Chapter VI

CONSTRAINTS IN BILATERAL RELATIONS
CONSTRAINTS IN BILATERAL RELATIONS

Since independence, various social and political issues in Uzbekistan have played a significant role in shaping its foreign policy. The spread of Islamic groups trying to establish Islamic states in the region raised alarm in Uzbekistan. The rise of Taliban in Afghanistan and the civil war in Tajikistan added to the security threat to the Republic in the Nineties. Even today, deteriorating situation in Afghanistan is a constant concern for Uzbekistan.

President Karimov has been the President ever since Uzbekistan’s independence and has crushed down any opposition to his regime. The government crackdown on people suspected of being associated with Islamic groups, systematic torture, censorship on media and lack of democratic reforms have raised objection from the international community. However, in the past few years few positive developments have taken place in the Republic.

The U.S. and the West criticism of poor human rights records and lack of genuine democratic reforms in the Republic have from time to time shaped Uzbekistan’s relations with the West as well as with other external players like Russia and China. With Uzbekistan moving close to the U.S. after September 11, human rights issues and democratic reforms temporarily took a back seat. These socio-political dynamics once again became determining factors in Uzbekistan-U.S. ties after the Andijan incident in May 2005.

Moreover, corruption, torture, lack of freedom, poverty and others have made the common people dissatisfied with the government. The government’s stern measures have prevented any mass uprising but tension prevails in the society. All strong political opposition forces in the Republic have been crushed, leaving the people with no genuine political alternative. Growth of religious extremism, lack of progress in democratic reforms and continuous human rights violation has a bearing on both domestic and foreign policy of Uzbekistan. Lack of progress in human rights, political and economic
reforms has been a cause of friction in the Uzbekistan-United States relations. However, post September 11, these issues were sidelined.

The year 2005 was a dark year in the Uzbekistan-U.S. relation. Two incidents primarily marked the end of the three and half years of close bilateral ties-the May Andijan incident and the closure of the U.S. base at Kharsi-Khanabad. Differences between the two countries started appearing even before 2005 but the two incidents gave the final blow.

Worsening human rights situation in the Republic made the State Department uneasy, forcing the State Department to cut down the U.S. assistance to the Republic in 2004. However, the continuing mission in Afghanistan made it essential for the U.S. to maintain ties with Uzbekistan, causing dilemma among U.S. policy makers. The importance of the Republic to the U.S. war efforts in Afghanistan was evident from the importance the U.S. Department of Defense attached to the Republic much against the wishes of the State Department. Nevertheless, the developments in 2005 finally cut off ties between the two sides. Uzbekistan’s decision to call off its relation with the U.S. indicated that the CARs are not mere spectators to the developments in the region but capable of taking independent stand according to its national interest. The support Uzbekistan received from Russia and China after the Andijan incident helped Uzbekistan to come out of the international isolation imposed on the Republic by the West. Thus, breaking off ties with the U.S. also had geo-political ramifications, indicating the bargaining power Uzbekistan enjoys with regard to the external players engaged in the region. Both Russia and China are important players in the region, who became uncomfortable with the continuous U.S. military presence in their neighbourhood. Both these countries saw the closure of the K2 base as a welcome development. The SCO\(^1\) Astana summit in July 2005 too had demanded for a time-period for the U.S. forces stationed in the region after the U.S. claimed that the war is Afghanistan is over. The U.S. had always claimed that its bases in the region are temporary and will wind up after the war in Afghanistan is over.

\(^1\) Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a regional group consisting of Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as members (Details in Chapter 7).
The chapter discusses the constraints that both sides face in developing the bilateral relation. Various socio-political issues remain vital as they can lead to social tension, threatening the regional security. Moreover, some of these issues till the beginning of ‘war on terror’ were important criteria for developing ties with the West, the scenario, nevertheless, changed after September 11. In addition, the chapter discusses two incidents in 2005, which finally damaged the bilateral relation. Both these incidents had far-reaching impact on Uzbekistan’s relation with the major players in the region. Moreover, government repression following the incident further portrayed a grim picture of the human rights situation in the Republic, an area where Uzbekistan has never scored well.

**SOCIO-POLITICAL DYNAMICS**

**Islam in Uzbekistan**

Islam during the Soviet period

Decades of Soviet rule could not wipe out Islam from Central Asia. It was practiced during the Soviet times, albeit in restricted manner; confining to private domain only. Like other CARs, post independence, Islam became a symbol of national identity for Uzbekistan too. However, after independence there has been growth of Islamic extremism in Uzbekistan, which found support from a section of the population. With the increase in terrorist attacks in the Republic, believed to be the handiwork of Islamic fundamentalist groups, religious activities in the Republic came under strict government scanner. Moreover, civil war in Tajikistan and Afghanistan under the Taliban further made the Uzbekistan government apprehensive of spread of Islamic ideas in the country. A brief description of the role of Islam in the region before independence would help to better understand its relevance in the post-independence days.

The Jadid movement, a reform movement in the region started in the late nineteenth century. The Jadists considered that faith rests on the nation (millat) and the nation on nationalism (milliyat) and that there is no distinction between Islam as a faith and Muslims as a community (Khalid 2003: 575-576). The Jadids wanted to bring about
reform in Islam to meet the demands of the new age (ibid: 575). The Russians initially did not interfere in the Jadist movement. But with the coming of the Bolsheviks, the situation changed. The Bolsheviks in order to “sovietize” the Central Asian society encouraged literacy, forcefully abolished the veil system and introduced Latin script (ibid: 576). The Jadids supported the Bolsheviks in their efforts to modernize the Central Asian society. A number of Jadists joined the Communist Party of Turkestan from the middle of 1918 and the Jadists of Bukhara with the help of the Red army ousted the Emir of Bukhara in 1920 (ibid: 577). Jadids in the 1920s had a role in formulating the cultural policy of the region but the final decision-making was controlled from Moscow (ibid).

Eventually the Bolsheviks became stricter and from the middle of 1920s began to attack Islam. The Bolsheviks in their drive to separate religion from the State shut down mosques, Sharia courts and religious schools in the region, waqf properties were confiscated and Muslim clergies were persecuted (Tazmini 2001: 64). Lenin in order to win local support stopped anti-Islamic campaign for some time but again from 1925 the Soviet government resorted to its anti-Islamic campaigns (ibid). During Stalin period, the payment of the zakat (alms), the hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca, and the observance of the fast of Ramadan were forbidden (ibid).

The Soviet anti-Islam policy did not go unopposed in the region. The attack on Islam led to the rise of the Basmachi revolt in 1918, which opposed the Soviet rule in the region, but by 1928 the Soviets were able to completely crush the revolt (ibid). Years of repressive measures under the Soviet rule forced Central Asian Islam into “isolation” and Islam became “synonymous with tradition” (Khalid 2003: 577). It became difficult to practice Islam officially during the Soviet days; nevertheless, Islamic teachings were practiced discreetly. For example, every collective farm had a mosque registered as a storage room or a community hall; the imam was officially registered in a different profession and influential local men (ibid: 578) performed the rituals. Despite anti-religious propaganda by the Communist Party, “Islam persisted as a key element in every day life of the Central Asian people who adapted themselves to the new circumstances. Even party members did not completely disown their Muslim identity while celebrating birth of a child, solemnizing wedding or offering prayer at burial of the dead” (Kaushik
During the Soviet days, adhering to Islamic practices by the locals became the benchmark to distinguish between the natives and the Russians (Khalid 2003: 578). But these local practices were closely woven with the Soviet system, thus avoiding any direct challenge to the Soviet regime (ibid: 580). On the other hand, the Soviet Union also portrayed the region as its success story to the Muslim world to highlight its ability to modernize an underdeveloped region (ibid).

In order to control religious activities in the region, the Soviet government promoted the growth of official Islam, controlled by the State. The Soviet government established the Muslim Spiritual Directorate for Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) in 1943, which was one of the four Muslim boards established in 1943 in the region (ibid). SADUM came to be recognized as official Islam in the region. The change in Soviet policy towards Islam in the region was a result of various developments like acknowledging Muslim contribution in the Second World War, the Soviet Union’s gradual rise as a global power and its attempt to increase its influence in the Muslim Middle East (Tazmini 2001: 65).

SADUM had the responsibility to register mosques, appointed imams and even prepared the contents of the sermons and decided the nature of ‘proper’ Islamic practice (ibid). The official ulema helped the Soviet government to formulate Soviet foreign policy with the rest of the Muslim world and also to address domestic religious issues (Khalid 2003: 580) With the beginning of official Islam, new mosques were opened, believers were allowed to raise funds, and communication with the outside Muslim world, though in a limited scale became possible (ibid). Religious higher education got a boost with the reopening of the Mir-i-Arab Madrasa in Bukhara in 1948 and the establishment of the Imam al-Bukhari Islamic Institute at Tashkent in 1971. Nevertheless, unofficial Islam existed side by side with the official Islam. The number of unofficial ulemas was far more than the official ulemas, who since the 1960s started Islamic teachings discreetly (ibid: 581).

During Krushchev period, the region again witnessed Soviet attack on religious activities. The March 1961 decree on the strict observance of the laws on religious cults,
for example, indicated the Soviet apathy for Islamic practices in the region (Tazmini, 2001: 65). However, with the beginning of perestroika and glasnost, religious activities in the region got a boost.

Post-Independence developments

Since the last few years preceding independence, there were signs of revival of Islam in the region. Khalid (2003: 583) argues that after independence the region witnessed “considerable religious revival and nowhere is it more visible than Uzbekistan”. Post-independence Islam in Uzbekistan and in the region became a symbol of “national identity” (ibid).

With the loosening of Soviet control on religious activities in the region in the late 1980s, the unofficial ulemas revolted against SADUM. In February 1989, a protest at Tashkent forced Shasuddin Boboxon, then head of SADUM to relinquish his post (ibid: 584). Several new mosques were built, old mosques were reopened and were officially recognized, Sufi teachers emerged and religious education was imparted (ibid). By 1997, the number of mosques in Uzbekistan increased from 80 to 5000 (Tazmini: 2001: 67). With the rise of new sects and religious groups like Ahli hadis and Ahli Qur’on, use of Arabian script, Quran translated into Uzbek in 1992, Islam in the Republic got a boost (Khalid 2003: 584). Another interesting development during this period was the availability of religious commodities in the markets like plaques and stickers with photographs of the holy sites in Mecca and Medina, new editions of writings of ‘classical’ Muslim authors of Central Asia and other Islamic books (ibid). School curriculum in Uzbekistan, however, remained secular (ibid: 585). Islamic renaissance as Khalid (2003: 585) observed was “largely a phenomenon of cultural rediscovery” with little effect on the day to day life of the common people. However, the role of women in the society changed, who since independence were expected to play more traditional roles (ibid: 586). Adherence to Islamic life style like, veils for women and Islamic caps
for men today is more visible in cities like Margilon, Ferghana city rather than in the capital Tashkent.

Post-independence also saw the emergence of Uzbek nationalism. The Muslim Directorate of Uzbekistan replaced the earlier SADUM. Independent Uzbekistan stressed on celebrating the “Golden Heritage” (oltin meros) of Uzbekistan as a means to promote Uzbek nationalism (ibid: 587). Historical figures like Timur became the icon of Uzbek identity and Islamic scholars like al-bukhari, al-Maturidi, and al-Tirmidhi became revered figures in the Republic (ibid). Uzbek became the State language in 1989, indicating the wave of nationalism in the Republic. After independence, Uzbeks were given preferences in bureaucracy and the security forces (ibid).

**Islamic Groups in Uzbekistan**

Post-independence, on one hand there was revival of religious practices, which became a symbol of national identity and on the other hand, there was rise of Islamic extremist groups, dissatisfied with the functioning of the Karimov regime. These groups, nevertheless, posed threat to the regional stability. The Ferghana valley of Uzbekistan, which saw the spread of Wahabism since the late eighties, witnessed the first incident of Islamic fundamentalist movement after independence (Kaushik 2000: 9). Violent demonstrations demanding the establishment of an Islamic State in Uzbekistan took place in Namangan during President Karimov’s visit to Namangan in early 1992 (ibid). In December 1997, religious extremists killed Namangan militia Deputy Chief in protest against corruption (ibid).

Post-independence the two main Islamic groups that gained popularity in Uzbekistan are Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hizb ut-Tahrir al Islami (HuT).

---

2 Authors observation while visiting these places as field trip for the study in November 2008
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)

Juma Namangani and Tohir Yuldeshev established IMU in Afghanistan around 1998. Both of them have fled Uzbekistan after they ran into problem with the Karimov government. IMU after its establishment declared jihad against Karimov regime. In a statement issued by IMU, which was read out on Iranian radio on 11 April 1999, IMU’s stated its strong opposition to the Karimov regime. IMU was of the opinion that Karimov was trying to “give Jews and Christians a chance to secure a predominant economic, political, and military status in Uzbekistan”, thereby threatening Islam in the Republic (SWB 1999e). The statement said-

“the oppressive regime in Tashkent, contrary to all international norms and laws and national customs, continues to put fear into the hearts of the innocent citizens and file false charges against them. From pursuing a policy of tormenting the opposition and silencing them, and also persecuting young Muslim people, Karimov’s regime switched over to a policy of arresting and tormenting the fathers for crimes planted on their sons. After this, Karimov’s criminal hand started encroaching on women’s dignity.---[Uzbekistan is trying] to implement the policy of eliminating Islam in Uzbekistan as part of a general policy being pursued by America and Israel in the world [and] to turn Uzbekistan into a country which is hostile to close neighbouring states like Russia and China, in particular against neighbouring Islamic states like Afghanistan and Iran. -----We call on all people in Central Asia to assist the Muslim people of Uzbekistan, and we want the people of Central Asia to consider Uzbekistan as in the front line protecting them from US and Israeli attempts to enslave the people of Uzbekistan and Central Asia, to plunder their wealth by means of building military bases and occupying them by military means” (ibid).

