Central Asia, including the territory of modern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has historically been a single region. Although names may differ, the vast expanse from the Ural to the Pamir mountains, the shores of the Caspian to the Altai mountains, has long been regarded as a single home. During the pre-Soviet period, the Central Asian cultural sphere was comprised of the territory noted above and, in addition, northern Iran, Afghanistan and some regions of western China. The present size of Central Asia covers almost four million square kilometers (2.4 million square miles). More than fifty-five million people reside in the region. As for natural resources, the region is one of the richest in Asia, containing the entire spectrum of minerals. The region leads the world in cotton and natural gas production,
and contains some of the largest oil reserves on the planet. Demographically, the region is one of the fastest growing; in the next ten years, the indigenous population of Central Asia is expected to grow at a much higher rate than that of the European Newly Independent States (NIS). Ethnically, Central Asia occupies a kind of bridge between the Turkic and Persian worlds. While various ethnic groups historically occupied different economic niches, they were all native to the land. Bi-lingualism was seen as normal for many centuries, not only among the intellectual elite but the common people as well. Command of three or four languages was not exceptional. Society and culture were formed on a multi-lingual basis. This process was facilitated by the fact that no nation-states, as understood in Western terms, took shape in Central Asia for many centuries. Local khanates and emirates were not formed from any one ethnic community. No ethnic criteria were applied in forming a ruling elite. The Russian colonial administration ignored ethnic background as well, choosing to categorize the native populations by religious denomination.
Cultural and religious awakening in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

Islam as a social and cultural factor has played a major role in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Society in Central Asia traditionally relied upon the mahalla (peasant community) as its basis. The mahalla controlled the irrigation system, without which no farming was possible, and the pastures in areas where animal husbandry predominated. The state owned the water and pastures indirectly, with the mahalla as the main custodian and consumer. On the territory controlled by Russia the institutions of "state" Islam, which brought together communities covering vast areas, were abolished. At the level of kishlaks (villages), the mosque and mahalla remained practically unaffected by this. The Russian administrators did not intervene in their functions and did not infringe on their structure. No matter how hard Moscow sought to integrate representatives of different
ethnic groups into the Central Asian establishment, local councils removed them as soon as possible, regardless of whether they were born in Central Asia or had good command of the local languages. During the course of Soviet power, not a single "non-Muslim" can be said to have made an impressive career in the region or held undisputed authority in Central Asian society.

As a result of the long isolation of Central Asia from major Muslim cultural and religious centers and the shortage of religious literature and restrictions on religious practices, the level of religious education declined dramatically. Although the Bolsheviks completed the destruction of state Islamic institutions in Central Asia, the organization of local society remained much the same for the common Muslim population. It is not surprising that official ideology, the social repressions of the 1930s, urbanization, universal secondary education and industrialization failed to undermine the traditional communal basis of Central Asian communities.
Since the breakup of the USSR, both the Uzbek and Tajik governments have been trying to give Islam a more official status and make it a household word. Primary schools have begun to teach Arabic script, as well as the Koran and Muslim customs. Such schools operate mainly in rural areas, but all children have the right to go to Muslim schools after classes at state-controlled schools.

Processes are underway in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan which seek to politicize Islam, primarily in areas with high population densities and low standards of living in particular, the Ferghana valley of Uzbekistan. This politicization, unofficial or even openly antagonistic to the ruling government, is usually regarded by authorities as a threat of fundamentalism, but this approach can hardly be fully justified. The social significance of this process is obvious: the countryside, groaning under demographic pressures and inhabited by small landowners, looks to Islam for language to formulate and articulate its needs and demands.
The traditional countryside is arming itself with Islam as a political ideology and is becoming politicized as it sees no other way out of the present situation. Movements of this sort are typical of societies passing through deep crisis. People in such conditions see no real prospects for themselves in earthly life; they hate the present and fear the future. The only way to survive is to idealize the past. A turn to bygone days prompted by despair.

