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VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND INSURGENCY IN UZBEKISTAN: A RISK ASSESSMENT

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ACRONYMS

AQMM	Al-Qaeda Media Machine
BTRs	armored personnel carriers
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HT	Hizb-ut-Tahrir
ICG	International Crisis Group
IJU	Islamic Jihad Union (<i>Islomiy Jibod Ittibodi</i>)
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (<i>O'zbekistonda Islomiy Harakati</i>)
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (of Pakistan)
MOD	Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Uzbekistan
MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs (of Uzbekistan)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SADUM	Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan
SNB	National Security Services (of Uzbekistan)
TSJ	Transnational Salafi Jihad
UAE	United Arab Emirates
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
USSR	United Soviet Socialist Republic
VE/I	Violent Extremism and Insurgency
VIE	Violent Islamist Extremism

MAP



Map No. 3777 Rev. 6 UNITED NATIONS
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report draws on and synthesizes published sources to assess the current and prospective risk of violent extremism and insurgency (VE/I) in Uzbekistan. It does not attempt to offer an in-depth analysis of VE/I in Uzbekistan, but rather seeks to provide an overview of key drivers, mitigants and trends in order to inform future USG policies and programs. The framework used for this assessment is based on the Guide to Drivers of Violent Extremism, produced for USAID by Management Systems International (MSI).

Context. Up to 96.3% of Uzbekistan’s population self-identify as Muslims.¹ Almost all are Sunni Muslims who describe themselves as followers of the Hanafi school that enjoys official support. External displays of religiosity, however, are carefully regulated and discouraged. The vast majority of Uzbekistan’s Muslims do not participate in formally organized religious structures or attend mosque regularly (9% attend weekly), but Islam is increasingly a frame of reference for moral decisions and debates and an important part of Uzbek identity. This unusual dichotomy between public religious practice and private belief has emerged as a result of authoritarian controls over civic and religious freedom.

An Islamic revivalist movement began in the late Soviet period and benefited from increased religious tolerance from Soviet authorities. Islamic values were seen by many as an attractive alternative to chaos, corruption and ethnic violence that emerged during the transition, especially in the peripheral Ferghana Valley, where many charismatic religious leaders had emerged with strong local followings. The Karimov government developed and continues to deploy a two-part response to this popular challenge, both parts of which had their roots firmly in the Soviet period. The first is to co-opt the appeal of religion by promoting carefully vetted religious figures and ideas through state-sponsored institutions closely managed by the quasi-independent Muftiate. The second is to brand all other religious figures and activity as “foreign extremism” and to police it as a security threat, using as much force as necessary—as in Andijon, where state security forces killed as many as 600 unarmed civilians—and treating thousands of religiously observant Muslims as potential terrorists.

The government has used the existence of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and “Akromiya” Uzbekistan to justify government repression, which has resulted in as many as 10,000 religious prisoners of conscience by current estimates. Though Uzbekistan has been the target of terrorist or insurgent violence several times in the past two decades, after each episode the government exaggerated the threat and responded disproportionately or with excessive force. Terror and insurgency have at times been a legitimate threat to public safety, but the damage done to the civilian population by the government’s heavy-handed response has exacerbated the threat posed by extremist or militant groups in every case.

With this in mind, it cannot be ignored that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and its splinter group the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) are very real organizations allied with al-Qaida. However, neither group has launched a significant attack inside Uzbekistan since 2004. Although the government prefers to refer to them as domestic groups, both are currently based in Pakistan. They have become integrated into the ongoing Afghan conflict and other priorities of the Transnational Salafi Jihad (TSJ) movement, and as a result have been severely degraded by US military operations.

¹ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Mapping the Global Muslim Population*.
<http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Topics/Demographics/Muslimpopulation.pdf>.

Uzbekistan’s high level of authoritarian consolidation and effective security services make it difficult or impossible for these groups to carry out significant attacks inside Uzbekistan, and neither has significant ties any longer to Uzbekistan’s domestic population. Exaggerating the threat from and level of sympathy for these groups by tying them to any and all religiously observant Muslims, however, assists the Karimov regime in thoroughly repressing independent Islamic activity without generating popular unrest.

Similarly, the government has consistently attempted to tie events in Andijon in 2005—the second bloodiest conflict in Central Asia after the five-year Tajik civil war—to a vast conspiracy between extremist groups and the US government in an attempt to undermine Uzbekistan’s independence. These events can be more accurately described as a localized insurgency motivated primarily by economic and civil rights grievances. It stands as an extreme example of both the potential for economic grievances to drive the population to desperate measures and of the way in which the government’s own response constituted a greater threat to the civilian population than extremism or insurgency.

Current risk. While there have been episodes of violent extremism and militancy in Uzbekistan in the past, it is unlikely that significant new episodes would occur absent major changes in the current political order. Uzbekistan differs from most other countries in the region because it is a highly consolidated authoritarian regime. The success of this consolidation and the degree of control it can exercise makes some individual drivers of extremism less relevant for Uzbekistanis living inside the country. No secular or Islamic opposition group can participate legally in the political system. According to our best assessments, no extremist groups have an organized presence in the country -- even underground. This means there is no domestic group to join or to be coerced into joining and the costs to start even secular peaceful groups are well demonstrated by recent history. Individuals have relatively less autonomy in Uzbekistan’s consolidated authoritarian system, making individual level drivers less relevant than in neighboring states.

Group level drivers likely have a much greater potential to pull Uzbekistanis into organized violence, though the absence of Islamist groups inside the country makes other networks and identities far more likely to drive conflict. Increased competition between regional patron-client groups currently in power threatens to result in conflict if a contested succession to President Karimov upsets the current balance and pits the groups against one another. Uzbek nationalism could similarly become a significant “pull” driver in the event of a protracted conflict perceived to target ethnic Uzbeks in neighboring states.

Additionally, economic grievances that threaten livelihoods or survival, especially when they affect an existing group or network that can act in solidarity and “pull” in individual members—such as all the merchants on a bazaar, or residents of a community cut off from vital services like heat or electricity or the network of businessmen in Andijon—remains one of the only drivers that continues to occasionally provoke social mobilization in defiance of local authorities or security services. Even under a strict authoritarian regime, the cost-benefit analysis appears to tilt toward collective action when individual citizens believe they have little or nothing left to lose and can contribute something meaningful if they act as a group.

Finally, in addition to individual- and group-level drivers of VE/I, USAID’s *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism* also highlights seven “political drivers” that have the potential to shape and reshape society broadly. These drivers include: (1) denial of political rights and civil liberties; (2) violations of human rights; (3) widespread government corruption; (4) the presence of ungoverned territories; (5) a history of prior militant conflict; (6) external state support for domestic violent extremist groups;

and (7) illegitimate yet unchallenged national governments.² Many of these drivers are present today in Uzbekistan, but authoritarian controls and the pervasive influence of the security services successfully prevent even peaceful protest or public complaint in response. If these drivers are predictive of the risk for VE/I in the country, this risk will depend in part on the durability of authoritarian controls and the choices made by Karimov's successors. Events in Libya and Syria since the Arab Spring illustrate the way that consolidated authoritarian regimes are, in a manner of speaking, highly stable "until they are not." The weak development of civil society and socio-political institutions outside the ruling party or elite groups often leads to chaos and violence when authoritarian regimes collapse or become vulnerable.

Future risk. While many potential drivers exist in Uzbekistan that have given rise to violent extremist groups elsewhere or moved populations to passively support them, as stressed in USAID's *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism*, no combination of drivers constitutes an automatic formula for social mobilization. For a variety of reasons explored above, in spite of significant negative factors such as widespread human rights abuses and religious persecution, at present Uzbeks have not found extremist groups to be an attractive or useful network for social mobilization. The report assesses four scenarios, however, that could be the most likely vectors for future development of VE/I in Uzbekistan. These are: 1) Conflict among elites that creates opportunities for extremist groups; (2) The emergence of ethnic conflict in a neighboring state; 3) "Self-radicalization" among labor migrants or refugees; and 4) The return of the IMU or IJU to operational capacity in Central Asia.

Implications for USG. Uzbekistan presents significant challenge for USG/USAID responses chiefly because the current government is determined to resist democratizing or liberalizing reforms—and to some extent even reforms that might help create more socio-economic mobility for the populace—because of the threat these might pose the current order and centralized control over rents and resources. There are a few areas in which we can likely address the present drivers—which may create a long-term threat for instability even if controlled in the short term—in a way that current government could more easily see corresponds to its own goals and priorities. These are:

- 1) Education, including language instruction and opportunities for students to study in international institutions where they can acquire knowledge and skills that meet international standards.
- 2) Enhanced access to communications technologies that give users open access to information.
- 3) Support for religious freedom and moderate, independent religious organizations and institutions that can react to society's increasing interest in organizing their lives, communities, and moral decisions around religious principles.

