

Turkmen opposition – possible change for Turkmenistan?

Together with Northern Korea or former Iraq Turkmen regime became one of the most authoritarian in the world. Comparing with the states mentioned the attention paid to Turkmenistan is much less. Consequently, the level of corresponding research is still far lower than that of Iraq, Northern Korea or other authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.

The phenomenon of Turkmenistan presents certain specific features even in comparison with other Post-Soviet countries; some of which have been recently touched by another wave of possible democratisation. On the background of so-called “colour” revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia or Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan seems to be unaffected and resist like firm system of one person rule unaffected by any changes. The potential for any changes in any direction is still far more limited than in the cases of other “revolutionary” post-Soviet countries. However, there are several groups especially outside the country, which try to call world’s attention to the situation of Turkmen regime. Their voice is still quite quiet and the will of international community to face the conditions in the country is limited. Their effort usually results not more than to declarations, which do not have any effect on the regime itself.

This article attempts to analyse history, contemporary conditions, chances and perspectives of current opposition in Turkmenistan as well possibilities for changes.

The History of Resistance against Turkmenbashi’s Regime

Democratic opposition in Turkmenistan

Saparmurat Türkmenbashi (up to 1992 Niyazov), the president of Turkmenistan was nominated to the post of the First Secretary of Communist Party of Turkmen SSR in 1986, on the wave of Gorbachev’s elite shift in Central Asia and in other republics and regions of USSR. He was considered to be a kind of compromise figure, not connected with any particular Turkmen political clan. In that time, Mikhail Gorbachev tried to beat down traditional communist elites in the majority of Soviet Republics formed mainly after Second World War. New First Secretary was considered to be a relatively weak person having stable connections in Moscow than in Ashgabat.

As well as in other republics of former Soviet Union, the ideas of *perestrojka* led to establishing of several alternative groups to Communist Party in Turkmenistan. The most important of them was *Agzybirlik* (in interpretation “those, who eats from one pot”), based mostly on intelligentsia - writers or scientists.¹ Their demands were similar to other nationalist movements in former Soviet Union republics – culture revival of Turkmen culture and recognition of Turkmen language as the official language in the republic. They formed a nationalist programme called “*Galkyn halkym!*” (Grow up, my Nation!). The group was eliminated in spring 1992 – their leaders were mostly imprisoned or persecuted. In fact, the new power of Saparmurat Turkmenbashy in fact implemented almost all demands of this movement to political life of the republic, even in much more extreme way.² Another opposition group with some influence, which was able to become a regular party, was Democratic Party led by Durdymurat Hojамuhammedov.

Apart from political parties, intellectual elites of Turkmenistan were able to form several other opposition groups such as Forum of *Paykhas* (leader Shohrat Kadyrov, now emigrant living and publishing in Norway) or a circle around journal *Dayanch* (its editor-in-chief, philosopher and journalist Mahammetmurat Salamatov, is sometimes called “Turkmen Sakharov”).³

Despite the fact, that the leaders of these groups were usually very intellectual and professionally-skilled persons, their abilities to be well oriented in the politics were limited at that very moment. This was the main reason why Turkmenbashy, as a new leader of the Turkmenistan with the experience in Communist state organs with their machinations, was able to suppress them easily. In 1990-1993, there were sporadic and mostly isolated attempts to make some demonstrations against rising power of Turkmenbashy, as well as to place several opposition candidates to the new state organs. Those attempts terminated without any outward results and, on the contrary, served for strengthening of the regime. These movements were not (at least at the first phase) connected with Turkmen region. Even more, the region became towards quite suspicious toward centre.⁴

¹ Most important of them were mainly poet Shirali Nurmuhamet or writer Muhammet Velsapar.

² For example Turkmen language was introduced as the only official language. Compulsory knowledge of it caused removal of major Russian cadres from their posts.

³ Safronov, R.: Opposition in Exile: Turkmenistan. 2002, Eurasianet.org, 12.9.2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/eav120902.shtml>.

