

SOVIET PRESS COVERAGE OF POLITICAL "NEGATIVE PHENOMENA" DURING THE DECEMBER 1986 ALMA-ATA DEMONSTRATIONS

ARALIK 1986 ALMA-ATA GÖSTERİLERİ SIRASINDA "OLUMSUZ SİYASAL OLAYLARIN" SOVYET MEDYASINDA AKTARIMI

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ABSTRACT

The Alma-Ata events of December 17-19, 1986 were a prerunner of the return of ethnic nationalism in the Soviet Union. The two day demonstrations in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR) have, among other factors, led to the first social agitations in the context of new policy launched by Mikhail Gorbachev. That uprising in Alma-Ata—and in other Kazakh cities—was the first "big bang" that undermined the Soviet federal structures and "social fabric." After these protests the myth of the fraternal unity and brotherhood of the Soviet peoples fell apart in a matter of a few years. This article investigates the Alma-Ata events of December 17-19, 1986 as presented within the pages of the main organs of the Soviet press and four Russian-language Central Asian newspapers between December 1986 and March 1987. The Kremlin's response to the events of Alma-Ata, though ultimately ineffectual, revealed both the growing influence of Mikhail Gorbachev's new policy of glasnost and a continued reliance on customary Soviet propaganda techniques.

Key Words: Kazakhstan, Soviet Union, Central Asia, History, Empire, Mass Media

ÖZET

17-19 Aralık 1986 tarihinde gerçekleşen Alma-Ata olayları, Sovyetler Birliği'nde etnik milliyetçiliğin geri dönüşünü habercisiydi. Kazak Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyeti'nde iki gün boyunca süren gösteriler Mihail Gorbaçov'un ortaya koymuş olduğu politikaların neticesi olan çalkantıların da ilkiydi. Alma-Ata'da gerçekleşen gösteriler –ve diğer Kazak şehirlerinde-Sovyetlerin federal yapısını zayıflatacak ve sosyal yapıyı sarsacak ilk "büyük patlama" idi. Protestoların ardından, Sovyetlerin kardeşlik ve birliktelik üzerine inşa edildiğine dair efsane birkaç yıl içerisinde paramparça olacaktı. Bu çalışma 17-19 Aralık tarihinde gerçekleşen olayları, ana akım Sovyet medyası ve Rusça olarak çıkarılan dört Orta Asya menşeli gazete üzerinden okumaya çalışmaktadır. Bu bağlamda Aralık 1986 – Mart 1987 döneminde yayınlanan bu çalışmada incelenmiştir. Bu olaylar, Alma-Ata olayları sırasında Kremlin'i göstermiş olduğu tepkinin etkisiz olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Aynı zamanda Gorbaçov'un glasnost politikası zemin kazanırken Kremlin'in hala daha geleneksel propaganda tekniklerini kullandığını da göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kazakistan, Sovyetler Birliği, Orta Asya, Tarih, İmparatorluk, Kitle İletişim Araçları

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Initial Coverage

The Alma-Ata demonstrations were a clear signal of the failure of Soviet nationalities policy, and thus, of the Soviet Union itself. They also constituted the first of several ethnic flare-ups that would shake the Gorbachev regime and its policies to their very core. Soviet press reaction to the events of December in the main Soviet and Central Asian dailies graphically illustrated not only how far the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) had come since the advent of the Gorbachev era, but also how far it still had to go in pursuing the goals of peaceful interethnic relations and individual human rights. On the evening of December 18, TASS news agency announced that a nationalist uprising had occurred in Alma-Ata. On December 19, the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a press conference that provided official information about the riots.¹ US diplomats described the seemingly candid nature of Soviet admissions as "extraordinary," and the "frank" reporting on the riots was interpreted by many Western observers as "another sign of Mikhail Gorbachev's campaign for glasnost."²

The decision that provided the pretext for the demonstrations—to retire First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK) Dinmukhamed Kunaev and replace him with Gennadi Kolbin, an outsider and ethnic Russian—and the occurrence of the demonstrations on December 17-18 were reported fairly promptly, not only in the main Soviet dailies of *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, but also in the major non-Kazakh Central Asian newspapers.³ The latter papers, which were all published in the capital cities of their respective republics, included *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, published in Dushanbe; *Pravda Vostoka*, published in Tashkent; *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, published in Frunze (now Bishkek); and *Turkmenskaia Iskra*, published in Ashkhabad. All of these papers were dailies of three to four pages in length and were read by the Russian-speaking native populations along with *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, which were larger (six to eight pages) in length.

Although the timely Soviet reporting of the Alma-Ata demonstrations was certainly a novelty, as will be shown, the Soviet press—both in Moscow and in Central Asia—also fell back on tried-and-true methods of propaganda and/or outright deception in its coverage of events. Two days after the sacking of Kounaev, an uprising led by young Kazakhs broke out in Alma-Ata.⁴ The Soviet

¹ Human Rights Watch, *Conflict in the Soviet Union: The Untold Story of the Clashes in Kazakhstan*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1990), p. 38.

² Bill Keller, "Soviet Says Hundreds Were Involved in Riot", *New York Times*, 20 December 1986, p. 5; and James Jackson, "What Really Happened in Alma-Ata", *Time Magazine*, 2 March 1987, p. 25; see also Taras Kuzio, "Nationalist Riots in Kazakhstan", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1988, p. 79.

³ "Plenum TsK Kompartii Kazakhstana" (Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPK), *Pravda*, 17 December 1986, p. 2; *Izvestiia*, 17 December 1986, p. 2; *Pravda Vostoka*, 17 December 1986, p. 2; *Turkmenskaia Iskra*, 17 December 1986, p. 1; *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, 18 December 1986, p. 2; "Soobshchenie iz Alma-Aty" (Report from Alma-Ata), *Pravda*, 19 December 1986, p. 6; *Turkmenskaia Iskra*, 19 December 1986, p. 2; *Izvestiia*, 20 December 1986, p. 6; *Pravda Vostoka*, 20 December 1986, p. 4; *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, 20 December, 1986, p. 4; *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 21 December 1986, p. 2.

