

# Analysis of the relations between Uzbekistan and the Western community

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Certain progress in the relations between Uzbekistan and the West has been undeniable. This assumption is confirmed by frequent visits US and EU senior officials pay to Tashkent, the announcements of increasing Western investments in the Uzbek processing industry, and general advancement in trade and economic relations. Some politicians remain optimistic about the prospects of these relations, their optimism based upon what they see as liberalization of Tashkent's domestic policy. Others counsel caution and suggest waiting for President Islam Karimov to keep promises regarding human rights observance and putting an end to repressions.

Permit me to give a brief account of the positions of Uzbekistan and the West in order to try and analyze their relations.

One. Tashkent knows that international human rights organizations are resolved to bring its state officials to answer for systematic application of torture. I'm convinced that the publication in the media and Internet of the documents drafted for the next Session of the UN General Assembly - even if two years late- will shock the general public in the Western community and in Uzbekistan itself.

Two. When the regular army gunned down peaceful demonstrators in Andijan on May 13, 2005, the West found itself torn between the polar assessment of the tragedy by Uzbek official statements, on the one hand, and independent experts and Uzbek citizens, on the other. It eventually suggested an independent international investigation which Karimov, in turn, never authorized (the impression is that he has valid reasons to fear what this investigation might unearth). For this reason, the European Union slapped symbolic sanctions on Tashkent. Karimov countered by launching a thoroughly anti-Western policy and turning to the Kremlin again. Tashkent signed an alliance treaty with Russia on November 15, 2005, and restored its membership in the Eurasian Economic Cooperation Organization and CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Taxing patience of their partners in the Commonwealth, Eurasian Economic Cooperation Organization, CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization, and Shanghai Cooperation Organization in talks lasting two-and-a-half years, the Uzbek authorities signed over 95% of the negotiated treaties and bilateral agreements. These include agreements they had never planned to honor. The most important agreements were ratified with reservations and corrections that thoroughly invalidated the very essence of the documents.

Trusting Karimov to keep his word, gullible partners in the Eurasian Economic Cooperation Organization and Shanghai Cooperation Organization offered Uzbek businesses tax and customs privileges and freedom of movement on their territories. They did not get anything in return and it is widely believed that the time has come to keep their promises. Meeting with the Uzbeks within the framework of these international structures, Tashkent's partners badger the Uzbek president to keep his promises (i.e. open the borders and domestic market, ensure freedom of movement of finances, individuals, goods, and so on). CIS businesses operate in Uzbekistan at their own peril, paying colossal taxes and customs duties in the hope to improve the situation. Literally, any moment, they may find themselves without some or all their assets in Uzbekistan due to the deterioration of international relations with Tashkent. It already happened to businesses from Turkey, South Korea, Arab countries, the United States, and other countries from the West. These days, it is happening (or rather being done) to businesses from Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

Opened borders and lower taxation and duties will deliver a hard blow to the Uzbek state budget. The influx of goods from abroad, that are cheap and of adequate quality, will send prices in the country plummeting and improve living standards, in general. On the other hand, a hard currency

stamped from Uzbekistan will cause the artificially maintained exchange rate of the sum (local monetary unit) to plummet, cause inflation to soar sky-high, ruin the feeble financial and breakable banking systems and the production base, as such. Establishment of a new and competitive production base, in the meantime, will require foreign investments and take several years.

Uzbekistan remains one of the major suppliers of raw materials and intermediate products to Russia and China. Finished goods never exceed 20% in the structure of its export. The national economy has always been, and remains, raw-materials-export-orientated and, therefore, unable to compete with others. Never missing a chance to elaborate on "colossal economic accomplishments and successes", Karimov knows the true state of affairs. He cannot afford to open even a crack, much less throw the gates open or open the borders, because local and foreign business and banks will immediately withdraw assets from Uzbekistan. Many of these investors will be happy to share 30-40% of what they own with whoever will help them withdraw from Uzbekistan and spare them further administrative chaos, bureaucratic tyranny, and all-permeating corruption.

