

## COUNTRY PROFILE: TURKMENISTAN

February 2007

### 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 (Daşoguz), Mary, Turkmenabat (Türkmenabat; formerly Charjew), and Turkmenbashi (Türkmenbaşy; formerly Krasnovodsk).

**Independence:** Turkmenistan's 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:** Turkmenistan's official national holidays are New Year's Day (January 1), Memorial Day (January 12), Turkmen Flag Day and the birthday of former 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 anticonscription 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 re-election (although in 1992 he completely dominated the only presidential election in which he ran), making him effectively president for life. During his tenure, Niyazov conducted frequent purges of public officials and abolished organizations deemed threatening. Throughout the post-Soviet era, Turkmenistan has taken a neutral position on almost all international issues. Niyazov 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 against Niyazov 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.

Between 2002 and 2004, serious tension arose between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan because of bilateral disputes and Niyazov's implication that Uzbekistan had a role in the 2002 assassination attempt. In 2004 a series of bilateral treaties restored friendly relations. In the parliamentary elections of December 2004 and January 2005, only Niyazov's party was represented, and no

international monitors participated. In 2005 Niyazov exercised his dictatorial power by closing all hospitals outside Ashgabat and all rural libraries. The year 2006 saw intensification of the trends of arbitrary policy changes, shuffling of top officials, diminishing economic output outside the oil and gas sector, and isolation from regional and world organizations. China was among a very few nations to whom Turkmenistan made significant overtures. The sudden death of Niyazov at the end of 2006 left a complete vacuum of power, as his cult of personality, compared to that of former president Kim Il Sung of North Korea, had precluded the naming of a successor. Deputy Prime Minister Kurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, who was named interim head of government, won the special presidential election held in early February 2007.

## 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.

**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; Iran, 922 kilometers; Afghanistan, 744 kilometers; and Kazakhstan, 379 kilometers.

**Disputed Territory:** Boundary disputes with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were settled by treaties signed in 2001 and 2004, respectively.

**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 deposits of oil and other natural resources.

**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. In far eastern Turkmenistan, 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).



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**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 along the border with Iran.

**Natural Resources:** By far the most plentiful natural resources are natural gas and oil. Reserves of gas, estimated in 2005 at 2 trillion cubic meters (fifteenth in the world), could rise to as much as 9 trillion cubic meters if the newly discovered Iolotan field is as large as predicted. 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.

**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 major environmental problems are the various effects of the desiccation of the Aral Sea; contamination of soil and groundwater by agricultural chemicals; desertification, which is reducing the 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 an intensifying shortage of water, which is an absolute requirement for the development of agriculture, industry, and large population centers anywhere in the country. The cult-of-personality dictatorship of former President Niyazov combined with a shortage of resources to limit citizen input on environmental issues. Turkmenistan's participation in regional environmental programs has been stymied by government control of environmental information.

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

## SOCIETY

**Population:** In 2006 Turkmenistan's population was estimated at 5,042,920. The annual growth rate was 1.8 percent. In 2006 some 55 percent of the population lived in rural areas. Population density, 10.3 people per square kilometer overall, 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 2006 the net migration rate was –0.75 per 1,000 population.

**Demography:** In 2006 some 35.2 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 0.98 males per female. The birthrate was 27.6 births per 1,000 population, and the death rate was 8.6 per 1,000 population. The infant mortality rate was 72.6 deaths per 1,000 live births. Overall life expectancy, which fell substantially in the early 2000s, was 61.8 years: 58.4 years for males, 65.4 years for females. In 2006 the fertility rate was 3.4 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. The Turkmen are divided into five major tribes: the Ersary, Goklen, Teke, Yasyr, and Yomut. The Teke, to which President Niyazov belonged, predominate in top cultural and political positions. In the early 2000s, government and societal 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. Russian is spoken mainly in urban areas, and Uzbek is spoken mainly in northern Turkmenistan. Since the late 1990s, the government has discouraged the use of Russian. 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. No Russian-language newspapers or radio broadcasts were permitted as of 2005.

**Religion:** Turkmenistan has no state 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 11 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 requiring ethnic background checks on applicants. Instructors in higher education must have degrees from institutions in Turkmenistan. Bribes often are necessary to enter a university.