⁴ Taking into account real policy and the question on power, organization of any effective resistance of population against dictatorship is now unconceivable without participation of structural formation of Turkmen nation (it means

Diversified nature of opposition and its dispersion has become its characteristic feature since then. Opposition groups were surrounded around one or several individualities usually without coordinated co-operation with other groupings.

At the beginning of 90's, following the first arrests (one of the leaders of *Agzybirlik* was arrested yet in 1990), Turkmen opposition elite representatives started to leave the country trying to escape from Turkmenbashi's growing persecution.⁵ Several others emigrated due to their personal and ideology disagreement with Turkmenbashi.⁶ It was also the case of Avdy Kuliev, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, who left the country firstly to Prague and then to Moscow. In the period of 1993-1994, Turkmen KNB (formerly KGB) "cleared up" all known opposition representatives.

Turkmen Opposition in Exile

Turkmenbashi was and still is very suspicious against anybody who could challenge his rule or simply more capable than him. During last 15 years, he has cleared away almost all Turkmen elites except of several most sycophantic or the most needed-to-him persons.⁷ Increasing pressure on everybody with potential opposition "mood" forced to transfer the main centres of opposition (having the real ambitions to fight against Turkmenbashi) to emigration.

During 90's several opposition circles were established in Russia and Western Europe. "The Prague team" around Turkmen broadcasting of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty became soon one of them; others were concentrated in Norway and Sweden based S. Kadyrov or Murad

Akhal-Tekke hegemony). The victory over the regime is not possible without opposition, which will not be backed by population of capital and its surroundings. The experience of 1989-1995 showed, that people from regions do not participate in street manifestations. Due to the majority of Akhal-Tekke in capital and central regions any opposition party should consider its local elites during negotiation with the power. Kadyrov, S.: *Natsiya plemen*, Centre for Civilization and Regional Research, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 2003, p. 146 (quotation of Velsapar).

⁵ First wave of immigrants was formed from these figures – S. Kadyrov and A. Velsapar found asylum in Norway; Salamatov a Nurmammedov were either under home arrest, or sentenced to long-term prison.

⁶ Ponomarjov, V.: *Turkmenskaya gosudarstvennaya politika i prava cheloveka 1995-1998*. [Turkmen State Policy and Human Rights 1995-1998] www.memo.ru/hr/politpr/cntrasia/turk/index.htm. [last download 22. 4. 2002].

⁷ Former Deputy Prime Minister Jelly Kurbanmuradov and former Chief of President's Office and at the same time Deputy Prime Minister Rejep Saparov has been ultimate prominent figures in the surroundings of Turkmenbashi. According to Vitaliy Ponomarjev (Head of The Central Asian Monitoring Program in Russian centre for Human Rights protection Memorial) these people has known Turkmenbashi Soviet era and they could not accept him as the real Prophet with divine inspiration, but as a normal man. Dolgin, B.: *Stepen stabilnosti turkmenskogo obshchestva preuvelichena* [The Level of Stability in Turkmen Society is overestimated]. Gondogar.org, 4.9.2005, www.gundogar.org [downloaded 5.9.2005].

Esenov respectively.⁸ Although the centres mentioned above formed exiled Turkmen Diaspora, they can not be considered as real opposition movements.⁹

Such group with features of party with ambitions to remove Turkmenbashi's regime from power was set up only in 1994, when Avdy Kuliev left Prague RFE/RL for Moscow to found so-called "Turkmenistan Fond" for supporting its initiatives. In the first years the group hoped for fast end of the regime.