In the second half of the 1980s, Islamic activists Wahhabites became prominent in Tajikistan. They were largely between 30 and 45 years of age, mostly from clerical families. Most of them had failed to enter the madrassah and begin a religious career but had received a fairly good education nonetheless. They knew the laws and followed the press, and were well versed in national customs and traditions through permanent contacts with believers. Most of them were good public speakers. Intuitively, they grasped the underlying spirit of the dogma and formulated their own demands in terms of Muslim tradition. Their first demand was for
"inexpensive rituals" and for all people to learn every sura (chapter) in the Koran. Gradually, they turned their movement into a reform drive, seeking to revive Islam in these republics and attract new groups of followers.

At the same time, the role of mahalla committees grew as well. From the end of the 1980s, each mahalla began to build its own mosque. This was not a sign of a revival of religious consciousness, but merely that the clergy sought to legalize its status under conditions of a liberalized public life. Conflict between the political executive powers and traditional institutions ensued. At approximately the same time, the clergy began to nominate their own candidates for different bodies of power, and began winning elections at all levels. In conjunction with the mosque, the mahalla is now forming a public mechanism for regulating and regenerating the traditional way of life in the agrarian sector. These influences are now controlling and guiding people's everyday lives to a much greater degree.

As the Wahhabite movement was denied recognition by official clergy and authorities, it found
itself in confrontation with the government. The Wahhabites were against practices of the established clergy, demanding that they not live on the donations of believers or gain at the expense of money raised for religious ceremonies. They stressed that the Muslim clergy must know the Koran perfectly, be competent in religious affairs and conduct a highly moral way of life. The Wahhabites held that the established official clergy were forgetting and forsaking these duties. Their criticism fell on fertile soil. Their activities marked the beginning of a political and ideological mobilization of rural Central Asia afflicted with overpopulation and land shortages. The mahalla is very much alive, and people continue to honor traditions and worship Allah.

Economic reasons have been also contributing in the shaping of societies in these republics. Uzbekistan, with the third highest population in the NIS, also has the fastest growing population, with a growth rate of 27 per 1,000 persons per year. The republic's population is expected to double within the next 25 years. Social stability in Central Asia in the next few decades will
depend directly on the ability of the post-Communist elites to alleviate the agrarian duality. This can be done only by giving away considerable portions of state lands to the private sector. This will undoubtedly become an element of discord in the political struggle.

The dangers that lie in store for those who fail to solve their agrarian problems are clearly demonstrated by the situation in Tajikistan, where a tragic combination of ethnic, social and political problems caused a bloody civil war in 1991 and 1992, resulting in a death toll of over 100,000. If a Tajik-style social crisis engulfs Uzbekistan, it will lead to a regional catastrophe on an unprecedented scale. The danger of such a scenario will grow in the next decade, and the world should be made aware of this potential catastrophe.

Russians and ethnic problems in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

The presence of Russians, and Europeans in general, has been a major ethno-cultural factor in
Central Asia since the end of the 19th century. In 1917, a million and a half Russians lived in the region, half of them having resettled there with the Russian government's encouragement to colonize Kazakhstan's vast vacant lands for farming. Russians also came to the region to work in industry and build railroads. This process gained momentum after the Revolution. Russians fleeing famine, civil war and repression arrived between 1918-1936. Even more came seeking safety from Stalin's Great Purges, beginning in the 1930s. World War II saw the influx of Russians who had been evacuated with industrial enterprises, with over one million moving to Uzbekistan alone. After the war, another wave of migrants arrived to fulfill Khrushchev's Virgin Lands program; they continued to come and work in industrial enterprises after that. In 1968, Russians arrived in Tashkent to help rebuild the city after an earthquake. Throughout the entire period of Russian migration to Central Asia, the Russians tended to settle in urban areas where they, along with other non-indigenous groups, nurtured a specific Euro-Asian cosmopolitan subculture. In the 1959 All-Union Census,
a record-high share of non-indigenous people was established in Central Asia: more than ten million people, 45 percent of the total population. After 1959, the region's demographic balance began to shift in favor of the native ethnic population. The indigenous population grew 2.7 times, while the Europeans grew by half. In the 1960s and 70s, the number of Russians continued to decrease each year. According to the 1979 census, there were 9.5 million Russians in Central Asia. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the outflow of Russians and Russian-speaking people increased dramatically. An estimated 8.5 million such people, however, are still residing in the region.

