



# HOOVER DIGEST

RESEARCH + OPINION  
ON PUBLIC POLICY

SUMMER 2018 NO.3

USA \$8.00 / CAN \$8.40



THE HOOVER INSTITUTION • STANFORD UNIVERSITY

The ***Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace*** was established at Stanford University in 1919 by Herbert Hoover, a member of Stanford's pioneer graduating class of 1895 and the thirty-first president of the United States. Created as a library and repository of documents, the Institution approaches its centennial with a dual identity: an active public policy research center and an internationally recognized library and archives.

The Institution's overarching goals are to:

- » *Understand the causes and consequences of economic, political, and social change*
- » *Analyze the effects of government actions and public policies*
- » *Use reasoned argument and intellectual rigor to generate ideas that nurture the formation of public policy and benefit society*

Herbert Hoover's 1959 statement to the Board of Trustees of Stanford University continues to guide and define the Institution's mission in the twenty-first century:

*This Institution supports the Constitution of the United States, its Bill of Rights, and its method of representative government. Both our social and economic systems are based on private enterprise, from which springs initiative and ingenuity. . . . Ours is a system where the Federal Government should undertake no governmental, social, or economic action, except where local government, or the people, cannot undertake it for themselves. . . . The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication to recall man's endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life. This Institution is not, and must not be, a mere library. But with these purposes as its goal, the Institution itself must constantly and dynamically point the road to peace, to personal freedom, and to the safeguards of the American system.*

By collecting knowledge and generating ideas, the Hoover Institution seeks to improve the human condition with ideas that promote opportunity and prosperity, limit government intrusion into the lives of individuals, and secure and safeguard peace for all.

• • •

*The Hoover Institution is supported by donations from individuals, foundations, corporations, and partnerships. If you are interested in supporting the research programs of the Hoover Institution or the Hoover Library and Archives, please contact the Office of Development, telephone 650.725.6715 or fax 650.723.1952. Gifts to the Hoover Institution are tax deductible under applicable rules. The Hoover Institution is part of Stanford University's tax-exempt status as a Section 501(c)(3) "public charity." Confirming documentation is available upon request.*

# HOOVER DIGEST

---

**RESEARCH + OPINION ON PUBLIC POLICY**  
SUMMER 2018 • [HOOVERDIGEST.ORG](https://hooverdigest.org)

**THE HOOVER INSTITUTION**

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

# HOOVER DIGEST

RESEARCH + OPINION ON PUBLIC POLICY  
SUMMER 2018 • HOOVERDIGEST.ORG

The *Hoover Digest* explores politics, economics, and history, guided by the scholars and researchers of the Hoover Institution, the public policy research center at Stanford University.

The opinions expressed in the *Hoover Digest* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, or their supporters. As a journal for the work of the scholars and researchers affiliated with the Hoover Institution, the *Hoover Digest* does not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

The *Hoover Digest* (ISSN 1088-5161) is published quarterly by the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University, Stanford CA 94305-6003. Periodicals Postage Paid at Palo Alto CA and additional mailing offices.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to the *Hoover Digest*, Hoover Press, Stanford University, Stanford CA 94305-6003.

© 2018 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Comments and suggestions:  
**digesteditor@stanford.edu**  
(650) 723-1471

Reprints:  
**hooverpress@stanford.edu**  
(650) 498-7880

## SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

\$30 a year to US and Canada  
(international rates higher).

**http://hvr.co/subscribe**

Phone: (877) 705-1878  
(toll free in US, Canada)  
or (773) 753-3347 (international)

Write: Hoover Digest,  
Subscription Fulfillment,  
PO Box 37005, Chicago, IL 60637

## ON THE COVER

This 1918 recruiting poster from the Hoover Archives touches on a turning point in the history of the United States Marine Corps. While it reminds potential recruits that the Corps is "first to fight," it gives no hint of the baptism of fire the Marines experienced in June of that very year. That was when elements of the Fourth Marine Brigade, attached to the American Expeditionary Force and fighting in support of British and French troops, entered a thicket called Belleau Wood. See story, page 182.



