

Uzbekistan: Europe's Sanctions Matter

I. OVERVIEW

After the indiscriminate killing of civilians by Uzbek security forces in the city of Andijon in 2005, the European Union imposed targeted sanctions on the government of President Islam Karimov. EU leaders called for Uzbekistan to allow an international investigation into the massacre, stop show trials and improve its human rights record. Now a number of EU member states, principally Germany, are pressing to lift or weaken the sanctions, as early as this month. The Karimov government has done nothing to justify such an approach. Normalisation of relations should come on EU terms, not those of Karimov. Moreover, his dictatorship is looking increasingly fragile, and serious thought should be given to facing the consequences of its ultimate collapse, including the impact on other fragile states in Central Asia such as Kyrgyzstan.

On 12-13 May 2005, the Uzbek government responded to an armed uprising in Andijon with indiscriminate force, gunning down hundreds of mostly unarmed civilians. Over 400 refugees who fled to Kyrgyzstan were eventually given asylum in third countries, after intense pressure from a number of Western governments, in particular the U.S. After the first of many trials stemming from the Andijon events, the EU imposed a visa ban on a dozen Uzbek officials most directly involved in the massacre. When EU foreign ministers hold their monthly meeting on 13-14 November 2006, they will decide whether to renew, modify or drop the sanctions.

Since the sanctions were imposed, the crackdown on dissent has not relented. Journalists, human rights activists, and religious leaders, among others, have faced harassment, arrest, torture and lengthy prison sentences. Those seeking refuge abroad have come under pressure from Uzbek and other security services, and some have been forcibly repatriated. Uzbekistan has held show trials of accused Islamic extremists, with the all but inevitable convictions based on confessions extracted through torture. Rather than proving itself a valuable ally in the "war on terror", the government continues to create conditions in which popular support for radical Islam is likely to grow.

The government maintains tight control over the country's main export commodities – cotton, gas and gold – ensuring that revenues go not to communities involved

in their production, or to the national budget, but to the regime itself and its key allies, particularly those in the security services. Perhaps motivated by an increasing sense of insecurity, the regime has begun looting some of its foreign joint-venture partners. Shuttle trading and labour migration to Russia and Kazakhstan are increasingly threatened economic lifelines for millions of Uzbeks.

Rather than take serious measures to improve conditions, President Karimov has resorted to scapegoating and cosmetic changes, such as the October 2006 firing of Andijon governor Saydullo Begaliyev, whom he has publicly called partially responsible for the previous year's events. On the whole, however, Karimov continues to deny that his regime's policies were in any way at fault, while the same abuses are unchecked in other provinces.

Karimov's government is brittle and rife with rivalries. The president is increasingly isolated, surrounded by a shrinking circle of cronies. Speculation about possible successors is rife, with his daughter, Gulnora Karimova, and her putative ally, Moscow-based Uzbek oligarch Alisher Usmonov, mentioned most frequently as possibilities. There is small likelihood of a popular uprising but a palace coup by disgruntled members of the elite is more feasible, though for now at least Karimov's hold over the security services appears fairly solid. However it occurs, succession is unlikely to be smooth and may seriously threaten stability in the region as a whole.

The EU should:

- ❑ renew its visa ban sanctions for a year, extending coverage to Karimov, his family, recent major appointees and members of his inner circle;
- ❑ freeze the assets of those subject to the visa ban so they cannot access the European banking system; and
- ❑ concentrate on building resilience in the neighbouring states that already suffer from the instability and economic policies in Uzbekistan.

II. ANDIJON AND THE WESTERN REACTION

For years, repression, corruption, ruinous economic policies and bad governance have been driving Uzbekistan towards poverty and violence.¹ Matters came to a head in May 2005. For months, a group of 23 wealthy and influential businessmen in the eastern city of Andijon² had been on trial, accused of belonging to an extremist Islamic movement “Akramiya”, named after its alleged founder, former math teacher Akram Yuldoshev.³ As the trial neared its conclusion, hundreds, then thousands of relatives, employees, and supporters staged daily, peaceful demonstrations outside the courthouse. On the night of 12-13 May, however, as the verdicts were due to be announced, an armed group stormed the prison where the men were held, freeing them and hundreds of other inmates. The group then moved to take over administrative buildings in the centre of town, while seizing local government and police as hostages. This was followed by a massive demonstration in Bobur Square, where thousands, almost all unarmed civilians, expressed their grievances and called for the president to come to the city.

Negotiations with the security services quickly broke down, and as evening fell, government security forces fired

indiscriminately on the crowd with high-calibre weapons mounted on armoured vehicles. Hundreds were killed – again, mostly unarmed civilians, including women and children. Hundreds more fled to Kyrgyzstan, from where many eventually made their way as refugees to the U.S. and Europe.

While Russia and China – governments to which Uzbekistan had been drawing closer economically and politically – lent their full support to the handling of the Andijon uprising, Western states were quick to condemn.⁴ On 14 November 2005, as the sentences were handed down in the first post-Andijon trial, the European Union announced “restrictive measures” against Uzbekistan, including a visa ban on individuals “directly responsible for the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force in [Andijon] and for the obstruction of an independent inquiry”⁵ and a ban on the export to Uzbekistan of “arms, military equipment and other equipment that might be used for internal repression”. The restrictions were for one year, to be reviewed “in light of any significant changes to the current situation,” including:

- ❑ the conduct and outcome of the trials of those accused of participating in the Andijon disturbances;
- ❑ the situation regarding detention and harassment of those who have questioned the Uzbek authorities’ version of events in Andijon;
- ❑ cooperation with any independent, international rapporteur appointed to investigate the disturbances;

¹ For previous Crisis Group reporting on Uzbekistan, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°45, *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul*, 16 February 2006; Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°38, *Uzbekistan: The Andijon Uprising*, 25 May 2005; Crisis Group Asia Report N°76, *The Failure of Reform in Uzbekistan: Ways Forward for the International Community*, 11 March 2004; Crisis Group Asia Report N°46, *Uzbekistan’s Reform Program: Illusion or Reality*, 18 February 2003; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°21, *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression And Instability*, 21 August 2001.

² The international media use various spellings for this city, such as “Andijon”, “Andizhan” and “Andijan”. Crisis Group uses “Andijon”, which most accurately reflects the name in Uzbek.

³ Born in Andijon in 1963, Yuldoshev was a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir until becoming disillusioned with the movement. He left and began to argue for the establishment of an Islamic society through social and economic activism, ideas which he presented in his publication *Iymonga yul* (“The Path to Faith”). Yuldoshev was arrested following the 1999 bombings in Tashkent, sentenced to seventeen years in prison on a variety of charges, including terrorism, “inciting national, racial or religious hostility”, “undermining the constitutional structure of the state” and establishing a forbidden religious organisation. “Memorial”, Human Rights Centre, *Spisok lits, arestovannykh i osuzhdennykh po politicheskim i religioznym motivam v Uzbekistane (dekabr’ 1997g.-dekabr’ 2003g.)* [A list of individuals arrested and convicted on political and religious motives (December 1997-December 2003)], Moscow, 2004.