**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 specialized 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. President Niyazov's 2005 proposal to close all hospitals outside Ashgabat intensified this trend. Physicians are poorly trained, modern medical techniques are rarely used, and medications are in short supply. In 2004 Niyazov dismissed 15,000 medical professionals, exacerbating the shortage of personnel. In some cases, professionals have been replaced by military conscripts. Private health care is rare, as the state maintains a near monopoly. Free public health care was abolished in 2004.

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) has been 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 declared several large-scale increases in public welfare, and in 2006 the state budget continued providing heavy subsidies for basic services, goods, and utilities, although availability of many such goods and services was sporadic. 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 Turkmenistan broadened the coverage of its social security system, and in 2004 pensions and public-sector wages were increased by 50 percent. 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 and no official poverty line exists, some failures of the welfare system have been reported since 2000. Turkmenistan’s income inequality is the greatest among the Central Asian republics, with especially strong differences between urban and rural living standards.

## ECONOMY

**Overview:** As in the Soviet era, central planning and state control pervade the system, and the Niyazov government (in power 1991–2006) consistently rejected market reform programs. The state subsidizes a wide variety of commodities and services. Economic planning is done in long-term programs, the latest of which is the Strategy for Turkmenistan’s Economic, Political, and Cultural Development for the Period to 2020. Privatization has been minimal, particularly in larger enterprises. Corruption is common, and the business and legal systems are poorly developed. Based on Turkmenistan’s oil and gas deposits, industry is the dominant sector. Because official economic statistics are unreliable and a dual exchange rate is used, the most accurate economic figures are estimates by international organizations.

**Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** In the early 2000s, Turkmenistan’s GDP has risen annually. At current prices, the GDP for the years 2001–4 has been estimated at US\$3.2 billion, US\$3.7 billion, US\$4.5 billion, and US\$5.3 billion, respectively. In 2005 the World Bank estimated the GDP at US\$6.8 billion, or US\$1,350 per capita. According to estimates for 2005, the industrial sector contributed 38 percent of GDP; services, 41.1 percent; and agriculture, 20.9 percent. By comparison, for 2004 the respective shares were 42.7 percent for industry, 28.8 percent for services, and 28.5 percent for agriculture. The private sector’s share of GDP was estimated at 25 percent in 2005.

**Government Budget:** Budget statistics are unreliable because the government spends large amounts of extra-budgetary funds. In 2004 official expenditures totaled US\$3.05 billion, and revenues totaled US\$3.05 billion, creating a balanced budget. The government also reported a roughly balanced budget for 2005, at an undisclosed level of revenue and expenditure. In an effort to increase revenues, the tax code was streamlined in 2004.

**Inflation:** In 2005 Turkmenistan's inflation rate was estimated at 10.5 percent.

**Agriculture:** In the early 2000s, the contribution of Turkmenistan's state-run agriculture sector to gross domestic product 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 responded efficiently to this need. Irrigation now depends mainly on the decrepit Garagum Canal, which carries water across Turkmenistan from the Amu Darya. The Dostluk dam, opened at Serakhs on the Iranian border in 2005, has increased available irrigation water and improved efficiency. Plans call for a similar dam on the Etrek River west of Ashgabat. 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. In 2006 grain crop failures led to steadily increasing bread lines and reinstatement of a ration system in most regions. At the root of those failures was a culture of falsifying output figures together with poor administration of the sector.

**Forestry and Fishing:** Turkmenistan has negligible forested land. The only industrial fish crop is Azov Sea sprat, 14,300 metric tons of which were caught in 2003.

**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 2004, 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. Discovery of the large Iolotan gas and oil field in southeastern Turkmenistan in 2006 promised to further improve the country's position as a fuels exporter. 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. An excess of generating capacity has stimulated the refurbishing of the power generation and distribution systems in the early 2000s, with assistance from Iran, Turkey, and the United States. That process is expected to improve generating efficiency by 40 percent starting in 2011.