VISIT HOOVER INSTITUTION ONLINE | [www.hoover.org](http://www.hoover.org)

## FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



**TWITTER**



**FACEBOOK**



**YOUTUBE**



**ITUNES**



**INSTAGRAM**

@HooverInst

[www.facebook.com/HooverInstStanford](https://www.facebook.com/HooverInstStanford)

[www.youtube.com/HooverInstitution](https://www.youtube.com/HooverInstitution)

[itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/hoover-institution](https://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/hoover-institution)

<https://instagram.com/hooverinstitution>

## DOWNLOAD OUR APP



Stay up to date on the latest analysis, commentary, and news from the Hoover Institution. Find daily articles, op-eds, blogs, audio, and video in one app.



## HOOVER DIGEST

PETER ROBINSON  
*Editor*

CHARLES LINDSEY  
*Managing Editor*

BARBARA ARELLANO  
*Senior Publications Manager,  
Hoover Institution Press*

## HOOVER INSTITUTION

JOEL C. PETERSON  
*Chair, Board of Overseers*

PAUL LEWIS "LEW" DAVIES III  
MARY MYERS KAUPPILA  
*Vice Chairs, Board of Overseers*

THOMAS W. GILLIGAN  
*Tad and Dianne Taube Director*

ERIC WAKIN  
*Deputy Director,  
Robert H. Malott Director  
of Library & Archives*

## ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS

CHRISTOPHER S. DAUER  
DENISE ELSON  
COLIN STEWART  
ERYN WITCHER TILLMAN  
*(Bechtel Director of Public Affairs)*

## ASSISTANT DIRECTORS

MARY GINGELL  
JEFFREY M. JONES  
CHARNETTE RICHARD  
KAREN WEISS

MICHAEL FRANC  
*Director of Washington, DC,  
Programs*



FSC  
[www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org)

MIX

Paper from  
responsible sources

FSC® C006300

# Summer 2018

HOOVER DIGEST

## THE ECONOMY

### 9 *How to Fend Off Collapse*

The federal budget's chilling forecast: annual deficits of a trillion dollars or more. *By Michael J. Boskin, John H. Cochrane, John F. Cogan, George P. Shultz, and John B. Taylor*

### 12 *The Taming of the Debt*

How to contain the growth of Medicare and Social Security without cutting benefits. *By Martin Feldstein*

### 15 *Toxic Tariffs*

Tariffs impede trade and help only the privileged few, while raising prices for everybody else. What's not to like? *By John H. Cochrane*

### 19 *Lifting All Boats*

The growth of "inequality" is the wrong metric to use in assessing our progress. The correct one? The retreat of poverty. *By David R. Henderson*

### 26 *No Teens Need Apply*

A high minimum wage keeps teenagers out of the job market, robbing them of crucial experience and lowering their future earnings. *By Charles Blahous*

## POLITICS

### 31 *Irrational Numbers*

Sweet reason? Not in contemporary American politics. *By James W. Ceaser*

## THE LAW

### 36 *Fidelity to the Constitution*

*Textualism* holds that judges enforce the Constitution and not their own preferences. It may seem a mere legal theory, but our freedoms depend on it. *By Clint Bolick*

### 43 *Textualism? It Has Its Limits*

Even the most faithful judges sometimes have to read between the lines. *By Richard A. Epstein*

## DEFENSE

### 48 *Rightsize the Navy*

If we continue to build ships that cost too much and do too little, we'll be sunk. *By James O. Ellis Jr.*

### 55 *The Future of War*

Of course we need high-tech weapons. But with great capabilities come great vulnerabilities. *By Williamson Murray*



## NATURAL RESOURCES

62 *Flow West*

A brisk trade in water rights would send supplies where they're most needed. *By Terry L. Anderson and Henry I. Miller*

66 *Green Grows the Market*

Energy breakthroughs arise from neither political patronage nor government subsidies. *By Lee E. Ohanian and Ted Temzelides*

## EDUCATION

69 *Brushing Up on “Truth Decay”*

Separating fact from fiction is an elementary skill. So why don't we teach it in elementary school? *By Chester E. Finn Jr.*

