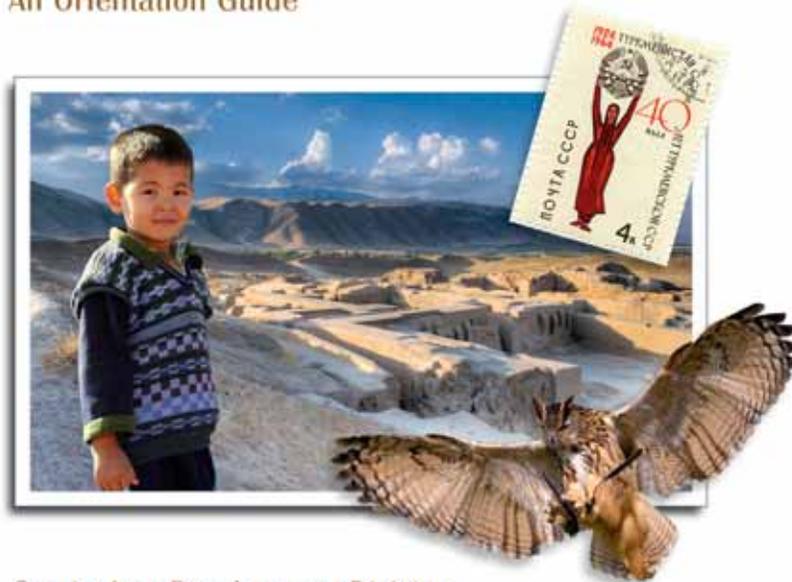


# TURKMENISTAN IN PERSPECTIVE

An Orientation Guide



Curriculum Development Division  
Educational Technology Department  
February 2008



DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

# Turkmenistan in Perspective

<b>CHAPTER 1: PROFILE</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>FACTS AND FIGURES</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: GEOGRAPHY</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>TURKMENISTAN'S NEIGHBORHOOD</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>AREA</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CLIMATE</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>MAJOR CITIES</b>	<b>10</b>
ASHGABAT	10
TURKMENBASHY	10
MARY	11
DASHOGUZ	11
<b>BODIES OF WATER</b>	<b>11</b>
ATREK RIVER	11
AMU DARYA RIVER	11
TEJEN RIVER	12
MURGHAB RIVER	12
CASPIAN SEA	12
<b>WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3 - HISTORY</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>EARLY HISTORY</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>RUSSIAN COLONIAL RULE</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>SOVIET TURKMENISTAN</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>INDEPENDENCE</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>RECENT DEVELOPMENTS</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>TURKMENISTAN TIMELINE</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4 - ECONOMY</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>STANDARD OF LIVING</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>AGRICULTURE</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>ENERGY RESOURCES</b>	<b>24</b>
NATURAL GAS	24
PETROLEUM	25
<b>INDUSTRY</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>BANKING</b>	<b>26</b>

<b>FOREIGN INVESTMENT</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5 - SOCIETY</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>ETHNIC GROUPS</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>LANGUAGE</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>CUISINE</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>HORSES</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>CARPETS</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>MUSIC</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>LITERATURE</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>RELIGION</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6 - NATIONAL SECURITY</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>TURKMENISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>THE STATUS OF BILATERAL RELATIONS</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>RUSSIA</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>IRAN</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>EUROPEAN UNION</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>UNITED STATES</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>CHINA</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>AZERBAIJAN</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>KAZAKHSTAN</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>TAJKISTAN</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>UZBEKISTAN</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>AFGHANISTAN</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>POVERTY</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>DISSIDENT GROUPS</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>ARMED FORCES AND LAW ENFORCEMENT</b>	<b>40</b>

## Chapter 1: Profile

### Introduction

Turkmenistan is mostly desert with significant underground energy reserves, giving it the potential to become the Kuwait of the former Soviet Union (USSR).<sup>1</sup> Independence in 1991 enabled it to take control of its natural resources, but maximizing revenues has proved problematic owing to Russia's continued control of the pipelines, which allows Moscow to set prices.<sup>2</sup> Its first post-Soviet leader, who died in December 2006, declared himself President for Life based on cult of personality rule. Since then his successor has largely appropriated that cult of personality to legitimize his own rule.<sup>3</sup>



Turkmen boys in the Karakum desert © Fraser Lewy

### Facts and Figures<sup>4</sup>

**Area:** slightly larger than California  
*land:* 488,100 sq km (188,456 sq mi)

#### **Bordering countries:**

Afghanistan 744 km (462 mi), Iran 992 km (616 mi), Kazakhstan 379 km (235 mi),  
Uzbekistan 1,621 km (1,007 mi)

**Population:** 5,097,028

#### **Nationality:**

*noun:* Turkmen(s)

*adjective:* Turkmenistani

#### **Ethnic groups:**

Turkmen 85%, Uzbek 5%, Russian 4%, other 6% (2003)

#### **Religion:**

Muslim 89%, Eastern Orthodox 9%, unknown 2%

---

<sup>1</sup> Caspian Crossroads Magazine. Ochs, Michael. "Turkmenistan: Pipeline Dream II." Winter 1995.  
<http://ourworld.comuserve.com/HOME/PAGES/USAZERB/9.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "The Great Uncertainty: Russian-Central Asian Energy Relations." 13 June 2007.

<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/index.cfm?fa=eventDetail&id=1013&prog=zru>

<sup>3</sup> National Public Radio. Gillespie, Kristen. "Niyazov's Cult of Personality Grips Turkmenistan." 9 August 2007. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12316714>

<sup>4</sup> All statistics in this section are from the CIA World Factbook and are 2007 estimates unless otherwise noted. CIA World Factbook, "Turkmenistan." 24 January 2008.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

**Languages:**

Turkmen 72%, Russian 12%, Uzbek 9%, other 7%

**Literacy:**

*definition:* age 15 and over can read and write

*total population:* 98.8%

*male:* 99.3%

*female:* 98.3% (1999 est.)

**Age distribution:**

*0–14 years:* 34.7% (male 900,718/female 866,930)

*15–64 years:* 60.9% (male 1,537,638/female 1,567,049)

*65 years and over:* 4.4% (male 97,454/female 127,239)

**Median age:**

*total:* 22.3 years

*male:* 21.7 years

*female:* 22.9 years (2007 est.)

**Population growth rate:** 1.617%

**Life expectancy at birth:**

*total population:* 68.3 years

*male:* 65.23 years

*female:* 71.54 years

**Total fertility rate:** 3.13 children born/woman

**Country name:**

*conventional long form:* none

*conventional short form:* Turkmenistan

*local long form:* none

*local short form:* Turkmenistan

*former:* Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic



© Fraser Lewy  
Road to Nisa

**Type of government:** Turkmenistan is a republic with authoritarian presidential rule that has little power outside the executive branch.

**Capital:** Ashgabat (Ashkhabad)

**Administrative divisions:** 5 provinces (welayatlar, singular - welayat) and 1 independent city\*: Ahal Welayaty (Anew), Ashgabat,\* Balkan Welayaty (Balkanabat), Dashoguz Welayaty, Lebap Welayaty (Turkmenabat), Mary Welayaty

**Independence:** 27 October 1991 (from the Soviet Union)

**National holiday:** Independence Day, 27 October

**Constitution:** adopted 18 May 1992

**Legal system:** The legal system of Turkmenistan is based on a civil law system and Islamic law, and has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction.

**Suffrage:** 18 years of age; universal



© Antonio Shen  
President Berdimuhamedov

**Executive branch:**

*chief of state:* President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov (since 14 February 2007)

*note - the president is both the chief of state and head of government*

*head of government:* President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov (since 14 February 2007)

*cabinet:* Cabinet of Ministers appointed by the president

*elections:* The president is elected by popular vote for a five-year term. The most recent election was held on 11 February 2007 (next to be held in 2012).

*election results:* Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov elected president; percent of vote - Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov 89.2%

**Legislative branch:**

There are two parliamentary bodies, a People's Council or *Halk Maslahaty* (supreme legislative body of up to 2,500 delegates, some elected by popular vote and some appointed; meets at least yearly) and a National Assembly or *Mejlis* (50 seats; members are elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms).

*elections:* People's Council - last held in April 2003 (next to be held in December 2008);  
*Mejlis* - last held 19 December 2004 (next to be held in December 2008)

*election results:* *Mejlis* - DPT 100%; seats by party - DPT 50

*note:* All 50 elected officials are members of the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan and are preapproved by the president.

*note:* In late 2003, a law was adopted reducing the powers of the *Mejlis* and making the *Halk Maslahaty* the supreme legislative organ. The *Halk Maslahaty* can now legally dissolve the *Mejlis*, and the president is now able to participate in the *Mejlis* as its supreme leader. The *Mejlis* can no longer adopt or amend the constitution or announce referendums or its elections. Since the president is both the "Chairman for Life" of the *Halk Maslahaty* and the supreme leader of the *Mejlis*, the 2003 law has the effect of making him the sole authority of both the executive and legislative branches of government.

**Judicial branch:** Supreme Court (judges are appointed by the president)

**Political parties and leaders:** Democratic Party of Turkmenistan or DPT

*note:* Formal opposition parties are outlawed; however, unofficial, small opposition movements exist underground or in foreign countries. The two most prominent opposition groups-in-exile have been National Democratic Movement of Turkmenistan (NDMT) and the United Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (UDPT). NDMT was led by former Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov until his arrest and imprisonment in the wake of the 25 November 2002 assassination attempt on President Niyazov. UDPT is led by former Foreign Minister Abdy Kuliev and is based in Moscow.



**International organization participation:** Asian Development Bank (AsDB), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), G-77, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (ICRM), Islamic Development Bank (IDB), International Finance Corporation (IFC), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (IFRC), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Maritime Organization (IMO), Interpol, International Olympic Committee (IOC), International Organization for Migration (IOM) (observer), International Organization for Standardization (ISO) (correspondent), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Partnership for Peace (PFP), United Nations (UN), UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Universal Postal Union (UPU), World Customs Organization (WCO), World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), World Health Organization (WHO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

**Diplomatic representation from the U.S.:**

*chief of mission:* Ambassador (vacant); Charge d'Affaires Richard E. Hoagland

*embassy:* No. 9 1984 Street (formerly Pushkin Street), Ashgabat, Turkmenistan 744000

**GDP per capita:** USD 8,500 (2006 est.)

**Labor force by occupation:**

*agriculture:* 48.2%

*industry:* 13.8%

*services:* 37% (2003 est.)

**Unemployment rate:** 60% (2004 est.)

**Population below poverty line:** 27% (2002)

**Internets:**

*hosts:* 97 (2007)

*users:* 64,800 (2006)

**Airports:**

28 (2007)

**Railroads:**

*total:* 2,440 km (1,516 mi) (2006)

**Roadways:**

*total:* 24,000 km (14,913 mi)

*paved:* 19,488 km (12,109 mi)

*unpaved:* 4,512 km (2,803 mi)

## Chapter 2: Geography

### Introduction

Historically home to a tribal nomadic culture, Turkmenistan's landscape has three features: desert, oases, and mountains. Desert is by far the largest. With one of the lowest population densities in Central Asia, pockets of intensive agriculture exist amongst irrigated oases. In addition, Turkmenistan has large gas and oil resources.



© Carpetlogger / flickr.com  
Yangykala Canyon

### Turkmenistan's Neighborhood

Of the former Soviet Republics, Turkmenistan is the southernmost state to join the loose federation of former Soviet Republics, called the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).<sup>5</sup> Slightly larger than California, it borders the Caspian Sea 1,786 km (1,109 mi), Iran 992 km (573 mi), Afghanistan 744 km (462 mi), Uzbekistan 1,621 km (1,007 mi), and Kazakhstan 379 km (235 mi).

The break-up of the Soviet Central Asian Republics into nation-states meant that bilateral agreements on border issues and resource usage were needed. These new agreements replaced those which Moscow put in place. In most cases, pre-existing arrangements survived the transition to independence.

