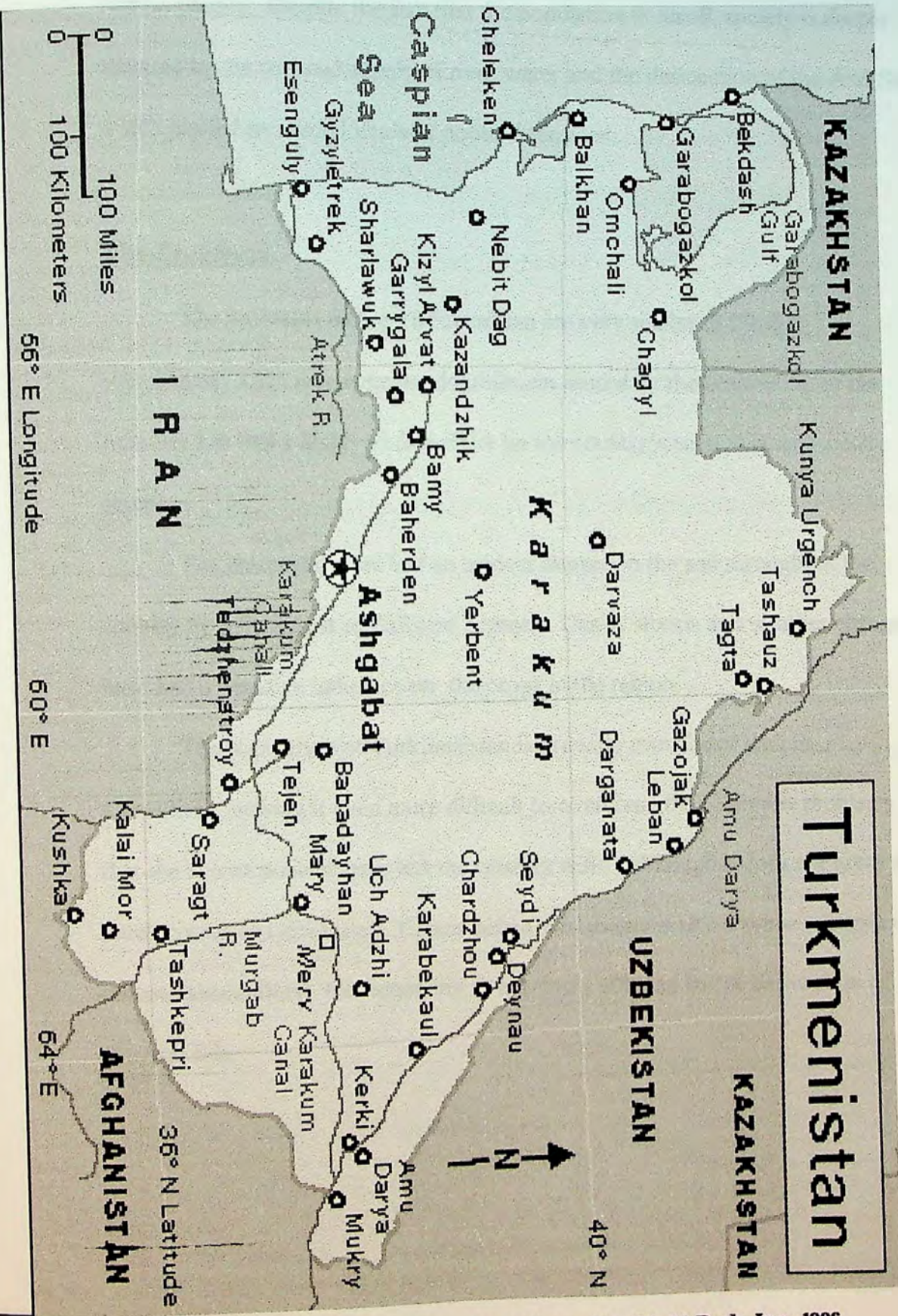
Despite the current level of export of these natural resources, cotton remains Uzbekistan's main export. In 1996, cotton alone accounted for 75 percent of the country's dollar earnings.⁸⁹

The environmental degradation therefore continues to have a major impact on the future of the Uzbek people and their economy. If their agricultural production continues to decline, it is unlikely that the country will be able to avoid political violence.

⁸⁸UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea Nairobi; UNEP, 1992: 38

⁸⁹Hunter, Sherin. Central Asia Since Independence Westport; Center for Strategic and Independent Studies, 1996

Chapter VI
Turkmenistan



Turkmenistan is predominantly a desert country in western Central Asia. It covers 488,100 square kilometers, and has a population of less than four million people. Despite the fact that the population is small, society is deeply affected by the reduced supply of river water and the desiccation of the Aral Sea, which has led to several kinds of political tensions.

The Problems

The problems facing Turkmenistan are very similar to those in Uzbekistan. The environmental degradation caused by the desiccation of the Aral Sea has had a highly visible effect on the country's economic and social situation.

The desiccation has had an evident impact on the soil throughout the country by salinating it to different degrees. Desert storms and weather changes have had a negative influence on the crops in the region.

The population of Turkmenistan is growing even faster than in Uzbekistan, making it even more difficult to overcome the economic problems that the Soviet policies have left the country with. Although it does not grow as much cotton as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan's economy is also a prime example of cotton monoculture. Consequently, it is acutely affected by the desiccation of the Aral Sea.

A. Aral Sea

Turkmenistan does not have any actual coastline on the Aral Sea. But it is very close to the sea. The country is therefore deeply affected by any changes that occur to it. The climate in the region closest to the sea has changed just like it did in Uzbekistan. The season when it is possible to grow cotton has decreased by 30 days, thereby making it impossible to grow it in the region closest to the sea.⁹⁰

Within a distance of 200 kilometers from the Aral Sea, the atmosphere has changed. The average number of days without rain has "increased considerably. Between 1950 to 1959 there were 30 to 35 especially dry days annually....However, between 1970 to 1979 the number increased to 120 to 150 days"⁹¹ As a result the air humidity needed for desert vegetation has declined considerably.

In the area that is within a 500 kilometers radius of the Aral Sea, the number of desert storms has increased by more than 50% since 1966. In places close to the sea these storms have increased by 3.6 times.⁹²

B. Population Growth

The population growth in Turkmenistan has had a major effect on the way the country has been influenced by the environmental degradation that has resulted from the drying up of the Aral Sea.

⁹⁰Kotlyakov, V. "The Aral Sea Basin: A Critical Environmental Zone" Environment V. 33, No. 1 (January/ February 1991): 6.

⁹¹UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea. Nairobi; UNEP, 1992: 44.

Turkmenistan has a relatively small population, but it is growing fast. In the period 1979 to 1989 the growth rate was 2.86 %.⁹³ The growth rate has remained more or less the same throughout the 1990s and is not expected to decrease for another decade. Consequently, the economy badly needs to expand.

Currently, more than 40 percent of the population is under the age of 15. This means that within the next few years, there will be an even greater demand for an expansion of the labor market. There is already 25% unemployment in Turkmenistan.⁹⁴ The government therefore rapidly needs to make changes in the economy to accommodate these people.

C. Soviet Economic Legacy

As in Uzbekistan, the Soviet Union left the Turkmen economy in a bad condition. The policies of Moscow were not in the interest of Turkmenistan, and left it very poor.

Turkmenistan was one of the three main cotton producers in the Soviet Union. This cotton was the basis of its economy. Its decline therefore has a major effect on all sectors of society.

Number of hectares cultivating cotton (million)

Year	Hectares	Increase, 1940-1986 (Percent)
1940	0.151	330
1971-1975	0.438	
1976-1980	0.504	
1981-1985	0.534	
1986	0.650	

SOURCE: James Critchlow. *Nationalism in Uzbekistan*, Boulder Westview Press, 1991: 64

⁹³James Critchlow. *Nationalism in Uzbekistan*, Boulder Westview Press 1991: 70.

⁹⁴World Bank figures found in *The Mindscape World Atlas*, 1995.

As the table shows, there was a large increase in the number of hectares cultivating cotton over a period of a few decades. In order to reach Moscow's cotton targets, Turkmenistan was forced to abandon its other agricultural products. As a result, the republic imports almost all of its food.

Despite the fact that Turkmenistan receives a large share of the water through the Karakum Canal, it will be very difficult for it to increase the number of hectares in order to expand food production. It is already using most of its arable land. Consequently, Turkmenistan would have major economic problems even without the environmental degradation. But now it is worse than it has ever been in this century. All the country's foreign currency earned by the sale of natural gas, oil, and cotton is used to import basic food.

Increased Pressures

The effects of the environmental degradation can be detected in all aspects of Turkmenistan's economy, especially in the agricultural sector. But the government is relying on the gas and oil reserves to overcome the decline in agricultural production and the related industries. As the country more or less imports all of the basic food, more and more hard currency is needed to maintain the already low living standard. Unless the gas and oil exports increase dramatically, Turkmenistan has to continue its cotton production to finance its debts. Hence, the country continues to be highly dependent on the declining agricultural sector.

By the second half of the 1980s, 372,000 hectares, which was one third of the arable land, was partially or severely salinated. In the period between 1981 and 1985 alone, the salinated land had increased by 76,000 hectares.⁹⁵

Turkmen officials claimed that the cotton yields per hectare had remained the same since the 1970s. This yield was 22.7 tons per hectare, which was lowest in Central Asia. Kazakhstan which has the second worst yields per hectare had 27.0 in the late 1970s. But it turned out that the statistics had been changed to meet the cotton targets set by Moscow. In 1986, the cotton yields were 18.2 percent less than in 1960.⁹⁶

Cotton yields are not the only yields that have decreased. In 1987, the grain yields were 36% less than they were in 1960 and the vegetables were 12.9 percent less.⁹⁷

In the Shakh-Senemesk region 250 km south of Dash Khouz, canals were dug to cultivate wheat. But the soil contained a too high concentration of salt. As a result in 1994, only 5-15 centners were harvested from each hectare in that region. In the same year, there were fields which were not harvested because the yield was so low that the fuel costs to collect the crops would exceed their value.⁹⁸

Ashgabad, the capital, does not receive adequate supplies of water. In the summer months many parts of the city only receive water in the middle of the

⁹⁵ UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea. Nairobi; UNEP, 1992: 94

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Arabaev, Andrei. "Chasing Ghosts" Ecotan News V.2, No. 12, December 1, 1994.

night. People then store it in containers for daily consumption. People are constantly worried that nightly flow will not continue.

In some areas of the capital, the water is black. The water is pumped from the Karakum Canal which brings the water from the Amu Darya river. Along the way there is a purifying system, but the system is very old.⁹⁹ It has not been renewed for several decades.

A. Decreased Economic Production

The decline in cotton production as a result of the environmental degradation has been very clear. In the period 1976 to 1980 the average cotton yield per hectare was the same as in 1960. From 1985 to 1989 it declined from 23.0 to 17.5 centners per hectare. But the gross harvest increased to the 1985 level, due to the fact that the country added to the irrigated land.

President Sapamurad Niazov has attempted to improve the economic situation by increasing the cotton and grain production, but in 1995 and 1996 the harvests were only one-third of the quotas set by the government. As a result, several government officials were fired for corruption and mismanagement.¹⁰⁰

Niazov's government seems to believe that their economy can survive without making any major changes. Environmentalists and scientists have not been allowed to interfere with the policies of the government.

⁹⁹ Sievers, Erik. "Aral Region Water Quality" Ecotan News (Online) V. 3, No.4, April 1, 1995.

¹⁰⁰ Bezananis, Lowell. "More Echoes of the Past in Turkmenistan" Transition February 7, 1997: 93.

Turkmenistan has found large reserves of oil and natural gas. The country has an annual capacity of 110 billion cubic meters of gas.¹⁰¹ The export of these resources has paid some of the country's debts and has enabled it to continue subsidizing the main food products.

With its new found oil, the Turkmen people have high hopes that their country will turn into the Kuwait of Central Asia. The government has signed several long term agreements with American, European, and Middle Eastern oil companies. Although their inflow of foreign capital has increased considerably, they are still far from achieving their goals. As long as the stability of the country and region is uncertain, there is no guarantee that their new oil wealth will be the basis for long term economic development, and not end up in the hands of a few privileged people.

Despite hopes of turning into another Kuwait, the oil and gas exports have not increased. In 1996, Turkmenistan only exported 25 million cubic meters, less than the previous year and far less than its capacity. Most of the gas was exported to the highly indebted countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in the Trans-Caucasus and Ukraine. In early 1992 a conflict occurred between Turkmenistan and Ukraine over the price of gas. It was agreed that Ukraine would pay 800 rubles per thousand cubic meters. The dispute was over whether this price included the price of transportation. On March 1, Niazov turned off the supplies pointing out that 800 rubles were only 10% of world prices. Ukraine responded by pointing out that it could deny Turkmenistan to run its gas through its territory. The conflict dragged on for

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 92.

nine months before Ukraine agreed to pay 3000 rubles per thousand cubic meter. During 1993 similar conflicts took place with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. In 1997, the former Soviet republics together owed Turkmenistan more than \$2 billion. The other Central Asian countries also owe huge sums, but cannot afford to pay.¹⁰²

It has become clear to Turkmenistan, that it can not rely on the other former Soviet republics to provide it with the hard currency that it desperately needs. Turkmenistan, therefore, needs to find a way to transport the gas to outside markets. The problem is to find routes connecting Turkmenistan to these markets. To the north the country is surrounded by the other former Soviet republics. To the south it borders war torn Afghanistan and Iran. It made an agreement with the Argentine company Bidas to build a pipeline through Afghanistan to Pakistan, but Niazov decided to cancel it. Turkmenistan's reputation as a reliable source suffered from this action.

Another route they have considered is the possibility of moving the gas via Iran and Turkey in order to reach the European markets. In December 1997, Turkmenistan celebrated its new gas pipeline to Iran, and there are hopes that a gas line will be built from Iran to Turkey. But such a project will be very costly and will depend on International finance and an image of stability. Moreover, Turkmenistan needs to build up a reputation as a reliable and constant supplier or it will be very difficult to attract the international oil companies. The fact that Turkmenistan and Kazakstan have in the past cancelled signed agreements with

¹⁰² Bezanis, Lowell. "More Echoes of the Past in Turkmenistan" Transition February 7, 1997: 92 - 93.

foreign investors is a setback for Niazov's hopes of becoming a major gas and oil exporter.

