

Soviet and Post-Soviet Discourses on Islam: A Comparative Study of Uzbekistan

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Abstract

The present study is an unpretentious attempt to delve the two discourses on Islam, during the two epochs, Soviet colonization, and Post-Soviet authoritarianism in the diminutive part of the globe none other than Uzbekistan. The study will highlight the Marxist-Leninist discourse on religion in general and Islam in particular. The second part delineates the Karimov's authoritarian regime with special reference to his discourse on Islam. The study is comparative in this sense that before independence, Islam under Soviet rule was suppressed and Muslims were persecuted, questions, was it by nature to suppress and persecute or something was lying in the ideologies of two groups (Muslims and Atheists). In the aftermath of the Soviet disintegration in 1991, Uzbekistan emerged as Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan found herself in a situation that was alarmingly challenging. First and the foremost challenge in front of nascent State was to re-introduce the age old Islamic culture and identity and do so in a fashion that would not be against the present demands and challenges. Initially Karimov sporadically has used Islamic symbolism to stabilize his political position, but the external and internal impellents obliged him to divert his attitude and discourse on Islam. There was hue and cry for Islamic revivalism in the Republic of Uzbekistan, which directly or indirectly laid its adversarial impact on Religious freedom in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Karimov believed that the Islamic activities is an ideological and political threat and warns that Islamic freedom is trying to destabilize his regime. The clash of ideology was more or less correct, while studying the Soviet discourse and Post-Soviet discourse on Islam in Uzbekistan. President Karimov. Karimov's communist background and the policies he has followed, cause him to be criticized as a hypocrite and apostate (Olcott 1996, 117). After independence, Karimov strategically embarked upon public efforts to construct an image as a 'Muslim' leader sympathetic of Islamic rituals (i.e. taking oath on the Qur'an, making pilgrimage to Mecca, establishing an Islamic university, and instituting an Islamic TV channel.) Karimov government had an instrumentalist view of religion. Religious expressions were encouraged where they contribute to the goal of nation-building and legitimization of the dominant power coalitions as defined by the power holders.

Key Words: Islam, Soviet, Post-Soviet, Islam Karimov, Discourses, ideology and atheistic.

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Islam in Central Asia- Historical Background

The solicitation of Islam reached Central Asia during the mid of 7th century. Regarding the methodology of solicitation, there are antithetical panoramas among scholars. Some atheists claimed that the diffusion of Islam in Central Asia, Caucasus, and the Volga region took place by force, i.e. by sword. The claim is supported by State and some learned men. (Bekbolat, 1929). In opposition, Muslims insisted that their ancestors accepted Islam willingly without any force. To them, the main reason to spread of Islam among the peoples so rapidly is the enormous attractiveness of it (Islam). The Ziyauddinkhan Babakhan (1908-1982) believes that Islam was not contrary to the interests of the people. He mentions the testimony of many writers of the middle ages, confirmed by modern scholars such as H. G. Wells and W. Barthold, showed that many peoples of the Caucasus and Dagestan, and Turks people embraced Islam in the main of their free will. (Critchlow, 1989) The Muslims, on the other hand, were led by a brilliant general, Qutayba bin Muslim, and were highly motivated by the desire to spread the Islamic ideology. Because of these factors, and the strength of the Islamic *aqeedah* (*belief*) and the nature of the Shariah (Divine law), the population of Mawarannahr was easily liberated (Ashtiyani, 2001).

The Islamization of the region was accomplished quite rapidly. Within some fifty years, Transoxiana had been co-opted politically, culturally and economically into the Islamic Caliphate. The roots of Islamic faith were strengthened during the Karakhanid and Seljuk empires. Islam developed deeper historical roots in the non-nomadic Tajik and Uzbek populations than among the nomadic Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Kazakh tribes (Rashid, 2001). The scholarship of Central Asia during the medieval era (or Muslim era) had left an indelible mark on the world. The period from 7th century to the end of the fifteenth century is marked as the age of achievement in the annals of world history (M.S, 1997). In the eighteenth century Tsarist penetration started in the region. The conquest of the Khanates began with the fall of Tashkent in 1865. Bukhara and Khiva became protectorates in 1868 and 1873 respectively; Kokand was fully integrated into the Russian Empire in 1876. Transcaspia (modern Turkmenistan) was conquered in the 1880s.

