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Book Review: *Uzbekistan's New Face*, by S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell (eds)

Uzbekistan declared independence in 1991 following the collapse of the USSR, coming under the leadership of Islam Karimov until 2016. In December of that year, then-prime minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev became the country's second president, claiming electoral victory on a campaign of far-reaching national and political reforms. This edited volume evaluates Mirziyoyev's reforms in various spheres and from various perspectives. Aziz Berdikulov, of the European Centre for Minority Issues, provides an overview of each contribution and highlights their strengths and weaknesses. Overall, he praises the book as a valuable resource for both novices and specialists in Uzbekistani and Central Asian studies but cautions that further reading would add depth and nuance to the reader's understanding of the region.*

***Uzbekistan's New Face*, by S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell (eds), Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018, 264 pp.**

This edited volume by S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell is the first attempt to analyse the reforms in Uzbekistan initiated by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who became the leader of the country after the long-lasting reign of his predecessor, Islam Karimov. Over nine chapters, eight authors present analytical overviews of different spheres of state life and provide careful forecasts of what might be awaiting Uzbekistan under the new leadership.

In the first chapter 'The Center of Central Asia: Uzbekistan in Regional and International Politics', Cornell looks at the evolution of the country's regional and international politics and analyses Uzbekistan's standing in the region. Quoting Brzesinski, he explains why there should be several 'geopolitical pivots' in Central Asia: Kazakhstan is the first, however, as Cornell underlines, it cannot assume a regional leadership role on its own.

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He argues that Uzbekistan should be considered the second pivotal state in the region, considering its huge population of 32 million people, its geographical location, its strong military force and its balanced economy. Cornell argues that Afghanistan forms the third pivot due to its potential to provide access to much closer seas via Pakistan and India.

Cornell looks back at the geopolitical situation in Central Asia since independence. He summarizes how, in the 1990s, Uzbekistan attempted to resist Russia's efforts to restore a 'sphere of influence' and how the whole region became an area of increased interest for the US and Russia after the 9/11 attacks in New York. Moscow's invasion of Georgia in 2008 compelled Uzbekistan's government in Tashkent to join forces with China, such as its participation in the 'Silk Road Economic Belt' initiative. Cornell connects Uzbekistan's regional and international standing to the country's self-perception as a regional power, as well its awareness of its own – and its region's – vulnerabilities to local and transnational threats. These include porous borders, particularly in the Ferghana Valley, and local radical Islamism. Involvement of religious groups in civil wars in neighbouring Tajikistan and Afghanistan has made Tashkent decisive in tackling such tendencies on Uzbek soil.

Describing Uzbekistan's international relations, Cornell underlines that the country managed to establish cordial partnerships with Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and a number of other East Asian states. More challenging were relations with its smaller neighbours, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, due to territorial disputes and shared use of water resources. Finally, as Cornell stresses, Uzbekistan saw Afghanistan as a key security threat and even attempted to establish a multi-actor platform involving NATO, the US and Russia, to seek solutions for the Afghan crisis. Concluding, Cornell lists Uzbekistan's main achievements to date, which include the ability to eschew sole dominant power, to repel radical Islamist groups and simultaneously to promote modern religious practices in harmony with secular principles. Uzbekistan played an important role in the economic advancement of the region and managed to put the stabilization of Afghanistan on the agenda. Cornell predicts that future reforms will make Uzbekistan more open, efficient and competitive on the global scene – forecasts that remain to be tested.

The second chapter 'Continuity and Change in Uzbekistan, 1991-2016' by Starr covers Uzbekistan's establishment as an independent state as well as Mirziyoyev's reforms as prime minister since 2003. This brief historical overview explains how Uzbekistan has tended to strive for more autonomy, even under the strong hand of the imperial centre in Moscow

during Soviet times, and that Karimov's appointment as First Secretary of Uzbekistan's Communist Party should be seen as a continuation of this drive towards sovereignty and greater self-government. Starr draws parallels between Karimov and other post-colonial presidents who opted for defensive strategies, and underlines that this option led to numerous positive results. Starr describes several of Karimov's decisions in the economic domain, including Uzbekistan's strong state control and presence in the country's rich industry and refusal to make Uzbek currency (the *som*) convertible; Starr notes that this decision was the most criticized, leading as it did to parallel shadow currency exchange markets and corruption, and the establishment of vocational and technical institutions aimed at transitioning to more a competitive market-based economy. Starr concludes that these decisions – though somewhat controversial – and the country's 'go-it-alone' strategy helped Uzbekistan to withstand the financial crisis of 2008 with little damage.

