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**“SONS OF MUSLIMS” IN MOSCOW:
SOVIET CENTRAL ASIAN MEDIATORS TO THE
FOREIGN EAST, 1955–1962***

As the Soviet Union reached out to attract new peoples and regions to its camp after World War II, it had to adapt to new political environments and international expectations. In Eastern Europe, the Soviet military presence resulted in the establishment of what Tony Judt called “replica states,” meaning people’s democracies with the same formal governmental structure as the USSR ultimately guided by the Communist Party in Moscow. Starting in the mid-1950s, Soviet rapprochement with the Middle East also encouraged replication in friendly states of certain aspects of Soviet “modernity,” namely, industrialization, economic planning, a single-party political system, and even youth culture. This Soviet courtship of independent Middle Eastern states – which coincided with decolonization, the rise of new Afro-Asian “nonaligned” movement, intensification of geopolitical interest in the Middle East, and Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization and antireligious campaign – led to a new instrumentalization of Soviet “eastern” cultures (those from

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Central Asia and the Caucasus), and created opportunities for Soviet “eastern” peoples to become managers and intermediaries in the so-called new eastern politics abroad. It was in the mid- to late-1950s that Soviet Central Asian and Caucasian politicians started to host more Asian and later African delegations in Tashkent, Dushanbe, and Baku. Some Central Asian Party elites were even transferred to Moscow, and later into the Soviet foreign service, to act as representatives and arbiters of Soviet foreign policy to the Middle East. More broadly, this internal reorganization reflected changes in assumptions about who in the USSR had the knowledge and authority to make meaningful decisions about Soviet foreign policy in “the east.” This essay explores the emergence of this “new Eastern politics” – as it was referred to in the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s – and how it developed during the thaw in late 1950s and early 1960s.

Cold War observers of this phenomenon overwhelmingly focused on the increased public diplomacy by Soviet religious organizations such as the *Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul'man Srednei Azii i Kazakhstana* (SADUM) (Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan),¹ and interpreted the larger role of Central Asians through the framework of Islam – arguing that the Soviet Union was using “Soviet Muslims” to show the foreign Muslim world that Soviet and Muslim ways of life were compatible.² While this dimension of Soviet propaganda was important, there are a number of reasons why it does not capture the full complexity of this process.

First, the post–World War II international context – including decolonization, organization of the nonaligned movement, and what at the time was referred to as “the Cold War” – drove the Soviet Union to seek alliances with the Afro-Asian solidarity movement. Soviet efforts to join this movement were hindered, in part, by accusations that they had colonized Central Asia, were behaving as an imperial power, and that Soviet Central Asian peoples were “imprisoned” and not independent. The Soviet answer to such accusations led to a large-scale redistribution of influence and responsibilities for work with foreign countries among Soviet Central Asian and Caucasian peoples; it also brought about the replication of Union-wide institutions on

¹ SADUM reported to the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults, which was part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

² Ivar Spector. *The Soviet Union and the Muslim World 1917–1958*. Seattle, 1958; Yaacov Ro'i. *The Role of Islam and the Soviet Muslims in Soviet Arab Policy // Asian and African Studies*. 1974. Vol. 10. No. 2. Pp. 157-218; 1975. Vol. 10. No. 3. Pp. 259-280; also Michael Rywkin. *Moscow's Muslim Challenge: Soviet Central Asia*. New York, 1990.

a republican level in Central Asian and Caucasian republics, contributing to their new degree of autonomy to act in the international arena.

Second, recent scholarship on Soviet Central Asia has shown that "Islam" as an identity and practice in the Soviet Union had been transformed so drastically by the mid-1950s that it might be more accurate to describe it as a component of "national heritage."³ This did not mean that unofficially, large sections of the population did not continue to practice their religions, but it did mean that referring to Islamic practices as national culture became the only socially and politically acceptable form of discourse on the topic, especially among party circles responsible for the representation of Soviet "reality" to foreigners. Consequently, SADUM, the other Soviet muftiates, and other official institutions explicitly dealing with Islam as a religion played a marginal role compared to a host of other institutions that represented Islam in its more ideologically acceptable national cultural forms. The closed-door debates within institutions like the Sovetskii' komitet solidarnosti stran Azii i Afriki (SKSSAA) (Soviet Committee for Solidarity with Asia and Africa) – which brought together orientalists, Muslim clergymen, Central Asian poets, and other "Eastern intellectuals" to brainstorm ways to facilitate rapprochement – show that similarities between Soviet Central Asia and Caucasus and the "foreign east" (East and South Asia and the Middle East) were rarely expressed in terms of shared religious values. Instead, they were usually conceived of as shared history and national culture.⁴ Within such a framework, SADUM muftis had little political agency compared to Central Asians promoting literary and artistic culture or presenting themselves as experts on the east.

This essay argues that religion, and specifically Islam, was part of a larger set of Soviet ideas about "eastern" culture that were instrumentalized in the 1950s and 1960s for the purposes of cultural diplomacy in the Middle East. Assumptions by Soviet leaders about the appeal of nonreligious aspects of eastern culture (national literatures, history, and traditions) to Middle

³ Adeeb Khalid. *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. Berkeley, 2007. Ch. 4.

⁴ It is significant that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Soviet orientalist journals were renamed because the older concept of the *vostok* ("east" – which included Asia and the Middle East) became too limited as an arena for potential Soviet modernization, which could be encouraged throughout the developing "Third World." Therefore, the journal, *Sovremennyi Vostok* (Modern East), was renamed *Aziia i Afrika Segodnia* (Asia and Africa Today) in 1960, and *Problemy Vostokovedeniia* (Problems of Oriental Studies) was renamed *Narody Azii i Afriki* (Peoples of Asia and Africa) in 1961. The "foreign east," however, continued to be used as a category that referred to Asia and the Middle East.

Easterners were used not only by Soviet propagandists but also by some Soviet Central Asians and Caucasians to gain real political influence within the Union.

Central Asia in Soviet Propaganda pre-1956

For over two centuries, Russian *vostokovedenie* (oriental studies) linked the study of Central Asia with that of other areas of the “foreign East” more commonly studied by European and American orientalists like South and East Asia, and the Middle East. After the Russian conquest of the Caucasus and Turkestan in the nineteenth century, the volume of scholarship about the new domestic eastern territories produced by Russian orientalists, archaeologists, linguists, and colonial administrators, increased. After the Bolshevik Revolution, in the early 1920s, Soviet and foreign Eastern peoples were brought together around the idea of “the East” at the Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku in September 1920, and also served as the basis for the creation of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), which since its establishment in 1921 had become an increasingly important center for study and for the training of future political leaders of communist parties from across Eurasia and the Middle East. These examples indicate that in prerevolutionary and early Soviet scholarly and political projects, the category “East” brought Central Asia, Caucasus, Middle East, and South and East Asia under one umbrella.

Bringing together eastern students from regions under Soviet control and other regions under colonial rule, however, led to some ideological complications that required clarification. In May 1925, Stalin delivered a speech at a meeting of students of KUTV in which he made an explicit distinction between two Easts – domestic and foreign – which would apply not only to the student body and organization of the university’s curriculum but also to the broader theoretical approach of Soviet oriental studies:

The first group consists of people who have come here from the Soviet East, from countries where the rule of the bourgeoisie no longer exists, where imperialist oppression has been overthrown, and where the workers are in power. The second group of students consists of people who have come here from colonial and dependent countries, from countries where capitalism still reigns, where imperialist oppression is still in full force, and where independence has yet to be won by driving out the imperialists. Thus, we have two Easts, living different lives, and developing under different conditions. Needless to say, this

duality in the composition of the student body cannot but leave its imprint upon the work of the University of the Toilers of the East. That explains the fact that this University stands with one foot on Soviet soil and the other on the soil of the colonies and dependent countries.⁵

This distinction was reflected not only in the curriculum and structure of the KUTV but also in the pages of Soviet orientalist journals,⁶ which continued to publish research on Central Asia throughout periods of massive political and cultural transformation in the USSR, keeping such “Sovietizing” regions within the general fold of scholarship on “the East.” Of those journals, however, only the ones that reflected Stalin’s distinction between the foreign and domestic East and grouped articles about Central Asia in a separate section on the “Soviet East,” were allowed to continue to publish. Thus, the two Easts remained separated but linked until the end of Stalin’s time in power, and because the broader concept of *vostok* (the East) included a rapidly transforming and modernizing domestic component – the intellectual and political role of the concept *vostok* had a different valiance in the Soviet context than its counterpart, “the east” or Orient, in Europe and the United States.