## SCIENCE AND MEDICINE

75 *Bottling Up Drug Prices*

Medicine will just keep getting more expensive until we do something obvious: introduce price competition. *By Scott W. Atlas*

80 *“Moon Shot” for the Flu Shot*

Americans just endured another flu season—a rough one—and the next is always just a sneeze away. Let's get serious about improving vaccines and conquering the wily influenza virus. *By Henry I. Miller*

## SYRIA

85 *Where the Great Powers Collide*

Syria is a historical “roundabout” around which religions, civilizations, and nations flow—and clash. *By Charles Hill*



89 *Elegy for the Arab Spring*

Seven years on, those who hoped for a modern, humane Syria have few illusions left—Syrians fewest of all. *By Samuel Tadros*

96 *Target Assad's Enablers*

The Syrian civil war teems with outside actors. American strategy must reckon with their ambitions—and check them. *By Russell A. Berman*

## ISRAEL

101 *Israel at Seventy*

A nation that “encourages its citizens to challenge authority, ask the next question, and defy the obvious.” *By Peter Berkowitz*

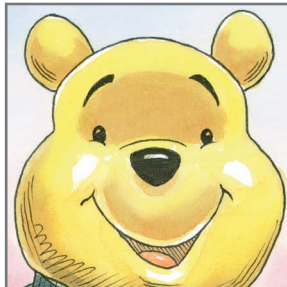
## CHINA

107 *Turning Scholars into Unpersons*

China is determined to tell its story on its own highly selective terms. How the People's Republic has updated Orwell's “memory hole” by making it electronic. *By Glenn D. Tiffert*

115 *Goodnight Mao*

To the monitors of China's “Great Firewall,” even storybook characters can be subversive. *By Markos Kounalakis*





## INTERVIEWS

120 ***“What Do You Do with Freedom?”***

Black Americans would do better to stand than to kneel. An interview with Hoover fellow **Shelby Steele**. *By Peter Robinson*

130 ***Why Putin Lashes Out***

Vladimir Putin is no Josef Stalin, says Hoover fellow **Stephen Kotkin**, but his regime’s weakness poses its own kind of danger. *By Tunku Varadarajan*

## VALUES

137 ***Speaking Freely***

Lose free speech, and lose our political freedom too. *By Bruce S. Thornton*

## RELIGION

143 ***Never Cry “Islamophobia”***

Societies learn and grow when they question, challenge—even offend. Islamists are pressuring free people to give up their most basic rights. *By Ayaan Hirsi Ali*

## HISTORY AND CULTURE

151 ***Making Countries Great Again***

What made America great in the first place, and what threatens that greatness today. *By Victor Davis Hanson*

## HOOVER ARCHIVES

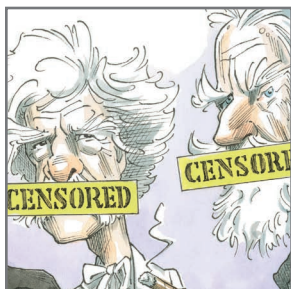
### 157 *A Window on the Soviet Breakup*

It was the biggest purge, and the last, in post-Stalin Russia. The “Cotton Affair” was a tale of corruption and frustrated power that preoccupied the dying Soviet Union and presaged its end. *By Riccardo Mario Cucciolla*

### 169 *Empire on Trial*

Seventy years ago in Tokyo, Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu stood accused of “waging aggressive war.” His documents and sketches enhance a Hoover collection that gives historians a seat in that courtroom. *By David Cohen and Yuma Totani*

### 182 *On the Cover*





# *A Window on the Soviet Breakup*

**It was the biggest purge, and the last, in post-Stalin Russia. The “Cotton Affair” was a tale of corruption and frustrated power that preoccupied the dying Soviet Union and presaged its end.**

---

***By Riccardo Mario Cucciolla***

**T**he “Uzbek Cotton Affair,” the largest purge in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, offers a useful lens through which to interpret the Soviet collapse and see how perestroika changed the Soviet system, especially the relationship between the center and the periphery. This episode during the final years of the Soviet era was a drawn-out judicial and political imbroglio that grew out of falsified cotton production data and corruption. It involved 58,000 party and state officials—20,000 of whom were criminally charged—in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. This long period (1983–89) of mass purges and criminal cases makes up a relatively obscure but highly charged episode of historical significance in late Soviet history.

