UZBEKISTAN’S NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY AND NONPROLIFERATION

by Kholisa Sodikova

Kholisa Sodikova is a Ph.D. candidate in International Relations at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and is completing a thesis on “The Essential Regional Security Problems of Post-Soviet Central Asian States.” She has also researched American-Iranian relations and the integration of Uzbekistan into the world community. This report was translated by Laurel Nolen and Lydia Bryans.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly independent countries of the Central Asian region, including Uzbekistan, have searched for means to provide for their own national security, create new systems of regional security, and integrate into the world community. In the seven years since independence, Uzbekistan has made gradual and significant progress toward developing a national security policy that will enable it to achieve these objectives. Uzbekistan has already laid the foundation for such a national security policy, having achieved recognition as a sovereign state by the world community, enacted a new national constitution, and created a national army. Uzbekistan has also established diplomatic relations with many states around the world, worked to create regional organizations, such as the Central Asian Economic Union, and been accepted as a member by several international organizations. As an important aspect of this developing national security policy, Uzbekistan has become an active member of the global nonproliferation regime embodied by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Despite its accomplishments, however, Uzbekistan, located in the middle of Central Asia, still faces a number of security challenges. Uzbekistan shares a 137-km border with Afghanistan, where war has been raging for two decades. It also has a 1,161-km border with Tajikistan, where inter-clan and inter-ethnic conflict have continued for seven years. Uzbekistan, as a country interested in peace and stability, has offered assistance in the resolution of the Tajik and Afghan conflicts and has also endeavored to prevent its own involvement in them. During the past seven years of independence, although Afghanistan and Tajikistan have not been able to find lasting peace, Uzbekistan has not become entangled in these bloody wars. India and Pakistan, which both detonated nuclear tests in May 1998, and have a history of conflict, are also among Uzbekistan’s regional neighbors. This geographical proximity to South Asia makes nonproliferation a critical part of Uzbekistan’s national security policy.

In seeking to promote nonproliferation as a means to achieve national, regional, and global security, Uzbekistan has pursued four different strands of policy: (1) participating in international nonproliferation agreements, such as the NPT and CTBT; (2) joining the IAEA; (3) promoting the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia; and (4) pursuing bilateral cooperation on nonproliferation with the United States. The remainder of this report will examine these four aspects.
of Uzbekistan’s nonproliferation policy and relate them to Uzbekistan’s broader national security goals.

**UZBEKISTAN’S PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL NONPROLIFERATION AGREEMENTS**

Since achieving independence, Uzbekistan has gradually joined all of the major international agreements on nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including the NPT, the CTBT, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). It has also joined the Convention on Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials. Uzbekistan was the first of the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union to accede to the NPT, on May 2, 1992. For a state that had become independent less than a year earlier, joining the NPT was an important step toward gaining international recognition as a sovereign state. By becoming a member of the NPT regime, Uzbekistan demonstrated to the international community that it is a peace-loving country.

For Uzbekistan, the first years of independence were a period of active searching for a path to social and economic development and a foreign policy orientation. The main directions of Uzbekistan’s national security policy had just begun to take shape. Uzbekistan’s attitude toward the proliferation of nuclear weapons was expressed in its accession to the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state. Although Uzbekistan does have nuclear installations, including research reactors and uranium mines, which will be discussed in more detail below, these are dedicated solely to peaceful uses.

On August 30, 1995, Uzbekistan’s legislature, the Oliy Mazhilis, officially accepted the military doctrine that provides the legal basis for Uzbekistan’s national security policy.1 Uzbekistan’s nonproliferation policy is expressed in the provisions of this doctrine. The fundamental principle of the doctrine is that Uzbekistan strives to prevent war and the threat of war as its main strategic objective. As part of this strategy, the military doctrine endorses “comprehensive prohibition of nuclear tests,” and the “universal destruction of chemical, bacteriological, and other weapons of mass destruction.” The military doctrine also outlines potential sources of military danger to Uzbekistan and details measures to prepare the economy and populace of the country for national defense. Among possible threats to Uzbekistan, the doctrine includes “terrorist acts, implemented in the region by extremist political organizations, illegal military troop formations, and activities conducted by them intended to inflame nationalistic attitudes and religious intolerance.” However, the doctrine does not clearly define which political organizations should be considered extremist and which military formations are illegal.

