

THOUGHTS ON "RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM" IDENTITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

H. B. PAKSOY

Texas Tech University

Department of Philosophy

As a means of focusing our attention, let us consider two questions:

- 1) What is the Identity of Fundamentalism? For example: Is Religion equal to Nationality?
- 2) Who is more eager for the Central Asians to be "fundamentalists?"

Now, we can consider a population in 1990, exhibiting the following confessional attributes: 35,0481 operating churches, clustered in 219 denominations; 58.6 % of the total population maintaining church membership; 335,389 pastors in parishes; 537,379 total clergy. This country has 203 seminaries with 52,025 students enrolled. One sect alone operating 8,913 schools, not counting other denominational parochial schools. These figures do not include resources devoted to overseas evangelical and missionary activities. This political entity has 3.5 million square miles of territory and 145,383,738 out of a total population of 248 million are church members. The political entity in question, of course, is the United States. (1)

There are no comparable statistics with respect to Central Asia, which has a land mass akin to that of the U.S., but its population of approximately 80 million is clustered in several irrigated patches separated by uninhabitable expanses. From the late 1930s until 1990 there were only two seminaries in Central Asia, with a student body not more than several dozen students in attendance. (2) Total number of operating mosques, according to varying Soviet statistics, numbered around one hundred. The holy book Koran was published less than half a dozen times until 1984 in limited quantities. (3) The entire clergy was under the total control of the state. The bureaucratic apparatus of the center selected the seminary students for training and the graduating clergy were then assigned by the state apparatus to practice religion who paid them monthly. All "official" clergy reported to one of the four Moslem Spiritual Boards. In Central Asia the US type evangelical TV or radio stations are not indigenous. In the earlier periods, such as between the 12th and 16th centuries, the propagation medium of religion and legitimation of a new ruler was literature, especially poetry. Instead, especially during the past two centuries, Central Asia has been a target of proselytization, both Islamic and Christian, rather than a jubilant exporter of religion. The sources of these efforts to variously Islamicize or Christianize Central Asians are diverse, and now continuing with renewed vigor.

At this point, it may be useful to remind ourselves of a fundamental difference between Christianity and Islam: Christianity generally operates within a set administrative church apparatus. The Christian sects have a hierarchy, with a church pastor answering to a bishop of his denomination as

well as the congregation. The bishop, in turn, answers to a higher-level cleric, and so on. And, some of the denominations maintain a worldwide spiritual leader, with a suitable supporting state apparatus. None of this is the fundamental case with respect to Islam. A prayer leader only answers to his congregation. This is because Islam believes that there ought not be any type of mediation between a soul and God, a thought that fueled the Christian Reformation in the 16th century. Each individual will communicate with the deity at his own personal level and receive unconditional salvation. Again, in its original form, Islam did not make a distinction between the spiritual and the profane worlds; religion and statecraft are of one fabric. That is, when the mosques are not under the control of the political state, be it the 8th century Caliphates or the 21st century sovereign states. As mentioned above, on the other hand, the Soviet Union totally took over religion and placed it firmly under state control. Nothing religious, regardless of sect, could take place without the knowledge or permission of the security organs. The purpose, as demonstrated in related literature, was to remove this religious influence from the ruling equation, to make the population more pliable in general to the demands of the state. After all, a religion usually has legitimation issues involving the ruling strata and may support or oppose a political system or politician.

Much has been written about the rise and fall of Islam as a political movement, military power and distinct civilization. A great majority of those commentaries aim to view Islam as a monolith. Indeed, some of the practitioners and even opponents of Islam wish to portray it as such—each for its own benefit. (4) One look at the record indicates that, much like Christianity, national interests have always taken precedence over that putative unity. Christian Europeans have killed each other by the tens of millions during the 20th century World Wars under various grievances. Likewise, Islamic states also went to war with each other during the same period. Were all those wars fought in the name of religion? At the time of the fighting, the combatants claimed so. Further, all parties insisted that theirs was the true religion, and the belief of the opposing party was nothing but heresy. But, everyone, deep down their hearts could at least sense that there were other reasons. These are as varied as the desires and dreams of all humans. Some can be lumped together under economic, even political sub-headings.

