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Ethnicity and Foreign Policy:

Uzbekistan and 'Uzbeks abroad'

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Abstract

The paper examines the relationship between Uzbekistan and Uzbek co-ethnics abroad and asks what role, if any, they have played in the country's post-Soviet state- and nation-building.

In the wake of the end of the Cold War the issue of co-ethnics and their relationship with kin-states has dramatically come to international attention. The presence of large cross-border communities in post-communist Eurasia has presented both challenges and opportunities for both state- and nation-building. Scholarly attention has thus far mainly concentrated on the policies and practices of the state and the relationship between majority and minority groups therein.

Less explored is instead the impact that co-ethnics living on the other side of the border have on the processes of state and nation formation in the state where ethnic kins constitute the 'titular nation'. This paper examines the question of Uzbek communities outside Uzbekistan as this was indicated by scholars and analysts as one of the potentially contentious issues that would mark inter-ethnic relations and state-building in post-Soviet Central Asia. Despite initial predictions, however, inter-ethnic conflict or irredentist/secessionist claims did not occur and the transition, in that regard, was peaceful.

The paper shows that ethnicity has played little role in shaping Uzbekistan's regional policy. Uzbek co-ethnics, disempowered in their new countries of residence, have felt progressively ignored by Uzbekistan. Concern with domestic challenges (power struggles between regions and clans; rise of the Islamist threat) has dominated Tashkent's agenda since independence. Statehood (*davlatchilik*), rather than nationhood, has been the priority of the Uzbekistani elite. The paper argues that understanding state- and nation-building in post-communist Eurasia would greatly benefit from paying more attention to the impact of co-ethnics abroad on the alleged kin-state. This not only calls for reconsidering existing work on the interplay between kin states and co-ethnics abroad, but also exposes the internal contradictions of Uzbekistan's nation-building process and conceptualization of Uzbekness (*O'zbekchilik*).

1. Introduction

Understanding the political behaviour of Uzbeks living outside Uzbekistan and their relationship to Uzbekistan has been an issue often referred to as being of critical importance for the region stability (Bohr, 1998; Carlisle, 1995; Olcott, 1992a, 1992b, and 1994; Lubin and Rubin, 1999; Rumer and Rumer 1992; Tabyshalieva, 1999). The importance of the issue goes beyond issues of identity change (however important these questions also are) and has far-reaching implications for the process of post-Soviet state-building, inter-state relations and more broadly regional stability in Central Asia. The paper discusses the relationship between Uzbekistan and Uzbeks living in two of the latter's neighbours, namely Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and examines the extent to which the relationship between the two sets of actors has affected the process of state- and nation-building in Uzbekistan. The paper's main contention is that state-building has constituted a higher priority for the ruling elites than establishing and/or developing links with co-ethnics abroad. This has meant that links between Uzbekistan and Uzbeks abroad have been progressively sidelined and no diaspora, let alone irredentist policy has been conceived by Uzbekistan. In fact, if anything, Uzbekistan has played a stabilising role in this sense, by refraining from playing the 'ethnic card' in regional politics. By contrast, greater emphasis has been given to issues of state independence, sovereignty and more generally state-building. The reason for this can be ascribed essentially to domestic reasons (within Uzbekistan): the progressive blurring between state-building and regime consolidation and the renounce to links with co-ethnics have been functional to dealing with the two main issues that have emerged since independence: the rise of an Islamist threat, construed as coming from outside (and Tajikistani and Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks are concentrated in the Ferghana Valley, where religious sentiments are particularly strong), and the struggle between regional power groups.

The paper examines the impact that dealing (or not dealing, as will be shown) with Uzbek co-ethnics in the neighbouring republics has had on Uzbekistan's state- and nation-building process. Data presented and discussed in this paper were collected during three phases of field research in Uzbekistan (2002 and 2003), Kyrgyzstan (2003 and 2005) and Tajikistan (2003). The combined use of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection was deemed appropriate to assess both the extent to which particular attitudes and beliefs were widespread within the Uzbek community and the nuances that are inevitably lost in survey studies (e.g. the *whys*

and *hows* of Uzbek co-ethnics' disenchantment towards Uzbekistan). In Uzbekistan I conducted 29 individual in-depth interviews with members of the Uzbek political and cultural elite and 7 focus groups for a total of other 29 respondents. In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan data collection proceed along a two-stage process. First, I conducted a small-scale survey to gather a sense of what the general attitudes of the Uzbek community were toward Uzbekistan and Uzbekistan's policy towards them (73 respondents in Tajikistan and 54 in Kyrgyzstan). Next, I followed this up by conducting a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with members of the local Uzbek elite (30 in Tajikistan and 62 in Kyrgyzstan) to investigate this issue further, e.g. by asking whether Uzbekistan's policy had changed over time, whether help or support had materialised in any one occasion[1].

The paper is structured as follows. First, I briefly examine how the emergence of the issue of co-ethnics has been framed by scholarship on post-communist Eurasia. I then provide a brief background to the case of Uzbek communities living outside Uzbekistan. A discussion of Uzbekistan's policy towards Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan follows. The views of Uzbekistani elites towards Uzbek co-ethnics and the latters' attitudes and perceptions of Uzbekistan's policy towards neighbours will be taken into account to explore what an analysis of 'external homeland-ethnic kins' links can tell us about the nation- and state-building process in the homeland. Here the question is not to establish whether Uzbek co-ethnics see themselves as Uzbeks in the same way as their kins in Uzbekistan, but rather to discuss the extent to which these are viewed as integral to the process of post-Soviet state and nation formation. I conclude by contextualizing the findings within the literature on ethnicity and post-communist transformation.

2. Co-ethnics, foreign policy and state-building in post-communist Eurasia

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought with it the stranding of millions of co-ethnics, large communities of people sharing a common ethnic bond with others living "on the wrong side of the border". Over seventy million people (out of nearly three hundred million), nearly one in four Soviet citizens[2], found themselves in a country where they constituted new minorities. The driving force behind this phenomenon was a mismatch between borders and peoples: these new "beached diasporas" as Pal Kolstø labelled this new category of peoples, were not the product

of mass migrations (movement of peoples across borders), but, of the "movement of borders across settlements" (1999).