The chapter becomes somewhat repetitive, covering geopolitical developments already discussed in the first chapter, but he then draws attention to the fact that 'titular nationalities', living on both sides of the borders with neighbouring countries, sometimes jeopardized the complex personal relationships between regional leaders. Starr also underlines that the religious vacuum created during Soviet times, and the lack of understanding of the Hanafi school of Islam, was quickly filled by Muslim extremists from Persian Gulf countries and Pakistan. In addition, homegrown religious groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, started gaining popularity and influence. In 2005, a group calling itself 'Akromiya', named after its founder Akram Yuldashev, seized the government of the city Andijan, freed its own members from a local prison and assassinated several local officials. By the time the uprising had been quashed by government forces, 188 people were dead, including civilians. Starr accuses international observers and the human rights lobby of distorting the information and prematurely blaming Uzbekistan for the death toll, which ultimately worsened relations with the West. It would not be a stretch to say that the 2005 Andijan episode is one of the most controversial and secretive moments in Uzbekistan's recent history, requiring very careful and balanced research. Starr, however, refers solely to a report written by Shirin Akiner, published in 2005 by the Silk Road Studies programme (which also published this edited volume). In her report, Akiner appears to support Uzbekistan's oppressive actions in Andijan and expresses a great deal of suspicion towards various human rights organizations' narrative of the events. The report was especially criticized by Craig Murray, who previously acted as British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, who published an open letter to the management of the

School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), where Akiner worked, accusing her of academic dishonesty and propaganda endorsing Uzbekistan's regime. The fact that Starr mostly relied on Akiner's report to interpret the 2005 Andijan events, without reference to other sources, including the detailed report by Human Rights Watch, raises a number of questions.

Analysing Mirziyoyev's record as prime minister, Starr focuses on five projects that are emblematic of Mirziyoyev as a politician and a problem solver. They include: the 'Strategy for Improving the Living Standards of the Population', initiatives to tackle the issues of working conditions and child labour, initiating legislation and international conferences to prevent an ecological crisis in the Aral Sea, attempting to modernize rural life through housing policies and property rights, and supporting businesses. Starr separately notes Mirziyoyev's attempts to push for improvements in the human rights sphere, including in criminal justice and the rule of law, which is often overlooked. However, the non-convertible *som*, an overly complicated visa regime and extremely cautious relations with neighbours remained challenging. Starr allows the reader to understand that, unlike his predecessor, Mirziyoyev was open to listening to the international community and cooperating with international actors to overcome Uzbekistan's internal challenges. Starr's chapter provides interesting examples, comparing Uzbekistan to other post-colonial states, which helps the reader to place Uzbekistan within a global context. However, while praising Uzbekistan's impressive economic performance, Starr fails to mention continuous human rights violations and the persecution of political activists; readers would be advised to conduct their own research on these topics.

In the third chapter 'Uzbekistan's New Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity under New Leadership', Richard Weitz reviews how the Uzbek government has been improving its regional standing and influence. He distinguishes four approaches that Mirziyoyev and his government undertook to achieve this goal: promoting regional cooperation, improving global economic competitiveness and image, reviving bilateral partnerships, and balancing the Great Powers (China, Russia and the US in this case).

Weitz details the reforms described by Starr in the previous chapter and provides an overview of Mirziyoyev's administration's actions in water management, climate change, tackling radical Islamist extremism, and religious tolerance and openness, particularly focusing on marginalized women and youth. He discusses the 'Development Strategy for 2017–2021' (hereinafter 'the Strategy') aimed at promoting 'civil, inter-ethnic, and inter-religious peace and harmony' among other issues. Uzbekistan joined international instruments for the

prevention of torture, it addressed the issues of child labour and human– and drug trafficking, it reopened the country’s Human Rights Watch office, released some activists and revitalized the dialogue on human rights with international actors. Under Mirziyoyev’s stewardship, relations with Afghanistan were strengthened and joint cross-border and infrastructure projects were initiated. With regards to the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), Uzbekistan remained sceptical in order to preserve its independence. However, the country continued participating in the Commonwealth of Independent States’ (CIS) projects and events. Mirziyoyev aimed at improving bilateral relations with a number of regional organizations, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the EU, NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Economic achievements included the introduction of a floating exchange rate and the conclusion of numerous bilateral agreements; the latter was, in part, intended to balance China’s growing interest in the region and Russia’s expanding military presence.

