THE RETURN OF HISTORY

Paul B. Henze and S. Enders Wimbush

I

No part of the ex-Soviet Union was more cut off from its historical past and isolated from its traditional links with the outer world than the southern periphery the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. These regions, old crossroads of civilization, were locked into the Russian Empire during the 19th century and autocratically administered from distant St. Petersburg. They were colonies. Their trade and cultural life were reoriented toward Russia, though as long as the tsars ruled they still retained many of their old links to outer world.

This changed quickly after the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917. During the early years of Soviet Union their borders to the south were for all practical purposes sealed. Bolshevik leaders in Moscow claimed to be champions of anti-colonialism, cultural liberation, and accelerated economic development. In actuality they subjected the peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus to a more pervasive form of colonial exploitation than they had known under the tsars or than any classic European colonial power still practiced. Their economies were fully subordinated to Moscow. They were turned into suppliers of raw materials and minerals for the Soviet economy and supplied a few specialized commodities that the Soviets would otherwise have had to import. They had no independent trade with the outer world. Their history was distorted to demonstrate that their destiny had inevitably led them to be absorbed by Russia. Their languages and alphabets were manipulated to isolate them from kindred peoples across the Soviet borders. They were given no training or experience in self-administration that could prepare them for independence. Ancient religious connections were restricted with the intention of eventually eliminating all religion.

As the Soviet Union stagnated and weakened, all the peoples along the southern periphery began to reassert a sense of identity, but it was a hesitant, incomplete, and in some ways confused process. They were still far from ready for independence when it came with unexpected suddenness in 1991. Russia was not well prepared for independence either. For it, too, independence has been confusing. Russians have not yet reconciled themselves to losing the empire the tsars gained, and Lenin reconsolidated. Russians are having difficulty defining their own national interests, including their relationship to the colonial territories they formerly ruled and exploited. They have not yet shaken habits of interference in the affairs of these countries, claiming special privileges, and from time to time pressuring and threatening them. There is no widely accepted consensus in Russia on the future of the country, less so than in most of the other ex-Soviet countries because none of them has an imperialist past to overcome. Among the common features of life in Russia and its former colonies is a preoccupation with history

reexamining the past, reinterpreting it and arguing about it while adapting it to new plans and policies.

History has come abruptly back to life in the countries of the former Soviet Union to a degree never seen before anywhere in the world. Political leaders cite it, newspapers debate it, ordinary people redefine their family and clan backgrounds in historical terms. Relations between these countries and their neighbors are debated and negotiated in terms of history. Central Asia and the Caucasus are among the oldest areas of civilization on earth. Consequently they have an enormous accumulation of history. It can be drawn on for present purposes of politics, religion, and even economics. Most of the new relationships are developing in patterns and channels that once prevailed in the past or, sometimes more importantly, what people want to believe happened in the past.

Other parts of Central Asia, e.g. Mongolia and the Altai, the western regions of China (Tibet, Chinghai, Gansu, and Xinjiang), the Himalayan region, and Afghanistan were long inaccessible except to explorers and adventurers from the West, though trade and other traditional patterns of contact continued with the regions conquered by Russia until the beginning of the Soviet period. The Soviets turned Outer Mongolia into their first satellite in the early 1920s and for the better part of the next three decades exercised what amounted to colonial domination over most of Xinjiang. After the communists took power in mainland China, they reestablished control over Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and (with considerable difficulty) Tibet and cut off what contacts still existed between these regions and the outer world. Though of these regions only Mongolia has gained real independence since the collapse of the Soviet Union, all have been affected by the momentous changes that are under way in Central Asia. They, too, like the countries of ex-Soviet Central Asia, are experiencing a return of history.

II

Many years ago the great British historian Arnold Toynbee compared the Central Asian steppes to the sea, noting that for thousands of years these vast open prairies and plateaus offered routes for movement of peoples, religions, cultural and political influences, trade, and diffusion of technology over great distances in all directions just as, for example, the Mediterranean Sea did.[1] The concept is useful for understanding Inner Asian history.

