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## LEGAL FOUNDATIONS OF MILITARY REFORM AND DEFENSE GOVERNANCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

**Abstract.** *This article analyzes the legal foundations and current development directions of defense system reform in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The research treats defense reform as a law-based governance process rather than a purely military-administrative issue. It examines the Constitution, the Law on Defense, the Defense Doctrine, the Law on the State Border, the Law on Cybersecurity, and recent presidential acts on digital command systems and military regulations. Using formal-legal, systematic and functional methods, the article argues that Uzbekistan's defense system has evolved from the initial formation of national armed forces into an integrated security model linking military governance, border protection, cybersecurity, professional personnel policy and accountability. Foreign literature on security sector governance is used to assess the relationship between effectiveness, civilian control, legality and human rights. The article concludes that the next stage of reform should focus on legal integration, cyber-resilience standards, competence-based military personnel policy, stronger internal complaint mechanisms and transparent civilian oversight over non-classified aspects of defense policy.*

**Keywords:** *defense system; Armed Forces; defense law; military reform; security sector governance; border security; cybersecurity; professional army; Uzbekistan.*

### INTRODUCTION

Defense reform is one of the central legal questions of modern statehood because it directly concerns sovereignty, territorial integrity, constitutional order and the security

of the population. In Uzbekistan, this connection is expressed at the constitutional level: Article 152 of the Constitution provides that the Armed Forces are established to protect state sovereignty, territorial integrity, the peaceful life of the population and public security, while Article 153 provides that Uzbekistan has Armed Forces sufficient to ensure its security (Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023, arts. 152-153).

These norms show that the defense system is not merely a military organization. It is a constitutional institution whose structure, powers and limits must be determined by law. The Law on Defense develops this approach by defining defense as a set of political, economic, military, social-legal, informational, organizational and other measures aimed at protecting sovereignty, territorial integrity and the peaceful life and security of the population (Law on Defense, 2001, art. 1).

The purpose of this article is to examine the legal foundations of defense reform in Uzbekistan and to identify the priority directions of further modernization. The article is based on the idea that successful defense reform requires not only combat readiness, but also lawful authority, inter-agency coordination, digital resilience, professional personnel policy and accountability. This approach is consistent with the international concept of security sector governance, which links the effectiveness of armed forces with democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights (DCAF, 2015; OSCE, 2019).

## METHODOLOGY

The research uses formal-legal, systematic and functional methods. The formal-legal method is applied to the Constitution, laws and presidential decrees. The systematic method identifies connections between defense, border security, cybersecurity and military service norms. The functional method evaluates the practical role of institutions such as the President, the General Staff, military districts, border authorities and cybersecurity bodies (Law on Defense, 2001, arts. 8, 11-12).

The main national sources are the Constitution, the Law on Defense, the Defense Doctrine, the Law on Universal Military Obligation and Military Service, the Law on Cybersecurity, the Law on the State Border, Presidential Decree PF-27 of 2023 and Presidential Decree PF-23 of 2025. Foreign sources include OSCE and DCAF materials on security sector governance and the OSCE/ODIHR-DCAF compendium

on the human rights of armed forces personnel (DCAF, 2015; OSCE/ODIHR & DCAF, 2021).

*Table 1. Normative framework of defense system reform in Uzbekistan*

Legal act	Date/number	Main legal significance
Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan	30 April 2023	Defines the constitutional mission of the Armed Forces and the sufficiency principle.
Law on Defense	11 May 2001, No. 211-II	Regulates defense organization, state powers, the General Staff and military districts.
Defense Doctrine	9 January 2018, No. ZRU-458	Confirms a defensive policy and links defense with international law.
Law on Cybersecurity	15 April 2022, No. ZRU-764	Creates the legal basis for cybersecurity governance and protection of information systems.
Law on the State Border	13 September 2023, No. ZRU-868	Establishes a multi-agency legal regime for border protection.
Presidential Decrees PF-27 and PF-23	2023; 2025	Develop automated command systems and update military service regulations.

*Note. Prepared by the author on the basis of LexUZ legal instruments cited in the references.*

### ***Constitutional and Legislative Foundations***

The constitutional framework creates the highest legal basis for defense reform. Article 152 establishes the Armed Forces as an institution designed to protect sovereignty, territorial integrity, the peaceful life of the population and public security. This wording is broader than a technical military mandate: it connects defense with the rights and safety of society as a whole (Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023, art. 152).

Article 153 introduces the idea of sufficient Armed Forces. In legal analysis, sufficiency is a balancing concept. It means that the state must maintain real defense capability, but the size and structure of military institutions should be connected to actual security needs, rational planning and proportionality. This provides a constitutional basis for a modern, capable and legally limited defense system (Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023, art. 153).

