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Autocrats, Islamists, and the Rise of Radicalism in Central Asia

ERIC MCGLINCHEY

Of the many striking developments in post-Soviet Central Asia, perhaps the most notable is the revival and radicalization of Islam. Although Islam never disappeared during Moscow’s seven decades of control, Central Asians, much like their Russian Orthodox counterparts, were encouraged and at times coerced to abandon religion in deference to the Communist party’s ideal of *homo sovieticus*, the soviet man.

In the 1920s and 1930s the party’s faithful traversed the Kazakh steppe to establish strongholds among the Uzbek and Tajik cities lying between the Amu and Syr Darya rivers. In the following years, outward signs of Islam became fewer and fewer. Soviet bureaucrats converted mosques into warehouses and cultural centers. They padlocked the doors to madrassas, jailed uncooperative religious leaders, and staged veil-burning ceremonies to coincide with International Women’s Day. By the 1960s Central Asian Islam had become Sovietized—not eliminated, but outwardly subordinated to and routinized by the Soviet state.

Social scientists confirm what many know from their own lives: culture and beliefs are slow to change. Visiting Central Asia’s government centers today, it is not a surprise to see monuments to secular rule. Indeed, statues of Lenin continue to tower over city squares throughout Central Asia. Travel beyond the capitals’ marble and cement, however, and into the traditional old cities or the countryside, and the crescent-topped minarets rise above Central Asia once again. Islam has returned to the region, or rather, the public markers of Islam have

returned, for most likely it was only the visual symbols of religion that disappeared under Soviet rule.

There is no one Islam in post-Soviet Central Asia. Just as Uzbeks will debate proper head covering for attending the mosque, so more broadly do Central Asians contest what it means to be a Muslim 15 years after communism’s collapse. Raise the question with a government official, and he will extol the region’s “traditional” imams—religious leaders who today, much as they did during the Soviet period, seek common ground with the political elite. Of course, not all imams want close ties with the state and it is here, among the independent-minded, that the question of multiple Islams in Central Asia arises.

Radicals are one subgroup among these independent-minded Muslims. Radical Islamists are those who seek to replace secular governance with rule based on sharia, or Islamic law. These Islamists may be militant, readily embracing the use of force to further their political goals. Alternatively, they may attempt political change through unarmed revolution, choosing mass mobilization rather than violence in their attempt to build sharia rule.

Both violent and nonviolent Islamist groups find support in Central Asia society. But measuring the extent of this support is difficult. Islamist groups are banned throughout the region and, as such, few Central Asians openly admit to radical or militant leanings. Nevertheless, by studying what these groups do and the frequency and intensity of their actions, we can obtain rough measures of Islamist support across the Central Asian nations.

ISLAM AND THE STATE

In recent years both local and Western scholars have begun to reevaluate the Soviet influence on Central Asian Islam. These new interpretations

ERIC MCGLINCHEY is an assistant professor at George Mason University and an associate of the Program on New Approaches to Russian Security at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

demonstrate that practicing Muslims, rather than only being the victims of communist repression, coexisted with and at times benefited from the Soviet bureaucracy. This is not to say the Soviet leaders did not employ coercion in their early attempts to consolidate authority in Central Asia. What these studies do show, however, is that after the brutality of the 1920s and 1930s, Moscow began what ultimately would prove a remarkably successful assimilation of the region's Islamic elite into the patronage-based system of Soviet rule. This patronage-based strategy of co-opting the Muslim elite persists in Central Asia today. Critically, however, the current results of this Soviet-era strategy have been decidedly mixed.

The communists policed the Islamic elite through the SADUM, the Central Asian Muslim Spiritual Directorate. The muftiate, as Central Asians refer to the directorate, controlled religious education as well as decided who could or could not become an imam. Although the directorate was, on paper, independent of the government, the board nevertheless maintained close ties with the regional and central administration. Thus, the muftiate distributed religious offices—and the accompanying privileges of office—much as did any other ministry within the Soviet bureaucracy: while it expected some degree of competence among the Islamic elite, what the directorate most rewarded was loyalty to the state.

