

**Statement by Abdurahim Polat
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**THE UZBEK OPPOSITION IS NOT UNITED, BUT NEVERTHELESS
FIGHTING AND THERE IS NO HELP FROM THE WEST**

We are going to talk about democratic changes in Uzbekistan. These changes must happen. The possibility of changes depends on many factors. I would like to underline three of them that we can influence.

I. The help of USA and the West to the Uzbek democrats

I am skeptical about the help of USA and the West. There are a lot of reasons for it. Let political scientists investigate it fully and make complete conclusions.

I will limit myself to two very small, but very characteristic examples.

1.1. Conference in DC. Several years ago I attended the Conference “Threat of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus” organized by a prominent University in DC. The main speaker was the professor from London. He made colorful and emotional speech without any significant evidences.

I asked him: “Do you really think that there is the threat. Can you give some more serious specific evidences?” Believe me, my question was not ironical. I really wanted to listen to some new facts.

His answer was: “Yes, I am sure. I heard about it from Radio BBC myself”.

There may not have been a Homeric laughter in the auditorium, but many people were giggling. It is another matter that after that event the organizer of Conference, famous professor Mr.Starr stopped sending me e-mail invitations for the similar pseudo-scientist arrangements.

I later heard more than once, even from the Americans, that the US President’s Administration, being misled by the conclusions of those kind of conferences and their organizers, is making wrong decisions, for example, regarding Uzbekistan.

I believe the reality is quite contrary. Those kinds of conferences were held to support the Administration’s decision.

This is nothing to be surprised about. I don’t know about other countries, but in Soviet Union this style of political technology was an ordinary method. That is why there was nothing for professor Frederick Starr to be ashamed about.

1.2. Another example. There were parliamentary elections in 2004 in Uzbekistan. “Birlik” Party announced its intention of participating in those elections and began to prepare for them one year before. We had financial problems for organizing training for our activists. Nevertheless, we solved these problems with great hardship.

We got to know absolutely by chance that NDI and IRI were conducting training for activists of small opposition groups in Tashkent. Our requests to them to help us did not find adequate respond. By the way, later, all trained groups refused to participate in elections. Only “Birlik” desperately fought to participate in elections.

Does somebody think that NDI and IRI did not know that “Birlik” is main opposition organization; only “Birlik” one year ago announced its intention to try to participate in the elections in any case, and was really preparing for the elections? Did they just forget to suggest us trainings that we needed? It is impossible. We think they knew everything. But their goal was just to pretend to help Uzbek democratic opposition. They were giving clear signal to Uzbek authorities that they would not have any deals with real and main opposition group.

Analyzing those two and other tens of similar examples, “Birlik” expressed its concerns in the Statement of Party regarding first anniversary of Andijan massacre. Here is quotation from it:

““Birlik” has always called for the skilful combination of the external pressure on Karimov’s government with integrating Uzbekistan in all international institutions, and thereby, promoting democratization of our country.

It is more important to render support to pro-democratic forces inside the country. However, it is impossible to speak about any appraisable interest from the West to the problems of democrats in Uzbekistan. One of the reasons of this, most likely, is an excessive fear of the West from possible rising of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia, if the existing regime weakens and democracy develops”. (The end of quotation)

“Birlik” has been understanding very well that, though the threat of religious extremism exists, it should not be exaggerated. The only real alternative to present authorities in Uzbekistan is a democratic opposition. I want the West know if “Birlik” came to power we will be able to handle the problem regarding with extremism too.

The existing reality is that, Uzbek opposition is strong enough. Karimov has been trying to destroy the opposition physically for 17 years, but he couldn’t do it and will not be able do it. Since Uzbek opposition has a root in the nation. There is no another example in the Central Asia. It is not an insult to the neighbors, but one has to acknowledge that Kazakh and Kirgiz oppositions are opposition of the so-called “nomenklatura”. In the fighting for power, a part of “nomenklatura” rised against another one under democratic slogans. I am not saying it is bad. I am just underlining existing fact.

Unfortunately, the West has opinion different from us, that is why to make it brief, we are very skeptical about the support of the West.

II. WHAT WE ARE DOING OURSELVES AND WHAT WE WILL DO

The serious democratic changes in Uzbekistan can take place just after democratic opposition would set on its firm/strong feet.

In 1992-1993 opposition was actually crushed down. Following years oppositionist were continuing their activity as human rights fighter and independent journalists. Beginning of the new century, the opposition began to re-establish itself. After the September 2001, when Uzbekistan became the partner of US in antiterrorist war, the process of rebuilding was going more effective.

In 2003 “Birlik” was fully re-created as political party at its Congress, which was held for first time for 10 years.