The exodus of Russians and current production slump has not resulted in a considerable increase in urban unemployment, who made up much of the industrial workforce. The indigenous population largely avoided industrial labor, working instead in trade, services and management, where there have been many fewer job cuts. Hence an employment paradox exists, typical of the third world: a huge army of unemployed
exists in a region with many vacancies. The natural growth of labor resources in the region has been much faster than the growth of new jobs. According to various estimates, the actual unemployment in the region amounts to 15-20 percent of the population, varying considerably by zone and republic.

There are also regional differences in living standards, although any accurate assessment is made impossible by unreliable and incomplete statistics. According to the World Bank in 1993, all former Soviet Central Asian republics had a per capita income ranging from 900 to 1,300 dollars per year.

The City and Industry After The Empire

As noted earlier, the Russian population of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan was almost completely urban and industrial. The indigenous rural inhabitants have always viewed everything Russian and urban as alien. During the Soviet period, the intellectual elite and moral and political leadership was primarily a function of the
center, and now that it no longer exists, the Russian minority, with its past as "big brother" and a present as "Moscow's Fifth Column" (as a local journalist has dubbed them), must rely on Moscow's support again but now this support comes from a "foreign country."

Under these circumstances, the Russian speakers, who make up four-fifths of the industrial workforce, are losing all incentives to work. There is no point in providing a good education to one's children and upgrading one's skills and qualifications when any social advancement is constrained, not by one's abilities and persistence, but by ethnic background. The bleak outlook places thousand of people in a difficult position. It is not easy to learn another trade or change one's social status. It is still more difficult to move to another country where no hearty welcome can be expected and a change in the way of life is required after many decades elsewhere.

The migration of ethnic Russians is not only an economic, but also a socio-cultural problem for those who remain. The exodus will bring about a mass influx
of rural inhabitants to the cities, with their own system of values and understanding of how life should be arranged. The socio-cultural niche which used to be filled by Russians will inevitably be filled with Islamic traditions, which will amount to an all-pervasive shift in society's mentality.

There is a paradox, however. The remaining Russians are acquiring social and economic status they never had before. The Russians' educational background, their place in industry and the economy, and their links to Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union make it much easier for them to adapt to the emerging market conditions. The ethnic composition of industrial personnel in the major countries of the region is such that any democratic, open and rapid privatization would place the bulk of the industrial sector in the hands of Russians. In this situation, the post-Communist national elites seek to isolate the Russian-speaking population and block their access to privatization as much as possible. Yet the present ethnocratic elites are not interested in any large-scale
outflow of Russians from the Central Asian republics. This would be a serious detriment to the economy of these countries, and the presence of an ethnic Russian population is viewed by the rulers as a counter-balance to growing pressures from the traditionalist Islamic-minded countryside.

To a certain degree, the presence of a Russian population is viewed by the local elites as a means to ensure Russia's support in possible critical situations. The correctness of this view has been fully confirmed by the scenario of the internal strife in Tajikistan, where the rescue of local Russians was one of the chief ideological motives (or a publicized pretext) for intervention by the Russian army.

One specific problem faced by the Russians in issue of dual citizenship. Most Russians in these republics favour dual citizenship and Russia formally backs their demand. The national governments, however, are blocking this demand because they regard foreign citizenship of a fairly large group of people in their countries as a factor of diminishing loyalty of their non-
indigenous inhabitants and an instrument of Russian pressure, and hence a threat to their own independence. The governments refer to recommendations by international organizations which point to the danger and undesirability of dual citizenship on a large scale. The larger the share of Russians and Russian-speakers in a country, the harsher the position of its government with regard to dual citizenship. Russia's pressure in this sphere is mainly declarative and ideological in character because mass-scale dual citizenship might speed up the process of migration of Russians on a scale for which Russia is ill-prepared.

