

Sogdiana Azhiben

The Andijan Events: Radical Islam and Conflict in Uzbekistan

Kurzfassung: Gegenstand der vorliegenden Studie ist es, anhand einer Analyse des radikal islamistischen Diskurses und der in Zusammenhang mit sozio-ökonomischer und politischer Instabilität stehenden Ereignisse in Andijan am 13. Mai 2005, den Einfluss des radikalen Islams auf die entstehenden Konflikte in Uzbekistan zu untersuchen. Zu diesem Zweck wird unter Bezugnahme auf bestehende Theorien des politischen Islams untersucht, mit welchen Narrativen und Diskursen der religiöse Faktor, die usbekische Regierung, die internationale Staatengemeinschaft und die usbekische Bevölkerung in den einheimischen und ausländischen Medien dargestellt werden. Im ersten Abschnitt werden die zentralen Forschungsfragen der Untersuchung formuliert und der Versuch unternommen, das Phänomen des radikalen Islams in einer für das Verständnis des usbekischen Falles angemessenen Weise in Begriffe zu fassen. Die folgenden drei Abschnitte diskutieren den Zwischenfall von Andijan und geben eine detaillierte Analyse seiner Vorbedingungen, seiner Entstehung und seiner Nachwirkungen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen eine Kontinuität der Unterdrückung des Islam, auch in der post-sowjetischen politischen Situation des heutigen Uzbekistans. Die radikal islamische Rhetorik, die zum Instrument des Konfliktaustrags geworden ist, beruht stärker darauf, die Entstehung einer Opposition zu verhindern, als auf einem anti-westlichen Widerstand gegen importierte demokratische Werte. Um die usbekische Gesellschaft zu verstehen ist es von Bedeutung dass es den radikal islamischen Ideen deswegen nicht gelungen ist, die Unterstützung der breiten Bevölkerung zu gewinnen, weil der gängige usbekische Islam eher eine Frage der Religiosität denn eine Frage der Religion ist. Erstere, die auf Konzepten der Spiritualität beruht, hat in der heimischen Kultur und Lebensart einen größeren Einfluss und unterstützt Gewalt als Mittel der Einflussnahme nicht. Politisch betrachtet stellt die Überbetonung des religiösen Radikalismus jedoch einen Fehlschlag des politischen Systems dar, der die Korruption begünstigt und notwendige soziale und ökonomische Reformen verhindert. Sie trägt zur Verbreitung von Unzufriedenheit bei, die in Form von Ressentiments gegenüber dem Gewaltmonopol des Staates ihren Ausdruck findet. Darüber hinaus zeigt die Studie, dass die Neuordnung der Sicherheitspolitik gegenüber Russland und China die politische Absicht widerspiegelt, die islamistische Bedrohung mittels einer erneuerten Kooperationsstrategie zu bekämpfen und künftige Unruhen in Uzbekistan zu verhindern. Letztlich ermöglicht ein solcher "status quo" jedoch die Übertreibung radikaler religiöser Strenge, welche der zunehmenden Radikalisierung zu öffentlicher Akzeptanz verhilft.

Abstract: The aim of this study is to examine the influence of radical Islam on the emerging conflicts in the Republic of Uzbekistan through the analysis of radical Islamist discourse and the Andijan events that occurred on May 13, 2005 in the context of socio-economic and political instability. The method employed is the analysis of narratives and discourses on the religious factor in the local and foreign media, the Uzbek government, the international community and the Uzbek populace, with reference to existing theories of political Islam. The first section (Introduction) introduces three research questions and attempts to conceptualize the phenomenon of radical Islam by screening for appropriate definitions in an effort to understand the Uzbek cause. The next three sections discuss the realities of the Andijan incident and provide a detailed analysis of its preconditions, development and aftermath. The findings show a continuity in the oppression of Islam, even in the post-Soviet political situation of present-day Uzbekistan. The radical Islamic rhetoric that became an instrument in resolving conflicts is based more on preventing the emergence of opposition than on anti-Western political resistance against imported democratic values. What is relevant to understanding Uzbek society is that Islamic radical ideas have failed to attract support in the general populace because popular Uzbek Islam is more a matter of religiosity than of religion. The former, which relies on concepts of spirituality, is more influential in the local culture and way of life and does not support violence as a means of exerting influence. From a political perspective, however, the over-emphasis on religious radicalism indicates a failure of political institutions that encourages corruption and avoids needed social and economic reforms. It contributes to popular grievances that are formulated and expressed in terms of resentment (the Andijan incident) against the state monopoly of power. Additionally, this study revealed that the dynamics of the security realignment toward Russia and China symbolized a political intent to persist in a renewed cooperation strategy for combating the Islamist threat and preventing future unrest in Uzbekistan. In the end, such a "status quo" allows the overstatement of radical religious strength that complements further radicalization with popular acceptance.

I Introduction: Conceptualizing Radical Islam: The Search for the Uzbek Cause

That radical Islam exists in Uzbekistan should not be exaggerated, nor should it be minimized. The origins of previous studies of Islam and Islamic radicalism (or 'fundamentalism', the term most researchers use in referring to contemporary radical Islamic currents) can be found in various different background contexts and, consequently, there are different arguments and underpinnings for understanding Islamic revivalism and violence. Among these studies, however, it would be hard to find even one comprehensive work on Islamic radicalism in Central Asia that could help us to understand current events in the region, particularly in Uzbekistan. Most scholars' analyses have so far been reductive to the Islamic cause itself and do not supply us with overall alternative explanations for violence and unrest. Such areas of social activity as the economy, legal system, political participation and the exercise of fundamental freedoms should receive closer scrutiny in order to achieve a more comprehensive interpretation. For that purpose, I point to three main research questions:

1. Why are conflicts and unrest in Uzbekistan framed in the context of radical Islam?
2. Is radical Islam linked to the violent conflicts (analyzing the Andijan events) that are emerging in the Ferghana Valley?
3. How can we understand radical Uzbek Islam and measure its influence on changes in Uzbek foreign and domestic policies?