Moreover, the supply of oil at current levels of extracted outputs is only estimated to last for another 35 years, and the natural gas another 22 years. This means that these resources are not alternatives for long-term development of Turkmenistan's economy.¹⁰³

President Niazov "sums up his economic program with two words: 'open doors'. The strategy calls for foreign investment to finance the exploitation of the country's oil, gas and natural resources, and thus obviate the need for market reforms. All natural resources will remain state property, but foreign investors will not have to pay taxes until their projects become fully operative and profitable."¹⁰⁴

B. Living Standards

The decline in economic production has had a very strong effect on the living standard of the majority of the people. As unemployment increased annually, the number of poor increased as well.

President Niazov is attempting to buy social peace by providing subsidies for the large number of poor people. During 1993, all citizens were given gas, water, and electricity free of charge. But with 25% unemployment this is not

¹⁰³ UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea. Nairobi; UNEP, 1992: 38

¹⁰⁴ Islam, Shafiqul in Michael Mandelbaum, Central Asia and the World: Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgistan and Turkmenistan. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994: 169 .

enough. Many cannot afford the basic goods even at subsidized prices.

After the January 15, 1994 poll where 98% of the voters supposedly backed Niazov, the president celebrated by decreeing that gas and electricity would from then onwards be free for all Turkmen. This is despite the fact the country has not yet turned into the Kuwait of Central Asia. In fact, this is still far from reality.

Since the manat, the new national currency, was introduced in November 1993, prices have risen up to six times. Most of the shops are empty and 60% of the basic goods are imported. It is common in the capital to see 400 or 500 people standing in line just to buy bread. In other parts of the country, people can only receive 200 grams of bread a day. In November 1994, the only food available in shops were chicken legs that had been part of an American humanitarian aid package.

The export of natural resources has not improved the living standard of the Turkmen people. Nor has it provided employment for the labor force. It has just minimized the country's foreign debt.

C. Increased ethnic tensions

Turkmenistan has the least complicated ethnic division in Central Asia. It has a 72 percent Turkmen majority. The minorities include 9 percent Russians, and 9 percent Uzbeks. The remaining 10 percent are many small groups of other nationalities.

Tensions tend to occur between ethnic groups when one or several groups perceive the other ethnic groups as threats to their interests. Conflicts are especially possible if there is a history of tensions. In Turkmenistan this does not seem to be the case, although the interaction between the different ethnic groups has not always been smooth.

So far, the relations between the different ethnic groups do not seem to have suffered much from the environmental degradation. The main reason for this is that the country is less developed in social terms. It is more like a tribal confederation than a modern nation.¹⁰⁵

More than fifty percent of the ethnic Turkmen live in the rural areas, while around ninety-seven percent of the Russians live in the urban centers.¹⁰⁶ The majority of Russians are skilled workers, technicians, and managers, while the Turkmen are mainly working in the agricultural field, although many work in government offices and in the educational system. As the Turkmen and the Russians who comprise the majority of the population do not work in the same labor markets, they are not competing for the same jobs, nor are they living in the same areas. This has lessened the possibility for violence. The Turkmen realize that if the Russians leave, they will not be able to replace them. So although the Russians' standard of living has been reasonably stable at a time where environment degradation has led to poverty and unemployment among many rural Turkmen, there has been no flare-up of ethnic conflict.

¹⁰⁵Hyman, Antony. "Power and Politics in Central Asia's New Republics" Conflict Studies No. 273 (August 1994): 9.

¹⁰⁶Nissman, David. "Turkmenistan (Un)transformed" Current History (April 1994): 185.

There has been no pressure for the Russians to leave. Their standard of living has not declined and the hyper inflation that has occurred in the other Central Asian countries has not been as severe in Turkmenistan. The state continues to subsidize basic foods when available.

Increased Pressure on Civic Institutions

The civic institutions of Turkmenistan are not very strong. The political system is based on the hegemony of Niazov. The political parties are not much more than a front for the regime.

In the fall of 1991, the Communist Party of Turkmenistan was reorganized and renamed the Turkmenistan Democratic Party (TDP). The members of the new party were the same as the Communist Party.

The leadership after independence was clearly moving towards a dictatorship similar to those led by the communist leaders. President Niazov showed his attitude toward democracy, when he stated: "For our people democracy is not a good system."¹⁰⁷ Censorship only approves of 'what is in harmony' with government policies.

Apart from the TDP, there is one more legal political party. This is the Peasants' Party whose membership is mainly from the rural areas. However, this party seems to be generally inactive.

All the other political parties and movements which were organized before independence have not been allowed to register. Among these parties,

¹⁰⁷Manz, Beatrice F. Central Asia and Historical Perspective Boulder: Westview Press, 1994: 157.

there is the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, which claims that its goal is to unite all the efforts of all the democratic parties in Central Asia.

A second party is Solidarity. Solidarity was originally registered with the Turkmen Academy of Sciences in 1989, until it declared itself a political movement in 1990. The party has been attacked by government officials since it was initiated. Its membership is mainly from the literary parts of society.

The Movement for Democratic Reform is more 'accommodating' to president Niazov's regime. Its members include former representatives from the communist party and parliamentary deputies. This party has 'strong ties' with Moscow.

When the new post independence constitution was approved on May 18, 1992, it was hoped that the authoritarian system of rule would change. In the constitution it is written that Turkmenistan is a presidential republic that is governed by a president, a prime minister, and a parliament. There is a People's Council which has the power to make constitutional amendments. This power, however, is highly limited by the fact that its members are appointed by the president. Although numerous new offices and councils have been established, it has become clear that Niazov has even more power as president than he did as first secretary of the communist party.

There are various vague areas in the constitution that allow the regime to pursue its policies as it pleases. Article 27, for example "guarantees the 'freedom of meetings, rallies, and demonstrations in the procedure established by legislation.' In other words, the legislation is free to pass laws curtailing that right. Another example: Article 28 states that 'citizens have the right to create

political parties and other public associations operating within the framework of the constitution and the laws'. This same article also outlines the basis by which political parties can be banned. One basis for prohibition would be if these parties 'encroach on the health and morals of the people.' As a result of this clause, the government passed a resolution that stated that demonstrations were illegal because they were a threat to the public's health.¹⁰⁸

Freedom of the press and speech are also 'guaranteed' by the constitution, but the press is totally censored and there is only a very limited freedom of speech. The government controls all the radios, the television, and newspapers. All publications must be submitted to the Committee for the Protection of State Secrets before they are published. Opposition papers published outside the country are destroyed if caught. Articles are only allowed to criticize a government policy if the regime has already decided that that specific policy would soon change.

The possibility of civil strife is highest when the decreased economic production and the following decline in living standards affects the legitimacy of the regime. If the people consider the political system to be legitimate and trust it to solve their economic problems, then there will be less chance for civil strife. The people must lose faith in their government for them to try and change it by violent means. However, when the government is repressive, it is difficult for opposition groups to organize and use the frustrations of the people in order to overthrow the government.

¹⁰⁸Nissman, David. "Turkmenistan (Un)transformed" *Current History* (April 1994): 185.

When Turkmenistan was preparing for its independence day in 1994, two palaces were built for the president and a reviewing platform was erected for President Niazov to stand on while the people marched by carrying his portrait. These facilities cost the Turkmen state more than sixty million dollars¹⁰⁹. This took place at the same time as there was no food for the population. Added to their many economic problems, the president's choice of public spending has disenchanted many of the citizens. His many promises have only resulted in a declining standard of living.

But because of the state's repressive nature, few people have attempted to officially express their disenchantment. Fear is part of the governments policy. This policy has kept the people reasonably quiet.

Conflict

There have already been several indications that tensions are increasing within Turkmenistan. But although its legitimacy is very weak, Karimov's regime has been strong enough to repress most outbreaks of discontent.

Since independent the government has been able to keep its power intact. At the present time there does not seem to be any person or group able to truly challenge president Niazov. But if the economic problems and the living conditions continue to worsen, it is doubtful whether the people will continue to accept the unwise environmental and consequent economic policies of the government.

¹⁰⁹Sievers, Erik. "Protests in Turkmenistan" Ecological News from Central Asia
V.3, No. 8, August 1, 1995.

A. Deprivation Conflicts

Decline in living standards and the high unemployment that is caused by the degradation of the soil and climate change, seems to be the main cause of conflict in Turkmenistan. People are very frustrated over the economic conditions that their country is going through, and over the fact that the government has not been actively attempting to overcome these problems. It does not seem to be trying to solve the environmental problems that have caused them so much misery.

Despite the facts that experts have shown that the dust storms and the decline in crop yields are caused by the drying up of the Aral Sea, Niazov plans to use future revenues from the sales of natural gas to lengthen the Karakum Canal in order to increase the number of hectares used for agriculture. This will only deteriorate the geological condition of the agricultural land and possibly provoke conflict with down stream Uzbekistan.

The political tensions over the economy have so far only led to minor incidents of violence. Most of the resistance is done by printing illegal newspapers, holding secret meetings and so on. Publicly, few people dare to voice their opposition. There have been no major rallies or demonstrations concerning the economy or lack of food since independence.

In May, 1988 the high level of unemployment among the youth led to riots in Ashkhabad. This led to large numbers of arrests and has not occurred again.

In May 1989 there were riots in Ashkhabad and Nebit-Dag over high prices. And in the first half of 1992 there was a strike in a bus station in Nebit-Dag. The workers were calling for up to 500% increases in pay. The fact that Niazov sent the responsible minister showed that the government was worried that the social unrest would spread.¹¹⁰ There were unconfirmed reports of sporadic protests over food shortages in 1996 and violent prison unrests in late summer.¹¹¹

B. Civil Strife

Niazov's government has mainly been able to maintain stability because of the relative weakness of the opposition groups and movements. This weakness is attributed to several factors: "the continued pre-eminence of tribal identities over any sense of Turkmen nationhood, let alone commitment to democratic norms; the low level of economic and social development, with the majority of rural population far removed from the better educated urban elites; the absence of a sizable and active intelligentsia capable of articulating or mobilizing the population; and the tight control maintained over society by the authorities since the late 1980s."¹¹²

Despite the governments repressive nature, there have been several incidents of violence, where different movements demanded a change in the

¹¹⁰ Anderson, John. "Authoritarian Political Development in Central Asia: the case of Turkmenistan." *Central Asian Survey* V. 14 No 4 (1995): 513.

¹¹¹ Bezanis, Lowell. "More echoes of the Past in Turkmenistan" *Transition* February 7, 1997: 93.

¹¹² Anderson, John. "Authoritarian Political Development in Central Asia: the case of Turkmenistan." *Central Asian Survey* V. 14 No 4 (1995): 513.

political system. In March 1995, six people were sentenced up to twelve years on the charge of conspiracy to seize power and overthrow the government. On July 12, 1995, 500 to 1000 protesters, mostly ethnic Turkmen from rural areas outside Ashgabad held a public rally demanding democratic presidential elections and censuring the policies, acts and the corrupt government of President Saparmurad Niazov.¹¹³ These people were from rural areas of Turkmenistan which are experiencing shortages of many basic necessities, and hunger has provoked them into desperate measures. The protesters distributed leaflets urging the Russian-speaking population to join them. They emphasized that the rally was not nationalistic or ethnic oriented.

On July 26, 1995 over one hundred women protested in front of the presidential palace about the policies of the government. Many people were arrested in July 1995 for anti-government demonstrations, even though they had been peaceful. The majority were released after a short period, but twenty seven were retained in custody.¹¹⁴

Although large numbers of people are frustrated with the government, there has been no movement to unite and organize their efforts. So, apart from showing their disenchantment, these demonstrations, strikes and minor riots have no major effect on the strength of the government.

¹¹³ Sievers, Eric. "Protests in Turkmenistan" *Ecological News from Central Asia* V.3, No. 8, August 1, 1995 : 1

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

C. Islamic Fundamentalism

Islamic fundamentalism is a movement that all the Central Asian governments fear. The regime does not, therefore, allow any kinds of religious meetings or publications.

Article 3 of the constitution states that the people of Turkmenistan have the "freedom to exercise a religion or other convictions [and] is subject only to those restrictions which are necessary to safeguard public safety and order, the life and health of the people, and morale"¹¹⁵ This allows the government to exert strict control over Islamic activity. And so far it has worked.