Soviet discourse on Islam:

Intermittently certain questions needed more answers like why, how, to what extent? While studying the seven decades Soviet role and discourse in Central Asia vis a vis to Islam, these questions directly or indirectly takes place in the everyone's mind that why Islam or Muslims was persecuted, suppressed and became injured party of Soviet imperialism? How Islam or Muslims survived during the brutal colonialism? To answer these questions Soviet discourse on Islam in Central Asia is quite utilitarian.

There are various Soviet discourses on Islam but I here will discuss the *Marxist-Leninist* discourse. While exploring the *Marxist-Leninist* discourse on Islam, Let us examine the Marx-Lenin ideologies and approaches regarding religion. Religion in Marxist ideology is the “Opium of toiling masses, distracting them from the social struggle against the exploiting parasites”: it has played and playing a reactionary role, being an instrument for spiritual oppression of work”; it inculcates in man the spirit of resignation and humanity, thus distracting him from revolutionary activities”; it is a fanciful, fallacious and anti-scientific creed, projecting the dream of paradise into an imaginary other world”; and finally, the main argument used against all religious, “as a spiritual creed, is a hangover from the pre-socialist past...” it be clear from the ideology of Marxism there is natural incompatible and irreconcilable and the Communist party cannot remain indifferent or natural towards religion...it is must fight it and defeat it” one of the key tenets of the Soviet system is religion is incompatible with communism and communists methodically set about repressing all forms of religious expression. (Rashid A. , 2002)

Immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, within a few years after the Bolshevik Revolution, some of the Ulama, especially the official ones, had begun to urge acceptance the new regime. For example, the Muslim Religious Board of Ufa pronounced a fatwa declaring that “By the great grace of Allah, the Revolution which has taken in Russia has destroyed a brutal, despotic autocracy which persecuted the Religion of Islam (Critchlow, 1989) Also the Mufti of *Mahkeme-i Şer’iye* (the Highest Muslim Religious Board of Turkistan in Tashkent) Zahiruddin Allam, declared a supporting fatwa in 1925. Although some years after revolution, the policies and strategies of Soviets dramatically changed, it will be well to say that Soviet policies, towards religion in general and Islam in particular were zig zag rather static depends on the situation.

Whenever Soviets need Muslim support, they give some concessions. By 1920, Soviet Russia suppressed Islam in Central Asia, as Alexander Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejaye identifying the decree of the Council of the People’s Commissars of 1918 that created the ‘Central Commissariat for Muslim Affairs,’ whose task for the next several years was to “bolshevize” the Muslim masses (Lemerrier-Quelquejaye, 1967) In 1924, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic and other Republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, the aim was well planned to create modern nations, which would stamp out a religious ideology or Pan-Islamic ideology (Lemerrier-Quelquejaye, 1967) After early concessions to the Muslims to win support for the Soviet government viewed Islam as a political and ideological threat and set out to destroy it. Otherwise, the anti-religious feelings have been a part of Soviet policy from its inception (Rather, 1999)

In view of above mentioned ideology, religion is naturally opposite of it. Now we came to the question “Why” i-e Why Islam became injured party during the Soviet imperialism? The answer is simple and obvious; the special arguments used by atheists against Islam. According to the atheistic propaganda, Islam- far from being the national or native religion of the Soviet Muslims. Islam has at all times been perceived as something alien (brought to Central Asia by alien invaders i-e Arabs, Persians and Ottoman Turks) Soviets followed the same dictum, even one step ahead by claiming Islam- most conservative, even reactionary and it sanctifies in its followers fanaticism, intolerance and xenophobia; Islamic rites and customs such as circumcision and fasting (During the month of Ramadhan) were criticized as primitive, barbarism and unhealthy (Chylinsky, 1991).

Islamic morals are thought to be opposed to Communist morals, with Islamic art and literature ossified and unable to evolve or progress, not even to the capitalistic stage of evolution, but to the past feudal era. As such, Islam has no place in society of “advanced Socialism” another argue led by the Soviet imperialists for persecution/ suppression of Islam, Islam they considered as backward and retrogressive. They depicted Islam as a reactionary Mullah led force supported by British imperialists that was trying to undermine the revolution and prevent progress and education. (Rashid A. , 2002). Islam was increasingly portrayed as a negative element in the newly forming Soviet society. This process culminated in the Law on Religious Associations (O religioznykh ob’yedneniyakh) of 1929, which prohibited the teaching of religion, the printing and dissemination of religious texts and related activities Islam (Kehl-Bodrogi, 2008). In reality, Islam was one of the basic ideological enemies of the Bolshevism which worked against the spreading the ideas of Socialism and Communism among the Muslim population of Central Asia. Therefore, the Bolshevism, following the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of religion, Bolshevik authorities had no alternative but to suppress it in all its manifestations and institution.

