

SECURITY AND STABILITY IN UZBEKISTAN: CHALLENGES, THREATS AND SOLUTIONS

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A new system of security is being established in Uzbekistan. Preventive measures against possible challenges and threats are being developed. Presently, the only factor in Uzbekistan's policy which is obvious to the outside watcher is that there are armed conflicts neither inside nor on the borders of the country. The fact of stability itself has a certain political and social value. But the following two questions naturally come out of this:

What is the cost of this stability?

How it can be evaluated in the context of general Central Asian events?

Besides the clearly recognisable regional processes there are some internal trends, which may bring uncontrolled situations and become a matter of concern. Among them there are the following:

(1) Increasing isolation of individuals while the opportunities for their professional or entrepreneurial realisation and urgent human needs satisfaction still remain limited.

(2) Contradictions between local governors and local clan authorities.

(3) Sizeable growth of the number of Muslims over a rather short period during active fundamentalist actions in the neighbouring countries with interests in the Ferghana Valley, southern and Tashkent regions.

(4) Loss of public trust in the government's economic and fiscal policy.

(5) A delay in the population's social, economic and political culture growth in regard to the development of official reforms, which generates social apathy, parallel nationalism and cosmopolitanism, uncritical relation to provocative news and antigovernment propaganda.

(6) The problem of unemployment or incomplete employment of the population.

All the above trends are a natural consequence of the radical social transition in Uzbekistan during the last five years of independence. The existing state and public structures have worked out certain means of exercising control over them.

One of the most fundamental researches into public attitudes was the public opinion research held in Uzbekistan in the autumn of 1996 by the International Foundation for Election Systems - IFES (USA). Analysis of statistics given in the inquiry Report allows one to make certain conclusions.

43% of the population showed complete satisfaction with the Government of the Republic, 33% were "more or less satisfied" and 24% "not satisfied". The indicator of 24% of "not satisfied" ones is rather disturbing if one takes into account that 33% of

the more or less satisfied ones include many representatives of the middle class, who have widely lost their former well-being and have no serious guarantees in the immediate future. Many of those people lost not only their sources of income, but also their professional field, and have not any capability to reach in other business fields that competence which they had had by virtue of their primary background.

Besides, in the countryside in typical Uzbek families there are traditionally many children. According to the Ministry of Macroeconomic Data more than 50% of families in Uzbekistan which used to live in villages have more than three children. Mostly a man is the only breadwinner in a family. Unemployment or incomplete employment brings full poverty to such families and strengthens complaints in the agricultural provinces of Uzbekistan.

It is possible to assume that in dynamics these 33% will probably tend towards dissatisfaction.

The too large densities of those considering that there are too many changes in society demands more attention: 27% against 35% of those satisfied by quantity and rates of change. The complaint against changes reflects conservative public attitudes intrinsic to those who for various reasons cannot join in active social or professional activity in the transition period. As a rule, those expressing unambiguous complaint against changes are those who, first, have a steady vital position and, secondly, have tried practically to solve their problems. Therefore, the 27% reflect the judgement of an active and conservative public group including pensioners, former officials, community authorities, and workers in industrial and agricultural production, who had high qualifications, authority and positions in the past. The representatives of this group can render moral influence on those who have not generated as yet their own judgement (8%) and on those who “do not see any changes” (13%).

In regard to serious difficulties in the field of financial reform policy or the gradual course of reforms, some groups of the population, 42% in total, are more or less dissatisfied. 36% of people questioned do support the governmental position of gradual economic reforms. In conditions of a steady rise in the cost of living, it is possible to assume that the quantity of those satisfied with the course of economic reforms has reduced since the autumn of 1996, when the inquiry was conducted.

The adherence of the majority of the population to the state control of the economy generates, in its turn, dependency attitudes among the adult population, and an overstated insistence on Government evaluation of economic policy and economic growth. This consequently gives the clever political opposition a rather effective tool of influence on mass consciousness by the charge that the Government deceives the expectations of the citizens, who have trusted it.

51% of the respondents welcome democratic changes and support the Government. However, understanding of democracy by different groups of the population varies. Some understand democracy as only economic reforms, others as political reforms, or associate the concept of democracy with an increase of social support from the state.

