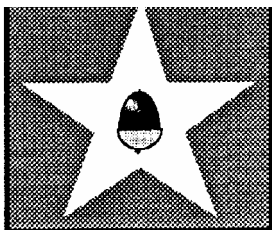


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**Uzbekistan - Old Threats
& New Allies**

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After 11 September 2001, democratic, industrialized countries “discovered” Central Asia. Uzbekistan’s strategic location and stable leadership make it an important ally in combating militant Islam and promoting economic cooperation in the region. The new, mainly Western partners understand that there cannot be stability in Central Asia without a stable Uzbekistan and are ready to overlook the Uzbek leadership’s governing methods and its less than gentlemanly treatment of the opposition parties. This policy is helped by the opposition’s tendency to score own goals: paying lip service to democratic values, embracing vague, unrealistic and occasionally extremist policies and seeking partners with dubious democratic credentials. The revitalized Western and Far Eastern economic and security interests in Central Asia, together with political changes in Moscow, have forced Russia to conduct a more realistic, less arrogant, foreign policy towards its former southern territories. Uzbekistan’s awareness of its own importance on the international arena is accompanied by President Karimov’s dynamic foreign and security policy and the growing competence of its implementers.

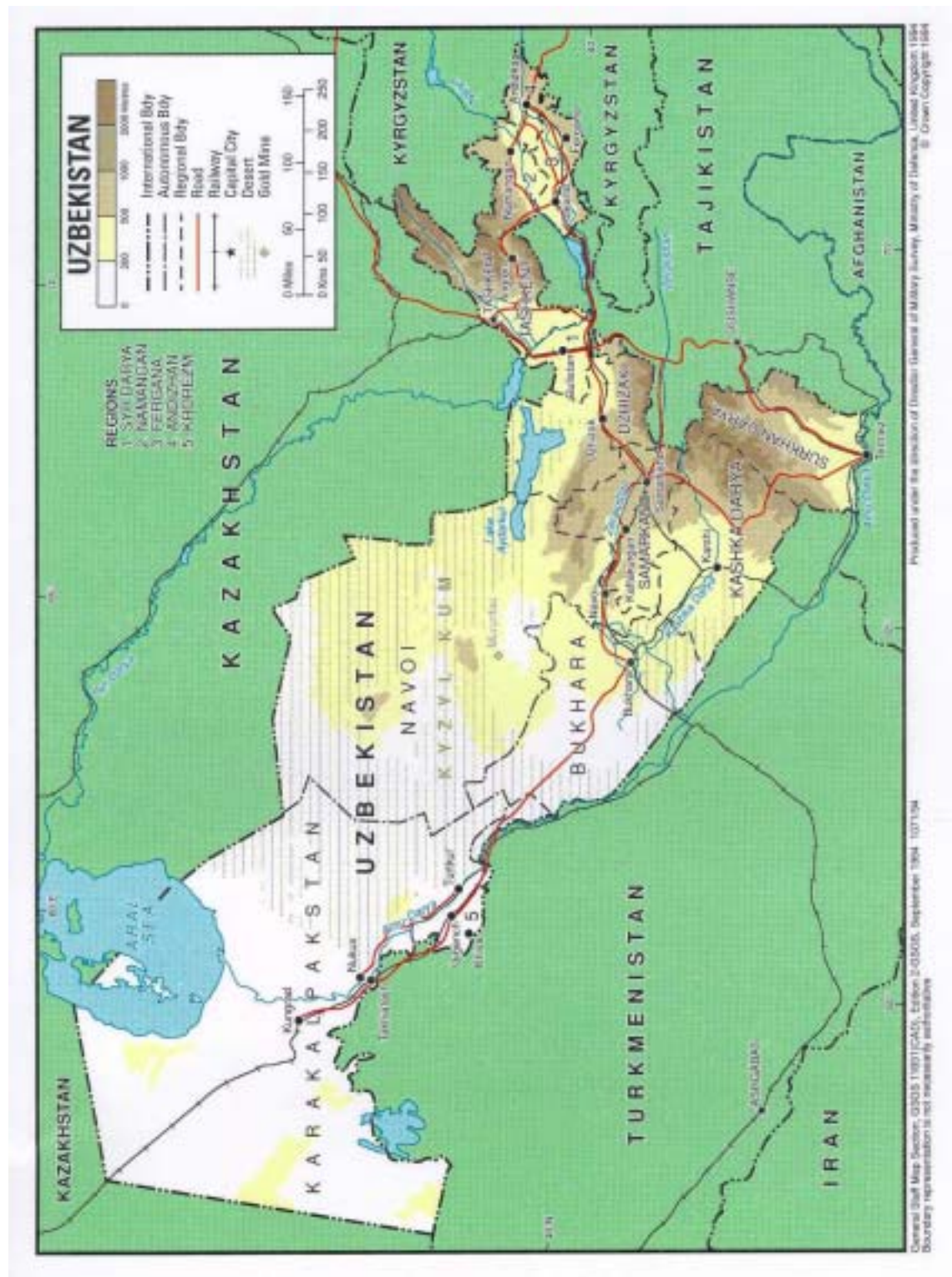
Tashkent’s relationships with its five neighbours range from excellent, with Kazakhstan, to disturbing with Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan’s security problems - terrorism, drug-trafficking and organized crime - are all transnational and this forces Tashkent to concentrate on the improvement of bilateral relations with its neighbours and more distant allies, with varying degrees of success.

Uzbekistan - The Centre-Piece Of The Central Asian Puzzle

Uzbekistan is one of the world’s two double landlocked countries – the other being Liechtenstein – if the Caspian and Aral Seas are looked upon as large lakes. It has 6,221km of land borders, most of which are with the other four former Soviet Central Asian republics. When Uzbekistan declared its independence, in the summer of 1991, the only properly demarcated, equipped and manned part of its border was the 137km section of the old Soviet border with Afghanistan.

These potential disadvantages are counterbalanced by Uzbekistan’s strategic position in Central Asia; its resourceful, homogenous population; considerable natural resources; a stable leadership and, on the whole, good relations with its neighbours. Uzbekistan is also the spiritual home of large Uzbek minorities in the neighbouring countries, an important element in this ethnically and religiously sensitive region. All these factors make Uzbekistan, not an important military power, into a major regional player.

Map: Uzbekistan



With more than 25 million inhabitants in 2001, Uzbekistan is the most populated of all the new Central Asian states (25,155,064: Uzbeks 80%, Russians 5.5%, Tajiks 5%, Kazakhs 3%, Karakalpaks 2.5%, Tatars 1.5%, Other - 2.5%). Officially 88% of the Uzbek population are Moslem, mainly Sunnis, although the number of Uzbeks living in accordance with Islamic rules is said to be as low as 600,000.¹

Uzbekistan is in the comfortable position of being the only one among the five former Soviet Central Asian republics bordering the other four states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan) and at the same time not bordering the two military superpowers of Asia, Russia and China. Its defence and security agreements cannot therefore be seen by Moscow or Beijing as a direct threat, particularly if they bring stability to Central Asia. An unstable Uzbekistan, on the other hand, would certainly destabilize Central Asia.

