

LEADER IDEOLOGY IN POST-SOVIET TAJIKISTAN

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Introduction

Ideology is one of the foundations of authoritative regimes and forms the image of their leaders. Using Uzbekistan as an example, A. March comes to the conclusion that the ideological system imposed by the state has a tangible impact on society, even one that has already lived at one time under the communist ideology.¹ Based on an analysis of several special features of the development of the post-Communist countries (and several others), the conclusion is drawn that during a political regime change, the population can be ideologically “reset.” After a new ideology has been repeatedly fed to the people over the span of several years, it becomes a conscious or subconscious element of society’s mindset.² Thus ide-

ology plays a significant role in state- and nation-building, particular after the formation of new states or territorial units.

The new system forms in several interdependent dimensions. The first, chronologically, is historical ideology. The existence of a historical past that goes back into antiquity sets a nation or nationality above others (usually its neighbors). Research studies in this area are leading to the rapid development of archeology and myth creation about antiquity. Another goal of historical ideology is searching for the most significant periods in history of a certain territory (or nation) which are frequently associated with certain outstanding personalities: “great” nations are regarded as the predecessors of present-day territorial units, and heroes are associated with the leaders of the most recent times (presidents or monarchs),

¹ See: A. March, “From Leninism to Karimovism: Hegemony, Ideology, and Authoritarian Legitimation,” in: *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 19, Issue 4, 2003, p. 309.

² Ideological frameworks also exist (albeit in vaguer form) in the so-called democratic regimes of Europe. Examples are a certain kind of anti-Islamic ideology, advancing the ideology of a democratic society, and so on. In demo-

cratic countries there is usually no single ideological system that might be spread by monopolized mass media, as is the case in authoritarian regimes.

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which largely determines the ideology of modern states.

As early as Soviet times, studies of the ancient historical past turned into a “struggle over the oldest settlement” in this or another Central Asian republic, whereby the number of celebrations in honor of “the founding of a City” has only increased in the post-Soviet era. In this way, based on the “latest studies,” the history of several towns proved older than people thought.

Building a modern nation is the second dimension of the ideological system (based on its national and territorial past), which frequently leads to denial of the previous regime. In this way, such “modernization” in post-Soviet countries is turning into denial of the Soviet regime and is manifested differently in each of them. Attempts are being made to introduce modern power institutions and advanced technology (often at any cost), rebuild cities (mainly capitals), democratize society (keeping in mind local national traits), and incorporate other innovations; the regime strives to become “modern.”

These ways of forming a new system lead to the people identifying the presidents of the new states with historical heroes and sometimes idolizing them (as in the case of the first Turkmen presi-

dent).³ Presidents become the guarantors of contemporary development and stability, which in the conditions of the authoritarian regimes of Central Asia (CA) promotes the emergence of personality cults.

This article will take a look at these phenomena (the personality cult and its development) based on the example of Tajikistan. An analysis will be conducted of the political portrait of Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov (Rakhmon) drawn by his ideologists and “court” journalists on the pages of official publications. Particular attention will be given to his ancestry and a description of his personality and activity during his time as a statesman. Running ahead, it can be noted that a certain idealized virtual portrait of president Rakhmon has been created in the sources used.

³ See my previous works on Turkmen ideology: S. Horák, S. Riazanova, “Mifologičeskoe i religioznoe v ideologii postsovetского Turkmenistana,” in: *Politeks*, No. 2, 2006, pp. 323-331; S. Horák, “Mify velikogo Turkmenbashi,” in: *Vestnik Evrazii—Acta Eurasica*, No. 2 (28), 2005, pp. 105-133; Idem, “Portret prezidenta Turkmenbashi kak osnova turkmenskogo rezhima,” in: *Vestnik Evrazii—Acta Eurasica*, No. 3, 2007, pp. 139-165. For more on the ideology of post-Niyazov Turkmenistan, see S. Horák, J. Šír, “Dismantling Totalitarianism? Turkmenistan under Berdymuhamedov,” in: *Silk Road Studies Paper. Central Asia and The Caucasus Institute — Silk Road Studies Program*, Washington, Stockholm, March 2009, pp. 32-43.

The Ancestry and Personal Traits of Emomali Rakhmon

The formation of Rakhmon’s present-day image is closely associated with his legendary predecessors. The future president grew up in a peasant family that lived a simple life. Many people in Dangara (Rakhmon’s home town) recall those times, so the many “glorious” stories are often not so much about him as about his ancestors, which makes it even more difficult to distinguish the truth from fiction.

