

National Ideology and State-building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

Erica Marat

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Preface

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the states of Central Asia found themselves in a position of independent statehood that most of them had not sought, and which many of the region's leaders embraced only with trepidation. After all, they were all creations of the Soviet Union: before the territorial delimitation of Central Asia in the 1920s, no state had ever existed with the name, or the boundaries, of any of the five republics that were eventually created. National identities were poorly developed, while the region's republics were economically and institutionally scarcely prepared for independent statehood. The two smallest and poorest republics of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, were perhaps in the least enviable position. Their economies were weak, and a great chunk of their budgets came in the form of direct subsidies from Moscow. Moreover, their isolated and landlocked location complicated their participation in the world economy.

Their demographic makeup was also a concern. In both republics, the titular nationality formed only a slight majority of the population, and substantial ethnic minorities were present. National cohesion was rather limited, certainly in the population at large and even among the titular ethnicity. Violence on ethnic and regional lines plagued both republics: Kyrgyzstan managed to avoid a large-scale conflict following the bloody riots between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh in 1990; but Tajikistan descended into a murderous civil war that made the 1990s a lost decade for the country.

Upon gaining independence and stabilizing their position, the leading elites of both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan hence naturally groped for national ideas that would help form cohesion and loyalty among the population, and ideally also shore up their own government's legitimacy and position. They had to do so taking into account a delicate balance between ethnic-based ideas that appealed to the pride of the titular nationality; while also promoting inclusive identities that made minority populations feel at home in the new states.

It is this complex process that Erica Marat sets out to study in this Silk Road Paper. For anyone interested in the state-building processes of Central Asia,

her study will form essential reading, shedding considerable light on the machinations of the state-formation process in Central Asia's two easternmost states.

This paper was prepared within the framework of a research project on state-building in Central Asia, focusing on the experiences of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, funded by the Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation. The Joint Center would like to express its gratitude for the generous funding provided by SIDA, which made this research possible. Any opinions expressed in the paper are nevertheless those of the author only.

Svante E. Cornell
Research Director

Summary and Recommendations

This study focuses on the production of national ideologies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan since 1991. Both states are strongly affected by corruption, suffer from economic underdevelopment, and experience a high level of organized crime fueled by the drug economy. Unlike Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, which have been relatively calm since gaining independence, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have dealt with instability and the sudden eruption of political crises. However, while Kyrgyzstan became a corrupt and unstable state after a relatively open political regime led by former Kyrgyz president Askar Akayev, Tajikistan's political problems stem from the legacies of its civil war. Although increasingly authoritarian, the Tajik government managed to develop mechanisms to avoid an escalation of tensions between regionally mobilized violent actors. A series of political showdowns in Kyrgyzstan following the March 24 Revolution pointed at the state's dependence on the shadow economy and the criminal underworld. In attempts to reach national stability and legitimize their own hold on power amid competing political forces, Akayev and incumbent Tajik president Emomali Rakhmon were the main architects of the national projects developed during the post-Soviet period in their respective countries.

Even though the Central Asian nations inherited statehood as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, political elites quickly realized that if their states were to continue functioning as cohesive entities, a unifying national ideology had to be cultivated. Central Asian political elites had to create and reinforce the positive image of newly acquired independence, as well as justify their hold on power. With the urge of fostering nationalism in the early 1990s, the elites produced national ideologies based on revised history without allowing any broader scholarly or policy debate. In this rush, the political elites became the sole producers of national ideologies, with other public sectors, including academic circles, working merely in a support role for the elites and thus not putting forth competing interpretations.

However, Central Asian political elites rarely managed to separate ethnicity from the nation and ideology from nationalism. Some Soviet categories such as “ethnic genesis” and “ethnic code” were used interchangeably along with concepts of “national identity” and “cultural heritage.” Such conceptual confusion has roots in the Soviet academic tradition that treated “ethnogenesis” as a central category in the historiographical research of the formation of ethnic groups. The concepts deal with the nations’ wish for a sovereign state, distinct ethnic identities, political coalitions with other similar nations, pretensions for greater territories, and the promulgation of citizens’ rights. As during the Soviet period, ethnicity today is still largely understood as a biological category, rather than a cultural one. Such a primordialist approach was shaped by Lenin, Stalin, and leading Soviet historians throughout the Communist regime’s existence. The biological definition of ethnicity by Soviet ethnography was influenced and formulated by Nicholas Marr, a historian and linguist, in the 1930-40s. Only in the late 1980s did Russian scholars begin incorporating Western notions of the constructed nature of ethnic identities.

Among Central Asian leaders, Akayev was the most elaborate in moving away from Soviet historiographical traditions towards the recognition of separate concepts of citizenship, nationality, and ethnicity. By recognizing the ethnic minorities living in Kyrgyzstan, Akayev urged them to associate themselves as citizens. He tried to maintain a balance between ethno-centric and civic-based ideas by designing a number of different ideological projects. Partly due to Akayev’s liberal approach to ethnic minorities, Kyrgyzstan was considered to be among the most welcoming countries for Russian and other minority ethnicities in the post-Soviet space. However, Akayev still used ethno-centric ideological projects to mobilize the state apparatus to work for the continuity of his own hold on power. His celebrations of the Manas epic’s 1,000th anniversary, as well as Osh 3,000, were used strategically to generate support before the presidential elections in 1995 and 2000, respectively.

Although his ideological projects received extensive criticism from the domestic public, during his 14-year reign Akayev has been Kyrgyzstan’s main ideologue. His successor Kurmanbek Bakiyev, in contrast, has ignored the

production of state ideologies. Instead of generating nation-wide campaigns on ideological concepts, Bakiyev sought to emphasize the intensification of divisions between northern and southern political elites. The idea of such a regional divide between elites that emphasizes the unequal distribution of power among northern and southern groups turned into a primary definition of today's interpretation of the Kyrgyz nation. Bakiyev used such arguments of national division in order to legitimize his hold on power despite low public support and widespread corruption.

Soviet ethnographical and historiographical traditions considerably influenced the formation of ideology in independent Tajikistan. The primordial definition of ethnicity as well as the category of ethnogenesis provided the central tenet for Rakhmon's ideologies. Tajikistan's production of ideology based on historical narratives became a highly strategic political issue after the end of the civil war in 1997. In his ideological projects, Rakhmon primarily sought to increase his presidential power and alienate the Islamic opposition. Three projects were predominant in Rakhmon's ideological production: Zoroastrianism, the cult of Ismail Samani, and the Aryan civilization. Among all, the Aryan myth proved to be the most central in Rakhmon's politics which helped him to consolidate the public sector in the wake of presidential elections in November 2006. Since the Aryan project was not adopted by any other Central Asian state, Rakhmon could point at Tajikistan's regional peculiarity. Aryanism emphasized the antiquity of the Tajik as an ethnic group, thus hinting at its cultural superiority. The Aryan project also alienated the Islamic opposition and informally built a link between Tajikistan and European civilization.

Although the Tajiks' connection to the Aryan civilization does not enjoy an unambiguous scholarly recognition – even in Tajikistan itself – Rakhmon nevertheless institutionalized the idea by supporting numerous scholarly writings, promoting it through his own books and speeches, and by holding grand celebrations in September 2006. In this respect, Rakhmon's efforts were similar to those of Akayev's, when the latter fostered the creation of visual images of the mythic hero Manas.

To promote their ideological projects, both Akayev and Rakhmon authored a number of books dealing with issues of statehood, national histories, and the

future prospects for national development. While Akayev was Kyrgyzstan's main ideologue and authored most ideology projects himself, Rakhmon heavily relied on a group of historians who advised him on issues of ideology. Like the majority of other states in the world, the Kyrgyz and Tajik presidents believe that their countries are located at the crossroads of great civilizations and have a unique national identity because of their great history and culture. Both states emphasize the immense antiquity of their culture and language, claiming that their nations are among the most ancient in the world. In such a debate, an ethnic group's antiquity alludes to its cultural richness and superiority.

This report shows that ideologies were part of the state-building process and that they strengthened the ruling regime, rather than increasing its popularity among society. State-promulgated ideological projects do not necessarily increase the popularity or effectiveness of incumbent regimes before elections, but they do allow the consolidation of state power in the interests of the ruling elites. The process of ideological production and promotion increased the loyalty of primarily state actors at various levels: from top political elites to the local government – all of who were responsible for disseminating ideologies among the masses. Both Kyrgyz and Tajik political leaderships promoted state ideologies vigorously before presidential elections. The celebration of national historical events, such as the Manas's anniversary in Kyrgyzstan and the Aryan civilization in Tajikistan, allowed the incumbent regimes to mobilize the entire public sector under the banner of patriotism. Akayev and Rakhmon monopolized their interpretations of national histories by suppressing or rejecting any possibility for public debate over interpretations of histories and their meaning in the present day reality. In this way, any attempt to question the correctness of the regimes' interpretations of history was considered to be unpatriotic.

The report is written within the political science discipline and not from the point of view of history of the Central Asian states. Some arguments on historiography in the Central Asian states' formation might seem to be simplistic and superficial. However, the important goal of the report is to highlight the main aspects in the current interaction of political elites with academic circles in the formation of ideological projects and implications on

nation-building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This report is not about the formation of the Central Asian ethnic or cultural identities, but its main focus lies in the analysis of Kyrgyz and Tajik governments' creation of the national ideologies.

The main recommendations of this study include the necessity of changing and even abandoning some of the existing mechanisms of national ideology construction, to recognize ethnic minorities, and to promote civic culture in both states. The Tajik government must encourage the learning of Tajik and Uzbek languages in the country's northern and western parts. Tajikistan should also allow broader scholarly debates on national ideologies. The current Kyrgyz government is counseled to calm down the north-south divide by accentuating the importance of citizenship ahead of sub-ethnic confrontation. Indeed, similar recommendations are applicable to other Central Asian and post-Soviet states, where national ideologies are often used for the mobilization of titular ethnicities and the ignorance of minorities or civic rights.

Introduction

While initially unwilling to separate from the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Central Asian states nonetheless had to develop new national concepts which would prioritize their post-Soviet independence. The ruling regimes were bound to construct ideologies that were both based on the administrative divisions of the Soviet regime and promoted their states' sovereignty. These nation-building processes took place amid post-Soviet economic instability and political uncertainty, inter-clan divisions, and the rapid mobilization of non-state actors in the Central Asian region, which predetermined ruling elites' inclination to construct ideological projects that would legitimize their own political positions. A post-Soviet national ideology also had to subdue cleavages in the society among regional elites, religious groups, and ethnic minorities.

This study focuses on the politics of state nationalism in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan expressed in their ideologies. Political elites in both states developed national ideologies commensurate to the changing domestic and regional settings, reacting to outbreaks of instabilities and ideological projects promulgated by their neighbors. The study has three parts. Part I outlines the historical background of the Central Asian states, describing some of the most lasting legacies of the Soviet Union that continue to shape the states' production of ideologies in the independence period. It also examines domestic and external factors influencing nation- and state-building processes. Domestically, political opposition and cultural divisions between clans and ethnicities provoke competition for political state power. Externally, the international community's expectations regarding the functioning of centralized states with legitimate political powers force national political elites to strengthen their own positions at home and abroad through propagating the importance of a unified nation.

Part II explores the 'behind the scenes' dynamics in the production of national ideologies. It focuses on inter-elite interaction between groups of

government officials (presidents, opposition leaders, ministers, parliamentarians) who are responsible for producing new national concepts, professionals (historians, political scientists, Islamic clergy, etc.), and their competing ideological views (communist, liberal, nationalist, etc.). This section includes detailed descriptions of the ideological projects that were promulgated by former Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev and incumbent Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon.¹ It discusses Akayev's and current Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's efforts to construct national ideologies as part of their power struggle. Both Kyrgyz and Tajik political elites emphasized several national ideology projects, which they portrayed as the only possible direction for successful nation-building. National projects included or excluded certain social groups, political forces, and even individual political actors.

The Kyrgyz and Tajik cases show how presidents choose different strategies in designing ideologies. While Akayev was the main ideologue in Kyrgyzstan and authored most of the books on national ideology himself, Rakhmon always heavily relied on the local academic community. Ironically, both Akayev and Rakhmon's advisors received their education in leading Russian universities. Similar to Rakhmon, his Uzbek and Kazakh counterparts relied on known academics in developing national ideology. Former Turkmen president Saparmurat Niyazov, on the other hand, was the main author of pervasive national ideologies in Turkmenistan.

Part III identifies components of nation-building such as fine-tuning historical experiences, and over- and underestimating the importance of certain historical moments; the creation of national myths and symbols; the celebration of old and new holidays; and the interaction between secular and Islamic views. Specific ideological tools used by the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments are also examined. Both states often resorted to Soviet methods in order to impose certain ideas while also promoting more ethno-centric views. As in the former Soviet regime, propaganda about national projects is channeled through presidential speeches and books, the mass media,

¹ In March 2007, the Tajik President changed his name from "Rakhmonov" to "Rakhmon", justifying it by his wish to follow Tajik traditions and dropping the russified "ov" ending. The president's published works were authored under "Rakhmonov."

academic writing of national history, the educational system, and public institutions.

In conclusion, the research on nation-building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will shed some light on how political elites maneuver between domestic challenges and external expectations while also trying to retain their own political power for the longest period possible. The concluding part will outline the implications of national ideological production on state-building processes. Importantly, it will outline the challenges and prospects for international development policy in both countries. These research findings can be further expanded by analyzing other states in the post-Soviet space where interaction between state and non-state powers create complex settings for national ideology production.

The Soviet Period and Local Cultures

Lenin and Stalin undoubtedly played an enormous role in creating and interpreting the Central Asian states and societies. The impact of Soviet nation-building in the 1920s-1950s is visible in Central Asian national border delimitations, the structure of local languages, and even in material and visual cultural artifacts. Rogers Brubaker has argued that with regard to Soviet state-building, “no other state has gone so far in sponsoring, codifying, institutionalizing, even (in some cases) inventing nationhood and nationality on the sub-state level, while at the same time doing nothing to institutionalize them on the level of the state as a whole.”² Building on these arguments, the Soviet Union’s institutionalized definition of nationhood, which ultimately contributed to the disintegration of the Soviet state, continues to structure national identities in the successor states.³ Soviet institutionalization of nationhood through tagging national identity and defining territory produced a crude base for claiming sovereignty under Gorbachev’s leadership.⁴ After the Soviet Union’s collapse, the successor states inherited ready templates to continue promulgating political attitudes to the masses, which provided the former communist political elites with instruments to treat nations as “concrete collectivities.”⁵

Even though the Central Asian nations inherited statehood as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, political elites quickly realized that if their states were to continue functioning as cohesive entities, a unifying ideology

² Rogers Brubaker, “Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account,” *Theory and Society*, 23(1), 1994.

³ Brubaker, “Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia”; Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review*, 53(2), 1994.

⁴ Brubaker, “Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia”; Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford: University Press, 1993.

⁵ Brubaker, “Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia.”

had to be cultivated. With the region's fuzzy borders and the dominance of the Russian language and Soviet culture, Central Asian leaders had to develop a national idea that would solidify the population's recognition of post-Soviet statehood and the new political leadership. Lowell Barrington has argued that while it was important for new states to consider themselves as nations, it was difficult to find "a list of measurable characteristics" for each of them.⁶ The Central Asian states inherited borders and cultures shaped by the Soviet Union, which they then tried to fill with new meanings by finding historical analogies and metaphors. Often these attributes were sought in the pre-Soviet period, when no hard national borders existed or strict cultural boundaries could be identified. The overall picture suggests, from the words of a historian from Karakalpakistan, that thus far "politicians and academics have been using old Soviet methodology to fill historical events with new meaning without renewing empirical sources."⁷ In such idiosyncratic settings, Central Asian regimes tried to build national ideological concepts that would be accessible to the mass public, increase the legitimacy of ruling political elites, and contain some actual historic basis.

In the pre-Soviet period, the idea of nationality and ethnicity were loosely correlated in the Central Asian region due to the great intermixture between various ethnic and tribal groups.⁸ Religious, nomadic, and sedentary identities were prevalent among the Central Asian peoples. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Central Asian states were ethnically heterogeneous, with Russians dominating in urban areas. One of the major challenges that political elites encountered in mediating nationalism in the post-Soviet period was intensified antagonism among various non-state actors such as ethnic movements and religious fundamentalist groups with ethno-nationalist undertones. Because of the international community's expectations that newly independent states should move towards liberalism

⁶ Lowell W. Barrington, "Nationalism and Independence," in ed., Lowell W. Barrington, *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006, p. 6.

⁷ Authors interview, July 2007, Almaty.

⁸ Ian Bremmer, "The Post-Soviet Nations after Independence," in ed., Lowell W. Barrington, *After Independence*, p. 155; Francine Hirsch, "The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress: Ethnographers and the Category Nationality in the 1926, 1937, and 1939 Censuses", *Slavic Review*, 56(2), 1997.

and respect for human rights, the Central Asian ruling elites could not openly suppress competing political forces. For instance, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan had to create ideologies that would downplay ethnic minorities' identities while at the same time hint at the ethnic majority's supremacy. The Uzbek leadership built a national ideology based on the cult of Amir Timur – a Turko-Mongol leader of the 14th century – and thus disregarded the Tajik minority's Persian identity. Likewise, the Tajik government chose to emphasize the period of Ismaili Samani – a Persian ruler of the 8th century – despite the fact that up to 15 percent of Tajikistan's population are ethnic Uzbeks. Tajikistan also promoted the Aryan heritage as a state ideology.

In rewriting national histories and creating ideologies, Central Asian political elites rarely managed to separate ethnicity from the nation and ideology from nationalism. Some Soviet categories such as “ethnic genesis” and “ethnic code” were used interchangeably along with concepts of “national identity” and “cultural heritage.” Such conceptual confusion has roots in the Soviet academic tradition that treated “ethnogenesis” as a central category in the historiographical research of the formation of ethnic groups. The concepts deal with the nations' wish for a sovereign state, distinct ethnic identities, coalitions with other similar nations, and pretensions for greater territories. As during the Soviet period, ethnicity today is still largely understood as a biological category, rather than a cultural one. Leading Soviet historians shaped such a primordialist approach throughout the Communist regime's existence. The biological definition of ethnicity in Soviet ethnography was either influenced or formulated by Nicholas Marr, a historian and linguist.⁹

In the post-Soviet period ethnic groups continued to be a “legal category” and used in official documents.¹⁰ Ethnic majorities and minorities preferred to retain their ethnic belonging in official documents. Even the Soviet concept of “titular ethnicity”¹¹ associated with the state territory of that ethnicity was

⁹ Yuri Slezkine, “N.Ia. Marr and the National Origins of Soviet Ethnogenesis”, *Slavic Review*, 55(4), 1996.

¹⁰ Brubaker, “Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia.”

¹¹ Although this is a translation from the Russian “titul'naya natsional'nost'”, in essence “natsional'nost'” means ethnicity and not nationality.

widely accepted and routinely used in public discussions in the post-Soviet period. Rarely was the concept questioned even though newly adopted constitutions recognized the rights and liberties of all citizens and that no titular nationality or ethnicity should be prioritized. Furthermore, the strong link between ethnicity and territory was an essential factor in legitimizing the political power of the titular ethnicity. All Central Asian state leaders represented the dominant ethnic group. Only in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan did ethnic Russians, Koreans, and representatives of other minorities occasionally occupy high-level public positions.