The muftiate remains today the key institution through which Central Asian governments attempt to control Islam and the Islamic elite. Reconstituted at the state level following the Soviet collapse, the region's now five muftiates continue to allocate Islamic offices according to deference to state power. That this Soviet strategy should persist is to be expected. In three of the five Central Asian states the same elites that ruled under Mikhail Gorbachev, the last Soviet leader, remain in power today. And even in the Kyrgyz and Tajik cases, where there has been leadership change, the current presidents held high office during communist rule. That this strategy is often no longer successful in patterning Islam in the state's image has undoubtedly come as a surprise to Central Asia's Soviet-trained political elite.

Despite their shared histories, the Uzbek and Tajik muftiates have been less able to prevent extremism than have their Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen counterparts. Part of this variation, Western scholars and many Central Asians themselves argue, derives from the historical embeddedness of Islam in the region. Practicing Muslims have lived in the territory that is today Uzbekistan and Tajikistan for over 12 cen-

turies. And although the rulers and inhabitants of Silk Road cities such as Bukhara and Samarkand changed over the years, these cities' importance as centers of Muslim learning remained steady. In contrast, in the lands of the Turkmen, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz nomads, the conversion to Islam was more recent and, paradoxically, embraced by many only after Soviet modernization.

Yet, to claim that the intensity of religious association or gravitation toward radicalism or fundamentalism is a function of how long Islam has been practiced in a region would be a mistake. Indeed, one need only look to fundamentalist movements in the United States to see that extremist beliefs have found more fertile ground in the new world than they have on the European continent.

In fact, government policies—and not toward religion but toward domestic opposition—are equally or more important to the rise of Islamist groups than the duration of religious practice or the old and in many respects now inconsequential muftiates. Islamist radicalism in Central Asia, much as it has been elsewhere in the world, is in large part a response to authoritarianism. Where governments tolerate some degree of political opposition—either in parliaments or in the press—society's enthusiasm for Islamist goals is limited. In contrast, where governments seek to limit meaningful political contestation, the anti-establishment message of extremist Islam finds growing support. Nowhere has this relationship between authoritarian politics and radical Islam been more pronounced than in Uzbekistan.

A Foothold in Uzbekistan

In September 2000 the Clinton administration added the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) to the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations, a distinction the IMU now shares with Al Qaeda and 38 other militant groups. The administration's decision to single out the IMU was based on evidence linking the Uzbek group to Al Qaeda and the Taliban as well as to a series of hostage takings and deadly bombings in 1999. US bombs are alleged to have killed the IMU's commander, Juma Namangani, in northern Afghanistan in November 2001. Namangani's disappearance, however, only temporarily silenced the IMU. In 2004 the group claimed responsibility for a series of fatal explosions in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent.

Less violent but equally deserving of censure, Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov and his supporters contend, is the radical Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), the Party of Liberation. The Uzbek leader's aversion

to HT is understandable. HT members, active not only in Uzbekistan but across Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, maintain that their goal is non-violent revolution that will topple secular regimes and replace them with a Muslim caliphate. HT is banned in Uzbekistan, as it is in Germany, Russia, and much of the Middle East, and as it most likely will be in the near future in the United Kingdom.

HT's rhetoric is chauvinist and virulently anti-Semitic. In the wake of the July 2005 London bombings, Prime Minister Tony Blair labeled HT leaders "preachers of hate." President Karimov could not agree more. According to US State Department estimates, his security forces jailed nearly 5,000 Uzbeks between 1999 and 2001 for participating in HT activities. Recent years have not seen any easing in the government's campaign against what it claims is spreading extremism. In May 2005, Uzbek government troops killed hundreds in what the state press service labeled an uprising of "radical Islamists and evil forces" in the eastern city of Andijan. That the Andijan protesters or the many thousands imprisoned in Uzbek jails are in fact all radical Islamists is unlikely. What is certain, however, is that between the resurgence of the IMU and the spread of HT, extremist Islam does have a foothold in Uzbekistan.

