

Muslims, national security and the state in Uzbekistan

Charles Fugère, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montréal

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Abstract

The idea of an "Islamic threat" to national security in Uzbekistan is widespread in the media and amongst several academics. The regime of Uzbek President Islam Karimov has repeatedly emphasized the seriousness of this threat and acted to contain it. In this thesis, I examine both the present ability of different Muslim political actors to challenge the Uzbek state's defense position and recent historical elements of the Uzbek security strategy related to Islam. I argue that the relationship between Muslims and national security in Uzbekistan is characterized by the two following observations: 1) it is unlikely that Muslims are able to present a national security risk and 2) there are reasons to suspect that the national security policies of the Uzbek leadership target Islamic fundamentalism at least in part to legitimize the continued repression of most types of opposition.

Résumé

L'existence d'une "menace islamique" à la sécurité nationale de l'Ouzbékistan est une idée répandue dans les médias et chez certains spécialistes. Le régime du Président ouzbek Islam Karimov a souligné cette menace à plusieurs reprises et a agi en conséquence. J'examine à la fois la capacité actuelle de différents groupes musulmans à défier les mécanismes de défense de l'état, ainsi que des éléments d'histoire récente de la stratégie de sécurité nationale ouzbèke liés à l'Islam. L'argument présenté est que la relation entre les musulmans et la sécurité nationale en Ouzbékistan est caractérisée par les deux observations suivantes: 1) il est peu probable que les musulmans soient capables de poser un risque à la sécurité nationale et 2) il existe des raisons de suspecter que les politiques de sécurité nationale du gouvernement s'attaquent à l'intégrisme musulman au moins en partie dans le but de légitimiser la répression continue de la majorité des forces d'opposition.

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Introduction

The leadership of the state of Uzbekistan, especially president Islam Karimov himself, along with the vast majority of newspapers and non-academic literature on the country identify the "Islamic threat" as the most serious menace to national security. The goal of this study is to understand what is at this moment and what has been in the recent past the relationship between Muslims¹ and national security in Uzbekistan.² This means exploring two questions: 1) determining if the Muslims are able to present a security threat to the state of Uzbekistan and if so, how, 2) understanding why the Uzbek national security strategy in this period targets Islam as a security threat.

The first suspected terrorist attacks in Uzbekistan occurred in December 1997³ and in the following year the "Islamic threat" became the object of much attention, it is for this reason that I have set 1998 to early 2005 as the focus, but not the limit, of this research. Important events of the 1990s will be incorporated. The aim is to draw conclusions for the current state of affairs in the country using information as recent as possible while having been verified.⁴ Since the study of Central Asia as a region of independent states is rather new because the states themselves are barely 15 years old,

¹ The matter of which Muslims are the object of the study is discussed in length in chapter 1.

² Trivial but interesting: Uzbekistan means "the land of the Uzbeks". From Alaolmolki we learn that Uzbek is made of the word "Uz", which originally meant "self", and the word "Bek" which meant "strong". Although the label "Uzbek" became the official reference under the 1918 Soviet System, it goes further in history, the Mongol empire of the Golden Horde was apparently Islamized by a Khan named Uzbek (1282-1342). His people later migrated in the south and established the Khanates of Khiva, Bukhara and Kokand. See Nozar Alaolmolki, *Life After the Soviet Union*, SUNY series in Global Politics (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 75.

³ This date refers to the killing of a captain and three policemen by masked attackers in the city of Namangan in November and December, which Karimov blamed on Wahhabi fundamentalists.

⁴ The May 2005 events surrounding the incidents with protesters in the province of Andijan will not be discussed. Circumstances and analyses are still chaotically contradictory and it would be hard to discuss them without relying on too much propaganda from both sides.

and since Islam in Central Asia is also a rugged terrain for the field of Islamic studies⁵, noteworthy literature prior to the 1998-2004 period will be also incorporated to situate this study within broader fields such as Islam and modern nation-states, Central Asian security, and politics and society of modern Uzbekistan. Little has been written on the dynamic between the Uzbek state's security policies and the Muslims at a large popular level, therefore this thesis also aims at bringing together the works from scholars on Islam in Uzbekistan with those in regional security analysis, while using recent events to re-assess the conclusions previously reached by others. I argue that the relationship between national security and Muslims in Uzbekistan at this moment is characterized by the two following observations: 1) it is unlikely that Muslims are able to present a national security risk and 2) there are reasons to suspect that the national security policies of the Uzbek leadership target Islamic fundamentalism at least in part to legitimize the continued repression of most types of opposition.

The Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 renewed a widely shared belief among political scientists and observers that secular nation-states governing significant Muslim populations face the ever present risk of being destroyed and replaced by Islamic polities. Even though the expected role of Islam in the downfall of the USSR never materialized, the collapse of the Afghan state was a reminder to post-cold war nation-states that the ultimate triumph of the secular capitalist and liberal system of government still had rivals.

⁵ Central Asia has been at the periphery of mainstream Islamic studies since it evolved apart from the Arab world which receives overwhelming focus in the field. Although there are studies dealing with older periods such as the Timurids, the Khanates of Bukhara and Khiva, there was a halt of studies on Islam in Central Asia for most of the 20th century under the assumption that the Soviets had eradicated the Islamic roots of the people. Independent Central Asia has renewed the interest for Central Asian Islam, although most contributions are from socio-anthropologists and other people attracted by identities and symbols, and that the field of Islamic studies itself is still boycotting the region to a certain extent.

Since the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the official realisation that "Islamic terrorism" had gone global and was no longer constrained to hot pockets of the developing world such as Palestine, it became almost automatically expected to keep a closer watch on the Muslim communities wherever they were. Political Islam became feared as a doctrine capable of using populist tactics in order to overthrow regimes, or worse, capable of creating super suicide commandos against whom law enforcement is powerless. A serious problem, from an educated and critical perspective, is that many arguments used to illustrate the threat of political Islam in Uzbekistan are based on events that did not happen in Uzbekistan. They are part of a derivative reasoning which is fuelled by selected episodes in the political history of the Muslim world to create an oversimplistic formula of the effect of Islam on politics.⁶ Obviously there is no such general rule and the history of Muslims shows enough spatial and temporal diversity and complexity to warrant a detailed local analysis of a given Muslim population before predicting their fundamentalist tendencies or how harmful they can be to a modern state. For this reason, although I will incorporate authors who use comparative approaches in their works, my own arguments will be built upon contemporary events and data in the state of Uzbekistan only.⁷

⁶ In a very interesting work, Will Myer demonstrated how the construction of the myth of the Islamic rebellion against modern Central Asian states is nearly identical to the construction of the myth of the Islamic rebellion and triumph over Soviet administration. See Will Myer, *Islam and Colonialism*, Central Asia Research Forum (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

⁷ Obviously I could use my own argument to say that Uzbekistan is a generalization and that Muslims must be studied at the community level from one neighbourhood to the other. However, since I want to relate my study to the policies of the Uzbek government at a national level, I have chosen to use the boundaries of the modern nation state.

A glimpse at the context in which Uzbekistan became independent on 1 September 1991⁸ reveals that it was in a tight spot, with a high level of economic and military dependence on Russia, serious border disputes with its neighbours from the onset, doubly-landlocked⁹, with a multi-ethnic 88% Muslim population just emerging out of decades of imposed Soviet atheism.¹⁰ The initial boost of Islamic revivalism in Uzbekistan was led by Ferghana Valley based groups who ended up being labelled Wahhabis, although they were not directly offshoots of the Saudi equivalent in more than the fact that they preached a return to pristine Islam.¹¹ There is no doubt that the early years of the country's independence saw a rise in religious practices and identification and it is suitable to speak of massive revivalism.¹² At independence, President Karimov took it upon himself to foster Islam, declaring that it was the guardian of the Uzbek way of life and conscience,¹³ and he encouraged religious festivals such as the Kurban Bairam

⁸ There are differences regarding the date of the independence of Uzbekistan and at times serious scholars fall in the trap themselves. Independence was proclaimed by the president on August 31st 1991, but independence day is celebrated on September 1st, since this was the first day in the history of the independent state. The referendum to endorse independence and the elections to appoint officialy Islam Karimov as president took place on December 29th 1991.

⁹ This means that the country is landlocked and so are all its neighbours. Uzbekistan and Liechtenstein are the two only doubly-landlocked states in the world.

¹⁰ Indeed there was a repressive attitude towards religion but observation of local Islamic rituals such as rites of passage or fasting were never really eradicated from the Uzbek society, especially in the province of Andijan, as numbers indicate. See: Magali Barbieri and others, "Nuptiality, Fertility, Use of Contraception, and Family Policies in Uzbekistan," *Population Studies* 50, 1 (March 1996): 74. Weddings, secret teaching of the Qur'an by elders and tea houses converted into secret prayer rooms were also ways to maintain a religious culture in this context, see Shahram Akbarzadeh and Abdullah Saeed, eds, *Islam and Political Legitimacy* (London : RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 90.

¹¹ Wahhabism in Uzbekistan refers to a younger generation of Muslims depriving Islam of its superstitious rituals, thus initiating a revivalism which seemed foreign to the elders who began to label it Wahhabism. See James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 181. Karimov comments that the idea behind Wahhabism in the country is a rejection of greed and luxury and a return to purer Islamic ethics. See Islam Karimov, *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 24. Rashid claims, however, that many young men had trained and studied Arabic in Saudi Arabia and were funded by Saudi Wahhabite foundations. See Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 138.

¹² For a description of the increase in mosques, prayers, festivals and such indications of a revival see for instance Badan Phool, *Dynamics of Political Development in Central Asia*, (New Delhi : Lancers' Books, 2001), 186-87.

¹³ Akbarzadeh and Saeed, 91.

and the Uraza Bairam.¹⁴ This wave of religious liberty was short-lived. With Afghanistan's Najibullah regime falling to the Taliban in 1992 and the explosion of a civil war in Tajikistan (1992-97) which led to thousands of refugees penetrating Uzbek borders,¹⁵ President Karimov saw the need for an uncompromising line of development towards "a secular nation-state based on a market economy and authoritarianism,"¹⁶ in part drawing his inspiration from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's model of state building in post World War I Turkey. Karimov argues that he stands for democracy and freedom. To critics challenging him on his authoritarian approach or on his human rights records, he answers that "the Uzbek people are building their own national democracy, and have no need to imitate western patterns."¹⁷ He has won several elections since independence, the most recent one in January 2000 when he obtained 94% of the votes and even his only opponent for the Presidency, Abdulhafiz Jalalov, admitted voting for Karimov.¹⁸ The President now has the total command of the state and also controls most decisions taken in the Oliy Majlis¹⁹ (Supreme Assembly of 250 elected members).

During a brief period of freedom in the first year and a half after independence, organized secular nationalist opposition parties Birlik (unity) and its offshoot Erk (freedom) were able to operate. Soon after, measures such as party banning, press-

¹⁴ The Kurban Bairam consists in sacrificing a lamb and eating it in memory of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son to God. The Uraza Bairam is the family feast at the end of the month of Ramadan.

¹⁵ Although Uzbekistan does not recognize the existence of refugees within its borders, it was estimated in 2003 that between 6000 and 7000 Afghan refugees were living in the country. "Afghan refugees face uncertain future," IRIN 24 June 2003. (Last accessed 21 July 2005)

¹⁶ A. Aydın Çeçen, "Uzbekistan between Central Asia and the Middle East: Another Perspective," In *Rethinking Central Asia*, ed. Korkut A. Ertürk (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1999), 151.

¹⁷ N.I. Petrov, "Political Stability in the Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime," In *Central Asia*, ed. Alexei Vassiliev (London: Saqi Books, 2001), 85.

¹⁸ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 85.

ensorship, widespread use of torture in jails, closure of borders, kidnapping of political opponents in neighbouring countries and tight control of private businesses and independent farms and several state mechanisms aimed at the citizen's personal life were introduced. President Karimov was setting up an undeniably authoritarian regime which he defended as being appropriate to preserve stability and pursue his reforms.²⁰ It is possible that he was defending Uzbek independence against Russia, which was suspected of backing up any mechanisms of opposition to weaken the regime and increase its own influence.²¹ Most of these measures, still in place today,²² are now performed to protect the country's stability against the Islamic threat. One of the questions that should preoccupy us is the extent of the threat.

In the first chapter of this work, I define two key elements of the equation of my main argument; "which Muslims are we talking about?", and "what is national security?" In the second chapter, I review the main literature and sources available concerning independent Uzbekistan, Islam and security in more details. I conclude the chapter by raising a few questions regarding the strengths and weaknesses in the literature. In the third chapter I look at different groups of Uzbek Muslims, separated according to the similarity of their political status vis-à-vis the regime. I gather and present information

¹⁹ Roger D. Kangas, "Uzbekistan: the Karimov presidency - Amir Timur revisited," in *Power and Change in Central Asia*, ed. Sally N. Cummings, Politics in Asia (London: Routledge, 2002), 135.

²⁰ For a detailed discussion of how Karimov built his authoritarian hold on the country during independence and in the early years of the Uzbekistan state until 1995, see William Fierman, "Political development in Uzbekistan: democratization?" In *Conflict, cleavage, and the change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1997), 360-408. For an analysis of how he used involvement in the Tajik civil war to strengthen this same authoritarian position see chapter 6 in Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's New States* (Washington D.C. : United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996)

²¹ Marina Pikulina, *Russia in Central Asia: Third Invasion - An Uzbek View* (Camberley: Defence Academy of the UK, Conflict Studies Research Center, February 2003, K38), 7.

that will be used to determine if any group is able to present a credible threat to national security. In the fourth chapter, I look at noteworthy elements of the national security strategy of President Islam Karimov and how it related to Islam. In the fifth chapter, I explain how we can draw the two observations that I mentioned previously and I also discuss the efficiency of the security strategy. Finally, in the conclusion, after going back to the main points, I venture to explore certain unresolved issues concerning the future of the current regime in Uzbekistan and possible instability.

²² For a recent overview of what is going on with these measures, see "Uzbekistan: Review of 2004," IRIN 20 January 2005. (Last accessed on 21 July 2005)

1- Defining Blurry Concepts

Among the hardest things to do in this study is to come to terms with the several definitions of Islam and national security. I am trying to keep my definitions as broad and accommodating as possible but a brief overview of what is being used "on the front lines" is necessary to situate the context of this thesis. Many scholars do not bother defining what they understand in these ambiguous terms before using them and as a result the literature is filled with imprecision.

1.1- What Islam or which Muslims?

I myself am not fond of using the term Islam for political analyses. It is not relevant, even in a purely theoretical approach, to draw conclusions of what political Islam is. From the moment that Islam came into practice, its history became so diverse and related to factors such as society, geography, economy and "real politik" that it is no longer suitable to call it political Islam. I enjoy Salwa Ismail's interpretation when she writes that "in its interaction with the social, religion ceases to be religion (understood as fixed beliefs, dogma, immutable rites and so on)."²³ She develops the idea as following:

This view is premised on the idea of an orthodox Islam understood as the true/authentic doctrine, that is now engaged in a struggle for universal dominance against other systems of faith, as well as against the relativism of post-modern cultures. [...] My argument against this reading by Turner, Roy, Barber, Ahmed and others, is that they continue to hold on to a notion of essential Islam and an essential Islamism or fundamentalism [...] this selfreflexive Islam continues to maintain global pretences to homogenize and totalize the cultural identity of Muslims against the diversity of consumer cultures. We need to ask where is this Islam located? In what way can it stand outside the same processes it seeks to overcome? Where does the space of externality exist? The answer, it would seem, is in the text, the norm and tradition; that is, in the trans-historical Islam that overrides temporality and spatiality of the world. As demonstrated in the

²³ Salwa Ismail, "Being Muslim: Islam, Islamism and Identity Politics," *Government and Opposition* 39 (September 2004), 620-621.

discussion of the interaction between religion and the social, this notion is untenable if we shift our focus to the level of practices, the sociality of religion or the everyday-life politics of the believers. Similarly, we should focus on the different terms of insertion of Muslims into the political sphere.²⁴

If our object of study is the political history of the regions associated with Islam or the current political situation where Islam is practiced as a religion, I find it better applicable to use the expression Muslims and politics rather than political Islam, since the Muslims are the ones making political moves, not Islam itself. I am not saying this to defend the religion; I am only supporting what appears as the most logical approach. The term "Muslim" is an identity category and it does nothing more than specify an individual's religious affiliation. Therefore, "Muslims and politics" only suggests that the political actors happen to be Muslims religiously speaking, whereas "political Islam" presupposes that Islam is the main motivation in a Muslim's political actions, which is a wrong assumption and must be assessed on a case by case basis. This is why my own wording will always be "Uzbek Muslims and national security" instead of "Islam and national security".