² Denoeux and Carter, p. 27.

Summary Assessment of Violent Extremism and Insurgency (VE/I) Risks in Uzbekistan

Key issues	Overall assessment	Explanatory note
1. Current level of VE/I activity	Very Low	Uzbekistan experienced small-scale attacks by extremist groups in 1999-2004 that posed a serious threat to public safety but did not threaten the stability of the state. These groups have been severely degraded in the Afghan conflict and by US strikes; there is little or no evidence they maintain an operational presence in the country or border areas. The Andijon unrest in May 2005 could be described as an insurgency to which the state responded with overwhelming force that was effective but also disproportionate.
2. Overall capacity of state and society to respond to VE/I	Uzbekistan is a consolidated authoritarian regime with highly developed security capabilities. It has consistently demonstrated the ability to use overwhelming and at times indiscriminate force against any internal challenges. Centralized control, however, likely undermines social capacity to respond to VE/I.	Primary emphasis on security responses and rapid (and potentially uncontrollable) growth of influence of the National Security Services (SNB) have likely weakened the capacity of society to respond to violent extremism. This situation could increase the country's vulnerability to VE/I in the (unlikely) event of a sudden political collapse. Civil society is atrophied and in the forms that it is allowed to exist is mostly subservient to the state and can do little or nothing to compliment state programs. Officially sponsored religious institutions are weak and their legitimacy is likely increasingly compromised by government manipulation.
3. Likely trajectory of VE/I over next 3-5 years	The risk of substantial VE/I over the next 3-5 years is low, barring significant political or civil conflict that could lead to the sudden collapse of the current regime.	The lack of a history of domestic organized violent extremism or organized insurgency in the country and the state's strong capacity to respond to nascent threats suggests that home-grown VE/I will not be widespread during this time. The existence of numerous drivers of VE/I suggest that other types of conflict could emerge.
4. Nature of the threat posed by VE/I	Attacks by extremist groups are unlikely to threaten political or economic stability and likely would contribute to the Karimov regime's claims that the extremist threat justifies authoritarian measures. VE/I does not pose a significant threat to the country's economic development. .	The regime is vulnerable to extremism and militancy emerging from nationalist groups or internal conflicts between ruling elite groups especially in the event of a contested succession. Nationalism is on the rise accompanied by an isolationist, victim mentality promoted by the state that could draw society into a destructive ethnic conflict in a neighboring state, but Uzbekistan's powerful military is unlikely to suffer significant losses in any such conflict. Regionally based patron-clients may attempt to mobilize violence in the event of a contested presidential succession, at outcome that could have devastating political and economic consequences.
5. Implications for USG policies and programs	Authoritarian controls obviate short-term VE/I risks, development approaches can best address feasible medium and long-term problems.	Recommendations for feasible programs include education assistance, spread of communications technology, and support for the development of moderate religious institutions in country and a multi-state effort for the millions of Uzbeks living elsewhere as migrant laborers.

I. BACKGROUND: RELIGION, POLITICS, AND CIVIC CONTROL

Uzbekistan is unique among the Muslim-majority states of Central Asia for the degree to which it has successfully re-created a highly consolidated authoritarian regime after the collapse of the USSR. The Karimov government in Uzbekistan attempts to engineer social, religious, economic and political life on a scale almost equal to the Soviet Union. This situation creates a paradox for assessing the potential risk for violent extremism and insurgency (VE/I). Authoritarian controls make the emergence of any opposition to the current order highly unlikely while simultaneously exacerbating many of the most important macro- and individual-level drivers for VE/I.

State and Islam: Legacies of Soviet Rule

According to Pew Research reporting, up to 96.3% of Uzbekistan's population self-identify as Muslims.³ Almost all are Sunni Muslims who describe themselves as followers of the Hanafi school that enjoys official support. External displays of religiosity, however, are carefully regulated and discouraged. The vast majority of Uzbekistan's Muslims do not participate in formally organized religious structures or attend mosque regularly (9% attend weekly), but Islam is increasingly a frame of reference for moral decisions and debates and an important part of Uzbek identity.⁴ The ancient oasis cities of Uzbekistan's southern regions were centers of Islamic civilization from its earliest centuries, and were home to many of its major figures like Imam al-Bukhari and Bahuaddin Naqshband who are celebrated today as part of Uzbekistan's official national heritage.

When Soviet power consolidated over Central Asia in the late 1920s, the Soviet government began a massive social reorganization that attacked Islamic institutions, scholars, clerics, and external signs of religiosity and drove religion almost completely from public view, destroying many of the community institutions that had organized social and civic life.⁵ These formalized Muslim institutions were more developed in the urban areas of Uzbekistan and in the densely settled cities of the Ferghana Valley than in other areas of Central Asia, and were viewed as dangerous competitors to Communist legitimacy and control. During World War II, however, Moscow began to see advantages to allowing limited civic religious activity in a way they believed could be controlled. In 1943 the establishment of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM, or the "Muftiate") marked a transition to a period of relative religious tolerance.

The return of limited opportunities for legal religious education and a markedly less harsh policy toward unregistered education and activity signaled that the Soviet government no longer felt Islam was a direct threat to Communist legitimacy.⁶ Educational, legal, political, and civic institutions were thoroughly secularized and promoted official state atheism. For many, faith became a private matter reserved for the sphere of the home and the family; it was not uncommon for members of the Communist party to profess atheism during their careers and wait to practice religion until after

³ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Mapping the Global Muslim Population*.

<http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Topics/Demographics/Muslimpopulation.pdf>.

⁴ Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity*. <http://www.pewforum.org/Muslim/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-2>; <http://www.pewforum.org/Muslim/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-2;Johreligious-commitment.aspx#mosque>. Johan Rasanayagam, *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: The Morality of Experience* (Cambridge University Press: 2012).

⁵ Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, not Mecca: the Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport, CN: Praeger 2001).

⁶ Eren Marat Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943-1991*, PhD dissertation, Harvard University Department of History (Cambridge, Mass. 2010).

retirement out of the public eye. For some Uzbeks today—especially those who grew up in the Soviet system—overt public displays of religiosity continue to arouse suspicion and discomfort, a sentiment that the government uses to its advantage as it continues to strictly control religious activity; many others are uncomfortable with public practice of religion as a consequence of exactly those controls.

Social Collapse and Islamic Revival

By the 1970s and early 1980s private religious schools flourished on the margins of official civic and social institutions, especially in peripheral areas like Ferghana Valley. Only two Islamic institutes of higher education were available for all of Central Asia, and these were far too small to meet cautious public demand for religious teaching and for clerics who could perform funerals and other life cycle rituals. A sharp divide emerged in this period between conservative traditionalist Hanafi scholars and a group of reformists who arose out of these schools called the *mo'jaddidiya*, or “renewers.” These reformers argued for a revival of “pure” Islam that focused on religion modeled in the primary texts, the Qur’an and Sunna, and rejected what they described as accommodations traditional Hanafi clerics made toward both local practices they described as superstition and “Russian” or “Communist” lifestyles and mores. In spite of the latter, Soviet authorities, including the Muftiate, found a shared agenda with the reformers in their fight against local mystical practices regarded as “backwards” superstitions; this tacit approval gave them considerably more room than their traditionalist peers to teach, argue, and even publish openly in Communist government newspapers.⁷

As the Soviet order started to collapse in the mid and late 1980s young, charismatic imams from this movement like Abduvali Qori Mirzaev in Andijan, Obidxon Qori Nazarov in Namangan and later Tashkent began to draw a significant social following. Revivalist reformers met little or no resistance from disorganized Soviet authorities as they began to promote an increased social and potentially even a political role for Islam in everyday life and mobilized to take over functioning mosques from older-generation clerics and petition for others to re-open. Then and today, Islamic revivalists’ message of order, morality, and justice appealed to many in the atmosphere of collapse (*buzukchilik*), corruption and inequality that many experienced in the late Soviet and independence period.⁸ Islamic revival was embraced by much of society as an exercise of newfound freedom that *glasnost*’ and ultimately independence were supposed to bring.⁹

Civic Violence: Religious Responses to Riots and Ethnic Conflict

Even though national political order remained consistent and in the hands of the same Soviet elite groups during the transition to independence, in 1989, Soviet civic order and policing began to fully collapse in portions of the Ferghana Valley. Local elites and aspiring political entrepreneurs seized on the opportunity to mobilize members of the titular ethnic groups against perceived economic inequalities that they claimed favored ethnic minorities, capitalizing on the slogans of national revival movements. From 1989-1992, major episodes of civic violence, mostly along ethnic lines, broke out across the Ferghana Valley. As civic order and then the entire Soviet polity disintegrated, local communities formed groups of “people’s militias” to protect neighborhoods. In the Valley, revivalist mullahs and imams organized civic groups that in riot-torn Namangan in particular filled a vacuum left by the collapse and restored order alongside or in cooperation with groups of Afghan war

⁷ Babajanov, Muminov et al; Allen Frank and Jahongir Mamatov, *Uzbek Islamic Debates: Texts, Translations and Commentary* (Springfield, VA: Dunwoody Press, 2006).

