State of Human Rights in Uzbekistan: An Analysis
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Abstract: Human right is a sensitive issue, the states across the planet are known by defending and violating human rights. This paper aims to demystify Uzbekistan’s policy towards human and religious rights and through light on intense waves of Human Rights violation in Uzbekistan since the dawn of independence. Since independence, Uzbekistan used coercive measure to control politico-religious organizations and their activities, and as a result became hotbed of human rights violation. Human rights got arrested both by State authorities as well as extremists. After surveillance, it has been found that, the state authorities are violating the international standards of Religious freedom and Human rights and are interested to control the religious activities of the descent. In theory, the state offered religious freedom and ensures rights of every person to freedom of conscience and religion, equality of rights of citizens irrespective of their attitude toward religion but in practice, human and religious rights are highly restrictive. This paper concludes that, democratic wave is the crying need of the hour. Uzbekistan needs to respect human and religious rights, and amend the existing policies for the future progress and prosperity of the nation. If the situation remained same, the fire of Arab Spring in 2011 may soon engulf Central Asia

Key Words: Human rights, Religious freedom, hotbed, extremism, Arab Spring

I. Introduction
“To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity”
Nelson Mandela

Human rights are basic rights and freedoms that all people are entitled to regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, race, religion, language, or other status. Human rights include civil and political rights, such as the right to life, liberty and freedom of speech and expression; and social, cultural and economic rights including the right to participate in culture, the right to food, and the right to work and receive an education. Human rights are protected and upheld by international and national laws and treaties. Human rights denounce the repressive means and methods.

In the western context, human rights developed as a proactive concept to defend the autonomy of individual against threats coming from states actors and non state actors. At the International level, Universal Declaration of Human Right by United Nations on 10th of December 1948 is landmark in the history of human rights. In the subsequent years, most of the states all over the world embraced Human Rights and put in their constitutions, ideologies and policies but the truth is that in most of the states human rights are violated whether it is Central Asia, Myanmar, Kosovo, Somalia, Palestine, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Sudan etc. this paper analyzes the human rights condition in Uzbekistan where since independence the Islam Karimov is ruling and religious and Political freedom is marginalized.

The human rights situation has been deteriorating in all Central Asian states since independence. At that time, facing challenges or concerned that new challenges might arise, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan opted for outright dictatorial rule, although in different forms and to varying extents, as permitted by the realities of their respective societies. Having no threatening or potentially threatening opposition, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan settled for less dictatorial, although not democratic, political systems. Extensive human rights abuses ranging from intolerance of any form of political opposition (Turkmenistan) to subjection of legal opposition groups and individuals to various restrictions and maltreatment and of illegal ones to brutal suppression(Uzbekistan and Tajikistan)—have been the case in the first group of states. In the absence of any major threatening political opposition, the second group of states also subjected legal opposition to various maltreatment and restrictions, though to a lesser extent, leaving more room for peaceful dissent. However, this policy began to change when dissatisfaction with the status quo among nationals increased the possibility of that sentiment developing into mass movements as the opposition groups increased their activities. Hence, since the late 1990s, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have also increased their human rights abuses, showing an eroding tolerance of dissent even though they are still more democratic or, more accurately, less abusive than Tajikistan,
Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Major human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch (HRW 1993–2008), have documented various human rights abuses (e.g., banning opposition activities, closing opposition facilities, harassing opposition members and supporters through arrests, torture, kidnapping, killing, and unfair trials) by the Central Asian governments since 1991, as well as election fraud. The Ministry of Interior controls the police, who are responsible for law enforcement and maintenance of order and investigate general crime. The NSS, headed by a chairman who reports directly to the president, deals with a broad range of national security and intelligence problems, including terrorism, corruption, organized crime, and narcotics.

Prosecutors investigate violent crimes such as homicide as well as corruption by officials and abuse of power. Where jurisdictions overlap, the agencies determine among themselves which should take the lead. The ministry’s main investigations directorate has internal procedures to investigate abuses and discipline officers accused of human rights violations, but the government rarely punished officials who committed human rights abuses. A human rights and legal education department within the ministry investigated some police brutality cases.