Among the internal challenging factors, there is an increase of nationalistic moods. According to the research, 71% of the people polled “are oriented rather as nationalists”. The growth of nationalism in representatives of all nationalities occupying Uzbekistan is becoming a hardly controlled process and is connected to the formation “of national commercial oligarchies”. The roles of the cultural-national

centres at the beginning of the 1990s have now become insufficient. A number of such centres (for example, Koreans) have become the centres of shadow commercial and ideological activity, others merely exist and act rather formally.

The opposition group (opponents to nationalism - 9%) includes many of those in the past named "cosmopolites". The most active part of this group is oriented to departure abroad, or are critical conduits for the philosophy of foreign countries, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, China etc. Among them there are many intellectuals, young people speaking foreign languages and working for foreign companies and their representative offices.

The process of national separatism, alongside economic and religious separatism, appears to be a component of the general process of social alienation and is a strong challenge to stability.

"Dissidents" in the selection were 19% of the total. This figure might include both active political or religious opposition, and simply dissatisfied demagogues, pensioners and persons wishing to go abroad. Besides, among "dissidents" there are a lot of people who were simply not informed enough on government activity. But religious extremists and nationalists are also often met in this group.

Democrats (25%) are pleased with the reforms, but this deserves especially steadfast attention as, firstly, they make up only a quarter of the population, secondly, it is not known what underlies their satisfaction and, therefore, thirdly, it is difficult to foresee how long they will remain loyal. According to the survey, the majority of the population of the Republic of Uzbekistan wishes to live in a democratic civil society, but few of them trust in this possibility.

Among internal challenges it is essential to consider the trend to recession in small and medium size businesses. Many small and medium size firms have been destroyed. The major concerns, supported by government subsidies, continue to work. However, some of them are compelled to proceed to reduce the working day and the working week, because of shortages.

For the period 1997-98 the number of commercial organisations in the republic was reduced by 70%. This fact in itself marks a lot of social problems, namely: a considerable decrease in the number of active businessmen; a shortage of stable jobs and earnings; a reduction of the population's incomes; the sizeable volume of cash which has been taken out of turnover, that in its turn provokes a jump of emission, and consequently inflation. But the main problem is that the quantitative reduction of active commercial subjects brings irreversible qualitative changes in the market infrastructure. And these changes can no longer be controlled by former means.

Many difficulties arose due to the recent changes in Russia's international economic policy. Uzbek enterprises suffered great deficits in the goods traditionally imported from Russia, which caused price rises both in products and currency markets. This brought a sizeable decline in economic activity. Compared with the end of 1997, nowadays the situation seems to be even worse. Consequently rising unemployment makes the social situation explosive. The measures undertaken by the Government to keep control are mostly oriented to strong taxation policy and prevention of corruption. This leads to complaints among businessmen, especially those working in remote agricultural provinces.

At the same time general reintegration processes in the CIS have resulted in unexpected worsening of the relationship between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The very closeness of some Tajik provinces to the Ferghana Valley of Uzbekistan and Islamic extremists' activity in this area have made the social situation in this region quite unstable. That forced the Tashkent Administration to reinforce prohibitive actions in the Ferghana Valley; the southern regions of Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya, some districts of Tashkent region and Samarkand. Mostly these steps were aimed at preventing fundamentalists' provocations coming out of Tajikistan's territory both directly and through Kirgystan (Osh-Andijan).

Acceleration of social development makes many of the methods of social control adopted nowadays excessively bulky and hardly applicable. Even in the structure of government, on the one hand, the accuracy and efficiency of data acquisition and reporting are reduced, and on the other hand, inadequately broad prohibitive and repressive sanctions are brought into force. This consequently generates negative response by the population.

In the period when the Republic has declared itself as a steady independent state the internal challenges and outside threats require considerably more clarified and scientifically reinforced prohibitive approaches. Moreover, this assumes the creation of a theoretically justified and adequate system of control patterns, an effective methodology of collecting and processing information, and operational development of the appropriate strategic and tactical solutions.

One may highlight following categories of main measures of security improvement.

I Institutional:

Establishing a Centre of Strategic Studies at the Ministry of Defence with the following main purpose:

Development of the conceptual bases for the national strategy of military security maintenance and war prevention,

and studying the following primary problems:

1. Study of global processes in the world (USA, Japan, European Union) and, contiguous to the region, Eurasian (Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey) centres of forces; analysis and evaluation of the interests of exterior regional forces in Central Asia, their external political and other operations affecting the national interests of the Republic of Uzbekistan and other states of the region.