The Law on Defense concretizes the constitutional mandate. It defines defense as a complex set of measures rather than only the combat activity of troops. It also establishes the powers of the President in defense matters, the role of the General Staff in national military strategy and operational-strategic command, and the status of military districts as military-administrative units operating in specific directions (Law on Defense, 2001, arts. 1, 8, 11-12).

The Defense Doctrine adds strategic content. It states that the doctrine determines principles and approaches for ensuring national security in the military sphere and confirms the defensive nature of Uzbekistan’s defense policy. It also declares that Uzbekistan does not consider any state its enemy and builds relations on peaceful settlement, equality, non-interference and international law (Defense Doctrine, 2018, paras. 1-4).

Therefore, the legal architecture of defense reform has three levels: constitutional legitimacy, legislative organization and doctrinal strategy. Their combined meaning is that defense must be lawful, sufficient, defensive in orientation and institutionally organized. This corresponds to the international governance principle that armed forces are effective when they operate under a clear legal mandate and accountable civilian authority (DCAF, 2015).



Figure 1. Timeline of major legal milestones in Uzbekistan’s defense reform. Note. Dates are based on the legal instruments cited in Table 1.

The institutional reform of Uzbekistan’s defense system began with the formation of national armed forces after independence. The initial task was to adapt inherited

military infrastructure to national interests, establish independent command structures and create a national personnel base. In legal terms, this stage was part of consolidating sovereignty and building state institutions capable of independent defense governance (Law on Defense, 2001, art. 1).

A central institutional element is the General Staff. The Law on Defense assigns it responsibility for developing national military strategy, the conceptual foundations of Armed Forces construction and operational-strategic command. This is important because defense reform requires the coordination of planning, command, training, mobilization and inter-service cooperation (Law on Defense, 2001, art. 11).

Military districts also have major legal significance. They allow Uzbekistan to combine centralized strategic leadership with territorial-operational responsiveness. Because different regions may face different logistical, geographic and border-related risks, military districts create a legal framework for regional readiness, coordination and mobilization (Law on Defense, 2001, art. 12).

Recent reforms show a transition toward digital command. Presidential Decree PF-27 of 2023 provides for creating and further improving a unified automated command-and-control system of the Armed Forces and for defining inter-agency cooperation and information exchange procedures. This means that digitalization is not only a technical measure; it is a new legal layer of command, data protection and institutional responsibility (Presidential Decree PF-27, 2023).

The adoption of updated military regulations in 2025 through Presidential Decree PF-23 complements this process by regulating daily service standards, discipline, ethics and conduct of service personnel. Strategic reform will not be effective unless it is translated into everyday rules of service, lawful command behavior and internal order (Presidential Decree PF-23, 2025).

Contemporary defense threats are multi-domain. They include terrorism, extremism, illegal armed formations, organized crime, border incidents, cyberattacks, disinformation and hybrid pressure. The Defense Doctrine recognizes the need to evaluate modern military conflicts, threats in the military sphere and the state's preparation for possible conflict scenarios (Defense Doctrine, 2018, paras. 5, 39-40).

Border security is one of the practical fronts of defense policy. The 2023 Law on the State Border regulates relations concerning the establishment, alteration, guarding

and protection of the State Border. It identifies the powers of the Cabinet of Ministers, the State Security Service, the Ministry of Defense, the National Guard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Digital Technologies and other agencies (Law on the State Border, 2023, arts. 1, 11-25).

The State Border Law is important because it treats border protection as a multi-agency security process. It also regulates the rights and obligations of the Border Troops as well as the Air Defense Troops and Air Force of the Ministry of Defense in guarding and protecting the border. This confirms that border security now includes ground, airspace, technical monitoring and inter-agency coordination elements (Law on the State Border, 2023, ch. 4).

The law also contains rule-of-law guarantees. Border protection measures are financed from the State Budget and other lawful sources, and decisions or actions of state bodies and officials in this field may be challenged before a higher body or a court. Such provisions demonstrate that even sensitive border-security activity must remain legally accountable (Law on the State Border, 2023, arts. 67-69).

Cybersecurity is equally central to modern defense. The Law on Cybersecurity regulates relations in the cybersecurity field, while PF-27 requires development of automated military command systems. As military governance becomes digital, legal regulation must address access rights, data classification, audit trails, incident response and the protection of military-critical information infrastructure (Law on Cybersecurity, 2022, arts. 1-2; Presidential Decree PF-27, 2023).

Global trends confirm the urgency of resilient defense governance. SIPRI reported that world military expenditure reached USD 2,718 billion in 2024, a 9.4 percent real increase and the tenth consecutive annual rise. This global environment shows that states are modernizing defense systems under growing geopolitical pressure, but for Uzbekistan the more important lesson is to prioritize legal clarity, cyber-resilience and efficient governance rather than mere quantitative expansion (SIPRI, 2025).

