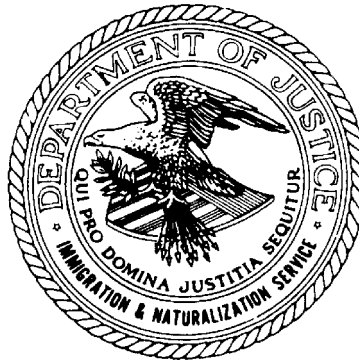


ALERT SERIES

TURKMENISTAN

**POLITICAL CONDITIONS
IN THE POST-SOVIET ERA**

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SUMMARY

Of the fifteen former Soviet Republics, Turkmenistan is one of the most politically repressive -- and potentially one of the wealthiest. The Commission on Security and Cooperation has predicted that despite Turkmenistan's repressive policies, it will be able to "...mollify the population economically..."¹ Only cosmetic changes in the leadership and bureaucracy have occurred since Turkmenistan's independence in December 1991 -- it is essentially ruled by the same leadership, bureaucracy, and repressive laws of the Soviet era. Turkmenistan has a one-party system: although opposition groups and media sources exist, they are not officially recognized. Real or perceived political opposition is subjected to severe repression. Several political activists and journalists have been tried and jailed, some on political charges, but more frequently now on criminal charges (such as drug smuggling or corruption).

Because media coverage of Turkmenistan is minimal, it is impossible to know for certain how Turkmenistan's ethnic and religious minorities are being treated. The government does not appear to be discriminating against or harassing any group solely because of its ethnic or religious orientation. While the overwhelming majority of Turkmenistan's population are Turkmens or of Turkic origin, and some have expressed hostility toward "Russian-speakers" (Russians, other Slavs, Armenians and Jews), the kind of societal-level hostility against "Russian-speakers" or against Jews in many other former Soviet states does not appear to be as prevalent in Turkmenistan. However, religious or cultural activities or organizations, whether Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, which the government perceives as a potential source of political opposition, could put religious and cultural activists at risk. As an example, the government of Turkmenistan has not allowed religious groups -- Muslim, Jewish or Christian -- to register as official organizations. Concrete information on how many Russians, Armenians, and Jews remain in Turkmenistan is unavailable, but most sources believe that ethnic minorities are leaving for Russia, Armenia, or Israel.

¹Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan," *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 188.

HISTORY

One of the most immediate consequences of Turkmenistan's independence is that many common beliefs concerning Turkmenistan's history, economic development and culture -- formed during the Soviet era -- are being challenged. It is likely that events in Turkmen history, and interpretations of them, will be a matter for debate as historical records are scrutinized and oral histories gathered.

In 716 the Arab Caliphate² (the self-proclaimed religious and political successor to the prophet Mohammed) had conquered the territory between the Caspian Sea and the Amu Darya.³ As a result, the Turks converted to Islam and entered into trade and cultural relations with the rest of the Muslim world. As Arabic, but not Islamic, authority eroded, Turkmenistan was invaded once again by the Oghuz Turks, and the country fell under control of the Seljuk Empire, which was ruled from Merv (modern Mary, in Turkmenistan) by the Seljuk Oghuz tribe, in 1040. The Turkmens consider themselves descendants of this Oghuz tribe.⁴

After the Oghuz had mixed with the other peoples in the region, the people acquired their present ethonym 'Turkmen' and the country as a whole became known as Turkmenistan ('land of the Turkmens'). The Turkmens, although the founders of the two most powerful Turkic empires - the Seljuk and the Ottoman -- never had a state of their own until late 1991.⁵ The region passed

²In 716 there was only one Caliphate. Later there were a number of regional Caliphates, as will be discussed below.

³Darya means river.

⁴Nissman, David, "Turkmenistan," *Collier's Encyclopedia*, v. 22 (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 549.

