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Erica Marat

## State-Propagated Narratives about a National Defender in Central Asian States

- 1 In the early 1990s the Soviet successor states of the Central Asian region – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, – albeit not wishing to separate from the Soviet Union, were bound to form new definitions of their own nation-hoods which would prioritize the benefits of independence. Ironically, at the independence, the legacies of the Soviet leadership of institutionalized nationalism helped the Central Asian ruling elites to restructure national ideologies according to their own political and economic interests<sup>1</sup>. With that, inherited templates of geographical divisions, cultural interpretations, and political institutions were conducive to strengthening positions of titular ethnicities and, at the same time, marginalizing ethnic minorities. The military institutions, like health and education domains, continued to play an important role in heralding ideological indoctrination, now shifted from Soviet ideals to more ethno-centric moods.
- 2 Today it would be difficult to find a Central Asian who questions the underlying reasons of why national ideologies constantly refer to specific historical figures. Personalities are reincarnated everywhere - throughout Central Asian state institutions, – from mythic to real, from ancient to contemporary. A vividly drawn historical persona, male and a warrior, centers ideas about the “high culture” and an “important history” of the Central Asian peoples<sup>2</sup>. Abylaikhan in Kazakhstan, Manas in Kyrgyzstan, Amir Temur in Uzbekistan, Samani in Tajikistan, and, finally, Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan – all represent masculinities within national ideologies reinforced by the Central Asian political elites. The spirit of a national defender is brought as an indispensable source of national ideologies. Similarly to “golden ages” of national prosperity and the “glory of the homeland” now found in every Central Asian president’s speeches, the legends of nations’ “great sons” depict qualities and virtues of a genuine national defender.
- 3 Besides being part of broader national ideological projects, a cohesive historical narrative about a national defender is an important part of the Central Asian states’ attempts to raise a loyal contemporary soldier unified with his compatriots on the basis of cultural values and objects of loyalty. Whilst triggering a broader public, narratives on national defenders are especially promulgated at military institutions. A narrative promotes cultural values for the military service and functioning of military institutions. This article examines the relationship between narratives about primordial heroes and standards set before a contemporary soldier. Both phenomena are normative elaborations primarily driven by the state as a part of broader politics of post-Soviet nationalism. The relationship between broader nationalist ideology and nationalism pertained at military institutions is direct and subtle, depicted in new medals and literature on national military histories and presidential speeches.
- 4 Thus, the article has two main goals. First is to examine how Central Asian political elites’ new ideas on nationhood are reverberated across military institutions. Second is to show how military institutions serve political elites’ goals in promoting nationalist indoctrination among broader masses. The article also questions why national ideologies, developed since 1991, promulgate images of a particular set of historical heroes? How these narratives are developed? What standards do they intend to set for national soldiers? In conclusion, the article tries to answer whether ideologies containing state-propagated narratives about national defenders were successfully acclimatized both among masses and military institutions.
- 5 The article’s first part discusses how the military remains to be a vital channel for disseminating nationalist ideas in the post-Soviet states. It considers theoretical arguments on military institutions being an important element in the broader nation- and state-building process in young states where political elites tend to reinforce or reduce the significance of military experience of the titular ethnic group, which they often represent, in accordance with their own interests. It lists theoretical arguments on how narratives about historical heroes are often expressive of what political elites expect from military service but are restrained from

depicting in official policy documents. The Soviet experience of using military institutions as a tool for indoctrination of the masses will be illustrated. The article's second part discusses how narratives about a national defender in particular and ethno-centric nationalism in general, are counter-productive to newly announced reforms at military institutions. Finally, narratives about national heroes cultivated by political elites against the backdrop of post-communist state ideology in each Central Asian state are examined. It is shown that in most cases such nationalism was rather unsuccessful.

## Ideal National Defender

6 The military is one of the key institutions in a young state. Symbolic value of the military in the independence period can become the central source of building a sense of totality of a nation and its prospect for a stable future<sup>3</sup>. The impact of state ideology on military is demonstrative of the effect produced on states' most important institutions of nationalization, among them education and healthcare. As noted by Morris Janowitz (1977), especially in postcolonial societies the military is an important agent of change:

“...the army becomes a device for developing a sense of identity – a social psychological element of national unity – which is especially crucial for a nation which has suffered because of colonialism and which is struggling to incorporate diverse ethnic and tribal groups.”<sup>4</sup>

7 Among the arguments about the military being an important part in the state-building process military sociologists as well as political scientists will agree with the assumption that any new state aspiring for domestic and international sovereignty will need at least some amount of armed personnel. Besides police forces and a national guard, the entire community of new states in the twentieth century was reported to have armed forces in their disposals<sup>5</sup>. The example of Tajikistan shows how severe shortage of state-controlled armed forces in the early years of independence led to a quick accumulation of armament among non-state actors and consequently to a civil war between communist government and religious opposition troops<sup>6</sup>.  
8 Depending on previous experience in conflict management and the use of armed forces, symbolic meaning of the military in state's existence also varies. In states with a record of armed mobilization, the military turns into a primary symbol of security at the independence period. Likewise, armed forces perform merely figurative function in societies with little or no recent experience of conflicts. Political elites will emphasize the most successful experiences of the past by bringing out positive and powerful historical images as a ground for generalization of titular ethnicity's potential<sup>7</sup>. Especially if titular ethnic group had a positive practice in warfare, use of arms in preserving its integrity or successful record of defensive actions, these instances will be “strategically” celebrated in modern times. The memory of positive experience can be adopted in the present day reality with a slight modification by leaving out gloomy periods and accentuating the most optimistic moments<sup>8</sup>. There can be competing interpretations of history: some claimed as illegitimate, others effectively providing orientation to social action and constitute a mutual adjustment to historical memory<sup>9</sup>. In states where the national borders are unclear in the independence period, the military becomes a symbol of national sovereignty<sup>10</sup>. Nationalism in this view is a process, rather than a fixed interpretation of culture.

