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https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php

Believing in God at Your Own Risk: Religion and Terrorisms in Uzbekistan*

RUSSELL ZANCA

Toshkentning markaziy maydoni hisoblangan Mustaqillik maydonida o'nlab kishilar va bir nechta militsiya xodimining ko'z o'ngida bir kishi ayolni o'ldirib, beymalol maydondan chiqib ketdi va g'oyib bo'ldi. Halq shovqin-suron ko'tarib, militsiya xodimlarini so'ka boshladi. Keyinroq Ichki Ishlar Vazirligiga qo'ng'iroq qilishdi. Voqea sodir bo'lgan joyga darhol general yetib keldi va militsiya xodimlariga tashlandi:

Bekorchilar, nega qotilni ushlamadinglar, hammangni ishdan xaydayman, itvach'chalar!

Militsionerlar generalga javoban:

Aybdormiz, or'tiq general, bugun o'zimiz bilan narkotik va "Hisbut-Tahrir varaqlarini olishni unutupmiz!

On Tashkent's Independence Square, a man murders a woman in cold blood before dozens of people and a few cops. The murderer easily works his way out of the crowd and disappears. The crowd raises hell and begins to curse the cops. A while later they call on the Ministry of Internal Affairs to intervene. Upon finding out what has happened, a commanding officer from said ministry immediately appears at the scene and lashes out at the cops:

You do-nothings, why didn't you detain the murderer? You sons-of-bitches! I'll fire all of you!

The cops then respond:

Comrade General, we're sorry, but the fact is that today we forgot to bring narcotics and Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflets with us.

Contemporary Uzbek humour from the *Ozod Ovoz* website¹

Introduction

My contention in this essay is that terrorism may be as easily rooted in the execution of power on the part of a self-proclaimed secular government as it may be in the worldview of those seeking to establish a theocratic government. There are two types of terrorism in Uzbekistan today, one committed sporadically in the name of Islam,

*This paper was first presented in the panel 'Religion, Power, Political Economy: Postsocialist Views' at the Meetings of the American Anthropological Association, Chicago, 2003.

and the other carried out on a daily basis by state authorities. Having alleged this, I want to make it clear that I think neither type is acceptable or justifiable, nor do I think that it is possible to know precisely what causes the one or the other just as it is nearly impossible to claim that state terrorism necessarily brings about terrorism among the powerless. Today violence in Uzbekistan veers increasingly towards the uncontrollable and the attendant fears resulting from this situation both on the part of government representatives and of ordinary people make Uzbekistan a country embroiled in terrorism. Lest the reader think it a matter of hyperbole to declare that there is state terrorism, I would ask him to consider the origins of this phrase that extend back to the French Revolution and have their modern example in Stalinism (late 1920s until mid-1950s). What I mean is that the actors who represent the state routinely flout the state's laws and Constitution in an effort to frighten the population with the goal of making the population passive so that no oppositional tendencies toward its rule, either on an individual or organised group basis, emerge.

Instilling fear is easily accomplished by the Uzbekistani state because of its routine use of torture and violence in police stations and jails. The population is constantly made to feel afraid of undertaking certain actions or holding certain opinions; devout religious practice or speaking out on behalf of human rights are two such examples that stir fear in the hearts of those engaging in such actions as well as of those associated with such people. To return to the aforementioned Stalinism as a state terrorism model, it seems a reasonable conjecture to state that the Uzbekistan model is one of neo-Stalinism imbued with the peculiarities of postsoviet Uzbekistani society and culture. Furthermore in the case of Uzbekistan there is a strong argument to be made for proportional responses to relentlessly violent policies, or an argument on behalf of an understanding rather than a justification of the terrorism of the persecuted when a state's leadership not only engages in the business of ordering society but of beating it into compliance. While I explore reasons for what motivates the leadership, I am less concerned with the insider's justifications or rationale (what anthropologists call the *emic* perspective) than I am with making the case for talking to, arguing with and generally humanising either ordinary terrorists or those who justify what most would call terrorism. While I have no particular *métier* for theorising terrorism, I do want to encourage more anthropologists to take as dispassionate an approach to this subject as possible in the interest of discerning new tactics toward making peace.²

