

Balancing American Involvement In Uzbekistan

Peter K. Forster¹

During the struggle between Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh and the Shah in April 1953, John Foster Dulles noted that under normal circumstances the United States did not want to support dictators (e.g., the Shah), “but in times like these, . . . we know that we cannot make a transition without losing control of the whole situation.”² Dulles’s comment epitomized a fundamental truth of foreign policy, namely that security remains an “irreducible” national goal and security is well served by stability. Nonetheless, subjugating foreign policy exclusively to security concerns often has unanticipated and unsavory results. Since its emergence as a global power in the late 1800’s, U.S. foreign policy has been governed by six principles: peace, prosperity, stability, security, defense, and democracy. Over time there emerged a synergy among these objectives, but a single-minded strategy may extraordinarily influence the pursuit of them. For example, while the United States is a prime advocate of democratic principles, the pursuit of security, as defined by anti-communism during the Cold War, resulted in supporting regimes that have little inclination towards democracy, such as that of the Shah. Second, American foreign policy is issue-sensitive, meaning that policies may shift quickly in response to crises and other factors in the international system. This approach limits the United States’ attention span, particularly as new crises emerge. As American attention shifts, the tendency to neglect those who previously were considered critical allies and whose expectations had been raised through contact with the United States increases. This shift from attention to neglect encourages increased authoritarianism by leaders seeking to remain in power and an anti-American backlash that can severely curtail American influence. This scenario occurred in Iran and is possible in Uzbekistan if the United States is not careful.

Prior to the attacks of September 11, 2001, American policies in Central Asia sought to capitalize on the economic potential of the region’s energy resources, retard the re-emergence of Russian influence, and ensure that the region remained free from domination by China or Iran. The region’s increasing importance was evident in President Clinton’s creation of an ambassador-level position for the Caspian basin, since discarded by the Bush Administration, and Congress’s 1997 declaration naming the Caspian Sea region as being of vital interest to the United States. In 1999, the Silk Road Strategy Act and the shift of U.S. regional mili-

¹ Dr. Peter K. Forster is Associate Director, Academic Programs, World Campus/Distance Education Penn State University.

² Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 62.

tary responsibility from the Pacific to the Central Command moved this region from the periphery to the center of America's security agenda. While the shift in military command meant a single command was given responsibility for the energy-rich Persian Gulf and the Caspian basin, the region remained a global backwater to much of the American population. The average American could not find Tashkent or Samarqand on a map, and commonly referred to area by the generic term "Stans." U.S. embassy staff bemoaned being assigned to Almaty and Tashkent, but dreaded even more risky assignments in Dushanbe or boring ones to Bishkek.

In the aftermath of September 11, security concerns have again gained prominence over economic ones as the primary driving force of American foreign policy. As a result, the importance of the new military command structure and the Silk Road Act as means of extending American influence in Central Asia has increased. Intensified American interest in Central Asian security has resulted in an increased flow of assistance to the region and an overt American military presence. Hoping to immediately impact the war on terrorism, Congress appropriated \$25 million for Uzbekistan to improve its military capacity in October 2001, provided Tashkent with an additional \$100 million to fight terrorism in January 2002, and has committed a total of \$160 million by the end of 2002. American and allied troops are using airbases in Uzbekistan as well as ones in Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic to support military operations in Afghanistan. The question that remains unanswered is the extent to which the new security relationship will address some of the region's chronic problems, thus establishing long-term stability and an environment more conducive to democratization. This article offers a cautionary note to American policy in Uzbekistan while exploring those chronic problems and providing some solutions.

While support from Uzbekistan and other states worldwide remains critical to the success of the war on terrorism, the United States should proceed cautiously in its relationship with the Karimov regime. While American short-term interests are served by developing Uzbekistan's military infrastructure, the prospects for long-term stability and civic development in Uzbekistan remain questionable without broader reforms. As a result, in conjunction with strengthening military capabilities American policy needs to emphasize societal reforms, build pluralistic institutions, and seek to de-politicize Uzbekistan's security sector.

