

**UZBEKISTAN:  
RISK ASSESSMENT BRIEF**




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**Stability Ratings Based on CIFP Methodology**

| BACKGROUND   | CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS <sup>1</sup>   |
|--|---|
| <p>Uzbekistan is plagued with both internal and external regional conflict that is tied to its neighbouring states Russia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Xinjiang (China). In Uzbekistan, the IMU, an armed opposition group, which opposes the state government, is seeking to establish an Islamic state. Uzbekistan is technically a republic, however, its state of governance is similar to which existed prior to collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990.</p> <p>Uzbekistan remains a non-democratic state, which is led by an authoritarian president. Uzbekistan human rights record continues to be abysmal, its security and police forces are guilty of abuses, deaths and torture. Uzbekistan's judicial system is in catastrophic condition, as citizens are arbitrarily detained for prolonged periods. Several have died in state custody as a result of mistreatment. Due process is not guaranteed, illegal searches and wiretaps are common, and police corruption and bribery is widespread. Further, state censorship of association, press, speech and religion is pervasive, public assembly is limited and freedom of the movement of goods and people is restricted.</p>  | <p><b>1921</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uzbekistan becomes part of Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic<sup>2</sup>.</li> </ul> <p><b>1980s</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Soviet policy of glasnost opens way to increased Islamic consciousness</li> <li>Violent attacks against Meskhetian Turks &amp; other minorities in Fergana Valley</li> </ul> <p><b>1990-1996</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communist Party of Uzbekistan declares economic and political sovereignty.</li> <li>President Karimov bans the political parties Birlik (Unity) and Erk (Freedom)</li> <li>Members of opposition are arrested in for alleged antistate activities</li> <li>Uzbekistan signs an economic integration treaty with Russia, and an economic, military and social cooperation treaty with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan</li> <li>Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan &amp; Kyrgyzstan agree to create single economic market</li> </ul> <p><b>1999</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bomb blasts in Tashkent kill more than a dozen people</li> <li>Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) broadcasts a declaration of jihad</li> <li>IMU fighters engage in first of several skirmishes with government forces</li> </ul> <p><b>2000</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karimov re-elected president in election deemed neither free nor fair</li> <li>Human Rights Watch accuses Uzbekistan of widespread use of torture</li> </ul> <p><b>2001</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>70 people jailed for terrorism after cross-border incursion by Islamic militants</li> <li>Uzbekistan, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan launch Shanghai Cooperation Organization to tackle ethnic and religious militancy, promote trade and investment.</li> <li>Uzbekistan allows USA to use its air bases for action in Afghanistan.</li> </ul> <p><b>2002</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karimov wins support to extend presidential term from five to seven years</li> <li>President Karimov visits USA to sign strategic partnership agreement</li> <li>IMU military leader Juma Namangoniy reported killed.</li> <li>Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan settle a long-standing border dispute</li> </ul> <p><b>2003</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erk holds first formal meeting since being banned 11 years ago</li> </ul> <p><b>2004</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>47 people killed in wave of terrorist attacks blamed on Islamic extremists.</li> <li>15 Islamic militants sentenced for involvement in terrorist attacks. Militants alleged to be members of al-Qaeda linked groups Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Jamoat<sup>3</sup></li> <li>Trade restrictions lead to civil disorder in eastern city of Kokand</li> <li>Parliamentary elections held; opposition parties are barred from taking part</li> </ul> |

## MAIN ACTORS (internal)

| NAME  | INTERESTS/GRIEVANCES  |
|---|---|
| <i>President Karimov</i>                    | Authoritarian leader in power since the collapse of the Soviet Union. His regime risks losing international legitimacy as a result of human and civil rights performance.   |
| <i>Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)</i> | IMU goal is the adoption of Islamic precepts in Uzbek life through constitutional means and equal rights for all citizens. It was outlawed by the constitution, which bans religious parties, and its founding leader, Abdullah Utayev, disappeared in 1992. The party subsequently became inactive. The IMU is now an armed Islamist group widely believed to be based in Afghanistan or Tajikistan. The IMU is alleged to have ties with Al Qaeda and the militant Islamic organization, Hizb-e Tahrir. The IMU includes many non-Uzbeki fighters in its ranks. The IMU was accused by Karimov of carrying out the 1999 and 2000 bombings, kidnappings, and cross-border incursions. They were also behind the attempted assassination of President Karimov in February 1999. The IMU set-up training camps inside Afghanistan and later expanded their goals to include the establishment of Islamic rule throughout Central Asia. |
| <i>Erk (Freedom) Democratic Party</i>       | Erk was founded in 1990 by urban intellectuals led by Salai Madaminov Muhammed Solih. The party was Banned in 1993 and the government closed down its newspapers and removed its deputies from the parliament. Solih lives in exile since the government accused him of having links to the IMU and the Taliban and plotting to murder Karimov.   |
| <i>Birlik (Unity) Movement</i>              | The party was founded in 1989, and is led by Abdurrahim Pulat. Birlik is seen as the largest opposition and is a strong advocate for freedom of religion and Uzbek tradition.   |