9 Some formal means of promoting ethnic-nationalism at military institutions include renaming, introducing new, and withdrawing old honorary titles, anthems, oaths, orders and medals that blatantly hint at the preeminence of certain historical or contemporary record of military experience. Informal regulations include control for ethnic representation in the military, especially at higher ranks. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, for instance, decisively discriminate ethnic minority cadres from army service<sup>11</sup>. This is done with the belief that only representatives of the titular ethnicity are solicitous of national stability and are able to show a desired degree of loyalty to the ruling regime. Patriotism is linked to ethnicity in these states and knowledge of national language plays an important role.

10 In extreme cases patriotic encouragement is sought by comparing national soldier with a national historical hero of the times when the nation prospered in unity and/or occupied greater

territories. Such comparison is captured in the new state-funded literature, official speeches and emblems. A publicized narrative serves the function of including or excluding certain traits of a soldier, it may trigger an ethnic meaning, physical requirements, class, gender, tribal identities and ideas about male qualities. Narratives can be rigid or fluid, and ethno-centric to a different degree. But narratives are also subject to change of boundaries of their favoritism or exclusiveness of various social groups<sup>12</sup>. A narrative about a national defender may be aimed at erasing sub-ethnic and inter-clan characteristics by replacing them with broader ones that contribute to the sovereignty of a titular nation. Primordial heroes set standards for a national soldier, defender of the nation and nationalism, and represent a coercive power of the state to galvanize soldiers for defense against foreign and domestic instabilities<sup>13</sup>. State elites will seek to link a contemporary conscript with his historical predecessors, who fought for unity, integrity, and dominance of the nation. But the link often risks fusing with ethno-centric ideas of protecting a cultural community identified with the narrative, as opposed to a physical entity within state borders. In this way, state narratives filter standards for military recruitment.

11 Adding historical ideals with an ethnic axis into such narratives is aimed at eradication of an undue intra-ethnic politization among military personnel. In the Central Asian context, a soldier from Osh would assimilate himself with Bishkek commandship in times of instability at the Kyrgyz southern frontier; a militiaman from Samarkand will know that he is linked to Ferghana and Tashkent security structures while executing orders of the central command.

12 With that, bringing in historical narrative at the present discourse is not the end product of ethnic nationalism. Ernest Gellner introduced the argument on the necessity for the state to retain a sufficient degree of capacity to publicize the importance of the historical experience and the ideals of nationalism, or the “high culture”<sup>14</sup>. Political elite’s efforts to reproduce historical knowledge might achieve various degrees of efficiency. The feeling of a “natural tie” to the state is reproduced through a vast variety of means<sup>15</sup>. It is not the richness of historical experience, or its antiquity that predetermines efficacy of modern narratives. Benedict Anderson’s notion of a “print-language”, referring to a mass community of readers able to access publicized ideas, is an important factor in promulgating national ideologies as well<sup>16</sup>. Increased literacy rates, industry, and communication contribute to homogenization of the mass thinking. Likewise, print-literacy, or knowledge of the same language among community of people, makes dominating ideas of the state accessible to masses. In this context, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan moved significantly further in disseminating the idea of nationalism, including narratives about national defenders. Thanks to sufficient economic capabilities, these states could encourage publication of various historical books about national historical heroism in titular and Russian languages. In contrast, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, although having developed heroic ideals, lag behind economically advanced neighbors in publicizing nationalism.

## National Defender’s Ideals

13 Central Asian pre-Soviet military and martial formations followed a distinct trait of organization regarding the logic of internal hierarchies and conscription traditions. There were no armies submitted to a centralized state, but divided into smaller groups among clans and settlements. Despite disparities with the pre-Soviet experience, Central Asian peripheral armies quickly inscribed many features of the Russian Tsarist and Soviet military organizations. These structural changes were largely preserved in the independence period<sup>17</sup>.

14 During the communist regime, the Central Asian militaries, formed entirely from the grassroots, represented a supra-national institution, where a “Soviet Man” was trained to protect the integrity of the “Soviet nation” despite his own ethnic origin. However, with a seeming façade of all-equality in the Soviet Army, military units outside Russia were under an intensive impact of russification. Starting from a regular soldier level up to officer corps, fluent knowledge of Russian language and military theory in Russian was an indicator of higher professionalism. This unavoidably led to the segregation of non-Russian ethnicities by Russian specialists with better chances for career growth and inferior treatment of regular draftees<sup>18</sup>.

Discrimination was stronger in non-Slavic militaries in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and some parts of Russia.

15 After the World War II, the share of ethnic conscripts participating in the Soviet Army increased. Uniting multiple ethnicities in the Soviet army was part of the policy of integration of ethnic communities, where Russian language remained the main medium of communication. But attempts to blend conscripts from various parts of the Soviet Union did not result in harmonized relations between Russians and indigenous soldiers and, moreover, were not a successful politics of building and promoting the identity of a Soviet patriot. Ethnic antagonism persisted in army structures and was reflected in cadre politics, ranks, and the extent of professionalism among conscripts. At times, military structures revealed the deepest ethnic cleavages if the Soviet army were to be zoomed to the level of inter-personal communications. The effects of strong russification in the military were especially evident in the first years of independence when the number of high-qualified Slavic specialists sharply decreased<sup>19</sup> and there was a general downfall in the quality of armed service.

16 During the seventy years of communism, to foster Soviet patriotism, Soviet authors were systematically mobilized to write on military topics<sup>20</sup>. Teams of Soviet writers produced a significant amount of work about the spirit of the Soviet patriotism, the communist people, and limitless love for “our Socialist Motherland” to prepare a young Soviet man to defend his country<sup>21</sup>. The ideological zeal behind the literal works was, as noted by Mark Hooker (1996), zero tolerance for shortcomings among the military, higher moral qualities, and a sense of responsibility for fulfilling soldiers’ Party and military duties<sup>22</sup>. Military topics saturated classic Soviet works during and after the World War II. Finding themes for the military prose was not difficult at that time as most of the authors had served in the army themselves: “Soviet literature created great images of the great heroes of the Revolution and the war”<sup>23</sup>. In the late 1970s, however, when memories of the war began to fade, it became more difficult to find “effective” themes. The focus shifted from war heroes to modern war technologies and achievements made by military technicians and engineers.