⁵Barthold, Wilhelm, *Zwoelf Vorlesungen ueber die Geschichte der Tuerken Mittelasiens* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Buchverhandlung, 1962), p. 240.

under the rule of the Khorezmshahs, Ghengis Khan, Tamerlane (Timur the Lame), the Persian Empire, and the Khanate of Khiva.⁶

By the early 18th century, Turkmens became a regional force in agriculture and international trade, with substantial military capabilities. As a consequence, the Turkmens were able to defeat the armies of the Khanate of Khiva and Persia (Iran) during incursions which took place in the mid-19th century.⁷

Major trade routes connecting Europe with Central Asia, Iran and Afghanistan passed through Turkmen lands. During the Russo-Persian War of 1803-1814, Russian diplomats successfully sought an alliance with the Yomut, Goklen and Tekke against Iran. At the same time, Turkmenistan became an obstacle to Russia's conquest of Central Asia and Turkmenistan's resources -- especially its cotton -- became a target of Russian imperial and colonial policy. While the western part of Turkmenistan fell easily to Russian diplomacy and force of arms, eastern Turkmenistan resisted until a prolonged assault by Russian forces was able to capture the Tekke fortress of Gok-Depe in January 1881. This battle not only solidified Russia's hold on Turkmenistan, it completed Russia's conquest of Central Asia. From this point onward, Turkmenistan's fate was inextricably bound with that of the Russian and later Soviet state.

Turkmenistan under Russian Rule

⁶Nissman, David, "Turkmenistan," *Collier's Encyclopedia*, v. 22 (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 549.

⁷Barthold, Wilhelm, *Zwoelf Vorlesungen ueber die Geschichte der Tuerken Mittelasiens* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Buchverhandlung, 1962), pp. 239-240.

Turkmenistan's economic development fell under Russian state control and its lands were developed primarily to supply raw materials for Russia's growing industrial needs.⁸ The construction of the Transcaspian Railroad, completed in 1888, expedited this process. Cotton production received a priority, increasing fifteen-fold between 1890 and 1915. Livestock breeding and petroleum production also increased. Most of the profits from this economic upsurge went to Russian and foreign capitalists. As a consequence, the population of Turkmenistan -- now mostly Turkmen in the rural areas and Russian in the cities (primarily Krasnovodsk and Ashkhabad) had strong reasons for dissatisfaction with Tsarist rule. During the Russian Revolution of 1905-1907, Russian-dominated Social Democrats engaged in political strikes and actions against the Transcaspian Railroad to protest Tsarist policies.

While these acts of rebellion were quelled and dissent was suppressed even further following the collapse of the 1905 Revolution, Russia's entry into World War I caused a massive revolt in Central Asia in 1916 against conscription into the rear ranks of the Russian Army. After the victory of the February 1917 Revolution, previously suppressed Social Democratic and Bolshevik groups became active in Turkmenistan's major cities of Ashkhabad, Krasnovodsk, Chardzhou and Mary (Merv). The collapse of Tsarist authority left a power vacuum in the country. While the Bolsheviks were able to make inroads among the mostly Russian or Slavic workers in urban centers, their attempts at promoting their movement among Turkmen peasants (**daykans**) and animal herders was ineffective: various forces, including the White Russians, the British Expeditionary Forces, the nationalist intelligentsia of Turkmenistan, and, in the eastern

⁸Berdi Murat, Aman, "Turkmenistan and the Turkmen," *Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities* (New York, Macmillan, 1975), p. 263.

region, the Khanates of Khiva and Bukhara, vied for power with the Bolsheviks. The Turkmen region did not come under full Soviet control until the 1920s.⁹

Turkmenistan during the Soviet Period (1920-1991)

Until October 1924, Turkmenistan was officially called the Turkmen Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and was administratively part of the RSFSR. On October 27, 1924, the Central Executive Committee of the USSR adopted a resolution establishing the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic. In February 1925, the Turkmenistan Communist Party held its first Congress in Ashkhabad. The first step taken by the new government was to continue the land and water reforms started after the Bolshevik military victory in 1920. At the same time, Turkmen agricultural production was expanded, both by redistributing land which had previously belonged to the **bays** (the landowning class to whom the lands had belonged by tribal tradition and social custom), and also by the formation of farmers' cooperatives. The Turkmen petroleum industry, which had virtually ground to a halt during the revolution, was revived.

Collectivization of agriculture began in 1926. The initial focus of this effort was directed at the large cotton-growing plantations; by 1929 almost 15 percent of the **daykans** (peasant farmers) had been collectivized, by 1940 more than 99 percent of the land and those who cultivated it had been collectivized into **kolkhozes** (collective farms). Shortly before World War II, Turkmenistan became the second largest cotton producer in the USSR. Improvements in

⁹Murat, Aman Berdi, "Turkmenistan and the Turkmen," *Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities* (New York: The Free Press, 1975, Z. Katz, R. Rogers, F. Harned, eds.), p. 265. Nissman, David, "Turkmenistan," *Collier's Encyclopedia*, v. 22 (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 549.

irrigation, primarily through the construction of reservoirs and canals, contributed to the development of other sectors of Turkmenistan's agriculture. During the 1930s, Turkmenistan's oilfields also underwent extensive development, and a significant industrial working class developed.