The pluralism of opinions on the nature of radical Islam leaves these questions unanswered, meaning that previous and perhaps also current scientific efforts have failed to place this social phenomenon into a secure conceptual framework. Speaking of theory, I will not offer a precise definition of radical Islam since it is not my field of expertise; but I will try to offer a general theoretical framework for further use in the discussion, relying on the ideas of three social scientists (Olivier Roy, Gilles Kepel and Bernard Lewis) whose works offer the best informed, most contemporary and reliable analyses of the Muslim world and Islam per se.

In his *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, Olivier Roy sees the expansion of radical Islam as "a consequence of and [a] reaction to social changes," rather than as evidence of the crystallization and stabilization of values.¹ Discussing radical violence, Roy stresses the cause and the purpose of *Jihad* which, surprisingly, is not the essential feature of radical Islamic movements. The orientation of Islamic discourse on *Jihad* in Uzbekistan varies dramatically depending on whom one talks to. Most media sources, both national and international, warn that Uzbekistan is a venue of struggle between radical (fundamentalist) and 'moderate' (official) opinions over the right to speak for Islam. There are doubts, however, about whether the Republic is a place where the struggle, if at all, is actually taking place. This argument must be supported by data and statistical information on the situation and the facts. Roy could also be misleading in saying that the disappearance of traditional values laid the groundwork for re-Islamization. State policies on returning Uzbekistan to traditional Islamic practices (for example, the administrative establishment of *mahallas*, strict control and censorship of television and radio broadcasts; the promotion of traditionalism in regard to marriage and family life, including the limitation of women's rights in this respect; bringing the religious heritage and the Islamic historical legacy in the face of Amir Temur, which slept under the Soviet rule, back to the surface of Uzbek consciousness; and the 'fight' against modernization in the form of surveillance of and restraints on the private economic sector and the overall economy) have not furthered the disappearance of the traditional values of the Uzbek grassroots population, but rather have tended to crystallize them. Whether the events unfolded in a reversed scenario – crystallization favored Islamic radicalization – is hard to judge, despite the spread of the radical agenda of *Wahhabism*,² *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and *the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)*³ on the territory of the Republic. The President's efforts to impose "defensive" state-controlled re-Islamization on Uzbek society as an aspect of Islamic revivalism provoked resistance at the grassroots level. Was the resistance expressed in terms of *Jihad*? Did it have a movement, an organization, or a leader propagating radical ideas? Did the Andijan events prove the existence of

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1. Mamdani, Mahmud, *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2005. *Whither Political Islam?*, <http://www.foreignaffairs.org>
 2. *Wahhabism*, a fundamentalist movement launched on the Arabian peninsula in the late 18th century by Muhammed Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud. The followers of this movement constitute the largest and most conspicuous category of Islamic revivalists or Islamists. Referred to as 'scripturalists,' 'legalists,' and 'literalists', they advocate rigid adherence to the fundamentals of Islam, as literally interpreted from the Koran and *Sunna* (the Prophet Mohammed's sayings and deeds). Wahhabis often strive to establish an Islamic state based on the rigorous implementation of the Shari'a and insist that the five *faraidh* (duties) be scrupulously adhered to by all their co-religionists. See further A. Jerichow & J. Baek Simonsen, *Islam in a Changing World: Europe and the Middle East*, Curzon Press, 1997; p. 98
 3. "The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was founded in 1991 in the Ferghana Valley by Juma Namangani and Takhir Yuldashev after their peaceful appeals to President Islam Karimov to take Islamist concerns more seriously ... fell upon deaf ears and provoked a crackdown. A 1999 assassination attempt on Karimov that killed thirteen and injured 128 was blamed on them, and they were sentenced to death in absentia. Supported by outside funding, they retreated to Tajikistan and Afghanistan, from whence they launched a number of incursions into Uzbek and Kyrgyz territory ..." See further Eastvold, Jonathan C., 2003, *Charming the Hyrda: Assessing Islamist Militancy in the Ferghana Valley*, Department of Politics, Princeton University (paper presented at the Central Eurasian Studies Society Fourth Annual Conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2-5 October 2003.)

active radical Islamist groups in Uzbekistan? I could go on with such questions, as they indicate that certain elements of Roy's theoretical explanation cannot be applied to the situation in Uzbekistan: He mostly refers to Islam and Islamic history in the Middle East and discusses their relationship with the West, which the other two scholars also discuss in their works.

The state-created ideological division between radical and moderate Islam did not make Uzbek Islam controversial and did not bring it to the development and adaptation stages¹ because of suppression from above. The question is still open of whether the suppression of religiosity can still destine Uzbek Islamism to failure and encourage the spread of radical Islam. Obviously, the blurring of the frontlines between Uzbek Islamism and radical Islam is confusing: If state-promoted pan-Uzbek national ideology with 'moderate' official Islam at the core is the first issue, then a grassroots-level struggle for freedom of religion, economic and political prosperity in the name of fundamentalism must be the second. A comparison with neighboring Afghanistan, however, where the Shari'a was interpreted more radically under the Taliban, who promoted a return to a Islamic Caliphate by targeting traditional local culture and limiting women's rights, helps to distinguish between constructive and destructive ideas. I am not arguing that radical ideas cannot be constructive. Perhaps they were, if we view the Andijan events as an attempt to bring an end to socio-economic frustration and alleviate the oppression of religion and the state's authoritarian policies. But the question is whether the constructive aspects should be understood in terms of religious radicalism, whose role began to be overemphasized especially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States.

