When a Pound Weighed a Ton: The Cotton Scandal and Uzbek National Consciousness

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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The Ohio State University

2013

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Abstract

During the reign of Leonid Brezhnev as General Secretary of the Soviet Union, corruption was hardly uncommon. Even by the standards of the era, the web of illegal activity that developed in the Uzbek S.S.R. was astonishing. Sharaf Rashidov was the man largely held as responsible for bringing about the massive amount of corrupt activity in Uzbekistan by utilizing cotton, Uzbekistan’s most important export, to build his network.

Rashidov siphoned billions of rubles away from Moscow by falsely reporting cotton harvest numbers. But simply labeling Rashid as a corrupt official or what became known as the Cotton Scandal as a typical example of Brezhnev-era corruption does not answer several important questions: was the scandal inevitable, what motivated Rashidov to engage in falsifying cotton reports, how did the exposure of the scandal impact how other Soviet citizens viewed Uzbekistan and finally, how did Uzbeks view themselves?

This paper will examine the potential causes and motives of the scandal by exploring Rashidov’s life before taking control of the Uzbek Communist Party in 1959 as well as the cotton procurement policies dating back to the Stalin era. By calling attention to these factors, it will become clear that several intertwining factors led Rashidov to pursue the policy of extensively altering cotton procurement reports.
Perhaps the most important aspect of the cotton scandal was not the huge sums of money pilfered by Rashidov, but rather the fallout after it was revealed to the Soviet public. The investigation conducted by Telman Gdlyan and Nikolai Ivanov led to the Uzbek S.S.R. and its people being cast as thieves and naturally corrupt. The repeated accusations and typecasting of being corrupt and “backwards” fed into an “us versus them” mentality and a reactionary way of self-identification on the national level. The culmination of this method of identifying oneself as an Uzbek in the face of hostility came to fruition at the onset of independence. Islam Karimov, the president of independent Uzbekistan, saw Rashidov as representative of Uzbek strength and someone who fought for the benefit of the Uzbek people, and chose to use him in building an Uzbek national symbol.

This analysis of the Cotton Scandal and its influence on the growth of Uzbek national consciousness will show that the scandal itself, as well as Rashidov, was anything but simple. Unfortunately, Rashidov is all too often portrayed as simply corrupt, without analysis of possible motivations or reasons that led him to doctor procurement figures. Here, a critique of existing scholarship is in order to identify some of the common shortcomings of research on Rashidov and offer criteria in order to better and more completely evaluate the man behind one of the largest incidents of corruption in the history of the Soviet Union.
Dedication

I wish to dedicate this final project of my Master’s degree to my parents, who have been nothing but supportive in all of aspects of my life.
Acknowledgments

The work I have done would not have been possible without the support I received from my advisor, Dr. Morgan Liu and my other committee members, Dr. David Hoffmann and Dr. Scott Levi. The staff at the Center for Slavic and East European Studies: Dr. Yana Hashamova, Eileen Kunkler, Lance Erickson, Maryann Walther-Keisel and Jordan Peters, have also always been willing to help me whenever they could and have made my life much easier throughout my time at Ohio State. Last but not least, I want to thank my colleagues in the center for always offering support and encouragement as we went through our program together.
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Fields of Study

Major Field: Slavic and East European Studies
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1959, Sharaf Rashidovich Rashidov ascended to the top of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan. Amongst his many other duties, Rashidov would be in charge of the mass production of cotton, the principle crop of Uzbekistan and one that the Soviet Union desired to be entirely self-reliant in its production. Year after year, Rashidov’s republic continually met its production quotas, and often even surpassed them. This led to quotas continually being raised as the potential for growth of cotton production also seemed to grow. Shortly after his death in 1983 however, shocking news would sweep through the Soviet Union as to exactly how the Uzbek S.S.R. (Soviet Socialist Republic) was meeting its mounting demands for cotton: a widespread web of corruption unheard of in the Soviet era.

Such a large amount of illicit activity brought about stern responses from Soviet leaders Yuri Andropov and Mikhail Gorbachev, who were both determined to rid their nation of the corruption of the Brezhnev era. The Uzbek Party leadership would find itself on the wrong end of an aggressive investigation by Telman Gdlyan and Nikolai Ivanov, two prominent state prosecutors from Moscow, with more than twenty six hundred of its officials arrested for their alleged participation in what became known as the Cotton Scandal (or Rashidov Affair). The party, and unfortunately the Uzbek people, faced severe repercussions from the other peoples of the Soviet Union. The reputation of Rashidov was dramatically altered after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as Uzbek
President Islam Karimov rehabilitated Rashidov as a new symbol of Uzbekistan. While the investigation uncovered ample amounts of illegal activity, the nature in which it was conducted and the subsequent rehabilitation of Rashidov led to an interesting development: a growth of Uzbek national consciousness.

The development of a national consciousness in Uzbekistan is an important subject to analyze, in that will demonstrate how the process of development of this consciousness during the Soviet period was appropriated into a kind of national ideology at the onset of independence. But in order to properly examine the evolution of this idea, one must look to the Soviet period to gain an intimate understanding of it. Placing the focus of this analysis in the Soviet period of Central Asia will allow for a more helpful understanding of the idea of national consciousness, as we will see how events in the Soviet period spurred on this growth. While there is no shortage of incidents to examine, this paper will focus on the Cotton Scandal that rocked the Uzbek S.S.R. in the years immediately prior to the collapse.

This is not to say that the Cotton Scandal is the most important event in the development of Uzbek national consciousness. There are certainly other crucial events to examine when studying the development of national consciousness in Uzbekistan, the *hujum* against veiling in the 1920’s, World War II or the devastating earthquake that ravaged Tashkent in 1966 for example. We should remember that all of these events played a part in the evolution of national consciousness and I am not asserting that the Cotton Scandal is more or less important than these other incidents. They all have the common theme of center-periphery but the Cotton Scandal offers a number of unique
aspects, most notably the vigorous prosecution conducted largely on a national basis, ethnic discourse of corruption and proximity to the collapse of the Soviet Union. While these unique characteristics make the scandal worth analyzing, it does not mean that it cannot aid in understanding these other incidents in Soviet Uzbek history. By identifying how the Uzbek people reacted to the issues put forward by Moscow’s cotton policies, procurement pricing, soil damage and party discipline for example, we will be able to apply these lessons to other events in Soviet history.

This analysis will examine the Cotton Scandal from the time that Rashidov took power in Uzbekistan in 1959 to his political rehabilitation by the first (and only) independent Uzbek President Islam Karimov in 1992-1993. By beginning the analysis at the time of Rashidov’s ascension to power, we will better understand the nature of Uzbekistan in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. In this time period, I will explore the nature of Rashidov as the head of the Uzbek Party as well as the way in which cotton procurements were raised and collected. To better explain the mentality that was pervasive in the republic throughout Rashidov’s reign, I will put forward the term “ideological opportunism.” This will help to articulate how the foundation was laid out for the massive corruption that was to occur.

Another important aspect of the situation in Uzbekistan during the reign of Rashidov was the nature of cotton and how this profitable but ecologically challenging crop was cultivated in the republic. Extensive damage to Uzbek soil led to the discussion of a bizarre and unfeasible plan, the diversion of Siberian river water to Central Asia. An examination of the discussion between proponents and opponents of the plan can give an
insight into the immense logistical challenges of the plan as well as why the plan seemed so nonsensical. This will not be an attempt to show discord between the two parties, as the idea itself was an unreasonable and drastic solution, but how bad the ecological condition of Uzbek agricultural lands had become after years of improper cotton management.

After exploring the elements of Uzbek political and agricultural practices leading to the scandal, a more thorough analysis of what had happened during the years of false procurement reporting is in order. To do this, the relationship between Rashidov and General Secretary of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhnev should be examined. While Rashidov was not the only leader to cultivate a relationship based on corruption with Brezhnev, he became a model republic leader for his ability to repeatedly bring forward the continually rising cotton amounts. After Rashidov’s death in 1983, the prosecution of the scandal by Gdlyan and Ivanov provide the most detail about what actually happened during the scandal. Reports of the prosecution’s investigation in periodicals such as Pravda, Pravda Vostoka or Izvestia will shed light on what had happened in the Uzbek S.S.R. while the web of corrupt officials and farmers were operating at the height of their illicit activities.

The details of the corruption are not the only bits of information that get be gained from an analysis of the prosecution of the Uzbek party. In fact, the investigation proved to be one of the most important aspects of the scandal, which would have an influence on the development of a national consciousness in Uzbekistan. When the doings of Rashidov and his cadre of corrupt Party members became public knowledge, many
Soviet citizens began to heap scorn on the Uzbek people, including women and young children who played absolutely no part in the scandal whatsoever. From incidents such as this, we can see how the idea of a national consciousness was developing in reaction to instigation by not only the leadership in the Kremlin, but also everyday Soviet citizens.

To see the ultimate culmination of the evolution of Uzbek national consciousness, the actions of President Karimov must be examined, because the recently disgraced Rashidov would be transformed by Karimov into a new symbol of Uzbek strength in the face of an overbearing Moscow and policies designed to rob the Uzbek people. Almost immediately after independence, Karimov began speaking of Rashidov in a different way than his predecessors, who spoke of Rashidov as a scourge on not only the Communist Party, but also the Uzbek people. By making Rashidov a point of national pride, Karimov made the former Party leader a symbol of Uzbek identity.

At this point, it should seem that the portrait of Rashidov is in fact quite complicated. All too often however, Rashidov is cast in most Western scholarship as a symbol of corruption only, unfortunately. Here I will offer criticisms of works that have offered descriptions of Rashidov, albeit incomplete ones. These inaccurate descriptions will lead some to be tempted to casually write off Rashidov as a corrupt Soviet official who orchestrated a typical Brezhnev-era corruption network. I believe looking more closely at Rashidov will prove this assumption to be incorrect, but in order to realize this fact, scholars must begin to analyze Rashidov by a wider variety of criteria that span from his beginnings in the Communist Party to his demise at the end of the Brezhnev era.
By employing these modes of analysis, we can further evaluate other Soviet leaders in a manner that is more thorough than simply labeling one as “corrupt.”

I argue that the evolution of Uzbek national consciousness, already in development from the very beginning of the Soviet Union in 1924, was ultimately crystallized in a reactionary manner, as this study of the Cotton Scandal will show.¹ By showing how the corruption was enabled by Moscow’s policies, one will see that the framework was laid out for the pursuit of corruption as the Uzbek party was reacting to the situation that they were placed in. The subsequent stigmatization of the Uzbek people by the prosecution and other Soviet citizens reinforced this new way of self-identification. It was Karimov who utilized Rashidov’s character and actions as a new symbol of Uzbek strength by transforming the disgraced former leader into a national hero, thus helping to define Uzbek national consciousness as a reactionary development to unreasonable Soviet policies.

It must be said that I am not trying to define who is or what constitutes being an Uzbek. To attempt to do so is well beyond the scope of this paper and may very well be impossible. By identifying Uzbek national consciousness as the focus of this work, I am analyzing only one aspect of how an Uzbek would identify his or her self. I believe this warrants its own discussion due to the unique matter that the idea of an Uzbek nation came about. It certainly is not the only manner which an Uzbek would identify themselves, as a Muslim or Central Asian for example. This is by no means unique to Uzbekistan, as one could find multiple methods of self-identification in any nation (in the

¹ The works by Francine Hirsch and Terry Martin on this subject will be discussed below.
United States, an American will identify themselves in a variety of ways: region of origin, ancestral heritage, statehood or American if abroad). Islam and regional ties to other Central Asians may have played a role in a particular response in the development of a national consciousness but cannot explain the entire notion of Uzbek nationhood and themselves deserve their own study as a method of Uzbek self-identification.