While Soviet rule brought greater literacy and more educational institutions to the region, the price of "development" in Turkmenistan was high: many thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of **daykhans** (kulaks, or relatively more prosperous peasants) perished or were killed as a result of collectivization in the 1930s. Virtually the entire Muslim clergy and many of the newly-formed national intelligentsia were victims of the Stalin purges, which lasted from the mid 1930s until the early 1950s. Data on the extent of the human cost of Stalinism in Turkmenistan only began to emerge after Turkmenistan achieved independence in late 1991.

World War II gave a major impetus to Turkmenistan's economic development. With Germany's attack on the Soviet Union, much of Soviet industry, which had been concentrated in the eastern part of the USSR, moved behind the front to regions like Turkmenistan. The Ashkhabad Railroad (now the Central Asian Railroad Administration) and the Caspian Sea port of Krasnovodsk were developed to facilitate industrial production and transport. In the post-World War II period, Turkmenistan's industrial base continued to grow, with greater oil and gas production, petroleum refining and machine-building. The construction of the V. I. Lenin Karakum Canal, which connects the waters of the Amu Darya with the Aral Sea, provides sophisticated irrigation systems for growing produce and cotton, and which will ultimately link up with the Caspian Sea, proved a boon to agriculture.

CONDITIONS IN POST-SOVIET TURKMENISTAN

General Conditions

On August 22, 1991, Turkmenistan declared its independence in the wake of the failed coup directed against Mikhail Gorbachev, then General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [CPSU]. Saparmyrad Niyazov, former first secretary of the Turkmenistan Communist Party, was elected President in an uncontested election. The Turkmenistan Communist Party disbanded itself and was replaced by the Turkmenistan Democratic Party.

From the time Turkmenistan became part of the Soviet Union, it was ruled by the Communist Party. As of January 1990, the Turkmenistan Communist Party [TCP] had 115,008 members and candidate members, who were divided into 5,117 primary party organizations. The primary party organizations were organized under **rayon** (local) party committees (raykoms), which in turn were grouped under **oblast** (regional or district level) party committees (obkoms) or city party committees (gorkoms). All of these were subordinate to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan, headquartered in Ashkhabad.

At the 25th Congress of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan in the Autumn of 1991, the party decided to dissolve itself, a process that continued into 1992. In its place, the Turkmenistan Democratic Party [TDP] was organized, and on December 16, 1991, Saparmyrad Niyazov, who was elected President of Turkmenistan in October 1990, signed a decree officially conferring TDP membership on former TCP members. Around the same time, Turkmenistan, which had been divided by the Soviet Union into four oblasts, each composed of a number of rayons, is redrawing its territorial-administrative boundaries. Turkmenistan is now divided into five **velayats** -- Akhal (formerly Ashkhabad Oblast), Balkan, Tashauz, Mary, and Leban (formerly

Charjou).¹⁰ These are governed by **velis** appointed by and responsible to the President, and each **velayat** is composed of **ils** administered by **hakims** appointed by the **veli** and responsible to him.

The TDP has pledged to initiate and carry out reforms in economics, politics and culture; democratize all aspects of Turkmenistan's society; cultivate and develop Turkmen history and national traditions; act without regard for nationality or personal beliefs and promote the equality of all citizens; and eliminate state control over certain branches (primarily manufacturing and industrial) of industry and the economy. It is unclear to what extent the TDP Program will be carried out in fact. According to Helsinki Watch, since Saparmyrad Niyazov was elected President in October 1990, "there are regular violations of freedom in Turkmenistan: criticism of the government is suppressed, censors approve only what is in harmony with government policy, and residents who dissent or who have contact with dissidents are prevented from leaving the country, impeded from associating freely with some foreign observers, and are put under de facto house arrest."¹¹

Turkmenistan's Constitution and Government

Turkmenistan's Constitution contains many guarantees which are not observed in practice. This section will first describe the ostensible structure of Turkmenistan's government, and then review human rights abuses committed despite legal guarantees.

