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The use and abuse of history: 'national ideology' as transcendental object in Islam Karimov's 'ideology of national independence'

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Introduction: ideology and the legitimation of authoritarianism in Uzbekistan

Islam Karimov is unique in Central Asia not so much for his authoritarian structures and patterns of rule, but for his systematic, formal and self-conscious efforts to formulate, transmit and impose a new 'national ideology' as a means of legitimation. The ideology has been elaborated over the entire period of independence in a corpus of texts published both under the President's name and by 'court intellectuals', academics and others from the fields of political science, philosophy, economics, religion, law, literature and art. The main canon of Karimov's works, published in a series of numbered tomes reminiscent of the 'Works of Lenin', are required reading throughout all levels of education in Uzbekistan and are heavily propagated through mass media, state institutions, cultural associations, and organs of local ('*mahalla*'[1]) administration. It is clear that the 'Ideology of National Independence', as Karimov has dubbed it, enjoys state status and is designed to replace Marxism–Leninism as the ideological underpinning of the state at the expense of the main ideological alternatives that emerged in the later years of perestroika, namely Islamism, Liberalism and Pan-Turkism. While this project certainly merits attention by Russian and Central Asian area specialists as part of contemporary discourses on such topics of ideological competition as economic development, official versus mass nationalism and political Islam, it is primarily as a mode of legitimation that it is worthy of study.

Clearly, consequentialist arguments are among the most accessible and prominent of Karimov's modes of legitimation. The appeal to peace, stability and order is the centrepiece of the consequentialist legitimation: 'I admit: perhaps in

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my actions there are signs of authoritarianism. But this I explain as follows: in certain periods of history, especially during the construction of statehood, strong executive power is necessary. It is necessary in order to avoid bloodshed and conflict, to preserve in the region inter-ethnic and civil harmony, peace and stability, for which I am prepared to pay any price.'[2] Thus, there is a certain extent to which the justification of authoritarianism is dependent upon the existence of credible *threats* to the political community. It is significant that Karimov's most heavily propagated text begins with almost 130 pages of the description of the various 'threats to stability' facing Uzbekistan and the region, including 'regional conflicts, religious extremism and fundamentalism, great-power chauvinism and aggressive nationalism, ethnic and interethnic contradictions, corruption and criminality, regionalism and clans, ecological problems'.[3]

The stability argument is thus grounded in immediate political contexts and it follows that authoritarian legitimation often refers to its *transitory* character. In this vein Karimov insists that 'if I could impose democracy and the market on society with one command I would do it immediately. But how many years does it take to change the consciousness of people, to establish a harmonious and developed society of free, law-abiding citizens? How long did it take Germany, Great Britain and France, beginning with the Revolution in 1789? Just what do you want from us?'[4]

Embedded in the 'transition defence' of authoritarianism, one often finds the argument that the regime is not only committed to democracy but that its methods are necessary prerequisites for democracy and upholding human rights. 'Developments in Tajikistan, Georgia and elsewhere in the CIS [where opposition leaders have taken power] have shown that first it is necessary to secure and defend the most sacred human right—the right to life, and only after that other rights, including the right to democratic freedoms. For those living in areas where the Islamic extremists operate the greatest priority is not the freedom of speech or other democratic principles, but security and freedom from fear.'[5] This argument itself hinges on the treatment of types of opposition and the regime's particular decontestation of democracy. For such regimes, there is always acceptable opposition ('constructive' opposition) and 'radical and extremist' opposition whose very existence is a threat to democracy. This in itself constitutes a covert justification of authoritarianism (covert because it does not acknowledge the authoritarian nature of the argument) and is also much more significant for our purposes, as it represents not a contingent claim but rather an essentially authoritarian (and permanent) attitude towards politics.

Thus, in speaking about the opposition he is willing to recognize, Karimov refers to 'constructive opposition capable of offering alternative variants of the reform programme and the movement of society along the road of progress and renewal'.[6] Understanding that the 'reform programme' and the 'road of progress and renewal' refer to the policies and directions that Karimov himself has established, the democratic opposition—and here we are speaking about Karimov's theoretical and principled musings on democracy—is thus *a priori* reduced to operating within Karimov's own specific political framework. Simi-

larly, Karimov and his court intellectuals offer a communitarian and paternalist decontestation of democracy: 'While in American democracy the individual predominates, in Uzbekistan we are used to living according to the interests of society. … In the minds of some Western analysts, if in some post-Soviet republic all is calm and there are no demonstrations that means there is a lack of democracy, even if this calm is tied to economic stability and the just social policy of the country's leadership.'[7]

