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## The Caspian Sea Region's Key Position In The Rise Of Militant Islam

Graham Cage  
*University of Central Florida*



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THE CASPIAN SEA REGION'S KEY POSITION  
IN THE RISE OF MILITANT ISLAM

by

GRAHAM CAGE  
B.S. Baylor University, 2002

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Masters in Arts  
in the Department of Political Science  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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## ABSTRACT

Researchers and policy experts point to key issues and groups such as the Palestinian/Arab-Israeli Conflict, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Saudi exported Wahhabism, and, in more recent times, the Iraq wars as being the source of militant Islam in this day in age. However, this perspective ignores key issues and ideals in to how this new form of Islam has emerged in recent decades. For instance, with all the conflicts that have occurred in recent decades, except for the 1979 Revolution in Iran, why have they not yielded *Shari'a* inspired Islamic states in Yemen, Lebanon, the Occupied Territories and Iraq? Currently the only Islamic states in the Arab world are ones that lay on the Persian Gulf that were established during their independence from colonial rule.

One only has to look further east and to the north of the Middle East to see militant Islam taking hold in places like Chechnya, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Waziristan and a host of other areas which do not get the attention from many people in the West. After the demise of the Soviet Union and the years directly after, a political vacuum was formed that received almost no attention from the outside world except for states with historical and cultural similarities. Here Islam has and is being used as a military and political doctrine to accomplish goals and as an ideological base for launching new attacks against its proclaimed enemies. Indeed many of the key theologians and figures have come from the Arab world, but the rise of militant Islam could not have formed with this alone. Many of the fighters on the

ground in al-Qaeda and its direct affiliated groups are indeed not Arabs but come from a wide range of different ethnic groups such as Afghans, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Uyghurs and Pakistanis who have answered bin Laden's call of lesser *jihad* against the West.

Rather than examining militant Islam through a Middle Eastern perspective, this author wishes to give an alternate view that the current rise of militant Islam in the world is directly associated with the internal political situation of the Greater Caspian Sea Basin and not the Middle East as so many people have proposed in the past. To examine this idea, this author will look extensively at the internal conditions of states that have allowed militant Islam to arise and mature in such a short time span in this often forgotten region. The primary purpose of the proposed paper is to examine the rise of militant Islam through a Caspian Sea region lens rather than a Middle Eastern one. This study will also examine violent groups in various states to understand how groups are able to form and how they differ from each other. Countries ranging from as far as Turkey to the Xinxiang Province in China and from the southern reaches of the Russian Federation to Pakistan will be the primary focus.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States  
CRI – The Chechen Republic of Ichkeria  
FATA – Federally Administered Tribal Areas  
HT – Hizb ut-Tahrir  
HN – Hizb an-Nasra  
IJU – Islamic Jihad Union  
IMU – Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan  
IRP – Islamic Renaissance Party  
ISI – Inter Service Intelligence  
IJU – Islamic Jihad Union  
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
NIS – Newly Independent States  
NWFP – North-West Frontier Province  
SSR – Soviet Socialist Republic  
USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republic  
UTO – United Tajik Opposition  
US – United States

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Militant Islam Today

Since the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> in New York City, Pennsylvania and Washington D.C. the United States has turned its foreign policy attention away from the Cold War mentality, revolving around Russia and the communist bloc, and toward the hot bed of political and religious unrest in the Middle East and the Arab world. The Saudi born leader of the attacks is Osama bin Laden who with his al-Qaeda network is a primarily Arab group who wish to overthrow the regimes throughout the Arab and Muslim world and reestablish the Islamic Caliphate. Consequently Western governments see the rise of militant Islam strictly as an Arabic phenomenon that threatens to spill over to other areas of the Islamic world as far as the Philippines and even parts of Western Europe and the US.

Researchers and policy experts point to key issues and groups such as the Palestinian/Arab-Israeli Conflict, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Saudi exported Wahhabism, and, in more recent times, the Iraq wars as being the source of militant Islam. However, this perspective ignores key issues and ideals in how this new form of Islam has emerged in recent decades. For instance, with all the conflicts that have occurred in recent decades, except for the 1979 Revolution in Iran, why have these not yielded *Shari'a* inspired Islamic states in Yemen, Lebanon, the Occupied Territories and Iraq? Currently the only Islamic states in the

Arab world are ones that lie along the Persian Gulf that were established during their independence from colonial rule.

One only has to look further east and to the north of the Middle East to see militant Islam taking hold in places like Chechnya, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Waziristan and a host of other areas which do not get the attention from many people in the West. After the demise of the Soviet Union and the years directly after, a political vacuum was formed that received almost no attention from the outside world except for states with historical and cultural similarities. Here Islam has and is being used as a military and political doctrine to accomplish goals and as an ideological base for launching new attacks against its proclaimed enemies. Indeed many of the key theologians and figures have come from the Arab world, but the rise of militant Islam could not have formed with this alone. Many of the fighters on the ground in al-Qaeda and its direct affiliated groups are indeed not Arabs but come from a wide range of different ethnic groups such as Afghans, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Uyghurs and Pakistanis who have answered bin Laden's call to lesser *jihad* against the West.

Rather than examining militant Islam through a Middle Eastern perspective, this author wishes to give an alternate view that the current rise of militant Islam in the world is directly associated with the internal political situation of the Greater Caspian Sea Basin and not the Middle East as so many people have proposed in the past. To examine this idea, this author will look extensively at the internal conditions of states that have allowed militant Islam to arise and

mature in such a short time span in this often forgotten region. The primary purpose of the proposed paper is to examine the rise of militant Islam through a Caspian Sea region lens rather than a Middle Eastern one. This study will also examine violent groups in various states to understand how groups are able to form and how they differ from each other. Countries ranging from as far as Turkey to the Xinxiang Province in China and from the southern reaches of the Russian Federation to Pakistan will be the primary focus.

### The Road Less Studied

From this analysis of the Greater Caspian Sea region, a new policy perspective can be viewed that moves toward other areas in the Islamic world. The “War on Terror” that is currently under way has focused on the Palestinian/Arab-Israeli conflict, Saudi Arabia’s Wahabist interpretation of Islam, the current invasion and occupation of Iraq, and Shia controlled Syria and Iran with only limited focus on the war in Afghanistan. The West has only focused on these select few countries because of the competition for resources and allies during the Cold War with the Soviet Union. However, the west, and particularly the United States, has not addressed the areas that composed the former Soviet Union in any type of policy initiative until very recently as they shared almost no historical commonality with Europe.

Because of this, this study could provide some foundation for future policy initiatives not just in combating militant Islam in the future but in formulating and implementing policy toward the region. With the war in Iraq spinning out of control and the current crises in Gaza and the West Bank, the US and its allies have not become any safer. Leaders in states outside the Middle East have gained little attention outside of the economic and direct military threat spheres. Areas like Tajikistan, Chechnya, Uzbekistan and Pakistan gain little attention for the US government outside the occasional air strike or harsh language from world leaders to suppress Islamic movements. By examining the current militant Islamic movements outside the Middle East, important policy changes may be considered if it can be proven that the internal political conditions of these areas play a larger role than previously believed.

Unlike other areas of the Islamic world such as Indonesia, Thailand and the southern Philippines where strong Islamic movements have very often turned violent, the Caspian Sea region has played large roles in the global movement of militant Islam. Areas in South-East Asia and in the Pacific Rim though may have international connections that do not threaten to spill over and engulf their neighbors in similar situations that we see today in Afghanistan and other states. Most of the East Asian Islamic movements are based around a small minority of disenfranchised people who wish for more political and economic freedom. However, there has been a domino effect in the Caspian region since the fall of the Soviet Union which illustrates how interlinked these states and groups have become in the past fifteen years.

Many of these other movements are associated with nationalist movements where the Muslim population is an ethnic minority and live in less developed areas.

Lastly, with regard to the various conflicts in the Caspian Sea and Central Asia occurring today, this study will bring many of them, some that have almost no contribution in the English literature, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and current Waziristan conflicts in Pakistan, to the forefront of modern militant Islam. As the current “War on Terror” has no foreseeable end in sight it is imperative that the English literature address these remote and previously unknown groups which have banded together to understand their mentality in allying themselves with the Taliban and al Qaeda. Understanding how these groups have evolved over the decades will be a vital aspect in creating and implementing new policies for the future.

In addition, a theoretical understanding in how stateless movements are able to form can be explored and examined. With every day the world is moving away from a state centered system and toward a world where borders play a less important role than they once did. This study can provide a case study of how non-state movements are able to pick up momentum and produce a network that can stretch over the entire world without having a capital to from which to operate from. If this author can accurately show that the internal conditions that were present in the Caspian Basin can produce this type of trans-state network, then this would contribute to the greater understanding of how and where non-governmental groups are able

to start and thrive. A theoretical understanding of fundamentalism in general can also be gained if certain internal conditions can be shown to create an environment that breeds these ideals.

### Past Works

The literature dealing with Islamic militancy is quite large with many authors from various disciplines weighing in and applying various theories from economics to historical causes to religious differences. This thesis will cover a wide selection of previous works conducted in explaining militant Islam. Because most of the literature in English focuses on how the Middle East is and has been the center of this movement, this study will use this foundation as a source of how a Caspian Sea perspective differs and surpass a Middle Eastern one. This does not mean, however, that there is no literature on this area outside the Middle East, although most of it has come out of the events the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> and from a strong Western or US policy lens. Though this research will focus somewhat on how to stem the rise of militant Islam, it will trace the roots and argue that the internal politics of states have allowed this phenomenon to form. We will deal with the research in a chronological format to trace how authors have evolved in their research.

No literature review of militant Islam can exclude Samuel P. Huntington's thesis in *"Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order"*. Huntington suggests that the coming conflicts will not be based on economics or ideology but on cultural lines. Though he does not predict the rise of Islamic militarism against the West, his theory does illustrate how one 'civilization', the Islamic world, is against everything that another is composed of. Huntington does state that the western civilization will come into conflict with one or more other civilizations because of its top position in world politics. The Islamic world is simply the first of many challenges against the West's dominance in the world.<sup>1</sup>

A less known but still very important author is Mark Tessler who uses the case study of Algeria to explain the rise of Islamic movements in his article, *"The Origins of Popular Support for Islamic Movements"*. Instead of giving a religious perspective to the situation, Tessler states groups quickly become religious affiliated because of the already established network of mosques and the ability to criticize the existing order without fear of reprisal. Religion becomes simply the means to replace the existing government and not necessarily the primary cause. In a sense the movements are not religious in nature but to an outsider looking in at the start of political unrest would only see a radical Islamic movement with the idea of destroying the existing regime. The author also states that very often these groups do not become stable party's once in government and forced to produce results as their power rests solely in criticizing.<sup>2</sup>



An examination of Central Asian terrorist groups in particular up to 1999 are analyzed in Anna Zelkina's paper, *"Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia: How Genuine is the Islamic Threat"*. Zelkina finds that by studying the various Islamic groups in the three major countries with major Islamic groups, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the many Islamic populations, except in Tajikistan, have no tradition of political parties but form religious groups at all levels of society. These groups even bond with secular groups as well when the government begins to crack down on all possible opposition groups. Then these groups receive financial and logistical support from outside states which also supply other groups in the region as well. This allows some level of unity amongst the groups in different countries as fighters and commanders travel from hot spot to hot spot.<sup>3</sup>

Writing before the events on 9/11, Bernard Lewis, considered one of the foremost and influential scholars on the Middle East, in his book *"The Crises of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror"* presents the causes of militant Islam in the governments of the Arab countries themselves. Lewis points to economic and political inequalities and backwardness as the driving causes throughout the Middle East and which causes militant groups to rise and contest the status quo. In addition, very radical interpretations to Islam, primarily Wahhabism, has added another layer to the problem as many of these groups see everything Western as something that has caused their suffering. Even Muslims who have adopted Western ways are considered to be enemies of these fundamentalist groups. The primary goal of all these

militant groups is to return the Islamic world to its historical place of grandeur and reestablish the Islamic Caliphate based on *Shari'a* law.<sup>4</sup>

Another case study is in "*The Russians, Chechens and the Black Gold: a Geo-economic Explanation for the Chechen War*" by Andrew Towner who gives an example of how conflicts in the region can erupt through economic means. Towner states that multiple economic causes, some dating back over decades, were the true cause for the Chechen conflicts. The Islamic factor was simply a unifying factor used to rally the people's support. The conflict started when the Federal Republic pushed for economic and political independence. Because of key oil infrastructure and resources the Russian Federation could not allow this without consequence. The political factors primarily include the Caucasus states pushing for more independence directly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The author does point out that this war has no one single cause but stems from a multiple number of factors, both economic and political, that came together at the wrong time.<sup>5</sup>

John L. Esposito in his book, "*Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*", comes very close to giving a true Caspian Sea region focus on the creation of modern militant Islam. He proves an account of the evolution of al Qaeda and bin Laden from the Soviet-Afghan War to September 11<sup>th</sup>. Esposito focuses both on the psychological as well as the physical attributes that created al-Qaeda from both the Arab world as well as the greater Islamic community. The author shows how the ideologies from Egypt and Pakistan came to the forefront as groups like

the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Taliban were able to gain momentum where the internal conditions were prime for breeding hostile ideologies. Instead of looking narrowly at the Middle East, the author looks at the entire Islamic world as a stage for al-Qaeda and gives examples of various areas and how they have contributed to bin Laden's cause.<sup>6</sup>

Ahmed Rashid, a well known and respected reporter and author in the region, looks at Central Asian Islamic groups in his book, *"Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia"*, and argues that the prime reason for Islamic militarism is that the oppressive regimes in Central Asia have caused different groups in the five newly independent republics to rise and contest the ex-Soviet leaders. One can see how the civil war in Tajikistan was able to topple the government and create a reasonably stable government and claim some success as an Islamic group became one of two leading parties in government. Other states like Uzbekistan are still combating Islamic groups which have become bold enough to attempt numerous assassination attempts against the president. Rashid also points to how some of the harsher attempts to stamp out all forms Islamic fundamentalism have forced other groups which have remained mostly peaceful, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) to turn more militant. This in turn has caused the level of militant attacks to increase against the government.<sup>7</sup>

Another of Bernard Lewis's books is entitled *"What Went Wrong?: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response"* which also details why the European and Muslim world has come into conflict in past decades. Here he states that after the rise of the Islamic world, the West

began to defeat the Islamic Caliphates first on the battlefield and then in the market place. What once was the center of the world for the arts and sciences was reduced to eventually being a colony by the same people they thought were uncivilized barbarians. As a result the Muslim world began to blame their own internal problems on Christians and then Jews. Lewis discredits the policies that the European powers implemented on the Islamic world as the causing factor and states that the issues that the Muslim world faces are purely internal. Muslims across the world have produced their own sense of victimhood that they then turn onto others.<sup>8</sup>

Fareed Zakaria's book, *"The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad"* gives a strict political explanation for the rise of violence in the Islamic world today. His thesis tries to prove that the necessary requirements for the development of a democratic government are not present in many cases but violence arises when the populace attempts to modernize. Though Zakaria's book does not speak specifically to the Islamic world he points out that many of these cases are in the Islamic world and dedicates a chapter to Islamic terrorism which he states is a result of people connecting their own individual regimes with the US. As a result if a discrepancy arises against the regime, the US is automatically seen as an enemy as well. Therefore the only way to achieve victory against governments is to stop their international support.<sup>9</sup>

Even further east in China's Xinjiang region, traditional part of Central Asia, Eric Hyer addresses the independence movement of the Muslim Uighur minority group in his work "*China's Policy toward Uyghur Nationalism*". Hyer addresses the causes of groups push for independence as well as their religious differences from the vast majority of the rest of China. Because the Uyghur nationals have been found fighting along with their Turkic kin for Islamic causes, China is extremely worried that another pan-Islamist front may be called against them with backing from its Central Asian neighbors. The author also addresses China's policy of economic importance in the region as Caspian Sea and Central Asian natural resources prove to be an important strategic opportunity as the Xinjiang province provides the only direct path for China to acquire these resources.<sup>10</sup>

A very different explanation of how militant Islam has formed comes from David Commins and his book "*The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*". Instead of explaining religious fundamentalism in an economic or political light, Commins explains the rise of Wahhabi Islam as an internal competition for the minds of the Islamic world through different religious institutions. Over the past few decades, the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam came to dominate much of religious institutions through their massive spending of petrol dollars on schools and madrasas. The author states that the actual militant movements such as the Taliban in Afghanistan were not a result of these madrasehs as these movements have a history going back to the colonial period but have been greatly empowered by the massive influx of funds

from the Saudi state. The cause of modern militant Islam was an unexpected backlash from a corrupt state using its massive funds to promote their ideals in the name of Islam.<sup>11</sup>

Last book to be looked at is one that looks at the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia itself. Matthew Crosston's book, *"Fostering Fundamentalism: Terrorism, Democracy and American Engagement in Central Asia"*, argues that the US has allowed groups like the IMU, UTO and others to form because of the lack of oversight on foreign governments to implement democratic reforms after independence. Because of the events of September the 11<sup>th</sup>, the US has allowed its allies in the region with a political blank check who have in turn halted all, and in some cases reversed, political reforms. This in turn has allowed religious groups to arise and gain prominence as many people see them as alternatives to authoritarian rule.<sup>12</sup>

These various books and articles cover a wide variety of different viewpoints and causes behind Islamic militarism. Some like Samuel Huntington see the situation as a grand struggle between various civilizations while others take a much narrower approach and look for individual causes that each ethnic group or state has for allying with Islamic militants. Others simply give a history of events of various groups through civil wars to explain how this global movement came to play a huge role in this region of the world. However, all authors, including ones who wrote before September 11<sup>th</sup>, see external factors, meaning outside the Caspian Sea and Central Asian areas, as a serious cause though they all address different international

actors in different ways. It is interesting to note that the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> caused no dramatic change in the literature as various views on radical Islam were consistent before and after.

