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UZBEKISTAN: AN OVERVIEW

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1 Historical Background

The Republic of Uzbekistan, like all other republics of Central Asia, is a product of the Soviet system of nation and state building. In its current form and within its current borders, the republic came into existence in December 1924. At the time of the Tsarist conquest of the area that now comprises the territory of Uzbekistan, it was ruled by three independent emirates and khanates of Bukhara, Khokand and Khiva.¹

Not only is Uzbekistan, as a territorial and political construct, a very recent phenomenon, but as a “nationality” in a sense even remotely approaching the modern definition of the term, the “Uzbeks” are the product of the early Soviet period.² Even the term Uzbek, defining a separate ethnic group, appears quite late, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. And as late as 1869, a dictionary of Turko-Tatar dialects, intended for the use of Russian officials and merchants, defined “Uzbek” as “the proper name of a tribe of Tatars comprising the main population of the Khanate of Khiva”. This is a very important point because it implies that the inhabitants of other parts of the current republic were not Uzbek. The 1869 dictionary further described the word Uzbek as a “sobriquet adopted by the nomads of Central Asia, together with their clannic names”. In the 1902 Russian Encyclopaedia issued in St. Petersburg, “Uzbeks” are referred to as a “conglomerate of tribes in which the Turkic element is mixed with Mongols”.³ Beyond the regions mostly populated by Turko-Mongol peoples, the modern Uzbeks are also a result of the mixing of Turkic and Mongol tribes with Central Asia’s indigenous Indo-Iranian peoples.⁴ The definition provided by James Critchlow perhaps best describes the diverse ethnic origins of modern Uzbeks. “Ethnically, the Uzbeks are descended from a conglomerate of nomadic Turkic tribes; over a period of many centuries, their ancestors invaded the region from the Eurasian steppes to the North, many settling in the warmer southern climate and intermingling with the native Iranian stock.”⁵

However, until the two Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century under Genghis Khan and under Tamerlane in the fourteenth century, the Iranian element dominated the cultural and political landscape of the region. Even the Arab defeat of the Iranian Sassanid Empire in 642 A.D. and subsequent expansion of Arab domination, together with Islam, to the Eastern parts of the Iranian world, did not alter this situation. Rather, Central Asia - in the broadest definition of the term, which included parts of north-eastern Iran, notably Khorosam - became the centre of a post-Arab-invasion Iranian cultural and political renaissance and the development of what has been described as an Irano-Islamic civilization. The most significant political embodiment of this civilization is the Samanid dynasty, which, according to Teresa Rakowska Harmstone, was the last of the “pan-Iranian empires”.⁶ The Samanid legacy is still alive today in Bukhara; the tomb of Amir Ismail Samani is a place of

¹ For an account of the historical evolution of Central Asia’s borders (1869-1930), see Barthold, V.V., *An Historical Geography of Iran*, ed. by C.E. Bosworth, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989

² Critchlow, J.C., *Nationalism in Uzbekistan: A Soviet Republic’s Road to Sovereignty*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1991, p. 3

³ *Idem*, p. 4

⁴ *Idem.*, p. 3

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Harmstone, T.R., *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia: The Case of Tajikistan*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970, p. 12

pilgrimage for Uzbekistan's Tajik population. This legacy, however, is also a bone of contention between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, as the latter is trying to build its new national identity on the basis of its Samanid legacy, while Uzbekistan, despite its emphasis on the Turko-Mongol heritage of the country, also lays claim to the Iranian/Tajik Samanid heritage.

The Irano-Islamic culture of the region survived even the two devastating Mongol attacks and ultimately exercised a civilizing influence on the Mongols, to the point that these Turko-Mongol conquerors became proponents of Persian culture and took it to other lands that they conquered. The best example of this phenomenon is the Mogul Empire in India.⁷ The influence of Irano-Islamic culture, although weakened by decades of Russification and Sovietization, remained strong until the later 1980s. Writing in 1991, James Critchlow states that "even today, many Uzbeks are bilingual, speaking both their own language, which is closely related to Turkish, and Tajik, an Iranian tongue of the Indo-European family that differs little from the Farsi of Iran or the Dari of the Afghan cities".⁸

1.1 The Legacy of Soviet State-Building

The way the Soviets divided Central Asia, especially the areas that now constitute the republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, had significant ramifications for the ethnic and cultural balance of the region. From an ethnic perspective, when the Republic of Uzbekistan was created, a large number of Tajik inhabitants became identified as Uzbek because they were registered as such. From a cultural perspective, the inclusion of the two most important centres of Central Asia's Irano-Islamic civilization - Samarqand and Bukhara - within Uzbekistan, coupled with a policy of promoting the language of the titular nationality - in this case Uzbek - severely undermined the Iranian-Tajik culture. Yet compared to the current situation of the Tajik culture in Uzbekistan under an aggressive policy of Uzbekization and cultural homogenization of the country, Tajik culture fared better during the Soviet era.

These historic and cultural issues are of extreme contemporary importance as the newly-independent states of Central Asia are in the process of forging new identities. This process of identity formation is often accompanied by a reinterpretation and even falsification of history, and aggressive efforts at ethnic and cultural homogenization. In the case of certain countries, notably Uzbekistan, this process of artificial identity formation is a potential threat to the cultural and ethnic survival of groups such as the Tajiks.

Uzbekistan's exclusive claim to the cultural heritage of the region and the glorification of certain periods and personalities - especially the cult of Tamerlane - as justification for a policy of regional prominence, if not domination, also have serious and mostly negative consequences for relations among Central Asian countries. This is particularly true of

⁷ S.M. Stern has noted that by the eleventh century A.D., "the Persian cultural revival had reached such an advanced state that the Turkish rulers themselves fell under its spell and acted as its promoters. Largely through their action, the eleventh century also saw a considerable territorial expansion, and it was of far-reaching consequence that the new provinces gained for Islam - such as India and Anatolia - though governed by Turkish military rulers (and in the case of Anatolia populated by Turks), *became colonial territories of Persian culture.*" [Emphasis added]. See Stern, S.M., Ya'qub the Coppermith and Persian National Sentiment, in Bosworth, C.E. (ed.), *Iran and Islam*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971, p. 539

⁸ Critchlow, p. 3. It is important to note that distinctions made between Farsi (Persian), Dari, and Tajik are colonial constructs. In reality, Farsi-e-Dari (Dari Persian) is the name given to the post-Arab invasion Persian language as opposed to the Pahlavi of the Sassanid era or other East-Iranian languages such as Sogdi, which is still spoken in certain remote parts of Tajikistan.

relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, although it also causes strains in Uzbek-Kyrgyz ties, and does not help the promotion of friendly relations with Kazakhstan.