⁴ *Pravda*, 19 December 1986, p. 6.

press with only a few details reported the violent events. Deliberate Omissions in the Soviet media showed that totalitartian reflexes and habits of disinformation cannot be dispense with swiftly. For instance, the news release did not mention that other riots had occurred in other Kazakh cities (Shymkent, Pavlodar, Karaganda and Taldykorgan), that events had resulted in casualties (the number is unknown) and led to massive arrests (up to 5,000 arrested and jailed according to some non-governmental reports), and that the police investigation had never been made public.⁵ Enraged protesters, about whom the Soviet press conclusively said that they could not commit their acts spontaneously but rather only with the backing of an underground organization, marched through the streets of Alma-Ata. Reports on the number of protesters have widely varied. Moscow initially reported that about 200 people were participating in the riots. Later reports from Kazakh SSR authorities estimated the number of rioters at 3,000 people. Non-governmental estimates calculated that the riots drew between 30,000 and 40,000 people, while in the 2006 Jeltoqsan ("December events" in Kazakh) leaders said over sixty thousand Kazakhs participated in the protests.⁶ Their placards' slogans were provocative and clear enough: "We want to be part of China," "Americans are with us," "Russians go out."⁷ They attacked Kazakh Central Committee offices and Alma-Ata city prison and called themselves the Golden Horde and the New Islam. Two days after the onset of social chaos the CPK Central Committee ordered troops from the republican Ministry of Internal Affairs, volunteers (*druzhiniki*), cadets, policemen and the KGB to brutally intervene, cordon off the Brezhnev square and videotape the participants. Protesters, however, vowed to take revenge on the Soviet authorities.

From its inception in 1917, the Bolshevik regime had always, to quote Soviet press scholar John Murray, "understood the value of the newspaper as a means of schooling the public in the basics of Marxist ideology and of casting in a favorable light selected government policies."⁸ The complete control of the Soviet press by the CPSU ensured not only a "patronizing, teacher-pupil relationship" between newspapers and their readers, but also a preponderance of rambling, ideologically slanted columns with little coverage of "fresh news" for fear of "causing sensation."⁹ Thus, even though the more substantial coverage of the Alma-Ata events seems to have violated the above-mentioned restriction on reporting breaking news, during the weeks following the disturbances, Soviet officials concerned about nationalism and interethnic relations resorted to three basic and time-honored Soviet strategies for dealing with the political and

⁵ Bohdan Nahaylo, Victor Swoboda, *Soviet Disunion, A History of the Nationalities Problems in the USSR*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990), p. 241.

⁶ Bruce Pannier, "Kazakhstan: Jeltoqsan Protest Marked 20 Years Later", *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, 14 December 2006, (<http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1073453.html>).

⁷ Yaacov Ro'i, "The Soviet and Russian Context of the Development of Nationalism in Soviet Central Asia", *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 1991, p. 130.

⁸ John Murray, *The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin: Behind the Paper Curtain*, (Brookfield, Vermont: Edward Elgar Publishing Co., 1994), p. 87.

⁹ John Murray, *The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin: Behind the Paper Curtain*, p. 93.

ethnic fallout of Alma-Ata. These strategies included attempts to discredit the demonstrators and the Kunaev-era leadership, passing Kolbin off as a principled reformer, and extolling the virtues of Soviet "internationalism" while denigrating potential counter-forces such as nationalism and Islam. Prior to analyzing Soviet officials' strategies in the wake of the 1986 Alma-Ata protests, it is essential to examine first the historical social forces that have led to these dramatic events.

Historical Background

At the turn of the 1930s Stalin proclaimed that the national question was "completely and permanently" settled in the USSR.¹⁰ Because of its comparatively more docile behavior in its relations with the nomenklatura and central government ministries, Moscow believed that the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR) would never become an showcase of the falsity of the Marxist theory of the brotherhood of workers and nations, and that the odds were low that the KSSR would suddenly keep its distance with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and Soviet "internationalism." Years later, Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU, serving from 1985 until 1991, and the last head of state of the Union Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), recalled how this way of thinking was widespread within the state apparatus. About the 1986 turmoil in Alma-Ata he wrote: "With regards to Kazakhstan, we were guided by the conventional notion that, within the framework of peoples' brotherhood and friendship, only spontaneous outbursts of nationalism represented a real threat to the authority of central institutions. We generally explained these outbursts of nationalism not because of the existence of real problems, but because of the survival of the past and the influence of external forces."¹¹

While over-confidence prevailed within Kremlin circles, fed by people of Central Asia's history of passivity, a mountain of revelations about the existence of all-powerful republican, clan-like mafias accumulated at an unprecedented rate in Soviet history, so that the Soviet press talked about the "Kazakhstan issue," the "Uzbek issue," the "Turkmen issue" and the "Tajik issue." Open discussions of these problems backfired on central authorities' control over Soviet nationalities and strengthened national and Islamic solidarities.

With the introduction of Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* (transparence), the Soviet press in Moscow and Central Asia described in detail the increase of socio-economic problems in the southern part of the Soviet federation.¹² It euphemistically called them "negative phenomena" caused by the "return of bourgeois nationalism."¹³ In Kazakhstan, during the period of "developed socialism," socio-economic problems shared by moderately or highly urbanized and industrialized societies became apparent—alcoholism and drug addiction,

¹⁰ See Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *L'empire Éclaté*, (Paris : Flammarion, 1978).

¹¹ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Zhizn' i Reformi (Life and reforms)*, (Moscow: Novosti, Book 2nd, 1995), p. 421.

¹² *Pravda*, 23 January 1988, p. 3 via *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (henceforth FBIS), 28 January 1988, pp. 57-60.

¹³ *Pravda*, 16 July 1986 via *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (henceforth CDSP), Vol. 39, No. 28, 1987, p. 15.

disparities in education and health, aging populations, rising criminality, low work ethic, careerism, etc.

In some measure, these socio-economic problems were noticeable in other Central Asian republics. Nationalist attitude, anti-Russian xenophobia and commitment to Islam were stronger than in the KSSR. Because of his alleged links with criminal groups, patronage, corruption, mismanagement and betrayal of Soviet ideals, Gorbachev forced Turdakun Usabaliev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, to leave his post in 1986. In the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (Uzbek SSR), after the death of the First Secretary Sharaf Rashidov in 1983, the Party and administration of Uzbekistan were subjected to a widespread purge to root out corruption and nepotism.¹⁴ In 1986 Gorbachev posthumously exposed Rashidov's crimes at the 27th Congress of the CPSU. In early 1986, Gorbachev removed Muhammetnazar Gapurov, First Secretary of Turkmenistan, from his post due to a cotton-related corruption scandal and sent him into retirement.