The behaviour of ethnic minorities in the new states and their relationship with their kin-state (real or imagined) has been object of study of an increasing number of scholars. Within international relations the nexus between ethnic minorities and the kin-state's foreign policy has been object of particular attention (Moore, 2002; Saideman, 2002, 1997; Carment and James, 1995, 2000; Heraclides, 1990; Fawn, 2003; Cummings, 2003; Lake and Rothschild, 1996; Cetinyan, 2002, Kaufman, 1996, Davis and Moore, 1997). The precipitating factor behind this rise in international and scholarly concern lies in the end of the cold war; this was not simply characterised by the democratization of previously communist regime and the transition to market economies, but also by a third noteworthy process: that of nation-building. The redefinition of conceptions of belonging was particularly problematic in multi-ethnic states in post-communist Eurasia (and there were many) because of the lack of congruence between territorial and ethnic boundaries. Circumstances varied greatly, and different states dealt with the issue (relations with co-ethnics) differently. In Milosevic's Yugoslavia, Serbian nationalism, the manipulation of ethnic entrepreneurs, the redefinition of the Yugoslav state and historical memories all contributed to make the kin state-co-ethnics abroad the most catastrophic one (Gagnon, 1995). Relations between historical homeland and the states where co-ethnics are settled underwent phases of serious tension in the case of Hungary, where the desire to repair historical wrongs (the 1920 Trianon Treaty which left two thirds of Hungarians and previously Hungarian lands cut off from Hungary) (Chiva, 2006; Paul, 2003). Demographic concerns were more central to the case of Kazakhstan, where the titular group was in fact a plurality in the country (and a minority in some areas). As Cummings shows (1998; 2003) an active diaspora policy was deemed necessary to reverse an ethnic imbalance. Repatriation led to the alteration of the ethnic balance and ultimately made Kazakhs the majority group, with the attached privileges that such status entail in the Soviet and post-Soviet period (Diener, 2005; Dave, forthcoming). Even Germany, though certainly the issue figured less prominently, embarked on the repatriations of Germans scattered across the former Soviet territory. Closer to home, relations with Germans in neighbouring Poland and the Czech Republic also played a role in the country's policy towards its neighbours (Wolff, 2000; Wolff and Cordell, 2005; Wolff and Rock, 2002).

It is the Russian case (or the case of the Russified settler communities, Melvin, 1995), that the issue of co-ethnics and the policy implications emerged more starkly. Twenty-five million former Soviet citizens (hereafter referred to as 'Russian diasporas') found themselves turned from 'primus inter pares' to unwelcome remnant of empire and in some cases actual denizens (Melvin, 1995; Melvin and King, 1998; Kolsto, 1996, 1999; Chinn and Kaiser, 1996; Smith et al., 1998; Laruelle and Peyrouse, 2004; Smith, 1999; Smith and Wilson, 1997). Russified settler communities were and still are by far the most visible examples of post-Soviet diasporas. They are not alone in this: Armenians, Kazakhs, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Tatars, among others also existed in the Soviet Union as officially recognised titular nations and internal diasporas (internal to the Soviet Union)[3]. The absence of real borders between Union republics made the geographical distribution of ethnic groups somewhat irrelevant in Soviet times, but particularly problematic in the post-Soviet era. Unlike the Russian diasporas, Uzbeks have not been "diasporised" by either voluntary or forcible migration, but by the movement of borders across settlements. In most cases, Uzbeks never moved from places where they had been settled for centuries. Borders did. The case of Uzbeks is significant in a number of ways. Uzbeks constituted the largest Muslim and also the largest non Slavic community in the former Soviet Union. In post-Soviet Central Asia, they are the most populous ethnic group and their political behaviour and the way Uzbek co-ethnics relate themselves to the country where the majority of kins live (Uzbekistan) ultimately affects the whole region, its stability and the process of state- and nation-building there. It is not merely about demographics therefore, but also about geopolitics. As many authors have noted, should Uzbekistan adopt a pro-active stance towards Uzbeks abroad, seeking to re-unite them with the mainland or even just to act on their behalf to protect them, this could potentially enflame the region.

Uzbekistan matters because it is demographically the stronger state in the region and has the largest army, which the Uzbekistani authorities have not refrained from using whenever Uzbekistani strategic interests are stake. This has included military support alongside political backing to pro-government factions in the Tajik civil war (Horsman, 1999a), conducting police operations in foreign territory un-authorised[4], and unilaterally demarcating and mining state borders. As Uzbekistan is militarily stronger than all its neighbours, a state dispute could potentially lead the region into a domino effect of violence and instability, with Uzbekistan's neighbours

possibly retaliating by supporting its minorities. However, despite initial predictions (Olcott, 1992a and 1992b; Carlisle, 1995; Rumer and Rumer, 1992) and later warnings (Lubin and Rubin, 1999; Khamidov, 2000; Tabyshalieva et al., 1998 and 1999) that un-addressed political and economic grievances and the presence of ethnic minorities spanning contested borders constituted a potentially explosive combination in the heart of Central Asia[5], Uzbek communities in those two countries have not resorted to violence, but gradually adjusted to living 'at home abroad'. This calls for a re-assessment of initial predictions as to how state- and nation-building would unfold in the region and of the implications this has for Uzbekistan.

Table 1. Dealing with co-ethnics in post-communist Eurasia

	Type of links	**Agency dealing with issue/for a where the issue is debated**	**Solution**	**Kind of support**	**Rationale of support**
Russia	Cultural, some political support (rhetoric)			Dual citizenship	Rus domestic politics
Germany	Cultural				
Hungary	Cultural	Constitution, parliament	EU conditionality/minority provisions in host states		
Serbia	Political, military		War/refugees/catastrophe		
Kazakhstan	Cultural		Repatriation/support with resettlement	Repatriation and benefits	Demography
Uzbekistan	Few, if any (textbooks)	none	Neglect – assimilation?	none	n.a.