The wording used by academics or analysts studying security in Central Asia or in the Muslim world in general belong to two categories. The first one is the category that uses "political Islam" or "Islamic threat" and put all Muslims in the same basket in order to build theories that the whole of Islam is incompatible with the modern nation-state. They fall in the trap addressed by Ismail above. The thinkers who try to use specific expressions to convey a more precise idea of which Muslims they are talking about belong to the second category. For example, Karimov speaks of "Islamists" or

²⁴ Ibid., 623.

"fundamentalists", other writers such as Bannerman use "fundamentalist Islam", others "radical Islam" or "militant Islam" (as Ahmed Rashid). In French, some commonly used expressions are "musulmans intégristes", "intégrisme musulman", "islam radical". We add to this mixture all those who speak of Islamic terrorism or Muslim terrorists. In the specific context of Uzbekistan, I think that they all have the same people in mind when using these different labels: those Muslims, armed militants or passive supporters, who would prefer the overthrow of the current government in favour of an Islamic state.

In this study, we will not discuss in length the question of "an Islamic threat" in ideological terms; in fact we will present strong criticisms to this approach in the literature review of the next chapter. The analysis will cover the usual suspects and more; the underground fundamentalists and armed militants who use Islam as a platform for insurgency, but also the religious civil society who could be a basis for opposition. The mass of Uzbek Muslims and its likeliness to side with a religion-based opposition to overthrow the regime will also be examined.²⁵ Such a broad incorporation of all the potential political Muslims means going beyond the usual studies in term of demographic proportions of the population, while remaining more Uzbekistan-focused than most studies. The resulting picture will be as accurate a portrait of the Muslim political element in the country as possible.

²⁵ Muslims belonging to the government and who could force a power struggle within the regime are beyond this study. My focus is the regime versus its subjects, not internal dynamics of the ruling party.

1.2- What is national security?

If we are to examine the relationship between Muslims and national security, we must first define precisely which aspect of national security we are referring to. The concept of national security is being used in different ways. We can work from this initial definition relating to the specific context of the United States's defense to create a better, more applicable one for our purpose. The Oxford dictionary of the U.S Military defines national security as following:

Specifically, national security is the condition provided by: (a) a military or defense advantage over any foreign nation or group of nations, (b) a favorable foreign relations position, or (c) a defense posture capable of successfully resisting hostile or destructive action from within or without, overt or covert.²⁶

It seems from the wording used that a state fulfilling one of the three characteristics listed above is enjoying a condition of national security, but by quickly going over each item we realise their contradictions and the weakness of the definition.

Certainly the first striking feature of item A of this definition is the apparent impossibility for more than one state to have national security, for in theory only one can have a defense advantage over any foreign nation. For this reason, I believe that we must exclude item A from the definition if we are to work within the context of Uzbekistan and this study, since Uzbekistan is not a military superpower at the international level. Its military might be strong enough to make it a regional power in Central Asia,²⁷ but that is not a huge accomplishment. It is obvious that Uzbekistan cannot realistically hope to

²⁶ "National security," The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military. Berkley Books, 2001, Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press,
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?entry=t63.e5404> (Last accessed on 17 July 2005)

²⁷ The position of Uzbekistan as a regional strongman is evident in the analysis provided by Niklas Swanström, "The prospects for multilateral conflict prevention and regional cooperation in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey* 23 (March 2004): 41-53.

secure national security by acquiring a defense advantage over any foreign nation, and this with or without a threat from its Muslim population. Furthermore, item A does not mention anything about domestic threats. If a state is strong enough against foreign nations to hold a military advantage over all of them, it can still be vulnerable to domestic actors, such as separatists for instance, who by their actions could threaten the very existence of the state. We will discard this condition for the time being and move to the next ones.

It would be hard for us to use item B, because of its comparative and wide nature. Not only does foreign relations encompass economic, political, cultural and military affairs, to name only the most obvious ones, but trying to conclude whether Uzbekistan has a favorable foreign relations position would require us to inquire in the affairs of the other states with which it interacts. To accomplish such a task would demand either to set a limit, for instance to regional neighbours. This may end up being misleading. A state such as Uzbekistan, a new state in a region considered a periphery of the international system, could have bad relations within the region but support of a superpower, complicating the assessment of its foreign relations. The other option is to undertake the monumental task of researching in detail the intricacies of every actor with which Uzbekistan holds relations. This exercise would eventually lead us out of the scope of this study which is aimed at what goes on within the country. Uzbekistan being a state in the developing world with new infrastructures and a fragile economy, we do not really need thorough research to understand that it does not have a favourable foreign relations position in general. At times however, it is possible that it would find itself in a desirable

spot for a brief period of time with a specific actor, as was its position vis-à-vis the US when the latter needed allies to begin its operations in Afghanistan, and use this situation to maximize its other foreign relations temporarily.

In the context of this thesis, since we are dealing with issues such as terrorism, domestic groups or exiled groups looking to gain access to the country again, potential populist revolutions and overthrow of the government, we will define national security along the lines of item C. In this sense national security is "the condition provided by a defense posture capable of successfully resisting hostile or destructive action from within or without, overt or covert", and measures and strategies of national security would be policies put in place in order to reach this condition. In the context of this definition, it is not clear if the defense element is linked to protecting the existence of state in itself as a polity, with reference to its borders, its ability to police within them and its being recognized as such by other members of the international system, or if it is linked to defending any specific government or regime in power. Because states can easily survive regime change or serious alterations to some of their institutions, we are facing two possibilities.

The problem with the issue is that it propels us in the realm of international relations where everything is about systems, systems and more systems. Some have separated regime security from state security, commonly called national security. Amitav Acharya wrote that a definition of national security that would focus on protecting the state itself against external threats is unsuited for the third world where internal threats to

overthrow a particular regime are the more serious ones. For this reason, he proposed to distinguish between national/state security and regime security.²⁸ In an effective response to this argument, Hooman Peimani writes that both in the third world as well as in the developed world, threats to overthrow the existing regime of government will at least in some way have an impact on the security and stability of the state.²⁹ In most of the literature that will come under review, analysts do not always spend time in specifying their understanding of national security or security. However, we get the impression from their arguments that a threat of overthrowing the government and imposing a new constitution, or a regime change, is considered a national security risk. We will consider that we are referring to the defense of the government in place, which by logical extension also includes defending the state in itself.

Obviously the definition adopted here is almost military-centric and one could argue that the element of security in the expression "national security" could take another meaning. National security could be the preservation of the life and well being of the state's population, i.e. the nation. Let us take for instance the definition of security from Robert J. Art in the Oxford Companion to World Politics:

Although a concept that is crucial to an understanding of international politics, as is the case with most fundamental concepts, "security" is ambiguous and elastic in its meaning. In the most fundamental sense, to be secure is to feel free from threats, anxiety, or danger. Security is therefore a state of mind in which an individual, whether the highest political leader of the land or the average citizen, feels safe from harm by others. Used in this way, a state (or its leaders and citizens) believes itself secure when it fears that nothing adverse can be done to it by other states or by other foreign nonstate actors. To define security in this fashion is to see that it is a subjective state of mind, not an objective condition of being. It describes how people feel, not whether they are justified in feeling the

²⁸ Hooman Peimani, *Regional Security and the Future of Central Asia* (Wesport: Praeger, 1998), 14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

way they do. In this sense security depends on the perceptions people have of their position in their environment, not on an objective view of that environment.³⁰

This definition does justice to the sociological complexity of the dynamics of fear and security, but the problem is that we cannot achieve a systematic study of national security in Uzbekistan based on the feelings of certain citizens because we do not have this information. There is in fact a gap between the two approaches to define national security, based on what perspective one chooses. Some define it from the view of the population, as Art did above, and weigh criteria such as crime, medical services, environmental degradation,³¹ freedom from police abuses, and so on. The other group defines it from the state's defense perspective and focuses on the three items of our initial definition. Art himself admits that the term is however most often used to describe an ability of the state to deter or resist an attack.³² Barry Buzan tried to elaborate a comprehensive way of looking at security. He demonstrated that there are five sectors affecting security: military, political, economic, societal and environmental.³³ This one is a little too large for our study. The environment is not an issue to Uzbek security at this moment. Scientifically speaking, it is perhaps becoming one with the Aral Sea drying and other similar problems but these do not appear to come into the equation from the Uzbek government's point of view. I am reluctant to get into the societal risk factor, which

³⁰ Robert J. Art, "Security," *The Oxford Companion to the Politics of the World*, 2e. Joel Krieger, ed. Oxford University Press Inc. 2001, Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t121.e0679> (Last accessed on 19 July 2005).

³¹ For articles on how environment degradation can be incorporated into the calculations for national security, see Jessica Mathews, "Redefining security," *Foreign Affairs* 68 (Spring 1989) : 162-77.

³² Art, "Security."

³³ Peimani, 15.

Buzan links to the cultural identity of the state.³⁴ Uzbekistan is still in the process of national identity formation so I am not sure that we could draw coherent conclusions on this issue. Economic security could be interesting in another study but it is again absent from the national security discourse of Karimov. We are left with military and political, and, again since this is the prevailing definition surrounding the actual discourse in Uzbekistan and amongst scholars in the field, I have decided to keep using it myself.

In light of our final definition of national security, we can conclude that the aim of this study will be to determine if or how certain groups of Muslims in Uzbekistan can perform hostile or destructive acts against which the state's regime would not be able to resist on the one hand, and what has been the situation of Islam within the policies put in place by the state to strengthen its security. This will give us the two sides of the relation between Muslims and national security in today's Uzbekistan.

³⁴ Ibid.

2- Review of the Literature on the threat of Islam in Uzbekistan

It is much easier to find the works devoted to the debate on how Islam can be a security risk than those dedicated to analyzing Uzbekistan's national security strategy, which is why I will devote this section to the complex discussion of the Islamic threat and leave the literature on the security strategy for chapter four and five. Islam in Uzbekistan is not as rich an academic field as Islam in other parts of the world because it is a rather new focus and specialists are scarcer. However, it is enriched by the proliferation of books and journal articles on regional politics in Central Asia and by the many agencies and think tanks which diffuse their findings via the Internet. As a result, there is plenty of material available to the Western student to study modern political Islam in Uzbekistan.

Many studies on Central Asia in the early 1990s were motivated by understanding the formation of religious identities from an anthropological and post-modern point of view. I have left those aside to limit myself to people who were relating in some way their arguments to political consequences.³⁵ In this chapter, I have sorted the academics who dared to offer conclusions on the Islamic threat into theme baskets. This will help to highlight the trends in the scholarship.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the idea of the Islamic threat is often associated with a general belief held by certain scholars that Islam in general will inevitably conflict with a modern secular, liberal and democratic state. The first part of

³⁵ I have in mind anthropological books such as Jo-Ann Gross, ed, *Muslims in Central Asia*, Central Asia Book Series (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).

this chapter will be devoted to presenting the arguments of Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington in this respect. Although they do not aim their work specifically at Uzbekistan, it will be productive in our context to briefly introduce their contributions. The second part is an analysis of the disagreements to this generalization of Islam produced by later academics, which I expect will help us conclude that Muslims must be studied in a particularistic framework. The third part is a presentation of the perspective of the Uzbek President Islam Karimov in a 1998 book. This is a treat, for it is rare that the main political protagonist of a study is also a scholar who has published in the field. The fourth and fifth parts consist of the academics who see legitimacy in the Islamic threat discourse on the one hand and those who do not on the other.

2.1.1- Islam, the nation-state and liberal democracy: Lewis and Huntington

Bernard Lewis defends the argument that Islam as a religion and Muslims as political beings are not compatible with secularism, liberalism and democracy. Hence, although he does not address the Uzbek state, we can derive from his reasoning that, assuming Uzbekistan is authentically in the direction of a secular and pluralistic liberal democracy, it will inevitably be threatened by Islam in the future. His generalization of Islam is related to his idea that "Islam transcends all other identities."

Lewis wrote an analysis of the incompatibility in 1993. He saw many irreconcilable differences between elements of the modern state and Islam. He begins by saying that "some form of council or assembly, through which qualified members of the

polity participate in the formation, conduct, and, on occasion, replacement of the government"³⁶ never existed in the Muslim world. He explains why:

One obstacle to the emergence of such bodies was the absence of any legal recognition of corporate persons. [...] Thus almost all aspects of Muslim government have an intensely personal character. In principle, at least, there is no state, but only a ruler; no court, but only a judge. There is not even a city with defined powers, limits, and functions, but only an assemblage of neighborhoods, mostly defined by family, tribal, ethnic, or religious criteria, and governed by officials, usually military, appointed by the sovereign.³⁷

Which leads him to conclude on the possible chances of Western-style legislation:

One of the major functions of such bodies in the West, increasingly through the centuries, was legislation. According to Muslim doctrine, there was no legislative function in the Islamic state, and therefore no need for legislative institutions. [...] For believing Muslims, legitimate authority comes from God alone, and the ruler derives his power not from the people, nor yet from his ancestors, but from God and the holy law. [...] In principle the state was God's state, ruling over God's people; the law was God's law; the army was God's army; and the enemy, of course, was God's enemy.³⁸

This has led to specific development in political theory and explains the authoritarian nature of today's states in the Muslim world:

Without legislative or any other kind of corporate bodies, there was no need for any principle of representation or any procedure for choosing representatives. There was no occasion for collective decision, and no need therefore for any procedure for achieving and expressing it, other than consensus. Such central issues of Western political development as the conduct of elections and the definition and extension of the franchise therefore had no place in Islamic political evolution. Not surprisingly, in view of these differences, the history of the Islamic states is one of almost unrelieved autocracy. The Muslim subject owed obedience to a legitimate Muslim ruler as a religious duty. That is to say, disobedience was a sin as well as a crime.³⁹

³⁶ Bernard Lewis, "Islam and liberal Democracy," *The Atlantic* 271 (February 1993), 94. Available at <http://proquest.umi.com/> (Last accessed 21 August 2005)

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 95.

³⁹ Ibid.

Lewis adds that the non-liberal systems also existed socially via the structure of power in the home as well as elements such as polygamy and slavery, which prepared an individual for a life where everything was geared toward domination. He points out, nonetheless, that the Muslim ruler was theoretically subject to the law rather than above it, and that he was appointed out of a group of able and just men. In addition, Islam has at times showed amazing tolerance for diversity and pluralism, be it legal or social. This could help accommodate Islam and liberal democratic states. Lewis' conclusion is that the prospects for democracy in the Muslim world are not good, and fundamentalist regimes coming to power are likely, yet not inevitable.⁴⁰

The discussion in this section is, as the reader will expect, motivated to a great extent by the polemical "clash of civilizations" theory of Samuel Huntington. Huntington wrote his bestselling book in 1996. In it, he divides the world in mutually exclusive civilizations, and Islam is one of them. For him, the civilizations will inevitably clash because of irreconcilable differences in their basic values. He sees Islam as a threat to any modern state: "The idea of sovereign nation states is incompatible with belief in the sovereignty of Allah and the primacy of the *ummah*,"⁴¹ and he predicts nothing but instability in Central Asia: "Islamic culture explains in large part the failure of democracy to emerge in much of the Muslim world. [...] The prospects in the Muslim republics (of the ex-USSR) are bleak."⁴² Huntington also concludes that "the general failure of liberal democracy to take hold in Muslim societies is a continuing and repeated phenomenon

⁴⁰ Lewis, 97-98.