2 Geographic and Demographic Characteristics

In addition to the above-described historical and cultural factors, the internal evolution and external relations of Uzbekistan are influenced by its geographic and demographic characteristics.

Uzbekistan is the largest and most populous republic in Central Asia. Its territory covers an area of 477,400 square kilometres. It is a doubly-landlocked country, in the sense that it borders countries - Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan - which do not themselves have access to the open seas.⁹ Considering Uzbekistan's ambitions to be a leader in Central Asia and a major player in the politics of Eurasia and South Asia, this situation has significant implications. An important consequence of this condition is an impulse to extend influence into neighbouring areas.

Administratively, Uzbekistan consists of one autonomous republic (Karakalpakstan), 12 provinces known as *velayat* and one city.¹⁰ Uzbekistan also has the largest and on the whole the most homogeneous population in Central Asia. This is in sharp contrast with the neighbouring states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which have large Uzbek minorities, 13% and 25-30%, respectively. However, the degree of Uzbekistan's ethnic homogeneity would be reduced if there were a more accurate assessment of the number of the country's ethnic Tajiks.

As of July 2001, the population of Uzbekistan stood at 25,155,064, divided along the following ethnic lines. Percentages, however, are based on 1996 estimates.

Table 1: Ethnic Breakdown in Uzbekistan

Ethnic Group:	% of Total Population
Uzbek	80%
Russian	5.5%
Tajik	5%
Kazakh	3%
Karakalpak	2.5%
Tatar	1.5%
Other	2.5%

Source: CIA World Factbook

⁹ Uzbekistan shortest border is with Afghanistan (137 km), followed by Kyrgyzstan (1,099 km), Tajikistan (1,161 km), Turkmenistan (1,621 km), and Kazakhstan (2,203 km). United States, Central Intelligence Agency, *World Fact Book*, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/uz.html> [accessed June 2002]

¹⁰ The autonomous republic of Karakalpakstan is one of the most environmentally damaged regions of Uzbekistan. The regions (*velayats*) include the following: Andijan, Bukhara, Farghana, Jizzak, Kharazm, Namangan, Nawai, Qashqadarya, Samarqand, Sirdarya, Surkhandarya, Tashkent, plus the city of Tashkent. *Ibid.*

Other sources put the percentage of Uzbeks at 71.4%, while giving higher percentages for Russian, Kazakh, and Tatar ethnic groups.¹¹

The reliability of the statistics for Tajiks, however, is at best uncertain and therefore must be treated with caution. Several reasons justify this attitude. First, historically, when the republic of Uzbekistan was created, Soviet-era censuses identified most residents of regions that are now part of Uzbekistan as Uzbek, irrespective of their real ethnicity. Thus, a large number of Tajiks came to be identified as Uzbeks. Second, many Tajiks, for purposes of expediency, such as better access to education and jobs, identified themselves as Uzbek. This trend has intensified in the post-Soviet period as President Islam Karimov has embarked on a systematic policy of Uzbekization and of eroding the position of the Tajik ethnic and cultural presence. This policy has become harsher in the last few years. Indeed, as will be detailed later, if continued this could lead to the elimination of Tajik language and culture from Uzbekistan and potentially a large-scale exodus of the Tajiks. Currently, however, it is safe to assume that the percentage of ethnic Tajiks in Uzbekistan is higher than those estimates provided by various statistics, although it may not be as high as the figure of seven million claimed by the Tajik diaspora.

3 Religion

The overwhelming majority, nearly 88%, of Uzbeks is Muslim. Most of the Muslim population adheres to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam. But there is also a small minority of Twelver Shi'as. Since the late 1960s non-Hanafi influences coming from the Middle East and later Afghanistan and Pakistan have caused schism among Central Asian, including Uzbek, Muslims. Among these influences has been Wahhabism, some versions of which have had radical tendencies. Others have included Salafism and the extremist offshoots of the Ikhwan-ul-Muslimun (Muslim Brotherhood), such as the Hizb-ul-Tahrir. Part of the attraction of non-Hanafi interpretations of Islam for the younger generation of Uzbeks and other Central Asian Muslims is due to the fact of the identification of official Hanafi clergy with the state, both during the Soviet period and after independence. Moreover, many young Muslims find the Hanafi position too accommodating toward political power. Consequently, they are attracted to those interpretations of Islam that justify political activism and even rebellion when the ruling system is corrupt and unjust.

Because what is now Uzbekistan, especially the cities of Bukhara and Samarqand, historically has been a major centre of Islamic learning, the Uzbeks are among the most religious people of Central Asia. It is because of the deep historic and cultural roots of Islam in Central Asia, notably Uzbekistan, that the religion survived various waves of anti-religious campaigns during the Soviet era. Consequently, following the introduction in the Soviet Union of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, there was a qualitative and quantitative increase in the presence of Islam in Uzbekistan. During this period, Islam was also politicized and a number of Islamic political parties and movements emerged, some of which later became radicalized. This process occurred rather rapidly, partly because the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the impact of the Soviet-Afghan war had awakened the socio-political consciousness of the Central Asian Muslims.

¹¹ Lobe, J., Uzbekistan, Self-determination in Focus: Regional Conflict Profile, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, November 2001, http://www.fpif.org/selfdetermination/conflicts/uzbek_body.html [accessed June 2002]

The more open atmosphere of the *perestroika* era also offered opportunities for a variety of Christian and other sects - in addition to Orthodox Christianity, which had been introduced to the region following the Russian conquest - to establish themselves in the country. In fact, the Uzbek government, fearful of the political dimension and influence of Islam and the potential challenge that it could pose to the established political system, has encouraged the spread of these new sects. Indeed, a 1993 US Department of State report indicated that Muslims suffered more restrictions than Christians in the practice of their faith because of extensive government control over the Muslim religious establishment.¹²

The second largest religion of the country in terms of the number of followers is Orthodox Christianity, whose adherents constitute 9% of the population.