The case of Uzbekistan and Uzbeks abroad appears of particular interest because unlike the many other examples where kin states supported their co-ethnics, nothing of the sort occurred with regard to Uzbekistan. Unlike Germany, Hungary and Russia,

the issue was not debated in parliament or media. This should not come as a surprise of course, given the state of the Uzbekistani political system. Unlike Hungary and Russia, no third party (i.e. EU or other international organizations) was involved in mediating between the different actors (though the OSCE and NGOs did become involved in attempt to de-escalate tensions). Unlike Kazakhstan, there was no need for Uzbekistan to facilitate the return of co-ethnics, since Uzbeks constituted a large majority in the country. If anything, efforts were made (in practical, though not in policy terms) to increase ethnic homogeneity in the republic. Cultural contacts, where maintained, were kept at a minimum and were often limited to the provision of old school textbooks in Uzbek language. Overall, with the emergence of new international borders and the unexpected thrust to independence, Uzbekistan seemed to 'forget' about the very existence of Uzbek co-ethnics abroad. Why was this the case, and with what consequences for the way Uzbekistani authorities conceived of the new state and the formation of Uzbek national consciousness[6]?

3. Background to Uzbeks abroad

Central and South Asia are home to about twenty-five million Uzbeks. Besides the two million living in northern Afghanistan, most Uzbeks are settled in one of the five post-Soviet Central Asian republics. The large majority of Uzbeks are concentrated in Uzbekistan, created by the Soviet authorities in 1924 as the alleged 'historical homeland' of the Uzbek people[7]. With the exception of Afghanistan which underwent very different historical processes[8], Central Asian Uzbeks share a most obvious legacy: the seventy and more years of Soviet rule and, earlier, several decades of Russian imperial rule. Soon after re-establishing control over the territories formerly belonging to the Tsarist Empire, the Soviets introduced a comprehensive program of political and social re-organization of Central Asia: the "national delimitation" (*natsional'noe razmezhevanie*, 1924-1936). The process marked the beginning of the nation-making process under Soviet rule guided by the principle of territorialization of nationality. Ethnographers, official representatives, scholars as well as the local population were mobilised in a comprehensive process of re-organization, not just of territory and institutions, but of the peoples that inhabited those lands. Border making (creation of national territories), the use of census as a policy tool, the promotion of national languages, and a nativization policy aimed at creating national cadres were

the instruments used by the Soviet authorities to promote nationhood[9]. Soviet nationality policies, however, never constituted a coherent and homogenous body of policies (let alone practices). In addition, the specific conditions of the various national groups varies extensively across the Soviet space. Individual groups themselves, presented a high degree of internal heterogeneity[10].

For Afghanistani Uzbeks kinship and lineage retain their importance, whereas for large part of Central Asia post-Soviet Uzbeks attachment to tribes has been by and large erased by the Soviet campaign of modernization (according to which ancient and backward tribes and tribal identities were to be superseded by modern national consciousness. Nevertheless today's Uzbeks remain a rather heterogeneous group, with areas in Xorazm and the Turkmen provinces of Erap and Tashauz showing a rather distinctive identity from those living in areas such as Buxoro and Samarqand where coexistence with Tajiks and closer influence by Persian culture has made Uzbek identity much more complex to define[11]. Uzbeks living in Tajikistan present an even more complex picture. Shirin Akiner notes how Tajikistani Uzbeks are in fact product of three different waves and patterns of settlement in the country[12]. Significant differences also exist among the republics that have emerged from the Soviet collapse. Tajikistan descended in a bloody civil war from 1992 until 1997 and that is has only recently begun a process of institutional and societal reconstruction. Kyrgyzstan experienced its brief, but bloody phase of communal infighting during the 1990 Osh conflict, but state and societal breakdown have been prevented despite the fact that the odds were stacked against it (regional, ethnic sub-regional and clan cleavages, social and economic deprivation). Turkmenistan has been subject to an intense process of Turkmenification and isolation from neighbours and pretty much the rest of the world under President Niyazov. Kazakhstan has attempted to balance nationalising policies aimed at enhancing the status of the titular group (Kazakh) and the necessity not to alienate minority groups, particularly the Russian-speakers in the north. Kazakhstan's comparative economic advantage has also made the country one of the destinations of labour migrants and shuttle traders of the neighbouring republics and this common perception of relative while unevenly spread wealth has affected the perceptions of non Kazakhs as well as ethnic Kazakhs.

In all cases, Uzbek co-ethnics are settled in areas bordering Uzbekistan (see map 1). Kyrgyzstan's Uzbeks live, with very few exceptions (in the northern cities of Bishkek and Tokmok), in the southern Ferghana Valley provinces, namely Osh,

Jalalabat and Batken. Though official census figures are disputed (as they are in the other countries below as well), the latest data see Uzbeks represent about 14% of the overall population (at about 700,000). Tajikistan is home to the largest Uzbek population in the region. Uzbeks are mostly concentrated in the northern province of Leninabad (de facto connected to Uzbekistan under Soviet times and indeed it served as Tashkent's stronghold in Tajikistan) and in the south-west of the country (Khatlon province). There smaller, though by no means irrelevant, Uzbek communities in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan (less than half a million each). Turkmenistan's Uzbeks are concentrated in the Tashauz and Lebap provinces in the eastern part of the country. In Kazakhstan, Uzbeks are mostly found in the Southern Kazakhstan province (especially in and around Shymkent). Next, I briefly delineate Uzbekistan's policy towards Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, where the largest Uzbek communities outside Uzbekistan live.

Map 1.1 Uzbekistan and Uzbeks abroad

Source: Original Uzbekistan map available at www.ozodlik.org and later modified by the author. Uzbek settlements outwith Uzbekistan are indicated with small circular marks.

4. Uzbekistan's policy towards Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan

Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and the "Leninabadi" faction

In partial compensation for the loss – following the national delimitation process - of what Tajiks regarded as their historical cultural centres (Samarkand and Bukhara), Soviet Tajikistan obtained the more developed northern area around the city of Khujand (located in the western Ferghana Valley). *De facto* the northern city of Leninabad, as Khujand was been renamed in Soviet times, continued to gravitate around Tashkent's orbit[13], from which it barely lies a bare hundred miles away. Being the most Russified (culturally), located in the most advanced area of the country (economically), and host to a significant Uzbek minority, it appeared sensible to the Soviet authorities to back the political elite from the north as their intermediary for ruling the country. This gave birth to an informal practice in Tajikistani politics: the political domination by northern elite which has defined Tajikistan since 1945[14]. This did not lead to a complete domination of the Leninabadis, as Akiner notes. In fact, since the early seventies an agreement for power and resources distribution was in place between Leninabadi and southern (Kulyabi) political factions. When Tajikistan became independent, a sudden and violent struggle to reshuffle the power arrangements and distribution took place, the faction of the then president Nabiev outplacing Leninabadis and Kulyabis from power. The conflict degenerated and other dimensions were added to the conflict (ie regionalism, role of Islam in political life, criminalization of politics, etc.).

