THE ROLE OF ISLAM IN THE UZBEK POLITICS

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will investigate the 2005 uprising in Andijan as a case study to question whether it was a radical Islamist revolt against a secular regime, as labeled by the government some scholars argued, or a reaction to years of oppression and economic strife. The state blamed the protestors as being radicals. However, demonstrators asserted that they were the victims of the government.

The first part will examine the religious policy of the government towards deemed radical groups and devout Muslims with the aim of describing a general picture of Islam in Uzbekistan since an understanding of governance and Islam will be helpful to analyze the Andijan event. The second part will criticize the Andijan uprising as a case study to demonstrate whether there is enough evidence to call the uprising as a radical Islamist attack.

Therefore, I argue that the Andijan uprising, while having Islamist participants, referring to all protestors as radical Islamists in inaccurate. Many of those who demonstrated that day were local people who wanted to express their discontent with social and economic issues plaguing the country. Because of government paranoia against political Islam in the country, it served their interests to deem the protestors radical Islamist and terrorists, delegitimizing their concerns.
To Omer Faruk Han
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HT: Hizb-ut Tahrir
IMU: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
MIA: The Ministry of Internal Affairs
SADUM: The Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia
USSR: The Union of Soviet Socialist Republic
Introduction

Islam is a rapidly expanding religion. After 2050, Islam is expected to be the largest religious group in the world.\(^1\) Even though Islam encompasses several different schools of thought and doctrines, (like the Sunni school has Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, and Shafi’i, and Shia school has Ja’fari and Zaidi) the growth of Islam may cause some anxiety in the world because of radicalization movements. Since many radical movements operate in Central Asia, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Taliban, and others, it is an important factor to consider when discussing revolt in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is one of the critical countries in Central Asia because of its crucial geographic location - close to Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and Iran which are important countries in the global world. Uzbekistan’s resources, like natural gas, lignite, coal, gold, and oil make it an important country in the region.\(^2\) Also, Uzbekistan borders all the other Central Asian countries. Therefore, in terms of regional organization and regional security, Uzbekistan is strategic.\(^3\) That is why the stability of Uzbekistan, or the safety of Uzbekistan, is important not only for the country itself, but also for the region and investors operating in the country.

After the fall of the USSR, Uzbekistan struggled with radical Islamism and was exposed to several Islamist attacks in 1999 and the 2004 Tashkent Bombing.\(^4\) Later, on May 13, 2005,

there was an uprising in Andijan. It is not certain whether an Islamist attack instigated the
trouble, or just an anti-government demonstration. Although the government blamed the terrorist
group ‘Akramiya’ as responsible for the protests, protestors argued they were innocent citizens
who wanted to demonstrate their disenfranchisement.

Reports of massive human rights violations concerning religious freedom in the country
have been rampant since the end of the Soviet Union. Before evaluating the events of Andijan
and whether it was an uprising or terrorist attack against the regime, showing a picture of the
approaches of the government to radical groups and devout Muslims from the mid 1990s will be
helpful to understand a clear view of Islam in Uzbekistan.

The thesis begins with a literature review that shows the different perspectives of the
other scholars’ ideas about radical Islam, defines the meaning of radical Islam for this study, and
evaluates different opinions of the scholars on whether the Andijan uprising was a terrorist
attack.

The second part of the study shows a clear picture of Islam in Uzbekistan from the mid-
1990s to today by determining the governmental approaches to Islam and its reflection to
outstanding radical movements IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan), and HT (Hizb ut-
Tahrir) and devout Muslims in Uzbekistan using secondary sources.

The third part examines the Andijan uprising by evaluating newspapers and international
organizations’ reports, in order to bring different perspectives together to evaluate whether it was
a radical revolt against the regime. I collected articles from multi-language newspapers (English,

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5 Akram Yuldashev created Akramiya after leaving from Hizb-ut-Tahrir in 1996. Since he thought that creating the
system of a caliphate is not a realistic and Islamic state should establish locally, he left from Hizb-ut-Tahrir and
created that group. (Dilip Hiro, Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan,
Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Iran, (New York, NY: Overlook Duckworth, 2009) P. 188)
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4550845.stm
Turkish, Russian) that were published during the uprising, and investigated international organizations’ reports. After examining these sources, the result which shows that the uprising was organized by an armed group. However, it does not make the uprising a Radical Islamist attack since the purpose of the demonstrations was not extinguish the secular regime. Also, many protestors were local citizens who were influenced by economic and social factors to join the uprising.
Literature review

Before evaluating the place of radical Islam in Uzbekistan, the meaning of radical Islam must be defined. Martha Brill Olcott stated that any activity of Muslims against the “official religious establishment” may be referred to as “radical” Islamism or fundamentalism\(^8\) by the government of Uzbekistan. Official Islamic institutes in Uzbekistan depend on the government and are controlled by the government. Therefore, accepting all Islamic activity as a radical movement if it is against the official institutes means all religious activities will be subordinate to the regime. Like Adeeb Khalid asserts, there is no one way of Islamic discourse in the world,\(^9\) so, how can accepting Islam in one way and including it in one official way be right? Also, when the citizens believe different than the government, might we call them as radical Islamists? If so, how may freedom categorize? Since there are many ways of understanding Islam, there should be many ways to experience it. However, In Uzbekistan, there is an official Islam, so the other Islamic approaches are accepted as radical Islam. This attitude of the regime makes it challenging to divide radicals from devout Muslims according to the state.