Almost immediately after Kuliev's arrival to Moscow Turkmen KGB agents kept eyes after him very thoroughly.¹⁰ This fact forced him to be very cautious to distinguish between provocateurs and serious oppositionists. The problem to differentiate these similar behaved groups of people was manifested during most serious attempt to peaceful overthrow of Turkmenbashi in 1995. Two emissaries from Ashgabat were not fully accepted by Kuliev and the demonstrations and its organizers were brutally persecuted.¹¹ Even if the success of such demonstrations was disputable, disunity and distrust among the opposition even diminished all the chances. So its final effect was contradictory – the regime became stronger and more repressive after these events. On the request of Turkmen security organs, Kuliev and other activists of "Fond Turkmenistan" were searched by Russian FSB. However, Russia finally did not risk the extradition of these people (mostly Russian citizens) to Turkmenistan.

After this unsuccessful event in 1995 the activity of opposition became much less effective. Kuliev continued to call for support of Turkmen opposition in several countries and organizations in the world. These efforts encountered with almost zero reaction and unconcern of influential persons or states, with the exception of few NGOs with no real power to initiate any changes.

⁸ Leader of The United Turkmen Democratic Opposition Avdy Kuliev is convinced that Esenov is the agent of Turkmen Secret Services. According to him he was seen several times at the receptions at Turkmen Embassy in Moscow. The real Esenov's role in this case is, however, a questionable issue. But since any possible provocation is taken to account very seriously by Kuliev, he has broken off serious co-operation with him. Rossijskiye spetssluzhby ishchut vinovnikov neudavsheysya popytki gosudarstvennogo perevorota v Moskve [Russian Secret Services look for offenders of unsuccessful attempt of state coup in Moscow]. *Erkin Turkmenistan*, No. 8, 2003, pp. 33-36.

⁹ Despite this fact, Turkmen Security Service, in co-operation with its Russian counterpart, took up two Turkmen emigrants – Murad Esenov and Halmurad Sojunov. They were accused from terrorist activities against Turkmenistan. *Turkmenskaya Iskra* and Turkmen Press, 3.1.1995, p. 1.

¹⁰ It was confirmed in 1994, when two Turkmen oppositionists were arrested by Turkmen agents in Tashkent and for their contacts with Kuliev they were sentenced for a long terms.

¹¹ Interview with Avdy Kuliev, 5 October 1999.

Kuliev alone used opportunity to visit Turkmenistan again in 1998, when Turkmenbashy was on the official visit in USA.¹² But his journey was interrupted by KNB organs just at the Ashgabat airport. He was imprisoned and after 3 days expelled back to Russia.¹³ The year later, in 1999, the visa-free system was almost completely abolished in Turkmenistan. The citizens of all countries (including CIS) have had to ask for Turkmen visa since that time. Citizens of Turkmenistan were periodically obliged to get exit visa to leave the country. Russian radio and TV became more systematically censored and subscription of Russian newspapers was forbidden. The contact between exiled groups and their supporters fell to almost zero.¹⁴

New wave of exile in 2001-2002

In autumn 2001, one of the most prominent figures of Turkmenbashy's regime - Minister of Foreign Affairs Boris Shikhmuradov – had to leave its post and was sent to “honour exile” as an Ambassador to China. When Turkmenbashy accused him of illegal trade with weapons, he went from the Embassy to Moscow and declared his switch passing to opposition. He had a lot of sources to start his activities to face Turkmenbashy. He found People Democratic Movement of Turkmenistan (*Narodno-demokraticeskoe dvizhenie Turkmenistana*), promoting his opposition ideas on the internet site Gundogar.org.¹⁵ During 2002 another high persons in Turkmen politics followed Shikhmuradov and joined him. The most important of them were Khudajberdy Orazov, former Director of Central Bank and Deputy Prime Minister, and Nurmuhamet Khanamov, who left the position of Turkmenistan Ambassador in Turkey. Shikhmuradov's plans and activities attracted these “new opposition” and, according to a Shikhmuradov's interview, dozen of emigrants entered so-called Higher Executive Board (*Vysshiy ispolnitelnyy soviet*) of the movement. It was visible that Shikhmuradov started the process to overthrow Turkmenbashy's rule alone. His ambitions to become the only leader of united Turkmen opposition and his aggressive campaign at the end of 2001 and beginning of 2002 led to displeasure and suspicion

¹² Turkmenbashy expected the invitation to the White House during this visit. His meeting with US president could serve as affirmation of his regime for Turkmen Ideology.