### Area

The largest natural feature in Turkmenistan is the Karakum (Black Sand) Desert, which occupies about 350,000 sq km (135,135 sq mi). Successive sand mountains, made from shifting winds, form chains across the desert landscape. These dune-like mountains range from 2–20 m (6–65 ft) and can be several kilometers (less than a mile) long. Clay deposits created by the rapid evaporation of flood waters are evident, as are marshy salt flats found in many depressions.<sup>6</sup>

The Pamir-Alay mountain chain extends into the extreme eastern part of Turkmenistan, boasting elevations exceeding 3,000 meters (9,842 ft). The Kopetday Mountain Range, with dry and sandy slopes, high plateaus, and sheer ravines, lies in the border area with Iran. Tectonic plate movements cause periodic earthquakes throughout the region.<sup>7</sup>

### Climate

Turkmenistan enjoys a mild subtropical climate with low humidity. Annual temperatures range from 11–13 °C (51–55°F) in the north to 15–18°C (59–64°F) in the southeast. With

---

<sup>5</sup> Country Studies. U.S. Library of Congress. "Turkmenistan Geography." 1996.  
<http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/6.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Country Studies. U.S. Library of Congress. "Turkmenistan Geography." 1996.  
<http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/6.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University. Windows on Asia. "Geography of Turkmenistan." No date. <http://www.asia.msu.edu/centralasia/Turkmenistan/geography.html>

temperatures ranging from -6°C (21°F) in the northeast to 5°C (41°F) in the southwest, January is the coldest month. Summers are dry and hot with temperatures ranging from 27–30°C (80–86°F). An exception is the desert, where the mercury can rise as high as 50°C (122°F) at mid-day before the temperature drops sharply after dark.

Precipitation is limited. The amount of rain, which falls mainly from October to April, ranges from 400 mm (15.74 in) in the mountains to 100 mm (3.9 in) in the northeast.<sup>8</sup> Winds, blowing from different directions, are more or less constant throughout the year.

## Major Cities

### *Ashgabat*

The capital, Ashgabat, with an estimated population of 763,500, is situated in the foothills of Kopetday. Ashgabat developed as a military fortress. A railway reached the area in 1885, leading to the growth of a town in which residents did not rely on agriculture for their livelihood. The city's historical prominence lies in the fall of the fortress during the period of Russian colonization. Today it is dotted with fountains—control of water being a sign of power in Central Asia.<sup>9</sup>



© Michel Rotand-Cuill  
View of the Kopetdag Mountains from Ashgabat

### *Turkmenbashi*

Turkmenbashi, formerly known as Krasnovodsk, is located west of Ashgabat on the shores of the Caspian Sea. It was renamed in honor of the late President Saparmurat Niyazov, who bestowed the title *Turkmenbashi* (leader of all the Turkmen) upon himself.<sup>10</sup> Built as a bridgehead for the Russian campaign to pacify Central Asia before the British were able to do so, it became the last stop for the Trans-Caspian Railway in the late 19th century.<sup>11</sup> The city has 16 km (10 mi) of shoreline on the Caspian Sea and is the site of Turkmenistan's largest refinery.<sup>12</sup> Today it is home to an estimated population of 78,400.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Jacob Blaustein Institute for Desert Research. Orlovsky N. and L. Orlovsky. "Water Resources of Turkmenistan: Use and Conservation." No date. <http://www.ccb.ucar.edu/centralasia/orlovsky.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> MongaBay. Population statistics for this section are as of 2005 unless otherwise noted. "2005 Population Estimates for Cities in Turkmenistan." 2004–2007. [http://www.mongabay.com/igapo/2005\\_world\\_city\\_populations/Turkmenistan.html](http://www.mongabay.com/igapo/2005_world_city_populations/Turkmenistan.html)

<sup>10</sup> Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research. Plants Genetic Resources in Central Asia Caucasus. "Turkmenistan: Cities and Sites." 2003. [http://www.cac-biodiversity.org/tkm/tkm\\_cities.htm](http://www.cac-biodiversity.org/tkm/tkm_cities.htm)

<sup>11</sup> The Hindu. Aneja, Atul. "The Great Game Along the Silk Route." 20 April 2007. <http://www.hindu.com/2007/04/20/stories/2007042004881100.htm>

<sup>12</sup> International Herald Tribune. Associated Press. "Energy-Rich Turkmenistan Wants Foreign Investment for Caspian Sea Resort." 22 July 2007. <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/07/22/asia/AS-GEN-Turkmenistan-Tourism.php>

## *Mary*

East of Ashgabat, Mary is located on a large oasis in the Karakum Desert close to the Murghab River. An estimated 150,000 people make this city their home. It was founded as an administrative center for Russian armed forces in 1884 and growth was rapid after it became a transit point on the Trans-Caspian Railway. After the establishment of the Soviet Union, Mary evolved into a major center of cotton and natural gas industry.

## *Dashoguz*

Located at the northern end of the Karakum Desert and on at the oasis of Khiva, Dashoguz was established as a fortress. In modern times the city has become an important agricultural and industrial center, housing 209,000 people. The waters of the nearby Amu Darya River, along with some of its tributaries, enable farmers to intensively cultivate cotton and jute.<sup>13</sup> The health of residents has been affected by the drying up of the Aral Sea, which has introduced saline debris, spread by wind, into the air.<sup>14</sup>

## **Bodies of Water**

Rapid expansion of area under cultivation in the 1960s, coupled with the dearth of precipitation, means farmers are heavily dependent upon irrigation to cultivate crops. In this regard the most important waterway is the Karakum Canal. Built in the 1950s, although construction was not actually completed until the 1970s, it measures 1,266 km (786 mi) in length and transverses the length of the country.<sup>15</sup> It remains the largest irrigation canal in the world.<sup>16</sup>



## *Atrek River*

The Atrek River marks the border between Turkmenistan and Iran before flowing into the Caspian Sea. Since the end of the Cold War, the river valley has become of great interest to archeologists who have found connections between Middle Eastern and Central Asian culture.<sup>17</sup>

## *Amu Darya River*

The Amu Darya is the largest river in Turkmenistan. It is the source of 90% of the water used in the country.<sup>18</sup> The river has been heavily dammed resulting in a declining water volume, which has been cited as a factor in the shrinkage of the Aral Sea.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Turkmenistan.it. "Dashoguz." 2002. <http://www.turkmenistan.it/dashoguzgb.html>

<sup>14</sup> UNICEF. "Turkmenistan: Brining [sic] Water, Bringing Life to People in the Most Remote Areas of Turkmenistan." 2007. [http://www.unicef.org/turkmenistan/reallives\\_7182.html](http://www.unicef.org/turkmenistan/reallives_7182.html)

<sup>15</sup> *A History of Inner Asia*. Soucek, Svat. "Chapter One: Introduction [p. 8]." Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. [http://assets.cambridge.org/97805216/51691/excerpt/9780521651691\\_excerpt.pdf](http://assets.cambridge.org/97805216/51691/excerpt/9780521651691_excerpt.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> The Free Dictionary. "Kara-Kum." 2004. <http://encyclopedia.farlex.com/Kara-Kum>

<sup>17</sup> Harvard University Gazette. Powell, Alvin. "First U.S.-led Iran Dig in Ages." 7 April 2005. <http://www.hno.harvard.edu/gazette/2005/04.07/13-irandig.html>

<sup>18</sup> University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire. Sherman, Matt. "Turkmenistan: An Environmental Overview." No date. <http://academic.evergreen.edu/g/grossmaz/ShermamrTurkmen.ppt>

### *Tejen River*

The headwaters of the Tejen are in the Hindu Kush of Afghanistan, where the river is known as the Hari Rud. After forming a portion of the Afghanistan-Turkmenistan border, it terminates in the Tejen Oasis, located in the Karakum desert.<sup>20</sup>

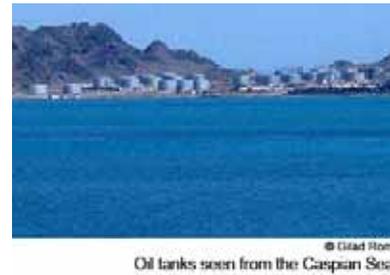
### *Murghab River*

The Murghab River has its source in the Hindu Kush, a mountain range in Afghanistan, and runs out in the Karakum Desert. It fed the desert oases around the ancient city of Merv, near present-day Mary. Concerns have been raised about water drawn from the Murghab becoming undrinkable due to an increase in salinity.<sup>21</sup>

### *Caspian Sea*

Completely landlocked, there is disagreement over whether the Caspian Sea is a lake or a sea. Because it is landlocked, its waters are not governed by the law of the sea, which extends navigation rights to all states.<sup>22</sup>

Traditionally, it has been used only by the five nations which border it, including Turkmenistan.<sup>23</sup> The Caspian may have as much oil as the Persian Gulf.<sup>24</sup> Yet division of oil rights has proved contentious among the five border countries and an agreement on seabed and maritime boundaries has not been reached.<sup>25</sup> This has stalled exploration. The Turkmenistani government has moved ahead on a multimillion dollar resort project on the shores of the Caspian to attract tourism.<sup>26</sup>



Having already built a number of artificial lakes, Turkmenistan has started to build another in the desert. The new lake will supply necessary water and will feed into

---

<sup>19</sup> Radio Free Liberty. Pannier, Bruce. "Turkmenistan: Projects Sounding Alarm Bells In Region (Part 2)." 30 August 2004. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/08/01c9b2b0-be6d-470c-9873-e92b5901a35b.html>

<sup>20</sup> HighBeam Encyclopedia. The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. "Hari Rud." 2007. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1E1-HariRud.html>

<sup>21</sup> Open Society Institute, Turkmenistan Project. "Weekly News Brief on Turkmenistan." 12 January–18 January 2007.

<http://www.eurasianet.org/turkmenistan.project/index.php?page=wnb/editor/wnb20070119&lang=eng>

<sup>22</sup> Boston College School of Law. Dunlap, Ben. "Divide and Conquer: The Russian Plan for Ownership of the Caspian Sea." No date. [http://www.bc.edu/schools/law/lawreviews/meta-elements/journals/bcicl/27\\_1/03\\_TXT.htm](http://www.bc.edu/schools/law/lawreviews/meta-elements/journals/bcicl/27_1/03_TXT.htm)

<sup>23</sup> The other countries that border the Caspian Sea and use it are Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation.

<sup>24</sup> International Institute for Caspian Studies. 30 January 2007. <http://www.caspianstudies.com/basicinfo/caspian%20history.htm>

<sup>25</sup> Central Asia Caucasus Institute. Johns Hopkins University. "Caspian Sea Talks Between Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and in Failure." 3 May 2001. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/857>

<sup>26</sup> International Herald Tribune. Associated Press. "Caspian Sea Resort, Latest Effort to Open Up Reclusive Nation." 3 December 2007. <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/12/03/asia/AS-GEN-Turkmenistan-Caspian-Tourism.php>

Ashgabat via a man-made river. The estimated time to completion is 20 years and the ecological impact of this proposal has generated controversy.<sup>27</sup>

### **Water Resource Management**

Under Soviet rule, water and energy resources moved across Central Asian republic administrative borders according to bureaucratic directive. The revenues to maintain the infrastructure as well as the management expertise to run it were both supplied by Moscow.<sup>28</sup> After the break-up of the Soviet Union, division of water resources became the responsibility of the newly created Interstate Commission for Water Coordination. The portion of the Amu Darya allocated to Turkmenistan is 50% of the actual river flow at the Kerki gauging station.<sup>29</sup> The other 50% is allocated to Uzbekistan.<sup>30</sup>



Disagreements have arisen over how much downriver countries, such as Turkmenistan, should contribute to upriver Kyrgyzstan's efforts to maintain the Amu Darya's headwater dams. In the absence of sufficient financial contributions, impoverished Kyrgyzstan is left with the option of releasing the water when it chooses without regard for the consequences to downriver countries.<sup>31</sup>

### **Environmental Hazards**

The primary environmental hazard in Turkmenistan is desertification.<sup>32</sup> Among other causes is year-round grazing by animals, particularly camels, which can be pastured in the desert.<sup>33</sup> Livestock owners have little incentive to curtail usage of pastureland in which everyone enjoys user rights.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Radio Free Europe. Pannier, Bruce. "Turkmenistan: Ashgabat Has Grand Plans To Create Man-Made Lake, River (Part 1)." 30 August 2004.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/08/4cb05b36-65e5-45b5-8fe6-663f88830754.html>

<sup>28</sup> International Crisis Group. "Central Asia: Water and Conflict." 30 May 2002.

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1440>

<sup>29</sup> A gauging station is where the river emerges from the mountains and flows into the desert lowlands.

<sup>30</sup> FAO Corporate Document Repository, Water Reports. "Irrigation in the Countries of the Former Soviet Union in Figures." 1997. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/W6240E/w6240e18.htm>

<sup>31</sup> PRAXIS, The Fletcher Journal of Development Studies. Spechler, Martin. "Regional Cooperation in Asia Central: Promises and More Promises [p. 8]." 2000.

<http://fletcher.tufts.edu/praxis/archives/xvi/Spechler.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> University of Texas. "Optimizing Long-Term Water Management in the Amudarya River Delta: A Water Management Model for Long-Term Assessment." No date.