Past experiences of ignoring this broader approach in favor of a single-purpose policy have proved costly. In assessing the current situation in Uzbekistan, lessons learned from American experiences with the Pahlavi regime in Iran from 1953–1979 should prove valuable. Writing about U.S.-Iranian relations in *Paved with Good Intentions*, Barry Rubin points out that American policy often portends an "overdependence on seemingly changeless factors, unwarranted reliance on the strength of the status quo, and an excessively cynical view of considerations pre-

sented as moralistic.”³ In other words, American policy-makers tend to assume the existing domestic environment is unlikely to change and fail to realistically analyze the breadth and depth to which a given regime’s policies accentuate schisms within its society and contribute to anti-Americanism.

While acknowledging the Shah of Iran’s lack of progress in implementing political reform and human rights, each American administration since Truman allowed the Shah’s virulent anti-communism to overshadow the lack of development of a workable civil society in Iran. In 1947, the Truman Administration felt that increased military assistance to Iran was not warranted both because the Shah’s regime was too politically unstable and the development of its military capacity might incite a Soviet attack. By 1953, the goal of containment of the Soviet Union dominated foreign policy. Seeking to strengthen containment on the Soviet Union’s southern border, the Eisenhower Administration ignored the Shah’s authoritarian tendencies in favor of his strong anti-communist position. When confronted with the emergence of the leftist leaning Mossadegh-led government, the CIA supported the coup aimed at Mossadegh’s ouster. In the wake of the coup, the American relationship with the Shah deepened, as his regime appeared to provide an island of stability in the sea of Middle Eastern instability. As the United States sought to reduce its global commitments in the late 1960s, Richard Nixon accelerated the sale of arms to Iran as part of his Twin Pillar Policy, which promised to create regional proxies capable of containing Soviet expansion. In addition to containment, the Shah’s assertion that regional extremism was an increasing threat influenced Nixon’s decision.⁴ By the mid-1970s, the provision of high-tech weapons was both financially profitable for the American defense industry and enhanced American security in the vital Persian Gulf. American support also fed the Shah’s imperial desire by establishing him as a seemingly invincible regional power. Moreover, the Shah rejected the need for domestic reform, instead emphasizing that internal development was worthless without defense.⁵

American military assistance was offered without commensurate pressure to implement meaningful economic and political reforms. Weapons purchases contributed negatively to an already strained economic situation that increased “social separation” in Iran and raised anti-regime sentiment. Without a formidable external threat, the military focused inward and established itself as a powerful elite within the regime. The empowered conservative security sector insulated the Shah from the population, contributing to his disenfranchisement, and simultaneously became the guarantor of the regime’s survival. As the regime ignored the growing economic stagnation and challenged established societal values, such as the influential *Ulema*, or religious leadership civil unrest grew. The response from the

³ Ibid., x.

⁴ Ibid., 124.

⁵ Ibid., 159.

Shah was increased coercion that encouraged anti-regime feelings and increased the influence of the security sector. The use of force as a means of domestic governance is finite. In Iran, the ground was fertile for a reactionary response. The desire to remove the Shah from power climaxed with the Khomeini-led Islamic Revolution, in which the enraged Iranian population identified the United States as the primary contributor to the regime's power. The result of the revolution was the collapse of the Pahlavi monarchy, the dismissal of attempts at political moderation, and the establishment of a theocracy that has used anti-Americanism to define U.S.-Iranian relations and its own legitimacy for nearly 25 years. The mistakes of a narrowly-focused American foreign policy in Iran should not be lost sight of in today's environment as the battle with terrorism more heavily engages the United States in Uzbekistan.

When viewed within the Iranian context, three similarities emerge regarding American policy towards Uzbekistan. First, the Karimov government is facing increasing "social separation" as well as regime-society alienation. This is particularly evident with regard to the rural areas, where religious affiliation is strong. Even authoritarian regimes need to be responsive to public opinion, as the case of the Shah proved; thus, this alienation may sow the seeds of chaos. Second, the Karimov regime relies on coercion and fear to maintain control in society and has used its war on Islamic terrorism as an excuse to increase repression. Third, the United States' military presence and its ties to the Uzbek government are increasingly emerging as a lightning rod for dissatisfied sectors of society. Without renewed efforts at reform, unrest will continue to grow and contribute to feelings of anti-Americanism that could cripple U.S. influence in Central Asia. By accepting these similarities, two fundamental questions regarding American involvement in Uzbekistan emerge. What is the impact of U.S. investment in the military capacity of Uzbekistan's government on Uzbekistan and the region? And what influence can American presence have on the development of a civic society in Uzbekistan that will minimize instability and the likelihood of future anti-Americanism?

