

Uzbekistan: Stagnation and Uncertainty

I. OVERVIEW

Uzbekistan remains a serious risk to itself and its region. While 69-year-old President Islam Karimov shows no signs of relinquishing power, despite the end of his legal term of office more than half a year ago, his eventual departure may lead to a violent power struggle. The economy remains tightly controlled, with regime stalwarts, including the security services and Karimov's daughter Gulnora, exerting excessive influence, which drives away investors and exacerbates poverty. The human rights situation is grave, and those who seek to flee abroad live in constant danger of attempts to return them forcibly. While the government cites the "war on terror" to justify many policies, its repression may in fact be creating greater future danger. Efforts at international engagement have been stymied by its refusal to reform and to allow an independent investigation of the May 2005 Andijon uprising. Little can be done presently to influence Tashkent but it is important to help ordinary Uzbeks as much as possible and to assist the country's neighbours build their capacity to cope with the instability that is likely to develop when Karimov goes.

According to the law, Karimov's latest seven-year presidential term expired in January 2007, a date which passed largely unnoticed. Speculation about who will ultimately succeed Karimov continues, though there is no clear front-runner. While Turkmenistan managed a peaceful transition following the death of President Saparmurat Niyazov in December 2006, there are reasons to be concerned that Karimov's departure may lead to serious instability, with potentially grave consequences for the region as a whole.

The economy remains heavily dependent on the export of cotton, gold and natural gas, all commodities largely controlled by the regime and its allies, who reap considerable profits while the population at large faces serious hardship. Gulnora Karimova has reportedly been particularly ruthless in her drive to increase her financial empire. Millions of rural citizens have turned to shuttle trading or sought jobs outside the country to get by, with the latter group sending large remittances, although government interference may be increasing in these areas as well. Even major Russian and Chinese investors interested in Uzbekistan's energy industry face serious obstacles to doing business.

Despite the release of two recently convicted human rights activists, the overall situation has changed little. Regime critics are severely persecuted. Hundreds of citizens have fled abroad, and some of those in Russia or Kyrgyzstan have faced harassment and intimidation from local and Uzbek security services. There have also been a number of cases of illegal deportation. Religious freedoms are severely curtailed: members of "non-traditional" sects encounter harassment and arrest, and devout Muslims run the risk of being branded extremists or terrorists. Civil society and the independent media have been almost wiped out, while journalists working for foreign news services face threats and persecution.

The government regularly cites the dangers posed by radical Islamist groups, particularly Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) to justify such policies. Despite occasional outbreaks of violence in the region in recent years, however, there is no clear evidence the IMU poses a direct threat to it. However, if the regime continues its repressive policies, support for radicalism may well grow.

The suppression of an uprising in Andijon in May 2005 was a turning point. Hundreds – if not more – of civilians are believed to have been killed. Alone among world powers, the EU imposed limited sanctions and has continued to uphold them, albeit in progressively weaker forms, most recently in May 2007. Repeated efforts by the EU, and particularly Germany, to promote renewed engagement with the Uzbek authorities has evoked only token gestures. Relations with the U.S. are at an all-time low. Even ties with Russia, which supported Karimov over Andijon, show signs of strain. Despite Karimov's desire to retain foreign policy options not to be an international pariah, his regime has done little to improve relations with any of its foreign interlocutors.

II. THE DOMESTIC SITUATION

Of the five Central Asian states, Uzbekistan is probably at greatest risk for eventual instability.¹ More than anything,

¹ For previous reporting on Uzbekistan, see Crisis Group Asia Briefings N°54, *Uzbekistan: Europe's Sanctions Matter*, 6 November 2006; N°45, *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul*, 16

President Karimov's economic record has angered the population of over 26 million. Ineffective policies and corruption have led to grinding poverty for most. Matters came to a head in May 2005 in the eastern city of Andijon,² when the trial of 23 influential local businessmen accused of Islamic radicalism ended in a jailbreak and an armed uprising, followed by a massive demonstration in the town centre at which citizens expressed grievances. Government forces opened fire on the crowd with high-calibre weapons mounted on armoured vehicles, killing hundreds – if not more – of mostly unarmed civilians.³ Since then the regime has made cosmetic changes to appease Western critics (particularly the EU,⁴ which imposed limited sanctions), while continuing to crush dissent.

In the past two years, Crisis Group, like many Western organisations and critical academics, has had increasing difficulty in obtaining direct information from Uzbekistan. As a consequence, this briefing is not able to provide a full assessment of the situation on the ground, the private moods of the business and political elites or the full extent to which government rhetoric and the reporting of international organisations about economic progress diverge from everyday reality. It is based on published reports and interviews with people who have recently left the country. For security reasons, most of the latter cannot be named. Nonetheless, despite the difficulty of obtaining reliable information, certain trends are reasonably clear:

- A crisis of authority is building. Karimov's legitimacy is potentially open to challenge, and

February 2006; and N°38, *Uzbekistan: The Andijon Uprising*, 25 May 2005; and Crisis Group Asia Reports N°76, *The Failure of Reform in Uzbekistan: Ways Forward for the International Community*, 11 March 2004; N°46, *Uzbekistan's Reform Program: Illusion or Reality*, 18 February 2003; and N°21, *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression And Instability*, 21 August 2001.

² The international media use various spellings, including "Andizhan" and "Andijan". Crisis Group uses "Andijon", which most accurately reflects the name in Uzbek.

³ For more information, see Crisis Group Briefing, *The Andijon Uprising*, op. cit.; also "Preliminary Findings on the Events in Andijan, 13 May 2005", Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), 20 June 2005, available at www.osce.org; "Report of the Mission to Kyrgyzstan by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) concerning the killings in Andijan, Uzbekistan of 13-14 May 2005", UN OHCHR, 12 July 2005; and "Bullets were falling like rain": The Andijan Massacre, 13-14 May, 2005", Human Rights Watch, June 2005, available at <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/uzbekistan0605/>.

⁴ For more on EU policy in Central Asia, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°113, *Central Asia: What Role for the European Union*, 10 April 2006.

there is a growing likelihood of a serious, potentially violent struggle for power once he departs.

- The economy depends heavily on export commodities; powerful elites use whatever means are necessary to control key sectors and continue to make foreign investment extremely difficult.
- Despite token gestures to its Western critics, the Karimov regime continues to persecute human rights activists, journalists and members of the political opposition. Uzbeks who have fled abroad face the constant threat of forced and illegal repatriation.
- The government, while not wishing to be treated like a pariah and obviously not wholly comfortable with the current state of its international relations, continues to resist Western efforts at engagement, frustrating many of its current or potential foreign supporters.

A. THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

The political scene is full of uncertainty. The apparent public apathy reflects a pervasive fear and sense of hopelessness. According to the constitution, Karimov's presidential term expired on 22 January 2007, seven years after his last inauguration. The law states that a new presidential election can only be held in December of the year the term expires, which means that if it were to be followed, the country would be without a president for eleven months. This has hardly been commented upon outside Uzbekistan, and not at all – at least publicly – inside the country. Karimov seems to have chosen to ignore the inconvenient fact. Early speculation that he might change the law to extend his term or even step aside for a pliant successor, while maintaining most of his power behind the scenes,⁵ now seems highly improbable. Still, his plans are unclear; the law requires that a presidential campaign be announced six months in advance but that date, for a December 2007 election, has passed. Some now wonder if Karimov will even bother with the formality of an official election.

There have been rumours for years about Karimov's health and speculation about a successor. Daughter Gulnora, National Security Service chief Rustam Inoyatov, Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Rustam Azimov and Moscow-

⁵ On 5 March 2007 the lower house of parliament passed a law on the roles of political parties and parliament that some felt might foreshadow a symbolic restructuring, with Karimov switching from president to prime minister in a new system under which that office would have the most power. For more on this, see "Will Uzbek Leader Become Prime Minister?", BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union, 12 March 2007.

based oligarch Alisher Usmonov are thought to be possibilities, but there is no front-runner. Indeed, many of these have compelling reasons not to seek the job. Inoyatov is considered unlikely to make an outright power bid, though he might play an important role behind the scenes. It is difficult to imagine Usmonov, one of the wealthiest businessmen in Russia, leaving his comfortable Moscow life, although some see him using his wealth and political ties in Russia to act as a post-Karimov power broker. Gulnora Karimova, whom many are inclined to see as the most likely choice, would come with considerable baggage: her at times ruthless quest for riches and political power may have earned her powerful enemies. The only scenario that would guarantee the family's safety is one in which President Karimov hangs on to power as long as possible.

Karimov is thought to rely most heavily on the security services – the ministry of internal affairs (MIA) and the National Security Service (usually known by its Russian initials, SNB) – to retain power. An uneasy balance formerly existed between the two but in the wake of Andijon, the SNB has emerged as the dominant force.