17 Today, the Soviet constructed strategies of appraisal of national heroes among society and military institutions are still practiced, whilst not intentionally, in all Central Asian states. Military is still regarded as one of the main sources of political indoctrination of the society, now shifted from Russian-centric to titular nationality-centric themes. Centrality of the military in perpetuating and dispersing the values of loyalty to the state remained after the dissolution of the Soviet rule, but primordial characters were added into such indoctrination. Although military institutions became a vivid example of states’ strive to nationalize them in order to distance from the Soviet past, the Central Asian states retained the same Soviet tools of cultivating patriotism, only new heroes were created by local academicians and political elites<sup>24</sup>.

18 For example, the concept “patriot of the Motherland”, the core oath of the Soviet Army, is transformed and adapted in the context of the present day, retaining the significance of the service but changing the connotation of the “motherland”<sup>25</sup>. Instead of a Soviet soldier defending the USSR against the foreign aggressor, the concept now signifies protection of the national territory from external and internal instabilities. As illustrated later in this article, patriotism was equated to affection to and respect for the nation as an ethnic entity and this fact itself discriminated promotion of cadres with non-titular ethnic backgrounds. In Uzbekistan, for instance, irrespective of professionalism, ethnic Uzbeks are informally granted better chances for career growth in military as well as other sectors<sup>26</sup>.

19 Similarly, the perception of an “otherwise-minded” (*inakomyshliashchie*, - Russ.), referring to those not supporting state ideology, was prevalent in the Soviet times. The concept represented a source of an accepted suppression of the “otherwise-minded” through legal means of violence: those doubting the communist ideology were punished as views outside the established socio-political structure. A similar attitude toward national ideology can be found in the region’s most illiberal states – Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Those who question the

validity of interpreted national history are considered as erroneous, not fitting the course of a purportedly 'organic' understanding of state-promulgated ideas.

20 Ethnic-based nationalism can also be deliberated from the way Central Asian presidents evaluate the significance of the Soviet past, depending on negative or positive attitude, how the Russian culture is acclimatized in the independence period. Coming into conflicting terms with the meaning of the Soviet influence, Uzbek, Turkmen, and partially Kazakh leaderships sought to find spirits of national heroes in the past disconnected from the Soviet or, more precisely, Russian influence in military affairs. For instance, the Uzbek President Islam Karimov openly refers to the Russian pervasive influence in the twentieth century as direct "colonialism", hinting at the unequal nature of the relationship between Russians and indigenous peoples<sup>27</sup>. Achieving success in imposing of an all-embracing ethno-nationalism in Turkmenistan, the former Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov sees the experience of the Soviet rule as a gloomy past with unwanted legacies that should be eradicated at the present. The Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev identifies Russian Tsarist and Soviet rule as a "people's prison" or "devastating demographic stabs" where every nationality, including Russian, was equally oppressed by the communist regime<sup>28</sup>. In contrast, Kyrgyz and Tajik leaders emphasize the importance of the shared history with Russia and its positive implications at the present times.

21 There is an ample diversity of historical heroes among the Central Asian peoples from various time periods that fought to protect native lands and people. The most challenging task that the Central Asian scholars encountered in writing books about national characters of historical heroes was that in the pre-Soviet time no contemporary ethnic group in the region had a clearly defined territory or a recognized state-hood. The Central Asian population was divided into khanates comprised of clans and tribes that were subject to continuous reshaping, synthesis and partition, prosperity and impoverishment. Likewise, many of these divisions within ethnic groups, especially among nomadic people, evidenced their own micro-experiences of historical heroism. Despite centuries of interconnected histories among the Central Asian peoples, there is no single story told twice by the region's political elites. Instead, national characters depicted in ideologies seem to have been developed disjointedly from each other in the pre-Soviet period. In addition to differences between states' narratives on national heroism, historical epochs chosen by political elites in their ideologies also do not match. Political elites or state leaders develop the post-Soviet literature on national heroism and military genesis in the Central Asian states by emphasizing ethnic and cultural uniqueness against the neighboring nations.

22 In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, states with more open political systems, there are noticeable debates between academic and political circles on the importance of historical aspects that could serve as prototypes in today's ideologies<sup>29</sup>. Some pluralism of prototypes is a sign of decentralized discourse about states' military history and history in general. Such pluralism can be either competing or complementing in the elite's efforts to disperse ideals about a national defender in armies and among students. Competition on what represents the primary elements of the "high culture" arises among political circles and then dispatches to academic factions in order to fill political discourse with scientific knowledge. From the example of Tajikistan, it is seen that secular and religious political actors have competing interpretations of the same historical era in constructing national ideological projects. Both the Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov and the religious opposition refer to the cult of an Islamic Ismaili Samani. The government emphasizes the importance of the Tajik statehood during the Samani period (819-999), while the opposition interprets it as a hallmark of Islam for the Tajiks<sup>30</sup>.

23 Interpretive pluralism about historical experiences may also acquire a healthy complementarity among academic circles. Kazakhstan is an example of a rich academic reproduction of historical narratives on national military crafts. Despite such pluralism in ideas about national heroes, there is no domination of a single ancestor but scholars published about a myriad of genuine baatyr (heroes) who mastered the art of nomadic military. In Kyrgyzstan, there is a mixed situation of competition and complementation of historical knowledge. In the 1990s, Kyrgyz political elites tried to promote a number of historical figures, such as Baitik,

Shabdan baatyr, Semetei and Seitek. But even a semi-mythic hero Manas from a cognominal epic narration actively promoted by the former Kyrgyz president Askar Akayev failed to gather support among non-Kyrgyz and urban residents. Such dynamics in the interpretation of historical knowledge did not exclude an ethno-centric grip of state nationalism. Although Kazakh and Kyrgyz political elites did not promote ethnic nationalism as insistently as their counterparts in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the discourse was nevertheless maintained in the orbit of titular ethnicities.