4 Economy

Statistics on the Uzbek economy differ, depending on sources. What becomes clear, however, after examining various data, is that the Uzbek economy is still dominated by the agricultural sector. With 61% of Uzbekistan's total population living in rural areas, the importance of this sector for the Uzbek economy is quite clear. According to World Bank statistics, in 2000 the agricultural sector accounted for 34.9% of GDP, up from 33.5% the previous year.¹³ This increase, however, was more a result of the fall in the share of the industrial sector than increase in agricultural output.¹⁴

The agricultural sector provides employment for nearly 45% of the country's working population.¹⁵ Uzbek agriculture is dominated by the cultivation of cotton. Indeed, the entire Uzbek economy is heavily dependent on the cultivation and export of cotton. Although Uzbekistan produces considerable amounts of cereals and other foodstuffs, it is not self-sufficient in food, and has to import foodstuffs to compensate for the shortfall.

Cotton is Uzbekistan's most important export and earner of foreign exchange. According to one source, cotton exports account for 28% of Uzbekistan's total foreign exchange earnings.¹⁶ Other sources put the share of cotton exports at 40% of total export earnings.¹⁷ During the last years of the 1990s, because of the collapse of cotton prices, earnings from this sector were diminished. In addition to cotton, minerals, notably gold, constitute Uzbekistan's major exports, followed by natural gas, mineral fertilizers, ferrous metals, textiles, food

¹² United States, Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 1993: Uzbekistan*, Washington, 1994

¹³ World Bank, *Uzbekistan at a Glance*, 13 September 2001, http://www.worldbank.org/cgi-bin/sendoff.cgi?page=%2Fdata%2Fcountrydata%2Faag%2Fuzb_aag.pdf [accessed June 2002]

¹⁴ For instance, the production of seed cotton fell from 3.639 million metric tons in 1999 to 3.002 million metric tons in 2000. See Uzbekistan section in, Asian Development Bank, *Key Indicators: Growth and Change in Asia and the Pacific*, Hongkong: Oxford University Press China for Asian Development Bank, 2001, http://www.adb.org/Documents/Books/Key_Indicators/2001/UZB.pdf [accessed June 2002]

¹⁵ This figure includes those employed in refining agricultural products. See: Agriculture in Uzbekistan, *Interfax Central Asia and Caucasus Business Report*, 1 October 2001

¹⁶ Uzbekistan: Economy - Country Overview, *Quest Economics World of Information Country Report*, 8 May 2002

¹⁷ See Agence France Presse, Albrighton, D., New US Ally is Soviet-era Strongman Running Iron-Fisted Regime, 6 October 2001

products, and automobiles. It is estimated that, in 2000, of total exports of US\$3.26 billion, US\$2.9 billion consisted of the above items.

In terms of trading partners, Russia is still most important for Uzbekistan, accounting for 16.7% of its exports and 15.8% of its imports. In general, most of Uzbekistan's trade is still with members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Table 2: Exports/Imports

EXPORTS/IMPORTS	1998	1999	2000	2001
Exports of goods fob (US\$ m)	2,888	2,790	2,935	2,769
Imports of goods fob (US\$ m)	-2,717	-2,587	-2,441	-2,534

Main trading partners					
(% of total)					
				Jan-Sep	Jan-Sep
	1998	1999	2000	2000	2001
Exports to:					
CIS	26.0	30.4	35.9	37.1	34.7
of which:					
Russia	14.9	13.4	16.7	16.5	16.7
Kazakhstan	3.5	4.6	3.1	3.3	3.1
Ukraine	0.9	3.8	4.7	5.7	5.2
Non-CIS	65.6	69.6	64.1	62.9	65.3
of which:					
UK	10.0	9.6	7.2	7.3	6.0
Switzerland	10.3	9.5	8.3	6.9	5.6
South Korea	7.3	3.8	3.3	2.3	4.3
Imports from:					
CIS(a)	27.8	26.0	34.8	34.0	36.6
of which:					
Russia	16.0	13.9	15.8	15.2	19.0
Kazakhstan	4.9	4.1	7.3	7.6	5.5
Ukraine	4.5	4.2	6.1	4.8	7.0
Non-CIS(a)	72.2	74.0	65.2	66.0	63.4
of which:					
Germany	8.3	10.7	8.7	8.8	7.9
South Korea	11.4	13.0	9.8	8.3	12.3
US	7.4	7.6	8.7	9.7	4.8

Sources: International Monetary Fund; Uzbek Economic Trends; Economist Intelligence Unit

Commodity composition of exports, Jan-Sep
(US\$ m unless otherwise indicated)

	2000	2001
Cotton	545.3	459.0
% share of total goods & services exports	24.2	19.3
Metals	152.2	173.6
% share of total goods & services exports	6.8	7.3
Energy	250.9	240.3
% share of total goods & services exports	11.1	10.1
Chemicals	61.3	63.9
% share of total goods & services exports	2.7	2.7
Machinery & equipment	69.5	102.3
% share of total goods & services exports	3.1	4.3

Sources: IMF; Uzbek Economic Trends; Economist Intelligence Unit.

Turkey is another relatively important trade partner for Uzbekistan.¹⁸

In terms of the future of the Uzbek economy, especially the survival and expansion of its agriculture, the question of availability of adequate water will be crucial. Water shortages could also become a source of regional conflict. Water shortages could become a means of pressure by water-rich countries on Uzbekistan. According to some reports, Uzbekistan is interested in the diversion of water from Siberia to cotton fields in the country. But Moscow is unlikely to agree to this scheme. It might also be expected that Uzbekistan would seek to gain access to Tajik and Kyrgyz resources. The growing risk of severe shortage of water in Uzbekistan is closely tied to the cotton monoculture, which consumes 90% of the nation's water supply.¹⁹

4.1 Unemployment

The problems of unemployment and underemployment are very serious in Uzbekistan. However, reliable figures on unemployment are hard to come by. This is largely due to the fact that various institutions which provide statistics on unemployment rely on materials supplied by the Uzbek government. According to the *CIA World Factbook*, the Uzbek unemployment level in 1999 was estimated at 10%, with another 20% underemployed.²⁰ But the real level of unemployment is likely to be higher.

In terms of the social and political stability of the country, the worrying aspect of unemployment in Uzbekistan is that it is most widespread in the case of rural youth, with secondary education. According to one report, in 1999, 59% of those looking for work were between the ages of 16 and 30, and 37.5% between the ages of 30 and 50.²¹ Unemployment is

¹⁸ Information based on website of Uzbek embassy in Washington DC, at <http://www.uzbekistan.org/genoverview.htm> [accessed June 2002]

¹⁹ Insarova, K., Parched Uzbekistan Covets Russian River Waters, *IWPR Reporting Central Asia*, No. 117, 26 April 2002, http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/rca/rca/20024_117_2-eng.txt [accessed June 2002]

²⁰ United States, Central Intelligence Agency

²¹ Young Educated Men from Countryside Account for Most Uzbek Unemployed, *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 24 May 2000, quoting *Biznez-Vestnik Vostoka*, 18 May 2000

also high among women. Of those seeking work in 1999, 46.5% were women, and of the total 68.1% were residents of rural areas. Among the regions most affected are Namangan, Ferghana, and Samarqand.²² Another worrying aspect of rural unemployment is the high level of poverty. For example, in the Ferghana Valley, 22% of the rural population live on approximately US\$2 a day. It is, therefore, no wonder that the Ferghana Valley is an important centre of Islamist activities. With a growing population, the unemployment problem is likely to worsen.