Stability First, Democracy Can Wait

After successive invasions from East and West throughout the centuries, Uzbekistan was set up as a Soviet Republic in 1924, as a result of the carve-up by the victorious Bolsheviks of the six year old Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Turkestan. The shape of Uzbekistan changed several times in the Soviet period: when Tajikistan became an independent Soviet republic in 1929; in 1936, when Russia gave Karakalpakstan to Uzbekistan; and in 1953, 1956 and 1971 when Moscow organized and directed territorial exchanges between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Soviet control of the republic was facilitated by its geographic position. Uzbekistan was surrounded by other Soviet republics and Afghanistan, none of them an object of emulation. The majority of the population of Uzbekistan lived, and still does, in rural communities depending on cotton production, a practically monocultural agricultural policy imposed by Moscow. Soviet leaders expected their republican underlings to keep their fiefdoms ideologically pure and secure and to fulfil their republics' economic plans. Other, extracurricular, and often illegal activities were usually tolerated. In the 1970s and early 1980s this policy allowed the communist leadership in Tashkent to "out-corrupt" even Moscow. Sharaf Rashidovich Rashidov controlled a feudal-style system based on profits derived from large-scale falsification of the cotton harvest figures. The illegal profits allowed Rashidov to bribe or intimidate officials at the republican and union level. Tashkent was not much different from other republican capitals, including Moscow. Rashidov died in 1983, and it was not in the interest of his supporters and protectors in Moscow to conduct an in-depth investigation into corruption in Uzbekistan. Later on, however, several of Rashidov's high ranking cronies, including Leonid Brezhnev's son-in law, were imprisoned and many thousands of Communist Party and republican officials lost their jobs, but Rashidov's image was left intact. Two decades after his death, therefore, Rashidov is still seen by many Uzbeks as a local strong-man who challenged Moscow's might, a legend not supported by any evidence.

Mikhail Gorbachev's choice for the Uzbek Communist Party leadership was Islam Karimov, little known outside Uzbekistan, the republic's deputy prime minister. Younger than Gorbachev, Karimov was seen as his man in Uzbekistan. When Gorbachev became the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Islam Karimov was elected to a similar position in Uzbekistan. When Gorbachev gradually transferred the decisionmaking powers from the Communist Party structures to the state structures, Karimov, with Moscow's blessing, did the same at the republican level. Karimov was elected President of Uzbekistan on 24

March 1990, in a Soviet style election and with Gorbachev's approval. Their ways parted in August 1991. After the failed coup of August 1991, Karimov instantly pushed for the republic's independence, declared officially on 1 September 1991 more than three months before the Belovezha trilateral agreement spelling the end of the USSR.

With no history of statehood or democracy, the majority of Uzbeks saw no reason for an immediate parliamentary or presidential election and Islam Karimov, as an Uzbek patriot and an experienced politician guaranteeing the stability of the country in its post-natal period, was seen as a stable and pragmatic leader. The 1992 Constitution gave Islam Karimov more powers, including hiring and firing the highest state and government officials, appointments which only occasionally needed the endorsement of the subservient unicameral parliament. His position was strengthened by the radicalized Islamic opposition which aimed at establishing a transnational Islamic state in Central Asia. At the beginning of the of the 1990s developed democracies were preoccupied with Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and Iraq. They were determined not to upset Boris Yel'tsin and their political involvement in Central Asia would certainly provoke his displeasure. Their original interest in the area was purely economic, driven by oil companies eager to develop its oil and gas fields. There was no Western "investment" in democratic groups or individuals and democracy had no historical roots in the region. The fledgling non-Islamic opposition was not able to come up with a credible political programme and even if they had, they would have received little publicity, as the president controlled all major media outlets.

A landslide national referendum in March 1995 allowed Islam Karimov to run in the presidential election in 2000. In January 2000, he was elected for a further five years with equally suspiciously high support, 91.9% of votes. His closest opponent, a placebo candidate Abdulkhafiz Dzhahalov, First Secretary of the People's Democratic Party, formerly the Communist Party, received 4.2% of the votes. In 2002 the presidential term was extended to seven years with effect from the 2005 election.

The terrorist attacks in the USA in September 2001 reinforced Karimov's position on the international stage. Uzbekistan, one of the three former Soviet republics bordering Afghanistan, became an important component in the anti-Taliban campaign. The leader of Tajikistan, Emomali Rakhmonov, owed his position to the Russians and with their help had succeeded in defeating internal radical Islamic movements and in keeping the Taliban out of his country. Any significant Western presence in Tajikistan was likely to upset his reliable Russian allies and Tajikistan could therefore be discounted in this context. Nor could President Niyazov of Turkmenistan, an unpredictable and unreliable megalomaniac, be regarded as a partner by the anti-Taliban coalition. Uzbekistan, though, was a victim of attacks conducted by Islamic radical groups based abroad and funded from abroad. It conducted increasingly independent foreign and defence policies. The anti-Taliban campaign was also President Karimov's campaign, although with a largely Islamic population he would have to be discreet when assisting Washington and its allies.

President Karimov's new allies were not only keen to talk to him but were also willing to listen to his concerns, the greatest of which was the Islamic extremist threat. Less than democratic methods used by the Uzbek power structures in suppressing militant and benign opposition alike were ignored and military and security aid and related offers of assistance poured in. The Uzbeks knew the battle with Taliban was won but the war against Islamic radicals continued. Those Uzbek militants based in Afghanistan were decimated by the Northern Alliance and the US Air Force, and prodded by Moscow and Washington, Uzbekistan's neighbours stepped up their own

campaigns against homegrown and transplanted Islamic extremists. However, the electoral victories of militant Islamic candidates in Pakistan, the unstable political situation in Afghanistan and the still thriving international Islamic militant network continue to make Uzbekistan a potential target. Tashkent therefore continues to strengthen its defence and security organizations, and is currently taking steps to improve its security and defence agreements with its neighbours and distant allies.

Fighting Militant Islam

Islam began to make successful inroads in Central Asia at the beginning of the 8th Century and had been the dominant religion in the region until the end of the 1920s, when Joseph Stalin's indiscriminate purges reached every corner of the USSR. The anti-religious campaign began in the early 1920s, culminating in the mass purges of 1937. The number of mosques in Soviet Central Asia fell from 25,000 in 1917 to 1,700 in 1942.² Facing a mortal threat from the German armies however, Joseph Stalin relented and made minor concessions, by allowing the creation of state controlled religions. Thus the Muslim Spiritual Board of Central Asia was established in 1943. Supervised by the Communist Party and watched by the NKVD (the Secret Police), official Islam had also a tolerated, unofficial, silent current, one practically invisible during the Soviet period but instrumental in the resurgence of Islam in Uzbekistan when communism began to collapse. Islam quickly filled the ideological vacuum; money for the restoration of old and the construction of new mosques began to pour in from abroad. In 1989 the officially sponsored mufti of Tashkent was dismissed for insufficient knowledge of Islam, drinking alcohol and womanizing. His replacement resigned two years later after financial irregularities were uncovered in his organization.

The country's first law on freedom of worship and on religious organizations was adopted on 14 June 1991 when Uzbekistan was still a part of the USSR. The Uzbek lawmakers were not too preoccupied with the security Pandora's box they were opening, as security and law and order issues were the prerogative of the All-Union structures. The law was a free-for-all permission for religious missionaries, benefiting mainly Islamic activists coming from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Middle East. Islamic religious schools (madrasas) and mosques appeared around Uzbekistan, unregistered and uncontrolled. The shortage of Uzbek Islamic experts forced Tashkent to accept foreign teachers of Islam without verifying their credentials or teachings. The prayers and lessons delivered by imported imams and teachers were often radical and inflammatory. They occasionally attracted equally radical foreign students, including Chechens and Dagestanis, the most notorious of whom was Salman Raduyev.³ Foreign Islamic missionaries were usually Wahhabis or Shia Moslems opposed to the local Islamic rituals, based on Imam A'zam, or Hanifit interpretation of Islam, an interpretation accepted by most Uzbeks for centuries because it promoted loyalty to the rulers of the day and adopted local customs and traditions.

The funds for new mosques were pouring mainly into the Ferghana valley, the richest part of Uzbekistan and the crossroads of Central Asia, containing 20% of Uzbekistan's oil fields.⁴ One thousand three hundred mosques were built in the Namangan region alone in the mid 1990s, for a population of 1.8m people; 780 of the mosques were not registered with the Uzbek authorities.⁵ In 1998 in one district of Namangan there was only one school but 13 mosques for 2,500 inhabitants. The clan system which served so well the Soviets and then Islam Karimov for controlling and monitoring local communities was quickly adapting to the new realities. Some administration heads

in the Uzbek parts of the Ferghana Valley were more interested in pleasing the local imams than state authorities.