The collapse of Soviet Union forced the newly independent states of Central Asia to accept responsibility for their domestic and international affairs. The only model understood by the states' leaders was based on the single-party rule of the Soviet system. After ten years of independence, all Central Asian countries still face a multitude of internal and external threats that perpetuate authoritarianism, corruption, and political instability. Many of the threats are complex and not easily compartmentalized. Furthermore, the region's leaders' increasing encouragement of a "cult of personality" dims the prospects of democratic reform. Uzbekistan is no exception.

Uzbek society is becoming increasingly segregated economically, demographically, politically, and religiously. According to Birlik Party activist Pulatzhan

Akhunov, the Soviet era accumulations are dissipating.⁶ As economic growth declines, poverty and unemployment rise. Although a 1996 survey by the International Foundation for Election Systems found 43 percent of the population was satisfied with the government and 33 percent were more or less satisfied (compared with only 24 percent dissatisfied), the report adds that economic erosion will push the middle 33 percent to the negative side of the equation.⁷ Events like the closing of small businesses, a sector that contracted by 70 percent between 1997 and 1998, contribute to the loss of public trust and growing dissatisfaction.⁸ Citing the unwillingness of the government to move to convertibility of the Som (Uzbekistan's currency) and generally accept advice, the IMF closed its Tashkent offices in 2001.

Corruption within government circles remains a problem, and if reforms are not enacted American assistance may well simply benefit Karimov and his protégés. Public apathy is also growing. Internet access is heavily restricted, contributing to limited opportunities for professional or personal growth and creating a sense of unfulfilled expectations. Economic and societal divisions are exacerbated by high population growth in the rural areas, conflicts between regional governors and local clan authorities, and different standards of living between urban and rural populations. As rural life continues to deteriorate, the rural population becomes increasingly disenfranchised and susceptible to recruitment by Islamic fundamentalist groups that often provide basic social services, including religious-based education.

The political characteristics of democratization are no better developed than those of economic reform. Authoritarianism continues to curtail political development. In addition, Karimov has been permitted to shroud his repression of democracy and corruption under the veil of the war on terrorism. Although the Foundation indicated that 51 percent of the population "welcome" democratic reforms and support the government initiatives, society's definition of democracy is ambiguous.⁹ Freedom of speech and assembly remain questionable. According to the Independent Human Rights Organization, more than 7000 people have been jailed for expressing anti-government views.¹⁰ In response to international pressure, the government's chief of censorship was removed in May 2002. Still, journalists continue to face harassment and censorship. Only approved groups are allowed to convene meetings, and those still must be supervised. The Erk and Bir-

⁶ "Uzbek Opposition Figures Urge Caution on U.S. Support for Karimov," Eurasianet, March 27, 2002; available online at www.eurasianet.org.

⁷ Bakhrom Tursunov, "Security and Stability in Uzbekistan: Challenges, Threats and Solutions," Partnership for Peace Information Systems Conflict Studies Research Center, December 1998; online at www.pims.org/Projects/CSRC/Security-K25.html.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Raphael Puzant, "Uzbek Crackdown on Religion Continues Unabated," Eurasianet, November 12, 2001; available online at www.eurasianet.org.

lik Parties, banned in the mid-1990s, remain political pariahs. The four political parties allowed to operate were founded and approved by Karimov. Although he rejected a parliamentary endorsement for a lifetime presidency, Karimov did accept the results of a dubious referendum extending his presidency for five more years. He did initiate some cosmetic reforms prior to his trip to the United States in March 2002, including registering a handful of human rights organization and releasing some political prisoners to placate Washington. Nonetheless, political suppression remains a consistent part of Uzbek politics.