Scholars focusing on the Soviet Union and Russia lately have turned their attention to the centenary of the 1917 October Revolution, which brought the Bolsheviks to power. Also important to history is perestroika, the

---

*Riccardo Mario Cucciolla participated in the Workshop on Authoritarianism and Democratic Breakdown at the Hoover Institution. He is a postdoctoral research fellow at the International Center for the History and Sociology of World War II and Its Consequences at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow.*



***KING COTTON: Under the Soviet system, cotton was identified as a strategic sector in Cold War competition, crucial to building “communism in twenty years.” Uzbekistan moved heavily into cotton monoculture, providing the material for not only robust, cheap textiles but military products as well.*** [Max Penson]

---

restructuring movement launched by Mikhail Gorbachev just over thirty years ago. Despite the importance of this reformistic period and its consequences for the Cold War and the Soviet system, perestroika and Gorbachevism remain under-researched.

To understand Gorbachevism, we must go back to Yuri Andropov's circle. Indeed, the former chairman of the KGB and then the secretary responsible for ideological affairs was among the Soviet figures most informed about the political system that was largely floating adrift. Andropov believed in the Soviet project and promoted a new, younger generation of politicians—such as Gorbachev, Yegor Ligachev, and Nikolai Ryzhkov—all of whom were distinguished for their moral integrity and who were supposed to follow a prudent but effective reformist agenda. Andropov considered a struggle against the rampant corruption within the Soviet system the only way to heal the Soviet Union. However, he did not realize that corruption, in its broadest meaning, had *become* the system. Andropov's rule was too short (1982–84) to show the results of this moralizing campaign aimed at uprooting these “negative phenomena” in the party and state apparatus.



***“WHITE GOLD”:*** Cotton production in Uzbekistan, pursued for centuries, increased dramatically in the early twentieth century, driven by quotas. The increasing demands on the collective farms in the Soviet era led to falsification of data and corruption. [Sovfoto Universal Images Group/Newscom]

