

U.S. Strategic Dilemmas in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan Briefing at CSIS

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Stephen Blank: Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Commission, it is a great honor to appear before you today to discuss the situation in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan for they have become, especially in Uzbekistan, issues of international contention and of a vibrant policy debate here in the United States. Events in Uzbekistan, notably the uprising and massacre at Andizhan on May 12-13 and the subsequent controversies and even threats to the continuation of our base in Uzbekistan have also exposed the deficiencies of our policymaking process in regard to Uzbekistan and Central Asia as a whole. Although analysts had warned about the possibilities and potential consequences of an eruption of violence in Uzbekistan; these events caught our governmental agencies flatfooted and internally divided against themselves. As a result they were too slow to respond to rapidly unfolding events And when they did so they responded in divided and contradictory ways that exposed some of the defects in our policy toward Central Asia and the lack of contingency planning that should have been built upon timely forecasts of those contingencies.

Central Asia's Geostrategic Situation, The Great Game's Present Status

These defects must be overcome because of Central Asia's rising strategic importance. Central Asia's strategic significance has been growing since the Clinton Administration became involved there. It did so to counter renewed Russian encroachments and to ensure these countries' economic independence, helping them diversify their trade connections and foreigners' access to their large energy holdings. Thus Central Asia's strategic importance was growing even before September 11, 2001 and has grown even more due to its strategic location to both the terrorist hubs and to major powers.

Central Asia's sizable energy deposits play an important role in foreign interest in the area and in American policy but we should not fall into asserting, as do so many uninformed analysts that our interest there, or for that matter anywhere else, is solely or even primarily driven by the quest for energy access. That is demonstrably false. The primary strategic asset or cause of this area's importance remains its proximity to major international actors: Russia, China, Iran, India, Pakistan, and not least, Al-Qaida. Furthermore, for all

the major players there energy is a strategic asset. Issues of access to energy or to energy markets is of crucial strategic importance to them all. Russia and China want to monopolize that access for themselves and deprive other states of access or local governments of alternative energy trade partners. Our strategy aims at ensuring these states' economic and thus political independence, exactly the opposite of Moscow and Beijing's goals. U.S. policy promotes diversity of markets and access and the independent sovereign choice of Central Asian governments concerning the choice of their business partners. And both sides' strategies are tied to competing models of economic-political organization, i.e. closed, corrupt, state-run autarchic structures vs. liberal, market-oriented systems.

Furthermore, the attempt to export corrupt, backward, authoritarian petro-state type structures to Central Asia or to preserve such forms of rule are driven by Russia and china's own domestic political systems. Both of these states are authoritarian to one or another degree and view themselves as legatees of empire. A de-democratizing Russia which explicitly identifies itself ever more with Russia's imperial heritage cannot survive except by exporting its own form of rule to the CIS or further abroad whether it be Ukraine or Central Asia. It is no accident that President Vladimir Putin has also just launched a campaign against Russian NGOS who are funded from abroad because they ostensibly corrupt and threaten Russia's political stability.

Neither has Moscow shirked from more forceful gambits. It has attempted coups d'etats, participated in assassination plots, in Turkmenistan, or even if many press reports allege, continuing arms shipments to the Taleban. Its policies toward Ukraine underscore how deeply it seeks to corrupt its neighbors' independence and sovereignty. Indeed a Russian diplomat recently told the OSCE that Georgia is a "province". Russian policies here also manifest the overt and strong participation of organized crime as a conscious instrument of state policy, displaying a fusion of government and criminal figures who can only flourish by further corrupting local governments.

Russia also clearly seeks to oust American forces in Central Asia and replace them with its own forces. It has obtained a second base in Tajikistan, is doubling its forces at the Kant air base in Kyrgyzstan, and the Russo-Uzbek treaty of 2004 and recent agreements between the two states talk of up to 10 Russian airfields in Uzbekistan, arms sales, and joint bilateral exercises. Moscow and Beijing are also quite ready to offer Uzbekistan or other governments anything they want to supplant us. Apart from the recent communiqué of the Shanghai Cooperative Organization calling for a timetable for American withdrawal from Central Asia and maliciously false interpretations by President Putin of the situation in Afghanistan, Russia is now organizing a Caspian littoral force as well as a force that it will dominate under the aegis of its Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to oust all "non-regional forces" from the area.