Despite the closure of KUTV in 1938 as a result of Stalin’s purges, and a general decrease in scholarly activity in the Soviet Union during World War II, the Soviet “domestic East” continued to play a significant role in Soviet wartime and postwar propaganda targeting the Arab Middle East. The *Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo kul’turnoi sviazi s zagranitse* (VOKS) (All Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) printed pamphlets about the successful modernization of Central Asia and organized exhibitions on this theme in Cairo, Damascus, and other large Middle Eastern cities in

⁵ See “Peoples of the East,” speech delivered at a meeting of students of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East. Marxist Internet Archive. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1925/05/18.htm> (last visit: October 19, 2011).

⁶ The two main Orientalist journals in the 1920s and 1930s were *Novyi vostok* (New East), published from 1922 to 1930 by the *Vsesoiuznaia nauchnaia assotsiatsiia vostokovedeniia* (VNAV) (All-Russian Association of Orientology) under the Commissariat of Nationalities, and also KUTV’s journal *Revolutsionnyi vostok* (Revolutionary East) published 1927–1938. *Novyi vostok* did not restructure its table of contents to reflect Stalin’s distinction whereas KUTV’s journal *Revolutsionnyi vostok* did, in 1928. Perhaps it was this reluctance along with other “bourgeois” tendencies discussed below that led to the closure of *Novyi vostok* in 1930. *Revolutsionnyi vostok* continued to publish, paying homage to the “Two Easts” paradigm and praising this shift in Oriental studies and political imagination in a special tenth-anniversary article in *Revolutsionnyi vostok*. 1935. No. 10. Pp. 7-21.

the 1940s and early to mid-1950s. VOKS used Central Asia as a symbol of economic and cultural progress, highlighting Soviet industrialization, the Union's multiethnic composition, and its ability to incorporate diverse societies and cultures. The "success story" was always framed through the comparisons of pre- and postrevolutionary economic and cultural indicators such as production output, agricultural yield, numbers of schools, and general literacy. As a narrative of success, it came to be used as a symbol of "Soviet reality" that could be presented to foreigners, especially in the developing world. The pamphlets and exhibitions about the success and modernization of Central Asia produced by the VOKS international section, however, contained little explicit emphasis on Soviet Muslims or Islam.⁷

During the early and mid-1950s, there was limited informal diplomacy between the Soviet East and the Middle East along religious lines. Small groups of Soviet Muslims were allowed to travel on the hajj, making stops in Cairo, Damascus, and other Arab cities. After their return, pilgrims gave detailed reports of their travels to the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults, an institution that managed official religious activity and was subordinated to the Council of Ministers. In these reports, the pilgrims would repeatedly explain that they tried to represent "Soviet reality as it really was," and while most Arabs seemed convinced, the reactions to these versions of "reality" from Central Asian expats and refugees who fled during the revolution and were living abroad ranged from skeptical to openly hostile.⁸ In addition to these pilgrimages (which did not exceed twenty pilgrims per year), most of the foreign religious contacts consisted of foreign visits by the SADUM mufti to meet with foreign Muslim notables and his reception of foreign delegations in Moscow or Tashkent.⁹

The international scene changed considerably in the mid-1950s, signaling to the Soviet leadership that the popularity they enjoyed in the developing

⁷ State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) F. 5283. VOKS. Op. 19 (Section of Near East and South East Asia). D. 1 (Correspondence with Society of Friendship with the Soviet Union of Syria and Lebanon). L. 56; See also GARF F. 5283. VOKS. Op. 19. D. 6 (Correspondence with the Mission of the USSR in Syria and Lebanon, 1941–42). L.14-15 and L.18.

⁸ GARF. F. 6991. Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults. Op. 4. Sovet po delam religioznykh kul'tov pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR 1944-1960. D. 41. Ll. 4-12, 13-14, and 15-18. "Reality" here is usually expressed as "kak bylo na samom dele," as opposed to "sovetskaia deistvitel'nost'."

⁹ The small SADUM was, however, so cut off ideologically from the main effort of building a Socialist society that their main journal, published quarterly only after 1969 and through the 1980s, was never even translated into Russian.

world since the end of World War II was coming under threat. The adoption of the Baghdad Pact to contain Soviet influence and prevent its expansion into the Middle East suggested that new types of explicitly anti-Soviet regional alliances were being formed by their enemies. From a different direction, the budding Afro-Asian Solidarity movement, manifested in the Bandung Conference of 1955 – where much of the debate centered around the question of whether Soviet policies in Eastern Europe and Central Asia should be censured along with Western colonialism – could also take a disastrous turn for Soviet prospects if it went unchecked.¹⁰

The importance of this new “Third World” solidarity movement was apparent in both the Soviet and American camps.¹¹ Before the Bandung Conference, the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs called a meeting of experts on the East to discuss what could be done about Soviet participation. The group concluded that even if they were not invited to participate, they should at least try to send a Soviet delegation with observer status. The minister of foreign affairs, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov, appointed the first secretary of the Central Committee (TsK) of Uzbekistan, Nuritdin Mukhitdinov, to head this delegation. Mukhitdinov was an ethnic Uzbek, born in 1917 outside of Tashkent, who had studied Arabic from a young age as part of his religious education.¹² He was then selected by the Narkom of Enlightenment and the Komsomol as one of six Uzbek star student activists to be sent to study in Moscow.¹³ He was a veteran of World War II,¹⁴ and was promoted to first secretary of the TsK UzSSR by Khrushchev. To Molotov and others in the Foreign Ministry, Mukhitdinov probably seemed like a

¹⁰ In his account of Bandung, Richard Wright reported that “In closed committee sessions Russia was attacked time and again and Chou En-lai refused to let himself be baited into answering. Russia had no defenders at Bandung.” Richard Wright. *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*. Jackson, 1995. Pp. 157; see also Angadipuram Appadorai. *The Bandung Conference*. Delhi, 1955.

¹¹ Richard Wright. *The Color Curtain*. New York, 1956; reprint ed., Oxford, 1995; Carlos Romulo. *The Meaning of Bandung*. Chapel Hill, NC, 1956; and Jansen Faber. *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*. London, 1966. Meanwhile, U.S. National Security discourse became increasingly unhappy that even strongly anticommunist nationalists in the Middle East were opposed to letting their countries be dragged into the Cold War and instead wanted to chart their own independent course, mainlining friendly ties with (and accepting aid from) both the West and the Soviet bloc.

¹² Nuriddin Mukhitdinov. *Gody, provedennye v Kremle*. Tashkent, 1994. Pp. 12.

¹³ Nikolai Zen'kovich. *Samye zakrytye liudi: entsiklopediia biografii*. Moscow, 2002. Pp. 394; Mukhitdinov. *Gody, provedennye v Kremle*. Pp. 15.