Ancestry plays an important role in the life of well-known people. The legend about the president’s ancestors has it that they were from Samarkand and were forced to hide from the Manghut warriors of the Manghit dynasty (that is, Uzbeks), who ruled at that time in Bukhara.⁴ Evidently the roots of the present-day ideological and political struggle between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan go back to this period.

⁴ See: S. Mirzoshov, Sh. Khanif, *Mirotvorets*, Adib, Dushanbe, 2004, pp. 21-22.

The president's grandfather is also mentioned in this connection as a renowned and respected *ishan* and *mawlawiyah*, which emphasizes Rakhmon's religious Muslim roots.

According to this version, the president is a *seyid* (descendent of Ali) from the illustrious family of Khoja Yusuf Khatloni.

So the president associates his post with the status of a descendent of a saint, which gives him the right to possess the spiritual power characteristic of many rulers and privileged people from Central Asian history.⁵ Just as interesting is the legend about the president's father, who became acquainted with his future wife in rather storybook circumstances. According to the story, he happened to meet a young and beautiful widow, the mother of two children, by a well and fell in love with her at first sight.⁶

Rakhmon's father is described as an ordinary hard-working man who was not any different from anyone else. It should be noted that mention of the president and his family's lower-class background has become one of the distinguishing features in all the publications about him.

Rakhmon's father was a common collective farm laborer, his mother, being a very wise woman, helped people with her advice. The birth of the future president, Emomali Sharifovich Rakhmon, blends harmoniously into this picture of an ideal family. For giving birth to a son, his mother received a swath of silk from her husband as a gift, which in those days was extremely rare.⁷

Emomali's childhood is described in a whole series of idealized stories that happened to him in his home town of Dangara and its environs.

It is interesting that in contrast to the description of the youth of other current presidents of Central Asia (for example, the Turkmen president), Rakhmon's childhood is described in positive terms, which is remarkable if we keep in mind the ideological system of post-Soviet Tajikistan; the Soviet leadership is not presented as an oppressor of the people of Tajikistan (in contrast to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, or to a certain extent Kazakhstan).⁸

Judging from its description, Dangara was full of hard-working people who strove for the common good; the same picture is also drawn in Soviet Tajik literature of socialist realism.

Emomali himself is described as a man of labor who (in contrast to his brother Nuriddin) did not have the opportunity to enjoy children's games.⁹ All the same, as in any ideological biography, love plays a significant part. Rakhmon had a favorite teacher, Alla (a symbol of knowledge), who even used to appear in his dreams.

The fact that Rakhmon came from an ordinary family later served to bring him closer to the common people. He is described as having the characteristics inherent in Tajiks—wisdom, honesty, flexibility, democratic character, kindness, perseverance, and inquisitiveness. These are the traits the Tajik people expect in a leader, and Emomali Rakhmon certainly fits this mode.¹⁰

In the 1980s-1990s, Rakhmon worked as the director of a collective state farm and according to his ideologists and biography writers his revolutionary approach to management became one of the main prerequisites for his further climb up the political ladder. He permitted the farm workers to use

⁵ For more on Rakhmon possibly coming from a family of saints and on the reasons for looking for saints among the renowned people of Central Asia in general, see: S. Abashin, "Potomki sviatykh v sovremennoi Srednei Azii," in: *Et-nograficheskoe obozrenie*, No. 4, 2001, pp. 62-83 (see also: V.I. Bushkov and D.V. Mikulsky, *Anatomiia grazhdanskoi voiny v Tadzhikistane*, RAS Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Moscow, 1997, pp. 138-139).

⁶ See: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., pp. 25-28.

⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

⁸ Some Tajik political scientists and historians do not fit the official historiographic mold, nor do they always uphold the official viewpoint on the Soviet period (see, for example: A. Mamadazimov, *Politicheskaia istoriia Tadzhikskogo nar-oda*, Donish, Dushanbe, 2000). Due to the periodical aggravation in Russian-Tajik relations, articles also appear that accuse Soviet policy of colonialism in order to find favor with the president and condone his current policy.