The Ferghana Valley has the richest agricultural land in Central Asia. It is inhabited by 10.5m people, including half of the population of Kyrgyzstan, 27% of the population of Uzbekistan and more than 30% of the Tajik population. The population of the valley grows by 2% every year.⁶ Islam was never successfully eradicated by the Soviet power. The valley was therefore a natural starting point for Islamic religious movements after the collapse of communism. Militants' ideological investment in the valley soon paid off. After listening to the teachings of radical imams many young men in the valley were ready to fight for what they had just learned. Selected individuals were sent to training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan. By 1998, 400 young men from Central Asia, mainly from Uzbekistan's part of the Ferghana Valley, were undergoing training in Islamic extremist camps in Pakistan alone.⁷ When groups of Islamic radicals infiltrated the valley the three countries sharing the region counterattacked with several well coordinated, decisive and sometimes brutal operations. The high level of coordination prevented the militants from border hopping and forced most of them to flee.⁸

Local Islamic activists preoccupied with creation of new Islamic infrastructures did not have politics as their first priority. As a result, the Islamic parties in Uzbekistan became increasingly radical. Their main aim was to remove Islam Karimov and their first attempt was through the ballot box. The Uzbek Supreme Soviet had barred the first non-Communist movement Birlik (Unity), from contesting the election in February 1990. Founded in April 1990, the first officially registered party Erk (Freedom) was banned in October 1993. Members of the banned parties were harassed, beaten up, arrested, imprisoned and tortured. Some movements reacted by speeding up the organization of armed groups, others, assisted by Western human rights groups, began well orchestrated campaigns in democratic countries aiming at discrediting Karimov and distracting attention from their own undemocratic programmes.

They were less keen to focus attention on their own programmes, which were equally undemocratic. One of the Uzbek Islamic movements advocated the establishment of a khalifate covering Central Asia, called President Karimov a Jew and the US a "colonialist Kaafir [rejectionist] nation".⁹ The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) broadcasts from Iran are anti-democratic, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, anti-American and most of all anti-Islam Karimov.¹⁰ The IMU and larger radical Islamic organizations such as Hezb-e Tahrir were supported by less known but equally radical parties and movements like Adolat (Justice), Islom Lashkarlari (Islamic Army), Emirlar (Emirs), Tavba (Repentance) and several other groups keen to set up an Islamic state in Uzbekistan.¹¹ The radical anti-Karimov Islamic organizations like to call themselves "independent" and all the activists in Uzbek prisons "prisoners of conscience". Even the first Uzbek popular movement, Birlik, accepted radical Islamic support and its professed human rights concerns are sometimes difficult to separate from its increasingly radical political line. Its defence of a local Wahhabi leader Sheik Mirzaev who "advocated the organizing of Islamic education and community life" and the organization's own website suggest that Birlik is far less committed to democracy than it would like its supporters in democratic countries to believe.¹² The democratic credentials of Birlik's leader, Abdulrahim Pulatov, are not enhanced by his radio broadcasts beamed from Mashad in Iran.¹³ The same radio station serves also as a mouth piece for the Erk party and its leader Mohammed Solih.

In May 1998 President Karimov visited Moscow and at a meeting with Prime Minister Kiriyenko described the threat posed by the Islamic radicals operating in Uzbekistan. The Uzbeks had detailed information about the Islamic movement in their country, their structures, leaders and training but not about their operational plans.¹⁴

Six bombs exploded in Tashkent on 16 February 1999. The main target of the attack was President Karimov. Five explosions were designed to cause confusion, the sixth triggered an explosion which was to kill the president. Karimov was saved by his bodyguard, who stopped the presidential car 200m from an old Volga car packed with explosives. The explosions killed 15 people, injured about 180 and damaged several government buildings.¹⁵ Twenty-two individuals were charged with an attempt to murder Islam Karimov.¹⁶ Abdulrahim Pulatov, in a broadcast from Iran, discounted any possibility that the explosions could have been the work of Islamic extremists. Pulatov said that the explosions were most likely organized by the Uzbek government.¹⁷ The attack on the presidential cavalcade was followed by a series of unprecedented harsh security operations, judicial and administrative measures.

In August 2000 the Uzbek Ministries of Defence and Internal Affairs conducted a major operation, including ground attack aviation against several small Islamic groups in the Devlok, Kishtut, Angarikozi and Hamidarcha regions.¹⁸ The militant groups tried to counterattack in simultaneous attacks in southern Saryassiya and Uzun districts in Uzbekistan and southern Lyaylyak district in Kyrgyzstan. The Uzbek ministries claimed that the attackers came from villages near Kandahar and Kabul in Afghanistan and from Tavildara and Gharm Districts in central Tajikistan.¹⁹

The forced “emigration” of the Islamic radical leadership from Uzbekistan meant that they had to plan their Uzbek operations abroad. The most aggressive, best organized and funded militant group, forced to flee Uzbekistan after several trilateral anti-terrorist operations concentrated on the Ferghana Valley, and involving Tajik and Kyrgyz forces as well as Uzbek ones, was the IMU, led by a former Soviet paratrooper, Juma Namangani (real name Jumaboi Ahmadzhanovitch Khojaev), who subsequently became a deputy of Osama bin Laden in charge of the Northern Front in Afghanistan.²⁰ The number of IMU fighters on Afghan territory was assessed at the beginning of 2001 at more than 7,000.²¹ They were trained in Mazar-e Sharif by Pakistani instructors belonging to several radical Islamic organizations.²²

The American intervention in Afghanistan practically obliterated the Uzbek Islamic opposition based in that country, especially the well organized IMU. A deputy secretary of the Tajik Security Council, Mirzovatan Hasanliyev, claimed however that small groups of IMU fighters might still be operating in the Badakhshan Province of Afghanistan and that Misir Ashirkulov, the IMU leader believed to be dead, was not killed but only wounded and was preparing about 1,500 Islamic militants to invade the Ferghana Valley.²³ On the other hand, this may be a manoeuvre by the Tajik Security Council to attract the attention of powerful foreign supporters in their own struggle with Islamic militants in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

Not By Fire Alone

Military and security operations aiming at suppressing armed Islamic militants have been accompanied by strict laws and administrative regulations. Women wearing hijab and men with beards were banned from state universities in 1997. It was forbidden to broadcast a call to prayer by loudspeaker. By June 1998, 21 students had been expelled from Uzbek universities for wearing religious clothing or for

growing beards; a further 58 students were threatened with expulsion.²⁴ Religious literature had been meticulously examined and only authorized textbooks licensed.²⁵

In April 1998 the Supreme Assembly of Uzbekistan had introduced changes to the first Uzbek law on freedom of worship and religious organization, adopted on 14 June 1991 in Soviet Uzbekistan.²⁶ The most important part of the amendment was the obligatory official registration of all religious organizations. This allowed the Uzbek authorities to keep their activities under scrutiny. By August 1999 the authorities had registered 1,702 religious organizations, of which more than 1,500 were "Islamic orientated".²⁷ A presidential decree in 1999 established the Tashkent Islamic University. The opening ceremony took place on 2 September.²⁸ With all these opportunities, the Uzbek Moslems in search of Islamic education would thus have no justification for studying abroad, and the Uzbek authorities were able to impose quality control on higher Islamic education.

