

CARNEGIE

P A P E R S

**A FACE
OF ISLAM**
**Muhammad-
Sodiq
Muhammad-
Yusuf**

Martha Brill Olcott

**Russian and
Eurasian Program**



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Muhammad-Sodiq through the Eyes of a Close Associate

Personal qualities: strong nature, character and charisma of a leader, ambitious, independent position, high theological erudition, significant international authority and especially in the countries of the CIS, a great authority among the believers inside the country and in the region.

Muhammad-Sodiq is generally reserved and complex, with an aspect of a political chameleon who can adapt to changing winds. Outwardly he looks more like a sultan than an academic-theologian; he has a heavy, attentive, and penetrating gaze reminiscent of the eyes of expert hypnotists or high officials. He knows how to listen and persuade. He is calm (at least outwardly), but in anger he is a dragon who breathes fire.

Muhammad-Sodiq, like most of Uzbekistan's religious establishment, is startlingly fixated on money. With it in sight, his eyes begin to burn and his usual restraint disappears. He is rancorous and he carries grudges. Nor does he like to be argued with, especially when he knows his position is wrong. Such qualities are well-disguised from public eyes, but manifest themselves after extended contact.

PART ONE: MUHAMMAD-SODIQ THE MAN

Muhammad-Sodiq Muhammad-Yusuf (also known as Mamamsodiq Mamayusupov), the former mufti of the Muslim Spiritual Administration of Central Asia, Uzbekistan's first mufti after independence, and the most prominent theologian in the country, is a figure worthy of attention by anyone interested in the political role that Islam might play in Uzbekistan.

He is the unofficial spiritual leader for the majority of believers in Uzbekistan and some adjacent regions like southern Kazakhstan. Most Muslims agree with the positions he takes, including most official imams and many politicians. His wide support makes him capable of influencing the broad population and, if necessary, of leading it.

Experience has taught him to be careful. After his time in Tajikistan, which was wracked by civil war, he understands that sharp and impulsive actions can lead to great bloodshed and the splintering of the Muslim community into factions fighting each other. For that reason, Muhammad-Sodiq avoids making controversial public statements.

Although he is careful not to allow sharp discord with the state, he has produced a significant number of publications, many of which express original ideas. Among local theologians, he is the most prolific, which garners a certain respect. In his writings, he considers the most acute problems his flock of believers faces.

His publications have recently been the major cause of his strong and growing popularity. His work is read by not only the believers in the Central Asian region but also government officials and even his enemies. He welcomes Russian translations of his work, which boost his popularity among the large Muslim populations in Russia.

At present Muhammad-Sodiq is perhaps the most charismatic figure of all religious leaders in Uzbekistan and even in Central Asia. He is the only religious figure currently living in Uzbekistan who has enough authority to preserve his independence and maintain a strongly critical position just short of open opposition vis-à-vis the state.

A close associate commented, "Muhammad-Sodiq does not call for people to go to the barricades, but instead calls for peaceful coexistence with the state." What is meant by coexistence? The implication is that despite a clear clash of ideologies, or worldviews, the differing points of view can be accommodated by religious believers in current circumstances.

Muhammad-Sodiq would like to see these circumstances change, and he is using his writings and preachings to try to create the conditions of a religious revival in Uzbekistan—a revival that would bring together traditional Hanafi teachings with more radical neo-Islamic ideas.

A few of his students find Muhammad-Sodiq comparable in philosophical stature with Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, but he himself does not consider such comparisons seriously and does not like them because they could alter his current status and impede his religious mission.

If the state did not confer with him and show him respect, it would risk confrontation with traditional believers. His arrest, disappearance, or exile would seriously damage Uzbekistan's reputation in countries where the Organization of the Islamic Conference enjoys strong influence; this includes many prominent Arab states.

For those who live in Uzbekistan, such an independent and critical position is an indulgence almost no one can afford. His outspokenness has boosted his popularity with believers as well as with those theologians who do not agree with his position.

Biographical Sketch

Muhammad-Sodiq was born in Andijan on April 15, 1952. He is the son of Muhammad-Yusuf qori (who died in 2004), who was the son of Muhammad-Ali domulla Andijani.

Muhammad-Ali domulla Andijani died before the Bolshevik Revolution. He was a teacher (*mudarris*) in an Andijan madrassa and was said to have had a very comfortable lifestyle. His ancestors came from a family of Sufi sheikhs (*ishanlar*) of Naqshbandiya-Mujaddidiya. Muhammad-Ali himself was not a practicing Sufi sheikh.

His son, Muhammad-Yusuf qori, was also learned in Sufism but did not practice and did not recruit students. He opposed Soviet rule but stayed far away from politics. Because of the risk of persecution, he did not establish an underground religious school (*hujra*) but he did instruct his youngest son, Muhammad-Sodiq Muhammad-Yusuf, in the basics of theology.

Yet Muhammad-Yusuf qori remained a person of respect for his level of religious learning, and in 1950 he was invited by Ishan Babakhan bin Abdul Majid Khan to serve as a lecturer on Quran and Quranic commentary at Mir-i Arab madrassa in Bukhara, which first opened in the mid-1940s.

In 1953, Muhammad-Yusuf qori was appointed by the Soviet Union's Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia (SADUM) to be head sheikh and keeper of the shrine (*mazar*) of Baha ad-Din Naqshband just outside of Bukhara; Baha ad-Din Naqshband was a founding father of the Naqshbandiya order of Sufism. Muhammad-Yusuf qori served there until the shrine was closed in 1957, and he continued working in the madrassa until 1960, when he returned to his home city of Andijan. Then, before retiring on a pension, he ran his own bakery for two years.

Muhammad-Yusuf qori was able to support his family and live comfortably for more than forty years without ever working again. The family clearly had some assets that it had accumulated before the Soviet period; for example, Muhammad-Yusuf qori once was brought in for questioning by the authorities because he had sold ten imperial gold rubles, seemingly inherited from his father.

Muhammad-Sodiq's wife, Kennoyi M. Sattimova, is also from an old religious family; they were originally from Namangan, but they subsequently moved to Bukhara and Tashkent when family members received appointments from SADUM. I. Sattimov was a close friend of Muhammad-Yusuf qori and an even closer associate of Ishan Babakhan bin Abdul Majid Khan, who served as SADUM's first mufti. Ishan Babakhan appointed Sattimov to be the director of the Mir-i

Arab madrassa in Bukhara, a post he held until 1962 when Ishan Babakhan's son and successor, Ziyauddin Khan Ishan Babakhan, named him as head of the fatwa department of SADUM.

I. Sattimov was a controversial figure. It is said he was dismissed as director of Mir-i Arab madrassa because when he hired people to work at the madrassa he favored people from his native Ferghana Valley.¹ The papers relating to Sattimov's behavior, which was investigated in 1961 by a joint session of SADUM and the committee on religious cults, eventually disappeared from the archives of SADUM. Although Sattimov was fired, connections were everything; hence he was later appointed to head the department on fatwas.

Sattimov sent most of his children—his sons and his other daughter—to study in secular, not religious, schools. For example, one son and the other daughter studied at the Judicial Institute. Even Muhammad-Sodiq's wife maintains a fair amount of independence, and she admits she is able to disagree with Muhammad-Sodiq on occasion.

Muhammad-Sodiq's sister-in-law is married to a man educated as a lawyer who presently occupies a high post in the Uzbekistan Ministry of Justice. This lawyer was the mediator during the 1999 negotiations between Muhammad-Sodiq and President Islam Karimov, arguing for the former mufti to be allowed to return to Uzbekistan and help with the fight against ideological terrorism. In addition, the connections of the Sattimov family were useful in keeping Muhammad-Sodiq from being jailed in 1992–1993 and helping to arrange his semivoluntary exile.

Muhammad-Sodiq received his primary religious education from his father. He studied in Soviet middle school where, according to him, he was a straight-A student. After he finished middle school in 1970, Muhammad-Sodiq was accepted into the Mir-i Arab madrassa in Bukhara. He then studied at the Higher Islamic Institution in Tashkent, finishing with distinction in 1975. In 1975–1976, he worked as an editor for the magazine, *Muslims of Soviet East* [Sovet Musulmonlari].

Thanks to his wife's connections, he won a competition (without competing) to study abroad (in Libya), and he received government permission to do so; these developments reflected his excellent political connections. Libya, then socialist in orientation, was seen by Soviet authorities as a less risky place than many others for the training of Central Asia's Muslim clerics. By Muhammad-Sodiq's own admission, he was the only foreign student who had read Colonel Muammar Qaddafi's *Green Book*, and he referenced it during one of his examinations, which was likely his first political act.

In 1976, Muhammad-Sodiq was admitted to ad-Dawa al-Islami National Islamic University in Libya, which he finished with distinction and a financial award. This period of study exposed him to a future generation of Muslim clerics, mostly from the Arab world but even reaching to places as far away as Japan as he studied in the same class with the current imam of the "cathedral" mosque in Tokyo, whose Muslim name is Muhammad-Rashid.