⁴¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 175.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 29.

beginning in the late 1800s. This failure has its source at least in part in the inhospitable nature of Islamic culture and society to Western liberal concepts."⁴³

Since the two authors have published their material, effective counter-arguments and responses to their perspectives have been produced, and we shall move to the exploration of some of them.

2.1.2- Responses and nuances to the incompatibility theory

One weakness that I see in the previous arguments is that, in order for the reader to accept these scholars' rationale, he or she needs to deny the experiences and diversities of Islamic political history. It would certainly be unacceptable to any western scholar if I were to suggest that Christianity is not compatible with capitalism,⁴⁴ not merely because we have examples of their co-inhabiting at this moment but also because no one would tolerate the generalization that Christianity is one thing (even Huntington divides it in more than one civilization). However, when it comes to Islam, writers are at times satisfied by very simplistic and naïve discourses. The facts of Muslims living constructively in a secular nation state like Canada or the U.S and participating in the democratic process are forgotten. Selective emphasis is put on incidents such as Marseille Muslims resisting the ban of the hijab in public schools to confirm the inevitable confrontation.

⁴³ Ibid., 114.

⁴⁴ The argument is theoretically possible if one were to emphasize the strong dichotomy between the basic Christian message of distancing oneself from material possessions and capitalism's emphasis on the accumulation of wealth, a perspective of equal simplicity to that forwarded to illustrate Islam's incompatibility with non-Islamic politics.

My concerns are shared by others; "These specialists fail to make sense of the essence of the very complicated processes and often dump everything into a single, jumbled heap. This line of argument foments a negative attitude towards Islam in general - which in turn is cheerfully exploited by journalists and politicians."⁴⁵ A similar remark is made by Anna Zelkina, a specialist of Islam in the ex-USSR, in her overview of the literature on the issue "[...] it is believed that 'Islamic' can uniquely provide us with an understanding of the way social, political and economic relations have been structured."⁴⁶ In the same year as Huntington published the "Clash", Fred Halliday published a deconstruction of the confrontation theory in which he argues that:

Many people in the world opposed to Islamic states - Christians, Jews, Hindus, South-East Asian Chinese - hold the view that Islam and Western democracy are incompatible. Once again we find people in the Islamic world, from the Saudi ruling family to Khomeini, advancing the same belief. [...] Yet to be drawn into an argument about any necessary incompatibility, or for that matter compatibility, between Islam and democracy is to accept precisely the false premise that there is one true, traditionally established, 'Islamic' answer to the question, and that this timeless 'Islam' rules social and political practice. There is no such answer and no such 'Islam'.⁴⁷

In a much less post-modern response to Huntington, Manus Midlarsky, a conflict resolution expert, although generalizing on Islam himself, shows using computed indicators (typical international relations calculus) that it is not incompatible with procedural democracy. Liberal democracy and the social values associated with it are alien to the Islamic world, but voting rights and lower forms of freedoms are not at all in

⁴⁵ Bakhtiar Babadzhanov, "Islam in Uzbekistan: From the Struggle for 'Religious Purity' to Political Activism," In *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?*, ed. Boris Rumer (New York : M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 299.

⁴⁶ Anna Zelkina, "Continuity and change in the societies of Central Asia and the Caucasus: a theoretical approach," in *Oil, Transition and Security in Central Asia*, ed. Sally Cummings (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 98.

⁴⁷ Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 116.

conflict.⁴⁸ Therefore, according to him the risk of an automatic civilizational conflict is non-existent.⁴⁹

One way to approach the problem was to show that nationalism and Islam can reinforce one another. Berna Turam, a sociologist with extensive fieldwork experience, wrote to correct the idea first proposed by Ernest Gellner that Islam was incompatible with the loyalty to the nation-state because it called for an allegiance to the Islamic community. She was able to show that in the specific case of Turkish Islam in Turkey and Central Asia, Islamic nationalism was in cooperation with the nation-state. "The predominant Euro-centric idea of secularism, understood as the decline of religion and its replacement by nationalism, obscures the convergences between Islamic and secular nationalism,"⁵⁰ says Turam. "Similarly, the exploration of the cultural basis of belonging and identity in the Muslim context tends to downplay the inheritance of revivalist Islamic movements from the nation-states into which they were born."⁵¹ Anita Sengupta, author of one of the most important books on independent Uzbekistan, argues along similar lines. She writes that the national identities are unlikely to be transcended by Islam. "The conclusion would be that rather than serving to dilute or weaken nationalism, Islamic belief, along with linguistic differences, seems to function as a base of national identity."⁵² Ghoncheh Tazmini reaches the same conclusion: "Islam and nationalism, rather than act as opposing forces, will mutually stimulate each other: the Islamic

⁴⁸ Manus I. Midlarsky, "Democracy and Islam: Implications for Civilizational Conflict and the Democratic Peace," *International Studies Quarterly* 42 (September 1998): 504.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 506.

⁵⁰ Berna Turam, "A bargain between the secular state and Turkish Islam: politics of ethnicity in Central Asia," *Nations and Nationalism* 10 (July 2004): 370.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁵² Anita Sengupta, *The Formation of the Uzbek Nation-State* (New York: Lexington Books, 2003), 207.

consciousness will help shape Central Asia's national and regional identities and vice versa. However, Islam, as an expression of national self-consciousness, is and will remain innocuous and far from revolutionary."⁵³

We, thus, have reasonable motives to discard the clash theory and focus the rest of the study on the particularities of the Central Asian scene. Even though we cannot escape the fact that some of the scholars that we will review work by analogies, we will incorporate as much analyses as possible which have a particular focus on Uzbekistan.

2.2- Islam Karimov's book

Why study what politicians have to say, knowing that they almost surely not mean it? Certainly because a lot more people listen to them instead of scholars. Their words can have a social impact. Remember Boris Yeltsin, involving his troops in the fight against Islamic insurgents during the Tajik civil war, who was urging central Asian leaders in the summer of 1993 to combat Islamic fundamentalism before it spreads all over the region and into Russia.⁵⁴ President Karimov's book, in which he reflects on the future of his country and offers some kind of rationale for his vision, offers us a unique insight into "the regime's psyche". Its most interesting chapter, for our own endeavour of course, is his analysis of religious extremism and fundamentalism which is in the "threats to security" sub-part.

⁵³ Ghoncheh Tazmini, "The Islamic revival in Central Asia: a potent force or misconception?" *Central Asian Survey* 20 (March 2001): 68.

⁵⁴ Steven Erlanger, "Block Raids, Yeltsin Tells Central Asians," *New York Times*, Aug 8, 1993 pg. 17. Online (Last accessed on July 4th 2005 through ProQuest Historical Newspapers)

Karimov sets off to explain the link between the religious revivalism in central Asia, which he sees as primarily a weapon of ideological struggle due to the repression of the USSR,⁵⁵ security threats and problems of political and economic stability. He writes that religion is linked to other spheres of social life, and because of this "religion has, throughout human history, been employed to a greater or lesser degree to achieve political goals which were not always noble."⁵⁶ In a not so surprisingly "Marxesque" opium perspective analysis, he accuses religious fanatics of destabilizing society by labelling their actions as people's action, therefore enabling "the population to relinquish feelings of personal responsibility for individual actions."⁵⁷ He also accuses them of playing the religious card for political goals instead of leaving Islam in spirituality where it belongs.⁵⁸

Karimov identifies seven ways in which Islamic fundamentalists pose a threat to the country's national security (giving this lengthy quotation will also convey the emotional tone of his phrasing):

1. In attempts to disseminate fundamentalism to undermine the confidence of faithful Muslims in the reforming state, and to destroy the stability and national, civic and interethnic harmony that are pre-conditions of transformations for the better. Islamists are aiming to discredit democracy, the secular state, and a multi-national and multi-confessional society.
2. In the clear-cut notion that those, particularly our youth, who follow the populist, attractive, but entirely hollow and baseless slogans of the fundamentalists about justice will turn out to be hostages of the will of others, which in the end will direct not only their brains, but also their destiny. The subordination to such authority may result in personal tragedy. The most severe consequences are personal servility, constraint, slavery of an individual, complete

⁵⁵ Islam Karimov, *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1998), 23.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

limitation of freedom - with which our movement forward progress is impossible.

3. In provoking, among social groups and regions of the population, confrontation based on 'true' and 'false' devotional principles of religiousness. These sorts of activities led to the split of the nation in Algeria and Afghanistan.
4. In the situation of the civil war on the southern borders of Uzbekistan and in neighboring countries which is reproducing new generations of terrorists, armed militants who consider themselves to be true Muslims, fighters for faith, and those who are eager to impose their monstrous ideas on our people.
5. In creating a repulsive image of Uzbekistan among both Muslim and non-Muslim states, to whom we are presented either as anti-religious atheists or as hidden supporters of state Islamization.
6. In shaping a global confrontation between Islamic and non-Islamic civilizations. This has a most negative impact on our integrational processes within the world Community and preserves the backwardness of the newly independent states. And, what is worse, people's expectation of 'civilizational clashes' is based on religious principles.
7. In exerting influence on the mass mind, the concept of religion being presented as a universal means to solve all economic, political and international problems and contradictions.⁵⁹

It seems that Karimov is mainly concerned over fundamentalists making false promises, giving a bad image to Muslims worldwide and brainwashing the next generation with monstrous ideas. On some issue, he seems idealistic, on others, realistic or pessimistic. As regards to religion, he is trying to side with the average Muslim who feels his religion is deprived from a "welcome" in the community of civilizations owing to the actions of those with political goals. Politically, he wants everyone to prepare and sacrifice for the hardships of transition but resents his competitors trying to gain ground with miraculous promises.

After leaving us with this list, Karimov makes an unexpected turn in his reasoning. Up to this point we get the impression that he wants to focus the blame on fundamentalists for their being knowingly deceptive. All of a sudden, the very next

sentence after the list, the argument shifts and Karimov writes, "Recently, there were foreign press reports that the Uzbekistan leadership does not believe in the threat of fundamentalism but uses it to frighten the West and pursue particular goals."⁶⁰ Following this, he attacks those in the West, not mentioning any names, who believe that fundamentalists emerge only to fight in their own state and thereby underestimate the threat from fundamentalist terrorism. His conclusion is that those who think fundamentalists would become peaceful towards foreigners if they had the control of the state make a mistake. According to him, the way of thinking of the west versus the east, characterized by chauvinism, arrogance and neo-colonialism is also to blame for the insecurity in his region and the middle-east.⁶¹

2.3- Academics who view Muslims as a threat to Uzbekistan

This category comprises specialists of Central Asia or of Uzbekistan. Their reasons and approaches differ. We will approach them chronologically. Among the scholars who study Uzbekistan through comparisons and derive a conclusion about the risks of political Islam are Ralph Magnus, a recognized author on Afghanistan, and Eden Naby, a cultural historian of the Middle East, who were writing in 1995 and predicting that Central Asia would follow the same path as Afghanistan. They argue that strong ties were developed between Central Asian Soviets and Afghan resistance fighters since the USSR's invasion of 1979.⁶² Afghanistan, since 1992, presents an attractive model to

⁵⁹ Ibid., 25-26.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁶¹ Ibid., 27.

⁶² Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby, "Afghanistan and Central Asia: Mirrors and Models," *Asian Survey* 7 (July 1995): 613.

Central Asians they write, because it shows how Islam can eliminate foreign control.⁶³ Because both are Sunnis and striving for independence, they cannot escape being models for one another.⁶⁴

Hooman Peimani, an independent international relations consultant, writes in 1998 that there exists a chance that Islamic radicals who penetrated Uzbekistan during the Afghanistan and Tajikistan struggles may become an influence in this country.⁶⁵ The same year, Neil J. Melvin, a specialist of Uzbek politics in transition, says that the lack of secular opposition and the deep nature of Islam in Uzbek society combined with the harsh governmental repression may allow political Islam to challenge the Karimov model of leadership and stability.⁶⁶

Alexei Malshenko, an expert on the Caucasus, in 2001, claims that the events of the second half of 2000 proved that the Islamists presented not only a threat to Uzbekistan, but also a regional threat to Central Asia.⁶⁷ Tazmini in 2001 as well, writes that Islam in the region is moderate and subject to the many social identities dividing the population.⁶⁸ He hardly sees how this could become a threat, especially considering the measures that the state and its international partners are putting in place to resist Islamists. However, if the regime does not respond to the economic challenges and fall in

⁶³ Ibid., 614.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 620.

⁶⁵ Peimani, 58.

⁶⁶ Neil J. Melvin, *Uzbekistan: Transition to authoritarianism on the silk road*, Postcommunist States and Nations (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), 59.

⁶⁷ Alexei Malashenko, "Islam in Central Asia," in *Central Asian Security*, ed. Roy Allison and Lena Jonson (Washington DC : Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 56.

⁶⁸ Tazmini, 81-82.

bankruptcy, he argues, and if no slack is cut for popular Islam in the legal political sphere, radical sympathies could take over.⁶⁹

The year 2002 was a very rich year in the field. Many scholars, in the soon after September 11 era, argued along the lines of an Islamic threat. Boris Rumer, an acknowledged reference on post-Soviet politics, seems hesitant to offer a conclusive opinion. He says that Uzbekistan must react to the threat of Islamic militants, and that the example of Tajikistan proves that a brokered deal with them does not consist in a viable option.⁷⁰ He thinks it is unlikely that Uzbekistan will turn into an Islamic State and he does not see validity in drawing analogies with states of the Middle East or North Africa who lacked the Soviet Experience, but he argues that if the regime were to collapse to Islamic forces (which suggests that he sees it as a possibility), then "bloody chaos" would spread beyond the borders of Uzbekistan.⁷¹

Laurent Vinatier, a French expert on Russia and Central Asia says that the masses siding with an Islamic ideology to overthrow the regime is unlikely, but that the capture of the state by armed groups is a real force with the potential to threaten security and destabilize the state. We could then assist to a forced and imposed Islamisation of the country.⁷² Bakhtiar Babadzhanov argues that there is no risk coming from the militants. Movements such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) "are hardly to be the impetus for disorders," but he thinks that underground propaganda movements can

⁶⁹ Tazmini, 70.

⁷⁰ Boris Rumer, ed, *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 16-17.

⁷¹ Ibid, 33.

⁷² Laurent Vinatier, *L'islamisme en Asie centrale, L'Histoire au présent* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2002), 245.

become a risk if the government continues to use repression against them and leads them to prevail through an alliance with external Islamic forces.⁷³

According to Ahmed Rashid, the famous Pakistani scholar of terrorism, from 1999 onwards, the IMU became "the most potent threat to Central Asian regimes."⁷⁴ On the other hand, he still concluded that the IMU and Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) had neither the power nor the popularity to challenge the Karimov regime, and that their presence and success were a result of the state's repression but had limited "expansionability" because their ideologies were "oversimplistic" and imbued with too many foreign elements. He also assessed as one of their main weaknesses the fact that their international religious solution rhetoric was not addressing the real problems of the peoples of Central Asia.⁷⁵ He concludes that the Afghan example of terrorism, instability and poverty is a real possibility in Uzbekistan if the state does not use its new international window to solve economic problems, because "the real crisis in Central Asia lies with state, not the insurgents."⁷⁶ He also suspected that the strategic alliance concluded by Karimov with the US should turn more ordinary Muslims against the regime, contributing to an escalation of the threat.⁷⁷

Michael Fredholm, a security policy specialist, in 2003, said that there is support for fundamentalism in Uzbekistan that goes beyond economic and hardship causes, based

⁷³ Babadzhanov, 322.