However, while Karimov has certainly used Islamophobia, the need for stability and the promise of welfare as the most accessible 'consequentialist' justifications of authoritarianism, his writings on ideology contain a more subtle and permanent defence of non-democratic rule, based on a hegemonic strategy of asserting the existence of a broad-based national ideological consensus. Rather than present direct arguments for non-democratic rule (either principled or consequentialist), Karimov instead argues for a conception of politics based on the focused realization of universally held goals derived from unproblematic values and orientations, thus obviating the need for competitive politics. Central to these texts and to Karimov's self-legitimation is, importantly, a discourse on 'ideology' as such. Karimov and his court intellectuals offer a conception of 'ideology' as the comprehensive pre-political consensus of any political community, replacing constitutionalism and procedure as the 'given' of Uzbek political life. In Karimov's words, 'it is natural that the state system, its operation and accompanying policies should above all be constructed on the basis of a concretely formulated ideology'.[8] Their concept of 'ideology' results in a political logic whereby the political community, the state, the unifying telos of politics and the present regime are fused into a single entity:

> The goal is the distinct, unifying, directing banner of the nation. This banner is a force embodying the spirit and pride of the nation, its potential and aspirations. The goal of our state, with its grandeur and nobility, its justice and uprightness, should become a powerful stimulus capable of unifying nations and peoples and transform into a force and ideology overcoming everything. It will be an ideology established on the outlooks and mentality of the nation formed over millennia, determining the future of that nation, enabling it to take its distinguished place in the world community, and capable of becoming a stable bridge between past and future.[9]

This ontological fusion is presented as an unassailable hegemonic reality and occurs at the pre-political level, resulting in the vanishingly small space left over for competitive politics that characterizes authoritarian systems. This teleological concept of the political and the assertion of the existence of a natural consensus around the ideological orientation of the state figure as both a more sophisticated and more permanent theorization of authoritarianism than the arguments for stability that are more commonly associated with Karimov's justification of authoritarianism.[10]

In this article I will focus on the treatment of history in these texts, which forms a significant sub-discourse within the discourse on 'ideology' and, as such, is important for Karimov's legitimation of non-democratic rule. This article does

not represent by any means a comprehensive treatment of the ideological and polemical use of history in Uzbekistan since independence. Rather, I have drawn only from those texts that treat the problem of history in the specific context of the formulation of a new national ideology and its presentation an inevitable product of Uzbek cultural life, rather than as the historically contingent product of Karimov's regime.

The use of 'Uzbek history' in the creation of Karimov's 'ideology of national independence'

Karimov's ideological project begins with a form of 'myth making' about the human condition and history. He and his collaborators construct a crudely idealist theory of history based on a dichotomy between forces endowed with positive ideas of progress and construction and forces endowed with anti-humanist ideas of gain-seeking and reaction. Karimov uses these tropes to establish the over-riding need for a paternalistic national ideology as a hegemonic force in society. In this section, I will show how Karimov creates an anachronistic, functionalist reading of Uzbek history around the themes of *state-building* and *national independence*, themes that will be shown to be conducive to an authoritarian logic. The attempt is to invent a history not so much for the Uzbek nation, but, oddly enough, for the ideology of national independence itself. The argument is that the post-Soviet ideology of national independence is merely the present incarnation of a transcendental phenomenon in Uzbek history to which all Uzbek intellectual, spiritual and political activity has contributed. This is an audacious and ambitious attempt to co-opt and redefine all intellectual activity since Tamerlane (Amir Temur in Uzbek) and the great Islamic medieval thinkers as a single phenomenon directed uninterruptedly towards a common set of values and the idea of national independence. Furthermore, this history is then presented as culminating in the ideological and political achievements of Islam Karimov, the latest incarnation of the 'Great Uzbek state-builder' and 'leader-ideologue'.

This invention of history is an extremely important facet of the hegemonic project. Karimov writes that it is 'unnatural to imagine that the state is established first and then the ideology appears. First the idea appears on which basis then emerges the ideology. On the basis of the ideology then the political system is constructed.'[11] What is startling about this statement is his perceptive characterization of the status of his own project while denying that any such status could actually be the case. Uzbekistan is precisely a case of the achievement of statehood and nationhood through historical accident and Karimov's project is precisely an effort to create a national ideology *ex post facto*. This self-awareness reveals the extent to which Karimov is concerned to avoid the appearance of the artificiality or fabrication of his 'ideology', or even of too close an association with himself. He needs to invent a history for it not only to validate his substantive claims but so that the entire project seems pre-determined, natural, pre-destined; in a word: hegemonic.