Also in 1999, the Uzbek authorities began to pay closer attention to pilgrimages to Mecca.²⁹ The Uzbek government resolution of December 2001 on organizing the February-March 2002 haj pilgrimage provided the pilgrims with a high degree of support and protection but also allowed their close supervision. As a sop to the Islamic community, the Uzbek authorities also began to show more interest in Christian missionaries operating in Uzbekistan. Two Uzbek Christians distributing video and audio tapes, leaflets and books to non-Christians were arrested on drug charges and sentenced to 10 and 15 years imprisonment in the summer of 1999.³⁰ Several representatives of Baptists, Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses were charged with divers crimes and sentenced to imprisonment or fined.³¹ In an attempt to win the hearts and minds of his subjects, at the beginning of 2001 President Karimov released 800 religious suspects from Uzbek prisons; in all 25,000 prisoners were amnestied throughout 2001.³² By September 2002, more than 100 radical Islamic activists had been amnestied and allowed to return to Uzbekistan.³³

The Borders First

Islam Karimov and his officials responsible for the defence and security of Uzbekistan had no reason to worry about territorial demands from its neighbours. There were bound to be occasional minor border disagreements between the new states but Tashkent was not afraid of any major territorial claims or hostile intentions. The problems and challenges all five new Central Asian states had to face in the 1990s were very similar. All countries faced legal and illegal infiltration by Islamic militants, large scale drug smuggling, smuggling of weapons, including components for weapons of mass destruction, illegal migration and organized crime.

Less than 2% of Uzbekistan's new border, the 137km border with Afghanistan, had a proper infrastructure and even that section was commanded by Russian officers when Uzbekistan declared its independence. Uzbekistan's other borders are: Kazakhstan - 2,203km; Aral Sea (Kazakhstan) - 420km of the shoreline; Kyrgyzstan - 1,099km; Tajikistan - 1,161km; Turkmenistan - 1,621km.

In 1992, Uzbekistan, together with several other former Soviet republics, decided to take the protection of its borders into its own hands. Moscow's willingness to help patrol the border of the countries with which it had no borders made very little sense for the Uzbeks and was seen in Tashkent as a part of a much larger, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) "game", which the Uzbeks refused to play, although in December 1993, Russia and the five Central Asian states did sign a Memorandum of

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Cooperation in the Protection of External State Borders.³⁴ Uzbekistan's determination to improve its border control was reflected in the nomination as the head of the Border Guards in 1993 of Major-General Vladimir Sogdyevich Rakhmatullayev, a tough special forces officer, a former KGB veteran and the head of the antiterrorist unit in Tashkent between 1991 and 1993.

Islam Karimov was unenthusiastic about the CIS and its military and security councils, committees and other subordinate structures. From the CIS' inception, Uzbekistan was a reluctant member of the Commanders' Council of the Border Guards of the CIS and its Coordinating Service. It stayed a member of the council and several related working groups on crime, customs and excise, migration, border area security and terrorism, but it reduced its role in them in most cases to the status of observer. To limit its dependence on the Russian border guard schools the Uzbeks set up in 1994 the Tashkent Border Guard Academy.³⁵ When Uzbekistan started stepping up its border control in the mid 1990s it did so without cooperation with the CIS. In June 1997, however, President Karimov announced that an agreement had been signed on cooperation of Uzbek Border troops with the Russian Federal Border Service. That, added Karimov, did not mean that Russian border troops would guard Uzbek borders.³⁶ For most of the 1990s Uzbekistan had kept the old Soviet security structure, changing the name of the republican KGB to the National Security Service (NSB) and left the Border Guards under its control. Gradually the border guard troops grew into a major power structure. In January 1999, the Uzbek Border Guards were withdrawn from the National Security Service and resubordinated directly to the president.³⁷

The Uzbek law on the state borders states that the Border Guards, renamed the Committee for Protecting the State Border of Uzbekistan, still controls the border troops. The National Security Service provides appropriate intelligence and assists the Committee in operational matters, the Defence Ministry protects the country's air space and the Interior Ministry enforces the special regime in the border area. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs ensures the protection and guarding of the state border through foreign policy in line with international law and is responsible for the legal framework of international agreements on border issues.³⁸

In 1999 Uzbekistan began to reinforce its borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with which it shared the sensitive and easily accessible Ferghana Valley. The demarcation of the Uzbek-Tajik border started in 1999.³⁹ The two countries agreed on 86% of the common border. Three years later, in October 2002, at the Central Asian Cooperation Organization summit, Tajikistan relinquished its rights to Bukhara and Samarkand but there are still minor differences as to the delineation of borders in Tajikistan's Sogd district.⁴⁰ Uzbekistan set up several border stations and police posts, and organized groups of local volunteers in the area bordering Tajikistan.⁴¹ The Tajik side of the border with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan was reinforced in July 2001.⁴²

In 1999, short of personnel, infrastructure and funds, the Uzbeks began to lay mines on what they claimed was their side of the southern border.⁴³ The policy immediately became a controversial issue, because in some areas where the mines were laid, like those in the Sokki and Shakhimardan enclaves at the border with Kyrgyzstan, the border was not delineated.⁴⁴ The mined strips in the two enclaves are 250m wide and have between 2,000-3,000 OZM-72 anti-personnel mines per 1km width.⁴⁵

Three groups of people on both sides of the border oppose the Uzbek landmine policy. The first and the most vocal group has commercial interests in the border areas. This

group includes legitimate traders, relatives separated by the new border as well as smugglers and drug runners whose members and decoys are occasionally killed or injured when they try to cross the border illegally. The second group are those supporting militant Islamic movements whose illegal border crossings have been made difficult by the landmines. The third group are the farmers who have always grazed their livestock close to the border. Some members of this group cross the new borders several times a day to visit their friends and relatives. The Uzbek border minefields have claimed victims among the trespassers from/to all three countries. Between 1999 and 2002, 50 people have reportedly been killed by landmines on the southern Uzbek border.⁴⁶ The number of those killed and injured on the minefields is probably much higher, because the Islamic extremists and drug smugglers usually try to recover their dead or injured colleagues and are not quick to complain, unless it can be done by proxy.

Despite several protestations from Bishkek and Dushanbe, Uzbekistan has no intention of removing the landmines on its side of the border with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Tashkent claims that its land-mining border policy is legal and it has no plans to change it.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan signed a treaty of border delineation and demarcation in November 2001. There were, however, problems with the village of Bagys, inhabited by Kazakhs not happy with their transfer to Uzbekistan. In the Soviet era the village had been officially given to Kazakhstan but a closer scrutiny of the relevant cartographic documents showed that the agricultural land of the village belonged to Uzbekistan.⁴⁷

The Military

The armed forces play only a supporting role in measures taken by the Uzbek authorities against the current threats. The National Security Service and the Interior Ministry are the main suppliers of information relevant to the security of the state - the Uzbek Military Intelligence Service was established in the second half of the last decade. The Ministry of Interior is responsible for combating organized crime. The Ministry of Defence is responsible for the security of Uzbekistan's airspace but its operations are limited to air patrols and fire support in operations against Islamic radicals.

On 14 January 1992 the Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan enacted a transfer of military formations, units, educational establishments and other military structures on Uzbek soil to its own jurisdiction. This was followed by several laws on defence, the military oath, military service, alternative service, the military doctrine and the defence doctrine of the Uzbek Republic. Tashkent had housed the HQ of the USSR's Turkestan Military District and had a lot of hardware and infrastructure.⁴⁸ In addition to armoured and infantry equipment, the disbanded Soviet Union left in Uzbekistan a fighter bomber regiment (39 MiG-27), one military transport regiment (20 AN-12) and several helicopter regiments.⁴⁹ However, all the equipment of the Uzbek power structures, the military schools and frequently the mindset of Uzbek officers was Soviet. As a state, Uzbekistan had no modern military traditions, no neighbours to learn from and a shortage of spare parts for its equipment: Moscow, on the other hand, wanted to be able to control, or at least to influence, the military industrial enterprises, such as the Chkalov aviation complex, based in Uzbekistan and was afraid that the USA would try to step in as a partner, protector and

investor.⁵⁰ At this stage Russia was a natural ally in combating the radical Islamic groups trying to infiltrate the region, the USA was not.