In recent years the opening of Central Asia to Western archaeologists in cooperation with those in the region has focussed new attention on Indo-European origins. All the major language groups of Europe, including the Slavic languages, are Indo-European. So are Armenian, Persian, and several of the most widely spoken languages of the Indian Subcontinent, including one of the oldest written Indo-European languages, Sanskrit. There have long been reasons for speculating that Indo-European speakers originated in Central Asia and migrated out in several directions. Two extinct languages called Tokharian A & B were discovered in documents collected in Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang) early in this century by the great Central Asian explorer, Sir Aurel Stein.[2] When deciphered, the languages turned out to be Indo-European, with affinities even

1 A Study of History, Abridgement of Volumes I-VI by D.C. Somerville, London, 1946, pp. 166-67, 185-86.

2 Annabel Walker, Aurel Stein, Pioneer of the Silk Road, John Murray, London, 1995.

to early Celtic. In the last few years mummies with blond and red hair and distinctly European features have been unearthed in Xinjiang and more are still being found.[3] Work by American, Kazak, and Russian archaeologists now under way in the southern Urals and Kazakhstan on steppe societies who domesticated the horse appears to link up with these discoveries, for early Indo-Europeans are known to have used horses for riding and may have invented chariotry.[4] The likelihood that Indo-European speaking people originated in the very heart of Asia and spread across the steppes and deserts to the Middle East and Europe, while others made their way over the Himalayas south to India is gaining substantiation. Peoples who came after them spread across Asia and into Europe in similar fashion.

Much more is known about later history. Early Chinese emperors undertook expeditions deep into Central Asia, according to some records as far as the Aral Sea. Buddhism spread into Central Asia from India and reached China. The famous Silk Road brought many exotic products from China to the Mediterranean during the time of the Roman Empire and long afterward. The Silk Road was never a single route but an extensive network of caravan trails that crossed Central Asia from east to west and north to south.

These trails led over the high Himalayan passes to India, led on to the Caucasus, Anatolia, and Syria, and eventually extended northward to the forest fastnesses of Russia as well. They were used by all the peoples who moved out of Central Asia over the millennia. The Huns, a people thought to be proto-Turk or Mongol, came out of the Altai and the Gobi and moved inexorably into Europe until their defeat by a Roman army at Chalons-sur-Marne (north of Paris) in 451, after which they retreated to Pannonia _ present-day Hungary. As Christianity spread, Nestorians sent missionaries and established colonies all the way to the borders of China.

Chinese chronicles mention Turks among "northern barbarians" at least three centuries before Christ. The earliest Turkish inscriptions, dating from the 5th century AD, have been found in the Orkhon valley of Mongolia, in Tuva, and along the upper Yenisei in Siberia. Some Turks were already moving westward. Byzantine sources chronicle contact with Turks, including soldiers serving as mercenaries, from this period onward.[5] Turks had begun spreading through Asia much earlier, advancing from the northern forests where they originated into the rich agricultural oases around Kashgar, Samarkand, and Bukhara. Groups of Turks are known to have come into the Caucasus during the first millennium AD. Most famous were the Khazars who created a large state in the North Caucasus and along the lower Volga in the 7th century.[6] The Seljuk Turks, coming out of Central Asia by way of Iran, defeated the Byzantine emperor in 1071 and moved on into Anatolia. Their successors the Ottomans crossed the straits into Europe a century before they captured Constantinople (1453), defeating the Serbs on Kossovo Polye in 1389. Their advance was only halted before Vienna by the Polish king Jan Sobieski in 1683, long after America had been discovered and was being settled.

In the preceding centuries two other remarkable waves of human expansion had spread across

3 Victor Mair, "Mummies of the Tarim Basin", Archaeology, March/April 1995, pp.28-35.

4 David Anthony and Nikolai Vinogradov, "Birth of the Chariot", Archaeology, March/April 1995, pp. 36-41.

5 Gyula Moravcsik, Byzantinoturcica, die Byzantinischen Quellen der Geschichte der Turkvolker, Brill, Leiden, 1983.

6 The Caspian Sea is still known as "The Sea of the Khazars"--Hazar Denizi--in modern Turkish and Azeri.

Central Asia _ the Arabs from the west and the Mongols from the east. Only five years after the death of the Prophet Mohammed (632), Arab armies overran Ctesiphon, capital of the Emperor of Persia and forced him to flee deep into Central Asia (637). By 660 the Arabs had penetrated into the eastern Caucasus and had conquered Persian-ruled territories as far east as Afghanistan. In the next century they took Balkh, Bukhara, and Samarkand. Finding Turks already a significant element of the population of these regions, they called it Turkestan.[7] The Arabs introduced Islam, which has prevailed in Central Asia ever since. By both land and sea Islam spread to China in the centuries which followed.[8]