The IMU in its declaration of jihad (1999) against the government of Uzbekistan stated that the IMU seeks to establish an “Islamic state with the application of Sharia founded upon the Koran and the Noble Prophetic sunnah” (Rashid 2002: 248). The main goals of the jihad as stated in the Declaration were-

“the defense of our religion of Islam in our land against those who oppose Islam. The defense of the Muslims in our land from those who humiliate them and spill their blood. The defense of the scholars and Muslim youth who are being assassinated, imprisoned and tortured in extreme manners-with no rights given them at all.---Also to secure the release of the weak and oppressed who number some 5,000 in prison, held by transgressors.---And to reopen the thousands of mosques and Islamic schools that have been closed by evil government.----The Islamic Movement warns the Uzbek government in Tashkent from propping up or supporting the fight against the Muslim” (ibid).
In 1999, IMU started its offensive actions against Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. During 1999 and 2000, IMU led series of incursion on the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border, creating panic in the region. Though the IMU forces were crushed, it drew considerable attention in the region as well as among the international community. Moreover, its action created intra-regional tensions. On 9 August 1999, IMU guerillas kidnapped the Mayor and three officials from a village near Osh in Kyrgyzstan and in exchange of the hostages IMU demanded $1 million in ransom, supplies and a helicopter to take out the IMU members to Afghanistan (Rashid 2002: 161). The Kyrgyzstan government was taken aback by the incident forcing Kyrgyzstan to allow the IMU guerillas passage to Tajikistan and it is also said that Kyrgyzstan paid about $50,000 as ransom (ibid) The Kyrgyz government action was strongly opposed by Uzbekistan government (ibid). Uzbekistan later on attacked Tavildara and Garm in Tajikistan to wipe out the IMU guerillas, who had taken shelter there, causing civilian causalities and thereby creating tension between the two countries as desired by Namangani (ibid: 162).

Though IMU primary target was Uzbekistan but its displeasure with the Akayev regime was evident in the Declaration of jihad. IMU justified its attack on Kyrgyzstan in its Declaration of Jihad, which stated- “the reason for the start of the jihad in Kyrgyzstan is due to the stance of the ruler Askar Akayev. Bishkek, in arresting thousands of Muslim Uzbeks who had migrated as refugees to Kyrgyzstan and were handed over to Karimov’s henchmen (ibid: 249).

Later on, IMU captured a Major General of the Kyrgyz Interior Ministry (Rashid 2002: 162). On 23 August 1999, IMU kidnapped seven people including four Japanese geologists working in Kyrgyzstan. The incident drew lot of international attention. As of late August 1999, IMU groups held twenty hostages, whom they set free gradually, except the four Japanese hostages (Rashid 2002: 163). In October 1999, the four Japanese geologists were released and it is said that Japan clandestinely paid 2-6 million dollars to release the geologist, however, both Japan and Kyrgyzstan denied having paid any ransom (ibid: 164). Namangani and IMU guerillas moved back to Tavildara with the beginning of winter, however, they were forced to flee to Tajikistan and shift to Afghanistan after repeated pressure on Tajikistan by Uzbekistan (ibid).
IMU received funds from various sources. According to some sources, Osama-bin Laden was said to have given $26 million to Namangani (ibid: 166). IMU received funds from other sources like, Uzbek Diasporas in Saudi Arabia and the opium trade (ibid: 165-166). IMU also received funds and weapons from Islamic groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan as well as from several sponsors in the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia (ibid: 166).

IMU received help from the Taliban forces in Afghanistan and both agreed to assist each other. Taliban allowed IMU to carry out attacks against Uzbekistan from Afghanistan while IMU in return agreed to fight for the Taliban against Ahmed Masood’s forces in Afghanistan (ibid: 164). The IMU by 1999 became prominent in the region and it was able to attract considerable sympathizers from the region. Ahmed Rashid (2002: 163-164) wrote:

“At no point in 1999 had the IMU posed significant military threat to Central Asia, but the guerillas had notched up successes beyond their wildest dreams. They had caused consternation amongst the governments of the region, Russia, and abroad, widening the existing rifts between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan even as these governments repeatedly pledged cooperation with one another. They had proved that the poorly trained, ill-equipped armies of the region were no match for their hostage taking and pinprick guerilla attacks and tactics. Most important, they had made a name for themselves, declaring their agenda amid a blaze of publicity that would ensure new recruits. For the first time since the Basmachi revolt, the specter of a military jihad rose across Central Asia”.

In August 2000, IMU again started its offensive action in the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan border. About 170 IMU guerillas built a fortified camp in the Surkhandarya province in south-eastern Uzbekistan (ibid: 168). Though the Uzbek army was able to crush the IMU forces in the Sukhandarya province but it received tough resistance from the IMU guerillas, causing casualties to the Uzbek army, which the highly trained Uzbek Special Forces never expected (ibid). On August 24 2000, IMU guerillas killed two soldiers and took four soldiers hostage from Bostanlyk and Gazalkent, lying north of Tashkent; after several weeks of stiff resistance from IMU guerillas, Uzbekistan was able to crush the guerillas (ibid: 169). In Kyrgyzstan too, the IMU guerillas continued attacking Kyrgyz army posts (ibid: 170). On 12 August 2000, IMU took captive twelve foreign mountaineers and four Americans but the hostages managed to escape from the IMU guerrillas (ibid). This incident drew significant international attention towards IMU.
activities and eventually the U.S. in September 2000 declared IMU as a terrorist outfit, which came as a relief for Uzbekistan. Both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan received international support after the incident. The U.S., Russia, China, Turkey, France and Israel gave supplies and counter-insurgency equipment to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to counter IMU attacks (ibid: 172).

In the Summer 2001, IMU forces again started their offensive action. On July 24-25, IMU guerillas attacked army posts in the Batken region on the Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan border (ibid: 181). Again on 31 July IMU attacked a Kyrgyz television transmitter in the Batken region (ibid). By 2001, IMU guerilla forces were already based in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and have established an independent commanding authority functioning in Namangani’s absence (ibid: 182). With the beginning of the U.S. led war in Afghanistan, the situation underwent a major change. IMU guerillas fought with the Taliban against the U.S. led coalition forces in Afghanistan, in which IMU suffered a severe blow with several of its guerillas being eliminated. Namangani is reported to be killed in the U.S. attack on Afghanistan after September 11. However, there are contrary reports suggesting that Namangani is still alive.

**Hizb-ut-Tahrir al Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation) (HuT)**

HuT established in 1952 is believed to have been started in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Jordanian-occupied East Jerusalem by a group of Palestinians led by Taqiuddin an-Nabkhani al Filastyni (Rauert 2005). Not much information is available about the Organization’s leadership, structure and financing (ibid). Cohen (2003) stated that HuT is a “clandestine, cadre-operated, radical Islamist political organization that operates in 40 countries around the world, with headquarters apparently in London”. The HuT website (2009) describes the purpose of the Organization as-

“Hizb ut-Tahrir is a political party whose ideology is Islam. Its objective is to resume the Islamic way of life by establishing an Islamic State that executes the systems of Islam and carries its call to the world. Hizb ut-Tahrir has prepared a party culture that includes a host of Islamic rules about life’s matters. The party calls for Islam in its quality as an intellectual leadership from which emanates the systems that deals with all man’s problems, political, economic, cultural and social among others. Hizb ut-Tahrir is a political party that admits to its membership men and women, and calls all people to Islam and to adopt its
concepts and systems. It views people according to the viewpoint of Islam no matter how diverse their nationalities and their schools of thought were. Hizb ut-Tahrir adopts the interaction with the Ummah in order to reach its objective and it struggles against colonialism in all its forms and attributes in order to liberate the Ummah from its intellectual leadership and to deracinate its cultural, political, military and economic roots from the soil of the Islamic lands. Hizb ut-Tahrir endeavours to change the erroneous thoughts which colonialism has propagated, such as confining Islam to rituals and morals”.

The Organization believes in peaceful means to achieve its goals but its radical ideas have raised doubts about its non-violent path. According to HuT website (2009), however, it does not believe in use of violence.

“Hizb ut-Tahrir has adopted in its method to establish the State a host of Shari'ah rules, one of which is that it does not undertake any physical actions nor any violent acts, thus emulating the Messenger of Allah (saw), because the actual reality is the very reality of the Messenger of Allah (saw) in Makkah with regard to the absence of Islam’s implementation and with regard to the work towards establishing it”.

HuT started operating in the Central Asian region after the independence of the Central Asian Republics (CARs). Today the Organization has emerged as a “major threat to stability in Central Asia” (Khamidov 2003). The ICG Report (2003) indicated that the movement first emerged in Uzbekistan in mid-1990s and eventually spread to southern Kyrgyzstan, especially after the Uzbekistan government’s repressive measures in 1997 forced many to leave the country. The Report also highlighted that the movement gradually extended to Tajikistan and since 2000 it is believed that the movement is also gaining foothold in southern Kazakhstan and in prisons in Turkmenistan. Its membership in Central Asia is increasing despite the group being declared illegal in the CARs and many of its members either killed or put behind bar (Saidazimova 2007).

The movement came to Uzbekistan in 1995 and its main leader was Salahuddin (Rauert 2005). Bruce Pannier (2004), an expert on the region wrote, “leaflets from Hizb ut-Tahrir, now found virtually everywhere in Central Asia, call for the overthrow of the Uzbek government, regularly insult President Karimov, and call for the creation of an Islamic caliphate”. The Karimov government is viewed as the “most restrictive government in the region” and hence the opposition to the regime is growing in the region (ibid). Moreover, the majority of HuT members consist of ethnic Uzbeks, which is
another main reason for choosing Uzbekistan as their main target (ibid). It is reported that there are about 100,000 members in Central Asia; however, the exact figure is debatable (ICG Report 2003). The ICG Report (2003) stated that by 2002 about 4000 HuT members were in prisons in Uzbekistan. The exact number of members is difficult to ascertain but according to some scholars HuT members in Uzbekistan may be around 15,000 as in 2003 (ibid: 17). The ICG Report (2003) indicated that HuT in Uzbekistan “has a particularly strong role as the only serious political opposition to an overwhelmingly repressive government”. Among other things like monetary benefits, psychological and ideological motivations, government repressions also play a role in increasing membership. The ICG Report of 2003 stated that-

“Government repression clearly has some impact both in dissuading potential members and attracting others. One member in Uzbekistan explained that he had never really been interested in Hizb ut- Tahrir until his brother was arrested for membership. Then he, too, joined, disgusted with the way the police treated him. He was later arrested, but released under an amnesty. Many women have become involved because their husbands or sons have been arrested, and wider community sympathy has been generated because of extensive kinship ties in traditional Uzbek families”.

HuT leaflets have been quiet vociferous in criticizing the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan. One such leaflet stated-“We ask the Almighty, that he carry away all our troubles, defend us, destroy the Jew Karimov, and his comrades in arms, and call us all from the darkness of the tunnel to the light, and unite us all under the flag of the holy Islamic Caliphate. We hope only in this” (ibid: 26-27). One common theme of propaganda in Uzbekistan has been that “once Karimov is overthrown; Muslims will be free to live under the justice of the Caliphate” (ibid: 26).

Other Islamic groups have also come up in the Republic. Akramiyya, a break away faction of HuT was established in 1996 under the leadership of Akram Yuldashev (Berdikeeva 2006). In 1992, he wrote a pamphlet called "Iymonga Yol", or the "Way to Sacred Islam", dealing with questions of morality and emphasized the superiority of the Islamic worldview (Tumelty 2005). The group unlike HuT believes in violence to remove Karimov and establish Islamic rule at the local level rather national level (Berdikeeva 2006). However, Yuldashev is behind the bar since 1999 convicted for illegal activities
and serving seventeen years sentence term. Uncertainty prevails about the structure and on the existence of the group (Tumelty 2005).

Another radical group in the Republic is Hizb an-Nusra, also a break away faction of HuT. It was established in 1999 at Tashkent and believes in violence to achieve its aim of overthrowing Karimov regime (Khamidov 2003).

**Terror Attacks in Uzbekistan**

On 16 February 1999, serial blasts took place at Tashkent, destroying government buildings, killing, and injuring people. The first explosion occurred near the Ministry of Internal Affairs building, followed by attacks on Nodirabegim cinema building, Cabinet of Ministers building and in the area surrounding National Bank building (SWB 1999h). About fifteen people died in the explosion and several others injured (SWB1999c). No one took responsibility for the attack but the government blamed foreign extremists and terrorist organization for the attack (SWB 1999j). As in 25 February 1999, thirty people were detained in connection with the February blast at Tashkent and the government sources claimed that all of them are local nationals and have undergone training in sabotage in Chechnya, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, belonging to various terrorist and extremist religious groups like Hezbollah, HuT or supporters of Wahhabi sect (SWB 1999g). According to government sources, the blast was to “show the entire Uzbekistan and the world what kind of events were taking place in Uzbekistan [and] an attempt on President’s life” (SWB 1999j).

The opposition groups on the other hand called the February attack a handiwork of the Karimov government itself. Pulatov, the leader of the banned Birlik Party in an interview said that the bomb explosions were perhaps hatched by the government itself (SWB 1999d). He ruled out the role played by Islamist groups in the attack and called it “complete fabrications” and ‘to commit such an act against a ‘totalitarian regime ---where the state is in control of everything’, would be beyond Islamic or any other group” (SWB 1999d). He also dismissed the government claim that the attack was an attempt on President’s life (ibid). Another opposition leader Mohammad Solih of the Erk Party accused that the government had prior information about the 16th February attack. He
said, "10 days before the explosions a group headed by the Deputy Chairman of the National Security Service of Uzbekistan arrived in Turkey and asked the permission from Turkish officials to arrest Uzbek terrorists [the Uzbek government started to arrest people], who took part in the explosions ten days before the explosion (SWB 1999f).

During 1999-2000, several IMU incursions took place in the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan border, posing threat to the regional security. In 2004, again series of bomb blasts rocked Uzbekistan from 28 March-1April. The Jihad Islamic Group (JIG) or Jamoat, a successor to the IMU claimed responsibility for the attack (Apostolou 2004). The first attack took place in a village called Qahramon in Bukhara on 28 March (Kimmage 2004). On 28-29 March, three policemen were killed in separate attacks in Tashkent and on 29 March, two suicide bombings took place at the Chorsu market in Tashkent (ibid). Again, on 30 March there were attacks in a Tashkent suburb, close to the area where high government officials resided (ibid).