The local elites are therefore facing the task of removing Russians from the most significant social and political positions, while preserving them in the economic and cultural spheres. For their part, the Russians, particularly in such centers as Tashkent, Dushanbe are ready to back the tough authoritarianism of the local regimes, which they regard as the only guarantee against chaos, ethnic violence and Islamic revolution. The Russians in Central Asia see quite clearly that democracy
will inevitably bring to power aggressive Islamic traditionalism or even fundamentalism, an outcome they would not welcome.

All options for overcoming the crisis and modernizing the economy of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are associated in one way or another with the prospect of attracting foreign financial and technical assistance.

**In search of political stability: from state socialism to national authoritarianism**

Differences between the scenarios of political development of European and Uzbek and Tajik republics are obvious. The ex-communist elites have retained their hold on power in practically all post-Soviet nations. What is now happening in most of them can hardly be viewed as a full-blown democratic development by Western standards. It is clear that the level of democracy, openness, political and civil freedoms and human rights in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus cannot be compared with that of these republics. For the first time in decades, non-communist political refugees are fleeing
not from Russia, but from these states. None of the republics has an open, legal and civilized political opposition. None of them has freedom of the press or a court system independent of state power. None of the republics has held elections which can be described as free. But it would be simplistic to view the political processes in the region only through the prism of confrontation between the "post-Communist" regimes and "democratic" opposition forces. The situation in these republics is much more complicated and dramatic than that: The key item of its agenda is not the introduction of Western-style democracy (as in Russia) but the prevention of an ethnic-social explosion of immense power. The war in Tajikistan is an example of a failure to do so.

As a result of the USSR's collapse, Central Asia has found itself at a civilization-scale junction, at the epicenter of conflicts between: The need to dismantle the Communist power structure and the impossibility of doing so without incurring devastating upheavals; The social structure implanted from above and Islamic
traditionalism rising from below; The need for modernization and the task of safeguarding stability; National revival, complete with the construction of a nation state, and the preservation of society's multi-ethnic character; The need to distance the new state from Russia and the need for Russia's assistance.

The scale of these problems makes it clear that introduction of political democracy must be postponed. Moreover, as counter-elites are being formed the tasks of modernization and democratization appear to contradict each other, at least in one part of the region, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

**Political changes in Uzbekistan**

*national democrats: a victory turned defeat*

Since the end of the 1980s, processes in Uzbekistan have developed more and more clearly in favour of the forces opposed to the republic's communist leadership. Opposition parties do exist. In May 1989, the Birlik (Unity) movement held a founding congress. It
was headed by representatives of Tashkent's intellectual community, including poets and scientists. Birlik grew rapidly in 1989 and 1990 when it held large meetings to demand that the Uzbek language be granted the status of a state language and to mount a campaign in defense of young Uzbeks who were victims of unfair treatment in the Soviet army.

By the middle of 1990, Birlik had around 300,000 activists. The leaders of Birlik sought to achieve democratic aims by stimulating the Uzbek people's awareness of their national identity. The movement's slogan calling for national renaissance was met with broad-based support in society, particularly among students. Students of Uzbekistan's colleges, many of whom came from the countryside, formed the bulk of the meetings organized by Birlik in 1989 and 1990. Contacts with Uzbek peasants were also established through students.

By the end of 1990, Birlik had evolved into the only mass opposition force in Uzbekistan. According to some estimates, had Birlik been recognized in 1990 it
could have won up to 70 percent of the votes in Uzbek elections to local councils and the republic's parliament, based on protest against the Communist Party and local authorities. But at the time the system of power wielded by the Communist Party of Uzbekistan was so strong that Birlik did not even raise the question of taking over.

In the spring of 1990, the Erk democratic party emerged in Uzbekistan to urge the proclamation of the republic's political independence. Erk's aim was to secure political power in parliament. However, the botched hard-line coup in August 1991 led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the proclamation of independence by Uzbekistan, without any visible role played by the national democrats. The goal of independence was achieved so quickly and easily that the movement lost its raison d'etre. The leadership of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, on the contrary, acted resolutely and retained most of its structures.