Should it happen, numerous economic failures and political fiascoes of the dictatorial regime would become public knowledge while Karimov is still alive. However, while remaining on top of the pinnacle of political power in Uzbekistan, Karimov will never allow this to happen. He will never open the borders for Russia, China, the West, or even for neighbors.

Karimov has now deprived himself of room for political maneuvering. He has always been focused on getting any and all privileges from partners, in return for false promises. All of that does not mean, however, that Russia and other CIS countries will wizen up and choose to compromise their relations with Tashkent. Each of them has something or other to lose. They are unlikely to opt for a dramatic deterioration of their joint trade and economic relations.

Third. Dealings with all capitalist countries in the Uzbek foreign trade turnover amounted to 70% before 2006, the rest was distributed among China, Russia, and countries of the Commonwealth. Western travelers and businessmen accounted for 80% of Tashkent's revenues in its travel and hotel businesses. At the same time, Russia and China never compensated Uzbekistan for its U-turn and deterioration of relations with the West. Tashkent's hopes were pinned on major investments in the Uzbek economy based upon the promise to re-orientate its foreign policy, which flickered out and died. Relatively small investments were made in the development of the country's natural resources. Russia and China eventually abandoned unpromising projects, concessions, and efforts to establish of a modern production base in Uzbekistan. Deterioration of relations with the Western community worsened economic and social crises in Uzbekistan. Lastly, competition with neighbors for investments was miserably lost.

Tashkent is out to overtake arrears.

Compelled to seek warmer relations with the West, the Uzbek regime offered an excuse that its government is adaptable and its foreign policy versatile.

As for the West, sanctions against Tashkent cost it influence with the Uzbek state and, consequently, its positions within the Uzbek economy. All the same, countries of the West would dearly like to take part in acquiring the strategic mineral resources of Uzbekistan.

Also countries of the West want their clout with official Tashkent restored for the sake of promoting human rights and democratic reforms. This is what Western officials say but, by and large, these objectives are only secondary. Socially active Uzbeks who do stand for democratic reforms in the country are never permitted inside Western diplomatic missions, at forums or other events. Though it is rumored that some grants for promoting democracy are handed over to these people. The impression is, however, that the grants are only given to whoever is sitting on two chairs at once, meaning whoever corroborates with the dictatorship and serves as a bridge between local authorities and Western missions. This is how representatives of the West make their life in Uzbekistan easy, a nuance their taxpayers no nothing about.

Advancing relations of a partnership with Uzbekistan, Western governments also perceive an opportunity to finally normalize the situation in Afghanistan that has been their headache for years.

The West promises Uzbekistan economic aid and offers Tashkent handsome sums for the use of the Uzbek territory, infrastructure, and its production base for the restoration of the Afghani economy. To accomplish this, the Western community is prepared to advance political contacts

with Tashkent at all costs. It is even prepared to forget the Andijani tragedy and lift the sanctions, or at least suspend them, for another six-month term.

Bearing in mind Western countries' offers and wishes, Karimov made them a number of promises. Only one of them was actually kept, and that conditionally. This is what I'm talking about.

Badgered by the local and foreign general public and the governments of the United States, Germany, Great Britain, France, Switzerland, and other democracies, Karimov ordered Mutabar Tajibayeva of the Fiery Hearts Club released from jail on June 2. This decision was prompted by the discovery that the Martin Ennals Foundation had made human rights activist Tajibayeva a laureate of a prestigious international award which made all international human rights and humanitarian organizations quite happy.

As a matter of fact, Tajibayeva was released from jail on conditional discharge, with a three-year probation period. The human rights activist is under house arrest, monitored day and night by secret services, local authorities, and the mahallja (district) administration that actually promotes the interests of the regime, rather than those of the population. Tajibayeva is compelled to report to the local police station for weekly "conversations" and write explanatory notes. Even the mahallja chief is empowered to summon her for "a friendly chat" at any moment. Leaving the territory of Marginal requires a permit from the local police chief. Any disobedience on her part, any objection to police cruelty or lack of politeness, any criticism of the regime may result in instant imprisonment. It is actually easy for the police to provoke Tajibayeva, exhausted by the endless strain as, into something she will regret later on. (The authorities and the police honed this practice when dealing with Nasyr Zakirov, formerly of RL.) As a matter of fact, Tajibayeva may find herself locked up again if relations with the West deteriorate. She is under house arrest now, but she may be imprisoned on an invented pretext any moment.

