

COUNTRY PROFILE: TURKMENISTAN

October 2004

COUNTRY

Formal Name: Republic of Turkmenistan.

Short Form: Turkmenistan.

Term for Citizen(s): Turkmenistani(s).

Capital: Ashgabat.

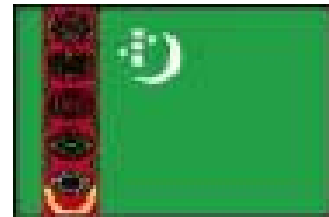
Other Major Cities: Balkanabat (formerly Nebit-Dag), Dashhowuz, Mary, Turkmenabat (formerly Charjew), and Turkmenbashi (formerly Krasnovodsk).

Independence: The date of independence is recognized as October 27, 1991, the day when a national referendum called for Turkmenistan to leave the Soviet Union.

Public Holidays: The official national holidays are New Year's Day (January 1), Memorial Day (January 12), Turkmen Flag Day and the birthday of President Saparmurad Niyazov (February 19), Women's Day (March 8), Navruz (March 21), Victory Day (May 9), Constitution Day (May 18), Independence Day (October 27), and Turkmenistan Neutrality Day (December 12).

Flag:

The background of the flag is green, with a vertical maroon stripe close to the left edge. On the maroon stripe, five carpet designs are arranged vertically. To the right of the maroon stripe, on the upper left of the main green field are five white stars partially encircled by a white crescent moon.



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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the eighth century A.D., Turkic-speaking Oghuz tribes moved from Mongolia into present-day Central Asia. Part of a powerful confederation of tribes, these Oghuz formed the ethnic basis of the modern Turkmen population. In the tenth century, the name “Turkmen” was first applied to Oghuz groups that accepted Islam and began to occupy present-day Turkmenistan. There they were under the dominion of the Seljuk Empire, which was composed of Oghuz groups living in present-day Iran and Turkmenistan. Turkmen soldiers in the service of the empire played an important role in the spreading of Turkic culture when they migrated westward into present-day Azerbaijan and eastern Turkey. In the twelfth century, Turkmen and other tribes overthrew the Seljuk Empire. In the next century, the Mongols took over the more northern lands where the Turkmens had settled, scattering the Turkmens southward and contributing to the formation of

new tribal groups. The sixteenth and eighteenth centuries saw a series of splits and confederations among the nomadic Turkmen tribes, who remained staunchly independent and inspired fear in their neighbors. By the sixteenth century, most of those tribes were under the nominal control of two sedentary Uzbek khanates, Khiva and Bukhoro. Turkmen soldiers were an important element of the Uzbek militaries of this period. In the nineteenth century, raids and rebellions by the Yomud Turkmen group resulted in that group's dispersal by the Uzbek rulers.

Russian forces began occupying Turkmen territory late in the nineteenth century. From their Caspian Sea base at Krasnovodsk (now Turkmenbashi), the Russians eventually overcame the Uzbek khanates. In 1881 the last significant resistance in Turkmen territory was crushed at the Battle of Gokdepe, and shortly thereafter Turkmenistan was annexed, together with adjoining Uzbek territory, into the Russian Empire. In 1916 the Russian Empire's participation in World War I resonated in Turkmenistan, as an anti-conscription revolt swept most of Russian Central Asia. Although the Russian Revolution of 1917 had little direct impact, in the 1920s Turkmen forces joined Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks in the so-called Basmachi Rebellion against the rule of the newly formed Soviet Union. In 1924 the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic was formed from the tsarist province of Transcaspia. By the late 1930s, Soviet reorganization of agriculture had destroyed what remained of the nomadic lifestyle in Turkmenistan, and Moscow controlled political life. During the next half-century, Turkmenistan played its designated economic role within the Soviet Union and remained outside the course of major world events. Even the major liberalization movement that shook Russia in the late 1980s had little impact. However, in 1990 the Supreme Soviet of Turkmenistan declared sovereignty as a nationalist response to perceived exploitation by Moscow. Although Turkmenistan was ill prepared for independence and communist leader Saparmurad Niyazov preferred to preserve the Soviet Union, in October 1991 the fragmentation of that entity forced him to call a national referendum that approved independence.