The Russians were on difficult legal ground. Although the USSR was no more and the Russian Armed Forces were established by a presidential decree only on 7 May 1992, the administrative frictions of the two armies were treated in Moscow as teething problems of the CIS. Russia saw the commonwealth as a Warsaw Pact Mark II, a view not shared by Tashkent or other Central Asian capitals. It took several years before politicians and generals in Moscow understood that Russian might in the future become Uzbekistan's larger, but not a senior partner. Having neither border with Uzbekistan nor a large ethnic Russian minority in the country, Moscow could only ask for cooperation, not insist on it.

Uzbekistan originally planned to have 35,000 professional troops in its armed forces and national guard units. This would represent about 50% of the Soviet forces deployed in the region. There were very few Uzbek officers holding important positions in the Soviet Armed Forces. The Uzbek leadership had therefore no choice when it began to promote young Uzbek officers, giving them positions for which they had no formal training or experience.⁵¹ As it had done with the border guards, Uzbekistan made an effort to limit its dependence on Russian military and security schools and academies. The Academy of the Uzbek Armed Forces established by a government decree of 15 August 1994 trains officers for all national power structures, including the State Border Protection Committee and the national Security Service. The Academy has particularly close relations with the German army.⁵²

Financial constraints and shortages of qualified manpower and equipment forced Uzbek planners to postpone major reforms. Adapting the country's forces to new Uzbek realities began in 1999 with the introduction of a new, integrated defence and security system which included the armed forces and internal and border-guard troops. In this context in 2002, President Karimov outlined seven national priorities for Uzbekistan:

- maintaining sovereignty,
- stability and security,
- development of economic reforms and creation of a powerful market infrastructure,
- further development and renewal of Uzbek society,
- creation of civil society,
- legal and judicial reforms,
- social policy.⁵³

The latest military reforms aim to make the Uzbek army "mobile and highly professional". The Armed Forces are to be reduced from the present 65,000 to 52,000-55,000 in 2005, by which time all five military districts are to be fully operational. In September 2002, President Karimov announced that the Uzbek Armed Forces would be made more professional and that the obligatory military service should be reduced from 18 to 12 months.⁵⁴ This reduction should be possible if adjustments are made in the conscription and alternative military service laws, to limit the number of deferments. The number of males reaching military age in Uzbekistan was estimated in 2001 at 275,000⁵⁵ but only 25 to 34% of able bodied young men of conscription age serve in the army, because the conscription system is not enforced consistently.⁵⁶ The modest Uzbek defence budget of approximately \$200 million will not allow the military planners in Tashkent either to modernize or to strengthen the armed forces appreciably, unless Uzbekistan's

new defence partners provide more financial and technical assistance. The special purpose units in all power organizations, including the armed forces, can expect to benefit from the planners' selective generosity and will be treated as test cases for modernization. The army special purpose brigade based in Yunusobod district of Tashkent, for example, received a purpose built, experimental military "housing complex" at Qalqon (Shield).⁵⁷

The CIS Is Dead

As noted above, the military and security relations between Tashkent and Moscow were fraught with difficulties. The CIS might have been an acceptable solution, but from the outset political, military and financial problems began to pile up. The CIS was Moscow-driven and to a large degree Moscow funded. Most of the military and security planning was designed to serve Russia, not the other partners. The common air defence agreement signed in 1995 allowed CIS officers to learn from their Russian colleagues and to work with Russian air defence equipment, but the potential air attacks, which according to Moscow planners could only come from the USA and China, were of little interest to Uzbekistan, one of the original signatories of the 1995 agreement. The committees and subcommittees were good venues to discuss regional foreign policy and defence issues, but as Uzbekistan began to acquire more partners among industrialized nations, its interest in CIS policies and undertakings plummeted.

In January 1999 Islam Karimov sent a letter to a CIS conference criticizing Russia for its foreign policy and its treatment of the CIS in particular. Karimov criticized Russia's attempt "to fight jointly and develop a common policy of struggle against NATO" and mentioned that 70% of all the issues to which the CIS countries had subscribed, but which were not working, had been imposed by Russia. The CIS administration refused to announce the text of his letter to the participants of the meeting.⁵⁸

The Uzbek Foreign Ministry followed up with a statement on 4 February 1999 that the republic intended to withdraw from the CIS Collective Security Treaty, but added that this position did not change Uzbekistan's attitude towards bilateral cooperation with Russia and other CIS countries.⁵⁹ President Karimov announced at the end of March 1999 that Uzbekistan would remain a member of collective security treaty between the members of the CIS, on condition that it resolved its current problems.⁶⁰ In the event, Uzbekistan did not sign the new Collective Security Treaty prepared that year, but it has not cut off all its ties with the organization. Tashkent appears to have officials in some CIS substructures as observers and made its test range at Zhaslyk available for the CIS Combat Commonwealth 2001 exercises.⁶¹

Uzbekistan is no more enthusiastic about other international regional organizations. It failed to attend a GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova) meeting in Baku in July 2001, although the meeting planned to discuss world and regional security and stability.⁶² Uzbekistan suspended its membership of GUUAM in summer 2002 although it was allegedly asked by the USA not to leave the organization.

At the Shanghai Five Summit in Beijing in June 2001, the Presidents of Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan agreed on setting up a regional anti-terrorist centre in Bishkek.⁶³ Returning home from the summit the Uzbek President warned, however, that the organization must not turn into a military

or political bloc and should not conduct any activities against any countries.⁶⁴ Uzbekistan did not send its Defence Minister, Kodir Ghulomov, to the session of the defence ministers of the group, renamed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in May 2002.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, Uzbek officials take part, if only as observers, in most antiterrorist meetings of the three organizations. When it comes to security issues, Islam Karimov is equally uncompromising with his growing number of Western partners. In December 2000, he harshly criticized the West for its inconsistent approach to international terrorism, although no specific countries or international organizations were mentioned.⁶⁶ In October 2002, President Karimov even criticized the UN for its lack of support to ensure stability in Central Asia.⁶⁷

Long Live Bilateralism

The Russian Ministry of Defence analysts were right. The USA is slowly filling in the vacuum left by their departure. US-Uzbek close cooperation took off in 1998 with visits by several senior US civilian and military officials to Uzbekistan.⁶⁸ In October 2000 a group of FBI agents attended a five-day seminar in Tashkent on international crime.⁶⁹ In November 2000, during a visit to the USA, Uzbek defence Minister Ghulomov signed a military cooperation agreement with US Secretary of Defence William S Cohen.⁷⁰ In January 2001, the Border Protection Committee of Uzbekistan received 75 military communications systems, worth a total of \$300,000, from the USA under the Central Asia Security Initiative (CASI) programme.⁷¹ A non-commissioned officer school aiming to train Uzbek NCOs to US standards opened in Chirchik, 30km south of Tashkent, in June 2001.⁷² Also in June 2001, Uzbek and US officials discussed the training of Uzbek pilots.⁷³ A US-Uzbek threat reduction agreement was signed in early June 2001, in the USA, by Colin Powell and Uzbek Foreign Affairs Minister Komilov.⁷⁴

The focus on Central Asia after the 11 September 2001 attacks boosted Uzbekistan's position in Central Asia and on the world stage. A trickle of visitors from the USA turned into a flood. The US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, arrived in Uzbekistan on 5 October 2001 to discuss with President Karimov how to combat international terrorism and improve bilateral cooperation. Uzbekistan agreed to open its airspace for the US military but only for humanitarian purposes.⁷⁵ Two days later Uzbekistan and the USA signed an anti-terrorist cooperation agreement.⁷⁶ Defence Secretary Rumsfeld returned to Tashkent to continue military and security cooperation talks at the beginning of November 2001⁷⁷ and again in mid December, when he met the Uzbek Defence Minister Kadyr Ghulomov at the air force base of Khanabad, to discuss the situation in Afghanistan and further prospects for military cooperation.⁷⁸ The US-Uzbek agreement for temporary use of the Khanabad base by US forces was signed on 7 December 2001; the Americans were also interested in the Navon air base. According to the agreement, the US forces can use Khanabad, which had been used by the Soviet Army and Air Force during their intervention in Afghanistan,⁷⁹ only within the framework of the antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan and only for search and rescue and humanitarian missions. The US asked to be allowed to station combat troops including special forces units there. The request was officially refused. American troops are also stationed at Kokaidy military base.⁸⁰ There are officially 1,500 US military personnel stationed in Uzbekistan. Senators Carl Levin and John Warner visited Uzbekistan in November 2001. Both senators were received by President Karimov to discuss military cooperation and the situation in Afghanistan.⁸¹ Tommy Franks, commander of the US Central Command, also

visited Uzbekistan in November 2001.⁸² He was followed by Secretary of State Colin Powell on his whistle-stop tour of 10 European and Asian countries.⁸³ In the meantime, US biological warfare experts were allowed to inspect the Soviet biological weapons base on Renaissance Island in the Aral Sea.⁸⁴