¹⁴ Details about his activities during World War II can be found in Mukhitdinov. *Gody, provedennye v Kremle*. Pp. 19-28.

logical representative from the Soviet state to the Non-Aligned Movement, especially in light of an anti-Soviet propaganda campaign that focused on two things: pointing out that the Soviets led one of the Cold War blocs and should be excluded from Afro-Asian solidarity events, a fact that could not be changed; and undermining the Soviet Union's status as an Asian power by claiming that Central Asian republics had been forcibly conquered by Russia and were its colonies, deprived of sovereignty and independence. This second issue was raised at Bandung and continued to plague the Soviet Union well into the 1970s. Although the Soviet delegation was not allowed to attend the first Bandung Conference in 1955, the Soviet Union upheld the conference's principles in the Bulganin-Nehru statement of June 22, 1955.¹⁵ It became increasingly clear, from the tone of the conference, that the status and presentation of Central Asia and its people would remain critical to the Soviet ability to present itself as anticolonial, making it easier for them to support and be supported by anticolonial movements in the Afro-Asian nonaligned world.¹⁶

Mukhitdinov, Nehru, and Khrushchev in 1955

Following the Bandung Conference, in June 1955, Jawaharlal Nehru visited the USSR with his daughter, stopping first in Moscow and then undertaking a tour of Uzbekistan. During his tour of Uzbek cities, he was accompanied by Mukhitdinov and the deputy minister of foreign affairs of the Soviet Union, Vasilii Vasil'evich Kuznetsov.¹⁷ In his memoirs, Mukhitdinov recalled his conversation with Nehru, where Nehru remarked that there was not enough attention in Soviet official discourse to the history of relations between Uzbeks and other peoples of Central Asia, and India.

¹⁵ Soviet Central Asian republics and Outer Mongolia were not allowed to participate because of their intimate relationship with Moscow. Vijay Prashad. *The Darker Nations: A Biography of the Short-Lived Third World*. New Delhi, 2007. On upholding principles, see Roy Allison. *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment in the Third World*. Cambridge, 1998.

¹⁶ Soviet Central Asian Republics were not allowed to participate in the Second Bandung Conference in 1965 for similar reasons, that "they are component parts of the Soviet Union and not states independent of it. Naturally they cannot take part in the summit conference of independent Asian-African states." Chinese Government Statement, May 30, 1964, cited in Michael Freeberne. *Radical Issues and the Sino-Soviet Split // Asian Survey*. 1965. Vol. 5. No. 8. Pp. 408-416.

¹⁷ Kuznetsov also had a connection to the national question in the USSR and had served as chairman of the Soviet of Nationalities before moving into the foreign policy section of the Presidium of the TsK.

“Some speakers said that friendship began in the 1950s, after the declaration of independence of India. Such flattery is nice to hear, but in fact there is a rich history of friendship between the peoples of India and Central Asia, and to ignore that is to destroy the foundations set by our ancestors,” he said to Mukhitdinov, and proceeded to give a short lecture on the history of regional relations that began over 4,300 years ago.¹⁸

When Mukhitdinov visited Moscow two days later, Khrushchev asked him about his conversations with Nehru, and Mukhitdinov gave an account of it based on notes he took in Uzbekistan. Khrushchev agreed that what Nehru said about the East should be taken seriously. His reply, according to Mukhitdinov, was the following:

Our problem is that here, in Moscow, we have no representatives of the East – of such people who would know the problems of Asia and Africa and follow their events. And moreover, if we look at the history of the Party, all of its leaders from Plekhanov to Lenin are people of a European mindset, born and having lived in Europe. The East for them was a faraway and incomprehensible place. In the first years of Soviet power, there were some educated Asians at the Center. But they were soon distanced and accused of nationalism. The second generation of representatives of our republics, including of your homeland, was destroyed in the 1930s. And now, when the East is boiling, and when our government has great authority, they have hopes for us and value our material, military, and political support, now, as Nehru said, we need a new Eastern politics and new experts.... You should study the documents of the TsK on the issue of the East... Go and see what our cadres are like – scientists, diplomats, economists, what the general level of study of the East is in the ministries, and to what extent they meet today’s demands. You, as a person of the East, an Asian, a son of a Muslim – think about our Eastern politics. Then you can tell me. It would be better to do this before the Congress. [Here he is referring to the twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. – N. Mukhitdinov].¹⁹

In Mukhitdinov’s recollection, Khrushchev referred to a fundamental difference between the East and West, and believed that people of a European mindset could not understand the East. That line between them cut across the Soviet Union, separating its capital from Central Asia. Khrushchev

¹⁸ Nuritdin Mukhitdinov. *Reka vremeni ot Stalina do Gorbacheva: vospominaniia*. Moscow, 1995. Pp. 211.

¹⁹ Mukhitdinov. *Reka vremeni*. Pp. 213-214.

himself sometimes had trouble understanding the East, notoriously mixing up Central Asian republics. Once he publicly addressed an audience of Uzbeks as Tajiks, speaking about their higher agricultural standards vis-à-vis the Uzbeks. After being corrected, he played the mistake off as a joke to test whether his public was paying attention.²⁰ “Educated Asians” were exceptions—implying that he considered that most Asians still lacked education compared to non-Asians—but as exceptions, they were resources that needed to be used more effectively to serve the nation. As such, they were not necessarily most useful as Muslims. While Khrushchev addressed the first secretary of Uzbekistan as “Eastern” and “Asian,” he called him the “son of a Muslim” rather than a Muslim, implying that this part of Mukhitdinov’s identity was something of the past, familial, and present, but not active or manifest.

After Khrushchev’s short speech, Mukhitdinov did not dwell on the leader’s reasoning. His reaction testified to just how normal and natural such language and political attitudes were among Party elites in Moscow, and that that there were no expectations of equality along national lines. Rather, Mukhitdinov described Khrushchev in his memoirs as a positive and highly supportive figure, and credited him for supporting his eventual candidacy into the TsK KPSS. After this particular conversation with Khrushchev, Mukhitdinov took the opportunity afforded to him and began his research into the historical and present political situation in the foreign East.

On his first day as member of the TsK KPSS, Mukhitdinov was again confronted with the importance of his ethnoreligious and national background. Walking into his office for the first time, he recalled receiving a folder with clippings from foreign newspapers about his election. The clippings included headlines such as, “How will Mukhitdinov – an Uzbek, Muslim – resolve his national and religious convictions with Marxist atheism and proletarian internationalism?” Other headlines included: “Khrushchev is toying with the exploited Soviet peoples and through Mukhitdinov wants to forge a path to former colonial countries”; “First Muslim in history to be a member of the Politburo and a secretary of the TsK of the Party. How long will this experiment last?”; and “Apparently the new Secretary of the TsK will become a bridge for Soviet power to the Muslim world.” When he read these headlines, Mukhitdinov wrote, “I understood that I was in a new world where any wrong word can not only be used against me, but can harm the party and the state.”²¹ Realizing his own importance, Mukhitdinov left his office to

²⁰ *Ibid.* P. 215.

²¹ *Ibid.* P. 273.

discuss with Khrushchev the logistics of settling in Moscow, and continued gathering materials in preparation for the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Twentieth Party Congress and Orientalism in the Soviet East

At the famous congress, more known for the anti-Stalin "secret speech," Khrushchev publicly spoke about the appearance of military blocs such as the Baghdad Pact as a "cold war launched against the socialist camp." In this war, he said, "many countries found themselves, against the will of their peoples, involved in closed aggressive alignments."²² On a more optimistic note later in the speech, he announced the arrival of a new period in world history, predicted by Lenin, "when the peoples of the East play an active part in deciding the destinies of the whole world, and when they have become a new and mighty factor in international relations."²³ Affirming this change, the congress rejected its earlier two-camp theory of the world (socialist-capitalist), and reiterated the position taken by Nehru and U Nu at Bandung: that the camp theory provided a vision of the world that suggested that war was the only solution to the division. By way of solution, the congress adopted the notion of the "zone of peace," to include all states that pledged themselves to a reduction of force on behalf of a peace agenda: the socialist world, and what it called "uncommitted states" or the nonaligned "Third World."²⁴

With the reformulation of the importance of the East, there also came an explicit critique of domestic and foreign Soviet politics and academics

²² Text of the speech cited in Ya'acov Roi. *From Encroachment to Involvement. A Documentary Study of Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1945–1973.* Jerusalem & New York, 1974. P. 155. "The inspirers of the 'cold war' began to establish military blocs, and many countries found themselves, against the will of their peoples, involved in closed aggressive alignments – the North Atlantic bloc, the Western European Union, SEATO, and the Baghdad Pact," Khrushchev said.