State Response

Karimov has often used terror attacks in Uzbekistan as an excuse to justify state’s repressive measures. Several people suspected to be associated with the banned Islamic groups have been arrested or detained. Torture to get confessions is common, and even family members of the suspected terrorists are subject to torture. Also, there are reports suggesting that the government authorities have implanted jihadi leaflets and drugs to implicate people opposing government and sentenced them for engaging in anti-government activities. A person detained under charges of terrorist activities in most case do not get a chance of fair trial and generally land up getting long prison terms. Restrictions have been placed on religious practices.

The Law on Religious Organizations adopted in May 1998 puts lots of restrictions on religious activities in the Republic.

"[The] law guarantees freedom of religion subject to reasonable restrictions in the interest of public health, morality and order. A religious organization to be recognized must have at least 100 adult followers among citizens residing on the

3 Discussed in the earlier section
 territory of the Republic. A registered religious organization can own land and other property. Registered religious organization can have their central organs but their leaders can only be citizens of Uzbekistan and non-citizens can be leaders only with permission of the Ministry for Religious Affairs. The law prohibits religious followers wearing in public of dress or sporting beard identified with a religious sect" (Kaushik 2000: 12).

The law further forbids imparting military training to the followers of any religious organization and circulation of religious literature and objects were also subject to scrutiny by the state (ibid).

In 2000, Tolib Yoqub, chairman of the Uzbek nongovernmental organization for the protection of human rights in an interview pointed out that Karimov's repressive policies on religion is accentuating protests among Uzbek Islamists (SWB 2000b). He observed that-

"the stronger the pressure, the stronger the resistance: religious organizations are stepping up their resistance each day. More than 5,000 members of the Hezb-e Tahrir movement went out on central streets on new year's eve in Andizhan. A large number of leaflets were distributed in markets and other places in Tashkent the same day. The distribution is well -organized all over Uzbekistan. This is what the religious opposition is turning to in protest against the repressions. Of course, the confrontation will continue unless Karimov changes his policy concerning religious people and opposition and gives way to them and starts a dialogue with them" (ibid).

Sharing similar view Akbarzadeh (2005: 37) argued that-

"within a decade Islamism in Uzbekistan has grown to be a real force with broad implications for that state [Uzbekistan] and the region as a whole. It is ironic that Tashkent's policies of repression and intolerance have, by default, nurtured what it feared the most".

The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) established in June 1990 at the Congress of the Muslims held in Ashtrakhan aimed at enabling the “Muslim population of the former Soviet Union to live according to the requirements of the Quran and advance humanistic ideals and equal rights for all nations” (Kaushik 2000: 8). Uzbekistan after independence refused to register IRP as a political party as the government feared that the Party could use religion for political ends (ibid: 10). The Uzbek government introduced amendments to the Criminal Code in May 1999. Under Article 244 of the Criminal Code, people found guilty of “forming, leading or participating in religious extremist, fundamentalist
or other prohibited organizations could get five to fifteen years in prison and their property would be confiscated (SWB 1999b). In 2000, Namangani and Yuldeshev were tried in absentia in a Uzbek court for their involvement in various subversive activities against Uzbekistan (Rashid 2002: 172). In 2001, the Dzhizak Regional Court in Uzbekistan sentenced Mahmud Jumashev to twelve years in prison and Idris Umarqulov to six years in prison for their alleged membership with Hizb-ut Tahrir (SWB 2001b). Both of them denied having any link with HuT and said that they were tortured and forced to give false testimonies (ibid).

Several other such cases of government repression are noted in Uzbekistan. Mutabar Ahmedova, an unofficial member of Amnesty International in Uzbekistan in an interview with Iranian radio in 2001 pointed out that “repression had been stepped up in Uzbekistan over the past 10 years and that Muslims in particular were suffering repression” (SWB 2001a).

It is also argued by some that the Uzbek government exaggerates the threat of radical Islam in the country (Kamalova 2007: 6). She argues that Islamic movements exist in the Republic but is limited to a small section (Kamalova 2007: 6). Schatz (2002: 338) also emphasized that –

“Islamicism did grow in importance in Central Asia throughout the 1990s, but the extent of its influence should not be overstated. Central Asia has a tradition of religious tolerance and moderation without a political orientation. Political Islam became relatively strong only in Tajikistan and the Ferghana Valley region”.

**Democratization in Uzbekistan**

Lack of democratic reforms in Uzbekistan has been one of the critical areas of the Uzbekistan-U.S. relations. The West has long criticized Uzbekistan for its failure to introduce meaningful democratic reforms in the last twenty years. The state of democracy in the Republic is still shaky. Opposition movements have been crushed in the Republic and lack of media freedom further hinders the growth of genuine democracy. However, it is not to suggest that there have been no reforms at all. Few measures have been taken, albeit at a low level. Elections have regularly taken place under international observation but genuine voice of the people is still stifled in the Republic.
Attack on opposition movements started even before independence, which helped Karimov to consolidate his position. In February 1991, a law on protecting the honour and dignity of the UzSSR President and other high-ranking officials was passed, which called for punishments for insulting government officials (Fierman 1997: 375). It further stated that harsher punishments would be given for repeating the offence and to those using the mass media to malign government officials (ibid). Anyone using the mass media to criticize government officials could face imprisonment up to six years and a particular media institution may be permanently shut down if it repeatedly engaged in criticizing government officials (ibid). The Law on Public Associations in the Uzbek SSR, passed in February 1991 put various curbs on establishing associations, practically making it difficult for any association critical of government to sustain in the Republic (ibid). The law prohibited associations “directed towards destruction of moral foundations of society, universal humanistic value, and likewise whose goal was the illegal change of constitutional structure or the destruction of the unity of the territory of the USSR, the Uzbek SSR and the Karakalpak ASSR” (ibid: 376). It also put restriction on any association propagating “war, violence and cruelty or inflame social hatred leading to division of society” and it also “outlawed religious political parties and use of antidemocratic coercive pressure by public associations” (ibid). Some other laws adopted to cripple the growth of opposition movement in the Republic were the law “On the Mass Media” of June 1991 and “Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations adopted also in 1991 (ibid: 376-377). In April 1992, a resolution “On Measures to Prevent the Illegal Financing of Public Associations of the Uzbekistan Republic” was adopted, which “prohibited political parties and mass movements that pursued political goals from financing their publications with funds from religious organizations, or from foreign states, organizations or citizens” (ibid: 384). In May 1993, the “Law on Protection of State Secrets” further curbed media freedom (ibid: 385).

The Uzbek authorities refused to register the Uzbekistan Human Rights Society led by Abdumannob Polatov and instead the government set up its own body called National Committee for the Protection of Human Rights (ibid). Media repression forced Birlik and Erk to close their publication by early 1993 and access to Russian media by the people of Uzbekistan was also restricted (ibid: 386-387).
The main Opposition Forces—Birlik and Erk

The two main opposition groups Birlik and Erk have been banned in Uzbekistan and most of its members have been put behind bars or are living in exile. Both these parties managed to keep alive their movement from exile. Ahmed Rashid (1994:98) wrote that "the political opposition that has developed in Uzbekistan since 1989 is perhaps the most sophisticated and the strongest in Central Asia. Caught between the nationalists and the Islamic fundamentalists, the government is attempting to cajole and repress both sides at the same time." However, the government banned all opposition political groups by middle of 1993 and was able to crush their leadership (ICG Report 2001).

The Birlik (Unity) Popular Movement or the Movement for the Preservation of Uzbekistan's Natural, Material and Spiritual Riches was established in November 1988 (Rashid 1994:98). It later became the Birlik Party, which is also known as the Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (ICG Report 2001:4). The Birlik Movement was started by eighteen people and the first congress of the Movement was held on May 28 1989, which was attended by three hundred delegates (Rashid 1994:98). The leader of the Party is Abdulrahim Pulatov. Birlik consists of diverse groups of people like intellectuals, environmentalists, ultra Uzbek nationalists, pan-Turkic and Islamic activities (ibid:99). The first public protest of about 50,000 people under the Birlik banner led by Pulatov was held in October 1989 at Tashkent, demanding Uzbek to be the country's main language, which led to the arrest of about one hundred people including Pulatov (ibid:98). Pulatov also protested against the August 1991 coup attempt in Russia, which was strongly supported by Karimov (ibid: 93).

On 22 November 1991, Birlik was registered as a movement in Uzbekistan but could not get recognition as a party (Rashid 1994:98). Birlik after independence led series of demonstrations, meetings and protests to oppose Karimov government (ICG Report 2001). Even though Birlik had collected 3,500 signatures (the minimum requirement to register as a Party was 3000), Birlik failed to register as a party in 1992 (ibid: 5). The Movement worked for "democratic and nationalist goals including a renaissance of Uzbek culture, multi-party democracy and greater independence from Moscow (ibid: 4).
The other demands of the Party were introduction of liberal reforms, respect for personal freedoms, establishment of Uzbek as the official language, and measures to address ecological and health problems (ibid). Repression against the movement aggravated; Polat was physically assaulted in June 1992 (ibid: 5). He was forced to take political asylum in Turkey and in 1998 shifted to the U.S. (ibid).

Rashid (1994:99), however, wrote that the movement’s ‘core is Uzbek nationalism, which means that it adopts diverse and often contradictory political positions. The movement is confused and divided but it commands respect among the people”.

As in 2005, the party had 20,000 registered members (Polat 2005). The Uzbek authorities have crushed the Birlik movement. In 1999, Ahmadkhon Turakhonov, Chairman of the Birlik’s Namangan City and a Birlik activist from Andijan Zhurahon Azimov were killed by the Uzbek government (Polat 2004). In 2001, Shohrukh Rozimuradov, Chairman of Birlik’s Kashkadarya region (was also the former Deputy of the Uzbek Parliament) was killed by the police (ibid). Again, in 2001, the government prohibited the Party to hold a conference on regional organization in Ferghana (ibid). The Ministry of Justice of Uzbekistan has repeatedly refused to register Birlik as a Party in Uzbekistan.

However, things improved in 2002-2003. In 2002, Birlik could organize regional conferences throughout the country. In 2003, the Congress of Birlik was hold in Uzbekistan for the first time ever since the last Congress in 1992 (ibid). However, threats from the Special Forces Representatives to Party workers continued, emphasized Polat in his statement at the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe of the U.S. Congress in 2004. Atrocities on Birlik Party members by the government continued. Mukhiddin Kurbanov, Chairman of Birlik’s Djizzakh region was arrested on some flimsy grounds and was released only after the intervention of the U.S. Embassy and then Ambassador of Great Britain to Uzbekistan Craig Murray, albeit paying huge money as fine (ibid).
The Erk (Freedom) movement was established in 1990, which was a breakaway faction of the Birlik. The leader of the Erk movement is Salay Madiminov, known by his pseudonym Mohammad Salih (ICG Report 2001). Later on the movement was redesignated as the Erk Democratic Party and was officially registered on 5 September, 1991 (ICG Report 2001). The leader of the Erk party, Muhammad Salih contested the Presidential election of 1991. Unlike Birlik that believed in radical methods, Erk members adopted moderate approach and wanted “reforms largely through existing political process” (ibid:5). The Erk members emphasized on rapid economic liberalization and private land ownership (ibid). Erk was initially more willing to work within the existing system and hence Salih was allowed to contest the 1991 Presidential election. On the other hand, Birlik leader Polat was debarred from contesting the election, further straining the relation between the two main opposition groups.

However, the government gradually became suspicious of the activities of the Erk party too and resorted to repressive measures to curb the movement. In April 1993, Salih was arrested but was later released under international pressure (ibid:6). Other Erk leaders were also arrested like Altanazar Aripov, Party Secretary, Ibrahim Haqqu, chief editor of a newspaper. In 1993, Salih took political refuge in Turkey. It is also said that Karimov wanted Turkey to extradite Salih to Uzbekistan; Turkey, however, did not extradite him but had asked Salih to leave Turkey (ibid:7). Salih then moved to Norway in 1999. In 2003, Erk was able to hold a conference in Uzbekistan.

Muhammad Salih was convicted in absentia for his alleged involvement in the 1999 car bombings in Tashkent and the government sentenced him to fifteen years in prison. This forever rules out the possibility of his return to political life in Uzbekistan. Three of Salih’s brothers were also arrested for “alleged anti-state activities and cooperation with ‘terrorists’” (ibid:7). In May 2003, a youth leader of Erk Hasan Qambarov was arrested (Solih 2003).

As time passed, new opposition groups emerged. Two new opposition forces in Uzbekistan are Party of Agrarians and Entrepreneurs and Party of Free Farmers. Ozod Dehqonlar or Free Farmers Party led by Nigora Hidoyatova was established in 2003 but
has failed to get registration and hence could not participate in the December 2004 Parliamentary election in Uzbekistan (Eurasia Insight 2005b). The Party calls for land privatization, which is impossible "without liberalization, democratization, and overall openness"(Eurasia Insight 2005b). The Party of Agrarians and Entrepreneurs of Uzbekistan is led by Marat Zahidov. The Party too has been unsuccessful in getting registration.

**Elections in Uzbekistan**

Uzbekistan has conducted regular elections both for the Parliament and for the office of the President; still the Republic can hardly be called a democratic country. Genuine democratic reforms are still missing in the country. The elections in Uzbekistan have been marred by controversies but they indicate some positive developments.

**Presidential Elections**

Part V, Chapter 19 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan enumerates the Constitutional provisions for the office of the President. Article 89 of the Constitution enshrines that the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan is the Head of State and executive authority in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The President also serves as the Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers. Article 90 deals with the eligibility provisions for contesting the post of President. It says,

"any citizen of the Republic of Uzbekistan" who has reached the age of 35 is in full command of the state language and has permanently resided in Uzbekistan for at least 10 years, immediately preceding the elections, shall be eligible for the post of President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. A person may not be elected to the office of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for more than two consecutive terms”.