## Ideal National Defender vs. Ideal Military Reform

- 24 The transformation of conscript's motivation in army service to a sense of a professional occupation rather than a patriotic mission is one of the major shifts in the Western military organization in the late twentieth century<sup>31</sup>. Such status is encouraged by material values at the first place, and not ideational. As the state attains its administrative capacities, nationalism diminishes, and the role of culture and history steps aside from primary factors of national identity. In other words, narratives will fade in modernity as fostering of ethnic feelings contradicts the very notion of a post-modern military, a volunteer army, and a professional soldier<sup>32</sup>. As Cynthia Enloe puts it, "the Scottish soldier will become merely a soldier; his kilt will be traded in for khaki"<sup>33</sup>. Therefore nationalist states with ethno-centric ideas about the military will not be able to transform the army into all-volunteer institution in the concepts' genuine meaning. As maintained by Stephen Rosen, if the military personnel is intentionally formed by a dominating ethnicity, this signifies the state's objective to foster loyalty to an ethnic-state as opposed to loyalty to a nation-state<sup>34</sup>.
- 25 In the late 1990s, all Central Asian states declared their wish to transform national armies from Soviet-based structures into Western-inspired ones. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and, partly, Uzbekistan officially declared their intentions to transform labor-intensive armies into professional and voluntary entities. This included reformation of mass armies into small and mobile forces, professionally trained and equipped with modern technologies that would be able to react rapidly and operate in mountainous areas<sup>35</sup>. However, these announcements came before the political elites thought about revising national ideologies with dominant ethno-nationalist elements. Because of this inconsistency, despite available funds, international assistance or political elites' rhetoric, national armies still risk to be divided along ethnic margins. Put differently, as long as Amir Temur, Samani and other masculinities dominate the discourse on national ideology, local armies will inevitably reflect upon ethno-nationalist elements of these narratives.
- 26 In the worst case, the Central Asian states' efforts to enhance service conditions of the army, its technological provision, and the quality of professional training might lead to even greater divides and thus intensify competitiveness between military personnel belonging to a majority or minority ethnic group. One solution to such inevitable ethnic discrimination in the army could be a universal conscription<sup>36</sup>. Since the army is a political entity in each Central Asian state and an important public institution, all groups of society and every ethnicity must be equally involved in the political process in the first years of the independence period. With that, the Central Asian military institutions should not recoil from reforming their internal structures according to international standards.

## Central Asian Baatyr<sup>37</sup> Meet Modernity

- 27 The following analysis of each Central Asian states' narratives about historical heroes within national ideologies will focus on a set of specific features. First, symbolic and practical importance of national languages' statuses should not be underestimated when discussing the constructed image of a contemporary soldier. In every Central Asian state national history and titular language were set as compulsory in education systems. It is now required for Central Asian students to learn national languages and pass state exams on national histories. Notions of historical heroism are portrayed as naturally and directly representing the current society, thus uniting it and marking cultural and physical boundaries. All military medals and oath are publicized primarily in the national language.

- 28 Second, a Central Asian soldier is a secular or quasi-religious actor. In most states, a national hero usually demarcates the border between religious personality and a secular actor. The importance of Islam in rewritten military histories is not assigned a central position because religion represents a competing orientation of loyalty to incumbent political elites. Religious affluence of historical figures is mentioned, but not brought to the foreground. In Uzbekistan, where problems with radical forms of religious behavior were especially acute, Ulugbek and Amir Temur stand as non-religious heroes. In Tajikistan, this contour is rather blurred although the role of religious values is in the heart of government-opposition conflict.
- 29 Third, military is a deeply masculine institution in the Central Asian states, similar to the education sector that is typically a female occupation. Ideals about a male – defender and a warrior – therefore target male population and traditionally masculine institutions such as the law-enforcement agencies and security structures. With some exceptions in Kazakhstan, absolute male majority represents the military. All men after reaching of age must complete minimal military training.

## Kazakhstan

- 30 Among other Central Asian states, Kazakhstan published an outstanding quantity of books with historical insights on Kazakh *batyrs*, military symbolism in the pre-Soviet times, and descriptions of major historical battles<sup>38</sup>. According to Kazakhstani historians, the central motivation for academic inquiry of former times lays in bringing back the affluence of historical experience in today's development of military institutions<sup>39</sup>. Military history of Kazakhs, they argue, contains ample records of prominent warriors from different tribes and pre-Soviet time. Among them Abylaikhan (1711-1780), Malaisary-batyr (XVII century), Agibai-batyr (1802-1885) and Kenesary Kasymov (1847) who acted against seizure of the Kazakhs by Djungars and Tsarist Russia, fought for unification of all Kazakhs, national integrity and prosperity<sup>40</sup>. Starting from the 2000s a great deal of attention was paid to Altyn Adam, an image developed on the basis of historical excavation of golden outfit of an unknown warrior near Almaty in 1969.
- 31 The increase of such academic and scholarly participation in heralding the importance of the past in the modern times would not have been possible without some directives and financial support from the Kazakh government. The state deliberately linked military and academic elites and encouraged development of a mutual relationship. In addition to supporting literary contribution to the military affairs, the government fostered development of the military science. Images and statues of Altyn Adam are posted across public places, including security structures. With that, however, insignificant amount of historical literature has been published on Altyn Adam's historical importance for the Kazak people.
- 32 The modern Kazakh military literature in Kazakhstan never prioritized the cult of a single dominant commander of the past or certain historical period as a blueprint for the present day. Although Nazarbayev is subtly wavering between the rhetoric of ethnic-nationalism and civic-based state ideology and is inclined towards the former by showing a greater degree of segregation of ethnic minorities<sup>41</sup>, the Kazakh government does not encourage a prototype of a unifying ethno-centric character among military structures. The literature on the Kazakh military emphasizes historical military system of Asian settled and nomadic communities as one of the most progressive in the Middle Ages. It portrays how the institution of military power was the focal point of functioning of Turkic nomadic tribes. Accordingly, depending on military capability, a given tribe could perpetuate over generations. This historical experience provides a rich background for elaborations about the cultural and historical significance of the armed forces in the endurance of the modern Central Asian nations: nomadic life mode allowed acquiring a unique system of warfare thanks to which nomads were able to attain military superiority over settled peoples<sup>42</sup>. Nomads' military organization was an indispensable element of understanding their lifestyle, statehood, and survival of the Kazakh ethnos through centuries.
- 33 Some Kazakh authors emphasize that traditionally, possession of weapons among nomads was at the center of survival of tribes and individuals. Ability to use weaponry was a requisite for

all male population at all times, including in everyday life. Khans and tribe leaders ruled based on military potential of their tribes. In particular, the art of hunting on wild and gregarious animals was indicative of the development of military art among nomads' tribal divisions. To a certain extent, hunting represented a military training for males with wealthy backgrounds<sup>43</sup>.  
 34 However, Nazarbayev appeals for not associating the modern national mentality with nomadic culture that was prevalent until the late nineteenth century on the territory of modern Kazakhstan<sup>44</sup>. Because nomadic culture has little to contribute to the idea of a unified modern statehood, the president emphasizes that for many centuries local settled communities of people reinforced the Kazakh national identity<sup>45</sup>. Accordingly, preservation of cultural values, the language and religion in the pre- and Soviet existence of the Kazakh ethnicity testifies its maturity and ability to function as a civilized community. Similarly, former Kyrgyz president Askar Akayev was unresponsive to the nomadic past of ethnic Kyrgyz, bringing to the popular attention only selective instrumental examples of this culture.

