

TESTIMONY – Professor Stephen Blank

Iran, Xinjiang, and Democratization in Eurasia: The Impact of Recent Upheavals

Professor Stephen Blank

Strategic Studies Institute

US Army War College Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013

July 2009

Testimony to the US Helsinki Commission

July 16 2009

Draft: not for citation or quotation without consent of the author

The views expressed here do not represent those of the US Army, Defense Department,
or the US Government

Senator Cardin, Congressman Hastings, Members of the Commission; it is a great honor to appear before you again to testify about the prospects for democratization and human rights in Eurasia. Despite all the rampant pessimism about the course of democratization, in fact during 2009 we have seen significant signs that Eurasia's authoritarian regimes are in as much if not more trouble.¹ During the first half of 2009 we have already seen on several occasions that the authoritarian structures of government in Eurasia are still precarious. Demonstrations in Moldova, Iran, and more recently Xinjiang both showed the power of the new information technology and social networking programs, and that they can be used to threaten corrupt and repressive regimes that seek to rule through electoral fraud, repression, and in China's case, internal colonialism. There is also no doubt that these manifestations of unrest have serious repercussions beyond their borders. Often the silence or restricted coverage by official media in neighboring authoritarian states concerning these events is itself an eloquent testimony to this impact because the rulers fear the impact of such news upon their populace. We have evidence of such deep scrutiny of Iranian events in neighboring Azerbaijan where the official media was very quiet but independent media thoroughly reported the news from Iran.² Indeed the Azeri government actually called for stability in Iran despite its wary relationship with Tehran, a sure sign of its anxiety over the demonstrations there.³ Similarly members of the Kyrgyz "Citizens Against Corruption" human rights group held a demonstration at the Iranian embassy in Bishkek on June 27.⁴

These reactions to Iran's elections, or for that matter the Moldovan election crisis and the uprising in Xinjiang, all suggest that Eurasian societies (and Xinjiang is part of Central Asia) are still unsettled or are again entering a dynamic phase of political

development. As they well know, popular unrest is quite possible in many of these states, especially at a time of economic crisis, and too overt an effort to stage an electoral fraud could be a trigger for such unrest as in Moldova and Iran. In fact, these episodes testify to the inherent fragility of anti-democratic regimes and their susceptibility to internal violence. They also show that honest elections are increasingly likely to unseat or defeat these parties.⁵ We saw large-scale electoral protests in Moldova thanks to the diffusion of social networking technologies followed by subsequent crackdowns and repression. Meanwhile in Xinjiang we can see the fruits of a policy that can best be described as internal colonialism with the not unexpected consequences of ethnic discrimination and a recourse to violence since all other avenues of democratic protest are blocked. Here too the government's immediate answer was large-scale force. The most significant example, however is in Iran.

The Iranian government brazenly rigged its recent presidential election. Then it launched high-handed and coercive efforts to strangle the protests that arose in its wake. But by doing so the Iranian government has, perhaps unintentionally, but nonetheless firmly, sent several messages to the world. First of all the Iranian government has made clear its determination to remain in power even at the cost of the regime's legitimacy and authority. Thus it now stands on the brink of becoming a regime that relies on nothing but force, fraud, and nationalist xenophobia rather than its previous legitimacy to stay in power. Indeed, Mohsen Rezaei a conservative who was defeated in his run for the presidency and a former Revolutionary Guards commander, warned that "continuation of the current situation would lead us to collapse from inside."⁶ Second, the upheaval at home in the wake of this phony election has fractured the unity of both the clerical

establishment and the political elite.⁷ As a result the actual ruling group is smaller and perhaps more cohesive than before but the wider political class is more fragmented and the ruling elite's legitimacy has been undermined by its own actions making it a more isolated group. That situation almost certainly implies a greater resort to internal force, repression, and nationalist xenophobia if that regime is to stay in power. As Jim Hoagland wrote in the Washington Post, about President Ahmadinejad's likely future course, "His reasonable facsimile of a dictatorship is more likely to act as such regimes usually do. They exhibit the same aggressive, chest-thumping behavior in foreign policy to intimidate or impress the home audience."⁸ And that also would therefore entail a likely acceleration, if it is possible, of the Iranian nuclear program if not Iran's support for terrorist groups abroad like Hezbollah and Hamas.