Weitz illustrates Mirziyoyev’s efforts to revitalize relations with other Central Asian states by reaching out to all neighbouring countries, even suggesting cooperating on the construction of power plants in Kyrgyzstan and relaxing the rhetoric around the Tajik Rogun Dam, long a matter of contention between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Weitz compares Uzbekistan’s two presidents’ style and standing in terms of their relations with other Central Asian states. What has remained relatively unchanged between two administrations are Uzbekistan’s relations with the Great Powers; the country has continued strengthening its cooperation with China, Russia and the US, while simultaneously keeping its relative distance.

In the fourth chapter ‘The Economic Modernization of Uzbekistan’, Mamuka Tsereteli analyses the impact of economic reforms introduced by Mirziyoyev and the prevailing conditions that allowed these reforms to take place, namely the economic system and strategy of Uzbekistan before the 2016 power transition. Tight governmental control over almost all economic sectors and small-size privatization maintained the stability and security of Uzbekistan’s economic performance after the USSR’s collapse; this made it the first former Soviet Socialist Republic to regain its pre-1991 real gross output levels. Tsereteli illustrates the causal link between the introduction of strict exchange limitations and the emergence of black markets for currency exchange. Borders were controlled too for reasons of security and protection from competing industries. The country’s social policies, which had been seen as a major success, gradually became the source of corruption, especially in the healthcare and education sectors. Economic shortcomings caused a huge wave of migrant labour leaving for

Russia, providing Moscow with additional tools to influence Tashkent. This migration also uncovered the fact that numerous Uzbeks were being recruited by religious extremist groups outside of their home country. Nevertheless, Uzbekistan's economy was relatively strong and stable by the time Mirziyoyev assumed power.

Tsereteli also discusses the Strategy (introduced in Chapter 3), calling it a 'reform manifesto' and focusing on its five priority areas: public administration reform, judiciary reform and strengthening rule of law, economic development and liberalization, the social domain, and security and foreign policy. Tsereteli comments that the Strategy's economy-related reforms appear to be well crafted. Some reforms, including foreign exchange market liberalization, ensuring transparency, and the reduction of excessive regulations, started to be implemented immediately following the publication of the Strategy. The reader can draw a link between Chapter 2, where Starr discussed Mirziyoyev's election promise to make the *som* convertible, and this chapter, where Tsereteli discusses the actual impact of that reform. The bold reforms paid off, as Uzbekistan managed to sign multi-billion contracts with the biggest international banks as well as garnering praise from the IMF for country's ongoing changes. Tsereteli also builds on Weitz's Chapter 3, discussing Mirziyoyev's visits to other Central Asian states, but focuses on economic initiatives such as trade agreements, joint infrastructure and transportation projects, and water management. In conclusion, Tsereteli argues that even though some obstacles remain, Mirziyoyev's policies give grounds for optimism. Mirziyoyev's intention that Uzbekistan should join the World Trade Organization, his liberalization of numerous economic sector spheres and his focus on Central Asia may be able to form a new regionalism.

Mjusa Sever, **in the fifth chapter 'Judicial and Governance Reform'** expresses frustration at most Western observers' lack of understanding of Uzbekistan. He partially attributes this to Uzbekistan's self-isolation, which prevented information from flowing within and outside the country. The author discusses Mirziyoyev's call to reform the National Security Service (SNB) emphasizing his push to reform the country's most powerful agency, even at the cost of direct confrontation. Sever laments that, after the Andijan unrest, the West focused almost exclusively on those events of 2005 and earlier, and remained negative towards developments in Uzbekistan. The reforms and changes that were taking place were often unseen by the West and other observers. For instance, Karimov abolished the death penalty and introduced *habeas corpus* legislation. He also took a calm and measured response to the influx of ethnic Uzbek refugees fleeing ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan's southern city of Osh