In order to better understand this puzzle, it may be helpful to delve into the identity of the belief systems, stripped of their outer garments.

It is commonplace to have a person or polity to have more than one identity. Political (political party preference), economic (free market or restricted forms of daily economic activity), belief systems (for example, Buddhist or Christian, etc). But, choices and occurrences do not stop there. We, as individuals cannot choose our birth order, an occurrence that also contributes to one's identity, much like being a parent, member of a particular social or service club, or a graduate of a specific school. This complexity of identities certainly contributes, as a package, to the outcome.

Within the foregoing framework, therefore, it may be necessary to investigate the needs of various identities and the interactions among those needs, and associated costs.

Governance

The statecraft of Central Asia has deep roots, with surviving manuals from the tenth century and even earlier. The nature and identity of political systems of the region have evolved according to the needs of the populace and ecological environment. As it always is the case, a certain "ruling exhaustion" (born of long term governance) had already set in by the time outsiders first "discovered" Central Asia. These outsiders began publishing their understanding of the events, institutions and practices. However, the visitors—whether they were traveling in an invading army, or collecting intelligence or peddling commercial wares—had arrived with pre-conceived notions. These prejudices included both expectations of what to find and also their own perceptions of personal worth and capabilities. Unfortunately, those published works served to establish the bases for foreign policy options of a number of neighboring and far away states. This practice produced disastrous consequences for all, born of a mismatch between what is expected of the central Asians and the conditions that existed in central Asia. Most of those issues are still alive and well.

When the polities that come under pressure from outside sources to modernize, open up to global trade, their long standing local values are disrupted. These disrupted polities will wish to preserve their identities as a means of preserving and maintaining their life styles in many manners they think appropriate. After all, they realize, this is war by other means.

Anytime a problem is defined, the mind wanders about casting for an answer or solution. There may not always one ready to hand, other than the invisible hand that apply to economics. That is not to say that there ought not be any communication whatever among polities. Rather, the question is at what level? And, what ought be the qualifications of those communicators? And their numbers, intentions, objectives? If the designated communicators are there with the pre-conceived notions, to impose their will on the other side, the entire enterprise fails, and the hostilities commence once again.

It has been suggested that peace, enduring peace, can only be devised by global participation of all polities. This is difficult to defend or demonstrate. Some governance systems are designed for perpetual conflict without which they cannot survive. To quash such particularistic systems, other polities must arm and wage real war. The necessity to establish additional forces and logistics for the purpose eventually recalls Napoleon's dictum: "One can do everything with a bayonet, except sit on it"

The federative model of governance is a solution advanced to check the excesses of a overly centralized and overly authoritarian world government. In that case, the laws enacted, rules promulgated with executive decree in the name of the majority (it those indeed reflect the clear decisions of the majority), presumably for the good of all will not suit the needs and aspirations of the minority or minorities. Will that mismatch not constitute a violation of rights pursued by the majority

as well? Will the minority be forced into submission into a set of circumstances, for example, buying a certain product, for the sake of 'efficiency?' If the producer of, say, genetically engineered agricultural products have the right to engineer and market them, should not the consumers also have the right to accept or reject them?

Belief

Assaults on belief systems are not uncommon to Central Asians, who, in the course of a millennium, have braced themselves against a number of major campaigns. However, shamanism is the earliest known belief system, based on spirituality, courage, physical prowess, hospitality and generosity. It has two discernible basic branches: one of the earliest known monotheisms, the Tengri; and the dual diety Erlik and Dirlik (Sky and Underground gods, respectively). Over time, the Turk shamanism came into contact with neighboring belief systems, such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Mithraism; and exchanged tokens (images and lores) or significant eschatological aspects. The entry of Islam into this Shamanist territory created new traditions, and in some cases seriously eroded the basics of both belief systems. There are myriad poems and stories demonstrating the shamanist resistance to Islam, from all over Central Asia. (5) For example: A Turkmen rider encounters a dismounted kinsman. The latter had stuck a twig in the ground, in the vast expanses of the bozkir (semi desert, arid-lands) to create a semblance of private space, and is performing namaz (ritual prayer) behind it. The rider chides the worshipper:

Anan, atan işidür
çarpmak, yıkmak, talamak
Kim kodu sana
çöpe tapmak, toprak yalamak?