The human rights activist, who only demands that authorities abide by the law, is treated like a hard-core criminal.

Used as Karimov is to applying sheer strength of arms to tackle dissent at home and to intimidate CIS countries, and particularly neighbors, strength is the only language he understands. He does not understand the language of diplomacy, persuasion, or political compromises. Promises, he never keeps. The Uzbek authorities denied continuing their accreditation to Andrea Berg, erstwhile director of the Human Rights Watch Tashkent Bureau. They denied accreditation to three newly appointed directors, two Associated Press correspondents, journalists of Die Deutsche Welle and other Western media outlets. Tipped that foreign journalists had been coming to Uzbekistan as tourists to draw reports on the state of affairs in this country, official Tashkent had the parliament adopt a new law "On foreigners' presence in Uzbekistan" that stiffened control over foreigners. Also, prestigious international organizations are denied permits to launch their activities in Uzbekistan. Three months ago, Tashkent gave a preliminary consent for an international media seminar to be held in early June, but quietly waived its consent as soon as sanctions against Uzbekistan were suspended.

The human rights situation in Uzbekistan, in the meantime, is worsening. The dictatorship continues putting pressure on those who dissent and having the police and hired thugs disperse pickets. This happened with citizens who tried to lay flowers at the symbolic, yet non-existent, monument commemorating victims of the Andijan tragedy and included servicemen of the army and police and officers of the National Security Committee. Every person who had a camera on Bobur Square in Andijan on May 13, 2005, was branded an extremist and terrorist. The Uzbek authorities made lists of these persons, sent them to Interpol, and have hunt them down, throughout the world, ever since. Regrettably, some governments do trust the dictatorial regime and extradite the innocents to Uzbekistan where there is really nothing for them but interrogations, torture, and imprisonment.

The progressive general public was stunned in December 2007 to hear of the arrest and imprisonment of Jusuf Juma, a prominent poet who has been criticizing Karimov's regime for years. Juma and his family organized pickets in front of the Karakul district and Bukhara regional administrations and drove autos with posters saying "Away with President Karimov! The Constitution does allow for a third term of office!" and so on. The gifted poet was charged with assault and battery (he was alleged to have sent a group of young, and physically fit, policemen to the hospital), convicted, and imprisoned. These days, the authorities claim that the inmate, who

has an injured leg, has escaped. Is Juma still alive? And how come Western diplomats never insist on a meeting with him, or his release, if he is?

Harassment of the faithful in Uzbekistan continues unchecked. Representatives of both Islam and Christianity are imprisoned for the temerity to call for observance of the Ten Commandments, and to question the morals of the powers-that-be and the dictator's policy. In order to mislead general public, these people are tried under invented grounds. Why is the international community disinterested?

Happy with Tajibayeva's conditional discharge, the international community does not care that political prisoners remain in Uzbek jails by the dozen, many of them seriously ill. They include Sunny Coalition leader Sandjar Umarov, gifted writer Mamadali Mahmudov, ex-lawmaker Murod Djurayev, Ahmadjon Adylov [Adylov, 82, was recently released- Ferghana.Ru], Izhak-ata Abdullayev (75), Sunny Coalition ideologist Hotam Abduraimov, human rights activist Ajzamdjon Farmanov, and many others.

In other words, official Tashkent will mend its ways. Reluctant to let Uzbekistan isolate itself from the world and to lose its own clout with the obstinate ruler, the West keeps advancing relations with Uzbekistan, making concessions and actually deceiving its own public opinion.

I call for all international human rights and humanitarian organizations to take a critical stand on their respective governments' policy with regard to Uzbekistan, to demand no more concessions, and - with an emphasis on the human rights dimension - to strive for immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners. This rape of the Uzbek people must be stopped.

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