The KSSR was the second largest republic by land area after the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (RSFSR).¹⁵ In 1930, a population of just a little less than 7 million (60% of Kazakhs and 20% of Russians) inhabited the vast and arid steppes of the republic. Between the late 1930s and the 1980s the percentage shares of particular ethnic groups were significantly altered. Non-Kazakh groups began to outnumber Kazakh nationals. Persistently and methodically, Moscow aimed at shifting the ethnic configuration of Kazakhstan through considerable and quick population transfers and ethnic cleansing policies. Stalinist labor camps spread throughout the republic as a result of forced industrialization and mass deportations of blacklisted nationalities. Also, nearly a million Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Poles of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) emigrated to Kazakhstan in the wake of Khrushchev's 1954 grandiose Virgin Lands scheme which was to bring into cultivation 32 million acres of Kazakh marginal land.¹⁶ In 1960, out of 17 Kazakh administrative regions (oblasts), Muslim Kazakhs were in greater number than other nationalities in only Shymkent, Gurievsk and Kzyl-Orda oblasts, three south western regions. In Alma-Ata, Kazakh nationals constituted only 10 percent of the total inhabitants. This major change in the capital's ethnic structure was due to the Russian colonial policy and the program of Russification that included the imposition of the Russian language in schools and in governmental institutions.

Official estimates put the population of Kazakhstan at 16 million when the first phase of *Perestroika* (reconstruction) got under way in 1985, and more importantly, they indicated that the Kazakh population decline that began after the 1930s was stopped and reversed, so that Kazakhs were about to outstrip the number ethnic Russians for the first time in more than half a century.

¹⁴ *Pravda*, 2 February 1986, via FBIS, 10 February 1986, p. 24

¹⁵ See Michael Rywkin, *Moscow's Muslim Challenge*, (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc, 1990).

¹⁶ See Boris Z. Rumer, *Soviet Central Asia, A Tragic Experiment*, (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 214-221.

Moscow leaders' policy of Russification, however, had been successful since in 1989 estimates showed that native Kazakhs, with 39.7% of the total population compared to 37.8% for ethnic Russians, were reduced to a minority status in their own national republic. The remaining 22 percent was composed of Ukrainians, Germans, Byelorussians, Tatars, Uzbeks and a string of Turkish-speaking ethnic groups.¹⁷ The KSSR was the only Soviet republic where the titular nationality had the status of a minority.

The geographic distribution of nationalities was also, in many respects, to the benefit of non-Kazakh nations. In the northern and eastern parts of the republic (Karaganda Kokchetav, Kustanay, Pavlodar, Tselinograd), where the 1950s and 1960s Virgin Land program was carried out and where large industrial and mining developments attracted skilled workers originating from other national republics, millions of non-Kazakh took up residence with their family and became the leading force in the development drive. In the southern and western regions, (Aktyubinsk, Alma-Ata, Gurievsk, Djambul, Zhezkazgan, Kzyl-Orda, Semipalatinsk, Taldy-Kurgan, Uralsk, Shymkent), which were the less industrialized and urbanized regions of Kazakhstan, Kazakhs and Turkic groups represented the overwhelming majority of the population. For Kazakhs, the "colonialist" policy of the central government was largely to blame for these inter-ethnic economic and social imbalances.

Nevertheless, during the reign of the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK) Dinmukhamed Kunaev (1964-86) many indigenous Kazakhs did experience a period of relative ease and prosperity which transformed relations between major ethnic groups.¹⁸ In all spheres of administration, science, academic work and education Kazakh cadres swelled in numbers and worked their way up to leadership positions. Some of them assumed important government positions. In truth, though, native Kazakh elites often had little authority in the republican political bodies.

As a result, despite having slightly lower numbers than ethnic Russians in terms of overall population, native Kazakhs by and large filled the lower ranks of the state bureaucracy.¹⁹ The dynamism of Kazakhstan's *Kombinats* (industrial units, plants) had come to depend less and less on a Kazakh-born workforce. Russian workers were the backbone of the Kazakh labor force; the Kazakh economy ran more and more on (cheap) Russian labor. In ministries, before co-optation became all-pervasive, lower rank positions were consistently assigned to Kazakh nationals. Selection criteria were not formulated based on gender, age or professional qualifications, but on ethnic factors. Even in institutions of higher education where Russians had been given the right to hold a specified number of faculty positions, Kunaev's clan frequently managed to transgress this legal right by appointing Kazakhs instead of Russians or candidates from other ethnic groups. These social and economic developments, combined with

¹⁷ Lee Schwartz, "USSR Nationality Redistribution by Republic, 1979-1989: From Published Results of the 1989 All-Union Census", *Soviet Geography*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 1991, pp. 209-248.

¹⁸ See William Fierman, *Soviet Central Asia, The Failed Transformation*, (Boulder: Westwood Press, 1991).

¹⁹ See Anmed Rashid, *The Remergence of Central Asia, Islam or Nationalism*, (Boulder : Zed Books, 1994).

growing nationalist sentiments, helped setting the stage for the December 1986 Alma-Ata demonstrations. Unhappy over decades of Russification at the expense of their own national identity, native Kazakh elites set out to fuse clan interests and Kazakh nationalism.²⁰

The central government expected from Soviet nationalities that they keenly embrace the Soviet value system and ideals. The Leninist-Stalinist nationalities policy consisted of four general principles. First, it recognized the link between national rights and the territory of an ethnic group (nation). Second, the language of a national group embodied the national culture of that same group. Central political authorities tolerated nationalist sentiments within national groups provided that ethnic nationalism did not contradict the Soviet and socialist core value system. Third, nationalities were obliged to comply with the requirements of the "socialist division of labor" so that their "internationalist obligations" and the present-day tasks of scientific and technical progress could be fulfilled. Fourth, nationalities had the constitutional right to have equal representation in local, regional and federal governments and administrative bodies. This policy sought to put breaks on any rise of nationalism in the republics of the federation.²¹

The Leninist-Stalinist nationalities policy, commendable and constructive in some respects, went together with, however, a set of old Tsarist recipes and initiatives, generally ineffective, which led in many national republics to anti-Russian xenophobia and a revival of attention to an array of historical and legitimate grievances. These "old" methods (mixing of ethnic Slavs and Central Asian ethnic groups through population transfers, encouraging inter-marriage between "Europeans" and Central Asians, stimulating the birth rate among the Slavic populations and discouraging it among "peoples of the south," launching "purge campaigns" in order to Russify administrative bureaucracies, "international education" programs, etc.) were applied at a time when Kazakhstan was undergoing a long-overdue modernization process. Consequently, Improvements in education, progress in mass communication technologies, massive internal displacement to cities and the establishment of industrial centers have, on the one hand, induced the creation of an elite of bureaucrats and "red" managers who, on the other hand, propped up the ethnic and cultural cohesion of the Kazakh nation. The influx of Russians and other Slavic peoples and the socio-economic modernization drive coalesced to spark off, in many quarters, an exalted and outward manifestation of Kazakh patriotism, if not parochialism. This unexpected occurrence in the Soviet "social fabric" gravely worried Moscow, especially since Kazakh patriotism fed on Islam which had become state religion in nearby countries such as Iran and Pakistan.