II. Setting the Context: Human Rights Violations in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan got Independence from erstwhile Soviet Union in late 1991. Independence though brought euphoria but socio-political, ethnic and religious sphere was not a domestic bliss. President Islam Karimov is ruling Uzbekistan since, and the nature of his ruling is oppressive, harsh, and coercive, people are deprived of their franchises (social, economic, political and ethnic). Pro-democracy activists within the opposition political group Birlik established the first non-governmental human rights organization in Uzbekistan – the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU) – in 1992. From the very beginning, it was clear that the Uzbek govern-ment would not tolerate independent human rights organizations. In December 1992 the president of HRSU, Abdumannob Pulatov, was arrested by Uzbek authorities at the conclusion of a human rights conference in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and charged with violating the “honor and dignity” of the president; he was later convicted but released in an amnesty the same day.¹ Uzbekistan has a abysmal Human Rights records since independence. Uzbekistan’s civil society is in crisis. Human rights defenders, independent journalists and political activists are imprisoned on bogus charges simply for doing their work. Many are subject to ill-treatment and torture in prison. Those human rights defenders who remain at liberty face constant government pressure and harassment. Independent journalists risk prosecution for writing stories the government deems to be “defamatory,” and many lawyers who took on politically sensitive cases have been disbarred. When he was in Uzbekistan, Human Rights Watch researcher Steve Swerdlow met with courageous individuals who continue their work despite the risks they face. Even worse than the economic stress, though, is the government's repression of citizens. Free speech and religious practice are non-existent in Uzbekistan, and torture is "systematic and rampant"². Political prisoners' bodies are returned to their families in sealed coffins; some are said to have been boiled to death in prison. During the Andijan Crisis in 2005 Several hundred demonstrators were shot dead by the Uzbek authorities; Muslims who practise their religion outside state controls continue to face imprisonment and torture, as do the country's small number of Jehovah's Witnesses; human rights activists and journalists are frequently imprisoned on false charges; more than a million people are mobilised for forced labour each year.³

In 2012, 10 human right defenders were put behind the bars on wrongful charges.⁴ In spite of this trafficking of humans is a serious concern for Human rights defenders. Human trafficking in Uzbekistan is an internationally recognized problem. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Fact book:

“Uzbekistan is a source country for women and girls trafficked to Kazakhstan, Russia, the Middle East and Asia for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation; Men are trafficked to Kazakhstan and Russia for the purposes of forced labor in the construction, cotton, and tobacco industries; men and women are also trafficked internally for the purposes of domestic servitude, labor in the agricultural and construction industries, and for commercial sexual exploitation.”⁵

Uzbeks face an increasingly repressive economic and political environment. Anyone who opposes the regime is liable to be accused of being an Islamist radical or terrorist. There are small numbers of both in Uzbekistan but the vast majority of protests have been by people angered by economic policies that have concentrated wealth in the hands of a tiny elite while stifling opportunities for others. Industry is in dire straits, foreign investment has evaporated, and agriculture provides almost no income for farmers. The World Bank calls Uzbekistan a "Low-Income Country under Stress", a polite term for a state at serious risk of failing. But the international community has been slow to recognise the dangers of instability. Overall, the freedom of religion is controlled, right to opinion is banned, women are being harassed and trafficked, domestic violence is at peak, use of internet is not allowed. In such a situation, it seems that Uzbekistan authority is resilient by force not by choice.

III. Human Rights Violations by the Security Forces

Uzbekistan possesses the largest military forces in the Central Asian region, having around 65,000 people in uniform as of 2012. Political opposition particularly opposition parties are banned and crack downed by Uzbek
The security forces are primarily concerned with security, for them security comes first, citizen comes later. They are working on the instructions of Islam Karimov.

In 1998, the government of Uzbekistan instituted a massive crackdown against the HT in 1998, after Karimov’s rubber-stamp parliament passed the Law on Freedom of Con-science and Religious Organizations, which severely restricts the right to freedom of worship. President Karimov railed against the fundamentalists in parliament. “Such people must be shot in the head. If necessary, I will shoot them myself,” he said. According to Amnesty International, in the first six months of 1999, 55 death sentences were handed down and 15 executions took place under this law. According to Human Rights Watch, “Uzbek police and security forces have arrested thousands of pious Muslims. These arrests are illegal and discriminatory, they target people who belong to unregistered Islamic groups, who practice outside state-controlled mosques, or who possess Islamic literature. Police routinely torture and threaten detainees, deny them access to medical treatment and legal counsel, and often hold them cells for up to six months. Trials are grossly unfair, as judges systematically punish independent Muslims with lengthy terms in prison for their religious beliefs and affiliations, ignoring allegations of torture, and allowing coerced self-incriminating statements as evidence, often the only offered evidence, to convict.”

A 2010 report by Human Rights Watch reveals that, the Uzbek government continues to intimidate and harass the families of Andijan survivors who have sought refuge abroad. The police regularly summon them for questioning, subject them to constant surveillance, and threaten to bring criminal charges against them or confiscate their homes. School officials humiliate refugees’ children. Nine years have been passed, the government of Uzbekistan still using coercive methods in Andijan. The sentencing on April 30 of Diloram Abdukodirova, an Andijan refugee who returned to Uzbekistan in January, to ten years and two months in prison, shows the lengths to which the government will go to persecute anyone it perceives as linked to the Andijan events.