In November 1991 the Popular Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (NDPU) was formed from the ashes of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, which had announced
its voluntary self-dissolution. Having preserved the Communist Party's organizational structures, the new party retained its party committee in practically all industrial enterprises. The NDPU faction in the parliament ensures an absolute majority (327 seats out of 500). At the same time, the NDPU is certainly nationalistic in character less than one-third of the Communist Party's 800,000 members joined the new party. The other two-thirds, mostly Russians, left.

The leaders shed their outworn communist ideology easily. The new power of the elite was based on an ideology of state independence and on the nationalist revival of Uzbekistan. Practically the entire ideology of the nationalist movement was borrowed by the NDPU. The party called for "the equal status of all forms of property and labor, entrepreneurship and competition," guarantees of freedom of speech and conscience, and railed against the domination of a single ideology. It proclaimed its commitment to state sovereignty and the full official use of Uzbek as a state language. As a result, the national-democratic opposition found itself deprived
of any slogans and ideological landmarks it could use to mobilize the masses. The last opposition slogan which appealed to the population related to the plummeting standards of living, especially among the younger generation. The student riots convinced the Karimov government that Uzbekistan could not afford to follow the "Russian path" and pursue a policy of rapid economic liberalization. Without state price regulation and assistance to the poor, the republic would soon find itself on the verge of social explosion.

From "Partocracy" To Conservative Authoritarianism:

The Karimov Way

In June 1989, Islam Karimov replaced Rafik Nishanov as the First Secretary of the Central Committee. Karimov was one of the first republic Party leaders to follow Gorbachev's example of "nominated" rule instead of popularly elected rule, by having the Uzbekistan Supreme Soviet name him to the position. After independence in 1991, Karimov legitimized his position in popular
elections, which he won with an absolute vote of 87 percent. He followed this with a new constitution in December 1992, which called for a strong presidency as head of state and of the executive branch.

An authoritarian political system was formed over the first three years of Uzbekistan's independence. Karimov has extensive power in the appointment of regional khokims, the heads of people's deputies councils, the Chief Prosecutor, and also names candidates to the Constitutional Court.

The NDPJ is formally a governing party, but it does not fully control either the political or economic sectors, and has become a pale shadow of its former self. Karimov naturally continues to draw support from the party faithful of the NDPU, but he does not allow the party to monopolize its position as the president's only backing force. While firmly suppressing the actual opposition (Birlik and Erk), from time to time the president voices support for separate initiatives coming from below to create new political organizations. This is how the "Fatherland's Progress" party, the Movement of
Uzbekistan's Business People, and the Association of Young Scientists and Specialists appeared. By creating these quasi-parties, the regime builds additional channels for forming a political class and organizing a social base for itself. These organizations have attracted socially active young people, intellectuals and entrepreneurs, who for whatever reason found it unacceptable to join either the NDPU or the opposition movements.

The authorities, however, firmly reject any possibility of a large-scale peasant-based political organization. For example, the authorities prohibited the Free Dehkan Party from registering. The reasons for such actions are obvious by proclaiming itself to be a political party of peasants, Free Dehkan will raise questions about distribution of land to private owners. As polarized agrarian dualism persists in Uzbekistan, this might lead to social unrest in many regions. On the other hand, bans of this kind can hardly last indefinitely, and there are grounds to believe that an influential agrarian party will appear in the future.
The authoritarian regime is evidently accomplishing a significant historic task. The suppression of the opposition to create social and political stability gives the ex-Communist national elite a chance to adapt to new conditions and gradually privatize the property it controlled during the years of the Soviet Union. Within the framework of stability engineered by the regime, the former nomenklatura can govern the state and manage the economy through various mechanisms. One such mechanism currently used by Karimov is the "nationalization" of Uzbekistan reducing the importance of various leading clan forces by shuffling appointments of officials in various regions. By this, Karimov forces the population to abandon regional classification in favor of being "Uzbeks" first and foremost. As a result, unlike Tajikistan's civil war that has resulted from disagreements between regional clans, Uzbekistan has nearly completed a national consolidation that will make emergence of a separatist process very unlikely.
Emergence of Islam as a Cultural and Political Force and Democratization Process in Uzbekistan

The sudden collapse of the authoritative communist regime at the end of 1991, led to the emergence of five sovereign central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkemeministan, Kirghistan and Kazakhastan. Uzbekistan is the most populous republic in the region comprising a population of 21 million, in which about 90% are Muslims.