For the first half of the war (arguably until 1994) Uzbekistan played a significant and stabilising role in leading the opposing sides (government-backed factions and United Tajik Opposition) to the negotiating table. The move was not out of mere generosity: a crucial concern was the fear that territorial claims on ethnic basis would spread over to neighbouring targets, making the Uzbekistani cities of Samarkand and Bukhara (but also the province of Surkhandarya) the targets of Tajik revisionists[15]. Similar concerns over the possible spill-over of conflict into Uzbekistani territory were paramount in Tashkent's decision to side with Russia in brokering a cease fire and negotiating an end to the conflict. However, since 1994-1996 Uzbekistan's role in the country has become increasingly peripheral (Akiner,

2001) and the relations between the two countries have soared. Russia and Uzbekistan at this stage intervened to push the sides towards a cessation of hostilities and negotiated an agreement for power distribution. Although this was ultimately formalised in the 1997 Peace Accords, a power shift was already in place in 1994, with one southern faction (from Danghara, near Kulyab) headed by a former kolkhoz chair, Emomali Rakhmonov monopolising political and economic power. Following what is widely perceived as the "Kulyabization" of the country and its alignment with or reliance on Russia for support, Uzbekistan ceased to play a significant role in Tajikistani affairs (Horsman, 1999; Abdullaev and Barnes, 2001; Akiner, 2001 p.48). The withdrawal did not last long, and Uzbekistan continued to play a less direct role in Tajikistan for a few years (1996-1998). These essentially consisted of a series of uprisings from February 1996 until November 1998 (February 1996, August 1997, October 1997, and November 1998) in the northern province of Leninabad/Sughd. Although these intrusions have been portrayed by the Tajikistani government as failed coups, it seems instead that more economic considerations were at the basis of these incursions[16]. Allegations from Dushanbe that Uzbekistan might be behind the intrusions (which involved the former prime minister Abdumalik Abdullajonov and especially the former Tajik army commander Mahmud Khudoyberdiev) have always been rejected by Tashkent. After playing a direct role in Tajikistani politics for more than seventy years and contributing to stopping the civil war, relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have become increasingly strained. What emerged here is that the Uzbek factor is of little help when one tries to make sense of the events, despite the fact that there is a large Uzbek minority in the north and that the northern Sughd province is traditionally more Uzbekified and better connected with Uzbekistan than with the rest of the country. In addition, Khudoyberdiev, who posed a significant threat to Tajik authorities in the mid- to late 1990s is widely seen as an ethnic Uzbek, is in fact an ethnic Lakay. Lakays havegone through a process of ethnic revival in recent years, also promoted by state authorities that saw in the promotion of Lakay distinctiveness a way to weaken the Uzbek presence in the country (a Lakay separate entry was also created in the latest population census). So overall the clashes between the two neighbours should be seen through the lenses of power politics rather than as a manifestation of ethnic tensions.

Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbeks

Compared to Tajikistan, the situation in Kyrgyzstan involved a less direct involvement from Uzbekistan, though this was by no means less controversial. Despite the potential for conflict over resources or territory[17], relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan throughout the 1990s have remained essentially peaceful. Tensions have mounted towards the end of the decade resulting in the straining of relations between the two countries[18], and Uzbekistan's tightening of border controls. The triggering factors has been the intensification of the threat posed by Islamist militants to the ruling regime in Uzbekistan, which dramatically manifested itself in the 16 February 1999 Tashkent bombings and the summer 1999 and 2000 incursions of Islamist militants -belonging to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan- through Kyrgyzstani territory into Uzbekistan[19]. Blame in these later two cases fell on Kyrgyzstani authorities for failing to stop the militants and that country's weakness has been henceforth used to legitimise the closure of the border and the tightening of border policy. Resentment among cross-border communities is due both to the popuplation's perception that state authorities are undertaking deliberate nationalising programmes aimed at enhancing the status of the titular group. Furthermore, distontet is fuelled by the damage that border closures and a tight visa regime cause to shuttle trade, essential as part of the local population's survival strategies in times of economic duress. At a state level two main sources of tension can be identified: territorial claims and energy-related disputes. There are seven enclaves in the Ferghana Valley, the most known and problematic of those being Sox and Shax-i-Mardan (belonging to Uzbekistan) and Vorux (Tajikistan). Besides the fact that enclaves are often home to people whose nationality is different from that of the state exerting sovereignty over the territory (Sox), the problem actually has more to do with the exploitation of natural resources and territorial delimitation than to ethnicity. In February 2001 a secret memorandum was signed by the Uzbek prime minister U. Sultanov, and his Kyrygz counterpart, Kurmanbek Bakiev, agreeing on a land swap: Uzbekistan would be given a land corridor to link Sox to the mainland, and in return Kyrgyzstan would be given a portion of land around the exclave of Barak[20]. The document was leaked to the press in Kyrgyzstan, and the prime minister was accused by the opposition and the public that this "sell off" of the country brought "unsatisfactory compensation"[21].

Uzbekistani elites' views on co-ethnics abroad

In Uzbekistan I sought to explore the way Uzbekistani Uzbek elites relate to Uzbek co-ethnics living in the neighbouring countries. Interviews and focus groups aimed at identifying the general attitude, the extent to which local respondents perceive other Uzbeks as part of the same nation, and whether Uzbekistan should do more to maintain links with them. The small sample (fifty-eight respondents) makes generalizable claims impossible; however it is possible to draw indicative considerations even on the basis of the available evidence[22].