⁹ See: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁰ See: S. Fattoev, "Prezident Emomali Rakhmonov," in: *Emomali Rakhmonov: nasha tsel'—edinstvo, soglasie, sozi-danie*, Irfon, Dushanbe, 2000, pp. 112-113.

part of the fields for their personal needs, which allowed them to make extra earnings.¹¹ Such innovations later formed the basis for the agrarian reforms in independent Tajikistan; which his former coworkers, who praise the president's wisdom, take great delight in recalling.

The best source of information about this period is the small Rakhmon museum located in his former office in the administration building of the state farm in Dangara. The room has a desk, a television from the 1980s, a safe, and a few shelves and tables where photographs and documents signed by Rakhmon are kept.

The fact that the museum operates unofficially shows that the personality cult has not really taken off the ground in the republic. In addition, Dangara is not an ideological center and many people outside the region do not know the museum exists.

But the president's popularity is much higher in his home town than it is in the capital (Dushanbe), although his fellow townsmen still live a rather impoverished life.

This positive attitude of the residents of Dangara toward the president's activity was formed under the influence of the republican mass media and ideological literature (the image of a president-peacekeeper, the custodian of national independence). In this context, people are simply repeating what they have heard and accepting it as their own.¹² But the main reason for this veneration of the president can be considered to be the sense of community that is felt among fellow countrymen, which plays a huge role in Tajikistan, particularly in forming the national elite.

Changes in the outer appearance of Dangara are given as another reason: the repaired streets, new buildings, schools, museum, railroad (not far from the town), building of an airport, and so on.

In this case, his peasant ancestry becomes intertwined with his lower-class background; in articles on the president's frequent trips to Tajikistan's regions, the official press constantly focuses attention on these factors, particularly emphasizing how well Rakhmon is informed about what is going on in the country, his ability to socialize with the people, and his ongoing concern about the common people.

An example of his socialization with the people is given in a story about how Rakhmon gave an old man and his grandson a ride. The old man did not recognize him, although he thought his face was familiar. Later, when all was revealed, the old man compared Emomalijan with saint Khizar, who appeared before them.

Despite the fact that this is a typical Tajik expression, it nevertheless elevates the president, just as does the old man addressing him as "padishah" (a superlative royal title in the Tajik language, roughly equivalent to "the Great" or "Great King").¹³

Another story describes a walk the president took incognito. But it should be stressed that all the president's trips to the Tajik regions are planned in advance and the local authorities prepare for them with immense care to ensure that the president is happy and the local officials are not reprimanded.¹⁴

Among Rakhmon's other characteristics, mention is often made of his innate intelligence, thirst for knowledge, and thoughtful analysis of the texts he reads; such qualities are ascribed to all the leaders of the Central Asian countries.

The president is idealized as a young and talented leader; all his positive qualities go back to his childhood. His physical strength and athletic spirit are particularly noted. These qualities enhance the president's image as a symbol of justice who protects the weak from the strong.¹⁵ However, keeping in mind the increasing corruption and tyranny of the president's family, the people are skeptical about these characteristics.

¹¹ See: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

¹² Interviews in Dangara in July 2006 and February 2008.

¹³ See: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

¹⁴ Interview with former official in Kulob, July 2006, interview with former high-ranking official in Dushanbe, July 2006.

¹⁵ See: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

Rakhmon's Political Career

Rakhmon's political image is also enforced thanks to the many photographs that illustrate all the publications about him.

Photographs usually show the president in three main circumstances.

First, there are photographs that show phenomena typical of Tajikistan. All the Central Asian leaders try to show respect for their elders (*aksakals*). This is why elderly people are often appointed as the heads of district, regional, and local administrations. Photographs also show Rakhmon meeting with his parents (in the Dangara museum there are many such photographs). Photographs of historical monuments are also traditional; they often depict the president's visits to archeological digs in Penjikent, the *sadak* at the site where poet Rudaghi's tomb is presumed to be, and so on.¹⁶

The modernizing aspect of ideology can be clearly seen on the photos depicting the president's visits to large building sites or his attendance at their official openings.

The photographs primarily show current infrastructure facilities, such as new highways (the Kulma pass on the Chinese border—Pamir-south Tajikistan-north Tajikistan) and tunnels (in particular the Istiklol tunnel under the Anzob pass).

In the context of the republic's modernization, the president often appears at the opening ceremonies of new schools. Since all authoritarian regimes declare education and science as the most important priorities (although these spheres are in fact undergoing degradation), there are always photographs of pupils, students, and scientists in the president's albums.