It is the tradition of your forebearers
to strike, to raid
So, who induced you
to worship the twig and lick the dirt?

In another instance, precepts of Islam were being explained to a gathering of Kazaks. The preacher, attempting to review and reinforce his message, puts the question to the assembly: "And, how will the Kazaks enter paradise?" To which an attendee responds without hesitation: "On horseback." (6)

Among some of the Turk groups, reverence is articulated towards the ancestral superstars in poetry:

Kök kümbezin kürüldetip,
Ürkütme bizni Biy Temir;
Qaraqaş taşın qımıldatıp,
Qorkutma bizni Biy Temir

Do not scare us Bey Temir
By making your blue dome thunder;
Do not frighten us Bey Temir
By moving your black stone
Haris Sisenbay, c. 1922 (7)

Of course, many an ode was written to Islam as well as Christianity. (8) The following is a rare 'fusionist' (combining Turk Shamanism with Islamic doctrines) poem, somehow attempting to merge the two.

Bir kapıdan Baba İlyas çıktı
Ayak çıplak baş açık sine üryan
Erenler katında ulu kaçıkı
Yarı İslâm idi yarı Şaman (9)

Baba İlyas emerged from a door
Barefeet, open headed, bare chested
Among the saints, a grand ole holy fool
Half Shaman, the other half Islam

Perhaps the Turk proverb "Avcu nice al bilse, Adük anca yol bilür" (As many devices the hunter knows to hunt with, so does the bear to escape) is still meaningful.

Economics

In the recent months, works on 'influence of modernity' on Central Asia began appearing. According to this observation, capitalist consumer goods flooded third world countries as a part of the globalization process. This caused an outflow of capital from essentially poor economies to wealthy ones, leaving the poor countries even more destitute. Artisans, merchants and others became unemployed reducing income generation. Poverty deepened.

The foregoing can be either a Marxist or a Capitalist view. Only the proposed solutions differ. The Marxist demand that all outside intervention to cease, foreigners to go home. Capitalist require loans to be made from their financial institutions to the countries at hand.

Economic, political and military institutions form an inseparable trivet. Does any one of these have an absolute superiority over the other two? Not even in absolute regimes can they be separated. This, however, does not stop absolutists from trying. Marxists demand and fund national liberation fronts, while the Capitalists---by now having been converted into Mercantilists

monopolists—insist on joint ventures and free trade. Both parties will also desire a military solution, involving the basing of troops, previous withdrawal demands notwithstanding, from both sides on the soil of the third party.

So far, as it is noticed, suggestions and demands have been pouring from out side in. No one yet consulted the populace that became a target of outside theories, generally hatched without reference to the practices followed in daily life. This is where the Identity issues become clear.

Global Trade is war by other means. It is an attempt at transferring wealth and resources from the losing party to the victor. The party that amasses the most wealth will be known as the most noble. Since Second World War, it has been argued that a world government is necessary to prevent global wars. This is in essence an idea first advanced over two centuries ago, at least in two different major versions: The Hobbesian variety relied on a strong central ruler (as in Leviathan) to impose order. In the other, Mill foresaw a trade based mutually dependent environment conducive to peace. Kant then made an attempt to combine the two, by means of cosmopolitan laws. In all cases, the sovereignty of the nation—states are reduced in favor of cosmopolitan laws. These writings greatly influenced the present forms of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization.

It can be argued that both approaches can be associated with a unique transference of initiative, resources and sovereignty from the individual to multinational organizations led by yet to be tested. One relatively new experiment on these principles is the formation of the European Union. In addition to a large bureaucratic apparatus, the EU also possesses a legislative body based in Strasbourg. However, the European Parliament lacks the real means of regulating the multinational organizations. If, on the other hand, should the European Parliament acquires such means, there is always the danger of that body going beyond the intention of the population—that may, perhaps, endow that body with stronger charter—in general.

As one response, perhaps Consumerism need to adapt, to consider such agreements as NAFTA regulations where a grieved person or company, from a polity outside of the USA may force the closure of a US business; in a secret meeting, closed to the public.