All this raises the question of what will happen once the inevitable occurs. Some point to the peaceful transition in the wake of the death of former Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov as an indication that Karimov's departure may not lead to serious instability. Indeed, Turkmenistan's transition has been peaceful so far, and the country has even taken first, uncertain steps towards at least social and educational reform.⁶ Uzbekistan, however, is a different situation. The Turkmen population had mostly made its peace with life under Niyazov; in Uzbekistan, resentment remains, though currently held in check by the shock of Andijon and the pervasive security services. Uzbekistan, unlike Turkmenistan, is home to a radical Islamist underground; while this may not pose a serious present challenge to the regime, instability could prove to be a galvanising factor. Uzbekistan also has powerful political and economic actors outside government who may be tempted to make their own bids for power. In sum, there is serious concern for profound instability, even violence, after Karimov, which could have disastrous consequences for neighbours.

B. THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Macro-Economics. Uzbekistan has a per capita GDP of \$1,673, one quarter that of Turkmenistan's. Per capita GDP has not declined sharply in recent years, and the infant mortality rate compares favourably to Turkmenistan's, but the economy is in extremely poor

shape, with gas revenues and gold and cotton exports propping up a regime following an unsustainable path.⁷ The economy is still largely state-run, in part because that facilitates control, but there is little potential for the growth necessary to lift citizens out of grinding poverty. There is a huge waste of human resources, with professionals reduced to menial work.⁸ At least 10 per cent of the labour force works abroad.⁹ That so many Uzbeks are willing to do so, often in very harsh circumstances, reveals the desperate conditions now common in the country.¹⁰ Health expenditures per capita are \$159, compared with \$221 in Turkmenistan, a level of spending inadequate to achieve decent health and wellness.

The budget is nearly as opaque as that of Turkmenistan. While the government discloses size and spending by area, only broad revenue categories are known. In 2005, the most recent year for which the International Monetary Fund has data, 60 per cent of total expenditure (32 per cent of GDP), was for the social safety net, including health and education. "Public authorities" accounted for less than 2 per cent.¹¹ This does not fit with the everyday reality of well-funded security forces and state doctors who are paid poverty wages. In March 2006 the World Bank stopped making new loans because of concerns the money would be misspent. Limited lending was restored four months later, after the government committed to reform, but the Bank's new interim arrangement focuses mostly on technical and analytical support.¹²

⁷ Crisis Group interview, London, 18 October 2006.

⁸ A former senior Western diplomat relates that his embassy's doormen were all highly trained surgeons but salaries for doctors were so low that their menial job was more lucrative. Crisis Group interview, London, 18 October 2006.

⁹ The exact numbers in Kazakhstan are not known, but up to a million Uzbeks are currently thought to be working illegally there. For comparison, the size of the official labour force is 7.9 million. Crisis Group interviews, Almaty, October 2006, and 2007 CIA World Factbook. Some 2.5 million Uzbek migrants are in Russia, according to Russia's Federal Migration Service.

¹⁰ Ilan Greenberg, "Central Asians Chase Jobs, and Endure Exploitation", *The New York Times*, 15 May 2007; "The Cost of Dying Abroad for Central Asians", Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), *Reporting Central Asia*, 28 May 2007.

¹¹ "Republic of Uzbekistan: 2006 Article IV Consultation – Staff Report", IMF Country Report no. 07/133, March 2007.

¹² "World Bank to Resume Some Funding to Uzbekistan", Reuters, 27 July 2006. The World Bank never admitted that the cut-off was part of President Paul Wolfowitz's anti-corruption campaign; Wolfowitz has been accused by some critics of picking out Uzbekistan from many corrupt countries that the Bank deals with as retribution for closure of the U.S. air base there. Steven R. Weisman, "Turmoil Grows for Wolfowitz at World Bank", *The New York Times*, 13 April 2007.

⁶ See Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°60, *Turkmenistan after Niyazov*, 12 February 2007.

The government has announced tax cuts, mainly for business, to stimulate the economy. These include the oil and gas sector, indicating difficulty in attracting investment despite high global prices. The cuts make it unlikely the government can keep its promise to hold the budget deficit to about 1 per cent of GDP, despite increased export commodity prices and import tariffs, unless significant off-budget spending continues. The best that can be said about commodity exports is that some money filters into the general revenue stream and helps preserve modest welfare and pension payments.¹³

Cotton, one of Uzbekistan's most important export commodities,¹⁴ is planted, grown and harvested in a system that pays farmers – whose numbers are supplemented by schoolchildren, university students, medical professionals and state employees driven en masse out to the fields every year – little or nothing in return for their labour. Local administrators, whose political survival depends upon meeting production targets, resort to a variety of harsh measures, including physical violence, to see that quotas are filled. Export revenue is often diverted into offshore accounts or circulates among companies presided over by a small elite, with only a tiny fraction – the exact amount is unknown – eventually making its way into the budget. The SNB and its allies are thought to reap the lion's share of the profits.¹⁵

Energy. A second major source of income for the regime is the export of natural gas.¹⁶ Uzbekistan ranks seventeenth worldwide in gas reserves,¹⁷ although there is scepticism as to how much is actually in the ground; a thorough, independent appraisal has never been done and government-controlled Uzbekneftegaz has reason to exaggerate reserves and production to attract investment.¹⁸ Most gas fields are in Bukhara and Qashqadaryo provinces and the Ustyurt plateau, in the severely impoverished Autonomous Republic of Qaraqalpaqistan¹⁹ in the west.

¹³ Crisis Group interview, London, 18 October 2006.

¹⁴ In 2005, Uzbekistan exported \$1.03 billion of cotton fibre, roughly 21 per cent of its total exports. "Uzbekistan at a Glance", The World Bank, at http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/uzb_aag.pdf. According to IMF estimates, cotton exports totalled just over \$1 billion in 2006 and are expected to be some \$1.1 billion in 2007. IMF Country Report, op. cit.

¹⁵ See Crisis Group Asia Report N°93, *The Curse of Cotton: Central Asia's Destructive Monoculture*, 28 February 2005. Elyor Ghaniyev, Uzbekistan's foreign minister and a former senior SNB officer, is thought to play a pivotal role in the cotton industry.

¹⁶ For more on this issue, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°133, *Central Asia's Energy Risks*, 24 May 2007.

¹⁷ *Oil and Gas Journal*, 1 January 2007 estimate.

¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, London, 18 October 2006.

¹⁹ The Autonomous Republic of Qaraqalpaqistan (also known as Karakalpakstan) is in the west of Uzbekistan. Its autonomy is

The gas sector is mismanaged and deteriorating.²⁰ The transport and distribution system began breaking down in the late 1990s, when an estimated twenty billion cubic metres (Bcm) per year was lost.²¹ Since then it has received little investment. Recently the government began charging for domestic gas sales in order to increase availability for export. Yet how much it exports and exactly how much it earns is difficult to determine.²² Previously, Karimov was believed to use the revenues to control or placate the MIA. Former Uzbekneftegaz director and deputy minister of internal affairs Abdusalom Azizov was recently demoted, however, and replaced by Nurmuhhammad Ahmadov, a long-standing professional from the gas sector. Some see this as part of an effort to professionalise and reform the decrepit industry but it may also be yet another sign of the ministry's fall from grace since Andijon.

Uzbekistan has been keen to attract foreign investment in gas and oil, particularly from China and Russia. Yet even as it enjoys closer-than-ever relations with both, it seems reluctant to open its markets to them. The government has accused Gazprom of not living up to promises of \$300 million in investment, for which some Russian officials blame the Uzbeks. In April 2007,

in name only, a holdover from Soviet days, when administrative boundaries in some areas were – at least nominally – drawn up along ethnic lines. Ethnic Qaraqalpaqs, most of the territory's population, speak a language very similar to Kazakh, which has enabled many to migrate across the border to Kazakhstan, some as temporary labour migrants. The region's deep poverty is worsened by the desiccation of the Aral Sea, the result of decades of irrational water use, which has lost much of its original area, leaving behind a toxic, salinified wasteland and disastrous ecological, economic and public health consequences. See Crisis Group Report, *The Curse of Cotton*, op. cit.; also "Karakalpakstan: A Population in Danger", Médecins sans Frontières, at www.msf.org/source/countries/asia/aralsea/2003/karakalpakstan/complete.pdf.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, London, 23 November 2006.

²¹ Sources indicate that the Russian company Itera – which imports gas for Gazprom – was only able to obtain about 1.5 Bcm of gas in recent years. Crisis Group interview, London, 23 November 2006. Reportedly, Russian purchases of Uzbek gas totalled around 5 Bcm in recent years. "Uzbekistan President, Russia Minister Discuss Economic Cooperation", ITAR-TASS World Service, 10 May 2007. This is considerably less than the 9 Bcm of Uzbek exports to Russia usually referred to in the press.