That conclusion is perhaps the most dangerous possibility in this situation. Indeed, Afghanistan's President Karzai publicly worried that Iran's turmoil might end the pattern of relative restraint in Afghanistan.⁹ But there are also other dangerous potentialities in the current situation. Iran is quite likely to step up its efforts to promote revolutionary Shia regimes and movements or radical anti-Western forces in the Gulf or the Levant, e.g. Hamas and Hezbollah or its Iraqi proxies, suggesting more violence in the Middle East, if it feels its room for maneuver or domestic legitimacy is coming under attack.¹⁰ Indeed, it is likely to refuse to moderate its open anti-Semitism towards Israel even if that is a requirement for engagement with Washington. As the International Crisis Group recently reported,

In conversations with the Crisis Group, and even as they discuss readjustment of some policies, Iran's leaders exclude any softening of their anti-Israel rhetoric and practice which – together with their close embrace of the Palestinian cause – they see as pivotal to their growing regional influence. The Islamic Republic long ago

concluded that its uncompromising hostility toward Israel and support groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad enabled its significant inroads among Arab and Muslim public opinion and provided it with the means to pressure (and undermine) pro-Western Arab regimes. For them, these are tools that, at this stage at least, are too precious to forsake.¹¹

And to the extent that it feels isolated in the West it will further strengthen what has been the dominant line of its foreign policy, namely an Ostpolitik that looks to solidarity with the Russian and Chinese authoritarian states rather than to the West. That alignment, built on oil and gas, as well as a shared antipathy to democracy would mark an epochal realignment of Iranian political culture as Iran has looked West, not East, for inspiration for several centuries.¹² The International Crisis Group's report's conclusion is of particular interest here, namely,

Bereft of a single, reliable ally, Iran is seeking to diversify and balance its relationships, both as a means of maximizing gains and as insurance policy. Its interest in improving relations with the U.S. is a natural corollary; in theory, this would lessen any security threat; legitimize Tehran's role in its immediate neighborhood (Iraq and Afghanistan); and, through the eventual lifting of sanctions, pave the way to full use of its energy potential despite Russian opposition (this refers to oil and gas where such full use would compete with Russia-author) But, at least as its leaders currently view it, the partnership with countries such as Russia and China is not a temporary stopgap as Iran awaits restored relations with the U.S. and the end of sanctions; it reflects, rather a strategic decision aimed at bolstering independence, vis-à-vis the West. Accordingly they put considerable weight on working through regional institutions such as the Economic Cooperation Organization, the D-8 group, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.¹³

These considerations also help explain and lend weight to the community of interest among states like Russia, China, and Iran concerning the suffocation of all chances for liberal and democratic reform of the political system, an opposition to democracy that is rooted both in these states' internal political structure, their ideologies that have significant points of overlap, and their common anti-American foreign policies.¹⁴

Thanks to the regime's actions, I believe it has, in effect, signed its death warrant.

But while ultimately this system cannot survive, or at least its survival is now open to question, nobody can know how, when, or under what circumstances that transformation will occur. Thus its end could well be a bloody one. And the Iranian example, for good or bad, is likely to influence short-term political development in other nearby states, both in the Gulf and in Eurasia. Third, by its no less high-handed efforts to blame the United Kingdom and the US and its threats to put British diplomats on trial it has shown not just its abiding paranoia and willingness to blame foreigners for its defects, it has also made clear that the ruling elite is not ready to enter into genuine negotiations with the West (including the US government) on its nuclear programs let alone stop them.¹⁵ Even if the government is now preparing its negotiating position, this position is unlikely to be one the West, not to mention Washington, can easily accept since it entails allowing Iran to enrich uranium and recognizing it as a regional hegemon in the Gulf and its neighborhood.¹⁶ Not surprisingly officials in Washington, if not elsewhere, have begun to realize that the Obama Administration's efforts to engage Iran directly on this program will probably fail even if such efforts are still ongoing.¹⁷ Even if the Administration continues to pursue the will of the wisp of a serious engagement with Iran as appears to be the case, it is quite unlikely, given Iran's well-developed capacity for stalling and Sino-Russian support for it, that Tehran will feel truly pressured to resolve its differences with the West.