Creating Functional Ideologies

The necessity of generating state ideologies in the Central Asian states in the early 1990s emerged before the scientific national community could conduct any meaningful debate over which historical events should be framed in the state's politics. In Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan state-reconstructed national histories were treated as the only possible interpretations of the past. These state constructs were thus defined as official national ideologies. In some cases political elites sought international recognition of their historical interpretations from the UN, UNESCO, and the Soros Foundation, which helped them organize cultural events or publish books on national history.

Like other post-communist Eurasian states, even the rare instances of civic nationalism in the Central Asian states contained elements of ethno-centrism. Often both categories overlapped and blended into each other.¹² In fact, Taras Kuzio has argued that in the example of Ukraine, what often is considered to be civic nationalism in the post-communist Eurasian states could also be interpreted as a variation of ethno-nationalism.¹³ There is not a single case among the former Soviet states where civic-based nationalism represents the state and society's open acceptance that ethnic differences are not driven by unambiguous characteristics or that national belonging and citizenship could be identical. Indeed, such cases are rare in general. But the

¹² Suny, "Nationalism, Nation Making, and the Postcolonial States of Asia, Africa, and Eurasia," p. 281.

¹³ Taras Kuzio, "Kravchuk to the Orange Revolution: The Victory of Civic Nationalism in Post-Soviet Ukraine," in ed. Lowell W. Barrington, *After Independence*.

idea of civic nationalism is largely alien to Soviet-educated politicians, academics, and societies. Even former Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev's ideological projects articulated a more primordial rather than a constructed definition of ethnicity.

Whereas most other former Soviet states could refer to pre-Soviet models of statehood, the Central Asian states had to create their "stateness" by inventing new state symbols while navigating through a "timeless and ahistorical past."¹⁴ Their elements of a modern state, such as the system of public administration, institutions of education, the military, and social services, predate the states themselves. But the Central Asian states, more than other former communist states, were determined to develop the idea that their nations existed before they received independent statehoods. These efforts were expressed by political elites in their construction of an idea of a sovereign state based on the argument that the dominant ethnicity has its own understanding of statehood derived from its ancient, rich, and unique history and development. The significance of elements of statehood at various periods are often inflated and over generalized. As Murat Sembinov argues, the legacies of Turkic khanates' experience in statehood are ascribed as indispensable in understanding today's statehood traditions in Kazakhstan. However, this type of overgeneralization on the legacy of Turkic khanates can be applied in any Eurasian state, Russia, Hungary, Turkey, Iran, China, and even Korea.¹⁵

The post-Soviet historiography has evidenced controversial developments in terms of its methods and tendency to become politicized. History is no longer a merely academic task, but [re]writing national history has become the government's instrument in developing nationalism in the state and among the masses.¹⁶ Historians and politicians alike regard history as a fundamental study that bears the ability to unify people living in one state.

¹⁴ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*, New York: New York University Press, 2000, p. 161.

¹⁵ Murat Sembinov, discusses this issue in his analysis of post-Soviet history writing in Kazakhstan in "Stanovlenie natsional'noi istorii Kazahstana" [The Formation of Kazakhstan's National History], *Natsional'naya istoriya v sovetskom i postsovetskom gosudarstvakh*, Moscow: AIRO-XX, 1999, p. 187.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Especially, such perception prevails among the ruling elites that seek to construct narratives on specific historical epochs in order to fill in their political projects with scientific context. As writing national history became a political task, the demand from influential families and political circles to depict and embellish the history of particular individuals or epochs has increased. Competing political forces used historians to research and publicize histories of their clan or family origins. Such political orders often acquired an element of competition between political forces. For instance, the celebration of Kulyab and Khodjent became a matter of contest between Tajikistan's southern and northern political elites. As Anuar Galiev argues, "It is likely that 'deepening' the history of one or other tribe must strengthen the position of its representatives within the power structure."¹⁷ Numerous books featuring biographical narratives about political leaders fill local stores throughout the region.

As discussed in Part III, the competition over national antiquity among the Central Asian political elites complicates the writing and teaching of regional history. The current educational program in teaching national history in each Central Asian state does not allow the creation of a common course that would depict the history of the entire region or go beyond its borders. Instead, teaching of regional and national histories emphasized the cultural superiority of titular ethnicities. National histories usually portray the narrative about titular ethnic groups, omitting ethnic minorities. Even histories of the 20th century or modern times neglect the chronicles of ethnic minorities such as the Dungsans, Uygurs, Chechens, Ingush, Koreans, etc.

In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, countries with a relatively open political climate, history is written by anyone who seeks participation in national politics, promotion of the national identity, or simply wishes to express their own patriotism. Such cultural and ethnic entrepreneurs represent various backgrounds – from professional historians to experts with technical educations – who can offer "pseudo-scientific evidence" to their own

¹⁷ Anuar Galiev, "Mythologization of the History of the Turkic Peoples at the Beginning of the Third Millenium", *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*, 47 (3-4), 2002.

arguments.¹⁸ Some regarded their own work as patriotic missions, while others delivered political and social orders.

By contrast, the Tajik, Turkmen, and Uzbek cases show that with stronger ruling elites,¹⁹ the state possesses the capacity to be pervasive in nationalist projects by raising societal consciousness around the significance of a selected historical experience.²⁰ The state “fine-tunes” historical records by underscoring certain time periods that positively describe the ethnic group’s development and conceal less triumphant instances. In some cases, state elites falsify and fabricate historical narratives.

Along with the Central Asian states’ reliance on Soviet techniques of promoting ideological concepts to the masses through presidential speeches, books, celebrations, and public education, the internet serves as a competing medium staging a more informal discourse on state ideologies. A number of internet sites and loosely administrated forums feature lively debates on nationalism and ideologies. In fact, it could be argued that internet forums have become the main medium for mainstream discussions on the importance and effectiveness of national ideologies.

Ideology and Society

Although the Communist Party had been the sole architect of ideology formation in the Soviet era, the local Soviet apparatuses had obediently spread the idea across society. Unsurprisingly, post-Soviet political elites in the Central Asian states continued to treat national ideology as the key function that they had to fulfill with respect to the masses. Similarly, Central Asian societies were accustomed to being passive recipients of the state’s ideas in the independence period, as they preserved traditionalism despite Soviet efforts to emancipate them. This was partly due to the region’s large agricultural sector, which comprised up to 60 percent of the local economy.

¹⁸ Galiyev, “Mythologization of the History of the Turkic Peoples at the Beginning of the Third Millennium”, p. 388.

¹⁹ For instance, Brubaker places state elites in the center of constructing nationalist projects in postcommunist states: Brubaker, Rogers, “Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia.”

²⁰ The link between politics and ethnic nationalism on the basis of pre-existing models of nations is extensively discussed by Anthony D. Smith, “Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism.” *International Affairs*, 72(3), 1996.

Such a monolithic economy during the Soviet period indicated that a significant part of the Central Asian population was rural.²¹

After becoming independent, traditionalist values in politics and society continued to prevail in the Central Asian states and even saw a new reemergence. The revival of conservative values was evident in many aspects of local lives, including the political domain. In some cases, conservative societal practices surpassed those that existed in the pre-Soviet period. This included the radicalization of religious practices, stronger conservatism in family values, and greater emphasis on cultural identities (ethnic, religious, clan, family, etc.). In the political domain there was an increase in the manifestations of traditionalism through the attainment of public offices based on informal ties and identities. Political actors frequently built their campaigns by instrumentalizing the conservative values and beliefs of the local population, such as by organizing lavish celebrations on national holidays, paying respect to the elderly, building mosques and *madrasas*, and propagating a sense of national dignity based on ethnic identity. Political actors who gained local popularity thanks to traditional attitudes among the rural population were uninterested in modernizing the periphery. Traditionalism in society served as an easy instrument to attain quick support without the necessity of designing viable political, economic, or social programs.²²

On the other side of the spectrum, non-traditionalist political actors in the Central Asian states are not able to fully ignore traditionalism in their societies. Even the most liberal political leaders like Akayev and Nazarbayev inevitably had to address local conservative publics along with more liberal groups. As demonstrated in Part II, while in search for a national ideology,

²¹ While the region's rural areas were overpopulated, the agricultural sector's productivity index was still among the lowest in the USSR. Likewise, while in most parts of the Soviet Union urbanization was a common trend, in Central Asia, and especially in Tajikistan in the 1980s, the situation tended towards deurbanization. As a result, the region always lagged behind other Soviet republics in all social and economic indicators. Ajay Patnaik, "Agriculture and Rural Out-migration in Central Asia, 1960-91," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 47 (1), 1995.

²² Erica Marat, *The State-Crime Nexus in Central Asia: Corruption, Organized Crime, and State Weakness in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*, Uppsala & Washington D.C.: CACI & SRSP Silk Road Paper, October 2006.

Akayev was a regional pioneer in promulgating concepts of citizenship and liberalism. But he was forced to resort to more ethno-centric categorizations after his popularity began to wither away during the mid-1990s. In other cases, however, Central Asian political elites preferred to deepen the traditionalization of the local population. Uzbek, Tajik, and Turkmen state leaders appealed mostly to the conservative sentiments of the population rather than promoting more cosmopolitan views. All three presidents developed historical narratives that confirmed the necessity of a strong central state and a father-like national leader. Inevitably, in elaborating the idea of a national statehood, they incorporated ethno-centric concepts.

Time and Space

An important feature of Central Asian states' ideologies in the post-Soviet period is the fact that they are mostly backward-looking. This is in striking contrast to Soviet ideological projects. The Soviet Union's concept of the "Soviet People," for instance, was primarily forward-looking. It was an ideology of continuing progress for the Union's internal cohesion and the strengthening of people's loyalty to the Party. Under the "Soviet People" context, Soviet identity had to eventually prevail over a national identity in the long run. Soviet ideology sought ideational support for the Soviet Union's history starting from the time when Lenin first began disseminating Marxist ideas in the early 20th century. Stalin's victory in the Second World War also became a prolific source for ideological mobilization. The spirit of Soviet heroism and patriotism turned into a central theme for indoctrination. The Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War provided ample sources for the identification of an external enemy. Likewise, Nikita Khrushchev's collectivization and economic reforms in the 1960s served as verification for the idea of a bright future for the Soviet people.

By contrast, ideologies from the post-Soviet period seek vigor in past experiences by drawing analogies with historical events, peoples, and personas. With the partial exception of Nazarbayev's elaboration of the "Kazakhstan-2030" agenda, all other Central Asian leaders looked to past experiences as sources for ideological inspiration. In this respect, the role of the Soviet Union was largely left out of the narrative by most political elites.

Such selected amnesia helped the Central Asian leaders to tailor narratives of the distant past in their own interest.²³

The states' consideration of their neighbors' historical narratives in constructing their own narrative is a significant element in national ideology production as well. No single story is told twice in the Central Asian states on the history of their nation or the region in general, but political elites focus on people, places, and events that are disconnected from their neighbors' narratives. Such reflexivity in historical narratives about the important past is expressed in the political elites' branding and promoting of a certain historical past that would emphasize the antiquity and uniqueness of the titular ethnicity. Historical figures, usually male warriors, are chosen as symbols of both the nation's antiquity and aptitude in statehood in each Central Asian state. Importantly, the nation's pre-Soviet experience in statehood, be that of a nomadic nature or sedentary, occupies a central place in the revised versions of national histories. For instance, Rakhmon's ideology emphasized the Tajiks' experience in statehood during the Samanid empire, while Akayev tried to prove that Kyrgyz's memory of statehood dates back 2,200 years.

Although some subtle competition is present among the states over the ancientness of their culture and ethnicity, it rarely leads to an open confrontation. With the exception of Tajikistan, the absence of a definition of the "other" or of an external enemy is another dissimilarity between today's ideological projects in the Central Asian states and those of the Soviet Union. The national ideologies are rigorously inward-looking. All ideologies incorporate or identify historical experiences that took place exclusively on the territory of that state. Only Tajikistan, whose historical experience is tightly connected with Bukhara and Samarqand, cities which today are located in Uzbekistan, refers to territories outside its modern boundaries.

²³ Touraj Atabaki, presentation at a Regional Seminar for Excellence in Teaching project "National Historiographies in Post-Soviet Central Asia", July 2007.

Venerating Historical Personas

To foster Soviet patriotism during the 70 years of communism, Soviet authors were systematically mobilized to write on military topics.²⁴ Teams of Soviet writers produced a significant amount of work about the spirit of Soviet patriotism, the communist people, and their love for the “Socialist Motherland” in order to prepare the young Soviet man to defend his country.²⁵ The ideological zeal behind the literal works contained, as noted by Mark Hooker, zero tolerance for any shortcomings within the military, high moral qualities, and a sense of responsibility for fulfilling the soldier’s Party and military duties.²⁶ Military topics saturated classic Soviet works both during and after World War II. Finding themes for these military prose was not difficult at that time, since most of the authors had served in the military themselves: “Soviet literature created great images of the great heroes of the Revolution and the war.”²⁷ In the late 1970s, however, when memories of the war began to fade, it became more problematic to find “effective” themes. The focus shifted from war heroes to modern war technologies and achievements made by military technicians and engineers.

Today, Soviet-constructed strategies of praising national heroes within society and military institutions are still practiced in the Central Asian states. But indoctrination efforts shifted from Russian-centric to titular nationality-centric themes. The centrality of the military in perpetuating and dispersing the values of loyalty to the state remained after the dissolution of Soviet rule, with the corollary that today primordial characters have also been added to such indoctrinations.

Personalities are reincarnated throughout Central Asian state institutions, – from mythic to real, and ancient to contemporary. A vividly drawn historical persona, usually a male warrior, reinforces notions about the “important history” of the Central Asian peoples. Abylaikhan in Kazakhstan, Manas in Kyrgyzstan, Amir Temur in Uzbekistan, Ismail Samani in Tajikistan, and

²⁴ For excellent research on Soviet military literature, see Mark T. Hooker, *The Military Uses of Literature: Fiction and the Armed Forces in the Soviet Union*, London: Praeger, 1996.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p 18.

Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan – all represent masculinities within national ideologies reinforced by Central Asian political elites. Like the “golden ages” of national prosperity and the “glory of the homeland” now found in every Central Asian presidential speech, the legends of a nation’s “great sons” depict qualities and virtues of a genuine national hero.

Likewise, the concept “patriot of the Motherland,” the core oath of the Soviet Army, is transformed and adopted in the context of the present day, retaining the significance of service but changing the connotation of the motherland. Instead of a Soviet soldier defending the USSR against the foreign aggressor, the concept now signifies protection of the national territory from external and internal instabilities. Patriotism is equated to affection to and respect for the nation as an ethnic entity and this fact in itself discriminates against the promotion of cadres with non-titular ethnic backgrounds. In most cases titular ethnicity is granted better chances for career advancement in the military and other sectors irrespective of professionalism.²⁸

Soviet Structuring of Central Asian Languages

Language policy was central to Soviet state-building process. After changing Central Asian Arabic scripts to Latin in 1924-1930, the local population was massively reeducated in Soviet schools, and lost access to historical texts, poetry, and the Koran.²⁹ The Latin alphabet harmonized spelling across Turkic peoples in the Soviet Union and coincided with Kemal Ataturk’s introduction of the Latin script in Turkey in 1928. The Tajiks were the least pleased with this change of alphabet, since it meant that their distance with the Persian world and their own history continued to widen significantly. New generations had virtually no access to Persian poetry or scholarly works.³⁰

²⁸ Taras Kuzio, “Soviet-Era Uzbek Elites Erase Russia from National Identity,” *Eurasia Insight*, 20 April 2002.

²⁹ Rustam Shukurov, “Tadzhikistan: muki vospominaniya” [Tajikistan: Pain of memory], *Natsional’naya istoriya v sovetskom i postsovetskom gosudarstvah* [National history in Soviet and post-Sovite states], Moscow: AIRO-XX, 1999.

³⁰ Elizabeth E. Bacon, *Central Asians under Russian Rule: A Study in Culture Change*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966, p. 191.

However, growing similarities between the Soviet Turkic nationalities and Turkey raised concerns among Soviet leaders.³¹ It was believed that through the Unified Turkic Latin Alphabet, Azerbaijani and Central Asian peoples could become more attached to Turkey than to the Soviet Union. Besides, the Latin alphabet, although contributing to the enrichment and nationalization of local languages, obstructed the Central Asian population from learning Russian. In 1930-1940 Stalin introduced Cyrillic script with slight differences tailored for each Central Asian language to meet phonetic variations. Due to the mass purges of the Central Asian elite in 1932-1939, there was little resistance among the local population to such an abrupt and radical change of alphabets. With the reformation of Central Asian alphabets, merging local dialects and standardizing languages, new Russian words were introduced. Most of them were related to technology, science, household items, and Soviet ideology. Imported words were often left without translations into local languages.³²

After receiving independence, special language committees were formed to translate Russian loan words into state languages. Turkic and Arabic languages were the primary languages used to find the equivalent translations. In rare cases English and Latin words were incorporated as well. Names of months and places were the first to be changed, often replaced by words that were in use in the pre-Soviet era. Terminology related to political affairs and state structures were also quick to change. With the majority of local populations in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan speaking native languages, renewed political terminology entered daily communication with relative ease. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where a large proportion of the urban population speaks Russian, it took a longer time for non-Russian terms to gain popularity. Some of the new words did not survive or turned into reasons to mock the governments' nationalism. The

³¹ Bacon, *Central Asians under Russian Rule*.

³² An amusing trend among the local Central Asian population, especially in rural Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, was naming children with newly imported Russian words. Eg.: Some names include Oktyabr', Sovietbek, Khimiya, Porshen', Menzurka, Sud'ya, Diktatura, etc. This trend lasted throughout almost all of the Soviet Union's existence, in the 1920s-1980s. However, after receiving independence, and with the rise of nationalism, popular names became more ethnicized, often having roots in the pre-Soviet era.

most common controversy in Kyrgyzstan having to do with the national identity of ethnic Kyrgyz is the question whether someone considers him or herself to be “Kirgiz” or “Kyrgyz.” The former way of pronunciation refers to the Russification of that person and the latter to a more ethno-national mindset.

Kyrgyzstan lacked the necessary resources to boost the popularity of the Kyrgyz language among non-Kyrgyz or even ethnic Kyrgyz populations. Seventeen years after receiving independence, Russian language fluency is still considered to be a sign of a good education and advanced social status, while Kyrgyz is still regarded as the language of the periphery. Former president Askar Akayev was not able to reach the desired level of Kyrgyz language usage in official records or society. The incumbent president Kurmanbek Bakiyev, on the other hand, did not make any visible efforts to increase the popularity of the Kyrgyz language. Parliamentary hearings and education are dominated by Russian. Schools and universities offering education in Russian are still considered to be significantly better than those in Kyrgyz, partly due to the lack of books in Kyrgyz. The majority of Kyrgyzstan’s mass media is published or broadcast in Russian.

Only Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan adopted the most radical language reforms and changed alphabets from Cyrillic to Latin. The language reforms were conducted under strict regulations of the Uzbek and Turkmen governments in a relatively short period of time. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, even the mere proposition of similar policies would be met with significant resistance from state and non-state actors.