After independence Niyazov continued as Turkmenistan's chief of state, replacing communism with a unique brand of independent nationalism reinforced by a pervasive cult of personality. A 1994 referendum and legislation in 1999 abolished further requirements for the president to stand for reelection (although in 1992 he completely dominated the only presidential election in which he ran), making him effectively president for life. Niyazov has conducted frequent purges of public officials and has abolished organizations deemed threatening. Throughout the post-Soviet era, Niyazov declared Turkmenistan's neutrality on almost all international issues. He eschewed membership in regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and in the late 1990s he maintained relations with the Taliban and its chief opponent in Afghanistan, the United Front. He offered limited support to the military campaign against the Taliban following September 11, 2001. In 2002 an alleged assassination attempt led to a new wave of security restrictions, dismissals of government officials, and restrictions placed on the media. Niyazov accused exiled former foreign minister Boris Shikhmuradov of having planned the attack.

GEOGRAPHY

Location: Turkmenistan, the farthest southwest of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, is located on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. To the south is Iran, to the south and east is Afghanistan, and to the north are Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.



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Size: Turkmenistan occupies 488,100 square kilometers, almost all of which is land surface.

Land Boundaries: The length of Turkmenistan's borders with neighboring countries is as follows: with Uzbekistan, 1,621 kilometers; with Iran, 922 kilometers; with Afghanistan, 744 kilometers; and with Kazakhstan, 379 kilometers.

Length of Coastline: Turkmenistan's only coastline, along the Caspian Sea, is 1,768 kilometers long.

Maritime Claims: Turkmenistan has an ongoing dispute with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan over division of the Caspian seabed, which contains rich oil deposits.

Topography: Most of Turkmenistan's surface is flat desert. The Garagum (Kara Kum) Desert occupies all of central Turkmenistan, from the northern to the southern border. The Kopetdag Range extends along the central part of the southern border with Iran. The western extent of the Pamir-Alay Range includes the country's highest point, Mount Ayrybaba, which is 3,137 meters high. The Kopetdag Range is prone to severe earthquakes. The Krasnovodsk and Ustirt plateaus dominate northwestern Turkmenistan. Along the Caspian coast, elevations are at or below sea level for as much as 150 kilometers inland.

Principal Rivers: The most important river is the Amu Darya, which flows across northeastern Turkmenistan, thence eastward to form the southern borders of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Other major rivers are the Tejen (1,124 kilometers), the Murgap (852 kilometers), and the Atrek (660 kilometers).

Climate: Most of Turkmenistan has a subtropical desert climate that is severely continental. Summers are long, hot, and dry, and winters are mild and dry. Annual precipitation ranges from 80 millimeters in the northwest to 300 millimeters in the Kopetdag Range.

Land Use: Some 3.7 percent of the land is classified as arable, and less than 0.2 percent is planted to permanent crops. About 17,500 square kilometers are irrigated, mainly for cotton production.

Environmental Factors: Turkmenistan has fewer critical water- and air-pollution problems than most of the other former Soviet republics because it has relatively little heavy industry, a low concentration of motor vehicles, and low population density. Turkmenistan's three major

environmental problems are the various effects of the desiccation of the Aral Sea; the desertification that is reducing Turkmenistan's stock of arable land; and a complex of conditions resulting from water levels and industrialization on the Caspian Sea. Related to the first two problems is the shortage of water, an absolute requirement for the development of agriculture, industry, and large population centers anywhere in the country. The cult-of-personality dictatorship of President Niyazov has combined with a shortage of resources to limit citizen input on environmental issues.

Time Zone: Turkmenistan's time zone is five hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time.

SOCIETY

Population: In 2004 Turkmenistan's population was estimated at 4,863,000. The annual growth rate was 1.81 percent. In 2003 some 55 percent of the population lived in rural areas. Population density varies greatly between desert areas and areas where water is available. In the first post-Soviet years (1991-95), Turkmenistan experienced a strong rate of immigration as ethnic Turkmens returned to their homeland, but by 2003 the net migration rate was -0.86 per 1,000 population.

Demography: In 2004 some 36.2 percent of the population was 14 years of age or younger, and 4.1 percent of the population was 65 years of age or older. The sex ratio was .98 males per female. The birthrate was 27.8 births per 1,000 population, and the death rate was 8.8 per 1,000 population. The infant mortality rate was 73.1 deaths per 1,000 live births. Overall life expectancy was 61.3 years: 57.9 years for males, 64.9 years for females. In 2004 the fertility rate was 3.45 children born per woman.