<http://www.ce.utexas.edu/prof/mckinney/papers/ara/Schluter.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Country Studies. U.S. Library of Congress. "Turkmenistan Environment." 1996.

<http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/9.htm>

<sup>34</sup> Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management. Asian Development Bank. "Turkmenistan: National Programming Framework [p. 15]." 28 February 2006.

<http://www.adb.org/Projects/CACILM/turkmenistan.pdf>

The dramatic expansion of land under cotton cultivation also creates environmental hazards. Cotton requires far more pesticides than other crops.<sup>35</sup> Fertilizers are frequently applied in excessive amounts to obtain a higher yield. That which is not absorbed by the crops, however, is washed into the soil, and subsequently the groundwater.

The exploitation of oil resources in the Caspian Sea with primitive technology poses potential environmental hazards to aquatic life.<sup>36</sup> A total of 273 species of fauna and 110 species of flora face the prospect of extinction. A significant spill or other type of accident could make that a reality.<sup>37</sup> In addition, overfishing is a problem. The population of Stallate sturgeon, for example, is estimated to be at only 10% of what it was in 1978. The point is fast approaching where it may be too late to save some types of Sturgeon.

---

<sup>35</sup> Mongabay. "Turkmenistan Geography." 2004-2007.

[http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country\\_studies/turkmenistan/GEOGRAPHY.html](http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/turkmenistan/GEOGRAPHY.html)

<sup>36</sup> Stanford University. Ivy, Ashley. "International Law and Concens [sic] of the Caspian Sea Region." 6 December 2002.

<http://www.stanford.edu/class/e297a/International%20Law%20and%20Concerns%20of%20the%20Caspian%20Sea%20Region.htm>

<sup>37</sup> EurasiaNet. Open Society Institute. "Turkmenistan Needs to Balance Energy Development Desires with Environmental Risks: Watchdog Group." 13 September 2007.

[http://www.soros.org/initiatives/turkmenistan/articles\\_publications/articles/risks\\_20070913](http://www.soros.org/initiatives/turkmenistan/articles_publications/articles/risks_20070913)

## Chapter 3 - History

### Introduction

Scattered across a vast desert plain, for much of history the Turkmen were a tribally-organized people whose livelihood was based on animal herding rather than agriculture.<sup>38</sup> Chieftains established their bases at the local water source (*oasis*) since control of water resources conferred power.<sup>39</sup> Groups frequently fought for control over the oases in an environment where there was no centralized political authority. As nomads, the Turkmen prized mobility and viewed settled farming as an invitation to predatory behavior. Indeed, for centuries Turkmen preyed upon settled communities in addition to fighting each other.

### Early History

Central Asia was a frontier zone between Asia and Europe that experienced massive population shifts over many centuries as empires rose and fell. Cyrus the Great controlled the region in the 6th century B.C.E.; Alexander the Great conquered the region during his expansion campaign toward India in the 4th century B.C.E.; and Arab control in the 7th century C.E. introduced Islam to inhabitants of the region.

The origins of the Turkmen nationality have been traced back to the 8th century C.E. when Turkic-speaking Oghuz tribes migrated from present-day Mongolia into Central Asia. Oghuz expansion extended as far as the Volga River and Ural Mountains; however, the geographic limits of their authority was evident in the steppe areas extending north and west from the Aral Sea where their ability to control territory waxed and waned.

The Oghuz lacked a centralized power structure. Instead power was vested horizontally in numerous “kings” and “chieftains” each of whom controlled territory independently. The vastness of their respective domains made the logistics of acting in concert difficult. The bonds which held what was a loose confederation together began to fray. In the 10th century, a clan leader named Seljuk established a dynasty that encompassed parts of present-day Turkmenistan and Iran.

### Turkmen Expansion

Seljuk’s expansion campaigns afforded migration opportunities to the Turkmen who began to settle in present-day Turkmenistan. Prior to their arrival, most of the desert had been uninhabited. The areas that were suitable for human habitation, specifically along the shores of the Caspian Sea, in the foothills of the Kopetday Mountains and along the banks of the Amu Darya and Murgab Rivers were populated predominantly



© Datan R. Fryberger  
Ruins of Merv

<sup>38</sup> Weaving Art Museum.org. Cassin, Jack. “Archeological Prehistory of Turkmenistan.” 2000. [http://www.weavingartmuseum.org/ex3\\_prehist.htm](http://www.weavingartmuseum.org/ex3_prehist.htm)

<sup>39</sup> Eurasianet.org. “Desert Gold: Niyazov’s Conflicted Approach to Turkmenistan’s Water Woes.” 16 April 2004. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/environment/articles/eav041604.shtml>

by Persians. Around the ancient city-state of Merv, near present-day Mary, a settled farming community had developed. This community supported an urban merchant population whose commercial activities were part of the Silk Road trade.<sup>40</sup>

In the 12th century, Turkmen and other Central Asian tribes overthrew the Seljuks. Over the course of the next century the area came under Mongolian domination as Genghis Khan's forces swept through the region. His harsh rule precipitated the movement of Turkmen southward and contributed to the formation of new tribal groups.

For several centuries the territory of present-day Turkmenistan was the battleground for competing Uzbek and Persian regional empires in which authority over the inhabitants was often more nominal than real. By the 15th century, the southern part of present-day Turkmenistan was chafing under Persian control. The northern part was dominated by the Uzbek-led states of Khiva and Bukhara.

The Khanate of Khiva, also known as Khorezm, illustrates the complicated relationship of the nomadic Turkmen with political authority. Some of the Turkmen, primarily of the Yomut tribe, who had taken up residence in the region began to consider themselves subjects of the Khivan khan by the latter half of the 18th century. Yet their way of life also enabled them to flee whenever the khan attempted to impose unwanted obligations on them.

Because the khan was reliant on their warrior prowess, the Turkmen were ultimately granted privileges not extended to other ethnic group inhabitants such as exemption from taxation as well as the right to own slaves. These concessions were intended to make a sedentary lifestyle more attractive to them. Nonetheless, as a 19th century observer wrote, "strictly speaking, even the settled ones don't live all the time in the same place."<sup>41</sup>

### **Russian Colonial Rule**

The Turkmen mounted the fiercest resistance to Russian imperial encroachment. However, by building a port city, Krasnovodsk (renamed Turkmenbashi a century later), on the shores of the Caspian Sea in 1869, the Russian Empire was able to establish a foothold in present-day Turkmenistan.

In 1873, the Russians were able to travel from their port city to the Khiva Khanate. During this time, Russian troops engaged in punitive raids against the Turkmen, many of whom were in the Khiva khanate military forces. Settlements were destroyed and non-combatants were slaughtered. The Russians reached agreement with the Persians later that year, which established the border between Turkmenistan and Iran that remains largely unchanged today.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress,. *Country Studies: Turkmenistan*. "History." March 1996. <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/1.htm>

<sup>41</sup> *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*. Edgar, Adrienne Lynn. "Sources of Identity Among the Turkmen [p. 23]." 2004. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>42</sup> Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Country Studies: Turkmenistan*. "Incorporation into Russia." 1996. <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/3.htm>

Those areas formerly under the control of Khiva and the Persians were incorporated into Russian Turkestan in 1881. It was unclear to the new rulers whether the Turkmen tribes were in fact distinct ethnic groups or merely sub-ethnic divisions within a tribal society.<sup>43</sup> It is easy to understand the Russian confusion. The Turkmen lacked a clearly demarcated territory, did not speak a common mother tongue or share a common history. Nor could their way of life offer a basis for ethnic cohesion; some were nomads, others were settled farmers who tilled the land and many based their livelihood on some combination of the two activities.

It was the Russians who first put the Turkmen under the authority of a centralized political structure. To administer the area, colonial officials created social distinctions that had not previously existed in Turkmen tribal culture where seniority conveyed authority and leadership was conferred only for a specific period of time according to the immediate needs of the group.

Preferring to deal with a hereditary elite that resembled Russian nobility, the officials selected representatives of leading families from each tribe or descent group who were put in charge of such tasks as collecting taxes. In exchange for their cooperation, members of the families were rewarded with land grants, salaried administrative positions, and officer-level appointments to the Czarist military.

### **Soviet Turkmenistan**

Czarist rule was replaced by Soviet communist leadership in the 1920s. According to Marxist ideology, societies pass through successive stages of development, from tribal origins where people subsist in a primitive environment to nation-states that are part of the larger capitalist world order before communism can emerge. The Soviets saw it as their mission to speed their non-Slavic brethren through this process by inculcating a sense of national identity through language standardization, demarcated territory, and economic development. While the average Turkmen was indifferent to the communist agenda, converts to the cause were highly receptive to the argument that the Turkmen needed a recognized homeland.

This marked a conceptual departure from the past because, for the first time, control of territory was linked to identity.

Moreover, Marxism offered an explanation as to why this had not happened earlier. In brief, the population had been artificially fragmented into tribal groups preventing the emergence of a collective identity. The establishment of a republic would overcome those divisions by creating a sense of ethnic solidarity from which class consciousness would emerge.



---

<sup>43</sup> *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*. Edgar, Adrienne Lynn. "Sources of Identity Among the Turkmen [p. 17]." 2004. Princeton: Princeton University Press. <http://books.google.com/books?id=-IUR24wFNRAC&pg=PA199&lpg=PA199&dq=russian+colonial+rule+turkmenistan&source=web&ots=pFeYeauwIt&sig=LmZD6uvqXc447XRuDHjfriczVIU#PPA17,M1>

In reality, class consciousness, which would give rise to what the Soviets considered to be the driving force of history—class struggle—was adapted by the Turkmen to provide justification for continuing ancient tribal vendettas. Groups bound together by genealogy, not class or residence within a set of administrative boundaries, remained the primary unit of social identity.<sup>44</sup> This was a legacy of pastoral nomadism which was not possible to eradicate in a short amount of time.

The Soviets were nonetheless successful in creating the basis for a republic. Educated Turkmen saw the benefits of becoming a unified entity which could marshal the resources to resist the bullying of other Central Asian nationalities. They promoted the standardization of a national language to replace the myriad of mutually unintelligible dialects spoken by Turkmen tribes. Their objectives were always more nationalist than socialist in nature, however. By the end of Soviet era, the Turkmen were liberated from the constraints of being part of a larger administrative entity with a socialist modernization program few Turkmen found appealing.

### Independence

After the Soviet Union was disbanded, the Communist Party renamed itself the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan. Its leader, Saparmurat Niyazov, survived the transition with his leadership intact. An engineer by training, he had joined the Communist Party in 1962. By 1985, Niyazov had been promoted to Party Chief for the Republic. In 1991, he was elected the first president of an independent Turkmenistan. In 1999, he was anointed president-for-life by parliament. The absence of political institutions with an independent basis of power under the Soviet system enabled him to do this and appropriate all political authority for himself.<sup>45</sup>



Courtesy of Wikipedia  
Independence Park in Ashgabat

Niyazov pronounced himself *Turkmenbashi* or “father of Turkmen.” Portraits of him appeared on every street corner dominating public space with a sign proclaiming “Nation, People, Leader” (*Halk, Watan, Turkmenbashi*).<sup>46</sup> No town square was complete without a golden statue of Niyazov standing, or sitting regally on a throne-like chair, chin cradled in hand projecting a sense he is mulling over matters of the greatest importance.<sup>47</sup> State-run television news was programmed to begin with a prayer or greeting for the venerated leader as Niyazov’s image was superimposed on the screen.

In the late 1990s, he declared that neither the Quran nor the Bible offered sufficient spiritual vision. To fill the gap, Niyazov wrote *Ruhnama* (The Answer to All Questions) which subsequently replaced much of the Soviet-era primary school curriculum. It is a

---

<sup>44</sup> *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*. Edgar, Adrienne Lynn. “Introduction: “Tribe, Class and Nation” 2004. Princeton: Princeton University Press. <http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/i7858.html>

<sup>45</sup> University of Leeds. Denison, Michael. “Reluctant Eurasians? Great Patriotic War Commemoration as Geopolitical Anchor in Turkmenistan.” [http://www.princeton.edu/~restudy/soyuz\\_papers/Denison.pdf](http://www.princeton.edu/~restudy/soyuz_papers/Denison.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Mother Jones.com. Rall, Ted. “All Turkmenbashi, All the Time.” 8 September 2000. <http://www.motherjones.com/commentary/columns/2000/09/rall2.html>

<sup>47</sup> National Public Radio. Gillespie, Kristen. “Niyazov’s Cult of Personality Grips Turkmenistan.” 9 August 2007. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12316714>

reinterpretation of national history in which Turkmenistan is represented as one of the great civilizations in the history of the world which had little interaction with those outside its borders. In addition, *Turkmenbashi* renamed the days of the week for himself, his family and some of the more colorful characters which appear in *Ruhnama*.<sup>48</sup> The introduction of family members was a way to emphasize his Turkmen ethnic roots and distance himself from his career rise through the “foreign” Soviet system.