Respondents pointed to the lack of information available on the topic. Many respondents admitted difficulty in providing any meaningful answer. Others pointed that "there was no point [for them] to investigate what Uzbeks in other republics did or thought" (ca. 8%), while about one third of respondents did not have sufficient information on which to ground an opinion or was not willing to express it. Of those who answered, very few could go beyond phrases of circumstance ("yes, we are all Uzbeks"; "Uzbeks are always Uzbeks", "Uzbeks are Uzbeks everywhere", "blood is the same, so they are Uzbeks", "we speak the same language"). What responses seem to suggest is that they do not regard Uzbeks living on the other side of the border as different. What instead emerges is the effect that the increasing isolation of Uzbeks abroad from Uzbekistan can have on their self-identification. This, I was repeatedly told, could lead them to increasingly adopt the traditions of their place of residence. "If they live long in Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan, they will become more like Kyrgyz or Kazakh", Aziza-opa, a researcher from Samarkand noted. This view was shared by most respondents. When I asked about their reaction to this process of indigenisation/nationalization, the response was generally a positive one. "If that is the place where they [Uzbeks abroad] live it is normal that they take up the customs of the place where they live. Like here, in Uzbekistan, other groups are becoming Uzbek". Mutual expectations ("do not mess up with your neighbour if you do not want him to mess up with you") seem to be a tacit dogma.

Scarce information derives from a lack of public debate on the subject (in Uzbekistan's strictly controlled media) which in turns is a product of the sensitivity of the issue. This is not surprising considering the lack of open debates on these issues on Uzbekistani media and within academic and policy circles as well. Given the centralization of power, policies originate directly from the president himself. In this

case (relations with Uzbeks abroad) Uzbekistan does not have a policy at all. Unlike other countries where these issues are debated in specific fora (Hungary, Russia), media (Serbia, Russia, Kazakhstan), or have been the domain of specific state institutions (Kazakhstan, Hungary), nothing of the sort has occurred in Uzbekistan. This does not mean that "what happens to Osh Uzbeks is of no interest to the Uzbekistani leadership", so the head of a social science research institute in Tashkent told me[23]. The fact that Uzbeks, especially young males, are the most likely recruits for underground movements such as Hizb-ut Tahrir and IMU is a serious cause of concern for Uzbekistani authorities. As a consequence, Uzbekistan maintains a form of informal control in cities like Osh through a network of informants among the local population.

As this section has shown, Uzbekistan does not have a diaspora policy aimed at the repatriation or protection of co-ethnics abroad. In fact, it does not have any official position on the matter, other than the support of principles of state sovereignty and its protection from foreign interference. Uzbekistan's regional policy appears to be driven by 'hard security' concerns, rather than by any concern for its co-ethnics living on the other side of the border. Ethnicity has played little role in shaping regional policy and in Tashkent's official foreign policy discourse. Overall, the lack of a formulation on the diaspora issue seems to reflect two policy priorities. One the one hand the marginalization of Uzbeks abroad from political discourse is part of the stability and security discourse, which differentiates sharply between inside stability and outside disorder. Also, the lack of interest from the Uzbekistani side seems to be part of mutual tacit accords between the Central Asian states not to back each other's minorities. In the end, if Uzbeks in Osh are "expected to Kyrgyzify", Tajiks in Samarkand might be expected to do the same. This discussion of the perceptions of Uzbekistani Uzbeks of the "diaspora" was necessary to provide the context within which to locate Uzbekistan's foreign policy and especially its relations with its neighbours. Next, I examine the views of Uzbeks abroad vis-à-vis Uzbekistan.

5. Tashkent has ignored the call [from Uzbeks abroad], but… was anybody calling in the first place?

Many scholars and analysts have suggested the possibility that Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks might act as a "fifth column" of Uzbekistan – something which has raised understandable concern in that country. In an insightful study of Osh Uzbeks and their

relation to political authority, Morgan Liu looks at their "discrimination and disempowerment" as leading motives behind their articulation of a "vision of an ideal authority and polity in discourses about their post-Soviet predicament" (2002 p.1). Uzbekistan's president is then idealised and "imagined" as a "benevolent despot", looking after his people (ibid., p.2). Osh Uzbeks "recognise the khan" in Islam Karimov. My study of members of political, economic, and cultural elites among southern Kyrgyzstani and northern Tajikistani Uzbeks calls for some qualification of Liu's depiction of Osh Uzbeks. Opinions among local Uzbeks towards Uzbekistan tend to show a disenchanted view of the neighbour. In some ways this is very similar to the views emerging from the study conducted in Uzbekistan showing a trend toward mutual disinterest. In Tajikistan seventy-three respondents out of one hundred and forty-seven (53%) consider Uzbekistan as a neighbour/neighbouring state/sovereign country. Thirty-five (25%) considered it as either their homeland (*rodina*), or the homeland of their ancestors (*rodina moykh predkov*). About fifteen (ca 9%) declined to express any opinion, whereas the remainder had more negative views of the neighbouring country. With regard to the situation in Kyrgyzstan, the sample was smaller (fifty-four). Twenty-five respondents indicated that Uzbekistan to them is "a neighbour/-ing country". Sixteen on the other hand consider Uzbekistan as their (ethnic) homeland. Six respondents added other comments, some of which were remarkably negative ("we [in Kyrgyzstan] have democracy, they [in Uzbekistan] have paper democracy", "Uzbekistan is a dictatorship, a totalitarian state oppressing its own people"), and other more positive ("it is a rich country, which I respect", "borders do not have any meaning to me"). Respondents in the two case studies present similar type of responses among those who tend to consider Uzbekistan as nothing more than a neighbour. Only about fifteen respondents expressed a less positive view of Uzbekistan. A common theme was the reference to Uzbekistan's "lack of hospitality" (*ochen' ne gostipriennoe gosudarstvo*) referring to the border policy and the visa regime. More open and critical comments emerged in the follow-up interviews. Here those more likely to discuss the different sides of Uzbekistan's regional politics came from the younger generation and this was especially so in Kyrgyzstan. Incidents between Uzbek border guards and police and the latter's incursions in Kyrgyzstani territory are recurrent. Most lament the impossibility of visiting relatives on the other side of the border, attending weddings or funerals. The necessity of acquiring a visa and therefore the expenses one would incur in travelling

to Bishkek have had an impact not only on the practicalities of living at the border, but on the perceptions of so doing.

Table 2. How do you rate Uzbekistan's policy towards Uzbeks living in Tajikistan/Kyrgyzstan?

	Tajikistan	Kyrgyzstan
Positive	15.8	17.0
Negative	45.1	25.0
No difference	31.6	37.8
Don't know	7.5	20.2
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 3. Does Uzbekistan defend the interests of its co-ethnics in Tajikistan/Kyrgyzstan?