⁸ Shahrani

⁹ Adeb Khalid, *Islam After Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007),

veterans and martial arts clubs.¹⁰ The charismatic imams with the largest following, like Mirzoev and Nazarov, kept their distance from these groups and avoided any direct political confrontation.¹¹ But in Namangan a group led by a young mullah named Tohir Yo'ldosh and an Afghan war veteran, Juma Namangani, pushed for more. In late 1991 they demanded that Karimov annul the new parliament and create an Islamist government. For a period of a few months in late 1991 and early 1992, they and affiliated groups repurposed a Communist government facility in Namangan as an Islamic education center and publicly humiliated Karimov when he attempted to negotiate with them.¹² Karimov regrouped, and within three months had disbanded all the militia groups of the Valley and driven their leaders across the border into Tajikistan, where many were pulled into the conflict that erupted there later in 1992.¹³

Strategies for Regime Consolidation and Preservation

No imams dared question the secular order after control was restored in Namangan in early 1992, but like in the USSR of the 1920s the semi-consolidated regime in Tashkent feared the challenge popular imams might pose to its legitimacy. Even the Soviet-organized Muftiate, designed to manage religious activity under state atheism, seemed like a potential threat as crowds in the Khokand held demonstrations asking Mufti Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf to run for president.¹⁴ The strategy Karimov developed in response is to promote Islamic symbols and carefully selected, reliable religious figures to appropriate the popular legitimacy of Islam, while at the same time conducting campaigns with the security services to remove all individuals and groups who may challenge the status quo. The first round of crackdowns eliminated members of the Muftiate who were deemed either too popular or unreliable: the Mufti himself, Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf, was removed from his position in 1993 and driven into exile in Libya, replaced by an uncharismatic and unremarkable cleric with close ties to the government.¹⁵

Abduvali qori Mirzoev, who had served as chief imam of Andijon, the largest city of the Fergana Valley, disappeared in 1995 from the Tashkent airport. His followers have long believed he died in custody of the National Security Services. In 2012, an article appeared under a pseudonym from a source claiming to be a former NSS officer; the author claimed that Mirzoev died after only a few days in custody under intense torture.¹⁶ Obidxon qori Nazarov, who had become imam of one of the largest mosques in Tashkent and was a contender to become the next Mufti, was removed from his post by security services in 1996. After months of surveillance and threats he fled the country and went into hiding in 1998. Dozens of his relatives and hundreds of followers and students were arrested and interrogated, many of whom were abused in custody according to international monitors.¹⁷

In addition to removing charismatic leaders the government has focused on policing religious practice itself in an effort to prevent any new challenges from appearing. The Uzbek government uses a broad criterion for justifying police actions against observant, non-political Muslims. People and practices deemed reliable and controlled by the Muftiate are described as “traditional” Islam that

¹⁰ Abduvahitov, Khalid, Schoeberlein-Engel.

¹¹ Bajabanov, Muminov, et al.

¹² Eric McGlinchey, “Islamic Leaders in Uzbekistan,” *Asia Policy* 1 (2006), p. 136.

¹³ Khalid. Matthew Stein, “The Goals of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and its Impact on Central Asia and the United States,” U.S. Army Foreign Military Studies Office 2012.

¹⁴ McGlinchey, 136.

¹⁵ Irene Hilgers, *Why Do Uzbeks have to be Muslims?: Exploring religiosity in the Fergana Valley* (Halle: Lit Verlag 2009).

¹⁶ The article is no longer available, but it was summarized here: “Взрывы 1999 года в Ташкенте: Терракт исламистов или спецслужб?” *Ferghananews.ru*, <http://www.ferghananews.com/article.php?id=7280>

¹⁷ Acacia Shields, *Creating Enemies of the State: Religious Persecution in Uzbekistan*, Human Rights Watch, 2004.

corresponds to Uzbek national identity, while independent thought and religious activism or anything deemed too popular and thus potentially threatening is dubbed “foreign,” “alien,” or “extremist.” Mirzoev and Nazarov became the names most frequently associated with “foreign” Islam, and to the present day hundreds of people have been charged with crimes against the state on the grounds of allegedly listening to recorded sermons by these clerics, which are widely available on the internet. Over time other groups real and imagined have been added to the list of threats, bringing the number of prisoners of conscience sentenced for treason or related crimes for their religious beliefs to between 6,000 and 10,000 at any given time since around 1999.¹⁸

The religious policy of the Karimov government is rooted squarely in the Soviet past. Combining parts of both the early period (full-scale attack on religion and religious practice) and the Muftiate approach, the government selectively promotes Islamic practices and identity to enhance its legitimacy. The Karimov government promotes Islam while the USSR only tolerated it, but Uzbekistani Muslims have less freedom of conscience and association and face much harsher penalties for “unregistered” religious activity or unsanctioned external religious observance than they did in much of the post-war Soviet period. Under the basic legislation governing religious life, passed in its current form in 1998, harsh restrictions forbid any unofficial religious instruction in the home even within a single family. Proselytization of any religion is strictly forbidden, women and minors are banned from attending mosque in many places, and “religious clothing” worn by anyone other than officially registered clerics is forbidden—a vague law made to be so broad in enforcement that it effectively bans men from growing beards.¹⁹

II. VE/ ORGANIZATIONS AND INCIDENTS IN UZBEKISTAN

The extended history above is included to underline that Uzbekistan’s approach to managing and policing Islam developed and has remained consistent—only intensifying the degree of control and surveillance—long before the first major incident attributed to Islamist extremists in February 1999.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)

The roots of the IMU (*O‘zbekistonda Islomiy Harakati*) are frequently traced to the 1991 confrontation in Namangan described above between Karimov, Yo‘ldashev and Namangani. This approach presumes that the IMU developed its doctrine, goals and specifically its willingness to use terrorist violence to advance these shaped by the environment of the Ferghana Valley in the early 1990s, and implies that the same environment is likely to produce other similar groups. In reality, however, during the intervening years between 1991 and its first operations in 1999 the founders of the IMU were influenced in important ways by drivers that did not then and do not now exist in Uzbekistan.

Yoldashev, Namangani and their followers left Uzbekistan in early 1992 and parted ways. Namangani joined the Tajik Civil War (1992-1997) and served as a successful field commander for the United Tajik Opposition, fighting side by side with regional, and secular democratic groups.²⁰ Yoldashev reportedly moved to Peshawar and traveled widely; it was in this period, not while living in the USSR, that he came under the influence of the Transnational Salafī Jihad (TSJ) movement and some of its

¹⁸ US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2013 Annual Report, “Uzbekistan,” p. 183.

¹⁹ International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Islam and the State*, Asia Report No. 59, 2003.

²⁰ Stein, “The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan,” 3.

leading figures.²¹ It was not until the Tajik civil war ended that Namangani and Yoldashev resumed their cooperation. They formed the IMU around 1998 in Afghanistan and only at that time focused their activities on overthrowing Karimov and establishing an Islamic state inside Uzbekistan. Yoldashev swore *bayat* (allegiance) to Mullah Omar. Uzbekistan actively supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban; a victory against Karimov would have extended the power of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

With reference to the list of drivers identified by USAID's 2009 study that forms the basis for this series of reports, it is important to note that the IMU's founding, tactics, and goals were shaped in critical ways by several drivers that did not—and still do not—exist inside Uzbekistan even though the Karimov government was always a primary, if largely aspirational, target.²² The IMU formed and primarily operated outside Uzbekistan, its leaders battle-hardened in two foreign wars and supported by external states, including the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and, according to some sources, by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI). In Afghanistan and Pakistan their leadership and rank-and-file were influenced by the ideology of global jihad to the extent that they refocused their operations on the Taliban's war with the NATO and the United States in 2001. This latter move was nearly fatal. It cost the movement all its original leadership and left it severely degraded, driven into the tribal areas of Pakistan. Namangani, the group's military commander, was killed in 2001 attempting to resist the US invasion of Afghanistan; Yoldashev, the charismatic ideological founder, was killed in Waziristan by a suspected US drone strike in 2009. His successor Abu Usman was killed in another drone strike in 2011. The IMU has not conducted a verified operation in Uzbekistan since 2000.