The pink colored volume is found in every office, school and mosque or church. Public readings are held frequently and attendance is mandatory. Questions drawn from it appear on the written exam for a driver’s license. Although the contents may seem difficult not to ridicule, in fact writing spiritual guidance books has a long historical precedent among Central Asia leaders.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, while his more far-fetched pronouncements received international attention, it has been argued that these in fact obscured the actions of a rational, calculating politician who was successful in cultivating world leaders despite his obvious and bizarre eccentricities.<sup>50</sup> An alleged assassination attempt on his life in 2002 provided the pretext to crush all potential sources of internal opposition.

### Recent Developments

Niyazov’s sudden death in December 2006 led to predictions the country would descend into chaos, given that his cult of personality style of leadership had left no clear successor.<sup>51</sup> According to Turkmenistani law, the president is to be succeeded by the head of the legislative body, the People’s Assembly. This post, however, had been filled concurrently by Niyazov.<sup>52</sup>



© Antonis Shen  
President Berdimuhamedov sworn into office in 2007

A carefully organized election was held in February 2007 to choose his successor. While it was not monitored by outside observers, it was closely watched by governments in the

<sup>48</sup> *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*. Bremmer, Ian. “The Far Left side of the J Curve [p. 30].” 2006. New York: Simon and Shuster Paperbooks.

[http://books.google.com/books?id=mJSqwuwZT6AC&dq=the+j+curve+a+new+way+to+understand+why+nations+rise+and+fall&pg=PP1&ots=Ra0RrhAKW&sig=prXJOUTikwnaEdZC\\_L47L\\_UBYR0&hl=en&prev=http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=the+j+curve:+a+new+way+to+understand+why+nations+rise+and+fall&btnG=Google+Search&sa=X&oi=print&ct=title&cad=one-book-with-thumbnail#PPA30,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=mJSqwuwZT6AC&dq=the+j+curve+a+new+way+to+understand+why+nations+rise+and+fall&pg=PP1&ots=Ra0RrhAKW&sig=prXJOUTikwnaEdZC_L47L_UBYR0&hl=en&prev=http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=the+j+curve:+a+new+way+to+understand+why+nations+rise+and+fall&btnG=Google+Search&sa=X&oi=print&ct=title&cad=one-book-with-thumbnail#PPA30,M1)

<sup>49</sup> Contemporary Review. Rasizade, Alec. “Turkmenbashi and his Turkmenistan.” October 2003.

[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2242/is\\_1653\\_283/ai\\_110266765/pg\\_2](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2242/is_1653_283/ai_110266765/pg_2)

<sup>50</sup> University of Wollongong. Brown, Stephen and Konstantin Sheiko. “The Soviet Legacy and Leader Cults in Post-Communist Central Asia: The Example of Turkmenistan [p. 5]” (paper presented at the 16th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Wollongong). 26 June 2006. <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/biennial-conference/2006/Brown-S+Sheiko-K-ASAA2006.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Eurasia Insight. “Turkmenbashi Dies, but Impact for Turkmenistan is Unclear.” 21 December 2006.

<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav122106.shtml>

<sup>52</sup> BBC News, International Edition. “Turkmenistan’s ‘Iron Ruler’ Dies.” 21 December 2006.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6198983.stm>

West as well as Russia and China for evidence the political system might change.<sup>53</sup> In fact little changed; Niyazov's successor, his dentist, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, who had also served as a government minister, simply appropriated the cult of personality for himself.<sup>54</sup> It has been a gradual process of transferring ownership; portraits of Niyazov have disappeared to be replaced by those of Berdimuhamedov.

---

<sup>53</sup> New York Times. Chivers, C.J. "Turkmenistan Holds Carefully Managed Election." 11 February 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/11/world/asia/11cnd-turk.html?ex=1328850000&en=a5faf7fd9f4b5a75&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

<sup>54</sup> Radio Free Europe. Pannier, Bruce. "Turkmenistan: Explaining the Presidential Election." 8 February 2007. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/02/78707cdf-3e78-4dbb-b453-f367a7a4969a.html>

## **Timeline of Turkmenistan**

**6th Century B.C.E.** Territory which comprises present-day Turkmenistan was part of Cyrus the Great's Empire.

**4th Century B.C.E.** Alexander the Great establishes control of Central Asia.

**7th Century** **Arabs conquer Central Asia and introduce Islam to inhabitants.**

**10th Century** Oghuz Turkish tribes, forebears of the Turkmen, begin migration into the area between Urals and Aral Sea and establish tribal bases.

**13th Century** **Genghis Khan of Mongolia conquers all of Central Asia.**

**14th–15th Centuries** Oghuz tribes in present-day Turkmenistan shared enough common characteristics to be considered a distinct nationality.

**15th–17th Centuries** Northern Turkmenistan is absorbed into the Uzbekistan-based Khanates of Khiva and Bukhara while the southern part is controlled by Persians.

**1881** Turkmenistan is incorporated into Russian Turkestan.

**1925** **Turkmenistan becomes a Republic of the Soviet Union and its borders are drawn to match those of the present-day nation-state.**

**1930s** Soviets set about remaking Turkmenistan into a class-based rather than tribally-organized society.

**1940** Written Turkmen rendered in a modified Cyrillic script.

**1967** **Completion of Karakum Canal, the world's longest artificial waterway, enables a dramatic expansion in cotton cultivation.**

**1985** Saparmyrat Niyazov assumes leadership of the Turkmen Communist Party.

**1990** **Turkmenistan declares itself to be an autonomous Republic within USSR and Niyazov is named President.**

**1991** Niyazov declares independence shortly before USSR is disbanded.

**1992** New Constitution adopted making the President head of state with broad powers of governance.

**1992** Niyazov elected President of Turkmenistan in an election where he stands unopposed.

**1993** Manat introduced as national currency replacing the Soviet ruble.

**1994** Referendum allows Niyazov to remain in power until 2002 without further elections.

**1995** Turkmenistan declares its foreign policy is guided by doctrine of “positive neutrality” and non-aligned status recognized by UN.

**1996** Turkmen Latin alphabet phased in to replace Cyrillic one in use.

**1997** Land ownership in Turkmenistan is privatized.

**1998** Natural gas pipeline to Iran starts production.

**1999 Parliament approves Niyazov “president for life” and he establishes a government based on a cult of his personality.**

**2000** Plans are unveiled for the construction of a large artificial lake in the middle of the Karakum Desert.

**2002 August** Niyazov renames days of the week and months of the year to honor himself, his family and his spiritual narrative of Turkmen history, *Ruhnama*.

**2002 November** Assassination attempt on Niyazov’s life. More than 40 assailants ultimately sentenced to long jail terms though controversy continues to surround incident.

**2005 August** Recorded musical performances banned on television and in public places.

**2006 April** Agreement reached between Ashgabat and Beijing to build pipeline to supply Turkmen gas to China.

**2006 December Niyazov dies of heart failure.**

**2007 January 1** Minister of Defense disappears briefly from public view leading to speculation that intense jockeying underway to succeed Niyazov.

**2007 February** Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, who served as interim President, wins carefully orchestrated election to succeed Niyazov.

**2007** Public portraits of the late Niyazov are gradually replaced with those of Berdimuhamedov indicating that no political thaw is to be expected.



## Chapter 4 - Economy

### Introduction

Turkmenistan's economy is export-driven. Its primary commodities are oil, natural gas and cotton. This has enabled the country to register GDP growth thought to be around 7%.<sup>55</sup> Because statistics and budget data are not made available to the public, hard information about the real state of the economy is difficult to come by.<sup>56</sup> There's an international consensus, however, that a significant obstacle to achieving higher growth rates is the fact that the economy remains under the same types of controls introduced by the Soviet Union to administer a planned economy.



© Gihad Rom  
Port of Turkmenbashi

### Standard of Living

GDP growth contracted in the years immediately following independence, although not as dramatically as in other parts of the former USSR. This would have resulted in a reduced standard of living. Most families continue to derive their living from some sort of state sector employment. Such jobs are in short supply and unemployment is assumed to be high. To make life more tolerable, the government provides a number of subsidies to its citizens in the form of free gas, electricity, water, etc. Delivery can range from sporadic to non-existent, however.<sup>57</sup> The standard of living in rural Turkmenistan is much lower than in urban areas.

More problematic for the long-term is the destruction of the primary educational system, which offers Turkmen schoolchildren a curriculum dominated by the study of Ruhnama, a quasi-religious history textbook written by the late President; this does not bode well for preparing students for good jobs.<sup>58</sup> The number of schooling years has been decreased from ten to nine.

### Agriculture

Agriculture is the dominant source of employment for the Turkmen. Yet farmers grow mainly cash crops, in particular cotton. Under Soviet rule staple food items for consumption were imported from other parts of the country. After independence they had to be procured from other governments through bilateral trade.<sup>59</sup> This led Ashgabat to prioritize grain in order to achieve self-sufficiency in food production.

---

<sup>55</sup> CIA World FactBook. "Turkmenistan." 28 January 2008. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>

<sup>56</sup> Institute for War & Peace Reporting. Khadjiev, Annadurdy. "Turkmen Economy Needs Real, Not Superficial Reform." 11 January 2008. [http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=341921&apc\\_state=henh](http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=341921&apc_state=henh)

<sup>57</sup> Radio Free Europe. Pannier, Bruce. "Turkmenistan: 'Gas-Rich' Residents Shiver in the Cold." 3 January 2008. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2008/01/a2e230b8-4619-4245-ac1d-3bfd86683bbf.html>

<sup>58</sup> New York Times. Greenberg, Ilan. "When a Kleptocratic, Megalomaniacal Dictator Goes Bad." 5 January 2003.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E02E5DA143FF936A35752C0A9659C8B63&sec=&spn=&pagewanted=print>

<sup>59</sup> Mongabay.com, Country Studies. "Turkmenistan Economy."

[http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country\\_studies/turkmenistan/ECONOMY.html](http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/turkmenistan/ECONOMY.html)

Tales of a record grain harvest in 2005 conflicted with reports of flour and bread shortages. This discrepancy is explained by the fact that officials who report honestly risk not only being sacked but possible imprisonment, creating incentives for them to falsify acreage sown and inflate harvest yields.<sup>60</sup> When President Niyazov finally became aware of the situation, heads rolled and he ordered that grain production be increased by 20% the next year to make up the shortfall.<sup>61</sup>



On a per capita basis, Turkmenistan is the world's largest supplier of cotton. It is second to Uzbekistan in output among the Central Asian Republics. After independence, the government wanted to maintain high harvest levels since they were a source of foreign exchange earnings. The state supplies farmers with planting seeds and irrigation water. It then buys the harvest from them at a low, state-set price which is then sold on the international market at market-determined prices.<sup>62</sup> Whether or not the farmers come out ahead is a matter of dispute.<sup>63</sup>

The government continues to dictate how much wheat and cotton will be grown by whom and where without any input from the cultivators. Decades of intensive farming, necessary to meet production quotas, has reduced the land's fertility. Moreover, lacking such necessities as adequate storage facilities, both inputs and outputs are squandered in the cultivation and harvesting process.<sup>64</sup>

## Energy Resources

### *Natural Gas*

Turkmenistan's natural gas reserves at 2.86 trillion cubic meters (100 trillion cubic ft), making it the world's 4th or 5th largest source, according to British Petroleum. It is second only to Russia as the largest natural gas producer in the former USSR, producing 62.2 billion cubic meters (2,189 billion cubic ft) in 2006. More than two-thirds of production was left available for export after domestic consumption for 2005 used only an estimated 17.07 billion cubic meters (602 billion cubic ft).<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Radio Free Europe. Pannier, Bruce. "What 'Happened to 'Record' Grain Harvest?" 8 November 2005. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/11/71106ca6-77df-4f36-9167-d6910024cda8.html>

<sup>61</sup> Turkmenistan Project. "Weekly News Brief on Turkmenistan: November 24–November 30 2006." <http://www.eurasianet.org/turkmenistan.project/index.php?page=wnb/editor/wnb20061201&lang=eng>

<sup>62</sup> U.S.D.A. Foreign Agricultural Service, Global Agriculture Information Network. "Turkmenistan Cotton and Products Annual 2005." 23 June 2005. <http://www.fas.usda.gov/gainfiles/200506/146130080.doc>