⁷⁴ Rashid, 153.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 243.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 244.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 186.

on real hatred for the Karimov regime. Although the state is strong enough with its international partners to resist petty popular rebellions, too much association between the "despotic" Karimov and the American interests is likely to stimulate hatred for western symbols. This hatred could take roots so deep that repression will not suffice in containing it. The risk is that this hatred will explode in the future when the time comes that a political relaxation appears on the Uzbek scene, and we could witness events reminiscent of the Iranian experience.⁷⁸

2.4- Academics who do not see Islam as a threat to security

Interestingly, certain scholars who do not believe in the Islamic threat leave themselves an open door suggesting that maybe in the future, under certain conditions, Islam could be a force. This section is arranged more by similarity of rationale of the scholars discussed than by chronological order.

One trend among the scholars who do not see Islam as a threat to security is to define Uzbek Islam as an element tied to an individual's cultural identity and not to his political identity. This general theme has been explained by some as merely being a consequence of the USSR's outlawing religion but being less zealous for profoundly cultural aspects of religion, such as rights of passage.⁷⁹ Consequently, the argument concludes that a practising Uzbek Muslim who values his spiritual belief will fight for the freedom to explore his religion on a social basis but if he is not oppressed at this level he

⁷⁸ Michael Fredholm, *Uzbekistan & The Threat From Islamic Extremism*, Camberley: Defence Academy of the UK, Conflict Studies Research Center, March 2003, K39, 15.

⁷⁹ Shirin, Akiner, ed., *Political and Economic Trends in Central Asia* (London : British Academic Press, 1994), 185.

will not have inclinations towards the Islamisation of his polity because he sees his political identity as tied with the nationalist secular project that lies at the root of the modern Uzbek nation-state. This is the point of view explored by A. Aydin Çeçen who writes in a 1998 study of the competing historical influences to modern Uzbek identity that "Moreover, orthodox Islam - both in its Shiite or Sunni versions - was quite alien to the religious beliefs and practises of Uzbek Muslims, for whom religion mainly constituted a basis for cultural identity rather than an ideational or a political stand."⁸⁰

Badan Phool, who is working on central Asia as a whole but whose fieldwork has led him to spend more time in Uzbekistan than in other republics, concludes that the religious revival is the strongest in this state.⁸¹ In 2001, he wrote a more nuanced view of Çeçen's reasoning. In this work, he understands that the dynamic of revivalism has yet mostly involved cultural Islam, but he separates these social developments on a mass population level from the underground efforts of fundamentalists. Furthermore, he suggests that the wave of cultural Islam could be transformed into political ambitions but he does not see it happening in the near future:

The role of Islam and its effect on the Central Asian life cannot be ignored since it has emerged as a potential force which has influenced the cultural, economic, political behaviour of the people. Several groups in the region are making vigorous efforts to manipulate this situation for their own benefit. But at present, there seems to be no major threat to the secular fabric of the region. The native people are happy with the religious freedom granted by the respective governments of the Central Asian republics, and there has growing influence of Islam in their daily life.⁸²

⁸⁰ Çeçen, 150.

⁸¹ Badan Phool, *Dynamics of Political Development in Central Asia*, (New Delhi : Lancers' Books, 2001), 192.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 188.

Phool has reservations, however, that there may be several elements in the changing socio-political framework that could trigger a fundamentalist turn in this overall peaceful revival. He cites the issues of women's rights over which secular states must take a strong stance to assure that the progress from pushed Soviet egalitarianism is not lost. This could lead to friction with the more patriarchal Islamic culture of central Asia. He also has concerns over issues such as family planning. These two conflict zones between the revival of Islamic traditions and recent pre-independence social-policies, if not handled well, could open a door for the growth of sympathy for fundamentalism if the population feels discontent with the administration.⁸³ Phool predicts three ways in which Islam could develop: 1) it could become a political force (through an Islamic state, through rhetoric used by secular leaders for legitimacy or either through a voice of protest by the mass population), 2) it could become above all a cultural form of identity or 3) it could become a purely religious or spiritual identity.⁸⁴

A second identifiable trend is to illustrate that the Islam that survived in Central Asia is weakened by other social factors preventing by this manner a massive rally of the population behind an Islamic revolutionary message. In his 1995 article, Rajan Menon, expert in international relations, although on a regional rather than a nation-state focus, embraces similar conclusions. His very insightful analysis of the different security challenges in Uzbekistan does not cast Islamic fundamentalism as the main security protagonist.⁸⁵ Menon sees irredentist conflicts emerging from the different ethnic

⁸³ Ibid., 189.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 192.

⁸⁵ Rajan Menon, "In the Shadow of the Bear: Security in Post-Soviet Central Asia," *International Security* 20 (Summer 1995): 149-181.

Diasporas created by the process of state formation as the main obstacle to national security in Uzbekistan, especially Tajik ethno-centrists forces, consisting of both organizations such as the Samarqand Society as well as border rebels based in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. This and the pressures of economic transformation and potential Russian neo-imperialism will determine political stability. Menon acknowledges the resurgence of Islam in the post-Soviet Uzbek society as a source of social mobilization, but remarks that this does not lead necessarily to instability and insecurity. "Islam does provide a sense of identity and community" he writes, yet it is very diverse and its unifying factor is counterweighted by clan affiliations and varieties of Sufi mysticisms.⁸⁶

Two years later, William Fierman, himself a specialist on Central Asia, published an analysis with similar reasoning yet a more cautious stance for the stability of the future. Noting that the Muslims in Uzbekistan did not seem dissatisfied with Karimov's questionable attitude in patronizing Islam, he writes, "Moreover, it appears unlikely that such dissatisfaction alone would unite Uzbekistan's people in a movement to promote change, let alone overthrow the government. Islam, after all, means very different things to different segments of Uzbekistan's population, and it would likely be difficult for such diverse groups to agree upon a common definition, and certainly a common leadership."⁸⁷ He suggests on the other hand that the diverse groups of people divided along ethnic lines

⁸⁶ Rajan Menon, "In the Shadow of the Bear: Security in Post-Soviet Central Asia," *International Security* 20 (Summer 1995): 164.

⁸⁷ Fierman, 394.

or tribal and sectarian affiliation could blend and unite if the social and economic conditions worsen to a degree where, overall, Islam is the voice of dissent.⁸⁸

Focusing on military elements, Rustam Burnashev thinks that the Islamic threat is cited deliberately by the government in order to justify the lack of democratization. He thinks that the government's goal is to make the population view the absence of democracy as a positive guarantor of stability and for this argument they keep scaring the masses with the threat of radical fundamentalists.⁸⁹ Comparing the numbers of troops and the budget of the Uzbek army against the alleged numbers of militants, he presents strong evidence that, militarily speaking, the IMU and others have no chance of challenging the state's defense troops. He thinks that the threat also serves the purpose of attracting American funds. Although most of it now is purely propaganda, he sees it possible in the future that under conditions of growing civil conflict the militants could pose an internal threat.⁹⁰

I will now leave all these opinions aside for a moment and explore the facts on the main Muslim political actors in the country. Later, in the conclusion, I will come back and reflect on whose theory still stands the strongest in the light of the evidence presented in this study.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Rustam Burnashev, "Regional Security in Central Asia: Military Aspect," In *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?*, ed. Boris Rumer (New York : M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 145.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 146.

3 - Muslims in Uzbekistan - The actors

The tendency among academics who study the political role of Islam in Uzbekistan is to divide the people along the lines of their religious denomination, or community, and from these groupings try to understand the political consequences. I have decided not to do that, partly for the sake of originality and partly because doing this almost inevitably leads one to assume general rules about how the Shiites, the Sunnis or the mystics are most likely to behave politically and I don't believe in the validity of such imprecise rules.

In this chapter I look at the groups of Muslims who play political roles in the country. The purpose is to explain who they are, what their role or position regarding the state is, and to assemble information on their potential capabilities to threaten the state. Religion lives at different levels in a society, and the form, vigour and use of the faith and the religious message and deeds will depart from the stereotype of its label (be it Wahhabi, Isma'ili, or any affiliation to a Tariqa) and vary depending on the different social factors that affect these levels of the society, be they economic, legal or political. I have created three categories and each one will constitute a part of the chapter in the corresponding order. They are: 1) the underground radical movements, 2) the religious civil society organizations, 3) the masses of average citizen Muslims.

3.1- The underground radical movements

The first category of political status belongs to the most feared actors; the militias, the terrorist groups, the underground dissident cells and those alike. They have been the

focus of many of the writers that we have reviewed as being the core of the Islamic threat in Uzbekistan. Some of them have different approaches, methods, and organizations, but their messages call for the establishment of a caliphate across Central Asia. For the Karimov government, they are all considered Islamic fanatics, national security risks and enemies of the nation.

3.1.1- The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)

The IMU, sometimes referred to by its alternate name of the Islamic Party of Turkestan,⁹¹ is the most famous of predominantly Uzbek terrorist organizations. It was formed in 1998, possibly as a kind of federation of all the insurgent groups that had emerged in the Ferghana Valley since 1989.⁹² These groups (sometimes called Salafis), had been chased out of the country by the 1992 Ferghana crackdowns and were meddling, training and associating with their Tajik and Afghan counterparts until the end of the Tajik civil war in 1997.⁹³ The leaders announced the creation of the movement and its goals in the summer of 1998 from Afghanistan, and officially declared a jihad against the Karimov regime in the summer of 1999. The ideology of the IMU is pretty straight forward; it wants to avenge the Muslims who died at the hand of the regime, to free the Uzbeks from the oppression of Karimov and remove him from office by waging a bloody Jihad, then it wants to set up an Islamic state based on the Islam of the prophet, different from the Taliban or the Iranian or Saudi models.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Mariam Abou Zahab and Olivier Roy, *Islamist Networks* (New York : Colombia University Press, 2004), 8.

⁹² Ibid., 7.

⁹³ Vitaly Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia, The Soviet Bloc and After* (Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 38.

⁹⁴ Rashid, 148-49.

There are two men recognized as having formed the IMU, the first one is Jumaboi Ahmadzhanovitch Khojaev, better known as Juma Namangani, an ex-soviet soldier who was sent to fight the Mujahidin during the Soviet Afghan war. During this time, it is believed that he became a "born again" Muslim.⁹⁵ He deserted the soviet camp and befriended Osama Bin Laden.⁹⁶ He later joined Adolat, the party of Tahir Yuldosh (described below), before leaving for Tajikistan in 1992. He is the one who brought the initial paramilitary expertise to the IMU from his background as a paratrooper. It is commonly reported that he doesn't know much about Islam but is primarily a guerrilla fighter, and is motivated above all by his hatred for the Uzbek government.⁹⁷ At the end of the Tajik civil war, he refused the cease-fire and left for the village of Hoit, where he bought a farm and some trucks to finance his projects of continued Jihad.⁹⁸ After a few visits to Kabul to proclaim the birth of the IMU, he moved to Afghanistan in 1999 with some 200 co-militants.⁹⁹ It is reported that he has been killed during combat with Uzbek security forces, in October 2001. Some reports that he was killed as the results of American bombings near Kunduz in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁰ Reports by Kyrgyz authorities in 2002 say that he is still alive.¹⁰¹

The other co-founder and the theological specialist of the organization is Tohir Abdouhalilovitch Yuldeshev, aka Tahir Yuldosh. He was a college drop-out and a mullah

⁹⁵ Ibid., 138.

⁹⁶ "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)," Key Leader profile, MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base. <http://www.tkb.org/KeyLeader.jsp?memID=5876> (Last accessed on 20 July 2005).

⁹⁷ Rashid, 143.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 144.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 145.

¹⁰⁰ Abou Zahab and Roy, 9.

¹⁰¹ "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)." Terrorist group profile. Janes's Strategic Advisory Services. Posted online June 2005. URL in table of contents (Last accessed 16 August 2005).

in the local Islamic underground in the Ferghana Valley.¹⁰² He first joined the ranks of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) as a mullah before leaving and co-founding the Adolat (justice) party. This party in the early 1990s became influential in the Valley, opening mosques and religious schools. It ordered religious customs such as veiling to be respected and set-up vigilante personnel to combat crime.¹⁰³ Members were initially well accepted by the elders who saw them as youths devoted to their ancestral traditions.¹⁰⁴ In 1992, Adolat was banned in Uzbekistan and Yuldosh left for Afghanistan and travelled to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Turkey and Iran before settling until 1998 in Peshawar, Pakistan, which is known as the international center of pan-Islamic jihad.¹⁰⁵ Then he was given a house in Kabul by the Taliban and bin Laden and it was from there that he and Namangani declared the existence of the IMU, which he claimed was a movement of 100 000 people.¹⁰⁶

The IMU emerged on the central stage on 16 February 1999. A series of six bomb attacks including one that was apparently aimed at Karimov shook the city. It has been suggested, and Rashid for one presents this as the most common hypothesis, that these bombings were the work of government members trying to get rid of Karimov,¹⁰⁷ that it involved the Russians who wanted to eliminate him. The official position of the government attributed the responsibility to the IMU, and Karimov began to threaten to arrest any father of an IMU member saying: "If my child chose such a path, I myself

¹⁰² Rashid, 137.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 139.

¹⁰⁴ Naumkin, 59.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 71.

¹⁰⁶ Rashid, 149.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 85, 150.

would rip off his head."¹⁰⁸ The attacks led to the death of 16 civilians and 150 injured. The main target building was the office of the cabinet of the ministers in independence square. In the summer of 1999, shortly before Namangani published his declaration of jihad and left Tajikistan for Afghanistan, the IMU orchestrated a wave of kidnappings and killings which centered attention on them once again.¹⁰⁹ These attacks took place in Kyrgyzstan, in the areas of Batken and Osh, and their climax was the kidnapping of four Japanese geologists.¹¹⁰

In July 2000, about 200 armed militants of the IMU engaged in coordinated manoeuvres and many penetrated Uzbekistan's Surkhandarya province from the Tajik and Kyrgyz borders with the aim of supplying weapons to the inside cells.¹¹¹ Militants were able to inflict damage to Kyrgyz army posts near Batken and to kill and take a few hostages in the surroundings of Tashkent itself, in Bostanlyk and Gazalkent.¹¹² During the same offensive, American climbers were held hostage by IMU militants, which led the U.S. to put the group on its terrorist list.¹¹³ At the end of the year, an Uzbek court tried IMU leaders (in absentia, along with Muhammad Solih, leader of Erk, in exile in Norway) and found them guilty of killing 70 and injuring 200 people. Namangani and Yuldosh were sentenced to death while Solih received twenty years.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 150.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 153.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 162.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 168.

¹¹² Ibid., 170.

¹¹³ Ibid., 171.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 172.

In July 2001, a series of attacks against Kyrgyz border guards, and other Kyrgyz targets such as a television transmitter in Batken, as well as combat against Uzbek troops in south east Uzbekistan opened a new offensive, and it confirmed that the IMU had sleeper cells in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and was growing independent from the Tajik and Afghan bases.¹¹⁵ The offensive was interrupted in September after the terrorist attacks in New York brought thousands of American troops to Uzbekistan.