²³ Cited in Roi. *From Encroachment to Involvement.* P. 157. Here Khrushchev is referring to Lenin's "Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organizations of the Peoples of the East," made on November 22, 1919. Also, after a triumphant tour of India, Burma, and Afghanistan (from November 18 to December 19, 1955), he spoke about the Baghdad Pact in the Middle East saying, "The pact's sponsors are known to be moving heaven and earth to inveigle the Arab countries into this aggressive bloc. But they are coming up against the mounting resistance of the peoples of these countries." *Ibid.*

²⁴ Aryeh Yodfat. *Arab Politics in the Soviet Mirror.* Jerusalem, 1973. P. 6; James Richter. *Khrushchev's Double Bind: International Pressures and Domestic Coalition.* Baltimore, 1994.

by Anastas Mikoyan, including of Soviet academic orientalism. “While the entire east has awakened, the Institute [of Oriental Studies] goes on dozing contentedly. It is about time that it should lift itself to the standard required in our day,”²⁵ said Mikoyan. After criticisms of Soviet orientalism throughout the 1930s and 1940s for its alleged ineffective bourgeois tendencies and outdated philological methodologies, this new criticism, leveled by one of the party’s most influential leaders, could not be ignored. Its aftermath brought about a profound reorganization of oriental studies research, methodologies, publication, and other types of intellectual activity. It also elevated the status of knowledge production about the East in the academies of Central Asia and Caucasus.

In April 1957, Mukhitdinov, who was still secretary of the Uzbek CP, proposed to the TsK KPSS to organize an All-Union Conference of Orientalists in Tashkent. This idea, he claimed, came about as a result of conversations with Mao Tse-tung in Peking, Kim Il-sung in Pyongyang, Nehru, Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, Sukarno, Zahir Shah, and Reza Shah Pahlavi in Tashkent, and various members of delegations from Asian, African, and Latin American countries present at the nineteenth and twentieth Congresses of the Communist Party. “The new epoch of the East, naturally, demanded rethinking of all that was happening and picking a new direction in all aspects, from scientific/academic to diplomatic,” said Mukhitdinov before the Presidium.²⁶

The Presidium’s reaction to this proposal was mixed. Mukhitdinov recalled that “Some members looked at me skeptically; others said that we already support national-liberation movements; yet others voiced concerns that this was an attempt to juxtapose the East against the West. One member of the Presidium asked directly: ‘And what in your opinion is the East?’ And why should we have this conference in Tashkent? If it is necessary, why not do it in Moscow or Leningrad?”²⁷ Despite this initial skepticism and opposition, Khrushchev liked the idea and supported it, so planning went ahead. In a meeting with Mikhail Andreyevich Suslov, the Party’s chief ideologue, Mukhitdinov created an organizing committee headed by the vice president of the Academy of Sciences Konstantin Vasil’evich

²⁵ Anastas Ivanovich Mikoyan. Speech at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. Moscow, 1956. P. 36.

²⁶ Mukhitdinov. *Reka vremeni*. P. 296. The transcript for this TsK KPSS Presidium meeting has not been published in Aleksandr Fursenko’s *Presidium TsK KPSS* volumes, and is still classified in the Russian Government Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI).

²⁷ Mukhitdinov. *Reka vremeni*. P. 298.

Ostrovityanov. The Uzbek organizing committee included the secretary of the Uzbek TsK Zuhra Rahimbabaeva, the deputy chief of the Soviet of Ministers Gani Sultanov, and the vice president of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences, Ibrahim Muminov.²⁸ Because the conference would bring together experts from Central Asian republics and foreign countries, ensuring its high profile, it was a good opportunity to reallocate resources to Uzbekistan and show the republic's increased importance. The redistribution resulting from the conference was only an example of a larger pattern of increased resource flow to Tashkent that did not go unnoticed. When Mukhitdinov was elected to the Party Presidium in December 1957, Khrushchev warned him, "Some people are saying that Tashkent is becoming the new capital of our country. This is very dangerous. The rates of growth of Uzbekistan are so high that its neighbors are becoming jealous. It is your job to make sure there is more equality."²⁹

The Tashkent Orientalism Conference took place on July 11–13, 1957, and was attended by delegations from Moscow, Leningrad, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Turkmen Republic, Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan, Dagestan, Tatar Republic, and Kabarda. Foreign academics from China, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Vietnam, and Romania were also present.³⁰ The increasing contact among orientalist research centers in the communist bloc, and their representation at this conference, meant that these intellectual debates had impact far outside the USSR. Opening the conference, the director of the Pacific Institute and one of the USSR's main foreign correspondents writing about the developing world, Evgenii Mikhailovich Zhukov, thanked Uzbek academics for taking the initiative to organize the conference, referring to Lenin's statement about the awakening of the East and the "importance of political, agricultural, and cultural accomplishments of peoples of the Soviet East" within the framework of all study of the East.³¹ These peoples of the Soviet East were important not just for their accomplishments within the Soviet framework, but also for

²⁸ Ibid. Of these three, I. M. Muminov presented a paper at the conference titled "The Idea of Friendship of Peoples in the Work of Uzbek Intellections in the Second half of the Nineteenth and First Half of the Twentieth Centuries." *Materialy pervoi vsesoiuznoi nauchnoi konferentsii vostokovedov v g. Tashkente*. Tashkent, 1958. Pp. 145-151.

²⁹ Mukhitdinov. *Reka vremeni*. P. 265.

³⁰ Mukhitdinov. *Gody provedennyye v Kremlе*. Tashkent, 1994. P. 310.

³¹ *Materialy pervoi vsesoiuznoi nauchnoi konferentsii vostokovedov v g. Tashkente*. Tashkent, 1958. P. 8.

their historical, commercial, and intellectual ties with China, India, Europe, and other regions of the Silk Road.³²

The second presentation, on the status of Soviet orientalism, was made by the Tajik orientalist and the newly appointed Director of the Moscow Oriental Institute, Bobojon Ghafurov. Ghafurov was moved to this new position after more than a decade of serving as first secretary of the Tajik Communist Party. Alongside his party career, he had managed to establish an academic reputation. While serving as secretary of propaganda in Tajikistan in the 1940s, he published numerous books and articles, including his monumental history of the Tajik people, which was translated into Russian and published in multiple editions after 1949.³³ Ghafurov had also been elected to the TsK KPSS at both the nineteenth and twentieth Congresses. After 1957, like Mukhitdinov, he was quickly becoming a leading strategist of Soviet foreign policy in the east.

At the Tashkent conference, Ghafurov spoke about the history of Soviet orientalism, including the damage caused by the 1930s “liquidation” of certain academic institutes of oriental studies. The solution, as it was “dictated by the Twentieth Party Congress, and other directives from the KPSS,”³⁴ was to establish new research centers in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Tajikistan, and other Eastern republics³⁵ and to organize research on the East in such a way that individual problems would be studied in appropriate (*sootvetstvuiushchikh*) regions of the country.³⁶ Different research responsibilities were then allocated as follows: “Institutes in Central Asia should study China, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. Institutes in the Caucasus should study Iran, Turkey, and Arab countries. It is our opinion that the Tashkent and Baku Institutes should be transformed into centers of Soviet Turkology, while the Tbilisi and Erevan centers should focus on Arab studies.”³⁷

³² Ibid. P. 146. An entire section of the conference was devoted to “economic and cultural ties of peoples of the East,” and included presentations on historical ties between Central Asia and India, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, and India and the Arab world.