<sup>63</sup> International Crisis Group. "The Curse of Cotton: Central Asia's Destructive Monoculture." 28 February 2005. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3294&l=1>

<sup>64</sup> Rand Corporation. "The Land, Chapter Four [p. 102]." [http://www.rand.org/pubs/commercial\\_books/CB367/chap4.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/commercial_books/CB367/chap4.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> United Press International. Daly, John K. "Analysis: China and Turkmen Energy." 4 January 2008. [http://www.upi.com/International\\_Security/Energy/Analysis/2008/01/04/analysis\\_china\\_and\\_turkmen\\_ene\\_rgy/4323/](http://www.upi.com/International_Security/Energy/Analysis/2008/01/04/analysis_china_and_turkmen_ene_rgy/4323/)

Since the gas is naturally pressurized, pumps are not needed to bring it to the surface. It's the logistics of transportation that are problematic. The existing pipelines were laid as part of a single hub transmission system which leads to Moscow, a legacy of the USSR. Most gas is transported through the Ukraine in pipelines owned by intermediaries of Gazprom, the Russian oil monopoly.<sup>66</sup>



In 2006 Turkmenistan successfully negotiated better terms of trade for its natural gas exports to Russia and Ukraine. Specifically, the deal included an end to barter settlements as well as a nearly 50% increase in the export price.<sup>67</sup> The agreement allowed Gazprom to buy 50 billion cubic meters (1,765 billion cubic ft) of Turkmenistani gas a year at USD 100 per 1,000 cubic meters (35,314 cubic ft), up from the previous price of USD 65. In November 2007 a subsequent agreement raised the amount to USD 130 for January–June 2008, with an agreed additional increase to USD 150 effective 1 July 2008.<sup>68</sup>

The Russians are eager to maintain this arrangement despite the price increases they have been forced to sign off on, since they sell two-thirds of their own natural gas to Western Europe at a market price.<sup>69</sup> It is considerably higher than what they pay Turkmenistan whose gas is used to meet their own domestic consumption needs.<sup>70</sup> The only way to change this arrangement is through new pipeline construction which would deliver Turkmenistani gas elsewhere.<sup>71</sup> A number of such pipelines have been proposed. In addition to cost, the number of sovereign countries through which they need to pass poses difficulties.

### *Petroleum*

Turkmenistan is a geographical anomaly which the petroleum industry has never confronted on such a scale: a nation atop abundant hydrocarbon deposits which lacks the transportation infrastructure to deliver the product to industrial world markets where it is in high demand.<sup>72</sup> Pipeline transmission across national boundaries and diverse

<sup>66</sup> Radio Free Europe. Kupchinsky, Roman. "East: Ukraine, Russia Spar over Turkmen Gas." 18 April 2005. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/04/4536eb92-8082-4970-8f81-5d070a6ecf47.html>

<sup>67</sup> World Bank. "Country Profile 2007: Turkmenistan." September 2006. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/TURKMENISTANEXTN/0,,menuPK:300741~pagePK:141159~piPK:141110~theSitePK:300736,00.html>

<sup>68</sup> United Press International. Daly, John K. "Analysis: China and Turkmen Energy." 4 January 2008. [http://www.upi.com/International\\_Security/Energy/Analysis/2008/01/04/analysis\\_china\\_and\\_turkmen\\_energy/4323/](http://www.upi.com/International_Security/Energy/Analysis/2008/01/04/analysis_china_and_turkmen_energy/4323/)

<sup>69</sup> Brookings Institute. Demokratizatsiya, Hill, Fiona and Florence Fee. "Fueling the Future: The Prospects for Russian Oil and Gas [p.14–15]." No. 10. Fall 2002. [http://www.brookings.edu/dybdocroot/views/papers/hillf/200205\\_demokratizatsiya.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/dybdocroot/views/papers/hillf/200205_demokratizatsiya.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> Jamestown Foundation. Socor, Vladimir. "Interest Rebounds in Trans-Caspian Pipeline for Turkmen Gas." 24 January 2006. [http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=2370697](http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2370697)

<sup>71</sup> Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "The Great Uncertainty: Russian-Central Asian Energy Relations." 13 June 2007. <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/index.cfm?fa=eventDetail&id=1013&prog=zru>

<sup>72</sup> American University, The School of International Service. "Turkmen Oil and Natural Gas: The Viability of Delivering Prosperity to Global Markets." <http://www.american.edu/TED/TURKMEN.HTM>

topographical landscapes is much more expensive than sea tanker transport. With the price of oil steadily inching upward, however, it may become more attractive to extract petroleum even under these circumstances.

The vision of a trans-Caspian energy bridge connecting Turkmenistan to Western Europe remains unfulfilled. In the 1990s there was such a planned transportation link through the Caucasus which, despite the distance, would have delivered Turkmen oil to Europe at a reasonable cost. When gas rather than oil, as expected, was discovered in intermediary Azerbaijan, they became a major supplier to western Europe and lost interest in serving as a pipeline conduit for Turkmenistan. The two Caspian Sea neighbors then became embroiled in a dispute over claims to ownership of mid-sea mineral deposits. Moscow took advantage of the disagreement to convince Ashgabat it was better off selling its oil to Gazprom. It remains contractually obligated to do so.<sup>73</sup>

### **Industry**

Although Turkmenistan possesses a strong resource base for industrialization, the Soviets invested in Turkmen industry only to the extent it served the needs of the entire country. So the newly independent nation, for example, lacks significant domestic oil refining capacity.<sup>74</sup> It also has limited cotton spinning capabilities. The government would like to further develop and modernize its industrial capacity because the prices finished or semi-finished products fetch on world markets is higher than for raw materials. To develop production facilities capable of producing higher value added products, however, will require foreign investment.

### **Banking**

The banking sector, which consists of the Central Bank of Turkmenistan (CBT) and several other specialized banks, continues to function essentially as a conduit through which state-owned enterprises (SOE) receive credit.<sup>75</sup> This was the system set up under Soviet administrative governance to meet the needs of a planned economy. As a result, when inflation surged during various periods since independence, the CBT lacked the levers to tame it since it doesn't have control of monetary policy.



The disparity between the official exchange rate and the “curbside” or black market rate settled at a five-fold difference which reflects the strong need to marketize the financial sector. Yet some well-placed government insiders may not want to do that given the

---

<sup>73</sup> Johns Hopkins University, SAISPHERE. Starr, Frederick and Svante Cornell. “The Politics of Pipelines: Bringing Caspian Oil to World Markets.” 2005. <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/pubaffairs/publications/saisphere/winter05/starr-cornell.html>

<sup>74</sup> Jamestown Foundation, PRISM. Kolchin, Sergei. “Turkmenistan’s Oil and Gas Complex.” Volume 4. 9 January 1998.

[http://www.jamestown.org/publications\\_details.php?volume\\_id=5&issue\\_id=243&article\\_id=2759](http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=5&issue_id=243&article_id=2759)

<sup>75</sup> Asian Development Bank. Turkmenistan. “Outlook: 2003–2004.” 2008.

<http://www.adb.org/Documents/Books/ADO/2003/tkm.asp>

lucrative opportunities the status quo affords for arbitrage.<sup>76</sup> In the absence of reform, however, interest in financial sector investment will remain tepid. No international bank has identified any Central Asian country as a target market for its services.<sup>77</sup>

### Foreign Investment

Turkmenistan's investment environment can be characterized as "closed" despite the fact the government officially welcomes foreign investment.<sup>78</sup> Regulations are not transparent and companies from countries with friendly relations with Turkmenistan enjoy the insider track.<sup>79</sup> Negotiating with the mercurial late President Niyazov, who sacked technocrats whom he suspected of disloyalty, also proved to be a disincentive to investors. His successor has not been in power long enough to engender more than speculation over how far he will reform the system.<sup>80</sup> A year after he took office, no significant economic reforms have been proposed.

The government appears to recognize the critical role international investors familiar with world market trends can play in opening up the sector. There is also the prospect that Western buyers would be willing to pay the market price for gas, in contrast to Russia which has maintained its pipeline monopoly.<sup>81</sup> During a September 2007 visit to Washington, President Berdimuhamedov met with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to discuss ways to promote American investment in Turkmenistan.<sup>82</sup> Yet regulations unveiled since then differ little from those previously on the books. Western companies would want independent confirmation of natural gas reserves before committing themselves to major pipeline investment projects.<sup>83</sup>



U.S. Asst. Secretary of State Sullivan visits Ashgabat

<sup>76</sup> World Politics. Hellman, Joel. "Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Postcommunist Transitions." Vol. 50.2. January 1998. [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/world\\_politics/toc/wp50.2.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/world_politics/toc/wp50.2.html)

<sup>77</sup> Radio Free Europe. Saidazimova, Gulnoza. "Central Asia: New Report Says Banking Woes Hurting Some Central Asian Economies." 15 December 2004. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/12/a334cdc2-de89-4917-a68d-b2118bf22416.html>

<sup>78</sup> Heritage Foundation. "Index of Economic Freedom: Turkmenistan." <http://www.heritage.org/index/country.cfm?id=Turkmenistan>

<sup>79</sup> Bureau of Economic, Energy and Business Affairs. U.S. Department of State. "Turkmenistan: 2007 Investment Climate Statement." <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/ifd/2007/80754.htm>

<sup>80</sup> San Francisco Chronicle. Kucera, Joshua. "New Turkmen President Tones Down Despotism." 28 August 2007. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2007/08/28/MNPNR5FMB.DTL&type=politics>

<sup>81</sup> Radio Free Europe. Najibullah, Farangis. "Turkmenistan: Ashgabat Presses Cautiously Forward on Foreign Investment." 18 August 2007.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/10/a4e262ad-6804-44e2-9183-9f208514f82a.html>

<sup>82</sup> Asia Economic Institute. "Turkmenistan's Natural Gas and Oil Industry Hopefully Opens to International Investors." [http://www.asiaecon.org/aei/index.php/inside\\_asia/country/turkmenistan](http://www.asiaecon.org/aei/index.php/inside_asia/country/turkmenistan)

<sup>83</sup> International Herald Tribune. Stern, David. "Turkmen Natural Gas: A Glittering Prize, or a Mirage in the Desert?" 13 November 2007. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/11/13/sports/renturk.php>

## Chapter 5 - Society

### Ethnic Groups

Turkmenistan is a tribal society with a stratified social structure which historically included slaves. The tribes claim a common mythical ancestor, Oghuz Khan, from whom they are descended. The genealogical connection is strong within each group, each of which believes its tribe represents the true “Turkmen.”<sup>84</sup> Each large tribe is identifiable based on carpet pattern, clothing, and headgear.<sup>85</sup> There are also groups with deep roots in Turkmenistan that do not trace their ancestry back to Oghuz Khan. Instead they appear to be descended from other Turks and Persian settlers. In addition there are ethnic minorities such as Uzbeks and Tajiks who live inside the borders of Turkmenistan.



© Nicola Tanggaard  
Young woman in Ashgabat

### Language

Turkmen refers to a large number of dialects many of which are mutually unintelligible. The official language of Turkmenistan is based on the Yomut dialect. After incorporation into the Soviet Union, a modified Cyrillic script was introduced. Before that, two other scripts had been used, an Arabic one and a Latin one.<sup>86</sup>

Russian remains more widely in use than in other former Central Asian Republics in part owing to difficulties in expressing technical concepts in Turkmen.<sup>87</sup> In 1996 the Latin alphabet was introduced replacing the Russian Cyrillic alphabet.