The rapid conquests of the Arabs across Central Asia were no less remarkable than those of another originally small and obscure people, the Mongols. Ethnically close to the Turks, the Mongols were a minor tribe until they produced a remarkable leader, Temuchin, who became known as Chingis Khan, the greatest of all world-conquerors. He first conquered north China[9] and then, recruiting Turks to fill out his armies, led his mounted warriors with astonishing speed westward across Asia. When he died in 1227, his sons and grandsons divided his empire and consolidated control over China, Siberia, and Russia, advanced into Poland, and reached the Adriatic. Others moved into Anatolia and conquered Iran, while in the heartland of Central Asia, Turkestan, dynasties founded by the Mongols ruled for the next several centuries. Originally animists, the Mongols displayed no religious zeal and, except in Mongolia and China, most of Chingis Khan's descendants adopted Islam and became Turkified. Among the best known are Tamerlane, who made Samarkand his capital, and defeated the Ottoman sultan at Ankara in 1402; and Babur, Tamerlane's 5th generation descendant, who conquered northern India in the next century and founded the Moghul Empire which lasted until Britain brought it to an end in 1867.

The descendants of the Mongols who became known as the Tatars of the Golden Horde were converted to Islam and ruled Russia for more than 200 years from their capital on the lower Volga.[10] As the princes of Moscow gained strength, they shook off Mongol control. Ivan IV (the Terrible), who was the first Russian prince to be crowned tsar, captured Kazan, the capital of the Golden Horde, in 1552.[11] Despite conquest by Russia, Kazan remained the center of Tatar life and culture. Tatars were not forcibly converted to Orthodoxy. Most of them remained Muslim and some prospered under Russian rule. Tatars became active in trade with Siberia and Central Asia. Tatars were in the forefront of the Turkic revival in Russia in the late 19th century. They are the most populous Muslim nationality in Russia today, numbering over 6 million. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union they have been as assertive as the Chechens about taking political and economic control of their republic, but their leaders have been more clever in the

7 The Soviets tried to discourage common bonds among Turkic peoples and abolished the designation Turkestan when they gerrymandered Central Asia into ethnic republics. Curiously, the Red Army retained the name for the Turkestan Military District.

8 Islam ousted Buddhism which continued dominant only in Mongolia and Tibet, to which the Arabs did not penetrate.

9 Establishing the Yuan Dynasty, which lasted until 1368.

10 E.H. Parker, A Thousand Years of the Tartars, Dorset Press, New York, 1987; Azade Ayse Rorlich, The Volga Tatars, a Profile in National Resilience, Hoover, Stanford, CA, 1986; Devin DeWeese, Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

11 The Turco-Mongol Giray dynasty, which ruled in Crimea and owed allegiance to the Ottoman sultans, was not subjugated by Russia until 1783.

way they have gone about it. As a result, Tatarstan is peaceful and profiting from its oil and heavy industry. Tatar President Mintimer Shaimiev has negotiated agreements with Yeltsin which give his republic broad autonomy, the opportunity to trade directly with other ex-Soviet states and to deal directly with foreign investors. Thus Tatars have made history come alive in both symbolic and concrete fashion.

III

We have only scratched the surface of the complex and colorful history of Central Asia and the impact peoples coming out of Central Asia have had on the world around it. It is not hard to understand how people who live there now, given the opportunity, have seized the chance to repossess their history, explore it, clean it of communist and colonialist distortions, and draw on it to rebuild their political, cultural, and even economic systems. This is not to say that history is still not controversial for the nations of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Interpretations may differ widely. Views clash. Current politics is often debated in terms of history, sometimes very ancient history. Nowhere has this been more true than in the ethnically complex Caucasus. But there is also a more benign side to the return of history. It is being used to inspire and consolidate the newly independent states.