In 1980 Muhammad-Sodiq returned to Uzbekistan and worked in the department of international communications for SADUM and simultaneously taught at the Higher Islamic Institution in Tashkent, serving as a lecturer on *tafsir* (extensive commentaries), *hadith* (customs and commentaries from the time of Muhammad), and *fiqh* (Islamic law), respectively. During his years there, Muhammad-Sodiq's organizational skills became evident, and he began to strengthen his international connections. He actively participated in the organization of a series of international conferences that occurred in the 1980s in Tashkent.

But Shamsuddin Khan Babakhan, who came to power as the head mufti in 1982, became jealous of the growth of Muhammad-Sodiq's international authority. Shamsuddin tried to bury Muhammad-Sodiq in administrative responsibility, first appointing him assistant director of the Higher Islamic Institution and then naming him director a year later. These appointments and responsibilities, instead of leading to political difficulties, caused Muhammad-Sodiq to thrive: he led a sweeping reorganization of the teaching methodology used at the institute, he developed a curriculum for self-education, and he introduced educational programs for modern Islamic educational centers.

Muhammad-Sodiq as Mufti

Muhammad-Sodiq was elected mufti by the SADUM in March 1989, and in the same year he was elected as a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Thus, Muhammad-Sodiq was a very self-conscious actor trying to build his prestige on two very different stages simultaneously. He tried to raise the visibility of Islam in Uzbekistan while he simultaneously sought to press the same cause—albeit by the use of very different tactics—on the stage of the Soviet Union more generally. Because of Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's reluctance about Islam, which Gorbachev saw as a source of the “backwardness” of the Central Asians, it was necessary for Muhammad-Sodiq to win the Soviet leader's favor if he had any hope of influencing developments closer to home.

Muhammad-Sodiq loves to reminisce about the late Gorbachev years, which he remembers as the most influential years of his life in many ways. Muhammad-Sodiq considers Gorbachev to have been an intelligent and clever politician. He remembers that Gorbachev always deferred to him personally when questions arose over decisions about religion or sensitive diplomatic relations with Arab countries.² Muhammad-Sodiq served as Gorbachev's personal translator on a number of occasions when the Soviet leader received delegations from countries such as Syria and Saudi Arabia. Muhammad-Sodiq claims that Gorbachev once attempted to use him to prod the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to raise slumping oil prices, a vital means of survival for the USSR and its failing economy of the time. Although Muhammad-Sodiq participated in some of these discussions as a translator, he does not know how the negotiations ended; he understood that he was being used, but he sincerely tried to help Gorbachev.

Muhammad-Sodiq was rather successful at using his position as a member of the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies to advance the agenda of SADUM (and Muslim clerics more generally). He put forward a formal list of requests, including permission for Soviet Muslims to be allowed to travel to Saudi Arabia for the hajj and for students to travel for religious study, establishment of new mosques and Islamic educational institutions, and publication of newspapers and periodicals. Muhammad-Sodiq's success at loosening restrictions on foreign education for Muslims accelerated the process of Islamization already under way, and it created a flood of Central Asian Muslim students traveling to the Middle East.

Muhammad-Sodiq believes that, largely through his contacts with Gorbachev, his goals were achieved. He also attained permission to import into the country—almost without censorship—religious literature from Arab countries. He says that, in retrospect, he regrets this last measure because much intolerant propaganda from religious-political parties in Arab states was delivered in this manner.³

Muhammad-Sodiq also moved on the smaller, regional bureaucratic chessboard as well. If he had failed to dominate regionally, he would have lost his access to the world chessboard that his relationship with Gorbachev was increasingly propelling him onto.

In some ways Muhammad-Sodiq's position was vulnerable. He became mufti as a result of a coup within SADUM that led to the removal of Shamsuddin Khan Babakhan from the post. The coup took the form of a demonstration of believers, something of a first in the period of post-World War II Soviet history. Most of the demonstrators were from the Ferghana Valley (namely, Andijan and Namangan). Although Muhammad-Sodiq maintains that he did nothing to bring about his appointment, this is not true; a secret committee to orchestrate Shamsuddin's ouster had been created by Muhammad-Sodiq two months earlier, and Muhammad-Sodiq continues to reward those who were part of this committee.

Thus, from his first days in office, Muhammad-Sodiq had many powerful enemies from within SADUM's hierarchy and clerical support structure, and he made even more enemies by his actions. As mufti, he took on the state apparatus that supervised religion; for example, he took exception to the desire of the Committee on Religious Cults to edit published fatwas. In general, Muhammad-Sodiq displayed his habitual independent position in relation to other government positions and decisions, pressing the regime to consider the traditions of the population's Muslim majority in their decisions.

He also diverged from state policies on a number of substantive issues. Like many other clerics, Muhammad-Sodiq sharply criticized in his Friday sermons and also in the form of a fatwa the Soviet government-promoted program on "conscious motherhood," which not only encouraged the use of contraceptives but also intended the legalization of abortions. Such a strong critique complicated Muhammad-Sodiq's relations with the public bodies.

During this time, Muhammad-Sodiq also actively sparred with many representatives from the government's Adviser on Religious Questions. It is widely known that the mufti had a direct conflict with the adviser's first deputy, Mutalib Usmanov,⁴ who hated Muhammad-Sodiq for what Usmanov believed was the mufti's key role in organizing the growing number of demonstrations (and more disorderly manifestations of protest) by crowds of religious believers in Tashkent, Andijan, and other cities. The number of such protests sharply increased in 1989 and 1990.

Muhammad-Sodiq believed that his primary purposes as mufti were to raise the level of religious education, spread religious education to more students, and increase the number of madrassas (during his time there were fourteen) and mosques (he increased the number of mosques from 188 to 5,000). During these years he even sought to expand the body of literature under study and go beyond traditional teachings of the local Hanafi school of law. He introduced popular Arabic authors into the curriculum as well.

Religion was becoming a very public part of Uzbek life. This meant that in addition to the opening of new mosques and madrassas, which the mufti obviously favored, it also led to the revival of a host of different types of traditional rituals such as pilgrimages to graves (*ziyarat*). Such pilgrimages were potentially quite disturbing to Muhammad-Sodiq, who did not want to see practices depart from formal Hanafi teachings. In addition to issuing a number of fatwas, he demonstrated his attitude toward management of these shrines and pilgrims' behavior through his appointment of a special imam to be assigned by SADUM to each shrine. The imam's job was to

explain Hanafi teachings on *ziyarat* as part of an effort to ensure that rituals with no relationship to dogma were not performed. In addition, orders were sent to all the mosques requiring that local imams offer similar guidance to those attending their services.

SADUM sought to limit the various polytheistic practices that were still associated with the worship of so-called saints, and SADUM of course rejected the notion that such saints were buried in Central Asia. SADUM rejected practices such as material offerings left at graves, lighting of candles on graves, grinding of holy dust from the graves of local saints, and other similar rituals.

However, Muhammad-Sodiq certainly did not want these graves closed because the voluntary donations of money (*ihsan*) given by Muslims or left on the shrines were one of the sources of SADUM's income. Instead, Muhammad-Sodiq persuaded the government to transfer control of all such holy places to SADUM. From Muhammad-Sodiq's point of view, the opposition of the pseudosufis who dominated the shrines was much less of a threat than the opposition of the Mujaddidiya groups (the so-called Wahhabis) to the other Muslim groups.⁵

In many ways, the most important issue Muhammad-Sodiq faced as mufti was the division between the Muslims of the Ferghana Valley, who were much more radical in their theology, and the Muslims who dominated in most other regions of Central Asia. In 1995, Muhammad-Sodiq published a book, *The Essence of Contradictions* [Ikhtiloflar hakida], dedicated to the theological analysis of the disagreements that separated the two groups. Almost from his first day as mufti, Muhammad-Sodiq exerted significant efforts for reconciliation of the two factions. In May of 1990 he finally succeeded in getting those who opposed his authority to come to a forum of SADUM and agree to the publication of a joint "fatwa on the world." However, the division between the groups was never successfully overcome.

Muhammad-Sodiq's relations with Abduhvali qori, another cleric born in 1952 in Andijan who was a leader of local Muslims characterized as Wahhabis, were always tense.⁶ In the 1990s, Muhammad-Sodiq very much hoped to win Abduhvali's support and thought that he would be able to reconcile Abduhvali's followers with Muhammadjan Hindustani's followers, many of whom were working as imams of the leading mosques following the change of policy toward religion during perestroika. But this goal eluded him.

Any hope of friendship with Abduhvali was dashed in 1991 when Abduhvali began to jockey for Muhammad-Sodiq's job as mufti. This struggle intensified in the autumn of 1992 when Abduhvali entered into an alliance with Shamsuddin Khan Babakhan, the former mufti. Shamsuddin enjoyed the support of many powerful people from Tashkent who also hated Muhammad-Sodiq.