Russia and China are also assiduously spreading the idea that

Washington is organizing some sort of bloc of post-Soviet states against their interests and that Washington, through the CIA and NGOs receiving foreign aid and assistance, if not direction from Washington, is busy instigating and fomenting revolutions in Central Asia and elsewhere to oust uncooperative governments. Allegedly Washington in this scenario does not understand that the only alternative to the status quo as both local rulers and Beijing and Moscow see it, is fundamentalist terrorist regimes.

Thus China and Russia now also wage an unremitting ideological war against democratization charging America with fomenting revolution and spreading economic largesse among Central Asian governments. China is organizing with Russia and bringing pressure to bear upon local governments like Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan or offering them material and ideological support to eject America from Central Asia because of the fear of democratization that could spread to China and because of the proximity of American air bases to its Interior.

We may also discern comparable neo-colonialist drives originating in the desire to preserve an undemocratic domestic system in Chinese policy. China's newest moves in Central Asia reflect not just its rising capability, long-standing desire to suppress any possible external support for insurgents in Xinjiang, long-held great power ambitions, or rising hunger for energy, but also the impact of events like the Kyrgyz revolution of March, 2005 and the massacre at Andizhan. The intersection of these events upon China's recent policy initiatives reveal several new departures in Beijing's foreign policies toward Central Asia.

China has abandoned its earlier reticence about former Russian Prime Minister Evgeny Primakov's strategic triangle with Russia and India and took part in a meeting of Foreign Ministers of the three states in Vladivostok on June 2, 2005 a day after a bilateral meeting with Russian foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. At this meeting the war on terror, access to Central Asian energy (including Iran), and the issue of uprisings in Central Asia were discussed among the participants although we do not know what practical conclusions, if any, they reached.

Second, China has pushed to invigorate the Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO) as an agency for bilateral and multilateral action to suppress popular unrest in Central Asia and to strengthen it as a bulwark against Western (especially American) ideas and policies about democratization, making it the equivalent of the 19th century Holy Alliance against revolution. As part of this program China has supported and may have even instigated the SCO's decisions to make India, Pakistan, and Iran observers of the SCO and to advocate a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. bases. President Jiang Zemin first advocated this withdrawal in 2002 in Tehran, undoubtedly to cement Sino-Iranian ties.

Third, China has continued upgrading its military capability, particularly regarding the dispatch of rapid reaction forces to Central Asia. The widespread reports of Chinese interests in a base in Kyrgyzstan, though denied, may yet come true, possibly as an SCO base rather than a purely Chinese one. But we should have no illusions that China has launched a qualitative and comprehensive improvement of its regional and local military capabilities and is readier than ever to put them at the service of its interests if necessary. Its calls for upgrading the SCO's capabilities and its upcoming combined exercises with Russian forces, ostensibly in anti-terrorist scenarios, albeit one that looks suspiciously like an anti-Taiwanese, American, or even Korean landing operation, also suggest heightened concern about trends and the presence of U.S. power in Central Asia.

Fourth, China has substantially enhanced its ties to Iran. This policy aims at more than ensuring a reliable supply of energy although that certainly is a major Chinese motive. After all Iran and China signed a \$70 billion energy deal in October, 2004. But this policy not only strengthens Iran against Washington in the Gulf and regarding nuclear proliferation, it also cements a shared purpose in restricting America's ability to act in Central Asia and thus threaten both those states. Iranian elites openly welcome the idea of a bloc with China, Russia, and India (again the triangle) against Washington).

Finally we have seen an intensified courtship of Moscow and vice versa, not just on the basis of the triangle or the SCO but in all aspects of the overall bilateral relationship, including military cooperation. There are those in Russia calling for this kind of coalition. Meanwhile the SCO's less publicized recent decision to create its own team of supposedly impartial outside observers to monitor presidential and other elections in Central Asia and other actions cited above provide a mechanism for expressing not just common strategic goals, but more importantly, shared ideological-political aspirations to freeze the status quo in Central Asia.

China's new policy initiatives bespeak both the increased importance of this area to China in terms of energy and the impact developments in Central Asia would have upon Xinjiang and China's overall state structure. They also attest to the increasing and widening rivalry with the United States in Russia and China's effort to build counter-coalitions against what it perceives to be U.S. encirclement and potential threats on its doorstep. Third, these policies also highlight the tremendous and strategic importance of energy access to China; an issue that is critical for the long-term and which already is and will be a major driver of future policies. Fourth they point to the increasing militarization and strategic polarization of the Central Asian and post-Soviet "space" as rival security blocs are beginning to take shape and more and more exclusively military interests are beginning to make their presence felt here. The SCO, China's first formal show of willingness to project power beyond its borders, is but one manifestation of this trend as are its 2003-2005 exercises and growing military links among all of its members.

