


2007

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### Recommended Citation

Bulur, Latife (2007) "Uzbekistan at the Crossroads," *Human Rights & Human Welfare*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, Article 34.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/hrhw/vol7/iss1/34>



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## Uzbekistan at the Crossroads

### Abstract

Uzbekistan is at the crossroads of the Central Asian region. Because of its strategic location and natural resources, Uzbekistan is becoming an interest to many different states, including the United States. However, many states that are interested in Uzbekistan are cautious about developing relations due to civil and governmental unrest.

### Keywords

Human rights, Terrorism, Uzbekistan, Radical Islam

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## **Uzbekistan at the Crossroads**

By Latife Bulur

Uzbekistan is at the crossroads of the Central Asian region. Because of its strategic location and natural resources, Uzbekistan is becoming an interest to many different states, including the United States. However, many states that are interested in Uzbekistan are cautious about developing relations due to civil and governmental unrest.

Uzbekistan is facing many problems regarding human rights policies and terrorist activity. The Islamic radical groups that reside in Uzbekistan are fighting the Uzbek government in response to what they claim have been years of repression. Meanwhile, the government serving under President Islam Karimov is under the impression that these radical groups are staging an uprising, and therefore is retaliating against Islamic groups.

In assessing where the true terrorism lies, some scholars believe that the Islamic groups are attempting to overthrow the secular government established there, while other scholars argue that the true terrorist activity is being propagated by the government itself.

Possible solutions for this now dysfunctional state are in much demand. However, Uzbekistan is closely tied to other Central Asian states. Therefore, whatever international policies are directed toward Uzbekistan may affect the region as a whole. With this in mind, scholars seek to address not only issues faced by Uzbekistan, but to view such problems in the context of the region in which it is situated.

Islamic fundamentalism constitutes a serious impediment for human rights in Uzbekistan. Radical Islamic groups sometimes incite civil conflicts, the reasons for which are oftentimes unknown. Some of the conflict may be influenced by terrorists from Afghanistan who are using Uzbek forces to achieve their own ambitions. Certain scholarly works argue that terrorists throughout the region are collaborating in an effort to gain supremacy over the secular government already established. Countering this notion, other authors contend that collaboration between regional radical groups is nothing but a government conspiracy against Islamic groups.

One of the most prominent hypotheses regarding why Islamic groups are inciting conflict is that they have endured terrible religious persecution by the government. Yet not all Islamic groups make this claim. At least one reason why this is the case is because these groups are not all militarized. There are various Islamic groups in the Uzbek region, some of which are very moderate, while others are extremely radical. Because of the large number of Islamic groups, many Muslims who may participate in a more moderate group are being falsely accused of crimes committed by radical Islamic insurgents. The government oftentimes fails to differentiate between the various groups, and instead deems all groups as "bandits." This, in turn, encourages (otherwise) non-violent groups to retaliate against governmental repression.

Some scholars accuse the Uzbek government of being ignorant regarding the differences between these groups. Many works can be found that portray the Uzbek government in a very negative light, and which argue that the government has been repressing its people and producing insurgents.

One of the most important and disastrous events that occurred in the Central Asian region is the massacre in the city of Andijan in May of 2005. This event began when several individuals broke a number of businessmen out of prison who were accused of belonging to a radical Islamic group in the area. While the protest that followed began somewhat peacefully, it quickly turned violent. Government authorities opened fire on the crowds, killing hundreds of protestors and civilians.

Since this incident, the Uzbek regime and its leader, President Karimov, have been criticized for the use of excessive force. At the time, the regime claimed that the protest was an attempt to stage a coup on the government, but many scholars believe that the government's response was too harsh. Some scholars even declare that the government, led by Karimov, is the true terrorist. The government, it is claimed, inflicts daily human rights violations on its people. Others believe that the Islamic groups hope to destroy the secular government in efforts to replace it with a religious state.

The situation in Uzbekistan is difficult for proponents of human rights to evaluate, and for advocates to agree upon an appropriate course of action. Islamic fundamentalism, disorganization within the government, and regional instability are only a few of the factors that continue to make the situation tenuous. However, due to Uzbekistan's strategic location, there is much international support for development and stability. The resources listed in the bibliography that follow provide a glimpse into this tragic situation, and present possible solutions for Uzbekistan's many human rights issues.



### Central Asian Focus

Bowers, S. R., B. Musayev, et al. 2006. "The Islamic Threat to Eastern Central Asia." *Journal of Social, Political & Economic Studies* 31 (4): 375-397.