⁴ The U.S. government called for a full enquiry. UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said his government had “made it clear to the authorities in Uzbekistan that the repression of dissent and discontent is wrong, and they urgently need to deal with patent failings in respect to human and civil rights”. On 23 May the EU’s External Relations Council issued a statement condemning “the reported excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the Uzbek security forces” and calling on the Uzbek government “to respect their international commitments to democracy, the rule of law and human rights”. The Council likewise expressed its concern over the failure to respond to calls for an international investigation, stating that it would “consider further steps” depending on President Karimov’s ultimate response. Statement from Richard Boucher, State Department spokesman, 23 May 2005; Foreign and Commonwealth Office press release, London, 14 May 2005; “External Relations Council conclusions concerning the situation in eastern Uzbekistan”, Brussels, 23 May 2005.

⁵ These included Rustam Inoyatov, head of Uzbekistan’s National Security Service (usually known by Russian initials, SNB); Interior Minister Zokir Almatov; Defence Minister Qodir Ghulomov; Andijon governor Saydullo Begaliyev; and Vladimir Mamo, commander of the interior ministry special forces. Almatov, Ghulomov and Begaliyev are no longer in their positions; see below.

- ❑ the outcome of any independent, international inquiry; and
- ❑ any action demonstrating willingness of the authorities to respect human rights, rule of law and fundamental freedoms.⁶

No sooner had the common position been announced that it was revealed that the person literally and figuratively at the top of the EU list – Zokirjon Almatov of the ministry of internal affairs (MIA) – was in the German city of Hannover receiving treatment for cancer. German and EU officials cited humanitarian grounds for the waiver.⁷ On 12 December 2005, with the backing of Human Rights Watch, survivors of the massacre and victims of other human rights violations urged the German government to arrest Almatov for crimes against humanity.⁸ Their call was echoed by Manfred Nowak, the UN special rapporteur on torture.⁹ However, Almatov returned to Tashkent, where his retirement on health grounds was announced.¹⁰

Whatever the humanitarian aspects – and Almatov was certainly ill – Germany also took into consideration when it granted the visa its desire to retain access to the airbase at Termez, the last remaining NATO base in Uzbekistan. It was fresh in all minds that after the Kyrgyz government had acceded to Western – especially U.S. – pressure and allowed Uzbek refugees to be sent to third countries, Tashkent had required the U.S. to leave a major base near the southern city of Qarshi, which it had been using since 2001.

Relations with the West soured on other fronts as well. Dozens of foreign NGOs – particularly those funded by the U.S. – have been forced to cease operations in Uzbekistan. U.S. diplomats report difficulty in obtaining accreditation for new embassy personnel. The UK embassy was forced to temporarily shift its visa operations to Almaty after Tashkent city authorities removed protective barricades from the front of the building in the name of “urban

beautification”.¹¹ Western diplomats in general report increased difficulties in meeting with Uzbek officials.

In contrast Uzbekistan and Russia signed a military alliance in November 2005, and Uzbekistan joined the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Community (EURASEC) in January 2006.¹² In August 2006 Uzbekistan was re-admitted to the Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), from which it had withdrawn in 1999.¹³ Russian companies Gazprom and Lukoil have expanded their investments in Uzbekistan, and Gazprom agreed to a near doubling of the price of its gas imports. But President Karimov is unlikely to be entirely comfortable with being back in Russia's embrace, especially after having spent so many years trying to assert his political and economic independence. A savvy politician, he is also probably not happy relying on a single major ally and may have already begun searching for other partners. China is showing increased interest in Uzbekistan's natural resources, including hydrocarbons and cotton, while overtures are being made to Japan, Korea and India.

Karimov may also be working to mend his relations with the West – at least the EU. Since November 2005, contacts between EU and Uzbek officials have been severely restrained, due to the partial suspension of the bilateral Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA).¹⁴ In 2006 Commission officials and the newly appointed EU Special Representative to the region, Ambassador Pierre Morel, have travelled to Tashkent to meet with their Uzbek counterparts. The fact that these visits took place with minimal press coverage has fuelled speculation about a possible softening of the EU's stance towards the Uzbek government. Some EU member states express

⁶ The full text of the common position is available at http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/l_299/l_29920051116_en00720079.pdf.

⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Brussels, November 2005. German officials also say the visa was granted several days before the Council imposed the sanctions, though the action was known to be pending.

⁸ “Germany: Uzbek security chief accused of crimes against humanity”, Human Rights Watch, 15 December 2005.

⁹ See the 16 December 2005 press release of the Special Rapporteur, available online at <http://www.unhchr.ch/>.

¹⁰ “Controversial Uzbek interior minister resigns”, RFE/RL, 22 December 2005, available at <http://www.rferl.org>.

¹¹ British visa services in Tashkent have recently been restored.

¹² See Crisis Group Briefing, *In for the Long Haul*, op. cit. EURASEC members are Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

¹³ The CSTO, whose members pledged not to participate in other military alliances or attack each other and to regard an attack against one member as an attack against all, was formed in 1992 by Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Belarus joined in 1993. In 1999, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan withdrew and, with Ukraine and Moldova, formed the more West-oriented GUUAM bloc. Uzbekistan withdrew from GUUAM in 2005.

¹⁴ PCAs form the basis for the EU's interactions with most post-Soviet states. They establish a legal basis for bilateral cooperation in such areas as the economy, trade, legislative approximation to EU laws and standards and improving the business and investment climate. Provision is made for a political dialogue covering human rights, constitutional reform and regional affairs, although specifics are not elaborated. See Crisis Group Asia Report N°113, *Central Asia: What Role for the European Union*, 10 April 2006.

doubts as to whether the Andijon massacre should have provoked as strong a response as it did, although an EU official close to the original sanctions discussions told Crisis Group that by the last months of 2005 a broad consensus had developed that the EU needed to follow its verbal protests with action.¹⁵

Perhaps adding to European uncertainty has been the lack of a clear position from the U.S., which did not match the EU's visa ban. To mark the one-year anniversary in May 2006, Senator John McCain and Representative Chris Smith introduced separate bills in Congress proposing targeted sanctions, which would be lifted upon the completion of an independent international inquiry into the events.¹⁶ The Smith bill also aimed to provide support for, among other things, free media, regional democracy activities and educational programs for Uzbeks abroad. However, neither bill has been enacted into law.

On the basis of discussions at working group level in the Council which started in mid-October, the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC) is expected to recommend a common position on the sanctions at its 9 November meeting, in advance of the formal decision to be taken by foreign ministers on 13-14 November.¹⁷ Unless there is unanimity among the 25 member states to renew them, the sanctions will automatically lapse.

The Uzbek government has pushed for renewal of contacts and opening of a human rights dialogue. On a proposal by the EU Troika (the current Finnish Presidency, the Commission, and the incoming German Presidency) the Council has agreed to hold a PCA meeting with Uzbek representatives on 8 November.¹⁸ Some officials have stressed that the two events – the PCA meeting and the PSC action to be taken the next day – are unrelated. Some member states, however, particularly Germany but also France, are apparently waiting to hear what the Uzbeks have to say before making up their minds on sanctions.