## Kyrgyzstan

35 President Akayev<sup>46</sup> maintained a balance between different ideological projects from "Kyrgyzstan is our common home" that called for unification of different ethnic groups in the country to "Manas-1,000", "Osh-3,000", and "2,200 Years of the Kyrgyz Statehood" introducing historically important events into political discourse. In the mid 1990s, the Manas ideals, based on the world's longest epic narration, were placed at the center of advancement of the national ideology. A special governmental committee on cultural and educational affairs modified seven maxims mentioned in the epic to include them into the official state ideology. Akayev emphasized the importance of Manas in his public openings and speeches, and authored a book entirely dedicated to the epic's value in Kyrgyzstan's statehood<sup>47</sup>. A special state commission was formed to encourage revival of the popular epic among Kyrgyz citizens and promote it among the international public.

36 For the Kyrgyz government the Manas epic represented a comfortable choice to be laid as a national ideological groundwork. The epic captures the history of major inter-tribal and inter-ethnic battles and victories, delineates foes and friends of the Kyrgyz ethnos and reflects philosophy of a national unity, as well as heroic actions of the main character and his followers. Manas is a collective image of a male, who is a warrior, defender of the motherland, exemplary son, husband and a father. The epic depicts the Kyrgyz people's life style and the value of inter-personal relations. The seven maxims captured in the epic were not a mere tool for reconstruction of a national self-image among the Kyrgyz, but called for generalized principles of ethnic tolerance, respect for the elder and care for younger generations, as well as other positive social relations. The stimulus of the Manas ideals in the military is evident from the new collection of medals and honorary titles introduced in the 1990s. From the first lines of the epic, the Manas character seems to provide an ultimate epitome of a national soldier in the modern army:

Running when seeing an enemy,  
 Fast like whirlwind,  
 The man ferocious like a tiger  
 has passed  
 Who was it? If not the hero?

37 Despite the epic's evident richness of ethno-centered symbols and potential value for developing national consciousness, neither the maxims, nor the epic itself managed to gain wide consent of the public. Manas is a profoundly ethno-centric identification of patriotism, it contains a spirit of defending the Kyrgyz nation from outsiders and befriending with the neighboring nationalities. Although the name Manas was introduced in very Kyrgyz city to rename main streets and buildings, the government organized a large celebration in 1995 dedicated to the epic, and young "*manaschy*" (people who know the epic by heart) received state scholarships, the ideals of Manas did not acclimatize among the wider public, especially in the Russian-speaking capital Bishkek. The ideology of Manas was associated

with a state-imposed idea and unnatural development of the contemporary national identity among russified public and ethnic minorities. The epic was perceived rather as an ethnically discriminating story, not relevant at the present day.

38 One reason why *Manas* was not successful in the society is the multiethnic composition of the Kyrgyz population especially in urban areas where education levels were traditionally higher. The ideology based on *Manas* encouraged the usage of the Kyrgyz language and return to the practices of national traditions. As an ethno-centric ideology, it raised an open discontent among Russians, lowered their trust in the state and, in some cases, was a primary reason for emigrating from Kyrgyzstan. The civic-based policy “Kyrgyzstan is our common home” was primarily directed at significant minorities of Russian-speaking and Uzbek population. A competitive ideology to *Manas*, it seemed to have gained more popularity. Diverging from pure forms of a nationalist state where ethnic minorities would have to follow the dominant culture of the titular nationality, the policy paid off Akayev’s regime by Russian president Vladimir Putin’s political support.

39 However, attempts to embrace the feelings of all ethnic groups into the common idea about the Kyrgyz statehood inevitably exacerbated neo-nationalist politicized movements in the country. Predominantly villagers and some parliamentarians voiced their critique, emphasizing the crucial mistake of giving up the intention to recall the important past in order to build a stable future<sup>48</sup>. Such a resistance to civic-based nationalism confirmed that there was a strong resistance among some political elites against Akayev’s liberal ideas and there existed conservative views on what must constitute national ideological beliefs. Ultra-nationalist politicians called for the return of Kyrgyz cultural and religious traditions through the cults of historical personas and periods. For instance, Dastan Sarygulov, a well-known politician and businessman, is an active propagator of the pre-Islamic Tengrian period<sup>49</sup>. Akayev also felt pressure from the Uzbek minority in southern parts of the country. Celebration of “Osh-3000” and separation of Batken oblast from Osh oblast in the aftermath of conflicts with guerillas of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan pointed at the government’s concern with southern parts of the country.

40 In sum, the cases of Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyzstan show that civic-based ideology will lack a central persona, but will nevertheless venerate notable heroic images. And on the contrary, presence of a vivid image of a historical individual will entail highly ethno-centric interpretation of state ideology among local minority groups, such as the Russian and Uzbek communities.

## Tajikistan

41 The experience of the Tajik army deviates from other Central Asian states. It is a highly complicated case of intermixed directions of ideological thinking, where for a long time the government defied to play a leading role<sup>50</sup>. The aftermath of the 1992-1997 civil war undermined formation of coherent ideology among the army personnel. The Tajik armed forces were structured according to their submission to individual leaders in the government, opposition party, or the president. For a few years after the end of the civil war, state-cultivated sense of patriotism remained to be a marginal concept for a Tajik soldier<sup>51</sup>. Understanding of professionalism among Tajik soldiers was interconnected with their submission to high-ranking officials. As there was no defined control over the military structures formed in the independence period in Tajikistan that would follow constitutional division of powers, a dominating national idea was also stagnant in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The warfare experience among Tajik militants unavoidably cultivated stronger identities of clan divisions. But loyalties among military personnel did not overlap with the state-maintained ideology of Samani’s heroism.