Authors such as Rashid and Zelkina who look at the Islamic movements as regional organizations constantly refer to either the USSR or the new Russian state, primarily the former, at fault because of their anti-religious and political policies and the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The Afghan invasion is a constant factor that these authors provide as a starting point for armed resistance along religious and ethnic lines. The situation did not improve as the Soviet Union disintegrated and the new rulers continued with the old Soviet institutions to maintain power. Even with the Russian Federation, Russia's harsh policy towards the Chechen independence movement created a serious terrorist movement that had the ability to strike at the heart of Moscow at its peak. These sources see these Islamic movements primarily in an anti-Soviet context.

Other authors like Commins, Esposito and Lewis see the Saudi Wahhabi influence and other Middle Eastern ideals as playing the primary role in the primary cause for these radical movements. With the intention of producing allies in the newly independent Muslim states Middle Eastern states began to provide funds and ideas to a population that in many ways needed both. Commins and Lewis see the Wahhabi funded madrassahs and mosques preaching an extreme form of Salafi Islam as the prime reason for why groups like al Qaeda and their

associated groups were able to thrive so easily. The outside sponsors, if even only supplying political support, were able to create complex organizations which stretched over continents. These authors see the radical Islamic movements in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea region as trying to reestablish their connections with the Islamic world with fellow Muslim help.

The last group of authors put the Islamic movements in context with the European world. Zakaria and Huntington are two examples that try to explain how Islamic militarism has grown out of hatred of the West. Though these two authors have very different explanations and theories for why the West has come into conflict with radical Islam, they agree that the West's relationship with the Muslim world has played a large part. Huntington believes, as already stated, that the West comes into conflict with different civilization because of the colonial history in so many areas of the world while Zakaria explains that the Islamic groups see the West supporting unjust governments in the Muslim world. Therefore these two authors have common theme that the radical Islamic movements were created out of resentment for the West.

It is also important to note that when Islamic fundamentalists are fighting against the West, they do not mean the West as the US knows it in the Cold War era. The West refers to all European countries and states including the Eastern European one that came from the former Soviet Union which still hold European ideas and standards. With the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the late 1980s, the mujahedeen believed that the downfall of



communism was directly accredited to them and their military accomplishments. Therefore, the current regimes in the former-Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea regions are seen as the last breath of Western imperialism which is still a primary battleground.

### Providing a New Perspective

The literature, expansive as it is, however does fail to provide any real connection between the Caspian region and the global jihadist movements operating around the world. Though all authors post September 11<sup>th</sup> pay some heed to Afghanistan and Pakistan, the majority of the literature revolves around al-Qaeda's connection and influence in the Arab world in countries like the Sudan, Saudi Arabia and more recently in Iraq. Then these countries are linked to terrorist attacks around the world, especially in Western Europe and the US. Very little connection is made relating groups such as the IMU or the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) to how they contributed to the rise of al-Qaeda and the Taliban and produced a generation of trained warriors that are dedicated to the ideals of lesser *jihad*.

These sources go into detail about this topic but fail to connect them in any real way to international terrorism and al-Qaeda. The radical groups are only seen within the context of the state of origin in or, at best, in the context of a conflict in an adjacent state. Never do the authors put these regional organizations in context with global radical Islam in the same way

that Middle Eastern groups, like Hezbollah, are placed. They are always seen as being separate and independent without connections to any outside groups. The authors largely ignore, or place in a secondary position, the actions of networks like the IMU which play a large role in events in Afghanistan and Pakistan before and after the US led invasion of against the Taliban. Yet the many of these groups, both militant and simply fundamentalists were and still are widely known to be using Afghanistan or Pakistan as a base of operations. In the case of HT, a more peaceful Islamic group, they have offices across, not only the Islamic world, but as far as Europe. Placing groups like this into the forefront of the Islamic radicalization movement unfortunately has been largely ignored.

This study will add to the literature by bringing these groups to the center stage by providing a unique perspective that places the Caspian Sea region as the central focus instead of the Middle East. Following the divisions in the literature that this author presented above as a guideline, this study will try to connect the first category to the third. Never in the literature has a study been fully dedicated to this idea that the terrorist organizations that now threaten the West are a product of the NIS of the Caspian Region. Some authors connect the first and second categories together by stating that other Muslim countries have spawned militant Islam as a result of ideological exporting and vey liberal spending to groups with similar ideologies. Instead the third group is commonly linked to the second to explain militant Islam.

In addition, as stated above, very little has been written from a scholarly perspective about these militant groups in English without the connection of September 11<sup>th</sup> being the primary focus. Though the 2001 US terrorist attacks do play a large role in this study, the point is not to connect these individual attacks to any one source but to show that the fundamentalist movements originated in the Caspian Sea Region. If the US sees itself playing a larger role in the region, either militarily or economically, the literature must reflect a move toward the region as it is equally, if not more, complex as any in the Islamic world.

#### Process of Examination

This study will be divided into five chapters that will examine the presented topic. The first chapter will be the introduction which will present the thesis and introduce the key regional actors that will be addressed along with the more specific topics to be discussed. This second chapter will attempt to persuade the reader that the policies that the Soviet Union implemented left many of the NIS and autonomous republics inside Russia behind economically and was seen as backward while at the same time being cut off from the rest of the Islamic world. Starting with the Basmachis revolt in the 1920s, the first revolt against the newly established Soviet authority, and coming up to the dissolvent of the Soviet Union, this chapter will attempt to understand the history of these different areas through the perspective of

growing religious animosity. Factors such as the economic conditions of various political units inside the Soviet Union leading to conflicts and rising tensions such as the war in Afghanistan will be examined to lay the foreground of the rise of Islamic militarism in the world.

The third chapter will focus on the policies that major and minor powers in the Caspian Sea Basin have adopted that have either led to the increase of militant Islam or the reduction in it. States like, Russia, Uzbekistan and Pakistan, to name a few, will be analyzed to understand what successes and failures have occurred that has led to this outbreak of violence in the past fifteen to twenty years. This chapter will be brought as closely up to date as possible as information comes available. Because the events of September the 11<sup>th</sup> played such a huge role in how not only the US understands these areas but also how most, if not all states, view Islamic movements in general, this chapter will address policies of these various powers before and after 9/11. The primary purpose of this is to see if and how states have changed their stance toward militant Islam between these two periods.

The fourth chapter will explain how the evolution of various movements were able blend into one another and create a global militant front that threatens the security in many states, not only in the region but also in Europe and further abroad. To do this the various conflicts that have erupted since 1991 that have contributed to militant Islam on a global scale will be examined in chronological order. Though the war in Afghanistan pushed many gears into motion that created this modern phenomenon, only limited pages will be assigned as this

will be dealt with at length in the first chapter. Some of the conflicts that will be dealt with in detail will be the Nagorno-Karabakh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the two Chechen Wars, the civil war in Tajikistan and current war against the Taliban in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan. To test this theory the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was in Eastern Europe, will be dealt with in brief to see if these conclusions can be applied to other areas of the world with similar characteristics.

The fifth and final chapter will be the conclusion which will involve not only finding a greater understanding of how militant Islam has evolved and come into the forefront of world politics from the Caspian sea region but what also can be done to stem the tide of this movement. This author understands that there is no single cure for the violence that plagues the Islamic world today, but by going to the breeding grounds of militant Islam one might understand how and why it has grown to the level it is today. Some policy recommendations will be given from a global perspective on what can be done to eliminate this threat in the long term.

As stated above, the internal conditions of the Greater Caspian Sea Basin will be the prime focus in these three chapters. The internal conditions, for better clarification, will include everything from economic policies from the creation of the Soviet Union until today to political policies that have either hindered or created a strong sense of Islamic nationalism amongst its people. Though addressing internal conditions may be too overarching for one single study to

review, this author will try to touch on all possible aspects that have contributed to Islamic militarism in the regions but will focus greatly on the key aspects that are presented throughout the research which as of now will focus on economic inequalities, harsh suppressive tactics, and neighboring failed or failing states in the region.

Throughout the examination the concept of an ever changing national identity will be present. Numerous authors related to the field of ethnic, national and the overall identity will show how the rise of militant Islam is strongly related in the Caspian Sea Region. Theories attempting to show the importance of identity will be viewed chapter by chapter. The final chapter will take these theories into consideration to see which one is the most applicable toward the rise of militant Islam.

## CHAPTER II: THE EVOLUTION OF ISLAM DURING THE SOVIET EMPIRE

### Introduction

When analyzing the origins of Islamic resistance to any non-Muslim power it is imperative to remind one's self that armed resistance against an outside force is nothing new to the world. Revolts in the name of religion have occurred in numerous places at numerous times and with numerous results. The British Empire had *jihad* declared on them a few times ranging from the Sudan in 1885<sup>13</sup> to British India in 1857.<sup>14</sup> Imperial Russia had a very similar experience when the Caucasus were conquered in the 1830s where a renowned militant leader named Imam Shamil led a brave but futile revolt against the Russian invaders in Dagestan and Chechnya.<sup>15</sup> Even in distant China under the Qing Dynasty the Muslim Hui population staged a revolt that starting in 1856.<sup>16</sup> It seems that whenever large populations of Muslims were incorporated into non-Muslim empires, revolts arose with a very strong religious connotation to them. These revolts however failed to free their respective populations in the long term but showed that these revolts most certainly did not start either in the Middle East or in the twentieth century.

Russia has one of the longest continuous histories of incorporating large Muslim populations into its empire. The destructions of the Kazan Khanate in 1552 by Ivan the Terrible

brought the first large Muslim population into Moscow's control. The Russian Empire continued to grow at a rapid rate incorporating many other ethnic groups under their control. The Great Game during the nineteenth century pitted Tsarist Russia against the British territories in India. During this time the Russian Empire expanded its influence over the Central Asian Muslim Turks. Russia always looked at these Khanates and tribal authorities as backward and barbaric and in need of proper guidance. Periodic resistance arose to challenge Tsarist rule but were always immediately squashed. Even in the Caucasus the numerous nations came under dominance from the Russians. Many revolts in both areas arose but never achieved any long-lasting successes.

#### 'An Army of Islam'

These revolts never took a pan-Islamist face until the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 and the Soviet Union began the painful and arduous task of reincorporating breakaway states which lasted until the Second World War. Because of the distinctly European view of the Cold War and the West's emphases on liberating fellow Europeans, the first revolt against Soviet rule is often forgotten. The Bashmachi Rebellion operating at its height from 1917 to 1924<sup>17</sup>, but lasting until 1933, challenged Soviet authority in the Central Asian states that now are Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan with Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan being the center of resistance because of its larger population and centralized position. Composed of any and all who opposed Soviet rule joined together under the banner of



resistance which the Russians labeled as *basmachis*, or bandits. A large portion of the resistance came from the Islamic community who opposed both the European dominance and the abolishment of their Muslim heritage for Christian and Western values.<sup>18</sup>

Leaders and fighters from many parts of the Islamic world came to fight against the atheist Russian forces. During the early phases of the rebellion, the conflict took a very pan-Turkish nature as the Ottoman Empire was collapsing and “Young” groups were finishing gaining momentum in Turkey and increasing in Central Asia. The idea of a pan-Turkish state formed by *jihad* came to the forefront with the arrival of Enver Pasha, who opposed in Turkey, had come to Central Asia with the hope of uniting the Turkic people. During this time the notion of a united Turkistan became a plausible outcome. Immediately on his arrival in 1921, Enver began to unite the various *basmachis* under one command.<sup>19</sup> By early 1922 Enver controlled over twenty thousand men directly and established a base of operations in Bokhara. During this time Afghanistan had also become a base for providing arms and asylum to fighters as Turkic populations also lived in the northern regions of Afghanistan.

Islam played a monumental role in the rebellion as leaders, both conservatives and liberals alike saw their fight against the Soviet Union as a matter of faith. As the communist came in, *Shari'a* courts were abolished, religious leaders were excluded from government, and land reform threatened the traditional *waqf* land holders. The fighters in the Fergana valley labeled themselves ‘an army of Islam’ while leaders took up historical Islamic titles. Even self-

proclaimed Muslim communists believed in the importance of incorporating Islam with communism in order to improve society. Communists in Muslim Central Asia saw communism in a nationalist perspective and not in the revolutionary world view that the Russians saw. As a result the Soviet Army would have to defeat the pan-Turkic nationalist movement in order to succeed in incorporating Turkistan.<sup>20</sup> Enver himself wished to resurrect the Islamic Caliph, which had just been abolished in the Ottoman Empire, and took the title of “commander-in-chief of all the forces of Islam, son-in-law of the Khalif, and representative of the Prophet” to legitimize his role.<sup>21</sup>

By 1922 the Soviet government, having already defeated the White Army, was able to focus much more attention on the rebels and launched an assault against Enver which succeeded in killing him and much of his staff by the end of the year. From here the revolt took a downward spiral as all the major leaders were either dead or in hiding until 1924 when the Soviet Union saw fit to establish a civilian government. From 1924 until the early days of collectivization in the 1930s, small outburst occurred against the communist government but all were quickly and brutally put down.<sup>22</sup> Isolated small groups operated in the mountains and occasionally attacked Soviet targets but only with limited effectiveness. Eventually all the leaders were hunted down and killed. Enver’s successor fled with what was left of his army to Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup>

## The Soviet Union goes over the Caucasus

The Caucasus also saw much action during the Russian Civil War. At the end of the First World War, the various peoples of the Caucasus rose up against their Russian masters and established a series of states that highlighted their own national identity. Immediately after the abolishment of the Russian Empire in 1917, two new states declared their independence and established their own government. The Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus incorporated what is today Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia and Dagestan under one government that lasted until the Soviet invasion in 1921. Incorporating the Southern Caucasus was the very shortly lived Transcaucasia Democratic Federative Republic which roughly included what is today Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia which lasted until its breakup into three respective separate states in 1918. These two states incorporated both Christian and Muslim populations which lived in relative peace. Due largely to their internal strife and a growing Red Army to the north these quickly crumbled but not without stiff resistance.

When examining these two areas, North and South Caucasia, in this study, the history of how these states came into being is not as important as their defiance to being incorporated into the Soviet Union. Though it should be noted that many of the leaders, such as Sayd Shamil, grandson of Imam Shamil, were decedents from legendary leaders who opposed Tsarist rule and had held on hope that one day they would be able to establish their own state. Northern Caucasia was only incorporated after a considerable small, but effective revolt

occurred where the Mountainous Republic had just been invaded by Soviet forces in 1920. A “*Shari’a* army of the Mountain People” was formed to combat the Red Army and gained a strong foothold in southern Dagestan.<sup>24</sup> However, the last major stronghold of the Terek-Dagestani rebellion, as it was later named, fell in May of 1921, only a year after the rebellion started.