¹⁰*Law on Constitution's Implementation* (Ashgabat: *Turkmenskaya Iskra*, 19 May 1992, pp. 1,3) as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 24 June 1992, pp. 101,102.

¹¹Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Human Rights Watch, July 1993), p. 1.

Article 1 of Turkmenistan's Constitution, adopted on May 18, 1992, defines Turkmenistan as a "presidential republic."¹² It has a President, a Prime Minister, and a parliament called a Supreme Soviet. In addition, the legislative branch of the Turkmen government also includes a "khalk maslakhaty [people's council] which takes care of passage of constitutional amendments. Helsinki Watch has pointed out that "with few exceptions...all members of this ostensibly highly powerful body are appointed, not elected, greatly diminishing its ability to function as a representative body, and compromising the principle and practice of separation of powers."¹³ On the rayon and oblast level it has representative government in the form of Soviets of People's Deputies who are elected directly by the people. Advising the President is the Presidential Council, who are appointed by the President. There are also a number of committees at the cabinet level, most important of which is the National Security Committee. During the Soviet period, many industrial and other institutions were under the control of All-Union ministries; as of January 1, 1992, these devolved to the government of Turkmenistan, which is still in the process of reorganizing the government bureaucracy. Some Turkmen ministries existed on paper alone or had purely ceremonial functions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Following independence, this ministry has begun to actually play a foreign policy, diplomatic and consular role; others, such as the Ministry of Defense, had never existed at all in Turkmenistan and are now in their initial stages. The organizations and rosters of the independent Turkmenistan ministries will probably not be complete until the end of 1993.

¹²*Republic Adopts New Constitution* (Ashgabat: **Turkmenskaya Iskra**, 19 May 1992), pp. 1-3 as reported in Foreign Broadcasts Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 24 June 1992, pp. 103-111.

¹³Helsinki Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Helsinki Watch, July 1993), pp. 2-3.

According to the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, many of Turkmenistan's constitutional guarantees are not observed in practice. For example:

Article 27 states that "Freedom of meetings, rallies and demonstrations *in the procedure established by legislation* is guaranteed," leaving the legislature open to pass laws that curtail that right, rather than guaranteeing the right absolutely. Similarly, Article 28 states that "Citizens have the right to create political parties and other public associations operating within the framework of the Constitution and the laws." Article 28 also lays out that basis on which political parties can be prohibited by the government, including those parties which "encroach on the health and morals of the people." The vague wording here causes concern that any opposition to the government could be seen as an encroachment on the "health and morals of the people," especially in view of the fact that an October 1991 resolution declared that demonstrations and hunger strikes in public places were illegal because, among other things, they were a threat to "public health."¹⁴

Turkmenistan's officials justify such controls as necessary for "stability."¹⁵ This "stability" led the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe to conclude that:

It may be that Turkmenistan will remain the most "stable," or stagnant, of the Central Asia countries, especially if the level of government repression remains unchanged. For in addition to the repressive policies, the government has a large reserve of natural resources on which to mollify the population economically, unlike many of the other former Soviet republics. Turkmenistan's natural gas reserves are third only to those of Russia and the United States; that alone, given Turkmenistan's relatively small population of 3.5 million, may "buy" Niyazov the compliance he demands.¹⁶

GROUPS AT POTENTIAL RISK

Political Organizations and the Media

¹⁴Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan," *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 181.

¹⁵Helsinki Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Helsinki Watch, July 1993), p. 2.

¹⁶Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan," *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 188.

As mentioned above, freedom of expression and freedom to practice opposition politics are nearly non-existent in Turkmenistan. According to the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the only legal, registered political party in Turkmenistan is the **Democratic Party**, which is essentially just the successor to the Communist Party.¹⁷ As Helsinki Watch stated, since Saparmyrad Niyazov was elected President, "there are regular violations of freedom in Turkmenistan: criticism of the government is suppressed, censors approve only what is in harmony with government policy, and residents who dissent or who have contact with dissidents are prevented from leaving the country, impeded from associating freely with some foreign observers, and are put under de facto house arrest."¹⁸

The media in Turkmenistan is strictly censored, and the government has taken steps to control those papers created during the final years of glasnost in the Soviet era. **Journalists** have been detained, had their houses ransacked, been beaten, harassed, or threatened. One journalist, Mukhammedmurat Salamatov, founder and editor of Turkmenistan's first independent journal, *Daianch*, has had copies of his paper confiscated and has stood trial three times on charges of violating the republic's press laws. More recently, Salamatov was tried on a charge of being financed by the mafiosi, a charge the Helsinki Commission dismisses as "obviously trumped-up."¹⁹ **Political activism** is strongly discouraged: although a number of political organizations were

¹⁷Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan," *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 178.