²⁰ Roy Medvedev, Giulietto Chiesa, *Time of Change, Insider's View of Russia's Transformation*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), p. 33.

²¹ Yaacov Ro'i, "The Soviet and Russian Context of the Development of Nationalism in Soviet Central Asia", p. 125.

Strategy I: Blame "Hooligans" for the Disturbances

The first strategy used by Soviet leaders and the new government of Kazakhstan was an attempt to discredit the demonstrators (and hence, the demonstrations) by writing off participants as hooligans, drunks, drug addicts, or impressionable students unwittingly manipulated by the former unsavory elements. Thus, the initial image of the demonstrations portrayed by *Pravda*, *Izvestiia* and the Central Asian dailies was as follows: On December 17 a group of "youths" (*molodezhi*), instigated by "nationalistic elements" (*natsionalisticheskiye elementy*) took to the streets protesting the decision to retire Kunaev. The resulting disorder was then taken advantage of by "hooliganistic" (*khutiganstvuiushchie*), "parasitical" (*paraziticheskie*) and other "antisocial individuals" (*antiobshchestvennye litsa*), who set fire to a grocery store and several private automobiles. "Order" (*poriadka*) was being restored, various groups of respectable individuals had come out in favor of the decision to retire Kunaev, and "firm measures" (*reshitel'nye меры*) were being taken against hooliganism. There was, of course, no discussion regarding whether or not the grievances of the young protestors were actually legitimate.²²

According to information that was later given to the Shakhanov Commission by Alma-Ata city and oblast medical institutions, no new cases of alcoholism or drug addiction were registered during December 17-19, and the city's "drying out tanks" did not treat a single individual who had been involved in the demonstrations.²³ This fact, however, did little to stop rumors on the part of the media and high officials that alcohol and drugs had played a major role in inciting the students during the Alma-Ata disturbances. On December 24, *Pravda* published an article about the CPK entitled *Protiv negativnykh iavlenii* (Against negative phenomena)²⁴. The article, which was subsequently run in *Izvestiia* and three of the Central Asian dailies, spoke of the struggle for "discipline and order" being waged by the CPK against "drunkenness" (*pianstva*), "alcoholism" (*alkogolizma*) and other "antisocial manifestations" (*antiobshchestvennykh proiavlenii*). A similar article on December 28, again published in *Pravda*, then *Izvestiia* and three of the Central Asian papers, spoke of the formation of a "coordinating council" that was assigned the specific task of waging a struggle against "crime," "alcoholism," and "drug addiction."²⁵ Indeed, this aspect of the Party's smear campaign was so effective that the heading of an article in the *Washington Post* on December 22 blared: Soviet Rioters Got Vodka, Drugs, Witnesses Report.²⁶

²² "Soobshchenie iz Alma-Aty", *Pravda*, p. 6.

²³ See A Report by Mukhtar Shakhanov, Commission Co-Chairman, USSR Supreme Soviet Member and USSR's People's Deputy, Alma-Ata, November 14, 1989, Appendix A, Conflict in the Soviet Union, p. 59.

²⁴ "Protiv negativnykh iavlenii" (Against Negative Phenomena), *Pravda*, 24 December 1986, p. 2; *Izvestiia*, 25 December, 1986, p. 2; *Pravda Vostoka*, 25 December 1986, p. 1; *Sovietskaya Kyrgyzia*, 25 December 1986, p. 1; *Turkmen'skaya Iskra* 26 December 1986, p. 1.

²⁵ "Reshitel'no borofsia s negativnymi iavleniiami" (To Decisively Struggle with Negative Phenomena), *Pravda*, 28 December 1986, p. 2; *Izvestiia*, 29 December 1986, p. 2; *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 30 December 1986, p. 3; *Pravda Vostoka*, 30 December 1986, p. 3; *Turkmen'skaya Iskra*, 30 December 1986, p. 2.

²⁶ Gary Lee, "Soviet Rioters Got Vodka, Drugs, Witnesses Report", *Washington Post*, 22 December 1986, p. 1, and 6. An article later published by the *Washington Post* carried the subtitle, "[Soviet]

Even after the dust had settled in Alma-Ata, the Soviet press continued to return to the theme of the nefarious effects of drugs and narcotics. An *Izvestiia* article published on January 15 mentioned that Kolbin had identified the struggle with alcoholism and other "negative phenomena" as being "among the main tasks" faced by the CPK²⁷. On February 3, *Turkmenskaia Iskra* devoted an entire article, penned by the Deputy Procurator of the Republic, to the subject of narcotics.²⁸ On March 14, an article published in *Izvestiia* and subsequently republished in *Pravda Vostoka* and *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia* was devoted to the strengthening of "socialist legality" in Alma-Ata. The piece mentioned that there was still "insufficient coordination" between the actions of law enforcement organs and the military in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR), but also observed that the organs of internal affairs had "noticeably intensified" the "struggle with crime, alcoholism, and drug abuse."²⁹

Strategy II: Discredit "Corrupt" Officials around Kunaev

The second broad strategy employed by the CPSU was a nother standard Soviet propaganda ploy dating back to the 1930s (and perhaps even earlier). This approach consisted of an attempt to set Kazakhs against the former leadership of the republic by discrediting Kunaev and his colleagues while simultaneously drumming up support for the new regime by presenting Kolbin as an honest reformer.³⁰ On January 10, in a halfhearted attempt to placate Kazakh national feeling, Moscow replaced the Russian Second Secretary of the CPK, Oleg Miroskhin, with S. Kubashev, a native Kazakh.³¹ This conciliatory move came, however, amidst a flood of criticism of CPK higher-ups—mostly Kazakhs—who had served under Kunaev. In addition to alcoholism and drug abuse, *Pravda's* December 28 article announcing the decisive struggle with "negative phenomena" also listed "protectionism" (*prot eksiion izm*), "nepotism" (*kumovstvo*), "ethnic connections" (*zemliachestvo*), "bribery" (*vziatochnichestvo*) and "official abuses" (*sluzhebnie zloupotrebleniia*) as shortcomings to be dealt with.³²

On January 12, *Izvestiia* ran a story that gave highlights of Kolbin's speech at a plenum of the Central Committee of the CPK two days earlier. Kolbin voiced the

Account Says Drunken Youths Carried lion Rods, Marble Chunks". See, Celestine Bohien, "Soviet Press Details Kazakhstan Riot", *Washington Post*, 11 January 1987, p. A28.