Radical Islam for this thesis is defined through McGlinchey’s perspective that radical Islam is a movement whose aim replaces the secular regime with an Islamic regime and secular rules with Sharia Law (Islamic law).\(^10\) Members of the radical movements, radical Islamists, might prefer to use their aim with the help of armed force, or more peaceful, nonviolent action to create their Islamic government.\(^11\) With this concept, prominent radical groups (IMU and HT) will be investigated.


Emmanuel Karagiannis states that HT is a social movement since it has three essential characteristics of social movements: “a higher degree of internal organization; typically longer duration, …, and the deliberate attempt to reorganize society itself.”\textsuperscript{12} Karagiannis argues that since HT has existed since the 1950s, the purpose of the group is to peacefully implement radical changes, and “the group has a pyramidal structure of command.”\textsuperscript{13} HT is a peaceful movement. Up to the present, there is no evidence of violent activity by HT in Central Asia. However, even though HT is a nonviolent movement, one of its’ aims is establishing a state based on the Khalifah system and Islamic rules. Therefore, eliminating the secular regime and creating an Islamic regime in Uzbekistan makes HT a radical movement instead of social movement. Thus, this study will accept HT as a radical movement.

On May 13, 2005, there was an uprising in Andijan; however it is not known whether radical Islamists attacked the secular regime or demonstrated to show unrest against the government. Zeyno Baran and her friends highlight that the uprising was organized by the Islamists, and according to some records, religious slogans were chanted during the demonstration.\textsuperscript{14} Encouraging the uprising did not make the uprising an Islamist terrorist attack. This study does not claim there were no Islamist groups in the uprising, however, it claims that even though there were some Islamists in the event, many of them were ordinary citizens who sought a solution for their problem. Also, the aim of the Islamist group did not attack the secular regime, instead they sought more freedom. Slogans are essential to show the reaction of people,

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\textsuperscript{13} Karagiannis, Ibid, 267
\end{flushright}
but most of the newspapers highlighted the slogans related to social and economic issues and chanting for jobs and freedom.\textsuperscript{15}

Shirin Akiner believes that the uprising was a “carefully prepared attack,” and that the protestors were not “peaceful civilians, but an action undertaken by armed men with some degree of military training.”\textsuperscript{16} Also, she argued that the number of people killed is not like the media indicated with more than 1000, but is closer to the government stated which was under the 200 people, and she expressed the media dates had confused her.\textsuperscript{17} While international media did not have an opportunity to investigate the event deeply because of the restrictions by the government, Akiner had access to the field with the help of officials in Andijan, which reduced her objectivity.\textsuperscript{18} Instead of governmental sources, independent media and international reports are more reliable.

Adeeb Khalid highlights the arrest of a successful religious businessmen and believes the regime saw the businessman as a competitor of its regime since they had social power and the ability to mobilize.\textsuperscript{19} Since Uzbekistan has had authoritarian tendencies,\textsuperscript{20} the government sees businessmen as a threat to their regime and arrested them.

\textsuperscript{17} Akiner, \textit{Violence in Andijan}, 10.
\textsuperscript{18} Khalid, \textit{Ibid}, 209.
\textsuperscript{19} Khalid, \textit{Ibid}, 208.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{BBC News}, “Uzbekistan Country Profile”.
Methodology

The first section of this study used secondary reports and books to illustrate how the Uzbek government relates to religion since the fall of the Soviet Union. Outstanding regional books and articles were selected according to the Islam discourse in the Soviet Period and after. Also, to indicate the position of the government in relation to its citizens, the constitution of Uzbekistan and its laws, in combination with international organization’s reports related to human rights and radical movements from 1991 to 2017 were evaluated.

For the second part of the thesis, the critical case study of the Andijan uprising is investigated because it was noted as being the biggest and bloodiest uprising after 1991 in Uzbekistan.21 Newspapers published within one month after the uprising were collected. Firstly, the articles related to the uprising were selected and I investigated how the event happened and how the newspapers reported on the events. Russian, American and Turkish newspapers were studied. Since American and Russian journals come to the forefront on the global level, they were investigated. Also, because Turkey is a secular Islamic country like Uzbekistan, Turkish newspapers were used to gain a different viewpoint in the research.