The democratic process in Uzbekistan started with the introduction of Gorbachev's policy of 'glasnost' and 'prestroika' in mid 1980s, which greatly affected the socio-religious and political conditions of the country. The term 'glasnost', which means 'openness' and was intended to remedy an entirely different set of political ills in the country, provided Uzbeks with an officially sanctioned vehicle for expression of cultural, linguistic and religious grievances that had been suppressed earlier.
In the process of 'glasnost', Gorbachev encouraged the formation of what came to be known as 'informal groups'. Many of these groups did concern themselves with issues such as economic mismanagement, environmental degradation, and the like. But much to the dismay of Gorbachev, even greater numbers focused on how to revive their cultural heritage and to assert their national and religious identities. Many groups with an Islamic flavour emerged on the scene, even though they didn't have official sanction. But even more important as a result of 'glasnost' there was an upsurge in religious activity and an increased level of religious concern over the lack of public prayer accommodations and Islamic education began to be heard frequently in many parts of Uzbekistan.

In the course of Islamic revivalism, another major development occurred in 1989, when Muslims of Uzbekistan launched a campaign to depose shamsdin Babakhanov Zeyudin, the head Mufti of the Muslim Religious Board of central Asia. The campaign was

apparently masterminded by an organisation named ‘Islam and Democracy’ whose declared objective was to ‘cleanse Islam in the Soviet Union. Accused of violating Islamic codes of behaviour and conduct, Babakhanov was forced to resign.²

With the pace of political liberalisation accelerating in the late 1980s, during the later phase of ‘perestroika’, demonstrations for specific demands were coming into vague. In October 1988, a group was formed which initiated the creation of a national democratic movement called ‘Birilik’ (Unity). Birlik grew rapidly during 1989 and 1990 when it held meetings, which attracted thousands of supporters. Birlik advocated greater attention to the Uzbek cultural heritage and Uzbek language as the state language of Uzbekistan.

The Birlik leaders sought to achieve democratic aims by stimulating the Uzbek people’s awareness of their national identity. The movements slogan, which called for national renaissance, met with a broad-based

response in society, particularly among student and peasants in the countryside. As an umbrella organisation, which had by now appropriated such cause as a confederation of all central Asian republics, propagation of Islam, and a wider use of the Arabic alphabet for Uzbek, Birilik and attached not only uzbek nationalists and pan-Trukists but also Islamists.

By the end of 1990, Biruliksts had, 300,000 activists and had evolved into a mass opposition force. According to some estimates, had Birlik been legalised in 1990, it could have won up to 70 percent of all votes in the Uzbek countryside elections to the local councils and the republic’s parliament, simply on the strength of its protest against the communist party and local authorities. But at the time, the system of power wielded by the communist party of Uzbekistan was so mighty that the Birlik leaders did not even propose that they should take over.

---

The communist party of Uzbekistan (CPU) was the only political party to participate in the March 1990, parliamentary elections. Since Birilik's status as a public movement had not been changed to that of a political body and recognised by the government as such, it couldn’t contest these elections. The CPU in its manifesto for the election stated the party’s stance on religion thus: The republican party organisation is actively in favour of freedom of religion and the legal rights of believers and for co-operation with religious organisations. Believers are entitled to all opportunities for participation in the public, political and cultural life of the republic.5

In April 1990, barely a year after the founding of Birlik, Mohammed Salih (an Uzbek poet and secretary of the writer's union) and two other leaders left to establish the Democratic party of 'Erk' (Freedom). For Salih, working for Uzbekistan's independence was the foremost priority, leaving democracy for later. Salih was also at the forefront of the campaign for the official instatement of Uzbek language. For Salih and his nationalist colleagues

the official status or the Uzbek Language was closely related to the sense of period in their uzbekness.