Once the military doctrine established these basic principles of Uzbek national security policy, the country joined several additional international nonproliferation regimes. Uzbekistan signed the CWC on July 23, 1996, and the CTBT on October 3, 1996. Signing the CTBT was a particularly significant step, as in May 1968, during the Soviet era, Uzbekistan had been the site of a peaceful nuclear explosion.2 Uzbekistan has also joined the BWC and, most recently, acceded to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials, on February 9, 1998.

**UZBEKISTAN’S MEMBERSHIP IN THE IAEA**

Uzbekistan joined the IAEA in September 1992, less than a year after becoming an independent state. As a non-nuclear weapon state party to the NPT, Uzbekistan has concluded a comprehensive safeguards agreement with the IAEA, which entered into force on October 8, 1994. This agreement provides guarantees to the international community that Uzbekistan’s nuclear installations, which include uranium mining and milling facilities as well as two research reactors, are used for exclusively peaceful purposes.3

Uzbekistan was a major source of uranium ore for the Soviet nuclear program: of the more than 400 uranium deposits that have been discovered in Uzbekistan, about one-third are already depleted. The main deposits are in Kyzylkum, where four large reserves are located at Nurabad, Uchkuduk, Zafarabad, and Zarafshan.4 Uzbekistan’s cooperation with the IAEA is particularly tied to the activity of two research reactors, one located at the Tashkent Institute of Nuclear Physics under the Uzbekistani Academy of Sciences, and the other at the Photon Radioelectrical Technical Plant in Tashkent.

The Tashkent Institute of Nuclear Physics is actually located 30 km from Tashkent, in the town of Ulugbek. The institute’s activities include nuclear and particle physics, radiation and materials sciences, and the study of high-temperature super-conducting materials and ra-
diochemistry. The reactor located at the institute is a VVR-SM-type reactor, which uses highly enriched uranium (HEU) fuel enriched up to 90 percent. It first went critical in 1959, and was used to conduct military scientific experiments in the Soviet era. The institute now engages in peaceful nuclear research with a number of foreign partners in Russia, Germany, Switzerland, China, India, and the United States. The institute’s equipment also includes two cyclotrons, a gamma source facility, a neutron generator, and a radiochemical complex.5

As of May 1996, the institute was reported to have a stockpile of about 9 kg of fresh HEU fuel for its reactor. Since the HEU fuel is a potential proliferation concern, Uzbekistan, in cooperation with the IAEA and the United States, has taken steps to improve its security. In June 1995, IAEA specialists reviewed the nuclear materials protection, control, and accounting (MPC&A) systems at the institute. By August 1996, facility upgrades had been completed. To improve physical protection at the institute, four main systems were installed: delay barriers, entry control systems, an alarm assessment system, and an enhanced communications system. A 10-meter-wide clear zone was established around the reactor complex. Windows at the ground level were permanently covered with security grills. At the lobby entrance in the main building, a grilled door was installed to control entry. Main doors to the lobby entrance, the reactor control room, and the reactor building were equipped with magnetic card readers and keypads, magnetic door locks, balanced magnetic switches, and request-to-exit switches. The fresh-fuel storage vault was reconfigured as a room-within-a-room that requires two authorized personnel to be present with lock codes to open the magnetically locked door. The institute was also provided with a central alarm station to monitor these secure areas and guard against unauthorized forced entry into the facility. To improve material control and accounting at the institute, a fresh-fuel measurement system was provided, including a computer-based material accounting system and tamper indication devices.6

The Photon Radioelectrical Technical Plant is located in Tashkent and has one IIN-3M liquid-pulsed reactor, with a capacity of 10 kW (average) and 200 GW (maximum pulse). The reactor uses a liquid salt of HEU as fuel. The reactor is used to improve the quality of semiconductor materials. During the Soviet era, Photon was under the aegis of the Ministry of Electronic Production and made necessary parts for submarines. To date, there has been no reported international assistance to improve MPC&A at this facility.7

As a member of the international nonproliferation regime, Uzbekistan also seeks to implement an effective system of national export control. According to nuclear nonproliferation specialist William K. Domke, an effective national export control system contains five elements.8 First, a state “must make the important international commitments through participation in the leading international agreements. At minimum, IAEA and NPT membership are taken as a basic level of support.” As a member of both the NPT and the IAEA, Uzbekistan has met this criteria. Second, “a government must enact the necessary laws or executive procedures as the basis for legal action.” Uzbekistan has made less progress in this area. While Uzbekistan has adopted legislation regulating foreign trade, this legislation does not contain specific provisions aimed at export control over the proliferation of nuclear weapons.9

Third, export control demands the creation and training of an effective licensing or export-regulation organization. Here too, Uzbekistan still faces challenges. Export control is implemented by several state organs, whose actions are not always sufficiently coordinated to establish effective export control. To accomplish this goal, the Uzbekistani government might consider establishing a new organization to supervise export control in the sphere of nonproliferation and provide appropriate training for specialized personnel.