The President is elected for a term of five years and is elected by the citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the basis of the universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot (Article 90). A referendum in February 2002, however, extended the term of the office of the President to seven years.
There is no provision for impeachment of the President. Only ground of removal enshrined in the Constitution is on health grounds. Article 96 says,

"Should the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan fails to perform his duties due to poor health, confirmed by a certificate of a State Medical Commission formed by the Oliy Majlis, an emergency session of the Oliy Majlis shall be held within ten days. This session shall elect acting President of the Republic of Uzbekistan from among its deputies for a term of not more than three months. In this case the general elections of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan shall be held within three months" (The Government Portal of the Republic of Uzbekistan).

At the time of independence, Karimov was the first Secretary of the CPU and was elected unopposed on 24 March 2004 as the President by the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (Rashid 1994:93). Since independence there have been three Presidential elections in Uzbekistan. The first Presidential election took place in December 1991. Birlik was not allowed to register and so could not contest the election. Once the Birlik Party’s registration was cancelled, the Birlik Popular Movement tried to put up Polatov as an independent Presidential candidate by collecting the minimum number of signatures required by a non-party candidate. In a day it was able to collect 63,000 (the minimum requirement is 60,000), however, its candidature was rejected by the authorities on a trivial issue (Fierman 1997:379). The Islamic opposition parties were also banned and hence could not participate in the election (Rashid 1994:94). On the other hand, Erk, which showed interest to work with the regime, was allowed to register and Mohammed Salih contested for the post of President.

Though Salih was allowed to contest against Karimov in the Presidential election but various other measures indicated that introduction of meaningful democratization was not the intention of the Karimov government. The election rules and deadlines for the election were not announced until 23 November while the election was scheduled for on 29 December (Fierman 1997:378). Moreover, the rules for collecting signatures, which were mandatory for non-party candidates, were not announced until 26 November; the last date for submission of the signatures to the Central Election Commission (CEC) was 3 December (ibid). These made it practically impossible for non-party candidates to collect the required 60,000 signatures. Financing of elections were state controlled, which nevertheless worked in favour of Karimov (ibid). Moreover, state had complete control
over the media, which too was used to campaign for Karimov and Salih’s campaigning time was curtailed (ibid).

In the 1991 election, Karimov won the election by securing 85.9 percent of the votes and Mohammad Soalih managed to get only 12.4 percent of the votes (Rashid 1994:94). These were however, official figures, which the Erk party claimed to be erroneous. Salih in his speech at the fifth Congregation of the Erk Party said that in reality Erk had won four times the official figures (Solih 2003).

The next Presidential election was to be held in December 1996. However, on 26 March, 1995, Karimov called for a referendum and extended his term of office without going for elections until 2000. According to the official sources, 99.6 percent of the electorate took part in the referendum and out of which 99.4 percent voted in favour of extending the next election until 2000 (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe 1998).

The second Presidential election was held on January 9, 2000. Karimov won the election with 92 percent votes and was elected the President for another five-year term (ICG Report 2001). Even in this election there was no genuine opposition. The other contestant for the post of President was Abdulhafiz Jalalov, First Secretary of the Central Council of the People’s Democratic Party. As per Uzbekistan CEC data 95 percent of the electorate participated in the election and out of which 92 percent voted for Karimov and only 4 percent voted for Jalalov (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe 2000:8). The disturbing aspect of the election was that Jalalov later on himself acknowledged that he had voted for Karimov in the “interest of stability, peace, our nation’s independence,[and] the development of Uzbekistan” (ibid). About 100 foreign observers participated in the Presidential election (SWB 2000c). The ICG Report (2001:7) stated that the election “failed to meet basic democratic standards”. The OSCE/ODIHR refused to be observer of the Presidential election and stated that the election lacked “democratic competition” (Commission on Security and Cooperation in

4 Karimov was the head of the Council of the People’s Democratic Party, which he left in 1996.
Europe 2000:9). Even within Uzbekistan, criticism for the 2000 election was voiced. Tolib Yoqub, Chairman of the Uzbek non-governmental organization for the protection of human rights indicated that there were "mass violation of the election procedure" and citing an example to demonstrate the level of violation said that there were reports that one person of the family voted for all the members of his family (SWB 2000b).

In 2002, President Karimov increased the term of the President's office from five years to seven years, which was also criticized by western observers. A referendum to extend the term of office of the President took place on 27 January, 2002. The authorities announced that more than 90 percent of the participants had voted in favour of the referendum (Ferghana.ru 2006). The referendum increased the term of the office of the President till 2007. Karimov justifying the necessity to extend the term of office said that the decision is beneficial for "the future of the republic" and not "the future of an individual" (ibid). Another issue passed in the referendum was the establishment of a bicameral legislature in Uzbekistan, which was a step forward in developing democratic institutions in the Republic (ibid).

Uzbekistan had its third Presidential election on 23 December 2007. The outcome of the election was a foregone conclusion - another seven year term for President Islam Karimov. The very basis of Karimov contesting the election for the third time was questionable as the Constitution of Uzbekistan debars a contestant from contesting for more than two consecutive terms (Article 90). President Karimov has been the President of the Republic since 1991. Another Constitutional anomaly with the election of the President was the date of the election. President Karimov after his re-election in 2000 took oath as the President on 22 January 2000. His term therefore ended on 22 January 2007 whereas the election took place in December 2007. The Election Commission of Uzbekistan allowed Karimov to contest without giving any specific explanations, raising doubts about the fate of democracy in the Republic.

Mohammad Sahli was nominated as the Presidential candidate of the Erk Party for the 2007 election. He was convicted for his involvement in the 1999 Tashkent
bombing and was tried in absentia, making his return to the country difficult. According to Article 90 of the Constitution, a person contesting for the post of President has to reside in the Republic for at least ten years immediately preceding the election, which makes Sahli ineligible for the post as he is living in exile since 1993. Other opposition leaders were also prohibited from contesting on various pretexts and one of the issues was their absence from the country for more than ten years.

The three candidates who were allowed to contest the election were Asliiddin Rustamov of the People’s Democratic Party, Diloram Tashmukhamedov of the Adolat Social Democratic Party and Akmal Saidov, nominated by an initiative group of voters. These opposition candidates are mere eye-wash as all these candidates had publicly endorsed President Karimov. Uzbekistan still lags far behind in genuine multiparty system; only parties loyal to President Karimov passed the eligibility criteria to contest. President Karimov was elected by the Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan in the 2007 election. The National Democratic Party “Fidokorlar” (“Selflessness) and the Milliy Tiklanish Party (“National Revival Party) each nominated a candidate, but failed to collect the required five per cent supporting signatures (OSCE/ODIHR 2008). In 2000 presidential election, President Karimov was the candidate from the Fidokorlar Party (ibid).

According to official statistics, Karimov came out victorious with 88.1 percent vote, Rustamov received 3.17 percent, Tashmukhamedov 2.94 percent and Saidov 2.85(ibid). According to official estimates, 90% of the total eligible electorates voted in the election (ibid). Allowing the initiative group of voters to nominate candidates was a positive step, noted the OSCE election-monitoring mission (ibid).

The western observers questioned the fairness of the election while both Russia and China supported the election. The OSCE/ODHIR (2008) reported-

“The 23 December 2007 presidential election took place within a tightly controlled political environment and failed to meet many OSCE commitments for democratic elections as laid down in the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.

---

5 Initiative group of voters mainly represented NGOs organized in a government-initiated NGO umbrella Organization (OSCE Report 2008).
While there were four candidates, including one woman and one candidate nominated by an initiative group of voters, the voters were nonetheless left without a real choice as all contestants publicly endorsed the policies of the incumbent president, Mr. Islam Karimov. Legal and administrative obstacles prevented political movements representing alternative views from registering as political parties or initiative groups, thereby precluding them from fielding presidential candidates.

Election monitors from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) election monitors called the election as “free, fair and transparent” (RFE/RL 2007). The CIS election monitoring mission noted-(Press Service of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2007).

"all required conditions for international and internal monitoring of the elections and voting processes were created in Uzbekistan. The activity of election commissions of all levels was open and transparent. Observers participated in the sessions of the central and district election commissions. The election campaign was held within the legal and ethical norms----calling the elections free, open and transparent”.

Sharing similar views, SCO election monitoring mission noted that the election conformed to “generally accepted international electoral standards and provides the necessary democratic and legal preconditions for free expression of the voters’ will by secret ballot” (SCO Official Website 2007).

Parliamentary Elections

Before the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) was established, the Supreme Soviet functioned as the highest Legislature of the newly independent Republic. The sixteenth Session of the Supreme Soviet in September 1994, adopted a Resolution to conduct the first election of Deputies of Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan on 25 December 1994 (Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2008). Three rounds of election were conducted to elect the Deputies and the elections were held on 25 December 1994 and 8 and 22 January 1995. After the election, a unicameral Parliament –Oliy Majlis with 245 deputies was established (ibid). The Oliy Majlis after the election included 69 Deputies from the National Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, 47 from the Social Democratic Party “Adolat”, 14 from “Vatan tarakkiyoti” Party and 7 from “Milliy Tiklanish” Party, while the remaining Deputies were nominated from the bodies of representative power (ibid).
The second election to the Oliy Majlis for 249 seats was held on 5 and 19 December 1999. According to a law passed in 1998, the government allowed Citizen’s Initiative Groups to nominate candidates not affiliated with any political parties, a welcome step towards growth of democracy. Three categories of candidates participating in the election were- OCSE/ODIHR 2000)

- First class included candidates nominated by local representatives like Jokorgy Kenes of Karakalpakstan, Regional and Tashkent city and Councils of People’s Deputies. These candidates were called “Executive Body” candidates and required no petitions or other approvals.
- Second class included candidates who had to get 50,000 signatures and not more than 8 percent could be collected from any one region of the Republic. These candidates were nominated by political parties registered by the Ministry of Justice.
- Third class included independent candidates nominated by the initiative groups and they were required to get signatures of more than 8 percent of the total voters in a district.

The candidates for the “Executive Bodies” were employees of Khokimats while the candidates nominated by the Initiative groups were supported by one of the five registered political parties (ibid) Independent candidates failed to get the minimum 4,500 signatures without support of the local authorities (ibid). The five registered political parties were the People’s Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (PDPU), Vatan Taraqqiyoty (Homeland Progress), Adolat (Social Democratic Party - Justice), Milliy Ticklanish (National Revival Democratic Party) and Fidokorlar (National Democratic Party - Self-Sacrificers (ibid). 1010 candidates participated in the election. Seventy percent of the candidates represented on of the five officially registered parties.

The table below shows the number of registered candidates belonging to the Executive Bodies, Political Parties and candidates nominated by the Initiative groups.
Table 6.1
Registered Candidates in the 1999 Parliamentary Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominating Bodies/Political Parties</th>
<th>Number of Applications submitted to the CEC</th>
<th>Number of Registered Candidates by the CEC</th>
<th>Percent of Application/Registration</th>
<th>Percent of Registered Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People’s Democratic Party</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fidokkorlar Party</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatan Tarakkioti</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolat Party</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milli Tiklanish</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total for Political Parties</strong></td>
<td><strong>887</strong></td>
<td><strong>707</strong></td>
<td><strong>81%</strong></td>
<td><strong>70%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Bodies</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens’ Initiative Groups</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of all Candidates</strong></td>
<td><strong>1330</strong></td>
<td><strong>1010</strong></td>
<td><strong>76%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


About 95.03 percent of the electorate took part in the polls (OSCE/ODIHR 2000). The PDPU won the largest number of seats in the election followed by Fidokkorlar. Initiative groups represented only 6 percent of the total deputies in the Parliament. The table below shows the outcome of the election.
Table- 6.2

1999 Parliamentary Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominating Bodies/Political Parties</th>
<th>Number of Deputies elected on the First round</th>
<th>Number of Deputies elected on the Second Round</th>
<th>Total number of elected Deputies</th>
<th>Percent of Elected Deputies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People’s Democratic Party</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fidokkorlar Party</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatan Tarakkioti</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolat Party</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milli Tiklanish</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for Political Parties</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Bodies</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens’ Initiative Groups</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of all Candidates</strong></td>
<td><strong>184</strong></td>
<td><strong>65</strong></td>
<td><strong>249</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Limited Election Assessment Mission of the OSCE reported that- (ibid: 1-2) “neither the registered parties nor independent candidates nominated by citizens’ initiative groups offered genuine alternatives to the electorate. During the pre-election phase, individuals, groups, political parties and non-governmental organisations that oppose the government could not freely associate, present their views and take part in the political and electoral process. Freedom of association is limited through denial of registration by the Ministry of Justice to non-governmental organisations and political parties that criticise state authorities and their policy. Freedom of assembly is limited by a Soviet era decree, which only permits indoor public meetings and demonstrations, and only with prior consent of authorities. The electronic and printed media are subject to structural censorship through direct control, as well as licensing and registration obstacles”.

The OSCE mission also raised objection to the division of three categories of candidates, which is discriminatory in nature. Campaigning opportunities were restricted
and absence of independent mass media denied "genuine political debate and campaign", emphasised the OSCE mission (ibid: 3).

The year 2002 saw a major change in the Republic. Uzbekistan introduced bicameral legislature in 2002 after a national referendum. The two houses of the Oliy Majlis are-Legislative Chamber (Lower Chamber) consisting of 120 seats and a Senate (Upper Chamber) consisting of 100 seats. The members of the Legislative Chamber are directly elected. The term of the office for both the houses is five years. The table below highlights the share of seats of each province to the Legislative Chamber.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Tashkent</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andijan</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bukhara</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jizzakh</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navoi</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namangan</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samarkand</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrdarya</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surkhandary</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tashkent</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferghana</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khorezm</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kashkadarya</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Republic of</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karakalpakstan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>120</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


For the seats in Senate, eighty four seats are elected-each province (12 provinces, Tashkent city and the Republic of Karakalpakstan) elects six members and the President appoints sixteen members to the Senate (Songstad 2005:3). The 2002 referendum took away the rights of the local government bodies to nominate candidates for the elections to
Parliamentary Elections for the bi-cameral Legislature was held on 26 December 2004 and 9 January 2005. The first round of the election held on 26 December elected sixty-two Deputies and the second round held on 9 January elected fifty-eight Deputies. The election lacked genuine multi-party politics. In the 2004 Parliamentary election, five parties were registered and was allowed to nominate candidates for the elections. All these parties were endorsed by the government. Below are the details of the five registered political parties in Uzbekistan, which took part in the election (ibid).