Karimov's lack of domestic reforms is not surprising. A former Communist Party boss, the president has no experience with political plurality. Moreover, like his counterparts in the rest of the former Soviet Union, he witnessed the collapse of the former Soviet Union and learned his lesson. As Akhunov recently noted, "Karimov is not about to attempt the simultaneous political and economic reform that doomed Gorbachev."¹¹ While the lack of meaningful reform is a concern, so is the U.S. shift in policy towards Uzbekistan since September 11, 2001. The problem is not increased American involvement in Uzbekistan but rather that its foreign policy has become narrowly focused and appears blinded to the potential problems lurking under society's surface. Prior to September 11, the United States was a vocal critic of the government's human rights record. The State Department's February 2001 Human Rights Report noted that Uzbekistan's "poor human rights record worsened."¹² In the post-9/11 environment, an unnamed Bush Administration official declared that security took a "front seat" during the war on terrorism. The October 2001 copy of the report did not designate Uzbekistan as a state of "particular concern" with regard to human rights.¹³ During his spring 2002 visit to Central Asia, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stressed these states' "wonderful cooperation" in the fight against terrorism, their involvement as members of NATO's Partnership for Peace, and their own efforts at combating terrorist organizations that threatened the region's regimes.¹⁴ He made no reference to their human rights records or progress towards democratization. During Karimov's visit to Washington, the Bush Administration did stress that he must implement democratic reforms to ensure a continued flow of American assistance. In fact, the Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework committed Uzbekistan to democratic reforms, while the United States promised to provide assistance in developing the society. Notwithstanding, many international observers believe the United States will not enforce these demands and instead

¹¹ "Uzbek Opposition Figures Urge Caution on US Support for Karimov," Eurasianet, March 27, 2002; available online at www.eurasianet.org.

¹² Raphael Puzant, "Uzbek Crackdown on Religion Continues Unabated," Eurasianet, November 12, 2001; available online at www.eurasianet.org.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Press Conference, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, April 27, 2002.

will continue to focus on the military dimension of the relationship.¹⁵ If the allocation of \$160 million in military assistance in 2002 is not tied to political and economic reforms, the Karimov regime will have developed an impressive military capability without enhancing the prospects for civil society in Uzbekistan. The United States' willingness to ignore or at least "downplay" human rights abuses and lack of democratic reforms in the wake of September 11 is contributing to the emerging schism between the regime and the population. It is also linking the United States to Karimov's policies.

The politicization of Islam is another divisive factor in society that serves as a catalyst to regional instability and is one of greatest risks facing the Karimov government. Following independence, the Karimov government sought to co-opt Islam as a nationalizing force by opening religious schools and promoting state-sanctioned Islam. However, this strategy was less than effective. First, in the deeply orthodox Ferghana Valley in eastern Uzbekistan, the Sharia had provided a social code of conduct during the anarchic times that accompanied the end of Soviet era and early independence.¹⁶ The Muslims in this region were unwilling to embrace the more secular form of Islam promoted by the government. Second, with the suppression of political opposition groups, Islam emerged as an alternative avenue for public expression and social development within Uzbekistan. As a result, the number of practicing Muslims is increasing not only in the Ferghana Valley but also in the southern and Tashkent regions of Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya, respectively, and in Samarqand as well.¹⁷ In an effort to counter the growth of non-state related religious activities, the government has ordered that prayer may only take place in state-approved mosques and has forcibly suppressed religious groups.

In 1999, Karimov used terrorist bombings in Tashkent and incursions from Tajikistan by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) into the Ferghana Valley as an excuse to intensify his crackdown on those with religious affiliations. The government's broad targeting of religious groups has resulted in a further radicalization of religion, which only serves to strengthen extremist groups, such as the IMU, Hizb ut-Tahrir, and the Afghan-based Islamic Party of Uzbekistan (IPU), each of whom represent legitimate threats to regional stability. Regional reports estimated that nearly five percent of the Uzbek population belongs to one of these religious groups, and that Karimov is using the war on terrorism as an excuse to indiscriminately crush non-conformist Muslim groups.¹⁸

¹⁵ Kenan Aliyev, "Karimov Maintains Low Profile During U.S. Visit," Eurasianet, March 20, 2002; available online at www.eurasianet.org.