The most basic use of history in connection with the present ideological project consists in anachronistic references to the 'Uzbek nation' throughout the centuries, superficial citations from the great figures of Uzbek history, and an appeal to national pride through mention of past glories. In this vein, Karimov writes that with 'the proclamation of the independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan an ancient dream has come true. This is the most significant event in the centuries-long history of the nation. Much of what we had failed to achieve for centuries has been attained during the first year of our Republic's independence. *The people of Uzbekistan have become the true masters of the tremendous wealth of their native land.*'[12] In relation to the need for development and advanced education, he writes that 'the famous expression of our great ancestor Amir Temur "Strength is in Justice" can be applied to the realities of modern life with a slight modification: "Strength is in Knowledge and Reason".'[13] Similarly, in claiming scientific progress as a goal of his regime, Karimov appeals to national pride associated with great figures from medieval Transoxania: 'Amir Temur was renowned for his patronage of scholars, philosophers, architects, poets and musicians. The age of the Timurids was truly a period of Eastern renaissance, guaranteeing an unprecedented flowering of science, culture and education.'[14] 'Just as from the 9th to 15th centuries, the educated world had great respect and valued such scientists and thinkers as al-Bukhari, al-Fergani, al-Khorezmi, al-Beruni, Ibn Sina [Avicenna] and Ulughbeg, we must aspire in the 21st century to the same level of respect throughout the world for our people, our nation.'[15] All of these references are classic examples of the invention of tradition and continuity for the nation, particularly in post-colonial settings. Previous rulers that would have identified themselves by religion, clan or dynastic pedigree now become Uzbek statebuilders;[16] the piece of land once known as Transoxania (*Ma wara an-nahr* in the Islamic tradition) or by its separate khanates, emirates and city-states now becomes 'Uzbekistan'; peasants, merchants, ulama, nomads, clansmen now all retroactively become 'Uzbeks'.

As alluded to above, however, the use and abuse of history in this project goes beyond the creation of a national pantheon or emphasis on past glories. Karimov wants to establish that there is a single thread running through history, particularly 'Uzbek' history, of 'two forces that constantly struggle with one another on the world stage' and thus that the battles of Islam Karimov are essentially the same ones fought by Amir Temur. We learn that 'constructive, noble ideas raise man up, inspire his soul. The great Amir Temur ruled precisely through ideas such as these in his founding of a centralized state and benevolent ordering of the fatherland.'[17] This use of Tamerlane succinctly combines anachronism ('fatherland') and speculation (Karimov knows what Tamerlane's motivating ideas were?) not only to identify himself with a world-historical figure, but to do so by making a point highly conducive to the regime's purposes: the decontestation of 'constructive, noble ideas' as the construction of a strong, centralized state. This is the true value of the Tamerlane myth in post-Soviet Uzbekistan: Not only is it the rehabilitation of a national hero in the attempt to inspire

national pride and invent a national history after a long period of colonization, but it is the deliberate elevation of values associated with a (single) strong leader, centralized statehood and political order achieved through the manipulation of an untouchable symbol.[18] This is what makes the Tamerlane industry in Uzbekistan an inherently more authoritarian and narrowly political project than similar efforts, such as the reinvention of Chinggis Khan in Mongolia, the mythologization of Skanderbeg amongst Albanians, and the claiming of Greater Moravia and Svätopluk in post-independence Slovakia.

The cult of Tamerlane has indeed been the centrepiece of post-Soviet Uzbek official nationalism. His rehabilitation after years of historiographical ignominy under the Soviets has involved the construction of statues and monuments in the most prominent square of Tashkent as well as other Uzbek cities, the displaying of his likeness in public space, and the construction of a museum in Tashkent honouring him and his descendants in the blue-domed style of Timurid architecture. The construction of this cult around the memory of Tamerlane is key to understanding Karimov's self-legitimation. Its role goes beyond the 'substantive' lessons that Karimov can draw from Tamerlane's own acts and writings (i.e. the emphasis on national glory, statehood, autocratic leadership and Uzbek regional dominance) emphasized in the previous paragraphs—there is something in the very *practice* of celebrating Tamerlane that is itself an act of legitimation for the regime: 'Saints arise in the symbolic realm during crises of legitimation, caused either by succession problems or by a weakening or failure of the legitimating ideology'.[19] For one, it can be cast as an act of post-colonial national liberation on the part of Karimov:

> The name of Amir Temur was blacked out from the pages of our history in an attempt to bury him in oblivion. The goal was to remove the national consciousness from the soul of the people so that it might lose its sense of national pride and reconcile itself to its dependence and subordination. Our people, trapped for so many years in the clutches of the colonial vice, are no longer deprived of the opportunity to honour our great compatriot and render to him his historical due.[20]

Just as the act of pronouncing a new national ideology can be presented as an act of national liberation, so can the practice of rehabilitating national heroes. Again, it is Karimov's monopoly of such practices that make them acts of personal legitimation and central to the authoritarian project.