Ethnic Groups: In 2003 the population of Turkmenistan was 85 percent Turkmen, 5 percent Uzbek, and 4 percent Russian. Smaller ethnic groups, in order of size, are Tatar, Kazakh, Ukrainian, Azeri, and Armenian. In the early 2000s, government discrimination against minority citizens, particularly Russians, has increased the rate of emigration and depleted the fund of Russian technical expertise. Dual Russian-Turkmenistani citizenship was abolished in 2003.

Languages: In 2003, officially 72 percent of citizens spoke Turkmen, the official state language. Some 12 percent spoke Russian, and 9 percent spoke Uzbek. However, since the late 1990s the government has discouraged the use of Russian, which is spoken mainly in urban areas. Uzbek is spoken mainly in northern Turkmenistan. In 2000 President Niyazov decreed that all governmental office holders and officials in higher education must speak Turkmen, and a campaign has sought to abolish non-Turkmen instruction in institutions of higher learning. All Russian-language newspapers ceased distribution in 2002.

Religion: An estimated 89 percent of the population practices Sunni Islam and 9 percent Russian Orthodoxy. Islam in Turkmenistan often includes elements of mysticism and shamanism.

Education and Literacy: In the Soviet era, Turkmenistan's population was considered to be well educated. In 2002 the literacy rate was estimated at 98 percent. However, since

independence a serious deterioration of the education system has depleted the overall skill level of the working population. The government has limited curricula by eliminating a wide variety of studies that are considered dangerous or useless. Funding has not matched the growing population, teacher salaries have been reduced, and the infrastructure is in poor condition. The dismissal of many ethnic Russian teachers also has damaged the system. The reduction of obligatory education from eleven years to nine years put Turkmen students at a disadvantage in continuing their education past secondary school. Some 16 institutions of higher learning were operating in the early 2000s, but the government has limited access to higher education by eliminating free tuition (in 2003) and by ethnic background checks on applicants.

Health: In the post-Soviet era, reduced funding has put the health system in poor condition. In 2002 Turkmenistan had 50 hospital beds per 10,000 population, less than half the number in 1996. Overall policy has targeted inpatient facilities to the detriment of basic, outpatient care. Since the late 1990s, many rural facilities have closed, making care available principally in urban areas. Although health care is theoretically available to all citizens without charge, physicians are poorly trained, modern medical techniques are rarely used, and medications are in short supply. Private health care is rare, as the state maintains a near monopoly.

The most common causes of death are cardiovascular disease, cancer, and respiratory disease. Major health factors are poor diet, polluted drinking water, and the industrial and agricultural pollutants that are especially concentrated in the northeastern areas near the Amu Darya River and the Aral Sea. The reported occurrence of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is less than 0.1 percent. However, sharp increases in drug trafficking through Turkmenistan are likely to increase that figure substantially.

Welfare: In the post-Soviet era, the Niyazov government has declared several large-scale increases in public welfare. In 1992 Niyazov declared a "Ten Years of Prosperity" program, the goals of which were virtually free natural gas, electricity, and drinking water to all households in the republic and increased social benefits, minimum wages, and food subsidies. The program was renewed for another 10 years in 2000. In 2003 Niyazov declared the doubling of pension amounts, and Turkmenistan broadened the coverage of its social security system. The state pension system nominally pays retirement pensions to men aged 62 or older who have worked for 25 years and to women aged 57 or older who have worked 20 years, with reduced eligibility requirements for work under hazardous conditions. The disabled and survivors of pension recipients also are eligible for pension coverage. The system also includes sickness and maternity benefits. Although information about living standards is sparse, some failures of the welfare system have been reported since 2000. In 1998 only an estimated 7 percent of Turkmenistanis were living below the poverty line, although differences between urban and rural living standards are believed to be substantial.

ECONOMY

Overview: As in the Soviet era, central planning and state control pervade the system, and the Niyazov government has consistently rejected market reform programs. The state subsidizes a wide variety of commodities. Economic planning is done in long-term programs, the latest of

which extends to 2020. Privatization has been minimal, particularly in larger enterprises. Corruption is common, and the business and legal systems are poorly developed. Industry is the dominant sector.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): In the early 2000s, Turkmenistan's GDP has risen annually. In 2001 the official figure was US\$5.96 billion, and in 2002 it grew to US\$7.28 billion. Per capita GDP for 2002 was US\$1,520, compared with US\$1,264 in 2001. In 2003 the industrial sector contributed 46.2 percent of GDP, services 28.9 percent, and agriculture 24.8 percent. By comparison, for 2002 the respective shares were 51 percent for industry, 21.5 percent for services, and 27.5 percent for agriculture.