Emomali Rakhmon, like all the Central Asian presidents, often has his photo taken with young people ("the country's future"). Such meetings are frequently accompanied by presenting gifts of modern equipment, often computer technology.¹⁷ These acts are described by the mass media as a sign of the country's modernization. Despite this, the technology often spoils over time or is not used due to lack of heating, because the teachers themselves do not know how to use computers, or simply because there is often no electricity.¹⁸ Representatives of the arts are also considered to be a valuable contribution to the radiant future.¹⁹

The last category of photographs serves to legitimize the president in the eyes of the people and the outside world and create his image as an outstanding international statesman. They are mainly devoted to Rakhmon's speeches at the U.N. and other international forums and meetings with the official leaders of Russia, the EU, U.S., and Asian and other countries.

The president is shown on these photographs as a political and national leader who is recognized and respected by the world community and, of course, by his own people. They often show protocol meetings and his addresses at formal summits, which are presented as key speeches. Here the point is to accentuate the significance of the president's international activity.

This "collection of souvenirs" presents the president as a national hero who has an influence on world history, that is, a parallel is drawn with the outstanding personalities of the Tajik people.

The photographs of all three categories present Rakhmon as a national leader and father of the nation and raise his political status. The president's activity on the world arena and his constant concern about his people reinforce his image as the state's head. This also enforces the idea of the permanency of the head of state.

¹⁶ See, for example: A. Dostiev, *Sitorai Golib*, Matbuot, Dushanbe, 2006; *15-bakhorii Istiklol (nasr va azm)*, Adib, Dushanbe, 2006 (see also: E. Rahmonov, *The Tajiks in the Mirror of History*, Volume One, *From the Aryans to the Samanids*, River Editions, London).

¹⁷ See: V. Gaffori, Z. Saidov, *Vdokhnovitel' national'nogo renessansa*, NIAT Khovar, Dushanbe, 2007, p. 37.

¹⁸ Interview with a school director in the Sarvud Region, July 2003.

¹⁹ See: A. Sharipov, "Emomali Rakhmonov. Prezidenti mo! Our President! Nash Prezident!" Manuscript from the website [<http://www.president.tj>], p. 143.

After the 2003 referendum, amendments were made to the constitution of Tajikistan. They legally extended the president's term in power, which corresponds to the region's patriarchal tradition (the leading role of the head of the family or patron).

All the above-mentioned methods for forming the leader's image are not only used in the CA countries, but also in all authoritarian regimes, as well as in the memoirs of prominent political figures. Tajik and Central Asian practice as a whole borrows Soviet Central Asian traditions in this respect.²⁰

The Beginning of Rakhmon's Political Career

Rakhmon's advent to power is considered a key event in the history of the Tajik people. As we know, he was elected president in November 1992 at the 14th session of the Tajik Supreme Soviet in the palace of Arbob in Khujand (which was still Leninabad at that time).

This event can in fact be considered an auspicious occasion in Tajikistan's most recent history, although many publications describe it differently. The president's supporters write about the exclusively legal and fair election of the president, which is also reflected in the protocol of the Supreme Soviet session.²¹

Other sources, particularly from the opposition camp, talk about a controlled process, influenced by the main warlords at that time, S. Safarov and S. Kenjaev.²² They claim that Rakhmon's candidacy was proposed out of the blue. According to the Russian military, Rakhmon was considered a person of little influence in the Dangara region by that time.²³

The organization of the so-called *oshi oshiti* ("food of conciliation") is considered one of Rakhmon's first contributions to national conciliation (immediately following the 16th session of the Supreme Soviet). This act is advertised by the president's supporters as one of the first steps the new leader took as president toward conciliation.²⁴ But, as ethnographers and historians note, this "tradition" was rather an artificial invention and could not have a serious effect on further conciliation.²⁵

The "court" ideologists relate Rakhmon's advent to power to different legends.

The story of Rakhmon's neighbor, who had a dream several days before the session in Khujand about a golden apple flying over Dangara, the surrounding hills, and the *mazar* (tomb) of a local saint, Mavlano Tojiddin, deserves special attention. People tried to catch the apple, but only Emomali was able to do it. According to popular belief, the owner of a golden apple is destined for great things.²⁶

²⁰ See, for example, publications about the first secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party Sharaf Rashidov, who is described and shown on photographs as an outstanding Central Asian leader, a resolute and beloved politician: S. Rizaev, *Sharaf Rashidov, Shtriki k portretu*, Ezuvchi-Nur, Tashkent, 1992.