The trend in Tajikistan with regards to the Russian language is the complete opposite. Only a small group of Soviet-educated people, primarily in the capital city Dushanbe, are able to fluently speak Russian. The number of Russian schools has decreased tenfold since 1991 and the rural population speaks only Tajik. The popularity of the Arabic script is spreading rapidly in Tajikistan among rural and urban residents. The Uzbek language is widespread among the population in northern Tajikistan. The inability to speak Russian is one of the main problems for Tajik migrants traveling to Russia. Reportedly, up to 90 percent of Tajik labor migrants cannot speak

even basic Russian.³³ This inevitably leads to frequent miscommunications between Tajik migrants and the Russian authorities, and is a major reason why Tajik migrants do not understand their own rights and responsibilities while residing in Russia.

Tajikistan's political and intellectual elites debated whether they should convert the Tajik language back into the Latin or Arabic script. The reasons that the Tajik government was reluctant to change the alphabet are more complex than they first appear. To begin with, the country's overall economic weakness does not allow for these types of significant changes. However, the issue also touches upon the government's relations with the religious opposition and its endemic dependence on Russia and its Central Asian neighbors. An attempt to introduce the Arabic script would be costly, but would probably be applauded by the religiously traditional public and intellectual elites. Yet, this would also increase the popularity of religious political forces.³⁴ Furthermore, it would alienate Tajikistan from its neighbors, especially from Russia, where hundreds of thousands of Tajik labor migrants earn their living.

In sum, this section has argued that, in the post-Soviet period, Central Asian political elites had to create and reinforce the positive image of newly acquired independence, as well as justify their hold on power. With an urge of fostering nationalism in the early 1990s, the elites produced national ideologies based on revised history without allowing any broader scholarly or policy debate. In this way, the elites became the sole producers of national ideologies with other public sectors, including academic circles, working merely in a support role for the elites and thus not putting forth competing interpretations.

³³ Author's interview with a Tajik representative from an international organization in Dushanbe, June 2006.

³⁴ Author's interview with a Tajik expert, October 2006.

Post-Soviet Ideologies in Kyrgyzstan

“Everyone in Central Asia wants to create something great, no one wants anything simple...”³⁵

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are two post-Soviet states that share many similarities, yet these similarities developed in different settings. Both states are extremely corrupt, suffer from economic underdevelopment, and experience a high level of organized crime fueled by the drug economy.³⁶ Unlike Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, which have been relatively calm since gaining independence, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have dealt with instability and the sudden eruption of political crises. However, while Kyrgyzstan became a corrupt and unstable state after a relatively open political regime led by Akayev, Tajikistan’s political problems stem from the legacies of its civil war. Although increasingly authoritarian, the Tajik government managed to develop mechanisms to avoid an escalation of tensions between regionally mobilized violent actors. A series of political showdowns in Kyrgyzstan following the March 24 Revolution pointed at the state’s dependence on the shadow economy and the criminal underworld. This section takes a close look at the evolution of these countries’ national ideologies. Both Akayev and Rakhmon were the main architects of the national projects developed during the post-Soviet period in their respective countries. Indeed, they used the help of local academic elites to gather historical facts.

During his 14-year reign, President Akayev maintained a balance between different ideological projects, ranging from “Kyrgyzstan is our common home” which called for the unification of different ethnic groups in the country, to “Manas-1000”, “Osh-3000”, and “2200 Years of the Kyrgyz Statehood” which introduced historically important events into the political

³⁵ A quote by an Uzbek high official, Washington, D.C., April 2007.

³⁶ In 2006, both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan received a 2.2 in Transparency International’s corruption ranking (a non-governmental organization which aims to curb corruption). The organization ranks countries from 1 to 10, with 1 being the most corrupt.

discourse. In his early public addresses to the nation, Akayev warned that nationalism in Kyrgyzstan was potentially risky if promulgated by former communists and socialists.³⁷ Instead, he appealed to reviving traditions that existed in the pre-Soviet times that could have a positive impact on contemporary politics. In naming those traditions, Akayev discussed how cultural heritages in Russia and Uzbekistan were also revived during the independence period.

Among the Central Asian states, Akayev used the most liberal approach in defining citizenship in the early independence. Already from the first days of his leadership, Akayev separated two concepts: “nationality” and “people.” While the first category referred to ethnic groups, the second one contained a more civic-based understanding almost synonymous to citizenship. According to Akayev, both concepts coexisted in Kyrgyzstan and their coherence was vital for the country. In his public speeches, he was highly elaborate on the importance of revisiting the Soviet understanding of ethnicity. More than his Central Asian compatriots, the former president emphasized democracy as a means for eradicating ethno-nationalistic views and often used the term “mezhdunarodnoe soglasie” (*international accord*). Here, international meant relations between nationalities living in Kyrgyzstan.

Akayev and Ethnic Minorities

According to the Kyrgyz National Statistic committee, at the time of independence more than 90 nationalities resided in Kyrgyzstan. Among them ethnic Russians, Uzbeks, Uyghurs, Jews, Germans, and Ukrainians were the largest minorities. In the early 1990s, as ethnic Russians, Jews, Germans, and Ukrainians were massively emigrating out of the country, Akayev developed a national concept “Kyrgyzstan is Our Common Home” that underscored the importance of civic rights while also emphasizing the ethnic identities of each group living in Kyrgyzstan. It inspired the creation of the People’s Assembly which all ethnic communities were encouraged to join. The

³⁷ *Kyrgyzstan: Na puti stanovleniya nezavisimosti* [Kyrgyzstan: In the Process of Formation of Independence] Askar Akayev’s selected speeches, Bishkek: Uchkun, 1995, p. 5.

Russian and Uyghur communities were especially active in the Assembly. As part of the ideological project, Akayev organized a gathering of the peoples of Kyrgyzstan in December 1993. The event accommodated representatives of Kyrgyzstan's biggest ethnic groups. Among them were Russian Orthodox clergy as well as leaders from Korean, Uyghur, Turkish, Kurdish, Tajik, Uzbek, Karachai, Azeri, Belarusian, and other communities. Renowned Kyrgyz scholars and writers also participated in the gathering which received widespread publicity in the local mass media. Using this ideology, Akayev's government also encouraged the formation of cultural centers representing various ethnic groups.

Table 1: *Ethnic Trends in Kyrgyzstan*³⁸

Ethnic Trends in Kyrgyzstan					
Ethnic group	1926 000 (%)	1959 '000 (%)	1970 '000 (%)	1989 '000 (%)	1998* '000 (%)
Kyrgyz	661.1 (66.7)	836.8 (40.5)	1284.7 (43.8)	2229.6 (52.3)	2836.8 (61.2)
Russians	116.4 (11.7)	623.5 (30.1)	855.9 (29.2)	916.5 (21.5)	690.9 (14.9)
Ukrainians	64.1 (6.4)	137.0 (6.6)	120.0 (4.1)	108.0 (2.5)	69.0 (1.5)
Uzbeks	109.7 (11.1)	218.8 (10.5)	332.9 (11.3)	550.0 (12.9)	666.3 (14.4)
Kazakhs	1.7 (0.2)	20.0 (0.9)	21.9 (0.7)	37.3 (0.9)	42.8 (0.92)
Tatars	4.9 (0.5)	56.2 (2.7)	68.8 (2.3)	70.0 (1.6)	58.2 (1.3)
Germans	4.2 (0.4)	39.9 (1.9)	89.8 (3.0)	101.3 (2.3)	15.3 (0.3)
Others	(3.0)	(6.8)	(5.6)	(6.0)	(5.7)
Total	989.9 (100)	2066.1 (100)	2933.2 (100)	4257.7 (100)	4634.9 (100)

* As of 1 January 1998.

In addressing the question of ethnic minorities, Akayev's civic-based ideology acknowledged the contribution of various ethnic groups towards the development of Kyrgyzstan during the Soviet era. He appealed especially to the Russian-speaking groups including the Russians, Germans, and Jews who

³⁸ Source: Ainura Elebayeva, et al., "The Shifting Identities and Loyalties in Kyrgyzstan: The Evidence from the Field," *Nationalities Papers*, 28 (2), 2000.

traditionally represented the highly educated urban population. Akayev expressed his thankfulness to the Russian minority by praising Russia's contribution to Kyrgyzstan's development in the 1920s whenever the issue of ethnicities in Kyrgyzstan was brought up in public discourse. He mentioned the importance of Russian influence in economic development as well as in introducing high standards of education and liberal culture to the local population. Kyrgyzstan's Germans were appreciated for importing international standards of agricultural planning, small industrial development, and hard work during the first German settlements in northern Kyrgyzstan in the late 19th century.³⁹ Akayev summarized his approach to ethnic minorities in the national ideology in the following manner:

...we need an elaborate ideology of international relations. In fact, it should be succinct and clear. I would suggest the following philosophy. Let's agree: Your country – is your home. The same with our Kyrgyzstan – it is our common home. Home with a capital letter. It is created, beloved and cultivated in its current appearance by those who live here. Its every brick is a memory of those who built the walls of our Home with a calloused hand...⁴⁰

The ideology of “Kyrgyzstan is Our Common Home,” as Akayev wrote it, was reinforced to prevent the outward migration of Slavic nationalities and Germans in the 1990s. In his address to the Assembly, Akayev declared that “people's hearts are at pain because our brothers are leaving – Russians, Germans, Jews, Ukrainians. From that our country is becoming only poorer.”⁴¹ Akayev's embracement of Russian culture was expressed in establishing the Russian language as a second national language and renaming the Kyrgyz-Slavic University after the former Russian President Boris Yeltsin – both were illustrative policies adopted by Akayev to welcome the expansion of Russian culture in the country. In fact, Kyrgyzstan's favorable attitudes towards Russia and Russian culture remained throughout the independence period. Unlike Akayev, his successor Kurmanbek Bakiyev

³⁹ Akayev's speech at the German Forum in Bishkek, 7 July 1992.

⁴⁰ Akayev's speech at Kyrgyzstan's People's Assembly in Bishkek, 22 January 1994.

⁴¹ Ibid.

was rather reluctant to emphasize the importance of Kyrgyz-Russian cultural relations, focusing primarily on political and economic ties.

In practice, however, Akayev's civic-based ideas were not as successful and persuasive as they appeared. Although Akayev pioneered the modern definition of citizenship in Kyrgyzstan and the Central Asian region, both Kyrgyz political elites and the public had difficulties in separating the ideas of citizenship, nationality, nation, and ethnicity. In addition, during the start of his reign his ideas conflicted with the legislative base of the country. Kyrgyzstan's constitution always contained the definition of a "titular nationality" and a "titular language" which referred to the ethnic Kyrgyz.

Attempts to embrace all ethnic groups into a common idea about the Kyrgyz nation-state inevitably exacerbated neo-nationalist politicized movements in the country. A number of parliamentarians were most predominant in voicing their critique, emphasizing what a terrible mistake it was to deny the nation's past in order to build a stable future.⁴² Such resistance to civic-based nationalism confirmed that some political elites despised Akayev's liberal ideas and that there were also more conservative views on what should constitute national ideological beliefs. Ultra-nationalist politicians called for the return of Kyrgyz cultural and religious traditions through cults of historical personas and periods. For example, Dastan Sarygulov, a well-known politician and businessman, is an active propagator of the pre-Islamic Tengrian period.⁴³ During his service as state secretary, Sarygulov published a number of books on Tengrism.

Manas-1000

To accommodate rising ethno-nationalist feelings in the mid-1990s, Akayev shifted the focus of his ideology to the Manas epic, the world's longest oral narration. A special governmental committee on cultural and educational affairs extracted seven maxims mentioned in the epic and included them in the official state ideology. Akayev emphasized the importance of Manas in

⁴² For instance, an ultra-rightist politician, Kyrgyz Ombudsman, Tursunbai Bakir Uulu in the early 2000s.

⁴³ Katarina Radzihovskaya, "Interview s Dastanov Sarygulovym 'Ot tengrianstva v gosudarstvennuy doktrinu Kirgizii mogli by voit...'", *Belyi parohod*, 25 July 2005.

his public openings and speeches, and authored a book dedicated to the epic.⁴⁴ A special state committee worked to promote the epic both among Kyrgyz citizens and abroad.

For the Kyrgyz government, the Manas epic represented a comfortable option for a national ideological framework. The epic captures imagined and real history of major inter-tribal and inter-ethnic battles and victories, delineates the different foes and friends of the Kyrgyz people and reflects the philosophy of national unity, and identifies the heroic actions of the main protagonist Manas and his followers. Manas is the ideal and collective image of what it means to be a male, warrior, defender of the motherland, exemplary son, husband and father. The epic depicts the Kyrgyz people's lifestyle and the value system of societal relations. The seven maxims captured in the epic were not only tools for the reconstruction of a national self-image among the Kyrgyz, but also called for generalized principles of ethnic tolerance, respect for elders and care for the youth, as well as other positive social obligations and principles. Thus, the maxims represented a comprehensive system of values and beliefs. Widely publicized, they included the following:

- Unity and solidarity of the nation
- International harmony, friendship and cooperation
- National dignity and patriotism
- Prosperity and welfare through painstaking and tireless labor
- Humanism, generosity, tolerance
- Harmony with nature
- Strengthening and protection of Kyrgyz statehood

By publicizing Manas's maxims, the government sought to achieve a two-fold goal. On the one hand, the maxims were meant to satisfy the demands of the nationalistically oriented segments of the public and political elites. The Manas ideals could aspire for a central role in Kyrgyzstan's national

⁴⁴ Askar Akayev, *Kyrgyzskaya gosudarstvennost' i narodnyi epos Manas* [Kyrgyz Statehood and National Epic Manas], Bishkek: Uchkun, 2002.

consciousness because of the epic's cultural richness and its grandiosity which reached a global scale. The ideology based on Manas emphasized that the epic is the world's longest oral narration, beating the length of other known epics. With that, its maxims did not contain any direct calls for ethnic nationalism or the prioritization of the Kyrgyz as an ethnic group. They were intended to be accepted by the entire population regardless of ethnic belonging since the Manas maxims portray more general values. However, as a result of this subtle dualism, neither group was satisfied by the Manas ideals.

In the summer of 1995, Akayev organized celebrations for Manas's symbolic 1,000th anniversary. Although the epic's hero is semi-mythic, the government mobilized artists and architects to produce and distribute images related to the narrative. Some images were borrowed from the Soviet depiction of the narrative, but a myriad of new versions were created as well. Among them, national dances, games, and theatres were staged in Talas, Manas's native city. The event's highlight was a giant three-story yurt, an exotic and grandiose construction built according to local perceptions. A new collection of medals and honorary titles renamed after Manas were introduced as well.

An important trait of Akayev's Manas ideology was abandoning his earlier pronouncement on the idea of citizenship as a central element of the state ideology. In his books and speeches on the significance of the Manas heritage in Kyrgyz national consciousness, Akayev argued that every nation has its own "genetic code" that was formed thousands of years ago.⁴⁵ The epic, he explained, was a physical representation of this type of "code" for the Kyrgyz.⁴⁶ Akayev compared the significance of the epic with the significance of the New Testament for Christians, hinting at its near-religious and mythic connotations for the Kyrgyz. According to Akayev, Manas helped the Kyrgyz nation link up to various historical periods and understand its importance in present day reality. The epic mentions various historical periods as well as geographical locations. Among them are China, India, the Crimea, and Hungary.

⁴⁵ Askar Akayev, *Trudnaya doroga k demokratii* [Difficult Road to Democracy], Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 2002, p 177.

⁴⁶ Askar Akayev, *Otkrovenny razgovor* [Frank Conversation], Moscow: Sovershenno sekretno, 1998, p. 24.

Akayev also linked the Manas epic with Kyrgyz's negative experience in the 1930s-40s, when the Soviet government massively repressed local intelligentsia. He argued that the persecution of Manas supporters was part of a broader campaign to suppress Kyrgyz nationalism. Akayev recalls the names of important political figures from that time who resisted the Party's pressure and continued to support the epic's popularity. Among those Akayev mentions is Iskhak Razzakov, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, who spoke out about the significance of Manas for the Kyrgyz nation.⁴⁷ Akayev also argues that Moscow perceived Manas apprehensively because the epic depicted Kyrgyz victories against the Chinese and therefore could have jeopardized Soviet-Chinese relations.

Akayev sought to publicize the Manas celebrations internationally. Numerous international guests were invited, mostly from Turkic countries, and several illustrated books were published and translated into foreign languages. The former president also promoted the epic by giving out printed versions at official meetings with foreign representatives.

Importantly, the celebration of Manas in 1995 coincided with the first presidential elections in independent Kyrgyzstan. By scheduling the event four months before the elections, Akayev mobilized political elites, scholars, artists, actors, and even the sporting community for the preparations. The involvement of virtually the entire public sector in staging the celebrations minimized the possibility of administrative support for other presidential candidates. Thus, Akayev also used Manas celebrations to prevail over his political allies and rivals. He claimed that he faced strong resistance from the parliament about holding elections in 1995. According to him, his allies in the government and parliament pressured him to organize a referendum and prolong his presidential term instead of holding elections. In his memoirs he wrote that he chose his own way despite external pressures and decided to hold elections in December 1995.⁴⁸ The major resistance, according to him, stemmed from communist ideologues who were against the idea of venerating Manas ideals. His main rival at that time was Absamat

⁴⁷ Akayev, *Kyrgyzskaya gosudarstvennost' i narodnyi epos Manas*.

⁴⁸ Akayev, *Trudnaya doroga k demokratii*, p. 187-188.

Masaliyev, former Secretary of the Kyrgyz Communist Party and then an MP, who still had significant weight in political circles and opposed the growing nationalism. While promoting Manas, Akayev adjusted his definition of state nationalism by treating anyone opposing the Manas ideology as unpatriotic. Similar techniques – arranging grand celebrations in the wake of presidential elections – were used by all the other Central Asian presidents. In 2006 Rakhmon organized several celebrations just weeks before the presidential elections.

In the 1995 presidential elections Masaliyev scored 80 percent of votes in southern Kyrgyzstan, his native region. Losing the south convinced Akayev to pay more attention to Osh city. Shortly before the presidential elections in 2000, Akayev organized celebrations of the 3,000th anniversary of Osh. Celebrating Osh's anniversary was indeed a symbolic event with Kyrgyz and Russian historians presenting evidence about the first written mentions of the city in a runic script from about the 6th century B.C.⁴⁹ However, these archeological findings and the course of the city's development throughout millennia are a subject for various interpretations and further historical investigations. What remains clear, however, is Akayev's efforts to build up a powerful argument to emphasize the southern city's importance in the current statehood. Both the "Osh-3000" celebrations as well as the separation of Batken city from the Osh oblast in the aftermath of the conflicts with the IMU guerillas pointed to the government's growing concern about the southern regions of the country. Akayev also felt pressure from the Uzbek minority in the south which sought stronger autonomy and better representation in public institutions.