The People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (PDPU) is a “left-wing” party established in November 1991. At the time of the 2004 election the Party had 580,000 members. Its primary objective is “to safeguard social protection in the transition to market economy and protect the needy and socially vulnerable groups”.

Social-Democratic Party “Adolat” was established in February 1995 and in 2004 it had 50,000 members. It supports trade union and protect the socially vulnerable section of the population.

National Democratic Party Milliy Tiklanish was established in June 1995 and in 2004 had 50,000 members. The main objectives of the Party are revival of Uzbek culture, promoting solidarity with the rest of Central Asia, and supporting the idea of a greater Turkestan homeland.

National Democratic Party Fidokorlar created in April 2000 “tries to portray itself as the party of the country's new, young elite”. After 1999 Parliamentary elections, the Watan Taraqqiyoti party merged with Fidokorlar. During the 2004 election it had 61,750 members. The Party nominated Karimov's candidature for the 2000 Presidential election.

The Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (LDPU) created in November 2003 had 141,818 members in 2004. The party addresses the issues of the young people and “vows to work towards the encouragement of entrepreneurship and initiative, rule of law and market economy”. The Party nominated Karimov for the 2007 Presidential election.
Out of the five parties only PDPU and LDPU could put up candidates for almost all the 120 electoral districts (OSCE/ODIHR 2005: 4). Opposition groups like Erk, Birlik, Ozod Dekhonlar and Party of Agrarians and Entrepreneurs were not allowed to participate in the election. None of these parties could register, which is mandatory to participate in the election. The non-participation of genuine opposition groups in the election questions the democratic credentials of the Republic.

The registered political parties nominated one candidate per electoral district (Songstad 2005:9). A positive development of the 2004 election was that each party had to reserve 30 percent of its seats for female candidates (ibid). 517 candidates were registered for the election. The table below gives the details about the Parties and their candidates.

Table- 6.4
Parliamentary Election 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Registered Candidates</th>
<th>Actual Number of Candidates</th>
<th>% of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People’s Democratic Party</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Democratic party Adolat</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Democratic party Milliy Tiklanish</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Democratic party Fidokorlar</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democratic Party</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative groups</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


About 85 percent of the electorate took part in the election, according to official estimates. The table below gives figure of participation in the election. However, independent observers claimed that the actual participation was far less (Saidazimova 200
Table 6.5

Participation in the 2004 Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number of Voters</th>
<th>Number of Cast Votes</th>
<th>Percent turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Tashkent</td>
<td>1,236,607</td>
<td>1,001,651</td>
<td>81.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andijan</td>
<td>1,297,947</td>
<td>1,139,597</td>
<td>87.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bukhara</td>
<td>828,978</td>
<td>716,236</td>
<td>86.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jizzakh</td>
<td>510,793</td>
<td>452,562</td>
<td>88.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navoi</td>
<td>474,086</td>
<td>381,639</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namangan</td>
<td>1,138,834</td>
<td>1,005,590</td>
<td>88.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samarkand</td>
<td>1,540,761</td>
<td>1,305,024</td>
<td>84.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrdarya</td>
<td>341,964</td>
<td>297,166</td>
<td>86.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surkhandarya</td>
<td>977,338</td>
<td>798,485</td>
<td>81.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tashkent</td>
<td>1,449,616</td>
<td>1,193,033</td>
<td>82.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferghana</td>
<td>1,661,508</td>
<td>1,425,937</td>
<td>87.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khorezm</td>
<td>824,543</td>
<td>700,037</td>
<td>84.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kashkadarya</td>
<td>1,226,010</td>
<td>1,060,498</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Republic of Karakalpakstan</td>
<td>844,724</td>
<td>719,704</td>
<td>85.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14,323,709</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,197,159</strong></td>
<td><strong>85.1</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The figures are based on Central Election Commission of Uzbekistan

The table below gives the Party wise allocation of seats in the December 2004 Parliamentary election.

Table- 6.6

Election Results of 26 December 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People's Democratic Party</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Democratic party <em>Adolat</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Democratic party <em>Milliy Tiklanish</em></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Democratic party <em>Fidokorlar</em></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democratic party</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voters’ initiative groups</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>62</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first round of the election, LDP received the highest seats (21) of the total 62 seats. After the second round of election was over in January 2005, LDP was declared the winner. The Party is supported by President Karimov. About 230 observers from OCSE, CIS and SCO monitored the election (Saidazimova 2004). OSCE/ODIHR established a limited election observation mission for the election. The OSCE election monitoring mission expressed their dis-satisfaction with the conduct of the election. It said, the election

"fell significantly short of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections, despite minor improvements identified in the election law. The implementation of the election legislation by the authorities failed to ensure a pluralistic, competitive and transparent election. An analysis of the election platforms of the five registered political parties revealed no significant differences, and in general neither they, nor independent candidates nominated by initiative groups, provided the electorate with a genuine choice. Fundamental freedoms in Uzbekistan remain severely restricted, and the relevant principles necessary for a meaningful democratic election process, such as freedom of expression, association and assembly, were not respected" (OCSE/ODIHR 2005:1).

The mission further highlighted that-

"all of the principal laws governing the electoral process – the law on Elections for the Oliy Majlis, the law on Political Parties, the law on the Central Election Committee and the laws that regulate the functioning of the mass media - need to be thoroughly reviewed----- The absence of a diverse and genuinely independent mass media prevented any meaningful political debate, and thus negated the essence of an election campaign period. Whilst censorship is prohibited, in reality, the authorities exert a tight control on the mass media through registration and licensing regulations. The tight control by the state, combined with heavy taxation and other forms of pressure, apparently resulted in self-censorship" (ibid: 1-2).

The CIS observer mission termed the election as free and open (Saidazimova 2004). Vladimir Rushailo, the head of the CIS observation mission called the poll as "legitimate, free, and transparent" (RFERL 2004). Members of Erk called the election as a “crime against the Uzbek people”; the opposition parties also raised doubts about the official figures indicating high participation in the election (ibid). Scholars like Aftab Kazi (2005: 16) were of the opinion that “the Parliamentary elections were well organized and transparent, hence a substantial step forward in the democratic transition”. He further opined that-
“Uzbekistan’s elections may not have been conducted at the standards established by the OSCE. Yet different political cultures cannot be judged uniformly outside their operating domains. Comparing Uzbekistan’s election with West European elections is unlikely to provide contextually correct conclusions. A deeper understanding of regional realities indicates that the elections were a step forward in the electoral process, hence forming part of a gradual approach toward the creation of pluralism. Despite the controversy over the rejection of opposition, the December 26 elections introduced different political parties with their own identities, notwithstanding their coalition with the ruling party, and a commendable electoral management” (ibid: 15-16).

The next Parliamentary election for the Lower House of the Oliy Majlis took place in December 2009. The first round of election took place on 27 December, 2009 and the second round of election was held on 10 January, 2010. The number of seats of the Lower House of the Parliament was increased from 120 to 150 in December 2008. Out of these 150 seats, fifteen seats are reserved for the Ecological Movement. The Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan established in 2008 deals mainly with environmental issues. 517 candidates participated in the election (RIA Novosti 2009). All the four parties that contested the election were like the earlier elections pro-government and hardly there was any genuine multi-party contest. The number of candidates each party put up was - the Adolat Social Democratic Party 123, Milliy Tiklanish Democratic Party 125, the Liberal Democratic Party 135 and the People's Democratic Party 134 candidates (ibid). Independent candidates or candidate nominated by “Initiative Groups” were not allowed to contest the 2009 Parliamentary election (Pannier 2009). During the election campaign, criticism against each other focused “more on the conduct of other parties than on core issues such as social improvements or government reforms” (ibid).

According to official statistics 87.8 percent of the electorate participated in the polls (Ahmedova 2010). Fifty-three members from LDPU, thirty-two from PDPU, thirty-one deputies from Milliy Tiklanish Democratic Party of Uzbekistan and 19 MPs from Adolat Social Democratic Party of Uzbekistan won the election (Ahmedova 2010). Out of 150 members, thirty-three members i.e.22 percent were women and fifteen seats are reserved for the Ecology Movement of Uzbekistan (ibid).

According to government sources, more than 270 observers from thirty-six states and four international organizations, OSCE/ODIHR, CIS Executive Committee, SCO and
the OIC and over sixty thousand observers and authorized representatives of political parties that nominated their candidates monitored the election (ibid). The opinions of the international observers monitoring the election varied. The CIS observers’ mission said that “the election process was conducted in an organized way and held high standards – not only in the center, but also in the regions” and that the elections demonstrated “political maturity” (ibid). The OSCE refused to be an observer in the election as it was dissatisfied with the democratic reforms in the country. OSCE said that “the basic freedoms in the country are still limited, the existing political spectrum does not give the electorate opportunities for a genuine choice among the competing political alternatives, the previous key recommendations of the OSCE remain incomplete, and there is no progress in putting the existing legal system in accordance with the OSCE rules” (ibid).

The Human Rights Watch Advocacy for Europe and Central Asia described the “election campaign in Uzbekistan as oppressed by the government. Human rights are violated everywhere around the country, there is no political competition, all the parties are running for this election are supporting the government” (RIA Novosti 2009).

**U.S. view on democratization in Uzbekistan**

The U.S. like the other western countries remains critical of the elections in Uzbekistan. The Annual Reports published by the U.S State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor have criticized the elections in Uzbekistan. Lack of genuine opposition voices, restriction on registering political parties not endorsing government views, restricted freedom of press, curtailing freedom of expression, absence of real power in the Parliament to initiate laws, President enjoying absolute power are some of the lacunae, indicates the State Department’s Annual Reports.

Back in 2001, the State Department’s 2001 Annual Report pointed out that Uzbekistan failed to make any substantial progress in the area of democratization. The Report stated, “the Government of Uzbekistan has not taken effective steps to build democracy. Despite a constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech, political opposition to the government is not permitted in practice. The most recent parliamentary elections [December 1999 election] were not democratic and the January 2000 Presidential
elections were not democratic” (U.S. Department of State 2002a). The 1999 Parliamentary election did not reflect a genuine multi-party election as no opposition candidates were allowed to participate, pointed out the Report.

The picture in Uzbekistan has remained more or less the same even today. The other elections have also been criticized. The 2004 Parliamentary election, according to the State Department’s Country Report on Uzbekistan (2006), fell significantly short of international standards. The State Department’s 2004 Country Report on Uzbekistan (2005) observed -

“Uzbekistan is an authoritarian state with limited civil rights. The Constitution provides for a presidential system with separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, however, in practice, President Islam Karimov and the centralized executive branch that serves him dominate political life and exercised nearly complete control over the other branches. On December 26, elections were held for seats in the lower chamber of the Supreme Assembly (Oily Majlis) that fell significantly short of international standards for democratic elections. The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, the executive branch heavily influenced the courts and did not ensure due process”.

The State Department’s 2008 Country Report on Uzbekistan like the previous years reports have observed that “Uzbekistan is an authoritarian state” and despite the Constitution providing for a Presidential system with separation of powers, the actual power lies in the hand of the President Karimov and the centralized executive branch. Both the Houses of the Oily Majlis consist of officials appointed by the President and members of parties that supported him, emphasized the Report.

The 2009 Parliamentary election has also been criticized by the West. The U.S. has sent five teams as observers for the 2009 Parliamentary election (Embassy of United States in Uzbekistan 2009). The team comprised of staff of the U.S. Embassy and members of American families in Uzbekistan (ibid). A spokesperson from the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent after the election said that the 2009 elections did not “allow for the participation of political parties with diverse view points---- as only representatives from parties that reflect the government’s views were on the ballot” and could not reach international standards (Tynan 2009).
However, the State Department in its 2009 Country Report on Uzbekistan have pointed out that there were few improvements towards democratization in the 2009 Parliamentary election, indicating better relation between the two countries. Anomalies in the election procedures are still present in the country and one such major drawback is the practice of ‘family voting’. The Report stated- (U.S. Department of State 2010)

“changes to election law ensured that only members of political parties (all of whom supported the president) were eligible to run for office. For the first time, however, the political parties engaged in debate and criticized each other’s proposed policies. Election observers noted that the elections themselves appeared to be conducted with fewer irregularities than in previous years. Multiple voting instances were the most commonly observed problem, attributed to a tradition of "family voting," in which one person casts votes for an entire family”

The Section 3 of the 2009 Country Report on Uzbekistan (2010) further stated some of the major drawbacks prevailing in the country, which reflects the U.S. dissatisfaction with the growth of democratization in Uzbekistan-

“the Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government; however, in practice, citizens could not change their government through peaceful and democratic means. The Government severely restricted freedom of expression and repressed opposition groups and individuals. The Government is highly centralized and is ruled by President Karimov and the executive branch through sweeping decree powers, primary authority for drafting legislation, and control of government appointments, most of the economy, and the security forces”.

For the Presidential elections too, the State Department expressed that none of the three Presidential elections were free and fair. The 2008 Country Report observed that the 2007 Presidential election “fell short of international democratic norms”.

The U.S. also expressed its dis-satisfaction with the referendums in Uzbekistan. Citing lack of legitimacy of the Karimov government to hold a referendum, the U.S. government did not send observers to monitor the national referendum held on 27 January 2002. The referendum was held just one day ahead of the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Elizabeth Jones and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Mira Ricardel’s visit to Uzbekistan. Addressing a Press Conference on 29 January 2002, the Assistant Secretary of State Elizabeth Jones said, “we did not send observers to the referendum because we believe that there must be free
and fair elections for the leader of the country before a referendum would be valid” (Embassy of United States in Uzbekistan 2002). The delegation visited Uzbekistan from 28-29 January 2002 to participate in the Joint Security Consultations, which reflected that though the U.S. criticized the lack of growth of genuine democratization in the Republic was not ready to allow these issues to affect the bilateral relation, as cooperation from Uzbekistan was vital for the U.S. mission in Afghanistan.