Government Budget: Budget statistics are unreliable because the government spends large amounts of extra-budgetary funds. In 2003 official expenditures totaled US\$3.91 billion, and revenues totaled US\$3.48 billion, creating an official budget deficit of US\$430 million.

Inflation: In 2003 Turkmenistan's inflation rate was estimated at 9.5 percent.

Natural Resources: By far the most plentiful natural resources are natural gas and oil. Reserves of gas are estimated at 2 trillion cubic meters (15th in the world), and reserves of oil are estimated at 500 million barrels. Small amounts of salt and gypsum are extracted. Agricultural land generally is of poor quality and requires intensive irrigation.

Agriculture: In the early 2000s, the contribution of Turkmenistan's state-run agriculture sector to gross domestic product (GDP) has increased under close state supervision. As during the Soviet era, cotton is the dominant agricultural commodity because it is an export staple. However, in recent years state policy makers have increased the range of crops with the aim of making Turkmenistan self-sufficient in food. In the post-Soviet era, the area planted to grains (mainly wheat) has nearly tripled. However, most agricultural land is of poor quality and requires irrigation. Turkmenistan's irrigation infrastructure and water-use policies have not served this need efficiently. Irrigation now depends mainly on the inefficient Garagum Canal. A new dam planned at Serakhs on the Iranian border would increase available irrigation water and improve efficiency. Private farmers grow most of Turkmenistan's fruits and vegetables (chiefly tomatoes, watermelons, grapes, and onions), but all production phases of the main cash crops—grain and cotton—remain under state control.

Forestry and Fishing: Turkmenistan has negligible forested land. The only industrial fish crop is Azov Sea sprat, of which 12,300 tons were caught in 2001.

Mining and Minerals: Aside from the oil and gas industries, the only mineral substances extracted are bentonite, salt, and gypsum.

Industry and Manufacturing: In the post-Soviet era, Turkmenistan's industrial sector has been dominated increasingly by the fuel and cotton processing industries to the detriment of light industry. Between 1991 and 2003, some 14 new cotton-processing plants were opened, sharply increasing the capability of processing domestically produced cotton. In the early 2000s, the government subsidy program also has targeted food processing, machine building, and

metallurgical industries in order to expand the range of products in which Turkmenistan is self-sufficient. Completion of a Turkish-funded steel mill has increased output of crude steel. The construction industry depends mainly on government building projects because construction of private housing is a low priority.

Energy: Turkmenistan is self-sufficient in oil and natural gas, although a decaying infrastructure and state subsidies hinder efficient distribution and discourage conservation. In the early 2000s, gas output has increased sharply because of export agreements with Russia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. In that same period, Russia and Ukraine have made substantial investments in Turkmenistan's fuel industries. In 2001 natural gas output was estimated at 48.2 billion cubic meters, and oil output was estimated at 162,000 barrels per day. In 2003 gas output increased by 8 percent and oil refinery output by 19 percent compared with 2002. Turkmenistan also is a net exporter of electric power, exporting 980 million kilowatt hours in 2001. Natural gas generates most of Turkmenistan's electric power.

Services: The financial system is under full state control. The banking system, which was reduced substantially after the 1998 financial crisis, includes twelve national banks. These institutions have the same basic division of responsibility as they had in the Soviet era, overseen by the Central Bank of Turkmenistan. Lending operations and household savings have not been important functions of this system. Turkmengosstrakh, the state insurance firm, has a complete monopoly of the very small insurance industry. The rest of Turkmenistan's services sector has grown slowly because of the priority given to heavy industry. Retail sales have suffered from the low purchasing power and credit of potential consumers. Poor infrastructure and state hostility to foreign influences have seriously crippled the tourist industry.

Labor: Recent statistics are not available on Turkmenistan's labor force. In 1998 the labor force was estimated to include 1.84 million workers, of whom 48.5 percent worked in agriculture, 37 percent in services, and 15 percent in industry and construction. Unemployment statistics are not available because unemployment does not exist officially.