## MAIN ACTORS (external)

| NAME  | INTERESTS/GRIEVANCES  |
|---|---|
| <i>US</i>   | The US has maintained good relations with Uzbekistan over the past decade, providing it with some \$263 million in economic and military aid between 1992 and 2001. The US-led coalition has soldiers and airmen at the Khanabad base in southern Uzbekistan. Washington is interested in Uzbekistan's natural resources as a key point for expanding U.S. influence in Central Asia, and as a bulwark against drugs and radical Islamism. Washington put the IMU on its terrorism list in September 2000 and has charged it with drug smuggling. Washington has also provided antiterrorism and border assistance. Recently, the U.S. cut aid to the government over its lack of progress on human rights. |
| <i>Afghanistan</i>                                      | Uzbekistan is used to transport Afghan heroin to Russia and Western Europe. There is a high degree of movement between Islamic forces in Afghanistan and neighbouring Uzbekistan due to the relatively porous nature of its borders.  |
| <i>Kyrgyzstan</i>                                       | Because of similar economic structures such as raw material extraction, cotton production, and the need to divide scarce resources (ex. water) among them, the inherent competition contains the potential for strife. In 1993, Uzbekistan halted the flow of natural gas to Kyrgyzstan in response to their introduction of a new currency.  |
| <i>China</i>  | The issue of the Uighur Diaspora is very sensitive due to close relations between Tashkent and Beijing. The emergence of five newly independent states in Central Asia following the collapse of the Soviet Union stimulated a separatist movement among the Uighur minority in neighbouring China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. Since September 11 <sup>th</sup> , Chinese officials have portrayed Uighur radicals as separatists and terrorists with links to a range of extremist Islamic groups throughout Central Asia, pressing regional countries to exert tighter control over their Uighur minorities. <sup>4</sup>  |
| <i>European Bank for Reconstruction and Development</i> | After completing its one-year assessment of the Uzbek government's steps toward meeting human rights benchmarks, the EBRD announced that it would limit its investment in Uzbekistan over the government's lack of progress   |

# OVERVIEW OF CONFLICT AND PEACE INDICATORS

## POLITICAL FACTORS

### CONFLICT FACTORS

*Democratic Deficit.* Uzbekistan is among the world's most repressive regimes. There are no officially registered opposition parties in Uzbekistan<sup>5</sup>. Harassment and repression of dissident groups and nongovernmental organizations, including human rights groups, is endemic. The most recent presidential elections, in 2000, have been denounced as unfair, unfree, and illegitimate by Western observers. Restrictive registration procedures denied opposition parties the opportunity to participate fully in elections for the new bicameral parliament held in December 2004, prompting international observers to repudiate the election results<sup>6</sup>. The civil and criminal court system in Uzbekistan permits the use of torture and other coercive interrogation techniques and falls well below accepted international standards for fairness and transparency<sup>7</sup>. Senior members of the regime are actively engaged in the trafficking of opium and other narcotics. Uzbekistan's corruption score in the 2000 index was a dismal 8.5 out of 10<sup>8</sup>.

*Suppression of Civil Rights.* Uzbekistan's human rights record is disastrous<sup>9</sup>. Major violations of fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression, religion, association, and peaceful assembly, are pervasive. Credible reports allege the existence of an official government policy of discrimination against the Tajik minority<sup>10</sup>. The government continues to control and intimate civil society groups, human rights activists, and political opposition groups. Religious persecution and torture remain serious problems. Terrorism trials monitored by independent observers failed to meet international fair trial standards.

### PEACE FACTORS

*Media Censorship.* Though media censorship was officially abolished in 2003, state control of the media remains absolute in practice. No criticism of the President, the government, or public policy is permitted. Although media censorship and the suppression of civil rights will likely provoke a violent backlash against the regime in the long-term, in the short-term, media censorship will, paradoxically, act as a stabilizing force, as it enables the regime to continue to mask its economic failures, curb the dissemination of information about dissent political groups and alternative forms of government, disrupt the organization of opposition parties, and isolate the populace from sympathetic foreign influences, including human rights groups and foreign governments. If not accompanied by radical reform to the country's system of governance to allow for greater political participation, freedom of the press, however desirable, would drastically undercut any semblance of legitimacy the regime may still retain, thereby accelerating the deterioration of the state structure and possibly even precipitating an insurrection.