1920s-30s, state mechanism of terror was launched at large-scale skirmish against Islam and its followers. From the mid-1920s onwards, expanding anti-religious machinery was set in motion and the Muslim region were flooded with anti-Islamic posters and publications. An organization called “Society of Godless Militants” (*Soiuz Voinstvuiushchikh Bezbozhnikov*, SVB) of Jews and Communists created in Moscow in 1924, had the duty of conducting anti-Islamic crude campaign. As Daniel Peris has shown, the SVB claimed to aim at overcoming religion not through indiscriminate use of force, but through scientific explanation and convincing propaganda against “religious prejudices”. The SVB distinguished itself not only from the random and brutal anti-religious “hooliganism” of the Communist Youth Organization (Komsomol), but also from the uncoordinated administrative closure of mosques and schools by the local organs.

(Peris, 1998) Several journals were published for guidance and training of the people for the tactics and methods of anti-Islamic propaganda. The different tactics of anti-Islamic struggle were: a) attacking on Islamic Customs and rites, b) attack on Holy places and Sufism, c) the Ulama were attacked on various anti-people allegations as untrustworthy, exploiters and enemies of people, d) the liberation of women from tradition like veil, bride price and for this purpose the so called liberated women were used. (Rather, 1999). The Soviet state utilized all available coercive and institutional means at its disposal, including: direct physical attacks against places of worship and education, and their destruction or closure; virulent attacks against religious teachers, ritual leaders, and individual believers, who were accused of every conceivable crime, ranging from the crimes of custom to trumped-up charges of murder & embezzlement.

Three out of the five pillars of Islam were outlawed (*zakat*, *hajj*, and fasting during Ramadan) and alleged violators were punished. All forms of Muslim education, including the printing, dissemination and teaching of Islamic texts were prohibited. During 1920s and 1930s, the script from Arabic and Persian to Latin and then to Cyrillic was constantly changed. This policy effectively cut off the younger generation of Central Asian from the textual sources of their Muslim literary heritage. The policy of de-Islamization was accompanied by a policy of re-educating the Muslim masses in "scientific atheism" which was systematically and militantly pursued. The integrity of Islam and Muslim values and institutions was seriously undermined through subversion of its leadership in 1941 when Stalin, Secretary General of the Soviet Union from 1924 to 1953, strictly controlled Islam and regulated Islamic practice through state law and regulations by controlling the publishing and selling of the Holy Quran and outlawing three of the five pillars of Islam, 1) the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), 2) The obligatory giving of alms (*zakat*) and 3) Ramadan (*Siyam*).

Stalin also created an officially constituted Muslim Religious Boards (MRB), the so-called "Official Islam." The Communist Youth activists enjoyed themselves bulldozing Muslim shrines. As a result of this horrible attitude many religious leaders, many Sufi sheikhs, theologians and ordinary believers were repressed, and Muslim spiritual schools (*madrassalar*), etc. were closed. (Keller, 1992). Soviets eliminated countless Muslim scholars and local leaders, destroyed Islamic texts and literature, closed tens and thousands of mosques and madrasas and converted into shops, schools, ware houses and museums or factories (Akiner, 1994) Islamic properties were confiscated. Publishing of Islamic literature and its import from other Muslim countries was banned. Severe restrictions were imposed on *Waqf* property destined to be used for sacred and learning purpose. In 1943 the remaining Islamic institutions were brought under control of clerical administration of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan in Tashkent. Soviet media continued to disseminate the publication of anti-religious books and articles.

In July 1948 *Sovetskaia Krygizia* (a publication) cautioned that the authority of Islamic tenants was yet again deepening on account of reduction in anti-religions campaigns and the extension of Islamic Madrasas. Muslims were prevented from worship and observance of their religions practices.