The Kyrgyz believe that they are descended from original Turks who came down from Siberia over a thousand years ago. They claim their language is the purest form of Turkic. To underscore their independence, their new leaders somewhat arbitrarily designated 1995 the 1000th anniversary of their national hero, Manas. Celebrations were held in August in Bishkek and throughout the country. They culminated at the site of Manas's presumed tomb in the Talas valley. Hundreds of bards recited portions of the great epic, 100,000 lines long, which glorifies the deeds of the hero and records the legends that the Kyrgyz regard as the basis of their history. Representatives of all the other Turkic peoples as well as guests from many parts of the world joined in the celebrations. In this way President Askar Akaev strove to overcome clan and regional differences and bolster his own leadership position.

Bordering on China, as their countries do, both the Kyrgyz and the Kazakhs have lost no time in renewing contacts at many levels. Visits of leaders have been exchanged and trade and cultural agreements signed. Since nearly 200,000 Kyrgyz and over a million Kazakhs live in Chinese territory, kinsmen on both sides of the borders have eagerly resumed contact. Tens of thousands of people cross each year in both directions. Trade has burgeoned. Markets in Bishkek and Almaty are replete with Chinese goods. Kazakhstan's China trade in 1996 officially exceeded its trade with Russia in value. There is a great deal of unofficial trade as well. These developments have their downside, however, for the Chinese are sensitive to the influence which the sizable minorities of Uigurs and Dungans in the newly independent Central Asian countries may have on their co-ethnics in Xinjiang. And much as they welcome trade and contact, the leaders of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan fear an influx of ethnic Chinese into their own countries and have taken measures to restrict permanent settlement of those who come to work and trade.

Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are also expanding contacts with China. Many historical links are

being revived. Uzbeks were prominent as traders in the oases of Chinese Turkestan[12] in the 18th and 19th centuries. They were known as Andijanis, since at that time the designation Uzbek was applied only to rural descendants of former nomadic tribes, while urban dwellers in the cities of Western Turkestan were known as Sarts.[13] Descendants of Andijanis--the name is derived from the city of Andijan in the Fergana Valley--have become active in commerce again since the reforms following the death of Mao Zedong. Clan and ethnic ties remain strong in Central Asia. Many of the Andijanis' descendants are participating in the brisk trade that fills the stalls of the great weekend tolkuchka[14] at the Tashkent hippodrome with Chinese goods.

In the 1950s the Chinese communists created an "autonomous" Tajik region centered on Tashkurgan in the far southwest corner of Xinjiang, where Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor meets the border of Pakistan. Given the deterioration of administrative control that resulted from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, all borders have become porous in this strategic region where, during the Great Game at the turn of the last century, three empires (the British, the Russian, and the Chinese) met and competed. Of the three, the British are long gone, while the Chinese retain the most control over their territory. The Russian army is in Tajikistan still, guarding the borders against incursions from Afghanistan while trying to keep Tajik factions from tearing their country apart. Tajikistan is the least consolidated of the new Central Asian states. The whole region, like Afghanistan itself, continues in a condition of comparative anarchy with local clans and warlords often alternating control from one valley to the next in Badakhshan and the Pamirs. The economic common denominator is trade, some of which is illicit--drugs and other kinds of contraband--but it carries the potential of softening clan and factional strife, because traders are natural compromisers and need relatively peaceful and predictable conditions to prosper.[15] There is a religious common denominator in this region too, Ismailism, the Muslim sect which recognizes the Aga Khan as leader. His followers dominate the former principality of Hunza and neighboring regions in what Pakistan now calls its Northern Territories.

The lines between different kinds of trade are not easy to draw. Official trade will undoubtedly continue to expand because Russia is incapable of satisfying the needs of Central Asians for consumer goods and modern industrial products. Economically dynamic China has an almost insatiable demand for raw materials--minerals, hides, wool, cotton--that Central Asian countries can supply. China has quickly become a major trade partner and will remain so, but from the first months of independence the leaders of the newly independent Central Asian states

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12 It became known as Xinjiang, the "New Dominion" only after the Chinese defeat of Yakub Beg in 1878 when China established full control over the region.