The revolutionary wave in Islam, as Bernard Lewis correctly states in his *The Crisis of Islam*, can be linked to humiliation, frustration and new confidence characterized by the sense of power:

the feeling of a community of people accustomed to regard themselves as the sole custodians of God's truth, commanded by Him to bring it to the infidels, who suddenly find themselves dominated and exploited by those same infidels and, even when no longer dominated, still profoundly affected in ways that change their lives, moving them from the true Islamic to other paths.²

It is still not certain what 'true Islamic' means in contemporary Uzbekistan and what 'other paths' might be. Put simply, for an Uzbek Muslim 'true Islamic' can mean living according to long-accepted Sufi traditions, while for a radical Pashtun it can mean writing the Shari'a into state laws and the criminal code. If it is impossible to distinguish what is true under the conditions of current events in Uzbekistan, how can we identify what is radical? Perhaps political leverage is more easily managed due to the implementation of the latter project; however, it does not facilitate our search for the Uzbek cause.

The aforementioned humiliation and frustration recall the past, when Islam was suppressed in Uzbekistan by Russian imperialism and the Soviet Union, yet instead of disappearing gained new confidence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Did the dynamics of economic and political transformation in Uzbekistan prompt independent religious Uzbek Muslims to try to change the new regime and establish their own based on the Shari'a? Minor efforts were made to agitate for radical anti-government ideas, but were not taken seriously because of their ambiguous and somewhat utopian character. Moreover, the availability of social and economic alternatives helped to avoid a stalemated situation in the Republic, but left no room for political solutions. It is debatable whether social despair in making political choices is one of the key components of radicalization in Muslim countries, and it is also debatable whether it is the key issue when it comes to Uzbekistan specifically. Another debatable point is whether a healing process for Islam (complete separation of religion and politics) is feasible in the long run, not just in Uzbekistan, but for Islam as a whole, since that would require dramatic changes in religious practice, not to mention whether we could predict other consequences.

Methodology: This study has multiple tasks. First, it attempts to distinguish elements of radical Islam within Uzbek Islam through the analysis of Islamic discourse on both the grassroots and governmental levels. It involves a closer study of the reports, as well as the perceptions of Islam among and by international human rights reporting groups, NGOs, and media from the period when the Andijan events occurred up until today, revealing the consequences in both the political and socio-economic spheres. Second, in this study I try to use the more comprehensive approach needed to guide the understanding of radical Islam in Uzbekistan, relying on existing theories of political Islam and supplementing them with additional research and first-hand knowledge of this geographic area. An overview of the preconditions of the Andijan events (radicalization in the late 1980s and the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991) is necessary for further narrative and discourse analysis, as I consider it a reference point in seeking signs of and judging the extent of the influence of radical Islam on popular unrest today. Yet, I will try to analyze in a way going beyond the topic of radicalism and to look for other more cogent and relevant explanations.

1. Here I rely on Gilles Kepel's (*Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*) theory that democratic ideas and equivocal Islamic practices can either destine Islamism to failure or reorient it to more progressive forms. Piscatori, James P. (University Lecturer on Islamic Politics and Fellow at Wadham College, Oxford University, author of *Muslim Politics*), May/June 2002. *Foreign Affairs, The Turmoil Within*, <http://www.foreignaffairs.org>

2. Lewis, Bernard, March 2003. *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*, Random House, p. 18

II On the Path to Andijan

"... the tale of confessions and executions went on, until there was a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon's feet and the air was heavy with the smell of blood, which had been unknown there since the expulsion of Jones."

George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (1945), Ch. VII

In the year after the Andijan events of May 13, 2005, countless versions and opinions were offered by the international community, media, Uzbek Government, victims and refugees regarding what actually happened in Babur Square in the town center and who was responsible for the violence that resulted in the deaths of Uzbek civilians. Most of the reports and articles published since then give us a narrative about the chronology of unfolding events in Andijan, but very few provide truly unbiased and reliable information on the real situation in the Republic. The analysis of this chapter includes both the alleged Islamic cause and socio-economic conditions, taking a look at the historical premises of the past several decades.