Supporters of Abduhvali arrived in Tashkent on a dozen large buses. They boycotted SADUM's general meeting, organized demonstrations almost every day in front of SADUM, and wrote letters to the Committee on Matters of Religion and to the Adviser on Religious Questions. Muhammad-Sodiq attempted several times to telephone Abduhvali, but Abduhvali did not pick up the phone; Muhammad-Sodiq then sent an emissary to Abduhvali, but Abduhvali did not receive him. It seems clear that Abduhvali, like Shamsuddin Khan Babakhan, also wanted to become mufti. But for some reason, in November 1992 Abduhvali rapidly stepped back and said that he would undertake no further actions.

There are two possible explanations for Abduhvali's reluctance. Muhammad-Sodiq asserts that Abduhvali understood that the security services stood behind his ally, Shamsuddin; therefore,

Abduhvali's plan rapidly changed. An alternate version holds that Muhammad-Sodiq simply bribed Abduhvali. The latter version has been put forward by Muhammad-Sodiq Kasym Andijani, whose people, according to him, were among the followers of Abduhvali (or, more precisely, were a kind of "fifth columnists" in his camp). The story is murky, and possibly Abduhvali was simply scared off.

Certainly there was no love lost between Muhammad-Sodiq and Abduhvali, for both ideological reasons and competing personal ambitions. Muhammad-Sodiq believed Abduhvali crossed a doctrinal line and that Abduhvali's commentaries on the Quran (*tafsir*) could not be included in even the most strict constructionist interpretation of Hanafi Islam because they provided virtually no role for pre-Islamic norms and customs. This to Muhammad-Sodiq was evidence that Abduhvali's commentary was written under the explicit influence of the commentary offered by Sayyid Qutb.

It is ironic that when Muhammad-Sodiq was removed from the post of mufti, people from Andijan including supporters of Abduhvali came to his defense. They may well have intuitively understood that his removal meant that they, too, would soon be under threat.

Muhammad-Sodiq's centrist position ultimately did not satisfy either side. The fact that he was too moderate for the radicals and too radical for the conservatives began to affect his standing negatively. His relations with the state also did not improve.

In mid-January 1993, Muhammad-Sodiq was "asked" to write a request to be relieved of his duties because of health difficulties (the traditional Soviet style of resignation). The entire SADUM was dissolved, and a substantial part of the archives was seized and confiscated. This caused a sharply negative reaction from Muhammad-Sodiq's supporters and almost led to a clash with law enforcement officers. But Muhammad-Sodiq was able to stop the demonstrators and convince them to disperse. Shortly thereafter, on New Year's Eve, Muhammad-Sodiq's house was bombed—the mystery of who caused the bombing was never solved—and he began planning to leave the country.

Looking back on these events, Muhammad-Sodiq now says that he should have been more flexible at some moments and less flexible at others. He suggests he should have been more defiant when he was accused of having personally benefited from the sale of Qurans provided by the Saudis for free distribution.⁷ In private interviews with close associates he also admits that he erred by effectively trying to sit on the fence during the siege of the administration building in Namangan in December 1991.⁸

Muhammad-Sodiq Out of Office

In January 1993, Muhammad-Sodiq's friends in Libya and Syria helped him get settled and obtain a residence permit in Libya. He continued to travel widely in the Arab world, however; and he has continued this practice since his return to permanent residence in Uzbekistan. In fact, he created a position of some importance for himself in the Arab world. According to Muhammad-Sodiq, his peers outside Uzbekistan were comparable experts on Islam, but he alone was an expert on the countries of the former Soviet Union, so their interest in him was motivated entirely by that. He had constant and accurate information about the situation in Uzbekistan. His sons often traveled, and he encountered many Uzbeks performing the hajj in Mecca and Jiddah. Muhammad-Sodiq himself explained that with his knowledge of the local situation he could be useful as a spiritual authority (even informally) only by preserving a connection with his native land.

His expertise was recognized. In 1997 Muhammad-Sodiq was put in charge of Muslim countries and federations of the Commonwealth of Independent States within Rabita al-Islamiya (Muslim World League), an international Islamic organization in Saudi Arabia. He is a permanent member of the governing council of this organization.

Throughout his approximately seven years of exile, Muhammad-Sodiq preserved hope for repatriation. Although he gave interviews only rarely in an attempt not to spoil his relationship with the Uzbek government, he also sought to preserve his independence and maintain a critical view of the actions of the government. He wanted to take this position without manifesting the obstinate and sharp-tongued behavior of his years as mufti.

Although it seems he made some money in the trading sector (either through his own actions or through using his religious influence to open the doors for more worldly relatives), his focus in exile was on the condition of Islam in Uzbekistan and in the other regions of Central Asia.

As the civil war in Tajikistan became an increasingly troubling event for Muhammad-Sodiq,⁹ it appears he felt burdened by supporting the Islamists of Tajikistan both morally and materially instead of attempting to persuade them to switch to peaceful means in the struggle for their rights. This, however, is a position he will never acknowledge in public discourse.

Muhammad-Sodiq in exile became a prolific writer. From 1994 to 2000 he produced 60 percent of all his published work, including approximately thirty popular articles and twenty-five books and pamphlets. Most were written in Uzbek, and some were translated into Russian. The Kara Su branch of the press of the Islamic cultural center in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, published most of Muhammad-Sodiq's writings.¹⁰

Muhammad-Sodiq's political skills were also strengthened during this time, and he began to identify himself not so much as a theologian but as a politician with solid international authority. He knew that delegations from different countries would call on him, so he built a separate hall in his house—on the model of a European drawing room. He cultivated the protocol of diplomacy—he learned how to behave with foreign politicians, journalists, researchers, and human rights activists and how to converse with official visitors.

He also used his time in exile to learn about life in Europe and America. He never missed a conference to which he was invited, and he tried to produce a strong impression, attempting to tailor it to the nature of the audience.

A video recording of his appearance at the international conference, "Islam for Peace," in Egypt shows him several times repeating his own name, sprinkling it "randomly" through the report.¹¹ He used beautiful Arab phrases, speaking in the lustrous tones of an orator.

At conferences (primarily in Russia) where both secular experts and specialists in Islam participated, Muhammad-Sodiq demonstrated his mastery of more abstract analysis and rhetoric. Earlier he did not know how to speak this way, but he used the experience gained at international secular conferences and Islamic forums to develop a new form of international recognition and raise his individual religious authority.

He returned to Uzbekistan with the hope that his past political ambitions had now moved within reach; he was ready to proceed with restraint and care but not at the expense of his independence. Muhammad-Sodiq implied at the time that he was ready to collaborate with all who were "not against Islam and Muslims" in his effort to gain and leverage political authority.

Since his return he has sought to hold the government at arm's length because he believes that, if the public perceives he is too cozy with the regime, he will lose much of his authority and respect. In many ways he seems to have gone beyond his earlier overestimation of his strength and influence and his underestimation of the official government's capabilities.

Muhammad-Sodiq now appears to appreciate that society is not yet sufficiently Islamic and is not prepared for those changes that the Islamic leaders proposed at the end of perestroika and the beginning of independence. He also has a better idea of what is necessary for the formation of the Islamic state, having lived so long in countries in which Islam rests at the heart of the political system (or at least quite near to it).

Certainly, a strong shift occurred during his seven-year exile. Muhammad-Sodiq read a lot during this time, especially literature on international themes mostly by Arab authors; he also read Arab translations and interpretations of international events. He describes his attempt at adequately estimating the position of Islam in the world—including the strengths and weaknesses of Islam and of Muslims themselves, the dogma and political standing of Islam, and the relations of Islam with other religions. During these years, he emphasized the theme of unity among Muslims because he realized he was capable of influencing the situation through the publication of his mass-market essays.

Muhammad-Sodiq also recognized that his message was one that the Uzbek government would not fully endorse. He recalled that, when government representatives began negotiations with him about his return, he hoped that he would be given a certain freedom of action. But Muhammad-Sodiq most likely knew better than to have naive expectations. He must have held out little realistic expectation of complete freedom of action, but he also understood that his presence in Uzbekistan is itself a factor aiding the integration of Muslims.

Many Uzbek authorities also recognize Muhammad-Sodiq's authority among believers. Abdulaziz Kamilov, a former foreign minister and now Uzbek ambassador to Washington, has always maintained reasonably close relations with him. Through relatives, many high-ranking officials from the prosecutors' office also maintain decent relations with the former mufti. But these are mainly "diplomatic relations" designed for public consumption.

Although distance between the authorities and Muhammad-Sodiq remains, the regime no longer pressures him openly. The Uzbek government also alternates between warmth and chill in its attitude toward their most prominent cleric. Authorities have been irritated recently by Muhammad-Sodiq's numerous interviews with foreign correspondents in which he frankly criticized the religious policy of the state.