The Uzbek Situation

What are the motives of the state actors and the political leadership in Uzbekistan? Is the emergence of an independent Uzbek state so tied to its Soviet progenitor that what we see is a replaying of a junior Stalinist-type entity wreaking violence on its own citizenry in ways long characteristic of Soviet tactics themselves, particularly toward dissenters?

(Mazzower, 2002, p. 1168)

During the Cold War the USA favoured an approach that stipulated that communist or quasi-communist movements had to be combated virtually anywhere in the world. The period since the Cold War ended has seen a combination of lip service and action toward dismantling autocratic and grossly human rights violating regimes that the USA had supported to varying degrees prior to the Soviet collapse. During the first decade from the time of the emergence of newly independent countries in Central Asia

the attitude of the US government fluctuated. Initially, until 1997–98, relations were cool between the USA and the most repressive regimes, notably Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, but gradually warmed as the USA began to pursue myriad bilateral opportunities in fields from education to gold mining and natural gas export. Scholars and commentators now tend to focus on the fact that the USA has endorsed virtually all positions taken by Uzbekistan since 11 September 2001, but in fact marked US support for the current Uzbek regime began from February 1999 as a result of the terrorist bombings in Tashkent and the attempt to assassinate the Uzbek leader Islam Karimov. Typically in places where press freedoms are limited, conspiracy theories abound (Najimova, 2003), and in Uzbekistan all manner of convoluted and complicated renditions of who planned and carried out the attacks ricochet about the entire republic (Yaqubov, 2000). Wherever the truth may reside concerning this event, the fact is that the USA began giving the Karimov regime greater and greater support, especially in the form of concrete counterterrorist measures, from early 1999. Whether he was the true victim of an assassination attempt or had simply staged the whole event, the Uzbek leader emerged not in some *hors de combat* state of compromise³ (his promise that he would usher in eight years of ‘peace through stability’ now having been plainly discredited), but more like an enraged *capo* storming about his dominion, declaiming on the need to ‘cut off heads’.

On the one hand, the Uzbek leadership wants a basic Soviet-style secularism, and in this context it allows what it considers to be rooted confessional traditions of Central Asia, such as Sufism and its Naqshbandiyya or Yasawiyya *tariqa*.⁴ On the other hand, it is disappointed with the lack of acceptance of government-promoted nationalism on the part of the people and this may help to explain its enraged response to those who prefer better-established worldwide monotheisms.⁵ The Uzbek leaders are aspiring to create an isolationist outlook centred on Asia and the Middle East. Access, either physical or intellectual, to Europe and the USA is allowed or even promoted, but only to the extent that individuals do not adopt rhetorics of human rights, freedom of speech or freedom of religion. The ‘West’ is understood to be good as long as it is not a liberal and transnationalist West.

Certain international Islamic groups such as the Deobandi and the Islamic Brotherhood⁶ belittle the current regime. Foremost in this regard would be the Hizb ut-Tahrir organisation, an international ‘Party of God’, which hopes to restore the Islamic Caliphate (defunct since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire). While the movement says it eschews violence as a means toward achieving political power, it has been blamed for inciting violence by the Uzbek government. Personal readings of their literature confirm that it is antisemitic, attempting to show that the Uzbek leader is a Jew in league with Israel against the interests of Muslims. Saudi missionaries have meanwhile brought quantities of their own literature to Uzbekistan since the late 1980s; it aims to undermine secularism, and denigrates the new regime’s continuation of Soviet-style rule, urging people to resume their religious orientation prior to the 1920s. Meanwhile many Uzbeks naturally want to counter the view that they are wayward Muslims who drink, smoke, eat pork and fail to pray regularly. Anthropologists, myself included, and other western scholars are partially guilty of creating the image of a kind of nontraditional and indeed ‘not genuine’ Islam on the basis of the way in which many Uzbeks live and speak about their interests and values in life. It is possible that many now-devout Muslims in Uzbekistan have turned to a religious life with a new thoroughness because of perceived images of themselves from outsiders, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, as a half-Muslim people at best. Arguments concerning the waywardness of formerly Soviet Muslims go way beyond