Conclusion

It was estimated in 1989 that if Turkmenistan continued to extract oil at the (1989) quantity, then the oil reserves would last for 41 years and the natural gas reserves would last around 28 years.¹¹⁶ This means that the government will not be able to buy itself peace for ever. It will have to solve the environmental problems that the country is facing before it is too late to turn back. Today, even if none of the Central Asian countries use any water it will take many years for the volume and size of the Aral Sea to return to its original size. It will take

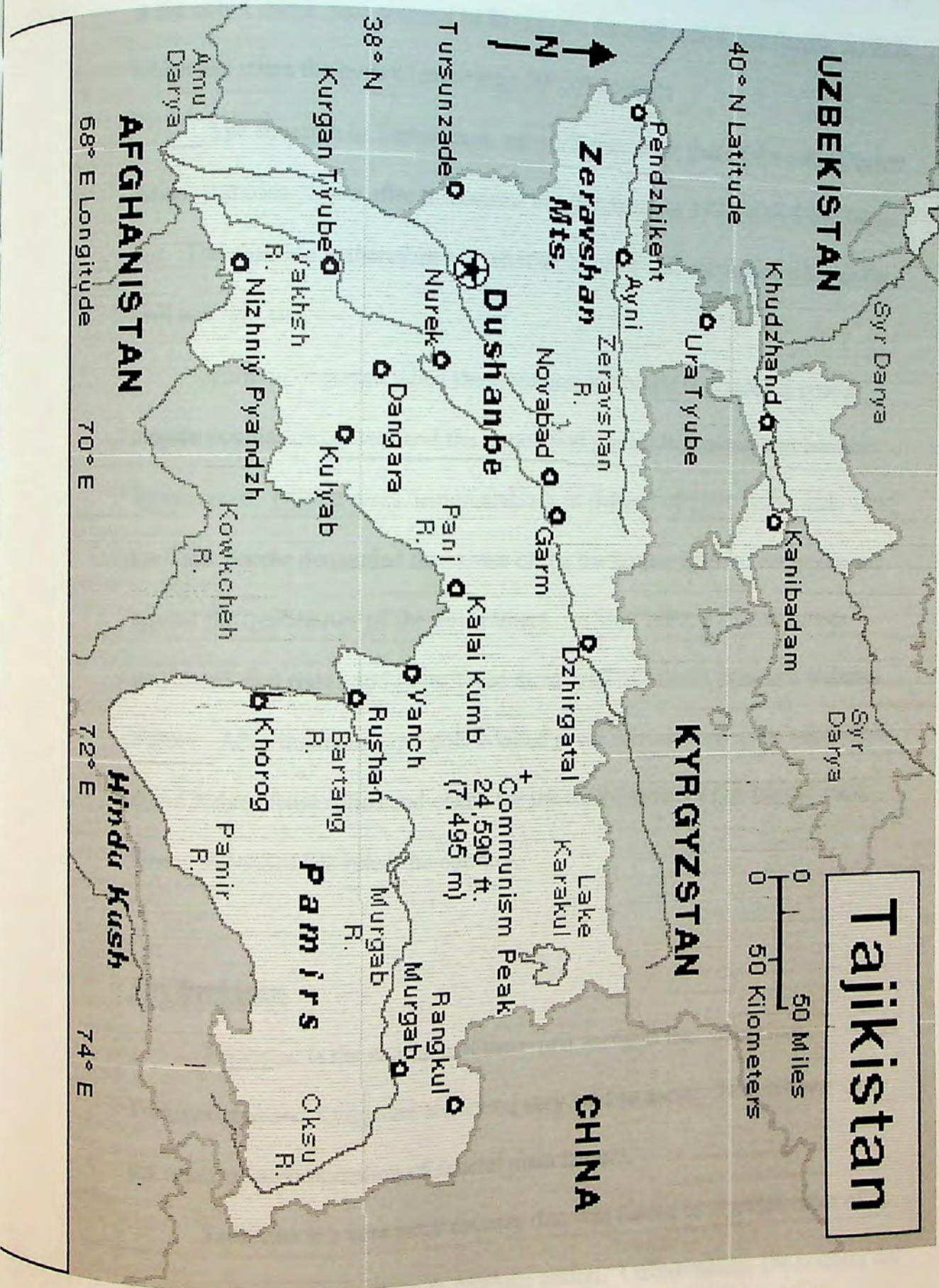
¹¹⁵Nissan, David. "Turkmenistan (Un)transformed" Current History (April 1994): 185

¹¹⁶UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea. Nairobi; UNEP, 1992: 38

even longer for the government to overcome all the internal environmental problems that have resulted from it.



Chapter VII Tajikistan



Tajikistan is the poorest country in Central Asia. Apart from water it has very small amounts of natural resources and it is the most densely populated. It is the only Central Asia country to have gone through a civil war (began in 1992), which has taken the lives of more than 200,000 people.

The situation in Tajikistan is very different from that of the other Central Asian countries. Soon after it received independence in 1991, a civil war broke out. The question is therefore not whether conflict will occur, but whether the civil war will end.

Turmoil occurred when the Communists fought to remain in power despite popular discontent and the opposition parties Rastokhez and Islamic Renaissance. During mass demonstrations in the end of 1991 and in early 1992, the Tajik people demanded the ouster of the parliament speaker and protested against the inefficiency of the government. In May 1992, the Communists suspended civil rights and reinstated dictatorial rule under president Rahman Nabiev. After the militia and police killed some demonstrators, the opposition drove Nabiev from office and called for the establishment of an Islamic state. Since then chaos has ruled the country.

The Problems

Tajikistan is the example of the worst scenario that Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgystan are trying very hard to avoid. The civil war was the result of a combination of several main factors.

Tajikistan is a very poor country that was forced to abandon most of its agricultural products in order to produce cotton. Unfortunately, the country did

not have enough arable land to sustain the economy. So before independence the national budget was totally dependent on subsidies from Moscow. When Tajikistan received independence, it had to rely on its own agricultural production.

So when the desiccation of the Aral Sea affected the cotton yields by salinating the soil, an economic crisis occurred and tensions among the different clans quickly aggravated. No clan wanted another clan to rise to power.

A. Aral Sea

Tajikistan is not beside the Aral Sea. In fact it is several hundred miles away from it. Still it is influenced by its degradation, especially by the desiccation of the two river deltas.

Most of Tajikistan's agricultural production takes place in the Tajik share of the Ferghana Valley. Unfortunately, this is the land that is the closest to the Aral Sea and therefore the land most affected by its degradation.

As Tajikistan is further away from the Aral Sea than Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, its soil has become less salinated. The soil, however, has degraded over the years. In the period 1976 - 1980 the cotton yields per hectare were 39.7, while in the period 1981 - 1984 they had decreased to 29.8 per hectare. The figure has decreased even more in recent years but because of the civil war there are no exact statistics.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Martin McCanley in Shireen Akiner . Political and Economic Trends in Central Asia
London: British Academy Press, 1993: 95.

Cotton was not the only crop that suffered from the soil degradation and the salination that was the result of the desiccation of the Aral Sea as well the rivers leading to it. The grain yields per hectare in 1987 had decreased by 3.1 percent in comparison with 1960. Vegetables yields had decreased by 4.6 percent.¹¹⁸ But as only 6% of the land is arable, the possibility for expanding the number of cultivated hectares is limited.

B. Population Growth

Tajikistan has had the largest population growth rate in the region for many years. In the 1940s the population consisted of only 1.5 million people. At present there are more than five million people in Tajikistan. During the 1980s there was an average growth rate of 5 percent.¹¹⁹

Infant mortality is also very high. Despite the fact that it has better medical services than the rural areas, Dushanbe has an average death rate of 51.8 per thousand. This is very high compared to the Soviet average of 25.6 per thousand.¹²⁰

With the weak economic state and political instability that Tajikistan is going through it will be very difficult for any future regime to find employment, agricultural land, housing and industrial development for such a growing population.

¹¹⁸ UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea. Nairobi; UNEP 1992: 94.

¹¹⁹ "Tajikistan" CIA Fact Source Book, (online), 1995

¹²⁰ Rashid, Ahmed. The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism London; Oxford University Press, 1994: 171.

C. Soviet Economic Legacy

More than ninety percent of Tajikistan is covered by huge mountains, especially the Pamir mountains, long considered the world's most inaccessible mountains. Large glaciers have produced hundreds of rivers that flow down the mountain sides and irrigate the land below it.

By the time of independence, Tajikistan was producing various minerals like coal, radium, uranium and zinc. Eighty hydro and oil fired stations produce more than 15,500 kilo watt hours of electricity. Most of this electricity is exported to the other former Soviet republics. Economic production has been falling rapidly since the second half of the 1980s. For example oil production fell from 300,000 tons in 1989 to 90,000 in 1990 due to emigration of the Russian skilled work force and lack of spare parts.

Agriculture is the main source of income for the majority of Tajiks. When the Soviets first took control of the area, around 490,000 hectares were cultivated. When Tajikistan received its independence, the number of hectares had increased to 803,000 hectares. 43,000 kilometers of irrigation canals had been built. Tunnels had been dug through the mountains to bring the water down to the valleys.¹²¹

With five climate zones Tajikistan had the possibility of growing various crops. But like the other Central Asian republics, Moscow was determined to grow cotton. The average cotton cultivation yielded 900,000 tons annually,

¹²¹Rashid, Ahmed. The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism London; Oxford University Press, 1994:170 -171.

which was approximately 10% of the total Soviet production. It ruined the food production and led to the erosion and salination.

Table 5. Number of hectares cultivating cotton (million)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Hectares</u>	<u>Increase, 1940-1986 (Percent)</u>
1940	0.106	196
1971-1975	0.264	
1976-1980	0.295	
1981-1985	0.308	
1986	0.314	

SOURCE: James Critchlow. *Nationalism in Uzbekistan*, Boulder; West View Press, 1991: 64

As early as 1987, Soviet experts estimated that maintaining the living standard in Tajikistan, already the poorest in Central Asia, would necessitate a minimum increase in investment of 250 percent. At the time this meant 6 to 7 billion rubles.

Unemployment in 1987 was estimated to be 25.7% which was the highest in any of the former Soviet republics. Most of this unemployment was in the declining agricultural sector. Due to the civil war, there are no exact statistics after 1992 for either the agricultural production or unemployment, but the production has definitely declined and the unemployment has increased. The average wage in 1997 was \$1 per month, which was the lowest in the region.¹²²

The sharp decline in agricultural production since 1992 has mainly been the result of the civil war. But after the major violence stopped in Tajikistan it

¹²²Pannier, Bruce. "A Year of Violence in Tajikistan" *Transition* (online) February 7, 1997

was very difficult for the farmers to return to the pre-civil war production. But the actual decline in yields per hectare is not known.

D. Increased Ethnic and Clan Tensions

Tajikistan has both ethnic and clan tensions. This is not a new situation, but the Soviet central government was strong enough to keep it under control. The post-independence regime was not considered legitimate by the people nor did it have the power to maintain order by force.

There has always been mistrust and resentment between the three main ethnic groups; the Tajiks (62%), the Uzbeks (24%) and the Russians (8-10%)¹²³. But it was mainly the economic decline caused by the decreasing agricultural production that brought these tensions to the surface. The high level of unemployment has been the target of nationalist criticism on the basis that the Soviet authorities imported workers to run the industries that had been created since the 1950s.

In the mid 1980s a quarter of the working population was unemployed. Yet at the same time there was a severe shortage of skilled workers for the industrial enterprises. This led to further imports of workers from Russia and Uzbekistan, which fueled ethnic tensions.

With the declining agricultural production levels and the salinated land, large numbers of the rural population moved to the urban centers, especially the capital Dushanbe. But in the capital there was no employment and there was a

¹²³"Tajikistan" CIA Fact Source Book (online) 1995.

great housing problem. At the same time, Russians were being imported to run the industries and in return received housing. This caused a lot of resentment.

The housing problem in the urban areas, especially in Dushanbe, has been under criticism from the nationalists. The imported workers and the Russians in general received housing before the Tajiks. For this reason, the false rumors that a large number of Armenian refugees who had escaped from the violence in Azerbaijan were given priority in housing led to a large demonstration in Dushanbe on February 11, 1991. The "demonstrators underlying grievances were not about the Armenians but about general dissatisfaction with the standard of living and the unresponsive political leadership, but those rumors struck a raw nerve."¹²⁴ When the Ministry of Internal Affairs reacted by firing on the demonstrators who gathered the next day to continue their demands, rioting spread over all the city.

Relations with the Russians, who comprise over 10 percent of the population, have been increasingly tense. Since independence, Tajiks have been more open about their resentment over the fact that the Russians are receiving priorities and about the fact that after several decades the Russians are still unable to speak Tajik.

The Russians, on the other hand, are getting increasingly worried because of the 1989 law that made Tajik the primary language of the state. They are especially worried that their children will be denied a good education in their native Russian language.

¹²⁴Gleason, Gregory in Ian Bremmer ed.: Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993: 367.

More than 300,000 Russians and other nationalities have been emigrating from Tajikistan in recent years. There is controversy over how large these numbers really are.¹²⁵ It is estimated by local specialists that around 10% of the non-native population have been leaving the region since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Prior to independence, the Tajik regime depended on aid from Moscow. With the loss of the subsidies together with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the local Communist Party was forced to look for new sources of political support. It found it in the regionalist and clan relations.

The Tajiks were never a unified and coherent society. Tajik is a term applied by others to all speakers of Central Asian dialects of Persian. They themselves did not identify themselves as a group. Although officially called Tajik, these different clans have different identities and distinct cultures. Some are mountain-dwelling peasants and others are settled people whose identification is based on region of residence. The most important clans are the Pamiris, the Leninabadis, Gharmis, and the Kulabis.

The Leninabadis and Kulabis came to dominate the Communist Party, while opposition groups like the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) and the Democratic Party of Tajikistan were supported by the Gharmis and Pamiris.

None of these clans would accept that another clan had control over the government, nor were they willing to share the power. As a result, tensions began to flare-up as soon as independence was received.

¹²⁵ Rumer, Rumer, Boris Z. "The Gathering Storm in Central Asia" *Orbis* v. 37 (Winter 1993): 97-98.

Conflict

After receiving independence in 1991, the government of Tajikistan inherited weak political institutions and a very poor economy. But violence might not have occurred if the Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPTJ) had not been so rigid and unwilling to compromise with the opposition.

Riots in February 1991 caused considerable fear within the CPTJ. These riots were therefore used as an excuse to ban opposition candidates to the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan. As a result 94 percent of those elected were communists, who re-elected Kakhar Makhamov. The 'refusal' of the authorities to oblige the opposition at a time where other Soviet republics were 'liberalizing their political processes, 'convinced' the opposition that the official channels would not fulfill their goals.

There were demonstrations outside the parliament building when president Makhamov supported the August 1991 coup in Moscow against Gorbachev, forcing him to resign on September. Kadriden Aslonov, who replaced him was from the liberal wing of the communist party. He suspended the CPTJ and froze its assets. Aslonov was replaced with Rakhmon Nabiev, a former first secretary of the CPTJ, on September 23 when parliament made a counter coup. Nabiev re-invoked the party and declared a state of emergency.

Once more, the opposition protested in the streets. For ten days thousands of people demonstrated peacefully outside the parliament building, demanding that the government should resign. The opposition groups, including

the IRP, organized the protest by providing transport for these people into Dushanbe. The size of the demonstrations forced Nabiev to give in to their demands. The state of emergency was retracted and the CPTJ was banned once again on October 2. An election date was set and the ban on opposition parties was lifted. The IRP made an alliance with two other opposition groups and chose Daulat Khudonazarov, a film producer, as a presidential candidate.

The elections took place on November 24, 1991 and gave Nabiev a 58 percent victory. The IRP candidate received 34 percent of the vote. The opposition claimed that the elections had not been fair and demanded new elections. Nabiev refused and lifted the ban on the communist party on January 4, 1992. This was the beginning of major disputes.

In March 1992, the mayor of Dushanbe and members of the city council were arrested 'along' with members of opposition parties like the Rastokhez Popular Front and the Democratic Party of Tajikistan. They were charged with corruption. But it is more likely that they were arrested because they were pro-opposition. The people reacted to these arrests by demonstrations throughout the city.