From time to time even the government authorities make use of Muhammad-Sodiq. He has been valuable, for example, in the fight against the radical ideology of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which he honestly opposes because it threatens the hierarchical and institution-based Islam with which he has been associated all his life. Hizb ut-Tahrir also advocates an ideological rejection of Hanafi Islam and the remaining three schools of law.

Muhammad-Sodiq also went on television on May 20, 2005, just days after Uzbek government troops opened fire on protesters in Andijan. On television, Muhammad-Sodiq spoke out against Akramiya, founded by Akram Yuldashev, a group that is believed to have been involved in the Andijan unrest. Muhammad-Sodiq strongly criticized Yuldashev, saying: "Who is this Akram? No one! He is illiterate in both religious and secular matters."

Certainly Muhammad-Sodiq does have credibility among believers, which is useful for the regime to tap into—credibility that extends beyond Uzbekistan and Central Asia and into a broader Muslim community. Muhammad-Sodiq maintains this credibility with a great deal of forethought. He has chosen not to work in the government's agencies for religious control. Thus, no key posts have been offered to him. And, realizing his own international reputation, he would never accept anything less than a key post.

A regular critic of Uzbekistan's limited number of religious educational establishments, its declining numbers of mosques, and a state policy that is consciously designed to impede the spread of Islam, Muhammad-Sodiq cooperates with the state only when it suits his broader mission of bringing people back to the faith. His preferred "weapon" for doing this is a broadly based, large-scale movement for improved Islamic education of the masses. For this reason he publishes in the vernacular of ordinary Muslims in order to raise their level of religious education.

Muhammad-Sodiq realizes that his international authority will rise when he presents himself to the Islamic world, secular Russia, and the secular West as an intermediary between Muslims and the representatives of other confessions. So far, he is playing this role brilliantly. He has been able to convince many diplomats, international figures, and politicians who work with Central Asia that he is a carrier of a peaceful and controlled Islam; thus, they can rely on him as an independent and influential figure. Muhammad-Sodiq does indeed represent the interests of the Muslims of Uzbekistan and a solid part of the region, but it should not be forgotten that he has his own interests, and he is quite calculating in his pursuit of respectable standing with the West and with Russia.

Thus, he quite readily accepts invitations to various events and conferences on topics like conflict resolution that are held in the United States, Europe, Russia, and other countries. He immediately left for Russia when, for example, a group of armed Chechens stormed the old Dubrovka theater and took hundreds hostage in October 2003; he intended to be on hand during negotiations with the terrorists. At the time he was not camera shy; he gave many interviews and seemed to enjoy the attention. Although he did not negotiate an end to the siege (special forces stormed the theater to end the standoff), he raised his authority another notch.

He subsequently said he had never believed the negotiations would be successful but—for the image of Russia's Muslims—it was necessary for him to be there and to try. He said that the armed hostage takers spoke to him politely, but their understanding of Islam was quite limited.

His most cherished ambition is not to be on television in Russia; it is instead to create an independent council of ulema in Uzbekistan that he would chair and then expand to a level covering all of Central Asia. Muhammad-Sodiq's most basic goal is political, not religious. It is to achieve peace among the Muslims in the country, the region, and the Muslim world in general—the convergence and unification of Muslims.

Supporters and Detractors of Muhammad-Sodiq

Muhammad-Sodiq's main students and followers are composed of the members of the younger generation whom he taught in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These students, who were later sent to study in various centers in Arabic countries, include Ayub-khon Khamidov (a lecturer at the Highest Islamic Institute), Muzaffar Kamilov (the deputy rector in the state Institute of Oriental Studies), Azam-khon Kayumov (a lecturer at the state Institute of Oriental Studies), and Rahmatulla

qori (imam of a mosque in Tashkent and at the same time lecturer at the State Islam University in Tashkent) as well as many imams in Tashkent, Andijan, and elsewhere.

They are very often guests at his home, and almost all participate in the dissemination of his ideas and writings. He receives a dozen or more visitors daily, and they sometimes include officials who are close to the president but who are also sympathetic to Muhammad-Sodiq's ideas regarding religious problems. Many were his students.

Among his main rivals are Abdulatif Kasym Andijani, Muhammad-Sodiq Kasym Andijani, and some Tashkent ulema, but their level of authority in the international arena is significantly lower than Muhammad-Sodiq's. The main complaint of the conservatives is that Muhammad-Sodiq, while calling for peace, is consciously or unconsciously aiding the Wahhabis. Meanwhile, the "Wahhabis" are convinced that, on the contrary, Muhammad-Sodiq is too tied to the Hanafi conservatives.

In recent years, members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Akramiya, and other such religious-political groups have also gone on the attack against Muhammad-Sodiq. Hizb ut-Tahrir even wrote him several letters—both open and private—with accusations that he, with all of his authority, should have "joined the struggle against Karimov's regime" and helped with its downfall. Muhammad-Sodiq does not respond to such attacks. He says, "They can read an answer in my essays on my site (www.Islam.uz) or in my books."

The majority of the faithful community regards Muhammad-Sodiq with respect, and his authority is growing, which is stimulating jealousy among Uzbekistan's official religious establishment.

PART TWO: MAJOR WORKS OF MUHAMMAD-SODIQ

Muhammad-Sodiq is considered by many to be a great orator, but he prefers to convey his thoughts and ideas in writing. Thus, few recordings of his speeches are known. There is a known recording of his sermons from 1989 to 1993, and it is in them that we see quite radical positions and arguments, especially concerning the communists and "their henchmen." In the past few years, a few video recordings of his appearances have been made, often at weddings, private anniversaries, and other celebrations, including some in which my associates have participated. At these events he does not broach the subject of politics. At only one such appearance did he speak of the "harmful affairs of Hizb ut-Tahrir." He always closes with the same call for all Muslims to unite and advance their common cause.

He is the author of more than one hundred popular articles and more than forty books and brochures—a record among the theologians of Central Asia and the Caucasus. He is unquestionably the most prolific scholar in the region. His writings are immensely popular among Uzbek-speaking Muslims. Some fifty thousand copies of his most recent book, *Religion Is Edification*, were distributed, and the second edition is already in the works. In this book, and in his other recent publications, he styles himself as "Sheikh" Muhammad-Sodiq Muhammad-Yusuf.

In all of his books since 2002 he writes the following credo at the beginning, in the style of an Islamic movement that is seeking to transcend the divisions within the faith:

Our motto: We aspire toward a true faith, toward a pure Islam, we desire to study the Koran and Sunna in order to follow them, and we want to spread the study of Islam. We want to follow the true Mujahids—the blessed ancestors [as-Salaf as-Salihun]; we want to spread toleration and brotherhood (of Muslims). We also want to eradicate religious illiteracy and to put a stop to our contradictions and splits, to purge our fanaticism, and our sinful affairs.

His main works include:

“Commentary on the Quran [Tafsir-i Hilal]” (2003);

Hadiths and Life [Hadis va hayot] (begun in 1995 in Osh; completed in 2000 in Tashkent);

“Islam and Democracy [Islom va demokratiya]” (1995, Osh);

“The Sunni Credo of Faith [Sunnii aqidalar]” (2004, Tashkent);

The Essence of Contradictions [Ikhtiloflar hakida] (1995, Osh; reissued in expanded form in 2000 in Tashkent); and

Religion Is Edification [Din Nasihatdir] (2005, Tashkent)

“Commentary on the Quran [Tafsir-i Hilal]”

In keeping with Hanafi tradition, Muhammad-Sodiq rejects the literal, external interpretation of Quranic verses (*ayat*) and hadith; he carefully studies the historical context and the circumstances in which the particular verse was written or the hadith formulated. Thus, following in the tradition of classical *tafsir* writers such as at-Tabari and al-Baydawi, Muhammad-Sodiq also follows the contemporary or reformed style of Muslim exegesis.

He argues that, in the conditions of the contemporary world and given the development of civilization, the literal interpretation of *ayat* will not only repel youth from Islam but will send Muslims back to the Middle Ages. In Islamic studies, these methods are called historically causative.

At the same time, Muhammad-Sodiq believes that the commentator should not only directly interpret a particular verse and extrapolate its meaning to fit the contemporary situation but also carefully study the reasons behind the verse and the exact cause of why the verse was sent as well as compare the historical circumstances of these verses.

This is how, for example, Muhammad-Sodiq approaches the verses in the Quran about jihad. He writes that in the circumstances of the times in which they were written these verses were appropriate, but the invocation of jihad in today’s world should be done not by individuals but by the decision of a council of ulema of the entire Islamic world.

***Hadiths and Life* [Hadis va hayot]**

Muhammad-Sodiq develops similar ideas regarding the hadiths in his treatise, *Hadiths and Life*. Here, along with a discussion of theological problems, Muhammad-Sodiq addresses the question of relationships of Muslims with others of different confessions as well as the status of Muslim communities in Islamic governments.

In interpreting the well-known hadith of the Prophet—“The Muslims who live among polytheists are alien to me”—Muhammad-Sodiq demonstrates that this was said only in reference to the payment for the death of a group of *ashab* [companions of the Prophet] who died (at Hasam) during prayer.