It is absolutely crucial to remember that prior to Soviet delineation most Central Asians would not have identified themselves as simply “Uzbek.” According to Francine Hirsch, the process of delimitation in Central Asia assigned to the Soviet ethnographers was daunting, and that the borders of the Central Asian republics were drawn only after extensive research and ethnographic surveys.² Hirsch’s work illustrates the complexities of Central Asian ethnicities quite well, especially when detailing the various censuses. For example, Hirsch lists the various natsional’nosti for the 1920 Census and the narodnosti for the 1926 Census, with the first list containing over fifty entries and the latter over one hundred and ninety.³

What is interesting is that in the 1920 Census, Uzbeks were listed under “Other Turks”, not as their own nationality such as Russians, Georgians or Turkmen.⁴ This analysis sets up the framework that makes the study of Uzbek national consciousness so interesting, in that this idea found fertile ground within borders established not by the people of the Central Asian republics themselves, but by Soviet ethnographers from thousands of miles away. The idea behind the drawing of these borders was to curb

³ Ibid, 327-333.
⁴ Ibid, 327-328.
potential (and problematic) feelings of nationalism or pan-Turkism. Hirsch calls this process “double assimilation”, in which “the assimilation of a diverse population into nationality categories and, simultaneously, the assimilation of those nationally categorized groups into the Soviet state and society” occurred. The important lesson to take away from these ideas is that the development of an Uzbek national identity was not a foregone conclusion, in that the borders that were drawn in Central Asia were not of Central Asian design and consequently not a sign of national desires on the part of the local population.

As Hirsch’s data shows, there were not enough Central Asians who classified themselves as “Uzbek” to have it listed as a category on the 1920 census, four years before the establishment of the Uzbek S.S.R. This is not to say that the idea of being Uzbek would not have had an influence on the eventual development of nations in Central Asia. The important fact to be aware of here is that the formation of what would become Uzbekistan after the collapse of the Soviet Union was brought about by ethnographers from Moscow, not the people of Central Asia themselves. This means that an Uzbek nation did not begin to develop from a concerted effort of Central Asians identifying themselves as Uzbek, but rather from a Soviet program. I am not arguing that the Soviet Union central administration was solely responsible for the formation of an Uzbek national consciousness, but that its policies led to reactions from Uzbeks and other

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5 Ibid, 14.
6 The process of delimitation and korenizatsiia campaign are both important parts of establishing the foundation of Uzbek national consciousness. This paper will not engage this subject in detail as it would not be able to give it proper attention. Hirsch’s Empire of Nations and Terry Martin’s Affirmative Action Empire are two works that will be of great use to those wanting to further study delimitation and the nativization campaign.
Central Asians which over the course of the Soviet period, formed a new method of self-identification.

When examining the development of national consciousness in Uzbekistan, it is helpful to further explain what constitutes a reactionary evolution. Judith Nagata uses two terms that are useful in evaluating Uzbek national consciousness, *primordialist* and *contextualist.* These two ways of describing identity are helpful, in that they point out the differing ways one can examine the growth of Uzbek national consciousness. *Primordialist* somewhat implies that the evolving national consciousness was a natural occurrence, in that the banding together of Uzbeks happened due to *primordial* feelings of kinship. *Contextualist* implies that the growth of national consciousness was a response to the situations that arose during the beginnings of Soviet delineation and continued throughout the period of Soviet rule in Uzbekistan until 1991. The examination that this paper will provide will take both of these ideas into account, as both concepts are visible in the evolution of the Uzbek national consciousness.

What we must keep in mind is that the answer to this question will change depending on who is asked. It is not out of the ordinary to hear the response that Central Asians were acting out of their traditional beliefs and practices. While some may be of the opinion that if Uzbek national consciousness developed as a response to Soviet policies and actions that their national consciousness is purely *contextualist,* we should resist the idea that the formation of this consciousness was completely devoid of elements that predated the Soviet period. It also should be mentioned that when saying there are

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primordialist elements to the growth of national consciousness, it does not mean
essentialism. Charles Keyes acknowledges that primordial factors are not genetically
predetermined, and that these factors “can vary through time.”

Also according to Keyes, “changes in ethnicity, in both cultural and social
dimensions, are precipitated, by radical changes in the political-economic contexts in
which people live.” I believe this can tie the terms primordialist and contextualist
together, in that a certain situation or development can change what is considered
primordial. When I use the term primordialist I am trying to convey that there were
elements of Central Asians’ way of life that would influence their reactions to Soviet
policies. Keeping Keyes in mind, these elements can be altered, keeping them from
staying static and becoming essentialist. The terms primordialist and contextualist are
both helpful when describing the reactionary development of national consciousnesses
and as long as we avoid assigning essentialist characteristics in the guise of primordialist
factors, they will help sift through the complexities of the case of the Uzbeks. While I
argue that Uzbek national consciousness developed in a reactionary way to the various
exploits of the Soviet state, we must not dismiss this formation as being one that lacked
some preexisting traditions.

While not a Central Asian example, one should consider the situation of Muslim
women in Egypt laid out by Saba Mahmood in her work Politics of Piety, where it is easy
to see these Egyptian Muslim women as still trapped in an oppressive, misogynistic

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9 Ibid.
system. This was not the case from their perspective as they did not feel like they were being oppressed, but evolving their role in their own society. Mahmood suggests “that we leave open the possibility that our political and analytical certainties might be transformed in the process of exploring nonliberal movements of the kind I studied…”

While it might be easy to assign the label of strictly contextualist to Uzbek national consciousness seeing as the very notion of Uzbek national identity, according to Andrew Segars, is a Soviet creation, we should refrain from doing so. Omitting these primordial aspects would be a mistake, as if we look past some of our own preconceived notions on what Uzbek national consciousness or Uzbek identity is, we can conduct our examination more thoroughly.

What we need to take away from these examples is that when describing the development of Uzbek national consciousness is that while we can label it reactionary, we cannot exclude some of the opinions of the Uzbek people which may be considered to be primordialist. Central Asians “at one level identified themselves as ‘Soviets.’ But they also have a Turkestani identity, a nationality identity (based on national republic), and local or clan identities.” This spells out the complexity of trying to pin down what it means to be Uzbek. Can we say that these other Central Asian identities offer a

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11 Ibid, 39.
13 I am acknowledging Mahmood’s work here, as it should keep us from making sweeping generalizations about another culture. It would be easy to claim all developments of Uzbek national consciousness is contextual as “Uzbek” as a method of national identification was a Soviet creation. By doing so, we relegate primordialist evolutions to essentialism and lose out on valuable insight from Uzbeks themselves.
glimpse into what can be called a *primordial* sense of identity? How did these other methods of self identification play a role in the development of Uzbek national consciousness?

These questions raise a concern that has already been posed by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper on the topic of identity and its use as an analytical term. Should we continue to use identities, which they assert are “suggestive oxymorons” as tools of analysis which can mean everything and nothing? Brubaker and Cooper point out that other methods of analysis such as “transnational issue networks” that link groups from across the globe concerned with problems ranging from apartheid to human and women’s rights are better methodological tools to analyze complex issues like identity. They do pose an interesting point in identifying the somewhat constricting nature of a term like identity (or perhaps national consciousness), but this does not mean that we should simply dismiss the term. If we acknowledge the shortcomings of identity or national consciousness as an analytical term and make sure to define them as concisely as possible in our evaluation of a subject, we can move past these deficiencies. Having already recognized that there are a great number of factors that influenced Central Asian identities, we should keep this complexity in mind when analyzing the growth of Uzbek national consciousness. These complicated intricacies were “institutionalized into ethnically coded territorial-administrative structures…” This helps us to understand that there is room for identity in the discussion of Uzbek national consciousness, because

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15 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond "Identity" in *Theory & Society*. 29, no. 1 (2000), 89.
16 Ibid.
in this discussion there can be multiple identities when analyzing a group like the Uzbeks and their forming of a national consciousness. There was no simple ordering of characteristics in the minds and actions of Central Asians that undoubtedly lead to the formation of an Uzbek national consciousness, because without the invasive policies of the Soviet Union there would not have been a catalyst to begin this new way of self identification.\textsuperscript{18}

Liu also raises an interesting point concerning what the culmination of Uzbek national consciousness entailed. He cites Laura Adams who acknowledges that the “cultural renaissances” of Central Asia did not come about from “repressed national sentiments, but emanate[d] from state technologies of rule.”\textsuperscript{19} Since there were no preconceived notions of an Uzbek national consciousness arising before the arrival of the Soviet Union, it was the response to the policies being directed from Moscow. According to Adams, this period shaped how the Uzbek state would look in the post-communist era.\textsuperscript{20} Again we must look to the declarations of President Islam Karimov for insight into this matter, in that many of his decisions upon assuming power at the onset of independent Uzbekistan will illustrate both \textit{primordialist} and \textit{contextualist} developments of national consciousness.

While the primary focus of this paper concerns the development of national conscious during the Cotton Scandal, attention will also paid to the way scholars have

\textsuperscript{18} This does not imply that the evolution of national consciousness was predetermined or ready to emerge, and simply needed a jump start. The Soviet policies gave the Uzbeks the opportunity to react to these new situations, offering various instances for national consciousness to form.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} More can be found on this subject can be found in: Laura L Adams, \textit{The Spectacular State: Culture and National Identity in Uzbekistan}, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
evaluated Rashidov. The scholarship on Rashidov, in my opinion, is lacking insofar as its ability to offer a complex and complete picture and will lead to other scholars to simply write him off as a corrupt Soviet official. I believe that Rashidov must be studied more thoroughly in order to answer questions on the inevitability of pursuing corrupt action and whether or not it would have occurred if another figure was in charge. This is not an attempt to justify what Rashidov did while leading the Uzbek S.S.R., but by trying to uncover the possible motivations for the corruption that engulfed Uzbekistan we will be able to better understand not only Rashidov himself, but also the system in which he found himself in.

By keeping these terms mind, we will be able to better understand the intertwining of circumstances that led Rashidov and the other members of the Uzbek Party to pursue such extensive corrupt activities. This will allow for a stronger comprehension of how various factors such as party purging or ill-advised irrigation and other agricultural techniques drove the party leadership of Uzbekistan to pursue the policy of falsifying cotton production reports as a reaction to Soviet policies.
Chapter 2: Sowing the Seeds of Corruption

In order to better understand the Cotton Scandal and those responsible for it, one must first look at the kind of situation the Uzbek S.S.R. was in. To do so, the early systems of cotton harvesting and procurement quotas must be examined. The corruption that blossomed in the Uzbek Party during Rashidov’s reign was not a foregone conclusion, and we will see that a series of events that unfolded in the decades leading up toward the scandal were significant in bringing about the scandal.

In this chapter, I will set out procurement policies that were laid out as early as the Stalin era that offered to pay farmers more for their larger harvests. This established the idea that financial benefits could be incurred from producing cotton above and beyond the set procurement amounts. This is not that only aspect of central planning that would play a role in laying the groundwork for corruption. While one could benefit from producing a large sum of cotton, he would face dire repercussions if procurement numbers were not met. Fear was not limited to cotton farmers though. Rashidov came to power after the Uzbek Party was purged by then General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev; a fact that I argue was significant in setting the foundation for corruption.

These dual motivations were crucial in bringing about the scandal, and can be conjoined and described as fostering a mindset of “ideological opportunism.” What I mean by “ideological opportunism” is that the Uzbek Party understood that if they delivered the desired amount of cotton, or even exceeded procurement quotas, they would
simultaneously gain favor in Moscow and acquire increased revenue. This would also
spare them the fate of missing these requirements, which could very well have led to the
punishment of the Party leadership. Since this is how Rashidov came to power, it
certainly resonated in his mind.

In this analysis, we should also look at the Siberian river diversion debate. While
there were ardent proponents and opponents of the plan, it nevertheless seems that the
project was unrealistic and a logistical nightmare. This debate does have a place in this
discussion though. The important aspect of this discussion is not that there was discord
between the two parties, as whenever a scientific undertaking of this magnitude is
proposed there will unsurprisingly be intense debate between the two sides. What is
important is that the agricultural situation was so bad in Central Asia that a plan such as
this was even proposed and then strongly pursued. Cotton is a crop that can be
devastating to the landscape if not cultivated and rotated efficiently. Such was the case in
Uzbekistan during the Soviet period and perhaps a clue as to why Rashidov orchestrated
a group of conspirators in order to continue producing cotton at the level set by central
planners in Moscow. If there was no way to realistically produce as much cotton as was
demanded by Moscow, disingenuously claiming successes in cotton harvests seems
plausible considering the alternative of being reprimanded or punished by Party
authorities.

As far as commodity production, Uzbekistan’s cotton crop was of immense value
to the Soviet Union. It is no secret that the Soviet state hoped to use Uzbek cotton to be
largely self-sufficient in textiles, and it was for this reason that the Communist party

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would utilize these resources for the state’s benefit. In as early as the Stalin period, cotton farmers in Central Asia were motivated by compensation for their products. Two measures instituted by the Soviet government in 1935, *premii-nadbavok* (premium) and *kontraktsionnyi dogovor* (contractual agreement), were used to motivate the cotton farmers in republics like Uzbekistan. While this might seem initially surprising given that this implementation of payment for production is occurring near the summit of Stalinism, the reasoning behind the increased amount of incentives was that the Soviet state was determined to become not only self-sufficient in cotton production, but also to be able to export large amounts of cotton. This introduction of higher procurement prices also took place during the “Stakhanovite” movement, where individual and exemplary work was valued in Stalinist society. However, policies like these left many Russians of the time, including Nikita Khrushchev, assuming that Central Asians were accruing an inordinate amount of wealth off of these policies, and their shortages in other agricultural areas was the result of their idleness, not poor Soviet planning.