Therefore and fourth, it should be clear that the rigging of Iran's presidential election did not occur exclusively for domestic reasons of staying in power. The leaders of the regime, the Supreme leader Ali Khamenei and President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, do not want to engage in direct talks with Washington lest this expose the regime to

Western influence or slow or stop the nuclear program. Indeed there were signs that the opposition, led by Mir Hossein Mossavi, campaigned on the platform of negotiations with Washington and of deemphasizing Iran's nuclear project.¹⁸ But for the governing regime, "The greater tensions with Washington are, the easier it is for the regime to rally supporters, suppress dissent and invoke national unity against a common enemy."¹⁹

Worse yet, from the regime's standpoint,

By contrast, normalization with Washington could entail serious political costs for the regime, possibly outweighing expected gains and triggering internal tensions within leadership ranks. Engagement likely would bring to the surface non-nuclear related issues where Washington's stance might resonate more broadly with the wider public – **including the human rights record** – or support for militant Arab groups that has been questioned by ordinary Iranians. Many citizens associate the launch of a U.S. dialogue with hope for internal liberalization and could seize the opportunity to press harder for domestic reform.²⁰ (Bold, Author)

That observation was made before Iran's elections. In the present climate it is even more to the point. Under present circumstances the likelihood of an engagement with the US given this context is very small at best. Indeed,

The clampdown serves the purposes of those who feel their grasp is loosened by responding positively to President Obama's offer to negotiate. They raised the threshold of what Obama must swallow to get a deal to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.²¹

In this context, it is not and should not be surprising to us that Iran's friends, like Russia, stated in their official media that they believed the Iranian elections and subsequent protests were handled by the state in accordance with Iranian law and probably welcomed the suppression of the protests. Certainly Moscow saw nothing wrong in immediately welcoming President Ahmadinejad to Russia, claiming that Iran's election was merely an internal Iranian affair that is nobody else's business.²² It has also made the same claim with regard to events in Xinjiang.²³ Indeed, as long as Moscow and

Beijing see in Iran a potential partner rather than a threat we should not expect much progress with Russia or China on Iran. Indeed, those partnership deals with Iran are continuing as China and Iran are presently working on a memorandum of understanding concerning China's financing of major investments to expand Iran's oil refineries at Abadan and Hormuz, a critical bottleneck in its industry.²⁴

Russian analysts, diplomats, and officials are brutally frank as to why they see Iran as a partner. For example, Alexei Arbatov observes that unlike America, Russia does not view North Korea and Iran as potential enemies. Iran also occupies the second or third place (depending on the year) among buyers of large lots of Russian arms, which has helped the military-industrial sector to survive in spite of limited defense orders for the Russian armed forces for many years. Finally, Iran is an extremely important geopolitical partner of Russia's, a growing "regional superpower" that balances out the expansion of Turkey and the increasing U.S. military and political presence in the Black Sea/Caspian region, and simultaneously contains Sunni Wahhabism's incursions in the North Caucasus and Central Asia.²⁵ Thomas Graham, formerly of the National Security Council, concurs in this assessment of Iran, seen from Moscow as the dominant regional power in the neighborhood that can project power into the Caucasus and Central Asia as well as the Persian Gulf. Therefore Moscow values Iran's refraining from doing just that by its pro-Iranian policies.²⁶ Russian diplomats confirm this evaluation of Iran's importance to it. Thus Gleb Ivashentsov, the then Director of the Second Asia Department in the Russian Foreign Ministry, told a Liechtenstein Colloquium on Iran in 2005 that,

Iran today is probably the only country in the greater Middle East that, despite all of the internal and external difficulties, is steadily building up its economic,

scientific, technological, and military capability. Should this trend continue, Iran – with its seventy million population, which is fairly literate, compared to neighboring states, and ideologically consolidated, on the basis of Islamic and nationalist values; with a highly intellectual elite, with more than eleven percent of the world's oil and eighteen percent of natural gas reserves; with more than 500,000 strong armed forces and with a strategic geographic position enabling it to control sea and land routes between Europe and Asia – is destined to emerge as a regional leader. This means that the Islamic Republic of Iran will be playing an increasing role in resolving problems not only in the Middle East and Persian Gulf area but also in such regions that are rather sensitive for Russia as Transcaucasia, Central Asia and the Caspian region. This is why dialogue with Iran and partnership with it on a bilateral and regional as well as a broad international basis is objectively becoming one of the key tasks of Russia's foreign policy.²⁷

Beyond these considerations Russian officials and analysts have long seen Iran as a useful partner for Russia in thwarting US policies in the Middle East and Gulf and in restoring Russia's status there as a major player whose interests must be respected.