Foreign Economic Relations: Although Turkmenistan requires substantial foreign investment to capitalize on its natural gas reserves, it has made very selective concessions in that direction, especially toward the United States. In 2003 Turkmenistan reached an agreement with Russia for joint supply of natural gas to Afghanistan. Some energy cooperation agreements have been reached with China, although a proposed natural gas pipeline to China and Japan has not been realized. As a member of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Turkmenistan has reached agreements with other Turkic-speaking members on the restoration of the "Silk Road" trading route from China across Central Asia to the West. Beginning in 1999, a series of export agreements with Russia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan has stimulated increased natural gas production in Turkmenistan.

Imports and Exports: In 2002 Turkmenistan's main imports were machinery and transport equipment, basic manufactures, chemicals, and foods. Its main exports were natural gas, oil, basic manufactures, and non-fuel crude materials. The principal suppliers of its imports, in order of volume, were Germany, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, and Turkey. The principal customers for its exports, in order of volume, were Iran, Ukraine, Azerbaijan,

Kazakhstan, and Turkey. The dominance of crude products in Turkmenistan's exports has limited the prospect of establishing non-regional markets.

Trade Balance: Turkmenistan's trade balance has fluctuated widely because it depends so heavily on the price and volume of fuels sold. After suffering deficits during the 1990s, Turkmenistan showed a substantial surplus in 2000 because of new natural gas agreements with Russia and Ukraine. Less robust surpluses have followed in the early 2000s; the figure for 2002 was US\$737 million, and in the first three-quarters of 2003 the surplus was US\$788 million.

Balance of Payments: In 2002 Turkmenistan had an estimated current-account deficit of US\$700 million, after having surpluses in 2000 (about US\$600 million) and in 2001 (about US\$250 million).

External Debt: In the early 2000s, external debt has risen because of heavy borrowing by state enterprises. Because natural gas customers often fail to pay on time, Turkmenistan's debt service has been inconsistent.

Foreign Investment: Despite the attractiveness of Turkmenistan's fuel industries, foreign direct investment has been discouraged by Turkmenistan's location and its poor business environment. Turkish textile companies have established joint ventures with many of Turkmenistan's textile industries. The Turkmenbashi oil refinery, largest in Turkmenistan, has been refurbished with investment from French, German, Iranian, Japanese, and Turkish companies. Canadian and German firms invested in the Naip natural gas refinery, which opened in 2004. French and German firms have been active in upgrading the national telecommunications system. The greatest foreign participation is in the construction industry, where French, Turkish, and Ukrainian firms have helped build government buildings and infrastructure projects.

Currency and Exchange Rate: In 2004 the official exchange rate was 5,200 manats per U.S. dollar. In 2003 the black-market exchange rate was 21,000 manats per U.S. dollar.

Fiscal Year: Turkmenistan's fiscal year is the calendar year.

TRANSPORTATION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Overview: Access to the Caspian Sea makes Turkmenistan's transportation situation less difficult than that of other Central Asian republics. In the early 2000s, substantial work was done to restore infrastructure and extend travel routes.

Roads: In 2001 Turkmenistan had an estimated 22,000 kilometers of roads, of which about 18,000 were paved. One major highway runs westward from Mary, along the Iranian border through Ashgabat and then to Turkmenbashi on the Caspian Sea, and a second runs westward from the Afghanistan border through Turkmenabat, along the Uzbekistan border to Dashhowuz. In the early 2000s, major road building projects improved sections of the highway connecting Ashgabat with Turkmenbashi and Mary and built a new road between Ashgabat and Dashhowuz. The rate of car ownership is estimated at less than 5 cars per 100 population.

Railroads: In 2003 Turkmenistan had 2,440 kilometers of railroad line, all of which was broad-gauge. In 1996 a rail line was opened to Iran. A line is scheduled for completion between Ashgabat and Dashhowuz in 2006. Urban transportation systems are being upgraded in Ashgabat, Dashhowuz, and Mary.

Ports: The main port at Turkmenbashi (formerly Krasnovodsk) on the Caspian Sea is being renovated. Main shipping lines cross the Caspian to Astrakhan in Russia and Baku in Azerbaijan. Smaller Caspian ports are Alaja, Chekelen, and Okarem. In 2002 some 41 merchant marine vessels, of which two were of more than 1,000 tons displacement, were in operation.