²⁷ "Rabotat' tselestremiennee, s bol'shei otdachei" (To Work More Purposefully, with Greater Reward), *Izvestiia*, 15 January 1987, p. 3.

²⁸ See, "O. Begniiazov, Narkoticheskoe bezumie" (Drug-Induced Insanity). *Turkmenskaia Iskra*, 3 February 1987, p. 3.

²⁹ "Ukrepiat' sotsialisticheskuiu zakonnost'" (To Strengthen Socialist Legality), *Izvestiia*, 14 March 1987, p. 4; *Pravda Vostoka*, 15 March 1987, p. 3; *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, 15 March 1987, p. 3.

³⁰ The view according to which the uprising was voluntarily organized by the Brezhnevian high-ranking officials is not solid since the "naïve students," "alcoholics and drug addicts," "hooligans" and "anti-social elements," as press briefs call the insurgents, attacked Brezhnev statue in downtown Alma-Ata. See Yaacov Ro'i, "Yaacov Ro'i, "The Soviet and Russian Context of the Development of Nationalism in Soviet Central Asia", p. 138.

³¹ Celestine Bohien, "Soviet Press Details Kazakhstan Riot", p. 28; and "Communique on the Plenary Session of the Kazakhstan Communist Party Central Committee", *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, p. 1. Translated and condensed in C DSP, 1987, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 10-11.

³² "Reshitel'no borot'sia s negativnymi iavleniiami", *Pravda*, p. 3.

need to institute economic and political reforms called for by the 27 Party Congress of the CPSU (February 1986), and also mentioned the need to eradicate the "utilization of official positions for personal ends."³³ The most negative attacks against the Kunaev leadership were confined to *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, as opposed to the Central Asian dailies. A lone *Izvestiia* correspondent, E. Matskevich, spearheaded press attacks against Kunaev-era officials in two investigative pieces that were published only in *Izvestiia*. In his original article of February 14 and follow-up report, which was published on March 15, Matskevich lauded the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the KSSR for its decision to confiscate dozens of hostels, cottages, hunting lodges and luxury apartments—worth hundreds of thousands of rubles—previously owned by Kunaev higher-ups. According to the articles, the confiscated, ill-gotten gains were to be turned into kindergartens, camps for young Pioneers and other more socially constructive projects.³⁴

On March 9, *Pravda* published an article under the heady-sounding title "Greater Adherence to Principle: The Truth Has Come out. What is to be done about it?" The piece, attributed to Kolbin himself, listed the former members of Kunaev's government who apparently had not been acting in accordance with correct Party codes of conduct. Individuals who had been penalized by the new regime included the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPK, D. Bekezhanov (criticized); the First Secretary of the Alma-Ata oblast committee, K. Aukhadieva (relieved of office); the First Secretary of the Chimkent obkom, A. Askarov (dismissed from the Party); the Dean of the faculty of Journalism at Kazakh State University (KazGU), T. Kozhakeev (dismissed from the Party); and the Minister of Automobile Transport for the KSSR, A. Karavaeva (also dismissed from the Party).³⁵

In the aftermath of the riots Kolbin and his Muscovite guest, Party Control Commission Chairman M.C. Solomentsev, mounted a major publicity campaign, ostensibly for the purpose of winning back the support of the Kazakh people. On December 20, *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* printed an article announcing that Kolbin and the newly-arrived Solomentsev had visited a machine-building factory and cotton combine in Alma-Ata on December 18, and had become acquainted with various production enterprises in the area. This article was subsequently reprinted in all four of the Central Asian papers.³⁶ On December 21 and 22,

³³ "Bol'she produktsii zhivonovodstva" (Greater Production in Animal Husbandry), *Izvestiia*, 12 January 1987, p. 2; *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, 13 January 1987, p. 2.

³⁴ "E. Matskevich, Khorishie budut detskie sady" (They will be Better as Kindergartens), *Izvestiia*, 14 February 1987, p. 2; "Eshche raz o 'khitrykh' osobniakakh" (Once More about 'Clever' Mansions), *Izvestiia*, March 15, 1987, p. 3.

³⁵ Gennadi Kolbin, "Bol'she printsipial'nosti" (Greater Adherence to Principles), *Pravda*, 9 March 1987, pp. 1 and 3. Interestingly, though Kunaev himself escaped any sort of arrest or imprisonment he was "retired" from his position on the Soviet Politburo on January 28. This was reported by all six newspapers. See, "Informatsionnoe soobshchenie o Plenum Tsentralnogo Komiteta Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soiuz" (Informational Report of the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU), *Izvestiia*, January 29, 1987, p. 1; *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 29 January 1987, p. 1; *Pravda*, 29 January 1987, p. 1; *Pravda Vostoka*, 29 January 1987, p. 1; *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, 29 January 1987, p. 1; *Turkmen'skaia Iskra*, 29 January 1987, p. 1.

³⁶ "Prebyvanie v Alma-Ate" (Stay in Alma-Ata), *Pravda*, 20 December 1986, pp. 2; *Izvestiia*, December 21, 1986, p. 2; *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 21 December 1986, p. 2; *Pravda Vostoka*, 21 December

respectively, *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* reported a visit by Solomentsev and Kolbin to Alma-Ata's central kolkhoz market, where the Soviet officials familiarized themselves with commodities as well as vendors, salespeople, and other workers from the village cooperative.³⁷ Finally, on December 22, *Pravda* published an account of an address given by Solomentsev and Kolbin to an expanded session of the Council of Ministers of the KSSR. According to the article, which was reprinted in all four of the Central Asian dailies, special attention was focused on the "elimination of shortcomings in the social-economic development of the republic." Solomentsev and Kolbin particularly singled out deficiencies in the production of sugar beets, cattle, and raw cotton.³⁸ Solomentsev and Kolbin's overemphasis on raising Kazakhstan's food and crop production even led one astute observer to conclude "food shortages may have played a part in fuelling the riots."³⁹