²¹ See: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., pp. 64-67 (also see the memoirs of the then deputy and later deputy chairman of the Supreme Soviet Abdulmajid Dostiev: A. Dostiev, op. cit., pp. 50-53).

²² See: M. Isin, "Geopolitika odnogo kontsa. Tsentral'noaziatskie anomalii," 18 February, 2002, available at [<http://www.nomad.su/?a=2-200202180100>].

²³ See: S. Kolosov, "Vostok—delo tonkoe. Tadzhikskie zametki komandira otriada," available at [<http://www.agentura.ru/library/spetsnaz50/vostok/>]. This fact is confirmed in an interview with a former member of the president's entourage, July 2006.

²⁴ See: S. Nazarov, "Retsept mira" *nachali iskat' v Khudzhande*, NIAT Khovar, 13 November, 2007, available at [http://www.topjtj.com/ShowNews.aspx?news_id=6898E423-302E-471D-90D4-1A9BF31F77D7].

²⁵ See: V.I. Bushkov, D.V. Mikulsky, op. cit., p. 137.

²⁶ See: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., p. 54. The following work was used for questions of oneirology: B. Ostfanský, "The Art of Medieval Arab Oneirology," in: *Archiv Orientální* (Prague), No. 4, 2005, pp. 407-428.

The events in Khujand in November 1992 are also associated with unusually clear and warm weather, which set in precisely after the news was received of Rakhmon's election as president; there was no more cold weather until the end of the winter and no snow fell at all in Dushanbe, which many refugees had been worried about.²⁷

But after November 1992, a civil war began in the country, and a state leader with little political experience could hardly have been capable of reconciling the fighting sides at that time.

However, after almost five years, Rakhmon was able to achieve peace with the opposition. The official press emphasizes this as a unique event in history, and the president himself is considered a talented self-taught person who was able to quickly comprehend the basics of politics himself.²⁸

Thus Rakhmon became the nation's savior and a symbol of its sovereignty.²⁹

The president's resolve and steadfastness are characterized by the expression frequently cited by his ideologists: "on the path to peace and consent I will either die fighting or achieve my goal!"

Peacekeeper

Peacekeeping has become the springboard of President Rakhmon's nascent personality cult; however, despite the high praise, this part of his ideology is relatively weak. It primarily emphasizes the actual achievement of peace agreements.

The merits of the president himself come to the forefront without drawing attention to the merits of other people, particularly leaders of opposition.³⁰

It should be noted that special efforts were not required to achieve the population's approval of this aspect of the president's activity. All the people wanted was for the fighting to stop, and anyone who could cope with the situation was considered a real peacekeeper. And despite the participation of the opposition in state governance, Rakhmon kept a firm grip on the main levers of influence (including ideological).

The role of chief peacekeeper ensured Rakhmon the support of most of the population; although in 2005-2006 it significantly flagged.

In official publications, Rakhmon is described as a strong personality with extraordinary governing abilities. It should be admitted that not every president could stay in power during and after a civil war. Much attention is focused on promulgating the president's decisiveness after his advent to power in November 1992. It was precisely his words and orders, it seems, that forced the state officials to return to Dushanbe.³¹ At that time the Tajik capital was considered a dangerous place to be and outside government control.³² Propaganda emphasizes the unassertive conditions in the head of state's main camp at that time.³³

²⁷ See: Sh. Zukhurov, *Prezidenti Khalk—Prezidenti man. Emomali Rakhmonov: "Vakhdat, sulkh va bunedkori maromi most!* Irfon, Dushanbe, 2000, p. 61.

²⁸ See: *Narodnaia gazeta*, 4 October, 2006.

²⁹ See: S. Fattoev, op. cit., p. 105.

³⁰ In this respect, Tajik political scientist Abdugani Mamadazimov, who essentially places the leaders of the opposition on essentially the same level as Rakhmon, upholds a more well-balanced approach (see: A. Mamadazimov, op. cit., pp. 325-326).

³¹ See: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., p. 71.

³² Despite Rakhmon's ideological heroism, the capture of Dushanbe began at this time during a session of the Supreme Soviet in Khujand, i.e. Rakhmon went to regions already occupied by the National Front forces that supported Rakhmon under the command of people from Kulob and Tajikistan. It was at this time that persecution began in Dushanbe of people from the "opposition" regions of the country (Karategin, Pamir, and so on) (see: V.I. Bushkov and D.V. Mikulsky, op. cit., p. 65).