After the 1995 elections, Kyrgyzstan's economy showed some signs of recovery following protracted crisis in the early 1990s. Akayev was quick to associate these positive developments with the overall strengthening of the

⁴⁹ For instance, books by known historians Semenov G.L. "Zamki Semirech'ya: Osh i Ferghana v istoricheskoi perspektive" [Castles of Semirechye: Osh and Ferghana in Historical Perspective], Bishkek: Muras 2000; Kutimov, Yu.G. "Osh-3000 i kul'turnoe nasledie narodov Kyrgyzstana" [Osh and Cultural Legacy of Kyrgyzstan Peoples], St. Petersburg; Zadneprovsky, Yu. A. "Spornye voprosy krasnoangobirovannoi keramiki Fergany" [Disputed Questions in Ferghana Ceramics], St. Petersburg. The Osh-3,000 idea was harshly criticized by several Kyrgyz academics, including Salijan Jigitov, a writer from Kyrgyzstan, at *ResPublica*, November 5, 2002.

national consciousness and saw the power of the Manas ideals which was spreading thanks to the grand celebrations in 1995.⁵⁰ By analyzing economic growth, he wrote that the “people’s spiritual uplift is able to do miracles.”⁵¹ By contrast, Akayev blamed global financial processes in Asia and Russia for the sudden slowdown of Kyrgyzstan’s economy in the late 1990s.

However, despite the epic’s evident richness in historical facts about Kyrgyz culture and history and its potential value for developing national consciousness, neither the Manas maxims nor the epic itself had managed to gain wide consent among the public. Although the name “Manas” was used to rename main streets and buildings in cities, and even though the government organized a large celebration in 1995 dedicated to the epic and provided young “manaschy” (people who know the epic by heart) with state scholarships, the ideals of Manas did not resonate among the wider public, especially in the mainly Russian-speaking capital Bishkek. This is because Manas bears a profoundly ethno-centric identification of patriotism and emphasizes a spirit of defending the Kyrgyz nation from outsiders while befriending neighboring nationalities. The ideology based on Manas encouraged the use of the Kyrgyz language and the return of national traditions. Among the russified public and ethnic minorities the ideology of Manas was associated with a state-imposed idea and as an unnatural way for contemporary national identity to develop. The epic was perceived as an ethnically discriminating story which was not relevant to the present day. It raised discontent among Russians and lowered their trust in the state. The civic-based policy “Kyrgyzstan is our common home” competed with Manas as an ideology and enjoyed greater popularity in these sectors of the population.

2,200th Anniversary of Kyrgyz Statehood

Despite the difficulties encountered with popularizing Manas, the epic provided a prolific groundwork for transforming the national ideology into a more generalized and less ethno-centric project in the early 2000s. Amid his rapidly decreasing popularity at home, economic underdevelopment, and

⁵⁰ Akayev, *Trudnaya doroga k demokratii*, p. 192-193.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

rampant corruption, Akayev moved to another major ideological project that emphasized the ancient history of Kyrgyz statehood, the “2,200 years of Kyrgyz civilization.” The project was developed during controversial third term of Akayev’s presidency, when there was widespread public acknowledgement of the pervasive involvement of his family members in the country’s economy. Kyrgyzstan’s domestic stability was also shaken by repeated violent outbreaks of terrorist guerilla activities on the border with Tajikistan in 1999 and 2000. The national security structures were unable to efficiently resist intrusions instigated by the IMU, causing the Kyrgyz side to suffer vast human and financial losses. The local mass media outlets saw the Kyrgyz security structures’ poor responses to the terrorist outbreaks as signs of diminishing national sovereignty.

The “2,200 years of Kyrgyz civilization” project was also widely criticized by the public. It turned into a theme for jokes about the actual economic and political developments of the country as opposed to the ideology’s far-reaching ambition. Although the project was broadly promoted across the country, perhaps it was the least popular of all projects developed by Akayev. The former president’s own falling popular approval rating also played a negative role. With the “2,200 years of Kyrgyz civilization” Akayev hoped to improve public support in the wake of the 2005 presidential elections, which did not take place because of the change of regimes in March that year. The project failed to conceal or downplay the shortcomings of Akayev’s regime.

Neither Akayev nor the current Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev sought to bring nomadism into the cultural discourse on national ideology. Like Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Akayev avoided comparisons of nomadic and sedentary life-styles that were present in the Central Asian region. This coincides with Nazarbayev’s appeals not to associate national mentality with the nomadic culture that was prevalent on the territory of modern Kazakhstan until the 19th century.⁵² Such reluctance to embrace nomadic life as a part of national history is embedded in the Soviet academic tradition, which treated nomadism as a regressive phenomenon that had

⁵² Nursultan Nazarbaev, *My stroim novoe gosudarstvo* [We are Building a New State], Moscow: Paleya-Mishin, 2000, p 266.

reached its stalemate in the late 19th century.⁵³ Because, according to this tradition, nomadic culture has little to contribute to the idea of a unified modern nation-state, the president emphasized that local settled communities had been reinforcing the Kazakh national identity for many centuries.⁵⁴ Accordingly, the preservation of ethnic Kazakh cultural values, language, and religion in the pre- and Soviet periods testifies to its maturity and ability to function as a modern society.

Social Reforms as National Projects

Besides grand national ideological projects, Akayev designed a number of short-term projects that were aimed at raising public awareness of social and environmental issues. These projects included a series of one-year campaigns addressing social issues such as poverty reduction, gender inequality, social support for the elderly, environmental problems, and tourism. These issues were selected to respond to social anxieties, as opposed to cultivating national pride. The projects consisted of extensive PR campaigns in mass media outlets and in the streets of large cities. The existence of a background ideological concept, such as “Kyrgyzstan is Our Common Home,” created an image of a continuity of political, economic, and social processes.

The year 1996, which was dedicated to gender issues, was the most successful in terms of how the government’s rhetoric coincided with the implementation of effective projects. The government’s PR campaign during 1996 emphasized the fact that in the gender equality index, Kyrgyzstan occupied the world’s number two rank after Sweden. At that time women represented 30 percent of Kyrgyzstan’s top public positions and almost 19 percent of ministerial cabinet positions (the world average then was 6 percent).⁵⁵ Throughout 1996, various powerful historical heroines, mythic or real, were venerated in public campaigns. Among them were the goddess Umai Ene, Manas’s wife Kanykey, and a renowned political figure of the 19-20th century, Kurmanzhan Datka. Numerous women NGOs were founded as

⁵³ Khalid, “Between Empire and Revolution.”

⁵⁴ Nazarbayev, *My stroim novoe gosudarstvo*, p. 386.

⁵⁵ Akayev, *Otkrovenny razgovor*, p. 34.

well. Akayev's other social reforms that were combined with ideological thinking were less effective.

In 2004, when Akayev's public standing had reached a low point, he initiated a national project "Clean Hands" dealing with corruption. But similar to previous anti-corruption projects initiated by Akayev's government, the proclaimed fight against corruption did not lead to any sizeable outcomes.

Shortly after being elected in 2005, Bakiyev began to actively promote reforms of the nutrition system in elementary schools. But this initiative was perceived skeptically by the public. The Ministry of Education was mocked for dealing with rather insignificant issues and failing to carry out more consistent reforms. Since Bakiyev had a background in the agricultural sector, he also paid attention to the problems of the rural areas. However, his efforts were highly criticized because they lacked a broader framework for the development of the agricultural sector. Gender representation records worsened in the mid 2000s under the reign of Bakiyev. In early 2007, the government and parliament, comprised exclusively of male representatives, discussed the issue of removing polygamy from the criminal code. The Minister of Justice, Marat Kaiypov, suggested that polygamy should be a matter of moral judgment and could potentially reduce poverty and prostitution.⁵⁶ Thus, a decade after celebrating Kyrgyzstan's high performance in gender representation in the mid-1990s, the Kyrgyz political establishment reverted to a deeply traditional stance.

The Post-Akayev Period

Following the March 2005 Tulip Revolution and the establishment of a more decentralized system of governance in Kyrgyzstan, the discourse on national ideologies was actively maintained by several individuals. Among them are the State Secretary Adakhan Madumarov and Dastan Sarygulov. In the course of two years both politicians produced and widely publicized their own concepts on national ideologies. While Madumarov sought to introduce Western concepts of citizenship into the ideology, Sarygulov managed to use

⁵⁶ *Akipress*, 27 February 2007.

the cult of Tengrism in his ethno-centric ideas.⁵⁷ In his promotion of Tengrism, Sarygolov treated Tengri and Islam as two separate religions among Turkic peoples. He particularly focused on selected components from the Tengrian period, ignoring some other known cults that existed along with the Tengri god, such as Umai Ene, the goddess of life and fertility, and Erklik, representation of death and hell.

In the past few years Kyrgyz scholars have published dozens of books on national history and its importance in state-building. However, most of these works relied on identical sources primarily collected by Russian or Soviet scholars. The historiographical scholarship, therefore, was similar in its research approach, but contained slight variation in interpretation. In 2006, Toguzakov and Ploskih, Kyrgyzstan's famous historians, attempted to develop their own interpretation of the national ideology. Their interpretation of a nation largely reflected the Soviet academic tradition and defined the Kyrgyz nation from a primordial and autochthonous perspective.⁵⁸

The central theme of Akayev's books always remained the cultural and historical sophistication of the Kyrgyz as an ethnic group. In *Kyrgyz Statehood and the National Epic 'Manas's*, for instance, Akayev links the idea of present-day Kyrgyzstan with events that took place centuries ago: "By analyzing our multi-century history, I am more and more convinced in the notion that a great national idea about [our] own statehood not only appeared among our ancestors, but was also fulfilled in life. Since then it was rooted in the mass consciousness of the Kyrgyz."⁵⁹ Akayev argued that the idea of Kyrgyz statehood continued to mature for centuries and ended in the "successful" and "historically significant" emergence of Kyrgyz modern statehood in 1991. The independence from the Soviet Union, he writes, was a desirable and inevitable historical development for Kyrgyzstan.

⁵⁷ Marlene Laruelle presents an excellent study of the revival of Tengrism in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere, "Religious revival, nationalism and the 'invention of tradition': political Tengrism in Central Asia and Tatarstan", *Central Asian Survey*, 26(2), 2007.

⁵⁸ Janybek Jeenbayev et al. "O koncepcii gosudarstvennoi ideologii Kyrgyzstana" [On the Concept of State Ideology in Kyrgyzstan], *Analitika.org*, 24 January 2006.

⁵⁹ Askar Akayev, *Kyrgyzskaya gosudarstvennost' i narodnyi epos Manas*, p. 19.

Besides developing national ideological projects geared towards the local public, Akayev managed to cultivate a peculiar international image for Kyrgyzstan. During the first few years of his presidency, Akayev promulgated the notion of Kyrgyzstan being a “Switzerland of Central Asia” and an “Island of Democracy” in the Central Asian region. Both concepts played an important role in Kyrgyzstan’s appeal for the allocation of international investment and credit in its private and public sectors. This positive external image also boosted the local public’s confidence in the regime. The belief in the possibility of democratic development and the international community’s support for reforms in the early 1990s set a precedent for Kyrgyzstan’s further move towards liberal reforms. However, these internationally popular concepts about Kyrgyzstan were later largely abandoned by the local and international public after Akayev began suppressing the opposition in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

After Akayev was ousted as a result of popular protests on March 24, 2005 and Bakiyev succeeded him, both positive concepts about Kyrgyzstan’s course towards democracy were largely forgotten by the new government. This was not due to Bakiyev’s less democratic policies or more obvious corruption, but because his government stopped supporting the ideological concepts developed by Akayev. Bakiyev was able to gain quick but short-lived popularity due to his anti-corruption slogans. He received roughly 90 percent of the vote in the July 2005 presidential elections due to his political alliance with Felix Kulov, opposition leader during Akayev’s regime. With such high public support, he did not make any attempts to reconstruct old or construct new ideological projects. In contrast to Akayev’s regime, Bakiyev ignored the power of national ideology in preserving his own legitimacy and popularity.⁶⁰

Partly because of the Soviet regime’s strong ideological indoctrination and partly because of Akayev’s ardent attempts to create a unifying national idea, the Kyrgyz public expected Bakiyev’s regime to come up with an alternative ideological project. The irony of post-March 2005 Kyrgyzstan is that although the state and society functioned in a relatively open environment and

⁶⁰ Erica Marat, “Kyrgyz Government Unable to Produce New National Ideology,” *Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst*, 22 February 2006.

ideological production was a fairly dynamic process, most projects have nevertheless always been initiated by the ruling elite. The State Secretary always had the official responsibility of developing national ideology, but civil society and academic elites sought participation in promoting their own understanding of a national ideology during Akayev's reign. Thus, the Kyrgyz public remained skeptical about any ideological projects produced by the government. This led to a situation where society was expecting the state to be the main source of ideological production, but at the same time refused to accept any of the state's constructs.

Bakiyev's ignorance about the need to meet society's expectations and produce some overarching ideational rationale for his political course is comparable to the general inefficiency of his government in carrying out economic and administrative reforms. Already after a year into his presidency, the possibility that he might be forced to leave his position before his first term expired in 2010 was debated among Kyrgyzstan's political circles. Realizing his rapidly falling popularity and being aware that a mass upheaval was capable of ousting an unwanted political leader, Bakiyev was nonetheless reluctant to make any visible efforts to boost the economy and curb corruption. He seemed to be unable to and disinterested in designing long-term policies, including ideologies. While Akayev hoped to hold on to the presidency for the longest period possible and perhaps pass his power on to his family members, Bakiyev's low popularity already a year after the Tulip Revolution made it clear that he would be unable to be reelected in 2010. Akayev's search for a suitable ideology was influenced by his fluctuating domestic popular approval rating in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In contrast, Bakiyev's negative image at home failed to motivate the president to design popular political concepts altogether.

Bakiyev created a special committee responsible for producing a new ideological project. The committee included scholars, civil society activists, and politicians. After functioning for roughly two years, the committee failed to publicize any fresh project. The committee members were reluctant to develop ideological projects due to the lack of motivation and organizational coherence. In August 2007, Madumarov declared that the ideological committee decided to shift away from the term "ideology" and

replace it with a concept of a “nationwide idea.”⁶¹ As Madumarov claims, the Kyrgyz people will realize that the state should not be the main producer of national ideologies. The national idea will be based on constitutional principles and represent a type of document. The main values of the “national idea” will primarily include “statehood, nationwide unity, people, the state power’s character, the rule of law, country, patriotism, self-realization, freedom and economy... the main goal – is freedom of speech.”⁶² In essence, the ideological committee embraced Western values of democracy without hinting at any ethnocentrism or nationalism. After Madumarov officially presented his national ideology concept he was harshly criticized by most independent mass media outlets for his clumsy formulations and incoherence.⁶³ The critics raised the fundamental question whether Kyrgyzstan still needs a national ideology and, more importantly, the position of state secretary.

A number of Kyrgyz politicians are actively pushing Tengrism, an ancient Turkic religion dating to the fourth century B.C., to fill the ideological void. Sarygulov, formerly state secretary and chair of the Kyrgyz state gold mining company, has established “Tengir Ordo,” a civic group that seeks to promote the values and traditions of the Tengrian period in modern Kyrgyzstan.⁶⁴ Tengrism, according to Sarygulov, is the genuine religion of the Kyrgyz and helped the people to survive throughout the centuries. In his interpretation, Tengrism promotes an anti-capitalist lifestyle and is a natural response to the problems caused by globalization: “The time has come to get rid of external influences – to lift barriers, the inferiority complex, and centuries of humiliation.”⁶⁵ Sarygulov found support among Kyrgyzstan’s communists who embraced his ideas. Anarbek Usupbayev, secretary of the Kyrgyz Communist Party, saw resilient similarities between values of Tengrism and communism, such as social justice and equality.⁶⁶ Usupbayev also tried to

⁶¹ 24.kg, 2 March 2007.

⁶² 24.kg, 2 March 2007.

⁶³ 24.kg, 3 August 2007; *Moya stolica novosti*, 31 July 2007; *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 27 July 2007, etc.

⁶⁴ Erica Marat, “High-Ranking Kyrgyz Official Proposes New National Ideology”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 6 December 2005.

⁶⁵ *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 22 July 2005.

⁶⁶ *Bely parohod*, 31 May 2005; *Moya stolitsa novosti*, 9 November 2005.

draw parallels between Tengrism and the Manas epic, which he refers to as the "Kyrgyz Bible." Supporters of Tengrism do not deny that as a national doctrine, it will represent mainly pan-Turkic and even pan-Kyrgyz views.

The current Kyrgyz president's failure to develop a national ideology is a rather uncommon development in the Central Asian context. Today Kyrgyzstan is the only country in the region that lacks a state-fostered ideology. There is, however, a high risk that any ideological project developed under the reign of Bakiyev is bound to fail due to his low popularity. These kinds of dynamics in the realm of ideology production means that Akayev was the country's main ideologue. His ability to express ideas not only popularly, but also academically, while enjoying the status of president overshadowed other elites' attempts to construct national ideologies. Despite the strong criticism of his regime, not all of his ideological projects are bound to fail. His three main ideologies of "Kyrgyzstan is Our Common Home," "Manas -1,000," and "2,200 Years of Kyrgyz Statehood" are often used as references in the analysis of stages in nation- and state-building processes in the country.

The Bakiyev government's rather passive attention to issues of national ideology pushed local civil society groups towards engaging more actively in public discussions about what a new ideological project should contain. Several NGO representatives from the state ideological committee participated in debates outside of the committee's meetings. For instance, in January 2007 the NGO "Citizens for Democracy and against Corruption" staged a demonstration in central Bishkek against the violation of ethnic minority rights, thus promoting the importance of civil rights in national politics. Given that the record of civil rights abuses in Kyrgyzstan is rather mild (with neighboring countries having worse records), such a movement testified to society's active engagement in political affairs. Following the Tulip Revolution in March 2005, Kyrgyzstan's civil society groups noticeably increased in numbers and scope of activities. However, along with high civic activism, Kyrgyzstan today is drowned in political populism voiced by various civic and political groups, as well as individual advocates. Most civic activists condemn the divide between political elites into northern and southern clans or pressure the government to fight corruption. Especially,

anti-corruption slogans and warnings over the north-south divide allowed numerous political actors to quickly gain popularity. Meanwhile, although Kyrgyzstan's political domain is filled with populism and loud voices, progress towards meaningful changes in the state's functioning and state-society relations is rather sluggish.

The increased participation of the Kyrgyz public in discussions of prospective national ideological projects was also evident from the local mass media outlets' extensive focus on the issue. A number of political officials expressed their views on what the new national idea should represent. Their views received numerous responses in internet forums. Although it is difficult to come up with any systematic conclusion on the Kyrgyz public's attitudes towards any particular ideological project in the past few years, since no such research has been conducted, an overview of local mass media outlets suggests that the public desires to have a "national father" with high moral values and strong patriotism who would encourage economic revival and cultivate national pride.⁶⁷ This yearning arises amid continuous political turbulence in the post-March 24 period. Some Kyrgyz express worries that the nation is disintegrating because of widespread organized crime, nepotism, and corruption that also affects the country's international image. Furthermore, there is a collective understanding that massive public mobilization can play a meaningful role in changing the government's policies. Thus, an ideological void during Bakiyev's regime is likely to continue to be part of the president's negative image.

Bakiyev often emphasized how competition among northern and southern political elites fostered corruption and labeled it as the cause of ineffective governance in Kyrgyzstan. A native of southern Kyrgyzstan, Bakiyev sought legitimacy by reminding the public that northern Kyrgyzstan long suppressed southern elites. The idea of a north-south divide in the country has almost become the main definition of the Kyrgyz nation in the post-March 24 period, as it was actively promulgated by pro-regime politicians.

⁶⁷ Among many others, this view was expressed by Muratbek Imanaliyev, former Foreign Minister and head of the movement Zhany Bagyt (New Direction), "Ideologiya, kotoraya mozhet ob'edinit' ludei – eto romanticheskii natsionalizm" [The Ideology that Can Unite the People Is Romantic Nationalism], *Posit.kg*, accessed on 30 January 2006.