¹³ This journey was described by Vitaliy Ponomarjev, his companion during the visit.

¹⁴ Interview with Avdy Kuliev, 5 October 1999.

¹⁵ <http://www.gundogar.org>. This page continues to exist and collects materials about Turkmenistan and Central Asia. Electronic version of the only Official Russian Newspaper in Turkmenistan *Neytralnyy Turkmenistan* (Neutral Turkmenistan) is published every day on this page. It serves as one of the best sources on Turkmen state propaganda.

among the “old opposition”.¹⁶ They refused to co-operate with Shikhmuradov and stayed aside of so-called Turkmen terrorist acts in autumn 2002. However, the activities of Kuliev, which tried to consolidate diversified and illegal opposition group in Turkmenistan, rose up as well. Despite several declarations about some unity, two opposition waves were not able to evolve any fact of coordinated activity.¹⁷

At the same time, Shikhmuradov pragmatically understood the situation in the country. Necessary changes in the country could have been possible only after any kind of removal of Turkmenbashi (including physical elimination). At the first phase, he planned to start with peaceful demonstrations, which could lead to some kind of revolution led by his movement. Several supporters, according to their words, started to prepare the field in Turkmenistan at that time.¹⁸ In autumn 2002 Shikhmuradov crossed illegally Turkmen borders and started to operate directly in the country. It is still quite unclear, which concrete actions went off. Anyway, intensification of opposition mood in Ashgabat probably did not avoid the notice of Turkmen KNB, even though the latter organ had been weakened by vast purge few months before.¹⁹ Security forces of the republic produced alleged assassination on Turkmen president on 25 November 2002. Shikhmuradov was proclaimed as a main chief of this action.²⁰ Finally he was sentenced to many years of prison in fabricated process, during which he read his act of contrition, possibly under narcotic intoxication.²¹

Shikhmuradov's opposition movement, activities of which increased rapidly in 2002, split to several fractions and their doings came down again. The People Democratic Movement of Turkmenistan itself continued to work, but in much smaller format. This fact was reflected by

¹⁶ Statement of United Turkmen Opposition, 13.11.2001; Kuliev, A.: *Turkmenskaya oppozitsiya na nyneshnem etape, preodoleniye razdroblennosti i dostizheniye yedinstva* [Current Turkmen Opposition, Overcoming of disintegration and Achievement of Unity]. Paper on the Conference on Human Rights and Security, International Helsinki Group and Memorial Centre, 3.-4.11.2002; Consultation with A. Kuliev, e-mail from 30. 4. 2002. See also, Pronin, V.: *Mirazhi i realii “novoy turkmenskoy oppozitsii” I-IV* [Mirages and realities of “The new Turkmen opposition”]. Erkin.net, 2002. <http://www.erkinnet.net/chronicle/pronin1.html>.

¹⁷ *Turkmenskaya oppozitsiya – Yesli my budem yediny... Opozitsiya Niyazovu opredelyayet obshchiye celi i zadachi*. Central Asia and The Caucasus Broadcasting, Radio Liberty, 12. 3. 2002. <http://gundogar.org/rusapages/211.htm> [last download 9.4. 2002].

¹⁸ Sir, J.: Interview with Leonid Komarovskiy, 28.9.2003 (archive of author).

¹⁹ The victim of this purge became the head of KNB Muhammet Nazarov, one of the most powerful and skilful men within Turkmen elite. He was sentenced to a long-term prison. Almost all higher officers of KNB were also removed from their posts and most of them were persecuted as well.

²⁰ Atadzhanova, K.: *Oni khoteli zakhvatit vlast* [They wanted to seize the power]. Turkmenistan.ru, 30.12.2002, <http://www.turkmenistan.ru/print.gfm?r=5&d=2451> [last download 9.1.2003].