Professionalization is a core direction of defense reform. It should not be understood only as contract-based service. A professional defense system requires quality recruitment, military education, ethical leadership, technological competence, reserve training, social protection and clear disciplinary responsibility. The Law on Universal Military Obligation and Military Service provides the basic legal framework,

but contemporary threats require continuous modernization of training and personnel policy (Law on Universal Military Obligation and Military Service, 2002).

The human rights of armed forces personnel are a necessary part of professionalization. Military service may involve lawful restrictions based on discipline and security, yet service members remain rights-bearing individuals. The OSCE/ODIHR-DCAF compendium emphasizes that laws, policies and mechanisms should protect the rights and fundamental freedoms of armed forces personnel in line with international standards and OSCE commitments (OSCE/ODIHR & DCAF, 2021).

This standard has practical meaning for Uzbekistan. Internal complaint mechanisms, proportional disciplinary procedures, protection against degrading treatment, medical and psychological support, family-related guarantees and anti-harassment rules should be viewed not as civilian luxuries, but as components of military effectiveness. Trust in lawful internal procedures strengthens discipline and cohesion (OSCE/ODIHR & DCAF, 2021; Presidential Decree PF-23, 2025).

Civilian oversight is another element of a mature defense system. It does not mean interference in operational command; it means that defense policy, budgetary responsibility and general legal accountability are directed by legitimate civilian institutions. DCAF notes that the legitimacy and effectiveness of armed forces depend on operating accountably under democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights (DCAF, 2015).

In Uzbekistan, future reform can strengthen open discussion of non-classified issues such as veterans' guarantees, military education, cyber-resilience, social protection, personnel training and general reform priorities. Such transparency does not contradict national security secrecy. On the contrary, it separates legitimate confidentiality from the public's right to understand the legal direction of defense reform (OSCE, 2019).

## RESULTS

The analysis produces four main results. First, Uzbekistan's defense system has a clear constitutional and legislative foundation based on sovereignty, territorial integrity, public security and the sufficiency of Armed Forces. Second, the legal framework has moved toward an integrated model combining military governance, border protection, cybersecurity and personnel policy. Third, digital command modernization has become

a central reform direction. Fourth, the effectiveness of reform depends on balancing military readiness with legality, accountability and protection of service personnel (Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023; Law on Defense, 2001; Presidential Decree PF-27, 2023).

The first recommendation is to develop a unified conceptual framework for defense and security legislation. The current legal base is broad, but the relationship between defense, border security, cybersecurity, mobilization and emergency response should be further clarified. A conceptual matrix would help determine which institution leads, supports, reports and reviews specific categories of threats (Law on Defense, 2001; Law on the State Border, 2023).

The second recommendation is to adopt defense-sector cyber-resilience standards. Such standards should regulate access control, data classification, secure procurement, audit logs, incident reporting, protection of automated military systems and cyber exercises. This would make military digitalization legally sustainable and operationally safer (Law on Cybersecurity, 2022; Presidential Decree PF-27, 2023).

The third recommendation is to modernize personnel policy through competence-based training and certification. Military education should include international humanitarian law, cyber hygiene, information security, leadership ethics and human rights. Reserve training and contract-service guarantees should also be strengthened (Law on Universal Military Obligation and Military Service, 2002; OSCE/ODIHR & DCAF, 2021).

The fourth recommendation is to strengthen internal accountability and civilian oversight. Complaint procedures, disciplinary review, monitoring of service conditions and non-classified reporting on reform priorities would improve legitimacy without disclosing operational secrets. This approach is consistent with good security sector governance and with the constitutional nature of defense as a public-law institution (DCAF, 2015; OSCE, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

Defense system reform in Uzbekistan rests on a developed legal foundation. The Constitution defines the mission and sufficiency of the Armed Forces, the Law on Defense organizes the institutional system, and the Defense Doctrine provides strategic

direction based on a defensive policy and international law. These instruments form the legal core of the national defense model (Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023; Law on Defense, 2001; Defense Doctrine, 2018).

The current stage of reform is characterized by integration. Border security, cybersecurity, automated command systems, professional personnel policy and service regulations are no longer peripheral issues; they are central components of defense capability. The State Border Law, Cybersecurity Law, PF-27 and PF-23 demonstrate that Uzbekistan is moving toward a defense governance model in which military readiness is supported by legal coordination and digital resilience (Law on the State Border, 2023; Law on Cybersecurity, 2022; Presidential Decree PF-27, 2023; Presidential Decree PF-23, 2025).

The next stage should deepen legal integration, cyber-resilience, professionalization, civilian accountability and protection of service personnel. Such a model would preserve sovereignty and operational readiness while strengthening legality and institutional trust. In this sense, the future of defense reform in Uzbekistan depends on the balanced development of strong institutions, modern technology and the rule of law (DCAF, 2015; OSCE/ODIHR & DCAF, 2021).

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