Annotation: The authors of this piece analyze the evolution of violence in the Central Asian region. They state that the region initially developed culturally and socially, but later began to morph into a jihadist campaign in which attempts were made to undermine the secular authority. Terrorist attacks increased against security personnel, and worse, against civilian targets. This article illustrates this evolving history well, and establishes that the violence has been steadily increasing in the region over the past five years.

Chaudet, D. 2006. "Hizb ut-Tahrir: an Islamist Threat to Central Asia?" *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26 (1): 113-125.

Annotation: This author explores the Hizb ut-Tahrir—a new danger in the Central Asian Region, in addition to examining other possible threats. It is argued that Hizb ut-Tahrir could be the new Al-Qaida, threatening the safety and security of Central Asia, and even of the United

States. The author also takes the position that there are other sub-national rivalries, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, that are equally threatening.

Crosston, M. 2006. *Fostering Fundamentalism: Terrorism, Democracy and American Engagement in Central Asia*. Burlington: Ashgate.

Annotation: The author of this book examines how the U.S. is influencing countries in the Central Asian region such as Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The author states that the U.S. is creating conditions in this region that serve no purpose other than to produce a new generation of Islamic radicals. This book provides a relatively controversial approach to U.S. foreign policy as it relates to the Central Asian region.

MacFadyen, D. 2006. *Russian Culture in Uzbekistan: One Language in the Middle of Nowhere*. London: Routledge.

Annotation: This book focuses on the Russian side of the relationship with Uzbekistan. Russian-speaking citizens who reside in the Uzbekistan are faced with a complication that Russia is no longer the only power in the region. The author of this piece concerns himself with examining Russia's experience in and around Uzbekistan since 1900, and addresses the role of Islam in the Central Asian region.

Petrenko, V. D., Y. N. Karimov, *et al.* 2005. "Efforts of Uzbekistan to Prevent Nuclear Terrorism and Smuggling of Radioactive and Nuclear Materials." *Applied Radiation & Isotopes* 63 (5/6): 737-740.

Annotation: This article focuses on how safeguarding nuclear materials has come to the forefront since terrorism has increased in the Central Asian region. Uzbekistan lies in the crossroads of the North and the South, and should terrorist activity increase regionally, transporting such materials through the country will become risky. This article also covers the developments that have been made to prevent possible interceptions of nuclear materials by terrorist groups.

Trisko, J. N. 2005. "Coping with the Islamist Threat: Analyzing Repression in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan." *Central Asian Survey* 24 (4): 373-389.

Annotation: This article takes an empirical approach to understanding the Central Asian region, specifically Uzbekistan and its government. The author delves into a decision-theoretic model formulated by Gartner and Regan; it is a theory that analyzes the use of governmental repression. The role of Islam in the region is discussed as well. The author acknowledges the

importance of building positive relationships with moderate Islamists who are open to a dialogue with the government.

### Religious Oppression

Andersen, M. 2005. "Chronicle of a Massacre Foretold." *Index on Censorship* 34 (4): 11-16.

Annotation: The author reviews decisions made by President Karimov regarding Uzbekistan. There has been much criticism of Karimov, particularly regarding how he has been responding to the uprising of certain Islamic groups. This author, along with other critics, agrees that the Uzbek government and Karimov is applying too much pressure on the Islamic groups, which equates to repression. The author believes that this repression may lead to another Andijan incident.

Bakker, E. 2006. "Repression, Political Violence and Terrorism: the Case of Uzbekistan." *Helsinki Monitor* 17 (2): 108-118.

Annotation: This article concentrates on the issues that have contributed to the rise of violence and terrorism in Uzbekistan. The author explores how repression has resulted in terrorism, and discusses the ways in which an increase in terrorism may even lead to a collapse in the regime. The author makes a suggestion in this piece about how to resolve this issue, as well. The Karimov regime, in the author's opinion, would have much to gain if it were to find a more liberal and comprehensive approach to security.

Gannushkina, S. and Y. Ryabinina. 2005. "Muslims on Faked Charges." *Index on Censorship* 34 (4): 118-119.

Annotation: This article focuses on the charges placed on Muslims falsely for committing acts of terrorism. According to the authors, Muslims are being tried for extremism based on trumped-up charges. Meanwhile, human rights groups in the region are receiving many requests for aid. This article mentions how the "Civic Assistance" group and the human rights group "Memorial" have been monitoring the trial process that is taking place in Russia.