The 1999-2000 Tashkent Bombings and Incursions

Before the IMU was pulled into the war between the US and the Taliban, however, the Uzbek government blamed them for what it claimed were the deadliest successful militant operations in Central Asia. In February 1999, a series of six car bombs detonated in central Tashkent near government buildings, killing up to sixteen people and injuring some 100. The bombings were unprecedented in Uzbekistan's short history and narrowly missed the arrival of Karimov's motorcade to a meeting at the Cabinet of Ministers. Karimov immediately described the attack as an attempt on his own life. Official investigation eventually blamed a broad international conspiracy between secular nationalist and Islamist groups, including the IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a non-violent Islamist party that had been building a modest presence mostly in the Ferghana Valley since the early years of independence.

The Uzbek government's heavy reliance on extracting confessions—often obtained under severe duress or torture—and on convicting dozens of people for the same crimes in evolving conspiracy narratives make it difficult to evaluate the evidence. Unlike operations later that year, the IMU denied responsibility for the bombings.²³ Many believe the attacks were an internal conflict between elite groups. A pseudonymous article cited above by an author claiming to be a former NSS officer said the bombings were carried out by followers of the murdered imam Mirzaev in cooperation with the IMU and Chechnya-based Islamist militants.²⁴ The evidence remains unclear, but “Islamic

²¹ Ahmed Rashid, “They’re Only Sleeping: Why militant Islamicists in Central Asia aren’t going to go away” *The New Yorker*, January 14, 2002.

²² Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter, ‘Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism’ (produced for USAID by Management Systems International, 2009) <http://transition.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan_africa/publications/docs/guide_to_drivers_of_ve.pdf>.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ There is some evidence to indicate a grain of truth to this narrative. There may be no link to the February 1999 bombings specifically, but many members of the IMU and especially its splinter group, the IJU, revere Mirzaev as a

extremists” became the target of massive arrest campaigns, sweeping up thousands of young men whose beliefs or external behavior were deemed “non-traditional.”

In the summers of 1999 and 2000, the IMU engaged in verified operations from Namangani’s former base in Tajikistan with logistical support from Mirzo Ziyoyev, the Tajik Minister for Emergency Situations and a former UTO comrade. Kidnapping and guerilla raids against police and military forces in Southern Kyrgyzstan enraged Tashkent; the Karimov government responded by launching air strikes on villages in Batken Province (Kyrgyzstan) and in Taviladara (Tajikistan) suspected to be staging grounds for the movement.²⁵ In the most successful of the kidnapping operations the IMU militants captured a group of Japanese geologists; the Japanese government negotiated a ransom for them of up to six million dollars according to press reports, and as part of their release Russia agreed to transit the militants back to Afghanistan.²⁶

In the summer of 2000 another small group of Namangani’s militants attempted set up a base of operations inside Uzbekistan in the remote mountains of Surxandaryo province bordering Tajikistan. Uzbekistani special operations forces quickly expelled the group, killing most of its members.²⁷ In the process they bombed nearby mountain villages and reportedly arrested many unaffiliated civilians who lived in the area in an attempt to identify any local supporters. Simultaneous IMU operations in Kyrgyzstan were far less successful than the year before; Kyrgyz security forces better anticipated the raids and quickly engaged them.²⁸

The Karimov government became infuriated with Tajikistan for allegedly offering the IMU safe harbor. Uzbekistan mined large portions of the Uzbek-Tajik border and cut off natural gas supplies to its neighbor. Under pressure, Ziyoyev negotiated a deal with the IMU to retreat back to Afghanistan in return for safe passage through Tajik territory, again demonstrating the importance of external state support in the movement’s small-scale military operations. Without what may have been tacit Tajik approval the IMU failed to launch any operations in the summer of 2001. After September 11 the US pushed the remaining IMU forces into the tribal areas of Pakistan, where they remain based today.

Emergence of the Islamic Jihad Union and the 2004 Tashkent Attacks

Shortly after the IMU sought refuge in South Waziristan, they were further degraded by a split in the movement which resulted in the formation of a new organization called the Islamic Jihad Group, or later the *Islomiy Jihod Ittibodi*: the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU). One of the most important differences between the groups initially was their choice of tactics. Unlike Namangani’s traditional guerilla warfare operations developed in the Tajik Civil War, the IJU adopted methods and targets more closely in line with the Transnational Salafi Jihad (TSJ) movement. In March of 2004, they claimed a series of attacks against police in Tashkent that shook the city.

On March 28, in the large Chorsu bazaar in Tashkent’s old city, two young women detonated themselves near a row of police lined up for morning inspection, killing ten of them in Central Asia’s first suicide attacks. Over four days other explosions and clashes with police killed up to 47 people,

spiritual leader and promote recordings of his teaching on their official website. There is no evidence that Mirzaev ever advocated religious violence, but his presumed murder by Uzbek authorities is a prominent grievance cited by insurgent groups.

²⁵ Stein, “The Goals of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan,” 4.

²⁶ ICG, *Central Asian Islamist Mobilisation and Regional Security*, 1 March 2001, p. 8

²⁷ Stein, 5; ICG 8-9.

²⁸ The IMU managed to kidnap a group of mountain climbers that included several US citizens, but the climbers took advantage of poor organization of the militants and quickly escaped.

most of them from the group of attackers. A rumor spread that the cell planned to detonate another bomb in a school, shutting down all public education facilities across the city. Unlike in 1999 when Karimov made an immediate announcement, this time the government enacted an information blackout that made it impossible for citizens to judge the severity of the threat. Little information was ever released about the attacks. Eventually the government blamed Hizb-ut-Tahrir, though information released by the State Department indicates US intelligence believes the IJU's claim was credible.²⁹

In July, three near simultaneous suicide bombings at the US and Israeli Embassies and the Prosecutor-General's office killed four more people and indicated the IJU had expanded its focus to more closely match the agenda of global jihad.³⁰ In 2005, the United States named the IJU as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist organization in response. Attacks the IJU claimed inside Uzbekistan, however, were aimed primarily at police. Many in Uzbekistan believed that the Interior Ministry substation in Chorsu bazaar was singled out for the first attack because—according to widespread rumor—a 74-year old vendor at the bazaar had been beaten to death by police the day before when he refused to pay a bribe.³¹

The Uzbek government has not attributed any further attacks in Uzbekistan or elsewhere in Central Asia to the IJU. The US intelligence community assesses that the IJU is allied with al-Qaida and maintains a small presence in Pakistan, where the group claims to play an active role in guerilla warfare operations against US and NATO forces in Afghanistan. In recent years, US federal prosecutors have linked the IJU to several ethnic Uzbek refugees arrested inside the United States, notably in Colorado and Idaho. Evidence made publicly available indicates these suspects allegedly “self-radicalized,” and contacted the group individually through its website. In both cases the suspects received no tactical or material support in response.

The 2005 Andijon events and “Akromiya”

The 2005 Andijon events—the only significant episode of militant political opposition to the current regime—offers an extreme example of the government's willingness to use all the coercive and propaganda powers of the state to repress any perceived threat to the regime. The events also importantly illustrate that sudden state interference in the local economy is a key driver that has caused popular discontent to erupt into violence in Uzbekistan, especially when it threatened local livelihoods.³² The details of the Andijon events are sharply contested, but even Uzbekistan's official estimate of 187 dead in the Andijon violence exceeds the total casualties of all prior incidents linked to extremism or militancy. Most international monitors estimate that a more accurate count is around 750 in a roughly 24-hour period between May 12-13 2005.³³ By this estimate, the five-year-long Tajik Civil War is the only conflict that claimed more lives in the post-Soviet period in Central Asia.

In the weeks preceding the events, peaceful protests began in Andijon's city center in response to the trial of 23 of the city's most prominent businessmen; protestors were mostly drawn from their family

²⁹ Richard Boucher, “U.S. Department of State Designates the Islamic Jihad Group Under Executive Order 13224.” <http://merln.ndu.edu/archivepdf/terrorism/state/46838.pdf>

³⁰ “Two killed in Uzbekistan blasts,” BBC News, 30 July 2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3940019.stm>

³¹ Gulnoza Saidzimova, “Uzbekistan: Effect Of Tashkent Explosions Still Felt Two Years Later” March 27, 2006. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1067140.html>

³² Several other episodes of unrest that resulted in riots and limited unrest occurred the year before in other cities of the Ferghana Valley in response to government interventions or sudden reforms that threatened livelihoods. Though after Andijon popular demonstrations or protests are exceedingly rare, economic conditions and livelihood issues continue to be a driver that can prompt social mobilization in defiance of local authorities or security services.