It would be during the post-Stalin period where the cotton industry in Uzbekistan would be shaped in a manner that would eventually lead to the cotton scandal. With a well expected dip in cotton production during the period of World War II, the Soviet Union resumed ramping up its production in the years after. Soviet cotton production prior to Operation Barbarossa sat at about 2.24 million tons and by 1960 the harvest was

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22 Ibid.
reportedly 4.29 million tons, nearly doubling the mount procured before the war.\textsuperscript{23} This boom of cotton production was not only the result of Uzbekistan, as Turkmenistan and Tajikistan were also important producers of cotton in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, this demonstrated improvement in the cotton industry of the Soviet Union played a pivotal role in the increased demand for cotton that would take place and eventually lead to the greatly exaggerated production numbers by Uzbek Party officials in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s.

Nikita Khrushchev, whose mistrust of the incentives given to cotton farmers in Central Asia, was responsible for setting in motion the adjustments to the policies concerning cotton in the later years of his reign. Hodnett calls the attitude adopted by Khrushchev and the Soviet authorities as “subjectivism,” a contrast to the idea of increasing incentives leads to increased cotton yields. He mentions the threatening remarks made by Khrushchev himself that spelled doom for many Party members, as purges would mark the beginning of the 1958 Seven Year Plan, with the Uzbek Party facing the Kremlin’s wrath in March, of 1959.\textsuperscript{24} As one would expect, a failure to meet a center’s plan resulted in punishment for the periphery, even if the goal was set too high to begin with. These threats and actions by the Kremlin towards the collective farm workers of Central Asia would resonate for some time, as they could assume without much hesitation that if a planned goal was not fulfilled, serious repercussions would soon follow.

\textsuperscript{24} Hodnett, 1974, 71.
These decisions made by Khrushchev are important for several reasons. Given Khrushchev’s early negative opinions on increased compensation for exceeding production goals, his hostilities towards cotton collective farmers not fulfilling plan are not surprising. It would be Khrushchev however, who would take one of the first steps towards moving policy towards cotton procurement in the opposite direction. On March 15, 1963, a joint resolution decided to raise the cotton procurement about 20% as well as other reforms, which ultimately resulted in the increase of productivity.²⁵

This set of contradictory views from Khrushchev, criticism of Central Asian procurements as exploitive of Slavs and his eventual press for incentive reforms, set up the mentality that many in Uzbekistan would have during Rashidov’s reign. It is possible to explain Khrushchev’s change in opinion towards procurement prices as when he held his early opinion, he was not the head of the state. Upon taking power, it is reasonable to suggest that he saw the situation in more realistic terms, in that this was an effective method of increasing production. In 1969, the Modal Statute “established minimum wage and pension programs for deqhans, and allowed greater flexibility in payment of wages.”²⁶ It is for reasons such as these that one can make an observation that “pressure to meet impossibly ambitious plans resulted in corruption and labor productivity that was lower than it should have been”.²⁷ This is a critical argument to remember, in that while there were reforms to the procurement policy at the end of the Khrushchev era as well as

²⁵ Hodnett, 1974, 72.
²⁷ Ibid, 38.
the Brezhnev era, the fact remained that the party leadership in Moscow would still be demanding increasingly large amounts of cotton from Uzbekistan.

The situation many Uzbek collective cotton farmers found themselves in was a complicated one. On one hand, they had been receiving more compensation for their efforts in delivering their product. On the other, they would continually be expected to meet increasingly high demands from Moscow, facing troublesome repercussions if they were unable to comply with them. Given these conditions, it is not surprising that the Uzbek Communist Party would be inclined to forge some numbers, as it would be a necessity for survival. What would lead the party to make such drastic forgeries though? There are two reasons for the incredibly exaggerated figures composed by the Uzbek Party: additional agricultural policies implemented by the Soviet leadership in Moscow and the culture of corruption that emanated from the capital city.

It is clear that the Soviet regime put cotton as an incredibly high priority in their agricultural policy in Uzbekistan. One of the most glaring inefficiencies of Soviet policy in Uzbekistan would be how they supported this booming cash crop. Cotton plants require a large amount of water in order to produce quality fibers. While Uzbekistan may not have any other issues as far as adopting the role of major cotton producer, the necessity for large amounts of water would prove a problem, as Uzbekistan is not a country that receives much rainfall. The Soviet irrigation system as drew so heavily on water from Uzbekistan’s two major rivers, the Syr-Dar’ya and the Amu-Dar’ya, that the Aral Sea had been shrunk to almost half its size by the early 1980’s.\(^\text{28}\) Given its nature as

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needing an abundant amount of water to grow, the vast amounts of arable land that were used for cotton were then rendered quite incapable of providing fertile soil for other crops.

Irrigation was a constant source of trouble for the Uzbek Party, as the republic does not receive much rainfall, and a constant source of water is needed for successful cotton production. A proposed plan to divert Siberian river water to Central Asia for irrigation purposes, while incredibly controversial and immensely complex, was being discussed in the Soviet press during the height of the falsification of cotton production. A debate between the two sides, for and against the project, occurred in the Soviet publication, Literaturnaia Gazeta, in 1982. The two parts of the article center on an interview with Igor Andreevich Gerardi, a proponent of the plan, and a V. Perevedentsev, an opponent of the plan.29 Gerardi argues that the plan would quickly recoup its investment in that the irrigation improvements allotted by the Siberian water would substantially boost production capabilities. Perevedentsev counters the claims of Gerardi with his own statistics and while refuting the plans for the project, he does not dismiss the idea of finding a way to improve the irrigation systems in Central Asia. About a month later, a reply to Perevedentsev’s argument was published in the Tashkent-based Pravda Vostoka. In this article, three men associated with production forces and hydro-economic construction, S. Ziadullaev, A. Bostanzhoglo and A. Pugachev, claim that Perevedentsev

is simply posing questions without giving any sound answers to the problems he brought up.\(^{30}\)

Now, one should not be quick to jump to one side or another of this debate. From the perspective of Moscow, this undertaking would be incredibly costly and time consuming, and according to economists like Perevedentsev, a logistical nightmare. From the perspective of the Central Asians, irrigation issues were of significant importance, in that all one needs to do is examine the decline of the Aral Sea. According to Medvedev, by 1982 the Aral Sea’s population of freshwater fish had died off almost entirely.\(^{31}\) Medvedev acknowledges that while the increased draw from the Amu and Syr-Darya rivers helped with an increase in cotton exports, “the negative economic effect is inescapable.”\(^{32}\)

This would not be an issue that was quickly resolved, as even at the onset of the demise of the Soviet Union, the Aral Sea problem was still being discussed at length in Soviet periodicals. In a January 1990 issue of *Pravda Vostoka* the issue of water diversion was raised yet again. In the article, the authors L. Epshtein and F. Eyngorn assert that while there was work being done on the issue, the people need to understand that radical solutions to the problems of the Central Asian states are not in the best interests of the union as a whole.\(^{33}\) The lesson that should be learned from this ongoing (even still to today) debate is not that there was an anti-Central Asian conspiracy in


\(^{31}\) Medvedev, 1987, 231.

\(^{32}\) Ibid.

Moscow, but instead that there was a serious problem with agricultural planning in Uzbekistan. A debate on controversial scientific endeavors is not evidence of dissent between experts in Moscow and Central Asia, but an indicator of how rapidly the situation regarding cotton had degraded.

This inability to produce enough food is one of the most “elementary requirements of any system” and Soviet Union had continuously failed to adequately address the issue, as their continued reliance on outside sources damaged their claims of self-sufficiency. The presence of private plots (a policy that was officially discouraged but nonetheless widely occurred) also demonstrated how poor Soviet planning resulted in many ordinary Uzbek farmers taking survival into their own hands, as these private plots may have accounted for as much as 28% of Uzbekistan’s gross output as well as a third of a farmer’s income. This put the people of the Uzbek-SSR at an uncomfortable crossroads, in that their country not only valued the Republic’s cash crop more than the ability to feed the people who harvested it, but also expected them to not stray from the state planned economy. It would be up to the Party leadership in Tashkent as well as the farmers in the fields to ponder a suggestion on how to survive these graves inefficiencies.

It would be a stretch to call this sort of survival mechanism a form of corruption that would lead to the wide spread purges of the late 1980’s. A “shadow economy” developing where essential goods consistently lacked is not surprising, as these spread throughout the Soviet Union when certain materials were frequently unavailable. This

necessity for goods that were difficult to attain played a significant part in the interconnected web of corruption, as it set the precedent for exploiting policy directives from the center to achieve the needs of the periphery. It has already been discussed how the Uzbek S.S.R. was constantly in need of outside food imports, and it makes sense that the attitude of doing what was necessary to gain supplies for the individual would securely implant itself in the psyche of Uzbek farmers and political leaders alike. This practice and mentality did contribute to the corrupt culture of the Brezhnev era, but Rashidov would be the man to use this mentality for even greater gain at the center’s expense.

As previously mentioned, cotton is a crop that can be incredibly damaging to soil. The intensive depositing of minerals in the Amu Darya led to “mineral contents running as high as 1.5 grams a liter in Karakalpakia” and consequently dramatic increases in illness in the area.\textsuperscript{36} The declining quality of the soil of Uzbekistan and the ecological and agricultural conditions in general was a substantial reason to engage in false cotton production numbers, in that it is quite possible that with the falling soil quality that the Uzbek S.S.R. would not be able to meet the plan goal. One should keep this situation in mind for any analysis of the man largely responsible for the web of corruption that would reign over Uzbekistan for over two decades, Sharaf Rashidov.

Rashidov took power from Sabir Kamalov in 1959, and would consolidate his power in Uzbekistan that would lead towards a longer period of rule than any other

Soviet Central Asian leader. 37 Prior to his ascension to power, Rashidov aspired to be the consummate party man. After finishing high school, Rashidov joined the Young Communist League and while working on the Samarqand paper, Lenin yoli, joined the communist party. 38 A short time later, Rashidov would serve in the Red Army during World War II and after returning from the front, complete with wounds, he was selected as the secretary of the Samarqand Oblast Communist Party Committee and would also head the Union of Writers of Uzbekistan until 1950. 39 His last position before becoming the general secretary was chairman of the Presidium, Uzbekistan SSR Supreme Council, which he attained in 1950. 40 Rashidov also aspired to be a “total communist man,” which placed him in a small minority in Uzbekistan during the 1940’s and 1950’s. 41

It was this fact, intertwined with the previously discussed procurement policies, is what I believe led Rashidov to pursue the falsification of cotton harvests. The fact that Rashidov came to power as a result of the Uzbek Communist Party purge could have plausibly imprinted in his mind that notion that planned goals must be hit, regardless of their perceived impossibility. This is another factor that contributed to the “ideological opportunism” that took root in Uzbekistan during Rashidov’s reign. Rashidov understood the benefits being a good party man, as he was able to repeatedly rise through the ranks of the party to become one of the prominent party men in the republic.

Combining his successes in the party and his intimate knowledge of the Rashidov knew

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38 Edward Allworth, The modern Uzbeks: from the fourteenth century to the present : a cultural history. (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1990), 265.
39 Ibid, 266.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid, 264.
the political game he had to play, and while not being honest in his republic’s shortcomings, he proved to be an apt player.

Rashidov’s ascension and maintenance of power in Uzbekistan was symbolic of increasing local influence and reorienting the focus of the local Party leadership towards regional issues. This means that the Uzbek leader utilized his stable position as head of the Party in the Uzbek-SSR to continuously promote local leaders to higher positions, forming a cadre that would pursue local goals while still paying enough homage to Moscow to keep their positions. The pursuit of these goals in favor of Uzbekistan’s well being is what won over many Uzbeks’ loyalties, and helps to explain why they thought of him as a “god.”

