



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Uzbeks campaign for economic rights and release of prisoners, 2005

January

2005

to: May 13,

2005

Country: Uzbekistan

Location City/State/Province: *Andijan, Andijan Province*

Location Description: *Babur Square*

Goals:

To free twenty-three prominent businessmen arrested by the police and to force the Uzbek government into improving the economic situation in the Ferghana Valley. Protesters also spoke out against the corruption in the Uzbek government.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 4th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 5th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 020. Prayer and worship
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- Muslims in Andijan
- The arrested businessmen and their employees were the most active people.

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Not known

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

No known joining order

Segment Length: 3 weeks

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

The Uzbek government, judiciary, police, and army.

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

An armed group of men stormed a jail, freeing the businessmen, and killing several guards. Some armed demonstrators also took government workers and security agents as hostages, and used them as human shields against gunfire from the army and the police. A handful of armed demonstrators shot at army and police forces. While all of this violence occurred during the campaign, the violence was quite separate from the peaceful protests, though they shared a common goal.

Repressive Violence:

Army and police forces repeatedly fired on unarmed and armed demonstrators in Babur Square and on the road out of the Square in response to the militant action on May 13. Many of the demonstrators wounded in the shooting were executed by the army.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0 points out of 1 point

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The campaign ended on May 13, because government soldiers killed so many protesters.

In June of 2004, police arrested twenty-three businessmen in the Uzbek city of Andijan for their supposed connection to Akramia, an Islamic extremist group. These businessmen enjoyed considerable support among the Andijan population, because they employed many locals at higher wages than other companies did. The national government, however, saw these businessmen as a nuisance. After the 1999 Tashkent bombings, the Uzbek government cracked down on Muslims, and made it much harder for Muslims to have their own businesses. The twenty-three Muslim businessmen in Andijan had avoided the government crackdown by sharing capital and creating successful businesses. After their arrest, they were put on trial, and thousands of demonstrators campaigned for their release and against the poor economic conditions in Andijan.

Beginning in January of 2005, locals, many of whom had lost their jobs following the arrest of the business leaders, protested routinely in Babur Square, the square in front of the courthouse where the businessmen were being tried. They held signs and chanted slogans in an organized fashion, and their demeanor was non-confrontational. They aimed at first to simply pressure the

authorities into releasing the businessmen, because Uzbek authorities regularly arrested people on exaggerated charges to scare them, and then would decrease the severity of the charges after public pressure. Over time, the protesters also spoke out against the poor economic conditions present in the Ferghana Valley (where Andijan is located) and corruption within the Uzbek government. By the end, the protest became just as much about social and economic issues as political issues.

For almost the entire campaign, the protesters used similar techniques. They gathered in front of the courthouse in small groups, and conveyed their message through signs and chants. On April 25, the arrested businessmen announced a hunger strike in protest of the judge's actions.

The pattern of the campaign changed as the verdict deadline approached. The verdict was set to be announced on May 11, and on the 10th, 1,000 people showed up in front of the courthouse. A large crowd gathered on the 11th as well, but the court delayed the verdict indefinitely. On the 11th and the 12th, police detained several relatives of the already detained businessmen.

During the early morning of May 13, a handful of unidentified men forcefully took weapons from an army unit and stormed the Andijan jail, liberating the businessmen and other prisoners. The militants killed some guards in the process. Many of those liberated made their way to Babur Square. Armed civilians also seized a government building near a square and made their way to the Square with some hostages, and kept other hostages in the building. While both militants and peaceful demonstrators occupied Babur Square, the two groups stayed separate, and the militants were a small minority of the entire crowd. News of the events spread quickly, and soon thousands gathered in the Square. Protesters put microphones in the middle of the Square and people spoke out against poverty and injustice. Many also prayed as a group at the nearby mosque. Beginning in the early morning, army and police forces set up blockades around the Square, but allowed people to enter on foot. As the situation escalated, some protesters wished to leave the square due to the potential for violence, but organizers feared that anyone who left the Square would be executed, and urged people to stay in solidarity.

By the afternoon, between 10,000 and 15,000 people had gathered in the square, and many believed President Karimov would come to address the crowd. Without warning, however, police and army forces attacked largely unarmed demonstrators with gunfire, and forced them out of the square. As they escaped, the demonstrators placed hostages in front of them, but many hostages were killed by government fire. Unarmed demonstrators faced intermittent fire from the army and police. Some broke off from the main column via side streets, while others continued in a large group, and a small portion walked across the border to Kyrgyzstan. Various sources estimate the protesters' death toll between 300 and 5,000 people.

The campaign ended in disaster for the protesters. The death toll was enormous, and none of their demands were achieved. While militants perpetrated very little violence against the Uzbek government, it, along with the presence of weapons in Babur Square, was enough to cause a violent reaction from the government.

Research Notes

Sources:

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Additional Notes:

The nonviolent campaign failed to release the prisoners or improve economic conditions because of the massacre perpetrated by the Uzbek government. However, it was not the peaceful protesters that provoked the government; the violence committed against jail guards and government employees caused the Uzbek government to respond violently, therefore ending the campaign. Following the massacre, the Uzbek government refused to release all of the victims' bodies to their relatives, especially those of women and children killed. Because of this, the exact death toll is not known.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Danny Hirschel-Burns, 09/03/2011

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