³³ ICG, “Uzbekistan: The Andijon Uprising” Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°38, 25 May 2005.

members and employees and numbered up to 3,000 according to press reports.³⁴ The men belonged to an informal business cooperative organized around Islamic beliefs and practices, called a “*jamoat*” (society).³⁵ The cooperative allowed them to establish a broad network of enterprises that pooled resources, offered one another favorable treatment, agreed to a common standard for labor practices and engaged in charitable activity that provided a social safety net for employees and the neighborhoods in which they operated. Many such *jamoats* exist in Uzbekistan and other parts of Central Asia, especially where state social services are weak or non-existent, as they did in Andijon can sometimes become vehicles for political mobilization. The large Andijon *jamoat* was organized around a charismatic spiritual entrepreneur named Akrom Yo’ldashev, whose teaching promoted a focus on self-actualization and entrepreneurship that conformed to Islamic values of family and community in contrast to the cutthroat business practices that emerged in the chaos of the Soviet collapse.³⁶

As the trial of the 23 businessmen dragged on, protesters became increasingly angry and frustrated.³⁷ Late in the night on May 12th and into the morning of the 13th, SNB agents began arresting protestors and family members of the accused. Some of the protestors overpowered local police, seizing their weapons. They proceeded to the jail where the defendants were held and broke them out, releasing some 500 other inmates in the process. In the early morning the armed men and some of the freed defendants came back to the city center and took control of the provincial administration building (*hokimyat*) where they took several government employees hostage.³⁸ They demanded to speak with the president. The square in front of the seized administration building began to fill with protestors again, this time in much larger numbers. The defendants’ supporters were joined by many other residents who came to protest economic conditions, low wages and other grievances; other bystanders gathered to listen to men from the group give speeches over a loudspeaker.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Some sources from before the trial indicate that people in the city referred to the members of the *jamoat* as “*birodarlar*,” or “the brothers.” This may simply be a generic term. In an author interview with two of the members of the Andijon group the members denied they had any name, but referred to themselves generically as a *jamoat*. ICG interviews conducted in 2005 among Andijon refugees in Kyrgyzstan and accused members in Tashkent found similar responses.

³⁶Yo’ldashev, a former high school mathematics teacher, was one of the many Ferghana Valley residents who studied religion informally in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He emerged as a mostly self-taught religious scholar with his own, somewhat original, approach to Islam laid out in a slim booklet called *The Path to Faith (Iymonga Yo’l)*. In 1999 he was arrested on charges that claimed to link him, like hundreds of others, to the February bombings in Tashkent. He was sentenced to seventeen years in prison, although the prosecution did not provide any evidence connecting him to the bombings. His followers and their businesses operated without interference or accusations of extremism until 2004 See: Noah Tucker, “Akrom Yo’ldashev, the Myth of Akromiya, and Islam Karimov’s “War on Terror”” Central Asia and the Caucasus Working Group, Harvard University. October 2007.

³⁷ During the trial the government followed a line of allegations used against Yo’ldashev five years before that focused on the pamphlet *The Path to Faith*, stating that it called for the violent overthrow of the secular government of Uzbekistan and laid out a plan in specific stages. This was a familiar allegation prosecutors frequently made in Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) cases, referring to HT literature that calls for the establishment of a Caliphate through stages of non-violent political transformation. No copy of *The Path to Faith*, however, was produced at the trial (nor since) with similar content; extant copies make no reference politics of any kind. As international pressure increased for Uzbekistan’s security services to explain the charges after the violence in Andijon, they modified the claim to acknowledge that no such content is present in the booklet. Subsequent statements say “notes” outlining the stages were found among Yo’ldashev’s personal possessions, though such evidence has never been released to the public. See: Sarah Kendzior, “Inventing Akromiya: The Role of Uzbek Propagandists in the Andijon Massacre.” *Demokratizatsiya*, Fall 2006. pp 545-562. Saidjaxon Zaynabidinov, “Obshina “Akromiya”—Tendentsiozoe Tvorchestvo Uzbekskikh Spetssluzhb i Politologov.” (“Akromiya”—A Tendentious Creation of Uzbek Security Services and Political Experts) *Ferghana.ru*, 5 April 2005. <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=3629>. Accessed May 13, 2007.

³⁸ ICG 2005.

The demonstration in Andijon was unprecedented in Uzbekistan's history. Just across the border in Kyrgyzstan, however, the "Tulip Revolution" had occurred only weeks before. Protestors in Osh and Jalalabad, where Andijonis had many relatives and business connections, had frequently occupied government buildings to force authorities to negotiate with them. As security forces moved in from across the region and from Tashkent and surrounded the square, several thousand protestors stood between them and the small group of armed men. According to official accounts, an exchange of fire took place between the armed men and the security forces, as a result of which the men were driven from their position in the hokimyat after executing the hostages. The armed men and their supporters scattered and fled the city for the Kyrgyzstani border, where hundreds of people crossed and sought refuge. Uzbek government information states nearly all of the 187 people killed in the exchange were members of the security forces or the armed insurgents. Eyewitness accounts, including reports from several international journalists there to cover the protests that took place earlier in the week, challenge nearly every aspect of the official narrative. Extensive documentation by international investigations conducted by Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the International Crisis Group (ICG) indicate that heavy fire was used indiscriminately on unarmed civilians in the square and along side streets as they attempted to flee, killing around 600 more people than reported in official accounts and wounding hundreds more.³⁹ As the events happened and in the days after, the Uzbek government enacted an almost total information blackout; international news networks were taken off air, internet sites were blocked, cell phone towers in Andijon province were shut down and police cordoned off the city, seizing cameras and phones.

The information blackout marked a watershed moment in Uzbekistan's foreign policy. The government quickly deployed a narrative that described the businessmen and their supporters as members of an extremist group called "Akromiya," and claimed that militants from the IMU or other al-Qaida linked groups assisted in the unrest. When Western governments reacted cautiously and pressed Tashkent to allow an international investigation, Uzbekistan began a process of rapid isolation. It has often been overlooked that in the trials that followed the unrest, prosecutors introduced evidence in the form of "confessions" that alleged the US Embassy in Tashkent had funded the uprising.⁴⁰ The fallout from the Andijon events initiated an era of sharp anti-American and anti-Western messaging in Uzbekistan's state-controlled media and propaganda that has grown into an enterprise that promotes a siege mentality. According to these messages, Western values and democracy offend Uzbek Islam, while all Islam not carefully policed by the state is dangerous extremism.

III. CURRENT AND PROSPECTIVE DRIVERS OF VE/I IN UZBEKISTAN

Analysis of the Scope, Nature and Drivers of the VE/I Risk Today

Many of the potential drivers of VE/I identified in USAID's *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism* are present in Uzbekistani society.⁴¹ The following paragraphs provide a discussion of these drivers and, more specifically, how these drivers potentially might operate at the individual, intermediate

³⁹ Human Rights Watch June 2005 Vol. 17, No. 5(D) "'Bullets Were Falling Like Rain": The Andijan Massacre, May 13, 2005." ICG 2005.

⁴⁰ Daniel Kimmage, "Uzbekistan: Under Siege In An 'Information War'" RFE/RL, 22 March 2006. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1067012.html>.

⁴¹ Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter, 'Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism' (produced for USAID by Management Systems International, 2009) <http://transition.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan_africa/publications/docs/guide_to_drivers_of_ve.pdf>.

group, and society-wide levels to foster violent extremism and/or insurgency. The drivers are not new to Uzbekistan, and the country has experienced no precipitous political or economic changes since the Andijon events in 2005. However, combined with external “pull” factors, drivers have the potential to foster violence in other forms, especially in reaction to sudden economic changes, the outbreak of ethnic conflict in a neighboring state where ethnic Uzbeks were perceived as the victims, or in the event of a contested succession to President Karimov that would suddenly open opportunities for elite groups to compete for control of resources.

Individual-Level Drivers of VE/I

USAID’s *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism* encourages the analyst to consider the absence or presence of the following five categories when assessing the potential individuals may engage in violent extremism or insurgency: (1) “concrete and specific political, economic, and social grievances”; (2) “broader ideological (especially religious) objectives”; (3) “the search for economic gain, or the pull exercised by prior involvement in illicit economic activities”; (4) “personal factors ... (such as) the desire to avenge a loved one, or follow a friend ... on the path of jihad”; and (5) “intimidation or coercion by peers or the community.”⁴²

As noted in the introduction, Uzbekistan differs from most other countries of the region because it is a highly consolidated authoritarian regime. The success of this consolidation and the degree of control it can exercise makes some individual drivers less relevant for Uzbeks living inside the country. No Islamist or militant opposition functions inside the country—which means there is no domestic group to join or to be coerced into joining and the costs for attempting to start a even a secular group are well demonstrated by recent history. Individuals can join other groups like the *jamoats* discussed above, however, and as in Andijon these have the potential to become politicized especially if the government attempts to outlaw them. Where individuals have relatively little or no political, social or economic autonomy, individual level drivers become perhaps less relevant in Uzbekistan in neighboring states.