Finally the strategic bipolarity between America and Russia, China, and Iran is now being reinforced by ideological-political cleavages over democratization and human rights in both Central Asia and China, Iran, and Russia. This ideological dimension can only reinforce and strengthen the existing tensions regarding rival strategic ambitions in and for the Caucasus and Central Asia. Thus they will make great power cooperation much harder to achieve and will probably strengthen internal and inter-state cleavages in Central Asia. Domestic actors there will now have foreign patrons to whom they can go for support and aid, or to whom they can complain about domestic conditions. Domestic and regional, if not international, cleavages will duly reinforce and replicate each other making it much harder to stabilize local conditions or avoid great power confrontation in or over Central Asia. That structural geostrategic rivalry should not be in our interests or in the peoples of Central Asia's best interests. But it is becoming a fact and China's new initiatives demonstrate not only its understanding of that fact, but also Beijing's resolution to exploit that fact to its own advantage.

Several Years ago Zbigniew Brzezinski called this area the Eurasian Balkans. While the comparison or analogy may be inexact, the possibility that domestic factions in each country will be able to appeal to and pressure foreign governments to come to their aid, or that governments will be able to exploit the emerging bipolarity or tripolarity in this area by playing one bloc off against another to secure tangible political, military, and economic benefits all resemble the old structure of or interaction of Balkan and international crises through Yugoslavia's wars of the 1990s.

Thus it also is no secret therefore, that local governments fully understand this rivalry and its importance. This also explains why for their own benefit they continue to welcome America's economic presence as a guarantor of their independence. Accordingly what under Secretary of State Richard Armitage actually called vital U.S. interests, i.e. interests for which we are prepared to commit troops, are involved in Central Asia and they far transcend access to energy. Our interests there are fundamentally geostrategic. Even our approach to energy, to ensure that no one state has a monopoly on exploration or pipelines in the area, is predicated on the strategic goal of ensuring local governments' real economic and political independence and on their not being enmeshed in a new imperial bloc in Eurasia. Added to the fact that we are at war in Afghanistan against the perpetrators of Al-Qaida and its allies, the preeminently strategic nature of our involvement in Central Asia and in the bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan becomes clear.

Because our vital interests in Central Asia are primarily geostrategic they have superseded our parallel and coinciding interest or values to help achieve a liberalization if not democratization of existing regimes in Central Asia. Although U.S. government agencies and many NGOS work constantly to facilitate liberal and democratic social, economic, and political policies and institutions, every official statement of our policies there places geostrategic interests relating to the war on terrorism and the independence, stability, and security of those states above the promotion of democracy and human rights,

including freedom of religion.

This may be unpalatable, but in wartime and given the nature of that war and the governments of Central Asia we must recognize that democratization, including the inculcation of official tolerance and freedom of religion, is the work of years if not generations. While Uzbekistan's record on all these issues is frankly abysmal and has led to earlier cutoffs of aid, those cutoffs have been labeled by Chief of Staff General Richard Myers as 'short-sighted'.

Therefore those who wish to punish Uzbekistan for its sins, real and imagined, are driven by an understandable revulsion at Uzbekistan's previous behavior that for them takes precedence over a sober concern for our interests. They also are clearly animated by the feeling that we must do something to register our moral outrage even if it is action that runs counter to our strategic interests in wartime or to stated policy. In this case those interests comprise winning the war in Afghanistan, ensuring the region's independence from external threats, both of neo-colonialist blocs or of terrorist-inspired violence, and thus safeguarding the independence, security, and stability of regional governments.

In Uzbekistan there is the further important objective of engaging an army, one of the most pro-American institutions in Uzbekistan, so that it can become more interoperable with our own forces and also learn from us something of Western or American values that pertain to civilian-military relations. Cutting contacts and assistance to them merely reinforces the strength of less pro-Western or anti-Western elements in the government while penalizing those who seek partnership with us. That also eliminates any strong American presence in Uzbekistan and hands the country to Russia and China. Their objectives are quite obvious and well known to Central Asian governments. They entail the subjection of those regimes to an exclusive dependency and neo-colonialist relationship that can only perpetuate their corruption, backwardness, dependence, and authoritarianism. While all of them must live with Beijing and Moscow; they do not wish to be left alone with them. Sanctions will lead to that outcome and the lasting result of such subjection to a Russo-Chinese condominium or spheres of influence is already clear. Ultimately such regimes will inevitably explode, engulfing Central Asia in violence, paradoxically threatening the interests of both Beijing and Moscow.

