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RUSSIA

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POLITICAL FUTURE FOR UZBEKISTAN

In Uzbekistan, all the modern institutions such as the media, the rule of law, an independent judiciary, the constitution, political parties, parliament and elections, are little more than superficial ornamentation. As in many other post-Soviet countries, real politics happens behind the thick walls of the presidential palace. It is determined by two main factors. The *first* is the actions and decisions of the president himself, who is a hybrid of the traditional pre-Soviet Central Asian ruler and the

«Power in Central Asia is informally decentralized and distributed between the clans. [...] The degree of this decentralization of power between the different groups varies from country to country, and takes different forms. On the whole, however, it is a combination of power through state institutions, which was characteristic of the Soviet era, and power through personal connections and cronyism. [...] The system of informal governance has become stronger during the transitional period, increasing the influence of the existing clans and groups on the state. This has led to a weakening of state institutions, especially those beyond the president's office».

To a future without barriers. Regional cooperation in human development and security. UNDP regional bureau for Europe and the CIS. 2007. Bratislava, Slovakia. P. 198-199.

first secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party. The *second* factor is the interplay between the informal groupings within the ruling elite, and the relations of these groupings with the top leadership.

The elites of the countries on the southern periphery of the former Soviet Union are structured as stable informal groups based on family ties, territorial provenance and/or personal relationships built in the course of a bureaucratic career. These factors are often interrelated; family ties are often linked to territorial provenance, and close or distant relatives who also hail from the same province try to

support each other's bureaucratic or business careers. In essence, these

clans represent a hierarchy of clientele systems, with a high level of internal solidarity and loyalty to the leader of the clan. Membership of these clans is an important and sometimes compulsory precondition for becoming part of the elite and making a successful career in Uzbekistan.

UZBEKISTAN'S POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

The clan system that now exists in Uzbekistan has been in the making for the past 100-120 years, and is based on the territorial principle. With a fair degree of approximation it can be said that eastern Uzbekistan (Tashkent, Namangan, Andijan and Fergana provinces) were part of the Kokand Khanate. The central and southern parts of the country (Bukhara, Samarkand, Kashkadarya, Surkhandarya, Jizzakh and part of the Navoiy provinces) were part of the Bukhara Emirate, along with most of the present-day Tajikistan. The western and northwestern Uzbek provinces (Khorezm and the Karakalpak autonomous republic) were part of the Khiva Khanate, along with a large part of what is now Turkmenistan. This historical division persists to this day in the form of *political regions*, which are quite different in terms of their economies, social set up, and local politics.

Figure 1. Provinces and political regions of Uzbekistan (source: Grozin Andrey. Tamerlane's heirs. <http://arabeski.globalrus.ru/opinions/150389/> (in Russian), last accessed on November 15, 2011)



The Fergana, Tashkent and Samarkand-Bukhara provinces play a special role in the country's economy and politics. They generate 75% of Uzbekistan's GDP and are home to 60% of the Uzbek population. The elites of these three regions therefore control the bulk of the country's economic and financial resources, and dominate the central bureaucracy.

The *Fergana region* (Fergana, Andijan and Namangan provinces) has a high percentage of rural population and very high population density (426 people per square kilometer, which is almost seven times the national average). The ethnic Uzbeks who live in Fergana consider themselves to be

pure Uzbeks, i.e. the least mixed up with the other ethnic groups, such as the Tajik, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, etc. Historically Fergana Valley has always been the main center of Islam in Central Asia. Starting from the early 1990s many radical and extremist Islamist organizations and movements have sprung up in that province.

The *Samarkand-Bukhara region* (Navoiy, Samarkand and Bukhara provinces) has a high proportion of Persian-speaking groups, mostly ethnic Tajiks. When the border between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was drawn, about a million ethnic Uzbeks were left on Tajik territory, while two million Tajiks were left in what became Uzbekistan, mainly in the Samarkand and Bukhara provinces, as well as in southern Jizzakh region. Officially there are about 1.2 million ethnic Tajiks in Uzbekistan, which is about 5% of the population, unofficial estimates quote a number closer to 6-7 million (or 20-25% of Uzbekistan's population) and include those who have been assimilated and are now regarded by the government as ethnic Uzbek. Thus the rivalry between the Samarkand-Bukhara clan and the other clans of Uzbekistan has an ethnic component, which dates back to rivalry between the Bukhara Emirate and the Kokand Khanate.