Historical victimhood continued through the years of offenses against and suppression of local religious practices by the Soviets, especially during Stalinist rule (massive purges of the late 1920s and 1930s),¹ but Muslims in Uzbekistan cooperated with the Soviet Government in Moscow.² Theoretically, such treatment of Islam and Uzbek religiosity might eventually have cumulated into popular grievances at the lack of religious freedom and mobilized the masses to violent resistance, but this never occurred. Nonetheless, throughout seventy years under Soviet rule, a key issue was the loss of honor and religious privileges suffered by Uzbek Muslims.³ It should not be ruled out, however, that a well-operating albeit deficient system of social welfare and authoritarian yet continuous political stability assuaged sentiments of victimhood, as they coincided in time (the Iron Curtain that isolated Soviet Muslims from the rest of the Muslim world but did not deprive them of collective social and civic privileges). Speaking of contemporary Uzbekistan, where the head of state was a product of Soviet secularism, the implementation of policies on closing borders with neighboring countries, the promotion of a pan-Uzbek national ideological alternative to Islam, incorporation of fundamental Islamic practices into the law, and, finally, the monopolization of control over the national economy in accordance with the private interests of the surrounding elite, have changed the scenario. The foundation of today's religious situation in Uzbekistan was laid when Islam Karimov took control after the elections in 1991 and adopted an "undifferentiated approach to any kind of Islamic belief beyond the officially approved religion," that he expected to be able to manage.⁴ A new era of Muslim victimization by the new regime was something Muslims hoped they would not suffer; it would only be exacerbated by economic impoverishment and other frustrations in the coming years, even though economically citizens were better off in the first few years of independence than those in other Central Asian countries. I recall a brief urbanization boom during which many ethnic Uzbeks were able to afford to move from rural villages to urban areas due to the fears of the majority of the local Slavic population. Many Slavs fled the country in anticipation of unfavorable Uzbek nationalism and policy changes regarding the official language and employment conditions. During the course of a massive "brain drain," more children of *dekhkonlar* (peasants) were able to move away from the cotton fields and obtain secondary and often higher education. However, dynamic urbanization and access to education are not the sole factors worth discussing. The ideological vacuum and political learning allowed the emergence of Islamist movements on the territory of the Republic that met with quick suppression (in the early 1990s⁵), which differed from recent practices in Andijan.

What happened on May 13 has been called a 'massacre' or at least 'violence' by some, while others have referred to it simply as 'events' (in this study, depending on the context, however, the reader will find a variety of terms, none of which reflect my personal views). In all reports consulted⁶ and other sources of information on the events, the beginning is dated to Friday, May 13, 2005. If we look beyond the violent events, the beginnings date back to January/February 2005, when

1. Roy, Olivier, 2000. *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*, I.B. Tauris; p. 52
2. See Lewis, Bernard, 2002. *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*, New York, Oxford University Press
3. *Supra*, 7.
4. Goble, Paul, 24 March 2006. *Uzbekistan: Analysis From Washington – Fighting Fundamentalism With Sufism*, http://www.naqshbandi.org/events/us2000/uzbek_pres/rfe_uzbekistan.htm
5. *The Economist*, 24 July 2003. *Allah's Shadow: Is Radical Islam a Threat to Central Asia's Stability?*, <http://www.economist.com>
6. The reports include: two ICG reports, *Uzbekistan: The Andijan Uprising* and *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul* accessible at <http://www.icg.org>; Human Rights Watch report, *"Bullets Were Falling Like Rain": The Andijan Massacre, May 13, 2005* accessible at <http://www.hrw.org>; OSCE/ODIHR report, *Preliminary Findings on the Events in Andijan, Uzbekistan, 13 May 2005* accessible at <http://www.osce.org>; and Shirin Akiner's report, *Violence in Andijan, 13 May 2005*, print edition.

a trial of 23 local entrepreneurs began on charges of belonging to a religious extremist group, *Akramiya* (allegedly a faction of *Hizb ut-Tahrir*). By the same token, the explosions in Tashkent in February 1999 could also be a reference point that catalyzed the escalation of the government's crackdown on opposition of all sorts, whether secular or religious.¹ The implementation of a massive detention program in summer 1999 and spring 2004² targeted people engaged in any independent activity (uncontrolled by local authorities) that involved pious Muslims. Selective entry to the country, poor international investment in the local economy, and the growing Uzbek population left only the majority of religious-minded Muslims to do business with. The state's hypothesis that independent business networks similar to the one charged with extremism in Andijan are a front for the radical Islamic agenda can be disputed; however, the flourishing system of corruption and state autocracy that eradicates opposition exists at the expense of such networks. On a path leading to self-destruction, Uzbekistan could not refrain from violence in Andijan. For Uzbek Muslims the fact that the authorities are reluctant to seek non-economic solutions is no wonder. The Ferghana Valley (where Andijan is located) has been regarded as a hotbed of instability and religious extremism since the early 20th Century³ and therefore required more commitment in managing problem zones, but instead was handled ineptly by the government from the day Karimov came to power. Perhaps it should have been taken into consideration that the Ferghana Valley is the most populous region of the country (with more than eight million people; nearly 30% of the entire population), troubled by border and inter-ethnic tensions and disputes over the allocation of water resources that make the failure of core political institutions most salient there. The initiative of the 23 religious entrepreneurs to build up their community in Andijan and contribute to the socio-economic development of the town was not fruitful. In this sense, it was a failure to discern an emerging domestic market that had more to do with the development of Islamic middle-class business than with the call for *Jihad*.⁴ The fact of being Islamic did not challenge the country's political order, but rather was a "push for the abolition of state monopoly."⁵ Such incompatibility of official and popular interests contributed to an asymmetric vision of Islam and made the religion and the way it is practiced part of the socio-political dilemma that in the end resulted in the Andijan violence.

III Friday the 13th: Mirroring the Reality

"The great enemy of the truth is very often
not the lie: deliberate, continued, and dishonest;
but the myth: persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic."

John F. Kennedy (1917–1963)⁶

Violent protest in Andijan⁷ could be a strategy to force the President to pay attention to social concerns about living standards, but it could also be a long-planned attempt to overthrow the Government and oust the head of state in the name of Islam. The previous lack of evidence that would support either of these hypotheses also admits of the contrary – that it could be a resentment-driven grassroots response to an authoritarian regime. I will not repeat the chronology and the nature of the events, because that is not the purpose of this study; rather, I will analyze the narrative and the discourse on the day of violence, and then in the next section discuss the consequences.