¹⁶ Bakhrom Tursunov and Marina Pikulina, "Severe Lessons of Batken," Partnership for Peace Information Systems Conflict Studies Research Center, November 1999; available online at www.pims.org/Projects/CSRC/Security-K28_Batken.html.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Religious extremism is a transnational issue. Just as the campaign against terrorism has provided greater latitude in using force to deal with domestic opposition, it provides opportunities for Uzbekistan to be more aggressive regionally. Uzbekistan has displayed a desire to establish its regional primacy. On occasion, it has resorted to Soviet-style bullying of neighbors to extract concessions, such as stopping gas deliveries in October 2001 in retaliation for Kyrgyzstan's failure to provide electricity. Extremist groups operating from bases in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan also provide an excuse for continued regional interference. Uzbek relations with Kyrgyzstan provide excellent examples. Uzbekistan's disagreements with Kyrgyzstan include disputes over water access, border control, and effectively countering insurgency. Since September 11, Kyrgyzstan has accused Uzbekistan of unilaterally occupying disputed border territories under the aegis of stopping terrorist incursions. Uzbekistan has sown land mines on its border to discourage terrorist infiltration. The militarization of the border areas has resulted in a reduction of trade between the countries, furthering both states' economic plight and eroded confidence building. Third, there is a concern that Uzbekistan may directly intervene in Kyrgyzstan to reduce the instability that perpetuates extremism. President Akaev's military has proven to be ineffective in dealing with the IMU, and continued civil unrest threatens to plunge Kyrgyzstan into civil war. Both undoubtedly should be considered catalysts to further Uzbek interference.

Circumstances are not much better with Tajikistan. Anarchy still is predominant in Tajikistan in spite of the 1997 accord ending the civil war. There also is evidence that the IMU may have found support from certain sectors of the Tajik government. According to Bakhrom Tursunov, the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), which was integrated into the Tajik government as part of the peace accord, may be harboring IMU cells and fomenting a *jihad* against Uzbekistan.¹⁹ It is known that the UTO maintained ties with both the Taliban and the IMU, including its Uzbek field commander Juma Namanganie, who is suspected to have been killed by U.S. bombing in Afghanistan.

The high level of tension in the domestic and international environments has elevated the importance of Uzbekistan's security sector. The development of Uzbekistan's military capacity, in the absence of democratic reforms, has potentially negative internal and external ramifications. Although the Uzbek military has acted regionally, internal security—a task that eventually sets the military in opposition to the society it is supposed to protect—remains its primary role. The war on religious extremism has expanded the military's internal role and threatens to erode its currently good relationship with society. Although Uzbekistan's 1992 Law of Defense announces a strictly defensive security policy with no territorial ambitions, the 1997 Concept of National Security and Military Doctrine provides

¹⁹ Ibid.

for broad application of military force to protect the domestic population against extreme situations, expatriate Uzbek minorities, and similar regimes, which implies a regional role. Internally focused military functions, whether designated in doctrine or arising from practice, tend to create a military value perception that encourages it to play a strong domestic role. The development of military capacity simply contributes to the military's role as an internal security force. Furthermore, the regime-military relationship is strengthened by capacity development processes. For example, the provision of new weaponry is viewed as a corporate benefit by the officer corps and enhances its allegiance to the regime.²⁰ By implication, closer regime-military relations encourage the use of the military as a coercive force domestically, as both the regime and the military are interested in maintaining their power. Third, as the regime relies increasingly on domestic coercion, the military's influence in policy-making increases (as occurred in Iran) and may result in the regime resorting to military force without fully examining more expedient and less provocative options.

The development of military capacity also contributes to regional destabilization. Neighbors already wary of Uzbek hegemonic ambitions become increasingly concerned as it enhances its military capabilities. At a minimum, these circumstances erode confidence building. In a more extreme case, the situation may force other countries to seek military guarantees elsewhere. In May 2002, India established its first foreign military base in Tajikistan.²¹ This introduces India as a new regional force in Central Asia while potentially providing Tajikistan with its own resources to develop military capacity. Third, as noted in the case of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan sees itself as being threatened by its neighbor's inability to control its territory and borders. As is the case in the domestic environment, close military-regime relations may result in seeking military resolutions rather than diplomatic ones to international disagreements.

The second question posed above concerns the impact that the American presence may have in creating an environment that is conducive to the development of a civil society in Uzbekistan. Directly related to this phenomenon is the extent to which the United States is viewed as the regime's benefactor rather than a neutral party. As is the case with most international operations, American involvement in Uzbekistan is a double-edged sword. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the region's governments see the United States as a power that can provide both regime security and regional stability where no one else can. Second, U.S. influence over economic development is evident in the continuing debate over energy pipelines from Central Asia. Third, American assistance is critical to economic stability and development. In spite of its geopolitical proximity and continued in-

²⁰ Risa Brooks, *Political-Military Relations and the Stability of Arab Regimes*, Adelphi Paper #324, International Institute for Strategic Studies (December 1998), 28.