Andranik Migranyan, an advisor to President Boris Yeltsin and an unapologetic defender of Russian primacy in the CIS, then told Iran News in 1995 that,

In many areas Iran can be a good strategic ally of Russia at [the] global level to check the hegemony of third parties and to keep the balance of power --- Russia will try to further cooperation with Iran as a big regional power. We will not let the West dictate to Russia how far it can go in its relations. Of course, we will try at the same time not to damage our relations with the West.²⁸

Similarly, at a 1995 Irano-Russian roundtable, speakers outlined the enduring geostrategic rationales for Russo-Iranian partnership, if not alliance. These rationales endure to this day.

The speakers alluded to the quest by Iran and Russia for an identity and to Russia's political determination to prevent any country from dominating the region [Central Asia and the Caucasus]. It was stressed that Iran and Russia are natural allies with distinctive natural resources and the predominance of any third power should be prevented. This is related to the manner in which the two sides define their strategic objectives. It was also stated that Russia's influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus should be treated with respect and if domination is not the objective cooperation is possible.²⁹

International Implications

Meanwhile Iran's and Moldova's election crises and the rioting in Xinjiang already have international implications going beyond the boundaries of their own countries. Unfortunately those implications in the short-term are likely to be negative ones, insofar as prospects for greater liberalization, not to mention democratization, of these societies are concerned. The experience of watching the Iranian elections and their aftermath as well as the rioting in Xinjiang will probably lead Eurasian rulers to conclude that they must act even more resolutely to ensure that future elections cannot under any circumstances lead to a change in regime. As noted above neighboring Azerbaijan, itself a non-democratic state, has closely watched events in Iran. It has limited state reporting of events there lest the idea of popular protest in Iran gain traction in Azerbaijan. While the Azeri government has urged the return of stability at the earliest possible date, opposition and independent media have concentrated on the challenge to the Iranian regime clearly intending to use Iran as a stand-in for Azerbaijan.³⁰ But it is by no means alone in its concern over Iran.

This situation will probably replicate itself in other Eurasian countries where the official media and the government will seek to restrict knowledge of events in Iran and Xinjiang while opponents of those regimes will use those events as symbols of what they are criticizing in their own governments. Indeed in Kazakhstan it is already happening as President Nazarbayev, despite OSCE appeals and the fact of prior promises of reform and democratization in advance of Kazakhstan's becoming the OSCE Chairman in Office in 2010, has just signed the restrictive and draconian internet law. This law will allow local courts to block websites, including foreign ones, and to class blogs as media which makes

them susceptible to prosecution and repression under the law.³¹ This law would thus restrict freedom of expression via the Internet and has already aroused a large amount of controversy.³² Indeed, according to US experts this law is even more draconian than Russia's law and could easily serve as a template for other Central Asian governments.³³ It also serves as a slap in the face to the US as it was signed right around the time that a high-level State Department delegation came to Astana. Beyond the fact that Nazarbayev openly advocated limitations on the freedom of the Internet, there have been recent massive hacker attacks on opposition websites and internet resources.³⁴ Andrey Richter, an expert from the OSCE, has confirmed that this law completely contradicts the promises made by Kazakh authorities concerning civil and human rights.³⁵ But it clearly aims to forestall the kind of networking we saw among the opposition in Moldova, Iran, and Xinjiang.

Therefore and more negatively, we can and should expect Eurasian governments to learn from these events that they must not under any circumstances allow truly authentic and free elections that can change the nature of their political leadership to take place. It already is the case that the imminent elections for President in Kyrgyzstan appear to be a foregone conclusion and every effort is already being made to ensure that outcome. But we may expect that elsewhere in Eurasia, including Russia, that the authorities will see to it that opposition candidates cannot run, mobilize popular support, gain access to funding or media, and certainly gain any control over the actual counting of the votes. Kazakhstan's internet law is a case in point. Likewise, the appointment by Moscow of Vladislav Surkov to represent Russia in a bilateral commission with the US government on problems of civil society indicates both Moscow's contempt for us and

for democracy and its determination to squelch any such manifestations of an independent civil society or election campaign.