More than 10,000 anti-government demonstrators camped at the shaheed (Martyrs) square, while Nabaiev's supporters counter demonstrated in Azadi square. President Nabiev seemed blind to the threatening crisis. He convinced parliament to give him emergency powers to deal with the demonstrators. In the following days the number of anti-government demonstrators increased to more than 100,000 people and violence erupted.

President Nabiev had pursued hard line politics without a solid political base. There was no national army and the police was demoralized and mainly unarmed. Nabiev's National Guard consisted of seven hundred men recruited from criminal 'elements' from Kuliab. The CIS troops had orders not to get involved. As a result, within hours after Nabaiev imposed a curfew after dark, demonstrators surrounded the president's palace. They demonstrators had taken over all the most important government buildings in the capital.

On May 7, 1992 several clashes occurred between the National Guard and militia units belonging to the opposition parties. The militias seized the presidential palace after Major-General Bakhrom Rakhmonov, the chief military advisor to the president, surrendered in order to prevent 'bloodshed.' Within the next few days violence spread throughout the city, as Nabaiev supporters and opposition groups fired upon each others and set up roadblocks.

Fear that the Islamic Renaissance Party would get the upper hand, impelled the Russian officers within the CIS forces in Dushanbe to interfere. They organized talks between the two opposing groups. As a result of the talks on May 8, an agreement to set up coalition government was made and the opposition groups promised to disarm their supporters and lift the roadblocks around the city. Despite this agreement, violent clashes continued around Dushanbe, as the opposition demanded that the president resign. His supporters in the Khodjent threatened that they would declare their region independent if Nabaiev was forced to resign. These threats from the northern regions, which were pro-communist, created the fear that the republic would be partitioned.

On May 12, the groups met once again within the CIS barrack and agreed to implement the May 7 agreement. The opposition agreed to allow Nabaiev to remain president while they received eight out of twenty four ministries. Daulat Usman, the vice chairman of the IRP, became the deputy prime minister. A transitional national assembly was set up to include all the opposition parties.

The political struggles that had taken place in the capital led to unrest in the remainder of the country. Regions declared their autonomy and threatened to form separate republics. The president was unable to rule outside the borders of Dushanbe. The political duality of the coalition government 'paralyzed the state. Each side continued to 'undermine' the other and threatened to seize total control. Parliament existed but did not meet.

In addition to all these problems the pro-Nabaiev communists in Khodjent and Kuliab refused to recognize the coalition government. Armed Kuliabis began to attack farms in Kurgan Tube in June. The farms were run by supporters of the IRP. On June 28, 1992 over one hundred people were killed on a state farm when these Kuliabis fired at them randomly. Thousands of people fled their farms in fear of these Kuliabis. They fled to Dushanbe. Anarchy spread as armed groups blocked all the main roads to the capital. Fighting worsened as weapons entered Tajikistan from Afghanistan. Rivalries were beginning to appear within the IRP between figures trained by the Muslim Brotherhood such as Himatzade, and Qazi Toradzhon Zoda who was building his own lobby within the party.

On August 31, 1992 students who were members of the Dushanbe Youth Movement (organized by Qazi Zoda) 'stormed' the parliament building and took government officials hostage. As protesters stood outside the building, the Prime Minister, Akbar Mirzoyev, and several other ministers resigned. Talks between the president and the opposition parties 'broke down' and the Presidium of Parliament announced on September 3 that Nabaiev was out of office even though no vote had been taken.

Nabaiev, who at the time was staying at the CIS military barracks, refused to leave his office. Parliament made an emergency meeting to choose a new leader, but all the Nabaiev members did not show up. Clashes continued in the city, killing around thirty more people. On September 7 Nabaiev attempted to escape to Khodjent, but he was stopped at the airport by IRP militants. There was some shooting between the militants and the bodyguards, after which Nabaiev resigned. Parliament speaker Akbarso Iskandarov became acting president and he asked the opposition to continue working with the communists in the coalition government.

Fighting in the Kurgan Tube continued and cost the lives of hundreds of people. On September 27 the Kuliabis seized four tanks and took control of the center of the area thereby forcing hundreds of the militants to retreat and thousands of civilians to flee to Dushanbe.

A lot of weapons and military vehicles were brought in from Afghanistan, but most of the weapons were seized from local Russian CIS troops and the police. It was estimated that around 18,000 weapons were seized illegally. Tajik soldiers were deserting the Russian and CIS units and joining their clans.

Moscow said that it could not afford to send a peacekeeping force, but CIS troops took control of the airport and several other important installations around Dushanbe. A Russian office was opened in a hotel to organize the evacuation of Russian nationals. Nearly one million settlers (Russians, Germans and Ukrainians) were preparing to leave the country. Two hundred thousand had already left in the first half of 1992.

The IRP condemned the communists and Russia for sending more troops to Tajikistan and accused them of fueling the conflict by helping the Kuliabi forces. With the acting president Iskandarov calling for increased Russian forces and the IRP protesting against their presence, the government became incapable of reaching a political solution.

By the end of 1992, the state had so little control that the capital Dushanbe was in a state of chaos and close to collapse. The government imposed "A dusk-to-dawn curfew after some 1,500 men from Kuliab attempted a coup d'etat against the government on 24-25 October. Foreign diplomats were evacuated and foreign business people fled to Moscow. At dusk the police would disappear leaving the city in the hands of villains who robbed cars and the homes of residents. Through out the night shots would ring out from around the city, though nobody ever knew who was firing at whom. Armed Mafia, political groups and ordinary criminal gangs controlled separate areas of Dushanbe"¹²⁶ The government was in so weak a position that it was forced to accept the demand that parliament convene in Khodjent where the

¹²⁶Rashid, Ahmed The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism London; Oxford UP, 1994: 164.

communists dominated. On November 10 president Iskandarov and his cabinet resigned and Imam Ali Rakhmanov, a communist from Kuliab was elected president by parliament. The fact that Rakhmanov had been elected showed that the Islamic and democratic factions had lost some of their power within parliament.

Parliament announced that there would be a cease-fire and 'reconciliation' between the opposing factions. They also announced that 50,000 people had died since June 1992 and that 500,000 were now homeless refugees. They also voted that the political system would be changed from presidential to parliamentary.¹²⁷

But there was no cease-fire or reconciliation. The fighting continued as usual. There were eight hundred casualties in the south when Kuliabis attacked refugees which were camped there. As a result thousands of Tajiks began fleeing to neighboring Afghanistan. Hundreds of these people died during the escapes. Some died of cold and lack of food, some drowned in the Amu Darya river when trying to cross it. Others were killed by Kuliabi forces.

In December, IRP forces set up barricades around the capital Dushanbe to prevent the new president from setting up his office. Kuliab and Khodjent forces 'retaliated by a full scale attack on the city on December 5. Over a period of a few days several hundred people were killed. On December 11, the pro-communists achieved the upper hand and the president Ali Rakhmanov and Prime Minister Abdulmalek Abduljanov were flown in to the city.

¹²⁷Ibid., 181.

The Islamic forces stationed themselves around the city and fighting continued. It now became very clear that the CIS troops and Uzbekistan were helping the government. Kofirnikhon, a small city where the IRP militants were staying, was bombed by Uzbek jets and helicopters. More than 150 people were killed during the fighting. By December 22 the Islamists had lost and fled to the Pamirs and across the Afghan borders. They announced that they would continue guerrilla attacks from there.

The violence was not over, however. Sanjak Safarov, the commander of the Kuliabi forces in Dushanbe was a criminal who had spent twenty-three years in prison for murder. His forces, the Popular Front, "went on the rampage against the supporters of the opposition. People were dragged out of their beds at night and shot in the streets, hundreds of women were raped and children saw their parents being shot before their eyes.... Perhaps as many as five thousand people were killed in this Tajik-style ethnic cleansing"¹²⁸

In the first half of 1993, the government was 'preoccupied with stopping the infiltration' of IRP militants from Afghanistan. The militants returned with weapons and other supplies. In February and March there was continued fighting as the IRP 'launched' guerrilla attacks on the government. The Russian 201 Motorized Rifle Division joined the regime in attempts to drive the militants. During these month the government made no attempts to breach the gap between the different factions within Tajikistan. All its efforts were concerned

¹²⁸Rashid, Ahmed The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism London; Oxford UP, 1994: 182.

with fighting Islamic fundamentalism and winning over the opposition in order to consolidate the power of the old nomenklatura.

The government's policies cleared the way for further clan warfare. Whole "districts such as the Garm, where the Qazi came from, and Badakstan were designated as the strongholds of the opposition. In military offensives to create a *cordon sanitaire*, civilians from these areas were driven out of their villages and collective farms. The ideological battle in Tajikistan had always been a veneer for the district and clan rivalries between Kurgan Tube and Garm on the one hand and the Kuliab and Khodjent regions on the other. This only intensified during the summer of 1993."¹²⁹ Throughout 1995, the opposition kept up its attack on government forces and on Russian border troops on the Afghanistan-Tajik border.

The incidents which finally led to the civil war in 1992 were basically based on the mixture of economic desperation and a tradition of ethnic and regional (local) tensions. The fact that living standards had declined so drastically brought the ethnic tensions to the surface and led to the violence. If the economy had not been so bad, the civil war would probably not have begun so quickly after independence.

More than 77% of the population lives in the rural areas. When the agricultural production declined throughout the 1980s, more and more people entered the category of poor. The decline was clearly felt in the 1980s, but Moscow paid 40% of the subsidies and the government budget. This kept the frustrations reasonably quiet, but when the country received independence in

1991, these subsidies immediately stopped. When the new government was unable to provide them, there was public anger and resentment. It was therefore only a matter of time before violence broke out, especially with weapons available from across the border in Afghanistan.

The riots that took place in February 1990 because of the rumors that Armenian refugees would be provided with housing, showed the growing influence of the IRP. The party had previously been working underground. People demanded better housing, closure of pork-selling shops, and the increase of mosques, among other things.

After the Civil War officially ended

Tajikistan's economy, unity and sovereignty was 'shattered' by the civil war and can only be overcome if the different fractions in society agree to reconcile, if there is more political openness, and establishment of political institutions. However plans for holding political elections is not enough, if the leaders of the opposition parties refuse to return to Tajikistan. After the civil war officially, the government was too weak to control the Popular Front forces which has helped to bring it back to power.

There are three main obstacles to political reconciliation between the Popular Front and the armed opposition which is working from across the borders in Afghanistan. The first obstacle is that the Popular Front is seriously affected by the border clashes as they are in control of the southern region of the

¹²⁹Rashid, Ahmed The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism London; Oxford UP, 1994: 183

country which borders Afghanistan. The continuous attacks across the border has led to hatred and to motives of personal revenge as as members of their clans (Kylyab, Kurgan, and Tyubi) are getting killed. The Popular Front therefore oppose open discussions with the opposition.

The second obstacle is that it is very difficult for the government to disarm the Popular Front. These militia men are very much in control and autonomous in their native south.

The third obstacle is that the Popular Front expects to be compensated for their loyalty to the government. They want as much land and political power as possible. They are therefore against the return and rehabilitation of refugees from Afghanistan.

What changed this political situation was Russia's continuing influence in the country. In mid-1993 the situation had not improved. The opposition was divided into two groups. The democrats and the nationalists were working out of Moscow and the armed fighters were trained in Afghanistan to fight across the border once in a while.

One incident changed Russia's view of the situation. The Russian troops stationed in Tajikistan , 'in retaliation' for a border clash which killed twenty five Russians, were in 1993 accused by the Afghan government of crossing the borders and bombing some of their villages. Suddenly, Moscow and Uzbekistan started talking about the need for a solution to the conflict in Tajikistan.

Russia justified its interference with the domestic politics of Tajikistan with the excuse that it was protecting the interests of the ethnic Russians living there. But the discrimination against Russians has been exaggerated. There

were only a few Russians who were killed in or after the civil war. Russians were mainly emigrating because of the lowering living standards and the general violence in the country.

Russia is more concerned with the fact that huge numbers of Russians are returning to Russia. Moreover, Moscow is reluctant to withdraw from areas that have been within their sphere of influence for many years. President Yeltsin has even stated that the Tajik-Afghan border is Russia's border.¹³⁰

It was made clear to Rahmonov that he would not receive Russia's blessing unless national unity and political stability were achieved. Previously, the Tajik government had refused to negotiate with the armed opposition in Afghanistan, and the opposition made impossible demands like the withdrawal of Russian troops and a political settlement before they returned. They demanded to negotiate directly with the Russian government.

But now they announced that they were prepared to have direct talks with the Tajik government and share power with the communists. The Tajik government agreed to talk to "all social and political organizations of the opposition which are ready to cooperate with the leadership in order to build a democratic and secular state in Tajikistan."¹³¹

Despite all the talks and agreements, the government of Tajikistan has still not been able to maintain peace. At the end of 1995, there was a breakdown in peace talks between the government and opposition forces. In January 1996

¹³⁰Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou. "Tajikistan: From Freedom to War" Current History (April 1994): 175.

¹³¹Ibid.

Ibodullo Baimalov, the former major of Tajik city Tursun Zade returned from self-exile in Uzbekistan and took the city by force. At the same time, the commander of the army's first brigade in Kurgan-Tyube mobilized his unit and marched towards the capital. Both of them demanded changes in government personnel. When President Rakhmanov removed several government officials, including the prime minister, the two groups went home.

The opposition, however, took advantage of the government's "predicament" and attacked central Tajikistan. They captured regional centers and parts of a strategic highway. They were also able to cause major casualties among the government forces.

By May 1996 the opposition forces controlled the strategic town of Tavit-Dara and during the summer they advanced to take several more cities like Komsomolabad, Tajikabad, Garm and numerous smaller towns. At the same time, demonstrations were held in the north in cities like Khojent and Ura-tyube. At first they were only demonstrating for better living conditions. But they soon started to demonstrate against the Kulyabis who were from the south. Under President Rakhmonov, the Kulyabis had come to occupy many of the upper level positions around the city.

Throughout 1996 fighting continued in the central regions leading to the destruction of many villages and thousands of dead. The government's control was confined to the capital and the surrounding areas.

The position of the opposition forces, now called the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), was not much better. It was still based in Afghanistan and

fighting across the border, but neither side seemed able to win. So president Rakhmanov and UTO leader Said Abdullao Nuri met in Afghanistan in December 1996 to start talks which led to the signing of the Tajik National Peace Accord in June 1997. According to this accord, the UTO and government forces would share power.