Second, the ubiquitous tendency on the part of regimes to use public rituals (such as the unveiling of statues, celebrations of death anniversaries, etc.), public space and architecture as a form of legitimation has been widely noted.[21] Through icons, cults of dead heroes, awe-inspiring structures and mausoleums, regimes send numerous messages to their subjects in addition to any literal ideological messages that might be inscribed on them. Such use of space is primarily an act of identification: 'This is who we are.' (The sons of Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln, emulators of Che, Lenin or Mao, great-grandchildren of Amir Temur, Simon Bolivar or Salah al-Din.) Who we are, of course, is largely comprehensible in relation to who we are not (but could be), or who we no

longer are. Erecting the statue of Tamerlane in Tashkent literally on the ground where Lenin stood before sends an unmistakable message of the transformation of the nature and basis of the political community. In addition to the act of identification of the ruler with the people, *the re-creation of a political community*, the use of visual symbols and public space is an act of collapsing time and identifying the ruler himself with the transcendental icon. In the Amir Temur museum in Tashkent, portraits of the great warrior compete for space with those of Karimov himself; reconstructed models of Tamerlane's architectural legacy, various artefacts and copies of medieval religious and scholarly texts all are juxtaposed with kitschy 'gifts' to the museum from Karimov; explanations of the significance of Tamerlane for the Uzbek people take the form of large block-letter quotations from none other than Islam Karimov. The use of architecture and public space thus conveys numerous substantial messages about the nature of the political community, and this in itself is a significant act of legitimation, but it also conveys a more basic message about the power, stability and permanence of the state and ruler as such. Symbols are meant to awe and inhibit as much as they are meant to identify: The statement of the *fact* of state power clearly serves as a normative act of legitimation.

Just as Karimov shares the values and aspirations of all those throughout history committed to progress and order, so does he share their enemies: 'Anti-humanist ideas bring nations only misery and poverty. Both ancient and recent history offers countless such examples. Ideas of such an order served as the foundation for the Crusades, the spreading of religious fanaticism, fascism and bolshevism. Today, when humanity has entered the 21st century, religious fanaticism and extremism represent a social evil threatening peace and progress on Earth.'[22] The Islamist threat is thus, consistent with the tactics of a Gramscian war of position, denied any specific Uzbek socio-political context; it is simply the latest incarnation of a transcendental, eternal evil, the heir to the Crusades, fascism and bolshevism. More ambitiously, the authors attempt to deny the Islamist opposition Uzbekistan's specifically Islamic heritage, by arguing that in their day, Imam Bukhari (one of the greatest collectors of hadith in Islamic history and, thus, a central figure in Islamic fiqh) and Ibn Sina (Avicenna, one of the greatest Islamic neo-Platonic philosophers and a Persian speaker) also 'suffered from various forms of oppression and were punished by religious fanatics for free thinking'.[23] The authors are not shy about the authoritarian lesson of what one scholar of communist and post-communist ideological patterns has called 'the Jacobin–Leninist logic of vigilance and intransigence'[24] that the reader is supposed to glean from the study of history: 'Consequently, the necessity of being ready for battle with them, of being ever vigilant, becomes an important imposition of the times'.

The use of history in the project, however, goes beyond this instrumental pseudo-Manicheanism. Just as an attempt is made to fuse Uzbek nationality, statehood and aspirations into the single concept of ideology, the attempt is made to fuse all of Uzbek history into it as well, so that no act, utterance or achievement can be seen to have occurred on 'Uzbek soil' without being

appropriated as a contribution to the national ideology. One of Karimov's court intellectuals thus answers his own question as to 'who is the subject of the ideology?' in the following way: 'The national ideology belongs to a concrete nation and, moreover, in respects to time, to all past and future generations. Its ideas are born throughout the entire span of history and national statehood, for example from the states of the Timurids to independent Uzbekistan in its contemporary borders. Each generation of thinkers, state actors, politicians and representatives of the common man makes its own contribution to its development.'[25] This is an audacious claim to the entirety of Uzbek history and statehood, and the co-opting of anyone in historical Transoxania who ever said or did anything as a progenitor of Karimov's official nationalist ideology. No matter what the nature of the activity or orientation of the actor, no one is exempt from absorption into the direct line established here from Tamerlane to Karimov. Figures and movements as diverse and contradictory as Soviet-era dissidents as well as Soviet-era leaders, the Jadidist modernizers as well as medieval theocrats, are all swept up into the same pantheon, united only by the anachronistic 'constant' of the drive to national independence: 'It is obvious that in various times under various conditions one finds certain individuals or groups of individuals that give a new direction, an idea around which the majority of members of society rally. In the period when Uzbekistan was part of the USSR, the ideas of independence were carried on in intellectual circles. Even earlier, during the period of Tsarist colonialism it was the Jadids.'[26] Another monograph published as part of a series entitled 'New Pages of the History of Uzbekistan' refers to the work of the Jadids as the 'paths of renewal, reforms and the battle for independence', which could easily be confused for the title of one of Karimov's own pamphlets or tomes.[27]