Inland Waterways: The main waterways are the Amu Darya River, which runs along the northern border, and the Garagum Canal, which runs from east to west from the Amu Darya near the Afghanistan border through Mary and Ashgabat to Turkmenbashi. The 1,400-kilometer Garagum Canal, designed mainly for irrigation, is navigable for 450 kilometers from its Caspian terminus. Because water is withdrawn for irrigation, the Amu Darya is navigable only about 250 kilometers downstream from the Afghanistan border to Turkmenabat.

Civil Aviation and Airports: In 2003 Turkmenistan had an estimated 69 airports, of which one (at Ashgabat) had a runway longer than 3,000 meters. In the mid-1990s, the Ashgabat airport was enlarged and modernized. Smaller international airports are located at Dashhowuz and Turkmenabat. Air travel within Turkmenistan on the national carrier, Turkmenistan Airlines, often is unreliable. Flights are available from Ashgabat to Europe via Istanbul.

Pipelines: In 2003 Turkmenistan had 6,634 kilometers of natural gas pipelines and 853 kilometers of oil pipelines. The critical export of natural gas has depended on outmoded Soviet-era pipelines. Since the stabilization of Afghanistan in 2003-04, Turkmenistan has sought international funding for the construction of a new pipeline across that country, linking domestic gas lines with ports in Pakistan and reducing dependence on Russian lines.

Telecommunications: Turkmenistan's long-term (through 2010) economic development plan includes substantial upgrading of the telecommunications system, which has been evaluated as providing poor service. In 2002 the country had 82 main telephone lines per 1,000 population and about 8,200 cellular telephones in use. International connections are limited. In 2000 the government assumed a monopoly of Internet service provision by revoking all private licenses. In 2002 Turkmenistan had an estimated 8,000 Internet users.

GOVERNMENT

Overview: Turkmenistan's government nominally has three independent branches. However, President Saparmurad Niyazov has largely preserved the governmental structure of the Soviet era, assuming total control over all government institutions and making opposition impossible.

Executive Branch: The constitution calls for the president to be elected directly to a maximum of two five-year terms. Since the parliament named him president for life in 1999, Niyazov no

longer is required to stand for reelection. He also sits as head of government, commander of the armed forces, and chairman of the parliament. He appoints all members of the cabinet and national judiciary, as well as chief executives of local and regional jurisdictions. The domination of the president has been likened to that of President Kim Il Sung of North Korea. Niyazov is both president and chairman of the Council of Ministers, whose members he appoints and which is entrusted with day-to-day governance. In 2004 the Council of Ministers included 20 ministers and the chairmen of five state committees.

Legislative Branch: After the parliamentary elections of 1999, the Majlis (parliament), now made up only of members from Niyazov's party, received nominal new powers, including a mandate to form committees examining a wide range of public policies. However, because all members of that body are of Niyazov's party, this mandate is meaningless and the Majlis is a rubber-stamp body. In 2003 an arbitrarily ratified constitutional amendment effectively replaced the Majlis as the chief legislative body with the Khalk Maslakhaty (National Council), a 2,507-member, unicameral body that previously had exercised vague executive, judicial, and legislative powers. Only 65 of that body's members are popularly elected; the remainder are ex officio members or are appointed by the president, who also is presiding officer. The Khalk Maslakhaty, which now sits continuously, received the power to dissolve the Majlis and to make constitutional law.

Judicial Branch: The only national court is the Supreme Court, whose 22 members are appointed without legislative review to five-year terms by the president. The president also has the authority to dismiss any judge. There is no constitutional court.

Administrative Divisions: Turkmenistan is divided into five provinces, which in turn are divided into a total of 50 districts. The city of Ashgabat has the status of a province.

Provincial and Local Government: Governors of the provinces are appointed by the president. District heads, known as *hekims*, are appointed by the governors. Local and provincial councils are elected directly.

Judicial and Legal System: Although the constitution calls for an independent judiciary, in practice the judicial branch is under the control of the president because of his authority to appoint and dismiss judges. At the next level, there are five provincial courts and a separate court for the city of Ashgabat. Within the provinces are a total of 61 district and city courts. Civilian courts hear criminal cases against members of the military. The decisions of lower courts may be appealed at the next level. The procurator's office conducts all criminal investigations. Although the constitution states the right to counsel, few lawyers are available to represent defendants.