The agreement stated that opposition armed forces would demobilize so centers have been set up in the Garm and Karatigen Valleys. According to Nuri, more than 5,000 men will disarm during May 1998.¹³² But even if these men disarm, this does not mean that peace has been achieved. Far from it. Tensions are still very high and violence might break out at any time.

Moreover, rural areas are not under government control. They are ruled by local warlords who are ignoring the peace agreement. Within the capital the sounds of gunfire can still be heard at night.

Conclusion

When Tajikistan received its independence, its people were very poor and divided. The government therefore inherited a very dangerous situation. Even without the environmental degradation, the economy would have been in a bad shape. It depended considerably on grants (40 % of budget) from Moscow to pay for its budget deficits. But if the environment had not led to rapid decline in

¹³²Eggleston, Roland. "Tajikistan: Armed Forces Demobilize" RFE/RL (online) April 22, 1998.

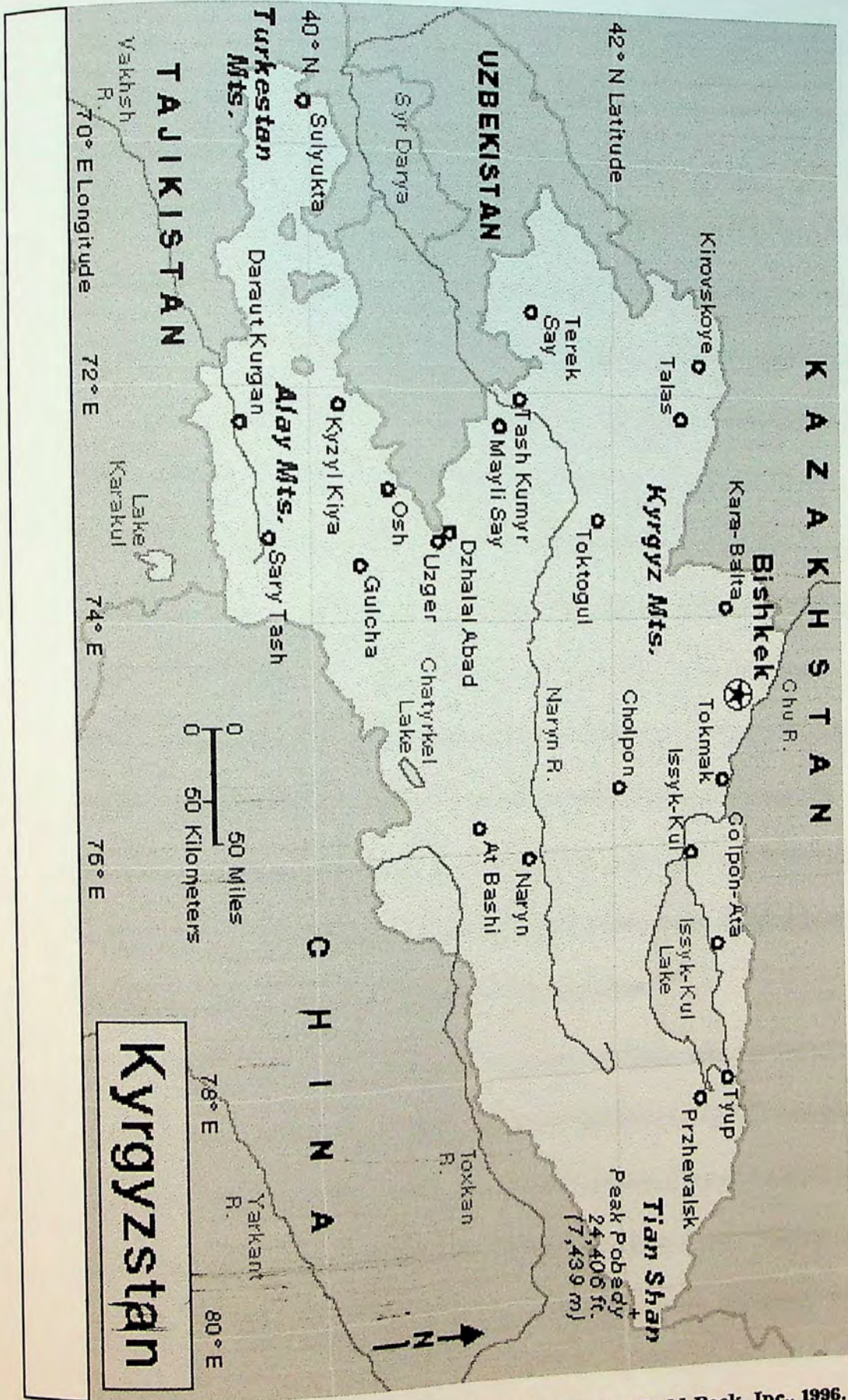
the agricultural production which employs a very high percentage of the labor market, the Tajik government might have been able to overcome these problems.

The desiccation of the Aral Sea did not directly cause the civil war, but it sped up the process by degrading the little arable land that Tajikistan has. Some of the land is so severely salinated that it is almost unusable. It also worsened the situation because so many people have little to lose.

After the civil war, the environmental situation has made it harder for the Tajik economy to come back on its feet. It has made a bad situation worse. The salination of the soil has made it hard for farmers to improve their standard of living.

It is unlikely that the outbreaks of violence will end in the near future. It will be very difficult for the Tajiks to rebuild their economy after 6 years of continuous fighting. If it was estimated before the civil war that more than 6 billion rubles would be needed to rebuild the economy, then a lot more will be needed today. Unfortunately, there is not much finance available and Tajikistan does not have natural resources such as oil and gas to pay the bills.

Chapter VIII Kyrgystan



Kyrgyzstan is surrounded by some of the highest mountains in the world, thereby making it the most isolated country of all the former Soviet Republics. Kyrgyzstan is well known in the region for being the most democratic and progressive republic. It used to be considered the quietest country in the region. Turdakun Usubaliev headed the Communist Party for more than twenty years until he was removed by Mikhail Gorbachev on nepotism and bribery charges. He was quietly replaced in 1985 by a technocrat, Absamat Masaliev, who is mostly remembered for promoting friends and relatives from his native region.

Masaliev term of office only lasted for five years. After clashes in the Osh region in 1990 over land distribution, there were a number of mass demonstrations against his government. The demonstrators called for a presidential type of government. Masaliev expected to win the presidential election as the majority of parliament were from the Communist Party. But in August, "however, 114 democratic oriented members of the new Supreme Soviet issued a statement that renounced the old guard and proclaimed democracy and national unity. The democratic opposition gained momentum when former Prime Minister Djumagulov, joined them and decided to run against Masaliev in the parliamentary elections for president."¹³³

According to parliamentary rules, any candidate who receives less than 50% of the vote can not run again. So when Masaliev decided to run against Apas Djumagulov he broke the unity of the Communist Party. Neither of the two candidates received the required percentage in the first round. This opened the way for new candidates. Askar Akayev was a well known and respected

scientist and politician so he was nominated. After he won parliament's election for president, Askar Akayev organized general public elections in October 1991 and won them.

The Problems

Kyrgystan is a poor country. Thus any decline in the economic production is acutely felt. The economy is based on agriculture although it is not as dependent on the a single crops as the previous four countries.

The environmental degradation has had a major impact on the agricultural production and consequently on the entire economy. Year after year, the number of people living under the poverty line has been increasing. This has led to two interrelated conflicts. First, frustrations over the worsening living standards and the increasing unemployment has led to disillusionment with the state and led to minor deprivation conflicts.

Second, unemployment in the rural areas has led to mass migration to the urban areas. This has led to several incidents of violence between ethnic groups that were previously separated.

Third, combination of the first two problems have undermined the legitimacy of the government and lessened the possibility of achieving a true democracy. In order to maintain the economic situation, democracy was forgotten.

¹³³Chukin, Almas. "Free Kyrgyzstan: Problems and Solutions" Current History (April 1994): 169.

A. Aral Sea

Kyrgyzstan is not very close to the Aral Sea and yet it is affected by its degradation. Not only has its share of the water decreased, but it is affected by the change in climate, the desertification of the river deltas, and by the dust storms carrying the toxic salts.

In Kyrgyzstan, the environmental problems related to the degradation of the Aral Sea are less than the problems in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The country is not as affected by drying up of the rivers as the other two countries because it has several sources of water.

In Kyrgyzstan there is water everywhere. There are around three thousand lakes which are continuously filled by rivers flowing down from the mountains. Many of these lakes are more than 3,000 meters above sea level.

And yet Kyrgyzstan, which is hundreds of kilometers away from the Aral Sea, realizes "that a continuation of the current policies cannot be in the country's best interest, since salt and sand storms are already causing glaciers in Kyrgyzstan to melt."¹³⁴

Only 6 percent of the Kyrgyz land is arable. So although its population is not currently very large it cannot afford the soil degradation that is occurring as a result of the increase in dust storms carrying the toxic salt.

Ninety three percent of Kyrgyzstan's total territory (198,500 square kilometers) are mountains and most of the land is 500 meters or more above sea

¹³⁴Dieter, Herbert. "Regional Integration in Central Asia: Current Economic Position and Prospects" *Central Asian Survey* V. 15, No 3 (1996): 377.

level. It is therefore very important that the remaining soil is in good condition and suitable for agriculture.

Most of the country's fertile land is in Kyrgyzstan's part of the Ferghana Valley. Unfortunately, this is the land that is the closest to the Aral Sea and therefore the land that is the most affected by its degradation.

By the end of the 1980s sixteen percent of the cultivated land was severely salinated, and this figure is continuing to increase. In the end of the 1970s yield per hectare was 28.3, while a decade later it was 19.1 per hectare. This is a very sharp decline.¹³⁵

B. Population growth

Kyrgyzstan is also facing a population growth problem, although it is less serious than those facing the other countries in the region. In the period 1979 to 1989 there was an average growth rate of 1.97%. This rate was relatively lower than the other Central Asian countries due to the fact that that the country had a large Russian population.

Unfortunately, this population growth rate went up in the 1990s. The current rate is 2.2% and is estimated to continue at this rate for another decade.¹³⁶ It is still less than the other Central Asia countries, but high for a country that has little economic potential.

¹³⁵ Martin McCauley in Shirin Akiner. Political and Economic Trends in Central Asia
London: British Academy Press, 1993: 95.

¹³⁶ World Population Data Sheet, 1997

At the present time, 38% of the population is under the age of 15.¹³⁷ Within a few years these young people will enter the labor market. This realization is putting great stress on the government. In the current state of economy, there does not seem to be much possibility for expansion in order to accommodate this enlarged labor force.

Approximately, 65% of the Kyrgyz live in rural areas. This percentage is increasing as the birth rates in the countryside are higher than in the urban areas.

C. Soviet economic legacy

Kyrgyzstan's economic legacy is not very different from the other former Soviet republics. The Soviet Union forced upon it economic policies that were not in the country's interest and still affect its present and future.

Kyrgyzstan has a great number of livestock. It currently has more than ten million sheep and goats, two million horses, cattle and half a million pigs feeding on grazing land.¹³⁸ The nomadic lifestyle of the shepherds and farmers tending these animals has not changed much over the past centuries.

Around 1.3 million hectares are now cultivated compared to the 640,000 hectares that were cultivated when the Soviet Union took control over the area. Most of this land is irrigated by water that is brought down to the valley from the lakes in the mountains. Kyrgyzstan is currently self sustaining in wheat, rice, vegetables, sunflower oil, and fruit.

¹³⁷ World Population Data Sheet, 1997

¹³⁸ UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea. Nairobi; UNEP, 1992

Table 6. Number of hectares cultivating cotton (million)

Year	Hectares	Increase, 1940-1986 (Percent)
1940	0.064	55
1971-1975	0.074	
1976-1980	0.093	
1981-1985	0.096	
1986	0.098	

SOURCE: James Critchlow. Nationalism in Uzbekistan, Boulder; Westview Press 1991: 64

Seventy five percent of the agricultural labor force is Kyrgyz, while only twenty five percent of industrial work force, where the jobs and the working conditions are better, is Kyrgyz.

There is a potential for developing the mineral resources that exist in the country. The problem, however, is how to export them. The roads are not very good, and the entire railway system is only 370 kilometers long. Exports would have to be moved through either Kazakhstan and Russia to reach the West, or through Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, the Caspian Sea, and Russia to reach the Black Sea. Either way the distances are very long. As for the other Central Asian countries, they mainly barter for the most necessary resources.

D. Increased Ethnic Tensions

Like the other Central Asian republics, Kyrgyzstan's society is far from homogeneous. There is a constant fear among its citizens that the ethnic tensions will escalate into violence.

President Askar Akaev was chosen for the presidency by the Kyrgyz Supreme Soviet in the fall of 1990 after ethnic clashes had taken place in Osh. These clashes had killed more than three hundred people and discredited the communist regime.

Having come to power as a result of ethnic conflict, president Akaev is very aware of the ethnic problems of the country and is trying to improve the inter-ethnic relations by a policy called national harmony. This policy provides the different ethnic groups with a considerable degree of cultural autonomy. Practically, however, this policy has created difficulties because the rival groups get aggressive when they perceive that one of the other groups have gained an advantage. Keeping all groups happy all the time is more or less an impossible task, especially if the regime fails to improve the struggling economy.

The Kyrgyz people are in the unfortunate position of only having a slight majority in their own country. They have only been a majority in the last few years because of the large emigration of the Russians.

Currently, the Kyrgyz represent 52 percent of the population while the Russians represent 21 percent. The Uzbeks are 13 percent while the remaining 14 percent are more than 80 small ethnic groups.¹³⁹

¹³⁹Pannier, Bruce. "President Acquires More Power in Kyrgyzstan" Transition February 7, 1997: 94.

When the Tsar took control of the region in the 1850s, he ordered that the best land should be given to Russian and Cossack settlers. These settlers were exempted from taxes and military duty. Each settler received twenty five acres of the best grain producing land as well as fifteen years of subsidies. As more and more Russians arrived, the Kyrgyz were forced more and more towards the mountains. This was the beginning of resentment against the Russians.

In 1916, the Russians enforced a new law that made it compulsory for the Kyrgyz to join the Russian military because of the war. When the Kyrgyz rebelled, a Cossack army was sent to crush the rebellion. The Cossacks killed entire flocks, burned down villages and killed tens of thousands Kyrgyz. This brutality has not been forgotten. The memory has been kept alive by the nomadic tradition of story telling and legends. Many Kyrgyz remain bitter despite the fact that they do not criticize publicly.