²¹ Sound record of Turkmen TV with Shikhmuradov's speech from 29.12.2002. Archive of author.

deep conflicts among “new opposition” and ambitions of most prominent figures of the former Higher Executive Council. Furthermore, division between “old” and “new” opposition did not get over. New parties like *Watan* (leaders Khudajberdy Orazov and Aleksandr Dodonov), *Galkynysh/Vozrozhdeniye* (Halnazar Sojunov) and Republican Party of Turkmenistan (Nurmuhammet Khanamov) appeared on the opposition scene.

The attempt to re-unification of opposition was made (mainly by NGOs and Human Rights organizations) during Prague Conference of Turkmen opposition forces in September 2003. The main result of this meeting became the establishment of so-called Union of Democratic Forces of Turkmenistan (UDFT) consisted of *Watan*, *Galkynysh*, Republican Party of Turkmenistan and Kuliev’s United Democratic Opposition of Turkmenistan. The participants condemned repressions of Turkmen regime, and appealed for introducing of international sanctions against regime, as well as revocation of “neutral status” of Turkmenistan (being one of the main ideological columns of the regime) in UN General Assembly.²²

Despite the very fact of the ability meeting of four most important opposition groups to meet, their influence on the situation in Turkmenistan was overestimated. Actually, achieving some declaration and creation of “united front” was not the main problem of opposition. All parties shared common goals (removing Turkmenbashy from the power) and more or less democratic attitude to post-Turkmenbashy Turkmenistan. However, the outcome of the conference was too general and without much concrete goals stated except of new constitutional design.

At the following conference of opposition parties in Vienna in November 2003 UDFT became a formal joint platform for opinion exchange, but without deeper ambitions to coordinate opposition actions of its members.

Contemporary opposition – problems and perspectives

In 2003-2005 the activities of united Turkmen opposition did not get over periodical meetings and contacts between individual persons and parties. But common plans for joint actions in the fight against Turkmenbashy’s regime were probably abandoned.

²² Prague Communiqué and Common Statement of opposition organizations of Turkmenistan. Prague, 28.9.2003.

Each party presented their own concepts of law, election, constitutional or educational design that could be applied after elimination of Turkmenbashy's regime.²³ Separated parties turned to organs of EU or UN several times with their declarations to call for some measures that could be taken by international community against President Turkmenbashy.²⁴

Despite of some party leader's opinion, disunity makes opposition fight against regime much less effective.²⁵ For example, if just one political party proposes some declaration without the support of other ones, its chance to "lobby" at some institutions is more complicated than in a case of united opposition action. Incapability of common steps (common open letters, statements or declarations to world institutions) also disperses potential international aid. Moreover, Turkmenbashy could stay strong enough to deal and fight with several individual parties for a long time, but united and stronger opposition front would be more dangerous challenge for him.

According to program documents, each opposition party worked out the strategy of action after the fall of current regime. These programmes automatically suppose democratization of the country and relatively free elections. But democratization in Post-Soviet Space in the beginning of 90s, after the fall of totalitarian regime, very often turned up to some kind of authoritarian regime (distinctive examples of the case are e. g. Kuchma's Ukraine or Lukashenka's Belarus). The experience of contemporary Eastern Europe also shows that formal democracy on political level (elections, parliaments etc.) is not usually accompanied by real democratization of society. Mentality and social formulas of the post-totalitarian nation, who used to live in some kind of authoritarian regime, is unreformable in a short period. In this context, the leaders of Turkmen opposition parties should have in mind also such aspect of future (and inevitable) transition of Turkmenistan. Whoever will be in the power in Turkmenistan should count with it.

The last but not least problematic issue for Turkmen opposition is a method of ousting current president. Opposition parties tend to use "soft" methods in their fights with Turkmenbashy – open letters, resolutions or declarations. However, it is uncertain whether such acts are able to

²³ Probably most profound elaborated programme was presented by party *Watan*. Its updated version was published in February 2005. http://www.watan.ru/rus/view.php?nomer=26&razd=new_dey_ru&pg=1 [last download 25.8.2005].