I employ methods within the document analysis approach to systematically code key themes and issues across the documents gathered. This approach relies on systematic content analysis.

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Islam in Uzbekistan

During the 1920s (Soviet Period), it was a tough time for the religious community. A lot of mosques were closed and converted to museums or storage facilities by the Soviet regime. Some Muslims were arrested and some of them were executed, Muslim women had to remove their veils, the wealth of the Waqfs (religious organizations) was seized, religious schools (madrasas) closed, and many ulama (educated Muslim groups) were banished, captured, or killed. Thus, Islam had to live underground during this term.

In 1943, the Soviet Regime created SADUM (The Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia). All Islamic activities such as registering mosques, deciding concepts of Friday sermons, publishing books were controlled with the help of this Islamic Institution which is equivalent to the Muftiate system in Uzbekistan today. Even though the USSR collapsed, the system of SADUM remained with the name of the Muftiate system, and was allowed to create an official Islam in Uzbekistan after the Soviet collapse. Creating a state Islam resulted in all the other Islamic figures, activities, and movements being made illegal in Uzbekistan.

During the 1990s, Uzbekistan was a stable country compared to its neighbors Tajikistan and Afghanistan because of its authoritarian structure. During this term, fundamentalists groups

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23 James R. Millar (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Russian History* ([Place of Publication not Identified]: Thomson/Gale, 2004), 682. [http://go.galegroup.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7C9780028659077&v=2.1&u=uiuc_uc&it=a boutBook&p=GVRL&sw=w&authCount=1](http://go.galegroup.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7C9780028659077&v=2.1&u=uiuc_uc&it=a boutBook&p=GVRL&sw=w&authCount=1)
lived secretly or departed from Uzbekistan. At the end of the 1990s, two radical groups which challenged the present regime arose. The main aim of the groups (HT and IMU) was to create an Islamic based government, and the main differences between them were their method to establish an Islamic state. While IMU has been able to apply violence to get their results, HT has preferred the pacifist route. Thus, after 1998, struggling with the fundamentalists has been one of the primary purposes of the government.

On May 1, 1998, the Republic of Uzbekistan created a law ‘Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations.’ According to this law, the government guaranteed practicing or not practicing a religion, and without looking at the citizens’ religious leanings, all citizens have equal rights under the law. Also, religion and the state are separated from each other so, it can be seen that Uzbekistan is a secular country. Creating political parties and social movements are banned if they are based on religion. Education and religion also are separated from each other; there is no possibility to include religion into the educational curriculum. The Uzbekistan law indicates that religious organizations are based on voluntariness, and they must register with the Ministry of Justice or the local agencies. To create an organization, at least a hundred citizens must gather. Thus, many mosques are closed due to lack of attendees. While there were more than 5,000 mosques in Uzbekistan before the law, in 2003, for instance, there were just 1,800 mosques remaining. In 2015, there are 2,064 mosques, Islamic centers, and educational institutions registered.

28 Olcott, Ibid, 52.
If the young generations want to learn religion, according to law, after secondary school, they might begin religious education at religious educational institutions which register with the Ministry of Justice and provide necessary licensing. Learning religion in private is banned.\textsuperscript{33} There are only two religious institutions of higher education which are the Tashkent Islamic Institute and the Tashkent Islamic University. Besides these two, there are ten Madrasas offering two-year training.\textsuperscript{34} Therefore, it is apparent that there are not many spaces to learn religion from a faith based perspective. Registration is also a significant problem in the country.

Looking at the law of Uzbekistan regarding religion, except for the Ministers of Religion, wearing religious dress in public places is banned.\textsuperscript{35} A Turkish newspaper indicates that the chief physician Zuhra Najimova signed a letter which shows wearing a hijab in the service is not allowed. Women who did not want to sign the letter were fired.\textsuperscript{36} Also, the news indicated that \textit{tarawih} prayer is banned in the mosques for the students. Although religious freedom was guaranteed by the law, there is clearly a restriction of Islam in Uzbekistan. If the Islam is a culture or custom in Uzbekistan, it would not cause a problem for the government. However, it can be seen that there are some restrictions on the practice of Islam. This attitude of the government might cause the rise of the radical movements and their supporters. Some citizens of Uzbekistan want to learn about their religion. However, because of the government restrictions, they do not have enough legal places to get it. The restrictions may result in people learning religion illegally, becoming a supporter of radical movements, or at least having a sympathy for these actions. There is some result of this delinquency.

\textsuperscript{33} Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, \textit{Article 9}.
\textsuperscript{34} ICG Asia Report, \textit{Islam and The State}, 8.
\textsuperscript{35} Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, \textit{Article 14}.
In the criminal code of Uzbekistan, the punishments are detailed for those who breaks the rule. For instance, the establishment of illegal religious organizations may be punished from six months to five years in prison.\(^{37}\) If any citizen helps or supports radical movements, such as the IMU, they might be arrested for eight to ten years in the best-case scenario, and years of imprisonment might change according to crime, potentially rising to twenty years or even capital punishment.\(^{38}\)

The Uzbek government has described extremist religious groups as a potential threat to the security and stability of the country.\(^{39}\) Hizb-ut Tahrir is one of the members of these extremist groups.