Andizhan and Its Consequences

The reporting and commentary upon the events in Andizhan unfortunately illustrate a similar rush to moralism on the basis of incomplete and even unverifiable information, the opposite of what sound policymaking should be about. Moreover, they have hobbled our ability to respond to that uprising and repression and to the subsequent Sino-Russian effort to undermine our entire strategic

position in Central Asia. Without question, this episode, like other previous outbursts of public violence in Uzbekistan are traceable to Uzbek President Islam Karimov's repressive rule that imprisons people for merely expressing an untoward or seemingly untoward interest in religion, mainly Islam. Not surprisingly, since dissent has been stifled and economic conditions in many places -- though not Andizhan -- are quite bad, dissent often turns to radical Islam. That is the only ideological or intellectually coherent alternative to the hollowed out official Islam and Karimov's cult of nationalism and personality. Our interest in democratization in Uzbekistan, apart from our own values, thus relates to the fact that we believe, with good reason, that continued harsh repression and pervasive corruption from the top down can only facilitate violent uprisings that extremists could then exploit for their own benefit. Therefore, and we should so argue, liberalization is in the interests not only of the people, but of the ruling elite as well if it wishes to prolong its tenure on the basis of a consolidated legitimacy.

Consequently we must be very careful in stating what happened in Andizhan on May 12-13. Many human rights agencies and NGOs, often with a distinct political agenda of forcing the U.S. to withdraw from Uzbekistan and our bases there, have charged that the police and military repression there was a massacre directed against peaceful protests against the injustice and repression that mark this regime. Unfortunately this is not verifiable and it is by no means the case or the whole case. My own research as well as that of Shirin Akiner, an internationally respected British expert on Central Asia who is by no means pro-American, suggests that those who launched the uprising on May 12-13 committed deliberate acts of violence and insurgency against the regime and unarmed officials. Their activities were violent, armed, well-organized and entailed among other things the murder of 54 unarmed men and women prison guards on the night of May 12-13 when they liberated the prisoners in Andizhan.

The 23 men initially arrested there and their supporters claim to be merely religiously minded followers of a movement called Akromiya after its originator Akromiya Yuldashov. Indeed recent eyewitness interviews with some of their leaders who survived confirm that they consciously acted as a kind of surrogate government in Andizhan. While their deeds may have been well-intentioned, under the circumstances they had to know they were playing with fire. Thus these interviews, press reports, and accounts like Akiner's give us grounds to suspect some Hizb ut-Tahrir (A leading radical and fundamentalist opposition to the regime which does not shirk from violence) or radical Islamist influence given events in Andizhan (We need not take too seriously Russian officials' claims that they know that there were outside agitators and organizers behind the events in Andizhan for they always make such manifestly self-serving statements and their past record does not inspire confidence). Certainly these men perceived themselves and apparently were perceived locally and by the authorities as a political challenge to a regime not known for its forbearance in these matters.

Here we should note that the Hizb-Ut Tahrir movement is wedded to a Leninist, conspiratorial organizational model that aims to restore the Caliphate and conducts violent rhetorical opposition to Karimov, and virulent anti-Semitic and anti-Western propaganda. Beyond this group's

activity, there are also numerous Uzbeks working with or in Al-Qaida, probably in Pakistan or along the frontier with Afghanistan. There also are signs of a revival of the Islamic Movement for Uzbekistan (IMU), an opposition group that was thought to be destroyed in the American attacks on Afghanistan in 2001-02. There are also many reports of renewed terrorist activity among Uzbek diasporas in Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan that obviously alarm those regimes as well.

The demonstrations of May 12-13 were a culmination of rising public anger at the arrest of these 23 businessmen who claimed to be arrested largely because the secret police and government wanted to confiscate their businesses, by no means an unlikely scenario. However, despite mounting anger these demonstrations, including demonstrations at the accused' trial, were peaceful. But on the night of May 12 the NSS, the secret police, began arresting demonstrators and relatives of those 23 men. This ignited the demonstrations and riots that led the "insurgents" to overrun first a police station, and an Army or government office to gain weapons and then to storm the prison.

At the prison the demonstrators overran the building, freed the prisoners, and then wantonly and brutally killed the 54 unarmed prison guards including women. The next morning the crowd attached to the events of the preceding night naturally the crowd swelled. And when negotiations with local authorities collapsed, members of the various Uzbek armed forces (nobody can give a clear description of which forces they represented) apparently began firing indiscriminately, triggering a massacre that claimed at least several hundred lives. While nobody knows who gave the order to fire or who fired first, Karimov came personally to Andizhan and was directly involved with events there for several hours. So it is hard to imagine the troops simply losing control and firing into the crowd. Even so it is clear that this episode highlighted their incomplete professionalization and training.