The laws on criminal liability for extremism, religious fundamentalism, and separatism promulgated in the criminal code of independent Uzbekistan created a legitimate framework for identifying and banning local religious initiatives. The publications of Western press groups and the Western media pictured the Government's actions to quell the unrest as illegitimate and even criminal. According to these publications, which I refer to as reports, the events in Andijan constituted a slaughter of innocent civilians by state military forces in an attempt to divert attention from public calls for socio-economic and political reforms. Two questions arise immediately: If it was intended as a peaceful protest, why would people initiate it at midnight and seize weapons?; and why would troops open fire if the protest did not have anything to do with violence

1. Roy, Olivier, Summer/Fall 2001. *Qibla and the Government House: The Islamist Networks*, JStore online database. SAIS Review Vol. 21, # 2.

2. UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2005. *Central Asia Human Development report*, Bratislava, Slovak Republic.

3. Shields, Acacia, September 2000. Human Rights Watch, *International Religious Freedom report*, testimony before the House Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights.
<http://www.muslimuzbekistan.com>

4. Roy, Olivier, 2004. *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, New York, Columbia University Press; p. 97

5. *Ibid.*, p. 98

6. <http://www.quoteworld.org/quotes/7643>, (May 2006)

7. Here, I refer to the way the events in Andijan are addressed ("the armed protest") in major reports and additional sources of collected data used for this study.

justified by a radical Islamic or *coup d'état* agenda, as some reports claim? Such inconsistency in the reports compels us to study the reality of the events: The alleged seizure of Kalashnikov machine guns and the occupation of the jail,¹ the unauthorized release of inmates (including the 23 detained entrepreneurs) and participation in a few exchanges of shots are, if true, radical. The reports are similar in denying religious motivation and taking a stance on violations of human rights and international law principles, which responds to a pro-democratic, Western-promoted foreign policy toward Uzbekistan and all of Central Asia. The fact that the headquarters of all major reporting groups are located in Europe (e.g. the OSCE) and the United States (International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch, UN) and operate under the auspices of the respective countries could affect the nature of the Andijan-related reports, suggesting the one-sidedness of the findings. What could also make the reports unreliable is the reporters' limited knowledge of the perception and role of Islam in the political and social life of the Republic, as well as of the local Muslim culture per se. The misguided and extreme Western policy toward Iraq, for instance, destabilized the country but so far has not achieved its stated goals, which also had much to do with a somewhat naïve approach to Middle Eastern realities and idiosyncrasies. I am not arguing that Western sources are absolutely unreliable or provide completely unsubstantiated information on the uprising and its causes. They must have relied on at least some theoretical framework to analyze the shortcomings and draw the conclusions that Andijan, and for that matter the entire Ferghana Valley, enjoys few advantages in the development of local business, infrastructure and the system of social services. However, it would still be premature to identify the causative or correlative factors and the extent of their influence on the situation.

Giving broader perspectives on the discourse, a report by Dr. Shirin Akiner² deserves special attention due to its apologetic tone and counterproductive argumentation. Her principal statements – that the episode in Andijan was not a "demonstration mounted by peaceful civilians ... but a carefully prepared attack"³ with hidden religious motives aimed at changing the political order – started people thinking. These are not the statements of a media journalist or a professional belonging to a media group, but rather of a *Western* academic on whose expertise and knowledge of the Central Asian region one could hardly cast any doubt. However, the report provoked skepticism regarding the objectivity of the analysis, perhaps because it was a single Western source that did not conflict with the official Uzbek version in a general sense, or because the research was conducted under rather complicated conditions and therefore could be misleading. I am not familiar with Dr. Akiner's other publications on Uzbekistan, but my guess is that her previous work and field research earned her the confidence of the Uzbek authorities (Dr. Akiner had been visiting and writing about Uzbekistan for more than 25 years⁴) and apparently enabled her to obtain permission to conduct an on-site investigation. Unfortunately, it is hard to say whether Dr. Akiner managed to dig deeper than her competitors or could prove her results, yet she did make valuable comments, although some of them remain quite ambiguous. While Dr. Akiner mentions the fact that the small *Akramiya* movement enjoyed neither popular support nor that of the local *ulama*,⁵ she leaves out the three-month long peaceful demonstration by several hundred supporters in front of the court building.⁶ The explanation offered for such support is the provision of employment to young male residents that is described as a strategy to recruit followers to the movement. It makes Dr. Akiner's argument that the population in Andijan belongs to the middle class self-contradictory in the sense that presumably if there were employment alternatives in the town, the recruitment strategy would be unsuccessful. Due to double standards in the sphere of international development, it is incorrect to assert that the population of Andijan and the poverty symptoms are unrelated. The miserable living standards of a poor African, for instance, residing in a Third-World country who can barely make ends meet, do not necessarily mean that those of a poor Uzbek will be more tolerable. On the other hand, the reality is often relevant to a specific economic milieu that cannot be evaluated just by looking at stores and cafes and talking to merchants in the local bazaars. (It could also be true that lower wages do not always cause poverty for the local population, since the gray and black markets and illegal incomes form a long-established system.)