the kind of accounts of religious syncretism or of differences between rural and urban Muslims that we find in a great many studies of Islamic traditions and culture. I share Lynda Newland's view, based on her recent work on religiosity in West Java, that religion has to be seen as culturally and historically specific whatever its origins or orthodox traditions and texts (Newland, 2000, pp. 200–203).

State Repression

Donald Kurtz contends that it is the leaders of less stable polities who generally act with the greatest level of paranoia and the greatest fear of losing their grip on power. Polities that garner little loyalty and support tend to be the most oppressive and tend to persecute worldviews or cosmologies that do not place the guiding ideology of the state itself at the centre of an individual's sense of right action and conduct in daily life (Kurtz, 2001).

In Uzbekistan devout Muslims are labelled as extremists and are associated specifically with non-local types of Islamic practice typical of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt or Pakistan. While the number of mass arrests of devout religious people may be falling, prison life continues to include harsh sentencing, terrible conditions and routine torture.

The state's role is to convince its people that these 'extremists' are in essence people who have become outsiders, rejecting their native Islam. In 1996 Karimov railed against men who wear white skullcaps (characteristic of universal Islam) rather than the local *duppi*, a brimless four-cornered hat of a completely different design. I saw the president speaking to the following effect on television: 'We don't need these foreign hats, they aren't a part of our heritage and they put our women out of work. Tell me what's wrong with our native clothes and styles!'

For people who hope to show that the Uzbek leadership is against Islam as such, their choice of rhetoric sounds appropriate alarms: they use the word 'genocide', meaning genocide perpetrated against all Muslims, much in the way this term has been used by militants or Islamists in the Chechen and Bosnian situations (Muslim Uzbekistan, 2003).⁷ Resort to the concept of 'genocide' is no doubt partly a consequence of the abrupt replacement of Soviet modernisation by a rapid process of amorphous and economically dislocating globalisation. The hyperboles about 'terrorists' on the one hand and 'genocidal policies' on the other arise in the context of the idea of civilising and decivilising processes simultaneously at work, with both sides casting the other as barbarians, animals, savages and murderers. The case of the former Yugoslavia is unlike Uzbekistan in almost all ways, save for the fact that there are perceptions that identity groups are being singled out for removal or elimination of one sort or another; hence, I think, the place of genocide rhetoric on the part of the victimised religious actors has a precedent (Bax, 2000, pp. 32–33).

An Extremist to Some, Perhaps

Shamsiddin, a man of about 40, has travelled the world as a circus performer and as the one-time boyfriend of an American student. I have known him as a friend off and on since 1991. He used to attend *jumah* services (Friday afternoon prayer service obligatory for able-bodied boys and men) in New Jersey in the mosque that was the former domain of the now infamous blind Egyptian imam Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, whose militant *khutbas* (Friday sermons) urged his congregation to commit violence. Shamsiddin became more and more devout over time, finding in faith an

escape from family problems, his inclination towards wanderlust and irresponsibility, his bouts with the bottle and his endless rounds of womanising. He claims that religious faith renewed his love of life and people, and especially his sense of dedication and responsibility to his family.