³³ A. Mukhtarov and Sh. Shapiro. Akademik Bobodjan Ghafurov. Dushanbe, 1983. Pp. 10-11. These works were considered to have rescued Tajik history from distortions of bourgeois western Orientalism, and show that the history of the Tajik people was ancient and rich, independent of Iran. For this, Ghafurov was made a doctor of history. These works include “Tajik People in the Struggle for Freedom and Independence of Their Motherland” (1944), History of the Tajik People (1949), and articles about women and religion, Ismailis, and many others.

³⁴ Materialy pervoi vsesoiuznoi nauchnoi konferentsii vostokovedov v g. Tashkente. P. 35.

³⁵ Ibid. P. 33.

³⁶ Ibid. P. 35.

³⁷ Ibid. P. 33.

Another important new direction of research was to include the historical relationship of Central Asia and the Caucasus with other parts of Asia, using the rich archival materials at the republics' disposal.³⁸

The larger project of Soviet orientalists to rescue oppressed peoples and their histories around the world from exploitation, however, could also not be undertaken by Moscow and Leningrad alone. "We need the support of all Republican oriental centers," said Ghafurov. "Yes we have [our own] national questions that await solutions, but a more pressing problem that cannot be put off is the development of countries and peoples of Asia and Africa. The party demands this of us, life demands this of us, because now the East plays an important role in all international affairs."³⁹ This argument by a Tajik director of the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies suggests that decolonization and national liberation movements abroad created new possibilities of agency for Central Asians who were also fluent in both their national "eastern" and Soviet Party languages. They could use the idea of their special cultural knowledge, and national cultural specificity to elevate their own status within the Union, restructuring knowledge in a way that benefited other Soviet Eastern elites.

Exchanges among orientalists at the Tashkent Conference led to an outline of a new set of directions for academic research and, at a Union-wide level, a coordinated work plan for different research institutes and universities on topics of the east. It also generated a set of policy recommendations, which were approved by the TsK, circulated to different republics, and reinforced existing information channels.⁴⁰ When Ghafurov would later report back to the TsK KPSS about changes within the Oriental Studies Academy and work of the Moscow Center, his letters were addressed to Mukhitdinov in response to Mukhitdinov's queries, implying that the information about Soviet "eastern politics" was being transferred to the top through this Central Asian party elite in Moscow.⁴¹

³⁸ Bobojon Ghafurov. *Izbrannye trudy*. Moscow, 1985. Pp. 527-528. This article was originally published in *Vestnik Akademii nauk SSSR*. 1957. Vol. 9. Pp. 13-24. Ghafurov's other statements about the need for Oriental institutes in Union Republics, including in Tajikistan, are mentioned in *Materialy pervoi vsesoiuznoi nauchnoi konferentsii vosto-kovedov v Tashkente*. Pp. 22-36, 107-117; and in Mukhtarov and Shapirov. *Akademik Bobodjan Ghafurov*. Pp. 20.

³⁹ A. Muhtarov and Sh. Shapirov. *Akademik Bobodjan Ghafurov*. Pp. 19.

⁴⁰ Mukhitdinov. *Reka vremeni*. P. 298.

⁴¹ Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI). F. 5. Op. 35. Ideological Section. D. 78. L. 1-7. Letter from Ghafurov in the Academy of Sciences to the secretary of TsK KPSS, Mukhitdinov on February 21, 1958.

VOKS Reform and New Societies of Friendship

In 1957, new institutions in the “Soviet East” were formed not only within the Academy of Sciences but also within the mechanisms of Soviet cultural diplomacy. Khrushchev’s foreign politics brought larger numbers of foreigners to all parts of the USSR. They attended events such as the Sixth International Youth Festival in Moscow, which brought together youth from hundreds of countries in the summer of 1957. Other delegations flooded the USSR throughout the rest of the year, bringing unprecedented numbers of visitors to Central Asia.

Institutionally, these new numbers strained the capacities of the centralized *Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo kul’turnoi sviazi s zagranitse* (VOKS) (All Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries).⁴² Although VOKS already had republican representation, it was disorganized and served no specific function independent from the center. On October 5, 1957, the Secretariat of the TsK KPSS issued Protocols 48 and 180 denouncing VOKS for falling behind the times and out of touch with the demands of the present international situation.⁴³ One problem that the TsK KPSS identified in VOKS was it did not institutionally reciprocate Soviet Societies of Friendship, while Societies of Friendship with the USSR existed in many other countries. By way of a solution, VOKS was transformed into the *Soiuz sovetских obshchestv druzhby i kul’turnoi sviazi s zarubezhnymi stranami* (SSOD) (Union of Soviet Societies of Friendship and Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries). This shift meant to make the organization seem more genuine and less official, but, more important, it pluralized official forms of “friendship,” a metaphor for cultural diplomacy, and made them more culturally specific, flexible, and dynamic.

The primary goals of this new union included (1) developing and strengthening friendship and mutual understanding between the peoples of the USSR and foreign countries; (2) maintaining peace; and (3) distributing information about accomplishments in state building, economic development, culture, and science, and thereby increasing sympathy among foreign society (*obshchestvennost’*). Moreover, these changes were not uniform across the USSR and had different repercussions on the republican level.

⁴² For more on VOKS before the changes, see Michael David-Fox. From Illusory “Society” to Intellectual “Public”: VOKS, International Travel, and Party-Intelligentsia Relations in the Interwar Period // *Contemporary European History*. 2001. Vol. 11. No. 1. Pp. 7-32.

⁴³ RGANI. F. 89 (Communist Party on Trial). Op. 55. D. 28. L. 1-3. This criticism echoed the one leveled against the Orientalist Academy the year before.

On July 31, 1958, the Secretariat of the TsK issued another order to create Societies of Friendship on the level of the republics, specifying the kinds of friendship they would pursue.⁴⁴ The final approved list looked as follows:

Ukrainian SSR	China, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, GDR, Albania, Italy
Belorussian SSR	China, Poland, GDR
Uzbek SSR	China, Arab East, India
Kazakh SSR	China, India, Arab East, Mongolia
Georgian SSR	China, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Greece
Azerbaijan SSR	China, Albania, Arab East, India
Lithuanian SSR	Poland, GDR
Moldavian SSR	Romania, Bulgaria
Latvian SSR	Finland
Kyrgyz SSR	China, Mongolia
Tajik SSR	China, Arab East
Turkmen SSR	Arab East
Armenian SSR	Bulgaria, Arab East
Estonian SSR	Finland
Leningrad Region	China, Finland, Sweden, Norway, England, GDR, Poland
Khabarovsk Region	China, Japan
Primorsky Region	China, Japan
Irkutsk Region	China, Japan
Stalingrad Region	Czechoslovakia, Poland, GDR, England
Buriat ASSR	Mongolia

Table from RGANI F. 89 (The Communist Party on Trial). Op. 55. D. 22. L. 3.

In this distribution, only China is assigned friends from across regional and linguistic groups. The European territories were mostly assigned to Europe; the southern republics of Central Asia and Caucasus were assigned to Arab countries, India, and China, and the Soviet Far East was assigned to East Asia. Not all of these republics were even nominally Muslim, since Armenia was also expected to maintain a friendship with the Arab world. This shift meant that the TsK saw their nationalities as carriers of an allocatable historical, national, and ethnic culture and expertise – of which “eastern” was a component – and which could be used, because of certain affinities with foreign cultures, to further Soviet interests among its neighbors.