**Hizb ut-Tahrir**

According to Hizb ut –Tahrir’s official website, it is an Islamic party whose aim is to create an Islamic Khalifah state based on Sharia. Having different Islamic viewpoints for the *Ummah* such as belonging to different schools or having different nationalities do not matter for them. They have divided the world into two parts: “Dar al-Kufr (Land of disbelief)” and “Dar al-Islam (land of Islam).” In that division, it does not mean occupant of the land should be Muslim; the group is based on whose rules are enforced in the territories. In this regard, they believe that all Islamic lands are under the control of Dar al-Kufr which needs to change. For this purpose, Hizb ut-Tahrir arose in 1952 in Al-Quds.\(^{40}\)

HT started its activity in Uzbekistan during the middle of the 1990s. There are some specific reasons why the people in Central Asia have joined the group. The social-economic conditions of Central Asia is one of the main reasons. Some members of HT denied joining the


\(^{39}\) U.S. Department of State, Uzbekistan 2016, 6.

\(^{40}\) “Hizb ut Tahrir”, *Hizb-ut Tahrir*, accessed November 1, 2017. [http://english.hizbuttahrir.org/about/about-us](http://english.hizbuttahrir.org/about/about-us)
HT because of the economic shortcomings to show their professional, affluent western members as proof. However, in the case of Central Asia, it looks like some of them have been expecting financial support from the movement.\textsuperscript{41} However, there is no substantial evidence about that. One of the member’s wife indicated that only the jobless younger generation joins the group, supporting for financial compensation.\textsuperscript{42} Also, habitants who do not have any expectation for their future and have a desire to make something for their society have joined HT.\textsuperscript{43}

One of the differences of HT from the other Islamist groups is its perspective on violence. There is no proof of their involvement in violence across Central Asia. They have preferred to achieve their goals in a peaceful way through nonviolence and propaganda.\textsuperscript{44}

The relationship between the government and HT began after 1997. Since the members of HT were engaged in their activities mostly in the Ferghana Valley and Tashkent, arrests were usually in these regions. Especially, after the attempt of the assassination of Karimov in 1999, the Uzbek government accused ‘Islamist terrorists’ of this attempt and started to arrest them dramatically. According to party’s allegation, the government arrested more than 8,000 members of the HT.\textsuperscript{45} After the 9/11 attacks in the US, the approach of the government towards the Islamic groups changed dramatically yet again. Arrests and repressions intensified.\textsuperscript{46} 4,200 members of HT were living in prison in 2002 as reported by the Uzbek security services.\textsuperscript{47} Besides torture by the police and the security services, their condition was worse than an


\textsuperscript{42} ICG Asia Report, \textit{Radical Islam in Central Asia}, 15.

\textsuperscript{43} ICG Asia Report, \textit{Radical Islam in Central Asia}, 14.

\textsuperscript{44} ICG Asia Report, \textit{Radical Islam in Central Asia}, 7.

\textsuperscript{45} ICG Asia Report, \textit{Radical Islam in Central Asia}, 33.


\textsuperscript{47} ICG Asia Report, \textit{Radical Islam in Central Asia}, 33.
ordinary prisoner in jail, with occasional limits and restriction of food and water.\textsuperscript{48} Besides suffering from torture and persecution, religious prisoners were beaten, raped, and killed. Human Rights Watch indicated some reports which show the condition of religious prisoners in jail. Prisoners Muzafar Avazov and Husnidin Alimov, for example, died at the Jaslyk prison. 60-70 percent of Avazov’s body was covered in burns, had massive bruising on some parts of his body, and no fingernails in his hands.\textsuperscript{49}

**Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan**

The other radical movement in Uzbekistan is IMU which was created in roughly 1966 during the Soviet period by Jumabai Khojiev and Tahir Yoldashev and has continued today.\textsuperscript{50} They had a jihadist approach and wanted to create an Islamic State in Uzbekistan.\textsuperscript{51} The US declared IMU as a terrorist organization,\textsuperscript{52} and since the IMU had a relationship to the Taliban and al-Qaeda and used Afghanistan for their operations, most of them were killed, including Juma Namangani\textsuperscript{53} by the United States military forces in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{54} After the death of one of the leaders, Juma Namangani, the other members of IMU went to South Waziristan in Pakistan. There has been little to no information beyond this.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{48} ICG Asia Report, *Radical Islam in Central Asia*, 34.
\textsuperscript{50}Shirin Akiner, “Islam: Islam in Central Asia.” In Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd Ed., Ed. Lindsay Jones, 4620-4630. Vol.7. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 4628. [http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=uiuc.uc&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CCX3424501555&it=r&asid=6d49ebb9453a66497be1a466b1e582a0#](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?p=GVRL&sw=w&u=uiuc.uc&v=2.1&id=GALE%7CCX3424501555&it=r&asid=6d49ebb9453a66497be1a466b1e582a0#)
\textsuperscript{51}Hiro, *Inside Central Asia*, 165.
\textsuperscript{52} McGlinchey, Autocrats, 337.
\textsuperscript{53}McGlinchey, Autocrats, 337.
\textsuperscript{54} ICG Asia Briefing Paper, The IMU, 1-2.
In recent years, IMU has developed prominent relationship with ISIS. In 2015, IMU declared its loyalty to ISIS. According to news, IMU will be a part of the ‘Khorasan Province,’ which includes Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, betrayal of IMU to Taliban caused the death of some IMU members and the leader Usman Ghazi. It shows IMU exists but probably was weakened because there is no a significant proof that shows the IMU’s influence in Uzbekistan. The most important thing of this event is the power of Taliban. However, it is not the subject of this study.

Although at present, there is no hazard of the fundamentalism in Uzbekistan, why has the threat of Islam been significant for the government? After the USSR, like all Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan was not able to create stability in their country, especially economically and socially. For this reason, the government has needed to find an excuse for their failure. The threat of Islamism is a perfect scapegoat for them. Also, thanks to that danger, the government maintains its authoritarian regime.

Muftiate System and Being Devout Muslim in Uzbekistan

The muftiate system (Muslim Spiritual Board) was created to control Islam and its activity. The muftiate system was the successor of the SADUM. It is a central factor of the control of Islam in Uzbekistan. The muftiate is based on a hierarchical system. The Cabinet of Minister is the first place and controls the muftiate. Muftiate is not independent, and imams are controlled by the muftiate. They are not only managing imams but also, imams’ khutbahs. Sometimes, they declare official fatwas. It is prohibited for an imam to deliver their own

58 ICG Asia Report, Radical Islam in Central Asia, 33.
59 McGlinchey, Autocrats, 337.
khutbah. Occasionally, some imams give speeches ingenuously. Believers mostly prefer to go the mosques where independent imams are. In brief, the muftiate is a crucial element to supervise the mosques and religious institutes.

Most imams were loyal to this muftiate system and the Karimov regime since they did not want trouble with the government. However, some of them preferred to be free. For example, Rustam Klichev and his followers. Rustam was appointed as an Imam of the Nava mosque in 2000 after that his popularity was growing day by day. He always advised his followers not to join the radical Islamic groups like Hizb-ut Tahrir, but he was arrested as a member of a fundamentalist group and indicated him to return traditional Islam. According to his supporters, he was arrested because he did not make his Friday sermons which were coming from the Spiritual Board, and he was a self-reliant Imam.

After Klichev was imprisoned, some of his followers went to Tashkent to protest that one of his supporters named Tulkin, a journalist, was suffering from government sanctions like others. The police often arrested him, and watched his family home and warned them not to have a relationship with the radical Islamists. His wife Tahmina was not pleased with her husband’s preference.

Uzbekistan’s well-known spiritual leader Sheikh Mukhammad Sodyk Mukhammad Yusuf criticized the government’s constraint of Islam. He indicated that 90 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, but they do not have accessibility to religious materials. Since they do not know what Islam is and how the behavior of Muslim should be, they are easily persuaded

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by radical movements such as Hizb-ut Tahrir. He expressed that although members of Hizb-ut Tahrir in jail, they published a magazine, fifty books, and distributed leaflets. However, the officials of Religious Affairs neither published nor translated even one book.66

In fact, the limitations of accessibility of Islamic materials continued in 2015. Still, some people who want to import or publish Islamic documents without getting official permission are arrested and accepted as extremists. However, minorities highlighted the difficulties of registering and getting permission for religious activities.67 Only the muftiate, Tashkent Islamic University, and Tashkent Islamic Institute may publish, import or distribute religious material. Also, children and teenagers who are under 16 years old are not allowed to practice religion.68

Currently there is a department of Struggle with Terrorism and Religious Extremism is responsible for controlling religion which is a subsidiary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) in Uzbekistan. Mostly they are interested in higher level circumstances. Polices are the focus of the primary level cases.69 In Uzbekistan, some officials are called posbon, every mahalla has one or more. Their duties are a report of the suspicious activity in their mahalla. However, this job is suitable for manipulations. There are some examples which show how the posbon use their duty for bribery, or call the officers immediately, unsure of whether that people are terrorists or only devout Muslims.70 Corruption of security forces causes citizens unrest, also may affect being a sympathizer of the radical movements. An ICG interview with an imam in Tashkent shows the possible emergence of the future and displays the people expectation from the government:

67 U.S. Department of State, Uzbekistan 2016, 7.
68 U.S. Department of State, Uzbekistan 2016, 16.
69 ICG Asia Report, Central Asia: Islam, 10.
70 ICG Asia Report, Central Asia: Islam, 11.
“If the negative tendencies in our society do not stop, and corruption, unemployment continues to grow, and the police continue to terrorize people, then in the place of state organs, underground anti-state structures will begin to emerge. This will happen not today, but when young people, who have passed through underground education in the humiliating conditions of suppression of Islam, and children, whose fathers sit in prison, mature politically. Then an explosive situation will arise.”