²¹ "Tajikistan-India Sets up First Foreign Base," Indo-Asian News Service via Daily Defense News, August 19, 2002; available online at <http://www.periscope1.com>.

fluence in the region, Russia's inability to end the war in Chechnya has eroded its reputation—and that of the CIS Collective Security Treaty—as a viable protector. Moreover, Russia's propensity to pressure rather than develop states through economic means leaves states such as Uzbekistan preferring to keep Russia at arm's length. In May 2002, President Karimov emphasized that no Russian troops would be deployed in Uzbekistan. Other regional security cooperation agreements, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) that favors China as the primary regional power rather than Russia, also have problems. China's proximity, its overwhelming size, growing economic power, and need for resources mean its motives are to be viewed with caution. Moreover, the ability of either the SCO or China to protect the current regimes is dubious.

In the post-9/11 environment, American interests shifted from securing development and access to the region's energy resources to preserving a balance of power that facilitated the war on terrorism. Regardless of whether American policy is committed to guaranteeing the security of existing regimes, U.S. interests are served by maintaining stability in Uzbekistan, which is best attained, in the short-term, by nurturing reforms within the Karimov regime. From a military perspective, Uzbekistan is a valuable ally in the war on terrorism. In 1992, the Karimov government assumed the command structure and the armaments of the Soviet Union's Turkestan Military District, making it the best-equipped military in Central Asia. Uzbekistan also has the best transportation and logistics facilities. According to J. D. Crouch, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security, in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the military-to-military contacts that preceded September 11 were instrumental in allowing the United States' rapid deployment of forces into Central Asia.²² However, the extent to which this American presence will positively influence Uzbekistan's civic evolution is affected by many variables.

From a regional perspective, American presence promotes stability and enhances security. The United States is committed to reducing threats by building confidence among the states through increased contact and transparency of their policies. By reducing the level of threat perception, an environment conducive to negotiated settlements to disputes emerges. In addition, Crouch commented that the United States wants to "demilitarize former Soviet facilities" and provide a democratic model, military advice, and "tailored assistance."²³

The U.S. Department of Defense is implementing its policy of democratization through increased interaction between the Uzbek and U.S. armed forces personnel. Uzbek officers are undergoing exercises in planning, training, and implementing military operations. They also are experiencing how Western mili-

²² Jim Garamone, "Central Asia Crucial to War on Terror," June 27, 2002, via DefenseLink; available online at www.defenselink.mil/news.

²³ Ibid.

taries operate, including their chain of command and subordination to civilian oversight. However, within authoritarian regimes the definition of civilian control often is ambiguous and does not necessarily equate to democratization of the armed forces. An unanticipated effect of a training relationship can be to increase the officer corps' independence.²⁴ This potentially has the effect of establishing the officer corps as a counter-balance to the regime. Whether this is positive or negative depends upon the military's role in the politics of the regime and ultimately in a succession process. For example, an expansionist officer corps may be able to convince the regime to become more aggressive regionally. However, the opposite also may be true in that the military can reduce the regime's expansionist tendencies. Two things are relatively certain in these circumstances: the military will exert a greater influence over policy, and therefore they will have a greater stake in governance, and thus a more active role in succession.

In addition to exposing the military to the influence of civil society, the American presence also exposes society to American values. While much of the initial assistance to Uzbekistan has been used to develop its military capacity, subsequent aid will be used to promote economic and political reforms. For example, the Import-Export Bank recently allocated \$55 million for small and medium-size business development.²⁵ The Bush Administration has recognized that, while poverty and oppression do not equate to terrorism, they are catalysts to "hopelessness and despair." Thus, the president has proposed a three-year \$5 billion increase in American foreign aid to "poor nations that support human rights, adhere to strong systems of law, and have open markets." The hope is that Uzbekistan's share of these funds will be given with direct oversight, to ensure their proper use. Recent reports from the region also indicate that the American presence has been responsible for a decline in governmental pressure on NGO's.²⁶ Nonetheless, the sustainability of this progress is tied to continued American engagement.

Probably the greatest risk to long-term American interests is the extent of the U.S. commitment to continued engagement in Uzbekistan. It would be a critical mistake for the United States to turn its back on Uzbekistan as the war on terrorism changes venue. As previously noted, the United States has dramatically increased Uzbekistan's military capability, but its impact upon society as a whole has been minimal to date. To ignore Uzbekistan's other problems because American attention is focused elsewhere would be catastrophic. With its enhanced military capability, Uzbekistan could decide to settle its regional disputes militarily, thus igniting a regional war, the benefactor of which would only be organizations

²⁴ Risa Brooks, *Political-Military Relations and the Stability of Arab Regimes*, Adelphi Paper #324, International Institute for Strategic Studies (December 1998), 29–30.