Moreover, in any case these regimes will try to ensure beyond any doubt that the outcome is foreordained and then ratified as legitimate. In practice this suggests the following developments across Eurasia:

- We can expect increased interference with the operation of free media and in particular a crackdown on the information technology of social networking, i. e. the internet. Again Kazakhstan exemplifies this trend but it is not alone as its law will inspire others to follow in its footsteps. Authoritarian regimes' success in this endeavor to date calls into question the hitherto unquestioned assumption that this technology inherently favors freedom and its supporters.³⁶ This repression can also go beyond suppression of the free use of the internet and of other forms of information technology and social networking to include periodic or at least intermittent efforts to isolate the country from foreign media, including expulsions of foreign writers, denial or visas to them, interference with the internet, and increased threats if not use of repression against news outlets and their reporters. These threats need not include violence, they can be effectively implemented by economic means, denying revenue from advertising, or by what Russians call telephone justice, i.e. telephone calls from authorities to compliant editors. This also means greater efforts to develop a "patriotic" media and mobilize popular support around those tamed and docile "house organs." So it is quite likely that those repressions of new and older media will also be accompanied by favoritism for the "patriotic" media and the systematic inculcation of nationalist xenophobia, something we see already in China, Russia, and Iran.

•Increased restrictions upon opposition political movements are also likely. This repression will occur, not just in terms of their freedom of communication or access to the media, but also in terms of the right to assembly and publicly protest their condition. Invariably this also entails heightened forms of repression, not just in Iran or Xinjiang where thousands have been incarcerated for varying durations but also in Russia where the Ministry of Interior (MVD) and the Federal Security Service act together to repress dissent.³⁷ In Iran we can already see that the regime has essentially blanketed the country with police forces and some officials have threatened the opposition with heavy jail terms or even with being labeled enemies of the state.³⁸ And in Xinjiang the authorities have followed suit and threatened any demonstrators with the death penalty.³⁹ This likely trend also means more show trials and repressions like that of Mikhail Khodorkovsky that is currently taking place in Russia. These kinds of show trials may also be used to settle factional and clan scores in Central Asia whose states are governed by clan and patron-client politics.⁴⁰ Since the greatest danger is a division within the elite these trials have a “salutary and educational” effect upon any elite figure who thinks it would be to his interest to defect to the opposition. Thus in whatever form they appear these trials will be, as Soviet rulers intended, both educational and a deterrent to political activity in their impact.

Here we should remember that Russia once again has a Gulag with political prisoners in psychiatric institutions, repressiveness and insecurity of property and the reintroduction of a “boyar”-like retinue around an all-powerful ruler who rules through a state-sponsored cult of personality.⁴¹ The numerous reports of the Russian authorities’ fears of social unrest during a time of economic crisis and their adoption of new

repressive measures to deal with them suggests that a strong effort will be made to suppress any sign of political unrest in Eurasia at the first moment lest it connect with growing economic grievances. Indeed, Russia has also recently enacted many new regulations designed to forestall and repress any expression of mass unrest due to the economic crisis. Kazakhstan's efforts to ban the book of Rakhat Aliyev, the internet law, and the current purge of former high-ranking officials on corruption charges also opens the door to the possibility of a larger campaign to stifle any potential political opposition. Similar phenomena can be expected and should not be ruled out in other Central Asian states, especially given a prolonged economic crisis that could shake the pillars of the state in these countries.

- Along with the growth of repression and electoral chicanery we can also expect a growth in officially sponsored xenophobia. All these societies have existing or potential ethnic conflicts or manufactured and readily available "foreign devils" that can be accused, as were the UK and US, of seeking to undermine the political integrity of the state and of its regime. We already see a disturbing rise of ethnic violence in Russia as well as such officially sponsored campaigns against the US and the West. For example, immediately after meeting President Obama, Prime Minister Putin donned an all-black outfit and gave political blessing to a group of Russian bikers called "night wolves" (Nochnye Volki) who were riding down to Sevastopol to take part in a 65th anniversary of the city's liberation from Nazism, but also to make the point that Sevastopol and the Crimea are Russian not Ukrainian.⁴² It would be easy for Moscow, which already has long conducted a campaign of vilification against Georgia, to do the same to Ukraine for allegedly selling out to the West and betraying the Russian people and nation.

We also see in China, for example, an apparently popular internet movement against the Uyghurs that expresses a strong Han nationalism. Such sentiments also exist in Russia where an aggrieved Russian nationalism can easily be turned against Muslim migrant workers or other more traditional political targets and could easily be organized and channeled into a basis of mass support for further chauvinism and repression there and in China.⁴³ And in the other authoritarian states it also would not be unduly difficult to manufacture such a campaign if necessary. The rioting in Xinjiang shows us that authoritarian states, even reasonably well developed ones like China, cannot solve the problems of internal colonialism and ethnic minorities who are thereby oppressed by an undemocratic political regime. Whereas in Iran or Russia the regime might find military adventurism abroad tempting, others may do so at home and target ethnic minorities. Certainly we are already seeing this in the wake of the current ethnic crisis in Russia.⁴⁴