4.2 Economic Reform

Compared with some other Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan has been resistant to economic reform. In fact, immediately after independence President Islam Karimov stated that Uzbekistan would not rush into drastic privatization and reform programmes; rather, it would proceed slowly and try to find its own unique model for reform and development.²³ Some measure of reform was, however, undertaken in 1993, when the government partially liberalized prices, imposed new taxes, removed some import tariffs and privatized small shops and residential housing. New laws on banking, property, and foreign investment were also enacted. However, during the early post-independence years, no real privatization occurred and whatever took place amounted to nothing more than the appropriation of state property by former communist bosses, who had turned into businessmen. Periodically, the President has announced large-scale economic reforms, but so far the pace of reform has been very slow.²⁴ Uzbekistan was initially also wary of borrowing from international organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), because it believed such financial dependence would undermine the country's independence. Later, however, facing the harsh realities, it changed its attitude. Nevertheless, Uzbekistan's relations with the IMF have been difficult because of Uzbekistan's exchange and monetary policy. Since the autumn of 1996, Uzbekistan's national currency, the som, has not been freely convertible. There is a three level exchange rate, all of which are highly overvalued, which has led to widespread trading on the black market. President Karimov repeatedly promised to restore the convertibility by 2000, but failed to do so. Consequently, the IMF closed its office in Tashkent.²⁵

Ironically, at the beginning, this cautious policy to some degree shielded Uzbekistan from the disruption and fall in production capacity, which bedevilled some other Central Asian countries, notably Kyrgyzstan. However, in the last few years, the lack of reforms has been manifested in low or no growth because - together with other factors - it has slowed the flow of investment funds. This situation has led to the gradual depletion of the industrial and other capital accumulated during the Soviet era. However, any correct assessment of the Uzbek economic performance is made difficult by the lack of reliable statistics. Government statistics nearly always claim a rise in GDP. For example, according to Uzbek official

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Brown, B., Central Asia: Economic Crisis Deepens, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*, Vol. 3, No. 1, January 1994

²⁴ For example, in March 1995 President Karimov announced his intention to embark on fundamental and far-reaching reforms, including making the Sum convertible by the end of the year. See, Karimov Addresses on State Policy, *Foreign Broadcasting Information Service*, 7 March 1995

²⁵ United States, Department of State, Background Note: Uzbekistan, May 2002, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2924.htm> [accessed June 2002]

statistics, GDP grew by 4.5% in 2001.²⁶ But these figures are treated with scepticism by outside experts.

Following the events of 11 September 2001, which increased Uzbekistan's regional profile and brought about a closer relationship with the US, there also seems to have been a new determination to effect economic reforms. The dilemma facing the Uzbek government is that aspects of economic reform will be painful and could cause social and political instability. Consequently, the general expectation is that President Karimov intends to pursue economic reforms without, however, opening up the political system. In addition to the authoritarian tendencies of the Uzbek political system, this approach derives from the fact that President Karimov has been influenced by the Soviet Union's experience of trying to implement simultaneously economic and political reforms under Mikhail Gorbachev, which resulted in turmoil and eventually the disintegration of the USSR. Karimov is determined to avoid this fate.

Be that as it may, new political conditions, resulting from the events of 11 September 2001, have led to greater interest and involvement of the major international development institutions, such as the World Bank, in Uzbekistan. This newly enhanced interest was reflected in the visit of the World Bank president, James Wolfensohn, to Uzbekistan in April 2002 as part of a tour of Central Asian countries.²⁷ During his visit, the president of the World Bank warned Uzbekistan of slowing economic growth, stagnant foreign investment, and declining living standards unless it speeds up the pace of financial reform.²⁸ He also noted that Uzbekistan's so-called "gradualist approach" to reform was not working. Finally, he stressed the importance of reform for public welfare and thus for the country's overall social and political stability.²⁹

Some movement toward reform has been observable in the financial sector. In January 2002, Uzbekistan reached an agreement with the IMF according to which it would "achieve the gradual removal of all restrictions on access to foreign exchange for current account transactions and the unification of exchange rates by the end of June 2002". Some observers, however, have expressed doubts regarding whether Uzbekistan is willing or able to implement such reforms, as well as doubts as to their impact on increasing the level of investment.³⁰

According to the London-based Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Tashkent's long-term intentions are unclear, especially as the prices for Uzbek commodity exports decline.³¹ Furthermore, according to the above report, removing currency restrictions could increase the

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Machleder, J., World Bank President Remains Confident in Uzbek Government, *Eurasianet Business and Economics*, 25 April 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav041502.shtml> [accessed June 2002]

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Blua, A., Uzbekistan: Tashkent Moves toward Unifying Currency Rates, *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 28 April 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/pp042802.shtml> [accessed June 2002]

³¹ Quoted in *Idem.*

country's external debt and end a ready source of taxes and fees for the government and the Central Bank.³²

Notwithstanding doubts about the future of reforms in Uzbekistan, the country has received pledges of more aid, both from the US and from the World Bank.³³ However, given the magnitude of Uzbekistan's economic problems, it is unlikely that such assistance would be enough to make a major difference in the country's overall economic conditions or in the living standards of the more deprived segments of the population. Large-scale economic progress will depend on difficult and multifaceted reforms that would, among other things, encourage the flow of technology and investment funds.

5 Political System: Imperial Presidency

If judged solely by their constitutions, all Central Asian countries are secular, democratic and law-based states. Uzbekistan's Constitution, after declaring the state to be secular, democratic and law-based, goes as far as to declare the mission of the Uzbek people as "the creation of a humane democratic state based on the rule of law".³⁴

On the surface, Central Asia's political systems are also based on the separation of powers among the executive, legislative and judiciary branches, a rule to which Uzbekistan is no exception. In reality, however, all power is concentrated in the executive branch, which is of the presidential type. In other words, the President wields the real power in Uzbekistan.