The *Tashkent region* is the most economically developed, and this is where most of the money is invested by the government and foreign investors. The province, and especially the city of Tashkent itself, is the most *European* part of the country. It has the largest concentration of the Uzbek intelligentsia, which dominates the country's science and culture, and which has been gradually merging with Uzbekistan's administrative and economic elite.

The Samarkand-Bukhara clan conglomerate traces its roots to the old Bukhara Emirate. The Fergana and Tashkent clans' lineage goes all the way back to the Kokand Khanate. Some of the most prominent families are descendants of the old aristocracy or wealthy merchants. The history of others can be traced back to the Islamic missionaries of Arab or Persian origin who married into the local feudal clans in the olden days.

20 YEARS OF THE KARIMOV REGIME

The key defining characteristics of the current Uzbek regime were shaped in the early years after the break-up of the Soviet Union. In December 1991 he won 88 per cent of the vote in the republic's first presidential election. In 1995 his term of office was extended until 2000 at a national referendum. The Fergana clan was pushed to the sidelines of Uzbek politics, and all the leading positions in the Uzbek bureaucratic hierarchy were filled with Tashkent and Samarkand people.

In the early 1990s Uzbekistan's national-democratic opposition was crushed; its leaders were either forced into exile or jailed.

In the second half of the 1990s Uzbekistan went through a period of relative political stability, but the situation had deteriorated by the turn

of the century associated with increased popularity of the outlawed Islamist organizations.

Over the past decade three main conflict lines have emerged in Uzbekistan.

The first is the confrontation *between the Karimov regime and the Islamist movements* which want Uzbekistan - and eventually most of Central Asia - to become an Islamic caliphate. The country's leading Islamist movements are the *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)* and *Islamic Jihad* (both based in Afghanistan), as well as *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, which is based in Uzbekistan itself. The IMU and Islamic Jihad advocate an armed struggle against the regime. *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* prefers political methods, waging an energetic propaganda campaign and recruiting supporters in government agencies, media outlets and universities. *Islamic Jihad* has assumed responsibility for the terrorist attacks in Tashkent in April 2004.

The second major conflict that defines politics in Uzbekistan is rivalry between the Tashkent and Samarkand clans which results into scheming and jostling for senior government posts and for access to the president's ear. For his part, the president actively encourages this rivalry. He sees it as an instrument that can help him to secure his grip on power and to remove from the political arena those players who he thinks have become too influential, or whom he suspects of harboring presidential ambitions.

Finally, the third major conflict, which had come to dominate Uzbek politics by the late 2000s, is the power struggle over the issue of succession. Karimov marked his 70th birthday in January 2008. When he ran for a third term of office in 2007 (in breach of the Uzbek constitution), it became clear that he had not yet decided who should succeed him. The issue seems to remain unresolved to this day.

POSSIBLE SUCCESSORS

It is impossible to predict who will succeed Karimov, or how. But there is a degree of certainty about the possible candidates to succeed Karimov, and about the personalities and institutions that will play the decisive role during the transition of power.

One rumor making the rounds in the bureaucratic circles in Tashkent is that Karimov wants to hand over power to his elder daughter Gulnara. The rumors are quite plausible. Obviously, Gulnara Karimova is a very influential player because of who her father is. Nevertheless, she does not seem to have a group of supporters she could call her own. She has no network of loyal allies in the

Gulnara Karimova, born 1972, graduated from the Tashkent State University in 1994. Received a Master's degree from Harvard in 2000. Appointed as an advisor to the foreign minister in 1995. In 2003-2005 served as an advisor-envoy at the Uzbek embassy in Russia after a stint as an advisor to the Uzbek permanent envoy to the UN. In February 2008 appointed as deputy foreign minister for cultural and humanitarian international cooperation. In 2008 appointed as Uzbekistan's permanent envoy to the UN and other international organizations in Geneva. Appointed as the Uzbek ambassador to Spain in 2010. Believed to be one of Uzbekistan's richest and most influential women.

government apparatus, in the army of in the security agencies. In other words, there is no compelling reason to believe that Gulnara Karimova could ever become an important political figure in her own right even while her father is still in power, let alone after his exit. In that case the only way she can end up as the new Uzbek president is by becoming a figurehead controlled by a group of people who hold the real power in the country.