Electoral System: Elections nominally are organized by the Central Election Commission, a rubber-stamp organization whose members are named by the president. In the presidential election of 1992, no opposition candidates were allowed to stand, in 1997 the presidential election was canceled by referendum, and in 1999 the parliament declared Niyazov president for life. In the local elections of 2003, all candidates were nominated by Niyazov's administration or by the Ministry of National Security.

Political Parties: The only legal party is the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, which evolved from the Soviet-era Communist Party of Turkmenistan. Because of Niyazov's complete dominance of political life, the Democratic Party has little significance. The two major opposition parties were forced into exile in the early 1990s. In the mid- and late 1990s, some large-scale protests were stimulated by specific events. Some small underground political groups exist in Turkmenistan, and three major opposition groups operate from exile: Gundogar and Moscow-based Erkin are led by former officials of the Niyazov government, and the coalition Union of Democratic Forces, formed by four exile opposition groups, is based in Vienna.

Mass Media: The Niyazov regime has concentrated heavily on gaining full control of the media. The government funds nearly all newspapers, and criticism of the president is absolutely forbidden. State licensing policy effectively eliminates all outlets not reflecting official views. To avoid reprisal, domestic and foreign journalists engage in self-censorship. In 2003 the newspapers with the largest circulation were *Mugallymlar gazetesi* (Teacher's Newspaper), *Adalat* (Justice), and *Vatan* (Motherland). Most newspapers appear weekly or three times weekly. The only news agency is the Turkmen State News Service; the Anadolu Agency of Turkey maintains an office in Ashgabat. Broadcasting is under the full control of the National Television and Radio Company of Turkmenistan, which operates three national television channels.

Foreign Relations: The strict neutrality policy of the Niyazov regime has limited Turkmenistan's foreign relations except when gas and oil are concerned. Increased Western attention to the region following the September 11, 2001, attacks has not appreciably reduced Turkmenistan's isolation. Because the main prerequisite for foreign relations has been the possibility of improving routes and markets for fuel exports, Russia and Ukraine are important partners. In the early 2000s, Belarus and Turkey also established significant trading relationships with Turkmenistan. Despite Iran's international isolation, that country is seen as an important partner and counterweight to Russia. Relations with Azerbaijan are strained because of differing approaches to ownership of Caspian Sea resources, and Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have long-standing differences over their respective treatment of the other country's minority populations and over Uzbekistan's moves toward regional dominance. After September 11, Turkmenistan offered humanitarian but not military aid to the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan, rejecting what was considered a good opportunity to expand U.S. relations.

Membership in International Organizations: Turkmenistan is a member of the following international organizations: the Asian Development Bank, Commonwealth of Independent States, Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Food and Agriculture Organization, Industrial Development Bank, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Finance Corporation, International Labour Organization, International Monetary Fund, International Organization for Migration (observer status), International Telecommunications Union, Organization for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Partnership for Peace (of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO), United Nations, United Nations Committee on Trade and Development, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, Universal Postal Union, World Customs Organization, World Federation of Trade Unions, and World Health Organization.

Major International Treaties: Among the multilateral treaties to which Turkmenistan is a signatory are the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution, Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, Geneva Conventions (1949), Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer, Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (including the Kyoto Protocol).

NATIONAL SECURITY

Armed Forces Overview: When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Turkmenistan inherited the largest armed force in Central Asia. However, since that time neutrality and isolationism have been the crucial elements of Turkmenistan's defense doctrine, and the domestic armed forces have been neglected. After a gradual withdrawal of Russian commanders from Turkmenistani units in the 1990s, no Russian or other foreign troops remain in Turkmenistan. The armed forces depend on a high percentage of increasingly outmoded, Soviet-era equipment, however; in the 1990s, Russia provided re-supply of some military matériel. In 2004 the army had about 25,000 active personnel, the air force had 3,000, and the navy had 1,000. A naval coast guard has been in the planning stage since the mid-1990s. The military is believed to be a very corrupt organization.