¹⁸Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Human Rights Watch, July 1993), p. 1.

¹⁹Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan," *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), pp. 186-187. Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Watch World Report, 1993* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1992), p. 240.

formed in the past few years, most are inactive, have not been able to register officially, are pro-government, or face serious obstacles to participation in politics. A law enacted in 1990, the Law Against Insulting the Dignity and Honor of the President, and one passed in 1991 prohibiting hunger strikes and demonstrations in public places in Ashgabat, the capital, allows the government considerable latitude in punishing opposition parties and journalists. However, like the Soviet Union in the past, the Turkmen government may imprison dissidents on criminal charges (drugs or corruption), instead of clearly political charges (sedition or treason), or may have them fired from jobs or routinely harassed. Another tactic reported by the Helsinki Commission is to shoot opposition leaders and later claim that the shooting resulting from an "argument" or "domestic dispute." Harassment, ransackings, house arrest and surveillance of perceived opponents of the government are common.²⁰

Specific Political Organizations

Early in 1992, the **Peasants' Party of Turkmenistan** was organized. Its draft program describes it as a "parliamentary-type" of party. It defines its goals as defending the interests of farmers and peasants, workers in the agricultural processing industry, and the rural intelligentsia (physicians, veterinarians, teachers, and agricultural technicians). It advocates a free economy,

²⁰Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan," *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), pp. 178, 183, 184, 185.

the right of peasants to own the land they cultivate and the right to bequeath this land to their heirs. Its current membership is unknown. While it is registered, it is considered to be inactive:²¹

There is also an unregistered **Democratic Party of Turkmenistan** which was established on December 22, 1990. It has been refused registration by the Turkmenistan Ministry of Justice. It claims to work toward uniting the efforts of all democratic parties in Central Asia.²² It published the newspaper **Dayanch** ('Support') together with **Agzybirlik** (see below). According to its president, Durdymurat Khojamukhammed (now residing in exile in Azerbaijan): "if the president wishes to register a party, it is registered; if he does not he can stall under the pretext that the party does not exist."²³ The party claimed membership of 1,500 in 1992.

On September 1, 1989, **Agzybirlik**, the Society for the Protection of the Turkmen Language, was registered with the presidium of the Academy of Sciences TSSR. Its original platform was independence from the USSR and greater emphasis being placed on Turkmen language and history. The Soviet government officially closed the organization on January 15, 1990, because it wished to mark the anniversary of the battle of Gok-Depe, when the area comprising modern Turkmenistan was forcibly annexed by the Russian Empire.²⁴ According to Akmuhammed Velsapar, secretary of **Agzybirlik**'s press service, it declared itself a "popular

²¹Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (Human Rights Watch: New York, July 1993), p. 6.

²²Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan," *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 179.

²³Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Human Rights Watch, July 1993), p. 7.

²⁴Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan," *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 179.

movement" in 1990, but the Turkmenistan government has refused to register it. It now has a hardcore membership of some 30 people, and 1,000 others have expressed an official interest in joining. Velsapar has commented that: "It's interesting that before the fall of the USSR they declared us a `CIA organization,' but now we are a `KGB organization.'"²⁵

Connected to the reform movement in Moscow is the **Movement for Democratic Reform**. It includes some former Communist Party members and two deputies in Turkmenistan's Supreme Soviet, and is considered by some to be more willing to accommodate itself to Turkmenistan's current regime.²⁶

Finally there is **Genesh** ('Council') founded in August 1991. It is a coalition formed by **Agzybirlik**, the **Democratic Party of Turkmenistan** and the **Movement for Democratic Reform**. It is supposed to coordinate the work of all the opposition groups, but its activities are unknown.²⁷

Ethnic and Religious Groups

According to the 1989 census, Turkmens totaled 2,524,136, 72 percent of Turkmenistan's population. Other significant ethnic groups include the Russians at 334,477 (9.5 percent), Uzbeks

²⁵Helsinki Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Helsinki Watch, July 1993), p. 8.