Moreover, in many of these countries, including Russia, China, and Central Asia, regime leaders still accept the Leninist paradigm that their countries and governments are menaced by linked internal and external enemies. Thus they regularly accuse NGOs of being in the CIA's employ and claim that these so-called color revolutions really represent US efforts to undermine them and are instigated by the CIA, NGOs, etc. Indeed, the head of Iran's largest think tank openly stated that the "improved relations with Washington often ended up with "velvet revolutions," political upheavals that were directly organized by the U.S.⁴⁵ Therefore he logically concluded that Iran may not draw any benefits from a dialogue or normalization with the U.S.⁴⁶

This statement clearly illustrates the linkage between domestic and foreign policy considerations in Iran and in similar governments. And for those reasons ethnic violence,

directed against minorities or just simply protracted repression and discrimination against political opponents or targeted minorities are by no means out of the question. But it also points to the following shortcoming of U.S. policy that will plague all efforts to improve our position in Eurasia until and unless it is addressed. Since the US government has never bothered to develop a coherent information policy for any of these regions it has never bothered to acknowledge or deny these charges, leading the masses to believe that there is some veracity to them, especially as they are endlessly reproduced in keeping with the tradition of the big lie. This failure precludes and inhibits our ability to work effectively either for US interests or for political liberalization, not to mention democracy in Eurasia.

- This increased xenophobia will invariably reinforce preexisting disposition to display a hostile attitude towards the US on issues of foreign policy concern to us like Iranian proliferation or Russian foreign policy in the CIS and Russian policy towards Iran, and the enlargement of Europe, not just NATO. Indeed, we can expect intensified efforts at still more collaboration on the part of these governments to set up not just an alternative value system and ideology concerning democracy and international relations more generally, but also counters to organizations like the OSCE. The CIS' use of member states' election monitors to verify the "democratic procedures" of their elections and thus make a mockery of the OSCE and democracy will probably grow in frequency. Russia is already calling the Iranian election "an exercise in democracy" and respects their outcome.⁴⁷ Gleb Pavlovsky, one of the most prominent "political technologists" of the Putin regime observed, as did analysts from the Public Projects Institute that in Russia

‘democratization’ as such is “redundant, if not harmful.”⁴⁸ So while the system needs ‘modernization’ “we will not let anybody touch this system to dismantle it.”⁴⁹

The point is that despite their confident statements’ to the contrary, these regimes’ behavior indicates that they are so aware of their inherent fragility that they know very well that the spread of democracy in any one nearby state immediately puts them all at risk. As the Public Projects Institute report stated, democratization of Russia cannot be a priority. Instead the priority lies in effective management for otherwise “any attempt to suddenly abandon the long-term trend of gradual democratization will only lead to political radicalization and further reaction.” Moreover, preventive measures must be taken since during this crisis, as in war, everything will be changing very quickly and unexpectedly.⁵⁰ These remarks underscore the governing elites’ sense in these states that while the regime might look unbreakable; any sustained reform push puts its viability into instant doubt. Consequently to them ultimately there is no difference between the spread of democracy or military defeat in their peripheries because it will amount to the same thing, the loss of their power. It is not for nothing, for example that in 2006 Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov wrote that for Russia wrote that the greatest threat to Russian security was efforts to transform the “constitution” of any of the CIS members.⁵¹

Therefore we can expect more resistance to the US’ calls for democratization and human rights, which, in fact, have been attenuated under the present Administration. It makes no sense to demand that states like Turkmenistan conform to human rights obligations when we refuse to press China or Russia, the latter being a signatory of the Helsinki treaty, to uphold their treaty commitments. Kazakhstan’s contempt for us and for its sovereign promises to the OSCE is another example of the problem. Since Russia

is in many ways an alibi for other Eurasian states this makes pressing it doubly important even if Moscow does not like to hear it. For if we refrain from doing so, this only tells Russian leaders that we are not serious in our commitment and that they can therefore disregard us with impunity on this and other issues.

We need to understand that absent constant foreign pressure the upheavals in Eurasia can only frighten local leaders into clamping down even more because there will be nobody to stop them from doing so. Furthermore the failure to date of the protest movement in Iran, though I believe its ultimate vindication is assured – although nobody can say how, when, or under what circumstances that triumph will occur --- will only stimulate greater authoritarianism and repression across Eurasia, greater solidarity among these states, and the consequent frustration of US interests. After all these leaders will have learned that elections are even more dangerous than they originally feared and that repression and manipulation work.