Foreign Military Relations: A 1992 bilateral treaty named Russia as guarantor of Turkmenistan's security and provided for command of the armed forces to gradually shift from Russian to Turkmenistani officers. That process concluded with the withdrawal of the last Russian border forces in 1999. In a move to balance Russian influence, Turkmenistan established an agreement for limited military cooperation with China in 1999. To maintain its neutrality, Turkmenistan consistently has refused to join multilateral military groupings of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), although it participates in the Caspian Sea Flotilla with Russian and Kazakhstani naval forces. In late 2001, Turkmenistan allowed the passage of humanitarian but not military supplies for the U.S. campaign in neighboring Afghanistan. In the early 2000s, the United States provided equipment and training to Turkmenistani border guard personnel.

External Threat: Although relations with neighboring Uzbekistan are strained, in 2004 Turkmenistan was under no credible military threat.

Defense Budget: In the early 2000s, Turkmenistan made slight increases in defense expenditures. Between 2001 and 2003, the defense budget increased from US\$144 million to US\$173 million.

Major Military Units: In 2004 Turkmenistan's army had four motorized rifle divisions, one artillery brigade, one multiple rocket launcher regiment, one antitank regiment, one engineer regiment, two surface-to-air missile brigades, and one independent air assault battalion. The air force had two aviation squadrons.

Major Military Equipment: In 2004 much of Turkmenistan's military equipment was Soviet-era matériel that was in storage. The army had 702 main battle tanks, 170 reconnaissance vehicles, 930 armored infantry fighting vehicles, 829 armored personnel carriers, 269 pieces of towed artillery, 40 pieces of self-propelled artillery, 83 mortars, 65 multiple rocket launchers, 100 antitank guided weapons, 72 antitank guns, and 48 anti-aircraft guns. The air force had 24 fighter planes active, 200 fighter planes in storage, and 50 surface-to-air missiles. The naval force on the Caspian Sea had five boats.

Military Service: Men are eligible for conscription at age 18. The period of active service is 24 months. Although Turkmenistan has announced plans to end conscription in 2005, compulsory military service has proved an efficient way of limiting youth unemployment. Bribery of draft officials is common.

Paramilitary Forces: Turkmenistan has three types of paramilitary forces: the border guard, the national guard, and the internal troops of the Ministry of Security. The number of personnel in each is not known. Three new border guard units were formed in 2001.

Military Forces Abroad: No Turkmenistani military personnel are stationed abroad.

Police: The criminal justice system of Turkmenistan essentially retains the structure of the Soviet system. The Ministry of National Security retains most of the same functions as the Soviet-era Committee for State Security (KGB). The chief responsibility of security forces is to ensure that the government remains in power, using whatever social controls and repressive measures are necessary. The Ministry of Internal Affairs directs the operations of police departments, which cooperate closely with the forces of the Ministry of National Security on matters determined to affect national security. Personnel numbers for the police and security forces are not known.

Internal Threat: In the early 2000s, the volume of narcotics trafficking, mainly in heroin, from Afghanistan through Turkmenistan increased significantly, in part because Turkmenistan's long borders are poorly controlled. Opposition groups in exile have accused the Niyazov government and its Ministry of Security of involvement in arms and drug trafficking operations, which are known to rely on the corruption of local officials and police. The presence of narcotics also has increased the incidence of related crimes and drug addiction. Turkmenistan has a low rate of violent crime, but in the early 2000s common street crime increased.

Terrorism: There is no record of Turkmenistan having sequestered terrorist groups or of terrorist acts having been committed on Turkmenistani territory.

Human Rights: In 2003 a new law required that all associations register with the Ministry of Justice. That law also prohibits the operation of unregistered public associations and requires that all foreign assistance be registered with the Ministry of Justice. In 2003 a new law on religion added restrictions on religious practice and criminalized unregistered religious activity. Even before the new law, only Islam and Russian Orthodoxy had status as registered religions. The 2003 law also stipulated that only government-approved individuals and institutions may teach

religion. Raids have shut down worship services of Protestant groups, Shia Muslims, the Armenian Apostolic Church, Bah' ai Muslims, Jews, and other groups. All national minorities, including Russians and Uzbeks, suffer various types of discrimination and attack, and proof of Turkmen nationality is required for many types of activity.

Due process, nominally guaranteed by the constitution, rarely is observed, and few defense lawyers are available. No warrant is required for an arrest. In 2002 a wave of political repression, including further negligence of fair-trial standards, followed an alleged assassination attempt against Niyazov. In 2003 a new treason law interpreted a wide variety of activities as punishable by life in prison. The state controls publishing and broadcasting licenses, and the Niyazov administration is the sole source of information about government activity.