South Caucasia, a more religiously divided area including various forms of Christianity and Islam, had seen the encroachment of Soviet Russia as soon as the Northern Caucasus had been subdued. By this time the unified government of the three separate nations had crumbled and each had its own republic. Georgia and Armenia had been traditional allies to some degree against the two Islamic empires to the south, Persia and the Ottoman Empire, though Muslim settlers, both from Azerbaijan and Turkey, had settled in both territories over the years.<sup>25</sup> Traditional Azerbaijan however had been split in two between Imperial Russia and Persia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is interesting to see that even at this point in time Azerbaijan did not associate itself directly with Islam but with its own ethnic group.<sup>26</sup> Both groups of Azeris, in Russia and Iran, tried to keep their own individual culture and language alive and therefore a strong sense of nationalism had grown amongst the population. Progressiveness had also inched its way into society to the point where Azerbaijan became the first Muslim state to allow women to vote, preceding even Western democracies like the US and Britain.<sup>27</sup>

## Remapping the Lands

Following the re-conquest of lands lost in the Russian Revolution, the Soviet Union under Stalin's direction wished to make the various ethnic groups easier to control from afar through a series of different policies. During this time both regions saw both the redrawing of borders and the forced movement of peoples across all of the USSR. The process of national delimitation was in full swing which promised different national groups the right to govern themselves in the Soviet Union. As a consequence, peoples not fitting into a specific ethnic group were thus removed and placed in their corresponding national political entity. During this time small revolts occurred, such as in Chechnya and the isolated Bashmachi rebels, but all were quickly and easily disposed of. Many of these revolts in the Northern Caucasus were met not only in military defeat but with mass deportation to the scarcely populated steppe of Kazakhstan.

Though the boundaries within Central Asia are not completely without reason, they were designed to economically and politically benefit Moscow's agenda. The primary driving force behind the ethnic distinctions was language but ignored group identities even when peoples within a Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) had little cultural similarities. Overseen but Stalin himself in the mid 1920s, these new boundaries were designed so that each new SSR had an equal share of resources and to guard against a potentially dangerous national identity from forming.<sup>28</sup> The Kyrgyz people in particular had very little cultural identity to speak of so a

'Kyrgyz' identity was more or less formed from the outside which included its own national history, art and language with much of it European in nature.<sup>29</sup> Kyrgyz life had remained unchanged for centuries until the arrival of Europeans during the Great Game.<sup>30</sup> As a result ethnic groups in Central Asia were for the first time restricted by boundaries from without.

The new boundaries of Central Asia also had to take into account the abolishment of two of the last Khanates in the region, Bukhara and Khiva during the re-conquest of the Bashmachi Revolt. Some of the more conservative values of Central Asia survived in these two areas which were also some of the more ethnically mixed. Psychologically, the destruction of these two states brought in European and communist ideals into a very conservative Muslim region with a long standing tradition of contributing to Islam and, in addition, ended the rule of the last ruling descendants of Genghis Khan.<sup>31</sup> These two political entities were first abolished and then incorporated into the preexisting political structure under Uzbekistan due to proximity.

A social revolution also occurred as this new political system was created. Seen as one of the more backward regions of Soviet Union, Soviet reforms were felt most strongly. The language itself was dramatically changed to include new words and was drastically changed when converted to the Latin then Cyrillic script from their original Arabic or Mongolian characters.<sup>32</sup> Women's position in society was dramatically altered as European forms of dress quickly replaced the more tradition nomadic and Islamic dress.<sup>33</sup> Education and literacy also

became more wide spread as both boys and girls were required to attend school. Literacy in Central Asia before the Russian Revolution hovered around 1 to 2.3 percent but by 1945 it had soared to 75 percent in the most rural areas with most regions having anywhere between 90 and 100 percent literacy.<sup>34</sup> This new education however strongly diverted away from any tradition subjects and focused on a very Soviet form of education.

The Caucasia states went through a similar, but in many ways more drastic, changes as populations were physically moved against their will and new boundaries were imposed over old ones. During this time the North Caucasus went through tremendous change primarily during the onset of the Second World War. The Chechen people and their immediate neighbors had always been seen as a thorn in the side of the Russian Empire and later on the Soviet Union. As a result the majority of the political and religious repression fell upon them. Throughout the 1930s, the Soviet Union devised a similar policy of dividing the peoples along political lines as was done in Central Asia.<sup>35</sup> As an example Chechnya found itself in an Autonomous Republic with its Muslim neighbor, the Ingush. In order to counter any center of future resistance, the new Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic incorporated both the former oblasts as well as other areas previously outside the two ethnic group's physical area in order to include more Slavic peoples.<sup>36</sup>

However these border changes did not stop further armed resistance against the Soviet authorities. Small resistance groups operated continuously until the onset of the Great

Patriotic War when again a large uprising emerged using guerrilla style tactics against the Red Army.<sup>37</sup> With the German army pushing deep into the heart of the Soviet Union, the Chechen/Ingush resistance movement had some level of connection with German intelligence agents and commandos who provided logistical and military support to the rebels. Though this support was very limited, Stalin and other Soviet leaders used this connection as a reason to further crack down on the Muslim ethnicities in the North Caucasus. Even persons serving in the Red Army were subject to persecution based solely on ethnicity and religion.<sup>38</sup>

In the final two years of the Second World War the entire population of numerous Muslim groups, including the Chechen, the Ingush, Balkars, Karachai and the Dagestani, were mass deported to Kazakhstan and Siberia where a large portion of the population<sup>39</sup> died due to poor conditions. The Soviet historian Sergei Arutunov states that the deportations were however a result of Chechen resistance to collectivization and not because of the collaboration with the Germans.<sup>40</sup> Most likely a number of causes produced this policy of ethnic cleansing but, in any case, the Soviet Union commenced with the deportations of entire ethnic groups until the end of the War. The borders were then redrawn again to reflect the new ethnic climate. By the end of the Second World War the populations were allowed to return to their homes only to find other ethnicities such as transplanted Russians and Ukrainians living in their homes.<sup>41</sup>



It is important to note that armed resistance and the redrawing of the map was not isolated to just Central Asia and the Caucasus but was occurring elsewhere in the Soviet Union. However, when pertaining to the two regions just described, the ethnic groups still had a very strong sense of ethnic and/or religious identity. The process of national delimitation sought to alter the preexisting identity of these peoples into new ones that would be more compatible with Soviet Europe. The remapping of the lands was made with the idea of making any future resistance unlikely which would then make the individual political divisions easier to integrate and control from afar. Century old political connections between different groups were broken until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

### The Political and Economic Environment During Soviet Rule

#### Political

The political and economic repression of the Muslim populations of Russia, though intensified under the Soviet Union, started under Tsarist rule.<sup>42</sup> Even before the First World War Imperial Russia had placed traveling restrictions on pilgrims traveling to Mecca and nationalized religious *waqf* lands in order to produce cotton as a cash crop.<sup>43</sup> However, until the 1930s with collectivization and the Great Purges the religious institutions were allowed to remain intact but with limited influence. Though the move to abolish religion was not in response to Islam but to the Russian Orthodox Church, Soviet authorities used this blank check

to wipe away Islam as well.<sup>44</sup> This period until the demise of the Soviet Union saw only state approved mosques with government regulated religious criteria. Publicly religion was discouraged as an evil that, under communist doctrine, an institution that suppressed people in their given socio-economic level. As the peoples in many areas of Central Asia and the Caucasus were deeply devout Muslims, this policy was most severely felt here.

Madrases and other mosque centered functions have a long tradition in Central Asia in particular. It was here in Samarkand, modern day Uzbekistan, that the madrases had their origin when Central Asia was the center of Islamic thought and culture.<sup>45</sup> During the processes of collectivization and national delimitation the peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus saw both these vital institutions quickly become dismantled as schools were closed, mosques being forced to go underground, prominent Muslims either executed or deported, and even communist leaders openly stated to be Muslim where accused of being spies and traitors.<sup>46</sup> Anti-religious propaganda also was produced in mass with numerous books trying to undermine the legitimacy of the Koran and of key figure in the religion itself. At its peak even the five pillars of Islam were not allowed to be practiced under fear of reprisal.

However, by the closing days of the War, corresponding to the return of the exiled ethnic groups of the Northern Caucasus, Stalin had loosened his grip on religion throughout the country. Though still severely limited compared by 1920s standards, government controlled mosques were allowed to be opened, the Koran and select works could be legally owned, and

even some of the more historic madrassahs were allowed back open.<sup>47</sup> From this point until the late 1970s repression of religion, though still harsh, was much more subtle and non-violent as the Khrushchev and Brezhnev administrations came to power. Instead the publishing of atheist literature and the opening of cultural centers that limited religion to historical interpretations were established which gained huge amounts of readers and visitors throughout the years.<sup>48</sup> Under the All-Union Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, or *Znanie*, Russian word for knowledge, for example, new atheist institutions were slowly able to establish themselves alongside a limited Islamic revival.

Though Islam was able to exist in the Soviet Union the communities were disconnected from the rest of the greater *umma*, or the greater Muslim community. Religion, at least officially, was only able to operate under the gaze of the state. Religion became much more private and socially underdeveloped as people were not able to express and discuss their personal views of religion in open and organize religious functions outside state control. In a sense, Islam began to look like a European religion with European customs becoming entrenched with local customs. This was especially true in Kazakhstan where European customs were brought in by immigrants, both voluntarily and forced, from all over Eastern Europe. Large groups of Ukrainians, Russians, Byelorussians and Germans were brought over to work as professionals in the Eurasian republic.<sup>49</sup>

The Caucasian republics found themselves in a very similar situation as did the peoples of Central Asia. As in their neighbors to the east, the Muslims of the Caucasus had a long standing tradition of Islam being incorporated into their identity as many of the nations were previously part of the Persian Empire. In many of these areas, the suppression of Islam was seen as a suppression of their own national identity. Many of these policies were not directed at Islam in particular but had strong and very real implications for Muslims. The only dramatic difference of the Caucasus and Central Asia was the prior extent of Russification on these areas. The Caucasus had a much longer history with the Russian Empire and had both adopted Russian customs to some extent and Russians had moved into the region as settlers into the major cities.<sup>50</sup> In addition, as with most of the ethnic groups of the mountainous region, the populations of these ethnic groups were very small by comparison to others. Therefore combined with the numerous ethnic divisions above, this made any possibility of a common identity from forming nearly impossible. Only groups with previously strong identities could fight against their encroaching northern neighbor and remain unified in any significant way.<sup>51</sup>

The Northern Caucasus in particular, as a result of the insurrection during the Second World War, saw the exclusion of local ethnic groups from high ranking political positions until the later 1980s. This caused many people to believe that indeed they were being completely controlled by outsiders who had no regard for their wellbeing.<sup>52</sup> This would later play largely into the psyche of the Chechen rebels in both wars in the 1990s.<sup>53</sup>

## Economics

Economics is a valuable tool in understanding militant Islam as areas where future conflicts would arise were left underdeveloped in comparison to other parts of the Soviet Union. Indeed the Soviet Union did bring areas like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan up to par with the rest of the USSR, as described in the previous section, but further investment and allocation of resources was limited to areas that would benefit Moscow. Some Muslim areas of the Soviet Union, particularly in the Russian SSR saw very high levels of economic development as large groups of Russians lived alongside local populations and the location lay on economic strategic lands.

The planned economy the USSR had laid down as policy devoted certain sectors of the economy to particular areas. Uzbekistan is a perfect example as cotton had become the staple crop for the entire USSR. As a result investment only was given on a need-be basis with Central Asia and the Caucasus, to a less extent, receiving little as there were few natural resources to be exploited or strategic importance. However, other areas, like Kazakhstan and Tatarstan, though still Muslim received great amounts of investment that greatly exceeded the need for the population. This would play largely into the actions of both groups and leaders directly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Table 1 Investment into different Republics

Republic	1970	1980	1988 <sup>54</sup>	Population % in '89 <sup>55,56</sup>
Russia	60.3%	57.2	57.0	50.8
Georgia	2.6	2.2	2.1	1.4
Armenia	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.6
Azerbaijan	1.1	1.0	0.9	2.4
Kazakhstan	3.9	3.8	3.6	2.8
Turkmenistan	0.4	0.4	0.4	1.0
Uzbekistan	2.1	2.2	2.1	5.8
Tajikistan	0.6	0.5	0.5	1.5
Kyrgyzstan	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.9

Source: Information collected by the International Monetary Fund, The World Bank, the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the Soviet government.

The Table 1 above shows in the first three columns the percentage of investment each republic received from the Soviet government from 1970 to 1989 and in the last shows the national population as a percentage of the entire Soviet Union in 1989. The table shows that the more southern republics received less monetary investments even though they represented a large portion of the population. Turkmenistan is the only the south republic that received investments close to its population while Uzbekistan, with the largest percentage of the population in the Caspian Sea Basin in the Soviet Union, received considerably less investment compared to its population. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan all received investment that was comparatively less than their population.

The republics directly north, Kazakhstan and Georgia, received much more investment in comparison to their population size. This indicates that as one goes further north from the Caucasus and Central Asia, one would see much more infrastructure than they would in the

south regardless of the population size or density. Though not intentional, it provided an efficient policy in avoiding breakaway entities and which left many republics economically underdeveloped when compared to others. It is not coincidence that republics, which would become states, that are further in the south experience much more political and ethnic turmoil. This logic becomes even more obvious as other Muslim majority political entities inside the new Russian Republic received even higher levels of investment. Nationality, as the table shows, had no real impact on the level of investment in these areas. The only exception to this was the Chechens who are further north than even Georgia, which will be addressed in the next chapter.

Oil and natural gas, though important during the Cold War, has become a much more important factor in recent years. The oil infrastructure therefore provides an excellent example as the largest producer and refiner can be looked at in understand how the economies have grown in respective areas. Out of chance, this very important natural resource provides the best example of how investment operated in the Soviet Union. The importance of oil will play a very important role in areas such as Chechnya and is directly connected to the conflict.

Table 2 Oil Extracted from Political Regions

Republic/ Admin Division	1970	1975	1980 <sup>57</sup>
Tatarstan	100 million metric tons	101	75
Georgia	0	0	3
Azerbaijan	20	17	13
Uzbekistan	2	1	1
Kyrgyzstan	0	0	0
Tajikistan	0	0	0
Turkmenistan	14	16	11
Kazakhstan	13	24	18
Dagestan	2	1	0

Table 2 shows the oil output of republics from 1970 to 1980. It is very obvious to see the major producers of oil with Tatarstan standing out as the top producer here accounting for more than all the others combined. A general trend that all of them share is that each republic starts to dip after 1975 in their production. All the republics in the Caucasus have a constant trend downwards even from 1970. The traditional oil sector prior to 1970s was in Baku, Azerbaijan where the vast majority of the world's oil originated.<sup>58</sup> As the Cold War became a long term reality, the Soviet Union began to expand its oil sector in the Volga Region, where Tatarstan is located, under fear that any southern military push from Turkey could spell devastation for the Soviet military and economy.<sup>59</sup> This "Second Baku", as it would be called, became the primary focus for oil refining and the major hub of the Soviet oil sector. Oil flowed



from all regions of the Soviet Union to the Volga Region including the Caucasus and Central Asia. By the 1970s, yet again the production of oil changed to a “Third Baku” when oil was discovered in large quantities in Siberia. This time the Volga Region kept its significance as it provided already built oil infrastructure to transport oil to the western, and more populated, portions of the country.<sup>60</sup>

With the central region of the oil industry leaving the Caucasus, the need for further investment became less important outside of simply maintaining the pre-existing infrastructure. Central Asia saw a similar effect though not as large as the level of oil was considerably less in addition with Siberia quickly replacing the Volga Region. This made the areas dominated by Muslim populations less economically relevant than before as investment funds went to other more profitable regions of the country. Only in Tartarstan in the Volga Region did the Muslim population retain its geographic importance as a key link in the oil infrastructure.