²⁶Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan," *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 179.

²⁷Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan," *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 179.

at 317,252 (9 percent) and Kazakhs at 87,595 (2.5 percent). In addition, there was an Armenian population of 31,838, a declared Jewish population of 2,138, of which 218 identified themselves as Central Asian (including Iranian) Jews (Sephardic or Bukharan), the remainder of European origin (Ashkenazis). Other sources put the number of Jews in Turkmenistan before independence at between 3,000 and 4,000.²⁸

According to the All-Union Census of 1989, the total population of Turkmenistan in 1989 was 3,512,190, up from 2,784,748 in 1979. On January 1, 1990, the population of Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan's capital, was 407,200. The population of Turkmenistan's other large cities are Chardzhou, approximately 160,000; Mary, 90,000; Nebitdag, 85,000; and Krasnovodsk, 60,000. In 1991 more than 1,728,000 of the population lived in urban areas, and close to 2,086,000 in the countryside.²⁹

Figures from before the break-up of the Soviet Union cannot be used as an accurate reflection of the current population of Turkmenistan, however: the Department of State reported that during 1992 many Russians and other non-Turkmen residents left for other former Soviet republics. Many members of the small Jewish community emigrated to Israel. In addition, over 40,000 refugees of various ethnic groups entered Turkmenistan to flee the fighting in Tajikistan. The government has provided the refugees with temporary housing and other social assistance.³⁰

²⁸Gosudarstvennyy Komitet po Statistike, *Natsional'nyy Sostav Naseleniya, Chast' II* (Moscow: Informatsionno-izdatel'skiy tsentr, 1989), pp. 94-95. "Across the Borderline," *The Jerusalem Report* (Israel: The Jerusalem Report, 1 July 1993), p. 34.

²⁹Gosudarstvennyy Komitet SSSR po Statistike, *Natsional'nyy Sostav Naseleniya, Chast' II* (Moscow: Informatsionno-izdatel'skiy tsentr, 1989), pp. 94-95.

³⁰Department of State, "Turkmenistan," *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1992* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 1993), p. 948.

Turkic Populations

Any discussion of groups at risk must take into account the fact that, with stiff censorship, incidents of violence or repression may not reach the press or human rights monitors. However, it appears that none of Turkmenistan's Turkic (and predominantly Sunni Muslim) populations are at risk solely because of their ethnicity or because of their religious heritage. Turkic minorities, such as **Uzbeks**, have access to education in their own language, and at last count about 70 mosques had been built in the country. Nonetheless, ethnic Turks and practicing Muslims can become at risk if their religious, cultural, or other activities are perceived by the Turkmen government as endangering the "security" of the state -- in effect, if they are perceived as opposing the government in any way. For that reason, for example, fundamentalist Muslims who are actively attempting to push Turkmenistan towards a less secular state could be at risk.³¹ Laws on political and religious rights are written in such vague language that the government can, and is willing to, punish people it perceives as a threat to the current government. As the previous section on political activists and journalists spells out in greater detail, the government of Turkmenistan has dealt extremely harshly with any individuals it perceives as potential or active opposition.³²

The Turkic peoples total more than 80 percent of the population of Turkmenistan. The **Turkmens**, forming 72 percent of Turkmenistan's population, are descendants of the Oghuz tribe who came to the region of western Central Asia, northern Persia, Anatolia (now Turkey) and the Caucasus in the 7th and 8th centuries A.D. where they formed a number of larger confederations

³¹"Across the Borderline," *The Jerusalem Report* (Israel: The Jerusalem Report, 1 July 1993), p. 35.

³²Helsinki Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Helsinki Watch, July 1993), p. 1.

and empires, the largest of which was the Seljuk Empire in the 11th century. The Turkmen language is linguistically most closely related to modern Turkish and Azerbaijani (Azeri). In addition to the some 2.5 million Turkmen living in Turkmenistan, there are also an estimated one to two million Turkmen directly across the border in northwestern Afghanistan and close to one million in northeastern Iran. There are also some two to three hundred thousand Turkmen in other parts of Central Asia, Turkey, and Iraq. Tribal-clan relations are of great importance in Turkmen society; of the many tribes, the Tekke (the current President of Turkmenistan is a Tekke) and Yomut are the most numerous tribes in Turkmenistan today.