Therefore, the government should do something about not only the corruption problem, but also, accessibility problems to religious materials. In addition, the differences between being an Islamist or being a devout Muslim should be considered. There are some examples of the life of Muslim society in Uzbekistan in 2004 that show its difficulties. Botir, who has a beard and religious knowledge, has lived in Dungar in Ferghana Valley. Since he is both educated and a spiritual person, the local police always watch him. Especially after 2004 Tashkent bombing, his home was searched to find evidence related to that attack. Botir was lucky because there was no evidence to insinuate guilt or a connection. However, Botir’s friend wasn’t as lucky. In his friend’s case, the police found a Kalashnikov cartridge in his home, which makes him Islamic militant. This story indicates the difficulties the life of devout Muslims or those who have a beards or wear a hijab in Uzbekistan.

Similarly, Nodira’s story is also interesting. Nodira is from Uzbekistan. Her husband was a drug distributor. While he was in prison, Nodira found religion and joined Islamic meetings like reading Quran and learning Arabic. Since she is wearing the hijab, the officials of Mahalla beset her.

The headscarf and the beard are dangerous for a society who does not want to have trouble with the government because these symbols are seen as an extremist or radical symbol of

71 ICG Asia Report, Central Asia: Islam, 12.
72 Sahadeo & Zanca, Ibid, 310-311.
73 Sahadeo & Zanca, Ibid, 312.
Islam by the government. Due to these symbols, people might be arrested, and charged with being a fundamentalist.

Therefore, Islam has two different aspects in Uzbekistan. Based on a legal level, it is controlled by the muftiate and, all the others. ‘Parallel’ Islam has a lot of different ways such as practicing Islam in illegal places, joining the Islamic groups like HT, and violent actions against the regime. However, being a devout Muslim and being a radical Islamist are different phenomena.

On the other hand, there is a pressure by the government towards religion and there is not freedom to publish religious books, so this pressure may encourage the public to join or become a supporter of the radical movements.

The pressure of the regime and economic-social problems may cause some protest in Uzbekistan like it did in the past. On 13 May 2005, there was an uprising forced by Islamists but based on the local citizens who sought to respond to their problems. Some scholars and the regime viewed the protestors as radicals, however looking at the international reports and newspapers which were published during the event shows although there were Islamists in the uprising, could the uprising be called as an Islamist attack?

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74 Khalid, Ibid, 156.
Andijan: A Critical Case Study

On May 13, 2005, in the city of Andijan in Uzbekistan witnessed an uprising that would change the trajectory of its governance towards Islam. The government blamed the terrorist group “Akramiya” as responsible for the protest. However, protestors argued they were innocent citizens who wanted to show their unrest towards the state. Although the uprising started on May 13th, it occurred because of some disturbances.

First of all, the process of the uprising will be evaluated. The event will be studied with the help of newspapers which were published during the event, and international organizations reports (International Crisis Groups, Human Rights Watch, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and Institutes for War & Peace Reporting) related to the uprising, rather than state media or reports. The newspapers not only investigated what happened in the square, they also focused on what journalists, and other countries bureaucrats’ speeches about the uprising with the aim of bringing a different perspective to the event.

The Background of the Andijan 2005 Event

In June 2004, 23 businessmen were arrested with the suspicion of being members of “Islamic Charitable Organization,” subbed “Akramia” by the state. The regime also argued that the businessmen had a relationship with the HT. Bakhrom Shakirov, who was the father of one of the businessman, gave some information to the organization. He argued that they were not an underground organization, but rather the businessman were devout Muslims and they created a fund to help each other for their financial problems and charitable organizations such as helping their employees and funding schools. He believed that since the businessmen became famous for

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75 BBC News, “How The Andijan Killings Unfolded,”
their charitable works using Islamic economics, the government saw them “as ideological competitors.” The businessmen’s companies were well-known in Andijan because they helped their employees by giving them free meals, paying their wages on-time, and helping their medical expenses and also helped orphanages, schools, nursing home, and poor households.