Some of the drivers are present at significant levels. The current regime consolidates almost all economic resources and potential for social and economic mobility in the hands of a small elite group. This ensures that a large portion of the population has concrete grievances of all types (1), but the potential cost for acting on these, especially after the ruthlessness the Karimov government and the security forces displayed in Andijon, outweighs any potential benefits. In July 2013 a small group of demonstrators in the southern city of Qarshi gathered to protest the arrest of an elderly family member who they believe was charged with a heinous crime to punish their family for the secular political activism of one of their sons who lives in exile in the United States. The group of women and children was attacked and seriously beaten before they could even begin the protest; after the beating they were charged with holding an unsanctioned demonstration and fined over \$15,000.⁴³ Each episode like this creates new grievances, but under the current regime, the cost of acting on them is too much for most to risk. Economic organizations, like the *jamoats* or informal associations of bazaar merchants will often group together to act in response to economic changes that threaten their livelihoods, but these protests usually have local, limited goals.

The ideological driver (2) has had limited historical appeal to most Uzbeks, most of whom are averse to politics in general.⁴⁴ Though much of the Uzbek population has become increasingly interested in organizing their lives and some community functions around Islam, no popular

⁴² Denoeux and Carter, p. 63.

⁴³ Uznews, “Hasan Choriev’s Supporters Ordered to Pay Huge Fine,” July 8, 2013.
http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=en&sub=top&cid=3&nid=23297

⁴⁴ Sarah Kendzior, “The Curse of Stability in Central Asia,” Foreign Policy: Democracy Lab,
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/02/19/the_curse_of_stability_in_central_asia

domestic Islamist movements have arisen in Uzbekistan—but then, neither have any other political alternatives to the current regime. Uzbekistan has a tradition of robust local Islamic scholarship that has proven attractive to many in the population, but to date this has usually been unpoliticized. In the event that Uzbekistan’s political system were to genuinely open, it is highly likely that parties or figures with a platform focused on Islamic values like justice and opposition to corruption would quickly emerge, as one did during the brief period of political openness as the USSR collapsed. No such party currently exists, however, and one is unlikely to emerge in the near term. And while the TSJ movement and affiliated groups have shown some ability to map themselves temporarily onto local conflicts or grievances, they have shown little interest in doing so in Uzbekistan and have no meaningful presence in country or avenues of communication with its population. The ideology of these groups, which focuses on colonial grievances, “puppet” regimes and broad international conspiracies, have little appeal to Uzbeks living in a highly isolated society with a significantly different history as part of the USSR.

The Uzbek-founded Islamist groups, the IMU and IJU, maintain websites and conduct media outreach in the Uzbek language. But both groups have long ago shifted focus away from Central Asia and rarely aim their media content at Uzbekistanis, who are unlikely to be able to access it because of the state’s elaborate system of internet censorship.⁴⁵ If those groups are able to resume operations inside Uzbekistan and position themselves as potential alternatives to the Karimov regime, their ideology may become more appealing. This is a highly unlikely development in the short term and medium term, however.

Drivers (3) and (5) also have a much smaller role to play in Uzbekistan than in neighboring states. Uzbekistan’s illicit economy is controlled by the same centralized elites who control most of its licit rentable resources as well, leaving no room for criminal entrepreneurs who might forge ties with extremist groups. Community and peer pressure in Uzbekistan appears more likely to prevent interest in violent extremism than encourage it, especially because the security services frequently punish whole families for the actions of a single member. The most recent ethnographic investigations available on these topics, from before the 2005 Andijon events, show anecdotally that local communities exert significant pressure on all members to avoid even the appearance of extremist ideas or excessive religious devotion (or any kind of opposition to government policies).⁴⁶

Finally driver (4), particularly the desire for revenge, does not currently appear to drive many residents to violence but has the potential for significant mobilization. The indiscriminate nature of arrest campaigns against outwardly pious Muslims and the frequency with which these prisoners are mistreated and sometimes die in custody means that there is no shortage of citizens who may be motivated to violence by the desire for revenge. Though not enough information is available to evaluate the motivations of the attackers in all the Tashkent bombings in 1999 and 2004, it is likely that revenge was a factor, especially in the 2004 suicide attacks on police and the Prosecutor-General’s office. In a sense the analytical task may be to first explain, as for driver (1), why there have been no similar attacks since 2004. The lack of actualization for the revenge driver is likely explained by the same factors as listed above for (1). In the current environment the costs are too high in comparison to the chances for success—though this may not deter a suicide bomber. Bombs are difficult to construct and require technical information and expertise; as the information necessary to

⁴⁵ Stein, IMU. Sarah Kendzior, *Digital Freedom of Expression in Uzbekistan: An example of social control and censorship in the 21st Century*, New America Foundation July 2012.

http://mediapolicy.newamerica.net/publications/policy/digital_freedom_of_expression_in_uzbekistan

⁴⁶ Hilgers, *Why Do Uzbeks Have to be Muslims?*, Julie McBrien, “Extreme conversations: secularism, religious pluralism, and the rhetoric of Islamic extremism in Southern Kyrgyzstan,” and Johan Rasanayagam, “I am not a Wahhabi: State Power and Muslim Orthodoxy in Uzbekistan,” in C.M. Hann, ed. *The Postsocialist Religious Question: Faith and Power in Central Asia and East-Central Europe* (Muenster: Lit Verlag, 2006)

conduct one-person or two-person suicide operations becomes easier to access over the internet, it is possible that this kind of small-scale revenge attack will become more common in Uzbekistan.

Group-Level Drivers of VE/I

The *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism* highlights political anthropologist and counter-terrorism expert David Kilcullen's observation, "people don't get pushed into rebellion by their ideology. They get pulled in by their social networks."⁴⁷ This observation is particularly relevant to the Andijon violence in 2005 described above, where the arrest of only twenty-three men affected the lives (and livelihoods) of thousands who mobilized to their defense; when a small group of their supporters adapted violent methods in response to additional arrests, a much larger group was pulled into the crossfire. The Uzbekistani government has been particularly cognizant of the potential for groups and networks for mobilization since 2005 and has targeted several others that formed dense social and economic networks. These include traditional neighborhood (*maballa*) organizations, a central part of the fabric of traditional Uzbek society, that government has carefully co-opted by integrating it into government structures; other Islamic business formations (*jamoats*); and also alumni networks, especially of students who studied abroad or in foreign-connected institutions. For example, hundreds of former students who were Umid Scholars (recipients of a prestigious government-sponsored fellowship program to study in universities abroad) or former students of Turkish lyceums connected to the Fethulla Gulen movement have been targeted in arrest campaigns.⁴⁸ None of these campaigns, however, have resulted in violent mobilization. The response of most members of vulnerable groups has been to flee the country for asylum elsewhere, just as hundreds connected to the "Akromiya" network eventually did.

Group level drivers have the potential to lead to organized violence, especially in the event of increased competition between regional patron-client groups currently in power. If a conflict between these groups were to break out, or if a contested succession to President Karimov upsets the current balance and pits the groups against one another—likely creating rivalries inside the powerful security services—these networks could become significant "pull" drivers for conflict. Uzbek nationalism could similarly become a significant "pull" driver in the event of a protracted conflict perceived to target ethnic Uzbeks in neighboring states. Ferghana Valley Uzbeks in particular have dense economic, family, and associational networks with their co-ethnics across the Kyrgyzstani border; unrest there has significant potential to draw in individuals or potentially break-away units of the security forces if they spin out of control in the future.

Additionally, economic grievances that threaten livelihoods or survival, especially when they affect an existing group or network that can act in solidarity and "pull" in individual members—such as all the merchants on a bazaar, or residents of a community cut off from vital services like heat or electricity or the network of businessmen in Andijon—remains one of the only drivers that continues to occasionally provoke social mobilization in defiance of local authorities or security services. Even under a strict authoritarian regime, the cost-benefit analysis appears to tilt toward collective action when citizens believe they have little or nothing left to lose and could potentially achieve something meaningful when they act as a group. Though Islamist organizations have had little success exploiting purely economic issues, these grievances have the potential to drive militancy mobilized around non-Islamist identities or networks in response to sudden, drastic changes in economic conditions as they did in Andijon in 2005.

⁴⁷ Denoeux and Carter, p. 74.