These changes in how Uzbekistan was run, from the increasing payments for procurements beginning in the late Khrushchev era to the consolidation of power by Sharaf Rashidov and refocusing of local issues, were instrumental in laying the groundwork for the massive corruption that was to take place. The implementation of various Soviet policies regarding agriculture in Uzbekistan put Uzbek Party leaders as well as the average kolkhoz farmer under duress, but can this reason by itself be responsible for the Cotton Scandal? One should not believe so, as the massive scale of corruption needed oversight, and Sharaf Rashidov would be the man to direct the country as it began its endeavor down this path of corruption that was unheard of in the Soviet

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42 This helps to explain the spreading presence of privately owned farms, something Moscow was ideologically opposed to as well as detrimental to hitting planned quotas.
43 Sengupta, 236.
44 This can also be seen in the political rehabilitation of Rashidov in the post-Communist era as a hero championed for pursuing policies that favored the Uzbek people and not the unjust center.
Union, becoming an essential part to the culture of corruption that would be pervasive in the Brezhnev era and a shining example of “ideological opportunism.”

Rashidov, a World War II veteran and former head of the Uzbek Writers’ Union, seemed to be an ideal Brezhnev era leader. In his work *Soviet Uzbekistan*, Rashidov pays high praise to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, calling him “the outstanding political and state leader of our time...who has the infinite respect and trust of each citizen of our country...” This respect between leaders of the center and periphery was mutual, as Rashidov was certainly no stranger to receiving award after award and medal after medal for his leadership of the Uzbek SSR. In his twenty four years in power, he collected “10 Orders of Lenin, 2 Gold Stars, a Lenin prize, 2 Hero of Socialist Labor medals, 2 Sickle and Hammer Gold medals and the Badge of Honor...among others.”

These acts of patronage are easily explained, in that Rashidov’s complements of Brezhnev’s leadership certainly helped him increase his political clout. It was his “achievements” in the agricultural sector of his republic that brought him the highest praise from both Moscow and Uzbek cities. This put him in an opportune position to continue to be praised by his Uzbek constituency for his actions in acquiring more resources, however illicit they may be, for his republic, while at the same time finding his way into Brezhnev’s good graces by continuously producing “extraordinary” cotton harvests.

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45 It should be clear that there was certainly corruption in Uzbekistan prior to Rashidov, but the amount of corruption that occurred under his watch was unique.
46 The book was published in 1982, but Rashidov makes mention of the “spectacular” 1980 cotton harvest, when Brezhnev was still in power and Moscow was still being swindled.
Rashidov was seen as a “god” by the Uzbek people, as well as favored by Brezhnev and other high ranking Soviet politicians in Moscow in that he was a candidate member of the central politburo.\(^{49}\) Rashidov kept Brezhnev and other ranking Soviet leaders happy by “delivering the cotton and keeping internal peace…the latter was achieved by a mixture of patronage, corruption and repression.”\(^{50}\) Rashidov did indeed deliver the cotton to Moscow, even though a substantial portion of the alleged cotton did not exist.

Rashidov wrote that in 1980, the Uzbek SSR would produce an astounding six million tons of cotton, a record for the republic and over a million and a half ton improvement from the harvest in 1970.\(^{51}\) One should not immediately discount the claims of improvement by Rashidov as entirely over-exaggerated, as production figures of harvesting machines increasing from forty four thousand units in 1975 to fifty five thousand in 1980.\(^{52}\) This was the most dramatic increase in any five year period from 1965 to 1984, which can help to explain how such massive claims of deliveries of imaginary cotton could continue throughout Rashidov’s time as head of the Uzbek Communist Party.

This was a period of immense growth in cotton production as the high point of the Brezhnev period, evidenced by an Uzbek party member’s (jailed on corruption charges) description of a visit by Brezhnev in the 1970’s. In this interview, the former party

\(^{49}\) Ibid, 188.
\(^{51}\) Rashidov, 1982, 49.
\(^{52}\) Medvedev, 1987, 292.
member claimed Rashidov promised the Soviet leader an astounding five million tons of cotton a year, to which Brezhnev replied, “Round it off to six million Sarafchik” with Rashidov answering “Yes sir, Leonid Illich.”  

An exchange such as this gives an interesting insight to the situation in which Rashidov was operating in his time heading the Uzbek Communist Party. This relationship between Rashidov and Brezhnev is another key issue in answering why the cotton scandal took place. Their relationship seemed to symbolize the process of increasing demand from Moscow and increasing, albeit imaginary, supply of cotton from Uzbekistan. Brezhnev’s unwillingness to effectively solve Soviet economic problems would also play a critical role in allowing these imaginary bales of cotton to be “delivered” from Uzbekistan.

The attitude Leonid Brezhnev held in regard to the economic shortcomings of the Soviet Union, was keeping “his own Politburo in the dark so it could not blame him for the building economic disaster. In effect, he was securing his own position at the expense of the nation’s economic well being.”

This is an astute observation that can be of great use in answering how the Cotton Scandal continued to grow, in that if the flaws in the Soviet economic system were in fact known but were not going to be remedied (as it would impact the political livelihood of Brezhnev), the falsifying of production numbers could continue as Brezhnev embraced numbers he knew to be greatly over exaggerated. It should also be understood that Rashidov was seen as the model leader of a Soviet Republic, and was lauded by Brezhnev as such. If Brezhnev were to suddenly

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53 Critchlow, 1991, 63.
55 Coleman also points out that as head of the KGB, Andropov knew how bad the economic performance was, thus influencing him to pursue action upon his gaining power.
reveal that his prize Republic leader was actually defrauding the state of billions, it would be incredibly politically harmful. Combine this refusal to acknowledge glaring economic issues with “huge investments [and] price and wage policies favoring the peasant” put the opportunity for Uzbeks ranging from famers, to policemen, to high ranking Party members to engage in this widespread corruption with little fear of immediate repercussions.

The increasingly demanding quotas for cotton set by Moscow were growing impossible to achieve without substantial alterations to production figures. Combine this with Uzbekistan’s necessity for additional imports in terms of food, and it’s understandable why Rashidov would doctor these numbers from an economic perspective. We must also recall Rashidov’s party experiences as a young man who excelled through the ranks but received the head position in Uzbekistan due to a purge. Additional economic and political capital from Moscow would be of great benefit to him and the people of his republic, while keeping the party bosses at bay. It was these funds he attained by seizing on his strong relationship with Brezhnev and the perception of his being an ideal leader of a Soviet republic. As one will soon see, the sheer magnitude of corrupt activities these conditions produced is staggering and the fallout from their revelation would be highly influential in shaping how Uzbek national consciousness evolved.

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57 Reference back to the vast listing of awards bestowed on Rashidov during his time in power.
Chapter 3: The Scandal and Fallout

Now that the incentives for corruption are clear, we must turn our focus to the actions of not only Rashidov, but also those of General Secretaries Yuri Andropov and Mikhail Gorbachev, special investigators Telman Gdlyan and Nikolai Ivanov and finally President Islam Karimov. After Brezhnev’s death in 1982, Andropov and Gorbachev both waged campaigns against corruption in the Soviet Union. Gdlyan and Ivanov would be the men tasked to investigate and prosecute the Uzbek Party members involved in corrupt activities. What they found shocked not only themselves, but also citizens across the Soviet Union. These revelations led to widespread arrests of the leadership of the Uzbek Party and ultimately brought shame in droves to the republic. Uzbeks were frequently the targets of ridicule from other Soviet citizens living in Uzbekistan during the unveiling of the corruption, forcing them to become defensive about their supposed national character.

This investigation would lead to disgrace of Rashidov, as he would be cast as a man who abused the people of his own republic along with those across the nation in order to line his pockets through extortion, bribery and blackmail. Rashidov would remain in political disgrace until the Soviet Union collapsed. The newly “elected” Uzbek President Islam Karimov would rescue Rashidov’s reputation from its political exile and

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58 Chernenko was largely bedridden and did not pursue corrupt officials with the zeal that that his predecessor and successor would. It is also plausible to assume that while Andropov was more informed when it came to matters of corruption due to his position as head of the KGB, Chernenko may have been one of the many Soviet officials left in the dark by Brezhnev when it came to the amount of illicit activity in the Soviet Union.
utilize the former Party leader as a national symbol of strength. Karimov cast Rashidov in a different image than that of Gdlyan and Ivanov, in that while not dismissing the corrupt nature of his activities, credited him with putting the needs of his republic before Moscow’s. In a way, Karimov made Rashidov a symbol of the national consciousness of Uzbeks, in that he represented the necessity of Uzbeks to work for their own benefit by resisting the impossible demands of Moscow’s economic planners during the years of the Soviet Union.

By placing the end of the examination in the independence period, we will be able to see how the entirety of Rashidov’s life as well as the conditions in Uzbekistan ultimately created the “perfect storm” for the immense amount of corruption. The sheer magnitude of the corruption in Uzbekistan makes it a worthy subject of study in Soviet history, and as the examination will demonstrate, it must be examined past the collapse of the Soviet Union. If the post-Soviet period is not explored, Rashidov’s actions are left to be deemed simply corrupt and mostly likely being seen as just the illicit activities of a typical Brezhnev-era official.

The lack of accountability and transparency in authoritarian regimes allowed leaders like Rashidov to continue their opportunistic practices without facing consequences from the Kremlin. The sheer amount of corruption that took place in the Cotton Scandal does make it somewhat remarkable. An astonishing aspect of the widespread corruption is the fact that the leader of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev (as well as KGB head Yuri Andropov), knew about the false cotton reports. However, Brezhnev chose to keep this information to himself, seeing as he as propped Rashidov up
on a pedestal as a model Republic leader.\textsuperscript{59} If one of his model leaders were to be implicated in a network of corruption like in Uzbekistan, the political fallout would have been disastrous. This practice of constantly looking other way for the sake of political prestige by Brezhnev would have dire implications that would ripple across the Soviet Union for a decade after his death in 1982.

In terms of amount of money pilfered from Moscow, the Uzbek Party successfully obtained about three billion rubles for cotton that did not exist.\textsuperscript{60} The extent of the corruption was also stunning, in that in order to obtain the first shreds of hard evidence, Brezhnev’s successor, Andropov, was forced to use Soviet spy satellites to take photographs of Uzbek cotton fields.\textsuperscript{61} The investigation that began under Andropov would not be over quickly, as the process of investigating the immense amount of corruption would take time. The investigators assigned to examine the Uzbek corruption were Telman Gdlyan and Nikolai Ivanov and what they would unearth would be absolutely staggering.

Initially sent to Uzbekistan in 1983, Gdlyan and Ivanov almost immediately encountered massive amount of corruption upon their arrival. An article in Moskovskiyiye Novosti offers a thorough insight to what exactly was happening in the Uzbek S.S.R. while Rashidov was in charge. It details how the First Secretary of the Bukhara Province Party Committee, Abduvakhid Karimov, had swindled enough money from the state to provide both Brezhnev and Rashidov with gold busts of themselves and also accumulated

\textsuperscript{59} Coleman, 1996, 138.
\textsuperscript{60} Clark, 1993, 187.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 188-189.
large amounts of “gold coins, timepieces, jewels and briefcases stuffed with cash,” which were subsequently confiscated by Gdlyan and his fellow investigators.\textsuperscript{62} An example of the extensive bribery that took place in Uzbekistan is also evident in the article, when Brezhnev’s son-in-law Yuri Churbanov accepted a 10,000 ruble bribe from Karimov not to report consumer good shortages after an official visit.\textsuperscript{63,64}

Interestingly enough, the corruption surrounding cotton production did not stop with Rashidov’s death. His successor, Inomjon Usmankho’dzhayev, promised to deliver the six million tons of cotton Rashidov had promised, although according to the Gdlyan investigation, he ordered an additional 240,000 tons added to the reported amount, at a loss of a quarter of a billion dollars for the state.\textsuperscript{65} Even though Gdlyan and Ivanov were rapidly uncovering corruption and illegal activity, the individuals involved did not necessarily go without a fight. In a \textit{Komsomolskaya Pravda} article, A. Ganelin describes a plot murder Gdlyan. While transporting an official arrested for bribery to Moscow, conspirators involved in the corrupt actions of the Uzbek Party attempted to bring down Gdlyan’s plane by stringing a steel cable across the runway.\textsuperscript{66} The attempt on Gdlyan’s life was unsuccessful, but it demonstrates how deeply rooted the corruption in Uzbekistan was, in that an attempt on the life of a high ranking official from Moscow showed a willingness to continue illicit activity throughout the republic. It also provides an

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} According to Loshak’s article, Karimov was sentenced to death for his crimes in Uzbekistan.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
example of the amount of extra-legal power and ability of the Uzbek Party cadre to pursue their own interests at the expense of Moscow.