### Cuisine

Turkmen culinary traditions are rooted in their nomadic past. Due to their nomadic way of life and the lack of wood available for furniture making, Turkmen tribes set their food on the ground wherever they sought shelter. The “dining table” continues to consist of a cloth, typically laid on a carpeted floor. It is the place in the home around which contemporary family life revolves.<sup>88</sup>

This nomadic history necessitated that food preparation remain a simple affair. Staple items include soups (usually with a meat base) and dairy products. Cultivated vegetables were an infrequent addition to the daily diet. The Karakum Desert, which encompasses four-fifths of the country, limited the prospects for settled farming. Instead, Turkmen

---

<sup>84</sup> University of California, Berkeley. Edgar, Adrienne. “Identities, Communities and Nations in Central Asia: A Historical Perspective.” (Paper presented at the “Central Asia and Russia: Responses to the ‘War on Terrorism.’”) 29 October 2001. [http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~bsp/caucasus/articles/edgar\\_2001-1029.pdf](http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~bsp/caucasus/articles/edgar_2001-1029.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> Country Studies. U.S. Library of Congress. “Turkmenistan Social Structure.” 1996. <http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/11.htm>

<sup>86</sup> UCLA Language Materials Project. “Turkmen.” <http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/Profile.aspx?LangID=68&menu=004>

<sup>87</sup> BNET. “Bread is Sacred: Reflections of a Peace Corps Nurse, Turkmenistan 1996-1998.” Sept/Oct 2002. [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa4022/is\\_200209/ai\\_n9110664](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4022/is_200209/ai_n9110664)

<sup>88</sup> Suite101.com. Nayler, Ray. “Turkmen Culture Tips.” 6 September 2007. [http://middleeasttravel.suite101.com/article.cfm/turkmen\\_culture\\_facts](http://middleeasttravel.suite101.com/article.cfm/turkmen_culture_facts)

raised sheep, camels, and mountain goats hardy enough to withstand desert temperature extremes. These animals offered them sustenance in the form of milk and meat.<sup>89</sup>

Regional variation in cuisine reflects different natural habitats. In the southwest, for example, fish is part of the Turkmen diet owing to proximity to the Caspian Sea. In the heartland, a well-known dish is sheep stomach stuffed with minced meat (*garyn*). Preparation involves burying the stuffed carcass in the hot sand and then air-drying it in a way that preserves the meat. In contrast to other Central Asians, the Turkmen do not eat horse meat given the value of the horse in their culture.<sup>90</sup>

### Horses

The cult of the horse was an essential feature of Turkmen culture. For nomads who frequently engaged in warfare, a good horse could mean the difference between life and death. Given such an essential role in tribal survival, horses were well cared for by their masters. This is reflected in the Turkmen saying, “When you get up in the morning, greet your father and then see your horse.”<sup>91</sup>

The region’s arid environment favored the survival of those which could tolerate extreme heat, dry cold and drought. Moreover, fresh grass, an essential component of the high bulk diet required by equines, was available only a few months of the year. The domesticated horse, in short, had to subsist on a meager diet comprised of low-bulk, high-protein grains mixed with mutton fat, which was often fed to it by hand.



The small-hooved Akhal-Teke is recognized today as the national symbol of Turkmenistan.<sup>92</sup> Archeological digs in southern Turkmenistan have unearthed the skeletal remains of tall, fine-boned horses dating back to 2400 B.C.E. which have been identified as its forbearers. The name of the breed, however, dates back only to the end of the 19th century. “Akhal” refers to the long oasis situated in the foothills of the Kopetday Mountains and “Teke” to the particular Turkmen tribe which inhabits that area and raised this breed.

Over the course of history successive waves of human and equine movement throughout the region largely bypassed the isolated Akhal oasis. The Caspian Sea, located to its west, mountains on the south and desert to the north collectively functioned as a protective geographical barrier that contributed to the genetic purity of these prized animals.

---

<sup>89</sup> Saudi Aramco. Goldstein, Darra. “Turkmenistan on a Plate.” January/February 2006. <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200601/turkmenistan.on.a.plate.htm>

<sup>90</sup> Saudi Aramco. Goldstein, Darra. “Turkmenistan on a Plate.” January/February 2006. <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200601/turkmenistan.on.a.plate.htm>

<sup>91</sup> ARAMCO World. “The Golden Horses of Turkmenistan.” May/June 1997. <http://www.silk-road.com/artl/maslow.html>

<sup>92</sup> Oklahoma State University. “Akhal Teke.” c.1995–2007. <http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/horses/akhalteke/index.htm>

Although no longer required for warfare or field work, the breed's endurance owes to its current-day international success as a show horse.<sup>93</sup>

## Carpets

Marco Polo, who passed through Central Asia in the 13th century, was the first foreigner to remark on the intricate beauty of Turkmen carpets.<sup>94</sup> Though referred to as woven, carpets are in fact knotted. Turkmen carpets are distinguished by their color, almost always red, and their density, which reaches 240,000 knots per square meter (10 square ft) in some traditional weaves.<sup>95</sup> Offset knotting, which refers to a high vertical horizontal knot ratio, is a distinct feature of Yomut carpets.<sup>96</sup>

For centuries carpets provided Turkmen families with a source of cash income. Tradition dictated that men built the loom frames which women worked to weave the carpets.

When Central Asia came under the control of Tsarist Russia in the late 19th century, the indigenous rug weaving industry evolved from being a local occupation to producing a commodity for export.<sup>97</sup> After independence in 1991, this trend continued. Machines are rapidly replacing human weavers in Turkmenistan.<sup>98</sup> Carpets represent a source of hard currency for the government and mass production is the best means to maximize the bottom line. Individual artisans, largely cut off from the outside world, are unable to respond to new trends in the international carpet market.



## Music

The music of Turkmenistan has its origins in tribal nomadic history. Itinerant singers (*bakshi*) who were sometimes accompanied by instruments travelled among the tribes. Melodies were passed down and the *bakshi* would personalize them by adding their own interpretations as they sang. Different instruments became associated with different geographical locations, for example the pipes were played in the mountains. In addition, rhythms were used to symbolize different aspects of every day life such as a horse galloping or a carpet weaver at work.

---

<sup>93</sup> Central Asian Equines. "Breed History and Standards: Akhal-Teke" No date.  
[http://www.centralasianequines.com/breed\\_history\\_&\\_standards\\_at.htm](http://www.centralasianequines.com/breed_history_&_standards_at.htm)

<sup>94</sup> Transitions Abroad.com. Powley, Hayley. "Discovering Turkmenistan Culture and Carpets." September/October 2004.

[http://www.transitionsabroad.com/publications/magazine/0409/culture\\_and\\_carpets\\_in\\_turkmenistan.shtml](http://www.transitionsabroad.com/publications/magazine/0409/culture_and_carpets_in_turkmenistan.shtml)

<sup>95</sup> Country Studies. U.S. Library of Congress. "Turkmenistan Industry." 1996.  
<http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/22.htm>

<sup>96</sup> Marla Mallett: Textiles and Tribal Oriental Rugs. "Woven Structures Update: Turkmen Offset Knotting." No date. <http://www.marlamallett.com/turkmen-offset.htm>

<sup>97</sup> eRugGallery.com. "Turkmenistan/Uzbekistan." 2008.  
[http://www.eruggallery.com/learnrugs/learn\\_detail/make/lrn\\_make\\_turkmenistan.htm](http://www.eruggallery.com/learnrugs/learn_detail/make/lrn_make_turkmenistan.htm)

<sup>98</sup> Radio Free Europe. Tahir, Mohammad. "Turkmenistan: Native Carpet Weaving An Endangered Tradition." 4 September 2006.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/09/de396191-deb4-41cc-aefc-a622a88ae442.html>

Russian colonialists were intrigued when they first heard this music. They annotated the melodies and published them. The music was first recorded after the establishment of the Soviet Union. In 1928 an edition of “Turkmen Music” was released to great critical acclaim. Turkmen composers took advantage of the educational opportunities Moscow afforded in polyphony and composition, resulting in new genres of traditional music being created.<sup>99</sup>



In 2005 the late President Niyazov announced a ban on sound recordings at musical performances on state holidays, in television broadcasts that featured lip-synching which he found particularly offensive, at all officially organized cultural events and in places of mass assembly as well as at weddings and other public celebrations. The stated aim of this prohibition was to protect Turkmenistan’s unique cultural heritage, specifically its musical and singing traditions.<sup>100</sup>

Previously he had declared that opera was an alien form of music. As a result opera and ballet halls, followed by the circus and movie theatres, were prohibited from putting on performances and screenings. In January 2008 his successor reversed the ban on ballet and circus performances which had been put in effect in 2001.<sup>101</sup> The decision offered hope that the performing arts can be fully revived in Turkmenistan in the near future.

### Literature

History was traditionally passed down in oral form, particularly poetry. The unrivalled literary genius of Turkmenistan was a poet named Fragi Makhtumkuli (1770–1840). His poems, which are revered more than the words of the Quran, embody mystical, lyrical, religious, social, and patriotic concerns which may account for their wide and enduring appeal. Moreover, his tragic life personifies the view that an artist must suffer to produce great works. Born in a place which is now part of Iran and trapped in a loveless marriage, the loss of his two young sons to illness was just a part of the hardships he endured.

There are conflicting interpretations of what became of his literary output; according to one, the entire corpus was confiscated by the Persians. As he stood witness, the camel on which his manuscripts had been packed lost its footing and tumbled into a river which swept it away. The precious cargo was never recovered.<sup>102</sup> However, one hundred manuscripts survive, including one housed in the British Museum.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup> Cultural Directory. “Turkmenistan: Music.” No date.

<http://www.turkmen.co.uk/PerfArts/Musicians/Introduction.htm>

<sup>100</sup> BBC News (International News). “Turkmenistan Bans Recorded Music.” 23 August 2005.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4177622.stm>

<sup>101</sup> Radio Free Europe. Pannier, Bruce. “Turkmenistan: Lions and Tigers and Mozart to Return to Cultural Life.” 26 January 2008. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2008/01/b234f43f-64f5-40a4-b25c-d8e5bc65abf1.html>

<sup>102</sup> Plants Genetic Resources in Central Asian Countries. “Turkmenistan Culture.” 2003. [http://www.cac-biodiversity.org/tkm/tkm\\_culture.htm](http://www.cac-biodiversity.org/tkm/tkm_culture.htm)

<sup>103</sup> Turkmen Literature. “Omakhtumkuli Let’s Not That Way Sink!” No date. [http://www.gunesh.org/english/azemoun\\_makhtumkuli.htm](http://www.gunesh.org/english/azemoun_makhtumkuli.htm)

The late President Niyazov also published several books of poetry. One poem was praised by an exiled writer with the caveat that it was unlikely to have been produced by Niyazov's own pen, however. Schooled in the Russian language which was the working language for most of his professional career, Turkmenbashi's command of Turkmen was not considered good enough to have created the works of poetry he passed off as his own.<sup>104</sup>

## Religion

Most Turkmen identify themselves as Sunni Muslims. Since independence there has been a revival of Islam. The number of mosques has increased from 4 to 398.<sup>105</sup> Still, most Turkmen do not attend mosque services on a regular basis or demonstrate adherence to the faith publicly except in such life passage public events as weddings, funerals and burials.<sup>106</sup>

They have long been regarded as practicing a form of "folk Islam" rather than the stricter variant observed in Middle Eastern countries. This determination is based partly on the number of rituals Turkmen perform which do not have their origins in Islam. Shrine or holy site worship, for example, remains an important part of daily life despite the fact that veneration of saints (in the place of God) is not permitted according to Islamic teaching.

Many Turkmen, particularly residents of rural areas, continue to pray for miracles at shrines through appeals to its patron saint.<sup>107</sup>



In addition, the concept of the "evil eye" is an important one in Turkmenistan. Travelers have reported bazaars are full of goods marketed to ward off the evil eye.<sup>108</sup> Most accidents which do not have an obvious cause are attributed to the powers of the evil eye. As a precaution, Turkmen hang a shrub with spherical twigs over their doorways that is thought to have the power to ward off the effects of this unwelcome spirit.<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Radio Free Europe. Moore, Kathleen. "World: Many Politicians Choose To Follow Their Hearts, Let Their Artistic Sides Soar." 10 March 2005.

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/03/c3c910da-2e96-41f5-afb3-12adedf39422.html>

<sup>105</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. U.S. Department of State. "Turkmenistan. International Religious Freedom Report 2007." 14 September 2007.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90236.htm>

<sup>106</sup> Country Studies. U.S. Library of Congress. "Turkmenistan Religion." 1996.

<http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/14.htm>

<sup>107</sup> Central Asian Monitor. Tyson, David. "Shrine Pilgrimage in Turkmenistan as a Means to Understand Islam Among the Turkmen." 1997. <http://www.uga.edu/islam/turkmen.html>

<sup>108</sup> New Yorker. Theroux, Paul. "Letter from Turkmenistan: The Golden Man." 28 May 2007.

[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/05/28/070528fa\\_fact\\_theroux](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/05/28/070528fa_fact_theroux)

<sup>109</sup> *Tradition and Society in Turkmenistan: Gender, Oral Culture and Song*. Blackwell, Carole. "Religion and Belief Patterns [p. 39]." 2001.