Various International Human rights organizations in their reports perpetually provoke Karimov coercive methods and demands respect of human rights but Uzbekistan till date has not adopted any liberal policy. Theoretically, Uzbekistan talks about human rights and religious freedom but practically the reality is contrary.

IV. Role of Extremist Groups in Uzbekistan

The emergence of Extremism and its role in violating Human right has been deeply rooted. After assuming power in January 1992 through oath of office with one hand on the constitution and the other on a copy of the Qur’an, Islam Karimov then immediately set about restoring order and recovering the control that had slipped through his fingers in the chaos of that autumn. When in January 1992, students at Tashkent University went on strike to protest economic issues: in the middle of a grave economic crisis, they had not received their ration tickets to purchase basic food items. Obliviously this was their right which was crushed and Karimov responded by sending in the police, which shot into the crowd when the demonstrators refused to disperse. When this police action gave rise to more protests, the university was closed down and the students sent home.

This episode was the beginning of a crackdown that quickly restored the authorities’ control of the political situation in the country. Militias sent from Tashkent shut down Adolat and other vigilante groups in the Fergana Valley, arresting nearly seventy activists and chasing others out of the country. By 1993, all opposition groups had been banned and their leaders beaten up or hounded out of the country. Karimov articulated his attitude toward the opposition in a speech to the Supreme Soviet in July 1992: “It is necessary to straighten out the brains of one hundred people in order to preserve the lives of thousands.”

Of some 6,000 prisoners in Uzbek jails by the spring of 2001, at least half are considered to be adherents of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

It is not need to deny that extremist groups in central Asia like Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb-ut-Tahrir has played a negative role regarding Human Rights. One the worst tragedy of Uzbekistan is the repression of religious life of the people. The crackdown of religious activities is the legacy of Soviet Union where Islamic madrassas, mosques were closed. But in Uzbekistan all the religious activities are controlled by the State authorities. The chieftains of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) covertly propel the Uzbek youths towards Jihad and demoralizing their familial responsibilities. Islamic Jihad Union, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb-ut-Tahir-al-Islami (HuT), are popular due to their orthodox religious beliefs and discontent towards Islam Karimov. Although Hizb-ut-Tahrir does not promote extremism and based on non-violent method to establish Islamic State yet the state authorities dealing it with jealous eye and even arrests its members on wrong charges. Extremist groups in Uzbekistan are violating the human rights both directly and indirectly; directly they insists the youths to fight along them against the Karimov regime, if the people refuse, the extremist covertly exploits and threatens them. Indirectly, the principal threat to the government is extremism and any person who has covert ties with extremists is punished badly by the state and his family also. The state on such strategy arrests the people on the guise of extremism to suppress any violent incidence. The people that have no link with extremist frequently trapped in the police led raids.

V. Conclusion

Not only Uzbekistan, all the Central Asian states are worst in human rights violations. They are not defender of Human rights but violator. International community has diverse opinion regarding human rights violations.
United States Russia and China have strongly backed Karimov's approach, ignoring the reality that his failed economic policies and political restrictions have fuelled the potential for a serious Islamist opposition. U.S. policy has focused almost entirely on maintaining a strong security relationship, with far less attention to improving human rights, encouraging political reforms or opening the economy, thus inevitably undercutting these objectives and adding to some of the very risks that Washington says it is engaged in the region to prevent. Unless Uzbekistan urgently adopts widespread economic and political reforms, it is likely to move with greater speed towards state failure. This would have a profound impact on all Central Asia, including Afghanistan. Chaos in the region would be the best possible outcome for a number of underground Islamist groups that are active in Uzbekistan and its neighbours.

The needed and what this paper tries to promote is that Uzbekistan should adopt liberal policy and must defend human rights, innocents, should not be punished or harassed. Due to human rights violations, the Uzbek ruler Islam Karimov at international level is regarded as worst dictator among the former Russian Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Harold J Laski aptly said that, “every state is known by the rights it maintains”. The state of Uzbek should launch an anthropocentric developmental approach for the betterment of the descents. Islam Karimov is ruling since independence and adopted a tight approach over the citizens, thus his attitude is not contrary to that of Adolf Hitler and Mussolini. Islam Karimov must remind the Arab Spring in 2011 where the corrupt and long ruling dictators were ousted from power through mass based protests. Though revolution occurred in Kyrgyzstan but the other Central Asia states remained active to block any spark of revolution. The principal concern of states at international level is security, security of its citizens but Karimov concern is survival in power, a long run approach to create history or record. Theoretically we can accept but practically we find the power is being misused by so called “Haves” by Karl Marx at the expense of masses.

Notes and References

[10] Ibid.