When considering the political and economic situation of the Greater Caspian Sea Basin it is important to see it as an indirect effect of Soviet policies that had an unanticipated effect. The policies implemented were not aimed directly toward the Islamic communities but policies did have a profound effect on them. The political policies toward Islam were an indirect result of Soviet repression of the Orthodox Church in the west. Economic policies followed a line of logic that attempted to benefit the Soviet Union as a whole and did not take into consideration

the idea that the Soviet system would one day cease to exist. Russians were seen as the perpetrators of many of these reforms as the government was dominated by ethnic Russians, others who claimed to be Russians, or leaders who adopted Russian culture. This would leave the other republics in the Soviet Union without adequate infrastructure post independence in 1991 with much resentment toward ethnic Russians living in all the Republics.

### A Second Chance for Success

In 1979 the Red Army invaded its southern neighbor of Afghanistan in order to replace the crumbling communist government and to reestablish order after civil war erupted in the country. This act, called “an exercise in ‘good neighborliness’”<sup>61</sup> by Leonid Brezhnev, started a ten year long occupation that lasted until 1988. During this time the Red Army became involved in a guerrilla war that resulted in the deaths of over 14,000 Russian troops<sup>62</sup> and well over one million Afghan civilians, though no official numbers exist, and caused one of the biggest refugee populations the world has ever seen. This decade long war also saw the resurgence of militant Islam in the Caspian Sea Basin. During this time Islamic fighters, calling themselves the *mujahedeen*, Arabic for strugglers, swarmed in from a host of different countries to defend the Afghan people. The Soviet Union soon found themselves fighting a dedicated guerrilla force that would soon be supplied by various other countries with new and

advanced weapons. During the 1920s the surviving Bashmachis fled the Central Asia republics and resettled in Afghanistan. The Soviet Union found itself fighting an enemy that they had already defeated sixty years before but on different soil.

Similarly to the Bashmachi Revolt, the Soviet-Afghan War from the start had a strong Islamic context to it. The first ethnic group to call to arms against the invaders just days after the war began was the Nuristani people of Eastern Afghanistan.<sup>63</sup> Nuristan itself, meaning 'home of the Enlightened' in Farsi, became one of the strongest centers of resistance of the insurgency throughout the entire war. The Nuristan people are considered to be some of the most religiously devout people of all Afghanistan as derived from their name and only after their example did the rest of the country rise up to join the Nuristanis and fight the Soviet Union until their eventual withdrawal.

It was this war that brought the Central Asian and Caucasian Muslims into direct contact with other Muslims from other areas of the world and with the *umma*. At first the Red Army sent large amounts of Central Asian conscripts to Afghanistan with the hope that the local populations would be more receptive to what the government thought were their 'elder brothers'.<sup>64</sup> This policy was soon reversed as the Central Asian soldiers were deserting in large numbers and sometimes even joining the *mujahedeen*. One such paratrooper that participated in the initial invasion was a young man named Jumabio Khojayev who would later lead the militant wing of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan under the alias of Juma Namangani.<sup>65</sup>

This exposed a generation of soldiers who had been isolated from state sponsored Islam and exposed them to the ideas of a very radical form of Islam with an ethnically similar people. These soldiers would then bring back their new form of Salafi Islam to their home republics where animosity was already running high amongst the population of the ongoing war. The soldiers would come back with tales of the heroic 'freedom fighters' as they faced disproportionate odds against one of two superpowers. The credibility of the *mujahedeen* increased even more as the Red Army was beginning to lose ground and lives in the later years of the war.

The *mujahedeen* that participated in the fighting were composed of a variety of ethnic groups across the Muslim world. The Afghan War became the first Islamic conflict of the modern era in which volunteers came from far and wide to participate in fighting against a common enemy and stop what they perceived as further European expansion. At this time a common figure today came from his home country to participate in the *jihad*. Osama bin Laden became a chief organizer and financier of fighters traveling from their home state, to Pakistan and then into Afghanistan. Unfortunately both for a security and scholarly perspective, the amount of fighters coming into Afghanistan at this time is not known though it is thought to be believed that many of the people coming in came from various parts of the Arab world.

During the war, various countries including the US, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and China supplied huge supplies of weapons to various insurgent leaders especially in the later years of

the war. This would have disastrous consequences directly after the 1989, as the weapons remained while the country fell into civil war. These new and advanced weapons such as the STINGER missile system ensured that the fighting would continue.<sup>66</sup> Most of the weapons would go to the fundamentalist leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his Hizb e-Islami militia who would later be the Prime Minister before the Taliban.<sup>67</sup> Years later these weapons would remain as the US-led coalition invaded in late 2001 the Afghan civil war resumed in full. Discussion of the Taliban and their rise to power will continue in more detail in the fourth chapter.

Unfortunately for the rest of the world, the Afghan descent into anarchy was the single most important event that allowed militant Islam to be projected on the global scale. This conflict marks the beginning of events in the Caspian Sea Region that will dramatically affect the ability for militant groups today to operate. Many of these foreign fighters would later return to their home countries with new tactics and ideological perspectives of religion that would greatly affect the entire Muslim world where certain personalities would become dominant figures. Without the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan militant Islam would have surely evolved in a very different manner. This would have been particularly disastrous for the NIS which bordered the war-torn country as the Soviet war machine had withdrawn and left the borders open for fighters and smugglers to pass easily through.

## Remarks

Throughout the modern history of Central Asia there had always been a sense of not belonging to the rest of the Soviet Union. This is shown through the Basmachis rebellion that lasted into the 1930s and how the ultimate repression of religion did not succeed. The time between the Stalinist era and the Afghan war saw the Muslim peoples of both Central Asia and the Caucasus become less aware of their own religion. The Afghan war unfortunately exposed the soldiers who went to a very fundamental and puritan form of the religion which was then imported into the Soviet Union. The only two forms of Islam existing in the Soviet Union were either state sponsored which was seen as a puppet of the state and the Salafi interpretation which was almost completely different. Because the state sponsored mosques were seen as agents of the Soviet Union, people who were looking for a new form of religion, they would automatically look toward the fundamentalists. However the evolution of militant Islam does not stop with the demise of the Soviet Union but continued onto the NIS as will be explained in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER III: THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE SINCE INDEPENDENCE**

### Introduction

The difficulties of the newly independent states in the Caspian Region only became more complex after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Though the people of the region finally rejoiced over their own national state, the political elites understood that without the Soviet political system they would become increasingly isolated from world affairs. The Second Persian Gulf War in 1990/91 had gained much of the media's attention as the US wished to establish its 'New World Order' in the post-Cold War world. The Caspian Sea region found itself in an international political system that knew very little about while the European satellite states and East European ex-Soviet republics received most of the attention. Even the Russian Federation lost much of its interest in the area, outside of the millions of ethnic Russians living in the new countries, as the country fell into political and economic chaos.

Even in the scholarly field, interest in the area was not present. Directly after their independence, some literature was published trying to reintroduce the areas back into the western realm of knowledge. However by the mid 1990s, the Caspian Sea Basin largely fell out of sight in the academic and public spheres alike. This became partially true with Russia as well. The Russian Federation largely ignored the issues that had consumed the region as its own

political and economic instability forced the country to look inward. As a result the states were left in a limbo with no real historical friends in the region. The peoples had ethnic and religious ties to some regional powers in the area, such as Turkey and Iran, but contact was minimal by most standards. This left the NIS in uncertainty as in all the states except for one, Kyrgyzstan, ex-Soviet leaders still held onto power by any means possible. With no large international support these countries became ideal for anarchy.

With no resources being supplied by Moscow to control their populations, the ex-Soviet leaders lost their last defense in holding back aggressive groups that had spawned during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The economic, political and religious repression that lasted during the Soviet era could have continued as long as the Soviet central government provided adequate institutions and forces in the republics. However as soon as they left in 1991, the urges that built up over generations emerged and the new groups of every kind formed almost overnight across the region. The following chapter will examine how these groups developed and evolved to the present day. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in Central Asia and the de facto Chechen state in the Caucasus will be used as examples. Their connection to other Islamic militant groups in the region will also be looked at to understand how the Caspian Sea Region became the center for the War on Terror.



### 'Tyrannical Apostates'

As the Soviet Union fell, the leaders of the Soviet Central Asia, Kazakhstan and the Caucasus found themselves almost overnight without a political, economic and military provider. Though the people of each state wished to obtain national states of their own, the leaders had some foresight to see that their own governments would have difficulty on holding onto power. Their legacy gave them only the tools of repression and isolation, as which was handed down to them from the Soviet Era. Secret police, interrogations and censorship of all form of media were used in every state under fear that rival groups would take action against the ruling government. This was the last existing barrier for the formation of militant groups in the region to form. The loss of military and political control over the state itself allowed political groups to establish themselves in opposition to the current regimes. This was no more noticeable than in the Fergana Valley of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan where the vast majority of the population of Central Asia resides. The Fergana Valley traditionally has been seen as the heart of Central Asia both for its population density but also its historical Islamic roots going back centuries. In addition, most of the major cities of Soviet Central Asia are in this valley.<sup>68</sup> It is no coincidence that this area became one of the focal point of Islamic militarism in the Caspian region.

The tensions that had been building for three quarters of a century took no time in establishing their presence in the region. In less than a year the political instability produced a

civil war in Tajikistan and the establishment of vigilante groups within neighboring Uzbekistan. The Tajik Civil War has its roots during the Soviet-Afghan War when the Tajik Republic became a center for protest against the aggression and had established organizations with other Muslim nationalities that would become key players during the civil war.<sup>69</sup> The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) along with a wide variety of other opposition groups contested the first presidential election where the leader, Rakhmon Nabiev, won and set up a Soviet style state. In response the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), supporting the opposing candidate for president was an all-encompassing political and militant group made of democrats and Islamists.

Though the details of the war will be discussed in the next chapter along with other conflicts it is important to note the fear that this conflict produced in other capitals across the region that such a civil war could erupt inside their own state. Interestingly, the civil war under the UTO was eventually a success which led to elections and a semi-stable government that exists even today. The 1997 accords that concluded the war allowed that IRP a third of the positions within the government and won a considerable percentage of the electoral votes.<sup>70</sup> The groups that participated on both sides of the conflict were allowed to participate in government. However the majority of the IRPs influence in Tajikistan has faded since the accords were signed. Since then the Islamic group has not been able to provide any better future for its citizens and has done increasing worse in the polls.

From the beginning the Tajik Civil War had connections to the Afghan Civil War occurring just south of the border. Leaders active in the Afghan Civil War, such as Ahmed Shah Massoud, had close ties with the IRP and the UTO and traveled regularly in between the two countries. This put the leaders of the region on edge with the belief that the Afghan Civil War might spread to their countries in a similar way that the Afghan one had spread to Tajikistan.

Islam Kiramov, the President of Uzbekistan, quickly began to crack down on any potential Islamic group, or any other group for that matter, that might contest his authority especially as many of the IRP fighters were ethnic Uzbeks who had joined the fight. The city of Namangan, which is very close to the Tajik border and has a very large Tajik population, would be an ideal city for Karimov to make an example.<sup>71</sup> In Namangan time two groups arose. The first was an Uzbek form of the IRP which had national movements across the post-Soviet state. This group was quickly suppressed though it had not conducted any attacks against the Uzbek government. The mere appearance of another IRP was enough to repress the organization regardless of the group's goals or means. The second was a vigilante group named Adolat, Uzbek for justice that operated primarily in Namangan. Political oppression also found this group before it could adequately establish itself.<sup>72</sup>

This can be seen as the first stage of an evolution of militant Islamic groups in their region. Groups can be characterized as being disunities, small and struggling to find an

underlining purpose. Groups like the Islamic Renaissance Party, Adolat, Lashkari Islami, and a host of others in Central Asia all had the underlying similarity of bringing about change for the current institutions but had no manpower, resources or organization to implement these changes. This in turn made them easy prey for the region's governments which instantly saw them as a very serious threat to its power. Only the Islamic Renaissance Party had any type of organization though it was not truly independent as it was incorporated in the Tajik Opposition Union very early on.

### The Rise of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

The Soviet paratrooper Jumabio Khojayev at this time would become a major player in militant Islam as he was a member of both the Uzbek branch of the IRP and Adolat, and had participated in the Tajik Civil War along with his soon to be companion Tahir Yoldashev. Yoldashev began his Islamic career by establishing an organization in Uzbekistan called the *Lashkari Islami*, or Troops of Islam, which was a nonviolent group that pushed for social and political change following *Shari'a* law. Like all other groups Yoldashev was quickly isolated and banned by the Kiramov regime. These two figures eventually agreed that the need to remove Islam Kiramov from office was necessary to establish an Islamic Republic in Uzbekistan. However the loss of Tajikistan following the conclusion of the civil war in 1997 forced the Uzbek

fighters, who were unable to return home under fear of arrest or persecution to either stay in Tajikistan or flee to neighboring Kyrgyzstan where the formation of the IMU occurred in 1998. Yo'ldosh, now taking a more ethnic Uzbek sounding name for himself, became the leader of the IMU and made numerous statements where he refers directly to Kiramov and his repressive government. Khojayev would also, at this time, change his name to Juma Namangani, named after the city from which he was born, would become the head of the military wing of the IMU.

The IMU was largely the byproduct of both of these key figures combining the remnants of their previous organizations and any other that wished to replace the Kiramov regime with a true Islamic state. It is both interesting and important to note that the political motivations were the prime reasons for deposing the President. Other authors, such as Ahmed Rashid, point to the squandered economic opportunities as a primary cause of the rise of militant Islam.<sup>73</sup> Though the economic conditions surely played an effective recruiting tool for many disenfranchised youths, the public statements made by the IMU do not support this. The following is an excerpt from a public statement issued from the IMU following a series of bombings in Tashkent which were aimed at assassinating Kiramov himself. Though there is a dispute over the perpetrators of the act, the IMU used this only to enhance their argument:

Having attained freedom, instead of bringing back Islamic life, which had been here for centuries, we have allowed tyrannical governments apostates to seize power. They had

been fighting against Islam; their preceptors had shed more Muslim blood than the Bolsheviks; they have jailed, deported, and killed the *'ulama*. They had oppressed young Muslims with particular cruelty. They had closed the mosques of Allah, forbidding the mentioning of Allah's name. In former times, they had been serving Communist interests in Uzbekistan.

The rest of the message gives a brief outline of how the Uzbek government is supposed to dismantle itself. Nowhere in the declaration does Yo'ldosh give economic factors as being a part of their discontent of their regime. The message goes into detail the current offenses that the Uzbek President has made against Islam and of being more brutal than the Soviet regime itself. This declaration to overthrow the Karimov government sounds extremely familiar to the al-Qaeda declaration of revolt against the Saudi government a few years before. The group holds the government responsible for the attacks that kill civilians as Karimov has not allow any form of criticism to be raised against himself or his rule. Even some of the early groups that promoted the idea of a peaceful replacement of government found themselves being incorporated into the IMU as they believed the current regime could only be taken down by force. Yo'ldosh's original group, Lashkari Islami, is a perfect example of this. Other groups like the pan-Islamic group Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), another peaceful Islamic group, fear that they might be pulled into a more militant path if the repression continues.

Fareed Zakaria states that there is no economic solution to militant Islam as the cause does not stem from economics but from a religious and political ideology. Zakaria is speaking also primarily about the al-Qaeda network above other umbrella groups. He points out that the people that occupy key positions in these groups are occupied by educated and well-off people who could have a very stable future. He uses the 9/11 hijackers as an example of this as the hijackers all came from middle class backgrounds and had the ability to be a part of their society. The groups operating in the Caspian Sea Region follow this similar path. The IMU and its affiliated groups wish to overthrow the current regime for its perceived political mismanagement which follows a similar line to what bin Laden has stated in the past about his home country Saudi Arabia. This connection also shows how close these groups operate together in the region.

The rise of the IMU can be seen as the second stage of the development of militant Islamic groups in Central Asia as the smaller and less defined groups were incorporated into a larger, more organized umbrella movement. This second group is much more organized and has the ability to act, often violently, against the central governments of Central Asia unlike the previous other groups who were largely local in their operations. At this time the organization also had the opportunity to connect itself globally with other organizations at if already had the international apparatus established across states.