The two of us never spoke much about religion until 2000. On a very hot day in Tashkent in late May that year he and I met for dinner. We met outside a metro station in the centre of the city. Shamsiddin looked at his watch and then up at the sky. He seemed concerned. 'What is it?' I asked him. 'Are we expecting somebody else?' 'No,' he replied, 'we're just coming up to evening prayer (*maghreb*), and I need to find a place to pray.' 'Oh, well isn't there some mosque around here?' He smiled coyly. 'In this district there aren't any. I just need to find a place that isn't so out in the open, that isn't so public. Haven't you heard that it's kind of dangerous to be a Muslim in Uzbekistan these days?'

For the next 15–20 minutes we walked and perspired as the sun began its slow descent. I was growing increasingly nervous. Even though the terrorist bombing of 1999 was more than a year in the past, Tashkent was under perpetual guard, and police and paramilitary forces seemed to be stationed at nearly every intersection and every corner of the wide bright thoroughfares of the city. That period in 2000 happened to coincide with perhaps the highest number of mass arrests of ordinary Muslims in at least the past 50 years in Uzbekistan.⁸ Although central Tashkent is a slightly more tolerant locale than other areas of the city, to say nothing of other areas of the country, it finally dawned on me that both Shamsiddin and I were at some risk as a result of what seemed to me more of a political statement on his part than a simple act of devotion. I grew more and more uneasy. Would we both be arrested as soon as he spread out his rug and made his first genuflection? Eventually, Shamsiddin decided on a spot within eyesight of a local ministry. Guards and soldiers stared at us for a few minutes from behind a huge iron gate, evidently regarding us as a curiosity, but took no action to stop us.

Over dinner we talked about the February 1999 bombings, and I asked Shamsiddin if he did not agree with one of the leading conspiracy theories that the president had himself orchestrated the entire incident. After a short thoughtful silence, Shamsiddin shook his head. Without answering yes or no, he said simply, 'What other recourse do you think people have here? These people [the state leaders] don't understand any other kind of reaction.' He went on to argue, as people do in all sorts of violent political situations, that force can be overcome only by a challenging force. The important point for me was not only that Shamsiddin thought that some sort of opposition group had carried out the bombings, but that he seemed to endorse the idea. In maintaining his justification for the act, he mentioned the persecution of ordinary Muslims,⁹ the popular perception of rampant bribery, colossal unemployment (well above 70 per cent in population-dense rural areas), and general disillusionment stemming from the fear of challenging those in power. He concluded by telling me that Islam was the only solution and the only hope for Uzbekistan's woes.

It occurred to me much later that the views Shamsiddin expressed could easily be construed as support for terrorism and that in the Uzbek context this could amount to his being considered a terrorist too. I started thinking about all the problems he had had to put up with in recent years and went on to think about the various men I had got to know over a decade of visits to Uzbekistan whose lives had been ruined by the authorities who had brought charges of religious extremism or 'Wahhabism' against them. In Uzbekistan today it is hard to engage in serious politics when there is the

ever-present risk of imprisonment and torture. In these circumstances, it seemed to me understandable that Shamsiddin and others like him might come to endorse extremist actions.

Three Years Later

After finishing a teaching degree, by 2003 Shamsiddin was working in a nursery school in a residential part of the city. He lived in a modest apartment with his oldest daughter, who looked after domestic matters while attending a home economics school, and he frequently travelled back to the Fergana valley to spend time with the rest of his family, including his infant son. He kept his full beard, but always dressed smartly, wearing a tie in order to avoid attracting the attention of the authorities. One afternoon he explained to me at great length that he was trying to show his daughter a better way, 'a more American way'. What this meant to him was that one must have pride in, and care about, all the things around one, especially one's living arrangements and food. I gathered that these were impressions he still carried with him from his time in the USA. To make sure I understood what he was trying to teach his daughter, he brought out a textbook from a stack of English-language books and periodicals. It was a kind of home economics and household maintenance primer from a Christian educational publishing house, a good 25 years old, but still vitally important to Shamsiddin because of its examples on self-reliance, cleanliness, orderliness and home improvement. He declared that the book conveyed just the kind of outlook and conduct that Uzbekistan needed; young people, especially village girls like his daughter, just did not realise that there was a better way.