The author adds that, in the past as well as in the present, Muslims have lived and will continue to live among members of different confessions, and they should look for ways to interact with them. Many positive examples of this interaction, he maintains, can be found in the Sunna.

Here, as in other essays, Muhammad-Sodiq similarly tries to explain to the reader that dogmatic variation in law and in ritual is a natural occurrence and that these variations should not be an object of disputes or protests. He maintains that the external disputes of the Sunni Muslims should not serve as the basis of jurisprudence among Muslims.

For this reason Muhammad-Sodiq opposes political parties in Islam, as he sees them as fueling schisms within Islam. Similarly, he decries neo-Islam as an unacceptable product of the Western systems. He also actively opposes groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Akramiya.

Islam does not contradict some of the pillars of democracy as they are understood in the West, he says, but Islam does offer an interpretation of democracy well suited to the religious life of Muslims. No “foreign” or alien view of democracy should be forced upon Muslims, he argues.

Religion Is Edification [Din Nasihatdir]

This book was published by a government-owned press that prints nothing without special permission. Sheik Minavarov, the Committee for Religious Affairs, and the Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Uzbekistan officially authorized the book’s publication through recommendation letter no. 127.

The title is a quotation from a well-known hadith, and Muhammad-Sodiq declared at the beginning:

Our slogan: we are striving for true faith, pure Islam ... we want to spread the teachings of Islam ... we want to promote tolerance and Muslim brotherhood. We also want to destroy religious illiteracy, heal our internal divisions, destroy fanaticism, and cease our sinful deeds.

It is not a secret that very abominable events, wars and conflicts are taking place throughout the world. And we know well that there are some aspects related to Muslims as well. We also know that different people do much to stop these conflicts. To reach this noble goal many actions are being taken to promote a dialogue of religions, civilizations, different cultures, regions and countries. And there are already some fruits of this dialogue.

The Islamic world, an inseparable part of the whole world, has suffered most from these troubling world events. Energetic work is being done to stop conflicts, to correct past mistakes. The Islamic world condemns the mistakes of those who step outside religious boundaries—those who are too militaristic, those who set out with arms. But it is not enough for the Muslims to condemn these events. The calls have been made for Muslims to establish an internal dialogue, to do away with internal contradictions, and to find a correct solution to problems together.

The text continues with a description of how Muslims in Central Asian regions have these same problems; and Muhammad-Sodiq adds that as many people as possible should participate in the process of reconciliation.

Muhammad-Sodiq writes that he was not always so active in reconciling Muslims in the region because he was busy doing other things. Recently, however, he decided that the task of unification would be his life's work and legacy, and many Muslims from feuding groups sought his insight.

He then writes that this book is dedicated to making sense of the thorny issues he has grappled with for years, with the hope of resolving and reconciling them. Regarding these issues, he feels responsible before Allah. According to the stipulations of faith, he should not and cannot hide his knowledge from others.

Muhammad-Sodiq writes of the mission of prophets, specifically those who were contemporaries of Muhammad, at the time when the verses of the Quran were sent by Allah forbidding internal strife and polytheism.

One should not overwhelm newcomers to the religion, he argues. Instead, one should explain all stipulations and requirements in simple form. This is the only way for Muslims to promote Islam throughout the world.

In the chapter, "Faithfulness to the Precepts of Allah," Muhammad-Sodiq explains several hadiths that require believers to beware of spreading information that could be harmful to the unity of a community. He cautions that "enemies of Islam try to exploit contradictions and splits among Muslims," echoing the age-old boilerplate phobia of elusive external enemies, which tragically distracts attention from the fact that Muslims are their own worst enemy.

Muhammad-Sodiq then spends four short chapters summarizing the period of the rule of the first four caliphs. His point is that many contradictions among Muslims during those early caliphates were overcome thanks to decisive actions, many of them military. The author again attributes the killings of two caliphs (Usman and Ali) to the "enemies of Islam" who triumph because Muslims had abandoned the covenants of Allah and the Prophet.

Muhammad-Sodiq then considers the issue of defining what constitutes a Muslim apostate, one who has left the religion. He says that an apostate is one who allows, or causes, fractures within the community to fester.

In the chapter, "Growing Problems and Internal Conspiracies [*fitna*] among Muslims," Muhammad-Sodiq observes that the number of conspiracies and problems among Muslims has grown recently:

The number of organizations, movements, and parties that include such religious terms as "Faith," "Islam," "Jihad," and "Grace" in their names has grown recently. The names and charters of these parties and movements are different, but the goal is the same—to obtain influence, using Islam as a cover.

These organizations weaken Islam and the authority of Islamic scholars, or ulema, he says. Muhammad-Sodiq then quotes the respected Arab theologian Muhammad Said Ramadan al-Buti on the issue of "new Islam" that is appearing in our time:

This is not the religion sent by Allah. This is a religion that comes from the heads and ideas of some people. This religion contradicts Islamic norms and Sharia. . . . Today we are witnesses to events in the Islamic world that are the result of these "new messengers [of Allah]." It was not always this way. They want their Islam to replace the Islam we knew before and the Islam that was sent to us by Allah. . . . They claim that their Islam is based on *fiqh* [Islamic jurisprudence]. But it is not so. . . . Killing Muslims, they claim, through acts of suicide in planes full of innocent people is a dictate of Sharia.

Muhammad-Sodiq writes that he could provide hundreds of such quotes, but he limits himself to the statement that this new Islam, having laid the foundation for direct contradictions, has brought much grief to Muslims and has caused irreparable damage to Islam itself.

In the chapter, “The Situation in Our Region,” Muhammad-Sodiq contemplates the Islamization of the lands of Central Asia, and he discusses some famous theologians of the region, including al-Bukhari and al-Termizi. He addresses the period of colonization, and especially the Bolshevik regime, as a period when Islam incurred irreparable damage. He illustrates his statements by using the actions of Rano Abdullayeva, who was the secretary for ideology of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan. She ordered, for example, the reburial in a different location of the body of a pilgrim to Mecca, someone who had completed hajj.

In the current period of independence, he praises the new attitude toward religion. Yet the return to religion has not been without problems: the lack of educated theologians, theologians’ excessive conservatism in small communities, and the activity of foreign emissaries of neo-Islam—in other words, religious-political parties from Muslim countries.

Because many people, especially young people, were “longing for Islam,” foreign emissaries took advantage of their longing to instill the ideas of neo-Islam. This created many contradictions within Islamic communities on a local level because many Muslims did not understand the situation and could not tolerate the emissaries.

In the chapter, “Hizb ut-Tahrir,” Muhammad-Sodiq borrows from prominent reference books published in Arab countries his arguments against the position of the groups promoting the new Islam; however, he almost never provides citations. He also refers to Hizb ut-Tahrir literature, but again he borrows most of his quotes from Arab reference books, which were traditionally compiled.

Muhammad-Sodiq provides a short description of Hizb ut-Tahrir and its first leaders, and he follows with a dry recitation of Hizb ut-Tahrir’s political doctrines and attitudes toward issues of *fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence, straight from the reference books. He then refutes the positions he lays out, adding his own arguments. He finds it curious to say, for example, that Hizb ut-Tahrir, a party outlawed in almost all Muslim countries, finds refuge in London. “This makes one wonder,” he writes.¹²

He emphasizes that Hizb ut-Tahrir holds two positions that are at odds with mainstream Islam, and he cites this as proof that the group has left the faith: he says that Hizb ut-Tahrir wrongly denies that on Judgment Day, first, there will be suffering and, second, that the Messiah will appear in the forms of Jesus Christ and the False Messiah. Muhammad-Sodiq cites the Quran and Sunna to prove that these beliefs are in fact firmly rooted in Islamic dogma.

Further, he accuses Hizb ut-Tahrir of excessive rationalism, of “excessive belief in [the members’] own intellect, rather than belief in Allah.” Such beliefs, he says, contradict Islam:

Hizb ut-Tahrir claims that an unbeliever can be head of an Islamic state.¹³ This means that an unfaithful caliph could rule the caliphate. This raises suspicions of the present status of Hizb ut-Tahrir in some countries. It is possible that there are unbelievers among current, carefully concealed leadership. It looks like this fatwa is given by Hizb ut-Tahrir to satisfy these unbelievers. In the Islamic world, nobody ever gave such a fatwa.¹⁴

Hizb ut-Tahrir doctrine claims that an Islamic state can pay *jizya* [concession that nonbelievers living in an Islamic state must pay if they decide not to adopt Islam] to a state of unbelievers. This completely contradicts the directions of Allah. This fatwa is an actual

continuation of the previous, and apparently reflects the secret goals of the Hizb ut-Tahrir leadership, and it is aimed at deceiving Muslims.

