

Defense Reform and Professional Military **EDUCATION** *in* **UZBEKISTAN**

The Armed Forces Academy of Uzbekistan

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As the entire system of international relations is transformed, Central Eurasia is experiencing mounting threats to international and regional security. To meet these challenges, Uzbekistan has instituted unprecedented reforms across the entire spectrum of government and society, emphasizing defense reform in particular.

The unique challenges to international security and cooperation brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 have placed a premium on the responsibility, agility and resourcefulness of governments around the world. The more capable of adaptation and adjustment, the more likely the government is to successfully address the multiple security challenges caused by the shifting contours of the international security terrain. The modernization of defense capacity requires updating doctrine and protocol, but that is not sufficient in itself; defense modernization is not an act but a process of continuous improvement.

One of the most salient features of Uzbekistan's current defense modernization program is the government's deep commitment to undertake significant and ongoing internal reforms and improvements in all spheres of economic, social and governmental affairs. One of the government's highest priorities is improving relations with foreign countries, particularly

Uzbekistan's nearest neighbors. Defense reform is playing a key role in the improvement of foreign relations. Improvement in professional military education in Uzbekistan is one of the fundamental pillars in the formation of stable and constructive relations with foreign countries.

Sweeping governmental reforms were introduced soon after Shavkat M. Mirziyoyev was elected president of Uzbekistan in December 2016. Uzbekistan's reforms had an immediate, discernible effect on the public atmosphere and soon had an empirically demonstrable effect on leading indicators of social and economic progress. From his first days in office, Mirziyoyev brought in a skilled, innovative team of government officials to begin implementing profound reforms in all areas of state development, particularly in defense and security institutions. In the early days of Uzbekistan's reform programs, new leadership was announced at the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The National Security Service was reorganized as the Uzbek State Security Service in 2018. A key public security organization, the Uzbek National Guard, founded in 1994, was greatly expanded in 2019. The Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan was expanded and given new responsibilities as the country's leading foreign policy think tank.



An Uzbek soldier stands at attention during Uzbekistan's Independence Day celebration. Uzbekistan declared independence from the Soviet Union on August 31, 1991. REUTERS



STAFF SGT. STEVEN COLVIN/U.S. ARMY

The success of Uzbekistan's reforms

In addition to improvements in the security-related institutions, Uzbekistan also undertook a broad and ambitious program of modernization in the social and economic spheres, focused on improvements in the legal and policy framework of commercial activities and the improvement of health and social support services. The government began a systematic process of liberalizing the economy, first through fundamental currency modernization in 2017 and commercial enterprise privatization in 2018.

The effects of improved social and commercial policies were soon recognized and applauded by commercial interests and international organizations. For instance, in January 2020 World Bank Vice President Cyril Muller, head of the office of the European and Central Asian region, observed that Uzbekistan's lending program had grown to be the second largest in the region, second only to Turkey. That is significant in itself. The World Bank includes in the European and Central Asian region: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. This group of countries includes all the states of the post-Soviet communist world. Turkey, of course, was never a communist country, and most institutions do not categorize it today as either in Europe or in Central Asia. If one sets Turkey aside, Muller's statement implies that Uzbekistan, drawing more World Bank lending than all the other countries in the bank's region, represented the largest support portfolio among all the post-communist countries that emerged from the Soviet Union's disintegration.

The importance of Uzbekistan's economic, social and governmental reforms extends beyond the country's borders, to the entire Central and South Asian region. Uzbekistan is playing an increasingly important role in the region as a rapidly developing and stabilizing factor. In foreign policy, Uzbekistan occupies a geographical position that bridges

East and West, North and South. Uzbekistan's role in Afghanistan's reconciliation efforts illustrates the country's importance in the region.

In February 2018, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani chaired the meeting leading to the Kabul Declaration, making a critical appeal to warring parties for reconciliation of Afghanistan's long-enduring conflicts. The United Nations Security Council in March 2018 endorsed Ghani's appeal for the "comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process to support reconciliation." President Mirziyoyev, at the close of the Tashkent Peace Conference on Afghanistan in March 2018, offered to host Afghanistan reconciliation negotiations in Tashkent. A new phase of Afghanistan reconciliation negotiations opened, offering new hope to bring an end to the country's 40-year strife. Bad-faith negotiations and divisive tactics could undermine Afghanistan's stabilization. This underscores the enduring importance of Mirziyoyev's insistence on an Afghan-led direct dialogue between the Afghan central government and opposing domestic political forces to restore peace and legitimacy. Uzbekistan's efforts to promote this dialogue and reconciliation process stand out as one of the most important current developments in the Central and South Asian region. Uzbekistan's defense and security reforms are a fundamental part of Uzbekistan's continued contribution to peace and security in the region.

Soldiers from Uzbekistan and the United States train together during the Invisible Sentry exercise in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in February 2020.