In Beshkeh, around 50 percent of the people are Russians who hold the best positions in the government and the industry. More than 100,000 of them have emigrated since 1991, but the positions of those remaining continue to fuel Kyrgyz resentment. The government is now trying to change this discrimination by promoting the Kyrgyz instead in the government and in university admissions.

The problem with this policy is that it can very easily lead to violent tensions between the Russians and the Kyrgyz, similar to the violence that occurred in Osh.

The Uzbeks feel there is an unfair distribution of political power. Out of twenty five first secretaries in the local districts, only one is Uzbek. Moreover, only 4.7 percent of the leading department positions are held by Uzbeks. This perception of political disenfranchisement is increasing Uzbek irredentist demands.

Increased Pressure

The population growth, the ethnic tensions and the decline in agricultural production has put enormous pressure on the Kyrgyz state. Kyrgyzstan does not have a strong political base with institutions which can approve and implement policies that will improve the environment and consequently, the agriculture which is the basis of the economy. Kyrgyzstan's democracy is very fragile, with a few weak political parties and powerless political institutions. Askar Akaev is a president without a real power base. Even though he was popularly elected, it is very difficult for him to get his policies implemented. The old communist bureaucracy which remains in power, resists most of his reform policies.

None of the political parties have a "clearly defined and dedicated membership base. In general, all parties advocate democracy and market reforms but differ in their approaches to implementation and in their attitude toward the future of Kyrgyzstan as a nation. Radical nationalists to the right of the political spectrum advocate ethnic Kyrgyz dominance; they want stricter enforcement of Kyrgyz as the national language, and they favor the emigration of

ethnic Russians. On the other side of the spectrum are the Communists, who would like to see a reconstituted Soviet Union."¹⁴⁰

There are four main political movements in Kyrgyzstan:

1. The radical nationalists: Free Kyrgyzstan Party and The Party of National Renaissance.
2. The national democrats: The Democratic Movement and Motherland Party
3. The moderates: People's Republican Party, Social Democrats of Kyrgyzstan and the Agrarian Party.
4. The left: Communist Party.

People from the urban areas tend to support the Social democrats while the countryside tends to support the Agrarian Party. The Communist Party tends to attract the older generations. It remains the most organized party.

Another party worth mentioning, is the Asaba (Banner) Party which worked under the umbrella of the Democratic Movement prior to independence. This party is pressuring the government by stirring nationalist sentiments.

A. Decreased economic production

Of the former Soviet republics, Kyrgyzstan has the least resources thereby making it very difficult to form an independent economy. And yet it has had the most ambitious economic reform program in Central Asia.

Since the middle of the 1980's the rural areas of Kyrgyzstan have been in a situation of economic crisis. The mixture of a stagnant economy and the high

¹⁴⁰Chukin, Almas. "Free Kyrgyzstan: Problems and Solutions" *Current History* (April 1994):

birth rate has led to a generation of rural youth without employment in the villages and without skill to find work in the city. While the average rural population of the Soviet Union has been declining, the rural population of Kyrgyzstan has doubled and continues to grow. At the time of independence over 100,000 youth were unemployed and even more were under-employed. In the Osh oblast, the largest agricultural region in the country, almost half of the employees received 125 rubles per month while the average monthly wages were 180 rubles.¹⁴¹ After independence the economic situation in the rural areas worsened even more. By 1991, over 140,000 people were unemployed. More than a half million earned less than 75 rubles per month.¹⁴²

Although Kyrgyzstan is self sufficient in crops like wheat, rice, vegetables, sunflower oil and fruit, the agricultural production of these have been decreasing since 1992 due to the political uncertainty and environmental degradation that the country has been going through. The production of wheat, an essential crop, decreased from 1.5 million tons in 1991 to 1.3 million tons in 1992. Crops like potatoes, milk and meat also experienced severe declines.

Kyrgyzstan has a small industrial sector with around five hundred large factories. Some of these factories like the sugar and flour mills, cotton and wool cleaning factories, and the timber processing factories receive their raw materials from within the country. But many of the factories faced major problems when the raw materials from other republics were no longer

¹⁴¹Huskey, Gene in Ian Bremmer Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993: 405

delivered. It is mainly the Russians who are suffering from the decline in this sector. Very few Kyrgyz actually work in industries.

In a market economy where there is more competition the Kyrgyz might fall even further behind the other ethnic groups, especially since the youth are not actively attempting to enter the industrial work force.

In an attempt to find employment large numbers are seeking work and housing in the urban areas. But the cities have no place for them. Nor do they have employment. Instead of living in small apartments, most of these people live in overcrowded dormitories or the corners of private houses. Some set shelters on the outskirts of the cities, even though the authorities keep tearing them down. The knowledge that a large number of Russians live in nice apartments in these same cities has increased resentment and frustrations.

In 1996 the inflation rate was 40% and the average monthly income was between \$20 and \$30. Officially the unemployment rate was 4.5% but expert estimate it to be closer to around 20-25%.¹⁴³

B. Living standard

The living standard has not only declined for the 150,000 people who are unemployed, but also for the more than a half million people, out of a population of 4.4 million people, who earn less than 75 rubles per month.¹⁴⁴ With the high inflation rate, these people can not afford to provide an entire family with more

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

than the very basic food for survival. They would not be able to afford luxuries like meat, milk, fruit and so on. According to a World Bank study, approximately 49% of Kyrgyz families live below the accepted poverty level and the number is increasing annually.¹⁴⁵

Moreover, there is a very clear difference between the urban and rural areas. In Djalabad Oblast 30% of the urban population was classified as poor, compared to 71.4% in the rural areas. In the Osh 39.3 % of urban households were considered poor, while 50.5% of rural areas were poor.¹⁴⁶

In February 1996, Kyrgyzelbank, the largest bank in the country collapsed, thereby threatening the deposits of around two million people, which is nearly half of the population. To prevent riots, the government promised compensation, but with Kyrgyzstan's poor economic conditions, it was slow in doing so. Many were paid in October, but by the beginning of 1997 there were still some who hadn't received it.¹⁴⁷

C. Increased Pressures on Civic Institutions

Population growth together with ethnic tensions and a decline in agricultural production puts enormous pressure on the state. If that state is

¹⁴⁵ Bransten, Jeremy. "Kyrgyzstan: A Democracy Only for the Rich" RFE/RL October 14, 1997

¹⁴⁶ Howel, Jude: "Coping with transition: Insights from Kyrgyzstan" Third World Quarterly vol. 17, no. 1, 1996: 56.

¹⁴⁷ Pannier, Bruce. "President Acquires More Power in Kyrgyzstan" Transition Feb. 7, 1997:94.

strong and considered legitimate by its people, it will probably be able to overcome the economic problems Kyrgyzstan is going through. If the state is authoritarian, it will be able to enforce its economic policies despite public protests. But if the state is somewhere in between, it is very likely that it will be unable to repress violent outbreaks.

After Independence Kyrgyzstan started out with considerably more democracy than the neighboring countries. But the regime quickly realized that if it wished to remain in power, it would have to be more repressive and implement policies that would worsen the living conditions of the people before improving the overall economy.

When president Akaev was elected by the people after independence in 1991, the people of Kyrgyzstan were "convinced that democracy had arrived in a single stroke. With the people behind him, the president would be able to come to grips with the economy, improve the living standards, and clean out the bureaucracy. Understandably and inevitably, the deterioration of the republic's economy has meant that the optimism of autumn 1991 has given way to wide spread cynicism and bitterness"¹⁴⁸

Four factors have kept the conflicts to a minimum. The first factor is that the people generally approve of Akaev's economic policies. The severity of the economic situation and the promises of quick reforms have kept the people quiet and made them accept the increasingly authoritarian government.

The second factor is that, reluctant to give up their traditional nomadic lifestyles, the Kyrgyz have historically been politically passive. Moreover,

Kyrgyzstan has the very distinct political situation that the major political opposition parties have the same agenda as the president. Both want to liberalize the economy as rapidly as possible. As a result there has been no major organized movement to challenge the regime's political position.

The fourth factor, is the example of Tajikistan. The Kyrgyz people live in constant fear that their country might end up in civil war as well. This has made the people more ready to accept the decisions made by the government.

But as the years have gone by and the economy has worsened instead of improved, the regime has lost a great deal of its legitimacy in the eyes of the people. Corruption has gone to appear as a few people are annually becoming richer and richer while the remaining 80% of the country is getting poorer. Consequently, groups have appeared in attempts to improve their economic conditions.

As a consequence of the many frustrations over housing problems in the capital Frunze (now renamed Beshkeh), an independent association was formed under the name Ashar (solidarity). Immediately after its initiation, five thousand out of the twenty thousand families without housing became members of the association.¹⁴⁹

Ashar exploited the rumors of the Armenian refugees, by seizing land just outside the city, in order to construct a shanty town. This action created panic

¹⁴⁸Pryde, Ian. "Kyrgyzstan: The Trials of Independence" *Journal of Democracy* V.5, No.1 (January 1994): 113.

¹⁴⁹Huskey, Gene in Ian Bremmer *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993: 405

within the Kyrgyz leadership. Ashar could alienate a frustrated and desperate part of the population and set it against the Russian and Kyrgyz elites. After lengthy negotiations, the authorities decided to recognize Ashar, despite the fact that they were frustrated with their limited success in decreasing their activities on housing projects.

The recognition of Ashar rapidly led to the rise of other social movements. Within two years there were thirty six associations. Many of these movements were nationalistic and ethnic oriented, and their memberships were more or less based on ethnicity.

The people seem to have lost faith in democracy as a result of the regime's failure to deal with the republic's economic crisis, and with its inability to keep the different political movements quiet. The president's policy of giving in every time there is any organized resistance has caused a lot of criticism among the people.¹⁵⁰

Conflicts

The possibility for conflict in Kyrgystan is considerably high. The regime is annually losing more and more of the legitimacy it had when the country attained independence. At the same time, it does not have a powerful political base to enforce its policies if conflict spreads.

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

There are two main causes of conflict in Kyrgyzstan. These are ethnic and economic related conflicts. There has already been several incidents which indicate that the situation will probably worsen in the next few years.

Although the regime has been losing its legitimacy, no organized groups have attempted to overthrow the government. Nor is it likely that Islamic fundamentalism will lead to violence in the near future.

A. Ethnic conflicts

In the middle of the 1980s, a revival of national values spread throughout the country. The Kyrgyz became interested in their history, their traditional culture and their language which had been suppressed by the Soviet authorities. This revival has led to tensions between the Kyrgyz and the Russians as well as between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks.

Most Russians and Uzbeks have no problems living near the urban Kyrgyz, but they strongly dislike the rural Kyrgyz whom they consider to be backward and dirty. In the past this was not a problem, but when the agricultural production declined, thousands of rural Kyrgyz moved to the urban areas thereby bringing them in close contact with the urban Russians and Uzbeks. In 1994 alone, 116,000 people moved from the rural areas in the south to the industrialized areas in the north.¹⁵¹

In the summer of 1990, "competing claims advanced by new ethnically based associations in the Osh region led to inter-ethnic violence that

¹⁵¹UNHCR. "Central Asia on the move" Displacement in the Commonwealth of Independent States (online), 1996

fundamentally transformed the political landscape in Kyrgyzstan. In contrast to [the success of Ashar in] Frunze, land claims by the ethnic Kyrgyz were handled with less success in Osh, where unemployment and land hunger was more acute and local politicians were more willing to openly support Kyrgyz nationalism. The Kyrgyz in Osh resented the relative wealth and prominence of the local Uzbeks, who controlled, according to one estimate, 80 percent of the city's trade."¹⁵²

In May 1990, Osh Aimagy, an association similar to Ashar, demanded land in Osh for ethnic Kyrgyz families to settle upon. U. Sydykov, the regional party first secretary, agreed to "allot Osh Aimagy thirty-two hectares of a predominantly Uzbek collective farm on the outskirts of Osh. The reaction of local Uzbeks was swift and dramatic. They seized the occasion to advance a range of political claims, including home rule for an Uzbek region in southern Kyrgyzstan and the recognition of Uzbek as the official language of the territory."¹⁵³

When the government refused to accept the Uzbek's demands or to return the land it had given to Osh Aimagy, widespread violence occurred between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek communities in that region of the country. The violence began when the local Uzbeks attacked the police. This led to bloody revenge killings, which spread to other cities including the capital Beshkeh. Clashes in the streets continued for many weeks.

¹⁵²Huskey, Gene in Ian Bremmer Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993: 406

¹⁵³Ibid.

The Uzbeks were supported by their co-nationals from Uzbekistan, who had crossed the borders in the early stages of the fighting. The borders were closed off and the Soviet army was called in by the government to restore peace.

During the riots which continued into June 1990, thousands of private homes and buildings were destroyed and 230 people died (although unofficial estimates put the number of dead at a more than 1,000). Police stations were burned down. A state of emergency was declared in Beshkeh and a night curfew was imposed in many of the surrounding cities. In Uzgen, a city north of Osh, the situation was so serious that three quarters of the buildings were destroyed. These events clearly showed and 'deepened' the cracks in the political leadership.¹⁵⁴

After these violent occurrences, the newly established Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan demanded that the leaders of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan (CPK) should resign.

After independence president Akaev has tried to 'incorporate' the leaders of all the different ethnic groups into one grand coalition which is committed to political as well as market reform. It has been his policy to take middle course in order to appease all the ethnic communities. For the rural Kyrgyz he has adopted "special measures for the 'defense' of the shepherds and restor[ed] traditional folk holidays and customs. He actively solicits the support and understanding of the Slavic community,

¹⁵⁴Rashid, Ahmed The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism London; Oxford UP, 1994: 146.

reminding them of his long tenure in Russia and [he has] appointed two Russians to his twelve-man cabinet"¹⁵⁵

To prevent the electoral system from worsening the ethnic divisions in the country, president Akaev supported the formation of a presidential National Unity party which was a multi-ethnic party committed to political consensus. The party was a mixture of the old party nomenclature and national democratic movements. The challenge for president Akaev is to hold this coalition together. Unfortunately, economic deprivation and instability are not conducive to politics of consensus.

Although the violence has not been repeated in Osh, the ethnic tension have been far from solved. There is hardly any communication between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks. Each ethnic group has its own schools, mosques, shops and cafes.