³³ See: S. Mirzosh and Sh. Khanif give the example of the reception of a delegation of elders and askakals from Khissor (see: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., p. 74).

Rakhmon's biographers frequently point out the president's inner strength honed by his farm work and service in the Pacific fleet.³⁴

In addition to decisiveness, Rakhmon (as his biographers note) is distinguished by immense courage. This fact is usually proven by the new head of state's move to troubled Dushanbe.³⁵

Rakhmon's activity during the war (according to his ideologists) was an endless series of important talks and meetings; the president is depicted as a national hero.

To confirm the president's personal courage, his official biographers give the example of how he visited the leaders of the opposition in the borough of Khosdekhi in Afghanistan in December 1996.³⁶ Historians and political scientists who are not pro-Rakhmon also indicate the critical significance of this moment.³⁷

Special emphasis is placed on the president's unbending will, who was not afraid to attend a meeting in the opposition camp on Afghan territory, something that was considered extremely dangerous. As official publications emphasize, this makes Rakhmon not only a peacekeeper with respect to Tajikistan, but to Afghanistan as well.³⁸

There is also frequent mention (as an example of the president's courage) of two more significant events that augment his image of an intrepid man.

- The first was in Rushan when the opposition attempted to halt the president's cortege and local representatives tried to persuade Rakhmon not to participate in a meeting with the population, but the president would hear nothing of it.³⁹ According to official sources, this event shows Rakhmon's support by the people who forced the "disturbers of the peace" to open the road to the president. Whereby Rakhmon asked the journalists present not to cover this event so as not to arouse a negative response in the people of Pamir and eastern Tajikistan. So this event also showed the president's political qualities in addition to his courage.
- The second case is related to an assassination attempt on Rakhmon in Khujand. The president's wife (Azizamokh) dreamt that she saw herself dancing alone, which according to popular belief precedes mourning and nostalgia for a person who is no longer with us.⁴⁰ But Rakhmon, even after the attack, from which he escaped with a few injuries, did not decline from meeting with people among whom there might also be terrorists.⁴¹

In addition to his decisiveness and courage, Rakhmon's penchant for hard work also helped to settle the conflict in Tajikistan. According to official sources, thanks to his tireless labor, the president was able, in addition to entering a peace treaty, to achieve success in resolving two more important problems.

In the post-war period, Rakhmon has raised the standard of living more than any other leader in the previous 70 years.⁴² After the war, he was able to remove the local warlords,⁴³ in particular those who could undermine his position or simply knew too much about him.

³⁴ See: V. Vorobiev, "Sem' let prezidenta," in: *Emomali Rakhmonov: nasha tsel'—edinstvo, soglasie, sozidanie*, p. 119 (see also: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., p. 17).

³⁵ See: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 152-168.

³⁷ See: A. Mamadzimov, op. cit., p. 327.

³⁸ An example of this peacekeeping is Emomali Rakhmon's speech from the U.N. rostrum (see: A. Sharipov, Z. Sirodzhov, *2005—God kul'tury mira*, Davashtich, Dushanbe, p. 8).

³⁹ See: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., pp. 145-146.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 184.

⁴¹ See: S. Fattoev, op. cit., p. 107.

⁴² Ibid., p. 118. This assertion can be challenged keeping in mind the catastrophic socioeconomic situation in the country, which only partially improved after the war and is maintained largely by migrant workers.

⁴³ See: A. Dostiev, op. cit., p. 52.

In June 1997, a peace treaty was signed in Moscow that ultimately gave the president of Tajikistan the image of peacekeeper.

To be objective, it should also be noted that Rakhmon's ideologists gave the same assessment of the role of Said Abdullo Nuri, who signed the treaty on the part of the opposition. All of these events are used as an example for schoolchildren.⁴⁴

Thus, Rakhmon's role (for the future generations) is emphasized as a national hero and the founder of political culture in Tajikistan based on peace and understanding.⁴⁵

Emomali Rakhmon as a Politician

Rakhmon has been honed by the hardships he endured during his peacekeeping mission, and, without losing the dignity and honor he inherited from his great grandfather and the father of his great grandfather, he has become the leader of the country just like a commander at the head of his troops, carefully calculating each step forward.⁴⁶

Despite the obstacles already mentioned associated with the fact he does not have an intellectual background, the president has been able, according to his ideologists, to occupy a dignified place among the top world leaders and also become a symbol of independent Tajikistan.⁴⁷