In 2002, a bombing that killed seven people in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan, was blamed on the IMU by the local government.¹¹⁶ In May 2003, a person was killed by a bomb in Osh, targeted at the currency exchange building. Police claimed to have arrested IMU members in relation with both incidents and to have thwarted plans to attack the US embassy in Bishkek.¹¹⁷ In July 2004, three suicide bombings occurred in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent. Among the targets were the embassy of Israel, the Prosecutor General's office and the American Embassy. The government blamed these events on an IMU-HT coalition, but no proof has been presented.

The IMU may have financed itself before the American entry in Afghanistan in 2001 by receiving money from the Taliban forwarded by Yuldosh stationed in Kabul and by profiting from the drug trade between Afghanistan and Central Asia. There are also reports that they received funds from rich Uzbeks now living in Saudi Arabia.¹¹⁸ The

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 180.

¹¹⁶ "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)." Terrorist group profile. Janes's Strategic Advisory Services. Posted June 2005. (Last accessed 16 August 2005)

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

members of the group are recruited from Uzbekistan principally, but also from all over Central Asia, and they had over the years grown increasingly closer to the Taliban and Osama bin Laden himself, sometimes performing attacks on Afghan targets on behalf of al-Qaida.¹¹⁹ They usually change their tactics from one attack to another, making it harder for their adversaries to resist ambushes.¹²⁰ They work in ethnically divided brigades of 40 to 50 or 15 to 20 men.¹²¹ Their top equipment consists of AK47s, sniper rifles, night-vision goggles and grenade launchers.¹²² According to the most recent US numbers, the group would have less than 700 members in its ranks.

3.1.2 The Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT)

The group Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) is another organized underground movement which is often suspected to have ties with terrorist militias. The movement, banned in the Middle east but still popular in Muslim countries such as Turkey, Egypt and across North Africa, operates openly from European headquarters, especially in London. It is believed to be in touch secretly with local leaders unknown by the public in Central Asia and is deemed to be well funded.¹²³ This group has proven its ability to use new information technologies to spread its message.¹²⁴ HT members have been accused at several occasions by Karimov, whom in return they call the "Tyrant of Tashkent,"¹²⁵ to be

¹¹⁹ "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)," Terrorist group profile, MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base. <http://www.tkb.org/Group.jsp?groupID=4075> (Last accessed on 20 July 2005).

¹²⁰ Rashid, 154.

¹²¹ "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)." Terrorist group profile. Janes's Strategic Advisory Services. Posted June 2005. (Last accessed 16 August 2005)

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Rashid, 119.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 121.

¹²⁵ Wording used on HT's website at <http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org/>. The website and its publications are available in Arabic, Russian, Turkish, English, Urdu, German, and Danish, but in none of the Central Asian languages, an example of the lack of regional focus for which the movement is often criticized.

masterminding attacks on government targets. They are also accused of using drug trafficking to finance some of their cells, although no proof can be found. Nevertheless, "there are more HT prisoners in Central Asia's prisons than those of any other movement, including the much better known IMU."¹²⁶ Chances are that HT is really involved in terrorism, its rhetoric is uncompromising and its goals are to win over a country and from then annex the rest of the Islamic world.¹²⁷ Its leader, Sheikh Abdul Qadeem Zaloom, whose whereabouts are always a mystery, declared that Central Asia was ripe for takeover because it had reached a boiling point.¹²⁸

The creation of HT goes back to 1953 when Palestinian Sheikh Taquiuddin an-Nabhani Filastyni founded it in Saudi Arabia and Jordan. It was introduced rather late in Uzbekistan, in 1995 a Jordanian called Salahuddin established the first cell and now it is believed that HT has 60 000 members in Tashkent alone and several thousands in other cities and regions of Uzbekistan, not to mention its cells in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.¹²⁹ HT leaders have claimed that the repression that its members are facing in Central Asia were reminiscent of the oppression that early Muslims and prophet Muhammad had endured in Mecca before leaving in exile. It follows in the equation that HT members are expected one day to come back from the dark and take over the Central Asian lands from the existing regimes, however the movement hopes that the masses will rise and perform this task peacefully and not through an armed insurgency.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Rashid, 115, 126. The last figures from 2001 suggests that there were 5150 HT political prisoners in the country out of a total of 7600 political prisoners.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 116.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 120.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 117.

Ideologically speaking, HT is aspiring to re-create a Caliphate in the likes of the Ottoman one (which is quite original for a group that has its origins in the Arab world where the Ottoman empire is often viewed through local nationalist discourse as the dark ages of Islamic history in that region where Islam was deemed corrupted by pagan Turks). Rashid thinks that this appeals to the Turkic population of Central Asia who identify with the founders of the Ottoman empire,¹³¹ who were themselves Turkic peoples. HT portrays Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish republic, as a puppet playing a part in a western and Zionist conspiracy, happening all over again through the corrupted secular dictators of Central Asia such as Karimov.¹³² Among other things, HT's ideology is simplistic, anachronistic and denies the diversity of Islamic history. It is opposed to Sufism, to Jews, to Israel, to Shiite Muslims, and to the validity of other Islamic movements around the World.¹³³

Ahmed Rashid claims to have talked in a secret interview with a senior secret cell leader in Uzbekistan. Through his reports, we learn that HT in Uzbekistan is organized in secret cells called *daira* (circle) of five to seven men. Only the leader knows the contact information for other cells, which make the structure impregnable even to Uzbek police agents who have successfully infiltrated the organization. As in a pyramid scam, the main mandate of cell members is to spread the HT message and create new cells.¹³⁴ HT claims

¹³¹ Ibid., 122.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 123-24.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 119-120.

to have many members among Karimov's inner circle, among students and urban intelligentsia as well as disenchanted urban workers.¹³⁵

HT has never claimed responsibility for any attacks and the U.S. administration did not put it on the terrorism list because they neither perform guerrilla warfare, nor set-up training camps, nor kidnap people.¹³⁶ They publish pamphlets, distribute Islamic literature and run underground tea-rooms and mosques. They try primarily to use propaganda to gain the support of disillusioned youths. There is a fear that they might turn to guerrilla techniques, because they have warned in the past that too much oppression from the current regime makes violent Jihad inevitable.¹³⁷ They claim that Central Asian leaders and the Russian intelligence structures are coordinating their operations against them,¹³⁸ which is likely to be true. Although HT activists living in Afghanistan had been found training in guerrilla camps, this is not true for Uzbek HT activists. In response to HT's denial of terrorism, the Uzbek regime cites reports of a secret reunion aimed at cooperation that was held by members of HT, the IMU, the Taliban, Al-Qaida and Chechen separatists in Kabul in 2000.¹³⁹ This was never proven, but a look at HT's website, its publications and messages reveals that their discourse is almost identical to al-Qaida in its anti-Western, anti-colonial and anti-American stance. The major difference is the condemning instead of condoning of political violence at this moment. HT was in its apogee in 1998 but since then it has been split. Its offshoot, Hizb

¹³⁵ Ibid., 124.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 132.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 134.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 132.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 133.

an-Nusra, thought that a radical change in the activities was necessary and favoured more radical methods of struggle.¹⁴⁰

Among the most serious terrorist attacks ever to occur in Uzbekistan were those committed by a nameless terrorist militia with claims to be linked to al-Qaida in the week of late March and early April of 2004. The Uzbek government claimed that HT was responsible for the bombings and the shootings, an allegation they backed by written confessions of some of the defendants.¹⁴¹ The wave of attacks were carried in the cities of Bukhara and Tashkent and resulted in the deaths of 47 people and was the first ever suicide bombing attack recorded in Central Asia. In their trial for this attack, of the twenty defendants, six admitted having been trained in weaponry at a terrorist base in Kazakhstan and five claimed they had received suicide bombing and police combat expertise in Pakistan.¹⁴² It is suspected that these confessions were bogus. Proof of armed Jihad being associated with HT is still lacking and HT denied any links with the 2004 bombings.¹⁴³

Michael Fredholm, a researcher at the U.K Defence Academy, points to other temporary and less important groups that played a minor role at some point in time:

By 1999, there were also reported to be about ten other, smaller militant Islamic groups active in the Ferghana valley, with names such as Tabligh ("Revelation"), Uzun soqol ("Long Beard"), Adolat uyushmasi ("Justice Union"), Islom lashkarlari ("Warriors of Islam"), Tavba ("Repentance"), and Nur or Nurchilar

¹⁴⁰ Babadzhanov, 319.

¹⁴¹ "Al-Qaeda-lined group faces up to 20 years imprisonment," IRIN 23 August 2004. (Last Accessed on 21 July 2005)

¹⁴² "Al-Qaeda-lined group faces up to 20 years imprisonment," IRIN 23 August 2004. (Last Accessed on 21 July 2005)

¹⁴³ "Karimov believes hizb-ut-tahrir behind most recent Tashkent bombings," EurasiaNet, 2 August 2004. (Last accessed on 16 August 2005)

("Ray of Light"). The number and names of these groups may well reflect old information, no longer reliable, or pure misunderstandings. Some groups of these names, such as the Islom lashkarlari of which Adolat was a faction as well as their successor Tavba (also known as Hizbullah, "Party of God"), were in fact groups that were crushed by the authorities in 1992 and 1995, respectively, while others, such as Uzun soqol, are merely the popular nicknames ("the bearded ones") of Islamic extremists. Others, including Jamaat-e Tablighi, are Islamic missionary movements based in India and Pakistan. Even so, the Jamaat-e Tablighi is known to have administered the recruitment of Islamic volunteers to the jihad in Afghanistan and the movement has been accused of subversive activities in Central Asia as well. Nurchilar, finally, is a Sufi movement. It probably has little to do with the other groups.¹⁴⁴

3.2- The religious civil society

This section is of course dealing with the Islamic religious civil society. Islam has a long relation with civil society in the Central Asian region. Not only was the mosque the center of social life, but "underground" Islamic initiatives such as tea-rooms and independent schools were the only kind of civil society existing during Soviet times.¹⁴⁵ It has been argued that civil society survived in two principal ways in Uzbekistan; communal, and the more typical western civil society. Communal was cooperation and organization originating from both proximity (more precisely the Mahalla, or neighbourhood) and extended kin (more precisely the Avlod, "ascent patriarchal extended family").¹⁴⁶ In the early 1990's, we could have considered Adolat, Tahir Yuldosh's party, and the Islamic Renaissance Party as religious civil society organizations. Of course,

¹⁴⁴ Fredholm, 15.

¹⁴⁵ Sergei Gretskey, "In search of civil society in Central Asia," In *Oil, Transition and Security in Central Asia*, ed. Sally Cummings (London : RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 92.

¹⁴⁶ Sabine Freizer, "Central Asian fragmented civil society: communal and neoliberal forms in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan," In *Exploring Civil Society*, eds. Marlies Glasius, Favid Lewis and Hakan Seckinelgin (New York : Routledge, 2004), 131-32.

these are long gone; the IRP was crushed before independence and Adolat in March 1992.¹⁴⁷

The important Uzbek constitutional provisions dealing with religious civil society are the following:

Article 57. The formation and functioning of political parties and public associations aiming to do the following shall be prohibited: changing the existing constitutional system by force; coming out against the sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of the Republic, as well as the constitutional rights and freedoms of its citizens; advocating war and social, national, racial and religious hostility, and encroaching on the health and morality of the people, as well as of any armed associations and political parties based on the national or religious principles. All secret societies and associations shall be banned.

Article 58. The state shall safeguard the rights and lawful interests of public associations and provide them with equal legal possibilities for participating in public life. Interference by state bodies and officials in the activity of public associations, as well as interference by public associations in the activity of state bodies and officials is impermissible.

Article 61. Religious organizations and associations shall be separated from the state and equal before law. The state shall not interfere with the activity of religious associations.

Article 62. Public associations may be dissolved or banned, or subject to restricted activity solely by the sentence of a court.¹⁴⁸

The law clearly restricts the scope of the associations' activities. It is unlikely that civil society in general will flourish in Uzbekistan, where everything originating from outside the state and carrying a flavour of communal association is crushed or regulated by the government. Sergei Gretsky thinks that the prospects of Islamic civil society are

¹⁴⁷ Reuel Hanks, "Civil Society and Identity in Uzbekistan: The Emergent role of Islam," in *Civil Society in Central Asia*, ed. M. Holt Ruffin and Daniel Waugh (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 170.

¹⁴⁸ Constitution of Uzbekistan, available at <http://www.press-service.uz/en/section.scm?sectionId=4713> from the PSPRU. (Last accessed 21 August 2005).

grim, even for Waqf.¹⁴⁹ Islam Karimov himself once claimed that public movements appear when there is a lack of political authority.¹⁵⁰ Religious organizations and movements are especially targeted by the regime's fear that any Islam related gathering is a chance for fundamentalism to take a step forward. When the state passed the Law on Freedom of conscience and Religious Organizations in 1998, the chances for religious civil society got grimmer:

Under this law, in addition to outlawing proselytism, all religious organizations must be registered with and approved by the Uzbek government before they may conduct worship activities and religious rituals as well as conduct other social programs. With regard to registered Islamic organizations, the primary target of the legislation, only those imams, mosques, liturgy and publications are permitted that have been approved by the Spiritual Directorate for Muslims (the Muftiate), a government agency with members appointed by the president.¹⁵¹

There is no major religious civil society actor that is not under state control at the moment, and members of new emerging groups are immediately tried and forced to confess HT membership, which is illegal.¹⁵² Secular NGOs can barely survive and many members say their work is impossible due to government repression and interference:

The government tightened its grip on civil society in 2004 by extending to international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) many of the repressive tactics it has used against local NGOs. In 2004 it introduced burdensome new registration and reporting procedures requiring international NGOs to obtain "agreement" from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) on the content, agenda, timing and place of any activity, and to invite MOJ officials to attend. The government closed the Open Society Institute, which provided vital support for civil society groups, and suspended the activities of the local affiliate of the media-support organization Internews for six-months for alleged minor administrative violations. It also forced all women's NGOs to undergo re-registration procedures.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Gretskey, 92.

¹⁵⁰ Gretskey, 88.

¹⁵¹ John R. Pottenger, "Civil Society, religious freedom, and Islam Karimov: Uzbekistan's struggle for a decent society," *Central Asian Survey* 23 (March 2004), 70.

¹⁵² "Uzbek crackdown on religion continues unabated." Eurasianet, 21 November 2001. (Last accessed 16 August 2005)

¹⁵³ "Human Rights Overview Uzbekistan," Human Rights Watch, available on the official web site at: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/01/13/uzbeki9895.htm> (Last accessed 21 August 2005)

The Uzbek embassy in the US says that there are nearly 2000 Muslim organizations in the country registered with the ministry of Justice.¹⁵⁴ Being registered with the ministry implies that the organization forfeits its independence since it is subject to state administration, which makes it unfit for the definition of civil society. Other associations are plainly illegal.

3.3- The masses

The average Muslims of Uzbekistan, the ever understudied silent majority, may hold the most serious key to determining the final role that Islam will play with regards to security in the country. If they choose not to support insurgents and not to follow preachers who want to Islamize the state, both projects have little chance of success. On the other hand, should they cooperate in hiding and protecting and supplying insurgents in their effort against the state or should they embark in a popular revolution marching for a Caliphate, there would be little that the government could do and the official resistance would be futile. Public opinion is hard to assess and we have very little serious data available on the issue of religiosity. We have to draw conclusions looking at a few surveys to understand this side of the relation. We will look at two elements primarily; the sympathies towards an Islamic revolution and the popularity of the President and the regime.