Besides attempting to rectify the agricultural and food production deficiencies of the republic, the Kolbin government also tried to win support from the Kazakh population by appearing to push for more responsiveness in local government and an end to the KSSR's chronic housing shortage. Thus, a widely printed article covering the December 23 session of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPK mentioned that republican Party organizations had turned to the practical task of fostering "criticism and self-criticism, democratic norms and glasnost."⁴⁰ In a similar piece, which was disseminated in *Pravda*, *Izvestiia* and *Pravda Vostoka*, Solomentsev and Kolbin called for putting an end to "elements of stagnation and inertia" in the republican leadership.⁴¹ A few days later, yet another article spoke of Kolbin's determination to "more fully protect the population from criminal, hooliganistic and parasitic elements."⁴²

Finally, on January 23, *Izvestiia* and *Pravda Vostoka* published an account of Kolbin's determination to alleviate a problem very near and dear to the inhabitants of most of the USSR's urban areas during the late Soviet period—the shortage of suitable residences. "Party plans call for the provisioning of every family in need with a well-equipped apartment or house by the year 2000," the article trumpeted.⁴³ Thus, by January Moscow's handpicked successor to Kunaev had begun to sound more like a Western electoral candidate facing an uphill campaign than a Soviet quasi-dictator. Kolbin's concerted attempt to win

1986, p. 1; *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, 21 December 1986, p. 1; *Turkmenskaia Iskra*, 21 December 1986, p. 1.

³⁷ "Vstrechi s trudiashchimisia Alma-Aty" (Meetings with workers of Alma-Ata), *Pravda*, 21 December 1986, p. 2; *Izvestiia*, 21 December 1986, p. 2.

³⁸ "Kursom uskoreniia" (In the Course of Acceleration), *Pravda*, 22 December 1986, p. 2; Kursom perestroiki i uskoreniia (In the Course of Perestroika and acceleration), *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 23 December 1986, p. 2; *Pravda Vostoka*, p. 3; *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, p. 1; *Turkmenskaia Iskra*, p. 1. (The article is the same in all papers despite the slight difference in title.)

³⁹ Taras Kuzio, "Nationalist Riots in Kazakhstan", p. 88.

⁴⁰ "Protiv negativnykh iavlenii". *Pravda*, p. 2.

⁴¹ "Nauchnomu potentsialu—effectivnoe ispol'zovanie" (To Effectively Utilize Scientific Potential), *Pravda*, 25 December 1986, p. 2; *Pravda Vostoka*, p. 1; *Izvestiia*, 26 December 1986, p. 2.

⁴² "Reshitel'no borot'sia", *Pravda*, p. 2.

⁴³ "Zhilishchnoi probleme—skoreishee reshenie" (Quicker Resolution to the Housing Problem), *Izvestiia*, 23 January, 1987, p. 2; *Pravda Vostoka*, 23 January 1987, p. 2.

the trust of native Kazakhs not only revealed how far the CPSU had come since the days of Stalinism, but also attested to the increased political clout of a nationality that Moscow had previously felt it could ignore.

Strategy III: Nip Nationalism or Islam in the Bud

The last strategy of the CPSU with regard to Alma-Ata and the nationalities problem that was reflected in the Soviet press consisted of both positive and negative elements. While emphasizing the fraternal unity and brotherhood of the Soviet peoples, the Soviet and Central Asian dailies also ran articles critical of cultural and political forces—including nationalism and Islam—that were perceived as inherently threatening to Soviet *edinstvo* (unity). In addition, a string of articles emphasizing the need to improve "internationalist education" among Soviet youth testified to the jarring psychological impact Alma-Ata had on Moscow's orientation towards the Soviet nationalities. The term, of course, signified little more than a thinly disguised attempt at political indoctrination by the central government, with the goal of replacing loyalty to region and nationality with loyalty to the Soviet State.⁴⁴

On December 28, *Pravda* carried a front-page article entitled, In a Single Soviet Family. The piece emphasized correct training of Party cadres in order to pull people away from a "localistic," "departmentalistic," or "nationalistic" mindset.⁴⁵ On December 30, *Kommunist Tadzhikistana* ran its own version of *Pravda*'s "friendship article." The front-page report, written to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the opening of the first all-Soviet Congress of the USSR, spoke of the contributions made by each republic to the strengthening of the "social administrative complex" of the USSR. The article identified the "greatest tasks" of the Party to be "the deepening and consolidation of the process of the socialist building of inter-relationships between peoples" and the "formation in every citizen of a feeling of Soviet patriotism and Party internationalism."⁴⁶ Finally, on January 10, *Izvestiia* editor of the letters department Vladimir Nadein published a column that discussed readers' letters regarding Alma-Ata. Waxing eloquent, Nadein noted: "Literally in every one of the letters one is able to find persuasive evidence of the pure, sincere friendship of the peoples of our country, examples of the type that humanity has formerly never known." According to the author, readers attempting to explain the Alma-Ata demonstrations pointed to "formalism," "isolation from real life" and the "activities of internationalist politics," as well as "shortcomings in the sphere of Party educational work."⁴⁷

According to Taras Kuzio, the Alma-Ata events invariably led to "many re-evaluations of Soviet nationality policy."⁴⁸ Indeed, Mikhail Gorbachev testified

⁴⁴ Kuzio equates internationalist education with "thinly disguised Russification". See, Taras Kuzio, "Nationalist Riots in Kazakhstan", p. 100.

⁴⁵ "V edinoi sovetskoi sem'e" (In a Single Soviet Family), *Pravda*, 28 December 1986, p. 1.

⁴⁶ "Sil'ny druzhboi" (Strong Friendships), *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 30 December 1986, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Vladimir Nadein, "Chitaia pochtu: svoe suzhenie imet'" (Reading the Mail: to Make My Own Judgment), *Izvestiia*, 10 January 1987, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Taras Kuzio, "Nationalist Riots in Kazakhstan", p. 92.

to this fact when he addressed a plenary meeting of the CPSU Central Committee on January 27. "It is clear already today, the Soviet leader noted, that what has happened [in Alma-Ata] should compel not only Communists in Kazakhstan, but all Party organizations and their committees to face up to the problems of the further development of national relations, of enhancing internationalist education. It is especially important to save the rising generation from the demoralizing effects of nationalism."⁴⁹

Thus, the CPSU embarked on a campaign to foster internationalist education among the young, and internationalism became a positive catchword in the Soviet press just as drunkenness, corruption, and provincialism became "negative phenomena."