## The Wolves Return

However unlike the militant groups that arose in Central Asia, the Caucasus had more economic causes of conflict. This was no more evident than Chechnya where the separatist movement went through two wars with the Russian Federation directly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The separatists believed that the oil infrastructure running through their region was not being used to advance the staggering economic status of the republic.<sup>74</sup> The oil infrastructure also ran directly through the breakaway region which meant that if Chechnya were to break away, it would be in a key position for an independent oil hub that was outside the Russian sphere of control.<sup>75</sup> The war saw initial success for the Chechen rebels as the Russian military was pushed into chaos which resulted in large amounts of casualties on both sides. This war, like the Afghan war for Central Asia, produced a group of heroes who identified their nationalistic Chechen cause and the advancement of Islam as one and the same. One of the leading figures in this conflict was a Chechen named Shamil Basayev, named after Imam Shamil who fought against Tsarist rule in the early nineteenth century.<sup>76</sup>

Many of the Afghan *mujahedeen* again participated in the First and Second Chechen Wars. The First Chechen War, ending in 1996, saw the establishment of the de facto state of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (CRI), Ichkeria being the traditional homeland in the mountains



for the Chechen people. The national symbol of the Chechen people was the wolf which became a symbol both for the new republic and Basayev as well. Without any recognition from the world community, besides one president of Georgia, the Chechen Republic saw little political or economic advancement. With the conclusion of the first Chechen War the CRI wished to incorporate its fellow Muslim neighbors in Ingushetia and Dagestan and the militant leaders wished to make a united Northern Caucasian state into a new Kuwait that would thrive on its oil reserves. This ignores the fact that all of the other republics publically stated that they had no wish to leave the Federation. As a result, a small group of fighters led by Basayev invaded and occupied a few small towns in Dagestan which in part started the Second Chechen War. Unlike the First Chechen War this time around the Russian military fared much better and was able to reincorporate the Chechen republic into the Federation and push the remaining fighters into the mountains.

The First Chechen War became the equivalent to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as it became a rallying point for the local population as well as for foreign fighters. And just like the Afghan War, Chechnya became a staging ground for other conflicts in the region such as Dagestan, as stated above, but as well as Abkhazia and South Ossetia, both break away areas in Georgia where leaders of the Chechen movement, like Basayev would participate and lead military operations. By this time a variety of rival groups had arisen around other warlords who had come to dominance during the multiple conflicts. Groups like the International Islamic Battalion, the Caucasian Front and other minor groups all participated in the fighting. However,

unlike Afghanistan, the Second Chechen War along with Chechen terrorist attacks in Moscow and Beslen took away this safe haven and any public sympathy for the rebels and made the rebels seem like the cruel aggressors. Fortunately for the Caucasus the Second Chechen War saw the threat of militant Islam quickly suppressed and eliminated as a major actor in the Caspian Region in a relatively short time.

The Northern Caucasian Front, the International Islamic Battalion and few others all were largely disorganized and lacked direction during their first phase. During the First Chechen War they quickly learned to work together against the common enemy, similarly to the Uzbek groups against Kiramov. The second phase for the Caucasus was somewhat of a success for the Chechens but the Second Chechen War combined with the terrorist tactics and influence from outside states severely limited its popularity after 2002. Even the famed Chechen hero Shamil Basayev was killed by what was believed to be a car bomb planted by a rival group. The second phase, though successful directly after the First War did not last.

### From the New Great Game to the War on Terror

The international and regional setting of the Greater Caspian Sea Region also had a profound effect on the rise of militant Islam starting at the new millennium. The most

important factor when considering the rise of jihadist groups is the politics of the war-torn country of Afghanistan and its political vacuum. Because many of the conflicts in the Caspian Sea Region have strong connections with Afghanistan, the internal happenings of Afghanistan can have profound consequences for others. As the Tajik war was in its early stages, so was the rise of the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, or more commonly known today as the Northern Front, which is a multiethnic group representing the diversity of the country itself.<sup>77</sup> This Northern Front<sup>78</sup> in 1993 would be the first non-Pashtu government to take control of the country in centuries and had ethnic and cultural ties to all its northern neighbors.<sup>79</sup> The Islamic State of Afghanistan, as the official name of Afghanistan became, saw the Tajik Civil War as a prime opportunity to expand its influence to fellow Muslims who had gone through similar hardships. Therefore Afghanistan became a natural staging area for the resistance as the UTO had its biggest support in the southern portion of Tajikistan.<sup>80</sup> The UTO however always remained primarily a nationalist conflict even though foreign fighters did participate under the banner of militant Islam.

The IMU also has similar connections with Afghanistan. As the Northern Front was pushed out of Kabul in 1996, the Taliban and their extreme puritanical ideology of Deobandist Islam came into power to restore Pashtu dominance over the Afghan state.<sup>81</sup> The Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan, as the Taliban named the country, became a model of success for the IMU when it was established in 1999. The IMU quickly looked toward the south and established relations and bases of operations while retaining their older ones in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The IMU would at this time also receive expertise and funds from the world network funded by Osama bin Laden. Once in contact with the Taliban and al-Qaeda, the group was also exposed to both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan which were huge supporters of their own Islamic ideology. For the first time the IMU became exposed to other terrorist organizations and truly became globally connected. Though in all reality there was little possibility of the IMU overthrowing the Uzbek government with its huge military alone, it however rattled the government to their highest levels.<sup>82</sup>

The IMU unwillingly found itself in the New Great Game, a struggle over resources in Central Asia, where it had instant connection with both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, two countries that were also supporting the Taliban until 2001. Both countries were seeking allies in the region and spending large quantities of money to build future support. Saudi Arabia had been exporting its Wahhabist form of Islam, very similar to the Deobandist Taliban movement, since the Soviet-Afghan War and had established a network of mosques and Islamic schools throughout Central Asia while Pakistan at the same time had been funding and training the *mujahedeen* fighters in Afghanistan since the Soviet War. This support would continue with the rise of the Taliban in the mid 1990s. Both states saw the IMU as a further extension of their network bearing fruit. Though the IMU was not a central figure in Saudi Arabia's or Pakistan's goals, it was an important ally which could be used to place pressure upon the new Central Asian regimes.

The fall of the Taliban and the occupation of Afghanistan by the US in 2001 had the most dramatic impact on the IMU since its founding. Not only was the head of the militant wing of the group, Juma Namangani, killed in the early days of the invasion but the IMU lost its primary bases and largest support from Afghanistan. The IMU was forced to retreat with its Taliban and al Qaeda allies into the southernmost Pashtu region of Afghanistan and in the Waziristan region of northern Pakistan. Here the IMU became extremely decentralized to avoid detection from pursuing forces. Today the IMU has played a very large part in the Afghan and Pakistan war on the Taliban as attacks have been coordinated between the IMU and other terrorist groups in the region. Though the IMU is believed to have been wounded in its fight with the US and its allies it is surely still a major actor in the War of Terrorism in Afghanistan and Central Asia

This sudden change marks the third phase in the evolution of militant Islam in the Caspian Sea Region. The last phase marks the decentralization of the movement where the leadership is much more of a symbolic figure than an actual commander in the field. As with the IMU Yo'ldosh took over the militant operations after the loss of Namangani and is believed to be involved in the ongoing Wana conflict in Pakistan. The decentralization is very vividly shown in the quantity of splinter groups have attempted, and succeeded, in attacks across the world but still hold onto the idea to overthrowing the Uzbek government as their long term goal. Examples of these splinter groups include the Eastern Turkistan Islamic

Movement, the Jamaat of Central Asian Mujahedeen and the Islamic Movement of Turkistan. These groups have all commenced with their own attacks, including attempted attacks in Europe under the IMU's cause. Though the IMU was used here as an example, other groups exist including Hizb ut-Tahrir and its splinter groups do and follow very similar though they are not as large as the IMU and its affiliated groups. For the Chechens, the last phase did not occur as the territory was reincorporated back into the Russian Federation. Their movements were all successfully undermined and eradicated by the Russian military. Officially the Chechen conflict is ongoing but the intensity of the fighting has greatly diminished.

#### The al-Qaeda Connection

The three phases of militant Islam have a key position in understanding militant Islam in the region and its connection to global *jihadism*. This connection becomes clear when examining the Taliban and al-Qaeda in similar light. If one were to consider al-Qaeda, the Base in Arabic, as the central figure in global militant Islam not only would al-Qaeda naturally have relations with the IMU and other groups in the region under ideological similarities but the three phases of militant Islam also fit perfectly with this case as well. Al-Qaeda, once a small funding organization for Afghan *mujahedeen* fighters became very centralized in the years preceding 9/11 but became very decentralized but with the same capabilities as before after

the invasion by US forces. This is by no coincidence that the IMU followed a very similar path as did its allies and evolved in a very similar manner.

Al Qaeda's influence in the Caspian Sea Region is also evident by examining the attacks on existing government and state targets. In the region al-Qaeda has never directly attacked any targets. Even in Russia al-Qaeda does not have a presence. Attacks in any state in the Caspian Sea Region have been carried out only by al-Qaeda affiliated groups and not by al-Qaeda itself. It would be logical to think that if a strategic state like Uzbekistan with its historical ties to Islam does have an al-Qaeda branch already in place then another group, in this case the IMU would be acting in its stead. Even their tactics have become similar as the IMU and the Chechen rebels have used al-Qaeda style tactics which include multiple simultaneous bombs, suicide tactics and mass casualties.

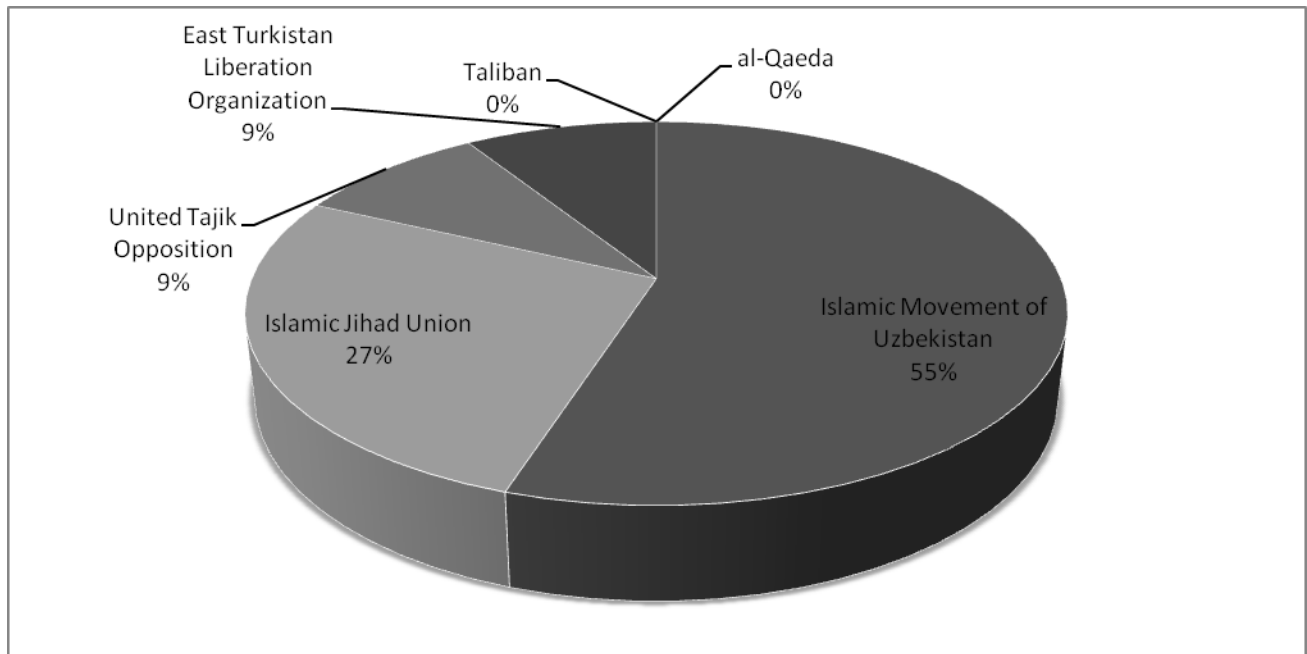


Figure 1 Terrorist Attacks in Central Asia

Chart 1 above gives the percentage of terrorist attacks in the five ex-Soviet republics in Central Asia. Note that the Taliban and al-Qaeda do not have any presence in the chart. The East Turkistan Liberation Organization is a movement for the establishment of a Uyghur state out of China's Xinjiang province which also has connections to the IMU and al-Qaeda. The majority of attacks have been conducted by the IMU but the Islamic Jihad Union is second with a considerable amount of attacks. This author would have included other splinter organizations in this chart however some of the organizations are very difficult to identify and whether to determine if the attacks can be attributed to them. All of the attacks were aimed at government and diplomatic targets including the US embassy in Tashkent. The chart shows



that no attacks were directly conducted by either al-Qaeda or the Taliban in the region but were left to the other groups with a strong presence inside the countries already.

### Clash of Identities

One sees a clear separation of ideas of how to view the new states of the Caspian Sea Region. The religious view that came to dominate the IMU and the Chechen independence movement came in conflict with the nationalistic aspirations of their leaders. Erica Marat in her work, *Imagined Past, Uncertain Future: The Creation of National ideologies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*, states that the five leaders of Central Asia were forced to forge new identities after the fall of the Soviet system. In each state they took a new form but one common factor in it was the absence of Islam. Not only was Islam not to play a role in the political realm, it was not to play any role in the social fabric of society with mosques and other religious institutions being completely sidelined.<sup>83</sup>

Marat goes on to say that the states have looked to a historic past predating Islam and emphasizing on history as far back as two thousand years or more. The Islamic groups, as one would assume, focus primarily on reintroducing the Islamic faith as a religious, social and political system. The IMU and the Chechen independence movement can then be seen as an internal conflict with region, and at times, international implications. These two conflicting

view points on how the states of the Caspian Sea Region have dominated politics since independence.

## **CHAPTER IV: CONFLICTS OF THE CASPIAN REGION**

### Introduction

When examining conflicts in this region, one can view its root causes and aims in a wide range spanning from political to social and economic to religious. The reality of all situations is that not one or two causes are responsible but is a result of numerous causes. Obviously this study will emphasize the religious causes and goals behind the numerous conflicts in the Caspian Sea region but it is important to remember that other root causes and aims should not be forgotten. Ethnic, economic and political factors play at least some role alongside religious factors in the conflicts explained in this chapter. The ethno-political setting very often plays a very prominent role. To give one more layer of complexity, all of these factors are somehow intertwined together which forms the culture of which the conflict originates in. Fighters coming across borders often bring the possibilities of foreign contacts which then used to support the conflict.

Focusing directly on the region itself every state has experienced some form of violent outburst from militant Islam since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Only a few of the states, such as Turkmenistan, in the region have avoided all out conflict with either one of its neighbors or from civil war. Because of the complete lack of foreign involvements to stop them, foreign fighters from neighboring countries were able to easily enter war zones and

participate in the conflicts in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Chechnya. The abundant amount of conflicts easily allowed the creation of trained ideologically motivated fighters with regional connections who would travel from hot spot to hot spot. This chapter will focus on the conflicts that have played a large role in the development of militant Islam and the fighters who traveled across Asia to participate.

Unfortunately from a scholarly perspective no reliable data exists on the exact ethnic makeup of the various groups operating in the region. However to take a snapshot of the makeup of the various groups one can look at the Guantanamo Bay list of captured fighters from Afghanistan which provides their country of citizenship.