I do not know exactly where Shamsiddin stands today on the issue of violence to achieve political ends and to promote the establishment of a more theocratic government. It seems clear, however, that the end of Soviet modernisation, in which he grew up, and the rise of an imbalanced and punitive globalisation, which he deplores, have created in him the positive force that Appadurai calls the 'role of imagination in social life' (Appadurai, 2002, p. 274). Shamsiddin is thinking his way out of lacklustre regularity not by resisting but by creating an alternative based on a knowledge gained elsewhere. While this may appear to set him apart from many fellow citizens without his experiences, I believe we can be certain that the experiences and attitudes of those whom we do not know are likely to be similarly nuanced and differentiated. It is likely that many devout people and even people willing to take extreme actions will have a wide range of motivations and different influential experiences. Ascertaining this kind of truth seems to me to be at the heart of what makes anthropology a vital field of inquiry. People may seem conformist and undifferentiated when one observes them from afar and knows nothing about them individually, but they turn out to be much more complicated when one gets to know them with even a tiny degree of intimacy.

The important lesson from this profile of Shamsiddin is that we should make efforts to consider the profile of the extremist/fundamentalist/Islamist/terrorist in ways that enable us to see what Gledhill calls the 'contradictions and contradictory tendencies' of actors within social movements (Gledhill, 2000, p. 196).

The Economy as an Aggravating Factor

The economic straits in which so many millions of Uzbek citizens find themselves certainly, at the very least, tax the patience of almost everybody save those, perhaps,

employed by the leadership. The major structural problems for Uzbekistan with regard to the economy include lack of convertible currency, the pocketing of foreign credits and aid, corruption in access to the micro-credits made available by the government to farmers, herdsman and businessmen, the creation of latifundia out of kolkhozes and sovkhoses, the loss of Soviet-era industries and much of the infrastructure comprising them, the lack or thwarting of foreign investment and the dismantling of social safety nets – everything from single-mother child support to retirement pensions – from the socialist era.

The results, naturally, are massive unemployment (alluded to above) and widespread poverty with frequent, but fortunately small-scale, outbreaks of real hunger. Uzbeks have long been known for their traditions of entrepreneurship, however, and people actively pursue money-making activities, working in market-places, travelling abroad to sell goods or sexual services and working in the ‘Near Abroad’ (Russia and Kazakhstan) as hired help in the agricultural sector as well as in all manner of low-paid jobs in cities. Recent reporting speaks of the slave-like conditions of Uzbeks working outside Uzbekistan.¹⁰ Suffice it to say that if cotton remains Uzbekistan’s number one export human labour must be rapidly catching up. This is globalisation a la Uzbekistan.¹¹

While these deteriorating economic conditions have consequences for nearly every sphere of social life, including education and family arrangements, we can neither make any predictions about how these developments will affect the current state’s ability to monopolise power, nor gauge how such widespread dissatisfaction might convert into an oppositional politics emboldened by religious convictions. Freedom of conscience often seems to be less of a concern to the average Uzbek than freedom from grinding material deprivation, especially as it affects family men who cannot take care of their children and wives according to the normative models in which their parents were raised. These are areas on which more research needs to be done.

The Anthropological Perspective

My profile of Shamsiddin helps me demonstrate my major concern here, and that is that anthropologists really should make efforts to ensure that those who might be vilified or worse have their positions known for their depth and complexity. It is easy and natural to generalise and fit people into established categories, especially when they come from different cultures, but it is hard to maintain stereotypes once one knows individuals personally. Herzfeld makes this point repeatedly in his recent book on the usefulness of anthropology to our world today (Herzfeld, 2001).