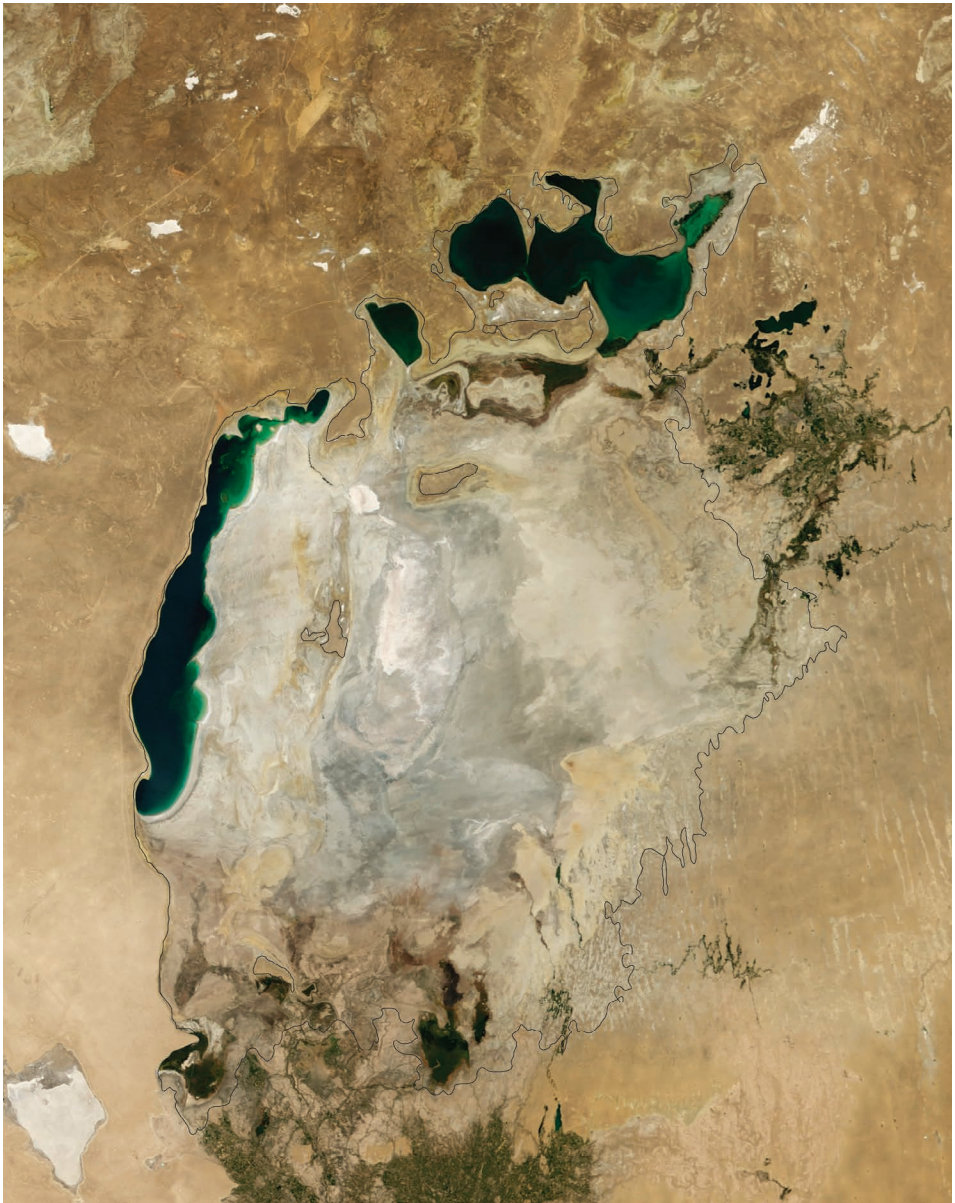
---

In March 1985, Gorbachev, one of Andropov’s closest associates, became the new general secretary of the Communist Party after the short Chernenko interregnum. At that time, the new general secretary did not have a defined reformist agenda, and until 1986 he limited his action in continuing the moralization mission started by his mentor. Gorbachev’s “neo-Andropovism” was evident in the unpopular policy of partial alcohol prohibition (1985–87), along with the timid reforms announced by the acceleration (*uskoreniye*) program and the continuation of “demonstrative terror” against local cadres who had been held responsible for stagnation, purging them with a limited use of violence and publicly exposing their wrongdoings.

## **MOUNTAINS OF “WHITE GOLD”**

Gorbachev had emphasized this “purging” narrative during the twenty-seventh party congress, and the most notorious episode of this “demonstrative terror” would become the Uzbek Cotton Affair. Indeed, the case enjoyed vast media coverage from 1988 to 1991 when the two prosecutors of the cotton affair—Telman Gdlyan and Nikolai Ivanov—entered politics; at the time even prominent members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party were





***ECOCIDE: A satellite photo shows the extreme shrinkage of the Aral Sea, which was drained amid extensive cultivation of cotton, a notoriously thirsty crop. The dry Aral lakebed continues to be responsible for releasing salt and pesticides into the air, causing many reports of health problems. [NASA]***

---

being accused of colluding with the Uzbek “mafia.” Public opinion threatened the credibility of Gorbachev, the legitimacy of the party and the state, and the Soviet Union’s survival in a time of freedom of increasing information and debate, important changes, and great internal challenges.

The roots of the episode reached back several decades, when, after Stalin’s years of terror, the

Soviet system assumed a more peaceful, decentralized, and inclusive nature. Encouraged by increasing indigenization of cadres, the system

began to rely on party officials (patrons) using public resources to secure the loyalty of local elites (clients). This posture was particularly evident during the long reign (1959–83) of Sharaf Rashidov, first secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, who turned Uzbekistan into a “cotton republic” providing Moscow planners more than 60 percent of the total Soviet production of “white gold.” In fact, cotton was identified as a strategic sector in Cold War competition and for building “communism in twenty years.” It was not only key to producing robust, cheap textiles but was largely absorbed by the military industry to produce gunpowder and even propellant for ballistic missiles.