Thus Islamic culture with its value system was pushed to back seat. Policies aimed at changing the Muslim character of the region were adopted for imperialistic designs. As a result of which Islam and Islamic practices in the region became a soft target. S. Keller had mentioned in his book “To Moscow, not to Mecca” that the decades of suppression drove religion out of the public sphere. Some have argues that Islam persisted through the Soviet period in a superficial form, more as a “symbol of Culture and identity” than religion. (Tabyshaliva., 2000) Despite of heavy-handed and aggressive atheist policy people continued to follow their beliefs at least in everyday life. (Kaushik, 2000) Because of the highly successful Soviet programs of de-Islamization in Central Asia, the near universal claims of Muslim identity by Central Asian natives became devoid of any meaningful religious content--they *became Muslims in name only!* Paul Goble (2000) has suggested, Central Asians sought to “retain attachment to it [Islam] as marker rather than a guide” and Islam became a “shell, an identity, a primordial tie, rather than apolitical [religious?] reality.” However, the Soviet traditional policy of zero tolerance of Islam remained strong even during the early years of Gorbachev's rule- -e.g. as reflected in his strongly anti-Islamic speech in Tashkent in 1986. (Fierman, 1994).

Post-independence/Karimov's discourse on Islam:

The unprecedented epoch-making event of the 20th century, culminating in the attainment of independence by five Central Asian Republics opened the doors of Islamic revivalism in Central Asia. (Mandelbaum, 1994). Central Asian Muslims who had been forced to renounce or hide their religion for 74 years, at least the dissolution gave an opportunity to reconnect spiritually and culturally with their Islamic past (Rashid A. , 2002)

Uzbekistan, with asseveration of independence, on September 1st, 1991, Islam has taken an altogether new role in the “nation-building process” and became a right alternative ideology to fill the socio-political vacuum or in other words, Islam was the natural choice to fill an ideological vacuum created by the disintegration of the Soviet Union and its communist ideology. The nascent republic under former communist leader Islam Karimov, held the new constitution in one hand and the Quran in the other, when he took the oath of allegiance as the first president of independent Uzbekistan. (Akiner, 2003) The oath ceremony gave hope of Islamic revivalism in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

After independence Islamic resurgence in the republic of Uzbekistan begin to assume an important factor in Uzbek socio-cultural life. (Mohanty, 2006) . President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan, along with other Central Asian leaders, publicly expressed enthusiasm for the secular Turkish model, but also embark to reclaim elements of Islam and Muslim traditions to help to consolidate state power. In an interview in 1991, Karimov declared that "the gravest crisis that has befallen us is not economic but moral- the destruction of the age-old moral principles for ideological reasons will be far more difficult to overcome than the chaos in the economy (M.Berger, 1991) He bemoaned how a Communist could not even attend the burial ceremonies of his/her loved ones; and how *awqaf* were confiscated, shari'a abrogated, mosques and shrines destroyed and desecrated by the Soviet regime. For a short period, the opening of old mosques was encouraged and the building of new ones permitted without much official interference by the state or the Spiritual Administration.

President Karimov visited Saudi Arabia, performed *'umra* (pilgrimage to Mecca outside of the Hajj period), and made official visits to Muslim capitals. During the first years of Independence, the official policy of Islam Karimov was focused on changing the Soviet atheist mentality of the population and propagating the spiritual wealth of the Uzbek nation. Indeed, the independent Uzbek state engaged in a wide array of activities for reclaiming Islam and Muslim heritage on its own terms but did so in a way that was neither entirely successful nor free of cynicism/hypocrisy (Shahrani, 1995). Shirin Akiner criticized the official policy of Karimov administration by saying, "the chief beneficiary was the republican government, which was adroit enough to use Islam to strengthen their own positions and to pave the way for an eventual transformation from communist party functionaries to nationalist leaders (Akiner, 1994)

What make Karimov to put all power in his own hand? Civil war in Tajikistan, which was ended by power sharing, put some psychological threat to Karimov's authority, now Karimov in order to avoid the threat, he held almost all powers in his own hand and banned opposition parties, placed tight control on media, and outlawed public discussions and debates on future policy. Karimov ensured that the politically active elements, intellectuals, mullahs, new political parties would forced like Islam of Soviet era, to go underground. And with that, all these groups eventually became radicalized and violent and among them many young people looked towards Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia for new ideological inspirations. (Rashid A. , 2002) This resulted in the emergence of number of radical groups and movements like Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Hizb-ul-Tahrir al Islamiyya, Akramiya, Tawbah and Adalat.