2.1. Registration of opposition parties. As democratic organization, we want to strengthen our position in country by participating in elections and enter to the parliament. In order to participate in elections, it is necessary to be a registered organization.

Beginning 2003 until May 2005, that is until Andijan events, “Birlik” 5 times filed documents for registration to the Ministry of Justice. We have been demonstrating for everybody that “Birlik” can organize not only meetings and demonstrations, but we can fight with existing authorities on legal space.

When we have fulfilled all requirements of the authorities regarding our documents, they have changed the Law On Political Parties in several days and raised the number of the necessary party members from 5 to 20 thousand. Karimov was sure that we never could raise number of our member to 20 thousand. But the during three next months, we have raised the number of the party members to 21 thousand. Right now we have 26 thousands registered members.

One has to understand what we did was almost impossible in dictatorship Uzbekistan but we did it.

During that process, Andijan massacre occurred and process of registration came to standstill. We are now resuming it.

However, OCSE, its Bureau on Democratization and Human Rights, and embassies of the western countries, including the USA, didn't do anything to help us. I am absolutely sure that before Andijan events when the relations between Uzbekistan and USA were rather high, USA could have helped significantly accelerate the process of registration or even complete it.

It is true Helsinki Commission was only organization, which tried to help us. The letter of Commission was sent to President Karimov. But in spite of my pleading request, the letter was not only about "Birlik". There were enumerated parties, which didn't even apply for registration. In other words, it sent Uzbek authorities wrong signal. First, senders of the letter do not even know the real situation, second, therefore the letter is not serious and of no insistence.

Imagine, now that USA will demand from Hezbollah to stop hitting by rocket not only Israel but Israel and, for example, Australia. Who will accept this kind of demands seriously? It would be signal for Hezbollah to continue to hit Israel.

So by this manner, the wrong signal was sent to Karimov's government.

2.2. Elections 2004. Despite of all obstacles of authorities, we will continue try to participate in any elections. Only by this way we will gain experience of democratic struggle and ultimately breach wall of obstacles.

I already mentioned about our effort during parliamentary elections campaign in 2004.

It is understandable; in order not to give us the chance to participate in the elections, the authorities had denied to register "Birlik" Party. But Uzbek laws actually allow participating in elections for unregistered organizations, using possibility of nominating independent candidates both to parliament, and to presidency, on behalf of so-called initiative groups of the electors. So we used this possibility during parliamentary elections.

When "Birlik" has declared about its intentions, the authorities immediately began to stir. They changed immediately the law, increasing minimal number of participants of initiative groups from 100 persons to 300.

Even under new conditions we began to prepare to nominate our candidates to Parliament at least in 30-40 districts. By the way there are 120 members of Low Chamber of Parliament and accordingly 120 electoral districts.

What happened then? In all districts where our activists had began organizing meetings of the initiative groups, employees of the local administrations, officers of the special services and police literally went house-by-house and warned the people that they should not go on meetings, organized by "Birlik", which is an enemy of the state and personally of president Karimov. The most active people were brought, often on night, to police and were threatened with arrest and other large troubles for members of their families.

In spite of frantic resistance of the authorities, we could hold meetings of initiative groups of electors in 10 electoral districts. So, 10 activists of "Birlik" were put forward as candidates to lower chamber of the Uzbek parliament, among them 2 vice-chairman's of the party - Pulat Ohunov (Andijan region) and Ismail Dadazhanov (Fergana area).

After that, the fighting went to the level of the election commissions, which had to register the candidates. In majority districts, where our candidates were put forward, election commissions simply scattered, they did not appear on work offices before the end of the registration period. Our appeals to Central Election Commission remained without consideration.

One has to understand what we did was almost impossible in dictatorship Uzbekistan but we did it.

Regrettably, OCSE, its Bureau on Democratization and Human Rights, and embassies of the western countries, including the USA, again remained deaf against our request to help us.

That days the high level delegation of Department of State visited Uzbekistan. Again, we requested, we begged the Chairman of Delegation to officially meet with both our nominees and representatives of Central Election Commission with aiming to promote process of registration of opposition candidates. But there was only one meeting with one of nominees in unofficial situation.

We have just one explanation for these kinds of facts. The West have been desperately scaring of possibility of raising Islamic extremism and prefers not to irritate Uzbek regime instead of helping Uzbek democrats.

2.3. Presidential Elections – 2007. In this difficult situation, when terrible dictatorship is withstanding against us, we are going to participate in upcoming presidential elections. The election campaign was beginning with a statements of “Birlik” which called all opposition groups to be united and participate in election with common candidate. Now all groups except small fraction of “Erk” Party support this proposal. I think there will not be a big problem and the united opposition will choose presidential candidate within several months.