²² In Uzbekistan, as in neighbouring Turkmenistan, state budgets are not trustworthy. Significant revenues and spending are off-budget. The IMF has some recent statistics, though it admits their quality is not good. They indicate energy exports in 2006 were estimated at \$810 million and energy imports at \$268 million, for net export revenues of \$542 million. Using this estimate and the IMF's nominal GDP estimate of \$16.04 billion, energy exports (nearly exclusively gas) are about 3.4 per cent of GDP. IMF Country Report, op. cit.

the Chinese company Sinopec withdrew from a \$110 million oil exploration deal signed in 2005, citing highly unfavourable terms.²³

Uzbek officials also try to attract U.S. money. On 27 June 2007, the American-Uzbek Chamber of Commerce (AUCC) held its annual conference in Washington DC, with officials, including Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Alisher Shaykhov, urging businessmen to consider Uzbekistan for investment. Despite glowingly optimistic presentations, many potential investors seemed unimpressed; in a private conversation, a senior executive said, “no U.S. company would ever agree to invest in Uzbekistan” due to excessive government involvement in many key industries and prohibitively high taxes.²⁴

The Karimov Family Business. A major obstacle to foreign investment is the involvement of powerful state actors in most spheres of economic life. Though the company denies it, Gulnora Karimova, the president’s daughter, is reputed to be a major participant in Zeromax GmbH, a Swiss-registered company which owns Uzgazoil and has oil and gas joint ventures, including with Uzbekneftegaz. Its holdings in Uzbekistan are worth about \$400 million.²⁵ In February 2007 it was reported that Gazprom had agreed to purchase a controlling 51 per cent stake in Zeromax, though details were not disclosed.²⁶ If it goes through, the deal would appear to cement Gazprom’s status as the dominant foreign player in the gas sector.²⁷

Zeromax is also involved in fields as diverse as textiles, beverages and mining, particularly gold mining. Uzbekistan is one of the world’s top ten gold producers. In 2006, according to IMF estimates, gold exports totalled \$1.4 billion, with \$1.5 billion in exports expected in 2007.²⁸ Where this money goes is a secret but there have been

allegations that a portion forms the principal source of the Karimov family’s personal fortune.²⁹ The government has moved to tighten its hold over this resource by exerting pressure on foreign mining companies.³⁰ Most recently, the UK-based Oxus Gold company preserved its right to operate in Uzbekistan only by selling some 16 per cent of its shares in the Amantaytau goldfields joint venture to Zeromax.³¹ Zeromax and its rumoured connections with Karimova have been receiving increased attention in the Western press. An article in *Harper’s* magazine identified it as among the clients of GlobalOptions, a security and investigations firm based in Washington DC.³²

A subsequent *Harper’s* article detailed a lawsuit filed by a Texas-based tea company, Interspan, against its insurer, Liberty, for refusal to pay out on extortion and kidnap coverage after Interspan was forced to shut its operations in Uzbekistan. Interspan had apparently cornered as much as 30 per cent of Uzbekistan’s packaged tea market, which seems to have angered local rivals. The lawsuit asserts in detail that local employees of Interspan and their relatives were threatened and kidnapped and much of their and the company’s assets seized by members of the military, the secret services and other government agencies.³³ Interspan claims Karimova was behind their employees’ problems:

Interspan was advised that this extortion scheme was orchestrated by individuals with ties to the highest levels of the Uzbek government, including Gulnara Karimova – the daughter of Uzbekistan’s president – and her business associates. Consistent with the widely reported corruption within the government, Ms. Karimova is reported to exercise control over many governmental entities, including the police, portions of the military, and even prosecutors and courts. Ms. Karimova is widely-reported to use such governmental entities illegally

²³ “Uzbekistan looks to diversify its energy options”, *Eurasianet*, 6 June 2007.

²⁴ Crisis Group observations and discussion, AUCC conference, Washington DC, 27 June 2007.

²⁵ Officially, Karimova is not affiliated with the company. In an interview with the Uzbek service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Zeromax’s executive director, Mirodil Jalolov, called rumours that Zeromax was linked with Karimova “slander”. Alisher Siddiq, “‘Zeromaks’ aktsiyalari ‘Gazprom’ga sotiladi” [Zeromax’s shares will be sold to Gazprom], *Ozodlik*, 13 February 2007. See also “Gazprom Intending to Purchase Oil and Gas Assets of Zeromax in Uzbekistan”, SKRIN Newswire, 2 February 2007. \$400 million is substantial in an economy with an annual GDP of \$13.1 billion (nominal, market exchange rates).

²⁶ “Gazprom Uzbek Deal”, *World Gas Intelligence*, 14 February 2007.

²⁷ It also would seem to indicate the continuing powerful role of Alisher Usmonov in Uzbekistan.

²⁸ IMF Country Report, op. cit.

²⁹ For example, in a November 2004 Chatham House speech, former UK Ambassador Craig Murray stated that money from gold sales goes directly to the ministry of finance, with 10 per cent diverted into Karimov’s personal accounts. Murray’s address is available at http://archive.muslimuzbekistan.com/eng/enews/2004/11/enews09112004_1.html.

³⁰ In October 2006 the U.S.-based Newmont Mining company was ordered to shut down its operations in the Muruntau goldfields joint venture after refusing to pay retroactive charges stemming from the sudden revocation of its tax privileges. See Crisis Group Briefing, *Europe’s Sanctions Matter*, op. cit.

³¹ “UK gold company yields to Uzbekistan to preserve its license”, BBC Monitoring, 11 December 2006.

³² The article called GlobalOptions “Princess Gulnara’s escort to the Washington Ball”. Ken Silverstein, “Washington Insiders Lend Helping Hand to ‘Princess of Uzbeks’”, *Harper’s Magazine*, 11 May 2007, available at www.harpers.org.

³³ Ken Silverstein, “One lump or two? Uzbek dictator’s daughter wipes out competing tea firm with ‘brain’ and ‘muscle’”, *Harper’s Magazine*, 6 June 2007, available at www.harpers.org.

to force profitable businesses either to partner with her on terms very unfavourable to the business or to surrender the business' assets to her altogether so that she can personally enrich herself.

Ms. Karimova's tactics have been reported to include various methods of extortion, such as illegally using various governmental entities and agents to threaten employees and principals of such businesses with bodily injury, including the use of kidnapping, incarcerations, malicious prosecutions on trumped-up charges, sham trials, torture, sexual assaults, and possibly death, among other things.³⁴

The lawsuit claims the insurer's agent in Uzbekistan repeatedly indicated to the company that Karimova and her allies – allegedly including Zeromax – had interests in rival tea distributors, and that, at their behest, authorities sought to concoct a variety of charges against Interspan employees, from drug trafficking to funding the Andijon uprising, all in an attempt to drive them out of business. It is asserted that Eskender Kiamilev, the father of one of Interspan's two principals, Emil Kiamilev, was detained by security services in February 2006 and threatened with imprisonment, and Mikhail Matkarimov, the brother-in-law of Interspan's other principal, Eric Johnson, was convicted in August 2006, after months of illegal detention and torture, on charges including grand theft, illegal sale of goods through the black market, trading in contraband and involvement in a criminal organisation. As a result, the lawsuit claims, Interspan agreed to surrender its business interests, and the assets "were ultimately taken over by companies reported to be controlled by Gulnara Karimova and her business associates".³⁵

According to Interspan, "the companies that Ms. Karimova owns or controls presently control 67 per cent of the Uzbek packaged tea market. This is up from the approximately 2 per cent her companies were believed to control prior to the actions she directed against Interspan".³⁶

Involvement of presidential family members in political and economic life is the bane of most Central Asian countries and in many cases a potential threat to stability.³⁷

³⁴ Text of Interspan's complaint of breach of contract against Liberty Insurance Underwriters, available at www.harpers.org/media/pdf/UzbekTea.pdf.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ There is strong evidence to suggest that countries with abundant natural resources have a higher risk of conflict. According to Bannon and Collier, at the turn of the century, nearly 50 active armed conflicts "had a strong link to natural resource exploitation, in which either licit or illicit exploitation helped to trigger, intensify, or sustain a violent conflict". Collier states that countries in which around a quarter of GDP results from natural resource exports (like Uzbekistan) are acutely at

Anger over the growing influence of his relatives was a major factor behind the ouster of Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev in March 2005.³⁸ Fears that Maksim Bakiyev, the son of the current president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, has become that country's *éminence grise* were a factor in opposition demonstrations in 2006 and 2007.³⁹ Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev's former son-in-law, Rakhat Aliyev – once deputy foreign minister and seen, with his ex-wife Darigha Nazarbayeva, as a major political figure – faces criminal charges and has sought refuge in Austria.⁴⁰ Yet the degree to which Karimova appears to have embedded herself and her allies in Uzbekistan's economy far exceeds that of her regional counterparts. As long as she and other regime allies can act with impunity, incremental reforms can do little to improve the situation. Moreover, the intense enmity she has earned raises the question of stability once her father departs the scene.

Poverty and Survival. Ordinary Uzbeks have ever fewer options. Many, especially women in border regions, turn to shuttle trading, particularly in the densely populated Ferghana Valley. Kyrgyzstan's wholesale markets, such as the gigantic Karasuu bazaar in Osh province, are stocked with cheap consumer goods that provide income for large numbers of traders across Central Asia. Increasingly, the Uzbek government has sought to bring this last largely unregulated sector under its control, tightening restrictions on shuttle traders and bazaar sellers. Anger had begun to spill over before Andijon; in fact, that uprising was followed by a smaller one in the border town of Qorasuv, where residents drove out the local government and rebuilt a bridge across the Shahrikhansay River linking them to Karasuu and its market on the Kyrgyz side. Though the uprising was put down, the bridge remained open for a

risk of civil conflict. For a more detailed discussion, see Ian Bannon and Paul Collier (ed.), *Natural Resources and Violent Conflict: Options and Actions* (Washington DC, The World Bank, 2003), and Paul Collier, *Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy* (Washington DC, The World Bank, 2001).