At the conclusion of the arrests of the corrupt Uzbek Party members, over 2,600 Uzbeks implicated in the scandal were jailed. 67 “From 1984-1987, 90.4 percent of the nomenklatura of the CPSU Central Committee of Uzbekistan 76.6 percent of Uzbekistan’s party nomenklatura were replaced” as well. 68 An interesting note to accompany the prosecution of the corrupt Uzbek Party members is the fact that Gdlyan and Ivanov were soon brought up on charges for exceeding their authority.

It’s easy to assume that the massive arrest of the top of the Uzbek party elite could bring about these charges, but it was not so. The difficulties in investigating Moscow party elites is where Gdlyan and Ivanov would, according to the Soviet legal system, overstep their boundaries. In May of 1989, Gdlyan and Ivanov made several accusations against prominent Moscow politicians following an outlining of the cases and convictions, beginning the process of “overstepping their reach.” 69 This sets up an interesting dilemma, in that while executing the falsification of cotton production numbers, the Uzbeks had to have been sending the incorrect amounts of cotton somewhere, to be received most likely by a non-Uzbek. How was it that Gdlyan and Ivanov could not investigate the other culprits involved in the scandal? This would be an issue that the two prosecutors would repeatedly bring up throughout their own trial. The inability of the prosecution to investigate Moscow shows a definitive disparity in how

67 Clark, 188-189.
republics in the Soviet Union were treated. After their trial on ethnical missteps ended with the charges being dropped, Gdlyan and Ivanov proclaimed that the guilty Uzbeks should be set free, as the investigation would not punish all of those responsible.70

The conclusion of the Cotton Scandal investigation had a profound impact on the reactionary development of Uzbek national consciousness, in that the disgrace of Sharaf Rashidov and the mass amount of other high ranking Uzbek Party members established an “us versus them” mentality in the republic due to the abuses that were being hurled at them. Kyrgyz novelist Chingiz Aitmatov took out an entire page in Pravda during the investigation of the scandal to announce that it was in fact the Uzbek people who were most adversely affected by corruption, and that not all Central Asians were proponents of corruption. He comments that Soviet power and those complicit in the corruption in Uzbekistan were filled with “hypocrisy, deceit and fraud.”71 This raises the question of how other Soviet citizens of other republics viewed the Uzbeks during the Cotton Scandal investigation and fallout. Aitmatov must have been responding to assertions that were degrading of Uzbeks, assertions that were very much a reality.

Aitmatov’s reaction to the subjecting of Uzbeks to unfounded charges of being corrupt as a people demonstrates the forming of new ways of self-identification in Central Asia came as a response to Soviet policy. As we will see below, Russians did ridicule their Uzbek counterparts during the time after the scandal came to light. By responding in the manner the manner in which it did, Aitmatov’s article suggests the possibility of an evolution of a separate identity from the one that emanated from

71 Chingiz Aitmatov, “Perestroika, Glasnost’ i Drevo Vyzhmaniya” Pravda Vostoka, Feb. 12, 1988, pg. 3.
Moscow. Combine these realities of discrepancies and the constant criticisms against Uzbeks after the revelation of the scandal and one can see that a new way of Uzbek self-identification forming in reaction to the outpouring of criticism and abuses against them as decidedly different from the other people of the Soviet Union.

The economic difficulties associated with the cotton monoculture of Uzbekistan put the republic in a difficult position. Combine this with Uzbekistan’s low rank in terms of GDP, healthcare and education, and the republic appeared to ripe for corruption, as one can easily understand the development of an attitude of self-reliance. Regarding healthcare, this is almost an understatement. In 1990 piece in the *New York Times*, Francis X. Clines details a trip to a medical facility in Samarqand, where he was witness to a baby’s death due to deplorable conditions and lack of equipment. When questioned, a doctor replied that “this is one of the best places. Still we have only our hands and our heads to work with.”

Such appalling lack of medical technology on the most rudimentary level shows a disparity in the way a city or region is financed. It is hard to imagine one of the larger cities in the Russian Republic being subjected to this kind of neglect. One of the doctors Clines spoke to espoused a similar thought when complaining that his hospital was not receiving what it needed from the government stating: “We know Government ministries have been able to quietly accumulate some foreign currency, but those dollars are being

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spent on new Japanese cars and video recorders for the officials, not on our infants.”

This is a good example of the kind of hypocrisy that Aitmatov wrote about, in that the central Soviet administrators were utilizing resources for their own gain rather than helping others in the Soviet Union.

After the revelation of the massive corruption in Uzbekistan, there were definite hostile treatments and actions towards Uzbeks. Hostile would be an understatement in some circumstances. For example, when Ronald Wixman interviewed several Russian mothers in 1985, they commented that they encouraged their children to not associate with their Uzbek counterparts for reasons ranging from them being “griaznye i dikie” (dirty and wild) to their consistent fighting and lying. The Russians interviewed by Wixman continued to explain their dislike and distrust of Central Asians by exclaiming that all Central Asians, not just children, “are violent, not honest, mistreat their wives, and do not learn Russian well (a sign of their backwardness and inferiority).” All of these interviews took place in Tashkent or Bukhara, where these Russians had been living for decades. Wixman does not comment on the impact of the Cotton Scandal on these interviews, but the hostility emanating from Russians living in Uzbekistan does demonstrate that was a disparity in how Central Asians were viewed by Russians.

Uzbek author Timur Pulatov however, did reference the Cotton Scandal when he wrote about how Uzbeks were treated after the corruption had been brought to light. He mentions the Uzbek children at Orlyonok Pioneer Camp were told to “go home” because

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74 Ibid.
76 Ibid, 162-163.
“they were children of thieves and bribe-takers.”

Many other Central Asian writers of the time (he mentions Muhammed Salih and Otkir Hashimov for example) claimed that the corruption network that arose was a “natural response” to increasing quota numbers sent down from Moscow. This is a fantastic example of how the Cotton Scandal contained both primordial and contextual factors in its role in the development of Uzbek national consciousness. We cannot disregard the notion that what the Central Asians did was not “a natural reaction” but in keeping with Keyes’ elaboration on the term primordialist, the increasing demand from Moscow perhaps changed what a primordialist response would have been. Here we see the primordialist and contextualist terms intertwining, giving a deeper insight to the role the scandal played in growing Uzbek national consciousness. The idea put forward by Salih and Hashimov that falsifying cotton production numbers was a natural response (primordialist) to a situation imposed on them (contextualist) is an example of this intertwining of the two terms.

We should not see the treatment of the Uzbek women and children as well as the ghastly conditions in which Uzbek doctors were working in as circumstantial events. These various accounts provide examples to what Aitmatov laid out in his article in Pravda. Aitmatov’s defense of his fellow Central Asians and these disparities in how they were treated by Russians and other Soviet citizens shows that there was definitive conscious awareness of a disparity in how they were treated and in the case of the scandal prosecution, how they were treated in the Soviet legal system. This perception, as we

78 Ibid.
have seen, ranged from an average woman or child in Uzbekistan to medical professionals and intellectual elites. With these various strata of society all feeling some kind of frustration or mistreatment, the examples given provide more than superficial examples of disparity in treatment, but demonstrate that growth of national consciousness was occurring and was evident in the reactions of those like Aitmatov to the perceived abuses occurring throughout the region.

The conclusion of the Soviet period in Uzbekistan saw plenty of policies and attitudes that would shape Uzbek national consciousness in a reactionary manner. The rhetoric directed towards the Uzbeks during the period of the Cotton Scandal prosecution shows the incongruity in how they were viewed by the Russians of the Soviet Union. From the Cotton Scandal prosecution’s focus on the Uzbek Party members (and being stonewalled in Moscow and brought up charges of their own for overstepping their legal boundaries) to the way that Russians living in Uzbekistan spoke about Central Asians, the Uzbek people were being made into scapegoats for Brezhnev era corruption and prejudiced against for their “un-Russian” lifestyle.79 The most visible development of the formation of the Uzbek national consciousness however, would take place in the years immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and can be found in the writings of former Soviet leader and newly “elected” Uzbek President Islam Karimov.

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79 This is not to say that all Russians escaped arrest. For example, Yuri Churbanov, Brezhnev’s son-in-law, was arrested for his connection to the corruption. The interesting fact here is that there was such a small number of Russians arrested, when surely there were more involved than were punished.
Upon achieving independence, Karimov emphasized the “Uzbekness” of Uzbekistan, and in doing so made a decision that attempted to establish a discernible national consciousness and a symbol of national strength. Karimov made the decision barely a year after the fall of socialism to politically rehabilitate Sharaf Rashidov, and did not only rehabilitate him, but called him “a true son of the land and people (rodiny i naroda).”\textsuperscript{80} The rehabilitation of Rashidov in the new post-Soviet period was a symbol that emphasized the Uzbek state’s national strength in that it had valiantly tried to resist Soviet central planning that was believed to detrimentally affect the people of the republic.

I believe this to be the defining proof that Uzbek national consciousness derived in a reactionary way. As this paper has shown, Uzbek national consciousness predominately developed in reaction to the circumstances the people of Uzbekistan were put in by the Soviet authorities in Moscow and even fellow Soviet residents of the republic. While this decision to rehabilitate Rashidov does show that there were contextualist elements to this national consciousness, we still must not discount the notions of primordial notions of what it means to be Uzbek, like resisting oppressive demands from Moscow. Even as late as 1990, increasingly unacceptable procurement

quotas were still being set. B. Jumaniyazov wrote that the Party and government continually raised the procurement requirements, and that it was no different in 1990 even after years of false reporting as the only way the republic had been able to meet demands. He claims that increases such as these are unacceptable and that realistic expectations be pursued and specialists consulted to better prepare the Uzbek cotton industry for the world market.

This is not to claim that there is an “essentially Uzbek” response to these invasions from Russia. But many Uzbek’s would claim that their resistance to Moscow’s various initiatives was in their very nature and this is not something to simply brush aside. It is easy to say that if an Uzbek was to say that his or her reaction to an outside encroachment was in their nature that this response is only coming about due to their reaction to the particular situation or context. Recalling Keyes, some these reactions and changes actually shape what we would consider to be primordialist features of the growth of Uzbek national consciousness. What we should keep in mind when discussing the terms primordialist and contextualist is that when speaking about a phenomenon of another culture much different than our own, we must not dismiss how these people would identify themselves.

We have already examined the rehabilitation of Rashidov by Karimov in the early 1990’s but reaction to the Soviet system also shaped how the newly independent Uzbekistan would be run. President Islam Karimov has repeatedly argued that, as

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82 Ibid.
‘Asians,’ Uzbeks and Tajiks are prone to violent outbursts, and that their tempestuous character should be controlled by the strong hand of the state.” Here we can see similarities with the feelings held by many Russians concerning their Central Asian neighbors in cities like Bukhara and Tashkent. This further illustrates the complexities in the development of national consciousness in Uzbekistan. What Karimov did by rehabilitating Rashidov and commenting on some of the “primal” aspects of Central Asian culture was demonstrate that there are traces of contextualist and primordialist development. While I am certainly not arguing that there is truth to Karimov’s claim about Central Asians’ “violent nature”, these types of essentialist claims are a clear holdover of the Soviet Union. Karimov epitomized the reactionary development of national consciousness by rehabilitating Rashidov, a man who in his own way rebelled against the disparity in which various republics were treated in the Soviet Union. By citing his perceived essentialist elements of his people’s nature while simultaneously claiming historical figures like Tamerlane as distinctly Uzbek (historically untrue), Karimov was also attempting to utilize primordial elements to characterize what it meant to be Uzbek.84

The rhetoric and actions of Islam Karimov show the culmination of Uzbek national consciousness, complete with the complexities and potential pitfalls of assigning identity labels to Central Asians. Clearly the reactionary nature of the development is apparent, but we can also see the mixture of both contextual and perceived primordial

84 Ibid.
elements. We cannot dismiss or neglect the aspects of Uzbek culture prior to the inclusion of Uzbekistan into the Soviet Union, but understand that many Uzbeks would point to some of these identities as the reason they reacted to the policies from Moscow. This does not mean reifying elements of essentialism, but rather giving weight to how an Uzbek would characterize his or her national identity. These ideas should be considered primordial elements and as long proper attention and evaluation are used when analyzing them they will avoid be categorized as essentialism.