There has been no actual violence between the Kyrgyz and the Russians, but the tensions are high. The Russians feel that they are being discriminated against in both job and educational opportunities. In the street, the Russians often perceive themselves to be mistreated.

Several factors tend to lead to ethnic conflicts. Among them are; large scale population movement, ethnic groups living in a state of deprivation, and when groups perceive other groups to receive privileges. All three factors are taking place in Kyrgyzstan. It is, therefore, highly likely that the number of ethnic conflicts will increase in the next couple of decades, if the government

¹⁵⁵Huskey, Gene in Ian Bremmer Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993: 410.

does not manage to improve the economic situation.

B. Deprivation Conflicts

When 65% of the population lives in rural areas, then a very high percentage of society is affected by the degradation of the soil. But the perceived legitimacy of the states has so far prevented general violent conflicts. Most of the conflicts have been minor acts of discontent.

Although all of the tensions and acts of violence in Kyrgyzstan have been related to the economic decline, the fact that society is heterogeneous has just exasperated it and brought it to the surface. In spite of the fact that the population has become very critical and frustrated, tensions have not yet escalated to general violence. There have, however, been isolated incidents of demonstrations and minor riots over the economic situation.

In February 1990, Ashar organized a rally in the main square of Frunze (Beshkeh) demanding better housing for the Kyrgyz people, as well as denying entry for refugees from Azerbaijan.

President Akaev's regime continued to face the growing economic crisis, and in January 1992 student demonstrations broke out in Beshkeh. The students were demanding larger grants, better housing and food. After prices had been freed earlier that month, the price of food increased by over 400 percent. Even though minimum wages increased at the same time, the people were still hit hard by the high inflation and food shortages.

The economic situation had still not improved by 1996. The living standard is still very low. On August 1993, 200 homeless people demonstrated in Besheks old capital square to demand improved living conditions. Several makeshift settlements have appeared around the city, with no fresh water or electricity. These settlements are growing steadily as rurals move to the city. Living conditions in rural areas are even worse

In October 1996, 1,500 people rallied in front of the government building protesting about raising prices and declining living standards. Later in the same month 300 people rallied for the same reasons.

Kyrgyzstan is putting its hope on the Kumtor gold mine operation to save the country's economy. The mine is estimated to contain 514 tons of gold reserves, thereby making it the eighth largest gold deposit in the world. The mine was ready to start working at the end of 1996.¹⁵⁶ But the economy has still not improved.

C. Civil Strife

By 1996, the economic situation was in such a bad condition that the regime was forced to take extreme measures in order to remain in power. In 1991, Kyrgyzstan had started out with a reasonable degree of democracy. There was a considerable freedom of speech, and the mass media was allowed to criticize the president and the regime's policies.

¹⁵⁶ Pannier, Bruce. "President Acquires More Power in Kyrgyzstan" Transition Feb. 7, 1997: 95.

By 1996, the ethnic and economic tensions were so serious that the government continuously cracked down on the mass media and freedom of speech. People were no longer allowed to openly criticize the government's policies.

Consolidation of president Askar Akaev's power has now become the main aim of the regime. Human rights has taken a clear downturn in both 1996 and 1997. Whether this change in policy, in addition to the severe economic problems will lead to civil strife is not yet clear, but for many Kyrgyz people it is just a matter of time before violence breaks out. Some fear that a civil war similar to the one in Tajikistan will occur. But so far the resistance is taking place in small mainly unorganized groups. There have been not riots or demonstrations demanding changes in the political leadership.

The Asaba Party is pressuring the government by stirring nationalist sentiments and organizing student demonstrations. "Its success so far, however, "is less a testament to Asaba's strength than to the government's weakness. Since the summer of 1990, the government's main concern has been to avoid a repetition of the Osh tragedy. It therefore tends to give way whenever it is threatened by well organized demonstrations"¹⁵⁷

D. Islamic Fundamentalism

The Kyrgyz people are officially Sunni Muslims but pre-Islamic traditions are still very strong and can be seen in their daily lives. They believe in the

¹⁵⁷Pryde, Ian. "Kyrgyzstan: The Trials of Independence" *Journal of Democracy* V.5, No.1 (January 1994): 111.

spiritual power of the mountains, the rivers and the sun. Shamanism, a religion characterized by a belief in sorcery and demons, is still influential. Shamans conduct funerals and other rituals, and 'intercede' between the living and the dead.

The Islamic opposition groups have remained on the periphery of politics mainly because of the people's tolerant attitude towards religion. Moreover, the mullahs in Kyrgyzstan have always been considered outsiders. There is therefore no strong local Islamic leadership to play a political role. In the areas where beginnings of Islamic fundamentalism appeared, it was quickly crushed by the government. The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) does have a political base, but it is underground and does not enjoy popular support.

The main region where Islam is strong is the Kyrgyz part of the Ferghana Valley. After independence there has been a considerable growth of the Wahabi movement. But since it is underground, it is not known how many followers it has. There is a dramatic growth of mosques and Islamic schools in cities like Osh and the cities around it. It has been easier for fundamentalism to grow in Ferghana Valley because the people are more 'receptive' to it and because it is close to the borders of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. By having their headquarters in there, it is easy for them to spread their message to all three countries.

There is a fear among the Kyrgyz that the deepening split among the westernized north and the increasingly Islamic south will in the future lead to civil war between regions. But this does not seem to be a possibility in the near future.

Conclusion

After independence, the Kyrgyz leadership and people were ready to completely change their political system and totally reform their economy, but the high hopes for the future did not last long.

Kyrgyzstan is one of the poorest countries in the region and does not have much economic potential apart from agriculture and the export of hydro-electricity. The agriculture and its branches employs most of the labor force. Consequently, when it declined the entire socio-economic relations were affected. All parts of society have been negatively affected. All social and ethnic groups are becoming increasingly frustrated and aggressive.

Over all, the ethnic and economic tensions are the main threats to Kyrgyzstan's political stability. These tensions are a result of soil degradation. The government is currently in such a weak position that it will not be able to prevent any major outbreaks of violence.

Fear of civil war has kept the Kyrgyz people reasonably quiet, but as the economic situation and ethnic relations are worsening violence seems a very high possibility in the near future.

Chapter IX

The Effect of the Desiccation of the Aral Sea on Regional Relations

In Central Asia the desiccation of the Aral Sea and the related environmental degradation crosses the borders of the entire region. All of the four countries are completely dependent on the same water supplies which originate in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan before running downstream to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Any decision made by one of these four countries has a devastating impact on the remainder of the region.

This chapter examines the relationship between the environmental degradation and regional relations between Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. It questions whether the water scarcity has caused tensions between these four countries and whether it could lead to violent conflict.

During the days of the Soviet Union, the central authorities in Moscow decided how the water from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya was regulated. Moscow decided how much water would be allocated to each country. This division was not always equal or fair. With independence, the Central Asian countries suddenly had to agree among themselves on how much water each country should have. As all of them need more water to improve their economy, this is a very difficult agreement to make.

Even without the water scarcity problem, Central Asian regional relations are not exactly harmonious. Territorial disputes have soured relations since the borders were drawn up by the Soviet authorities in Moscow. These disputes continue to be a source of problems between the neighboring countries and have become the basis for secessionist and irredentist desires in certain areas:

“secession of Karakalpakia from Uzbekistan; ... separation of the northern part of the Tashauz and Chardzhua oblasts on the Amu Darya from Turkmenia and their addition to Uzbekistan; ... the separation of the Zeravshan valley of Uzbekistan and its addition to Tajikistan; and separation of the Surkhandarin valley of Uzbekistan and its addition to Tajikistan. These irredentist problems are intensified by the competition for resources and the artificiality of the borders”¹⁵⁸

At the surface the different republics seem to be increasing their cooperation through various regional and bilateral agreements. But “some of the problems which are widespread in the region, such as the low standard of living, the degraded environment, and the pressures of a rapidly rising population on scarce water, farm land and housing, pit the republics - and the dominant nationalities within them - against each others.”¹⁵⁹ The different republics damage each others' economies by attempting to keep materials that are in high demand within their borders. Oil producers like Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have stopped fuel shipments to Tajikistan at harvest time, thereby preventing

¹⁵⁸ Gleason, Gregory in Ian Bremmer Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993: 350

¹⁵⁹ Atkins, Muriel in Ian Bremmer Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993: 371

trucks from bringing the crops to the market. Tajikistan banned the export of certain goods such as food and other high demand goods. It enforced this by making checkpoints along the roads leading to the other republics, in addition to the airport and railway stations.

There have been several attempts to create a single Central Asian economic territory since 1991. Many resolutions were made, but no action was taken to implement them.

In January 1994 Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan began a new round of negotiations, which ended by an agreement for the creation of a single economic unit. Kyrgyzstan joined shortly afterwards. The agreement led to the Almaty Declaration of 8 July. In this declaration, the three presidents agreed upon the "formation of an inter-parliamentary work group charged with harmonizing the legal frameworks, an increase in joint efforts to protect the environment, specifically in the form of additional measures for the rehabilitation of the Aral Sea, and the coordination of the foreign policy of these three Central Asian Countries."¹⁶⁰ They agreed upon sixty projects in various sectors of the economy, as well as the formation of a Central Asian Bank. They formed an Interstate Council consisting of the presidents and premiers of each member state, a Council of Premiers, Council of Defense Ministers, and a Council of Foreign Ministers.

However, apart from the councils which became operational immediately, most of the agreements are non-binding declarations of intent. The single

¹⁶⁰Dieter, Herbert. "Regional Integration in Central Asia: Current Economic Position and Prospects" *Central Asian Survey* V. 15, No 3 (1996): 378.

economic territory is supposed to be implemented by the year 2000, but its exact format has not yet been determined.

Moreover, the fact that the member countries have very similar economic structures lessens the possibility of success. Economic unions often fail when the countries are too similar which make them competitive and not complementary.

Ethnic Problems that Cross Borders

Central Asia obtained many different ethnic groups in the 1930s and 1940s. Millions of these people forcibly relocated from other regions of the Soviet Union. In addition, millions of Slavs were encouraged to settle in Central Asia for development reasons. As a result, the region contains more than 100 ethnic groups. These ethnic groups cross all the borders of Central Asia. It is therefore not a surprise that ethnic tensions are occurring the region.

There is a striking difference in power between Uzbekistan and the other Central Asian countries put together. The Uzbek population alone is twice that of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan is therefore crucial when it comes to regional relations, especially as there are tensions between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan as well as between Uzbekistan and Kyrgystan.

Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have a history of tensions because of Stalin's divisions of borders. Stalin gave Samarkand and Bukhara to Uzbekistan. These two cities are major centers of Tajik culture and history. Their loss continues to hurt the Tajiks.

Around 25% of Tajikistan's population are Uzbeks, who are concentrated in Beshek, Gissar and the Kyghan Teppe regions close to the Uzbek- Tajik borders. In these three regions the ethnic Uzbeks account for 30-40% of the local inhabitants. At the same time more than one million Tajiks live on the Uzbek side of the border. The Uzbek government fears that the increasing tensions between the two ethnic groups in Tajikistan will spill into Uzbekistan. This was an important motive as well for Karimov's intervention in the Tajik civil war. On the other hand, Tajik nationalists fear that Uzbekistan will use its power on behalf of the Uzbeks living within Tajikistan, who question the legitimacy of the Tajik state.

In the Tajik civil war, Uzbekistan indirectly provided weapons and logistical support to Tajikistan People's Front (the pro-communist forces) and directly intervened with aircrafts, helicopters and personnel carriers using the local Uzbeks as justification. Once the opposition was removed from power by the end of 1992, a pro-Uzbek government from the Leninbad-Kuloub region was installed.¹⁶¹

Tensions over irredentist Uzbek nationalism is simmering in southern and western Kyrgyzstan. In the regions of Osh, Uzben and Jalalabad (Dzhalabad) the tensions became so serious that the government had to declare states of emergency in those three regions. The Uzbeks are demanding greater political representation and in 1992 they demanded a referendum to decide the future affiliation of their areas. The Kyrgyz, on the other hand, resent the economic advantages of the Uzbeks in their country.

In June 1990, the Uzbek - Kyrgyz borders were closed in order to prevent an armed mob of around fifteen thousand Uzbeks from crossing into Kyrgyzstan to liberalize Uzbeks living in Osh. During 1993, the borders were again closed several times.

Regional Migration Problems

The civil war in Tajikistan and the two smaller, but nevertheless frightening ethnic conflicts in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, together with the environmental and economic factors have led to a fear of violence all over Central Asia. As a result there were large movements of people within, to and from the region. Including Kazakstan, more than 4.2 million people have moved since independence.:

“* 700,000 people were displaced during the Tajik civil war, including the 60,000 who became refugees in Afghanistan.

- As many as 100,000 (mainly Meskhetians) fled or migrated as a result of fighting in the Ferghana Valley.
- At least 250,000 people have been forced to leave ecological disaster areas
- 2 million people have returned to their ethnic homeland somewhere else in the CIS because of a mixture of economic and ethnic fears”¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Memon, In the Shadow of the Bear” International Security v.20, No. 1 (Summer 1995):161

¹⁶² UNHCR. “Central Asia on the move” Displacement in the Commonwealth of Independent States (online), 1996.

These large numbers of people migrating from one country to another creates problems for the receiving countries. More than 30,000 refugees have already moved to Kyrgyzstan. This migration has aggravated the economic problems that the country is already having. The Kyrgyz government has been forced to set up several commissions and send delegations to Tajikistan in order to prevent mass relocation of ethnic Kyrgyz, especially from regions like Murgab (12,000) and Jergetal (30,000) which are on the border. It has been necessary for Kyrgyzstan to distribute aid across the border and provide these people with basic goods like food and clothes. This material support of refugees has created a serious problem for the Kyrgyz national budget.¹⁶³

Similar problems are occurring in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. More than 30,000 have relocated to Uzbekistan and more than 45,000 people have migrated to Turkmenistan. This is one of the main reasons that these countries have interfered with the civil war in Tajikistan.¹⁶⁴

Water and Regional Relations

In Central Asia the survival of the two downstream countries Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan depends on the water from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers. At the same time, they are both more powerful than the two upstream countries Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. This means that if the two latter countries

¹⁶³Tabyshalieva, Anara. "Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: a Good Experience" Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative (LGI), 1997

¹⁶⁴Ibid

make any attempts to reduce the water flow, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan would not hesitate to violence, even war.