	Tajikistan	Kyrgyzstan
Yes	12.6	13.4
No	63.7	69.5
Don't know	23.7	17.1
Total	100.0	100.0

Responses in the two countries reflected a similar assessment of Uzbekistan's policy towards Uzbeks abroad. Although partially overlapping, the two questions address distinct issues: an overall evaluation of Uzbekistan's foreign policy, and an opinion specifically focused on the extent to which Uzbekistan is seen to defend the interests of the Uzbek population living abroad. In both cases a positive assessment of Uzbekistan's foreign policy is rare (15% in Tajikistan and 17% in Kyrgyzstan, table 2). It is especially the case in Tajikistan that a negative assessment appears strong (45%). Uzbekistan's construction of Tajikistan as an "anti-model" against which Uzbekistan's development is measured probably plays a role in this (otherwise only 25% of respondents in Kyrgyzstan assesses Uzbekistan's regional policy negatively). Opinions become more homogenous when respondents are asked whether they think Uzbekistan is defending (in whatever way, political, economic, cultural) the interests of the Uzbek population in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. A very strong majority (60-70%, table 3) reject this idea. Local Uzbek associations report the systematic refusal by Uzbekistani authorities to intensify contacts with them. An Uzbek deputy of the Jogorku Kenesh noted with regret that "…we [the local branch of the UNCC] always invite him [Islam Karimov] to come and visit us; not only he never visits, but we never receive any reply either". A major cause of grievance among elite and non elites alike is Uzbekistan's refusal to open a consular office in southern Kyrgyzstan (a

similar demand is made in northern Tajikistan). A negative assessment of Uzbekistan and its policies is reflected also in the following question. Asked to indicate which institution(s) should address the demands, concerns, and interests of Uzbeks, Uzbekistan is indicated by a mere 2.3% in Tajikistan (no-one in Kyrgyzstan). What is surprising is that this is equal or less than the percentage of respondents indicating international organizations. About three out of four respondents by contrast indicate that it is the duty of all the citizens of the republic and also of state institutions to look after the interests of non titular groups.

6. The ideology of national independence: Tensions between *Davlatchilik* (Statehood) and *O'zbekchilik* (Uzbekness)

Nick Megoran notes how existing studies on Uzbekistan discuss its foreign policy conduct separately from domestic affairs[24]. Understanding Uzbekistan's geopolitics and relations with its neighbours, Megoran correctly contends, cannot be done in isolation from an analysis of the country's domestic politics. This inevitably entails a study of the project of state-building and in particular of the role the ideology of national independence has played in forging the country's new identity and worldview[25]. Stability (the preservation of peace and order within the country's territorial borders) has become the mantra of Uzbekistan's geopolitics. Uzbekistan's discourse of stability has been constructed against a series of others (Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism) which pose a threat to the security of the country. While the nature of these threat is to a certain extent real, they have also become central to the strategy of self-legitimation of the Uzbekistani political elite. The ideology of national independence has provided the regime with the conceptual framework to locate these real or imagined threats within the discourse of peace, order and stability within the country. The opposition between inside and outside in Uzbekistan's geopolitics is stark. Beyond the fences of "Fortress Uzbekistan" lies the realm of instability and disorder which the current leadership has prevented from spilling over into Uzbekistani territory. Tajikistan, with its tentative democratic openings in early 1990s, the formation of a coalition government with the Islamic opposition in the second half of the decade and the collusive ignorance of IMU militants operating on its territory, easily became Uzbekistan's significant and negative other. This dimension of Uzbekistan's (security-centred) ideology should be complemented

with a second dimension which has more to do with the construction of a state and national identity. Despite claims of the current leadership that Uzbekistan-ness is the political identity and the counter claims from ethnic minorities that in fact *O'zbekchilik* and *O'zbekistonchilik* are coterminous, the reality appears more complex. Uzbek national identity is a recent construct and, as the political formation within its current boundaries, owes its historical development more to the Soviet nationality policy than to Amir Temur[26]. In the wake of independence the state leadership was forced to look for political legitimacy, which it lacked also due to its passivity in the struggle for independence. The Uzbekistani authorities were then faced with a challenge: to privilege an inclusive and citizenship-based identity or to build an exclusive ethnic Uzbek identity (itself to be constructed, due to the significant regional heterogeneity of the country) and alienate Uzbekistan's own minorities (especially Tajiks and Russians). Uzbekistan eventually chose not to choose and this explains the contradictory nature of its nation-building process. I argue that the study of how Uzbekistan relates to Uzbek co-ethnics abroad best illustrates the contradictory nature of its own nation-building process. Understanding the significance that ethnic ties have in driving Uzbekistan's regional policy also reveals what dimensions (ethnicity, territoriality or else) are being privileged as criteria for defining the nation.

So far, caution if not outright 'denial' has dominated Uzbekistan's relations with Uzbeks abroad. The issue is indeed very sensitive as perceived support for Uzbeks in Khujand, for example, might lead to unwanted domino effects within its (Uzbekistan's) own territory. In light of the priority given to the discourse of stability it comes as no surprise that whatever is perceived as a threat to it (directly or indirectly) is "othered".

The theme of unity is also crucial to understand the path taken by Uzbekistani elites. In this respect it is clear that between the unity of the state and unity of the nation the Uzbekistani leadership has chosen the former. This requires the integration of non-Uzbek groups into the larger Uzbekistani nation (O'zbekistonlik as opposed to O'zbek). This is actually something different from the traditional dichotomy between an ethnic and a civic conception of the nation. As Aleksandr Djumev notes in an insightful study of how Uzbekness is being constructed in the country (2001), the consolidation of the "great Uzbek(istani) nation" builds on the acceptance, from minority groups, of the values of *O'zbekchilik* (Uzbekness). The combination of past

and present is necessary to ensure the country a great future (the theme figures everywhere in the country's iconography with the slogan *O'zbekiston – kelajagi buyuk davlat*[27]). This can only be achieved if stability is maintained. Stability in the country can only be achieved by gradual reforms and the Uzbek model of development. With this respect authoritarianism is legitimised as a necessary evil:

> "[…] perhaps in my actions there are signs of authoritarianism. But I explain as follows: in certain periods of history, especially during the construction of statehood, strong executive power is necessary. It is necessary in order to avoid bloodshed and conflict, to preserve in the region inter-ethnic and civil harmony, peace and stability, *for which I am prepared to pay any price*" [my italics] (Karimov, 1996 cited in March, 2002a p.372).