2. Monitoring and simulation of the military-political situation in the region, analysis and evaluation of the strategic concepts, doctrines, directions of military construction and perspectives of the development of the Armed Forces of neighbouring countries, their capabilities of increasing the numbers of forces, their target industrial regions (objects) and reserves of strategic raw material.

3. Complex evaluation of the military-political and military-strategic situation, detection of military threats for the Republic of Uzbekistan, evaluation of the scale and character of threats to military security and development of recommendations on their neutralising and liquidation.

4. Research into modern strategic concepts and doctrines, the specifics of revolutions in military affairs and problems of maintenance of military security, military construction and processes of armed struggle, and development of proposals on the conceptual bases of military reform and the construction of military forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

5. Research into the essence of modern wars and crisis situations, methods of evaluation of their possible scales and character, means of armed struggle, forms and ways of management of battle operations, problems of selection of means of war prevention and crisis situations developing into a military phase.

6. Study of non-military forms and means of struggle with an opponent, including diplomatic, psychological, information and other means, and development of recommendations on their use.

7. Scientific, operative-strategic and military-economic substantiation of stages of reforming military forces.

8. Study of problems of strengthening international, regional and national security, development of international co-operation in the military field, activity in this field of international interstate (unions, alliances, commonwealths etc) and governmental agencies, problems of extending confidence measures in the military area, reduction and limitation of arms, expertise of projects of external political solutions in the military field, evaluation of the political risk of their realisation, and development of proposals on formation of a system of international military-political and military-technical co-operation.

9. Researches into problems of military economy, maintenance of the country's mobilisation readiness (population, economy, governing bodies and Armed Forces), prognosis of permissible degrees of mobilisation and economic pressure of the state during peace or war periods, and development of proposals on mobilisation preparation for the country and its military-industrial development.

10. Co-ordination of researches and developments in the field of structuring of the armed forces.

11. Study of problems of international and military legislation, the legal base of military construction, social protection of servicemen and their families, and proposals for its improvement.

12. Participation in personnel training in informational-analytical links including ones at the operational-strategic level.

13. Preparation and publication of materials on actual problems of military science and practice, policy and strategy in the field of defence and security, and also advanced foreign experience in these areas.

14. Organising and holding conferences, seminars, symposiums, schools and courses, on actual problems of military science and practice, policy and strategy in the field of defence and security.

This new Centre is organised parallel to the existing Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and is to serve

directly the General Staff of the Army. The initial assignment of Director was made in December 1998.

In 1997 the Institute for Monitoring of Human Rights Legislation and the Institute of Public Opinion were organised under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic. Both institutions are aimed at co-ordination of the government's activity with real public needs to prohibit social conflicts.

II Conceptual:

A strategic algorithm of outside scope correction is developed (*Directions: USA and Western Europe*).

The purpose of this development is a program of adjusting the image of Uzbekistan on the international arena on the basis of patterns of Uzbekistan's interaction with USA and Western Europe. Adjusting the image of the Republic has the purpose of creating in partner-countries an authentic image of the Republic, its President, people, social structure and potential on the international arena. The basic principle of this adjusting is to achieve an optimum balance between expectations of partner-countries and Uzbekistan's initiatives.

Presupposed expectations of partner-countries:

USA: a reliable geostrategic situation of Uzbekistan under the control of the USA government.

Countries of Western Europe: internally contradictory attitudes:

Fulfilment before USA of partnership obligations in NATO;

Observance of the economic and geostrategic interests of European Union in Central Asia region.

From the point of view of the states of the European Union Uzbekistan should correspond to West-European standards of legal framework, access to economic information, openness to social manipulations, commercial infrastructure.

The Concept of National Security and The Military Doctrine of the Republic of Uzbekistan were adopted in 1997.

The Program of Uzbek Army Reformation is currently under consideration. Below is cited the Preamble of the Draft Program:

"The Program of Reforming the Armed Forces of the Republic of Uzbekistan is directed to the realisation of the military policy of the State at the present stage. The basic rules, purpose and problems of reforming, the direction of joint activity of public authorities, public organisations and citizens on maintenance of national defence, protection of the population against extreme situations and creation of effective military forces are stated.