Militant Islam was also on the rise in Tajikistan in the 1990s: it played a central role in that country's civil war. Between 1992 and 1997, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) fought President Emomali Rakhmonov's Russian- and Uzbek-backed military. The IRP was itself not without outside supporters, receiving funds and weapons from former mujahideen turned government ministers in Kabul and from Islamists in Iran and Pakistan. The IRP also benefited from a politically inspired upsurge of religious ethnonationalism. President Rakhmonov, though he enjoyed support from his native Kulyab region in the south, was perceived elsewhere in Tajikistan as a communist holdover and a puppet of Moscow. Rakhmonov, in short, was the opposite of

what many imagined national identity should encompass in post-Soviet Tajikistan. For many, supporting the IRP represented both a rejection of Rakhmonov and his Moscow handlers and an act of defining what it meant to be Tajik following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

This new identity did not come without costs. An estimated 50,000 Tajiks died in the civil war, and President Rakhmonov remains in power today. Critically though, the IRP, unlike Uzbekistan's IMU, has become less rather than more militant in recent years. Other Islamist groups, moreover, have found little support among the Tajik population. Hizb

ut-Tahrir is active in Tajikistan—yet those attracted to HT are predominantly ethnic Uzbeks, and the activities of almost all HT cells in Tajikistan are directed not against the Rakhmonov government, but against President Karimov of Uzbekistan.

Why in Tajikistan should militant Islam fade while in neighboring Uzbekistan extremist groups

find increasing support among the population? One likely explanation lies in the differing political trajectories of both countries over the past decade. In Tajikistan, political competition was institutionalized, albeit imperfectly, after the civil war. In Uzbekistan, the Karimov regime has remained steadfastly intolerant of any opposition. Barred from all branches of government at the local, regional, and national levels as well as from the media, a growing number of Uzbek oppositionists feel they have few alternatives but to support the revolutionary agenda of the IMU and HT.

THE ANDIJAN UPRISING

It is not only the political opposition in Uzbekistan that the repressive Karimov government is pushing toward the extremist camp. Even those without political ambitions are suspect in the eyes of government authorities. The events leading to the May 2005 mass uprising in Andijan illustrate this point. In June 2004 Uzbek police jailed 23 prominent Andijan businessmen on charges of Islamist extrem-



The Call of Islam in Central Asia

The Kalyan mosque in Bukhara, Uzbekistan.

ism. That the businessmen were Islamic is undisputed. A central reason for their success was their shared faith: the mutual assurance that, as devout Muslims, they would honor one another's contracts aided capital accumulation. Their common beliefs, in effect, provided the needed property guarantees that the predatory and corrupt Uzbek officials did not. Moreover, their businesses—bakeries and clothing, furniture, and construction companies—were among the most sought after places of employment in the city.

Most governments would welcome such entrepreneurs. In Uzbekistan, however, where state authority is maintained by patronage and coercion—that is, by making political appointees dependent on the central government for personal enrichment—the Muslim businessmen posed a threat to Karimov's control in Andijan. Indeed, in May 2004, one month before the businessmen were jailed, Karimov sacked Andijan's long-serving governor, Qobiljon Obidov. Speaking from Andijan, where he had traveled to oversee the governor's removal, the Uzbek president explained that shaking up the local elite was necessary because “personal connections have intensified in the region” under Obidov's tenure. As Andijan residents later confirmed during my own visits to the region, Karimov dismissed the governor because he was more responsive to the local businessmen than he was to the central administration.

Although many were displeased by Obidov's sacking, Uzbeks have come to accept that the central leadership will dismiss its appointees and jail political opponents under any number of pretexts. The attack against the businessmen, who, though prominent, nurtured no political ambitions, was not as easily accepted in Andijan. Beginning in February 2005, when the state began its formal prosecution of the businessmen, and lasting until May 12, the day when the government's verdict was to be delivered, growing numbers of Andijan residents began to gather outside the city's courthouse. When a verdict did not arrive by the evening of May 12, frustration turned into violence as several young men led a jailbreak that ultimately freed the businessmen. The young men next seized the government's administrative building in the city's central square. By mid-morning the next day the leaders of the jailbreak were joined by thousands of local residents—

including many women with their children—in what became a spontaneous outpouring of frustration against the Karimov regime. Within 24 hours many of these protesters were dead, shunted by government troops into side streets and killed in a hail of gunfire.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe estimates that between 300 and 500 protesters, for the most part unarmed civilians, died in the May uprising. The Uzbek government disputes this finding, arguing that fewer than 200 died, the majority armed Islamic militants and government soldiers. Findings from interviews with those who were at the protests, including my own, discredit Karimov's depiction of the Andijan protesters as radical Islamists connected to the same militant groups that carried out the May and July 2004 bombings in Tashkent.