Hill, F. and K. Jones. 2006. "Fear of Democracy or Revolution: the Reaction to Andijan." *The Washington Quarterly* 29 (3): 111-125.

Annotation: These authors analyze the reaction from the Uzbekistan government, specifically Uzbek president Karimov, following the Andijan incident. The article gives a short account of the massacre, and discusses how people present in the crowd felt about the government.

Citizens highlighted government repression and corruption, particularly as Karimov had ordered his troops to open fire on the crowd, killing many Uzbek civilians. The authors portray Karimov's behavior as a panicked act against protesters, whom he thought were staging a coup against his government. Karimov, according to this article, is only focusing on short-term stability solutions, and is ignoring what the people truly need.

Horsman, S. 2005. "Themes in Official Discourses on Terrorism in Central Asia." *ThirdWorld Quarterly* 26 (1): 199-213.

Annotation: The author of this piece explores how the governments of Central Asian region—Uzbekistan specifically—have perceived the threat of Islamic terrorist groups. He critiques the perception of the threat, turning to a theoretical definition of terrorism. The author wants to view the wider political culture, and to analyze the objectives of these regimes. He suggests that what is truly necessary is an effective and coherent assessment of the nature and extent of the terrorist threat.

Ilkhamov, A. 2006. "The Phenomenology of 'Akromiya': Separating Facts from Fiction." *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4: 39-48.

Annotation: The author of this piece examines the group known as Akromiya, and considers its involvement in the violence in Uzbekistan. The Uzbek government labels this group as an extremist Islamic organization with intentions of overthrowing the order of the state. Other works, it is noted, contend that such a group does not even exist. This author aspires to decipher the truth of this preponderance. The article concludes with a suggestion that if the Uzbek government desires to boost its relations with its own population, it needs to make a distinction between moderate and radical Islamic groups.

Kamp, M. 2006. *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Annotation: This book explores the lives of Uzbek women before and after the Russian Revolution of 1917. The author takes a personal approach, by including direct quotes and words from Uzbek women. Uzbek women have chosen to become unveiled, as a path to Islamic social and intellectual liberation. The author explains how this movement has triggered violence against women, and how this event remains highly volatile for women today.

Kendzior, S. 2006. "Inventing Akromiya: The Role of Uzbek Propagandists in the Andijon Massacre." *Demokratizatsiya* 14 (4): 545-562.

Annotation: The author of this piece discusses the relationship between the Akromiya group and the Uzbek government. The government currently views Akromiya as a highly violent organization set on overthrowing the state. Akromiya, according to the government, is responsible for what happened in Andijan when the violence broke out. The author argues that this portrayal is nothing but a government conspiracy, and has been propagated by members of the Uzbek government.

McGlinchey, E. 2005. "The Making of Militants: the State and Islam in Central Asia." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25 (3): 554-566.

Annotation: The author of this piece addresses variations between Islamic groups, and specifically seeks to explain why the tension between the state and Islam has proven greater and considerably more violent in Uzbekistan than in many other areas of Central Asia. The author also makes an interesting point that the more authoritarian the state, the more pronounced political Islam will be in society.

Murray, C. 2007. *Murder in Samarkand: a British Ambassador's Controversial Defiance of Tyranny in the War on Terror*. Edinburgh: Mainstream.

Annotation: This is an autobiography on the life of British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray. He was removed from his post after exposing human rights abuses by the regime of President Karimov. Described as a candid and, at times, shocking memoir, this book analyzes the countless acts of tyranny from Karimov. He also mentions how despite these violations of human rights, Karimov was still viewed as a key U.S. ally in the "War on Terror."

Naumkin, V. V. 2005. *Radical Islam in Central Asia: between Pen & Rifle*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Annotation: This book examines the history of Islam in Uzbekistan. The author breaks down the history of Islam by splitting it into several important periods of time, beginning with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and leading all the way up to the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan became involved in campaigns against the United States. The author studies the main political Islamic movements in Uzbekistan, and acknowledges that while he has touched on many points; his work still does not exhaust the topic of religious radicalism in the Uzbek region.



**Terrorist Activity**

2005. "Bullets Were Falling Like Rain: the Andijan Massacre, May 13, 2005." *Human Rights Watch* 17 (5): 1-66.

Annotation: This article deeply examines the Andijan Massacre that occurred on May 13, 2005. The authors who compiled this work start the piece by giving an overview of how the massacre built up momentum. They convey the many kinds of suffering experienced by individuals, which included hostage situations, prison breaks, and the sealing off of the Bobur Square. The authors conclude their piece by providing recommendations for easing the conflict in Uzbekistan.