42 Since the late 1990s, the Tajik government appealed to different historical periods as being important in the present day reality<sup>52</sup>. The government was appraising the period of Zoroastrism as an alternative religious-political project to Islam. The project on Zoroastrism was bound to fail for its historical distance and abstract symbols that offered only a loose

- connection with the modern Tajik identity. Partly because records of the Zoroastrian period are scarce and vague, the Tajik government was rather unsuccessful in promoting the idea<sup>53</sup>.
- 43 In the 2000s, however, the government began institutionalizing the symbols representing the period of Ismail Samani ruler. The period of Samani in 819-1005, the rule of Tajik empire in the Central Asian region with the capital in Bukhara, is remembered in history as a great Islamic dynasty<sup>54</sup>. The government's attempt to bring in the memory of the Samani epoch symbolized its attempt to accentuate the importance of the strong Tajik statehood that politically dominated in the region. In 2001 the Tajik government initiated a celebration of 1,100th anniversary of Samani Empire. Rakhmonov's official stance captured that "Samanids epoch – golden age of Tajiks – enlightens thousands years of their history", as "there emerged the idea working for the uniting of Tajiks"<sup>55</sup>.
- 44 In parallel, the IRP, representing a religious alliance of anti-governmental forces favors the Samanids' epoch to link it with the current religious identities. However, this syncretic competition lasted only until the parliamentary elections in February 2005 when the IRP managed to win only two seats. The elections signified that the Rakhmonov's Peoples' Democratic Party, enjoying access to public administrative resources, was able to suppress other political parties.
- 45 For Tajikistan, revival of historical narratives inevitably raises grievance and feeling of discontent with the fact that the key historical cities of Samani dynasty period, Samarkand and Bukhara, today are parts of Uzbekistan<sup>56</sup>. Not only historical memories link the Tajiks with these places, but also family ties were established since the Soviet times.
- 46 Thus, Tajikistan's experience illustrates that incoherence in public institutions hinders the production and successfulness of any strong ideological idea.

## Uzbekistan

- 47 After the collapse of the Soviet regime, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan underwent the most dramatic changes in language policies, education system, and governmental structures<sup>57</sup>. But most importantly, the Uzbek and Turkmen leaderships were the most zealous in identifying the Soviet history as a period of Russian colonialism. Both states' politics of nationalism, in contrast with Kazakhstan, and partly Kyrgyzstan where the Russian minority is larger, was deep-rooted in ethnic identities. In Uzbekistan, even the country's largest Tajik minority was barred from possible restoration of ethnic identities in the post-Soviet period, let alone a small Russian minority that felt increasingly marginalized in the 1990s. Karimov with his record saying "One nation, two languages" addressed the Tajiks who preserved the language after decades of living on the Uzbek territory to assimilate with the dominant ethnicity.
- 48 The cults of historical figures of Amir Tamur (Tamerlane) and Ulughbek were taken as modern heroes to set the beginning of Uzbek national consciousness, the deep self-identification as a coherent entity. Interestingly, the ideals of Timur times in the 14th century considerably overlap with important historical records of all other Central Asian states. Any regional ethnic group can eventually build a link between that historical period and its present statehood<sup>58</sup>. This type of usurpation of important historical events under the national banner allowed the Uzbek government constructing a symbolic image of cultural superiority among its regional neighbors. As Karimov writes in his book on Uzbekistan's future development:
- "Our great ancestors – Imam Bukhari, At-Termizi, Naqshband, Ahmad Yassavi, Al-Khorezmi, Beruni, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Amir Temur (Tamerlane), Ulughbek, Babur (the first Mogul Emperor of India) and many others – have greatly contributed to the development of our national culture. They became the national pride of our people... Only after gaining independence could we render proper veneration to and appraisal of our great ancestor"<sup>59</sup>.
- 49 Other steps towards abolition of the influences of the Soviet past besides rewriting the history, was changing the Uzbek alphabet from Cyrillic into the Latin script. The entire system of administrative documentation was translated into Uzbek within a decade. The language policy and rewriting of history by openly blaming the legacies of the Soviet period in current problems in the country influenced the new generation of Uzbeks who are less fluent in Russian and can only use the Latin script. Change of scripts complicated inter-

state communications, exchange of documents and represented a problem for Uzbekistan's neighbors. Uzbekistan's imposition of Amir Timur ideals is strong across national military institutions. Military titles, orders and medals approved in the beginning of 1990s incorporated various "nationalized" labels such as "Hero of Uzbekistan" (*Uzbekiston Kahramoni*), "Golden Star" (*Altyn Ulduz*), "Independence" (*Mustalilik*), "Friendship" (*Dostlik*), "Courage" (*Jasorat*) and "Glory" (*Shuhrat*). "Amir Temur" was approved as a military medal in 1996.

50 Uzbekistan's military became one of the means for the state to perpetuate the ideas of a strong Uzbek nation and identify threats to the national integrity. The power of national military institutions supersedes the importance of any other public formation and is identified as the main deposit of the state's stability. Strong military that attracts the country's best men turned into the core constituency of the national integrity idea:

"The objective should be the gradual creation of a professional army and air force with adequately trained fighters, loyal to their nation, and capable of defending the honor of the Motherland to the end... It is necessary to learn from and assimilate the military arts of our great ancestors: Jalaluddin Manghuberdi, Timur Malik, Amir Timur, Babur and others... We need a military training system that produces physically and morally strong members of our society, patriots of their Motherland, who have mastered values of our nation"<sup>60</sup>.