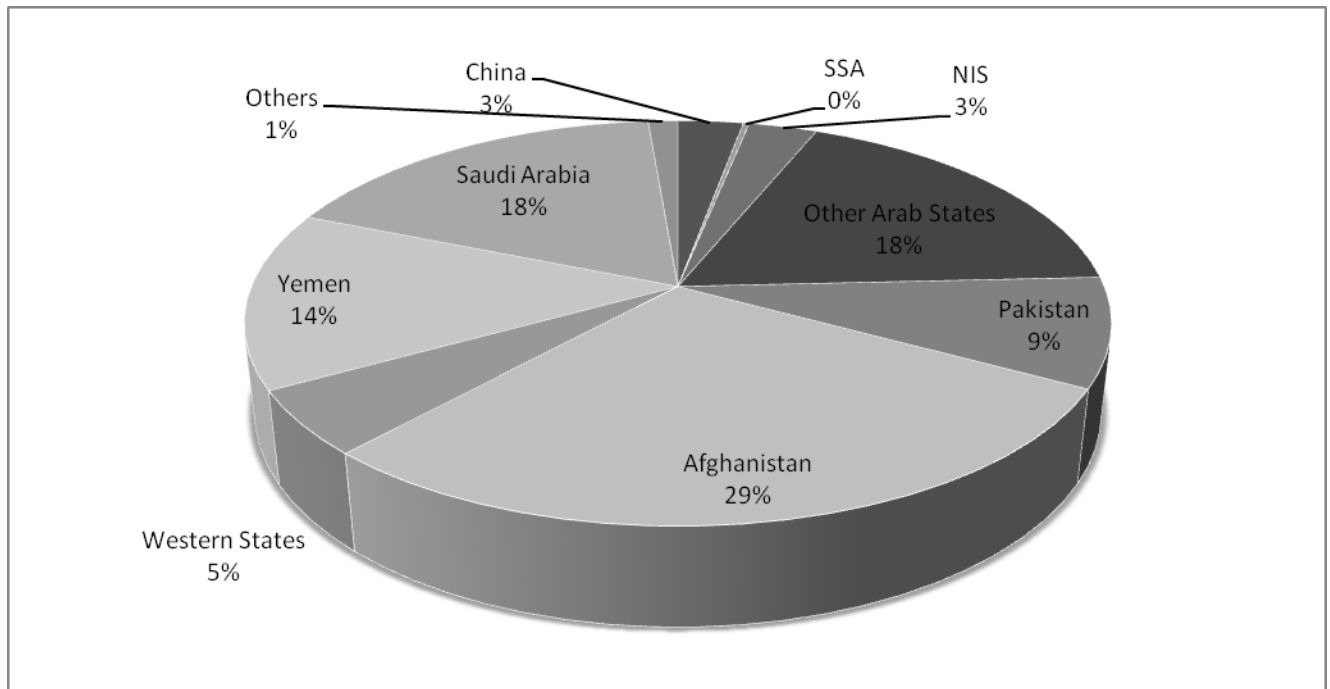


Figure 2 Citizenship of Detainees at Guantanamo Bay

China – 22 Persons

SSA (Sub Saharan Africa) – 1 Chad, 1 Uganda Total of 2

NIS (Newly Independent States) – 1 Azerbaijan, 3 Kazakhstan, 11 Tajikistan, 1 Turkmenistan, 7 Uzbekistan  
Total of 23

Other Arab States – 25 Algeria, 6 Bahrain, 6 Egypt, 8 Iraq, 8 Jordan, 12 Kuwait, 1 Lebanon, 11 Libya, 15 Morocco, 2  
Somalia, 13 Sudan, 10 Syria, 12 Tunisia, 2 UAE, 3 West Bank and Gaza Total of 137

Pakistan – 66

Afghanistan – 219

Western States – 2 Australia, 2 Belgium, 1 Denmark, 7 France, 9 Russian Federation, 1 Spain, 1 Sweden, 15 United  
Kingdom, 1 United States Total of 39

Yemen – 108

Saudi Arabia – 133

Others – 2 Bangladesh, 3 Iran, 5 Turkey Total of 10

Grand Total of 759 persons

Of the 759 people held at Guantanamo Bay, 50% of the list is Arabs with Saudi Arabia and Yemen, two countries where bin Laden has considerable influence having the biggest percentage with 18% and 14% respectively. These two countries are the only real source of

Arabs in Afghanistan as Chinese nationals, with 3%, equal any other Arabic state. The other half is composed of other ethnic groups from the region including Uyghurs, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Afghans, Kazakhs, Muslim Russians and a variety of others. However regarding some of the ethnic groups that reside in Afghanistan, one can argue that the actual numbers of fighters may be more as they are able to blend into society better than say an Arab might. Therefore it is not unreasonable that local ethnic groups would make up more of a percentage than Arabs since they are less detectable. The considerable amount of Arabs caught in Afghanistan shows the internal conditions allowed them to operate in a way that they could not in the Middle East.

This chapter will examine how from Afghanistan militant Islam was able to grow and evolve in the Caspian region into the world wide phenomenon that is known today. With all of these conflicts they draw the attention of most of the world powers such as Russia, China and the US as well all the medium range powers that play a critical role in the region. It is important to note that all the conflicts discussed below have different causes and consequences with no two conflicts being exactly the same. This trend makes it extremely difficult to characterize the growth of militant Islam in that the only common factor for these cases is the movement of fighters to country to country. Instead of examining the conflicts in a chronological order, as many of them overlap each other, they will be addressed relative to their position from the first major conflict, Afghanistan, which will be address first.

## The War to Start all Wars

The Afghan War of the 1980s and its immediate aftermath was the single most important point in time for militant Islam when the Afghan mujahedeen and the foreign fighters swelled into the ranks to fight the Soviet army. Though the various groups were still in the first phase of militant Islam, the mujahedeen became extremely effective at combating overwhelming conventional military force. Though there were surely other internal causes to the withdrawal in 1989, the Soviet Union had only lost 14,000 troops in ten years, low for conflicts lasting a decade, yet it was considered to be a monumental military defeat. This was in part because of the huge amount of military and financial support entering Afghanistan from around the world without much oversight to who exactly received it. The Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) became the sole organization responsible for who received much of the materials. At the time of the conflict the Pakistani President, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, was keen on expanding the role of Islam in Pakistan and in Afghanistan because of his hard line approach toward communism and the promotion of Islam in society. As a result millions of dollars and untold amounts of military materials went primarily to the Afghan Hizb e-Islami party under Gulbuddin Hekmatyar who is widely considered to be a fundamentalist Muslim and is still currently allied with the Taliban against the US.

From the Pakistani side of the border the establishment of thousands of *madrases* sponsored by foreign aid in the 1980s, primarily from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states,

provided both a network and a training facility to students that first became radicalized and trained. Though many moderate Islamic scholars believe these schools are not legitimate because of their lack of scholarship and that they are simply an institution that has been hijacked by radical elements, they became increasingly prominent in 1980s Pakistan. These institutions in Pakistan would later become the prime area for voicing criticism of both future Pakistani and Afghani regimes and have in many cases become staging grounds for attacks in countries all over the world.

Other private organizations, such as the predecessor organizations to al-Qaeda, supplied funds through these *madrases* to foreign fighters who wished to participate in the jihad. After the Soviet withdrawal an untold amount of military supplies were simply left behind as the retreating army had no physical way to effectively transport it back to the Soviet Union. As one would expect, these arms, the ones still operable also fell into the hands of various warlords as Afghanistan again fell into an all-out civil war in the early 1990s. The civil war throughout the early nineties ensured that no strong form of national government could establish itself and maintain control for long.

Perhaps even more severe because of its long lasting effects was the huge humanitarian crisis that began during the Soviet war and today is still largely unresolved. The thirty year civil war has created a huge amount of refugees in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan and in eastern Iran. Pakistan's NWFP had always maintained close ties with



Afghanistan of its own Pashtu majority. This ethnic factor would come to play a major role in the Afghan civil war as the US and its allies invade in 2001 as the NWFP would once again supply fighters and supplies into Afghanistan. Since the founding of Pakistan in 1947 the huge border between Afghanistan and its southern neighbor has been poorly marked splitting the Pashtu nation in half. As a result the two states have always had difficulty controlling who and what enters one country and enters another. During the Soviet invasion of the 1980s the largest refugee crisis in the modern world occurred as millions of people sought a safe haven in Pakistan from the fighting.

With refugees crossing the border and the Afghan economy being completely destroyed, two long lasting results of the civil war that have played a monumental role in shaping militant Islam. The first is the growth of the opium trade has supplied the groups with large amounts of funds and, second, the creation of a large orphan class that all factions have used to swell their own ranks with new recruits to fight. Forty-two individuals in the detainees list are believed to be minors (under 18 years of age) at the time of their capture. There is no data on minors fighting with the Northern Alliance.

These two factors have enabled the various warring groups inside Afghanistan with the ability to effectively continue the conflict. However they have crippled the country more so. The drug trade, though the largest profit gains the country has does not allow the development of other sectors of the economy with would allow it to grow even further. Opium, the largest

drug grown by volume, is extremely easy to grow and is in high demand in the world market at a very high cost. The various warlords, both within the current government and fighting against it, use the cash crop to advance their personal wealth and increase their power within their respected political structures. Hamid Karzai, the President of Afghanistan, has ignored allegations that his brother has participated in the trade for a number of years. Ironically the Taliban sought to completely annihilate the drug trade all together as it was seen as un-Islamic but quickly changed its policy as the reality of the economic situation of Afghanistan came into full light. The Pashtu 'mafia', a network of drug traders that expands across the globe to every major city, ensures that the flow of funds and materials to the ongoing conflict will not stop as long as there is profit to be had.

The drug trade, because of Afghanistan's landlocked position, has created a network of individuals and organizations that span across much of Central Asia, the Caucasus and on into the Russian Federation. This network provides not only an easily accessible route of exporting drugs out of the Golden Crescent, the historical opium producing area of Central Asia, but also a complex network that allows material and funds in and out of Afghanistan. In particular, the states of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and to a lesser degree Turkmenistan have become key actors in the Afghan drug trade. This inadvertently allows a regional network of individuals and organizations to poses the ability to move funds and materials back into Afghanistan where it is used to finance the civil war. This same network was used to supply the Chechen conflict at its height with fighters and supplies en route from Afghanistan.

The orphan crisis that has gripped Afghanistan and parts of the NWFP has given a large pool of human resources from which to acquire new recruits for the war lords. Ahmed Rashid has traveled to Afghanistan numerous times in his journalistic career and in his work, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, goes into some detail about the internal issues of the orphan class appearing during Taliban rule.<sup>84</sup> When comparing Rashid's numerous travels he noticed that the fighters currently participating in the conflicts have little clue about their own identity, traditions or even about the previous conflict against the Soviets where as the fighters from the Soviet-Afghan War, whom Rashid also traveled with and interviewed, had a strong identity about them not only about Islam but about their historic Pashtu roots and their proud culture. This lack of culture Rashid illustrates shows how the different warlords have used these orphans as conscripts in their armies as a military class of their own. After thirty years of constant conflict the size of the orphan class has increased dramatically. The refugee camps, in the same areas as many of these radical *madraseshs*, in the NWFP have been and still are natural breeding grounds for extremism. Unless this flow of fighters and refugees are reincorporated into Afghan society there will be a militia waiting to incorporate them into their own ranks and continue the fighting.<sup>85</sup>

Since being ousted from power by the US and NATO in late 2001 the Taliban and its allies have waged a guerrilla war that has thrown the country into chaos. Bombings, fire-fights and assassinations have been common throughout much of the country with the national Afghan government and its Afghan Security Forces (ASF) largely ineffective. Though this phase

of the Afghan Civil War has not been as destructive as previous phases, such as the Soviet period and the early 1990s, the level of violence has increased steadily since 2001 with no sign of slowing. The Karzai government is forced to rely on outside support to maintain his power and the ASF is largely unable to operate without NATO's assistance.

### War Spreads to the North

Directly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union numerous civil conflicts erupted in new established countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Many of them were aimed at overthrowing the leaders who were in power during the later days of the Soviet Era who did not step down. Others were aimed at creating a new state based on pan-Islamic ideas. Perhaps the two most notable examples of this are the Tajik Civil War and the Two Chechen Wars. Though both have already been discussed in some detail it is important to highlight the influence and level of foreign fighters entering the two states and directly participating in the fighting.

Tajikistan went through a devastating civil war where the preexisting communist government of Rahmon Nabiyev resisted political change and staged a coup after being ousted for a brief time. As a result, anti-government forces under an umbrella group named the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), rose up in response. Tajikistan has had close social ties with

most of its neighbors such as Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan which allowed the UTO to gain considerable outside influence from other actors. Though the UTO consisted of multiple groups, most of them with not religious affiliation, only the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) was gaining fighters and funds on the scale that it did from outside sources. Though the war, destructive as it was, affected the lives of people living within Tajikistan, the most important consequence of the war was the international implications. The same Gulbuddin Hekmatyar who founded the Hizb e-Islami militia and, by then, the prime minister of Afghanistan was believed to have established bases in Afghanistan along the Tajik border for Tajik militants and other *mujahedeen* to enter Tajikistan without fear of reprisal from government troops. This gave the leaders in Central Asia, with Islam Karimov Uzbekistan in particular, a fear that if radical groups were not stopped the entire region would be in civil war.

Though other authors have contested the effects of the connection between the Tajik and Afghan Civil Wars on other regional leaders frame of mind, one must look at the situation. Well known authors such as Martha Olcott<sup>86</sup> and Anna Zelkina<sup>87</sup> have stated that the leaders themselves are the reason that groups such as the UTO and the IMU are able to thrive as easily as they do. However the facts seem to point that the leaders of the region were put off guard directly after independence as the ruling elites found themselves in a situation with no real patron to support their governments and with two extremely devastating civil wars in the region with signs of spilling over. The state boundaries drawn in the early days of the Soviet Union were specifically designed, as stated in chapter two, to create a system where one ethnic

group was never the only single one in the Republic. As a result the current states in Central Asia have large quantities of their neighbors corresponding peoples. This, in the case of Uzbekistan, presents a huge problem as some of the traditional and biggest Tajik cities currently are in Uzbekistan.

This has caused both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to take action in the early and mid 1990s by stationing troops along their borders with the intent of preventing the Tajik conflict from spilling over. To prevent any group from contesting the governments, any organization with an Islamic nature was either monitored very closely or outright banned. Fearing government action many individuals fled to the chaos of Tajikistan with the hope of establishing themselves without the fear of reprisal. Many individuals joined the UTO and the IRP with the hope of instigating political change.

After the Tajik Civil war ended in 1997, and some sense of stability was reestablished to Tajikistan, militant fighters turned to Kyrgyzstan, which was also under some political turmoil, as another springboard from which to launch future attacks against other states and to avoid persecution from their home country. Without the assistance of the IRP various groups attacked Kyrgyzstan with the idea of regime change in another country. Within a matter of weeks the attack against Kyrgyzstan was ultimately unsuccessful and many of the groups were forced to flee to Afghanistan where the Taliban became a natural ally. Many of the future attacks on Uzbek targets before September 11<sup>th</sup> can be traced back to Afghanistan. When the

US invaded in 2001 the IMUs leader Juma Namangani was killed in the opening days in the city of Kunduz, closer to Tajikistan than Uzbekistan.

Two of the countries in Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, have largely remained unaffected by the spread of conflict from Afghanistan. Kazakhstan has in the past played a considerable role in preventing its spread by participating in counter terrorism operations aimed at destroying any potential threat that may have entered the country and Turkmenistan has remained under a totalitarian regime since independence. Both states have a favorable position in comparison to their neighbors as they have no large concentration of other ethnic groups inside their borders and have few of their nationals in any of the surrounding states. Turkmenistan in particular under the leadership of the Turkmenbashi, father of the Turkmen, Saparmurat Nasayev was considered to be one of the most bizarre totalitarian regimes in the world which kept all aspects of society and life under his strict control.

In recent years the amount of information pertaining to these groups has been extremely scarce. Unfortunately from a researcher's perspective these groups have operated in extreme secrecy and, to make it even more difficult, Western and US media focus on these groups is extremely minimal. If these groups are mentioned they are stated simply as an al-Qaeda affiliated group. This creates a lack of information to the accountability which makes researchers forced to guess the group's identity that perpetrated the attack and the desired

effect if it is military or political. One such example was an attack on a Kyrgyz-Tajik border outpost in May of 2007 where bandits raided and looted weapons and quickly disappeared. Because the attack fell on the anniversary of the Andijan Uprising in Uzbekistan analysts believe that the bandits were indeed members of the IMU but now verification by a group can be found.<sup>88</sup> It is believed however that many of these groups, though wounded, are still operating in the NIS north of Afghanistan.

### War Spreads to the South

In addition to war spreading to the northern states, war also began to inch its way into Pakistan, primarily in the eastern tribal areas where the state's Pashtu population is located and to the south where the majority Baluchi population lives. Both of these conflicts are very different from each other though they share a commonality in which they both are connected to the Taliban in Afghanistan. The fighting that broke out in 2003 in the NWFP and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) will be addressed first because of its ethnic commonality with the Taliban. Though the conflict has had many different stages it is collectively known as the Wana Conflict because of its origin in the Waziristan region, Wana being the largest city in the Waziristan region in FATA. The Wazari themselves are a tribe of Pashtu that have become one of the more dominant ones in the FATA. Since its initial phase in Wana, the conflict has



widened in include many other parts of Pakistan including other parts of the FATA and NWFP including well known tourist resorts in Swat. The assassination of Benazir Bhutto in 2008 has been attributed to this conflict spilling over.