Details are given in the Program of military, organisational-technical, economic, social-political and other measures of military construction on qualitative transformation of the military organisation of the Republic of Uzbekistan which determines the basic content of reform of the Armed Forces, other troops and military formations in the period till 2005.

The legal base of the Program are the Constitution and other normative-legal rules of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and also international obligations of the Republic”.

Among the most set-minded outside views a Special Trip Report may be mentioned, by Curds M Coward. Below is an abstract from this report, named: “US Policy Priorities in Central Asia: Views from the East and South”.¹

“Uzbekistan”

With each annual visit (this is the third by the Atlantic Council) Tashkent conveys a different impression. This time was the first we witnessed new buses and streetcars, and a wide variety of stores and restaurants, open during the day and night. The city also appeared cleaner than in the past, and far fewer police were noticeable on the streets. The markets were as full as ever, though prices seemed higher.

The rhetoric of government officials each year also is slightly more nuanced. One still hears the naive expectations of U.S. policy in the region, exaggerated portrayals of the Russian menace (while downplaying the significant Uzbek-Russian cooperation underway on issues such as Afghanistan) and the insistent reminders of Uzbek singularity that make its problems and their bizarre solutions unfathomable (but necessary) mysteries to outsiders. However, the language has been toned down across the board, as if Uzbek public diplomacy were conducted intentionally by trial balloon from year to year.

One aspect of Uzbek leadership remains constant, and it is the strong conviction of predestined, regional primacy. The subjects raised by our counterparts ranged from the Middle East peace process, to the future of Russian reform and the US-China dialogue. They seemed offended by our wish to discuss more parochial issues closer to home, chiefly the divisive and perceptibly self-defeating diplomacy toward their neighbors. These topics were viewed with discomfort, as though one were to insist on discussing Canadian salmon stocks or water rights on the Rio Grande in a meeting with the most senior US policy-makers. (In fairness, we might have envisioned a visiting French or English delegation preoccupied with similar issues in a visit to Washington just seven years after our country's independence.) Our Uzbek counterparts were much happier talking about high geopolitics — with the highest possible degree of abstraction.

Eventually, however, the discussion became more specific and approached a state resembling honesty. Uzbek officials view their foreign policy vis á vis the former Soviet Union as most akin to Ukraine's. They do what they need to get along with Russia, but are steadfast in their desire to break permanently with their colonial past. They take pride in their status as the only Central Asian state with no Russian troops on its soil and refuse to participate in CIS programs like the customs union, peacekeeping and so on when the benefits are only symbolic. Uzbekistan remains a titular member of the CIS, though an increasingly truculent one.

Uzbekistan's relations with Iran are similarly ambiguous. It cooperates actively with the Iranian government in its support for the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan while at the same time backing opposing parties in Tajikistan. Uzbekistan uses the port of Bandar Abbas for much of its trade, especially cotton, but opposes major regional energy pipelines through Iran. The change in rhetoric regarding Iran was the most noticeable difference from years past. Before, Uzbek officials went out of their way to ape US negative rhetoric about Iran, swearing that Iran could never be considered a reliable partner in Central Asia. This has changed to recognition of the diversity of opinion in the United States about restructuring the Iranian relationship and the blunt

acknowledgement that "Iran has a population of 60 million — more than all of Central Asia. Of course it will play an important role here." Nevertheless, most Uzbeks maintain a deep dislike toward Iran and its policies. They said Iran "will not be loved" when it assumes a more prominent regional role because of its basic hegemonic instincts (striking the listener as competitive contempt). Moreover, Uzbeks are convinced that Iran is the hidden hand behind almost all events in neighbouring Tajikistan, and to a lesser extent in Afghanistan. Regarding the latter, the Uzbeks conveyed strongly the wish to utilise Iran's influence in Afghanistan tactically to the US advantage by forcing Tehran to continue what they perceive as largely responsible behaviour in a co-operative context.

The Uzbeks are far less realistic about China. They have had little contact with China, instead flaunting their good relationships with Japan and South Korea. Their view of the Chinese people is still grounded in Soviet-era (or even older Turkic) prejudices. They have rebuffed Chinese offers to loosen the restrictions on business visas, citing the population of Chinese businessmen as exceeding the total population of Uzbekistan multiplied by ten. "We know that many Chinese who go abroad stay for good... The last thing Uzbekistan needs is a yellow invasion."