A group of member states, including the UK, Spain, Denmark, Ireland, and the Netherlands, want the sanctions renewed at a minimum.¹⁹ However, there seems to be a serious lack of will to challenge those who believe that the current measures should be dropped in favour of pursuing more strongly the dialogue Tashkent is now offering, even though that offer comes against the backdrop of continued deterioration of the human rights situation over the past twelve months. A potential compromise is reportedly being discussed to extend the sanctions for three months. Since the further review that would then be necessary would be conducted under the German presidency, this might slightly favour the position of those who seek a more accommodating policy toward Uzbekistan.²⁰

The European Parliament sent a similarly mixed message in a resolution on Uzbekistan adopted on 26 October.²¹ Its language reflects the split between the Socialist and Green caucuses, which favour renewal and expansion of sanctions, and the European People's Party (EPP), Christian Democrats and the Communists, which favour lifting the sanctions and promoting constructive "engagement" with the Karimov government.

The Uzbek government has not satisfied a single one of the conditions in the original common position. It persists in rejecting any independent inquiry into the Andijon events and relentlessly persecutes those who present any version of events that differs from its own. Refugees have come under intense pressure in various countries. At home, the government continues to repress independent political and religious voices and stifle independent media, while its members use corrupt and exploitative means to enrich themselves.

III. THE CRACKDOWN GOES ON

The Andijon events were followed by a massive crackdown on opposition and independent political and religious voices throughout the country. Over 200 people

¹⁵ Uzbekistan and the Andijon events featured in the General Affairs and External Relations Council conclusions on 23 and 24 May 2005, 13 June 2005 and 18 July 2005, before sanctions were announced on 3 October 2005. An EU official close to the discussions said including the twelve individuals' families was considered but member states decided to "keep it up [their] sleeve". Crisis Group telephone interview, 24 October 2006.

¹⁶ The text of the McCain bill is available online at <http://www.thomas.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?c109:1:/temp/~c1090Sgnab>.

¹⁷ The meeting of foreign ministers is the monthly session of the EU's General Affairs & External Relations Council (GAERC).

¹⁸ The EU has only partially suspended the PCA, allowing political discussions such as a Cooperation Council to be held. The last Cooperation Council was scheduled for February 2006 but Uzbekistan chose not to participate.

¹⁹ Crisis Group telephone interviews, October 2006. Hugh Williamson, "Berlin raises Uzbek sanctions hopes", *Financial Times*, 2 November 2006; Andrew Rettman, "EU likely to rollback Uzbekistan sanctions", *EU Observer*, 31 October 2006.

²⁰ Voting at the UN General Assembly on Resolution 60/174 concerning human rights in Uzbekistan on 2 November 2006 seems telling of EU divisions; while Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and the UK lent their strong support to the resolution, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Rumania, and Spain did not support it.

²¹ European Parliament Resolution, 26 October 2006, available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu>.

have received prison sentences in trials that, with the exception of the first, have been conducted behind closed doors. More than a year and a half later, the trend shows no sign of slowing. The following list is by no means exhaustive; it is only intended to provide concrete examples of how the regime is handling dissent.

Muhammad Bekjon. The former editor of the opposition newspaper *Erk* was sentenced to prison in 1999 for plotting a coup. Recently, his wife, Nina Bekjonova, who visited him in prison in Qashqadaryo province, reported that he was being held in solitary confinement and regularly tortured; all his teeth reportedly had been knocked out, and he is consequently unable to eat solid food. Bekjonova also stated that her husband was suffering from tuberculosis,²² a perennial problem in post-Soviet prisons.

Ruhiddin Fakhriddinov. The former imam of Tashkent's Khuja Nuriddin mosque was living in the Kazakh border city of Shymkent from 1999 to 2006 when he was kidnapped, possibly with the involvement of Kazakh security forces, and forcibly returned to Tashkent. He was accused of being a "Wahhabi"²³ and charged with crimes in connection with the 1999 car bombings in Tashkent, including terrorism, forming a criminal group, and undermining the constitution. Fakhriddinov's relatives were not allowed to attend the trial, in the town of Chirchiq, just outside Tashkent. In March 2006, while he was in investigative custody, his six-year-old daughter was raped near her home; while her sixteen-year-old attacker was arrested and sentenced to nine years in prison, human rights activists have speculated that the incident may have been used to exert pressure on Fakhriddinov, who on 16 September 2006 was sentenced to seventeen years in prison.²⁴

Dadakhon Hasanov. A well-known singer, Soviet-era dissident and a founding member of the opposition *Birlik* ("Unity") movement, Hasanov was placed under house arrest after audio cassettes of his regime-critical songs – including "There

Was a Massacre in Andijon" (*Andijonda qatli om buldi*) – began circulating.²⁵ His trial on charges of undermining the president and the "constitutional structure" of Uzbekistan, and distributing subversive materials, began on 5 September, with Hasanov reportedly forced to act as his own lawyer.²⁶ In October 2006 he received a three-year suspended sentence on condition that he refrain from writing songs or poems with political content.²⁷

Ulughbek Haydarov. An independent journalist from Jizzakh, he was arrested on 14 September 2006 on charges of extortion. On 5 October, after a two-day trial, a Jizzakh court sentenced him to six years in prison, despite the fact that all prosecution witnesses recanted their earlier testimony.²⁸

Jamshid Karimov. A nephew of President Karimov and an independent journalist, he vanished from Jizzakh in mid-September 2006. It was later revealed that a court in Jizzakh, without informing relatives or allowing independent experts to participate in the hearings, had confined him to a psychiatric hospital in Samarqand for six months.²⁹

Mu'tabar Tojiboyeva. Head of the unregistered "Ardent Hearts" (*Ut yuraklar*) human-rights club in the city of Ferghana, she was arrested in October 2005 and convicted in March 2006 of

²² "Pravozashchitniki Uzbekistana obespokoeny sostoianiem zdorov'ia politzakliuchennogo Mukhammeda Bekzhana" [Uzbekistan's human rights activists are concerned about the state of political prisoner Muhammad Bekjon's health], *Fergana.ru*.

²³ Wahabbi is the term used by Uzbek security forces to describe any religious Muslim they deem an extremist. It does not necessarily mean the person follows the Saudi Sunni sect.

²⁴ Hurmat Bobojon, "Taniqli imom 17 yilga qamaldi" [A well-known imam has been imprisoned for seventeen years], *Ozodlik*, 16 September 2006, available at <http://www.ozodlik.org>.