By exploring the Cotton Scandal and its fallout, this paper has shows that Uzbek national consciousness developed primarily in a reactionary manner, and that these reactions evolved in both contextualist and primordialist aspects. This is important in that the study of the national consciousness of Uzbeks will help one understand the political and social maneuvers undertaken by the Uzbek government and society since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This grouping of people into the republic of Uzbekistan was not a natural grouping, and by understanding the development of Uzbek national consciousness, one will better understand post-Soviet Uzbekistan.

This study does not mean to assert that the Uzbek national consciousness that developed during the Soviet Union is an all encompassing identity. Recalling William Fierman, the idea of being an Uzbek in the national sense is but one facet of how a Central Asian living in Uzbekistan may identify his or her self. I do not want to imply that anyone who is living in Uzbekistan would naturally call themselves an Uzbek. Quite to the contrary, the nationalities of Central Asia can be found in the various countries of the region as during the delimitation process of the early of Soviet period, cities that were
predominantly Tajik, Samarqand for example, were placed within the borders of Uzbekistan.

It is well beyond the scope of this paper to try to characterize the entire identity of the Uzbek people. In doing so, one would probably run into the issues of outlined by Brubaker and Cooper, in that by attempting to explain too much, nothing would be explained. By outlining the development of Uzbek national consciousness, we have only unpacked one layer of the several ways an Uzbek would identify his or her self. But we have been able to illustrate the complexities in this development. According to Segars, the creation of an Uzbek national identity was exactly that, a creation.\textsuperscript{85} This seems to be claiming that this is a completely contextualist development of national consciousness. Remembering how Keyes elaborated on how primordialist development should be understood, we cannot dismiss that the idea of Uzbek national consciousness was influenced by these factors as well.

After the events of the Cotton Scandal and the subsequent fallout, we can see the culmination of Uzbek national consciousness as a reactionary development. The abuses heaved at Uzbeks prompted responses from regional elites and led to the growth of an “us versus them” mentality. The prejudice toward the Uzbek S.S.R. can also be seen in the charges brought against Gdlyan and Ivanov for trying to investigate the falsified cotton procurements outside of Uzbekistan. The Soviet officials did not have a problem with having thousands of Uzbek Party members arrested, but would not tolerate an investigation of central party officials.

\textsuperscript{85}Segars, 2003, 99.
This observation is shared by Donald Carlisle, who comments that a “reactive national identity” was “stimulated and crystallized” by the degradation of the Uzbek people as a result of the Cotton Scandal.\footnote{Donald Carlisle, “Power and Politics in Soviet Uzbekistan,” in \textit{Soviet Central Asia: The Failed Transformation}, ed William Fierman, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 117.} I agree with Carlisle that the development was certainly reactionary and that the Cotton Scandal was critical in shaping this consciousness. Taking the approach of analyzing this reactionary development by exploring the Cotton Scandal using the \textit{primordialist/contextualist} terms allows us examine the evolution of Uzbek national consciousness with greater detail and achieve a better understanding of the beginnings of a new nation in a fascinating region of the world. Even with this improved understanding, there is still an aspect of the Cotton Scandal that requires additional attention: the evaluations of Sharaf Rashidov in recent scholarship. Rashidov is the centerpiece of the growth of Uzbek national consciousness during the Cotton Scandal, as it was his actions that enabled the corruption in cotton procurement reporting to occur and consequently subject his republic to an intense investigation.
Chapter 4: Rethinking Rashidov—what to make of the man behind the scandal

The Cotton Scandal and its subsequent prosecution have helped us gain a stronger understanding of how Uzbek national consciousness developed in the late Soviet period. There is one aspect of the scandal that does deserve more attention than it has received from current scholarship on Uzbekistan in this period. That is the man largely responsible for the massive web of corruption that dominated the cotton economy of Uzbekistan: Sharaf Rashidov. By arguing to further evaluate Rashidov, I am by no means condoning his actions. Corruption is corruption and extortion is extortion, but a simple writing off of Rashidov as a corrupt Soviet Party leader does not give proper evaluation of a crucial part of this historical event. This is not to say that there has been no sufficient work done on Rashidov and his role in the scandal, but by and large this scholarship is lacking. I intend to point out some of the deficiencies associated with analyses of Rashidov in current scholarship and how these works could be improved, and will also give evidence to support my claims by further complicating the man behind the scandal.

Perhaps the discussion most lacking concerning Rashidov is that of Ronald Suny in his work, The Revenge of the Past. When discussing the long tenures of republic leaders beginning in the Khrushchev era and extending through the Brezhnev era, he
mentions that Sharaf Rashidov was a man who “became synonymous with corruption.”

It should be stated that while Suny does not go into much detail on Central Asia in his work (a fault, but not one that will be discussed here), more elaboration on comments such as these is necessary. Why was Rashidov a man who was “synonymous with corruption?” What kind of corruption was he involved in? Were the other long-tenured Central Asian leaders also participants in illicit practices like Rashidov? These questions are left answered by Suny and do require further clarification. It is certainly reasonable to assume that the Uzbek Party leadership was not the only party cadre that participated in illicit activities. But if Rashidov is mentioned to be immediately identified with corruption, then he must have been associated with acts of wrongdoing much more substantial than that of his other Soviet counterparts.

One should also recall the consistent increases in demand for cotton from republics like Uzbekistan. These procurement orders had to be filled, or the Uzbek Party and cotton farmers, would most likely face discipline at the hands of Moscow. Perhaps no one knew this better than Rashidov himself, who ascended to the top of the Uzbek Party after the purge of 1959. As previously outlined, there was also a debate concerning the diversion of Siberian river water to Central Asia to help alleviate some of the region’s irrigation issues. Clearly there were issues with cotton production in republics like Uzbekistan, ranging from rapid degradation or agricultural lands to increasing procurement orders that were beyond the capacity of the republic to fill. These

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motivations to engage in illegal activity have already been analyzed, but should always be kept in mind when examining Rashidov.

Again, this is not an attempt to absolve Rashidov of the corrupt practices he engaged in. By better understanding the situation the Uzbek cotton industry found itself in, we can complicate the study of Rashidov. Simply labeling him as a corrupt Party leader as Suny has done will lead scholars to miss many of the rich details that the Cotton Scandal holds. If Suny were to elaborate on why he believes Rashidov to be a leader “synonymous with corruption” it would make his assessment a bit stronger. Seeing as he does not focus on the Central Asian republics, perhaps it would have been a better choice to simply list Rashidov and his years as head of the Uzbek party, as he does with many of the other republics, without suggesting his corrupt nature.

Even if the Cotton Scandal is not the focus of one’s work, it can still be fairly portrayed in a concise manner. In his work *The Economies of Central Asia*, Richard Pomfret offers a brief explanation of Rashidov and details some of the highlights of the scandal. Although he incorrectly lists Rashidov’s death as occurring in 1986, not 1983, Pomfret lists the number of Uzbek Party members arrested as well as the total amount of money that was siphoned away from Moscow (2,600 and two billion dollars respectively).\(^8\) Pomfret also offers the idea that the harsh prosecution of the Uzbek Party “led to an upsurge of national feeling in Uzbekistan” and the Uzbek people “were

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incensed about the victimization of Uzbeks among the many thousands of corrupt officials in Brezhnev’s USSR.\textsuperscript{89}

Pomfret’s treatment of Rashidov is still lacking in terms of laying out the motivations for Rashidov’s corruption, but still touches on the subject, stating the Rashidov “kept Moscow happy by delivering the cotton and by maintaining internal peace.”\textsuperscript{90} There is still more to be said about the kind of man Sharaf Rashidov was and the kind of situation he found himself in when he took over the republic in 1959. Pomfret still gives the impression that Rashidov was the prototype Brezhnev era republic leader, enmeshed in corruption and illegal activity. But no other republic leader orchestrated a system of illicit activity that was as successful as Rashidov’s or faced the same kind of disgrace during Mikhail Gorbachev’s anti-corruption drive. Pomfret’s description of the scandal, while lacking some important details, demonstrates how the Cotton Scandal can be briefly but well articulated to give the reader a better understanding of Rashidov.

Neil J. Melvin also briefly covers Rashidov in his work, \textit{Uzbekistan: Transition to Authoritarianism on the Silk Road}. Melvin does not go into detail regarding Rashidov’s rise to power in the Uzbek party or his involvement in the orchestration of the Cotton Scandal. Where Melvin’s work is valuable however, is in his observation of a particular role that Rashidov played at the onset of independence as an asset to Islam Karimov’s solidifying of his power. As previously described, the campaign to rehabilitate Rashidov was a priority to Karimov and the new independent government. While some Uzbeks came to see (or had already believed) Rashidov as a man who defied Moscow in order to

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
better his own people, not all of the country was enamored with him. Melvin points out that the opposition group *Birlik* was critical of Rashidov, an action that led the Karimov regime to “equate [them] with the betrayal of the homeland.”

The issue with making this observation without expanding the narrative of Rashidov’s part in the Cotton Scandal is that one will not understand the possible reasons why a group like *Birlik* would be critical of Rashidov. It is not out of the question that the group would be quite skeptical of anyone put forward by Karimov as a national hero. If Melvin had gone farther into depth in explaining the intricacies of the Cotton Scandal, this would provide a much clearer picture. Specifically, if he were to examine the findings of Telman Gdlyan and Nikolai Ivanov, the prosecutors of the scandal, many instances of bribery, extortion and violence would be revealed. Most Uzbeks did not deny these at times heinous acts, but insisted that the conspirators were not solely located in Uzbekistan. It is very possible that while the perception of Rashidov was that of a leader placed in an impossible situation that tried to put the needs of his people before those of Moscow, there were negative opinions of Rashidov’s crimes and his general characterization as a corrupt Soviet official, regardless of his motives.

This is not to say that Melvin’s observation regarding the use of Rashidov as a symbol of the new nation (that was impervious to critique without consequences) is without use. By placing Rashidov in the context of national hero who cannot be criticized, Melvin has added an additional outlook on Rashidov by identifying his use by the Karimov regime as both a unifying and dividing force. This adds support to the

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91 Melvin, 2000, 45.
argument that the Cotton Scandal and Rashidov were instrumental in the evolution of Uzbek national consciousness, in that Rashidov became a symbol of the newly independent Uzbekistan, a symbol that was both a figure of unity in the face of persecution, and simultaneously an emblem that would allow for increased political repression.

Where Melvin’s work lacked in discussing the actions of Rashidov, William A. Clark’s *Crime and Punishment in Soviet Officialdom* offers a more concise examination of some of the aspects of Rashidov’s reign that allowed him to keep his power as long as he did and events that transpired during the scandal. Clark’s work also shines in giving a very thorough examination of the prosecution of the Uzbek Party by Gdlyan and Ivanov after Rashidov’s doings were revealed. Clark states that as Uzbek cotton grew and grew (officially that is) Rashidov received medal after medal and award after award for his republic’s supposed progress in cotton growing. One of the most humorous and shocking events of the scandal, Yuri Andropov’s decision to use spy satellites on the Uzbek cotton fields, is cited by Clark to show just how tightly wound in corruption the entire Party apparatus was during the leadership of Rashidov.92

Clark’s most valuable contribution is his detailing of the prosecution of the scandal, in that it allows the reader to see that many of the Uzbek people’s concerns about the deflecting of responsibility solely to them were justified. The details of the eventual charging and prosecution of Gdlyan and Ivanov are highlighted by the prosecutors issuing of a statement that since the officials in Moscow were protected from

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92 Clark, 1993, 189.
investigation, that the Uzbeks should go free.\textsuperscript{93} This explains the resentment that many Uzbeks felt during the investigation, as they felt they were being unfairly cast as a scapegoat in the anti-corruption drives in the post-Brezhnev era. An explanation such as this is valuable when considering why Rashidov was an ideal candidate to be cast in the role of national hero at the onset of independence. By characterizing Rashidov as a leader who put the needs of his people before the needs of a corrupt and greedy center, Karimov was able to construct a powerful symbol of Uzbek independence. By focusing a portion of his discussion on the details of the Cotton Scandal prosecution, Clark fills in a substantial gap of the literature on Rashidov.