Between Russia and the ‘Rest’

Seventeen years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia is still regarded as a historical partner both in Bishkek and Dushanbe. Unlike more negative re-evaluations of the Russian influence in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, Russia is associated with economic and cultural development in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Fluency in the Russian language and familiarity with Russian literature are considered hallmarks of cosmopolitanism and a quality education. Studying at Moscow universities is popular among young Kyrgyz and Tajiks. Russia sporadically supports cultural exchange programs, and Moscow regards Russian TV channels as important transmitters of Russian language and culture throughout the Central Asian region.

Among other post-Soviet states, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan remain especially loyal to the Kremlin. Cooperation with Russia in economic, political or cultural fields is frequently embraced in appraisals of the formidable historical links with the stronger neighbor. Both countries have Slavic universities that enjoy high popularity due to support from Moscow. Akayev summed this ideational connection between Bishkek and Moscow as “Russia is given [to Kyrgyzstan] by God.” In Tajikistan, Russia is associated with peacekeeping efforts during the civil war. Moscow’s intervention in the Tajik civil war is mostly regarded as a positive development. Yet some Tajik experts take a more negative view, criticizing the Kremlin for pursuing its own interests and pointing out that some Russian military servicemen are pervasively involved in drug trafficking.⁶⁸

After Bakiyev came to power, ethno-nationalist views among the public intensified. These nationalist moods were mainly directed in favor of, or against, international players present in Kyrgyzstan, among them Russia and the U.S. The government’s abandonment of a minimal degree of nationalism created an ideological void that was felt in the public’s frustration with the allegedly increasing Western influence in the country. Kyrgyzstan’s possibility to join the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) designed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank revealed some of the most radical divides in society’s attitudes towards the Russian

⁶⁸ Author’s interview with a Tajik NGO representative, Dushanbe, March 2004.

and Western presence. Shortly after the announcement of Kyrgyzstan's perspective membership in the initiative, the decision gained a deeply nationalistic undertone. The HIPC was associated with Western hegemony over the country, and any display of support for the HIPC was equated with anti-patriotism and betrayal to American politics. A series of protests with graphic images against the HIPC were staged at various locations in Bishkek. As the HIPC in Kyrgyzstan was discussed, local NGOs played a pivotal role in mobilizing society and pressuring the government against the initiative. Kyrgyz civil society groups used slogans of national pride to counter allegations of Western usurpation, thus ascribing the issue a political meaning, rather than regarding it as a purely economic project. The activists used all possible means to reproduce their message through mass media outlets, street protests, and parliamentary lobbying.

Such a negative perception of the international, mainly Western, community's engagement with local politics would not have been possible without a pervasive influence of the Russian mass media. The vast majority of Kyrgyzstan's mass media outlets are published and broadcast in the Russian language. Only a handful of newspapers and TV channels use Kyrgyz as their main language. The Kyrgyz government heavily controls channel KTR, which is the only media outlet that broadcasts across the entire country. About a dozen Russian TV channels enjoy widespread popularity in Bishkek, where more than 20 percent of the country's five million residents live. Most Kyrgyz get their international news reports from the Russian state-run channels ORT and RTR, which also broadcast popular entertainment programs.

Since most Russian mass media outlets usually promulgate pro-Kremlin views, the Kyrgyz public's perception of world affairs are similar to those held by Russian citizens. The Russian mass media was especially successful in building pro-Kremlin attitudes toward the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, and the war in Chechnya. They also propagate Russian President Vladimir Putin's image as a strong-minded pragmatic politician. As a result, the Kyrgyz public's trust in Russian policies in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia is higher compared to their trust in the West.

In May 2007, opposition leader and former Prime Minister Felix Kulov asked the Kyrgyz Central Election Commission to organize a national referendum on the issue of a Kyrgyz-Russian confederation. Kulov's proposal was received with great skepticism both in Kyrgyzstan and Russia. But while it is currently unpopular, the suggestion comes amid mounting public discontent with the U.S. military base in Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital. Kulov's idea pushed the limits of pro-Russian views among political circles in Kyrgyzstan. Although many in Kyrgyzstan find Kulov's idea absurd, most Kyrgyz citizens agree that today Russia is the country's key strategic partner. Support for greater integration with Russia is noticeable across all generations and occupations. Some believe that while the U.S. presence in Kyrgyzstan is temporary, links with Russia are historical and therefore more stable. On various occasions Parliament Speaker Marat Sultanov has mentioned the need to return Russian border guards to Kyrgyzstan in order to increase control over Kyrgyzstan's frontiers. According to Sultanov, Kyrgyzstan is not capable of guarding its own borders effectively.

Kulov chose such a pro-Russian line primarily to increase his own political standing. Among the Central Asian states, Kyrgyz political officials seek power by subordinating their country to Russia rather than promoting national sovereignty. For example, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, both with strong Russian political and economic influence, maintain a fundamentally different approach toward Russia. While acknowledging the importance of links with Russia, the governments of both states emphasize their country's ethnic identity and sovereignty. Kulov appealed to patriotic feelings to promote his idea. He suggested that Kyrgyzstan would solve its most pressing problems by joining Russia, including the north-south divide and economic underdevelopment. Kulov also brought in historical arguments highlighting the 150 years of Kyrgyz-Russian diplomatic relations.

Conclusions

Among Central Asian leaders, Akayev was the most elaborate in moving away from Soviet historiographical traditions towards recognition of the separate concepts of citizenship, nationality, and ethnicity. By recognizing the ethnic minorities living in Kyrgyzstan, Akayev urged them to associate

themselves as citizens. He tried to maintain a balance between ethno-centric and civic-based ideas by designing a number of different ideological projects. Due to Akayev's liberal approach to ethnic minorities, Kyrgyzstan was considered to be among the most welcoming countries for Russian and other ethnicities in the post-Soviet space. However, Akayev still used ideological projects to mobilize the state apparatus to work for the continuity of his own hold on power. His celebrations of the Manas epic, Osh 3,000, and 2,200 years of Kyrgyz statehood were used strategically to generate support before the presidential elections in 1995, 2000, and 2005, respectively. Although his ideological projects received extensive criticism from the domestic public, Akayev was Kyrgyzstan's main ideologue. Bakiyev, in contrast, has underestimated the role of state ideologies. This contributed to the intensification of divisions between northern and southern political elites. On the other hand, Bakiyev's ignorance has also spurred local civil society groups to participate in designing ideas for national unification.

Post-Soviet Ideologies in Tajikistan

Tajikistan's experience in producing national ideological projects deviates from that of other Central Asian states. It is a highly complicated case of intermixed ideological thinking, in which the Tajik government refrained from playing a leading role for a long time.⁶⁹ As Rustam Shukurov argues, the active phase of ethno-nationalist mobilization in Tajikistan coincided with the Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan, when Tajik conscripts were recruited by the Soviet army en masse for their knowledge of the area, Farsi language, and culture.⁷⁰ Since this was the first time Soviet Tajiks had been heavily exposed to their Afghani neighbors, Shukurov writes that "Tajik interpreters were genuinely shocked to realize that the Soviet troops are killing not strange foreigners in Afghanistan, but Tajiks similar to them."⁷¹ At the same time, Tajik conscripts contributed to the import of Iranian and Afghan literature with both a secular and religious context into Tajikistan. The spread of imported literature by "renowned poets and philosophers (Rumi, Attora, Sanoi and tens of others)" provoked reflections among Tajiks about their own culture and history, and the influence of the Soviet regime.⁷²

Today, Tajikistan's two major political forces – Rakhmon's regime and the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) – compete over whose views will play a more dominant role in the national ideology. Although both the government and the opposition have developed a culture of dialogue since the end of the 1992-1997 civil war, they nevertheless vie for their own ideational domination among the masses.⁷³ The complexity of the Tajik identity, according to Shukurov, includes divides into confessional belonging, citizenry, and the place of birth. The confessional separation among Tajiks includes the

⁶⁹ The Tajik government became increasingly repressive of democratic freedoms in the aftermath of the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005.

⁷⁰ Shukurov, "Tadzhikistan", p.234.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 235.

⁷² Ibid., p. 249

⁷³ Pulat Shozimov, "Tajikistan's 'Year of Aryan Civilization' and the Competition of Ideologies", *Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst*, 5 October 2005.

majority of Sunni Muslims and a much smaller denomination of Shia Muslims mainly in the Pamiris. Ethnic Tajiks live in neighboring Central Asian states and therefore have Uzbek, Afghan, and Kyrgyz citizenship. The complexity of Tajik identity is also exacerbated by the place of birth, whether in southern or northern parts of Tajikistan or in neighboring countries. According to Shukurov, Aini's works are widely used in interpreting the content of Tajik identity today. Especially his *Images of the Tajik Literature* from 1926 provides historical and philosophical grounds for the definition of Tajiks as a united people and a distinct ethnic group based on the historical narrative of the Tajik ethnos.⁷⁴ The government's use of Aini's contribution to narrating the history and content of the Tajiks as an ethnic group today shows the importance of Farsi literature in Tajikis' identity.

In general, since the end of the civil war in 1997, Rakhmon has promulgated three broad projects based on the Samanids historical legacy, Zoroastrian period, and the Aryan civilization. All of his projects are similar in the way that they have aimed at marginalizing the role of Islam and the Islamic opposition in state politics. Rakhmon counterweighted the importance of a secular state with the possibility of renewed hostilities and bloodshed with the religious opposition. According to him, separating religion from politics is a guaranteed path to stability. In his book *Tajikistan at the Threshold of the 21st Century*, he maintains that "for the purposes of preserving peace in Tajikistan, today there is no need for politically charged religious ideology that contains the danger of drastic, catastrophic changes in people's lives."⁷⁵ Rakhmon accused religious radical forces of instigating the war in 1992, while refusing to identify specific actors among these forces.

In order to promote secularism in politics, Rakhmon has been willing to tolerate the fact that parts of the population still support the Communist Party – one of the main political forces in Tajikistan – emphasizing that the Communists are secular. The Communist Party currently claims to have about 40,000 members, but some local experts estimate that membership has

⁷⁴ Shukurov, "Tadzhikistan", p. 237.

⁷⁵ Emomali Rakhmonov, *Tadjikistan na poroge XXI veka* [Tajikistan at the Threshold of the XXI Century], Dushanbe: Sharq ozod, 2001, pp 50-51, p. 6.

significantly shrunk in recent years and does not exceed 20,000 people.⁷⁶ Even though in the aftermath of the Soviet Union the Tajik Communists inherited a vast infrastructure with members spread throughout the country and offices located in virtually every village, the party is only a nominal structure with insignificant leverage over political processes. Realizing its weakness, Rakhmon's government has not hindered its functioning. The Communists, like other political parties in Tajikistan, represent a "loyal opposition" to Rakhmon.

Since 1997, Rakhmon organized celebrations for a number of national ideological projects, particularly before the November 2006 presidential elections. Two months before the elections, Tajikistan's grand celebrations included: a celebration of 2,700 years of Kulyab, Rakhmon's native region; the promotion of the Aryan civilization⁷⁷; assemblies of all Tajiks and Farsi-speaking people; and Tajikistan's independence day. All celebrations and ideological projects noted the cultural role of Tajiks in Persian and Turkic civilizations. Tajik academicians and the president himself sought historical evidence for ascertaining the validity of these anniversaries. As Rakhmon writes: "In the span of their long history the Tajiks made a substantial contribution to the world culture. They take pride in such great names as Rudaki – the father of Tajik literature, Firdusi – the great poet, Abu Ali Sina – the founder of Eastern medicine and well known poets of the world Hafiz, Omar Khayam, Nosir Khoustrav, Jami, Rumi, Saadi."⁷⁸

In the late 1990s the Tajik government and IRP stressed the importance of various concepts in their constructions of ideologies.⁷⁹ While the government emphasized the idea of statehood, the IRP focused on the role of Islam. Government-opposition competition over the construction of national ideology was especially evident in their interpretation of the importance of

⁷⁶ Author's interview with a Tajik opposition leader, Dushanbe, June 2006.

⁷⁷ Rakhmon is originally from Dangra of the Kulyam oblast.

⁷⁸ Emomali Rakhmonov, *Tajik People in the Reflection of the History*, Dushanbe: Irfon, 1999, p. 109.

⁷⁹ Pulat Shozimov, presentation on Tajikistan at SAIS, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC, USA, 4 March 2005.

the Samanid dynasty in Tajik history.⁸⁰ The period of the Samanids in 819-1005, which witnessed the Central Asian region being ruled by a Tajik empire with Bukhara as the capital, is remembered as a great Islamic dynasty.⁸¹ The government's attempts to weave the Samanid epoch into the collective consciousness symbolized its effort to accentuate the importance of the strong Tajik statehood that politically dominated the region at that time. In 2001 the Tajik government initiated a celebration of the 1,100th anniversary of the Samanid Empire. Rakhmon's official stance was that the "Samanid epoch – golden age of Tajiks – enlightens thousands of years of their history," and that "there emerged the idea working for the unifying of Tajiks."⁸²

Starting from the early 2000s, Rakhmon stressed the need to draw parallels between the Samanid's statehood and the current state-building processes in Tajikistan. In this discourse, Rakhmon emphasized the Samanid dynasty's stability which was able to overcome external pressures. Like Akayev's argument on the importance of the historical idea about Kyrgyz national statehood in today's reality, Rakhmon was keen on linking the Samanid era with the present day. He argued that although the Samanid dynasty collapsed, the idea of Tajik statehood prevailed in the national consciousness through the centuries, and argued the significance of the language of state administration in Central Asia having been Farsi.⁸³ However, the Samanid period did not lead to the creation of an integral paradigm about the Tajik state that would be somewhat instrumental today. Since Rakhmon's approach to Samanid's legacy represented scrutinized attention and interpretation of selected events and individuals of that particular epoch, the project suffered from a sloppy ignorance of the importance of other historical periods before and after the Samanid dynasty.

In parallel, the IRP, representing a religious alliance of anti-governmental forces, used the Samanid epoch to draw a link with current Islamic identity among Tajiks. However, the opposition's voice was much quieter. The IRP

⁸⁰ Shozimov, "Tajikistan's 'Year of Aryan Civilization' and the Competition of Ideologies."

⁸¹ Rahim Masov, *Tadjiki: Vytesnenie i assimiliatsiya* [The Tajiks: Displacement and Assimilation], Dushanbe: Tajik National Museum, 2003.

⁸² Rakhmonov, *Tadjikistan na paroge XXI veka*, pp. 50-51.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

lacked the means and opportunities to spread its own interpretation of historical events. The competition between Rakhmon and the opposition only lasted until the parliamentary elections in February 2005, when the IRP won only two seats. The elections signified that Rakhmon's PDP, which enjoyed access to public administrative resources, was able to suppress other political parties.

In developing ideological projects, Rakhmon arguably tried to alienate northern elites from political and economic power.⁸⁴ Being a native of Kulyab, Rakhmon emphasized the ancientness of the city along with its cultural pureness. A number of pro-presidential politicians argued that Kulyab must become the national capital due to its historical heritage. However, Tajikistan's northern elites, who had traditionally occupied leadership positions before Rakhmon came to power, criticized the government for discriminating against other Tajiks. Kulyabi Tajiks were accused of considering themselves as ethnically the most pure compared to populations from other regions.⁸⁵ Despite accumulating discontent among Tajik political elites about Rakhmon's calls to elevate Kulyab's status, no open tension is visible in Tajikistan. The November 2006 presidential elections illustrated that the prospect of a renewed civil war is a powerful political instrument for Rakhmon. He and his government repeatedly remind the public about the costs of the war.

As Rakhmon's government became more centralized, the president turned increasingly assertive in taking credit for the stability in the county. The Tajik population largely welcomed Rakhmon's purges of former war commanders, who fought both on the side of the government and the opposition. Roughly a decade after the peace accord between the Tajik government and the United Tajik Opposition was reached, Rakhmon was able to suppress all the former war commanders including: Faizali Saidov, Gafor Mirzoyev,⁸⁶ Makhmud Khudoiberdiyev, Ibodullo Boitmatov, Yakub

⁸⁴ Shozimov, "Tajikistan's 'Year of Aryan Civilization' and the Competition of Ideologies."

⁸⁵ Author's interview with a Tajik journalist, June 2006, Dushanbe.

⁸⁶ Sentenced to life imprisonment in August 2006 after being convicted of charges of terrorism and plotting to overthrow the government

Salimov,⁸⁷ and Shamsiddin Shamsiddinov.⁸⁸ The suppression of former field commanders, who still had access to arms, controlled groups of soldiers, and were involved in the drug economy was done in the name of lasting national peace in Tajikistan. The Tajik population preferred that the country's regions were controlled by the central government as opposed to former warlords, as had been the case for a few years after the end of the civil war.

By the 2006 elections Rakhmon had become accustomed to being a symbol of post-war stability in Tajikistan. His politics became more personified, bordering on former Turkmen leader Saparmurat Niyazov's personality cult.⁸⁹ Like Niyazov, Rakhmon's picture decorates public places and the president is frequently praised in the local mass media. Rakhmon's glamorous and public celebrations of his family events are another instance of the president's uncovered egocentrism. A few months before the November 2006 presidential elections, six new books were published dedicated to Rakhmon's politics and personal qualifications.⁹⁰ Two books, *Emomali Rakhmon: Year of Culture that Conquered the World* and *Emomali Rakhmon: The Year of Aryan Civilization* appraised the president's efforts in rediscovering the heritage of the Aryan civilization. Rakhmon also authored several books on pre-Soviet Tajikistan history.

Inventing Zoroastrianism

Before highlighting the historical significance of the Aryan civilization, Rakhmon emphasized the importance of Zoroastrianism in Tajiks' history. Like the Aryan doctrine, Zoroastrianism was used to deter the political role of Islam in domestic politics. However, in part because records of the Zoroastrian period are scarce and vague and offered only a loose connection with modern Tajik identity, the Tajik government was fairly unsuccessful in promoting the idea.⁹¹ This is also partly due to the fact that the

⁸⁷ Sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for state treason and banditry in April 2006.

⁸⁸ Sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment in January 2004 for organizing a criminal gang, polygamy, and illegal border crossings.

⁸⁹ Opinion expressed by a Tajik opposition leader, author's interview, Dushanbe, June 2006.

⁹⁰ *Tajikistan Online*, 30 August 2006.

⁹¹ *Deutsche Welle*, 8 January 2005.

Zoroastrianism project lacked depiction in visual images that could be associated with the idea.

Rakhmon dedicated the year 2003 to celebrating the heritage of Zoroastrianism. With Rakhmon's initiative and UNESCO's approval, Tajikistan celebrated 3,000 years of the Zoroastrian civilization. The Tajik government and UNESCO jointly published the book *From Songs of Zarathustra to Melodies of Borbad*, collecting authors from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Iran, France, Germany, Canada, and the U.S. Rakhmon's chapter "Tajikistan – the Motherland of Zarathustra, As the First Prophet of Justice" was the opening chapter of the book. Uzbek historians also found historical evidence to support the theory that Zoroastrianism was once prevalent in Uzbekistan. This view was voiced by Koregi Zhumayev, director of the Sitorai Mohi Khosa museum in Bukhara. Zhumayev claimed that Zoroastrianism, the "world's first religion," was born in Khorezm, an Uzbek city which was part of the Silk Road.