³⁸ For more on this, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°85, *Political Transition in Kyrgyzstan: Problems and Prospects*, 4 November 2004, and Asia Report N°97, *Kyrgyzstan after the Revolution*, 4 May 2005.

³⁹ See Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°55, *Kyrgyzstan on the Edge*, 9 November 2006. Maksim Bakiyev denies the rumours. Crisis Group interview, Bishkek, April 2007.

⁴⁰ Among the charges Aliyev faces are the kidnapping in early 2007 of two senior employees of a bank in which he and Nazarbayeva had significant interests; a request for his extradition from Austria has been denied. Aliyev has claimed that the charges are politically motivated. Nazarbayeva has suffered for her former husband's alleged misdeeds; her political party (Asar) has been absorbed into her father's Nur-Otan party, and her name has been dropped from the candidate list in the approaching parliamentary elections.

time, with 30,000-40,000 crossings daily.⁴¹ But it has again been closed, forcing traders to make a wide detour to an official border crossing or risk their lives on the river illegally.

For more and more men, the option is to leave for jobs in Kazakhstan or Russia. Most work illegally, under constant threat of deportation and with little or no recourse in the event of abuse or exploitation (including human trafficking and slavery). They are often the victims of racist violence. As Uzbekistan has been extremely reluctant to acknowledge the phenomenon – to do so would indicate all is not well at home – estimates of the numbers working abroad vary from the hundreds of thousands to well over a million; nor is it known how much money is remitted, though there are indications the amount is very significant.⁴² The government recently announced its intention to regulate labour migration and reach a bilateral agreement with Russia but what exactly this would entail – greater opportunity for labour migrants or increased restrictions – is unclear.⁴³

In July 2007 the government said it would raise the national minimum monthly salary to 15,525 soms (roughly \$12) as of 1 August. Those whose salaries come from state-funded institutions also saw a slight rise, with doctors now receiving the equivalent of just over \$100 per month and teachers receiving around \$90. Pensions and stipends to students and the disabled were likewise increased. Karimov has stated that this is part of a plan to increase salaries 2.5-fold across the board by 2010.⁴⁴ At the same time, there are reports that bread and meat prices in Tashkent markets have risen, the former by 20 per cent, and that the cost of fuel and public transport has increased sharply.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, Osh, July 2007.

⁴² According to one report, 1.3 billion roubles (roughly \$50 million) in remittances were sent to Uzbekistan in 2006. "Remittances by labour migrants support economy", *New Europe*, 23 June 2007, at www.neurope.eu/view_news.php?id=75380. Another, citing the Russian Central Bank, stated that remittances totalled \$210 million in the second quarter of 2006 alone. *CACI Analyst*, 30 August 2006, www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4156. In Tajikistan, where labour migration is also a vital economic lifeline for millions of rural citizens, an estimated \$1 billion in remittances entered the country through the banking system alone in 2006. Crisis Group interviews, Dushanbe, 4-11 July 2007.

⁴³ See "Uzbekistan: komu vygodny novye mery vlastei po kontroliu za trudovoi migratsiei?" [Uzbekistan: Who benefits from the measures by the authorities to control labour migration?], *Ferghana.ru*, 2 July 2007.

⁴⁴ "Uzbekistan: Prezident uvelichil razmer minimal'noi zarabotnoi platy do 12 dollarov v mesyats" [Uzbekistan: The president has raised the minimum salary to twelve dollars per month], *Ferghana.ru*, 11 July 2007.

⁴⁵ "Uzbekistan: posle povysheniia zarplat biudzhetikov srazu

C. HUMAN RIGHTS

Uzbekistan has one of the worst human rights records in the former Soviet Union.⁴⁶ Following a 2002 fact-finding mission, then UN Special Rapporteur Theo van Boven reported that the use of "torture or similar ill-treatment" by the authorities was "systematic".⁴⁷ The situation has not improved. The Andijon events were followed by a sweeping crackdown on dissent throughout the country. According to official Uzbek sources, "as many as 251 persons were condemned to fourteen to twenty years' imprisonment and sixteen persons were made to suffer other punishments" in relation to Andijon. Fear of persecution has caused hundreds to seek refuge abroad. Following Andijon, roughly 500 fled to Kyrgyzstan. After considerable delays and in the face of massive pressure from Uzbekistan, most were eventually relocated to third countries, although four were handed over to Uzbek authorities in September 2006. There has since been a steady trickle of asylum-seekers, including human rights activists, members of the political opposition and relatives of previous refugees.

Since Andijon, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has registered hundreds of Uzbeks as refugees in Kyrgyzstan, most of whom have been relocated to third countries. European countries have apparently been most welcoming; efforts to relocate refugees to the U.S. or Canada have occasionally bogged down due to lengthy security checks.⁴⁸ While awaiting relocation, Uzbek refugees in Kyrgyzstan are under constant threat of abduction and forced repatriation, since Uzbekistan's security services are believed to be actively hunting them.⁴⁹

podorozhali khleb i miaso" [Uzbekistan: Immediately after the rise in budget workers' salaries, bread and meat have become more expensive], *Ferghana.ru*, 13 July 2007; "V Uzbekistane rezko vyrosli tseny" [Prices have risen sharply in Uzbekistan], *Ferghana.ru*, 1 August 2007.

⁴⁶ According to the U.S. State Department's 2006 Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Uzbekistan, published in March 2007, "the government's human rights record, already poor, continued to worsen during the year". Among the abuses the report details are: the use of torture or beatings by police to obtain confessions; harassment (including arbitrary arrest and physical assault) or forced psychiatric treatment of the regime's critics; the denial of counsel to criminal defendants; nearly-universal guilty verdicts in criminal cases frequently based on confessions and coerced eyewitness testimony; and severe restrictions on freedom of assembly, access to information and freedom of religion. The report is available at www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78848.htm.

⁴⁷ Van Boven's February 2003 report is at http://hrw.org/pub/2005/Uzbekistan_Special_Rapporteur_Report_Feb03.pdf.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, June 2007.

⁴⁹ An example is that of Nasrullo Saidov, a journalist who fled to Kyrgyzstan after being threatened with arrest for possession

Deportations from Kyrgyzstan of those with official asylum-seeker status appear to have stopped, but fugitives who lack such status have no protection. A case in point is Otabek Mu'minov, who had apparently been hiding in Osh for two years following the Andijon events without approaching UNHCR or Kyrgyz migration authorities. He was arrested and eventually deported to Uzbekistan in June 2007.⁵⁰

Another is Muqimjon Mamadov, a 38-year-old native of Osh who lived in Uzbekistan in the 1990s and was briefly detained after being accused of membership in the banned Islamist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir. He left Uzbekistan for Osh in 2004, where he lived quietly until 30 May 2007, when he was arrested by Kyrgyzstan's State Committee for National Security (GKNB), apparently at the behest of Uzbek authorities who also requested his extradition. He was held incommunicado for weeks before finally being released on 9 August.⁵¹ Human rights activists believe the number of those who, like Mu'minov and Mamadov, remain in Kyrgyzstan without seeking official status is probably very small, but there are some who are fearful that revealing themselves to the authorities would result in their forced repatriation.⁵²

Uncertainty likewise surrounds the fate of Uzbeks who fled even farther. Ukraine extradited ten asylum-seekers on 14 February 2006, including some believed to have witnessed the Andijon events.⁵³ Dozens of the 196 Andijon refugees who reached the U.S. have returned home, their expenses paid by the Uzbek embassy, allegedly out of homesickness and in response to government promises that they would not be harmed. While the stress and isolation of refugee life may indeed have been the deciding factor, there are concerns coercion was involved as well, perhaps of relatives in Uzbekistan. Contributing to such concerns are the mysterious deaths of two Uzbek refugees

in the U.S. who attempted to persuade the returnees to remain.⁵⁴ It is virtually impossible to get information about the returnees or to guarantee their safety. The main international organisation that might be able to do so, UNHCR, was forced to close its Uzbekistan office in March 2006.⁵⁵ Relatives of those who have stayed abroad are closely monitored by the local neighbourhood (*mahalla*) committees in an effort to deter them from trying to join those abroad.⁵⁶

The fate of fugitives in Russia is another cause for concern. As Moscow has drawn closer to Tashkent, a number of accused extremists have been subject to detention and possible deportation, including:

- Muhammadsolih Abutov. A native of Turtkul in the Autonomous Republic of Qaraqalpaqistan, he was arrested for religious extremism in 1996 and sentenced to seven years in prison, though not released until 2004. He went frequently to Kazakhstan for work, decided to move to Russia after the security services searched his home in January 2007 and was arrested on 13 June 2007, shortly after he approached the Civic Assistance Committee (*Grazhdanskoe sodeistvie*), a Russian human rights organisation, for advice on applying for refugee status. That organisation consequently speculates that its offices and employees may be under surveillance.⁵⁷
- Abdulaziz Boymatov. A native of Namangan province, he left Uzbekistan for Russia in 1997 following the arrests of several relatives on charges of religious extremism. In 1998 the Uzbek government announced he was wanted for "infringing on the constitutional order". An extradition request was denied in 2006 but he was arrested on 25 April 2007 in Sverdlovsk province. According to the Civic Assistance Committee, police from Namangan

and distribution of a cassette containing songs critical of the Karimov regime and the Andijon events. For more on this cassette and the fate of its creator, dissident singer Dadakhon Hasanov, see Crisis Group Briefings *In for the Long Haul* and *Europe's Sanctions Matter*, op. cit. According to human rights activists, two police officers from Saidov's home province of Bukhara recently travelled to Kyrgyzstan searching for him, first in Osh, then in Bishkek, and in an effort to learn his whereabouts threatened a local human rights activist whose cell phone Saidov had used to call home. Crisis Group interview, Osh, June 2007.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, Osh, June 2007.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, Osh, June 2007. "Kyrgyzstan: chislo bezhentshev iz Uzbekistana znachitel'no vyroslo" [Kyrgyzstan: The number of refugees from Uzbekistan has grown considerably], *Ferghana.ru*, 15 August 2007.

⁵² Crisis Group interview, Osh, June 2007.

⁵³ See Memorial Human Rights Center (hereinafter "Memorial") press release, 16 February 2006. Memorial is a Russia-based human rights group, www.memo.ru.

⁵⁴ 25-year-old Olimjon Sobirov, a native of Andijon, died in his sleep in September 2006 in the U.S. state of Idaho. Later that month, 30-year-old Samarqand native Zahidjon Mahmudov died in similar circumstances. "V SShA pri strannykh obstoiatel'stvakh skonchalis' dve andizhanskikh bezhentshev" [In the USA two Andijon refugees have died in strange circumstances], *Ferghana.ru*, 6 October 2006.

⁵⁵ *Uznews.net*, citing anonymous sources in Andijon, reported that returnees are required to report to the police daily, are not allowed to make phone calls or use the internet and must regularly express regret in public hearings for "foolishness" in allowing themselves to be "duped" by Uzbekistan's enemies.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, Osh, June 2007.

⁵⁷ See 19 June 2007 press release by Memorial, available at www.ferghana.ru.

then requested local Russian officials to assist extradition, a request which was apparently granted.⁵⁸

- The “Ivanovo Uzbeks”. Following the Andijon events, fifteen ethnic Uzbeks in the Russian city of Ivanovo were arrested at Uzbekistan’s request for helping to fund the uprising. One was extradited to Uzbekistan after fleeing to Ukraine; thirteen applied unsuccessfully for refugee status in Russia and faced possible extradition.⁵⁹ On 5 March 2007, twelve were released from detention and registered with Russia’s Federal Migration Service (FMS), which required them to leave Russia within one month. However, permission to leave was denied due to the lack of Uzbek exit stamps in their passports.⁶⁰ In May 2007, the Ivanovo FMS office denied the group the right to seek refuge in Russia; their lawyers have filed a case with the European Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg.⁶¹
- Yashin Jurayev. A native of Tashkent, he was arrested in Uzbekistan in October 2004 on charges of forming a banned religious organisation but was fined and released in January 2005. Fearing a second arrest, he went to Russia. On 26 January 2007, he was arrested outside a mosque in Moscow. The Civic Assistance Committee says the arrest was most likely at the request of Tashkent authorities. Jurayev applied to the FMS for refugee status in March 2007 but was turned down.⁶²
- Rustam Mu’minov. An accused member of Hizb ut-Tahrir,⁶³ he was detained near Moscow in February 2006 but the prosecutor general’s office rejected requests for his extradition to Uzbekistan in September. Apparently still not feeling safe, he appealed to UNHCR for refugee status and asked the Civic Assistance Committee for assistance. On 17 October, while visiting that organisation’s

office, he was arrested for not having the proper residency permits⁶⁴ and one week later was deported to Uzbekistan, despite an appeal to the European Court for Human Rights.⁶⁵ On 15 March 2007, he was sentenced to five and a half years in prison for infringing upon the constitutional order and membership in a banned organisation.⁶⁶ Following a protest from the European Court for Human Rights, Russian officials investigated and subsequently fined a low-ranking migrations official 35,000 roubles (\$1,380).⁶⁷

Within Uzbekistan, as the following cases illustrate, the crackdown on independent journalists, human rights activists and supporters of the political opposition continued unabated, even as the authorities engaged in “dialogue” with the EU on human rights issues:

- Jamshid Karimov. A nephew of President Karimov and an independent journalist, he vanished from Jizzakh in mid-September 2006. It was later revealed that a court in Jizzakh, without informing relatives or allowing independent experts to participate in the hearings, had confined him to a psychiatric hospital in Samarqand for six months.⁶⁸ When that term expired in March 2007 he was not released, and in April 2007 it was announced, without a medical explanation being given, that his confinement had been extended for a further six months.⁶⁹
- Isroiljon Kholdorov. A leader of the banned opposition movement Erk (“Will”) in Andijon, he sought refuge in Osh in 2006. He later disappeared, only to resurface in custody in Uzbekistan in early 2007. It is suspected he was kidnapped and forcibly returned by the Uzbek security services. He was charged with infringing on the constitutional order, organising a forbidden social association or religious organisation and preparing or distributing materials

⁵⁸ See 28 April 2007 press release by Memorial, available at www.memo.ru/2007/05/03/0305072.html.

⁵⁹ For more on the “Ivanovo Uzbeks”, see Crisis Group Briefing, *Europe’s Sanctions Matter*, op. cit.

⁶⁰ “Ivanovskikh uzbekov’ ne vypuskaiut iz Rossii bez razreshenii Uzbekistana” [The “Ivanovo Uzbeks” are not being allowed to leave Russia without Uzbekistan’s permission], *Ferghana.ru*, 30 March 2007.

⁶¹ See 31 May 2007 press release by Memorial, available at www.memo.ru/2007/06/05/0506073.html.

⁶² See 27 January 2007 press release by Memorial, available at www.memo.ru/2007/01/30/3001071.html, and Elena Rabinina, “Posle Andizhana: Polozhenie uzbekskikh bezhentssev na territorii Rossii prevratilos’ v permanentnyi ekstrim” [After Andijon: The situation of Uzbek refugees in Russia has turned into a permanent extreme], *Ferghana.ru*, 31 May 2007.

⁶³ Russia-based human rights activists insist that the suspicion about Mu’minov is groundless. Crisis Group interview, October 2006.

⁶⁴ See 7 and 23 October 2006 press releases by Memorial.

⁶⁵ “Grazhdanin Uzbekistana Rustam Muminov deportirovan na rodinu” [Uzbekistan citizen Rustam Mu’minov has been deported to his homeland], *Ferghana.ru*, 25 October 2006.

⁶⁶ “Uzbekistan: ekstradirovannyi iz Rossii R. Muminov osuzhden na 5,5 let” [R. Mu’minov, extradited from Russia, has been sentenced to five and a half years], *Ferghana.ru*, 15 March 2007.

⁶⁷ See 25 May 2007 press release by Memorial, available at www.ferghana.ru/.

⁶⁸ “Uzbekistan: zhurnalists Dzhamshid Karimov byl napravlen v psikiatricheskuiu bol’nitsu Dzhizakskim gorsudom” [Uzbekistan: journalist Jamshid Karimov was sent to a psychiatric hospital by Jizzakh city court], *Ferghana.ru*, 5 October 2006.

⁶⁹ “Uzbekiskomu zhurnalistu Dzhamshidu Karimovu prodlen srok prebyvaniia v psikhbol’nitse” [Uzbek journalist Jamshid Karimov has had his stay in a psychiatric hospital extended by six months], *Ferghana.ru*, 13 April 2007.

containing threats to public safety and social order, as well as illegal border crossing. In February 2007, he was sentenced to six years in prison.⁷⁰

- Umida Niyazova. A 32-year-old independent human rights activist and journalist who had most recently worked as a translator for Human Rights Watch's Tashkent office, she was detained by customs officials in December 2006 when returning from Kyrgyzstan. Her laptop computer and flash disk, which officials said contained illegal and extremist materials, were confiscated. She fled to Kyrgyzstan and applied to UNHCR for asylum-seeker status but was lured back to Uzbekistan in January 2007 when her lawyer told her there would be no charges. She was arrested on crossing the border into Andijon and held for three and a half months, during which time she was subjected to interrogation sessions that lasted as long as fifteen hours in a day.