The trial of the businessmen started on February 11, 2005. From that time to mid-May, the authorities did not intervene in a silent protest of the businessmen’s friends and family. On May 12, people were expecting to learn the verdict of the judge. Since it was deferred again, disappointment caused an attack on the prison due to the extended delays from arrest to trial to verdict. On the night of May 12-13, an unknown group of people attacked the military to get Kalashnikovs in Andijan. After that, some unknown group of people attacked the Andijan prison to rescue the businessmen and other convicts (many of them were arrested because of being fundamentalists). Unknown armed people talked to the prisoners about organizing a meeting in Babur Square. About twenty of businessmen joined them to go to the square.

**Andijan Uprising with the Light of the Newspapers and the International Reports**

People started to learn about the meeting in the Babur Square from their friends, neighbors, and drivers while going to work. According to an interview of ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) with the refugees who left Andijan on May 13,

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78 Igor Rotar, Uzbekistan: Islamic.
81 ICG Asia Report, Uzbekistan: The Andijon, 3.
82 McGlinchey, Autocrats, 339.
84 Human Rights Watch, Bullets, 12-13.
85 OSCE, Preliminary Findings, 11.
people were talking about their problems. About 10,000 people came together; some attendees argued it was approximately 30,000. There were peaceful protestors without weapons, including women and children. Military forces started to shoot the protestors around 7 a.m. After that time, a different group of soldiers opened fire from time to time at a different part of the square. However, instead of splitting apart, people gathered in the square since they believed Islam Karimov would come to listen to them and their problems. However, nobody came, and instead, around 5 p.m., heavy trucks covered all around the square and started to fire on the people, even journalists were under the fire. The mass of people dispersed from the square, some of them walked to the Kyrgyz border, approximately 30 kilometers far from Andijan (around 18.61 miles). Nearly 540 immigrants reached Kyrgyzstan.

According to some eyewitnesses in the square on May 13, there were no ambulances in the square to help the wounded the whole night. Instead, some soldiers killed the wounded. On the morning of May 14th, Karimov declared that Islamic extremists were responsible for the violence the previous night. They aimed to capture Andijan, and they did not come to the square as protestors. An investigation by Human Rights Watch in Andijan, did not find any proof that shows prison attackers and protestors in the square were encouraged by the fundamentalist groups. Also, Hizb ut-Tahrir denied the accusation of Karimov. The organization’s London office stated that because of Karimov’s corruption and pressure, civilians

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86 OSCE, Preliminary Findings, 11.
88 OSCE, Preliminary Findings, 12-14.
89 Human Rights Watch, Bullets, 26-32.
90 OSCE, Preliminary Findings, 20-21.
91 BBC News, “How The Andijan Killings Unfolded,”
93 Human Rights Watch, Bullets, 37.
94 Human Rights Watch, Bullets, 49.
could not stand him, and the Andijan event was a product of this.\textsuperscript{95} During the Soviet period, the secularization of the states come to the forefront, and it affects the present structure of Uzbekistan. Today, support for radical Islamists groups is dwindling in Uzbekistan. However, economic problems and bribery have forced the hand of citizens to protest.\textsuperscript{96} Therefore, people joined the meeting to talk about their issues. There was a microphone in the square to mention their economic problems to the masses.\textsuperscript{97} Expecting to see a government representative to address them, they were met with overpowering military force.

In the morning of May 14, eyewitnesses said that the authorities collected the bodies in a school, a college and local parks as makeshift morgues, and Babur Square too. People come to find their relatives.\textsuperscript{98} According to a doctor who was working in the morgue of the city said that at least 500 rebels were killed. Survivors stated the government shot them like rabbits. However, Karimov claimed that he did not give an order to shoot people.\textsuperscript{99}

The uprising started in Andijan and moved to Qarasuv (Karasu) (a small town which bordered on Kyrgyzstan) and shifted to Pakhtabad (about 30 far away from Andijan).\textsuperscript{100} Angry people came to the Qarasuv and took the Mayor as a hostage. Later, they rebuilt the bridge of the Shakhrikhansay river, which is very important for the trade with the Kyrgyzstan. Bakhtiyor Rahimov was the responsible for that action; it appears that his main aim was re-establishing the trade connection with Kyrgyzstan.\textsuperscript{101} The public started to shout slogans in the village of Karasu (Korasuv), such as: “Karimov, give the public a job,” “The last of the bullshit (Zorbaliga son),”

\textsuperscript{95} “Isyan Guclenerek Geri Donecek,” Ortadogu, (16 May 2005)
\textsuperscript{96} ICG Asia Report, Uzbekistan: The Andijon, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{97} BBC News, “How The Andijan Killings Unfolded,”
\textsuperscript{100} Ilya Graschenkov, “против режима каримова бунтуют города,” Novoye Russkoye Slovo, (17 May 2005)
\textsuperscript{101} ICG Asia Report, Uzbekistan: The Andijon, 5-6.
“Don’t kill your people.”102 The Karasuv uprising was over on the morning of May 19th with the arrest of Rahimov and others.103