Thoughts on Identity

The issue, at once, becomes cultural; thus, a matter of Identity. Moreover, the tussle and the concern is not over a specific product, but over the pre-eminence of ideas and approaches to that intellectual output. A 'problem' is defined in cultural terms, containing the seeds of a proposed solution. If a polity is regarded as the problem, should it be exterminated? What if the same polity also regards the earlier one in the same terms? What is likely to transpire? Mutual annihilation? For example, when the steel makers of other polities put the US steel plants out of business, what was the problem, and its solution?

During the 1960's and 1970's waves of international terrorism swept Europe. Prominent European politicians and businessmen were kidnapped and killed. When caught, the perpetrators defended themselves with the assertion that they had the right to break the law, and such a right could not be truncated by any authority. Some judicial organs and Thought Employers (10) understood the true nature of the claim; it was to stress the nature of the laws and associated intentions. At the time, no polity was bombed by the armed forces of any country.

It appears a world government, as has been proposed, has some issues to resolve yet. The bow of a boat arrives at its destination first, ahead of the stern. But, it is the stern that guides it there.

Thus, Identity is a composite. (11) A great many ingredients are stirred into a solution, which, from the outside seems a solid unchanging mass. This makes Identity an extremely fluid structure, but one with definite parameters. Shifts in the composition are predictable. That is, it is definite that anger and despondency will be exhibited when income reduced or lost. What we do not know is when this person or better yet a group of persons in the same set of conditions will take some firm action, such as revolting by various means.

Identity components are strongly influenced by culture. Culture, by its original definition, is cultivation of mind. This is specific to place and time. What was handed down from the parents from childhood on? A composite of values transmitted from one generation to the next determines the general culture of a given polity. It is both changeable and immutable. This seeming contradiction is best understood by learning the specific culture.

If a given polity has a culture of unchanging adherence to certain principles in personal life, for examples as Amish live, then there will be a collision, between a given immutable principle and the society at large. Literally. In Ohio and Pennsylvania there are regular accidents between horse drawn Amish carriages and motorcars. Does that create a certain tension within the community?

The consequences of intergenerational conflict in a large part of the world have been appearing ever since the first generation. This shift of emphasis, or change, is forced by changing conditions in the immediate vicinity. However, the reception of the depth and range of change differs from one polity to the next. This is not because a polity cannot handle the change or its speed. The priority is attached to the leavening of the given culture. How and what was learned.

The Marxist culture, for example, equates "enlightenment" with empowerment, so that individuals can take their fate into their hands. The opposing camp, the capitalists, fervently believe the solution lies in "education." Even if the terminology is somewhat different, both end up with the same methods and means. So far, however, it must have become apparent, the real competition is actually between two groups who interpret and staunchly practice their ideologies. The target polity is a field of contention, the prize, or, at best, a testing laboratory.

Then, after a while, the target polity, or its components, begin assessing these outside factors influencing and affecting their lives. These alien thoughts appear to be contrary to their own desires and expectations, as leavened by their own culture. As a result, they decide to take action, in order to remove the outside obstacles to their own lifestyle. The methods they choose to obtain will vary from one polity to the next. But they will also learn from the methods directed at them by all camps. And, they will turn the tables on alien influences. It will be costly to all parties involved.

Belief systems have always been a part of human endeavor. In turn, there has always been a raging competition between belief systems. Is it the ideas themselves, or the agents they influence and act upon that compete? How well do the agents understand the basic precepts of the belief systems? Or, did the agents deliberately distort those tenets, for pecuniary interest? Central Asia has been, and still is, a battlefield of belief systems, with Islam being one of the latest entrants into the fray. And, many interpretations of Islam have been fueled not only by indigenous interest groups, but also by the outside players. The latter may have the distinction of constituting the majority of such initiatives.

The belief systems, once released onto a polity, begin interacting with the economic, political and military trivet, leading to a new set of issues and possible solutions. What complicates this already crowded matrix is that most, if not all, belief systems tend to have subdivisions. These internal components of a belief system may and do contain self-contradictory doctrines in themselves. The existence of such bifurcations are an ideal opening for outside forces to exploit, for the purpose of influencing the affairs of target polities. When the target polity objects to the outside entities and their aims and methods, these outsiders may and will resort to clandestine methods. They will, essentially, insist on getting their way.