This account of the demonstrations and of the preceding context is taken from numerous sources, including in some cases, eyewitness accounts. From what is known it is impossible to confirm the figure of over a 1000 dead, let alone several thousands that have been wantonly bandied about. Neither can we confirm the presence of units that may or may not have been trained by the U.S. military. The inflammatory headlines claiming this, on closer inspection, are misleading if not inconclusive as they too admit that these charges cannot be verified. And even if they were they are ultimately irrelevant. We do not train troops to conduct massacres. But forces operating under military discipline with the commander in chief on the spot are extremely loath to commit acts of insubordination in unclear circumstances especially where challengers to the regime are involved. In fact these articles represent rather devious efforts by the human rights lobby to push its own agenda and narrative onto the U.S. government which clearly is not prepared or was not prepared to deal with what this author and others warned would be insurgent events that could be easily forecast given Uzbekistan's domestic situation.

The argument that U.S. forces trained those involved or that

therefore the U.S. government should simply get up and leave is, however, an unsound response to this tragedy. It is unsound as regards the defense of U.S. interests and the promotion of U.S. values. Imposing sanctions undoubtedly allows those who recommend this to feel virtuous, but does nothing to advance human rights in Uzbekistan, quite the opposite. Instead they only serve to advance the claims of those who argue that the U.S. government is actually behind local NGO agencies and that both have an agenda of fomenting revolution. As this is the siren song that Moscow and Beijing constantly repeat and is now being acted out in trials of NGO employees in Uzbekistan, it makes no sense to take actions that may give us moral satisfaction but also make such propaganda credible while achieving nothing tangible for human rights.

The recommendation to impose sanctions is also fundamentally misconceived given Uzbekistan's strategic situation which is all too reminiscent of the Cold War. In a wartime or Cold War situation of at least a facsimile of regional bipolarity between America and the terrorists, or in the regional rivalry between Washington, Moscow, and Beijing, Uzbekistan has much room for pocketing our aid and then going its own way. Indeed, Karimov has masterfully played this game with all of the major powers for over a decade. Today a situation resembling that strategic bipolarity exists in Central Asia where the rivalry between Russia, China, and America gives aid recipients like Uzbekistan room for maneuver and the ability to withstand U.S. sermons on reform even in spite of the danger to Uzbekistan posed by terrorism and America's war against it. A recent study on conditionality issues in Africa by Professor Thad Dunning is highly relevant to the situation we face in Uzbekistan and concludes that,

To the extent that donors actually prefer to to promote democracy among recipient countries, threats to make aid conditional on the fulfillment of democratic reforms may not be credible, because withholding aid from autocratic countries could mean losing clients to the other Cold War power. In other words, the geostrategic cost of losing clients may override any perceived benefit from successfully promoting democratic reforms among recipient countries.

In fact, there is little we can do about it at present. Even though some argue that Uzbekistan is more susceptible to our pressure than it will admit and therefore advocate more such pressure, research on Cold War security cooperation suggests that the ability to induce positive democratic reforms in a state that receives substantial U.S. aid diminishes under conditions of strategic bipolarity. Therefore there is no alternative to continued U.S. strategic engagement as even Uzbek dissidents acknowledge. We should not be ashamed to speak out either publicly or privately about injustices or be hesitant about making our case to Uzbek and other officials, but we should not be playing Moscow's or Beijing's game for those capitals. Neither must we allow obstructive Uzbek officials to dictate the terms of our bilateral relationship with Tashkent. Sanctions and ensuing withdrawal only

relegate Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to the tender mercies of those in Moscow and Beijing who would simply convert the area into a permanent and backward sphere of influence that has an ever-present potential for violence. Our engagement must be driven by our interests and a sober appreciation of realities both locally and internationally, and that estimate of the real strengths in our position should enable us to use whatever leverage we possess to its utmost effectiveness, no matter how limited that leverage might be.