Apart from economic lag as a factor, the over-politicization of the linkage of events to religious protest is confusing. If the armed protesters had a radical Islamist agenda and plans for its realization, why did it take massive arrests and irregularities in the trial process to provoke a resort to violent tactics, and why did this not happen earlier? If there were generous financial support from outside and the involvement of external forces (allegedly from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) to support and mobilize the protesters, why were a military unit armed with Kalashnikovs targeted as a source of weapons and freed

1. Human Rights Watch report, *"Bullets Were Falling Like Rain": The Andijan Massacre, May 13, 2005* accessible at <http://www.hrw.org> quoting the speech by Islam Karimov on 14 May 2005 on the First Channel of Uzbek Television
2. Dr. Shirin Akiner is a Lecturer on Central Asian Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and an Associate Fellow of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. She has written seven books and many articles, as well as giving frequent BBC commentaries on the region. Dr. Akiner speaks and reads both Uzbek and Russian. See Starr, S. Frederick, Introduction to *Violence in Andijan, 13 May 2005* by Shirin Akiner
3. Akiner, Shirin, June 2005. *Violence in Andijan, 13 May 2005*, print edition, p. 30
4. Akhborot Plus Programme, Uzbek TV, *UK Academic Says Interviews Corroborate Uzbek Official Death Toll*, interview with Haydar Hasanov, 29 May, 2005; http://www.uzbekistan.de/en/2005/e_n0602.htm
5. Islamic clergy.
6. Photoessay, *The Wail of Andijan*, June 2005; <http://muslimuzbekistan.net/en/centralasia/genocide/story.php?ID=514>

prison inmates (as many as 500¹) regarded as potential reinforcements? The state monopoly on the right to speak for Islam precludes a confrontation between different visions of Islam, and this points to the weakness and insignificance of religious radicalism as a factor. However, it is becoming more common to hear statements sympathetic to radical Islamists among the secular Uzbek population, who claim that government by Islamists would eliminate corruption and theft.² Just as the present Government is becoming convinced that any means of eliminating opposition are legitimate, namely 'the fight against religious radicalism and extremism', the rising tide of radicalization could be passing through the Uzbek population, convincing people that any means of changing the regime are justified.³ Such a sentiment is more likely to receive quick acceptance among Muslims in the Ferghana Valley, united as they are by a common socio-economic crisis which is exacerbated by disputes over irrigation and cross-border issues.

The establishment of faithful *nomenklatura* around the President helps to override the personal convictions of the overwhelming majority of government officials, who are conscious of the leader's faux pas. Obedience to implicit orders to fire at the unarmed crowd was the main indicator that political decisions determine a political milieu bypassing pivotal problems and producing such precedents as the Andijan conflict. "You know how it is in Uzbekistan – we do only what we are told to do, and we do nothing unless told to do something,"⁴ precisely describes the state of affairs within the Uzbek Government. It is therefore understandable that even in the President's inner circle people tend to silently "take into consideration the complicated social and economic situation, and as a consequence, the growth of discontent among the population and the increase of religion's role in social life [that] could create a worst-case scenario [in Uzbekistan] in the intermediate future."⁵

IV The Aftermath: The Triumph of the Regime

"A man his worn-out garments laying by
Some different and newer clothes will try
And thus the bodied soul takes other forms
When it discards the worn-out ones that die."

Bhagavad Gita⁶

A sudden shift in Uzbek domestic and foreign Western-oriented policies towards Russia and China occurred immediately after the events. The broad scope of the Andijan aftermath affected media outlets, international NGOs, human rights reporting groups, as well as the US military base in Karshi-Khanabad ("K2") from within the country and extended beyond the state's boundaries, as the Uzbek authorities cooperated with other governments to prosecute and arrest Uzbek citizens abroad. The subdivision of this change into what I call domestic and foreign aspects does not put the two categories into different corners, yet requires their separate overview, entailing the examination of details, exploration of transitions, and the effects of the events on the government, country and populace.

IV.1 Domestic Affairs

The blockage of external information sources and the reiteration of government-supported versions in regard to the internal situation of the Republic has become customary since the explosions in Tashkent in 1999, making rumors one of the main instruments in spreading information at the local level. There were small numbers of satellite television and Internet users in the urban and especially rural areas, while an overwhelming majority of the country's population was left in uncertainty. The policy to ensure that disputes over Andijan realities would prevent the population from arriving at more accurate conclusions through the return of pre-Andijan political conjunctures paid off in due time: A considerable number of US-funded NGOs⁷ stopped their activities, and there was interference with local civil society initiatives and human rights groups.⁸ No-

1. ICG report, 25 May 2005, *Uzbekistan: the Andijan Uprising*, Asia Briefing #38, p. 1
2. Rotar, Igor, 12 August 2004. Jamestown Foundation, *Why Extremism is on the Rise in Uzbekistan*, Vol. 2, Issue #16; <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369711>
3. Ibid
4. I was told this by the Head of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the international organizations in Vienna. For the sake of confidentiality, I have omitted the source's name.
5. Novikov, Evgeniy, 16 November 2004. Jamestown Foundation, Spotlight on Terror, *Islam and Uzbekistan: An Interview with Dr. Rafik Saifulin* (former director of the Uzbek Institute of Strategic and Regional Studies, and, by now probably, former adviser to Islam Karimov), Vol. 2, Issue #12. <http://www.jamestown.org>
6. Runzo, Joseph, 2001. *Global Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford, England. Oneworld Oxford; p. 127
7. See HRW Country Summary on Andijan's aftermath, January 2006; <http://www.hrw.org> and Ferghana.ru reporting *Posle Nas Hot' Potop. Vlasti Uzbekistana Izgonyayut iz Strany Predstavitelstvo Counterpart International*, 5 February 2006; <http://news.ferghana.ru/detail.php?id=4378>
8. *Supra*, 54

tably, the ambiguity of the laws made it difficult for organizations to adapt their community- and human rights-oriented activities to legal requirements before the incident and simplified the employment of harsh tactics against these organizations afterwards. The expulsion of NGOs from whom the local population derived benefits reduced public exposure to the Western-supported promotion of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, freedom of speech and justice. The triumph of autocracy was conditioned by the silencing of outsiders who had pointed out its deficiencies and provided societal information that once tangibly contributed to the clearer formulation of goals at the the Uzbek grassroots level. The state's strategy to suppress the sentiment of social solidarity from within society contradicted its political ideology of national independence – and therefore the pre-eminence of the Uzbek nation – parodying the Soviet attitude that hampered the integration of Muslim societies in its Central Asian satellites.