**Human Rights Issue**

Poor human rights records in the Republic have been a major irritant in developing closer cooperation between Uzbekistan and the West. Crack down on opposition forces critical of government, torture, custodial death, suppression of free media, attack on ordinary citizens in name of tackling religious extremism etc are common in Uzbekistan.

The U.S. Department of State 2005 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in Uzbekistan pointed out the following human rights problems prevalent in the Republic, which remains more or less same at present too (U.S. Department of State 2006)-

- "inability of citizens to change their government through peaceful and democratic means
- prison deaths under suspicious circumstances
- lack of due process
- routine and systematic torture and abuse of detainees by security forces.
- Intentional and involuntary committal of sane persons to psychiatric treatment as a form of detention or punishment
- poor and life-threatening prison conditions
- increased incidents of arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention
- impunity of officials responsible for abuses
- lengthy pre-trial detention
- infringement of the right to a fair public trial and restricted access to independent monitors
- approximately five thousand political prisoners
- frequent searches of homes by authorities
- occasional eviction of residents from their homes without due process
- regular or frequent detention or mistreatment of family members of persons under criminal investigations
- government limitations on the freedom of speech and press
- arrest, harassment, intimidation, and violence by police and other government forces against journalists
- self-censorship by journalists
- blocked public access to internet content objectionable to government
- restricted freedom of assembly and association
• blocked registration of many religious congregations
• societal discrimination against ethnic Uzbek Christians
• limited freedom of movement through the use of exit visas, a local registration regime, and deportation on political grounds
• no formal recognition of asylum of refugee status or established system for providing protection to refugees
• frequent harassment of members of unregistered parties
• widespread public perception of government corruption
• limited respect for constitutional rights to access government information affecting the public
• regular threats and intimidation by police and security forces to prevent human rights activists from conducting activities
• restrictions on human rights and other activities of international bodies and foreign diplomatic missions
• persistent societal discrimination against persons with disabilities
• trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation, and men for labor exploitation
• denial of workers' rights to associate and bargain collectively
• reports of forced or compulsory labor; continued mobilization of youth for work in the cotton harvest”.

In June 2002, the Government of Uzbekistan allowed the UN expert team on torture to visit Uzbekistan for a fact-finding mission. Special Rapporteur Theo van Boven and his team visited Uzbekistan from 24 November to 6 December 2002. According to some observers, this step by the Karimov government was a result of strengthened Uzbekistan-U.S. relation since 11 September and Uzbekistan’s commitment under the Strategic Partnership Agreement.

The Special Rapporteur team expressed concern over the poor human rights situation in the Republic. In spite of repeated requests for clarification of individual cases from the Uzbek government over the years, the Special Rapporteur complained that it failed to get responses from the Uzbek authorities at the time of writing the report (Akbarzadeh 2005:150). The team reported that “torture is being used virtually in all cases in which articles 156 159 and 244 CC—are invoked, in order to extract self-incriminating confessions and to punish those who are perceived by public authorities to be involved in either religious or political activities contrary to State interests (so-called security crimes). These provisions, which are rather vaguely worded and whose scope of application may be subject to various interpretations, are said to have been used in numerous allegedly fabricated cases and to have led to harsh prison sentences” (ibid:151-152). Boven’s report (ibid:153) also highlighted the loopholes in the judicial process-
“lack of statutory powers and lack of independence of judges are alleged to make any defence and any torture complaint meaningless”. The Report also pointed out that a person acquitted after being arrested is viewed as negligence on part of investigator, procurator and the judge involved in the case, which prompts them to use illegal means to get confessions. The team also visited Jaslyk colony in Karakalpakstan, which keeps political prisoners and is notorious for its harsh conditions. The team was not satisfied with the local level cooperation during their visit to Jaslyk. Though the Special Rapporteur had earlier mentioned his desire to spend six hours in the colony, his visit was so arranged by the local authorities that he could spend only two hours at the colony, indicated the Report. Interviews with inmates, which were confidential interviews, were disrupted several times by the Uzbek officials, making it difficult for the team to interact with the inmates freely, stated the Report.

Opposition forces critical of government policies is constantly stifled by the government. As discussed above, atrocities committed on opposition movements like Birlik, Erk and others forced their leaders to leave the country. Activists and their family members of these groups living in the Republic have been frequently subjected to torture and intimidation by the Uzbek authorities, making it difficult for these groups to operate in the Republic. The authorities have repeatedly refused to register Uzbek human rights groups and political parties critical of the government. Till now only two organizations working on human rights have been registered---Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan (IHROU) and Ezgulik. Other human rights groups like Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, Mazlum and the Mother’s Against the Death Penalty and Torture have not been allowed to register.

Media freedom too has been severely curtailed. According to Uzbek law, criticism of the President and public insult to the President is a crime punishable up to five years in prison (U.S. Department of State 2010). Article 67, Chapter 15 of the Constitution, however, states that “the mass media shall be free--- and censorship is impermissible”. The Uzbekistan National News Agency (UzA) in cooperation with the Presidential staff solely controls all news and information published in the Republic (U.S. Department of State, 2010). Few private newspapers with limited circulation are allowed
in the country. Private newspapers like Russian-language newspapers—Novosti Uzbekistana, Zerkalo XXI Veka, and Biznes Vestnik Vostoka and Uzbek-language newspapers, Hurriyat (owned by the Journalists' Association) and Mohiyat (owned by Turkiston-Press, a nongovernmental information agency loyal to the state) are operating in the Republic; however, they too carry pro-government views (U.S. Department of State 2010).

Defending the government, Ibrohim Normatov, Head of the Uzbek State TV in 1997 remarked that the “BBC, Radio Liberty and Human Rights Watch organization aim to undermine political stability in Uzbekistan through a deliberate policy of disinformation” (SWB 1997). He further stated that “all the positive changes that have happened in the Uzbek press are misrepresented by the press in the West. To show the Uzbek press in black colours alone is a test or means of survival for some of our envious colleagues” (ibid).


“under pre-existing law, the composition of the boards is, at the time a newspaper is established, effectively subjected to Government veto. The net effect of the changes was an abolition of prior censorship, tempered by new possibilities for both hostile board interference and legalized retribution against media outlets and their employees. Ordinary citizens remained afraid to express views critical of the President and the Government in public. Self censorship still occurred”.

Uzbekistan refused to give permission to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Voice of America, and BBC World Service to broadcast from within the country and has refused to accredit foreign journalists and local correspondents for those or other Western media, including Reuters and the Associated Press (U.S. Department of State 2010). Journalists have been frequently subjected to harassments for independently expressing their opinions. In June 2009, the Uzbek government accused eight journalists from Yetti
Iglim newspaper and Irmoq magazine (private, Uzbek language publications) of membership in the banned Nur religious movement and convicted all the accused with sentences ranging from six and one-half years to twelve years in prison (ibid). In July 2009, Uzbekistan convicted Dilmurod Sayid, an independent journalist on charges of extortion and bribery and sentenced him to twelve and half years in prison (ibid). Sayid was arrested after he exposed corruption of local government officials (ibid). Again in December 2009, the Uzbek Communication and Information Agency filed a defamation case against photographer Umida Ahmedova for her work in the documentaries—"The Burden of Virginity" and "Customs of Men and Women" (ibid). The government claimed that her photographs damaged the image of the country (ibid). The government also forced Charter IV, a Ukrainian non-profit organization to cancel its training programmes for journalists, scheduled to be held at Tashkent in May 2009 (ibid).

Back in 2003, Ruslan Sharipov, former head of the Independent Union of Journalists of Uzbekistan (IUJU) was arrested on charges of sodomy, corruption of youth and sex with under age persons. However, observers are of the opinion that government actions against Sharipov were “fabricated or selective prosecution” and were inflicted to punish Sharipov for his critical articles (U.S. Department of State 2004). In 2004, Sharipov was released as part of a Work Furlough Programme after which he had left the country (U.S. Department of State 2005).

Torture to obtain confession during pre-trial detention is a common feature in Uzbekistan. In 2008, Turgunov, a human rights activist was poured boiling water while in police detention centre (International Federation of Human Rights 2009). Some activists like Elena Urlaeva, Shokhida Yuldasheva, Lydia Volkobrun, Jamshid Karimov, Mutabar Tojibaeva and others have been forcefully put in psychiatric hospitals (International Federation of Human Rights 2009). The 2009 Report at the 96th Session of the Human Rights Committee observed –

“country keeps denying its citizens their rights to life, protection against torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of association. Since it was last examined by the Human Rights Committee in 2005, the Uzbek authorities have engaged into a public relations exercise on the international scene. They have contracted new international human rights obligations, and have released from jail a few human rights
defenders who had gained international notoriety. In the meantime, they have refused to engage into a genuine dialogue on the very noticeable violations of their international human rights obligations, rejected the idea of an international inquiry into the Andijan events and persistently denied the use of torture in the country. They have continued to harass and arrest human rights defenders, sentencing some of them to long prison terms on fabricated charges”.

Post Andijan incident, widespread human rights violation was reported in Uzbekistan. The State Department’s 2005 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Uzbekistan observed-

“following the May violence in Andijon, the government arrested several prominent human rights and political activists and others who spoke to journalists and made public statements suggesting abuse by government forces or criticizing the role of the president or other government officials in the events, charging them with slander against the president. Following the May events, criticism of the government, particularly by religious figures, journalists and human rights activists, became more restricted. In one example, on August 27, police arrested human rights activist Elena Urrayeva and forcibly committed her to psychiatric institution for two months for allegedly distributing leaflets with caricatures of the national seal”(U.S. Department of State 2006).

With the deteriorating Uzbekistan-U.S. bilateral ties after 2005, the Uzbek government restricted the work of both domestic and U.S. funded democracy, civil society and human rights organizations; many of the NGO’s were closed or suspended. Karimov’s suspicion for international NGOs began after the Rose Revolution of 2003 in Georgia, which ousted President Shevardnadz. According to some observers the U.S. funded NGOs working in Georgia, supported the revolution, which made Karimov suspicious of western NGOs working in Uzbekistan. Since December 2003, the government put various restrictions on the working of NGOs (Kamalova 2007). After the Andijan incident, the Uzbek government closed all U.S. sponsored American Corners, also restricted the functioning of the U.S. funded student exchange programmes, and other programmes (U.S. Department of State, 2005-2006).

In 2005, about 200 local NGO’s were forced to shut down (U.S. Department of State 2007). In 2006, Freedom House, working on Human Rights, International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), American bar Association’s Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI, American Councils for International Education (ACTR/ACCELS, a student exchange Organization and several other NGOs were shut
down (ibid). Back in 2005, the Open Society Institute was closed in Uzbekistan. Several legislative measures further made it difficult for NGOs to register and operate smoothly in the Republic. In December 2003, the government made it mandatory for all international NGOs to re-register (Kamalova 2007: 6). The February 2004 banking decree, was apparently introduced to prevent money laundering but in practice was selectively used to prevent both registered and unregistered NGOs working on human rights or political work from receiving international financial assistance (U.S. Department of State 2007). By an amendment to the Administrative Liability Code in December 2005, the government could impose huge fines for "violations of procedures governing NGO activity, as well as for "involving others" in illegal NGOs" and the law, however, did not clearly indicate the term "illegal NGOs"(those forcibly suspended or closed, or those unregistered) (ibid). The amendments also increased penalties against international NGOs for engaging in political activities, works inconsistent with their charters, or activities not approved in advance by the government. According to the decree, all NGOs have to take government permission to operate in the Republic, to present report and submit documents indicating the use of property and financial resources (Kamalova 2007:7).

In 2007, another Legislation was passed, which provided $1.5 million government fund to support NGOs and other civil society institutions in Uzbekistan (U.S. Department of State 2009). The fund would increase dependence of the NGOs on the State (ibid). However, independent organizations could also apply for this fund (ibid). In January 2007, a law was passed guaranteeing certain rights and freedoms to NGOs, including the right to conduct "any type of activity not prohibited by law and in line with the purposes set by their charters (ibid). The legislation also prohibits interfering with the activities of such organizations, provides for property rights and the rights of NGOs to "seek, receive, research, disseminate, use, and keep information in accordance with legislation" (ibid).

In 2008, two U.S. based NGO's (Institute for New Democracies and National Democratic Institute, NDI) were given registration, first time since Andijan incident (ibid). In December 2008, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) was re-registered.
Despite widespread human rights violation in Uzbekistan, some positive steps have taken place in the country in the past few years. In January 2002, Uzbekistan allowed International Committee on Red Cross to visit pre-trial facilities in Uzbekistan. In January 2008, two laws came into force in Uzbekistan—abolition of death penalty and introduction of habeas corpus. In 2007-2008, some human rights activists like Ihtiyor Hamroev, Umida Niyazova and Mutabar Tojibaeva were released (International Federation of Human Rights 2009). In December 2008, the Uzbek government registered the French NGO ACTED working on public health issues, first time that an NGO that was forced to leave the country in 2007 regained its legal status (U.S. Department of State 2010). Moreover, Uzbekistan started Human Rights Dialogue with EU and ratified a number of additional human rights instruments like Second Optional Protocol to ICCPR, ILO Conventions 182 and 138 etc (ibid). However, critics view these measures as mere token gestures on part of the government and that the real picture is still grim in the Republic.

SETBACK IN BILATERAL RELATIONS

Andijan Incident

Uzbekistan-U.S. relations worsened after the 12-13 May 2005 violence in Andijan, a city in eastern Uzbekistan with Namangan region in the north and north-west, Kyrgyzstan in the east and the Ferghana Region in the south and south-west. The incident had far-reaching impact on the domestic and foreign policy of Uzbekistan. The reports by the government and of various human rights groups and activists differ considerably, raising discrepancies about the actual turn out of events. Whatever, may have been the true picture, the incident gave a severe blow to the Uzbekistan-U.S. strategic partnership.