We are very worried, will the West and USA help us in this hard period. What help do we need?

Because of all our previous even tiny requests didn’t find adequate response, now I am very careful.

First. We are going to hold the All-opposition Convention either in one countries of CIS or East Europe or USA. We need help, from getting permission of country where the Convention will be held to covering some of the expenses.

Second. It is impossible even to think about democracy and democratic changes without free mass media. This matter becomes vital in connection with upcoming presidential elections.

There is only one independent from government publication which have been continuously publishing during 10 last year – the opposition Journal “Harakat”. It is public-political, social-economic and human rights publication.

The circulation of this bimonthly journal is 3 thousand per issue. But it is important that practically whole circulation spreads in Uzbekistan.

Its circulation is insufficient for country with population 26 million people, especially on the eve of elections. Now we are going to increase its circulation up to 20 thousands per issue and apply to US organizations to help cover extra expenses. But we are not sure that we will get adequate respond again. I don’t know can Helsinki Commission support us in this case.

III. ABOUT OF UNITY AND DISUNITY OPPOSITION

I am aware that many people like to talk about the disunity of the Uzbek opposition. Of course, who can image unity of democratic and radical Islamic opposition?

Yes, there are some opposition groups, which are sometimes using democratic phraseology, but they are not democratic in principle. One of the thus group is fraction of “Erk” Party leading by Salay Madaminov. All other groups are united and as I talked above they are going to the presidential elections together.

Why we have been considering this group rather extremist than democratic? Although there are a lot of examples, I will very short and give just one of them.

Many people knew the statement of chairman of this fraction Salay Madaminov/Muhammad Salih, published in the newspaper “Erk”: “We have to raise our youth generation in that way, that they have to go to death without thinking, if order was given by the name of Allah”. Does it not seem by the words of the leader of this party that it was Usama bin Laden himself speaking?

I think Allah would be against of such stating of the problem. He gave the people a head and to live wisely using it is more correct interpretation of Islamic values.

I am agreeing now with people, who say it was written a long time ago. We have to live with today's problems without looking back; we have to look forward.

In my hand the article, which are written these days. More precisely, June 26, 2006. Name of the article is: "We need the Savior".

It is very boring paper. I will give just short content by couple quotations: "So, the West is going to the end. Because, it is drowning in the bog of social-moral illnesses. Their woman cannot give birth to more then 2 kids. It is not enough to maintain us as humanity. China will drown by another reason. Only Muslims will survive, because we are following hadis of Prophet Muhammad, Who said: "Reproduce". That is way our women has at least 4 children. Only Islam conforms to democracy. Very soon the West will understand it and will lead Islam itself. If person (not Muslim, but any person) is perfect there should be democracy in his head and Islam in the heart."

"There is a precise time when Islam will be only and common religion of the Humanity. It will be about 2050. That time we have to have leaders who will lead us. One of them is already among us. In 2050 he will be just 100 years old. But he will still be young by spirit and will help us. His name is Muhammag Salih, the leader of "Erk".

If somebody would like to read this work of art he have to be very hurry. Because, I think it will be removed from sites of "Erk" Party as soon as possible after my speech. The Article is signed not by Muhammad Salih, although it is written by him, but signed by the name of Chairman of un-existing youth wing of "Erk"Party.

Do your remember the quotation from the article of politician, which was written in 1994. He wrote about youth population of members of "Erk," who will go to death. Now I see that they are deciding the same problems without raising suicide bombers, but reproducing.

At the same time Muhammad Salih has openly been claiming that he is the founder of the National Salvation Committee. It is another matter that this organization exists only in the mind of several people. More important is the fact that this Organization's charter is unconstitutional. This has created a very dangerous situation. On one hand, there are the statements of those people including Salay Madaminov, that their Office of the National Salvation Committee is in Turkey and that the National Intelligence Organization (it's more known by Turkish abbr. MIT) of Turkey guards it. On the other hand, there is the above-mentioned article of the founder of the so-called National Salvation Committee, openly directed to increasing tension between Islamic and non-Islamic world.

This is definitely a provocation, first of all against the current government of Turkey and Islamic world in general. It became more sensitive right now when current Turkish government is under fire from those who are trying to accuse it of non-secular politics.

So I want to say for people who are supposedly uncomfortable about the disunity Uzbek democratic opposition and want to unite us: Democratic opposition of Uzbekistan is united. And it cannot be together with these fanatics and ignorants of this fraction of "Erk". We have different ways.

We, Uzbek democrats need support of the USA and the West. But as I say repeatedly there is not interest from that side to our problems. I hope I was heard today, both at last and at least.

Thank you.