With regards to being sympathetic to a popular Islamist revolution, it looks as if the chances are bleak even though the majority of the population is practicing Muslim. In

¹⁵⁴ "Religious Freedom", Social Issues, Embassy of Uzbekistan to the United States. Official web site. http://www.uzbekistan.org/social_issues/religious_freedom/ (Last accessed 21 August 2005)

2002 Bakhran Tursunov was writing that only 600 000 out of the 26 million population of Uzbekistan considered themselves practicing Muslims,¹⁵⁵ a number for which he does not give a source and which seems highly unlikely. CIA sources from 2005 give a number of 88%, an approximation resembling all other sources except Tursunov. Nevertheless, at the time the country gained its independence, the masses were not posing strong demands for the Islamic concept of statehood,¹⁵⁶ and this was the most intense Islamic revivalist period of the recent history. Anita Sengupta argues that "fundamentalist sects" do not have much popular support in Uzbekistan; chances of support for their projects are very low.

We should not interpret the many young men joining the ranks of militant groups as a sign that Jihad is attractive for its own sake among the Uzbeks. The IMU is able to fill its ranks often by offering refuge to criminals fleeing the law or by paying competitive salaries to its fighters. One member said in 2000 that he was paid 500 USD a month to fight in the IMU,¹⁵⁷ which is high above national average of individual incomes, especially in the impoverished regions of the Ferghana Valley where most militants are recruited. Studies have showed that the IMU does not receive funding from Uzbek religious organizations,¹⁵⁸ partly because of the state control, but also partly because the movement is not so popular throughout the country.

¹⁵⁵ Bakhran Tursunov, *Extremism in Uzbekistan*, Camberley: Defence Academy of the UK, Conflict Studies Research Center, July 2002, K33, 1. Actually, the entire article is very dubious. Aggressive claims are made, such as the Turkish PM Erbakan paying the IMU to attack Tashkent, a huge list of political and religious secret pacts are discussed by without a single source or interview citation.

¹⁵⁶ Çeçen, 150.

¹⁵⁷ Rashid, 171.

¹⁵⁸ Fredholm, 10.

President Karimov is very popular among his people and even though he is described as harsh from a western perspective, his regime is seen positively by the majority of citizens in the country. A 2004 survey that looked at how a regime is perceived as corrupted by its own population revealed that Uzbekistan scored the best in Central Asia, tying in 114th place, while Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan tied in 122nd, and Tajikistan and Turkmenistan tied at 133rd.¹⁵⁹ In a very interesting report from fieldwork and interviews conducted all over the country with several hundreds of people of diversified backgrounds, Timur Dadabaev presented the following table in a 2004 article. The question he asked was "what is the level of trust that you have in the following institutions. The answers are revealing:

Level of trust	Central government (%)	Local government (%)	Army (%)	Militia (%)	NGOs (%)	Legislative system (%)
Trust	15.00	8.50	23.50	10.40	5.70	10.50
Partly trust	42.70	39.30	41.90	26.60	31.20	36.20
Partly distrust	26.10	31.80	20.50	31.10	37.80	31.70
Distrust	16.10	20.30	14.10	31.90	25.30	26.60

Level of trust	Parliament (%)	Public education system (%)	Public healthcare system (%)	Local big business (%)	International business (%)	Labor unions (%)
Trust	15.80	12.30	9.50	10.40	20.20	7.20
Partly trust	38.20	43.80	35.00	41.60	50.20	24.20
Partly distrust	25.40	28.00	31.90	30.30	21.00	28.40
Distrust	20.60	15.80	23.50	17.80	8.60	40.20

Level of trust	Mass media (%)	Religious organizations (%)	UN (%)	WTO (%)	WB (%)	IMF (%)
Trust	8.10	15.20	32.70	20.80	28.90	25.70
Partly trust	29.70	41.40	47.10	49.90	47.40	47.10
Partly distrust	29.30	19.30	13.20	20.50	15.20	16.20
Distrust	32.80	24.20	7.00	8.80	8.20	11.00

Source: Timur Dadabaev, "Post-Soviet realities of society in Uzbekistan," *Central Asian Survey* 23 (June 2004): 147.

¹⁵⁹ TI Corruption Perceptions Index 2004, available at <http://www.transparency.org/cpi/2004/cpi2004.en.html> (last accessed 21 August 2005)

The results show that the army, international businesses and the International Financial Institutions have the trust of most of the people; so does the U.N, religious organizations (we have to assume the state's), the parliament and the central government. Local big businesses and the public education system are also well positioned, while local governments are edging the 50% combined mark. There is also an overwhelming majority of the population which has no trust in labour unions. This closes another potential window of opportunity for Islamic militant groups to operate from the inside and stir revolution ideas.

A Survey published by the Uzbek National News Agency conducted in August 2005 reveals even stronger support for the state.¹⁶⁰ 85% of the population believe that Uzbekistan is on the path to improvement and that problems will be solved in the near future. 90% of the population said that they were satisfied with their rights of religious assembly. 98.4% of the population support the government's measure to fight terrorism and religious extremism. 92.8% of the population approve of Karimov as a leader and believe that he is the main guarantor of stability and the solution to the country's problems, an increase from the 91% recorded in 2003. Although these numbers are too high to be reflecting the reality, there nonetheless appears to be a strong majority of the population who backs President Karimov and resent Islamists.

¹⁶⁰ Although August 2005 is a bit later than our focus, such surveys are ever worthier when they are more recent. See "Most Uzbeks support reforms in the country - poll," UzA, 23 August 2005 (Last accessed on 23 August 2005).

Boris Rumer was writing that the culture of a strong ruler that may appear harsh to the exterior is embedded in Uzbekistan, and "the average citizens do not seem to complain about the authoritarianism."¹⁶¹ The numbers so far prove him right. It is fair to say, in view of this data, that the central government of Karimov along with its international partners is much more popular than their opposition, suggesting that the state does not need to worry about its population supporting the overthrow of the regime.

¹⁶¹ Rumer, 31.

4- The Government's National Security Discourse and Strategy and Islam

Now that we have explored the Muslims as a subject and the state as the object, we will reverse the relation and explore the Uzbek national security strategy. We know that obviously Islam has been occupying a great deal of room in the government's security rhetoric, a role that has likely been magnified,¹⁶² and has been the official target of many defense and security related strategies. In this chapter, we review some the security measures that were particularly linked with Islam and we explain their context. We see that from the early 1990s to the present, there has been a continuous discourse of Islamic threat and, in consequence, a series of actions taken to counter it. The chapter is divided into three parts; the first and the second ones focus on the national level and the regional level strategies respectively. The third part deals with the international strategy and contains a sub-part devoted to an analysis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

4.1- Domestic security strategy

The idea of crushing potential Islamic threats to security goes back many years before the incidents of winter 1997. We can say that in the beginning of 1993, with Birlik and Erk neutralized, secular opposition had almost disappeared from Uzbekistan. Petrov says that it was "smashed" because the government had reached a stable dominating position through the establishment of a domino system from the President to the provincial governors. Petrov labelled it a Command-Administrative regime.¹⁶³ The struggle between the different clans was well exploited by Karimov and did not appear to

¹⁶² Hanks, 170.

¹⁶³ Petrov, 81.

be usable as a security threat to his administration.¹⁶⁴ The next target for President Karimov was to contain the issue of Islamic revivalism labelled Wahhabism concentrated in the Ferghana valley, a potential thorn and source of insurgency:

In a series of crackdowns in 1992, 1993, and after 1997, Karimov arrested hundreds of ordinary pious Muslims for alleged links with Islamic fundamentalists, accusing them of being Wahhabis, closing down mosques and madrassahs, and forcing mullahs into jail or exile. The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), formed in the Soviet Union as an Islamic political party that would have an independent branch in each Central Asian state, was never able to register as a legal party in Uzbekistan.¹⁶⁵

Actually, much before that, another Tsarist later turned Soviet Muslim institution, the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM), was dismantled in Uzbekistan (as in the other republics) at the onset of independence. The reason for this was the growing threat from Fundamentalists.¹⁶⁶

The attempt to monopolize the legitimate religious discourse is a clear trend in the national strategy. The extension of the control by the State over the mosques to prevent the spread of fundamentalist discourse has also been a security strategy targeting Islam more than other religions. Since all clerics in Uzbekistan must be appointed by the state, the popularity of a cleric amongst his community of followers is not a criterion for a religious career. Actual clerics have been criticised by independent observers for not being able to reach the young people because of their lack of popularity at the mosque.¹⁶⁷ The basic rule is that when a powerful Imam begins to disagree with the government, he

¹⁶⁴ Petrov, 81.

¹⁶⁵ Rashid, 85.

¹⁶⁶ Malashenko, 51.

¹⁶⁷ "Al-Qaeda-lined group faces up to 20 years imprisonment," IRIN 23 August 2004. (Last Accessed on 21 July 2005)

disappears. This is what happened in March 1998. The then imam of the Tukhtaboi mosque in Tashkent went missing with his son and it is believed that they were kidnapped by the government, although this is denied by the officials.¹⁶⁸ In the city of Kokand, in 1995, the government closed a mosque and threw many of its members in prison under accusation of fundamentalism, although it is suspected that nothing more than a critique of the government's policies was going on.¹⁶⁹ The government also recalled for the security reason that they were being indoctrinated by Islamic clerics more than 2000 students who were studying abroad in Turkey in 1997.¹⁷⁰ Even a pro secular-nation-state movement such as Fetullah Gülen's was banned and its schools closed since 1999.¹⁷¹

Along with doctrine control came legal control. In 1997, the government passed a new law on political parties, specifying that the main aim was to ban religious parties who "subverted the constitution."¹⁷² In 1998, the government passed the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations which is seen by many as a massive crackdown on Muslims in particular in oppressing their religious freedom while leaving other religious denominations unaffected.¹⁷³ Under this law, out of 4200 Uzbek mosques, only 1566 were allowed to register and the state committed many actions which were

¹⁶⁸ Rashid, 146.

¹⁶⁹ Hanks, 171.

¹⁷⁰ Melvin, 53.

¹⁷¹ The Gülen movement originates from 1980s Turkey, and it spread to Central Asian Turkic states after their independence. The message of this movement favours a revival of Turkic Islamic culture in harmony with and loyal to the secular modern nation state. For a study of the movement's revival and actions in Central Asia see Berna Turam, "A bargain between the secular state and Turkish Islam: politics of ethnicity in Central Asia," *Nations and Nationalism* 10 (July 2004): 353-374.

¹⁷² Rashid, 146.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 85.

widely described as pure oppression, "Police questioned all men with beards or more than one wife, as well as anyone traveling to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pious Muslims could be refused permission to pray, fathers could be jailed for the crimes of their sons, all Muslim organizations and mosques had to be registered with the government, and it was illegal to preach Islam. Women could be arrested for wearing the hijab."¹⁷⁴

The law itself specified the conditions under which a mosque or a religious organization could be legally registered, a necessary requirement to operate. Every mosque or group of more than one hundred members had to give details of the name, the location, the nature of the activities, personal data on the members and the founding principles of the group to the ministry of Justice. If registration was approved, the ministry still had power to control the structure and administration of the organizations, as well as restrain its activities.¹⁷⁵ This measure was officially meant to reduce and contain the numbers of independent teachings and practices of Islam which scared the state.

There were also harsher and more radical preventive measures taken to prevent the Islamic security risk. In April 1999, 8 alleged Islamic militants were shot dead on the spot during a police road check in Tashkent.¹⁷⁶ Since the government attached the situation to the February bombings, the investigations went no further. In the summer of 2000, there were some incursions from militants of the IMU through the Tajik borders. In

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 125.

¹⁷⁵ Sengupta, 200.

¹⁷⁶ Rashid, 151.

response, the Uzbek authorities decided to evacuate the population of 22 villages in the Sukhandaria region bordering Tajikistan:

The displaced villagers, mostly ethnic Tajiks, were reportedly rounded up and forced into military helicopters at gunpoint, while their homes were set on fire or bombed and their livestock killed. They were first moved to camps located in the steppes and were not allowed to bring their belongings with them. Later, in November 2000, the authorities reportedly moved the IDPs to relocation villages, where they had been expected to cultivate the land and rebuild their lives on their own.¹⁷⁷

There were overall 3500 of these Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who were evacuated from this now military zone region from 2000 to 2001, they were accused of selling food to passing Islamic militant fighters without notifying the authorities.¹⁷⁸ Actually, it is alleged that these men informed the army months before the attacks but that these sightings were ignored.¹⁷⁹

In November and December 1997, a police captain known for his extreme brutality¹⁸⁰ in the city of Namangan, in Ferghana, was beheaded by masked attackers. So was the chief of a collective farm. During the operation to arrest the criminals, three other policemen were killed. One of the attackers was found to be a Wahhabi and to have received training from Namangani himself.¹⁸¹ "This was used by the government as a pretext to impose curfews in the cities of the Ferghana Valley and to detain large numbers of local residents accused of religious extremism."¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ "Evidence of forced displacement, says report," IRIN 13 October 2003. (Last accessed on 21 July 2005)

¹⁷⁸ "Focus on IDPs in Surkhandarya," IRIN 8 December 2003. (Last accessed on 21 July 2005)

¹⁷⁹ Rashid, 169.

¹⁸⁰ Naumkin, 72.

¹⁸¹ Rashid, 146.

¹⁸² Naumkin, 72.

4.2- Regional developments and the security strategy

Although the containment of the Islamic threat is mentioned by the Uzbek government as a top priority in its relations with its neighbours, in concrete terms the state has not been involved in significant regional cooperation initiatives aimed at long term solutions.¹⁸³ Allison also illustrates how the different regional level security initiative have failed for the most part in the region, partly because of mistrust and lack of commitment, partly because the competition between Russian and American influence constantly disturbs the regional security projects.¹⁸⁴ One would think, however, that Karimov would seek strong regional security initiatives if one were to follow Amitav Acharya's views that regional security substantially improves the defense posture of a state facing mostly internal threats.¹⁸⁵

Karimov had always been vehemently opposed to the Taliban, but he changed his stance in October 2000. He declared that the Taliban did not represent a threat to Uzbekistan and that they had maintained control of an Afghan frontier town without showing any signs of aggression.¹⁸⁶ His foreign minister said a few days later that Uzbekistan was hoping to forge friendly relations with the Taliban and keep the border open as long as they do not present a threat to the domestic affairs of his country.¹⁸⁷ That Karimov was moving towards cooperation with the Taliban is completely atypical of

¹⁸³ Swanström, 51. Similar evidence presented in the article by Annette Bohr, "Regionalism in Central Asia: new geopolitics, old regional order," *International Affairs* 80, 3 (2004): 485-502.

¹⁸⁴ Roy Allison, "Regionalism, regional structures and security management in Central Asia," *International Affairs* 80, 3 (2004): 463-483.

¹⁸⁵ Peimani, 14.

¹⁸⁶ "Uzbek President softens stance on Taliban," IRIN 16 October 2000. (Last accessed on 21 July 2005)

¹⁸⁷ "Foreign Minister ready to open border with Afghanistan," IRIN 19 October 2000. (Last accessed on 21 July 2005)

him, certainly the Taliban had not relinquished their hardliner stance regarding their theocratic ideals, how is it that they could become potential allies to Karimov? He had done something similar in 1999 when he invited the Taliban to a U.N meeting in Tashkent, to which the Taliban declined. Some view this as an effort of regional cooperation against internal threats, as he was apparently hoping to lure them into breaking ties with the IMU.¹⁸⁸

There are not many other regional strategy elements to discuss. There is a consensus among scholars who study regional cooperation in Central Asia that little has been done and that little is likely to happen in the near future. Uzbekistan is involved in a number of disputes with its neighbours. It accuses Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan of harbouring some of its dissidents and terrorists, and it has cold diplomatic relations with the other ones. Uzbekistan's attempt to be a regional hegemony is creating a negative diplomatic environment in the region preventing states to agree on purely regional initiatives.