51 Karimov distinguished four main factors of the armed forces' efficiency in the late 1990s. "Patriot of the motherland" and physically fit soldiers are the primary source of successful functioning of the military<sup>61</sup>. The quality of the armament and availability of sophisticated weaponry is the second important factor. The third factor of the state's defensive capability is the military infrastructure and adequate conditions for national troops to carry out their service. And fourthly, Karimov insists that in order for the military to become a self-sufficient institution, it is imperative to encourage the development of other related industries that can help to facilitate the country's defensive capability. He cites that in line with concentration of the economy around the military, constructing and executing the security policy of the state "requires the giving up of individual plans by every agency and program for the promotion of separate elements of defensive capability..."<sup>62</sup>.

52 Uzbekistan differs drastically from the experience of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Among a plurality of heroes, particular ones were especially emphasized by the state. An ideological project concentrates on one historical character and illustrates the authoritarianism of Karimov's rule.

## Turkmenistan

53 Turkmenistan stands out as an extreme case of strong ethno-centric nationalism with its portrayal of features of former president Saparmurat Niyazov's personality cult. In his own book *Rukhnama*, Niyazov emphasized the historical significance of Oguz khan (VII-VIII). However, any historical account on Turkmen khans or warriors was overshadowed by portrayals of president's own achievements and ideas<sup>63</sup>. By publishing *Rukhnama*, the Turkmen leader became a national monopolist in interpreting historical knowledge. Especially younger generations, being cut out of any alternative sources of information, became increasingly indoctrinated with the *Rukhnama* principles. In worst cases, *Rukhnama* is studied up to eight hours a week in schools<sup>64</sup>. The extent of penetration of the *Rukhnama* into the daily life of the citizens is perhaps among the most extreme in the experience of the world's modern states<sup>65</sup>. Similarly, a Turkmen soldier's professionalism is measured by the perfection of his knowledge of *Rukhnama*. Unlike other Central Asian states, Niyazov's own cult did not represent a warrior.

54 In the 2000s, Niyazov increased the number of military personnel recruit them across virtually all public institutions. Tens of thousands of public workers with still Soviet professional training in medicine, sciences, and engineering were replaced by army conscripts. In addition to a rapidly decreasing level of professionalism among young people, older Soviet specialists were also barred from their normal occupations. Since 2002-2003, Niyazov notably increased military expenditures up to \$200 million and additional \$80 million in 2004. The army

personnel doubled, amounting to total 200,000 conscripts, the highest number in Central Asia<sup>66</sup>.

55 The relative ease with which the Turkmen leader was implementing changes in public structures suggested that he had the capacity to alter people's political and social lives with hardly any limits. Health and education sectors were continuously demobilized by the government in the last decade, but military institutions, as well as Turkmenbashi's publishing received increased governmental investment. Notably, unlike in other Central Asian states, Turkmenbashi considered the present time to be the most decisive in the nation's development.

## Conclusion: Narratives and the State

56 Problematic domestic sovereignties and rapid mobilization of non-state violent actors make the development of strong military especially decisive for the Central Asian states' functioning. Political elites' mounting insecurity for their own hold on power and control of state territory pushed them to seek loyalties among native ethnic communities. By cultivating ideals of a historical hero, who is directly or indirectly linked to a modern soldier, Central Asian political elites create a sense of patriotism and loyalty to themselves and to the state. These ideals usually portray historical figures as the main symbols of state's security and genuine patriotism. The more a state brings in ethnic undertones into national ideology, the more it feels insecure because of the lack of authority among its citizenry, ineffective political institutions, and unclear national borders<sup>67</sup>. By contrast, if political elites are not challenged domestically by insurgent groups, their political legitimacy is unquestioned and they maintain control over resources within indisputable national territory, they will be preoccupied with "qualitative" changes in the military such as enhancement of technological equipment and Western-style professional training.

57 Deducting the impact of ethnic nationalism to a soldier level, ethno-centered ideas will promote heroism of a single historical character that is potentially discriminatory against ethnic minorities. In this case, military institutions are designed to protect the titular nation and not the citizenry at border areas and conflict situations. The military personnel are intentionally structured by a single ethnic group, often not reflecting the real constitution of society. There are dominating narratives about particular historical warriors in all Central Asian states. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are the extreme cases of states' strong capacity to disperse nationalism across military institutions. Rukhnama and stories about Amir Temur are published in the sufficient amounts so every Turkmen or Uzbek citizen will be able to read the story, if he or she speaks the national language. In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, attempts to center ideals of a historical persona in the contemporary soldier's professional ideology were rather failed activities due to these states' weak capacities to reproduce ideas in a print language and a generally low economic and political strength of the governing elites. Kazakh political elites have produced an outstanding amount of literature on military history and no single historical persona seems to dominate. Against this background, Kazakhstan has achieved the region's most outstanding military reforms in the last decade.

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### Endnotes

1 Rogers Brubaker, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account", *Theory and Society*, # 23, pp. 47-78, 1994.

2 Here, the concept of "high culture" is used along with Ernest Gellner's definition. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1983; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991.

3 In Morris Janowitz, *Military Institutions and Coercion in the Developing Nation*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 156.