Hizb ut-Tahrir doctrine also claims that it is permitted to fight under a flag of a state of unbelievers, if that state is at war with another state, and if this meets the interests of Muslims. I wonder what simple members of Hizb ut-Tahrir would say, those members, who blame all states of “unbelievers” for everything? These states are not ruled by unbelievers, they do not pay *jizya* to unbelievers, and they do not say that you could and should fight for the interests of a state of unbelievers.

Muhammad-Sodiq is especially angered by Hizb ut-Tahrir’s promotion of jihad and martyrdom as *shahid* (martyrs) through suicide, although he makes very few theological arguments. Instead, he favors emotional arguments:

Hizb ut-Tahrir calls not to be afraid of death and to sacrifice oneself “on the path of Allah” by all possible means, including suicide. However, when it comes to them, they do their deeds undercover. . . . So, why don’t they want to make their names known? Why do they want to stay alive, while they are prepared to send their ordinary members to death? Why do they call on their followers to conduct their propaganda openly, while they are in hiding? They say to their followers: “Go and kill yourself for Allah’s sake! Then you will become *shahid*.” So, why don’t they want to do it themselves?

Muhammad-Sodiq writes that Hizb ut-Tahrir exploits most Muslims’ pervasive ignorance of the complete Sharia. Instead, Hizb ut-Tahrir invents stories, ostensibly true, such as the tale of a certain man by the name of Abd al-Karim who arrives in Tashkent and discovers that, although people in Arab countries long ago ceased to believe in the possibility of a unified caliphate, in Central Asia conditions are prime for realizing this idea.

Muhammad-Sodiq writes that these legends appear because people are too simple and naive to question them; he bemoans ordinary people’s inability to see things for what they are:

These legends continue to be created throughout the whole Muslim world. This one recently appeared, given the events in Iraq: Muslims, led by Saddam Hussein, will overcome Americans and declare a Muslim caliphate, and soon the whole world will become ours. Nobody thinks.

Muhammad-Sodiq writes contemptuously:

. . . Saddam Hussein was the most prominent enemy of Islam, he killed ulema like sheep, and he harshly suppressed any Islamic parties. He himself was head of an atheistic state, and everybody knows that well.

Muhammad-Sodiq notes that Hizb ut-Tahrir claims to be alone among Muslims in calling for *dawat* [roughly, evangelical Islam] although the group understands *dawat* as political rather than religious propaganda. How, Muhammad-Sodiq wonders can Hizb ut-Tahrir call for the spread of Islam without a solid understanding of the basic tenets of Islam?

In the chapters, “Who Is to Blame?” and “What Is to Be Done?” Muhammad-Sodiq offers a kind of homage to Nikolai Chernyshevsky, the Russian intellectual who posed the questions in *What Is to Be Done?* in the tendentious years before the Bolshevik revolution.

Muhammad-Sodiq answers the first question as to how the current crisis occurred, saying that he as well as all Muslims are themselves to blame and that local Muslims should think critically and carefully about what is offered to them as “the truth.”

He similarly says that responsibility for the hideous events of the recent past lies with all Muslims—more with some, less with others. Lessons should be taken from past suffering, not least because the correction of mistakes is a requirement of Sharia.

Muhammad-Sodiq cites the book, *Jami' bayani-l-'ilm va fadlihi*, published in Beirut in 1998 by the Arabic theologian, Imam Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, and writes that common believers should follow the advice of their ulema when in doubt. Muhammad-Sodiq states that societies must place great importance on cultivating and educating truly wise ulema, and he uses himself as an example, a point he makes obliquely:

Only those ulema can become true examples for us who have mastered the knowledge of Allah, who follow it, and themselves serve as an example of genuine faith and moderation. They can lead a society down the correct path and preserve its unity. And unity is a very important factor... Therefore we should try to train such ulema whom people will follow and who will strictly adhere to their positions... In a society where there are no such ulema or where they are inactive, various other foreign communities or parties will certainly appear. Moreover, we should study the state of religious affairs in the society and provide conditions for correct development.

Muhammad-Sodiq clearly strives to show that he has a clear sense of how to improve the religious situation in Uzbekistan and that he personally is in a position to determine how things should be done. Through these excerpts, one can see Muhammad-Sodiq trying to demonstrate that he is prepared to cooperate with the government of Islam Karimov, although because of Karimov's rather inflexible positions and views, sweeping goals, and allegedly power-hungry character, such cooperation would likely benefit Muhammad-Sodiq, not the government.

Muhammad-Sodiq's fundamental goal is the gradual but full Islamization of Uzbek society. For him, the spread of Islam cannot begin with explaining to people complicated questions of religion and its requirements. One should first study the state of a society and its receptivity to religion, and then one should conduct the spread of Islam gradually. This keeps from putting people in difficult situations.

This formulation mirrors the concept of jihad, except that jihad calls for controlling a certain territory first, then imposing Islam. Muhammad-Sodiq's formulation sees territorial gains coming hand-in-hand with the spread of religion.

Muhammad-Sodiq prescribes certain rules for the spread of Islam:

- One should keep order and peace and accept necessary compromise.
- One should not deviate from the precepts of Islam, which requires the regular close reading of Islamic scholars' work.
- One should reject formulaic assistance from abroad.

In the final chapter, "Good News [Yakhshilil bashorati]," Muhammad-Sodiq offers a hymn to himself. He writes that when he was forced to leave his motherland he came back occasionally and learned that many Muslims had come to his house, asking him to return:

As my wife told me, after the conversations I had with many people during my brief visits home, many people had experienced positive change. Gradually, the number of meetings and conversations increased and issues of various new religious groups, parties, and associations were raised for discussion... Sometimes parents brought their children to be shown a true path. Sometimes Muslims addressed me with bureaucratic problems they could not resolve. Scholars, too, started coming to me.

He recalls how a group of imams from Samarkand asked him in one such session why educated people join uneducated groups. Muhammad-Sodiq writes that he responded that young people's education lacks structure. It is not based on thorough, sophisticated study of religious texts. Without deep, full knowledge, those who are educated are in fact not educated at all, and they frequently become victims of propaganda:

I heard especially many positive responses to my book, *Hadiths and Life*. For many it was news. Some people who read this book declared that they were leaving parties, various groups. And although this book did not have a word on various groups and parties, it had the right influence on people, and we realized how strong people's quest for true knowledge is. And therefore, our ulema should speak of our religion in simple and accessible language.

Then we published a book on contradictions [*The Essence of Contradictions* (Ikhtiloflar hakida)]. This small book became a subject of big debate and discussion. There were people who enjoyed it, people who criticized it without reading it, and those who begged not to read it. There were even people who were indifferent. However, thanks to Allah, the majority enjoyed it.

Muhammad-Sodiq then recounts that a fan called him at home to say that, if his book had been read earlier, the 1999 Tashkent bombings would not have taken place, an observation offered in ironic jest.

He also writes that someone who did not like *The Essence of Contradictions* left a couple of leaflets at his gate. The leaflets said that, instead of mutual understanding, this book only increased the sense of internal contradictions among Muslims, and that, in reality, ulema themselves cause these contradictions. Muhammad-Sodiq told some ulema about these leaflets. They responded that this was partly true, that the book did cause some contradictions, but only among adversaries—the Wahhabis—as they consider only themselves to be true Muslims.

Muhammad-Sodiq also claims that arrested members of Hizb ut-Tahrir were given this book to read. They then repented and came back to local Hanafis.

In the conclusion, Muhammad-Sodiq argues that every Muslim should remain with the Sunni *mazhab*, or theological-juridical school, and he speaks of advantages of the local *murid* school of the Hanafi tradition: "Many other ulema came from our region. Among them is the famous imam an-Nasafi, who wrote the book, *Al-Aka'id an-Nasafi*. Another famous scholar Taftazani, who wrote the commentary to an-Nasafi's work.... In studies of our religion we should follow the ideas of our blessed ancestors." Here he means the Hanafi school of thought.

Muhammad-Sodiq closes the book with the following invocations:

Ulema should be respected and followed.
Special attention should be given to the upbringing of children.
Beware of becoming members of different groups and parties.
Strengthen peaceful coexistence between people.
Serve your motherland and people.

PART THREE: POLITICAL AGENDA OF MUHAMMAD-SODIQ

One of the major questions facing Uzbekistan is what role to accord Islam in this secular state, as the country's current rulers believe that the state must determine the role of religion in society. Muhammad-Sodiq would like to see this relationship changed. But as the following section details, he is opposed to direct confrontation with the state, favoring an evolutionary approach in which a society replete with believers expects the state to reflect its will.

Is Muhammad-Sodiq a Moderate?

Muhammad-Sodiq enjoys particular respect for his theological literacy and erudition; he is an intellectual who constantly strives to improve himself. He is well-read and actively seeks to read important contemporary works in many languages. He reads secular literature—mostly periodicals on politics, history, philosophy, and oriental studies—in their Russian or Arabic translations. He knows some German and has studied English, but my Uzbek colleagues are not aware that he reads in these languages. Their perception is that Muhammad-Sodiq reads translations or summaries of Western-language literature for its possible use in conversations or disputes with the secular elite.