The first mention of the need to better pursue internationalist education came in the *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* articles of December 21 and 22, mentioned earlier, which reported the meetings between Solomentsev, Kolbin, and laborers and professionals of Alma-Ata on December 20.⁵⁰ On December 23, *Pravda* reported discussions which had taken place the previous day between Solomentsev, Kolbin, and the Komsomol aktiv of Alma-Ata. The report, which was reprinted in *Izvestiia* and three of the Central Asian dailies, mentioned that the meeting highlighted "serious deficiencies" in the Komsomol organization and emphasized the difficulty of reconciling such shortcomings with "internationalism and an ideological-moral upbringing."⁵¹ The theme of internationalist education also cropped up in an *Izvestiia* article of January 2, which subsequently appeared in *Pravda Vostoka*, *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, and *Turkmenskaia Iskra*. The article, which chronicled highlights of a meeting between Kolbin and Kazakh writers on December 31, spoke of the responsibility of the Soviet press and Soviet publishers for the "ideological-moral and internationalist upbringing of workers, especially the youth," and for the "truthful representation of reality."⁵²

The campaign to foster correct internationalist education was apparently deemed so important that the Soviet press continued to harp on this theme throughout the months of January, February and March.⁵³ On January 15, *Izvestiia* published an account of Kolbin's address, two days earlier, to a conference of

⁴⁹ Mikhail Gorbachev, "On Restructuring the Party's Personnel Policy: Report to the Plenary Meeting of the CPSU Central Committee", *Speeches and Writings Vol. 2*, (New York: Pergamon, 27 January 1987), p. 129.

⁵⁰ See, "Vstrechi s trudiashchimisia Alma-Aty", *Pravda*, p. 2.

⁵¹ "Sovershenstvovat' vospitatel'nuu rabotu", (To Improve Educational Work), *Pravda*, 23 December 1986, p. 2; *Izvestiia*, 24 December 1986, p. 2; *Pravda Vostoka*, p. 1; *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, p. 1; *Turkmenskaia Iskra*, p. 1.

⁵² "Vysokoe prizvanie pisatelei" (The Highest Calling of Writers), *Izvestiia*, 2 January 1987, p. 2; *Pravda Vostoka*, 3 January 1987, p. 2; *Turkmenskaia Iskra*, p. 3; "Vysokoe prizvanie pisatelii" (The highest calling of a writer), *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, 3 January 1987, p. 2. (The article is the same.)

⁵³ Another interesting aspect of this campaign had to do with attempts in the Soviet press to teach Russian as the language of inter-republic communication. See, Lu Bromlei, "Natsional'nye protsessy v SSSR: dostizheniia i problem" (National Processes in the USSR: Achievements and Problems), *Pravda*, 13 February 1987, pp. 2-3; and Abdizhamil Nurpeisov, "Vozvyshaia nashi sviatyni" (Elevating Our Sacred Values), *Pravda*, 5 March 1987, p. 2.

aktivs. Again, Kolbin listed as a main goal the "improvement of internationalist and patriotic education."⁵⁴ Even the Kazakh press received a dressing-down for "having failed to put in place systems for covering questions of internationalist education" in a particularly critical article that appeared in *Pravda* on February 11.⁵⁵ In a corresponding report for *Pravda Vostoka* on March 17, T. Novozhenina wrote about the responsibility of publishers and the press, in the wake of Alma-Ata, to "instill in young people" the "highest feeling of internationalism and Soviet patriotism."⁵⁶ In the Kyrgyz SSR, an entire republican Party aktiv was devoted to the theme of bringing up good internationalists. The proceedings of the aktiv, which was held in Frunze on February 21, were given extended coverage within the pages of *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia* on February 24 and 25.⁵⁷

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of relevant articles in the Central Asian press in the wake of Alma-Ata was an intense campaign against both nationalism and Islam. Although such efforts in part reflected ongoing CPSU nervousness about the political and social effects of the conflict in Afghanistan, Alma-Ata certainly did not help matters. Moscow's tremendous sensitivity toward any hint of nationalism in Central Asia was vividly illustrated by an article published in *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia* on the day of Kunaev's dismissal. The piece pointed out the important role played by "Western propaganda" in the realization of the geopolitical designs of "Imperialism" in Central Asia: namely, to "mislead" the Central Asian republics, undermine the "brotherly friendship and unity of the Soviet peoples," and then foment a "revolutionary transformation in the newly-independent countries."⁵⁸ Thus, the CPSU presented nationalism and regionalism as little more than tools in the West's divide-and-conquer strategy vis-a-vis the USSR and hinted that Central Asians who were too proud of their cultural heritage to risk being duped by the "Imperialists."

On January 7 and 8, respectively, *Kommunist Tadzhikistana* and *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia* ran a report about Sikh violence in the Indian state of Punjab entitled, The Poisonous Idea of Separatism, and on January 22, *Turkmenskaia Iskra* printed a similarly negative-sounding book review entitled, Nationalism in the Service of Imperialism.⁵⁹ A somewhat more positive, but no less propagandistic piece

⁵⁴ "Rabotat' tselestremennee, s bol'shei otachei" (To Work More Purposefully, with Greater Reward), *Izvestiia*, 15 January 1987, p. 3.

⁵⁵ "T. Esil'baev, Tsena samoliubovaniia" (The Price of Arrogance), *Pravda*, 11 February 1987, p. 2.

⁵⁶ T. Novozhenina, "Za internatsionalizm na dele" (For Internationalism in Practice), *Pravda Vostoka*, 17 March 1987, p. 2.

⁵⁷ See, "Sobranie respublikanskogo partiinogo aktiva: vospityvat' patriotov-intematsionalistov" (Meeting of the Republican Party: to Bring up Patriots and Internationalists), *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, 24 February 1987, p. 3-4; and "Sobranie respublikanskogo partiinogo aktiva: byt' vernymi printsipam internatsionalizma" (Meeting of the Republican Party: to be True to the Principals of Internationalism), *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, 25 February 1987, p. 3-4.

⁵⁸ L. Stroilov, "Islam v oboime antisovetizma" (Islam in the Arsenal of Antisovietism), *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, 16 December 1986, p. 3.