The **Uzbeks** are concentrated along the course of the Amu Darya adjoining Uzbekistan. They are descendants of the Turki group of Turkic peoples, and are linguistically distinct from the Turkmen. The **Kazakhs** are located primarily in northern Turkmenistan and along the shores of the Caspian Sea. They are descendants of the Kipchak group of Turkic peoples, and also speak a language distinct from Turkmen. Uzbeks, Kazakhs and **Baluches** have schools and textbooks in their own languages in regions where their ethnic groups predominate.³³

The Turkic peoples in Turkmenistan are primarily Sunni Muslims. The current Muslim religious leader of Turkmenistan, headquartered in Chardzhou, is the Kazi-Imam Nasrulla Ibadullayev. Although the former Soviet government promoted atheism as an official policy, and indeed attempted to destroy most religious practices, a religious revival has been underway since 1986, when the Soviet attitude toward Islam was relaxed. One consequence has been the increase of mosque construction. While there were only four officially recognized mosques in Turkmenistan in 1985, by June 1990, about 70 congregations which had been operating

³³Helsinki Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Helsinki Watch, July 1993, p. 37.

underground or informally registered with the authorities as official Muslim congregations. These statistics only apply to mosques officially recognized by the government of Turkmenistan. Due to the decades-long ban on religious freedom, a number of 'unofficial' mosques continue to exist; while their exact numbers are unknown, it is believed that they number in the hundreds. There are also a number of noted religious shrines in Turkmenistan, often centered in Muslim graveyards or near tombs of prominent Muslims of the medieval period.³⁴

The independent government has declared a secular society, with separation of church and state. During the Soviet period, official Muslim affairs were administered by the Spiritual Administration for Muslims of Central Asia in Tashkent. At that time, the Spiritual Administration appointed a **kazi** to supervise Islam in each republic. In Turkmenistan, the Kaziate is located in Chardzhou. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Muslim spiritual administrations collapsed also. On June 1, 1992, the Kazi Hajji Nasrullah ibn Ibadulla officially registered the Kaziate of Turkmenistan with the Turkmen Ministry of Justice. The condition under which it was registered was that Ministry of Justice officials "maintain a working relationship with the religious representatives."³⁵

According to Article 6 of Turkmenistan's Constitution, religious practices are free, but private religious instruction is forbidden.³⁶ There are also other conditions placed on the practice of religion. Under Article 3, which guarantees freedom of conscience, it is stated that "exercising the freedom to profess a religion or other convictions is subject only to those restrictions which

³⁴Nissman, David, "Iran and Soviet Islam," *Central Asian Survey* (Oxford: Society for Central Asian Studies, December 1983), pp. 45-60.

³⁵Turkmeninform, "Kaziate Registered," *Turkmenistan* (Ashgabat: 3 June 1992), p. 3.

³⁶Helsinki Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Helsinki Watch, July 1993), p. 2.

are necessary to safeguard public safety and order, life and health of the people, and morale...¹⁸⁷

The vagueness of the wording permits the government enormous latitude in interpreting the concepts of public safety and order, morale, etc.

The Turkmenistan Government Council for Religious Affairs is the final arbiter of religious activity in Turkmenistan. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, various forms of missionary activity began to be conducted. In line with the prevention of the uses of religions for the purpose of anti-state and anti-constitutional propaganda, spelled out in Turkmenistan's law on "Freedom of Worship and Religious Organizations," a member of the Council for Religious Affairs has noted that "missionary activity is, in fact, illegal."¹⁸⁸ This limitation applies to both Muslim and non-Muslim religious activity.

Non-Turkic, Non-Muslim Populations:

Russians, Other Slavs, Armenians and Jews

Any discussion of groups at risk must take into account the fact that, with stiff censorship, incidents of violence against ethnic minorities may not be reported. Helsinki Watch has reported that they "received no evidence that Turkmenistan is experiencing a pronounced emigration of minority ethnic groups" and that evidence of ethnic discrimination is "inconclusive" and

³⁷Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan," *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), pp. 182-183.

³⁸*Religious Affairs Council on Current Tasks* (Ashgabat: Turkmenskaya Iskra, 31 March 92, p. 2) as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 29 April 1992, p. 86.

