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Finnish Doctor Sheds Light on Uzbek Leader's Demise

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Juha Hernesniemi **www.hus.fi**

A Finnish doctor who assessed late Uzbek President Islam Karimov's condition after his Aug. 27 stroke has shed light on the apparent political machinations surrounding the president's death. ⊠

Juha Hernesniemi, a world-renowned neurosurgeon from Finland, was flown into Tashkent by the Uzbek government shortly after Karimov's hospitalization to give consultations on the president's condition. In an interview with the Finnish Broadcasting Company, the neurosurgeon said he found that Karimov was "in practical terms" already "brain dead," RFE/RL reported.

Hernesniemi's account reveals that Karimov's condition was much more serious than the Uzbek government admitted until right before his death. It also hints at the possibility that Tashkent made efforts to stage-manage the president's death and keep him alive, either

through medical interventions or a fictional narrative, until after Sept. 1, the 25th anniversary of Uzbekistan's independence from the Soviet Union.

The surgeon's revelation also helps explain why several top experts on Uzbekistan received word from insider sources about Karimov's death a few days before the official announcement.

According to Hernesniemi, after he and other medical experts from Germany, Monaco, and Russia gave their opinions, the "power game" began as Uzbek officials struggled to find a successor.

As rumors about Karimov's demise spread throughout the media, the Uzbek leader remained on life support and officials released no further statements about his health, although Karimov's youngest daughter, Lola Karimova-Tillyaeva, hinted on social media that he was still alive. Then, on the morning of Sept. 2, the Uzbek government announced that Karimov's condition had deteriorated and was now considered "critical." That evening, after many preemptive media reports of Karimov's death, Uzbek television announced that the president had died at 8:55 p.m. local time.

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