**Services:** The financial system is under full state control. The banking system, which was reduced substantially after the 1998 financial crisis, includes 12 national banks. These institutions have the same basic division of responsibility as in the Soviet era, overseen by the Central Bank of Turkmenistan. Lending operations and household savings have not been important functions of this system. In 2005 an estimated 95 percent of loans went to state enterprises. 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 crippled the tourist industry. However, in the early 2000s the construction of luxury hotels and the modernization of the Ashgabat airport signified an attempt to reverse this trend.

**Labor:** Recent statistics are not available on Turkmenistan's labor force. In 2003 the labor force was estimated to include more than 2.3 million workers, 48 percent of whom worked in agriculture, 38 percent in services, and 14 percent in industry and construction. Because the state dominates the economy, an estimated 90 percent of workers are in effect state employees. Unemployment statistics are not available because unemployment does not exist officially. It is believed that downsizing the government workforce, which began in 2003, increased unemployment in subsequent years. Beginning in 2004, state workers have received annual wage increases.

**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. In 2003 Turkmenistan reached an agreement with Russia for joint supply of natural gas to Afghanistan, to which increasing exports of electric power also are planned. In 2006 China assumed a major role in Turkmenistan's fuels industry when it received development rights to the newly discovered Iolotan gas and oil deposits, and it signed a contract for Turkmenistan to send 30 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually to China via a pipeline to be completed in 2009. 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.

**Imports and Exports:** Turkmenistan's trade balance has fluctuated widely because it depends heavily on the price and volume of fuels sold. In 2005 exports were worth an estimated US\$4.7 billion, and imports were worth US\$4.175 billion, yielding a trade surplus of US\$525 million. In 2005 the main imports were machinery and transport equipment, chemicals, and foods. The main



exports were natural gas, oil, petrochemicals, cotton fiber, and textiles; finished goods contributed an increased percentage of export income. In 2005 the principal suppliers of Turkmenistan's imports, in order of volume, were the United Arab Emirates, Azerbaijan, the United States, Russia, Ukraine, and Turkey. The principal customers for its exports, in order of volume, were Ukraine, Iran, and Hungary. Although Ukraine retained its high position by virtue of its natural gas purchases, in 2005 trade with countries outside the Commonwealth of Independent States increased. The dominance of crude products in Turkmenistan's exports has limited the prospect of establishing non-regional markets.

**Balance of Payments:** In 2005 Turkmenistan had an estimated current account deficit of US\$236 million, after having a surplus of US\$114 million in 2004.

**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. In 2003 the external debt was estimated at US\$1.5 billion after reaching US\$2.2 billion in 2001.

**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. Total foreign direct investment for 2005 has been estimated at US\$220 million, a very small amount compared with similar countries. In 2004 the largest sources of foreign capital were Turkey, Iran, Russia, Afghanistan, the United States, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom. In 2005 the role of China increased significantly. Turkish textile companies have established joint ventures with many of Turkmenistan's textile industries. The Turkmenbashi oil refinery, the 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. Two West European firms, Siemens of Germany and Alcatel of France, are upgrading the telephone system.

**Currency and Exchange Rate:** The Turkmenistan manat has dual exchange rates. The official exchange rate is fixed at 5,200 manats per U.S. dollar. At the end of 2005, the black-market exchange rate stabilized at about 24,000 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, which was in general disrepair, and to extend travel routes. Major new road and railroad projects were in progress in 2006.

**Roads:** In 2001 Turkmenistan had an estimated 22,000 kilometers of roads, about 18,000 kilometers of which were paved. One major highway runs westward from Mary, along the Iranian border through Ashgabat and then to Turkmenbashi on the Caspian Sea; a second runs northwestward 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. A major highway between Ashgabat and Dashhowuz, scheduled for completion in 2007, is part of a plan to link the capital with major points in all five provinces.

**Railroads:** In 2005 Turkmenistan had 2,440 kilometers of railroad line, most of which runs close to the northern and southern borders. The Tejen–Serakhs–Mashhad railroad, built in 1996 by Turkmenistan and Iran, has become a vital link of Central Asian, Russian, and European railroad systems with South Asia and the Persian Gulf. In February 2006, the final construction phase began on the Trans-Garagum Railway, a direct link between Ashgabat and Dashhowuz that will halve travel time between the southern and northern borders. Urban transportation systems are being upgraded in Ashgabat, Dashhowuz, and Mary.