Fourth, enforcement is an essential aspect of export control. Uzbekistan has border and customs controls, but still lacks some of the necessary equipment to implement them effectively, such as radiation monitors to detect possible illegal exports of radioactive materials. Uzbekistan could also tighten up its export control legislation to give its court system a legal basis for action against those who violate export controls.10 Finally, the exchange of information between states in the sphere of nonproliferation is an important aspect of export controls. Since Uzbekistan in recent years has actively engaged in consultations on nonproliferation issues on a bilateral and multilateral basis, it is already well on the way to meeting this criteria. Looking at all five criteria, however, one can conclude that Uzbekistan has made tangible progress, but will need some additional time to fully develop its export control system.
REGIONAL COOPERATION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE ZONE IN CENTRAL ASIA

Uzbekistan is now seeking to make its own contribution to the future development of the global nonproliferation regime by supporting the creation of a Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone (CANWFZ). The establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones has been recognized by the international community as one of the most effective nonproliferation policy tools. Uzbekistan first announced its support for the creation of a CANWFZ on September 28, 1993, at the 48th session of the UN General Assembly. Since then, Uzbekistan’s foreign policy has emphasized active participation in the creation of such a zone. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the creation of such a zone in Central Asia would help promote regional cooperation among the five Central Asian states, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.

More than five years have passed since Uzbekistan first presented this initiative to the UN General Assembly. During this time, the countries of the region have been able to find a common language, and considerable work aimed at fostering regional cooperation has been accomplished by the Central Asian states, particularly Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. These three countries within the Central Asian Union (now the Central Asian Economic Union) created institutional organs that facilitate regional integration. The name “Central Asian Union” was the unofficial name of the “Unified Economic Area,” which was created in January 1994 between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Subsequently, Kyrgyzstan expressed desire to join this union and, in April of 1994, a new treaty was signed between the three countries. Tajikistan, however, although it could see the economic virtues of the Central Asian Economic Union, remained indecisive about joining for political reasons, fearing to annoy Russia, on which it is heavily dependent. After the hope of a political resolution to the civil strife in Tajikistan lessened this dependence on Russia, Tajikistan was officially accepted as the fourth member of the Central Asian Union in March 1998.

Although the members of the Central Asian Union do not always pursue unified policies and actions (and this is natural, since each country has its national interests), this union is much more effective than many other such international organizations in the post-Soviet space, such as the Customs Union (which includes Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) or the CIS. The Central Asian Union includes several multilateral institutions, such as the Intergovernmental Council, consisting of the heads of state and prime ministers, and the Central Asian Bank of Development and Cooperation. Under the aegis of the Intergovernmental Council, there is also a separate council that includes the prime ministers, foreign ministers, and defense ministers of the four members. This body meets regularly, and affords the member states the opportunity to resolve economic, diplomatic, and defense issues jointly. In light of the critical situation in Afghanistan during 1997-1998, this council and the Intergovernmental Council have held several meetings to discuss security issues. In order to create a new security system in Central Asia, it is crucial that these already-founded institutions be strengthened and developed further.

Until 1997, little progress was made toward the establishment of a CANWFZ. After 1994, the creation of a CANWFZ was regularly discussed at the summits of the Intergovernmental Council and at meetings of the ministers of foreign affairs, ministers of defense, and prime ministers of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. On the international level, Uzbekistan reiterated its proposal for a CANWFZ at the December 1996 summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). However, these discussions did not produce any concrete results.