In theory, according to the Uzbek Constitution, the President is elected for five years, but in reality, Islam Karimov has been in power since 24 March 1990, when he was elected to the presidency by the then Supreme Soviet. The extension of his original term for an additional five years was approved by an overwhelming majority, 99.6%, during a national referendum held on 27 March 1995. President Karimov was again elected in January 2000. Another referendum was held on 27 January 2002, and Karimov's term was extended until December 2007. Unless for personal reasons, including health, Karimov decides to withdraw from politics, in all likelihood before the end of this term approaches he will once again extend his term in office. In fact, the system of government in Uzbekistan, as in the rest of the Central Asia, increasingly resembles the "president for life" systems observable in the Middle East.³⁵

Because of the lack of viable and independent political parties, the Uzbek legislature is of the "rubber stamp" variety. It meets infrequently and has little influence to shape laws. The President also controls local politics through the appointment and replacement of governors. This situation is clearly unhealthy in terms of the prospects for developing viable and representative political institutions and a functioning civil society. By preventing lawful and

³² *Ibid.*

³³ The supplemental US assistance budget for 2002 allocates US\$155 million in aid to Uzbekistan, half of which will consist of security assistance. During President Islam Karimov's visit to Washington, the US Export-Import Bank allocated a US\$55 million credit facility for small and mid-size Uzbek businesses. Cohen, A., US Officials Give High Marks to Karimov on Washington Visit, *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 18 March 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav031502b.shtml> [accessed June 2002]

³⁴ From a copy of the text of the Uzbek constitution obtained by the author

³⁵ See Panfilov, O., Five Royal Presidents Rule their Kingdoms, *Transitions*, Vol. 5, No. 10, October 1998, pp. 56-9; Corley, F., Uzbekistan: Islam Karimov's Everlasting First Term, *Transitions*, Vol. 5, No. 10, October 1998, pp. 62-3

effective participation in the political process it creates conditions conducive to the spread of radical ideas, including those of the religious variety, which operate in an underground fashion and which potentially could destabilize the country.

In terms of independence and influence, the judiciary does not fare much better than the legislature. Corruption is rampant, and international financial and economic organizations, notably the World Bank, consider the reform of the judiciary and the curbing of its corrupt practices to be essential to economic reform. However, prospects for real reform are poor, especially since, given Uzbekistan's enhanced strategic importance for the West, it is not very probable that Western governments and other institutions would pressure the Uzbek government to introduce reforms. President Karimov often juxtaposes reform and stability, thus avoiding making the necessary changes. Yet the longer reforms are delayed, the more severe will be the disruption when the system can no longer function.

5.1 Political Parties

The period between 1988 and 1991 saw the flourishing of a variety of social and political movements, some of which later formed full-fledged political parties. In Uzbekistan these groups fell into three broad categories: 1) nationalists, ultra-nationalists, and pan-Turkist; 2) Islamists; and 3) minority-based. Another phenomenon which does not fit into any of the above categories is that of revamped and reconstituted communist parties, under various names mostly with the word "democratic" attached to them.

Within the first category the first political grouping to emerge (in 1988) was Birlik ("Unity"). The ideology of the party is strongly influenced by nationalist and pan-Turkist ideas. The Erk ("Freedom") party was formed one year later by some of the founding members of Birlik, who broke from it. Erk, too, has nationalist and to some extent pan-Turkist tendencies. Since late 1992, both Erk and Birlik have been banned. The leader of Erk, Mohammed Salikh, has sought refuge in Turkey. It appears that Islam Karimov was alarmed by the popularity of the party, which captured a substantial number of votes during the December 1991 presidential elections.³⁶

Within the second category, the most important party was the Islamic Revival Party which was the Uzbek branch of an All Union Islamic movement.³⁷ The party has been banned since 1992. The Adolat, which now is referred to as social democratic, initially had Islamist tendencies. But the Islamist elements left and eventually joined other groups and personalities, which formed the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) under the leadership of Juma Namangani and Tahir Yoldash. Both have been reported killed following the US military operations against the Taliban after the events of 11 September.³⁸

³⁶ University of Essen, Center for Studies on Turkey, *Uzbekistan: Current Political and Economic Developments*, Cologne, May 1994, p 18

³⁷ On the origins of the Islamist Revival Party, see Mikulsky, D.V., *Islamic Revival Party Structure, Ideology*, *FBIS/Sov-95-067*, 7 April 1995, pp. 93-100, quoting *Vostok*

³⁸ Adolat initially was an independent Islamic movement that emerged in Nawangan and in 1991 together with more militant groups such as Tauba ("Repentance") and Islam Lashkari ("Army of Islam") organized anti Kashmir protests in Nawangan. See Polat, A., *The Islamic Revival in Uzbekistan: A Threat to Stability*, in R. Sagdeev and S. Eisenhower (eds.), *Islam and Central Asia: An Enduring Legacy or an Evolving Threat?*, Washington DC: Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 2000, pp. 45-6

In the third category was the Samarqordan Movement, which was never transformed into a political party. The goal of the movement was to protect the cultural and linguistic rights of the country's Tajik population. With the government's merciless onslaught on Tajik culture - to be discussed below - the movement has become all but irrelevant as a force within the Uzbek political spectrum.

Another political party was the Vatan Tarakkiyoti ("Fatherland Prospers") party, established in 1992. This party was essentially created by the government to act as a "loyal opposition" and is still functioning. Another similar party is that of Fidokorlar ("Self-sacrificers") which also supports the government. During the early years of *perestroika* and independence, there was also the "Party of Free Peasants", whose members consisted of farmers and state and collective farm workers. The main base of support of the party was in the Ferghana Valley and it was said to be ideologically close to Erk, in other words, nationalistically-oriented. Another party created in 1995 is the Milli Tiklanish ("National Rebirth") party. This party is also supportive of the government. But the only party with any real influence is the National Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, whose leader is President Islam Karimov.

The number of deputies from each party in Uzbekistan's unicameral legislature based on December 1999 elections clearly demonstrated the executive control over the legislature.

Party	Number of deputies
National Democratic Party	48
Self Sacrificers Party	34
Fatherland Prospers Party	20
Adolat Social Democratic Party	11
National Rebirth Party	10

The rest of the 250 seat Supreme National Assembly (Oliy Majlis) are held by citizens groups and representatives of local governments (110).