²⁵ Possession of copies of this cassette can have serious consequences. Two people are known to have been arrested for this by the SNB in early November 2005 in Bukhara's Ghijduvon region: schoolteacher Jamol Qutliyev and 70-year-old Hazrat Ahmadov. Nasrullo Saidov, head of the regional branch of the opposition movement *Erk* ("Will"), was accused by the SNB of distributing the cassette; after being interrogated for hours, he fled to Kazakhstan before making his way to Kyrgyzstan. Crisis Group interview, Nasrullo Saidov, Bishkek, January 2006. In April 2006, Qutliyev and Ahmadov were sentenced to seven and four years in prison, respectively. Sid Ianyshiev, "V Tashkente prokhodit sud nad avtorom 'Andizhanskoi pesni' Dadakhonom Khasanovym" [In Tashkent, the trial of the author of the "Andijon Song" Dadakhon Hasanov is underway], *Fergana.ru*, 7 September 2006.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ "Uzbek folk singer receives suspended sentence for song about Andijan crackdown", Associated Press, 12 September 2006.

²⁸ "Dzhizakskii zhurnalists Ulugbek Khaidarov osuzhden na shest' let lisheniia svobody" [Jizzakh journalist Ulughbek Haydarov sentenced to six years' imprisonment], *Fergana.ru*, 5 October 2006.

²⁹ "Uzbekistan: zhurnalists Dzhamsheed Karimov byl napravlen v psikhiatricheskuiu bol'nitsu Dzhizakskim gorsudom" [Uzbekistan: journalist Jamshid Karimov was sent to a psychiatric hospital by Jizzakh city court], *Fergana.ru*, 5 October 2006.

slander and extortion and sentenced to eight years in prison.³⁰ Tojiboyeva was forced to undergo ten days of psychiatric treatment in June 2006.³¹

Yodgor Turlibekov. A native of Qarshi, this 69-year-old human rights activist was arrested on 16 June 2006 when dozens of armed police officers burst into his home. Initially charged with undermining the president, Turlibekov, like Haydarov, was ultimately convicted of extortion and sentenced to six years in prison on 6 October. His family and lawyer had no access to the three-day trial.³²

Sanjar Umarov. A millionaire businessman and leader of the opposition "Sunshine Coalition", he was arrested in October 2005 and reportedly tortured, beaten and kept in a drugged state.³³ In March 2006 he was sentenced to more than ten years in prison for economic crimes.³⁴

Saidjahon and Ilhom Zaynabiddinov. Saidjahon Zaynabiddinov, an Andijon lawyer, was arrested just over a week after the Andijon events and sentenced in January 2006 to seven years imprisonment for "spreading false information". His son Ilhom, continued his father's work until he was arrested in May 2006 and charged with forgery.³⁵

Many others have attempted to escape similar fates by fleeing Uzbekistan to neighbouring countries, particularly Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, where, however, they have faced pressure, intimidation, abduction and forced repatriation. In August 2006, after more than a year of legal and political disputes, Kyrgyzstan handed over to the Uzbek security services four fugitives from the Andijon violence to whom the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had granted refugee status. That same month, five more Uzbek fugitives vanished from the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh; there are fears they

have been kidnapped by Uzbek security services. The daughter of alleged "Akramiya" leader Akram Yuldoshev was briefly detained in Osh to face terrorism charges but was ultimately released.

There have been disturbing developments in Kazakhstan as well. In July 2005, Lutfullo Shamsuddinov, a human rights activist from Andijon, was granted refugee status by the UNHCR office in Almaty, only to be arrested by Kazakh police in response to a request from Uzbekistan.³⁶ Shamsuddinov was released to the UNHCR after an international outcry.³⁷ Others have not been so fortunate. According to the Moscow-based human rights association Memorial, between 23 and 27 November 2005 ten Uzbek citizens – including some who had sought UNHCR protection – vanished from the southern city of Shymkent. Memorial has accused the Kazakh security services of turning the men over to Uzbekistan.³⁸

Uzbek refugees in other parts of the former Soviet Union have come under pressure. In June 2005 fourteen ethnic Uzbeks (twelve citizens of Uzbekistan, one of Kyrgyzstan and one who claimed Russian citizenship) were held in the Russian city of Ivanovo, accused of belonging to Akramiya and of aiding the Andijon uprising. They face extradition to Uzbekistan. Thirteen of the men, including a citizen of Kyrgyzstan, later appealed to the Russian government for refugee status; their claim was rejected on 17 January 2006. One, Khotam Hojimatov, fled to Ukraine and applied to the UNHCR after a Russian court ruled he did not have Russian citizenship and was, therefore, subject to extradition (Russian law does not allow its citizens to be extradited). Legal appeals by the remaining "Ivanovo Uzbeks" were rejected in June, and in July Russia's prosecutor-general announced his intention to begin extradition proceedings against one of the men, Ma'murjon Toshtemirov, an ethnic Uzbek citizen of Kyrgyzstan; proceedings against nine others began the following month. In mid-August, however, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, acting on an

³⁰ RFE/RL Newswire, 7 March 2006.

³¹ See "Myths and Reality: An Analysis of the Uzbek Government's June 30, 2006 Aide-Memoire, 'Situation of human rights in Uzbekistan', responding to UN General Assembly Resolution 60/174 of December 16 2005", Human Rights Watch, 3 October 2006, available at <http://hrw.org/backgrounder/eca/uzbekistan1006/>.

³² "V Uzbekistane osuzhden kashkadar'inskii pravozashchitnik Iadgar Turlibekov" [Human rights activist from Qashqadaryo Yodgor Turlibekov is convicted in Uzbekistan], *Fergana.ru*, 11 October 2006.

³³ See Crisis Group Briefing, *In for the Long Haul*, op. cit.

³⁴ Ian McWilliams, "Uzbekistan jails opposition chief", BBC, 6 March 2006.

³⁵ "Myths and Reality", op. cit.

³⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Almaty, July 2005.

³⁷ See press release, Human Rights Watch, 14 July 2005.

³⁸ Memorial reports that most of the men had previously been sought by the Uzbek authorities for membership in banned religious organisations or seeking to undermine the constitutional order – common charges leveled by the Karimov regime against potential troublemakers. One was allegedly a member of the Akramiya movement. See the 5 December 2005 statement by Memorial at the organisation's website, www.memo.ru. Four of the men had applied to the UNHCR for refugee status; their cases were pending at the time of their disappearance. Crisis Group interview, Almaty, February 2006.

appeal from the group's lawyer, ordered that the proceedings be halted.³⁹

Other Uzbek fugitives in Russia have been seized while attempting to seek refuge. In August 2005, Russian authorities arrested Bayramali Yusupov, an Uzbek who had been living legally in Tiumen', two weeks after he had appealed to the local government for refugee status. Yusupov has been accused of illegal religious activity in Uzbekistan, accusations which Russian human rights activists say are false. Though he was denied refugee status, Yusupov successfully fought extradition to Uzbekistan and was released from custody in October 2006.⁴⁰ Yet, this may not be sufficient to guarantee his safety, as the case of another Uzbek fugitive, Rustam Mu'minov, illustrates. An accused member of the banned Islamic organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir,⁴¹ Mu'minov was detained near Moscow in February 2006, but requests for his extradition to Uzbekistan were rejected by the prosecutor general's office in September. Apparently still not feeling entirely safe, Mu'minov appealed to the UNHCR for refugee status and asked the Moscow-based NGO *Grazhdanskoe sodeistvie* (Civic Cooperation) for assistance. On 17 October, while visiting the organisation's office, he was arrested for not having the proper residency permits;⁴² he is thought to have been deported to Uzbekistan.⁴³