13 Common in 19th century travelers' accounts, the term Sart has disappeared, but their descendants have continued to multiply. Sart meant urban dweller in the great Central Asian cities: Samarkand. Bukhara, Khojent, Kokand, Namangan, Margelan, and Osh. Many spoke both Turkic (now Uzbek) and Persian (now Tajik) and had no strong ethnic affiliation. Their primary identification was as Muslims. In the 1920s the Soviets required all Sarts to declare themselves Uzbeks or Tajiks and to declare oneself simply Muslim was forbidden. Cases were reported of one brother choosing to call himself an Uzbek while the other declared himself a Tajik. Seventy years of Soviet rule appear to have consolidated these original ethnic decisions, and both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan now count sizable numbers of each other's nationality as minorities.

14 A Russian term used in the Soviet period for a market where goods were traded illicitly by tolkachi--pushers, i.e. black marketeers. It is now used for any free, open market.

15 For a vivid firsthand account of the travels of a trader from northern Afghanistan into Tajikistan and then to Peshawar in the Pakistani Northwest Frontier Province, with information on various routes, see Hali, the International Magazine of Carpet and Textile Art, January 1997, pp. 128-129.

have looked farther east as well, to Korea and Japan. They offer greater possibilities than China for high technology. Both these countries are investing in Central Asia. Daewoo, for example, opened an automobile assembly plant at Asaka (called Leninsk in the Soviet period) in Uzbekistan in July 1996. It was already producing 120 vehicles per day by August and production is expected to rise to 700 vehicles per day by the year 2001.

IV

Central Asian leaders have rapidly come to think in broad economic terms, to reach out in all directions to develop economic relationships, and to avoid dependence on any single country or region by diversifying trade and investment. The region's economies were originally so tightly tied to Russia and other parts of the Soviet Union that a quick rupture of the Russian relationship was neither possible nor desirable. Realization of the extent to which they had been exploited by the Soviet system, receiving only a small fraction of world prices for their oil, cotton, and minerals, coupled with the inability of financially strapped Russia to pay world prices, spurred the newly independent countries to seek new markets. The often crude declarations and occasional pressure Russians have made against them have reinforced their determination to recast economic relations with Russia into a normal, mutually beneficial pattern. Meanwhile they have worked to build ties to Turkey, Europe and the United States too.

Historic Central Asian links to the south are being rapidly renewed and offer great promise for the future, not in the least as routes to the open seas for movement of oil and bulk goods. All aspects of life are intertwined in this process. They key players in this aspect of the Central Asian game are India, Pakistan, and Iran. All three will be discussed at length in subsequent sections of this study. The relationships which are in the process of rapid development rest on a great deal of history. The Indian subcontinent with its easier climate and tropical products, with its multiplicity of religious and sophisticated cultures, has long attracted people living in the harsher conditions of Central Asia. This must have been part of the reason early Indo-Aryans came from the north to India. They are certainly what drew Babur to India to found the brilliant Moghul Dynasty. Indian artifacts have been found in abundance in Central Asian archaeological excavations. Pilgrims from Central Asia--and even from China--left pictures and inscriptions on rocks along the trails over the Himalayas which are now followed by the Karakoram Highway. World-famous Indian products _ Cashmere (Kashmir) wool actually came from Xinjiang and Tibet. Indian tea has been carried to Central Asia since ancient times.

Until the last half century, anything said of India and Central Asia applied to Pakistan as well. As a Muslim country Pakistan since its creation has had an even stronger orientation toward Central Asia than India. Following the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, the Soviet Union strove to build up a special relationship with India and succeeded. While India remained a democracy, it made many pragmatic concessions to Soviet communism, supported Soviet Third World initiatives, and became a major recipient of Soviet military and economic aid. In rivalry and at times in conflict with China over Himalayan territories on both the western and eastern extremities of its northern borders, India, after the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s, became increasingly hostile to China and China reciprocated. China still retains a large chunk of Indian-claimed territory on the western edge of Tibet (Aksai-Chin). Pakistan, on the other hand, feeling threatened by India and in chronic dispute over Kashmir, developed a friendship with

China even while it maintained a strong pro-Western stance, including membership in Western-supported anti-Communist alliances. It concluded a border agreement with China in 1964. India's and Pakistan's contradictory political and military relationships resulted in different attitudes toward Central Asia in India and Pakistan and different attitudes toward the collapse of the Soviet Union.