⁵⁹ "Iadovitye idei separatizma" (The Poisonous Idea of Separatism), *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 7 January 1987, p. 3; *Sovietskaia Kyrgyzia*, 8 January 1987, p. 3; and M. Jordan & T. Khydyrov, "Natsionalizm na vooruzheni imperializma" (Nationalism in the Service of Imperialism), *Turkmenskaia Iskra*, 22 January 1987, p. 3.

appeared in *Kommunist Tadjikistana* on February 20 in a column entitled, We Are Internationalists. The article related the story of native Tadjik Ibodulo Sharipov who, despite losing both legs in the service of his country in Afghanistan in 1984, later managed to realize his life-long dream of "becoming a member of Lenin's party."⁶⁰

Finally, Alma-Ata events seemed to have at least partially energized the CPSU propaganda drive against Islam. In Afghanistan, the Soviets had recognized a clear connection between Islam and strong nationalistic sentiment. Thus, Moscow attempted to nip any Soviet Central Asian variants of this phenomenon in the bud. In January, three major articles directed against the Islamic faith appeared in the pages of *Pravda*, *Pravda Vostoka*, and *Kommunist Tadjikistana*. "It is not possible to agree... with Muslim ideologues' definition of their faith as a 'civilizing religion',"⁶¹ Dr. A. Tursunov asserted in *Pravda*. The author then proceeded to damn Muslims for implanting Islam in Central Asia "by fire and sword" in the 16th century, and causing the region (including Afghanistan) to "lag behind in its development" by enveloping it in a "thick fog of superstition." While somewhat less confrontational in tone, Khasym Shadiey's article, which appeared in the January 10 editions of *Izvestiia* and *Pravda Vostoka*, also took aim at Islam by tying it to anti-Soviet propaganda in connection with the struggle in Afghanistan.⁶² V. Rabiev's article in the January 31 edition of *Kommunist Tadjikistana* was also anti-Islam in tone. Rabiev reported the antics of "mullah-pretenders" in the republic, pointing to them as examples of the threat to societal order posed by "religious fanaticism." Moreover, the author also equated traditional Islamic religious teaching with pedagogy.⁶³

Conclusion

Because the CPSU exercised final control over the contents of the Soviet press, the way in which Alma-Ata was treated within the pages of *Pravda*, *Izvestiia* and the Central Asian dailies provides something of a written snapshot of the Soviet leadership during the early glasnost period, identifying the key concerns, fears, and political tactics of Moscow in the waning days of the Soviet empire.⁶⁴ Certainly one of the most obvious conclusions that can be reached from the available evidence is that press reaction to the Alma-Ata events revealed the Soviet leadership to be in an early transitional stage between the Stalinist-type authoritarianism of the past (or Brezhnev era stagnation, for that matter), and the emphasis on human rights and democratic norms that characterized the

⁶⁰ T. Khetagurova, "A zhizn prodolzhaetsia" (And Life Goes on), *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, 20 February 1987, p. 2.

⁶¹ A. Tursunov, "Voprosi teorii: ateizm i kul'tura" (Questions of Theory: Atheism and Culture), *Pravda*, 16 January 1987, pp. 2-3.

⁶² Khasym Shadiey, "Musul'mane v SSR: domysly i fakty" (Muslims in the USSR: Suppositions and Facts), *Pravda Vostoka*, 10 January 1987, p. 3; *Turkmen'skaia Iskra*, 10 January 1987, p. 3. (The latter newspaper article lacks a paragraph, but is otherwise identical.)

⁶³ V. Rabiev, "Na ateisticheskie temy: v klass s Koranom?" (On the Subject of Atheism: In Class with the Koran?), *Kommunist Tadjikistana*, 31 January 1987, pp. 2.

⁶⁴ The lack of articles lambasting the Kunaev leadership in the Central Asian dailies may also have been due to their smaller size (hence, less space for articles).

late Gorbachev period. Thus, while coverage of the riots may have been biased, propagandistic and lacking in details, the occurrence of the demonstrations was, nevertheless, reported promptly.

It is also possible to conclude that at least at the time—late 1986 to early 1987—the Soviet leadership took very seriously the threat posed to the Soviet political system by republican-level nationalism (not to mention Islam) among Central Asia's rapidly rising, youthful population. The thorough and continuous press coverage of Moscow's political-ideological campaign to foster internationalist education undeniably testifies to this fact. In addition, the fact that the CPSU chose to attack the Kunaev leadership within the pages of *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, while focusing mainly on internationalism and the positive aspects of Kolbin's program in the other Central Asian dailies, seems to attest to Moscow's wish to incite as little ethnic unrest in the region as possible. When the Soviet press did run negative articles in the Central Asian dailies, as has been shown, vehement criticism was directed mainly against the clear and present threats of nationalism, separatism, and the Islamic faith.

Considering the attempts to placate the population that were widely advertised in the Soviet press, one can also conclude that the new First Secretary and the CPSU were experiencing a "hard sell" when it came to convincing the majority of Kazakhs of their version of the riots; in effect that Alma-Ata was nothing more than a selfish tantrum thrown by drunken young hooligans. Though the December events did result in the "general re-imposition of political conformity" in the KSSR in the short term, by 1989 democratic reform was beginning to penetrate the republic and Gorbachev felt compelled to oust Kolbin in favor of the Kazakh Nursultan Nazarbayev.⁶⁵ On June 26, 1989, the USSR Supreme Soviet appointed the Shakhnov Commission to "bring full glasnost" to the Alma-Ata events.⁶⁶ Finally, on May 21, 1990, the Central Committee of the CPSU formally rescinded its resolution of July 1987 that had branded the demonstrations as specifically anti-Russian and nationalistic phenomena.⁶⁷

Thus, when Soviet press coverage of the Alma-Ata riots is examined in historical context, the most glaring conclusion is simply that all of the various strategies employed by the Soviet leadership to keep Kazakhs (and all Central Asians) quiescent eventually proved ineffectual. Moreover, such heavy-handedness on the Kremlin's part only added to the list of ethnic grievances—or post-Cold War political baggage—that are now an integral part of present-day Russo-Kazakh relations. After taking all of the above into consideration, then, it also seems reasonable to conclude that it was the long history of Soviet repression in Kazakhstan which encapsulated the real "negative phenomena."

⁶⁵ Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh Identity*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1995), pp. 56.

⁶⁶ *Kazakhstanskaiia Pravda*, (29 July 1989), cited in Bess Brown, "The Alma-Ata Events of 1986 Reexamined", *Report on the USSR*, Vol. 1 No. 6, 9 February 1990, p. 25.

⁶⁷ See, A Report by Mukhtar Shakhnov, Commission Co-Chairman, USSR Supreme Soviet Member and USSR's People's Deputy, Alma-Ata, November 14, 1989, Appendix A, Conflict in the Soviet Union, p. 1.

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