This decision was curious given the Uzbeks' complaints about the shoddiness of Chinese goods that flood their markets. What they failed to admit to us was the fact that Uzbek traders are the ones buying cheap goods in China for resale in Central Asia (we saw them in Kashgar). They insist on paying low prices and get what they pay for. If anyone could make an alarmist case about the hordes of unpleasant 'businessmen' it should be the Chinese referring to Uzbeks in their regional markets (as far south as Chengdu and Chongqing) who keep the demand high for inferior goods that most Chinese would not buy themselves. But a Chinese rebuttal probably would not increase the wariness Uzbeks already feel toward China. One fairly well-informed scholar chided us for spending so much time in China on this trip and President Clinton for doing the same a week later with the advice, "don't expect a close relationship with the Chinese — they will turn on you in the same way they did on the Soviets!" By contrast, the Uzbeks urged on us the need to establish better ties with India. That would help restore the regional balance of power and offset their concerns about a nascent India-Iran-Russia axis.

As is apparent from their assessment of world power, the Uzbeks place great emphasis on population size, reminding one of Soviet gigantism. Their intent, according to a strategy paper given to us by a premier think tank, is to grow their population to 50 million by 2010. When we pointed out that this policy would put great pressure on already strained resources, the response was typically Uzbek: "that may make sense to you, but you fail to understand our unique situation in Central Asia." Only when we pointed out that it was mathematically absurd did they disavow the figure.

Despite their wonderful hospitality and their current love of Americans, the Uzbeks present several causes for concern. Unless President Karimov and his government have some secret economic weapon that several hundred years of Western experience with market economies has failed to unearth, the Uzbek financial system is on a collision course with economic reality. The government's policies of import substitution, monetary laxity and high subsidies cannot last forever. The economy must collapse, probably sooner than later. The impact of that is shuddering given how much has been invested in raising expectations and the us-versus-them psychology now prevalent among the populace. Nervous governments are known to do strange things in such circumstances.

Even more worrisome is the Uzbeks' Soviet-style method of dealing with their smaller and weaker neighbors. Uzbekistan's coercive measures on a range of issues from gas and water bills, to border demarcation, to outright interference in domestic politics have soured relations with virtually all of its fellow Central Asians. It was mindboggling to us to learn that the Uzbeks still have no embassies in many of these countries. To them it is a silly question of cost: "the Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and the rest are always trying to extort money from us. Why should we give them another opportunity? If they need something they can come here." Such an approach to the region seemed to us to be both unnecessary and counterproductive. Uzbekistan's neighbours have begun to explore their options with other large powers, namely Russia, Iran and China, the implications of which the Uzbeks fail totally to appreciate. It is difficult to say where this process will lead. But one hopes that the Uzbek learning curve is about to take a lift upward, and that the government and its highly capable diplomats enrol themselves in a basic crash course in good neighbourliness.

A visit to Uzbekistan at the self-proclaimed center of Central Asia is always interesting. Officials continued to insist disingenuously that they have nothing to prove, then proceeded with one justification after another for their short-sighted policies, designed, it would seem, to score instant points on a scale of ephemeral grandeur. When faced with their certainty about US vital interests in their region, we responded that the United States has a strategic interest in Uzbekistan's survival but not a vital interest. This basic appeal to realpolitik seemed to impress them. That alone might be grounds for optimism."

III. Organisational:

In its attempts to find the best solution for rapidly arising security problems, the Uzbek Government has undertaken lately a number of radical changes in the Republic top management, which brought a series of dismissals of high officials. Among those dismissed in 1998 were:

- Governor (Hokim) of Samarkand Region – Mardiev;
- Governor (Hokim) of Navoi Region – Gaffarov;
- Deputy Prime Minister - Jurabekov;
- Deputy Prime Minister – Azizkhojaev;
- Minister of Defence – Akhmedov;
- Minister of Internal Affairs – Almatov and some others.

ENDNOTES

¹ US Policy Priorities in Central Asia: Views from the East and South. Report of an Atlantic Council delegation visit to China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and India. Atlantic Council of the United States. 14 June-4 July 1998.