Celebrating the Aryan Civilization

The idea to dedicate the year 2006 to the celebration of the Aryan civilization in Tajikistan came to Rakhmon in 2003. Tajikistan's praise of its Aryan heritage has been a controversial issue. There is no solid universal consensus about the Tajik connection to the Aryan civilization. However, Tajikistan's academic community voiced little opposition to the idea of placing the celebration of Aryan heritage at the center of national ideology. As Rakhmon himself asserts: "The word 'Tajik' is a synonym of the word 'Aryan' meaning generous and noble. In modern Tajik language this word means 'having crown' and 'peace loving people.'"⁹²

Already during the Soviet period, the Aryan project was central to Tajik historiography works. Former First Secretary of Soviet Tajikistan and famous Tajik academician Bobodzhon Gafurov was the foremost promoter of the Tajik ethnic group's Aryan background.⁹³ Gafurov's influential works include *Istoriya tadjhikov [History of the Tajiks]* and *Tadjhiki. Drevnejshaya*,

⁹² Rakhmonov, *Tajik People in the Reflection of the History*, p. 100.

⁹³ Marlene Laruelle, "The Return of the Aryan Myth: Tajikistan in Search of a Secularized National Ideology", *Nationalities Papers*, 35(1), 2007.

drevnyaya i srednevekovaya istoriya [*The Tajiks: Antique, Ancient and Medieval History*], published in 1947 and 1972, respectively.⁹⁴ In both books Gafurov argued for the Tajik ethnic connection with the Aryans and Uzbekistan's seizure of Tajik territories in the early twentieth century. As interpretations of the significance of the Aryan civilization in Tajik nationhood in the independence period, the Soviet works on this controversial subject also contained anti-Turkic and anti-Uzbek connotations in writings of national histories.⁹⁵ Thanks to the contribution by Russian scholars from Moscow and Saint Petersburg and his top position at the Party, Gafurov was able to publish and disseminate his books despite the fact that his works contained some controversial ideas.⁹⁶ Already during the Soviet era, Gafurov's *The Tajiks* became core reading on Tajikistan's national history.

Today, the Aryan identity serves a dual role in Rakhmon's politics. By placing Tajiks among other modern nations and ethnic groups whose ties with the Aryan civilization are more evident, Rakhmon built a stronger link between the Tajiks and the Aryans. The president compares Tajiks with the Taldysh, Ossetians, Kurds, Iranians, and peoples in India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Aryan identity also connects the Tajiks to greater civilizations, including European, thus raising Tajikistan to a global scale.⁹⁷ At the same time, by accentuating Aryan heritage Tajikistan creates its own regionally distinctive identity. According to Tajik historian Polat Shozimov, the Aryan civilization deters the Turkization of Tajiks and contributes to Tajikistan's uniqueness in Central Asia.⁹⁸

Celebrating Tajik belonging to the Aryan civilization marginalizes the role of Islam in the national ideology. By promoting principles of humanism and creativity, the ideology of the Aryan civilization represents an alternative system of beliefs to Islam. It reaches out to a number of grandiose historical events in Eurasia, which includes remembering the period of Alexander the

⁹⁴ Laruelle, "The Return of the Aryan Myth."

⁹⁵ Shukurov, "Tadzhikistan", p. 244.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 234.

⁹⁷ Marina Strukova, "Svet s vostoka" [Light from the East], *Zavtra.ru*, 29 December 2004.

⁹⁸ Shozimov, "Tajikistan's 'Year of Aryan Civilization' and the Competition of Ideologies."

Great and his conquering of the Central Asian peoples. Some Tajik scholars' incorporate anti-Fascist slogans in elaborating the significance of the Aryan civilization's pacifist principles in modern life.⁹⁹ Tajik scholars also claim that the lessons to be learned from the history of Aryans should be juxtaposed with the current global trends of rising terrorism and religious fundamentalism. Not having direct links to Nazi Germany, the possible promotion of the swastika as a national symbol was mooted in Tajikistan. This system of pacifist values and beliefs was presented as predating the Islamic era.

It took roughly two years to prepare for the nation-wide celebrations of the Aryan civilization in 2006. The government mobilized professionals who could spread the idea in a creative way. As Rakhmon himself notes: "Scholars, poets, writers, architects, and members of the arts community felt an innovative impulse in their creativity that goes back centuries."¹⁰⁰ The president argued that the celebrations were necessary to recover the 'Tajiks' national consciousness and for their "liberation from self-destruction."¹⁰¹ Similar to the way Akayev linked the celebrations of Manas with the consequent economic growth in the country, Rakhmon asserted that "chaos and bewilderment in the minds of the best part of society changed to a hope on real possibility to attain new and reincarnate lost values."¹⁰²

Besides mobilizing academic and arts communities, the government forced thousands of students from state universities to participate in preparations for celebrating Aryan civilization. Similar to Soviet times, students from Dushanbe and neighboring towns were mobilized to express their "patriotic feelings" and fulfill their "civic debt."¹⁰³ They were forced to rehearse massive theatrical shows for the entire summer of 2006, and in cases when students declined to participate, their placement at universities was jeopardized.

⁹⁹ Mamadsho Ilolov, "Nasledie nashih predkov" [Our Ancestors' Heritage], *Narodnaya gazeta*, 22 June 2005.

¹⁰⁰ Rakhmonov, *Tadjikistan na paroge XXI veka*, p. 58.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Asia Plus*, 14 July 2006.

Rakhmon incorporated various historical figures from the pre- and Soviet period into the discourse on how the heritage of the Aryan civilization was preserved until the present day. The list included Jamshed and Faridun, Kir and Dary, Spitamen and Ardasher, Ismail Samani and Abulfazl Balami, Akhmadi Donish, Shirishsho Shotemur, Nusfatullo Makhsum, Chinor Imomov, Sadriddin Ayni, and Babajan Gafurov.¹⁰⁴ The interpretation of the Aryan civilization in Tajikistan obviously contains deep ethno-nationalist undertones. In particular, the Aryan civilization raises a counter-balance against Uzbekistan's powerful promotion of its regional leadership in Turkic civilizational development. Tajikistan's Aryan doctrine embraces the area of Central Asia and Afghanistan where ethnic Tajiks presently reside.

A renowned Tajik historian and academic, Rakhim Masov was among the foremost promoters of the Aryan civilization's significance in Tajikistan's national ideology. Masov published a number of provocative books and articles on Tajik history where he condemned chauvinists (mainly Uzbek) who acted against the formation of Tajikistan in the 1920s-30s. Masov also rationalized Tajiks' territorial losses at the outset of the Soviet Union's formation. While not condemning the intentions of the 1917 Revolution, he denounced the pan-Turkism which prevailed among Uzbek political elites at that time.¹⁰⁵

Rakhmon enthusiastically picked up on Masov's interpretation of modern Tajik connections with the Aryans. The president often refers to vague notions of "foreign invasion," "the iron fist of imperialism," and "abnegation and appraisal of the alien." All these concepts are embedded in the notion that throughout the history of Tajiks, various enemies strived to destroy the nation, but the Tajiks survived through the millennia by preserving their national dignity and culture.¹⁰⁶ In his public speeches Rakhmon mentions abstract enemies of the Tajik nation in the early 20th century who "reiterated that the Tajik people are backward and incapable of self-government."¹⁰⁷ The

¹⁰⁴ Ilolov, "Nasledie predkov."

¹⁰⁵ Sergei N. Abashin, "Zarozhdenie i sovremennoe sostoyanie sredneaziatskikh natsionalizmov" [The birth and Current Condition of Central Asian Nationalisms], *Centrasia.ru*, 9 May 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Rakhmonov, *Tajiks in the Mirror of History*.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

president subtly refers to Turkic and Uzbek destructive influences on the formation of the Tajik statehood in 1920-30s. While acknowledging that Tajiks and Uzbeks lived side by side for centuries, the president has continued to develop the image of an abstract enemy: “Our enemies did not want the construction of Tajik statehood and rejected the existence of the Tajik people and Tajik language.”¹⁰⁸

For Tajikistan, the revival of historical narratives inevitably raises grievance and feelings of discontent about the fact that the key historical cities of the Samani dynasty period, Samarqand and Bukhara, are today parts of Uzbekistan.¹⁰⁹ Not only do historical memories link the Tajik with these places, but also family ties have been established since Soviet times. Russian historian Sergei Abashin has argued that the discussion of “Who is to blame?” for Tajikistan’s reduced territory has become part of its national ideology.¹¹⁰ The question permeates all discussions of Tajikistan’s history and current situation.

With the Tajiks’ two “civilizational reservoirs” located within the territory of the Uzbek SSR, Tajik historians faced a dilemma of autochthony that was overcome by other Central Asian nations.¹¹¹ Unlike Kazakh and Uzbek historians who resorted to historical works produced on their territories, their Tajik counterparts were reflecting upon works by thinkers who lived outside of Tajikistan’s modern borders.¹¹² The separation of both cities from the Tajik SSR arguably deepened intra-ethnic divides in Tajikistan as “the ‘body’ was left without its ‘head.’”¹¹³ As Shukurov argues, these divides indirectly contributed to the escalation of the civil war in 1992.

The ideas of a “Greater Tajikistan” or a “Historical Tajikistan” permeate post-Soviet reconstructions of national history by Tajik scholars.¹¹⁴ The idea presumes that the current territory of Tajikistan does not match with the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 114.

¹⁰⁹ Among the most outspoken scholars on this view is Masov, *Tadjiki: Vytesnenie i assimiliatdsiya*.

¹¹⁰ Abashin, “Zarozhdenie i sovremennoe sostoyanie sredneaziatskih natsionalizmov.”

¹¹¹ Shukurov, “Tadzhikistan”, p. 242.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 238.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 242.

¹¹⁴ Nazarov, “Ethno-natsionalizm kak panatseya ot revolutsii.”

nation's historical influence. Tajik academic Nugmon Negmatov tried to solve the issue of autochthony in his book on Tajikistan's national history, by drawing a map of "Historical Tajikistan" that includes almost the entire territory of modern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, parts of Kazakhstan, China, Afghanistan, and Iran.¹¹⁵ In his works on the Samanids dynasty, Negmatov largely relies on Gafurov's historiography. Both Gafurov and Negmatov continue to shape the modern discourse on Tajik's history and ethno-national identity. The concept of a great and historical Tajikistan arouses the feelings of Tajiks living in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Along with including ethnic Tajiks living in Uzbekistan and parts of Kyrgyzstan in the concept of a greater Tajikistan, Tajiks in Afghanistan are also included, though to a lesser extent.

Masov, being a flamboyant critic of Uzbek historical nationalism against Tajiks and other Central Asian nationalities, faced extensive criticism from his Uzbek counterparts. His ideological doctrine's main opponents were Uzbek historians, who claimed that the Turkic civilization had a far greater impact on Tajiks than the Aryan civilization. Masov engaged in fierce debates on that matter with Uzbek historian Akhmadali Askarov. Masov wrote an article in response to Askarov's claim that the Aryan civilization is also part of the Turkic civilization. He accused Askarov of falsifying historical facts to foster Uzbek nationalism. Both authors caused wider debates in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.¹¹⁶ In essence, both academics contested whether it was the Turkic or Aryan civilization which was more dominant in Eurasia. Their debate extended to a political level when both accused each other of radical ethno-nationalism. Masov tagged Askarov's arguments as pan-Uzbek and pan-Islamic, while the latter argued that Tajikistan was promoting pan-Iranism.

¹¹⁵ Nugmon N. Negmatov, *Tadzhikskii fenomen: Teoriya i istoriya* [The Tajik Phenomenon: Theory and History], Dushanbe, 1997.

¹¹⁶ See Rakhim Masov, "Turkizatsiya ariitsev: chush' ili nedomyslie" [The Turkization of Aryans: Nonsense or Folly?], *Centrasia.ru*, 6 January 2006; Akhmadali Askarov, "Ariiskaya tsivilizatsiya: novye podhody i vzglyady" [Aryan Civilization: New Approaches and Views], in A.A. Anarbayev, ed., *Istoriya Uzbekistana v arkheologicheskikh i pis'mennykh istochnikakh* [Uzbekistan's History in Archeological and Scriptory Sources], Tashkent: FAN, 2005.

Both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan's worries about rising nationalism in the neighboring countries can be explained by their ethnic composition. The ethnic Tajik population in Uzbekistan comprises roughly one million and is the fastest growing ethnic minority. Moreover, it mainly lives in the Samarqand oblast, on the border with Tajikistan. Its rights to ethnic identity have been suppressed since Soviet times. The sense of national pride cultivated by Rakhmon's government might serve as a strong factor in the political mobilization of Uzbekistan's Tajiks. Conversely, such nationalist feelings could lead to the suppression of Tajikistan's Uzbeks, who comprise about one million (15 percent) of the population. Confrontation between the two countries on issues of "cultural legacies" is at the root of their deteriorating economic and political relationships. Ideological battles are in fact a product of deeper obstacles in Tajik-Uzbek relations.¹¹⁷

In contrast to Tajikistan's aspirations to enlarge its territory beyond the state's modern borders in line with its national self-perception, Uzbekistan's nationalism only encompasses peoples living within the current territory of the country. Ethnic Uzbeks from neighboring states have not mobilized around Karimov's nationalism, and the Uzbek government refuses to grant citizenship to ethnic Uzbeks from other Central Asian states and Afghanistan.

The Secularist-Islamic Debate

Upon gaining independence, religion became a political phenomenon in Tajikistan before any other national ideological concept could develop. A decade after the conflict between the secular government and the religious opposition was settled, debates between secular and religious forces continue to lie at the heart of national ideological production. In this contest, Rakhmon's government seems to have emerged as a clear winner despite the fact that Tajik society is deeply religious. As a result, Tajikistan today is an example of a country where the state's national ideology and society's religiosity are two conflicting phenomena. A similar situation can be observed in Uzbekistan. Although both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

¹¹⁷ Alik Nazarov, "Ethno-natsionalizm kak panatseya ot revolutsii" [Ethno-nationalism as Panacea from Revolution], *Prognosis.ru*, 21 December 2005.

incorporate Islamic symbols into national emblems, they act vigilantly to maintain control over religious authorities and feelings among citizens.

By the time that the National Reconciliation Commission mediated by the UN and Russia was negotiating for peace between Tajikistan's secular government and the United Tajik Opposition in 1997, the term "secular state" had already turned into a controversial issue.¹¹⁸ The Tajik Constitution adopted in 1994 defined the political system as secular; however, conservative leaders from the opposition perceived secularism as anti-religious rather than non-religious. Conservatives insisted that the constitutional wording on secularism should be excluded altogether. Furthermore, in the aftermath of 9/11 when the world focused its attention on Islamic terrorism, the Tajik religious opposition demanded that terms referring to religious extremism be carefully operationalized in the political discourse.

Complications in conceptualizing relationships between secular and religious political forces further deepened after the adoption of the law "On Religion and Religious Organizations," which contains contradictory statements on the role of religion in the state. The Tajik constitution postulates that no religious organization is allowed to participate in state politics, whereas the law preserves the "separation of religion from the state."¹¹⁹ At least two problems arise from this inconsistency. First, the legality of practicing religion and how religious organizations should function is unclear, since both legal acts operate with competing definitions. Second, the law alienates the entire religious community and religiously-minded citizens from the political process. Under the law, any form of religious expression in the political discourse can potentially be subject to persecution by the state. Evidently, despite the fact that today Tajikistan is the only Central Asian state to allow functioning of a religious political party, both the constitution and the law isolate the Islamic opposition from the political process, making

¹¹⁸ Muhiddin Kabiri, "Terminologicheskie aspekty svetskogo-islamskogo kompromissnogo dialoga" [Terminological Aspects of Secular-Islamic Compromise Dialogue] in Jean-Nikolas Bitter, *Postroenie doveriya mezhdu islamistami i sekulyaristami – tadzhikskii eksperiment* [Confidence Building between Islamists and Secularists – the Tajik Experiment], Dushanbe: Devashtich, 2004, p. 266.

¹¹⁹ Kabiri, "Terminologicheskie aspekty svetskogo-islamskogo kompromissnogo dialoga," p. 270.

the IRP's agenda as well as its participation in the government and parliament almost negligible. Muhiddin Kabiri, the leader of the IRP, has argued that if the state prevents religious forces from intervening in politics, then it should also refrain from controlling the society's religious life.¹²⁰

After the Islamic opposition lost a major part of its political representation in the government and parliament in the 2000s, the debate on the role of religion shifted towards identifying the status of Islam in building a secular state.¹²¹ By then it was clear that although the legal code seemed to have formed a compromise between secular and religious forces on the role of Islam in the state, crucial disagreements still prevailed. Almost a decade after the end of the civil war, the Tajik government moved towards intensifying its control over religious organizations. In 2006 the Tajik government developed a bill "On Freedoms of Confessions and Religious Organizations," which became one of the most rigid and illiberal regulations of its type in Central Asia. The bill restricts religious education for children and increases the required number of congregants needed to register mosques. The bill also allows the Rakhmon government to rely more heavily on local law-enforcement agencies to control religious leaders.

Despite Rakhmon's oppression of the religious opposition, the president nevertheless cannot afford to fully exclude either the IRP or the representatives of the northern elites from the political process. Instead, he prefers to have the IRP's symbolic presence in the parliament and the government to foster his image as a democratic leader. Not least, this image is necessary for Rakhmon to continue to receive international humanitarian and development aid. The president also recognized that the possibility of renewed tensions would increase if the IRP was completely expelled from the political domain. In response, the IRP turned into a 'loyal opposition' for Rakhmon, since it realizes that its political participation is limited. With both sides calculating their capacities against each other, the Tajik political system today represents a balance between a strong government and a weak opposition that chooses to continue its passive existence.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 271.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 269.

In 2001 the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) launched a program to mediate a dialogue between the Tajik government and the Islamic opposition. On the basis of the initiative, Tajikistan's political actors and academics discussed various terminologies related to the relationship between the state and religion. They came up with a list of terms which were in most need of being operationalized, which included "political Islam," "traditional Islam," and "modernization of Islam." The OSCE's conclusions after mediating the Tajik government-opposition dialogue maintain that both sides are in favor of the peace agreement. But the government realizes that the IRP still enjoys considerable support among the population and any radical attempts to curb the religious opposition could potentially lead to destabilization.¹²² The IRP, in turn, understands that the government is able to pressure its leaders through law enforcement structures and continues to alienate religion from the state.

The State, Islam, and Foreign Policy

Among the difficulties the IRP faced after the end of the civil war was the need to identify its international preferences. Three elements inevitably limit the IRP's ability to formulate its domestic and international agenda. First, the presence of conservative forces within the party restrains its pro-Western orientations. Cooperation with Islamic states and political forces are regarded by the IRP's conservatives as an important part of the party's agenda. Second, the IRP's domestic and international recognition restrict its options to cooperating only with Islamic forces that also enjoy a similar legal status, as opposed to those condemned by the international community. The IRP's legal status in effect compelled the party to break relations with some of its civil war allies. Its status also put pressure on the party to condemn any manifestations of radical Islamic forces in Tajikistan and the region. Thirdly, the Tajik constitution and numerous other laws prescribe a secular state, thus driving out any promulgation of religious values in domestic or foreign politics. In order to continue to enjoy domestic and international support, the

¹²² Arne Zaifert, "O pol'ze ukrepleniya doveriya mezhdu islamistami i sekulyaristami: [On the Benefits of Strengthening Confidence between Islamists and Secularists], in Jean-Nikolas Bitter *Postroenie doveriya mezhdu islamistami i sekulyaristami*, p.47.