⁴⁴ RGANI. F. 89 (Communist Party on Trial). Op 55. D. 22. L. 1-2.

Afro-Asian Solidarity

Besides the Societies of Friendship, the single most prominent organization tasked with carrying on informal foreign diplomacy with Asia and Africa was the SKSSAA (Soviet Committee for Solidarity with Asia and Africa). In its official literature, this committee traced its origins to the Conference of Asian Solidarity in Delhi in April 1955, and although it was not explicitly a part of any Soviet state body and was formally a member of the nongovernmental Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) based in Cairo, from its formation in 1956 the Soviet Committee worked closely with Communist Party.⁴⁵ The first meeting of the Presidium of the Soviet Committee convened in November 1956, in preparation for the larger international AAPSO Conference in Cairo in 1957. It was presided over by the Tajik poet Mirzo Turson-Zade, a recipient of the Stalin prize for his poetry and a longtime friend of Bobojon Ghafurov, also a member of the Presidium. By the mid-1950s, Turson-Zade and his poetry had already become well known in India and other countries of the Afro-Asian world, and his talent made him a particularly eloquent propagandist.

The first SKSSAA Presidium meeting on November 1, 1956, in Moscow was a brainstorming session that united creative and distinguished members of the arts and literary community from across Central Asia and the Caucasus, with heads of Africa, Asia, and oriental research centers of Moscow. The meeting opened with a discussion of strategies for working with foreign delegations because, according to Turson-Zade, many of the Central Asian republics, judging by his own, were unable to handle the large new volume of visitors.⁴⁶ One of the problems, as he saw it, was that itineraries were too repetitive. Visitors from India, Cairo, Lebanon, and other regions were shown the same monuments, schools, and factories in a way that created the impression that the tours were staged, artificial, and boring. The Honored Cultural Worker of the Armenian SSR, writer Garegin Sivunts suggested more specialized tours for different delegations. His suggestion was supported by the then head of the Moscow Oriental Institute, Alexander Andreevich Guber, who recommended tailoring such trips by, for example, showing courtrooms to jurists and hospitals

⁴⁵ Interview with Vladimir Shubin, head of the SKSSAA from 1969 to 1982 and later head of the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1982 to 1991. Interview conducted on October 13, 2011.

⁴⁶ GARF. F. 9540 (SKSSAA). Op. 1. D. 2. L. 15. Transcript of the Presidium meeting on November 1, 1956.

to doctors.⁴⁷ The Georgian actor Akaki Alekseevich Horava also agreed and added that they should address the problem of not having enough money to entertain foreign guests and running out of allotted funds at awkward moments when an international group “could really use another bottle.”⁴⁸ Some places, like Bukhara and Khiva, were deemed “not yet ready” for visitors, suggesting that the popularity of Central Asia as a destination for political and cultural tourism had grown too rapidly for local organizations to handle and that the new volume of visitors was posing new kinds of problems that required more institutions and manpower to resolve.

Because it was a closed meeting, statements about similarities between the Soviet east and the Afro-Asian world made by some of the artists suggest a level of freedom of expression that may have been uncommon in more public forums and even other closed political meetings. For example, Sivunts suggested that, as in the Soviet East, *splochenie* (a Soviet category meaning unity and cohesion) could serve as a model for the future solidarity process in the Afro-Asian bloc. “I want to raise an example that is perhaps not too successful,” he began. “What would have happened with our republics, Eastern and others, if not for our meetings in the first days of the October Revolution, if we did not unite into a single family?”⁴⁹ This suggestion by an Armenian author of a celebrated two-volume novel about the social struggles of the Iranian people – that aspects of the Soviet model of nationalities politics could be reproduced on an international level – implies that he imagined the Soviet east’s connection with the foreign east through the prism of Soviet nationalities politics and the transformation of political culture. While he may have gone out on a limb to suggest the replication of Soviet nationalities policies on the international level, Sivunts was also speaking as the former head of the Armenian VOKS, and was not a novice in mediating Soviet reality to the abroad.⁵⁰ Perhaps it was because Sivunts was eastern but not culturally Muslim, but neither he nor any other Presidium member except for Mufti Ziautdin Babakhanov (mufti, 1957–1982) ever

⁴⁷ GARF. F. 9540. SKSSAA. Op. 1. D. 2. L. 51. Transcript of the Presidium meeting on November 1, 1956.

⁴⁸ GARF. F. 9540. SKSSAA. Op. 1. D. 2. L. 58. Transcript of the Presidium meeting on November 1, 1956.

⁴⁹ GARF. F. 9540. SKSSAA. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 36. Transcript of the closed Presidium meeting on November 1, 1956 in Moscow.

⁵⁰ Indeed, Sivunts’s cautiously uttered metaphor of *splochenie* in 1956, had by 1961 entered official SKSSAA language used in printed materials to describe international solidarity. GARF. F. 9540. SKSSAA. Op. 1. D. 80. L. 64–66. Resolution of the SKSSAA Presidium after a meeting on February 1, 1961, in Moscow.

mentioned their connection with the foreign east in religious terms. What Presidium members did agree on was that they could use the “classics, cultural figures, art, and literature shared with Asian countries,” and use their celebrations as opportunities to invite neighbors to such festivals.⁵¹ Emphasis on interaction with foreign easterners was placed more on having a good time, and celebrating great poets like Abu Abdollah Rudaki and Ali-Shir Nava’i, rather than on shared religious practices, or on showing foreigners that Soviet order was compatible with Islam.⁵²

International objections to Soviet presence at Afro-Asian events were also usually made using ethnonational rather than religious terms. For example, in a Presidium meeting in 1959, the high-profile publicist, writer, and editor of *Ogonek* who was also head of the Society of Friendship with Arab Countries, Anatoli Vladimirovich Sofronov, reported about a “negro writer” who initially boycotted the 1959 Soviet Afro-Asian Writers Conference in Tashkent because they claimed that “colonialism had been resolved in the USSR, and that Russians need not participate.”⁵³ Sofronov explained that this delegate did not appreciate Soviet national distinctions, and therefore had wrongly dismissed Tajiks and Uzbeks as Russians. Similarly, the “potential” for public diplomacy harbored in Central Asia and the Caucasus was also usually expressed in cultural-national terms.⁵⁴ For example, the Presidium members were very aware of the increased interest in them by foreigners from the Middle East. The president of the Turkmen Academy of Sciences, T. B. Berdyev noted that “most of the intelligentsia of Arab countries is interested in the accomplishments of Central Asia. We should

⁵¹ GARF. F. 9540. SKSSAA. Op. 1. D. 1. L. 66-67. Transcript of the closed Presidium meeting on November 1, 1956 in Moscow.

⁵² Abu Abdollah Rudaki (858–941) was a Persian poet at the Samanid court in Bukhara. Ali-Shir Nava’i (1441–1501) was a Turkic poet and politician in Herat, capital of the Timurid Empire. They were made into symbols of Soviet Tajik and Uzbek national culture, respectively, and the Soviet government sponsored films, celebrations, and conferences in their honor.

⁵³ GARF. F. 9540. SKSSAA. Op. 1. D. 13. L. 11-15. Sofronov reporting on the Eastern Writers’ Conference in Tashkent at an SKSSAA Presidium meeting on November 20, 1958.

⁵⁴ GARF. F. 9540. SKSSAA. Op. 1. D. 14. L. 43-45. Transcript of the Presidium meeting on December 29, 1958, in Moscow. Only once was religion brought up by someone besides the mufti, who was usually producing albums and exhibits on Soviet Muslims in parallel with the work of the committee. One committee member mentioned that he brought up the issue of using “religious ideology” with editors of the popular Oriental journal *Sovremennyi Vostok* (Modern East) to discuss the fate of Soviet “Muslims.” In reply, he was told that, “there was no such ideology,” and the issue was not brought up again.

learn from this."⁵⁵ He also proposed that the committee try forging links with Turkmen populations in Iran and Turkey to "renew their ties," because feelings of national solidarity could even cut across the divide between ideological camps.

