



ELSEVIER

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

 ScienceDirect

**Communist and
Post-Communist
Studies**

Communist and Post-Communist Studies 40 (2007) 209–221

www.elsevier.com/locate/postcomstud

Dynamics of Islam, identity, and institutional rule in Uzbekistan: Constructing a paradigm for conflict resolution

Reuel R. Hanks*

*Department of Geography, Oklahoma State University, 211 Scott Hall, Stillwater,
OK 74078-4073, USA*

Available online 26 April 2007

Abstract

The “re-Islamization” of society in independent Uzbekistan has proven to be a complex process, generating conflict in the social, cultural and political spheres. Since the early 1990s, the regime of Islam Karimov has sought to undermine any manifestation of “unofficial” Islam via imprisonment of the leadership, implementation of repressive statutes governing religious activity, and other coercive means. Yet, since 1999 Uzbekistan has experienced more religious violence directed against government power structures by “extremists” than any other former Soviet republic in Central Asia. Important issues that should direct U.S. policy remain unresolved: How significant is the threat from radical Islam in Uzbekistan, that is, what are the chances of politicized, “fundamentalist” Islam emerging as a mass movement there? Has recent U.S. policy reduced or exacerbated the dynamics of conflict between the regime and the “radicals?” In order to effect resolution of this conflict, a new paradigm must be implemented in U.S.–Uzbek relations which moves the Uzbek regime toward democratization, while maintaining social stability. In addition, politicized Islam, in a non-radicalized form, should also figure into any policy strategy directed at long-term stability in Uzbekistan.

© 2007 Published by Elsevier Ltd on behalf of The Regents of the University of California.

Keywords: Politicized Islam; Religious identity; Uzbekistan; Re-Islamization; Conflict resolution

* Tel.: +1 405 744 9148; fax: +1 405 744 6250.

E-mail address: reuel.hanks@okstate.edu

Islam, governance, and conflict

The era of independence in Uzbekistan has witnessed a pattern of escalating conflict between the authoritarian regime of Islam Karimov and various manifestations of “unofficial” Islam. The latter have sought, to differing degrees, a place in the country’s political arena, some via non-violent means, others eventually through the instruments of terrorism and insurgency. The focus here is to elucidate and analyze the following components that underlie this conflict. First, I will briefly review some of the theoretical approaches that characterize recent scholarship on religious identity and political Islam. I then move to a discussion of the major adversarial players and their history in Uzbekistan. Following this description, I attempt to outline and analyze the causes underlying the conflict between the regime of Islam Karimov and the “Islamists,”¹ and finally, I suggest some possible prescriptive strategies for resolution of this conflict, and the role U.S. policy might play in achieving such a solution.

Identity and “political Islam” in Uzbekistan

Durkheim (1915) noted that the religious system in society reflects the “collective representations” of that grouping, and held that religion functions to generate and solidify sentiments of social community and unity. To place this thesis in the political context of an emergent nation-state, religion acquires the status of a fundamental cultural marker or icon, anchoring a concept of identity at various scales: individual, local, and national. Smith (1991) builds upon this by suggesting that religion’s part in constructing what he terms the *ethnie*, or ethnic community, functions along social lines as well as spiritual. It would logically follow that in societies where other markers underpinning identity, such as a distinctive linguistic tradition, a territorial association of extensive duration, or an established historical presence linked to a corresponding “myth” are all incipient, the religious tradition’s role in identity, at all levels, is magnified. This condition would especially hold in those developing societies where such weak icons were at least partially de-legitimized as symbols by their association with a recently-jettisoned colonial structure.

These conditions are applicable, in varying degrees, to all of the recently-emerged states of Central Asia, and hold particular significance for Uzbekistan. A distinctive *national* linguistic identity did not appear until the early Soviet period, when a standardized literary Uzbek was promoted as one of the foundations of a newly-discovered *Ozbekchilik*, or “Uzbekness.” No precise territorial dimension had ever been associated with this notion until 1924, and only a loose common historical consciousness existed among the various clans and tribes that were eventually categorized as “Uzbek” by Soviet officials and scholars, a consciousness

¹ I use this term in this context not to represent “fundamentalists” or “militants,” but rather any group that has adopted Islam as a basis for its political agenda, regardless of whether it employs violence to enforce that agenda, or seeks its implementation through non-violent strategies.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1046710>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1046710>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)