The Durand Line, the poorly marked border between Afghanistan and Pakistan goes through the Pashtu dominated areas and cuts the Pashtu nation down the middle. As a result social, cultural and linguistic ties on both sides of the Durand Line are extremely strong with no real enforcement of the border taking place. Therefore the Pashtu dominated Taliban saw the FATA alone with the NWFP, both Pashtu dominated regions of Pakistan, as a natural region from which to re-base and re-group in order to stage future attacks in Afghanistan.

Though the Pashtu resistance most certainly did not start with the introduction of the Taliban movement, as both the FATA and the NWFP have always been difficult to control, the expansion of the Afghan theater of operations most certainly gave militant Islam in the region a new dimension. Because of the growing Islamic radicalism originally started by President Zia in the 1970s and 80s, the Musharraf government has come under increasing pressure not to act against the radical tribesmen operating in the Pashtu areas. As a result President Pervez Musharraf currently does not allow US or any other NATO forces in Afghanistan to cross the border to combat the tribesmen out of the fear of angering the religious community in his own country. However the US has made a few airstrikes at key members of the al-Qaeda network in

the past when it sees it necessary. Instead the Pakistani government has taken upon itself to combat the Pashtu tribesmen with limited success.

Not internationally recognized by any state, the first stage of the Wana Conflict saw the establishment of the de facto establishment of the Islamic State of Waziristan where the Taliban are believed to be establishing a new base of operation after being ousted from Afghanistan. The Wana conflict as a result has been directly tied to the ongoing US led campaign in Afghanistan. The de facto Waziri state might prove in the future to be the next Afghanistan style state where militant Islamic groups now have a new safe haven of operations from which attacks on both Pakistan and Afghanistan can be conducted. The effects of the de facto region are already being felt in side Pakistan as attacks based in Waziristan have been carried out against government forces across the FATA and NWFP. Bhutto's assassination is believed, according to official Pakistani statements, to have been perpetrated by a Waziri tribal leader.

In addition to the Wana Conflict, the Baluchi people of the south-west of Pakistan have also begun to wage a separatist war against the national government in recent years. Though this event is not unique for the Baluchi people have tried several times in recent Pakistani history to establish its own independent state, the current phase which started in 2004, has shown a regional connect with Afghanistan. With the advent of the Wana conflicts, the Baluchi

population in southern Pakistan once again has resumed their struggle for independence by attacking government targets with the aim of establishing an independent Baluchistan.

Like the Pashtu tribes to the north, the Baluchi nation is divided along international borders with considerable populations in Afghanistan and Iran. Believed by Pakistan that Iran and the Taliban support the Baluchistan Liberation Front (BLF), the most prevalent of the Baluchi resistance groups, Pakistan has tried to connect the Baluchi uprising with the Taliban style warlords arising in the northern portion of the country. The BLF is also believed to be involved in the drug trade by supplying the Pashtu mafia with chemicals needed for the production of heroin. In late 2007 the leader of the Baluchi resistance movement was reportedly killed in southern Afghanistan by Pakistani forces that were pursuing him. As a result attacks by Baluchi fighters have increased against government troops.

The situation in Pakistan has more far reaching consequences because of the massive movement of Pakistani nationals migrating outside the Indian subcontinent. This has created huge communities of Pakistanis living in Europe, the US and other Western states. Particularly in countries like Great Britain and Germany the Pakistani communities have caused some reason for worry as both have had terrorist attacks either carried out or averted as the result of people who either are Pakistani nationals or live and worked in Pakistan. Numerous attacks that have been both carried out or averted have involved well educated people who had strong families and potential futures. However the *madrases* system in Pakistan has found methods

of radicalizing individuals who would otherwise not be suspicious when seeking to emigrate from their home country. Through Pakistan the militant Islamic network has a gateway out of the region and into the western world with individuals that are difficult to detect. Not only people of Pakistani origin but also Uzbeks, Afghans and other ethnicities have used this route to leave the region and emigrate.

### War spreads to China

Much like the Pashtu and the Baluchi of Pakistan, the Uyghur Muslim minority found the call to militant Islam as a path to reestablishing their own independent state in the Xinxiang province of north-west China. Having a long history in opposition to Chinese rule, the Uyghurs, the second largest Muslim ethnic group in China, have caused great concern for the Chinese communists which seek out to minimize the religious and ethnic identity of the people. Like many countries in the region, China became very fearful of an Islamic revival during and after the events of the Soviet-Afghan War. These fears were only solidified as a Uyghur revolt in the late 1990s arose but ended in disaster for the separatists as Beijing moved in soldiers. Beijing in recent years has become extremely worried if the Uyghur resistance groups, many of them based abroad, were to cause even more harm especially right before China hosts the Olympic Games in 2008 similar to the scenario in Tibet.

The Uyghurs themselves are a Turkic ethnic group that adheres to the Sunni branch of Islam with cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious similarities with their newly independent western neighbors. With over eight million individuals comprising the Uyghur nation, they have always fought the Chinese Han majority for political independence. During the Chinese Civil War the Xinjiang province was able to establish its own independent state with Soviet assistance. However the newly established state was quickly overrun by communist forces in 1949 where it became part of the People's Republic of China. As of today tensions between the Han Chinese majority and the Turkic minority have remained high.

With the advent of the Afghan Civil War and the breakup of the Soviet Union, Uyghur resistance groups, such as the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and East Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO), have operated throughout Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. These two groups have reported to have strong ties with the IMU, the Taliban and al-Qaeda and have been labeled terrorist organizations by all countries in the region as well as the US and the UN. Though the real threat of these groups is highly debatable the regional network is obvious when considering that the leader of the ETIM was killed not in China or even in one lateral state of Xinjiang but in Pakistan in 2003. In addition 3% of the detainee list held Chinese citizenship and were members of either the ETIM or the ETLO.

Like many places in the Islamic world the Uyghur nation is located above one of the biggest oil reserves in China which needs more energy to maintain and expand its ever growing

economy. However the Xinxiang Province has been known as one of the more underdeveloped areas of China until recently as large amounts of infrastructure are being built at an alarming pace. To ensure that the flow of oil and other natural resources are not disrupted, the Chinese government has allowed little dissent to take place with Han Chinese playing an ever larger political role in Xinxiang by taking up key positions of power in the government.

### War in the Caucasus

Because the Chechen wars have already been examined in some detail in the previous chapter, some amount of attention will be paid to some of the other conflicts that have erupted in assistance to and in conjunction with the Chechen wars. Areas of Russia such as Dagestan and North Ossetia as well as newly created Muslim majority states and regions to the south have experienced varying amounts of militancy connected with Afghanistan, Chechnya and the outside world. Though these other conflicts are individually not very devastating, these ongoing conflicts ensure that Russia will remain an essential player in the Caspian Sea Region's militant Islamic problem. Much like China, Russia has energy interests, primarily with oil and natural gas, which, could land in the hands of a religiously motivated antagonist and inspire other Muslim groups to follow suit. Though most Muslim dominated lands do not sit upon oil, key infrastructure runs through the southern portion of Russia along the 'Second Baku' of

Tatarstan. However, no other group, including Tatarstan, followed the same path to independence as the Chechens but instead worked inside the Russian political system.

Though most of the attention is focused on Chechnya, the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict was the original draw for militant Islam to the Caucasus. The Muslim Azerbaijani were at war with their Christian neighbor of Armenia over the Christian Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. Fighters from Afghanistan and Tajikistan rushed to the opportunity to assist. Even though the war was eventually a loss for the Azeri, the militants were introduced to a new region to spread militant Islam. Directly after the Abkhazia region of northern Georgia descended into a civil war where Islamic fighters were once again drawn to conflict. Though these two conflicts did precede the Chechen conflict they did not have the same political impact as the conflict in Chechnya. Chechnya saw the defeat of Russia in the First Chechen War and the establishment of a de facto Chechen state which was then used to launch attacks in surrounding states within Russia. Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia proved to be only the beginning on the introduction of militant Islam into the Caucasus.

#### The Pan-Islamist Party of Liberation

The pan-Islamic movement known as Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), Arabic for Party of Liberation, is an interesting case to examine when the development of militant Islam. Officially a non-

violent movement, HT has the goal of reestablishing the Caliphate and uniting the entire umma under its guidance. The Party has offices and movements in some form in most countries of the world but HT has found a huge base in the NIS in Soviet Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Even though the stance of the Party is to recreate the Caliphate through peaceful means, all governments in the region see it as a very serious threat and have hunted and captured its leaders and suspected members simply by associating with it. Currently in Central Asia there are more HT members in jail than any other Islamic group with an estimated 20,000 more members still believed to be operating amongst the public. Currently the governments of the region and many abroad have labeled HT as a terrorist organization.

HT believes in recreate the Shari'a based system through greater jihad (enlightenment) instead of lesser jihad (militant Islam). As a result the group publishes and produces large amounts of literature ranging through pamphlets to texts and holding secret lectures where debates concerning anything and everything Islamic. However there has been concern that the HT might move more toward an armed revolt against the regimes in Central Asia. Ahmed Rashid in an interview with an unnamed leader of HT states that if, in this case, the Karimov regime moves militarily against other Islamic groups, both militaristic or not, that the Party would not stand and idly watch. Already the HT has seen the third phase of militant Islam occur as groups have broken away when the desired results are not met, or believed not able to be met through current tactics. Hizb an-Nusra (HN), Party of Support in Arabic, is one such example where the stance of the use of non-violent techniques to achieve its goals has been



abandoned. Another more well know example in the West is the Akromiya which is believed to be involved in the Andijan Massacre where an estimated thousand people were shot simply for protesting against the arrest of several business men believed to be 'Wahabist'. Wahabist in the post Soviet states has come to mean any individual or organization that has a strong Islamic identity regardless if the individual or group has had no previous contact with a Saudi-Wahabist individual or organization.

These two groups have not only abandoned HT's stance against using violent measures to accomplish its goals but are reportable been in close contact with al-Qaeda, the ETIM and the Taliban. This progression of events corresponds closely with Ahmed Rashid's fears, which he states in another work entitled *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, that more peaceful groups will follow in the footsteps of the IMU when the governments of the region begin to suppress them even further.<sup>89</sup> These breakaway groups are evidence that the argument is not only theoretical but very real for the region. Ironically the repressive methods used by the governments create a situation where the government uses repressive means to combat perceived threats to their power and the individual groups seek to replace the regime because of these same aggressive methods. HN has resorted to violence with the aim of stopping the repression of religion by the governments use of repression in the first place because they see HT as a direct threat to their power. Other authors such as Stephan R. Bowers, Bakhodir Musayev and Steven Alan Samson have even gone as far as to say that the HT movement in Central Asia could be the biggest security threat for the entire world coming out

of the region. In their analyses of the Party, the authors came to the conclusion that HT has the potential to become an even bigger threat to world and regional security than even al-Qaeda.<sup>90</sup>

Unlike the IMU or the IRP Hizb ut-Tahrir has a truly regional dimension as its network extends to even Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan where other groups have been unable to gain a foothold in the past. HT plays a very large role in Kazakhstan and a considerable role in Turkmenistan which involves the wide distribution of literature and even holding underground lectures in the capitals.

#### Iran and Turkey's Limited Role

Iran and Turkey for the most part have stayed out of the affairs of the Caspian Sea Region's security affairs. The Iranian government's support of Armenia during the war with Azerbaijan and Iran's assistance in quelling the violence in neighboring Afghanistan after the 2001 campaign are the two examples where the Islamic Republic has directly involved itself in the region. In addition these two examples, Iran has funded groups in Chechnya, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Iran was once on a very slippery slope to being directly involved in the region in 1997 when several Iranian nationals were executed in their embassy inside Afghanistan by Taliban militants. This shows a clear divide between the two sects of Islam the majority Sunni and the minority Shi'a in Iran. All of the groups and states described above are majority Sunni

with the more conservative actors adhering to Wahabist and Salafi principles believing that the Shi'a sect of Islam is made of heretics and traitors. This shows a clear line between two separate groups of Islamic militants based on different sects of the same religion.

Applying this to Iran's situation in 1997, the regional network of terrorist and militant groups in the Caspian Region possibly was provoking one of the strongest regional player to intervene in Afghanistan with the hope of eliminating the Shia political body in the world that, in their view, completely perverted the Prophets teachings. Ultimately the Iranian attack on Afghanistan was averted by UN intervention at the last moment. However the situation in the Caspian Sea Region could have looked extremely different if history had taken a different turn. Instead Iran's focus for much of its modern history has been towards the Persian Gulf and the Middle East with only a limited focus on the NIS even after 1991. Much of its limited influence has been toward promoting Persian culture primarily to Tajikistan which is a fellow Persian country but does not follow Shia Islam.

Since the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan Iran has provided the Hazara ethnic group, the only large Shia ethnic group in Afghanistan, with funds, military materials and construction projects in order to provide assistance to a long time ally. As a result Hazarajat, the roughly defined Hazara homeland in central Afghanistan, has been one of the more peaceful parts of Afghanistan. The Hazara political party and militant group have played a large role in the Karzai government since 2002.

Turkey, much like Iran, has remained primarily a financial provider of militant groups in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan in the past decades. Very similar to Iran's role, Turkey has used militant groups as political leverage against its potential rivals. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey has begun the process of reintroducing itself to its fellow Turkic brothers. Turkey gave supplies and volunteers to the Azeri cause in its war with Armenia as a way of connecting to another Turkic ethnic group and to further a containment agenda with the Armenian state, one that that Turks have had extremely bad relations throughout most of their history.

Turkey has also played a similar role in Afghanistan as Turkey has supplied the Uzbek political party and militia under the leadership of General Dostum. Now part of the new Afghan government Dostum has acted without much oversight, primarily because of his outside Turkish support, by establishing his own political units in the northern parts of Afghanistan; a move Karzai was publically against but could not prevent. Turkish support of Dostum ensures that Turkey will have a hand in the stability of Afghanistan.

### Remarks

From what started in the war-torn country of Afghanistan as a resistance movement against an invading force, in an extremely short time either was exported or inspired other militant Islamic groups across the Caspian Sea Region to link arms and rise up. Possibly the most important aspect of this chapter to take away is the fact that every state in the region saw this as a threat and, rightly or wrongly, connected the groups with either al-Qaeda or Afghanistan. Ironically groups like the IMU, the BLF, and the ETIM which started out with protesting against alleged abuses of power were drawn into a more militant form of resistance with strong religious undertones and rhetoric which ended in transforming them into what they are today. The same is happening with more peaceful groups such as HT which has been losing members and even networks to more radical elements which see militancy as the only path to accomplishing their goals.

The Caspian Region does allow three major powers to be directly involved in fighting militant Islam. Russia and China along with many smaller states in Central Asia have joined together and created the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which as one of its founding

purposes is to stem the influence of militant Islamic groups in the region with the Taliban in particular in 1996. Though the US is not involved with the SCO directly, it has the same goals and works with member states to accomplish the similar goals. There are very few regions of the world where there is a common goal such as the eliminating militant Islam and the major powers of the world come into almost agreement.

This international factor caused by these numerous, sometimes extremely small, groups is exactly how al-Qaeda was able grow into the international organization that it is today. The militant Islamic network spread within a decade to involve every state in the region and beyond. However the groups always maintained a strong nationalist identity even though they had allied themselves with a pan-Islamist organization. Even states that wished to remain isolated have been forced to deal with the realities of what might happen if groups within their respected borders might be infiltrated by militant Islamist as with the case of Turkmenistan. In addition through counties like Pakistan militant Islamic groups have the ability to touch numerous other actors in Europe and the Americas as immigration has placed large quantities of people in half a dozen other countries around the world. From one state the network of militant Islam was able to spread into a truly global organization.