IRP needs to master how to balance the demands of its own conservative forces with Rakhmon's push for secularism. At the same time, Rakhmon himself actively includes cooperation with the Islamic world in his own political agenda. His celebrations of the Aryan civilization and Farsi-speaking community in 2006 mainly assembled representatives from Muslim countries.

An interesting dynamic was observed among Central Asian secular and religious groups during the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict in the summer of 2006. As the Israeli offensive in Lebanon was rapidly turning into a humanitarian disaster, the Central Asian states found it difficult to formulate a unanimous opinion on the conflict. The IRP called on the government to take a firm position in favor of Lebanon. The IRP, whose political agenda only covers cooperation with Iran and Afghanistan, saw cooperation with Lebanon as an incremental advancement in its own scope of actions. The Tajik opposition forces attacked the government by using the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict as a pretext for advancing its own political ambitions. Likewise, ruling regimes used the opposition's arguments against them, accusing them of religious fundamentalism. Despite such accusations, regional political forces that call for more distancing from Tajikistan's Soviet past and building a new national identity, believed that it was important to find historical references in the Arab world. In this search, Lebanon stood as the most relevant Arab country in terms of the interplay between traditionalism and modernity.

Conclusions

Tajikistan's production of ideology based on historical narratives became a highly strategic issue after the end of the civil war in 1997. In his ideological projects, Rakhmon sought to increase his presidential power and alienate the Islamic opposition. Three projects were predominant in Rakhmon's ideological production: Zoroastrianism, the cult of Ismail Samani, and the Aryan civilization. Among all, the Aryan myth proved to be the most central in Rakhmon's politics, which helped him to consolidate the public sector in the wake of presidential elections in November 2006. The Aryan project was not adopted by any other Central Asian state and Rakhmon could point at Tajikistan regional peculiarity. Aryanism also emphasized the antiquity of

the Tajik as an ethnic group, thus hinting at its cultural superiority. Finally, the Aryan project alienated the Islamic opposition and linked Tajikistan with European countries. For the large part, Soviet ethnography and historiography traditions influenced the formation of ideology in independent Tajikistan. The primordial definition of ethnicity as well as the category of ethnogenesis provided the central tenet for Rakhmon's ideologies. Although the Tajiks' connection to the Aryan civilization does not enjoy an unambiguous scholarly recognition – even in Tajikistan itself – Rakhmon nevertheless institutionalized the idea by supporting numerous scholarly writings, promoting it through his own books and speeches and by holding grand celebrations in September 2006. In this respect, Rakhmon's efforts were similar to those of Akayev's, when the latter fostered the creation of visual images of the mythic hero Manas.

Components of National Ideologies

Although the Central Asian states' ideological projects are built on the recollection of different historical periods, they share a set of similarities in the methods of ideological production and promotion. These similarities primarily have to do with the use of administrative tools to spread messages about national ideologies to the masses. Some of these similarities include using Soviet formulas to promote national ideas, such as celebrating national independence and venerating historical heroes. To promote their ideological projects, both Akayev and Rakhmon authored a number of books dealing with issues of statehood, national histories, and the future prospects for national development. Like the majority of other states in the world, the Kyrgyz and Tajik presidents believe that their countries are located at the crossroads of great civilizations and have a unique national identity because of their great history and culture. Both states emphasize the immense antiquity of their culture and language, claiming that their nations are among the most ancient in the world. In such a debate, an ethnic group's antiquity alludes to its cultural richness and superiority.

The fact that their ideological production coincided with the turn of century also plays a symbolic role. Akayev and Rakhmon, like their other Central Asian counterparts, utilized the symbolic meaning of a new beginning and comfortably joined the global discourse about the eventful history of the 20th century and the potential of even more significant changes in the 21st century. Both presidents published books related to the turn of century where they summed up the achievements of independence and outlined prospects for the future. All the Central Asian presidents identified the beginning of the new century as a threshold in political, cultural, and economic development of their nations, and argued that their nations had made important contributions to world cultural heritage. The following sections examine the common features that the Central Asian states share in promulgating

national ideologies to the masses. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are given special attention.

Celebrating Independence

In every post-Soviet state, celebrations commemorating the 1991 independence turned into major holidays. In the Central Asian states such celebrations are usually vast and extravagant, even though they were fairly passive observers during the Soviet Union's collapse. In many cases the grandiosity of independence celebrations outstrip former communist holidays such as Labor Day and the Red's Revolution celebrated on May 1 and November 7, respectively. By commemorating independence, all the states are frantically trying to promote various attributes of their ethnic identity such as national costumes, dances, songs, and food. However, few Central Asians are aware that most of these material artifacts and oral cultural attributes were in fact institutionalized during the Soviet regime.

Celebrating March 24, the day of the Tulip Revolution in 2005, turned into a controversial issue for Kyrgyzstan. In the first months following the ouster of Akayev's regime the day was promoted as the most important national holiday because the country was steering a new course towards democracy. However, a majority of Bishkek residents refused even to celebrate the first anniversary of the revolution in 2006 since Bakiyev's popularity had rapidly fallen. Because of the regime's multiple failures in the political and economic domains, the revolution's coming anniversaries are likely to have a more negative connotation. The post March 24 government and the opposition's inability to pass constitutional reforms also undermined the symbolism of Constitution Day celebrated on May 5.

State Symbols

The post-independence emblems of Central Asian states are very similar to those that were created during the Soviet period. New emblems replaced the hammer and sickle with images of the sun or religious symbols. In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, Islamic symbols replaced old Soviet ornaments and the colors of cottonseeds became slightly brighter. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan's new emblems exhibit a greater divergence from the Soviet period and

contain similar accents on sun and sky symbols. Old symbols were also changed into new ones by renaming streets named after famous Soviet Party members or places and events. Some were renamed after famous local politicians and artists who also lived during the Soviet period and were members of the Communist Party.



Tajikistan's Soviet emblem



Tajikistan's emblem in independence

Religious and Soviet Holidays

Most Soviet holidays were abolished in the Central Asian states. These mainly included November 7, the Day of the 1917 Revolution, and April 22, Lenin's birthday. A number of professional holidays, such as Cosmonauts' Day (April 12), were forgotten during the independence period as well. However, some Soviet holidays, usually containing loose political connotations and celebrated internationally, continued to be part of the local culture. Among them are New Year's Eve, International Women's Day (March 8), and International Labor Day. The Day of the National Defender on February 23, although not an official holiday in any of the Central Asian countries, is still popular. Except for Turkmenistan, these holidays are not banned by governments and sometimes are even encouraged.

A more interesting dynamic plays out in regard to religious holidays. Of all the Central Asian states, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have the most eclectic collection of religious and cultural holidays. Urban Kazakh and Kyrgyz publics celebrate Christmas according to Western and Russian Orthodox

calendars, as well as the Zoroastrian holiday Nouruz on March 21.¹²³ Furthermore, Valentine's Day is becoming more popular among Central Asian urbanized youth despite the fact that February 23 and March 8 are still widely celebrated. Broadly taking the 20-40 year old demographic, Kazakh and Kyrgyz post-Socialist youth today are widely exposed to the growing popularity of various forms of self-expression channeled through Western and Russian mass media outlets, foreign movies, and the internet.

Celebrating Numbers and Places

Numbers and places are essential to Central Asian national ideologies. Both Akayev and Rakhmon routinely incorporated round anniversary celebrations of various geographical locations and historical figures. In Akayev's case these were: 1,000 years of the Manas epic, 3,000 years of Osh city, and 2,200 years of Kyrgyz statehood. In Tajikistan these included 1,100 years of the Samanids dynasty and the 2,700 year anniversary of Kulyab city. Along with grand anniversaries, numerous smaller anniversaries of renowned national poets, writers, politicians, and military heroes are also celebrated. Celebration of rounded anniversaries arguably makes it easier for the larger public to grasp the magnitude of certain historical events. Emphasizing anniversaries also creates a solid reason for celebrations. Through celebrations, presidents mobilize academics, journalists, and members of the arts community to transmit messages purporting the grandiosity of historical anniversaries and places. It should be noted that all these anniversaries contain an ethno-centric undertone. They are also often organized in the wake of presidential elections. Any skepticism on the significance and meaning of such celebrations by politicians or academics is considered to be unpatriotic. These celebrations are based on historical interpretations that were developed in the post-Soviet period, and similar techniques are used throughout the post-Soviet space. Almost every post-Soviet state celebrates an anniversary of some geographical location or historical persona. The tradition dates back to the Soviet times when the birth of the Soviet Union was commemorated on an annual basis, which signified the strength of communist ideology.

¹²³ Erica Marat, "Syncretic and 'Synthetic' Islam in Central Asia," *The Times of Central Asia*, 28 December 2006.

Remembering Tragedies

The revision of histories written during the Soviet period often includes reexamining collectivization processes, “historical grievances” and “injustices,” famine and human migrations in the 1920s-1930s. With that, however, the recounting of the meaning and consequences of the Second World War remains untouched. Although new evidence of Central Asian peoples’ role in the war is revealed, the post-Soviet accounts about the war preserved the Soviet interpretation.¹²⁴ In rewriting their national histories, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have adopted a new perspective on national resistance against the Russian Tsarist and Soviet occupation, Stalin’s purges, and domestic civil conflicts. In all cases rewritten histories express more compassion towards human losses and tragedies that were effectively silenced during the Soviet period.

The Kyrgyz uprising against Tsarist Russia in 1916 became a cornerstone for Kyrgyzstan’s historical revisions. Facts that had often been undisclosed during the Soviet era about the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz in the anti-Russian uprising entered into public debates.¹²⁵ Unlike other efforts to revise historical facts, this particular initiative stemmed from academics and civil society groups and not the state. The national-democratic party “Uluu birimdik” (*Great unity*) proclaimed that October 14 was a memorial day for victims who fell in 1916. The uprising was identified as the most tragic event in the history of the Kyrgyz.¹²⁶ An NGO “Ai-Symal” located in Issyk Kul, a region that lost the greatest number of people in the 1916 purges and where first-hand witnesses are still alive, labeled the events as a Russian genocide against the Kyrgyz. The NGO called for establishing a memorial for victims, claiming that virtually every family in northern Issyk-Kul lost a relative in 1916.

Accusations against Tsarist Russia’s atrocities or Stalin’s purges in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia are voiced with the understanding that no

¹²⁴ Ibid., Sembinov, “Stanovlenie natsional’noi istorii Kazahstana.”

¹²⁵ According to various estimates, the number of victims in 1913-1924 in Kyrgyzstan ranges from 160,000-422,000, while the total population in that period was roughly one million.

¹²⁶ Kabar, 13 October 2005.

blame is to be attributed to modern day Russia. However, in analyzing pre- and Soviet tragedies, the value of independence and a sovereign state are nevertheless subtly emphasized by Kyrgyz historians and politicians. At the same time, these historical revisions and sympathies exclude other ethnic groups residing in Kyrgyzstan. There is virtually no discussion about historical tragedies experienced by other ethnic groups that were forced to immigrate to Central Asia. Among them are Dungans, Koreans, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, and several other ethnic groups mainly from the North Caucasus.

Political Parties

Amid the ruling regimes' attempts to construct national ideologies, some Kyrgyz and Tajik non-state actors also base their activities on nationalist ideas. More so in Kyrgyzstan than in Tajikistan, a number of political parties promulgate ideas of national unity, dignity, and spiritual wealth. Roughly 80 political parties were registered in Kyrgyzstan at the beginning of 2007. While the high number of political parties suggests that Kyrgyzstan's party building *per se* is in its nascent stages, it also reveals high levels of political activity among the population.¹²⁷ Although none of the existing political parties function within solid ideological frameworks, such as liberal or conservative, most of them promote nationalist values. For instance, the names of Kyrgyzstan's leading parties include: Ar-Namys (Dignity), Ata-Jurt (Fatherland), Ata-Meken (Fatherland), Sanzhyra (Ancestry), Erkin Kyrgyzstan (Free Kyrgyzstan), National Unity Democratic Movement, etc. Most of these parties trigger patriotic values, while religious parties are prohibited in Kyrgyzstan.

In Tajikistan, the IRP and the Communist party represent alternative ideological concepts to those of state policy (at least symbolically). Three other political parties, the Democratic Party, the Social Democratic Party, and the Socialist Party are generally clustered around their leaders and not ideas. The President's People's Democratic Party (PDP) serves as a platform for promoting the regime's ideological views.

¹²⁷ "Interview with Kyrgyz analyst Tamerlan Ibraimov", *24.kg*, 22 January 2007.

Interaction of Religious Identities and State Ideology

The production of national ideologies was accompanied by a revival of religious feelings at the grassroots level. In Tajikistan the tendency of Islamic revival was more widespread and intensive than in Kyrgyzstan. The mobilization of religious movements resulted in civil strife between the Islamic opposition and the secular government. After coming to power in 1994, Rakhmon had to maneuver between growing support for religious practices among the population and the growing popularity of the United Islamic Opposition (UTO). If Rakhmon was to avert the UTO's dominance over the conservative public, he had no choice other than to welcome religiosity into society while separating it from the state. After the end of the civil war, the opposition was allowed to occupy 30 percent of parliament, but it was never able to fulfill its quota. With some representatives of the IRP in the parliament and government, the opposition's influence on the political process was insignificant.

Conversely, in Kyrgyzstan, being non-religious or a Christian convert is considered to be an issue of ethnic and national identity.¹²⁸ According to Igor Rotar's analysis, if an ethnic Kyrgyz converts to Christianity or to some other religion, his national identity will be questioned. Similar dynamics are apparent in Kazakhstan as well. Rotar contrasts these perceptions of religious identity with conventions in neighboring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, where defying Muslim belief is considered to be an individual's moral inappropriateness.

Issues related to religious identity were not of major importance to the Akayev or Bakiyev governments when they were considering their national ideological projects. Of far greater significance was the idea of modern statehood, especially for Akayev in the early 1990s. Akayev believed it was important to define the concept of citizenship while also preserving and developing Kyrgyz national ethnic identity. Civic values were designed so as not to harm ethnic values. The Kyrgyz public's reluctant attitude towards the status of religion in state politics was also the main reason why Dastan

¹²⁸ A viewpoint expressed by Igor Rotar during his presentation on Islam in the Central Asian States and Xingjian, The Jamestown Foundation, Washington, DC, 12 January 2007.

Sarygulov's project on Tengrism failed to gain support. The project was based on the principles of an ancient Turkic religion dating back to the 4th century BC. It was bound to fail because the project advocated an alternative religious identity and had an ethno-centric undertone, which could potentially be discriminatory to non-Turkic nationalities in the country.

Akayev routinely referred to abstract "higher powers" in his speeches and writings. These references did not raise any opposition either from the religious or secular public. Akayev's occasional allusions to God, such as "Russia was given to us by God" or "Manas is genuinely God's creation," represented figurative rhetoric without any political connotations. Likewise, neither Akayev nor Bakiyev felt a necessity to emphasize the importance of secularism in Kyrgyz politics. A consensus that religion is a separate domain outside of state politics was apparent from the outset of independence. Conversely, the competence of Islamic clergy was often ignored when the government or mass media outlets assessed threats stemming from religious radical groups domestically or regionally. At times this led to inaccurate interpretations of religious texts by journalists or political actors.

As a result of constitutional reforms in November and December 2006, the passage on secularism in the Kyrgyz political domain was omitted. Although prior to the constitutional reform the secularism of Kyrgyz politics was a commonly accepted fact, after the passage was neglected, controversies arose around issues such as polygamy and a woman's right to appear in hijab in passport photographs. Two months after the adoption of the new constitution, the Kyrgyz Minister of Justice, Marat Kaiypov, proposed to remove polygamy from the criminal code, which stipulates punishment of up to two years in prison for men who share a household with more than one wife. Instead, Kaiypov proposed to make polygamy a moral issue without treating polygamists as criminals.¹²⁹ In that way, according to the minister, poverty and prostitution would be reduced.

Kaiypov's proposal received strong support from Mutakalim, a religious movement comprised of female leaders. The movement claimed to have tens of thousands of supporters across the country and was quick to use the lack

¹²⁹ *Akipress.kg*, 27 February 2007.

of a constitutional provision on secularism in its argumentation for the necessity of obeying Islamic laws. The issue of polygamy was also a sign of the lack of female representatives in the Kyrgyz parliament and government. In response to the Ministry of Justice, a number of Kyrgyz political figures urged the government to reintroduce the constitutional passage on secularism.

Creating Myths about Neighbors

The differences among the Central Asian states were continuously cultivated by the Soviet leadership throughout the Soviet Union's existence. During the Soviet period, nations were compared to each other in terms of economic achievements and the loyalty of local political elites.¹³⁰ During the independence period, in addition to rewriting their own national histories, the Central Asian states sought to form images about their neighbors. These narratives usually question neighboring ideological projects. In the case of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, scholars and politicians from both states accuse each other of pretensions for cultural dominance in the region. In his historiography works, Masov depicts early 20th century Uzbekistan as chauvinistic towards Tajiks, who were suffering from economic troubles.¹³¹ Masov's works became official and scientifically documented evidence of Tajiks' rights to Bukhara and Samarqand.¹³²

Similar indirect competition is noticeable between Kazakh and Kyrgyz writers. Tensions between nationalists from both states occur on the grounds of cultural similarities and differences. Complications in the Soviet formation of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the 1920s-30s serve as a fertile source for today's debates on the legitimacy of each state's territory. In 1920 Kazakhstan had the status of Kyrgyz Autonomous Socialist Republic and only emerged as the Kazakh SSR in 1936. Kyrgyzstan was first named Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic in 1924 and gained its status as the Kyrgyz SSR in 1936. Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan continue to develop their own

¹³⁰ Abashin, "Zarozhdenie i sovremennoe sostoyanie sredneaziatskikh natsionalizmov."

¹³¹ Masov, *Tadzhiki: Vytesnenie i assilyatsiya*.

¹³² Shukurov, "Tadzhiki", p. 243.

distinctiveness by finding historical events that speak for cultural inimitability.

As a result of each Central Asian state attempting to build a particular national identity, regional identity has obviously suffered. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the weakest states in the region, had to maneuver between prioritizing the cultivation of national uniqueness and regional integration. The wish to build stronger links with neighboring states was evident in the fact that the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments joined every regional agreement. But an ongoing competition between Tajik and Uzbek scholars on ideological projects pushes both states apart. Neither side is ready to compromise on the meaning of the historical heritage of its people and politics. In the case of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, both states prefer to focus on the differences of their historical backgrounds rather than cooperating on an ideational basis.

The idea of Turkic civilization, which is the only concept that could potentially unite the Central Asian states on the grounds of common identity, is either ignored or monopolized by individual state leaders. Rakhmon promoted a regionally peculiar Persian identity while also mentioning the importance of the Turkic civilization in the country's history. He preferred to juxtapose pan-Turkism with Uzbekistan's nationalism, while also treating it as a basis for mutual friendship with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Karimov, by promulgating the ideology of Tamerlane, seeks to lead Turkic regional identity.