Responding to increasing demand from Moscow, the Uzbek republic improved cotton monoculture and in 1959–81 more than doubled production, concentrating much of its budget on plans for irrigation and mechanization. In the mid-1970s, more than twenty thousand square kilometers, an area roughly the size of New Jersey, was under intense cotton cultivation.

The unintended consequences of cotton monoculture for society and the environment were dramatic. Intensive production of cotton served to ruralize Uzbek society, separating the largely rural Uzbeks from the urban Slavic settlers, while annually exposing millions of field workers (including thousands of children) to toxic agents—fertilizers, pesticides, and defoliants—with catastrophic consequences for public health and the environment. The ecocide of the Aral Sea became the most dramatic and evident consequence of the cotton fever. Yet in the tenth five-year plan (1976–81), Soviet planners demanded an annual production of six million tons of raw cotton from Tashkent—a demand that seemed physically impossible. However, reaching this target at any cost was a matter of political stability, legitimacy, and survival for the Uzbek ruling elite at local and central levels. Thus during this period

---

***Eventually the Soviet demands for Uzbek cotton became unsustainable. Corruption and environmental disaster ensued.***





КОРНЕЙ ЕВАНГЕЛЬЕВИЧ ПОЛИН  
АХАПОВИЧ  
1919-1994

АЛЕКСЕЙ ИВАНОВИЧ  
ПОСЫСКИН  
1928-1995



systemic corruption spread from the collective farms to the Central Committee in an attempt to cover the inefficiencies of the planned production and falsify production data.

## **PURGES AND CONFESSIONS**

The rise of Andropov and his moralization campaign coincided with an attempt to legalize, cleanse, and ultimately revitalize a system in which stagnation and fraud had reached unprecedented levels. In 1983 the cotton scandal unveiled the systemic scam and exposed the degree of official corruption. The first phase of the affair was characterized by preliminary inquiries, the preservation of power structures in Uzbekistan, and general institutional silence. It revealed a scheme of falsified production data that every year absorbed billions of rubles from the state per half million tons of cotton produced merely on paper. This phase culminated in the sudden and mysterious death of Rashidov, the Uzbek party leader, and exacerbated the subsequent struggle among local elites.

Andropov died in February 1984. However, his anticorruption mission continued under his successor, Konstantin Chernenko, and collaborators such as Ligachev, who in June 1984 chaired the famous sixteenth plenum of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, defining the systematization of the purges. In this phase, hundreds of anonymous letters reached the central committees at the local and central levels to allege the moral and material corruption of some cadres; this eventually degenerated into a witch hunt that was ordered from above but fed from below. The Cotton Affair extended far and wide to other economic sectors of the republic, while the influence of Moscow became increasingly stronger. Gorbachev, who became general secretary in 1985, continued the work of his predecessors and reinforced anticorruption campaigns.

Indeed, the scope of the Cotton Affair extended even further at the beginning of 1986. While Gorbachev was about to launch his reformist program, the central party demanded that the Communist Party of Uzbekistan publicly confess to its failures. Tashkent's leadership accepted its fate, extending

***MORAL REFORM: Soviet leader Yuri Andropov (opposite), who is buried at the Kremlin necropolis, attempted to root out corruption in the Soviet system. The former KGB chairman cultivated new, younger politicians—notably Mikhail Gorbachev—who were distinguished for moral integrity and who were supposed to follow a prudent but effective reformist agenda.*** [Ben Sutherland—Creative Commons]

---



***A REDEFINITION: Uzbek President Islam Karimov dances alongside then–prime minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev (the current Uzbek president) during independence day celebrations in August 2007. Karimov (1938–2016) initially appeared on the scene as a peacemaker, a go-between to balance Uzbek interests and Moscow’s demands. Eventually he characterized Moscow’s prosecution of the Cotton Affair as “colonial,” “repression,” “terror,” and even “genocide.” [Shamil Zhumatov—Reuters]***

---

the purges to the whole party *nomenklatura* and the state apparatus and posthumously condemning Rashidov as the main culprit of the affair. The former leader—previously a symbol of integration within the Soviet system—was now considered a mobster and the main scapegoat of the stagnation, corruption, and economic and political failure of the republic, and his memory condemned.