All throughout recorded history one warlike visit begat a return of the same upon the initial aggressor. As an extension, when clandestine operations become known---and they will invariably become public---the same response can be expected. These responses need not be on the same level of the outside offenders. The targeted polity will choose its timing and methods. Even after a long wait, lasting decades.

If the clandestine forces of the outside polities choose to concentrate on bifurcations of belief, governance or economic systems to exploit, that does not mean that the target polity will respond in kind. But, respond, they will.

Both the authoritarian and the mercantilist systems, while competing against each other, will also initiate paramilitary operations. At a certain activity level, these operations will be penetrated and compromised. This is exactly the case with respect to Afghanistan and the rest of Central Asia. Not only the immediate neighbors of Afghanistan in Central Asia, but also polities from other regions have been partaking in this process of exploitation of bifurcated belief and governance systems. A portion of the targeted population, originally grieved by economic and political depredations, will

respond decisively to the provocation. This will be in the direction of military action. This includes, necessarily, the struggle waged between the 17th and 20th century struggle between the mercantilist and the capitalist governance systems; the latter attempting to change the world, as the former doggedly resisting.

Central Asia, even if the term implies a block of land, is not a monolith in cultural terms. Afghanistan has a different history and culture than Iran or the Newly Independent States of Kazak, Kirghiz, Tajik, Turkmen, Uzbek. Even within the NIS, the experience, for example, of Tajikistan is different than the adjacent neighbor Uzbekistan. For example, Afghanistan did not exist as a state before the 20th century. The five states of Central Asia were part of a much larger entity, named Turkistan. Languages spoken in Afghanistan, that is, the existence of large minorities are not the same elsewhere.

What To Expect

The issue at hand, then, becomes: 1) Will the polity at hand evolve politically and economically, if left to its own devices 2) How much external interference in whatever form will be tolerated a) by the governance strata of the target polity b) the people of the polity.

The political systems of the region, prior to the arrival of outside authoritarianism in the form of various external clandestine services, were designed or evolved according to local realities. These "eastern" or "Oriental" governance systems, labeled 'unsophisticated,' 'primitive,' so on, were in existence for millennia or more, when they were discovered or designed for the past two hundred years within the "western" reaches of the world. When Bismarck, in late 19th century was designing his Governance Participation Units (factory unions; workplace representatives, etc) or multi-party and coalition initiatives were taking place in their neighborhood, such systems have been functioning in places such as Afghanistan and in the east for quite sometime. They were established institutions long before university based social scientists created books of terminology to explain them.

All these old and new systems of Governance Participation Units came into being for the obvious reason: to share in the resources, to keep the polity in balance. Every Governance Participation Unit, through its membership strength and leadership skills, sought to obtain what they deemed a fair share of what is available. In terms of functions, who gets how much water and who gets to build a golf course or travels to space as a tourist work on the same principles.

One of the implications of this (often is regarded euphemistically as a resource sharing arrangement by the outsiders) is that the polities targeted by authoritarian or mercantilist polities will assess the relative merits of what is being imposed on them. In the end, the target polity members may reject what is on offer from the outside, in favor of keeping what is and has been there as far back as the existence of the polity. The more the pressure on a target polity, the more energetic the objections and resultant counter-measures.

Corruption, under many guises will take place, despite prescribed safeguards. Corruption is basically an attempt at subverting the rules of governance. It is a dash to jump the queue, divert resources for the benefit of a sub-group or individual at the expense of the rest of the polity. If the polity does not have effective recourse to enforcement of the rules, corruption will cause the eventual collapse of the system, and the polity. Some polities engage their secret services, in full force, to deal with corruption. To eradicate it, other polities' secret services fully cooperate with the players of corruption and become corrupt themselves. The entire polity suffers from a range of ills, including human rights abuses and distortions in income distribution. When the corruption is exported along with a political and economic system, the recipients not only may not appreciate the incoming product, but also resent the defective nature of the process and choose to fight it with tools at their own disposal.

The abusers of belief systems are rather adept at exploiting all of the above ideas and means. As usual, when a new system arrives, it has to do battle with the existing one. The new recruits or converts will be more eager to prove their worth than the rest who have been in it for a longer period. Similarly, adherents of an old system will seek revenge. The methods of the revenge are not necessarily salient; revenge, itself, is.