On 1 May, after a closed, two-day trial, she was sentenced to seven years in prison for illegal border crossing, contraband and "preparing or distributing materials which contain threats to public safety and public order".⁷¹ On 8 May, under international pressure, this was commuted to a three-year suspended sentence after she was required to give a full confession and denounce the work of international organisations.⁷²

- Gulbahor Turayeva. A 40-year-old doctor and human rights activist from Andijon, she was arrested in January 2007 on returning from Kyrgyzstan with materials published by Erk. She had repeatedly challenged the government version of the Andijon massacre, which she witnessed. On 24 April, an Andijon court sentenced her to six years for "infringing on the constitutional order", slander and distributing threatening materials.⁷³ According to some reports, her sentence was extended to eleven years, eight months on 7 May, when she was also convicted of slander.⁷⁴ The government denied

this, stating that the second conviction resulted in a fine of roughly \$518. On 12 June, she was released after commutation to a three-year suspended sentence. This was done after a full confession and a denunciation of international organisations and foreign journalists who were painting an "untrue" picture of the Andijon events and life in Uzbekistan.⁷⁵

While the release of Niyazova and Turayeva is welcome, their freedom of movement and communication is extremely limited. Those whom the authorities have released can be easily re-arrested on the slightest pretext. Their release while other activists languish in prison does not seem to indicate any change in the broader human rights picture. At the same time, opportunities to monitor human rights violations are becoming fewer; in mid-July 2007, the expatriate employees of the Tashkent office of Human Rights Watch were denied accreditation and required to leave the country.⁷⁶

In November 2006, the U.S. State Department designated Uzbekistan a "country of particular concern" with regard to suppression of religious freedoms.⁷⁷ Members of Christian minority sects such as Jehovah's Witnesses often face numerous hurdles to obtaining permission to open centres of worship. Leaders of such groups are sometimes subjected to serious harassment and arrest. A case in point is that of Dmitri "Pastor David" Shestakov, a Protestant pastor from Andijon sentenced to four years in prison in March 2007 for inciting religious hatred.⁷⁸

The majority Muslim community suffers the most severe violations of religious freedoms. Religious institutions are under extremely close state control. Clergy who take an independent stance do so at their peril, particularly if they are seen as possessing authority in their communities. Those whom the authorities deem overly zealous in religious observations risk being accused of membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir, which seeks to unite all Muslims in a single worldwide caliphate, avowedly only by peaceful means.⁷⁹ Over the years, thousands of accused members

⁷⁰ Nodira, "Isroil Kholdorov olti yilga qamaldi" [Isroil Kholdorov has been imprisoned for six years], *Ozodlik*, 21 February 2007, www.ozodlik.org.

⁷¹ "Sud nad Umidoi Niiazovoi. Kak eto bylo." [Umida Niyazova's trial. How it happened.], *Ferghana.ru*, 2 May 2007.

⁷² "Uzbekskaiia uznitsa Umida Niiazova osvobozhdena pod mezhdunarodnym davleniem" [Uzbek detainee Umida Niyazova freed under international pressure], *Ferghana.ru*, 8 May 2007.

⁷³ "Uzbekistan: pravozashchitnitsa Gul'bahor Turaeva prigovorena k shesti godam zakliucheniia" [Uzbekistan: human rights activist Gulbahor Turayeva sentenced to six years' imprisonment], *Ferghana.ru*, 24 April 2007.

⁷⁴ "Uzbekistan: srok tiuremnogo zakliucheniia pravozashchitnitse G. Turaevoi uvelichen vdvoe" [Uzbekistan: the prison term

for human rights activist Gulbahor Turayeva has been doubled], *Ferghana.ru*, 10 May 2007.

⁷⁵ See Human Rights Watch press release, 15 June 2007, at <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/06/15/uzbeki16190.htm>.

⁷⁶ "Uzbekistanskoe predstavitel'stvo 'Kh'iuman Raits Votch' ostanetsia bez sotrudnikov" [The Uzbekistan representation of Human Rights Watch is left without employees], *Ferghana.ru*, 18 July 2007.

⁷⁷ Other countries currently designated as such are Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Sudan.

⁷⁸ "'Pastor David' 4 yilga qamaldi" ["Pastor David" has been imprisoned for four years], *Ozodlik*.

⁷⁹ For more information, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°58, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir*, 30

have been arrested and sentenced to lengthy prison terms, often on the basis of scant – and sometimes fabricated or planted – evidence, or confessions extracted by torture.

On 29 March 2007, the trial of seven women accused of membership – all wives or relatives of men imprisoned for that offence – began in Tashkent.⁸⁰ On 11 April 2007, according to *Ozodlik*, the Uzbek-language service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), police in the Tashkent province district of Chinoz detained seven other women on charges of membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir, while two others fled. Human rights activist and lawyer Sur'at Ikromov said one of the women has been accused of being the local leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir's women's branch.⁸¹ Like the seven on trial in Tashkent, those in Chinoz are all wives, mothers, or other close relatives of men convicted of membership.⁸²

D. CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE MEDIA

In the aftermath of the Andijon uprising and massacre, the civil society sector was hit by forced closures, with the result that there are now virtually no functioning non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the country. Almost all U.S.-based NGOs were forced to leave, as were a number of European ones, though to a much lesser extent. Most independent Uzbek journalists have fled the country, while those few who remain face harassment and persecution, including imprisonment (such as Jamshid Karimov, discussed above). International media have come under pressure as well; in 2005, the RFE/RL Uzbek service was stripped of its accreditation and the BBC, citing government pressure on its employees, closed its Tashkent office. In March and April 2007, three correspondents of Germany's Deutsche Welle (DW) faced criminal charges of tax evasion and working without a license; though the charges were ultimately dropped, a fourth DW correspondent, Natal'ia Bushueva, was forced to seek asylum in Europe.⁸³

June 2003. As more and more male members are arrested, Hizb ut-Tahrir appears to be attracting an increasing number of women.

⁸⁰ "Ўзбекистон: diniy e'tiqodda ayblangan ayollarni ommaviy ravishda sudlash boshlandi" [Uzbekistan: the group trial of women accused of religious fanaticism has begun], *Ferghana.ru*, 31 March 2007.

⁸¹ Some have expressed scepticism at such claims; as a human rights activist pointed out, Central Asian security services, anxious to appease their backers at home and abroad, have a tendency to exaggerate the significance of the arrests of even relatively minor figures. Crisis Group interview, June 2007.

⁸² "IIB Chinozdan 'Hizb ut-Tahrir'ga aloqador ayollarni 'topdi'" [The MIA has found women connected to Hizb ut-Tahrir in Chinoz], *Ozodlik*, 12 April 2007.

⁸³ Interview with Natal'ia Bushueva, *Ferghana.ru*, 8 August 2007.

E. TERRORISM AND EXTREMISM

For years, the government has used the threats of extremism and terrorism to crack down on religious activists at home and to present itself to the world as a valuable partner in the "war on terror". Indeed, though there have been no major terrorist incidents in Central Asia in recent years, from time to time groups have emerged which show willingness to use violence. In June 2007, rumours – dismissed by human rights activists and political analysts – began circulating that a shadowy group known as the Islamic Jihad Union (*Islomiy jihod ittihodi*), thought by some to have been behind a series of bombings and shootouts in Tashkent and Bukhara in 2004, had resurfaced and was threatening to launch a renewed jihad against the Karimov regime.⁸⁴

Questions abound about the status of Central Asia's best known jihadist organisation, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). It is generally thought to be but a shadow of the force that launched military incursions into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000. Following the death of their military leader, Juma Namangani, during the U.S.-led war against the Taliban, IMU remnants, including the political leader Tohir Yuldoshev, relocated to the Pakistani region of South Waziristan. Beyond that, very little is known. There have been reports of deep splits, with a number of former followers renouncing jihad and seeking refuge in Iran; another faction, apparently led by Yuldoshev, has, according to some reports, recast itself as the Islamic Movement of Turkistan (IMT) and announced its intention to carry jihad to other parts of Central Asia and Afghanistan.

In April 2007, Pakistani media reported that troops and local tribesmen were engaged in pitched battles with thousands of well-armed, well-trained Uzbek militants in Waziristan.⁸⁵ No concrete evidence was ever provided, however, and no journalists were allowed into the alleged combat zone, leading to suspicion that the Pakistani government was deliberately exaggerating the situation in order to quiet those who had criticised it for being too slow to tackle extremism and militancy, particularly in the restive tribal areas.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ See, for example, "Kto ob"iavil voinu prezidentu?" [Who has declared war on the president?], *Uzmetronom*, 14 June 2007, at www.uzmetronom.com, and statement of the Uzbekistan Human Rights Association, 13 June 2007.

⁸⁵ See, for instance, "Pakistan: Focus – The Game Is Up for Uzbeks in South Waziristan", *Dawn*, 5 April 2007.