The process of “de-Rashidovization” was not merely symbolic. It affected all the power structures that in previous decades had dominated the republican political scenario. Afterward, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party advanced the *krasnyi desant* (red paratroopers) campaign. These “party reinforcements” led by Moscow consisted of several hundred Slavic officials “exported” to Uzbekistan to heal the corrupted situation and directly govern the republic, replacing local cadres in key posts. The reversal

of the long process of indigenization and the imposition of outside rulers among the highest ranks of the republic defined a sort of trust administration run by Moscow under the banner of perestroika. Throughout the rest of the country, the slogans of economic reform, transparency, and democratic openness dominated the political scene. Meanwhile, in the Central Asian periphery the largest systemic purge of the post-Stalin period was taking place.

## **GORBACHEV CLEANS HOUSE**

Uzbekistan was not an isolated case. In the other Central Asian parties, first secretaries who had been leading their respective republics for decades were finally replaced by Gorbachev's purges. In November 1985, the Kyrgyz leader Turdakun Usubaliyev (in power since 1961) was replaced by Absamat Masaliyev on the basis of allegations of corruption concerning the livestock sector. In December, Qahhor Mahkamov replaced Rahmon Nabiev and became the leader of the Tajik party. Saparmurat Niyazov replaced the longstanding Turkmen First Secretary Muhammetnazar Gapurov, who had been in power since 1963. In December 1986, the longstanding Kazakh First Secretary Dinmukhamed Kunayev, in power since 1964, was replaced by the ethnic Russian Gennady Kolbin, triggering a wave of protests that were violently quelled by Soviet authorities.

In Uzbekistan, as in the other republics, these operations were changing the center-periphery relations and reversing the process of indigenization.

They appeared to be forms of colonial interference against peripheries of the empire that had enjoyed some degree of political autonomy in the previous decades.

Despite slogans of democracy and reform, perestroika was perceived as an intrusive policy of controlling the periphery, fueling a sense of frustration and, in many places, humiliation of local elites who had suffered the burden of scandals and the imposed rule by cadres who were considerably closer to Moscow than to local communities.

In 1988, while perestroika was taking effect, the incredulous first secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party, Inamzhon Usmankhodzhaev, was struck by the same corruption scandals that he himself had fueled, and was ousted. In his place Rafiq Nishanov, a Moscow loyalist close to Gorbachev's circle, was appointed and

---

***In the Soviet realm, Uzbekistan was a “cotton republic.” Its task was to provide Moscow planners more than 60 percent of the total Soviet production.***



***THE NATIONALIST CARD: A soldier stands guard in front of a portrait of Islam Karimov after the Uzbek leader died in September 2016. Karimov's view of Uzbek identity became an ideological pillar of the post-Soviet state, comparing the nation to other newly independent states in the nonaligned movement. In fact, Karimov reiterated the old Soviet system, preserving its authoritarian and centralist characteristics.*** [Alexei Druzhinin—TASS]

---

acted as a sort of Moscow viceroy attempting to destroy local neopatrimonial networks in the last and most intense period of the Cotton Affair. The little-loved Nishanov heavily played up scandals and acted against his opponents, fueling a climate of disaffection against the regime in a time of economic and political crisis. In June 1989, Nishanov's failure to quell interethnic clashes in the Ferghana Valley determined his own political end. In his place, Islam Karimov—previously minister of finance and head of Gosplan—was appointed head of the Uzbek Communist Party. Karimov appeared as an outsider, aloof from the political struggles of the Cotton Affair, who could act as a peacemaker while representing Uzbek interests and mediating between local elites and Moscow to get more autonomy and economic benefits for the republic.