Though media censorship was officially abolished in 2003, state control of the media remains absolute in practice. No criticism of the President, the government, or public policy is permitted. Consequently, the Uzbeki people have limited information about alternative forms of governance.

## SOCIAL FACTORS

### CONFLICT FACTORS

*Religious Extremism and International Terrorism.* The wars in neighbouring Tajikistan (1992-97) and Afghanistan (1979-96, 2001—present day) have attracted *mujahadeen* from throughout the Muslim world, resulting in the proliferation of religious extremism in the region<sup>11</sup>. Weapons and narcotics trafficking, endemic unemployment and poverty have compounded the problem.

*Poor Water Management.* The overuse of inefficient irrigation systems has contributed to the dramatic lowering of the water level of the Aral Sea, resulting in the contamination of underground potable water supplies and an increase in the salinity of the soil.<sup>12</sup> Prolonged drought and dependence on cotton cultivation has created water-sharing difficulties for Uzbekistan and its neighbours. As the ageing Uzbek water infrastructure deteriorates, water-related disputes among Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are becoming more contentious. Moreover, the 'Golden Lake' project planned by Turkmenistan threatens the water supply to Uzbekistan and northern Afghanistan from the Amu Darya River, further exacerbating the water-supply problem and heightening the possibility of both intrastate and interstate conflict<sup>13</sup>.

### PEACE FACTORS

*Relative Ethnic and Religious Peacefulness.* Uzbekistan is Central Asia's most populous country, comprised of a multitude of ethnic groups. However, the ethnically diverse, the country is not marred by ethnic conflict. Uzbeks, the predominant ethnic group (80%), coexist relatively peaceably with ethnic Russians (5.5%), Tajiks (5%), Kazakhs (3%), Karakalpaks (2.5%), and Tatars (1.5%),<sup>14</sup> nor has the country been plagued by religious conflict. The country's Sunni Muslims (88%) and Eastern Orthodox Christians (9%) coexist peaceably.

## **ECONOMIC FACTORS**

### **CONFLICT FACTORS**

*Narcotics Trafficking.* The economic stagnation in Uzbekistan and neighbouring states has created a fertile breeding ground for Islamic terrorism, making future violence likely.<sup>15</sup> Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley is itself a major source of opium production as well as a key trafficking route for opium from Afghanistan, the world's leading producer of opium poppies and heroin, bound for Western markets. With the tacit support and active participation of corrupt government officials, the police and military, the Ferghana Valley provides funding and security to drug-traffickers and their international terrorists allies<sup>16</sup>.

*Poor Economic Policymaking.* Economic policy is monopolized by a small group of corrupt political elites<sup>17</sup> at the heart of a system of governance lacking transparency and accountability<sup>18</sup>. Uzbekistan is the most closed economy in Central Asia, and its business climate considered among the worst in the region,<sup>19</sup> making it one of the three poorest countries among the CIS states<sup>20</sup>. Nearly 33% of Uzbeks continue to live below the poverty line, while 28% of the population is still unable to meet basic food needs<sup>21</sup>. In 2003, inflation was a staggering 21.9%, while real wages remained stagnant and per capita GDP amounted to only about \$350<sup>22</sup>. It is estimated that per capita GDP likely dropped to a paltry \$250 in 2004<sup>23</sup>, while income inequality climbed<sup>24</sup>. Border and trade restrictions are turning Uzbekistan into an isolated and failing economy, but there is no evidence that the government intends to introduce economic reforms,<sup>25</sup> while subsidies from foreign governments have actually exacerbated the country's economic decline<sup>26</sup>. Consequently, the Heritage Foundation-Wall Street Journal Index of Economic Freedom named Uzbekistan among the worst countries in the world in which to do business, ranking it 147 out of the 155 countries that it evaluated<sup>27</sup>.

### **PEACE FACTORS**

*Modest Economic Growth.* Due to a healthy 4.4% growth in GDP in 2003<sup>28</sup> and positive monetary changes intended to bring the black market under control<sup>29</sup>, the IMF has praised Uzbekistan's economic progress<sup>30</sup>.

## **MILITARY FACTORS**

### **CONFLICT FACTORS**

*Obsolescent Equipment.* Though Uzbekistan possesses the most capable military power in the region, its equipment, which it inherited from the Soviet Union, is outdated, and its training program needs improvement<sup>31</sup>. Failure to address these deficiencies could leave Uzbekistan vulnerable to the burgeoning terrorist presence in the region.