⁴⁸ BBC Uzbek, "Nurchilar"ga ov davom etmoqda yohud bu oqimdan qo'rqish kerakmi?" June 23 2011. http://www.bbc.co.uk/uzbek/uzbekistan/2011/06/110623_latin_nurchilar.shtml

Political- and Societal-Level Drivers of VE/I

In addition to individual- and group-level drivers of violent Islamist extremism, USAID's *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism* also highlights seven "political drivers" that have the potential to shape and reshape society broadly. These drivers include: (1) denial of political rights and civil liberties; (2) violations of human rights; (3) widespread government corruption; (4) the presence of ungoverned territories; (5) a history of prior militant conflict; (6) external state support for domestic violent extremist groups; and (7) illegitimate yet unchallenged national governments.⁴⁹ Many of these drivers are present today in Uzbekistan, but authoritarian controls and the pervasive influence of the security services successfully prevent even peaceful protest or public complaint in response. If these drivers are predictive of the risk for VE/I in the country, this risk will depend in part on the durability of authoritarian controls and the choices made by Karimov's successors. Events in Libya and Syria since the Arab Spring illustrate the way that consolidated authoritarian regimes are, in a manner of speaking, highly stable "until they are not." The weak development of civil society and socio-political institutions outside the ruling party or elite groups often leads to chaos and violence when authoritarian regimes collapse or become vulnerable. In the event of sudden collapse or political rift that allows for organized action, all of these factors could quickly become relevant because they are present in Uzbekistan to a greater degree than anywhere else in the region (with the possible exception of Turkmenistan).

Uzbekistan is frequently assessed among the least free nations on earth. One of only nine countries that received Freedom House's lowest possible score for civil and political rights (7/7) in 2013, Uzbekistan ranks in the company of nations like Somalia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Syria, and super-isolated states like North Korea and Turkmenistan.⁵⁰ Elections are not free, all forms of civic association are strictly limited, freedom of speech, press, and religion are severely constrained.

Uzbekistan correspondingly scores among the worst in the world in assessments of human rights. The US faults the Karimov government for "torture and abuse of detainees by security forces; denial of due process and fair trial; and widespread restrictions on religious freedom, including harassment of religious minority group members and continued imprisonment of believers of all faiths ... incommunicado and prolonged detention; harsh and sometimes life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention ... violence against women and government-organized forced labor in cotton harvesting. Authorities subjected human rights activists, journalists, and others who criticized the government to harassment [and] arbitrary arrest ..." and other violations.⁵¹

As detailed in all sections above, violations of religious human rights have been particularly pronounced. Although many more mosques are permitted to function in contemporary Uzbekistan than during the Soviet period, the degree of control and surveillance is far higher. Friday sermons are written in advance by the Muftiate and approved by the state, and include specific instructions to local imams not to answer questions from congregants after the sermon nor to allow them to linger in the mosque to discuss anything with one another.⁵² Private religious education in the home is banned, as is attendance by minors at the mosque. Laws like these are not always enforced, but selective enforcement makes the lives of believers even more precarious and makes many vulnerable to predatory practices by local authorities seeking bribes.

⁴⁹ Denoeux and Carter, p. 27.

⁵⁰ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World*. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2013>

⁵¹ US Department of State Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2012: Uzbekistan*, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>

⁵² Office of Muslim Affairs. November 9, 2012. *Tezis 47: Yurt Tinchligi—Oliy Saodat!* [Sermon #47: Peace in the Homeland is Supreme Happiness!].

Corruption in Uzbekistan is pervasive, as it is in most other states of Central Asia, and as in other categories it ranks among the worst in the world on international indices. Transparency International ranks Uzbekistan 170th out of 176 countries globally for the 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index.⁵³ Though corruption is encountered at all levels, the very worst instances are reserved for those closest to the center. Recent investigations in the Telecom industry, for example, have shown that international companies who want to do business inside the country have paid as much as \$320 million to the presidential family for access to the market.⁵⁴ In 2012 authorities investigating money laundering in Switzerland froze over \$600 million in assets registered to accounts in the name of one of Gulnora Karimova's closest former business associates. Ordinary citizens are vulnerable to corruption at every level, from fabricated traffic tickets to routine over-collecting on utility bills.

The remaining political and societal level drivers—the presence of ungoverned territory, a history of prior militant conflict, external state support for domestic violent extremist groups, and illegitimate yet unchallenged national government—have all been present at different times in recent history except for prior militant conflict. The chaos and civic violence in the Ferghana Valley in the late 1980s and early 1990s described in the first sections of the report arose in under-governed areas, motivating local residents to self-organize community policing in response. Also as detailed above in the section on VE/I groups, external state support from Tajikistan and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was likely critical to the IMU's ability to infiltrate Uzbekistan in 2000, though in spite of its roots in Uzbekistan it was never a domestic group. Finally, although anecdotal evidence points to the conclusion that much of the population regards the Karimov government as illegitimate, the degree of successful authoritarian consolidation means that the regime faces no challenges or competition and that citizens have no outlet to voice dissatisfaction.

Scenarios for the Emergence of VE/I in Uzbekistan

Although two militant Islamist organizations with roots in Uzbekistan have targeted the country and likely continue to maintain aspirations to do so again, many analysts agree they do not have the operational capability to threaten Uzbekistan's security and stability in a meaningful way.⁵⁵ Neither appears to have any personnel or resources in Central Asia that could carry out operations planned in Pakistan. Security forces neutralized the threat from the 2000 incursion by the IMU and the 2004 Tashkent attacks relatively quickly. In both cases, however, heavy-handed tactics including aerial bombardment of settled areas and sweeping arrest campaigns often accompanied by torture and abuse of suspects have affected far more Uzbekistani citizens than the extremist groups themselves.

While many potential drivers exist in Uzbekistan that have given rise to violent extremist groups elsewhere or moved populations to passively support them, as stressed in USAID's *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism* no combination of drivers constitutes an automatic formula for social mobilization. For a variety of reasons explored above, in spite of significant negative factors such as widespread human rights abuses or religious persecution, at present Uzbeks have not found violent extremist groups to be an attractive or useful network for social mobilization. There are no charismatic leaders or locally functioning groups supporting extremist organizations that might pull disaffected young Uzbek males into such movements; those that are drawn into the IMU/IJU, or other existing organizations in small numbers have since 2004 been redirected to other conflicts in areas where these groups currently operate, that is, mostly in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The flow of

⁵³ Transparency International, "Corruption by Territory: Uzbekistan," <http://www.transparency.org/country#UZB>

⁵⁴ Daisy Sindelar, "Uzbek diplomats break silence on Swiss money-laundering case," RFE/RL, 12 October 2012, <http://www.rferl.org/content/uzbek-diplomats-break-silence-on-swiss-money-laundering-case-gulnora-karimova/24737984.html>.

⁵⁵ Nathan Barrick, "Post-2014 Terrorist Threat in Central Asia: Keeping it Real," Registan.net, <http://registan.net/2013/01/28/defining-the-post-2014-terrorist-threat/>.

Central Asian recruits to these movements appears to have all but ceased according to data published by the groups themselves about their membership in the form of “martyrs lists.” Disaffected Uzbek youths are pulled, however, in very large numbers to labor migration in Russia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and South Korea: estimates on the number of Uzbekistani labor migrants range up to 8 million per year;⁵⁶ annual remittances from Russia alone dwarf the numbers to other states in the region. Total remittances likely constitute a portion of the country’s GDP nearly equal to the cotton industry and possibly exceeding it.⁵⁷

The emergence of violence and instability is still possible; this report assesses the four scenarios described below as the most likely, but these are not exclusive by any means. The first two are mobilizations of non-extremist networks in response to the same drivers that could create opportunities for new extremist groups to emerge or existing groups to become involved. The final two are potential vectors for externally based extremist groups to infiltrate Uzbekistan and stage operations again as they have in the past.

Scenario 1: Conflict Among Elites Creates Opportunities for Extremists

As described above in the discussion of group-level drivers, existing patron-client networks built around regional identities (sometimes called “clans”) or core institutions such as the SNB have the potential to pull members into a conflict initiated from the top by elites who control distribution of vital goods and services. A contested presidential succession is probably the most likely scenario for this type of conflict to emerge, though contested succession to Colonial-General Rustam Inoyatov, the powerful head of the SNB, is another potential vector that is especially opaque to outside analysts. Conflicts such as these are unlikely to develop, however, because control of rentable resources is highly centralized in Uzbekistan—unlike in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, where such conflicts have been common and resulted in the overthrow of two administrations.⁵⁸ Power and resources are concentrated in the hands of a few elites who appear to behave cooperatively to preserve the status quo for their own benefit. In the event that a schism developed between the power groups, however, the resulting conflict could open up new opportunities for extremist groups to operate inside the country as authoritarian controls weakened or an alliance of convenience emerged between weaker elites and extremist groups.