Stability is not only internal. In the case of Uzbekistan, in fact, preservation of stability has often implied protection from spill-over from neighbouring countries. This long premise is necessary to situate Uzbekistan's regional policy in perspective. It does not take place in a vacuum, but rather it appears to be highly influenced by the project of state-building. How does all this affect Uzbekistan's worldview and in particular its relations with Uzbeks living in the other Central Asian republics? Outside threats have become increasingly[28] central to the country's political discourse and ideology. Islam Karimov's *Uzbekistan on the threshold of the twenty-first century. Threats to security, conditions of stability and guarantees for progress* (1997) probably best exemplifies the Uzbekistani regime's preoccupation with fear of instability. The outset of the volume sounds like a warning despite the father figure-like image Karimov has often conveyed:

> "[w]hat kind of period will the 21st century be for the inhabitants of Uzbekistan? […] Are we aware of difficulties on the road to reform […]? [A]re we aware of the threats to our stability and security?" (1997 p.4).

Karimov continues to outline his vision of security: "the support for indivisibility of security as a permanent process with no limits, the threat posed by ethnic, regional

and local conflicts and aggressive separatism, the lack of a collective security system in Uzbekistan's proximate environment, terrorism, drug-trafficking, arms trade, and ecological problems" (ibid., p.10-13). A separate mention is reserved to a particular kind of threat: Uzbekistan's "encirclement by countries burdened with ethnic, demographic, economic and other problems" (ibid., p.11). Uzbekistan's geopolitical environment is elevated to the level of problem *per se* and Uzbekistan is the only bulwark against chaos[29]. What seems to worsen the situation is the fact that "these [Afghanistan, Tajikistan] where the Uzbek diaspora are the most numerous among foreign ones" (sic) (ibid.). Later in the volume Karimov outlines a way out of the quagmire: the inviolability of borders (p. 25), the importance of a country's multi-ethnic character to stability and security (p. 59), and the significance assigned to the links with Uzbek communities living outside Uzbekistan (p. 71): "[t]he unity of any nation, the Uzbek nation included, implies close linkages with its ethnic brothers, living in other sovereign states, including the Central Asian countries" (ibid.). The question of cross-border minorities ("separated nations", p. 25) is primarily discussed as a source of threat:

> "the ongoing conflicts give some people a possibility to exaggerate the problems of 'separated nations'. Often a deliberate selection of arguments in favour of, for example, the unification of Tadjiks or Uzbeks and Pushtun tribes on both sides of the border with Afghanistan. It is terrible to imagine the consequences of any attempt to change the existing borders using the ethnic principles of division".

Although the presence of Uzbek communities in the neighbouring countries has often been highlighted as one of the possible tools in the hands of Tashkent to influence the course of politics in the neighbouring countries, a review of a decade of Uzbekistan's regional politics reveals its restraint in playing the 'Uzbek card'. A reversion to more traditional instruments of power politics has been preferred.

7. Conclusive remarks

In light of the findings presented in this paper it is possible to draw two conclusions. First, Uzbekistan has adopted a policy which radically differs from the one of countries such as Kazakhstan (Cummings, 1998) or the Russian Federation (Melvin, 1995, 1998). Kazakhstan's interest in the diaspora was primarily aimed at re-

establishing demographic superiority in the country, whereas the Russian diaspora has mainly been used as a tool in the domestic political debate. With regard to the Uzbek diaspora, by contrast, an alternative consideration has dominated Uzbekistan's agenda: the separation from the instability at its door by establishing an island of stability.

Second, Uzbekistan's policy towards its neighbours has been shaped by territorial and resource disputes rather than ethnicity. Immigration of Uzbeks from Tajikistan, for instance, has not been preferred to that of Tajiks from the same area. In fact both have been obstracised. Land mines affect mostly Uzbeks as they are concentrated in border regions. Shuttle trade is also affected by a visa regime and familiar links and communications in general have often been severed by the lack of an Uzbekistani consulate in southern Kyrgyzstan and northern Tajikistan. The Uzbek elites in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, however, do not seem to look to Tashkent for inspiration or support (Tashkent does not consider official Uzbek associations as one of the channels to deal with neighbouring countries). This study therefore suggests a lack of support from the ethnic patron (Uzbekistan) for Uzbek co-ethnics abroad. After an initial involvement in the neighbours' domestic affairs (particularly Tashkent's meddling with the Tajik civil war from 1992 to 1994), Uzbekistan has restrained from supporting Uzbek communities in the neighbouring countries. While the possibility of Uzbekistan's support for Uzbeks abroad has often been indicated as one of the de-stabilising factors in the region, little evidence has been provided to justify this claim. Overall, if anything, Uzbekistan has played a stabilising role in this respect. This, it was argued, can be ascribed to three main factors. First is the emphasis that Uzbekistan has placed on state-building. With security concerns paramount and the construction of a public discourse that sees Uzbekistan as a "fortress" encircled by a series of threats to the integrity and stability of the state, the country's leadership has severed its links with Uzbek co-ethnics in the neighbouring republics. Suspicion towards the Ferghana Valley Uzbeks is particularly acute in Uzbekistan, due to the alleged association between the profound religious sentiment of the valley's dwellers and their involvement in militant activities. The Islamic threat, imagined or real, by and large informs Uzbekistan's Weltanschauung and its relationships with the neighbours. A second possible factor for Uzbekistan's reluctance in dealing with Uzbeks abroad, lies in the priority given by Uzbekistan to inter-state bilateral relationships. Not only has Uzbekistan eschewed any form of regional arrangement