Maximizing U.S. Leverage and Reshaping our Policy Process To Counter Threats to Uzbekistan's Security

We must never forget that a consensus on values cannot be achieved absent a consensus on mutual interests. We cannot attain other states' conformity to our values if our and their interests are fundamentally opposed and postulated as irreconcilable --something inherent in the act of sanctions. Here we need only remember the efforts to induce human rights change in the Soviet Union to see the correctness of this insight, namely that consensus on interests must precede and undergird consensus on values. We never stooped engaging Moscow or campaigning for human rights, even as we waged what amounted to economic warfare against it and proved that we could achieve both our interests and our values over time. But to replicate this outcome over time, the only way that it can be done, we must do more than simply engage foreign regimes and point out where interests are congruent and how congruent values might reinforce that convergence of interests to mutual benefit. We must also go beyond engagement and dialogue, even if it is a tough-minded and critical dialogue, to enhance our ability to forecast trends in Uzbekistan and throughout Central Asia and our ability to respond to or even exploit them to our benefit. Nobody can relieve us of our responsibility here for effective policy and policymaking begins at home.

While conditions operating within contemporary world politics may frustrate American efforts to induce Uzbek reforms, the preceding absence of inter-agency and policy coordination in Washington aggravates them. That failure robs us of the ability to conduct a truly strategic policy in Uzbekistan and many other places. While the difference between the State Department and the Defense Department emphases in their policies owes much to their inherent functional differentiation, there is no a priori reason why greater policy and strategic coordination cannot be realized. Until and unless that happens, Uzbek officials who oppose domestic reforms or organizations who wish to exploit that division to push policies that may serve their interests but not those of the U.S. government can continually exploit the gaps in these two departments' outlooks and policy lines to preserve Uzbekistan's status quo with minimal alteration except for the diminution of our standing there.

Uzbek officials who oppose reform will then also be able to disregard the chorus of disapproval from America and European governments and to some extent from international financial institutions (IFIs) concerning Uzbekistan's domestic and economic policies. Unfortunately in doing so they may be hastening the demise of

their own system in Uzbekistan and undermining the interests of Uzbekistan's most visible ally, in what could quite likely be a violent demise. We have the responsibility of pointing out to them that continued obduracy vis-a-vis the challenges of domestic reform heightens the likelihood of violent challenges to their continued tenure in office. Therefore reform is in their own best interest. Such persuasion can only occur over time but it cannot even begin if we unilaterally deprive ourselves of a tangible and mutually beneficial presence in Uzbekistan.

Unfortunately American policymakers do not have the luxury of taking a leisurely approach to coordinate their policies toward Uzbekistan for there are too many signs of rising threat beyond reports of Karimov's illness and the inherent weakness connected with the issue of succession in a regime gripped by illegitimate governance. Andizhan suggests that time is running out for the regime because of the numerous cases of social violence and the many signs of public lack of support for the regime. These signs, added to the pervasive corruption, economic differentiation and signs of civic anomie already point to real problems that could soon arise there. But other issues beyond these suggest a rising tide that could, in tandem with a succession or other crisis, generate an upheaval in Uzbekistan that would quickly spread beyond its borders. As one recent report observes,

That the preponderance of extremist forces are allied against Karimov evokes, from the U.S. perspective, memories of pre-1979 Iran; we are in the uncomfortably familiar situation of having our principal military ally in a Muslim region being a corrupt, secular, authoritarian opposed by Islamic fundamentalist forces.

For example, Karimov's continuing penchant for arresting anyone who expresses independent religious or political views has essentially converted official Islam into a colorless tool of the state that lacks for effective spokesmen. Much evidence indicates that this policy has led to a situation where the official clergy cannot even begin to deal with opposition religious arguments. Even though some observers cite the general past political quietism of Central Asian religion and its subservience to the state, in fact these officials may be losing their ability to credibly represent Islam to their constituents and thus their legitimacy as authority figures. Then the field would be open to challengers of the regime who can cloak their violent radicalism in religious rhetoric. This consideration applies with particular force to opposition groups like Hizb-Ut Tahrir or other groups that may be associated in some way with Al-Qaida or homegrown terrorist movements like the revived IMU.

All opposition to Karimov and innocent victims of the regime are routinely described as belonging to one or more of these organizations.

Nonetheless independent observers confirm the revival of the IMU, the presence of Uzbeks in Al-Qaida's entourage, and the continuing presence of Hizb-Ut Tahrir in and around Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan has also been the Central Asian state most targeted by terrorist violence dating back to 1999 and there have been at least three major episodes of such violence in 2004 alone. As noted above, one of the most troubling manifestations of these eruptions of violence and discontent is that there no longer appears to be either public fear of the regime or any sign of public support for it. This lack of public support along with the police's incompetence and venality renders the regime vulnerable to armed coups or mass uprisings, especially in a moment of vulnerability such as that occasioned by a succession struggle. But those armed coups could even come about through the alignment of one or more opposition factions with other such groups or even with one of the rivals for succession. Meanwhile Karimov's response, and that of his subordinates, therefore, is to criticize his neighbors and other international security agencies for not doing enough to stop terrorist infiltration from their territories into Uzbekistan and to label all opposition as belonging to Hizb Ut-Tahrir, the IMU, Al-Qaida, etc.