Common Turkic culture only unified the five Central Asian states in the early 1990s, when numerous regional multilateral and bilateral agreements were established based on shared identities. Indeed, most of these agreements proved to be dysfunctional, especially when security threats to the Central Asian states became more pressing towards the end of the 1990s. Yet, ideational commonalities paved the way for an agreement on peaceful coexistence and non-interference. These regional norms were encouraged both by national regimes and Turkey's increased presence in the region in the early years of independence.

Between Nationalism and Regionalism

Most scholars dealing with nationalism agree that increased domestic or regional instability can fortify national cohesion. Central Asian leaders mostly identified transnational religious radical groups linked to drug trafficking as the primary threats to national security and the continuity of statehood. Uzbek President Islam Karimov pointed to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Hizb-ut-Tahrir, and Akramiya as the principal sources of insecurity in Uzbekistan. The Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik governments at various periods have also identified the IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir as the most pressing security issues. However, since religious extremist groups represent a transnational concern and not an immediate threat to one particular state, they are only a marginal consideration in the development of national ideologies. Except for Karimov, all other Central Asian leaders have been fairly inarticulate in linking the stability of statehood with the necessity to counter the spread of terrorist and extremist groups.

Each Central Asian state explicitly indicates that no other nation or group of nations can be treated as national enemies. Such a tolerant attitude towards the external world can be explained by three main reasons. Firstly, at the time of independence no Central Asian state had articulated its own foreign policy divergent from the Soviet perception of international relations. In the 1990s, coherent political attitudes towards the rest of the world had yet to be formed. Secondly, international expectations that the former Soviet states would seek to form sovereign governments reinforced domestic state-building processes based on international norms of peaceful coexistence. The states quickly moved towards creating bilateral and multilateral agreements that proved to be inefficient in practice. Lastly, the newly independent Central Asian states were too weak to allow themselves confrontation with the external world. Partly due to the inertia of Soviet perceptions, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan vaguely declared that nations pursuing the unsanctioned proliferation of nuclear weapons would be treated as potential threats.¹³³ But to a large extent, all states were quick to declare friendly

¹³³ These attitudes are elucidated in Kazakhstan's and Uzbekistan's military doctrines.

relations with regional neighbors, former Soviet republics, and with the rest of the world.

The Impact of External Factors on National Identities

Today many countries seek to cultivate their international images as much as they work to develop national identities. Thanks to globalized mass media and business, states are able to attract more tourists and investors by promoting their images across the world. These images usually emphasize states' positive traits, uniqueness, and geopolitical importance. It was mentioned that Akayev invested substantial efforts into constructing an image of Kyrgyzstan for international consumption. This image, referred to as the "Island of Democracy" or "Switzerland of Central Asia," still permeates Kyrgyz public discourse about its national identity. Rakhmon's celebrations of Farsi-speaking nationalities in 2006 also pursued a twofold agenda: to establish Tajikistan's external image and increase national consciousness.

A rather interesting situation developed around Kazakhstan's external image. Kazakhstan's international image was affected by British comedian Sasha Baron Cohen through his character "Borat." While Borat attracted international attention to this newly independent state, Kazakhstanis themselves found it difficult to laugh off his jokes. Similar to other Soviet successor states, Kazakhstan is struggling to build its own image as a sovereign state with a legitimate government when the country is home to numerous ethnic groups. However, Kazakhstan's case shows that international factors often emerge *ad hoc*, while national elite efforts to promulgate ideologies are more strategic.¹³⁴ The accidental international media blitz played a far greater role in the Kazakh public's realization (be it of dismay or cheerfulness) of what their external image represented than any comparable domestic ideological projects. Although national political elites find that national ideological projects are important for societal cohesion,

¹³⁴ "Cultural Learnings of Kazakhstan", *The Economist*, 9 November 2006; Erica Marat, "I Like! You Like?: British Comedian Cheers, Disgusts Kazakhstanis", *Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst*, 18 October 2006.

cultivating international images may prove to be far more effective for social mobilization.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As no systematic study of the impact of national ideology on society has ever been done in the Central Asian states, it would be fair to give only rough conclusions on how effective national political elites have been in promoting their ideas. The Soviet tradition of ideological production is still prevalent among both state and society actors. Political elites treat ideologies as part of their function and societies accept the fact that ideologies are the state's product. The role of the government office of the state secretary presupposes creation of and finding suitable strategies to spread national ideological projects. Although society might disagree, and even mock the state's ideological production, there is a tendency that the state will nevertheless be able to dominate the discourse over the national "important past." Such a domination of the state in the historical discourse is also present among historians and academics who often find themselves executing the government's requests to fill in certain ideological concepts with "scientific" content. High demand for the construction of historical narrations in the post-Soviet period encouraged many teachers and scholars of history to treat their own profession as a mission. They were bound to look for manifestations of antiquity in their researched objects.¹³⁵

In producing state ideologies, all Central Asian leaders face a similar set of difficulties. First, since all Central Asian states are multiethnic, with at least one ethnic group representing over 10 percent of the total population, political elites need to find a balance between a conservative ethno-nationalist public and ethnic minorities. Any ethno-centric ideological concept inevitably suppresses ethnic minorities' identities. However, the push by political elites towards adhering to ethnocentrism is often stronger than incentives for a balanced inter-ethnic policy. The Soviet tradition of treating ethnogenesis as

¹³⁵ For instance, Akayev's projects "Manas-1,000" and "Osh-3,000", as well as Tajikistan's Kulyab "2, 700," were typical political orders to the academic circles who then were entitled to provide "scientific" basis.

the only possibility of explaining the modern existence of ethnic groups and ethnic identities, as opposed to treating ethnicity as a social construct pertinent to concrete territory and state, is still predominant across the Central Asian region. Most political leaders responsible for the production of ideologies rarely question the scientific underpinnings of such an autochthonous approach and therefore routinely refer to it.

Second, to receive international recognition, Central Asian political elites cannot fully ignore the concept of citizenship. But not all political elites seem to want or know how to separate citizenship from ethnicity. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were more successful in bringing in the idea of citizenship into the discourse on state ideology. Both Nazarbayev and Akayev constructed their national ideologies by referring to the importance of the equality of citizens and respect of civic rights ahead of ethnic identities. In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, however, citizenship is still a rare concept used in discussions on the role of state ideologies in the state's functioning. By and large the category of citizenship is used interchangeably with ethnicity and this prevents the larger public from understanding the differences between the two. This fuels inter-ethnic confrontation between ethnic minority and majority groups.

Third, all Central Asian political elites need to be attentive in addressing the role of Islam in state ideologies. Even in Kyrgyzstan, where the public is religiously less conservative, a mere elimination of the definition of the state as secular in the new constitution, adopted in December 2006, gave rise to numerous religious organizations. In Tajikistan, Rakhmon's efforts to alienate Islam from the national ideology are a result of the inter-elite struggle between the ruling elite and the religious opposition. In Uzbekistan, Karimov is also determined to dissociate the cult of Tamerlane with Islam, portraying him as a secular national hero.

This study shows that ideologies were part of the state-building process and that they strengthened the ruling regime, rather than increasing its popularity among society. State-promulgated ideological projects do not necessarily increase the popularity of incumbent regimes before elections, but they do allow the consolidation of state power in the interests of the regimes.

The process of ideological production and promotion increased the loyalty of primarily state actors at various levels: from top political elites to the local government – all of who were responsible for disseminating ideologies among the masses.

Both Kyrgyz and Tajik political leaderships noticeably promoted state ideologies vigorously before presidential elections. The celebration of national historical events, such as the Manas's anniversary in Kyrgyzstan and the Aryan civilization in Tajikistan, allowed the incumbent regimes to mobilize the entire public sector under the banner of patriotism. Akayev and Rakhmon monopolized their interpretations of national histories by suppressing or rejecting any possibility for public debate over interpretations of histories and their meaning in the present day reality. In this way, any attempt to question the correctness of the regimes' interpretations of history was considered to be unpatriotic.

The main difference between the two countries' experience with production of national ideologies is that Akayev authored most of the projects himself and resorted to the academic community for historical evidence, while Rakhmon largely followed influential historians in promoting his projects. Also, Rakhmon's ideas had to compete with the popularity of the Islamic opposition, while during his reign Akayev did not face any significant challenge from his political opponents in constructing ideologies.

Both states actively created visual interpretations of their ideological concepts. Even ideologies based on semi- or mythic events such as Kyrgyzstan's Manas hero or Tajikistan's Aryan civilization were supported with visual symbols. The governments indeed monopolized the construction of these symbols. Along with the state's reliance on Soviet techniques of promoting ideological concepts to the masses through presidential speeches, books, celebrations, and public education, the internet also serves as a competing medium for a more informal discourse on state ideologies. A number of internet sites and loosely administrated forums feature lively debates on nationalism and ideologies. In fact, it could be argued that internet forums have become the main medium for mainstream discussion on the importance and effectiveness of national ideologies.

Both Akayev and Rakhmon interpreted national independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 as inevitable and positive historical developments. Unlike their neighbors, both presidents see Russia's historical influence on their country's economic, political, and cultural development as a positive legacy. A striking difference between Akayev and Rakhmon's ideologies is their focus on national and regional domains. Akayev was mostly oriented towards the local public in Kyrgyzstan, whereas Rakhmon promulgated the idea of a "Greater Tajikistan" that embraced the territories of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

For Akayev it was necessary to face the double pressure of a nationalist public and a Russian-speaking population. The former president had to maneuver between ethno-nationalist and civic-based nationalism. Rakhmon, on the other hand, had to consolidate his government in the post-civil war period and respond to the Islamic opposition's influence in the country. It was imperative for the Tajik President to design a political ideology that could compete with the religious ideology, which was promoted by the opposition. Akayev authored national ideological projects himself, while Rakhmon actively used the help of the local academic community. Both presidents, like their Central Asian counterparts, fostered national ideologies to prevail over other political powers. They acted as their nations' main ideologues and tailored discussions on economic and social issues according to their ideological projects.

The importance of UNESCO in the Central Asian states' ideological production should not be underestimated. The organization has played a visible role in legitimizing Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan's celebrations of historical events. UNESCO secures a certain recognition by the international community of the national elites' ideologies. When UNESCO refused to recognize "the year of Aryan civilization in Tajikistan" in 2006, the Tajik government sought to convene a conference of Farsi-speaking countries the same year to show international recognition of its celebrations. When UNESCO and other international organizations support national cultural projects, they risk strengthening incumbent regimes instead.

Recommendations

On the basis of the above conclusions, the following recommendations can be made to the international development aid community, as well as the national governments in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan:

- **States should abandon institutionalized mechanisms for producing national ideologies**

The governments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as other Central Asian countries, must abandon the position of state secretary or any other relevant public office that is primarily responsible for producing ideological projects. Indeed, these mechanisms were inherited from the Soviet regime and represent a strictly vertical system of development and promotion of ideas about the state and the nation. Likewise, leaders of these states should avoid seeking the support of local historians and academics in building present day political concepts. History as a discipline should be depoliticized in the public domain such as the education system, renaming sites and streets, celebration of anniversaries, etc. Nationalism should not be based on attitudes derived from speculative historical facts and figures, but represent a set of civic based norms with the strong prioritization of citizenship. These initiatives should be welcomed from the grassroots and civil society groups. Political parties, think tanks, NGOs, and business organizations should be actively involved in debates on national history, identity, and culture.

- **States should recognize ethnic minorities**

One way to homogenize the state at a national level is to allow ethnic heterogeneity prosper through democratic means.¹³⁶ A more liberal approach to ethnic minorities will indeed increase the amount and directions of ethnic movements, but can also potentially strengthen the state's ability to balance its policy towards various groups in society. In contrast, if the state tries to dominate over ethnic minorities, this may lead to their consolidation and radicalization against it. Furthermore, such a policy might lead to the further

¹³⁶ This argument was presented by David D. Latin in discussion of his book *Nations, States, and Violence*, Oxford, 2007, at the conference organized by the Association of Studies of Nationalities, New York, 13, April 2007. Latin argued that efforts to increase national homogeneity through state ideologies will foster local ethnic heterogeneity.

consolidation of sub-ethnic identities of the dominant ethnic group. This argument accords credence to the fact that nationalist leaders' calls for actions are often taken too seriously and might not be shared by wider groups in society. In contrast, the less the state restrains ethnic consolidation, the less political reason there will be for the existence of ethno-centric movements acting in opposition to the state. That is, in more liberal states, calls for nationalist and ethnic succession by individual actors may remain at a rhetorical level and not lead to any particular actions.

The example of Kyrgyzstan and its Uzbek and Uygur minorities show that the state's liberal approach to ethnic minorities devalues the meaning of radical nationalist movements. Although some frictions exist between the Kyrgyz majority and Uzbek minority, living mainly in southern Kyrgyzstan, cases of sub-ethnic (clans and families) disputes are incomparable with the breeding tension of ethnic minorities in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.¹³⁷ Akayev's acceptance of religious plurality was also a key factor in the development of the civic culture in Kyrgyzstan. Likewise, the existence of various confessions in Kyrgyzstan is widely acknowledged by the public, and Islamic clergy emphasize their tolerant attitudes towards other religions.

- **States should promote civic culture**

The state's liberal approach to ethnic and religious identities presupposes promotion of civic culture across public and societal institutions. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's political and cultural modernization depends on the national governments' adherence to the civic culture in their ideological projects. The civic culture should be promoted among the population through the education system, including schools and higher education institutes. Other public institutions that have so far been treating ethnicity as a legal category must be transformed as well. A healthy combination of civic and ethno-centric categories in developing the civic culture would include recognition of ethnic pluralism and at the same time institutionalization of a more rigid definition of the citizenship.

¹³⁷ Indeed, it should be mentioned that in summer 1990 a violent clash between Kyrgyz and Uzbek residents took place in Osh. The conflict claimed hundreds of lives.

On the same premises, it is important to permit local scholars to stage debates on national histories, ideologies, and cultural values. The impact of radical nationalists will be devalued in open debates, as it is unlikely that they will be able to attract a majority of the population. Furthermore, with the civil culture more pronounced in the state's ideological projects, the importance of religion and ethnicity will be eventually depoliticized. The role of the international community is imperative in encouraging local scientific publications, dissemination of literature on civic education, and training local teachers about the meaning of civic culture. These types of activities are especially recommended in peripheral areas where an ethnic majority lives intermixed with minorities in northern and western Tajikistan and parts of northern and southern Kyrgyzstan.

- **States should reform language policies**

Language in the Central Asian states should be more associated with a means of communication, rather than representing the main category of ethnic identity. Residents of ethnically intermixed cities and villages should be encouraged to learn both the majority and minorities' languages. Training in foreign languages such as English, German, French, Chinese, and other languages is important as well to provide the local population access to international sources of information. In Kyrgyzstan's case, the government and public's worries that the usage of the Kyrgyz language will wane due to its low popularity are understandable. Yet, with the Kyrgyz language being spoken largely by the rural population and Russian and Uzbek languages enjoying quite an advanced status in the country, there is little propensity to inter-ethnic confrontation or national mobilization on the basis of ethnic identities.

- **The Kyrgyz government should calm the north-south divide**

Post-March 24 Kyrgyzstan is an example of the state's loose control over the production of national ideology. While it gives the incentive to civil society actors to promote their own projects, the Kyrgyz government could use its political leverage and promote an ideology that would smooth the divide between northern and southern populations. Today, Kyrgyzstan is in desperate need of a national concept that would unite the northern and

southern parts. The country is divided not so much along the lines of inter-ethnic identities, but along an inter-regional cleavage between northern and southern political elites and their constituencies. President Bakiyev's clumsy politics in promoting the importance of the political representation of southern elites is the main source of tensions between the country's northern and southern elites. The Kyrgyz government should foster, if not act as the main producer, of an idea working towards promoting the importance of citizenry ahead of inter-regional competition. To meet the demands of a more conservative public, this task can be achieved only through a deliberate combination of civic-based and ethnic-based principles.

- **The Tajik government should loosen state control over the production of national ideologies**

In Tajikistan, where the state has resorted to the help of academic community to produce national ideologies, local scholarly works have been used as the main sources of scientific justification of ethno-centric nationalism. Masov played a role as an advocate of Tajik nationalism, rather than being a mere a state advisor or a scholar.¹³⁸ Little time was spent on scholarly debates before political elites turned to the promotion of post-Soviet national ideologies in the early 1990s. The state used its authority to produce post-Soviet ideologies before societies themselves could develop a curiosity in ethnic identities and their pre-Soviet historical past.

Rakhmon is likely to intensify ideological production before the next presidential elections in 2013. Concurrently, the Tajik government will continue to curtail open debate on questions of national history, only allowing selected academics to participate in historiography. Also, the battle of ideas between Tajik and Uzbek scholars over the meaning of the Aryan civilization versus the Turkic civilization in the Central Asian region will continue. The Tajik-Uzbek confrontation over ideas will feed from ongoing economic and political tensions between the two countries.

¹³⁸ The idea of scholars acting as nation-builder was discussed by Paul Robert Magocsi at a conference organized by the Association for Studies of Nationalities, New York, 13 April 2007.

Both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan should remember that suppressing feelings of identity among ethnic minorities on their territories might endure a heavy cost in the long run. Seven decades of Soviet leadership showed that neither ethnic Tajiks living in Uzbekistan, nor ethnic Uzbeks in Tajikistan will give up their ethnic identities in the presence of disputed borders between the two states. National ideologies promoted by both states might overshadow ethnic identities, but in the long-run they will not be able to override them. On the contrary, promoting Aryanism in Tajikistan and Turkicness in Uzbekistan will exacerbate tensions among minority and majority ethnic groups, as well as at the inter-state level among political elites. Since neither side allows free academic debate – with historiography having turned into a political project within the state-building process – there is the danger that national ideologies may in fact lead to the destabilization of the state. In this sense, as the state becomes increasingly consolidated, majority and minority ethnic groups will identify with their unequal statuses by disagreeing with the state’s language or education policies.¹³⁹

Unlike Tajik and Uzbek leaders, Akayev first identified and accepted ethnic minorities living in Kyrgyzstan before turning to more ethno-centric ideals. At least formally, his government was ready to support ethnic minorities and even allocate them some public resources to allow the development of their distinct identities. Along with the identification of ethnic minorities, Akayev tried to associate them with notions of citizenry. This process was bypassed in Tajikistan and its government still ignores the large population of Uzbeks.

It is difficult to deny that a newly independent state can survive without some form of nationalism. Most young states in the last century resorted to nationalist projects, be they ethno-centric or civic based. The Central Asian states show various interplays of development and promotion of nationalism among actors in both state and society. They indeed share many similarities, including the veneration of messianic figures and places or overgeneralization about the meaning of some epochs that, in Rakhmon’s words, “work for the unity” of the nation. This report has sought to show that the building of ideologies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is an ongoing

¹³⁹ Latin, *Nations, States, and Violence*.

process that reacts both to domestic and international political, economic, and cultural settings. More than a decade into post-Soviet ideology construction, some established national symbols have been produced. Manas in Kyrgyzstan, Samani in Tajikistan, Abylaikhan Adam in Kazakhstan, Amir Timur in Uzbekistan, and Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan. As time passes, these symbols might remain widespread but lose their original meaning of promoting national and ethnic unity. Like Sweden's images of the Tre Kronor (Three Crowns) or Vikings, they might also turn into national brands without claiming deeper political meaning.

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