Routledge. [http://books.google.com/books?id=ZwUSitzGojkC&pg=PA39&lpg=PA39&dq=evil+eye+turkmenistan&source=web&ots=CGpdm454mA&sig=qRXinJo3SA\\_3TaCDrjQm10i9QRg#PPA39,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=ZwUSitzGojkC&pg=PA39&lpg=PA39&dq=evil+eye+turkmenistan&source=web&ots=CGpdm454mA&sig=qRXinJo3SA_3TaCDrjQm10i9QRg#PPA39,M1)

## Chapter 6 - National Security

### Introduction

Turkmenistan is a small Central Asian country with natural gas reserves which are ranked conservatively as within the top 10, perhaps the top five, in the world. This gives it an economic and strategic importance far beyond what territorial size alone would suggest. The driving force behind the 19th century “Great Game” between imperial Britain and Czarist Russia was not simply competition to gain control over Central Asia’s natural resources for itself, but also to acquire the power to deny access to others. In many respects the United States has replaced Britain as the outside power seeking to achieve a dominant role in the economic and political future of the region.<sup>110</sup> New players have also been added, principally Iran and the People’s Republic of China.



Turkmenbashi's statue at the Walk of Health

### Turkmenistan’s Foreign Policy

When the Soviet Union (USSR) was disbanded in 1991, Turkmenistan went from being a republic to a nation-state literally overnight. The highest ranking official, who had been named president a year earlier, managed to hold on to that title through the transition and a subsequent election, in which he ran unchallenged. This mandate was later extended to lifetime by a parliament which answered to him. Over the course of a decade and a half, President Saparmurat Niyazov, also known as Turkmenbashi, maintained the country’s Stalinist character like a “shrine to an aging silent film star” with his cult of personality style of governance.<sup>111</sup>

The need to establish post-independence foreign relations led to a policy called “positive neutrality.” Turkmenistan’s non-aligned status was officially recognized by the United Nations in 1995. In short, Ashgabat would take advantage of opportunities presented by any side as they came along instead of entering into formal alliances with any major power bloc.<sup>112</sup> In practice, positive neutrality resulted in Turkmenistan’s relative isolation from the rest of the world. This has been interpreted as a calculated move on the part of Niyazov to hold on to power by keeping global influences at bay.<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Danish Association for Research on the Caucasus. Norstein, Øystein. “Oil in the Caspian Region and Central Asia-the Political Risk of the Great Game Continued” (presented at a conference in Boulder, CO). 11 April 1998. <http://www.caucasus.dk/publication8.htm>

<sup>111</sup> *The J-Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*. Bremmer, Ian. “Chapter Two: The Far Left Side of the J Curve [p. 30].” 2006. New York: Simon & Shuster. <http://books.google.com/books?id=mJSqwuwZT6AC&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+J-Curve:+A+New+Way+to+Understand+Why+Nations+Rise+and+Fall.&sig=m4Z3EdTwLFgV-scs3HU0AUKh2E8#PPA30,M1>

<sup>112</sup> Power and Interest News Report. Weinstein, Michael. “The Erosion of Political Institutions in Turkmenistan.” 30 December 2004.

[http://pinr.com/report.php?ac=view\\_printable&report\\_id=250&language\\_id=1](http://pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_printable&report_id=250&language_id=1)

<sup>113</sup> Real Clear Politics. “The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall Q & A With Author Ian Bremmer.” 7 September 2006.

[http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2006/09/the\\_j\\_curve\\_why\\_nations\\_rise\\_a.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2006/09/the_j_curve_why_nations_rise_a.html)

Such isolationism was evident in August 2005, when Turkmenistan officially downgraded its participation in the twelve-country Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to that of associate member at a heads-of-state summit. Ashgabat has avoided membership in more recently formed multilateral regional groupings altogether.<sup>114</sup> This includes the Shanghai Cooperation Organization which has brought together Central Asian nations with China and Russia, sparking speculation that it could become the “NATO of the East.”<sup>115</sup>

Niyazov, who died in December 2006, spent the final years of his life seeking new pipeline agreements.<sup>116</sup> He belatedly recognized the value of ending his country’s dependence on pipeline infrastructure left over from the Soviet-era and operated for many years by Gazprom, Russia’s largest company and the world’s biggest supplier of natural gas. Although his government enacted laws to attract foreign investment, Turkmenistan’s legal system lacked the means to enforce them.

Since consolidating power, every move of his successor, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, has been analyzed to see what changes might be forthcoming.<sup>117</sup> Some changes have been positive, such as the number of international trips he made in 2007. Others, like the ban on satellite dishes in the capital city, have been interpreted as a sign that we shouldn’t expect a political thaw.<sup>118</sup> Nonetheless, removing those satellite dishes, which allow residents to watch Turkish and Russian programming, has proved to be logistically impossible given the number already in use.



© Fraser Lewy  
Satellite dishes in Ashgabat

## The Status of Bilateral Relations

### *Russia*

Russia has a uniquely important relationship with Turkmenistan. The existing pipeline grid through which Turkmenistani gas flows was built under Soviet rule and moves the gas through the Ukraine to Russia. Recognizing the value of this transportation monopoly, Moscow has carefully sought to protect its valuable asset. However, since

<sup>114</sup> The Jamestown Foundation, Eurasian Daily Monitor. Gleason, Gregory. “Turkmenistan’s Neutrality and Russia’s New Southern Policy.” Volume 1, Issue 120 (4 November 2004).

[http://www.jamestown.org/publications\\_details.php?volume\\_id=401&issue\\_id=3130&article\\_id=2368799](http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=401&issue_id=3130&article_id=2368799)

<sup>115</sup> New York Times. Khanna, Parag. “Goodbye to Hegemony.” 27 January 2007.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/27/magazine/27world->

[t.html?\\_r=1&scp=1&sq=shanghai+gazprom&st=nyt&oref=slogin](t.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=shanghai+gazprom&st=nyt&oref=slogin)

<sup>116</sup> Council on Foreign Relations. Zissis, Carin. “Which Way Will Turkmen Gas Flow?” 22 December

2006. <http://www.cfr.org/publication/12303/>

<sup>117</sup> San Francisco Chronicle. Kucera, Joshua. “New Turkmen president tones down despotism.” 28 August

2008. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi->

<bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2007/08/28/MNPNR5FMB.DTL&type=politics>

<sup>118</sup> Radio Free Europe. Saidazimova, Gulnoza. “Turkmenistan: A New Obstacle for Access to the Airwaves.” 5 December 2007. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/12/2e82f2bd-1e61-406e-81a4-f442bf6876d4.html>

existing oil fields yield less as they age, Gazprom, the largest Russian energy company, has had to find ways to increase their supply. It began purchasing gas from its energy-rich Central Asian neighbors rather than investing in the lengthy and costly development of untapped Arctic fields.<sup>119</sup>

Moscow has agreed to pay Turkmenistan successively higher prices for its natural gas.<sup>120</sup> Given its market dominance in Europe and ownership of the primary export channel from Central Asia to Europe, Russia is positioned to set prices at both ends, to the detriment of European consumers as well as Central Asian producers.<sup>121</sup> From 2008 on, Moscow plans to import large quantities of low-priced Turkmenistani gas to meet its own domestic needs. In turn, Russia plans on releasing the equivalent amount of Russian gas to the European Union (EU) where it will fetch a higher market-determined price.<sup>122</sup>

In May 2007 Russia secured a new pipeline deal to transport Turkmenistan's gas north. This delivered a serious blow to U.S. and European hopes for a deal that would carry the gas West through Turkey thus bypassing Russia's powerful grip on energy routes.

### *Iran*

In November 1993, Moscow further strengthened its control of Turkmenistan oil by terminating access to a Russian pipeline to Europe. The flow was redirected to Ukraine and Transcaucasian countries. This motivated Niyazov to hasten the construction of a pipeline from Turkmenistan, through Iran, to Turkey, and on to Western Europe.<sup>123</sup> Despite several planned pipelines, in the end only one small pipeline was built. This has provided Turkmenistan with little new capacity (or bargaining leverage).<sup>124</sup>

Iran's interest in this arrangement was similar to Russia's. Although Iran possesses the world's second-largest gas reserves after Russia, a lack of infrastructure has forced it to import gas in order to meet its domestic needs, particularly in the northern region close to the Turkmenistani border. It has been exporting 30 million cubic m (1,059 million cubic ft) of natural gas to Turkey every day, for which it is paid a market-determined price, while importing roughly 23 million cubic m (812 million cubic ft) daily from Turkmenistan to meet its own needs. Long-simmering strains in this relationship spilled



Sign of Turkmenistani and Iranian alliance

<sup>119</sup> Radio Free Europe. Kimmage, Daniel. "Eurasia: Central Asian Gas Powers Regional Aspirations." 25 January 2006. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/01/ccc5007c-e8bc-4a9d-8a7f-a36b3fa27b85.html>

<sup>120</sup> Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "The Great Uncertainty: Russian-Central Asian Energy Relations." 13 June 2007.

<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/index.cfm?fa=eventDetail&id=1013&prog=zru>

<sup>121</sup> The ability to set prices is also known as collecting "rents."

<sup>122</sup> Eurasia Daily Monitor. Socor, Vladimir. "Turkmen Gas Price Hike: Implications for Russia and Europe." 23 June 2006. [http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=2371215](http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2371215)

<sup>123</sup> Caspian Crossroads Magazine. Ochs, Michael. "Turkmenistan: Pipeline Dream II." 1994. <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/HOMEPAGES/USAZERB/9.htm>

<sup>124</sup> Rice University, James Baker Institute of Public Policy. Olcott, Martha Brill. "International Gas Trade in Central Asia: Turkmenistan, Iran, Russia and Afghanistan [p. 2]." Working Paper #28. May 2004. [http://www.rice.edu/energy/publications/docs/GAS\\_InternationalGasTradeinCentralAsia.pdf](http://www.rice.edu/energy/publications/docs/GAS_InternationalGasTradeinCentralAsia.pdf)

out into the international spotlight in late 2007 when Iranian-Turkmenistani talks on the price of gas exports hit a road block.

As a chilly 2008 began, pipeline maintenance work, as the Turkmenistani government claimed, forced Turkmenistan to cut supplies to Iran.<sup>125</sup> It soon became apparent that Ashgabat was displeased with Tehran's low purchase price: USD 75 per thousand cubic m (35,000 cubic ft) or roughly half of what Russia pays for the same amount. This led to a prolonged shutdown that had the effect of making Russia look like a more reliable provider than Turkey from the vantage point of Europe.<sup>126</sup>

### *European Union*

The vote to move ahead on granting Turkmenistan most-favored-nation trading status came in 2006.<sup>127</sup> The EU is heavily reliant on gas imported from the former USSR, a reliance which is likely to grow in the near future.<sup>128</sup> Owing to this situation, the plan to build a trans-Caspian pipeline has received renewed attention in Brussels. From either Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan the gas would flow through Azerbaijan and then via Turkey to the European market.<sup>129</sup>

Entering into such business partnerships poses a challenge to European governments where human rights issues as well as groups promoting corporate social responsibility play a role in policy: Can member countries import adequate supplies of gas without fueling corruption in the countries which sell and transport it? One suggestion, among others, is to refrain from entering into agreements with Turkmenistan until Ashgabat agrees to implement a program of fiscal transparency, illuminating how public funds are spent.