One area where Clark could go into more detail regarding Rashidov and the prevalence of corruption during his reign is the situation that the Uzbek Party found itself in after Rashidov’s ascension to the top of the party in 1959. This does not substantially weaken Clark’s work, but it leaves out the possible motivations for Rashidov to engage in massive amounts of corruption. Clark concludes his chapter by citing Richard Sakwa, who said “the Soviet…ruling classes had become one of the most venal, incompetent and useless ruling classes in history.”\textsuperscript{94} This is an accurate assessment by Sakwa, but in his concluding remarks, Clark does not elaborate how this inept leadership led to the scandal. While there was massive corruption throughout the Soviet Union during the Brezhnev era, certainly some exception should be made for the Cotton Scandal simply due to the magnitude of its scale. Nevertheless, Clark’s work is valuable in the study of the scandal

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid, 195.  
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid, 197.
and Rashidov, in that it offers an in depth explanation of unfortunately brought Rashidov’s name into the across the Soviet Union.

A theme continually arises in the discussion of the literature on Rashidov is the lack of detail on his early years in which he came to run the party. This is an important analytical aspect of Rashidov, in that if we only have available scholarship on the revelation of corruption, we run the risk of assuming that it was a foregone conclusion that the Cotton Scandal would take place, regardless of who was in charge of the Uzbek Party. An analysis of these earlier years is essential when exploring this subject, and in that regard Edward Allworth’s *The Modern Uzbeks*.

Allworth’s work pays much closer attention to the details around Rashidov’s ascension to power and thoroughly describes the situation of the Communist Party in 1959. Party demographic statistics as well as biographical information about Rashidov offer a more complete picture of the man and people who were blamed for the Cotton Scandal by giving background information on the kind of person Rashidov was before he attained his position as leader of Uzbekistan. Allworth details the early years of Rashidov’s life up to the point when he takes over the leadership of the republic in 1959. Prior to his role as Party head, he was an avid writer and veteran of the Great Patriotic War. These two facts can offer further insight into who Rashidov was and perhaps why he was chosen for his position. According to Allworth, Rashidov aspired from an early age, twenty two, to be “total communist party man.”

Later on in his life, Rashidov was briefly the head of the Union of Writers of Uzbekistan, a post that Allworth believes he

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95 Allworth, 1990, 264.
held unhappily, but it did have an effect on the other writers and poets of the intelligentsia of Uzbekistan. Allworth comments that upon Rashidov’s death in 1983, many of these Uzbek authors expressed to him (researching in Tashkent at the time) their wariness of the future, as they saw Rashidov as their “ally and protector.”

These two points can help explain why Rashidov was able to orchestrate the web of corruption that remained operation for so long. Allworth points out that Rashidov would probably not win a vote to lead the republic, but the fact that he stood at the forefront of the Uzbeks in the Uzbek Communist Party led to his placement there by higher officials. As a “total Party man” Rashidov understood that he would have to make the center happy when extraordinary requests were made of him. When a cotton procurement requirement rose, Rashidov knew that he had to see that it was met, whether that meant striving to actually meet the new demands or falsifying production numbers so that the procurement quotas were met on paper. His appeal to the intelligentsia of Uzbekistan could also have further isolated him from being exposed before his death. If some of these authors were so unsure of their future after Rashidov’s death, they too may very well have had a stake in the corruption.

With Allworth’s thoroughly researched work, we are able to see some of Rashidov’s characteristics not mentioned or glossed over in other works. This helps complete the picture of Rashidov, from his rise to the top of the Uzbek Party to his death and subsequent disgrace and rehabilitation. While Allworth does not go into much detail

96 Ibid, 266.
97 The purpose of Allworth’s usage of the idea of “voting” implies that he was largely unknown by a majority of Uzbeks in the republic.
on the subject of the scandal prosecution, his contribution is quite valuable. By providing the details of Rashidov’s earlier life, we can begin to see that perhaps the scandal was not a foregone conclusion. If Rashidov had not been the total party man, would he have continually reported larger and larger false procurement numbers? Would the intellectual elite have been as willing to accept another leader who did not have the literary background of Rashidov? To try to answer these questions in this framework would be speculation, and I do not intend to attempt to. But by simply posing them, I believe we are further complicating Rashidov.

It should be restated that the purpose of these critiques is to try to further complicate Sharaf Rashidov, not to condone his actions. While it is clear that corruption was in abundant supply during the Brezhnev era, Rashidov and other leaders of the Uzbek Communist Party seemed adept at perfecting it. What is needed in scholarship on Uzbekistan during the Soviet period or the Soviet economy is a more in depth complicating of Rashidov. There have been many good works on these subjects, but none offers a truly comprehensive portrayal of Rashidov, whether it be an inadequate description of his early years before taking the reins of the Uzbek party or a simple labeling of him as a corrupt official.

I propose some criteria which will allow scholars to look at Rashidov in a more productive manner. This will allow for a more complete understanding of a man who is far more than simply “corrupt.” Without exploring Rashidov further, one could ask the question why didn’t something like the cotton scandal happen in every republic. By

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98 Allworth’s book was published in 1990 and it can be assumed that much of the information available on the scandal was not available during the time he spent researching.
simply labeling Rashidov as corrupt, we are missing valuable aspects of his personality and actions that will be of extensive use to us while investigating the Cotton Scandal and the evolution of Uzbek national consciousness. The following areas of analysis will give a more complete picture of Rashidov and better utilize him to further study this subject. To be clear, I am not claiming that these methods of analysis have not been utilized by scholars, but that they have not been used together.

First, Rashidov’s life and experiences prior to his becoming head of the Uzbek Communist Party should be examined. His status as a “total party man” and active in the intelligentsia, referencing Allworth, can tell us a bit about how his mind worked as he was rising in the party ranks. From here we can see how these aspects may very well have influenced his actions during the scandal.

Secondly, it must not be forgotten that Rashidov came to power after the Uzbek Party was purged and would quickly find himself in a Soviet Union headed by Leonid Brezhnev. These two events led to what I call a foundation of “ideological opportunism” in that duel motivations of fear and profit potential allowed the Uzbek Party to not only fill the increasing procurement quotas, but also collect money for cotton that did not exist. It may be tempting to discard the word “ideological” from the above turn, but I believe that it will prompt questions about Rashidov’s nature as well as add another potential incentive to participate in falsifying cotton numbers, the pride of fulfilling goals for example. By keeping this motivation in mind, it will keep us from seeing Rashidov as simply corrupt upon his taking his power and that the massive web of corruption that emerged in Uzbekistan under Rashidov’s administration was not a foregone conclusion.
The prosecution of the Cotton Scandal is also crucial when assessing the character of Rashidov. One of the most important aspects of this moment was the stonewalling of Gdlyan and Ivanov when they attempted to investigate Party members in Moscow. When the prosecutors were not permitted to continue their investigation and brought up on charges of their own, it demonstrates that the Uzbeks were not alone in the corruption. This raises questions of how the scandal began and who profited from it. Clearly it was not solely Rashidov or other members of the Uzbek Party, in that someone had to sign for the falsified amounts of cotton and these individuals were almost certainly not in Uzbekistan. By examining the victimization of the Uzbeks, even if it is only perceived this way in Uzbekistan, we will see that Rashidov was not alone in the corruption that flourished in the Soviet Union under Brezhnev.

Finally, the perception of Rashidov in Uzbekistan after the collapse of the Soviet Union is important in that we can see how Rashidov was utilized by the Karimov regime as a symbol of power and “Uzbekness.” The way in which Rashidov was viewed in independent Uzbekistan offers another opinion of the former party leader, in that he was more concerned with the well being of his people than the consistently rising demands from Moscow. Were there so many injustices and feelings of being slighted by Moscow in Uzbekistan that the Party leadership felt compelled to act in such a corrupt manner? Azade-Ayse Rorlich asserts that Central Asians were by and large aware of their position at “the bottom of the Soviet scale in terms of GNP, health facilities, and education…” they
felt] that their biological survival, not to speak of their spiritual survival, [was]
jeopardized by the policies of the center.”

We should also recall the doctors that were interviewed by Clines during his trip
to Samarqand and the deplorable conditions they were forced to work in. While Clines
traveled to Samarqand during the Gorbachev era, we can still ask whether or not the
medical capabilities of hospitals like these changed from the time that Rashidov was in
power to the time of Clines’ trip. Unfortunately, this paper is lacking the sources to
decidedly comment on whether or not the medical system in Uzbekistan was always
operating on such a poor level, or if Rashidov had improved the quality of care during his
time power. Further research on the conditions of aspects of Uzbek life like healthcare or
education will offer a clearer portrait of what life was like before, during and after
Rashidov’s reign and will hopefully bring us closer to being able to answer the question
of whether or not Rashidov was a man of his people or a greedy dictator.

I am not arguing that Rashidov was a truly benevolent leader, but suggesting that
these characteristics be considered in order to form a more complete picture of the man
who organized one of the largest rings of corruption in the Soviet Union. When his name
was initially floated as a symbol of strength in the newly independent Uzbekistan, his
flaws were also brought forward. B. Tashmukhamedov, A. Pulatov and Sh. Ismatullayev
pointed out some of Rashidov’s faults in a 1991 article in Izvestia, specifically
highlighting that the “[lives] of rural people, especially women and schoolchildren,
became one of hard labor in the cotton fields. And the sharp deterioration in the condition

99 Rorlich, 1990, 86.
of the land never stopped the yearly increase in the procurement plan.”¹⁰⁰ This raises another aspect of the rehabilitation of Rashidov that we must keep in mind: how did the average citizen of Uzbekistan view Rashidov as a national symbol? Unfortunately this paper lacks the fieldwork required to satisfactorily answer this question, but by posing it we can see another form of discord arising between the government and people of Uzbekistan.¹⁰¹

I disagree with Tashmukhamedov, Pulatov and Ismatullayev’s assertion that any individual in Rashidov’s place would have done the same thing and have argued such in the second chapter of this paper. Their claim of Rashidov causing the cotton monoculture is interesting though, in that Rashidov himself warned of neglecting helpful crops like alfalfa in rotations and agricultural damage that could result from solely planting cotton in his 1965 article in Izvestia.¹⁰² Again, we should ask another interesting question regarding the perception of Rashidov by the Uzbek people: was he the catalyst of the turn towards the cotton monoculture and degradation of rural Uzbek life or the republic leader who did what he could for his people in a bad situation? The answer to this question will require extensive fieldwork in Central Asia to assess how Rashidov is perceived, but again by simply posing the question we can add an additional dimension to this individual who is all too commonly portrayed as a simply corrupt republic leader.

¹⁰¹ I will be traveling to Dushanbe, Tajikistan in the summer of 2013 and hope to speak with Uzbeks living in Tajikistan about national consciousnesses in order to better answer this question.
By questioning what Rashidov’s motivations were, we again are adding another level of complexity to his character. This question can help bear even more fruit if we can then apply the question of motive to other incidents of corruption in the Soviet Union. By possibly separating the corrupt officials and the system that they served in, we will be able to gain a more thorough understanding of how the Soviet system impacted the individuals who became leaders in the party and whether or not this determined their attitudes and practicing of illicit activity.

The purpose of outlining these four points is to establish a series of criteria in order to compose a strong all around portrait of Sharaf Rashidov. Many of the works I have examined in this chapter utilize one or more of these criteria in their assessment of Rashidov, but are lacking in other aspects. If a study of Rashidov is undertaken with all of these points of analysis, we will have a more thorough understanding of the way that party politics and the center-periphery relationship worked in the Soviet Union. This analytical framework can then be applied to other leaders and republics in the Soviet Union, especially when the subject at hand is the development of nationalism or national identity in these states.

The benefits of creating a comprehensive set of characteristics to judge a historical figure like Rashidov are numerous, but perhaps the most helpful is that by complicating Rashidov we are adding additional complexity to the, as Winston Churchill would exclaim, the “enigma” of the Soviet Union. Brezhnev era corruption was the target of both Andropov and Gorbachev’s drives against official abuses. But after examining the Cotton Scandal and Rashidov himself, can we assume the unprecedented
level of illicit activity was inevitable? While I do not want to excessively dwell on this subject, as it is beyond the ability of this paper to provide an all-encompassing answer, it merits mention in this discussion. If Rashidov is simply labeled as corrupt, it is doing a disservice to the issue of corruption in the Soviet Union and the drive against it. If a prominent official like Rashidov is simply labeled as being corrupt, it may lead one to just assume that this was period of immense illegal activity and not attempt to further investigate why this corruption occurred.