The Boston Globe emphasized human rights groups reports which mentioned the massive violence of the government. Also, the newspaper is included White House spokesman Scott McClellans statement:” We have had a concern about human rights in Uzbekistan, but we are concerned about human rights in Uzbekistan, but we are concerned about the outbreak of violence.”104 In another speech Scott McClellan highlighted that Uzbeks want to have a more democratic administration.105

A Russian analyst, Yulia Latynina, commented the uprising ”This was not an extremist revolt, but simply a revolt by desperate Muslims, who above all wanted to free their relatives from prison.”106

Craig Murray, who was the British ambassador in Tashkent remarked that the protestors in Andijan don’t want to create a radical Islamist regime in Uzbekistan, they want to get democracy, and possibly more Islamic influence over governance. However, he stated that it is not like the Taliban, it looks more like Turkey.107 So, it means that their aim was not to attack the secular regime as the state declared, rather they wanted to have greater freedom for their religious life.

As Prof. Dr. Ahat Andican highlighted, there was no influential opposition group in Uzbekistan. Therefore, the uprising could not spread to all districts in Uzbekistan. It was only at

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102 Nerdun Hacioglu, “Halk da Ayaklandi,”
103 ICG Asia Report, Uzbekistan: The Andijon, 5-6.
104 Bukharbayeva, 12 Killed, A6.
107 Kozlovsky, Андижан, 7.
the local level.\textsuperscript{108} After twelve years since Andijan events, it can be said that some respected businessmen created an Islamic charity in Uzbekistan. They were arrested on suspicion of being fundamentalists. After their trial, their friends, family and beneficiaries revolted since there was no verdict in the trial, and the public joined them. Firstly, the uprising started for the 23 businessmen’s trial but, after civilians attended them, it converted to the rebellion for the economic and social problems in Uzbekistan. Because Karimov was a powerful president, who did not want to lose his power, he declared these protestors as terrorists and, put down the uprising with the bloody way.

After these events, an international investigation was started. However, Russia and China were against that research. With influence over them, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization accepted the Andijan event as ‘a terrorist plot.’ Thus, the investigation was not successful.\textsuperscript{109}

After twelve years from the Andijan uprising, still, there are some restrictions of the regime. Being a devout Muslim and being an extremist, radical Islamist is not apparent. Also, there is no definite evidence to show increasing radical movements and treating the regime in Uzbekistan.\textsuperscript{110} After the death of Islam Karimov, the new president Shavkat Mirziyoyev declared 2017 as “Year of Dialogue with the People and Human Interest.”\textsuperscript{111} It is too early to say something about the new President of Uzbekistan. However, it can be expected that Shavkat Mirziyoyev realizes the necessity of religious freedom in the country and gives the public more religious freedom, and by doing so, radical movements will expire in Uzbekistan.

\textsuperscript{108} “Ozbekistan’d a Ayaklanma,” Cumhuriyet, (17 May 2005) 11.
\textsuperscript{109} Hiro, Ibid, 190.
\textsuperscript{110} ICG Asia Briefing, Uzbekistan: Stagnation, 1.
Conclusion

Looking at the place of Islam at the governmental level, it could be seen that, as a successor of SADUM, the *muftiate* system, ensures the control of the mosques, religious institutes, and Muslim religious leaders in Uzbekistan. Also, with the help of the law “Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” (1998) the pattern of secularism in Uzbekistan is guaranteed. Although this law shows the equality of citizens’ religious beliefs, it also brings many restrictions for those who want to be practicing Muslims. In conclusion, obtaining religious knowledge without approval of the government has been regulated and restricted. Beyond the legal structure, all the religious activity is called “unofficial” Islam. This thesis clarifies the governmental approach to Islam in terms of not only radical movements (IMU, HT) but also, devout Muslims with the aim of making apparent the relationship between Islam and the state.

Since the regime wants to maintain its autocratic rule and sees any uprising as a threat to the regime, radical Islam seems to be a useful tool and the Andijan uprising was no exception. Even though the government arresting 23 businessmen appeared to eliminate radical Islam or provide a temporary fix, in reality, it aimed to constrain opposition. These businessmen were respectful people who were trying to help others under the Islamic charity. The government arrested them, and their journey to a verdict took so much time which forced people to attack the prison and to save businessmen, and finally to organize an uprising. Although, it is not acceptable attacking the prison and using violence to save the businessmen, to call the uprising as a radical Islamist attack is not be accurate since there were many people joined the uprising, ranging from economic instability to social discomfort.
This thesis shows that the 2005 Andijan uprising was organized by radical Islamists to defend the businessmen’s rights. With contributions by local people who wanted to find a solution to their economic and social problems it became a significant protest to show the unrest of citizens. So, to call the uprising a radical Islamist attack to demolish secular regime needs further proof, which can not be shown, even 12 years later.
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