Chairman of the US Senate Governmental Affairs Committee Joseph Lieberman led a US Senate delegation on a fact finding mission to Uzbekistan in early January 2002.⁸⁵ At the end of January 2002 General Franks revisited Uzbekistan to talk to Kadyr Ghulomov. The USA and Uzbekistan signed a plan for defence cooperation, and the USA increased its allocation for military cooperation with Uzbekistan from \$60m in 2001 to \$160m for 2002.⁸⁶

In February 2002, in Termez, the US gave the Uzbek border guards ancillary workshop equipment worth \$200,000. A further shipment of 60 tonnes of ship construction steel, a diesel powered generator and 15 naval transceivers was to follow. The USA also offered \$3m for training Uzbek law enforcement personnel.⁸⁷ The chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers visited Uzbekistan in February 2002.⁸⁸

David Hobson, a member of the US House of Representatives and head of the Congress Military Construction Committee, led a delegation to Uzbekistan on a five-day visit in March 2002. It was his second visit to Uzbekistan.⁸⁹ US Secretary of State Colin Powell and Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov signed on 12 March, in Washington, a joint declaration of strategic partnership and cooperation.⁹⁰ The agreement included a clause on cooperation on nonproliferation of nuclear weapons and envisaged the transfer of enriched uranium stored in Uzbekistan to Russia.⁹¹ At a meeting with President Karimov, President Bush described Uzbekistan as a strategic partner.⁹² A second US Congress delegation visiting Uzbekistan in March 2002 was led by Richard Shelby, deputy chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, who held talks at the National Security Service and the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations.⁹³ The US ground forces commander General Paul Mikolashek visited Uzbekistan at the beginning of May 2002⁹⁴ and an 11-member US delegation headed by Congressman Curt Weldon, chairman of the Armed Services Procurement Subcommittee, arrived in Tashkent on 27 May.⁹⁵ The US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Lynn Pascoe led another delegation in June 2002 to discuss further cooperation and regional security.⁹⁶ The US Congress then allocated an additional \$3m to help Uzbekistan to combat drug problems.⁹⁷

At the end of June 2002 Uzbek Defence Minister Ghulomov visited the USA where he discussed cooperation between the two countries.⁹⁸ On 11 August 2002, Minister Ghulomov received Major-General (Rt) J D Crouch, US assistant defence secretary for international security policy. During the visit, the Uzbek MOD announced that US military cadets regularly visit Uzbekistan to take part in tactical training exercises.⁹⁹ A team of 10 US experts had begun the previous month to train 31 Uzbek officers how to respond to accidents and attacks involving weapons of mass destruction. The US team was expected to offer the Uzbeks 2,700kg of equipment worth \$270,000.¹⁰⁰ In August 2002 President Karimov once again received General Franks to discuss the situation in Afghanistan.¹⁰¹

In their fight against radicals and smugglers, the USA is the only non-regional partner Tashkent can fully rely on. However, Russia, Turkey and Germany are also interested in defence and security cooperation with Uzbekistan.

In the 1990s, Russian foreign policy in Central Asia was conspicuous by its lack of focus, its short-term planning and the post-colonial arrogance of its implementers. At a meeting with a Russian Federation Council delegation in February 1999, President Karimov said that Russia had no Central Asian policy.¹⁰² But things were changing in Moscow almost as he was making the criticism. In May 1999, when President Karimov visited Moscow he met Vladimir Putin, then head of the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Secretary of the National Security Council, to discuss the issues concerning both countries, including regional security and strengthening military and technical cooperation.¹⁰³ In a TV broadcast in December 1999, the Uzbek president praised Vladimir Putin, not President Boris Yel'tsin, for combating terrorism in the second Chechen war.¹⁰⁴ In March 2001 the Russian parliament ratified a military cooperation agreement with Uzbekistan.¹⁰⁵ Constrained by the second Chechen war, manpower shortages and financial problems, Russia could not match the US' increasing defence and economic assistance to Uzbekistan, but it possessed knowledge of Central Asia and its neighbours that no other country could match. After the September 2001 attacks in the USA, President Vladimir Putin dispatched Secretary of the Russian Security Council Vladimir Rushaylo on a tour around Central Asian capitals. Rushaylo visited Tashkent on 19 September 2001. His main concern was the reported Uzbek willingness to make airspace and territory available for the US anti-Taliban forces, but mutual security concerns were also discussed.¹⁰⁶ Russia could not intimidate Uzbekistan or coerce it do anything it did not want to do. Attempts to pressure Tashkent to modify its foreign or defence alliances would fail. What Moscow could offer was expertise in combating Islamic militants, relevant intelligence information, spare parts for Uzbek military equipment and modern weapons at affordable prices. Its discreet assistance to Tashkent must have been successful because in July 2002 the Russian armed forces newspaper boasted that President Karimov saw Russia as "a security guarantor and a strategic partner".¹⁰⁷ Vladimir Putin confirmed the close security links with Tashkent two months later, in a message to President Karimov on the occasion of the Independence Day of Uzbekistan, saying that relations with Uzbekistan had always been one of the Russian priorities.¹⁰⁸

Of all Uzbekistan's old and new allies Turkey was the quickest and most determined to develop multifaceted cooperation, after Tashkent declared its independence from Moscow. As NATO's only Eurasian member, undergoing rapid modernization, experienced in combating armed radicals, with a large Islamic population but committed to secularism of the state and sharing common language roots, Turkey was Uzbekistan's natural ally. Ankara wanted to increase its influence in the Turkic language area of Central Asia and in contrast with other more affluent states treated Uzbekistan from the beginning as an equal partner.

At a consultation meeting with the Turkish ambassadors accredited to the Central Asian and Caucasian countries, Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem stressed in an opening statement that the two regions "have priority in Turkey's multidimensional foreign policy".¹⁰⁹ Turkey and Uzbekistan signed a treaty of cooperation in May 1996, during the second visit to Uzbekistan of Turkish President Demirel.¹¹⁰ After the explosions in Tashkent, on 16 February 1999 Tashkent and Ankara announced that Turkey would assist the Uzbek investigators. During a single meeting between the presidents of Uzbekistan and Turkey in March 1999, the two leaders signed 46 agreements. Islam Karimov called President Demirel "my dear elder brother Suleyman" and President Demirel emphasized improving military cooperation between the two countries, especially in combating international terrorism.¹¹¹

Yet relations between Tashkent and Ankara have had their difficult moments. In the past, Turkey had been criticized by Uzbekistan for harbouring wanted Uzbek radicals and tolerating their anti-Uzbek activities on its soil.¹¹² Tashkent accepted that Ankara was obliged to respect the wishes of Turkish voters, who supported increasingly popular populist Islamic politicians, but the tolerance with which Chechen radicals are treated in Turkey periodically strains the relations between the two capitals.