In the context of the elevation of Ismoil Somoni, as a founder of the predecessor state of present-day Tajikistan, Rakhmon is presented as his heir. Both leaders took upon themselves the arduous task of forming the Tajik nation.⁴⁸ Both are regarded as unifying factors of their nation, who also held out their hands to their opponents, calling on them to work toward strengthening their countries.⁴⁹

Some authors also try to compare Emomali Rakhmon with Abraham Lincoln, who united the Americans. Rakhmon also succeeded at one time in preserving the state and the country's territorial integrity.⁵⁰

The postwar era has not called for heroic deeds, so propaganda has been concentrating on the image of an intelligent and kind president who gives all kinds of good advice.

Two interesting examples can be given.

When visiting a beekeeping farm, the president gave some intelligent advice on how first-class honey could be made and exported abroad. The minister of agriculture was instructed to draw up a strategy for supporting beekeepers.⁵¹ The president also showed how well informed he was in maternal and child health issues. At a meeting, "the president gave some good advice and enlightened the audience in family planning and how to bring up healthy and educated children."⁵² In this respect, it is interesting to note that the president recommended that women wait three years between the birth of each subsequent child.⁵³

Rakhmon's positive traits stand out even more vividly against the background of his enemies.

⁴⁴ One of the teachers I interviewed showed me essay topics for upper-classmen that were related to this period. By way of example, the following topics can be given: "The President's Courage During the Civil War," "Path to Peace in Tajikistan and President Rakhmonov." Interview with a primary school teacher in Dushanbe, July 2006.

⁴⁵ See: *Narodnaia gazeta*, 21 June, 2006.

⁴⁶ See: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., p. 83.

⁴⁷ See: S. Fattoev, op. cit., p. 106.

⁴⁸ See: S. Mirzosh, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., p. 67.

⁴⁹ See: V. Vorobiev, op. cit., p. 120.

⁵⁰ See: S. Fattoev, op. cit., p. 111.

⁵¹ See: *Narodnaia gazeta*, 9 September, 2005.

⁵² *Narodnaia gazeta*, 11 October, 2006.

⁵³ See: "Semia—osnova i opora gosudarstva," in: V. Gaffori, Z. Saidov, op. cit.

A case in point is the former warlords, although some of them greatly assisted the president during the civil war. Subsequently criminal cases were instigated against them (as soon as they began to get stronger); and the official press and mass media were invited to cover the court cases.

This is how the president's main opponents, Ia. Salimov and G. Mirzoev, were dealt with. During the civil war and after it many warlords adopted impermissible methods and committed unjustified actions.

It was these two who were declared enemies of the state, as criminal and corrupted elements. This method has been systematically used in authoritarian regimes with low information pluralism to denounce unfavorable elements. In the official press, the president is presented as a "good/kind leader" as opposed to the "bad commanders."⁵⁴

Against the background of the universal corruption in Tajikistan, the president looks like the most honest person, who is fighting bribe-taking and clannishness in the political elite (despite his control over the most important branches of the economy). It is precisely the governing and foreign policy methods Emomali Rakhmon uses that are studied in state institutions to educate new officials.⁵⁵

Great attention is focused in the Tajik mass media on covering the president's activity in traditional neighborly mutual assistance (*khashar*) or at voluntary work; he is frequently presented as a protector of the ordinary people, who are exploited by "evil" officials.

An example is an incidence that happened during Rakhmon's trip to the Ishkashim region. An old woman came up to him and asked for help finding her son, who was killed during the war. The president began to cry (a sign of sensitivity), and then promised to find and punish those who rendered her no assistance (the president's justice and decisiveness).⁵⁶

The president again demonstrated his sense of justice during a trip to the Kulob region. Rakhmon visited one of the enterprises and was very displeased with the owner when he found out how much the workers were actually paid (30 somoni, approximately \$10 a month). The president ordered the owner to immediately raise salaries and hire new workers (reduce unemployment) by cutting back on the owner's income.⁵⁷ The Tajik official press also shows examples of how the president's instructions and assignments are carried out.⁵⁸

The mass media regularly highlight the progressive changes that occur in the country's regions after the president has visited. An example is the president's second visit to the village of Puli Sangin, in which, after his first visit, wages were raised, even to as high as \$150 for one dairymaid.⁵⁹

Ideologists describe the president as a generous person who gives out money, whereby, as it is emphasized, from his own pocket. An example is the description of a meeting at a school in Garm-Chashma in Pamir, during which the president personally gave the school director money to buy clothes and shoes for the children.⁶⁰

Conclusion

All of the above-mentioned signs of idealization of the president do not go beyond the bounds of the Central Asian traditions of political culture. All the presidents of the region are depicted by

⁵⁴ S. Mirzoshlo, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., pp. 117-119.