Most likely, however, the government's response to Andijan has furthered the militant cause. With the political opposition in prison or in exile and with independent employers such as the Andijan businessmen increasingly under suspicion, one of the few groups remaining that can provide some insulation from government abuse is the underground Islamists.

Underground Islamist groups may soon be the only remaining organizations to which Uzbeks can turn in hopes of forcing political change.

A (SMALL) OPENING FOR TAJIKS

Across the border in Tajikistan, state-society relations are markedly different. The current Tajik administration is no champion of democracy. In recent months the Rakhmonov regime has imprisoned several prominent opposition leaders. In April the head of the opposition Democratic Party, Mahmadrusi Iskandarov, was forcibly returned to Dushanbe from Moscow to stand trial on terrorism charges. (It is unclear who conducted Iskandarov's deportation. Iskandarov claims Russian security forces transported him to Dushanbe, although there is also evidence suggesting Tajik agents participated in the rendition.) And in June the editor of the opposition newspaper *Neru-i Sukhan* was found guilty of libel for printing an article titled “When Will Rakhmonov Become Putin?”

Yet, despite the system's flaws, it does allow for a degree of political contestation. In contrast to Uzbekistan, where there is no freedom of the press and where no opposition politicians hold government office, in Tajikistan an independent press does

exist and IRP as well as other opposition party members can be found in the administration and the parliament. Granted, the opposition's influence is limited. In the heavily manipulated February 2005 parliamentary elections, for example, the IRP won only 2 of 22 parliamentary seats allocated by proportional representation. Nevertheless, the opposition's ability to openly challenge the Rakhmonov regime through existing government institutions and the media limits the attractiveness of extremist and revolutionary Islamist ideology.

Civil war and pressure from international actors created the imperfect but welcome pluralism we see in Tajikistan today. Confronted with flagging Russian support and growing pressure from the West and from multilateral organizations, President Rakhmonov consented to a 1997 United Nations–brokered cease-fire in which the political opposition was accorded 30 percent of all offices in the executive administration.

One hopes Uzbekistan, with a population five times that of Tajikistan's, need not travel through a similarly painful process. Unfortunately, as witnessed by the 2004 Tashkent bombings and by the May 2005 Andijan clashes, recent events provide little hope for a nonviolent solution to the growing discontent with the Karimov regime. And with no opposition parties left to mobilize society, underground Islamist groups may soon be the only remaining organizations to which Uzbeks can turn in hopes of forcing political change.

THE KYRGYZ AND KAZAKH CASES

Although they accommodate a degree of political pluralism, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are not democratic states. After the collapse of communism, the presidents of both countries rigged elections, jailed oppositionists, and undermined parliamentary power in order to strengthen their executive rule. Through political appointees and other dependents, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev and the recently deposed Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev harassed the independent media with endless libel suits.

However, whereas Karimov has pursued a scorched earth strategy in Uzbekistan, seeking to destroy any and all opposition he confronts, the Kyrgyz and Kazakh executives have been more selective, working to eliminate only those political

rivals who pose an immediate threat to the autocratic status quo. One could argue that the Kyrgyz and Kazakh executives' restraint is not intentional—that they simply lack the same capacity to repress that their Uzbek counterpart enjoys. Regardless of the cause, the outcome of this comparative restraint has been a slow albeit limited institutionalization of political contestation. Opposition parties, even opposition members of parliament, exist in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. And, as is the case in Tajikistan, the presence of this political opposition has limited society's attraction to the anti-establishment ideologies of militant Islam.

Islamist groups are present in both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. In contrast to their broader appeal in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, however, the Islamist groups in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan tend to be concentrated in specific regions and among specific eth-

nicities, namely among Uzbeks living in cities along the Kyrgyz-Uzbek and Kazakh-Uzbek borders. Revealingly, HT leaflets circulating in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are most often

written in Uzbek and are directed against Uzbek President Karimov. Perhaps not surprising, arrests of HT members in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have been considerably fewer—in the hundreds rather than the thousands of arrests documented in Uzbekistan.