Scenario 2: Ethnic Conflict Fuels Extremism

As also described above, a conflict along ethnic lines in a neighboring state with a significant ethnic Uzbek population could become an active “pull” factor that draws the population or renegade/unofficial units of the security services into violence. Another dangerous factor that could catalyze the spread of ethnic conflict is the aggressive promotion of nationalist ideology by the Uzbek government since the early 1990s and the emergence of a “victim mentality” among ethnic Uzbeks. The perception of victimhood as a central part of Uzbek identity is fostered by both opposition reactions to government repression and violence against civilians and, conversely, by the Uzbek government itself. Since 2005, Tashkent has used state-controlled media to promote the idea that the state and society are under siege and that Uzbeks and Uzbek independence are under attack from all sides. A protracted conflict in Kyrgyzstan, where two large-scale but short duration conflicts have erupted in the last 20 years, has the potential to activate many of the drivers that are identified as

⁵⁶ Erica Marat, “Labor Migration in Central Asia: Implications of the Global Economic Crisis,” Central Asia and the Caucasus Institute Silk Road Program, Johns Hopkins University May 2009. http://edoc.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/HALCoRe_derivate_00003964/2009_marat_labor-migration-in-central-asia.pdf.

⁵⁷ Institute for War and Peace Reporting, “Uzbek Leader Wakes Up to Mass Emigration: President shows sudden concern for unemployed.” January 25, 2013. <http://iwpr.net/report-news/uzbek-leader-wakes-mass-emigration>.

⁵⁸ See Scott Radnitz for a comparison of patron-client relations in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan: *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia* (Cornell University Press 2010).

factors that draw populations into violent extremism. These include concrete economic and political grievances, ideology (nationalism), desire for revenge and to follow friends into conflict, and community pressure, especially in the Ferghana Valley where cross-border communities are intertwined through economic and family ties. While Islamist groups have up to this point made only very feeble efforts to exploit internal conflicts, protracted violence resulting in instability could open up opportunities for them to establish operations in Central Asia in an ungoverned or contested space. Up to this point, however, Islamic figures and organizations have played a role in peace building and attempts to ratchet back ethnic tensions, stressing that Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are both Muslim peoples and that ethnic conflict is prohibited in Islam.

Scenario 3: Migrant Workers or other Expatriates are “Self-Radicalized”

While existing Islamist groups appear to have little ability to reach Uzbekistani citizens inside the country and also appear to have little appeal to them, labor migrants, expatriates, or political exiles may potentially be both easier to reach and more receptive. Isolated from family and community structures that would ordinarily exert a mitigating influence, migrant workers are especially vulnerable in countries where they are treated badly by the local population, shunned, or ghettoized. Outside Uzbekistan’s carefully constructed information blockade and pervasive surveillance, they may also have opportunities to access opposition voices and alternative sources of information about politics and religion, both of which the IMU and IJU actively produce in the Uzbek language. Islamist groups affiliated with TSJ and the Al-Qaida Media Machine (AQMM) have come to increasingly rely on “self-radicalization” for their tactical approach to targets outside the few zones in which they can operate freely. The alleged Boston bombers, Tamerlan and Johar Tsarnaev, were immigrants to the US from Kyrgyzstan who appear to be examples of exactly this type of “non-recruitment” or self-radicalization. Jamshid Muhtorov, an Uzbek former human rights activist from Jizzakh who received political asylum in the United States, is another. He was arrested in 2010 departing Chicago allegedly for an IJU training camp after initiating contact with the group himself and offering material support. While overall labor migration from Uzbekistan is likely a mitigating factor, residents are potentially more vulnerable to be pushed or pulled into extremism while working abroad, especially if the migration fosters a grievance in itself. Without training or access to weapons or explosive material, few self-radicalized recruits are able to carry out successful attacks, and are more likely to strike against their host country than their country of origin. Still, it remains a possible, if unlikely, vector for increased Islamist extremism inside Uzbekistan that could result in small-scale attacks that would not threaten overall stability but could create a serious threat to public safety.

Scenario 4: The Return of the IMU/IJU to Operational Capacity in Central Asia

Though much discussed in the context of US/NATO plans to hand over security operations to Afghan National Forces and withdraw most ISAF troops from Afghanistan in 2014, the return of the IMU and/or IJU to operations inside Central Asia presupposes a number of conditions that depend on one another—all are unlikely. Even in the event that the Taliban would retake control of Kabul, recreating the situation that existed in 1999 and 2000 when the IMU last made incursions into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, their numbers (assessed in the low hundreds) and operational capacity are likely significantly less today than the number of militants who participated in the 1999 and 2000 campaigns.⁵⁹ The IMU has evolved a great deal in the past decade, lost all its original leadership, and most of its original membership. It has a much more tenuous connection to Uzbekistan; after the death of Tohir Yoldosh a Bangladeshi imam took up spiritual leadership of the movement. They

⁵⁹Christopher Anzalone, *The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan: Down but not out*, November 20, 2012. http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/11/20/the_islamic_movement_of_uzbekistan_down_but_not_out?wp_login_redirect=0

currently specialize in small-scale assassination operations in Afghanistan that could prove disruptive to public safety in Uzbekistan if they were able to stage similar attacks there, but would not pose a serious threat to state stability or survival. Without tacit support from Tajikistan, which now regards the IMU as an active threat, it is unlikely that the IMU has the operational capacity to recreate even its previous operations, which similarly posed no existential threat to Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan. Assessments that emphasize this potential vector of threat also usually overlook the fact that the US will almost certainly retain the capability to conduct Special Operations and unmanned aerial strikes, both of which have severely degraded the operational capacity of Central Asia-focused extremist groups since 2001.

IV. POTENTIAL USG RESPONSES

Uzbekistan presents significant challenge for USG responses chiefly because the current government is determined to resist democratizing or liberalizing reforms—and to some extent even reforms that might help create more socio-economic mobility for the populace—because of the threat these might pose the current order and centralized control over rents and resources. As Sean Roberts noted in the Kyrgyzstan report for this series, states resistant to reform require that development interventions build a popular constituency for reform—this is a steep task in Uzbekistan, where the USG and sponsored projects and organizations have few opportunities to interact freely with the population and where popular opinion has little influence on governance.⁶⁰ Mistrust of the USG and US intentions, particularly with an eye to democratizing reforms that many in the Uzbek government accuse the US of promoting to undermine their national independence, further complicate the task of convincing Uzbekistani government stakeholders that development programs that might promote reform or social mobility are in their own interest.

Although significant drivers for violent extremism exist in Uzbekistan—especially corruption, human rights abuses, and denial of civil and political liberties—the above sections have demonstrated that these do not appear to threaten the emergence of violent extremism in the short term, particularly because of a lack of “pull” drivers that could draw the population into established extremist movements or organizations. This allows the USG to adopt a “long game” approach that can advocate gradual changes that may have more significant effects in the medium and long term and do more to either prevent sudden economic or political collapse that could rapidly give rise to conflict or help society weather a similar collapse without descending into violence. There are a few areas in which the USG can likely address the drivers that are present in a way that current government could more easily see corresponds to its own goals and priorities. These are:

- 1) **Education, including language instruction and opportunities for students to study in international institutions where they can acquire knowledge and skills that meet international standards.** Education can lay the foundation for a system of social mobility based on merit rather than patronage, nepotism, and corruption. Knowledge of a foreign language (other than Russian) gives citizens the opportunity to access more objective information beyond what is provided in the local, state-controlled press or other outlets that promote anti-American messaging (such as Russian media), nationalist groups, and Uzbek and Russian media outlets of extremist groups.
- 2) **Enhanced access to communications technologies that give users open access to information.** Open access complements the same benefits provided by education, and likewise gives citizens the opportunity to acquire technical skills and create networks that promote social and

⁶⁰ Sean Roberts, Drivers for VE/I in Kyrgyzstan

economic advancement based on merit rather than corruption or patronage. It can also be used to increase transparency, document grievances, and organize non-violent (and non-extremist) responses.

3) Support for religious freedom and moderate, independent religious organizations and institutions that can react to society’s increasing interest in organizing their lives, communities, and moral decisions around religious principles. Denial of basic religious freedoms and widespread human rights abuses against religiously observant Uzbekistanis are potentially the single strongest platform that extremist groups have for recruitment. Conversely, religious communities—when allowed to function—often provide critical social safety net and other community supports and functions that can mitigate many of the drivers for violent extremism that current state policies and weaknesses only help perpetuate. Similar support should be considered on a regional or multi-country level for communities and organizations that could serve the large numbers of Uzbek labor migrants and refugees living in other countries of the former USSR, who, as discussed above, may be particularly vulnerable to extremist messages.

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