According to some observers, the May 2005 incident in Andijan was the outcome the people's frustration against the government action. It began with the arrest of twenty-three businesspersons in June 2004 by the Uzbek authorities. The authorities alleged that these men belonged to the banned Akramiya Islamic group and their trial began in February 2005. The arrested men, however, denied any allegiance to any extremist
groups. During the trial, which was criticized for being unfair, supporters and family members of those arrested staged peaceful demonstrations against the trial outside the court (Human Rights Watch 2005). The arrested businessmen were: Rasuljon Ajikhalilov, Abdumajit Ibragimov, Abdulboki Ibragimov, Tursunbek Nazarov, Makhammadshokir Artikov, Odil Makhsdaliyev, Dadakhon Nodirov, Shamsitdin Atamatov, Ortikboy Akbarov, Rasul Akbarov, Shavkat Shokirov, Abdurauf Khamidov, Muzaffar Kodirov, Mukhammadaziz Mamadiyev, Nasibillo Maksudov, Adkhamjon Babojonov, Khakimjon Zakirov, Gulomjon Nadirov, Musojon Mirzaboiev, Dilshchodbek Mamadiyev, Abdulvosid Igamov, Shokurjon Shakirov, and Ravshanbek Mazimjonov (ibid).

These men owned production companies (like bakery, tailoring firms, construction companies etc) providing jobs to the locals and was generally considered as good employers. These production units offered better pay packages than government jobs (Eurasianet.org 2005a). These men were also engaged in charitable works like running hospitals, orphanage etc to help the poor. Many view that the financial assets at the disposal of these men were the cause behind their arrest; these assets were confiscated after these men were arrested (Saidazimova 2005). Moreover, the companies run by these men were shut down as long as the case was not decided, for which many locals lost their jobs, creating further discontent among the locals (ibid).

The government claimed that these men belonged to the Akramiya Islamic group. However, others see the arrest as fallout of power struggle in the region. These men were close to the former Provincial Governor of Andijan Regional Legislature, Kobiljon Obidov, who was sacked in May 2004 (Eurasianet.org 2005a). Obidov was said to be involved in various corruption charges, which led to his dismissal, despite being once close to President Karimov. Obidov was replaced by Saydullo Begaliyev, who upon taking charge tried to do away with people close to the earlier administration. He began criminal proceedings against many members of the Obidov’s administration (ibid). The new administration also attacked the entrepreneurs close to Obidov (ibid). It is reported that the twenty-three businesspersons arrested had opposed the new administration’s
drive to take over their businesses and the government in retaliation put them behind bar (ibid).

However, all these men denied having any link with the group and claimed that they have been tortured to confess. Initially, these men were arrested on charges under Article 159 of the Uzbek Criminal Code relating to unconstitutional activity (Saidazimova 2005). Once convicted under this Article, a person is liable to face sentence up to twenty years in prison (ibid). Later on, the charges on these men were reduced from terrorist activities to crime for organizing criminal groups because of strong protest in the city as well as by the accused (ibid). Once convicted under these charge, these people could face sentence up to seven years (ibid).

AbduMannob Polat, (2007) leader of the banned Birlik Party wrote that by the time the trial of the twenty-three arrested businessmen were coming to an end by 11 May their supporters were getting ready for tougher action, if denied a fair trial. Relatives of some were reported to have said, “we are ready for any actions in order to free our innocent brothers (ibid: 9-10). Some others said, “if the sentence is unjust, we will be forced to act. We are now waiting---- we are not a mob; we’re intelligent people, so we are waiting for the sentence (ibid:10). Sensing the general discontent regarding the trial and that harsher sentence could lead to violence, it is said that the authorities planned to pronounce lesser sentences of three to seven years to the guilty and agreed to release three of the defendants (ibid). There were reports that the government has arrested some of the demonstrators as pre-emptive measures, however, such reports were never confirmed (ibid). Some argued that the news of arrest of the demonstrators on 12 May instigated the demonstrators to turn violent (ibid).

In a Press Conference on 16 May 2005, President Karimov emphasized that-

“a group of armed felons attacked the guards on duty of the patrol-sentry service in Andijan city at 00:30 and shot four people, having seized weapons. Later the group attacked the military unit No.34 at 13:30 and killed about five people. The group seized additional weapons, including machine guns, pistols and grenades. The guerillas also captured military lorry ZIL-130. Using this lorry they attacked remand prison and released almost all inmates, total number of them was some 600. Afterwards they started robbery and took over all cars on their way. They directed to three buildings, including buildings of regional departments of Interior..."
Ministry and National Security Service and regional administration. The group seized the regional administration of Andijan as the guards were not armed, while staff of regional departments of Interior Ministry and National Security Service resisted. Uzbek leader said the group was not able to detain them. After the group captured the building, they started to call their relatives, families and wives and demanded from them to arrive to building of administration and to stay around the building. The guerrillas used these people, including children, women and elder people, as live shield. Altogether there were about 300 of these people around the building” (Embassy of Uzbekistan to the United States 2005a).

In the Press Conference (2005a), President Karimov pointed out that he reached Andijan at 7:30 in the evening of 13 May. Interior Minister Zokir Alimatov and the head of the regional administration Saydullo Begaliyev from the Uzbek side negotiated with the rebels to settle the standoff, which continued for nine hours (ibid). The Uzbek government also claimed that the group made telephone calls to Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan (ibid). President Karimov further stated that the attack was well organized planned mission and not a spontaneous action, an attempt to topple the government (ibid). While answering questions at the Press Conference, President Karimov emphasized that the group fired first and the government law enforcement bodies retaliated in self-defence (ibid). President Karimov categorically mentioned that there was no crowd at the Central Square of the city. People gathered around three different buildings—regional administration building, regional police department building and National Security Service building (ibid). About 200-300 people, mainly relatives of the attackers had gathered around the building (ibid).

Shirin Akiner6 (2005) of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in an independent assessment of the event observed that some of the claims by the Uzbekistan government were true and that media reports in some cases has been exaggerated. She highlighted that the attack was not a “spontaneous demonstration but a carefully prepared attack”; the demonstrators carried arms and had some military training. She further stated that the demonstrators chose Friday as the day of action to give the protest a religious colour, which failed. The attack was mainly to release the Akromiya members in the prison, pointed out Dr. Akiner. She also noted that the

---

attacker had expected that other prisoners in the prison would join them but on contrary, prisoners who were forcibly moved out of the prison voluntarily return in a couple of days. Other than locals, the insurgents also included people from other parts of Uzbekistan and neighbouring Kyrgyzstan and other CIS states, stressed the independent report. She also observed that the possibility of external funding received by the insurgents could not be rule out. She repudiated the media claim of thousands of people dying and several others injured in the incident and rather claimed that the government figures to be true. Negating claims by the foreign media that government attacked “innocent bystanders”, the report claimed that clash was only between troops and insurgents.

The Human Rights Watch Report of June 2005 gives a different picture of the incident. The Report stated gross violation of basic human rights by the Uzbek authorities, killing several hundreds. According to the Report (Human Rights Watch 2005:2), “the scale of this killing was so extensive, and its nature was so indiscriminate and disproportionate, that it can best be described as a massacre”. The Report also stated that the protestors did not have any Islamist agenda like establishing an Islamic State in Uzbekistan unlike as claimed by the Uzbek government. The Report (2005:11) pointed out that “a small number of protesters were armed, there is no indication that they were ‘fanatics’ and ‘militants’ with an Islamist agenda as alleged by President Karimov”. The prisoners interviewed by the Human Rights Watch Group told that the attackers set free about thousand prisoners while the government claimed that 527 of the 734 prisoners were freed from the prison.

The protest was mainly to draw the government’s attention to some of the local grievances like economic condition of Andijan, government repression and the unfair trial of the twenty-three businessmen, who have been falsely implicated (ibid). Heavy exchange of gunfire took place at the National Security Service, known as SNB building when the attackers tried to take over the building, killing many of the attackers, stated the Report. The SNB officers were able to crush the attack, said the Report. The attackers took government officials as hostages but did not physically harm them (ibid: 19).
Several people including women and children gathered at the Bobur Square. The Human Rights Watch Report (2005: 16) claimed that “a massive civilian crowd of protesters, as well as the location of a small number of gunman outside the crowd and away from the protesters. -----there were large numbers of women and children among the civilians in the square during the protest”. By noon of 13 May, there were about 10,000 people at the Square (ibid). The government, on the other hand denied that there was a protest at the square (Embassy of the United States in Uzbekistan 2005a).

According to the survey conducted by the Human Rights Watch Group (2005:20), large number of protesters were protesting peacefully and “did not engage in any violence or threats. Women and children were sitting on carpets brought to the square from the hokimat building; at lunch time, food was distributed”. The Report (2005: 20) suggested that government forces attacked the unarmed civilians;-

“at various points during the day, troops in armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and military trucks periodically drove by, firing randomly into the edge of the largely unarmed crowd. The government had also deployed snipers above the square, but neither the snipers nor the drive-by shooters appeared to be directing fire at persons who were posing any threat. ----there were almost no armed men on the square itself, and there is no evidence to suggest that the security forces made any attempts to focus their fire on legitimate targets such as the few gunmen in the square----Means of restoring order or dispersing the crowd short of lethal force do not appear to have been used”.

The attackers wanted to negotiate with the government and used the hostages to connect to government officials in Tashkent. They were successful in talking with Interior Minister Zokirjon Almatov, who refused to accept their demands and later on the government refused to negotiate with the attackers (ibid: 23-24). The Report (2005: 24) observed, “no authorities-other than a few local officials who were taken hostage and thus forced to speak-came to address the people, listened to their demands, or requested that they leave the square”. The government on the other hand claimed that the government officials negotiated with the protesters for nine hours (Embassy of the United States in Uzbekistan 2005a).

Polat (2007: 10) like Dr. Akiner dismisses the idea that the protest was a spontaneous response. He wrote that
“it is clearly impossible to organize a military operation as massive as the one organized on May 12 to 13 in just a few short hours—an uprising on the scale of the one that occurred in Andijan would require many days, if not weeks, of preparation. Forcing authorities to release several, if not most of the defendants and seeing the remainder given much milder sentences in comparison to similar cases could have been a major success for the Andijan demonstrators. In retrospect, it seems that extremists probably miscalculated their level of popular support and thus decided that it was time for an armed military insurgency as the prelude to triggering a broader people’s revolution” (ibid: 10).

Polat (2007:11) ruled out the possibility that people gathered at the Square out of curiosity as the locals have already heard the sounds of gunfire that took place on the night of 12 May between the government forces and the attackers. It is highly improbable that the people did not see that the gunmen have seized the hokimiyat building (ibid). The government officials taken as hostages were tortured by the rebels and used the hostages and women as human shield (ibid). Polat (2007: 13) also supported Dr. Akiner’s view that the Bobur Square was not big enough to accommodate 4000 people.

There were other conspiracy theories, which was circulating after the incident. Some believed that the uprising was provoked by the Uzbek SNB forces. The rivalry between the Interior Ministry and the SNB has existed since the Soviet days, which was believed to have a role in the prison attack. However, Polat (2007:15) ruled out such a possibility, as these claims could not be proved.

After the incident, the government repression increased. Several people were arrested in connection with the Andijan incident. Many fled to Kyrgyzstan to avoid persecution. The government imposed strict rules on the media coverage of the event, banned entry of journalists to the city and punished those who tried to bring out the truth behind the 13 May incident (Human Rights Watch Report 2005:45). The locals fearing government reprisals preferred not to speak about the incident (ibid). Journalist and human rights activists who spoke against the government had to flee the country or were arrested. For example, Saidjahon Zainabitdinov was arrested on 21 May for his independent reporting of the incident, members of the Andijan branch of the Ezgulik, a human rights group were physically assaulted and harassed by the Uzbek authorities (ibid: 48). The government also came down heavily on independent reporters and foreign
organizations. Tulqin Qoraev, a freelance journalist of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) was forced to leave Uzbekistan in July; two employees of the U.S. media organization Internews were convicted by the Uzbek court on charges of producing TV programmes illegally but was later released on amnesty (Kimmage 2005a).

The Uzbek government also became critical of the foreign funded NGOs working in Uzbekistan and alleged that these NGO’s were instigating people against the government. In an interview on the Uzbek TV in July 2005, the Editor in Chief of “O’zbekiston Ovozi” newspaper stated that the “Soros Foundation may seem very fair and protective of democracy and human rights on paper but, in reality what they are involved in is evil things, coups, destruction in countries where they operate, and so on” (Kimmage 2005b). After the incident, almost all foreign funded NGOs were shut down and their re-registration made difficult. Even local NGOs bore the brunt of the government’s action. In 2006, several local courts in Uzbekistan conducted trials of defendants said to be involved in the Andijan incident and mostly all these trials were closed to outside observers (U.S. Department of State 2007).

Uzbekistan’s foreign policy underwent a major change after the Andijan incident. September 11 gave Uzbekistan an opportunity to come closer to the U.S. and thus move out of Russia’s orbit. The tilt towards the west received a setback after the Andijan incident. The U.S. initially moved cautiously to avoid any unpleasant developments. As Cooley (2008:77) indicated that the State Department, Pentagon and CENTCOM did not criticize the Uzbek government immediately after the incident. The U.S. government in the beginning also refused to be part of the NATO Joint Communique demanding an international investigation of the Andijan incident, however, later on the U.S. too called for an international investigation of the incident (ibid). After the Andijan incident, the first visit from the U.S. side took place on 29 May 2005. A delegation led by Senator John McCain (Republican Arizona), Senator Lindsey Graham (Republican South Carolina ) and Senator John Sununu (Republican, New Hampshire) visited Uzbekistan to review the situation. The delegation expressed concern over the poor human rights situation in Uzbekistan and demanded an independent international investigation of the
Andijan incident. The delegation, however, could not meet any Uzbek government officials.

The EU was more critical of the Karimov government’s response to the Andijan incident. The EU demanded an independent international investigation of the incident. The EU imposed visa restrictions on twelve Uzbek government officials, believed to be involved in the Andijan massacre. Moreover, EU also imposed ban on arms sales to Uzbekistan.

Till date, the Uzbek government has refused an international independent investigation. The demand for international investigation has been a thorny issue in Uzbekistan’s relation with the West. For the Uzbek government, the demand for an International Investigation Commission was “groundless” because Uzbekistan as sovereign country has the right to investigate the Andijan incident “independently and to provide detailed information upon its results to UN, as well as relevant European agencies” (Embassy of Uzbekistan to the United States 2005b).