In February 1997, the first major political step toward the establishment of a CANWFZ was taken when the Almaty Declaration was signed. In this declaration, for the first time, the presidents of the five Central Asian countries confirmed their support for the creation of a CANWFZ. Then, in September 1997, a major international conference, entitled “Central Asia—Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone,” took place in Tashkent. Participants at this conference included representatives of the five Central Asian states as well as experts from 56 other countries, including many in regions of the world where nuclear-weapon-free zones have already been established—Latin America, the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, and Africa. Uzbekistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Institute of Strategic and Regional Studies in Tashkent did a great deal of preparatory work to facilitate the success of the conference. Following the conference, the foreign ministers of the five Central Asian states issued a declaration underlining their support for
the establishment of a CANWFZ, and calling for international assistance to facilitate the process.12

The international community expressed its support for the establishment of a CANWFZ in December 1997, when the 52nd session of the UN General Assembly passed a resolution—jointly sponsored by the five Central Asian states—supporting the initiative to create a CANWFZ, and instructing the UN Secretary General to provide assistance to the Central Asian states in their efforts to draft a treaty to establish the zone.13 A similar resolution was passed by the UN General Assembly at its 53rd session, in December 1998.14 During 1998, a group of experts from the five countries, with assistance from the UN and IAEA, engaged in intensive negotiations aimed at concluding a treaty creating a CANWFZ.

Turkmenistan and Tajikistan have played an interesting role in this process. Turkmenistan, after announcing its neutrality following the collapse of the Soviet Union, did not participate in the Central Asian Union, steadfastly maintaining its neutral status. The participation of Turkmenistan in the creation of a CANWFZ provides hope that through participation in the zone, Turkmenistan may become more fully integrated in other regional institutions. Before the intensive discussions on a CANWFZ began in 1997, Tajikistan was not a member of the Central Asian Union either. But afterwards, in March 1998, it decided to join, as noted above.

The nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan in May 1998 once again confirmed the importance of creating a CANWFZ. Uzbekistan’s immediate reaction to the Indian nuclear tests was fairly sharp, and the official statement published in the Uzbekistani press expressed the deep concern of the country regarding the tests. After Pakistan conducted its nuclear tests, the reaction was the same, and the statement of the Uzbekistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs was similarly published to demonstrate Uzbekistan’s attitude.15 The geographic proximity of Pakistan and India to Central Asia naturally concerns the Central Asian countries, since nuclear tests conducted so close to Central Asia may, at a minimum, have environmental consequences for the region, and could possibly lead to a future Indo-Pakistani conflict escalating into a nuclear war that would affect all neighboring countries. In the new environment created by the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests, accelerating the process of creating a CANWFZ would enable the Central Asian states to create a legal basis on which to actively defend the region’s interests in the international arena.

As of early 1999, experts from the five Central Asian states, with assistance from the United Nations, continue to work on drafting a treaty to establish a CANWFZ.

US-UZBEKISTANI BILATERAL RELATIONS, REGIONAL SECURITY, AND NONPROLIFERATION

Cooperation with the United States has also become an important element in Uzbekistan’s national security and nonproliferation policies. Bilateral relations between Uzbekistan and the United States since Uzbekistan became independent can be divided into two stages, 1991 to 1996 and 1996 to the present. The first period was characterized by its complexity. Relations with the United States in the first years after Uzbekistan became independent were difficult in terms of economics, foreign policy, and government structure. Issues such as human rights and the democratization of society were particularly thorny. Nevertheless, bilateral cooperation on nonproliferation issues began during this period. For example, the MPC&A upgrades at the Tashkent Institute of Nuclear Physics described above were conducted at this time, with assistance and funding from the United States Department of Energy and Sandia National Laboratory.

The second period began in June 1996, when Uzbeki- stan President Islam Karimov visited the United States and met with President Clinton. An analysis of bilateral relations reveals that preconditions for the improvement of relations had been achieved even before this visit. New priorities for American foreign policy in Central Asia were laid out in a speech by US Ambassador James Collins, special advisor to the secretary for the Newly Independent States, in October 1996:
• to support the independence, sovereignty, and security of every Central Asian country;
• to provide assistance in establishing a free market economy and democratic governments;
• to integrate these countries into the political and financial institutions of the world community, and to promote their participation in the Euro-Atlantic security dialogue and in joint programs within that structure;
• to prevent all transport of weapons of mass destruction through the region; and
• to increase the role and scope of US commercial interests and the exploitation of regional energy reserves.16
It is clear from these priorities that, in 1996, the United States began to reexamine its relations with these newly independent states.