A potential explanation for this variation is not that Islamists are fewer but rather that the Kyrgyz and Kazakh states are less keen to prosecute HT revolutionaries and other Muslim extremists. Although this may be true—the Uzbek state, for example, has demonstrated a greater appetite for persecuting opponents of all stripes, not only Islamists—a June 2005 survey of Kyrgyz public opinion conducted by the US State Department suggests that radical Islamist groups find little support outside of Uzbekistan. For example, among the small minority—11 percent—of Kyrgyz who are proponents of sharia rule, only 31 percent reported that they support fundamentalist groups such as HT. Equally revealing of the limited appeal of radical Islam, this 11 percent of sharia proponents expressed *greater* satisfaction in their country's secular leadership than did other survey respondents.

In Kyrgyzstan, as likely is the case in Kazakhstan, Islam has not seen the same politicization as it has in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Instead, because their

Niyazov's attempts to elevate himself to the stature of prophet could spark an Islamist backlash among the Turkmen population.

governments accommodate a degree of dissent both in their media and in their parliaments, disaffected Kazakhs and Kyrgyz have chosen to rally around opposition figures and parties that operate within the existing political framework rather than gravitating to more revolutionary Islamists. This was most clearly demonstrated in the March 2005 Kyrgyz protests that ultimately unseated President Akaev.

These protests, sparked by the government's blatant manipulation of parliamentary elections, were led by a secular elite that, thanks to Akaev's comparative tolerance of political dissent, had mobilized a wide following in recent years. Oppositionists in the southern city of Osh occupied local administration buildings, police headquarters, and the one road linking Kyrgyzstan's northern and southern regions through a pass in the Tien Shan mountains. Emboldened by the administration's muted response in Osh, protesters in the northern capital city of Bishkek stormed the executive compound and established a command center in Akaev's hastily abandoned presidential suite. On July 10, 2005, Akaev watched from exile in Moscow as Kurmanbek Bakiev, the leader of the demonstrations in the south, was elected Kyrgyzstan's new president.

There have been no protests of comparative magnitude in the Kazakh case. Still, the proliferation of opposition parties and coalitions such as the Democratic Movement of Kazakhstan and the near absence of support for Islamist organizations like HT suggest that Kazakhs, like their Kyrgyz counterparts, prefer to lobby for reform within the current political framework rather than to support any revolutionary destruction of existing government institutions. What is striking about both the Kazakh and Kyrgyz cases is that leaders need not tolerate vast amounts of secular opposition to diffuse popular support for radical Islam's call to revolution. In the outgoing 2000–2005 Kyrgyz parliament, for example, only 11 of 60 legislators were members of the political opposition. In Kazakhstan the opposition holds only 1 out of 77 seats in parliament.

Importantly, neither the Kazakh nor the Kyrgyz opposition has been naïve. Opposition groups understand they are grossly underrepresented both in the government and in the media. Their patience with the existing institutions stems from the realization that, even if they are currently marginalized, the mere fact that they can organize and mobilize popular support means they enjoy a chance of winning power in the future. In Kyrgyzstan that future has already arrived. And one expects the opposition

in Kazakhstan has taken careful notes on their Kyrgyz colleagues' success.

TURKMENISTAN'S TYRANT

The situation is very different in Turkmenistan. Saparmurat Niyazov, or Turkmenbashi ("The Father of All Turkmen"), as the president prefers to be called, is often portrayed in the Western media and government reports as an all-powerful despot. The *CIA Factbook*, for example, reports that the Turkmen leader has "absolute control over the country and opposition is not tolerated." President Niyazov undoubtedly would be happy if this indeed were the case. His visions of grandeur equal and in many cases are more bizarre than those of other delusional leaders. But the likely reality is that Niyazov's control is not complete and that his perverse attempts to elevate himself to the stature of prophet could spark an Islamist backlash among the Turkmen population.

Many of Niyazov's eccentricities have quickly become legend in the global press—the golden Turkmenbashi monument that rotates so it is always facing the sun, his proposal to build an ice palace in the Turkmen desert, the renaming of the months and days after his relatives, and the oedipal dictate that Turkmen use his mother's name, "Gurban-soltan," as their new word for bread. While these self-tributes are comparatively harmless, others are not. Niyazov requires that his *Ruhnama*—his self-authored "Book of Spirit"—be displayed in mosques beside the Koran and that prayers be said in his honor during Friday services. In addition to these adulations—unusual even for Central Asia's autocrats—Niyazov has implemented restrictions similar to those Karimov has instituted in Uzbekistan. Political opposition is banned, the religious elite is strictly controlled by the state Muslim board, and private religious instruction is punishable by law.