These minor disagreements have not prevented Ankara from pursuing a pro-active and consistent Central Asian foreign and economic policy. Resit Umam, the newly appointed Turkish ambassador to Tashkent, announced on 8 February 2001, a day after presenting his credentials to President Karimov, that “any threat to Uzbekistan is a threat to Turkey” and that cooperation in combating international terrorism is a “priority task for each country”.¹¹³ The military and military-technical cooperation between Ankara and Tashkent was strengthened and substantial financial and material aid was given to Uzbekistan during a visit to Uzbekistan of a Turkish military delegation led by the chief of the Turkish General Staff General Hussein Kivrikoglu in March 2002.¹¹⁴

With Turkish politics dominated by democratically elected Islamic politicians, Turkey may be forced to modify its military assistance policy to Uzbekistan and to conduct it more discreetly. Islam Karimov’s secular policies are not dissimilar to those of Kemal Ataturk, but the narrower interests of the recently victorious Islamists in Turkey may force the new government in Ankara to concentrate only on economic cooperation.

The Germans had a head start over their European partners when making contacts in all CIS countries. They had at their disposal their own, “West German” experts but also those from the GDR, together with their slightly dilapidated but very useful networks in Central Asia. Probably bearing in mind the saying that the Uzbeks are the Germans of Central Asia, Germany decided that Uzbekistan was to be its main partner in the area. The German effort was appreciated in Tashkent and by May 1996 Islam Karimov was describing Germany as a priority partner in Europe.¹¹⁵ Defence and security stood high on the cooperation agenda of both countries. Only the USA, Russia and Turkey could match German defence and security assistance to Uzbekistan. Cooperation between the two defence ministries began in 1995,¹¹⁶ and experts from the German Federal Office of Public Security organized several practical anti-terrorist workshops in the 1990s.¹¹⁷ The German Federal Criminal Police representative in Central Asia, Thomas Hausberger, was received by the Minister of Interior Colonel-General Zohirjon Almatov in December 2000, and the German and Uzbek Interior Ministries announced their intention to expand cooperation to fight terrorism, religious extremism and drug trafficking.¹¹⁸

In April 2001, President Karimov received the visiting German President Johannes Rau, Foreign Affairs Minister Joschka Fischer, and Interior Minister Otto Schilly. President Rau noted that Uzbekistan was Germany’s most reliable partner in Central Asia.¹¹⁹ In May 2001, the German Defence Ministry presented its Uzbek counterpart with aid worth DM 500,000 for medical equipment and working clothes.¹²⁰ In August 2001 Brandenburg state Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Joerg Schoenbohm was received by Lieutenant-General Bahodir Matlyubov, an Uzbek deputy interior minister.¹²¹ As part of the anti-Taliban campaign, the first 45 German soldiers arrived in Uzbekistan in January 2002.¹²² In February 2002, during a visit by German Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping, Germany signed an agreement with Uzbekistan to rent the airport of Termez on the Uzbek-Afghan border.¹²³ The Bundeswehr uses the airfield as a transit point en route to Afghanistan.¹²⁴ The Uzbek

Uzbekistan - Old Threats & New Allies

Defence Academy has particularly close relations with the German army and the German organizations combating drug trafficking assist their Uzbek colleagues.¹²⁵ The continuation of German investment in and assistance to Uzbekistan will depend mainly on maintaining the present political stability achieved by Islam Karimov. Its military and security assistance to Tashkent will depend on how sensitive the present left-of-centre government in Berlin will be to possible future criticism of cooperation with its not entirely democratic Central Asian ally.

Uzbekistan has concluded several anti-terrorist cooperation agreements with NATO and EU countries, sometimes on a bilateral basis and sometimes as part of the Partnership for Peace programme. The UK and Turkey plan to assist Uzbekistan in establishing a training centre; Canada is to supply Uzbekistan with equipment for bomb disposal squads and the Netherlands has sent medical equipment and pharmaceuticals to Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan also has formal and informal security agreements with Italy, Austria, Ukraine, India and several Central European countries.¹²⁶

The Uzbeks are trying to build better relationships with states which are seen as tolerating or supporting Islamic extremists or in which the extremists are supported by influential individuals and groups. Prince Sultan Bin-Abd-al-Aziz Al Sa'ud, a deputy prime minister and defence minister of Saudi Arabia, received the ambassador of Uzbekistan to the Saudi Kingdom, Ulughbek Isroilov, in August 2002.¹²⁷ No information concerning the subjects discussed was made public. Since 1998, Tashkent has been critical of Pakistan for tolerating, harbouring and training Islamic militants on its soil. As a result of the anti-terrorist campaign and international pressure put on the countries tolerating or assisting alleged terrorists, Uzbekistan and Pakistan signed an extradition treaty in March 2002.¹²⁸

The Neighbours

Uzbekistan's defence and security cooperation with distant countries is useful. Good relations with its neighbours are vital. Speaking at a meeting of Central Asian states in January 2001, Islam Karimov, stressing the security interdependence of all Central Asian states, said that the stability of Tajikistan was also the stability of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.¹²⁹ This security interdependence has not always been sufficiently appreciated by Dushanbe, Tashkent and Bishkek. In 1993 Uzbekistan helped the Tajiks to suppress the Islamic rebels in the Gorno Badashkhan region. The leader of the failed uprising, Colonel Mahmud Khudoiberdyev, escaped and in November 1998 Tajikistan accused Uzbekistan of harbouring the renegade colonel and allowing him to prepare an attack on northern Tajikistan from Uzbek soil. (He has since died.)¹³⁰ Anti-terrorist cooperation between Tashkent and Dushanbe has improved in recent years but both countries have yet to establish a reliable mechanism to exchange quickly perishable security information. The lack of such a mechanism has been exploited in the past by Moscow, happy to serve as a provider of the security information needed by both governments but giving it a slant beneficial mainly to Russia.

In October 1999 the Uzbeks criticized the Kyrgyz for not sufficiently dynamic attempts to destroy the Islamic militants on their territory. Uzbek concerns were expressed three weeks after the Kyrgyz requested fire support from the Uzbek Air Force in a joint anti-militant operation.¹³¹ Tashkent accused Bishkek of not hunting down the militants with sufficient vigour and allowing them to cross into Uzbekistan.¹³² Bishkek could have argued that the reason why the militants were

forced to flee Kyrgyzstan was its determined military action and that some of the militants came originally from Uzbekistan, but said nothing, at least publicly. The Kyrgyz enjoy more freedom than their neighbours in Uzbekistan and tolerate occasional public veiled support for the Uzbek militants, but not for their own. Tursunbay Bakir Yulu, a member of the Kyrgyz parliament and the leader of the Erkin Party, warned in June 2001 that Uzbekistan should be ready for a military conflict with Islamic radicals. The remedy offered by the Kyrgyz politician might suggest that the warning was more of a threat rather than constructive advice: he suggested that the Islamic clerics should be allowed to solve the regional contradictions themselves.¹³³ On 4 September 2001 the Kyrgyz parliament refused to ratify the treaty on military-technical cooperation with Uzbekistan which the presidents of the two countries signed in January 2001. The Kyrgyz deputies expressed concern about alleged incursions of Uzbek border troops onto Kyrgyz soil, about the minefields placed on their common border in the enclaves of Sokki and Shakhimardan, and about the Uzbek mines occasionally placed on the Kyrgyz side of the border.¹³⁴

The treaty included a clause on joint action against terrorist and religious fanatics. The Kyrgyz tolerance of Uzbek radicals is seen as a deliberate policy to buy peace in their own country. The Uzbeks claim, for example, that Mohammed Solih, the leader of the banned Uzbek party "Birlik", travelled in the past with two legal passports, one of them issued by Kyrgyzstan.¹³⁵ Relations between Tashkent and Bishkek are improving, but in October 2002 Islam Karimov, speaking about security in the region, suggested that some states were still only talking about terrorism and "flirt too long with terrorism".¹³⁶ Relations between the two capitals will not improve as long as the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley remains the main target of Islamic radical groups and the Bishkek anti-terrorist policies are seen in Tashkent as an attempt to buy peace in Kyrgyzstan with inaction. Uzbekistan could argue that Bishkek's more tolerant internal policies are successful only because this is the price the Islamic radicals are willing to pay for being left in relative peace in Kyrgyzstan to plan their campaigns in Uzbekistan. Bishkek in return is entitled to claim that its domestic tolerance works and it is up to Tashkent to provide irrefutable evidence that Islamic groups are conspiring against it on Kyrgyz soil.