Through Pakistan a breakaway group of the IMU called the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), sometimes referred to as the Jamaat for Central Asian Mujahedeen, was the primary organizer of the foiled German bombings based out of Frankfurt. These attacks were planned with the

same notion as the Spanish train bombs that played some part in the decision to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq. German troops in Afghanistan were based in the northern parts of Afghanistan and had battled remnants of the IMU and the ISU. Though in US media the ISU was referred to only as an 'al-Qaeda affiliated group', this example shows just how far independent militant Islamic groups in the Caspian Region can reach if the need arises.

## **CHAPTER V: IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT**

### A Caspian Centric View on Militant Islam

The previous chapters provided an overview of how militant Islam was able to form and evolve in the Greater Caspian Sea Region and at the same time form tight relations with the central organization associated with worldwide Islamic terrorism. Without the conditions that were present in the region, militant Islam would have never been able to grow and advance the way it did throughout the 1980s and 90s. Very often government bodies and the media give a Middle Eastern view of the militant Islamic while only giving limited emphases on the Caspian Sea region. Researchers tend ignore the growth of jihad on the world stage and only focus on the intellectual and ideological formation of radical Islam from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Occupied Territories. This final chapter will place the Caspian Sea Region in the center of growth for militant Islam and argue that without Central Asia and the Caucasus descending into chaos, it is very possible the 'War on Terror' might have been dramatically different or absent altogether.

The current view of militant Islam in the American and European frame of mind comes from the long standing history in the Middle East spanning from the end of the Second World War to the present. During the West's confrontation in the Cold War with the Soviet Union, the Caspian Sea Region was believed to be under the complete control of the USSR minus Iran,



Turkey and Pakistan. The Caspian Region until the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 was either under complete control of the Soviet Union, such as the SSRs, or under Moscow's direct control like Afghanistan. The Iranian Revolution brought even more complication to the West's influence as the pro-American Shah was overthrown and replaced with an Islamic republic. Even during the Shah's rule Iran was seen as a state at the heart of the Middle East. As a result the Caspian Sea Region fell out of almost all knowledge in the West and the Middle East took not only the central role of Islam but was the only center of Islam in Western thought.

Indeed the Caspian Sea Region itself is, politically, is one of the newest regions in international politics as the NIS of Central Asia and the Caucasus brought another level of complexity to the post-Cold War world. Originally defined in economic terms as the struggle for oil and gas routes known as the New Great Game, the Caspian Sea Region was only seen as such. Each state in the region was politically connected to neighboring regions as their prime concern with Iran looking toward the Persian Gulf, Pakistan involved with India, and even the NIS leaning more toward Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). However all the states have a security interest in the Caspian Region that connects them besides in economics since the dissolution of the USSR.

As emphasized in this argument Afghanistan has played a critical role for the development of militant Islam for the worse. Directly after the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989 the country descended into a brutal and bloody civil war that persists today. Without this

state becoming a breeding ground for radicalism and a base for operations for groups wishing to attack neighboring countries, many of these militant groups like the UTO and the IMU would not have been able to form and strengthen the way they did. Chechnya is a very similar case in the Caucasus when the Ichkerian Republic was able to establish itself after the First Chechen War. Groups for neighboring states and Republics would have a base of operations from which to strike out from such as Abkhazia in Georgia. These rogue states, as one can call them, acted extremely outside the norm for the region and both were very concerned about gaining allies with similar ideological beliefs.

This “Afghan Effect” has no such example in the Middle East before the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The Middle East became one of the many battle grounds of the Cold War where the Soviet Union and the US were competing for allies and resources in the region. The Caspian Region was always considered to be firmly within Soviet control. When the dissolution occurred in 1991 the US did not try to expand its influence in any meaningful way to the ex-Soviet supported countries outside Eastern Europe and did even less for the newly created states in the Caspian region. Because of preexisting ties between the US and the Middle Eastern states the US maintained whatever relations existed before 1991. The US placed almost no emphasis on the new states that were at this time without any outside power supporting them. Though the Caspian states were part of the CIS, the Russian Federation, the biggest and most powerful member of the CIS, was left with its own internal problems to struggle with during the 1990s. Though large international support was largely absent Russia

provided only minimal intervention to save ethnic Russians from the conflict. Therefore the lack of international support left Central Asia and the Caucasus with minimal amount of tools and resources to combat militant Islam.

The second advantage when dealing with the Caspian Region over the Middle East, tying directly to the previous point and to chapter four where the amount of conflicts occurring in the region. However, even in Chechnya where a large scale war occurred fighters were able to train and gain tactical experience in fighting wars. These same fighters traveled in multiple countries fighting in the name of God against the European powers that they place blame on for the stagnation of Islamic culture. No conflicts such as these are present before 2003 in the Middle East. Previous conflicts in the Middle East, though have Islamic underpinnings, were based on nationalistic objectives. Without these conflicts occurring, the various militant groups would have never been able to perfect their techniques and methods for the intervention of the US and other states post 2001 in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Even though there have been conflicts in the Middle East such as in Yemen, Lebanon and Algeria over the decades none of them have produced Islamic style systems the one can see being formed in Afghanistan, Chechnya and, more recently in Pakistan, in the Waziristan region. Islamic militancy has been able to grow so strong in the Caspian Sea Region that the groups have been able to establish state systems whereas the Middle East has not been able to do so except in Iran, though not based on Sunni principles. One would think that if the Middle

East were the center of militant Islam the region would be showing some signs of it. Yes there are militant Islamic organizations operating in the Middle East but the US has provided massive support to states like Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and any other state that requires assistance. Ironically this support was originally provided to assist Israel and to buy off neighboring states from attacking Israel states have used this same support to solidify their rule. The Caspian Region has shown that there is a possibility for Islamic style states to arise in this region when compared to the Middle East as no such outside support was available until recently. However all the established emirates have not been recognized by the vast majority of the international community.

Without argument, one cannot argue the importance the Middle East has been in the advancement of militant Islam over the decades. States in this region, much like Iran and Turkey, have supplied materials, funds and even man power to the region to Islamic causes throughout the world. However if the Middle East were the center of the jihadist movement surely the region itself would produce Islamic style political units. The closest Islamic Republics to the Middle East are in Africa such as the Sudan and Mauritania or in Iran. However there are numerous states where *Shari'a* law is in effect around the world. Only in the Caspian Region have Islamic emirates have been to establish themselves without foreign intervention.

## The Ethnic Reality

The obvious application of this study is how to better understand the situation occurring today not just for the US and its efforts to systematically annihilates militant Islam but for other states in the region that wish then to incorporate the populations in these states into their own state. Fortunately for the world community militant Islam is one of the few issues today that states can agree on to deal within the Caspian Sea Region.

Obviously seventy years of political and social conditions cannot be fixed in a matter of months or years. Like much analysis on militant Islam, this author agrees that this issue will last for decades to come. However this does not imply that the situation is hopeless for foreign actors and the world must live in fear of future attacks. There is a need to drive a divide between many of these groups in the Caspian Region. The US and its allies must step back from the notion that 'you are either with us or against us' and pursue a policy of divide and conquer. The Soviet Union left new states based along ethnic lines from where volunteers are largely originating from in Central Asia. Though they all share a common religion their national group, though linguistically close, are not identical. The example of the Wana Conflict in the Waziristan region of Pakistan which once again employs the IMU is a perfect example.

Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the IMU and other allies fled Afghanistan and resettled in the Pashtu dominated Wazir province and the surrounding areas in the NWFP and the FATA of

Pakistan. From here the Taliban have been able to regroup and use this region largely outside of the federal government's control to stage further attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Wazir tribes themselves have been an armed struggle of resistance against the Pakistani government and were able to establish a level of independence. However in 2006 an al-Qaeda leader, either from al-Qaeda or from the Taliban (as the exact story is somewhat unclear) was killed by IMU troops. As a result the Pashtu tribesmen rose against the Uzbeks and eventually were able to defeat and push them out of Waziristan. Where exactly Yo'ldosh and his movement are is still unclear. However this example shows how cleavages within the different militant groups can prove to be an advantage when deciding how to effectively deal with them.

This provides an interesting example and opportunity of how militant Islam is evolving. As stated in the previous chapter all conflicts have many multiple layers including religious, ethnic and economic causes. This example also provides an opportunity and illustrates the complexity of the Afghan situation. The opportunity in this is that the militant groups operating in the region do have dissension in their own ranks which then resources must be spent to finding new recruits. The world community should stress the ethnic dimension of the conflict more than the religious regardless of the realities of what the groups claim to be united under. If a strong ethnic dimension is able to implant itself in the Taliban or the various Central Asian groups one could see them undermining themselves instead of being united in their struggle. This would have disastrous effects for al-Qaeda, being predominantly Arab, as ethnically and linguistically they are completely different from the Turkic and Persian ethnic groups in the

region. The Chechen conflict went through a similar experience whereas of current the leaders, along with their numerous predecessors, of the major Chechen rebel group are not even from the region but from Saudi Arabia. This has caused the loss of much of the Chechen support for the Ichkerian movement.

As a result of this one cannot look at the region in terms of states as nation-states have not fully established themselves in the Caspian Region. The literature looks at militant Islam primarily through either a religious or state centric view but at the same time largely ignoring the ethnic dimension. However the ethnic dimension for many of these groups and conflicts originate from ethnic struggles. Just by the names of some of the groups, one can see the ethnic struggle that the group is underlining. The IMU, the UTO, the Taliban, in its earlier years, and the Ichkerian movements all have an ethnic dimension that differ them from 'the Base' and its Arab members. However as the ethnic groups come into contact with al-Qaeda they quickly become a regional or global organization instead of narrowly focusing on their original goal.

Again we will take the IMU as an example. Though the exact movements and declarations made by the movement are not publically made or made public by the governments' involved one can analyze the course the Uzbek Islamic group has made in regard to the global jihadism. Chapter three described the growth of the IMU and followed is history up to it being expelled from Afghanistan in the 2001 phase of the Afghan Civil War. In Pakistan there have been rumors that the IMU has changed its official name to the Islamic Movement of

Turkistan. Though there has been evidence that this new name did not stick this might indicate that the IMU is being pushed to be a regional organization based on an al-Qaeda model. Al-Qaeda and its directly affiliated groups such as al-Qaeda in the Maghreb and al-Qaeda in Iraq emphasize, by their names, a regional affiliation rather than an ethnic one. The IMU, as its name indicates, has an ethnic focus with aspirations on challenging the preexisting Karimov regime .

### Tightening the Noose

In many ways the Second Chechen War can be seen as a significant success against militant Islam as one of the most troubled areas of the world was able to be reincorporated into the world system. As a result the Russian tactic was able to defeat the insurgency along with a variety of militant groups funded from outside. Though some of the tactics cannot be applied directly to other situations in the region, their intentions can be used for a template for change in other situations. Though the Second War has been a long and drawn out conflict it has shown dramatic successes for the Russian Federation. The Soviet Union, and later, the Russian Federation have considerable experience in the region which other actors do not. The Second Chechen War was the third such conflict that the Soviet/Russian military has been involved with the Caspian Region against militant Islam in the past twenty years. This has



allowed the military to evolve and improve its tactics to maximize their effectiveness. Other states such as the US and other European powers do not have such experience in the region. Much of the outside world has little knowledge of and even less understanding of the Caspian Region.

Possible the most important objective in preventing the growth of militant Islam is cutting off the flow of fighters and funds to groups that are operating in the area. This task is twofold. The first is securing the borders between states to contain the spread of militant groups. The second task is to minimize the influence the level of support of the militant groups among the population. The Chechen model was able to accomplish this relatively quickly though with large amounts of human loss. Minimizing both the funding of the rebels as well as effective political isolation made the Icherian republic extremely short lived. However no other strategy has been effective in combating a well entrenched enemy and succeeding in reincorporating the area as it did.

One of the more difficult tasks to accomplish is the complete fault of fighters crossing the borders primarily between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. This requires that the states involved, with outside help if necessary, put in a real effort to block these crossing points and any other crossing points that may form. The Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are examples of this as the separatist conflicts are believed to have strong ties with the Chechen militants. Only when the Russian

Federation was able to effectively cut off the trans-border routes to and from areas like Chechen, Dagestan and Ingushetia from the southern republics were the other militant groups able to be dealt with more effectively. This same policy needs to be implemented in Central Asia.

This however proves much more difficult as the area is much larger and with more people. The governments in the region, especially Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan, need to play a role to cutting the flow of fighters crossing the borders. The most difficult case of this would be in Pakistan's Waziristan where the federal government has little control over the border between the mountainous Pashtun dominated region. The current events of Pakistan have only complicated the situation even more as the ability of the Pakistani government to project its power within its own borders has diminished greatly. If the lessons learned from the Chechen Wars can be effectively applied to other parts of the Caspian Region the same results may indeed result. However it must be in conjunction with Russia and have the support of governments in the region.

### Iraq

One of more dangerous possibilities for the future of militant Islam is the 2003 Iraq war. Though this author does not want to shift completely to the Middle East it is important to do so

as many of the characteristics that have been examined in the study are present. If the war in Iraq is not properly conducted or falls into even more disarray, it has the real possibility of becoming the next 'Afghanistan' for militant Islam. It is widely known that the Iraq war has become a focal point for foreign fighters entering the country and playing a crucial role in the civil war. Though the war in Afghanistan is not complete, which still is a rallying point for Central Asians, Chechens and other ethnic groups from the Caucasus, numerous other ethnicities have been caught or killed alongside Arab nationals. However, this time other neighboring countries such as Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia are acting like bases of origin for the various warring factions. Iraq has already become the next conflict involving foreign Islamic fighters. However there are more worrisome indicators that Iraq may become the next Afghan style power vacuum. Opium and other drugs have, for example, been reported being grown in southern Iraq near Basra. This could indicate Iraq might be sliding even further into warlordism and the economy is collapsing even further into ruin.

The same ethnic approach can and has been applied to Iraq. The current Anbar Awakening that has occurred in the Sunni dominated regions against al-Qaeda in Iraq has shown that the US is willing to support some militia groups over others, such as the Shia militias in Baghdad and in the south of the country. US support has been one of the major factors for al-Qaeda being pushed almost completely out of the Sunni dominated central portion of the country. At the same time the US has moved against the Shia backed militias that operate without the same control as the Sunni ones with the hope of strengthening the national

government. Though the Iraq conflict is still far from settled the US siding with one group over another has benefited the situation greatly.

The situation becomes much more complex for this study as the influence of Iran and Turkey take on an extremely different shape. Unlike how the two countries play little direct roles in the Caspian Sea Region, Iran and Turkey are willing to provide more direct influence on Iraq. Turkey has been sending small, and sometimes large, excursions into the northern Kurdish regions of Iraq with the hope of combating Kurdish terrorist groups. Iran, unlike Afghanistan, has become directly involved in Iraq as Iranian agents are reported to be operating within Shia groups and funding of militia groups is believed to have been increased dramatically with the aim of attacking US and coalition troops.

#### Final Remarks

Simply because the Caspian Sea Region of commonly held view of militant Islam can be changed from the Middle East does not necessarily imply that the situation is any more complex or more difficult. The characteristics that plague Afghanistan, parts of the Caucasus, and elsewhere in the region have comparisons in other parts of the world. The situations in Iraq and the Occupied Territories present very similar scenarios that could quiet realistically spiral out of control in not properly watched and acted upon but are not as urgent as other

areas like Afghanistan and Chechnya. However the creation and impact of al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups can be felt most dramatically in the Caspian Sea Region as al-Qaeda related groups with ties to Afghanistan has created a network. This network has been established over decades as Afghanistan became the center for militant Islam. As a result the effects of militant Islam with the connection to al-Qaeda have been largely confined to the Caspian Sea Region.

Also like the Middle East there is no simple answer to stopping militant Islam without addressing the core causes of why these groups arose. The region has a unique combination of political, economic and social issues that prevent the region from containing the threat that these groups pose to both the governments in the region and governments abroad. These numerous causes cannot and will not be resolved in a matter of months and years but instead with decades, and possible even longer, of hard effort from numerous parties involved. International organizations along with states must play a constructive role in effectively resolving militant Islam.

## **APPENDIX: MAPS**

Political Map of the Caspian Sea Region 1.1

Southwest Asia



Topographical Map of the Caspian Sea Region 1.2

## CENTRAL ASIA



Political Map of the Caucasus 1.3





Political Map of Afghanistan and Pakistan 1.5



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