Uncertainty likewise surrounds the fate of Uzbek refugees who fled even farther. Ukraine extradited ten asylum-seekers on 14 February 2006, including some believed to have been witnesses to the Andijon events.⁴⁴ Dozens of the 196 Andijon refugees who reached the U.S. have recently returned home, their travel expenses paid by the Uzbek embassy in Washington, allegedly out of homesickness and in response to promises from the government that they would not be harmed. While the stress and isolation of refugee life may indeed have been the deciding factor, there are still concerns that coercion may have been involved as well, perhaps on relatives left behind in Uzbekistan. Adding to concerns

are the mysterious deaths of two Uzbek refugees in the U.S. who had attempted to persuade the returnees to remain.⁴⁵ It is virtually impossible to find information about the returnees and guarantee their safety: the main international organisation that might be able to do so – the UNHCR – was forced to close its Uzbekistan office in March 2006.⁴⁶

Uzbekistan has long promoted itself as a valuable ally to the West in the global "war on terror" and has been praised as such by Western governments, which have justified their cooperation with the regime on the grounds that it provides valuable intelligence on current or potential terrorist activity. Fears of jeopardising such cooperation may well lie behind the West's lack of resolve even in the wake of Andijon. As much of the intelligence provided by the Uzbeks is likely derived from torture, however, there are reasons for grave concerns about both its legality and reliability. What is more, the actions of the Uzbek government, particularly the security services, far from paving the way for victory in the "war on terror", seem likely to make the problem worse.

Central Asian governments often point to two extremist groups as their key concerns: Hizb ut-Tahrir (the "Party of Liberation"), which seeks to unite all Muslims in a single worldwide caliphate, avowedly only by peaceful means;⁴⁷ and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), an armed militant organisation that emerged out of Karimov's crackdown on Islamist opposition in the Ferghana Valley in the 1990s.⁴⁸ Allegations of connections

³⁹ Kim Murphy, "Uzbekistan pursues suspects on Russian soil", *The Los Angeles Times*, 17 October 2005. See also the 14 November 2005, 18 January 2006, 31 January 2006, 11 June 2006, 28 July 2006, 2 August 2006, and 15 August 2006 press releases of the Memorial human rights association, available at www.memo.ru.

⁴⁰ See Memorial's 7 October 2006 press release.

⁴¹ Russia-based human rights activists insist that the suspicion about Mu'minov is groundless. Crisis Group interview, October 2006.

⁴² See Memorial's 17 and 23 October 2006 press releases.

⁴³ "Grazhdanin Uzbekistana Rustam Muminov deportirovan na rodinu" [Uzbekistan citizen Rustam Mu'minov has been deported to his homeland], *Fergana.ru*, 25 October 2006.

⁴⁴ See Memorial's 16 February 2006 press release.

⁴⁵ 25-year-old Olimjon Sobirov, a native of Andijon, died in his sleep in early September in the U.S. state of Idaho. Later that month, 30-year-old Samarqand native Zahidjon Mahmudov died in similar circumstances. "V SSHA pri strannykh obstoiatel'stvakh skonchalis' dve andizhanskikh bezhentsy" [In the USA two Andijon refugees have died in strange circumstances], *Fergana.ru*, 6 October 2006, available at <http://ferghana.ru/article.php?id=4625>.

⁴⁶ *Uznews.net*, citing anonymous sources in Andijon, reports that returnees are required to report to the police daily, are not allowed to make phone calls or use the internet, and must regularly express regret in public hearings for "foolishness" in allowing themselves to be "duped" by Uzbekistan's enemies.

⁴⁷ For more information, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°58, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir*, 30 June 2003. As more and more male members are arrested, Hizb ut-Tahrir appears to be attracting an increasing number of women.

⁴⁸ The IMU, led militarily by Jum'a Namanganiy and politically by Tohir Yuldotshev, allied with the Tajik Islamist opposition during the 1992-1997 civil war and used Tajikistan's territory to stage armed incursions into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000. Forced to quit Tajikistan, it relocated to Afghanistan and allied with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Namanganiy was killed during the US-led 2001 campaign to oust the Taliban. Yuldotshev and the remnants of the IMU are believed to be holed up along the

between the two are common, yet little or no proof is generally forthcoming. While there does appear to be an upsurge in Hizb ut-Tahrir activity throughout the region, and isolated and sporadic incidents of violence have been attributed to the IMU or its allies in recent years,⁴⁹ it is not at all clear to what extent the actions of these groups justify the measures taken against even independent religious figures of all stripes in Uzbekistan. In the meantime, arrests and trials of alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir supporters continue. In September 2006, a Tashkent court sentenced three men to prison terms varying from three to sixteen years for membership.⁵⁰ Later that month, the trial of 33-year-old Komiljon Usmonov, accused of being the leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Tashkent province, began in the capital.⁵¹

“There are real forces who fanatically believe in the ideas [of radical Islam]”, said “Salim”, a lawyer who has defended a number of terrorism suspects:

Afghan-Pakistani border. Recently, video and voice recordings attributed to Yuldoshev have been circulating in Central Asia, warning the Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek regimes that the IMU will continue its armed struggle to create a caliphate in the region.

⁴⁹ On 25 January 2006, an attack on a detention facility in Qayroqum, northern Tajikistan, freed Fathullo Rahimov, an accused IMU member. The alleged leader of the attack was Dilshod Rahimov, a relative. There were reports the Rahimovs and their accomplices fled across the border to Kyrgyzstan. On 12 May, clashes between an armed group and Kyrgyz and Tajik border guards resulted in the deaths of four attackers, four Kyrgyz soldiers and two civilians; Dilshod Rahimov was said to be part of this group. Shootouts between police and accused militants in the southern Kyrgyz city of Jalalabat resulted in the death of one officer and the wounding of two officers and one civilian on 9-10 July. Four days later, five suspected Islamic militants were gunned down by police in Jalalabat. On 6 August, security forces in Osh killed two suspected IMU members, including Fathullo Rahimov, and the popular imam of the as-Sarakhsiy mosque in the Kyrgyz border town of Karasuu, Rafiq Kamoliddinov. The imam's death sparked angry demonstrations in Karasuu, and Kyrgyz officials eventually said he may have been a hostage, not an accomplice of the purported IMU members, and his death an accident. On 2 September, security forces in Osh shot and killed Rasul Okhunov, a suspected militant. IMU leader Tohir Yuldoshev in recent announcements has said the IMU had no part in these events.

⁵⁰ “Uzbekistan: oqlashen prigovor po delu trekh obviniaemykh v chlenstve partii ‘Khizb ut-Takhrira’” [Uzbekistan: Sentence announced in the case of three accused members of Hizb ut-Tahrir], *Fergana.ru*, 19 September 2006.

⁵¹ “V Uzbekistane nachalsia sud nad predpologaemym liderom tashkentskogo otdeleniia organizatsii ‘Khizb ut-Takhrira’” [In Uzbekistan, the trial of the alleged leader of the Tashkent section of the Hizb ut-Tahrir organisation has begun], *Fergana.ru*, 22 September 2006.