Post-Andijan consequences for religion and religiosity took the the form of intensified surveillance that increased at the end of March 2006¹ and targeted pious Uzbek Muslims for national victimization. It could be that official measures in the struggle against the autonomy of Islam and its potential to become political led to the creation of a fairly strong opposition.² Yet, it is not the struggle between secularism and Islamism, but secular re-Islamization – the promulgation of an educated vision of Islam by the authorities that is at issue. In this context, the adherents of the opinion that (uneducated) Islam should be left in peace are categorized as Islamists, more often radical, whereby *namaz* (the daily prayer) and *zakat* (charity) appear secondary. Interestingly, however, it is hard to speak about an educated vision of Islam without its five pillars, including these two practices, at the core. Perhaps the establishment of institutionalized Islam will be tolerated under the present regime; but there is skepticism about its full acceptance in the longer run, whereby the politicization of popular Uzbek Islam may become a by-product.

IV.2 Foreign Affairs

The plan for security cooperation realignment, that started ripening within the Uzbek Government before the Andijan violence, broke off friendly diplomatic relations between Tashkent and Washington, and quickly reoriented Uzbek foreign policy towards Russia and China. The closing of US military base "K2" in November 2001 and the refusal to authorize US overflights³ were gestures of dissatisfaction with the US government's failure to live up to its offer of protection against Islamic radicalism in exchange for the President's agreement to cooperate with the global War on Terror. Russian and Chinese support for Uzbekistan presupposed the elimination of the United States as their major competitor for interests in Central Asia. What is interesting, however, is that both Russia and China faced similar dilemmas, the Chechen and Uyghur conflicts respectively, although dissimilar to the Uzbek case in substance. Political flip-flops in relations between the three states brought new advantages in the geopolitical and strategic spheres of cooperation that led to diplomatic exchanges and subsequent *de jure* shifts.⁴ For China, for instance, the interests include not only oil and gas, but also potential markets and opportunities for Chinese investors. In this sense, the state of affairs in the development of post-Andijan relations in the Chinese-Russian-Uzbek coalition rests on the axis of mutual optimality and political caution.

Speaking of the project for strengthening state security, the interest of the Uzbek government in strengthening and retraining its military forces must not be overlooked. Theoretically, the process of militarization may be intensified in response to the coup d'état.⁵ In this case, the government-pursued militarization using the dividends it received from Russia to train the army and security services⁶ is in fact justified by the anticipated continuation of the Andijan plot. Simply compare the increased discrepancy in the number of police and security officers in the streets of Tashkent (Uzbekistan), Almaty (Kazakhstan) and Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), which are more numerous in Tashkent than in other capitals of the region. This factor could be determined by the larger Uzbek population, but became a compulsory feature of the regime over time. As a part of the militarization project, cooperation with Russian security services went so far as to detain and extradite Uzbek residents in Siberia (Russia's Far East) in Andijan's aftermath.⁷ The simplistic principle 'we littered, we must clean up' in the

1. Rotar, Igor, 18 April 2006. F18 News, *Transitions Online: 'Militant Islam': Crackdown in Tashkent*, <http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/section.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&tpid=16>
2. There are several reasons for this: the exodus of the old intelligentsia that occurred in Uzbekistan after independence significantly decreased the chances of building a politically strong and secular opposition; the ideas of radical Islam that opposed political revivalism after independence met with some acceptance among the younger Uzbek Muslim generation, who tended to reject the rhetoric of the successor Government.
3. ICG report, 16 February 2006. *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul*, Asia Briefing #45, Bishkek/Brussels, <http://www.icg.org>
4. 'Marriage of convenience', signed on 14 November 2005 between Uzbekistan and Russia, conditional on Russian military support in the case of future attempts to undermine the regime. Spring 2005 was marked by the United States terminating its strategic partnership with Uzbekistan, and China signing the agreement on "The Partnership Relations of Friendship and Cooperation."
5. Chossudovsky, Michel, 10 July 2004. Center for Research on Globalization, *Coup D'état in America?*, <http://www.globalresearch.ca>
6. *Supra*, 65
7. *Supra*, 65

interpretation of Uzbek sovereignty and internal affairs does not reckon with the principles of international law, as it resulted in the decline of Western requests for independent investigations of the Andijan events. In the end, such political leapfrogging by the government has weakened the state over the past few years, leading to the crystallization of political ambitions at the core of the implementation of the military strategy against an abstract enemy.

V Conclusion: Religious Impact: From Radical Islam to Violence in Andijan?

Based on the above analysis, present dynamics in Uzbekistan that incorporate all three vital aspects – socio-cultural, political, and economic – are hard to reconcile with the theory that the Islamic factor has led to a heightened conflict potential. In regard to the three research questions set at the start of this paper, the findings are respectively:

1. Since the time of Soviet rule, as far as the Central Asian region is concerned, the label of religious radicalism, namely *Wahhabism*, has become fashionable among policymakers trying to explain radical forms of Islam in Uzbekistan. Historical records of the relations between government elites, both the Soviet and the post-Soviet Uzbek systems, and those of Islamic movements (as well as Islam as a religion per se) tell us about the image of the Islamist threat with a potential to undermine each regime during the period of its existence. Such negative political experiences have affected present political standards in regard to religion and other independent forms of activity (be it social, economic, or political) that are hard to monitor.

The social aspiration "to enjoy the blessings of freedom and democracy and free enterprise"¹ is framed in the context of radical Islam not because it is described as the promotion of Western values that Uzbekistan has been resistant to so far, but because these values (universal and fundamental) would become a natural precondition of the healthy political (as well as social and economic) competition that Uzbekistan has never enjoyed. What is unclear is whether there is political uncertainty about progress as a part of modernization and globalization or a deliberate attack on internal and external initiatives, targeting the social and economic sectors of the state as a toolbox for reform, or both.

2. The failures of the Soviet and pan-Uzbek identities and secular ideologies, although the destruction of the collective spirit bypassed the individualization of society, did not make Uzbek Muslims espouse radical ideas. Yet the failures of ideology and identity remain on the political periphery, while dire socio-economic conditions and a crisis of political institutions occupy the center of the emerging conflicts. The experience of political and social deprivations that are triggered by confronting the authorities is encouraging Uzbek Muslims to search for an alternative source for the enforcement of justice and law, the importance of which Islam has always stressed. The latter does not provide any link to the radicalization of popular Uzbek Islam, because for ordinary Uzbek people their Islam is not a set of divinely revealed principles, but rather spirituality – a customary historical, cultural, ideological, and exemplary element – that they rely on in times of hardship. Whether this guided the protesters in Andijan on the basis of personal or political impulses remains a matter of opinion, whereas the religious impact was overestimated due to the government's political motives. A higher degree of religiousness in the Ferghana Valley than in other regions of the country² facilitates such political treatment despite the fact that being more religiously inclined does not mean that one will be more prone to violence. It is rather the region's socio-economic problems that deserve a more adequate spectrum of political attention.
3. In trying to understand radical Uzbek Islam, one should bear in mind that the fault-line between the Republic's essential and constructed reality in regard to the radical Islamic threat is unclear. The problem is that radical Uzbek Islam did not fail mainly because it has not yet reached its peak, but has suffered some recent decline. So far, it was understandable in terms of a political discourse that constructed a political mythology around the regime as a defense. Such political 'deculturation'³ among the republics of the former Soviet Union, where Muslim communities were also involved in conflicts with authorities (namely Russia and China), makes religious radicalization a by-product and facilitator.⁴ For the Uzbek government, the failure to differentiate between fundamentalist/radical (hard) and popular/moderate (soft) Islamic orders could be conditioned by the secular education received during Soviet times that did not allow for Islamic learning. This is exacerbated by the absence of holistic Uzbek Islam, that entails not only the fragmentation of the entire vision of Islam in the country, but also incoherence within the fragmented elements.⁵ It makes one wonder who chooses to fight for the ambiguous ideologies of such twofold movements. Accordingly, it shows that in the Republic the linkage between radical Islam and conflict, including the Andijan incident, is rather

1. Roy, Olivier, 2004. *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, New York, Columbia University Press; p. 333
2. Wearing headscarves (*hijab*) and long traditional dresses is more a value than a tradition for women in the Ferghana Valley that does not have any religious significance.
3. The term that Roy uses to refer to the blurring of borders between cultures in the contemporary Muslim and Christian worlds. Ibid, p. 330-331
4. *Supra*, 40-41

weak. What strengthens it, however, is the political strategy to employ an undifferentiated approach that helps radicals overstate their numbers and appear more legitimate in the long run. Such a conjuncture assumes that the more intense exploitation of the alleged cause has become a complex interconnection of multi-sided rhetoric: official Islam – to win Uzbek Muslim minds from radical Islamic ideologies for the sake of stability; stability – to clamp down on alleged radical Islamists; and a rhetorical crackdown on alleged radicals to preserve the status-quo in the presidential apparatus.

Finally, it is important to stress that in trying to heal the Republic of its crises of identity (socio-cultural) and ideology (socio-political), a cure for economic and political crises should also be concurrently pursued. There should be no state-promoted dividing line between 'us' and 'them' that defines domestic and foreign policies today but leads to a country's stagnation, which in turn promotes an increase in religious activism and subsequent radicalization among the masses.

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5. The ideological split between its two leaders of the IMU, Juma Namangani and Takhir Yuldashev, led the two groups along divergent paths. The fact that the movement ended up divided in its methods of recruitment but remained similar in terms of the original goals should be attributed to the local context of political and socio-economic mutability. Such mutability impedes the process of differentiating and explaining radical Islam vis-à-vis other forms that exist in Uzbekistan.

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About the author: Sogdiana Azhiben received her Bachelor degree in Chinese Language and Literature from Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies in 2005. In 2003-2004 she participated in the US-Government sponsored undergraduate exchange program majoring in American Studies at Eastern Connecticut State University. In 2006 she obtained her MA degree in Political Science (Central Asia) from the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. She has published an article on Chinese deep culture at the Austrian Institute for Integrative Conflict Transformation and Peace Building. Her professional experience includes internship at the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna, full-time work at Tashkent field office of the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), and English translation at the Uzbek Central Television.

Address: eMail: bagira_uz@yahoo.com