The so-called fundamentalism is a hybrid. First there exists a body of disgruntled people. Second, there are individuals and groups who abuse the belief system for either institutional or personal gain. Third, the interest groups from the outside place unwanted pressure on the same people. The resultant cocktail can well be overly potent. And, one fundamentalism, regardless of its origin and location, will fuel others; just like one-armed visit will begat a military invasion in return.

Central Asian political movements emerging at the beginning of the 20th century stressed a separation between religion and state, before the coercive Soviet methods were put into place. This can be observed from the platforms and programs they issued over time. When the Bolsheviks militarily incorporated Central Asia into what became the Soviet Union, all plans for a secular and independent Central Asian state were also postponed.

In closing: to place the issue of fundamentalism into perspective, perhaps the two initial questions need to be reiterated: 1) Is religion equal to nationality? 2) Who is more eager for the Central Asians to be "fundamentalists?" (12)

1. Constant H Jacquet, Jr. Editor, Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 1990 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, Communications Unit of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, 1990).

2. "In 1900, it was estimated that in Turkestan alone, without counting the khanates of Bukhara and Khiva, there were 1503 congregational mosques and 11230 parish mosques with a total of 12499 imams (prayer leaders) to minister to 6 million persons, that is, one mosque for every 471 believers."

See Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History of Central Asia* (New York: Praeger

3. H. B. Paksoy, "Deceivers." *Central Asian Survey* Vol. 3, N. 1, 1984.

4. H.B. Paksoy, "Nationality or Religion?: Views of Central Asian Islam" *AACAR Bulletin* (of the Association for the Advancement of Central Asian Research) Vol VIII, No. 2, 1995; Reprinted in *International Journal of Central Asian Studies* Volume 3, 1998; Translation in *Central Asia and the Gulf*, Masayuki Yamauchi, ed. (Tokyo: Asahi Selected Series, 1995) . Original reprinted in *Essays on Central Asia* (Lawrence, KS: Carrie, 1999) also accessible at: <http://www.ukans.edu/~ibetext/texts/paksoy-6/cae02.html>

5. H. B. Paksoy, "Sun is also Fire" *Central Asian Monuments* (Istanbul: Isis, 1992).

6. With many thanks to Dr. Buğra Atsız.

7. Z.V. Togan, *Hatıralar* (Istanbul, 1969) . Sisenbay was the Başkurt orderly to Z.V. Togan (1890–1970) during the Turkistan National Liberation Movement of the 1920s and 1930s. See "The Basmachi Movement From Within: An Account of Zeki Velidi Togan" *Nationalities Papers* Vol. 23, No 2. June 1995. Pp. 373–399. Reprinted in *CENTRAL ASIA READER: The Rediscovery of History* H.B. Paksoy, Editor, Translator (New York/London: M. E. Sharpe, 1994). 'Biy Temir' (or Temur Bey) is the correct spelling of what has been rendered as 'Tamarlane:' And the 'black stone' is the very large, very dark green jade marking Timur's burial location, inside the moseleum known as Kök kumbez 'Sky Blue Dome' ('sky blue' or 'Turquoise' has been the primary royal color among Turks).

8. See Peter B Golden "Codex Comanicus" in *Central Asian Monuments* (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 1992).

9. <http://www11.ewebcity.com/ahibirlikleri/aef.html>

10. H.B. Paksoy, "Dusunce Isvereni" *Turk Tarihi, Toplumların Mayasi, Uygarlık* (Izmir: Mazhar Zorlu Holding, 1997) <http://www.ukans.edu/~ibetext/texts/paksoy-3/turk15.html>

11. H.B. Paksoy, *Identities: How Governed, Who Pays?* (Lawrence: Carrie, 2001). Simultaneous print and e–book release. Accessible at <http://www.ukans.edu/~ibetext/texts/paksoy-7/>

12. *The Question of Religious Fundamentalism in Central Asia* <http://www.ukans.edu/~ibetext/texts/paksoy-6/cae03.html> H.B. Paksoy, *Essays on Central Asia* (Carrie, 1999) <http://www.ukans.edu/~ibetext/texts/paksoy-6/>

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