Source: CIA: World Fact Book

5.2 Press and Media

Uzbekistan also lacks an independent press and media. Multiple media outlets (newspapers, radio, television) have been established in the last decade. But nearly all of them either remain under total state control or do not take part in political debate

6 Human Rights Conditions

The Constitution of Uzbekistan guarantees all manner of social, cultural, economic and political rights to the country's citizens, including its ethnic and religious minorities. Nevertheless, Uzbek constitutional and other laws in this regard include vague language that can be abused by the state. For example, Article 10 of the Constitution states that only Parliament and the President can speak on behalf of the people and that no other part of society, political party or individual, can do so. Article 20 of the Constitution qualifies the exercise of basic rights and liberties by stating that their exercise "must not violate the legitimate interests, rights and liberties of other persons, the state and the society". However, it does not clarify what is meant by "legitimate interests" of the state, thus enabling the government to interpret them in any way it wants.

This situation, together with the overall repressive nature of the Uzbek government, has meant that large segments of the population have been under severe pressure. During the early 1990s after independence, as noted, a number of political parties were banned and their leaders were beaten and harassed, leading them to seek refuge abroad. The latest US Department of State report on Uzbekistan paints a very grim picture of human rights conditions there, stating that “the government’s human rights record remained very poor, and it continued to commit numerous serious abuses”.³⁹ Arbitrary arrests, disappearances, torture, and other abuses, such as forced confessions, are rampant. Uzbekistan does not have any laws concerning the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, and it does not recognize the right of first asylum. It does not adhere to the 1951 convention relating to the protection of refugees or its 1967 protocol. Asylum seekers from Tajikistan and Afghanistan are considered economic migrants and are subjected to harassment, bribe demands, and deportation. Freedom of speech and other political freedoms are severely restricted, and there are large numbers of political prisoners, although most of them have been charged with other crimes.

While all of the population is subject to some form of limitation or disregard of its basic rights, two groups are especially vulnerable: 1) the Tajik minority; and 2) practising Muslims, who are often branded as *wahhabis*, which is considered equivalent to extremism.

6.1 The Tajik Plight

From the earliest period of his assumption of power, Islam Karimov has embarked on a policy of cultural discrimination against the Tajiks, which in the last few years has become more intense. If continued, it could lead to all but complete elimination of Tajik language and civilization - which incidentally is the indigenous culture of the region - from Uzbekistan. It could also either lead to the complete assimilation and loss of identity of the Tajiks or result in substantial Tajik out migration.

In the last few years, these extreme pressures on the Tajiks have been justified on the grounds that the Tajiks are sympathetic to Muslim extremists in Uzbekistan. However, repression of the Tajiks began before the radicalization of Uzbekistan’s Islamic Movement, which was partly due to the indiscriminate crackdown on moderate but practising Muslims.

By 1994, the Tajik university in Samarqand and other Tajik-language schools were closed. The authorities justified this action on the grounds that because of the Tajik civil war, inter-ethnic relations had deteriorated. What is conveniently ignored, of course, is that Uzbekistan, together with Russia, played an important role in igniting the Tajik civil war.⁴⁰ However, considering the fact that the Tajik civil war ended after the signing of the Peace Accords of 1997 between the Tajik government and the UTO (United Tajik Opposition), the continuing repression of the Tajiks has other causes. The most important of these causes is the government’s policy of the total Uzbekization of the people and their culture. The fear that a vibrant Tajik community may have separatist tendencies and may demand the unification of Samarqand and Bukhara with Tajikistan also plays a role in this anti-Tajik policy.

In addition to the closing of Tajik schools and other academic institutions, the government, according to some reports, has embarked on burning Tajik-language books, including school textbooks in Tajik in the cities of Samarqand and Bukhara, where a high proportion of the

³⁹ United States, Department of State, *Country Reports*

⁴⁰ See Rubin, B.R., The Fragmentation of Tajikistan, *Survival*, Vol. 35, No. 4, Winter 1993-1994

population is Tajik. The books are being destroyed according to an instruction issued in 2000 by the Education Ministry.⁴¹ In one Samarqand school alone, “more than 2,000 copies of textbooks on technical and natural science published in 1995 and 1998 and 90% in Tajik, were destroyed; the process is happening in all schools so one can imagine the nationwide scale of the campaign”.⁴² According to Jamal Mirsaidov, the representative of the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan (IHROU) in Samarqand: “In my [Jamal] village, where only Tajiks live, in a library near my place there is not a single book in Tajik. The worst thing is that masterpieces of world literature, works by Avicenna, Saadi, Shakespeare, Byron, Pushkin, and many others are being destroyed.”⁴³

In addition to waging a fierce struggle against Tajik education and literature and, generally, against the national essence of the ethnic Tajiks in Uzbekistan, the government has also embarked on selective eviction of Tajik citizens of Uzbekistan. For example, in the fall of 2000, 365 ethnic Tajik families from nine villages in Dara-i-Nihon were transferred to a wilderness in the southern Sherabad district.⁴⁴ According to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reports “people were not allowed to take their belongings when they were expelled. Government agents stole the private cattle and domestic appliances of the people of Dara-i-Nihon and burnt the homes they had inherited from their ancestors. The Uzbek government hastily built a village called Istiqlol Uzbek (“Uzbek Independence”).”⁴⁵ Moreover, “70 of Dara-i-Nihon’s ethnic Tajiks, including 21 teachers, were imprisoned for between eight and eighteen years.”⁴⁶ The principal charge used against many Tajik citizens is that they are sympathetic to the Muslim militants. As a result of these policies, Uzbekistan’s Tajik population is increasingly feeling insecure.

6.2 Other Ethnic Groups

It must be noted that Kazakh inhabitants of certain disputed border regions also suffer from discrimination in many areas, including education, although not to the extent of the Tajiks. For instance there are 700 Kazakh language schools. However, the change of alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin is a bone of contention, also causing problems for Russian speakers.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Uzbeks Evict Tajik Citizens, *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 1 May 2001, quoting B. Irgashev, There Are no Eternal Friends only Eternal Interests [title translated from Russian], *Novoye Pokoleniye* [Almaty], 27 April 2001

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Rights of Minorities Violated in Uzbekistan - Tajik Commentary, *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 23 February 2002, quoting *Soghd* [Khujand], 6 February 2002

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* See also Tajik NGO Head Sends Open Letter About Hardship of Ethnic Tajiks in Uzbekistan, *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, 28 July 2001, quoting *Asia-Plus* [Dushanbe], 19 July 2001

⁴⁷ Uzbekistan’s Kazakhs Want Uzbeks to Scrap Latin Script, *Uzbekistan Daily Digest*, 7 March 2002, quoting *Kazakh Commercial TV*, 6 March 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/uzbekistan/hypermail/200203/0017.shtml> [accessed June 2002]

The Soviet census showed 107,000 Meshketian Turks living in Uzbekistan. However, of these about 90,000 have now left the country for Russia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine or Kazakhstan, with the result that the remaining group is not very significant in number.⁴⁸

Other smaller groups such as Tartars, Karakalpak, Azeris etc. are not present in any significant numbers, while the Uighur population does not seem particularly targeted, except in the case of individuals involved with Islamist groups..