The ways these intellectuals spoke about shared culture with the foreign east suggested they might have thought of it more as a loosely defined "Islamic civilization" rather than as shared Islamic religion. In fact, Islam was an understated component of the cultural arsenal at the disposal of these Central Asian and Caucasian intellectuals.⁵⁶ When SADUM Mufti Babakhanov participated in these discussions, he always made the same suggestion: that Muslims be included in delegations to the foreign east. However, M. I. Kotoy, the head of the Soviet Partisans for Peace Committee, suggested that religion could be used more as part of the propaganda campaign, but it would never be the focus.⁵⁷ Soviet Muslims were also never the primary "eastern" representatives, unless Babakhanov personally attended a religious function. For example, at the 1957 Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference in Cairo, the Soviet Union was officially represented by the chairman of the Presidium of the Uzbek Supreme Soviet and future Uzbekistan Party leader Sharof Rashidov, and the director of the Institute of Global Economy and Institute of Rights of the Academy of Sciences, Anushavan Arzumanyan. The two gave presentations about imperialism and about Soviet economic relations with the countries of Asia and Africa, respectively. Although Babakhanov was present at the conference, he made no suggestions in the summary discussion back in Moscow. He only reported that he had convened a plenum in Tashkent and briefed the other Muftis about the decisions of the conference. Thus, religious "eastern" representatives like the mufti remained at the margins of political discussion, while nonreligious "eastern" Party elites like Ghafurov and Mukhitdinov, by contrast, were brought in as advisers to the Solidarity movement, SSOD, and the TsK KPSS itself, and had much more authority in determining their structure and in planning their activities.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ GARF. F. 9540. SKSSAA. Op. 1. D. 2. L. 63. Transcript of the Presidium meeting on November 1, 1956.

⁵⁶ For more on the international role of SADUM during this period, see Eren Murat Tasar. *Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943–1991* / Ph.D. dissertation; Harvard University, 2010. Ch. 5.

⁵⁷ GARF. F. 9540. SKSSAA. Op. 1. D. 2. L. 71-74. Transcript of the Presidium meeting on November 1, 1956.

⁵⁸ For example, at the 1958 SKSSAA Presidium meeting, the editor in chief of *Ogonek* and SKSSAA Secretary Sofronov spoke about the need for the committee to involve more Orientalists because of their knowledge and contacts in Asia and Africa: GARF. F. 9540.

The desire for support from the international solidarity movement led to the replication of various internationally oriented all-Union-level institutions on the republican level in the Soviet east. At an SKSSAA Presidium meeting in January 8, 1960, the head of the Soviet organization dealing with foreign trade, the Torgovaia Palata (Chamber of Commerce), Mikhail Vasil'evich Nesterov, described a transformation in the Union-wide structure of the chamber that occurred as a result of a series of difficulties related to Soviet participation in the 1958 Afro-Asian economic conference.⁵⁹ The formal argument against Soviet participation was that even though they wanted to send representatives of its Asian republics, they would not be considered as a delegation from an Asian country because of the location of the Soviet capital in its European part. This position was supported by representatives from Indonesia, Japan, South Vietnam, and some African countries. Finally, an economic cooperation agreement, signed in Damascus on December 4, 1959, specified that future conferences would be limited to participants of Bandung and to countries of Asia and Africa that had achieved independence since then. To put pressure on the Permanent Secretariat of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee in Cairo, the Soviet Chamber of Commerce organized subchambers in all Central Asian and Caucasian republics in 1958. Each new institution then sent letters to Cairo asking for permission to participate.⁶⁰ In this case, the significance of the Soviet east to “eastern politics” was more geographical, ideological, and cultural, and this new role led to more formal administrative autonomy.

On February 20, 1961, an edict of the Presidium of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee also called for the establishment of branches of this Committee in Central Asian and Caucasian republics.⁶¹ The official reason for this shift was that in light of the increased interaction between Soviet society (*obshchestvennost'*) and the countries of Asia and Africa, and the increased travel of foreigners to Central Asia, Kazakhstan, and the Caucasus, the working masses of the “Asian part of the USSR” wanted to support the solidarity struggle and create local committees. Their initiative was in turn

Op. 1. D. 10. L. 20. Ghafurov agreed, promising to pick a group of young Orientalists to advise the committee: GARF. F. 9540. Op. 1. D. 10. L. 24.

⁵⁹ GARF. F. 9540. SKSSAA. Op. 1. D. 60. L. 3-12. Notably, in the discussion of radio programming production, Turson-Zade brings up the fact that there are many people who speak Arabic in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and other republics, and who could produce Arabic-language programs.

⁶⁰ GARF. F. 9540. Op. 1. D. 60. L.13-17.

⁶¹ GARF. F. 9540. Op.1. D. 80. L. 59-60. Coincidentally, this was also the year that SADUM's international department was established.

accepted and supported by the TsK of SKSSAA, leading to the creation of committees in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, and Uzbek SSRs. Although the language of the edict suggested that the initiative came from the bottom up, meetings later that same year described this process as one of harnessing the full potential of the national republics,⁶² suggested they should not only be used to receive foreign delegations, but their members should also be sent as representatives abroad.⁶³

Khrushchev and His Guests from the Foreign East

While these new institutions and forums brought together Soviet intellectuals and progressive activists in Asia and Africa in conversation about their different political and artistic visions, a much simpler set of assumptions about the east was operating at the highest level of power. Khrushchev often brought up Central Asia in his conversations with Arab statesmen. For example, on February 25, 1959, he met with an Iraqi delegation that included the procommunist minister of economy, Ibrahim Kubba, the minister of planning, Talat al-Shaybani, the minister of health, General-Major Muhammed al-Shawwaf, and the Iraqi ambassador to the USSR, Abd al-Wahhab Mahmoud. After Kubba explained that they had difficulties with irrigation because Iraq's irrigation was historically intended to serve a small group of feudal landowners, Khrushchev suggested that the delegation "visit Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkemnia, where climate conditions were similar to those of Iraq, and where they also grow cotton, and corn."⁶⁴ Then he patronizingly told them that if Iraq, like these republics, just put some effort into its land, they could make it into a piece of heaven. Khrushchev justified his position, comparatively invoking Central Asia:

Go to Tashkent, Baku, and see what the Soviet Union has done in these Muslim countries [*sic*, he means "Republics"]. They are located next to Iran. Compare the accomplishments of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan with Iran, and you will see that Soviet Central Asian and Caucasian republics have gone far ahead in their development compared with Iran, Turkey, and other countries of the Near and Middle

⁶² GARF. F. 9540. Op.1. D. 81. L. 3-4. Transcript of the Presidium meeting on May 18, 1961 in Moscow.

⁶³ GARF. F. 9540. Op.1. D. 80. L. 52. Transcript of the Presidium meeting on February 1, 1961 in Moscow.

⁶⁴ Document reprinted in Aleksandr Fursenko. Presidium TsK KPSS 1954–64. Vol. 3. Moscow, 2008. Pp. 836-842. Originally from RGANI. F. 52. Op. 1. D. 566. L. 26-39.