in 2010. This ultimately led to more open relations both with international communities and at home. However, Sever notes that while Karimov focused on strengthening the parliament and building familiarity with international systems of governance, real power remained in hands of the president, the SNB, internal and foreign Ministries, and the Prosecutor General's Office. By 2011, changes were starting to appear, but the pace of reform greatly increased under Mirziyoyev's presidency as of 2016. Sever's comparison of Uzbekistan's two presidents' governance styles resonates with Starr's. Sever calls Karimov 'a national icon', a very skilled politician who, however, remained extremely closed-off to ordinary citizens. Mirziyoyev, since the beginning of his prime ministership, travelled around the country and was 'a man of dialogue and action' who used every opportunity to hear from people. Mirziyoyev was very decisive in strengthening the separation of powers, and Sever further discusses ongoing reforms within the executive, legislative and judicial branches. The author further notes that young professionals have started to be promoted, assuming high-level government positions, and communication with the population has moved more online, which is expected to tackle corruption, increase the attractiveness of government jobs and maintain continuous public feedback that was particularly challenged due to excessive bureaucratic procedures and general inaccessibility of governmental bodies.

Sever illustrates how Mirziyoyev pushed to uphold the rule of law and maintain the independence of the judiciary, stressing the importance of professional and well educated lawyers and judges. Mirziyoyev went further, replacing the heads of the National Security Service, the Prosecutor General's Office and the Interior Ministry, and initiated reforms within these bodies to enable greater public oversight and control. Sever highlights Mirziyoyev's attempts to reach out to public and strengthen its voice – something unimaginable under Karimov. The author provides multiple examples of how citizens interacted with officials via multiple 'virtual offices', first introduced by Mirziyoyev, and notes that 1.2 million complaints were received in 2017, out of which a striking 96% were resolved. Sever concludes by saying that Uzbekistan is undergoing impressive reforms, but acknowledges that challenges remain, chiefly corruption, the unwillingness of powerbrokers from the previous regime to relinquish control, and members of the administration, who already have been dismissed from their high-level positions by Mirziyoyev, but might still preserve certain levels of power. Sever believes that in order to continue with its bold reforms and further strengthening of power separation, Uzbekistan will need to open up for involving civil society, media, and international community.

Anthony Bowyer, in **Chapter six ‘Political Reforms: Elections, Political Parties, Civil Society’**, provides background on civic activism under Karimov’s presidency and examines Mirziyoyev’s reforms in political structures. The author argues that Uzbekistan’s first president, having witnessed an unsuccessful coup in Moscow and the crippling civil war in Tajikistan, decided to focus exclusively on sovereignty. This resulted in control over the opposition and the sidelining of potential political rivals. According to Bowyer, this somewhat single-minded governance, executed by a tight grip, led to the relatively peaceful and stable development of the young state. In this environment, political parties were created ‘from above’; however, they managed to gain recognizable identities and remain competitive within the limited field of play. Bowyer echoes other authors in providing background on Mirziyoyev’s rise to power and presidential elections. He notes that international observers positively assessed Uzbekistan’s efforts to organize transparent elections and provide all candidates with equal access to media. He particularly mentions the efforts of state institutions to increase the election literacy and education of citizens, especially women – a truly unprecedented initiative in Central Asia. Media, including international outlets, covered the elections with great enthusiasm, while candidates used various platforms to reach out to their constituencies. While Bowyer argues that Mirziyoyev’s longstanding prime ministership undoubtedly contributed to his impressive victory, he argues that reforms promised during the election campaign were even more important, promising, as they did, to ‘reinvent the relationship between citizens and the state’.

The author also revisits the Strategy (mentioned in previous chapters), focusing on the fact that the country’s leadership involved the public in its drafting. Bowyer explains the sub-objectives of each of the Strategy’s five goals and highlights security, religious tolerance and inter-ethnic harmony among its priorities. The author praises the goals, but admits that continuous political will and deeper commitment are needed to achieve them. In unison with other authors in this edited collection, Bowyer stresses that Uzbekistan is undertaking bold reforms and that working closely with civil society, media and other traditionally marginalized populations will become very important. The author provides the necessary background for the reader to understand Uzbekistan’s electoral processes, administrative–territorial division and range of public servants. Analysing Mirziyoyev’s reforms, Bowyer goes into a great detail explaining precisely how he reformed elections: Mirziyoyev called for the direct election of mayors throughout the country, increased the number of MPs elected to the parliament and strengthened the competencies of the staff of the Central Election Committee. The president’s

authority to directly appoint mayors and some MPs was abolished in order to increase the public's participation and ensure transparency. Bowyer also notes attempts to address the needs of disabled voters as well as enhancing the participation of national minorities and women in voting processes.