There had been great opposition from the Tajik people to the building of the large hydro-electric dam which the Soviets started to build in 1976. The irrigation water that the reservoir would provide for the neighboring countries, would flood good farm land within Tajikistan and drive people from their villages. As the water originates in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, these two countries mistrust the 'designs' the down stream countries Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have on their water.

The Great Ferghana Canal which brings water from Tajikistan into Uzbekistan is very important for that latter country. This canal brings water to the Ferghana Valley which contains the most important agricultural land in Uzbekistan. If Tajikistan ever tries to use this water as a leverage, then it is very likely that the more powerful Uzbekistan will resort to violence. This is also one of the reasons that Uzbekistan has interfered with the Tajik civil war. President Karimov wants to ensure that there is a pro-Uzbek regime in Tajikistan. If the Islamists in Tajikistan come to power, tensions will most probably increase between the two countries.

The upstream countries can not make any decisions regarding water use within in their country without it affects the downstream countries. Any decision therefore affects the relationship between the countries.

Between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan " a major irritant in relations in the post - independence era has been the fact that Tajikistan has signed

protocols with Afghanistan and Turkmenistan on the joint use of water resources of the Amu Darya”¹⁶⁵

In Soviet times it was simple. Kyrgyzstan provided the water and Uzbekistan grew the cotton. In return for providing the water, Kyrgyzstan received subsidies from Moscow. After the fall of the Soviet Union the Kyrgyz continued to provide the water free of charge, but now it no longer received the subsidies in return.

Kyrgyzstan's lakes and reservoirs collect approximately 50,000 million cubic meters of water annually. Of this amount, only 12,000 million cubic meters remain in the country. Because most of the water is delivered in the summer, Kyrgyzstan must wait until fall and winter to produce its own hydroelectric energy. This is both expensive and forces Kyrgyzstan to rely on imported electricity from Uzbekistan. Moreover, it angers the Kyrgyz that Uzbekistan makes no contribution to the maintenance of the dams.¹⁶⁶

Relations grew strained between the two countries when Kyrgyzstan began to demand payment for its water. Uzbekistan refused and threatened to cut off gas and coal supplies. In 1994, the two countries made an informal agreement to exchange water for heat and electricity.

Uzbekistan has several times demonstrated its superior power to Kyrgyzstan, indirectly threatening it. For example, in march 1993, “Uzbekistan constructed an unauthorized military exercise in the sensitive Osh region, a

¹⁶⁵Salimjon, Aiobov. “Tajik’Uzbekistan: Relations warming between neighbors” RFE/RL
February 20, 1997

¹⁶⁶Bransten, Jeremy. “Kyrgyzstan / Uzbekistan: The Politics of Water” RFE/RL
October 14, 1997.

reminder to the weaker Kyrgyzstan that the Uzbek ethnic and strategic interests are backed by a superior power."¹⁶⁷

Kyrgyzstan has several hydroelectric stations and dams on the Syr Darya river. Through them the country can control the amount of water that flows into the down stream state Uzbekistan. A dispute "developed shortly after both states became independent, initially over the prices of Uzbekistan's natural gas supplies to Kyrgyzstan. When Kyrgyzstan was unable to pay the higher prices demanded, Uzbekistan discontinued supply. Subsequently, during the summers of 1993 and 1994, the Kyrgyz filled their water reservoirs to capacity to boost the production of hydroelectric energy. Since, after natural gas shipments had been discontinued, electric power was increasingly used for heating."¹⁶⁸

Uzbekistan found itself in the situation that during those summer months it had less water than previously for irrigation. In the winter months Kyrgyzstan drained those reservoirs for the production of electricity more often, causing flooding in Uzbekistan. This issue continues to be a major 'strain' of their relations.

Turkmenistan is not technically an upstream country. It does not control the flow of the water. But the Karakum Canal diverts water from the Amu Darya early in the river. The more water it diverts, the less water Uzbekistan will get. Relations between the two countries have been tense since 1991 over

¹⁶⁷ Menon, Rajan "In the Shadow of the Bear" *International Security* v.20, No. 1 (Summer 1995): 163

¹⁶⁸ Dieter, Herbert. "Regional Integration in Central Asia: Current Economic Position and Prospects" *Central Asian Survey* V. 15, No 3 (1996) : 377.

this issue, but violent conflict is highly possible if Turkmenistan goes through with its plan to extend the Karakum Canal.

In 1991, "Uzbekistan concluded an agreement with its southern neighbor, Turkmenistan, resulting in a commercial treaty and a statement, at least in principle, of the need to resolve water and land conflicts along the republics' lengthy common border."¹⁶⁹ But these agreements are not binding and have not been implemented.

There have been several disputes over water across the Kyrgyz- Tajik border. One "dispute over claims to irrigation water and farm land led to violence between Tajik and Kyrgyz villagers on the border between the two republics. According to official Tajik sources, about a thousand people fought over this on June 13 and 14, 1989; one person died and more than a score were wounded. Although the water disputes were eventually resolved, recriminations between the leaders of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan over the territorial dispute continued into 1991."¹⁷⁰

When looking at Central Asia's regional relations, it is necessary to look at two other countries that have an impact of it. These two countries are Russia and Afghanistan.

Although the Soviet Union has officially been dissolved, Russia still has a major influence on what it calls its 'near abroad'. Central Asia is still very dependent on Russia militarily and politically. More than 10 million Russians

¹⁶⁹ Gleason in Ian Bremmer Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993: 350.

¹⁷⁰ Atkins, Muriel in Ian Bremmer Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1993: 372.

still live in Central Asia. Russia has to protect these people. It is not in its interest for all these million to return to Russia. It is therefore in Moscow's interest that the region remains stable. And Russia still has the power to enforce this stability.

Afghanistan borders Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The civil war which began in 1978 could possible spread into Central Asia, especially into Tajikistan. Before 1991 the borders were well guarded, but now , although it is guarded by CIS troops, it is possible to cross.

More than four million Tajiks live in Afghanistan, a country split by ethnic civil war. With the fall of the Najabullah regime in Kabul, the dominant ethnic group is fighting with the smaller ethnic groups, mainly Tajiks and Uzbeks who want greater political power. Links are now being made across the borders and there is the danger of irredentist ideas.

More over, the opposition in Tajikistan, are fighting from across the borders and are bringing in weapons. As a result, it is harder to regain peace within Tajikistan.

Conclusion

All five Central Asian leaders realize how devastating an impact the desiccation of the Aral sea and the consequent degradation of the environment is having. They also realize that none of their economies can prosper if the Aral Sea problem is not solved.

The hypothesis of this paper was that poor agricultural countries are vulnerable to environmental degradation and that as a result environmentally induced tensions and conflicts were likely to occur in Central Asia as a result of the desiccation of the Aral Sea. Environmental degradation, combined with an unsustainable economy, weak political institutions, and tense social relations would eventually lead to various degrees of conflict.

The desiccation of the Aral Sea and the two rivers, the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya, has together with the resulting environmental degradation made the independence period very difficult for the four Central Asian countries studied in this paper. Both prior to and after independence in 1991, environmental degradation led to different degrees of political tensions in all four countries, although the governments have so far been able to prevent major outbreaks of violence by short term economic policies that the governments can not afford. A mixture of repressive policies and subsidies has kept the tensions reasonably quiet in all the countries except Tajikistan.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, five new states emerged in the Central Asian region. The collapse ended a long period of Russian domination, but it also initiated a transition period characterized by serious social and economic problems.

Under Soviet domination, the region was unified by its common economies and social situations. Since regional development was based on Moscow's needs, the cotton policy was not based on local attributes and tended to cross borders. Agricultural production, industries and transport sectors were planned by Moscow on a regional basis. This meant that the five Central Asian countries were highly interdependent. As a result, when they received independence none of their economies were self-sufficient.

Although each country has its own advantages and vulnerabilities, they all share common problems which have aggravated the affect the Aral Sea desiccation has had on their economies and societies. During the Cold War period, the central government in Moscow wanted to be self-sufficient in cotton. Since this crop needs specific weather conditions, the best region within the Soviet Union for this crop was Central Asia. The only problem was water. The Soviets realized that the enormous use of water in such an arid region would cause environmental problems. But it was decided that this was not too high a price.

Since most of Central Asia is arid, there was not enough land and water for both cotton and other agricultural products. As a result, cotton became the basis of Central Asian economies at the expense of all other crops. Other crops were only grown if each country had reached the quota set by Moscow. As this

quota was unrealistically high, hardly any other crops were grown. As long as the region was dominated by Russia, this was not a problem. These other crops were delivered from other parts of the Soviet Union at artificially low prices.

When the region received independence, the Central Asian countries found themselves in the situation where they had to import almost everything. As a result, economic problems could be felt almost immediately after independence and the national debts started to grow.

The Central Asian regimes realize that the cotton monoculture is leading to environmental degradation which is slowly destroying their land and people's health, but as cotton is their main source of hard currency and employment it is very difficult for them to replace it. The different governments have stated that the short-term socio-economic conditions of their populations must be given priority over long-term environmental problems.

It is a very difficult decision to make. If the desiccation of the Aral Sea continues, the future of the region will be very grave. The longer the local regimes wait before they change their economic policies, the harder it will be. Every year they wait, the more the land will be damaged and the worse the health conditions of their people will be. If the desiccation continues at the current level, it will only be a matter of time before no crop can be grown on the salinated land. So far, more than 85,000 people have been forced to migrate because of the Aral Sea and this number will probably increase.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹UNHCR. "Central Asia on the move" Displacement in the Commonwealth of Independent States, 1996

At the same time, the current social and economic problems are so critical that there is constant fear that the civil war in Tajikistan will spread to the rest of the region. In order to guard against this, the Central Asian leaders need to build post-Soviet regimes with new political institutions, rules and procedures in order to provide stability, national integration, and state legitimacy. This process of political institutionalization is difficult in itself, but in Central Asia it is aggravated by the contradictory sources of social mobilization in the four societies; Islam, opposition nationalist and democratic movements, ethnic and protest groups.

These social groups, along with the worsening economic problems and demographic pressure, make long term stability very difficult to achieve. Continuing inflation, unemployment and falling agricultural production will remain part of the foreseeable future.

The leaders of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, trying to avoid disruptions caused by economic transformation, are attempting to buy political stability by their raw natural resources, such as oil, natural gases and gold. But these resources are only short-term solutions.

The presidents know that the peace will only be temporary unless they improve the environmental situation. The five leaders have met several times in order to find a solution to the Aral Sea problem.

At a 1993 meeting, the five presidents of Central Asia agreed that each country should pay 0.3 percent of its national income for Aral Sea projects, but until February 1997, none of them had paid close to that amount. Kyrgyzstan, for example, only paid 17 percent of what it had agreed upon.

On September 20, 1995, there was a three day conference at Nukus sponsored by the UNDP on the Aral Sea situation. At the conclusion on of the conference the five leaders once again pledged to cooperate in both environmental and irrigation strategies. They agreed on a \$200 UN-World Bank program to deal with the shrinking. By spring 1997 only \$41 of this program had actually been paid.

At a summit in Almaty on February 28, 1997 a senior official said that the World Bank planned to provide \$380 million by the year 2000 to help cope with the Aral Sea crisis.¹⁷² Once again in 1997, the presidents of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan met and agreed that they would contribute 0.3 percent of their GDP to the Aral Sea Fund. The Tajik president Emam Ali Rakhmonov, however, announced that his country would not be able to pay because of the difficult conditions it is going through. No matter how much money the International organizations agree to pay in order to solve the Aral Sea crisis, the problem can not be solved unless the Central Asians make some changes within their own borders.

Societies can try to adapt to changing environmental situations, by trying to improve the environment or at least maintaining it at current levels. They can attempt to do this in several ways.

First of all, these societies can continue to rely on their diminishing resources, but they should use them more sensibly, and attempt to find the segments of the labor force in question alternative employment.

¹⁷²“Summit in Almaty” RFE/RL Daily Report February 29, 1997.

Secondly, they can attempt to lessen dependency on the scarce resources, giving economic incentives to produce goods and services that do not heavily rely on these resources. These incentives might be technological. Technology can at times compensate for the environmental loss. The government needs to develop institutions and organizations to buffer the population from the effects of the environmental degradation and scarcity.

The Aral region's environment has been degraded to such a degree that the Central Asians can not just continue to live and work the way they used to do. The role of cotton in the economy should be reconsidered, and replaced with increased food production and less water intensive crops, as well as crops that are less affected by the salt level.

Unfortunately, it is very difficult to move away from their Soviet legacy of monoculture, when the entire economy is geared toward that one crop. The land, the irrigation systems, the factories are all related to the cotton. The change therefore needs to be gradual while at the same time modernizing the existing crop and improving the quality of the cotton.

The per capita water consumption of the Central Asian countries is by far the greatest in the world: According to the figure provided by the World Bank, Turkmenistan is the world's largest consumer of water, using 6,216 m³ per year between 1970 and 1992. With a usage of 4,007 m³, Uzbekistan is the second largest consumer of water. Kyrgyzstan comes in third place with 2,663 m³

followed by Tajikistan, which used 2,376 m³. In comparison, the water consumption of the United States was 1,868 m³ per capita per year.¹⁷³

Several changes need to be made in order to increase the water flow to the Aral Sea. It is necessary to withdraw the land that has been severely degraded from irrigation. These lands are not only low producers but they also require more water than average soil. In Kyrgyzstan where the soil is less degraded it uses 22 percent more water than average soil, while in Uzbekistan the degraded soil used 64% more and in Turkmenistan it uses 67% more.¹⁷⁴

If roughly 15% of the severely salinated land is removed from irrigation around 15 to 20 cubic kilometers less water would be used every year. Of course the different governments would have to find solutions for the populations living on the land that is removed from irrigation. New work places must be found and losses compensated.

If the Central Asian leaders do not agree within the next few years on how to lessen their use of water in agriculture, it is just a matter of time before they all follow the path of Tajikistan. The regimes can not continue to buy peace by implementing short term economic policies that are worsening the economies and will make it far more difficult for the governments to maintain political stability.

¹⁷³ Water Development Report, 1995: 226-227.

¹⁷⁴ UNEP The Aral Sea: Diagnostic Study for the Development of an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Aral Sea. Nairobi; UNEP, 1992: 95

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