The fear and favor policy by Karimov government was enforced by all available means of aggression and terror, produced another powerful legacy in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The Post-Soviet discourse/ Karimov's discourse of Islam in the nascent Republic is best evaluated through the policies, programmes and directives enforced in order to put the religious activities under the government surveillance. The constitution of Uzbekistan guaranteed the limited access to freedom of religion. The religious freedom and religious education is restricted by three articles of the Uzbek constitution. Article 16 authorizes the government to limit the right to manifest one's religion in light of any rights and interests of the state which in this case are political interests. Article 20 states that one's exercise of rights and freedom may not violate the lawful interests, and freedoms of the state or society. Like article 16, the ambiguity of the language in Article 20 provides an additional obstacle for religious adherents because Uzbek officials interpret the words 'lawful interest, rights and freedoms' to suit their own purposes, including suppressing perceived ideological and political opponents. Finally article 61 which provides for the separation of religion and state falls prey to the state's "rights and interest" and "lawful freedom" limitations provided in article 16 and article 20 respectively.

In 1998, the law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organization" was adopted by the constitution of Uzbekistan. The 1998 law is a function of three principle antecedents: (1) the Constitution of Uzbekistan. (2) Uzbekistan's 1991 Freedom of Conscience Law, and (3) Russia's 1997 Freedom of Conscience Law.

In Uzbekistan, the state makes great efforts to control religious education, by keeping all religious educational institutions under its tight state surveillance. The 1998 Law on freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations severely restricts the exercise of religious freedom. Through the law government sanctioned and controlled forms of religious education as the only legal modes of religious learning. (McGlinchey, 2006) The law imposes onerous hurdles for the registration of religious groups, severely restricts religious freedom for unregistered and registered groups deemed in conflict with national security. The law criminalizes unregistered religious activities; restricts the right to establish schools and train clergy to registered groups alone.

Proscription of fundamental religious liberties are found scattered throughout the twenty-three articles that comprise Uzbekistan's 1998 law on freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations. However they seem to fall into three basic categories: (1) Provisions restricting freedom to manifest religious convictions, (2) Provisions restricting freedom to disseminate religious ideas, and (3) Provisions restricting freedom to assemble for religious purposes.

According to 1998 Human Rights Watch Report the Uzbek government has increased its official legislative restrictions against independent Islamic worship since 1996. First, in 1997, the government began closing all mosques and Islamic primary and secondary schools not registered according to the current religious law. The government does not provide any legal explanation for closing these religious institutions. Some of the articles of the law are as follow;

Article 14 of the 1998 freedom of conscience prohibits any citizen of Uzbek Republic except a religious organization's "ministers" from appearing in public places in "religious attire". The practical effect of this broad restriction is to virtually outlaw the deeply rooted Islamic traditions of beard and headscarves. Numerous governmental and non-governmental reports verify that on multiple occasions men with beards have arbitrary arrested and forced to shave on the grounds that is beard is "Wahhabi" likewise, even women dressed in traditional Islamic *Hijab* (traditional Muslim covering, usually including a head scarf, sometimes covering the face, and a long, loose-fitting robe or dress) *are* often viewed as potential threat to national security. In 1998, dozens of students were expelled from state institutions of higher education for wearing Islamic attire. Female students who wore hijab were expelled, and male students with beards were subjected to expel.

University administrators pointed to the law, particularly the prohibition on "ritual" dress in public, to support their decisions to deprive pious Muslim students of their right to education. Even primary and secondary school girls were expelled for wearing hijab. The National Security Service (SNB) followed several expelled university students who had met with Human Rights Watch, and warned them not to speak with foreigners again. Since 2011, the government has required students at all institutions of higher education to sign a 23-pages pledge agreeing not to wear religious dress or immodest Western-style clothing. (USCIRF, 2013) Thus, through its legislation, the Uzbek government imposes state-sponsored Islamic observance upon Uzbek citizens and prohibits independent Islamic worship and education and Islamic outlook (beard, clothing and hijab).