They act on young people's minds and try to recruit them. These are genuinely fanatical forces who don't recognise any form of government other than an Islamic one. They sympathise with those who carry out acts of violence and terrorism in the name of these ideals. But it's poverty and injustice which are the fundamental reasons that our people are drawn into extremist organisations.⁵²

Trials on charges of extremism in Uzbekistan tend to adhere to a strict formula,⁵³ with convictions – themselves usually a foregone conclusion once a trial has begun – resting almost entirely on confessions extracted through torture and threats of retaliation against family members. There is at least anecdotal evidence to suggest such ruthless tactics used by the security services to suppress dissent of any kind may be playing into the hands of extremists. “I personally haven't seen any harm done by the Wahhabis or Hizb ut-Tahrir”, a Fergana resident said on the eve of the Andijon uprising. “But I've seen the harm done by the prosecutor's office, the MIA and the SNB [National Security Service]”.⁵⁴ “People used to shun me”, a relative of an imprisoned Hizb ut-Tahrir member from the Fergana Valley said in 2006. “Now more and more people are telling me that Hizb ut-Tahrir was right about Karimov all along”.⁵⁵

IV. THE KLEPTOCRACY

More than anything, it has been the ruinous economic policies of the Karimov regime which have increased popular dissatisfaction and led to unrest. A recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission reported that economic performance was generally very good in

⁵² Crisis Group interview, October 2006.

⁵³ In 2004, for instance, a Crisis Group researcher attended a trial hearing stemming from the bombings and shootouts that had broken out in Tashkent and Bukhara earlier that year. Prosecution witnesses, by turns terrified, bewildered or seemingly excited to be receiving attention, were coached through stumbling and at times self-contradictory testimony by the presiding judge; his colleagues seemed to have little interest in the proceedings. Defence lawyers asked almost no questions. Despite the serious charges, the defendants, all young men, seemed remarkably unconcerned, whispering and sniggering among themselves as a young female witness testified. “Of course they're in a good mood”, a human rights activist later said. “They're outside their cells, no one is torturing them, they can see their relatives in the courtroom – this is a vacation for them”. The presiding judge later admitted to Crisis Group that the witnesses had not made a convincing case; nonetheless, all defendants were convicted.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, Fergana, 30 April 2005.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, January 2006.

2004, as reflected in GDP growth of roughly 7.5 per cent.⁵⁶ The World Bank reported GDP growth in 2005 as 7 per cent.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, there are several reasons for concern. First, official economic statistics in Uzbekistan are notoriously unreliable and often inflated. Secondly, even if one takes the figures at face value, GDP growth is driven by favourable prices for the country's main export commodities: cotton, oil, gas and gold. These sectors remain under tight state control but rather than filling the treasury, much of the money vanishes into secretive, off-budget accounts.

Cotton, one of Uzbekistan's most important export commodities,⁵⁸ is planted, grown, and harvested in a system that pays farmers – whose numbers are supplemented by schoolchildren, university students, medical professionals, and state employees driven en masse out to the fields every year – little or nothing in return for their labour. Local administrators, whose political survival depends upon meeting production targets, resort to a variety of harsh measures, including physical violence, to see that quotas are filled. Export revenue is often diverted into offshore accounts or circulates among companies presided over by a small elite, with only a tiny fraction – the exact amount is unknown – eventually making its way into the budget. The SNB and its allies are thought to reap the lion's share of the profits.⁵⁹

Uzbekistan also possesses large natural gas reserves and is the main supplier to neighbouring Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – a fact which gives it political leverage, as well as the ability to raise prices without any fear of competition. Recently, Uzbekistan concluded a number of agreements with the Russian companies Gazprom and Lukoil, which have together pledged to invest some \$2 billion in development of the gas sector. As with all of Uzbekistan's commodity dealings, it is difficult to say with certainty where the money from gas exports goes but there are rumours that much of the sector is controlled by the president's daughter, Gulnora Karimova, who is thought to be largely responsible for negotiating Gazprom's entry into the Uzbek gas business. While income from the export of gas may total as much as \$1 billion, the state-run gas and oil company, Uzbekneftgaz,

seems unable to provide the most elementary services and may be severely cash-strapped.

Revenues from gas exports, including the substantial increase recently negotiated with Russia's Gazprom, do not go into a transparent national budget but rather appear to be substantially reserved for the Karimov regime to distribute among elites in return for political support, or at least tolerance, and to keep the security services – the foundation of its hold on power – well funded.⁶⁰ Export of gas takes priority over the domestic market, so shortages during the cold-weather months are common. Prior to the Andijon events, gas shortages occasionally resulted in demonstrations.⁶¹ While demonstrations are now rather less likely, shortages persist; recently, state radio broadcast calls for citizens to stock up on firewood.⁶² With gas production stagnant as exports increase steadily, reductions in domestic supply are likely to be increasingly frequent.

Somewhat less is known about a third major Uzbek export, gold. The country is one of the world's top ten gold producers. In 2005, exports were worth \$1.29 billion dollars, roughly 27 per cent of total export earnings.⁶³ Where this money goes is kept in secret but there have been allegations that a portion of it forms the principal source of President Karimov's personal fortune.⁶⁴

With gold prices at an all-time high in 2006, the regime seems to have decided to tighten its hold over the resource at the expense of foreign partners. The Zarafshan-Newmont joint venture between U.S.-based Newmont Mining, the world's largest gold producer, and the government had processed gold ore at the Murantau deposit since 1995 but in June 2006 the government revoked its tax privileges and demanded \$49 million for three years of back payments. When Newmont balked at retroactive charges, a local court began bankruptcy proceedings, and in October 2006 the Supreme Economic Court ordered the joint venture to shut down in three months.⁶⁵ Also under pressure is Marakand Minerals, a subsidiary of UK-based Oxus

⁵⁶ See IMF Press Release No. 05/60, 15 March 2005.

⁵⁷ See World Bank web site available at <http://www.worldbank.org.uz>.

⁵⁸ In 2005, Uzbekistan exported \$1.03 billion of cotton fibre, roughly 21 per cent of its total exports. "Uzbekistan at a Glance," The World Bank, available at http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/uzb_aag.pdf.

⁵⁹ See Crisis Group Asia Report N°93, *The Curse of Cotton: Central Asia's Destructive Monoculture*, 28 February 2005.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, October 2006.

⁶¹ Crisis Group Briefing, *The Andijon Uprising*, op. cit.

⁶² Crisis Group interview, September 2006.

⁶³ "Uzbekistan at a Glance", op. cit.

⁶⁴ For example, in a November 2004 Chatham House speech, former UK Ambassador Craig Murray stated that money from gold sales goes directly to the Ministry of Finance, with 10 per cent diverted into Karimov's personal accounts. Murray's address is available at http://archive.muslimuzbekistan.com/eng/ennews/2004/11/ennews09112004_1.html.