The value of intellectual production is always tightly linked to the value of statehood: 'The intelligentsia has always played its role in the fate of Central Asia, in the development of statehood, beginning with the thinkers of the medieval Islamic renaissance through the Jadids and continuing with such names as Faizullah Khodjaev, Sharaf Rashidov and Islam Karimov.'[28] This effort to reduce Uzbek history to a linear progression towards statehood thus produces some strange associations. It is true that many of the great names of medieval Islamic philosophy and science lived in cities now found within Uzbekistan, but to the extent to which they were at all interested in questions of the state they were consumed with the problem of constructing an Islamicized neo-Platonic conception of the 'virtuous city'. The notion of a strong state run according to Islamic law was something they would have taken for granted; a national state defined on ethnic or linguistic terms would been beyond the realm of comprehension. The Jadids were a modernizing reform movement that arose in Russian-held Turkic-speaking lands (primarily Tatarstan and Uzbekistan) that aimed at modern teaching methods in school and the unification of all Turkic-speaking peoples in the Russian Empire. After the 1905 Revolution, they began to push for a pan-Turkic Islamic state. Khodjaev was an early communist leader of Uzbekistan and victim of the infamous 1938 Moscow trials that featured

Bukharin as the chief defendant. The most controversial figure from the above is Rashidov, who was the Party leader in Uzbekistan for almost 30 years and implicated in the most famous corruption scandal of the Brezhnev era, involving the inflation of cotton production figures and the embezzlement of millions of rubles. The list thus includes figures and ideas that, if taken seriously, would undermine Karimov's form of secular nationalism, as well as figures that hardly merit inclusion in a list of intellectuals and state-builders. In the case of the former, Karimov has gone to great lengths to suppress not only radical Islamist activism but also any serious avowal of pan-Turkism or attempts to construct a moderate, reformist and modernist conception of Islam and politics.[29] Karimov's tactic is obviously to claim these potentially dangerous historical, cultural and ideological traditions and resources as his own, and then to neuter them by redefining their mission in ways compatible with his purposes. As such, he derives the benefit of seeming to the unobservant as rehabilitating the Jadids and the Islamic tradition after Soviet suppression, but pre-empts any serious efforts to recast their ideas in ways relevant to post-independence Uzbekistan.

Concerning Karimov's interest in actually rehabilitating the likes of Rashidov (Khodjaev was rehabilitated under Krushchev) by associating him with the great intellectuals and state-builders of Uzbek history, his motivations might be both personal and pragmatic. Karimov hails from the same Samarqand-Djizakh 'clan' as Rashidov and was his political protégé in the early years of his career. However, there is also genuine resentment among Uzbeks at the way Rashidov was singled-out for the 'cotton affair' (Brezhnev's own son-in-law was actually responsible for facilitating the swindle from Moscow) and the way Uzbeks as a nation became a Soviet-wide symbol of corruption. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Rashidov symbolized for Uzbeks their collective resistance to the 'Moscow centre' and Russian hegemony.[30] The use of him in this context can thus be seen as a very convenient way of claiming another popular symbol with the added value of doing it in a way that privileges the single lesson that Karimov wants his readers to derive from Uzbek history: The paramount importance and tradition of strong centralized statehood in Uzbekistan or the aspiration for it. Rashidov the corrupt communist thus becomes Rashidov the Uzbek patriot who did what he could in the specific circumstances he found himself in to advance the cause of Uzbek independence and strength against the overwhelming tide of Russian hegemony.

A particularly fascinating and audacious manipulation of history occurs with the treatment of medieval Islamic philosophy, in particular al-Farabi's treatise, *al-Madina al-Fadila* (*The Virtuous City*). Tadzhiev attempts to reinterpret this Islamic-Platonist text in a way that not only gives validation to an authoritarian conception of politics, but also to a secular conception of the state. The main concepts found in Farabi that Tadzhiev attempts to reformulate include happiness (Arabic: *sa'ada*, derived from the Greek *eudaimonia*), philosophy (*falsafa*), politics (*siyasa*), city (*madina*) and philosopher-king. He interprets Farabi's basic mission as the search for utopia and the attainment of happiness based on the