The Uzbek government on 10 June 2005 established an investigation group comprising of qualified professionals and agreed that UN and OSCE missions and the embassies of all countries accredited in Tashkent were allowed to visit Andijan and have direct meetings with the local population (ibid). The group also included members of the embassies of key countries, including UN Security Council members’ states, as well as representatives from the embassies of the neighbouring countries accredited in Tashkent (ibid). The Uzbek Parliament also set up an independent Parliamentary Commission to provide legal assessment of actions of the Government and law-enforcement agencies of the Republic (ibid).

With the pressure increasing for independent investigation, Uzbekistan cut off ties with the West. The closure of the U.S. base at K2 further damaged the bilateral ties, culminating in complete lack of trust on both sides. The extent of the thaw in the Uzbekistan-U.S. bilateral relation after 2005 was visible in the shift in the Uzbekistan’s domestic political circle too. The then Uzbek Defence Minister Qodir Gulomov, one of the strong pro-U.S. leaders was removed from power and convicted of treason.
Fearing international isolation after its relation with the West deteriorated, Uzbekistan moved closer to Russia and China. Both of these countries remained silent on human rights issues. Unlike the West, they did not criticize the Karimov government for its role in handling the Andijan crisis. Both countries sided with Karimov government and agreed that Islamic radical forces had hands in the Andijan incident, much to the liking of President Karimov. China was the first foreign country Karimov visited after Andijan incident. President Karimov visited Russia in June 2005. The tilt towards Russia and China after Andijan incident reflected the shift in Uzbekistan’s foreign policy.

**Closure of the U.S. base at Karshi-Khanabad (K2)**

Uzbekistan allowed the U.S. led coalition forces to use its base at Karshi-Khanabad (K2) in October 2001. The K2 base was used as landing base carrying humanitarian goods by road to Northern Afghanistan and as a refueling base (Wright & Tyson 2005). The U.S. was never allowed to deploy combat aircraft in the base (Cooley 2008). The opening of the base heralded a new beginning in the bilateral relationship. It enhanced Uzbekistan’s international and regional prestige. The Republic also attracted the highest U.S. assistance in the region because of its closeness with the U.S. On the other hand, the U.S. got a base in the region, which was crucial for its mission in Afghanistan.

The U.S. demand for an independent enquiry of the Andijan incident marked the beginning of the thaw in the bilateral relation. Immediately after the Andijan incident, the Uzbek government “imposed ban on all night flights in and out of the (K-2) base” (Daly et al. 2006:96). The final blow came on 29 July 2009 when Uzbekistan asked the U.S. to pull out from the K2 base within 180 days. Cracks in the bilateral relation developed even before the Andijan incident took place. With the colour revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan alleged to be supported by the U.S., President Karimov became worried about the safety of his regime. Moreover, Uzbekistan got frustrated for not getting reply to the six letters it had sent earlier to the State Department regarding the K2 base (ibid: 105). However, the incident that is believed to have triggered Uzbekistan’s decision was the U.S. support for the UN decision to airlift 439 Uzbek political refugees from Kyrgyzstan. These people fled to Kyrgyzstan following the government crackdown.
after the Andijan incident. The Uzbekistan government wanted them returned to Uzbekistan.

Moreover, Uzbekistan was unhappy that the U.S. did not pay any rent for the use of the base unlike the Manas base in Kyrgyzstan. The government’s complain was that “the U.S. practically has not made any payments to cover the extra costs incurred by the Uzbek side to ensure the security of the Khanabad airfield, establish and exploit the needed infrastructure; nor has it compensated Uzbekistan for the environmental damage occurring there, and for the dis-comfort to the local populations” (ibid: 105-106). The final eviction notice was couriered by the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Ministry to the Embassy of the U.S. in Uzbekistan without giving a reason (Wright & Tyson 2005).

Although the U.S. has other bases in the region like at Bagram, Kandahar and Manas, the K2 base has nevertheless been a key component of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. The K2 base served as an important hub for transport of troops, equipment and supplies to the coalition forces stationed in Afghanistan. Road linking Uzbekistan and Northern Afghanistan is good, unlike Tajikistan, which also shares border with Afghanistan and had expressed willingness to provide base to the U.S. after the closure of the K2 base. During winter months places like Mazar-i-Sharif in northern Afghanistan is difficult to access, except through Uzbekistan, making the base lucrative for the U.S. (Marten 2005: 212) The U.S. already has a base at Manas in Kyrgyzstan but the country does not share border with Afghanistan, making accessibility to Afghanistan difficult. Moreover, building new facilities like K2 in some other place in Central Asia would not be an easy task for the U.S.

The differences between the U.S. Department of Defense and the State Department regarding Uzbekistan indicate Uzbekistan’s significance in the continuing Afghanistan mission. In October, the U.S. Congress dis-satisfied with the developments in Uzbekistan after the Andijan incident made it necessary in its 2006 budget bill to have Congressional approval before giving funds to Uzbekistan under the Consolidated Stabilization Fund (CSF) (Daly et al. 2006: 107). Uzbekistan, however, received $22.3
million under CSF released by Pentagon as earlier rent payments for Khanabad, which was opposed by Congress (ibid: 107-108).

Given the significance of the K2 base, the loss of the base was a challenge to the U.S. The U.S. military officials, however, denied that the closure of the base would pose difficulties to the Afghanistan mission as reflected in the statement by Military spokesperson Col. James Yonts—"our ability to execute combat operations—will not be hindered by this decision [eviction]" (ibid :106). For the U.S., the loss of K2 was a diplomatic failure and a blow to its position in the region.

Moreover, with the closure of the K2 base, the U.S. was left only with one base in the region—the Manas or Ganci airbase in Kyrgyzstan. The U.S. became increasingly dependent on the Manas base for its mission in Afghanistan and the U.S. also lost its bargaining position with Kyrgyzstan regarding rent and status of the base (Marten 2005). Unlike the K2 base, the U.S. has to pay rent for the use of the Manas base. Time and again Kyrgyzstan has hiked the prices for the use of the base. According to news reports, the US in 2001 was paying only US$2 million a year (Pincus 2009). Kyrgyzstan later bargained for a hike, to which the U.S. eventually yielded and it began paying around US$17 million annually for using the base in addition to other assistance (ibid). In 2009, it further hiked its rent to US$60 million (Graubner 2009). With the US base in Uzbekistan closed in 2005, Kyrgyzstan became an important corridor to Afghanistan and the U.S. had to succumb to the Republic’s demands for hike in rent.

**CONCLUSION**

Uzbekistan still lags behind in implementing substantial democratic reforms and in improving the country’s human rights records. Both Presidential and Parliamentary elections lacked genuine opposition candidates. Only in 1992 Presidential election, Mohammad Sohli, leader of Erk party was allowed to contest against Karimov, which was the only time till date that real opposition candidate took part in the election. However, there were reports of government bias for Karimov in the 1992 election. In the Presidential election of 2000 and 2007, the opposition candidates were mere eyewash as they themselves supported President Karimov. In 1995, President Karimov through a
national referendum extended the term of the office of the President until 2000, which was supposed to end in December 1996. Another referendum in 2002 extended the term of the office of the President from five to seven years. Western observers have criticized both these referendums. Moreover, Karimov contesting the 2007 election was not in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, as the Uzbekistan Constitution does not allow a person to contest for the post of President after serving for two consecutive terms. However, President Karimov flouted the provision without any justification.

The Parliamentary elections were also not free and fair. All the political parties contesting the election were pro-government and there was no real opposition, vital for a Parliamentary democracy. None of the opposition parties critical of government policies were allowed to contest. The government since independence has crushed all opposition forces. In the name of controlling Islamic extremism, the government has introduced various restrictive measures to curtail religious freedom. Torture, arbitrary detention etc are rampant in the Republic. Prison conditions are appalling.

Few positive steps indeed were taken in the last few years but it remains far short of the actual needs. For example, bi-cameral legislature was introduced in 2002 and the members of the Lower Chamber were to be directly elected, abolition of death penalty, introduction of habeas corpus, amnesty to few jailed human rights activists. Given Uzbekistan’s record of human rights violation and authoritarian rule, these measures indicate some willingness on part of the government to improve the situation and an effort to improve the country’s image internationally, which has been tarnished after the Andjan incident of 2005.

These socio-political issues have impact on the stability and security of Uzbekistan, which in turn have regional implications. Uzbekistan’s authoritarian regime is building up tensions within the country, which so far have been controlled by government’s repressive measures. Islamic groups are spreading their base in the country. IMU forces have been dis-integrated after 2001 but HuT is posing threat to the Republic. The Ferghana valley has since independence witnessed the spread of Islamic extremism. The Ferghana valley is divided between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and any
tension in the Valley would affect all the three states. In Uzbekistan, the Ferghana region is the most populated. Moreover, poverty in the region makes it vulnerable to radical ideas and social unrest.

Another important question that arises is what will be the situation of the country in case of sudden death of President Karimov. President Karimov has not named any successor and opposition forces are weak in the country. Given the public discontent with the present regime and the absence of strong leadership in the country, the vacuum created after Karimov might lead to social unrest. Will Uzbekistan also see a smooth transition like Turkmenistan after President Niyazov's death? Will there be a genuine democratic election? If the frustration of the people takes shape of social unrest, the regional security will be at stake, which the U.S. or any other player in the region would not like to see happen.

The social and political dynamics of Uzbekistan have geo-political ramifications too. Among other things, Russia and China's silence on these issues have helped these two countries to come closer to Uzbekistan, especially after 2005. Both these countries, which are important players in the region, have been uncomfortable with the U.S. presence in the Republic and in the region. With the deteriorating Uzbekistan-U.S. relation, Uzbekistan strengthened its ties with Russia and China, both have never raised issues like human rights, political and economic reforms in their relationship with Uzbekistan.

The U.S. had ignored human rights or democratic reform issues since Uzbekistan extended support to the U.S. after September 11. Uzbekistan received huge assistance from the U.S. post September 2001. The U.S. assistance to Uzbekistan jumped up from mere US$14 million in 1995 to US$297.84 million in 2002 despite no improvement in its human rights records or in democratization process. However, cracks in the bilateral relation were visible from 2004. From US$297 million in 2002, the assistance dropped to US$101.88 million in 2004 and further to US$92.57 million in 2005. In 2002, Uzbekistan alone received US$1 million under IMET programme, highest in the region. However, during 2004-2006, the U.S. Secretary of State did not certify Uzbekistan eligible for FMF
and IMET assistance due to lack of progress made by the Republic required under the Foreign Assistance Act.

The U.S. under its assistance programmes for the region has been providing for democratic reform programmes too. In 2004, the total amount allocated for democratic reform programme for Uzbekistan was US$18.90 million, followed by US$16.25 million in 2005 and US$9.75 million in 2006.

Initially, it was hoped that with Uzbekistan moving closer to the U.S., the Republic would address the issues of human rights and democratic reforms seriously but unfortunately nothing substantial took place in the country. The situation became worse after the Andijan incident. Opposition groups like Birlik expected that Uzbekistan's closeness with NATO would bring about democratic reforms in the country. In a talk on the Iranian radio, Polatov in 1999 said,

"from the point of view of democracy NATO members are democratic states and the they will undoubtedly start to greatly influence Uzbekistan. And if Uzbekistan really becomes close to NATO and becomes a member, very soon, whether the present dictator Karimov wants it or not, the country will have to move considerably closer to democracy" (1999a).

Uzbekistan, despite its commitment in the Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation of 2002 did not introduce meaningful changes in the Republic. The Declaration stated

"The Uzbek side reaffirms its commitment and intention to further intensify the democratic transformation of society in the political, economic and spiritual areas, taking into account the obligations deriving from international treaties and the requirements of national legislation. The United States side will endeavor to provide appropriate advice, aid, and assistance, consistent with U.S. law, to the Uzbek side and Uzbek society to implement democratic reforms in the following priority areas, where both Sides expect concrete progress".

Differences gradually emerged within the U.S. policy-making circle on human rights and reform issues as criteria to engage with Uzbekistan. The U.S. Department of State expressed its dis-satisfaction with the worsening human rights situation in the Republic as well as for the lack of progress in democratic and economic reforms while the Defense Department on the other hand ignored these issues in the bilateral relation, as cooperation from Uzbekistan was essential for the operation in Afghanistan.
In the past few years, the bilateral relationship however is showing signs of improvement. The U.S. again has become soft on human rights and reform issues. Uzbekistan-U.S. relation halted after Uzbekistan refused an independent enquiry of the Andijan incident. No substantial development in human rights situation or political and economic reforms has taken place in the country. Also, Uzbekistan till date has not agreed for an independent enquiry of the Andjan incident. Nevertheless, the U.S. today is engaging with Uzbekistan. The ongoing Afghan imbroglio makes it necessary for the U.S. to develop closer ties with Uzbekistan. At this stage, the U.S. needs cooperation from the Central Asian countries to supply materials to the coalition forces stationed in Afghanistan. Taliban forces, jeopardizing the U.S. supply to the coalition forces in Afghanistan, have frequently attacked the main supply route through Pakistan.

Gradually, things started becoming better between the two sides. However, it is interesting that though there are signs of rapprochement with the U.S. and the EU, Uzbekistan till date have not acceded to the demand put forward by the West, ie, an independent international investigation of the Andijan incident. The ongoing Afghanistan war necessitated the need to find alternative supply routes. The Northern Distribution Network, supplying materials to the coalition forces in Afghanistan, bypassing the Pakistan route once again has made the Central Asian region important for the U.S. The change in the region is evident today. Uzbekistan’s willingness to cooperate with the U.S. reflects Uzbekistan’s tilt towards the West.

The U.S. would now prefer to put Andijan behind and maintain a balance between engagement and negative enforcement⁷. The U.S. at this stage does not see free and fair election as the main agenda of democracy but rather would like to see release of more political prisoners and development of civil society⁸. Even if there is no democratic reform in the Republic, the U.S. today would like to go ahead with limited engagement⁹.

---

⁷ Discussions with the officials at the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on 20 November 2008.
⁸ ibid
⁹ ibid
reflecting reconciliatory tone of the U.S. Even EU, which had strongly criticized Uzbekistan for its human rights records, especially its handling of the Andijan episode is improving its ties with the Republic.