

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.dw.com/en/after-karimovs-departure-uzbekistans-future-unsure/a-19515129>

After Karimov's departure, Uzbekistan's future unsure

9/2/2016

Uzbekistan's new leader might struggle to ensure consistency in politics. Longtime president Islam Karimov's style combined unpredictability, cautiousness and unwillingness to make concessions.



After a stroke last week, Uzbekistan's longtime president, 78-year old Islam Karimov - nicknamed Padishah by local media - failed to accomplish what was long awaited by his inner circle: a controlled transition of power through the appointment of a successor. The Uzbek constitution does not provide for a power transition of this kind. However, according to insiders, Karimov - the oldest of the former Soviet republic leaders - was about to do so after realizing that staying in power for a fourth term might have negative consequences for his health. But the dictator had to quickly change his mind after finding out that his plan would result in clan leaders, oligarchs and even his close relatives ending up in a severe fight for power.

Karimov's legacy

Karimov served as First Secretary of the Uzbek branch of the ruling Communist Party in Soviet times. During a chaotic transition period that marked the downfall of the Soviet Union, Karimov managed to regain order behind the scenes. However, it came at the cost of arresting his own daughter, Gulnara Karimova - a businesswoman and socialite well-known both at home and abroad - who made it clear that she wouldn't mind taking over. She also served as Uzbekistan's official representative to the United Nations and the country's ambassador to Spain. After Karimova fell into disgrace she was mentioned in the Western media largely in relation to corruption scandals related to a number of European companies that worked in Uzbekistan.

Analyst Günther Knabe on death of Karimov

Now, after Karimov's swift departure, the future of Uzbekistan is hard to predict. The president has left a legacy of handling internal problems - more or less - with tough and repressive methods of governance. One of the biggest problems that remains is a high poverty rate in the heavily populated Fergana Valley. The area is now widely associated with the massacre in the city of Andijan in 2005 when police, armed forces and national security services severely suppressed mass anti-government protests by machine-gunning civilians on Karimov's orders. As a result, hundreds of people were killed or wounded, and tens of thousands of refugees headed to neighboring Kyrgyzstan. The repressions that followed the Andijan massacre indirectly resulted in a spike in the number of political refugees from Uzbekistan that ended up settling in Europe, US, Turkey and Arab countries.

Radicals and oligarchs

Another related problem is that of radical Islamic terrorists active in the country. After 700 fighters of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, a militant Islamist group, broke through the Uzbek border from Kirghizia in 1999, local media were persistent in reporting that Karimov had cleansed Uzbekistan of all radicals. Independent sources, however, dispute that claim. According to human rights organizations, hundreds of people have been put in jail on allegations of their ties with the "Islamic State". Significant social and legal inequality persists in regions where local officials - the protégés of influential clans, oligarchs and organized crime leaders - imagine that they are above the law.

Due to the web of corruption and attempted power grabs by members of his own family, many people have tired of his regime and those connected with him. On the other hand, many are worried that clans might destabilize the country without his iron hand. Many Uzbeks are concerned about the possibility of chaotic and perhaps violent revolutions under democratic slogans - like those taking place in Kyrgyzstan since 2005 - let alone the prospect of another Afghanistan or Iraq quagmire.

Uzbek government confirms Karimov's death

International players in Uzbekistan

After Karimov's departure, the global players in Central Asia - Russia, China and US - have every reason to boost their efforts in Uzbekistan. Although Karimov had been giving hope for rapprochement to each of these countries and their representation among the local elites, none have become dominant.

China, wanting to partner up on its Silk Road project, has already marked off logistics routes across the map of Uzbekistan. Beijing will do its best to make sure that the transition of power in Tashkent will not ruin these plans.

Moscow in turn has a chance to convince Uzbekistan to participate in creating a collective security belt around Afghanistan. Karimov has long avoided deep involvement in Russia's military issues, including participating in the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a military alliance of six former Soviet republics. Uzbekistan's territory and military resources are extremely desirable for Russia's security belt concept. But a new Uzbek leader is likely to be less independent than his predecessor, considering that the situation in the mountainous Hindu Kush getting worse.

Possible liberalization

The United States also wishes to see Tashkent as a reliable ally in pursuing its security policy in northern Afghanistan. After the start of its Afghan anti-terrorism campaign in 2001, both the US and Germany tried to push Karimov's regime towards liberalization. The Adijan massacre four years later halted those efforts. After Karimov's death, the US and Germany will likely make another attempt. Not least because Berlin's interest in the military base at Termez - which Germany used between 2002 and 2015 - has not faded. Nor has America's interest in a military base in Khanabad, where the American air force was deployed between 2001 and 2005.