6.3 Practising Muslims

As noted earlier, Uzbekistan has, since the time of *perestroika*, experienced an Islamic revival, which also has had a political dimension. Because of this political dimension, coupled with the importance of Islam as a core component of Uzbek - and Tajik - identity and hence inherently a potential challenge to political authorities, the Uzbek government has tried hard to control the official Islamic establishment. And it has largely “succeeded in re-establishing control over the official Islamic clergy”.⁴⁹

For example, in 1993 Mufti Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf was forced to resign from his position as the official head of Central Asia’s Islamic community. Later he was forced to leave on charges of helping Tajikistan’s Islamic movement. Many other religious leaders have been jailed on “dubious charges of narcotics or weapons possessions”.⁵⁰ Another notorious incident was the arrest and disappearance of Abduvaliqori Mirzaev, a popular religious leader from Andijan.⁵¹ In addition, the Uzbek government controls the contents of the sermons of Muslim preachers and any Islamic material published in the country. In 1998, a new law on religious freedom was enacted, which was highly restrictive.⁵² These policies are viewed by some as having contributed to the radicalization of segments of the Uzbek population and the formation of extremist groups, such as the IMU, and the growing influence of other extremist groups, such as the Hizb-ul-Tahrir.

The Uzbek government deals harshly with anyone suspected of having any sympathies with the Islamists. For example, the US Department of State’s *Country Reports on Human Rights* for 2001, dealing with Uzbekistan, cites several examples of arrests and deaths of people accused of being members of the Hizb-ul-Tahrir or the IMU. The following are some examples taken from the report:

- On 21 February, police arrested Emin Usman, a prominent writer and an ethnic Uighur, on charges of possessing illegal religious literature and belonging to the banned Hizb-ul-Tahrir political party. Police returned Usman’s body to relatives on 1 March. The authorities, who claimed that Usman had committed suicide, ordered the body buried immediately and would not allow family members to view it; however, one family member who did view the body reported that it bore clear signs of having been beaten.

⁴⁸ See Memorial Human Rights Centre, *The Violations of the Rights of Forced Migrants and Ethnic Discrimination in Krasnodar Territory: The Situation of the Turks-Meshketians*, Moscow, 1996, <http://memo.ru/hr/discrim/meshi/ENG> [accessed June 2002]

⁴⁹ Polat, p. 50

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² For details, see *Idem*, p. 51

- On 7 July, Shovruk Ruzimuradov, a human rights activist and a former member of parliament, died in custody, allegedly after police tortured and beat him. Prior to his death, the authorities had held Ruzimuradov in a pre-trial detention facility for three weeks. While searching his house, police claimed to have found nine leaflets by the outlawed Islamist organization Hizb-ul-Tahrir, 28 bullets, and narcotics. Relatives reported that the police had planted the contraband.

There are many other such examples cited in the report.⁵³ Even relatives of those suspected or accused of sympathy with Islamist groups are not immune to persecution. For instance, according to the above-noted report, Bakhodir Khosanov, an instructor in French at the Alliance Française, whose brother was an Islamist, was detained and held incommunicado in July and was sentenced to a long prison term.⁵⁴ In fact, the harassment and arrest of the relatives of those suspected of subversive views, especially of those holding Islamist views, is common practice.

What is more serious, however, is that the Uzbek government, under the pretext of fighting armed Islamist organization, has “continued its harsh campaign against religious organizations, particularly Muslim groups not sanctioned by the state. Over the last several years, thousands of pious Muslims have been arrested and imprisoned on trumped-up charges of anti-constitutional activities”.⁵⁵ They also suffer from other restrictions. For example, Muslims are prohibited from wearing Islamic dress.⁵⁶

6.4 Christians

Orthodox Christians are not targeted for persecution. But there appear to have been recent cases of harassment of the followers of Jehovah’s Witnesses and of Presbyterians. This is a new phenomenon.⁵⁷

6.5 Victims of Environmental Degradation

The list of the most vulnerable segment of Uzbekistan’s population would not be complete without mentioning those who have been the victims of wrong policies - especially in regard to cotton cultivation - which has led to severe environmental degradation in certain regions, most notably Karakalpakstan. A disproportionate number of the areas’ residents suffer from various diseases because of air and water pollution.

6.6 Foreign Relations: Impact on Human Rights

Despite its worse than poor record on human rights, Uzbekistan has managed to blunt much external criticism and has avoided retaliatory measures because of its apparent strategic importance - especially to the United States since 11 September 2001 - and the skilful foreign policy it has conducted.

⁵³ See United States, Department of State, *Country Reports*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ See Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2001-2002: Uzbekistan*, New York, 2001, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2001/countryratings/Uzbekistan2.htm> [accessed June 2002]

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ See Rotar, I., Uzbekistan: Five Day Prison Term for Jehovah’s Witnesses, *Keston News Service*, 25 April 2002; Corley, F., Uzbekistan: Grandma’s Can Pray again but not on Sundays, *Keston News Service*, 24 November 2001

Most importantly, since 1994, Uzbekistan has succeeded in convincing the United States and some other Western states that it is the most pivotal country in the region and the best ally that the West can have. Thus, although during the immediate period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and later its collective security system, later it adopted a pro-Western approach.

The worsening of Russo-Western relations after 1994 - albeit to varying degrees in different periods - allowed Uzbekistan to portray itself as a counterweight to Russia in Central Asia. Similarly, taking advantage of US-Iranian animosity and the US policy of attempting to isolate Iran as much as possible and to limit its access to Central Asia, Uzbekistan also assumed the role of counterweight to Iran. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan cultivated relations with Israel and joined the so-called GUUAM group (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova), as part of an East-West economic corridor and security cooperation structure.