⁶⁵ Dorothy Kosich, "Uzbeks 'stole' Newmont gold mining operation", Mineweb, 3 October 2006, available at http://www.mineweb.net/whats_new/237187.htm.

Gold, whose license was abruptly revoked in August 2006, reportedly at the president's request, and transferred to a state-owned company.⁶⁶

Uzbekistan's poor relations with the U.S. and the UK are likely a partial explanation for these actions. However, the woes of Newmont and Oxus are also likely indicative of a kleptocracy that is spinning out of control, driven by uncertainty over the future of the country and the regime that spurs those who are in a position to do so to grab as much as they can while they can and to continue to buy support for as long as they can. "If [the government] had only waited two more years", a Western diplomat said, "Newmont would have been in the last stage of investment, as Oxus was, and it would have been fully operational – and more lucrative. But they want \$100,000 cash in hand today rather than \$2 million tomorrow, because they're not sure they'll be here tomorrow".⁶⁷

As the regime and its allies enrich themselves, the populace struggles to get by. Shuttle trading has become a lifeline for millions along the Kazakh and Kyrgyz borders but mounting restrictions on the bazaar, virtually the last sphere of autonomous economic activity, make this harder.⁶⁸ According to one estimate, five to seven million Uzbeks may now work in Kazakhstan and Russia.⁶⁹ While remittances help millions at home, those who work abroad often do so illegally and fall prey to human trafficking schemes – men as labour slaves, women as sexual slaves. Violence against immigrants in Russia is increasingly common. Furthermore, a major downturn in the host economy or shift in bilateral relations could have severe repercussions for labour migrants, as the confrontation between Russia and Georgia shows. Labour migration is not a phenomenon limited to Uzbekistan, but unlike Kyrgyzstan, which is negotiating with Kazakhstan for increased legalisation of labour migration, Tashkent refuses to recognise the problem. To do so would be to imply not all is well at home. Unprotected and isolated Uzbek labour migrants may also prove ready recruitment targets for radical Islamist or terrorist organisations.

V. COSMETIC CHANGES

In 2004, Andijon *hokim* (governor) Qobiljon Obidov, who held the position for eleven years, was sacked and replaced by Saydullo Begaliyev; the trial of the 23 Andijon businessmen began not long after. Obidov and his son Ulughbek are rumoured to have enjoyed close ties with the businessmen, and there has been speculation he may have lent support of some kind to the uprising. The authorities seem to have taken this speculation seriously: in October 2006 he was arrested and accused of organising the events. He is believed to be in investigative custody in Tashkent, while police search for his son.⁷⁰ On 13 October, during a visit to Andijon, Karimov personally fired Begaliyev, explaining that "extremists from the underground 'Akramiya' sect and their foreign sponsors and supporters" had exploited "the short-sighted policies of the local authorities" and accusing Begaliyev of, among other transgressions, "an administrative command style of leadership" and "lack of attention to the peoples' needs".⁷¹

This explanation surprised many. For the first time, Karimov seemed to acknowledge that long-standing public grievances may have fuelled the uprising. Yet, the innovation may be more evident than actual. He continued to repeat the litany of "foreign sponsors and supporters" as ultimately responsible and stopped well short of acknowledging that the Begaliyev style of governance was part and parcel of a nationwide system which ultimately answers to the regime, its architect and main beneficiary.

Nonetheless, speculation has been rife about what motivated the president to acknowledge public grievances. The general ostracism by the West of which sanctions are a highly visible part may rankle more than is generally thought. It is possible Karimov may have wanted to make at least a cosmetic gesture of change in Andijon with the hope of influencing the EU decision. Begaliyev is now one of several officials on the visa ban list who have lost their power, along with the former interior minister, Almatov, and Qodir Ghulomov, who was fired as defence minister in 2006 and faces criminal charges.

⁶⁶ Charles Carlisle, "Uzbekistan revokes Western gold mining company license", Mineweb, 18 August 2006, available at http://www.mineweb.net/whats_new/938307.htm.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, August 2006.

⁶⁸ See previous Crisis Group reporting on Uzbekistan cited in fn. 1 above for more on this topic.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, August 2006.

⁷⁰ "Byvshii khokim Andizhanskoi oblasti obviniaetsia v organizatsii sobytii 13 maia 2005 goda" [The former *hokim* of Andijon province is accused of organising the events of 13 May 2005], *Fergana.ru*, 10 October 2006; Hurmat Bobojon, "Sobiq hokimga Andijon voqealariga aloqadorlikda ayblanmoqda" [The former *hokim* is accused of connections to the Andijon events], *Ozodlik*, 11 October 2006.

⁷¹ "Uzbekistan: pochemu prezident uvolil glavu Andizhanskoi oblasti?" [Uzbekistan: Why did the president fire the head of Andijon province?], *Fergana.ru*, 15 October 2006.

More likely, however, Karimov was motivated by concerns closer to home; winter starts soon, and in the past shortages of gas and electricity have been a source of discontent and protests throughout Uzbekistan, particularly in Andijon. By making Begaliyev a scapegoat, Karimov may hope to forestall trouble once the inevitable shortages begin to hurt. There have also been reports that he had long held Begaliyev responsible for the Andijon violence but did not want to undermine the official version by firing him too soon.⁷² Finally, the firing of a local *hokim* is hardly without precedent, particularly when the regional results from the cotton harvest are disappointing. Indeed, shortly after Begaliyev's firing, the *hokim* of Ferghana province, Sheramat Nurmatov, was dropped as Karimov cited shortfalls in the cotton harvest.⁷³

In any event there is no indication that the action against Begaliyev signals an intention to pay more heed to the conditions of ordinary Uzbeks. Whatever special attention the government may have given Andijon after the eyes of the world, however briefly, were drawn to it, life in Uzbekistan's other provinces, far from the eyes of the international community, remains unchanged.⁷⁴

VI. LOOKING AHEAD

Rumours about the poor health of the 69-year-old president have been circulating for years. Karimov is said to be increasingly isolated, with discontent among some members of the elite growing, yet the loyalty of the security services – SNB chief Rustam Inoyatov is said to be a close ally – keeps potential challengers in check.⁷⁵

⁷² The online news service Uznews.net discussed this version in some detail. "Ukhod andizhonskogo oblastnogo khokima byl predreshen god nazad" [The departure of the provincial *hokim* of Andijon was decided a year ago], *Uznews.net*, 15 October 2006.

⁷³ "Sniat eshche odin oblastnoi khokim, na etot raz Ferganskii" [Another provincial *hokim* has been removed, this time from Ferghana], *Uznews.net*, 19 October 2006.

⁷⁴ For example, *Uznews.net* reported on 18 October 2006 that farmers in Samarqand province who did not meet daily quotas during the cotton harvest were ordered to report to the provincial administration, where they were beaten by police and SNB operatives. "Proizvol i beloe zoloto Uzbekistana" [Despotism and white gold in Uzbekistan], *Uznews.net*, 18 October 2006. Beating of cotton farmers who fail to meet quotas is often reported. See Crisis Group Report, *The Curse of Cotton*, op. cit.