An axiom of the past few years holds that the turn toward religion in Eurasia resulted from the collapse of the Soviet system and the cosmological void left when communism became discredited. In Central Asia, however, communism is not quite as discredited as many would like to believe. Another popular school of thought maintains that the increase in recruitment to militantly religious organisations in Central Asia is directly proportional to the economic failure of the state, the state’s refusal to pluralise the political process and the brutality with which the state handles dissent, or the mere manifestation of orthodox religion and/or attendant agitative religious practices (such as proselytising, leafleting, the distribution of fiery sermons and calls for the leadership to resign in favour of a caliphate).¹² Because these assertions are conjectural, one cannot precisely refute them and they

prompt one to speculate about what the role of religion would be in this society if it were just poor but liberal, or modestly prosperous but repressive, or prosperous and democratic. The prevailing wisdom is sensible, however, in that it reflects the typical situation in socio-political environments that are marked by a gross imbalance in power and by a willingness on the part of the state to act violently and illegally. Nevertheless, it does not explain, for example, the rise and establishment of similar groups of young militant people in the neighbouring republic of Kyrgyzstan, where the state authorities do not routinely violate religious citizens' rights or resort to torture. Moreover, while nobody questions the presence of violence-prone and religiously motivated actors in Uzbekistan, there are no well established numbers, which enables the state to repress all manner of perceived troublemakers by arresting people as militants, thereby inflating the number of alleged 'evildoers'.

The situation regarding Islamic militancy in Kyrgyzstan is complicated by the more lenient position of the Kyrgyz authorities regarding individual rights as well as by ethno-geographic factors. The latter include the fact that militant actors mainly inhabit southern Kyrgyzstan, especially Osh and Jalalabad provinces, which are territories populated by ethnic Uzbeks who often constitute majorities within particular political districts. This is not to say that there are no ethnic Kyrgyz Islamists, but it is likely that most of them are ethnic Uzbeks. Furthermore, the mountainous border regions, especially between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, have served as havens for small bands of Islamist fighters, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

Rather than claiming that it is simply a case of the Kyrgyz having an Uzbek problem, or that the Kyrgyz are simply less religious and more russianised than the Uzbeks, it might be fairest to point out that the Uzbek political leadership bears a big responsibility for the situation, pushing militancy to a degree of brinkmanship that forces many proreligious and antigovernment individuals to seek relative safety in a neighbouring country where devout practitioners are not routinely arrested and beaten. On the other hand, the Kyrgyz state leaders seem increasingly inclined to use violence toward members of their own country when necessary, so this demographic dynamic of Islamism may soon change in Central Asia.

Three times in modern history Uzbeks have invoked the idea of a *ghazavat* or Holy War to combat what they saw as outside intervention or unfair outsider practices. In 1898, in 1916 and during the 1920s and 1930s Uzbek and wider Central Asian Muslim rebellions occurred against Russians and the imposition of Russian/Soviet order (Mominov, 1971). Nevertheless, Central Asia's long Islamic history shows little in the way of organised religious movements striving to take political power in efforts to create theocratic states, let alone any such movement directed against an indigenous, albeit authoritarian, regime. I would argue that today's politically militant religious groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Hizb ut-Tahrir, are wholly outgrowths of influences from movements outside Uzbekistan, including South Asian Deobandism and the Afghan Mujahidist groups, but that these outside forces must be able to harness and channel the very strong feelings of alienation, frustration and anger that exist in Central Asia because of the poverty and because of the perception on the part of many people that the leaders in charge are not interested in the establishment of widely accessible development. In other words, militancy of foreign origin would have a harder time in gaining an ever-increasing foothold if local conditions were not receptive to many of its central aims. As disgruntled and devout Muslims face

arrest and torment on what are usually trumped-up charges, such movements will gain some sympathy, even though masses of would-be supporters are terrified of being associated with the movements themselves. The Uzbek leadership has recently succumbed very slightly to international human rights pressure and has begun to ease the scale of arrests. The fact that militants themselves have tried on occasion to disrupt the practices of popular worship in Uzbekistan (attacking popular shrine sites and desecrating Sufi monuments) does little to bolster their cause (Abramson and Karimov, 2002). At this point the likelihood that militant groups could take state power in any sort of coup or popular uprising is remote, even as they maintain the ability to destabilise the country.