⁸⁶ See David Hoffman's insightful commentary, "The IMU in Pakistan: A Phoenix Reborn, or a Tired Scarecrow?", published by The Roberts Report on Central Asia and Kazakhstan on 7 April 2007, at <http://roberts-report.blogspot.com/>. For more on Pakistan's tribal areas, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°125,

The extent of the IMU's presence in Central Asia itself is also unclear, though security officials in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have expressed concern that the clampdown on religious opposition of all kinds in Uzbekistan might cause militants to enter their countries. Some recent violent incidents in northern Tajikistan and southern Kyrgyzstan have been attributed to the IMU. In January 2006 a raid on a pre-trial detention facility in the northern Tajik city of Qayroqqum freed a suspected IMU militant, and in mid-May 2006 an armed group believed to be linked to the Qayroqqum incident stormed a border guard base in Tajikistan's northern province of Sughd, seizing weapons and killing two border guards. The group was surrounded by Kyrgyz security forces in the southern province of Batken after killing two customs officials there, and most of its members were killed.⁸⁷

In July 2006, alleged terrorists were killed in the southern Kyrgyz city of Jalalabat, and the next month security forces killed two suspected terrorists in a shootout in Osh city; also killed, under unclear circumstances, was Muhammadrafiq Kamolov, the popular and influential imam of the border town Karasuu's congregational mosque. His funeral there was attended by thousands. On 9 August, Central Asian media outlets received a voice email thought to be from Yuldoshev, who denied any connection between the IMU and Kamolov and said the IMU had nothing to do with the southern Kyrgyzstan violence.

23 accused IMU members were arrested in Tajikistan in 2006, and 2007 has seen a number of trials and convictions.⁸⁸ The trial of fourteen alleged IMU members, including three women, has begun in Khujand.⁸⁹ The extent to which those who have been arrested and convicted were active IMU militants is unclear; some

Tajik authorities state that they were sympathisers and supporters, not armed combatants or terrorists.⁹⁰ In 2004, authorities conducted an operation to break up a group active in the Isfara district of Sughd province, a deeply conservative region and centre of support for the opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). Known as Bay'at ("The Oath"), it was suspected of serious crimes, including armed robbery, arson attacks on mosques and stores selling alcoholic beverages and the murder of a Baptist missionary.⁹¹ Some of its alleged leaders were arrested and in May 2005 sentenced to from six to 25 years in prison.⁹²

Much about Bay'at remains unclear; in 2005, security officials were calling it an extremist organisation with close ties to the IMU, for whom it raised funds through crime.⁹³ Others now say Bay'at never existed as an organisation; rather, its purported members were individuals who had taken an oath to provide logistical and financial support to the IMU in its efforts to wage jihad against the Karimov regime.⁹⁴

In sum, there is no clear evidence that the IMU is an imminent threat to the Karimov regime. There is clearly an interest, however, in a number of quarters – from Islamabad and Tashkent to Moscow and Washington DC – in exaggerating its threat. Recently, the defence ministers of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan expressed concern that as the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated, IMU activity in the Ferghana Valley was likely to increase. This statement was made on the eve of the annual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO),⁹⁵ to be held in Bishkek in August 2007, and may have been part of an attempt to win greater support from Beijing and Moscow. Western diplomats in the region acknowledged

Pakistan's Tribal Areas: Appeasing the Militants, 11 December 2006.

⁸⁷ Uzbek security officials were also present during the operation but apparently did not take part in the fighting. According to a former member of the Kyrgyz security services, "the Uzbeks offered to help us by launching air strikes but we said 'no, thank you'; the last time they 'helped' us this way they missed the targets by several kilometres and ended up killing some of our villagers". Crisis Group interview, May 2006.

⁸⁸ In July 2007, Tajik authorities stated that they had arrested seven accused IMU members who had confessed to plotting to blow up bazaars and nightclubs in Dushanbe. "Tajikistan detains seven IMU suspects", RFE/RL Newline, 23 July 2007.

⁸⁹ Sources familiar with the case say that those arrested are mostly Tajik citizens suspected of having provided material support to the IMU; their arrests came after the discovery of two underground bunkers in the Isfara district of Sughd province, which authorities say were used to stock IMU supplies and extremist materials. One of the women on trial is the widow of a man killed in the May 2006 violence. Crisis Group interviews, Khujand, 1-3 July 2007.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Khujand, 1-3 July 2007.

⁹¹ See Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°33, *Tajikistan's Politics: Confrontation or Consolidation*, 19 May 2004.

⁹² After the sentences were announced, 25 to 30 relatives attempted to demonstrate in front of Khujand's city hall but were driven away by police. A demonstration of an estimated 50 women and children, all relatives, took place in Isfara on 1 June 2005, with some threatening suicide if the sentences were not reduced. One alleged senior member of Bay'at, A'lo Aminov, remains at large after shooting his way past police in December 2004. See "V Tadjikistane k razlichnym srokom prigovoreny sem' chlenov gruppirovki 'Baiiat'" ["In Tajikistan, seven members of the group 'Bay'at' have been sentenced to varying terms"], Avesta News Agency, 25 May 2005; "Rodstvenniki osuzhdennykh chlenov gruppirovki 'Baiiat' proveli miting v Isfare", Avesta News Agency, 1 June 2005; and Igor Rotar, "Tajikistan Officials Fail to Apprehend Key Member of Bayat", Eurasia Daily Monitor, 5 January 2005.

⁹³ Crisis Group interview, Dushanbe, 18 August 2005.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Khujand, 2-3 July 2007.

⁹⁵ SCO members are China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

that pressure on militants in Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan could theoretically have consequences for Central Asia – “they have to go somewhere” – but most indicated no reason for heightened concern at this time.⁹⁶

For years, the Karimov regime has justified repressive policies as a necessary element of its own war on terror, an argument which has found support in the West and in Moscow. Karimov’s allies and apologists portray him as the country’s sole bulwark against extremism and his government as the only alternative to a Taliban-style extremist regime in the Ferghana Valley. Such claims seem greatly exaggerated today but if the regime continues to crush internal dissent, eviscerate civil society, silence the independent media and smother religious institutions, the danger that they could become a self-fulfilling prophecy will grow.

III. UZBEKISTAN AND THE EU

While Russia and China – governments to which Uzbekistan had been drawing closer economically and politically – lent their full support to the handling of the Andijon uprising, Western states were quick to condemn it.⁹⁷ On 14 November 2005, as the sentences were handed down in the first trial, the EU, alone among world powers, announced “restrictive measures” against Uzbekistan, including a visa ban on individuals “directly responsible for the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force in [Andijon] and for the obstruction of an independent inquiry”⁹⁸ and a ban on the export to it of “arms, military

equipment and other equipment that might be used for internal repression”. The restrictions were for one year, to be reviewed “in light of any significant changes to the current situation”, including:

- ❑ the conduct and outcome of the trials of those accused of participating in the Andijon disturbances;
- ❑ the situation regarding detention and harassment of those who have questioned the Uzbek authorities’ version of events;
- ❑ cooperation with any independent, international rapporteur appointed to investigate the disturbances;
- ❑ the outcome of any independent, international inquiry; and
- ❑ any action demonstrating willingness of the authorities to respect human rights, rule of law and fundamental freedoms.⁹⁹

Since then, the sanctions have been a source of continuing controversy within the EU, with some members – most notably Germany, which maintains an airbase in the southern Uzbek city of Termez – lobbying aggressively for termination or relaxation, while others – most notably the UK and the Netherlands – argue for retention. On 13 November 2006, the first anniversary, it was decided to extend the visa ban for six months and the arms sales ban for a year, pending further review in March 2007; technical meetings between Uzbekistan and the EU were allowed to resume.

EU efforts to continue “engagement” with Uzbekistan have yielded no results. Uzbek officials agreed to begin a human rights dialogue and allow an experts group to conduct a very limited inquiry into the Andijon events. A delegation visited Uzbekistan briefly in December 2006, after which the government was apparently reluctant to hold further meetings, reportedly saying it considered the Andijon issue “closed”. This lack of cooperation caused the EU to postpone its sanctions decision until May 2007, when the visa bans were set to expire. A second meeting was eventually held on 2-3 April, also without results, and further sessions seem highly unlikely.¹⁰⁰ The first round of the human rights dialogue took place on 8-9 May.

The Uzbek government has continued to insist on its version of Andijon events: “acts of terrorism carried out in Andijon were planned and organised in detail by

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, July 2007.

⁹⁷ The U.S. called for a full enquiry. UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said his government had “made it clear to the authorities in Uzbekistan that the repression of dissent and discontent is wrong, and they urgently need to deal with patent failings in respect to human and civil rights”. On 23 May 2005, the EU’s General Affairs and External Relations Council issued a statement condemning “the reported excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the Uzbek security forces” and calling on the government “to respect their international commitments to democracy, the rule of law and human rights”. The Council likewise expressed its concern over the failure to respond to calls for an international investigation, stating that it would “consider further steps” depending on President Karimov’s ultimate response. Statement from Richard Boucher, State Department spokesman, 23 May 2005; Foreign and Commonwealth Office press release, London, 14 May 2005; “External Relations Council conclusions concerning the situation in eastern Uzbekistan”, Brussels, 23 May 2005.

⁹⁸ These included Rustam Inoyatov, head of the SNB; Interior Minister Zokir Almatov; Defence Minister Qodir Ghulomov; Andijon Governor Saydullo Begaliyev; and Vladimir Mamo, commander of the interior ministry special forces. Almatov, Ghulomov and Begaliyev are no longer in their positions.

