

## PREDICAMENTS AND PROSPECTS IN UZBEK ISLAMISM: A CRITICAL COMPARISON WITH THE TURKISH CASE

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### ABSTRACT

*Uzbekistan is a very crucial country in Central Asia with regards to threats challenging the region's stability. Any political and social change in Uzbekistan will have region-wide ramifications. This study endeavours to contribute to the current literature in terms of discussing the predicaments and prospects of the Uzbek Islamism by critically comparing it with the Turkish case with a special emphasis on the normative frameworks of the actors. Islams in Turkish and Uzbek contexts have several common points. These similarities are not only in the sense of theoretical orthodox Islams which are indeed identical but also in terms of folk Islams and the states' official Islams. Furthermore, both countries had experienced periods of official antagonism toward Islamic activism, especially its civil manifestations. Thus, this study endeavours to analyse if and to what extent Turkish Islamism's transformation could also be experienced in the Uzbek context and under what conditions.*

**Key Words:** *Uzbekistan, Islamism, Turkey, Radicalism, Central Asia*

### Introduction

Uzbekistan is strategically located in a region which is an important part of the world. The country's border with Afghanistan provides a vital access to this turbulent country's northern border. It is the most populous country in Central

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Asia, and it also has a high rate of population growth. There are large Uzbek ethnic minorities in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Thus, any political and social change in Uzbekistan will have ramifications in the Central Asia's stability.

With regards to stability in Uzbekistan, the current academic discussion on the country has generally focused on the country's Islamic identity, Islamism and Islamist extremist radicalism. In this context, the appeal of radical Islam has been explained by economic and political deprivation, the social inequality, the omnipresence of corruption, drug trafficking, population's increasing disillusionment with the regime's ability to improve the situation, authoritarianism, lack of political alternatives and the hard-line repression of Islamic and Islamist activists. This study endeavours to contribute to the current literature in terms of discussing the predicaments and prospects of the Uzbek Islamism by critically comparing it with the Turkish case with a special emphasis on the normative frameworks of the Islamist actors.

Islams in Turkish and Uzbek contexts have several common points. These similarities are not only in the sense of theoretical orthodox Islams which are indeed identical but also in terms of folk Islams and the states' official Islams. Furthermore, both countries had experienced periods of official antagonism toward Islam, especially its civil manifestations. Thus, this study endeavours to analyse if and to what extent Turkish Islamism's transformation towards post-Islamism and non-Islamism could also be experienced in the Uzbek context and under what conditions.

We firstly look at Uzbek Islam and give an historical account of Uzbek Islamism, followed by the government's response to it. We, then, analyze the main factors that paved way for Turkish Islamism's transformation to post-Islamism and non-Islamism with a focus on both institutional dimension and the agentive complexity. Finally, we discuss if and to what extent the Turkish experience could –and should- be emulated in the Uzbek context for the sake of the country's long term stability.

### **Islam in Uzbekistan**

There are several ways to discuss Islam in Uzbekistan that easily go beyond simple dichotomies.<sup>1</sup> Various events, factors, relationships and identities

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Zanca, "Explaining' Islam in Central Asia: An Anthropological Approach for Uzbekistan", *Journal of Muslim Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2004, p. 105.

cannot be placed within the opposition between ‘traditionalists’ and ‘fundamentalists’ or ‘official Islam’ versus ‘folk Islam’ that several studies on Islam in Central Asia attempt to construct.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, several studies that focus on the issue simply dichotomise the several manifestations of Islam in Uzbek society into lump sum reductionist categories and even in some cases blur fundamental differences between Islamic activists and political Islamists or differences between pro-violence groups and fundamentalists who are simply puritanists but are apolitical. As Zelkina showed, generally but wrongly labelled as ‘fundamentalism’, political Islam includes many diverse tendencies: ‘Wahhabism’ is only one manifestation of political Islam and “it is a term which at best can be applied only tentatively”.<sup>3</sup> The total picture in Uzbek Islam is much more complicated than to be summarized under umbrella categories. Especially after the independence, new hybridisations brought about new manifestations and understandings of Islam. In future, it seems that this trend will continue. Thus, any analysis of Islamism need to through take into account Islam’s different manifestations in the country.

Most people in Central Asia are Sunni and they follow Hanafi school of law (*madhhab*) which is the most tolerant and liberal *madhhab* of the four Sunni legal schools (Hanafi, Shafi’i, Maliki, Hanbali). This school is comparatively more flexible with regards to accommodating local customs and norms (*urf* and *adat*). Sufism is also widespread among Uzbeks and the Naqshbandiyya that has also been very influential in both Ottoman State and present-day Turkey is the dominant brotherhood in Uzbekistan.<sup>4</sup> Folk Islam was indifferent to formalism. Sufism stressed inner spirituality, mysticism, and the cult of saints. In daily life, there are sometimes discrepancies between the Hanafi school of law and people’s practices and orthodox *ulama* have been known to be criticising certain rituals of folk Islam such as shrine-worshipping.<sup>5</sup> There are also followers of Shafi’i school especially in Tashkent and also adherents of several other Sufi brotherhoods. In other words, folk Islam is neither monolithic nor completely different from the official and orthodox versions.

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<sup>2</sup> Sergei Abashin, “The Logic of Islamic Practice: A Religious Conflict in Central Asia”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2006, p. 283.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Zelkina, “Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia: How Genuine is the Islamic Threat?”, *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 27, No. 3/4, 1998, p. 355.

<sup>4</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Sufism in Central Asia: A Force for Moderation or a Cause of Politicization?*, Carnegie Papers, No. 84, 2007, pp. 2-5.

<sup>5</sup> Vitaly V. Naumkin, *Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*, (Berkeley, California: Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series, 2003), p. 16.

But after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, a full-scale assault on Islam was launched.<sup>6</sup> *Shari'a* courts and religious schools were closed down, *ulama* were persecuted, and religious endowment lands (*waqf*) were confiscated.<sup>7</sup> These policies were reversed again in 1924 when some prominent Muslim-turned Communists advised the Soviet rulers to rethink their tactics, resulting in the anti-Islamic campaign being put on hold and the Bolsheviks attempted to restore trust among the Muslims by returning *waqf* property, reopening mosques and Islamic schools, and resuming the practice of the *Sharia* law. But, when a relative degree of trust was achieved, the Soviets reverted to their long-term anti-Islamic strategy.<sup>8</sup>

The campaign intensified dramatically during Stalin's "revolution from above" and the purges of the late 1920s and 1930s. The majority of mosques were destroyed, and the Islamic clergy was decimated.<sup>9</sup> Seventy years of the Soviet regime endeavoured to diminish Islam's social role in society. *Shari'a* law was replaced with secular law and the influence of the clergy was reduced.<sup>10</sup> Madrassas were closed; people were discouraged from observing Islam; and the borders with Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey and later China were kept closed.<sup>11</sup> The Uzbek alphabet was changed twice—from Arabic into Latin and from Latin into Cyrillic.<sup>12</sup> Although the possibility of religious continuity was insured through the survival of a handful of people with religious education and the internal disposition, Islam effectively disappeared.<sup>13</sup> In 1943, the Soviets permitted the reestablishment of Islamic institutions and eventually ten mosques and two institutions of Muslim education were established. But "the number of religious institutions in the region was a small fraction of what had been in place prior to Soviet rule, when in Bukhara alone there were several hundred madrassas".<sup>14</sup> Ulama were prohibited from delivering sermons that might be construed as proselytizing.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ghoncheh Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia: A Potent Force or a Misconception?", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol., 20, No. 1, 2001, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Edward W. Walker, "Islamism and Political Order in Central Asia", p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Odil Ruzaliev, "Islam in Uzbekistan: Implications of 9/11 and Policy Recommendations for the United States", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2005, pp.14-15.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia*, Carnegie Papers, No. 77, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

In the 1960s a new Soviet foreign policy of supporting certain regimes in the Middle East to counterbalance the USA required that the Soviets treat their own Muslims better. Thus, two official madrassas were opened in Tashkent and Bukhara and an Islamic Institute in Tashkent was established to educate students of religion, paving the way for the emergence of a new term — ‘official’ Islam.<sup>16</sup> A Muslim Religious Board was established in Tashkent for Central Asia.<sup>17</sup> The official clergy was given considerable autonomy over religious matters. At the same time, Central Asians and their ulama adapted Islamic practices to Soviet conditions.<sup>18</sup> Being unsatisfied with the sterile official version of Islam, Muslims organised their religious activities “illegally within the so-called ‘Parallel Islam’, which functioned through a network of underground schools, mosques and structures of Sufi (mystical) orders centred around local sheikhs”.<sup>19</sup> Islam thus remained an important part of everyday life and identity in Soviet Central Asia, especially in rural areas.

Khrushchev’s policies opened the door for more linkages between Central Asian Muslims and the Muslim world.<sup>20</sup> Since Khrushchev believed that Soviet ideology had no current competitors and that religion as a spiritual competitor was not dangerous to Soviet rule, the pressure on religion in the USSR was reduced. One reflection of this was to allow the opening of new mosques, churches, and other places of worship. Thus, about 70 new mosques were opened in Central Asia in a very short time (bringing their total number to 112 in 1962).<sup>21</sup> The spread of religious texts was also inadvertently stimulated by the Soviet’s opening to the peoples of Asia and Africa. Moreover, delegations from the Middle East were invited to the Soviet Union and clerics were included in the groups, often visiting Central Asia. Especially, the clerics during all their visits donated literature to the Muslim libraries. This literature seems to have had some impact on the thinking of some *ulama* even in Soviet era.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Odil Ruzaliev, “Islam in Uzbekistan: Implications of 9/11 and Policy Recommendations for the United States”, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> This contrasts with the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs which has been a duty to supervise Islam in the country on behalf of the state, see in detail Ihsan Yilmaz, “State, Law, Civil Society and Islam in Contemporary Turkey”, *The Muslim World*, Vol. 95, No. 3, 2005 386-390.

<sup>18</sup> Edward W. Walker, “Islamism and Political Order in Central Asia”, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Zelkina, “Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia: How Genuine is the Islamic Threat?”, p. 357.

<sup>20</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia*, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Similarly, Khrushchev's foreign policies brought opportunities for some Muslims to study in the seminaries of the Middle East.<sup>23</sup> The Soviet-era *ulama* who received foreign training, especially those who went abroad during the Brezhnev years and later, were exposed to the Salafi teaching of as well as to the teachings of the other classical schools of Islamic jurisprudence, all of which were more conservative than the Hanafi school of law.<sup>24</sup>

With the launching of the Gorbachev reforms and especially with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the region began to undergo an Islamic revival.<sup>25</sup> The ideological vacuum and identity crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union have brought about a desire to learn about Islam. The country was flooded with missionaries from various religious organizations. The foreign groups mostly attracted urbanite young men. These young men were suddenly offered several competing options and Islamic worldviews to fill the ideological void and to ameliorate the identity crisis. The new state had been unable to compete with these visions and discourses. It lacked its own credible religious institutions so that it could offer its citizens alternatives. The number of imams and madrassa students increased fast. Many people began attending mosques. In only 1993, the number of the unofficial madrassas was around 5000.<sup>26</sup> In Central Asia, the focus of Islamic revival has been the Ferghana Valley, a densely populated and ethnically mainly Uzbek territory divided politically between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In 1993, 75% of the people in Andijan in the region said that they were regularly worshipping.<sup>27</sup> While for some, Islam was a comfort, for some other few it was a way to oppose a government they saw as oppressive.<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that aspiring for an Islamic identity is not always linked with real knowledge of Islam as the Uzbek case shows: Although 92% of the Uzbeks consider themselves as Muslim, almost half of them have either no religious education or very little knowledge of Islam.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> For Sufi revival after independence, see Martha Brill Olcott, *Sufism in Central Asia: A Force for Moderation or a Cause of Politicization?*, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> M. Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 159.

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Lubin, "Islam and Ethnic Identity in Central Asia: A View from Below", in Y. Ro'i' (Ed.) *Muslim Eurasia Conflicting Legacies*, (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> Odil Ruzaliev, "Islam in Uzbekistan: Implications of 9/11 and Policy Recommendations for the United States", p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Didier Chaudet, "Hizb ut-Tahrir: An Islamist Threat to Central Asia?", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 26, No.1, 2006, p. 115.

In short, Islamic identity was the only alternative to fill the gap left by socialism as far general masses were concerned. Even the Karimov government has relied on Islam in its nation-building endeavours. Similarly, in the discourses of the secular and nationalist-democratic *Erk* and *Birlik* parties Islamic identity has a very prominent place.<sup>30</sup> It is obvious that there is only a thin line between Islam's instrumentalist use by secular politicians and Islamism.

### **Uzbek Islamism**

The first period of Uzbek Islamism was between the years 1950 to 1970, when the first Salafis appeared in the region. They were isolated at the time and could not have any influence. Meanwhile, some members of the repressed ulama had begun to lose contact with the traditional Hanafi school of Islam and had begun to be influenced by literalist and puritanist Salafi-Deobandi-Wahhabi thought. The second period covers the period between 1970 and the late 1980s, when relatively less repressive Soviet rule enabled the puritanists to recruit more disciples and teach them privately at underground *madrassas*. Parallel to the limited number of formal Islamic learning institutions, there was also a growing number of underground Islamic circles, especially in the Ferghana Valley.<sup>31</sup>

In 1980s, thousands of Uzbeks joined Afghan mujahedeen and they interacted with Islamism during that period. Many of these Uzbeks, along with Tajiks, attended scripturalist Deobandi *madrassas* in Pakistan and fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan. They were hoping to establish an Islamic state after returning back to their countries.<sup>32</sup> The next period of Uzbek Islamism began at the end of the 1980s and the literalists started to operate more openly. They began to occupy significant positions in mosques and *madrassas*. They propagated a stricter, more puritanical, and conservative form of Islam. The fracturing of authority during and after the Soviet's collapse paved the way for the politicization of Islam. The revival and polarisation of

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<sup>30</sup> M. Turgut Demirtepe, , "Orta Asyada Radikalizm, Otokrasi ve Teror", Bal, Ihsan (Ed.) *Terörizm: Terör, Terörizm ve Küresel Terörle Mücadelede Ulusal ve Bölgesel Deneyimler*, (Ankara: USAK Yayınları, 2006), p. 259 ; Iona Ban, "The Chance for Civil Society in Central Asia or the Role of Islamic Movements in Shaping Political Modernity", *Romanian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 6, No.2, 2006, p. 123.

<sup>31</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia*, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 44-45.

Islam in the country took place on various social and political levels. On the political level it took several forms: (1) The emergence of the liberal and/or secular political parties that incorporated Islamic identity in their agendas; (2) An appeal to Islam as the source of legitimation by the government; (3) Attempts by state officials ('official Islam') to become an independent religious and political force; and (4) The emergence of politically active Islamic groups and parties within unofficial Islam.<sup>33</sup> A political void was formed in the collapsing Soviet Union and both the Hanafi ulama and their puritanist rivals became politicized to define how the void would be filled.<sup>34</sup> In both Andijan and Namangan strong, politicized Islamic presences emerged. In Namangan both Wahhabi and some Hanafi Sufi clerics were highly politicized.

It is unlikely that this politicization would ever have occurred if Soviet rule had not collapsed or if a strong alternative to these Islamist groups had existed.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the rise of Islamism speaks more to the Soviets' collapse and also the weakness of secular-liberal Birlik and Erk parties (the two secular opposition parties), and the initial failure of the Uzbek Communist Party to fill the ideological and power void.<sup>36</sup> An alternative apolitical, but contemporary understanding of Islam represented by strong religious figures with substantial number of followers is also missing from the picture.

At first, four radical Islamist groups were active in the Ferghana Valley: *Adolat* (Justice), *Baraka* (Blessings), *Tauba* (Repentance), and *Islam Lashkarlari* (Warriors of Islam). These groups existed even in the Soviet period, but emerged in the era of Gorbachev's reforms. Afterwards, other groups also became active in the region, including *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, *Akramiya*, *Hizb un-Nusrat*, *Uzun Soqol* (Long Beards), *Tabligh Jamaat*, *Lashkar-i-Taiba*, *Hizballah*, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).<sup>37</sup> Many of these groups but not all have a shared goal of the establishment of an Islamic state.

*Adolat*, *Tawba*, and *Islam Lashkarlari* was headed by future leaders of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). There were four prominent characteristics of *Adolat* ideology. First, it practiced Islamic puritanism,

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<sup>33</sup> Zelkina, "Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia: How Genuine is the Islamic Threat?", p. 358.

<sup>34</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia*, p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Zeyno Baran et al, *Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Implications for the EU*, (Washington DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program – A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center, 2006), p. 17.



directing its efforts at ensuring the strict observance of the ordinances, rituals, and norms of Islamic morality, as well as devotion and piety. In this sense, it was a Salafi organization. Second, it assumed responsibility for maintaining public order and eradicating crime. Third, it called for social justice and equality. And fourth, it espoused Islamic governance and the creation of a Shari'a state. These Islamists were not only Salafis, but also as violent jihadists as they were also committed to violent struggle against a secular regime in the name of Islam.<sup>38</sup>

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was formed in 1992 by Tahir Yuldashev who operated out of a mosque in Namangan.<sup>39</sup> His views were influenced by Wahhabism and Deobandism during his travels to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup> Through a network of mosques and madrassas his message was spread to all Ferghana Valley and he managed to unify the four radical Islamist groups (*Adolat* and *Islam Laskarlari*, both of which he led, as well as *Barak* and *Tauba*), under the umbrella of the IMU.<sup>41</sup> Under his leadership, the Islamists felt they were capable of launching a war to overthrow Karimov. Juma Khodjiev Namangani became the military commander of the IMU and by 1998, there were reports of hundreds of Uzbek *mujahidin* training in and operating between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, taking advantage of Tajikistan's civil war.<sup>42</sup>

The IMU vowed to establish an Islamic state in the Ferghana Valley (mainly populated by Uzbeks), which straddles the territories of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan and launched military actions in 1999 and 2000 that created a havoc in the region.<sup>43</sup> Beginning in the mid-1990s, the IMU started propagating

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<sup>38</sup> Vitaly V. Naumkin, *Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*, p. 48.

<sup>39</sup> On the IMU, see in detail, Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, Naumkin, *Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*, Michael Fredholm, *Uzbekistan and the Threat from Islamic Extremism*, (Sandhurst: United Kingdom Royal Military Academy, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Report No. K39, March 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Zeyno Baran et al, *Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Implications for the EU*, p. 25.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Svante E. Cornell & Spector Regina A., "Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2002, p. 196.

lessons on jihad throughout the Ferghana Valley.<sup>44</sup> The IMU classify Muslims into two groups: supporters of political Islam and opponents of political Islam. Although, they consider themselves to be Hanafi Muslims, not Salafi Muslims. However, some of their writings show that they are school-free Muslims and have a clear grievance with the Hanafi school.<sup>45</sup> Their writings on violent jihad that show very little expert knowledge of Islam resembles Salafi views, for the Hanafi school is much more prudent with regards to its advocacy.<sup>46</sup>

In view of the threat of politicized Islam, the government became repressive to eliminate the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) in 1992.<sup>47</sup> In 1994, it began a crackdown, primarily in Tashkent and in the major cities of the Ferghana Valley, involving “arbitrary arrests, ‘disappearances’ of Islamic leaders, the detention of bearded men and the harassment of women wearing veils—symbols of religious piety”.<sup>48</sup> The Uzbek ruling elite rely on the policy tool they know best—using the security apparatus and the penal system to eradicate the radical Islamist threat.<sup>49</sup> They have worked to assure that the regime, and the regime’s interpretation of every issue, is the only choice offered to Uzbeks, attempting to assure de facto regime perpetuity.<sup>50</sup> In practice, this means that anyone challenging a tenet of the Uzbek state is perceived as challenging the President, which is potentially criminal behavior.<sup>51</sup> This obstructs the creation of a viable, peaceful opposition, and anyone with a legitimate grievance will either be forced to give up his differences government or will go into a political underground.<sup>52</sup>

The regime has increasingly viewed all Islamic groups outside state control with suspicion and has cracked down on them vigorously.<sup>53</sup> Thus, many

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<sup>44</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia*, p. 28.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> For IRP in Uzbekistan and also in Tajikistan, see in detail Pinar Akcali, “Islam and Ethnicity in Central Asia: The Case of Islamic Renaissance Party”, *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Winter 1998, pp. 126-150.

<sup>48</sup> Ghoncheh Tazmini, “The Islamic Revival in Central Asia: A Potent Force or a Misconception?”, p. 73.

<sup>49</sup> Svante Cornell and Regina Spector, “Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists”, p. 196.

<sup>50</sup> John C. K. Daly, et al, *Anatomy of a Crisis: US-Uzbek Relations, 2001-1005*, Silk Road Paper, (Washington DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program & Jamestown Foundation, 2006), p.18.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Svante Cornell and Regina Spector, “Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists”, 196.

supporters of both Islamist and democratic opposition even if they were not Islamist such as the leaders of Erk and Birlik had to flee the country.<sup>54</sup> The government declared all these opposition groups illegal.<sup>55</sup> The authorities continue to view Islamic clerics and organizations functioning outside government-controlled institutions as a threat to the regime's legitimacy.<sup>56</sup> Hundreds of mosques that were not in the close control of the state were closed. Several Muslim activists were sent to prison. But, limiting the number of available channels for opposition and expression, has only exacerbated the situation.<sup>57</sup>

As a result of the government repression, the ideological wing of the movement lost the upper hand and the IMU now is less inclined to intellectual or political thought and ideological complexities.<sup>58</sup> After 9/11, many of the IMU members fought against the USA in Afghanistan and majority of them lost their lives (including Namangani). Since the conclusion of Operation Enduring Freedom, the IMU's infrastructure and manpower has been significantly weakened and it is claimed that today there are about 150 IMU militants who have the capacity to fight.<sup>59</sup> As IMU lost its strength, more than a year after 11 September, there was no violent "Islamist threat" to the regime.<sup>60</sup>

As a result, Hizb-ut Tahrir (HT), the Islamic Liberation Party, has become a prominent political actor. While the IMU largely discredited itself in the public opinion because of its violence, HT has gradually presented itself as the only viable opposition to the present ruling elites, given also that the secular opposition forces are extremely weak, where most of the opposition is in exile

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<sup>54</sup> The Erk leader, Muhammad Salih, run for president in 1991 but had lost to Karimov and was then forced to emigrate. A writer and a poet, Salih had been the founder of Erk, a liberal and secular party with strong elements of Turkic nationalism in its ideology. Salih received 12 percent of the vote in the elections. In late 1993, the party was banned, and he emigrated to Turkey.

<sup>55</sup> Vitaly Naumkin, *Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*, p. 24.

<sup>56</sup> Alisher Khamidov, "The Power of Associations: New Trends in Islamic Activism in Central Asia", Social Research Center, American University of Central Asia (AUCA), 2007, p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> Svante Cornell and Regina Spector, "Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists", p. 199.

<sup>58</sup> Didier Chaudet, "Hizb ut-Tahrir: An Islamist Threat to Central Asia?", p. 114.

<sup>59</sup> Zeyno Baran et al, *Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Implications for the EU*, p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> Aleksei Malashenko, "Islam, Politics, and the Security of Central Asia", *Russian Social Science Review*, Vol. 46, No.1, January–February 2005, pp. 4–18.

or jail.<sup>61</sup> The HT has a radical ideology with a vision of peacefully toppling the regime and establishing a Caliphate. They declared their adherence to nonviolence, but have developed agitation and propaganda. HT's ideology is fuelled by the restrictive economic, social and political conditions of the region, in which words such as 'freedom', 'prosperity' and 'democracy' are often heard but seldom seen in practice. HT's ideology is fuelled by the restrictive economic, social and political conditions of the region, in which words such as "freedom", "prosperity" and "democracy" are often heard but seldom seen in practice.<sup>62</sup> Uzbekistan's political and economic policies make a small number of young, often middle-income Uzbeks receptive to the message of radical groups.<sup>63</sup> The HT offers young, unemployed, and disappointed youth an alternative.<sup>64</sup> HT's simple answers and slogans are appealing because they are similar to the tone or form of those of the Communist Party.<sup>65</sup>

The HT has criticised attempts by other Islamic parties (e.g. The Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan or Turkey's Justice and Development Party) to utilise the democratic structures by holding ministerial posts in the existing governments, or participating in the electoral and legislative processes, in order to achieve some influence in the decision-making process.<sup>66</sup> The HT has also criticised those Islamic organisations engaging in non-political activities (e.g. welfare, education) for distracting the ummah from the task of working to re-establish the Caliphate.<sup>67</sup>

The Uzbek authorities have declared the HT illegal and prisoned many of its members.<sup>68</sup> The estimates of membership and level popularity of HT and other Islamic groups are highly unreliable.<sup>69</sup> There are no reliable data on their membership numbers. Some scholars argue that the Hizb ut-Tahrir threat is

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<sup>61</sup> Svante Cornell and Regina Spector, "Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists", p. 200.

<sup>62</sup> Zeyno Baran, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency*, (Washington DC, Nixon Center, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Apostolou, "State Failure and Radicalism in Central Asia", in Zeyno Baran (Ed.), *The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir: Deciphering and Combating Radical Islamist Ideology*, (Washington DC: The Nixon Center, 2004), p. 69.

<sup>64</sup> Svante Cornell and Regina Spector, "Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists", p. 200.

<sup>65</sup> Andrew Apostolou, "State Failure and Radicalism in Central Asia", p. 69.

<sup>66</sup> Emmanuel Karagiannis, "Political Islam in Uzbekistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 2, 2006, p. 266.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p. 267.

<sup>68</sup> Aleksei Malashenko, "Islam, Politics, and the Security of Central Asia".

<sup>69</sup> Alisher Khamidov, "The Power of Associations: New Trends in Islamic Activism in Central Asia", p. 4.

exaggerated by the Uzbek authorities, and to study HT generally means agreeing, most of the time, to use only biased information from the authorities in the region.<sup>70</sup>

It is evident that HT and IMU have adherents across Central Asia, but these two groups are not the only Islamic actors in the region.<sup>71</sup> HT appears to have lost its power as a political party fighting for Islam as some other Islamic figures and spiritual leaders have also put religion on the political agenda.<sup>72</sup> Radical groups such as IMU or HT do not have a monopoly over the expression of discontent or Islam in the region. Their message does not resonate with the grassroots and masses, and thus they do not have many followers. They increasingly face their main competition from “jamoats,” religious communities or informal associations of Muslims that focus on local economic initiatives rather than on global militant revolutionary scenarios.<sup>73</sup> Akramiya is the only one among those communities that seems to have been successful in developing a following by delivering on socio-economic promises that the Uzbek government has been unable to fulfil: jobs and money. Wealthier followers set up small businesses in which they employ young males who attend study groups after work. The owners of these businesses contribute about a fifth of their profits to a fund, which then assists poorer members of the group. This is one of the most successful examples of the bottom-up approach of pro-Islamic social activism. Even though some writers have asserted the founder Akram Yuldashev was once a member of the HT, there is no convincing evidence. Yuldashev is a mathematics teacher who wrote an apolitical book titled ‘*Iymonga Iyul*’ (The Road to Belief) that covers issues on Islamic ethics and some other issues. In time, a community gathered around him, but they were never known for their political ideas.<sup>74</sup> The group’s “intentions have been voiced only by those who renounce Akramiya—that is, the Uzbek government and certain members of the academic and policy

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<sup>70</sup> Didier Chaudet, “Hizb ut-Tahrir: An Islamist Threat to Central Asia?”, pp. 119-120.

<sup>71</sup> Alisher Khamidov, “The Power of Associations: New Trends in Islamic Activism in Central Asia”, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> Didier Chaudet, “Hizb ut-Tahrir: An Islamist Threat to Central Asia?”, p. 121.

<sup>73</sup> Alisher Khamidov, “The Power of Associations: New Trends in Islamic Activism in Central Asia”, p.4.

<sup>74</sup> M. Turgut Demirtepe, “Orta Asyada Radikalizm, Otokrasi ve Teror”, Ihsan Bal (Ed.) *Terörizm: Terör, Terörizm ve Küresel Terörle Mücadelede Ulusal ve Bölgesel Deneyimler*, (Ankara: USAK Yayınları, 2006), p. 15.

communities who support the government's portrayal of the group".<sup>75</sup> In fact, many pieces of information about the community appear to be unsubstantiated claims of the Uzbek authorities that have been recycled by certain academics without verifying the claims.<sup>76</sup> Experts studying the region argue that the portrayal of Akramiya "as a violent organization is highly suspect and may have been created by members of the Uzbek government and propagated by members of the international scholarly community".<sup>77</sup>

Despite the peaceful nature of the community and its apolitical stance, the government could not tolerate this rival civil organisation and cracked down on them, imprisoning 22 businessmen who were attached to Akramiya in Andijon. In 13 May 2005, civil and peaceful protests for their release turned into chaos, a group of men with rifles broke into the prison and set the prisoners free and the police shot the crowd indiscriminately killing about 700 people.<sup>78</sup> After Andijon, the Uzbek government took immediate steps to stamp out any possible sources and instigators of future incidents. The government also turned on outspoken campaigners for social reform, accusing them of treason and an often bizarre array of purported crimes ranging from slander and extortion to polluting the environment.<sup>79</sup> But in the final analysis, "[f]ar from quashing dissent and debate over Uzbek national identity, Andijon has become the impetus for its articulation".<sup>80</sup> Scholars note that Karimov violently repressed the uprising, but may have done so at the price of his regime's future legitimacy and stability. Hizbut-Tahrir or similar radical Islamist groups will be

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<sup>75</sup> Sarah Kendzior, "Inventing Akromiya: The Role of Uzbek Propagandists in the Andijon Massacre", *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2006, p. 547.

<sup>76</sup> "Given Akromiya's negligible status as an organized force prior to 2005—if, indeed, it existed as an organization at all—the few resources available on Akromiya raise serious concerns about the reliability of the group's public profile. Nearly every piece of information about Akromiya prior to May 2005 has its origin in books written by Uzbek officials or in documents presented in Uzbek courts. Therefore, the current public perception of Akromiya as a violent entity is based almost entirely on propagandistic works issued by the government that were then reiterated by both Uzbek and international scholars", Sarah Kendzior, "Inventing Akromiya: The Role of Uzbek Propagandists in the Andijon Massacre", p. 545.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 546.

<sup>78</sup> It should be noted that Andijon's practising Muslims suffered a 1998 law that required all places of worship to be approved by the government, resulting in the closure of 2158 of the city's 2200 mosques, Sarah Kendzior, "Poetry of Witness: Uzbek Identity and the Response to Andijon", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 3, 2007, p. 321.

<sup>79</sup> Fiona Hill & Kevin Jones, "Fear of Democracy or Revolution: The Reaction to Andijon", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2006, p. 117.

<sup>80</sup> Sarah Kendzior, "Poetry of Witness: Uzbek Identity and the Response to Andijon", p. 332.

able to exploit the misrule for their own purposes. Thus, extremists and terrorists may be the long-term beneficiaries of the tragedy.<sup>81</sup>

Other than Akramiya, there are several small-scale local apolitical religious communities whose members renounce militant groups. They only want a greater role for Islamic values in society. They oppose the idea of utopian and unrealistic global Islamic state. Unlike HT, these religious communities focus on economic and social needs of local populations rather than on political struggles of Muslims across the world.<sup>82</sup> Religious communities and independent Islamic leaders have also demonstrated their potential to counter extremist ideas. The activism and growing influence of religious communities, for example, pushes groups such as HT to rethink their global approach by focusing more on local needs. Some HT members have reportedly left the party to join religious communities.<sup>83</sup> These religious communities also vehemently oppose violence. When asked about his attitude toward Islamic terrorist organizations, a Sufi leader, Ibrahim Hazrat, responds that they are at a dead end, and that “Allah has left their hearts and Satan took up residence there.”<sup>84</sup> The social appeal of Sufism is growing, especially in such brotherhoods as those of Ibrahim Hazrat. The followers of the Sufi sheikhs in the region comprise mostly common people who lack higher education.<sup>85</sup> Radicalism cannot be a mass movement. No election or authoritative opinion poll in the region has found more than 5 percent support for radical Islamists of any stripe.<sup>86</sup>

Radical Islamism became instrumental in suppressing opposing voices by the authoritarian elite. The greater risk is that Central Asia's ruling elites will use the spectre of Islamism as an excuse to avoid economic and political reforms that would mitigate the conditions under which radical Islamism takes root and survives.<sup>87</sup> Power structures that see radical Islamism as a pump to

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<sup>81</sup> Edwin Bakker, “Repression, Political Violence and Terrorism: The Case of Uzbekistan”, *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 2, 2006, p. 117.

<sup>82</sup> Alisher Khamidov, “The Power of Associations: New Trends in Islamic Activism in Central Asia”, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>84</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Sufism in Central Asia: A Force for Moderation or a Cause of Politicization?*, p. 31.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35.

<sup>86</sup> Zeyno Baran et al, *Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Implications for the EU*, p. 13.

<sup>87</sup> Edward W. Walker, “Islamism and Political Order in Central Asia”, p. 21.

pull money out of the treasury are also engaged in various games with it.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the government has been diverting funds that could be used for social programs and development projects to purchase arms.<sup>89</sup> Islamist violence causes the government to unleash harsh security measures that negatively affect its social fabric and economy; but in turn poverty and economic hyper depression feed social discontent and increase sympathy towards underground Islamist groups.<sup>90</sup> The country's acute socio-economic and political problems, as well as the inability of its ruling elites to find a formula for successful modernization and democratization, are increasing social frustration and disaffection, which in turn provide fuel for Islamists of all types.<sup>91</sup> The failure of the government to distinguish between moderate Islamic forces in Uzbekistan and more radical elements may tend to radicalize larger and larger segments of the religious community.<sup>92</sup>

Many people in Uzbekistan consider Karimov to be half-Uzbek and half-Tajik (or maybe even pure Tajik). He was also married to a Russian and represented the Samarqand clan and was allied with the Jizak clan (not the strongest one in the republic). He was therefore viewed initially as a weak politician who would be unable to defeat the opposition, which by that time already consisted of radical Islamists as well as democrats (the Erk and Birlik political parties). But Karimov, despite the fact that he was not supported by some strong Uzbek political clans (for instance, the Tashkent and Ferghana clans) managed to consolidate his grip on power in the critical period following the Soviet collapse.<sup>93</sup> But, maybe it is these weaknesses that made him less-confident and more repressive, not even tolerating politically weak non-Islamist, liberal-democrat opposition. As a result, politics in Uzbekistan is limited, on the one hand, to the former communist elite in Tashkent and the provincial capitals, and, on the other hand, to an active fringe of radicals who have some limited support among their extended families and friends.<sup>94</sup> Unsurprisingly, Uzbekistan's repressive policies create a context within which

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<sup>88</sup> Aleksei Malashenko, "Islam, Politics, and the Security of Central Asia", p. 7.

<sup>89</sup> Svante Cornell and Regina Spector, "Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists", pp. 199-200.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 202.

<sup>91</sup> Vitaly V. Naumkin, *Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*, p. 4.

<sup>92</sup> Odil Ruzaliev, "Islam in Uzbekistan: Implications of 9/11 and Policy Recommendations for the United States", p. 22.

<sup>93</sup> Vitaly V. Naumkin, *Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*, p. 23.

<sup>94</sup> Andrew Apostolou, "State Failure and Radicalism in Central Asia", p. 67.



underground movements and radicalism are the only viable options for any political opposition. Uzbekistan's political exiles have little support and no way to effect policy. Attempts by these groups to engage in dialogue with the regime have led nowhere.<sup>95</sup> The secular and liberal opposition groups, which are alien to the political experience of many Uzbeks, have neither the support nor ability to survive.<sup>96</sup> The only genuine political competition that exists in Uzbekistan is between regional and central elites and among individual clan groupings represented in the government. At the moment, Uzbek politics are the product of deal-making among vested interest groups with concessions by the government to these groups.<sup>97</sup> Radical groups such as HT are not a threat to the state, even though they count more members than all of the other opposition groups combined.<sup>98</sup> The problem is not a hypothetical formal opposition, which does not exist, but certain forces within the ruling establishment that could become allies of the Islamist movement. Both in Tashkent and especially on the periphery, people are convinced that Karimov's opponents are capable of cooperating with the Islamist opposition under certain circumstances.<sup>99</sup> In the country, regional, clan, ethnic and tribal interests have precedence over adherence to a common religion.<sup>100</sup> Olivier Roy has argued that the Islamists implantation in Uzbekistan corresponded broadly to a regionalist identity that of Ferghana, which was not well represented in the central government.<sup>101</sup> The civil war in Tajikistan serves as an example where the political opposition (a competing clan) clothed its ideas in Islamic rhetoric and instigated hostilities against state authorities.<sup>102</sup> As known, "the Tajik Civil War was less a conflict between secularists and a coalition of Islamists and democrats and more a struggle for power between factions, clans, and sub-national groups".<sup>103</sup> The Islamist-led opposition was driven as much by clan rivalries, the growth of localism and regionalism as by their desire to establish an Islamic state and local people saw the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) as a

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>97</sup> Fiona Hill & Kevin Jones, "Fear of Democracy or Revolution: The Reaction to Andijon" p. 118.

<sup>98</sup> Andrew Apostolou, "State Failure and Radicalism in Central Asia", p. 69.

<sup>99</sup> Aleksei Malashenko, "Islam, Politics, and the Security of Central Asia".

<sup>100</sup> Odil Ruzaliev, "Islam in Uzbekistan: Implications of 9/11 and Policy Recommendations for the United States", p. 24.

<sup>101</sup> Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*, (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2000), p. 156.

<sup>102</sup> Andrey Grishin, "Assessing Religious Extremism in Central Asia", p. 71.

<sup>103</sup> Didier Chaudet, "Hizb ut-Tahrir: An Islamist Threat to Central Asia?", p. 115.

political party first, representing the interests of particular regions and clans, and an Islamist party second.<sup>104</sup>

Unfortunately, overwhelming majority of the studies on political Islam focuses only extreme and radical cases. Thus, an overview of the literature on the consequences of having Islam represented at the political level can lead to contradicting conclusions, since in most analyses pay little or no attention to more moderate cases.<sup>105</sup> The Turkish Islamism is one of those cases that have been understudied especially from a comparative perspective. Now, we turn our attention to the evolution of Islamism in Turkey as there are remarkable similarities between Islam as believed and practiced in Turkey and Uzbekistan. A discussion of the Turkish Islamism is relevant in the sense that we may be able to compare the normative frameworks of the Islamist political actors. This will then facilitate our discussion with regards to the predicaments and prospects of Uzbek Islamism and will help us to see if and to what extent Turkish Islamism's transformation could also be experienced in the Uzbek context and under what conditions.

### **Evolution of Turkish Islamism**

As an essentially modern movement Islamism developed very much in reaction to imperialist Western hegemony. In this sense it is similar to the Uzbek Islamism. Young Ottomans were the first to respond to the western hegemony, superiority and institutions by trying to formulate Islamic answers from the original Islamic sources. Young Ottomans demanded a constitutional government, a parliamentary regime and a political system based on human rights. They offered a constitutional project with an Islamic foundation.<sup>106</sup> They tried to legitimize their discourse with a constant endeavor to prove that the essentials of the major Western institutions were already in the authentic sources of Islam. Ottoman Islamists' identity and discourse were to a great extent de-legitimized and marginalized by the Republican elite. The role of Islam in the public sphere has been radically marginalized and the state attempted to confiscate and monopolize even this marginal role, leaving no official room for private interpretations of Islam. Thus, the Islamists had to keep a very low profile.

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<sup>104</sup> Ghoncheh Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia: A Potent Force or a Misconception?", p. 69.

<sup>105</sup> Iona Ban, "The Chance for Civil Society in Central Asia or the Role of Islamic Movements in Shaping Political Modernity", p. 123.

<sup>106</sup> Serif Mardin, "Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2005, p. 150.

After all Sufi brotherhoods and lodges were closed down by the authorities, they did not challenge the state, as a result of the Sunni understanding of preferring a bad state to anarchy, chaos and revolution. Nevertheless, they continued their existence unofficially without making much noise and without claiming any public or official role. In return, the officials turned a blind eye to their existence. Among them, Nakhsbandi brotherhood is very prominent as all of the successful elements of modern Turkish Islamic politics have originated in later branchings of the extraordinarily resilient Nakhsbandi brotherhood that was also the closest brotherhood to the Ottoman establishment compared to the others.<sup>107</sup>

In Turkey, the Khalidi branch of the Nakhsbandiyya has been the most politically engaged of the brotherhoods, whose debut in national politics was led by Sheikh Mehmed Zahid Kotku (1897–1980) who preached that it was the duty of observant Muslims to take an active interest in national affairs.<sup>108</sup> He did not perceive the secular state as an absolute enemy and, in that sense, did not hold much esteem for radical Islamists in the Muslim world.<sup>109</sup> He created a new version of the “operational code” of the brotherhood, synchronized with the political code promoted by the secular state that of constitutional legitimacy.<sup>110</sup> By the 1970s, Kotku started promoting a second layer of legitimacy, working in tandem with Islamic legitimacy, was that of political institution building.<sup>111</sup>

The first prominent Islamist party in Republican Turkey, the National Order Party (*Millî Nizam Partisi*, MNP) (1970–71), and the National Salvation Party (*Millî Selamet Partisi*, MSP) (1972–81) were established through his promotion and support and he had supervised their activities. The leader of these parties, Prof. Necmettin Erbakan, was a disciple of Kotku as well as the most of the leaders of Erbakan’s the National Order Party, were also disciples of Kotku.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p. 152.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas W. Smith, “Between Allah and Atatürk: Liberal Islam in Turkey”, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2005, p. 316.

<sup>109</sup> Serif Mardin, “Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes”, p. 158.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Rusen Çakır, *Ne Seriat Ne Demokrasi: Refah Partisini Anlamak* [Neither the Shari’a nor Democracy: To Understand the Welfare Party], (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1994), p. 22 cited in Mardin Mardin, “Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes”, p. 157.

National Order Party (MNP) espoused a discourse of new economic and social order based on “national” as opposed to Western principles. In MNP’s view, Turkey’s identity and future was with the Muslim world, rather than with the West. The party was shut down after a military intervention in 1971 on the ground that it was against the secularism. The National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi* (MSP)) was founded in October 1972. MSP’s ideology was almost the same as the closed MNP. The MNP argued that the Westernization had fragmented Turkish society. Erbakan envisaged that based on Anatolian heavy industry, a stronger Turkey would loosen the ties with the West and would become the leader of the Muslim world under the umbrella of a Muslim Common Market, with the Islamic *dinar* as its common currency. Also, a Muslim Defense Alliance would be developed. After the military coup in 1980, the MSP was also closed down. When the army returned back to its barracks in 1983, Erbakan founded a new party under a new name— the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi* (RP)). The Welfare’s ideology was not different from that of the MSP. Welfare had steadily increased its share of the votes and after the 1994 general local elections; mayors of several major cities such as Ankara and Istanbul (current Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan became the mayor of Istanbul at that date) were Welfare members. In 1996, as the bigger partner of a coalition government with the True Path Party (*Dogru Yol Partisi* (DYP)), Necmettin Erbakan became Turkey’s first Islamist prime minister. On February 28, 1997, the military dominated National Security Council presented Erbakan with a list of “recommendations” to curb the alleged anti-secular activities. The generals eventually forced Erbakan to resign in June. In January 1998, the Constitutional Court closed down Welfare Party and banned Erbakan from politics for five years. A new party was already ready before the closure decision. The Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi* (FP)) continued operating under Erbakan’s close friend Recai Kutan’s leadership until it was also shut down by the Constitutional Court in June 2001.

After the Welfare Party was ousted from power, many younger members of the Islamists began thinking that the only way they could succeed was to avoid confrontation with the establishment and to stay away from the instrumentalist use of religious rhetoric in politics. This started an internal debate among the Islamists. Thus, a cleavage emerged within the movement between two different groups. The “traditionalists” (*Gelenekçiler*), centered on Erbakan and the party leader Recai Kutan, opposed any serious change in approach or

policy, while the younger group of “renewalists” (*Yenilikçiler*), led by Tayyip Erdoğan, the mayor of Istanbul, Abdullah Gul and Bulent Arinc argued that the party needed to revise and renew its approach to a number of fundamental issues, especially the issue of relations with the West.

The influence of this internal debate was reflected in the platform of the post-Islamist<sup>113</sup> Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi* (FP)). The Virtue represented a partial rupture from the *Milli Görüş*'s Islamism. The Virtue's discourse differed from Islamism especially in its approach to the West and European Union. Especially the younger generation in the party showed some signs of a more sophisticated approach and they have learned to avoid the confrontational rhetoric, opting instead for a message of democracy and human rights.

The full rupture from the Islamist rhetoric came with the establishment of AK Party. The renewalists completely modified their discourse and frequently asserted universal values and value-based discourses such as human rights, democracy, and free market principles.<sup>114</sup> As they departed their ways with the Islamist wing of the Virtue Party, their new discourse is no longer a hybrid (post-Islamism of the Virtue Party) form of Islamism and democratic conservative values. While acknowledging the importance of religion as personal belief, they accommodated themselves within the secular constitutional framework.<sup>115</sup> They completely jettisoned the Islamist elements in their previous post-Islamist rhetoric and underscored a non-Islamist, as it were, universal liberal democratic conservative discourse. Erdoğan frequently states that his party is a conservative democrat party, implying a Muslim democrat party similar to Christian Democrats in Western Europe in which an Anglo-Saxon type passive secularism is espoused where public visibility of religion is tolerated but religion is only a cultural backdrop rather than an active

<sup>113</sup> In our conceptualization, post-Islamism denotes a departure, albeit in diverse degrees, from an Islamist ideological package that is characterized by universalist claims, monopoly of truth, exclusivism, intolerance, and obligation, towards acknowledging ambiguity, multiplicity, inclusion and compromise. Post-Islamism represents an endeavor to fuse religiosity with rights, faith and freedoms, Islam and civil liberties and focuses on rights instead of duties, plurality instead of singular authority, historicity rather than fixed and rigid interpretation of scriptures, and the future rather than the past, Asef Bayat, *Islam and Democracy: What is the Real Question?*, ISIM Papers, No. 8, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), p. 18.

<sup>114</sup> Ergun Yildirim, et al, "A Sociological Representation of the Justice and Development Party: Is It a Political Design or a Political Becoming?", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2007, p. 17.

<sup>115</sup> R. Quinn Mecham, "From the Ashes of Virtue, A Promise of Light: The Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2004, p. 350.

part of the Islamist discourse. In direct contrast to Islamists' formulation of political identity based on opposition to the West, the AK Party has steadily emphasized Western political values. At the same time, the party has viewed the West, especially the EU, as an important ally in democratization of Turkey. The party "successfully linked traditional identity and issues of social and distributive justice to a global 'Third Way' between a statist economy and unfettered capitalism".<sup>116</sup>

The AK Party has attracted the votes of a broad constituency, cutting across class, gender, and ethnic (and religious) lines, and who previously had voted for mainstream right and Islamist parties. In the 3 November 2002 election, it won 34 per cent of the votes. While in the government, the party and its leaders have shown a tremendous effort in reforming the country in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria that even puzzled its most staunch critics. Tayyip Erdogan has consistently underlined the importance of inter-civilizational dialogue and alliance of civilizations and how Turkey could play a bridging role between the West and the Muslim World. The prime ministers of Spain and Turkey, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, launched the inaugural session in 2005 of the Alliance of Civilisations initiative under the umbrella of the UN, to foster respect and dialogue between Islamic and Western societies.

In the most recent 22 July 2007 elections, the AK Party increased its share of the votes to 47 per cent, the main opposition party receiving only 21 per cent.

### **Factors that Influenced the Transformation from Turkish Islamism to Non-Islamism and Predicaments and Prospects in Uzbek Islamism**

In the domestic context, there are two major factors that contributed to the Islamist transformation in Turkey. First is the desire to avoid confrontation with the establishment as this would prevent Islamists to stay in power even if they rise to it as the Welfare Government experience showed. Constraints imposed by the establishment "structure have limited Islamist actions and provided distinct opportunities for the emergence of a brand of reformist new thinking".<sup>117</sup> Second major factor is a tolerant normative framework that has

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<sup>116</sup> Thomas W. Smith, "Between Allah and Atatürk: Liberal Islam in Turkey", p. 322.

<sup>117</sup> Gamze Cavdar, "Islamist *New Thinking* in Turkey: A Model for Political Learning?", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 121, No. 3, 2006, p. 480.

brought about Turkish Islamists' transformation. There are several factors that influenced the emergence of this tolerant framework. Its close ties with the Nakhsbandi tradition and Hanafi school of law differentiate Turkish Islamism from the majority of Islamist ideologies and movements worldwide. Turkish pluralist, constitutional and democratic history starting from the Ottoman times have also contributed to the moderate and less than reactionary nature of the Turkish Islamism. The Turkish Islamists never severed their ties with the tradition and did not succumb to the literalist rhetoric of the Salafis. On the contrary, as we discussed above, Republican era's Islamist parties originated from a Sufi brotherhood. Democratic experience in Turkey dating back to has also helped Turkish Islamists to stay away from radicalization of religion.

Export-oriented and liberalizing reforms of Turgut Ozal that integrated the country to the global structures and trends also made it possible for Anatolia's culturally conservative, religiously observant but economically liberal burgeoning bourgeoisie to be major players in the Turkish domestic scene. These new classes are more liberal than the Istanbul bourgeoisie as they were export-oriented unlike Istanbul businesses. Physical and discursive interaction of these businessmen, Islamists, Islamic groups, scholars, intellectuals and institutions in a pluralist, if semi-democratic, environment is also a major factor in the Turkish Islamism's transformation. The opposition of the post-Islamists to the establishment "is no longer expressed in the name of Islam per se but in the name of pluralism, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law."<sup>118</sup>

Finally, Turkish Islamists,

*"...saw that the existing system—that is, the current tacit or implicit social contract—indeed did include sufficient possibilities for others than the political elite to represent the national body politic of Turkey. From the Islamists' point of view, this realization presented some peace with the existing political apparatus that had been injurious to them since the 1920s."<sup>119</sup>*

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<sup>118</sup> Ihsan D. Dagı, "Rethinking Human Rights, Democracy, and the West: Post-Islamist Intellectuals in Turkey", *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2004, p. 139. See also, Ihsan D. Dagı, "Transformation of Islamic Political Identity in Turkey: Rethinking the West and Westernization", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2004, pp. 21–37.

<sup>119</sup> Yasin Aktay, "Diaspora and Stability: Constitutive Elements in a Body of Knowledge", in M. Hakan Yavuz & John Esposito (Ed.) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), p. 139.

Sunni and Hanafi understanding of preferring the worst state to chaos and anarchy has been their benchmark. They have always been content with democratic methods –maybe just because they were available- despite their parties were shut down by the establishment several times. Democracy, loyalty to the state and the nationalism are not anathema to the Turkish Islamists similar to the first Islamists in history, the Young Ottomans. Turkish Islamists have been allowed to participate in politics so did not need to look for other alternatives.

In this context, another relevant and remarkable example could be given from Uzbekistan's neighbouring country Tajikistan.<sup>120</sup> A reorientation of political Islam took place in Tajikistan, where the Islamist IRP switched to a moderate position, declaring the creation of an Islamic state to be a goal for the remote future. For the last 11 years, Tajikistan has had an official, legal Islamic party that participates in all political processes, including parliamentary and presidential elections. The party has deputies in the Tajik parliament. The movement of both parties in the Tajik conflict away from radical positions and toward more pragmatic positions allowed the creation of a model of coexistence between secular and Islamic concepts in a single state. Although there have been some serious problems, this model has worked for a decade.<sup>121</sup> The leader of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, Muhammad Sharif Himmatzoda, proposed the idea that Islam could coexist with a secular state. Himmatzoda argued that the head of state is not a sacred position in Islam. He is not a representative of God, but rather a secular person, which means that, according to Islamic teachings, the state itself is secular. He concluded that any type of a state that ensures social justice and a

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<sup>120</sup> See also on this, Yaacov Ro'i, "Islam, State, and Society in Central Asia", *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 3, 2003, p. 253.

<sup>121</sup> For detailed analysis of the political process during which multi-party political system was established after the end of the civil war, see, Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Geopolitics versus Democracy in Tajikistan", *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 14, No. 4, Fall 2006; M. Turgut Demirtepe, "6 Kasım 2006 Tacikistan Başkanlık Seçimleri: Rahmanov İktidarının Pekiştirilmesinde Yeni Bir Evre (mi?)", *Orta Asya ve Kafkasya Araştırmaları*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2006; International Crisis Group, "Tajikistan's Politics: Confrontation or Consolidation", *ASIA Briefing*, Dushanbe, 19 May 2004. Tajikistan is not yet on the way to complete democratization as seen in its parliamentary vote of February 2005 and Presidential elections in 2006. International observers criticised elections on the basis of "widespread irregularities". OSCE Election Observation Mission, "OSCE / ODIHR Final Report on Elections in Tajikistan on 27 February and 13 March 2005", 31 May 2005.



decent life for its people and ensures religious rights of the citizens is an Islamic state.<sup>122</sup>

It should also be noted that although South Kyrgyzstan has a population that has similar religious and cultural characteristics with Uzbekistan and the socio-economic conditions are not better than Uzbekistan, there is no terror in this region, as the Kyrgyz state has not been repressive in dealing with the Islamic activism. Similarly, the Uzbek city of Khojent in Tajikistan is poorer than any city in either Uzbek or Kyrgyz parts of the Ferghana Valley yet has not generated terrorism or the same level of extremism.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, the radicalization of the Ferghana Valley is sometimes directly linked to the religiosity of the region's population, but the religiosity is almost equally high in Bukhara and Samarkand, yet these centers have not produced radical and violent Islamists in numbers.<sup>124</sup> It must be noted that these regions and cities are more closely linked with national power centers than is the Ferghana region, so the political deprivation is not an issue at stake.<sup>125</sup>

Political systems, oppression, political deprivation, lack of viable political alternatives to the ruling elite, harsh socio-economic conditions, external influences, and crime are all factors that contribute to the development of radical and violent Islamist groups in Uzbekistan.<sup>126</sup> Sometimes, all of these factors can contribute to the emergence of a single terrorist organisation, and can be represented under the same umbrella. For instance, the IMU is not a monolithic organization. Most studies on the organisation indicate the coexistence of a more guerrilla-oriented and criminal faction and a more religious group within the IMU. The IMU can be best understood as a mixture of personal vendetta, radical Islamism, drugs trafficking, geopolitics, and terrorism.<sup>127</sup>

Conflicts such as those in Uzbekistan are commonly assumed to be between Islam and secularism, whereas, in fact, the real dispute lies within

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<sup>122</sup> Abdullo Khakim Rakhnamo, "Evolving Islamic Identities in Central Asia", Social Research Center American University of Central Asia (AUCA), Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 2007, pp. 3-4.

<sup>123</sup> Zeyno Baran et al, *Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Implications for the EU*, p. 43.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, pp. 48-49.

Islam.<sup>128</sup> As the Turkish case shows, Islam does not have any intrinsic problem with secularism or democracy, despite the essentialists' unsubstantiated claims. Especially, the traditionally tolerant and moderate Hanafi/Sufi faith to which the overwhelming majority of Central Asia's (and the world's) Muslims adhere conflicts with a radical, but numerically small, set of groups.<sup>129</sup>

As we have discussed above, limited popular knowledge of the traditional and classical orthodox Islam and post-Soviet identity crisis have benefited political, radical, extremist and unorthodox Islamic movements. The situation in Uzbekistan resembles that of other Muslim countries where founders or leaders of Islamism in Muslim countries, and especially leaders of extreme or radical groups, have generally not been from ulama class. Instead, they have been individuals who received secular education and renounced the elitist and specific nature of theological education.<sup>130</sup> Thus, they do not have a strong following in local societies. Only a minority of the population finds the message of the radicals and extremists appealing.<sup>131</sup> The lack of well trained imams, capable of refuting the arguments of Islamists still continues to be one of the major difficulties in confronting their message today.<sup>132</sup>

The ban on all secular opposition paves the way for the monopolizing of the political Islam by the radical Islamist movements, which are the only ones still can 'talk politics' and voice their opinion where democratic pluralism is not allowed.<sup>133</sup> Under these conditions, they will be likely to increase their influence although at the moment these radicals are not actually representative of an important part of the population and if democratic elections were held these radicals would not be able to gather many votes: the major part of the Muslim population still remains favourable to the idea of a secular state

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<sup>128</sup> Svante Cornell & Regina Spector, "Central Asia: More Than Islamic Extremists", p. 195; see also T. Jeremy Gunn, "Shaping an Islamic Identity: Religion, Islamism, and the State in Central Asia", *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 64, No. 3, 2003, pp. 389-410.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Martha Brill Olcott & Dora Ziyaeva, *Islam in Uzbekistan: Religious Education and State Ideology*, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), p. 24.

<sup>131</sup> Zeyno Baran et al, *Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Implications for the EU*, p. 49.

<sup>132</sup> Komil Kalonov & Antonio Alonso, "Sacred Places and "Folk Islam" in Central Asia", *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, No. 17, May 2008, p. 178.

<sup>133</sup> Sebastien Peyreuse, "Islam in Central Asia: National Specificities and Postsoviet Globalisation", *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2007, p. 257.

respecting the religious rights of everyone.<sup>134</sup> Only continuation of repressive and non-democratic policies can change this situation in the medium and long runs.

Thus, the Uzbek government must focus on gaining the support of non-radical Islamists and Muslim activists who are open to a dialogue with the government. It is impossible to resist radical Islam without appealing to Islam itself, especially as long as it stays as the dominant dimension of identity in the country. It is very important to oppose the radicalization of Islam from all directions; Islamic and also Islamist alternatives<sup>135</sup> for radical doctrine must play a very active role.<sup>136</sup> Allowing even limited and interrupted political participation, as the Turkish case shows, could reduce the threat that Islamist groups pose to the security of Uzbekistan and, if properly controlled, political participation could increase stability without fully undermining the regime.<sup>137</sup> Security and continuous stability in the Muslim world can be achieved only under conditions of consensus involving the broadest spectrum of political forces which would also address the grievance of political deprivation felt by all social, ethnic and tribal groups not only Islamists.<sup>138</sup> When doing this, it is obvious that the government should jettison its policy of ideological indoctrination and social engineering and should encourage political participation.

What Nakshbandiyya Sufism has achieved in Turkey is an important point as it is the dominant movement in Central Asia. Nakshbandiyya Sufism did not stay away from politics<sup>139</sup> and in the case of Erdogan, it on the contrary that Nakshbandiyya decided to enter into politics. Erdogan himself was disciple of a respected Nakshbandiyya Sufi sheikh who encouraged him to establish a party. Thus, if suitable pluralistic conditions can be created, Nakshbandiyya's dealing

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> See on this, also, Ghoncheh Tazmini, "The Islamic Revival in Central Asia: A Potent Force or a Misconception?", p. 70.

<sup>136</sup> Leonid Sjukijainen, "The Battle Within", in Zeyno Baran (Ed.), *The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir*, p. 87.

<sup>137</sup> Jessica N. Trisko, "Coping with the Islamist Threat: Analysing Repression in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 2005, p. 386.

<sup>138</sup> Aleksei Malashenko, "Islam, Politics, and the Security of Central Asia", *Russian Politics and Law*, Vol. 42, No. 4, July–August 2004, p. 19.

<sup>139</sup> In the Uzbek context, for some of Nakshbandiyya Sufists' politicization, see Martha Brill Olcott, *Sufism in Central Asia: A Force for Moderation or a Cause of Politicization?*, p. 6.

with politics may not be a bad thing at all. It may well serve to bring about a post-Islamist mentality in Uzbekistan as well. There is no clash between Sufism and Turkish Islamism unlike the overwhelming majority of the other Islamist experiences. Majority of Uzbeks have not been influenced by the Salafi scripturalism and literalism yet. These Uzbeks could be given a chance to develop their own indigenous Islamic Sufi-based “operational code”, synchronized with the political code promoted by the secular state, that of pluralistic constitutional legitimacy instead of seeking for foreign extremist alternatives.

The Uzbek government should also take into account the fact that the HT failed in creating a large following in Turkey. The rich tradition of Islamic literature in Turkey made HT’s publications look quite primitive, and there was no need to rely on this foreign “Arab” ideology. Turks have also managed to integrate their Islamists into the democratic system. Moreover, Turkish Islamists produce their own values, intellectuals, leaders and institutions, making it difficult for outside groups to gain a foothold.<sup>140</sup> In contrast, as we have seen above the lack of satisfactory production of Islamic knowledge paved the way for the de facto monopolization of the Islamic normative sphere by mostly foreign extremist and radical groups in Uzbekistan. Indigenous attempts such as Akramiya have been seen as competitors to the state’s hegemony and have been harshly repressed. If the regime become more self-confident and stops harassing the non-violent and non-radical activist scholars and believers, social, political and intellectual spaces will open up for genuine discourse.<sup>141</sup> Non-radical Islamic ulama and scholars and religious communities will then be able to speak out more strongly and effectively against extremists’ views of Islam. By organizing panel discussions, addressing Muslims in their mosques and in public sphere using local media outlets, such leaders can significantly reduce the growing popularity of extremist religious views.<sup>142</sup> When Islam is not renewed with newly created and implemented ijtihads by scholars, ulama, intellectuals and faith-based movement leaders, the new generations will not be satisfied with the traditional

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<sup>140</sup> Rusen Cakir, “The Rise and Fall of Turkish Hizb ut-Tahrir”, in Zeyno Baran (Ed.), *The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir*, p. 39.

<sup>141</sup> Alisher Khamidov, *The Power of Associations: The New Trends in Islamic Activism in Central Asia*, p. 7.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

expressions of folk Islam or state's official Islam and will look for foreign alternatives.<sup>143</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Uzbekistan is a very important country with regards to the whole Central Asia's political stability as any political and social change in Uzbekistan will have crucial repercussions in the region. Economic and political deprivation, the social inequality, the omnipresence of corruption, population's increasing disillusionment with the regime's ability to improve the situation, authoritarianism, lack of political alternatives, oppression, and the hard-line persecution of Islamist activists are some of the reasons that foster already existed radical and violent Islamists. After shortly looking at these factors, this study has focused on the normative frameworks of the political actors. It is argued that as there are similarities, which are not only in the sense of theoretical orthodox Islams, but also in terms of folk Islams and the states' official Islams, the transformation of Turkish Islamism could also be repeated in the Uzbek context as well if a pluralistic socio-political sphere can be created. It is of course too simplistic and reductionist to underscore certain similarities, however too many they are, and to conclude that similar transformations could occur in different contexts. But, normative framework has been one of the influential factors in the emergence of violent Islamism in Uzbekistan. Thus, the Turkish case can play an at least inspirational role in dealing with the normative frameworks of the Uzbek Islamists. Uzbek authorities can and should draw lessons from the Turkish experience where relative pluralism has allowed several Islamic and Islamist groups, institutions (official and unofficial), scholars, intellectuals, activists and businessmen to emerge and creatively interact in a controlled democratic environment. If the Sufi-based Islamism of Uzbekistan that is very similar to the Turkish one which has never been revolutionary, domination-oriented and supremacist and has had comparatively tolerant and completely non-violent attitude, it may develop a peaceful and democratic, secularism friendly, political Islam. What Nakshbandiyya Sufism has achieved in Turkey is an important point as it is the dominant movement in Uzbekistan. Nakshbandiyya Sufism did not stay away

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<sup>143</sup> It is doubtful if the youth feel a respect toward the official religious figures. A study argues that people in Kyrgyzstan see the *muftiate* as "intellectually and, actually, morally corrupt", Eric M. McGlinchey, "Evolving Islamic Identities in Central Asia", Social Research Center American University of Central Asia (AUCA), Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 2007, p. 2.

from politics and this has not been bad at all. On the contrary, the system and Islamist actors have managed to develop a modus operandi, thus, the radical could never exploit the grievances in society. Sometimes firefighters use fire to tackle bigger fire. Agreeing to a more just power-share among clans, social, political and economic groups and allowing a moderate Islamist (and also secular and liberal) opposition will pay the way for a more healthy and stable political environment. This has worked in neighboring Tajikistan to certain extent, why should not it work in Uzbekistan?

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