Bowyer provides further historical context for how civil society organizations operated during Karimov's regime and following Mirziyoyev's election. Bowyer provides examples of how the country's new administration has reached out to persons with disabilities, youth and women. To demonstrate Uzbekistan's commitment to improving its human rights record, Mirziyoyev invited the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, Secretary General, and Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief to visit the country in 2017. While their impressions were mostly positive, human rights organizations still face difficulties. In conclusion, Bowyer notes the impressive level of ongoing reforms and change in Uzbekistan, but admits that in addition to structural changes, shifts in the political culture and people's mentality will be needed, and that achieving this can be a very tricky task.

In Chapter 7 'Religion and the Secular State', Svante E. Cornell and Jacob Zenn analyse one of Uzbekistan's most sensitive issues: religious policies. In a brief but detailed historical background, Cornell and Zenn describe the emergence of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence and the Maturidi school of theology, both of which became dominant in the region when it was a prominent centre of Islamic culture. The authors contrast these developments with the changes brought about by the Soviet regime, which included attempts to curb religion from public life, making the Salafi theology, which was not traditional for Central Asia, dominant. Uzbekistan faced challenges in formulating its relationship to religion; to illustrate this point, the authors present five models regarding a state's possible positions towards religion: 'fusion' (merger of spiritual and political powers), 'dominant religion' (one dominant religion and provisions for continued existence of minority religions), 'state neutrality' (strict state neutrality in religious matters seen as purely civic and private), 'sceptical/insulating' (a sceptical approach to religion seeking to insulate the state from religious influence) and 'state hostility' (hostile attitude towards any manifestation of religion; this was practised in the USSR and other communist regimes). They argue that Uzbekistan's religious policies feature elements of both 'dominant religion' and 'sceptical/insulating' models. In a brief legal analysis, the authors identify that the constitution does not mention secularism; however, such notions as secularism, religious tolerance and a prohibition on proselytizing are mentioned in legislation concerning religion, education and the military.

Cornell and Zenn note that although no Uzbek law officially embraces the Hanafi school, high-level state religious officials refer to it as ‘our tradition’ and ‘our sect’. The authors underline that even though the Hanafi school is, de facto, a dominant religious identity, minority religions are not suppressed. Thus, Jewish and Christian groups (except for Jehovah’s Witnesses) were able to register their organizations and live free from persecution.

Further, the authors underscore the emergence of numerous Salafi-inspired radical groups, which strived to establish a sharia-based order. A group of Uzbek militants established the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which attempted several attacks in the country, including one on Karimov in Tashkent in 1999. Under Mirziyoyev, policies towards religion have become considerably more relaxed. As Cornell and Zenn contemplate, Uzbekistan might have reached a level of development whereby the threat of extremism is significantly reduced, thus allowing a decrease in restrictions on religion. Major developments have included the release of ‘religious radicals’ and an invitation for activists in exile to come back to the motherland. Mirziyoyev continued his predecessor’s policies of openness towards religious minorities. Human Rights Watch and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief made a positive assessment of the country’s improvements in human rights. Concluding, Cornell and Zenn underline that Uzbekistan still faces numerous challenges related to religion, including radical extremist groups. Interestingly, they point out that Uzbekistan, in striving to connect with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and to meet the demands of international organizations, will have to open up to ‘non-traditional’ Islam, which might destroy a fragile balance ensured by the dominance of the traditional Hanafi school and the prohibition of ‘alien’ sects. This chapter provides enough background for the reader to compare Uzbekistan’s religious policies under two presidents. However, a wider analysis on the standing of non-dominant religions in Uzbekistan would help to paint a more comprehensive picture.