²⁴ The final draft of a resolution as proposed by the Republican Party of Turkmenistan in exile for consideration and adoption by the European Parliament, <http://www.tmrepublican.org/content.php?t=policystatement&pg=5>, [last download 5.9.2005].

²⁵ Preferences for individual actions among the opposition were expressed for example in the interview with The Chairman of Executive Council of *Watan* Khudayberdy Orazov, 11.2.2005 [last download 5.9.2005].

lead to the end of current regime. “Hard” measures like “controlled” assassination of the president were possibly planned by Shikhmuradov, but also as the last and extreme variant. This alternative should also be considered among opposition in exile. It is almost clear that such plan is even developed by some groups inside Turkmenistan (so-called “hidden” opposition). Of course, in this case there is enormous danger that the situation come out of control. Even more planning of such violence action is very precise matter and no opposition party has necessary capacities to prepare it thoroughly.

Problem points of possible revolution in Turkmenistan

Considering possible development during and after expected end of Turkmenbashy’s period (in whatever manner it would come), there are several problems we should bear in mind analysing possible “revolutionary” scenarios.

Above all, any next revolution and post-revolutionary changes will be concentrated in central regions of the country, which is under the control of Akhal-Tekke tribe. Turkmen scientist Shohrat Kadyrov stresses this factor as one of the most important matter in the life of Turkmenistan, at least in the last century.²⁶ Those elites must participate in the changes, in whatever direction it would lead. The possibility for transferring Turkmen centre to other region (for instance to Western Balkan or Eastern Lebap) is more than hypothetical now.

Any regime transformation is accompanied by enormous economic transformation troubles. Every change in Turkmenistan would probably lead (at least in the first years) to another descent or even failure of economy, higher inflation rate and additional impoverishment of people. This feature is clearly visible in Ukraine after Orange Revolution in 2004. Weak economy and high share of population under poverty line could direct Turkmenistan to anarchy. Huge transfers of property will be accompanied with lot of re-privatization scandals. It will consequently cause decrease of foreign investor’s interest in the country. It is doubtful that any opposition party is able to manage such complex of problems by itself. Impoverishment of people is associated with possible increase of extremist mood and disillusion from democracy for a long time. Such “transition period” is a perfect opportunity for extremist and revivalist groups. So, in the next future we must expect disturbances and turmoil in Turkmenistan. Consolidation of the situation

²⁶ Kadyrov, S.: op. cit., especially pp. 145-151.

will probably need quite strong leadership of the country, which creates new space open for another authoritarian regime in Ashgabat.

Distance of the opposition in exile from internal life in the country gradually gets emigrants estrange from people and political life inside the country. Experience of Eastern European countries demonstrates that new power is usually generated from internal circles rather than emigrant ones. Meeting of these two kinds of elites usually ends up with mutual misunderstanding. This misunderstanding could be much stronger in Turkmenistan than in other transition countries. The cadres educated under very extraordinary regime of Turkmenbashy will incline to simpler decision of very delicate problems (for example above mentioned economical transition), which evokes again the tendency to authoritarian measures.

Disunity of opposition will make other troubles in case of the change of the regime. The proclaimed and fragile unity is only a temporary fact. Successive division of opposition parties under ambitious leaders in the countries like Turkmenistan will endanger a long-term instability of the country. Solving necessary transition problems could easily result in dissension among the victorious parties, which is visible in contemporary Ukraine or Kyrgyzstan).