By complicating Rashidov, we have not only established some criteria which to judge other republic officials, but also have identified issues like the setting of quotas, improper irrigation techniques and purging party officials which can help analyze the growth of agricultural corruption in the Soviet Union. Of course corruption in authoritarian regimes is not uncommon for reasons such as lack of transparency or accountability, but these alone cannot explain the amount of abuses that occurred in the Soviet Union, let alone Uzbekistan. Identifying aspects which influenced Rashidov and other party members to pursue the corrupt activities will hopefully lead other scholars to try to locate instances like this in other events of Soviet corruption. By further complicating individuals and the worlds that they found themselves in, we will be able to investigate extraordinary historical persons like Rashidov or events like the Cotton Scandal with greater detail and therefore be able to utilize them more effectively and efficiently when attempting to understand and explain some of the most complex issues of the Soviet Union.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to show how the Cotton Scandal and Sharaf Rashidov played a crucial role in the development of Uzbek national consciousness. The situation that Rashidov and the other party leadership found themselves in 1959 was a fertile ground for corruption, stemming from procurement policy procedures and attitudes emanating from Moscow. Rashidov proved to be what many would call a typical Brezhnev-era republic leader, frequently engaging in corrupt activity that was largely ignored by the central administration as long as he provided sufficient patronage. Rashidov was able to orchestrate a significant web of corruption that allowed for billions of rubles to be pilfered from Moscow.

After Brezhnev’s death, Andropov and Gorbachev’s drives against corruption were important in influencing the continued development of Uzbek national consciousness. Gdlyan and Ivanov’s investigation uncovered the illegal activity in massive quantities, prompting a heaping of allegations and scorn on the people of Uzbekistan. The Uzbek S.S.R. was forced to react to the perceived unfair investigation and consistent attacks on its people’s character as the scandal was made public. Gdlyan and Ivanov being stonewalled in Moscow and subsequently brought up on charges of overstepping their legal abilities give some support to this idea of the investigation being unfair. This ranged from shocked parents having to answer children’s questions about why they were treated so differently to well known authors such as Chingiz Aitmatov
taking out large print sections in *Pravda* to defend his fellow Central Asians against these charges.

By the time the Soviet Union had collapsed, it had become known that the central Party authorities had prevented the two prosecutors tasked with investigating the incident and the political climate had begun to change in the newly independent Uzbekistan. This is evidenced by the rehabilitation of Rashidov by President Islam Karimov and subsequent criticism of other party heads such as Nishanov who were seen as being too agreeable with the Kremlin as far as his critiques those implicated in the Cotton Scandal.

While I argue that these events influenced the growth of national consciousness in a reactionary manner, this does not mean that it was the only way it could have developed. One should recall the earlier discussion of Keyes’ and Nagata’s usage of the terms *primordialist* and *contextualist* regarding the formation of a national identity. Bert G. Fragner states:

> It is now time to become aware of the recent history and culture of Central Asian people as an object of study in its own right, rather than proceeding exclusively or predominantly from an outside perspective. The latter will be the case as long as analysts continue to regard the so-called Soviet Muslims only from the perspective of their anti-Soviet resistance and the ways in which they depend on the “Moscow Central,” thus disregarding the fact that regions like Central Asian and Caucasus have also experienced multifaceted inner development under Soviet auspices and that to a great extent this inner development is what determines the reality of life for the people who live there.

I believe Fragner makes a valuable argument, in that one cannot disregard the local elements of the evolution of national consciousnesses in Central Asia. An example of a

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local development that occurred under the Soviet regime is the mahalla. Ayşe Saktanber and Asli Özataş-Baykal argue “that in the new Uzbek society the sense of authenticity which enables the actualization of an imagined national true-self within the confines of a specific locale, the mahalla, is starting to be publicly legitimized through the employment of Islamic norms, idioms and practices.” The mahalla is important because it has started to “represent what is construed as national, independent and sovereign in the new Uzbek life.”

This is an interesting observation that meshes well with Fragner’s assertion that the doings of the Uzbek people not consistently be solely examined as being in conflict with the state. Saktanber and Ozatas-Baykal describe that while the mahalla existed before the arrival of the Soviets, it was transformed throughout the time of Soviet control. The oqsoqol, the head of the community, was retained during the Soviet period, but was put into power by the regional party head and was “assisted” the mahalla committee. This committee was established to oversee programs which dispersed ideology and “police the observation of norms of behavior.” Saktanber and Ozatas-Baykal note that many of these Soviet implementations were kept in place by the independent Uzbek government.

This is where one must be cautious when adhering to Fragner’s claim, in that while not completely subjecting Central Asians to examination focusing on their anti-Soviet feelings, the effect that the Soviet authorities had on the development of national

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105 Ibid, 233.
106 Ibid, 232.
consciousness cannot be understated. Without Soviet influence, the Central Asia that might exist today would in all probability be substantially different than what it is. I agree that when trying to give an answer to what is Uzbek is or who is an Uzbek, one must go beyond the Soviet and even imperial Russian period to do so. The idea of Uzbek national consciousness however, would not be possible without the division of Central Asia orchestrated by the Soviet ethnographers in the 1920’s and 1930’s. It is not out of the question to imagine that the landscape of Central Asia may have changed along tribal or ethnic lines, but it is unlikely that these boundaries would be similar to the current delimitations.¹⁰⁷

An interesting question to pose at this juncture is how do non-Uzbeks view themselves in Uzbekistan? Do they consider themselves to be Uzbek simply by residing in Uzbekistan or trace their heritage back along other lines? This question is a complicated one as evidenced by an interview with a Tajik who residing in Uzbekistan by Victoria Koroteyeva and Ekaterina Makarova. First describing how largely Tajik populated cities, such as Samarqand, were placed inside the borders of Uzbekistan during the delimitation of the 1920’s, Koroteyeva and Makarova show the somewhat ambiguous nature of self-identification in Central Asia by discussing an interview with a Tajik man who claimed he was Uzbek because he lived in Uzbekistan.¹⁰⁸ He then said that he would

¹⁰⁷ I do not wish to speculate about how Central Asia may look without a Soviet history, as to do so would not be productive in this paper. I am posing the idea to further demonstrate the importance of the Soviet period on shaping Central Asia.
claim he is Tajik if he lived in Tajikistan, showing the “territorial notion of nationhood.”  

This demonstrates the complexity of the issue of self-identification in Uzbekistan. Roberta M. Micallef acknowledges that one of the most pressing questions in the country is “Who are we” which has led to an “inclusive and exclusive national identity being constructed.”  

Micallef further elaborates that the population in Uzbekistan is anything but homogenous, with only about 71% being Uzbek, making the constructing of a national consciousness a complicated matter. She comments that beginning in the Soviet period, Uzbek authors began to reach back into the history of Central Asia and utilize figures like Amir Timur to inspire patriotism. It would be a stretch to classify Amir Timur as an Uzbek in the sense of what would be considered an Uzbek today, but the fact that he is can be linked to the Soviet period.

I believe the lesson in these examples of complicating and localizing the construction of Uzbek national consciousness is that while they may not be directly in contention with Soviet rule, Moscow-based domination was the primary cause for the growth of the role of the mahalla or Amir Timur being claimed as an Uzbek. While the mahalla was established prior to the Soviet period, in its current form it closely resembles that of the Soviet period. While it is possible that there would be conflict over the right

\[109\] Ibid.


\[111\] Ibid.

\[112\] Instances like this can be found in the World War II period when central authorities commissioned local authors to rally public support for the war effort by stoking the flames of historical patriotism.

of claiming Amir Temur, it is unlikely that it would be conflicting nations as opposed to different tribes or clans. This serves to complicate Fragner’s comment about paying closer to the inner developments of Central Asians in the Soviet period. While it is true that not every single aspect of Central Asian life developed in reaction to Soviet policy, there was a strong Soviet influence on these ways of everyday life.

I argue that the influence the Soviet Union had on these local and historical developments did ultimately stem from reactions to invasive Soviet policies. We can see the examples of the *mahalla* and Amir Temur as seemingly local developments, but ones which would have taken a dramatically different course had Central Asia not been dominated by Moscow. The changes to the native institution of *mahalla* which occurred during the Soviet period have been largely maintained into the independent period, even if some of these alterations have been changed to reflect new “democratic” aspects of the independent Uzbek government. Concerning the adoption of Amir Temur by Uzbekistan, a search for historical figures during a time of conflict such as World War II is not uncommon. But the notion of Uzbek in the time of Amir Temur was not a national sense of identification. In fact, Timur made Samarqand his capital, a city of largely Persian influence. Samarqand was a predominantly Tajik city at the time of the Soviet delimitation, making its “Uzbekness” questionable.

It is certainly not out of the question that a group would attempt to claim such a prominent historical figure like Timur. It also makes sense that the Uzbek government would continue to utilize the *mahalla* in the post-Soviet period, as it offers more access to the lives of individual Uzbek citizens, but also seems like a return to Uzbek tradition.
Both of these incidents came about due to the influence of Soviet policy, thus these elements of Uzbek national consciousness development as a reaction to these intrusions. These other ideas proposed by scholars of Central Asia help to illustrate the complexity of the reactionary development of Uzbek national consciousness. Again referencing Keyes and Nagata, this development contained both *primordial* and *contextual* aspects, in that while these reactions were brought about by Soviet intrusions into local lives and traditions, they were cast in a traditional guise.

It is for reasons such as these that a case of the Cotton Scandal or other dramatic incidents in Uzbek history, especially during the Soviet period, can be helpful in gaining more thorough understanding of how national identity developed in Uzbekistan. In these instances, both *contextual* and *primordial* aspects of development are present in Uzbek history. The forming of a national identity needed a catalyst, one which was brought by the arrival of Soviet authority. By briefly examining the *mahalla* and the claiming of Amir Temur, these two methods of development can be seen in other parts of Uzbek society. Again, we can see a Soviet prompt and an “Uzbek” response.

The suggestion of further complicating Rashidov will also bring the situation of the Uzbek Party and potentially others into a clearer picture. Without a complete understanding of the central figure of the Cotton Scandal, it will be very difficult to adequately produce scholarship on the subject and what can be gained from the study of the event and individuals involved. By moving away from simply labeling Rashidov as corrupt or giving an incomplete assessment of him, we can begin to ask more complicated questions about Rashidov himself and the system that he worked in. A more
complete characterization of Rashidov also allows him to be placed in the assessment of
the scandal when analyzing it by primordialist/contextualist criteria, his early life and
pursuit of status in the communist party and responses to demands from Moscow for
example. This means an overall stronger assessment of Rashidov and the Cotton Scandal
will be possible and the quality of scholarship on the subject will undoubtedly improve.

When discussing the Cotton Scandal, this comment does not imply that corruption
and Uzbek should be understood as synonyms. One should recall the rehabilitation of
Rashidov by Karimov after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as symbol of Uzbek strength
in the face of tyrannical and damaging policies emanating from Moscow. By placing the
Cotton Scandal and Sharaf Rashidov into the discussion of Uzbek national identity, we
will be able to attain a more comprehensive and clearer picture of how this new way of
self-identification evolved. While the Cotton Scandal is not the only incident that should
be examined to fully comprehend this idea, it offers several unique characteristics which
make it a worthwhile event to study.\textsuperscript{114}

The Cotton Scandal and Sharaf Rashidov are only two pieces to the large puzzle
that is Uzbek identity. We must not forget that the development of Uzbek national
consciousness began much earlier during the Soviet period and that other events like the
\textit{hujum} and the devastating earthquake that ravaged Tashkent in 1966.\textsuperscript{115} The

\textsuperscript{114} We have already seen how the incorporation of the \textit{mahalla} into both Soviet and independent Uzbek
ways of life and the claiming of Amir Timur in this paper. Other events such as the attack on veiling,
known as the \textit{hujum}, or the effect of World War II must also be studied in order to attain a more complete
grasp on the subject.

\textsuperscript{115} For more extensive reading on these subjects, see: Kamp, Marianne. \textit{The new woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, modernity, and unveiling under communism.} Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006;
crystallization of national consciousness during the time of the Cotton Scandal was a culmination of national events that were then appropriated by Karimov at the onset of independence as symbols of strength. Due to its proximity to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the scandal made for an appealing choice for Karimov to utilize as a demonstration of Uzbek national strength.

As mentioned above, this study of Uzbek national consciousness is special in that what would become Uzbekistan was decided largely by outsiders. By examining the development of national consciousness in Uzbekistan, we can uncover characteristics of these evolutions and apply them to other states not just in the territory of the former Soviet Union but to other states which had borders drawn by outside powers. As we have seen with Uzbekistan, the events and individuals involved in the growth of these consciousnesses are incredibly complex, and by establishing effective methods of analysis, we can contribute not only to Russian and Soviet history, but to states around the world that were faced with similar situations.
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