4.3.1- International foreign policy and the security strategy

The main partners of Uzbekistan in the recent international security strategy against Islamists have been Russia and the United States. In the mid 1990s, Uzbekistan began to distance itself from Russia, partly because of the poor performance of the once mighty Russian army in Chechnya.¹⁸⁹ The collapse of the Russian economy in 1998 also

¹⁸⁸ Rashid, 152.

¹⁸⁹ Timothy G. Craig, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization : origins and implications." (M.A. diss., California Naval Postgraduate School, 2003), 5.

called for new alliances. However, the Islamic threat and the wave of attacks in 1999 brought them back together. President Putin had presented himself as the leader of an anti-terrorism effort in Central Asia, and was able to tie strong alliances with the five republics on this issue, which led to the signing of a new Community of Independent States (CIS) Collective Security Treaty in June 2000 and the creation of a special CIS rapid force in May 2001.¹⁹⁰ President Putin claimed to be supportive of American anti-terrorist efforts and did not oppose the deployment of NATO military forces in Uzbekistan,¹⁹¹ but in early 2002, a series of diplomatic missions in the region by Chairman Gennady Seleznev ended up in a Duma decision to increase Russian military presence and criticize American penetration in the area.¹⁹²

Putin and his government can still exert pressures from the military sphere. Russia is still Uzbekistan's main arms supplier.¹⁹³ It has also been able to penetrate the national security apparatus by commanding the anti-terrorist and emergency response exercises executed in compliance with the CIS collective security pact. Apart from common security strategy, it is noteworthy to mention that in 2002 Lukoil and Itera formed a joint-stock company with the nationalized Uzbekneftegaz Company and financed close to 400 millions USD for the development of the infrastructure.¹⁹⁴ The resulting partnership was awarded the exploitation rights of many natural gas fields in Uzbekistan, including the very rich Kandym field. As a result of this merger, Russian interests now control 90% of

¹⁹⁰ Smith, *Russia, the USA & Central Asia*, 2.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹⁴ Smith, *Russian Business & Foreign Policy*, 7.

the shares in this joint-stock company and are able not only to make an incredible profit at the expense of the government owned Uzbekneftegaz, but also to exert considerable control over Uzbekistan's most profitable industry.¹⁹⁵

To balance against an increasingly strong Russian player in the country, Uzbekistan has used again the security strategy against the Islamic threat to make a pact with the USA. Since September 2001, Uzbekistan has become a crucial partner of the USA and received a lot of aid.¹⁹⁶ Karimov moved closer to a strategic alliance with America and pulled out of the CIS collective security treaty. Starting with the launching of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, the Americans became increasingly dependent on and interested in the use of Uzbek military facilities, especially air bases, for the support of their manoeuvres in Afghanistan. The USA gave capital in exchange for the use and the development of Air force bases and the installation American infrastructures on these bases. The funds awarded for this favour to the government of Uzbekistan constitute "significant additions to the budgets".¹⁹⁷ This external revenue and support gave more freedom to Uzbekistan as far as relations with Moscow are concerned but it makes it more dependent on US aid. The military penetration under the pretext of the war on terror was extensive. The Uzbek facilities and air space were rendered completely available to the Americans to do as they please.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 7.

¹⁹⁶ In military equipment for troops, 60 million US\$ were given to Uzbekistan from 2001 to 2005. "US and NATO security aid to Uzbekistan comes under scrutiny," posted 13 July 2005 on Eurasinet.org. (Last accessed 21 August 2005).

¹⁹⁷ Smith, *Russia, the USA & Central Asia* 7.

4.3.2- International foreign policy: the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a multi-purpose, multi-national organization which emerged to fill the vacuum created by the collapse of the USSR and the need of the Central Asian states to cooperate within an institutional framework. In April 1996, in the interests of stabilizing the borders, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan formed an alliance aiming at strengthening mutual confidence among the members. This alliance had the form of a non-aggression pact. "The military forces of the Parties deployed in the border area, as an integral part of the military forces of the Parties, shall not be used to attack another Party, conduct any military activity threatening the other Party and upsetting calm and stability in the border area."¹⁹⁸

After a meeting in Dushanbe in 2000, the alliance took the name of "Shanghai Five", which later, in June 2001, announced the joining of a new member, Uzbekistan, and was renamed the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in honour of the city in which the meeting was held. The first thing that the group did was to establish an anti-terrorism cooperation centre in Kyrgyzstan. In fact, anti-terrorism and anti-separatism is undeniably the backbone of this partnership and it continues to take precedence.

In June 2002, at the SCO's first anniversary meeting in St-Petersburg, the member states agreed on a charter of principles, which in a certain way serves as a nice advertisement poster for development and dissimulates with greater subtlety the strong national security aspect of the partnership. According to the charter, the main goals of the SCO are:

To strengthen mutual trust, friendship and goodneighborliness between the member States; to consolidate multidisciplinary cooperation in the maintenance and strengthening of peace, security and stability in the region and promotion of a new democratic, fair and rational political and economic international order; to jointly counteract terrorism, separatism and extremism in all their manifestations, to fight against illicit narcotics and arms trafficking and other types of criminal activity of a transnational character, and also illegal migration; to encourage the efficient regional cooperation in such spheres as politics, trade and economy, defense, law enforcement, environment protection, culture, science and technology, education, energy, transport, credit and finance, and also other spheres of common interest; to facilitate comprehensive and balanced economic growth, social and cultural development in the region through joint action on the basis of equal partnership for the purpose of a steady increase of living standards and improvement of living conditions of the peoples of the member States; to coordinate approaches to integration into the global economy; to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the international obligations of the member States and their national legislation; to maintain and develop relations with other States and international organizations; to cooperate in the prevention of international conflicts and in their peaceful settlement; to jointly search for solutions to the problems that would arise in the 21st century.¹⁹⁹

What emerges from these overall ambitious humanitarian plans is actually a pact through which the actual governments and interest groups (principally the military) of the member states were able to legitimize their hold on political power. This organization appears to have the function of promoting cooperation in the region in order to be stronger on the international arena, while defending the domestic status-quo in each of the member countries by condemning separatism, terrorism and by overemphasizing the importance of defense and security. Under this charter, member states can use the shield of security concerns over long term social developments and thereby legitimize almost any coercive government action, such as military intervention in separatist regions (Chechnya for Russia, Ferghana for Uzbekistan, Tibet for China) or excessive crackdowns.

¹⁹⁸ Craig, 2.

¹⁹⁹ Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Article 1. Available online on the SCO website.

The section on the principles of the charter confirms that the focus of this association is cooperation on regional issues and non-interference in domestic issues. Membership is open to any state making a pledge to respect the goals and principles of the SCO. A member state can resign its membership at any time pending notification of twelve months before the date of the desired withdrawal, and any state not complying with the principles of the organization will be temporarily suspended from the decision making bodies and will face the risk of being expelled if the non-compliance continues.²⁰⁰ The SCO has international legal capacity and it also is a legal person; which means that it can acquire property, open financial accounts, appear in court and agree to contracts.²⁰¹

The administration of the SCO is divided between the Secretariat and the several councils of states representatives. The council of heads of state is the supreme decision body of the SCO, determining the Organization's priorities and official diplomatic position regarding international affairs, while the council of heads of government is responsible for budget and economic issues.²⁰² The meetings of these councils are normally to happen once a year. There is a rotation in the host country following alphabetic order of the Russian spellings of country names. There are other councils of minor importance dealing with daily management of the SCO, such as the councils of ministers of foreign affairs that are in charge of setting up meeting dates and times, hire a caterer and similar logistical puzzles.

²⁰⁰ Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Article 13.

²⁰¹ Ibid., Article 15.

²⁰² Ibid., Articles 6-7.

The standing administrative body of the SCO is the secretariat; it is headed by the executive secretary, chosen by the heads of state for a non-renewable three year mandate. The secretariat's job is to make the proposals, budgets and other matter upon which the several councils will vote an official policy. The executive secretary supervises the work of the four deputy secretaries, one for each important branch of the institution's administration, as you can observe from the structural framework provided in appendix. The deputy secretaries must not be of the same member-state as the executive secretaries. There are also quotas regarding the number of other secretariat employees and their nationalities but the numbers are not available to the public.²⁰³ The secretariat also has permanent members representing every state; these are stationed in Beijing and chosen among the personnel of each country's diplomatic mission to the People's Republic of China. They are the member states' permanent contact with the organisation.

The decision making process is on the basis of consensus. Every member in the council of heads of state has the power to veto a foreign diplomatic policy. However, with regards to cooperation programmes among SCO members, there is no veto. The countries not interested in participating are free to do so, but they cannot prevent the parties in favour from going forward with the project, and they are free to join the programme at a later date should they choose to change their mind.²⁰⁴ The consequence of this is that there are likely to be very few official international diplomatic policies, rather a number of regional programmes whose participating states could have worked out the same contract without the existence of the SCO. In this matter, the SCO loses a

²⁰³ Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Article 11.

lot of executive credibility because it cannot compel its members to participate in a given operation.

So what has the SCO done since 2002 to foster success in its different objectives? Of course with one general meeting a year, miracles should not be expected. At the May 2003 general meeting, the only issues addressed were internal and administrative, nominating people for position, and choosing an executive secretary; Zhang Deguan from China. In September 2003, the councils of heads of government approved the 2004 budget and signed "The Program of multilateral trade and economic cooperation of SCO member-states", which according to official communiqués contained practical steps of economic and trade development and ideas to facilitate the moving of goods and people in the territories. In January 2004, the Secretariat was officially inaugurated and the organization became functional in all its aspects. It claimed that it was ready to begin its role as a major player in the international system. Some analysts have pointed out that the organization has done a great job in settling centuries old border disputes between the Central Asian territories and China.²⁰⁵ The SCO has two great foci, the creation of a preferential trading zone is one, and the coalition against terrorist and separatist threats is the other.

²⁰⁴ Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Article 16.

²⁰⁵ Swanström, 44.

5- The Matrix of the Relation between Muslims and National Security Reloaded

Now that we have considerable information on the current status and strength of the Muslim actors and that we have in mind how the Uzbek national security was shaped in the recent years, we can proceed to elaborate the conclusions on the nature of the relation between Islam and national security. In the first part of this chapter, I go back on the data from chapter 3 and explain why the Muslims are not likely to be a threat to national security. In the second part, based on the information from chapter 4, I explain why we have reasons to suspect that the three levels of the security strategy were part of a greater scheme to neutralize general opposition to the Karimov regime. The third part of the chapter looks at the effect that the security policies have had with regards to raising the level of tension.

5.1.1- Concluding on the nature of the relation; it is unlikely that Muslims can be a threat

I will go over the groups one by one and attempt to demonstrate how they are currently unlikely to be a threat to Uzbekistan's national security drawing from the definition of chapter one and the evidence of chapter three. The underground organizations are generally targeted as the serious opponents of the state, but they do not seem to pose such an impressive security threat. HT does not have armed militants, and the masses, according to our numbers, do not seem to prefer their message over the state's, so they are officially out of the picture until evidence of their involvement in armed struggle or massive demonstrations of support emerge. Rashid claims that, when the IMU struck in 1999, the Uzbek army was militarily overwhelmed because their

weapons were non-operational and their officers were not properly trained.²⁰⁶ He also said that in 2000 the Uzbek forces were insufficient and this made the long Uzbek borders easily penetrable for the insurgents.²⁰⁷ However, he attributes the short term success of the IMU to better tactics and guerrilla skills and affirms that "the IMU forces never posed a serious military threat to the armies of Central Asia."²⁰⁸ The same conclusion is reached by Djalili and Kellner who say that the IMU was never a threat to the regime, merely a pretext to outlaw opposition.²⁰⁹ They are certainly right. The most serious threat that was posed by the IMU was a possible invasion of the Sukh enclave in 1999,²¹⁰ but that never materialized and now the IMU is even weaker while the army is stronger.

After the kidnappings of 1999, Uzbek planes comfortably bombed Kyrgyz IMU positions around Osh and Batken,²¹¹ unopposed and at no risk to them. When we compare the numbers in the ranks of the IMU against the Uzbek army and the budget and military aid it receives, strikingly it appears that the IMU cannot come close to winning this battle. Although they had, in 2000, exploited the use of rocket launchers and other ambush equipment to hold off and inflict heavy losses to the Uzbek commandos, this was the peak of their potential. Being able to hide in a mountain pass and kill a dozen soldiers

²⁰⁶ Rashid, 233.

²⁰⁷ Rashid, 234.

²⁰⁸ Rashid, 154.

²⁰⁹ Mohammad-Reza Djalili and Thierry Kellner, *Géopolitique de la nouvelle Asie centrale*, 3d ed (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003), 317.

²¹⁰ The Sukh enclave is a piece of land belonging to Uzbekistan, populated with Tajiks, and situated within Kyrgyzstan. If it were to be captured, the Uzbek state would literally have to invade Kyrgyzstan in order to go defend it and for this reason Karimov is trying hard to acquire a territorial corridor to tie it with mainland Uzbekistan.

²¹¹ Rashid, 162-64.

here and there is one thing, defeating the standard army to control part of a territory is quite another. At best, the IMU can survive skirmishes but they are not able and never have been to present a destructive offensive that would overwhelm the state's defense apparatus. From that we can conclude that neither the IMU nor HT pose a serious threat to national security.

Their role in creating security risks have often been associated with the assumption that their activities were directly linked to different kinds of other illicit operations such as the trafficking of narcotics. The argument that drugs and weapons trafficking was the "financial mainstay"²¹² of radical Islamic movements has circulated in the field unopposed for quite some time. However, in her refreshing article, Nicole Jackson does a good job at deconstructing this argument and presenting a serious challenge to it. Examining the IMU and Hizb ut-Tahrir, she acknowledges that the IMU had before 2001 a history of operating drug routes but she concludes that:

Thus, the extent of current involvement of two key extremist Islamic groups in narcotic trafficking is not really known, but is assumed to be negligible at the moment. In future their involvement will depend on their capabilities and priorities, however, the opportunity exists. A key fear often expressed by members of the international community is that if extremist Islamic groups do regain a significant hold on trafficking activities, they, or other radical groups, will then try to promote instability and to take control over large parts of Central Asian states—as the FARC guerillas have in Columbia—in order to provide safe havens for their illegal activities. Certainly, however, this is not a possibility in the near future.²¹³

In addition to the narcotics issue, Jackson examines the possibility that these groups benefit and engage in arms trafficking activities. She stresses that there is a

²¹² Rashid, 229.

²¹³ Nicole J. Jackson, "The trafficking of narcotics, arms and humans in post-Soviet Central Asia: (mis)perceptions, policies and realities," *Central Asian Survey* 24 (March 2005): 45.

"general perception of a close link between the availability of arms, general instability and terrorism even without evidence of any direct connections at this time."²¹⁴ Although she does not deny that there is a possibility in the future for cooperation between radical Islamic terrorist groups such as the IMU and criminal groups and that the two are sometimes known to use the same methods in defense of their interests, she points out that "at present there are only indirect and minimal links between Islamic groups, narcotics and arms trafficking (but not human trafficking) in the region."²¹⁵

In light of her study, it appears that the only form in which these groups could now pose a threat to the state at the present is via their official mission and not indirectly by their assumed secondary activities. It really appears, thus, that their power is exaggerated; in fact, according to Mohammad-Reza Djalili and Thierry Kellner, all the radical groups are weak and pose no threat.²¹⁶

The independent civil society is weak and in no way able to challenge the state, even the bigger secular organisations such as Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan "have little organizational capacities or funding."²¹⁷ As for the Islamic civil society, it is facing, as Gretsky explained, two problems. On the one hand, the state is determined to crush it with legislation, intimidation and surveillance. On the other hand, international NGO's do not support religious organizations because they have an inherently secular mindset of

²¹⁴ Ibid., 46.

²¹⁵ Jackson, 46.