However history wrong-footed the national movement. The hardliner’s coup in Moscow in August 1991 led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. On 31 August 1991, the supreme soviet of Uzbekistan declared the republic, independent. Uzbekistan immediately joined the common wealth of independent states, after its formation in December 1991, without any visible role played by the national democrats. The aim of the national movement automatically lost its meaning.

The leadership of the communist party of Uzbekistan, in comparison, acted resolutely under the new conditions of suddenly acquired independence. On 17 September 1991, President Karimov issued a decree banning party activities in government organs. The communist party of Uzbekistan them renamed as the people’s Democratic party (PDP) of Uzbekistan on 1
November 1991, with virtually no change in its structure or personnel.6

The leaders of the PDP of Uzbekistan quickly shed the outworn communist ideology. The new power of elite was based on the national revival of Uzbek nation and the culture and religion was considered the most important aspects of the Uzbek national identity.

The new constitution of Uzbekistan was adopted on 8 December 1992. Article 4 of this constitution confirms to instate Uzbek as the official medium of the state. Article 54 of the constitution forbids political parties based on 'nationalism or religious principals'.7

Under this constitution, the president is recognised as the head of state and of the executive, as the chairman of the cabinet of ministers.

A politicized Islam and its use in a political struggle will undoubtedly exercise a strong influence on Uzbekistan's domestic and foreign policies.

It has become clear that the main political contradictions in Uzbekistan exist not between authoritarian power and a democratic opposition, but between organizations politically oriented toward Islam and the forces which adhere to secular forms of social thinking. This contradiction determines the contours of the emerging political system. The rival organizations of the NDPU, Birlik, Erk, and the presidential structures become allied whenever fundamentalist Islam rears its head. Both the establishment and the "civilized" opposition understand that the question is not one of a trivial reshuffling of power, but rather a truly radical revolution in which the traditionalist countryside confronts the national secular elite. The elite, formed over several decades, could be removed from power and the entire system of public life restructured. Undoubtedly, a revolution of this sort is impossible without devastating social upheavals and bloodshed. The main part of Uzbekistan's national intelligentsia would undoubtedly fall prey to radical Islamization of public life. A secular, atheistic and "Europeanized" elite would
be unable to fit into an Islamic model of development. Iranian and Afghan examples leave no room for illusions.

In the autumn of 1991, Adolat (Justice) groups began forming in the Fergana valley. Disciplined and skilled in martial arts, they were part of the Muslim self-government structure; they assisted in the settlement of small household conflicts and helped provide material assistance to the community. These groups included numerous Afghan war veterans, and they were controlled by the councils made up of aksakals (esteemed elders) and members of the local clergy. An average group brought 100-200 such people together. At the beginning of 1992, some sixty such groups were active in Uzbekistan. Adolat [justice, not the political party] highlights one of the key principles of Islamic fundamentalism the provision of equal opportunities for all Muslims. Zakat, a tax which goes toward redistribution of public wealth in favor of the poor and for the political structures of Muslim self-government, is expected to serve as a traditional tool of maintaining equality, while preserving material inequality.
in real society. Zakat has already been introduced in many parts of the Fergana valley as a parallel non-state tax.

The Islamic revival party (IRP) scored its greatest success at the end of 1991, when Adolat secured Karimov's visit to Namangan, where he transferred the headquarters of the Communist Party's City Committee to the community for use as the headquarters for Islamic self-government and agreed that the building of the former Regional Party Committee should house an Islamic hospital for women. However, the local Islamic revival party and Adolat activists in Namangan were suppressed by Uzbek authorities in the spring of 1992. Nonetheless, both grassroots groups and the Islamic revival party continue to function semi-clandestinely. They are practically indestructible, as they express the interests of the traditional countryside and draw support from key institutions the mosque and mahalla. The worsening situation in the countryside and the overpopulation will inevitably lead to further growth of the threat of fundamentalism, because the country
simply has no other ideology organically intertwined with its culture.