Conclusions – possible scenarios of changes

The wave of “colour revolutions” brought some hope for changes in rigid political systems of Central Asian region. But events in Uzbek Andijan, which followed a few weeks after the changes in Kyrgyzstan, clearly illustrated that such regimes are ready to secure themselves even using brutal violence to suppress any threat. At least formal participation of opposition in political life of the particular country was among most important factors that helped recent revolutions. This aspect made the regime of Shevarnadze, Kuchma or Akayev much less protected against the revolutionary wave in 2003-2005. In Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine or Georgia the opposition groups enjoyed both internal and external support for enforcement the changes. “Harder” regime like that in Turkmenistan has more difficulties to carry through any changes, if the opposition parties are not involved (at least in limited way) directly in the politics. Lack of support for opposition from outside world (cases of both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) makes the situation even more problematic.²⁷

²⁷ Belarus is similar case. Despite the support of Belarus opposition from many NGOs in several countries, real will to change the Lukashenka’s regime within great powers (including Russia) is not enough to enable such process.

Turkmen opposition underlines the weakness of the regimes in the country from 90's. The cliché about rapid dissolution of Turkmen system is repeated for several years. But these expectations have not been proved yet. The opposition underestimates stability of Turkmenbashy's regime based on constant fear on any level of power. Keeping the population in this fear is a sufficient tool how to prevent any serious "revolution" for quite a long time. The strength of the regime also lies in constant tense within ruling elite. Caballing and constant corruption and other crimes of Turkmenbashy's subordinates make the space for him to manoeuvre in the system. However, the opposition is right in one matter - such a regime should come to end one day, but the breaking point, which would initiate such change, is very unpredictable.

Thus, there are three most probable ways of regime change in Turkmenistan, no one of which is much favourable for current opposition in exile. The first is a sudden death of Turkmenbashy. In short-term view, it is possible to await this scenario due to speculations about poor health of president; in longer term there is a president's age as a key factor. After Turkmenbashy's death we should expect conflict among existing current internal elites. These people would probably try not to allow the opposition in exile to return back to the country and choose some successor among itself. The mode of this choosing ranges from usurpation of power in hands of one particular group to violent clashes. For Turkmenistan it would mean installing of another authoritarian regime, character of which would be very unpredictable.

The second way of regime change is a coup d'état organized by some interest group. The consequences would be probably very similar as in previous case. Organization of such overturn is quite complicated within current regime, in which tension and whispering within elites allows Turkmenbashy to know almost about every act against him. But anyway we can not exclude such possibility.

The other path to eliminate Turkmenbashy's power is an intervention from outside or at least with the support by external powers. However, in short-term perspective there is almost no chance that any of great power would become "attracted" in such "humanitarian intervention". Russia is mostly indifferent about internal development in the country; China is even more away from interference to such intervention, so the most possible initiator of such process could be USA. Unfortunately for Turkmenistan, the country is not still not part of "axis of evil" and does not produce nuclear, biological, chemical weapons or other threat to outside world. Washington is also more concerned about its Middle Eastern affairs. Turkmenistan could serve for them just

as a good base for their military forces. By the way, the speculations about re-dislocation of US Air Forces from Uzbek Khanabad to Turkmen bases in Mary and Kushka started to be discussed in September 2005.²⁸ Looking at Uzbekistan case the US Army presence in particular territory does not automatically mean initiation of some changes in internal affairs in the country. On the other hand the case of Iraq shows that eventual intervention needn't to result in order and democracy. Of course, in case of American (or anybody others) will to change the regime, the current opposition would have much more chances to be included in the process.

None of these three scenarios is very optimistic. Despite enormous efforts, present Turkmen opposition in exile has in reality only a little chance to change the situation according to its interests. Whether president Turkmenbashy leaves the country voluntarily or not, his inheritance will be a catastrophe for Turkmenistan for many years - in any case, under any successor, which would probably be “product” of current regime. As representatives of Turkmen opposition has repeated many times without any distinct reaction: the more dictatorship of Turkmenbashy will last, the longer will be an unavoidable transition process in the country.

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²⁸ Among many analyses on this topic see for example Dubnov, A.: Amerikantsy obustravautsya v Turkmenii. I evakuiroyutsya iz Uzbekistana [Americans establish themselves in Turkmenistan. And they evacuate themselves from Uzbekistan]. Vremya Novostey, 5.9.2005.