dual foundation of philosophy (theoretical knowledge) and politics, 'the practical art of accounting for interests and directing towards a goal that leads towards virtuous behaviour.'[31] The first step is thus for Tadzhiev to derive a favourable conception of politics and the state from Farabi. He notes that 'while in the philosophy of the Arab-Islamic thinkers politics has a wider meaning, the fact that politics represents the art of accounting for interests and guiding the realization of ideas and established principles independent of the private interests of any individual, gives ground for claiming that politics for them is the practical expression of philosophical knowledge and the instrument for achieving happiness'. The purpose of this interpretation is not just to validate the collectivist and teleological conception of politics preferred by Karimov, but to use Islamic philosophers to emphasize a pragmatic conception of politics. He seizes on the notions of 'practical art' and 'philosophical knowledge' to assert that what Farabi and the Islamic philosophers were arguing for was 'the priority in politics of reason above faith, that is, of the rational, which allows for the stronger and firmer organization of human association'.[32] In other words, he wants to use Islamic philosophy to legitimate a secular conception of the state. This is a brilliant tactic of arguing against contemporary political Islam not merely through the secular liberalism of the West, but through Uzbekistan's own Islamic intellectual heritage, as if it contained within itself the seeds of secularism. The hidden assumption behind this claim is that reason is, in fact, synonymous with secularism and antithetical to faith, an assumption that would hardly have been even communicable to the likes of Farabi.[33]

The foundation of this conception of politics is what Tadzhiev calls 'practical philosophy', that is, the merging of theoretical and practical knowledge about values, ethics and the experience of co-ordinating human social relations. He characterizes Farabi's conception of politics as a 'unifying force the goal of which is the attainment of happiness based on an ideological system in the form of "practical philosophy" on which foundation are formed various utopian models'. This conception of politics is then presented as the direct analogue of Karimov's own conception of politics as the unified movement towards a single goal based on national ideology: 'These [utopian] conceptions can be confidently called ideological and the role which is given in these models to philosophy and politics has not lost its relevance and applicability even today. This role can confidently be transferred to a contemporary footing, where philosophy and politics constitute a single entity in the form of national ideology.'[34] In an even more striking anachronism, he argues that the medieval (actually classical) conception of politics as pertaining to the 'City' is appropriately translated to modern times as referring to the 'Nation', which he admits is a 'category which in those times had no meaning'.

The equation of 'politics' with 'the art of attaining virtuous conduct', 'practical philosophy' with 'national ideology', 'reason' with 'secularism', and 'city' with 'nation' are all just the foundation for the two final coups that Tadzhiev hopes to carry out. The core concept in Farabi's thought is clearly '*sa'ada*', happiness, which he understood as a mixture of the Platonic notion of

liberation of the soul from the body and unification with its Form and the Islamic notion of salvation through following *shari'a*. The organization of the City in a hierarchical manner based on the priority of knowledge was both a metaphor for the relationship of mind and body and a way of ensuring salvation. 'Virtuous behaviour' in the neo-Platonic conception was a matter of knowing one's place and role in the overall organization of the City *qua* corpus. For Tadzhiev, however, 'virtuous conduct' can be interpreted in the modern period as a 'wide range of aspects, which can include the goals and means of national development, law and morality as well as all those political and socio-economic ideals the attainment of which is the precondition for the happiness and welfare of each member of the nation'.[35] If virtuous conduct is understood as that form of behaviour which every member has to adopt in order to achieve happiness, Tadzhiev then replaces the Platonic conception of 'knowing your place' with all action conducive to Karimov's notion of 'national development'. 'Happiness', which is supposed to be the goal of virtuous behaviour thus becomes 'that ordering of things in social organisation' not in the way most conducive to uniting the soul with its metaphysical Form but in the way 'that corresponds to the interests of both the citizen and the state in the person of the monarch'. In Tadzhiev's reworking, it is the benefits to all individuals and the state as such accruing from increased development that constitute 'happiness'.