Shishkin, P. 2005. "Uzbek Crackdown Fuels Instability in Central Asia." *Wall Street Journal - Eastern Edition* 245 (98): A1-A8.

Annotation: This article is a review of the incident in Andijan in May 2005. It begins by reviewing the beginning of the incident, outlining how armed men attacked a prison in order to free businessmen accused of belonging to a radical Islamic group. Then the article reviews the response by the Uzbek government, including its use of excessive force, which left hundreds of people dead. This article also reports on the reaction of the people in Andijan and on how this incident is shaping the relationship between Uzbekistan and the United States.

Zanca, R. 2005. "Believing in God at Your Own Risk: Religion and Terrorisms in Uzbekistan." *Religion, State & Society* 33 (1): 71-82.

Annotation: This author boldly takes a side against the Uzbek regime by beginning his article with a story of a man murdering a woman in front of dozens of people. The Uzbek authorities witnessed the murder and did nothing. This author portrays two forms of terrorism in Uzbekistan: one committed randomly by radicals in the name of Islam; and the second committed on a daily basis by the Uzbek regime. He believes that Muslims in the area must take drastic action against the regime if they are to pursue their own religious lives freely.

**Policy**

Akbarzadeh, S. 2007. "Uzbekistan and the United States: Friends or Foes?" *Middle East Policy* 14 (1): 107-116.

Annotation: This author examines the complex relationship between Uzbekistan and the United States. There have been many cases where the Uzbek Government has used particular attempts to bolster its own power. Uzbek leaders have developed a flexible posture towards foreign relations. This article illustrates how Uzbekistan relies heavily on foreign support.

Dubnov, A. 2005. "Putin Avoids Delving into Aspects." *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 57 (26): 1.

Annotation: The author of this piece focuses on Russian president Vladimir Putin's views on the issue of the Andijan massacre. The author discusses how Putin claims that militants from Afghanistan have enmeshed themselves into the ranks of the Uzbek protesters. Putin also contends, against the claims of the Uzbek president Karimov, that the incident was a foreign conspiracy. The author also briefly discusses the Russian and Uzbek governments' military cooperation post-Andijan.

Naumkin, V. 2006. "Uzbekistan's State-Building Fatigue." *The Washington Quarterly* 29 (3): 127-140.

Annotation: This article provides insight into the complex relationship between the U.S. and Uzbekistan. Originally, Uzbekistan was important to the U.S. because of its ability to act as a partner on the "War on Terror" and because of its prime location next to Afghanistan. However, the relationship between the two states deteriorated after the reaction to the Andijan massacre. The author mentions how now the Uzbek president, Karimov, has decided to abandon the U.S., realizing that the alliance is becoming a liability.

Rumer, E. 2006. "The U.S. Interests and Role in Central Asia after K2." *The Washington Quarterly* 29 (3): 141-154.

Annotation: The author of this piece explains the relationship between the U.S. and Uzbekistan. The article also goes into the Russian and Uzbekistan relationship in comparison to U.S. relations. The U.S. immediately pulled out of Uzbekistan in response to the Uzbek government's use of excessive force during the uprising in Andijan in May of 2005. The author recommends that the U.S. cooperate with Uzbekistan in order to advance U.S. interests in Central Asia, and specifically in Afghanistan.

Sidorov, D. 2005. "American Planes Leave Uzbekistan with a Boom." *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 57 (23/24): 4.

Annotation: The author of this piece discusses how the U.S. transferred from a base in Uzbekistan to a neighboring base. Uzbek authorities informed U.S. military personnel that they were no longer permitted to fly planes at night, and banned them from doing so. The U.S. had previously applied pressure to Uzbekistan by suggesting an independent investigation of the Andijan incident. This author views the ban placed on the U.S. as retaliation for such pressure.

Wall, C. and J. Overton. 2006. "Unethical ethics?: applying research ethics in Uzbekistan."  
*Development in Practice* 16 (1): 62-67.

Annotation: This article focuses on the application of Western research ethics in Uzbekistan. The author points out the need to make vital ethical considerations in conducting development-related research. Barriers to the adoption of new technologies include human rights and repression, ethical principles of self-determinism, non-maleficence, and justice and beneficence. Finally, the author argues that it is wrong to replace local notions of what constitutes appropriate behavior assessment with Western ethical concepts.