The two far more likely successors, as many experts agree, are Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev and his first deputy, Rustam Azimov.

Mirziyoyev maintains close political contacts with the president's advisor on personnel policy, Umar Ismailov; Supreme Court chairman Buri-tosh Mustafayev; and Zelimkhon Khaydarov, who served as chief of the presidential administration until July 2010. It is fairly certain that Mirziyoyev has the backing of the Samarkand clan and especially its ethnic Tajik members, such as the interior minister, Bakhadur Matlyubov. Opposition media outlets believe that the main reason for Merziyoyev's political longevity is that he hails from the same region as Karimov. He shares the president's gradual evolutionary approach to economic reforms, and has the same abrasive style leadership.

Shavkat Mirziyoyev - born in 1957. Hails from Jizzakh region. Officially he is an ethnic Uzbek, but unofficial reports claim that he is actually an ethnic Tajik born in Uratube province of Tajikistan. In the early 1960s his family moved to Zhamiynsky district of Uzbekistan's Jizzakh region. He graduated from the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Mechanization of Agriculture. In the early 1990s served as head of a city district in Tashkent. In 1996-2003 was the governor of first Jizzakh province, then Samarkand province. Mirziyoyev has served as prime minister since 2003; he is also in charge of formulating government policy on agriculture.

Mirziyoyev's main rival for nomination as heir-apparent is thought to be his first deputy, Rustam Azimov. The two are of the same age, but unlike the prime minister, Azimov is well educated. Born to the family of prominent Uzbek scientist Sodik Azimov, the deputy premier also has extensive contacts (as well

Rustam Azimov graduated from the History faculty of the Tashkent University, and holds a Master's degree from Oxford. Spent his early years in the Komsomol, the youth wing of the Communist Party. In 1990 became chairman of the board of Uzbekistan's first privately owned bank, Ipak Yuli. In 1991-1998 chaired the Uzbek central bank's overseas operations department and also represented Uzbekistan on the EBRD board of governors. In 1998 he was appointed as finance minister. After 2000 he has served as deputy and first deputy prime minister, finance minister and foreign trade minister.

as family ties) among the Tashkent elite. His remit in the cabinet includes foreign direct investment. In the West he is thought to be an advocate of market reforms, although he has actually done little to earn such reputation. It would be more accurate to call him pro-Western rather than pro-market. He has the backing of the Tashkent clan, which counts among its allies the chief of the National Security Service (SNB), Rustam Inoyatov, and the minister of defense, Kabul Berdiyev.

The prime minister and his first deputy both have a very good chance of succeeding Karimov in the next few years. If either of the two becomes president his respective clan will become even stronger, monopolizing all power in the country. That would be unacceptable to all the other clans, including the one that controls the strategically important and very unstable Fergana Valley. It is therefore quite likely that as soon as either Mirziyoyev or Azimov begins to gain the upper hand, all the other clans will unite against the frontrunner and try to derail his presidential ambitions. Such a turn of events would cause a major escalation and perhaps even a split within the ruling elite, potentially leading to even greater instability, armed confrontation and even disintegration of the country.

HOW TO PREVENT DESINTEGRATION?

The political future of Uzbekistan depends on the ability of the key power groups to agree at a critical moment on the candidacy of Karimov's successor. Such an agreement would be rather difficult to achieve for two main reasons. *First*, the process will inevitably have to involve a great number of political figures, groups and clans. And *second*, power brokers in Tashkent have surely noticed that it took the new Turkmen president Berdymukhamedov less than a year to sack everyone who brought him to power in 2006-2007. In other words, a political crisis in Uzbekistan may not be inevitable, but it is very likely.

There are two ways of avoiding escalation of political confrontation. The *first* is to give the presidency to a figurehead such as Gulnara Karimova. The real power would be held by a junta consisting of the heads of the army, police and security agencies, the prime minister and a few other figures at the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy. The institute of presidency would cease to be the supreme arbiter between the rival clans and groups; it would be replaced by a collective body. Such a solution would prevent a clash of the clans, at least for a time. But there is always the risk of the junta itself splitting into rival groups and losing control of the situation, triggering a massive political crisis. The *second* option is to nominate a representative of a minor clan to maintain the existing balance of power and interests.

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