²⁵ "Uzbek Opposition Figures Urge Caution on U.S. Support for Karimov," Eurasianet, March 27, 2002; available on-line at www.eurasianet.org.

²⁶ Adolat Najimova, "Central Asian Leaders Turn to Cult of Personality," Center for Security Studies and Conflict Research; available online at www.isn.ethz.ch.

such as Al-Qaeda and the IMU. Just as costly could be the regime's continued use of coercion to maintain its firm control over the domestic environment. As with Iran, a policy of repression will inevitably result in revolution. Each of these possibilities—civil war, regional conflict, or revolution—promises similar results in Uzbekistan as occurred in Iran and Afghanistan. Only through continued political, economic, and military engagement can the United States influence the way its military investment is used. Developing military capacity is analogous to letting the genie out of the bottle. Contradictory to the objective of confidence building, enhancing a state's military capabilities can disrupt the region's balance of power, thereby changing the threat perceptions. Additionally, there is no guarantee that the better trained and equipped military will be used strictly for the purpose intended, which in the case of Uzbekistan is combating the IMU and supporting operations against Al-Qaeda. Instead, they may be used to suppress anti-government sentiments in areas of weak government authority. For example, in Georgia there is speculation that American-trained forces may be used in Abkhazia rather than against potential terrorist cells operating in the Pankisi Gorge.²⁷

Finally, the United States' refusal to publicly pressure Karimov on reform is contributing to Uzbek "social separation" between those who favor the United States and those who oppose it. According to a July 2002 poll done by the Ijtimoiy Fikr Public Opinion Center, support for the U.S.-led war on terrorism has declined from nearly unanimous support in late 2001 to 60 percent in July 2002.²⁸ While any politician would be comfortable with a 60 percent approval rating, a 40 percent decline among a constituency cannot be ignored. Of greater concern, the same poll noted that the population increasingly views this war as one against Islam rather terrorism. Third, there is a growing percentage of the population that believes Karimov is using the American relationship as an excuse to crush Muslim groups.²⁹ Fourth, Tashkent is accused of "selling itself to the infidels" by granting the U.S. access rights to military bases. Such perceptions galvanize the orthodox religious community against the American presence and increase the IMU's recruitment possibilities. In fact, a recent report suggests the government's policies have actually increased IMU recruitment opportunities.³⁰ Finally, the American presence, to date, has done little to bring the perceived economic and political benefits of participation in the war on terrorism. While intellectuals are generally neutral regarding the American presence, they are disappointed with the level of liberalization within their country. Echoing former Speaker of the House of

²⁷ Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Georgian Minister of Defense, Joint Press Conference, May 7, 2002.

²⁸ Report by Marat Khadjimukhamedov, Deputy Director, Ijtimoiy Fikr Public Opinion Center, RFE/RL via Security Watch, February 26, 2002; available online at www.isn.ethz.ch.

²⁹ Artie McConnell, "Islamic Radicals Re-Group in Central Asia," Eurasianet, June 4, 2002; available online at www.eurasianet.org.

³⁰ Ibid.

Representatives Tip O'Neill's famous quote, "All politics are local," Marat Khadjimukhamedov, the Deputy Director of Ijtimoiy Fikr, noted that Uzbeks care about the American presence only to the extent to which it helps them solve their problems.³¹

All of these reports indicate that the perceived value of American involvement is diminishing, and there is an increasing perception among average Uzbeks that the United States is becoming more aligned with the regime's policies and has done little to support the rhetoric of democratization and liberalization. To avoid further erosion of U.S. prestige, the Bush Administration needs to reach out to moderate opposition groups and potential opposition groups. Ironically, the army may be a primary candidate. It has the potential to maintain a balanced perspective on the value of the United States to Uzbekistan. Furthermore, closer ties with the military may inhibit the emergence of an anti-American or anti-Western regime in the center of Central Asia if a regime change takes place. The emergence of an anti-American regime, analogous to Khomeini's Iran, would severely impact American interests. At a minimum, the United States would lose access to a valuable base for prosecuting the war on terrorism. A greater threat is the creation of a new haven for terrorists that is even less accessible than Afghanistan. Third, the emergence of an anti-American regime would disrupt American interests with regard to the development of Caspian energy resources. Finally, it might choose to form a closer alliance with Iran or China, thus increasing their regional influence at the expense of the United States.