The end of the last quote (' … in the person of the monarch') brings us to the second of Tadzhiev's coups. According to this interpretation of Farabi, the state is to be hierarchically organized under a 'philosopher-politician, which can be understood as an ideologue who establishes a conception of how society should develop, on the basis of which relationships and laws of behaviour'. Tadzhiev here takes the Platonic 'philosopher-king' (Farabi called him simply *ra'is*, 'head' or 'leader'[36]), re-dubs him the 'philosopher-politician' and characterizes him as an 'ideologue' with final responsibility for determining the shape of politics and social organization, making sure to use the core Karimovist concept 'develop'. Throughout subsequent pages, Tadzhiev then refers to Karimov variably as a 'leader-ideologue', 'politician-ideologue' as well as 'head of state-ideologue' and ascribes to him, by virtue of his responsibility as an ideologue, tasks similar in comprehensiveness to 'establishing a conception of how society should develop'. The final force of this excursus into neo-Platonism is, thus, to present Farabi's philosophy, which, as part of the 'authentic' intellectual, religious and historical (the more *historic* the better) heritage of Uzbekistan is an enormous resource to Karimov, as an earlier statement in a different philosophical language of Karimov's own conception of politics, ideology, goal orientation, the state and guardianship. This is a way of both Uzbekifying Islamic history and Islamifying Karimovism, taking a convenient work of Islamic philosophy and deriving from it a number of lessons highly conducive to Karimov's project, namely the centrality of 'ideology' in the organization of society, the authoritarian leader-principle of ideological formulation, the priority of reason over faith and the notion of a single telos as the *raison d'être* of the state.

Conclusion

The primary function of historiography in the Karimovist project is thus to invent a history not so much for the Uzbek nation, but for the Ideology of National Independence, for Karimov's particular conception of ideology and national development. He and his court intellectuals do this by treating all Uzbek history in a linear fashion, as a long march toward independent national statehood, and by claiming a philosophical foundation for the ideology in the form of both Western and Eastern philosophy. Tadzhiev's translation of Farabi into Karimovese is the most interesting example of the latter. However, what is particularly authoritarian about this use of history? How does it further the argument of this article, that the construction of ideology as the pre-political foundation of the state (including the use of history therein) is an inherently closed process? For one, distinctly authoritarian lessons are drawn from these references to Uzbek history, with prime emphasis placed on the importance of a strong state with a strong leader, collective and communitarian values of duty and obligation, and the priority of a single unifying *telos* to politics.

More importantly, however, the hegemonic strategy behind the use of history in this way is to reify Karimov's decisions, values and choices, to make them seem historically inevitable, passively reappearing after periods of dormancy and validated by the word and deeds of 'Uzbeks' going back before even the time of Tamerlane. The mode of legitimation utilized here is that of *identification*, i.e. to make the ideology seem not the product of any ruling group's self-interest but the cultural, intellectual and spiritual product of the entire nation, even before any such nation existed, and thus create a unique identification between the Uzbek nation and the person of Islam Karimov.

All ideologies tend to treat history instrumentally, as a resource for explaining, justifying and giving meaning to the present. Karimov uses a pseudo-Manichean construct of the vulnerable nation being fought over by the two contradictory forces of construction and destruction as a foundational myth to explain history and the present. Here, his answer to this existential condition—a strong, centralized, secular state oriented towards 'development'—is given further validation through the pseudo-historical myth of Tamerlane (and the minor incarnations of his spirit reappearing along the path leading up to Karimov) and the pseudo-philosophical reading of Farabi as a treatise compatible with Karimov's secular, authoritarian 'developmentocracy'.

Notes and references

1. An Arabic word referring to a local neighbourhood in a city, usually defined by the presence of a single mosque. The *mahalla* is traditionally the lowest unit of administration, and Karimov has been very successful at co-opting *mahalla*-level institutions not only for information and security purposes, but also ideological transmission.
2. Islam Karimov, 'Ne postroiv noviy dom—ne razrushai starogo', in I. Karimov, *Uzbekistan: natsional'naia nezavisimost', ekonomika, politika, ideologiia*, Vol 1 (Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 1996), p 135. English quotations from all texts cited by their Russian titles are this author's translations.
3. Islam Karimov, *Uzbekistan na poroge XXI veka: ugrozy bezopasnosti, usloviia i garantii progressa* (Moscow: Drofa, 1997).