5 This is also one of Janowitz's central arguments on military importance in state-building process.

- 6 Interview with Tajik expert, head of Shark research center, Saodat Olimova, Dushanbe, March 2004.
- 7 Kerry Longhurst, "The Concept of Strategic Culture", in G. Kuemmel and Andreas D. Pruefert (eds.), *Military Sociology*, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2000.
- 8 In the literature, it is often referred to a "fine-tuning" or "fundamental changes", in *Ibid.*
- 9 From Bourdieu's socialized subjectivity of knowledge "*habitus*"; Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education Society and Culture*, Stanford: Sage, 1977.
- 10 Janowitz, *Op. Cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 157-59.
- 11 Personal communication with Uzbek military experts. Although discrimination along ethnic origins exists in most Central Asian armies, the trend is poorly researched by regional scholars and rarely addressed by local experts in a systematic manner.
- 12 Enloe talks about boundaries in states' recruitment policy of various ethnicities. As an example, Enloe mentions the Soviet Union where ethnic homogeneity of the ruling elite impacted conscription patterns among other ethnicities. Although there were some ethnic mixtures in the Soviet Army, the central control belonged to Russians. Cynthia H. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldier: State Security in Divided Societies*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980, p. 17.
- 13 Argued by Enloe, *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- 14 Ernest Gellner, *Nation and Nationalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- 15 Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and Ethnicity", *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 19, 1993, p. 222; John Anderson, "Constitutional Development in Central Asia", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 16, # 3, 1997.
- 16 Anderson, *Op. Cit.*, Ref. 2, p. 143.
- 17 Abdirov Zh. et al, *Istoricheskii opyt zashchity otechestva: Voennaya istoriya Kazakhstana*, Almaty: National Academy of Science, 1999; Aibolat K. Kushkumbaev, *Military Affairs of the Kazakhs in the XVIIth - XVIIIth Centuries*, Almaty: Daik-Press, 2001.
- 18 Anthony Clayton, "Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Soviet Army, 1979-91", in Ninth Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalis, London School of Economics: Conflict Studies Research Center, 1999.
- 19 The number of draftees from among indigenous ethnicities remained low until the late 1930s. Slavs constituted the overwhelming majority in the Soviet Army was throughout the Soviet leadership. In 1970s the draft pool in the Soviet Army comprised of 74% Slavs, 13% Muslims from different nationalities and 13 other groups. The percentage of Slavs decreased in the 1980s, but still remained the majority throughout the Soviet period. According to other sources, the percentage of conscripts of Caucasus nationalities represented up to one third of the total number.
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- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 24 It should be noted that fifteen years after receiving independence, both academicians and political elites are still largely comprised of Soviet educated individuals.
- 25 In the Russian language there are *Rodina* (Motherland) and *Otechestvo* (Fatherland), the latter is used more often in the context of the Second World War.
- 26 Taras Kuzio, "Soviet-Era Uzbek Elites Erase Russia from National Identity", *EurasiaNet*, April 20, 2002.
- 27 Islam Karimov, *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997.
- 28 Nursultan Nazarbaev, *My stroim novoe gosudarstvo*, Moscow: Paleya-Mishin, 2000, pp. 266-271.
- 29 For instance, in Kyrgyzstan, Dastan Sarygulov has been very active in promoting the period of Tengrism. His ideas were hardly supported in the state or society, but nevertheless provoked widespread discussions.
- 30 Polat Shozimov, "Tajikistan's 'Year of Aryan Civilization' and the Competition of Ideologies", *Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst*, 5 October 2005.
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- 32 Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Practice of Civil-Military Relations*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957; Samuel Huntington, “Power Expertise and the Military Profession”, *Daedalus*, Vol. 92, 1963, pp. 785-807.
- 33 Enloe, *Op. Cit.*, Ref 12, p. 2.
- 34 Stephen Peter Rosen, “Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters (in Does Strategic Culture Matter?)”, *International Security*, Vol. 19, # 4, 1995, pp. 5-31.
- 35 The 1999-2000 clashes between Kyrgyz border guards with guerillas of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan motivated the Central Asian governments to reform large and immobile military institution into smaller and decentralized groups which would be able to mobilize quickly and work at difficult conditions in mountain ranges.
- 36 As suggested by Enloe, *Op. Cit.*, Ref. 12, p. 51.
- 37 Kyrgyz translation of “knights” or “heroes”, varies in all Central Asian languages: *batyr* in Kazakh, *baatyr* in Kyrgyz, and *botir* in Uzbek.
- 38 Abdirov Zh. et al, *Op. Cit.*, Ref. 17; Kushkumbaev, *Op. Cit.*, Ref. 17.
- 39 Abdirov Zh. et al, *Op. Cit.*, Ref. 17, p. 346.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- 41 Martha B. Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment, 2002.
- 42 Kushkumbaev, *Op. Cit.*, Ref. 17.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 34. For instance, there were several stages in hunting resembling offensive and defensive military actions distributed among pathfinders fulfilling the function of scouting, *gazarchi* – experts in local landscape, raid groups and leaders. Hunting techniques evolved over centuries structured the behavior of nomadic warriors and cultivated a war style perceived as hunting. The duration of hunting lasted for months and involved male population. Hunters were organized in hierarchical groups with a flexible system of remuneration and punishments for individual and group performances. The activity also incorporated symbolic traditionalism such as nominal participation of khans in commencing hunting season with throwing the first arrow ritual. Or, for instance, loosing a tribal flag was considered as a heinous sin in military actions.
- 44 Nazarbayev, *Op. Cit.*, Ref. 28, p. 266.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 386.
- 46 Although this article was written after the regime change in Kyrgyzstan, the new government has not taken any distinct nationalist policy.
- 47 Askar Akayev, *Kyrgyzskaya gosudarstvennost' i narodnyi epos Manas*, Bishkek: Uchkun, 2002.
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- 49 Katarina Radzhivovskaya, “Interview with Dastan Sarygulov 'Ot tengrianstva v gosudarstvennuy doktrinu Kirgizii mogli by voit...’”, *Belyi Parohod*, 25 July 2005.
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- 59 Karimov, *Op. Cit.*, Ref. 28, p. 87.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

63 Rukhnama text at [www.rukhnama.com](http://www.rukhnama.com)

64 International Crisis Group, *Repression and Regression in Turkmenistan: A New International Strategy*, Osh/Brussels, 2004.

65 *Ibid.*

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67 Enloe, *Op.Cit.*, Ref. 12, p. 20.

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## Abstract

This article examines the relationship between narratives propagated by the state about a historical national hero and a contemporary soldier's professional ideology in the post-Soviet Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan). It argues that while elite-maintained mass publishing of cohesive narratives about a vividly drawn historical persona, male and warrior, trigger at raising a loyal soldier unified with his compatriots on the basis of cultural values and objects of loyalty, state elites seek to link a contemporary army recruit with his historical predecessors who fought for unity, integrity, and dominance of the nation. But the link inevitably merges with ethno-centric ideas of protecting the cultural community identified with the narrative, as opposed to a physical entity within the state borders. State elites reinforce the significance of military experience of the titular ethnic entity in accordance with their own political interests. Narratives about a national defender articulate what the political elites expect from the military service but are restrained from depicting in official policy documents. In order to reach effective results, the Central Asian states retained the same Soviet tools of cultivating patriotism as the basis for the army's internal discipline, but primordial characters have also been incorporated into the indoctrination.

**Keywords** : Ideology, Central Asian Armies, Nationalism, Heroes

**Research Fields** : Political Science, Sociology

**Countries** : Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan