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## Uzbekistan: Basic Facts, 1992.

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### SUMMARY

The Republic of Uzbekistan is a predominantly Muslim republic in Central Asia bordering on Afghanistan. Mass political activity, often Islamic, and protests of government inaction and rising prices have increased in recent months but the ex-communist leadership continues to resist change. Uzbekistan faces severe economic and environmental obstacles to growth, a result of the Soviets' former colonial-style rule in this region.

### BACKGROUND

**Land Area:** 174,486 sq. mi., 2.0 percent of the former U.S.S.R.; larger than California; larger than Washington and Oregon combined.

**Republic Population:** 19.9 million (1989 census); 7.0 percent of the total for the former U.S.S.R. Administrative subdivisions include the Karakalpak autonomous republic, regions, districts, and cities.

**History:** Uzbekistan was named after Uzbek Khan, the early 14th century ruler of the Golden Horde, a mixture of Turkic tribes within the Mongol Empire. In the early 16th century, the Uzbeks conquered Turkestan which encompasses most of present day Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan, Kyrgyzstan and the southern portion of the Kazakhstan. The region evolved into three khanates incorporating aspects of Iranian, Arab and Turkic civilizations. Systematic Russian penetration of the region began in the mid-19th century. With the Russian conquest came new towns, railroads and cotton-growing into a largely nomadic society. In 1916 Russia ended its exemption of Muslims from military service, sparking a general revolt against Russian rule. In November 1917, Russian workers established Soviet rule in Tashkent and in April 1918 founded the Turkestan Autonomous Republic. A Moslem Congress met at the same time and founded the Provisional Autonomous Government of Turkestan. The Provisional Government's jurisdiction was mainly limited to the Ferghana Valley and Kokand's native old city. In February 1918, Soviet Russian forces crushed the Provisional Autonomous Government in Kokand. The Basmachi Rebellion came from the ashes of this opposition government and the Russian workers refusal to include local representatives in the Turkestan

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government. The Basmachi, Muslim guerrilla fighters based in the Fergana Valley, fought the Soviet Red Army until 1923. In 1924 and 1925 Soviet Central Asia was reorganized along ethnic and linguistic lines and the Uzbek Republic was established in 1936. This period also saw the national communist movement crushed under Stalin's effort to suppress all nationalism outside the Soviet communist framework. Following Leonid Brezhnev's death in 1982, this nationalism resurfaced during "the cotton affair" when Uzbeks, among them many high officials, were prosecuted and imprisoned by the Soviet central government on charges of bribery and embezzlement among other crimes. The Uzbek government had sold the central government cotton, inflating the production quotas, and then concealed the fact that the cotton had not been produced. The investigations and trials were conducted by non-Uzbeks from the central government, and many Uzbeks felt that the imprisonments were unjust. The central government also decided to shake up the entire Uzbek political apparatus during which tens of thousands of Communist party members were expelled and 3,000 police officers fired in three years time.

**Ethnic Composition and Tensions:** 14.1 million (71.4%) are Uzbek, 1.65 million Russian (8.3%), 934,000 Tadzhik (4.7%), 808,000 Kazakh (4.1%), 468,000 Tatar (2.4%), 412,000 Karakalpak (2.1%), and others (1989 census). Uzbeks are the most numerous of the Soviet Muslim nationalities. The August 31 independence law recognizes the sovereignty of the Karakalpak Republic and its right to secede from Uzbekistan. In June 1989, ethnic conflict between Shiite Meskhetian Turks and Sunni Uzbeks claimed about 100 lives. Historic tensions between Uzbeks and Tajiks and Kazakhs have also swelled with the disintegration of the former Soviet Union.

**Political Leaders:** President: Islam Karimov; Vice President: Shakurulla Mirsaidov; Chairman of Presidium of Supreme Soviet: Shavkat Yuldashev; Prime Minister: Abdulkhoshim Mutalov; Foreign Minister: Ubaidulla Abdurazzakou.

**Political Parties and Groups:** The People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan is the ruling party. Other parties include the "Erk" (Freedom) Party, the "Birlik" Popular Front (Unity) Movement, the Movement for Democratic Reforms, the Islamic Democratic Party, the Islamic Rebirth Party, the Humaneness and Charity group, the Inter-union Movement, and the Uzbekistan Movement. Erk, founded in 1990 with a narrow base composed of urban intellectuals, was allowed to register formally as a political party on September 5, 1991; the only party then to be allowed legal status. Despite being shown governmental favor, it pledged to continue the struggle for human rights and against the policies of the Uzbek Communist Party. Birlik, founded in 1989 with a broader more radical social base, calls for increased emphasis on Uzbek as the national language and freedom of religion. The Islamic Rebirth Party held its first congress in June 1990 in Astrakhan and is increasingly influential throughout the Central Asia region. The Party's objective is to enable Muslims to live in accordance with Islamic doctrine, but only through constitutional means



emphasizing equal rights for all nationalities and humanistic ideals. Muslim clergy are opposed to Mufti Muhammed-Sadyk Muhammed-Yusef, head of the Tashkent-based Religious Board for Central Asia, due to his close ties with the state apparatus and Communist Party.

After the August 1991 Soviet coup attempt, Karimov resigned from the U.S.S.R. Communist Party Politburo. He confiscated Communist Party property in the republic and the banned Communist Party organizations in the government and education. On August 28, the Uzbek Communist Party broke its ties with the Moscow party. On September 14, the Communist Party renamed itself the Popular Democratic Party of Uzbekistan at Karimov's urging. He remains at the head of the renamed party, defending it as a bulwark against "economic chaos." The renamed communist party does not enjoy wide support from the population; mass demonstrations calling for its abolition have been held in several cities. Following student riots on January 16-17, 1992, Karimov promised to register all political parties, possibly excluding the Islamic Rebirth Party.

**Political Institutions and Policies:** Karimov's brand of authoritarian political rule has been termed "national communism" by some observers. Although he has managed to co-opt many nationalist policies advocated by his opponents, he continues to face pressure for fundamental political and economic reforms from a variety of opposition groups and intellectuals.

The Uzbek Supreme Soviet elected Karimov to the newly created post of President in March 1990. A Presidential Council was set up by Karimov as an advisory body. A unicameral Supreme Soviet consisting of 360 deputies was elected in February 1990 in only partly free elections. One-third of the candidates ran unopposed, and one-fourth of the seats were reserved for representatives of Communist-dominated "public organizations." In November 1990, a Cabinet of Ministers was set up with the President acting as Chairman to carry out administration. According to one report, about 200 deputies of the Supreme Soviet, at an extraordinary session on September 30, 1991, expressed no confidence in Karimov's authoritarian leadership. On December 30, 1991 the Central Election Commission announced the results of the independence referendum and the election for President. The declaration of state independence passed overwhelmingly with 98.2% of the electoral vote. Islam Karimov was confirmed as President of Uzbekistan drawing 86% of the vote against the opposition candidate Salai Madaminov Muhammed Salih, a famous Uzbek poet and chairman of the "Erk" Party. Following the election, opposition groups charged authorities with questionable election activities, such as handing out multiple ballots and failing to ask voters for identification.

A Declaration of State Sovereignty was adopted by the Uzbek Supreme Soviet on June 20, 1990. On August 31, 1991, the Supreme Soviet declared Uzbekistan independent. It also declared that Uzbekistan would control its own socioeconomic and foreign policies and take control over all industries located

in the republic. Republic KGB and Ministry of the Interior (MVD) operations have been put directly under presidential control.

**Human Rights and Freedoms:** Karimov stated August 31, 1991 that the human rights of all ethnic groups would be respected and that Uzbekistan would adhere to the U.N. Universal declaration on Human Rights. Many observers, however, assess the human rights record in Uzbekistan as poor. Opposition party members and democratic and human rights activists have been arrested and many of their homes searched. Pro-democracy rallies in Tashkent scheduled for August 26 and September 8, 1991 were forcibly broken up by authorities. In late September, a police search of the office of the mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims triggered protests in several cities. Student riots January 16-17, 1992, during which several students were killed, have resulted in investigations by students' groups not in agreement with the government's version of events and further protests. On February 2, 1992 the independent Human Rights Association of Uzbekistan, the first human rights committee in Uzbekistan's history was founded in Tashkent. Abdumannap Polatov, a Tashkent State University associate professor and Birlik Executive Council member, was elected chairman.

**Relations with the Commonwealth of Independent States:** Uzbekistan along with the other Central Asian republics demanded entry into the Commonwealth of Independent States as "founding members" on December 21, 1991. In January 1992, Karimov expressed his considerable distrust of Russia and its intent to head the Commonwealth military forces. He suggested that the CIS armed forces follow the NATO model of command. Economic and trade treaties with Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Kyrgystan, Moldova, and Kazakhstan have been concluded. The emphasis in these agreements has been on food products and raw materials. In addition, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have signed an accord on mutual assistance in case of natural disasters, and intend to establish joint conservation projects. At a January, 20, 1992 press conference President Karimov called for a Central Asian union to surmount present economic difficulties within the region's five republics. The other Central Asian republics, fearful of Uzbek dominance, are reluctant to establish such a union.

**Foreign Policy and Defense:** Over the past year Uzbekistan has signed several bilateral treaties and agreements with bordering states and the former Soviet republics. In October 1990, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenia, and Uzbekistan signed a memorandum in Tashkent on economic cooperation with the Najibullah regime of Afghanistan. January 10, 1992 Uzbekistan applied for membership in the United Nations and offered to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Argentina, Brazil, Israel, Egypt, China, Turkey, Switzerland, Japan and a number of other countries recognized Uzbekistan in 1991. On January 30, 1992, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) admitted Uzbekistan, and the U.N. Security Council recommended acceptance of Uzbekistan's application to the U.N. General Assembly. The Uzbek government has attacked the foreign press as trying to undermine Uzbekistan's reputation



abroad and to disrupt internal affairs. President Karimov and Mufti Muhammed-Sadyk Muhammed-Yusuf have both praised the Turkish secular model of development.

The August 31, 1991 law on independence asserts the right to establish diplomatic, consular, and trade relations with foreign states and the creation of a Defense Ministry, National Guard, and control over Soviet troops stationed in the republic. A "Ministry of Defense and National Guard Affairs" was set up and a Defense Minister appointed September 10. A National Guard of 700 personnel is envisaged to serve as an honor and presidential guard. On January 13, 1992 President Karimov issued a decree placing former Soviet troops stationed in Uzbekistan under the Uzbek Republic's jurisdiction.

**Economy:** Karimov's aim is to create "market socialism" in Uzbekistan and he has spoken against the "shock therapy" method favored by other CIS leaders. GNP is about 3.3 percent of the total for the former Soviet Union (1988 Soviet data). In per capita income, Uzbekistan ranks with Tajikistan as the lowest in the former Soviet Union. Environmental degradation and economic decline have reached crisis levels--vast areas around the Aral Sea have become barren and almost one-half the population has incomes below the poverty level. Uzbekistan produces about two-thirds of the cotton grown and one-third of the gold extracted in the former Soviet Union. It must import grain and other foodstuffs because the cotton monoculture has stripped the soil of nutrients to the extent that other crops do not flourish. The independence law establishes control over gold and other precious metals and announces the right to a separate currency. On December 19, 1991, the Supreme Soviet passed a bill calling for denationalization and privatization of government property, excluding natural resources. Uzbekistan is negotiating with Great Britain, Sweden and Saudi Arabia on an agreement to export Uzbek labor. Continental Grain, an American corporation, is setting up joint ventures with Uzbekistan for processing agricultural produce. Uzbekistan will supply cotton while Continental Grain will supply grain, cotton-cleaning and fruit processing equipment, and will organize broiler and clothing production.

## **U.S. POLICY**

On December 25, 1991, the United States recognized Uzbekistan as an independent state. Uzbekistan must show its commitment to the five principles of democratic rule and human rights as stated by the Bush administration before diplomatic relations will be established. On February 10, 1992, "Operation Provide Hope" began U.S. military transport of humanitarian assistance to Tashkent and other cities of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The U.S. supported Uzbekistan's application to the CSCE, and Secretary Baker's visit to Uzbekistan this month may lead to the establishment of diplomatic relations.

# CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS



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