Thus the threat to stability in Uzbekistan resides not in an imminent terrorist takeover, but rather in the danger of a failed state. State failure is often a drawn-out process, much of which is hidden from external observers, or even possibly of the regime, as its governance capabilities gradually, unobtrusively, but steadily "hollow out". In Uzbekistan's case a succession crisis or a flash uprising like Andizhan could be the public detonator or accelerator for an already developing process of state failure in which popular support, the economy, the state's monopoly over violence, and effective ability to govern the society all decline. Should the Uzbek state disintegrate due to Karimov's illegitimate governance, the process or processes generated thereby could then possibly open the way to a terrorist or radical Islamist regime or to attempted takeovers by such forces that would probably generate a protracted insurgency in Central Asia, making it difficult, if not impossible for our bases there to function securely.

Therefore it is unlikely that the regime's collapse, should it occur, will immediately or directly lead to a terrorist takeover. Rather that failure or collapse could then enable such forces to coalesce or join forces with other contenders for power and then bid for power in an already destabilized situation. There is also good reason to think that taking together all the trends cited above, Uzbekistan is already at risk of such a failure, particularly in a succession crisis, especially if it turns violent and becomes an internecine struggle among rival factions, none of which enjoys much support or legitimacy. If that diagnosis is correct then U.S. policymakers must not only forge a strategically sound policy vis-à-vis Uzbekistan, but also work to prevent such a state failure while we can still do so.

The aforementioned defects in American policymaking in regard to Uzbekistan and Central Asia could work against U.S. interests there because they impede a truly strategic approach to Uzbekistan and Central Asia as a whole. Therefore the first two things that we must rectify are our policymaking structure and, with it, our approach to

security cooperation. If we wish to help secure Uzbekistan against terrorist or other threats and help it become a liberalizing and democratizing polity where citizens enjoy a growing number of rights and the capacity to enjoy them we must simultaneously recast our thinking about security and legitimacy.

Organizational and conceptual change must go hand in hand to be effective in achieving strategic objectives in Uzbekistan and Central Asia. Thus an effective interagency system for reviewing and making policy based on agreed upon criteria for progress in meeting the targets envisioned in U.S. aid programs must emerge from the policy process. Obviously this has yet to occur. Consequently our recommendation probably means that the NSC office that superintends Central Asian and Uzbek policies must take a stronger hand with the other relevant bureaucracies to see to it that President Bush's guidelines and the law are obeyed and implemented.

If various departments go off on their own without genuine policy coordination, Uzbek officials will scoff at other agencies' efforts to foster democratization. This could put American interests at risk due to threats to the stability of the Uzbek government, either under Karimov, or under a successor regime. As too much experience tells us, governments have a terrible track record in forestalling or averting state failure in governments at risk, and our record is no better. And, in no small measure, these policy failures are directly traceable to conjoined organizational and cognitive failures. However, there are some remedies available in our security cooperation programs and overall policies that could work to reduce the dangers posed by Uzbekistan's continuing intransigence on the issues of reform. Realistically speaking, as long as the war on terrorism continues the priority for Central Asian policy in general and for Uzbekistan in particular must be the defense relationship with each of those states, including Uzbekistan. One could plausibly argue that the stability provided by foreign military presence and assistance helps ensure a stability that, inter alia, makes Uzbekistan and similar countries more attractive to desperately needed foreign investment. However, it must be understood that security must not be thought of as residing wholly or even primarily in defense assistance or in assistance related to Nonproliferation or anti-narcotics activities in Uzbekistan, however valuable such programs are.

Instead Uzbekistan's security, like that of its neighbors, must be seen holistically, as encompassing economic and political governance, the social safety net, education, environmental threats, etc., not just a congeries of individual and uncoordinated programs tailored to achieve specific goals but with no overarching strategy behind them. For aid granters this holistic perspective regarding the goals of security cooperation and assistance must also be tied to a greater sense of the strategic unity of purposes involved in granting this aid. Military training and assistance programs must explicitly be tied not just to the enhancement of interoperability of the Uzbek and American or NATO forces, but also to specific democratization of internal defense policies and more democratic civil-military relationships within Uzbekistan's armed forces. Similarly, programs to upgrade the quality of the police and intelligence agencies, should also be explicitly tied to benchmarks of greater democratization, true steps

against corruption, and more professionalization. In other words, greater conditionality must be attached to aid to hard security sectors.