One colleague describes being present at numerous meetings between Muhammad-Sodiq and foreign delegations, where the Uzbek cleric sought to “flash his erudition” by casually citing the most recent article on politics or religion in the visitors' home countries. Such displays have the capacity to impress.

One American scholar was reportedly stunned to hear Muhammad-Sodiq say that he was familiar with Samuel Huntington and the clash of civilizations; Muhammad-Sodiq added that in his opinion such a clash can occur only if politicians are in error. Only after the American visitor left did it become clear that Muhammad-Sodiq had not read Huntington's work but instead had read several articles in Arabic about it. His secular erudition is, it seems, predominantly secondary.

Certainly his aim during audiences with Westerners is to use the rhetoric of the “peaceful nature of Islam, its natural tolerance.” This is also his strategy during meetings with Uzbek officials. During such meetings, he uses the entire discourse, with its ever ready clichés about Islam acknowledging Old Testament prophets and Jesus as legitimate envoys of God. Such references are consistent with Muhammad-Sodiq's self-image as theologian and politician. He understands that his authority as a politician depends on his authority as a theologian.

There is no question that Muhammad-Sodiq is not simply a politician; he is an Islamic politician who tries to express the position of Muslims. His purpose is the ideological, theological, and political strengthening of Muslims, and he views the advancement of his own personal ambitions as consistent with this.

He does not sanction the use of violence to attain this goal. He said once, purportedly with great sincerity, that violence and terrorism only discredit Islam. This religion, he argued, has adequate appeal to “conquer the world without violence and weapons.” He is confident—during discussions among his close circle, at least—that in the distant future Islam will become the only religion in the world.

Muhammad-Sodiq's theological-political views are between conservatism and the so-called conservative modernism. As an adherent of contemporary Syrian theologian Muhammad Said

Ramadan al-Buti, whom he often cites, Muhammad-Sodiq speaks against the division of Islam into political parties and movements. He argues that this contributes to the dispersion of Islam's intellectual and physical forces and interferes with real unification and rapprochement of Muslim states. He fears that the "conditions for a political union of Muslim countries are disappearing before new forms of colonization of the Muslims."

Both Muhammad-Sodiq and al-Buti speak in favor of Muslims' rapprochement and unification among all Sunnis.¹⁵

In conversations, Muhammad-Sodiq's conservative modernist views show a remarkable similarity to those of Jamal ad-Dina Afghani (who died in 1898) although Muhammad-Sodiq denies any external influence on his thinking except for books about Islam. In his answer to a question of whether he had read Afghani's book, *Refutation of Materialists*, Muhammad-Sodiq said that he had indeed read it and completely agreed with Afghani.

Muhammad-Sodiq also agreed that Muslims must embrace technical progress and master technical knowledge. This means they must be more open to the West but also preserve their religion, values, and ways of life.

When asked how he disagreed with Afghani, Muhammad-Sodiq said he disagreed in many ways but, in particular, with what he perceives to be Afghani's rejection of Sunna. Moreover, Muhammad-Sodiq says, Afghani's ideals of parliamentary government and secular constitutionalism are borrowed from the British.¹⁶ Muhammad-Sodiq believes that Afghani was shaped by orientalists, whom he does not like. To a considerable degree, Muhammad-Sodiq shares the opinion of Edward Said, whose book, *Orientalism*, Muhammad-Sodiq read in an Arabic translation.

Muhammad-Sodiq would like to see a return of the Muslim caliphate, which he believes is the ideal political structure, but he realizes it cannot be restored now because of the internal strife within Muslim societies.¹⁷ Muhammad-Sodiq understands the present political and economic state of Islamic countries. He sensibly evaluates Muslims' real potential for technical progress and influence over international policy.

In Muhammad-Sodiq's view, Muslims should preserve the image of Islam as a peaceful religion, strengthen traditional Islam, and unify around the idea of Sunni unity. He argues that Muslims must increase their knowledge of religion and religious traditions—this is their first obligation—but they should also master the secular sciences. Only on this basis, Muhammad-Sodiq believes, is there a chance to preserve and strengthen the Muslim community (*umma*) spiritually, politically, and ideologically. But this can occur only if internal divisions within the community are healed. Thus, he objects to Islam using religious political parties or movements, which in his mind serve to divide and weaken Muslims.

It is not clear whether he would reverse himself on the question of political parties and movements if legal systems in the Muslim world changed, making Muslim political parties legal rather than illegal formations. Muhammad-Sodiq seems to understand that it is absolutely necessary to adapt to the contemporary political realities in the world and inside Islamic countries, but he sees this adaptation within a conservative framework.

In his book *The Essence of Contradictions* [Ikhtiloflar hakida], he writes that there is no need to "change Islam and its religious traditions" in order to change and adapt to the realities of the

modern world; it is only necessary to more effectively use the tool of fatwa. This is why he embodies conservative modernism.

Muhammad-Sodiq and Islamic Unification

For Muhammad-Sodiq, the biggest problem is the unification of Muslims, both dogmatically and politically, within the confines of traditional Hanafi conservative discourse and in a way that allows him to reach out to the Hanafi Wahhabis in Uzbekistan.¹⁸ He, along with many other members of the theological unification movement, is certain that if such unification occurs Muslims' international and economic problems will find new sources for solution. Only then will Muslims be successful at resisting neocolonialism and the "pernicious influence of the West."

Muhammad-Sodiq is not the originator of the idea of Islamic unification; he is simply Central Asia's most recent and most prominent advocate. The drive for religious unification originated in the eighteenth century with Muslim theologians who became leaders of the religious and political movements, and it evolved during the twentieth century. These movements usually were a reaction to the colonial and neocolonial politics of the West. The theological core of religious unification rests in the continuous struggle to overcome the divisions in Islam that have formed through the separate theology-jurisprudence schools (*mazhab*) and their local forms of existence.

All forms of political Islam (including extremism and terrorism) are directly linked to the ideology of unification. The political goal of unification is to unite Muslims under a single banner before the expansion of other nations. This has been the aim of the Wahhabi movement of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, which became the state ideology of Saudi Arabia, as well as the ideological searches and activity of organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, that have emerged more recently. The Muslim Brotherhood in turn gave rise to the majority of the religious-political movements, parties, and groups of the Muslim world, including those of the extremist and radical sort. National or regional unification (for example, "the Arab world") was also often mentioned. Organizations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir often carried out operations on a larger scale; they are also based on the ideology of religious unification with a corresponding political credo: the reinstatement of a single caliphate of all Muslims.

For all these groups, the religious core remains the idea of a non-*mazhab*, so-called pure Islam that is based in most cases on the traditional Salafi idea of "initial, first-born" Islam as it existed in the time of the Prophet Muhammad.

In practice, instead of unification, movements and ideological currents of this sort have led to even greater dispersal; schisms; and political disorder, extremism, and radicalism. The majority of the contemporary Muslim theologians believe that this situation was caused by the reliance of these movements on differing theology-jurisprudence schools and ideological and political systems within Islam.

It is for this reason that a number of large inter-Islamic organizations (such as Rabita al-Islamiya), Islamic educational centers (such as al-Azhar University in Egypt), and many prominent Muslim theologians during the past few decades have advocated joint actions to overcome schisms within Islam or finally eliminate the differences among the *mazhab*.

For almost all contemporary efforts, the reformation of educational systems became the most practical lever for achieving unification and convergence, and for those adhering to the more liberal form of this ideology, the movement for reform of the educational system remains their predominant focus.

In countries such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan on the periphery of the Muslim world, these movements gained momentum through the process of re-Islamization, for which financing was initially state supported and made available by a number of Islamic organizations in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Libya. The curriculum these state-supported organizations helped develop and the literature that they made available were designed to impart to the post-Soviet countries a form of non-*mazhab* Sunni Islam. These educational materials advocated positions (sometimes called “neo-Islam”) distinct from (but not necessarily incompatible with) positions of Salafi thinkers. Unlike Salafi thinkers, who reject the legitimacy of the four schools of Sunni law, the state-supported educational materials argued that all four *mazhab* are equally legitimate and that religious unification through “sole, unified Sunnism” is adaptive to local conditions.

Political Nature of Islamic Unification

Over time Muhammad-Sodiq has become a strong advocate of this neo-Islam movement, the goals of which are to “uniformly defend the interests of Muslims” and “resist the local regimes of the unbelievers without bloodshed.”¹⁹

The idea of a single undivided Islam is a kind of mask designed to conceal far-reaching political goals. The political context of neo-Islamist ideas (which has been articulated in publications in recent years by contemporary Muslim leaders) is obvious. Behind such benign goals as “unification of Islam and Muslims,” are several objectives:

- Achieve a political convergence of all Muslims in secular and Islamic countries and regions through theological unification;
- Prepare the electorate of believers in countries with secular leadership (but with Muslim majorities) for the idea of a state status of Islam and, at a favorable moment, achieve this through majority pressure on the secular government; and
- Create new linkages between formerly secular countries and the leading Islamic countries in order to act as a “unified Islamic front” in the international arena.