⁵⁵ See: *Narodnaia gazeta*, 26 December, 2007.

⁵⁶ See: S. Mirzoshlo, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., p. 143.

⁵⁷ See: *Narodnaia gazeta*, 30 August, 2005.

⁵⁸ See: *Narodnaia gazeta*, 23 August, 2005.

⁵⁹ See: *Narodnaia gazeta*, 4 December, 2006.

⁶⁰ See: S. Mirzoshlo, Sh. Khanif, op. cit., pp. 136-138.

ideologists as leaders of the nation and good and kind rulers who fight against the enemies of the people (including bureaucrats).

The presidents are described as wise, well-bred people who are respected in their country and abroad; whereby their many photographs do not differ in theme from the former photographs of general secretaries and first secretaries.

However, the activity of the president of Tajikistan (or of the other presidents of the CA countries for that matter) cannot be underestimated, although nor can it be called genuine concern for the people, as official sources try to insist.

The corruption that corrodes all the Central Asian states cannot leave their presidents with entirely un sullied personalities.

Manifestations of the personality cult are also similar in all the CA countries: photographs of presidents in public places and their numerous sayings constantly cited in the press and textbooks, not to mention the multitude of books supposedly written by them.

All the above-mentioned signs are a traditional feature of authoritarian regimes (both pre-revolutionary and Soviet) and their corresponding leaders.

The main thing that distinguishes Rakhmon from the other CA presidents is his peacekeeping activity and unaffected manners. Rakhmon must be given his due; he has exerted a great deal of effort to establish peace in the republic, although, more than ten years later, people are gradually beginning to forget about this.

On the whole, all the presidents of the Central Asian countries are presented as caring “fathers” and nation-builders.

It should be noted that, in contrast to his colleagues, President Rakhmon does not focus attention on the level of his education, as the president of Kazakhstan does, for example (his dissertations), or on titles and awards.

Rakhmon projects the main traits of the nation onto himself, emphasizing his common birth. He, in a certain sense, is the “bobo” (father, elder) of the entire state, although he did not reach the age of an honorable aksakal (by CA standards) until recently.

The people like the image of an ordinary man he has created (“one of us”). In addition, there is limited access in the republic to foreign information (for example, the RTR television channel was closed down in the spring of 2009), which makes it possible to reinforce his image as an upright “father of the nation.”

The ideological effect greatly slows down the reassessment of values, and the country’s new leader (after Rakhmon steps down), no matter who it is, will have to uphold this ideological system, adjusting it to his own image.⁶¹

But it should be noted that many people who are attentively watching the processes going on in the country and abroad and have access to different sources of information are quite critical about the president’s idealized image.

His authority as an honest leader is also undermined by information that leaks through about the whims and fancies of Rakhmon and his family.

The president’s popularity (even among the ordinary people) declined somewhat after he made several curious decisions. Among them we can mention, for example, the Tajikization of names; the president shortened his name to Rakhmon (in March 2007).

Holding traditional ceremonies has been restricted by the law, which did not interfere with holding grandiose celebrations on the occasion of Rakhmon’s election as president in 2006.

⁶¹ The ideological resetting in Turkmenistan after the death of first president Saparmurat Turkmenbashi could serve as an example. Although the content changed when creating the new image of a leader, the form remained almost the same and led to a new personality cult in the country (see: S. Horák, J. Šir, op. cit.).

Many of the above-mentioned decisions are essentially demagogic in nature and frequently avoid resolving the problems that exist in Tajikistan.

The increasing decline in Rakhmon's authority is making it incumbent on his administration and "court ideologists" to increasingly mythologize his personality.

In 2006, a concept of Rakhmon was developed in foreign policy as a leader of the Aryan civilization.⁶²

The idea is being promulgated that in the conditions of the economic crisis that is reaching its peak, the president could save the nation from its dire consequences. But this, again, is nothing more than ideological speculation.

⁶² See: *Narodnaia gazeta*, 27 June, 2006.