²¹⁶ Djalili and Kellner, 321.

²¹⁷ Sabine Freizer, 134.

civil society.²¹⁸ For this reason, Islamic civil society is not a threat to the regime at all and it has not been one since independence. All of civil society is well under control, and Reuel Hanks has suggested that it is unlikely to evolve because public Islam is nearly a requirement for civil society in Uzbekistan,²¹⁹ but, as long as the state resists open religiosity with repression, civil society will not develop.

As for the risk of the masses supporting a hostile act against the regime, all the numbers that we have seen and examined suggest otherwise. The enemies of the state are marginalized and do not have the support of the population. It seems that the official Islam used by Karimov has been effective and that the majority of the population is satisfied with this system of state-censored religion, something that should not be such a surprise because a similar although less repressive systems exist in some Muslim countries, for instance in Turkey. In light of the situation of these three groups of political Muslims, and their weakness versus the state, we can conclude that, at this moment, the Islamic threat is not a reality in Uzbekistan.

5.1.2- Concluding on the nature of the relationship between Islam and the government's strategy

Roger Kangas opined that "Karimov can effectively use 'conspiracy theories' to root out enemies and maintain power."²²⁰ There are reasons to believe that this has been

²¹⁸ Gretsky, 93.

²¹⁹ Hanks, 174.

²²⁰ Kangas, 141.

the case of the Islamic threat argument at the domestic, the regional as well as the international levels.

In fact, the 1997 law on political parties also contains mechanisms to prevent more than religious opposition. To be legalized, a party must register at least 5000 members in at least eight out of fourteen administrative regions.²²¹ This indirectly prevents the emergence of regional and possibly secessionist parties, a threat related especially to the Ferghana Valley, and it also limits the ability of non-Uzbek ethnic interests parties, such as Tajik or Karakalpak, who could hardly meet the conditions for lack of geographical reach.

The 1998 law on freedom of organization is interesting. What the state is potentially doing through this law is widening its power to arrest and detain people well beyond the limits of criminal law, so that this way it can arrest any citizen it wants, for whatever reason, and find a bogus reason to put the person away.²²² For instance, the state in 1999 arrested the mother of Yuldosh and forced her to curse her son in a public address.²²³ Such procedures are common. The families of IMU militants are, without proofs of association, constantly jailed (Namangani's brother for 14 years) and brought in by the police.²²⁴ This could be a form of psychological warfare used by the security apparatus, and it has been made legal by the 1998 law. What purpose do these measures

²²¹ Melvin, 34.

²²² In fact, although most of the time the law is used to neutralize Muslims in the name of the state sponsored Islam, it has also been used ironically enough to persecute Christian dissidents and detain them under the charge that they were publishing Christian literature in Uzbek and corrupting the Islamic conscience of the country, see Akbarzadeh and Saeed, 92.

²²³ Rashid, 145.

²²⁴ Rashid, 147.

serve the state? It hardly does anything to boost security but spread fear among the population and increase their feeling of insecurity towards law enforcement. It is easy to see how the government most likely used them to gather personal information that it can store in databases and use in the future, for intimidation or investigations. This could allow the regime to neutralize not only any type of opposition organization by getting rid of its members but also to prevent the emergence of new opposition by tracking and jailing individuals who only show signs of non-conformity.

Alongside the bans and the legal dead-ends imposed to parties and groups, the Uzbek government is also able to limit the number of peaceful dissidents to its regime by playing the security card. Some activists and rights agencies based in Uzbekistan accuse the government of regularly using terrorist attacks as a pretext to imprison peaceful dissidents who happen to be Muslim. Following the severe attacks of 1999 and those of spring 2004, there were reports of massive arbitrary arrests of peaceful Muslims. These same activists, working for the international NGO Human Rights Watch have been accused by the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan of blowing the situation out of proportion because the police were reacting with emergency measures within their legal power.²²⁵ Whether this is the case or not is hard to tell, but it does little difference, for within Uzbek law police are entitled to detain suspected Islamic extremists for up to ten days before pressing any charges against them and notifying their families, and systematic and widespread use of torture takes place during this interrogation period, a reality reported by nearly all rights groups.

²²⁵ "Activists warn of crackdown following a week of violence," IRIN 2 April 2004. (Last accessed 21 July 2005)

I would not be the first to find reasons to believe that behind the Islamic threat discourse of Karimov most likely lies a parallel scheme to get rid of opposition. Djalili and Kellner wrote in 2003 that "the Uzbek President, Islam Karimov, has become a champion of the struggle against Islamic extremism. However, his gesticulations over the Wahhabi danger served as a camouflage for his real objectives. For him the matter was to insure the maintenance of his authoritarian regime and to use the Islamic argument in order to discredit and repress any potential opposition."²²⁶

There are also reasons to suspect that Karimov was in fact using the IMU as a pretext to get rid of those with potential sympathies to Tajik clan or nationalist groups. One of the IDPs from the evacuation of the villages on the Tajik borders gave an interview to the BBC to explain how they were victims of ethnic discrimination and left in miserable conditions; little later he was tortured and killed by the army before the matter could make national headlines.²²⁷

Measures of social control are implemented so that the state has a more penetrating influence and ability to restrain the citizen's personal lives, and also to establish a better monopoly over the narratives, ideas and discourses propagated throughout the society. This is a very totalitarian process, where the natural individual diversity is coerced by the state into conformity for specific reasons. Since President Karimov is trying to appear as the builder of a great liberal and free society, he would be ill disposed if he were to abuse of social control measures. However, by targeting Islamic

²²⁶ My own translation from the French, see Djalili and Kellner, 321-22.

²²⁷ Rashid, 169.

fundamentalism as a security threat, he is able to pass authoritarian laws, introduced in the name of national security to prevent the infiltration in Uzbek society of extremist elements, and not fall into utter self-contradiction.

Regionally speaking, why is Karimov reluctant to engage in regional cooperation, especially for the Ferghana Valley? Rashid reports the comments from Barnett Rubin saying that Karimov fears an alliance between Ferghana elites and the Islamists.²²⁸ Therefore, he is interested in maintaining the appearance of an Islamic threat to legitimize constant repression and the closing of borders, to weaken the ability of the Ferghana elite to organize extra-nationally and put them under pressure not to associate with the IMU. A regional conflict prevention and economic development initiative bringing actors together in concert is what Karimov appears to be trying to avoid, and for that he might prefer to play cat and mouse with insurgents. Karimov also used the Islamic threat of the IMU to weaken the position of his neighbouring states. Border issues are still unresolved with Kyrgyzstan. In 1999, under the pretext that it was bombing IMU supporters, the Uzbek air force launched raids against Kyrgyz border villages. Twelve Kyrgyz farmers were killed and dozens of houses destroyed.²²⁹

At the international level, there are also reasons to see the Islamic threat as a camouflage for repression and a defence against the lack of reforms. Rashid was writing in 2002 that "there is mounting concern amongst human-rights campaigners over the way

²²⁸ Rashid, 151.

²²⁹ Rashid, 164.

Uzbekistan is using its acceptability in the Western alliance as a means to intensify repression against its own population."²³⁰ Or as Grodsky puts it:

Similar to other authoritarian leaders, Karimov is known to speak fondly of human rights and espouse his own democratic aspirations while taking no steps in that direction. His 1999 promise to establish 'a whole system of human rights institutions' to increase accountability and bring Uzbekistan into compliance with international human rights agreements, for example, produced submissive state structures unwilling or unable to challenge state abuse of power.²³¹

It is widely known however that the Islamic risk was knowingly used and manipulated by the government in order to secure military assistance from Russia,²³² and funds from other major world powers such as the US.²³³ Nonetheless, although Uzbek foreign policy was finding new open doors through the argument of fighting common security threats, Karimov has been reluctant to join any real international security effort that would prevent him from doing what he pleases in his domestic security policy. This suggests that while he was claiming to coordinate his policies to provide security, he was in fact using a formula to block all types of opposition to his authoritarian regime.

The international relations of Islam Karimov are often accompanied by the discourse of a democratic state caught fighting with extremist elements. Unable to profit from the "Modern Great Game" because his country is isolated from the Caspian energy

²³⁰ Rashid, 135.

²³¹ Grodsky, 337.

²³² John Erickson, "Eurasian manoeuvres," in *Oil, Transition and Security in Central Asia*, ed. Sally Cummings (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 256.

²³³ For an analysis of how Uzbek cooperation with major powers shifted to maximize profits see Grodsky, 327-344, and Bohr, 485-502. Rashid also suggests that Uzbekistan exploited September 11th and the new alliance with the US to avoid criticisms for their hammering of Islamic groups. Rashid, 135. Claims have been made by McCauley that since ethnic Uzbek General Dostum's rout against the Taliban in Afghanistan in 1998, the US has been conducting covert operations in cooperation with Uzbek special forces against Taliban and insurgents. He claims that this is why Uzbekistan became the first regional ally of the US in the war on terror in Central Asia, and that Karimov used this new bargaining card for his irredentist aspirations in southern Kazakhstan. See Martin McCauley, *Afghanistan and Central Asia: A Modern History* (Harlow : Pearson Education Limited, 2002), 152-54.

resources, Karimov appears to have found after 11 September 2001 that the spotlights on Islamic Fundamentalism were a convenient a channel for alliances beyond his own region and for beefing up his own economy. The IMF had closed its offices in Uzbekistan in 2000 on the pretext that no satisfactory reforms were underway and that the climate was not conducive to foreign investment. When Karimov accepted an alliance with the US, immediately the World Bank offered to send a delegation to visit him "to revive its stalled relationship with the government and provide new loans to ensure economic stability - now that Uzbekistan was part of the front line in the war against terrorism."²³⁴

The devotion to anti-terrorism and separatism of the SCO is easily understood through our general argument reasoning. The SCO, by proclaiming the sanctity of the borders and the governments of the actual nation-states, strengthens the position of every Central Asian government vis-à-vis their domestic opponents. States will tolerate each others national repression and may even engage in cooperation against specific dissidents, who in turn have no chance to prosper in such an environment.

5.2- The impact of the strategy and the rise of unrest

Is this approach to national security, the destruction of all potential competitive popular and political forces, effective at all in fostering security? Some say yes in the short term, but not in the long run.²³⁵

²³⁴ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2002), 184.

²³⁵ Akbarzadeh and Saeed, 99.

Menon was pointing out in 1995 that the risks resulting from excessive repression from the Uzbek government may generate more insecurity because it excludes opposition groups from the political system at the national level and may force these oppressed groups (whether they fight for religion, ethnic minority rights, social justice, economic reforms or just their own interests) to resort to extra-systemic actions.²³⁶ In 2002, Rashid was suggesting that the popularity of militant Islam was due directly to "the repressiveness of Central Asian regimes", and that the strategy of responding to popular Islam with increased repression has boosted radical Islam.²³⁷ The government's severe measures which led to more radicalization from Islamic groups increasingly created even more abuses in the realm of human rights.²³⁸ In 2004, after the two waves of attacks, Uzbek political analysts were pointing out that the lack of religious and political freedom of the Uzbek youth was the main cause for the new generation's embracing resistance to the regime,²³⁹ a reality expected by Resul Yalcin when he wrote that "the authorities might unintentionally turn devoted believers into criminals."²⁴⁰

Rashid was writing in 2002 that the rise of Islamic militancy and the very power of the IMU were a direct consequence of Karimov's authoritarian attitude towards Islam and his outright oppression of peaceful Muslims who then turned into sympathizers to

²³⁶ Menon, 166.

²³⁷ Rashid, 228.

²³⁸ In his article, Brian Grodsky finds substantial contrary evidence from numbers of amnesties granted, crackdown on abuses, etc, that there was an improvement in Uzbek Human rights records in the few years following 9/11, but it seems apparent from the 2005 Andijon crisis where the state fired on unarmed civilians and then used torture and mass arrests to stop informants and activists that there has not really been a concrete human rights institutional improvement in the country, a reality that Grodsky suspected and feared in his conclusion at the time.

²³⁹ "Al-Qaeda-lined group faces up to 20 years imprisonment," IRIN 23 August 2004. (Last Accessed on 21 July 2005)

²⁴⁰ Resul Yalcin, *The Rebirth of Uzbekistan*, Durham Middle East Monographs Series (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2002), 301.

destabilization of the regime.²⁴¹ Numbers from the allegiance of the masses studied earlier suggest that we are still far away from the doomsday scenario where the state has alienated the population, but Karimov must still be careful of how much further he pushes his repression techniques because surely there is a limit to the citizen's tolerance.

²⁴¹ Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: the Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2002), 85.

Conclusion

After reviewing the evidence presented in this thesis, our findings demonstrate that the Islamic threat in Uzbekistan is not very serious at this time. Neither the underground groups nor the civil society nor the masses show signs of being likely able to carry acts against which the state's defense forces could not resist. This is due as much to the size of the Uzbek security apparatus as well as to the commitment of its international supporters. This is not to say that the situation cannot and will not change. Uzbekistan should pursue the development of its security to make sure that the state is always stronger than the armed insurgents. However, at present, there is a tendency in the media and among certain scholars to overestimate the strengths of the Islamic opposition to the Karimov regime. The likelihood of these actors being successful in their revolutionary project in the country is further lessened by data suggesting that a majority of the population frowns upon their message and their actions.

To the then logical question: why is the Islamic threat discourse still used by the presumably well-informed Karimov regime and its allies? It could be that, from the government's position, the threat seems honestly high, perhaps based on evidence and reports to which we do not have access. We have provided one of many possible alternative answers. Ours has been that, without at all labelling the current government as deceptive or hypocritical, there are elements in the security strategy warranting legitimate suspicions that President Karimov is at least in part using this discourse to repress domestic opposition to his authoritarian regime. These have been the two major

conclusions reached by this work on the relationship between Islam and national security in the country.

The current state of affairs demonstrates that the regime is strongly in control of the internal politics. Uzbekistan is still a fragile state, however. The economy, for instance, seems to be going nowhere. The Karimov regime still has the power to turn the situation around. Political integration of Islamic movements and economic development is almost unanimously prescribed by all specialists on Uzbekistan as the best strategy to adopt. A fascinating study by MacCulloh also demonstrated with hard numbers the often axiomatic relation between higher income and absence of revolts.²⁴² Nevertheless, at the time of writing, the leadership does not appear to be moving in this direction; each month the President bans from the country a new international NGO and officially denies the existence of many social and political domestic problems and issues.

Pressures could be exerted by strong allies to push for change. Certainly, it is not from China or from Russia that criticisms of repression in Uzbekistan will emerge since these two states appear satisfied with the current status quo. As for the United States, there are so many questions left for them to answer in order to determine if their best interest is to support or pressure Uzbekistan, to offer military assistance to weaken opposition or the offer economic assistance to neutralize the potential roots of terrorism and unrest.²⁴³ What economic assistance reaches Uzbekistan is at times diverted into

²⁴² Robert MacCulloh, "The Impact of Income on the Taste for Revolt," *American Journal of Political Science* 48 (October 2004), 830-848.

²⁴³ These questions are well put and explored in the article by S. Neil MacFarlane, "The United States and regionalism in Central Asia," *International Affairs* 80, 3 (2004) : 447-461.

Russian interests by Moscow's special agents and increase Russia's influence in Uzbek affairs.²⁴⁴ The likelihood of improvement in the living standards of the Uzbek citizens in the near term is indeed questionable.

²⁴⁴ Marina Pikulina, *Russia in Central Asia: Third Invasion - An Uzbek View* (Camberley: Defence Academy of the UK, Conflict Studies Research Center, February 2003, K38), 11.

Appendix A: Map of Uzbekistan



source: Neil J Melvin *Uzbekistan: Transition to authoritarianism on the silk road, Postcommunist States and Nations* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), xv.

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