Not only do these legislative provision separations of religion and state, but also they inhibit the right to freedom of religious violation of constitutional guarantees and international standards of religious freedom established by the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights), the ICCPR (International Convent of Civil and Political Rights), and the DRID (Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief). As summarized by Luong, when Karimov's calculations of strengthening his legitimacy fell to the fear of opposition, his ulterior motive to eliminate all potential political rivals came out of the closet:

“President Karimov of Uzbekistan in particular has maintained Soviet attitudes towards religion and dissent. He has moved beyond the notion that the state should simply ‘manage’ Islam by institutionalizing and de-politicizing it, however, to the conviction that it must be eliminated as an independent social force. Thus, while Karimov created his own committee for Religious Affairs to perform essentially the same function as the Soviet Islamic Central Asian Directorate –to oversee the practice of Islam-he has also executed a widespread crackdown on non-militant Islamists, which includes practicing Muslims and imams in both officially recognized and unofficial mosques” (Luong 2004, 22)

Comparative analysis and Conclusion

Whilst putting the two regimes (Soviet and Karimov) in the scale of comparative analysis. Soviet and post-Soviet policies of rejection of religion in general and Islam in particular in all its manifestations and institutions were based on ideological conflict. Religion and communism naturally are incomparable. It becomes easy to understand that the policy of “fear and favor” was mutually adopted. The majority of Research find the religious policies of the Soviet Union repressive and subjugate, and this evaluation is more or less correct (Keller, 2001).

However, the only difference was during Soviet rule, World War II (1938-1945) compels Soviet authorities to give some concessions in order to gain their (Muslim) support and in order to combat in the war. After independence in 1991, initially Uzbekistan under the Islam Karimov, people of the Republic feel fluky while seeing the enthusiasm of Islam. A. Karimov by opening old and new mosques, madrassas, performing hajj and make contacts to the Muslim World. However soon after independence, Uzbekistan under the authoritarian regime of Islam Karimov faces new chapter of suppression. Most studies rely on its heavy security apparatus to employ the ‘discourse on danger’ and to control any deviation from central state ideas of Islam.

In Uzbekistan, the state sponsored attempts to harness reformist Islamic thought, any public space to engage Muslim affairs publicly – and thus potentially politically – seems out of question for now. It is the state apparatus in the Republic that suppresses the social transformative force of Islam and religion. Karimov’ discourse on Islam is well understood by reduced social space to engage into new debates about the role of Islam and the Muslim communities. Two major episodes took place during Soviet period and Post-Soviet period i-e second world war and 9/11 respectively. Second World War (1938-1945), gave some concessions to Religion during Soviet colonialism. However, 9/11 episode has put the world in new direction, Karimov also start its own version of fighting against terrorism and extremism.

Islam and its followers and organizations or movements operating or having affiliation with Islam were tightly controlled even banned in the soil of Uzbekistan. Irrespective of the interpretive problems, Uzbek law restricting Islamic adherents' right to teach practice and worship. The political and ideological stance was based on a powerful discourse of rejection of religion in general and Islam in particular. It is important to note here that this policy of rejection was not even less than to the policies of Soviet imperialism. One thing is unanimous Uzbekistan during Soviet and Post-Soviet suffered from an ideological void, the reaction during the Soviet era was Islam operated clandestinely and dissolution of USSR is itself the reaction and the reaction to the Karimov's regime was the emergence of radicalism. President Karimov of Uzbekistan has maintained Soviet attitude towards religion and dissent. He has moved beyond the notion that the state should simply "manage" Islam by institutionalizing and depoliticizing it. However to the conviction that it must be eliminated as an independent social force, Karimov created his own version of Islam and created his own tested committee for religious affairs with same function as Soviets did by establishing Spiritual Directorate (SADUM) (Luong, 2004)

The discourse on Islam by Islam Karimov is well depicted by the Luong, Karimov's regime "suppressed all autonomous appeals to manifestations of Islam-a state policy that began in the city of Namangan in 1992 and accelerated out of control in 1997 with arrest, detention and torture of thousands of Muslims. (Luong 2004, 18) The Uzbekistan authorities have routinely bullied the popular religious leaders and dissidents using the state-controlled mufti offices and often accusing them of the radical ideologies of wahhabism. (Cichok 2003).

In the rhetoric of the Karimov government Islam has been similarly depicted as a religion incompatible with the secular nature of the Uzbek state. Reaffirming that Uzbekistan is "proceeding along the correct path towards building a new democratic and civilized state" at a meeting with foreign ambassadors and the media, Karimov stressed that "Islam shall not be the political plane in our country (and) Uzbekistan shall remain a secular state" (ITAR-TASS 1999).

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