While the Karimov regime does not appear to be on the verge of collapse, this paper has presented some threats and cautions worth considering. It does not advocate the abandonment of the existing regime, in spite of its shortcomings. However, it does stress that problems exist and appear to be multiplying, and that it is thus time for the United States to act decisively in its own best interest. Islam Karimov is only 63 years old; nonetheless, the question of succession in Uzbekistan remains unsettled. Karimov's death, an extended illness, or the need to deal with an expanded internal insurgency could plunge Uzbekistan into civil war. At a minimum, such a conflict would immerse the country into anarchy similar to what Afghanistan experienced following the Soviet withdrawal. Additionally, it is highly likely that at least one of the competing groups would be strongly anti-American. With a weakened central government, these groups would perhaps be able to gain a foothold in the Ferghana Valley, from which they could launch a guerrilla war. Either scenario would be damaging to American interests.

This being the case, how should the U.S. proceed? As indicated, Uzbekistan is a pivotal state in the Caspian region and is critical to securing stability and prosecuting the war on terrorism. U.S. engagement must include a commitment

³¹ Report by Marat Khadjimukhamedov, Deputy Director, Ijtimoiy Fikr Public Opinion Center, RFE/RL via Security Watch, February 26, 2002; available online at www.isn.ethz.ch.

to economic and social development. The United States needs to implement and maintain a consistent policy that both strengthens Uzbekistan's ability to contribute to the war on terrorism while simultaneously developing a foundation for much needed reforms. The Import-Export Bank's commitment is a step in the right direction, but Uzbekistan's share of the \$5 billion foreign aid program promised to relieve poverty must be used to stabilize its currency, continue the re-development of small and medium-size business, and encourage privatization of the economy as a whole.

Politically, there needs to be a return to the pre-9/11 posture. The United States must make it clear to Karimov and his supporters that the American commitment to Uzbekistan will be evaluated on the extent to which he allows the development of democratic opposition, promotes participation in the governing process, respects human rights, and encourages a free and independent media. Some of this process may be accomplished by promoting educational reforms and information access; access to new ideas was a major impetus to the outcome of the Cold War. Congress' Silk Road Strategy Act is a promising step in this direction; however, the curtailment of Internet access raises questions regarding its effectiveness. Finally, collaborative educational ventures utilizing the strengths of distance learning technologies and focusing on critical topics such as democratic process, market economics, and journalism should be encouraged and federally funded. At the same time, the United States needs to make it clear that it is going to establish a relationship with reputable members of the opposition. In Iran, the United States waited too long to take this step. From the evidence, it does not appear that such an opportunity has yet passed in Uzbekistan.

Militarily, joint military exercises, most effectively handled under the auspices of NATO's Partnership for Peace, should become more frequent. These are aimed at enhancing security and confidence building in the region by increasing transparency and creating a forum for conflict resolution. However, such exercises also provide an example of civilian control of the military. Turkey adds extensive value to these efforts, both because of its NATO membership and its ethnic and linguistic ties to the region. Efforts in improving anti-terrorism activities, including border controls, should continue. But most importantly, democratization and civilian control of the military should become major objectives. Education programs for officers—including studying in the United States or Western Europe, on-site programs, and distance learning initiatives that expand access beyond the highest ranks—should be implemented. A well-trained military that is responsive to civilian control is a solid guarantor of stability.

Linkage is a critical concept in international relations, and can dramatically impact foreign policy. Understanding the linkage concept is critical to an effective and coherent foreign policy. Currently, the United States has lost its perspective on this concept. While American assistance is improving Uzbekistan's capability to fight terrorism, it also is enhancing the regime's power to control its population

and is contributing to anti-Americanism. The Bush Administration needs to understand that the current linkage does not serve American interests. Instead, it needs to link its military assistance to political and economic reforms, thereby serving a more long-term policy that advances its foreign policy objectives of democratization, prosperity, and ultimately stability and peace while avoiding a potential repeat of the Iranian experience in the 1970s.