India has never been comfortable with the way China has dealt with Tibet, has given asylum to tens of thousand of Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama, and in the 1960s cooperated in American covert efforts to aid rebellious Tibetans. On the other hand, India has never risked open support of Tibetan independence. On the other hand, India gave tacit approval to Soviet pretensions that the Central Asian republics were a showcase of communist success in building new societies and creating a the Soviet man. The only significant direct Central Asian link to the outer world during the final decades of the Soviet period was the Tashkent-New Delhi air route. India, for many reasons, was discomfited by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Pakistan, on the other hand, was always more realistic in its assessment of conditions in Soviet Central Asia and more sympathetic to its Muslim brothers there. Its close relationship with China discouraged official political interest in the situation of Chinese minorities, but construction of the Karakoram Highway in the 1970s brought Pakistanis and Uigurs as well as other Muslims in Chinese Turkestan into close and continual commercial contact. These contacts have steadily expanded. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the Karakoram Highway has become a significant trade route to the independent countries of Central Asia as well. China is building a first-class highway to the Torugart Pass for access to Kyrgyzstan and highways crossing the border into Kazakhstan farther north have been improved. A direct rail link between Urumchi and the Central Asian railway system was completed in 1993. At least half a dozen new highway routes are in various stages of discussion to connect Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to Indian ocean ports.

Afghanistan remains a large question mark in all this debate, planning, and preliminary negotiation. The advantages of becoming a major route for transit trade from Central Asia might serve to reduce factional strife in that badly disrupted country and set it on the road to peaceful development again. Pakistan resumed rail service to Landi-Kotal at the entrance of the Khyber Pass in early 1996. The consequences of a decade of Soviet political maneuvering in Afghanistan followed by invasion and a decade of war have left this unfortunate country in a condition of acute political fragmentation. Life, however, goes on, and economically Afghanistan's borders open in all directions for trade and movement of people. The country will be discussed more systematically in a subsequent section of this study.

V

The same applies to Iran and Turkey, both countries with long histories of involvement with Central Asia. Before the arrival of the Turks in Central Asia a millennium and a half ago, Persian connections and Persian influences had been strong for at least 2000 years. The population of Uzbekistan has a significant Iranian substratum. The Tajiks are an Iranian people. Their language and the Farsi of Iran are mutually intelligible. Most of the peoples who inhabit

the isolated valleys of Gorno-Badakhshan are Iranian too, and a living museum for specialists in ancient Indo-Iranian languages and cultures. Iran's Shi'ite clerics have wisely refrained from making religion the basis of their relations with the newly independent Central Asian states, stressing instead trade and technology and on the cultural plane, ancient history. Iran is the most practical outlet for Central Asian oil. A pipeline is being built from Turkmenistan to connect with the Iranian system and a rail connection from Turkmenistan to Iran was opened with great fanfare in the spring of 1996. The Iranians are close to completing a huge free-trade center at Sarakhs near their northeastern border.

Most modern Turks still like to pretend that they all came from Central Asia, and there is no question that their language, their epics and traditions, and the dynamic leaders who formed the Seljuk and Ottoman empires did. But Turks also realize that a major portion of their country's more than 60 million inhabitants are a mix of many other ethnic currents, starting with ancient Hittites, Phrygians, Lydians, Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines, who mixed with all those who came later to Anatolia. The same occurred with many of the Georgians, Greeks, and Armenians who were absorbed as the Ottoman Empire expanded. As the Empire shrank, Circassians, Abkhaz, Chechens and Dagestanis, as well as Albanians and Muslim Slavs from Bosnia, Macedonia, and Bulgaria were given refuge and were absorbed into the Turkish population.[16] Even with the resurgence of interest in ethnicity which Turkey has been experiencing since the late 1980s, Turkic traditions and history are likely to remain predominant and epics such as Dede Korkut will remain relevant.[17]