Last year the most comprehensive sociological survey of young people's attitudes in Uzbekistan of the independence period was conducted under the auspices of the *Yosh Olimlar* (Young Scholars) Society and the Islamic University of Uzbekistan. Questioning the outlooks and attitudes of more than 700 young people between 18 and 25 from all over the country, the overall picture shows a remarkable lack of devout sensibilities or of engagement with militant causes, although clearly young people are in many ways more religiously engaged than the previous generation was. Interestingly enough, the majority of young people surveyed claim that their first source of religious knowledge was their grandparents (Karimov *et al.*, 2002).

Writing just before 11 September, Keppley Mahmood implored anthropologists to talk to those whom we or others might call terrorists. She amply demonstrated how such people have things to say that are worth listening to, whether or not we have any sympathy for their particular positions (Mahmood, 2001). I certainly believe that our readiness to listen, discuss and argue can open up both parties to the possibility of new ways of seeing and acting within the world. It would be naïve to suppose that listening and talking will turn the violence-prone into the peace-prone, but through dialogue we certainly stand a better chance of humanising marginalised people in a way that might prevent someone else from being arrested, tortured, maimed or killed. By the same token, anthropologists ought to start talking to individuals involved in state-sponsored terrorism in order to understand their own perspectives.

Conclusion

This essay is an attempt to deepen our awareness and understanding of the nature of terrorisms in Uzbekistan by trying to cut through characterisations of terror on the part both of state leaders and of militants and terrorists themselves. I have looked briefly at major factors contributing to terrorist behaviour and support for terrorism, factors which include the actions of the state's leaders as well as at the attitudes of those Muslims who feel the government allows them no other choice if they are to enjoy their religious lives and pursue their beliefs.

I have asked anthropologists to give serious consideration to working with people who may be terrorists, or those who avow terrorist methods, as a way toward achieving, at the very least, a fuller understanding of the need for this sort of position.

I believe that we have a duty to inform our own government of the possible disaster it may help to bring about by continuing to support the ruthless practices of the Uzbek leadership, and Uzbekistan's now very compromised position on the war against terror. While our input may do little ultimately to change foreign policy, we can at least provide information bespeaking the oversimplifications of this latest good-evil dichotomy. It seems to me, finally, that we should consider a general professional obligation toward the pursuit of peace in given conflict situations.