**Ports:** The main port at Turkmenbashi 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 Ekarem. Plans call for expansion of Ekarem into a second major Caspian port. In 2006 Turkmenistan had eight merchant marine vessels of more than 1,000 tons displacement, of which four were cargo ships, two were oil tankers, one was for refrigerated cargo, and one was a combination ore and oil ship.

**Inland Waterways:** The main inland 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 on the Caspian coast. The 1,400-kilometer 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 2006 Turkmenistan had an estimated 29 airports, of which 22 had paved runways and one (at Ashgabat) had a runway longer than 3,000 meters. One heliport was in operation. 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 Armenia, China, France, Germany, India, Iran, Moldova, Russia, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and Uzbekistan.

**Pipelines:** In 2006 Turkmenistan had 6,441 kilometers of natural gas pipelines and 1,361 kilometers of oil pipelines. The critical export of natural gas has depended on outmoded Soviet-era pipelines. The Asian Development Bank has granted funding for a new gas pipeline from Turkmenistan across Afghanistan, linking Turkmenistan's Caspian Sea gas deposits with ports in Pakistan and reducing dependence on Russian lines. The onset of construction, which would take seven years, was delayed in 2006 by hostilities in the southern Afghanistan portion of the proposed route.

**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. Siemens of Germany and Alcatel of France have been active in this project since 1993. In 2003 some 381,300 main telephone lines were in operation. In 2005 an estimated 106,000 cellular telephones were in use, compared with 8,000 in 2002. Russia's largest telecommunications company, Mobile TeleSystems, began mobile telephone operations in Turkmenistan in 2005. International connections are limited. In 2000 the government assumed a monopoly of Internet service provision by revoking all private licenses. In 2006 only 1 percent of people in Turkmenistan (about 50,000) used the Internet, and access was extremely difficult.

## GOVERNMENT

**Overview:** Turkmenistan's government nominally has three independent branches. However, after winning an uncontested presidential election in 1992 President Saparmurad Niyazov effectively dominated governance in all branches and at all levels until his death in late 2006. Political opposition reportedly is nearly non-existent. Harsh, arbitrary punishment of administrative "mistakes" and unforeseen shifts in top government positions have discouraged competent individuals from seeking government appointments.

**Executive Branch:** The sudden death of Saparmurad Niyazov in December 2006 left no mechanism or viable candidates to replace a leader who for 15 years had monopolized every phase of executive power in his country's government. However, an ad hoc constitutional amendment allowed Deputy Prime Minister Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, an obscure former dentist, to run in and win a special presidential election in February 2007. Akmurad Redzhepov, head of Niyazov's security service, reportedly was the power behind the new regime. The constitution of 1992 calls for the president to be elected directly to a maximum of two five-year terms. However, since the parliament named him president for life in 1999, Niyazov no longer was required to stand for re-election. He also sat as head of government (prime minister, heading the Council of Ministers), commander of the armed forces, and chairman of the parliament. Niyazov appointed all members of the Council of Ministers and national judiciary, as well as chief executives of local and regional jurisdictions. In 2006 the Council of Ministers, which is entrusted with day-to-day governance, included 21 ministers and the chairman of the Central Bank. The only ministries with significant power were those of defense, national security, and justice, all of which are important instruments of domestic repression or national security. A Council of Elders, including representatives of Turkmenistan's five tribal confederations, nominally provides advice to the president.

**Legislative Branch:** After the parliamentary elections of 1999, the Majlis (parliament) received nominal new powers, including a mandate to form committees examining a wide range of public policies. However, because all members of that body were from Niyazov's party, this mandate was meaningless, and the Majlis has been a rubber-stamp body. One-party Majlis elections also were held in 2004. 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. After the death of Niyazov, the Khalk Maslakhaty nominated the six candidates eligible for election as the new president.

**Judicial Branch:** The only national court is the Supreme Court, whose 22 members are appointed by the president without legislative review to five-year terms. 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. Although the districts send representatives to the Khalk Maslakhaty, they have no power because of the dominance of the president over that body. Continuing a long-standing trend of arbitrary dismissals, in 2006 President Niyazov replaced all five provincial governors, citing recent agricultural failures.