Defense reform and professional military education

During the Soviet Union's disintegration, Uzbekistan adopted a number of key national security and defense policies that were focused on protecting the national security of the newly established independent state. In May 1992, Tashkent served as the meeting place for the post-Soviet states that adopted the Collective Security Treaty (CST), an important stabilizing factor in the final stages of the Soviet Union. In signing

the CST, the former Soviet socialist republics set out to build new national security capacities adapted to a new age and a new set of national security requirements. The first years of post-Soviet independence were marked by simply building on existing practices and policies of Soviet military practice. Gradually, the Soviet conventions and practices were overtaken by substantial defense reforms.

For two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, Uzbek military practice was still to a large extent inherited from the Soviet period. In 2010, the Uzbek government officially identified the importance of new practices and policies and new ways of thinking about national security. The Uzbek Armed Forces Academy was identified as the premier professional military educational institution. It was assigned responsibility to combine the functions of military educational institutions, including service colleges, staff and command colleges and strategic-level war colleges, into a single, leading professional military institution. The current reforms appear to be reinforcing this trend in the country's defense reorganization.

In the context of continuing globalization and the transformation of the entire system of international relations, the military and political situation in the world is increasingly characterized by an expansion of the spectrum of challenges and threats to international and regional security: the intensification of geopolitical tensions, and the growing predominance of forceful approaches to resolving conflicts and crisis situations.

A big step forward was taken when the Defense Doctrine of the Republic of Uzbekistan was adopted on January 9, 2018. It defines the main characteristics of modern military conflicts:

- Preparatory informational and psychological propaganda campaigns aimed at establishing political justification and shaping international public opinion on the need to use military force to resolve an outstanding dispute.
- The use, along with military force, of nonmilitary measures (political, economic, information-psychological and others).
- The use of high-precision weapons, electronic warfare, unmanned aerial vehicles and robotic systems, network automated control systems; the ability to pinpoint targets on the entire territory of the opposing side; high mobility and employment of self-sufficient groupings of forces.
- The participation of special operations forces, illegal armed formations, private military companies and other hired personnel using sabotage and terrorist fighting methods; broad involvement and high vulnerability of the local population.
- The disabling (disruption of functioning) of important state infrastructure, the destruction of which can trigger large-scale emergency situations, including transborder crises; and a high probability of the rapid transformation of one form of military conflict into another.

In terms of implementing the goals of the new defense doctrine, it is critical to prepare a cadre with the skills and

knowledge necessary to implement national security objectives. In February 2013, the Ministry of Defense asked the United States Embassy in Tashkent to assess the Uzbek Armed Forces Academy. At that time, the Uzbek government was particularly interested in promoting bilateral cooperation in the field of military education to promote Uzbekistan's professional military education (PME). The Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense offered to help develop a program of cooperation in contemporary PME. At roughly the same time, the Uzbek Ministry of Defense requested similar assistance from NATO. These Uzbek requests eventually resulted in an exchange program called the Defense Education Enhancement Program, or DEEP. NATO established a Partnership for Peace Training Center in Tashkent. The U.S., in close consultation with partners, developed a PME program for the Uzbek Armed Forces Academy. The thematic for the PME focused on applied topics, such as courses in counterterrorism, civil emergency planning, staff officer training and familiarization with international standards. The U.S. DEEP program was based on demand-driven stimulus, involving consultations and discussions between U.S. and Uzbek experts in professional military education. Following the DEEP program, the U.S. government provided additional support through the Ministry of Defense Advisor program of the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency. The program provided an ongoing PME specialist physically situated within the Uzbek Armed Forces Academy as a continuous source of PME exchange.

The initial stages of the DEEP program focused on providing new instructional models and new curriculum materials. A high priority was placed on shifting from a static to a dynamic instructional model. A static model relies on one-directional presentation of course material assimilated in rote fashion by students. A dynamic model differs in that, while it includes the presentation of conventional curriculum content, it also presents material in the context of instructor-student interaction, thereby encouraging analytical reasoning, appropriate initiative, and the implementation of innovative adult learning technologies including exercise-based instructional modules.

On the basis of discussions and exchanges, it is clear that the PME specialists at the Armed Forces Academy clearly recognize and appreciate the importance of understanding international standards in teaching methods, in particular regarding advanced standards of methodology and judgment, critical thinking and data-driven evidence. The Uzbek Armed Forces Academy emphasizes the importance of interoperability along the lines of international standards. This modern orientation includes the development of courses on familiarization with NATO's organization and processes, staff planning procedures, counterterrorism and civil emergency planning, as well as classes that relate to technological advances such as advanced distributed learning. The inclusion of lessons learned from recent armed conflicts, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq, have provided an important component to the Uzbek Armed Forces Academy's modern PME curriculum. □