Notes

- ¹ The point of this anecdote is to show that in Uzbekistan the state is interested in pursuing criminals only if it can link them with religious/terrorist activity. In this instance, murder is treated as a minor matter because the police have not brought with them the items they need to plant on the person in order to have him arrested and prosecuted as a religious extremist. The emergence of this kind of humour bears witness to the fact that the repression of religious people and their activities is far more thoroughgoing now than it was during most of the period of Soviet power.
- ² For a deeply thought-provoking review of the potential benefits of investigating terrorism at a close and personal level, see Brannan *et al.*, 2001, pp. 1–22.
- ³ During the 2003 OSCE summit on Human Rights in Central Asia held in Tashkent, the Uzbek president was subjected to public criticism by Tony Blair's former international development secretary, Clare Short. So incensed was the Uzbek leader that he tore off his translation headset and stormed out of the conference hall. This incident occurred while the official, state-run Uzbek television service was broadcasting the conference simultaneously to the nation. This was the first time in ten years that the Uzbek population had had occasion to see their leader upbraided by another world leader and the effects were said to be devastating. One of my contacts told me: 'Now everybody in this country will never have any doubts about what kind of a bastard this guy is. He will never be able to recover from that day and he will never be able to live down or apologise to the people for what he has done because it is all about who he is. It bespeaks a shamefulness beyond any sort of excuse or apology. We were so happy to see it happen.'
- ⁴ These are traditions that actually extend back as far as the thirteenth century in Central Asia (DeWeese, 1994, p. 138).
- ⁵ Herzfeld draws up a compelling equation between nationalism and religion in his latest book (Herzfeld, 2001, p. 276).
- ⁶ The Deobandi is the name of a South Asian movement of the late nineteenth century, founded in Deoband. While this Muslim movement was largely anticolonialist and antiwestern, it was also largely intolerant of worldviews opposed to its own narrowly interpreted Islam. The Taliban movement is said to pattern itself on Deobandi-style beliefs and practices and the more orthodox religious schools or madrassahs of Pakistan are said to be Deobandi in inspiration. The Islamic Brotherhood, a movement that is rooted in religiously puritanical orthodoxy, was founded in Egypt in the 1920s and has since gone on directly and violently to challenge secular regimes in Egypt, including those of Nasser, Sadat and now Mubarak. The Islamic Brotherhood allegedly took responsibility for assassinating Sadat in 1977.
- ⁷ My mention of a website here gives me the opportunity to point out that the internet remains the one vehicle for dissenting Uzbeks to articulate their aspirations freely, despite efforts by the intelligence services to block access to it. Of course this is true for the citizens and exiles of many authoritarian states. As far as Uzbekistan particularly is concerned, however, scholars have found the internet of considerable importance as the main source of information not only about human rights violations in Uzbekistan but also about the actual positions of groups labelled 'extremist/fundamentalist/terrorist' by the leadership and about the variety of dissenting opinion within them. Although cyberspace functions occasionally as a thorn in the side of the Uzbek government, with its aspirations towards totalitarianism, this medium seems unlikely to figure largely as a source of popular oppositional outcry within the country. Inadequate infrastructure, high costs and basic lack of navigational literacy in fact restrict web access to a single-digit percentage of the population. Nevertheless, a careful investigation into the actual uses and challenges that characterise information technologies, especially the internet, would make an important contribution to the current Uzbek political scene. Castells and Kiselyova argue that the Soviet state was undermined by technologies that made the outside world better known to a population hungry for such knowledge while living under an authoritarian government where 'the

control of information was critical to the legitimacy of the state and to the control of [that very same] population' (Castells and Kiselyova, 1995, p. 38). The Uzbek leadership paradoxically takes great pains to distance itself rhetorically from Soviet rule, promotes the rapid and massive infusion of information technologies into its country, and then tries to use these same technologies to monitor and regulate who has access to what kind of information. It would seem that the current regime has set many information technology traps for itself; but the 'War on Terror' has helped it to buy time in that its alliance with the Bush administration has boosted its hold on power: US treatment of Uzbekistan as a strategic partner guarantees it a kind of international respectability as well as financial support.

- ⁸ According to Congressional testimony, there are approximately 7000 political prisoners in Uzbekistan today and the majority of these people are religious prisoners (Craner, 2002).
- ⁹ Unfortunately, as recently as 2001 the US government was ignoring the fact of persecution, an active state policy of repressing religious believers, in Uzbekistan. Fortunately, there are committed members of Congress who bring the testimonials of those who know the current situation to light; their aim is to force the US government to recognise the facts and to adopt an appropriate position (Briefing, 2002, p. 5).
- ¹⁰ Most of these reports are available as news items on Ferghana.ru, hrw.org (Human Rights Watch), Eurasia.net and iwpr.net (International War and Peace Reporting).
- ¹¹ Again the internet is of vital importance to those seeking information. Here I list just a few sites that provide important and socially contextualised economic data: International War and Peace Reporting; International Crisis Group; Eurasia Net; Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe; United Nations Development Project; Human Rights Watch; The World Bank.
- ¹² See, for example, Martha Brill Olcott's testimony before the US Congress (Briefing, 2002, p. 37).

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