and shown wariness towards any collective security regime, the regime of Tashkent has also systematically ignored any request for direct relationship with the organizations of Uzbeks abroad. Uzbek co-ethnics, Uzbekistan's President Karimov has often maintained, are citizens of other countries and therefore it is their responsibility, not Uzbekistan's to deal with their demands (and I suppose similar conclusions should be drawn with respect to Uzbekistan's Tajik minorities, for example). Related to this aspect is the tacit agreement that exists between the region's regimes. A support for one's own co-ethnics could, with all probability, ignite the region, causing a domino effect of support for co-ethnics beyond state borders. The region would soon descend into chaos. A further explanation for the lack of active links may be found in the views of Uzbeks abroad themselves. All the political, economic, and cultural limitations and problems notwithstanding, Uzbeks living there have enjoyed a limited degree of pluralism. At the very least, authoritarian control and repression have not reached levels anywhere close to those perceived to be the norm in Uzbekistan. The current political situation in Uzbekistan does not appear particularly appealing to Uzbeks abroad. A liberalization of the political climate in Tashkent might exert a greater appeal to Uzbeks abroad, but at the moment the more open political, economic and cultural environment in countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan does not suggest any move for migration, let alone requests for annexation to Uzbekistan. As a leading figure of the Uyghur minority in Tashkent put it clearly to me[30], given the current conditions, "no-one is interested in coming to Uzbekistan… the reality is that all those who can, leaves it!" One should also note that their sense of civic belonging (to the states of residence) is increasing. Expectations are rising vis-à-vis Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani authorities, but this, I argue, supports the view that Uzbeks now accept their permanent status as citizens of these new republics. The case of the relationship between Uzbeks abroad and Uzbekistan suggests that this does not think of the former as a community it has a responsibility to protect. As Gorenburg has correctly noted (2001), although the motherland may be calling, the "diaspora" may not be listening. In light of this, it seems necessary to qualify Rogers Brubaker's triadic nexus framework as a way to conceptualise the relationships between state (of residence), minority, and alleged 'external homeland'. While no doubt some among the Uzbek population may continue to look to Uzbekistan as a cultural homeland, or a country with whose citizens they may have special cultural and family bonds, the relationship between

Uzbekistan and Uzbeks abroad appears much weaker than the one, say, between Russia and Russians abroad.

Notes and References

[1]Sampling was not random due to resource constraints and practical reasons. Hence, I opted for purposive sampling as this allows to overcome the issue of discussing sensitive issues (ethnic questions tend not to be openly debated in any of the countries under investigation). A common risk in these circumstances is that of having a skewed sample where respondents indicate further potential informants on the basis of shared beliefs, though this – as data below show – proved not to be the case.
[2]According to the 1989 Soviet census the number of people residing outside the borders of their alleged homeland (internal or external to the Soviet Union) amounted to a stunning 71,191,055 (Vestnik Statistiki, 1990-1991).
[3]External diasporas included, for example, Uzbeks living in Turkey or Saudi Arabia, Ukrainians in Canada, and so forth.
[4]Naumkin (2003). Since summer 1999 (when militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan organised incursions from Tajikistan through Kyrgyzstani territory into Uzbekistan) this type of operations has intensified. Also, until very recently it was not infrequent for Uzbek troops to spill over into Kyrgyz territory to arrest elements allegedly belonging to the Uzbek opposition.
[5]Nick Megoran was one of the rare observers in counter-tendency at the time. In his brief essay appropriately titled *Calming the Ferghana Valley Experts* Megoran (2000c) notes how emphasis on the conflict potential of the region – parallel to a downplaying of positive developments – risks turning into a self-fulling prophecy.
[6] Here I am not suggesting that nations should be conceived as cohesive and bounded entities. I do subscribe to the constructivist view that identity is constantly produced, contested and reproduced, and that every community is home to different stances as to what being Uzbek (in this case) means.
[7] I am not discussing the controversies surrounding Uzbek ethnogenesis and the relationship between Uzbek nation-building and the formation of Uzbek statehood. For a comprehensive analysis of this see Ilkhamov (2003 and 2004).
[8] On Afghanistan's Uzbeks see Rasuly-Paleczek.
[9](Hirsch, 1997; Martin 2002; Suny and Martin 2001)
[10] On regional variations of Uzbek identity see Adams (1999a).
[11] For an excellent analysis of the complexities of local and national identities in Uzbekistan, particularly in Samarkand, see Schoeberlein (1994).
[12] Akiner identifies three main clusters that led to the formation of the Uzbek community in today's Tajikistan, depending on which of the various influxes of Turkic tribes they descend from: the first, now located in the southwest and fully sedentarised, the second, until recently semi-nomadic and settled in the centre-west, and the third and largest, particularly in the north (2001, p. 9).
[13]Akiner (2001) somehow qualifies the support the Leninabadis obtained from Uzbekistan, as this is Soviet times acted as pro-consul of Moscow. Sergey Gretsky instead considers the northerners as a mere appendix of Uzbekistan (1995).
[14] Roy, 1997; Akiner, 2001.
[15]For an example of this kind of views with extreme nationalistic tones mixed with a virulent anti-Uzbek rhetoric see the work of the otherwise well-respected Tajik academic Rakhim Masov (1991 and especially 1995).
[16]This, at least, seems to be the consensus of respondents from Khujand, Uzbeks and Tajiks alike, who see in those intrusions nothing more than activities related to smuggling (interviews conducted in August 2003).
[17]For a brief review of border disputes in Central Asia see ICG (2002a). Thorny issues include territorial claims (each country has exclaves located within the other's territory) and controversies over the supply and payment of natural resources (gas and water).
[18]For an excellent study of the 1999-2000 Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border conflict see Nick Megoran's *The Border of Eternal Friendship?* (2002d).
[19]Naumkin (2003).
[20]ICG (2002).

[21]For an excellent discussion of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border conflict see Megoran (2002).
[22]Interviews and focus groups were conducted in Tashkent and Samarkand.
[23]Interview with Arslan Joldashev, June 2003, Tashkent.
[24]Megoran essentially discusses three: Bohr (1998), Melvin (2000) and Yalcin (2001).
[25]For an insightful study of Uzbekistan's ideology of national independence – which is rather appropriately labelled "Karimovism" by the author - see the recent essays of Andrew March (2002a and 2002b).
[26] Ilkhamov (2003 and 2004).
[27]"Uzbekistan is a country with a great future".
[28]In a study of how President Karimov's extensive work has changed in the post-independence era, Megoran notes a progressively sombering of tones.
[29]For such a deterministic view of Uzbekistan as a "necessary hegemon" see Alimov (1995).
[30]Interview held in Tashkent, 8 June 2003.

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