In contrast to the Uzbek state's obsessive documentation of alleged Islamic fundamentalism so as to justify its authoritarian rule, the Niyazov regime has only rarely acknowledged the presence of radicals or militants. Moreover, Turkmenistan's uniquely inhospitable research environment makes it difficult to evaluate independently government claims of Islamist activity and public support for radical or militant organizations. The evidence that has emerged, however, suggests that some Turkmen Muslims are resisting Niyazov's autocratic rule, although not necessarily by adopting Islamist ideologies.

The Norway-based Forum 18, a freedom of religion watchdog group, has documented several cases of imams' refusing to display Niyazov's *Ruh-*

nama in their mosques, an act of disobedience for which they were expelled from their mosques. According to Forum 18, Niyazov's use of mosques as a vehicle for promoting his personality cult has led to Muslims' turning away from state-controlled or "official" Islam and a revival of the Soviet-era underground practice of *aksakal* or village elder-led Islam. In March 2004 a Turkmen court sentenced Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, the country's former head mufti, to a 22-year jail sentence for what the court concluded was the imam's involvement in a 2002 assassination attempt on President Niyazov. The court's decision, as with any action of Niyazov's government, must be treated with skepticism. One conclusion that can be drawn from Nasrullah's imprisonment is that the Niyazov regime fears it may not have full control over the Islamic leadership.

President Karimov in Uzbekistan shares a similar concern, and he has imprisoned hundreds of imams in his attempt to assert government authority over religion. Karimov's strategy backfired; his attack on imams, made worse by his parallel attack on the political opposition, only furthered public support for Islamist groups. A similar outcome is certainly possible in Turkmenistan should the many now underground imams, dismissed after refusing to sacrifice their beliefs to Turkmenbashi's personality cult, suddenly become the target of a new wave of government repression.

THE DEMOCRATIC FACADE

In the Western media the spread of Islamist ideas is often likened to that of an exotic disease, something that is little understood and debilitating to the entire body politic. What the Central Asian cases demonstrate, however, is that radical Islam is not inexplicable or universal—that despite a rhetoric of international revolution and a pan-Muslim caliphate, the global spread of Islamist ideas has, paradoxically, local and readily identifiable causes. Radical Islam in Central Asia manifests a society's response to the accumulated injustices of severely authoritarian rule.

Not all autocratic states engender Islamist opposition. Thus, while the recently toppled Akaev leadership in Kyrgyzstan was authoritarian and the

Nazarbaev government in Kazakhstan remains authoritarian by any measure, the fact that these regimes accommodated some degree of political pluralism limited the appeal of radical Islam. Because discontented Kyrgyz and Kazakhs can criticize the government in the media, because they can form opposition political parties and even, on occasion, win seats in the national parliament—in short, because Kyrgyz and Kazakhs can challenge authority from within existing institutions—society in these two states does not have an appetite for the Islamist call to revolution.

Similarly, in Tajikistan the Islamic Revolutionary Party and its supporters abandoned their weapons once the 1997 UN-brokered peace accords guaranteed them representation in the central government. Given the chance, politicians will prefer to be politicians. As the Uzbek case illustrates and the Turkmen example portends, however, politicians, when systematically barred from participation, will become militants and revolutionaries.

International groups such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and Freedom House, along with a chorus of liberal democracies, have been quick to dismiss the flawed elections in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Although this criticism is justified, and one hopes future ballots in these countries will be free and fair, we must not overlook the effects these elections have and the vast gulf that exists between Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and Tajik authoritarianism on the one hand, and Uzbek and Turkmen authoritarianism on the other.

What are often pessimistically referred to as "facade" democracies—as polities with a mere window dressing of political contestation—are in fact states that have turned out to be qualitatively different from other autocracies that prevent all opposition. Even a minimal voice in national politics provides people hope for change and dissuades society from turning to revolutionary ideologies like radical Islam. As such, foreign governments should continue to engage the Uzbek and Turkmen presidents and press them for even the most modest of political reforms. As the March 2005 Kyrgyz uprisings demonstrate, the slightest of political openings may be all a reform-minded opposition needs to achieve dramatic political change. ■