We should therefore remember that our interests and values are not opposed to each other as so called “realists” would have it. The defense of human rights, especially those guaranteed by international treaties like the Helsinki treaty, is a paramount geopolitical interest and value of US foreign policy. We support human rights and democratization not because it is moral, though we believe that, not because we are better than others, which is untrue, and not only because democracy works for the betterment of all communities though we believe we have seen the truth of that assertion. In Eurasia, if not elsewhere, human rights, democracy and the right of foreign governments and organizations to scrutinize publicly the conduct of other signatories of the Helsinki treaty and its protocols are a matter of international law that binds everyone equally. If we fail

to uphold the ancient dictum that “Pacta Sunt Servanda” (treaties must be upheld) on these issues then we should hardly be surprised that the perpetrators of those violations will engage in more truly destructive activities like nuclear proliferation, mass repression, ethnic violence and even the incitement of local wars.

A continuing commitment to both human rights and to international dialogue affirms our ongoing seriousness of purpose and puts our adversaries and those who define us as their adversaries like Russia, China, and Iran, on the defensive. We should understand that the Fascist temptation in Eurasia is a strong one, in many cases it is the ‘default option’ of governments that cannot and will not govern democratically and therefore must resort to such means to stay in power. Therefore if we are silent in the face of those actions and policies we will neither achieve our interests, nor successfully defend our values.

Notes

¹ Joshua Muravchik, “Something’s Dying In the Streets of Tehran,” *Washington Post Weekly*, July 13-19, 2009, p. 26 for the optimism and Freedom House, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, *Undermining Democracy 21st Century Authoritarianism*, Washington, D.C.: 2008 for the pessimism about democracy’s chances

² “North of Tehran,” *Osservatore Balcani*, www.ossevatorebalcani.org/article/articleview/11520/1/407, June 30, 2009; Shahin Abbasov, “Azerbaijan: Monitoring Iranian Events For Political Lessons,” *Eurasia Insight*, June 26, 2009

³ *Ibid*; “Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Calls For Stability In Iran” *Associated Press*, June 19, 2009

⁴ Bishkek, *AKIPress Online*, in Russian, June 26, 2009, *FBIS SOV*, June 26, 2009

⁵ Muravchik

⁶ “Iran Defeated Candidate Warns of ‘System Collapse,’” *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, July 13, 2009

⁷ Mazyar Mokti, Charles Recknagel, “How could Iran’s Hard-Liners Choose the Next Supreme Leader,?” *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, July 4, 2009; Michael Slackman and Nazila Fathi, “Clerical Groups Defies Leader on Disputed Iran Election,” *New York Times*, July 5, 2009; Thomas Erdbrink, “Iranian Details Alleged Fraud,” *Washington Post*, July 2009; Alireza Nader, “Iran’s Real Winners: The Revolutionary Guards,” www.rand.org, June 22, 2009

⁸ Jim Hoagland, “Mideast hawks, Take wing,” *Washington Post Weekly*, July 13-19, 2009, p. 5

⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹ International Crisis Group, *U.S.-Iranian Engagement: The View From Tehran*, June., 2009, p. 13

¹² Abbas Milani, “Iran: Clerical Authoritarianism,” Freedom House, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, *Undermining Democracy 21st Century Authoritarianism*, Washington, D.C.: 2008, p. 30

¹³ “U.S.-Iranian Engagement: The View From Tehran,” p. 15

¹⁴ *Undermining Democracy*, passim.

¹⁵ Nader: Alan Cowell and Stephen Castle, “Iran Cleric Says British Embassy Staff to Stand Trial,” *New York Times*, July 3, 2009

¹⁶ “Iran Develops Proposal For Renewed Nuclear diplomacy,” www.nti.org, July 13, 2009; *U.S.-Iranian Engagement: The View From Tehran*, passim

¹⁷ “Iranian Election Aftermath Dims Hopes for Nuclear dialogue,” www.nti.org, July 2, 2009s

¹⁸ Alireza Nader, “Mousavi Is the Man To Watch In Iran,” *The Daily Star*, March 27, 2009