The assassination attempt on President Niyazov of Turkmenistan on 25 November 2002 resulted in a witch hunt in its capital, Ashkhabad. The Prosecutor General of Turkmenistan accused Uzbek diplomats accredited to Turkmenistan of helping to organize the attempt on President Niyazov's life. On 19 December Turkmenistan moved a mechanized infantry division near the Turkmen-Uzbek border, more to intimidate the Uzbeks living on the Turkmen side than in anticipation of any hostile actions by the Uzbek army. The Turkmen special services conducted a search of the Uzbek embassy in Ashkhabad, disregarding its diplomatic status and Turkmenistan declared the Uzbek ambassador persona non grata. Neither side was expected to attack the other across the border but directly thereafter Uzbekistan took over the Turkmen part of the Karshi Canal, which supplies water to the Kashka-Darya region in Uzbekistan.¹³⁷ The Uzbek take-over of the canal pre-empted an almost certain attempt by Turkmenistan to cut off the water supply to part of Uzbekistan, but increased the tension between the two countries to the point where both sides have little room for mistakes.

Despite Niyazov's unpredictability, Turkmenistan is unlikely to retaliate with an all-out attack to regain this part of its territory. Turkmenistan would stand no chance against its more powerful northern neighbour, though skirmishing and occasional harassing fire will keep up Turkmen pressure on the Uzbek occupiers. As a result,

however, President Niyazov is more likely to offer support to Uzbek radicals and will certainly use the water supply as a long term weapon. Whatever is the outcome of the present conflict, the Uzbeks must realise that the Turkmen president for life, Niyazov, will neither forgive nor forget the annexation of the Karshi Canal.

At a news conference on 9 September 2002 the presidents of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan announced that they had resolved their differences on the Kazakh-Uzbek border and that they had no disputed issues left. President Nazarbayev even suggested that in the future, facing the existing political and military blocs, Kazakhs and Uzbeks may have to unite in one country. There has been no official Uzbek response to this egregious suggestion, which should probably be considered an expression of friendship and common interest.

The first step in the direction of closer cooperation could be a better synchronisation of the two economies. Kazakhstan's marketization of its economy has left Uzbekistan reaching for standard protectionist measures. Uzbek policemen, customs officers and border guards have begun to drive Uzbeks wanting to travel to Kazakhstan away from the border crossing points to stop them buying cheaper and better goods available in Kazakh shops and in Kazakh markets.¹³⁸

The destruction of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan reduced the threat of a large scale Islamic radicalism, although some parts of Afghanistan may still serve as a potentially fertile ground for radical Islamic groups or as a transit area for outsiders trying to infiltrate Central Asia. The Uzbeks reopened the first border crossing with Afghanistan, a bridge between the Uzbek town of Termez and the Afghan town of Hayraton, on 9 December 2001.¹³⁹ This positive but largely symbolic gesture has however opened a new route to Uzbekistan for drug trafficking. Despite attempts to limit drug production in Afghanistan, the warlords there regard drug production and trafficking as their main source of income. Drug trafficking is not a new phenomenon in Uzbekistan but the Uzbek border guards and law enforcement bodies will have to face this additional challenge brought about by the sudden positive changes in Afghanistan.

The Future

Whilst under control for the time being, militant Islamic groups remain the most important threat to the stability of Uzbekistan. Almost half of the Uzbek population is younger than 20 and only one third of the total population works and pays taxes.¹⁴⁰ Sixty percent of Uzbekistan's population lives in rural communities, with 44% employed in the agricultural sector, mainly in water intensive cotton fields. Uzbekistan's water shortage worsens each year because of the cotton fields and population growth. The shortages and waste of water should force all Central Asian states to adopt a programme of water management. If it wants to avoid a major economic slump, Tashkent has to lead the way in this in Central Asia. Uzbekistan uses 60% of the water in the region and 99% of its farm produce is grown on irrigated lands.¹⁴¹ Any refusal by its neighbours to cooperate could provoke tension, even leading to military conflicts if Tashkent feels that its livelihood is threatened. These are likely to remain brief and localised in nature, however.

President Karimov would like to industrialize Uzbekistan along a Turkish model based on a strong national tradition and Islam. This could prove to be a risky strategy. He may even be Central Asia's political Kemal Ataturk, but the Uzbek national and martial traditions are not as clearly defined as those of Turkey. Uzbekistan can only

envy Turkey its geographic position and the disciplined Turkish army which saved the country on several occasions from corrupt politicians and political and religious zealots. Uzbekistan's protectionist economic policy could provoke a certain degree of economic isolation or late, rushed marketization, both of which would result in economic hardship for the poorest stratum of Uzbek society and provide, once again, fertile ground for the Islamic radicals, especially in the Ferghana Valley. To keep the valley clear of militants Uzbekistan needs the cooperation of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. This is particularly important now that Tashkent is obliged to turn the attention of its power structures to its border with Turkmenistan. If one or more countries refuse to cooperate in anti-militant campaigns, the Uzbek forces may find themselves stretched and in need of international support, which they would most probably get, regardless of tensions this would create in the region.

A long term anti-drug war is the task the Central Asian law enforcement agencies and security services will have to be ready to conduct, irrespective of their other duties. Between 1994 and 2000 Uzbekistan destroyed 33 tonnes of drugs, not much considering that over 5,000 tonnes were grown in Afghanistan in 1999 alone.¹⁴² Another attractive source of income for smugglers is radioactive material. In May 1999 the Uzbek security services arrested an Uzbek national trying to smuggle radioactive plutonium on a flight to the United Arab Emirates.¹⁴³ In April 2000 the Uzbeks intercepted radioactive material packed in 10 lead containers. The consignment was transported from Kazakhstan in an Iranian vehicle being driven by an Iranian national to Pakistan.¹⁴⁴ However, it seems that the Uzbek authorities, with international help, have been able to eliminate radioactive smuggling, at least for now. The commitment of the Western nations to combat drug trafficking and assist drug producing and transit countries in their struggle against drug producers and traffickers is limited; profits offered by drug cartels to individuals and groups at the lower end of the income scale in the still underdeveloped regions is too tempting. In its effort to combat drug trafficking to and through Uzbekistan Tashkent has received, and will continue to receive substantial foreign assistance, mainly from economically developed democracies. Combating the drug business may become the most important task for the power structures of Uzbekistan if they succeed in suppressing the threat of Islamic radicalism. Their tasks will be made easier by Islam Karimov's uncontested position on the Uzbek political stage. Political strongmen not hindered by the niceties of liberal democratic legal systems are able to fight the drug-business better than their democratic allies if they are determined to do so.

However, to cope with the present and the future problems Islam Karimov will have to reform, modernize and invest in the National Security Service and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Both organizations have gone through only minor reforms since 1991.¹⁴⁵ With new tasks, and operating in the "post 9/11" world, they will have to be operationally compatible with their neighbours and allies. The stability of Uzbekistan depends on them. In prioritising stability, as President Karimov has done, democracy will have to take second place. This situation is likely to persist, as the parties opposing Islam Karimov do not offer viable programmes and their occasional calls for democratization usually serve their own less than democratic interests. President Karimov's complete domination of Uzbek political life could produce a devastating political and social vacuum after his departure. With any opposition suppressed, he would certainly be elected in the next presidential election in 2005 and could lead the country well into the second decade of the 21st century. However, with his 64th birthday approaching, the question about post-Karimov's Uzbekistan will be asked with increasing frequency. Although more sober, younger, healthier, better organized and more in control of his country than Boris Yelt'sin ever was, Islam Karimov may have to start to look for his Vladimir Putin.

ENDNOTES

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