⁹⁹ The EU “common position” is available at <http://eurlex.europa.eu>.

¹⁰⁰ An EU official was quoted as saying, “the only good result of the second Andijan meeting was that there will not be a third one. The quality of information submitted was so poor that our experts have decided there is no point in having a third meeting”. Andrew Rettman, “EU ministers to shy away from praising Uzbekistan”, *EUobserver*, 18 April 2007.

destructive foreign forces and directed against the national interests of Uzbekistan and the republic's independent policy, and followed the ultimate goal of changing the constitutional order and creating an Islamic state". These "destructive foreign forces" were aided by Western (especially U.S.) diplomats, journalists and NGOs with the aim of carrying out a "coloured revolution". As evidence, the government has offered heavily edited excerpts from testimony given by those in custody, including the alleged leader, Qobiljon Parpiyev, who was reportedly arrested with 42 accomplices in November 2005.¹⁰¹

On 14 May 2007, the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC, foreign ministers) extended the visa ban for most officials on the list for six months.¹⁰² Uzbek officials, who had been hoping for an end of sanctions, were apparently surprised. The foreign ministry's statement said the EU's initial condemnation had been caused "firstly [by] the reports of particular human rights and non-governmental organisations, as well as the noisy anti-government anti-Uzbek information campaign unfolded by the enraged mass media", and "the most recent GAERC decision was of ungrounded, biased nature, and under the guise of the human rights rhetoric aims at continuing the use of the so-called EU sanctions as a tool of systematic pressure on Uzbekistan". The response suggests that symbolic as they are, the sanctions are indeed a source of some irritation to Karimov, who deeply resents his status as an international pariah.

Uzbekistan's relations with the U.S. have been almost frozen since the Andijon massacre and the closing of the U.S. airbase in the country. A number of attempts to put the relationship back on a better footing have been rebuffed by Tashkent, which has turned towards Moscow and Beijing. The U.S. no longer has significant aid programs in the country, and most U.S.-based NGOs have closed their

offices. Washington has not, however, imposed sanctions on officials in Tashkent.

IV. WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

Perhaps one reason for the failure of EU "engagement" to yield concrete results and for the continuing impasse in relations is lack of clarity about what is needed to permit lifting of sanctions. At the very least, ambiguity allows the Uzbek government to believe that cosmetic changes and token gestures might be sufficient. If sanctions are to be anything more than an irritant – if they are to achieve any coherent policy goals – they should be tied to specific benchmarks, which would have to be met for them to be lifted. These should include:

- ❑ allowing re-registration of NGOs shut down in the wake of the Andijon events;
- ❑ ending harassment of foreign and independent journalists and local human rights activists;
- ❑ granting international observers unimpeded access to refugees from Andijon who have returned to the country so that their whereabouts and welfare can be ascertained;
- ❑ granting the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) unrestricted access to all places of detention in the country, in compliance with its mandate; and
- ❑ allowing an independent rapporteur, under the auspices of the UN or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), to carry out a thorough Andijon investigation.

In the meantime, there is more the international community should be doing, including:

Opening the Uzbek economy. This vital task involves holding a dialogue with Russia and China on economic issues and maintaining a consistent front that reforms are essential for the country's stability and its citizens' welfare. International organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and others should adopt a more critical approach and be less willing to accept distorted government data at face value when it is so clearly contradicted by the experiences of people in the country.

Keeping the flow of information open to Uzbekistan. This can be done on the internet, through broadcasting and by providing information for the millions of Uzbeks abroad. The U.S.-funded Voice of America has proposed to eliminate all funding for its Uzbek service in the coming fiscal year; Congress should require its retention and help RFE/RL and others expand their broadcasting. European countries should enhance their own activity, particularly

¹⁰¹ "S chego nachinalas' podgotovka" [How the preparation began], Uzbek government report on the testimony of those arrested for participation in the Andijon events, November 2006, on file with Crisis Group. Official Uzbek sources say Parpiyev and his group were arrested in Tashkent province; there are rumours, which Crisis Group cannot confirm, that the arrests may have taken place outside Uzbekistan. Crisis Group interview, July 2007. Parpiyev and 36 others received prison sentences of four to twenty years on 21 July 2006. According to government sources, as of November 2006, 282 individuals had been arrested for involvement in Andijon events, with 251 sentenced to up to twenty years in prison. Ibid.

¹⁰² Four individuals were dropped from the list, including Begaliyev and Ghulomov (the governor of Andijon and minister of defence, respectively, at the time of the massacre), and the current defence minister, Ruslan Mirzoyev, who was secretary of the security council at the time of the Andijon uprising.

in Uzbek-language broadcasting. Support for internet sites that report on Uzbekistan should also be increased. Even more effective could be support for Uzbek-language newspapers outside the country.

Supporting Uzbeks outside the country. Aiding self-help groups, the media and legal groups that provide protection and other areas of support, education and training to labour migrants and political refugees and asylum seekers is vital. There is a risk that the sense of isolation, exploitation and brutalisation that many Uzbeks abroad experience may make them easy targets for recruitment by Islamic radicals. There is need for continued vigilance regarding efforts by the Uzbek authorities to obtain the forced return of asylum seekers.

Supporting education abroad. Many Uzbeks express deep anxiety about their children's future in a country where education has suffered from the government's heavy hand. Providing opportunities outside the country is essential, not only in Europe, but possibly, and perhaps more cost-effectively, in Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Russia. Funding for this would assist the rebuilding of intellectual life in Uzbekistan under an eventual new regime.

Supporting the neighbours. Uzbekistan is at risk of civil conflict, which would likely affect its neighbours. Andijon showed how vulnerable those neighbours are. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan all need help building up their ability to withstand any shocks that may emerge from Uzbekistan. Improving training for border guards and police in issues including refugee law and protection is important. There is an urgent need to improve emergency-response systems and to encourage alternative transport¹⁰³ and energy arrangements¹⁰⁴ for these countries so they are not as vulnerable to Uzbek pressure.

Tackling the criminal nature of the regime. Karimov has created a kleptocratic regime that extracts wealth from citizens and concentrates it in the hands of a few. It is hostile to free trade and the development of small business; everyone down to the sellers of vegetables in bazaars suffers from the predatory behaviour. The fruits of this criminal economy are likely stashed overseas. This is a point of vulnerability; the freezing of North Korean assets in Banco Delta Asia in Macau proved a surprisingly effective pressure mechanism, making financial institutions reluctant to deal with the regime in Pyongyang or the banks it worked with. Uzbek companies, particularly those controlled by the political elite, should be subjected to similar scrutiny and measures, unless the government takes steps to reduce corruption and exploitation. Similarly, the links between the regime and its business affiliates and Western companies need to be more fully explored.

V. CONCLUSION

The Andijon events showed the ineffectiveness of years of uncritical Western "engagement" with Karimov. In the two years since, Uzbekistan has drawn closer politically to Russia and China, entered into a diplomatic stalemate with the EU and seen its relations with the U.S. sink to an all-time low. Even the relationship with Russia, perhaps Tashkent's closest foreign partner, is not without tension.¹⁰⁵ There seems little outsiders can do for now to influence political events inside Uzbekistan. Perhaps the best that is possible is to continue what support can still be provided to ordinary citizens, while working to prevent potential unrest within the country from spilling into the wider region.

Bishkek/Brussels, 22 August 2007

¹⁰³ A case in point is the "enclave" of Sokh, an island of Uzbekistan's territory that lies across a road linking the southern Kyrgyz cities of Osh and Batken. A bypass road detouring around the enclave between the towns of Pülgön and Bürgöndü in Kyrgyzstan's Batken province is under construction, and considerable progress has been made, though the road remains unpaved. Crisis Group observations, Batken province, July 2007. For more information on the Ferghana Valley's many "enclaves", see Crisis Group Asia Report N°33, *Central Asia: Border Disputes and Conflict Potential*, 4 April 2002.

¹⁰⁴ Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which receive almost all their natural gas from Uzbekistan, are particularly vulnerable; recently, both have undertaken to strengthen energy independence by seeking assistance for new hydroelectric projects. Uzbekistan has protested vehemently against Tajikistan's plans, claiming that they threaten its own water supply, a perennial issue in interstate relations in Central Asia. See Crisis Group Asia Report N°34, *Central Asia: Water and Conflict*, 30 May 2002.

¹⁰⁵ A case in point is rejection in February 2007 by an Uzbek military court of the appeal by Lt. Colonel Sanjar Ismoilov, formerly acting head of army intelligence. He was sentenced to twenty years in prison in 2005 on charges of spying for Russia; his wife, Natal'ia Bondar, has claimed that the conviction was retaliation for his allegations that a defence ministry official was aware the Andijon uprising was being planned but failed to notify authorities. Anna Skalova, "Spy case reveals tension in Uzbek-Russian ties", *Eurasianet*, 9 April 2007, www.eurasianet.org.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF UZBEKISTAN



APPENDIX B

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August 2007

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