East. It will become clear to you what a people can do if they take their fate into their own hands.⁶⁵

Khrushchev's expression is somewhat unusual here because he actually uses "strany" (countries) instead of "republics" to refer to Central Asia, which was probably a slip of the tongue, implying that he might have been speaking in an overly casual way, or perhaps trying to make his speech more understandable to foreign guests. His usage of "Muslim" as a qualifier for Central Asia can similarly be interpreted as emphasis intended for foreigners, but it is difficult to tell what he meant by it. In his memoirs, Khrushchev sometimes referred to the "Muslim world" without ever explaining what he meant by the term.⁶⁶ Regardless, this slip should not be interpreted as Khrushchev's personal bias, but rather as part of a more common set of ideas about the East that relied on slippage and elision of aspects of domestic and foreign "eastern" culture.⁶⁷ Khrushchev's assumption, however, that there was something shared between Central Asia and the Middle East, and that the former was a good example for the latter, was present until the very end of his administration. During another discussion with an Iraqi military delegation on June 11, 1964, Khrushchev again insisted that its members visit Central Asia. When they told him they could not, Khrushchev said that he regretted this but that when an economic delegation visited it would surely be sent there.⁶⁸

Affirmative action for secular Soviet party elites from Central Asia and the Caucasus continued into the Brezhnev period.⁶⁹ In 1968 Mukhitdinov

⁶⁵ Ibid. Later on in the conversation, when Kubba replies that the Iraqi Republic has to deal with (a) land reforms and agricultural development; (b) development of national industry; (c) organization of economic planning; and (d) the freeing of themselves from foreign monopolies – Khrushchev again replies that in order to resolve the agrarian issue, they should "see with your own eyes what we have done in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmen republics. We can give you the necessary technology to raise agricultural production and advise on other technical matters. But on the question of agrarian reform, for that, one has to know the situation inside the country, as it is hard for us to make suggestions. That should be most clear to you on the ground."

⁶⁶ Sergei Khrushchev (Ed.). *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev: Statesman Memoirs*. Vol. 3. Pennsylvania, 2007. P. 156.

⁶⁷ The "domestic east" usually referred to Central Asia and Caucasus, for "foreign east" see note 3.

⁶⁸ Discussion document reprinted in Aleksandr Fursenko. *Presidium TsK KPSS 1954–64*. Vol. 3. Pp. 951–955. Originally from RGANI. F. 52. Op. 1. D. 566. Ll. 46–54.

⁶⁹ The metaphor of "affirmative action" in the Soviet Union was developed in Terry Martin. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism 1929–1939*. Ithaca, 2001; also, Francine Hirsch. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca, 2005.

was appointed ambassador to Syria, and Sharof Rashidov continued to enjoy a high international profile as first secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, receiving increasingly more delegations and hosting more international Afro-Asian solidarity events. Ghafurov was never appointed ambassador to any Asian or African country, despite rumors to that effect circulating among the academic community.⁷⁰ As head of the Moscow Oriental Institute, he continued to direct the intellectual efforts that informed Soviet foreign policy in Asia and Africa. He and his Central Asian and Caucasian colleagues saw an opportunity and used the specificity of their national, cultural, and linguistic "easterness" to build political careers, acquire agency through political influence – not just within the USSR but also abroad – and travel to other parts of the world as representatives of a successful form of Sovietness.

What made these "eastern" intermediaries effective was the fact that, unlike Mufti Babakhanov, who was discursively and practically marginalized in the 1950s and 1960s, they were culturally integrated into Soviet society in ways that were closer to how the state saw and represented itself domestically. This permitted them to speak to foreign delegations with a degree of openness and confidence that was more difficult for official representatives of the Soviet Muslim clergy. As Turson-Zade remarked during one Afro-Asian Solidarity Presidium meeting, "a degree of honesty and relaxation in dealing with foreigners is one of the best ways of doing propaganda."⁷¹

Khrushchev's statements indicate that he believed he needed people like Mukhitdinov and Ghafurov, but not because they were of Muslim back-

⁷⁰ Iu. A. Petrosian. *Shtrikhi k biografii V. G. Gafurova-vostokoveda // Akademik Bobojon Ghafurov: k 100-letiu so dnia rozhdenia*. Moscow, 2009. P. 43. Iu. A. Petrosian recalls in his essay about Ghafurov that in the summer of 1960, when orientalist from across the USSR gathered in Moscow, rumors circulated that Ghafurov was about to be sent as ambassador to some Asian or African country. "I will never forget," writes Petrosian, "when Ghafurov was received in the Kremlin on the occasion of the congress, a famous Petersburg Sinologist, G. V. Efimov, whispered 'See there are no members of the TsK here; Gafurov's road is definitely to some ambassadors building somewhere in Africa'." Of course, these were the wishes of Ghafurov's enemies, and also enemies of the institute who hoped that with the transfer of the powerful director, its position would be weakened. Ghafurov knew about these rumors and once joked in conversation with me a few years afterward that if the rumors before and after the congress about his retirement had any basis in reality, he would have visited all Asian and African countries as the Soviet ambassador." Another Soviet Central Asian politician, the Kazakh Malik Fazylov, became ambassador to Morocco in 1983.

⁷¹ GARF. F. 9540. Op. 1. D 2. L. 76-80. Transcript of Turson-Zade's concluding at the first SKSSAA Presidium meeting on November 1, 1956 in Moscow.

ground and could therefore show that the Soviet way of life was compatible with Islam. Rather, as “easterners” they could better understand other foreign easterners. Khrushchev also understood that promoting Soviet cultural Muslims was an effective way to show that the USSR was anti-imperial and antiracist, unlike the Soviet Union’s chief rival, which was struggling with racism, civil rights, and other popular social movements of the 1960s.

Islam as a religion was therefore less effective than Islam as an aspect of Soviet culture in forums informing Soviet foreign policy decisions and cultural diplomacy towards the Middle East. Islam as religion did play a role in foreign policy, but was limited to the SADUM Mufti Ziyauddin Babakhan (mufti, 1957–1982).⁷² Babakhanov regularly traveled abroad to lecture on the livelihood of Soviet Muslims, but he also represented Soviet Islam as a member of the Partisans for Peace, the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, VOKS, and its later incarnation SSOD, and other international forums. Inside these institutions, he monopolized all discourse on Islam as religion, but he did not contribute much other than to suggest including more members of the Muslim clergy in delegations. His difficult position, one that contradicted the rest of mainstream Soviet morality and ideology, prevented him from taking any political initiative. Nonetheless, Babakhanov was a small part of a growing political apparatus staffed by a disproportionately large number of Central Asian and Caucasian cultural “Muslims” who officially presented themselves as atheist inside the Soviet Union.

Finally, the administrative transformations that broke apart the highly centralized Stalin-era institutions and created more particular kinds of interaction with the foreign East came about largely as a result of Cold War pressures and the growing strength of the Non-Aligned Movement. The creation in Central Asia and the Caucasus of Oriental Studies Centers, Societies of Friendship with Arab Countries, and Chambers of Commerce, and branches of SKSSAA meant that expanding Soviet influence was not just modeled *on* the management of Soviet “peoples” in the national republics, but actively helped shape the political structure and cultural institutions of the USSR.

⁷² In Soviet documents he is referred to as Ziyauddin Babakhanov. This more Russified last name differentiates him from his father who is referred to as Eshan Babakhan (mufti from 1943 to 1957).

SUMMARY

В статье Маши Кирасировой “Сыновья мусульман в Москве” рассматривается так называемая “новая восточная политика”, сформулированная в период оттепели в конце 1950 – начале 1960-х гг. в СССР. Ислам являлся элементом общих представлений советской элиты о “Востоке” и “культуре Востока”, что отразилось на “новой восточной политике” и целях советской культурной дипломатии на Ближнем Востоке. Так, советская элита хрущевских времен исходила из того, что “советский Восток” и “зарубежный Восток” имеют общую или родственные культуры (национальную литературу, историю, традиции). Это представление распространяли не только советские пропагандисты, но и некоторые выходцы из республик Средней Азии и Кавказа. Как показано в статье, манипулирование подобными представлениями об “исламе” и “Востоке” позволяло им добиваться реальной политической власти и влияния в руководстве СССР.