With the events following the tragedy of 11 September 2001 and the US-led war against international terrorism, and most particularly against the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan's strategic importance has increased. In particular, the events after 11 September have led to much closer military and political cooperation between the United States and Uzbekistan. This was highlighted during President Islam Karimov's visit to Washington in March 2002. Indeed, Uzbekistan has become a significant strategic partner of the United States.⁵⁸

However, the United States has insisted that the full development of this new multifaceted partnership be contingent on improvements in Uzbekistan's human rights record, though how far Washington is prepared to insist on this point is so far not clear.⁵⁹ In order to placate the United States, Karimov made some statements indicating that he is committed to economic and democratic reforms. Prior to his visit to the United States, he did take some symbolic measures, such as the registration of the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan (IHROU).⁶⁰ These tactical moves prompted US officials to express the view that they believe that President Karimov was sincere in his desire to bring about real economic and political reforms, including in regard to human rights.⁶¹ But exiled Uzbek politicians warned that "the United States was courting danger by supporting Karimov".⁶²

Furthermore, it is not clear at this point whether the US "alliance" with Uzbekistan is just short-term and tactical, essentially related to the war on terrorism, or whether it will evolve into a permanent set of arrangements and permanent US military deployments in the country, either in terms of so-called "warm basing" (the capacity to reintroduce forces rapidly) or in terms of fully-fledged, active bases on a continuing basis. Debate in Washington at the moment is beginning to centre on long-term US interests in the region, and the significant role to be played by Uzbekistan as part of an overall regional strategy. So far, however,

⁵⁸ Blagov, S., Karimov Comes to the United States Seeking More Assistance and Investment, *Eurasianet Business & Economics*, 11 March 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav031102.shtml> [accessed June 2002]

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Uzbek Opposition Figures Urge Caution on U.S. Support for Karimov, *Eurasianet Human Rights*, 27 March 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/eav032702.shtml> [accessed June 2002]

⁶² *Ibid.*

analysis of this potential strategic relationship, at least in public, has not brought together for examination the different strands of strategic policy, e.g., whether Uzbekistan can be a trustworthy ally, whether the US “needs” to be there permanently with military forces, and whether it should support Uzbekistan in its struggles with neighbouring countries, as a sort of mini-regional “hegemon”, assuming that the US, or the US and Russia, do not choose to play that role directly; nor has this public analysis yet related direct US strategic interests with either its concerns for human rights - and reputation for promoting human rights - or indirect strategic interests that could be deeply affected by the potential stimulus of local opposition to the US presence, with its own implications for complicating the US effort to reduce threats from terrorism and other factors potentially hostile to the United States.

Nor is the US the only major Western country that has been courting Uzbekistan. For example, President Karimov recently completed a successful visit to France. And, as noted before, the heads of major international organizations, such as the World Bank, have visited the country.

In short, although in most contacts between Western countries and Uzbekistan, the Westerners do mention the need for Tashkent to improve human rights conditions, it is unlikely that Western or other governments would be willing to jeopardize their strategic and political interests in the country by actively supporting the Tajiks’ cultural rights or the Muslims’ freedom of worship.

Meanwhile, the greater political and strategic emphasis put on Uzbekistan by the West, and by the United States in particular, is likely to embolden President Karimov to pursue a policy of intimidation toward Uzbekistan’s weaker neighbours, especially Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Already, following the incursions of the IMU forces into Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and 2000, Uzbekistan has laid land mines on its borders with Kyrgyzstan which have led to civilian casualties, and it has bombed areas of Tajikistan. It also expelled Tajiks from the Surkhandarya region.

No doubt, Uzbekistan is an important country and its collaboration in the fight against terrorism is necessary for success within the region. However, both for the sake of its own future well-being and for the sake of regional stability, the West - especially the United States - needs to be clear in striking a balance between its perceived strategic interests and its concern for human rights. A policy based solely on *Realpolitik* could prove disastrous for the region and for Western interests overall. Among other things, it could exacerbate ethnic and religious tensions and lead to more rather than to less radicalism of all kinds.

7 Conclusions

After more than ten years of independence and its emergence as an important political player in the politics of Eurasia, in many essential aspects Uzbekistan’s record has been disappointing. First, it has failed to develop a strong civic sense of nationalism which, while respecting and protecting the diverse cultural heritage of the country and its various ethnic groups, has the potential for also cementing people and society together. Instead, the politics of identity-formation, based to a significant degree on historical falsification, grandiose imperial ambitions, and ethnic and cultural discrimination, has exacerbated internal divisions and created legitimate and intense apprehensions among Uzbekistan’s neighbours.

Second, while the fight against religious extremism and terrorism is both necessary and legitimate, the Uzbek government's widespread mistreatment of moderate, apolitical, but observant Muslims has increased resentment toward the authorities and, paradoxically, could thereby help to provide new recruits for extremist groups.

Third, the authoritarian system of government, notable in the prevention of the formation of free and functioning political parties and civic organizations, has stunted the political and social maturation of Uzbek society. In the long run, this situation could prove highly damaging to Uzbekistan's stability, and it could severely hamper development of the necessary practice of the peaceful transfer of power, which so far is completely lacking.

Fourth, the government, by delaying economic reforms, has slowed Uzbekistan's economic development, the diversification of its economic base, the creation of adequate employment, and the improvement of living conditions. In fact, the economic future of the country, notwithstanding recent promises of external assistance, does not look bright, at least for the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, a number of problems, such as demographic expansion, water shortages, and rising unemployment, especially among the youth, could presage serious political problems, as well.

Fifth, Uzbekistan's ambitions to become the regional hegemon in Central Asia have created deep resentment on the part of its neighbours, which could prove damaging to Uzbekistan and to the cause of regional stability. The impact of these developments could also be felt far beyond the region, deeply affecting Western interests.

In spite of these negative factors there is at present, broadly speaking, no risk of a mass exodus of refugees from Uzbekistan. Tajiks are under pressure, but most of them are not in a position to leave the country. Those who do leave generally go to Russia, although some hope to eventually reach other European countries. It is also not too late for Uzbekistan to change direction and to pursue a policy of reform at home and reconciliation in the region. In this way, it could perform a positive and important role commensurate with its size, population, and resources. But the key question is whether President Islam Karimov will show the foresight and leadership needed to make possible such a change of direction. Or will he persist in his repressive policies domestically and unrealistic ambitions externally? The West should help him choose the former option, which is far more likely to benefit Uzbekistan and the region and to serve legitimate Western interests and universal, human values. Indeed, a major part of the future of the Central Asian region - in terms of politics, economics, social development, the inculcation of democracy, and respect for, and pursuit of, human rights - will turn on what happens in the next few years in Uzbekistan. Thus what happens there is of some considerable historic significance for the future of Eurasia.

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