### **PEACE FACTORS**

*Military Capability and Foreign Alliances.* Uzbekistan possesses the largest and most competent military forces in the Central Asia region. Military spending amounts to a moderate 3.7% of GDP, but this funding is augmented by infusions of military and security assistance capital from strategic allies<sup>32</sup>, most notably the United States, which considers Uzbekistan a key ally in the international war on terror. Uzbekistan is an active member of the global non-proliferation regime, and nonproliferation forms the cornerstone of its national security strategy<sup>33</sup>. Uzbekistan has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, has no known nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons programmes, and is working to clean up stockpiles of chemical and neurological agents stored in country by the former Soviet Union<sup>34</sup>. Moreover, Uzbekistan has made itself transparent to the International Atomic Energy Agency and is a strong advocate of the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone initiative<sup>35</sup>. Uzbekistan is allied with Russia, China, and other members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the regional campaign against transnational terrorism, and is also a member of the Partnership for Peace (NATO) and has signed a Partnership Cooperation Agreement with the European Union (2004)<sup>36</sup>. Following the 9-11 attacks, the United States was allowed to establish a vital military base in southern Uzbekistan (1, 000+ personnel) from which to launch incursions into Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom)<sup>37</sup>. More recently, however, Tashkent seems to be moving away from the US and closer to Moscow, no doubt on account of the US State Department's withdrawal of foreign aid to protest Uzbekistan's human rights abuses and out of fear that the US presence in the region will be short-lived<sup>38</sup>. Uzbekistan's security depends largely on the outcome of events in Afghanistan and Iraq, which the leaders in Tashkent are watching closely.

## SCENARIOS

### WORST CASE: State Failure/Dissolution of the Regional State System over the Short-Term

1. Religious extremism gains widespread support
2. Escalation of bombings by religious extremists (IMU)
3. Further repression by government forces (torture, execution, arbitrary detention)
4. Destruction of limited state infrastructure
5. Economic collapse fueled by shrinkage of Aral Sea and repressive government economic policies
6. Rise in opium cultivation and drug trafficking leads to total collapse of the rule of law
7. Heightened regional instability due to turmoil in neighbouring states

### BEST CASE: Emergence of Political and Economic Freedom over the Short-Term

1. Pressure by foreign governments and transnational NGO's forces Uzbek regime to adopt internationally acceptable standards for human rights
2. Political process gradually becomes more transparent
3. Opposition groups and independent media given meaningful role in governance
4. Foreign governments respond favorably and increase foreign aid and security/military funding
5. State and Military are better able to manage Islamic extremism
6. Improved business climate and increased foreign investment leads to meaningful improvement in living standards
7. Support for Islamic extremism decreases

### REALISTIC CASE: Gradual Deterioration of the Status Quo over the Long-Term

1. Maintenance of state censorship
2. Continuance of repression of civil and human rights (torture, child labour, arbitrary detention, absenteeism of political dissent)
3. Maintenance of closed economy, and continuance of economic stagnation
4. Failure to implement international political and economic reform commitments
5. Continual dependence on agricultural and cotton crops, leading to further environmental degradation of the Aral Sea
6. Rise in drug-trafficking, leading to increased state corruption and strengthening of terrorist network
7. Intensification of religious extremism and escalation of violence by insurgent groups

## CONCLUSIONS

The situation in Uzbekistan is fluid. Although the status quo will likely gradually deteriorate in the short to medium terms, certain events could trigger a much more rapid deterioration of the country's economic and political structure. Given the lack of a clear successor, the death of Karimov will create a power vacuum, potentially triggering a bloody power struggle amongst the country's political elites, or possibly even a civil war. The opaqueness of the autocratic state apparatus largely precludes a full understanding of the potential repercussions of Karimov's death, but it is our belief that the government will survive Karimov's demise and seek to maintain the status quo, which is simply not sustainable over the long-term. Even as the country sustains moderate growth in GDP, the Uzbek people become ever-more impoverished, thus strengthening the market for the illicit goods from which the extremist insurgency receives much of its funding. Environmental degradation further exacerbates the suffering of the Uzbek people. The government's violent suppression of civil and human rights, coupled with its disastrous economic policies, will surely lead to a failure of the state apparatus over the long-term. Despite its censorship of the media and repression of dissident political groups, the government of Uzbekistan will ultimately succumb to the chaos its policies have created. A more rapid deterioration of the politico-economic structure is stayed only by the government's formidable military capability and strong international alliances, most notably with the United States. The Uzbek-US alliance in the war on terror will no doubt prove ephemeral, however, and Tashkent's recent shift towards Moscow and Beijing is certainly indicative of its apprehension concerning US intentions in the region. Tashkent is watching closely as events unfold in Afghanistan and Iraq. The US and its allies can be expected to put increasing diplomatic pressure on the Uzbek regime once the utility of the strategic anti-terror alliance diminishes. In the short to medium terms, however, the conflict in Uzbekistan can be expected to simmer, as economic stagnation continues to weaken the country's infrastructure while political violence gradually escalates, until the state system finally implodes and civil war erupts among rival political factions, which may seek to exploit latent ethnic tensions to further their political agendas.

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