The new Uzbek leader openly criticized the “mistakes” of the Soviet regime—such as its ethnic policy, the imposition of cotton monoculture, the



total dependence on the planned economic system, the ecological disasters in the Aral basin, and the last “repressions” carried out during the Cotton Affair. He promoted the concluding of the purges and trials, the rehabilitation of the “victims” under the law (with a general amnesty), and restoration of the indigenization and of “clan” superstructures that had been uprooted in the previous years. However, the newly appointed Uzbek president also tried to rebalance the role of the republic within the Soviet Union until separation became inevitable after the August 1991 failed coup in Moscow.

## A NEW, SELF-SERVING STORY

The Cotton Affair was pivotal to Karimov’s first years of rule in Uzbekistan, when the story was officially narrated using terms such as “colonial,” “repression,” “purge,” “terror,” “new 1937,” and even “genocide.” This framing, in a republic once considered among the most loyal in the Soviet system, defined one of the first ideological transitions of the post-Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan. Thus, the affair figured strongly in Karimov’s ideological shift from communism to “Mustaqillik”—an ideology based on the values of Uzbek independence. It fueled a sensitive identity issue of revenge and resistance against the former rulers, conjuring a postcolonial, trauma-based discourse that helped legitimize the president’s regime and define his relations with local power networks and opponents.

Despite Karimov’s interpretation of the affair as the last colonial repression, opposition groups criticized the rehabilitation of Rashidov and other “victims” and accused the establishment of covering up malfeasance. Yet it is clear that Karimov’s regime was able to turn the narrative of the Cotton Affair to its advantage.

Previous Uzbek leaders had confirmed their devotion to perestroika, encouraging purges and the replacement of

---

***Despite its slogans of democracy and reform, perestroika was perceived as an intrusive policy aimed at controlling the periphery.***

loyalists. In 1989, when the Communist Party’s authority grew weak and the popular fronts’ claims more and more threatening, the new leader of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan was able to craftily change the official narrative, play the nationalist card, and consolidate his power. Karimov was thus seen as promoting an Uzbek version of the political concept of *trasformismo*: co-opting potential allies and marginalizing opponents while presenting the

old regime in a renewed style to justify an ornamental transition to a post-Soviet republic—and to consolidate his power.

The self-serving narrative gave Karimov the chance to renegotiate the role, rights, and redistributive quotas of Uzbekistan within the Soviet system in 1989–91, to justify secession in 1991, and finally after independence to create

a solid basis of identity.

It became an ideological pillar that represented post-Soviet Uzbekistan as a postcolonial entity

---

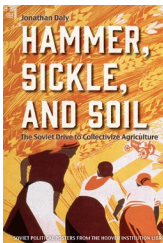
### ***As the affair unfolded, leaders fell all across Central Asia.***

comparable with other newly independent states in the nonaligned movement. In the following decades, the Uzbek president and his Mustaqillik ideology reiterated the old Soviet system, preserving the same authoritarian and centralist characteristics, while the republic still struggles to find its own national and post-Soviet identity.

It is necessary when reconstructing the political history of the late Soviet era to go beyond party-oriented perspectives. The collections of the Hoover Institution Library & Archives make it possible to study sensitive issues of the late Soviet era—such as NGOs, civil society organizations, and Uzbek opposition groups during the late 1980s and early 1990s—in a free, safe, and challenging environment. They also offer myriad documents, papers, newspaper articles, and reports on the transitions of Uzbekistan and other former Soviet republics, offering a more comprehensive picture of the role and perception of civil society in the late Soviet era.

The next challenge for historians is overcoming such divergences between evidence, official storytelling, and popular perceptions of perestroika—and even of the Soviet experience in general—while trying to find firm facts. The Cotton Affair remains a good starting point for further research into the Soviet collapse. ■

### ***Special to the Hoover Digest.***



---

*Available from the Hoover Institution Press is **Hammer, Sickle, and Soil: The Soviet Drive to Collectivize Agriculture**, by Jonathan Daly. To order, call (800) 888-4741 or visit [www.hooverpress.org](http://www.hooverpress.org).*