This conditionality must be explained in terms of both our continuing support of the regime against the real threats it faces, and also of our unwillingness to endorse policies that ultimately undermine the stability of Uzbekistan's domestic regime and endanger our presence there. Those policies contradict both the regime's and America's interests. This program of conditionality should also be emphasized in the Administration's policies toward the various IFIs operating in Uzbekistan. We should also take care to forge a more unified approach with NATO and EU and upgrade the quality and extent of their assistance programs to Uzbekistan and other former Soviet republics. While we must continue to ensure Uzbekistan's security against attack and terrorist inspired destabilization, we must also make every effort to expand the pro-Western and even liberally-oriented sectors of its government, economy, and society. If anything, more aid of all kinds, rather than sanctions should be sent. But that aid should be sent where it can do good, and thus be tailored to specific, often non-governmental programs within Uzbek society. These aid programs should also be strictly attached to measurable conditions of performance which, if not realized over time, can then trigger that aid's diminution.

A truly strategic perspective among policymakers in Washington also should lead us to diversify our attention in Central Asia and pay greater attention to Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan, not only to prevent their incorporation in a Russian or Chinese sphere of influence, but also to reward Kazakstan for its visible economic progress and help it emerge from the shadow of becoming a petro-state. There also appears to be some recognition in the State Department that Kazakstan, due to its economic reforms could become the leader and magnet for stability in Central Asia, rather than Uzbekistan. Greater support for Kazakstan due to its successes in economic reform may cause Tashkent to sit up and take notice and ask itself why this is happening. Then we should be able to point out that it is a reward for reform and that we will also reward similar types of policies in Tashkent.

Washington also must take greater notice of the succession issue in Central Asia generally and in Uzbekistan in particular as it approaches a strategic turning point. As the war on terrorism progresses -- assuming it will continue to do so and the progress registered to date in Afghanistan continues -- our focus must change from ensuring defense and hard security to providing for internal security and improved governance to alleviate the conditions that permit the rise of insurgencies, including terrorism. A truly strategic perspective on Central Asia will look beyond the immediate future to the medium and longer-term and build future policies around the preeminence of governance issues to overcome the syndrome of illegitimate governance and view the building of security in terms of increased domestic capacity and legitimacy.

Legitimacy is the center of gravity in insurgencies and the Uzbek

government's legitimacy is clearly at risk given the many cases of violence there this year and the visible signs of public disaffection. As Phillip Bobbit has recently warned, "legitimacy is a constitutional idea that is sensitive to strategic events." Consequently, in the present conditions of the Uzbek-American relationship those strategic events must go beyond victory in the war against terrorism; however it is defined, to include a change in American policy that is truly strategic in regard to Uzbekistan and Central Asia and that postulates greater legitimacy as the cause and consequence of victory in this war. Indeed, some observers even feel that in Central Asia all the states are regressing back to pre-modern or at least Soviet forms of police states if not a North Korean model in Uzbekistan's case.

Should we fail to take account of the risk to Uzbekistan and to ourselves for being closely tied to its government, then future strategic events in Uzbekistan and Central Asia will reflect a lack of legitimacy that may already be growing. And if that lack of legitimacy expands to the point of state collapse, not only will the constitutional idea of legitimacy be sensitive to strategic events, but so too will our position in Uzbekistan be affected by those events. In that case, the effect upon our strategic position will indubitably be a negative one.

These considerations should also apply to Turkmenistan which is truly a hermetic black box that makes Uzbekistan look like a liberal paradise. Unfortunately our ability to leverage democratic change in Turkmenistan and indeed, any government's ability to exercise meaningful influence there is extremely limited. Indeed, we have very limited knowledge of what is happening there except for the near universal foreboding that when President Sapirmurad Niyazov retires as he has allegedly claimed he wishes to do in 2009, there is no civil society or middle class or even a political class that could come to power. Chaos, even violence, becomes a very likely possibility. Here, as much, if not more than in Uzbekistan, we must devise a coherent, flexible, and future-oriented policy that embraces all the relevant agencies active in Turkmenistan and that does not lose sight of our regional strategic interests. Moreover, we need to work with other governments having significant interests in Turkmenistan to try and anticipate if not avert such an outcome. Here too unilateralism and moralism that place moralistic gestures over strategic conduct will not suffice here and will rob us of both the inter-agency coherence and flexibility needed at home as well as the ability to forge alliances on common interests with other interested governments.