¹⁹ *U.S.-Iranian Engagement: The View From Tehran*, p. 20

²⁰ *Ibid*., p. 21

²¹ Hoagland, p. 5

-
- ²² Uwe Klussmann, "Iranian Leader Finds Support in Yekaterinburg," *Der Spiegel*, June 16, 2009, www.spiegel.de
- ²³ "China Says Ethnic Violence in Check Amid Heavy Troop Presence," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, July 8, 2009
- ²⁴ "China, Iran Work On Energy MOU," www.upi.com, July 13, 2009
- ²⁵ Alexei Arbatov, "Terms of Engagement: WMD Proliferation and US-Russian Relations," paper prepared for the US Army War College conference "US and Russian: Post-Elections Security Challenges. Carlisle Barracks, PA, March 6-7, 2008, in Stephen J. Blank, Ed., *Prospects for US-Russian Security Cooperation*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2009, pp. 147-149
- ²⁶ Thomas E. Graham, "The Friend of My Enemy," *The National Interest*, No. 95, May-June, 2008, pp. 36-37
- ²⁷ Remarks of Ambassador Gleb A. Ivashentsov, Second Department for Asia Director, Russian Foreign Ministry," *Iran's Security Challenges and the Region*, Liechtenstein Colloquium Report, I, Liechtenstein and Princeton, NJ, 2005, p. 39
- ²⁸ Tehran, *IRNA* in English, March 8, 1995, *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia*, (Henceforth *FBIS NES*), 95-045, March 8, 1995, p. 51
- ²⁹ Tehran, *Abrar* in Persian, March 7, 1995, *FBIS-NES-95-052*, March 17, 1995, pp. 71-72.
- ³⁰ Abbasov; North of Tehran, "Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Calls For Stability In Iran"
- ³¹ "Kazakh Leader Signs Law Curbing Internet: Activists," *Reuters*, July 13, 2000
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ Remarks of US NGO experts at a meeting with them in Washington at the Center for Strategic and International Studies CSIS meeting with them in Washington, May 28, 2009
- ³⁴ Sergey Rasov, "Outside the Access Zone," Moscow, *politkom.ru*, in Russian, April 21-22, 2009, *FBIS SOV*, May 8, 2009
- ³⁵ "Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Calls For Stability In Iran"
- ³⁶ "Undermining Democracy: Strategies and Methods of 21st Century Authoritarians," *Undermining Democracy*, pp. 3-4
- ³⁷ Yekaterina Savina, "In the MVD's Department For Combating Extremism They Are Convinced That 'Almost Everyone Can Be Influenced, Pressured, and Convinced to Cooperate,'" Moscow, *The New Times*, in Russian, June 1, 2009, *FBIS SOV* June 27, 2009
- ³⁸ Sam Dagher, "A Peek Inside Iran Shows Protests Fading Under Withering Gaze," *New York Times*, July 9, 2009, www.nytimes.com
- ³⁹ Edward Wong "China Official Threatens Death Penalty After Riots," *Ibid.*; China Says Ethnic Violence in Check Amid Heavy Troop Presence,"
- ⁴⁰ Joanna Lillis, "Kazakhstan Corruption Scandals An Indicator Of Clan Infighting in Astana,?" *Eurasia Insight*, July 10, 2009
- ⁴¹ Jonas Bernstein, "Lev Ponomarev.: Russia has Four Categories of Political Prisoners," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, February 13, 2008.
- ⁴² Joshua Kucera, "Vladimir Putin, Biker Dude," <http://trueslant.com/joshuakucera/2009/07/08/vladimir-putin-biker-dude/>, July 8, 2009

-
- ⁴³ Sean Roberts, “The Information War Over the Urumqi Riots and the “Netizens” of China: Are We Witnessing the Dawn Of a New Era in Han Chinese Nationalism?” *Central Asia and Kazakhstan* <http://roberts-report.blogspot.com/2009/07/information-war-over-urumqi-riots-and.html>, July 10, 2009
- ⁴⁴ Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, “Central Asia : As Some Labor Migrants Leave Russia, Hate Attacks Continue,” *Eurasia Insight*, July 10, 2009
- ⁴⁵ *U.S.-Iranian Engagement: The View From Tehran*, p. 21
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ “Russia Respects Iran’s Election Results, Ties To Continue,” *Reuters*, June 22, 2009; “Russia Rest of G8 Clash On Approach To Iran,” *Reuters*, June 25, 2009
- ⁴⁸ Moscow, *ITAR-TASS*, in Russian June 10, 2009, *FBIS SOV*, June 10, 2009
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ Moscow, *Interfax*, in Russian, June 10, 2009, *FBIS SOV*, June 10, 2009
- ⁵¹ Sergei Ivanov, “Russia Must Be Strong,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 11, 2006, p. 14.