### *United States*

Turkmenistan, which received most favored nation trading status from Washington in 1993, has been an integral player in the U.S. Caspian Basin Energy Initiative, despite the lack of progress in building a pipeline through the Caspian. For the United States, Turkmenistan embodies a number of issues which are important, among them: 1) Russia's resurgence and dominance of Central Asia; 2) China's emerging regional

---

<sup>125</sup> Radio Free Europe. Pannier, Bruce. "Turkmenistan/Iran: Good Relations Take Turn for the Worse." 15 January 2008. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2008/01/ae26970f-e11f-4ac8-a792-3c336febe5dc.html>

<sup>126</sup> Eurasianet.org. Schleifer, Yigal. "The Iranian-Turkmen Gas Row: And the Winner is ... Russia." 28 January 2008. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav012808.shtml>

<sup>127</sup> Washington Post, Editorial. "Double Standards for Dictators." 14 April 2006. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/13/AR2006041301632.html>

<sup>128</sup> Global Witness. "Funny Business in the Turkmen-Ukraine Gas Trade." April 2006. [http://www.globalwitness.org/media\\_library\\_detail.php/479/en/its\\_a\\_gas.\\_funny\\_business\\_in\\_the\\_turkmen\\_ukraine\\_g](http://www.globalwitness.org/media_library_detail.php/479/en/its_a_gas._funny_business_in_the_turkmen_ukraine_g)

<sup>129</sup> Radio Free Europe. Lobjakas, Ahto. "EU Welcomes New Leader For Talks on Energy, Human Rights." 5 November 2007. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/11/215b858d-a80e-4892-81ca-66804f8a68ec.html>

aspirations; 3) energy security during a period of escalating high prices and expanding global demand; 4) fostering economic development amidst grinding poverty.<sup>130</sup>

The influence of China and Russia in Central Asia complicates efforts to promote democracy. In short, pushing this agenda will only make alliances with Moscow and Beijing, which are unconcerned with human rights issues, more attractive to autocratic governments like Turkmenistan's.<sup>131</sup> Given that Central Asia has been identified as a substitute for American dependence on the volatile Middle East for hydrocarbon resources, this is an issue which will not go away.<sup>132</sup>

### *China*

China's fast pace of growth has made it the second largest importer of fossil fuels.<sup>133</sup> This has led to a closer relationship with Turkmenistan, which poses a threat to Moscow's control of the pipeline trade. In July 2007, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) concluded an agreement to import 30 billion cubic m (1,059 billion cubic ft) of Turkmenistani natural gas annually over the next 30 years. This would be transported via the planned Central Asia Gas Pipeline.<sup>134</sup>



Courtesy of *Tharwa Review*  
The Central Asia Gas Pipeline

The Turkmenistani state-controlled media has reported that construction of the 7,000 km (4,350 mi) gas pipeline to China, which will run through Kazakhstan and bypass Russia, has begun. The completion date is scheduled for 2009 despite the fact experts have cast doubt on its feasibility.<sup>135</sup> It is being built by the Chinese without any apparent participation by Ashgabat.<sup>136</sup>

### *Azerbaijan*

Azerbaijan's relations with Turkmenistan have been beset by disagreement over how to apportion rights to the Caspian Sea. The proposed gas pipeline across the Caspian hit a stumbling block when Azerbaijan lost interest in the deal, after it began exporting

<sup>130</sup> Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. U.S. Department of State. "Turning the Page in U.S.-Turkmenistan Relations." 17 September 2007. <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rm/2007/92861.htm>

<sup>131</sup> The New Republic. Kurlantzick, Joshua. "Going Down." 5 December 2007. <http://www.tnr.com/politics/story.html?id=b48a55d0-b7c2-46e3-bc34-746270ff00dc>

<sup>132</sup> New York Times. Kramer, Andrew. "Central Asia on Front Line in Energy Battle." 20 December 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/20/business/worldbusiness/20gas.html?fta=y>

<sup>133</sup> Johns Hopkins University, Central Asia Caucasus Institute. Peimani, Hooman. "Turkmen-Chinese Energy Relations Likely to Cause Growing Tension in Regional Politics." 20 September 2006.

<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4184>

<sup>134</sup> Forbes Magazine. "China, Turkmenistan Agree on Gas Export Price of 195 USD per 1000 cu m." 21 January 2008. <http://www.forbes.com/markets/feeds/afx/2008/01/21/afx4555396.html>

<sup>135</sup> Radio Free Europe. Kimmage, Daniel. "Central Asia: Turkmenistan-China Pipeline Project Has Far-Reaching Implications." 10 April 2006. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/4/55F9574D-407A-4777-9724-944E6C2ECD7B.html>

<sup>136</sup> Oil and Glory. LeVine, Steven. "The High-Stakes U.S. Courtship of Turkmenistan." 30 November 2007. <http://oilandglory.com/2007/11/high-stakes-us-courtship-of.html>

petroleum itself.<sup>137</sup> This was a blow to the West, which wants such a pipeline precisely because it would enable European-bound shipments to avoid flowing through the Russian-owned pipeline infrastructure.

### *Kazakhstan*

A recent flurry of initiatives between Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan indicates that President Berdimuhamedov is seeking to end the isolation imposed by his predecessor. Road, rail, and air transportation links between the countries are being reestablished and expanded.<sup>138</sup>

### *Tajikistan*

The first official visit of a Turkmen head of state to Tajikistan occurred in 2007. Bilateral accords were signed and the two leaders pledged a new era of cooperation. After independence, Turkmenistan granted resident status to more than 10,000 Tajik refugees fleeing civil war in their homeland.<sup>139</sup>

### *Uzbekistan*

Relations between the two most isolated Central Asian nations, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, also improved during 2007 reflecting a similar desire on the part of the new president to end Turkmenistan's neighborhood isolation.<sup>140</sup> The China gas pipeline will pass through Uzbekistan, so the two countries share a common economic interest in a new natural gas market.

### *Afghanistan*

Ashgabat enjoyed good relations with the Taliban, a regime that also possessed an inwardly focused orientation.<sup>141</sup> The fall of the Taliban, however, opened up the possibility of a trans-Afghan pipeline for Turkmenistani gas exports.<sup>142</sup> Niyazov sought to secure foreign investment into a trans-Afghan pipeline, although nothing has materialized to date. An unwelcome development was the resurgence of poppy cultivation.<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup> Johns Hopkins University, SAISPHERE. Starr, Frederick and Svante Cornell. "The Politics of Pipelines: Bringing Caspian Oil to World Markets." 2005. <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/pubaffairs/publications/saisphere/winter05/starr-cornell.html>

<sup>138</sup> Radio Free Europe. "Kazakhstan/Turkmenistan: Resource-Rich Central Asian Duo Seeks Cooperation." 29 May 2007. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/05/37aaf34c-7953-4d98-bf89-9042ef739cb5.html?rapage=2>

<sup>139</sup> News Central Asia. "Turkmenistan, Tajikistan Sign Bilateral Agreements at Dushanbe Summit." 5 October 2007. <http://www.newscentralasia.net/Regional-News/176.html>

<sup>140</sup> Johns Hopkins University, Central Asia Caucasus Institute. Akhmadov, Erkin. "Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan: Latest Sign of Growing Regional Cooperation in Central Asia." 31 October 2007. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4729>

<sup>141</sup> United Nations. "Nations in Transit 2003: Country Report of Turkmenistan [p. 3]." <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/nispacee/unpan012480.pdf>

<sup>142</sup> University of California, Berkeley. "Afghanistan, Turkmenistan Oil and Gas, and the Projected Pipeline." 16 May 2002. <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~pdscott/q7.html>

<sup>143</sup> University of Madrid. Abbosov, Faridun. "Drug Problems in Central Asia." 2002. <http://www.ucm.es/BUCEM/cee/papeles/04/33.doc>

Since the early 1990s Turkmenistan has been a transit route for Afghan-grown opium bound for Europe's heroin market. Tehran's beefed up border patrol along the Iranian-Afghan border has only served to make the much longer Turkmen-Afghan border a more attractive crossing point.<sup>144</sup>

### Poverty

Sixty percent of Turkmenistan's population is unemployed and 58% of the population lives below the poverty line, despite a natural resource base that should afford the citizens of this sparsely-populated nation a comfortable standard of living.<sup>145</sup> This is the bane of countries afflicted with what is known as the "natural resource curse"; little of the wealth trickles down to the average person.<sup>146</sup> Instead, the late President Niyazov plowed the proceeds into grandiose construction projects and gold-plated statues of himself, rather than improving the lives of his people through the provision of quality health care and educational opportunities.



In recent years a pronounced drug problem among unemployed urban youth, some of whom have gone into prostitution, has become difficult to conceal from visitors. This is something the new President, a former health minister, has been more willing to acknowledge than his predecessor who simply denied there was a drug problem at all, let alone Turkmenistani citizens infected with HIV.<sup>147</sup>

### Dissident Groups

The only legal political organization is the Democratic Party. The Law Against Insulting the Dignity and Honor of the President, enacted in 1990, along with one passed the next year banning hunger strikes and public demonstrations in the capital, give the government wide latitude in cracking down on dissent.<sup>148</sup> Owing to the pervasive nature of state authority, organized opposition exists only outside the country.<sup>149</sup> Some dissidents who fled the country have established organizations critical of the regime in Europe. European aid workers are often assumed to be working in support of a political liberalization agenda.<sup>150</sup> There's little evidence of this; no non-government selected

<sup>144</sup> European Union. "Turkmenistan Profile 2003." 2003.

[http://www.ecodccu.org/English/coutry\\_profiles/turkemanistan/TURKMENISTAN%202003.htm](http://www.ecodccu.org/English/coutry_profiles/turkemanistan/TURKMENISTAN%202003.htm)

<sup>145</sup> Christian Science Monitor. Sershen, Derek. "Turkmenistan's Natural Gas; A Mixed Blessing." 17 May 2007. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0515/p07s01-wosc.html>

<sup>146</sup> Yale University. Luong, Pauline Jones and Erika Weinthal. "Prelude to the Resource Curse: Oil and Gas Development Strategies in Central Asia." 2000. <http://www.yale.edu/leitner/pdf/1999-08.pdf>

<sup>147</sup> New York Times. Chivers, C.J. "Heroin Seizes Turkmenistan, a Nation Ill Equipped to Cope." 11 July 2007. [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/11/world/asia/11turkmen.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/11/world/asia/11turkmen.html?_r=1&oref=slogin)

<sup>148</sup> Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Alert Series. "Turkmenistan: Political Conditions in the Post-Soviet Era [p. 12]." February 1993.

<http://www.uscis.gov/files/native/documents/turkme94.pdf>

<sup>149</sup> IRIN News. "Turkmenistan: Rights Group Reiterates Call for Release of Activists." 20 July 2006.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=59818>

<sup>150</sup> Johns Hopkins University, Central Asia Caucasus Institute. Peimani, Hooman. "Turkmenistan Accuses Europe of Subversive Activities." 12 July 2006. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4050>

candidate was allowed to stand for election to choose Niyazov's successor in February 2007. Nor did any candidate's official platform contradict that of the winner, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

### **Armed Forces and Law Enforcement**

When the Soviet Union was disbanded in 1991, its largest troop presence was in Turkmenistan. In 1993 Moscow and Ashgabat signed a "Treaty on Joint Measures," which stipulated that the Russian Federation would safeguard Turkmenistan's security. These responsibilities would be assumed by former Soviet army units already deployed in Turkmenistan. With the exception of border troops and air force and air defense units, which were to remain solely under Russian authority, the entire armed forces would be under joint command. This arrangement would devolve, over a period of ten years, to exclusive Turkmenistani command. For the first five years, Russia agreed to provide logistical support and pay Turkmenistan in exchange for the right to maintain special installations, while Turkmenistan was to shoulder the costs of housing, utilities, and administration.<sup>151</sup> Altogether, approximately 11,000 Russian troops were stationed in Turkmenistan as of mid 1996. The last of those troops left in 1999.



Turkmen soldiers at the Health Park

Turkmenistani internal security forces, which fall under the authority of the Committee for National Security, have changed little since the KGB era, as is the case with other non-democratic post-Soviet states. Although the precise number of officers is unknown, they are better funded and connected to the leadership than the armed forces, which recruits primarily among unemployed youth and those on the way to delinquency.

Soldiers routinely do farm work since the government views self-sufficiency in food production as part of national security. Food rations for those stationed in far-flung parts of the desert have been so meager, however, that there have been reports of starvation since the former Soviet troops departed.<sup>152</sup> In sum, Ashgabat was financially unable to sustain the level of support it had provided for the Russian presence. In 2006, its active duty army personnel numbered approximately 21,000. Air force personnel numbered around 4,300 while the navy had 700.<sup>153</sup>

The impoverished state of the Turkmenistani armed forces is partly to ensure that the military is unable to challenge civilian governmental authority.<sup>154</sup> After Niyazov's

---

<sup>151</sup> Global Security. "Separate Combined-Arms Army of Turkmenistan."

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/ogrv-turkmenistan.htm>

<sup>152</sup> Institute for War and Peace Reporting. "Turkmenistan: Soldiers Die of Hunger." 4 December 2001.

[http://iwpr.net/?apc\\_state=hruirca2001&l=en&s=f&o=162319](http://iwpr.net/?apc_state=hruirca2001&l=en&s=f&o=162319)

<sup>153</sup> Mongabay.com. "Country Profile: Turkmenistan Government and Politics." No date.

[http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country\\_profiles/2004-2005/2-Turkmenistan.html](http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_profiles/2004-2005/2-Turkmenistan.html)

<sup>154</sup> "Niyazov's Turkmenistan: a sultanistic regime? [p. 2]" No date.

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/jointsessions/paperarchive/grenoble/ws2/cummings.pdf>

sudden death there were reports that the Defense Minister had been detained.<sup>155</sup> Although he later reappeared in public, if true it reflects the intensity of the succession struggle in the hours immediately following the death of the late President for Life. Following the transition to new leadership in 2007, the number of roadside checkpoints, which had multiplied after an attempt was made on Niyazov's life in 2002, dramatically declined allowing for greater citizen mobility.

---

<sup>155</sup> International Crisis Group. "Turkmenistan After Niyazov." 12 February 2007. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4659>