"contradictory."³⁹ There is little evidence available that Turkmenistan's non-Turkic populations are at risk solely because of their ethnicity or because of their religious identification, although the Union of Councils of Soviet Jews has reported that all Russian speakers, including Jews, face a certain amount of societal hostility from the Turkic populations as "outsiders" in an unusually homogenous society. In general, the government is reluctant to allow cultural or religious organizations to form, whether Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, because they could pose a source of potential opposition. Ethnic and religious minorities could face risks if their cultural or religious activities are perceived by the government to constitute opposition.⁴⁰ Evangelicals may face difficulties because the government explicitly forbids "missionary activity," which can include proselytizing.⁴¹ Laws on political and religious rights are written in such vague language that the government can, and shown itself willing to, punish people it perceives as a threat to the current government.⁴²

Non-Turkic minorities do face possible discrimination, as well as potential economic and educational disadvantages, if they do not speak Turkmen. The Turkmen government has designated Turkmen as the official language of the republic, and has done nothing to offer language classes. Russian speakers, including **Russians, other Slavs, Armenians, and Jews of European or Iranian origin** are already facing difficulties in employment and education. There

³⁹Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Human Rights Watch, July 1993), p. 37.

⁴⁰"Turkmenistan: Examples of Recent Anti-Semitic Incidents," *Union of Councils of Soviet Jews* (Washington, D.C.: *Union of Councils of Soviet Jews*, August 1993), pp. 1-2. "Across the Borderline," *The Jerusalem Report* (Israel: The Jerusalem Report, 1 July 1993), p. 35.

⁴¹*Religious Affairs Council on Current Tasks* (Ashgabat: Turkmenskaya Iskra, 31 March 92, p. 2) as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 29 April 1992, p. 86.

⁴²Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Human Rights Watch, July 1993), p. 1.

have been some threats of firings of employees who fail to learn Turkmen, and reports of ethnic Turkmen being given preferential treatment in job placement.⁴³ However, Russian is still commonly used in business and in the government, and the Constitution states explicitly that ethnic minorities have a right to continue speaking their own languages. The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe maintains that as long as Russian-speakers are given the opportunity to learn the local language during the transition, "the language laws passed in all of the former Soviet republics are not in and of themselves violations of anyone's human rights."⁴⁴

As stated above, figures on how many non-Turkic ethnic minorities remain in Turkmenistan are unreliable. The most recent census mentions 334,477 Russians (9.5 percent of the population), as well as 50,000 other Slavs. There was an Armenian population of 31,838, a declared Jewish population of 2,138, of which 218 identified themselves as Central Asian (including Iranian) Jews (Sephardic or Bukharan), the remainder of European origin (Ashkenazis). Other sources put the number of Jews in Turkmenistan before independence at between 3,000 and 4,000, but estimate that at least half that number have already left Turkmenistan for Israel or other

⁴³Department of State, "Turkmenistan," *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1992* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 1993), p. 949. Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Human Rights Watch, July 1993), p. 37.

⁴⁴"Draft Copy Of Paper On Tajikistan," letter from Patricia Carley, Helsinki Commission (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe), to John Evans, Resource Information Center, 28 June 1993.

countries.⁴⁵ According to some reports, many ethnic Russians and Armenians have left for Russia and Armenia. Most non-Turkic peoples still in Turkmenistan live in the larger cities.⁴⁶

CITIZENSHIP IN TURKMENISTAN

According to the Helsinki Commission, Turkmenistan adopted a "zero option" citizenship law: those who were permanent residents of Turkmenistan at the time of the law's adoption, in September 1992, are automatically citizens of Turkmenistan. Non-citizens can obtain citizenship by meeting certain standards, such as seven years' residence, and knowledge of the Turkmen language. Turkmenistan allows dual citizenship, but only with those states (including Russia) with which it has signed an agreement. Turkmen citizenship can be revoked if the citizen petitions in writing.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Gosudarstvennyy Komitet po Statistike, *Natsional'nyy Sostav Naseleniya, Chast' II* (Moscow: Informatsionno-izdatel'skiy tsentr, 1989), pp. 94-95. "Across the Borderline," *The Jerusalem Report* (Israel: The Jerusalem Report, 1 July 1993), p. 34.

⁴⁶Department of State, "Turkmenistan," *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1992* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 1993), p. 948. Gosudarstvennyy Komitet po Statistike, *Natsional'nyy Sostav Naseleniya, Chast' II* (Moscow: Informatsionno-izdatel'skiy tsentr, 1989). pp. 94-95.

⁴⁷Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan," *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 183.

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