There is only one way for the conservative authoritarian regime to avoid an Iranian-style scenario of a clash between the political establishment and the fundamentalist majority: agrarian reform aimed at the internal disintegration of the minifundium system and the involvement of peasants in market relations. Special efforts will be needed to combine farming with other kinds of labor, as well as to promote wide-scale modernization programs to curb ruralization of life and overpopulation. It is clear, however, that modernization implemented at a pace outstripping that of the growing threat is intrinsically fraught with dangers of internal conflict, as was the Iranian Shah's "white revolution."

Modernization programs of this sort require considerable contributions from other countries, including Western international financial institutions, which is hardly likely in the foreseeable future or, in sufficient amounts. Even if such assistance were forthcoming, it would not guarantee success.
In particular, one cannot ignore the negative experience of the densely populated Middle and Near East nations with high birth rates; even the Arab nations with westernized and advanced elites (Egypt and Algeria, for example) have failed to modernize their traditional countryside. Even if the country develops in accordance with a favorable scenario, several decades are probably needed to reach a true balance between the religious and secular principles of life in Uzbekistan.

Of the five states in the region only Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan make open claims to ideological and political leadership. The position of Uzbekistan in this struggle is rather strong since it is the most highly populated, agrarian and Islamic of the five, and it has on its territory the historic Muslim cultural centers of Bukhara and Samarkand.

It is Uzbekistan with its authoritarian secular regime that is the main obstacle to the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism in the region. And as such it was the main ally of Russia. It was the military might of Uzbekistan (including direct troop participation) that
guaranteed victory to the pro-Communist grouping of the Khujand and Kulob clans in the cruel civil war in Tajikistan. Participation in the Tajik war was not something Uzbekistan chose by itself. The victory of the "Islamic democratic coalition" (a complex combination of clan, ethno-territorial and political forces) would have heralded for Uzbekistan the beginning of a complicated internal crisis which might have included the possible exodus of thousands of Uzbek refugees from Tajikistan (its Uzbek population exceeds one million), the aggravation of the conflict with its "own" Tajiks (over two million), and the growth of Islamic movements in the Fergana valley. National security considerations largely prompted Uzbekistan's active policy toward Afghanistan, where Karimov's regime supports direct ties with the military leaders of Uzbek descent. Tashkent had especially close relations with General Rashid Dostam, who received direct economic and military aid from Uzbekistan.

The Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan triangle presents the greatest military danger in the region.
Officially Tashkent continues to stress its allegiance to the great Muslim family and maintains outwardly warm relations with all major Muslim states, especially Turkey and Pakistan. However, aware of the danger a wave of fundamentalist Islam poses for the internal stability of the republic, the regime is searching for potential allies outside the Muslim world, even among its historic opponents. Visits to Tashkent by high-ranking officials from India and Israel caused outrage on the part of Islamists against Karimov. In turn, the rapid establishment of close ties of Turkmenistan with Iran, based on the project to build a gas pipeline through Iranian territory rather than ideological or religious stands, caused a negative reaction in Tashkent.

The emergence of a strong presidency in practically all nations of the region was a result of not only economic factors but also the national elite's need for consolidation, privatization and for securing its influence in the context of a new, capitalist mode of development.
Uzbekistan is quite frank in stressing the authoritarian character of his regime. Islam Karimov is openly looking to China as the model of market reforms in Uzbekistan: "Maximum freedom in the economy, minimum freedom in politics." In actual fact, there is no great freedom in the economy either political freedom. Along with all this, the very origin of the post-Soviet elite in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan determines many features of its behavior: It is characterized by a fresh, aggressive nationalism, and it is unwilling to share either property or power with national minorities. This creates a very tense atmosphere in some parts of these states. In addition, the threat of Islamic fundamentalism is on the rise. This prompts a conclusion that in the next few decades, social and political stability is unlikely in this part of the world, and major cataclysms can be forecast for the region with a great degree of certainty.