According to Islamic intellectuals, the major obstacles to fulfilling these goals are:

- Divisions in nationality;
- Divisions in religious interpretations by various groups of Muslims;
- Political dissociation; and
- Preferences for secular models of living instead of Sharia norms.

In part because of the expanded linkages that developed between Muslims in Central Asia (and particularly in Uzbekistan) and the major Islamic educational and religious centers of such countries as Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Egypt (in large part through generous funding by Egypt), the foundation for neo-Islam in Central Asia has significantly strengthened.

The groups of believers who support neo-Islamists in Uzbekistan include the young generation of graduates of the Higher Islamic Institution in Tashkent and of the Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies. Since the end of the 1980s, Uzbek students from both institutions have been able to continue their education in religious centers and universities in Arab countries and in Turkey.

It was in these foreign institutions that most students' worldviews and theological positions were formed on the basis of the ideas of religious unification. Even materials in such seemingly neutral subjects as Arabic philology were presented (via recommended readings or studied texts) to suggest the ideas of unified (that is, without *mazhab*) Islam.

After the scholars returned to Central Asia, practically everyone joined the system of religious education, at times in secular institutions such as the Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies. Maintaining the views learned abroad, they began to influence their homeland, its educational process, and their students' views of the world.

Some of these scholars have been recruited as consultants, experts, and aides to government offices. Some have become government advisers in religious matters in the administration of Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies. Some have taken positions on consultative boards of the State Committee on Religion and in the office of the Adviser on Religion to the president of Uzbekistan. Government involvement has strengthened the position of the neo-Islamists and has shown the relative ineffectiveness of the Karimov regime's control of religious politics. These trends have occurred at a time when the secular education system has not offered a secular ideological alternative.

With time, the system of religious education has lost its Hanafi influence and has become much more focused on the ideology of religious unification. Muhammad-Sodiq is furthering this trend through the advice he gives to the coterie of young people surrounding him. Many of them have applied to the Oriental Department of the university and then to Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies. The evolution of views among this group did not occur during their study in secular institutions; on the contrary, they were able to influence the views of their classmates in the theological institutions and thus facilitate the Islamization of some students.

The new generation of neo-Islamists has found it easier to achieve open dialogue with Uzbekistan's remaining Wahhabis and fundamentalists, but not with Hizb ut-Tahrir. It is quite possible that this has been the result of a well-developed plan by Muhammad-Sodiq to strengthen the position of neo-Islamists in secular institutions.

Muhammad-Sodiq has also been a strong and effective advocate of nostrification—the state recognition in Uzbekistan of diplomas of the graduates from religious educational institutions that gives the graduates the ability to get jobs in police departments, the judiciary, and the educational system.

The increasing integration of the local neo-Islamists in Uzbekistan means that it is only a matter of time before the question of the political status of Islam as a form of official state religion is raised. For now neo-Islamists are a quiet and often even hidden form of opposition vis-à-vis both the government and Hanafi believers. Neo-Islamists consider Hanafis to be unduly conservative, and they condemn them for their traditional political conformist policies (for example, their readiness to openly cooperate with any state), political apathy of their followers, fidelity to the local forms of confessional Islam, and their recognition as legitimate the national ceremonies and customs. It is the traditional Hanafi Muslims who are the immediate target of the neo-Islamists, who use both their religious education and their secular education to carry out their opposition.

During the past few years the neo-Islamists have been quite successful in manipulating the state bodies that form religious policy as the Islamists have pressed for fatwas directed at the struggle against various local forms of Islam (the customs and rituals that come from local practice but are not part of Sharia law). At the same time, these same neo-Islamists openly attack the religious policy of the state as being in violation of traditional, local Hanafi Islam.

These same neo-Islamists are also strongly supportive of introducing the history of religion in the secular schools, and they also seek to control the curriculum taught so that it reflects a neo-Islamist agenda. Thus far they have been quite successful at this.

The neo-Islamists have found easy ways to contact international Islamic organizations, including financial organizations that pursue neo-Islamist political objectives in one form or another. In turn, the Islamic organizations find various ways of directing financial assistance to the neo-Islamists in Central Asia; for example, they finance madrassas, channel money into religious funds for the purchase of books, and pay the wages of trainees. Often this is done with the full support of the state; during a trip to Kuwait, President Karimov agreed to the Kuwaitis supplying tens of thousands of books to the libraries of Uzbekistan's official religious schools.

The secular Uzbekistan government does not oppose the goal of general Muslim literacy, which is often mentioned by Uzbek media and is pursued by religious personages. The government stance contributes to the perception of allowing the consciousness of the electorate to evolve, forming support for non-*mazhab* Islam and the creation of an Islamic state, and eventual joining with the proposed union of Islamic countries.

In Uzbekistan today many conditions are encouraging the growing trend toward desecularization. This is especially noticeable when the government hurriedly tacks on religious values and heritage to the official ideology and permits religious literature to be published practically without oversight. These developments could well stimulate the politicization of Islam.

Muhammad-Sodiq is working hard to develop his own fifth column. He advises all his students and followers to earn secular diplomas (especially in the Institute of Oriental Studies) and then get jobs in secular institutions. People who share his views are growing in number in parts of the bureaucracy and among the educational elite, and they already significantly influence the educational process in all madrassas, at the Islamic university, and elsewhere.

Muhammad-Sodiq avoids direct defiance of the Karimov regime and whenever possible acts through third parties. In the event of a full political crisis, however, he almost certainly would join the political opposition to the government. The state, in contrast, puts its faith in Muhammad-Sodiq's often-stated position that the use of force in religious and religious-political movements is unlikely to succeed in the current situation.

Although Muhammad-Sodiq will avoid physical violence, all other options are on the table. He has said obliquely and in private that he "does not wish to work with this government of unfaithful." He has refrained from making such remarks in public, however, because he understands that another personal exile would damage his standing as one of Uzbekistan's leading clerics.

NOTES

- ¹ In fact, it was said that the only person from Bukhara who managed to get a job at the madrassa during Sattimov's tenure was his barber, who was also purported to have been his homosexual lover.
- ² It would be interesting to talk with Gorbachev about his view of the former SADUM mufti.
- ³ Muhammad-Sodiq's comment here might have been for external consumption (not only foreigners but also secular Uzbeks) because today Muhammad-Sodiq is the recipient of literature coming into Uzbekistan from the Gulf states. Many in the Islamic community (for example, Muhammad-Sodiq Kasym Andijani, a leading Hanafi cleric in Andijan) view this literature as intolerant.
- ⁴ Usmanov, who died in 1997, was an atheist, but up to the moment of perestroika he was among the proponents of Islam for its cultural and ritual heritage. He was the head of the Oriental Studies Division in the Institute of Oriental Studies of Uzbekistan, which was launched in 1988, and in 1989 he was appointed first assistant to the adviser to the president on questions of religion.
- ⁵ Some of the views of the Mujaddidiya groups are developed in another paper of this three-paper series.
- ⁶ The first paper in this series, Martha Brill Olcott, *Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia*, Carnegie Paper 77 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), provides details of the relationship.
- ⁷ Details of these accusations appear in the paper on Islamic finance that I prepared last year.
- ⁸ Details are provided in *Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia*.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ The lack of detail about the facts of publication (place and year of publication) is frustrating for researchers.
- ¹¹ The calculation could have been aimed strategically at getting others to memorize his name.
- ¹² No doubt his statement is meant as a not-too-subtle jab at Great Britain for ostensibly aiding in the group's efforts to deepen splits among Muslims.
- ¹³ Neither Dr. Bahtiyar Babajanov of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences in Tashkent, who helped on this paper, nor I have found this assertion substantiated in the Hizb ut-Tahrir literature known to us.
- ¹⁴ According to Bahtiyar Babajanov, these fatwas were written by local ulema, to recognize, for example, the status of Nicholas II as a "khalifa." Local theologians wrote that rulers (sultans, padishahs) who were nonbelievers could be recognized as legitimate on the condition that they did not constrain the Muslim community and allowed it to retain its beliefs. Finally, it is the impression of a colleague based in Tashkent that Muhammad-Sodiq is more conservative and intolerant than Hizb ut-Tahrir, but such a conclusion depends upon the doctrinal criteria employed.
- ¹⁵ Muhammad-Sodiq does not mention Shiites in this context.
- ¹⁶ In reality, Afghani changed his political credo many times. After emigrating from Egypt to Paris, for example, he favored another political system as "optimum for the Muslims"—autocracy through a "just ruler."
- ¹⁷ He made this point during conversations with me as well as with my Uzbek interlocutor on a couple of occasions.
- ¹⁸ The Wahhabis are described in the first paper of this series, *Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia*.
- ¹⁹ The quotations are from Mohammad-Sodiq during his private conversations with my Uzbek interlocutor.

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