4. Islam Karimov, 'Printsipy nashei reformy', in I. Karimov, *Rodina sviashchenna dlia kazhdogo*, Vol 3 (Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 1996), p 127.
5. Mehman Gafarly and Alan Kasaev, *Uzbekskaia model' razvitiia: mir i stabilnost'—osnova progressa* (Moscow: Drofa, 2000), p 248.
6. Islam Karimov, 'Put' nashego naroda—eto put' nezavisimosti, svobody i glubokikh reform', in I. Karimov, *Po puti sozidaniia*, Vol 4 (Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 1996), p 267.
7. Gafarly and Kasaev, op cit, note 5, pp 245–246.
8. Islam Karimov, 'Natsional'naia ideologiia—dlia nas istochnik dukhovno-nravstvennoi sily v stroitel'stve gosudarstva i obshchestva', in I. Karimov, *Nasha vysshaia tsel'—nezavisimost' i protsvetanie rodiny, svoboda i blagopoluchie naroda*, Vol 8 (Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 2000), p 451.
9. Islam Karimov, 'Ideologia—eto obyediniaiushchii flag natsii, obshchestva, gosudarstva', in *Svoio budushchee my stroim svoimi rukami*, Vol 7 (Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 1999), p 87.
10. See Andrew F. March, 'State ideology and the legitimation of authoritarianism: the case of post-Soviet Uzbekistan', *Journal of Political Ideologies* (2002 forthcoming), where I discuss in detail the concept of 'ideology' in Karimov's texts and how it results in a justification of authoritarianism.
11. Karimov, op cit, op cit, note 8, p 452.
12. Islam Karimov, *Uzbekistan: Svoi put' obnovleniia i progressa* (Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 1992), p 3–4. Emphasis in original.
13. Karimov, op cit, note 9, p 96.
14. Karimov, 'Bez proshlogo net budushchego, bez sotrudnichestva net progressa,' in *Po puti sozidaniia*, Vol 4 (Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 1996), p 331.
15. Karimov, op cit, note 9, p 97.
16. Here it must be remembered that Tamerlane lived a century before the arrival in Transoxania of the Uzbek tribal confederation, from which modern Uzbeks trace their linguistic and ethnic origin. See Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
17. National Society of Philosophers of Uzbekistan, *Ideia natsional'noi nezavisimosti: osnovnyie poniatia i printsipy* (Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 2001), p. 10.
18. See Scott Lash, 'Coercion as ideology: the German case', in Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S. Turner, eds, *Dominant Ideologies* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990) for a discussion of statism, the glorification of the state, as the ideological foundation of the legitimation of coercion.
19. Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society—The Soviet Case* (Cambridge: Cambrdige University Press, 1981), p 214.
20. Islam Karimov, 'Dan' uvazheniia', in Karimov, op cit, note 2, p 344.
21. See Charles Goodsell, *The Social Meaning of Civic Space: Studying Political Authority through Architecture* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1988); Lawrence J. Vale, *Architecture, Power and National Identity* (New Haven: Yale, 1992); Claes Arvidsson and Lars Erik Blomqvist, eds, *Symbols of Power: The Aesthetics of Political Legitimation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987).
22. National Society of Philosophers of Uzbekistan, op cit, note 17, p 11.
23. Ibid.
24. Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-communist Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p 8.
25. Khabibulla Tadzhiev, *Teoreticheskie i metolodogicheskie voprosy natsional'noi ideologii* (Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 1999), pp 45–46.
26. Ibid, p 46.
27. Dilorom Alimova, *Dzhadidizm v srednei Azii: Puti obnovleniia, reformy, borba za nezavisimost'*, (Tashkent: Uzbekiston, 2000).
28. Tadzhiev, op cit, note 24, p 68.
29. There will not be space here for discussion of the ideologies of the various Islamic opposition movements, but it ought to be pointed out that the two main organizations, Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), do not derive their main ideological inspiration from either the Jadids or the medieval neo-Platonists. Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation, HT) is a party founded in Saudi Arabia in 1953 by a Palestinian émigré and has largely been inspired by the ideology of the Egyptian-based Îkhwân al-Mûslimîn (Muslim Brotherhood). The IMU, largely for pragmatic reasons, soon after its inception came under the patronage of the Taliban and al-Qaeda and has largely adopted, to the extent that it is known, a mixture of the Taliban's Deobandist interpretation of Islam and al-Qaeda's radical Wahhabism. There is, thus, considerable justification for Karimov's dismissal of those particular organizations not only as threats to stability but also as carriers of alien ideologies. Karimov's ideological tactic, however, is to proceed on the assumption that 'stability' is good per se and that anything 'alien' is harmful without defending either assumption at length against the programmes of the various opposition movements.

30. See James Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan: A Soviet Republic's Road to Sovereignty* (Oxford: Westview, 1991).
31. Tadzhiev, op cit, note 24, p 43.
32. Ibid, p 44.
33. Farabi did actually consider philosophy and reason to be a purer form of knowledge than particular religions. This is not, however, equivalent to secularism. Farabi considered the Platonic One, or First Being, as analogous to God in Islam, intended the first *ra'is* to be the equivalent of the Prophet, the second *ra'is* to be the equivalent of the Caliph or Imam, and approved of the hierarchical organization of the Caliphate based on *shari'a* as a model of the hierarchical state he elaborated in *al-Madina al-Fadila*. See Miriam Galston, *Politics and Excellence: The Political Philosophy of Alfarabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
34. Tadzhiev, op cit, note 24, p 44.
35. Ibid, p 45.
36. See Abu Nasr al-Farabi, *Ara' ahl al-madinah al-fadilah wa-mudaddatuha* (Beirut: Dar wa-Maktabat al-Hilal, 1995), chapter 15.