If the authors of previous chapters analysed reforms under Mirziyoyev’s regime, John C.K. Daly, **in this eighth chapter ‘Foreign Coverage and Reaction to Uzbekistan’s Reforms’**, provides an overview of the international community’s reception of those reforms. In particular, he analyses the coverage of events in Uzbekistan since September 2016 by international media, foreign governments, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. In the lead-up to, and start of, Mirziyoyev’s presidency, international media outlets were either sceptical or critical of Uzbekistan’s new leader. Daly expresses frustration that international media and election observers almost completely ignored Mirziyoyev’s reformist agenda and focused exclusively on shortcomings of the electoral organization. The

president's inaugural speech, in which he discussed a currency law and called for the public's involvement, was also largely overlooked by the media. Gradually, the majority of the media changed their tone and started to cover reforms in Uzbekistan in a more nuanced manner. However, the main developments, such as the president's address in 2017, where he criticized the SNB, and the subsequent removal of the SNB's head – two very drastic events in post-Karimov Uzbekistan – went unnoticed by major foreign media.

Daly further overviews how foreign governments reacted to Uzbekistan's new leadership, which, unlike the media, were somewhat positive, with most seeking to further cooperation with Uzbekistan. American and Uzbek leaders discussed the strengthening of economic and diplomatic relations, as well as security issues in Afghanistan. President Trump invited Mirziyoyev to visit the US, even as the US State Department listed Uzbekistan among ten 'countries of particular concern' for religious freedom violations. Russia's approaches focused on common cultural, societal and military ties. The EU's delegations and Special Representative for Central Asia expressed their will to continue supporting Uzbekistan, and praised country's reinvigorated engagement with its neighbours. International financial organizations particularly welcomed Uzbekistan's efforts at economic liberalization. While international human rights organizations were cautious and rather pessimistic about Mirziyoyev at the beginning of his presidency, Daly offers the example of Human Rights Watch, who had not had access to country for the previous seven years, expressing in 2017 a 'cautious hope for change'. In the conclusion, the author stresses the importance of not looking at Uzbekistan through the prism of the previous regime's policies. He underlines that the impact of newly implemented reforms should become the central topic, and that if Uzbekistan allows the establishment of foreign media bureaus in the country, Uzbek people will get a chance to find their voice.

In the ninth and final chapter 'Looking Ahead', Starr and Cornell provide an overview of the edited volume and draw several conclusions. The authors express their admiration for Mirziyoyev's reforms and give credit to his team throughout the country, which supported the president in implementing the changes. Starr and Cornell distinguish four features of the reforms under Mirziyoyev: first, reforms are comprehensive and systemic in character; second, they were planned well in advance, especially during Mirziyoyev's prime ministership; third, while presenting each reform, the president openly stated the basic principle or affirmation from which it emanates; and fourth, the reforms were planned during a period of relative strength, rather than in a crisis. Starr and Cornell provide the reader with a list of

developments that remain to be seen. First, all ongoing reforms are of a ‘top-down’ nature, and one will have to wait and see the response from the ‘bottom’, including administrators on the ground. Will they all embrace the shift or there will be resistance? Second, it remains to be seen how the public will respond to the calls for greater civic engagement. Third, Mirziyoyev and his administration managed to reinforce effective relations with all neighbouring Central Asian states. How they respond to reforms that might threaten the status quo also remains to be observed in the future. And finally, fourth, is how the Uzbek leadership will respond to powerful and international global forces. The authors stress that Uzbekistan is noteworthy for its bold direction and the resolute manner with which it implements reforms, and this could have profound implications for the country itself, for Central Asia and for the world.

Overall, the reader will find this edited volume useful for learning about reforms in Uzbekistan under the new leadership. While the authors highlight the differences between Karimov’s and Mirziyoyev’s governance styles, they also allow the reader to see how the reforms were planned during Mirziyoyev’s prime ministership (and under Karimov’s presidency) and are evolutionary in nature, rather than discrete. This edited volume can become an interesting source for both newcomers to the Central Asian region and experts already familiar with the area. Detailed, chronologically arranged developments, titles of new legislation, statistical data and other figures are among the strongest parts of the book. However, there are some minor shortcomings too. As discussed above, exclusive use of one source when discussing controversial events might prompt the reader to look for alternative interpretations to construct a more balanced understanding. There are several minor omissions and typos which do not interrupt the flow of logic; however, some typos (such as giving a year as ‘1911’ instead of ‘1991’) might confuse a reader who is not very familiar with the history of Uzbekistan and Central Asia.

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