Uzbekistan has a unique role as a potential partner for the United States in Central Asia. Uzbekistan is the only country in the region that is not dependent on Russia. Since Uzbekistan became independent, it has not allowed any country, including Russia, to interfere with its internal affairs. Uzbekistan defends its own border with Afghanistan, for example, while Tajikistan still relies heavily on Russian military forces. Even Kyrgyzstan still has Russian border troops along its frontier with China. The economy of Uzbekistan is also less connected to Russia’s than that of Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan; for example, half of Kazakhstan’s import and export transactions are with Russia. Despite recent progress toward a political settlement, Tajikistan remains weakened after years of civil war and, because it is economically dependent on Russia, it has accepted nearly all of Russia’s political terms. Uzbekistan is thus the most promising independent partner in the region for Washington.

As a result, Uzbekistan and the United States have begun to cooperate closely where their interests coincide. US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton visited Uzbekistan in November 1997. Several factors can account for the decision to send Hillary Clinton rather than the president himself. First, since Central Asia is traditionally considered part of Russia’s sphere of interest, a visit from the United States president could have been negatively perceived by Russia. Second, US presidential visits require months of preparation. Third, Hillary Rodham Clinton’s visit coincided with difficult negotiations between Russia and the United States on the issue of NATO expansion. And fourth, at that time, Russian President Yeltsin had not yet made an official visit to Uzbekistan.


The commission has four committees: a political committee; a security committee; an investment, trade, and energy committee; and an economic cooperation and reforms committee. There is a Subcommittee on Nonproliferation under the political committee, which issued a statement after the initial February 1998 session of the commission in which both countries reiterated their commitment to the NPT as “the cornerstone of the international nuclear nonproliferation regime.” The Subcommittee statement also recognized the importance of maintaining export controls to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and said the two countries will work together on US Department of Defense training initiatives, including those under the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program (CTR). The Commission also promised immediate implementation of the participation of Uzbekistani scientists and research institutes in the programs of the Science and Technology Center in Ukraine (STCU), which is designed to help former weapons scientists find civilian applications for their research.17

While building up a closer relationship with Washington, Uzbekistan is also attempting to maintain a balanced policy with Russia. In August 1998, for example, President Karimov and President Yeltsin discussed the idea of creating a “three-way union” between Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to combat religious extremism in Central Asia.18 Some observers think that this initiative might give Russia the chance to reassert itself in the Central Asian region, the key to which is Uzbekistan. But the union reflects the short-term political interests of the three countries, which are alarmed by the situation in Afghanistan. Although a degree of cooperation will take place, certain factors will limit it. After all, Uzbekistan does not want Russia to occupy the position in the region that the Soviet Union once held, a stance that Uzbekistan’s policies of the past few years clearly demonstrate. And in any event, a November 1998 crisis between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan confirms that more trust is required for Uzbekistani-Tajikistani bilateral relations to flourish.19 These factors suggest that cooperation with the United States, on regional security issues as well as nonproliferation, will continue to play a central role in Uzbekistani national security policy.

CONCLUSION

After seven years of independence, Uzbekistan has developed a national security policy in which promoting the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction plays a major role. For Uzbekistan to continue along the path to increased security in the future, a number of con-
ditions must be met. First, although it has not been discussed in detail in this report, continued political, economic, and social modernization and integration into the international economy are important preconditions for political stability in both Uzbekistan and the entire Central Asian region. Second, it is critical to enhance regional economic and political integration by strengthening the role of multilateral Central Asian institutions. There is some tension here, since many countries fear giving up even a portion of their newly won sovereignty to a multinational organization, but successful compromises must be found if the Central Asian states are to work together effectively for mutual economic gain and regional security. Third, Uzbekistan should intensify its efforts in the nonproliferation field. One area that would benefit from particular attention is the training of Uzbekistani nonproliferation specialists, including experts in export and border control. Finally, Uzbekistan should continue its efforts, together with the other four Central Asian states, to establish a CANWFZ. The Central Asian states could make a significant contribution to the global nonproliferation regime if they can complete the treaty creating the CANWFZ by the opening of the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
16 Ambassador James Collins, Special Advisor to the Secretary for the New Independent States, “U.S. Policy Toward the Central Asian States,” remarks at the inauguration of the Central Asia Institute, School of Advanced International Studies, John Hopkins University, Washington, DC, October 21, 1996.