⁷⁵ Here too, however, the picture may not be simple. There have been rumours of discontent among the security services, particularly in the wake of Andijon. Inter-service rivalry between the SNB and the MIA predated Andijon, and shortly after the events the MIA was stripped of its internal forces, which were reportedly divided between the SNB and the

While the president's latest term should end this year, there have been no signs of any preparations for an election. Even an exact date – or whether one will be held – is uncertain.⁷⁶

Two of many questions is who might eventually succeed the president and what a post-Karimov Uzbekistan would look like. One figure over whom there has been considerable speculation is Namangan native Alisher Usmonov, a steel magnate and one of the wealthiest businessmen in Russia.⁷⁷ Reportedly, Usmonov was convicted of rape and spent several years in prison in Soviet times but has been rehabilitated by the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan, which concluded the charge had been fabricated.⁷⁸ He is director of Gazprominvestholding, a subsidiary of Gazprom and apparently plays a major role in the Russian gas giant's relations with former Soviet states. In September 2006, he purchased the Moscow-based Kommersant publishing house for \$200 million. Previously owned by Georgian magnate Badri Patarkatsishvili, it publishes an influential newspaper known for its independent political stance – a rarity in today's Russian media – and which has often run articles critical of the Karimov regime. While Kommersant's leadership has denied new ownership will affect content, its acquisition by a figure with close ties to both Moscow and Tashkent is worrying.⁷⁹

In late 2005, persistent rumours began circulating that Moscow was encouraging Karimov to install Usmonov as his successor. Many in Tashkent believe the rumours were deliberately spread by the regime or those close to it, either as a "trial balloon" to test public reactions or to

ministry of defence. Almatov's intended successor as minister apparently was Anvar Solihboyev, a former deputy head of the SNB and an Inoyatov protégé, whose appointment would have made Inoyatov's hold on the security services all but complete. MIA officials objected, however, and Solihboyev was replaced after one day in office by former customs agency chief Bahodir Matlubov, a protégé of Almatov. Crisis Group interviews, January and February 2006. Apparently Karimov was concerned enough about dissent within the MIA to withdraw an appointment, a rare occurrence.

⁷⁶ See, for example, "Kogda v Uzbekistane budut ob"iavleny ocherednye prezidentskie vybory" [When will the next presidential elections in Uzbekistan be announced?], *Fergana.ru*, 17 October 2006.

⁷⁷ Usmonov's net worth is estimated at over \$2.6 billion. *Forbes* ranks him as the world's 278th richest person.

⁷⁸ "Prodazha 'Kommersanta' i ego posledstviia" [The sale of *Kommersant* and its consequences], *Delovaya nedelia*, 31 August 2006, available at http://dn.kiev.ua/massmedia/world/kommersant_31.html.

⁷⁹ Alisher Siddiq, "Rossiyalik ũzbek milliarder 'Kommersant'lik bũldi" [A Russian Uzbek billionaire now has "Kommersant"], *Ozodlik*, 1 September 2006.

smoke out real or potential opponents.⁸⁰ It is difficult to imagine what would induce Karimov to step down in favour of Usmonov – or the latter to take his place. One scenario involves a rumoured alliance between Usmonov and the president's 34-year-old daughter, Gulnora Karimova, who has reportedly amassed a vast fortune through holdings – some would say near-monopolies – in telecommunications, the entertainment industry, tourism, and, more recently, natural resources. There is considerable speculation about her political ambitions. Unpopular as she is among both the general public and the political and economic elite, she may be hoping Usmonov's wealth and influence, in Moscow as well as Tashkent, could help an eventual bid for power.⁸¹ Still, Karimova's acquisitiveness has likely won her more than her share of enemies, and even with Usmonov's possible backing, she may well be an unacceptable candidate.

Increasingly, many point to a palace coup scenario. A popular uprising, despite repression and poor living conditions, seems unlikely; if nothing else, Andijon sent a clear message of how the regime would react. However it happens, Karimov's ultimate departure from office is likely to be accompanied by an intense, quite possibly violent power struggle among Uzbekistan's atomised and mutually suspicious elites. The consequences for relatively weak states in the region such as Kyrgyzstan,⁸² could be disastrous.

VII. CONCLUSION

In a recent interview with the internet-based Uznews.net news agency, well-known human rights activist Tolib Yaqubov, now living in exile in France, had the following message for Europe:

I see that there is some desire among European politicians to take a softer line [towards Uzbekistan]. But I never get tired of telling them: "If you let

the dictator lead you around by the nose, if you enter into a dialogue, you're making a huge mistake". The U.S. wanted to make Karimov different. What do we have now, when anti-American hysteria in the Uzbek press never ceases, when the Americans are [held] responsible for everything? Karimov deceives everyone, just as he deceived the U.S., and Russia, Turkey, and China before them – now it's the turn of the Europeans, who want to tame him. Europe should understand one thing: [Kazakh President] Nazarbayev can be reformed, so can [Tajik President Emomali] Rahmonov and so can Kyrgyz President Bakiyev, but not Karimov or [Turkmen President Saparmurat] Niyazov... any dialogue with them is like feeding a dragon, which will only become fatter, more insatiable, and more bloodthirsty.⁸³

Despite years of Western attempts at engagement, the Karimov regime has not been a reliable partner on any front: not in combating terrorism, not in business and not in political or economic liberalisation. It has done nothing to improve the lot of the people of Uzbekistan. On this record, there is no reason why the international community should return to anything like the status quo ante. Far from being dropped, the EU's sanctions regime should be broadened to include newly appointed officials who are part of the inner circle – and the president himself – and extended to freeze the assets of those on the visa ban list. While the hope for eventual normalisation of relations must not be abandoned, it should be Karimov who takes the first steps, not through token gestures but by genuine measures to improve the lives of his country's citizens.

Instead of reverting to an engagement policy that has failed, the EU should focus its energies and resources on doing what it can from the periphery to help Uzbeks, while building up resilience in the neighbouring states, all of whom are at risk from the instability that is increasingly being bred in Uzbekistan.⁸⁴

Bishkek/Brussels, 6 November 2006

⁸⁰ Crisis Group interview, September 2006.

⁸¹ Perhaps in a bid to improve her public image, Karimova has recently attempted to recast herself as a pop music diva under the name "Googoosha". See "Googoosha Joins the Ranks of the Beatles, Elvis Presley, and Frank Sinatra", *The Roberts Report*, 13 October 2006, available at <http://roberts-report.blogspot.com>. In 2003, the Superior Court of the U.S. state of New Jersey issued a warrant for Karimova's arrest after she failed to comply with a court decision granting sole custody of her two children to her former husband, Mansur Maqsudi, a U.S. businessman of Afghan Uzbek origin.

⁸² For more on this, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°118, *Kyrgyzstan's Prison System Nightmare*, 16 August 2006; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°109, *Kyrgyzstan: A Faltering State*, 16 December 2005.

⁸³ Interview with Tolib Yaqubov, *Uznews.net*, 18 October 2006.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group Report, *Central Asia: What Role for the European Union?*, op. cit.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF UZBEKISTAN



APPENDIX B

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