**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. Below the national level 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 also 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 Khalk Maslakhaty. 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. Nevertheless, Niyazov had promised a new presidential election by 2010, in which he would not run. In the local elections of 2003 and 2006, all candidates were nominated by Niyazov's administration or by the Ministry of National Security. In February 2007, a special election chose a successor to Niyazov.

**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 had 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 in 2003 four opposition parties in exile formed the Union of Democratic Forces, which is based in Vienna. The National Democratic Movement of Turkmenistan remained in opposition after the arrest of its leader, Boris Shikhmuradov, for complicity in the 2002 assassination attempt on the president.

**Mass Media:** The Niyazov regime 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 *Adalat* (Justice), *Mugallymlar gazetesi* (Teacher's Newspaper), *Neytral'nyy Turkmenistan* (Neutral Turkmenistan), *Turkmenistan*, and *Vatan* (Fatherland). Most newspapers appear weekly or three times weekly. The only domestic 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 four national television channels. No recent information on radio stations is available.

**Foreign Relations:** The strict neutrality policy of the Niyazov regime limited Turkmenistan's foreign relations except when natural gas and oil were 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 maintenance of primary 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, Turkmenistani policy makers have seen that country 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. Relations with Afghanistan have gained importance in the early 2000s with the prospect of a trans-Afghan pipeline moving Turkmenistani gas to markets in India and Pakistan. 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. Beginning in 2005, China and Turkmenistan intensified their economic, cultural, and geopolitical relationship, most notably with new agreements in the natural gas sector. China has supported Turkmenistan's policy of neutrality on international issues. Turkmenistan's political climate and human rights record have discouraged Western countries from seeking new 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 of the United Nations, 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 Telecommunication Union, Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Partnership for Peace (of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization), 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), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 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 dominated Turkmenistan's defense doctrine, and the 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 2006 the army had about 21,000 active personnel, the air force had 4,300, and the navy had 700. A 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 2006 Turkmenistan was under no credible military threat.

**Defense Budget:** In the early 2000s, Turkmenistan made significant increases in annual defense expenditures. Between 2003 and 2005, the defense budget increased from US\$83 million to US\$173 million.

**Major Military Units:** In 2006 Turkmenistan's army, posted in five military districts, had three active 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 and one transport squadron. A small naval base operated from Turkmenbashi.

**Major Military Equipment:** In 2006 much of Turkmenistan's military equipment was Soviet-era matériel that was in storage. The army had 702 main battle tanks, 170 reconnaissance vehicles, 942 armored infantry fighting vehicles, 829 armored personnel carriers, 269 pieces of towed artillery, 40 pieces of self-propelled artillery, 97 mortars, 65 multiple rocket launchers, 100 antitank guided weapons, 72 antitank guns, and 70 anti-aircraft guns. The air force had 89 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 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 National Security. The number of personnel in each is not known. Three new border guard units were formed in 2001.

**Foreign Military Forces:** No foreign military forces were stationed in Turkmenistan in 2006.

**Military Forces Abroad:** No Turkmenistani military personnel were stationed abroad in 2006.

**Police:** The criminal justice system of Turkmenistan essentially retains the structure of the Soviet system. The Ministry of National Security has 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 accused the Niyazov government and its Ministry of National 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:** Although the government has used the threat of terrorism to justify repressive policies, there is no record of a terrorist presence or of terrorist acts committed in Turkmenistan.

**Human Rights:** Turkmenistan's prisons are badly overcrowded, and disease, particularly tuberculosis, is rampant. Detainees and prisoners frequently are tortured. The only political party

allowed to register with the government is the ruling Democratic Party, and authorities do not grant permits for public assemblies. 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. During the Niyazov regime, all Muslim religious ceremonies were obligated to recognize Niyazov and quote from his spiritual code, Ruhnama, which had equal status with the Quran. Raids have shut down worship services of Protestant groups, Shia Muslims, the Armenian Apostolic Church, Bah'ai Muslims, Jews, and other groups.

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 with regard to 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. In 2004 two new monitoring agencies further extended government media control, and journalists have been arrested or beaten.