Thousands of Kazakhs and Uigurs who fled the Chinese communists were given asylum in Turkey in the 1950s and several thousand Kyrgyz from Afghanistan were welcomed in the early 1980s. These refugees, especially the Uigurs, have been influential in Turkey well beyond their numbers. The Uigurs opened trade with their countrymen in Xinjiang after Chinese economic liberalization. Turkey has also felt a special affinity to Afghanistan and Pakistan. All these relationships predate and underlie the great burst of contacts at all levels which Turkey developed with the newly independent ex-Soviet states. Turkey is and is likely to remain a significant presence on the Central Asian scene, not in the least because of the large number of Central Asians studying at Turkish universities and professional schools and Central Asian officers training in Turkish military academies.

VI

The disintegration of the USSR not only brought history back into the political debates of the peoples of the newly independent countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus, it also catalyzed the rapid emergence among all the elites of Central and South Asia and the Caucasus of an awareness of the historical factors that knit the various parts of the region together. The result is new strategic vision of the region in which the various states' political, and economic aspirations

16 A recent scholarly study explores this almost totally unknown aspect of Balkan, Caucasian, and Turkish history: Justin McCarthy: Death and Exile, the Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922, Princeton, NJ, Darwin Press, 1995.

17 English-language editions include an highly readable translation in the Penguin Classics Series: Geoffrey Lewis (ed.), The Book of Dede Korkut, Penguin Books, 1974, and Faruk Sumer et al. (eds.), The Book of Dede Korkut, a Turkish Epic, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1991.

and objectives are allowed to interact freely for the first time in modern history. Geographic proximity, economic opportunity, ethnic and cultural ties, and religion work together to influence the evolution of the new strategic region in a southerly direction, toward historical preferences and allegiances that were interrupted by Russia's sealing off of Central Asia for its own advantage.

Some observers have referred to the new situation as a reemergence of the Great Game, in which the US replaces Britain as Russia's main contestant for influence in Central Asia and, ultimately, the Indian sub-continent. This description is simplistic and masks more than it reveals. In fact, the number of regional actors has expanded significantly since the 19th century, as has the number of political, economic, and military scenarios, potential conflicts, and outcomes. The new strategic equation is extremely complex, and it poses a variety of vexing and unforeseen policy questions for the US and its Western allies that could affect on US political and military interests directly. Importantly, Central Asia is the only region in the world where the impact of five nuclear powers comes into play: Russia, China, Kazakhstan,. Pakistan, and India.

None of the new states is politically stable or militarily secure; all have serious economic problems; several possess a residual military potential, including nuclear potential, which makes them regionally and, because these weapons can be sold, internationally threatening; most are courted by outside political actors that seek to draw them into political, economic, and military agreements that could threaten many interests, including those of the US.

Several of the new states possess considerable discovered or suspected wealth. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are rich in oil, Turkmenistan in natural gas, and Uzbekistan is thought to possess impressive quantities of both, along with proven quantities of important minerals, such as gold, uranium, and titanium. Gaining access to or controlling these assets is likely to be a powerful magnet to other new states' and regional powers' political and economic interests. At the very least, Central Asia's economic ties could become significantly reoriented, if only because of the investment they must receive from outside to develop their extractive industries. Investment from Middle East, Europe, the US, S. Korea, Turkey, and Japan is already on the books. Such a reorientation will have implications for the stability of the CIS, in which most states still have membership, and for Russian and Chinese security concerns.

The potential for conflict among the new states and other regional actors remains high, as the current civil war in Tajikistan and its relationship to Afghanistan demonstrates. If communist control in China weakens, the Uigur, Kyrgyz, and (especially) the Kazakh populations of Western China are likely to become more openly assertive of their interests and more open in cultivating contacts with ethnic and religious kinsmen across the old Soviet border. Intra-regional conflicts can threaten US interests in the region, for example the stability of Pakistan, and provoke adventurism by other players with expansionist aspirations, ethnic ties, or irredentist claims who are prepared to pursue them more actively in the absence of strong Russian counterpressure. Both China and Iran could fall into the this category.